

THE THIRD GENERATION – A PROBLEM?

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The paper deals with one of the manifestations of the crisis of a traditional family. This is a very topical issue nowadays because within this crisis it is possible to develop a gender movement very easily and very effectively.

Elderly people have always existed. Their presence in society has been a natural phenomenon. It is also natural that these people have been in certain relationships with younger people and that these relationships have been different (harmonious or tense, firm or relaxed, etc.). It has been a normal part of life. My own childhood and youth are not particularly distant. Still, I do not remember old age being referred to as a problem. People sometimes talked about worrying about their grandfather or grandmother. There is a big difference between “I’m worried about” and “I have a problem”. In one case, the problem was talked about in the history of literature, where the retirement problem was mentioned as a special topic of the 19th century. Books on this topic were written as critiques, just as literary works drew attention to the bad situation of orphans and children. However, I do not think that we should overestimate this literature. Art always deals with what is already special. Extraordinary cases are written about, not common standards. In painting, many works tend to be based on unusualness. Winter scenes with snow are not the dominant aspect of the Dutch landscape. They rarely and briefly appear near the Gulf Stream. So I wonder when and how the problem of the third generation arose because it is undoubtedly a problem nowadays.

The problem is currently intensified for three reasons. The first is the effort to

transfer the care for the elderly from the family to institutions. The current family crisis is accelerated by the fact that some family groups are losing many of their functions, some in part and some overall. The situation where a family had to secure the lives of all its members in all respects has ceased to exist. Families no longer have to take care of their basic living conditions, the upbringing of children, the treatment of the sick, or the security of the elderly. We have institutions like schools, hospitals, or senior homes. The last two have existed for a long time because someone was left without family members. An orphan and a lonely elderly person used to be left in charity homes. These people were first taken care of by monasteries, i.e., special types of families.

A huge change, which caused a number of consequences, was the creation of old-age insurance, which later became a legal obligation. It brought some security to the elderly because it was not possible for them to be completely without resources. It turned out that these resources were not always sufficient and, most importantly, that material security is not everything. It also brought a sharp decline in the birth rate, as it became possible (but also more selfish) for the elderly to secure their old age by not relying on their grown-up children so much. The existence of pensions also means that children are not responsible for the lives of their elderly parents. It may have the character of dehumanization. The state takes care of old people. However, the state can only organize care for the elderly, but it cannot earn money for it. Society and people earn money and pay taxes, thus, they fulfil their civic duty and are no longer interested. This creates

a mass of elderly people with no face and no name.

Another reason is that the number of elderly people has massively increased, so there is an imbalance of the three generations. There are two causes. The first has already been mentioned, which is insufficient reproduction. The second is the extension of human life, which also has its downsides. Alzheimer's disease is a bad disease that has harsh and frightening effects on those surrounding the patient. It is not a new disease, but its incidence has multiplied simply because people have fallen victim to other diseases before Alzheimer's can develop.

The whole concept of old age has begun to change due to the general prolonging of human life span. A 50-year-old used to be considered old, but today, a 65-year-old is still a young person. This is only partially true because, on the one hand, such a person is not seriously limited by their age, but, on the other hand, their performance is worse.

The prolonging of human life span has also manifested itself in the fact that new scientific disciplines dealing with old age have emerged and strengthened. However, they understand age differently from the usual approach, as they cover the third age on a much wider scale. It is a special branch of psychology, pedagogy, and medicine that is focused on aging. These disciplines can show that the extension of human life span does not mean stretching it out, but rather an insertion of a new third phase between mature age and old age, strongly reminiscent of early autumn, which is no longer summer but is not yet a foggy November autumn, the decline just before winter.

The third reason is the speed of change in technology. While in the past, almost nothing changed in the way people worked or in their lives, there have been revolutionary changes in the last twenty years for many contemporary generations. The massive advent of electronics has literally changed the world, and while this is a normal environment for today's children, members of the third generation are working hard to live in it. Computer literacy has completely cast a shadow on alphabetical literacy. The situation in manufacturing is similar, where an experienced person in his fifties becomes a beginner again and has a hard time keeping up with workers who are

a generation younger. Yes, physical performance declined in the past, but it was more than offset by experience. Moreover, the decline of the importance of experience occurs not only in the area of manufacturing, but also affects life experience in general, because there are changes in the social structure, lifestyle, and values. The once unthinkable idea that a grandfather and grandson would not be able to understand each other because they do not know each other's realities is common today. In our country, the latter changes began to culminate in the socio-political change brought about by the 1989 revolution.

What we have mentioned as the cause of the third-generation problem is what describes its objective dimension. However, the awareness of this objective dimension is not enough to solve the problem. It covers a much more serious dimension. The third-generation problem is an ethical problem. Despite all the changes that have occurred, there are still elderly people today who have no problems except the common and intractable inconveniences of old age. They are people who live in good intergenerational relationships that have been built on certain ethical foundations.

Let us look at the reasons why the problems of the third generation are affecting more and more people and have become a society-wide problem. Today's Euro-American society, where this problem is significant, is a society of pleasures. A hedonist is a selfish, not a selfless person. Such a person does not see the meaning of life in caring for someone but in pleasures. With such a concept of life, of course, everything that is not pleasant is a disturbance and must be somehow eliminated from life. Sex is nice, but children disturb. The protection and contributions of parents are pleasant, but a sick and old person is bothersome. Life is nice, but pain and suffering do not belong in it. After all, income is also nice, but the work that leads to it is an annoying obstacle. A selfish hedonist must provoke a crisis of coexistence because they must remove all difficulties. They are then removed in an even more brutal way. Strong hedonism carries within it something suicidal and manifests itself so. Examples of ancient euthanasia can be found in the rich Epicurean Rome. When there were signs of old age – and they could no longer indulge in the things they were used to and without which their lives were not as

sweet, they prepared a feast with everything that evokes physical (but also intellectual) pleasure, and while the happy younger people continued with the feast, they, intoxicated with wine and drugs, entered a fragrant bath, opened their veins with a razor, and let the difficulties of old age fade away in their half-sleep. Today's society is being suicidal. On the one hand, it is dying out because there is a shortage of children. On the other hand, it is going to push its tired and inefficient part into increasingly less financially funded institutions of old age, which will turn into waiting rooms for death.

The root of the problem here is the amoral confusion of the existential "being" with "having". It is a reversal – from fertile dedication to sterile parasitic consumption. The degradation of the concept of life into a number of pleasures is accompanied by yet another contempt which is caused by technical progress. It is a cult of performance and faith in progress. Everything will be better, everything will be easier, one can do everything. This upward movement and enthusiasm for the new has also brought a change in people's values. A society that had respect for old age changed into a juvenile society. The young are valuable and hopeful; the world and the future belong to the young. Highly respectful designations for the elderly have changed to ironic ones. The word "*kmet*" (patriarch) is derived from *count*, and referred to a man mature and experienced enough to sit on the council of elders. Today, it is an archaism, and its meaning is vague. It is a kind of a warning shadow of a man in a robe with a long beard. In short, it is a prop from a historical play or fairy tale. Women have fared even worse because the word "*vědma*" (wisewoman) – referring to a woman so experienced that she was wise and therefore could give good advice – has changed to denote a destiny-guesser or a hag. All this indicates a loss of respect for old age and the elderly, but also putting them second or even third.

The solution to the third-generation problem must therefore come from the realm of morality. Technological solutions, which are most talked about today, will not solve the matter. They will do a lot of good, but the problem itself will get worse if it is overlooked. However, let us not be under the illusion that the moral condition of society will miracu-

lously improve, and let us look at the possibilities of education from an angle where we can convince people of the effectiveness and benefits of action because they can be expected to at least understand it.

It is important to show how valuable old people are. Despite all the changes we have talked about, the old man has life experience that certainly retains value even in the current conditions. These lived experiences are different from the experiences of today and enable other potential solutions. Based on such differences, it is always possible to better understand the current problems. Secondly, they are experiences that reach deep into the past and contain an awareness of the consequences that occurred after a long (or a very long) time period. They can highlight the breadth of predictive thoughts that need to be considered in current solutions. Finally, it sometimes happens that modern technologies fail, and then the seemingly unnecessary knowledge-experience is the only salvation. It is the grandfather who can light the stove and a kerosene lamp when there is a long power outage.

Grandparents have an irreplaceable role in maintaining the continuity of culture and tradition. Firstly, they have significantly more time to devote to children, and secondly, they have significantly more authentic experiences to tell the children about than the parents do. The cultural continuum at a time of fast development requires tradition to be passed on from grandfathers to grandchildren.

The special irreplaceability of the third generation is that they carry a lot of knowledge that no younger people have. This knowledge and these skills will disappear if they are not at least recorded. Regarding this fact, two things occur to me. One is a record of a family chronicle. Elderly people often tend to record their memories themselves. It is advisable to inspire them or help them. An adult child as an amateur ethnographic folkloristic or historical researcher can not only learn a lot, but also help the elderly person to feel that their life has a meaning. The second is just a special case of the same. You surely know statements like "*Buns, dumplings, soup, sauce... no one makes them like our grandmother anymore*". Certain dishes disappear with a generation. The reason is laboriousness, lack of ingredients, but also and above all, that the recipe is forgotten. Initiating the writing of a fami-

ly cookbook with children learning to cook something, having a party with a tasting, inviting their grandmothers to it, can also lead to a great revival of relationships in the family. The same role is played by essays assigned to children in school on topics such as: *When our grandfather was a boy*, etc.

Educators and psychologists know how important the presence of someone is when children return home from school. Parents are usually at work, although sometimes, mothers are on another maternity leave. A dog or guinea pig is better than nothing, but it will not answer any questions. After all, even upset and tired parents will benefit from a return to a cheerful home.

The goal of this article is not to show all the possible difficulties in relationships within a wider family and to point out how to avoid them and how to face them. However, it makes sense to show how to approach the needs of aging people. In education, teachers teach children, they do not educate grandparents. Children and young people need to be showed how to empathize with the situation of the elderly, because they cannot imagine it with their personal experience. It is clear but somehow forgotten that young people have not been old yet, while the elderly themselves have been young. Knowing and understanding the needs of the people around us is the starting point. It must be based on matter-of-factness and interest.

The very term third-generation problem is ambiguous and points to two perspectives. It is a problem that the third generation has, and at the same time, it is a problem that the younger generations have with the elderly. What do older people suffer from and how can these things be made easier for them? There is a lot, and I will not cover everything. I however consider the following to be important and easy to solve.

An old person suffers from a loss of strength and gradually realizes that they become of very little benefit, then useless, and finally obstructive and bothersome. This can be eliminated by always giving them a reasonable opportunity to participate in some, even very small, part of joint work. They must not feel like a dusty object. But it's even worse when they become a dusty treasure chest. The desperate feeling of abandoned grandparents, who are visited only because they can finan-

cially support their children, is not uncommon today.

With the loss of strength, the care for one's own closest environment starts getting too difficult. At the same time, the elderly realize that it is not right, which bothers them. They do not want to live in mess and dirt, but they cannot do anything about it themselves. Adult children can help effectively.

Another inconvenience of old age is the decreased living space. An aging person gradually enters a smaller area. They cannot go on holiday to the countryside, they do not dare to go to the city centre, they do not cross a busy street to the park, they do not go down the stairs... It is also easy to slow down this process. It is somewhat more difficult to keep the narrowing living space populated. Older people rapidly run out of friends of the same age. They have no one to talk to about the pleasant and great days of their lives with a full understanding based on shared experience.

Along with the loss of strength, aging people become less determined, more anxious, and distrustful. More bad aspects of their nature arise because they do not have the strength to control them.

Good human relationships are never completely egalitarian. Someone always works more because they have more strength. Someone always contributes more because they have more resources. There is always someone who is more patient. If elderly people lose patience along with their physical strength, the younger ones must be more patient. The fact that there is a certain inequality does not imply that everything goes one-way in human relationships. Even the weakest must contribute.

Exclusion from ordinary society in the form of institutional care is extremely bad for the elderly. All care homes have the terrible feature that there are unnaturally separated people of a certain category. It is an unnatural world of the sick and the old. Staff, whether carers (nurses and doctors) or supervisors (guards or educators), only visit this world, but do not belong in it. The arrival of children at a home for seniors is an amazing act of love, especially because there is an intergenerational meeting and the oppressive walls of the unnatural world are knocked down.

In all these moments, we must remember that these are events with a relatively slow

start and accelerating pace. Therefore, it is necessary to take defensive actions in time. It is disturbing to take small children to visit an old person who has already fallen into apathetic condition. We should have started visiting them a long time ago so that they had not fallen into this state so soon. It is too late to try to help a neighbour when they are too afraid to open the door. They need to get used to interacting with others. They need to be paid enough attention when they are still able to be pleased with it. That is the way it is with everything.

It is indisputable that aging people must also contribute. The idea of one-way solidarity is wrong. The problem of young people and the elderly must be paid attention to. They certainly have the above-mentioned advan-

tage that they already were young, but they may not be attentive enough. Therefore, it is necessary to show them what the needs of the younger people are. It is clear that communication is the best way to coexist and coexistence is the best way to understand.

Finally, I would like to point out that, in the first place of the section on interpersonal relationships in the commandments of the Christian Decalogue, there is a commandment to honour your father and mother, with an encouraging addition of wishing them *long life and well-being on earth*. This needs no explanation. All that needs to be said is that this commandment applies to the older generation in general and includes our behaviour towards them.

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