Presidenza del Consiglio dei Ministri

NATIONAL BIOETHICS COMMITTEE

DIFFERENTIATED ALIMENTATION AND INTERCULTURALISM

(17th March 2006)

abstract

In the sphere of intercultural or multicultural bioethics, the opinion deals with the question of alimentation in various establishments: schools, hospitals, prisons, barracks. In social contexts where subjects belonging to different ethnic, religious and cultural communities coexist, conflicts can arise with regard to the appropriateness of foreseeing differentiated contents and modalities for the nutrition of people in public structures.

The NBC, recognising the close link between food and culture, reasserts the respect of the fundamental values of the person and his or her freedom of conscience and religion, guaranteed by the Constitution. It puts forward the possibility that "positive" courses may be identified which would permit not only the claiming of the right to keep one's dietary habits unchanged, but also to propose them as an element of social integration. In this perspective the question of differentiated alimentation becomes part of a wider education process, understood as the learning of the cultural significance of food as an instrument by which to relate to others, facilitating also the understanding of why certain foods are prohibited for religious reasons. There is a need to foster the expression of individual identity in the person, the realisation of one's own values and a mature approach in one's own behaviour out of respect towards the needs of others.

It seems that the main obstacle is to be found in the costs needed in order to extend the possibility of differentiated alimentation in public facilities.