

Editor's Word

In 2019 Pope Francis and the Grand Imam of Al-Azhar Ahmad Al-Tayyeb issued a joint statement, *Document on Human Fraternity for World Peace and Living Together*, inviting people of different faiths to dialogue with one another, and to advance peace. During the Second Vatican Council (1962-1965) the Catholic Church had already affirmed the value of different faiths and the need for inter-faith dialogue. But in the past there was the impression that inter-faith dialogue was a lesser mission of the Catholic Church. Most of the faithful know little about the other faiths. If we look around the world today, many of the conflicts between peoples and among nations are linked to religion. In secular society a majority of people have religious affiliations; their impact on society is certainly not negligible. In his first papal encyclical, *Evangelium Gaudium* (*Joy of the Gospel*, henceforth cited as EG), Pope Francis clarified that “Interreligious dialogue is a necessary condition for peace in the world, and so it is a duty for Christians as well as other religious communities.... A dialogue which seeks social peace and justice is in itself, beyond all merely practical considerations, an ethical commitment which brings about a new social situation.” (EG 250) The quest for peace is not just to reduce or do away with conflicts or wars, even more important is the changing of hearts, to build a culture of love. Pope Francis has throughout his papacy promoted a Culture of Encounter. Dialogue is a path to building such a culture. One has to listen humbly, share and express oneself honestly, and trust in each other. “True openness involves remaining steadfast in one’s deepest convictions, clear and joyful in one’s own identity, while at the same time being ‘open to understanding those of the other party’ and ‘knowing that dialogue can enrich each side’.” (EG 251) Two years after the joint declaration with the Grand Imam, last September (2022) during the VII Congress of Leaders of World and Traditional Religions, Pope Francis reiterated that inter-religious dialogue is urgently needed on the path toward peace.

On 9 December 2021 in response to the appeal by Pope Francis and the Grand Imam, Centre for Catholic Studies and Centre for the Study of Islamic Culture, both of The Chinese University of Hong Kong, co-sponsored “Human Fraternity and Social Friendship: an Inter-Religious Dialogue,” and invited scholars of different faith backgrounds to respond to *Document on Human Fraternity*. From their respective religious belief and ethical principles, the presenters at the conference interpreted social friendship, how to connect with those who suffer, as well as explore religious values and education. Everyone listened humbly and by asking each other questions came to know more about one another, thus the conference became a platform for dialogue.

The current issue of the Journal is a collection of the presented papers in the conference. Catholic scholar Dr. Mary Yuen Mee-yin’s paper, “Accepting Sufferers with Mercy, Kindness and Interconnectedness—A Dialogue between the *Document on Human Fraternity for World Peace and Living Together* and Pope Francis’ Encyclical *Fratelli Tutti*,” brings the two documents together to show how they use a common methodology—to see/contemplate, to judge/discern and to act/propose. Both documents point out that today’s problem lies in indifference to the suffering of others. In face of suffering, the faithful need to discern, and choose whether to care or to flee. Both documents propose transforming the world with friendship and mercy, going to the margins of society to dialogue with those who suffer, and listen to their deepest voice. Religions cannot shirk their responsibility as it is their self-appointed task to advance the world toward the Great Unity (Da Tong). Furthermore Dr. Yuen reflects on the local context and suggests that the Church of Hong Kong actively become a Good Samaritan, to bring hope to the despondent, and offer opportunities for dialogue for people from different backgrounds. Christianity should target indifference, which is the source of current social problems, and promote inter-faith dialogue, listen to those who suffer, and build a culture of encounter.

Protestant scholar Dr. Natalie H.K. Chan's "Vulnerable Communion and Human Fraternity: Focusing on Christian Relational Anthropology and the Experience of Hong Kong Christian Women Living with Depression" explores the connection with those who suffer through "social friendship" and Christian Relational Anthropology to show the Christian vision of communion in love. Her paper underscores how dialogue should be based on an equal relationship, mutuality, reciprocal compassion and empowerment. However, today's social values put a premium on personal development capability and views human vulnerability and those less capable as weak or socially useless. In such thinking, those with different abilities cannot engage in an equal dialogue and help each other to grow. Using the framework of Christian Relational Anthropology, Dr. Chan discusses human community and vulnerability—to embrace one another's vulnerability with love, and build a community in which our vulnerability complements one another.

Dr. Ngai Ting-ming's "Real Admirable Gentry—Exploring the Confucian Complex of Hong Kong Gentry in the Case of Ho Kai and Hu Liyuan" uses the story of two personages in early Hong Kong history to illustrate how Confucian thinking, Christian and Buddhist beliefs are not mutually antagonistic, but can merge together. This method of using personal history and experience to present religious exchange is more three-dimensional and comprehensive than pure philosophical inquiry. After all religion is a matter concerning the whole existence of life.

Ordinarily people have a false or negative conception about Buddhism and Daoism, thinking that both focus on other-worldly thoughts, detached from social ethical issues of this world. In "The Balance Point of Interpersonal Relationships—Referencing the Law of Dependent Origination for Perfect Human Relationships," Rev. Dr. Sik Fa Ren arrives at the balance point of ethical relationships through the Buddhist *Sujata Sutra*. Rather than asking what the other person has done for me, consider how you wish to be treated, and so treat the other person. First sow good causes, then reap good fruits, thus countering today's social ethos of stressing rights

over obligations. In a similar way Daoist Rev. Chan King-yeung points out in his paper, “Religious Practice for the World: Daoism’s Response to the Challenges of the Present Times,” that Daoism is not a hermit religion, but a religious practice for the world. He suggests that today’s technological development makes production more efficient, and our everyday life more convenient and leisurely. But too much leisure creates a void that people fill with online activities; online meetings also become a norm during the pandemic, reducing human relationships to something virtual. Rev. Chan shares Daoist spiritual practice that is used to meet the challenges of this generation. It consists of *Daodejing*’s three treasures of “compassion,” “frugality” and “humility,” that is, a heart of charity, a heart of simplicity, and a heart of deference. This resonates with the compassion, simplicity and dialogue that the Pope and the Grand Imam advocate in the Declaration, and is meaningful to how we currently understand and deal with desire and conflict.

Confucian scholar Dr. Billy Tang Ka-jau’s “Interpretation of ‘Family’ and the Formation of Its Values and Virtues” compares and elucidates the understanding, values and moral cultivation of family from the three traditions of Confucianism, Buddhism and Catholicism. Although the three religions, owing to their dissimilar understanding of the origin and telos of life in the cosmos, interpret the meanings and functions of “family” differently, they affirm the importance of “family” in character formation, as well as ethical and spiritual education. Daoist Rev. Dr. Lee Chi-shing notes in “Religious Awareness and Dialogue: The Construction of Traditional Religious Values from Daoism’s Perspective”: “If one hears but does not believe, it is futile to listen to more principles; if one believes but does not practise, faith has no place to take root. The teaching of principles affords people a resource for belief; but if it is not put into practice fully, it is all but sound and fury, signifying nothing.” Thus, the focus of religious formation is on practice and awakening religious awareness. Rev. Dr. Lee suggests training in the first five stages of the Daoist *Zuowang Lun*—a movement from trust in the Dao to truth contemplation—to maintain personal spiritual tranquility, let go of worries and

return to the true self, in so doing resolve the suffering that individuals bear from contemporary social oppression. Both believers and non-believers can practise in this way. Although it could be misunderstood or distorted by non-believers, it is a tension that must be grappled with if religious values were to return to public life. As for conversations, Rev. Dr. Lee quotes Wang Chongyang on the Compatibility of the Three Teachings (Confucianism, Buddhism and Daoism): “Enlightenment will help you know their difference; awakening will lead you to be tolerant.” In this sense a thorough understanding of different religions leads to generous inclusion.

In an education system dominated by contemporary utilitarian values, how does religion form the physical, moral and spiritual development of students? Buddhist scholar, Dr. Elsa Lau Ngar-sze, takes a different tack in her paper, “Facilitating Human Fraternity for Living Together through Religious and Spiritual Education in Schools.” Instead of focusing on Buddhist spiritual education, she teaches students according to a plurality of cultures, and draws on spiritual exercises in different traditions. Taking anger as an example, she explains how different religions use different approaches to transform anger, thus confirming the important role of religion in spiritual education and positive education. Last but not least, in “Reflections on Contemporary Education from Insights Drawn from the *Document on Human Fraternity for World Peace and Living*,” Rev. Edward Chau King-fun of the Catholic diocese of Hong Kong discusses how religious belief, religious ethics and spiritual education contribute to the Culture of Encounter.

This conference and the very exchange among the participants not only contributed to the mutual understanding of religions, but also witnessed to the fraternity that dialogue fosters. Centre for Catholic Studies, CUHK, hopes for more future dialogues among religions.

Chief Editor

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