

Special Issue Editorial

Claritas: *Journal of Dialogue and Culture* is honored to be chosen to publish the proceedings of the “Buddhist-Catholic Dialogue on Suffering, Liberation, and Fraternity.” This historic dialogue, the first Buddhist-Catholic dialogue to be held at this high level in Rome, was sponsored by the Bishops’ Committee for Ecumenical and Interreligious Dialogue (BCEIA) of the United States Conference of Catholic Bishops (USCCB) in collaboration with the Vatican’s Pontifical Council for Interreligious Dialogue (PCID). The dialogue was convened from June 23 to 27, 2015 at the Focolare’s Mariapolis Center on the grounds of the pope’s summer residence in Castel Gandolfo, Italy.

Forty-five Buddhists and Catholics, religious leaders involved in dialogue and/or social action in the United States attended from five cities: New York City, Washington, D.C., Chicago, Los Angeles, and San Francisco. The archdioceses of these five cities supported the dialogue. Catholic participants represented the ecumenical and interreligious officers as well as the offices of Catholic

Claritas: Journal of Dialogue and Culture, Vol. 4, No. 2 (October 2015)
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Charities of the archdioceses, the Society of St. Vincent de Paul, the Monastic Interreligious Dialogue, the Focolare Movement, the Franciscan Friars of the Atonement, and the Catholic Association for Diocesan Ecumenical and Interreligious Officers (CA-DEIO). Buddhist participants included leaders representing the Sri Lankan, Thai, Cambodian, Vietnamese, Tibetan, Chinese, Korean and Japanese traditions, as well as participants who self-identify with growing Western forms of Buddhism.

Dialogue Documents:

- **Reflections and Blessing** by Pope Francis at a private audience
- **The Keynote Address** by Cardinal Jean-Louis Tauran, President of the PCID
- **The Greetings of Peace** by Most Rev. Mitchell T. Rozanski, Chair of the BCEIA
- **Joint Statement** by the participants

Day One: “Relational Suffering and its Causes”

Presentations from the first day of the dialogue developed the theme: “Relational Suffering and its Causes.” By “relational suffering” is meant the suffering that comes about within relations between persons and with other living beings. The papers include:

- **The Causes of Relational Suffering and their Cessation according to Theravāda Buddhism** by Ven. Dr. Phramaha Thanat Inthisan
- **Suffering and the Teachings of Jesus Christ** by Rev. Donald Rooney

- **The Teachings of the Buddha about Relational Suffering** by Ven. Maharagama Dhammasiri
- **The Understanding of Suffering in the Early Christian Church** by Rev. Leo D. Lefebure
- **Relational Suffering: Causes and Liberation according to Buddhism** by Sovan Tun.
- **Causes of Relational Suffering between Persons According to the Tradition of the Church Mothers** by Anne McCarthy, OSB.

Day Two: “Liberation from Relational Suffering”

The second day was divided between addressing the ways in which Buddhism and Christianity seek to liberate persons from relational suffering, and the ways that both traditions seek to alleviate suffering between persons and all living beings. The latter topic was timely since Pope Francis had just published his environmental encyclical, *Laudato Si'*. The papers include:

- **Mahāyāna Practices for Healing, Reconciliation and Peace: Perfect Peace Makes Practice** by Rev. Ronald Kobata
- **To Bind, To Heal, To Reconcile: The Church and Interreligious Dialogue** by Rev. Brian E. McWeeney
- **The Mahāyāna Practices for Healing, Reconciliation and Peace** by Ven. Thich Tu-Luc
- **Catholic Moral Teachings and Spiritual Practices for Human Relations: Catholic Practices for Healing, Reconciliation and Peace** by Fr. Wilfred Tyrrell, S.A.
- **Mahāyāna Practices for Healing, Reconciliation, and Peace: An Ethical Approach** by Ven. Chang-Hwa

- **Catholic Theology of Creation: Nature’s Value and Relation to Humankind** by Donald W. Mitchell
- **The Buddha Was Enlightened Under a Tree: A Buddhist Perspective on Nature and the Climate Crisis** by Hozan Alan Senauke

Day Three: “Fraternity as the Way Forward”

The third day was devoted to a discussion of what Pope Francis calls the “dialogue of fraternity.” In its 1984 document, “The Attitude of the Church Towards the Followers of other Religions,” the PCID defined four kinds of dialogue: dialogue of life, dialogue of action, dialogue of theological exchange, and dialogue of religious experience. Under Pope John Paul II, the dialogue of theological exchange for mutual understanding and respect was emphasized. This brought scholars together to explore similarities and differences. Pope Benedict XVI added emphasis on being a Pilgrim Church journeying toward “the fullness of Truth” in friendship with “fellow pilgrims” of other religions. Now, Pope Francis is expanding the dialogue further by emphasizing the need to develop a sense of “fraternity” as a foundation for the dialogue of action that addresses the social ills of our world. True solidarity in such action must be based on fraternity in its original sense of “brotherhood/sisterhood.”

The June encounter was the first of this kind of new dialogue to be held in Rome. Earlier in the year, one was held in Bodh Gaya, India—the site of the Buddha’s enlightenment. The participants at that dialogue were from India, Myanmar, and Sri Lanka where social ills with religious roots need to be addressed. In the Rome dialogue instead, a much larger group of Buddhists and Catholics

were invited from all around the United States to dialogue and explore fraternal collaboration in addressing the social ills in the cities of this one country. It was a new step forward in this dialogue of action.

The papers presented on this third day discussed two topics: the notion of “Fraternity among Human Beings” in Christianity and Buddhism, and “Building a Fraternal World.” The papers include:

- **The Four Divine Abodes and Fraternity** by Ven. Sumana Barua
- **Fraternity in the Christian Tradition: Koinonia as an Interpretive Hermeneutic** by Rev. Thomas A. Baima
- **The Great Compassion and Fraternity in Mahāyāna Buddhist Traditions** by Ven. Dr. Dhammadīpa Sak (Fa Yao 法曜)
- **Fraternity in the Catholic Monastic Tradition** by Rev. William Skudlarek
- **Fraternity as the Way Forward** by Rev. Kyoichi Sugino
- **Building a Fraternal World: A Won Buddhist Perspective** by Ven. Chung Ohun Lee
- **Survey of Catholic Social Teachings** by Rev. James Fredericks
- **Embracing Differences and Sharing Commonalities: Harmony According to the Middle Way: The Humanistic Buddhism Perspective** by Ven. Miao Hsi

Day Four: “Post-Dialogue Planning: Fraternal Interreligious Cooperation”

The final day of the dialogue was devoted to exploring the social issues in the United States that the participants feel need to be

addressed today, and ideas as to how possible Buddhist-Catholic collaborations of fraternal interreligious social action could be advanced in the United States. The papers include:

- **Social Ills and Possible Social Action in the United States: The Need to Support Families and Youth** by Ven. Bhante Chao Chu
- **Partnerships in Social Services and Dialogue: Lessons from Manhattan, Staten Island and the Bronx** by Thomas P. Dobbins Jr.
- **A Universal Vision of Human Goodness and Social Transformation** by Acharya Fleet Maul
- **A Catholic View of Social Concerns in the United States** by Lorraine Moriarty
- **Buddhist Views of Social Concerns in the United States** by Rev. Patti Nakai
- **Catholic Thoughts on Collaboration in Addressing Social Ills** by Susan M. Pudelek
- **Buddhist Thoughts on Collaboration in Addressing Social Ills in the United States** by Rev. Asayo Horibe
- **On the Practical Applications of Catholic Social Teaching** by David Fields
- **Understanding Power, Privilege, Intent and Impact in Catholic-Buddhist and Buddhist-Catholic Social Change Initiatives** by Rev. Mushim Patricia Ikeda
- **Possible Buddhist-Catholic Collaborations** by David Barringer

The editors of *Claritas* hope that our readers will appreciate the extraordinary richness of this dialogical thought and sharing of ideas about the human condition of relational suffering, its causes,

and religious approaches to liberation from such suffering on the individual and social levels. In terms of the latter, we hope that these reflections on fraternity, the social ills needing to be addressed, and possibilities for interreligious collaboration will inspire our readers to reflection and action. Indeed, since returning to the United States, the groups from the five cities have begun the process of building networks to explore joint projects that will define and address specific social ills in their cities. In future issues, *Claritas* will report on the progress of these initiatives.

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