

Editorial:

HOMO RELIGIOSUS AT THE SERVICE OF ETHICAL SOCIETIES

As I sat to write this editorial, the news came about the new encyclical by Pope Francis, *Fratelli Tutti: Fraternity and Social Friendship*. Catholic, religious, and secular media started discussing this imaginative and very much needed vision on Fraternity. The concept of fraternity was missing from the academia and public discourse, for a long time, while in the Christian thought and practice fraternity was ever present starting with the New Testament writings and early Christian communities. Though with the French Revolution, the triptych of *Liberté, Egalité, Fraternité* acquired political significance and universal meaning, the revolutionaries and the post revolution separated fraternity from freedom and equality and fraternity from its religious roots and kept it from the public space. Now as fraternity is back into public discourse, what is important from an ethical perspective are the questions, "What do we mean and what does it follow when we call someone 'sister' or 'brother'?"

Our focus in this issue of the Journal is to investigate and affirm the bond between religion and ethics and to throw light on the contribution of *homo religiosus* in the humanity's project of moving toward ethical societies. Despite the influence and efforts of modernism and rationalism, religion remains a fundamental dimension of human life and society and contributes to the construction and maintenance of ethical societies.

Ethics, Creed, and Cult are constitutive of all religions; there is no religion without rules for moral behaviour. *Homo ethicus* is also intimately related to *homo religiosus* in the stream of our forms of life. Traditionally religions were the custodians of Ethics and moral instruction, which were based on the scriptures and handed down through tradition. Life and words of the founders, prophets, and sages of religious paths guided the believers in deciding what is good, right, and just. The cultic celebrations are also occasions for ethical instructions. For many believers, it is religion that directs their ethical decisions and faith is necessary to live ethically.

With the arrival of modernity, secularism, and liberalism, however, many consider religion to be a liability than a contributor for human pursuit of peace and prosperity; they prefer and promote an ethics, devoid of divine and transcendental dimensions. It takes different forms: anti-religious, a-religious, and ethics beyond religions. They argue for a universal ethics which makes no recourse to religion, an ethics beyond religion. They prefer science to guide their lives and technology to provide peace and prosperity, rejecting all that could not be scientifically verifiable, including religions, as fictions.

Scientism is perhaps the dominant ideology of our time. It is so obvious, in most intellectual circles, that it is hard to take note of it at all. It is the cultural environment in which we live, move, and have our being, implicitly attributing omniscience and omnipotence to science and technology. The scientific culture implicitly or explicitly holds the belief that human beings as rational beings gradually evolved from myths and religious explanations to scientific understanding, which liberated human beings from false or primitive understanding of reality, to truth. As they hold, scientific method is necessary and sufficient to reach genuine knowledge, and therefore, scientific method should be applied in all forms of rational investigations; the progress of a society and the progress in science and technology are directly proportional.

The scientific culture led people to a market society, where people are valued based on their money power rather than an ethical society, where people are valued for their altruistic virtues. The technocratic and market driven contemporary culture works towards economic prosperity provided by science and technology and as panacea to problems of people and planet. Religious believers, on the other hand, argue that religions could be effective agents for the protection and promotion of *Liberté, Egalité, and Fraternité*; religious people are more motivated to work towards ethical societies that guarantee sustainable peace and prosperity for people and planet. As Pope Francis reminds us, "religious classics can prove meaningful in every age; they have an enduring power." Yet often they are viewed with disdain as a result of "the myopia of a certain rationalism" (Francis, *Evangelii Gaudium*, 256).

Pope Francis wrote in *Fratelli Tutti*, "The different religions, based on their respect for each human person as a creature called to be a child of God, contribute significantly to building fraternity and defending justice in society" (271). Faith in the fatherhood of God

demands ethical treatment of all as sisters and brothers, and give value to the earth as God's creation. While science and technology driven by market society constantly asks what we can do to enhance individual and collective happiness, religions insist on asking what we ought to do as rational and ethical beings. A world moving away from God moves away from people and planet, refusing to respond to the cry of the poor and the cry of the planet. Religious people are convinced that "If there is no transcendent truth, in obedience to which man achieves his full identity, then there is no sure principle for guaranteeing just relations between people" (John Paul II 849).

In the *Document on Human Fraternity for World Peace and Living Together*, Pope Francis and Grand Imam Ahmad Al-Tayyeb affirmed that "among the most important causes of the crises of the modern world are a desensitized human conscience, a distancing from religious values and the prevailing individualism accompanied by materialistic philosophies that deify the human person and introduce worldly and material values in place of supreme and transcendental principles" (6). It would certainly contribute to construction of ethical societies if *homo religiosus* follow their religious principles and practices. Religious convictions about the sacred meaning of human life permit us "to recognize the fundamental values of our common humanity, values in the name of which we can and must cooperate, build and dialogue, pardon and grow; this will allow different voices to unite in creating a melody of sublime nobility and beauty, instead of fanatical cries of hatred" (Francis, "Address to Civil Authorities," 7).

In this issue of the *Journal of Dharma* on "Towards Ethical Societies: Religious Perspectives" there are ten articles investigating different dimensions of religious life and its underlying ethical implications. The first essay "Religions as Ways of Life, Paths of Study, Communities in the Making" by Francis X. Clooney makes the claim that religion is a constitutive and inevitable part of 21st century life and not a dimension that is option, able to be put aside in a secular society. All citizens, even those interested only in their own religion or not personally committed to any religion, must know religions well, for the common good of all people in a city, state, or nation. If we are to take religions seriously, we must be committed to thinking non-reductively about life's 'religious dimension,' retrieving a rich sense of being-religious, and affirming religion as a whole way of life, rather than one component among many.

Christian life centres on the practice of the virtues of faith, hope, and love. Love in turn informs mercy and forgiveness. These virtues are essentially communal, and their fulfilment is withheld until the Second Coming of Jesus. Together, this means that Christian life is a shared life in which the essential practices bind the members together in the presence of Jesus Christ. These claims are developed by Jeffrey Bloechl in his article, "Bonds of Perfect Unity: Exegetical and Philosophical Approaches to Love, Mercy and Forgiveness," on the basis of an exegetical and philosophical reading of Chapter 3 of the *Letter to the Colossians*. What exegesis proposes to the life of faith, philosophy is able to disclose in its objective meaning.

The primacy of love in human nature and relations is explored further in the next essay "Opening the Eye of Love: James Purdy's Ethical Allegory" by Don Adams, by examining James Purdy's 1975 ethical and allegorical religious novel, *In A Shallow Grave*, from the viewpoint of negative theology. Purdy's allegorical-realist texts are approached from the enabling metaphysical and spiritual perspective of the *via negativa* through the writing of Pseudo-Dionysius and Pope Benedict XVI, revealing the fiction's mimetic contrariness as the vehicle of ethical instruction and metaphysical revelation. The essay sketches a vision of being's ultimate harmony that is gradually revealed to the eye of love through the insistent negation of our conventional egoistic assumptions regarding self and world.

David Lutz focuses on the ethical dimension of Christian love and its foundational nature in building up persons and societies in his essay "The Institution of the Family and the Virtuous Society." In traditional societies, the institution of the family has ethical obligations and promotes the common good of society. Within liberal societies, marriage is transformed into a relationship between contracting individuals, who are free to choose the rules for their marriages. Because the liberal model of marriage is based on emotions, which frequently change, it is argued that marriages are less stable and their ability to promote the good of society is diminished. In his view, we should safeguard or recover the understanding and reality of the family as a social institution with ethical obligations.

In the next essay, Nicu Dumitraşcu in "The Romanian Orthodox Church, Morality, and Politics" examines the relationship and limits of collaboration between Church and State, religious and secular power, renewal of the Orthodox Church, its dialogue with intellectuals, and

the criticism that comes from the followers of religious syncretism, the identity crisis of new generations and the moral relativism of civil society, and the use of technology and digital communication. According to the author, the Orthodox Church should rethink the manner of communicating with people in such a way that, without renouncing its own identity, it promotes a moralizing and brotherly spirit in modern society.

"'So I Always Take Pains to Have a Clear Conscience toward Both God and Man' (Acts 24:16): Saint Paul as Prisoner and Ethical Societies" by Christoph W. Stenschke investigates how Paul, the prisoner, and his contribution to ethical societies are characterised in the *Book of Acts* (21:27–28:31). After some introductory matters, the author examines how Paul's behaviour and words during his arrest, hearings in Jerusalem by Roman authorities and Jewish leaders, sea-voyage to Rome, and his stay there, and offers hermeneutical reflections and seeks to bridge the gap to current social ethics.

Based on the close relationship between religious culture and women's writing in the Qing Dynasty, Rongrong Han explores women's literature and the influence of religious culture on women's lives in the essay, titled, "Female Writing and Religious Culture in Qing Dynasty." The life experiences related to religion enabled writers to reflect over the hardships of life and the fantasy of breaking away from the world, with the hope of enlightenment. The language and style of female poets expressed religious thoughts and feelings, while the religious vocabulary and imageries of Buddhism and Taoism enriched the poetic language and images within their work.

Abhinav Anand in "Induced Abortion as *Pāṇātipāta*: Revisiting Buddhist Position on the Right to Life of an Unborn" investigates the issue whether Buddhism proposes (a) pro-life, (b) pro-choice, (c) middle way, or (d) ambiguous position on the issues of abortion. Three questions are examined: (i) when does an individual life begin according to the early Buddhist Pāli texts? (ii) What are the cases of abortion recorded in these texts? (iii) How and why the Buddhist metaphysical and ethical principles prohibits killing? Analysing selected passages of Pāli texts and their metaphysical and ethical ideas the author argues that abortion is an act of *pāṇātipāta* (killing) a moral being and is prohibited.

Ismath Ramzy, Azni Yati, and Faisal Mohamed in their research article, "Universal Aspects of Islamic Ethics and Muslim Extremism"

examine the role of Islam in promoting ethical society in the globalized world against the extremists' interpretations of Islamic ethical system, using the self-developed theoretical framework based on *Amr Bi al-Maruf Wa al-Nahyi al-Munkar* – promotion of goodness and prevention of badness. The content analysis method is used in this research to collect the data from the religious scriptures and literatures. This research found that Islamic religious ethics is universal and capable of guiding young generation in industrial revolution 4.0.

K. J. Gasper analyzes and presents the nuances involved in the phenomenological themes of empathy, ethical concerns and human existence and explicates their theological implications, in his essay titled, "Relational Nature of Human Person: An Analysis of St Edith Stein's Perspectives towards Ethical Community." The empathic inter-human relation, according to Stein, is a locus of Divine Grace wherein one along with the other involve in an attempt to orient themselves for higher values for which they are originally called by God in the order of Creation. In the light of Stein's views on human existence as Divine Vocation, this study argues that by pointing out self's fundamental opening as self of love and responsibility for the other, one can realize oneself as always and already otherwise-than-being.

Affirming the fraternity of all people and other beings and the ethical rights and duties of all people, may I submit this issue of the *Journal of Dharma* on "Towards Ethical Societies: Religious Perspectives" for your reading and reflection.

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