



## **Closing Remarks**

**His Eminence Cardinal Jean-Louis Tauran**

**Pronounced at the Closing Ceremony**

**of the Sixth Buddhist-Christian Colloquium**

**Taipei, 16 November 2017**

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**for the Sixth Buddhist-Christian Colloquium**

**His Eminence Cardinal Jean Louis Tauran**

**President of the Pontifical Council for Interreligious Dialogue**

**Taipei, 16 November 2017**

Dharma Master Ven. Hsin Tao,

Eminence,

Excellencies,

Distinguished Buddhist and Christian leaders,

Ladies and Gentlemen

We have reached the end of the 6<sup>th</sup> Buddhist-Christian Colloquium. Even though, I was not present at the beginning, I was told that it has been a great success. I would like to thank all of you for participating actively in this Colloquium as well as for the quality and variety of your presentations. I also take this opportunity to greet the distinguished authorities who honour us with their presence today. I am sure that your minds and hearts are filled with joy and happiness for the opportunity to make new friends and renew old acquaintances as well as to discuss and exchange ideas and experiences related to a culture of peace.

After three days of enriching exchanges on the general theme *Christians and Buddhists Walking Together on the Path of Nonviolence*, we are about to go back to our respective countries and institutions. At this point, we need to ask how can we go beyond the exterior surface of our interfaith encounters and use the knowledge and experiences we received at this Conference to fashion a world that is free of violence.

In my Vesakh Message for 2017, I mentioned that:

*“Though we recognize the uniqueness of our two religions, to which we remain committed, we agree that violence comes forth from the human heart, and that personal evils lead to structural evils. [...]” (n. 6).*

Violence, in other words, is manifested not only at the individual and social levels; it is also manifested structurally through socio-economic, political, cultural, and media forces. We are, therefore, called to work together to dismantle the evil that operates in us as well as in our social structures by:

- Speaking truth to power;
- Speaking truth in charity;
- Overcoming a ‘culture of indifference’ and building a ‘culture of encounter’;
- Moving from a ‘culture of reaction’ to a ‘culture of prevention’;
- Ending a culture of impunity and promoting ‘a culture of respect’; and
- Social peace through inner peace.

### **1. Speaking truth to power**

Speaking truth to power means that we speak out in defence of the powerless, calling for justice, and denouncing the situations that perpetuate injustice. We do so because of our inner conviction that the religious truths we profess call us to speak out on behalf of the victims of the misuse of power. When Lord Buddha spoke truth to power, there were attempts on his life. Speaking the truth to power cost Jesus Christ his life. As followers of Buddha and Jesus, we must have the courage to decry the evils we see. Such words and deeds comfort the afflicted; they also afflict the comfortable.

During the Vietnam War, the Buddhist monk Thich Nhat Hanh was judged a traitor by both sides in his country’s conflict because he had called for peace in Vietnam. Thomas Merton called him “My Brother”. Their interfaith friendship strengthened their determination to speak with one voice, the voice of love and compassion. In so doing, they became a voice for the voiceless. The example of this remarkable interfaith friendship and solidarity can inspire us as we face situations of injustice, oppression, and exclusion.

### **1. Speaking truth in charity**

When we speak the truth, how we say it matters? We need to learn how to speak the truth of nonviolence with charity. Angulimāla was a ruthless serial killer, but Buddha was able to redeem him, and he later became an arahant, a saint. Mathew was a *tax collector* who was despised by his fellow Jews because he was collaborating with the Roman occupation force. Yet, when Jesus invited him to be his follower, Mathew not only became one of the twelve close disciples of Jesus but also one of the four Evangelists who preserved the teaching and deeds of Jesus. These transforming experiences show us that the human person has the capacity for spiritual progress, regardless of his or her past. In other words, we can and should judge evil deeds, but we must do so without condemning the evildoer.

**Overcoming a ‘culture of indifference’ and building a ‘culture of encounter’**

Pope Francis warned that we have fallen into a globalisation of indifference that is causing individuals and communities to withdraw into themselves, closing out the “other” (Cf. *Message for Lent, 2015*). As a remedy, he invites us to work for a culture of encounter, as Jesus did. He emphasizes how different a culture of encounter is from a culture of indifference when he says that it involves “not just seeing, but looking; not just hearing, but listening; not just passing people by, but stopping with them; not just saying “what a shame, poor people!””, but allowing yourself to be moved with compassion; “and then to draw near, to touch and to say: ‘Do not weep’ and to give at least a drop of life” (*Morning Meditation in the Chapel of the Domus Sanctae Marthae, 13 September 2016*).

I am well aware that the Lord Buddha and many of his disciples in the past and in our own time have worked to foster a culture of encounter in place of a culture of indifference. Moving from a ‘culture of reaction’ to a ‘culture of prevention’

When faced with violence, people often react violently and seek freedom from discrimination and oppression. *Violence* only perpetrates more *violence*, creating a *vicious circle*. In many parts of the world, there are political situations that lead to untold acts of revenge. The 21<sup>st</sup> century has been marked by *identity-based conflicts*, conflicts that are related to ethnic, cultural, and religious affiliations and identifications.

Jesus opposed use of violence when he said, “All who will take up the sword, will die by the sword.” Buddha said, “*Hate* is never ended by more *hate*, but by friendship; that is an eternal law.” They were promoters of a culture of prevention, a culture that addresses the socio-economic and political roots of conflicts and tension and seeks to provide protection for the afflicted and vulnerable parties. It opposes indiscriminate offensive military actions; tackles self-directed, interpersonal, and collective violence; averts verbal, physical, sexual, and psychological abuse; develops safe, stable, and nurturing relationships between children and their parents and caregivers; promotes gender equality to prevent violence against women; safeguards the environment, our common home; and fosters dialogue at all levels to build inclusive societies.

1. Ending of a culture of impunity and promoting a culture of respect

In the Vesakh Message for 2017, I noted that “many of our societies grapple with the impact of past and present wounds caused by violence and conflicts” (n. 5). *Majoritarianism*, that is, rule by a majority at the expense of minorities, leads to relentless violence. In time of conflicts, when the state sanctions discriminatory laws, when it convicts and subsequently carries out arbitrary executions, it breaks the rule of law and creates a culture of impunity. In such a culture, people come to believe that they are free to do whatever they want, without having to face any consequences for their actions.

Pope Francis notes that “War ruins everything, even the bonds between brothers. War is irrational; its only plan is to bring destruction: it seeks to grow by destroying.” (*Military Memorial in Redipuglia, Saturday, 13 September 2014*). Wars and conflicts have huge human, economic, social, and political costs. In post-conflict situations, the wounds of wars and conflicts often continue. Therefore, the social, economic, and political realities in our respective countries call

upon all of us to engage in a spiritual battle within ourselves, within our religions, and within our societies. We need to reconcile our polarized societies. Violent conflicts inflict wounds on everyone, and therefore all are in need of healing. The victim suffers from being treated as less than human, while the perpetrator often suffers from guilt.

The Golden Rule, “Do unto others as you would have them do unto you,” lays the foundation for a culture of respect. Such a culture flows from an inner disposition that calls us to look upon and treat the “other” as a true sister or brother, not as an enemy or rival.

1. Social peace through inner peace

Pascal, the French philosopher, used to say; “All of humanity’s problems stem from man’s inability to sit quietly in a room alone.” Abba Moses, one of the great Desert fathers, would counsel his monks: “Go, sit in your cell, and your cell will teach you everything.” ‘Cell’ means ‘self’ or ‘heart’. Violence that is present in our hearts is also manifested in our society. By changing our *inner* worlds, we can positively influence our *outer* world. Through prayer, silence, and meditation, let us cultivate inner freedom, purity of heart, compassion, forgiveness, and the gift of self, all of which are essential conditions for the inner peace of the individual as well as for social peace.

## Conclusion

Because violence shatters human lives, our common task is to heal a fractured world. Interreligious dialogue is the antidote to today’s violence. Our reactions to violence must avoid contradictions and inconsistencies. Sometimes, we have a tendency to be vigorous in condoning the violence that was perpetrated in one incident, and then are equally passionate about condemning the violence in another incident. Our reaction to violence must be based on the dignity of the human person and not on our cultural identities and prejudices. What is needed today to foster a nonviolent world is a socially engaged Buddhist-Christian dialogue. Let us commit ourselves to cultivating within our families and within our social, political, civil, and religious institutions a new style of living where violence is rejected and the human person is respected!

I thank you once again for your presence at this important dialogue. I value strong and friendly relations between the Pontifical Council for Interreligious Dialogue and our Buddhist friends. I express my sincere gratitude to all those who made this event a reality, in particular, the Chinese Regional *Bishops' Conference* (CRBC), Ling Jiou Buddhist Monastery, the Government of the Republic of China (Taiwan), and also its embassy to the Holy See. It is very important today to disseminate the message of nonviolence to a wider audience. Let us do it together while walking on the path of nonviolence.