

EDITORIAL

The central theme of this issue of Islamochristiana is the “Document on Human Fraternity for World Peace and Living Together”, signed in Abu Dhabi by Pope Francis and the Grand Imam of al-Azhar Ahmad al-Tayyeb on 4 February 2019. Born of an encounter between the two at Casa Santa Marta in the Vatican and brought to maturity at the end of a year of joint work between the Holy See and al-Azhar, this Document takes on a great importance for interreligious relations in general and Muslim-Christian relations in particular, not solely due to the authority of those who signed it, but also due to the new vision it proposes: looking no longer backward but forward, this declaration rereads and reinterprets in a novel way the sacred texts and traditions of these respective religions. This explains on one hand the innovative force, and on the other hand the reservation and opposition it has generated. The Document, in sum, presents itself as an attempt to move beyond an impasse, as a new point of departure that, without denying the past, spurs us to look toward the future. For this reason, Pope Francis and Ahmad al-Tayyeb “ask that this Document become the object of research and reflection in all schools, universities and institutes of formation, thus helping to educate new generations to bring goodness and peace to others, and to be defenders everywhere of the rights of the oppressed and of the least of our brothers and sisters”.

The first words of the introduction constitute a milestone: “Faith leads a believer to see in the other a brother or sister to be supported and loved”. Signed by a Catholic Pope and a Sunnī Grand Imam, this affirmation sweeps away centuries of misunderstanding, of closedness, and of conflict – both armed and verbal. The “other” does not come with any additional adjectives denoting ethnicity or religion: the “other” is simply a brother or sister to love. Read in this contemporary key, the phrase has an immense social and political impact, if one considers what is occurring at this moment in history in different parts of the world, from the sad situation in the Middle East, which seems never to find peace, to the southern coast of the Mediterranean, to Sub-Saharan Africa, to Central and Southern Asia, and all the situations of conflict of any kind that afflict our planet. But read in a religious and “theological” key, the phrase opens the silos of identity constructed over the centuries, the ethnic and religious barriers – theologically justified – intended to limit obligations linked to fraternity and justify violence against the “other”. “Every war is a form of fratricide that destroys the human family’s innate vocation to brotherhood”, declared Pope

Francis in his Message for the Celebration of the 53rd World Day of Peace (1 January 2020). The creation of humankind by the One God makes all human beings brothers and sisters, in solidarity. It is a question of becoming conscious of this shared root and working to construct a world that makes fraternity and peace truly real.

Above all in Catholic circles, but also in certain parts of the Muslim world, the Document has been widely diffused and discussed. There have not been, however, at least up to the present moment, many specific attempts either to deepen the reflections of the Document or to study it in a scientific way. For this reason, Islamochristiana is pleased to present readers with a series of reflections and studies that revolve around the themes of human fraternity and the Document itself. At the beginning of this issue of the journal, we reproduce the two official versions, Italian and Arabic, followed by eight articles.

Cardinal Michael L. Fitzgerald reflects on the title, the contents, and the relation between the two official languages of the text, before presenting some general considerations about the theme at the end. Laurent Basanese briefly traces recent steps in the Muslim world on the themes of freedom, citizenship, and violence. He then dwells upon the most important aspects of the Document, emphasizing the fact that it does not limit itself to Muslim-Christian relations but proposes a general concept of interreligious dialogue. The article in Arabic by Adnane Mokrani comments on the Document in a similar way, but from a distinctively Muslim perspective: the Abu Dhabi declaration is an expression of humanity's conscience, which is alive and incisive. The Document offers both moral values and practical prospects to escape from the global crisis in which we find ourselves. The signing of the Document occurred during the eight hundredth anniversary of the encounter between Francis of Assisi and the sultan al-Malik al-Kāmil. Jason Welle offers an articulate contribution on the encounter at Damietta, consisting of a summary of the event, the influence that it had for St. Francis, the Arabic sources that could speak about it and its influence on the sultan, and finally, three lenses for evaluating the encounter: dialogue, friendship, and kinship. Two articles follow with comments from "outside" the Catholic Christian and Sunnī Muslim world. Jutta B. Sperber, a Protestant Christian, holds that the Document has a more pragmatic than theological function. She asks, nonetheless, whether, as a papal declaration, it could hold greater significance for Catholics at a dogmatic level. Mohammad Ali Shomali, a Šī'ī Muslim, highlights some of the most significant aspects of the Document. He presents certain qur'ānic verses that could witness to the reality of one single book and one single religion, which consists in turning one's gaze to God and doing good; in the end, Shomali proposes a change of paradigm in understanding "religion" that could take us beyond dialogue. Two twinned articles on the theme of fraternity close the section. Katia Suriano presents a narrative and intertextual approach to the qur'ānic story of the two sons of Adam; Valentino Cottini explores the theme of fraternity in the Bible, concentrating on the story of Cain and Abel in the book of Genesis. At the end of the Notes and Documents section of the issue, we have placed a short Dossier, in which one may find the English version of the Abu Dhabi declaration and some of the most significant later comments and developments.

This issue of Islamochristiana does not limit itself solely to reflection on human fraternity, but contains other interesting and important studies as well. In the realm of history, Michel Lagarde sketches an animated debate about a qur'ānic hapax legomenon; Ines Peta evaluates Abū Hāmid al-Ġazālī's theory of the imamate; Diego R. Sarrió Cucarella introduces and translates a short treatise by Hunayn b. Ishāq. Regarding dialogue today, Daniel A. Madigan reflects on the phrase from the Second Vatican Council affirming that Muslims adore "with us" the one God; Christopher Clohessy describes the memory of the battle of Karbalā' for Šī'ī Muslims and establishes a comparison with Catholic liturgical anamnesis; Jean Jacques Pérennès presents two diverse and complementary views of Islam, that of Pierre Claverie, Bishop of Oran, and that of the Trappist monk Christian de Chergé; Livia Passalacqua describes the way of the Ribāṭ es-Salām and the "martyrdom" of hope in three of the nineteen Martyrs of Algeria. Finally, in the realm of Muslim-Christian dialogue "in the field", Franco Sottocornola describes the current situation of relations between Christians and Muslims in Japan.

As can be seen, the harvest of contributions gathered in this issue of Islamochristiana is rich and plentiful. 2019 was a particularly fruitful year for encounters between Christians and Muslims in many regions of the world, as we chronicle in the abundant Notes and documents section, which, as we know, represents only a fraction of what took place around the world. An ample number of Book reviews completes the present volume, with some notes also on Books received present in the PISAI library.

Satisfied with this offering, we wish you happy reading!

Islamochristiana