

EDITORIAL

2020 could be called the Year of the Coronavirus (Covid-19). Hopefully, 2021 will be celebrated as the year of the exit from this scourge, thanks to the extraordinary efforts of the scientific world in research and the production of vaccines.

The pandemic struck an unprepared world. A microscopic virus has claimed more victims than the sum total of many wars; it has shown that all of creation, including human beings, exists as an interconnected and fragile system; it has sent the health services of even the most developed countries into confusion and stress. The discomforts caused by the pandemic have been profound: the social distancing necessary to prevent contagion and the resulting exponential increase in crises of loneliness, especially among the elderly and the sick; the prevention of gatherings of all kinds, whether convivial, academic, social, political, or liturgical; the dramatic limitation of human contact, from its simplest expressions to its most intimate. Fear of contagion and measures to contain it have severely damaged the world economy and prevented the planning of meetings, travel and trips, even at short notice. Online platforms have constituted a “surrogate” of presence.

Religions have also been put to the test by the pandemic: liturgical events, such as Sunday assemblies and sacramental celebrations (even Easter celebrations!) for Christians and congregational prayer on Fridays for Muslims have suffered. We remember, among other things, the emotional impact of Pope Francis's solitary prayer in front of St. Peter's Basilica on the rainy evening of March 27: he reminded us that we are all in the same boat, whatever our religion or ethnicity; he reminded us that we are all in God's hands and that no one is saved alone. The demands of the pandemic have stimulated prayers and inter-religious meetings, often online, throughout the world. Feeling all in the same situation of need and precariousness and praying together...could we interpret this as a small positive effect of the Coronavirus? Dramatically, the pandemic made us aware that we all belong to the same human family: the virus shows no preference for religion or ethnicity.

The latest encyclical of Pope Francis, Fratelli tutti, published for the feast of St. Francis of Assisi (see the “Dossier” in this issue of Islamochristiana), was prepared with a certain purpose in mind. That encyclical was not, however, generated by reflections on the current pandemic; instead, it matured as an expansion of the Document on Human Fraternity signed in Abu Dhabi together with the Grand Imam of Al-Azhar, Ahmad al-Tayyeb, on 4 February 2019. Issue 45 (2019) of

Islamochristiana had been dedicated to this historic document and the present issue continues in the same direction, but from the Islamic point of view. In recent years, many complaints have been aired in the “Western” world against the leaders of the Islamic world who, it has been claimed, would not distance themselves from violent fundamentalist movements. We desired to delve into this theme and therefore dedicate this issue of the journal to some of the recent Islamic declarations that maybe less familiar to some readers, declarations not so much “on” inter-religious dialogue but “for” inter-religious dialogue, to promote interreligious dialogue. To concentrate on less famous initiatives, we left aside, for example, the open letter of 2007, A Common Word between Us and You, addressed to Pope Benedict XVI and to the heads of the Christian churches (cfr. Islamochristiana 33 [2007]241-288).

Two articles trace the history of the declarations over the last twenty years: Card. Michael Fitzgerald discerns the thread that links the 2004 Amman Message to the Abu Dhabi Document and finally to the encyclical Fratelli tutti; Patrice Brodeur broadens the field of investigation both chronologically and qualitatively, highlighting new aspects that are not limited to the religious sphere. Four articles are singly dedicated to the analysis of particular documents: Giancarlo Anello studies the Charter of Medina, taken up and interpreted in several of the contemporary Islamic declarations; Gianluca Parolin analyzes the genesis, context and impact of the concept of citizenship in the Marrakesh Declaration; Wael Farouq highlights some significant aspects of the Charter of Makkah (Mecca); Wasim Salman reads and comments on a 2020 document produced by al-Azhar, The Renewal of Thought and the Islamic Sciences. The exponential increase in statements for interreligious and intercultural dialogue in this first part of the 21st century thus manifests a strong and progressive awareness on the part of the Islamic world that no culture and no religion in today’s world can be considered exclusive. Their common emphasis is the prevention and condemnation of fundamentalist and violent movements. In spite of the pockets of violence that still bloody some countries with an Islamic majority, it seems that progress is being made on the path to peace, in šā’ Allāh!

This issue of Islamochristiana, moreover, is particularly rich due to some other interesting contributions. The section dedicated to Islamic-Christian dialogue in history carries the articles of Michel Lagarde on a particularly difficult linguistic construction in the Qur’ān and of Anna Canton on an interesting argument by Riccoldo da Montecroce regarding the falsification of the Scriptures. Turning to more recent times, Diego Sarrió Cucarella analyzes the problematic relations of Card. Lavignerie, founder of the Missionaries of Africa, with Islam; David Bond considers the contribution to culture of Catholic missionaries in the period prior to the independence of Tunisia, and Livia Passalacqua reconstructs, through unpublished correspondence, the genesis of Christian de Chergé’s contribution to the Journées romaines of 1989.

For the section dedicated to Islamic-Christian dialogue in the current context, Gabriel Said Reynolds offers a noteworthy contribution on the question of the presence or absence of the notion of original sin in the Qur’ān; Ignazio De Francesco presents a synthesis of some of the new and main ethical issues that Islam is called to face;

Stéphane Delavelle reflects on the challenges facing the Church on Islamic-Christian dialogue starting from Moroccan situations and trajectories; Andrea Mandonico proposes the figure of Charles de Foucauld as a “universal brother”, cited also as an example in Pope Francis’s encyclical Fratelli tutti.

For the section on current encounters between Christians and Muslims in the world, Patrick Ryan presents the enticements of proselytism in the Islamic and Christian context of Africa, while Brigitte Proksch examines the situation of Islam in Austria.

Finally, a rich harvest of studies is followed by an equally rich collection of documents, declarations, meetings of personalities and communities of Christians and Muslims throughout the world, collected in the section Notes and documents. Due to the pandemic, many meetings were held online, testifying to the fact that the will to dialogue is stronger even than logistical difficulties. A large number of reviews of books dealing with Muslim-Christian relations and short notes on some books received into the library of the PISAI conclude this issue of Islamochristiana.

We hope that we have done a good service for our readers!

Islamochristiana