

EDITORIAL

2016 will be remembered, in the history of the Catholic Church, as the year of the 'Extraordinary Jubilee of Mercy'. Inaugurated by Pope Francis on 8th December 2015, the year closed on the last Sunday of the Latin Catholic liturgical cycle, 27th November 2016. One particular characteristic of this 'Extraordinary Jubilee of Mercy' was its diffusion. Certainly, Rome was at the centre, but Pope Francis has been determined to provide the necessary provisions, so that the whole Catholic Church, in each diocese and in its main sanctuaries, would become a 'common centre' of mercy and welcome, testifying to the whole world, by means of the symbol of the opening of the 'holy door', the mercy of God for all his creatures, reconciliation for each single person, for every culture and for all religions. With a gesture unique throughout the centennial history of jubilees, the Pope anticipated the official inauguration in Rome with the opening of the first 'holy door' in the cathedral of Bangui, capital of the Central African Republic, in a context of strong tensions between Christians and Muslims. Mercy and reconciliation, accordingly, are seen as critical to the achievement of peace.

We know well that mercy is the true beating heart, both in Christianity and in Islam. For this reason, PISAI organised an international conference during the 'Jubilee of Mercy' entitled 'Raḥma. Muslim and Christian Studies in Mercy' (13-15 October 2016). The proceedings of this interesting and well-attended conference will appear in the course of 2017 in the series 'Studi Arabo-Islamici del PISAI', but Islamochristiana desires to present some of these in advance, with the choice of five interventions, by which it is possible for the reader to perceive the quality of the whole conference.

The first is the keynote address of Cardinal Walter Kasper, whose studies have helped to stimulate the reflection of Pope Francis. His sharp and synthetical address presents the Christian biblical and theological data, but does not hesitate to launch some provocative challenges into the Muslim camp. As a 'pendant', we decided to include the article by Ramon Harvey on the revelation of mercy in the Muslim theological vision. Then follow the two great interventions of Angelika Neuwirth and Mustansir Mir. Professor Neuwirth, from Berlin, analyses with great precision the meanings of mercy and their various expressions in the Qur'an, while Pakistani-American professor Mir analyses, the same concept, also in the Qur'an but from a

different and complementary angle. Finally, the contribution of Dirk Ansorge on a difficult and complex theme: mercy as a theological problem, especially in relation to justice.

To speak of mercy in our present world seems almost anachronistic and out of place. Unfortunately, there are still tensions that result in armed violence in too many countries, many of them predominantly Muslim. Violence calls forth more violence and it is the civilian populations who suffer the most damage in terms of the loss of human life, poverty and forced emigration. For years now we have had the impression that nothing changes, that the skies remain grey and ever more threatening and that the movements of a violent fundamentalist type follow one another without interruption. The so-called Islamic State (IS) seems to have been downsized, by means of force, in the historical places in which it was born, but its ramifications are still very much present. Al-Qā'ida, ostensibly in decline, now seems to have raised its head again, while other groups of the same matrix multiply and mingle in different global contexts. In the West, mistrust seems to be growing, resulting in hostility and fear against 'all' Muslims. In short, this year it appears necessary to have to say, as in former years, that there is 'nothing new under the sun'.

Or perhaps there is, knowing that good is never as apparent as evil, and is often not reported in the mass media. Christians and Muslims are becoming increasingly aware that violence does not pay and that it is necessary to seek together the ways for peaceful coexistence. At the institutional and official level, I am thinking of two particular factors: 'the Marrakech Declaration' of January 2016, on minority rights in Muslim-majority countries, and the slow but promising mending of the broken relationship between the Holy See and the University of al-Azhar: many efforts have been made for the re-opening of diplomatic channels, eventually crowned with success by the visit to the Vatican of the Grand Imam of the Egyptian university, Aḥmed al-Tayyib, and the reciprocal visit to Cairo by Pope Francis at the end of April 2017. A careful reading of the especially rich Notes and Documents of this number will show beyond all doubt that even at a level, less official but perhaps more real and authentic, relations between Christians and Muslims in the world are improving dramatically.

But the richness of this issue of Islamochristiana also appears in the series of studies that follow the group of contributions on mercy. Two articles reflect on Muslim-Christian relations in history: Marek Nasiłowski and Diego R. Sarrió Cucarella, present an interesting and insightful critique of Christian credo by the Muslim scholar Ṣālih b. al-Ḥusayn al-Ġa'farī (d. 668/1270), while Jaume Flaquer shows the figure of Jesus as it emerges in the speculation of Ibn 'Arabī. Some current issues emerge in four articles: Maurice Borrmans presents one of the many aspects of the extraordinary figure of the Trappist monk Christian de Chergé; Tobias Specker offers a reflection on some significant points of Christian theology when it takes into account and allows itself to be challenged by Islam; Bishop Jean-Marc Aveline meditates on the 'passion' of Islamic-Christian dialogue; Sami Riahi translates into Arabic an important article by Gideon Libson on custom as a source of Muslim law. Finally, as a concrete

experience of dialogue in life, Ignazio De Francesco illustrates an experience of very good conduct in the Dozza prison in Bologna.

The numerous reviews and presentations of books concerned with Islam and Islamic-Christian relations complete this issue: lest it be necessary, let it be said once again, that Islamochristiana wants to be and to remain a living and active witness to the difficult and exciting adventure of the encounter between the Christian and Muslim believers.

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