

UPF San Marino: Religious Leaders Come Together to Discuss the Family

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Ethics, Spirituality and Education for Love in a Family of Peace

"The family in its entirety should be a school of love, dialogue, freedom and responsibility, where everyone builds their life experience and learns to be a bearer of peace. It is a place where love is experienced between spouses, among brothers and sisters and between parents and children. My hope is that this meeting can contribute to enhancing the role of the family in creating a healthy society and a world of peace."



With these words, Mr Michele Cavallotto, coordinator of the Interreligious Association for Peace and Development (IAPD-Italy), which promoted the webinar, opened the roundtable discussions on "Ethics, Spirituality and Family Cohesion," held on 4th December, 2023.

This initiative is part of a series of online interreligious public meetings titled "Our Exodus towards the Promised Land of Peace: Spiritual Dimension and Practical Life," which will continue in 2024 on a quarterly basis.

Presented by Ms Enza Pennino, the moderator, the speakers included: Nader Akkad, Imam of the Grand Mosque of Rome; Francesco Canale, Evangelical Pastor of "Equippers Church"; and Sergio Coscia,

Director of the Family Federation for World Peace and Unification (FFWPU), as organisation affiliated with UPF, in Turin.

"These are representatives of different faiths," explained the moderator, "happily married, parents and engaged in society with noteworthy technical and scientific professions. We will hear their own personal testimonies of how it is possible to practise a lifestyle capable of combining ethics, spiritual dimension and everyday life."



Taking the floor, **Pastor Francesco Canale** spoke about "four keys that determine the future of our lives, our happiness and that of our 'oikos': the choices you make, the identity you build, the faith you espouse to and the perseverance with which you follow it."

He explained that 'oikos' is a Greek word that expresses not only the meaning of home but everything that is familiar, that is the object of our care, that represents a common interest: in other words, proximity. He cited the words of Jesus "love your 'oikos' as yourself," emphasizing the importance of giving this term the connotation of 'oikos' when talking about family.

Referring to the theme of the meeting, he observed that "at the base of ethics - which concerns our behavior in the face of concepts of good and evil - spirituality and family, there is always the possibility of choice, which along with life, is the greatest gift of the Creator."

Regarding the first key, he explained that it is the responsibility of parents to educate their children regarding ethics, spirituality and their relationship with others.

The second key, identity, is the result of our choices, and it is important to "refuse to let others define us" because spirituality is a quest, something we must engage in, to "build around oneself a spiritual consciousness" since the identity of the believer is played between ethics and spirituality.

He continued by discussing the possibility of conversion if we have not received an education in spiritual values, emphasizing the importance of faith in our daily lives, "because it is believing that makes the difference in our spiritual life."

For the third key, the pastor referred to the definition of faith in the Bible: the certainty of things hoped for, and the evidence of things not seen, adding that it "allows us to find a greater meaning to our existence."

"The fourth key is 'perseverance because faith does not exhaust itself in a moment but can look hopefully toward the future,' knowing that we can rely on the promises of the Creator, which empower and guide us onto a challenging path but assist us in finding meaning for this life and the one that awaits us.

Mr Sergio Coscia stated that 'the family can be considered the heart of everything because it is the first place where we learn to build relationships with others. The more seriously and profoundly we live these relationships, the more cohesive the family unit will be, helping us to face the vicissitudes of life.'

He continued by adding that the stronger the people in a family are in their moral sense, the stronger we emerge, growing emotionally secure and strong, prepared to build a new family, one that is also strong and cohesive.

"Among important ethical values," he explained, "honesty should be mentioned, which in marriage, the foundation of family life, translates into fidelity. This virtue is the foremost factor in family cohesion and is a cornerstone of religious teachings across all faiths."

He then spoke about respect, which is learnt in the family when we see it practised by those closest to us, and kindness, which we learn when someone is kind to us and when we witness acts of kindness towards others by those we love.

"All values," he emphasized, "are part of the culture of the heart that Father and Mother Moon, the founders of FFWPU, consider fundamental and that is rooted in true love, which gives, forgets having given, and gives again and always."

For Mr Coscia, "the family becomes a school of love and the builder of a culture of the heart when it teaches us to see others as part of our extended family: the elderly remind us of our grandparents or parents, people our age are brothers and sisters to us, and the young are children and grandchildren".

Referring to our time, he observed that "we live in a plurality of views that can enrich us greatly, but excluding the spiritual and religious perspective or considering it as a private matter can generate a society characterised by a fragmentation of views that, instead of breaking down cultural barriers, erects new ones."

The speaker firmly believes that to "build loving families, we need to feel the moral duty and commitment to learn to love others, even when they are very different from me and when their sensibilities differ from mine."

"In conclusion, if we talk about ethics and spirituality to help the family be more united and cohesive, then we are talking about the ethics of true love and it is time for us to embrace in our lives."

The third speaker, **Imam Nader Akkad**, began by quoting a verse from the Holy Quran: "O people, we have created you from a male and a female and made you into nations and tribes so that you may know one another. Verily, the most honourable among you in the sight of Allah is the most righteous." "Regarding Islam," he explained, "on the issue of the right to a family and to understand its foundation, one must start from this basic concept."

He emphasized the importance of the relationship between man and woman, which must manifest as a strong bond for the "formation of a stable family capable of providing continuity through children to create nations and tribes."

"Another fundamental purpose," he continued, "is to safeguard the earth through good behavior. As the verse at the end of the chapter of the Cave reminds us, man and woman share responsibility for caring for creation, and each of their actions is precisely measured by God."

In Islam, men and women have distinct characteristics but are complementary: the purpose of family unity is for mutual completion because individually they are incomplete, explained the Imam.

It is said that when Adam was in Paradise, feeling the pain of loneliness, he prostrated under the throne of God for a thousand years, asking for a companion, "to understand what it means to live in unity within a family." After listening to his supplication, God created Eve.

"The Islamic family," he recalled, "is founded on peace and is an environment where a sense of complementarity and harmony is sought, to transform the earth into a dwelling of peace, as the verse says, 'God calls people to the Abode of Peace.'"

The Imam emphasized the importance of mercy within the family and in achieving peace, explaining that "God cannot be the God of peace without His great mercy" and adding that in His relationship with creation, He cares for all people on earth in a merciful manner.

He concludes: "Family in Islam is a very significant concept because it forms society, and it transmits faith and spirituality in a healthy and natural way. Within it, women have a very important role in transmitting mercy, and men in transmitting peace, together laying the foundations for a peaceful and merciful society."