

« Family and Religion »

Forum organized in France on the occasion of the International Day of Families 2016

Paris, France, 14. May 2016



On May 14, 2016, at the catholic center “Accueil Barouillère” in Paris, the French chapter of the Universal Peace Federation organized its first Forum on Family and Religion, on the theme: “The Family and the Transmission of Values.” Organizing partners were the French chapter of Women’s Federation for World Peace (WFWP) and the Circle of Reflection of Nations.

Family relationships being a cornerstone of religious traditions, and the family, though challenged at different levels in modern days, being the source of stability and solidarity for society, religious leaders from different faiths gathered at the first Forum on “Family and Religion” initiated by UPF France. The focus of the discussion was on the parent-child relationship and its central role in the family and society.

Speakers included: Father Michel Anglarès, a catholic theologian, former professor at the Catholic Institute of Paris; Dr. Djelloul Seddiki, the director

of the Al Ghazali Institute of the Grand Mosque of Paris, supervising the training of imams; Mrs. Sonja Read, from the Family Federation for World Peace; Pastor Agnès von Kirchbach, a protestant pastor from the Reformed Church of France; M. Jacques Marion, president of UPF France; and Mr.

Olivier Robin, in charge of the Versailles Parish of the Church of Jesus-Christ of Latter Day Saints.

Among participants were various representatives of religious communities, notably: Imam Moussa Drame, a Peace Ambassador from the Ivory Coast, who had come to Paris to



Sonja Read, Father Anglarès, Dr Seddiki, Jennifer Lambert on the panel

attend the event; Sheikh Abdelkader Achour, the imam of the Omar Mosque in Paris; Mr. Dominique Calmels, Director of Communications for the Mormon Church in France, and his wife, etc. In an 80 seat hall filled to capacity, the audience included Peace Ambassadors, NGO leaders and other members of civil society.



Moderated by Patrick Jouan, vice president of UPF France, the first session began with a brief introduction by Jacques Marion, who explained the plan to hold three forums this year on the role of parental love, siblings love and conjugal love, on their relevance for a stable society and the challenges they face nowadays.



The first speaker, Father Anglarès, shared a catholic view of the family. He emphasized the role of parents as co-creators with God, and that both parents and children are a gift of God to one another. If the Church made a sacrament of marriage, he said, it is **because all forms of God's love are contained in the family.** He also spoke of the feminine and maternal aspect of divine love, and of the need for investment and forgiveness in family relations.



Dr. Djelloul Seddiki exposed an Islamic viewpoint on the family, referring to Koranic sources. Quoting notably Surahs 22, 31, or 17, he outlined **God's plan for the family, the benevolence human beings owe to their parents, and the union of the masculine**

and feminine as the basis of existence. Benevolence that is to be applied toward all human beings, he said, should be all the more carefully and precisely applied within the family.



Mrs. Sonja Read, a Masters student specializing in the nutrition of infants in developing nations, gave a heartfelt testimony on her growing up in a religious family and on the ways she inherited the religious tradition of her parents. Sharing some of the struggles religious adolescents feel in an often faithless environment, she explained from her heart how she took the decision to maintain her faith, which now guides her life.



To begin the second session, moderated by Mrs. Jennifer Lambert, a member of WFWP France, Mrs. Brigitte Wada, WFWP France president, outlined briefly the goals and activities of her organization, emphasizing the **Founders' vision for women's role in peacebuilding through their "logic of love", and for them to stand as equal partners to men.**



Pastor Agnès von Kirchbach, leading the Saint-Cloud Protestant

community near Paris, caught the heart of the audience with practical lessons drawn from her fine analysis of biblical episodes: the failures of Adam and Eve, successes in the family of Abraham, the genealogy of Jesus, etc. She outlined some challenges to transmit values in current times, emphasizing the need for reciprocal listening between parents and children, putting words into deeds, or the need for prayer.



Jacques Marion then gave a Unificationist perspective on the parent-child relationship. Through lessons from early biblical figures, he drew attention to the significance of lineage and to inheriting the parental heart of God. He then shared about the essential role of parental love as the foundation for being an educator and a leader in society. He outlined the need for religions to clarify the role of **ancestors, "upstream" from the parent-child relationship, as well as the dynamic restoration of love beyond life and death.**



The last speaker was Mr. Oliver Robin, from the Mormon Church. To an attentive audience, he shared personally about his family, giving practical details on how Mormons put high priority on the family in daily life: spending one evening a week sharing and playing as a family; parents securing exclusive time with each child to develop their relationship, etc.

Questions and comments fused from all sides to the speakers, giving also an opportunity to Imam Drame or Imam Achour to **clarify Islam's view on providential figures like Abraham, or on Muslim family traditions.**

The variety of faiths represented was reflected in views and convictions both multiple and convergent, and expressed a shared, deep desire for unity and love within the family, and the importance to keep the natural family strong and alive.



Government laws denigrating traditional family values, he shared how he came to realize that the breakdown of the parent-child relationship deeply hurt young people. He then decided to dedicate his life as an educator at the service of fragile youth.

The meeting ended with the traditional **ceremony of assigning as “Peace Ambassador” a person dedicated to the peacebuilding values espoused by UPF.** The Peace Ambassador certificate was offered to Mrs. Marie de Cesare, an **artist and leader of the NGO “Long Métrage”.**



The Family and Religion Forum will resume for a second stage in September 2016, and a third in November. The themes to be discussed will be about brotherhood and marriage.

A final, very moving testimony was given by a young Christian, Antoine Payeur, **introducing his book entitled: “For me, living is Christ”.** One of the founders in **2013 of the youth movement “Night Watchmen”,** who organized vigils in front of the French Parliament and other cities in protest against French



Dr Seddiki - Imam Moussa Dramé, Ivory Coast, and Imam Achour, Omar MOsqe in Paris - Michel Thao Chan, director, Cercle de réflexion des nations