

UPF Rome, Italy: Italian Priest and Buddhist Monk Share Views on Birth

Carlo Zonato
March 31, 2025



Rome, Italy – "The Gift of Life – Birth" was the theme of a webinar organized by the Interreligious Association for Peace and Development (IAPD-Italy) on March 31, 2025. It was the first in a series of public events on "The Course and Value of Human Life – Spiritual Dimension and Practical Life," to be held throughout 2025.

Webinar speakers included **Don Valentino Cottini**, a diocesan priest from Verona; **Ven. Tenzin Khentse**, a Tibetan Buddhist monk; and **Mrs. Maria Gabriella Mieli**, external relations officer of UPF-Italy, who also acted as the moderator. In the opening address, **Mr. Carlo Zonato**, president of UPF-Italy, outlined the objectives of the host organizations and the event itself.



A biblical scholar and Islamic studies expert, Don Cottini began by presenting the Catholic Christian perspective on birth. Birth encompasses two elements, he said; the first is passive, representing the gift that one receives, while the second is active, relating to the responsibility each person has toward God and toward one's parents. The speaker stressed how birth and death are deeply interconnected and not entirely in human hands; there is a time to enter the world and a time to leave it, both beyond human control.

In the Catholic Christian view, every new human being is a child of God, created free and in a fraternal relationship with all. The Church respects and celebrates life from conception to natural death. Through the sacrament of baptism, the clergyman explained, one becomes Christian, marking a new birth in Christ and entry into the community of believers.

Ven. Tenzin Khentse, the second speaker, stated that in the Buddhist perspective, human life begins when consciousness unites with the human body, formed from the seeds of both father and mother. From the

very next moment, "old age" begins, referring to the period leading up to the separation of consciousness from the body – in other words, death. Death can occur at any time, and if caused by external forces, it is considered an act of killing. Abortion is one such example. In Buddhism, a person is considered complete and endowed with intrinsic value and rights from the very instant of conception.

The monk explained that every new life is precious, unique and capable of transforming the world, underscoring the importance of recognizing the significance of every existence within a relationship of interdependence. He went on to clarify that a birth is considered "miserable" or "wasted" if it occurs in a context where fundamental rights are denied, or in "barbaric lands" without ethical principles.



Buddhism makes no distinction between ethical and spiritual values; what truly matters is being a good-hearted individual, who contributes proactively and constructively to society, guided by love, compassion and interdependence.

Mrs. Mieli expressed the belief that the happiness of children brings joy not only to their biological parents but also to the Creator. At her invitation, a dialogue unfolded between the two religious speakers. The Buddhist monk explained the meaning of the term "Lama" to the Christian priest, defining it as a "precious spiritual mother" who guides and assists individuals in their spiritual growth.

Don Cottini pointed out that despite their foundational differences, Catholic Christianity and Buddhism share core values regarding the sanctity and preciousness of life, parenthood, and responsibility toward others and the world.

Having been born into a Catholic family but a devoted Buddhist for thirty-five years, Ven. Khentse said that he had discovered a deeper understanding of Christianity through Buddhism. Don Cottini observed that the great religions share similar concepts, despite originating from different principles, and that the diversity of faiths is a richness that testifies to human brotherhood.

At the close of the meeting, Mr. Zonato referenced the biblical story of Esau, who harbored deep hatred toward his brother Jacob and planned to kill him, only to later find the path to reconciliation. Mr. Zonato expressed the hope that, in the present time, a similar transformation of the heart would foster peace.