



天主教會台灣地區主教團 Chinese Regional Bishops' Conference

Pastoral letter of the CRBC for 2017 “Who is my neighbor?” (Lk 10:25-37)

We are all on the pilgrimage towards the fulfillment of life. In the Gospel of St. Luke, a scribe asked Jesus a question, “What must I do to inherit eternal life?” (Lk 10:25) We usually have the same question in our hearts. This question concerns, not only the big and small choices of ones personal life, but also public policy and regulations of the government and society. How should we respond to these questions, in order to help one another to keep striving for the fulfillment of life on the path of love?

The discussion of Taiwanese society on the amendment to the article 972 of the Civil Code is relevant to every one of us and to every family. Therefore, in the process of discussion and reflection, we must listen repeatedly to Jesus’ reply: “What is written in the Law? What do you read there?” What Jesus asked about then was the Jewish Law, God’s alliance of love, which was promulgated by God through Moses to the people of Israel, the “Law of Love.” This “Law” which is perfected in Jesus Himself, and, through the reflections and teachings of the Church, is presented to us as the foundation and guideline with which to face various difficulties and challenges of our contemporary society.

The consistent attitude of the Church towards family values

Over the past few months, we had the opportunity to listen to different opinions, and by means of the proactive assistance of some youth of the Church, we have gathered questionnaires of rich content in which we can see relevant experiences, reflections and opinions of our faithful. We have seen the diversity of the entire Church in Taiwan and its anxiety, and have

especially heard the expectations held towards the Church. Each opinion is an expression of the result of spiritual formation and is presented in prayer. We can say that all concerns, even some strong emotions, are due to different points of view toward “love” and “exhortation”.

The universal Church is indeed concerned with the protection of marriage and family values. In our times, the institution of marriage is continuously challenged by all kinds of factors such as the globalization of market economy, politics, individualism and the culture of hedonism, and we see in our pastoral work that many families are undergoing all kinds of sufferings. Since the publication of Pope Leo XIII’s encyclical “*Rerum Novarum*”, all the successive Popes indicated specifically the profound influences that economic development has brought to family life; especially the recent globalization and the gap between rich and poor have directly injured the respect of many families and unemployed youth toward human sexuality.

From a broader point of view, there are still many other factors that challenge the institution of marriage and the family; and in the past, the Church has set up many social work services to help the most precarious families, children and teenagers. Based on these experiences of social care over a long period of time, we react more carefully against the influences that the changes in important institutions might bring forth. In the past, we have emphasized too much the changing rules of market economy; this has brought an irreversible impact on the basis of society, the family. Besides the social work of the government financed by the taxpayers, the social work services operated by the Church also share the social cost.

Based on these experiences, we realize that before any change of important institutions related to human future development is undertaken, long-term influences must be considered. We need to know clearly the reasons why our society searches for changes and to listen to the underlying desires, making sure that the life and rights of the majority of citizens guaranteed by the primordial institution are not affected. Therefore, as regards policy decision making in search of happiness in the

family on a long-term basis, we must also ask the government to think twice before it acts.

The gift of love

In our culture, sexuality has been a topic difficult to openly and calmly talk about for a long time, and it lacks of appropriate discussions. Its intimate nature makes us unable to calmly look at this precious gift that God has given us. In the Book Song of Songs, there are descriptions about love between lovers that helps us understand the beauty of sexuality. The dynamism of sexuality enables us to love more abundantly and brings us to profound dedication and commitment. Sexuality is also a mystery: when a man and a woman unite with each other as one body in the love of husband and wife, this love is open to fertility and shares the creative power of God. However, from the life of Our Lord Jesus Christ, we clearly know that sexuality does not have absolute meaning in human life, and that it is not absolutely necessary on the path to love. On the contrary, chastity is an invitation for everyone to focus on the more important “Yes” of life, such as the dignity of human life, the exclusivity of sexuality for only the love between husband and wife, and the lasting character of the contracted marriage between a man and a woman. To protect these important “Yes’s”, we have to say “No” to many other sexual possibilities. Within this meaning of sexuality, not only husband and wife have to keep their promise to be faithful to each other for their whole life, but all of us, you and I alike, are also called to grow in chastity, and move forward hand in hand in the journey towards the fulfillment of love, no matter whether we are clergy, consecrated men and women or single men and women, who would like to marry in the future, regardless of his or her sexual orientation. We can fall and sin, but the merciful God is faithful; since it is He who invites us to start this journey, He must accompany us and give us graces to fulfill it.

In order to let our children and our teenagers receive this gift of love appropriately, we must pay close attention to the sexual education at school and in society. Pope Francis has a clear explanation on sexual education in nos. 280-286 of his encyclical “*Amoris Laetitia*”. The Church

recognizes the importance of sexual education: on the one hand, due to the change of times, we should adopt the youth's language in a creative way to teach them to know their body, to protect it and its autonomy; on the other hand, we should find a way that suits the youth, to accompany them to go through this period of life and to learn to deal with their own sexual desires, in order not to be misled by the excessive information that one can get as he wishes. It is not proper to encourage children to explore sexual experiences too early, before they can fully realize the characteristics of the development of their body and mind; the characters and functions of sexual organs should not be presented partially to psychologically immature children lest they indulge in sexual desires too early.

Pope Francis reminds us in no. 56 of "*Amoris Laetitia*": regarding gender equality or gender ideology, the Church's stand is not against equality between men and women, but against the denying of the difference and the complementarity between a man and a woman created by God. The Church is against the unchallengeable and harsh way to force gender ideology on others. Separating gender from sex, thus playing the role of God the Creator can mislead people to think erroneously that it is a basic right to decide one's gender. We realize profoundly that this event to some extent has an impact on the inner perception of the faithful, and we see the serious conflict among holders of different opinions within the Church and in society.

Therefore, we invite the whole Church in Taiwan to read together the encyclical "*Amoris Laetitia*"; it helps us, from a more comprehensive point of view, to know the love that God wants to communicate to us through marriage and family as an institution. At the same time, we should prepare ourselves to accept and accompany brothers and sisters from families in different situations; never hinder, - because of our prejudice and judgment, - their enthusiasm of seeking God through the service of the Church. We should adopt an open and caring attitude, just as Jesus did when He talked with the Samaritan by the well – He guides her thirst to the spring of eternal life.

“Love the Lord your God with all your heart, with all your soul, with all your strength, and with all your mind, and your neighbor as yourself.” (Lk 10, 27)

The scribe replied to Jesus saying that the summary of the Law is to

“love the Lord your God with all your heart, with all your soul, with all your strength, and with all your mind, and your neighbor as yourself.” We all thirst for this fulfilled love; however, this love must be practiced with a careful attitude and discernment, in a concrete social context and living situation.

During the Jubilee of Mercy concluded recently, we recited every Sunday the Prayer for the Jubilee of Mercy; part of this prayer provides us a very good direction of reflection as the dispute and discussion for the amendment of the article 972 of the Civil Code go on: “You willed that your ministers would also be clothed in weakness in order that they may feel compassion for those in ignorance and error: let everyone who approaches them feel sought after, loved, and forgiven by God.”

Let us keep silent for a moment, reflecting on this experience

We are like the Apostles who followed Jesus and argued in His presence, “Who is the greatest in the kingdom of heaven?” Moreover, at the last Supper, “A dispute arose also between them about which should be reckoned the greatest”. At this moment, our Lord Jesus got up, wrapped the towel around his waist and squatted down to wash the feet of the disciples. He taught us personally to love one another.

We should show greater empathy and be more sensitive: as we defend publicly the institution of marriage, we must know how not to let those who have different opinions and whose situation is different from ours feel discriminated and excluded, especially those who have same-sex orientation, and long for stable relations, together with their family members, and those parents who experience inner conflicts, in parish and in lay associations, because of the sexual tendencies of their children.

We need to reflect on ourselves sincerely and courageously: have we ever judged others’ suffering and struggle unconsciously with a blaming and scornful tone? Or do we quote any unverified information or ignore the discrimination and fear hidden in the untrue information? If the answer is “yes”, we have to be courageous to admit our reckless speeches and to repent and grow in love.

We should especially be sensitive to the faithful who are homosexual alongside with their parents and relatives. Pope Francis reminds us particularly that “such families should be given respectful pastoral guidance”, and that “those members include persons who experience same-sex attraction, a situation not easy either for parents or for children. We would like before all else to reaffirm that every person, regardless of sexual orientation, ought to be respected in his or her dignity.” (*Amoris Laetitia*, 250)

Most importantly, it is to help those families to “receive the assistance they need to understand and fully carry out God’s will in their lives.” At the same time, the Church, as all people are expecting from her, encourages those who have homosexual tendencies to make their effort to remain celibate in a relation of mutual commitment, to seek the path of life on which God is willing to accompany them and to walk with them.

Recently, many elderly faithful, seminarians, religious brothers and sisters, priests and even Bishops themselves are confused and worried that “more and more” young faithful choose to support those who have homosexual tendencies to fight for marriage rights. In fact, in the life experience of this young generation, they get more or less concrete contact with people of different sexual tendencies and are sensitive to discriminatory language. The experience of this new generation is precious; they provide real life experience for the whole Church to know better different groups. Besides, these young people are grown up in the age of Internet; their collecting information is very fast. The Church needs to cultivate well the characters of the new generation in order to encourage the dialogue between generations. Let the cooperation and dialogue across ages, areas and groups be the dynamism for reflection so that the clergy of Catholic Church in Taiwan can find growth and renewal.

The CRBC is concerned about the amendment of article 972 of the Civil Code

Alongside with the publication of a common announcement against the amendment of the Civil Code, the Bishops also have paid a visit to Yu Mei-Nu, the legislator who drafted the proposal of amendment of the Civil Code. Yu has paid close attention for a long time to the desire expressed by the homosexual social network. Her opinion is not

consistent with the Church's position. As representatives of the Catholic Church, we Bishops have raised doubts about her proposal; Yu has explained one by one the intentions of the proposal.

We clearly expressed the Church's position: Marriage is the bond between a man and a woman. In the Catholic Church, the marriage of the faithful is seen as a sacrament. We can understand the homosexual partners' hope that the law can guarantee their benefits. However, besides rejecting the amendment of the Civil Code, the Catholic Church can't accept the civil union of same-sex partners either. Regarding setting up what kind of special law to guarantee same-sex union, as the definition of marriage is the bond between a man and a woman, we can't have final conclusion until a concrete special law is drafted and examined carefully. If the setting up of a special law is a preparation for the amendment of the Civil Code in the future, the two parties of different opinions will then again fall into the debate on the definition of marriage — whether or not marriage is always between a man and a woman, and whether or not the definition of marriage is going to be changed, etc.. Furthermore, in the special law, it will not be indicated clearly that the two parties should live celibately.

The Church does not mean to impose the doctrine of the Faith on the content of the amendment of Civil Code. However, based on the profound reflection of the universal Church on family issues, she appeals again that both the amendment of the Civil Code to legalize same-sex marriage and the setting up of a special law to guarantee benefits of same-sex couples should demand the amendment of other related laws and the adjustment of policy implementation, for example: children adoption, surrogate mother, donation of ovum and sperms and assisted reproductive technology. As a result, it is necessary to explore more cautiously the responses to the related ethic issues. All these issues require time for clarification, reflection and dialogue, and the related laws should not be approved hastily. We expect that the process of rational discussion and respective reflection can be a witness to the maturity of Taiwan civil society on the international scene.

How to have non-violent communication and effective dialogue

We are glad to see that there are dialogues and communications of good intention. We have heard different voices in the Church. These dialogues may bring forth spiritual and intellectual impacts to each other, but that reminds us to search more humbly for the guidance of Holy Spirit. We are willing to remind everyone that all the arguments that seem to oppose one another are actually an appeal and an invitation for us to listen more deeply to the intention and the dynamism of love of each other, especially when this kind of dialogue is directed to individuals, families and Christian communities; one should not quickly get involved in disputes and arguments, but take time to pay attention, heeding the feeling and the real needs of each other. If the faithful have the feeling of conflict, doubts and being hurt through the process, it's better to stop for a while to strengthen personal prayer and to talk with trustworthy spiritual guides or counselors, ask them to help us discern our living situation and the presence of God.

When we talk with our non-Catholic friends, we need to learn to use the language which can be understood by them. Therefore, the faithful need to know more deeply the teaching of the Church and go back to their own experience for reflection, in order to transfer it into down-to-earth expressions which can cause sympathetic response of others. Especially when there are people questioning us about the Church's opinion, we must answer them with tender words, careful and firm attitude. If there is any place we don't understand or have doubts, we can tell them we need time to verify and then go to ask for help from priests or bishops. We hope this kind of dialogue and talk can become an opportunity of evangelization. We wish that charity and the truth of God can be revealed not only by our speeches, but also by our attitude.

“Who is my neighbor?”

When Jesus answered the scribe's question, “Who is my neighbor?” (Lk10, 30-37) this apparently simple but actually complicated question, the parable he used seems so similar to the experience of conflict that we face today. Moreover, at that time, “Jews do not interact with Samaritans”,

because Jews thought that Samaritans had lost the racial purity after many times of invasion by the gentiles, intermarrying with them. Jews were proud of been chosen by the Lord, so they kept their racial purity as an expression of their faith. However, the parable of Jesus invites us to think that mercy supported by Justice and Truth is the most beautiful action put in practice by faith.

The Good Samaritan questioned us with his tender attitude, “Who is my neighbor? Who is my enemy?” In this parable, it seems that we can hear Jesus’ exhortation: this dialogue provides for us an experience of knowing each other again, allowing us to see and hear those whom we have not seen, those whom we have not been familiar with. We hope that every seemingly opposing confrontation can become an “encounter” that helps each other to grow in love. We need to have a broader vision and mindset, to give up labels and prejudices, to trust generously and audaciously that everyone can be our “neighbor”: let us discover people’s new needs across cultures, races, mentalities and religions.

Let us go back to the context of this Gospel in prayer, to meditate on the situation when Jesus used the parable of the “Good Samaritan” to answer the question, and listen to the invitation Jesus made to the scribe after telling this parable: Go, and do the same yourself!

Pope Francis invites us to meet those who are marginalized by the society and to visit prisoners in the prison during the coming year. The Lord Jesus has taught us by Himself the proper attitude: to have a dialogue with them and to listen to their craving. Let us also get up and go, do the same ourselves!

Bishops of the Chinese Regional Bishops’ Conference

Taipei, January 1st, 2017,

Solemnity of the Blessed Virgin Mary, Mother of God