

## **TOWARD A NEW PARADIGM OF ECONOMICS – MRI SYMPOSIUM**

### **Three Key Ideas contributed by Dr. Christine Lai**

Pope Francis projects a vision of hope for our future, our common home, the poorest of the poor and the entire human family. His concern on the most vulnerable definitely includes the ageing groups who are less valuable in society due to their declining value to productivity and economics. Based on the mission of Pope Francis on “Towards a New Paradigm of Economics”, a new paradigm to see economics from a holistic view as it connects everything especially the ageing groups can be seen as a sustainable resource with wisdom contributing to the integral ecology.

#### **First key idea: Spirituality of ageing and human flourishing**

Spirituality is associated with deep values are the central philosophy of life and inner resources of elderly person. It implies sense of harmony, inner freedom, peace in relationship to God/heaven, nature and environment (Coward & Reed 1996, Gurklis & Meaker 1998, Reed 1991). The new paradigm developing positive ageing should include the spiritual dimension of ageing as a process in search for ultimate meaning of life grounded on a cycle of self-transcendence of loss and disabilities, securing final meaning and intimacy with God and/or others, and finding hope (MacKinlay, 2004). The full human flourishing through the ageing process to connect covers the time span of whole life including a process connecting with all the ups and downs in life. Ignatian spirituality focuses on ‘Finding God in all things’ certainly includes experience of old age.

#### **Second key idea: New paradigm drawn from the Catholic social teaching of Integral Human Development (IHD)**

The papal teaching of IHD advocated by Pope Francis evolves from a tradition of social teaching of his predecessors. Cardinal Turkson, Director of the Dicastery for Promoting IHD refers to the importance of later life searching for an integral life. We are living in a world emphasizing on economic growth, productivity and outcome. Human beings become the tools to fulfil these capitalistic values and goals. We are lost as human consumption and physical or materials world

cannot fulfil our deepest desire and longing for who we are. In particular, in the later stage of life, we have experienced all things but still longing for an integral life which can bring us spirit and joy in the process of progress, development and maturity.

With holistic vision *Laudato Si'* (LS) affirms that indeed “everything is connected” (LS 16). Human beings, and all beings for that matter, can exist only within a web of relationships. Integral understanding leads to a new way of seeing our place in the world is a paradigm to articulate the fundamental relationships of the person: with ‘God’, with ‘oneself’, with ‘other human beings’, and also with ‘creation’ leading to a fundamental questioning of several operating assumptions for modern societies, economies, politics and ways of life including the last phase of life in the ageing journey.

Integral approach takes into account of personal lifestyles, the need to foster personal, social and ecological harmony, for personal, social and ecological conversion, both individual and social conversion. It is very relevant to the harmony through addressing self-concept and self-identity and relations with self and God. Integral human development is therefore a holistic development of the human person, covering all aspects of life. In particular, “integral” is the key to the whole concept of IHD especially in helping appreciate the process of ageing and development in the later stage of life.

### **Third key idea: Intercultural dimension of Integral Human Development**

The new paradigm to enrich integral ageing comes from the rich Chinese wisdom tradition of Confucianism, Buddhism and Daoism which provides a rich interpretation of IHD with the source tracing back to the original Chinese translation of “Integral” coming from Buddhism. This intercultural dimension can enrich our understanding of the western Catholic and papal teaching of IHD in reality. The Chinese parallel of the concept opens up a long tradition of Buddhist, Confucian and Daoist teaching of how life can be fully harmonized and integrated. It is an organic

and dynamic vision of how life and society should be. It provides a new paradigm to expand our concept of ageing and rich complex content in integral life.

We are responsible to “restore the various levels of ecological equilibrium, establishing harmony within ourselves, with others, with nature and other living creatures, and with God” (*LS 210*). The connectedness of everything has its content and characteristics. It is harmony in Chinese traditions or “*Yuanrong*” (Chinese translation of Integral) in all relationships with all things. Papal teaching of IHD stresses the relationship with self and the understanding of self-concept and self-identity. The Chinese culture increases the richness of this connectedness through *Yuanrong*.

The condition of integrality therefore transcends humans as individual; it extends to the totality of their lives and encompasses the human ability to synthesize parts: family life, careers, friendships, social engagement, and religion and so on into a meaningful whole. IHD is therefore a holistic development of the human person, covering all aspects of life. For Chinese IHD, the integral focuses on harmony of all relationships especially familial and intergenerational relationship. Family is the most important relationship both in papal teaching and Chinese culture and traditions. Intergenerational solidarity as Cardinal Turkson emphasized echoes the Confucian teaching of intergenerational relationship. These relationship will enhance the harmony in people, nation, world and nature.