

Preface

The Pontifical Council for Interreligious Dialogue (PCID) is responsible for implementing the commitment of the Catholic Church to interreligious dialogue and fraternal relations with all persons of other religious traditions and people of good will. Therefore, we did not want this significant anniversary of our relations to our Buddhist brothers and sisters to pass without a public expression of gratitude and celebration. Twenty-five years ago, my predecessor, Francis Cardinal Arinze, began sending a Vesak letter of greetings to Buddhist friends worldwide with the words “Peace and blessings to you all!” The occasion at that time was the upcoming feast of Vesak in 1995. Describing the annual festival as a “reverent remembrance of the illustrious teacher,” Cardinal Francis Arinze declared that it is “an occasion for you as Buddhists and for us as Christians because we want to share in your joy, to meditate on teachings that concern us all.”

There have been numerous exchanges of joy and goodwill between us over these past twenty-five years. We Buddhists and Christians can rejoice because the monastics of our two traditions, those men and women living in religious orders and lineages of prayer and practice, have often joined together in conferences, exchanges, and retreats to share insights, concerns, and reflections on their profound wisdom and spiritual experiences. We can also rejoice in the fact that we have had six PCID sponsored Buddhist-Christian dialogues to build mutual understanding and appreciation as brothers and sisters since 1995. The Buddhist and Christian religious leaders throughout the world have followed the work of dedicated scholars and benefited from their efforts in countless ways from the interreligious dialogues of these experts with compassionate interest. Accompanied by Pope Francis’ dialogue of fraternity and respect, Buddhists and Christians across the world have been able to find creative ways to share the joys and mysteries of life together and to cooperate for the common good for all, and the survival of our common home.

We Buddhists and Christians are reminded in so many blessed ways of our fraternal friendship.

On the occasion of Vesak, and through the PCID's annual greetings, it is my intention, and that of my predecessors, to assure all who work together in promoting Buddhist-Christian relationships, of our esteem and appreciation for the efforts and wisdom offered. We pray for its continuation in partnership and cordiality.

In gratitude of these twenty-five years of Buddhist-Christian cooperation and exchange, the PCID has prepared this volume of contributions from authors around the world who have been involved in the joys and gifts of Buddhist-Christian dialogue and partnership. The chapters here provide the fruits of many meetings and exchanges, identify important sources, and offer thoughts from various leaders for further study. The book offers a moment of reflection on the past, and of the future of Buddhist-Christian relations. In particular, I would like to thank the Buddhist contributors to this effort. We are truly grateful to all who have participated, the majority of whom are not even named in this volume, yet who have in some way contributed to the progress of our relations.

Since his pontificate commenced, Pope Francis has often spoken of spiritual accompaniment and the promotion of human fraternity. He urges all of us to look beyond the conflicts and our insular ways of thinking and behaving in the past because the grave crises and needs of the present are so very urgent. During his Apostolic Journey to Thailand in Bangkok on November 22, 2019, Pope Francis encouraged Buddhist and Christian religious leaders with these words, and with which I would like to conclude my exhortation to the readers of this volume:

Now is the time to be bold and envision the logic of encounter and mutual dialogue as the path, common cooperation as the code of conduct, and reciprocal knowledge as a method and standard. In this way, we can provide a new paradigm for resolving conflicts and help foster greater understanding and the protection of creation. In this regard, religions, like universities, have much to offer, without having to renounce their specific character and special gifts. Everything we do in this regard will be a significant step towards guaranteeing younger generations their right to the future, while serving the cause of justice and peace. Only in this way will we provide the young with the tools they need to be in the forefront of efforts to

create sustainable and inclusive lifestyles (*Meeting with the Leaders of the Christian Denominations and other Religions*, Chulalongkorn University, Bangkok, November 22, 2019).

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