
SPIRITUALITY OF AGEING FOR HUMAN FLOURISHING: TOWARDS A NEW PARADIGM OF ECONOMICS

为人类繁荣的年长化灵修： 向经济学新范式迈进

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Introduction

Pope Francis shows special concern for the marginalized and the weakest. The elderly are among the most vulnerable and less valuable in the society due to their declining value in productivity and economics. To address the mission of Francis and his vision of hope for the entire human family, I would like to propose a new paradigm for the spirituality of ageing, based on his papal teaching of Integral Human Development (IHD), especially its intercultural dimension.

A Spirituality of Ageing for Human Flourishing

As Christianity is based on faith, hope and love, the spiritual dimension is fundamental. Spirituality associated with deep values are the central philosophy of life and inner resources regarding elderly persons. It implies a sense of harmony, inner freedom, peace in relationship to God/heaven, nature and environment. Elizabeth MacKinlay (2004, p. 84) explains the spiritual tasks of ageing demonstrated as a process in search for the ultimate meaning of life grounded

in a cycle of self-transcendence of loss and disabilities, securing final meaning and intimacy with God and/or others, and finding hope. John Cottingham (2012, pp. 373-396) observes that ageing is a process of “finding” as it is a continuing project for a whole lifetime to find an identity, an integrated self and a full integration of the whole self. The full human flourishing realized through the ageing process covers the time span of a whole life. Hughes (1999, p. 16) highlighted the insights of Ignatian spirituality’s exploration of finding God in all things, which include failing strength of body and mind, disappointment, failure, guilt and feelings of helplessness. “Finding God in all things” certainly includes experience of old age.

Papal Teaching on Integral Human Development

Integral human development has been given fresh emphasis in Catholic Social Teaching by Pope Francis. Peter Cardinal Turkson, Director of the Dicastery for Promoting Integral Human Development, identified the importance of the elderly in searching for an integral understanding of human life. In a world emphasizing economic growth, productivity and outcomes, human beings become tools to fulfil capitalistic values and goals. We are lost as human consumption and the physical or material world cannot fulfil our deepest desires and longing for who we are. In particular, in the later stages of life, even though we have experienced all things, we still long for an integral life which can bring us spirit and joy in the process of progress, development, and maturity.

Pope Paul VI planted the seed of an ecological concern among the faithful which became a key factor in the vision of human flourishing as taught by Francis. *Laudato Si'* affirms that indeed “everything is connected” (Francis, 2015, par 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. It provides 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 (Marx, 2016, p. 295).

To Reinhard Marx, Pope Francis’ concept of interconnectedness is extended to his concept of “integral ecology” (Francis, 2015, par 124), which addresses the ecological issue shaping our understanding of humankind, the world, and creation, as well as God himself. An integral approach takes into account 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 achieving harmony through addressing one’s self-concept and self-identity and relations with self and God.

Integral development means developing awareness that “everything is connected” which will lead to an integrally higher quality of life, for self and others. (Francis, 2015, par 194) Integral progress in such a vision is above all “an improvement in the quality of life” (Francis, 2015, par 46) with “an historic, artistic and cultural patrimony” (Francis, 2015, para 143). Quality of life including health and viable social relationships, in particular within families, is of “great importance” (Francis, 2015, par 213). In particular, “integral” is the key to the whole concept of integral human development especially in helping appreciate the process of ageing and development in the later stages of life.

Intercultural Dimension of Integral Human Development (IHD)

The term IHD is, in general, translated as 整全發展 (*zhenquan fazhan*) or 全人發展 (*quanren fazhan*). Presently, I adopt the translation of 圓融生命發展 (*yuanrong shenming fazhan*). The Chinese translation implies an all-rounded way of self-actualization through sound relationships with self, the others and the world. It is a full and harmonious fulfilment of life integrating individual, society and nature, in personal and spiritual ways of living. The key to this intercultural review focuses on the term “integral”. In English, the term is defined as an adjective describing a part being necessary to complete the whole. In this sense, the word essential is a near synonym. It is from Middle English, from Medieval Latin *integralis* “making up a whole,” from Latin *integer* “untouched, entire.” In *Populorum Progressio*, Pope Paul VI states that “Development cannot be limited to mere economic growth. In order to be authentic, it must be complete: integral, that is to promote the good of every person and the whole person.” (Paul VI, 1967, par 14)

The term is translated into Chinese as *yuanrong* 圓融. *Yuanrong*, the Chinese term, is composed of two Chinese characters, 圓 (*yuan*) and 融 (*rong*). The two characters have rich etymological meanings, entrenched in ancient Chinese culture, Confucianism and Buddhism, and to a lesser extent Daoism. The word “Integral” translated as “*yuanrong*” in Chinese originates from Buddhism. In Buddhist texts, “*yuan*” talks about Buddha looking at the nature, water, fire and wind. It fully covers completely the borders of the law, and “*rong*” means interconnected and fully assimilated.

Taking an intercultural view, IHD means “to restore the various levels of ecological equilibrium, establishing harmony within ourselves, with others, with nature and other living creatures, and with God” (Francis, 2015, par 210) (Marx, 2016, p. 302-306). It is harmony in Chinese traditions or *yuanrong* in all relationships with all things. IHD stresses the relationship with self and an understanding of self-concept and self-identity. The Chinese traditions added the content of this connectedness through *yuanrong*. The Chinese concept of harmony is developed from and based on the discipline and morality of self, the creation of a harmonious family relationship, a sound management of nation and then a harmonious and peaceful world.

For integral development, humans must find a right balance among the components of their lives: “authentic human development concerns the whole of the person in every single dimension” (Marx, 2016, p. 146). The condition of integrality therefore transcends humans as individuals; it extends to the totality of their lives and encompasses the human ability to synthesize parts into a meaningful whole: family life, careers, friendships, social engagement, religion and so on. IHD is therefore a holistic development of the human person, covering all aspects of life. For Chinese *yuanrong* Development of Life, integrality focuses on the harmony of all relationships especially familial and intergenerational relationships. Family is the most important relationship both in papal teaching and Chinese culture and traditions. Intergenerational solidarity as Peter Turkson emphasized echoes the Confucian teaching of intergenerational relationship. These relationships will enhance the harmony in people, nation, world and nature.

The rich Chinese parallel of the concept of IHD opens up a long tradition of Buddhist, Confucian and Daoist teachings on 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 a rich integral life. The intercultural understanding of IHD helps clarify how elderly people view the meaning of life with all their experiences reflected in the process, making the spirituality of ageing an important key to the assessment of the process as a whole, both its spiritual and worldly dimensions.



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