

«Are there universal family values across the religions?» - UN International Day of Families

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By Steinar Murud

The annual «UN International Day of Families» provides a wonderful opportunity to focus on what matters most to all of us; our family and family relationships.

This year's programme was organized in the Diakonhjemmet University College in Oslo, under the title: «Are there universal family values across the religions?»

In these days where the multicultural society has become a reality, and where its differences represent a challenge and potential for conflict, it is good to search for the common ground that we share.

Wherever we stand, politically or religiously, we belong to families. While titles such as imam or priest, member of parliament or mayor, are positions that only a few can have, everyone can be son, daughter, parent, husband or wife.

However, the cultural differences spanning from the past to the present, or from east to west, raises the question; are there universal values across these differences?

Four speakers commented on the topic.

Magdalena Kwak Nyberg, an academic born in Korea but settled in Norway, spoke on the Confucian concept of filial piety, which goes far beyond the 4th commandment in the Old Testament; to honour your father and mother. Even though the concept is alien for many people in today's society, there are elements here that deserve a closer consideration.



Nazish Khan, a Muslim author, born in Norway, spoke about topics from her newly published book, about values behind arranged marriages. She made a very clear distinction between arranged marriages and forced marriages, which

she declared as a criminal act. Arranged marriages, where the process takes place in full trust and freedom, can be a blessing for the couple.

Stein Hardeng, a teacher from the University College, gave a summary of how family patterns have developed during the centuries in our Norwegian society. He also shared contemporary statistics on families' situation today. Even though our history has shown progress in many ways, he expressed an open mind to learn from traditions in other cultures

Steinar Murud, secretary general of UPF Norway, addressed the metaphysical perspective: «God and the family». He raised the question whether there exists a common standard for all families. Who determines the standard? Moreover, how is it defined? He elaborated on the words «Imago Dei». These words, in the image of God, suggests that such an ideal do exist for all human beings.

He said we need a spiritual ideal in our lives, even though it takes efforts to live accordingly. He concluded that the consequence of not following an ideal could be much worse.

All speakers contributed well to this potluck of ideas about the family. I hope that it stimulated everybody to further thoughts on the topic. And hopefully it contributed to the idea that a common concern for the safety and development of our families can be a foundation for building a harmonious society as well.