

21. Joseph Tham\_ Social Responsibility and Health according to Western and Hindu Traditions

14th World Congress of Bioethics

**Health for All in an Unequal World: Obligations of Global Bioethics**

Title of the symposium	<b>Social Responsibility and Health according to Western and Hindu Traditions</b>
Abstract	<p>In the globalized reality, religions can play an important role in health promotion. Article 14 of the UNESCO Declaration on Bioethics and Human Rights on Social Responsibility and Health states that, “The promotion of health and social development for their people is a central purpose of governments that all sectors of society share... the enjoyment of the highest attainable standard of health is one of the fundamental rights of every human being...” The symposium will focus on how this article is understood in the West, especially Christianity, and the East, represented by the Hindu tradition. The contrast and dialogue between these two time-honored traditions can shed light on the differences and convergence of theories, methodologies and actions regarding social responsibility and health. In the West, this duty originated from the Good Samaritan question in the Gospel, “Who is thy neighbor?” This idea of supererogation—to act beyond the call of duty—is closest to the ideal of treating every stranger with equality and universality in the current milieu of global ethics and human rights. Hindu conceptions on social responsibility are based on the balance between the demands of <i>karma</i> and <i>dharma</i> found in Bhagavad Gita. <i>Karma</i> proposes a somewhat resigned acceptance on individual social status, condition and fate. To achieve the <i>dharma</i> of the social stages of life, individuals are inspired to serve and alleviate the social needs of the less fortunate. Ultimately, these social responsibilities arise from spiritual discipline of self-perfection and virtuous living to attain liberation or <i>moksha</i>. Some of the concerns raised in these two traditions are: 1) respective responsibilities of organized religion and state in healthcare provision. 2) the relationship between health-salvation at the physical and spiritual level. 3) the feasibility of egalitarian distribution of resources. 4) the language of duty vs. rights.</p>
Chair and main contact	<p>Joseph Tham, LC, MD, PhD  Fellow, UNESCO Chair in Bioethics and Human Rights, Rome, Italy  Via degli Aldobrandeschi 190 - 00163 - Rome - Italy  Italy +39 3451052662  <a href="mailto:jtham@legionaries.org">jtham@legionaries.org</a></p>

First Presentation

Title	<b>Christianity and the Asiatic religious worldview in the thought of Benedict XVI.</b>
Main presenter	<p><i>Sameer Vikram Advani, LC</i>  <i>Research Scholar, UNESCO Chair in Bioethics and Human Rights</i>  <i>Professor, Regina Apostolorum Pontifical Athenaeum, Rome, Italy</i></p>
Abstract	<p>In 1981 Joseph Ratzinger wrote: “I believe that as far as religion is concerned, the present age will have to decide ultimately between the Asiatic religious world view and the Christian faith. I have no doubt that both sides have a great deal to learn from each other.” The future pope framed and condensed the differences between the Christian and Asiatic religious worldviews—their conceptions of God and the human</p>

	person ultimately lead to two very different concepts of 'religion'. He views this plurality in a surprisingly positive light, in that both traditions can learn from each other through dialogue and mutual exchange.
Discussants	<i>John Lunstroth and Coleen Gallagher</i>

Second Presentation	
Title	<b><i>Christian conception of Social Responsibility in Health</i></b>
Main presenter	<i>Claudia Sotomayor, MD, PhD Research Scholar, UNESCO Chair in Bioethics and Human Rights MD Anderson Cancer Center, Texas, USA</i>
Abstract	Christianity interprets the parable of the Good Samaritan as Jesus' command to see and care for the stranger in need as our neighbors, even beyond the call of duty. These are works of supererogation that overcome the Old Law of duty with the New Law of love. This understanding further develops into a comprehensive understanding of justice, responsibility, and rights to provide individual and community health needs as reflected in the extensive Catholic healthcare provisions globally. It coincides with the vision of Global health and social responsibility expressed in the UNESCO Declaration of Bioethics and Human Rights.
Discussants	<i>Sameer Advani and Colleen Gallagher</i>

Third Presentation	
Title	<b><i>Hinduism and Social Responsibility</i></b>
Main presenter	<i>Vasantha Muthuswamy, MD President, FERCI, India Former Senior Deputy Director General, Indian Council of Medical Research</i>
Abstract	Vedanta provides the code of conduct and spiritual values which fully anticipate socio-economic problems. It prescribes <i>Dharma</i> , the righteous duty of each, and <i>Karma</i> , the line of selfless action to be undertaken without expecting any return. It provides the moral compass by cultivating family and social values to fulfil the social responsibilities towards the needy. Hindu ethics leads to self-realization or liberation from the cycle of birth and death, <i>moksha</i> , through service. The presentation will analyze the UNESCO Declaration through the lens of Hindu tenets that eventually form the guiding principles of the Indian Constitution of India which protects the fundamental rights of its citizens.
Discussants	<i>John Lunstroth and Sameer Advani John Lunstroth teaches Hindu ethics at the University of Houston, TX, USA.</i>

### **Format of the symposium**

The symposium hopes to stimulate dialogue among the different presenters, discussants and the audience through the moderation of the chair. This format will allow maximum engagement of scholars with expertise in the fields of religious ethics and human rights with involvement of the audience. Each of the three presentations will be 25 minutes long, with the main presenter explaining his or her paper (12 minutes), followed by the response of the discussants and eventually fielding questions from the audience (13 minutes). After the three presentations, the chair will summarize the findings and open up the discussion to the audience for further clarifications and debates (15 minutes).