

Why Another Inter-Religious Organization?

by His Grace Dr. Paulos Mar Gregorios

I feel great satisfaction at this Inaugural Assembly of the Inter-Religious Federation for World Peace, here in Seoul, Korea. This is also the occasion for me to place on record our deep and sincere appreciation for the warm hospitality extended to us by the people of Korea, and for the generosity and initiative of Rev. Sun Myung Moon, our Founder, Provider, and Promoter who makes the IRFWP possible.

I wish to express my personal appreciation and gratitude to God for this heroic personality of our time. His indomitable sense of purpose and his inspiring vision gives unswerving guidance for so many organizations and for a growingly large number of people, young and old, from all continents and from nearly all nations. Rev. Moon, with his firm trust in God and his indefectible self-discipline in following what he knows to be the will of God, has not only stood his ground in the face of misinformed or malicious propaganda and even persecution, but has actually moved ahead with determination, love and increasing generosity.

I should also pay tribute to the Reverend Chung Hwan Kwak, who with unassuming modesty, unruffled patience, and consummate skill keeps moving all of the many movements initiated by Reverend Moon. I have always wondered how Reverend Kwak manages to do so many things at the same time, and not only to do them well, but also to keep a smiling face. My respectful salute to him and to my other revered co-presidents, His Holiness Swami Chidananda, and His Excellency Sheikh Ahmed Kuftaro, both of whom I have known for many years as friends and co-workers, as also to the Ven. Temple Master Hsin Yuang of Taiwan, and to the other members of



the Presiding Council of IRFWP, among whom I count many friends.

I must also pay a special tribute to our Secretary General Dr. Francis Clark, who brings to IRFWP a vast fund of experience and wisdom, and to our Executive Director Dr. Thomas Walsh whose integrity and organizing ability bring strength and effectiveness to our movement. My humble and respectful salute to all of you who are here from the major religions of the world and from so many countries. Your presence means much to the IRFWP.

An unfulfilled dream

The question has often been asked, Why among the plethora of inter-religious organizations, a new one? The earlier part of our century was characterized by an optimism about the supposed omniscience of science/technology to solve all human problems. The secular triumphed over the religious in that context. Sci/tech has brought us many benefits but somehow we feel poorer and

sometimes more wretched. In the seventies of our century, the secular-scientific-technological, political-economic hope began to go sour. It seems wishful thinking to look for the secular utopia just around the corner.

I remember United Nations Secretary General U Thant of Burma asking for a "United Religions Organization" parallel to the United Nations Organization. That was the great dream of a great Asian leader. The dream, however, remains a dream.

That does not quite answer the question: Why yet another interreligious organization when there are already so many? I venture to suggest three possible answers, which may or may not satisfy, for other organizations too seem to be affirming the same or similar principles.

First, the IRFWP intends to be a spiritual and not a political organization. It unashamedly affirms its faith in the Divine, and acknowledges that without Divine Aid our human efforts can bear no significant fruit. This is a principle which our Founder constantly reaffirms.

By affirming this principle, however, we do not wish to exclude anyone from our fellowship. We are grateful that we have a Buddhist President. We respect the decision of some Buddhists not to affirm the soul or God, and we understand their reasons. Nor can we shut our doors against Secular Liberals. We respect these too, even when we disagree with them. It is our very faith in the Divine that permits us to freely embrace the whole of humanity.

A few weeks ago I was with Baba Virsa Singh, an outstanding Sikh saint, a man of prayer, and a member of our Presidential Board. He asked me a ques-

tion: "Would this meeting in Korea be the usual international meeting, with a lot of speeches and dinners and very little prayer or meditation or expression of the spiritual reality in all religions?" I tried to answer in the positive. He said that he loved me and trusted me. That made things worse, since I was not sure that I had not told him a lie. He is an unusual clairvoyant and healer. He saw our meeting in a vision and saw that it was not going to be a particularly spiritual event. So he sent me a touching letter in which he said that what he had seen in the vision was truth for him, and that he was not coming, because he acted on the basis of his visions as the truth revealed by God.

I want to ask you, Was the Baba right, or was I right? I suspected from the beginning that what I had told the Baba was not the truth. What can we do? I am eagerly searching for a functioning model for IRFWP, so that prayer, meditation and worship becomes central to the work of our organization.

Soul and body in harmony

A second aspect of the specific identity of IRFWP is related to the first point. The IRFWP does not act in isolation from other similar bodies and movements oriented in the same direction. This week, in addition to IRFWP, the Federation for World Peace will be simultaneously inaugurated. In Reverent Moon's vision, the IRFWP stands for the inner or spiritual core of the same movement of which the FWP forms the outer or bodily or organizational aspect, composed largely of political leaders. Together, they are one soul-body. Unification Thought re-

fers to this as sung-sang (soul or spirit), and hyung sang (matter or body). Whether you agree with that ontology or not, the point is that prayer-meditation on the one hand and social-cultural-economic activity on the other hand, are not opposed to each other, but complementary and integral to each other. The one by itself cannot produce the desired results. There must be an action component and a prayer component. It is not the case that FWP has all the action and we the IRFWP all the prayer. It is more complex than that. Both organizations will need both, but by the nature of our respective constituencies, each would be more productive if it put more emphasis on one than on the other. IRFWP has a big job cut out for it at this point. It would not seek to do everything; it would not just talk and act, though it may do both. It must pray; otherwise its identity is false.

The third aspect of the specific identity of the IRFWP has to do with its practice of pluralism and openness among the various religious traditions as well as towards those who profess no religion or faith. We do not want any one religion to dominate, not even Unification Thought or the Christian line. Nor do we have ambitious plans to work for a common religion, bringing together the best in all religions. We feel that the IRFWP should call upon all religions to go deeper into their own tradition, and bring out the best in each. Experience shows that the deeper we go into one's own religion, the more we find that basic love of God and love for all humanity which should unite us all. The more rooted one is in one's own tradition the freer and more secure one is in facing our fellow human

beings and finding our unity in God and in our common humanity. At the deepest levels, there is more unity than diversity among the world's religions. It is that helping to go deep that will help settle the specific identity of IRFWP.

Pluralism does not make sense, however, unless the variety is held together by a common core which unites us all. The basis of that unity is two-fold: the direct experiential knowledge of the Divine Mystery behind the universe, and a common commitment to a united, just and harmonious, peaceful and disarmed, free and dignified humanity living in God and friendly towards the rest of the cosmos. That experiential knowledge and common commitment come from Divine Grace and a strong self-discipline.

May the Lord of the Universe, that Supreme and Fundamental Truth, grant us the power, the wisdom and the love which can enable us to work shoulder to shoulder, and pray knee to knee, so that IRFWP may genuinely fulfill its Divine task. Please pray with me:

O God of all grace and mercy,

Lord who brings all things from nothing to being,

Spirit of Truth and Love that leads in wisdom and power,

Hear our prayers and help us.

Guide this infant organization in Thy ways. May we all be united in the Good. May we be vigilant and not stray from Thy path. Lead us that we may lead others. Bless us that we may bless others. Be Thou our Captain and our Guide. To Thee we commit ourselves. ■■■