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Foreword

Following the tide of globalization, today's world has become an integral entity witnessing frequent interactions between different regions and cultures. While economic development, information explosion and advancement in communications technology have shortened the distance between people, contributing to the advent of the global village, deeply rooted misunderstandings and prejudices have also been laid bare. Religious issues have always been one of the major causes of international conflicts. Particularly, the growing conflict between Christian and Islamic civilizations in recent years has seriously threatened global peace and security.

In light of these concerns, Master Sheng Yen, founder of Dharma Drum Mountain Buddhist Association, has proposed the formation of shared global ethics and values through inter-faith dialogues. In recent years, Master Sheng Yen or delegates of the Dharma Drum Mountain monastic community have attended numerous international conferences, including meetings organized by the World Economic Forum, the World Bank, the World Council for Religious Leadership, the Global Peace Initiative for Women,

the Earth Charter, as well as the World Youth Peace Summit.

These conferences all focus on the discussion of how to transform ethnic conflict into harmony to achieve lasting world peace; how to help developing countries shed poverty and become partners sharing the Earth's resources in pursuit of sustainable development; and how to transform hostility into mutual tolerance, acceptance, and intercultural understanding, thereby developing shared human values and morals.

This book is a collection of addresses and speeches delivered by Master Sheng Yen at major international religious events or meetings between 2000 and 2008. He has repeatedly stressed the necessity of inter-faith exchange and dialogues. Every religion has its unique cultural background and belief system, resulting from its own historical development. Therefore, it is impossible, and impractical, to attempt to integrate and unite all religious faiths into one. Diversity is a virtue rather than a threat. Various religions, faith systems, and cultural traditions not only enrich humanity, experience but also serve as a driving force behind the progress of civilization.

If we can foster mutual understanding, learn tolerance, and respect the differences between peoples,

religions, and cultures, seeking common ground while preserving individual identities, then gradually we will be able to achieve global peace for humanity in this century. This is precisely the vision advocated by Dharma Drum Mountain Buddhist Association: to pray for the coming of heaven to this earth and build this world into a pure land.

Eliminating Barriers, Enhancing Mutual Respect and Love

Most honored religious and spiritual leaders of the world, dear brothers and sisters:

Thanks to the joint efforts of humankind on earth, the movement toward world peace has been promoted extensively. Today, however, in the year 2000, we are still gathering here at the United Nations for a meeting to discuss how to achieve world peace. This signifies that there are still conflicts in the world waiting for us to find solutions.

I believe no one could doubt that we, the religious and spiritual leaders, are all peace-loving people. However, there still exists the fact that different religions clash or even provoke wars against each other. When people maintain what they believe in is the best religion in the world, they should not forget that others also have the right to say that their faith is the best. When people strive to survive and develop, they should not forget that others also have the right to survive and develop.

Therefore, I would like to make a sincere proposal: If you find that the doctrines of your faith contain something that is intolerant of other groups, or in

contradiction with the promotion of world peace, then you should make new interpretations of these relevant doctrines. Why? Because every wholesome religion should get along peacefully with other groups so that it can, step by step, influence humankind on earth to stay far away from the causes of war.

When speaking of the problem of humankind, poverty on earth, everyone will think of the regions that are ravaged by natural disasters and wars. So we should offer assistance to those regions and appeal for peace. But as you may also know, even the United States is not free from the problem of poverty. So I wish to point out a fact: poverty of material things threatens the lives of people, whereas poverty of the spirit and heart deprives people's living environment of security and happiness. Therefore, our organization, Dharma Drum Mountain, is promoting a movement called "spiritual environmentalism", where individuals start by purifying their mind, filling it with gratitude, kindness and compassion for life. In this way, they will devote the fruit of their efforts to others. As long as one continuously works hard to improve one's living conditions, one will be able to overcome material poverty; as long as one feels grateful and compassionate, one will be able to enrich oneself

spiritually and mentally.

Enrichment of the spirit is a more precious wealth than material possessions. Chinese Chan (Zen) Buddhism is characterized by a simple way of life. Chan practitioners can gain freedom and peace of mind because they have little desire for material things in their lives. When one's spirit is calm and stable, one will not be stimulated or tempted by the external material environment, neither will one harm others and damage the natural environment. Therefore, the *Awakening of Faith in Mahayana* says, "when the mind arises, all things arise; when the mind perishes, all things perish." Peace and war reflect the harmony or conflict contained in the human mind; likewise, paradise and hell are not separate from the human mind's inclination toward virtue or evil.

Poverty or wealth is mostly determined by the ignorance or wisdom of the human mind. If people are greedy and insatiable because of their ignorance, they will cause destruction and conflicts and end up poor. Even though some people possess enormous material wealth, they might lose all of it overnight if they are ignorant and unable to put it to good use. Indeed, the Buddha said: "One's material property is commonly owned by the five enemies, namely, flood, fire, bandits,

tyranny, and prodigal sons.” If you possess wisdom, you can transform the corruptible into something wonderful, turn discarded junk into treasure; you can also change few into many, make ugly things beautiful, turn disappointment into hopefulness, and transform hell into paradise.

Humankind's ignorance is caused by its deluded views. The Complete Enlightenment Sutra says, “Since time without beginning, all sentient beings have had all sorts of delusions, like a disoriented person who has lost his sense of direction. They mistake the gathering and dispersing of the four elements, (namely, earth, water, fire, and air) for their physiological selves, and the six conditioned impressions of the six sense objects, (namely, forms, sounds, smells, tastes, textures, mental objects) for their psychological selves. They are like a man with an illness of the eyes who sees an illusory flower in the sky, or a second moon.” Therefore, sentient beings vex themselves and others. If the concepts of the Buddhist scriptures can be used to guide humankind's life, and its methods of meditation can be applied to help people become aware of their weaknesses, then humankind can hope to achieve everlasting peace.

On the basis of “spiritual environmentalism,”

our organization is also advocating and carrying out social etiquette environmentalism, lifestyle environmentalism, and natural and ecological environmentalism. Together they are called the “Four Kinds of Environmentalism.” This is because we believe that, if we wish to pursue world peace, if we wish to solve the problems of humankind's poverty and the environment, then we should review and examine the thinking of humankind, and start by purifying the mind and uplifting the spirit. I would like to offer everyone two sentences: "With true wisdom one will not have any vexations. With true kindness and compassion one will not encounter any enemies."

Moreover, I believe that every religion cherishes an ever-lasting hope that God's paradise or the Buddha,s pure land will be established for the sake of humankind. Although Buddhism maintains that all sentient beings are equal, only human beings on earth can put the Buddha,s teachings into practice. Therefore, our organization is also promoting a movement: initially, to build God's paradise and the Buddha,s pure land on earth. If we could endeavor to carry out the construction of the earthly paradise or earthly pure land, then no matter when we die, we would surely be blessed by the grace of God and be taken by the

Buddha into his embrace.

Whatever name it may be given, be it paradise or pure land, we are good neighbors in the global village. Indeed, we are all sons and daughters born of the same Mother Universe. We are not just good friends to one another, but basically brothers and sisters in a great cosmic family.

Therefore, we have no other choice but to employ all kinds of methods to protect the living environment of this earth. We have no other choice but to remove all the mental barriers between people and to love one another. Thank you!

(Keynote Speech Presented on August 29,2000 at the Millennium World Peace Summit of Religious and Spiritual Leaders at World Peace Summit, United Nations, New York)

Cherishing the World and Bringing an End to Conflict

Esteemed guests, Bawa Jain and Dena Merriam, Secretary-General and Vice-Chair of the Millennium World Peace Summit of Religious and Spiritual Leaders,

First, I would like to thank the Secretary-General of the United Nations, Kofi Annan, for seeing value in the strength of religion, which can serve to care for the world; eliminate misunderstanding, discrimination, conflict and slaughter among religions, ethnic groups, and nations; and, moreover, save the planet from ecological disaster and ensure the dignity of human life. This is the difficult task which Mr. Jain and Ms. Merriam have taken upon themselves.

We firmly believe that every religion, in its fundamental essence, encourages humanity to practice mutual respect, assistance, and forgiveness. No matter what name its object of faith may be honored by, every religion universally cherishes all humanity and even all life. Regrettably, people have occasionally made biased interpretations of the scriptures they believe in, which has given rise to opposition and conflict among different religions and even conflict and struggle

among the sects of a single religion. Nonetheless, world peace is the common vision of all religions. Thus, if differences in religious beliefs lead people into conflict, the religions should consider making a new interpretation of the relevant doctrines.

We believe that the religious faiths of all the world's peoples each have their own historical and geographical background. Therefore, we must accept the fact of religious pluralization and believe each religion is taking up the task of purifying the spirit and society for the sake of humanity.

We deeply believe that, in the 21st century, every adherent, of whatever religion or sect, has the right to declare that his or her religion is the best.

If we wish to share the religion and ideas that we believe in with the rest of humanity, then the best way is to tolerate, respect, and assist those who disagree. For example, it has been characteristic of Chinese culture to constantly absorb and assimilate elements of other cultures. Similarly, the Mahayana Buddhism that arose in India holds that all sentient beings have the Buddha-nature just as a hundred rivers returning to the sea all have the same taste. For this reason, if we can respect one another's cultures and religions, learn from one another, supplement our own lack with

the other's abundance, develop our virtues and reform our faults, if we can praise the commonness while appreciating the differences and seek common ground while maintaining our uniqueness, then the interactions between individuals, ethnic groups, and religions will be characterized by mutual benefit, and prosperous coexistence.

We need to use compassion and wisdom to assist us in eliminating the conflicts and wars that erupt between the world's various ethnic groups. We need to use wisdom to handle each incident and compassion to care for every ethnic group, and to use loving hearts and methods to resolve the problems of conflict among religions and discrimination among ethnic groups. We must do this rather than replacing the religions originally followed by others with our own, or declaring that the religion that we believe in is the only truly peace-loving religion.

The world of the 21st century will certainly be one of religious pluralism and one of cultural pluralism. Each of the traditional, established religions will have to face challenges from all quarters. Due to the speed with which religious ideas and information can now be disseminated, new religions expand rapidly, and it is already imperative for traditional religions to open

up and to interact with other faiths. Although it may be to preserve their own safety, if they continue to be satisfied with the old ways, to exclude dissenting voices, and to attack other religious groups, religions actually endanger their own safety. This is because turning enemies into friends through peaceful methods is the easiest way to find acceptance, and turning friends into enemies with an adversarial attitude is the easiest way to meet with opposition.

Unfortunately, up to the present, in our world there are still more than a few religions that cannot accept that the followers of other religions have the right to and possibility of salvation. Not only do they not interact with or assist other religions, they have no dealings with them at all. More seriously, they discriminate against and exclude other religions, as well as criticize and attack them. This establishes segregation amongst people and carries grave dangers for our world. This is a problem we all must diligently work on together.

We should pray for the peace and happiness of all sentient beings. We should also pray for the success of the United Nations, program to involve religious leaders in promoting world peace.

(Presented on April 16, 2001 at “Religious

and World Peace through Protecting the Spiritual Environment” Forum)

Interreligious Understanding and Cooperation

I. Interreligious Respect

During the time of Shakyamuni Buddha, there was once a layman who, originally a devotee of another Indian religion, converted to Buddhism after meeting the Buddha. This layman was uncertain whether or not he could still make offerings to his original teacher. When he learned of the man's confusion, the Buddha told the man he could continue to make offerings to his original teacher just as before. In fact, in the Agama Sutras and Monastic Code preached by the Buddha, the Buddha frequently praises the merit of making offerings not only to the Buddha, Dharma, and Sangha, but also to other religious practitioners such as ascetics and Brahmins. So respecting other religions is a basic criterion for a Buddhist devotee. Therefore, Buddhists will not cause conflicts with followers of other religions, and will always get along with them peacefully, like good neighbors.

This is especially true in the Chinese cultural sphere. Although at times in Chinese history arguments have erupted between Confucians, Buddhists, and Taoists,

and there have even been large-scale persecutions of Buddhists, these incidents were all instigated by a small number of politically-connected Confucians and Taoists who used their influence at court to encourage misguided, anti-Buddhist policies. However, relations between ordinary folks of different religions have actually been very cordial. For instance, China in the 1940s, itinerant Buddhist monks could seek lodging in Taoist temples, and itinerant Taoist clerics could pass the night in Buddhist monasteries—they respected one another's faith and method of spiritual practice. The Chinese maintain, “all paths lead to the same destination.” So any religious practitioner who does not go against the basic moral principles of love, peace, and the pursuit of true happiness is worthy of approval regardless of his method of practice. Hence the Chinese saying that “Buddhist monks and Taoist clerics all belong to the same family.”

China has a plurality of ethnic groups and a great diversity of religions. At one time in history, the Confucians, due to their self-centeredness and superiority complex, viewed non-Han races as uncivilized barbarians. However, through mutual adaptation and interaction with one another over a long period of time, the Han eventually came to discover

that other cultures were also very admirable: not only did these other cultures have much in common with Han culture, but they actually had merits which Han culture lacked. Therefore, in the areas inhabited by the Chinese there have been neither religious wars nor implacable enmity between ethnic groups.

Chinese Mahayana Buddhists believe that the good teachings in all religions are the elementary prerequisites for attaining Buddhahood, and that the prophets of all religions are manifestations of Buddhas and Bodhisattvas. They have manifested themselves in these various personas only to adapt to different cultures and living environments, so that they may use the most appropriate means to deliver sentient beings. Hence in the 12th century, the Confucian scholar Lu Jiuyuan (1139-1193), influenced by Buddhism, said that “When a sage appears in the East, he has the same mind and realizes the same principle; when a sage appears in the West, he has the same mind and realizes the same principle.” This means that all prophets, from whatever geographical area and of whatever religion, have more or less the same love and realize roughly the same truth.

If we use this principle to view all religions, we will respect all religions. While it is perfectly natural for

devotees of any particular religion to claim that their own religion is the best, we must also acknowledge and respect the fact that our neighbors and relatives also have the same right to claim their religion is the best. Once on an airplane I was sitting right next to a Christian missionary, who was piously reading the Bible and praying. Seeing that I had nothing to do, he gave me a Bible and showed me how to read it. I praised his good intentions and enthusiasm, and agreed with his statement that Christianity is the only religion through which one can attain salvation. He immediately asked me, “If this is the case, why are you a Buddhist monk? Isn't that a pity?” I said, “I'm sorry, but for me, Buddhism is most suitable. So I would say that Buddhism is the best religion.”

II. Interreligious Understanding

As shown in the incident I just mentioned, it is necessary to respect one another before we can understand one another. I accepted the missionary's Bible, and in return gave him a Buddhist book. From his expression I could see how much he hoped that I would diligently read the Bible, just as I hoped he would look through the book about Buddhism.

In various parts of the world, I frequently go to the

educational institutions and churches of other religions, sometimes to lecture on Buddhist studies, sometimes to participate in symposiums, and sometimes to attend religious ceremonies. I have quite a few friends from other religions. Other religions invite me to discuss Buddhism, and we also invite missionaries and scholars of other religions to our Buddhist schools and institutes to introduce their religions. And representatives from the major religions are always happy to attend religious conferences sponsored by Buddhists.

From what I know, the first people to introduce Buddhism to the West were not for the most part Buddhists but rather Christian missionaries who had gone to the Orient to evangelize.

Buddhism has been in China now for 2,000 years. When it was first introduced to China, it tried to adapt to indigenous Chinese culture as much as possible, even using Taoist and Confucian terminology and concepts to explain parts of its doctrines. This then contributed to the arising of Buddhist schools with distinctly Chinese characteristics such as the Tiantai, Huayan, Pure Land, and Chan schools. In other words, Buddhism in China first learned and absorbed elements from traditional Chinese culture,

then evolved into new schools distinct from Indian Buddhist schools. Even traditional Chinese Confucians learned and incorporated Buddhist thought, which resulted in the rise of Neo-Confucianism in the Song and Ming dynasties. Chinese Taoists, in a similar manner, transformed and incorporated many Buddhist scriptures into the Taoist Canon, thereby enriching Taoist culture. In China, Buddhist monks from the generation before mine were required to be well versed in not only the Buddhist Canon, but also Confucian and Taoist thought; otherwise, it would have been difficult for them to propagate Buddhist teachings. In our age, we should open our minds even more, and learn about the various world religions, so as not to find ourselves in self-imposed isolation with narrow horizons, like a frog gazing up at the sky from the bottom of a well.

If we turn back to discuss Indian religions, we can see that they, too, have contributed to one another's growth through mutual influence and stimulation. In fact, much of the content of Buddhism was incorporated from ancient Indian religions. In the Buddha's time, different religious sects and schools filled India, some ancient, and some newly-established. Siddhartha Gautama himself humbly learned from many teachers of various spiritual schools. After

becoming a Buddha, though he developed distinctly Buddhist views, and discarded many religious views and beliefs not in conformity with Buddhism, Buddhism is still a product of Indian religious culture. Hence, in turn, in the 8th century the great Hindu philosopher Shankara (700-750) consulted Buddhist Madhyamika philosophy and thereby created Vedantic philosophy.

Buddhism stresses an ethic based on cause and effect—as you sow, so shall you reap—whereas Christianity seems to focus almost solely on the believer's salvation through faith, without relating it to his ethical behavior. Actually, according to the contemporary philosopher John Hick, if one looks at the parables of the worthy and unworthy servants and of the sheep and the goats in the Gospel of Mathew, chapter twenty-five, one can see that the teachings of Jesus Christ actually have a very strong ethical and practical character: that is, one day we will inevitably reap the consequences of what we do in our daily lives now. For this reason the Apostle Paul, in chapter six, verse seven of his letter to the Galatians said, “Whatever a man sows, that he shall also reap.” In addition, Hick said that “in our own time Catholic and Reformed... Christians have come, at least in a

significant minority, to see an authentic response to God as requiring a dedication, individually, nationally and globally, to social justice and the preservation of endangered Mother Earth.” Seen from this angle, the views of Christianity are not that far from those of Buddhism and other religions.

Let us now look at the God of Islam. In the Qur'an, Allah has ninety-nine different names, including the Protector, the Forgiver, the Bestower, the Forbearing One, the All-Forgiving, the Source of All Goodness, the Protecting Friend, the Loving One, the Lord, the Pardoner, the Compassionate, and the Guide to the Right Path. From this we can see that Allah is a God who loves all humanity, as stressed in the Qur'an, sura two, verse sixty-two, “whoever believes in God and the Last Day, and whoever does right, shall have his reward with his Lord.” In his book *The Fifth Dimension* Hick said that, when the Muslims came to India, there were some who argued that Zoroastrians, Hindus, Jains, and Buddhists were also “People of the Book.” “The Book” refers to the eternal word of God that is expressed to his people in different human situations through different prophets in different revealed scriptures. Even though many mainstream and fundamentalist Muslims believe that

many non-Muslims are missing their opportunity to enter Paradise, the message spread by Islam is that the possibility of entering Paradise is good news for all, not just for Muslims. The Islamic mystics, the Sufis, are especially able to believe that followers of other faiths may also receive God's mercy.

Naturally, from a standpoint of mutual respect and appreciation, religions must seek greater understanding of one another, yet there is no need to distort each other's beliefs in our search for common ground. That would not only cause great pain and trouble, but also lead to three possible outcomes: (1) twisting other religions to make them like one's own, (2) denying the position of one's own religion to comply with other religions, or (3) blending different religions together to establish a new one. None of these scenarios are healthy. Thus someone once asked a prominent world religious leader, "If you believe that all religions are good, should we establish a syncretic religion?" He replied, "No, there are already enough religions in the world." What he meant was that, since ancient times, humanity's religions have always been diverse. Each has its own beauty. Each has its own virtue. Each has its own truth. There is no need to blend them. It might be good to seek common ground while preserving

differences. For instance: Buddhism advocates the theory of conditioned arising and is non-theistic. It can respect and understand theistic religions and does not need to deny its own position in order to be on friendly terms with other faiths.

III. Interreligious Cooperation

Cooperation among religions does not mean leaders of various religions coming together to discuss doctrine to find out who is superior or inferior, higher or lower, greater or lesser, better or worse. This will only lead to conflict, deepen disagreement, increase enmity, and create opposition. If we can follow the principle of mutual respect, then we can all interact peacefully. Especially in our religiously pluralistic modern age, one has only to leave one's country, one's ethnic group, or even one's home, to come into contact with followers of different religions. In an open society, one may find several different faiths even within a family. We must respect, even support, each other's choices with an attitude of appreciation, and should never criticize other faiths based on our own subjective standpoint. We should cooperate to create a harmonious, peaceful, happy and warm community in which to live.

Today, and especially in the world of the future, due to the ever-increasing quantity and accessibility of information, the convenience of transportation, the rapid progress of technology, and the ever-changing nature of contemporary society, people separated by thousands of miles can talk as though they sat face to face. For this reason, those who would like a single faith to take over the niches of all other faiths are faced with stronger and stronger opposing influences. Unless we would isolate ourselves from the reality of the greater world, we must help one another and cooperate in sharing the various resources needed for life.

We religious believers all share a common way of thinking. We all believe that the object of our belief, be it called Jehovah, Jesus Christ, the Messiah, God, the Lord, Allah, Shiva, Vishnu, the Bodhisattvas, or the Buddha, is possessed of love, compassion, awe-inspiring presence, and great divine power; thus we believers are able to gain peace, protection, and salvation. Moreover, we also believe we must follow and practice the teachings and admonishments of our sacred scriptures, holy injunctions and revelations to help all beings also gain peace, protection, and salvation. In this way, we share the great love and compassion of God, the Bodhisattvas, and the Buddha

with all people. Yet this is not limited to spreading the faith; what is more important is maintaining the safety of humanity and the peace of people's minds and raising the quality of society and people's characters. A livable environment for all requires that all work collectively for its improvement.

All the living and non-living beings on this planet are integral parts of the community of all life, how much more so the believers of various religions who are human beings. Different interpretations of sacred texts, holy injunctions and revelations have led to the differences between religions; however, if one can experience the non-personal and indivisible Ultimate Reality, one would know that in this Reality, there is no distinction between self and other, inner and outer, superior and inferior, or high and low. Yet this reality is many-sided.

Looking at the life of Gandhi, we see that he was influenced by a Jain master named Raychandbhai to accept that many different views, including religious views, may all be reasonable and valid. Thus he agreed that “religions are different roads converging on the same point. What does it matter that we take different roads so long as we reach the same goal? I believe in the fundamental truth of all great religions of the world.

I believe they are all God given and I believe they were necessary to the people to whom they were revealed.”

This is to say that the various religions have only one goal, which is Ultimate Reality. This is the transcendence of human nature and divine nature, the movement from a personal, differentiated God to a non-personal, undifferentiated reality. In Buddhism this is called Reality; in other religions it is called Absolute Truth. Gandhi saw that Reality has many sides, so he accepted that the differences did not contradict Absolute Truth. What the various religions argue over is the different aspects of reality. If they realized that a single reality underlies those aspects, they would cease arguing. Naturally, we don't have to completely endorse Gandhi's view, but it is something we can raise for consideration.

I'd like to relate a true story: Thirty years ago, several friends and I made a vow to save Buddhism. Thereafter, some went south to Thailand, some northeast to Japan, and some into the mountains to practice austerities. More than ten years later, we unexpectedly all met again in the US. Each had learned different things, but they were all facets of Buddhism. Thus once again we agreed to cooperate on practical matters. Actually, there should be a lot

of room for cooperation between different sects of a single religion or between organizations or individuals of different religions. This cooperation doesn't have to entail joining a single organization. It could simply be acting in cooperation to abandon violence, cast aside long-standing grudges, and not to settle old scores. It could mean joining forces to eliminate the causes of starvation, diseases, natural disasters, and ethnic conflicts, to protect the environment and resources of this planet for future generations, and to protect the human spirit from being polluted by enmity, greed, envy, anger, pride, irresolution, fear, worry, arrogance, feelings of inferiority and voidness. If each religion can start by influencing and encouraging its own believers in this way, then the major religions of each country in the world can also influence that country's citizens, as well as politicians and businessmen. If everyone can share this kind of understanding, it will be a giant first step toward religious cooperation.

(Concluding Address Presented on September 20, 2001 at the “International Conference on Religious Cooperation”)

The Vision and Mission of Religious Leaders

We must realize that, from the perspective of any religion in the world, each believes it fervently loves life, and each believes it fervently loves peace.

We must realize that, from the perspective of any race or any country in the world, each believes it fervently loves its own people, and each believes it fervently loves its friends and neighbors.

We must realize that, from the perspective of any religion, any race, or any political ideology, each believes it is obliged to protect people,s lives, to assure their well-being, to maintain love and peace, and to seek freedom and equality. And all believe that interactions between people must not deviate from the principle of justice.

These three realizations, I believe, are the foundational consensus we should all have in order for humanity to make efforts toward lasting world peace. As of today, there are still a few groups whose leaders, in their fervent love for their own group and in their desire to maintain their group,s interests and attain more, greater, and better benefits, have developed antagonistic, hostile relations with other groups.

Such groups may attack or plunder one another, or even regard the opposing groups as demonic, to be conquered and exterminated. This is all caused by human delusion, which then leads to revenge, bloody feuds, and endless cycles of collective violence!

The so-called “human delusion” mainly refers to two blind spots people have in their thinking:

When considering, observing, or dealing with a problem, people only take into account their personal, selfish, and subjective standpoints. Rarely do they try to understand, feel, or sympathize with the other party's ideas, explanations, ways of doing things, or needs based on circumstances. This often results in antagonism and hostility, which then leads to conflict and war.

In facing all manner of complicated situations and problems, people uniformly judge things in simplistic, dichotomous ways. People always think they stand on the side of the true, just, and sacred, and that whoever or whatever disagrees with their faith and ideas is false, evil, and demonic. They perceive two sharply divided sides, and see no room for compromise and coexistence. So great feuds and animosity arise, and mutual slaughter continues endlessly.

As soon as humanity can free itself from these two

blind spots, lasting peace and happiness will be close at hand.

Now, as we face the negative consequences of these two blind spots, we urgently need to find ways to alleviate and resolve such problems. Yet to eradicate the root causes of such problems, I believe, we should first make an appeal to religious leaders, political leaders, and opinion leaders from around the globe: for the survival, prosperity, and sustained development of our world, in the pluralistic society of today, we must work together to carry out the following three points:

To fully strive for our own benefit, but at the same time to take into consideration the benefit of others;

To fully promote our own beliefs, but at the same time to respect the beliefs of others; and

To spare no effort to prevent an attack by enemies: either by giving the enemy no reason to attack, or by giving the enemy reason to fear the consequences of an attack and causing them to lose courage.

In short, these three points are to understand oneself and others, to respect oneself and others, and to transform enemies into friends. Obviously this requires time and patience as well as financial resources to establish defensive facilities and cultivate relations. Only in this way can we lessen hostility resulting from

misunderstanding and suspicion, lighten fears resulting from antagonism and conflicts, and reduce attacks and retaliation stemming from apprehension.

Great power and impartial, universal love must go hand in hand and be used together; they are not in contradiction with one another. Out of great compassionate love, giving people sufficient food, clothing, and the promise of security can win people's hearts and minds more effectively than large-scale military operations, and can even cause enmity to dissolve. Powerful armaments can deter rogues from striking, and impartial love can win the common people's gratitude and endorsement.

Bearing the principles above in mind, I would now like to present my views and suggestions regarding the following two issues: (1) how to avert terror attacks directed against countries in the world, and (2) how to raise the quality of people's religious life in countries that engage in religious suppression.

(1) In the aftermath of the September 11 terror attacks, besides giving our prayers for the more than 5,000 innocent victims, we should also pray for the nineteen terrorist hijackers. This is because both the killed and the killers were all victims, and the loss of any victim's life is equally tragic. Terrorist actions arise

out of delusion and weakness, which fill the terrorists, hearts with hatred. Only by guiding them with wisdom and showing them the warmth of compassion can we help them leave behind self-imposed isolation and the haze of fear and anger.

To root out anti-American terrorism, I think it would be best for the world to make extra efforts to befriend countries with terrorist presence. Furthermore, the world could increase collaboration, communication, and discussion with these countries on the problems common to all human civilizations, thereby advancing mutual agreement. In addition, world political, business, and religious leaders could first befriend moderate, liberal leaders from countries with terrorist presence, who in turn could seek to befriend the more radical leaders. When such radical leaders can become friends and sit down to discuss problems, mutual suspicion and enmity can be dissolved. This is the fundamental solution, the way to transform enemies into friends.

(2) Currently, although governments from countries that engage in religious suppression permits people freedom of religion, this is considered merely a stage in the revolution. In their view, as soon as ideal reforms have been completed, the people will no longer

need religion. This is because from the perspective based on historical materialism, all religions are merely “opium” for people to get temporary relief. So, although the countries that engage in religious suppression will not go so far as to eradicate religion, it would be unrealistic to expect them to devote effort to advance its development. In particular, organized, group religious activities are absolutely banned. Furthermore, religious workers, organizations, movements, and books are not permitted to enter these countries. These countries do not abhor religion, but they do fear that mass movements organized by religious groups could create political turbulence and social unrest.

We don't know whether the reality will be just as they have claimed, that as soon as ideal reforms have been completed, the people will no longer need religion. But currently, the vast majority of their people still need it, because religious faith in itself is a force that gives consolation and fosters social stability. At present, under the principle of not causing social turmoil in the countries that engage in religious suppression, we still have ample scope for helping their citizens to raise the quality of their religious faith. We could make productive efforts in at least three ways:

Promote exchanges to observe and learn from one another in the areas of religious education and culture. Through such exchanges, we could increase mutual affinity and accord and reduce hostility between people.

Call on world religious leaders, organizations, and individuals to: (1) make more contact and visits with religious workers and government officials in these countries in order to increase mutual understanding; (2) collaborate more frequently with the people of these countries in such areas as promoting social well-being, environmental protection, raising people's character, reduction of crime, disaster relief, and catastrophe prevention; and (3) not attempt to develop organized religious activities in these countries.

Invite these countries to send representatives to all global religious activities, and when possible, hold such activities within their countries. This would allow religious workers of these countries as well as related officials at all levels to keep abreast with the status quo in international religious developments. Hence, they would have the chance to benefit by growing along with other religions around the world without feeling threatened by foreign religious groups.

In conclusion, any religion, any country, or any

group hopes to be understood, respected, affirmed, and accommodated. Even those whose faith and ideas are totally different from our own can become our friends, as long as we are willing to try to understand, respect, affirm, and accommodate them. To take the first step in this direction and stick with it unwaveringly—**this**, then, is our common vision and mission.

(Presented on October 15, 2001 at the Inaugural Steering Committee Meeting of the World Council of Religious and Spiritual Leaders, New York)

The “Sacred” in a Pluralistic World: Seeking Common Ground While Preserving Differences

The definition of the “sacred” varies according to time, place, and individual. This is something of which we must be aware in a modern, pluralistic, and globalized society.

Most religions derive their understanding of the “sacred” from their faith in and interpretation of the holy scriptures and teachings they rely on, and some derive it from the revelation of religious experience. On the surface these understandings seem to come directly from objective “divine revelations,” but in reality their formation was influenced by a variety of factors relating to people, time, place, historical background and cultural differences. Thus these understandings are not purely objective.

I believe the highest Truth revered by each religion is necessarily completely perfect and absolutely sacred. However, once human factors come in and interpretations and outside agendas are imposed on this Truth, it becomes subjective and individual differences arise.

Thus, although Buddhists take the theory of causes and conditions as most sacred, we do not deny the values of monotheism—not that we identify with and accept them, but that we can understand and respect them. We can accept that every wholesome religion has room for continued development and the right to proclaim itself the world's best religion. Likewise, I myself would say that Buddhism is the best religion.

For this reason, to manifest the tolerance expected in a pluralistic society, the definition of the “sacred” must be reinterpreted. We must be aware that although the highest Truth is one, due to differences in cultural backgrounds, the holy scriptures and teachings, which were personally experienced by the prophets of different peoples and passed down orally and in written form, nevertheless have different perspectives and different possible interpretations. In order to save humanity from the danger of conflict and even destruction, we must not only preserve the values of our own group but also respect those of others'. While we can have our own self-centered values, we must also be tolerant of the values held by others.

The catalytic exchanges of a pluralistic society can provide the opportunity to learn from one another and grow; they can keep our cultures perennially

vibrant. The days of mono-cultural societies have long gone and will not return again, and fortunately so. Otherwise the destiny of humanity would be a very tragic one! Therefore, I want to make this appeal now to all humanity: in a pluralistic world, the one “sacred” principle which all humanity should come to understand is “seeking common ground while preserving differences.”

(Presented on February 1, 2002 at the World Economic Forum, New York)

Providing Economic Aid and Educational Support to Transform the Outlook of Fundamentalists

I.

In principle, it is natural for there to exist fundamentalists. In fact, to stick to any kind of religious value system, academic theory, or political ideology can be considered a form of “fundamentalism.” While some people can adjust and change what they adhere to, it is exceedingly difficult for others, such as those who adhere to particular religious views, to make any change.

II.

We should understand that poverty and ignorance are often interrelated. Because of poverty, it becomes difficult to access modern, pluralistic and global information. This may then lead to the isolation of culture and thinking, and result in discriminating against, belittling and rejecting whoever is different. Because of poverty, jealousy of the United States and other capitalist countries may arise. A sense of inferiority is transformed into extreme arrogance,

which then leads to the detesting, despising and attacking of whoever is different.

III.

Solutions. Military retaliation might have a temporary deterrent effect, but if a lasting peace is hoped for, we must take the following four steps with love and patience:

Provide economic aid in order to raise their productivity.

Support the improvement of educational facilities to give them access to modern, pluralistic, and global information.

Befriend them in a sincere manner to help them realize that: (1) only by respecting others will they receive others, respect, (2) only by tolerating those different from themselves can they achieve true and lasting security, and (3) only the power of love can permanently and fully conquer the world.

Encourage fundamentalists through cultural exchange and interaction to reinterpret their holy scriptures and teachings, so they themselves will adjust their values.

(Presented on February 3, 2002 at the World Economic Forum, New York)

The Mission of World Religious Leaders in the 21st Century

Today, in the 21st century, because of the rapid development of advanced technology, humankind can enjoy amenities of life far more convenient and abundant than those in the past. However, because of such development, traditional values have also been brought face to face with a variety of challenges. In particular, conservative religious beliefs, claims to racial superiority, social structures, and ways of life are constantly being criticized and tossed about in this time of globalization, social pluralism, and postmodernism.

Religion is the common source and refuge of all humankind. But we cannot deny that because some conservative religious figures are too quick to mistake those who are different for being evil, discrimination and opposition are formed, and hatred and conflict are created. This is a problem that is awaiting our positive resolution.

The important topics that should be discussed at this conference are “How can religious leaders assist the United Nations in resolving religious and ethnic conflict?” “How can poverty in the world

be alleviated?” “How can we effectively work to protect the global environment?” and “How can we end the violence of war and terrorist attacks?” In other words, aside from spreading their own faiths, religious leaders in the 21st century must also play an active role in rescuing humanity from these crises. These issues are precisely the emphases of the work my organization, Dharma Drum Mountain, has been engaged in diligently since the late 80's. Now, I'd like to share the ideas we have been practicing and promoting, and I welcome your feedback and suggestions.

1. How can conflicts be resolved? Whether in terms of religion, politics, or culture, there should be a consensus between different groups to “seek common ground while preserving differences.” That is, in the pursuit of common interests and goals, it cannot hurt to permit different ways of thinking and doing things. This is like the way members of a family are each allowed to think and do things in a different way. In this spirit, Confucianism advocates “seeking harmony, not sameness.” And the Buddha said: “Sentient beings have varying predispositions, but they all have the potential to realize the Path,” and that” A forest can accommodate myriad kinds of sentient beings.” Actually, religions themselves

do not conflict, nor is there any problem with the deities that are worshipped. Only because of the foolish interpretations of human beings, opposition and conflict exist. Therefore, we must make a public appeal: whenever a passage in a holy scripture is found to be in conflict with human peace, it should be given a new interpretation.

2. How can poverty be alleviated? There are two kinds of poverty: material and spiritual. Material poverty makes life difficult, but spiritual poverty can create disasters of great destructiveness. Materially impoverished peoples deserve great sympathy; spiritually impoverished peoples can be extremely dangerous. Today, besides those who are the victims of droughts, floods, and earthquakes, the recipients of international humanitarian aid are primarily war refugees. Inadequate productivity and the destruction brought by war result in material poverty. Yet spiritual poverty is the source of wars and conflicts between peoples. For this reason, if we wish to alleviate material poverty, the best way then is for religious leaders to encourage everyone to make a vow—to transform the selfish heart that plunders and takes into a compassionate heart that gives and contributes. While the materially affluent should of course give and

contribute, the materially impoverished should also partake in the joy of giving according to their ability. If such giving and contributing can be promoted widely, not only can it alleviate material poverty, but it can also resolve the problem of spiritual poverty. Only in this way is there hope for lasting peace on earth.

3. How can we effectively work to protect the environment? As you all know, the environment we live in is already rapidly deteriorating. The primary cause is humanity's excessive development and waste, resulting in the large-scale depletion and destruction of our natural resources and living environment. Therefore, effective environmental protection is a mission of great urgency. Environmental protection must, however, begin with a change in people's values. Hence, using the protection of the spiritual environment as its cornerstone, Dharma Drum Mountain Buddhist Association promotes the protection of the social and living environments, as well as our natural resources and ecosystems. Protecting the spiritual environment means looking within to develop wisdom and compassion. Once the spirit is enriched, one will be filled with a strong sense of stability and security. With this, one will no longer experience conflict within oneself nor with

the external environment. One will then always treat others with respect and courtesy. Moreover, one will no longer waste resources and destroy the environment in order to satisfy one's excessive material desires. Therefore, for religious leaders, protecting the spiritual environment is particularly important to emphasize.

4. How can the violence of war and terrorist attacks be ended? From the standpoint of a religious leader, compassion and universal love are absolute truths; justice and peace are inseparable. If in order to uphold justice and revere truth, one resorts to violence or terrorist actions, then these individuals must be dissuaded and such behaviors should be condemned. Violence may temporarily serve to shock and terrify, but lasting peace can only be established on a foundation of mutual respect and tolerance. In fact we should move beyond the principle of mutual and reciprocal benefits, engaging in giving without expecting any reward and contributing unconditionally. If everyone gives and contributes wholeheartedly, they will inevitably become more productive, grow faster, and become stronger. Therefore, this practice of contributing unconditionally can also be an effective method to root out violence and terrorism.

In conclusion, if humanity can seek common ground

while respecting differences, give and contribute, protect the spiritual environment, and respect and tolerate one another, then there is hope that in this century peace will gradually prevail. And this is the vision we are promoting: the arrival of heaven on earth, the establishment of a pure land on this world. Let us all pray for the swift coming of that day.

(Presented on June 12, 2002 at The United Nations Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific, Bangkok)

Combining the Power of Women in the Pursuit of World Peace

Women religious and spiritual leaders of the world,

First, I would like to wish success to all the women religious and spiritual leaders of this Global Peace Initiative. I pray that the convocation of this conference today in Geneva will bring hope to and lay the foundations for the cause of everlasting peace for all people throughout the world, and open the door to greater happiness and well-being.

Secondly, I would like to convey my respect for the great women of the world. Regardless of whether history has preserved their names, women in human society have always been men's strongest partner and most reliable support. For all the accomplishments for which men are given credit, half the contributions have come from women. How then could it not be that in the world's religions, there have always been women surrounding the founders and leaders, standing at their sides and at their backs, providing inspiration, care, and support? Moreover, not a few great religious figures have themselves been women.

Today, in the 21st century, the equality of men

and women has already become the consensus of the civilized world. Thus Dena Merriam conceived and organized this Global Peace Initiative of Women Religious and Spiritual Leaders, which convenes here today. Here in Geneva the best and brightest women of the world's religions have been brought together to discuss how they can together use spiritual values to assist the United Nations in preserving the traditional cultures and religions of the world's peoples, easing world conflict, encouraging ethnic harmony, and dealing with such problems as the oppression of women and abuse of children, as well as pervasive poverty and disaster relief.

In all ancient cultures of the world, the sky is referred to as the father of all things and the earth as their mother. The maternal and the paternal contribute equally to the earth and sky's creation and nourishing of all things. In the scriptures of Mahayana Buddhism, wisdom is described as paternal and compassion as maternal. When wisdom and compassion work together, we can liberate sentient beings from their afflictions and save them from their sufferings. Wisdom is the result of inner cultivation. Compassion is universal love in action. From this we can see that the female spirit creates the world and can give rise

to new life as well as bring humanity lasting peace and ensure the endless renewal of the world's natural resources.

I, myself, though limited in my influence, have spent the last ten to twenty years promoting enduring human peace through campaigns to protect the spiritual environment and establish a pure land on earth. Protecting the spiritual environment means maintaining inner peace and tranquility. No matter what situation one encounters, as long as one deals with it wisely, one will not have to struggle in panic and agony; as long as one deals with others compassionately, one will not be driven by tangled feelings of love and hate to harm oneself or others. In this way, a crisis can become the start of good fortune. The pure land on earth is a call to all humanity to actively and extensively promote a wisdom rooted in selflessness and a compassion directed equally to all in this time and place rather than simply wait for our ultimate reward. In this way we can eliminate the human disasters of enmity, conflict, discrimination, misunderstanding, violence, terror, destruction, and inequality. Even natural disasters will diminish.

Finally, let me again convey my best wishes for this first Global Peace Initiative of Women Religious

and Spiritual Leaders. May you meet with complete success.

(Opening Address Presented on October 7, 2002 at the First Conference of the Global Peace Initiative of Women Religious and Spiritual Leaders, Geneva)

Crisis and Peace

Ladies and gentlemen,

First of all I'd like to wish the best to all of you and the whole world: peace, happiness, and well-being for everyone in 2003.

According to statistics released by Munich Reinsurance Company, in 2002 alone, natural disasters worldwide, including massive floods in central and eastern Europe, the big earthquake in Afghanistan, and heat waves in India, have resulted in 55 billion US dollars in property loss, claiming more than 11,000 human lives and resulting in many people losing their homes and loved ones. The situation was far more devastating than the previous 6 years combined.

Apart from natural disasters, ongoing wars, terrorist attacks, traffic accidents, and various life-threatening diseases have claimed numerous lives and caused tremendous loss of property, posing a great threat to the safety of humanity. Therefore, we'd like to jointly make a wish and urge every individual in the world to sincerely say a prayer: "Peace for the world, stability in society, security for all countries, and peace of mind for all."

However, if humanity fails to develop the concept of peace, and to make contributions to the realization of peace, “peace” will just end up an empty slogan. Our mindset and actions must be in line with the objectives of our prayer. If we are filled with religious, cultural, political, economic, ethnic or personal conflicts, or even when we find ourselves conflicted between public good and our selfish desires, we are moving away from our prayer.

Although a universally loving God and the compassionate Buddhas constantly reach out to our rescue, if our way of thinking and our actions are marked by hatred rather than compassionate love, selfish plunder instead of altruistic giving, conflict rather than tolerance, discrimination rather than respect, suspicion rather than trust, then we are acting in the very opposite of our prayer. It's not that God is not universally loving or that the Buddhas lack in compassion; rather, it is us humans steering away from the direction of peace and bliss.

Therefore, let us pray for peace, and devote all our efforts to the realization of peace, and our world will witness a wonderful and peaceful tomorrow.

(Presented on January 29, 2003 at the Women,s Prayer Breakfast for Peace, Washington D.C.)

Violence and Terrorism in Religion

We believe that all religions of the world advocate that human beings should live together in harmony. We should accept that all religions in the world believe that the God they worship is the most righteous, the most loving, and possesses the greatest capacity to give humanity blessings of well being and happiness.

However, why has the world been rife with contradictions and conflicts, violence and terror throughout its history and why has this happened among social groups with the strongest religious fervor? Even among believers of the same religion in the same ethnic group, because of differences in times, environments, individual understanding, and emotional experiences, differences arose and people insisted that the God according to their own knowledge, views, experiences and beliefs is the only, most accurate, most peace-loving and the most real, and also the most perfect ultimate truth. Thus creating opposition, ideological rivalry and violent confrontations. This is probably the reason for the intolerance among various forms of fundamentalism that in turn brings about bloody conflicts.

This is neither the problem of “God” nor of religion. Rather this is because of human beings, ignorance, their lack of wisdom, and the inability to open up their minds in an attempt to understand oneself and others. If one believes that God is omniscient, omnipotent, full of love and authority, one should also believe that God will provide the most appropriate teachings and aids according to the needs of the numerous different ethnic groups of different times and civilizations. These various manifestations are the result of God's all encompassing love for all humans. With this understanding, one will see that the Gods worshipped by all religions and their sects are all the most supreme, monistic God, manifested in different forms as the result of God's universal love to humanity. If God can be manifested in many different forms, then followers of all religions are none other than the children of God. Therefore, aren't they all brothers and sisters? Is there still need for oppositions and conflicts?

Otherwise, the suspicion, denial, opposition and struggle among religions and sects will inevitably result in endless conflicts. Because of these conflicts, everyone loses his sense of security. In order to guarantee one's safety and protect one's space for survival, and in order to preach God's love and extend

God's righteousness and power, there is no choice but to use violence as a means to suppress those deemed as the evil enemies. These evil enemies are to be terrorized, destroyed, and thoroughly annihilated from the face of the earth so that no lurking dangers remain for one's ethnic group and religious sect. In reality, one can never completely annihilate all those who disagree with one's thoughts and religious beliefs. The enemies are all generated from within to begin with; after one group is exterminated, another group will appear. This way of perceiving all parties that do not concur with oneself as evil demons brings about an endless cycle of retaliation. How terrible this is!

Therefore we believe that religious violence and its terrorism have their origin in human beings, insecurity. When confronted with phenomena that one does not yet know, because of suspicions one has fear. Because of fear one resort to violent means, striking out preemptively to embolden oneself and trigger terror in the enemies.

How can we solve this millennia-old problem that has remained unresolved? I suggest the following two main general approaches:

1. The most swiftly effective means is to pass a resolution under international law in the United

Nations stipulating that in order to protect human beings, freedom of pluralistic religious belief and security of human lives, any individuals, ethnic group or country who uses religious groups to incite violence and terrorism should be tried by the international criminal court and be subjected to sanctions by all of humanity. However, this is not my area of expertise. Hence, this should be discussed by the legal experts in this conference.

2. The most thoroughly effective means is:

a. Call upon all people of love and wisdom, to employ all means and approaches to constantly extend, whenever it is appropriate, our friendship towards every ethnic group, region and individual who is prone to terrorism. Let them know that they are not alone or helpless and let them feel the warmth of care, respect and acceptance. When they feel the sense of security, then they will no longer feel the need to engage in violent terrorist actions because of fear.

b. Call upon all people of love and wisdom, to employ all means and approaches to actively interact with, understand, and empathize with every ethnic group, region and individual who is prone to terrorism. Whenever it is appropriate, help them correctly understand their own religious beliefs and let them

know that if they want to receive God's love, they must emulate God's all-encompassing love for the world. Hence, no one should regard terrorists as evil demons. Otherwise, if everyone treats all those who do not concur with oneself as evil demons, then terrorist attacks will never be terminated. Only when we give the world our love can we resolve all forms of enmity. This is the utmost reliable action for security.

c. Call upon all people of love and wisdom, to employ all means and approaches unceasingly to introduce, when appropriate, to every ethnic group, region and individual who is prone to terrorism knowledge of pluralistic ethnicities, cultures and religions. This is to help them understand that to allow for the mutual existence and prosperity of pluralistic cultures is the inevitable trend of civilization and the common necessity of modern human society. Only when we tolerate the differences among various ethnic groups within a pluralistic global society can we exchange virtues and strengths and learn from each other. Otherwise, if people seek only to reject those who are different from themselves and attempt to use violent means of terrorism to intimidate and conquer those who are different, the result is that they will end up targets of terror and conquest themselves.

d. Call upon all people of love and wisdom, to employ all means and approaches unceasingly to encourage, whenever it is appropriate, teachers of all religions and their various sects and all intellectual and influential religious people to reexamine their sacred scriptures. If they discover points that contradict the inclusiveness of a pluralistic global culture, they should be given a new interpretation. Human society has long transitioned from the dominance of a monolithic culture into that of cultural plurality and mutual interaction. Those who pay no heed will either be isolated from or come into conflict with the common global community as a result of their conservatism and insistence.

e. Call upon all people of love and wisdom, to employ all means and approaches unceasingly to make use of every appropriate opportunity to advise all religious and spiritual leaders that while they should pay attention to politics they should not harbor ambitions in politics. Furthermore, they should warn their followers not to be provoked, manipulated or controlled by politicians and not to become their tools. They should advise their country's political leaders that they can be devoted in their religious beliefs and religious experiences yielded from spiritual

cultivation but that they should not exploit religious followers, arouse religious fanaticism, incite religious reprisals, declare “holy war” against peoples who do not concur with them, or use terrorist attacks for political gains. In other words, we should help the ambitious religious and political leaders understand that, in today's global world, religion and politics must function separately from each other. Otherwise, while God and religion do not present a problem, it is unavoidable that people with unwholesome ambitions will exploit the name of God and its followers to incite ethnic conflicts and violence. While the powerful side will resort to war, the weaker side will then resort to terrorist attacks. This will, as a result, bring upon humanity unceasing calamities.

The abovementioned statements are my recommendations for today's topic of discussion and not a representation of Buddhist beliefs. Buddhism does not deny the Gods worshipped by all religions. More importantly, Buddhism is about how to use compassion in the interaction with others and how to use wisdom in handling affairs. With compassion one will not see loathsome enemies. With wisdom, one will be free from the vexations of suspicion, fear, etc. Buddhists should not harbor attitudes that go

against these principles, with or without a scriptural justification.

(Presented on May 21, 2003 at the “The Illegitimate Use of Religion to Incite Violence (Terrorism): Crime against Humanity” global conference, United Nations Dag Hammarskjold Library Auditorium, New York)

Establishing Global Ethics through Education

Although an important reason for establishing a global ethical standard is to counter and prevent the depredations of terrorism, this is not the only reason to do so. We need to pursue this goal in order to protect everyone, whatever their race, from threats of being harmed by others or causing harm to others. The aim is that every individual on this planet will be free from suspicion, misunderstanding, discrimination, and prejudice, and will receive respect, compassion and tolerance, and be able to learn from each other and help each other. Only in this way will we have universal and everlasting peace on this planet of ours.

The reasons for the emergence of terrorism in recent years are complex, involving a variety of racial, religious, political, economic, cultural and historical factors. Generally speaking, when a particular group seeks to protect its own interests or ensure its own security, it easily overlooks the interests and security of other groups. Given this situation, those groups who feel threatened, humiliated or victimized are particularly prone to viewing the use of violence in terrorist assaults as a means of retaliation, even to

the extent that they perceive terrorism as a legitimate channel for achieving justice.

When it comes to defining justice, every group has their own interpretation, and this leads to confrontation as each regards themselves to stand on the side of justice, and their opponents to stand on the side of injustice. The ethical standards of most groups tend to be self-righteous, believing in the rightness of what they believe, and the error of all other alternatives. It is for this reason that we need to establish a common or global ethical standard. Rather than trying to enforce our personal interpretation of what is right on others, we should seek to understand their flaws, extending the hand of friendship to every person so that we can live in peace together and to learn and grow together.

What is global ethics? It is a respect for all life. It is the recognition that everyone has the right to live, and everyone has the responsibility to love and protect others. Global ethics cannot condone the harm of any persons from any group in order to protect one's group. Such a system will exist only when we see all lives on this planet at large as our brothers and sisters, and work to foster respect and tolerance between each other. Thence, the question of whose cause is just and whose is not will no longer arise.

How should we go about creating a global ethics? The notion of global ethics is a system that is based on understanding rather than confrontation, on love and respect rather than force or the threat of force, on healing rather than revenge. If, in the sacred texts or ancient teachings of any peoples there are tenets that go against the principle of peaceful coexistence for all humanity, then these texts should be reinterpreted in the light of global ethics. In the 21st century, our world should be based on openness and diversity. It should be an environment in which all parts interact, one in which people respect one another and learn from one another. To quote an ancient Chinese saying, it should be a world in which “we seek unity, while preserving diversity.”

How should we go about creating a global ethics? The methodology of global ethics is implemented through educational institutions at the many levels—schools, community education organizations, religious institutions and families—so that these aims can be broadly promoted in a sustainable fashion over the long term. The focus should be on a respect for life, recognition that everyone has a right to live, that each and every one of us must learn to live harmoniously in diversity, and a sense of responsibility for protecting

the peace and prosperity of human society. How can these be implemented? I recommend that we propose to UNESCO to take on board the educational program outlined above, and make it one of its primary missions for this century to promote it around the globe. We, the World Council of Religious and Spiritual Leaders, will wholly support and encourage religious leaders at all levels to share in this duty.

Today's topic focuses on strengthening the tutoring on global ethics in the areas of formal school education and in parenting. We all know that formal education today tends to emphasize the transmission of knowledge and skills, often neglecting areas of facilitating the development of the sense of security or healthy personality within students. Parenting also faces many obstacles all around the world. Parenting should include the role of parents and children education, marriage education, financial planning and stages of life education, etc. Global ethics could also serve as the connection for an overall comprehensive parenting.

Education in global ethics, in addition to requiring everyone to respect all people with whom they share this environment, must also impose a responsibility for self-development, supporting others, and sharing

our knowledge and resources with our family, relations, friends and everyone on this earth. The government and educators in each country should set up educational policy and administration to promote global ethics in formal school education. The major role in parenting is performed by the mother and father, who must teach their children to respect and love others, protecting their tender spirits from the seeds of hatred, terror and violence. They should teach their children to understand people different from themselves and to have a compassionate heart.

From my childhood, I still recollect my parents, admonition to me to have a harmonious relationship with all family members and also to show hospitality to strangers from afar. So in my life, I have only ever met friends, never enemies.

(Presented on January 28, 2004 at “Fighting and Preventing Terrorism: Education and Parenting for Peace and Global Ethics” Global Conference, United Nations Dag Hammerskjold Library Auditorium, New York)

Compassion and Wisdom: Handling Conflict

From the perspectives of Chinese philosophy and Indian Buddhism, harmony and conflict are two sides of the same issue and both are normal phenomena. In Chinese philosophy, the interaction between yin and yang and the interplay among the five elements of metal, wood, water, fire and earth are relationships of both conflict and mutual enhancement. Destructive conflicts result when they are in opposition and competitive disputes against each other. Coexistence and prosperity result when they cooperate with and tolerate each other. Buddhism advocates the teaching of dependent origination, according to which all phenomena in our lives and the universe arise and perish due to causes and conditions. All phenomena, be they natural, social, physical, as well as the biological and psychological phenomena of human beings, are filled with contradiction and conflict and, at the same time, compromise and cooperation.

The questions are: what attitude should we use to face these facts? What methods should we apply to handle these facts? Based on my understanding, we should handle all matters with wisdom, and treat

all people with compassion. Not creating troubles for oneself is wisdom; not causing harm to others is compassion. To adjust one's attitude and look at reality as it is wisdom. To treat others with tolerance and empathy is compassion. With wisdom, vexations do not arise; with compassion, one will have no enemy.

This is because, based on our perceptions, our feelings about contradiction and conflict, judgement about evil and injustice, evaluation of and feelings about suffering and happiness, fortune and misfortune, as well as poverty and affluence, can all be subjective and differ from one person to the other, from place to place, and from one time period to the other. Once one's attitude and viewpoint are adjusted, one's sense of being wronged, one's anger and sense of injustice will dissolve. With inner peace, there will be happiness and peace. Otherwise, while seeking satisfaction from the natural surroundings, justice from the social environment, fairness from the different peoples and groups, logical reasoning and equality from family members and the relationship between the sexes will yield some results, there will still be external conflicts and contradictions within oneself.

I have handled many conflicts. Every time I see the individuals from the two sides, they would inevitably

feel that the other side was the perpetrator and themselves the victim, and thus believe that they must engage in retaliatory actions in order to regain justice and fairness. After some analyses and discussions, however, even the side that was determined to have been wrong would feel wronged. My approach to handle this is to tell them that using retaliatory means to punish the other party is not the best method and that it is in fact the worst one. As long as both parties are sincere about looking for a peaceful resolution, then the two parties will be able to forgive each other and thus avoid being hurt for the second, or even the third and the fourth times.

Some people believe that poverty can also lead to conflict. While there may be some truth to it, it is not the entire story. Actually, poverty in one's material life does not necessarily compel one to commit crimes. It is spiritual poverty and erroneous thinking that cause people to commit crimes and bring about destructive disasters in our world. For example, when I was in my six-year solitary retreat in the mountains, the best food I ate everyday was sweet potato leaves. I have also once been so destitute that I was homeless on the streets of New York. But my heart was filled with joy because of my religious faith and the great vow of

sharing the benefits of the Buddhadharma with others.

Due to differences in time and space and numerous other factors, it is impossible to attain absolute equality in economic life and social status for every individual or every ethnic group. The only thing we can do to narrow the disparity between the rich and the poor and to lessen various forms of conflict is to encourage those who are more affluent or more capable to commit more charitable acts for humankind. We can also encourage those who are impoverished to acquire knowledge and skills to improve their lot and to enjoy the wealth of their inner peace.

(Presented on February 1, 2005 at the World Bank's Faith and Development Leaders Annual Meeting, Dublin)

The Global Trend of Communicating from the Heart

Greetings, esteemed Dharma masters and distinguished practitioners. Forgive me for not being able to attend this forum because of my health condition, and listen to your valuable views. So I'd like to use this written address, which is now being read by a Dharma Drum Mountain representative, Bhikkhu Guo Pin, to seek your views and comments.

In the past few years, our organization, and I personally, have attended many international conferences, including the World Economic Forum, World Bank, World Council of Religious Leaders, Global Peace Initiative of Women, the Earth Charter, and the World Youth Peace Summit. These conferences all focused their discussions on the issues of how to transform conflicts between different groups and communities into harmony, so that world peace can be achieved; how to help poverty-stricken countries become collaborative partners to share world resources, and seek sustainable development of such resources; and how to turn hostility between different cultures into mutual learning and tolerance, so as to develop common values and moral concepts

among all humanity.

When I attend similar meetings, I don't emphasize the Chinese Buddhist standpoint, and I even avoid touching on issues that involve judging each other's core values. I only focus on the common points that people today yearn for and are concerned about. Ever since I proposed the "Protecting the Spiritual Environment" concept and "building a pure land on earth" campaign, I've always been able to have enjoyable conversations on whatever occasion, with people of whatever stance. For instance, people from Judaism, Catholicism, Eastern Orthodox Church, and Islam all treat me as their good friend. In fact, I'm not very knowledgeable, but because the Buddhadharma is the Dharma of the mind, if we deal with all problems with the attitude of no-self, then everything will go smoothly for us.

I will now set forth my own thoughts regarding the theme of this forum, "A Harmonious World Starts with the Mind."

As everyone knows, from the perspective of philosophy, Buddhism is neither materialism, nor idealism, nor theism, but is based on the law of causes and conditions. On the surface, the theme of this forum, "Starting with the Mind," seems to

classify Buddhism as idealistic. In this sense, even Dharma Drum Mountain's "Protecting the Spiritual Environment" campaign seems like idealism. But, this is not the case.

The basic Buddhist perspectives are the teachings of early Buddhism about the Four Noble Truths, twelve links of dependant origination and, especially, the theory of conditioned arising in the Agama Sutras, which takes the mind as the core of existence, as is revealed in the verse: "When this exists, that exists. When this ceases, that ceases." Among the Four Noble Truths, "suffering" is a phenomenon of the afflicted mind; the "origin of suffering" means the cause of the consequences created by the afflicted mind; the "cessation of suffering" means to cease the afflictions of the mind and hence obtain liberation; and the "path" refers to using various methods of spiritual practice to transform the afflicted mind into a liberated mind. Therefore, the teaching of the Four Noble Truths also revolves around the mind, the core of existence.

In the initial stages of Mahayana Buddhism, as it developed from early Buddhism, the Madhyamika school established its theory based on the law of dependent origination, derived from the principles

of the Four Noble Truths and the twelve links of dependent origination. The Madhyamika school teaches emptiness, which means to “empty” all attachment of the mind. Whether it is the doctrine about the emptiness of self, dharmas, or ultimately everything, they all refer to the need to empty our minds, attachment to these concepts.

So, the realm of sentient beings and the realm of the physical world are, after all, composed of five aggregates as they develop from the realm of the five aggregates. Therefore, we can see that the Madhyamika teachings also regard the mind as the core of existence. That's why the Heart Sutra says that, “He realized the five aggregates are all empty,” and that “There is no ignorance and no ending of ignorance; there is no aging and death, and no ending of aging and death.”

The Consciousness-Only school of Mahayana Buddhism divides the mind into the “mind-king,” and “mental factors or qualities.” It holds that everything is created by and transformed through the alaya consciousness, and that the seeds of consciousness will give rise to manifest activities, which will in turn influence the seeds of consciousness. In fact, all that can influence, and that is influenced,

are just a reflection of the phenomenal and cognitive aspects of the alaya consciousness. Although the alaya consciousness gives rise to all phenomena, it is still a deluded mind. And to attain the Buddhahood is to transform the deluded consciousness into the mind of suchness, or reality.

The Tathagatagarbha school, another branch of Mahayana Buddhism, emphasizes that the mind is not only the source of all dharma realms, but also encompasses all dharma realms and their functions. As the Avatamsaka Sutra says, “The mind is like a skillful painter painting pictures of the five aggregates. There is no dharma in all the worlds that is not created by it.” The Lotus Sutra also says, “All who say the Buddha's name but once have already achieved the Buddha path.” Then, who is it that says the Buddha's name? And, who is it that can achieve the Buddha path? It's the sentient being's mind. Also, when the Avatamsaka Sutra says, “There is no difference between the mind, the Buddha, and sentient beings,” it means that the mind of an afflicted sentient being is, in essence, the same as the pure mind of all the Buddhas with their perfect merit and wisdom. The Awakening of Faith in Mahayana says, “What are called, dharmas, refer to the mind of sentient

beings. This mind encompasses all the mundane and supramundane dharmas.” It also says, “As the mind arises, various dharmas also arise; as the mind ceases, various dharmas also cease to exist.” That means the mind is common to both ordinary people and sages, to both this world and the transcendental world, and to both conditioned and unconditioned things—it permeates each and every thing.

If we look at everything in this world and discuss different ethnic groups, cultures, and ideas from the Buddhist perspective of the mind, then we won't insist that there should be an absolute and unchangeable viewpoint. As far as the person who advocates a certain viewpoint is concerned, their perspective is right. But looking at it from the perspective of others, and especially from the perspective of humanity as a whole, there may still be room for discussion and modification. In international meetings, I often interact and discuss with other people from the perspective of no-self, without a subjective, preconceived standpoint. I will first approve of a person's idea, and that person will respect me, too. As the Commentary on the Mahayana Splendor Sutra says, “There's no object beyond the mind; when the object is nonexistent, the mind doesn't exist either. Those who realize that both

are nonexistent reside well in the Dharma realm of reality.” As real Buddhist practitioners, it doesn't matter whether we practice Mahayana or Theravada Buddhism, or the Madhyamika, Consciousness-Only, or Tathagata-garbha teachings. As long as we realize that no object is outside the mind, and that the mind does not exist outside the object, we will know that all problems actually come from the mind. It would be awful if we feel that there are still certain people and things to overcome or oppose, because what we are dealing with is not the people or things outside the mind, but our inner afflictions. If everyone can realize this and adjust their ideas promptly, then there's no external phenomenon that cannot be tolerated or dissolved.

Should you agree with what I just said, that means The World Buddhist Forum is a forum for all Buddhists around the world to express their ideas, including those from the traditions of Chinese Buddhism, Theravada Buddhism, and Tibetan Buddhism. Even though these traditions also include various schools, each with its respective philosophies, practices, and lifestyles, we should understand that these different schools arose as a result of differences in regions and cultural backgrounds. They may also differ in their modes of

expression because of the different scriptures they follow. In addition, the respective teachings, principles, practices, and attainments that each school values are also interpreted differently.

The World Buddhist Forum was initiated in China, and also held for the first time in China, which I think has a significant meaning. Because in the territory of China all the three main Buddhist traditions—Chinese Buddhism, Tibetan Buddhism, and Theravada Buddhism—**exist, even though the languages and races** of these three traditions are different. Now it's time for China to catch up. As Buddhist leaders from around the world have convened at this forum, hopefully it will bring about a revival of Buddhism in China, and further set the trend for global Buddhism.

Thank you, spiritual friends, and I wish the forum every success. Your comments on my above views are welcome.

(Keynote Speech Presented on April 13, 2006 at the First World Buddhist Forum, Hangzhou)

A Common Path

Your Holiness Aram I, Catholicos of Cilicia of the Armenian Apostolic Church and eminent religious leaders, it is with regret that I am not able to attend this conference. Even though I cannot be there in person, I am very honored to represent Dharma Drum Mountain and say a few words in this opening ceremony.

Dharma Drum Mountain is an international organization, and at first glance, the work we do at Dharma Drum Mountain seems to be of a religious nature. However, in reality, we are working diligently towards transcending the religious scope of our work and contribute towards the welfare of humankind.

My own religious background is Buddhism, and I belong to the Chan School in Chinese Buddhism. From a Buddhist perspective, whenever we are interacting with different religions, we do not impose upon others to accept our religious faith and the doctrines of our religion. Rather, we recognize the diversity of religious faiths that is observed by people around the world, and we strive to understand, accept, share and foster tolerance and acceptance of these traditions. Therefore, my first proposition is to urge everyone

to focus not so much on the discussion of one's own religious background, of one's own religious doctrine, of the similarities and differences between different religious faiths, but to focus more on the shared needs of humankind as a whole.

Due to the historical developments in all the religions, people approach their faiths from very different diverse cultural backgrounds and perspectives. Even within the same faith, they approach it from very different angles. I believe that the convergence of different religious faiths into one religious faith, or, urging all people to share a same religious faith is unlikely to happen. What is important in the 21st century is for us to cultivate and develop a tolerance and understanding of the diversity of religious faiths and backgrounds of all people and appreciate this diversity. Within this diversity and tolerant culture, we still need a common value: together to make an effortful contribution to current society and to humankind as a whole.

Therefore I would like to make a second proposition for the religious leaders, consideration: In this world of ours, starting now and continuing on into the future, all humankind must find a common path that reflects a set of global ethics which transcends religion, ethnicity

and culture. Each religious faith tradition can preserve their unique set of ethical rules and at the same time discuss the development of a set of global ethics that is shared by all of humanity. We can then come to an agreement of the content of this set of global ethics, instead of approaching it by using one set of specific religious ethics to replace the other religions, ethical rules. Thereby, the planning and creation of this set of global ethics will be a platform for dialogue and communication amongst people of all cultural faith traditions around the world. When they come together, they will have a common path and a common goal.

I would like to elucidate: What we are attempting to do is neither to establish a new religious tradition nor to replace an existing religious tradition. Rather, while simultaneously preserving the uniqueness of all religious traditions, we can establish a set of shared ethics that can lay down a common path for the entirety of humankind to walk down in the future. However, I believe that this process would be difficult because each religious tradition has its own perspective, its own interpretation and views of ethics. But for there to be a peaceful future for humankind, it is necessary to establish a set of shared global ethics that can help guide human beings in their interactions. Otherwise,

there will continue to be conflict between different religious and faith-based traditions and also sectarian struggles within the same religion/faith. If this were the state of our future, it would be very regrettable. So it is very important for us to find this basic ethical path of which all humankind can walk along, thereby creating a foundation for a peaceful future.

I would like to offer these propositions to the participants of this congregation, and send my best wishes for this meeting.

(Opening Remarks Presented on November 12, 2006 at the “A Re-Commitment to Spirituality for Building Mutual Understanding & Peace A Middle East-Asia Dialogue” , Beirut)

Resolving Conflict and Violence with Compassion

Iwould like to welcome the honored guests from Africa and Asia. After a long period of planning and preparation, the Asia-Africa Summit finally sees its opening day today. Over the next three days, I hope everyone can participate in the discussions on the agenda in a relaxed atmosphere. At the same time, I hope you can experience the atmosphere here at Dharma Drum Mountain, enjoying its scenery.

Among the honored guests participating in this meeting, most are religious leaders and youth leaders from Asia and Africa. These youth leaders are very influential people in the future. Even at this moment, many of them are engaging in various social service projects and peace movements within their own countries. Hence, even though this is not a large meeting by the number of participants, its influence must not be underestimated. At the same time, we can also anticipate significant contributions made by the participants to the world in the future. When I participated in numerous international meetings in the past, usually only the three major religions in the West, Christianity, Judaism, and Islam, were represented.

It was rare to see participants and attendees from Asian religions or Chinese Buddhism. I am very happy that Dharma Drum Mountain can host the Asia-Africa Summit as a Buddhist organization. Perhaps we can also consider this a sort of progress made by Buddhism.

The participation of so many honored guests in this summit would not have been possible if it were not for the work of Ms. Dena Merriam, the convener of Global Peace Initiative of Women. I am very grateful for her tireless efforts in networking and bringing everyone together and the wonderful job she has done. In the year 2000, the former Secretary General of the United Nations, Kofi Annan, urged the formation of non-governmental organizations outside the official and administrative structure of the United Nations. He hoped that these organizations can help solve global problems related to religion, wars, poverty, children, women, disease, etc. so that world peace can be achieved sooner. Until today, however, our world is still rife with problems that challenge the world's population. Among them, the most serious are wars, violence and conflict, such as conflict and wars between ethnic groups and between religions. These wars caused harm to two ethnic or racial groups

or two countries, disrupting economic production, followed by the problems of poverty, disease, and suffering of women and children, etc. The situation is even less secure in Africa, Iraq, Pakistan, Afghanistan and Cambodia. The reason for that is war, conflict and violence in these countries have caused incredible suffering for their people because of the resulting poverty and desperation.

Therefore, the goal of this summit is to apply the principle of compassion to explore ways to avoid conflict and wars on the one hand, and to encourage economic production and social stability on the other. Only in this way can peace and happiness be shared by everyone in the world. Otherwise, how can we speak of happiness and stability when people or ethnic and racial groups are constantly engaging in conflict and war.

My best wishes to everyone for a successful summit.

(Opening Address Presented on October 27, 2007 at the Asia-Africa Summit, Dharma Drum Mountain)

Starting from the Mind

Mr. Ye Xiaowen, Director-General of China's State Administration of Religious Affairs, Venerable Master Yi Cheng, General Convener of the Second World Buddhist Forum and President of the Buddhist Association of China, Dharma masters, distinguished guests from around the world, ladies and gentlemen. As I am unable to attend this Forum in person, my disciple Venerable Guo Pin will deliver this speech on my behalf.

To echo the theme of the First World Buddhist Forum, “A Harmonious World Begins in the Mind,” I have titled my speech “Starting from the Mind.” In recent years Dharma Drum Mountain has been promoting the vision of “Protecting the Spiritual Environment” and building “A Pure Land on Earth.” “Protecting the Spiritual Environment” is the way we operate; it is also the theoretical basis of our actions. “A Pure Land on Earth” is our project. In other words, we aim to build a pure land in this world.

First, I would like to explain the origin of the term “Protecting the Spiritual Environment” . Although it is a term I coined, it has its basis in Mahayana

scriptures and in the ideas advocated by ancestral masters of the Chinese Buddhism tradition. For example, the *Awakening of Faith in Mahayana* says, “As the mind arises all phenomena arise; as the mind subsides all phenomena subside.” Both the Huayan school and Tiantai school of Chinese Buddhism put great emphasis on the “mind.” *Avatamsaka Sutra* says, “The mind, the Buddha, and sentient beings are no different from one another.” The “mind” here refers to the minds of all sentient beings, the Buddha-mind, and the minds of all people. In other words, this “mind” is the mind of ordinary people as well as the mind of wisdom. Therefore, the minds of all Buddhas and bodhisattvas and those of all sentient beings are one and the same. Moreover, the *Platform Sutra of the Sixth Patriarch* says, “You are an ordinary being in the moments that your thoughts were deluded, but if they become enlightened just one moment later, you are a Buddha.” If the mind is deluded, you are an ordinary being; if it is enlightened, you are a Buddha. Hence, the “mind” is a fundamental basis highly emphasized in Buddhism.

Next, let me explain the meaning of “Protecting the Spiritual Environment.” In the world today, everyone talks about environmental protection. But

stressing the protection of natural environment, material resources, and ecological balance alone will not suffice. We should start with our minds, protecting the mind from contamination. Protecting our minds, including our thoughts and way of thinking is “Protecting the Spiritual Environment.” As a Buddhist saying goes, “All changes are inseparable from the mind.” The mind is extremely important; it can change for the positive, or for the negative. Therefore, we have to guard the mind well and keep bad thoughts from arising, and strive to develop a good mind, that is, a mind of wisdom and benevolence.

The Platform Sutra mentions that we should “think of neither good nor bad” in our mind. Now what sort of mindset is this? It is, in fact, the mind as described in a phrase in the Diamond Sutra: “Let the mind arise without abiding on anything.” When we think of neither good nor bad, it doesn't mean that our minds can't discern good from bad. It is ignorant to think that this is what it means. Actually, when we “think of neither good nor bad,” it means that we don't have a discriminating mind, but a mind of wisdom. Only by reducing and dissolving the afflictions in our minds can we achieve the goal of liberation. When we develop our wisdom, we will be able to

help sentient beings, our world, and ourselves. In this way, we can deliver not only sentient beings but also ourselves from suffering. Therefore, the purpose of “Protecting the Spiritual Environment” is to help all of us to overcome afflictions and develop wisdom, thus purifying our minds and our society.

So how do we build “A Pure Land on Earth” with the principle of “Protecting the Spiritual Environment?” As Chan Master Yongming Yanshou (904-976 A.D.) wrote in *Zongjing Lu* (Record of the Mirror of Orthodox), “When the mind is in accord with the Dharma for one moment, we are a Buddha for one moment; when the mind is in accord with the Dharma moment after moment, we are a Buddha moment after moment.” If the mind of one who recites the Buddha’s name is in accord with the Buddha-mind at any moment, then his or her mind is the Buddha-mind right then. But where exactly is this “pure land on earth?” “A pure land on earth” arises from our minds. It’s not easy to come about without the mind, for it will then be nothing but empty words or a fallacy. When our minds are pure, they are in accord with the Buddha-mind. The instant that our minds are pure, the world we perceive and live in will be “a pure land on earth” free from

the discrimination of self and others, and of right and wrong. Furthermore, the Vimalakirti Sutra says, “A straightforward mind is the site of enlightenment.”

“A straightforward mind” is the true mind, the pure mind, a mind of wisdom, compassion, and a mind of equality that is free from discrimination. Once we have a straightforward mind, we can experience the “pure land on earth.”

So the Vimalakirti Sutra further says, “If the mind is pure, the land will be pure.” As long as one’s mind is pure, the world he or she perceives is pure. If more and more people become pure in mind, the world in which we live will be turned into a pure land. Even if we cannot be pure in every thought, we can at least prevent our minds from coming into accord with vexations when we practice Buddhism. That way we will still be living in “a pure land on earth.” Therefore, to build “a pure land on earth,” we must start with “Protecting the Spiritual Environment.”

I hope that the spiritual teachers, Dharma masters, lay practitioners, and distinguished guests present at the Forum will make inspiring comments on the above.

(Keynote Speech Presented on March 8, 2008 at Second World Buddhist Forum, Jiangsu)