

## **Toward a religion named Life**

### **An interconnected world**

“You can hold the moon in your hands by scooping up water, and fill your clothes with scent by handling flowers.”

This line from an ancient Chinese poem is interpreted in many different ways, but I wish to cite it here as a message of encouragement in the sense that peace is not an elusive fantasy but something we can achieve and make ours through proactive efforts.

I am Eigen Onishi, a priest from Kiyomizu-dera, a Buddhist temple and WCRP Japan member in the ancient Japanese capital of Kyoto. I feel privileged to be speaking to you today, and would like to give thanks for the spiritual guidance and to everybody involved for granting me the opportunity.

The COVID-19 pandemic has freshly highlighted how interconnected the world is. A calamity in another country is no longer a fire on the other shore. In my view faiths no longer have the luxury of choosing whether or not to cooperate with each other—uniting to address the multitude of issues including those to do with the environment, human rights, poverty, and nuclear weapons is now an imperative. Let me show you what I think are two of the expected benefits of inter-religious cooperation.

### **Roles in society and public trust accorded to religions**

To begin with, faiths—with their rich and extensive historical backgrounds and histories of evolution achieved through countless pious deeds by earlier practitioners—can expect to play greater roles in society and win greater public trust by joining forces. For example, the WCRP World Assembly held in Lindau, Germany in 2019 welcomed the President of Germany Mr. Frank-Walter Steinmeier as one of its guests, demonstrating how public trust enjoyed by a body such as WCRP can have an impact on politicians, as well as frontline corporate leaders. It is widely known that Zen Buddhism was a source of significant inspiration for Apple founder Mr. Steve Jobs. I have the pleasure of knowing a great many other businesspeople who are keen to serve society through their corporate activities, rather than pursuing corporate gain alone, and look to religion for encouragement in this respect.

I see no difference between countries—though their circumstances may vary—in that politics, businesses, and faiths are invariably for the joy and happiness of people. Japanese Buddhism may be rightly known for its tradition of ascetic practices removed from worldly matters. At the same time, because thoroughly knowing a matrix allows us to break free from it, I believe we are also expected to approach politics and corporate players to a greater extent, placing ourselves in the midst of the real world like a flower that blossoms equally well in both clear and muddy water.

### **The capacity of religions to be heard by society**

Even today, an overwhelming majority of people worldwide are said to maintain some form of religious faith. If these people unite, they can become a majority, a force to be reckoned with, something I wish to highlight as the second benefit of inter-religious cooperation. A remarkable example is WCRP's 2010

Arms Down Campaign, in which 10 million people around the world signed a petition calling for nuclear abolition, arms reduction, and the fulfillment of the United Nations Millennium Development Goals. Regardless of whether it is of a lasting nature, enlightenment at this scale is no mean feat.

There is no room for complacency, though. Let me explain why by citing a Chinese parable. There once lived a Buddhist priest who was known to sit on treetops to practice meditation. One day a famous poet visiting from the capital eagerly asked the monk, "What is the essence of Buddhist teaching?" The monk's reply was, "Do no evil; do good; and keep your mind clean." When the poet retorted that such things were known even to a three-year-old, the monk pointed out, "Indeed three-year-olds know them, but we find them difficult to practice, even when we reach eighty."

Because inter-religious cooperation would naturally involve a wider population, the attention we receive will likewise be wider. One never knows when we will become the focus of public attention, interest, and awareness. This makes it necessary for us to remain committed to and conscientious about even the most elementary and basic of tasks, investing the same amount of enthusiasm in a task we are performing for the hundredth time. Such an attitude is compulsory and vital to inter-religious cooperation.

### **An all-embracing religion named Life**

After delivering a sermon a Buddhist priest was once asked by a young student, "What would you suggest I do in order to learn who I truly am, and the meaning of my life?" The monk replied, "Do your best—anything you can—for someone or something other than yourself. In the process you are bound to come to a point where you feel genuinely rewarded for your efforts. Such an experience gives meaning to life, and the person living that experience is the real you."

Life brings us challenges both large and small. Any goodwill we may have as individuals can succumb to the avarice of others. No man is an island, though. As I have argued at the beginning of this piece, this makes cooperation between faiths an essential condition for all of us to live. It seems to me that inter-religious cooperation is a movement guided by providence. It is as if we are coming home to one huge religion under the name of "life." A religion of life pursues actions for the joy, safety, peace, and happiness of others as well as ourselves. Through tolerance and sympathy it brings together disparate individuals, and above all reveres life. I wish to close by joining you in praying for greater peace under the all-encompassing religion named Life.