



The IRFWP Plenary Panel: Session One

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Saturday, August 29, 1992

Moderator: **Dr. M. Darrol Bryant**, *Organizing Chairman, 1992 Assembly of the World's Religions*

Panelists: **Dr. Francis Clark**, *Secretary-General, Inter-Religious Federation for World Peace*

H.G. Dr. Paulos Mar Gregorios, *President, Inter-Religious Federation for World Peace*

Dr. Frank Kaufmann, *Executive Director, Inter-Religious Federation for World Peace*

[Note: Given that the first IRFWP Panel session was for the most part a general Business Meeting with reports, we have chosen to include only a few excerpts from the proceedings.]



Dr. Paulos Mar Gregorios

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I do not speak officially for the IRFWP, but as an individual person, looking forward to what needs to be done at this stage. I wish to say that my main concern is to see the renewal of religion and its dedication to the welfare of the whole of humanity. I wish to express my gratitude for this opportunity, not of speaking as the chairman of the Assembly or as one of the presidents of the IRFWP, but simply as a person looking forward to what we need. As I see it, what we need is a renewal of all religions and their dedication and commitment to the welfare of the whole of humanity.

What I would like to highlight this morning is simply five aspects of this renewal and commitment. This is not meant to be comprehensive, but just five areas where we need to do some work. We have done some work; we need to do more.

First, one which many people have spoken of in this Assembly already, is the full participation of women in the life of the religions. I think one reason why religion has been so distorted is the solely masculine leadership that it has had until now. I think it is a difficult change

to effect. I hope that it will be possible for the IRFWP to organize a small interreligious, international seminar with a majority of women participants—I don't say all women participants, but the majority of women participants—on this issue of women's role in the various religions. Different religions may have different points of view. But I know one thing. In the life of my own religious tradition, Christian tradition, in the early period when it was very vital, there was a preponderance of women's leadership. I think we need to look into this.

Second, is the desire to see a reexamination of a principle which was enunciated about 200 years ago, namely, the separation of church and state, the separation of politics and religion. People are confused about this because both politics and religion are social realities, not individual realities. To keep them entirely separate does not work in any country. Particularly in the Islamic point of view such separation is against the will of God.

I think what has happened is that in the history of the western European nations, at one time there was a unity of church and state. After the Reformation there was a principle again in which the people had to follow the religion of their ruler, who used *regulo aeus religio* principle, and by abandoning that, we have come to the opposite principle, namely, separation. But I believe separation is the wrong word. I believe the right word is relation. Relation between church and state or politics and religion. This has to be freshly looked at. New principles have to be evolved. Though this principle has been written into the constitutions of many of our countries, I think it has not been adequately reflected upon. That is one of the things I would like to see someone undertake, IRFWP itself.

I will take an examination of the historical circumstances in which this principle was enunciated, and a new examination in an interreligious context of what should be the proper relation between politics and religion. I am not asking for their merger but for defining afresh that relationship.

The third area, which especially after being in this Assembly it came to my mind with a new strength, is the relation between spiritual disciplines and political, economic and social life. There is now a great effort in many places to seek inner enlightenment, to move away from the turmoil of the world to find peace within through spiritual disciplines. Does this mean a swing in the pendulum in the opposite direction? Or can we now develop a new understanding of spiritual disciplines in relation to social reality? But whatever spiritual disciplines we develop inside our own disciplined life must also have some relation

There is a danger that, in going back to the spiritual disciplines, we forget or ignore the problems that confront society.

The hardest job, as I have said in one of my little books, is to bring the two enlightenments together. There is a European enlightenment, which clarifies external reality in an astounding way, but there is another inner enlightenment which is the religious enlightenment. How do we hold these two enlightenments in the proper relation to each other? That is the third thing that I would like to see developed. Spiritual disciplines, but in relation to political, economic, and social life.

In my own theological tradition, this question is answered in a rather creative way, I think, by regarding the human person as a frontier being, straddling two spheres of being. On the one hand, he participates in the created world. On the other hand, he participates in God. So his role is to be a frontier being between the Creator and the creation, the mediator, to bring the creation to God, and to bring God to the creation. That is our understanding. In that context, the two enlightenments are both important. We have to understand the world in order to bring it to God. And you have to be in God in order to bring God to this world. So I think that reconciliation has to be worked out in the various religions in their own different ways. That is what I would like to see.

The fourth point is the issue of religion and development. Development, of course, has been a key idea for the last 40 years in our modern world. The U.N. has had three development decades. In 1967, Pope Paul VI made the famous statement that the new name of peace is development. In fact, in 1968, there was so much optimism, not only in U.N. circles but even in the Christian churches, about development solving most of the problems of the world. In fact, I remember the general secretary of the World Council of Churches, Eugene Carson Blake, embarking upon a scheme in which he said what is needed today to eliminate poverty and want from this world. The experts told us at that time in the 60s, just \$20 billion wisely invested would create enough jobs to eliminate all poverty and want from the world. So Dr. Blake jumped on that and said, "Twenty billion dollars, we can raise it if the churches will get together. If the Roman Catholic church and the World Council of Churches would just get together without the other religions being taken into account, we can raise that money and we must do this."

Well, it didn't work. It didn't work, in the first place, because nobody was quite happy to cooperate with other people in this thing. Everybody wanted to have his own show of development assistance. That was true of the World Council of Churches, the Roman Catholic church, the

Evangelical churches, everybody wanted to hold onto his own kitty and not share it with other people.

The other problem was that there was not enough commitment to this idea. At that time, several people thought that what the governments could not achieve, the private agencies could achieve, if they set their minds to it. But it hasn't happened. We should wonder where the bottlenecks are.

The United Nations had at least four major conferences, at two of which I was a speaker, on this subject. The U.N. Conference on Science and Technology for Development in 1979, the U.N. Conference on Trade and Development, the U.N. Conference on Disarmament and Development, and the U.N. Conference on the Environment and Development, the latest, held in Rio De Janeiro. All of them trying to approach the issue of development from various aspects of human life.

What has been the result? I would say that \$1 billion dollars has been wasted on these conferences. I remember at the first Vienna conference the U.N. spent \$25 million. The UNCED was more than \$150 million. It's a billion dollars that could have been properly invested, but it has been invested in conferences and bureaucracy. Can religions break through this? I am not asking for another U.N. conference on religion and development. Do we have the imagination to raise some new questions first, clearing the concept of development? What do we want to develop?

Well, I participated in another UNESCO discussion on this subject in the 60s in Paris and the governments of the world were divided, but they agreed on one point. First they said, development is more than economic development. Everybody agreed, all nations agreed. What was the more? Well, the western nations said, spiritual development. The Marxist nations said, cultural development. But for both of them, economic development was the primary reality to which the spiritual or cultural was an appendix.

They had not raised the fundamental question: What are we developing? The human being. How does the human being develop? Is it only through some of these things we have mentioned, or are there other factors in the development of humanity?

Again, if you ask me, from my tradition, I can answer the question, what is development? Development is when the powers of God are received by different people in different measures and they are all put together to cooperate for the building up of the whole, until the whole grows up in the full maturity. That is the efficient concept. That is my understanding of development.

But unfortunately we do not have a proper understanding of development or development objectives. Tribal people in India, more than 50 million of them, are saying that the government has five-year plans. They have decided economic development is the highest priority. But these tribal people are saying, "That is not how we see reality. For us, human relations, relations to the plants and trees and animals is the fundamental reality, not economic development." But what are the objectives of economic development? If we can sort them out among the religions it would be a very good thing. Then ask the question, what are the obstacles to development and how do we overcome them.

The fifth point is something that is very obvious and I won't take your time. We still need to discuss the question of religions and world peace to clarify how religions can contribute to the human effort to find justice, peace and a clean environment, which belong to a single packet that cannot be separated from each other: justice, peace and a healthy environment. How do we contribute to that kind of world peace? I have said already that we need a lot of analysis because one of the things people accuse religious leaders of is that we utter platitudes all the time. When we go to a conference on peace, we quote from our scriptures and say, my religion is all for peace. Everybody says that about his religion. Then we say some platitudes: If everybody is at peace with God, then there will be peace. These are simplistic answers. Can religion find more well-reflected answers so that the world outside can also take us more seriously? That requires more analysis, more prayer and more hard work.

These are some of the things I see ahead, and I hope that all of you and IRFWP all over the world will continue to collaborate and cooperate in this work. Thank you.