

Absolute Values and a Reassessment of Contemporary Society

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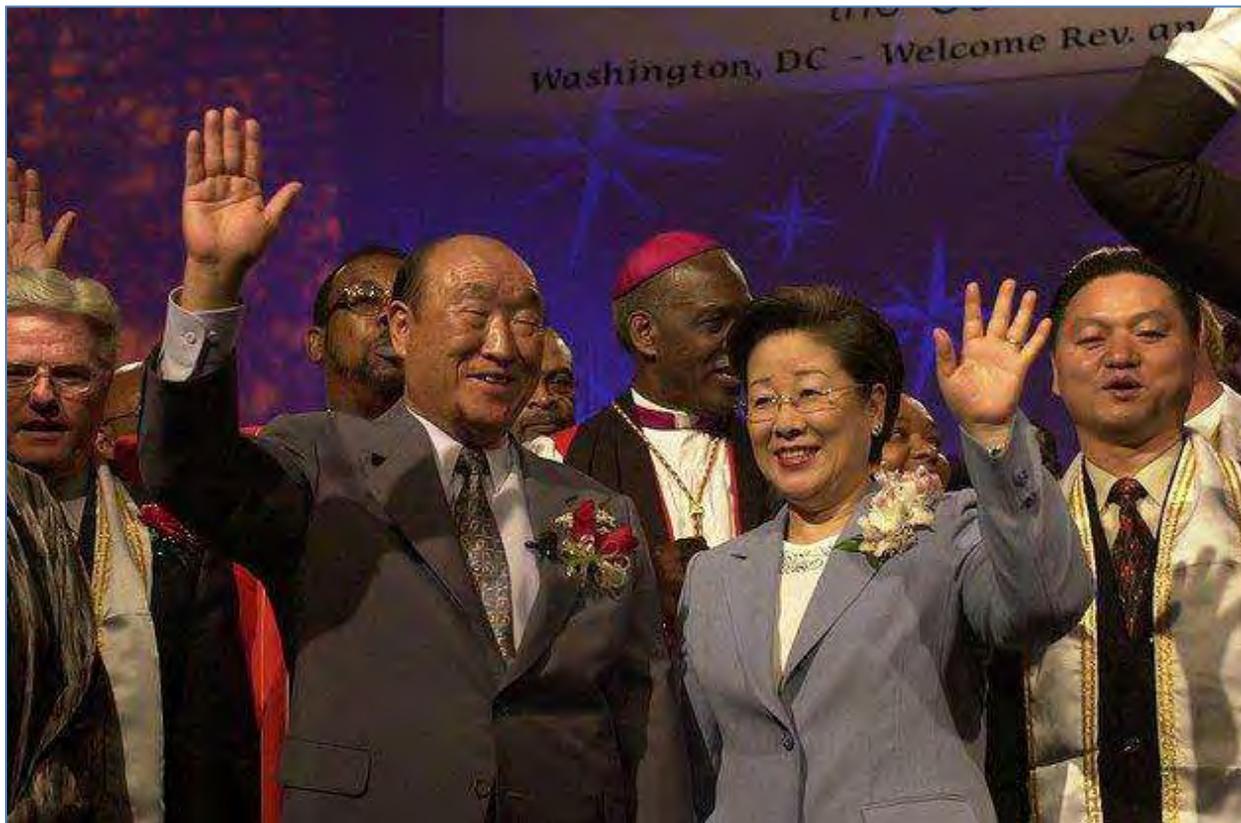


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Honorable chairman, committee chairs, distinguished professors, ladies and gentlemen:

As founder of the International Conference on the Unity of the Sciences (ICUS), I sincerely welcome you to the sixteenth meeting of ICUS. This year our theme for deliberation is, "Absolute Values and a Reassessment of Contemporary Society."

Why reassessment of the contemporary world is necessary

Today there is a real need to reassess the world in every field. I do not know any group better suited to make such a reassessment than ICUS -- this gathering of distinguished scholars representing all fields of knowledge as well as all cultures, religions, races and nations. I think that among all academic groups in the world, ICUS alone is striving to discover, on a fundamental level, the true purpose and unity of the sciences. You should know that, among all gatherings of scholars in today's world, ICUS has a historic mission.

The complicated problems of the world cannot be fully understood simply within the narrow perspectives of individual fields of knowledge. Their solution lies beyond the capability of any single specialized society of scholars. This is because the problems of the world are essentially problems of the human being. Each person has both a physical body, with material desires and physical senses, and a spiritual self, with spiritual desires and spiritual senses. The world is nothing but an extension of the human being with these twofold aspects. In other words, the interrelationships between people with their twofold aspects determine the order within societies and among nations. This is the reason why multidisciplinary research to solve the world's problems needs to give significant consideration to such factors as religion, culture, art and so on.

Reassessment of the contemporary world by ICUS should certainly include a reassessment of the systems of the eastern and western blocs and, at the same time, a reassessment of what the role of science in these two blocs has been and how close the sciences have come to attaining their ultimate ideal. Today, regardless of how many excuses the leaders of these two blocs make, no one can deny that the world's existing systems and orders have failed to guarantee the true happiness of humankind. They have already reached their limit, and they are going to decline.

A unifying standard and its central position in reassessing the world

For ICUS to reassess today's world, there should be a unifying standard with a central position. This central position should relate with the desires of both the physical body and the spiritual self of the human being. I recognize that, in the Middle Ages, God-centered thought and religious dogmatism blocked scientific exploration and limited human fulfillment in the physical realm. Yet, since the Age of Enlightenment, humanistic thinkers have made the major error of maintaining that religious belief is inferior to human reason and that a person's spiritual needs are in conflict with human reason.

The emphasis that the Enlightenment or humanism placed on rationality has been the great driving force for the sciences as they have pursued the discovery of rational laws in nature. With reason alone, however, we become separated from the ultimate purpose of the human being, who has a twofold nature. Without this ultimate purpose, a person cannot stand independently or even discover the right direction. While ignoring spirituality and being satisfied with reason and intellectual accomplishment, people have not been concerned about solving the urgent problems connected with their own ultimate purpose. As a result, they have become enthralled by materialism and consequently have lost their dignity.

There is only one ultimate truth, and it is a principle governing both nature and the human world. In nature, this principle is the root and source of all things of the universe. In the human being, this principle is the absolute value of love, which guides us to complete our personality by harmonizing our spiritual and physical aspects, realizing truth, goodness and beauty.

I do not believe that the claims made by theism, humanism and materialism have been in irreconcilable conflict with one another. Rather, I think they have been partial, not-yet-mature expressions of one principle. They are not-fully-accurate claims about this principle, which is the basis of absolute values. In order to solve, on a fundamental level, the various problems faced by people in the modern world, we should identify the set of absolute values, or the one principle that can cope with the whole, transcending all existing ideologies and claims.

Absolute values bring us ultimately to the fundamental inquiry about God. To accept that God does exist is to recognize that there exists a universal principle that operates consistently in nature and the human world. On this foundation, values that appear to be relative can be understood as interrelated with one another on the basis of absolute values.

Not absolutism but God's love

I know that "absolute values" is not a popular theme among scholars today. But I hope, first of all, that scholars do not make the mistake of confusing absolute values with absolutism. I have emphasized at several ICUS meetings that absolute values are based on God's love. God's love is not sectarian. It reaches deep into human hearts and becomes the source of true love gushing out into the everyday lives of people. Therefore, God's love is the fundamental element needed to form one harmonious realm, based on a heart that embraces all people and encompasses all relative values. Thus, absolute values based on God's love are deeper, broader and more enduring than values based on rational presuppositions or relative ideologies or beliefs.

Absolute values do not contradict rational thinking. Rather, they enable the discovery of its ultimate purpose. It is not merely our faculty of reason that makes us human. Intellectual analysis is deficient if it does not fully value emotion, will and spirituality in human life. Rational exploration will contribute to the true happiness of humanity only when guided by absolute values based on true love.

I urge ICUS to begin a comprehensive reassessment of today's world. Conventional mental habits and attitudes have been inadequate to deal with the profusion of problems in our world today. Furthermore, the solution of problems faced by contemporary society will not come from a consideration of human factors alone. We should also consider that human history has been proceeding toward the fulfillment of God's Will. Therefore, the contemporary world should be reassessed from viewpoints based on absolute values, which transcend nationalism, ideology and even global perspectives, and which originate from God's love.

Unity of the sciences is possible when we discover absolute values

As long as today's intelligentsia is swayed by relativistic viewpoints, there can never be unity of the sciences, nor can there be unity and harmony among races, cultures or religions. Courageous pioneers are needed who, in promoting the absolute values perspective, are willing to take risks and receive bitter persecution. Difficult and daring decisions are necessary if the many existing limited viewpoints are to be unified into one coherent principle.

Today we should acknowledge that scientific and philosophical approaches have failed to solve the world's problems. The great promise of natural science has too often been used for evil purposes, not for the true happiness of humanity. The fields of social science have often been corrupted under the influence of egoistic, sectarian political power and so have played a dysfunctional role on many occasions.

Philosophy, too, has given up its great pursuit of the ultimate ideals of human beings and hence has lost its life. Such a trend is becoming increasingly serious because of the passive attitude of most scholars. I think that scholars should not be satisfied merely with the outcome of their research but should respond to the call of the world, which is in need of active guidance.

The world requires responsible action by scholars who enlist their capabilities for the good of humankind, in accordance with a proper perspective on values. Conscientious intellectuals should protect the fruits of scientific research from being misused. Furthermore, the sciences should not serve only relative values that are limited in scope, but they should concentrate on absolute values for the benefit of the universe and all of humanity.

The urgent need to promote discussion of the unity of the sciences

Scholars should not be passively influenced by political, economic or social currents, but they should play an active role in leading society with wisdom gained through historical insight and with the feeling of mission. The contemporary world, more than ever before, is burdened with problems that can be solved only through cooperation among nations and races. In international and pluralistic societies, cooperative action by many intellectuals is no less important than individual research in specialized fields.

Among the many scholarly conferences in the world, ICUS alone has as its theme the ultimate issues of absolute values and unity of the sciences. No issues are more urgent than these. Without identifying absolute values, unity of the sciences is not possible. I have entrusted this mission to you. Therefore, I hope that this meeting will lead to a proper reassessment of contemporary societies and to the accomplishment of the historic task of opening the path to creating a new culture.

May God's blessing be with your work and your families!