

I would like to thank the founders of the Sunhak Peace Prize for your vision of peace as one family under God

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The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, the love of God, the Father, and the communion of the Holy Spirit be with all of you, your Excellencies, Eminences, Graces, Ladies and Gentlemen: First of all, I humbly stand here as a servant of God to accept this Sunhak Peace Prize. I would like to thank Dr. Hak Ja Han Moon, the founder of the Sunhak Peace Prize and your late husband, Rev. Sun Myung Moon, for your vision of peace as one family under God. I also thank those who suggested my name, as well as the work of the Sunhak Peace Prize Committee, chaired by Dr. Il-sik Hong. I also thank the Sunhak Peace Prize Foundation and all of you who have gathered here today and have honored us by your presence. And, most assuredly, I thank all those who believe in the mission of peace my Lord and Savior Jesus Christ has put on my heart.

I stand here in appreciation of the Korean people for their resilience and industriousness, I also extend my appreciation to the Korean churches, who are preaching Christ's Gospel of love and are advancing the kingdom of God in this beautiful country. I want to ask you to continue the good work of unity of the one church of Christ in Korea.

I have a special admiration for President Jae-in Moon, president of South Korea. I respect and admire his relentless efforts to unify this peninsula. I see that there is no other way forward for the people of this peninsula but finally to be unified under one flag and one leadership, as one unified Korea.

Breaking down hostility

Sometimes people ask me, Why do you work for peace through interfaith dialogue? My answer is, To work for peace based on justice is not only political; it is the core of the biblical message. From my perspective, it is Christ who calls me to serve suffering humanity and to return to them their God-given dignity. As a Christian, I believe Jesus called us to be peacemakers, not peace-talkers. St. Paul has written "For he is our peace; in his flesh he has made both groups into one and has broken down the dividing wall; that is, the hostility between us." (Ephesians 2:14) In Christ, God was reconciling the world to God's self, not counting the trespasses against them, and entrusting to us the ministry of reconciliation [2 Corinthians 5:19]. For this reason, I am called for this ministry of reconciliation, for there can be no peace without justice and no reconciliation without forgiveness. Therefore, I will continue to work for peace based on justice until the last breath of my life.

Peace is dependent upon respect for the dignity of the other, regardless of gender, ethnicity, race, religious or political affiliation. All of us are made in the image of God and are children of God. All of us are one family of God. And for this reason, all of us deserve to have life and dignity and peace.

Mutual recognition of each other's dignity is the foundation of our faith and of a new world order, one that is built and based upon truth, justice, love and freedom. This vision of a peaceful life together is the central message of every religion and is integral to the mission of every religious community. This is the reason I call on all religious leaders to raise their voices prophetically for peace based on justice and to speak boldly against the wave of hatred and oppression making its way across the globe today.

Religions must be the conscience of the world. Religious leaders must join their diverse voices into a symphony of peace, to disrupt the others shouting ugly messages of hatred, injustice, racism and oppression. Religious leaders must always be witnesses to the protection of life and its dignity.

Environments free from fear of harm

World leaders today talk about our shared security, but I challenge them instead to talk about our shared well-being. Not only security but a commitment to a shared well-being calls us to work for a safer world, a world without weapons of destruction.

When we see the image of God in the other, we can do nothing else but work for a nuclear-free world and weapon-free cities and states. Certainly, we must at least insist that our children have violence-free schools, neighborhoods and societies. When we hold our world leaders to task, demanding a general disarmament of all weapons of destruction -- nuclear, chemical, biological and the newly emerging tools of death, Korea and the whole Middle East will be much safer without these arms and weapons. We need justice, not weapons. It is my vision that all states use the funds allocated for weapons that kill life and instead invest them in economic development, equality, gender justice and freedom of religion. Pope John Paul II said, "We are a human family. 'Love your neighbor' has global dimensions in an interdependent world."

Jesus said, "I have come that you may have life, and life abundant." (John 10:10) This is a promise to all humanity not only to Christians, that all are intended to possess dignity, and the world is intended to know a shared well-being among all nations and ethnicities.

The lure and danger of fanaticism

How do we achieve such an abundant life? In a polarized world, religious leaders can affect our future toward this end by promoting the common values of living together in dignity, working for peace and combating fanaticism, fundamentalism and extremism. Religious extremists who use religion and manipulate God for their own selfish purposes are an existential threat to humanity nowadays.

Extremism is a blatant perversion of religion and is always the antithesis of love. For this reason, it is the role of religious leaders today to combat, boldly and prophetically, any kind of extremism within their own religion. It is imperative that we teach our own communities to see and value the image of God in those who are different from us. As it is written: "Those who say, 'I love God,' and hate their brothers or sisters, are liars; for those who do not love a brother or sister whom they have seen, cannot love God whom they have not seen." (1 John 4:20) This is our mutual call: To teach love, never division or hatred. With God's love guiding us, we, religious leaders, can always be instruments of peace and promoters of robust moderation.

The scourge of intolerance

Fear of the other is the source of all conflict, violence and war. Every day, we hear of another politician seeking to implant seeds of fear, seeking to grow a harvest of hatred among his or her people. It is no wonder that religious extremism, secular populism and racism are spreading throughout our societies.

We are not powerless in the face of this epidemic. We can and we must stand up and resist with all our might this disease of fear and xenophobia. We can inoculate our youth and societies against this disease by boldly proclaiming love, mercy, understanding and trust of others -- even of so-called enemies.

We can protect our communities from this disease by rising up against such sick ideologies, such as white supremacy, anti-Semitism, Islamophobia, Christian phobia, xenophobia, patriarchy and every other kind of evil. It is God's call to us to transform a world filled with hatred into a culture of harmony and love as we celebrate, this week, the UN world interfaith harmony week.

Sharing more than history

When people know that I am an Arab Christian coming from Jerusalem, they ask me if I am optimistic or pessimistic about the future. It is true that the political situation in the whole Middle East, especially regarding the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, is very tense. It seems that the end game is in the hands of the powerful. However, I continue to believe in and promote a two-state solution, with the State of Palestine living alongside the State of Israel, on 1967 borders, together enjoying justice, peace, equity and reconciliation. I continue to promote and insist on a Jerusalem that the three religions -- Judaism, Christianity and Islam share -- with full respect for the historic status quo of the holy places and with respect to the Hashemite King's custodianship of Christian and Muslim holy places. Jerusalem must be a shared capital for the State of Israel and the State of Palestine for the sake of peace and justice for both nations.

As long as I live, I will teach my children and grandchildren to see the image of God in our neighbors, the Israelis, and I pray that my Israeli neighbors will see the image of God in me and in my fellow Palestinians. Once we truly recognize the image of God in the other, we can mutually recognize and

protect each other's human, civil, political, national and religious rights. Only then will our Holy Land become truly holy, an equal home for Israelis and Palestinians. As long as there is a living God of justice, I know there is hope for both groups to live in freedom, peace, justice and dignity.

Questing for a just and peaceful world

Before I end, I would like to thank my family and especially my good wife Suad, along with my children and their families. They have always supported me in this mission of peace.

They know the risks and challenges of walking this path toward peace for all people, and yet they remain committed to this vision, not only for themselves, but for all children of the world. I am so grateful for them and humbled by their love and support.

Again as an Arab Palestinian Christian Evangelical Lutheran and a Palestinian refugee, I would like to express my gratitude for receiving this prestigious prize. Receiving this prize at this moment in history gives encouragement to Arab Christianity in the Middle East and encouragement for growing more moderates in the Middle East. We don't need any more extremism or weapons; we need only moderates and justice.

Receiving this prize does not graduate me from continuing to do the holy work of interfaith dialogue and peace building. On the contrary, I feel that this moment motivates me to continue to be a witness for peace, a broker for justice, a defender of human rights, a minister of reconciliation and an apostle of love. Please, continue to pray for me, and for all those sisters and brothers of any religion, and those of good conscience, who join us in the challenging call to bring peace based on justice to this one world we all inhabit. "Blessed are the peacemakers for they will be called children of God." (Matthew 5:9) May God bless you and keep you all the days of your lives, working for justice, peace and reconciliation. Thank you.