

Absolute Values and a Reassessment of the Contemporary World

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Honorable chairman, vice chairmen, committee chairmen, distinguished scholars, ladies and gentlemen:

It gives me great pleasure to greet you again in my home country of Korea. Already ten years have passed since we held our discussions here in Seoul on "The Creation of the New World." At that time I proposed the building of an international highway system extending from East Asia and connecting all regions of the world. We also began a project to publish the results of your research in a manner that would influence constructively the younger generations around the world. Ten years ago such plans seemed like impossible dreams. Today, however, we have established the necessary foundation for their realization, and we can see that they are beginning to take shape. For example, preliminary plans have been completed for an undersea tunnel connecting Japan and Korea, and an exploratory tunnel is now under construction.

For the publication of your papers and books, we now have the publisher Paragon House and the magazine *The World and I*. In addition, the Federation for World Peace and the Inter-religious Federation for World Peace are to be established here in your presence. I proposed these two organizations last year, and I believe you later received mailings with further information.

Esteemed scholars of the world! The world around us is in a period of transition and is in need of critical reassessment. In hindsight, the consistent emphasis on values in past ICUS conference themes seems prophetic. Today the cry for a new expression of values can be heard around the world, and the work of this conference has become an important means for dealing with current realities. The dramatic changes occurring in the Soviet Union and in Eastern and Central Europe underscore this fact.

Following the collapse of the communist world, there are those who speak with self-assurance of the superiority of the West's existing values and institutions. We must critically examine, however, the societies of the free world and other non-communist countries that until recently stood in opposition to the communist bloc. Where are these societies going? Does their progress reassure us that the future happiness of the world's peoples is guaranteed?

We can see that even after the collapse of the communist bloc, many problems remain in our world. To develop the necessary solutions, we need to look for the deeper origins of these problems. Our task has to be a fundamental reassessment of all the institutions and lifestyles of our contemporary world. Such a reassessment will enable us to identify those aspects of our world that can be considered suitable and fitting for an enlightened and awakened humanity possessing a renewed consciousness.

Fundamentally, the confusion in the value systems of today's societies derives from a break in the original vertical order between God and humanity. The various institutions and values we have today lack clear direction and are inherently unstable and mutually contradictory. This is because they are devised by humans and established only horizontally, that is, without a vertical axis connecting them to God.

The universe does not exist merely on the basis of the individual material substances that are its component parts. Our world is not a mere sum total of isolated individual substances. Material substances derive their primary existence from the energy created through their relationships with other substances. And societies exist, develop and prosper within the context of mutual give-and-receive relationships. Behind such relationships, that is, behind each relationship between material substances and behind each give-and-receive relationship between individual beings, there is a preexisting vertical order of a higher dimension that endows these substances or beings with a common motivational drive and purpose. For example, the Creator has endowed human beings with free will in order that we may experience the highest levels of joy and love for God and for our fellow human beings. Thus, if we are to fulfill the purpose of our existence, we need to inherit first the true love of God.

In an ideal human society, true love, which involves living for the sake of others, is the basis for all relationships. For each individual, such true love is motivated by the experience of true love from one's parents. The true love of parents, which in turn is rooted in God's true love, is the means to nurture children to become perfect, that is, fully mature in their individual character. Then, a man and a woman who have become fully mature in character are to form a family as an ideal husband and wife and convey true love to their children. This is the original order of God's creation. The ideal world on earth is built when one individual who is fully mature in character is able to expand true love to form a family, society, nation and world based on true love.

However, our world today is different in its origin from the ideal world I have just described. It is a world in which human beings departed from the proper order of true love, the most important principle for God's creation. Having turned against the order of God's creation, our world today places value in human-devised organizations and structures and in the order of law. Such a world cannot produce ideal individuals, families and peoples. If that is so, how can we secure a truly bright future for all humankind?

Respected scholars, you are highly educated in fields dealing with the developmental aspects of nature and human society. The natural world around us and our social order are suffering violence and injury every day. With each passing day the air we breathe, the water we drink and the food we eat become more polluted. Despite advances in science and technology and the increasing conveniences added to daily life, we find growing cause for despair. If humanity in the twenty-first century continues to place itself outside the fundamental principles of God who created the universe, we never will be qualified to be stewards of planet Earth.

Closer human relations, even if some may not want them, are necessary for the future of humankind. We are entering the age of one global family, in which we will have no choice except to live in much closer proximity to those whose religion, nationality and skin color are different from our own. In such a world we will need to develop a genuine appreciation, as opposed to simple acceptance, of the wide variety of religions, cultural traditions and lifestyles around us. It will be impossible for any individual or group to selfishly choose to withdraw to a separate haven. Society no longer can be allowed to despoil nature for its own selfish purposes. It needs to husband and develop nature in accordance with the larger purposes of the world community and future generations.

What will be the underlying order of this new age and new society, and how are we to raise up constructive members of such a global society? This question can be answered only in terms of the order of God's creation, with the discipline of love as its central axis.

Respected scholars, perhaps the points I have raised here will help explain why I, as one who has sought consistently to realize God's Will, have sponsored eighteen sessions of the International Conference on the Unity of the Sciences for a period of almost twenty years. Decades ago I foresaw the future toward which society was heading. Despite the inability of some to appreciate my efforts, I have maintained my spiritual and material support for this series of conferences with conviction. It is because of this ardent desire to serve the future of humankind that, beginning with the first session in 1972, ICUS has had an unconventional structure that brings together scholars in the natural sciences, humanities and social sciences in a common forum that emphasizes interdisciplinary harmony and unity.

I recognize that each academic discipline has its own specific characteristics, and I understand the need for specialization in research. However, research conducted in the various individual fields ultimately needs to be brought together through mutually cooperative and complementary relationships in order to serve more fully the common good. This is also the reason I have continued to place the term "absolute values" in the theme of each ICUS conference, although scientists frequently find this concept objectionable. So I am grateful that you and many other scholars around the world have come to share my vision and are cooperating to organize and continue the work of this conference.

The time now has come for ICUS to develop to a new level. With absolute values continuing as our central axis, we need to begin an aggressive effort to teach and apply the results of the comprehensive research of this conference in ways that will benefit the future of the world. With this in mind, the ICUS structure already has served as a medium for establishing branches of the Professors World Peace Academy in ninety-five countries, in order to involve scholars in these countries in a worldwide cultural effort.

Many have expressed great hope in such a practical movement of conscientious scholars. For intellectuals such as yourselves, who form the most respected group in our society, taking the lead in conveying proper values to young people of the world is no less important a task than your work as researchers and theorists in your specific fields. I believe it is important for scholars from around the world to form teams that visit various countries to give instructions on a wide range of topics. A program of this type already has been conducted with significant success in Japan and Korea. There is a need for the worldwide participation of scholars in a movement to give new vision to the people of our contemporary world, particularly young people, in order to save them from the snares of drugs, hedonism, violence and war. Given your ingenuity and practical experience, and using ICUS as the parent body, I know we can build a new world culture.

Finally, let me say I am confident that many valuable discussions and conclusions will emerge from this conference being held in my home country. I am proud of Korea for the fact that it has maintained a beautiful culture, including a robust family tradition, in spite of its long history of suffering. I also believe that Korea can be commended for having risen from the ashes of successive wars to rapidly achieve its current level of economic prosperity.

I hope you will have a fruitful stay here, and I pray that God's protection and blessing will be with you and your families.

Thank you very much.