

The World Fellowship Of Buddhists And World Fellowship Of Buddhist Youth General Conferences 2002

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I would like to thank the world Fellowship of Buddhists for the opportunity to address this esteemed gathering of world Buddhist leaders attending the 22nd General Conference of the World Fellowship of Buddhists and the 13th General Conference of the World Fellowship of Buddhist Youth. I am made to understand that these conferences are one of the biggest international Buddhist conferences ever to be held in Malaysia.

2. For the past 50 years or so, after the greatest world war humanity has ever experienced, there has been no more great wars. But the world is far from being peaceful. There was the Cold War, the proxy wars, the wars for national liberation, the wars to regain expropriated land, the wars against oppression and bushfire wars. And now we are witnessing the great world war against terrorism.

3. It would seem that despite the peace preached by all the religions of the world, humanity has not mastered the skills and the capacity to live at peace with each other. When it suits us we are ready to forget religious injunctions or at times to reinterpret religion in order to justify wars.

4. Yet we hear today more talks and exhortations for people, Governments especially, to respect human rights and uphold them, to allow for the freedom of choice in the election of Governments, for free speech and press freedom, for the abolition of the death penalty, for workers rights, abolition of child labour etc. One would think that humanity has become truly civilised even if they are less keen on religious and spiritual values. Some even believe that they can be human and humane without need for religion. They know what values are good and honourable without having to be told by religion about this.

5. But are people who downgrade religion, who claim that God is dead; are they really so civilised and sophisticated that they have no need for religion? The turmoil and injustice that we see today does not seem to indicate that today's man needs no religion.

6. We are today living in a world of fear. We are all being threatened by modern terrorism. We fear to fly, we fear visiting certain countries, we fear unexpected and unprecedented attacks within our countries, and between our countries, and we find ourselves unable to put our economy

back on track. There is also the collapse of morality so that all the things proscribed by religions are now flouted with impunity. The institutions of marriage and family are no longer respected. Worse still these institutions are mocked because the law in some countries, very civilised countries, permits man to marry man and woman to marry woman and regard these couples as families. Clothings are worn in order to expose the human body as much as possible not to cover it. In fact not wearing anything at all is a human right. Children are openly begotten out of wedlock and they attend the mock marriage of their parents.

7. Truly there is a total collapse of morality. The injunctions of religions, the codes of human behaviour are now totally rejected. Men it is claimed know what is good for them. The most important creed is freedom of the individual to do his own thing, to do what he likes without any consideration for the sensitivities and values of others, of the community. Any attempt to curb this absolute individual freedom is considered as abuse of human rights.

8. Yet democracy must be upheld. Democracy implies the upholding of the rights of the majority. This must necessarily be negated if the norms of the majority can be totally disregarded by individuals. One cannot help feeling that in this matter the world is very confused, insisting on the upholding of values which are totally incompatible. Yet were be tide those who try to practice the rights of the majority as implied by democracy.

9. Now even the propagation of democracy itself is undemocratic. Democracy means free choice. When there were autocratic rulers, the democrats struggled for free choice, i.e. free choice of the systems of Government including choosing democracy. But now no one is allowed to choose anything except democracy. If democracy is not chosen then the democrats will apply sanctions, will take military action, including bombing and killing innocent civilians, until democracy is forcibly practiced. Even when democracy is adopted there is no let-up. Accusations of failures to practice so-called true democracy are made and all sorts of pressures are applied in order to force the adoption of more liberal ideas about democracy.

10. There is a parallel to this in the history of religion. When some Romans adopted Christianity, they were persecuted by the "heathen" Roman Emperors. Christians were regularly thrown into the arena to fight and be killed by ferocious animals. But eventually Christianity was adopted by the Romans. And when most Europeans became Christians they were as intolerant of non-Christians or suspected heretics as were the heathen

Romans of the past. Heretics were tortured and burnt at the stakes. During the Spanish Inquisition the suspected heretics, the new converts from Judaism and Islam, were tried, tortured until they confess to the correctness of the charges, then tortured again for heresy and burnt at the stake. In other forms we are still seeing this today.

11. The situation today is not unlike that which prevailed when Christianity was being spread. Not only must we adopt the new religion called democracy, but also the worship of Mammon which has come together with it. "Globalisation" is about making money. All else is not important. Nothing must stand in the way of making as much money as possible. The borders which insulate nations and obstruct the capitalists must be brought down in the name of one world. Nations should not exist, nor should national Governments. If they exist, it is merely to enable the money worshippers to get at the money more easily. The Governments are there to prevent any opposition to the invasion and predations of the capitalists. They are there to uphold the rules that the capitalists have formulated to facilitate their making more money

12. Why should there be small banks and companies in any country when international giant banks and corporations can provide better service and products. The word international is indiscriminately used for entities which are owned and operated by the rich, for the rich. The argument is that the poor will benefit from the more efficient goods and services provided by the giants through the vaunted economies of scale. If the small banks and businesses have to shut down and their owners, managers and workers thrown out of work, that is a small sacrifice to make for better services and goods. But what happens to these people who are now unemployed? Well, they should be content with the unemployment benefits paid by the Government. But poor countries have no unemployment benefits like the rich countries have. That is too bad. They really should have. It is their fault if they don't. Whatever, they must not stand in the way of progress in a globalised world. One day they will realise how globalisation has brought benefit to them.

13. There was a time when the world gaped and admired the millionaires like Rockefeller, JP Morgan, Pierre Dupont and others. Today anyone can be a millionaire. They are dime a dozen. We talk now about billionaires and we are looking forward to the first trillionaire. We must not just admire these people but we must worship them. For they are the greatest worshippers of Mammon, the only true religion. They won't call it a religion of course. That is old-fashioned. But what is religion? Religion in the broadest sense is belief in the almighty. For the worshippers of Mammon, the almighty is

wealth as represented by the amount of money possessed by the followers. The greater the amount, the greater the degree of faith.

14. The ancient religions place more emphasis on spiritual values. Indeed while they do not decry wealth, they do not regard wealth as the deity. Spiritual well-being, peace with oneself and with the world is what the old religions promote. Wealth acquired should be given away to help the less fortunate, the poor, the deformed and the sick. The satisfaction of the spirit comes from the good feeling after doing good, after helping fellow men.

15. But what need is there for a billion dollars to a man. He cannot eat or drink or have houses or entertain himself more than a normal person can. But he feels a need for the money to make more money and to make even more money. If he has to destroy the lives of millions of people in order to do this, he will. It is just too bad. He will give away something for charity and have his name emblazoned on the front page of magazines and journals as a great philanthropist. But giving away a few billions will not make up for the misery of millions brought about by his greed for money.

16. Religion has been assailed ever since man discovered science. Through science Man believes he has discovered the origins of everything to be found in this world. He has no more need for obscurantist religious explanations. He knows why there is life in this world, how it is propagated, how the species are developed and improved. He knows how oxygen breathes life into living things and lack of oxygen kills. He knows all the elements which produce all the compounds which make up the materials on this earth, its core and its atmosphere. He has learnt how to artificially combine the elements and the compounds in order to produce new synthetic materials which are even better than what is found naturally. Now he can create life itself, he can play God and even more. What need is there for religion, for submission to a superior being. Knowing about everything around him he can scientifically create more than that created by what we call the Creator, by God.

17. But the scientist is wrong. He thinks that he knows all the answers. Actually he does not. For science cannot and can never answer the question "why". He can explain how things happen, how things possess the qualities that they have. But he can never answer why things happen the way it happens or have qualities that they have. Whenever he tries to explain why he ends up by explaining how things are but not why things are as they are.

18. We know that two atoms of Hydrogen combine with one atom of oxygen will form water - H₂O. That is how water is formed but why should it be two atoms of Hydrogen and one atom of Oxygen? Why cannot it be some other elements combining with each other? Why cannot it be two atoms of Chlorine and one atom of helium or any other gas? The scientists can explain how but not give a reason why. Every time they try they end up explaining how and not answering why.

19. Every time science explains anything about the materials or the phenomena on earth or in the universe it fails to explain why. Light travels at a certain speed and it takes light years to travel from stars to earth, from stars to stars, thus explaining how big is the universe. But again why should it take this time, why should it be so big or distant - these are things science cannot explain.

20. Finally science concludes that it is nature. But why should nature determine all these phenomena; from the electron, protons and neutrons, the electrical charges to the stars which are thousands of times bigger than the sun of ours, emitting enormous heat, science cannot explain beyond lamely saying that it is natural.

21. One can say that it is natural but one can also say that there is a certain power that determines this. And that power is the God that humans through the ages worship. That super-power, that super being is the answer to the question why.

22. So no matter how great science is, how much it can unravel and recreate things, what science can achieve is only what God permits it to achieve.

23. Science must go on to investigate the origins of things and how things are what they are; science must use the information to create and build new things; but science must not assume that religion, the teachings to be subservient to a great unseen and unexplainable power is superstition and should be discarded. Science is no substitute for religion, for no matter how great humans can be, in the end humans have to admit that there is a power greater than all humans. Indeed the greater the knowledge of science, the greater will be our wonder at the creations of the Creator, the God that we worship.

24. Religion is therefore even more necessary and relevant now, in the age of science, than when humans were more ignorant. The Apocalypse can still happen as for example when the world collides and the human race is wiped out or through some other of a myriad of phenomena that can by God's will happen. We should not give up on science. We should study,

unravel and make use of the knowledge that science brings but we should never be so arrogant as to conclude that faith, religion has no more place in this world

25. The humility that comes along with the realisation that despite all our knowledge, we are really not masters of the universe, will make us better humans. If today the world is in such a state of turmoil, if today science can kill and has killed more people than it saved, it is because humans, especially those who have successfully applied scientific knowledge, have lost their way and think that science has made God replaceable or irrelevant. Base desires and emotions have overcome them. They glory in their capacity and their willingness to destroy the human race in order to fulfill their base desires.

26. We who still have faith in religion can only pray and work to bring them back to their senses. They must be made to realise that the nuclear warheads that they possess can ignite and detonate and bring about the apocalypse that they don't believe in.

27. I would like to thank you for inviting me, a Muslim, to officiate at this General Conference of the World Fellowship of Buddhists and Buddhist Youth. I know there will be some among my co-religionist who will question my involvement in the affairs of another religion. Some indeed would use this to condemn me and accuse me of being an apostate.

28. But Islam recognises the right of other religions to exist. Islam agrees that we will be different. To you your religion and to me mine.

29. Today Islam and the Muslims have been vilified and condemned because some Muslims have been involved in acts of terrorism. I feel that it is the duty of all Muslims to try and correct the wrong perception of Islam. As much as the Spanish Inquisition and the pogroms were not a reflection of the teachings of Christianity, the terror attacks are not a reflection of the teachings of Islam. Certainly the sex scandals which involve the Christian priests are not due to Christianity, but just human failings. Among Buddhists too there must be failures.

30. We all have to attend to our failures and I am sure your conference will focus on the many problems which affect the human race and the role of your religion in bringing back a confused world to sanity.