

A Few Words of Welcome

By Masatoshi Doi*

Dear Friends!

I am very much honored to extend, on behalf of the sponsoring bodies, our hearty gratitude to all of you for sharing your precious time in attending this small consultation. In the famous Confucian Analects we find this statement: "What a joy it is to have friends coming from distant quarters!" This joy of ours is now fulfilled having about thirty distinguished scholars assembled here from all parts of the world.

This consultation is unique in the sense that it is a meeting of those scholars who are especially interested and experienced in the matter of inter-religious dialogue. It is also unique in that six major world religions are represented in it, i.e., Buddhism, Hinduism, Islam, Judaism, Shintoism, and Christianity. It is really multilateral. We have made it intentionally small in scale so that we may have wider and deeper contacts with each other.

It provides a rare opportunity to cherish fellowship among men of different religions on a scholarly level. But, all of us know that we are not here just for the sake of fellowship. We are assembled here to grapple with a more important task, the task of probing into the theological basis for and the implications of inter-religious dialogue and cooperation, and of

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finding, if possible, some guidelines for the forthcoming World Conference on Religion and Peace, which in itself is a great occasion of inter-religious dialogue and cooperation. This means that we are not here just for the sake of academic exercise. Rather, we are confronted with the Divine Imperative of promoting world peace. Our consultation will become really meaningful only if we are engaged in dialogue with the keen consciousness of this historical context.

The time of the consultation is too short to be very productive, I am afraid. Still, our sincere desire is that some new dimension or perspective be envisaged through our sincere engagement in discussions. So, my humble petition is this: let every one of us be frankly involved in the whole course of discussion. Finally, I must express our heartfelt gratitude to the Secretariat of the World Conference on Religion and Peace which has given us continued encouragement and all possible help. Thank you!