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C.G. Weeramantry

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THE LORD'S PRAYER: BRIDGE TO A BETTER WORLD

*His Excellency, C.G. Weeramantry**

Dr. Guruswamy, members of the clergy, trustees of NELPI, honorable judges, ladies and gentlemen, it is indeed a great privilege and pleasure for me to be able to address such a distinguished gathering on a topic which I feel will assume increasing importance as the years go by, especially at this crucial time in human history, when we are all acutely conscious of the dawn of a new millenium. We are all eagerly awaiting this new event, contemplating the mistakes that humanity has made in the past and the ways in which we can avoid those mistakes in the future. There is a sort of millenial fever that is gripping the world. We are thinking in terms of our expectations. We are thinking in terms of analysis of our past mistakes and future possibilities and making all sorts of forecasts, both informed and uninformed, about the future. Now, we have reached the stage at which, for the first time in human history, we are facing the beginning of a new century with the ability on the part of the human race to destroy the human race. In fact, to destroy the whole environment. There was a time at the dawn of previous centuries, in fact even at the dawn of this millenium, the current millenium, there was a lot of speculation as to what the future millenium would hold, but never did humanity have the capability to destroy itself. We now are facing this new era in human history with that awesome possibility facing us fairly and squarely not as a remote possibility but as something that could happen if a couple of mistakes are made. We must therefore think very deeply about the course we are to follow in this era that is to dawn which could become an era of tremendous plenty, an era of such prosperity as we have never known before if we direct our actions correctly, or it can be an era of catastrophe if we go the other way. So, let us therefore think of the ways in which we can correct the mistakes of the past in the future.

I have often given thought to the fact that law, certainly international law, has been steering a course which has separated it from religion, cer-

* His Excellency C.G. Weeramantry, Vice President, The International Court of Justice, The Hague. This speech was presented at the University of Tulsa, on August 7, 1998, in conjunction with his latest book: *The Lord's Prayer, Bridge to a Better World*.

tainly for the last three centuries or so. In the early days of legal systems there was a very strong dependence of law on religion, because law after all is based on the moral sense of the community and the moral sense of the community draws deeply from the reservoirs of morality that are present in religion. All legal systems at their formative stages of development drew heavily upon religious principles, not in the sense of the dogma, or shall we say the ritual, or the high theology of religion, but upon the basic principles of morality which were contained in that body of religious teaching. The common law itself, the law from which the law of the United States is descended, for the many centuries of its early development drew heavily upon the principles of Christian morality.

Around the 17th Century in particular a movement arose of distancing law from religion. That was for the reason that there were various religious conflicts going on. There were different sects anxious to destroy other sects, refuting the dogma of those sects and in every way trying to belittle them. In consequence of this, those who wanted to work out a secular legal system thought it desirable to distance that legal system from religion, because the moment you went directly in religion, you got embroiled in conflict. Now as a result of that those who were fashioning the new international law of the post Westphalian state, that is around about the 17th Century, when the nation states were emerging and the authority of the old Holy Roman Empire which had kept the nation states under some sort of model regime, were attempting to separate law from religion. When that authority had broken down, philosophers like Grotius were trying to work out a new set of principles to govern the life of this new international society that was coming into being. Naturally, because of the religious wars that were then prevalent they had to break away and distance themselves from religion. And that was a very good reason. They tried to set out a secular set of rules. And they consciously broke away from religious teaching as an authority for what they were seeking to set up. Now that was fine, that was well justified at the time. But since then the trend has grown. There was the Industrial Revolution, the Scientific Revolution, the Age of Reason, all of these reinforced that philosophical drive to push law away from religion. And as the centuries moved on, law receded further and further away from its religious base. Consequently we are today in a phase where law and religion are separated by a fairly large gulf that has grown up between them over the past three centuries. And it is time I believe at this crucial phase in world history to take stock as to whether this is a correct course we are pursuing.

A distinction must be drawn as I've said earlier between ritual, i.e. dogmatic theoretical speculation, high theology and the basic principles of theology that are contained in religion. What I am venturing to suggest is that the time is opportune to return to the moral base of religion as a source of inspiration. Law in its development must take into account nu-

merous different sources from which it feeds itself. One of those sources is religion; we cannot ignore that. I was referred by one of the guests this evening to what Elton Trueblood said of our current society. It is a cut flower society. We have cut ourselves away from our roots. Of course, the blooms will continue to be beautiful for a few days but because they are cut off from their source of nutrients they will wither and die. There is a danger that if civilization cuts itself off from their moral base, this could happen to them. Under the influence of the Philosophy of Reason, the Age of Science, the separation of religion from law has occurred since the 17th Century. If we pursue that course further, we are perhaps running into dangerous waters.

So, I would suggest that we look again as to whether there is the possibility of nourishing our legal systems from the reservoirs of morality that are contained within the world's great religions. Now to compare our situation today to that which prevailed in the time of Grotius, I need only draw your attention to the fact that of the six billion or so of the world population today at least four billion follow one or other of the four great religions, each of which might have a following of a billion or more. Now for each of those billion or so people who follow the great religions whether they admit it or not their moral philosophy is based to a large extent upon their religion. Religion is therefore a very real force in this matter of fact world. We may not be prepared to admit it but it is a very real force that operates in the day to day decisions that are taken by individuals and societies and governments. There is the fact that all the people who take these decisions owe allegiance, whether they practice it or not is another matter, but they owe allegiance, and they dare not deny that they do so, to religion that has a very strong moral base of principles which govern human conduct. Now why should we not draw upon that reservoir and enrich ourselves and in the process enrich our legal systems and our practical ways of life in this new millenium that is about to dawn.

Now, casting around for some means of exploring this possibility I thought of the Lord's Prayer as a repository of Christian Doctrine in very short compass because it is wonderfully concise. I thought, rather than explore the whole range of Christian scriptures, which is beyond my competence, that I would concentrate on this succinct, best known prayer in the Christian faith which every child learns and which every philosopher can derive inspiration from. The prayer appeals to people at their different levels of understanding; it appeals to the child and the philosopher alike. Tertullian said, for example, that all there is to know about the Christian doctrine is contained in the Lord's Prayer. So the thought struck me, "Why not look at the Lord's Prayer, and see if there are any principles of law that are contained within it."

When I was looking into the literature on the Lord's Prayer, I found that there are literally thousands of titles, thousands of books and treatises

have been written over the centuries on the Lord's Prayer. Most of them approach the question they are considering from a theological point of view. I have even run across a perspective from a journalist—a journalist looks at the Lord's Prayer. But I was not able to find a book in which a lawyer looked at the Lord's Prayer and tried to extract some of the principles of law and human rights that are contained within it. So looking at it in this way, I found that practically every word of the Lord's Prayer is resonant with human rights, is resonant with legal principles, if only we would just care to repose awhile and contemplate its immense richness.

There is a wonderful thing that I think has tended to pass unnoticed and for this reason I think it may be worth while spending a few moments on considering the legal richness of the Lord's Prayer. Now, let me take the commencement of the Lord's Prayer. Or perhaps I should tell you something before that. The sort of analysis that I tried to do led me to take each word of the Prayer and extract from it the legal principles that lay buried within it. In this way I was able to compile a fairly large volume examining each word of the Prayer. But my publishers took a look at this and said that this is far too diverse and that there are far too many themes in this for it to be a book that could be popular and read by everybody. So the publisher suggested that I concentrate on two themes: forgiveness and trespasses. The view being that if we could give thought to forgiveness and trespasses we would be giving thought to two of the principle areas of conflict in the world, two of the principle causes of trouble that the world is undergoing. So this present book that is being launched today concentrates on those two aspects but I just want to show you the richness of each word of the Prayer.

Now take the first word. "Our." When we say the first words of the Prayer, "Our Father," what we are saying is that all of us together here in this hall, here in this country, all over the world who are using the Lord's Prayer are banding themselves together into a common group and addressing their common superior. They may make divisions of race or gender or color or literacy or whatever among themselves, but that is no consequence in the eyes of the Almighty. So as far as the Prayer is concerned, all human beings are on a footing of equality whatever distinctions they may make among themselves. So the principle of equality is built into this togetherness with which the Prayer is recited. As you know the word "Our" occurs more than once in the Lord's Prayer. It is always stressed in the Prayer that it is a common Prayer that is uttered together. Now, we, therefore, get the principle of equality from the word, "Our."

Then again, there is the principle that everyone who is using this Prayer is addressing the Almighty direct. Earlier on there was the position that everyone who wanted to address the Almighty must go through a Saint or someone holding high ecclesiastical position, a priest, or a prophet or some person with very special authority. You had to invoke

that authority as a kind of passport to being able to address the Almighty direct. Now, here was Jesus Christ himself saying, when asked by the Apostles how they should pray. He said that they should pray, "Our Father." In other words he was giving the authority to every individual human being to address the Almighty direct. There is thereby conferred on every person uttering the Prayer a great amount of dignity by virtue of his being a human entitled to address the almighty direct. So we have equality, we have dignity.

We also have the fact that since this was given by Christ himself, the prayer was outlined by Christ himself, it was not anything that any potentate however powerful could take away from these individuals. So we have three principles in the first word of the Prayer, we have equality, we have dignity and we have the principle of the inalienability of that equality and dignity. If you look at the enormous edifice of human rights doctrine that has now been built up all over the world you will find that it rests upon three central pillars, equality, dignity and the inalienability of rights. All those three concepts can be read into the first word of the Prayer. In other words the basic structure for the whole edifice of human rights would be contained in that one word.

The second word, "father." The idea of parentage, a common parent, the idea of loving care that is associated with parenthood, the idea that there are children of a common father, members of a common family, therefore under a duty to help each other under a time of need, a duty to resolve their disputes peacefully, without resorting to war or killing each other, the duty of fellowship and togetherness, all of which is implicit in the word, "father." Furthermore, the idea that there is justice prevailing among all these people because under the governance of a common father there cannot be injustice. A father would not broke injustice in the affairs of the children that the father supervises, because the regime of a common father presupposes that that father ensures justice among the different members of that family. All these concepts, justice included, are contained in the second word.

Now in this way it is possible to analyze all the words of the Prayer. One arrives at a tremendous cornucopia, so to speak, of human rights principles contained in the Lord's Prayer if one examines it this way.

Take for example, "Give us this day our daily bread." Now the Lord's Prayer is anchored to reality. It is not a purely spiritual prayer. It is not concerned solely with the things of the hereafter. It is concerned with what goes on here, here and now, today. It recognizes that fact by speaking in terms of "our daily bread." So it is a practical Prayer, which takes note of the needs of human beings for sustenance, the needs that are to be satisfied if there is to be practical useful and dignified life on earth, because there is a recognition of this economic need.

Now just as an aside let me tell you that when the Universal Decla-

ration of Human Rights was accepted in 1948 the emphasis of that epoch making document was on political and civil rights, it was not on social and economic rights. It took eighteen years for the world community to realize that economic rights were also entitled to a place of parity along with civil and political rights. The International Covenant on Economic and Social Rights was passed in 1966 along with the Covenant on Civil and Political Rights, announcing to the world that these rights, the civil and political on the one hand and the economic and social on the other, were on a position of parity. Now it took a long time for the world community to realize that. But in the Lord's Prayer you have this recognition of our economic rights in this expression, "Give us this day, our daily bread."

Furthermore, you see the precision of words and the economy of words with which that right is itself circumscribed. You are told that you are entitled to ask for your "daily bread." There is a limitation upon what you can ask for. In other words there is a prohibition against the hoarding, the accumulation, the cornering of markets and that kind of thing. What the Lord has said is that you can ask for your daily bread, what is sufficient for what is necessary for you to carry on your daily existence, not for vast surpluses, not an endorsement of hoarding nor an exploitation of markets. So you have in that phrase, the practicality of that Prayer, a recognition of economic and social rights which was long delayed in the world community and many more, which I do not have time to go into all of these.

Now all of this indicates the richness of the Prayer as a source from which we can derive inspiration when we come to better our legal systems in the new century and the new millenium. The law is always looking out for, and should be looking out for, ways in which it can enrich itself. Here is a vast reservoir of untapped wealth, which we are just keeping away from ourselves and not drawing upon, because we believe that academic pedantry tells us we should not. Various arguments of one sort or another are trotted out to show that it is not the right or the done thing to show that law can derive inspiration from religion. I believe we must give up that rather childish position and take up a position more in consonance with the evolution of all systems of law. From the commencement of time, these legal systems have drawn activity upon a spiritual base to fertilize themselves. One must bear in mind that the area covered by morality is vast.

For example, take the area of morally prohibited conduct. The area of legally prohibited conduct is only a very small segment of that area. What the law prohibits is only a very small section of that which is prohibited by morality. What the law polices is only a very tiny fraction of what the law prohibits. So if you rely on the law, you are relying on only a force that can police a tiny part of human conduct. In other words, out

of that area which is governed by morality, only a small part is governed by law, and only a smaller part is policed by law. So if we are going to fall back upon the policing of conduct by the law, we are falling back upon a hopelessly inadequate scheme for the governance of humanity.

We have to go back to that moral base. And that moral base of course cannot be policed by law. That is the importance of drawing the attention of every individual to the fact that there is this prescription of moral conduct which is binding upon him as a human being of good will. We need to sensitize the conduct of everybody to these moral obligations because not only does the law not police a vast area of moral obligation but the law sometimes protects people who go contrary to their moral obligations. The law has developed all kinds of protections and screens to protect the wrong-doer from being pursued by the law.

Take for example corporate law today. Corporate law shields behind the screen of corporate personality all the people in the corporate boardroom. It is very difficult to pierce through that screen and get to the actual perpetrator of the wrong. So in corporate boardrooms around the world today a great deal of wrongdoing does take place, which is difficult for the law to reach through and police. So what is important is that the moral sensitivity of the individual be stepped up. I say this because in this era of individualism decisions are being made across the board; they are being made in the family, they are being made in the corporate board room, they are being made in the scientific laboratory, they are made in the government office, they are made in the classroom, they are made everywhere, everyday in millions of situations that the law cannot police. Therefore, we have to step the moral sensitivity of the actors. And who are the actors? The actors are each one of us. Every individual in the world is everyday taking decisions, which have legal implications. And we have to sensitize them to the fact that this is happening. And we have to sensitize them to the fact that the law cannot police this. And internalize in their consciousness, their morality, or the code of morality, which has been taught to us for generations in the great religions.

Now all that is just an introduction to the idea that the trespasses and temptations which the Prayer warns us against are trespasses and temptations which have magnified a thousand fold from the time that Jesus taught the Prayer. At the time that Jesus taught there was theft and adultery and assault and that was what was important at that time in the minds of people. We have progressed far beyond that as a result of modern technology, modern communications, the growth of economic power and so forth. We are today in a situation where all manner of trespasses and all manner of temptations are opened out to our current generation, which make these a thousand fold more attractive and a thousand fold more powerful than was possible at the time when Jesus taught.

Therefore, it is necessary when reading that Prayer which Jesus

taught in light of today's needs. Those who have philosophized on matters of teaching and theology tell us that it is necessary to evaluate the teachings of Jesus in light of the current situation. We cannot evaluate a teaching that was done a thousand years ago in light of what was known a thousand years ago. We must interpret it in light of our current situation. That is why they say the great commentators of the Church, Origen, Tertullian, Cyprian have all said that you must interpret the Lord's Prayer according to the needs of the time.

A great writer on Jewish jurisprudence, Julius Stone, was saying the same thing in regards to the interpretation of Hebrew scripture when he said, "We have to look at it as lawyers and see the constantly expanding word of the divine law giver." The constantly expanding word of the divine law giver because that which was uttered a thousand years ago can take on a whole new range of meaning in light of conditions today.

I can sit at my computer today and move thousands of dollars from one end of the world to the other. I don't have to have couriers carrying bags of currency notes to do this. I just do it with a few computer messages. Millions of dollars will change hands across the world. I can use it for all kinds of nefarious purposes. So the power that has been given to the individual has magnified a thousand fold. Therefore, our interpretation of the Prayer must also correspond to the increased powers that modern technology and modern economic conditions have given us.

We have this situation in Plato's writings. In Plato's writings, he talks about the conduct of human beings as similar to that of a charioteer. A charioteer has two horses to control. He says one is the spiritual and one is the sensual. So if you are to steer a proper course, you have to steer the sensual so that it does not get out of hand. You have to control that horse and make sure that both horses take the chariot in the direction, which you want it to follow. Now what has happened is that the sensual part has been given so much more power, by reason of the tremendous increase in individual power that modern technology and modern conditions have given us. Therefore, we must be much more on our guard against temptation than was even necessary at the time during which the Prayer was first taught. All that is on the question of trespasses and great temptations to which we are exposed.

May I say a word about forgiveness. Many of the problems of the world today are due to hatreds, differences, divisions that have been smoldering for a long, long period. They fester silently in the recesses of the mind. Eventually they break out in terms of genocide and all those terrible phenomena we see all across the world today.

Forgiveness runs through the whole Gospel and the teaching of Christ, and the Lord's Prayer itself. We know, of course, that Mary Magdalene, the sinner on the cross, the adulterous woman, all of them had forgiveness given out to them. The Lord's Prayer breaths the spirit of

forgiveness. It does so in beautiful balance because it says, "Forgive us our trespasses, as we forgive them their trespass against us." So it is beautifully balanced. We can only ask for forgiveness in the measure in which we give it out to others.

As some writers have said, the Prayer has this beautiful quality that it gives us the justice which we deserve. We determine the justice we deserve because we determine the standards by which we will be forgiven by the standards, which we apply to those we forgive. That is beautifully balanced between itself. Due to a lack of forgiveness there is so much strife all over the world. It is time that we took thought to these moral reservoirs, which are available to us to consider in what way we can better the human condition in the century that lies ahead.

Now people may say that genocide is a very rare phenomenon; it happens only once by way of aberration as in Hitler's regime and so on. We see genocide happening in many parts of the world even today. There are instances of genocide being practiced in the 19th century and the 20th century; it's not as rare as one would think. So all this is the result of hatred breeding quietly, as I said, in the recesses of the mind, rather than being cut off straight away by forgiveness.

Then again, there are so many injustices throughout the world, which we scarcely pay attention to on the basis of the self-satisfied feeling that these things do not happen today. Slavery is a thing of the past. Therefore, why worry about it today. But the statistics show that child slavery is absorbing millions of children into its net. Every year over a million children are sold into slavery and what are we doing about it.

Likewise, torture. We think torture is something that belongs to bygone ages. But Amnesty International and other researchers have pointed out that at this very moment an epidemic of torture is sweeping the world. Torture is practiced in many countries and there is also the fact that there are even schools of torture. There are even catalogues that advertise torturing devices. These are sold openly. In other words, there are a rash of torture practices sweeping across the world, which renders our present age as bad as that of Nero.

While I have been speaking, over the past half hour or so, so many people have been facing their torturers and have been tortured. Some of them have been tortured to the point where they could not stand it any longer and have succumbed or even died under torture. These things have happened in the last half an hour. They are things that are happening in the world today. What I am trying to say is: the principles that are contained in the Lord's Prayer, of concern for our fellow creatures, concern for the other members of humanity who are praying to a common Father, this concern should manifest itself in the manner of deeds rather than just in the formation of a lot of good intentions without practically putting those good intentions into effect.

As is sometimes said, the good Samaritan episode is a translation of the Lord's Prayer into action, because the good Samaritan was putting into effect the principles of the Lord's Prayer not merely reciting them as a kind of formula as often happens today. What we need to do is to put into effect the principles of the Lord's Prayer, translate them into practicalities, translate them as far as we can into practical rules of conduct and that way we can certainly have a better world as we face the new millennium that is to come.

I say this particularly with reference to international law because international law has gone through a transformation with all this new economic power, and damage to the environment, all of which are occurring on a global scale. The international lawyer of today is beginning to realize that we have to structure an international law based upon the principle of cooperation. All nations, all peoples must cooperate if humanity is to have a future. We cannot have co-existence as a principle of international law. Mere co-existence is not enough.

Take, for example, an international environmental problem, a global health problem. No one nation however powerful can address that problem alone, it needs the cooperation of the entire world to solve it. We see in international law that we are entering the era where active cooperation is necessary. The old international law merely spoke of passive co-existence. There is country A there, there is country B there. Where we like it or not we must tolerate country B's existence.

And the Good Samaritan idea is who is my neighbor. In the old days my neighbor might have been my fellow villager in that same village. Or, if you took a broader view, the people in a group of villages. Or in a broader view the people in a district. Or an even broader view the people in a country. But today, my neighbor is every citizen in the world because what I do today whether it be by way of some action that causes pollution, or some action that may have economic repercussions, may have repercussions upon people I never knew and would never meet, who might live 5,000 or 10,000 miles away. But they will be directly affected by my conduct. And who is my neighbor except the person who is directly affected by my conduct. To such a person I owe a duty. The Lord's Prayer directs my mind to that duty in a manner in which it would be very refreshing for legal systems to take note of.

So these are some of the principles that I am trying to draw to the attention of readers of this book. I am saying this in terms of the Lord's Prayer which is only a minute portion of the scriptures of Christianity. Can you imagine what a wealth of material would be available in the totality of those scriptures. The Lord's Prayer has this advantage, every day it is recited by hundreds of millions of people across the world. Hundreds of millions of people know it. That is a good base from which to begin. Unfortunately, it tends to be a mere ritual repetition, a thoughtless recita-

tion, rather than a contemplative reflection. What we want is a contemplative reflection of the principles of the Lord's Prayer.

If we can make individuals more sensitive to these aspects, since there are millions of individuals involved, that can make a very real impact upon the world's situation today. So that is very important from the standpoint of Christianity. Likewise one can do the same for the scriptures of all the religions of the world, Buddhism, Hinduism, Judaism, Islam, all of them are rich reservoirs of moral conduct which can guide human conduct in the next millenium. The Christian himself can draw a lot of inspiration from the minute analysis of human conduct contained in those religions.

To give you just one example, Buddhism talks of right conduct, the sort of conduct that a good human being should follow. It divides it into eight categories: there is right action, right speech, right livelihood, right thought, right concentration and so forth analyzing it in very great detail. Anyone reading those scriptures can gain a very great amount of inspiration from them. Even in regard to a better understanding of Christian conduct. Likewise, all the religions have concepts that would be of very great value to the law of the future.

Islam for example has the concept of trusteeship of earth resources. Under the common law system we have the idea that we are the owners of property. If I buy a piece of land, I can do with it what I will. The Islamic concept of land is that all property belongs to God. Whoever buys it is only the trustee of that property. As a trustee, you owe a duty to those who are going to come and enjoy it after you. If we had a principle like that, probably we would not have the environmental problems that we have today.

In fact, African customary religion has got that concept deeply embedded in it. The African traditional view of the human community was that its not only those who are alive here and now, but those who were before us and those who are yet to come; all three together, the three segments of the human community, together form an entity. The law must look at all those three before it makes a decision.

Every religion has this. Hinduism for example has beautiful descriptions of the nature of divinity, which would suit very well the Christian scriptures, and, in fact, some of them are referred to from time to time. You might remember Oppenheim, who contributed to the development of the nuclear weapon. He spoke of the Hindu scriptures as drawing his attention to the nature of God and the enormous beauty in the concept of God, and so on.

The descriptions of divinity and of righteous conduct in Hinduism, the idea of dharma, what is righteous conduct, is minutely analyzed in Hindu scripture, to the extent of volumes being written analyzing what are the constituent elements of righteous conduct. So in a world that is

going to be one world, where everyone is going to be brother and sister to each other, where there will be a great deal of cultural exchange in the future, we can draw great inspiration from other religions, just as other religions can draw great inspiration from Christianity. All of these would be an important fertilizing source for the laws of the future.

We should remember therefore as we turn the century, all the bonfires of the world are not going to be snuffed out when the chimes sound drawing in the new century. Carlisle once said, "each century is the lineal successor of its predecessor." The 19th Century was a century of bloodshed. It was followed by the 20th century. In 1899, there was a great peace conference, at which the nations of the world met together and tried to take stock of the errors made in the war-torn 19th century with a view toward avoiding them in the 20th Century. That was a dazzling conference and they achieved certain of their objectives but the 20th Century failed miserably in turning away from the path of war. So the 20th Century was a lineal successor of the violence and brutality of the 19th Century.

The 21st Century will be the lineal successor of the errors of this Century unless we change course. We have to consider carefully how we can change course. One way that we can do so is to give greater attention to religion and greater attention to the Lord's Prayer of one, which is known, to millions of the followers of one religion. That way we can steer a better course. It is sometimes said that the 20th Century is the century of lost opportunity. We had tremendous opportunities in 1899, which we have squandered. When 1999 comes we will look back with regret on a century of lost opportunity. The next century will be a century of last opportunity and unless we correct our course it will be the century of least opportunity. So let us draw from the reservoirs of religion, the inspiration and strength that they alone are capable of giving us.