

30th Niwano Peace Prize Address

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I would like to offer my sincere expression of gratitude to Mr. Yasutaka Moriguchi, administrative vice-minister of Ministry of Education, Culture, Sports, Science and Technology; His Excellency Ambassador Mr. Arne Roy Walther of Royal Norwegian Embassy in Japan; Rev. Masanori Yoshimura, Chairman of the Board, Japanese Association of Religious Organizations, as well as the many people attending today's thirtieth Niwano Peace Prize award ceremony.

It is a great honor for the Niwano Peace Foundation to present this year's prize to Gunnar Stalsett, Bishop Emeritus of the Church of Norway.

With this year's thirtieth award, the Niwano Peace Foundation marks a milestone. Since the first Niwano Peace Prize was awarded to Archbishop Helder Pessoa Camara of Brazil in 1983, its international stature has increased with each new recipient to where it is now widely known as Japan's peace prize and the peace prize of religion.

Since 2003, the Niwano Peace Prize Committee has been comprised of 10 religious leaders from countries around the world, and they have been selecting recipients from a broader perspective. I would once again like to deeply thank the distinguished members of the Niwano Peace Prize Committee for lending their expertise to the Niwano Peace Prize, as well as to everyone who has given us their support over the years.

The Niwano Peace Prize Committee, which I just mentioned, was chaired from 2004 to 2010 by this year's recipient, Bishop Stalsett. In fact, until recently he has been in the position of making the selection rather than being selected himself.

To tell the truth, Bishop Stalsett's name has appeared several times among the nominees, and his receiving the prize was postponed because he held the position of committee chair.

Today, we can finally award him the Niwano Peace Prize. I believe he is indeed a very appropriate recipient of this milestone thirtieth anniversary prize, and it is with great joy that I bestow it upon him.

I have already described some of Bishop Stalsett's activities. As all of you are aware, his peace activities cover a broad spectrum.

As one of the core leaders of the Lutheran World Federation and the World Council of Churches, he has advanced the ecumenical movement toward the goal of bringing together all Christian churches. At the same time, he has been a leader of the World Conference of Religions for Peace and the European Council of Religious Leaders, and has worked unflaggingly for interreligious dialogue and cooperation.

In Norway, as a member of parliament he has held cabinet positions. He has also served as a member for the Nobel Peace Prize Committee.

On the international stage, he has been actively engaged with such issues as interreligious dialogue, conflict resolution, and building peace in Iraq, Sri Lanka, Namibia, Guatemala, and in every part of the world. In particular, from 2006 to 2010, as a special emissary of the government of Norway, he played a key role in the peace process in East Timor.

At the UN, he has worked to solve many issues, from the HIV / AIDS crisis to reducing nuclear stockpiles, as well as helping the United Nations reach its Millennium Development Goals.

He has worked in so many fields—religion, politics, society, and culture—that I could not possibly mention all of his activities today.

Indeed, in thirty years of the Niwano Peace Prize, there may be no other example of a recipient with such a diverse portfolio of activities.

I have had the good fortune of knowing Bishop Stalsett for many years, through WCRP gatherings and Niwano Peace Prize committee meetings, and I have come to feel that his genius as a mediator and an arbitrator is truly that of a peacemaker.

With generosity of spirit, he gives equal consideration to everyone's opinions. He is always calm and collected. Without bias, he guides everyone toward a decision to which all parties can agree. With a serene countenance, he brings matters to a very natural conclusion—this is Bishop Stalsett.

With such integrity of character, he is trusted by people around the world. No matter how difficult the problem, they only need Bishop Stalsett's presence.

Once an interview with Bishop Stalsett was published in Rissho Kosei-kai's newspaper, in which he was quoted as saying:

“Christianity's commandments teach us to ‘Love the Lord, your God’ and ‘Love your neighbor as you love yourself.’ Revering what is sacred, loving your fellow human being, and ever losing respect for yourself—these teachings are found in all of the world's religions. What really matters here is whether our love of God, love of our neighbors, and self-respect are indivisible. If we only value our love of God, we may fall into fanaticism or dogmatism. Our love of God should always be tested and substantiated by the love we show to other people, our neighbors. And having self-respect means giving serious consideration to the role each of us has been given. The realization that we are all equipped with the power to change ourselves—that meaning is included in the commandments.”

Such profound faith forms the base of Bishop Stalsett's character and his activities in many fields.

Bishop Stalsett has also said, “All religious leaders who would question what is genuine religion and what is divine truth must first pass judgment on themselves.”

Some religious leaders suppose that being true to one's own faith makes one incapable of accepting other faiths—they have such a mistaken point of view.

However, when we thoroughly examine the nature of our own faith, we arrive at the truth that is common to all faiths.

The essence of this truth was summed up by Dr. Hans Kung, recipient of the twenty-second Niwano Peace Prize, with the phrase, "global ethic."

When I examine the common ground of universal truth, I see everything we need to build a peaceful society and world without conflict. The key to getting started, as Bishop Stalsett has told us, is religious leaders reflecting on themselves and striving to overcome the "ego" within their own religious organizations and their own religious faith.

I heard that recently, Bishop Stalsett recited St Francis's prayer for peace. The prayer of St Francis, who led a humble life of peace and poverty, transcends differences of faith and resounds in my heart.

I think many of you know the prayer of Saint Francis, which I would now like to recite:

Lord, make me an instrument of your peace.

That where there is hatred I may bring love,

That where there is wrong, I may bring the spirit of forgiveness,

That where there is discord, I may bring harmony,

That where there is error I may bring truth,

That where there is doubt I may bring faith,

That where there is despair I may bring hope,

That where there are shadows I may bring light,

That where there is sadness I may bring joy.

Lord, grant that I may seek rather to comfort than to be comforted,

To understand than to be understood,

To love than to be loved.

For it is by forgetting self that one finds.

It is by forgiving that one is forgiven,

it is by dying that one awakens to eternal life.

I find that this prayer for peace is a perfect expression of Bishop Stalsett's approach to peace.

I myself vow, in the spirit of Saint Francis' Prayer for Peace, to make an even greater effort to help realize a world full of love and compassion.

I would like to conclude my address by expressing my hope that today's award ceremony will become the opportunity for Bishop Stalsett's vision and initiatives be shared by even more people everywhere, and my heartfelt prayers that he continue, in good health, in his important mission in our world.

Thank you very much.