

STRESSING HUMANISTIC VALUES

Roberto Peccei, the son of Club of Rome founder Aurelio Peccei, is a Club of Rome member. Yoshi Nagaoka, Seikyo Shimbun staff writer, and Jeff Farr, World Tribune associate editor, talked with him about the club and his father's work at the Club of Rome's annual conference in Ponce, Puerto Rico, on Dec. 1, 1996.

WT: Do you have any recollections of when your father and SGI President Ikeda were becoming friends?

RP: I know that my father was always interested in trying to have a very broad experience. That is, to listen to people of different cultures, of different backgrounds. And I think he even had conflicts with some of his friends, who asked, "Why do you think discussions with, say, a Buddhist leader are important?"

He said, "Look, we're all in one world, and it's important to get many different perspectives."

I think he had a very good interaction with President Ikeda and was happy to actually collaborate with him. Unfortunately, my father died soon after.

It would have been interesting to see how their friendship would have developed in the future. But I know that he was very happy about the book they wrote together [*Before It Is Too Late*]. I know they didn't agree on many things, that each had his own road, but they had, I think, quite a reasonable dialogue.

WT: Did your father mention anything about President Ikeda to you personally?

RP: We always talked together about different things. At that time I was living in Germany, so it was a little easier for me to see him. Now I live in the States; it would have been a little more complicated now.

He certainly discussed some of the things that he was doing during the writing of his book. He again was quite certain that it was a good thing to do. As I said, it was not a particularly popular thing to do among some of his colleagues. But he felt that it was an interesting thing to do for him. And he felt that it was a very useful experience.

So he did not, if I remember, mention things directly about President Ikeda, but he talked about his ideas and view of nature, the protection of nature, which I know is very much in the thoughts of a Buddhist. And so my father was influenced by that. He thought that was a very good thing.

So it was more of a philosophical than a personal connection. Then I actually had the good fortune of meeting President Ikeda some time in 1985 or 1986 in Japan. I went to see him at the [SGI] Headquarters. My wife was with me, too. We had a very, very pleasant time with him and his wife.

WT: What was your impression of him?

RP: I was very happy to meet him. We talked about all sorts of different things. Again, he was quite happy about the work he had done with my father, the book that they had done together.

And he was very supportive of the ideas of the Club of Rome even then, although now

he's more involved. Even then he was very supportive of the general stand of the club.

WT: The Club of Rome is a gathering of intellectuals, but the SGI is a gathering of common people. It is so important, though, to work together as organizations that have these different natures. In what particular fields do you think we can work together?

RP: I think in the general understanding of how human beings must learn to cooperate and exist together in this world. This morning's session was about mediating conflicts and the interesting role that religious organizations play in conflict mediation. That was an example.

In fact I think we can work together in the stressing of humanistic values, which appears many times in the writings of President Ikeda and other religious leaders; and in giving a moral orientation to society — which doesn't mean we have to be partners in any one direction, but that we are generally centered in what is positive, what adds value.

And so in that I think there is an overlap between what the club wants to do, which looks perhaps more globally, and what the SGI wants to do, which tends to look more internally, perhaps more toward spiritual things. But if you forget about this distinction between looking outside and inside, in some ways the overlap is quite strong and interconnected.

WT: President Ikeda is now conducting a dialogue with youth, which we are publishing. Recently he introduced your father and some episodes of his life in the Italian Resistance during World War II, including his imprisonment (Dec. 6, 1996, *World Tribune*).

Mr. Ikeda was talking about how the truly courageous person doesn't give up even if he or she is imprisoned. I think some of our young readers would be interested in how your father, such a courageous man, raised you.

RP: I think that I learned from him by example more than by instruction. He sort of did things in his own way. And I learned by observing him rather than his direct teaching.

Actually, I keep learning from him, even though he is now gone. I reflect back on some of the things he did or the way he approached certain things.

And I think that the Club of Rome is a good example of something that he left behind. He started it with the idea of trying to understand better where the world was going. So he was always very brave and unafraid of criticism, but yet he would listen; it was an interesting combination. And he was very good at convincing people to join him. In fact, if you talk to some of the older club members, they were basically all convinced by him that this was something that they should do.

In that sense, he was not that much different from a religious leader who convinces by example, by what is perceived by others as the correctness of the ideas that he or she expounds. So in some ways it is not that surprising that he and President Ikeda got along.

WT: Would you like to convey a message to our members?

RP: Well, just a message of friendship and the fact that I am quite pleased that President Ikeda is now a little closer together with the Club of Rome. And that I hope that he continues his good work.

WT