

PERSPECTIVE: Creative Conversations
By PHIL SIMPSON
Atlanta

Fire, Flood Afflict Grand Forks” reads the headline. Downtown Grand Forks, N.Dak., looks like Venice, Italy, after a bomb. Hundreds of thousands of people are without food, shelter and water.

One day after celebrating Earth Day here in Atlanta, I found myself sitting at the kitchen table looking at the morning paper, pondering the meaning of nature’s devastating effects and what we can do to minimize humanity’s negative influence on the environment. Some scientists say that spring came one week early in the Northern Hemisphere this year, due to global warming. Will scenes such as the one in Grand Forks become more prevalent?

We are just five years out of the Earth Summit in Rio de Janeiro, at which the SGI displayed a huge environmental exhibit, “Toward the Century of Life: The Environment and Development.” Since then, the exhibit has toured major cities around the world. In the SGI-USA, also, we have hosted an environmental exhibit around the country.

Much still needs to be done to turn the corner on the environmental degradation around us. Catastrophes of nature brought about by humankind’s destructiveness continue to plague our planet.

How can one person help change come more swiftly? The answer seems to come at me from two directions. One source is a former Roman Catholic priest, Danny Martin, who lectured at Emory University on “Faith and Environment Symposium” for Earth Day. The other is “New Horizons of a Global Civilization” — SGI President Ikeda’s 1997 peace proposal (*April Living Buddhism*).

Dr. Martin, who grew up in Belfast, Ireland, amid religious strife and war, explains that he has broken through those limitations. He now travels around the United States with a message of human dialogue, which he considers necessary if we are going to solve our environmental problems.

“Faith is most basic in reaching beyond ourselves,” he said at his lecture. “Be present to one another in new and creative ways. If you are unfaithfully here [on Earth], you are causing damage.” His seems to be a message of hope.

He was also saying something else. We need to participate in skillful conversations with others, which he termed “creative conversations.” “Dialogue,” he explained, “comes from *logos, the meaning of things*, and *dia*, meaning ‘through.’ Through dialogue we discover what it means to be a human being in our own time. The next stage of realization [i.e., of a problem like the environment] must be actualization.”

This requires using the “forgotten skills of collaboration,” he explained — collaborating with others, making friends with those who have sympathetic views with ours, or winning over others’ hearts. These are the very things President Ikeda has been encouraging us to do as the means to make positive change in the world. “Take your practiced powers [of collaboration] and spread them out till they span the chasm between [people],” Dr. Martin said.

President Ikeda, once again, as he has done over and over, stressed in his most recent peace proposal the need to “probe much deeper, questioning and redesigning the relationships of human beings to each other, of human beings to the environment, and of human beings to society as a whole. It is a time of shift in the perspective of each and every person in the world.”

This shift to which he is referring is the shift that needs to occur in the hearts of all people as they internally reform themselves based on the Buddhist value of the sanctity of

life. We call it human revolution.

As we share that reformation with others, President Ikeda goes on to say, “trust between human beings becomes the lubricant that smoothes the functioning of a better society,” leading to the changes in perception that humankind needs to have to live in harmony with the environment — and eventually to begin making more positive changes on the Earth.

Our internal development first and then the sharing of it with others — could this be the truly forgotten part of skillful collaboration that Danny Martin is looking for? After all, there is a lot of talk going on while the environment just seems to be getting worse.

After his lecture, I had a chance to meet briefly with Dr. Martin. I shared with him President Ikeda’s peace proposal and had a little creative conversation. As a human being dedicated to the betterment of the environment through dialogue, I hope that my human revolution had some small effect on him. I will continue to do my human revolution as best I can to become the lubricant for a better functioning society — one that enhances the environment, not destroys it.

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