

Winning in the Information Age

Refining wisdom will allow us to better use knowledge, SGI President Ikeda says in message to the Club of Rome's annual meeting.

The Club of Rome, an international group of leading academic, business and government intellectuals, for the first time held its annual meeting in the United States, Oct. 23–25. The club chose the Smithsonian Institution's Renwick Gallery in Washington, D.C., right behind the White House, as the setting to discuss this year's topic: the global information society. President Ikeda, who became an honorary member of the club last year, sent the following message, which was read by Bertrand Schneider, Club of Rome secretary general on Oct. 24.

Dr. Ricardo Díez-Hochleitner, president of the Club of Rome, distinguished delegates, ladies and gentlemen:

On behalf of SGI members in 128 countries around the world, I offer my heartfelt congratulations on this annual conference of the Club of Rome.

I also want to express my most profound respect for the pioneering efforts of the distinguished Club of Rome members in tackling the key issues facing our age. I find it a singular honor to add my efforts to your invaluable endeavors.

We live in rapidly changing times. Technological innovation in the field of information and communications is progressing at great speed today. And the so-called information revolution, which is the spirit of the new era, is expected to have an impact on our society rivaling that of the Industrial Revolution.

What effects will the advent of the multimedia society have on our future?

In addition to changing how information is distributed, it can be expected to vastly transform interpersonal communication. I thus believe that if we are to face up to the issue of this vast unknown quality, we must reexamine the relationship between man and technology.

The great leap forward in communications, represented by the Internet and satellite communication systems, has made possible the global transmission of information, carrying news instantaneously throughout the world.

A form of communication of hitherto unimagined freedom and flexibility is taking shape, and this is rapidly removing the barrier created by the concept of nation-states, which have long separated human beings — at least as far as technological communication is concerned.

However, it is also true that the increased potential for communication created by this technological advance does not necessarily bring with it an evolution of heart-to-heart communication among the people.

Instead, the newly created information media could be used as a means to amplify confrontations based on prejudice and hatred. There is also the risk that public opinion could be misdirected through the willful manipulation of information.

I cannot help recalling the deep concern that was expressed by the late founder of the Club of Rome, Dr. Aurelio Peccei, as we engaged in the dialogue later published as *Before It Is Too Late*.

He said that “much of our communication lacks communion, the personal touch, the warmth of human presence and of mutual knowledge.... In other fields, people are

becoming so accustomed to talking to trusted machines and getting quick pertinent answers from them that they no longer find need or pleasure in talking to other individuals, who may fumble or disagree.”

As Dr. Peccei so aptly indicated, the key issue is how to make technology reflect the essential spirit of communication, which is conducted by the human being devoting his or her holistic personality. Technological progress that loses sight of the human being will not bring happiness to humankind in the end.

I am strongly convinced that the key to the impending multimedia society is a remolding of our perspectives, placing priority on human interchanges of the heart rather than on technology alone.

As our world becomes ever more interdependent, how do we guide it from friction to inspiration, from confrontation to harmony, from destruction to constructiveness? It is my firm belief that this is the path we need to follow if we are to bring to fruition the much-sought-after notion of a society of global neighbors.

Dr. Peccei advocated the development of wisdom to make the best use of available knowledge. It is naturally up to the individual who uses technology whether it will be to the best use. The Lotus Sutra, considered as the quintessence of the Buddhist scriptures, elucidates the concept of “awakening in all beings the Buddha wisdom, revealing it, letting all beings know it and enter into it.” This reminds us that the fundamental objective of Buddhism lies in tapping human wisdom.

My mentor and the second president of the Soka Gakkai, Josei Toda, also stated that confusing knowledge for wisdom is the principal error in the thinking of modern humanity. I believe that the burning question of contemporary society rests in fostering a correct viewpoint, in developing a “spiritual eye” that will prevent humankind from becoming a victim of the machinations of the information society.

Even if one has knowledge and can collect information, the information will be worthless if one is completely swamped by an enormous flood of data. It is far more important to fully develop the wisdom that will allow one to make good use of that knowledge.

I strongly urge that we now concentrate on human education, which will nurture that wisdom, generating a sense of purpose, mission and responsibility in people. The great advantage of the information revolution is to prevent knowledge and information from being monopolized by the few, so that they can be shared democratically by many. Only when each individual who has access to knowledge or information has the wisdom to truly put it to use will it be possible to summon forth the vitality to surmount the various obstacles that humankind faces and to create an enduring solidarity of the people.

In closing, I express my most sincere prayers for the continued well-being of the distinguished Club of Rome members, who are dedicated to mapping out a great path of hope for future generations, to advancing with a global vision and profound sense of responsibility as pioneering sages.

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