

A Future Religion?

SGI President Ikeda recalls his dialogues with Dr. Arnold Toynbee. The British historian was adamant about battling evil and establishing 'a future religion,' one which would enable humankind to overcome the evils that threaten its survival. Toynbee said, 'The most formidable of these evils are the oldest: greed, which is as old as life itself is, and war and social injustice, which are as old as civilization.'

I always like to speak in an informal manner. I like to speak in a way that will make everyone feel relaxed and at ease. I don't like to see people tense or stiff. There's no need for stuffy formality in the Soka Gakkai. I want everyone to be natural, free to be themselves. This is what our humanistic realm of the Soka Gakkai is all about.

To date, I have been awarded a total of 55 honorary degrees and professorships from educational institutions around the world. And earlier today, I was notified of the planned conferral of another such honorary title. When scheduled conferrals are added to the degrees already bestowed, the number now comes to 71.

Since I receive these honors as your representative, I wish to humbly report this to you. It is the same as if these awards were being bestowed on you.

Today, Oct. 22, is the day that Dr. Arnold J. Toynbee died in 1975. He was 86. Our dialogue was conducted in 1972 and 1973 for a total of about 10 days.

Dr. Toynbee was happy to talk with me. We shared our views with great seriousness each day from morning till early evening. In the afternoon, we'd have a break for tea time. His secretary would unobtrusively bring in some afternoon tea.

How delightful those quiet interludes with Dr. and Mrs. Toynbee were.

Sometimes Dr. Toynbee and I would carry on our conversation, while we took a walk. I vividly remember him saying to me on one occasion, at the front door to his apartment: "You're going to receive honorary doctorates from around the world some day. Perhaps even more than I've received."

In the course of our wide-ranging discussions, there was one incident where Dr. Toynbee's voice rang with exceptional harshness. The subject turned to the Holocaust — the genocide of the Jewish people perpetrated by Hitler.

When Hitler was at the height of his power, Dr. Toynbee wrote a journal on world current events for the Royal Institute of International Affairs in London. The institute required that its publications be scientific — unemotional, unbiased, impartial. But when it came to the issue of Hitler's genocide of the Jews, it was a completely different matter, Dr. Toynbee declared. He felt that it was impossible to remain impartial about this crime. If he were to write on the genocide as unemotionally as if merely giving a weather report, he said, it would not constitute a fair, just record of the atrocities. To ignore the moral issue would be tantamount to tacitly condoning the annihilation of the Jews, he asserted.

Therefore, Dr. Toynbee angrily condemned the Nazis' evil.

Evil is evil. To firmly assert this is true humanism, true compassion. "For me, condemning evil," Dr. Toynbee explained, "was the middle way." The middle way equals humanism. Dr. Toynbee was a great individual.

This is something proven more and more as time goes by.

The Price of Civilization

Why did people let the Nazis commit their atrocities? There is a lesson to be learned

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here. Dr. Toynbee says: “The moral is that civilization is nowhere and never secure. It is a thin cake of custom overlying a molten mass of wickedness that is always boiling up for an opportunity to burst out. Civilization cannot ever be taken for granted. Its price is eternal vigilance and ceaseless spiritual effort.”

In other words, the tendency to be attracted to evil of the likes of Hitler resides within human beings. So things must not be left to develop with abandon, without moral restraint. We must be constantly alert for the presence or appearance of evil people. Without such effort and engagement, civilization cannot be sustained, cannot grow and prosper. This was Dr. Toynbee’s conclusion.

It is therefore vital, he said, that we have the courage to state our own opinion and never to hesitate when it comes to opposing evil. This, according to Dr. Toynbee, one of this century’s greatest historians, is how civilization remains sound and healthy.

I will proudly state that the Soka Gakkai has been following this correct path throughout its development.

Dr. Toynbee also said, “Every human soul...is a spiritual battlefield in which good and evil are perpetually contending with each other for mastery....” A battlefield where good and evil wage combat — this is the human heart, he says. This is an insight that strikes a deep resonance with Buddhism, which expounds our eternal struggle between the Buddha nature and devilish functions.

It is important for us to triumph over destructive forces. We are not practicing faith if we allow ourselves to be defeated by them.

We practice this Buddhism to win.

What Kind of Religion Can Start a New Civilization?

During our dialogue, Dr. Toynbee and I discussed what a religion of the future, one that would give birth to and support a new civilization, would be like. Dr. Toynbee said: “A future religion that is to bring into being, and to keep in being, a new civilization will have to be one that will enable mankind to contend with, and to overcome, the evils that are serious present threats to human survival. The most formidable of these evils are the oldest: greed, which is as old as life itself is, and war and social injustice, which are as old as civilization.”

That was the kind of religion he hoped for, a religion committed to fighting injustice, a religions that refuses to compromise with evil and prevails over it. Such a religion will give rise to a new civilization.

Dr. Toynbee’s initial interest in the Soka Gakkai was over its ideals and initiatives, our movement to establish a third civilization.

I received a request from him to have an opportunity to meet and talk with me, someone whom, he said, he regarded as a genuine practitioner of Mahayana Buddhism. I was still quite young and had already been made the brunt of countless attacks by biased critics. But, as I have outlined, one of the world’s leading historians and thinkers saw me with clear eyes.

The Soka Gakkai is propagating a world religion of supreme validity and necessity for the 21st century. Let us advance in our endeavors with that proud conviction.

Better Off Without Them

Dr. Toynbee quoted the words of the Roman poet Lucretius:

*In doubtful perils — mark him as he is
Amid adversities; for then alone*

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*Are the true voices conjured from his breast,
The mask off-stripped, reality behind.*

The 21st century is almost upon us. We are at a turbulent time of transition that will sort the genuine from the frauds. It's important that we ensure that no corrupt individuals remain in our organization. Nichiren Daishonin warned against keeping on bad disciples and associating with bad friends. And his successor Nikko Shonin cut off ties with the five renegade senior priests, who turned their backs on the Daishonin's teaching.

This is the only way to protect the true teaching. Otherwise, it won't be possible to widely open the great path of kosen-rufu.

It's the same with people. When the times are toughest, at their most trying, those who are corrupt, self-serving or have no faith will gradually surface. Such individuals eventually find it impossible to remain in the pure world of the Soka Gakkai and depart of their own accord. And we are much better off without them.

Let us continue to stride forward cheerfully as proud exponents of the Daishonin's Buddhism.

Part 1 of SGI President Ikeda's speech at the 27th Headquarters Leaders Meeting, held at the Tokyo Makiguchi Memorial Hall in Hachioji, Oct. 22. Part 2 of this speech will appear in next week's issue.