

DIALOGUES ON EDUCATION EDUCATION IS THE KEY TO CHANGING THE WORLD

On Nov. 3, 2000, the Education as Transformation Project at Wellesley College in Massachusetts, bestowed its first Education as Transformation Award upon SGI President Ikeda in recognition of his efforts to promote a philosophy of education based on value creation. Professor Victor Kazanjian, dean of religious and spiritual life at Wellesley College and cofounder and senior advisor of the Education as Transformation Project, attended the presentation ceremony, which was held during a gathering celebrating Soka University's annual student festival, at the Soka University Auditorium in Hachioji, Tokyo.

The Education as Transformation Project, established in 1996, works with some 350 colleges and universities throughout the United States to initiate dialogue on religious pluralism and spirituality in higher education. Its advisors include many prominent and socially engaged intellectuals, such as the civil rights activist and professor of religious studies Vincent Harding and M. K. Gandhi Institute for Non-violence director Arun Gandhi. Wellesley College is one of America's premier women colleges.

Dr. Kazanjian has remarked that the purpose of education is to raise well-rounded human beings and that schools have a responsibility to cultivate character and intellect. He stresses the need to restore ethics and spirituality to the learning process.

In presenting the award, Dr. Kazanjian declared that "the 70-year history of Soka education has offered the world a model for an educational process which liberates the mind, frees the spirit and calls each of us to act towards others in ways that respect the inherent dignity and equality of all human life." The award certificate states: "By founding an educational system which nurtures people of wisdom and humanity, President Ikeda and the SGI offer vision of an educational process which by transforming the individual transforms the world."

In his acceptance speech, President Ikeda called on the assembled students to join him in courageously working to promote a renaissance of spirituality and philosophy in the 21st century. Describing education as a matter of the greatest importance for humankind, he vowed to continue issuing proposals on education and promoting the cause of educational reform.

Prior to the presentation, President Ikeda held a discussion with the visiting educator on the place of spirituality in education and other topics.

In response to a comment from Mr. Ikeda on the large number of women leaders that Wellesley has produced, Dr. Kazanjian explained that the school, in seeking to raise world leaders, strives to inject spirituality and religious depth into the learning process. He expressed his belief in the need for schools to instill in students a global awareness, respect for diversity, a pluralistic outlook and an understanding of value creation; adding that in so doing it becomes essential to address issues of spirituality and religion.

Relating his impressions on visiting Soka University of America, the Boston Research Center for the 21st Century, and Soka University in Japan, Dr. Kazanjian said that every institution President Ikeda has founded brims with energy. The educator confirmed that Mr. Ikeda's humanism and pacifist educational ideals are today urgently needed in the world. Thanking his guest for these gracious words, President Ikeda mentioned that the students of the Soka schools are truly his children and his life and that he will do anything he can to help them grow.

The SGI leader said he was impressed to hear that each year Dr. Kazanjian leads groups of students to India, where they learn through helping the poor. “Serving the people and learning from the people—this is the heart and the fundamental spirit of the Soka Gakkai that has been handed down by Tsunesaburo Maki-guchi and Josei Toda, the first and second presidents,” President Ikeda said.

Dr. Kazanjian related that his grandfather, who at one time served as president of Boston University, had lectured on the works of Mahatma Gandhi when the civil rights leader Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. was a graduate student at the school. Having grown up in such an environment, the educator said, he had learned that education can change the world and had been led to believe that this was what universities were there to teach. When he encountered the works of Mr. Makiguchi and President Ikeda, Dr. Kazanjian said he found the answer to the question “What is education?” and confirmed that education is the key to transforming the life of the individual and changing the world. He added that in visiting Soka University, therefore, he felt as if he were returning home.

In the course of their discussion, Prof. Kazanjian presented Mr. Ikeda with a letter from Wellesley College President Diana Chapman Walsh inviting the SGI leader to address the students and faculty of the school.