Review

Arnold J. TOYNBEE and Daisaku IKEDA. *The Toynbee-Ikeda Dialogue.* Tokyo: Kodansha International Ltd, 1976. 342 pp. Index. $13.95.

That Kodansha International, a publisher with a reputation for scholarly books, would publish this book is a significant fact in itself. Sōka Gakkai, under Ikeda Daisaku, has changed from a militant, nationalist organization to a moderate internationalist movement with large branches overseas, especially in the United States. Ikeda has also stressed scholarship, founding schools and cooperating with foreign scholars. This book represents the culmination of this process in Sōka Gakkai, involving a series of conversations between Ikeda and Arnold Toynbee, the distinguished British historian.

Divided into three parts, "Personal and Social Life," "Political and International Life," and "Philosophical and Religious Life," the book covers a variety of topics. It is skillfully edited by Richard L. Gage into twelve chapters. While the dialogue in these chapters usually flows smoothly from topic to topic, there are occasional rough spots with abrupt transitions and redundancies. Because the conversations were not restricted to the topics under which they are arranged, they are occasionally divided into several chapters and one detects snatches of an earlier conversation in later pages. But the editor has done a superb job on a difficult assignment.

An intriguing question for this student of Sōka Gakkai is why Prof. Toynbee would have agreed to the interviews and conversations with Ikeda. There are hints throughout the book: Toynbee describes himself as an "ex-Christian" several times (e.g., p. 318) and indicates his general preference for Buddhism (e.g. pp. 330, 341). Ikeda, to his credit, has avoided partisanship toward Nichiren Shōshū Buddhism in this conversation. He avoids mentioning Nichiren Shōshū in the dialogues completely, although he does introduce some Nichiren Shōshū terminology.

For example, in the discussion of "Heredity and Environment" in the chapter on "The Basic Human Being," Ikeda introduces the term *Eshō Funi* which is a Nichiren Shōshū neologism for "indivisibility of environment and life force." Toynbee picks up the term from Ikeda and uses it in his own analysis of altruism (p. 22) and

environmental abuse (p. 38). It is obvious that Toynbee is sympathetic to the beliefs that lie behind these terms, although he is not a believer in Nichiren Shōshū. His sympathies probably originated in his pessimism about Western culture, which he attributes in the preface to the book to a combination of old age, observation of the "decline of the West" and a historian's consciousness of human failure (p. 10).

Pessimism about Western culture is one of the two major themes of the book which I will examine here. The other is a related topic: the direction of social change in a post-Christian world. Rather than following the format of the book, I will trace these two themes as they recur throughout the dialogues.

The subtitle of the book, "Man himself must choose," is suitably ambiguous to cover a variety of the choices posed throughout the book. But it seems most suitable to the general theme of contrast between Western culture and Eastern culture, specifically between Christianity and Buddhism. At times Toynbee, especially, speaks of the Judaic tradition to encompass Judaism as well as Christianity and Islam, and of the Hindu-Buddhist-Confucian tradition. Ikeda also uses this terminology, for example to contrast the monotheism of the West with the polytheism of the East (p. 131). Toynbee goes so far as to extend the "Judaic tradition" to ideologies such as communism and attribute its fanaticism to religious sources (p. 179).

One aspect of this theme of contrast between West and East is religious conflict, and historical processes such as colonialism are woven into the discussion. Toynbee suggests, for instance, that despite the technical superiority of the West, the Judaic tradition was unable to make any inroads in southern and eastern Asia (p. 264). He seems to overlook the impact of Islam in India (now Pakistan) and Indonesia. At another point, Toynbee suggests that Japanese success in avoiding colonial domination is attributable to spiritual "virtuosity" (p. 237). Ikeda notes that Japan is one of the nations which is able to absorb and assimilate elements of other cultures without being dominated (p. 289).

A more central issue in comparative religion is the affinities between various religions which indicate basic human needs and aspirations. Here both Toynbee and Ikeda place emphasis on the grace and redemptive qualities of Christ and Buddha, the saints and the bodhisattvas (pp. 280–281). But both find fault in Christianity for the

insensitivity of its missionary efforts, which override the cultural integrity of target cultures (pp. 296–297). The missionary efforts of Buddhism are considered more compatible with cultural integrity.

Toynbee, with his broad knowledge of history, dominates the conversations with analyses of historical trends and intercultural impact. But Ikeda, with his religious virtuosity, subtly turns the dialogues toward the conclusion that Buddhism has more to offer for solving world crises than Christianity. Late in the book, he states this explicitly: "I am convinced that only a new religion will be able to take the lead in a civilization on a high plane that combines both science and philosophy" (p. 300). He does not seem to convince Toynbee that Nichiren Buddhism is that religion, however; Toynbee considers Shinto a possible candidate (p. 300). While Toynbee rejects the monotheism of the Judaic religions, he does not embrace Buddhism in their place. Rather, he suggests that all Asian religions teach "the surrender of the individual self to the universal self" (p. 315). This, Ikeda asserts, is the central doctrine of Buddhism, called "universal life force" (p. 315).

On the second main theme of the book, the direction of social change in a post-Christian world, the main thrust of the dialogues is evident in the foregoing excerpts. Because the West and Christianity have had their opportunities to solve world problems and have failed, a different form of culture is needed. Toynbee suggests that this will be "a common worldwide civilization that has originated in a technological framework of Western origin but is now being enriched spiritually by contributions from all the historic regional civilizations" (pp. 11-12.). Later he refines this prognosis to suggest that reviving religion (p. 188) and a "revolution on the religious plane" (p. 245) are necessary. In this manner, Toynbee gradually picks up Ikeda's terminology "the human revolution," or "self-revolution," which is introduced early in the book (p. 122) and used throughout (pp. 129, 282, 308, 325). The principal thrust of the "human revolution" concept is that social change begins with individual values (p. 128), so that the only way to reform society is through changing individual beliefs (p. 215). Further, if a leader arises who can lead humanity to a better world, he must be a religious leader rather than a political leader (p. 243).

"Human revolution" and religious leadership have been constant concerns of President Ikeda and the Sōka Gakkai in recent years.

They are, in fact, the ideas on which Ikeda has built his reputation and consolidated his leadership. He has published a lengthy autobiography (containing a biography of his predecessor, Toda Jōsei) with the title "Human Revolution." It is understandable that a religious leader would stress the personal biographical forms of social change. The principal leverage that a religious movement has in a culture is its influence on beliefs of individuals in that culture.

With the publication of this book, the Sōka Gakkai has come a long way from the Fujiwara affair several years ago, i.e. the attempted suppression of a critical book *Sōka Gakkai o kiru* (translated into English as *I Denounce Sokagakkai*). It has recouped its political losses in the recent election when the nominally independent Kōmeitō (Clean Government Party) nearly doubled its seats in the Diet. The publication of *The Toynbee-Ikeda Dialogue* marks another step in the resuscitation of the prospects of Sōka Gakkai and symbolizes its new image as an internationalist and scholarly organization.

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