

## From the Symposium “Interreligious Dialogue about Christian and Buddhist Civilizations” in Bulgaria

### Message

Daisaku Ikeda

PLEASE allow me to offer heartfelt congratulations on the symposium entitled “Interreligious Dialogue about Christian and Buddhist Civilizations” held jointly by the Center for Slavonic-Byzantine Studies, named after Professor Ivan Dujcev, world-famous for his work in Byzantine research, and the Institute of Oriental Philosophy.

In May 1981, I was blessed with a chance to visit Bulgaria to take part in celebrations marking the 1,300th anniversary of the founding of your country. On that occasion, I was honored to deliver a speech entitled “A Harmonious Blend of Cultures” at Sofia University.

I can still hear the bells of the Banner of Peace memorial tower that I listened to with a group of boys and girls ringing deep in my heart. I then journeyed to Plovdiv, where I was privileged to plant a memorial fir tree, which I understand has now grown to be a handsome and familiar sight in the neighborhood. On that occasion, the Plovdiv Youth Choir treated me to a performance. The strength and clarity of their voices remain unforgettable. Since then, I am immensely grateful for many opportunities to build golden bridges of culture, education, and friendship with your country.

I have engaged in diverse and highly meaningful discussions with Professor Axinia D. Djourova, former director of the Center for Slavonic-Byzantine Studies, who is profoundly learned in the spiritual culture of the Bulgarian people. Our dialogues, which covered a wide field including language, music, art, and literature and the possibilities of world religion, have been published in both Bulgarian and Japanese as *The Beauty of a Lion’s Heart*, or *Utsukushiki Shishi no Tamashii*. Professor Djourova has kindly donated valuable books to Soka University. I should like to take this opportunity to thank her again.

The philosophy expressed in the Mahayana Buddhist scripture known as the Flower Garland Sutra employs the metaphor of Indra’s Net to describe human civilization as it should be.

The palace of the deity Shakra (also Indra) is surrounded by a magnificent net of jewels known as Indra's Net with a gleaming jewel attached to each of its infinite number of knots. While flashing its own individual brilliance and color in all directions, each of these gems reacts with each of the others to create a diverse, new radiance in the magnificent totality of the net.

This metaphorically expresses a state of creative, reforming coexistence in which all members depend on and assist all others. This is the essence of the Buddhist doctrine of dependent origination.

Each of the gems at each knot could be said to represent the spiritual culture of an ethnic group. In such a case, each culture or civilization emits its own distinctive ray of light into the world. The essential nature of inter-civilizational and intercultural dialogue is to enable these rays to intensify each other in a symbiosis that increases creativity for the sake of human peace.

The philosophy of the Lotus Sutra, the paramount Mahayana scripture, explains the idea of the symbiosis of all things in terms of the parable of the three kinds of medicinal herbs and the two kinds of trees: "All these plants and trees grow in the same earth and are moistened by the same rain; each has its differences and particulars."<sup>1</sup> This passage describes an image of fertile symbiosis in which each of the various trees and herbs flourishing in the earth and blessed with the falling rain manifests its own characteristics and bears its own kind of flowers and fruit.

Humanity must strive for a world image of diverse cultures and civilizations flourishing together in keeping with the universal rhythm, just as a diversity of floral colors and forms makes a garden lovely.

Located on the Balkan Peninsula, long a place where Eastern and Western civilizations have met, Bulgaria has developed a distinctive spiritual culture making the primitive Bulgarian Varna culture flourish, and reflecting and combining the influences of Slavic culture and Eastern Orthodox Christian Byzantine civilization. Today it is coming into contact with the material civilization of the West as well.

Located in the Far East, Japan, too, has developed a distinctive culture combining indigenous Shinto, Buddhist—especially Mahayana Buddhist—Confucian, and Daoist elements introduced from China by way of the Korean Peninsula. Like Bulgaria, today Japan, too, is incorporating elements of Western material civilization.

This symposium represents a dialogue between two great cultures outside the Western sphere and the scientific technology it has generated: the civilization of the Slavs and of Eastern Christianity and

that of Mahayana Buddhism.

Professor Djourova concluded her postscript to our dialogue with the statement that the new world is not unipolar. She hoped that the new world would be founded on tolerance and the cultural traditions and spiritual values of each country and each individual. I agree with her. In the two great cultural spheres represented in this symposium, tolerance for other cultures and the philosophy of symbiosis with the world of nature are very much alive. Furthermore, both civilizations have a history of cultivating the good: the philanthropy, wisdom, courage, endurance, trust, and hope that generate rich spirituality and morality. I am confident that, while applying their spirituality in the name of peaceful coexistence and adopting elements of Western material civilization, Japanese and Bulgarian cultures can play a major role in creating a global civilization radiant with the best of human nature.

I should like to conclude my remarks with sincere prayers for the continued flourishing of Sofia University and the Center for Slavonic-Byzantine Studies and for the good health and vigor of Rector Ivan Ilchev and of everyone taking part in this symposium.

#### NOTE

<sup>1</sup> *The Lotus Sutra and Its Opening and Closing Sutras*, translated by Burton Watson (Tokyo: Soka Gakkai, 2009), p. 135.