

**Recollections With Leading World Figures By Daisaku Ikeda**  
**Francisco J. Delich — Former Rector of the National University**  
**of Córdoba, Argentina**

WHAT is an important prerequisite for happiness? I would have to say that it is “to be without regrets.”

Many of you may not be very familiar with the Argentine city of Córdoba. It appears in the famous children’s story “The Heart of a Boy” by Edmondo De Amicis (1846–1908). In the story, Marco, a 13-year-old Italian boy, crosses the Atlantic to find his mother who has gone to Argentina in search of work and has not been heard from for some time.

The monthlong sea voyage is a lonely and trying experience for the boy. When he arrives at last in the Argentine capital of Buenos Aires and thinks he will finally be able to meet his mother, he is told that she has gone to Córdoba, a city more than 400 miles further away. Though at first he is dismayed, he urges himself to continue on his journey and sets out up the La Plata River. In spite of many hardships — weariness, hunger and fear as well as the cold-hearted indifference of the adults around him — he presses on, driven by the hope of finding his mother.

Arriving in Córdoba, and learning his mother was not there, he said to himself: “I’ve come this far. I must keep going!” It is only after he has traveled yet another 400 miles or more and arrived in a tiny village in the foothills of the Andes that his hope is finally answered. There, his mother, who has lost all hope and the will to live, is lying gravely ill. Suddenly and unexpectedly, she is reunited with her son. As she embraces Marco in her arms, the will to live is rekindled within her.

“My parents immigrated to Argentina. They were poor farmers who originally came from Croatia,” related Dr. Francisco J. Delich, then rector of the National University of Córdoba, at our meeting in Nagoya in April 1994. The sky visible through the window was dyed with the lovely colors of the sunset.

Dr. Delich is the youngest of eight children. “My parents always worked very hard. The sweat of their brows taught us the rigors as well as the nobility of hard physical labor. My mother was illiterate, but she had a wisdom all her own,” he said.

His mother taught him two things: first, it is wrong to make money without working for it; and second, it is important to show respect for others by never telling lies. Such ethics were once taught in Japan, but today we are confronted by the bold-faced lies of our national leaders. How sad that we have become a nation without a soul!

Dr. Delich has heeded his mother’s words; he exemplifies true decency and integrity as a human being. His battle with the leaders of the military dictatorship in his country is also well known.

In early 1976, Dr. Delich was in Peru, having been driven into exile from his homeland; he had been forced out of his teaching post at the National University of Córdoba. Argentina had seen an alternate succession of military and democratic rule since World War II, and at that time, democratic rule was again in jeopardy as the country headed rapidly toward a state of totalitarianism.

In fact, during this period, South America came to be known as “the continent of military dictatorships.” Many scholars were robbed of their liberty and forced into exile from their homelands as a result.

Despite the volatile situation in Argentina, Dr. Delich decided to return because he had been elected to serve as chairman of the Latin American Sociologists Committee, based in Buenos Aires. The purpose of the committee was to lend various forms of assistance to exiled scholars, including providing refuge, and protection, and financial support for studies at academic institutions abroad. It was a noble purpose, and because of that, dangerous work.

IN Argentina, meanwhile, extremist factions on both sides were engaged in terrorist activities, and society was in an uproar. Yet terrorism has never changed the course of history. “I had a wife and four small children. What would happen if we returned? Of course, I was afraid,” he admitted. “But I was elected by the others, who had faith in me. I couldn’t let them down.”

After Dr. Delich returned, the situation in Argentina took a turn for the worse. In March 1976, the military staged a coup for the alleged purpose of “reestablishing the nation.” Under the military dictatorship, people’s freedoms were completely stifled. “Thinking was forbidden, speaking out was forbidden. How painful this is for human beings!” said Dr. Delich recalling those days. “I think that Soka Gakkai members, who have also been oppressed by military authorities in the past, understand what I am talking about.”

When a military government was formally installed, Dr. Delich lost no time in springing into action. The committee wrote letters to intellectuals all over the world, some 2,000 in all. One letter, which was reprinted in an international magazine, informed people what was going on in Argentina. Soon the committee’s office was raided, and Dr. Delich was placed under constant surveillance by the military.

“Once the oppression began, people were revealed to be one of two sorts. The first opposed the oppression but remained silent. The second opposed the oppression and fought back by speaking out. I chose to join the latter. Why? Because it is the right way to live,” explained Dr. Delich. When one believes something is right, one acts to realize it. This Dr. Delich learned from the writings of the French author André Malraux (1901–76). When he was only 19, the Argentine scholar was deeply moved upon reading the novel *La Condition Humaine* (Man’s Fate). He so admired Malraux that he decided to go to Paris to study. He is familiar with the fact that I had held a dialogue with André Malraux shortly before the latter’s death.<sup>1</sup>

As human beings, we are faced with constant decisions: Which of the many paths before us should we take in order to approach true humanity? Which road will enable us to feel proud of ourselves and to become better, more noble individuals? We create the distinctive shape of our lives from the infinite choices we make each day. As human beings, we must keep advancing toward the goal of true humanity. The moment we stop moving forward is the moment when that which is most human within us dies. Moreover, when an individual seeks to

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become more than a human being and succumbs to the lust for power in order to achieve this, he or she falls into a state that is less than human.

The early period of the military dictatorship, which lasted from 1976 to 1983, saw a reign of terror that was called the “dirty war.” Not only those who opposed the military regime, but many others who had never been politically active were taken into custody, accused of being terrorists. Military authorities suddenly burst into people’s homes and led them away at gunpoint. Even if the police were called, they didn’t come. The victims were taken to secret prisons where they were tortured and killed. Some were thrown, still alive, from airplanes. Some high school students were killed simply for seeking the introduction of student-discount train passes. The desaparecidos (“those who disappeared”), as they were known, numbered from 20- to 30,000.

THE Plaza de Mayo lies in the very heart of Buenos Aires. Even after the establishment of democratic rule in Argentina, several hundred middle-aged women with white scarves wrapped around their heads would gather there and demonstrate every week. They demanded that their missing sons, daughters and husbands be returned to them alive. They called on the government to let them know, at the very least, what had become of their loved ones. They hung pictures of their children around their necks and wore the names of their missing loved ones embroidered in blue thread on their scarves. No matter how fierce the rain or cold the wind, “the Mothers of the Plaza de Mayo,” as they came to be known, persisted in their protest.

I saw the Plaza de Mayo from the window of a car as I was driving through Buenos Aires in February 1993. It smote my heart when I imagined those desperate mothers demonstrating there. During the military dictatorship, the authorities jeered at them, calling them crazy women. But who was really crazy? And certain business people in Japan made statements to the effect that Argentina would be better run under the dictatorship, facilitating economic recovery so that the country could pay back its loans from Japan. How can people be so unaware of their own inhumanity?

“The seven years under the dictatorship were very long,” says Dr. Delich. “Once democratic rule had been restored, many who had kept silent came forth with all sorts of excuses. I have no wish to criticize them or paint myself a hero. But can they be satisfied with how they acted? Fortunately, I can. I stuck to my convictions. That is why I am happy.”

The process of democratization proceeded under President Raúl Alfonsín, and when I spoke with him in July 1986 during his trip to Japan, I congratulated him on this.

DR. Delich was soon elected rector of the National University of Buenos Aires and set about reestablishing the university. While rector, he invited me there. Two years later, he was appointed Vice Minister of Education, and he worked to make education at all levels throughout Argentina more democratic. Having been driven from the lectern by the government in the past, Dr. Delich is very deeply

and personally aware of the evil of allowing government to control education. He wants to build a society in which political leaders respect educators. Education, he believes, is the very foundation of the nation.

From 1989, he served twice, for a total period of six years, as rector of Córdoba National University. His most earnest wish is that there will never be another tragic time when mothers and their children are rent asunder, when people are persecuted for their beliefs and the entire nation divided. It is his belief that, in order to forge ties among people, we must promote a “new humanism” that will stimulate and encourage the humanity in each individual.

Since we were unable to arrange our schedules for my acceptance of an honorary de-gree from the National University of Córdoba with a trip to Córdoba, the ceremony was held in the suburbs of Buenos Aires, and Dr. Delich returned specially from Bologna, Italy, where he was visiting at the time, to take part. The summer sunlight of the southern hemisphere shone down brilliantly on the young people gathered for the conferral ceremony. What should our generation leave to these young people?

Dr. Delich recounts how one of his children asked him why he chose to fight the dictatorship. His reply was, “It was the right thing to do.”

We can leave future generations no more valuable legacy than the spirit to fight for what is right.

The words of a Chinese ex-change student in Japan come back to me painfully: “It appears to me that the Japanese are always only concerned with what is in their own interest. Japanese leaders seem to be lacking any fundamental sense of ethics, of what is right and wrong.”

To have no regrets because one has done what is right — surely this is the prerequisite for happiness and, at the same time, a precondition for genuine humanity. It is also an essential requirement for Japan’s internationalization and for the twenty-first century.

The world and history are calling out to Japan: Liberate yourselves from materialism, free yourselves from lies! □

1. André Malraux and Daisaku Ikeda, *Ningen Kakumei to Ningen no Joken* (Changes Within: Human Revolution vs. the Human Condition) (Tokyo: Ushio Publishing Company, 1976). Currently published in Japanese only.