

## Religion and Ecology Series Offers a Unique Opportunity

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Conferences at the Boston Research Center generate passionate dialogue between audiences and speakers and frequently provide to both an opportunity to transform words and thoughts into action.

Recently, at the first of a three-part conference on religion and ecology, Steven C. Rockefeller of Middlebury College invited everyone to participate in the "worldwide process of consultation that will lead to international agreement on an Earth Charter by the year 2000."

"Civil society at large" is the principal audience for the Earth Charter, Mr. Rockefeller explained, as he read from a draft approved by the Earth Charter Commission. The drafting process will continue until March 1998 and the final version is expected in June 1998. Worldwide support will be sought from then until the year 2000, when the charter will be presented to the United Nations for approval.

SGI President Ikeda's 1997 peace proposal, which advocates an Earth Charter, had just become available to the research center, and copies were available on the information table. Mr. Rockefeller's presentation and the SGI president's proposal seemed to many in the audience to be mutually reinforcing.

The research center's religion and ecology series attracted new and diverse audiences. Over three weekends, practitioners and observers of the world's major religions examined the role religion must play if environmental disaster is to be prevented.

The audiences came to learn and to share.

"Our guests," said Virginia Straus, executive director of the research center, "by their presence here and their enthusiasm, showed that many people are seeking to unite with one another on the bases of values and beliefs that have relevance to contemporary problems.

"Over and over they indicated how they enjoyed the combination of good scholarship and knowledge coupled with a spiritual and a personal perspective," she said.

"This pleased me very much because this is exactly the kind of dialogue President Ikeda founded the center to foster — dialogue that creates a sense of solidarity among networks of global citizens," she continued.

The first conference focused on Judaism, Christianity and Islam; the second on Hinduism, Buddhism and Jainism; and the third on Pacific indigenous traditions, Chinese religions and Shinto.

An observation by Donald Swearer of Swarthmore College was especially well received during the second conference.

Emphasizing the spiritual aspect of Eastern religions and using Shakyamuni Buddha's life as an example, the speaker declared that humankind must overcome the three poisons of greed, hatred and delusion, the real causes of the ecological havoc being wreaked on the Earth.

Co-convenors of the conference were John Berthrong, Boston University School of Theology, and Mary Evelyn Tucker, Department of Religion, Bucknell University.

There were 12 supporting organizations for this series, most local, but some from as far away as New Rochelle, N.Y., and Washington, D.C.

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