

Washington DC Unification Church's Cooperative Consciousness series

Michael Beard
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The Ginseng Tea House, shown here soon after its opening last September, has provided a forum for stimulating spiritual discussions in Washington

The newest project of the Washington D.C. Unification Church is the initiation of the "Cooperative Consciousness" series at the Ginseng Tea House. Inaugurated on February 13, 1974, the weekly programs provide a forum for spiritual groups active in the Washington area.

Unification Church director Michael Beard explained, "we had been looking for ways to draw many people and make contacts with spiritual leaders in the area. The idea for the series developed from these concerns. It has been a wonderful way to keep informed on events in the spiritual community." Of the eleven programs so far, Mr. Beard considered the best received presentations to be those of George Stone of the Unity School of Christianity and Stanwood Kalb of the Baha'i faith. From 20 to 25 guests attend each of the Wednesday evening programs. After a presentation of an hour or hour and a half, a stimulating discussion always emerges around Ginseng tea and light snacks.

Such discussions have led to interest in the weekend seminars sponsored by the Washington Unification Church. Church members follow up on the people they have met and two or three people attend each weekend seminar because of the Wednesday night series. The Unification Church in Berkeley, California, holds a somewhat similar series of weekly program.

With the title "Spiritual Pioneering/1974," it has featured Dr. Stillson Judah of the Berkeley Graduate Theological Union speaking on "Religion and Cultural Change, a Design for a Program," and Dr. Anthony Ash of George Pepperdine University speaking on "New Life from an Ancient Volume." A buffet dinner precedes each program.

One result of the Washington, D.C. "Cooperative Consciousness" series has been to build a working relationship between leaders of the various spiritual groups. A spiritual festival on the grounds of the Washington monument this summer is now in the planning stages. This is to be jointly sponsored by several spiritual groups in the area.

Michael Beard has received many favorable comments on the program. "No one else has ever sponsored such a program in this area," one guest told him. "I am so glad you have begun." The eleventh in the "Cooperative Consciousness" discussion series sponsored by the Washington, D.C. Unification Church featured Mr. Stanwood Kalb, a 92-year-old spokesman for the Baha'i Faith.

"All who are working for the spiritual development of mankind are brothers," he began. "No movement has a monopoly of love and, spiritual development. Agha Khan said that a truly spiritual person will recognize another."

His talk was characterized by informality, anecdotes of experiences with religious leaders, and studied care not to say anything too controversial or alienating. As he had told Norman Vincent Peale, "We are only working for what you are working-the Kingdom of Heaven on earth. It's an open field; it's not fenced in."

In a perspective on man's development, Mr. Kalb described three stages: man's physical perfection, which occurred some 50,000 years ago according to anthropologists; intellectual perfection, which has to a large degree been acquired; and spiritual development, which has nowhere been reached. To the late Mr.

Abraham Vereide, a zealous organizer of prayer breakfasts for government and business leaders, he asked the following question: "If by 1900 about 98 percent of the world was religionized, what percent were spiritualized?" Mr. Vereide considered 5 percent a generous estimate.

Mr. Kalb noted that Jesus came to spiritualize humanity, but it wasn't ready. Why wasn't it ready?

And is the world ready now? He considered illiteracy among the people and the division of the church into laity and priests to be hindrances to spiritual development, but maintained that men are more sensitive now to such things as war and violence. His definition of the spirituality that man is striving for was two-fold: God-consciousness and God motivation.

He explained this by noting that the Apostle Paul reduced religion to simple terms -- closeness to God, death to the ego, and permeation by the divine.

The next project Mr. Kalb would like to complete is a scientific study of spiritual values in daily life. Earlier in his life, he had established a reputation as an authority on genius. He organized special schools and edited a magazine on progressive education.

He seldom uses the term God in his conversation; he prefers "cosmic mind," because today's youth are likely to throw out any concept of God. He does make it clear, however, that he does believe in God as a being of love.

People have asked Mr. Kalb how to receive spiritual guidance. He gives a little formula: "If any two alternatives are equal, then stop agonizing, and kill all your desire for either A or B. Pray. As time passes, if every time you think of A, you are disturbed in ~ our solar plexus, and every time you think of B you are happy there, you can be sure B is the right course. I maintain that the cosmic mind is always ready to guide us."

In discussing Bahauallah, Dr. Kalb seemed to stress a confidence in him based on the validity of his prophecies. "Bahauallah brought a plan for a new world order, but when he laid down those rules 100 years ago, they were not part of the world's consciousness. When Bahauallah spoke of peace, war appeared to be a natural way to solve problems. Great Britain built up its empire not by writing letters inviting countries to join a confederation, but through its army and navy. Bismarck began with scores of German principalities and won wars against Denmark, Austria, and France."

Bahauallah predicted 100 years ago that wars would not continue as a matter of course, because the consequences of wars would be so great that people would fear too much to fight each other.

He had also predicted the emergence of "welfare states" and the growing power of labor. It wasn't many years ago that President Hoover said it was not in the province of the government to give food and shelter to its people. However, his successor, Franklin Roosevelt created jobs and programs for the unemployed and poor.

Today, there is no national leader who would dare say that whether people have food to eat and shelter is of no concern to the government. "Religion is not to be a destructive force," he stated, "but a development process." He implied that the Baha'i faith culminates the development process.

He closed with the admonition of Abdul Baba, who told him in 1912, "Be on fire with the love of God. Be on fire with the love of God. Be on fire with the love of God."