



STATEMENT DN092

Infighting, Division, and Scandal Afflicting Nichiren Shoshu Buddhists

Adherents of the worldwide Nichiren Shoshu Buddhist sect are embroiled in a growing, major dispute that could result in its breakup.

At press time the situation was clearly worsening as Nichiren Shoshu high priest Nikken Abe ordered the Soka Gakkai, the lay arm of Nichiren Shoshu to disband. But according to the November 11, 1991 *World Tribune*, Soka Gakkai president Einosuke Akiya has refused the November 8 order on the grounds that the Soka Gakkai is an independent religious organization. (The *World Tribune* is a newspaper published by the U.S. branch of the Soka Gakkai.)

The disbandment order was the second major blow against the organization by its priesthood in less than a year. According to the September 1991 *Cult Awareness Network News*, in December 1 990 the priesthood stripped Soka Gakkai leader Diasaku Ikeda of his title as *sokoto*, head of all Nichiren lay believers.

Since Ikeda's picture was prominently placed near Nichiren Shoshu altars worldwide, the move stunned many.

In some ways this rift between the priestly side of the sect (as represented by the Nichiren Shoshu high priest) and the secular side (as represented by Ikeda, who is also a powerful political leader in Japan who helped spawn Komeito, "Clean Government," the second largest opposition party in Japan) couldn't have come at a worse time for followers of Nichiren Shoshu Buddhism. In Japan within the past year and a half the Soka Gakkai group has been tarnished by a \$4.5 million tax evasion case, a major stock market scandal, and a scandal involving alleged missing funds resulting from the religious group's questionable acquisition of two Renoir paintings that also implicated the Mitsubishi Corporation (see the September 8, 1991 *Los Angeles Times*).

Until these scandals, which appear to have hurt Nichiren Buddhism in Japan, the movement was considered one of the fastest growing religions. But despite this, there are few outward indications that the squabbling has hurt the movement in North America. Here the sect is still in an expansion mode as it is attempting to build large educational and conference facilities in Southern California's Santa Monica Mountains and in Toronto, Canada. In both locations fierce community opposition to the sect — which is operating under the name SGI-USA (standing for Soka Gakkai-USA) in America and under the name NSC in Canada (standing for Nichiren Shoshu Canada) — is growing due to concerns that the group may be a cult.

According to the November 17, 1991 *Los Angeles Times*, while the group is credited with "many good works in Japan," many critics "say it functions like a cult, with promises of material rewards and happiness in exchange for unquestioning allegiance."

The article states that certain cult-watching groups, including the Cult Awareness Network, charge that it is "a dangerous cult because of its charismatic leader — Ikeda — its coercive recruitment techniques, and its emphasis on chanting for material gain, which the network describes as brainwashing." In addition, Canadian opposition to the group began following an episode of "Inside Edition," a tabloid television show, which accused it of practicing mind control.

According to the 1989 Winter/Spring CHRISTIAN RESEARCH JOURNAL, U.S. membership in the group was estimated at a half million, while worldwide membership of the Nichiren Buddhist movement was at 17 million (including 10 million in Japan) in over 117 countries.

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The movement was traced to a thirteenth-century Japanese monk named Nichiren Daishonin who claimed to have found the "True Buddhism." The JOURNAL's article, quoting the sect's own literature, also added that the group believes that the first Buddha, Shajyamuni, who lived in India 3000 years ago, predicted that his own teachings would lose their "validity and fall into confusion." He predicted that "a great teacher would propagate the correct form of Buddhism for the new age....[and] Nichiren Daishonin...fulfilled all the conditions of the prophecy."

The sect claims that in A.D. 1253 Daishonin began chanting NAM-MYOHO-RENGEKYO (which is said to mean "glory to the lotus sutra of the mystical law'), and that was the date the group started.

But Nichiren Shoshu did not develop into a significant movement until the Soka Gakkai was formed as a lay branch in the 1930s. Now the Soka Gakkai is reported to be the largest single religious group in Japan.

Since Ikeda took over as president in 1960 the Soka Gakkai has flourished. He has penned more than 200 books promoting his religious philosophy that he believes will someday shape the destiny of the world. And he has hobnobbed the globe making friends and gaining influence with many leaders. Soka Gakkai actually means "value creation society."

Nichiren Shoshu is quite a bit different than most forms of Buddhism in that it is a religion that attracts many upwardly mobile people. Other forms of Buddhism such as Zen, do not emphasize the material world. One cult watcher quoted in the JOURNAL article described it as a Buddhist "name it and claim it movement in which members chant for better jobs and material blessings. Most adherents chant to an altar in the morning and evening in which the *Gohonzon*, a scroll of sacred writings contained in a black box, is kept.

Since 1967 the Soka Gakkai's U.S. headquarters has been located in Santa Monica, California, where nearby in a lush mountain meadow the sect now operates a 100-student branch of Soka University (other branches are in Japan and France). But in recent days the university has ignited controversy as it has announced plans to expand the 580-acre campus to a full-blown liberal arts college for 4400 students, according to the September 8, 1991 *Los Angeles Times*. Besides the concerns of many in the community over the group's aggressive recruitment techniques, environmental groups are opposing the expansion.

In Japan the Soka Gakkai paid \$4.5 million in back taxes in May 1991 after a government investigation determined that it had underreported income earned from the graveyard business it operated with the Mitsubishi Corporation. The venture, which flourished as the result of selling and renting graveyard sites near Mount Fuji, attracted scrutiny about two years ago when \$1.2 million in cash was found in a safe accidentally sent to a scrapyard.

Soka Gakkais reputation was also tarnished by Japan's stock market scandal when it received about \$3.3 million from brokerage houses to compensate for its losses, while many other Japanese investors who lost millions received nothing.

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