

QUESTIONS AND ANSWERS ON THE TEMPLE ISSUE

What Is the Temple Issue?

The SGI-USA has just published a new pamphlet, Questions and Answers on the Temple Issue, which seeks to provide succinct information on this important issue. It will soon be available free of charge through the organization. Over the next several weeks, the study page will reprint each of the questions from the pamphlet as a service to our readers.

Q: What is the temple issue?

A: While the problem actually has roots that extend far back before the inception of the Soka Gakkai, tracing them meaningfully would require studying the history of Nichiren Shoshu, the “Fuji School” of Nichiren Buddhism. This would also involve an examination of the conditions of feudal Japanese society over the centuries that led to attitudes and orientations among Buddhist priests toward the laity that could best be described as a “lord–vassal” mentality.

More immediately, however, in late 1990, it became clear that the priesthood of Nichiren Shoshu — which the Soka Gakkai always had supported — had been conspiring to either take control over or disband the SGI organization. This course of action, dubbed by its authors Operation C (“C” meaning to “cut”), was inspired and led by the current high priest of Nichiren Shoshu, Nikken Abe.

It began with a presentation of nine written questions to Soka Gakkai leaders, accusing SGI President Ikeda of, among other things, criticizing the high priest. The temple based its questions on an inaccurate transcription of a surreptitiously obtained tape recording of a speech by the SGI president. Admitting later to the inaccuracy of their transcription, and the dubious origin of the tape, the temple later withdrew four of its questions.

Others were taken completely out of context and grossly misinterpreted. Among them, for example, was a criticism of President Ikeda’s suggestion that the choral part of Beethoven’s “Ode to Joy” be sung at a leaders meeting. The temple claimed that because the lyrics by Friedrich Schiller referred to Christianity, the Gakkai would therefore be promoting non-Buddhist teachings. This criticism was put forward despite it being widely acknowledged that Schiller’s poem is in honor of the highest potential of the human spirit; a celebration of reason, inner joy and human freedom.

This prompted the Soka Gakkai to call for a face-to-face dialogue to resolve any misunderstandings or misconceptions. The priesthood, however, adamantly refused any discussion and demanded a written response to its accusations within one week.

The priesthood’s stance, the triviality of the accusations, along with other information that came to light, made it very clear that the tape was no more than a pretext to justify actions that the priesthood had already planned. The Gakkai, since its request for dialogue had been denied, submitted its own questions to the priesthood, inquiring into its motives and actions.

The priesthood followed with a series of one-sided measures, including revising Nichiren Shoshu’s bylaws to effectively dismiss President Ikeda from the position of chief lay representative to the head temple. It also added provisions in those bylaws for punitive action to be taken against any practitioner who criticized the high priest, verbally or in writing, although it didn’t specify what was meant by “criticism.”

Just prior to this announcement, Nikken Abe had met in secret with the reporter Isao

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Dan, a Japanese tabloid-style journalist known to have written groundless and inflammatory articles about the Soka Gakkai. It was clear from this that Nikken was orchestrating an attack on the Gakkai that included attacks by outside media.

The priesthood's course of action against the Soka Gakkai and SGI culminated in an "order to disband" and, finally, notification of excommunication in November 1991.

The Soka Gakkai, having revealed the true nature and character of Nikken Abe, has since demanded that he resign. In response to the lies propagated by the priesthood, the Gakkai has been trying continually to shed light on the truth of the matter. Since the outbreak of this issue, many events have transpired and much information has come to light, all of which have underscored the SGI's fundamental conviction that these attacks occurred because it is practicing Buddhism in accord with Nichiren Daishonin's spirit, dedicated to accomplishing kosen-rufu.

One in a series

Key Points:

- **The issue has roots in the temple's history, in a "feudalistic attitude" toward lay believers that is particular to Japanese culture and history.**
- **It revealed itself in actions by Nichiren Shoshu and Nikken Abe, its high priest, to cut off and disband the Soka Gakkai in a plan called Operation C.**
- **To further their aim, the temple conspired with negative media contacts to defame the Gakkai and its president.**
- **After denying repeated requests for dialogue, the Nichiren Shoshu priesthood ultimately excommunicated the entire Soka Gakkai organization and its leadership.**
- **The SGI has called for Nikken's resignation and has been educating people on the reality of Nichiren Shoshu and its intentions.**

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