

EDITORIAL: Excommunicating the Excommunicated

Excommunicating them the first time didn't work. Let's try it again." This must be what Nikken and priests supporting him were thinking when they announced Oct. 1 that all Soka Gakkai members in Japan have until Nov. 30 to leave the Soka Gakkai — or else lose their "believer-status within Nichiren Shoshu."

This was a bit bewildering to the millions of Gakkai members who remember Nichiren Shoshu excommunicating them six years ago. Although the priesthood has argued that only the organization was excommunicated on Nov. 28, 1991, not the individual members, this technicality has never made much sense to Gakkai members. After all, the Soka Gakkai organization *is* its members. You can't separate the two.

Nov. 28, which SGI President Ikeda has called Soka Gakkai Independence Day, commemorates the excommunication of 10 million people by 1,000 Nichiren Shoshu priests.

So why would the priests try to scare members with excommunication again? The Oct. 3 issue of the *Seikyo Shimbun*, the Soka Gakkai's daily newspaper, suggested a couple reasons: First, Nikken needs to increase temple members if he's to make his goal of 100,000 participants for a pilgrimage next March.

Second, he's using any means possible to shift attention away from the Seattle Incident trial. In fact, Nikken announced this new "get-the-Gakkai" campaign to the priesthood at an emergency meeting on Sept. 29, the same day the Tokyo District Court ordered him to testify about the incident (see Oct. 10 *World Tribune*, p. 1). Nichiren Shoshu quickly tried to downplay the significance of the order. A Sept. 30 notice said that Nikken had "graciously expressed his intent to positively respond to the judge's request," but this was not a "request" — it was a court order.

Nikken may have many reasons for initiating this new attack on the Gakkai, but he has only one strategy: to employ scare tactics. "It is indeed foolish to close off your way to enlightenment by continuing your slanderous association with the Soka Gakkai..." the temple's Administrative Office declared Oct. 1. "Now is the time for you to sever your evil ties with the Soka Gakkai and carry out your pure faith as lay believers of Nichiren Shoshu." Such fire and brimstone is bound to backfire.

Nikken believes members would be willing to go through a humiliating ordeal to leave the Gakkai and join him. A Sept. 30 memo from the Administrative Office explains the step-by-step process of how priests intend to divide any members who switch to the temple into two camps: Those who have not received the Nichikan-transcribed Gohonzon from the SGI and those who have.

Those who haven't must sign a pledge that reads in part, "I deeply repent of the sin of having joined slanderous people and offer my sincerest apology." Those who have, after surrendering the Nichikan-transcribed Gohonzon to the temple, must sign a similar pledge, but "the sin of having joined slanderous people" is replaced by "the slander of possessing the 'counterfeit' Gohonzon." They must also submit to what the temple is calling a ceremony of admonishment before being allowed back on the temple roster.

Both pledge forms also contain the ominous provision that "in the event that I should run counter to the above pledge, I will accept whatever action you wish to take against me."

It's unclear yet how temples in America will respond to Nichiren Shoshu's new direction in Japan, but already the Oct. 1 notice has been translated into English and posted on the Internet. Some Japanese members here who have ties to temples in Japan have received the

notice in the mail.

No doubt, in America, too, there will be a renewed effort to try to scare people with the word *excommunication*. But as SGI President Ikeda commented in 1991, just after the first excommunication: "I can't for the life of me figure out what *excommunication* has to do with Buddhism. The word itself appears nowhere in the Goshō or the Lotus Sutra." Indeed, Nichiren Shōshū's plan to excommunicate the Gakkai a second time is a compelling reconfirmation that it no longer has anything to do with Buddhism.

Fear is born of ignorance, so the more we study and discuss the Daishōnin's Buddhism and the essence of this temple issue with one another, the less we will be influenced by such empty threats of damnation. SGI-USA members who know that happiness comes from devotion to their faith and not to priestly authority will see the meaninglessness of this latest excommunication.

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