MAKING SOKA GAKKAI TRULY INTERNATIONAL

DR. HOWARD HUNTER, CHAIRMAN OF THE DEPARTMENT OF RELIGION OF TUFTS UNIVERSITY, HAS WRITTEN WIDELY ON THE SOCIAL ROLE OF RELIGIOUS BELIEF. HE OFFERS SOME CONCLUSIONS TO HIS FIRSTHAND OBSERVATIONS OF SGI IN THE FOLLOWING ARTICLE.

THE growth of Soka Gakkai to the point where it has communities established in more than 120 countries has been one of the most interesting developments I have noted throughout my nearly forty years of teaching in the field of world religions. It was my good fortune to become familiar with Soka Gakkai when it was known as Nichiren Shoshu of America and was establishing its foundations in the United States. In subsequent years I had opportunities to attend several events in the United States and in Japan sponsored by Soka Gakkai. My interest in the organization deepened and I found it especially interesting to see its rapid global expansion. Thus, when the opportunity presented itself for me to investigate the Soka Gakkai within the limits of a sabbatical semester away from my university, I was eager to see for myself how it is making the notable transition from a distinctively Japanese religious movement to become Soka Gakkai International (SGI).

This article presents some conclusions to which my initial explorations have led, after I conducted individual and group interviews in SGI centers in India, England, Mexico and Italy. I have reported my observations of my visits in a series of brief articles in the *SGI Quarterly* during the past year and in *Living Buddhism* (January–April 1997). My research into the SGI communities in these widely differing cultures has by no means been detailed and exhaustive in the conventional scholarly manner. Instead, I conducted intensive person-to-person interviews with individual members and leaders. I was especially interested in questions having to do with the reasons for individual members joining and remaining with SGI, with the experiences they were having, their sense of relationship with the original Soka Gakkai organization in Japan and its leadership, and their views on the future of SGI as an independent religious movement following its separation from the Nichiren Shoshu priesthood in Japan. The central issue underlying all of my inquiries was this: Is SGI a truly multinational religious organization or is it a Japanese religion exporting itself to many different lands, comparable to Sony, Fuji and Honda?

WITH the separation of the Soka Gakkai lay movement, from its ties to the Nichiren Shoshu head temple—which claimed possession of exclusive rights to not only the property but also the philosophy and practice of the Buddhism of Nichiren—Soka Gakkai was presented with an extraordinary challenge and quite inescapable opportunity. It had to determine what its appropriate response should be as it faced an uncharted future. One might suppose that one of the options would have been to dissolve the lay movement and to express allegiance to the priesthood and its leaders. This clearly was impossible given the depth of Soka Gakkai's fundamental theological and structural alienation from the priesthood which culminated in the excommunication edict. A far different option was to acknowledge that now Soka Gakkai was presented the freedom—indeed the clear necessity—to articulate for itself a new understanding of its mission. Fortunately for Soka Gakkai, it had within its organization precisely those types of

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leaders who possess a worldwide vision of a universal humanistic movement embracing but also transcending national identities. This movement, they saw, could be religious in its expression, philosophical in its rationale, and activist in promoting means of achieving peace, education and culture.

Any authoritative assessment of SGI today would require a vastly expanded base of research as well as wider experience in many more SGI communities. Though this article appears in a respected scholarly journal, it can only be a description of my necessarily limited experience. Acknowledging the formidable limitations of my research, it remains clear that given the lack of information about SGI among the public and given the misinformation frequently encountered from the media, there is considerable value in a friendly but unbiased account of actual experience with SGI members and groups in widely differing countries. Based on that experience, I am able to summarize my current conclusions with the hope that future research of a similar sort will be possible.

Rather than to begin with a review of the experiences that have led to my current and tentative conclusions regarding SGI's internationalism, I would like to share with the reader two events that affected my opinion of the value of my own project. While I thought that a firsthand examination of the efforts of SGI in several different countries was worthwhile, I also thought it not especially urgent. The first event to change my mind occurred in Bombay at the home of the president of the local chamber of commerce, a prominent businessman whose son attends my university. I told him why I was in Bombay, and when he heard that I was visiting SGI centers he proceeded to procure for me a copy of *Time Magazine International*, which devoted a lead article to SGI in Japan and termed SGI President Ikeda the most important person in Japan. Then its contents conveyed at best an ambivalent and at worse a scurrilous portrait of SGI and its leader. It cited extremely negative sources and gave examples of what it portrayed as embarrassing episodes in Soka Gakkai history in Japan. It emphasized the political movement of Soka Gakkai, Komeito, and related its role in past and current Japanese politics. I could not help comparing what I have experienced in my associations with SGI in the U.S.A. and Japan and what I was learning for myself in meetings with Indian SGI members with what I was reading about the problematic aspects of SGI in Japan. I began to see that my humble interviews might, if reported, convey a more balanced and certainly unambiguous and accurate picture of SGI as it develops its programs internationally.

THE second event was of a similar but perhaps even more dramatic sort. I had not been in India long before several people asked me whether I had seen a film from the British Broadcasting Corporation dealing with SGI and President Ikeda. I had not, but in Bangalore the opportunity came, and at least three times I was able to view a film that I found seriously flawed and deeply offensive. It is a film that has been shown repeatedly in India over a period of several months and even in the air by British Airways.

The film begins with a short review of the criminal activities of the pathologically dangerous leader of the infamous AUM cult, whose members poisoned the Tokyo subways and engaged in other terrorist acts in the name of their religion. Then the film devotes the largest part of its time to a presentation of SGI and President Ikeda. The film necessarily cannot reach a uniformly negative conclusion and ends on a note of ambivalence in its evaluation of the work of SGI and its leadership. The film did not suggest that SGI was another AUM cult, but the damage was done: an uninformed

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viewer—and practically all the viewers were uninformed—might easily conclude that the two religious groups were similar if not identical. Now I had a new zeal for my research: I would see for myself whether the SGI I had encountered had anything like the characteristics implied by the magazine article and the film. I was free to find out anything I wanted and not once did I receive anything but full cooperation in my pursuit of the facts about SGI.

It was not until I had returned from my visits abroad and had a few months to reflect on them that I found my thoughts returning to an observation that surprised me. I find it radical, quite possibly inappropriate, and maybe simply wrong, but it is an observation that may provoke worthwhile examination of a serious issue. Someone suggested that the SGI name be changed, since the present name conveys nothing outside its nation of origin. It requires interpretation and provides an instant focus on its being Japanese. He suggested the name, "International Buddhist Association." Perhaps discussions among the various national organizations as to the matter of the name would be productive. No harm would come of this. The good result would be to increase awareness that the many SGI groups in more than a hundred countries belong to a truly international movement that is encouraged, but not dominated, by the control of the Japanese central offices.

Both to satisfy my own curiosity and in light of prominent negative publicity regarding SGI, I persistently inquired from each of the people I interviewed about his or her view of the relationship between the national organization and its headquarters and leadership in Japan. In not one instance did I receive any indication of any sort that the national movement was controlled either explicitly or implicitly by Japanese authorities. Appreciation was often expressed for the encouragement that the various centers in other countries received from Tokyo-based officials and especially President Ikeda. But, uniformly, members rejected emphatically any notion that their participation in SGI is anything other than totally voluntary and a matter of independent choice. They found ridiculous the idea that SGI is in effect a series of Japanese clones. Even where the current leadership in several of the centers I visited is fortunate enough to include Japanese members, it is clear beyond question that the membership considers its organization distinctly national and indigenous. It has been very important for Japanese members and leaders to offer their experience and talents in the crucial period of structuring and building the organization; for this, the Japanese members and leaders are respected and highly valued.

AN illustrative case in which Japanese leadership has effectively combined the experience and skills of the homeland with the concerns of identifying with the local culture is that of Dr. Akashi Ouchi, originally from Japan but a naturalized Indian citizen for many years. Dr. Ouchi came to India as a college student and remained in India after completing his doctorate at Nehru University. While a practicing architect, he also contributed his talents toward creating a chapter of Bharat Soka Gakkai, or Indian Soka Gakkai in New Delhi. The depth of his lifelong commitment to India—he has become a citizen of India—and its cultural and religious traditions is beyond doubt. He retains his birthright identity as a person of Japanese origin. While the next generation of leadership of SGI in India is most likely to be of Indian origins, Dr. Ouchi admirably fulfills a unique role as a living bridge between Japan and India.

In order for SGI to be truly international, its leadership in the various countries will likely become totally indigenous or, as in the case of Dr. Ouchi, committed to the

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development of indigenous leaders and forms of expression. At every center I visited, I discovered that members were dedicated to the task of articulating the Buddhism of Nichiren in terms and actions familiar to their fellow nationals. The very future of SGI depends on the success of this effort to determine the values and practices in the local culture upon which SGI can identify and build. Thus, members of SGI in the several nations have the task not only of maintaining their own specific identity but also becoming, as it were, culture critics. They must become strategists in determining which cultural traditions are compatible with the goals of SGI and to work effectively within them. They must be tacticians as well, by determining the ways in which the distinctive teachings of the Buddhist tradition may be articulated effectively. These are extremely difficult tasks for any individual or organization, and it is likely that progress will necessarily be slow. At this stage most SGI centers outside of Japan are very young. They are only beginning to find their approaches to the task of establishing a distinct identity while ultimately working to become an influential part of the mainstream of their local culture.

Were contemporary SGI to look at the now severed historic roots of the Buddhism of Nichiren, it would see a tradition ill-prepared to face its current and future responsibilities. It would find a cloistered, traditionalist, authoritarian model insisting upon preserving its age-old style at all costs. Fortunately, the international SGI centers need not concern themselves with the old patterns but can instead look at the model provided by President Ikeda. His persistent promotion of activities relating to issues critical to each culture, but transcending any one of them, gives reason to hope for the strong success of SGI in the future.

As one example, President Ikeda, through his ceaseless travels around the world meeting with educators, business and social leaders, heads of state, politicians and religious leaders of every persuasion, effectively destroys any notion that SGI can retreat into a series of self-satisfied small religious or philosophical discussion groups content with doing their own rather esoteric thing. They are instead challenged in thought, word and deed to fulfill the idea of the Bodhisattva who is not content until all others have received the message and the opportunity for enlightenment. In every one of the centers I have thus far visited, I saw nothing but admiration for this activist model of leadership from the Tokyo headquarters of SGI.

The future of SGI as a truly international movement is a topic too large for precise determination, but it is clear even now that its future will depend very much on the skills of its members to achieve adequate expression of their unique identity while at the same time identifying sufficiently with the mainstream cultures to make meaningful contributions to it. In interviews with a number of scholars in Italy, for example, I learned that, from their disinterested perspective, SGI was, in fact, making progress in this formidable task.

DISTINGUISHED Roman Catholic scholar Professor Massima Introvigne of Turin, Italy, observed in conversation with me that his analysis of the Soka Gakkai movement in Italy led him to conclude that its membership is indistinguishable from the broad cross-section of Italian society. It shared and expressed values familiar and acceptable to Italians generally. Of course, its stress on the primacy of individual conviction rather than ecclesiastical authority and its Japanese provenance made it distinctive. Numerically speaking, the 50,000 Buddhists of Italy of whom approximately 17,000 are members of SGI do not represent a statistically prominent

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group among the millions of Italians. One of the leaders of the Piedmont SGI, Nino La Piana, noted that so long as this remains the case, SGI will not experience much negative reaction among Roman Catholic authorities, but he anticipates that there would definitely be such reaction if Buddhist thought and practice became a considerable force in Italian life. It is for this reason that there is reluctance among Italian SGI groups to be seen as politically ambitious. Whereas in Japan SGI has long been associated with a political party, in Italy members of SGI wishing to gain political office have been discouraged from identifying themselves with SGI. So far as the matter of cultural exchange is concerned, it would appear to be a wise policy for the various national SGI groups to be free of political connections.

Surely the arts offer one of the most effective avenues in establishing the movement of Soka Gakkai internationally. The visits I made in India, Italy, England, Mexico, Japan and the United States made clear to me the importance of the arts as a way of expressing common concerns beyond the barriers of differing languages and cultures. In India, for example, the Bangalore Cultural Center achieved city-wide and regional attention of a most positive kind for its presentation of children's art. Not only were there examples from Japan but also from throughout the city from children of a wide variety of religious traditions. In Italy, Mexico and England outstanding exhibitions relating to social issues have extended the philosophy of SGI well outside the SGI community centers.

The SGI of Turin, Italy, brought forth a festival of many arts which was most enthusiastically received by capacity crowds. Similar accounts of the successful transmission of the values of SGI through the arts could be cited. The good-will engendered by such programs, which have a direct appeal beyond ecclesiastical, political and national boundaries, is incalculable. Occasionally, one hears a remark from someone unsympathetic to the emphasis on cultural programs, who asks, "What has all this to do with Buddhism?" The answer is clear. Was it not Shakyamuni himself who saluted his disciple for choosing a powerful but fragile object of beauty, a flower, rather than words to give voice to that experience of wonder and delight that underlies the Buddhist approach to life?

THIS distinctive emphasis within the SGI on the centrality of artistic expression is remarkably manifested in the choices for the most prominent statues gracing the administrative building of Soka University in suburban Tokyo. Two monumental statues of Victor Hugo and Leo Tolstoy greet visitors, and they lead to a third even larger statue, of American poet Walt Whitman. Whereas one might have reason to anticipate statues of Soka Gakkai founders and leaders like Josei Toda, Tsunesaburo Makiguchi and Daisaku Ikeda, one finds instead French, Russian and American writers whose common characteristic was a profound humanitarian compassion for all mankind. It is the spirit reflected in the choice of these figures to grace a university, founded on Buddhist principles, that augurs well for the future of an organization that is achieving international status.

In discussions with a leader of the British SGI, Robert Samuels, I spoke of my admiration for the spirit that guided the choice of these humanitarian but non-Buddhist figures as emblems of SGI values. I raised with him a question that has persisted throughout my studies of the SGI. The question relates to the relationship between physical and spiritual longings. The SGI is sometimes criticized for its apparent "this-worldliness," its concern for practical benefits and material needs and wants. I put my

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question to him in something like poetic form:

Bodies
Dew to the Spirit
Tell me then
Why does this dew yearn so?

A few days after sharing this question, I received from Mr. Samuels an answer that I believe shows great insight into the Buddhism of Nichiren and provides another avenue by which SGI may become truly international. He wrote:

Because the body and spirit are one
Bodily yearning is
Yearning of the spirit
Based on the universal, or greater self;
The tower of compassion—some would
say love—wisdom, courage of humanity
That yearning becomes the very cause for
Enlightenment.

Mr. Samuels effectively expresses the central Buddhist conviction that no separation between soul and body exists, and his poem makes clear that when we correctly understand ourselves, we see that we are the Buddha. The deepest yearnings of our life are for love and wisdom and courage. To understand this is to be enlightened.

My first conclusion is that the national SGI organizations are succeeding in attracting and keeping members who are sincerely dedicated to the cultivation and expression of the philosophy of the Buddhism of Nichiren. Any organization would be considered fortunate to have the enthusiasm, intelligence, sensitivity and critical insights I found among members of every SGI organization I visited. In addition, I found the members and leaders to be realistic regarding their ability to express Buddhist values effectively in societies either foreign, indifferent or even actively opposed to such values.

One problem that I discerned, however, was not very often acknowledged. That is the problem of the tension caused by conflicting needs faced by SGI members and groups outside Japan. These needs are, on the one hand, to be loyal to the teachings of Nichiren Daishonin and, on the other hand, to identify areas of common values and teaching in the faith communities prevailing in the local culture. The temptation is either to advocate too strongly the significant differences and thus risk alienating the prevailing or dominant society, or to gloss over and, in effect, to water down essential differences. If clear distinctions are not emphasized, then the question becomes one of asking why bother with so new and apparently exotic a philosophy and religion when they are not especially distinctive. If distinctions are emphasized, then one has to be prepared to face some serious opposition.

PERHAPS at this moment an illustration of what is meant in the preceding comment would be helpful. This illustration comes from a discussion I had in Italy with members who believe that, in the long run, religions are very much alike, all attempting to reach similar goals of personal and social salvation. Buddhism and Roman Catholicism are quite

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compatible, for both promote personal spirituality, social justice and ultimate harmony with God. So said some members in Italy, but others rightly, as I see it, pointed out that there are distinctions of the most profound sort between Catholicism and Buddhism that are glossed over to the loss of members of both religions.

Granted the immense difficulty and enormous challenge to the prevailing view in Italy, but Buddhists will be truer to their own founders and perhaps more effective in attracting a larger constituency if they insist upon a re-defining of the concept of God. For the Buddhist, the divine has the true transcendence of the immanent; God is not objectified and externalized but experienced as the dynamic presence within each sentient being that leads individuals toward truth, beauty and goodness. Forthrightly declaring that the authority in matters religious and philosophical lies in one's self is a true distinction that Buddhists have and which they should articulate as clearly as possible. To do so requires a most serious and prolonged educational effort, first of the practitioners themselves and then for those practitioners to prepare appropriate dialogues with non-Buddhists. Fortunately, the leadership of the groups I visited have a strong commitment in this area.

A second illustration came to my attention through a remark made by a member of the SGI in Mexico. She said it concerned her upon occasion that it was easy for some members of SGI to replace their familiar statues of Jesus, Joseph and Mary with the Gohonzon and to pray to it in a manner similar to praying to the icons of Christianity. While a substitution had been made at least superficially, she wondered whether there had been an accompanying change in the thinking of some individuals. This is an illustration of the problems faced by leaders who must devise sufficiently accessible educational programs to promote accurate understanding of Buddhism's distinctions.

AS SGI develops its many separate national movements, the central question remains: Which model of development is best? To which historical epoch, so to speak, shall each country's SGI organization look? The obvious model might be that of Japan since it is there that the lay movement of the Buddhism of Nichiren has the longest history and the greatest numerical success. It is obvious that the new movements can benefit from those successes and learn from whatever problems the parent organization has faced. But at least two other national organizations offer instructive examples to which organizers of new SGI groups may look: Britain and the United States.

Nichiren Shoshu of America (NSA), now SGI-USA, appears to have experienced shifts in its self-understanding and its sense of mission, which are worth noting. Though I have witnessed for myself some of these changes firsthand, I am indebted to the detailed analysis written by Jane Hurst in her book *Nichiren Shoshu Buddhism and the Soka Gakkai in America*. Her study concludes that SGI in America has undergone distinct phases of which the first culminated in a Bicentennial Convention coinciding with the Bicentennial of the USA. As she put it, "It was a crowning achievement of NSA's organizational skill at presenting cultural events and moving large groups of people."[1] It identified common values between NSA and America, provided a passionate exercise for practitioners to express their own "human revolution," and was, in Hurst's words, "the final expression of the movement in its most enthusiastic, youthful, and intense form."[2]

I can attest to the remarkable atmosphere of the International Culture Festival because I was one of some 10,000 participants and saw for myself the dramatic demonstration of the three themes that Hurst notes as the ethos of NSA, "individual power, change through the practice of Nichiren Shoshu Buddhism, and unity to bring

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about world peace."[3] It was an unforgettable experience to be seated on the speakers' platform before this great assembly and to note the huge portraits of America's founding fathers presented in somber tints and, among them, a similar portrait but in vibrant color of President Ikeda. For members of the SGI, such inclusion may not have seemed incongruous, but one might wonder what the uninitiated would make of this. To them it could be mysterious and a bit unsettling and challenging, as though a conclusion had been reached before the arguments were presented.

My conversations with leaders of SGI in Italy, England, Mexico and India lead me to believe that they appreciate the importance of identifying values their movement holds in common with those of their nation, but they wish to exercise caution about the manner of presenting this identity. One of the most significant as well as most positive conclusions I reached from my study of SGI organizations is that their leadership is quite self-consciously selecting the means of their publicizing SGI, with particular attention to avoiding non-productive and unintended challenges and arguments with their respective societies.

FOLLOWING the perhaps inevitable change from the initial organization-building enthusiasm of the first phase of NSA in America, "the direction was much more concretely away from the group and toward the individual's own life."[4] The larger social and even political goals became secondary to personal development. Hurst notes that it is not possible to answer how the NSA ethos has affected its members in any statistically verifiable way. "It is not the observable facts of the members' lives that have changed. Rather, the subjectively experienced NSA ethos has given the lives of NSA members an inner coherence which has endowed their ordinary activities with ultimate significance."[5] Even where, as in the USA, NSA was initially a predominately Japanese movement with a tight hierarchical structure, it is now, as SGI-USA, a movement with American leadership developing into an established religion. Its early hopes for a dramatic conversion of the USA to the Buddhism of Nichiren appears to have given way to the cultivation of individual spiritual practice and to a patient effort to achieve Buddhist values within American culture. The second phase of NSA in the USA is toward the promotion of peace, culture and education. "The more moderate, gradual, individualistic approach had won out."[6]

It now appears to me that the leaders of the SGI communities I visited have determined to build on the basis of phase two of the American experience rather than phase one. I believe they are wise to do so, for to do so provides ultimately a stronger and more lasting foundation for solid achievement. Though less dramatic than spectacular events involving masses of people and gaining considerable but ephemeral publicity, the development of dedicated local organizations interacting with non-SGI agencies in cooperative enterprises will likely bring more permanent benefits. This is not to say that excellent cultural programs utilizing SGI members' talents in a wide variety of ways—such as that recently presented by the Piedmont SGI in Italy—are not worthwhile, for they give both members and the public a fine demonstration of the quality and abilities of SGI members. In the long run, however, it is the multi-cultural and multi-faith events, such as exhibitions dealing with social issues affecting the entire community and even global concerns, which will create a more lasting and informed understanding of SGI and its mission.

THOUGH my experience with SGI in Britain was less extensive than in Italy and

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India, I was fortunate to have intensive discussions with its leadership as well as with a number of individuals, including Professor Bryan Wilson of Oxford University. Britain presents distinctive opportunities and challenges for SGI as a society with institutions based on traditions and values which are deeply eroded if not rejected by many—for example, the monarchy and established church. From the SGI members, as well as from Professor Wilson, I gained a clear impression of a religious movement carefully studying to discover the most effective means of defining and achieving its goals in a modern, largely secular, post-Christian society.

In a study done twenty years ago, *Contemporary Transformation of Religion,* Professor Wilson concluded that new religious movements are incapable of providing a lasting basis for a new religious culture. "Their growth, transient appeal, decay, and eventual replacement by other enthusiasms, appear to me to be evidence of the trials of the human spirit in a world in which new techniques and increasingly rational procedures dominate man's social experience." [7] After this study, Professor Wilson met with SGI President Ikeda, and in 1984 their conversations, reflecting an emerging international emphasis, were published as *Human Values in a Changing World*. More recently Professor Wilson's extensive study of SGI in Britain, *A Time to Chant*, which he co-authored with Professor Karel Dobbelaere, details the way in which the concerns and perceptions of young persons in Britain converge easily with the values promoted by SGI. They write: "When thirteenth-century scriptures are given twentieth-century relevance, the mystery of the sacred invocation readily accommodates the pragmatism of everyday life."[8] My discussions with present leaders and members of SGI-UK fully support this conclusion.

ONE model for the propagation of SGI values is the development of schools where the educational theories of Tsunesaburo Makiguchi, the first president of the Soka Gakkai, would be practiced. Alternatives to standard parochial or public school curricula might well find a very positive response in many countries. Already the Soka schools established by President Ikeda from elementary through graduate levels offer instructive examples of what could be done. The broadly humanistic approach would be welcome by many and would extend the constituency of SGI. Such schools not only provide prestige and exposure but, not incidentally, they could be financially self-supporting.

It would be a positive step for SGI leaders to concentrate some of their efforts on preparing appropriate materials on showing members how to discuss with their non-SGI associates both the areas of common values as well as the differences between the philosophy of SGI and the prevailing philosophies of the specific society. Instead of bluntly announcing, for example, the Buddhist rejection of traditional presentations of an extra-terrestrial male authority figure called God, the SGI members could counsel with the traditionalist who, whether accepting or rejecting the standard view, is unsatisfied with it. The non-SGI person who is experiencing sincere frustration with traditional positions could be counseled that perhaps the problem is not due so much to his or her lack of faith, or to his or her disobedience to authority, as to an unfortunate manner of "locating" the divine, a problem of imagery. When the Buddhist points out that the historical development of Judaism and Christianity, for example, illustrates the process of progressive re-locating the divine to the heart of the believer, it becomes clear that there are areas of close affinity with the prevailing religion and Buddhism.

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WHEN, as many SGI members have said to me, "As a Buddhist I do not believe in God," it naturally challenges or even antagonizes a believer without doing justice to the issue. Such confrontation opens doors that have been closed and keeps others firmly shut. What should be said, it seems to me, is that in keeping with the insights of traditional non-Buddhist religions I, as a Buddhist, find the meaning of God to be within my heart. I might refer to the Christian doctrine of Incarnation as complementing the humanization of the divine and thus presenting a rich opportunity for fruitful and mutually respectful dialogue. Clearly, the development of positive non-confrontational dialogues with non-Buddhist groups is an important way for SGI centers around the world to become better known and stronger within their contexts.

Everything I have discovered in my visits to SGI centers in India, Italy, Britain, Mexico and the U.S.A. corroborates what Professors Wilson and Dobbelaere write in their conclusion to *A Time to Chant*:

> The decline in the credibility of an anthropomorphic deity; the sense that traditional, formal religious institutions have in some sense become hollow representations of conceptions of worship that are superseded; the emphasis on the private nature of belief and practice—all open the way for less formal, less institutionalized patterns of faith.[9]

Soka Gakkai International strikes me as a most fortunate movement. It has a rich legacy of religious devotion and culture profoundly rooted in ancient Buddhist tradition. It has freedom from restrictive ties to that tradition and enjoys the leadership of dedicated leaders who bring to life a vision of an enlightened humanity devoted to peaceful living and to the cultivation of humanistic values. I see SGI as a movement well on its way to fulfilling its name, for it is building lasting organizations internationally. ❑

1. Hurst, Jane, *Nichiren Shoshu Buddhism and the Soka Gakkai in America*, (New York: Garland Publishing, Inc., 1992), p. 268.
2. Ibid., p. 268.
3. Ibid., p. 272.
4. Ibid., p. 274.
5. Ibid., p. 279.
6. Ibid., p. 283.
7. Wilson, Bryan R., *Contemporary Transformations of Religion*, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1976), p. 101.
8. Wilson, Bryan R. and Karel Dobbelaere, *A Time to Chant. The Soka Gakkai Buddhists in Britain*, (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1994), p. 231.
9. Ibid., p. 231.

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