

EDITORIAL: Propagation by the Unwise

By JEFF FARR

Associate Editor

At the *World Tribune* office, we often get e-mails from SGI members in foreign countries. When I get into an interesting e-mail conversation with one of these far-flung fellow members, I know what it means to be in awe of technology; I feel like the whole SGI world is in my computer.

But what's really amazing about such exchanges is that, in a relatively short period of time, just 40 years, the SGI has spread Nichiren Daishonin's Buddhism so extensively. There are members almost everywhere now.

One man, SGI President Ikeda, has shepherded this effort with great wisdom, courage and compassion. If not for the SGI and the SGI president, I certainly wouldn't be making all these international e-mail connections. My fellow members "over there" probably wouldn't even be members. And neither would I.

Every successful society or company or religion or organization, including the SGI, has a story to tell — an overarching story everyone involved can invest in. So this, I believe, is our SGI story: how regular people the world over have accomplished the widespread *and wise* propagation of this Buddhism. President Ikeda has always taught us to be wise in this propagation, to "make the formalities of Buddhism conform with the manners and customs of each area and with the conventions of the times" (*The New Human Revolution*, vol. 1, p. 33).

Buddhism can only be correctly propagated by people of wisdom, the Daishonin says. We in the SGI have proven ourselves to be such by successfully introducing this Buddhism to 128 countries, 128 cultures, in just 40 years.

But what's the story with Nichiren Shoshu? Argentina's decision last month to completely ban the priesthood's activities there made me wonder (again). This had never happened to the SGI — being banned from a country — and it was a first for the priests. They had opened a facility in Buenos Aires without the proper permits, and the priest assigned there had sermonized that Mother Teresa, beloved in that Catholic country, was a devil. Soon enough, naturally, the priests had their walking papers from Argentina's government.

In recent years, the priests have created similar problems for themselves in Ghana, Brazil and South Korea, trying either to take over SGI-owned buildings or illegally open new temples in those countries.

The SGI and Nichiren Shoshu have very different stories then: wise propagation vs. unwise. One story is of an organization of common people trying faithfully to transmit the Daishonin's humanistic spirit to the world, always careful to respect the culture and laws of each nation. The other is of an irresponsible priesthood, aloof from the world for hundreds of years, knowing little of the world, suddenly piggybacking its way on to the world stage — riding on the backs of sincere believers.

Now, after going it alone a few years and finding itself deadlocked membership-wise in its home country, the priesthood sees bolstering its "foreign markets" as its best hope for future growth. Toward this end, the 2nd Overseas Believers General Pilgrimage later this month has been the priests' main campaign all year; likewise, their desperate efforts to set up shop in South America, Africa, Asia and elsewhere. Their 700-year history has come to this: desperation.

And desperation mixed with not knowing much of the world outside has been nearly lethal for them. They apparently know nothing of the customs beyond their palace walls — not

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the laws and nothing of the times we're living in. "They ignore Buddhist practice and lack wisdom, idling their days away," as the Daishonin puts it (*The Major Writings of Nichiren Daishonin*, vol. 3, p. 211). This keeps getting them into trouble.

The SGI president has discussed every topic under the sun with leading cultural figures and established an international school system, from kindergarten through university. The SGI has sponsored a vast range of cultural exchanges. Nikken, on the other hand, has deemed culture unnecessary, unrelated to Buddhism.

What we have here are two very different world views. "A fool sees not the same tree that a wise man sees," William Blake says. The SGI and Nichiren Shoshu see two different trees, too.

Philosophy, for instance, is no longer really of any importance in the temple's world view. Now the temple's teachings are a jumbled heap, just like the growing piles of rubble outside the Grand Main Temple. All that's left is subjugation to the high priest; all that's left is the word *obey*. Humanism has been demolished.

I'll be the first to admit that destruction is sometimes entertaining. The thrill of summer movies like *Deep Impact*, *Armageddon* and *Godzilla* is seeing our cities blown up and consumed by monsters. But I feel sorry for the U.S. temple members who are leaving soon on Nikken's pilgrimage. They want to see the Grand Main Temple come down for themselves, maybe. Or they want to be there to witness Nichiren Shoshu completely fall apart.

But this is not a disaster movie. It's for real. People caught up in this catastrophe are destined to suffer and suffer.

And when it's all over, where will they go? Where will they find happiness again?

I hope that they'll come back to the SGI. That's the only happy ending there could be to the tragic story of Nichiren Shoshu's worldwide campaign.

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