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'It was common knowledge that during World War II, Nichiren Shoshu had accepted the Shinto talisman out of fear of suppression by the military government. But the truth was that long before that time the priests of the school had been violating the fundamental doctrine of "strictly admonishing slander of the Buddhist law."'

At the Soka Gakkai's Fujinomiya Community Center, Shin'ichi Yamamoto said to Shizuoka Headquarters Leader Ritsu Ohyama: "I am well aware that there are people within the Hokkeko who do not look kindly on the Soka Gakkai, but I want us to be tolerant and try to reach out to them. It is important at this point in our movement to encourage them to rise up and work together with us to achieve kosen-rufu.

"Most of the Hokkeko's criticism of the Soka Gakkai is because they don't fully understand the spirit of Nichiren Daishonin, nor do they appreciate what the Soka Gakkai is about. I have been talking with the president of the National Hokkeko Federation. I am sure they will eventually see what a wonderful organization the Soka Gakkai is and will come to respect us.

"I know there will be times when you will feel angry, but please be patient a little while longer. Actually, there are some factions within the Hokkeko that oppose the federation's attempt at unification, and the federation itself is having a hard time of it right now."

Ohyama nodded, and then said gravely: "Sensei, I am more concerned about the priests than the Hokkeko members. Around here, the priests at the head temple have a pretty bad reputation. People call them the 'debauched priests.' Soka Gakkai members are really disappointed in them. They see priests frequenting taverns or indulging in the entertainment of geisha. There are rumors of sexual affairs, too. There have been some instances where priests out drinking together have been overheard criticizing Soka Gakkai members, who after all are practicing their faith diligently.

"Although both you and President Toda have done your utmost to serve the priesthood in earnest, most priests do not seem to feel any gratitude. They act as if it were expected. In Osaka there was a temple that refused to confer the Gohonzon on Soka Gakkai members. Here in Shizuoka, they do not refuse, but at some temples the priests make it very obvious that they are not happy about it.

"When they conduct the Gohonzon-conferral ceremony, they take on an unbelievably arrogant air and strictly order the new member to come every month to offer a *toba* tablet for the repose of deceased family members [for which temples charged believers]. Sensei, we will do whatever is necessary to protect Nichiren Shoshu for the sake of kosen-rufu. No matter how difficult it may be financially, we are still willing to make offerings. In fact, this is exactly what we have done.

"But we do not want to donate one cent so that corrupt priests who malign the Soka Gakkai, the organization dedicated to widespread propagation, can spend it on pleasure seeking. This is not just my opinion — all the members feel this way."

As Ohyama spoke, his anger rose, and gradually his words burned with emotion: “I heard from a Soka Gakkai member who is on good terms with the priests that they think the Soka Gakkai has become too much of a nuisance,” he reported. “They are worried that if things continue the way they are, the Soka Gakkai will take over everything, and they will be left out in the cold. They are talking about disbanding us after we have built them enough temples.

“If we object, they say they will take away our Gohonzons and bar us from visiting the head temple. That is why they have decided to increase the membership of the Hokkeko and to organize and strengthen it. There are priests who simply want to milk the Soka Gakkai for all they can and then dissolve it. And they have no qualms about using the Gohonzon, the very foundation of our faith, as a tool to control practitioners and make them subservient. It’s really frightening.

“The reason there are so many in the Hokkeko who see the Soka Gakkai as a threat is because that attitude is instigated by the priests. The priests declare that they are superior to lay believers. They look at Soka Gakkai members as little more than slaves or machines to bring them offerings. I don’t think they have ever taken kosen-rufu seriously. All they think about is themselves. They have no faith and no compassion. They are corrupt.” Tears filled Ohyama’s eyes.

“This really is deplorable,” Shin’ichi replied. “I understand how you feel. It is only natural for you to be angry. In fact, just the other day Soka Gakkai General Director Harayama strongly appealed to the school’s administration to rectify the situation.”

Shin’ichi then turned to Koichi Harayama at his side and asked, “Mr. Harayama, how did they respond?”

“Well, they said they would take care of it, but they have not given us a concrete answer yet. They say the same thing every time. It is a real problem.”

When Ohyama heard this, his face flushed with anger, and he said: “Sensei, I can’t put up with this any longer. Not just myself, but the entire Shizuoka young men’s division won’t stand for it. Many of our members are exasperated and ask why we should remain faithful to priests who make no effort to realize kosen-rufu yet torment the Soka Gakkai members. If you will permit us, we would like to go to the head temple and lodge a serious protest.”

Shin’ichi addressed Hara-yama: “Mr. Harayama, the members seem to have reached the limits of their patience. At this rate, we’ll never get anywhere. I’m going to put in a call to the Nichiren Shoshu administration. Everyone is fed up. Next spring the Grand Reception Hall will be completed, and 3 million members will make a pilgrimage to the head temple. We are about to begin a new phase in the development of kosen-rufu. Now is the time for priests and laity to unite and make a fresh advance in the spirit of many in body and one in mind.

“Simply constructing a building like the Grand Reception Hall is not what is important—we must create a treasure tower of unity and pure faith aimed at the widespread propagation of the Daishonin’s teachings. Isn’t it compassion, therefore, to admonish that which must be admonished and thereby cut out the iniquity that is taking root within the priesthood?”

“I am sure that there are people who will react against this and hate me for it, but I am prepared to bear the brunt of everything.”

As Shin’ichi headed toward the office, Harayama followed him and said, “Please let me try to talk to them first.” With that, Harayama placed a call to a senior priest at the head

temple. Listening to Harayama's side of the conversation, it was clear to Shin'ichi that no progress was being made. Shin'ichi then picked up the phone and asked point-blank what practical steps the Nichiren Shoshu administration intended to take to deal with all of the problems they were facing.

Flustered, the priest replied: "We are aware that these are serious problems that need addressing. I have spoken with the high priest about how regrettable these attacks on the Soka Gakkai are, as well as regarding the behavior of the priests that you are referring to."

It was a half-baked answer that skirted the issues. Irritated, Shin'ichi replied forcefully: "I have heard this over and over again. We have been waiting for your response for a long time, but you refuse to take any concrete action. All the while, Soka Gakkai members continue to suffer these attacks. This is utterly irresponsible!" Shin'ichi's sharp voice echoed throughout the room.

"As we near the completion of the Grand Reception Hall, it is of utmost importance that harmony is forged between the priesthood and the laity, and that the Hokkeko joins us in generating a great flow toward kosen-rufu. Why are you not treating this matter seriously? Why do you let evil go unchecked?"

"I want you to confer with the high priest and come to an immediate decision. We will not be satisfied with excuses or explanations any longer," Shin'ichi said as he hung up the telephone.

Afterward, he did gongyo with local members at the center and participated in the center's opening ceremony. He then traveled by car to the Fuji Community Center in neighboring Fuji City to attend the inaugural meeting of Shizuoka Headquarters. In the car, Shin'ichi could not help but think about why the priesthood had so easily fallen prey to corruption and licentiousness.

It was common knowledge that during World War II, Nichiren Shoshu had accepted the Shinto talisman out of fear of suppression by the military government. But the truth was that long before that time the priests of the school had been violating the fundamental doctrine of "strictly admonishing slander of the Buddhist law." There were numerous examples of such corruption, just counting the major ones from the early 20th century on. For example, in November 1914, representatives of all the Nichiren schools met at Hommonji temple of Nichiren Shu [the Minobu school], in Ikegami, Tokyo, and drew up a basic plan for unification.

Nissho Abe, the 57th high priest of Nichiren Shoshu, and Houn Abe [later Nichikai, the 60th high priest] attended this conference. Nichikai Abe was the father of 67th high priest Nikken. On that occasion, Nissho Abe signed a document stating his agreement to the unification of all the Nichiren schools, including the Minobu school. The plan for unification later collapsed, but Nissho Abe again cooperated with representatives of the other Nichiren denominations when they requested that the emperor bestow the honorific title Great Teacher Rissho on the Dai-shonin, which was granted in October 1922.

It was Nissho Honda, chief administrator of the Kempon Hokke school of Nichiren Buddhism, who started the drive to have the emperor confer the title of "Great Teacher" on the Daishonin, just as many centuries earlier the title had been bestowed upon Dengyo and Kobo. Nissho Abe of Nichiren Shoshu signed the petition, and on the day it was granted, he joined other Nichiren school priests in reciting the "Life Span" chapter of the Lotus Sutra and chanting daimoku led by the head of the Minobu school. The actions of these priests to ingratiate themselves with authority were absolutely contrary to the spirit

of the Daishonin. In addition, the other Nichiren schools, while using the Daishonin's name, had completely gone against his spirit, revealing themselves to be like parasites that devour the mighty lion of the Daishonin's Buddhism from within.

Nissho Abe's act of reciting gongyo together with the head of the Minobu school was a clear violation of Nikko Shonin's admonition "You should not sit together with slanderers of the Law [at religious ceremonies] for fear of suffering the same punishment as they" (*Gosho Zenshu*, p. 1618). Such slander of the Law by high priests of Nichiren Shoshu continued.

In October 1931, just prior to the 650th memorial service commemorating the Daishonin's passing, the Minobu school was moving ahead with its plan to have the emperor inscribe on a plaque the Daishonin's new title, Rissho, to be kept at Kuonji, the head temple of the Minobu school.

Daisaku Ikeda appears in the
novel as Shin'ichi Yamamoto.
The events take place in 1963.