

Foreword

One of the most crucial lessons I've learned from the temple issue over the past nine years is the importance of developing a strong, independent faith. Rather than relying on interpretations, including those of the Nichiren Shoshu priesthood, this issue has caused me to return to Nichiren Daishonin's teachings like never before and to strive to understand his heart. I'm sure I'm not alone when I say that, in this sense, the temple issue has been a great benefit, a powerful cause for advancement. And, along with all of you, my education continues, not only in learning about the Daishonin's compassionate and courageous spirit but in learning the role of religion as we enter the twenty-first century.

A part of this education has been to take a hard look at history, for as the philosopher wrote, "Those who cannot remember the past are condemned to repeat it." The current circumstances did not arise recently or out of a vacuum. The roots of the issue can be traced back centuries to the time soon after the Daishonin's death and can be attributed to human foibles and the darker side of human nature. This look at history reveals the priesthood to be, as Phillip Hammond and David Machacek state in their book *Soka Gakkai in*

America, “a product of feudal Japanese culture—an era when values of duty, loyalty, obedience, and tradition reigned.” In one sense, the story here is not all that new—it has been repeated in many religions throughout the world.

The priesthood’s history, as is so evident on these pages, is one of self-preservation, compromised beliefs and utter misunderstanding of the Daishonin’s will. Even as a person who grew up and was educated in Japan, I never knew the details of that history until I read this account, first serialized in *Living Buddhism*. Reading it has made so many aspects of this issue clear to me for the first time, and for that I am grateful to all who made that series and this book possible.

We of the SGI, with our own history to learn from, have the ultimate responsibility to propagate this Buddhism. By reading this historical account, we can help clarify for ourselves the essence of this temple issue and can resolve in our hearts not to repeat any of these past mistakes. And with a selfless practice, deep conviction and a profound awareness of our mission, let us make Nichiren Daishonin’s Buddhism a religion for the people in the twenty-first century.

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