

Introduction

To most SGI members, the corruption of the Nichiren Shoshu priesthood first came to light when its plot to destroy the SGI surfaced at the end of 1990. However, the root cause of the priesthood's present corruption and turmoil dates back much further. The priesthood did not suddenly become aberrant. It has always had such a tendency, which became most evident when Nikken Abe, the sixty-seventh high priest of Nichiren Shoshu, initiated his plan to disband the SGI and bring its members over to his temples.

Josei Toda, the second president of the Soka Gakkai, knew well of this tendency. "In the seven-hundred-year tradition of this school," he once said, "there were, on one hand, some who were noble, pure and worthy of respect. But, on the other hand, you may find others like cats or rats." Throughout Nichiren Shoshu's history, many high-ranking priests, including some high priests, distorted Nichiren Daishonin's Buddhism and sought personal gain by using their religious status and authority.

Until recently, only certain events in the history of Nichiren Shoshu—the so-called Fuji School of Nichiren Buddhism—could be discussed. These included Nikko Shonin's founding of Taiseki-ji (Nichiren Shoshu's head temple); the selfless dedication

of the third high priest, Nichimoku, to spread the Daishonin's Buddhism; the restoration of the school by the ninth high priest, Nichiu; the establishment of the school's doctrinal foundation by the twenty-sixth high priest, Nichikan; and the sect's unprecedented development after World War II thanks to the Soka Gakkai. In reality, however, "the pure stream of the Fuji School," as the priests liked us to call it, was sporadic at best. The rest of the Fuji School history could best be described as "a muddy stream."

The fifty-ninth high priest, Nichiko Hori, an eminent scholar of Nichiren Daishonin's Buddhism, lamented the widespread corruption within the priesthood. He once satirically said: "It has fallen upon my ears that the wise priests of the Latter Day—throughout their past, present and future existences—always keep this thought in mind: 'How can I cause my purse to acquire money quickly?' How could this be possibly true?" (*One Hundred Sacred Admonitions* [Jpn *Seikun Ippyaku Dai*], p. 22). Here, of course, he was paraphrasing the famous conclusion of the Lotus Sutra's "Life Span" chapter: "How can I cause living beings to . . . quickly acquire the body of a Buddha?" (LS16, 232).

While Nichiko pointed out that within the priesthood there have always been corrupt priests living off Buddhism, the current situation is worse than ever. Now that the high priest himself has strayed from the Daishonin's Buddhism, corruption has spread throughout the priesthood, affecting greater numbers than ever before.

When we examine the entire seven-hundred-year history of the priesthood, we can see that distortion of the Daishonin's Buddhism and corruption are not new. The sect's history contains numerous precedents to the current corruption. Understanding the priesthood's history, therefore, gives us an invaluable insight into the current temple issue and is an excellent opportunity to deepen our understanding of the Daishonin's Buddhism.