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## The Active Dynamic of Resilience in Soka Philosophy

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**ABSTRACT:** This contribution aims to comprehensively examine the phenomenon of resilience from the point of view of the Soka humanistic philosophy of action. This is a general line of interest that intertwines theoretical and practical aspects, and requires examination at different levels of discourse. The paper will be particularly focused on analyzing philosophical and sociological aspects connected to resilience. On the philosophical level, the discourse takes a broader reflective direction, intertwining with the themes of lifestyle, values, human dignity, civic commitment, and humanism. In this regard, contemporary Buddhist literature offers a vast range of examples of ethical-practical and speculative analysis, and reflections on resilience. On the sociological level, it will examine some key aspects related to Soka Gakkai's activities, and the commitment of its members within the community and social sphere. The empowerment of the members contributes to the flowering of the community life of Soka Gakkai and of society as a whole; and, vice versa, the support of the community of practitioners and society allows and fosters the strengthening of the resilience capacities of individuals.

**KEYWORDS:** Resilience, Personal Emancipation, Social Commitment, Soka Gakkai, Daisaku Ikeda.

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## *Introduction*

With reference to individuals, resilience can qualify both as an aspect of a person's personality and character, as well as their behavior and response/reaction to specific circumstances (health, psychological, environmental or social stress, etc.). In recent times, this prevalent psychological/psychologistic perspective has tended to dominate the uses and intentions of the concept of resilience. However, a careful examination of complex experiential realities—such as life as a practicing believer, and active belonging to a religious community—reveals that the question of resilience goes beyond the level of analysis and psychological knowledge.

Essentially, this contribution aims to examine the phenomenon of resilience within Soka Gakkai from the point of view of its philosophical foundation, expressed in Daisaku Ikeda's philosophy of human revolution. It is a philosophy that, as is well known, has its foundations in Nichiren's (1222–1282) Buddhist doctrine, which is linked to the historic teaching of the *Lotus Sutra*. It is a doctrine that is accepted not only as a philosophy of life and worldview: Ikeda and Soka Gakkai members embrace and practice it as a *religion*. From this premise, it follows that it is necessary to examine different levels of discourse to understand the phenomenon of resilience within Soka Gakkai.

## I. Resilience and Religious Experience

Religious practice places at its center the search for faith and personal emancipation within a perspective that looks at [1] both the inner search (awakening of Buddhahood, i.e., the ultimate goal of Buddhist practice and the highest spiritual level of realization that all human beings can achieve), and [2] the practice of compassion (i.e., the Bodhisattva way, the active practice and

experience of compassion toward others and all living beings) and its transcendent dimension (the future beyond the present moment; life beyond death). The first point focuses on the issue of the power of faith and the practice that aims to awaken and then further develop that faith. Personal emancipation is a fundamental point, and is understood as: the ability to endure (the world we live in is called “world of endurance,” according to the Chinese translation of the Sanskrit term *sahāloka* or *sahālokadhātu*, that is “world of suffering”); the ability to cope, the exercise of courage (which is considered one of the fundamental virtues); the ability to win, the practice of determination (which is considered the decisive attitude to transform and overcome the tests of destiny).

The second point concerns what we could define as “religious commitment,” or the commitment to awakening others and spreading the teaching of empowerment. It is the practice of compassion, the fight against injustice and the destructive tendency, the commitment to improving social life.

The third point focuses more closely on the religious vision of life. In this regard, some statements of Nichiren are emblematic, and seem better than others in summing up all these points:

Suffer what there is to suffer, enjoy what there is to enjoy. Regard both suffering and joy as facts of life, and continue chanting Nam-myoho-enge-kyo, no matter what happens. How could this be anything other than the boundless joy of the Law? (WND 1999, 681).

This passage is taken from a short letter addressed to one of his most important disciples (Shijo Kingo, 1230–1300), who, at the time faced innumerable difficulties, related to his adherence to Nichiren’s teaching. Nichiren was persistently persecuted by the political and religious authorities of the time.

A second paradigmatic statement can be found in the letter “A Ship to Cross the Sea of Suffering,” dated 1261, addressed to the disciple Shiji Shiro (dates unknown) shortly before his first exile in the Izu peninsula.

In the Latter Day of the Law, the votary of the *Lotus Sutra* will appear without fail. The greater the hardships befalling him, the greater the delight he feels, because of his strong faith. Doesn’t a fire burn more briskly when logs are added? All rivers flow into the sea, but does the sea turn back their waters? The currents of hardship pour into the sea of the *Lotus Sutra* and rush against its votary. The river is not rejected by the ocean; nor does the votary reject suffering. Were it not for the flowing rivers, there would be no sea. Likewise, without tribulation there would be no votary of the *Lotus Sutra* (WND 1999, 33).

Finally, another significant statement is found in the important treaty *The Opening of the Eyes* (*Kaimoku sho*), written in 1272, during Nichiren's second, very challenging exile on the island of Sado (1271–1274). Nichiren himself describes the incredible conditions in a 1276 letter, "The Actions of the Votary of the *Lotus Sutra*," sent to the lay nun Konichi (dates unknown).

On the first day of the eleventh month, I was taken to a small hut that stood in a field called Tsukahara behind Homma Rokuro Saemon's [dates unknown] residence in Sado. One room with four posts, it stood on some land where corpses were abandoned [...]. Not a single statue of the Buddha was enshrined there; the boards of the roof did not meet, and the walls were full of holes. The snow fell and piled up, never melting away. I spent my days there, sitting in a straw coat or lying on a fur skin. At night it hailed and snowed, and there were continual flashes of lightning. Even in the daytime the sun hardly shone. It was a wretched place to live (WND 1999, 769).

As anticipated, it is this third point of the reference to the transcendent that leads to the intertwining of levels between religious and doctrinal discourse. This is an intertwining that is not entirely divisible even in Ikeda's philosophy of human revolution, which is anchored to Nichiren's Buddhism. It is an extremely significant point because it demonstrates how the phenomenon of resilience in Soka Gakkai cannot be known and explained in its entirety within the terms of psychology, sociology, and philosophy alone.

## II. Resilience and the Doctrinal-Theoretical Plane

In Nichiren Buddhism the key to happiness lies not only in the spiritual and moral strength, and therefore in an active practice of faith, but it resides in the awakening of the awareness that each individual possesses the "Buddha nature" (jap. *bussshō*), which is understood as the great, the true Self. Here, resilience is one with the practice to reveal this Buddha nature (in modern terms, this is the "human revolution"), that is, the practice to open the treasure chest of innate wisdom. The following are other doctrinal aspects that we find involved here:

(1) perseverance;

(2) the spiritual struggle to face, transform, and overcome obstacles, the doctrine of the causal law of life and the transformation of karma (in Nichiren Buddhism, all negative karma can be overcome and transformed through the practice of the Mystic Law—see the following point—and through the Bodhisattva way);

(3) the faith in the Mystic Law (it defines both the ultimate truth or law of the universe and the essential spiritual-religious law and principle summarized and expressed through Nam-myoho-renge-kyo—a prayer that Nichiren extracted from the *Lotus Sutra*), and in the power of the object of devotion (the Gohonzon, i.e., a calligraphic scroll, which, essentially, represents the sublime reality of the Mystic Law and Human Enlightenment; it guides practitioners during their meditation and prayer, and is the fundamental religious object of devotion for achieving enlightenment);

(4) the faith in the eternity of life, and the search for awakening to the eternity of life, a search that is one with the attainment of the true self, with the purification of oneself, with the realization of happiness. Reference, here, is to the four virtues (*jō-raku-ga-jō*)—purity, happiness, eternity, and true self—that are achieved by the Buddha.

### III. Resilience and the Philosophical Plane

On this level, the discourse takes a broader reflective direction, intertwining with the themes of lifestyle, values, human dignity, civic commitment, and humanism. In this regard, Ikeda's writings offer a vast range of examples of ethical-practical and philosophical considerations around resilience. In illustrating this point, some key passages from Ikeda's vast work can be considered, where we find a close comparison with some thinkers of the Western philosophical tradition, from Socrates (ca. 470–399 BCE: e.g., see Ikeda 1988, 4) to Søren Kierkegaard (1813–1855: e.g., see Ikeda 2008, 3–10), from Seneca (ca. 4–65 AD: e.g., see Ikeda 1999, 10–4) to the French philosopher Alain (Émile Chartier, 1868–1951: e.g., see Ikeda 2011, 10–25).

At present, there is no systematic and detailed study of the relationship between Western philosophy and resilience, and even less can we speak of the emergence of a philosophy of resilience. However, in the historical-philosophical field (better than in others) certain thinkers and schools can more easily be viewed, albeit retrospectively, as having the attributes of a reflective vision or a thematization of resilience as a significant and vital way for human existence.

The first tradition that comes to think of is Stoicism, not by chance much cited by Ikeda. Among ancient philosophies, Stoicism is undoubtedly the best comparable (albeit in a different way) to religions such as Christianity and



Buddhism. But this possible parallel does not mean close correspondence. The foundation of the Stoic ethics is the maxim of living according to nature, following the divine “logos” that pervades all things. Stoicism promotes virtue against hedonism, but at the same time, living according to nature means (under certain given conditions) accepting your own destiny. At the basis of Stoicism there is, in fact, an ethic of rational duty. On the one hand, it promotes the strengthening of oneself and the constant exercise of control over the passions, of inner strength and wisdom, as in Seneca and Marcus Aurelius (121–180), but on the other hand, it encourages distancing and detachment from the world, “apathy” (from *a-pathos*).

Ikeda’s perspective of human revolution speaks of the “transformation of desires into enlightenment”: facing sufferings and trials of life to overcome them and strengthen oneself. This is the practice of emancipation as an intra-mundane spiritual transformation, in accordance with the correct interpretation given by Max Weber (1864–1920). This philosophy does not promote detachment but commitment: the more one is committed to others and to great ideals (world peace, emancipation, and the happiness of humanity), the more he/she is able to transcend self-centeredness and attachments to worldly things (see Ikeda 2001; Busacchi 2018).

Other philosophical traditions strongly linked to the theme of resilience, and closer to us—and very much present in Ikeda’s reflections—are the spiritualist tradition and the existentialist tradition of religious inspiration.

Among the authors of reference, we could mention Ralph Waldo Emerson (1803–1882) and Gabriel Marcel (1889–1973). For the first, the discourse of resilience is linked to an idealistic-transcendental approach, which sees the spiritual significance of every event and suffering, and identifies in the human will and in the determination to progress the path for a meaningful and full realization of life. In the second, the discourse of resilience develops between the two key terms of “fidelity” (to God, to the values, to the promises and commitments undertaken) and “love” (as a human and religious sentiment, and as a metaphysical seal of the condition, the task, and the *parcours* of the human being). In both perspectives, there is the theme of the religious acts functioning as a supporting axis, and many similar elements are found in Ikeda’s perspective. But Ikeda’s philosophy of human revolution does not envisage a philosophy of resilience based solely on the level of experience and religious research. This is

demonstrated, for example, by his great attention to “extraordinary” life experiences, even of non-religious people, or to stories of lives at the crossroads, particularly hard and painful, in which people have responded by drawing on inner, motivational, and psychological resources (i.e., not religious resources only).

#### IV. Resilience and the Psychological Plane

The philosophy of human revolution aims at strengthening and changing the character. Happiness is a matter of personal maturation in an emancipatory sense—that is, as the development of life force—, openness and depth of life—that is, the experience of awareness, compassion and wisdom.

In dealing with this point, we can examine some of Ikeda’s key texts where psychological analysis is placed at the center, particularly:

- (1) in connection to the relationship between inner strength and happiness;
- (2) in connection to the relationship between creative effort and affectivity; and
- (3) in connection to the relationship between the experience of suffering and the search for meaning.

#### V. Resilience and the Pedagogical Plane

The philosophy of the human revolution also promotes emancipation in the sense of cultural growth and education (education in civic and moral values, education on human rights, education on multiculturalism and global citizenship). Ikeda, who was inspired by Tsunesaburo Makiguchi’s (1871–1944) philosophy of value creation, largely underlines the relationship between education and spiritual and moral strengthening. Therefore, education is a key to the promotion of resilience. We will illustrate this point by examining some key texts.

#### VI. Resilience and the Sociological Plane

The philosophy of human revolution is exercised and practiced both within Soka Gakkai’s activities and within the community and social sphere. On this

point, a virtuous circular dialectic between personal emancipatory effort and altruistic commitment (for the happiness of others and for peace) is revealed. On the one hand, the empowerment of the members contributes to the flowering of the community life of Soka Gakkai and of society as a whole; and, vice versa, the support of the community of practitioners and of society allows and fosters the strengthening of the resilience capacities of individuals, both of the people who actively receive support and of the people who actively exercise it.

We asked the question of what form the practice and experience of resilience has taken in the Soka Gakkai following the health emergency linked to COVID-19 pandemic. It seems useful to us to see in practice how this vision and teaching takes concrete form, guides and supports choices, actions, and behaviors, and allows us to face problems and difficulties, challenges and sufferings.

How did we operate? Mainly, (1) by analyzing some of the most important Italian publications of the Soka Gakkai, using, for example, the publications of the fortnightly *Nuovo Rinascimento* ([www.ilnuovorinascimento.org](http://www.ilnuovorinascimento.org)) and the bimonthly of in-depth study and culture *Buddismo e Società* ([www.buddismoesocieta.org](http://www.buddismoesocieta.org)) of the IBISG; and (2) through the method of direct interviews with representatives of Soka Gakkai, specifically for Japan and Europe (particularly United Kingdom and Italy). The interviews were based on an open-ended questionnaire.

#### *The idea of resilience within Buddhist magazines: the examples of Nuovo Rinascimento and Buddismo e Società*

We can take as paradigmatic the example of the uses of the concept of resilience in *Nuovo Rinascimento* and *Buddismo e Società*. We have already mentioned the polysemy of this concept from the perspective of Nichiren Buddhism. Let's take a closer look at the uses on the concrete front of the publications of these magazines, both read annually by about 26,000 members of the IBISG.

Let's see, first of all, the data relating to the use of this concept. Both, the *Nuovo Rinascimento*'s website and the *Buddismo e Società*'s website allow a basic and advanced search for terms and themes in reference to the contents of the publications of the last 20 years (*Nuovo Rinascimento* has been online since

2003, and *Buddismo e Società* since 2001). Launching a research on the recurrences of the concept of “resilience” (and “resilient”) in the first publication, it appears mentioned/used starting from 2014 (mainly as “resilience”), but sporadically up to 2017. We detected the occurrences summarized in Table 1.

**‘RESILIENCE’ / ‘RESILIENT’ WITHIN  
NR (FORTNIGHTLY MAGAZINE) AND BS (BIMONTHLY MAGAZINE)**

*Nuovo Rinascimento* (from 2003 on)

Year	2014	2015	2016	2017	2018	2019	2020	2021
Recurrences	≈ 0/1	3	1	2	14	22	16	11 (up to June)



*Buddismo e Società* (from 2001 on)

Year	2014	2015	2016	2017	2018	2019	2020	2021
Recurrences	-	≈ 0/3	3	3	2	15	8	3 (up to June)



**Table 1**

In light of this picture, we can identify 2018 as the turning point in the generalized use of the concept of “resilience.” How do we explain this? Undoubtedly, we must consider the widespread use of the term in the communicative sphere both in everyday life and journalism and, in general, in the media. We are speaking, in fact, of a term that has only become widespread in recent years.

In seeking an internal explanation for the semantic inflection of Buddhist publications, we believe we must keep in mind the centrality of the discourses, essays, editorials, messages, and texts that Ikeda has spread and disseminated in a broad and regular way (at least in recent years). Now, looking at the contributions from Ikeda after 2017, we see a water-shed moment in the use of this term with the publication of the text “An Appeal for Resilience and Hope” (Ikeda and Esquivel 2018) of June 5, 2018. Human rights activist and Nobel laureate for peace Adolfo Pérez Esquivel co-signed the text and was also the co-author, with Ikeda, of the book *The Power of Hope* (Ikeda and Esquivel 2021). It is in this appeal that the new polysemy of the concept of resilience finds in some way a better expression, capable of subsuming and conveying more clearly the ideas of courage, fortitude, attitude, tenacity, flexibility, determination, faith, etc. The

concept becomes able to subsume all those ideas, which are so important in Ikeda and Soka Gakkai's humanistic and religious teachings. For example, we find in the Appeal the following passage:

The future of humankind depends on the present, on young people who have the courage to confront reality, never submitting before adversity. [...] We are confident that young people will take up the search for solutions, acting in solidarity from within their respective places of belonging across all differences of spiritual and cultural identity to generate waves of dynamic, shared action. We call on youth to take on the responsibility of walking together with the people, embracing the confidence that each of their actions will produce results in future (Ikeda and Esquivel 2018).

Starting from this Appeal, the use of the term itself is proof of the greater incisiveness and intertwining of the idea of resilience in a Buddhist discourse *stricto sensu*, in the two magazines we are examining. And, once again, we find the clear influence of Ikeda (see e.g., Ikeda 2019; Ikeda 2020). The point remains firm, that in the publications the reference to resilience in the sense of (1) psychological resilience—of individuals and communities to crises, catastrophes and life trials—; and (2) civic-social resilience—through the structural organization, political choice, solidarity between citizens—; dominates. This point remains firm, we said, but with Ikeda at the forefront, the concept has fully entered to structure and nourish the same religious message and discourse. The evidence of this comes to us from the experience of the practitioners themselves, in the countless stories collected in Soka Gakkai's publications. We will see it better shortly, analyzing its use in relation to the experiences of resilience related to the dramatic COVID-19 pandemic that recently hit the world.

Concerning this emergency, can we truthfully say that Soka Gakkai has shown the behavior of a resilient religion?

### *The COVID-19 Pandemic Emergency: How Soka Gakkai Has Reacted*

As anticipated, in studying the behavior of Soka Gakkai in the face of the COVID-19 health emergency, the survey method used was that of the open interview (with the request for responses as precise and detailed as possible), on a block of four questions, essentially identical in all countries. Let's see, comparatively, the information and results that have emerged.

I. In which country (or countries) have you been active in recent years? How many people were doing regular activities before the COVID-19 pandemic?

As for Japan, we wanted to interview some representatives of Men, Women, Young Men, Young Women groups (or “divisions”). The intent was not to have general statistical data but to closely test the status of the activities and holdings in terms of concrete experience. The data we received are not general, therefore, but certainly representative of a situation that shows an ambivalent, multiform tendency, that is, of distancing and at the same time of resisting, of an active and creative response. From the answers to the first question (Table 2), we learn that the participation figures were ambivalent even before the COVID-19 emergency.

*JAPAN*

(via “representative,” non-statistical data)—For Men, Women, Young Men, Young Women leaders: the participation figure is ambivalent even before the COVID-19 emergency.

**Men division leader** ⇒ before the “COVID-19 emergency,” 60% members tended to carry on their Buddhist activities on a daily basis.

**Chapter women’s leader** ⇒ before the “COVID-19 emergency,” Women division most active compared to all others (“Young Men division was less active and present”).

**Young men area division leader** ⇒ before the “COVID-19 emergency,” only about 20% YM were active; adding to it a 10% active in the groups.

**Young women leader** ⇒ before the “COVID-19 emergency,” only about 10-15% YW were active.

**Table 2**

We cannot absolutize these data, because it would be necessary to carry on a detailed measurement and statistical survey, but we can hypothesize that, roughly, before the health emergency, 50-60% of women and men were regularly and actively engaged in Soka Gakkai’s daily activities, while no more than 30% of young men and young women were engaged on a daily basis.

As regards Great Britain, this first question was answered underlining that the general data available concern the discussion meetings. Out of a total of about 15,500 practitioners, a third regularly attended the meetings. The UK statistical framework shows the trend of participation in recent years. Under the pandemic, the organization of meetings on a digital platform has favored participation, and

even an increase in participation. As the General Director stated, “The total number of newcomers and of guests has increased through the last 14 months.”

In the specific case of Italy, this question has shown that the IBISG—which is not yet in possession of comparative statistical data on members’ participation before and after the pandemic—has substantially aligned itself with national provisions, according to the “Protocols for religious entities under an official agreement [with the State]”:

#### *THE UK*

“The total number of newcomers and of guests has increased through the last 14 months.”

(Source: Robert Harrap, SGI-UK General Director)

#### *ITALY*

“With the reopening in the summer 2020 it was possible to meet two, maximum three, people outdoors with masks, always paying close attention to the fundamental point: respect for the absolute sacredness of life. The intention of the [Buddhist] Institute has always been not to allow any member to become infected through participation in a religious ceremony or activity. [...] In July 2021, with almost all of Italy in the white zone, the Institute is discussing possible partial reopening with contingent meeting in the centers and small meetings of a few people in open spaces or in the gardens of private homes.”

(Source: Roberto Minganti, Director of the Department for External Relationships, IBISG)

### **Table 3**

In general, at the European level, we find similar situations (Table 4):

#### *EUROPE*

- A similar evaluative trend regarding the response of local organizations and practitioners.
- Although in several cases people took own decisions to continue to meet and gather in homes, most chose the path of indirect and distance exchanges (emails, phone calls, meetings on various platforms).
- There is a strongly ambivalent tendency toward the use of digital platforms in Buddhist activities:

*on the one hand, the opportunity offered by the system of platform meetings is recognized (it gives greater opportunities for participation);*

*on the other hand, the importance and irreplaceable nature of face-to-face personal relationships is emphasized.*

(Source: Suzanne Pritchard, SGI European Women’s Leader)

### **Table 4**

II. What happened during the pandemic? What efforts have people made to keep in touch and support each other? Have you noticed significant differences between the four divisions?

As far as this question is concerned, the character of an “unprecedented challenge” represented by the pandemic emerges also from the interviewees in Japan. It is a challenge accepted, but differently if we compare men, women and young people responses (Table 5).

*JAPAN*

**M leader** ⇒ It is a challenge accepted by actively operating to keep the network of links alive and constant through emails, social platforms, letters.

**W leader** ⇒ In her area of activity, no meetings during the first months of the pandemic. For many adult members, a general difficult to familiarize themselves with online platforms. The first commitment was to keep the network of ties alive first of all through individual contacts.

**YM leader** ⇒ February 2020-May 2020: no young people were engaged in activities. The substitute use of activities in presence with platforms was not immediate. The ease of learning by young people and, indeed, a new form of activity, much appreciated. The only criticality is the difficulty in reconciling daily commitments.

**YW leader** ⇒ The possibility of online participation is recognized as positive: in fact, it can favor greater participation as it allows connection from wherever you are.

**Table 5**

In the UK, face-to-face meetings were stopped immediately, in March 2020, two weeks before the lockdown announced by the government. Activities moved to online platforms (mainly via Zoom), and immediately produced an increase in attendance compared to face-to-face meetings. The increase in the participation of “guests” (that is, of people taking part in a Buddhist activity for the first time) is also repeatedly mentioned in the interviews. In the next phase, although the government had decided to relax the restrictions, Soka Gakkai has chosen to keep the activities in remote mode. Referring to the situation in July 2021, the General Director offered the comments summarized in Table 6 below.



### THE UK

“We are again at the point where the government intends to relax all restrictions on 19<sup>th</sup> July, but the numbers of those infected by the Delta variant are increasing (doubling every 9 days) so again there is little appetite for face-to-face meetings, despite the numbers of the population who are fully vaccinated—currently 52.4%.”

- There is great concern about the spread of the Delta variant.
- The organization intends to keep this line: it has renewed the Zoom licenses to be able to use them more widely.
- There is a (minority, but not insignificant) part of practitioners who reject the idea of platform activities.

(Source: Robert Harrap, SGI-UK General Director)

### Table 6

As for Italy, this question was answered by highlighting the “diversification” of the practitioners’ response (see Table 7 below).

### ITALY

“Most of the members saw in the various platforms the only way to keep the *sangha* (community) united, hence there was enthusiastic adherence. At the same time, a good number of practitioners were reluctant to engage with this type of digital relationships and lived in nostalgia for face-to-face meetings and above all for Buddhist practice carried out in groups.”

- (However): The effort of the leaders was to maintain contact with these members “through the telephone, during total closure, and in small open-air meetings when it was possible.”

- “The sensitivity of many people and the news gathered on the internet against vaccines have created a strong unease that the Institute deals with, leaving, obviously, everyone free to decide on their own health, but continuing to move with caution towards a restoration of face-to-face activities.”

(Source: Roberto Minganti, Department for External Relationships, IBISG)

### Table 7

At the European level, there is a trend similar to that seen in Japan and Italy. As Suzanne Pritchard confirmed, there is a mixture of recognition and intolerance for these new forms of activity that exclude personal encounters and exchanges.

III. Are activities in this country (or these countries) restarting? How many people are doing regular activities now?

As regards Japan, Table 8 shows again differences among divisions.

*JAPAN*

- M leader** ⇒ The objective of the activities and this commitment has not changed, and perhaps has even strengthened, since it essentially aims at not leaving anyone behind experiencing loneliness.  
(However) more than 50% decline in participation by members of his division.
- W leader** ⇒ An increase in participants; for women btw 30 and 40 years of age technologies are contributing positively to favoring their participation in evening meetings;  
Buddhist activity has taken on a more flexible format, even individual encounters are now understood as “activities” of equal value to “meetings.”
- YM leader** ⇒ 90% of the activities are now still carried out on the platform, while the remaining 10% are in presence, for activities such as individual meetings;  
(in his opinion) the future will be a “hybrid” future, with face-to-face and online activities.
- YW leader** ⇒ Positive value of new technologies: they considerably facilitate participation, even greater participation;  
(however), nothing can replace the quality and importance of face-to-face meetings.

**Table 8**

In the case of the UK and Italy, the interviewees answered as detailed in table 9 below.

*THE UK*

“At the moment” (July 2021) all activities remain online. The only exception is the important ceremony in August for the conferral of the Gohonzons: individual bestowals will be made by the leaders “at the doorstep of the practitioners.” As for the rest, SGI UK agrees to personal encounters or meetups, following the rules (of hygiene, distancing, and non-aggregation) indicated by the government. Recently there has been a positive response from UK practitioners, regarding the possibility of meeting in person: and this is equivalent to carrying out the planned activities monthly.  
(Source: Robert Harrap, SGI-UK General Director)

*ITALY*

“Currently, discussions are underway on an open-air opening, also considering gardens and terraces of private homes. At the same time, experiments were carried out in the cultural center of Florence of meeting in presence, with masks and with a limited number, by government protocols. There is no statistical data because everything is in the planning and testing phase. We are proceeding carefully, with attention, given the spread of the Delta variant.”  
(Source: Roberto Minganti, Department for External Relationships, IBISG)

**Table 9**

Table 10 explains the policy for Europe.

#### *EUROPE*

“The policy for Europe has been that to protect the health of not just members but their non-practicing family members who may be vulnerable—all meetings should take place on-line. The only exception to this have been the small number of Cohonzon conferral ceremonies, which have taken place under strict protocols. If small meetings have taken place it is because members decided this of their own accord. However, a new trend has also been recorded at a European level: in recent months the determination to study safer solutions to return to carrying out activities with face-to-face meetings has strengthened.”

(Source: Suzanne Pritchard, SGI European Women’s Leader)

**Table 10**

IV. In your opinion, what is the biggest difficulty or change that SG now has to face (during and after this pandemic)?

With reference to the fourth question, again we see significant differences (Table 11).

#### *JAPAN*

**M leader** ⇒ the encouragement addressed to each person represents the crucial point;

**W leader** ⇒ the challenge is to be able to involve those people who have moved away in the activities: the only way is through personal meetings;

**YM leader** ⇒ “taking care of every single person” can also be pursued through new technologies;

**YW leader** ⇒ the challenge is to find a way that integrates the new online ways of doing activities.

#### *THE UK*

The greatest criticality recorded concerns the methods and possibilities of reopening the activities and centers in the country, above all due to the variety and conflict of positions (Harrap).

#### *ITALY*

At present, employ the necessary wisdom to reopen religious activities with the utmost caution (Minganti).

#### *EUROPE*

To keep alive and revitalize an activity, which is capable of creating and sustaining a network (Pritchard).

**Table 11**

### *Resilience in the Practitioners' Own Words*

The idea (or ideas) of “resilience” also enters the story of faith experiences of practitioners, as we previously said; and both in a direct and in an indirect sense. The first uses of the word still show the connection with the paradigmatic change introduced with the Ikeda-Esquivel Appeal and with the word’s use by Ikeda himself in his various proposals and speeches on the environment, on communities, on the role of young people, on the themes of conflicts and the fight against the proliferation of armaments, and on the climate crisis. Two practitioners stated:

Now I am determined to make my contribution to achieving the goals of Daisaku Ikeda and Adolfo Pérez Esquivel’s “Appeal for Resilience and Hope” (Gallesi 2018).

All started on March 16, 2015, the *kosen-rufu* day. Almost fate wants to make fun of me while I am celebrating the tenth year of having the Gohonzon: during an augmentation ultrasound before birth, the doctor diagnoses a serious lateral cervical lymphatic malformation in Giona, the child I have in my womb. [...] I can’t break down because my strength is the strength of Giona, and my serenity is the serenity of Olivia, my first child waiting for her little brother. [...] This is a story of resilience. From March 16, a four-year struggle began, the first four months of which were spent in intensive care. Giona was taken to the operating room an unbearable number of times, and underwent a tracheostomy to allow him to breathe safely, because the lymphangioma proved to be extremely spreading. At the beginning of this journey, my faith faltered several times (Villa 2019).

For some years—we think from 2018—the concept of resilience has been fully subsumed in the Buddhist vocabulary, to express that kind of experience, attitude, idea, etc., which springs from the “search for the way,” from faith, from religious experience. In this regard, the meaning conveyed in Brunella Villa’s experience is eloquent.

In the experiences of Buddhist practitioners, the major key aspects discussed in the opening paragraph find clear reverberation. In many of them the reason for resilience is fully reflected. Compare the group of experiences from Great Britain—some of which were sent to us by the editor Jessica Squier (*Art of Living* / SG-UK), in response to our request to collect experiences on resilience (but in almost none of them the term appears):

I carried on chanting, trusting my daimoku. It was then that Nichiren Daishonin came to mind. I began to think of the time he spent on Sado island and when he was almost executed by the Japanese ruling government at Tatsunokuchi Beach. It occurred to me that he must have had

similar thoughts about his own mortality, yet he had been able to reveal the incredibly powerful life-state of a Buddha and realize the eternal nature of his life. It was his desire to communicate this to others that led him to write some of his most important treatises, including *The Opening of the Eyes*, which includes this extraordinary statement: “This I will state. Let the gods forsake me. Let all persecutions assail me. Still I will give my life for the sake of the Law” (WND 1999, 280). I realized that this was the vow that my prayer needed. My determination became not necessarily surviving the pandemic, but giving my life for the sake of the Law, no matter what (Hardinges 2020, 25).

I learnt to win in the moment. I made determinations for things I would do if I survived and, even better, become healthy again; and even: Through this experience, I have learned to love myself (*most* of the time) and I have experienced the dignity of my life, which helps me connect to the dignity of other people’s lives too (Kearney 2020, 10).

Then I remembered that I and my fellow leaders in South East England Area had made a determination at the beginning of the year to go out and visit each member in their home. As we were now unable to go to other people’s homes, I began to ring women’s division members on the phone. I realized that because I couldn’t go outwards, this was a time to go deeper in my Buddhist practice. This situation was training me to be more compassionate and wiser than ever before (Usmar 2021, 9).

In the experience of Adrian Hardinges—a nurse at the forefront of the fight against COVID-19, and against the anxiety of dying from it due to an infection in his ward—, we find the idea of resilience through the search for faith. The experience of deepening the resilience capacity of another practitioner, Annie Kearney, goes through the long and difficult fight against cancer, and becomes one with the discovery of the love for life, for its incalculable value. Belinda Usmar’s experience—struggling with financial problems, lack of work, and poverty—is a significant example of resilience developed through religious faith, and through the practice of compassion towards others, through the concrete commitment to dedicate time and energy to each individual practitioner, even during the lockdown period. The experience of Janine Crowe, a joyful and sociable woman, but struggling with a profound trauma, a source of insecurity capable of damaging her marriage and even destroying herself, is touching. The marriage crisis and the experience of the lockdown due to the pandemic lead her to “hit bottom,” and to discover within herself a completely new capacity for resilience, and transformation through despair. See Crowe’s account, and one by another practitioner:

I sat, raw, in front of my Gohonzon. Cried. Got angry. Cried again. It was the only place I could deal with what was happening around me. During this time, I had many realizations. I realized my life was precious. I realized obstacles will never go away and

that I need to be strong to approach and overcome them. I realized this was about me! My environment was only a reflection of how I was feeling inside. The catalyst for change was within me. I chanted the most heart-felt and deep daimoku that I have ever chanted in the whole ten years of my Buddhist practice. [...] I can honestly say I found myself during this pandemic. That will be my thought when this is talked about in years to come! (Crowe 2021, 29).

My therapist gave me the framework, but my Buddhist practice and study alongside my process of self-reflection helped in the actual transformation. I finally understood that there is no “perfect” me, which is free of fear or anxiety. My journey of transformation was to make sure that I didn’t suffer from it. Of course, I fully expect anxiety to surface again. It is a part of me. Equally I now expect to be able to achieve happiness and continue to fulfil my vow regardless of this (Mutharaju 2021, 35).

Julia Silva’s experience reveals a different nuance of the meaning and paths of resilience. In her long and tiring years as an emigrant, resilience is the daily effort to find one’s way of subsistence away from loved ones, to fulfil oneself as being human, to deepen human ties, and discover that it is in this way that one can find oneself at home even in a foreign land (see Silva 2021, 23–5). The experience reported by Mridula Mutharaju is also extraordinary. Her long fight against a pathological anxiety problem shows an idea of resilience that is deeper than simple courage and simple determination. It is not something linked to a resolution/determination or a change of perspective in faith. Rather, it is something very similar to deepening in the days, months, and years both one’s faith and one’s life experience, both the way to manage, cure and overcome anxiety and the way to transform it into an opportunity for psychological, existential, and spiritual emancipation.

Resilience as perseverance: this is another very widespread idea, and very close to the Buddhist teaching of “faith equals daily life” and “faith as flowing water, not as burning fire”: we find it in countless experiences such as that of Milton Lopes (“Perseverance is the key”: see Lopes 2021, 8–10).

### *To Conclude*

Thanks to the fact that the term “resilience” has become widely used today, and has a dense and varied polysemy, it is now a concept on which—as we have seen—ideas and key principles of Buddhist doctrine and its religious approach to life convey.

In extreme and very general synthesis, we can say that in the perspective of Nichiren Buddhism, “resilience” indicates a psychological *and* spiritual capacity, attitude, and disposition that matures through religious practice and can affect each aspect of life. It is also a *conditio sine qua non* (so to speak) even when spiritual evidence is sought that goes beyond conventional logic.

To illustrate this aspect, we choose to recall an experience of faith documented by the magazine *Nuovo Rinascimento* where the deep intertwining of psychological, emotional, motivational and spiritual aspects at the basis of a religious experience demonstrates a power that goes beyond the limits of what one would normally consider possible. We deliberately choose not to report an experience directly or indirectly linked to the pandemic, because the discourse of resilience transcends current circumstances. It is the axis of the Buddhist practice and the Buddhist approach to life.

The story is reported by Francesco Faggi, who at the time of this experience had been a practitioner for nine years. A “very insecure,” “aggressive,” “distressed,” and “introvert” person, Faggi reports his great disdain, his bad relationship with himself, and the absence of any relationship with the other sex. The lack of a partner, with the attending emotional emptiness, turns out to be a profound reason for suffering in his life. The efforts to open up and improve oneself lead over time, finally, to friendships, and also a certain degree of serenity and inner stability; but little or nothing emerges in terms of emotional engagement. It is a serious accident that comes to “upset all the balance of Francesco.” It was December 1996, and Francesco was poking a fire in the fireplace at home to have a barbecue.

I was spraying ethyl alcohol with a can when a backfire set fire to the can itself which, exploding, turned into a Molotov cocktail. The flames clung to me violently, devouring me in a terrible pyre. Fortunately, the can of alcohol exploded and fell from my hands, so that the strong flame started from below and I had a chance to try to extinguish it myself. The feeling you get when it burns is crazy. I saw death in the face that day! For an interminable and atrocious moment, I saw the salient parts of my life, as in an accelerated slow motion, and I could clearly see how empty and inconclusive my existence had been up to that moment, without having created any value. But the next moment I had a certainty: I could still do it, put out the flames and live. The three Daimoku I had chanted that evening on the street before entering the house had not been useless. I rushed to the bathroom and threw myself in the shower. The flames went out, but I was charred over a huge part of my body. I went out in that state on the street and arrived at my uncles’ house. They rescued me and called an ambulance. My condition immediately appeared

very, very serious, almost desperate. I was a smoking ember, I was losing large amounts of blood and was in excruciating pain and having convulsions (Faggi 1988, 25–6).

Francesco continues his story by describing the sad and painful experience in the hospital, and his determination to live (no matter what); and also the profound, incredible interpretation of the meaning of the terrible accident suffered: “I believe that the fire and the terrible suffering were the means by which I was able to clean up and transform my life.”

In fact, his life really underwent a transformation, and precisely in the very ward of the hospital, where his desperate spiritual struggle, which could end in non-healing and death, bore the fruit of an extraordinary experience of love. He met Franca, a Buddhist nurse who worked at that hospital.

Francesco goes on to tell the different phases of his hospitalization, and of having undergone a general skin transplant. He focuses, in particular, on a very critical moment of his experience, potentially harbinger of tragic outcomes. This is where, perhaps even better, that synthesis of the psychological and the spiritual in the Buddhist experience of resilience finds expression.

The doctors were already talking about another surgery, and other various extreme attempts to make since the skin did not regrow and the burns (250 cm<sup>2</sup>) did not heal with any traditional medical therapy. I decided to chant Daimoku with all my heart and to listen only to the sound of Nam-myoho-renge-kyo, covering my ears while I was chanting with cotton balls, to concentrate better. It was my final battle, the decisive one; if I lost there was no appeal. I recited to bring out the Buddha inside me! Strong faith transformed the impossible into possible: to the amazement of the doctors who took off the bandages it was clear that in just three days the skin had incredibly started to regenerate out of all proportion, and already many sores were closing despite the pathogenic bacteria. No intervention was needed anymore; I recovered spontaneously, and it was a process deemed irreversible and, according to the doctors, very rare (Faggi 1988, 27).

This experience reveals the presence of a particular Buddhist perspective on resilience strongly rooted in its doctrine and philosophy of human revolution. It is not reduced only to the strictly religious sphere, to the sole discourse of the research for faith or spiritual strength: rather, it shows the profound intertwining of existential reasons (the research for happiness, the research for fulfilment in everyday life, in this case in love), motivational and psychological aspects, attitudes, and life choices. Consequently, we can understand resilience in the perspective of the philosophy of human revolution. It is a psychological,



existential, and spiritual attitude that flourishes by actively pursuing the path of personal emancipation, acting to improve and strengthen oneself, to promote personal and social improvement, to cultivate the value and the positive and creative force of life.

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## Too Secularized for French Secularism: Testing the Resilience of Soka Gakkai as a Religious Institution

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**ABSTRACT:** This paper will explore the hurdles that Soka Gakkai, a Japanese lay Buddhist organization, has had to triumph over in its quest to be accepted as a bona fide Buddhist movement in France. Indeed, when compared to other national branches of the group, it appears that SGI-France has had a particularly ambiguous status in the country of *laïcité*, the French version of secularism. Some media outlets, anticult groups, and even government agencies, as well as members of the Parliament, have categorized Soka Gakkai as a “cult.” On the other hand, a few years ago it acquired the legal status of a religious association, making it officially a religion in its own right, at least legally speaking. By reviewing the arguments put forward by the people who consider Soka Gakkai as a “cult,” and building on previous scholarly work on Buddhism in France, this paper will argue that one of the main reasons this new religious movement has been labelled as such may be that it does not match the archetypal image of Buddhism held by most French people. This Buddhist archetype is built primarily on Theravāda, Tibetan, and Zen monastic traditions, which are obviously quite different from the secular and socially active Buddhist organization that Soka Gakkai is. This may explain why the group has had trouble being recognized as Buddhist: paradoxically, French secularism does not seem ready to accept a secular religious organization, and is more comfortable with more “traditional,” clerical Buddhist groups. In this perspective, it is significant that SGI-France is not part of the French Buddhist Union, a national federation of Buddhist associations composed mainly of Vajrayana, Zen, and Theravāda congregations. However, in the past two decades, SGI-France has undertaken a major overhaul, both in its structure and its public image, for instance by taking on a new official name in 2007, that is *Le mouvement bouddhiste Soka* (the Soka Buddhist Movement). These changes might be viewed as evidence of the religious group’s resilience and capacity to adapt to new political and social environments.

**KEYWORDS:** Soka Gakkai, Secularism, Anticult Movements, Buddhism in France, *Laïcité*.

## *Introduction*

Buddhism is now a fully established and accepted religion in France despite its relatively late arrival into the French religious context. But like other world religions, Buddhism does not constitute one monolithic block. It is comprised of a multitude of traditions and sects, and all have not been met with the same response on the part of the French authorities or the French public. Whereas Theravāda, Zen, or Tibetan traditions have enjoyed a positive image that led them to quickly obtain official recognition from the authorities, Soka Gakkai, a Japanese lay organization practicing Nichiren Buddhism, has had an ambiguous relationship with the French people and the French government. The group arrived in France in the 1960s, at the same time as many other Buddhist groups, Tibetan or Japanese, but in the 1980s and 1990s it faced a strong backlash from anticult organizations within and outside the government, and from the media. And yet, in 1991, the then president of Soka Gakkai International Daisaku Ikeda was received by François Mitterrand (1916–1996), the president of France at the time.

The difference of treatment in France between Soka Gakkai on the one hand and more mainstream Buddhist traditions on the other is quite puzzling. As this paper will argue, one possible factor that played a role in this discrepancy may be found in the archetypal image of Buddhism that many French people seem to hold in their minds. This image that is based essentially on Theravāda, Zen, and Tibetan monastic groups has created certain expectations regarding how and by whom Buddhism is practiced, as well as what Buddhist practitioners or organizations may look like. Because Soka Gakkai is a secular organization whose members have differing beliefs and practices, it does not fit this image, as will be explained in the second part of this paper, and it has been viewed by some as a “pseudo-Buddhist” group.

However, Soka Gakkai has shown great resilience in the face of this difficult acceptance, and has managed to adapt to the French context, notably by modifying its institutional structure. But to understand the context in question, it is first needed to review the main phases of the development of Buddhism in France, a development dominated by Theravāda Buddhism as well as by specific Mahāyāna traditions.

## 1. *The Development of Buddhism in France*

### 1.1. From Theravāda...

It is not the intention of this paper to retrace in detail the history of European contacts with and interest in Buddhism (authors with much more expertise in this field of study have already presented such an account, see for instance Donald S. Lopez and his monography *From Stone to Flesh*: Lopez 2013). However, to understand the reception of Soka Gakkai in France it is important to have a grasp of the history of Buddhism in this country, of how it has been viewed, studied, and which traditions are most present.

Even though Mahāyāna traditions can be considered the most important Buddhist ones in France nowadays, as will be shown further down, the Theravāda tradition was the one which first constituted the main object of interest of many intellectuals. Indeed, French orientalist in the 18<sup>th</sup> century, among whom was Eugène Burnouf (1801–1852), considered by some as “the founding father of modern Buddhist scientific studies” (Silk 2012, 1), believed in the existence of a “pure” or “original” Buddhism, which dated back to the founder of this religion, Buddha Shakyamuni, and whose closest descendant, so to speak, was in their eyes the Theravāda tradition (Obadia 1999, 32–5 and 44–5). As Lionel Obadia further explains in his book *Bouddhisme et Occident* [Buddhism and the West] (1999), orientalist were more interested in the “original” Buddhist philosophy as presented in the exegesis of monastic texts rather than in the Buddhist cosmology or the popular religious beliefs and practices (Obadia 1999, 44). Buddhism thus came to be interpreted as a rational religion. This interest in the Theravāda tradition could be found in other intellectual circles in France, such as the Society of the Friends of Buddhism (*Société des amis du bouddhisme*) founded in 1929. However, a few years later this society turned its focus towards Tibetan Buddhism, one of the Mahāyāna traditions.

### 1.2. ...to Mahāyāna Buddhism

This shift of interest from Theravāda to Mahāyāna Buddhism, and especially the Tibetan Vajrayana tradition, was probably influenced by another very famous French orientalist, namely Alexandra David-Néel (1868–1969). Called by Lionel Obadia the “first true apologist of Tibetan Buddhism in France” (Obadia 1999,

112), she promoted an image of Buddhism that was much more esoteric than what was presented and studied by previous orientalists. This can be seen in several of her most famous books, such as *Magic and Mystery in Tibet* (David-Néel 1929), *Tibetan Tale of Love and Magic* (David-Néel 1938), or even in her travel account *My Journey to Lhasa* (David-Néel 1927). In 2016, the first part of a four-volume comic book on David-Néel's life (*Une vie avec Alexandra David-Néel* [A Life with Alexandra David-Néel]) was published (Campoy and Blanchot 2016). It was reissued in 2017, along with the second volume (Campoy and Blanchot 2017), later followed by a third and fourth installments (Campoy and Blanchot 2018, 2020), which is evidence that her life, her travels and, by extent, the image of Tibetan Buddhism she painted in her books are still a source of fascination and interest for many French people. Her house in the town of Digne-les-Bains, in the South of France, has even become a museum.

The development and democratization of Tibetan Buddhism in France kept increasing throughout the 20<sup>th</sup> century, especially after World War II. This time, however, Asian practitioners and teachers took on themselves to spread their religion in Western countries. Chögyam Trungpa (1939–1987), Chuje Akong Rinpoche (1940–2013), Kalu Rinpoche (1905–1989), Sögyal Rinpoche (1947–2019), and other Tibetan teachers travelled to France and started not only to teach there but to create numerous Buddhist centers and temples (Rigal-Cellard 2009, 49–66). So much so that Raphaël Liogier asserted in his book *Le bouddhisme mondialisé* [Globalized Buddhism] that

France can be considered the European nerve center, not so much of Buddhism in general as of the so-called Great Vehicle (between 60% and 65% of Tibetan Buddhist centers in Europe are established in France) (Liogier 2004, 239).

The Dalai Lama also participated in this development of Tibetan Buddhism in France, at least indirectly, as he enjoys a tremendously positive public image. According to the journalist Gaël Lombart, the Dalai Lama made 21 trips to France in 35 years (Lombart 2016). One of his official translators, the French Buddhist monk Matthieu Ricard, is also a Buddhist figure very much liked by a significant proportion of French people, as is demonstrated by the dozens of books, and newspaper and scientific articles he (co-)published, as well as the many interviews he has given over the years on French television.

But Tibetan Buddhism is not the only Mahāyāna tradition to have known success in this country. Zen Buddhism shares a large portion of the French

Buddhist religious market. In 1999, French scholar Frédéric Lenoir listed 51 Zen centers in France, compared to 70 Tibetan Buddhist centers and only 15 Theravāda centers (Lenoir 1999, 423–40). One of the most well-known Buddhist centers in France is that of the Plum Village, near Bordeaux, which is among the biggest Buddhist centers in Europe as it boasts a monastic community of over 200 monks and nuns and has sometimes welcomed more than 700 guests for retreats, according to its official website. This huge center was founded by the famous Vietnamese monk Thích Nhất Hạnh and nun Chân Không in 1982.

### 1.3. The French Buddhist Union

In 1986, several Buddhist communities came together and formed the French Buddhist Union (*Union bouddhiste de France*, or UBF). It is a federation now comprised of most of the Buddhist traditions established in France, at the forefront of which are the Tibetan and Zen traditions: 8 out of the 9 presidents of this federation practiced either Tibetan or Japanese Zen Buddhism (the exception being Ven. Dr. Tampalawela Dhammaratana who is a practitioner of the Theravāda tradition). Right from the start the goal of the UBF was to become the official representative of Buddhism to the French authorities. It was quickly successful in its endeavor since only two years later, in 1988, the UBF obtained a seat on the board of directors of CAVIMAC (*Caisse d'assurance vieillesse, invalidité et maladie des cultes*), the French national health fund for members of clergy, congregations, and religious communities. Buddhism is still today the only non-Abrahamic religion on the board of directors of CAVIMAC.

That same year the French *Conseil d'État* granted the UBF another official recognition: the Karmé Dharma Chakra monastery obtained the legal status of congregation. Up until then, only Catholic worship associations enjoyed the benefits of that official status (Liogier 2005, 244). In 1997, the French Buddhist Union managed to secure a fifteen-minute time slot on France 2, the most important French public national television channel, in order to produce *Sagesse bouddhistes* (“Buddhist Words of Wisdom,” called *Voix bouddhistes* or “Buddhist Voices” until 2007). This TV program is broadcast every Sunday morning along other programs about Judaism, Islam, Protestantism, the Orthodox Church, the Eastern Catholic Churches, and before the live broadcast of the Catholic mass at 10:30 am.

It is therefore indubitable that the UBF has met with success as far as the French authorities are concerned. However, this sort of hegemony enjoyed by the UBF poses the question of the representation and recognition of Buddhist traditions that are not members of this federation, as is the case of Soka Gakkai. Even without considering the question of the UBF, the historical weight of the Buddhist traditions in France mentioned above has probably played against certain Buddhist groups such as Soka Gakkai, as the former are at the source of the archetypal image of Buddhism many French people hold in their minds, a sort of mold into which Soka Gakkai does not fit since, in many respects, it differs greatly from Tibetan and Zen traditions.

## *2. A “Pseudo-Buddhism”: Soka Gakkai and the Archetypal Image of Buddhism in France*

### **2.1. Soka Gakkai Classified as a “Cult”**

Soka Gakkai began to settle in France in the 1960s, around the same time as the creation of the first centers of the Tibetan and Zen traditions. Soka Gakkai and the other Buddhist traditions developed in parallel, though at a very different pace and with varying success: while the UBF was getting official recognition from the French government, the 1980s were for the Japanese sect a period of intense public rejection as it was accused of being a “cult.” Anti-cultists among French authorities, in the press, and in anti-cult associations even branded the group as a form of “pseudo-Buddhism.”

Since the 1980s, the French government has published every year or so a report on the “cults” (called “sectes” in French) established in France as well as the groups demonstrating, in the eyes of the authorities, “cultic tendencies” (“dérives sectaires”). Soka Gakkai was at least mentioned, if not openly criticized, in several of those reports. The first time was in 1985 with the Vivien Report which not only listed Soka Gakkai as a “cult” but went as far as to call it a “pseudo-Buddhism” (Vivien 1985, 62).

This term evidently implies that there exists a true or an original form of Buddhism, to which the authors of the report deem that Soka Gakkai does not belong. One might see in the use of this term and, consequently, in the act of judging the “purity” of a religious tradition, a legacy from the 18<sup>th</sup> century



orientalists who believed in such an original form of Buddhism. This is emphasized by another report, the Gest-Guyard Report (1995), which tackles the issue of what are called the “‘orientalist’ movements”:

The “orientalist” movements:

Is grouped under this term an extreme diversity of movements that refer to oriental religions and metaphysical doctrines, such as Buddhism, Hinduism or Taoism, *all while corrupting them*.

*Soka Gakkai claims to be teaching (despite the 1990 schism with Nichiren Shōshū) the doctrine of Nichiren*, a 13<sup>th</sup> century Buddhist monk who professed a nationalist and intolerant Buddhism (Gest and Guyard 1995, II.A.1, emphasis added).

In their review of “cults” established in France, the authors of the report created seven categories based on the characteristics of each religious group: the “‘apocalyptic’ movements,” the “‘neo-pagan’ movements,” the “‘satanic’ movements,” the “‘healing movements,” the “‘occultist’ movements,” the “‘psychoanalytic’ movements,” and the “‘orientalist’ movements.” As is explained in the quotation above, the orientalist movements are characterized by the fact that they corrupt “oriental religions.” Consequently, Soka Gakkai is supposedly not a genuine Buddhist group, its members can only “claim” to be practicing Buddhism. For the authors of the report, this lack of legitimacy seems further heightened by the schism between Soka Gakkai, the lay Nichirenist organization, and Nichiren Shōshū, the monastic order to which Soka Gakkai was affiliated until 1990.

## 2.2. The model of the Theravāda, Tibetan, and Zen Traditions

We might be here touching upon one of the reasons why Soka Gakkai has been viewed as a corrupt or fake form of Buddhism: if one follows the logic of the Gest-Guyard Report, a legitimate Buddhist group is one that is comprised of or affiliated with a monastic order. It is the opinion of the author of this paper that such a view of what constitutes a “correct” or legitimate Buddhist organization is based upon, at least partly, an archetypal image of Buddhism formed on the model of Theravāda, Tibetan, and Zen traditions. These Buddhist traditions lay great emphasis on the importance of the monks and nuns as well as the lineages they are part of (meaning the succession of direct transmission of certain teachings from

one generation to the next), as they are viewed as guarantors of the authenticity and orthodoxy of the teachings.

After all, the “ambassadors” or public figures representing and importing Buddhism in France have mainly been for more than sixty years Buddhist monks and nuns (the Dalai Lama, Matthieu Ricard, Taisen Deshimaru [1914–1982], Thích Nhất Hạnh, Chân Không, Kalu Rinpoche, etc.). Therefore, the mental image a French person may have of a typical Buddhist practitioner will probably be that of a monk or nun, with all the characteristics that may be associated with them. This is exemplified by the following quotation by Louis Hourmant who expresses his surprise at the differences between Zen and Tibetan practitioners, and members of Soka Gakkai:

Compared to Zen practitioners and more still to Tibetan practitioners, members of Soka Gakkai... blend into their surroundings because of the complete absence of exotic traits: they do not display saffron—or black—colored robes, they do not shave their head, they do not meditate in the lotus position but seated in a banal chair, they do not build pagodas or stupas... but they meet in apartments or in anonymous halls rented for the occasion (Hourmant 1999, 196).

The fact that Soka Gakkai is a secular organization and that it lacks the “exotic” characteristics mentioned above create a dissonance between its claim of being a Buddhist group in its own right and the collective mental image associated with Buddhism in the minds of many French people. These differences between Soka Gakkai and the Theravāda, Zen, and Tibetan traditions were so great in the eyes of French sociologist Frédéric Lenoir that he decided not to include this Japanese organization into his 1999 study of Buddhism in France.

However just this reason may be for such a decision, the way he justified it seems to be in keeping with the argument of this paper, namely that Soka Gakkai has been rejected as an authentic Buddhist group because it departs too much from the archetypal image of Buddhism in France, which is based on Tibetan, Theravāda, and Zen traditions:

The role of the sociologist is not to say whether the criticism [against Soka Gakkai] is justified, false, or excessive, but simply to observe that such differences exist between this very particular group and the other Buddhist traditions, so much so that it becomes therefore impossible to put them together in the same study. The significant success of Soka Gakkai and its solid implementation in most Western countries having been the object of specific studies, it seems to me wiser to compare these works to those, like ours, that focus on Buddhism in its most traditional acceptance—as represented in

France by the Theravāda, Zen, and Tibetan traditions—which is also the one spread by the media and in which every French person concerned directly or indirectly by this “Buddhist wave” can recognize themselves (Lenoir 1999, 23).

It is interesting to note that the anti-cult association UNADFI (Union nationale des associations de défense des familles et de l’individu, “National Union of the Associations for the Defense of the Families and the Individuals”) uses Lenoir’s study on its website as an argument from authority against Soka Gakkai (UNADFI 2014). On the contrary, other scholars who have studied Buddhism in France have included Soka Gakkai as well as other traditions in their works. This is the case for instance of Raphaël Liogier (2004), Thierry Mathé (2005), or Lionel Obadia’s 2011 article fittingly titled “Can You Judge a Monk by His Robe? Social Semiotics of ‘The Buddhist Being’ in the Western Context.” In this article, Obadia explains that

the association of appearance (the robe) and behavior (asceticism) has ideally corresponded to the prism of Western representations, to an absolute accordance between the norm (ethics) and the customs (its implementation) (Obadia 2011, 74).

### 2.3. A Religious Group That Is Too Secularized

Obadia is hinting here at another determining element in the reception and perception of Soka Gakkai in France when he speaks about the behavior and ethics of Buddhist practitioners, especially those wearing “the robe,” i.e. the monks and nuns, the *sensei* and the *lamas*. To paraphrase Obadia, many French people (and people from other Western countries) have suffered from a cognitive bias that overly credits Buddhist monastics with virtuous behavior. In other words, they are seen as the perfect embodiments of moral behavior, or virtue (*śīla*) (Obadia 2011, 77).

This is again reflected on the website of the UNADFI, where one of the main charges brought against Soka Gakkai is that it is “a Buddhism disseminated by a lay organization.” The UNADFI presents thereafter the difficult relationship between Soka Gakkai and Nichiren Shōshū, a relationship where the monastic branch has been the victim, and the lay branch the culprit:

Fights occurred in temples; a libel suit was filed by the SG against the Nichiren Shōshū in Los Angeles. The SG keeps on dragging Nichiren Shōshū’s name in the mud, to the point that some members of the SGF [Soka Gakkai France] have thought that this fight should not be based on hate (UNADFI 2014).

This exceedingly positive image of Buddhist monastics may explain why for many years some French anti-cultists have criticized Soka Gakkai for certain types of behavior that could also be found in more mainstream Buddhist traditions.

Another of the main points of criticism that have been made against Soka Gakkai in France has to do with its engagement with the secular world. The goal of the group is indeed to generate a “human revolution” and a world of peace thanks to the propagation of the *Lotus Sutra*. Among other things, Soka Gakkai works as an NGO with the United Nations, focusing on nuclear disarmament, human rights, and sustainable development. This lay Buddhist organization went as far as to create a new political party in Japan in 1964 called Kōmeitō.

This political engagement was badly perceived in France, even after Soka Gakkai officially cut ties with this political party in 1970, as is revealed by several press articles published in the 1980s and 1990s, at the peak of the anticult movement in France. For instance, an article from the daily newspaper *Libération* titled “All This Week in *Libération*: Cults in Quest of Political Influence Abroad. Today, Japan. Soka Gakkai Infiltrates Japanese Politics. Under the Cover of Being a Religion, the Rich Organization Maintains a Power-Conquering Strategy” (Amoua 1996).

On the contrary, other Buddhist groups’ engagement in worldly affairs has been perceived in a more positive light, if it was perceived at all. For instance, the numerous books and talks by the Dalai Lama on social issues such as abortion, democracy, the environment, economics, politics, and many others do not seem to have created as much antagonism in France as it has for Soka Gakkai (Obadia 1999, 148–49; Liogier 2004). Here again the fact that Soka Gakkai is a secular organization might explain the differences of treatment with other Buddhist groups. Members of the Buddhist clergy, as well as the doctrines they may teach, have long been viewed as primarily, if not only, concerned with spiritual matters and contemplative practices, to the point that some have viewed Buddhism as an “apathetic” religion (Obadia 1999, 80–1).

Contrary to Liogier’s argument that the representation of Soka Gakkai as an organization that is both completely religious and completely secular... is actually an asset for its Westernization (Liogier 2002, 11), it seems rather that in France the secular character of this Buddhist organization has hindered its process of public acceptance. Put differently, Soka Gakkai is—

quite paradoxically—too secularized a group for the country of *laïcité* as it goes against many of the characteristics attributed by many French people to what is considered to actually be Buddhism. However, Soka Gakkai's French offshoot has not remained passive in the face of these difficulties regarding its integration in France but, on the contrary, it has shown resilience.

### 3. *The Resilience of Soka Gakkai in France*

In August and September 2021, the European Association for the Study of Religions (EASR) held in Pisa its 18<sup>th</sup> annual conference on the topic of resilience. The concept of resilience was defined as follows in the conference's website:

Resilience can be considered as the ability to counteract or absorb a process of transformation. It is also characterized by a capacity to endure changes without having to adapt permanently, an ability to find what best suits new environmental conditions; and an awareness of how to cope with a crisis (EASR 2021).

Soka Gakkai in France seems to fit this description since at the beginning of the 21<sup>st</sup> century the organization resolved to change some of its practices (by using a more moderate form of proselytism for example), and adapt its institutional organization to the demands of the French authorities, as well as to fit the model set by other religions long established in the country. Since I have discussed in a previous article the evolution of proselytization practices by Soka Gakkai in France (Ben Hammouda 2019), the point of focus here will be on the institutional changes.

These changes took place mainly in 2007, when SGF went through a major overhaul that aimed at countering the arguments regarding the lack of transparency of the group. From that year on, Soka Gakkai in France was divided into three main branches, each branch having specific responsibilities. The group was first granted the legal status of “worship association” (*association cultuelle*) by the French authorities and chose a new official name that clearly asserts its affiliation to Buddhism: “Soka Worship Association of Nichiren Buddhism” (*Association cultuelle Soka du bouddhisme Nichiren*). Obtaining the legal status of a worship association was of paramount importance for the group as this status “provides public accreditation for legitimate religions” in France (Hervieu-Léger 2004, 55). In other words, it meant that the French Ministry of the Interior

(which manages all the questions related to religious groups established in the country) officially recognized Soka Gakkai as a legitimate religion and no longer as a dangerous “cult.” This does not mean however that the group has been completely free of this accusation. In 2017, for instance, Soka Gakkai was again mentioned in the yearly report published by the MIVILUDES (the Interministerial Mission for Monitoring and Combatting Cultic Deviances: MIVILUDES 2017).

The second new branch of Soka Gakkai in France is the Soka Cultural Association in France (*Association culturelle Soka de France*). It is in charge of the organization of cultural activities, such as (interreligious) conferences and seminars. It also administers the Maison Littéraire de Victor Hugo (see Rigal-Cellard 2021). The last branch, or association, is the Association of Commerce, Edition, and other Services (*Association de commerce, d'édition et de service*), which manages the publications of the movement in France.

This separation of the religious activities from the cultural and commercial ones into three specific official associations is proof of the capacity for structural resilience of this Buddhist sect. Beyond the question of transparency, it is also a way to fit, if not the French archetypal image of Buddhism, then the French administrative and institutional framework for religious organizations. In his 2004 article “Perspective: Toward a Definition of ‘New Religion,’” Gordon Melton underlined the capacity of new religious movements (NRMs) to adapt and change their beliefs and behaviors in order to overcome the accusations they may face:

[I]t has been observed that the new religions change rapidly, especially those still in their first generation of life. Newly founded groups, which may adopt beliefs and practices that set them in heightened tension vis-à-vis the establishment, can significantly lower their tension by altering behaviors with only minor adjustments to their belief systems (Melton 2004, 83).

The case of Soka Gakkai in France may invite us to add to these observations that new religious movements’ specific capacity for change does not solely concern the beliefs and behaviors of the groups in question, but might also pertain to their ability to alter their institutional structure(s).

One last element—but not the least—regarding SGF’s institutional overhaul needs to be examined. Indeed, there is another organizational body which oversees the religious activities of the group. This body is the French national

Soka Consistory of Nichiren Buddhism (*Consistoire Soka du bouddhisme de Nichiren*). Its official goal, as delineated in its Constitution available on its website, is to guarantee “the unity of the religion and the respect of the belief as well as the Buddhist practice of Nichiren Buddhism.” This is done in concertation with what they call the “world Consistory” (i.e. Soka Gakkai International). It currently consists of six members who have been chosen “by the world Consistory” for “their spiritual qualities and their knowledge of Buddhism” (Consistoire Soka du bouddhisme de Nichiren 2006, 6). The Consistory is also the official interlocutor of Soka Gakkai for the French authorities.

This description of the Soka Consistory is not dissimilar from Protestant presbyteries. The term “Consistory” itself is also used in French Judaism: the Central Israelite Consistory of France (*Consistoire central israélite de France*) was the first institution of that type created in France, in 1808, under Napoleon I’s (1769–1821) regime. In a way, one might argue that Soka Gakkai had to become less secularized, while remaining a lay organization, by adopting institutional traits of more mainstream religions so as to fit the administrative requirements of French secularism.

This adaptation of Soka Gakkai to the French political and religious context is in keeping with the Nichirenist precept of *zuihō bini*. As explained by McLaughlin in his monography *Soka Gakkai’s Human Revolution: The Rise of a Mimetic Nation in Modern Japan*, this term is “a term Nichiren used to mean the precept of adapting to local customs.” In the words of Nichiren,

if one does not go against the heart of the precepts, even if one departs ever so slightly from the teachings of the Buddha, one should avoid going against the customs of the country (McLaughlin 2019, 10).

McLaughlin further explains that *zuihō bini*

enabled Gakkai adherents to introduce suppleness into rigidity as it allowed members to fit exclusive Lotus adherence into local customs and to adapt *shakubuku* conversion techniques to suit situational mores (McLaughlin 2019, 10).

It seems that this precept has enabled Soka Gakkai to adapt not only its conversion techniques but also its institutional framework at the national level by mimicking—to use McLaughlin’s expression—other religions that have long been established in France.

## *Conclusion*

Despite being active in France for almost as long as Theravāda, Tibetan, or Zen traditions, Soka Gakkai has faced many more difficulties to be accepted both by French authorities and French society at large. This paper has thus tried to demonstrate that what may explain in part this difference of treatment between these Buddhist groups has to do with the archetypal image of the Buddhist religion many French people hold in their minds. As a new religious movement, Soka Gakkai did not benefit from the same long history of contact and interest between Europeans and practitioners of Theravāda and Mahāyāna traditions such as Tibetan and Japanese Zen Buddhism. Because French people have engaged with these specific traditions since at least the 18<sup>th</sup> century, be it through scientific studies or personal philosophical and spiritual interest, these groups have inevitably become the source of the collective mental image brought up to many French people's minds when they are asked the questions "What is Buddhism?" "What is a Buddhist?" or "What does practicing Buddhism look like?"

Soka Gakkai went against this fixed archetypal image of Buddhism since it was a completely secular organization with religious practices and beliefs that did not resemble those of other Mahāyāna traditions. However, this movement has shown great resilience in confronting these difficulties as it changed its institutional structure at the national level in order to meet the standards of organized religions within the framework of French secularism. By doing so, Soka Gakkai paradoxically had to present a less secular image of itself and assert its status as an actual, legitimate Buddhist religious movement. This is still however an ongoing process since as recently as 2017 the MIVILUDES report still ranked Soka Gakkai in the category of "pseudo-Buddhism."

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## **Buddhism and Women: Centers and Peripheries. A Case Study of Soka Gakkai**

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**ABSTRACT:** Over the years, Buddhism has been criticized for adopting sexist dogmas against women. While other religions have also been the recipients of similar criticism, particularly with the emergence of various feminist movements worldwide, there has been some effort in recent years to address this issue: firstly, by identifying perspectives held by different Buddhist schools of thought; secondly, by clarifying sociocultural factors over the ages that have influenced the manner in which these schools came to regard women; and thirdly, presenting the views on gender equality of a lay Buddhist organization, specifically Soka Gakkai, and how it is conveying a message of empowerment and engagement for women on a global basis in the modern era.

**KEYWORDS:** Soka Gakkai, Buddhism and Gender Equality, Nichiren, Lotus Sutra, Buddhism and Women.

### *Introduction*

Historically, social, economic, political, and cultural factors have conspired to relegate women to the role of a “secondary sex.” Religion has been equally culpable; and women have certainly been marginalized in Buddhism as well.

In the 21<sup>st</sup> century, when gender equality is becoming the ethos of the age, the relationship between Buddhism and women should warrant deeper reexamination. What is important is that in striving to do so, we should not merely censure Buddhist philosophical ideals and principles, but also identify and evaluate the concept of gender equality as originally embraced by Buddhism—and in so doing, inform the process from which to build a new relationship between women and Buddhism.

Unlike traditional Buddhist congregations, Soka Gakkai is a lay Buddhist organization that has consistently emphasized gender equality. Soka Gakkai's third president Daisaku Ikeda has striven over many years to empower women, regarding their flourishing as being fundamental to resolving the manifold challenges that confront the global society.

Ikeda's perspectives on humanity and women are rooted in Buddhist tenets, Shakyamuni Buddha, the *Lotus Sutra*, and Nichiren (1222–1282). Having studied the genealogy of women's emancipative thought in Buddhism and concluded that gender equality is essential to Buddhist thought, Ikeda has sought to communicate this in modern, readily accessible terms for contemporary society.

This presentation provides the perspectives of women held by Shakyamuni, the *Lotus Sutra*, and Nichiren while introducing Ikeda's beliefs regarding women that have been shaped and sustained by these three points of reference.

### *1. Shakyamuni Buddha's View of Women*

Discrimination against women was a demonstrable fact of life in the Indian subcontinent at the time Buddhism was founded. They were seen as inferior to men, and their rights and activities were rigidly restrained. In contrast, Shakyamuni Buddha saw both sexes as being religiously equal. Although women were thought to be a distractive influence, and thus excluded from monastic practice, their basic nature and capacity for religious salvation was not necessarily denied.

For example, in explaining his dharma, the Buddha compared it to a cart:

Be it woman, be it man for whom /

Such chariot doth wait, by that same car /

Into Nibbāna's presence shall they come (*The Books of the Kindred Sayings [Sanyutta-Nikāya], Part I* 1971, 45).

Moreover, the Buddha described the Brahman as follows:

Not by birth does one become an outcaste, not by birth does one become a brahman. By (one's) action one becomes an outcaste, by (one's) action one becomes a brahman (*The Group of Discourses [Sutta-Nipāta], vol. II* 1995, 16).

For Shakyamuni, one's worth was derived from deeds rather than attributes, and neither status nor gender were relevant.

His attitude toward women was further exemplified by their ordination into the clergy. Although a nun's practice was circumscribed with special rules—there were more precepts for nuns (348) than for monks (250)—, the very fact that women were admitted into the clergy at all was still an epochal development for the time.

The *Therīgāthā* (*Verses of the Elder Nuns*) vividly describes the circumstances and practices of nuns. In the work, the Buddha speaks to them as follows:

To Dhīrā, he said, “Dhīrā, attain cessation, the stilling of the (evil) notions, happiness; gain quenching, unsurpassed rest-from-exertion” (*The Elders' Verses II [Therīgāthā]* 1995, 1).

And to Mittā, “Mittā, having gone forth in faith, be one who delights in friends; develop good mental states for the attainment of rest-from-exertion” (*The Elders' Verses II [Therīgāthā]* 1995, 192).

These passages indicate that the Buddha considered it to be natural for nuns to reach the state of Nirvana.

Moreover, the nun Somā proclaims,

What (harm) could the woman's state do to us, when the mind is well-concentrated, when knowledge exists for someone rightly having insight into the doctrine? (*The Elders' Verses II [Therīgāthā]* 1995, 192).

During Shakyamuni's lifetime, monks and nuns undertook the same religious practices as the Buddha's disciples, and women experienced no discrimination with men in terms of their qualification for religious salvation. However, after the Buddha's passing, with Buddhist factions and movements being led mainly by monks, the status of nuns gradually declined.

It was during this period that the doctrine holding that women are subject to the five obstacles emerged. This doctrine purported that women cannot become a Brahma heavenly king, a King Shakra, a devil king, a wheel-turning sage king, or a Buddha. This was not merely a refusal of the female potential, but a basic denial of the essential religious qualification of women.

Thus began the gradual erosion of gender equality in Buddhism.

## 2. Women in Mahayana Sutras

The Mahayana Buddhist movement, which emerged around the first century BCE, was strongly influenced by the social institutions of the time because of the large role the laity played in it. The movement's view of women was also influenced by extant socially approved thoughts as incorporated in the Laws of Manu. This legal text or code rejected the notion of female independence, categorized women as being malignant by nature, and proscribed their reading of the Vedas. As Mahayana Buddhism absorbed the socially accepted ideas of the day, the attainment of Buddhahood by women was firmly denied, and their basic iniquity underscored.

However, even under these circumstances, a number of Buddhist scriptures were emerging that did not subscribe to such misogynistic beliefs. For example, the *Vimalakīrti Sutra* stated that it was an illusion to distinguish man from woman based on the concept of “emptiness” or non-substantiality. The *Śrīmālā Sutra* expounded that both men and women could attain Buddhahood equally, based on the concept of True Dharma. The most groundbreaking of all teachings was the *Lotus Sutra*, which revealed for the first time the dragon daughter's attainment of Buddhahood in the twelfth, or *Devadatta*, chapter. Despite her doing so, Śāriputra could not bring himself to believe it, so profoundly prejudiced was he by the theory of the five obstacles. According to the Sutra, the dragon daughter was transformed into a man before an assembly gathered before the Buddha; by carrying out her bodhisattva practice she gained spiritual enlightenment—and only then did Śāriputra become a believer (*The Lotus Sutra and Its Opening and Closing Sutras* 2009).

The dragon daughter's need to metamorphosize into a man before she gained enlightenment has been reproved in recent years. But what such criticism often neglects is the sociocultural context of that period. Given the extant predominance Hindu society assigned to men over women, any advocacy of gender equality was tantamount to heresy, and a potential danger for its advocates. The creature's transformation should therefore be interpreted as a compromise measure, tweaked to meet the social mores of the era. It can also be argued that it was done to facilitate popular acceptance. In any event, the dragon daughter's Buddhahood was a momentous matter in the annals of Buddhism.

### *3. Introduction of Buddhism to Japan and Japanification of Buddhism*

Having traveled through China and the Korean Peninsula, Buddhism was introduced to Japan in the 6<sup>th</sup> century CE, with many Buddhist scriptures having been translated into Chinese.

Among the most prominent of these translations was the *Lotus Sutra* completed by Kumārajīva (344–413). From the *Lotus Sutra*, the Tiantai school expounded the principle of “three thousand realms in a single moment of life” that was carried forward by Nichiren in 13<sup>th</sup>-century Japan. This principle serves as the theoretical basis and validation of the enlightenment of women.

In Japan, Chinese Buddhism underwent a metamorphosis, evolving to meet uniquely Japanese ways and needs. The first to be ordained were three young girls. It is said that their motives for doing so were twofold: first, they were virgins and, reflective of both indigenous religious as well as Buddhist beliefs at the time, thought to possess shamanistic powers; and second, as daughters from educated families that had emigrated to Japan, the girls were literate. Thus, during this early period of Japanese Buddhism, women were not seen as predisposed to religious inferiority and shunned as a matter of principle.

This attitude continued into the Nara period (710–793). For example, the “Statute for Priests,” a 27-article regulatory code governing temples and priests, was essentially gender-blind despite featuring numerous provisions regarding the Buddhist clergy.

The situation would change in the Heian period (794–1191), however. As a result of the institutionalization of Buddhism, temples served as official instruments of a state religion, and canonical authority rested almost exclusively in the hands of male priests. This came about as the shamanistic nature of women was relegated to irrelevance while the grip of paternalism on Japanese society grew even more powerful.

Among the more conspicuous developments of this era was the exclusion of women from temples and shrines. Beginning from the second half of the eleventh century, women were prohibited from entering and staying in such major Buddhist sanctuaries as Tōdaiji, Enryakuji, and Kongōbuji.

The prohibition was justified by the theory of five obstacles that emerged after the Buddha’s passing, asserting that women were a distraction and therefore



hindered monks from their ascetic practice. What was the cause of such sexist backlash at this time, while women faced little discrimination in the early days of Japanese Buddhism? It appears that other factors had conspired to bring the matter to the fore.

One such factor initially unrelated to imported Buddhist scriptures was the longstanding indigenous notion that women were fundamentally impure, a belief that Japanese Buddhism gradually assimilated. Impurity had been closely associated with “sin” and “disaster,” and the process of purification required a period of abstinence.

Little understood physiological phenomena such as death, menstruation, and childbirth were not seen as natural processes, and perceived instead as being impure and even virulent, and thus to be avoided. In order to evade “infection,” people believed that they needed to isolate the cause, and refrain from contact with anything related with such phenomena. Should such contact be unavoidable, people bathed and purified themselves with salt and water.

While death may have been a “defilement” common to both men and women at the time, menstruation and childbirth were peculiar to women. At first, women were considered impure only during such feminine processes, and able to return to their daily lives once such occasions ended. However, from around the 11<sup>th</sup> century, women themselves began to be seen as impure—what had been a temporary stigma persisted, and eventually became permanent. Women could not enter such holy facilities as temples, and were barred from other sacred sites.

Buddhism turned its early generosity towards women into a teaching that emphasized the depth of female sin, and strove to institutionalize their discrimination. Such thinking was pervasive in temples and the aristocratic elite, and gradually came to permeate the very lives of ordinary women.

#### *4. Nichiren's View of Women*

Buddhism in Japan underwent a significant transformation in the Kamakura period (1192–1333), spawning new schools of thought and culminating in the so-called Kamakura New Buddhism. Although the founders of these new schools held varied views of women, Nichiren deserves special attention.

Nichiren rejected the discrimination against women set forth in other sutras, and refuted their position that women cannot attain Buddhahood, basing his view on the *Lotus Sutra* and its description of the dragon king's daughter attainment of Buddhahood.

Nichiren wrote as follows:

In the various Hinayana sutras that were preached before the *Lotus Sutra*, it is denied that women can ever attain Buddhahood. In the Mahayana sutras other than the *Lotus Sutra*, it would appear that women can attain Buddhahood or be reborn in the pure land. But they may do so only after they have changed into some other form. It is not the kind of immediate attainment of Buddhahood that is based on the doctrine of three thousand realms in a single moment of life. Thus it is an attainment of Buddhahood or rebirth in the pure land in name only and not in reality. The dragon king's daughter represents "one example that stands for all the rest" (Nichiren 1999a, 269).

The central point, according to Nichiren, is that women have the capacity for the attainment of Buddhahood. This belief is based on the doctrine of three thousand realms in a single moment of life, which holds that all life possesses an infinitude of possibilities that can be manifested from moment to moment, thereby enabling any living being to attain Buddhahood in any given moment, regardless of one's gender or life-state.

Nichiren also repudiated those teachings that require women to metamorphosize into a man as a prerequisite to enlightenment. He pointed to the dragon daughter as the first ever example of a woman to attain Buddhahood in a single lifetime and that the outcome is ensured for all women in the *Lotus Sutra*. He asserted that the path to Buddhahood for women is only accessible to those who have faith in Nichiren's teachings, which are firmly grounded in the original intent and purpose of the *Lotus Sutra*.

At the same time, Nichiren clearly denied the theory of the five obstacles, while rejecting the notion that women are defiled by nature. He believed that menstruation and childbirth are not impure, but that they are simply biological and physiological properties.

For Nichiren, faith—not gender—was the primary determinant for the attainment of Buddhahood. He thus wrote:

There should be no discrimination among those who propagate the five characters of Myoho-enge-kyo in the Latter Day of the Law, be they men or women. Were they not Bodhisattvas of the Earth, they could not chant the daimoku (Nichiren 1999b, 385).

Positioning the *Lotus Sutra* at the core of his teachings, Nichiren made clear that gender has no bearing on an individual's capacity for religious salvation—the original view as expounded by Shakyamuni in the *Lotus Sutra* and one Nichiren carried forward. In an age that was so heavily misogynistic, Nichiren's proclamations, both emancipative and egalitarian, were nothing short of revolutionary.

As Japanese scholar of Buddhist studies Junko Oguri writes, when it came to attitudes on women in Buddhism, Nichiren stands out as “the most progressive among the founders of Kamakura Buddhism.” (Oguri 1987, 122).

### 5. Soka Gakkai's View of Women

Soka Gakkai, established in modern Japan, owes its lineage to the Buddha, the *Lotus Sutra*, and Nichiren. Introducing Daisaku Ikeda's views on the attainment of Buddhahood by women as revealed in the *Lotus Sutra* in turn provides perspective on and commentary to his manifold views on and expectations regarding women.

Ikeda points out the following on the attainment of Buddhahood by the dragon daughter:

[It] is also a grand declaration of human rights that refutes, by means of actual proof, ideas and beliefs that discriminate against women... (Ikeda et al. 2001, 93–4).

[E]veryone, men and women alike, possesses the “attainments that were inherent in her nature.” It is a jewel that exists in the lives of all living beings. This is the meaning of the mutual possession of the Ten Worlds and three thousand realms in a single moment of life; this is the *Lotus Sutra's* fundamental revelation. The Ten Worlds include the realm of Animals. The dragon girl has the form of an animal, and naturally the world of Buddhahood is also inherent in the realm of Animals. Her Buddhahood is invisible, however, to an eye that is tainted by prejudice. The *Lotus Sutra* teaches that all living beings possess the world of Buddhahood. There is not even a hint of discrimination toward women (Ikeda et al. 2001, 94).

Thus, Ikeda believes that discrimination by any measure, including gender, is an unspeakable affront to the universality of Buddhahood. He continues:

... the dragon girl's enlightenment indicates the principle of attaining Buddhahood in one's present form. The crucial point is that she had already become a Buddha in her female form. The dragon girl's changing into a man is nothing more than an expedient

means that she employs to drive home the fact of her Buddhahood to Shariputra and the others, who were convinced only men could attain Buddhahood.

It does not mean that a woman can only attain Buddhahood by first turning into a man... fundamentally, Buddhism views all living beings as individual manifestations of a single great golden life. This is the truth to which Shakyamuni had become enlightened... This, in essence, is the Mystic Law. From this enlightened standpoint, it would be ludicrous to assert that one sex is superior to the other (Ikeda et al. 2001, 94).

Having explored the sources of gender equality in Buddhist thought, Ikeda has for decades been encouraging women to contribute to the communities in which they reside and to society in general as independent individuals striving for self-realization. It may be, in fact, that Ikeda's perspective of wellbeing transcends gender, assigning primacy on such values as a person's humanity and humility, altruistic service, philosophical beliefs, and tenacity in the face of hardship, to achieve a truly fulfilling life regardless of one's sex or gender.

### *Conclusion*

Despite the fact that various schools of Buddhist thought and belief systems have long oppressed women and displaced them unto the peripheries of Buddhism, the genealogy and interpretation of emancipative Buddhist thought with regards to women has been consistent and continuous, as explained earlier.

Women in Soka Gakkai worldwide, inspired by Ikeda's clarion call for empowerment and self-realization over the years, are striving to transform the 21<sup>st</sup> century into what Ikeda terms the "century of life," in which individuals of all genders are cared for and share responsibilities, realizing their potential without restraint while serving to better society. They are, in fact, central to—not marginal in—this effort.

And that is precisely how Soka Gakkai views Buddhism: a dynamic, diverse and all-inclusive body of religious thought thoroughly relevant to the modern world, a key point when discussing the complex, often controversial and misunderstood relationship between women and Buddhism.

Indeed, gender equality as perceived in the *Lotus Sutra*, Nichiren Buddhism, and Soka Gakkai has broader connotations, reaching out to address every stereotype and inequality, be it in terms of race, ethnicity, ideology, religion, occupation, academic record, age, origin of birth, physical constitution or mental

or emotional condition. While such distinctions remain as embedded and abiding as ever, Soka Gakkai—based on the principle of the universality of Buddhahood as expounded in the *Lotus Sutra*—maintains that every human being possesses the Buddha nature, and is thus unique and invaluable.

No two human beings are identical. In theory, differences between people are natural, and it is precisely because we, as individuals, are different that we are able to learn from and enrich one another and appreciate our diversity. Yet, in practice, our human differences are what drive us apart, sowing the seeds for discrimination, exclusion, oppression, and conflict. That has been the intractable narrative of human history. As humanity strives to overcome this legacy and create a world built on peaceful coexistence, Soka Gakkai's perspectives on human dignity and universal equality, and its engagement in advancing such causes, may prove highly instructive.

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## An Endless Controversy: L. Ron Hubbard's "Affirmations"

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**ABSTRACT:** During a court case in 1984, disgruntled ex-Scientologist Gerry Armstrong mentioned a document nicknamed "Affirmations," including several handwritten notes by L. Ron Hubbard he had bound together while working at a biography of Scientology's founder to be written by British author Omar Garrison. Armstrong claimed these were "commands" Hubbard had written to himself for experiments in self-hypnosis. The document as such disappeared, but portions had been read into the court record. A new, allegedly complete, text was published by Armstrong in 2000, and was quoted by journalists and scholars as a significant document for understanding Hubbard's early ideas. The article argues that the 2000 text is, in all likelihood, false, and that the scarce portions that surfaced earlier are neither surely authentic nor particularly significant for an assessment of Hubbard and Scientology.

**KEYWORDS:** L. Ron Hubbard, Scientology, Dianetics, "Affirmations" (L. Ron Hubbard), Gerry Armstrong, Omar Garrison.

### *Introduction*

One of the most bizarre documents attributed to L. Ron Hubbard (1911–1986), the founder of Scientology, is commonly known as the "Affirmations." It has its own entry on Wikipedia, where it is described as "widely believed to have been written by L. Ron Hubbard" (Wikipedia 2021). Militant anti-Scientologist Gerry Armstrong wrote in 2000 that

Admissions are quite obviously a part of \$cientology's [sic: Armstrong writes "Scientology" with the dollar symbol for obvious derogatory purposes] 'scriptures.' On the holiness scale®, they are holier than the holiest of the Advanced Technology scriptures (Armstrong 2000).

Scholar Hugh Urban called them “one of the most important documents for making sense of the [...] occult roots of Scientology” (Urban 2012, 100). Anti-Scientology journalist Tony Ortega reported that it was in fact Urban who “encouraged us to publish some of L. Ron Hubbard’s infamous ‘Affirmations’ while we were at the *Village Voice*” (Ortega 2017).

Urban’s interest in the “Affirmations” is that they may confirm his theory that Hubbard was influenced by Aleister Crowley (1875–1947), the British magus who became the leader of the occult order Ordo Templi Orientis (O.T.O.). Whether Hubbard ever formally became a member of the O.T.O. is doubtful, and was later denied by both Sarah Elizabeth “Betty” Northrup (1924–1997), Hubbard’s one-time wife, and by science fiction author Alva Rogers (1923–1982), who were both part of the circle in California gathered around scientist and O.T.O. initiate John Whiteside (“Jack”) Parsons (1914–1952) in the years when Hubbard befriended him and lived in his house (Rogers 1982; Hollister 1997). On the other hand, Parsons made it clear that he regarded Hubbard as a trusted co-worker in the magical activities of his lodge (Bogdan 2016). Why exactly Hubbard became involved in Parsons’ occult endeavors is a matter of controversy, and one I discussed at length in a study of Hubbard’s relationships with magic (Introvigne 2019).

I did not quote the “Affirmations” in my article, since I believed that by 2019, it was obvious, at least to scholars, that their most often quoted text was a fake document. I was wrong. Urban politely entered a Facebook discussion about my study and declared itself “baffled by the fact that it does not even mention the key ‘Affirmations’ text (circa 1946–47) which is widely believed to be Hubbard’s.” This persuaded me that reconstructing the whole story of the so-called “Affirmations” was worth the while.

### *A Sordid Story*

The lengthy tale of the “Affirmations” starts with one Gerald “Gerry” Armstrong. A Canadian citizen, he joined Scientology in Vancouver in 1969. He became a de facto employee of L. Ron Hubbard and/or the Church of Scientology in 1971, and a legal resident of the U.S. in 1977 (Armstrong 2004). Armstrong worked for Scientology as a middle-level employee, although he later promoted himself in Russia to “former personal secretary to L. Ron Hubbard”

(Filippov 2011), a position he never held. Part of Armstrong's job was to collect documents for an authorized biography of L. Ron Hubbard, to be written by Omar V. Garrison, a British professional writer. Armstrong later claimed he suggested the idea of a biography to Hubbard, and Hubbard approved it.

Armstrong was not the first, nor the last, Scientologist who decided to leave the Church and become its militant opponent. He did so in December 1981. What was less common, however, is that he exited the Church taking with him 21 boxes including copies (and perhaps originals) of more than 10,000 documents and papers by and about Hubbard, which had been prepared for the proposed biography and he had given to Garrison for that purpose. Armstrong recovered the boxes from Garrison and gave it to his lawyer, Michael J. Flynn, a militant anti-Scientologist himself.

Not unexpectedly, Scientology sued for recovering the documents. On behalf of his clients, Flynn raised as a defense that taking the documents was necessary to protect Armstrong and his wife from harassment by Scientology once he had left the Church and started publicly criticizing it. The case was heard by the Superior Court of the State of California for the County of Los Angeles from April 19 to June 8, 1984, before Judge Paul G. Breckenridge, Jr.

During the case, Armstrong had to prove that some of the documents he had given to Flynn could work as his "insurance" against possible retaliation, as they were really detrimental to Scientology. Among the documents that Armstrong declared would be, if disclosed, highly damaging for the reputation of L. Ron Hubbard and Scientology, he mentioned the

Affirmations [which] were handwritten materials, handwritten by L. Ron Hubbard, which went over various of his problems, and they were self-hypnotic commands that he was writing to himself, affirmations (Superior Court of California for the County of Los Angeles 1984, V, 793–94).

Armstrong explained he had bound together different handwritten notes by Hubbard and had given them to Garrison (Superior Court of California for the County of Los Angeles 1984, V, 794). The latter testified, "I was the one that gave it that designation. The word 'Affirmation' doesn't appear on any of it" (Superior Court of California for the County of Los Angeles 1984, XXI, 3652). Armstrong expressed as his "opinion" that the notes he assembled dated back to "the period of 1946–1947" (Superior Court of California for the County of Los Angeles 1984, XII, 1928).



By reading the transcript, it is difficult not to conclude that Judge Breckenridge was extremely prejudiced against Scientology. In its “Memorandum of Intended Decision” filed on June 22, 1984, he called Scientology a “schizophrenic and paranoid” cult (Breckenridge 1984, 8). He accepted Armstrong’s defense, although he also indicated that the documents, or most of them, should eventually be “returned to the plaintiff,” i.e. to the Church of Scientology (Breckenridge 1984, 12).

Appeals and other legal actions were filed, and on December 6, 1986, the Church of Scientology International and Armstrong signed a settlement, which later became an exhibit in other cases, thus becoming publicly available. Scientology paid to Armstrong \$ 800,000 (Court of Appeal, First District, Division 4, California 2005; reportedly, \$ 300,000 went to his lawyer), and Armstrong agreed to maintain in the future “strict confidentiality and silence with respect to his experiences with the Church of Scientology and any knowledge or information he may have concerning the Church of Scientology, L. Ron Hubbard, or any of the organizations, individuals and entities” associated with Hubbard and Scientology. Armstrong also agreed to return to Scientology several documents, including “all originals and copies of documents commonly known as the ‘Affirmations’ written by L. Ron Hubbard” (“Mutual Release of All Claims and Settlement Agreement” 2016).

By his own admission in articles published in his Web site, Armstrong breached the agreement hundreds of times, lost several court cases for this reason, and a warrant for arrest was issued against him in California (see e.g. Armstrong 2014).

In particular, Armstrong admitted having helped those who wrote the most significant anti-Scientology books in the 1980s and 1990s (Armstrong 2004). These included the Danish-born American journalist Bent Corydon and British journalist Russell Miller. Corydon listed as his co-author one of Hubbard’s sons, L. Ron Hubbard, Jr., also known as Ronald Edward DeWolf (1934–1991), although the latter in a sworn affidavit dated May 20, 1987, claimed he had never authorized such use of his name. He added that,

my communications to Bent Corydon and others, were simply no more than wild flights of fantasy based on my own unlimited imagination. To now represent those statements as “truth,” and to steal the hard-earned value of the name “L. Ron Hubbard” by using my

former name as the co-author of a book I have neither written nor reviewed, is an unethical act of the highest magnitude (DeWolf 1987).

Both Corydon and Miller mentioned the "Affirmations" and quoted from their alleged text in their books (Miller 1987, 132; Corydon and Hubbard 1987, 53).

On March 11, 2000, Armstrong announced to the anti-Scientology Usenet group alt.religion.scientology that an anonymous correspondent "in this recent period sent me the copy from which I typed that follows," i.e. a full text of the "Affirmations." He published these "Affirmations" and reiterated his claim that they were part of Scientology's "scriptures," indeed one of the most important texts in the whole Scientology canon. He stated he believed the text he received from the anonymous was "within reasonable parameters, authentic" and that he was "posting the Admissions openly to confirm their authenticity." He hoped that disgruntled ex-Scientists "Robert Vaughn Young [1938–2003] and Stacy Brooks," who allegedly had read the document mentioned in the 1984 case, could come forward and confirm the text was genuine (Armstrong 2000). To the best of my knowledge, they didn't.

In 2008, Michael Snoeck, an independent admirer of L. Ron Hubbard not associated with the Church of Scientology, published a study of Armstrong's 2000 text, concluding that it was a hoax. Armstrong answered by insulting Snoeck and calling him an agent of Scientology (Snoeck 2008). Another independent ex-Scientologist, "Bernie," also argued that Armstrong had written himself the text of the "Affirmations" he published in 2000 ("Bernie" 2008; "Bernie" 2009).

Armstrong continues a career as a professional anti-Scientologist, having accepted (at least) \$ 500,000 in 1986 against his promise *not* to do it. Among his most unsavory activities is his public support of the Russian campaign of persecution against Scientology, a campaign denounced as a violation of the most basic human rights by the U.S. Commission on International Religious Freedom and the European Court of Human Rights (Kravchenko 2018; European Court of Human Rights 2015; USCIRF 2020). In 2014, he wrote to President Vladimir Putin, praising his anti-American pronouncements and inciting him to crack down even more mercilessly on Scientology (Armstrong 2014). In 2011, Armstrong lectured in Moscow and accused Scientists of providing information to "America's intelligence agencies (FBI and CIA)" (Filippov 2011), certainly not ignoring that this could support accusations of espionage on behalf

of the U.S. against Russian Scientologists, a crime for which the life imprisonment can be imposed.

### *What Are the “Affirmations”?*

To start with, there are no “Affirmations.” This is a fancy name (later replaced, in the jargon of Scientology critics, by “Admissions”) Omar Garrison gave to the content of what Armstrong’s attorney Michael Flynn described in 1984 as “a rudimentary item like a PC folder” (Superior Court of California for the County of Los Angeles 1984, XXVIII, 4871). The folder included what Armstrong claimed were notes handwritten by L. Ron Hubbard he had selected and assembled together. Flynn stated very clearly that “the original binder was created by Mr. Armstrong” (Superior Court of California for the County of Los Angeles 1984, XI, 1984).

In fact, what has often eluded both critics and scholars, is that there are *different* documents called “Affirmations” by the opponents of Scientology. They are not the same, and include:

(a) what we can call the “urtext” of the “Affirmations,” i.e. the binder created by Armstrong by assembling what he claimed were separated handwritten notes written by Hubbard between 1946 and 1947 and shown to various people and to the court in 1984 (AFF-81);

(b) the portions of the “Affirmations” read either by Armstrong (220 words) or by his lawyer Michael Flynn (26 words) into the court transcript during the 1984 Los Angeles case (AFF-84);

(c) the portions of the “Affirmations” somebody (presumably Armstrong) sent to the authors of the anti-Scientology books published in 1987 by Russell Miller (144 words) and Bent Corydon (25 words) (AFF-87);

(d) the text Armstrong claimed to have received from an anonymous, and published, in 2000 (9,086 words) (AFF-2000).

What follows is an analysis of these four sets.

*The "Urtext" of the "Affirmations" (AFF-81, 1981–82)*

Historians of literature, and of religions, use the word "Urtext" to designate a lost text, of which only subsequent reduced versions or quotes are available. For instance, theologians have called "Q" (*Quelle*, "source" in German) a supposed original and older text that might have formed the basis for the three synoptic Christian Gospels. As one of my professors at Rome's Pontifical Gregorian University used to tell over-zealous students, it is always important to remember that Q and other urtexts *do not exist*. They are *hypothetical* texts, tools useful for certain purposes, on whose existence, not to mention content, we can only speculate.

What do we know for certain about AFF-81? We know that Armstrong produced to the Los Angeles Court in 1984 a folder where he had bound together what he claimed were handwritten notes by L. Ron Hubbard dating back to the years 1946 and 1947. He claimed he had shown the folder to several people.

It is generally argued that AFF-81 existed, since the judge saw it, Scientology's lawyers saw it and did not challenge its authenticity, objecting only that its content should not be read in court due to its confidential and private nature. Another argument in favor of the existence and authenticity of AFF-81 is that, in the 1986 settlement with Armstrong, Scientology included the provision that it should get back "all originals and copies of documents commonly known as the 'Affirmations' written by L. Ron Hubbard."

We may thus accept that a binder existed. It does not exist anymore. Armstrong claims he has not had access to it for years (Armstrong 2000). In preparations for this article, I contacted the Church of Scientology, and they assured me that "we simply don't have them." Critics may object that of course Scientology would not admit having in his archives documents detrimental to Hubbard's reputation. But, if Scientology was as malicious as its opponents believe it is, it could simply have produced a transcript alternative to the one Armstrong published in 2000, claiming that the handwritten notes are lost but a transcript is still available. A possibility is that, among the more than 10,000 documents Armstrong returned to Scientology, the famous folder was either absent or subsequently got lost. Be it as it may be, we have no ways of knowing.

Assuming the document was what Armstrong said it was, it would be at best half-genuine, or half-false. Copyright lawyers know that you can produce a document that is technically false by assembling original pieces. For example, you can get hold of a treasure trove of thousands of pages of handwritten notes by a famous poet, everything from uncompleted poems to grocery lists and notes preparing a meeting with a lawyer. All these documents are handwritten by the poet and “genuine.” However, if you arbitrarily assemble six or seven of them, give them a title, and claim they are a representative work by the poet, you create a false document, although one based on original raw material.

This is what Armstrong, if we take his story at face value, did in the early 1980s. He picked up some notes by Hubbard, assembled them together, and claimed they were a coherent and all-important document. But, even assuming the raw material was genuine, the assemblage was Armstrong’s.

Finally, few have asked the question why, if these were, as Armstrong has repeatedly argued the most secret texts Hubbard ever wrote, he included them in the boxes he gave to Armstrong for the preparation of his intended biography in the first place.

#### *The Text Quoted in Court (AFF-84, 1984)*

In 1984, Armstrong, against the objections by Scientology’s lawyers, read the following alleged portions of the “Affirmations” into the records of the Los Angeles Court:

[By hypnosis I must be convinced as follows]

Your stomach trouble you used as an excuse to keep the Navy from punishing you. You are free of the Navy. You have no further reason to have a weak stomach.

Your ulcers are all well and never bother you. You can eat anything.

Your hip is a pose. You have a sound hip. It never hurts.

Your shoulder never hurts.

Your foot was an alibi. The injury is no longer needed. It is well. You have perfect and lovely feet.

Your sinus trouble is nothing. It is not dangerous. It will vanish. The common cold amuses you. You are protected from further illness. Your cat fever has vanished forever and will never return. You do not have malaria.

When you tell people you are ill, it has no effect upon your health. And in Veterans Administration examinations you'll tell them how sick you are; you'll look sick when you take it; you'll return to health one hour after the examination and laugh at them.

No matter what lies you may tell others, they have no physical effect on you of any kind. You never injure your health by saying it is bad. You cannot lie to yourself.

...That my eyes (which I used as an excuse to get out of school) are perfect and do not pain me ever (Superior Court of California for the County of Los Angeles 1984, XII, 1925–26).

Armstrong's lawyer, Michael Flynn, added three other sentences:

Men are your slaves.

Elemental spirits are your slaves.

You can be merciless whenever your will is crossed and you have the right to be merciless (Superior Court of California for the County of Los Angeles 1984, XIII, 2056–57).

There is no record that specific exams were performed to confirm that the handwriting was Hubbard's. Urban believes that the fact that Scientology's attorneys objected based on the private nature of the text, not of its authenticity, confirms that the quotes were authentic, and this was further confirmed by the stipulation in the 1986 settlement that Armstrong should give the folder back to Scientology (Urban 2012, 100). This is a possible argument, but in my opinion not a very strong one. As for the folder, we don't know what it exactly included. And privacy and confidentiality probably seemed stronger arguments on which to base an objection to Scientology's lawyers during the trial.

The lawyers did not limit themselves to confidentiality, however. They insisted that the documents, if one accepted them at face value, had been prepared by Hubbard for an experiment of "hypnosis" (Superior Court of California for the County of Los Angeles 1984, XII, 1927) and that nobody would regard tools prepared for self-hypnosis as factual statements. Armstrong himself had introduced Hubbard's notes to the Court explaining that they "were self-hypnotic commands that he was writing to himself, affirmations" (Superior Court of California for the County of Los Angeles 1984, V, 793–94).

It is well possible that Armstrong and Garrison took the name "affirmations" from the then famous book by Napoleon Hill (1883–1970), *Think and Grow Rich* (Hill 1937). Indeed, "affirmations" are still used today by practitioners of self-hypnosis. Garrison and Armstrong later tried to change the name to "Admissions," but "Affirmations" stuck. Perhaps they realized that, by using the

label “Affirmations,” they were destroying their claim that Hubbard was admitting shameful details of his life, or uttering grandiose claims such “all men are my slaves.”

“Affirmations,” in fact, as the academic literature on self-hypnosis has clarified, are part of “the field of the imaginary” (Mubiri, Richard and Bioy 2015, 116). Almost anything can serve as an “affirmation.” Self-hypnosis can be achieved by expressing fears, hopes, fantasies, fictional stories. Thousands of readers of *Think and Grow Rich* used as “affirmations” sentences such as “I have one million dollars in the bank.” They would have been surprised if a tax collector had knocked at their door asking to tax the amount. Affirmations are *imaginary* statements, and taking them as factual simply does not make sense. For all we know, assuming again the quotes are genuine, Hubbard might have written down events connected to an imaginary “double” of himself, or may even have been impersonating a character of one of his novels.

As I have discussed elsewhere (Introvigne 2017), Hubbard ultimately concluded that hypnosis was not useful and may actually be dangerous and unethical. Dianetics would offer all the purported benefits of hypnosis, minus the side effects and dangers. However, there is little doubt that he came to this conclusion based on a serious and in-depth study of hypnosis. Experiments with self-hypnosis might well have been a part of it.

#### *Quotes in 1987 Anti-Scientology Books (AFF-87)*

In 1987, as mentioned earlier, two anti-Scientology books included quotes that were allegedly part of the “Affirmations.” Russell Miller had the longer text:

Your ulcers are all well and never bother you. You can eat anything.

You have a sound hip. It never hurts.

Your shoulder never hurts.

Your sinus trouble is nothing.

The injury is no longer needed. It is well. You have perfect and lovely feet. [...]

Men are your slaves.

You can be merciless whenever your will is crossed and you have the right to be merciless. [...]

When you tell people you are ill, it has no effect upon your health. And in Veterans Administration examinations you'll tell them how sick you are; you'll look sick when you take it; you'll return to health one hour after the examination and laugh at them.

No matter what lies you may tell others, they have no physical effect on you of any kind. You never injured your health by saying it is bad. You cannot lie to yourself (Miller 1987, 132).

This text does not add anything to AFF-84. Miller slightly revised the English but basically reproduced quotes read in court in 1984. Corydon, however, did add something:

All men shall be my slaves!

All women shall succumb to my charms!

All mankind shall grovel at my feet and not know why! (Corydon and Hubbard 1987, 53).

The sentence "All men shall be my slaves!" is a variation of "Men are your slaves" in AFF-84. However, the other two sentences are not in AFF-84—curiously, they are not in AFF-2000 either. We have no way of knowing where they come from. Corydon implied that he got them from Ron DeWolf but, as we have seen, the latter would not vouch for any sentence or information in Corydon's book. The best guess is that they came from Armstrong, who perhaps just supplied AFF-84 and left for Corydon the task of embellishing some sentences.

*Text Sent by an Anonymous to Armstrong (AFF-2000, 2000)*

AFF 4 is a voluminous document of more than 9,000 words. It is also a fantastic text. Whoever wrote it was wise enough to incorporate AFF-84 into it. Urban believes that this document reflects the knowledge of Crowley's system Hubbard had acquired through Jack Parsons (Urban 2012, 100–1). I am not persuaded. The author of AFF-2000 shows only a limited, almost stereotypical knowledge of Enochian and Thelemic magic. As Bogdan (2016) demonstrated, Parsons, no amateur himself, held Hubbard's grasp of magic in high regard, and was even willing to accept his suggestions and instructions. Again, why Hubbard decided to play Parsons' game is a different matter altogether. But I doubt Hubbard would have written such poor statements connected to Crowley's and Parsons' system, not to mention the semi-pornographic fantasies that also pop up in AFF-2000.



The debate about the *content* of AFF-2000, however, is one I am not very interested in. We are so far away from having even the slightest evidence that AFF-2000 is a genuine Hubbard text that any such debate is, at best, premature. All we have for AFF-2000 is Armstrong's claim that he received it from an anonymous correspondent. He announced on March 11, 2000, that,

By the time the Admissions are posted to the internet, I will have, pursuant to the wishes of the person who made it, destroyed the copy I received (Armstrong 2000).

So, presumably this copy has been destroyed and nobody is in a position to check it.

We can, of course, speculate that Armstrong's correspondent did not exist, and he wrote AFF-2000 himself. This is well possible, but if he had in his possession the handwritten notes by Hubbard that he allegedly bound together in 1981–82 he could have produced them in 2000. The argument that, by doing so, he would have admitted that he had breached the 1986 agreement by keeping a copy of the notes, and opened himself to further litigation, is not persuasive. By 2000, Armstrong had breached the agreement so many times that one more would hardly have made a difference. On the other hand, producing *something* in Hubbard's original handwriting *would* have made a difference, and silenced his critics.

If an anonymous really sent AFF-2000 to Armstrong, we have every right to treat it as a hoax. If Armstrong wrote it, it is of interest only to some hypothetical future scholar who would have nothing better to do than studying Armstrong's prose.

Armstrong read my exchange with Urban on Facebook and wrote a lengthy article to answer the few paragraphs I had written as social media comments. Apart from the usual "argument" with which he routinely dismisses all his critics (they are hired guns for Scientology), Armstrong basically makes three claims for the authenticity of AFF-2000. The first, and most important, one is that

Introvigne asks, "How can we know that the 2000 text is the same as the 1984 one?"

The short answer is because I say it is (Armstrong 2019).

This would not deserve a comment. As mentioned earlier, Armstrong's Russian adventures would be more than enough to cast serious doubts on his personal integrity. But even somebody holding Armstrong in high regard could not be satisfied by the "Because I say so" argument.

Second, Armstrong claims that a fabricator of AFF-2000

would have to possess intimate, detailed knowledge of Hubbard's history, occult interests, writings, thought and ideas. The fabricator would have to apply that intimate knowledge to produce words, phrases and concepts in Hubbard's styles (Armstrong 2019).

I disagree on the point that AFF-2000 is written in typical Hubbard style. More importantly, however, a look at the closest mirror would easily reveal to Armstrong who such a "fabricator" may be. There is little doubt that he has been obsessed by Hubbard for most of his life and, for his own oppositional purposes, has gained an "intimate knowledge" of his life and work.

Third, Armstrong mentions that Mark Rathbun quotes portions of AFF-2000 in his *Memoirs of a Scientology Warrior* (Rathbun 2013). The argument has been used before, but the reference would be relevant only if Rathbun had written his book *before* 2000. After that date, any "reminiscence" of AFF-81 by both Scientologists and anti-Scientologists would unavoidably be tainted and compromised by the easy availability of AFF-2000.

### *Conclusion: Non Sequiturs*

Urban's 2012 article is, I believe, a good example of how journalists and even respected scholars were misled by Armstrong. Urban uses the following argument to conclude that the "Affirmations" are authentic:

No church official has ever publicly denied that "Affirmations" is an authentic Hubbard document, and Scientology's own legal position indicates that it does consider the document to be church property and clearly wants to keep control of the text. According to a mutual release and settlement agreement between the Church of Scientology of California and former member Gerald Armstrong in 1986, Armstrong agreed to return a number of confidential documents to the church, including all copies of Hubbard's "Excalibur manuscript" and "all originals and copies of documents commonly known as the 'Affirmations' written by L. Ron Hubbard." Here the church clearly indicates that the text was written by L. Ron Hubbard, and it is difficult to understand why the church would file suit to retain ownership of the text were it not an authentic document (Urban 2012, 100).

He also mentions that in the 1984 Los Angeles case, Mary Sue Whipp Hubbard (1931–2002), the third wife of the founder of Scientology, who intervened in the case and was represented by her own lawyer, objected to reading the documents

for their very private character, but did not argue they were false (Urban 2012, 100). Not much can be inferred from this since, when Hubbard allegedly wrote the notes, Mary Sue was 15 years old and would only meet Hubbard six years later. Somebody can object that she was following instructions by Hubbard, but there is no evidence for this.

The main problem, however, is another. Having argued for the authenticity of the “Affirmations” based on statements of 1984 and 1986, Urban proceeds to discuss several passages of them that, in his opinion, confirm the deep influence by Crowley on Hubbard. However, the passages he quotes are taken from AFF-2000, a document published *in the year 2000*. His arguments may refer to the existence of AFF-81, which nobody denies (but nobody knows its content or can guarantee its authenticity either), or to the court quotes of AFF-84. But in Urban’s article, statements in the court case of 1984 and the settlement of 1986 are used to authenticate AFF-2000, a text nobody had seen before 2000. Certainly, Urban does not want to imply that, by signing the settlement, in 1986, Scientology was preventively authenticating a text Armstrong would publish fourteen years later. In a simpler way, the same scheme is followed by the Wikipedia article (Wikipedia 2021). It claims that Scientology admitted the existence and Hubbard’s authorship of AFF-81 and then proceed to offer a detailed summary of AFF-2000. But there is no evidence whatsoever that AFF-2000 is the same document Armstrong showed to the court as AFF-81, and Armstrong himself has admitted he cannot conclusively prove it (Armstrong 2000).

What we are left with is AFF-84, whose authenticity claims rest on the argument that the lawyers for Scientology in 1984, did not object to it arguing it was false, and in 1986, asked to receive back all “documents commonly known as the ‘Affirmations’ written by L. Ron Hubbard.” There are many valid legal reasons why the lawyers did not base their objections on non-authenticity, and certainly any self-respecting lawyer would have advised Scientology, which paid Armstrong and Flynn \$ 800,000, to get back *everything* Armstrong mentioned in the trial or had in his possession that was remotely, really, or allegedly connected to Hubbard. Additionally, the fact that in the text of the settlement there is no comma after the word “Affirmations” means, in good English, that the documents referred to are “commonly known” as “the ‘Affirmations’ written by L. Ron Hubbard,” not that the settlement *asserts* that they are “written by L. Ron

Hubbard.” The settlement simply represented what the common opinion was, without taking a position on whether this opinion was true or false.

Even if the sentences of AFF-84 come from notes handwritten by Hubbard as tools or cards for experiments in self-hypnosis, as Armstrong argued, they do not prove anything about Hubbard’s early life, let alone about Dianetics and Scientology. Self-hypnosis affirmations are, by their very nature, imaginary statements. They might have referred to imaginary lives Hubbard might have lived, but didn’t.

Calling it “part of Scientology’s scriptures” is simply ridiculous. Even Hubbard’s early fiction, which is more important than any self-hypnosis card to understand his early studies and concerns, is not “part of Scientology’s scriptures.” The latter include only the texts Hubbard wrote to expound and teach the technology of Dianetics and Scientology. Surely, personal handwritten notes of 1946 or 1947 to be used for an experiment on self-hypnosis, even assuming they are genuine, are not “part of Scientology’s scriptures.”

Urban’s claim that they are “one of the most important documents” to understand certain features of Scientology obviously does not refer to the few sentences included in AFF-84. It refers to AFF-2000, but there is no evidence that AFF-2000 is anything more than a fake document written either by Armstrong or another anti-Scientologist, and not even a very bright one.

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**Ex-Member Accounts from New Religious Movements:  
A Compilation, 2000-Present**

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**ABSTRACT:** The 21<sup>st</sup> century has seen an explosion of personal accounts of life in and exodus from a range of new religious movements (more than 200 book-length titles). Much of this literature is self-published, poorly publicized, and difficult to obtain. Though often ignored, this ex-member literature forms a valuable additional insight into new religious movements when used critically and integrated with the many other information sources available to researchers. Ex-member accounts have added promise as representatives of three longstanding genres—religious testimonies, apostate stories, and memoirs. The literature cited also indicates the expansion of interest within the cult awareness movement beyond the relatively small number of new religions that dominated controversy in the 1970s and 1980s to look at the Amish, Hassidic Jews, polygamy-practicing Mormons, and traditionalist Catholics.

**KEYWORDS:** New Religious Movements, Cults, Apostate Literature, Religious Memoirs, Ex-Members of Minority Religions.

*Introduction*

In recent centuries, especially as religious freedom has become a fact of life, accounts by individuals of their pilgrimage from the religious group in which they were raised or joined as a young adult, to either a secular life or membership in another religion, have appeared decade by decade. Since World War II, with the growing diversity in religions in the West, the number of such accounts have

risen dramatically. Of special interest have been the stories of “apostates,” those who have not only withdrawn from their former religion but subsequently turned on it with often harsh criticism.

Apostate literature has been a subject of controversy over the years. Through the 1960s and 1970s, with the proliferation of new religious movements (NRMs), researchers viewed much ex-member literature as little more than a segment of the literature expressive of the emerging anti-cult (or “cult awareness”) movement. Indeed, several ex-members went on to become deprogrammers, helped create the cult awareness movement, and became important leaders of it. Simultaneously, NRM scholars also used former members (both those who authored articles and books and those who did not) as important sources of information. They tested the claims of former members about groups as they moved through the material published by groups and made their own observations of group activity.

There is also a body of scholarly literature critiquing apostate accounts and warning of the need to handle such accounts critically. A significant case highlighting the need to apply critical tools toward ex-member accounts was the book *Michelle Remembers* (1980), eventually uncovered as a hoax, but only after sparking the social panic over Satanism in the 1980s. While, the overwhelming amount of ex-member literature bears little resemblance to *Michelle Remembers*, the widespread acceptance of the book stands as a vivid reminder of the need to remain alert in approaching ex-member literature even as we keep all our research tools on the ready when visiting new religions.

Apostate accounts can be quite valuable in calling attention to problems within religious groups not readily available to even the most persistent scholars who may be blocked from certain aspects of any given group’s life while conducting research. Some groups announce up front their esoteric nature, and make no secret that certain aspects of their life are considered the sole property of accomplished members and should not be disclosed either to outsiders or the uninitiated. Almost all groups have matters that they wish to remain confidential, especially confidences shared with them by individuals in pastoral situations. The real problem often arises when groups attempt to withhold information on actions by leaders that might be considered illegal, immoral, or embarrassing. In this respect, ex-member literature provides new research agendas by calling attention to possible issues of interest that previous researchers had ignored.



While the accounts of former members of the many NRMs might be considered under the heading of apostate literature, such accounts also have an indistinct border with what might be considered testimonies of religious conversion, a large percentage of which includes the story of leaving one's birth religion for a new faith or a life of unbelief. Christian literature has made space for testimony stories of conversion to Christianity from other faiths, and in recent decades, as the world's religions have emerged in the West, they have begun to publish similar titles, and Atheist and Humanist literature has long valued accounts of people telling how they lost any faith in God and need for the community of the religious life.

These books also fit into another genre, that of memoirs. Memoirs have been valued for centuries for the personal point of view they promise on particular events the author has witnessed, and the unique illumination their insider status has given them. The memoir format suggests insights available only to someone who has lived through the events being described. As such they not only supply new data but offer some degree of emotional impact not found in, for example, third person accounts of life in a new religion. Memoirs can become an important platform for communicating intense feeling about a particular group.

Some ex-member accounts are also especially valuable in calling attention to groups from which little or no literature is available due to their separatist lifestyle, their lack of publications, and their refusal to cooperate with outsiders seeking to learn of them.

The discussion of the varied opinions on ex-member accounts over the last 60 years, however, goes far beyond the limited purposes of this paper, which are two. One is to re-affirm the continuing importance of ex-member NRM literature when used alongside of the spectrum of sources that one would want to consider in studying any given group. And, of course, it should be second nature to us, that like the literature generated by any group, ex-member literature from the same group is also to be used critically and not simply accepted at face value.

Second, this article is to call attention to the explosion of such literature in the new century. After an initial appearance of this literature relative to the more controversial NRMs in the 1970s and 1980s, there was a seeming drop off in the 1990s. However, since 2000, several hundred books by former members of different NRMs have appeared and over the past few years, the authors of this article have been compiling it for use in our work. Many of these books have been

difficult to locate as they were privately published and given little publicity, hence we offer a compilation of what we have found for any wider use that may flow from it. We also note that the number of groups called out as being “cults” or “cult-like” has expanded greatly. In recent years, hostile ex-member literature has targeted a whole new set of groups not included among the “cults” in the 1970s and 1980s, most notably the Amish, Hassidic Judaism, polygamist Mormons, and traditionalist Catholics. Several groups which were prominent in the earlier cult controversies have also continued to be targets of former members, most notably the Church of Scientology and the Unification Movement.

In organizing the many ex-member books, we have chosen to organize our list around the groups that have been left behind, and to organize those groups under the major religious traditions into which they fit. We start with the Asian religions—Buddhism, Hinduism, and Sikhism and Sant Mat—which are followed by Western Esotericism, Judaism, and Christianity. Finally, at the end are a set of books in which the “cult” being discussed is either unidentified or its placement in a major religious tradition difficult to discern. These are listed under “Additional Groups” (such as the Manson Family).

Finally, while the assembling of this list has occurred over several years during which time a diligent search for all of the literature (in the English language) was made, items have obviously been missed. The authors welcome information on additional items that should be listed below but have been missed. Please forward information on such Items to J. Gordon Melton (JGordon\_Melton@baylor.edu) and/or W. Michael Ashcraft (washcraft@truman.edu).

## **Part I. Asian Religious Traditions**

### **A. Buddhism**

Chandler, Christine A. *Enthralled: The Guru Cult of Tibetan Buddhism*. N.p.: Walk Away Publishing, 2017.

Re: Shambhala International.

Downing, Michael. *Shoes Outside the Door: Desire, Devotion, and Excess at San Francisco Zen Center*. Washington, DC: Counterpoint, 2001.

Linnell, Renee. *The Burn Zone: A Memoir*. Berkeley, CA: She Writes Press, 2018.

Newland, Tahlia. *Fallout: Recovering from Abuse in Tibetan Buddhism*. Escarpment Publishing/AIA Publishing, 2019.

Re: Sogyal Rinpoche.

## **B. Hindu and Related South Asian Groups**

*Cohen, Andrew (Evolutionary Enlightenment)*

Andrew Cohen, a student of Hindu spiritual teacher H.W.L. Poonja (aka Poonjaji, 1910?–1997), emerged as a popular spiritual teacher whose students began to complain of changes in his teaching style and about demands he made upon students. In 2013 he took a sabbatical from teachings and in 2015 apologized to his students, ceased teaching, and disbanded his organization.

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### *Rajneesh/Osho*

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Sheela, Ma Anand. *Don't Kill Him!: The Story of My Life with Bhagwan Rajneesh*. New Delhi, India: Fingerprint Publishing, 2013.

Stork, Jane. *Breaking the Spell: My Life as a Rajneeshee and the Long Journey Back to Freedom*. Sydney, Aust.: Pan MacMillan, 2009; Rpt., N.p.: the Author, 2018.

Waight, Subhuti Anand. *Wild Wild Guru: An Insider Reveals the True Story Behind Netflix's "Wild Wild Country."* London: Coronet/Hodder & Stoughton, 2019.

### *Transcendental Meditation*

Blakely, Richard. *The Secrets of the Mantras*. Providence, RI: the Author, 2013.

Bourque, Judith. *Robes of Silk Feet of Clay: The True Story of a Love Affair with Maharishi Mahesh Yogi, the TM Guru followed by the Beatles, Deepak*

- Chopra, David Lynch and Millions More. Cardiff, CA: Waterside Productions, 2018.
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- Hoffman, Claire, *Greetings from Utopia Park: Surviving a Transcendent Childhood*. New York: HarperCollins, 2016.
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### C. Sikhism/Sant Mat

#### *Sikh Dharma/3HO (Yogi Bhajan)*

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- Dyson, Pamela Saharah. *Premka: White Bird in a Golden Cage: My Life with Yogi Bhajan*. Maui, HI: Eyes Wide Publishing, 2020.

## **ECKANKAR**

Sykes, Joe. *Abused in the ECKANKAR Cult: Mental Emotional and Physical Abuse*. N.p.: Freedom from Cult Abuse, 2020.

Sykes, Joe. *Testament: True Story of an ECKANKAR Cult Victim*. Ser.: The Library of Truth, Book 5. N.p.: Freedom from Cult Abuse, 2020.

Sykes, Joe. *The Truth About ECKANKAR*. N.p.: Freedom from Cult Abuse, 2020.

Sykes, Joe. *Victims and Survivors: Escapees from the ECKANKAR Cult*. Ser.: The Library of Truth, Book 7. N.p.: Freedom from Cult Abuse, 2020.

## **D. Various Hindu-Inspired groups**

Barbosa, Robin. *I AM REVEALED: Behind the Ashram Door*. N.p.: Full Court Press, 2016.

[Barbosa, raised in a traditional Jewish home, joined a Hindu group, and has more recently become a Messianic Jew (i.e., a Jew who believes Jesus, or Yahshua, is the Messiah). See also a review of the book by Gina Catena, *ICSA Today* 10/3(2019):22–3.]

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Re: Guru Maharaj Ji.

Garden, Mary. *Serpent Rising: A Journey of Spiritual Seduction*. Victoria, Australia: Sid Harta Publications, 2020.

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## **Part IV: Christianity**

### *Amish*

[Note: Unlike most other “ex” memoirs, when it comes to the Amish, the ex-

Amish memoirs must compete with a large number of pro-Amish memoirs, in which the authors have largely intact, non-abusive childhoods. Because Amish life reminds many of Americana—the classic small town, church-centered life that many today look back to with nostalgia—ex-Amish memoirs have a special challenge that other categories of “ex” memoirs do not. For example, it is rare for someone who was in Scientology for a long time to write a memoir about how wonderful their life was in Scientology, and to get some sort of cultural affirmation of that story because it resembles something nostalgic in American cultural memory. It is also to be noted that there are a variety of distinct Amish groups.]

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[A variety of memoirs have been written by surviving members of the Branch Davidians, an Adventist church that largely ceased to exist following the burning of Mt. Carmel, their single center, in rural McLennan County, Texas. The memoirs reflect a spectrum of opinion of life in the group.]

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## *Polygamy-Practicing (Mormon) Groups*

[While the Fundamentalist Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-Day Saints (FLDS) is the best known of the several LDS polygamy-practicing groups, it is by no means the only one, and the current literature has been written by former members from different splinter groups.]

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Re: Church of the Lamb of God.

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### *Roman Catholic Church (related)*

Through the 19<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> century, at least until Vatican II, among the most popular segments of ex-member literature consisted of accounts by former priests, monks, and nuns who left their calling. This literature, which dropped in popularity after Vatican II, was often cited in the 1970s and 1980s to counter the impact of members leaving high demand groups that were organized similarly to Catholic orders. Simultaneously, accounts appeared of nuns who left the ordered life amid the feminist movement and the post-Vatican changes in church life.

In the 21<sup>st</sup> century, a new set of material was generated by several traditionalist Catholic groups that resisted the changes introduced by Vatican II, most notably the Slaves of the Immaculate Heart of Mary, a fringe traditionalist group based in Boston, Massachusetts; and the Congregation of Mary Immaculate Queen, a

traditionalist order based in Coeur d'Alene, Idaho; the Society of Saint Pius X, an international traditionalist group; and the Order of St. Charbel, an Australian order founded by William Kamm. All of the aforementioned groups are organizationally independent of the Roman Catholic Church. They stand in contrast to the Legion of Christ, a popular Latin American ordered community, founded in Mexico City in 1941. After disclosures of abuse within the Legion of Christ, its leader was removed, and the order underwent a renovation under papal scrutiny. In the new century, Paul Lennon, a former member of the Legion of Christ wrote and published a useful guide to the various Roman Catholic groups accused of cult-like tendencies: *Catholic Orders & Movements Accused of Being Cult-like: Intra-Ecclesial Sects?* (n.p.: the Author, 2020).

There is a large body of autobiographical Roman Catholic literature written by former priests, monks, and nuns who have left their vocation, some of whom also left church membership, and an even larger body of literature of or concerning lay members who have left. That literature has in turn generated a body of literature that attempts to analyze the many who have drifted away from faith, and the church has itself published books seeking to woo lapse members back into the church. This large body of material is far beyond the scope of this bibliography, which centers upon new religions and other groups popularly labeled as “cults.”

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