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What Ever Happened to the Worldwide Church of God?

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ABSTRACT: Prominently cited as a “cult” by Christian counter-cult watchers in the twentieth century, the Worldwide Church of God (WCoG) experienced a downward trajectory beginning in the 1980s, massive schism in the 1990s, and then disappeared altogether early in the new century. Although no church named “Worldwide Church of God” continues to exist, the former WCoG maintains a significant presence both through its official continuing body, now renamed Grace Communion International, after having renounced most of its unique doctrinal heritage, but most substantively in four schismatic churches—the Philadelphia Church of God, the Living Church of God, the United Church of God, and the Restored Church of God—each of which has tried with some success to reproduce the former WCoG’s beliefs and practices. Simultaneously, the WCoG and its present successors remain important reference points in ongoing discussions of both the nature of charisma and the process of schism in new religious movements. (A previous version of this paper was presented at the annual meeting of CESNUR in Vilnius, Lithuania, June 20–23, 2023).

KEYWORDS: Worldwide Church of God, Grace Communion International, Philadelphia Church of God, Herbert W. Armstrong, Schisms in the Worldwide Church of God, Restored Church of God, Living Church of God, United Church of God.

Introduction

Among the groups high on the list of 20th-century cult watchers, the Worldwide Church of God (WCoG) peaked in the 1980s with congregations across North America, Western Europe, and many of the former colonies of the British Commonwealth—the geography of its spread being largely determined by its acceptance of the teachings of Anglo Israelism, a perspective on Bible history aimed almost exclusively at white people.

The WCoG emerged as one of the most successful of the 50+ denominational bodies generated from the Millerite movement of the 1840s. In the 1830s,

William Miller (1782–1849) announced the imminent return of Christ from heaven. Following the Great Disappointment of 1844 (when Jesus failed to appear), the movement divided into three branches primarily over the practice of sabbatarianism and the acceptance of the prophecies of Ellen G. White (1829–1915). The divisions would lead to the founding of the Seventh-day Adventists, the Jehovah’s Witnesses (originally called Bible Students), and finally the WCoG.

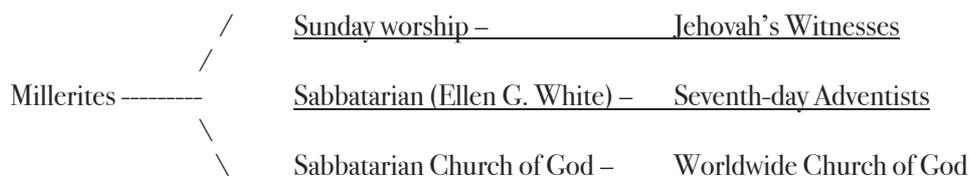


Figure 1. How the Millerites divided.

Once founded, each of these three religious bodies grew steadily through the mid-twentieth century, but in the 1990s, the Worldwide Church of God began to splinter, breaking into half a dozen larger factions and dozens of smaller ones. A decade ago, in his *Fragmentation of a Sect*, David V. Barrett provided a detailed early report on what was occurring (Barrett 2013). This paper will attempt to follow-up on Barrett’s work and carry the story forward, even as the WCoG became one of the most important groups to consider in building a theoretical understanding of what happens to new religions over time.

Founded in the 1930s as the Radio Church of God, the WCoG grew from the minuscule audience of the broadcast of founder Herbert W. Armstrong (HWA, 1892–1986). It began to experience significant growth in the 1950s, after Armstrong moved from rural Oregon to Southern California and then made the transition to television. Even as the broadcast, which offered “The Plain Truth About the World Tomorrow,” gave the church access to every home in North America with a television set, the church’s network of committed members remained almost completely invisible on the religious landscape as its congregations met unannounced in rented facilities and its members did not invite neighbors and friends to attend. Admission to the services (even knowledge of when and where they met) was carefully controlled.

Through the 1970s, the World Tomorrow broadcast was seen in all the major urban centers and at its height each issue of *The Plain Truth*, the monthly magazine (to which a free subscription was offered on every TV broadcast) was

mailed to some 3 million+ people. The church also offered numerous booklets on its key ideas (also free for the asking) with two or three featured in each issue of the magazine and/or mentioned on the TV show. As the church prospered, it offered more substantive books including the two-volume *Autobiography of Herbert W. Armstrong*. Its basic introductory text, *The United States and Britain in Prophecy*, grew step-by-step from a small pamphlet into a substantive book as new editions appeared through Armstrong's lifetime.

While the elder Armstrong built the audience of his initial radio broadcast from next to nothing into a small church, his early radio success did not translate well to television. He lacked the audience appeal of competing televangelists, but his son Garner Ted Armstrong (GTA, 1930–2003) came to the rescue. Handsome, personally winsome, and a talented orator, he assumed responsibility for the church's TV broadcasts in 1957. He had the charisma his father lacked, and at the height of his career, he was among the most recognizable persons in the United States.

The contrast between the elder and the younger Armstrong reminds us of the varied ways we use the terms “charisma” and “charismatic” in our discussions of new religious movements. The elder Armstrong was the typical (1) founder and self-appointed leader of the WCoG, while the younger Armstrong was (2) the magnetic personality that drew people to him by his oratorical skill and winsome personality. Neither claimed (3) to be in direct contact with paranormal or supernatural reality in the manner commonly claimed by mediums, channelers, or enlightened Asian teachers, and thus privy to spiritual realities unavailable to the average believer.

Charismatic Christian leaders commonly have gained the allegiance of followers by their mastery of the Bible and claims that through their study of the Scriptures they have attained an unusual level of insight and/or discovered truths abandoned or forgotten over the centuries. A variety of recent innovative Christian leaders have placed themselves in a Restorationist tradition delivering new biblical truth lost to the larger older church bodies. More negatively, of course, charismatic leaders are also seen as (4) sinister individuals who have mastered the art of brainwashing (mind control, mental manipulation) which they use to override the rational decision-making ability (free will) of group members (Introvigne, 2022).

The WCoG's 1970s Turmoil

Even as the WCoG emerged on the national and international stage in the 1970s, some dissent in the WCoG's leadership began to develop. One source of the disagreement was the prophecy that a United States of Europe would emerge and in 1975 rise up to overthrow both the United Kingdom and the United States (Armstrong 1957). Church members were advised to flee to a sanctuary in the Middle East. The younger Armstrong was among those who disagreed with his father on how the WCoG should handle the failure of the prophecy.

Simultaneously, however, it became known among the church's leadership that GTA was a sexual predator, and that he was targeting co-eds at the church's college (Barrett 2013). However, he was the church's public image as the host of its TV show. Reluctantly, the elder Armstrong removed him, but ratings and cash flow dropped significantly. Forgiven of past indiscretions, he was brought back, but his philandering ways continued. Thus, in 1978, he was completely disfellowshipped. After being pushed aside by the WCoG, GTA founded the Church of God International (CoGI), the first of the significant WCoG splinters (<https://www.cgi.org>).

Even as Armstrong was dealing with problems created by his son, other church leaders were raising a set of questions about the church's teachings. In response, a theological commission was organized to examine the questions, among them the practice of tithing and the dating of the feast of Pentecost. Included in the cadre of leaders who would leave with GTA to form the Church of God International were some who dissented theologically with what they had previously been taught. Eventually, the CoGI leadership, who had cast their future with GTA, found themselves unable to deal with his continued illicit sexual encounters, and in 1997, pushed GTA out of the CoGI. GTA then formed the Intercontinental Church of God (<https://theicg.org>). He died before it could again rebuild a public following. Both of these early splinters challenged the WCoG's teaching on tithing.

The WCoG's Unique Perspective

In founding the WCoG, HWA began with a few teachings that differed from mainstream Evangelical Protestantism, though they were well-known among the

different Millerite groups. To these beliefs common to the Millerite heritage, he added others more unique to himself and it was upon the adoption of this spectrum of beliefs (and the practices they implied) that Armstrong claimed that the WCoG was the one “true” Church of God. The WCoG published a mass of material expanding upon these basic notions, mostly booklets written by HWA, and more recently, the various splinter groups have begun duplicating Armstrong’s prodigious output with numerous booklets written by their founders.

The first and most important belief espoused by the WCoG was the identification of the ten lost tribes of ancient Israel as the Anglo-Saxon people of Northern and Western Europe, best known as the theory of Anglo Israelism (aka British Israelism: Cottrell-Boyce 2020). Through the nineteenth century, the idea would be used to justify the establishment of the global British empire and then the rise of the United States as a world power. Though the WCoG leaders did not emphasize the white supremacy inherent in British Israelism as did some of its more notorious twentieth century exponents, they were never able to shake off its racial connotations.

Even before his move to California, HWA published a summary statement of his views on Anglo Israelism for the audience of the Radio Church of God (Armstrong 1945). He would continue to issue new editions through his lifetime, each edition including new content. By the time of his death, the work had grown into a substantial book (Armstrong 1980), a text now kept in print by the Philadelphia Church of God (Armstrong 2007).

The adoption of sabbatarianism, which claims the Jewish Sabbath as the primary time for weekly communal worship, led to WCoG congregations gathering on Saturday rather than Sunday. Such practice also includes a recalculation of Jesus Christ’s death believed to be on a Wednesday, not Friday, and his resurrection on the Sabbath (Saturday) rather than Sunday (Armstrong 1972). This distinct understanding of biblical events had been perpetuated by both the Seventh-day Adventist and the Sabbatarian Church of God traditions among the Adventists. Within some Church of God groups the practice of sabbatarianism was correlated with the maintaining of the celebration of the traditional Jewish festivals described in *Leviticus* 23—Passover and the Feast of Unleavened Bread; Pentecost; the Feast of Trumpets (Rosh Hashanah), and the Day of Atonement (Yom Kippur); and the Feast of Tabernacles and the Last

Great Day. The different WCoG groups now publish an annual calendar that emphasizes the festivals and provides members with information on regional gathering sites for their celebration while additionally highlighting the schedule to be followed at each event.

While many different churches require (or recommend) that their members tithe (give ten percent of their income to their church), the Worldwide Church proposed a triple tithe. The first tithe directly supported the church, especially its activity of spreading the gospel of the kingdom. The second tithe was set aside to support the member's attendance and celebration of the annual "Feast of Tabernacles," the primary Jewish festival celebrated by the church. The third tithe (given only every third year) was used to support church members in need.

All publications were distributed at no cost, the price of production being paid by the church member's tithe. Armstrong additionally developed a way for non-members who listened to the TV show and wanted to become financial supporters of the church (co-workers) to contribute (but in a manner completely separated from any church literature or benefits they might otherwise receive). However, people who sent in money to "purchase" any of its publications would be sent the requested publications and their money would be returned.

The celebration of the festivals aligned with the WCoG's understanding of the primary role of the church—the proclaiming of the coming kingdom of God, which occurred through the church's broadcast ministry, the circulation of its magazine, *The Plain Truth*, and the distribution of additional printed material. It was through the broadcast that prospective members found their way to the church itself and began the process of joining that culminated in being baptized. Only baptized members attended the weekly Sabbath services. Their main task was not to evangelize, but to support the work of spreading the kingdom message.

Church members spent their church time in Bible study, learning the teachings of the WCoG in some depth, and personally preparing for the kingdom, due to arrive in the near future. Among the key beliefs to which they would be introduced, would be that of God as a Family. This teaching replaced the traditional Christian belief in the Trinity. God was seen as a family of two personages—God the Father and Jesus Christ—with the Holy Spirit understood as God's power (Flurry 2012, 2020).

Organizationally, the WCoG privileged *Ephesians* 4:11. HWA was seen as the Apostle of the Church of God. Other ministers were seen as pastors, evangelists, and teachers. Though not emphasized as much as his designation as Apostle, HWA was also seen as a prophet. Armstrong and the ministers, teachers, and evangelists he had ordained led the church.

Joseph Tkach

Armstrong died in 1986. He overrode any possible action by the church's Council of Elders to seize control, and appointed Joseph W. Tkach, Sr. (1927–1995) as his successor. Initially, Tkach was seen as inheriting all of Armstrong's autocratic powers to rule the church. Over the next few years, however, he was deeply affected by the theological critique of the WCoG's unique teachings by representatives of the Evangelical Christian counter-cult movement (Tucker 1989, Feazell 2003). Once convinced of the error of Armstrong's distinctive interpretations of the Bible, Tkach slowly informed the church's leaders of his conclusions and began the withdrawal of Armstrong's many publications from distribution. By the mid-1990s, he had moved the church into the orthodox Evangelical camp (Tkach 1997).

His actions created a crisis for the church's ministers and members. Should they continue to follow HWA's stance, which they had been teaching for decades, or should they support the man Armstrong appointed to lead them? Most chose the teachings, and through the mid-1990s the WCoG splintered. In the midst of the splintering, Tkach died, and was succeeded in office by his son Joseph Tkach, Jr. The younger Tkach continued the direction set by his father and in 1997, he led those who remained loyal to the WCoG into the National Association of Evangelicals. A decade later, the church's leadership concluded that they no longer represented anything created by their founder and in 2009 changed the church's name to Grace Communion International. By this time, most of the membership had left for one of the multiple schismatic groups.

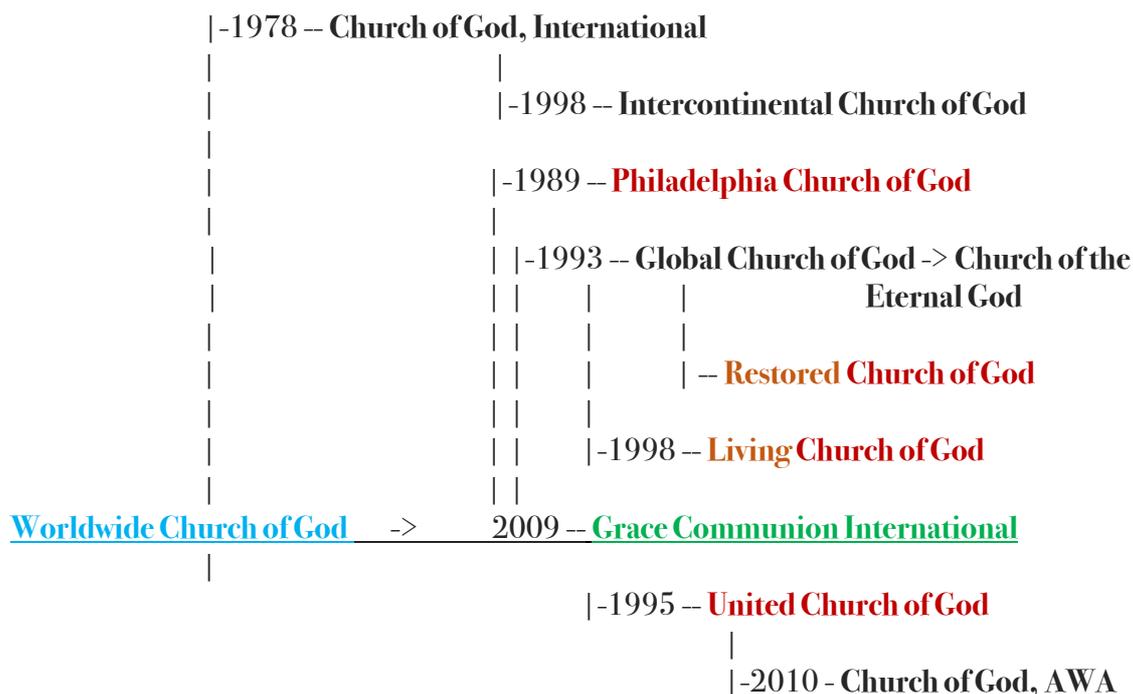


Figure 2. A Worldwide Church of God organizational tree (1978-present; the four groups in red slowly gathered in the great majority of members).

As each faction of the former Worldwide Church of God emerged, it saw itself as continuing the WCoG in both appearance and substance. Each reorganized its supporters in a pattern reminiscent of the WCoG and each began to publish a monthly magazine modeled on *The Plain Truth*. Each began a broadcast ministry and published its own basic statement of the British Israel perspective in its own text of *The United States and Britain in Prophecy*. And each published a regularly increasing number of booklets on the basic teachings of the former WCoG distributed freely upon request.

1. Philadelphia Church of God (1991)—Gerald Flurry

The first of the WCoG leaders to break away was Gerald Flurry, a pastor whose early questioning of Tkach’s changes led to his excommunication in 1989. He immediately founded the Philadelphia Church of God (<https://pcg.church/>) to perpetuate HWA’s teachings, and began publishing *The Philadelphia Trumpet*, modeled on *The Plain Truth*.

The name of the church came from *Revelation 2–3*, which speaks of seven ancient Christian congregations. Most of the denominations in the Adventist tradition interpret *Revelation 2–3* as a prophetic depiction of church history, with the last of the seven churches being the Philadelphia church. The remaining chapters of *Revelation* can then be used to illuminate contemporary events. Seeing his actions as foreshadowed in the *Book of Revelation*, Flurry immediately published a book, *Malachi's Message* (which he equated with the “little book” mentioned in *Revelation 10*: Flurry 1995). This book was received as a new prophetic message and its release began Flurry's own writing of himself into biblical prophetic history as continuing Armstrong's apostolic and prophetic work.

Even as Flurry was establishing the Philadelphia Church of God, Tkach had quietly withdrawn HWA's books from circulation, and the Philadelphia Church began to bring them back into circulation, beginning with *The Mystery of the Ages*, a substantial work published by Armstrong just before his death (Armstrong 1985). The Philadelphia Church's reprinting of the *Mystery of The Ages* soon led to a direct conflict between the WCoG, which owned all of the Armstrong copyrights and publishing rights. Litigation reached a climax in 2000, with the court ruling against the Philadelphia Church and sustaining the WCoG's control of Armstrong's writings.

The Philadelphia Church did not give up, however, and responded to the initial court decision by filing a broad lawsuit in which it made a somewhat unique argument that the WCoG was hanging on to the Armstrong copyrights not to assert its exclusive right to publish, but to suppress Armstrong's writings, after having abandoned his teachings. The WCoG now simply wanted to ensure that no further copies of the material would be published and in their action it was completely subverting the intent of the copyright laws. Before this case, which had the potential of rewriting copyright law in the United States, went to trial, however, in 2003 the PCOG and the WCoG reached a settlement in which an unnamed amount of money was paid to the WCoG and the PCOG received the copyright to *The Mystery of the Ages* and 18 additional books, all initially published by the WCoG, not the least important being Armstrong's final text of the all-important basic WCoG volume *The United States and Britain in Prophecy*. Additional Armstrong titles acquired in the lawsuit (all previously published by the WCoG) included: *The Autobiography of Herbert W. Armstrong*, *The*

Incredible Human Potential, The Missing Dimension in Sex, The Wonderful World Tomorrow, The Plain Truth About Healing, The Seven Laws of Success, and Which Day Is the Christian Sabbath?

The acquisition of the Armstrong copyrights has significantly bolstered the PCoG's claim to be the true continuation of the former Worldwide Church of God. Pursuing that endeavor, the PCoG has published a set of booklets about Armstrong including *He Was Right, Ambassador for World Peace*, and *A Warm Friend of Israel*. In addition, Gerald's son Stephen Flurry wrote a scathing volume against the leadership of the Grace Communion International for its attempts to dismantle the former Worldwide Church of God (Flurry 2006).

2. Global Church of God (1993)—Roderick C. Meredith

In 1993, when the changes in the Worldwide Church of God became undeniable and the possibility of recovering even a small portion of what Armstrong had taught lost, a second large schism occurred under the guidance of one of the few church leaders known outside of the WCoG, Roderick C. Meredith (1930–2017). Meredith had been one of the first people attracted to the church following its move to California in 1947. He was also one of the original graduates of Ambassador College, which Armstrong had started immediately after the move to California. The Global Church of God grew slowly at first, but as knowledge of the changes in WCoG teachings permeated the ministerium and the members, the new Global Church spread across North America and to the United Kingdom.

Then, in 1998, to the complete surprise of most, the Global Church's church board experienced a break with Meredith, its founder and presiding Evangelist. The board suddenly fired Meredith, the culmination of a set of events that had begun with the firing of another elder, David Peck, a few months earlier. Seemingly not aware of (or unconcerned with) Meredith's popularity within the Council of Elders and overwhelming support within the church, the board's action proved disastrous. Meredith and the elders withdrew taking most of the members with them, their action causing the Global Church of God to collapse, at least in North America. It survived in the UK, while the small remnant in the United States (and Canada) reorganized as the Church of God, a Christian Fellowship. That relatively small church, however, soon disappeared altogether

by merging into the United Church of God (see below). A few pastors resisted the merger, continued under the name Church of the Eternal God, and remain in communion with the British Global Church of God.

3. Living Church of God

Following the 1998 implosion of the Global Church of God in the wake of its firing of its Presiding Evangelist Rod Meredith, the latter publicized the firing and soon reorganized the great majority of the ministers and lay membership as the Living Church of God (<https://www.lcg.org/>). By this time, dozens of additional local congregations had separated from the WCoG and reorganized independently, each taking a variant name but one always designating it as a “Church of God.”

Immediately upon its reorganization, the Living Church of God appeared on the stage as the most prominent of the several WCoG splinters that had developed beyond a single local church into an association of congregations, and began to attract some of the new independent congregations into its fellowship. While numbers are hard to come by, the Living Church seems not to have caught up with the Philadelphia Church which was organized a decade prior to its coming into being. The Philadelphia Church has certainly built a far larger broadcast network both domestically and overseas than has the Living Church.

Within the context of the several WCoG schisms, the Living Church can also be seen as possibly the most liberal. While maintaining most of the doctrinal distinctiveness of the WCoG, it has taken steps toward mainstream Evangelicalism, and has offered a somewhat limited openness to the Charismatic Movement and to spiritual healing. Possibly its most important deviation from the WCoG has been its opening a role for its congregations and lay members to participate in evangelism and members to offer a direct witness to nonmembers of their faith in Jesus. In the wake of the changes, the Living Church of God has become the only one of the major WCoG splinters to invite nonmembers to worship with its local assemblies (Meredith 2016; Ogwyn 2010).

4. *United Church of God*

Shortly after the formation of the now defunct Global Church of God, another group of former ministers exited the WCoG and founded the United Church of God (<https://www.ucg.org>). They wished to maintain the basic doctrines and practices of the Worldwide Church of God, but moved toward a more collective leadership which they placed in a 12-member Council of Elders, to which were assigned powers previously exercised by WCoG's founder, including the development of church-wide policies and the oversight of any alterations or innovations in doctrine.

In the new structure, the Council appoints the church's president, who has been designated as the day-to-day spokesperson for the church and the administrative head of the national office. *Beyond Today* is issued as the United Church's monthly magazine. While holding real power for making policy, the Council is, however, elected by and charged with maintaining the confidence of the General Conference of Elders, consisting of all of the church's ministers (United Church of God 2016). The council members are elected to three-year terms and four members rotate off annually.

Most recently, the United Church has announced the circulation of *Beyond Today* to be above 300,000/issue, while that of the Living Church's *Tomorrow's World* is above 500,000.

In 2010, several senior pastors and elders separated from the United Church of God to form the Church of God, AWA (A Worldwide Association). Headquartered in McKinney, Texas, it claims some 5,000 members in the United States and 10,000 internationally.

5. *Restored Church of God*

David C. Peck a minister successively with the WCoG and then the Global Church of God, moved forward from his 1998 disfellowshipping from the GCG to found one of the most conservative splinters of the former WCoG, the Restored Church of God (<https://rcg.org>). Following his dismissal from the GCG, Peck did a personal survey of the then existing WCoG splinters, and in each of them found a problem of leadership. As he put it, among the various

groups, he sought one headed by a leader “committed to truth.” He concluded, “There were no such group.” He found all of the current leaders had either “compromised doctrines, were blind to the age or lacked training” (Peck 2012).

His assessment led him in 1999 to found the Restored Church of God, a very conservative new splinter that aimed to restore the WCoG as closely as possible. He began to see his role as being the one to lead God’s final end-time work. As of 2023, he continues as the Pastor General of the Restored Church, for which he has authored a number of books. He also contributes the lead article each month to *The Real Truth*, the church’s monthly magazine, over which he serves as publisher and editor-in-chief. In keeping with his earlier assessment of the various WCoG schisms, Peck also monitors the various groups and maintains an account of their innovations and changes in Armstrong’s teachings at a minute level (Peck 2018; Restored Church of God 2018).

Of the more impactful of the many WCoG splinters, the Restored Church is among the more difficult to assess in terms of support. It is the only one not to develop a radio or television broadcast ministry, but to rely primarily on its internet site (www.rcg.org) for its outreach. It has, however, developed a large library of written material (most authored by Peck) and numerous videos, which it offers free to site visitors. Its monthly periodical, *Real Truth*, maintains the same high quality as those of the other major splinters.

Additional WCoG Groups

From even a cursory search for the Worldwide Church of God on the internet in 2023, one could easily come away with the impression that it was a large church with a global impact that continues to have a significant influence today. In fact, it was a relatively large church that was beginning to make a place for itself on the religious landscape, an influence that peaked in the 1980s just before the scandal that took the younger Armstrong off the air initiated its downfall. That downfall was followed by the founder’s unfortunate appointment of a successor who over the decade after assuming office renounced all that the elder Armstrong believed and practiced.

In the wake of the attempt of Tkach Sr. and Jr. officially leading the WCoG into the Evangelical Christian fold, the great majority of church members and leaders

deserted the parent body, and did so with relative ease. The WCoG's physical assets were few and all owned by the centralized church body—a college, a cultural auditorium, and its headquarters and publishing facilities. The local churches met in rented facilities, and having separated themselves from the larger Christian community, they remained unattached to other groups inhabiting the religious landscape. Meanwhile, the national church neither owned nor possessed any equity in the facilities used by church members that could become a matter of contention should a congregation choose to withdraw.

And while the WCoG was distributing some three million issues of its magazine to those who requested it, the church's expenses were being paid by the relatively few people (little more than a hundred thousand) who went through the involved procedure of learning the church's full position on a host of teachings (such as the three tithes and the attendance at the festivals) before being baptized and welcomed into a congregation.

Once a congregation withdrew from the WCoG, it had several choices. Many attached themselves to one of the larger congregational associations discussed above. Some formed new associations that have remained small regional bodies. Many have simply remained single independent congregations. Of the later, a few have published books on matters of concern and/or a newsletter, but most have limited their outreach to a single web site. All have become lost in the massive population growth and the fragmentation of North American Christianity into its currently existing 1200+ denominations.

Almost all of the local and regional remnant groups of the WCoG have adopted variant names that include "Church of God" as part of the name, hence we see names like The Church of the Eternal God, the Continuing Church of God, the Church of the Great God, or the Church of God's Faithful among the lists of the names of all these small factions.

So, What Ever Happened to the Worldwide Church of God?

Out of this quick overview of the history and current status (as of 2023) of the Worldwide Church of God in the years since the death of its founder, we can begin to understand what has happened to the once vital church that had emerged in the mid-twentieth century. The simple answer is, of course, it continues on in

its varied new incarnations. One small faction maintains organizational continuity, though its membership is increasing embarrassed by its origin and has adopted a name that distances it from its early years.

The main life of the former WCoG is now carried in the four larger splinter groups that formed in the decade after the successor to the founder gradually dropped all the church's distinctive ideas, in the wake of which the great majority of members and ministers left. In the new century, each of these four churches has established itself across North America, opened a headquarters complex, and developed branches globally. Three of the four have launched a vital radio/TV broadcast ministry now more than equal to that the WCoG possessed in the mid-1980s, as it began its decline. In addition, each of the four groups has developed an expansive internet presence with multiple sites that rival the TV show in reaching the public and potential new church members. HWA died before the internet was really a part of social existence.

Each of the four groups has published numerous books and booklets on their major teachings, especially those points of theology that distinguish them from the mainstream of Christian Catholic, Orthodox, and Protestant traditions. Of the four, the Philadelphia Church of God stands out for having obtained copyrights to the founder's writings, though the three others have over the last two decades largely rewritten and published clones of Armstrong's key books using their own authors. Additionally, each of the four churches now issues a monthly full-color magazine (in the tradition of *The Plain Truth*) for general distribution and one or more for internal distribution.

Each of the four churches has grown to the point that it has founded a college for ministerial training. Meanwhile, the Philadelphia Church has garnered enough resources to open both a cultural foundation in the United States and an archeological institute in Israel.

Each of the four groups started with a relatively small membership (5,- to 20,000 range) and they have now collectively grown to have more than 100,000, that is to say, that collectively, the four have grown to the point that they now fill the vacuum created by the destruction of the WCoG in the 1990s. At the same time they remain mostly separatist and largely invisible on the religious landscape, known outside their fellowship to relatively few people, even among scholars of religion.

In the 1980s, it looked as if the WCoG was on a trajectory similar to the earlier Millerite groups, as both the Seventh-day Adventist church and the Jehovah's Witnesses now claim more than a million members in the United States. Dreams of such success were cast aside amid the disruption of the 1990s, but now a generation later, the substance of the pre-disruption era has been reconstituted and the churches that are still being nourished by Herbert W. Armstrong's life and work appear to be more than able to carry its founder vision forward.

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**Dalí's *The Three Sphinxes of Bikini* and Soka Gakkai's
Anti-Nuclear-Weapons Campaigns**

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ABSTRACT: American nuclear weapons tests in the Bikini Atoll of the Marshall Islands started in 1946 and continued until 1958. They had a powerful echo in popular culture, from comics to drinks, and French fashion designer Louis Réard in 1946 gave the name “bikini” to a new “explosive” two-piece female swimsuit. They also had echoes among leading artists, and in 1946 Salvador Dalí painted *The Three Sphinxes of Bikini*, a sober meditation on the possibility of a nuclear apocalypse and of a destruction of the environment by irresponsible humans. The paper compares the message of *The Three Sphinxes of Bikini* with the ecological and anti-nuclear-weapons teachings of Soka Gakkai and its third President Daisaku Ikeda. It also compares Dalí's painting to works of contemporary artists from East Asia who offer similar meditations, such as the installation *Fu Dao* of the late French-Chinese artist Chen Zhen, and the *Kaki Tree Project* and the installation *Mega Death* by Japanese artist and Soka Gakkai member Tatsuo Miyajima.

KEYWORDS: Nuclear Tests at Bikini Atoll, Bikini Atoll, *The Three Sphinxes of Bikini*, Daisaku Ikeda, Soka Gakkai, Chen Zhen, Tatsuo Miyajima, Kaki Tree Project.

The Bikini Tests

The name “bikini” evokes today the two-piece swimsuit for women created in 1946 by Louis Réard (1896–1984). He could not find a “respectable” model willing to present his “scandalous” swimsuit and had to hire nude dancer Micheline Bernardini to introduce his creation (Felix 2017).

Both Réard and Bernardini became immediately and internationally famous. Réard is still widely remembered as the inventor of the bikini, although there were already two-piece female swimsuits on the market. Another French fashion designer, Jacques Heim (1899–1967), had already launched one of them.

Interestingly, he had called it “Atom” (Gayomali 2012). The comparison between the atomic bomb and an “explosion” of femininity was very much in the air. The name of Réard’s bikini also had a nuclear connection, although today it tends to be forgotten.

When Réard launched his swimsuit, the U.S. had just detonated the first of twenty-four nuclear weapons it will drop on the Bikini Atoll in the Marshall Islands until 1958. These bombs were much more powerful than those used in the Hiroshima and Nagasaki bombings of 1945 (see Appendix A). Réard took the name of his swimsuits for “explosive” women from the Bikini atomic tests.

The 167 inhabitants of the Bikini Atoll had to be relocated elsewhere. Despite what had been promised, radiation continued to make it too dangerous for them to go back home. An ill-fated attempt between 1972 and 1978 exposed islanders to serious health risks (Niedenthal 2001). Only in 2012, it was determined that Bikini was safe enough to be inhabited again, but of the more than 4,000 descendants of those who lived there in 1946 less than ten returned. They take care of the tourists who come to what is both a diving paradise and a living memory of the nuclear tests of the Cold War era.

In 2010, UNESCO declared the Bikini Atoll a World Heritage Site (UNESCO World Heritage Committee 2010, 20) because it is

a testimony to the dawn of the nuclear age, the start of the Cold War and the era of nuclear colonialism—stages in human history of global significance (Republic of the Marshall Islands 2009, 11),

“in the context of a paradoxical image of peace and of earthly paradise” (ICOMOS 2010, 148).

Bikini and Popular Culture

The Bikini atomic tests had a large impact on popular culture. In a story published in October 1946 in *Action Comics*, Superman is forced by villain Specs Dour to drink a preparation that makes him insane. He ends up in Bikini just while the atomic tests are being performed. Paradoxically, the atomic explosions cure him from insanity (Siegel et al. 1946).

As American scholar David W. Kupferman has demonstrated, the Bikini nuclear tests entered the realm of kitsch too. For example, Marshall Islands bars

started serving drinks with atomic-derivative names, such as “Nuclear Survivors’ Special” (Kupferman 2015, 2).

Kupferman argues that kitsch is used to exorcise mourning and the fear of death but can also dangerously corrupt them and deprive mourning of its capacity of generating a moral reaction. Kupferman writes that,

The problem with kitsch is that it leads to [Immanuel] Kant’s [1724–1804] “pathological love,” and so we drink our Bravo Shots [another drink taking its name from a nuclear test] and read through the list of beach movies on the Bikini Atoll website without any sense of moral obligation to those whose lives were affected, and often destroyed, by the reality of the experience and the horror of the event (Kupferman 2015, 12).

While kitsch may be fun, confronted with the Bikini tragedy it is our moral duty to

consider the effects of kitsch, and the ways in which the conditions of possibility delineated by kitsch corrupt the work of mourning. For if kitsch totalizes the other and violates the requirement that we interiorize the dead while allowing them to speak, it also denies the face of the other, and the ethical epiphany of that face (Kupferman 2015, 17).

Dalí and Bikini: The Three Sphinxes

While these examples are from popular culture (and the distinction between a “high” and a “low” culture is increasingly controversial), other reactions to the Bikini tests came from leading artists. They had already reacted to the 1945 bombings in Japan.

Uranium and Atomica Melancholica Idyll by Salvador Dalí (1904–1989) may well be the first painting by a well-known artist following the atomic bombings of Hiroshima and Nagasaki (August 6–9, 1945: see Introvigne 2022). “The atomic explosion of August 6, 1945, shook me seismically,” wrote Dalí, and he immediately started the painting (Dalí 1976, 216).

Later, in 1951, Dalí will publish a “Mystical Manifesto” on atomic issues and the path that after Hiroshima brought him from anticlericalism to a return to Roman Catholicism. As other artists, Dalí was both fascinated by the new physics of the atom, which offered painters and sculptors seemingly infinite possibilities, and terrorized by atomic weapons (Dalí 1951).

Some Italian artists believed they had manifested similar attitudes and used the expressions “nuclear art” and “atomic art” before Dalí. They even sued him for

trademark infringement (Taylor 2016). In fact, there were two rival groups of Italian artists involved in the controversy, one in Milan around Enrico Baj (1924–2003) and one in Livorno around Voltolino Fontani (1920–1976) (Sauvage 1962; Anzani 1980; Corgnati 1998; Cagianelli 2002; Fontani 2005–6; Introvigne 2022).

Just as he had reacted to the bombings in Japan, Dalí also reacted to the tests in the Bikini Atoll. The result was his celebrated painting *The Three Sphinxes of Bikini* (1947).

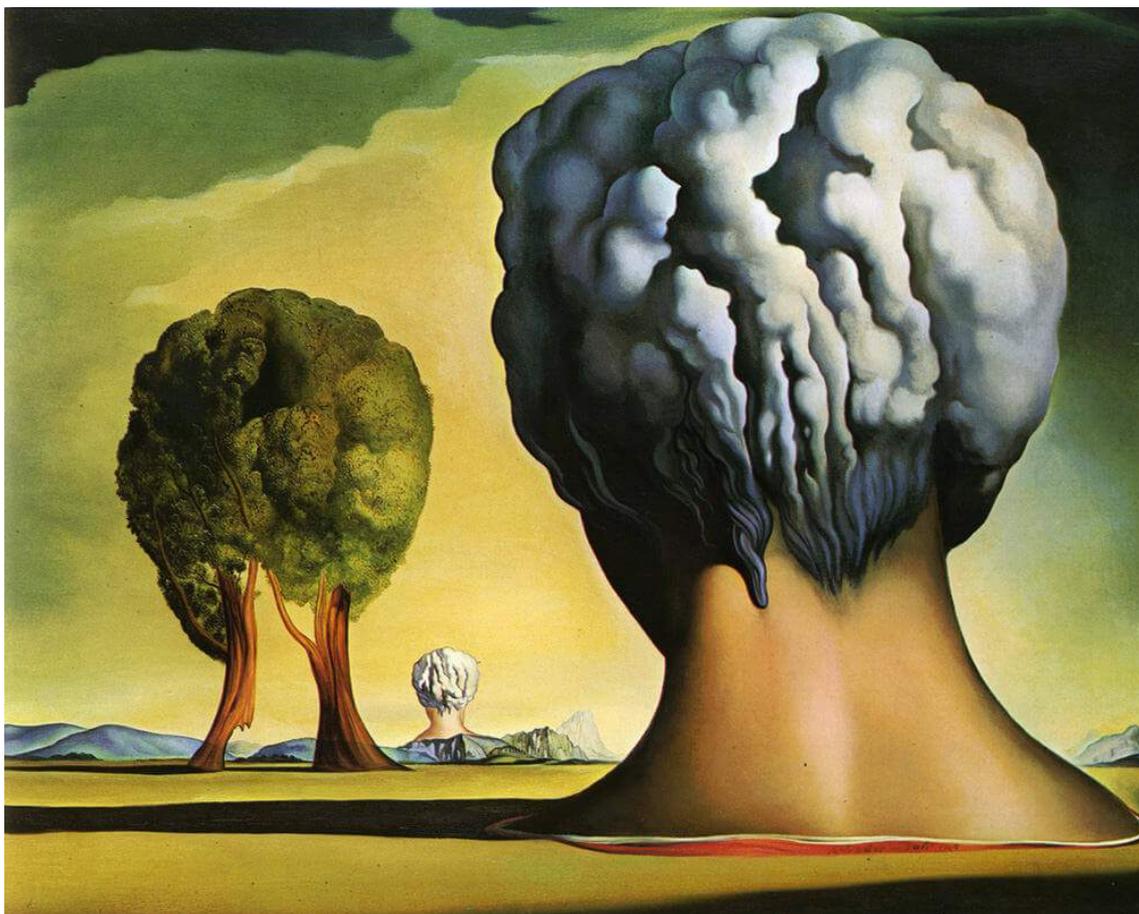


Image 1. *The Three Sphinxes of Bikini.*

The painting was purchased by Daniel Sickles (1900–1988), a famous American collector and the grandson of the Civil War general who had his same name (1819–1914). It passed through three other private collections until it was sold by Sotheby's in New York in 1993. The buyer was one of the leading international Dalí collectors, Teizo Morohashi (1934–2003), founder of the

Japanese sporting-goods retailing company XEBIO Corporation (Fundació Gala-Salvador Dalí 2023, 629).

In 1999, Morohashi donated his Dalí collection and the building hosting it to the newly established Morohashi Museum of Modern Art in the Aizu-Bandai-Kogen area of his home prefecture of Fukushima (Morohashi and Morohashi 2003). Ironically, or perhaps symbolically, considering the presence of the *Three Sphinxes* in the collection, Fukushima will become in 2011 the theater of one of the worst nuclear accidents in human history at its Daichi Nuclear Power Plant.

In Dalí's works, the reference to sphinxes in the title has often a negative connotation. In 1931, he had painted *Remorse: Sphinx Embedded in the Sand*, which may have alluded to his partner and later wife Gala's (1894–1982) sadness for not being able to have children from him.

Coming back to *The Three Sphinxes of Bikini*, if we eliminate the “sphinxes” from the painting we are left with a waste land whose most apparent feature is the absence of life. A study of the shadows projected by the sphinxes, and on the neck of the larger one, allows us to recognize the effects of one and perhaps two explosions, which are not part of the painting. What Dalí is showing us are not the nuclear bombs tested in Bikini but their possible effect: a post-atomic, apocalyptic desert.

However, in another way, Dalí does include atomic explosions in its painting. The heads of the first and the third sphinx are atomic mushroom clouds. Although Dalí shows us these human-atomic heads only from the back, the first, larger sphinx is clearly looking at the third. Her tense neck indicates concern and fear. However, perhaps the first sphinx does not realize that the third one is a mirror image of herself. When humans look at atomic destruction, they necessarily look at the same time at themselves as causes of the destruction, whether they understand it or not.

But then we have the second sphinx, which is totally different. There are no nuclear explosions there. We see a beautiful tree. In fact, two trees embracing each other. It is a triumph of nature, which when left alone, flourishes in harmony and love.

The Three Sphinxes of Bikini enacts the couple purity/danger of British anthropologist Mary Douglas (1921–2007: Douglas 1966). The purity of nature is in danger of being annihilated by nuclear weapons, whose destructive power

has been demonstrated by the Bikini tests. Yet, the strength of love and harmony represented by the two embracing trees leaves some hope that avoiding the apocalypse may not be impossible.

The Three Sphinxes and Daisaku Ikeda's Anti-Nuclear-Weapons Thought: A Comparison

Soka Gakkai is well-known for its campaigns against nuclear weapons. However, Daisaku Ikeda, Soka Gakkai's third President and now Honorary President, teaches that the fights for preserving the environment and to avoid the nuclear annihilation of all life on earth are two sides of the same coin, based on the principle of the "oneness of life and environment":

The destruction of nature is the destruction of humanity. Nature is our home. All life on this planet, including of course human life, was born from the natural environment. We don't owe our existence to machines or science. We are the products of nature (Ikeda 2010, 188).

We find in Ikeda's and Soka Gakkai's message against pollution and nuclear weapons the same fundamental themes Dalí tried to call our attention to during the Bikini tests with the *Three Sphinxes*:

- Nature (the second sphinx) embodies purity and hope.
- Both nature and humans are threatened by the danger of nuclear annihilation.
- We (the first sphinx) look at the possible apocalypse (the third sphinx) with awe and fear but do not realize that the "enemy" is within us (the third and the first sphinx are almost identical).

As Ikeda wrote,

If we are to put the era of nuclear terror behind us, we must struggle against the real 'enemy.' That enemy is not nuclear weapons per se, nor is it the states that possess or develop them. The real enemy that we must confront is the ways of thinking that justify nuclear weapons (Ikeda 2009, 12).

East Asian Artists and Ecological Disasters: Chen Zhen's Fu Dao

While Dalí's references are taken from Western culture, there are East Asian artists who have reflected on the same themes. The first case I would like to

present here is the installation *Fu Dao* by Chen Zhen (1955–2000), a Chinese artist from Shanghai who moved to Paris after the Cultural Revolution and became a French citizen (Chen Zhen et al. 2007).



Image 2. Chen Zhen, *Fu Dao* (1997).

While maintaining an ambiguous relationship with his youth during the Cultural Revolution, Chen Zhen was deeply interested in Buddhism and Taoism, which he saw as an antidote to the evils of an anti-ecological and consumerist society (Zhong 2014, 117–22). Indeed, he saw his art as a Taoist experience. He stated in an interview:

In Taoism, the Void is only what is ‘between.’ Within this perception, the world can be seen as a ‘juncture’ in space. So why not see art the same way? (Sans 2003, 156).

Fu Dao, created by Chen Zhen in 1997, is a typical contemporary (as opposite to “modern”) work of art consisting of a site-specific installation. That means that the work is installed for a limited period in a gallery or museum and adapts itself to the location. Each installation is slightly different from the others, and new versions can be installed even after the artist’s death. Two of the most famous versions of *Fu Dao* were installed at the Guggenheim Museum in New York in

2018, and in 2020–2021 (during the COVID pandemic) at the Pirelli HangarBicocca in Milan.

“Fu” (福) is the Chinese character for “good luck.” The character also indicates the Buddha. Two different Chinese characters, 倒 and 到, meaning respectively “upside down” and “to arrive,” are both pronounced as “Dao.” Thus, “Fu Dao” may mean “Upside-Down Buddha” or “Good Luck Upside Down,” or “The Arrival of Good Luck.” Chen used all these titles in English for his installation.

The work consists of a pagoda-like structure with a roof made of real bamboo wood and leaves. Two kinds of objects are suspended to the structure, upside down. In the upper level, there are objects typical of modern consumeristic and materialistic society such as discarded parts of bicycles, tubes, aluminum and plastic toys. At the lower level, small Buddha statues are suspended, also upside down.

The use of real bamboo indicates the glory of nature. However, this uncontaminated nature is attacked by pollution, symbolized by the industrial and consumer product wastes hung upside down from the first level of the structure. It seems that spirituality is also lost, as the Buddha statues are small, are placed in the installation upside down themselves, and hangs from the lower level. However, the message of the work does not end here. “Fu Dao” means “Buddha [or good luck] upside down” but also “the arrival of the Buddha.” Good luck and the Buddha have a possibility of “arriving,” of coming back. The upside down Buddhas can be put back on their feet. It is up to us. We have a roof made of real bamboo, i.e., a loving and caring Mother Nature, upon us. The process of pollution and destruction can be reversed, and we find how to reverse it by looking at the “in-between” Buddhist-Taoist space.

Tatsuo Miyajima and Kaki Tree Project

The second Japanese work I would like to mention is Tatsuo Miyajima’s *Revive Time: Kaki Tree Project*. Miyajima is a member of Soka Gakkai, and Nichiren Buddhism is crucial for his artistic experience. His work has been described as “a mimetic representation of Ikeda Daisaku in the art world” (Woolsey 2019, 41). He is well-known for his light installations based on LEDs.



Image 3. Planting a tree as part of *Kaki Tree Project*, Ormea, Italy, April 29, 2019.

As American scholar Jeremy Woolsey tells it, the story of *Kaki Tree Project* starts with

Ebinuma Masayuki 海老沼正幸, an arborist in Nagasaki, [who] managed to foster back to health a persimmon tree (kaki tree) scarred from the atomic bombing of Nagasaki on 9 August 1945. The tree began producing seedlings and, eventually, Ebinuma started to hand these out to children in Nagasaki to plant as symbols of peace. Miyajima met the arborist in 1995 when he was in Nagasaki for an exhibition, and, with his permission, began *Revive Time: Kaki Tree Project* in 1996 (modeled on Ebinuma's approach), with the first planting at the former Ryuhoku Elementary School. His aim was to decenter the role of the artist and allow each individual to make an artistic statement by planting a kaki sapling. Here, the kaki tree can be seen as a symbol of the continuity of life through horrific destruction (Woolsey 2019, 52).

Kaki Tree Project is part of contemporary art (as opposed to “modern”), which does not necessarily manifest itself in paintings and sculptures, operates through a different “paradigm” (Heinich 2014), and can even go beyond installations. Continuing to plant descendants of the Nagasaki tree throughout the world is an artistic form like what German artist Joseph Beuys (1921–1986), whose spiritual

context was Anthroposophy (Zumdick 2013), called “social sculpture.” Beuys himself in 1982 placed 7,000 basalt stones in front of Museum Fridericianum in Kassel, Germany, and suggested each was paired with an oak tree to be planted in the city. This was eventually done and became *7,000 Oaks*, one of Beuys’s most well-known works (Beuys et al. 1982).

The difference between the *Kaki Tree Project* and Beuys’ *7,000 Oaks* is that each tree planted as part of Miyajima’s project is a genetical descendant of the tree hit by the Nagasaki bombing and saved by Ebinuma. That tree was a *hibakusha*, one of the survivors of the bombing whose memories Soka Gakkai has devotedly collected and preserved for posterity.

The *Kaki Tree Project* is a story of rebirth but also of death. In this sense, it can be compared to Miyajima’s famous installation *Mega Death* (1999). There, 2,450 blue-light LED counters count, appear, and disappear. After one hour, all LEDs suddenly switch off and the room “dies.” However, hope is not lost since after a while the lights start to turn on again. It is a tale of death and annihilation, alluding to nuclear destruction, followed by rebirth. It is also, as the artist himself said, a symbol of reincarnation (Miyajima 1996, 103).



Image 4. Tatsuo Miyajima, *Mega Death* (1999).

Miyajima wrote that,

When I started thinking about art based on eternal life, *daimoku* (*Nam-myoho-renge-kyo*), Soka Gakkai and its great leader, Teacher Ikeda, were there to show me how to judge my works... Because we subscribe to this vision of eternal life, we can rigorously judge each moment. My mission as an artist is to render the accumulation of these judgments into powerful works of art (Miyajima 1996, 103–4).

As Woolsey wrote, Miyajima offers “visually appealing and persuasive representations of Sōka Gakkai doctrine and practice through his work” (Woolsey 2019, 54). Among the doctrines and practices represented are Ikeda’s teachings about the purity of nature and the danger of the nuclear apocalypse, and Soka Gakkai’s efforts to save the world from annihilation. Miyajima “is first and foremost a member of Sōka Gakkai, and then an artist” (Woolsey 2019, 54). As such, he confronts the questions of the *Three Sphinxes of Bikini*, but he believes he knows where to find the answers.

APPENDIX A

Chronology of Nuclear Weapons Tests on Bikini Atoll

[By comparison, the bomb dropped on Hiroshima had an actual yield of 15 kilotons, and the one that hit Nagasaki of 25 kilotons]

30 June/1 July 1946. “Able.” 23 kilotons.

24 July 1946. “Baker.” 21 kilotons.

1 August 1946. “Charlie” (cancelled).

1 March 1954. “Bravo.” 15,000 kilotons.

27 March 1954. “Romeo.” 11,000 kilotons.

7 April 1954. “Koon.” 110 kilotons.

25 April 1954. “Union.” 6,900 kilotons.

27 April 1954. “Yankee II.” 13,500 kilotons.

4 May 1954. “Yankee I” (cancelled).

20 May 1956. "Cherokee." 3,800 kilotons.

27 May 1956. "Zuni." 3,500 kilotons.

6 June 1956. "Flathead." 365 kilotons.

11 June 1956. "Tewa." 3,500 kilotons.

25 June 1956. "Dakota." 1,100 kilotons.

10 July 1956. "Navajo." 4,500 kilotons.

28 April 1958. "Yucca." 1.7 kilotons (nuclear device carried by a stratospheric balloon).

11 May 1958. "Fir." 1,400 kilotons.

21 May 1958. "Nutmeg." 25.1 kilotons.

31 May 1958. "Sycamore." 92 kilotons.

10 June 1958. "Maple." 213 kilotons.

14 June 1958. "Aspen." 319 kilotons.

27 June 1958. "Redwood." 412 kilotons.

29 June 1958. "Hickory." 14 kilotons.

2 July 1958. "Cedar." 220 kilotons.

12 July 1958. "Poplar." 9,300 kilotons.

22 July 1958. "Juniper." 65 kilotons.

[A last test, "Piñon," scheduled for August 1958, was never performed]

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Daisaku Ikeda's "Life-Sized Paradigm": From the 2003 Peace Proposal to the 2023 Statement on the G7 Hiroshima Summit

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ABSTRACT: 2023 marks the 20th anniversary of one of the most important yearly "Peace Proposals" of Soka Gakkai third President Daisaku Ikeda, the one he published in 2003. While the attention at the time might have focused on the political comments he made after the war in Afghanistan and on the eve of the second war in Iraq, the paper argues that his dialogue with French 17th-century philosopher Blaise Pascal and the proposal of a "life-sized paradigm" for peace are the most important features of Ikeda's text. In 2023, Ikeda has also published a statement on the G7 Hiroshima Summit. Here again, the paper argues that beyond political contingency the text is deeply rooted in a spiritual paradigm calling to the conversion of the heart as the only way to avoid a nuclear apocalypse.

KEYWORDS: Daisaku Ikeda, Soka Gakkai, Ikeda Peace Proposal, Ikeda Peace Proposal 2003, Ikeda's Statement on the G7 Hiroshima Summit, Pascal and Buddhism.

1. Pascal, the Six Senses of Buddhism, and Science: Ikeda's "Life-Sized Paradigm" After Twenty Years

The 2003 Message: The Political Context

Since 1983, Daisaku Ikeda, Soka Gakkai's third President and current Honorary President, has issued every year a "Peace Proposal." 2023 marks the twentieth anniversary of what I regard as one of the most important among Ikeda's Peace Proposals. It is his text for 2003, whose title was, "A Global Ethic of Coexistence: Toward a 'Life-Sized' Paradigm for Our Age." It is a dense document, in fact a small encyclopedia about peace (Ikeda 2003).

Ikeda normally starts from the international political context. 2003 was still a year marked by the aftermath of the 9/11 terrorist attack of 2001. Ikeda did not consider the Afghan Taliban innocent of the charge that they had supported terrorism and noted that stopping the operation of al-Qaida bases in Afghanistan was a positive result (Ikeda 2003, 2).

The Soka Gakkai leader distinguished his position from absolute pacifism by discussing sociologist Max Weber's (1864–1920) famous 1918 Munich lecture "Politik als Beruf" (Politics as Vocation). There, Weber distinguished an "ethic of ultimate ends," which may apply to personal life and to the practices of certain religious communities, and an "ethic of responsibility" politicians should adopt for the common good (Weber 1919). The "ethic of ultimate ends" may lead to the refusal of bears arms or wage wars. As an option for individuals or small communities it should be respected. However, the "ethic of responsibility" should acknowledge that the use of armed force may be unavoidable in certain cases (Ikeda 2003, 3).

Ikeda agrees, although he insists that the armed force should be used with "moderation and self-control" (Ikeda 2003, 3) to avoid being captured by an endless "cycle of hatred and retaliation" (Ikeda 2003, 5). Here, Ikeda includes a criticism of a form of unilateralism and a mistaken belief that the answer to 9/11 might be only or mostly military that he saw developing in the United States (Ikeda 2003, 4).

He published his peace message on January 26, 2003. On March 20, the United States and their allies started the second Iraqi war. Without entering the debate about this war and its motivations, we may note how prophetic now sound Ikeda's words questioning the wisdom of military campaigns not accompanied by clear plans for the future, and by a broader vision of how to promote a democratic and peaceful evolution of certain areas of the world through education and economic plans the citizens of these regions may recognize as beneficial and fair.

Changing the Ethical Paradigm

While Ikeda's political comments are in the first pages of his 2003 Peace Proposal, and may immediately capture the attention, I would argue that the text maintains an interest and a freshness today because of its core thesis, that humanity is doomed without a change of paradigm.

Ikeda is also known for his dialogues with the world's luminaries of politics and culture, which are often transcribed and generate books. The first best seller based on these dialogues was published in 1975 in Japanese and in 1976 in English. It featured the conversations between Ikeda and one of the greatest historians of the 21st century, Arnold Toynbee (1889–1975: Toynbee and Ikeda 1976).

In the 2003 Peace Proposal, Ikeda remembered how Toynbee told him that his main concern was that humanity was advancing towards a future of “mass-suicide” because the evolution of the technology was much quicker than the evolution of an ethical conscience capable of dealing with destructive technologies and controlling them. Actually, Toynbee believed, the average level of morality among human beings “may actually have declined” (Toynbee and Ikeda 1976, 300). Toynbee was skeptical about the future, unless one of the “revolution[s] in religion” he had studied as an historian would unpredictably happen and change the hearts of millions (Ikeda 2003, 2).

Obviously, when he mentioned a possible “mass-suicide,” Toynbee had in mind nuclear weapons, a theme of great interest for Soka Gakkai, which since the bombings of Hiroshima and Nagasaki has conducted massive international campaigns for their elimination (Šorytė 2019). Ikeda also contrasted Toynbee's concern for the general human morality with the Nazi Holocaust bureaucrat Adolf Eichmann (1906–1962) as depicted in a then recent play by Japanese writer Masakazu Yamazaki (1934–2020: Yamazaki 2002).

When he was arrested, brought to Israel, tried, sentenced, and executed, Eichmann continued to exhibit a lack of interest for human morality and even for his own. His defense continued to be that a state bureaucrat should just obey orders, not reflect on whether they are right or wrong, noble or monstrous. With such bureaucrats, dialogue is impossible. They continue to exist and put humanity at risk of mass suicide, because they will obey any criminal order of their governments (Ikeda 2003, 2).

By contrast, Ikeda proposed what he called a “life-sized paradigm.” He defined it as

a way of thinking that never deviates from the human scale. It is simultaneously a humane sensitivity to life as a whole and also to the details of everyday human existence (Ikeda 2003, 5).

A Dialogue with Pascal

But what is the “human scale”? Here, Ikeda starts a dialogue with 17th-century French Catholic philosopher Blaise Pascal (1623–1662). He quotes one of Pascal’s two most famous aphorisms: “Man is but a reed, the feeblest thing in nature; but he is a thinking reed” (Pascal 1670, 177). Pascal also wrote that, “By space, the universe encompasses and swallows me up like an atom; by thought, I comprehend the world” (Pascal 1951, I, 6, 113; the passage is not in the 1670 edition).

Ikeda’s ideal dialogue with Pascal focuses on the latter’s use of one French verb, “comprendre” (comprehend). Both the English “comprehend” and the French “comprendre” have two meanings: “to encompass” and “to understand.” Ikeda believes that the two meanings are connected, which by the way is etymologically correct.

What is, however, crucial for Ikeda is that Pascal wrote that “by thought, I comprehend the world.” He could have used other French verbs, which had a specific philosophical tradition, to indicate an intellectual grasp of the world (such as “saisir” or “apprehénder”). He used “comprendre,” a verb with two meanings. The choice of the verb, according to Ikeda, in turn illuminates Pascal’s understanding of the word “thought.”

Ikeda wrote that

“thought” is not used [by Pascal] in a narrow, Cartesian sense—an intellectual activity that reduces everything to quantifiable components. Rather, it embraces the qualitative virtues of human sensitivity as well as the holistic activities of life through both a “mathematical” and an “intuitive” mind, engaging one’s entire being (Ikeda 2003, 5).

Simply put, we “comprehend” the world both through our mind and our heart.

Here, I would mention a personal anecdote. By participating in international conferences about new religious movements, I came across a Taiwanese group whose name is Weixin Shengjiao, which specializes in teaching Feng Shui and I Ching (see Introvigne 2017). When I first met them, they translated the name of their movement into English as “the holy religion of mind only.” This puzzled me, because Feng Shui and I Ching are precisely ancient Chinese systems that it is impossible to grasp with the mind only. Later, they have acknowledged this problem and sometimes “Weixin” is now translated as “heart only” rather than as “mind only.” But the truth is that, depending on the context, the word “xin,”

which is crucial in Chinese culture and spirituality, can be translated both as “mind” and as “heart.” There is considerable scholarly literature on how to translate “xin,” and some suggest “mind-heart” or “heart-mind” (see Yu 2008; Palmer 2021).

We are not far away from Ikeda’s approach to the French word “comprendre” as used by Pascal. For him, it means that we can grasp the world only by using both the mind and the heart. In fact, I mentioned earlier that the dictum comparing the human being to a reed is one of the two most famous among Pascal’s aphorisms. The other universally known aphorism states that “Le cœur a ses raisons que la raison ne connoist point,” “The heart has its reasons, of which the reason [or mind] knows nothing about” (Pascal 1670, 269).

We should not forget that Pascal was a deeply religious man. For him, the problem with the mind was that it would never “comprehend” God. We can only have some knowledge of God through an intuition of the heart. One consequence is that the heart comes before the mind, a notion that Pascal further elaborated by suggesting that it is the heart that “comprehends” the first principles, which are needed for the mind to start operating.

Pascal and Buddhism

Ikeda does not quote this famous second aphorism of Pascal, but it would have nicely confirmed his argument. Being a Buddhist, Ikeda notes that Pascal’s thought

shares a deep commonality with the teachings of Buddhism, which stress the proper balance among what are referred to as the “six sense organs,” i.e., the five senses of sight, hearing, smell, taste and touch as well as the faculty of the intellect. In the Mahayana tradition, the structures of consciousness, including realms typically referred to as the subconscious and beyond, are explored in their full complexity. For present purposes, however, it is enough to note that Buddhism views the balanced functioning of the six sense organs as essential to the full and healthy workings of our life activities (Ikeda 2003, 5).

Pascal’s “comprendre,” which for Ikeda affirms the priority of life over mind, corresponds to a sentence by the Medieval Japanese monk Nichiren, the founder of the Buddhist school to which Soka Gakkai belongs: “The eighty-four thousand teachings are the diary of one’s own life.” “Eighty-four thousand” is the number

of different teachings offered by Buddhism according to the tradition. What Nichiren's sentence means, wrote Ikeda, is that all these teachings may be just "a detailed account of the inner life of a single individual" (Ikeda 2003, 5).

Going more in depth, Ikeda follows up by summarizing another quote from Nichiren (which I reproduce here in the longer version from the English-language *Writings of Nichiren Daishonin*):

One understands that everything that is contained within this body of ours is modeled after heaven and earth. Thus we see that the roundness of the head is patterned after the heavens, the squareness of the feet imitates the form of the earth. The empty spaces within the body correspond to the empty sky. The warmth of the belly is patterned on spring and summer, the firmness of the back is patterned on autumn and winter. The four major parts of the body imitate the four seasons, the twelve large joints imitate the twelve months, the three hundred and sixty smaller joints imitate the three hundred and sixty days of the year. The breath going in and out of the nose imitates the wind passing over the mountain lakes and stream valleys, the breath going in and out of the mouth imitates the wind in the open sky. The eyes correspond to the sun and moon, and their opening and closing correspond to day and night. The hairs of the head are like the stars and constellations, the eyebrows like the stars of the Big Dipper, the veins like the rivers and streams, the bones like the rocks, the skin and flesh like the earth, and the body hairs like the thickets and groves of trees. The five major organs correspond to the five planets in the sky, the five sacred mountains on the earth, the five agents in the yin-yang cosmology, the five constant virtues in human society, the five components that make up the mind, the five virtues in terms of conduct, and the five penalties in terms of the regulation of crime (Nichiren 2006, 848–49).

For a Western reader, this text evokes irresistibly the motto "As above, so below," which is constantly repeated by all esoteric masters and schools since it first appeared in the "Emerald Tablet," a text perhaps coming from the first centuries of the Christian era (although the first manuscripts we have of it, in Arabic, are of the 8th and 9th centuries) and attributed to the mythical Hermes Trismegistus (see Hanegraaff 2022). Although "As above, so below" is quoted so often that we risk missing its meaning, its message is that there are systematic correspondences between the macrocosm, the universe, and the microcosm, the human being.

While it worked as the foundation of the Western esoteric tradition, it is a principle that does not preclude dialogue with science, particularly in its modern incarnations. Ikeda quoted his dialogue with anti-nuclear-weapons activist David Krieger:

Just as science revealed the enormous amount of energy contained within even a single particle of matter, we must now awaken to the fact that the inner determination within each individual's life at every moment contains the power to change the world (Ikeda 2003, 15; Krieger and Ikeda 2002, 271)

—and to “comprehend” it based on the correspondence of microcosm and macrocosm.

Again, this is a message we found in Pascal's reed aphorism and in its reading and Buddhist comparisons by Ikeda. By comprehending ourselves with the heart and not with the mind only, we can comprehend the universe, or something of it. But a pre-condition for this comprehension is humility. Ikeda writes that,

We must never forget our true, human proportion—the fact that, within the larger context of the ecosystem, we are but “a reed, the most feeble thing in nature.” If we lose sight of this reality, we may find ourselves following the mammoth down the sudden path of extinction (Ikeda 2003, 7).

We can now have a better understanding of what the “life-sized paradigm” proposed by Ikeda twenty years ago really is. It is a conversion of the heart, a way of putting at the center not politics, economy, or even religion but the human beings, with both their fragility (they are like reeds) and their immense richness (in the inner life of a single individual, we may find all the 84,000 Buddhist teachings). The idea is not to put “me” at the center but all the suffering human beings. This is a core Buddhist idea and may also be the way to escape the nuclear “mass-suicide” Toynbee saw as a dramatic possibility of our time.

2. Daisaku Ikeda and the 2023 G7 Summit in Hiroshima

Introduction

Traditionally, the globalization of a religious movement is perceived as an expansion by increasing its membership worldwide. However, at the same time, there may also be another dimension of globalization—an expansion of its activities, beyond the purely religious or spiritual, into engaged political and social action nationally and internationally. Unlike other so called “traditional” Buddhist movements, Soka Gakkai, since the end of World War II, is deeply involved both in internal Japanese domestic issues and in international humanitarian, social, and political affairs.

Levi McLaughlin, in his seminal 2019 book *Soka Gakkai's Human Revolution*, credits Ikeda, who took office in 1960, for this astounding development (McLaughlin 2019). However, he built on the legacy of its predecessors Tsunesaburo Makiguchi (1871–1944) and Josei Toda (1900–1958), whose brand of Buddhism was always deeply interested in social and international issues.

Under Ikeda, peace, culture, and education became the three pillars of Soka Gakkai's outreach activities. Two important dates were 1981 and 1983. In 1981, Soka Gakkai obtained its first United Nations recognition as an NGO, when it registered with the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees. In 1983, Ikeda issued the first of his already mentioned "Peace Proposals," which continued to be published yearly and have now become an important and familiar reference for the international community of those engaged in peace education. Ikeda also published transcripts of his dialogues with world cultural and political luminaries, many of which were about international peace, starting with the one with Toynbee I discussed above (Toynbee and Ikeda 1976). Subsequent dialogues included conversations with political leaders such as Henry Kissinger, Mikhail Gorbachev (1931–2022), and several others (McLaughlin 2019, 59).

My observation of Soka Gakkai in Italy confirms that the movement has achieved a remarkable success in terms of number of members, while at the same time an even wider circle knows of its efforts in the fields of peace education and, particularly, anti-nuclear-weapon campaigns. While Soka Gakkai has some 90,000 members in Italy, visitors and participants in its anti-nuclear-weapon exhibitions and initiatives have been in the excess of 360,000 (Šorytè 2019; Pellecchia 2022).

Anti-Nuclear-Weapon Efforts After the War in Ukraine

In a previous paper, published in the September–October 2022 issue of *The Journal of CESNUR*, I discussed how Soka Gakkai's campaign against nuclear weapons entered a new and difficult phase when Russia invaded Ukraine in February 2022 (Šorytè 2022). I mentioned documents published by Soka Gakkai's Toda Peace Institute noting that in many countries the mood has shifted, and the number of those prepared to support campaigns against nuclear weapons has been substantially reduced (Clements 2022; Wulf 2022).

I also discussed Ikeda's Peace Proposal for 2022, which was published before the invasion of Ukraine, on January 26. Ikeda noted there that the year 2022 had started with a positive development (Ikeda 2022). The leaders of the five states that admit being in possession of nuclear weapons, i.e., the United States, Russia, China, France, and the United Kingdom, signed a "Joint Statement on Preventing Nuclear War and Avoiding Arm Races" ("Joint Statement of the Leaders of the Five Nuclear-Weapon States on Preventing Nuclear War and Avoiding Arms Races" 2022).

The leaders stated that their goal was "a world without nuclear weapons." Meanwhile, they said they regarded

the avoidance of war between Nuclear-Weapon States and the reduction of strategic risks as our foremost responsibilities. We affirm that a nuclear war cannot be won and must never be fought ("Joint Statement of the Leaders of the Five Nuclear-Weapon States on Preventing Nuclear War and Avoiding Arms Races" 2022).

The five countries assured the world they

remained committed to our Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty (NPT) obligations, including our Article VI obligation "to pursue negotiations in good faith on effective measures relating to cessation of the nuclear arms race at an early date and to nuclear disarmament, and on a treaty on general and complete disarmament under strict and effective international control" ("Joint Statement of the Leaders of the Five Nuclear-Weapon States on Preventing Nuclear War and Avoiding Arms Races" 2022).

Obviously, when Putin signed the Joint Statement on January 3, the invasion of Ukraine was already being prepared. Still, he may not have anticipated the strength of the Ukrainian resistance and the determination of the West to help Ukraine. What is sure is that Ikeda was not naive, and he warned that the words of the Joint Statement may be subject in the future to different "interpretations." In fact, threats to use the nuclear weapons were heard from several prominent Russian figures after it became clear that the war would not end as soon as the Kremlin expected.

On February 21, 2023, Russia suspended its participation in the new START (Strategic Arms Reduction Treaty), signed in Prague in 2010 to replace the SORT (Strategic Offensive Reductions Treaty), which was in force between Russia and the United States from 2003 to 2011. In turn, SORT was the last chapter in a long series of negotiations and agreements that had started between United States and the Soviet Union in 1969, when the first SALT (Strategic Arm

Limitation Talks) started. With the war in Ukraine, the sharing of information on their respective nuclear arsenals between the United States and Russia was also stopped.

Ikeda's Statement on the G7 Hiroshima Summit

A document where Ikeda reacts to these new developments is his April 27, 2023 "Statement on the G7 Hiroshima Summit, the Ukraine Crisis, and No First Use of Nuclear Weapons" (Ikeda 2023) to which I will now turn my attention. That a G7 summit may be organized in Hiroshima was an old wish of Ikeda. However, the Hiroshima summit took place on May 2023 in dramatic circumstances.

In the Statement, Ikeda reminds the leaders coming to Japan that the origins of the G7 can be traced back to the 1975 G6 Rambouillet Summit, which brought together the six nations that were the richest and most industrialized at that time: the United States, Germany, Japan, the United Kingdom, France, and Italy (Ikeda 2023, 4).

Ikeda notes that, coincidentally, Soka Gakkai International was also founded in 1975. In that year, he visited the five countries that admitted their possession of nuclear weapons and met with some of their leaders. He concluded his tour with a speech delivered in Hiroshima on November 9, one week before the Rambouillet G6 Summit started. He called for a next meeting to be held in Hiroshima, and for all nuclear-weapon and G6 states to sign a declaration of "No First Use" of atomic weapons (Ikeda 2023, 4–5).

48 years have passed from 1975. Ikeda's hope of a summit in Hiroshima has now been realized. Some progress has been achieved in the field of nuclear weapon risk awareness. Ikeda pays a special homage in the statement to one of the many luminaries he met, Dr. Bernard Lown (1921–2021), one of the greatest cardiologists of the 20th century and the inventor of the defibrillator. The cardiologist was a Lithuanian Jew born in Utena in 1921, although his family had emigrated to the United States before World War II and changed its last name from Lacas to Lown.

When Ikeda and Lown met in 1989, the Lithuanian-American doctor was well-known for another dialogue he had started in 1980 with a fellow Soviet

cardiologist, Yevgeny Chazov (1929–2021), a world-famous surgeon who will eventually serve as Gorbachev’s Minister of Health in the last years of the Soviet Union. Chazov and Lown shared a lifelong concern for the possibility that life on earth might be annihilated by a nuclear war. They are credited with inspiring the Reagan-Gorbachev 1985 Geneva Communiqué, which included the words repeated in the January 2022 Joint Statement: “A nuclear war cannot be won and should never be fought.” The two cardiologists also co-founded an organization called IPPNW, International Physicians for the Prevention of Nuclear War.

In 1986, Lown and Chazov delivered a joint lecture in Hiroshima at a symposium whose title was “Let’s Live Together, Not Die Together: What Must We Do Now to Prevent Nuclear War?” They also visited survivors of the 1945 bombing. While he fondly remembers his meeting with Lown, who died in 2021 a few months before turning 100, Ikeda invites the world not to under-evaluate the role of medical doctors. Their commitment to save human lives and experience of human suffering suggest that their professional organizations should be more involved by the United Nations and other international actors in their efforts to solve world crises (Ikeda 2023, 1–2).

Ikeda also celebrated the *hibakusha*, the survivors of the Hiroshima and Nagasaki bombings. Soka Gakkai made a considerable effort for preserving and publishing their stories, and believes they played a role in persuading the world that after the 1945 tragedies in Japan nuclear weapons should not be used. However, Ikeda notes that with the war in Ukraine the “taboo” against mentioning the possible use of nuclear weapons seems to have come to an end (Ikeda 2023, 3).

Ikeda was already the President of Soka Gakkai during the Cuban missile crisis of 1962. It was the incident closest to what we are seeing now around the Ukrainian war, Ikeda notes, but it lasted for thirteen days only, while

The current crisis is without parallel in the length of time that the threat of use and the fear of use of nuclear weapons have persisted without cease (Ikeda 2023, 3).

While Soka Gakkai remains committed to the total abolition of nuclear weapons, Ikeda asks the nuclear-armed states to sign for now a commitment of “No First Use” of the weapons they possess. This is what Ikeda asked in 1975. It would also be a firmer commitment than the one that a nuclear war “should never be fought” included in the 2022 Joint Statement.

In September 2022, when the war in Ukraine was entering into its seventh month, one of the world's leading Buddhist magazines, *Tricycle*, published an article about Soka Gakkai's efforts against nuclear weapons. The main point the article made was that for Soka Gakkai "nuclear abolition isn't just about politics; it's also about spirituality" (Kandil 2022).

Having interviewed several young Soka Gakkai anti-nuclear-weapon activists, the magazine concluded that they do not regard their efforts to practice Buddhism and their volunteer work against nuclear weapons as separated. They are two sides of the same coin. They observed that often professional negotiators they meet in international United Nations conferences focus on "numbers and military strategy," where Soka Gakkai volunteers try to put the problem of human suffering at the center of all discourses on nuclear weapons.

The Fundamental Darkness and the Devil King of the Sixth Heaven

From the point of view of Soka Gakkai members, whose brand of Buddhism is based on the teachings of the Medieval Japanese monk Nichiren (1222–1282), nuclear weapons are a manifestation of "fundamental darkness," also known as "primal ignorance." Nichiren personified it as "the devil king of the sixth heaven." The fundamental darkness exists in all beings, even in the Buddhas and Bodhisattvas. Nichiren wrote that,

The great demon of fundamental darkness can even enter the bodies of bodhisattvas who have reached near perfect enlightenment and prevent them from attaining the Lotus Sutra's blessing of perfect enlightenment. How easily can he then obstruct those in any lower stage of practice! (Nichiren 1999, 496).

The fundamental darkness, Ikeda explains,

is the fundamental negative impulse that resides in the depths of people's lives. This devilish nature or negativity gives rise to the desire to control others or even take others' lives, and causes destruction and war (Ikeda 2019),

particularly through nuclear weapons. Inside us, however, is also the fundamental nature of enlightenment, which coincides with the Buddha nature.

By practicing Buddhism, we bring forth our fundamental nature of enlightenment and overcome the fundamental darkness. Here also lies the final

solution of the nuclear weapon problem, which is to be found in a change of heart and not in a change of politics only.

It is also important to understand that the devil king of the sixth heaven does not operate in a Western dualistic system opposing forever a good God and a bad Devil. The second President of Soka Gakkai Josei Toda, who is at the origins of the movement's anti-nuclear-weapon efforts, noted that, "The devil king of the sixth heaven is depicted on the Gohonzon," i.e., the scroll containing Chinese and Sanskrit characters in front of which Soka Gakkai practitioners chant and recite portions of the Lotus Sutra.

So when we pray to the Gohonzon the devil king obeys the Gohonzon. The devil king will issue orders keeping the leaders of his devilish forces in check. The original enlightened potential of the devil king is manifested through the Gohonzon... The devil king of the sixth heaven then changes for the first time into an entity that helps and benefits others (Ikeda 2019).

Applied to the nuclear weapon drama, the story of the devil king of the sixth heaven encourages the Soka Gakkai volunteers to hope that everybody's heart can be changed, and the world itself can be changed into one free of nuclear annihilation fear.

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Design and Application of Activity Value Management (AVM): The Case of Taiwan Soka Association

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ABSTRACT: This study explores the essence and major theoretical innovations of Activity Value Management (AVM), which aims to assist organizations in effectively utilizing their resources. In the first part, it presents AVM essence and main theoretical innovations. In the second part, it discusses the application of AVM to Taiwan Soka Gakkai, Taiwan's affiliate of Soka Gakkai International. In the third part, it shows how AVM may assist managerial decision-making in the case of a non-profit organization. Finally, it lists different benefits the use of AVM may offer to non-profit organizations such as Taiwan Soka Gakkai.

KEYWORDS: Soka Gakkai, Taiwan Soka Gakkai, SGI, Activity Value Management, AVM.

Introduction

Through thirty-three years of integrating academic research, teaching, and practical application, I have built up the management accounting technique called Activity Value Management (AVM), which includes seven theoretical innovations to create value for organizations (Wu 2022).

AVM can be applied in the manufacturing, service, and healthcare industries, and even in the non-profit sector. The study examines the design and application of the AVM system in seventeen service centers of the Business Management Department of Taiwan Soka Association (Wu 2021).

First, the paper presents AVM essence and seven theoretical innovations. Second, it discusses five steps of AVM design for Taiwan Soka Association. Third, it provides AVM information for product and customer decision-making. Finally, it concludes with seven benefits of AVM for non-profit organizations.

AVM design involves the following five steps:

-Step 1: Design of the key management issues and value objects

It determines the relationship between management issues and value objects and accordingly forms an AVM checkboard chart.

-Step 2: Design for the resource module

It consists of products that are value objects, including books, clothing, Buddhist altars, Buddhist supplies, and so on, and customer categories, such as domestic customers or foreign customers.

-Step 3: Design for the activity center module

It identifies the first stage of activity performed by activity executors, who are mostly employees, such as employee product development, procurement activity, logistics activity, sales activity, and others.

-Step 4: Design for the activity module

It identifies the last stage of activity performed by employees, such as processing an order under the first stage of activity in sales. AVM collects the actual time (actual capacity) spent on each activity and calculates the actual costs. The most important feature of the activity module is that it consists of five major activity attributes: quality, capacity, value-added, customer service, and Environment, Social, and Governance (ESG). Because of activity attributes, cost management can integrate with quality management (recognizing the costs of internal failure and external failure), capacity management (recognizing productive or non-productive capacity), value-added management (recognizing value-added or non-value-added costs), customer service management (recognizing the costs for customer acquisition and after-sales services), and even ESG (recognizing the costs spent on environment, society, and governance).

-Step 5: Design for the value object module

Through the design of the activity driver, the costs and profits of products, such as Buddhist altars, Buddhist supplies, and so on, and of customers, such as domestic customers or foreign customers, can be calculated.

AVM can generate information on value, cost, and profit from the product perspective. The information from the product perspective can help managers' decision-making on product management.

AVM can also generate information on value, cost, and profit from the customers' perspective. The information from this perspective can assist managers' decision-making of customer management.

Taken altogether, AVM is able to provide positive impacts and benefits to non-profit organizations, including in effectively utilizing resources, reducing internal and external failure costs, elevating employees' capacity utilization, and improving the accuracy and relevance of management decision-making on products and customers.

Essence and Innovation of AVM

AVM is composed of four major modules.

1) Resource Module assigns resources to activity centers in order to understand the cost consumed by activity centers.

2) Activity Center Module identifies the first or second stage of activities under each activity center and calculates their standard cost.

3) Activity Module decomposes the first or second stage of activities into the last stage of activities and calculates their actual cost.

4) Value Object Module calculates the cost, profit, and even value of the value objects, which can be products, customers, projects, and others.

AVM integrates "cause" and "outcome" information together and provides relevant information for management decision-making. Module 1 of AVM includes "outcome" information concerning "how much expenses per month." Module 2 includes "cause" information related to "which department or executor spends the expenses." Module 3 collects "cause" information concerning "which activity or what activity the executor actually does." Module 4 includes "outcome" information related to "what activity contributes to value object" and "how much profit and value are created." The essence of AVM appears in Figure 1.

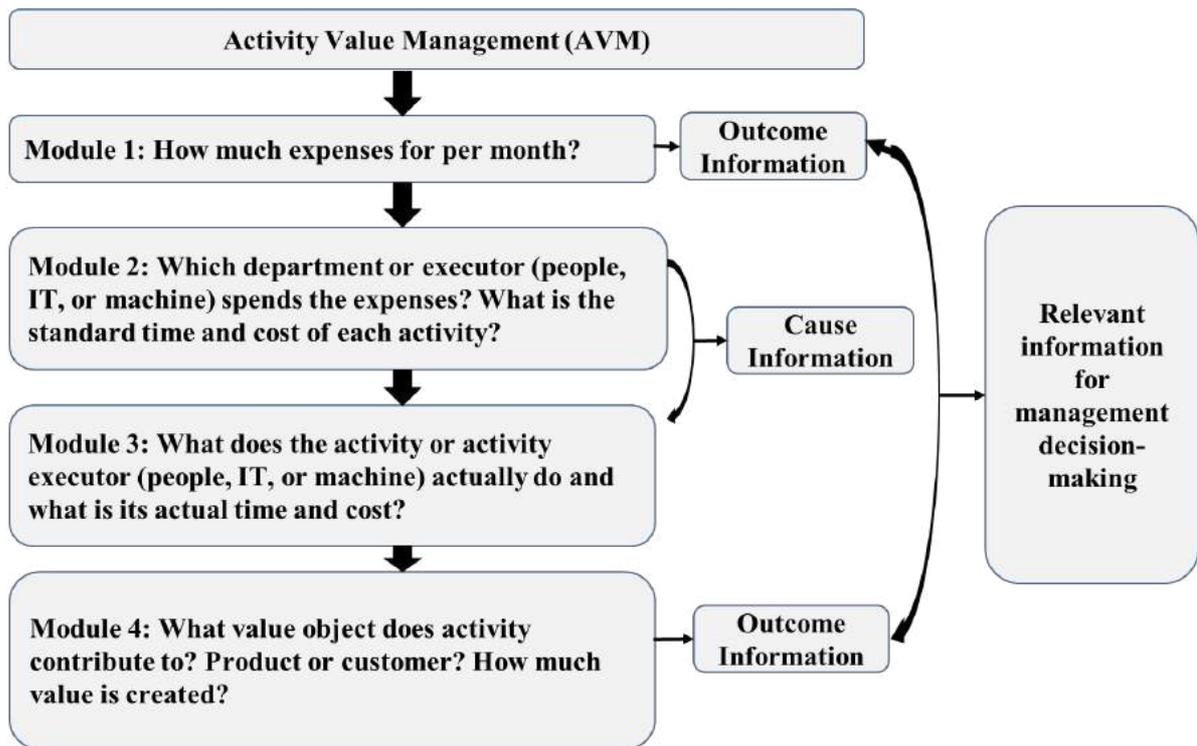


Figure 1. The essence of AVM.

AVM includes seven theoretical innovations as follows.

1. Innovation 1: The strategy guiding the design of AVM.
2. Innovation 2: The analyses of controllable and uncontrollable costs—Module 1.
3. Innovation 3: The analyses of overused or unused capacity of an activity—Modules 2 and 3.
4. Innovation 4: Five major activity attributes: quality, capacity, value-added, customer service, and ESG.
5. Innovation 5: The analyses of overall value chain costs of the enterprise—Module 4.
6. Innovation 6: The analyses of hidden costs, capital costs, and risk costs of value objects—Module 4.
7. Innovation 7: Integrated management decision-making information—Module 4.

Because of those seven innovations, AVM offers seven management values (see Figure 2).

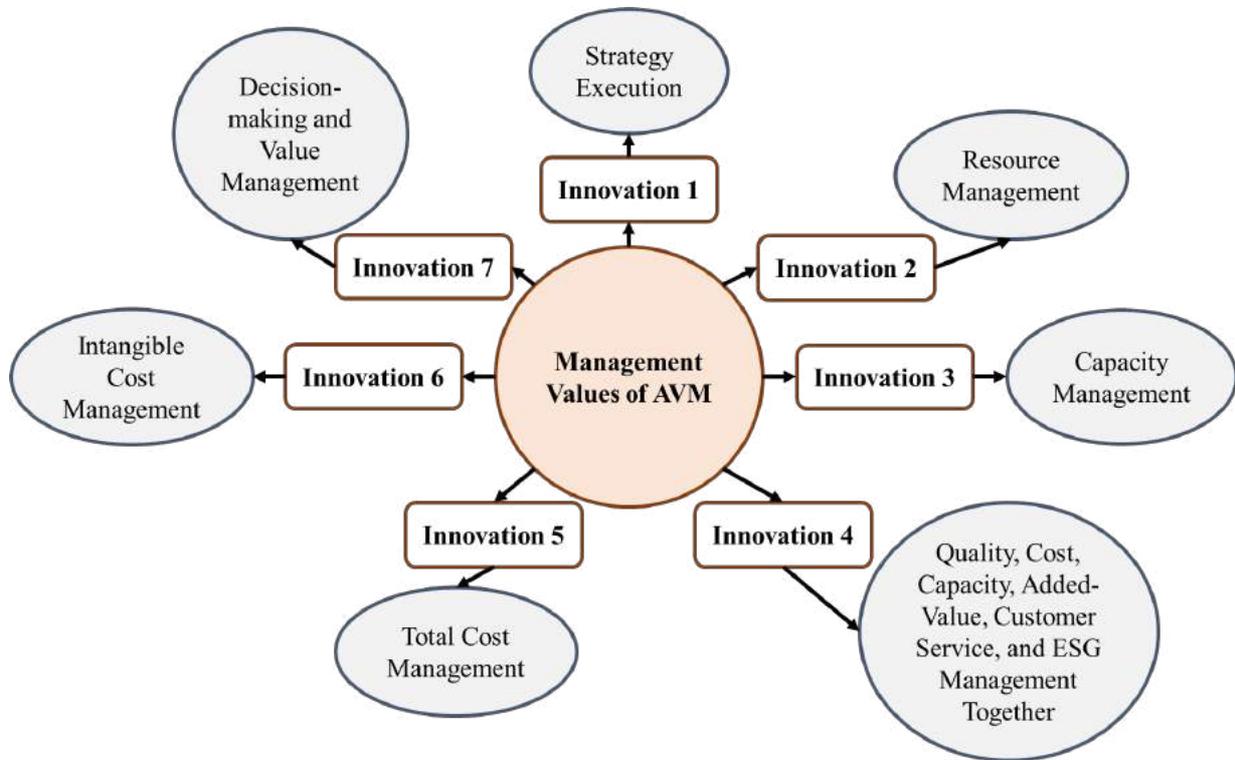


Figure 2. Seven management values of AVM.

Design of AVM: The Case of Taiwan Soka Association

We applied the five steps for designing AVM presented in the Introduction above to the case of Taiwan Soka Association.

-Step 1: Design the relationship between management issues and value objects

To understand the relationship between management issues and value objects, we use a checkboard chart (Figure 3).

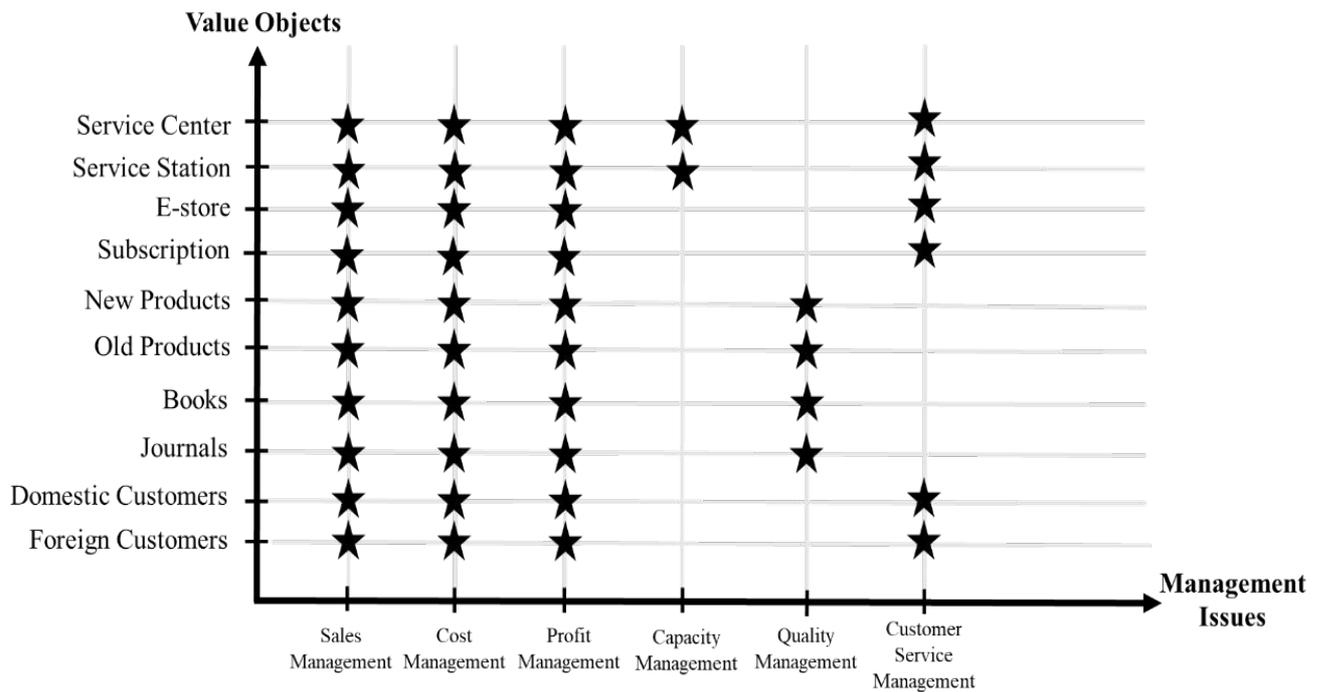


Figure 3. Management issues and value objects.

In Figure 3, there are six management issues such as cost management, capacity management, and so on, and ten value objects covering service center, foreign customers, and others. Based on Figure 3, we understand that sales management, cost management, and profit management are important for the service center.

-Step 2: Design the resource module

There are two significant sub-steps for designing the resource module. Step 2-1 is the design for value objects, which are products and customers as in Figure 4.

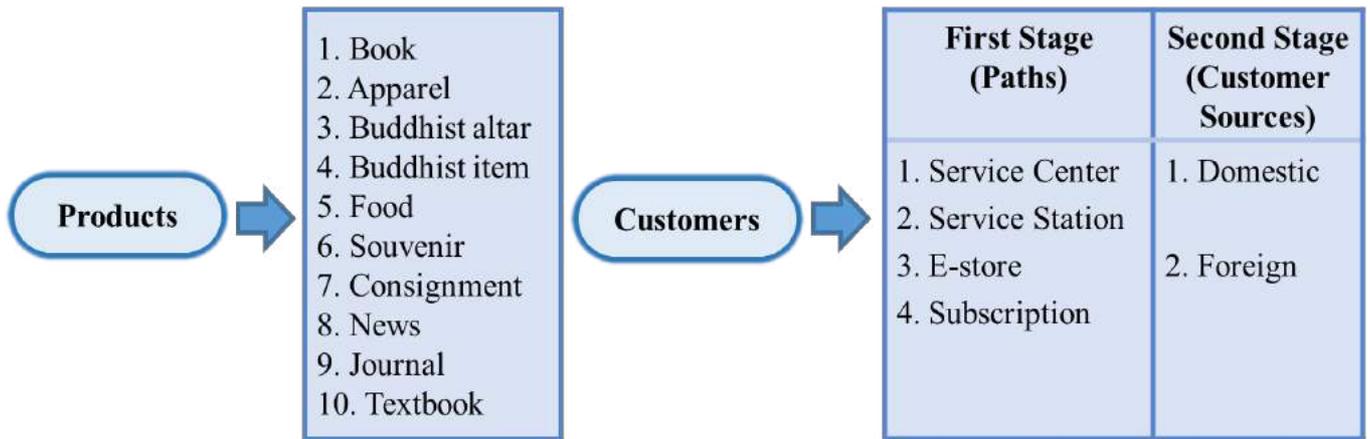


Figure 4. The design for value objects.

Based on Figure 4, we know that each product can be classified as “book,” “Buddhist altar,” and so on, and customers include domestic and foreign customers. Step 2-2 is the design for the activity center to understand the organizational structure, as in Figure 5.

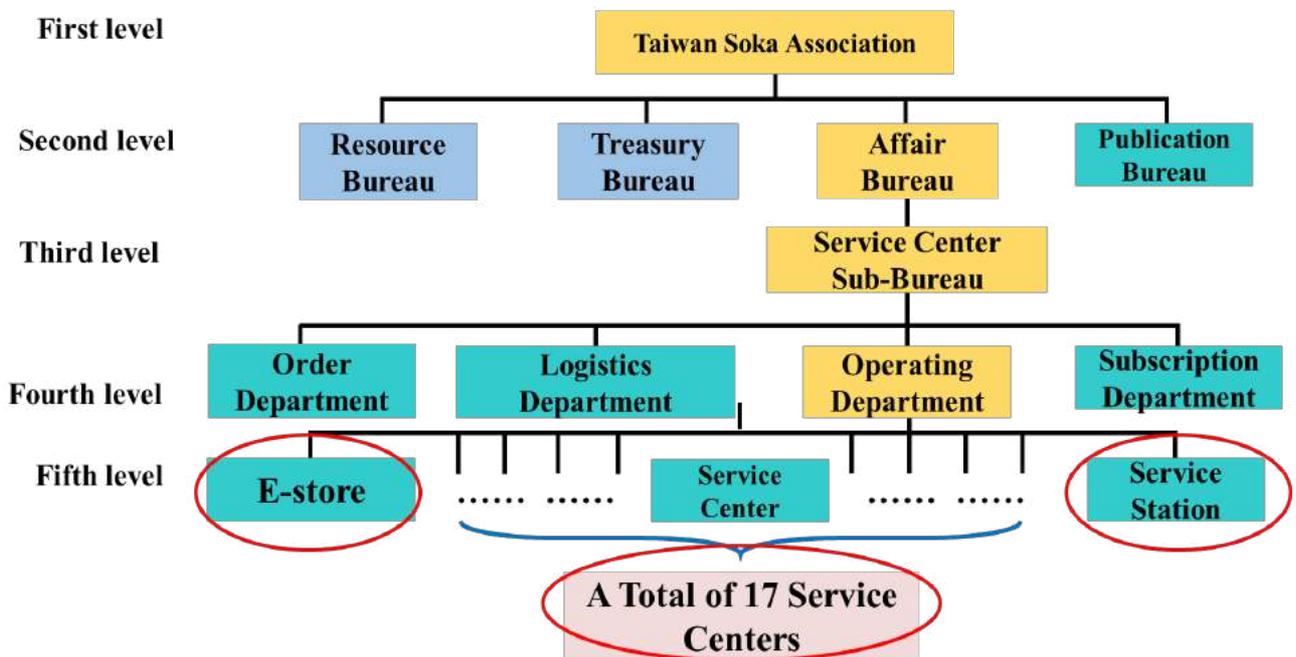


Figure 5. The design for the activity center.

Based on Figure 5, there are five levels of the organization. We designed AVM for seventeen service centers, which are the fifth level in the organization. In module 1, AVM can calculate controllable or uncontrollable resources used by seventeen service centers as in Table 1.

Resource Items	1. Zhi Shan Service Center		2. Jin Zhou Service Center		3. Ban Qiao Service Center	
	Amount	Proportion	Amount	Proportion	Amount	Proportion
Resource used by Activity Center	14,232.377	93.55%	30,408.477	96.45%	13,754.277	95.16 %
Resource used by Value Object	0	0.00%	0	0.00%	0	0.00%
Controllable Resources	14,232.377	93.55%	30,408.477	96.45%	13,754.277	95.16%
Allocative from M.A.C.	561.523	3.69%	280.761	0.89%	280.761	1.94%
Allocative from S.A.C.	419.423	2.76%	838.846	2.66%	419.423	2.90%
Uncontrollable Resources	980.946	6.45%	1,119.607	3.55%	700.184	4.84%
Total	15,213.323	100%	31,528.084	100%	14,454.461	100%

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Table 1. Controllable and uncontrollable resources of service centers: three examples.

In Table 1, we notice that uncontrollable resources are very small (less than 7%) in the three service centers selected as examples. AVM can also calculate the profit for each service center. Table 2 shows the profit and profit ratio for these three service centers.

Activity Center	Revenue from Activity Center's Customer	Total Cost from Activity Center's Customer	Profit from Activity Center's Customer	Profit Ratio from Activity Center's Customer
1. Zhi Shan Service Center	1,743.4	1,499.22	244.18	14%
2. Jin Zhou Service Center	9,852.48	7,277.06	2,575.42	26.14%
3. Ban Qiao Service Center	2,842.6	2,240.88	601.72	21.17%

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Table 2. Profit and profit ratio of each service center: three examples.

Based on Table 2, we understand that the three service centers have positive profits and profit ratios ranging from 14% to 26.14%.

-Step 3: Design the activity center module

These are three key sub-steps in the activity center module. Step 3-1 is the design of the first stage of activity. Table 3 shows the first stage of employees' activities for service centers.

First Stage of Activity	Activity Executor (Employee)
Product Development	Service Center Bureau
Purchase	Service Center Bureau
Logistics	Logistics Place/Operating Place
Tallying	Service Center/Service Station/Logistics Place
Shelves	Service Center/Service Station/Logistics Place
Sales	Subscription Place/Operating Place/Service Center
Shipment	Logistics Place/Operating Place/Service Center
Daily Work	Service Center/Service Station/Logistics Place
Abnormal Product Handling	Service Center/Service Station/Logistics Place/Operating Place
Publication of Journal	Publication GA
Publication of News	Publication GA
Book Project	Publication GA
Publication of Textbook	Publication GA

Table 3. The first stage of employees' activities.

Step 3-2 is the design of the activity center driver. This step sets up the normal capacity (expected working hours) of the activity. Table 4 shows the standard time (minutes) for the first stage of employees’ activities in one month.

First Stage of Activity	Standard Time (Minutes)
Logistics	6,209
Tallying	19,699
Shelves	25,785
Sales	119,721
Shipment	64,068
Daily Work	61,184
Abnormal Product Handling	5,941
Publication of Journal	16,089
Publication of News	59,407
Publication of Textbook	43,318

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Table 4. Standard time for the first stage of employees’ activities.

Step 3-3 calculates the standard cost for the first stage of activity. Table 5 presents the standard cost situation of the first stage of activity.

First Stage of Activity	Standard Time (Minutes)	Standard Cost (Minutes)	Standard Cost Per Minute
Logistics	6,209	65,840	10.60
Tallying	19,699	158,100	8.03
Shelves	25,785	320,648	12.44
Sales	119,721	1,088,472	9.09
Shipment	64,068	532,574	8.31
Daily Work	61,184	657,741	10.75
Abnormal Product Handling	5,941	32,288	5.43
Publication of Journal	16,089	269,370	16.74
Publication of News	59,407	994,623	16.74
Publication of Textbook	43,318	725,252	16.74

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Table 5. Standard cost for the first stage of activity.

Based on Table 5, we know that journal, news, and textbook publications have the highest standard cost per minute of NT\$16.74.

-Step 4: Design the activity module

There are four key sub-steps in the activity module. Step 4-1 is the design of the last stage of activity. Table 6 is an example of the last stage of sale activity.

First Stage of Activity	Last Stage Of Activity
Sales	Order Processing
Sales	Place an Order
Sales	Customer Reception, Consultation, and Sales
Sales	Complain _ Not Received Product
Sales	Complain _ Subscription System Relative
Sales	Complain _ Product Quality
Sales	Complain _ Other
Sales	Crisis Management _ Alleviation and Encourage
Sales	Crisis Management _ Help with Inquiries to Subscription Place
Sales	Crisis Management _ Explain and Return
Sales	E-ship Marketing
Sales	Marketing
Sales	Create Customer Profile

Table 6. Last stage of sales activity.

Step 4-2 is the design of the activity center driver. We use the AVM Timer to collect each employee’s actual work time in every last stage of activity. Step 4-3 determines overused capacity or unused capacity and the related cost. Step 4-4 is the design of activity attributes. Table 7 lists the four activity attributes for the sales function.

First Stage Activity	Last Stage Activity	1. Quality Attribute	2. Capacity Attribute	3. Value-added Attribute	4. Customer Service Attribute
Sales	Order Processing		Productive	Value-added	Providing
Sales	Place an Order		Productive	Value-added	Providing
Sales	Customer Reception, Consultation, and Sales		Productive	Value-added	Providing
Sales	Complain _ Not Received Product	External Failure	Non-productive	Non-value-added	Sustaining
Sales	Complain _ Subscription System Relative	External Failure	Non-productive	Non-value-added	Sustaining
Sales	Complain _ Product Quality	External Failure	Non-productive	Non-value-added	Sustaining
Sales	Complain _ Other	External Failure	Non-productive	Non-value-added	Sustaining
Sales	Crisis Management _ Alleviation and Encourage	External Failure	Non-productive	Non-value-added	Sustaining
Sales	Crisis Management _ Help with Inquiries to Subscription Place	External Failure	Non-productive	Non-value-added	Sustaining
Sales	Crisis Management _ Explain and Return	External Failure	Non-productive	Non-value-added	Sustaining
Sales	E-ship Marketing		Productive	Value-added	Acquiring
Sales	Marketing		Productive	Value-added	Acquiring
Sales	Create Customer Profile		Productive	Value-added	Acquiring

Table 7. Activity attributes for the sales function.

-Step 5: Design the value object module

There are two key sub-steps in the value object module. Step 5-1 is the design of activity driver. Table 8 shows the activity driver for sales activity.

Last Stage of Sale Activity	Activity Driver
Order Processing	Quantity of Order
Place an Order	Quantity of Order
Customer Reception, Consultation, and Sales	Quantity of Reception
Complain _ Not Received Product	Quantity of Customer Complain
Complain _ Subscription System Relative	Quantity of Customer Complain
Complain _ Product Quality	Quantity of Customer Complain
Complain _ Other	Quantity of Customer Complain
Crisis Management _ Alleviation and Encourage	Time of Handling
Crisis Management _ Help with Inquiries to Subscription Place	Time of Handling
Crisis Management _ Explain and Return	Time of Handling
E-ship Marketing	Time of Activity
Marketing	Time of Activity
Create Customer Profile	Quantity of Customer

Table 8. Activity driver of sales activity.

Step 5-2 calculates the cost and profit for value objects, which include product and customer service.

Product and Customer Management Decision-Making: The Case of Taiwan Soka Association

AVM can integrate “cause” and “outcome” information together and provide such information for managers’ decision-making. In general, the most significant management decisions are product and customer management decision-making.

-Product management decision-making

Based on the information of the product value chain cost and profit, we can understand the situation of product total cost and profit as in Table 9.

Product Code	Product Name	Product Quantity	Product Revenue	Product Value-chain Cost								Product Total Cost		Profit Amount	Profit Ratio
				R&D Cost		Design Cost		Manufacture Cost		Management Cost		Amount	Proportion		
				Amount	Proportion	Amount	Proportion	Amount	Proportion	Amount	Proportion				
P01	Book	1,565.1	603,631.1	0	0%	0	0%	121,134.3	79.43%	31,362.2	20.57%	152,496.5	25%	45,113.46	75%
P04	Buddhist Item	646.6	225,013.9	0	0%	0	0%	67,183.2	51.86%	62,361.1	48.14%	129,544.3	58%	95,469.6	42%
P08	News	17,530	188,973.9	0	0%	0	0%	99,292.1	100.00%	0	0.00%	99,292.1	53%	89,681.8	47%
P03	Buddhist Altar	7.4	157,186.5	0	0%	0	0%	72,431.8	89.77%	8,250.3	10.23%	80,682.1	51%	76,504.4	49%
P10	Textbook	1,000.1	69,566.8	0	0%	0	0%	34,763.8	99.80%	69.2	0.20%	34,833	50%	34,733.8	50%
P09	Journal	704.5	51,520.3	0	0%	0	0%	35,830.5	99.81%	69.2	0.19%	35,899.7	70%	15,620.6	30%
P06	Souvenir	801.1	48,629.4	0	0%	0	0%	13,115.9	70.84%	5,399.8	29.16%	18,515.7	38%	30,113.7	62%
P05	Food	203.7	23,513.8	0	0%	0	0%	13,769.7	26.33%	38,517.4	73.67%	52,287.1	222%	-28,773.3	-122%

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Table 9. Product value chain cost and profit analysis.

From Table 9, we know that P05, food, has the highest losses at minus NT\$28,773.3. Based on the AVM decision-making system, we can understand why P05, food, has losses.

Figure 6 shows the situation of value chain cost ratio for product P05, food.

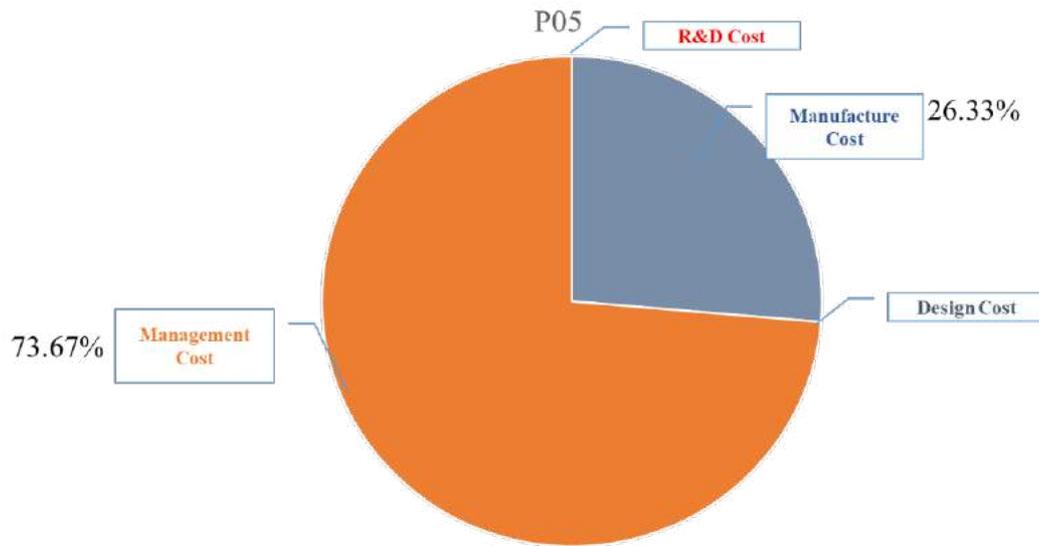


Figure 6. Value-chain cost ratio of product analysis: P05, food.

From Figure 6, P05 (food) has the highest management cost ratio of 73.67%. Based on Figure 7, P05 has the highest cost ratio in “purchase activity” at 39.66%. In addition, P05 has the highest cost ratio for the “purchase order sub-activity” at 62.16%.

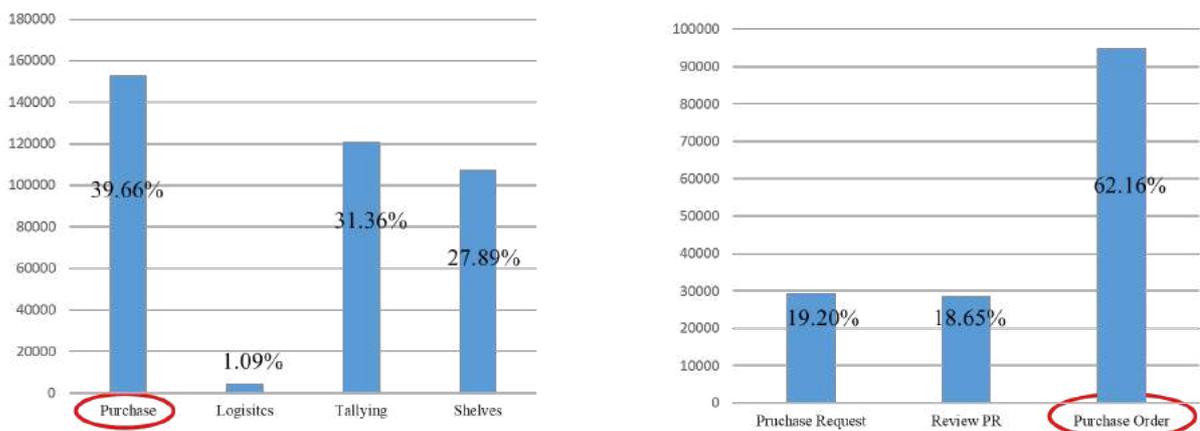


Figure 7. Value-chain cost of product activity analysis: P05, food.

-Customer management decision-making

Based on the information on profits for customer analysis, we can now understand the situation better. Table 10 shows the situation of the “E-Store Channel.”

Product Code and Name	Quantity	Revenue	Product Cost		General Service Cost		Customized Service Cost		Total Cost		Customer Profit	Customer Profit Ratio
			Amount	Pro-portion	Amount	Pro-portion	Amount	Pro-portion	Amount	Pro-portion		
P01:Book	103	2,136.5	797.191	3.63%	20,984.183	95.44%	0.00	0.00%	21,781.374	100%	-19,644.874	-9.29%
P04: Buddhist Item	70	1,811.7	727.316	11.01%	5,201.47	78.76%	0.00	0.00%	5,928.786	100%	-4,117.086	-2.65%
P06: Souvenir	230	1,217.8	376.564	12.02%	2,600.735	83.03%	0.00	0.00%	2,977.299	100%	-1,759.499	-1.57%
P05:Food	1	168	6.76	0.07%	9,102.572	99.72%	0.00	0.00%	9,109.332	100%	-8,941.332	-53.33%
Total											-34,462.791	

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Table 10. Profits for customer analysis: E-Store Channel.

Based on Table 10, we know that the E-Store Channel has losses at a total of minus NT\$34,462.791. Figure 8 shows that the E-Store Channel has the highest general service cost ratio of 92.75%.

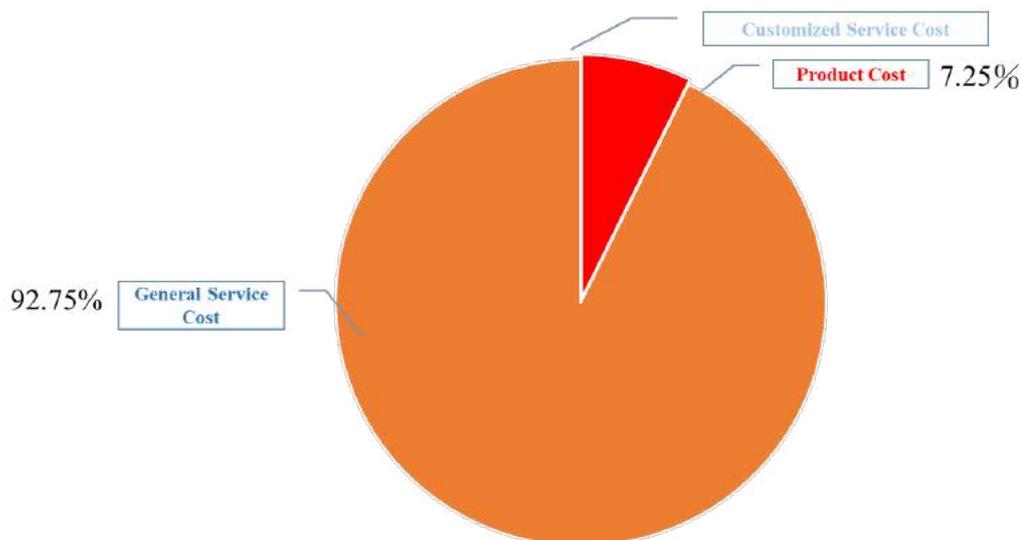


Figure 8. Cost ratio situation of customer analysis—E-Store Channel.

Figure 9 shows that the E-Store Channel has the highest “sales activity” cost ratio at 83.77%. The main cost ratio of sales activity is the “order processing activity” at 99.44%.

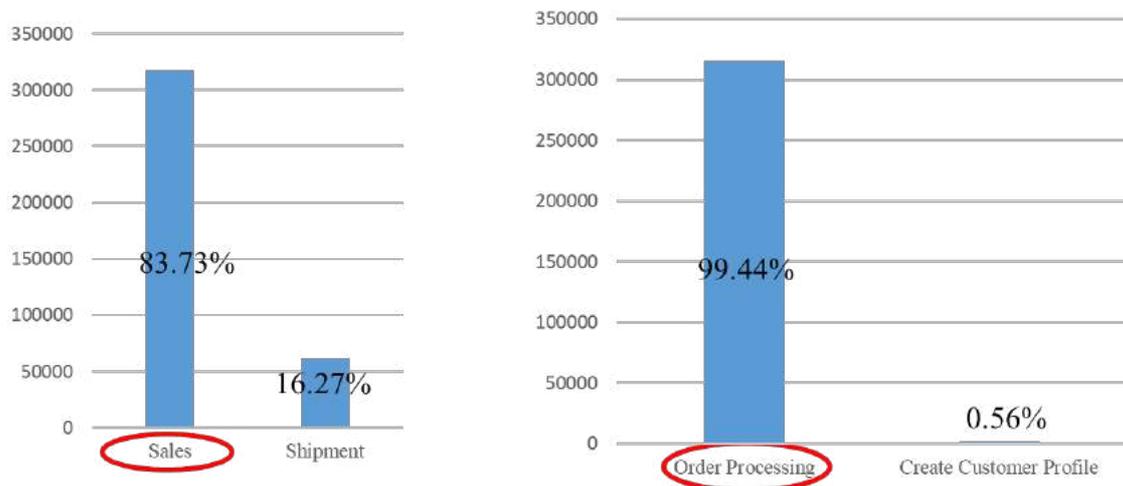


Figure 9. Activity cost of customer analysis—E-Store Channel.

Conclusion

AVM provides “cause” and “outcome” information for managers to make relevant decision-making. Therefore, AVM can create benefits for non-profit organizations. We conclude that those benefits are as follows:

1. Effective use of resources to spend on value-added activity.
2. Effective use of employees’ capacity to create value for a non-profit organization.
3. Increase employees’ productivity to decrease internal and external failure costs.
4. Integrate cost, quality, capacity, added-value, customer service, and ESG management together to upgrade management values.
5. Understand intangible values that contribute benefits for society and stakeholders.
6. Help different levels of managers make relevant decision-making and understand the reasons for the non-productive activity of employees.

7. Achieve the goal of sustainability for non-profit organizations. AVM and ESG integrate together based on activity attributes, and so non-profit organizations can understand which activity is good for ESG and sustainable development.

All in all, based on AVM design and application to Taiwan Soka Association, we validate AVM as being suitable for managers' decision-making and for future AI development in non-profit organizations.

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Research Notes

“Turning the Poison into Medicine”: Soka Gakkai in Italy and COVID-19

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ABSTRACT: Soka Gakkai’s remarkable success in Italy went through a difficult test when COVID-19 hit. In the first half of 2020, Italy had both more casualties and stricter quarantine measures than any other European country. The paper explores how the National Council of the Italian Soka Gakkai reacted to the pandemic, and how its decisions were received by the members. The National Council was more cautious, and acted earlier, than the Italian government itself. Not all members agreed. In retrospective, however, the measures probably contained the effects of COVID-19 among the Italian members and prepared a successful transition back from online to in-person activities, preserving Soka Gakkai from problems other religions experienced in the country.

KEYWORDS: Soka Gakkai, Soka Gakkai in Italy, Religions and COVID-19, COVID-19 Pandemics in Italy, COVID-19 Quarantines in Italy.

Introduction

The growth of Soka Gakkai in Italy has been unique among Eastern religious movements that came to Western Europe. Soka Gakkai started operating in Italy in 1961, and was formally established there in 1963, but the first members were expatriate Japanese. The first Italian member joined in 1966. In 1993, members were 13,000, and they reached 90,000 in 2019 (Introvigne 2019). They were 96,100 at the end of 2022 (CESNUR 2023).

Soka Gakkai attracted the attention of Italian media as among those who joined were well-known soccer stars, actors, and singers. Its activities for peace and

against nuclear weapons attracted an even larger audience, despite controversies generated by a few vocal ex-members. In 2015, Soka Gakkai entered the elite club of religious minorities that signed a concordat (“Intesa”) with the Italian government. It was ratified by the Parliament in 2016 (Introvigne 2019).

I have explored elsewhere the reasons of this extraordinary growth, by comparing Soka Gakkai with other Japanese religious movements who tried to make inroads into Italy. My conclusion was that Soka Gakkai, while maintaining a loyalty to its Japanese sources, successfully managed to present its message as universal and part of Buddhism, a global religion, rather than “Japanese,” “Asian,” or “exotic” (Introvigne 2019, 2021). Soka Gakkai is now perceived in Italy (except by a few stubborn opponents) as a legitimate part of the Italian religious landscape, and a benevolent organization well-known for its campaigns against nuclear weapons (Šorytè 2019; Pellecchia 2022).

This paper tests these conclusions with respect to the years 2020–2021, when the Italian branch of Soka Gakkai was confronted with COVID-19 and the long quarantines imposed by the Italian government. This was, of course, a problem of all Italian religions (Consorti 2020; Maciotti 2020), and of all branches of Soka Gakkai, including in Japan (Fisker-Nielsen 2020).

Maria Immacolata Maciotti (1942–2021), Italy’s main academic scholar of Soka Gakkai, devoted a paragraph to how the Buddhist organization was reacting to COVID in an article she published in 2020 (Maciotti 2020, 103). She summarized there the answers she had received from Roberto Minganti, one of the Italian leaders of Soka Gakkai. Unfortunately, Maciotti’s death in 2021 prevented her from further elaborating on the matter. Minganti, however, kept a copy of his 2020 answers and kindly put it at my disposal. I have also interviewed in 2023 other local and national leaders of the Italian Soka Gakkai, including Minganti himself.

A Prompt Reaction

All my interviewees insisted on the fact that Soka Gakkai, guided by the principle that “the health of our members, and of all human beings, is our first concern” (Maciotti 2020, 103), acted *before* the Italian authorities compelled it to take certain restrictive measures. In the Italian context, this should be compared

to the resistance put up by other religions, including some Evangelical churches and Catholic groups (although not the Catholic Bishops' Conference) against implementing the measures the government had introduced as mandatory.

Italy started discussing COVID-19 as a possible threat in December 2019, when reports came from China of a cluster of pneumonia cases of unknown origin. During the month of January 2020, these reports became more and more alarming. On January 30, 2020, the World Health Organization (WHO) declared a state of international emergency.

The first Italian measures concerned those who had traveled to China. On January 30, Prime Minister Giuseppe Conte announced that flights from and to China will be suspended. On January 31, the government appropriated funds for implementing precautionary measures based on the indications of the WHO, set up a Civil Defense Operations Committee, and declared a national health emergency.

The first Italian citizen who had never been to China and tested positive to COVID-19 reported to a hospital in Codogno, in the northern region of Lombardy, on February 17, 2020. By the beginning of March, there had been more than 3,000 confirmed cases and more than 100 deaths.

The Decree of the President of the Council of Ministers (DPCM) of February 23, 2020, authorized the government, and in case of urgency the local authorities, to impose a strict quarantine on the areas affected by the pandemic, including by closing the schools and prohibiting “public events and all forms of public gatherings.” The Decree also affected the Catholic Mass and other forms of religious worship, although its application was local, mostly in municipalities of Northern Italy, and exceptions were granted.

The Italian Soka Gakkai reacted to the news about the pandemic before the DPCM of February 23. Until January 2020, its National Council had continued to meet in person, in Rome or Florence. In February, it switched to meetings (and votes) via Zoom. It also kept in close contact via Zoom with Soka Gakkai in Japan, which in turn was implementing anti-COVID measures before the Japanese government made them mandatory (Fisker Nielsen 2020, 31).

Minganti reported that,

From the National Council's early discussions, it became clear that the sacredness of life and thus the preservation of the health of Soka Gakkai members would be the basis for

any subsequent decision: no member or family member was to fall ill as a result of religious activities.

Not only were the in-person meetings of the National Council suspended, but also the visits of the national leaders to local chapters and any travel for Soka-Gakkai-related activities.

On February 21, 2020, the Italian Soka Gakkai discontinued all in-person activities and closed its centers. All employees were put on smart working status, and already scheduled interfaith dialogues, book presentations, lectures, and exhibitions were cancelled. Maciotti reported that this was less problematic for Soka Gakkai than for other religious organizations, because its key practice is a personal relationship with the *Gohonzon*, the object of worship, which members keep at home (Maciotti 2020, 103). This is certainly true. However, the individual practice receives an important support from the *zadankai*, i.e., the monthly meetings of members in each area or neighborhood. Members had also built an intensive network of home visits and informal meetings. The Soka Gakkai groups of men, women, young women and young men, also had regular meetings; and members in general liked to gather to pray together, even outside scheduled activities.

The Italian Soka Gakkai operates through both individual and collective practice. New members receive their *Gohonzon* in ceremonies that are a crucial part of the Soka Gakkai experience both for them and their friends. They were also suspended in Italy on February 22, 2020.

On February 23, 2020, when the government had already announced its first DPCM, but some hours before it was signed by the Prime Minister, the Italian Soka Gakkai issued its first COVID-related communiqué (see Appendix 1). The National Council confirmed that “all Buddhist meetings in homes, centers, cultural centers, and anywhere else” will be suspended and all Soka Gakkai centers will be closed. As for personal behavior, the National Council asked members to follow the indications of the Ministry of Health.

The National Council was aware that renouncing the *zadankai* and other in-person meetings would be painful for the members. It added that,

The National Council apologizes to all members for the consequences and inconvenience this decision entails, and thanks for everyone’s understanding and cooperation.

In fact, several members complained, as did those who had eagerly expected to receive their *Gohonzon*. This was not an unusual reaction in Italy. In February, there were still those who regarded the measures against what they considered “just another seasonal flu” as exaggerated. By March, this position will become untenable.

The Dramatic Month of March 2020

While in the early period of COVID-19, before the DPCM of February 23, 2020, those who died in Italy because of the virus were around one hundred, between February 20 and March 31 they were in excess of 13,000. This was the highest percentage of COVID-related deaths with respect to the general population in the world, and all main international media showed the images of military trucks transporting hundreds of coffins out of Bergamo, the most affected among Italy’s large cities.

The government’s reaction was draconian, although in retrospective some regarded it as not quick enough. All schools and universities were closed on March 4. On March 9 and 11, two DPCMs closed restaurants, most shops except those selling essential products such as medicines and food, most businesses and factories apart from some deemed essential, and even the most sacred Italian institution, which for many is not religion but soccer.

The March 11 decree also explicitly prohibited religious ceremonies. It ordered Italians to stay home, except for some limited and essential activities. On March 22, the government specified that, at any rate, citizens were not authorized to leave the territory of their own municipality. Surprising foreigners who were accustomed to a somewhat relaxed relationships between Italians and the law, the measures were strictly enforced. Less tragic than the coffins of Bergamo, the most iconic images of the period are of Italians singing together from their balconies, as they were prohibited to leave their apartments, and of young men (they were all males) intercepted by police helicopters while they were running on deserted and even private beaches and arrested or heavily fined.

It was clear to all Italians that this was an exceptional, unprecedented, and unforeseeable situation. It was also clear to the leaders of Soka Gakkai. Minganti reported that the National Council adopted an emergency way of operating.

Before, there were monthly in-person meetings that lasted two days (Saturday and Sunday morning) with trips to Florence or Rome of representatives who came from various regions. Now the meetings were moved online but they were organized every week. Each lasted two or three hours.

But in fact the same emergency mode was adopted locally, Minganti said,

at all levels of the *sangha*: from regional meetings up to the *zadankai* organized on Skype or Zoom. Also, the “home visits home” meetings between two or three practitioners were moved online. Thanks to the online platforms, it was possible to keep together a complex *sangha* that had some 94,000 members. The editors decided to publish, in addition to the regular magazines *Nuovo Rinascimento* [New Renaissance] and *Buddismo e società* [Buddhism and Society], a free newsletter.

The first was published on March 11, and it continued throughout the year 2020. The National Council believed that in exceptionally difficult times the regular magazines were not enough, and members needed weekly encouragement through the newly created *NR Newsletter* (NR referring to the name of the magazine *Nuovo Rinascimento*). The first article of the first issue opened with these words:

In this time of special difficulty due to the spread of the coronavirus, the Soka Gakkai Italian Buddhist Institute has decided to disseminate periodically this *NR Newsletter*, which will also be published on the website sgi-italia.org. It is a collection of encouragements from Master Ikeda, of insights and news. There will also be testimonies from various areas of Italy on how our fellow believers are facing this challenge. With a desire to offer closeness and support to each person, we hope that this newsletter will be a source of inspiration and encouragement for all. As Master Ikeda writes: “Whatever happens, we continue to ‘turn poison into medicine’ through the power of the Mystic Law” (*NR Newsletter* 2020).

On March 7, all regional leaders joined the national leaders in a video conference. The result was a second communiqué, published on March 9. It repeated the Buddhist formula of “turning poison into medicine.” It informed members that all religious activities “including home visits” will continue to be suspended until April 3, and that Buddhist study exams, which in Soka Gakkai measure the members’ progress in their lifelong study of Buddhism, were postponed to October 18 (see Appendix 2).

Based on my interviews, by then members were learning how to continue to keep in touch through local Skype or Zoom meetings and through frequent personal phone calls. All efforts were made to overcome the unavoidable sense of

loneliness connected with the lockdown. Eventually, the Italian experience came to be seen as a model for other European branches of Soka Gakkai. Minganti reported that,

Our decisions found immediate positive feedback at an international level. Messages of approval and encouragement came from Japan, with a continuous support from Master Ikeda. At the center of the Soka Gakkai's world prayer is a famous passage from [the Medieval Japanese monk] Nichiren Daishonin [1222–1282]: “If you worry even just a little about your personal safety, you should first of all pray for the order and tranquility of all four quadrants of the country.” The pandemic was also an opportunity to practice for a collective worldwide purpose. The other Soka Gakkai branches in Europe after a while followed the same Italian methodology. At the same time, they also adopted a style of activity that members had developed during the 2003 SARS epidemic in Asia. It is called “1-2-3”: first, one hour of [chanting] *daimoku* per day; second, at least twenty minutes of study per day of the *Gosho* [the teachings of Nichiren Daishonin] and Master Ikeda's writings. Third, speaking on the phone with and encouraging at least three fellow believers or friends each day.

These were not the only measures taken by the Italian Soka Gakkai. Because of the concordat with the Italian state (Intesa), the Soka Gakkai Institute shares in the percentage of 0.8% of their taxes (in Italian, “Otto per mille”) that all Italian citizens should devote either to one of the religions that signed an Intesa or to the cultural and charitable activities of the government. With a third communiqué, dated March 25, 2020, the National Council announced that it had decided to devote the entire amount of its share of Otto per mille payable in June 2020 to the Civil Defense to support its efforts against the pandemic (see Appendix 3). Waiting for the Otto per mille payment in June, Soka Gakkai immediately transferred 500,000 euros to the Civil Defense.

Life Slowly Resumes

In April and May 2020, the number of infections and deaths slowly decreased with respect to the terrible month of March (although, when the end of the pandemic was declared in 2023, the total number of Italian COVID-related casualties had been in excess of 187,000). On May 18, together with the restaurants, churches and other places of worship were also allowed to reopen, although face masks and distancing remained mandatory in all services. Four days before, on May 14, Soka Gakkai had joined the World Day of Prayer for Humanity originating from an appeal of Pope Francis and other religious leaders.

On May 15, Soka Gakkai was among the signatories of a Protocol of Understanding for the Resumption of Worship Activities of Non-Catholic Religions with the government.

However, the National Council decided that it was better to err on the side of caution. It kept online activities that after May 18 it would have been legally possible to hold in presence. A new communiqué of May 17 (see Appendix 4) informed the members of these restrictions. Only the ceremonies for handling the *Gohonzon* to new believers and others who had requested it were resumed, but a further communiqué of June 22 imposed very strict conditions. These ceremonies should be held only in Soka Gakkai centers, preferably outdoors, in a shorter form than usual and without the presence of friends and relatives. New members receiving the *Gohonzon* should be accompanied by only one person chosen by them.

That the new *Gohonzon* might be delivered was the most pressing request of members, and ceremonies were held in July in Florence, Rome, Milan, Falconara, Palermo, Catania, Bari and Thiene. The centers, however, remained closed. They were opened exceptionally only for these events.

After the summer of 2020, when many had used the relaxed measures as an opportunity to move around the country for holidays, the COVID-19 situation in Italy became worse again. New restrictions were imposed in October. On November 3, a new DPCM divided Italy into “red,” “orange,” and “yellow” areas based on the number of COVID-19 cases and other parameters. In January 2021, a “white” classification was added for low-risk areas. The quarantine was almost as strict as in March–April 2020 in the “red” areas, and progressively milder in the “orange,” “yellow,” and “white” areas.

Italians became accustomed to listen every evening through radio or television to bulletins about the number of infections and deaths in the different regions, provinces, and municipalities, hoping to end up in a “white” area but afraid their municipality or region would be declared “red,” thus severely limiting their possibility of moving outside of their homes and living a normal life.

In 2021, with the start of the vaccination campaign and the introduction in August of the European Digital COVID Certificate, called in Italy “Green Pass,” the distinction became personal rather than geographical. Those who had been vaccinated or could prove they got sick with COVID but were cured, got their

certificates and were able to enter restaurants, board trains and flights, and perform several other activities from which those who did not have a “Green Pass” were excluded. The number of activities requiring a “Green Pass” increased during 2021, and decreased only in the spring of 2022, when the need of showing the certificate was progressively eliminated in Italy and remained only for traveling to or from certain foreign countries.

The “Green Pass” was never popular in Italy and was perceived by many as a tool of control and surveillance going beyond what was reasonably needed to fight the pandemic. This perception had an influence on the 2022 general elections, which were won by the only party that had not joined the large coalition supporting Prime Minister Mario Draghi and had not voted for its “Green Pass” measures. Others went one step further and adopted a conspirationist narrative, casting in doubt the effectiveness of the vaccines if not the reality of the pandemic itself.

The Italian Soka Gakkai accompanied the ups and downs of 2020 and 2021 by telling its members to respect the law and follow the instructions of the government. It continued to be, if anything, more cautious than the law would have requested in delaying or cancelling public activities, keeping open only the shops selling books and religious artifacts in Rome and Florence, two cities that were in the “yellow” rather than “orange” or “red” areas (Communiqué of November 6, 2020; see Appendix 6).

Not all members were persuaded. Through my interviews, I discovered that the Italian Soka Gakkai, as other religions and the general population in Italy, did have its percentage of “anti-vax” and “anti-Green-Pass” members. The National Council decided to adopt a conciliatory policy, based on the principle of *itai doshin*, “being of the same mind, even though we are many in body,” i.e., with different opinions on politics, science, or medicine. The policy was effective in avoiding divisions and keeping within the same fold members with different attitudes, until the controversy somewhat subsided with the end of the “Green Pass” era.

On the other hand, the Italian Soka Gakkai as an organization respected all the government’s prescriptions and, if anything, was slower than other religions in switching back from online to in-person activities. When it did, however, according to my interviewees the transition was more successful. In the Italian Catholic Church statistics are still missing, but the fear is often expressed that a

sizeable percentage of those who became accustomed not to go to the Sunday Mass during the quarantines did not return to the churches when the pandemic ended. Soka Gakkai, at least according to my interviewees, also has members somewhat “lazy” in switching back from online to in-person activities but the transition seems to have been more effective than in other religions.

Conclusion

According to my interviewees, the years 2020 and 2021 were dramatic and difficult for Soka Gakkai members as they were for all Italian citizens. The National Council acted with extreme prudence and caution, running the risk of being criticized by some members but keeping the rate of COVID-related deaths in the movement probably lower than among Italian citizens at large (in 2020, only four casualties due to COVID among members were reported to the National Council, although it is possible that there were other unreported cases).

On the other hand, several leaders and members insisted that these were years of soul-searching, which allowed them to examine what was essential in their Buddhist practice, and the relationship between the joy of being part of a vibrant and growing community and the essentially individual nature of the “fusion of reality and wisdom” (*kyochi-myogo*) that each member may experiment by chanting in front of the *Gohonzon*.

Caring for the weakest and the sick members was also a great experience of solidarity and growth. Looking back to these dark years, many Italian Soka Gakkai members would probably find them depicted as they were by the famous words of Charles Dickens (1812–1870) in *A Tale of Two Cities*:

It was the best of times, it was the worst of times, it was the age of wisdom, it was the age of foolishness, it was the epoch of belief, it was the epoch of incredulity, it was the season of Light, it was the season of Darkness, it was the spring of hope, it was the winter of despair... (Dickens 1859, 1).

They would also add that whether the time brought foolishness or wisdom did not depend on the time but on the women and men who lived through it. Some were indeed capable of “turning poison into medicine.”

Appendix 1. Communiqué of the National Council, February 23, 2020

[Italian text]

In seguito alle misure straordinarie adottate dalle autorità italiane rispetto alla diffusione del virus COVID 19 (CORONAVIRUS), l'Istituto Buddista Italiano Soka Gakkai ha deciso di sospendere temporaneamente tutte le riunioni buddiste nelle case, nei Centri culturali e in qualunque altro luogo, fino a data da definirsi, per tutelare il più possibile la salute e la sicurezza della popolazione.

I corsi nelle strutture esterne e gli eventi dei giovani in commemorazione del "16 marzo" sono posticipati fino a data da definirsi. I Centri culturali saranno chiusi al pubblico.

Il Consiglio Nazionale si scusa con tutti i membri per le conseguenze e il disagio che questa decisione comporta, e ringrazia per la comprensione e la collaborazione di tutti. Chiediamo di inoltrare questa comunicazione a tutti i membri e simpatizzanti dell'IBISG [Istituto Buddista Italiano Soka Gakkai] e a tutti coloro che offrono le case per le nostre attività. Grazie infinite per la collaborazione!

Riguardo ai comportamenti da intraprendere a livello individuale rimandiamo alle indicazioni ufficiali del Ministero della Salute, sviluppando saggezza e senso di responsabilità, ed evitando ogni allarmismo.

[English translation]

Following the extraordinary measures taken by Italian authorities with respect to the spread of the COVID 19 (CORONAVIRUS) virus, the Soka Gakkai Italian Buddhist Institute has decided to temporarily suspend all Buddhist meetings in homes, Cultural Centers, and anywhere else until a date to be determined in order to protect the health and safety of the population as much as possible.

Courses in outdoor facilities and youth events in commemoration of "March 16" are postponed until a date to be determined. Cultural Centers will be closed to the public.

The National Council apologizes to all members for the consequences and inconvenience this decision entails, and thanks for everyone's understanding and cooperation. We ask that this communication be forwarded to all members and

sympathizers of IBISG [Istituto Buddista Italiano Soka Gakkai, Soka Gakkai Italian Buddhist Institute] and to all those who offer homes for our activities. Thank you very much for your cooperation!

Regarding the behaviors to be undertaken at the individual level, we refer to the official guidance of the Ministry of Health, developing wisdom and a sense of responsibility, and avoiding any alarmism.

Appendix 2. Communiqué of the National Council, March 9, 2020

[Italian text]

Cari compagni e compagne di fede,

grazie di cuore per gli sforzi che state facendo in questo periodo così complicato. Sicuramente tramite l’incoraggiamento reciproco riusciremo a superare questa grande difficoltà e a trasformare il veleno in medicina.

Sabato 7 marzo i responsabili di tutte le regioni e i responsabili nazionali in video conferenza hanno avuto modo di ascoltare report di esperienze e iniziative da ogni zona d’Italia.

A seguito di queste riunioni l’Istituto ha deciso quanto segue:

1) La sospensione di tutte le attività religiose, comprese le visite a casa, prosegue fino al 3 aprile p.v. in linea con le ultime disposizioni del Governo italiano.

2) Gli esami di Buddismo di primo e secondo livello sono posticipati al 18 ottobre 2020.

3) Le redazioni delle nostre riviste invieranno una Newsletter settimanale per incoraggiare tutti i compagni di fede che stanno affrontando questo periodo difficile.

Per quanto riguarda i comportamenti individuali, poiché l’espansione del coronavirus continua a diffondersi nel nostro paese, è importante seguire le indicazioni del Ministero della Salute e dell’Organizzazione Mondiale della Sanità, sviluppando saggezza e un forte senso di responsabilità verso se stessi e gli altri.

Grazie infinite per la collaborazione.

[English translation]

Dear fellow believers,

Thank you from the bottom of our hearts for your efforts during this complicated period. Surely through mutual encouragement we will be able to overcome this great difficulty and turn poison into medicine.

On Saturday, March 7, the leaders of all regions and the national leaders gathered in video conference to hear reports of experiences and initiatives from every area of Italy.

As a result of these meetings, the Institute decided the following:

1) The suspension of all religious activities, including home visits, continues until April 3 in line with the latest provisions of the Italian government.

2) First and second level Buddhism examinations are postponed until October 18, 2020.

3) The editors of our journals will send out a weekly newsletter to encourage all fellow believers who are facing this difficult period.

Regarding individual behaviors, as the expansion of the coronavirus continues to spread in our country, it is important to follow the guidance of the Ministry of Health and the World Health Organization, developing wisdom and a strong sense of responsibility towards ourselves and others.

Thank you very much for your cooperation.

Appendix 3. Communiqué of the National Council, March 25, 2020

[Italian text]

L'Istituto Buddista Italiano Soka Gakkai ha deciso di devolvere in favore dell'emergenza Coronavirus l'intera somma dell'8xmille che riceverà dallo Stato per la prima volta il prossimo giugno. Ha inoltre deciso di destinare subito 500.000 euro alla Protezione Civile quale immediato contributo in questa prima fase di interventi, attingendo ai propri fondi.

L'Istituto Buddista Italiano Soka Gakkai partecipa alla ripartizione dell'8xmille a seguito della Legge di Intesa approvata all'unanimità dal Parlamento Italiano e

pubblicata sulla Gazzetta Ufficiale n. 164 del 15/07/2016. A decorrere dal 1° gennaio 2016, infatti, i contribuenti hanno avuto per la prima volta la possibilità di destinare l’8xmille del gettito IRPEF in favore dell’Istituto.

Con lo spirito del Maestro Daisaku Ikeda, continueremo uniti a pregare per le vittime di COVID-19, per la salute di tutti i cittadini italiani, per il personale medico e paramedico e per tutti coloro che in questo momento stanno facendo ogni sforzo per fermare l’epidemia in corso.

È pratica della Soka Gakkai proteggere e preservare la vita di ogni essere umano.

La nostra preghiera è innanzitutto rivolta a salvaguardare la vita di ogni singola persona, in Italia ed in tutto il mondo, con la consapevolezza che ciò inevitabilmente contribuirà ad uscire al più presto da questa grave crisi.

[English translation]

The Soka Gakkai Italian Buddhist Institute has decided to donate in favor of the Coronavirus emergency the entire amount of the Otto per mille [0.8% of taxes, which Italian citizens may assign to either one of the participating religious organizations or the state] it will receive from the state for the first time next June. It has also decided to immediately allocate 500,000 euros to the Civil Defense as an immediate contribution in this first phase of intervention, drawing on its own funds.

The Soka Gakkai Italian Buddhist Institute participates in the distribution of the Otto per mille following the Intesa (concordat) unanimously approved by the Italian Parliament and published in the Official Gazette No. 164 of 15/07/2016. Effective January 1, 2016, in fact, taxpayers had for the first time the opportunity to allocate 0.8% of their taxes in favor of the Institute.

In the spirit of Master Daisaku Ikeda, we will continue unitedly to pray for the victims of COVID-19, for the health of all Italian citizens, for the medical and paramedical personnel, and for all those who are making every effort at this time to stop the ongoing epidemic.

It is the practice of the Soka Gakkai to protect and preserve the life of every human being.

Our prayer is first and foremost to safeguard the life of every single person, in Italy and around the world, with the knowledge that this will inevitably help to get out of this dramatic crisis as soon as possible.

Appendix 4. Communiqué of the National Council of May 17, 2020

[Italian text]

Care compagne e compagni di fede,

un ringraziamento sincero per tutti i vostri nobili sforzi nel trasmettere speranza, coraggio e gioia a ogni persona, e nel cercare di riprendere il ritmo delle nostre attività attraverso le telefonate e le piattaforme online.

Il Decreto-Legge 16 maggio 2020, n. 33 (di seguito DL) prevede un ulteriore allentamento delle restrizioni finora imposte. Tuttavia il Consiglio nazionale, ritenendo prioritaria la salvaguardia della salute di ogni singola persona e considerato che in Italia abbiamo un numero significativo di nuovi casi quotidiani di Covid-19, dopo essersi confrontato con la SGI ha deliberato quanto segue:

– **ATTIVITÀ:** anche con l'entrata in vigore del nuovo DL, le attività mensili dell'IBISG (settimana degli incoraggiamenti, settimana dello studio, settimana delle riunioni dei 4 gruppi, settimana dello *zadankai*, incluse le visite a casa) proseguiranno per telefono e su piattaforme online, fino al 30 giugno 2020. Dopo questa data, si valuterà l'andamento della situazione.

– **CENTRI CULTURALI:** anche i Centri culturali rimarranno chiusi fino al 30 giugno 2020, salvo che per le cerimonie del Grande Voto.

– **CERIMONIE DEL GRANDE VOTO:** stiamo preparando le procedure per poter riprendere queste cerimonie nei Centri culturali. Appena sarà possibile verrà comunicato ufficialmente.

In base al Protocollo con le confessioni religiose firmato il 15 maggio 2020 con il Governo italiano (e disponibile sul nostro sito al seguente link: <https://www.sgi-italia.org/firmaprotocollo-palazzo-chigi/>), in una prima fase predisporremo le Cerimonie soltanto nei Centri culturali, nel rispetto delle procedure di distanziamento previste. Successivamente valuteremo come fare nelle regioni dove non ci sono Centri culturali.

Il 6 maggio c.m. il maestro Ikeda ci ha incoraggiato con queste parole: “Le cause che mettiamo nel presente determinano gli effetti che raccoglieremo nel futuro. Le azioni di ogni persona stanno contribuendo a creare il futuro dell’umanità”.

Attraverso un Daimoku ancora più profondo, facciamo emergere sempre di più la saggezza del Buddha inerente in ognuno di noi, affrontiamo la prossima fase con un forte spirito di responsabilità sociale e divulgiamo con ancora più forza la filosofia della sacralità della vita attraverso il nostro esempio positivo nella vita di tutti i giorni.

[English translation]

Dear fellow believers,

Sincere thanks for all your noble efforts in conveying hope, courage, and joy to each person, and in trying to guarantee the pace of our activities through phone calls and online platforms.

The Law Decree No. 33 of May 16, 2020 (hereafter DL) provides for further relaxation of the restrictions imposed to date. However, the National Council, considering the protection of everyone’s health as a priority and considering that we have a significant number of new daily cases of COVID-19 in Italy, after discussions with SGI [Soka Gakkai International] has decided the following:

– **ACTIVITIES:** even with the entry into force of the new DL, the monthly activities of IBISG [Istituto Buddista Italiano Soka Gakkai, Soka Gakkai Italian Buddhist Institute] (encouragement week, study week, 4-group meeting week, zadankai week, including home visits) will continue by phone and online platforms, until June 30, 2020. After this date, the situation will be evaluated.

– **CULTURAL CENTERS:** Cultural Centers will also remain closed until June 30, 2020, except for Great Vow ceremonies.

– **GREAT VOW CEREMONIES:** we are preparing procedures so that we can resume these ceremonies in the Cultural Centers. As soon as possible, this will be officially announced.

According to the Protocol with religious denominations signed on May 15, 2020 with the Italian government (and available on our website at the following link: <https://www.sgi-italia.org/firma-protocollo-palazzo-chigi/>), in a first phase

we will prepare the ceremonies only in Cultural Centers, in compliance with the planned distancing procedures. Subsequently, we will consider how to organize them in regions where there are no Cultural Centers.

On May 6, Master Ikeda encouraged us with these words, “The causes we put into the present determine the effects we will reap in the future. The actions of each person are helping to create the future of humanity.”

Through an even deeper Daimoku, let us bring out more and more of the wisdom of the Buddha inherent in each of us, face the next stage with a strong spirit of social responsibility, and spread the philosophy of the sacredness of life even more forcefully through our positive example in everyday life.

Appendix 5. Communiqué of the National Council of June 22, 2020

[Italian text]

Cari responsabili di regione,

vi ringraziamo per il prezioso confronto avuto con tutti voi, dal quale sono emersi suggerimenti preziosissimi e posizioni molto eterogenee circa la possibilità di ricominciare ad affidare i Gohonzon.

Tutte le vostre considerazioni sono basate su un forte senso di responsabilità, sia verso la salute dei membri e dei loro familiari, sia verso il desiderio sincero dei principianti che vogliono ricevere il Gohonzon.

Dopo gli incontri con tutte le regioni, abbiamo avuto un nuovo confronto sia con la nostra casa madre in Giappone, sia con la SGI europea. Hanno lodato la serietà con cui, tutti noi insieme, stiamo affrontando questa emergenza, e hanno approvato, in via del tutto eccezionale, la possibilità di consegnare i Gohonzon nei Centri culturali, individualmente e possibilmente all’aperto, mantenendo al minimo gli staff coinvolti.

In considerazione di ciò il Consiglio Nazionale ha deliberato di consentire, a partire dal 18 luglio e fino al 31 luglio, l’organizzazione delle consegne individuali dei Gohonzon, nel rispetto di tutte le procedure di sicurezza e distanziamento fisico da adottare. Le cerimonie saranno tenute all’interno degli spazi dei Centri culturali, ove possibile all’aperto, da un ministro di culto, un assistente e con il supporto degli staff, nel numero minimo indispensabile.

Non si svolgerà né Gongyo né Daimoku, ma solo un breve incoraggiamento da parte del ministro di culto. La persona che riceve il Gohonzon sarà accompagnata da una sola persona a sua scelta, salvo eccezioni per disabili.

Alle regioni che non dispongono di un Centro culturale chiediamo di avere ancora pazienza perché stiamo aspettando nuove disposizioni governative che ci consentano di affittare sale per svolgere la consegna dei Gohonzon.

Sarà cura di ogni Regione, confrontandosi con gli altri livelli di responsabilità e conoscendo il numero dei richiedenti, stabilire la data o le date necessarie a soddisfare le richieste da parte di principianti e/o dei già membri che debbano ricevere il Gohonzon, avendo grande cura dei seguenti punti, prima della consegna:

- incontrare uno per uno “virtualmente”, assieme ai loro responsabili, tutti i principianti che abbiano espresso il desiderio di ricevere il Gohonzon, per approfondire il significato di entrare nel Sangha della Soka Gakkai e l’importanza del voto e della gioia che deriva da questa decisione, affinché possano sviluppare una consapevolezza ancora più profonda sull’importanza di questo momento unico nella loro vita;

- preparare la lista nominativa di questi principianti e del loro unico accompagnatore/accompagnatrice;

- organizzare con i principianti e gli accompagnatori degli incontri online al fine di fornire una preparazione accurata che includa la spiegazione pratica di come si svolgerà la consegna e le relative misure di sicurezza, oltre alla possibilità di rispondere alle loro domande, nonché spiegare come aprire da soli il Gohonzon a casa utilizzando il tutorial;

- organizzare una riunione con i ministri di culto, con gli staff (nel numero minimo indispensabile), e il preposto del Centro culturale che spiegherà a tutti come si svolgerà la cerimonia e le relative misure di sicurezza.

In aggiunta al Comunicato a tutti i membri in cui si conferma la sospensione temporanea delle attività religiose fino al 31 agosto 2020 precisiamo quanto segue:

CENTRI CULTURALI: anche i Centri culturali rimarranno chiusi fino al 31 agosto 2020, salvo che per le suddette consegne dei Gohonzon.

CONSEGNE DEI GOHONZON: sulla base del Protocollo con le confessioni religiose (di seguito P.C.R.) firmato il 15 maggio 2020 con il Governo Italiano, abbiamo predisposto un Protocollo Interno Nazionale (di seguito P.I.N.) che indica le linee guida per poter svolgere in sicurezza e in via del tutto eccezionale, le consegne nei nostri Centri culturali nella modalità individuale su indicata.

Ogni preposto, con il sostegno dei responsabili di regione e nazionali, predisporrà l'Appendice 3 al P.I.N., inserendo le informazioni specifiche per ogni Centro culturale. Sarà cura dell'Istituto organizzare venerdì 26 giugno alle ore 19:00 una riunione nazionale online con i soli preposti al fine di sostenerli nella predisposizione dell'Appendice 3 al P.I.N. e allo scopo di approfondire ogni aspetto necessario.

In base al P.C.R. le consegne dei Gohonzon potranno svolgersi soltanto nei nostri Centri Culturali, nel rispetto delle procedure di distanziamento previste.

Ripetiamo nuovamente che ci siamo già attivati per richiedere la possibilità al Governo Italiano di estendere il P.C.R., consentendoci l'affitto di sale per poter organizzare le consegne dei Gohonzon anche in quelle regioni prive di Centri culturali.

[English translation]

Dear Regional Leaders,

We thank you for the valuable discussion with all of you, from which precious suggestions and very different positions have emerged about the possibility of starting to deliver the Gohonzon to new members again.

All your considerations are based on a strong sense of responsibility towards both the health of members and their families and the sincere desire of beginners to receive the Gohonzon.

After the meetings with all the regions, we had a new discussion with both our leaders in Japan and the European SGI. They praised the seriousness with which, all together, we are dealing with this emergency, and they approved, as an exception, the possibility of delivering the Gohonzon in our Cultural Centers, individually and possibly outdoors, keeping the staff involved to a minimum.

In view of this, the National Council resolved to allow, from July 18 until July 31, the organization of individual Gohonzon deliveries, subject to security and

physical distancing procedures to be adopted. The ceremonies will be held within the spaces of the Cultural Centers, wherever possible outdoors, by a religious minister and an assistant and with the support of staff, in the minimum number necessary.

Neither Gongyo nor Daimoku will be held, but only a brief encouragement by the minister. The person receiving the Gohonzon will be accompanied by only one person of his or her choice, unless exceptions are made for people with disabilities.

For regions that do not have a Cultural Center, we ask for patience, since we are waiting for new government regulations that will allow us to rent rooms to conduct the Gohonzon delivery ceremonies.

It will be the responsibility of each Region, after discussions with the other levels of responsibility and knowing the number of applicants, to determine the date(s) necessary to accommodate requests from beginners and/or existing members who need to receive the Gohonzon, taking great care of the following points beforehand:

- meeting one by one “virtually,” together with their leaders, with all beginners who have expressed a desire to receive the Gohonzon, in order to deepen their understanding of the significance of joining the Sangha of the Soka Gakkai and the importance of the vow and the joy that comes with this decision, so that they may develop an even deeper awareness of the importance of this unique moment in their lives;
- prepare the name list of these beginners and their one-time chaperones/escorts;
- organize online meetings with the beginners and chaperones to provide thorough preparation that includes a practical explanation of how the delivery will take place and related safety measures, as well as an opportunity to answer their questions, and explain how they may open the Gohonzon themselves at home using the tutorial;
- hold a meeting with the ministers, staff (in the minimum number necessary), and the Cultural Center’s provost who will explain to everyone how the ceremony will be conducted and the related security measures.

In addition to the Communiqué sent to all members confirming the temporary suspension of religious activities until August 31, 2020, we specify the following:

CULTURAL CENTERS: The Cultural Centers will also remain closed until August 31, 2020, except for the Gohonzon deliveries.

GOHONZON DELIVERIES: Based on the Protocol with Religious Denominations (hereinafter P.C.R.) signed on May 15, 2020, with the Italian Government, we have prepared a National Internal Protocol (hereinafter P.I.N.) that indicates the guidelines to be able to safely and exceptionally carry out the deliveries in our Cultural Centers in the individual mode indicated above.

Each person in charge, with the support of the regional and national leaders, will prepare the Appendix 3 to the P.I.N., including the specific information for each Cultural Center. It will be the responsibility of the Institute to organize a national online meeting on Friday, June 26, at 7 p.m. with only the principals in order to support them in preparing the Appendix 3 to the P.I.N. and for the purpose of delving into all necessary aspects.

According to the P.C.R., the Gohonzon deliveries can only take place in our Cultural Centers, subject to the stipulated distancing procedures.

We repeat again that we have already taken steps to ask the Italian Government for the possibility to extend the P.C.R., allowing us to rent premises where we may be able to organize Gohonzon deliveries even in those regions without Cultural Centers.

Appendix 6. Communiqué of the National Council of November 6, 2020

[Italian text]

A fronte dell'aggravamento della situazione epidemiologica in tutto il Paese, il Governo ha emanato il DPCM del 3 Novembre che ha validità fino al 3 Dicembre.

Il Consiglio Nazionale, in accordo con le parole di Nichiren Daishonin: “Come ti ho già detto, devi essere cento, mille, diecimila, milioni di volte più prudente di prima” (RNSD, 2, 741), ha deciso di recepire, oltre alle indicazioni del decreto, lo spirito in esso contenuto, volto alla massima prudenza ed alla minima esposizione al rischio di contagio.

Si ritengono pertanto rinviate tutte le attività di culto (DPCM: Art.1. par.9 p, q; Allegato 5) e quindi le cerimonie del Grande Voto previste per i giorni 14 e 15 Novembre, ad una data successiva, in cui la situazione generale dei contagi ci possa permettere di poterle effettuare su tutto il territorio nazionale.

Rimandiamo quindi tale valutazione al 3 Dicembre, data di scadenza della validità del DPCM. Restano aperti, negli orari previsti, soltanto i negozi della Creacommercio presenti nelle regioni gialle e che quindi non rientrano in quelle a rischio alto o intermedio (Roma e Firenze).

Questa attività di commercio al dettaglio (DPCM: Art.1, par.9 ff; Allegato 11) si svolge con presenze individuali estremamente scaglionate.

[English translation]

In the face of the worsening epidemiological situation across the country, the government issued the Decree of the President of the Council of Ministers of November 3, which is valid until December 3.

The National Council, in accordance with Nichiren Daishonin’s words, “As I have already told you, you must be a hundred, a thousand, ten thousand, a million times more prudent than before” (RNSD, 2, 741), has decided to incorporate not only the directions of the decree but also the spirit contained therein, aimed at maximum prudence and minimum exposure to the risk of contagion.

We are therefore postponing all worship activities (DPCM: Art.1. par.9 p, q; Annex 5) and therefore the Great Vow ceremonies planned for November 14 and 15, to a later date when the general situation of contagions may allow us to be able to carry them out throughout the country.

We therefore postpone this evaluation to December 3, the date when the validity of the DPCM expires. Only the Creacommercio stores that are present in the yellow regions and therefore do not fall into the high or intermediate risk regions (Rome and Florence) will remain open during the scheduled hours.

This retail activity (DPCM: Art.1, par.9 ff; Annex 11) will take place with extremely spaced-out individual attendances.

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