

Pluralism and the Limits of Interfaith Dialogue among Soka Gakkai's "Bodhisattvas of the Earth"*

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One of the things I worried about when I started doing research with members of Soka Gakkai was the discomfort I thought I would feel if members encouraged me to take up chanting. After all, Soka Gakkai is a group about which if people only know a couple of things, one of them will surely be its members' reputation for proselytizing. Soka Gakkai is a contemporary lay Buddhist group that claims 12 million members in more than 190 countries and territories. Soka Gakkai, or the "Value-Creation Society," was founded in 1930s Japan and based on exclusive faith in chanting the name of the Lotus Sutra, *Namu Myōhō Renge Kyō*. The group has its roots in the 13th century Japanese Buddhist monk and prophet Nichiren, who is known both for his anti-hierarchical claims that all people were equally able to achieve enlightenment, as well as his fierce intolerance of those who disagreed with him. Nichiren promoted a type of aggressive religious proselytizing called *shakubuku*, or "break and subdue," which he saw as a compassionate way to enrich a morally impoverished public with his own Buddhist values. In its early years, Soka Gakkai also took a confrontational attitude towards the broader public, and it courted public controversy because of its embrace of aggressive proselytizing tactics and its public incursions into politics. In recent years, the group has distanced itself from its controversial past, both by self-consciously

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and publicly embracing a set of supposedly universal cosmopolitan values and by accommodating itself to various local and national settings. Its leader, Daisaku Ikeda, is an embodiment of this more tolerant and liberal orientation, traveling widely and meeting with many world leaders and high profile public figures as he cultivates an image of himself as a global citizen.

While I knew that long gone were the days when members pulled people off the streets and into meetings, I still expected some pressure to take up the practice. Certainly a group whose membership is growing and global network is expanding still knows how to get people in the door, I figured. Yet of the many members with whom I spoke, only a very small number encouraged me to start chanting or even asked me if I was a member. And when they did, their comments were mostly lighthearted rather than exhortatory. "It's like eating chicken rice," one Singaporean member told me. "You can look at the chicken rice and see that it looks delicious. You can smell it, mmm, and it smells so good. You can see other people eating it and listen to them talk about it. But you will never really know the chicken rice until you taste it." We both laughed at his analogy—chicken rice is a local specialty—but he didn't pursue the subject. A Washington software engineer took a similarly low-key approach when he asked me if I had chanted yet. "You know, Richard Seager tried it," he said, referring to an episode in the Hamilton professor's *Encountering the Dharma*.¹⁾ "And he still managed to write an academic book."

Though members no longer aggressively proselytize, this paper argues that proselytizing is still a central practice. Instead of browbeating people by criticizing other religions, members instead embrace a "both/and" approach to proselytizing, in which they embrace pluralist values about religious tolerance while gently encouraging the conversion of others. Soka Gakkai members have seized on the circulatory power of the category of "cosmopolitanism" as a desirable global value, and have

1) Richard Hughes Seager, *Encountering the Dharma : Daisaku Ikeda, Soka Gakkai, and the Globalization of Buddhist Humanism* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2006).

enthusiastically embraced a host of putatively "cosmopolitan" values about difference, including religious pluralism, multiculturalism and secularism. The group's embrace of these values and its specific understanding of "dialogue" with nonmembers suggest both the possibilities and limits of existing models of cosmopolitanism and religious pluralism. The paper is based primarily on research I've done with members of Soka Gakkai in Washington, DC, and Singapore.

My own experience of not feeling explicitly encouraged to convert was not uncommon, as the majority of Soka Gakkai members' efforts at communicating with nonmembers are positioned not as proselytizing but rather as public outreach and dialogue—in other words, as a type of communication with nonmembers that demonstrates a welcoming disposition towards "others" rather than a coercive one. It is tempting to interpret this approach towards communicating with nonmembers as simply conversational, rather than as a form of proselytizing. Yet the group's relationship to communication as a religious act resists this kind of reading. The imperative to propagate the religion is written into the doctrine from the time of Nichiren, who saw all communication about the Lotus Sutra as a central religious obligation. In members' words, this process is known as "planting the seed." Gek Noi, the education director of Soka Gakkai in Singapore, was among the many members who described the process to me. "A lot of what we do is about planting the seed in others who have never heard of Soka or *Namu Myōhō Renge Kyō*" she said. "It doesn't matter if they start chanting today. Or tomorrow. Or the next day. But someday, maybe in a month or a year or ten years, that person I told about *Namu Myōhō Renge Kyō* will experience some sort of struggle or will need some sort of help. And then they will remember that I told them about *Namu Myōhō Renge Kyō*, and think, you know, maybe now I should try this."

My own experiences with the group testified to the power of this approach. During the course of my fieldwork, I attended many large-scale events that followed a scripted format: first were opening comments, then a panel "dialogue," followed by cultural performances, and concluding with

a reading of Ikeda's encouragements. On the day of the 57th Young Women's Division formation day celebration, when General Director Ong Bon Chai stood to deliver his comments, instead of congratulating the young women on their efforts, hard work and victories—I had been to enough similar events to anticipate this type of speech—he surprised many of us by singling me out. Mr. Ong described me as someone who had come to many events, sitting quietly and observing, but never speaking. Then he invited me to share my impressions of the group in the time I'd spent in Singapore so far. I approached the stage and, having no idea what to say or do, whispered to Mr. Ong, "What should I talk about?" His response was straightforward: "Just say something inspirational."

I wish I could say I rose to the challenge, in spite of my lack of practice at being "inspirational." I felt the pressure to be honest and also congratulatory. I stumbled through some comments about how grateful I was for members' having been so generous with their time, how inspirational their commitments to the group and each other had been, and how they inspired me to be brave in the face of a challenge like speaking in front of 1,600 people. I concluded with a platitude about keeping up the good work. I sat down, relieved to have gotten through it, but mortified that I couldn't come up with something better to say. And then it struck me: *I want to be better at doing this*. Fortunately, I got a handful of other. I came to expect that whenever I would be at an event with Mr. Ong, he would call upon me to offer some "impressions" of my time in Singapore, though he never warned me in advance. And by the end of the summer, I *had* gotten better at making these comments. I measured my own progress by my ability to elicit reactions from listeners, spurred on by positive feedback in the form of laughter or applause. I grew more adept at using concepts and turns of phrases that resonated with members, speaking in terms of speaking of repaying debts of gratitude or cultivating mentor and disciple spirit. At no time did I feel I was being insincere; instead, I felt I was simply expressing my genuine impressions in a more Soka-friendly language.

With some critical distance, I have a more complicated relationship to

these moments of public speaking. In Singapore, part of the appeal of having me speak to members was my own foreignness; I was never asked to speak to members in Washington in such a public way. My status as someone who had come from the United States to study the group represented visible evidence of the group's importance in local and global contexts. The Soka Gakkai in Singapore is mostly ethnic Chinese, and thus reminders that non-Chinese find the group's activities noteworthy and interesting are testament to the group's openness to "others." Indeed, the "V.I.P." section of many events was often filled with an array of multicultural faces, mine included.

My invitations to speak offer a window into one way in which a nonmember "other"—in this case, me—is gently drawn in, slowly becoming something not-quite-"other." Of course, I was never purely an "other" to members either in Washington or in Singapore, as members from the beginning saw my interest in Soka Gakkai as evidence of a karmic connection to the group. Most people are not purely "others" in a Soka Gakkai worldview, as nonmembers are mostly thought of as people who have *not yet* started chanting or who *might someday* start chanting.

As I was learning how to more effectively deliver inspirational comments to members, I was emulating discursive models I had already become familiar with while at the same time making them my own. Susan Harding has described a similar process in her discussion of fundamentalist Baptist acts of witnessing. "Witnessing aims to separate novice listeners from their prior, given reality, to constitute a new, previously unperceived or indistinct reality, and to impress that reality upon them, make it felt, heard, seen, known undeniably real," Harding argues. "The reality, or *truth*, constituted in witnessing is, in part, a linguistic one: the supernatural manifests itself as God's voice and his spirit is communicated and experienced through words."²) Witnessing appears to the "novice listener" as a conversation, but it is no mere dialogue, as it is a process by which the saved impresses upon the unsaved listener what Borker describes as a

2) Susan Harding, *The Book of Jerry Falwell: Fundamentalist Language and Politics* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2000), p. 37.

"compelling religious reality completely at variance with [the listener's] experience."³⁾ Soka Gakkai members' relationship to the religious quality of words is similar. The *words* of and about the Lotus Sutra are the plainest and most direct expression of the core religious belief and practice; chanting the Lotus Sutra is efficacious in and of itself. Communication about the Lotus Sutra or intended to impress the truth of the Lotus Sutra on others is a religious act of compassion in the truest sense.

My own experiences point to the existence of a shared general technique and rhetoric for these kinds of public speeches. Like the Baptists' strategy for converting others, Soka Gakkai's strategy also hinges on "one person insinuating his or her mode of interpretation in the mind of another."⁴⁾ After some weeks of steeping myself in this mode of interpretation, I was thrust into situations in which I reached out for it.

It is tempting to interpret this approach towards communicating with nonmembers as a type of open-ended and non-coercive disposition towards nonmember "others"—in other words, that communication is simply conversation, rather than a form of proselytizing. Yet the group's relationship to communication as a religious act resists this kind of reading. The imperative to propagate the religion was established by Nichiren, whose writings take the form of dialogues. Dialogue remains the dominant conceptual model of communication for Soka Gakkai members in Washington and Singapore, in addition to the model for the more highly publicized dialogues carried out by Ikeda and disseminated in the many Soka Gakkai publications. A wide range of conversations are referred to as dialogues, from intimate conversations among friends to panel discussions in front of audiences of hundreds. What differentiates "dialogues" from other conversations is the subject matter, as it can describe any conversation about humanist values, pluralism, and respecting difference,

3) Ruth Borker, "The Presentation of the Gospel in Everyday Life," unpublished manuscript cited in Harding, *The Book of Jerry Falwell: Fundamentalist Language and Politics*, pp. 36-37.

4) Harding, *The Book of Jerry Falwell*, p. 37.

as well as more straightforwardly about Soka Gakkai and Buddhism.

A major feature of dialogue is a genre of speech members refer to as "sharing experiences," in which members describe how chanting has affected their lives. Sharing experiences is an important way of encouraging others to convert. Sharing experiences is also a central way in which members learn to understand their own experiences in a Soka Gakkai interpretive framework, in which even the smallest events in one's life can be understood as the workings of the Lotus Sutra. Through the act of repeatedly narrating their own stories to others, members learn to speak a particular shared Soka Gakkai language, thus solidifying their sense of membership in the community.

Many of these experiences involve day-to-day struggles. Members tell stories about chanting for the focus to study hard for an exam or for the strength to bravely face a new job. Other experiences are graver, such as the Indian woman in Singapore who chanted for wisdom about whether to leave her abusive husband against the wishes of her family and then for the strength to follow through with her decision. A Washingtonian member chanted to alleviate her family's suffering because of her husband's alcoholism. Another Washingtonian member chanted for the strength to deal with her mother's cancer.

The most compelling experiences are those that describe how members took up the practice—or, conversion stories. Many common themes connect members' conversion stories. Many of these stories begin during a time of struggle in their lives. During these moments of struggle, people experience a turning point when they unexpectedly meet face-to-face a Soka Gakkai practitioner. The member introduces the practice and shares her/his own experiences and those of others, sometimes in the form of reading material. Many experiences relate a person's initial reluctance to practice and others' skepticism about their practice once they decide to take it up. Conversion stories do not stop at one's own conversion, but typically follow through to include one's efforts to convert family and loved ones. Thus, it is in the moment of *speaking* the truth of the Lotus Sutra to others that a person's conversion becomes complete.

As Bakhtin has argued, "The word in language is half someone else's. It becomes 'one's own' only when the speaker populates it with his own intention.... Prior to this moment of appropriation, the word does not exist in a neutral language..., but rather it exists in other people's mouths, in other people's contexts, serving other people's intentions: it is from there that one must take the word, and make it one's own."⁵⁾

Dialogue thus captures a wide spectrum of interactions. In one light, dialogue can be understood as a process by which people come together freely, share thoughts openly, and through the process of conversation itself work out what each thinks. In this capacity, dialogue is the foundation for peace, fellowship, and the promotion of global citizenship, and this is how members commonly describe it. Underpinning the impulse to engage in dialogue is the assumption that dialogue is itself a positive good, contingent on a spirit of openness to others. Dialogue is one answer—and the answer Soka Gakkai offers—to the question, how can we hold religious beliefs deeply and still get along with others? Soka Gakkai is not alone in offering this answer, as many scholars have argued for the importance of dialogue as a way to take difference seriously while still embracing democratic and secular values.⁶⁾ Calhoun, for one, has argued that effective public discourse is a "in and of itself a form of solidarity."⁷⁾

5) M.M. Bakhtin, "Discourse in the Novel," *The Dialogic Imagination: Four Essays by M. M. Bakhtin*, ed. Michael Holquist (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1982), pp. 293-294.

6) For example, see Gusta Niebuhr, *Beyond Tolerance: Searching for Interfaith Understanding in America* (New York: Viking, 2008); Robert N Bellah, *Habits of the heart: Individualism and Commitment in American Life* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1985); Martha C Nussbaum, "Patriotism and Cosmopolitanism," in *For Love of Country?* ed. Joshua Cohen (Boston: Beacon Press, 2002); Charles Taylor, "The Politics of Recognition," in *Multiculturalism—Examining the Politics of Recognition*, ed. Amy Gutman (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1994); Amy Gutmann, "Introduction," in *Multiculturalism—Examining the Politics of Recognition*, ed. Gutmann (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1994); Kwame Anthony Appiah, *The Ethics of Identity* (Princeton: Princeton Univ. Press, 2005).

7) Craig Calhoun, "The Class Consciousness of Frequent Travellers: Towards a Critique of Actually Existing Cosmopolitanism," in *Conceiving Cosmopolitanism: Theory, Context, and Practice*, ed. Steven Vertovec and Robin Cohen (New York, Oxford

Theories about religious pluralism also rely on assumptions about the central importance of free and open-ended public deliberation. Diana Eck, for example, describes pluralism—in this case American pluralism—as the promise to “come as you are, with all your differences, pledg[ing] only to the common civic demands of citizenship. In other words, come and be yourselves.”⁸⁾ Pluralism is an active project shaped by the encounter of and true engagement among many different religious groups. Eck describes dialogue as “a two-way discourse that is essential to relationship, not domination. One might call it mutual witness... It is the language of mutuality, not of power.”⁹⁾ Eck’s model articulates a way to use dialogue to respect difference by forging as many spaces as possible for communication, while never incorporating “others” into our “we.” Yet underlying this respect for difference is an assumption that before participants can be seated at the table of pluralist discourse, they must agree to certain preconditions about civility and openness in service of the greater good of social harmony. Eck carves out a space for creating a greater sense of collectivity—what others might refer to as global civil society—which would be “the crucial stage to which our interreligious dialogue must take us if we are to be up to the task of creating communication adequate for our interdependent world.”¹⁰⁾ Yet we do not receive from Eck further guidance about the creation of this language of transnational cooperation and mutuality, and she sidesteps questions both about unequal power and about how to create a language that would be open to all.

Soka Gakkai members’ understanding of dialogue as a type of communication that is both the means and end of its religious practice testifies to the limits of such models. While I may not *feel* as though I am

University Press, 2002), p. 97.

8) Diana Eck, *A New Religious America: How a “Christian Country” Has Become the World’s Most Religiously Diverse Nation* (San Francisco: HarperCollins, 2002), p. 47.

9) Diana Eck, *Encountering God—A Spiritual Journey from Bozeman to Banara* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1993), p. 19.

10) *Ibid.*, 203.

being proselytized to, that is exactly the point. The fact that Soka Gakkai has chosen to proselytize in this way highlights its awareness that it is operating in a larger global civil arena marked by certain values about tolerance and its limits. Soka Gakkai tacitly acknowledges the cosmopolitan discomfort with strongly proselytic activities. This awareness is evident in the group's choice to promote its exclusive message by embracing dominant cultural values, by supporting cultural institutions, by cultivating an ethic of global citizenship in which other religions are respected, and by presenting itself as "nonpolitical," even as these projects are actualized quite differently in different locations. The group promotes itself as a thoroughly cosmopolitan religious organization open to anyone, and at the same time uses this ethos as a powerful tool for persuading others of its correctness. Soka Gakkai's understanding of dialogue as a fundamentally religious project supports the many theoretical critiques of models of civil society that do not fully account for the reality that participants in public conversations never speak neutral languages, but instead always articulate their concerns in specific moral vocabularies.¹¹⁾

John, a recent college graduate and youth leader in Washington, described the value of dialogue in this way:

One of the things I love about this Buddhism is that we are able to make our own opinions. We can dialogue about it. Everything pretty much comes down basically to the Mystic Law. We define it like the lotus flower. Everything we do good or bad, whatever we do, we generate something in our universe. It's cause and effect. At some point, we have to take responsibility for that... We want peace. We all want peace. We just sometimes disagree about how to get there. I think it should be through nonviolent means, most of us do, but not everyone does. But they're entitled to their own opinion. It's not a political stance to be for peace. Human rights, abortion, these are political issues. We want peace based on our Buddhist values, but how do we get there? Through dialogue, through non-

11) See for example, Kenneth Baynes on moral vocabularies and the difficulty of agreeing on what constitutes "reasonable" public arguments, "A Critical Theory Perspective on Civil Society and the State," in *Civil Society and Government*, eds. Nancy L. Rosenblum and Robert C. Post (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2002).

violent means.

John seems to hold contradictory viewpoints. First, he claimed that Soka Gakkai encourages all members to "make our own opinions" through "dialogue." Immediately afterwards he claimed that everything can be reduced to the Mystic Law—or the workings of the Lotus Sutra in a person's life—and that all members seek peace, which can be obtained through the nonviolent approach of dialogue.

Many members echoed this ambivalence. Members see the work they do as non-political and claim the group encourages them to form their own opinions. Members should make up their own minds about how to live, act morally, vote, talk to strangers, and be a good citizen. Soka Gakkai promotes no moral code. One Singaporean member in his late 40's joked to me that he joined because, "This is the only type of Buddhism where you can drink alcohol and eat meat...as much as you want!" Leaders hold back from giving advice, instead listening to members' problems, encouraging them to chant, and perhaps offering them guidances or encouragements from Ikeda. In doing so, leaders and members promote an image of a world in which members are free and independent thinkers with a profound respect for difference.

The counterpart of this tolerance is an underlying belief among members that given the freedom to choose one's own course of action, there is a certain obviousness about what a person will choose. *Of course* I will take up chanting some day; members have planted the seed, and my own karmic connection to the group has cultivated the ground. *Of course* all people want peace. *Of course* all events can be understood as a result of a person's karma. Members hone their storytelling to emphasize the religious truth in these stories, learning to see events as rooted in karma both good and bad. The informal feedback members receive tends to reinforce these themes. In spite of members' claims that this cosmos has room for everyone, this is not a neutral universe but instead a thoroughly moral one with limits to the tolerance and respect for difference it cultivates in its membership. These limits are not only evident in John's

comments, but more generally in members' approach to the practice of dialogue.

Perhaps a better model for thinking about Soka Gakkai's use of communications would be to think about it as a type of redescription rather than either a type of dialogue or a type persuasion. Richard Rorty, for one, argues that *redescription* involves creative new uses of language to make my truth more compelling to a listener, which is different from argumentation, or trying to show another person that my truth more closely corresponds to the truth "out there." While Rorty is describing the way social change occurs, his method for change through redescription applies to Soka Gakkai's proselytizing as well. His method is "to redescribe lots and lots of things in new ways, until you have created a pattern of linguistic behavior which will tempt the rising generation to adopt it, thereby causing them to look for appropriate new forms of nonlinguistic behavior... [This sort of philosophy] says things like 'try thinking of it this way'—or more specifically, 'try to ignore the apparently futile traditional questions by substituting the following new and possibly interesting questions'."¹²) Not only do members redescribe ordinary events as meaningful, they are also actively engaged in taking publicly shared values—including pluralism, cosmopolitanism, and global citizenship—and redescribing them in a Buddhist light. Members do not try to put forth *new* values or argue that other values are the most important, but instead aim to redescribe the significance of those values *already* central to the ethos of global civil society. Eventually, against the backdrop of these redescriptions, certain things begin "to just make sense" in new ways.

Embracing redescription as an effective method of proselytizing that does not seem like proselytizing, Soka Gakkai is able to promote itself as a thoroughly modern, cosmopolitan, putatively nonpolitical and global religious group whose values are in keeping with the values of secular democracy. The group's public embrace of these values in different contexts not only suggests that the group acknowledges their circulatory

12) Richard Rorty, *Contingency, irony, and solidarity* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1989), p. 9.

power as markers of a tolerant, liberal and open-minded religious group, it further allows the group to use this identity to attract potential converts who similarly believe that religion *should be* tolerant, liberal and open-minded. In proselytizing in this way, Soka Gakkai members follow the biases of many scholars who presuppose a certain understanding of modernity in which "only religions that have accepted the assumptions of liberal discourse are being commended."¹³ Even as Soka Gakkai does not publicly push back against the limits of religious tolerance, its understanding of the role of communications both as a carrier of information *and* as a religious project challenges notions that Soka Gakkai as an institution embraces wholeheartedly these liberal values. Soka Gakkai members' remarkable success not only at local place-making, but also at forging a strong sense of global community attests to its ability to exercise centralized interpretive authority on individual experiences. Unlike models of dialogue that are open-ended, Soka Gakkai dialogues are subjected to both direct and indirect disciplinary processes that shape them into intelligible and remarkably consistent narratives. The same experiences are shared so often that speakers learn—consciously or unconsciously—to adapt the telling to highlight those moments that will resonate most with listeners. Similarly, listeners who have heard and read enough of these experiences learn to expect and respond to certain turns of phrase, figures of speech, and set pieces in these experiences. The more I spoke in front of members, the more I could not help but feel this pressure and adjust my comments accordingly. Some members' experiences are also disciplined in more formal ways. For example, before the panel discussions or sharing of experiences I discussed above, leaders will often have "practice" sessions where they will help members refine their narratives. At one such session before a large meeting in Singapore, a leader reminded one of her members to include a few guidances from Ikeda that she had found helpful. Interspersing one's own comments with

13) Talal Asad, *Formations of the Secular: Christianity, Islam, Modernity* (Stanford Univ. Press, 2003); Saba Mahmood, "Secularism, Hermeneutics, and Empire: The Politics of Islamic Reformation," *Public Culture* (18:2, 2006), p. 183.

comments from President Ikeda is another common way of disciplining individual experiences into exempla of a single universal experience. The more a person is incorporated into the group, the better she is at understanding her experiences according to this Soka Gakkai Buddhist metalanguage.¹⁴⁾

Because *all* communications about Soka Gakkai can, in effect, be seen as a type of “planting the seed,” the line between what is properly public and what is properly private becomes blurry. For a group of people for whom “speaking is believing,” as Susan Harding argued of Baptist fundamentalists, models of civil society that are premised on carving out a space for non-coercive, deliberative dialogue seem somewhat limited. For Soka Gakkai members, dialogue is not unproblematically a means of free and open conversation because there is little question about what the outcome of the dialogue will be. In spite of his countless “dialogues” with others, I have seen no evidence that Ikeda has either changed his mind or expressed doubt about anything. Dialogue is instead an opportunity for spreading the truth of the Lotus Sutra—for proselytizing.

In understanding the religious importance of communications in this way, Soka Gakkai members assert the group’s public importance and claim for themselves a great degree of religious freedom. The group neither must relegate religion to the private sphere nor check its most cherished beliefs at the door before participating in public conversations. Instead, it operates on a different model of freedom, in which it accepts the limits on free speech in the public sphere in order to press back against them through redescription. By redefining proselytizing as “dialogue,” it repositions religious communications as a central cosmopolitan value, at the same time that it attempts to redescribe this value in a Buddhist light.

14) I follow Roland Barthes’ understanding of a “metalanguage” as a type of discourse on discourse. Barthes has described a metalanguage as “myth itself... [I]t is a second language, *in which* one speaks about the first.” In this context, I understand the Soka Gakkai metalanguage to be a second-order reflection on difference, in which all differences are understood in light of a broader Buddhist logic that organizes difference and sameness according to their significance. Barthes, “Myth Today,” in *Mythologies*, trans. Annette Laver (New York: Hill and Wang), p. 115.

The precise way Soka Gakkai members have attempted to speak in public aims not only to exercise the group's freedom to speak, but also its ability to be heard in a way that, for example, terrorist groups are often not.¹⁵⁾ Soka Gakkai's incursions into the media sphere outside of Japan, however tentative, have generally ensured positive (or no) media coverage without offending either governmental regulations about the proper social place for religion or normative public ideas about what religion should or should not be. The choices members have made in "going public" suggest their tacit acknowledgment that public spaces are governed by unequal power dynamics, not the least of which is that certain habits of discourse among both speakers and listeners exist and govern any party's ability to speak or be heard at that moment. By learning to speak the language of dominant cultural values in local contexts, as well as the language of global civil society, Soka Gakkai has gained entry into public spaces, and thus carves out a space to exercise the most basic religious freedom to speak and be heard—and to proselytize—even as they pursue these projects under the guise of liberal values of tolerance and religious pluralism.

15) Mark Juergensmeyer and others have argued that terrorist groups resort to religious violence because they cannot otherwise make their voices heard in public arenas of civil discourse. *Terror in the Mind of God: The Global Rise of Religious Violence* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2003)