

# THE NEW RELIGIONS OF JAPAN

By H. Neill McFarland  
Professor of Perkins School of  
Theology, Southern Methodist  
University, Dallas, Texas



(Reprinted by permission of the author)

#### 4. *PL Kyōdan*

A few of the New Religions have adopted rather bizarre titles incorporating English words or Japanese transliterations of English words. One such sect is PL Kyodan ("Perfect Liberty Church"), a post-war revival of a pre-war movement known as Hito-no-Michi ("Way of Man"), which was begun in Osaka in 1925 by Miki Tokuhara, father of the originator and present leader of PL Kyodan. Hito-no-Michi was dispersed by the war-time cabinet, and most of the members disbanded. However, a few of the most ardent devotees maintained the ideals of the movement "underground" until the granting of religious freedom after the war made possible their open proclamation again. The movement

was reborn in PL Kyodan in 1946. The reorganizer of the sect in its present form is Miki Tokuchika who continues to serve the Order as its Master Teacher or *Oshie-oya*, an office which is comparable to that of the Shimbashira in Tenri-kyo, except that it is not necessarily hereditary.

The object of worship in the PL Order is *Mioya-O-Kami* ("Parent God"), who has no connection with any of the traditional deities of Japanese mythology. Indeed, the PL Kyodan is a monotheistic religion, though a very tolerant one. The Order teaches that other religions worship the one God according to different understandings of him.

The distinctive creed of this sect is set forth in twenty-one "Precepts

## THE NEW RELIGIONS OF JAPAN

for Conduct in Life.”<sup>7</sup> These are believed by the members of the Order to have been revealed to the Founder at Hiroshima in 1947.

1. Life is Art.
2. The whole life of the individual is a continuous succession of Self-Expressions.
3. The individual is a manifestation of God.
4. We suffer if we do not manifest our self.
5. We lose self if we are swayed by our feelings.
6. Our true self is revealed when our ego is effaced.
7. All things exist in mutual relation to one another.
8. Live radiantly as the Sun.
9. All men are equal.
10. Bring mutual happiness through our expression.
11. Depend on God at all times.
12. There is always a way peculiar to every name.
13. There is one way for men, and there is another for women.
14. All things exist for World Peace.
15. Our whole environment is the

mirror of our mind.

16. All things make progress and development.
17. Grasp the heart of everything.
18. At every moment man stands at the crossroads of good and evil.
19. Practice at once whatever your first inspiration dictates.
20. Attain the perfect harmonious state of mind and matter.
21. Live in Perfect Liberty.

The essence of the PL doctrine is included in the first article of the creed: “Life is art.” To every individual there has been given a personality that innately is both unique and precious. The happiness and meaningfulness of each life depends upon the full and free expression of one’s personality. Just as the “professional” artist expresses his personality by that technique and in that medium which constitute his forte, so every person should create art through the expression of his true self in the work that is his to do. As the Master Teacher says it: “When one sets one’s whole mind on washing or sweeping or any other

---

<sup>7</sup> *Perfect Liberty: How to Lead a Happy Life* (Tondabayashi, Japan: PL Kyodan, n.d.).

## THE NEW RELIGIONS OF JAPAN

work, one's true personal quality is expressed in it. Then, those works have been elevated to art.<sup>8</sup> Thus, the "artistic life" is the only way to true happiness and real satisfaction.

If, in the course of such a life, a misfortune such as illness or accident should occur, one must know that the event is God's warning (his parental admonition) that some deviation from the way has taken place. Relief from misfortune then awaits the discovery of the deviation and the manner of its correction. In general, misfortunes are regarded as *gasho* ("ego-phenomena"), manifestations of an overweening self-consciousness which occur when man forgets that he exists only by the grace of God. However, to learn the exact nature of a particular offense, one must turn to the Master Teacher (or one of a very few other sanctioned consultants) for a *kokoro* ("precept" or "instruction") which is applicable to his situation. The Master, who is said to be always

praying and to live in "conformity to God," is able to diagnose the nature and cause of each misfortune and to prescribe a corrective. An interesting but rather obscure aspect of this role of the Master is his ability and willingness, in certain emergency situations when there is insufficient time for instruction, to make himself a sacrifice for the believer—that is, to experience "vicarious suffering"—until such time when instruction can be given. The presence of such a man, in whom the wisdom of God is believed to reside, has made unnecessary the development of a scripture.

The PL Kyodan now has about 600,000 followers. Most of these are urban dwellers, but otherwise they are not typed according to particular social strata. Reportedly, a wide range of occupations and professions is represented among them. The organization and program of the Order is highly centralized. Though the leaders are interested in an international out-

---

8 Miki Tokuchika, "The True Way of Life" (An unpublished essay in typecript), p. 1. A copy was given to me on the occasion of a visit to the PL Kyodan headquarters at Tondabayashi on May 11, 1957.

## THE NEW RELIGIONS OF JAPAN

reach, the Order is as yet too young to support a foreign missionary program.

At the present time much of the energy of PL Kyodan is directed toward the development of their headquarters on an extensive acreage in a hilly and wooded area in Tondabayashi near Osaka. Most of the present buildings are only temporary structures, and it is evident that it will be a long while before their elaborate plans for permanent installations will be realized. In the development of this area, a major emphasis is being placed on youth and recreation. At the time of my visit (May 11, 1957), an eighteen-hole golf course and three baseball diamonds were being constructed. A labor force for the latter project is supplied by the PL Youth Association, whose members come in groups for four-day training periods, and perform manual labor as a part of their training. The leaders of the Order also aspire to make their headquarters a renowned beauty spot. To this end they have made a lake and have spanned it by an artistic red bridge. The hills around the lake have been

cleared of pine trees and planted with cherries, in the hope that within a few years this place will become one of the most famous cherry-viewing sites in Japan. The excitement of helping to create their own haven, or even heaven, is one of the important motivations and cohesive factors in the development of PL Kyodan.

### 5. *Ittoen*

In the hills just east of Kyoto there is a unique religious community called Ittoen ("Garden of One Light") which has as its founder and leader a saintly octogenarian by the name of Nishida Tenko. The movement which centers in this establishment is sometimes likened to the early Franciscan movement, and the leader, known affectionately to his followers as Tenko San, is often called by others the St. Francis, the Gandhi, or the Tolstoy of Japan.

The ideal life of Ittoen is one of total dependence upon God. It is characterized by five aspirations:

(a) A life of non-possession.

(b) A life of repentance and abiding in God.

## THE NEW RELIGIONS OF JAPAN

(c) The worship of God through all religious truths.

(d) Service of love, performed without hope of reward.

(e) The establishment of a heavenly kingdom upon earth.

God in Ittoen is called *Ohikari* ("Light") and is conceived as the the Essence of all religions. In this concept, as in a number of other aspects, Ittoen is conspicuously syncretistic. While the life of this community is pre-eminently the product of the faith and genius of Tenko San, he has been influenced by various religions, notably Buddhism and Christianity. This is nowhere more evident than in the principal symbol by which the community represents the object of its worship. It is a composite symbol consisting of a Christian (Greek) cross and a Buddhist swastika combined into a single circular figure and superimposed upon a light from which twelve rays emanate. The same concept is expressed in the arrangement of the sanctuary. In it there are three altars. The one in the center is dedicated to *Ohikari*; those which flank it on the right and left re-

present respectively the essence of Buddhism and the essence of Christianity.

Throughout Japan there are perhaps five hundred persons who endeavor to live by the principles of Ittoen, but the movement centers in the colony near Kyoto where two or three hundred residents share a communal life in company with their leader. They have few possessions. Their clothing, food, and living quarters are adequate but quite plain and coarse. Each day is lived according to a rather rigid schedule which makes provision for regular early morning and evening worship and places a special emphasis upon hard work. For the children there are schools, but the youngsters too are expected to contribute their labor. Much of the work is for the support of the community. There is cleaning and maintenance work to be done on the buildings and grounds; there is a printing press to be run; there are fields and animals to be tended. However, the community also undertakes to serve others, usually by performing such demeaning tasks as cleaning streets and rest

## THE NEW RELIGIONS OF JAPAN

rooms, without seeking remuneration for their work.

The way of life which characterizes this movement was initiated by Tenko San in 1905. Having entered a career in business some years earlier, he found unbearably repulsive the ugly struggle for existence in which he was involved. It seemed to him that the desire to live and flourish that drive a man to put self-concern above the regard for others and leads him to fight and cheat in his struggle for material gains has been through the centuries the cause of mankind's confusion. In his revulsion Tenko San renounced such a life and resolved either to live penniless apart from meaningless struggle or to die. On the third day of his homelessness, the faith which was to govern his life was born as he heard a baby cry for its mother's milk. This cry he interpreted as a message from God. As the mother responds to the baby's cry, he conjectured, so God assumes responsibility for the life of man in this world. Man can live in dependence upon God; indeed, this is the natural way for him to live.

Thus, Tenko San began a new experiment in living. He would live in the streets and possess nothing except a single coarse garment. He would eat nothing that must be acquired by struggle. He would do all the good for others which he possibly could do without considering the disagreeable nature of his work or hoping for reward. The results seemed to validate his faith. A sufficiency of the essentials of life was forthcoming, and in addition the example of his selflessness was awakening in others an awareness of their need for repentance and for the renunciation of materialistic standards. He was, of course, regarded by some as a mad man. At times he was also suspected by the government. But eventually he won the respect of the nation and attracted to himself persons who desire to follow his way of life. There came a time also when those who were renouncing possessions wished to give them to Ittoen. Since it would have been a violation of his principles to accept them personally, Tenko San permitted the establishment of an incorporated foundation

## THE NEW RELIGIONS OF JAPAN

to hold and manage property for the benefit of the life of Ittoen.

On December 30 and 31, 1956, I was the guest of Tenko San and his community. I was privileged to observe and to share in various phases of their life and to have three conferences with the saintly leader himself. As we conferred on the last day of the year, he told me that at midnight he would leave Ittoen and return "home"—by which he meant to say that he would go back to the streets which were his real abode. Ittoen, he said, could not be considered as his home but only as his place of service during the year. If it should be the will of the community that he should return, their representatives would seek him out on the following day and invite him back. Now, it is obvious that this procedure has only a symbolical significance. Tenko San is too old to live in the streets as once he did. Ittoen is his home, and he is the acknowledged and much respected leader of the community which he founded. However, in order to keep alive the ideal of homelessness and non-possession of material things,

he repeats this ritual at each year's end.

He is, in any event, a remarkable and admirable man whose life is an application of that exhortation of Jesus which he has taken as one of his mottos: "Seek ye first the kingdom of God and His righteousness; and all these things shall be added unto you."

### 6. *Rissho-kosei-kai*

Possibly the fastest-growing sect in Japan at the present time is Rissho-kosei-kai, a derivative of the Nichiren sect of Buddhism. Founded in 1938, this movement had only 1,000 devotees by 1945 at the end of World War II. It now claims a membership of 1,500,000. This sect has two founders, Mr. Niwano Nikkyo, president of the society, and Mrs. Naganuma Myoko, vice-president. People of lowly social origin and little formal education, they met in Reiyu-kai, another Nichiren off-shoot, and subsequently seceded from it in order to organize their own independent society. Their headquarters, already extensive but still being expanded, are in the outskirts of Tokyo.

In terms of its own expressed

## THE NEW RELIGIONS OF JAPAN

aim, Rissho-kosei-kai aspires to lead out in a revival of Buddhism. This is evident in the summary of its purpose which headquarters shares with inquirers. It reads as follows:

Adoring the Eternal Lord Buddha Sakyamuni as the Supreme Being, complying with the Scriptures of the Lotus of Perfect Truth and practicing the morality of the Bodhisattva, we aim to accomplish the perfect character and establish the Kingdom of peace and happiness.<sup>9</sup>

This statement coupled with an emphasis on services commemorating Saint Nichiren (1222—1282) would tend to identify the sect as essentially a Buddhist movement. However, its really distinctive aspects are more typical of the broader range of Japanese popular religion.

For example, not only is reverence for ancestors a point of major emphasis, but also the devotees are encouraged to believe that ignorance or neglect of the ancestors may be the cause of ill-health or unhappiness among the living. This belief, therefore, figures

prominently in the healing rites of the sect; for the healer's diagnosis of illness is often a pin-pointing of some neglect of the ancestors. Furthermore, divination of various sorts, with occasional tragic consequences, is generally practiced.

Another notable feature of Rissho-kosei-kai is the care with which the members are instructed. I was much impressed by this fact on the occasion of a brief visit to the sect's Tokyo headquarters. My visit happened to correspond with the period of daily worship and instruction, and I was granted the privilege of observing these activities. The devotees had gathered in a large modern building which had three spacious assembly rooms, one above the other, identically equipped with a worship center and the traditional mat-covered floor. Though this was just a normal day, several thousand people, mostly women, were present. When the worship had ended, the people divided into "buzz" groups which, so I learned, were study sections.

---

9 "A Summary of the Rissho Kosei Society" (Typescript). A document given to me on the occasion of a visit to the Rissho-kosei-kai headquarters at 27 Wadahoncho, Sugunami-ku, Tokyo, on May 28, 1957.



## THE NEW RELIGIONS OF JAPAN

Each group had its appointed leader whose task it was to instruct the members and to answer their questions, which oftentimes are associated with needs of a very personal sort. Frankness of a type which the Japanese usually shun is characteristic of these sessions.

It should also be said that Rissho-kosei-kai sponsors many types of group activities, such as pilgrimages, festivals, building projects, drama, and concerts, and that it promotes evangelistic work among the inmates of reformatories and prisons. Within its headquarters precinct the sect maintains a hospital,<sup>10</sup> a nursery school and kindergarten, lower and upper secondary schools for both boys and girls, and a library.

### 7. *Soka-Gakkai*

Another movement derived from the Nichiren sect of Buddhism is Soka-Gakkai ("Value-Creation Association"). This group, which was

founded in 1940, recently has become the most inflammatory of all the "New Religions." Retaining all of the fanatical intolerance of Nichirenism, the devotees of Soka-Gakkai apparently are endeavoring to spearhead a revolution in Japan. Their avowed political aspirations and their unscrupulous techniques of propagation are becoming increasingly alarming to many Japanese.

I have had no personal contact with Soka-Gakkai, but, particularly during the spring of 1957, I followed with interest the newspaper accounts of its activities. This report is a digest of newspaper clippings rather than a description of the sect.<sup>11</sup>

In June of 1957 it was reported that Soka-Gakkai held three seats in the House of Councillors of the National Diet and nearly sixty seats in various local government assemblies. It is the announced goal

---

<sup>10</sup> As in the case of Tenri-kyo, Rissho-kosei-kai in establishing its hospital has adopted the policy of employing only medical doctors. "Faith healers" do not practice in the hospitals; indeed, in an official pictorial survey of the sect's activities (published in 1954) the statement is made quite pointedly that the doctors are *not* members of the sect.

<sup>11</sup> The articles appeared in *The Japan Times* (May 23, June 20 and 21, 1957) and *The English Mainichi* (June 16 and 22, 1957).

## THE NEW RELIGIONS OF JAPAN

of the sect to control all seats of both houses of the Diet within two decades. In campaigning for their candidates the devotees flaunt the election laws, insisting as they do so that faith is more important than law. Thus they employ intimidation and bribery with impunity, and when some of their number are arrested they accept their fate without concern, believing that imprisonment is nothing but a sacrifice necessary to the accomplishment of their goal.

Soka-Gakkai also is making a determined effort to win the loyalty of coal miners in Hokkaido, the northern-most island of Japan. The sect has set itself up in opposition to the miners' trade unions. Taking advantage of the insecure material and spiritual condition of the miners, Soka-Gakkai says to them that if they will only believe in the teachings of the sect they will become invulnerable to the dangers of their trade, and their wages will be raised without their having to resort to strikes. So enticing has this appeal been that the unions are seeking means by which, without violating the constitutional

guarantee of religious freedom, they can defend themselves against this encroachment.

Similar irresponsible tactics are being employed all over Japan in the evangelistic endeavors of the sect. In one town a "missionary" succeeded in converting secretly a number of school girls, who were led to believe that membership in the sect would improve their scholastic records. This maneuver came to light when a Soka-Gakkai worker called at the home of one of the girls and demanded of her parents that they destroy their family Buddhist altar.

In another town a group of fanatics called at the home of the pastor of the Holiness Church, roused him from bed, and demanded that he convert to Soka-Gakkai and become the leader of their local group. When he refused to comply, his visitors rushed into the church and laid it waste. Official inquiries into this incident led to the further discovery that in that area proselytizers often had solicited members through extortion and blackmail and had forced their way into homes to destroy family altars.