

## RELIGION AND MODERN LIFE II

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(A report of three Round Table Conferences)

(Continued from Vol. I No. 4)

**Note:** The designations used to identify the religious tradition of the participants are as follows: B—Buddhist, (Jōdo [j], Nichiren [n], Shin [s], Shingon [sg], Zen [z], C—Christian, both Catholic [c] and Protestant [p], S—Shinto sects (Fusō-kyō [f], Misogi-kyō [m]), SS—Shrine Shinto, O—Others (Konkō-kyō [k], Seichō-No-Ie [s], Tenri-kyō [t], World Messianity [m])

### V. Modernization of Japan and Religion

*In discussing modernization, a sharp contrast appeared between Shinto and Buddhism, which have grown up within the Japanese tradition, and Christianity, which was introduced into this country with a background of the Western civilization.*

#### The Modernization of Japan

SS The modernization of Japan seems to mean basking in the Western rational, scientific spirit. I think that it is very important for us to understand clearly the defects in such a spirit and for Japan not to be spoiled by them.

SS Since the Meiji era stress has been laid on human reason and phenomena have been grasped from the standpoint of the independent subjectivity (*shutai-sei*)\* of man. Consequently, the kami are nothing but a mental phenomenon. However, such an idea has never existed in traditional Shinto.

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\* The term *shutai-sei* (主体性) is translated "independent subjectivity" to distinguish it from *shukan-sei* (主観性) which is translated "subjectivity." The term *shutai-sei* apparently has reference to Martin Buber's concept of "I-ness," or "I-consciousness." Ed.

I think that it was the Japanese classical scholars, who appeared in the latter days of the Tokugawa shogunate, that clarified this subject. We should wrestle with the ancient Shinto again and sense the breath of the ancient kami. I think that this is the form which a renaissance of Shinto may take.

C<sub>c</sub> I stated that modernization implies two ways. One is right modernization in which the authority of God or some religious authority is firmly established and, thereby, all worldly matters are dealt with rationally. The other is wrong modernization in which God or religion's authority is denied and earthly matters are regarded as absolute and become irrationalized and authoritative, although seeking rationality or equality. I wonder if the wrong modernization was introduced to Japan. In order to deal with this world in a thoroughly scientific and rational manner God or religion's authority should be established. In this sense modernization can be said to be the establishment of religion's authority in society. In Japan modernization has taken the position of denying this. I think that this is a wrong kind of modernization and a misuse of it.

C<sub>p</sub> In Japan modernization is not fully realized and the individual awakening or social consciousness bears no fruit. Therefore, the criticism of modernization that has arisen in the West cannot be applied to this country. If it were applied, it would cause Japan to become reactionary and would result in a return to the pre-modern. In the West criticism of modernization has arisen after its complete assimilation.

B<sub>z</sub> In the case of Europe the modern age came after over-

coming the pre-modern age. Today the time has come when the modern age is to be overcome. Japan became modernized in one leap by borrowing European modernization. Therefore her pre-modernity is not yet overcome but remains as it was. I think that in this sense modernization has not yet been realized in Japan.

If Japan were to overcome the modern age which has arisen in Europe, it would fall into an anachronism and at worst would return to pre-modernity. In Japan it is necessary to clear away pre-modernity before overcoming modernization.

**B<sub>2</sub>** The Japanese people have a tendency toward pseudo-rationalism which treats the kami or buddhas with contempt. However, the idea of overcoming modernization is being introduced. This seems to complicate the problem, because in the process of modernization the Japanese have become aware of its defects.

**C<sub>c</sub>** I think that in the case of Japan it is necessary to discriminate between irrational and super-rational things. This means that we should break through or rationalize pre-modern, irrational things first, and then approach the super-rational. I feel that there is a danger of concealing the irrationality of Japanese life under the name of overcoming the modern age.

**B<sub>3</sub>** The irrationality of Japan may be a defect, but the people have been satisfied with it from ancient times. This irrationality seems to have something useful for the West.

**B<sub>2</sub>** Christians seem to have a dogma that Western civilization or Christianity is the highest in the world. I think that you should frankly learn the Japanese climate and Shinto customs.

S<sub>f</sub> I should like to have both the Christians and Buddhists take another look at the reason why even at present we can be contented with the faith of irrational Shinto. In human society there are many things which cannot be treated rationally. As human life is rationalized and modernized, the human mind seeks the irrational. So I think that those who cry for rationalism do not understand this character of human beings.

C<sub>o</sub> I have introduced you to a certain literary critic's view that modernization has six phases, (1) the political phase (democracy), (2) the economic phase (capitalism), (3) the industrial phase (factory production, mechanization), (4) the educational phase (compulsory education), (5) the military phase (a national army), and (6) the consciousness phase (individualism). I think that the most important questions for Japan are democracy and individualism, which Japan failed to realize after the Meiji Restoration. Although the other phases of modernization in Japan have progressed as in the leading countries of Europe, these two have not yet been successful. I think that the reason for this is that these two are human problems which cannot be brought about in a short time. Because Japan after the Meiji Restoration tried to become a modern country as quickly as possible, these phases have been left unfinished and the country has become crippled.

In regard to the election system, although it is modernized, in regard to mutual relations, which should support and maintain the system, there remain very pre-modern elements, such as the boss-gang system. For example, we often hear

that in the country bosses are so influential that they direct the villagers how to cast their votes. Also in the other phases, the economic, industrial, educational, and so forth, in so far as man is responsible for them, problems remain. In short, Japan is not yet completely modernized in regard to human beings and this means that modernization is not yet entirely established.

C<sub>c</sub> As a familiar example of Japanese pre-modernity, there is the feudalistic human relationship found in the Japanese family system. Of course, there is some virtue in this and some Christians think that this virtue should be adopted. But, while the virtue itself is alright, it is an obstacle to the discovery of individual personality. Japanese religious leaders are apt to regard this virtue in the same light as virtue or love in a religious sense. Here-in may be found the anachronism or conservativeness of Japanese religionists.

### **Modernization and the Emperor System**

C<sub>c</sub> The emperor system in Japan is one of the major problems in the modernization of this country. The original Japanese emperor system may have been different in its character from the absolute monarchies seen in Europe. The emperor system, however, was made into something like an absolute monarchy by the Meiji government and was solidified into a kind of ideology.

In Europe this idea of absolute monarchism was destroyed by the bourgeois revolution and has become a thing of the past ; but in the process of modernization the former absolute monarchism of Europe was introduced into Japan,

and this was applied to the emperor system, which is continuing till today. Monarchism still remains in England also, but it is remarkably different from the former absolute monarchism.

I believe that Japanese modernization and the emperor system are inseparable problems and yet an important matter for Japanese religions. What do the Shinto members think about this point?

**SS** It was in the postwar period that the emperor system began to be much discussed. In the pre-war days, the system was spontaneously merged into our lives and never discussed. Anyway, I suppose that a half of the present Shinto priests approve of the emperor system and the other half do not.

From the viewpoint of Shinto it is a common idea that the Emperor is a kami. Because human beings themselves are born from Musubi-no-kami<sup>a</sup> (the kami of birth and growth), and are all endowed with the kami nature, they are kami. From the historic viewpoint and in respect to his true character, the Emperor is regarded as possessing a higher sanctity than we do.

**B<sub>z</sub>** Why do you regard the Emperor as a higher existence?

**SS** Because the Emperor was destined to be the lord of Japan from the time of the Sun Goddess.

**Chairman** In other words, the historic status of the Emperor is approved, isn't it.

**S<sub>m</sub>** The relation of the Emperor to us is something like the relation between a head family and its branches.

**S<sub>f</sub>** We feel an intimacy toward the Emperor like we feel to-

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a. 産靈神

ward our head family. In this sense I agree with the provision of the Constitution which states that the Emperor is regarded as a symbol.

**Chairman** I think that such an idea is the standpoint of the former State Shinto. I know some people have the idea that Shrine Shinto should definitely be freed from its chauvinism and ideology and become a religion now. What do you think about it?

**S<sub>f</sub>** From the standpoint of Sectarian Shinto, I think that it would be better for Shrine Shinto to be what it was.

**SS** After World War II Shrine Shinto underwent a great change. However, from the viewpoint of Sectarian Shinto, Shrine Shinto seems to be lacking in the character of religion, and Shrine Shinto itself is not able to become the same as Sectarian Shinto. So I think that Shrine Shinto had better maintain its pre-war status.

**S<sub>m</sub>** Our Sectarian Shinto exists as a religion. Therefore, Shrine Shinto should remain as it was in order to keep its ideological position. It is not necessary for it to become a religion.

**Chairman** At one time the Japanese state developed for several centuries around the Emperor and at the end of the Edo period this idea was stressed. It was then that Shinto developed with the Emperor as its center. This resulted in the establishment of State Shinto. However, there is also the spontaneous, natural Shinto, that is, the folk religion, which has existed from ancient times. Now, in connection with the separation of Shrine Shinto and State Shinto, which do you mean, a return to folk Shinto or do you mean for

Shinto to become a world religion. This would be a worthy question to consider.

C<sub>p</sub> It may be said that religions were reduced to obscurity by the establishment of the Emperor system. In Japan, the politicians did not understand religion. On the contrary, they tried to utilize it. Therefore, Buddhism and the other religions could not exert their proper influence in this country.

In Europe, the establishment of fundamental human rights in politics, for example, was developed by religion. Therefore, it can be said that politics in Europe was oriented from a broad religious standpoint. This is not the case in Japan.

C<sub>p</sub> The idea in Europe is that the state or the government is not absolute but temporal.

When Hirobumi Itō<sup>a</sup> drew up the Meiji Constitution, he said that in Europe Christianity had been the norm or the axis of its constitutions but that Japan had nothing like that and, therefore, he had set up the Emperor as the axis. I think that herein lies the special character of the Japanese understanding of religion.

In Japan, the lofty nature of religion is not recognized. The power of the state lays hold of the life of human beings. In modern Europe this phenomenon occurred in some places; and it was this that was welcomed and further developed, and finally led to the modernization of this country. From this viewpoint, I think that Japanese modernization in its true sense, or religious modernization, lies in the recovery of the territory proper to religion.

**Chairman** Buddhism did not confront Japanese authoritarianism

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a. 伊藤博文

but rather supported it. What was the reason for this?

**Chairman** Ancient Japan was not yet ready to accept the dynamic, broad, world view and so Buddhism was obliged to merge itself with Japanese customs. In order to be assimilated, of course, Buddhism had to possess this potential. I think Buddhism, which was introduced into Japan at that time, had an assimilable nature. The introduction of Buddhism into Japan was made through China, where it had been merged with the Chinese social status system. If it had been introduced directly from India, it might not have compromised, and hence might not have been assimilated.

### **The Modernization of Japanese Religions**

**C<sub>k</sub>** It is said that Japan was modernized after the Meiji Restoration, but this modernization was not achieved by itself. Japan fell into the illusion of being modernized merely by the transplantation of Western culture, because this country was too hasty to overtake the senior countries of the West. In regard to Japanese religions, however, modernization in its true sense seems to lie in emancipation from magic, liberation from the power of the state, and the abolition of authoritarianism.

**C<sub>p</sub>** What impresses us about Japanese religions is that they are lacking in a consciousness of social problems or the social structure. I think the modernization of Japanese religions lies in having such a consciousness. In this direction Japanese religions should go for modernization.

**B<sub>j</sub>** Japan's "new religions" look modernized in their form, but the contents of many seem to be as old as ever. The

doctrines are preached in connection with the emperor system or the family system. They are also rich in magic.

**B<sub>s</sub>** How do the Shinto participants think about the universality of Shinto?

**SS** As a rule, as man settled down a religion or kami concerned with the race or the state was devised.

**C<sub>p</sub>** If so, does this mean that in America there is an American kami and in England an English kami?

**SS** Yes. But I think that they should not be in a state of rivalry like local barons or be opposing each other's understanding. They should have a common universality in keeping the special interest of each.

During the wartime, Shinto energetically advocated the principle of "the eight corners of the world under one roof" (*Hakkō-Ichū-ia*, that is, "the universe-is-one principle"). However, this meant neither that the Japanese Emperor should be the sovereign of the world, nor that shrines should be built everywhere to paint all things with a Shinto color. It meant that each should be independent.

**C<sub>p</sub>** Then, does this mean that a religion should be rooted in a race or a country. If so, how could Christianity or others religions exist in Japan?

**SS** I think that so-called Japanized Christianity is desirable in this country. If Buddhism had remained as primitive Indian Buddhism, it would not have been prosperous in Japan.

**B<sub>j</sub>** Don't you think it necessary for Shinto to change over from a racial religion to a universal religion?

**SS** As for me, I don't think it necessary. I don't agree,

a. 八紘一宇

however, with racialism which advocates that only Japan should be saved and only Japan should be superior. I think a racial religion which has grown through the climate and the ancestral tradition of its country should have the universality to cope with the religions of the world. As Dr. Toynbee said, a racial religion will be able to naturally realize universality only if it has the factor to save the world. The term "world" of the so-called world religions does not mean that it spreads over the world.

**C<sub>p</sub>** Today's Japan is being developed from a closed society to a society open to the world. In this regard the way of existence of past Japanese religions seems to be questionable. In the case of Christianity, on the contrary, it seems to be questionable how far it has penetrated Japanese society proper and taken root in it.

**Chairman** It can be said that in Europe, where Christianity exists, modernization has already been realized to a fair extent and that it is not taken up as a problem as frequently as it is by Japanese Buddhism and Shinto. As for Christianity in Japan today, adaptation to the Japanese climate is a more pressing problem than modernization.

**C<sub>c</sub>** Because there was a rupture between the introduction of Kirishitan and that of Christianity after the Meiji Restoration Christianity may be said to be quite new to Japan. In this sense, adaptation to the Japanese climate is a very important matter for Christianity.

**C<sub>p</sub>** In comparing Japanese Christianity and European Christianity, it is clearly understood how firmly the latter is established in its tradition. Japanese Christianity has not

yet taken root in Japan. We Japanese Christians have sometimes been envious of the indigenization of Japanese Buddhism!

**C<sub>c</sub>** I feel that it is very difficult for Christianity to take root in the Japanese soil.

**Chairman** The time-honored Japanese Shinto and Buddhism, which has well over a thousand years of history in this country, may be an example, good or bad, for Christianity. However, Shinto and Buddhism must learn the meaning of modernization from Christianity.

**C<sub>p</sub>** I think that up to the termination of the war Japan continued as a pseudo-religious state which, although it formally adopted the principle of the separation of church and state, actually stood for the unity of church and state and for the absolute respect of the Emperor. Rational thinking and respect for the individual were possible only within the community of a family system analogous to the state of the emperor system. Protestantism, which was introduced into Japan with the background of the civic ethics of Europe and America of the the nineteenth century, may be said to be unsuitable to Japan.

**C<sub>p</sub>** When we are looking at the rural scenery of Japan where the harvested sheaves of rice are placed in order, we cannot but have a feeling which combines the sad and the beautiful. We Christians also can understand that in Japan defeat is beautiful, not dreadful. Looking at such scenery, I wonder if Christian eschatology might be acceptable to the Japanese climate. If the Japanese people had received it, I think that Japan would change in quality to some extent.

**SS** Protestantism was taken over to America and, after being assimilated there, became American Christianity. Therefore, Christianity in Japan should also become Japanized. At this point Shinto and other indigenous religions ought to be helpful models.

**B<sub>j</sub>** It will also be helpful to note that as Buddhism was Japanized and took root in the ground of this country to become a Japanese religion, it lost the aspect of a world religion.

**B<sub>n</sub>** In the early years of Meiji, the Buddhists agitated for the expulsion of Christianity. They attacked Christianity for the reason that it was non-Japanese and irrational. Later, however, after reconsidering its position, Buddhists realized that religion should transcend racial characteristics or mere rationality.

### **Modernization and Europeanization**

**Chairman** About the time that European civilization was introduced into Japan and "civilization and enlightenment" was glorified, the word "modern" seems to have been used to indicate a mixture of things Western and things Christian. Around 1887—1897, however, the people seemed to discover the fact that the problem of modernization or Westernization was not in point of fact the same as Christianization. Recently, the question has been very widely considered as to whether modernization can be distinguished from Westernization. If this is possible, then the question will arise as to whether the modernization of Buddhism can take place without its Westernization?

**B<sub>sg</sub>** The opponents of Westernization seem to insist upon Japanese modernization which does not include Westernization. It may become necessary to clarify what such modernization is.

**C<sub>p</sub>** I think that there is a common element in Westernization, modernization, and things Christian. In a word, it is democracy. In other words democracy, which is a special feature of Westernization or modernization, is backed by Christianity. The family system or the feudal structure in Japan, however, has been supported by the indigenous religions.

In Japan today democracy, as it appears in Westernization and modernization supported by Christianity, and the feudalism, supported by the past Japanese society and religions, are clashing with each other and are creating a whirlpool.

**Chairman** Trying to discriminate between things Western and things modern seems to be a evidence that the Japanese people intend to modernize themselves as Japanese. This means that the Japanese people are to wrestle with modern rationalism which is involved in things Western, instead of accepting those things as they are. This may be possible only in Japan and can hardly be understood by Europeans. This may also be said to be a demand of the Japanese.

— To be Continued —