

# THE RELIGIOUS VIEWPOINT OF THE JAPANESE LAYMAN

(A National Broadcasting Corporation Program.\*)

## INTRODUCTION

**Announcer** It is often said that we Japanese have no religious tendency, that we are weak in matters of belief. Yet in our homes are to be found both Buddhist altars and miniature Shinto shrines. In our kitchens and elsewhere various paper charms are hung. Moreover, in the present-day religious world we find Buddhism, Christianity, Shinto, and many so-called new religions which, with all their sects and subsects, include hundreds of thousands or even millions of believers. This is indeed a rare phenomenon in the world. However, despite this, we cannot say that a religious spirit is being fostered among us and is alive in our midst. What is the reason for this? The problem appears to center in the Japanese way of thinking about religion.

(Each person interviewed speaks for himself without comment. Ed.)

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\* Note: As part of a series of broadcasts on "Let's Learn about Japan," a special educational program entitled "A Series on the Japanese People" was broadcast five times beginning August 8, 1960 from 8:00 to 9:00 p.m. each evening. The purpose of this special program was to present "some of the main spiritual ideals of the Japanese people." Five themes were discussed: "Cherry blossoms and Mount Fuji," "Nature and the Japanese," "The Religious Viewpoint of the Japanese People," "Things New and Old," "The Popular View of the Hero," and "A New Patriotism." This article which was printed in the December 1960 issue of *NHK Hoso Bunka (NHK Broadcast Culture)* is a summary of the second program of the series and is presented with the permission of the National Broadcasting Corporation of Japan.

PERSONAL FAITH

Deeply Impressed by Wartime Experiences

*Sohachi Yamaoka, a writer*—"I was born in a Buddhist family and was taught from childhood to fold my hands in worship before the Buddhist altar. During the sixty days prior to the termination of the war, I stayed in Kanoya<sup>b</sup> in Kagoshima<sup>c</sup> prefecture, where there was a base from which the suicide pilots took off to attack Okinawa. Every day I witnessed the tragic scene of young men taking off never to return. This experience forced me to consider seriously what Buddhism really means, instead of just folding my hands before the altar. Now I enshrine all their spirits [in an altar], which I call the 'Goddess of Mercy of the Air' (*Kūchā Kannon\**), since all of them disappeared into the air.

"With this problem in mind I asked myself: what should Buddhism's most deeply-felt desire be? Instead of sticking to sectarian ways of thinking, where—considering the aim of Buddhism as a whole—should we find its major contact with the present age?

"I reached the conclusion that in Buddhism, if one wishes to lead a truly peaceful and free life, he should be free from the possessive instinct. I think this should be our objective.

"There are various grades of belief. One is very intellectual, a belief which cannot exist apart from rationality. Another is so emotional as to be superstitious if it goes too far. I feel

\* 空中觀音 Kannon (Jap.) or *Avalokiteśvara* (Skt.) is a bodhisattva who is regarded as the embodiment of compassion.

a. 山岡莊八    b. 鹿屋    c. 鹿兒島

that the Japanese people are very apt to run to superstition. Thus, quite apart from personal attachments to a particular sect or branch, Buddhism should come to life again as the all-embracing salvation-religion of the world."

### At the Kannon Temple in Asakusa, Tokyo

*A sixty-year-old contractor* — "The world situation being what it is, I cannot help praying to the Buddha for health and safety. In such a world I cannot fail to worship my ancestors every morning and evening, even though others may think it queer. I worship in order that the members of my family may lead a peaceful and healthy life and that I myself may always work well.

*A young man from Fukushima<sup>a</sup>* — "The present world has become strange, with 'beatnik' groups and the like. I am twenty-two years old, but I cannot agree with such a way of life. I have just prayed that we may avoid such a world; that we may avoid war and live in peace.

"I don't think I have any particular beliefs. I think I worship for the purpose of developing my feelings (*kimochi*<sup>b</sup>) into convictions (*shinnen*<sup>c</sup>).

"I don't stick to any one sect, like the Shingon Sect, for example, I think that we should have a definite object [of worship]."

*A forty-year-old woman following a "gay" trade.* — "After all, everybody has their desires, so I too earnestly make my requests . . . . . When I worship, I have the feeling that my requests will be granted. If I don't worship, I feel after all

a. 福島 b. 氣持 c. 信念

that . . . well . . . that something is missing. The reason is that I want the divine protection<sup>a</sup> of Kannon. I have children, you see, and must send money to them ; so I ask Kannon to make it possible for me to earn money . . . .”

### Sōka Gakkai Faith

*A woman follower of Sōka Gakkai<sup>a</sup>.*—“An invalid, who was a member of Sōka Gakkai was given up as a hopeless case at Tokyo University Hospital, but he lived seven years longer and then died the other day. Said to be on his death-bed, he got up and went right on with his daily work for seven more years. By virtue of his faith, he fulfilled his obligations before dying. He lived until all his daughters had grown up. I have a firm belief like that.”

*A twenty-two-year-old school teacher and an adherent of Sōka Gakkai*—“When I was a junior in high school, I accompanied a group to Ōita<sup>b</sup> in Kyūshū<sup>c</sup> to secure new believers, but at that time I was not much interested in religion. I went because I felt vaguely that it would be interesting. I stayed a week and found that fifty-seven families were converted. Before that there was not a single person in Ōita who believed in this religion. During that week I witnessed evidence of really remarkable piety. I grasped the fact that it was a splendid reality. I thought that if I didn't try it I would be the loser. After returning home I became a sincere follower.”

### Risshō Kōsei Kai Faith

“I used to be selfish and lacking in womanly tenderness.

a. 創価学会 b. 大分 c. 九州

Therefore, I entered Kōsei Kai<sup>a</sup> in order to foster womanliness, and hoping to serve others with a kind heart.”

### **Tenri-kyō Faith**

“There were six of us brothers and sisters, but five have died. I am the only one left. Mother was converted to Tenri-kyō<sup>b</sup> first. Then I woke up to the fact that I should have helped the others. Now I have given up my business and spend all my time helping others. I have become quite weak, but I walk about every day looking for people who are weak like myself and who are at their wit's end, so that I may become their counsellor.”

### **Konkō-kyō Propaganda**

“This religion teaches that we should not look down on the teachings of other religions. Wherever you go, kami\* is kami. It teaches that we should at least bow before some kami. Therefore, I don't like to criticize other religions. Instead, I just devote myself wholeheartedly to my faith. If others wish to bow their heads before other kami, that is all right too. This is what I have been taught from childhood. I don't know about others but, as for me, this is my attitude.”

### **A Firmly Rooted Tradition of Ancestor Worship related to Buddhism**

*A building contractor—a third-generation believer of Kon-*

*a.* 倭成会, an abbreviation for Risshō Kōsei Kai 立正倭成会。 *b.* 天理教

\* “Kami” is a Shinto term roughly equivalent to “deity” or “spirit.”

In this journal it is not italicized because it is treated as an English word such as kimono, Shinto, etc.

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*kō-kyō*—on the *Buddhist summer festival for ancestral spirits* —“Our religion also observes a festival for the ancestral spirits, so I ask my church to hold a service for my ancestors. In addition, because Buddhism has long been a tradition in our home, I have a Buddhist priest come to my house at the appropriate season. We hold a Buddhist service then because the funerals were Buddhist.”

## RELIGION AND SOCIAL PROBLEMS

### **Risshō Kōsei Kai**

*Mr. Motoaki Sano,<sup>a</sup> director of Risshō Kōsei Kai, concerning the attitude of that group toward social problems, especially the Japan-United States Security Treaty* —“This organization does not tell its believers what they must do about this problem. However, at that time our president expressed his opinion as to what the denominational view should be; namely, that under the present circumstances it was necessary to study whether this Security Treaty was good or bad, and that in any case we should adapt ourselves to the course of events.”

### **Konkō-kyō**

*Mr. Hitoshi Hata<sup>b</sup>, head of the Tokyo branch of Konkō-kyō* —“Konkō-kyō does not tell its members what attitude to take or how to think about this problem. This generation should seek what is best for Japan. Concerning this Security Treaty there are some who oppose it, some who agree with it, and still others who advocate an entirely different way of thinking

<sup>a</sup>. 佐野元章 <sup>b</sup>. 畑 齋

about it. [As for Konkō-kyō believers] the problem should always be viewed from the standpoint of the faith of Konkō-kyō....”

### A Buddhist view

*Mr. Nittatsu Fujii<sup>a</sup>, chief abbot of Nippon-zan Myōhōji<sup>b</sup>—*  
“Religion has a mission to bring about peace. Therefore, we can not approve an instrument of struggle. We should oppose the Security Treaty. We are opposed to it because this pact presupposes war. Instead of helping to establish a peaceful Japan, it assumes that Japan may be attacked by a potential enemy. Buddhism should oppose whatever sanctions the slaughter of men. For this reason we are in favor of the peace movement.”

## THE CHARACTER OF GOD—THE IDEA OF WITHDRAWAL—DISCIPLINE—THE RELIGIOUS SPIRIT

### Christian views

*A Protestant Christian, Mr. Mikio Sumiya<sup>c</sup>, professor of the Faculty of Economics, Tokyo University—*“I think that what is fundamental to the religious outlook of the Japanese people is the idea of a fusion or conformity between man and nature. In other words, where man seems to be absorbed or to empty himself into nature, there the Japanese people seem to find a certain religious experience. Such an experience may well appear to be a transparent world, but the problem is that man

a. 藤井日達 b. 日本山妙法寺 c. 隅谷三喜男

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himself may be lost in that world...

“When I consider the spiritual history of Japan and Japanese thought, I cannot help thinking that in Japan man has lost himself. The most serious problem of the Japanese people then, is to realize their human nature. How can this human character be realized? What is needed is faith in One who is Wholly Other and yet at the same time has the character of a personal God. I have found such a faith in Christianity. When one depends on the Gospel of Christ, he becomes a man for the first time. He becomes a personality. In this I believe there is a new course open to the Japanese people to live as authentic human beings.”

*Mr. Rinzo Shiina<sup>a</sup>, a Christian writer* — “As a young man, I was devoted to organizing a Communist cell at my place of work. At that time I knew nothing about the true character of religion. I just took part in anti-religious movements. Without thinking much about it, I was convinced that, as Lenin said, religion was a bourgeois policy for controlling the people, an opiate for the masses. In fact, even now I think that the idea of religion as opium could be applied to the Japanese attitude toward religion up to the present time. Just yesterday when I spoke with a certain religious teacher about the peace movement, he said, ‘When we participate in the peace movement, we cannot help being stained by politics. The truly religious life consists in going off by oneself and praying quietly to the kami.’”

“I feel that this way of thinking is closely connected with the Japanese idea of withdrawal. In other words, to enter the

a. 姓名 巖三



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Buddhist world is to separate ourselves from this mundane world, to cut ourselves off from the society in which we human beings live and to lead a sequestered life. This is said to be a truly religious life; but I cannot understand why it is called this.

“We Japanese, generally speaking, are deluded by this idea that religion means to abandon this world. But religion essentially means no such thing. At least, it has not been so for me. I was baptized into the Christian faith some six years ago because I wanted to become the kind of person that could live more abundantly than I had found possible under ordinary circumstances. In other words, I was baptized in order to become the kind of man who can live more vitally not only in daily life but also in social relations.”

### A Buddhist Businessman's View

*Mr. Benzaburō Katō<sup>a</sup>, president of the Kyōwa Fermentation Company and head of The Buddhist Layman's Society (Zaike Bukkyō Kyōkai<sup>b</sup>), a non-sectarian organization for Buddhist laymen —* “Discipline characterizes the whole of our lives. This is what we feel after we enter religion . . . . . Before we enter, life seems to be nothing more than a struggle between competing powers; but after we enter religion and look back at our daily life, we see that it is really a severe training ground. In a word, our daily life is discipline. It is Buddhism that permits us to see this. When we see this, Buddhism has really become a vital force in our daily life. My fundamental view of business management is being largely changed by the

a. 加藤弁三郎 b. 在家仏教協会

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teachings of Buddhism. This is a matter of my innermost heart. If I spoke of it, it would sound pedantic. I don't speak of it to anybody because it is my personal affair. For this reason, I never so much as mention Buddhism in my company. I never even dream of utilizing Buddhism as a means of managing my company. Buddhism should be a matter of inner concern for each of us. Therefore, it may be recommended, but it should not be forced upon others. To take advantage of Buddhism as a means of business administration seems to me to be entirely off the track."

### A Buddhist Movie Producer

A Nichiren Buddhist, Mr. Masaichi Nagata<sup>a</sup> president of the Daiei Movie Production Company — "I'd like to tell you in terms of my own experience something of how important faith is. In the first place, Japanese young men and women today have become known abroad under the label of Zengakuren<sup>b</sup>. Zengakuren is as well known as Mount Fuji. If we look back at the kinds of young people that have appeared during the fifteen years since the war, we find, first, demobilized soldiers engaging in such things as black market activities; next come the *arbeit*\* students; then the *aloha* gangs, the *mambo* gangs, the "beat" generation, and now the Zengakuren. The truth is that they are seeking outlets for their youthful energy, through violence, through sex, through gambling. . . . Their conduct has no deep roots. Incidentally, this is not limited to

a. 永田雅一 b. 全学速

\* The German word *arbeit* is common parlance in Japan where it refers to part-time employment.

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Japan. There are *mambo* gangs and the "beat" generation in Europe and America too. They seem quite similar to the groups in Japan, but in fact they are quite different. This difference stems from religious faith.

"Americans and Europeans are trained from childhood to go to the nearest church and worship for an hour on Sundays. Being taken to church by their parents from the time they are still young, they gradually develop habits which foster the religious spirit. By the time they attain the age of discretion, if they don't go to church and pray on Sundays, they feel [uneasy]. Thus, though their conduct appears dangerous, at bottom they are fundamentally sound. They do not go beyond a certain limit. This is due to their faith.

"The Japanese, because they lack faith, are apt to go to extremes.

"For this reason, I feel that having faith is a matter for great happiness and delight. I am a Buddhist, but whether one is a Buddhist or a Christian, I don't think there is much difference in faith."

## A PANEL DISCUSSION

### **Desire for Worldly Benefits-Characteristics of the Faith of the Common People**

*On the basis of the foregoing interviews, a panel discussion was held with Associate Professor Ichi Oguchi<sup>a</sup> of Tokyo University, Professor Saburō Ienaga<sup>b</sup> of the Tokyo University of Education, and Mr. Tetsutarō Kawakami<sup>c</sup>, a critic, as*

a. 小口偉一 b. 家永三郎 c. 河上徹太郎

*participants and Mr. Katsuichirō Kamei<sup>a</sup> as Master of Ceremonies (MC).*

**MC** "Problems of faith are delicate. It is difficult to express them in words. In fact it is quite presumptuous of us to discuss them just on the basis of what was said in these interviews. However, I have separated what was said into three or four problems . . . First, let us consider the worship of the Asakusa Kannon."

### Worldly Benefits

**Oguchi** "It has often been said that Japanese religion is concerned with worldly benefits. This cannot be denied. The people visit famous shrines or temples regardless of sect or doctrine in order to seek favors. This is the popular faith. What interests me most is that the word conviction (*shinnen<sup>b</sup>*) has appeared very often. To distinguish these terms, belief (*shinkō<sup>c</sup>*) conviction (*shinnen*), and religion (*shūkyō<sup>d</sup>*) academically may be very difficult. But, while there may be some who take their belief as a conviction by which they carry on their daily life, most ordinary people are inclined to seek divine favors or worldly benefits."

**MC** "It is generally considered that religions which seek worldly benefits are low and that those dealing with spiritual problems are high."

**Kawakami** "I don't share that opinion."

**Oguchi** "Nor do I. When religious leaders have said that their religion was right or good, they did so in order to establish a criterion for judging those religions which seek

a. 亀井勝一郎 b. 信念 c. 信仰 d. 宗教

worldly benefits as bad or superstitious. From the standpoint of the science of religion, this is regarded as a problem of magic and religion."

**Kawakami** "Mr. Oguchi has said just what I was going to say. The second person interviewed said very clearly, 'Mine is not belief (*shinkō*) but conviction (*shinnen*).' This being the first time it was said, it made a strong impressiou on me. The Japanese are said to have little religious spirit or little moral consciousness, but they do desire conviction. They want conviction, not by recognizing it in religion or something sectarian, nor yet in a transcendent kami, but by establishing it within themselves. . . . People in the neighborhood worship Kannon, as do those who pass by. If there is a Japanese religious spirit in such a place, it may be said that the Japanese do evince a very religious spirit."

**Ienaga** "Historically considered, I think that there is much reason for the fact that worldly benefits play an important role in the Japanese religious spirit. Japanese folk religion originated in the circumstance that the ancient Japanese people, whose principal industry was agriculture, expected a supernatural way to grow rice abundantly from the common rituals of the farm village. They gave thanks for a heavy crop in order that the rich harvest might be repeated the next year. It is natural, therefore, that the content of faith quite spontaneously became limited to the problems of this world. The stories we have just heard concerned individual desires: personal illness was cured, money was gained. This seems to show a new historical development. Individual desire has emerged from the communal as a result of social change.

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This is, however, linked in quality to the old."

### Religious Convictions

**MC** "In the statements we heard, the speakers used such words as, 'Our faith is our conviction (*shinnen*)'. This sounds emotional. It has no sharp point but sounds somewhat tender. It has no strong ego-centric feeling that they believe in something. This may be one aspect of the religious viewpoint of the Japanese people, and it may be the fundamental reason why, despite having so many religions, the Japanese are said to have no religion. In foreign countries, Christianity, for example, has something consistent about it, though it has had its ups and downs. Other religions or ideas are in such a relation to Christianity, that they have to confront it as a center. But such a powerful confrontation is not found in the Japanese tradition. The reason for this may lie in the fact that while there are various religions among the populace, it may also be said that they have no religion."

**Ienaga** "Solving every problem from the viewpoint of communal rituals may be going too far, but I think after all that in that approach lies a key for the solution of this problem. In my opinion in Japanese folk religion an individual does not enter a faith on his own initiative. He is born the subject of a certain tutelary deity, for example, and the vernal and autumnal festivals are an integral part of his daily life as annual events or customs almost separate from religious faith. If a religious faith continues in this form, it becomes spontaneously emotional. It does not confront other religions at all and does not struggle with them. I feel that one reason for the above-

mentioned mentality may be found in this situation.”

**Kawakami** “I have just read Mr. Kamei’s recent publication, *The Formation of the Ancient Intellectual Class*<sup>a</sup>, so I have a good chance to cheat! (Laughter) In the first place, according to your theory, as it relates to Mr. Ienaga’s view, when the Japanese people were afraid of nature, they turned to Shinto, and when a personal or human fear occurred, such as sickness or [a threat to] family prosperity, they turned to Buddhism. They had these two tendencies. In the second place, the Japanese religious mind cannot take a doctrinal form but always moves in the direction of feeling. I think that this also is a very important factor in the Japanese religious viewpoint.”

**Oguchi** “When we act as devotees (*ujiko*<sup>b</sup>) of a shrine, we sometimes cannot escape the social pressures of the community. In this sense it is rather important to see how a new religion functions when it enters a place where community feeling is very strong.”

### Organization Strength

**MC** “In regard to what you have just related concerning new religions, Sōka Gakkai and Tenri-kyō, for example, are very skillful in organization and in putting their principles into practice. The organization power of such new religions seems to be well-adapted to the Japanese people. They have a million or two million believers. The Socialist Party has only fifty thousand members at most . . . . . (Laughter). I wonder whether the reason why the new religions take root in many

a. 古代智識階級の成立 b. 氏子

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classes is that they are peculiarly well suited to the Japanese national character. If so, what is the nature of the relationship?"

**Oguchi** "I don't know whether the national character changes with the times or not, but it may be said that obedience to authority is a Japanese national characteristic. I think such authoritarianism has produced faith concerned with worldly benefits. There is a difference between Sōka Gakkai and Tenri-kyō in their organization. Sōka Gakkai is, so to speak, a secular authority. It places the sacred authority in the temple. In this sense Sōka Gakkai has a more efficient organization than Tenri-kyō."

**Ienaga** "Anyway, I think that such a strong organizational force as that should be studied in another sense by those who intend to create a social organization today. Recently some young scholars of the science of religion are studying the true character of the new religions. Instead of criticizing them as heretical religions or superstitions, they are paying special attention to their power of organization. I agree with them in this regard, but I think that the problem of religion should not be viewed solely from the standpoint of numbers. A study of their organizational power, therefore, may offer a chance for a consideration of the incompetence of reform bodies, but to overestimate this matter in the hope of getting at the true character of a religion is more than I can agree to."

**Kawakami** "I can give only an outsider's opinion, but it would seem better for us not to think that the new religions are authoritarian. In other words, their strong point is that they do not interfere very much with the daily life. Although



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the organization may be absolute, they permit a large extent of freedom in an individual's daily life. Turning our eyes to each believer, however, we can see that his own convictions are maintained by the authoritative power of the organization. This dualism may be one of the strong points of the new religions in present-day Japan."

**Oguchi** "Almost all the new religions are in principle layman-centered. They cannot, however, remain layman-centered to the end. A part of the believers must become professional. Herein lies a problem. Another problem is that of the form in which an organization should perpetuate itself when it is centered in a superior personality, a founder-like character."

**MC** "I am interested in groups called associations (*kō*) which visit the Grand Shrine of Ise or the Narita temple. They are operated by a community, a trade association, or the like in order to visit such religious places about once a year. From my non-professional viewpoint, it seems to me in a general sort of way that such a system has something to do with the organization of the new religions. What is your opinion?"

**Ienaga** "I don't know about this matter in detail, but when the community authority is dissolved and individual initiative is recognized, an association of this kind develops. The new religions seem to follow this same pattern."

## RELIGION AND STATE

**MC** "Let us now discuss the problem of religion and state."

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**Oguchi** "We should follow the principle of the separation of religious organizations from politics. In the case of a large religious organization, the problem of activities connected with elections arises. The leaders' opinion can have a great affect on a large number of votes. In this regard we have just heard the view of the president of Risshō Kōsei Kai on the Security Treaty problem."

**MC** "I doubt if it is right for a sectarian group as such to send a candidate to the Diet or to have a fixed policy in regard to national politics. What is your opinion?"

**Oguchi** "I think that this probably is understood by the religious organizations themselves. At the first election after the termination of World War II, many candidates from religious organizations ran for the House of Councillors, but Tenri-kyō and others have ceased to do this. I think they stopped on the basis of their experience."

**Ienaga** "I think that Japanese religions traditionally follow the politics of the group in power. Japanese folk religion is thoroughly fused with the customs of the particular locale in which it exists. Therefore, it cannot imagine a world other than the concrete one with which it is connected. It can only accept actuality as it is. Not only the folk religion but also Buddhism has a strong tendency always to be obedient to the authority in power.

"Pacification and Protection of the State" (*Chingo Kokka*<sup>a</sup>) is an example of this. However, not all did this. For example, Shinran<sup>b</sup> clearly opposed the political authority in its oppression of Jōdo Shin Buddhism saying, the sovereign as well as the

a. 鎮護國家 b. 親鸞

subjects run counter to the Law (*dharma*) and go against reason.\* This is because Shinran could take an attitude of thorough opposition to worldly authority. I think, however, that this is rather an exceptional phenomenon in the history of Japanese religion. I remember that one of the religious leaders interviewed said that people should adjust themselves to the present course of events. His words seem to express bluntly the characteristic Japanese religious attitude toward politics. If the attitude of thoroughly opposing contemporary conditions had been adopted, the idea of 'adjusting to the course of events' could not have emerged. That it has emerged is a very good example of the traditional Japanese attitude."

### **Intellectualistic Spirit: The Religious Viewpoint of the Intelligentsia**

**MC** "Did not Kanzō Uchimura, a renowned Christian of the Meiji era, teach us in a very good sense the spirit of resistance in a uniquely Japanese way in contrast with the past religious tradition of Japan?"

**Ienaga** "That is true, but numerically his movement is in the minority."

**Kawakami** "I think that resistance to society has not occurred in Japan. Uchimura's movement seems to prove it. He promoted a churchless Christianity. His spirit dwells in individuals, for example, in the spirit of Professor Tadao Yanaibara<sup>b</sup> and of Mr. Saneatsu Mushakōji<sup>c</sup>. It means that Uchimura's movement did not have the active power to affect society; and from

a. 内村鑑三 b. 矢内原忠雄 c. 武者小路実篤

\* quoted from "Kyō Gyō Shin Shō 教行信証." Shinran's main work.

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this point of view, Uchimura can be said to be a Japanese religious founder."

**Oguchi** "That is a point, worth grasping as a feature of the religious viewpoint of the intelligentsia."

**Kawakami** "Therefore, when Buddhism was first introduced into Japan, it was temporarily used as a tool of political struggle. However, when Christianity was introduced in the Meiji era, it did not struggle with Buddhism or Shinto. Instead, it fell into a kind of intellectualistic spirit."

**MC** "To take Meiji Buddhism as an example, when Christianity was introduced Buddhism should at least have shown surprise, because here it had to do with an entirely different religion. In fact, however, it never did this at all."

**Oguchi** "In this regard Mr. Sumiya referred to a personal God, but it seems difficult for the Japanese to understand a personal God in the Christian sense. This may sound queer; but it doesn't seem to fit the Japanese spiritually or materially. For them, god (*kami*) appears as a human deity who plays some such roles as a healer of disease, a controller of agriculture, and the like. They feel something strange in a transcendental, personal god."

**Ienaga** "According to Feuerbach, God is a projection of the human being. From this viewpoint, it may be said that the reason why the Japanese have no personal god lies in the fact that individual personality has never been developed in Japanese society. Christians may say that, unless the Japanese believe in Christianity, individual personality will not develop in this country; but, conversely speaking, because Japanese society is at a stage where individual personality is not recognized,

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Christianity is not accepted. This is reasoning in a circle. In this sense there is mutual reaction between them.

“I think that true faith, not limiting ourselves to Christianity, will not appear unless the prerequisite is met that the individual is clearly independent of society. If not, everything would be a matter of adapting to the contemporary situation. I think that the ideal religion will emerge when the independence of individuality is established and where it is supported by a strong religious belief.”

**MC** “Before the Meiji era, [that is, before 1868] the Japanese people had a tendency to become absorbed in nature and had no concept of either individuality or society; and this tendency was so strong at that time that the individual felt himself of no importance. When various social problems arose after the Meiji era, the religions of the past may be said to have done nothing to solve them. The same can be said about present-day religions. This problem may recur in the future. As Mr. Shiina [the Christian writer who had formerly been a communist cell organizer] said about Japanese quietism, we also have a desire to retire from the world and to be absorbed into nature. Therefore, the tendency is very strong for the Japanese to move in the direction of a poetic or aesthetic life.”

**Kawakami** “Mr. Shiina’s story made me stop short. I think that we cannot simply say that not taking concrete measures necessarily means Japanese quietism. Examples of quietism have been numerous even in foreign religions. There are persons who do not go out into society because, like many saints in the medieval period, they are absorbed in religion.”

**Oguchi** “In that case what we really see in his story is the

religious viewpoint of intellectuals like Mr. Shiina. People in general, however, have a religious inclination toward action in the secular world rather than toward quietism."

**Kawakami** "Yes. I am reminded that Mr. Benzaburō Katō referred to lay Buddhism. In his case it can be said that acting in actual social life is intrinsic to the religious mind."

### Youth and the New Religions

**MC** "There are more young devotees of religion than we think, aren't there?"

**Oguchi** "There are many recently."

**MC** "Have you observed them?"

**Ienaga** "I have not yet observed them, so I don't know too much about them, but I think that the energy of youth is bound to burst forth in various directions unless they face in the direction in which history is developing. Some go with the 'beatniks,' others to the new religions. I am afraid I am being disrespectful to the new religions when I compare them to the 'beatniks,' but after all both are historical phenomena."

**Kawakami** "The subject is confused because we criticize them indiscriminately as the generation of decadent or angry young men. For example, the spirit in which Mr. Shintarō Ishiwara\* goes for a ride in his yacht is a spirit of devoting oneself to one way. Ishiwara's yacht is a kind of new religion. I think that a young man can enter a new religion in this way."

**MC** "It is natural for them to seek convictions or a basis for spiritual reliance."

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\* 石原慎太郎 A popular young postwar novelist. The reference to his yacht is drawn from one of his novels.

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**Oguchi** "When they enter such a group, they find it quite different from their school life or work-a-day life. This may be another reason. They may find there what satisfies their own desire."

**Ienaga** "It may be very unscientific, not being based on statistics, but young men have come to occupy a very large role in society. However, the fact that young men have also appeared in the new religions should not be overestimated, if we compare the number who do so with that of the younger generation as a whole."

**MC** "We thought that young men in the postwar days would never enter a new religion. I was surprised to find that many young people do so."

**Oguchi** "It is because these religious organization as a matter of policy attach importance to their appeal to them."

**Ienaga** "It shows that these new religions have something to attract such a class which cannot be found in the traditional religions."

## SYNCRETISM

**MC** "We cannot reach any conclusion today as to 'the religious viewpoint of the Japanese people.' There are various different views. If Christianity is taken as an example, there is no principle which thoroughly penetrates Japanese life. It may be a Japanese characteristic that they are adaptable to all kinds of gods and generally take them all mildly, regardless of their good or bad sides."

**Oguchi** "The word 'syncretism' is often used to indicate

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things that are compromised and mixed. It means acceptance of anything without criticism. In the case of individuals, they accept anything convenient for them. One who excludes something seems to be a man of intelligence. Therefore, there is a difference between the religious viewpoint of the intelligentsia and that of the common people."

**MC** "I think that the distinction does not mean that one is better than the other."

**Oguchi** "It is a matter of difference in types."

**Kawakami** "As Japanese we are very sorry that syncretism is a characteristic of Japan, and that there is no clear strength of conviction, though, looking at things as a whole, I feel that there is a strong traditional way of penetrating things."

**MC** "Japan is, indeed, a difficult country, isn't it? There is everything in this country, but it does not seem to go straight ahead. This is simply the nature of Japan."

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