

WHAT IS RELIGION ?

Prepared by Yoshirō Tamura

(A Report of the Fifth Round Table Conference)

Introduction

Note: The Fifth Round Table Conference sponsored by the International Institute for the Study of Religions was held in August, 1960, at Lake Chūzenji with Dr. Fumio Masutani of Tokyo University of Foreign Studies as chairman. The ten young religious leaders participating in this conference, came from Buddhism (Jōdo, Shin, Shingon and Sōtō Zen), Catholic and Protestant Christianity, Shinnyō-en, Shrine Shinto, Tenri-kyō and World Messianity. The designations used to identify the religious traditions of the speakers are as follows: Ss—Shrine Shinto, Bsg—Shingon, Bj—Jōdo, Bs—Shin, Bz—Soto, Cc—Catholic, Cp—Protestant, Ot—Tenri-kyō, Om—World Messianity, Osn—Shinnyo-en.

I The Object of Worship

There are two main types of objects of worship: a personal God, the creator, and universal law. Christianity (Catholic and Protestant), World Messianity, and Tenri-kyō belong to the first type, although the Christian position differs from that of the others. Buddhism and Shinnyo-en belong to the second type. Shrine Shinto has a concept of deity, but it is not clearly defined and so stands in a class by itself.

The Catholic worships God, the Creator, who made man as a physical and spiritual being who seeks through his efforts to realize an eternally happy world. But this cannot be ac-

WHAT IS RELIGION ?

complished without God's revelation and a go-between (mediator). In the Old Testament, God revealed the way of salvation to the selected folk, the chosen people, and in the New Testament He sent Jesus Christ to this world. Jesus Christ is the go-between for God and man. He is the Son of God who leads man to the Kingdom of God. As the Word of God, he reveals the truth and the way to the eternal world. He says of himself, "I am the way, the truth, and the life."

The Protestant believes that God reveals Himself in the three aspects: Father, Son, and the Holy Spirit. God as Father is the creator of the universe. He is the Absolute Other for man who cannot understand without His revelation. The Father's love is shown through Jesus Christ, His Son, who came from God to man in order to save him. At present God reveals Himself through the Holy Spirit, that is, the power of God which lives in our minds (hearts), and works upon man.

For World Messianity the object of worship is the "Fundamental Main God" (*Konpon Shu Shin*)^a who is the creator of the universe. God is called "*Dai-kōmyō Shin-shin*,"^b that is, "the True God of Great Light," or "*Miroku Ōmikami*."^c This God is the same as "*Ame no Minaka-nushi no Kami*,"^d that is, the "Kami of the Center of Heaven" in Shinto. World Messianity comes from Shinto, and so it holds the concept that the one God is many or all gods at the same time. This God is also the personalized expression of universal law which rules all things. From this view point, this God is considered to be the ruler of this world. All phenomena is a manifesta-

a. 根本主神 b. 大光明真神 c. みろくおほみかみ d. 天之御中主神

WHAT IS RELIGION?

tion of this God's actions. World Messianity preaches that we should try to cooperate with other religions, because all religions were born through the Providence of this God and have the same origin.

The reason why their God is called "*Miroku Ōmi-kami*" is found in the idea that this God is the one who constitutes the world of Miroku*, that is, paradise on Earth (*Chijō Tengoku*)^a.

Tenri-kyō worships the Original God (*Moto no Kami*)^b who created man and the world from nothing. This God protects and rules all things in this world. He is not a God of awe, transcending us, but a merciful parent who loves us as his children. He is called "*Oya-gami*,"^c that is, the Parent God. He created human beings in order that they might have a Joyous Life (*Yōki-gurashi*)^d and that He could enjoy it with them. The Joyous Life is the ultimate goal for all human beings and the expression of their essential character. The meaning of life is to be found in this.

The object of worship in Shingon Buddhism is the Great Cosmic Buddha (*Dainichi*)^e. This absolute Buddha is also called "*Hosshin*" *Dainichi*," which unifies all special and concrete aspects of buddhas and bodhisattvas. This Buddha is the personalized expression of universal law (dharma), the character of which is void (*śūnya*).

From the standpoint of value, there cannot be found any difference between us and the Great Cosmic Buddha, but from

a. 地上天国 b. 元の神 c. 親神 d. 陽気ぐらし e. 大日 (Mahā-vairocana, Skt.) f. 法身 (dharma-kāya, Skt.)

* In Buddhism, 弥勒 (Maitreya, Skt.), the bodhisattva who is thought to be the Buddha of the future.

WHAT IS RELIGION?

the standpoint of practice, there is a difference in grade. The mandala of the “ Realm of the Matrix Repository,”^a illustrates the former point. The mandala of the “ Realm of the Diamond Element ”^b illustrates the latter. The “ Realm of the Matrix Repository ” is the descending gate^c and shows the identity of the Great Cosmic Buddha, as the central Buddha, and all buddhas, bodhisattvas, heavenly beings, etc., around the Great Cosmic Buddha. The “ Realm of the Diamond Element ” is the ascending gate^d which shows the process of practice in order to attain the state of the Great Cosmic Buddha.

In Pure Land Buddhism, the object of worship is the Buddha Amida.^e Amida (Amita, Skt.), literally, “ Infinite,” is the first part of the two compounds in Sanskrit, Amita-āyus (Ami-tāyus), literally, “ Infinite Life,” and Amita-ābha (Amitābha), literally, “ Infinite Light ”; so that Amida signifies the Buddha of Infinite Life (*Muryō-ju Butsu*)^f and the Buddha of Infinite Light (*Muryō-kō Butsu*)^g. This is also the Buddha of infinite love, which is proved in his vow and practice to save all beings. His Light delivers us from greed, hatred, and stupidity, and we find ourselves enveloped in his Life.

Fundamentally the object of worship in Buddhism is the dharma^h, that is, universal law. The Buddha is the one who has realized the dharma. An ordinary man, however, cannot realize the dharma without the Buddha’s help. Pure Land Buddhism especially stresses this point. It preaches that man can be born in the Pure Land of Amida by the invocation (*nembutsu*)ⁱ that is, the invocation of Amida’s name, and

a. Taijō-kai 胎藏界 *b.* Kongō-kai 金剛界 *c.* kōge-mon 向下門 *d.* kōjō-mon 向上門 *e.* 阿彌陀 *f.* 無量壽仏 *g.* 無量光仏 *h.* hō 法 Jap. *i.* 念仏

WHAT IS RELIGION?

that he can realize the dharma and become a buddha in the Pure Land. The invocation (*nembutsu*) is the practice of the Original Vow^a of Amida, which is mostly illustrated in the Eighteenth Vow, the most important of forty-eight vows which Amida made in the years of his life as Hōzō Bosatsu^b (Dharmākara Bodhisattva). It was the Vow that he would not accept perfect enlightenment unless all people who invoked his name could also enter the Pure Land.

The characteristic of Shin Buddhism is found in absolute devotion to the Buddha Amida. Absolute devotion consists of *Myōgō*^c, that is, *Namu Amida Butsu*, and the consciousness of our sinful acts. The former basically means adoration to the Buddha of Infinite Life and Light but, according to Shinran's^d interpretation, it means Buddha's call to us. It expresses the action of the religious law (dharma) of this world.

The Buddha Amida is neither the creator nor a deified man. He is the expression of the universal law which acts on us as the principle of salvation, that is, Life and Light. Shinran says that Amida has come from the universal law, the essential nature of which is unity^e, reality^f, entity^h, etc., with the vow to save us. In Shin Buddhism Amida, who made vows and practices to save people in his years as Hōzō Bosatsu, is called the Buddha of the "recompensed body" (*saṃbhoga-kāya*), that is, the one who has come into existence as recompense or fruit of the vows and practices of the dharma. It means the eternally personified and rewarded activity of the eternal

a. *hongan* 本願 b. 法藏菩薩 c. 名号 d. 親鸞 (1175—1263), the founder of Shin Buddhism e. *ichinyo* 一如 f. *jissō* 実相, *shinnyo* 真如
g. *hosshō* 法性

WHAT IS RELIGION?

truth (dharma). Amida in essence is called the buddha of the "law body" (dharma-kāya), because the dharma is the noumenon of the Buddha Amida. As for Sakyamuni Buddha, he is regarded as the buddha of the "accomodated body" (nirmāna-kāya), and as one of the appearances of the Eternal Amida in this world. This is the transformed or human Buddha.

Buddhism for the Zen follower is the religion that human beings become buddhas. What is a buddha? The Zen-ist answers this question by saying that it is one who has penetrated into truth. The pursuit of man and his life is the fundamental standpoint of Buddhism.

The Buddha as the object of worship is neither the transcendent God as the Absolute Other nor a metaphysical existence. Dōgen^a said that life and death are the essence of Buddha: there is no Buddhism without human life. In other words, there is no gulf between Buddha and man. Any man has the possibility of becoming a buddha, that is, of achieving the buddha nature.^b Zen Buddhism, however, insists that man has not merely the buddha nature. He has perfect buddhahood. That is, he is a buddha from the beginning.

Shinnyo-en stands on the universal law, the wonderful truth revealed by the Buddha. In particular stress is laid on the law of nirvana, which is expressed in the Nirvana Sutra as follows: "Rely upon the dharma, and not upon man. The dharma is the truth revealer (tathāgata)^c, the Great Perfect Enlightenment (Mahā-parinirvāṇa)."^d

a. 道元 (1200-1258), the founder of the Sōtō Sect of Zen Buddhism.

b. *bushō* 仏性 c. *nyorai* 如来, the highest title of the Buddha d. *dai-hatsu-nehān* 大般涅槃

WHAT IS RELIGION?

The object of worship is the Eternal Sakyamuni Buddha who is illustrated in the Nirvana Sutra. This Buddha is the buddha of the law body (dharma-kāya). "We especially worship the nirvana statue of this Buddha, because it is said in the Kōkitokuō Bosatsu Hon,^a chapter 10 of the Nirvāna Sutra that, if one establishes a Buddha statue or tower like a great thumb and joyfully adores it, he will be born in the immovable world (nirvana)." As the opportunity arises, buddhas, budhisattvas, and all heavenly beings in the whole universe are worshipped, for those beings are the expedient aspects of the buddha of the law body (dharma-kāya) and various kinds of manifestations of truth.

The Nirvana Sutra is regarded as the greatest of all sutras in Shinnyo-en, because the key note of this sutra is nirvana, which is the ultimate "eternity, bliss, self, and purity,"^b and to which all things are attributed. In conclusion "we make it our aim to realize the nirvana world of eternity, bliss, self, and purity."

The Kami of Shrine Shinto has been considered a mixture of the idea of buddha in Buddhism and of God in Christianity. Its proper concept has been lost. Therefore, we should re-examine it. The misunderstanding of the Kami of Shrine Shinto is a great loss for Japanese culture.

Shinto is a racial religion which originated in the feeling and mode of our racial life. But before this characteristic of Shinto became systematized, Buddhism, a foreign religion, came to Japan and enveloped it in Buddhist concepts. Even at present, we say "*shin-butsu*"^c, literally, "kami-buddha," which

a. 高貴徳王菩薩品 b. *jō, raku, ga, jō* 常樂我淨 c. 神仏

WHAT IS RELIGION?

signifies that Shinto and Buddhism have been merged together. In the Tokugawa^a era, Confucianism was utilized as the ethics of the feudalistic government, and Shinto and Buddhism were made subordinate. In the Meiji^b era, Shinto was used as a tool of supernationalism and expansionism, an anti-Japanese concept. We can say that Shinto, as the representative of the Japanese spirit and culture, has not been clearly established, and accordingly the Japanese spirit, ethics, and culture has not been clearly realized.

However, it is not so difficult to clear up the characteristics of the Japanese kami or spirit. The Japanese traditional spirit is of an artistic and symbolic nature. The Japanese kami cannot be caught by an attempt to formulate a general definition but by artistic sincerity. Shinto is the world of poetry. Artistic sincerity means that you should stand for the natural life. Norinaga Motoori^c interprets it in the word, “*Mono-no-aware*,”^d literally, “the pathos of things.” It comes from our natural emotion. We regard Ise Shrine as the native land of our racial spirit, and call the local gods “*uji-gami*”^e, literally, “guardian god of a clan,” or “*ubusuna-no-kami*”^f literally, “guardian god of a place.” All these kami are the products of our native feeling.

DISCUSSION

Christianity

C_p Questioned regarding which creation myth was accepted, the one in chapter I of Genesis, which comes from about

a. 徳川 b. 明治 c. 本居宣長 (1730—1801), a Japanese classical scholar.

d. 物のあはれ e. 氏神 f. 産土神

WHAT IS RELIGION?

400 BC., or the one beginning with the fifth verse of chapter II, the Protestant replied that he accepted both and pointed out that the latter falls on the seventh day of creation and deals with the goal of man's life.

C_c As to the theory of creation, the Catholic participant noted that there is a difference between the teaching of Tenri-kyō and Christianity, and pointed out that, according to Tenri-kyō, there was a muddy ocean at the beginning, but that Christianity preaches that there was void (nothing) at the beginning; that is, God created man from the void.

Chairman Attention also should be called to the fact that in ancient India there was the idea that there was void at the beginning, or that there was neither being nor non-being. However, such an idea was too difficult to be understood, so a more concrete expression was found. As to the depth of thinking, it is a deeper and more developed theory. The theory of creation in Genesis chapter II, verse 7, that is, "God formed man of the dust from the ground," is older and more primitive.

O_t Tenri-kyō preaches that the muddy ocean also was created by God. All things are created by God.

C_c I would like to emphasize that the creation theory of Tenri-kyō has Japanese characteristics, and that there is a shade of difference between Tenri-kyō and Christianity in the meaning of their creation theories.

Chairman In the creation myth of Tenri-kyō, two gods appear. It shows that the emanation mythology is mixed in, but the keynote is in the creation mythology. Judging from this, it may be said that there was a concept of creation

WHAT IS RELIGION?

in Japan also.

World Messianity

C_p You say that all religions were born through the providence of God. Does this mean that all religions are regarded as equal?

O_m Of course, we believe that World Messianity is the principal religion for the purpose of establishing the Paradise on Earth. However, we have the idea that all religions have the same origin and, therefore, we can cooperate with them.

B_z Does God in Christianity or Buddha in Buddhism come from the Fundamental Main God in World Messianity?

O_m All beings are created and maintained by the Fundamental Main God.

C_p Does it mean that all gods or buddhas are various aspects of the one fundamental God?

O_m Yes, we think so.

Chairman Is the Fundamental Main God in World Messianity the same as the creator in Christianity?

O_m "Fundamental Main" means "enveloping all things." As to creation, this God is continuously creating.

Chairman I feel there is a little difference between the two. The God in World Messianity seems to be the Universal Spirit rather than the creator of the universe.

Tenri-kyō

Chairman I think the Oyagami in Tenri-kyō is the first creator that has appeared in Japan. The creation concept in the

WHAT IS RELIGION?

Doroumi Koki^a (The Divine Chronicle of the Muddy Ocean) is its true meaning.

O_t Creation is the central preaching of Tenri-kyō. As to the name of God, the founder used the word Kami^b at first, but the word Kami makes us recall the traditional gods of Japan, such as *tatari-gami*^c (evil deities). Hence she expressed it with the word, *Tsuki-Ili*^d (Moon-Sun). Tsuki-Ili is the heavenly being who continuously gives us birth. Finally she came to use the word *Oya*^e (Parent), because *Tsuki-Ili* or *Ten*^f (Heaven) is apt to give us the impression that it is aloof from us.

B_s In Buddhism Buddha is also regarded as a parent. All beings are children of the Buddha. Wasn't Tenri-kyō influenced by Buddhism?

B_{sg} Buddha is often compared to a mother and called "*Butsumo*"^g, that is, Buddha, the Mother.

O_t I think Tenri-kyō was influenced especially by Pure Land Buddhism.

Chairman I hear the family where the founder was born was a supporter of Pure Land Buddhism, and she herself was devoted to it. The influence of Shingon Buddhism may be also found in her. We can see elements of Shingon Buddhism in the *Mikagura-uta*^h (Dancing Psalms).

O_t Tenri-kyō may be compared to a cloth woven of various kinds of thread. There can be found elements of Shinto and Buddhism in it. Some say that even the influence of Christianity can be seen.

a. 泥海古記 b. 神 c. 崇り神 d. 月日 e. 親 f. 天 g. 仏母
h. みかぐらうた (御神樂歌)

Shin Buddhism

S_s Sometimes I see worshippers who are chanting the nembutsu at Shinto Shrines. I think this shows that the kami and buddha are all the same to the Japanese people.

Chairman A kind of syncretism, isn't it? Christianity should take notice of such a characteristic of the Japanese people.

O_m In Japan the total number of religious adherents is more than the total population.

B_g It is because a person is counted as a Buddhist if he is a supporter (*danka*)^a of a Buddhist temple and at the same time as a believer of the religion in which he has a personal faith.

B_j In my native place, when one is taken ill, *kami-sama*^b (a pray-er) comes and prays for healing before the image of Kōbō Daishi^c or Nichiren Shōnin. When he dies, a priest of the Buddhist temple in which his family is registered, comes and holds a service.

C_c Japanese culture has the characteristic of duality, Dr. Tetsurō Watsuji^d says, for instance, the Western mode of living and the Japanese traditional mode of living co-exist in the Japan of today.

Chairman I think this characteristic can be found in every country of the East. In other words, it is an Oriental characteristic.

Shrine Shinto

Chairman Shinto may be said to be a religion with no

a. 檀家 b. 神様 c. 弘法大師 d. 日蓮聖人 e. 和辻哲郎

WHAT IS RELIGION?

founder. To have no founder is to have no doctrine or framework. This characteristic of Shinto is apt to be thought of as a weak point of Shinto, but we should remember that the Shinto spirit penetrates into the life of the merchant and artisan. Concerning the problem of religion in Japan, we should pay close attention to Shinto. To wrestle with Shinto is to wrestle with the Japanese people.

(To be continued)