

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, Shinnyo-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—Sōtō, Cc—Catholic, Cp—Protestant, Ot—Tenri-kyō, Om—World Messianity, Osn—Shinnyo-en.

III Practice

C_c In the Catholic Church faith is related to intellect and not to will, that is, to reliance on God's mercy, as is seen in Luther's faith. "Related to intellect," however, does not mean to reason out everything as rationalists sometimes try to do. It is reliance on God's infinite wisdom and authoritative teaching. The Catholic also attaches importance to super-rational or volitional reliance on God's mercy, but he does not oppose the cultivation of the intellect. It is the mission of man to endeavor to answer God's call and to follow in God's way by means of his intellect and will. The Church is a community of people who participate in Christ's work

WHAT IS RELIGION?

to save this world. It was founded by Christ who came from God and became man. It is the gateway which leads man to eternal life and unifies the visible and the invisible world.

C_p In Protestantism God's grace manifested by Christ is available to all men. The church is to witness to this and is the means of making it known in this world. The church does not exist for itself but is entrusted to man by God. It is an assembly of sinful men who acknowledge Jesus Christ as their Lord. The function of the church is to be found in proving the certainty of salvation through Christ, our Lord, and in the proclaiming of God's invitation to salvation.

O_m Unhappiness in World Messianity is believed to originate in a beclouded spirit. The beclouded state of the spirit is called sin or pollution. The fruition of a beclouded spirit is unhappiness in this life. God's power and our wisdom are necessary in order for us to be saved from unhappiness. Our wisdom corresponds to truth, goodness, and beauty. In this case truth is right teaching which God revealed through the founder; goodness is altruistic practice in establishing the earthly paradise; and beauty is natural and human art which is helpful in purifying the spirit. However, the most fundamental factor in realizing happiness is "purification of the spirit" (jōrei)^a. The concrete method for this purification is to shade a sick person with a practitioner's palm, in which case God's power acts through the palm.

O_t The way to live in accordance with God's will in Tenri-kyō is called *tannō*^b, or *hinokishin*^c. *Tannō* is to accept

a. 淨靈 b. たんのう (堪能) c. ひのきしん (日の寄進)

WHAT IS RELIGION?

whatever happens as an expression of the divine will, and to live a joyous life. It is neither resignation nor endurance. It is a perception of the divine goodness in whatever happens to us. *Hinokishin*, literally, "the daily donation of labor," is the positive expression of our joyful gratitude to God. It is the dedication of our sincerity to God, the Parent.

When we realize the doctrine of *tanno* and are inspired by devotion to *hinokishin*, we forget our own interests, and there appears the precious virtue of *makoto shinjitsu*^a, that is, "true sincerity," which means the possibility of interpreting the divine will as it is and to behave as God wishes. The life of *mako'ō shinjitsu* is *Yōki-gurashi* that is, the good life. Such a way of life will never end with one man alone. It will be outgoing and influence other men, making their hearts vibrate in joyous unison with his own. *Yōki-gurashi* is the ideal life of joy itself living in God's bosom and in harmonious cooperation with others. Moreover, it can be realized in this world, not in the other world nor in heaven. In conclusion, to make an effort to cleanse our minds every day and to realize the ideal of the good life (*Yōki-gurashi*) constitutes the discipline of Tenri-kyō.

B_{sg} From the standpoint of the Great Cosmic Buddha's (Dainichi's) power, enlightenment in Shingon Buddhism is called "the descending gate" (*kōge-mon*)^b. From the standpoint of our practices, it is called "the ascending gate" (*kōjō-mon*)^c. The Realm of the Matrix Repository (Taizō Kai)^d and of the Diamond Element (Kongō Kai)^e constitute the two gates by which these practices are carried on. In other words we

a. 誠真実 b. 向下門 c. 向上門 d. 胎藏界 e. 金剛界

WHAT IS RELIGION?

can all get enlightenment. Also in Shingon Buddhism emphasis is placed on polishing our wisdom to the point of ultimate wisdom (*prajñā*), that is, buddha wisdom. In order to attain buddha wisdom, however, we must observe the practices of the body, mouth, and will, and try to unite them with the "Three Secrets" (*Sanmitsu*)^a, the body, mouth, and will of the Buddha. In this sense Shingon Buddhism advocates penetrating directly into the buddha world by the totality of our body, mouth, and will, and not by our relative knowledge. Incantations and prayers are the methods necessary for attaining this goal. These methods are not merely expedient means but constitute the ultimate effect itself. This is the doctrine concerning practices in Shingon Buddhism.

B₁ Buddhism in general advocates submission to the dharma. The Buddha is the one who has realized the dharma, so the dharma is the first principle. For disciples or believers, however, the dharma is the law and teaching of the Buddha (buddha-dharma), that is, they have faith in the dharma through the personality of the Buddha. Accordingly believers rely on the Buddha and get enlightenment under the Buddha's guidance. Especially in the Latter Days, reliance on the Buddha is stressed, because people in such times fall into evil and sin, and lose the ability to get enlightenment by their own efforts. Pure Land Buddhism preaches that even faith is not acquired by oneself but is given by the Buddha. We can see that it is the turning-point of Buddhism. Honen called this turning point *senchaku*^b that is, selection.

Honen lived the life of a saint (*hijiri*) but he did not

a. 三密 b. 選択 c. 聖

WHAT IS RELIGION?

regard the prohibition of meat and matrimony as basic principles. Moreover, he insisted that any place where people chant the *nenbutsu*, that is, the repetition of the expression *Namu Amida Butsu* (Adoration to the Buddha Amida) is his footprint, and denied the validity of special places. This shows the equality of the clergy and the laity. In Hōnen there is no discrimination between holy and common professions. He said to a prostitute, "You are worthy of receiving the vow of the Buddha." If we follow Hōnen's standpoint the organization of temples becomes useless. But the contact of mind and body with others is more indispensable in today's complicated social system. Contact through the *nenbutsu*, as seen in Zendō^a and Honen, Honen and Shinran, or Honen and his followers, is the principal point of Pure Land Buddhism.

B_s Salvation in Shin Buddhism is instantly completed in the present through our faith. Therefore, the *nenbutsu* is not a practice for the attainment of salvation, but the manifestation of gratitude for having been saved by the Buddha Amida. Shinran said that the *nenbutsu* is neither a practice nor a virtue, but merit transferred from the Buddha Amida. In other words, on acquiring faith we are enveloped in eternal life, that is, we come to live in "a state equal to correct enlightenment" (*shōjō-ju*)^b. Shin Buddhism consists of two elements: the consciousness of our sinfulness through penetrating the real existence of human beings and salvation through the absolute other power of the Buddha Amida. In

^a. 善導 (613—681), a systematizer of Pure Land Buddhism in China.

^b. 正定聚

WHAT IS RELIGION?

this case absolute means the transcendence of any dualistic concepts, such as self and others.

B₂ The word Zen is a transliteration of *dhyāna* in Sanskrit and of *jhāna* in Pāli. It means meditation and was popularly used in India as a kind of mental training. Sakyamuni, however, adopted it as a means of penetrating into truth and oneself. Zen Buddhism tries to express directly and purely the enlightenment of the Buddha. This tendency developed especially in China under the influence of Chinese characteristics that are rich in concreteness, intuition, and practice. Zen Buddhism opposes scholastic doctrines and discussions, and makes an effort to go straight to the point of Buddhism by means of intuition and practices. From this viewpoint Zen Buddhism stresses “special transmission outside the scriptures” (*Kyōge betsuden*)^a, and “no dependence upon words and letters” (*furū monji*)^b.

Zazen^c, that is, “sitting in Zen meditation,” is a concrete practice of Zen for the purpose acquiring the essence of Buddhism that one’s own nature is itself the buddha nature. Accordingly *zazen* is the practice of penetrating into one’s own nature. However penetrating into one’s own nature does not mean attachment to oneself but the emancipation of one’s body and mind.

Moreover in Zen Buddhism practices are not merely a way to attain enlightenment but are manifestations of enlightenment. Dōgen said that the first steps of devotion to the Buddha way are the totality of original enlightenment. So there is no degree nor grade in *zazen*. *Zazen* is not a

a. 教外別伝 b. 不立文字 c. 坐禪

WHAT IS RELIGION?

practice to attain buddhahood but a means of manifesting it. The spirit of *zazen* is displayed in all the acts of daily life. O_{sn} Sakyamuni said at the beginning of his teaching, "This way opens man's eyes, enlightens his wisdom, and takes him to the calmness of nirvana." Shinnyo-en stresses gaining liberty not only for oneself but for others through wisdom (*parajñā*) in accordance with the words "to seek above, to save all below" (*jōgu bodai geke shujō*)^a, and "May we as well as all beings attain enlightenment." (*Warera to shujō to mina tomoni butsudō o jōzen*)^b

The primary factor in stimulating practices is wisdom and understanding. In the practices of Mahayana, however, wisdom is based on faith, and understanding is realized through saving others. The chapter on Kōkitokuō Bosatsu in the Nirvana Sutra says, "Do first for others and next for yourself. This is the Mahayana principle." In Shinnyo-en practices are the awakening of others, in other words, to enlighten oneself through awakening others.

The gate to enter nirvana is the wisdom of voidness (*prajñā-sānyatā*). In Shinnyo-en the wisdom of voidness is interpreted as "to convert from ego-centricity to Buddha-centricity." This is the so-called conversion in Shinnyo-en, where the attachment to ego, the three delusions of greed, hatred, and stupidity disappear, and the state of eternity, bliss, self, and purity appears.

As a concrete practice for getting into such a state, Shinnyo-en adopts the mediumistic method called "contact of mind" (*sesshin*)^c, that is, the contact of a believer's mind

a. 上求菩提, 下化衆生 b. 我等と衆生と皆共に仏道を成ぜん。 c. 接心

WHAT IS RELIGION?

with a medium. A medium is a practitioner who has supernatural power to transmit the will of the spiritual world to the human world. In accordance with a medium's words, a believer makes an effort first to deliver himself from egoistic or secular attachment and next to acquire things transcending this world. The believer's mind is telepathically understood by a medium: then a medium in reply phenomenalizes the believer's mind and indicates the way of purification. This supernatural power in a medium is the same as the mysterious power (*jinzū-riki*)^a in Buddhism.

DISCUSSION

Catholicism

S_s Shrine Shinto has no fixed form of religious practices, but Christianity has several clear forms. It may be a strong point of Christianity, but I am afraid that religious observances in Christianity, such as the Mass, do not agree with the character of the Japanese people.

C_c The adherents are told to go to church on Sunday, to observe the Mass, and to listen to the sermon. Moreover, they are required to confess at least once a year. The celibacy of priests is another characteristic of Catholicism. Such a form or characteristic may strike the Japanese people as strange.

Protestantism

B_{sg} As to the church, is there any difference between the

a. 神通力

WHAT IS RELIGION?

Catholic and Protestant church?

C_p Catholics insist on the authority of the Church and on papal infallibility, but Protestants recognize the authority of only the Lord Christ, and the Word of God, and do not consider the church as absolute. On this point there is a great difference between the Catholic and the Protestant.

B_{sg} Do you say that the church is not always important for the Protestant?

C_p The church is the place where evangelism is conducted. Moreover, in the Bible baptism, and the Lord's Supper are ordained as sacraments of the church. Therefore, the church is necessary for Protestants also.

World Messianity

S_s What kind of practice is necessary for one to attain the divine state?

O_m Generally speaking enlightenment through wisdom is advocated. As to concrete practices, there is the observance of the founder's teachings and the promotion of *jōrei*. In daily life altruistic works are encouraged as consistent with God's will.

C_p Doesn't God act toward us?

O_m For example, in conducting *jōrei*, we transmit God's power to others. Accordingly *jōrei* is an act of God's power. We do not conduct *jōrei* by our own power but we are enabled to conduct it by God's power.

O_t Is *jōrei* conducted only for others?

O_m It is conducted also for oneself. In that case *jōrei* is conducted before God.

WHAT IS RELIGION?

Chairman What is the form of *jōrei* in that case?

O_m Prayer to God.

B_s You speak of enlightenment through wisdom. Is this wisdom given by God?

O_m Yes.

B_s Do we understand from what you have said that you conduct *jōrei* as a religious practice through wisdom given by God and do altruistic works as social practices?

O_m Yes. In comparing *jōrei* and medicine, the latter is the product of human wisdom. Human wisdom is limited. Accordingly, medicine alone does not bring true health to us. The former is the action of God's wisdom, so we can get true health by it. From this viewpoint members of World Messianity seldom take medicine. We must also pay attention to the fact that medicine sometimes re-acts unfavorably on us.

Tenri-kyō

B_s Is *Yōki-gurashi* the ultimate ideal of Tenri-kyō?

O_t Yes. It is not only the ideal but the original state of human life.

O_m I have heard of "the world of *Kanrodai*^a (Nectar-altar) with all united in one." Does this mean that *Yōki-gurashi* is transmitted from one to another till all the world becomes *Yōki-gurashi* itself?

O_t Yes. As to *Kanrodai*, it consists of a stone pillar about 8.2 feet in height, built with thirteen tiers each hexagonal in shape. The *Kanrodai* is the concrete object of worship

a. 甘露台

WHAT IS RELIGION?

in Tenri-kyō. It stands on the *Jiba*^a, the place where God, the Parent, created mankind. The honey dew is destined to descend upon it when the human mind is reformed and becomes pure. The *Kanrodai* is a symbol not only of the cradle of the human race but also of the ideal human life.

B_z I think *Yōki-gurashi* is something like “It is a good day, everyday” (*nichinichi kore kōnichi*)^b in Zen Buddhism.

Chairman I think it expresses the characteristic of the Japanese people. Japan is a land where people can live an optimistic life, so that religions which are established in Japan have an optimistic character. In comparison with Japanese religions, Christianity, which was founded in a bleak desert, has a pessimistic or austere character.

Shingon Buddhism

Chairman What is the relation between Buddha and us in incantations and prayers?

B_{sg} It is “the union of Buddha’s power and our power” (*kajisōō*)^c. In this point we can see the characteristic of Shingon Buddhism.

C_c Shingon Buddhism seems to be the same as Catholicism in that respect.

Chairman In Catholicism I doubt that our own power reaches to God.

C_c Catholicism recognizes two powers. Catholicism also has two gates, descending and ascending. The descending gate is the salvation of the mind, and the ascending gate is our physical acts.

a. ちば b. 日々是好日 c. 加持相應

B_{sg} The descending gate is the gate of faith and through this gate we can soon become a buddha without practices. From this standpoint, it may be said that Shingon Buddhism is the same as Pure Land Buddhism, the Buddhism of other-power. The ascending gate is the gate of practice. This is the Buddhism of self-power. In conclusion, Shingon is the Buddhism which unifies self-power and other-power Buddhism. However, there is a discussion as to which point we should stress. One is called "the school of originally existing," (*honnu-ke*)^a which lays stress on the former point, and the other is called "the school of becoming by practices" (*shushō-ke*)^b which lays stress on the latter point.

O_{sn} Does Shingon Buddhism preach that man can become a buddha in this life?

B_{sg} Yes. It is the highest and only aim for Shingon Buddhism to "become a buddha in this body" (*sokashin jōbutsu*)^c

Pure Land (Jōdo) Buddhism

C_c Please interpret the *senchaku* on which Hōnen insisted.

B_j Buddhism was divided into two ways: the path of the Holy and the path of the Pure Land, the difficult and the easy path, and the miscellaneous and the correct practice. Hōnen selected the latter. The *nenbutsu* was established through such a choice. It is the practice based on Amida's Original Vow.

Shin Buddhism

C_c What is the relation between faith and practice in Shin

a. 本有家 b. 修生家 c. 即身成仏

WHAT IS RELIGION?

Buddhism?

B_s Shinran stressed the identity of faith and practice. In Shinran the invocation of Amida's name is the natural expression of faith.

C_c Is there any difference between Pure Land (Jōdo) Buddhism and Shin Buddhism in this point?

B_s Pure Land (Jōdo) Buddhism makes it a first principle to invoke Amida's name, and Shin Buddhism makes faith in Amida the correct principle. Hōnen preached, that the *nenbutsu* is a practice in order to be reborn in the Pure Land, but Shinran insisted that rebirth is assured by a single moment of faith. Moreover, Shinran said that rebirth was enlightenment itself, while with Hōnen one can become a buddha by practices for the purpose of enlightenment after he is reborn in the Pure Land by the practice of *nenbutsu*. With Shinran, not only rebirth but also enlightenment was assured at a single moment of faith. The *nenbutsu* in Shinran means the grateful expression of the assurance of rebirth and enlightenment.

Chairman Shinran in his later years preached "equal to tathagata."^a

Zen Buddhism

S_s In Japan Zen Buddhism was absorbed in Bushidō and art. We can see the living aspect of Zen in them. Is it because Zen Buddhism has the characteristic of fluidity?

B_z In China Zen art did not develop this way, but in Japan Zen was deeply absorbed in art, such as the Noh play, the

a. *nyorai todo* 如来等同

WHAT IS RELICION?

tea ceremony, flower arrangement, gardens, pictures, poems, etc. It is said that Zen art developed through the unification of Indian intellectualism, Chinese practicality, and Japanese emotionalism. Anyhow, the Noh play, the tea ceremony, and flower arrangement try to express activity in stillness. This is the character of Zen.

As for Bushidō, in it Zen's characteristic of deliverance from oneself through penetrating into oneself came to be accepted. In other words, the Zen concept of free movement through spiritual concentration supported Bushidō. For example, it is said that the unity of oneself and the sword is the state of an expert. In this expression, we can see the influence of Zen Buddhism.

S_s How does the Zen characteristic of "the emancipation of body and mind" function in respect to class restrictions in actual society?

B_z The abolition of class distinctions occurs through it. For example, Zen teachers do not truckle to the powerful.

S_s In the case of Bashō², the emancipation of body and mind does not seem to have been in the abolition of class distinctions but in escape from it.

B_z As for Dōgen he left Kyoto for the mountain recesses of the Hokuriku district, not with the intention of escaping from the actual world but for the purpose of establishing the purity of Buddhism. By transcending himself Dōgen was able to resist the powerful.

S_s I think a question will arise on the point that Dōgen left for the mountain recesses because he could not maintain the

a. 芭蕉 (1644—1694), a famous *haiku*—poet at the Edo period.

WHAT IS RELIGION?

purity of Buddhism in Kyoto.

Chairman Zen Buddhism, all Buddhism and Oriental thought lays stress on individuality, where the reformation of oneself is the first problem and the reformation of society, such as matters concerning class distinctions, is put off. Therefore, entering into the mountain recesses was sometimes tried with the intention of establishing ones true self. Even in city life the consciousness of social reformation is not clear. For example, the artist's spirit or the tradesman's spirit in Japan involved a thorough examination of one's own way in which we cannot find any movement to abolish class distinctions. The consciousness of the abolition of class distinctions and social reformation has appeared in Japan under the influence of modern Western thought.

S_s How is it in Nichiren Buddhism?

Chairman Nichiren laid more stress on society than on the individual, but he didn't have the consciousness of the social organization.

B_{sg} We can find the political idea, such as the abolition of class distinction in Buddhism. However, is it the general tendency of Buddhism to try to root that idea in the individual mind of the ruler, and not to realize it in a social movement.

Chairman The education of the individual mind of a ruler shows that Buddhism always stands for individuality.

Shinnyo-en

O_m Is there any method of developing as a medium?

O_{sn} Contact of mind, that is, a kind of *zazen*, is the method.

WHAT IS RELIGION?

B_{sg} The state of mysterious power is the state of a buddha, isn't it? If so, it will become questionable whether everyone can attain this state.

O_{sn} Shinnyo-en insists that everyone can get this state, because all beings have the buddha nature and can attain the state of buddha through practices.

B_{sg} Can people in general attain this mysterious power even though they have not acquired perfect enlightenment?

O_{sn} According to the Nirvana Sutra, we can get it only through having faith in that sutra and observing its teachings.

B_{sg} Is penance or ascetic practice necessary for one to become a medium and display mysterious power?

O_{sn} No, It is not necessary. We don't use outer physical practices but inner spiritual ones.

— 終 —