

INTERNATIONAL INTERFAITH ROUNDTABLE CONFERENCE

Prepared by Dayle Bethel and the editor.

Note : (C)=Christian, (B)=Buddhist, (H)=Hindu, (M)=Muslim
and (S)=Shintoist.

INTRODUCTION

A number of years ago, while attending a meeting of religious leaders from various parts of the world, the editor asked himself : Why invite guests from abroad for such a conference when there are so many people in Japan who represent the various religions of the world? Thus he determined to promote such a meeting at the first opportunity, but the months and years slipped by until the spring of 1963 when it seemed the time had come to act.

For a number of years the International Institute for the Study of Religions has sponsored interfaith roundtable conferences for representatives of the various faiths held by the Japanese people. It was a natural step, then, for the Institute to broaden its program to include the faiths of the world, and the first such Institute-sponsored conference is being reported in these pages. It was held in Tokyo on July 7, 1963, and it is expected that others will follow.

Being something in the nature of a pilot project to provide experience for making future plans, only a small number were invited to participate. At the last minute, however, unforeseen circumstances prevented four from attending, so the group was

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smaller than had been originally planned.

The participants included four Japanese government scholarship students from Asia, two Americans, and three Japanese. With one exception, all of the non-Japanese participants were laymen. Two were Moslems : Mr. A. R. Siddiqi from Pakistan, who was specializing in industrial management, and Mr. S. N. Samarrai of Iraqi, an agriculturalist. Mr. Manendra B. Desai is a Hindu of Bombay, India, in training here as a construction engineer. Mr. L. A. R. Perera, a Senghalese Buddhist of Ceylon, is studying in Chiba University. Mr. James Brown, is an American university student and member of a Presbyterian church in the US who is studying Japanese religions. And Mr. Dayle Bethel is a missionary in Japan of the Reorganized Church of Jesus Christ of Latter Day Saints, which has its headquarters in Independence Mo., USA.

The three Japanese participants were : Mr. Kansei Tamura, a Nichiren Buddhist and member of the faculty of Rissho University, the Rev. Yasuaki Nara, a Soto Zen priest and an associate professor at Komazawa University ; and Mr. Kenji Ueda, a Shintoist on the staff of the Institute for Japanese Classics and Culture.

Dr. Yoshiro Tamura of Toyo University and this Institute was an observer. The editor acted as chairman.

The language of the conference was English. Therefore, except for minor editorial revisions, the report which follows adheres closely to the remarks of the participants. The chronological order of the comments is retained, but the material itself has been brought together topically and much of an extraneous nature has been deleted.

THE DISCUSSION

The Faith of Islam

Samarrai (M) I am happy to be here to learn about other faiths and to let others know about my religion. I appreciate the chairman's statement that being tolerant does not mean to neglect your own faith. We tell the Christians: "You are our friends. You are Arabs like we are. You practice your religion; but your religion does not deal very much with politics and such things. In our religion, however, to be a good Muslim it is necessary to be one in everyday life, as a politician, as an economist, or anything that is a part of life." If we mix politics and religion the West raises a hue and cry; but if we don't do this, we are not good Muslims.

I don't say that the Arab is always right. If I took such an attitude, I would not be listening to you, and you would not listen to me. A religion which respects other religions is the ideal. A religion which compromises is not a good religion. A religion which co-exists with others, but in that co-existence seeks to dominate the others, is not worthy to be called a respectable religion. A religion should respect others. I say this: Be a good Buddhist; be a good Christian; be a good Muslim; but at the same time respect others: that is good religion.

The first thing that should be remembered about Muslims is that they obey their system of law, which is of divine origin, and not merely the opinion of a majority. It is this

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characteristic, i.e., the divine origin of the Law, which has contributed to the stability of Muslim society. The laws of Islam are not apt to be changed by the wish of any party or group which happens to be in the majority.

More than 1,400 years ago, Islam declared the principle that all people do not follow the same way of life. Even in a society where Muslims are in a majority, Islam accommodates itself successfully to those who do not accept it. The general idea in Western countries, and even in Japan, that Islam means the Koran and the sword, is not true. The Koran says in chapter 2, verse 56, that there should be no compulsion. All subjects have assurance concerning their safety and their liberty of conscience. The non-Muslim inhabitants of a Muslim state enjoy legal autonomy. Each community has its own tribunal, its own judges, and administers its own laws in all walks of life, civil as well as penal. The Koran says that even in an Islamic state Jews should be subject to Biblical laws, and Christians to those of the gospels.

The rights of non-Muslims in an Islamic state go even to the extent of giving them freedom to practice customs entirely opposed by Islam. For example, the manufacture of alcoholic drink is forbidden to Muslims, but non-Muslim inhabitants have freedom, not only of consumption but of the manufacture and sale of liquor. The same is true regarding gambling, marriage with close relatives, and usury, which are prohibited by Islam.

Q. *Has religion anything to do with the relationship between*

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the Arabs and Jews. To what extent is this a religious question? Can it be divided into a religious question and a political question? (Brown—C)

Samarrai (M) We are not against the Jews. We are against the Zionist movement which has as its aim the establishment of a Jewish state in our country. We are not against the Jews as individuals.

Q. *In Pakistan and Iraq is Islam the state religion? (Perera—B)*

Samarrai (M) Yes, In Iraq it is.

Siddiqi (M) In Pakistan it is not so stated in the constitution, but it is specified that the head of the state shall be a Muslim : that it is the duty of the state to provide facilities for the observance of Muslim festivals, the Muslim way of life, and the teachings of Islam. No law can be adopted contrary to the Koran, or the teachings of the prophet Mohammed. So, for all practical purposes, Islam is the state religion.

However, when we say that Islam is the state religion and that Islamic law must be applied, it must be remembered that Islamic law states that the minorities must get their share. So what practically happens in Pakistan, where 85% of the people are Muslims, is that 85% of the seats in the legislature go the Muslims ; 10% are Hindus, so 10% of the seats are reserved for them ; 2% are Buddhists, 2% Christians, and so on. In this way the rights of minorities

are fully preserved.

Q. Wouldn't it be better to leave religions as they are, and not let them get involved in politics? (Perera—B)

Samarraï (M) In Islam there is no favored class. No one needs to fear that Islam will be exploited by any class. Even the ruler in Islam has no divine characteristics. Being the head of the state, he is just a common man who is selected to function in that capacity. Another thing, Islam consists of law and faith; faith which applies only to Muslims; law which applies to all the land as national law. But, as I pointed out earlier, non-Muslims are governed by their own laws in areas which conflict with Muslim law. For example, even in the case of a tax, if it is to be used for purposes of worship, it doesn't apply to Christians.

Siddiqi (M) So there is no discrimination. There is tolerance.

Q. Since coming to Japan and meeting some of my Muslim and Christian friends, it seems to me that Muslims and Christians believe in the same God. Is that right? And if so, what was the origin of the conflict between Christianity and Islam? If I talk with some of my Muslim friends, they laugh at Christianity, yet they believe in the same God. Why is this? (Perera—B)

Siddiqi (M) Not only is the God of Christianity and Islam the same; but whether anybody believes in God or not, God

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is there. The God of all religions is the same. As for the relationship between the Christian and Islamic belief about God, I understand that in Christianity, in addition to belief in God, it is possible for there to be certain additional attachments to God. For example, there may be some partners somebody who is aligned with God or something like that. But in Islam we believe in God's absolute unity. We believe in God, and God alone, and that is all. After God there are no relationships such as God's being born, etc. There are only created beings.

We in Islam respect Christianity in the sense that it is the same religion that was started by Adam. We do not believe that Christianity and the teachings of Christ were in any way wrong. The teachings of the prophet Christ were the real teachings needed by the people of that day. However, around the time of the prophet Mohammed, as I understand it, the Christian Church became more or less changed and the true teachings of Christ were lost. Therefore, God had to send the prophet Mohammed who did not negate the teachings of Christ. He said they were right, if they kept their true form; but he said further that the teachings of Christ and Moses were not available in those days. So, if you believe in Islam, God sent the angel Gabriel to Mohammed and his words are written in the Koran.

You can see that there are many similarities between Islam and Christianity, perhaps more so than with any of the other religions; but our belief in God differs and this leads to differences in some other areas.

Chairman Islam was a reformist movement in the Semitic

tradition and because of the doctrine of the Trinity, Muslims regard Christians as a kind of polytheists (laughter). Thus Christianity is considered to be a corrupt form of the true faith.

We would like to know the historical basis for the antagonism which grew up between Christians and Muslims? Why do we talk about the Koran and the sword?

Samarrai (M) Islam is a realistic religion. It is idealistic, but it is also practical. Preaching peace only, without defending yourself, is foolishness. Actually this can be seen today on the part of America as well as Russia. The balance of power is preserved by both sides. You will find in the history of Islam that Arabs who were non-believers and who did not follow Mohammed sought to destroy Islam. Islam wanted to co-exist with them, but it was forced to defend itself. Islam is a revolutionary faith which aims to create an atmosphere of complete freedom where anyone can worship as he chooses. At times in history Muslims were forced to take the sword to preserve themselves and safeguard their freedom; but no one can show where a Muslim has ever compelled a non-Muslim to accept his faith.

The Nature of Man in Islam

Samarrai (M) In Islam a person is born neutral, without sin. When he becomes an adult, when he is able to recognize the difference between right and wrong, he is responsible for his own good and bad actions. He can be better than the angels — because angels have no choice — or he can

be bad. This badness or sinfulness can be removed by repentance to God directly without any mediation. If you make a mistake a million times, Islam always gives a chance for forgiveness. God forgives a man until death; but after death there is no repentance. If he dies good, he will be good; if he dies bad, he will be bad.

Q. *Does Islam believe in rebirth?* (Desai—H)

Samarrai (M) Central in our belief is the idea that all life is for death. This is a transitional, provisional life. It has no objective in itself. The objective is the life hereafter. Both our souls and our bodies will stand before God. The good will go to paradise; the bad will go to hell. There is no second chance.

Siddiqi (M) In Islam this life is treated as a transitory period to prepare for eternal life.

Samarrai (M) The concept of the final judgement is not so clear and is not emphasized in Christianity as it is in Islam. In Islam the day of judgement is as clear as this life is to us. From the details in the Koran, from the details given by the Prophet Mohammed, we may know it better than when someone describes the wild regions of Africa. It is so clear that we can see paradise with our eyes. We can see hell with our eyes. We know the whole story as it is written in the Koran. It is just like a movie. It is as clear as light to us. This is the first thing.

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The second thing is that we believe that perfect human beings are very few. We are led by two things, hope and fear. So at the end of this life there is judgement and eternal life. But we must be good for the sake of God, to please God. So God takes me to paradise.

I will remain faithful to my parents. Why? Because God tells me to. If he tells me not to drink, I will not drink. If I drink, I will go to hell. I will be kind to myself and to my neighbors. I will be good and seek to live a perfect life just to please God and have a happy future life. I will avoid bad things, because if I do bad things God will punish me just like the common law of any government. The government makes regulations. You do this, and you will get a reward; you do that, and you will be punished. It is very clear. Every Muslim believes this. The important thing is to do good, to do things that are constructive.

The Koran

Samarrai (M) In Islam we believe that the Koran is the word of God, the word of God as revealed through the angel Gabriel to the Prophet Mohammed. The Koran is the source of all law. The Koran is one thing. Tradition is another; that is, traditions regarding the actions and sayings of the Prophet which explain what is stated in a general way in the Koran. The Koran tells us what to believe and how to act; it explains the way of life. There are stories in the Koran about Moses, Abraham, the prophets, and about Christ. From these stories we can find examples for our daily life. How they

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got their messages. How they struggled between right and wrong. In a way it is just like history. In another way it is a lesson in morals. It encourages us to do good, and warns us against doing evil. It is a combination of law and history, a novel, and moral education. There is even something about economics: how we should settle property matters.

Q. *Anyway you put absolute faith in the Koran?* (Desai—H)

Samarrai (M) Yes. Every Muslim must.

Chairman *Say a word about the language of the Koran.*

Samarrai (M) Well, the language is of course Arabic. The Koran is the only book that is maintained in its original form. It is Arabic and Arabic is a living language which is used and read by millions of people as their mother tongue, even though they may not be Arabic scholars. The Arabic Koran is not a version; *it is the Koran*. There is no other. Not a single letter has been changed from the original Koran.

Q. *If you believe that you can communicate with God directly, that you can be a mediator, why can't you tell us something new, something that is not written in the Koran?* (Ueda—S)

Samarrai (M) It cannot be amended because it is the word of God. The Koran is a constitution. But it is not a detailed law. There are only general principles which can be

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applied according to the custom of the people and according to the times.

Siddiqi (M) There are do-es and don'ts in the Koran; and there is what may be called neutral ground. Things that fall in this neutral area must conform to the Koran, in the sense that actions which are not prescribed in the Koran cannot violate what is in the Koran. Otherwise there is complete freedom. Mohammed is the last prophet. There will be no one after him. Therefore what he taught cannot be changed.

Ueda (S) I think I understand. But my question concerns a more fundamental way of thinking. You said before that you can communicate with God directly without the use of any intermediary, or mediator. Why can't you say something through this contact with God, something new for the contemporary world? Why can only the Koran speak?

Samarrai (M) We say that anyone can have contact with God, in the same way that anyone can listen to the radio broadcast. Can you hear a radio broadcast without a receiving set? No. The Prophet is like a set. If you have the Koran you can hear the word of God. Sometimes you recognize what you are being told; sometimes you don't. You have no right to object. Sometimes you call a doctor, but you don't understand what he is doing or saying. There is no need for you to know. He is a doctor. God is great, absolute, the creator. He knows what is good for me and

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what is bad.

Q. *If it says in the Koran that pork cannot be eaten and you learn that pork is not harmful, can you eat pork? Can't you say that the Koran is wrong?* (Desai—H)

Samarrai (M) No. No. I gave you the example of the doctor before because, when the doctor prescribes some medicine for you, you don't know what the reason is, or what it is for. Pork contains many parasites, a great many, so even before the Koran humanity knew that it should not eat pork. In the same way we say that the Koran prohibits wine, but gives permission to use other things. It prohibits adultery, but permits marriage. It prohibits pork, but gives other animals.

Tensions in Ceylon

Perera (B) The topic for this morning is "Religious Tensions and their Solutions" and, by way of a brief introduction, I would like to tell you what happened in Ceylon in the olden days. First, however, it must be noted that about 65% of the people of Ceylon are Buddhists; the remaining population is made up of Muslims, Hindus from India, and Christians of all denominations.

Buddhism was introduced into Ceylon about 2,200 years ago, when Ceylon was still quite uncivilized, and it spread quite rapidly because at that time the religion of the country was very primitive. We had Ceylonese kings who, following

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the path of the Lord Buddha, taught Buddhism to all the people in Ceylon.

In later years, some minor tensions developed with the Tamils who had come from India for purposes of trade, but the major tensions developed with the arrival of the Westerners from the continent of Europe: the Dutch, Portuguese, and English. These Westerners came with the main idea of securing our trade, yet, once they settled down, they attempted to gain control over the Ceylonese people by propagating Christianity. They attempted to instill in our people the idea that the Ceylonese were still primitive and that the European peoples were far ahead in civilization.

Meanwhile the kings opposed the Europeans. They wanted to safeguard their Buddhist culture; and Buddhist priests joined them in this. In the end, however, these efforts failed; the Europeans remained, and many Ceylonese were converted to Christianity. In addition to our problems and tensions with the Christians, we also have had some involving Hindus and Muslims.

Let me mention one or two problems involving Christians. We have some of the biggest churches in Asia in Ceylon. Yet we find that missionaries continue to build large churches. In Ceylon there is complete freedom to practice ones own religion, yet there are some Buddhists who cannot tolerate the building of churches in the vicinity of their temples. Buddhist priests often petition the government and Christian organizations not to build churches in the neighborhood of temples or where there are many Buddhists, because to do so goes against local culture and local tradition. We find

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numerous troubles cropping up here and there in the island over this matter.

Another problem centers in the fact that we have not yet advanced very far in the industrial and economic sphere, with the result that if we go to the villages we find many people who are quite poor. Often we find missionaries going into those villages and converting the village folk to their religion by giving them small amounts of money or food and so on. A poor man who does not have much money — if given ten or twenty rupees — tends to consider the person who gives him the money as a god and to follow him and his way of thinking. There are missionaries who convert people by marketing their religion in this way.

Considerable tension has arisen, also, because certain religions, particularly Buddhist priests, take part in politics in Ceylon. After our independence fifteen years ago, the Buddhist priests declared that Buddhism should be given the right of priority in Ceylon, and we have gradually seen an increase in the Buddhist way of thinking. We don't want Christians to be in government posts. The Buddhist priests are saying such things as this in their platform.

Tensions also arise as a result of intermarriage between persons of different faiths. My father is a good Buddhist. He didn't expect any of us to marry outside our Buddhist faith. But, contrary to my father's ideas, my sister married a Christian and my brother married a Catholic. So the fact remains that, although my home is made up of Buddhist culture and tradition, we have three religions represented in my family.

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There are many people who have the old way of thinking in Ceylon, and they don't want their children to marry persons of other religions ; but it is my belief that interfaith marriage, although it may bring about a certain amount of tension, may also be one aspect of the solution of tensions in the long run.

Another area of tensions involves denominational schools. In the past we have had denominational schools of every sort : Catholic and Methodist ; the Hindus have their own schools ; the Muslims, and so on. In addition we have state schools. In mission and denominational schools we have found that the teachers often give the children, who are the coming leaders of tomorrow, very unworthy ideas regarding other religions. Such things cause the child, when he becomes a man, to continue to have such ideas. We feel that this has been one of the causes of tension in the island.

The government attempted to find a solution to this problem about four or five years ago by taking over all of the schools in the island. Some groups have continued to conduct private schools, but without any assistance from the government ; and, while it is difficult, some organizations are maintaining their schools quite well.

I might mention that, as a result of the demands of Buddhist priests, religion is now a compulsory subject in the schools. This being the case, a child can learn his own religion without any kind of external persuasion. The teachers also at their teacher training schools are given compulsory courses in religion.

Now, in a more general sense, let me say that I believe

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that man without religion is quite uncivilized. Man without religion is no more than another animal. However, I do not feel that religious belief should be dictated by a higher authority. Religion, I feel, has to do with the mind. Religion is something you must practice in your home; something you must have in your mind. Religion is not something which you practice only when you go to a church, or a mosque, or a temple. It should be inherent in everything. All religions teach one basic theme, love for all mankind. So while you talk with others, with your friends, this should come from deep down in your heart. That is what you call religion.

Thus, I feel that there should not be organized associations going into other countries to convert the people, especially not forcibly. Such missionary activity spoils the culture of that country. They go and say to the people: "Your country and your culture are still primitive. Why don't you believe in my religion? If you have any trouble, why don't you think of someone who will save you." That kind of thing I don't like.

Lord Buddha said that salvation lies in your own self.

Christian Missions and the Indigenous Culture

Samarrai (M) I would like to comment briefly on Mr. Perera's remark that missionaries, when they come to a country tend to destroy the traditional culture of the country. I do not agree with this. The problem is how the missionary can carry his message without producing a conflict and without

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harming the nation.

For example, there was an appeal to the United Nations about the lack of freedom for Christianity in the Sudan. Why? Because the priests of South Sudan are encouraging the movement to separate South Sudan. In such a case, when it comes to the security of the nation, missionaries should be checked, especially foreign missionaries, and the nationals should be encouraged to help themselves. But where the security of the nation is not concerned, I think that an open society is better than a closed society.

Perera (B) I am an Asian and I have my own traditions. Missionaries come to a country and to a certain extent, in trying to convert the people, they try to make them forget their own culture and their own traditions. To tell the truth, I developed this idea after coming to Japan. It doesn't apply to Ceylon. At the time Buddhism came to Ceylon we didn't have a culture or a tradition as such. It was only after Buddhism came that we had a culture. We don't have any culture in Ceylon today other than the traditional Buddhist culture, even though we have numerous other religions. But I feel pity for Japan when I find young Japanese people who are forgetting their own culture and traditions. I don't mean that the Japanese should not change their religion if they want to, but we have been talking about tensions and their solutions. What I feel is that if there were no missionary work and missionaries did not go to other countries there would be a lessening of tensions. I don't like missionaries coming to my country from other countries. It brings about

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tension.

Samarrai (M) Well now, take the case of Japan, if there are things in some other country or religion which the people want, which they can use, that is good. If there is something new to Japanese life, which adds to their life, which makes them happy, which makes them strong, I believe such things do no harm. Do you agree with me? If it useful to Japan, if the people select and choose it, then it is good.

Ueda (S) I would like to carry this point further. In Japan, isn't it possible to become a Christian without neglecting Japanese traditions? In other words, does not the question of Japanese modernization have very little to do with religion? As I listened to the discussion it seemed to me that some of the previous speakers were avoiding the distinction between religion and cultural tradition.

Furthermore, I think we have to separate the idea of Westernization and that of modernization. Since the war, modernization has threatened to destroy the traditional culture because people trained in the traditional culture do not know how to adjust themselves to the trends of modernization. This is the situation right now. We Japanese need to realize the nature of this situation much more clearly than we have and learn to adjust to the changes due to the modernization of our national life.

Nara (B) Just for the purpose of comparison, I think that two important periods in Japanese history should be noted. The

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first was the acceptance of Chinese culture in ancient times. The second was modernization in the Meiji era. At the time Buddhism was imported into Japan, Japanese culture was in a very primitive stage of development, whereas the culture of China was very highly developed. Thus, inevitably the impact of Buddhism was accompanied by various aspects of the higher culture and civilization. That was why there was a good deal of conflict between those who believed in the traditional Shinto faith and those who believed in the new Buddhist teachings. There were struggles and tensions, but in the course of history these two streams, traditional Japanese culture and Chinese culture, merged to form what we now call Japanese culture.

In the Meiji era, however, the situation was slightly different because, while the Japanese people could and did accept the material elements of Western civilization, the acceptance of the religious element was small. In other words, the influence of Christianity in the Meiji era was quite limited.

When I was in India I got the impression that India is now undergoing the process of modernization. I met many young scientists and students who were very enthusiastic about the acceptance of elements of material culture from abroad, whether it was the United States or the U.S.S.R. But for spiritual motivation they look to their own past. They are very proud of their own religion, Hinduism; and I don't feel that this mentality will hinder the modernization of India. Modernization can be carried out even when they look to their own national traditions for a spiritual basis.

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Perera (B) When you speak of modernization, it occurs to me that in India the Indians definitely have their own traditional culture, regardless of how much progress they make. In Japan I do not believe this is so. If you ask a young Japanese person today about his religion, he won't say, "I am a Shintoist," or "I am a Buddhist." He will say, "I don't have a religion." Why is this so?

Desai (H) But I believe that the same person will say he has a religion after he is 35. When a person is older he will remember the traditions and culture of his parents.

Nara (B) I believe that the ordinary Japanese, especially a young person, is quite indifferent to religion. He is just not conscious of religion.

Q. *Mr. Perera, you said that religion should be a matter of the mind. Is that what you meant to say? (Siddiqi—M)*

Perera (B) Yes. Religion is not something that can be limited to going to church or saying a prayer at a temple. You can't separate life and religion. That's what I meant. In regard to organization, I don't say that your own people shouldn't get together. That is all right. What I object to is the person or organization that seeks to impose its will on other people. A person should not be dictated to by an organization. We need only the teachings of Lord Buddha or Jesus Christ or the prophet Mohammed or someone else.

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There should be freedom of thinking. I believe that if there were no organizations there would be no tension.

Siddiqi (M) I don't agree with you on this point. There may be individual tensions, but the point is that there should be understanding between individuals and between organizations.

Chairman This raises another very important issue: the justification of missionary work, whether it be Muslim, Buddhist, or Christian, or any other kind. I would like to ask Mr. Tamura to express his opinion as to the justification of Buddhists, for example, going into another culture, either to revive a dying Buddhism as in India, or to go into America or Spain in order to preach it.

Tamura (B) In the course of propagating Buddhism in non-Buddhist cultures, it has been characteristic of Buddhism to embrace the religious elements of the local cultures, even including superstitious cults. This is in contrast to Christian missionary efforts. There are exceptions to this, my own faith, Nichiren Buddhism, for example. The main point of Nichiren's teaching was restoration of the original teachings of Buddhism by stripping away the corrupting influence or elements which Buddhism had acquired.

Q. *Is it correct to say that in the present program of spreading Buddhism in the West, the intention is to include Christian elements in their religious teachings? It's just a logical follow-through of what you have just said.* (Chairman)

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Tamura (B) Well, that is difficult to answer directly ; but, yes, I think I can safely say that Christianity in America will have a decided influence on Buddhism there.

Ueda (S) Shintoists today are not concerned about missionary work abroad. They are only interested in education or the revitalization of Shinto among the Japanese.

Q. In other words there is no conversion movement in Shinto. It's a racial religion. Mr. Siddiqi, could you give your views on the justification of mission work ? (Chairman)

Siddiqi (M) If the purpose of missionary activity is to clear up misunderstanding, to tell people what a religion believes, to give people information, knowledge, the true picture, then I believe it is good. But if there is some other behind-the-scenes motive, such as colonization or material gain, then I do not approve.

Q. Mr. Desai, is there any missionary impulse in India ? (Chairman)

Desai (H) No. None at all. If there is, it is only to explain the fundamental ideas of the religion, not to urge people to follow it.

Q. How do you account for the fact, then, that theosophists or the followers of Ramakrishna are going all over the

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world, particularly America, and are doing a great deal of missionary work? (Chairman)

Desai (H) But they are only explaining what Hinduism is.

Siddiqi (M) Well, of course, if you explain something to somebody and say, "Our religion is such and such, and is very good," then it means indirectly that you are saying, "If you like it, then accept it."

Samarrai (M) It seems to me that Hinduism, Judaism, and Shintoism are national or racial religions, and as such are not primarily concerned with converting others. An Indian may not know anything about Hinduism but still there is an attachment to it, because it is a part of his racial and national heritage. However, in the case of Buddhism, Christianity, Islam — and even Socialism and Communism — these are beliefs or ideologies which seek to influence our way of life. There is justification for this in my opinion, because the ideology which tries to unite people and bring about understanding between different races and nations is good. Therefore, I believe there is justification for Christianity, or Islam, and even Communism, if they are peaceful, to spread their way of life. We have minds to judge which is best among them, which will make the best society. So I think it is good to have the free interchange of ideas and beliefs which comes from missionary work.

Q. *Mr. Desai. The Maha Bodhi Society has developed centers*

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throughout India in order to spread the Buddhist faith and restore Buddhism to the land of its birth. How do you feel about the Maha Bodhi Society of Ceylon working in your country and trying to develop Buddhism there?

(Chairman)

Desai (II): It is the daughter coming home to her family.

Nara (E): I would like to comment, not exactly on the justification of missionary work but upon the attitude of the missionary. Zen is concerned with discovering the self. Therefore, it is quite personal. It doesn't seek to bring about any social revolution. The first problem is, What is "I"? The Zen master looks around and sees people who are suffering. He says to them, "What are you doing? Why are you suffering? Why do you have such agony without any cause? Life is so simple, so beautiful. You can lead a happy life, if you follow the way of life of Zen." Then by his teaching as well as his own behavior, he influences the people who are suffering. In this way Zen has spread.

Here it is not a matter of young or old, modern or ancient, Americans or Japanese. Such differences have nothing to do with it. It is just the Zen master who has realized what real life should be, looking at suffering people and seeking to influence them so that they can lead a happy life. That is all. Thus, if it is necessary, some organization may be established. The main point is that the reality of Zen, or the reality of the happy life, must be transmitted from person to person. That is why Zen is said to be a religion

rather than a philosophy, because personal contact is inevitable in Zen.

Original Sin and Life after Death

Ueda (S) I think that, most Japanese believe that Christianity teaches that man is a sinful being. Most Christian preachers stress this. You must confess your sinful nature before God and be converted to Christianity. What do Christians today think about this idea of sin in Christianity.

Q. *Do you mean original sin?* (Chairman)

Ueda (S) Yes.

Bethel (C) There are some schools of thought within Christianity which think of human personality, not so much in terms of original sin, as in terms of potentiality. Sin comes into the picture when an individual chooses the wrong, when he chooses to go against the purposes of God, rather than to work in harmony with them. In this sense every man is a sinner because all of us at times tend to follow the easy way. In this we sin.

Ueda (S) Then you are saying that human beings have the possibility of going against the will of God?

Bethel (C) Right.

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Ueda (S) That is the nature of sin?

Bethel (C) The going against the purposes and will of God is sin, not the potentiality. The potentiality is good. A human being has potentiality to develop to great heights.

Ueda (S) But you are saying that man has the possibility of going against the will of God.

Bethel (C) Yes. He has the freedom to go against the will of God if he wants to.

Ueda (S) Then I would like to know how you put the idea of original sin in the structure of the Christian concept of man. How much attention do you give to it?

Bethel (C) (*Mr. Bethel replied at length*) In my thinking the idea of original sin, which holds that because Adam or my forefathers did something wrong, I am a sinful being and have been since I was born, is untenable; but there are some Christian schools of thought who believe that this is the case.

Ueda (S) I think many Christians are trying to reinterpret the nature of man in a different way from the original interpretation or, perhaps I should say, from the commonly accepted interpretation. Still today many Christians, as far as I know, still believe in original sin.

Q. *Do Christians really believe in life after death?* (Tamura
—B)

Bethel (C) If you are asking, “Do Christians believe in the persistence of personality beyond death, the answer is unequivocally, “Yes.”

Q. *Personality in what sense?* (Ueda—S)

Bethel (C) That gets right back to the nature of this creature we call man. Your personality is made up of those things which make you; personality is a spiritual thing. It is in this spiritual respect that man is made in the image of God, not physically. It is this spiritual center of being, with the results of living indelibly woven into it, that persists beyond death.

Nara (B) This may be an elementary question, because my knowledge of Christianity is limited, but in many philosophies of both East and West man is conceived as being either good or bad. Does Christianity say in simple terms that man is either good or bad? In other words, as soon as a man is born, can you say that he has a good nature or that he has a bad nature?

Q. *You are asking if man has a predetermined nature?*
(Chairman)

Nara (B) Yes.

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Bethel (C) The main stream of Christianity, I believe, would answer that you cannot say either that man is born good or that he is born bad. Rather it would answer that man is born neutral or innocent with the potentiality of being either good or bad.

Brown (C) But I think you can't deny the fact that there are definitely conservative schools that believe man has this original sin which must be wiped away before he can be saved.

Ueda (S) What would be the percentage of the conservatives or fundamentalists?

Chairman Probably very large.

Q. In Christianity, do you believe that if a man does good or bad, he will suffer or receive the results of his actions in his life? (Desai)

Bethel (C) It's not that simple. Some of the best people have suffered the most. If they stand for high ideals, sometimes they suffer the most.

Brown (C) Do you mean that if a man leads an evil life he will suffer physical punishment or mental retribution before his death?

Desai (H) Both.

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Brown (C) If you had been an observer when Christ was crucified, you would obviously have seen that he was dying in pain.

Desai (H) But he was happy.

Brown (C) Yes, and that's why I would draw a distinction between the spiritual and mental and the physical. For instance, a man may lead an evil life and never suffer for it. Perhaps he has killed someone. He may never be caught, may never come to trial ; but while he may escape physical punishment he may suffer spiritually. That would be just natural punishment' not human punishment.

Chairman In other words, it would be in him — cause and effect.

Desai (C) Yes, cause and effect. Do you believe in that or not ?

Brown (C) In assessing this in Christianity, rather than saying that a person will inevitably suffer the effects of his deeds only in this life, you have got to include the Christian concept of the afterlife. Just as the Hindu, in the whole Karma concept, considers succeeding lives on this earth.

Desai (H) But we believe in rebirth.

Tamura (B) Christians do not believe in rebirth, do they?

Nara (B) Do you mean transmigration of the soul?

Chairman Transmigration, rebirth, and the persistence of personality are three different concepts. Transmigration means that your spirit reappears in another sentient being, human or otherwise, in some part of the world. Rebirth means that you are reborn as a human being. The persistence of personality is quite distinct from either of these.

Nara (B) Thank you. That is quite clear now.

Chairman There is a strong segment of Protestantism that regards the Bible very much in the same manner as the Muslim does the Koran. It is the inspired word of God inerrant in every respect, the only rule for faith and practice. One group says specifically that, when something is in the Bible, it is binding; when it is not in the Bible, there is freedom of action.

The time is about up and I think that we must end the discussion here. It is unfortunate that we do not have representatives from the Catholic Church, the fundamentalist or conservative point of view of Protestantism, or the Jewish faith. The next time we should be sure to have them present.

Note At the end of the discussion the non-Christians present expressed a desire to have a discussion on Christianity, Tolerance, and Indigenous Cultures. This will be the topic for the next meeting.