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The June 1964 Issue of Contemporary Religions in Japan

Life and Death

One can do little more than add one's sincere assent to the Editor's tribute to Professor Kishimoto. All who met him and came to know him could not but be impressed by his consideration for others and his deep sincerity. His essay on "Life and Death" cannot fail to move — even though it would hardly meet with a ready agreement. The "either-or," as presented by Professor Kishimoto, seems to be a strange one. One either accepts a naive explanation of "Paradise" and the "Pure Land," or else one follows so-called "modern science" in rejecting any kind of future life in which the continuity of the self is maintained.

Dr. Kishimoto, despite the state of "life-hunger," intensified by the cancer which made its attacks upon him for the ten years before his death, leaves no way open for a demythologization of cruder ideas (which were never intended to be taken literally anyway!) but feels that death is no more than the extinction or negation of life. Nor yet does Dr. Kishimoto explain the basis of the moral impulse for living this life to the full. Could we ask the Institute to sponsor a Roundtable Conference on the subject of "Death"? I feel that there would be plenty of life in such a debate!

Human Depravity and Faith according to Shinran

Dr. Bloom gives us a closely-argued exposition of Shinran's

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Philosophy of Salvation, but one could have wished for more felicitous English. The tortuous nature of the language almost gives the impression of it being a translation from Japanese! The study is a valuable one, and less extravagant in its parallels with Christian thought than the Rev. Arthur Lloyd's book on Shinran, published way back in 1910. (Dr. Bloom writes almost as if his work is a pioneer one in the presentation of Shinran.)

There is no reference to or elucidation of some apparent tautologies. For example, faith is described as the achievement of Buddha nature (*bushhin*), but then we are given an equation of Tathagata (*shinnyō*) with Nirvana (*nehan*), and Nirvana (*nehan*), in turn, is called "Buddha nature." Is there a sequence of thought or no?

Faith, as Amida's gift, would seem to provide the basis of a personal relationship, but the article does not give any clue as to the extent to which Amida himself is simply a *hoben*, a convenient device for explaining the ultimate dependence of the part upon the totality. We may well ask whether Shinran's heart was bigger than his head!

The Theory of Value

This further study on Sōka Gakkai from Mr. Brannen's pen is most welcome. The *Kachiron* is the only document of a semi-philosophical character which lends plausibility to the use of the title "Gakkai," but Mr. Brannen well points out the difficulty of harmonizing such a document with the fundamental standpoint of Nichiren Shō-shū. One would have hoped for a more detailed comparison between its utilitarian approach and

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the philosophical presuppositions of the Buddhist sect. Perhaps Mr. Brannen will one day provide some clues to understand what attracted Makiguchi to Nichiren Shō-shū, and why, once he had become an adherent, the *Kachiron* should have been retained as a fundamental scripture.

We are grateful to Mr. Brannen for his observations on the difficulties of establishing a genuine text. The same problem of canonicity applies to other "scriptures" belonging to other newer sects and religious movements. "Revision" seeks to bring the text up to date, but there is little attempt to indicate where changes have been made.

Popular Buddhism

The late Dr. Kamimura's study on Asakusa Kannon and other temples that are the focus of popular Buddhism is extremely valuable in bringing out the contrast between the Buddhism of the philosopher and the Buddhism of the masses. He recognizes the importance of the material to the average worshiper.

Although we are assured that the priests seek to lead the people further in their Saturday classes on the Kannon Sutra at Asakusa, yet only a small number would be thus influenced, and one may question whether there is an *adequate* effort on the part of the religious authorities to eradicate what they themselves would regard as baser or unworthier motives in worship. The sermon — a specimen, one may suppose, of a typical sermon — whilst it emphasizes the omnipotence of Kannon and her significance as the incarnation of *jihi*, still concentrates on the worship of the image as the means to

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benefit from the mercy of Kannon.

It is a pity we could not have had more on the other two temples, and more information on the link with Yin-Yang magic and symbolism.

The Problem of Religious Tolerance

The Roundtable Conference was worthwhile, one feels, in bringing out the point that religious tolerance must really involve personal conviction, seeing that, in the absence of conviction, one would have not tolerance but indifference. A true tolerance would respect a right to convictions on both sides, and one senses, on the part of the critics of "missionary intolerance," an intolerance towards the missionary's deep-seated convictions. The missionary's method rather than the missionary's message comes in for criticism, although belief can obviously influence methodology as well. The comparative wealth of the Christian mission evidently arouses suspicion, although the missionary should hardly be blamed for the inroad of Western habit and costume.

The suggestion that the Japanese Christian takes a more negative attitude to things Japanese than the missionary calls for some examination and validification. If true, the gap between church and society would show no sign of closing.

Thanks to the editor for an interesting collection of articles. Perhaps one could have been surrendered in this issue to leave room for a few Book Reviews. May one suggest, too, that Japanese books be also included amongst those reviewed, as it is in this area that the foreigner is generally ignorant.

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