

THE INTERNATIONAL INSTITUTE FOR THE STUDY OF RELIGIONS

A REPORT OF THE FIRST DECADE
(1954—1964)

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Director

The International Institute for the Study of Religions was founded ten years ago in the spring of 1954. The first decade has been a good one. There has been steady progress. Ten years ago nobody had heard of an institute of this nature. There was none. Today, although little attention has been given to publicity, it is widely known in both the religious world of Japan and among foreign leaders and scholars interested in Japanese religions. It seems appropriate, therefore, to briefly review the work that has been done since it was first established.

The International Institute for the Study of Religions is an independent, non-profit, non-sectarian Japanese foundation. Its primary purpose is to assist foreign scholars, religious leaders, and other interested persons in gaining a better understanding of the religions of Japan — Shinto, Buddhism, Christianity, and other religions — and the religious life of the Japanese people. It also assists Japanese scholars and religious leaders in their study of religions outside their country.

The Institute is not a propaganda agency. It does not associate itself with any particular philosophical, theological, or religious point of view or theory of religion. Questions as to

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the truth or falsity of a religion, religious teaching, or religious system, and value judgements regarding them are not within the province of the Institute. The Institute is interested in promoting understanding in the field of religion, but it does not attempt to define what constitutes understanding. Its functions are objective, scholarly analysis and description, on the one hand, and service, on the other.

Founded by a group of scholars and religious leaders belonging to the various religious traditions characteristic of this country — all but the writer were Japanese — the Institute endeavors to make accessible to foreign academic and religious circles sources of information regarding religion in Japan and and to provide Japanese scholars and religious leaders with information regarding the religious world abroad. A large majority of those directly assisted are advanced scholars in the field of religion.

BEGINNINGS

The idea that finally brought the Institute into existence developed sometime in 1951. It began during a visit to the writer's office of the Reverend Tatsuo Satomi and Mr. Gikan Matani, representatives of the Buddhist Federation of Japan. In the course of the conversation — indeed, this was the reason for the visit — the need was discussed for an organization which would devote itself to the promotion of international understanding on a religious level between Japan and the rest of the world, particular by the West, and the hope was expressed that the writer might be able to do something to meet this need. At the time there was no clear idea as to what

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form such an activity should take, but the proposal was an interesting one and it was decided that it merited more careful consideration.

Subsequently an ad hoc committee was formed with representatives of the major streams of religions in Japan participating; meetings were held to discuss the proposal; and general agreement was reached as to what should be done. Not unnaturally the main problem was financial. No one had any idea where funds for such a project might be secured.

In the spring of 1952, after his return to the United States, the writer received a letter from the Religions League of Japan inviting him to return in order to undertake the proposed institute, because by that time the idea was beginning to take concrete shape. Consequently, efforts were redoubled to contact potential givers, both individuals and foundations. This was discouraging work at first, but by the summer of 1953 a donor had been found,* the writer returned to Japan in November that year, and the ad hoc committee was again convened. For several months thereafter detailed discussions continued which finally resulted in incorporation on May 5, 1954. The burden of preparing the articles of incorporation and numerous other details fell mainly on the shoulders of Mr. Tan'un Kotani, a Buddhist layman and personal friend of the writer who for several years was on the Institute staff.

For a few months the office of the Institute was in the writer's home. Then it moved to the Buddhist Central Hall in Shiba Park. Later, when that building was sold, rooms were secured for the Institute's office and library at its present loca-

* For a list of donors to the Institute see page 295.

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tion.

Administration of the Institute is the responsibility of a self-perpetuating board of directors and a board of counsellors which meet annually, and a committee of standing directors that meets monthly. A majority of the standing directors are scholars who are well known both in Japan and abroad.* The day by day activities are in the hands of the director and staff.

Although the Institute is completely independent, it is in touch with a large number of Japanese religious scholars and most of the institutions of higher learning in Japan having courses in the field of religion, as well as the principal religious organizations (denominations and sects) and institutions of the country, but it is not directly related to any of them.

The Institute does not compete with existing institutions. It endeavors to utilize them as fully as possible, and only where necessary does it supplement what is already being done, especially in respect to developments in the field of contemporary religion.

Membership in the Institute is open to anyone interested in religion in Japan who will pay the required fees. The facilities of the Institute are available to all visitors.

ACTIVITIES

The primary purpose of the Institute being to assist its members in their efforts to understand religion in Japan and abroad, its activities have been planned accordingly. These fall mainly into two general categories: direct assistance and publications.

* For a list of directors and counsellors see pages 376—7.

Direct Assistance to Foreign Scholars and Leaders

Direct assistance to foreign scholars and leaders has taken a number of forms, the first and foremost being conferences with those who come to the Institute for information or help in connection with their studies and observation of religions in this country and abroad. The number of such visitors, of course, has never been large, but the amount of time devoted to them by the staff in the course of a month is often considerable. Year after year during the past decade more have been coming until sometimes it is difficult to get other necessary work done. A visit is usually preceded by correspondence, often extending over a considerable period of time, involving both academic planning and information regarding living conditions in this country.

A guest book is kept for those who come to the Institute for the first time, but no record is available of subsequent visits or of their special interests. They come from all part of the world; they represent many different nationalities and a considerable variety of religious faiths. As for their professions, scholars in the history of religion who are teaching in Western institutions of higher learning predominate. Religious leaders from the West and local missionaries constitute the next largest group. Among the latter there are always a number who are working for advance degrees in the field of religion, but a few are concerned solely with understanding the local situation. A third group is made up of graduate students from abroad, and a fourth of journalist, both Japanese and foreign. Not infrequently local educational institutions and foreign embassies have introduced guests or requested assistance in meeting their

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inquiries. Usually contact with these people is relatively limited, but some are frequent visitors. For a few people, continuing service is rendered over a period of months or even years.

The form of service varies from short briefings on the religious situation in Japan to arranging interviews with Japanese and foreign scholars and leaders and planning research activities leading to academic degrees or publications. In a number of cases essays, articles, and theses, in full or in part, have been submitted for examination and critical comment.

The fields of study or interest have covered a wide range, with the greater number being concerned with at least some phases of the newer postwar sects and movements, notably Sōka Gakkai.

No special effort is made to contact foreign visitors and no distinction has been drawn because of their reputation or academic attainments. It is pleasant, however, to recall some of the better known people whom the Institute has been able to serve. These include Dr. Paul Tillich of Harvard University, Dr. Heinrich Kramer of the Netherlands, Dr. Ernst Benz of Marburg, Germany, Dr. Lesslie Newbigin of Geneva, Dr. Kenneth W. Morgan of Colgate University, Dr. Arthur Koesler of London, Dr. Walter Horton of Oberlin College, and Dr. Robert McCracken of the Riverside Church, New York.

Lectures, Conferences and Group Tours

During the past decade numerous lectures, conferences, and group tours have been sponsored by the Institute, but generally speaking there has been no regular schedule of such activities.

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Foreign lecturers have included Dr. G. P. Malelasekera, O. B. E. of Ceylon, formerly president of the World Fellowship of Buddhists and presently the ambassador of Ceylon at London, Dr. Robert Bellah of Harvard University, and Dr. Zwi Werblowsky of the Hebrew University of Jerusalem. Of a related nature are the addresses on religion in this country by the director before numerous groups of foreign scholars, students, and other visitors, and a biennial course of lectures at the Tokyo School of Japanese Language. Occasionally there are even requests to explain the local religions to Japanese going abroad so that they can present them intelligibly to Western people. Mention should also be made of articles written by the director for local and foreign publications, including a weekly column in *The Japan Times* on some phase of religion in Japan.

Japanese scholars who have lectured under the Institute's auspices include the late Dr. Hideo Kishimoto, formerly head of the Department of Religious Studies of Tokyo University, Dr. Hajime Nakamura of the Department of Indian Studies of the same institution, Dr. Baiyu Watanabe, a Buddhist scholar of Nihon University, Dr. Sokyō Ono of Kokugakuin (Shinto) University and the Association of Shinto Shrines, and Assistant Professor Naofusa Hirai of the Institute of Japanese Culture and Classics of the same institution. The late Dr. Tokujirō Kanamori of the Diet Library, Dr. Yoshio Ōishi of Kyōto University, and Dr. Nobushige Ukai, formerly of Tōkyō University and currently president of International Christian University, delivered lectures on the subject of religion and state in Japan.

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Japanese religious leaders who have given addresses sponsored by the Institute have represented Ōmoto, P L Kyōdan, Risshō Kōsei Kai, Sōka Gakkai, Tenshō Kōtai Jingū-kyō (the so-called Dancing Religion), and Sekai Kyūsei-kyō (World Messianity). These lectures were primarily ends in themselves, but in a number of cases a recording was made and the addresses were published.

Tours too numerous to mention have been conducted during the past decade for local foreign residents, including one for foreign correspondents. Most of these, however, have been for either dependents of the United States Armed Forces stationed in Japan or local missionary bodies. Unfortunately, it has not been possible to meet all the requests that have been made for this kind of service.

Assistance to Japanese Scholars and Leaders

Assistance to Japanese scholars and leaders has not required a great deal of time in any single instance, but altogether the total has been considerable. Such service has taken four forms : introductions to foreign scholars and institutions, suggestions regarding itineraries while traveling abroad, reference materials of value in preparing for travel abroad, and miscellaneous. Some examples of the miscellaneous category are : (1) assistance to Japanese newspapers wanting foreigners to write articles, (2) a request for information about Buddhism in North Korea, (3) a request for information regarding Japan's wartime religious policy vis-a-vis Korea, and (4) the conduct of a tour of Christian institution by 200 teachers of a non-Christian sect. Almost every week there are calls from travel agents and others

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seeking miscellaneous information about religion in Japan.

Roundtable Conferences

Eight roundtable conferences on the general theme of "Religion and Modern Life" have been conducted and these have now become a regular feature of the Institute's activities. The participants of these conferences have generally been responsible representatives of the various streams of religious tradition in this country. Originally conceived as a means of promoting better mutual understanding of their own religions on the part of Japanese religious leaders, the reports of these conferences have proven to be of such value to foreign scholars that a dual purpose has been achieved.

Two conferences of a somewhat different nature concerned the ecumenical movement in Christianity. Representatives of the Catholic, Protestant, and Eastern Orthodox traditions participated. The purpose was not to promote the ecumenical movement but to help Buddhists, Shintoists, and others to acquire accurate information about the issues under discussion.

Two International Roundtable Conferences have been conducted. These were somewhat in the nature of pilot projects with representatives from Islam, Hinduism, and Southern Buddhism living in Tokyo participating along with representative of Japanese Buddhism, Shinto, Christianity, etc.

Miscellaneous Activities

Among numerous miscellaneous activities may be mentioned an essay contest on interfaith cooperation in which approximately one hundred persons participated. This was sponsored

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soon after the Institute was founded, and was mainly in order to advertise the Institute. In this sense the contest was successful.

A number of informal conferences were conducted in Kumamoto, Nagasaki, Fukuoka, and Tokyo on the problem of religion and education. These featured Dr. Sokyō Ono, a member of the board of directors already mentioned, Dr. Tatsuo Morito, who was then president of Hiroshima University and a member of the Board of counsellors of this Institute, the late Dr. Hideo Kishimoto, and others.

Of a somewhat different nature was a study of "Living Buddhism in Japan." This was carried on by Dr. Yoshirō Tamura, Assistant Professor of Buddhism at Tōyō University, for a period of approximately two years. During this period ten prominent leaders representing different streams of Japanese Buddhist thought were interviewed and their attitudes toward some of the major problems of religion today were summed up in a volume published under the title, "Living Buddhism in Japan." The reception of the book has been excellent. It has gone into three editions, and a fourth revised edition is being planned. In a sense the study is misnamed. Instead of describing Buddhism as it is today, it presents what certain leaders think about it and what they think it ought to be.

Currently a study of conversion is being conducted by the Institute. This is a phenomenological study which is intended to describe briefly the attitudes and experiences of individuals who have changed their religious faith in recent years. Since the experience is one that is most evident in Christianity and the newer religious movements that have come into prominence since World War II, — there are few real conversions in

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the established Buddhist and Shinto sects — the study is primarily concerned with conversions to or within these movements. This has been in process for two years but to date no report has been published.

PUBLICATIONS

The first publication of the Institute was a set of four directories of religious denominations: Buddhism, Christianity, Shinto, and the new sects. These were prepared in order to assist foreign scholars in getting a general idea of the sectarian situation in Japan and to help them in finding institutions they might wish to visit. Subsequently two volumes were added which list the courses related to religion offered in Japanese institutions of higher learning. The latter project was only partially satisfactory (1) because it was impossible to secure even brief digests of what was covered in the courses offered, and (2) because courses on religion are not always easy to identify — they are frequently included under such subjects as Chinese and Indian history and philosophy.

For five years beginning in 1955 a quarterly Bulletin was published in Japanese and English which contained special articles and lectures sponsored by the Institute. In 1960 this was discontinued and in its place *Contemporary Religions in Japan* was published. This is a quarterly journal containing articles, translations, book reviews, statistics and a chronology of events in the religious world.

When the Institute was organized in 1954 there were several requests from those who participated in its founding that something be done to help religious leaders become informed on

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developments of religious world outside Japan. However, since this was not directly related to the Institute's primary purpose, the matter was delayed for several years. Finally, in 1959, the bi-monthly Japanese language magazine, *Kokusai Shūkyū News* (*International Religious News*) was founded and is now in its fifth year of publication. While the subscription list is not large, a number of local periodicals have requested permission to reprint material in it, so its influence extends much beyond the actual subscribers.

In addition to those mentioned above the Institute has published *Konkōkyō: A Japanese Religion* by Dr. Delwin B. Schneider, *A Refutation of Deus by Fabian*, translated by Dr. Esther Lowell Hibbard of Dōshisha University, and *Catholicism in Japan* by Dr. Joseph J. Spae, C.I.C.M. Currently in preparation is *Modern Japanese Protestant Theologies* by Dr. Charles Germany.

POSTSCRIPT

As a result of a decade of experience, it has become increasingly clear that the Institute has only begun to perform the functions that need to be performed if it is to fulfill its mission. In particular there is a wide demand for translations of the large amount of research being done by Japanese scholars, which is largely unknown to the world outside Japan. The limiting factors are the lack of funds and personnel to do the work, the former being determinative.

During the past ten years most of the Institute's support has come from abroad. Beginning in 1965, however, this will change. Funds are now being raised in Japan to cover the

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overhead and the regular current program. To carry on other activities and to expand into new areas, assistance is needed from individuals and foundations interested in promoting intercultural understanding in the area of religion. The extent of cooperation in this area will determine the history of the Institute during its second decade.

LIST OF INSTITUTE DONORS

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