

RELIGIOUS ISSUES IN JAPAN 2006

The Potential Social Role of Religion

TSUJIMURA Shinobu 辻村志のぶ

International Institute for the Study of Religion

The following report on “religion in the news” in Japan from late 2005 through 2006 is a translation of a report published in Japanese as 「可能性としての宗教の社会的役割」 in the pages of 『現代宗教』 [Gendai shūkyō] 2007, a journal published annually by the International Institute for the Study of Religion. It is based on the database of the RIRC (Religious Information Research Center and on information culled from newspapers, journals, and specialized religious publications. As in previous years, the author has kindly consented to allow us to translate her report into English in order to provide information on the current state of religious issues in Japanese society.

Many more opinions regarding society were expressed publicly by the religious community during the present term (October 2005–September 2006) than in the previous one. Can we truly say, however, that the voice of the religious community reached society? A perfect example of the striking gap between society at large and the religious world is the report on the “Reform of the Public Benefit Corporation Law.” A variety of opinions on the social definition of a “religious organization,” which lies at the core of the debate on the relation of religious organizations to corporations and juridical foundations, were expressed, mainly in specialized religious publications. It is no exaggeration to say that all of this was ignored by the secular media. Aside from those directly involved, very few among the public are aware of the fact that the Japanese Association of Religious Organizations and various other religious organizations have sent numerous written requests and opinions to the government. The time has come for the religious community to search for ways not only to express its views but also to relate them to the concerns and interests of the general public. This is true for all the issues covered in the present report. Numerous resolutions and opinions are gathered in these

pages, but one has to remain skeptical as to how many of them have actually received recognition.

That said, there are a number of questions on which the views of religious people need to be considered. In the present report I would like to begin with a consideration of the progress made on problems addressed in the previous report on the lawsuit over official visits to the Yasukuni Shrine, constitutional reform, the dispute over a female empress and the shrine community, and the amendment to the organ transplant law. Following that I would like to take up the matter of “religion and education,” which has come to dominate the publications over the course of the past year. In doing so, I would like to summarize my own observations on the state of religiously affiliated educational institutions and religious education, based on my examination of major changes brought about by the revision of the “Fundamental Education Law” and responses to it by the religious communities.

Increased Opportunities for the Religious World to Speak Out

The Lawsuit over Official Visits to Yasukuni Shrine

Regarding the litigation concerning official visits to the Yasukuni Shrine, changes can be observed in three different areas. First is the follow-up report on the judicial decisions by the Supreme Court and district courts, discussed in an earlier issue of this journal.¹ On 23 June 2006 the Supreme Court held a hearing on an appeal against the decision passed by Osaka High Court and handed down its ruling. The second petty bench of the Supreme Court rejected an appeal in a damages suit:

Despite the fact that the Prime Minister’s visits offended religious feelings and caused discomfort, it cannot be said that the plaintiff’s legal benefits have been damaged by the premier’s visit. Accordingly, no compensation for damages can be claimed.

In the first lawsuit brought against visits to Yasukuni Shrine by the former Prime Minister, the Supreme Court overruled the decision passed by Osaka High Court in October 2005, which had ruled that the visits were unconstitutional. Hence the expectations of a resolution concerning their constitutionality were not met. In addition, the plaintiffs’ appeals were rejected in the lawsuits by the High Courts of Ehime, Chiba (June 27), and Tokyo (June 28), by the District

1. See the English translation in the author’s “Religious Issues in Japan 2005,” *Bulletin of the Nanzan Institute for Religion and Culture* 30 (2006): 19–22. [ed.]

Court of Matsuyama (March 15), the Naha Branch of the Fukuoka High Court (October 22) and the Takamatsu High Court (November 22).

The second change we observe is a normalization of the situation with the “Yasukuni problem.” Despite the backlash suffered by then Prime Minister Koizumi Junichirō, he visited the Yasukuni Shrine on 15 August, just prior to his expected retirement from the post in September, thus bringing to conclusion a public commitment he had made at the time of the general elections. It has been twenty-one years since incumbent Prime Minister Nakasone Yasuhiro paid a visit in 1985 to the Yasukuni Shrine on the anniversary of Japan’s surrender at the end of World War II. The number of regular visitors to the Shrine reached approximately 258,000, or 53,000 more than the previous year. As has been pointed out previously, after the six successive visits by Prime Minister Koizumi, the Yasukuni Shrine and its “problem” became ordinary, calm, and mundane, and indeed began to look like a well-established practice and just another accepted fact of life.

The third change we would note is the disclosure of the “Tomita Memorandum” by Japan’s leading financial daily, the *Nihon keizai shinbun*. In its morning edition of 20 July news broke of a “Tomita Memorandum” containing a written record of the late former Grand Steward Tomita Tomohiko, in which mention is made of Emperor Shōwa’s strong displeasure in 1988 over the inclusion of Class-A war criminals on the list of those honored by Yasukuni Shrine. The emperor is quoted as saying, “This is why I no longer pay visits there. It is a matter of deep conviction.” Regarding the relation of this statement to the problem at hand, it may be said the content of the memorandum does not seem to have any direct effect on the way the Yasukuni problem is to be handled, though it may yet prove to have ramifications of immense importance.

It is not clear yet how the current Prime Minister Abe Shinzō will deal with the Yasukuni problem, but whatever happens it seems clear that the filing of litigations had not finished. Since the objections raised by the plaintiff regarding “religious human rights” have yet to be acknowledged by the judicial authorities, religious people who oppose the visits of official persons to the Yasukuni Shrine will need to address the question from different angles and find new approaches.

The Religious World and the Revision of the Constitution

As observed previously, opposition by the religious communities—with the exception of Shinto—against the revision of the present Constitution, in particular Article 9, remains firm. An association of Religious People for Peace was begun in April 2005 under the direction of Murakami Yuki, former president of Taishō University. On 27 May 2006, around the time of the first anniversary of its foundation, the association organized a symposium and a demonstration

in Kyoto attended by some two hundred persons. Further, the Amidist Article 9 Association (formerly known as the Hongan-ji Article 9 Association) under the directorship of Shigaraki Takamaru (former president of Ryūkoku University) and established mainly by the authorities of True Pure Land Buddhism (*Jōdo shinshū*), held its first national meeting on the same day the New Draft Constitution was promulgated. At this meeting booklets on “Buddhism and Article 9 of the Constitution” were distributed, the endorsement of more than five hundred Buddhist clergy representatives was garnered, and formal protests were published in the *Hongwanji Newsletter*, which led to an increase of supporters.

On 22 November, at a meeting in honor of the fiftieth anniversary of the party’s founding, the Liberal Democratic Party officially released a draft of the proposed Constitution presented on 28 October 2005 at the Committee for Drafting a New Constitution. Obviously, the core of the report had to do with Article 9. The New Draft Constitution proposed to change the wording in the second article concerning pacifism from “a renunciation of war” to a “guarantee of national security.” The text of the first paragraph is retained:

Aspiring sincerely to an international peace based on justice and order, the Japanese people forever renounce war as a sovereign right of the nation and the threat or use of force as means of settling international disputes.

The second paragraph, which is being excised, reads:

In order to accomplish the aim of the preceding paragraph, land, sea, and air forces, as well as other war potential, will never be maintained. The right of belligerency of the state will not be recognized.

In its place, specific permission is given to establish a “self-defense military”:

1. To insure the peace and independence of our country, along with the safety of the country and of the nation, it [Japan] maintains a self-defense army with the prime minister as its supreme leader;
2. In accordance with the provisions of the preceding paragraph, the law stipulates that the self-defense military must be submitted to the Diet and any activities performed by the defense forces for the accomplishment of their mission require the Diet’s approval and control;
3. In accordance with the provisions of the preceding paragraph, the law stipulates that in addition to activities needed for self-defense, the defense forces can take part in efforts to maintain international peace and security under international cooperation, as well as to

- keep fundamental public order in our country in time of emergency, and to protect the nation's existence and freedom;
4. Matters concerning organizational structure and regulation of self-defense forces, other than those specified in the second paragraph, are established by law.

With the intentions regarding self-defense forces thus clarified, the support for Article 9 is gradually giving way to opposition against amendments to the Constitution.

Furthermore, paragraph 3 of Article 20 on freedom of religion reads, "The state and its organs shall refrain from religious education or any other religious activity." In its place the New Draft Constitution suggests:

The state and public organizations shall refrain from religious education or any other religious activities that possess religious significance or will lead to support, promotion, fostering, coercion, or interference with a specific religion beyond the bounds of accepted social protocol or ethno-cultural practices.

On 21 January the National Council for the Surveillance of Infringements against the Separation of Religion and State (also known as the Association for Separation of Religion and State, Koga Masayoshi and Kobayashi Takasuke, executive secretaries), in which many Christians participate, called an emergency meeting. The Council insisted forcefully that there are any number of legal cases in which participation in ceremonies such as the "first ceremonial offering of rice by newly-enthroned emperor," the "enthronement ceremony," and "ground-breaking ceremonies" have been designated "social etiquette" or "ethno-cultural practices." If the present draft is reflected in an amended Constitution, chances are that "ground-breaking ceremonies" organized by municipal bodies and participation in the Yasukuni Shrine visits by governmental officials will be recognized as constitutional. The Council voiced strong concern in various circles that the above cases are intrinsically related to the issue of religious freedom.

Meantime, the Shinto community, which seems prepared to affirm Article 9 and Article 20 of the New Draft Constitution, may have a problem with the Preamble and the articles regarding the emperor in Chapter 1. The *Shinto Shrine Newsletter (Jinja shinpō)* in its 5 December 2005 edition, expressed regret and dissatisfaction with various points in the "New Draft," including: (1) exclusion of the phrase in the Preamble "the Japanese people recognize the Emperor as a symbol of national unity" from the original draft in favor of "support for a symbolic Emperor system"; (2) failure to revise the status of the emperor as a "sovereign ruler" in Paragraph 1 on the role of the emperor in favor of "The Emperor shall be the symbol of the State and of the unity of the People, deriving

his position from the will of the people with whom resides sovereign power”); (3) failure to delete reference to the status of the emperor as based on the consensus of the Japanese people.

In general, developments within religious organizations with respect to constitutional amendments have been piecemeal, but there have been exceptions. For example, on 23 June 2006 the Nichiren Buddhist sect opened a meeting in the course of a promotional course held at the Tokyo Branch on the theme “Securing the Peace of the Land through the Propagation of True Buddhism (*Risshō ankokoku*) Today: Rethinking the Constitution.” At this meeting the issue of the constitutional amendment was addressed from a variety of perspectives, with speeches given both for and against. This suggests a growing interest in the issue among the religious communities. Again, on 1 December 2006 the Risshō Kōseikai, following a debate at its Research Group for Peace (an organization based in the Department for External Affairs and the Central Research Institute, headed by Matsubara Michio), sponsored a speech entitled “Fundamental Attitudes toward Constitutional Amendment,” in which it was clearly stated that, despite the fact that Risshō Kōseikai’s does not oppose constitutional revision per se, it nevertheless considers its obligation to support the content and the spirit of the Preamble as well as Article 9 of the constitution a matter of Japanese national pride. The speech further pointed out that relaxing the separation of religion and the state runs the risk of infringing on fundamental human rights that lie at the very foundations of the state. The Abe cabinet has aimed to enact in the current Diet session a national referendum bill establishing the procedure for a vote on constitutional revision.² As the question of constitutional reform becomes more and more real, we may expect more religious organizations to declare their views on the issue.

The Shinto Community and the Debate over a Female Monarch

In February 2006, the Imperial Household Agency announced news of the Crown Princess Akishino Nomiya Kiko’s pregnancy, reinforcing the determination of the ruling party to uphold its conservative policy toward the revision of the Imperial Household Law. In November of the previous year Former Prime Minister Koizumi Junichirō’s personal Advisory Council on the Imperial Household Law had drafted bills proposing to open succession to imperial daughters and offspring from the female line. The bills, entitled “Approval of Matrilineal Emperor of Japan” and “Priority of the Eldest Child,” were to be submitted to the Parliament, but news of the princess’s pregnancy put it on hold. On 6 September, after the Crown Princess Kiko gave birth at the Aiiku hospital in Tokyo’s Minato Ward to a baby boy, Prince Hisahito, third in order of

2. This national referendum bill was since passed by the Diet on 14 May 2007. [ed.]

imperial succession, the Abe Cabinet suggested postponing further debate over the revision of the Imperial Household Law. Deputy Chief Cabinet Secretary Shimomura Hakubun, who participated in the celebration ceremony in honor of the birth of Prince Hisahito, conveyed this in a statement declaring, “The Abe Cabinet is not obligated to follow the conclusions of the Expert Committee organized under the Koizumi administration.”

Nevertheless, demands to carry through a reform of the Imperial Household Law are growing, with both proponents of matrilineal succession working to pave the way for recognition of imperial matrilineality and female monarchs as well as those in favor of male lineage urging reform. On 17 October a non-partisan Federation of Diet Members supporting preservation of the male-only imperial succession held an inaugural meeting at the opening of the Association of Diet Members for the Protection of Imperial Household Traditions. A consensus was reached on revising the policy so that the opinions of the Imperial Household members would be reflected in the matter of imperial succession. The *Shinto Shrine Newsletter* published an article laying out views supporting those of the Association. A public opinion poll revealed that 63% of those polled thought a revision of the Imperial Household Law necessary (26 September 2006, poll conducted by the *Mainichi shinbun*). However, according to the same poll, 72% of respondents expressed the view that matrilineal imperial succession be recognized. All in all, this shows the variety of opinion and levels of support among politicians, the public at large, and the Shinto Shrine community with regard not only to the revision of the Imperial Household Law but also to the acceptance of female monarchs.

Draft of a Law on Organ Transplants and the Religious Community

In last year’s report I presented a general outline of controversy surrounding organ transplants and the cautious attitudes expressed by religious institutions and organizations regarding the question of making brain death a criterion for the pronouncement of death. During the present term, the juridical foundation of the Japanese Association of Religious Organizations held its second symposium on “Religion and Bioethics” in which a number of written opinions were made public, including those by religious organizations that had hitherto refrained from clarifying their position on the matter. In what follows I would like to examine the differences between the existing law and the Second Draft Amendment, and the views expressed by religious bodies.

On 31 March 2006, volunteer Diet members of Liberal Democratic Party and New Kōmeitō submitted to Parliament revised proposals to the Organ Transplant Law. The existing law reads:

1. Brain death as a valid criterion for pronouncing death may be applied only to those who have agreed to be donors;
2. Donors and their families must give written consent that they are willing to subject themselves to brain-death diagnosis;
3. Donors must give written consent that they are willing to allow the harvesting of their organs for transplant;
4. Only people aged 15 or older may give their consent for organ transplants;
5. Donors may not appoint transplant recipients [for their organs].

Kōno Tarō and other members of the House of Representatives have drafted a bill that proposes the following changes:³

1. Brain death may be applied to *every individual* as a valid criterion for the pronouncement of death;
2. Where organ transplantation does not take place, *a family's consent is not necessary* for pronouncing a person dead on the basis of a brain-death diagnosis;
3. Donor's family's consent to the harvesting of an organ is *a sufficient criterion* for allowing the harvesting of organs from a brain-dead person;
4. *The age limit of donors is not determined* (12 weeks after birth or older);
5. The donor's *family may be given priority* as potential recipients of organs for transplant.

Saitō Tetsuo of the New Kōmeitō Party submitted the following proposal:

1. Brain death as a valid criterion for the pronouncement of death may be applied only to those who have agreed to be donors;
2. Donors and their families must give written consent that they are willing to subject themselves to brain-death diagnosis;
3. Donors must give written consent that they are willing to allow the harvesting of their organs for transplant;
4. Only persons aged *12 or older* may give their consent for an organ transplant;
5. The donor's *family may be given priority* as potential recipients of organs for transplant.

3. Emphasis added by the author. [ed.]

As shown above, the envisaged revision to the Organ Transplant Law differs from its existing version in that it proposes to lower the age at which a person may consent to becoming a donor and to give priority to a donor's family.

On 16 November, an emergency meeting was called by the Citizens Network against Deterioration of the Organ Transplant Law in which a "motion by the religious community to those considering the deterioration of the Organ Transplant Law by defining brain death as the equivalent of human death" was passed and promulgated at the First Assembly Hall of the House of Representatives. At this emergency meeting the Japanese Association of Religious Organizations, under the chairmanship of Yamakita Nobuhisa, announced its consensus opinion in a "Declaration of Opinions on the Amendments to the Organ Transplant Law." In it mention is made of the fact that failure to reach a national consensus on the issue of brain death means that an enforcement of the revision is wrong and can only have devastating consequences in the future. Regarding some particular aspects of the proposed draft, namely, paragraphs 2 and 3 of Kōnō Tarō's proposal, the "Declaration" comments:

Since human concepts of the difference between life and death vary with different views of life and death, an "Individual's Official Declaration of Opinion" is an absolute and inalienable prerequisite for brain-death diagnosis and organ transplantation.

As for Saitō Tetsuo's proposal, the "Declaration" remarks on the suggestion to lower the age at which a person can consent to become an organ donor (paragraph 4):

Organ Transplant rules applied to adults must differ from those applied to children, since children are in a socially weak position and do not possess sufficient understanding of brain death and organ transplantation.

The "Declaration" goes on to caution that, "it seems highly problematic to what extent parents have the right to make decisions on behalf of their children on the matter of a child's life" and demands close scrutiny of the question. This "Declaration of Opinions on the Amendments to the Organ Transplant Law" is a demonstration of the increasing assertiveness of the Japanese Association of Religious Organizations, in contrast to its earlier position.

At this same meeting the religious organizations in attendance made formal presentations of their positions on brain death and organ transplantation. Since I dealt with the views of Ōmoto, Risshō Kōseikai, and Jōdō Shinshū in a former report, I would like here to condense the views of other groups.

ŌTANI BRANCH OF JŌDŌ SHINSHŪ

Based on the statements released under the name of Secretary General of Religious Affairs, “Declaration Regarding the Enactment of the Organ Transplant Bill by the House of Representatives” (1997) and “Perspectives on the First Organ Transplant from a Brain-Dead Person” (1999), the Ōtani Branch of Jōdō Shinshū sect filed a demand that the discussion be continued, indicating that decisions on such issues as life and death must take into account individual circumstances, while the regulation of human life based on the laws of the state may cause serious problems.

NICHIREN BUDDHIST SECT

The Nichiren Buddhists submitted two reports on the issue of organ transplantation. The first report of 1987 indicated that brain death may not be regarded as the actual death of a person and, therefore, that organ transplantation is unacceptable. A second report released in 1994 stated that it is undesirable to rely only on medical science in a decision made with regard to life and death. Therefore, organ transplantation based on a personal decision is compatible with the Buddhist conception of compassion, and Nichiren Buddhism does not object to medical treatment involving organ transplants after a pronouncement of brain death.

SŌTŌ ZEN BUDDHISM

According to a “Report on the Problem of Brain Death and Organ Transplants” released in 1999 by the Sōtō Sect Research Center for Modern Education, brain death can be seen as a convenient means to promote organ transplants, but the Zen Buddhist perspective finds no basis for positive support. The Sōtō School takes a very cautious view on this issue, noting that from a Buddhist perspective the transplanting of organs can be interpreted either positively or negatively, and that in spite of the fact that it can be considered an act of benevolence, it cannot be directly associated with the practice of almsgiving.

TENDAI BUDDHIST SECT

The Tendai Buddhist sect, in a report entitled “Perspectives on Brain Death and Organ Transplantation” and released by its Ad Hoc Committee on Brain Death and Organ Transplants, declared that although brain death cannot be recognized as a criterion for pronouncing death, organ donation may be interpreted as an act of benevolence on the part of the donor. Nevertheless, a prior approval documented in writing by the donors themselves is a prerequisite. While Tendai Buddhism itself views organ transplantation as undesirable, it shows a tendency to recognize its necessity.

On 30 November, in a continuation of its emergency meeting held on 22 February 2005, the Japanese Association of Religious Organizations opened a

Symposium on “Religion and Bioethics” at the Second Missionary Assembly Hall of the Tsukiji Hongan-ji in Tokyo’s Chūō. The panelists included Komatsu Yoshihiko (Professor, Tokyo University of Marine Science and Technology), Aoki Kiyoshi (Honorary Professor, Sophia University), Imaoka Tatsuo (Permanent Researcher, Jōdo Shinshū Research Institute), Saitō Hiroshi (Director of Studies, Ōmoto Study Center), Takeuchi Hiromichi (Chief Researcher, Sōtō Institute for Buddhist Studies, Zen Studies Department), and Imai Katsumasa (President, Risshō Kōseikai Central Research Institute). Shimazono Susumu (Professor of Religious Studies at Tokyo University and President of the Japanese Association of Religious Organizations) served as coordinator. The symposium was attended by approximately one hundred fifty participants from five religious organizations, including the Federation of Sect Shinto, the Japan Buddhist Federation, the Japan Confederation of Christian Churches, the Association of Shinto Shrines, and the Federation of New Religious Organizations of Japan.

In the symposium Mr. Komatsu presented visual materials in support of the opinion that “both substantially and scientifically, brain-dead people are still alive and organ procurement from brain-dead donors is de facto homicide.” One of the panelists, Mr. Aoki, speaking from the viewpoint of a Catholic believer, highly esteemed the 1995 papal encyclical *Evangelium vitae* by Pope John Paul II and expressed his concern that, despite the fact that organ transplants may be positively affirmed as an act of love, there is no sufficient consensus on the issue in Japanese society.

Mr. Imaoka, Mr. Saitō, Mr. Takeuchi, and Mr. Imai arrived at the conclusion previously formulated in declarations made by each religious organization that brain death may not be recognized as human death. In other words, the overall conclusion of the symposium was that brain death may not be recognized as human death in all individual cases. On this matter complete consensus was achieved.

According to public opinion polls, interest in brain death and organ transplant is growing year by year. The percentage of the people polled who responded in the affirmative to the question, “If a person’s will is not clear, may a family’s consent be considered a sufficient criterion for organ transplant?” is close to 70%. Furthermore, approximately half of those polled replied positively to the question, “If your own child is diagnosed as brain dead, will you allow their organs to be harvested?”⁴ Some of the Heath Insurance Union’s enterprises have already put into use donor cards accompanying health insurance cards. On the back side of a card there is place for individuals to declare their will concerning the donation of organs for transplant in the case of brain death. Similar measures are expected to be taken even by some municipal bodies. The city of

4. *Sankei Shinbun Honsha*, FNN Public Opinion Poll, April 2006.

Fukuoka plans to introduce something similar on National Health Insurance Certificates beginning in 2008.

In our age the line between life and death is not what it was in the past. With all the problems regarding brain death and the use of stem cells, it is hard to make a distinction between who is alive and who is dead, between when life begins and when it ends. Will religion help establish new rules or will it stick to the old ones? Where will it draw the line? In the future I hope to further consider the ways in which religious organizations might handle these problems.

Religion and Education

The history of the relationship between religion and education is a long and complicated one. In religious terms education means first and foremost passing on beliefs from master to disciple. It implies providing education as a believer to believers. Enormous amounts of time and resources have been devoted to the establishment of institutions for the cultivation of followers, not to mention educational projects for non-believers and the youth. All of this is the fruit of many years of activity by religious organizations and the development of close community ties.

Today, however, that relationship has been seriously debilitated. One of the reasons is a notable increase in misunderstanding between religion and society as well as a lack of interest in religion among the general public. Moreover, it is no exaggeration to say that a sense of fear has spread concerning religion in general, so much so that there is hesitation to teach even the most basic information about religion. Another reason is that members of the religious organizations suffer from the same problems of an aging population and a decline in the birth rate as the rest of Japanese society. Furthermore, there are generally few opportunities to connect with children, and for those religious people who try to do so, it is not easy to find ways to educate the youth given the present ambiguities. Efforts of religious organizations are also lagging. For example, on the occasion of the 750th anniversary of death of the Jōdō Shinshū founder Shinran in 2011, plans are underway to hold “children’s congresses” event in all of its some 10,300 temples. There are ongoing attempts to initiate workshops for training advisors in child education, but these are only in the first stages.

In what follows I will try to consider how in the present situation religion might manage to find its way to recapturing and strengthening its connection with education, by examining the reform of the Fundamental Education Law, the orientation of religious institutions in face of the declining birth rate, and issues in religious education.

The Reform of the Fundamental Law of Education

As previously observed in my essay in the 2004 edition of *Gendai shūkyō*,⁵ the reform of the Fundamental Law of Education (FLE) began in 1997 with an investigation by the Liberal Democratic Party under the administration of Prime Minister Hashimoto Ryutarō but only came to fruition in 2000 under Prime Minister Mori Yoshirō. Due to opposition by the New Kōmeitō—a coalition partner in the ruling block with the LDP—the FLE reform was not submitted to the Diet, but the process went ahead until a draft finally reached the Diet on 28 April 2006. On 23 May the ruling LDP drafted a reformed version of the FLE and submitted it to the Diet. After parliamentary debate, the Koizumi Cabinet failed to pass the FLE reform and the Draft was carried over to the following session of the Diet. Finally, three months after the inauguration of the Abe Cabinet, on 15 December, despite resistance by all opposition parties including the Democratic Party, the Communist Party, the Social Democratic Party, and the Kokumin Shintō (People's New Party), the complete revision of the FLE passed and was implemented at the plenary session of the House of Councilors.⁶

The Old FLE

PATRIOTISM/MORAL EDUCATION

There are no provisions in the Old Fundamental Law regarding patriotism.

There are no provisions in the Old Fundamental Law regarding moral education. Moral education in Japan is dictated by official Ministry of Education curriculum guidelines.

RELIGIOUS EDUCATION (ARTICLE 9)

1. The attitude of religious tolerance and the position of religion in social life shall be valued in education;
2. The schools established by the State and local public bodies shall refrain from religious education or other activities for a specific religion.

The LDP Draft

PATRIOTISM/MORAL EDUCATION

(Preamble): "In order to achieve this ideal, we will promote education aiming at the full development of personality, striving to rear a people who will esteem individual value, love truth and justice, respect community spirit, preserve the legacy of tradition, and become architects of a new civilization."

5. See 『現代宗教』 2004: 257–61, and the abridged English translation, "The Marginalization of Religion in Japan Today," *Bulletin of the Nanzan Institute for Religion and Culture* 29 (2005): 27–41, esp. page 28.

6. In the following, emphasis added by the author. [ed.]

(Article 2, Goals of Education, paragraph 1): “Foster healthy individuals with sound minds and bodies; cultivate erudite, truth-aspiring people who seek broad knowledge; foster rich sensitivity and moral sense.”

(Article 2, Goals of Education, paragraph 5): “Foster respect for Japan’s traditions and culture, love for our homeland and country, as well as respect for foreign countries; cultivate the consciousness of being members of the international community who have a contribution to make to the peace and development of international society.”

RELIGIOUS EDUCATION (ARTICLE 15)

1. The attitude of religious tolerance and the position of religion *as well as religion-related public education* in social life shall be valued in education;
2. The schools established by the State and local public bodies shall refrain from religious education or other activities for a specific religion.

The DPJ Draft

PATRIOTISM/MORAL EDUCATION

(Preamble): “Foster a true sense of responsibility and freedom; cultivate a spirit of unity sustaining coexistence among human beings, countries, religions, as well as between humanity and the natural world.

“The objective of our education is to cultivate respect for human beings and esteem for peace; to foster understanding of the significance of life, love for truth and justice; to nurture an aesthetic sense for the true appreciation of beauty; to advance the development of individuals rich in creativity.

“In addition, our goal is to foster fully developed individuals, imbued with an independent spirit and an aspiration for individual self-actualization, along with a sense of civic-mindedness and civil responsibility towards improper behavior in either personal or social domain.

“Simultaneously, we aim at *cultivating a heart that loves Japan*, respects ancestors, turns one’s thought to offspring, respects tradition, culture and arts, devotes efforts to the promotion of science; at understanding foreign countries and cultures, and aspiring for the creation of a new civilization.”

RELIGIOUS EDUCATION

(Article 16, “Life skills and Religious Education”):

1. *The consideration for the significance of life and the meaning of death, and developing an attitude of respect for life and living things shall be valued in education;*
2. *The understanding of the significance of religion and the acquisition of a basic knowledge of religious traditions and culture shall be valued in education;*

3. The attitude of tolerance toward religion and *fostering of religious sensitivity* shall be valued in education;
4. The schools established by the State and local public bodies shall refrain from religious education or other activities for a specific religion.

In looking at the response by the religious world to the FLE reform, we see that by and large the Shinto Shrine community supports the above changes. However, concerns had been raised over the three clauses in the revised version of the FLE before the LDP had officially announced it: the emphasis on “instilling patriotism,” the “lack of specific mention of the cultivation of religious sensitivity,” and the “failure to delete the phrase that, ‘education shall not be subject to improper control’ from Article 10 (School Administration).” These three points, incorporated in the new FLE draft due to the efforts of a nonpartisan organization of Diet members, the Committee for the Promotion of the FLE Reform chaired by Kamei Ikuo, a member of the Upper House), were roundly criticized by the *Shinto Shrine Newsletter*. On the same day as the ruling party passed its decision, the Japan Conference (President, Miyoshi Tōru) together with a private educational organization calling itself Educational Reform for Japan (President, Nishizawa Junichi) organized an “Emergency Meeting for the Enactment of the FLE Reform” in which Mahikari and the Shinto Association of Spiritual Leadership declared their intentions and arrived at a consensus on the importance of the same three points.

Also opposing the revision of the FLE or otherwise demanding a very cautious dealing with it are the Ōtani branch and the Hongan-ji branches of Jōdō Shinshū. The religious groups within the Hongan-ji branch included the Shinshū Association of Bereaved Families, the Joint Council against Yasukuni Shrine Visits, the Amidist Article 9 Association, and the Association on Article 20. Representing the Ōtani branch was the Gōja Group, which expressed its opposition at a “Meeting for Spreading Doctrine.” Opposition was also voiced by the Christian community, in particular, the Educational Department of the National Christian Council in Japan (NCC), the Committee on Church and State of the Japan Alliance Christ Church, the Japan Holiness Church, and the Japan Baptist Association.

These organizations do not object to the reform as such, but they raise objections against its content. The peculiar characteristic of these groups is that, in contrast to many other opposition groups, they do not lay much stress the “patriotism” issue. Their attention is rather focused on religious education as the core problem. One of these is the Japanese Association of Religious Organizations, which, since the beginning of consultations with the Central Council for Education, has been preoccupied with paving the way for an unbiased religious education that does not favor any specific religious organization. On the very

day the DPJ draft was announced, the Japan Buddhist Federation held a meeting of its Ad Hoc Committee for Religious Education in which it announced a working proposal drafted by the Japan Buddhist Federation in 2005. Closer in content to the DPJ draft than to that of the LDP, it read:

1. The significance and the acquisition of basic knowledge of religious traditions and culture shall be valued in education;
2. The attitude of tolerance toward religion and fostering of religious sensitivity shall be valued in education;
3. Schools established by the State and local public bodies shall refrain from religious education or other activities for a specific religion.

The three points, on which consensus was reached at the “Emergency Meeting for the Enactment of the FLE Reform”—instilling patriotism, the lack of specific mention of the cultivation of religious sensitivity, and the inclusion in Article 10 of the phrase, “education shall not be subject to improper control”—along with rejection of the bill proposed by DPJ strongly reflect the position held by the religious world in respect to educational reform. Their demands were not, however, met.

One can sense lurking in the background of the debate over the FLE Reform the intentions of the Abe Cabinet to initiate a revision of the Constitution, for which education reform is but a first step. In fact, there are many reasons to see a connection between Article 20 (freedom of religion) of the New Draft Constitution proposed by LDP on 28 October 2005 and the FLE Reform, especially concerning Article 9 on “Religion and Education.” I cannot here summarize the discussion, but the awareness of the problem among religious institutions and organizations for the same time frame can be traced by looking jointly at their views regarding the FLE Reform and the Reform of the Constitution.

Exploring “Religious Education”

As noted above, despite various counter-measures, the present and future does not look very bright for religious institutions, as witnessed in changes such as the centralization of pre-school education and the introduction of unified education from elementary school to higher education levels (including not only university education but all educational institutions at all ages). Religious educational institutions, in addition to training their religious successors and exploring the policy of the “separation of religion [from education],” need also to give sufficient thought to the advancement of research aimed at the development of religious organizations for generations to come and based in their institutions of higher education. Two symposiums held by the International Institute for the Study of Religions on “Raising Religious Believers Today” (2004) and “There is Reason for Them to be Energetic?! A Report from the Field on the Practice and

Problems of Training Believers” (2006), covered education-related issues in a broad sense and showed an awareness of the current state of religion.

In these circumstances, the issue attracting most attention is “religious education.” The objection may be raised that since the FLE Reform has been completed, “religious education” has effectively been prohibited in public educational institutions and that there is no longer any room for changes to be implemented. Nevertheless, a deeply-seated conviction is shared throughout the religious world that a way must be found to integrate religion positively into existing educational institutions. Behind it lies a sense of the growing need for “care for the heart” prompted by the number of tragic incidents in which children are involved as victims or assailants, as well as by the increasing the social problem of school bullying. Whether or not the reform will actually have any effect, the fact that mention is made of “moral education” and a “spirit of civic-mindedness” is a sign of unanimity on this question. The most difficult problem is the practical one of how to teach values to children in existing educational institutions while leaving religion out of the picture. Initiating “life education” and “death education” may be one way to accomplish it.

Life Education, Death Education

The “life education” that the Ministry of Education, Culture, Sports, Science, and Technology is trying to promote was initiated in response to a murder that took place in Sasebo City, Nagasaki Prefecture, in June 2004, when a sixth grade female student killed her classmate. Since 2005 this initiative has been implemented in 146 schools as a part of experience-related activities, and in 92 schools as a part of moral education. “Death education” began with the remarkable development of life sciences and biotechnology in the 1960’s in the United States as a means to provide children with the opportunity to learn about how life ought to be treated and how to deal with death. Although geared to children, it often targets adults as well. As “life education” and “death education” are not generally distinguished in contemporary Japanese discourse, I will treat them together here.

The amount of effort put into life/death education, the time devoted to it, and the methods used, often depends on the commitment of individual schools and instructors. At present, it is either during periods of “integrated studies”²² or existing “moral education” that time is allotted to life/death education. Integrated studies has been part of the curriculum in elementary and junior high schools since 2002, and in high schools in 2003. With elementary school students it begins from the third grade with three hours a week; with junior high school students, two to four hours a week; and high school students receive 3–6 credits in the area prior to graduation. The content is flexible and particular details are left up to individual schools. Without data it is impossible to determine which

schools conduct life/death education during integrated studies lessons, but we may give some practical examples.

Nakamura Hiroshi, a professor at the Tokyo Woman's Christian University and a pediatrician, creates time for teaching "contemplating death through life" to children who have little chance to encounter death. He seeks to instill a deep understanding of death in children, in contrast to a merely virtual perception. His efforts appear to have at least some effect on the rate of bullying cases among children and the number of children victims and assailants. The first question that the professor asks his students is, "What do you think happens after people die?" In 2005, a Research Society for Contemplating Death through Life organized under the supervision of Dr. Nakamura released survey results from two schools of the Tokyo metropolitan area. 372 elementary school students from the third through the sixth grade were asked the question, "Do you think a person who dies comes back to life?" 34% of students polled answered that a dead person "returns to life," 34% answered "does not return to life" and 32% answered "don't know." A lack of understanding and interest in death is obviously spreading among children.

Dr. Nakamura is not alone in his sense of the impending crisis. In 2005, ten years after the Great Hanshin Earthquake, the Hyōgo Prefectural Educational Committee, with the aid of the active teachers, organized an educational program called "A Proposal to Make the Importance of Life Real" geared toward instilling in children a deep realization of the sense of being alive and the joy of living. One of the teachers who participated in the program had an experience of preparing with his students a *Memento mori* publication in the high school newsletter. As a part of the process they collected information on bereaved families and on autopsies. They visited hospices and participated in activities organized by a local citizen's group, the Hyōgo Association for Life and Death, which had been founded to support people who experienced the tragic loss of a loved one. Teachers also began a Research Society for Education on Life and Death, and created video and tutorial materials. According to their research, 18% out of approximately 2,200 elementary and junior high school students of Hyōgo prefecture polled responded "I do not like myself," and these same students showed a strong tendency to affirmative attitudes toward suicide and exhibited little fear of death. Based on these results, experts indicate that low self-esteem can be observed in many children.

There are classroom lessons aimed at nurturing a "sense of self-respect" in children and explaining to them that they are irreplaceable beings with special value. Beginning with the initiative proposed by Terada Kiyomi, an assistant professor at Tokyo Seitoku College, "baby encounter classes" are on the rise around the country. Here elementary school children are given a simulated experience of being pregnant by carrying around the extra weight, and handle dolls to learn

how to cradle an infant who cannot hold its own head up. They have the chance to listen to local mothers who are invited to give talks and to experience first-hand what it feels like to hold a real child and even change its diapers. Where arrangements are made for the children to meet the same mothers on a regular basis, they also have the chance to observe the baby's growth and development in early childhood. Through these experiences children can experience the joy of dealing with babies and the hope of one day having babies of their own—all of which nurtures feelings of affection and reinforces their sense of self.

There are also animal-breeding activities practiced around the country. One high school in Saga Prefecture, formerly an agricultural high school, makes use of its tradition to conduct poultry-breeding classes, where children raise chickens by themselves during a two-month period, the number of chickens equalling the number of children in class. They take care of the birds with their own hands, grow affectionate towards them, and during the first part of December take their lives with their own hands and butcher them for meat. The purpose of the program is to help children become aware that the poultry they eat in their daily diet actually comes from living beings that they consume for their own survival. Some elementary schools also have special lessons in rearing small animals as pets in designated living spaces where children take care of animals themselves. This encourages children to keep a close watch on pets, to care for sick animals until the time of death, and to experience the pain of loss.

Given the above examples, it would be rather unnatural for religious groups, which are preoccupied with the issues of life and its meaning, with death and the world beyond, not to be a part of life/death education. In fact, proposals and movements to connect religion with education do exist. A symposium on "How to Convey the Dignity of Life" was organized in Nagasaki, bringing together Buddhist priests, professors from the Nagasaki Junshin Catholic University, and School Principals for an exchange of ideas on ways to convey to the younger generation the value of life. Similarly, Jōetsu Educational University located in Jōetsu City, Nagasaki Prefecture, held a "Life Education Forum" in which religious believers, health care providers, and educators talked about their experiences.

From the above examples, one can sense the growing need for religious education and a demand to meet it. Theoretically religion could contribute to the program of education in "Japanese Traditions and Culture" being promoted by the Tokyo Metropolitan Government's Board of Education. As part of its "Project for Promoting Understanding and Education in Japanese Tradition and Culture," the Board decided to introduce a new subject into the curriculum from 2007, "Japanese Traditions and Culture," beginning with ten metropolitan high schools and at fifty or sixty elementary and junior high schools. The content of the lessons will vary from school to school, but the basic plan is to provide

students with the opportunity to experience cultural legacies like folk dancing, Japanese drums, and other kinds of traditional entertainment, as well as the tea ceremony, flower arrangement, Japanese chess, and use of *furoshiki* (wrapping cloths). Given the deep connections between religion and culture in Japan, and the accumulated knowledge regarding such cultural phenomena, this may provide concrete opportunities to make religion useful for education.

According to a poll conducted by the *Yomiuri shinbun* in August 2005, up to 75% of respondents to the question, “Do you believe in any religion?” replied “I do not believe in any religion.” In response to, “Do you consider religion important?” 60% of those polled answered, “I do not believe so.” On the other hand, when asked, “Have you ever had a desire to call on the *kami* (spirits, gods) or the Buddha for help?” 44% answered “no,” and 54% of people polled answered affirmatively, more than those who replied negatively. Thus 47% of those who answered that they do not believe in any religion nevertheless are prepared to pray to the *kami* and the Buddha in time of need. This indicates that it is not that people do not *want* to believe but only that they have a distrust and antagonism towards religion. Nowadays the reaction of many people to attempts by the religious world to push a positive image of religion as a kind of “health food for the soul” (心のあり方に作用する宗教) can be summarized in one word: “cult.” They perceive such attempts only in a negative sense and even see it at times as dangerous. In such circumstances, there is little reason to be optimistic about things like the FLE Reform, based as it is on the premise that it will help to overcome the present hardships at one fell swoop. The role required of religion today is different from what it was in the past. It is new and as yet unknown.

[translated by Alena Govorounova]