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Interfaith Dialogue and a *Lotus* Practitioner

Yamada Etai, the *Lotus Sutra*, and
the Religious Summit Meeting on Mt. Hiei

This article is an examination of Yamada Etai, the 253rd head priest (*zasu*) of the Tendai denomination and his efforts to host the Religious Summit Meeting on Mt. Hiei. Following an in-depth analysis of Yamada's understanding of the *Lotus Sutra*, especially as it relates to interfaith outreach, Yamada's efforts to reshape contemporary Tendai Buddhism through a focus on compassionate service and salvation are examined in light of his efforts to put on a large-scale international interfaith meeting.

KEYWORDS: Yamada Etai—Tendai—interfaith—Temple Buddhism—*Lotus Sutra*

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ON 3 AUGUST 1987, leaders of the world's religions gathered on Mt. Hiei, the center of the Tendai denomination of Japan, for two days of prayer and discussion with the stated goals of bringing about religious understanding and world peace. Leaders representing Buddhism, Christianity, Islam, Judaism, Hinduism, Sikhism, Confucianism, and other religions gathered together with dozens of representatives from various Japanese religious organizations. The event was of such a scale that the Kyoto police department found its abilities taxed as it tried to provide protection to the many foreign and local dignitaries. The conference was covered in national and international news and marked a high point in Yamada Etai's 山田恵諦 career as head priest of the Tendai denomination of Buddhism. Yamada saw himself as a *Lotus Sutra* practitioner following the model of practice set forth by Saichō 最澄 (also known by his posthumous title Dengyō Daishi 伝教大師, 766/767–822), the founder of the Tendai denomination in Japan. Yamada saw the summit as the embodiment of *Lotus* practice.

Yamada Etai: Lotus Practitioner

Yamada Etai (1895–1994), the 253rd head priest (*zasu* 座主) of the Tendai denomination, played an instrumental role in addressing the challenges Temple Buddhism in Japan faces in the postwar period.¹ Yamada strove to define the “proper” role of religion, especially Buddhism, based on his understanding of the *Lotus Sutra* and the teachings of Saichō.

Perhaps reflecting on his long-standing interest in working towards peace, on one occasion Yamada sketched his life course as follows: “I was born at the time of the Sino-Japanese War, ordained at the time of the Russo-Japanese War, joined the military during WWI, and attained *satori* during the Pacific War” (YAMADA 1995, 5). In the same work, he shows that from an early age he wanted to have the power to effect change. For example, he relates the story of how the tales of traveling preachers (*hōwashi* 法話師) moved him as a young boy. He credits one story in particular with his decision to become a priest. In this story, a priest is being chased by a demon. As the priest flees, he throws objects that he is carrying at the demon. As each object lands it turns into a thicket, a forest, a river, or a mountain. The demon is halted in its tracks. Yamada writes that when

1. Temple Buddhism refers to those Buddhist sects that had been formed by the 1600s in Japan; see COVELL 2005.

he returned home from the dharma talk, he began throwing things around the house. When nothing turned into a mountain, he grew frustrated and turned to his mother to call the priest a liar. His mother told him that only priests are capable of such things. It was then, he said, that he set his mind on becoming a priest (YAMADA 1995, 10). He was not yet ten years old when he was ordained.

Yamada Etai was born on 1 December 1895, in Hyōgo Prefecture, the fourth son of a farming family. He was ordained in 1904 under Hori Ekei, head priest of both Kaikōin 戒光院 on Mt. Hiei and Enmeiji 延命寺 in Hyōgo Prefecture. He attended the Tendai sect's Seibu Junior High School and later Seibu University.² In 1915, he volunteered for one year of military service. In 1918, he was appointed head priest of Kaijōin 戒定院, a temple in the Enryakuji complex.³ In 1920, he graduated from university with an award-winning thesis entitled *Dengyō Daishi to Nihon Shintō* 伝教大師と日本神道 (Dengyō Daishi and Japanese Shinto). He then reluctantly returned to Hyōgo and became head priest of his home temple. In 1927, he went back to Mt. Hiei to teach Buddhism and English. At this point he was planning on becoming a scholar-priest. However, his career soon took a turn towards administration, a path he followed straight to the top of the Tendai denomination.

In 1928 he became the head priest of Zuiōin 瑞応院 in Sakamoto at the foot of Mt. Hiei. Soon, he was asked to serve as secretary to the chief administrator of Enryakuji, Akamatsu Enrin, in order to aid in the preparations for the 1150th anniversary of Saichō's opening of Mt. Hiei. In 1928, he was appointed *kanji* (one of several administrators in charge of operations) of Enryakuji.⁴ Two years later he married. He said that from when he was sixteen he had determined to marry because that would lead him to take responsibility, and become more emotionally restrained and composed. A few years later, Japan began what would become fifteen years of war in the Pacific. As it turned out, his past enlistment in the military was a fortuitous act. When the war began, most priests on Mt. Hiei were called to duty.⁵ Because Yamada had already served, he was not drafted and remained one of a handful of priests who took care of the entire Enryakuji complex during the war. In 1931, he was appointed *rinban* (person in charge of caring

2. Seibu Junior High was later renamed Hieizan Chūgakkō. Seibu University would later become incorporated into Taishō University.

3. Kaijōin was a temple on paper only. The actual building had been abandoned and lost during the Meiji Restoration. Granting the title of head priest of a non-existent temple was a common practice to ensure that priests could participate in the head priest meetings of the Enryakuji complex and receive a small stipend (YAMADA 1995, 30–31).

4. Enryakuji is the general name of the temple complex located on Mt. Hiei. It is not a single specific building.

5. For more on Buddhism and the Pacific War, see VICTORIA 1997.

for the temple) of Ganzan Daishi Dō 元三大師堂, and he served as *shigyō* (chief administrator) of Enryakuji from 1942 to 1943.⁶

It was during WWII that Yamada's faith in the *Lotus Sutra* was confirmed and deepened. According to a story that is reminiscent of the miraculous tales of the *Lotus Sutra* from times past and is told often by Yamada in his dharma talks (and also by Niwano Nikkyō 庭野日敬 and others in their writings about Yamada), towards the end of WWII Yamada was returning from Okinawa on a ship carrying fifteen hundred school children. American submarines were known to be active in the waters around Japan. All on board felt uneasy. At that time Yamada recalled a verse from the "The Universal Gate of Bodhisattva Avalokiteśvara" chapter of the *Lotus Sutra* that said those who called upon Avalokiteśvara (hereafter the Japanese is used: Kannon) when facing disaster at sea would be saved: "Or, one might be afloat in a great sea, in which there are dragons, fish, and sundry ghosts. By virtue of constant mindfulness of Sound-Observer [Kannon] the waves could not drown one" (HURVITZ 1976, 316). Yamada chanted the chapter ceaselessly during the entire trip to the mainland. When the ship arrived safely in port, Yamada was firmly convinced of the saving power of the *Lotus Sutra* (YAMADA 1980, 85–94; YAMADA ETAI ZASU TSUITŌ KANKŌ INKAI 2000, 176–77).

Six months prior to this, in January of 1944, Yamada chose to chant the "Universal Gate" chapter 3,300 times as a prayer for Japan's victory and a swift end to the war (YAMADA 1995, 68–69). In doing so, he was fulfilling his role as an administrator of Enryakuji, which was in many ways the historical center of the "defense of the nation" (*chingo-kokka* 鎮護国家) doctrines in Japanese Buddhism. To this day, the practitioners of the circumambulation of the peaks (*kaihōgyō* 回峰行) and other austerities on Mt. Hiei pray for the well-being of the emperor and the nation.

By 1944, Yamada and those remaining on Mt. Hiei were under considerable pressure to support the war effort. Yamada was not against using Tendai's history of praying for the state and the protection of the emperor as leverage in bargaining with the wartime government. It is clear that he firmly believed that the *Lotus* teachings of Tendai were very much for the protection and prosperity of Japan (something he later extended to the world), but in this case he also had very practical needs that had to be met. He successfully bargained on at least one occasion to obtain oil for the eternal flame on Mt. Hiei (YAMADA 1995,

6. Ganzan Daishi Dō is home of the *kankin* hell, one of the extended retreats on Mt. Hiei. The *rinban* is not only an administrative post but also a religious office. Yamada served for a three-year period in which he was virtually confined to the temple and required to perform all necessary rituals (in this case chanting sutras continually). Altogether Yamada completed three three-year terms as *rinban*. Among the various practices undergone during these retreats, the recitation of the *Lotus Sutra* is standard.

66–67). Yamada was not always successful. He resisted attempts by the military to turn Mt. Hiei into a base, but eventually failed to prevent it.⁷ Yamada's resistance was not based on a long-standing antiwar stance—though clearly he had grown weary of the war by this point—but on a desire to safeguard Mt. Hiei. It was only through self-reflection after the war that Yamada developed his more robust peace ideology.

In 1950, Yamada became the head of the Kyōgakubu (教学部, Division of Doctrine) and a member of the board of trustees for the primary and secondary school system run by the Tendai denomination (Enryakuji Gakuen 延暦寺学園). The following year he was made head of administrative affairs (*jimukyokuchō*) of Kangakuin (勸学院), the Tendai academy of doctrine.⁸ During this time he also rose steadily through the priestly ranks and in 1956 he was appointed to the highest rank, *daisōjō*. Also in 1956, he was appointed assistant *shigyō* of Enryakuji and the following year he was appointed for a second time to *shigyō*. In 1964, he was made the head priest (*monshu*) of Shiga'in (滋賀院). In 1972, he became the overall head (*inchō*) of Kangakuin. In this fashion, during his career he came to serve in nearly all the leadership posts within the Enryakuji complex, including postings to positions requiring ascetic practices, postings requiring administrative work, and postings to positions of authority within Tendai's scholarly world. Finally, in 1974 he became the head priest, *zasu*, of the entire Tendai denomination.⁹ For the following two decades he led the Tendai denomination. He was one of the longest serving head priests in Tendai history. Only those who have fulfilled all of the requirements, which can easily take a lifetime, can be appointed head priest. For this reason, those appointed are generally very advanced in age. Yamada himself was appointed on his seventy-ninth birthday.

In addition to performing the many annual rites required of the head priest and presiding over several major projects, he energetically engaged in numerous activities designed to open the Tendai *Lotus* teachings to the world. During his tenure, he made clear his views on Buddhist identity and sought to reposition Tendai at the center of Japanese religious life. Yamada's work in interfaith

7. The Japanese military succeeded in building a catapult system for launching planes from the top of Mt. Hiei (YAMADA 1995, 67).

8. Kangakuin has as its function the maintenance of doctrinal orthodoxy. It is comprised of between five and nine members, each selected by the head of the denomination administration and appointed to a four-year term by the *zasu*.

9. The Tendai sect and the Enryakuji complex represent two separate but entwined administrations. The sect administration is primarily in charge of all the sub-temples and other related organizations including lay membership, whereas the Enryakuji administration is in charge of maintaining the complex of temples on Mt. Hiei together with all of the rituals related to them. The head priest of Enryakuji is the head priest of all Tendai and as such his position serves to unite these two administrations.

dialogue is of particular interest. Under his leadership the Tendai denomination took center stage—leading efforts to bring about religious harmony and world peace. Yamada encouraged the activities of such senior priests as Hagami Shōchō (1903–1989), renowned for his completion of the severe ascetic practice *kaihōgyō* and for his work on the international stage, where he was especially close to the Roman Catholic Church and leading Islamic scholars.¹⁰ Yamada also favored young priests such as Sugitani Gijun (b. 1942), at the time an energetic young man who was inspired by the antiwar and social rights demonstrations of the 1960s and 1970s.¹¹ Yamada made four trips himself to China to build relations with Chinese Buddhists and especially to support Tendai in China. In addition, he flew many times to Hawaii in encouragement of the Tendai branch temple (*betsuin*) located there. He also attended the first Asian Conference for World Peace in Singapore in 1976, and the Word Prayer for Peace in Assisi in 1986. Indeed, he flew so much he earned the nickname “the flying *zasu*.”

In addition to his international focus, Yamada devoted considerable time to developing Tendai within Japan. His energy and charisma inspired many within Tendai to engage in social outreach programs, such as Tendai’s Light Up Your Corner Movement (*Ichigu o terasu undō* 一隅を照らす運動).¹² His internally and externally focused efforts were all guided by his notion of what Buddhism, and religion more broadly, should be at its core.

Yamada’s dream of opening the Tendai denomination to the world, which he saw as a return to the spirit of Saichō, was not without opposition. An examination of the Religious Summit Meeting on Mt. Hiei reveals divisions within the Tendai denomination, and arguably within all denominations of Temple Buddhism today, between those who see the role of priests as one of outreach, those who see the role of priests as one of perfecting individual spiritual practices, and those who see the role of priests as the maintenance of traditional institutions. These divisions are by no means clear-cut. In fact, they represent not only the fluctuating stances of various factional groupings but the constantly questioned self-identity of individual priests as well.

10. At the time that Yamada proposed a summit, Hagami was serving as the *kaichō* (chairman) of the World Federation Japanese Religions Committee (Sekai Renpō Nihon Shūkyō Inkaï). In addition to his work in interfaith dialogue and renown as a practitioner of the *kaihōgyō*, Hagami served for many years on the faculty of Taishō University.

11. By the time of the summit, Sugitani had served on the board of trustees for the Zen Nippon Busseinenkai (All Japan Young Buddhist Association), worked towards the establishment of the World Federation of Buddhists, and served as administrative head for the World Religionists Ethics Congress. He later became the head of the Tendai denomination’s administration and of the Japan Committee of the World Conference of Religions for Peace. Regarding Yamada entrusting operations to Sugitani and Hagami, see YAMADA 1995, 104.

12. For more on this movement see COVELL 2005.

Yamada Etai, the Lotus Sutra, and the Tendai Lotus Teachings

In order to put Yamada's efforts to reshape Tendai and Temple Buddhism into perspective, especially as they relate to his work on inter- and intra-faith outreach, we must first examine the roots of Yamada's thought. Yamada understood himself to be first and foremost a *Lotus* practitioner. The Tendai interpretation of the *Lotus Sutra*, in particular the teachings of Saichō and Zhiyi 智顛 (538–597), provided the foundation for Yamada's thought and practice.¹³

Yamada took the inspiration for his teachings and practices from Saichō. Indeed, he argues that he is doing no more than returning to the original intent of Saichō. "Buddhists should by all means return to the source," writes Yamada in his book *Dengyō Daishi to Hōkekyō* (Saichō and the *Lotus Sutra*; YAMADA 1973, 2). Here by the source he means the teachings of the *Lotus Sutra* and their interpretation as found in the writings of Saichō.

Much as the *Lotus Sutra* declares itself the "King of Sutras," Yamada claims that the "the reason for the Buddha's appearance in this world was to teach the *Lotus Sutra*" (YAMADA 1996b, 141). Yamada goes on to liken the *Lotus Sutra* to a great ocean or the light of the sun in comparison to other sutras, which are but rain drops or the twinkling of stars (YAMADA 1996b, 149), and to note that it is the only teaching that shows to all humanity the expanse of the Buddha's enlightenment (*satori*) (YAMADA 1996b, 146). This is why Yamada saw it as his mission to open the *Lotus* teachings of Tendai to the world. He based this on his belief that "Zhiyi taught the truth of the *Lotus Sutra* to priests but Saichō sought to lead the common people in the spirit of the *Lotus Sutra*" (YAMADA 1996b, 186).¹⁴

According to Yamada, the principal teaching found in the *Lotus* is that which brings people to it in the first place. He writes that it is through cause and effect that people come in to contact with the *Lotus Sutra* (YAMADA 1973, 2–3). Yamada points to chapter 7 of the *Lotus*, "Parable of the Conjured City," in which is found the "*innen* (direct and indirect cause/casual relationship) dharma talk." According to Yamada, this is for those who cannot understand the teaching of *shohō jissō* 諸法實相 (see below). The Buddha asserts in this chapter that this is not the first time the *Lotus* has been preached, nor is it the first time that his listeners

13. Many others have remarked on this; for example, Morikawa Kōei, who says, "The head priest's efforts to create a new world order of peace are the embodiment of the *Lotus Sutra*." (YAMADA ETAI ZASU TSUITŌ KANKŌ INKAI 2000, 311). A third influence in Yamada's life was Ryōgen 良源 (also known by his posthumous title Ganzan Daishi 元三大師, 912–985), who is credited with rebuilding the Tendai headquarters on Mount Hiei after a devastating fire in 966. This aspect of Yamada's life will be covered in more depth in my forthcoming biography on Yamada.

14. Despite Yamada's rhetoric, there is evidence that Zhiyi did not limit his teachings to the priesthood. Zhiyi taught the *Liumiao famen* (*rokumyō hōmon* 六妙法門, the "Six subtle Dharma gateways") for his lay follower, Mao Xi, which outlines practices that the laity can follow. I thank Kanno Hiroshi of Soka University for pointing out this material to me.

have heard it (HURVITZ 1976, 145–47). In the distant past the Buddha Victorious Through Great Penetrating Knowledge (Daitsūchishō Nyōrai 大通智勝如來) taught the *Lotus* and created a lasting relationship between the Buddha and his listeners. Yamada emphasizes that the Buddha taught in this way to assure that even those living in *mappō*, the Final Dharma Age—a time Yamada believes we are currently in—would still have access to the “True” teaching (YAMADA 1996b, 162).

Yamada tell us that, “A basic part of Buddhism is to teach to the listener’s ability” (YAMADA 1996b, 181–82). The *Lotus Sutra* is the supreme example of this idea. In a series of parable-filled chapters the *Lotus* lays out ideas at once profoundly difficult and startlingly simple. According to Yamada, chief among these ideas is that of *shohō jissō*. This is the teaching that “all the forms of difference/discrimination that appear in this world are, just as they are, the working of the True Principle (*shinjitsu no dōri* 眞實の道理). Put another way, the many dharmas/things (*hō* 法) of the ten realms are aspects (*sō* 相) of the Truth” (YAMADA 1996b, 149). While this may be grasped intellectually, Yamada says “the principle of *shohō jissō* is difficult to express in words. Nevertheless, because we are forced to give it a name, we say *myō* 妙 (marvelous/wonderful).¹⁵ This is something that must be experienced, like the cold touch of ice or the burning heat of fire. You can describe it all you want, but nothing communicates what it is better than experiencing it” (YAMADA 1996b, 150). To clarify this difficult notion Yamada adds that *shohō jissō* can be seen in the idea that the ten realms are, just as they are, Buddhahood.¹⁶ Taking this further, he applies this idea to one’s activities: no matter what one is doing, whatever job one has, one is walking in the Buddha’s path (YAMADA 1996b, 151). All the many differences are manifestations of the one Truth; “to deeply comprehend this is *satori*, is the true gate, is the superior teaching of the Buddha” (YAMADA 1973, 144). The *Wuliangyi jing* (*Sutra of Immeasurable Meanings*), the opening sutra in the threefold *Lotus Sutra*, tells us, says Yamada, that all of the various teachings are expedient means that lead to the *Lotus*. Seen in this light, Yamada’s emphasis on interfaith dialogue need not be seen as a leap to a distant shore, but the practice of awakening to the manifold ways in which the Truth is expressed.

The *Lotus Sutra* teaches that all sentient beings are Buddhas by nature (YAMADA 1973, 2–3; YAMADA 1980, 138). Furthermore, according to Yamada, the law of cause and effect, as understood through the teaching that the *Lotus*, combined with the teaching of rebirth, demonstrates that not just sentient beings but all life, grass and trees included, have Buddha nature (YAMADA 1996b, 241). Yamada turns to examples from the *Lotus* to clarify his position regarding Bud-

15. For the significance of the term *myō* within the Tendai tradition, see SWANSON 1989.

16. The ten realms are as follows: hell, hungry ghosts, animals, asuras, humans, heaven, śrāvakas, pratyekabuddhas, bodhisattvas, and Buddhas.

dha nature. Chapter 12, the “Devadatta” chapter, is used to demonstrate that all sentient beings are Buddhas by nature. This chapter tells the story of Devadatta, who committed the five grievous sins and yet was able to realize Buddhahood.¹⁷ This chapter also relates the story of the Dragon King’s daughter, who by her nature shows the potential for Buddhahood lies within all. She was young, female, and nonhuman and yet realized Buddhahood (YAMADA 1996b, 163). Chapter 8, “Receipt of Prophecy by Five Hundred Disciples,” is also drawn upon. In this chapter the Buddha relates the story of a man who always has had a precious jewel with him and yet did not realize it, just as sentient beings wander about in ignorance of the Buddha nature they already possess (YAMADA 1996b, 168).

The teaching that all have Buddha nature is critical to understanding Yamada’s interest in interfaith dialogue.¹⁸ If even those who have committed grievous sins like Devadatta can be saved, how much more so those who are engaged in religious self-reflection? Yamada, following Tendai thought, holds that the *Lotus Sutra* teaches that there are different paths, some gradual, some sudden, but all those treading a path (and those who have yet to seek) are equal in their possession of Buddha nature.

Nevertheless, the *Lotus Sutra* recognizes difference and discrimination within equality—all have Buddha nature but not all are equipped to understand it in the same fashion (YAMADA 1996b, 193). That is why, Yamada tells us, the Buddha works through a variety of expedient means to awaken people to their Buddha nature. Chapter 5 of the *Lotus* uses the metaphor of rain to describe the way in which the Buddha’s teachings fall equally upon all. People have different faculties for understanding and grow in different ways, but the Buddha dharma rains down on all (YAMADA 1996b, 48).

The parable of the burning house found in chapter 3, which is used in Tendai to explain the idea of one-vehicle for salvation, is used by Yamada to show the Buddha as a caring parent looking after his children. In this sense, all humanity is part of the same Buddha family (YAMADA 1996b, 159). Just as the Buddha cares for his children, it is in the nature of all religious people to help those in pain and in need. Because they are born with Buddha nature, Yamada believes that all must strive to create a world of peace where all act as Buddhas. Peace is not just the end of war, but the realization of equality and the fruit of happiness that derives from it.¹⁹

17. The five grievous sins are killing one’s father, killing one’s mother, killing an arhat, physically injuring a Buddha, and causing disunity within the Buddhist order.

18. “Nomination File of Yamada Etaï, Chief Abbot of the Tendai Denomination: The Templeton Prize for Progress in Religion,” 5 (unpublished document in author’s possession).

19. Taken from the keynote address given by Yamada Etaï at the Asian Conference on Religion and Peace 1976 titled “Buddhism Esteems Equality.” Cited in the “Nomination File of Yamada Etaï, Chief Abbot of the Tendai Denomination: The Templeton Prize for Progress in Religion.”

Yamada emphasized that this practice for peace begins at the individual and local level and shines out from there towards the world as a whole. The “Light Up Your Corner Movement” that Yamada promoted within Tendai was understood by him as a “religious activity to learn and practice the essence of the teaching that the basis of everyday living is to promote Buddha nature in every individual and to aspire to the creation of a Buddha-land in this very world.”²⁰

The *Lotus Sutra* teaches one to live a life of awareness that one is a Buddha and to see all other sentient beings in a similar light. In doing so, one learns to empty the self (YAMADA 1994, 38). This is the foundation of wisdom. Niwano recalls Yamada saying, “As long as one is self-centered, one cannot make proper judgments” (YAMADA ETAI ZASU TSUITŌ KANKŌ INKAI 2000, 178). The lesson that all will become Buddhas and its relationship to the teaching that there is no self leads to a view that all things are interrelated. This is a popular belief shared by Yamada’s contemporaries. Niwano states, “All things and phenomena are the results of causes and conditions and show themselves in this world. As such they are interrelated” (cited in SHIMAZONO 2002). An understanding of one’s own Buddha nature, coupled with the teaching of cause and effect found in the *Lotus Sutra*, leads to wisdom and compassion.

As an example of the embodiment of these *Lotus* ideals in practice, Yamada often turns to Kannon. As the story of Yamada’s harrowing journey from Okinawa to Honshu on a transport ship in dangerous wartime waters demonstrates, Kannon holds a special place in Yamada’s life. Like so much else, this derives from his interest in the *Lotus Sutra*. Chapter 25 of the *Lotus*, the “Universal Gate,” centers on Kannon. It is such a popular chapter that throughout East Asia it is often distributed and recited as a separate text.

For Yamada, the Kannon chapter shows the ongoing workings of the eternal Buddha. He bases this supposition on his understanding of the teachings of Zhiyi, who is said to have claimed that the workings (*hataraki*) of all twenty-eight chapters of the *Lotus* can be found in the Kannon chapter (YAMADA 1996b, 171). Kannon is thus the embodiment of the Buddha’s action in this world. “The merit of Kannon is the merit of the *Lotus Sutra*, the workings of the *Lotus Sutra* appear as they are as the benefits of Kannon” (YAMADA 1996b, 173). The salvation from suffering offered by Kannon, as it is, is the workings in this world of the merit of the *Lotus*. When Yamada prayed on his journey across dangerous seas for the protection of Kannon, he was seeking to actualize in his life the merits of the *Lotus*. This helps us understand Yamada’s efforts to bring about peace

20. From summary of 1991 speech on the Brighten the World at Your Corner Movement cited in the “Nomination File of Yamada Etai, Chief Abbot of the Tendai Denomination: The Templeton Prize for Progress in Religion.”

through interfaith dialogue. His efforts are modeled on Kannon's embodiment of compassion and thereby are understood as manifesting the *Lotus* in this world.

Related to his understanding of Kannon, Yamada saw the *Lotus Sutra* as "a guidebook for everyday life" (YAMADA 1986, 113). If there was one practice he took from his understanding of the *Lotus* above all others it was that of forgetting self and benefitting others (*mōko rita* 忘己利他). Saichō's *Ganmon* is the source for the phrase *mōko rita* that Yamada turns to time and again. "When asked what Saichō's heart (*kokoro*) is, I respond it is *mōko rita*" (YAMADA 1995, 91). For Yamada, the Pope's use of the phrase during his visit to Japan in 1981 gives Saichō's teaching global legitimacy and supports Yamada's belief that this teaching is a powerful expression of a universal truth.

According to Yamada, *mōko rita* is the manifestation of the Buddha's compassion and derives from the *Lotus Sutra*. "That is why the Daishi created on Mt. Hiei a *Lotus Sutra* dōjō for the salvation of the people of Japan" (YAMADA 1986, 222). It is interesting to note, however, that the *Ganmon* predated Saichō's interest in the *Lotus* and Tendai.²¹ Nevertheless, Yamada argues that this teaching of compassion must be understood in light of the *Lotus* teachings described above. For example, he writes that "one must control the production of desire for the sake of self alone and put desire into action for the sake of others in the knowledge that the self does not exist outside of relationships with others. If one does this, it will eventually benefit oneself.... In short, it is the wisdom to control one's own desire" (YAMADA 1986, 153). The teachings of equality in Buddha nature, cause and effect, and compassion seen in the *Lotus* play out in a call for compassionate practice based on recognition that self does not exist outside of relationships with others.

Yamada links *mōko rita* to another famous line from Saichō, "Within [the search for] food and shelter there is no enlightenment, but within the search for enlightenment there is food and shelter" (*Denjutsu isshin kaimon*, T 74.657c). The basic meaning here for Yamada is that one should practice with an understanding that seeking selfish this-worldly gain will not bring happiness, whereas in seeking for enlightenment, this-worldly benefits and happiness will accrue. As an active member of society one must live by *mōko rita*, letting go of self-interest in favor of seeking salvation for all (YAMADA 1980, 146–47).²² When writing the term for happiness (*shiawase*) Yamada uses the characters to "serve together" (仕合わせ) and not the common character for "happiness" (幸せ). This is because true "happiness" according to Yamada is to serve others (YAMADA 1986, 30).

21. Many thanks to Paul Groner for pointing this out to me.

22. Elsewhere Yamada extends this idea to one's work: "The meaning of *dōshin no naka ni* ... is that you find joy in pursuing the path given you. You do not think of your work as good or bad or better or worse but as your calling given to you by heaven and you pursue it as such. In that you will find joy and sustenance" (YAMADA 1986, 28).

One can readily see in this the foundation for Yamada's desire to reach out to the world. For Yamada, it is not just Buddhism but all religions that must communicate this compassionate service ideal. "It has become a world in which all religions must come together as one in cooperation, for the sake of others, for the sake of enriching the life of others, for the sake of making others happy" (YAMADA 1980, 246–47). He continues, "This is what the Religious Summit on Mt. Hiei was about. This was not something just thought up yesterday. It was for the 1200th anniversary of Dengyō Daishi who taught us *mōko rita*, to put others before ourselves."

Yamada notes time and again that to "forget self and benefit others" is the key to moving away from sectarian, national, and ethnic identities. Regarding religion and group identity, Yamada states, "Religion and faith originally come from the search for peace of mind and happiness in everyday life" (YAMADA 1993, 206; YAMADA 1987, 31). As such, religion was at first an individual matter. Over time it came to encompass the family, community, and nation. Yamada believes that it must be brought back to its original concern—the happiness of individuals. This is where "forget self and benefit others" plays a role according to Yamada—group identities can be overcome, thereby allowing individuals to cooperate to bring about peace and happiness.

Finally, Yamada takes one more practice from the *Lotus Sutra* that applies directly to his efforts to bring religions from around the world together in prayer. As seen in the *Lotus* chapter on Kannon, the *Lotus* promises the benefit of protection from suffering in this life for those who take it to heart. These benefits, Yamada writes, are realized through prayer. Yamada says that it was after his dangerous journey in wartime waters that he learned the power of prayer. "To pray to gods and Buddhas gives us their infinite power even though we humans are limited in our own power." He goes on to say, "Prayer is the origin of salvation and peace."²³ Chapter 26 of the *Lotus Sutra*, "Dhāraṇī," also provides the faithful with the practical benefits of protection. This chapter shows that various bodhisattvas exist to protect those who have faith and practice. In a speech about war and peace Yamada says this "serves as evidence that if you sincerely pray and practice you will not be led astray by demons and the like" (YAMADA 1994, 54). The power of prayer, he notes elsewhere, is that it is "an action of love that purifies and secures spirits which are confused by worldly passions."²⁴ For Yamada, then, organizing a world prayer for peace was at least in part inspired

23. From "The Meaning of the Prayer for Peace" presented at the 1989 World Day of Prayer for Peace in Warsaw, Poland, by Yamada Etai. Cited in the "Nomination File of Yamada Etai, Chief Abbot of the Tendai Denomination: The Templeton Prize for Progress in Religion."

24. From "The Meaning of the Prayer for Peace" at the 1989 World Day of Prayer for Peace in Warsaw, Poland, presented by Yamada Etai. Cited in the "Nomination File of Yamada Etai, Chief Abbot of the Tendai Denomination: The Templeton Prize for Progress in Religion."

by his belief that through prayer the merit of the *Lotus*, manifest in the presence of bodhisattvas and deities offering protection and relief from suffering, would be showered upon the world like the metaphorical rain of the “Medicinal Herbs” chapter.

Practicing the Lotus: The Religious Summit on Mt. Hiei

The 1987 Religious Summit on Mt. Hiei began with the desire of Yamada to do something in keeping with the spirit of Saichō and the *Lotus Sutra* that would be of enduring importance to mark the 1200th anniversary of the opening of Mt. Hiei by Saichō.²⁵ It became a major undertaking that involved overcoming resistance within the Tendai denomination, securing the cooperation of disparate Japanese religious groups and umbrella organizations, appealing to the Japanese government for diplomatic access and approval, and inviting religious leaders from around the world.

Yamada’s efforts did not take place in a vacuum. To be sure, both globally and within Japan, there was already considerable activity in the arena of religious cooperation. On the international level, in 1967, the World Association for World Federation (WAWF) set up a religion committee and shortly thereafter a Japanese branch was opened. In 1970 the World Conference on Religion and Peace (WCRP, Sekai Shūkyōsha Heiwa Kaigi) was formed and its first meeting held in Kyoto. Japan was viewed as a suitable site for the first WCRP conference because of the cooperation among Japanese religions and the funding available. However, the WCRP’s roots go further back to a series of meetings held from 1961. In 1976 the ACRP (Asian Conference on Religion and Peace, Ajia Shūkyōsha Heiwa Kaigi) was formed under the WCRP umbrella and its initial conference held in Singapore. Also in 1976 the Japan-Vatican Religions Meeting (Nihon-Bachikan Shūkyō Kaigi) occurred. In 1979, Japanese delegates joined religious leaders from around the world on Mt. Sinai to pray for a peaceful resolution to hostilities in the Middle East. And, in 1981, the World Religionists Ethics Congress (WOREC, Sekai Shūkyōsha Rinri Kaigi) was formed and its first meeting was held in Japan.

Within Japan, religious cooperation was also underway from the late 1940s. In 1946, the Japanese Association of Religious Organizations (Nihon Shūkyō Renmei) was formed consisting of the Kyōha Shintō Rengōkai (The Association of Sect Shinto), Zen Nihon Bukkyōkai (The Japan Buddhist Federation), Nihon Kirisutokyō Rengōkai (Japanese Association of Christian Organizations), and Shintō Hōnchō (The Association of Shinto Shrines). In 1951, the Shin Nihon Shūkyōdantai Rengōkai (Federation of New Religious Organizations of Japan) was

25. The date was determined not from when Saichō first climbed Mt. Hiei to begin his retreat but from three years later, when he first built the One-vehicle Meditation Hall (Ichijō Shikan’in 一乘止観院), today called the Main Hall (Konpon Chūdō 根本中堂).

founded through the efforts of Niwano Nikkyō, the head of Risshō Kōseikai, a large lay-Buddhist organization.²⁶ And in 1952, the Federation of New Religious Organizations of Japan joined the Japanese Association of Religious Organizations.

Activity within interfaith dialogue and religious cooperation for peace was related to larger trends within Japanese society and the world. In Japan, the growing interest in social engagement inspired by such events as the Vietnam War influenced many Buddhists and others to become involved in religious cooperation.

New religious organizations also found a need to organize in order to better respond to critiques from the mass media and established religions such as Temple Buddhism. Members of the Temple Buddhism community, too, were faced with many critiques regarding their role in society. For example, Robert KISALA claims, “In contemporary Japanese society it is not generally recognized that religion can fulfill a positive social function” (1999, 2). Yamada himself critiqued Temple Buddhism for what it had become. He writes that Buddhists must practice self-reflection. Disputes over taxes and other incidents made Yamada wonder if the Japanese Buddhists haven’t strayed from the spirit of Saichō (YAMADA 1986, 191).

One avenue pursued by Temple Buddhism denominations to counter this view of spiritual stagnation was to become engaged in activities such as religious cooperation. Yamada, for example, voices a concern echoed in other quarters of Japanese society, most notably among conservatives, that Japan has lost its moral rudder and is adrift in the sea of materialism. He claims that other countries critique Japan for a lack of spirituality (YAMADA 1994, 235; YAMADA 1986, 190). Spirituality or religion is the cornerstone of moral character according to Yamada. It is this moral lack that is the source of Japan’s weak participation in global concerns. Japanese must show their good character to the world. Yamada argues that the time in which Saichō lived was no different and, just as Saichō did not open Mt. Hiei solely for the sake of Tendai but for the nation, Yamada believes that Japan must become a role model to the world (YAMADA 1991, 86; YAMADA 1986, 191). Moreover, the teachings, practices, and activities of Temple Buddhism must lay the foundation for that effort.

To steer the Tendai denomination into international waters and towards a new identity (or in Yamada’s view, a renewed identity) as a catalyst for world peace, ranking members within Tendai first had to be persuaded. According to Sugitani, not long after the World Religionists Ethics Congress in 1981,²⁷ Hagami urged Sugitani, who was then a member of the Tendai denomination’s Diet

26. Niwano would go on to become a close friend of Yamada and to work with him on various issues.

27. This meeting was itself the result of a “mini-conference” held in Rome in 1978 at which representatives of Japanese religious organizations met with Vatican representatives. *Kōhō Tendai* 18 (June, 2002): 10, in TENDAI SHŪMUCHŌ 1995–2004.

and administration, to look into the possibility of organizing a gathering of the leaders of the world's religions. Shortly thereafter, Sugitani was also asked by Yamada to do much the same thing. Sugitani and Hagami then broached the idea to Kobayashi Ryūshō, the head of operations (*sōmu buchō*) of Enryakuji at that time. With Kobayashi's cooperation the plans for the summit got underway in earnest.

Although Yamada hoped to hold a truly special event to commemorate the 1200th anniversary of the opening of Mt. Hiei by Saichō, it is clear that it was not until the 1981 visit of Pope John Paul II to Japan that the idea of an international summit going beyond Asia took root. During his visit to Japan, the Pope gave a speech on religion and peace and borrowed the words of Saichō stating, "In the words of your most excellent teacher Saichō, 'to forget the self and to benefit others' is the height of compassion." Yamada comments in several of his writings that the Pope's words genuinely surprised and moved him (YAMADA 1993, 209, 213; YAMADA 1995, 93; TENDAI SHŪMUCHŌ 2001, 147). The Pope's speech served to reassure Yamada of his own conviction that the Tendai *Lotus* teachings were of critical importance to the modern world.

Honestly, when I heard that speech—in addition to thinking "Wow!"—my heart was warmed. In all religions there must be similar words.... But, there just aren't any that are as strongly and clearly put as Saichō's "Height of compassion...." I felt the power of that all over again. Of course, I knew those words well. But, I had no idea that they could, just as they were, be communicated to the rest of the world. (YAMADA 1993, 210)

So strong was the impact of the Pope's speech on Yamada that, elsewhere, he likens the Pope's words to Newton's apple (YAMADA 1995, 93).

No doubt drawing on the parable told in Chapter 8 of the *Lotus Sutra* of the destitute man who unknowingly carried sewn within his garment a priceless jewel (HURVITZ 1976, 166), Yamada states that hearing those words from the Pope made him realize that "It was as though some time in history we had stumbled for a moment and swallowed a great diamond. We have always had it right here in our belly. So now we have to do an operation or something to take it out and use it for the sake of humanity" (YAMADA 1993, 213).

With Yamada's backing, Sugitani, Hagami, and Kobayashi were able to bring both the administrative and the religious leadership of Tendai into alignment (TENDAI SHŪMUCHŌ, *Kōhō Tendai* 19 [January, 2003]: 13). Nevertheless, bringing together the various individual efforts at international outreach and overcoming the potential divide between administrators and religious leaders within Tendai were only two hurdles that had to be overcome. A related and more challenging obstacle to success lay in the many competing identities of Temple Buddhism. Within the Tendai denomination, for example, there were those who

believed that stepping onto the international stage was in the best interests of the denomination and those who felt that Tendai had to focus first and foremost on priestly practice or the maintenance of traditional institutions. These different identities within the Tendai denomination are common to most other Temple Buddhism denominations as well. Moreover, they surface in other aspects of contemporary Tendai practice such as in the Light Up Your Corner Movement. This movement was initially planned as an outwardly focused program that would engage the larger public and spread the Tendai teachings more broadly. In the end, it was turned inward to focus primarily on temple members as a means of reinvigorating their connection to their temples and to the denomination and, thereby, of strengthening the traditional temple member system.

Throughout his writings Yamada frequently attacks those who would defend sectarianism on what he felt were narrow interpretations of Saichō's life and teachings. To counter sectarian views and defend the move to open Tendai to the world, Yamada draws on the teaching of expedient means found in the *Lotus Sutra* and Saichō's "teaching in accordance with the times." He states,

I am not sure why, but there are those among modern religions who rashly seek to only transmit the teachings of their founder just as they were without diagnosing and prescribing [a cure] in accordance with the times.... This just isn't the time to seal off the gate to the denomination. We should look to the common goals of the world's religions, such as happiness for humanity and world peace, and open the expedient gate [*hōben no mon* 方便の門] of religious cooperation.
(YAMADA 1987, 20–21)

Yamada compares religious teachings to medicine that must be administered according to the situation, a technique we see in Zhiyi's *Mohe zhiguan* (DONNER and STEVENSON 1993, 330; STEVENSON 1986, 85–86). Elsewhere, Yamada says, "Religion is such that the essence does not change, and yet time marches on. [Religion] must guide people to happiness by adjusting its theory and methods appropriately to the times" (YAMADA 1986, 60).

In his work on the *Lotus Sutra* and Saichō, Yamada writes that now is the Final Dharma Age in which the teachings of the Buddha are no longer accessible. In such a period, Buddhists must return to the source of the teachings—the most basic teaching—which, Yamada says, is the *Lotus Sutra*. The heart of the *Lotus* is the teaching that "[we] will become Buddhas" (YAMADA 1973, 1–3). In short, Yamada builds support for his view of proper Buddhist action over and against those who might argue a competing version. He does so by claiming adherence to the essence of the teaching while making allowances for changed circumstances. It would appear from Yamada's writings on the *Lotus Sutra* that the *Lotus* has built within it an allowance for teaching in accor-

dance with the times.²⁸ Moreover, Yamada makes these arguments by drawing on the *Lotus*, Saichō, and Zhiyi, three nearly unassailable sources within Tendai. Yamada's approach worked toward silencing critics who might claim that he was straying from doctrinal orthodoxy.

Yamada also found it necessary to address those who were primarily concerned with the maintenance of tradition.

The traditional religions today are carrying heavy baggage—they are creaking under the load of maintaining tradition. In a limited way, that is the religious spirit and I am not going to say it is bad, but it is not religion's true form. A true religious practitioner is one who teaches well-grounded thought to the people.
(YAMADA 1995, 127)

Yamada clearly believes those who would strive to maintain traditional institutions, instead of seeking to recreate those traditions in light of contemporary demands, are not keeping with the teachings of the *Lotus Sutra* or acting in the spirit of a "true" religious practitioner. The new religions, Yamada notes, have grown because they meet the needs of the people for such things as healing. Without addressing such needs, "Buddhism will not survive" (YAMADA 1995, 114). Buddhism that focuses solely on the maintenance of traditions also fails to address other pressing issues such as world peace. Yamada continues, "If you think about it, in the face of the huge problem of world peace, Japanese Buddhists have been woefully silent and just sit twiddling their thumbs. This is where critiques of [Temple] Buddhism stem from" (YAMADA 1995, 93).

Temple Buddhism was also criticized as being funerary Buddhism (*sōshiki Bukkyō* 葬式佛教), a critique based on the maintenance of traditional institutions. The self-identity of many priests and the primary ritual function of most temples derive from the temple member system and its focus on the care of ancestors. This system has dominated Temple Buddhism for over three centuries. Echoing his father's critique, Yamada Nōyū, a leading Tendai priest criticizes it as it has come to be practiced by some, echoing a common complaint that priests fail to preach or to reach out to the laity during funerals and memorials. Yamada Nōyū states that if priests do no more than perform a ritual and leave, "Then there is nothing you can do about people saying that priests only think about making money. If you just charge large sums of money for funerals and memorial services and then when the service is over don't give anyone the time of day, of course you are going to be criticized" (YAMADA 2003, 79). Here

28. A possible source for this (Yamada does not give one) is found in the "Expedient Means" chapter of the *Lotus Sutra*: "I never told them, 'You all shall be able to achieve the path of the Buddha.' The reason I never told them is that the time to tell it had not yet come. Now is precisely the time to preach the Great Vehicle decisively" (HURVITZ 1976, 33). I thank Kanno Hiroshi for pointing out this verse.

he does not critique Temple Buddhism's role in funerals, but, like many others in Japan, he does critique the way in which funerals have come to be conducted.²⁹ This relates directly to his view of what Buddhism and religion more broadly should be at their core, namely, teachings and practices to bring about happiness and peace for humanity.

Yamada repeatedly states that his work to bring Tendai onto the world stage is done not for the benefit of Tendai but for world peace, which Yamada sees as a realization of Saichō's goals. "The twenty-year-old monk Saichō vowed to seek peace for all sentient beings, including humans. I believe that especially in this world today, in which we try to think globally, this must be made the starting point" (YAMADA 1994, 70). Moreover, Yamada's writings show a belief that Japan was particularly well suited to the task of bringing about world peace. He was not straying far from Saichō who claimed that the Japanese in particular had the proper faculties for the *Lotus* teachings (GRONER 2000, 180–83). For example, Yamada asserts that the kind of cooperation necessary to organize the summit was made possible by the "firm roots of the indigenous spirit of 'wa' 和 [harmony]" (YAMADA 1995, 96). This point of view is not uncommon in contemporary Japan.³⁰ Yamada further states that Japan's road to becoming a role model for global cooperation and peace was paved generations ago by the work of Shōtoku Taishi, who first introduced the "Mahayana spirit" into Japan (YAMADA 1996b, 191). According to Yamada, because of this history even those Japanese who are not actively practicing Buddhism have the seeds of Buddhism planted within them.

Yamada's view of Buddhism as a religion of global salvation faced considerable opposition from those who saw the primary role of the priesthood as the opening of *satori* through religious practice. His efforts to shift Temple Buddhism towards

29. The debate over Buddhist identity and the place of funeral Buddhism by no means ended with Yamada's statements. Within Tendai, many still see the primary role of the temple and priest as that of provider of mortuary services for temple members. A 1995 article in *Kōhō Tendai* written in response to the Aum Shinrikyō sarin gas incident and the vociferous critiques of Temple Buddhism as corrupt and out of touch that followed the incident, declares that priests should redouble their efforts within the confines of the temple membership system (*Kōhō Tendai* 1 [October, 1995]: 8–19, in TENDAI SHŪMUCHŌ 1995–2004). *Kōhō Tendai* is a magazine produced by the sect for its priesthood. Much like Yamada's critique, this article does not attack Buddhist funerals but points out that the system is in ill-repair. Unlike Yamada, who offers a broad vision of what Temple Buddhism must be, there is no mention of other possible roles for the priesthood. Within this article, priestly identity appears to be completely defined by the temple member system. It should be noted also that there are those who believe Buddhist funeral rituals are not in keeping with Buddhist teachings at all, such as those involved in the Critical Buddhism debates.

30. Among others, the films of Miyazaki Hayao are steeped in it, and it can be found in the writings of Niwano. According to KISALA, "Niwano attributes the proliferation of war in the West to the rather common view that monotheistic religions are inherently intolerant, as opposed to the attitude of tolerance engendered by the religiously pluralistic situation of Japan" (1999, 108).

an identity as a salvation religion were assailed by critics in part because Yamada's activities appeared to move Tendai away from its focus on the priesthood and towards a lay focus. Yamada responded, "Zhiyi taught the truth of the *Lotus Sutra* to priests, but Saichō sought to lead everyday people through the spirit of the *Lotus Sutra*" (YAMADA 1980, 130–31). Opposition on Mt. Hiei was vocal. Yamada recalls,

Since I became the head priest of Tendai, people close to me have told me that others are saying things like, "The head priest this time is different from those before. Something's not right." Looking into this I found that those who were saying this also said, "Our religion is one of *satori*, it is not a religion of salvation. But the head priest says things that ignore *satori*. What is this all about?" To that I responded, "There is a difference in where we place our emphasis. What is religion? Didn't it come about for the purpose of saving people? If it is just about *satori* you don't have to be a religious practitioner—even philosophers have realized *satori*. *Satori* is not religion. It is through salvation that religion finds life. Without it, Buddhism would never have come to be."

(YAMADA 1995, 113)

Yamada's arguments bring to mind standard Mahāyāna arguments and, in particular, *Lotus*-based arguments that Buddhism must be about salvation for all, not only about the enlightenment of the individual practitioner. Elsewhere, in support of his claims, Yamada calls on the "Universal Gate" chapter of the *Lotus Sutra*. The "Kannon" chapter states, "with true vision, pure vision, the vision of broad and great wisdom, the vision of pity and compassion." This shows the order of things—that the opening of *satori* is the beginning, and the important point of religion is how to put that to use" (YAMADA 1995, 113–14). Yamada writes, "Our life must be about ... striving for the enlightenment of all people, not just oneself, and to work for a world in which all people live a proper life and get along" (YAMADA 1996b, 231).

For Yamada, emphasizing the salvational aspects of Buddhism did not signal a shift away from Tendai's identity as a denomination of world-renouncers (*shukkesha* 出家者). The priesthood was essential. They were the guides on the path to salvation. Yamada draws on Saichō for support: "I explained it [the move to focus on salvation] as what Saichō meant when he said, 'Do not drink the flavor of liberation alone, do not give witness to the fruit of peace alone.' One should not just obtain *satori* but should instead use that *satori* to guide others and bring them happiness. This is what a priest must be"³¹ (YAMADA 1995, 86).

As we have seen, Yamada believed that the *Lotus Sutra* taught about the law of cause and effect. Understood in this light, practice is advanced through the repetition of good acts and leads to the perfection of self. However, in keeping

31. Saichō's statement is from the *Ganmon*.

with his focus on salvation over individual perfection, Yamada insists that for Saichō the self was understood as existing as part of a web of relationships. This means perfection of self can only be understood within the context of the larger society in which one exists. According to Yamada, this is where the teaching of “forget self and benefit others” fits in: it is the negation of self in service to others (YAMADA 1987, 16–18). Thus, “forget self and benefit others” is Saichō’s call to live a life of service to society, constantly engaged in good works. In his acceptance speech for the Niwano Peace Prize, Yamada states, “Buddhism is Śākyamuni’s teaching of a way of life and way of living for all people so that everyone can live in peace. Therefore, priests must guide people by practicing this philosophy and its methods so that everyone can live in a stable environment” (YAMADA 1989, 2).

Yamada directs his words at priests, but his views mirror those of the new Buddhist lay movements of Japan such as Risshō Kōseikai or Soka Gakkai. Kisala describes the world view of these new religions as follows: “The world is seen as an interconnected whole, and activity on one level will affect other levels. Therefore, a transformation on the most immediate level of the inner self will have repercussions within one’s family, the surrounding society, and eventually on the universe as a whole” (KISALA 1999, 3; see also TSUSHIMA 1979; HARDACRE 1986; and SHIMAZONO 1999). Yamada’s views are not unique to himself; many within Tendai and Temple Buddhism more generally share this basic world view of interrelatedness (COVELL 2004). Where Yamada differs from his critics within Tendai is that he believes that the denomination must actively pursue the transformation of society. Where he differs from the lay Buddhist movements and new religions is his view, harking back to Saichō’s call for a twelve-year retreat, that individuals require time to perfect this world view and, therefore, that the priesthood is still necessary (YAMADA 1973, 351). He acknowledges the potential of lay practitioners, for example, through his championing of the Light Up Your Corner Movement, but still believes the priesthood must play a crucial role in cultivating understanding.

In arguing for a greater openness within Tendai, Yamada calls for a “return” to the original spirit of Saichō—a move that undermines internal opponents by drawing on the legitimating powers of the founder. Kobayashi recalls Yamada always admonishing priests to think back to the early spirit of Saichō as he climbed Mt. Hiei. “The reason behind climbing Mt. Hiei was to study and to practice on his own and to become one who could both speak and act, a treasure to the nation. And to then educate more such people”³² (KOBAYASHI 1995, 63). Yamada often admonished priests to chant Saichō’s *Ganmon* daily. Thus, we see Saichō’s vision for Mt. Hiei described as a center for training people who

32. The source for this in Saichō’s writings is the *Shijōshiki* (Regulations in four articles; for more on the *Shijōshiki* see GRONER 2000.)

would not simply seek *satori* for themselves but also salvation for the people of the nation.

Yamada states that he wants people to focus on the young Saichō at age twenty-two, not on the posthumously named Dengyō Daishi who died at age fifty-six (YAMADA 1987, 10). This move places the founder that he draws on back before the denomination was formed, allowing Yamada to bypass sectarian accretions and go directly to what he sees as the true spirit of the founder.³³ “What is most important is to maintain our 1200 years of history. It is wrong to think of developing Mt. Hiei in accordance with the current times. We must have the spirit of returning to the past of Dengyō Daishi, of going back to his past” (YAMADA 1995, 141). Here Yamada does not intend to seal the gates of Tendai at some point 1200 years prior; rather, he aims to return to the “spirit” of Saichō—something much more open to definition and redefinition and yet a rhetorical move that bases Yamada’s vision of Saichō firmly in Saichō’s early and in many ways most emotionally powerful texts such as the *Ganmon*. This approach is teleological. It serves to place Yamada’s present need—the shaping of Tendai identity around the ideal of salvation for all and opening Tendai to the world—at the center of Saichō’s world view.

As a forceful reminder of the spirit of the founder, Yamada frequently invokes the image of the *nori no tomoshibi* 法灯, the light of the dharma, which is said to have burned continuously on Mt. Hiei since Saichō first lit it 1200 years ago.³⁴ Just as this light has shone for 1200 years, Yamada argues, so too does Saichō’s spirit. In fact, as part of the 1200th anniversary services the light was brought to nearly forty other locations around the country with a message referring to the Pope’s use of Saichō’s words and a call for all the people of Japan to step away from sectarian ideas of religion, and to live life properly and, in the spirit of Saichō, light up society by engaging the world around them (TENDAI SHŪMUCHŌ 2001, 209–11).

As we can see, Yamada strove to overcome the challenge of competing identities within Tendai. He did so by repeating within his writings and dharma talks the idea that, at its heart, Tendai—and Temple Buddhism more broadly—must be about salvation and happiness for all sentient beings, which is the core of the *Lotus Sutra*’s teachings as Yamada understands them. Moreover, the priesthood must engage society to make this happen. Yet, in order for the summit to succeed, Yamada had to do more than address ideological concerns—he had to

33. Though he calls for a return to Saichō over Dengyō Daishi, his writing on the matter generally refers to Saichō as Dengyō Daishi as this is the common honorific form of address.

34. The light survived Oda Nobunaga’s 1571 razing of Enryakuji because its flame had been passed to other temples. The image of the flame is still frequently used within Tendai. The flame is the first full picture in a catalogue from the museum exhibition of the “treasures” of Tendai that was held in the Tokyo National Museum in 2005 (KYŌTO KOKURITSU HAKUBUTSUKAN et al. 2005). The image served to remind readers that the centuries-old texts and works of art were not simply museum pieces but part of a living tradition.

bring together the various religions of Japan. The Tendai sect on its own did not have the financial nor human resources to put on such a large-scale event as an international summit. Here the connections of Sugitani Gijun and other members of Tendai involved in ecumenical work were especially helpful. According to Sugitani, initial attempts at cooperation were bogged down in the suspicion of the new religions on the part of Temple Buddhists (TENDAI SHŪMUCHŌ, *Kōhō Tendai* 19 [January, 2003]: 15). Nevertheless, Sugitani claims that the leaders of the new religions and Temple Buddhism were eventually able to see eye to eye on the need for cooperation. In particular, the friendship that developed between Yamada and Niwano enabled increased cooperation. In fact, Niwano later nominated Yamada for the prestigious Templeton Prize for Progress in Religion.

After establishing early contacts, a series of six meetings was held in mid-1986 by the Mt. Hiei Religion Summit Preparations Committee (Hieizan Shūkyō Sammito Junbi Iinkai), which was comprised of the leaders of the World Federation Japanese Religions Committee (Sekai Renpō Nihon Shūkyō Iinkai), World Conference of Religions for Peace (Sekai Shūkyōsha Heiwa Kaigi), and the Japanese Association of Religious Organizations (Nihon Shūkyō Renmei Kyōsan).³⁵ These meetings resulted in the creation of the Japan Conference of Religious Representatives (Nihon Shūkyō Daihyōsha Kaigi), which was charged with the responsibility of organizing the Summit. This committee met ten times between August 1986 and July 1987. A subcommittee was formed and met four times to write the Hieizan Message that was to be the centerpiece of the event. Finally, delegations were sent abroad on three occasions to seven countries and the Vatican to extend invitations to various religious leaders.

The manner in which the event was planned, as a cooperative undertaking involving nearly all Japanese religions, meant that a major event taking place as part of Tendai's commemoration of its founding was to be organized by the leaders of all Japanese religions. Moreover, each religion agreed to pay for its portion of the costs of the event. With this, fears within Tendai that such an event was beyond the financial and human resource capabilities of Tendai were quelled.

Coinciding with these proceedings, the Tendai denomination under Yamada's leadership held numerous memorials and other activities as part of the 1200th anniversary commemorations. Demonstrating the extent to which cooperation was realized, throughout May and June of 1986 twenty-one religious organizations that had historical ties to the Tendai denomination, including the Zen

35. The Japanese Association of Religious Organizations consisted of the The Association of Sect Shinto (Kyōha Shintō Rengōkai), The Japan Buddhist Federation (Zen Nihon Bukkyōkai), Japanese Association of Christian Organizations (Nihon Kirisutokyō Rengōkai), The Association of Shinto Shrines (Shintō Honchō), and Federation of New Religious Organizations of Japan (Shin Nihon Shūkyōdantai Rengōkai).

and Pure Land denominations, as well as new religions such as Risshō Kōseikai, organized large-scale memorial services on Mt. Hiei (TENDAI SHŪMUCHŌ 2001, 234–37; NAGAO 2002, 366). Over twenty thousand people participated.

It was just this sort of cooperation that Yamada believed to be the ultimate goal of the summit. And, success was assured, he and others believed, because of the widely-held view, at the forefront in many Tendai publications, its homepage and elsewhere, that Mt. Hiei—as the “mother of Japanese Buddhism”—was by its very nature symbolic of religious openness. From Mt. Hiei came the Pure Land and Zen schools, and Nichiren. According to this narrative, Saichō did not discriminate between religious practices but preferred to prescribe practices fit for specific individuals. He brought back from China Zen, Tendai, precepts, and Esoteric Buddhism. Kobayashi writes that, “The one-vehicle [the teaching of the *Lotus Sutra*], which was the basis of the thought of the founder Saichō, was comprehensive and held the depth and breadth to interact with any religion” (KOBAYASHI 1995, 64). Yamada argues that this is the key to religious cooperation and peace in the modern world. The reason why Tendai became the “mother of Japanese Buddhism,” he argues, is found here. Moreover, Yamada hopes that for the same reason Tendai will become the “mother” of world religious cooperation and peace.

The parade of religious organizations that came to Mt. Hiei for the summit and for the memorial services that preceded it served to strengthen Mt. Hiei’s image as the center of Japanese religious cultural life. And the message that Buddhism, and Tendai Buddhism in particular, was an open and accepting religion served to legitimize Buddhist efforts to play a role as equals with the Vatican, which was portrayed in the writings of many Buddhists as playing a pivotal role, albeit one hampered by a lack of true openness.

In the end, many declared the summit a success. Yamada countered critics who complained that merely bringing together leaders of religions to pray for peace was an ineffective strategy by stressing that their meeting alone was an important first step. Continuing the process was critical. “In thirty or fifty years, in our children or grandchildren’s time, war based on religious difference will cease if we keep meeting” (YAMADA 1995, 108). Yamada’s stress on continuing forward is not simply derived from the practical need to do so, but from Tendai *Lotus* teachings on perseverance as found in the “Admonition to Embrace the Sutra” chapter and the “Bodhisattva Never Disparaging” chapter. This teaching is still the centerpiece of one of the most famous practices on Mt. Hiei, the *kaihōgyō*.³⁶

Reflecting back on the summit many years later, Sugitani states that the summit was “a great success if only in that it brought together leaders from different religions on the same stage at a time when the typical view was that religions did not get along well” (TENDAI SHŪMUCHŌ, *Kōhō Tendai* 23 [March, 2004]:

36. See COVELL 2004 for further details.

10). Kobayashi writes that the summit was a success in that it brought the new religions and Temple Buddhism together, and in that it continued annually thereafter on Mt. Hiei and around the world. The year 2007 marked the twentieth anniversary of the summit and a major event was held on Mt. Hiei in commemoration.

Virtually all critiques of the summit as well as all praise for it centered around what was ostensibly its main goal—bringing about interreligious cooperation and world peace. No one has looked at the event as a means for bringing about a shift in identity within Tendai or Temple Buddhism. This examination shows that the summit served just such a role as well.

For Yamada the summit provided the means to emphasize his sincere desire for world peace, but also the means to reestablish Tendai *Lotus* teachings at the center of Japanese religious life and to reshape the identity of the modern priesthood. He sought to refocus the priesthood of Tendai on salvation for all through engaging society and pivotal social problems such as peace. He clearly hoped that in so doing the priesthood would recast itself and move away from a self-identity overwhelmingly defined by the ritual demands of the temple member system or modern images of a true priest as one who ardently seeks only after enlightenment.

Regarding the immediate effect on world peace that the meeting would have, Yamada used the image of a conjured city, which is the topic of chapter 7 of the *Lotus Sutra*: “It is my wish that this meeting will serve as a conjured city on the way to building religious cooperation” (YAMADA 1987, 22). Perhaps this is also a fitting way to view his efforts to reshape priestly and Temple Buddhist identity as well. From the time of his tenure as head priest of the Tendai denomination, Temple Buddhism has been undergoing a slow but steady change. The summit was a significant benchmark in this process. Since Yamada’s passing the process of change has picked up speed. Recent changes in the laws governing nonprofit and nongovernmental organizations have begun to have an impact on how Temple Buddhism is able to address social ills (WATTS 2004). Moreover, a small but increasing number of priests raised during Yamada’s time identify themselves less with the maintenance of traditional institutions such as the temple member system and more with social engagement efforts in the areas of interfaith dialogue, peace, minority rights, and care for the elderly as well as with ritual practices that are redefining how people view death, dying, and ancestor veneration.³⁷ Yamada’s *Lotus* practice of interfaith dialogue embodied in the 1987 Religious Summit on Mt. Hiei has had an enduring impact on Japanese Buddhism in realms far beyond that of interfaith dialogue.

37. See ROWE 2011 for an excellent introduction to the changing views of the dead and rites for the dead.

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