

Secularization in a Japanese Context

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DEFINING THE PROBLEM

Pointing out the paradoxical situation of religion in Japan has long been a classic starting point for any discussion on religiosity in this country. In the West, controversies over the implications of contemporary sociocultural changes on man's religious aspirations and expressions formulated in terms of secularization, and the corresponding difficulty of coming to a unanimous evaluation, have characterized sociological theories of religion especially during the last decade. But the Western observer of the Japanese religious scene has been facing the question whether Japan should be called a secular or religious society for a much longer time. It might seem, therefore, as if the introduction of Western concepts and theories of secularization and their application to Japanese religion, society, and the changes in both, have only furnished a new framework for discussing a paradoxical situation with which scholars of Japanese religion were already familiar. But there is more to it than that.

Attention should be called to a new paradox, namely, that of the coexistence and tension between forms of religiosity (or non-religiosity) inherited from the past, and forms that seem specific to the age in which we now live. In other words, a discussion of secularization in the Japanese context should not content itself merely with repeating the old arguments about the peculiar nature of Japanese religiosity, the difficulty of explaining it in terms of the sacred/secular dichotomy familiar to the West, and the possibility, nonetheless, of employing such an approach because of the inroads of Western ways of thinking upon the Japanese consciousness. In view of the fact that it is precisely these "traditional" Western ways of thinking that are currently being called into question, and the fact that the

process of secularization in the West is primarily a matter of its impact on religion *in the present age*, we should ask ourselves whether in Japan we have come to a situation that is genuinely novel as over against the heretofore predominant structure of society, culture, and consciousness, however paradoxical they may already have been.

This is not to deny all continuities with the past. Nobody would be so bold as to argue that the present upheavals, especially in Western perspective, have no antecedents in the sociocultural processes of preceding ages. But if my reading of contemporary authors concerning the present world situation is correct, and if my own evaluation of what is happening nowadays is not mistaken, it is hard not to subscribe to the view or feeling that all over the world man has come to a turning point and is in the throes of deep and perplexing changes that demand, in order to make sense of them, new perspectives and methods of approach.

In the opinion of this writer, the same holds true for Japan. The impact of the past is by no means to be underestimated, but it no longer suffices to look at Japanese religion and to approach the problem of what is called secularization in this country *exclusively* in terms of an ongoing modernization process, prepared for by certain traditional Japanese values (including traditional Japanese attitudes toward "the sacred" and "the secular") and brought into the open through the introduction of foreign ideas and techniques since the middle of the last century. What is needed is a new look at the present social and religious scene with at least some openness to the question whether Japan too is not participating in global sociocultural changes and performing an active role therein.

It is self-evidently impossible to present, in a limited number of pages, and overall view of the state of religion in present-day Japan. Moreover, the growing complexity of the religious situation itself does not facilitate the formulation of an interpretation that will at once correctly appraise the present and at the same time throw light on fundamental trends that point to future

directions of development. These difficulties are compounded by the fact that we do not yet possess concepts that will suffice both for the expression of findings of empirical research and for evaluations of a more impressionistic nature. If this is what one finds when analyzing the problem of secularization in the West — is there any other problem in recent religious studies that has more cogently brought into focus the eternal question of what religion really is? — it obtains even more in discussions of this problem in a society like Japan. One finds oneself constantly wavering between applying traditional Western concepts, arguing that ultimately they possess some universal value or that the degree of Japan's westernization permits their use, and, on the other hand, yielding to the temptation of overemphasizing the uniqueness of the Japanese case and calling for a typically Japanese form of conceptualization. It may be that the revered principle of "selective adoption and adaptation" that informs many Japanese cultural patterns could be of some value here. Yet we are faced with the fact and the problem that both donor and recipient are in a state of flux so all-encompassing that it sometimes seems to prevent all possibility of "stopping and thinking."

Awareness of these and other difficulties may be one of the main reasons that discussions of Japanese religion in terms of secularization are rather scarce.¹ Prudence demands that this paper too envisage no greater ambition than that of pointing out a few conspicuous phenomena in Japanese society and religion that seem representative of more fundamental sociocultural changes in today's world. After the description of these phenomena, some remarks will be added with the purpose of putting them in a broader interpretational framework.

1. One Japanese scholar who has done, and still does, ground-breaking work in searching out new interpretations of the contemporary religious scene in terms of the secularization problem is Ikado Fujio (1972, 1974). Shorter treatments of this subject have been attempted by the present writer (Swyngedouw 1970, 1971).

RELIGIOUS TRENDS IN PRESENT-DAY JAPAN

Identity quest. Japan's history, particularly since 1868, has been characterized by a pendulum-like alternation of periods of nationalism and internationalism. If the years immediately following World War II may rightly be called a period in which a more or less international outlook was predominant — in a certain sense a remarkable instance of the ability of the Japanese to absorb in a pragmatic manner pressures from the outside — the sixties, and still more the seventies, have brought in their wake a set of phenomena that point, rather, to a resurgence of nationalistic feelings. The clearest example in the cultural field is the continuing boom of “theories of Japanese-ness” (*nihonjin-ron*) with which the intellectual market is flooded. In the eyes of many foreign observers, the sensitivity of the Japanese to whatever is said about their country and the navel-gazing that goes with it have reached the proportions of a genuine self-identity crisis.

Repercussions from this nation-centered trend can easily be detected in concomitant phenomena with religious overtones. Even those who do not agree that this search for national self-identity should be interpreted as, fundamentally, a religious quest can hardly deny that a renewed interest in traditional Japanese expressions of religiosity forms part of this more general trend. This is evidenced by the number of research studies published on this theme and by the popularity they enjoy (Tamaru 1975, 1976). A case in point is the so-called Yanagita-boom that peaked in 1975 when the centenary of Yanagita Kunio, the founder of Japanese folklore studies, was commemorated. Another is the statistically proven growth in the number of participants in several traditional rites, especially in the larger cities, rites such as the New Year observances, annual festivals, and the like. Examples could be multiplied indefinitely, but it seems evident that at the heart of this sort of revival, the question of the fate and role of Japan's *Volksreligion* Shinto is posed anew — and equally evident that, as suggested above, considera-

tion of this question should take account of the sociocultural changes characteristic of the present day.

Moreover, when we consider that attention to the primacy of political values and their specific relation to religion has proved an appropriate key to correctly understanding his country, we find ourselves directed to facts illustrative of this point. Persisting government attempts to nationalize Yasukuni Shrine, where most Japanese war dead are worshiped, constitute one of the most conspicuous examples. This can hardly be dismissed as a *fait divers* of only passing significance in Japan's frenetic search for self-identity.

Ecumenism. Though looking inward may be the keynote, there are other equally important trends which, though often overshadowed, are very real and caution us against a unilateral emphasis on introspection. Indeed, the introspective concern may be a natural, to some extent even essential, mechanism of self-defense against more internationally oriented tendencies in contemporary society — and a proof of their reality. But even if openness to universal values is hardly the forte of Japanese people in general, the awareness is steadily growing that the world is evolving toward unity and that the nurturing of “international feelings,” together with a sound sense of self-respect, is a prerequisite for functioning effectively in the coming community of man.

This growing awareness likewise has repercussions in the field of religion, particularly in certain activities of Japan's religious organizations. It is truly striking that, in recent years, most of them have become ardent promoters of international understanding and have even started to bring this cause before international forums. In this respect, some of the so-called “new religions” take first place.² It is rather paradoxical,

2. Examples might include the prominent role played by Risshō Kōsei Kai in the World Conference on Religion and Peace and by Ōmoto in the World Federation of Religions for the Advancement of Peace. Quite apart from these activities (which are conducted in cooperation with other religious organizations), Sōka Gakkai too has been active on the international scene.

though not entirely incomprehensible, that such "ecumenical" endeavors should be undertaken by religious organizations which, for all their tolerance, are generally regarded as exponents of a typically Japanese particularism. Conversely, the Japanese Christian minority, which in principle should opt for universal values, seems reluctant to respond enthusiastically to this trend, apparently preferring to continue concentrating on the particularistic problems of indigenization and inculturation. If we were to probe into the reasons for this ironic pair of phenomena, facts of no little importance would doubtless come to light, particularly in view of the circumstance that much of this interreligious cooperation assumes a strongly sociopolitical color.

Religious boom. The renewed interest in religious expressions of Japan's uniqueness, combined with the growing activity of some religious bodies on a world plane, lends plausibility to the impression that Japan is witnessing something of a religious revival. Indeed, it is not only scholars of religion and religious people themselves who like to say that the "secular" sixties have given way to the "religiously inspired" seventies. The theme has been taken up by the mass media, and though one acquainted with trends in Japanese society tends to become mildly skeptical toward value-judgments as to the deeper implications of the many "booms" that with amazing regularity keep the Japanese public in suspense, there is manifestly a substantial sociological dimension behind this phenomenon of the "religious boom."

Problems of interpretation aside, there is certainly no lack of statistics on the religious affiliation and behavior of the Japanese. The discrepancy between the "official" statistics compiled annually by the Agency for Cultural Affairs from reports submitted by the religious bodies themselves, each reckoning its adherents according to its own definition and method of counting, and the statistics provided by other entities such as the Institute of Statistical Mathematics, statistics based on completely different

principles of data gathering, is all too well known. This discrepancy remains the preferred source and starting point for any discussion on the state of religion in this country. Without too much exaggeration one might add that for many scholars it is a point of honor to complement these available statistics with some smaller-scale inquiries of their own in order to preserve some semblance of originality. Yet the feeling is that somewhere an impasse has been reached from which it becomes increasingly difficult to extricate oneself.

The various statistics reveal neither sizable fluctuations in the membership of religious bodies in recent years nor fundamental changes in the religious consciousness of the Japanese. The number of adherents claimed for the diverse religious organizations remains far in excess of the total population, and the number of people claiming to be without religious faith (though in many cases affirming that religion is important) shows only a slightly increasing tendency. The statistics prove only that, for example, more people visited shrines and temples during the New Year period in 1976 than in the year before. But (prosaic though it may seem) the bad weather in the first days of 1975 was hardly conducive to an outing of that sort!

Interesting examples that seem to point to stirrings in Japan's religious world could easily be multiplied. As yet, however, these stirrings are not reflected in the general statistics. But perhaps we have here touched again on the question whether it is still adequate (if it ever was) to assess the present religious situation in the same terms as those upon which previous evaluations were based.

SECULARIZATION TODAY

Crisis awareness. How can the preceding observations be located in a broader interpretational framework? Most treatments of the problem of secularization, however its significance is interpreted, start from the presupposition that the momentous alterations in the conditions of established religious bodies and, simul-

taneously, the radical modification of the general cultural background in which religion evolves pose the religious problem today in an entirely new modality. In other words, a strong awareness of living in times of radical sociocultural change that have brought about a Western, if not global, civilization crisis, underlies nearly all scientific (and non-scientific) discussions of the present age and the role of religion in it.

As suggested above, I, for one, believe that Japan is very much a part of this world in crisis, even if it is sometimes difficult to demonstrate this fact with clear-cut data. Moreover, in Japan one always faces the seemingly unresolvable contradiction between the popularity of public talk about the predicament in which modern man has put himself and the dangers this entails for the future, and the lack of real crisis awareness which, at least from a Western perspective, remains characteristic of the average Japanese (as of Asian people generally). This is true also for many discussions of the Japanese religious and sociocultural scene by Japanese scholars. Secularization in terms of radical change has been taken up as a research subject, but one keeps wondering whether there also exists an awareness of crisis that transcends mere scientific interest.

The same principle obtains, of course, for Japanese religiosity itself in the sense that in their religious life the Japanese have several "circles" of belief and behavior that do not infringe on each other. Through "compartmentalization" they know how to harmonize elements that, to Westerners, seem intrinsically contradictory or at least difficult to reconcile. This method of disposition may help us to understand how it is that the Japanese seem able to neutralize to some extent the impact of radical change without upsetting the balance of their mental life.

The challenge of differentiation. If the term "secularization" be taken in its broadest sense, that is, as designating the whole range of sociocultural changes occurring in the modern world, particularly as they pertain to what is traditionally called "reli-

gion," and if we refrain from discussing the question whether the term is appropriate to the phenomena it purports to designate (mainly because it seems to presuppose a specific concept of religion, one based on a sacred/secular polarity), immediately we find ourselves confronting the problem of how to interpret what is happening to religion nowadays.

To say that there are many opinions on this matter is a euphemism for conflicting views that divide scholars of religion on this issue. Opinions are in fact sometimes so diametrically opposed to each other that an "objective" observer cannot but question the "objectivity" of the interpretations proposed. Is this due simply to the fact that no agreement is possible on the basic concept of religion? that in dealing with such problems even the most "objective" scholar inevitably invests some of his own values? This makes the issue even more challenging, especially if an attempt is made to place it in a broader context than that of the Western civilization in which it originally emerged.

There is, however, one point on which most scholars tend to agree. This is the realization that contemporary society is characterized by an ongoing process of differentiation and that the extreme development of this process in our age is challenging traditional ways of thinking and behaving with utmost intensity, setting into motion mechanisms both of adaptation and of reactionary defense. Applied to religion, this is simply the already mentioned general awareness that religious beliefs, actions, and institutions find themselves challenged in an unprecedented way by contemporary sociocultural changes, here understood primarily in terms of the differentiation process. Divergence of opinion arises when it comes to evaluating the nature, importance, and influence of religion's response to this challenge to society as a whole.

Two poles and a problem. Interpretations of secularization can be roughly divided into those that see the fate of religion primarily as one of decline and those that give attention, rather, to

the replacement of old-style religion by new forms of religiosity. Bryan Wilson may well be considered a prominent advocate of the former interpretation. Though he does not disregard the growth of new religious movements, he argues that "the dissolution of old, and the formulation of new, ideologies point perhaps not so much to a culture of belief emerging from an earlier and similar culture, so much as to the development of many subcultures of belief, to be found in the interstices between the rationally coordinated frameworks which hold together the modern world" (Wilson 1971, p. 269).³

Over against this interpretation stand those authors who claim that the social and cultural changes of the present may lead to a religious decline as regards some of its traditional appearances, but that they do not point to a decline in religion as such. For them the secularization process is, first and foremost, a phenomenon of religious change, of the birth of new social forms of religion. Some, like Thomas Luckmann (1967, pp. 77-106) and Richard K. Fenn (1972),⁴ deny the need for overarching cultural legitimations in advanced societies, a role traditionally played by a moral consensus with religious foundations, but they argue also that religion remains important as a phenomenon of the "private sphere," a subjectively constructed system of ultimate significance. Others, like Robert N. Bellah with his thesis on "civil religion" (1970, pp. 168-189),⁵ see traditional religious systems being replaced by the functional alternative of national or civil symbol systems as sacred legitimations of the social order — which needs such coherence to be viable.

The relevant questions, then, seem to be those of the degree to which differentiation has permeated the structural, cultural,

3. See also Wilson's article on secularization in this issue, especially the last paragraph.

4. Comments on Fenn's paper appeared in the *Journal for the scientific study of religion* 12/2 (June 1973) and 12/3 (Sept. 1973).

5. For an interesting defense of this thesis against the "privatist" opinion of Luckmann and Fenn, see Stauffer (1973).

and personality levels of the social system, how these diverse types of differentiation have affected the relation, and supposed balance, between the three levels, and what the consequences of this fact are for the role of religion both in its functions within the respective levels and in its functions for the social system as a whole.

THE CASE OF TRADITIONAL JAPAN

Any attempt to apply the above problematic to the Japanese religious scene makes us immediately aware of the relative value of this, as of any, interpretational framework. As a modern, advanced society, Japan no doubt participates in the tendency toward increasing differentiation on the structural, cultural, and personality levels of its social system. But does this process bear the same significance as that in the West? Does it start from a similar social situation, and does it lead to similar consequences? Obviously not. Yet it is no easy task to indicate precisely where the points of difference, among the many points of resemblance, are to be found.

Comparison with the West. The starting point for Western thinking about secularization is a society less differentiated than the present one or, more particularly, a more or less coherent social order depending on a set of norms supported by a widely accepted system of beliefs and values. It is generally acknowledged that the religious symbols of Christianity provided the basis for cultural integration in the West, though this obviously does not mean that every individual person's religiosity was always fully congruent with the "official" model of religion. This "official" model or overarching symbol system has its institutional basis in church structures that gradually became more and more specialized, a fact which (to follow Luckmann) bore in itself the seeds of the tension and ultimate rupture that took place between individual religious meaning systems and the model which, mediated by the church, had long been the major factor

integrating the whole sociocultural order. Thus differentiation, already manifest in the establishment of institutionally specialized forms of religion, notably the Christian church, led to the contemporary situation in which traditional Christian values tend more and more to lose their integrative role for society as a whole. In this sense the process of change we speak of as secularization implies the decline of Christianity as the "culture religion" of the West, the religious symbol system that monopolized Western civilization. Whether this process will entail the disintegration of all unifying cultural values and the end of religion as such, or the relegation of religion to the private sphere, or again the birth of some other form of "culture religion" is, as we observed, a moot question among sociologists.

The Japanese case is somewhat different. There is no doubt that the starting point is formally the same: the process of differentiation or secularization starts from the supposition of a coherent social order sustained by a widely accepted set of norms and values. Indeed, Japan's position as an island country at a "safe" distance from the continent has made for a degree of cultural integration that almost naturally surpasses that of Western civilization. The uniqueness of Japan's cultural history is not a fancy born of the feverish imagination of present-day theorists of Japanese-ness, but a fact with an unparalleled fundamentum in re. But when we ask what religion has supported this cultural integration, playing a role similar to that of Christianity in the West, we are at a loss for a direct answer. For centuries Japan's religious scene has been characterized by the coexistence of diverse religious traditions. "Unity in diversity and diversity in unity" sounds like a simple and accurate verbal expression of this phenomenon. But the reality to which it refers remains difficult to explain in rational-scientific terms, even if one can manage to come to a kind of intuitive understanding similar to the life attitude of the Japanese themselves, for whom there apparently exists no contradiction in simultaneously belonging to diverse religious traditions.

Admittedly, in the minds of ordinary Japanese people differentiation between the various religions at the level of doctrine has long been treated as a matter of minor importance. Differentiation does exist, however, on the organizational level, and it even implies a comparatively sharp demarcation of the spheres of life to which the respective institutions cater and in which they perform their specific roles. To call Shinto the religion for the living and Buddhism the religion for the dead is an obvious oversimplification, but it does illustrate this specialized role performance.

This leaves unresolved, then, the problem of where to look for the unifying principle that has made this cultural integration possible. The question can even be raised, since the diverse religious traditions are apparently unable to perform this role, whether this principle needs to be sought in an overarching value system, perhaps only obscurely religious in nature. In other words we face once more the question whether the religious pluralism that has obtained in Japan for centuries, at least on the organizational level, has not resulted in a situation bearing many resemblances to the contemporary religious scene in the West.

The level of social structure. It seems appropriate to look for a solution to the problem just specified by probing deeper into the nature of Japan's traditional religious pluralism. As mentioned, this pluralism is in the first instance one of institutional specialization. It is accompanied by doctrinal diversification, but this has largely been confined to the religious "specialists," for most ordinary people do not bother their heads about doctrinal subtleties. They seem to know precisely, however, what specific institution to go to when they confront specific problems.

Robert N. Bellah has rightly pointed out (Caporale 1971, p. 153) that not entirely dissimilar kinds of differentiation have also occurred in areas where supposedly monolithic religious structures predominate. But still there is a difference. Where,

for example, in Christian countries, especially those of Roman Catholic tradition, people turn to "religious specialists" located on the fringes of or outside official church religion, church "experts" will consider such acts as deviations from orthodox behavior — even if they are sometimes known to show a remarkable practical tolerance in these matters. Moreover, in many cases the performers themselves are more or less aware that by these acts they step outside the circle of what is allowed "in conscience."

In Japan there exists no such thing as orthodoxy, at least not in the sense Westerners usually attribute to this concept. There are, to be sure, examples of Buddhist sects which are apprehensive about the "syncretistic" behavior of their adherents and which try to propagate a "pure" faith. In general, however, the tolerance they show for, and the opinions they hold concerning, "deviant behavior" differ tangibly from those of their Christian counterparts.

Perhaps this difference may be accounted for in part by reference to the relationship between what Redfield calls "the great and little traditions" in Japan and the West. These relationships are dissimilar, and this is due mainly to the difference in the roles religious organizations have played in both societies. Since early times, institutional religious specialization in Japan has not taken the form, as it has in the West, of a monopolizing articulation of one overarching world view under the aegis of one specific religious tradition, nor have the various specialized institutions ever completely denied each other's claims to a part in providing religious meaning to their adherents. Even when Buddhism functioned as a quasi-state religion during the Tokugawa era and when State Shinto was imposed after the Restoration, religious pluralism in this sense remained a basically accepted reality.

The level of culture. What kind of values, then, have supported Japan's traditional cultural integration? It is in trying to

answer this question that the problem of the definition of religion is posed in its strongest form.

If we suppose that Japan's traditional social order has been sustained by values of a religious nature — and this has been the general opinion of practically all students of Japan — we come to a situation in which religion is differentiated on the level of organizational structure, but not on the level of culture. One is then led to ask how these two levels are related to each other and what degree of differentiation (or non-differentiation) obtains within each.

Some authors, writing about secularization in the West, would have us believe that differentiation at one level almost automatically and in a mirror-like way is reflected in the other levels of the social system. Social-structural differentiation, that is, institutional specialization of religion, results, then, not only in the differentiation of religion within the cultural dimension but also, more broadly, in the differentiation of religion from culture and society in general. In other words, it undermines the function of religious values for the *entire* society.⁶

The Japanese case seems to deny this. It points to the existence of a sort of religion that finds expression in various specialized institutions but also transcends this expression. It can be found within the various religious institutions, but none of them fully exhausts it, not even when taken together. It is the "religiosity" of the Japanese that gives a kind of sacred aureole to all entities that shape their daily life and make them truly "Japanese." It is the "religion of Japanese-ness" that has been able to accept religious traditions of foreign origin and adapt them to fit into the pluralistic pattern of mutual tolerance and relative role-differentiation.

The special place of Shinto in this pattern can hardly be overlooked and, in fact, gives rise to many new problems, both on the theoretical and practical planes. Insofar as the specific religiosity of the Japanese is a heritage from times in which religious

6. For a critique of this thesis, see Newman (1973).

pluralism did not yet exist, a heritage first expressed in terms of what is called primitive Shinto, the historical and institutionally specialized form of this Shinto tradition can certainly claim to be the primary custodian of this religiosity without therefore denying any role or value to other religious traditions. In fact it has done precisely this. The controversy over the non-religious or, more appropriately, supra-religious nature of Shinto is all too well known and is still capable of breeding bad blood among advocates and adversaries alike — a fact that casts a shadow over the famous tolerance mentioned above. Yet even if it can plausibly be asserted that Shinto in its broadest meaning, as the value system and the symbolization by which the Japanese express these values, is the unifying principle underlying Japan's cultural integrity, this does not necessarily apply to Shinto as a specific religious organization. Throughout most of its history institutional Shinto has been one of several institutionalized religions, though to some extent a *primus inter pares* because of its native origin. Shinto in its broadest sense has fulfilled the role of a "civil religion," a system which in sacred terms has legitimated the social order as such, but in its organizational form it had to compete with other institutions and was, in fact, unable to express the totality of "Japanese-ness."

Relation between the two levels. If Japanese history shows that a situation of cultural integration, that is, relative undifferentiatedness of religion at the level of culture, can go together with differentiation at the socio-structural level, this does not mean that there are no tensions between the two levels. Can it be said of any social system that a state of undifferentiation at the cultural level requires concrete expression at the social-structural level? As long as one religious institution can monopolize the function of cultural integration, there would seem to be no problem. But as differentiation increases and it loses its monopoly on sacred legitimation of the social order, a functional alternative is needed if integration is to be preserved. An example of such

an alternative is Bellah's American "civil religion" which, if I read it correctly, is a symbol system distinct both from traditional religious institutions and from the State.⁷

This need for a concrete expression of cultural integration at the social-structural level has also existed in Japan. The accepted plurality of religious institutions may constitute one of the reasons the State took this task in hand — and one aspect of the primacy of political values in Japan. Intrinsic to this task was keeping the diverse religions in check by allotting them only a circumscribed role subject to government supervision and, in times of need, capable of being mobilized in defense of Japan's particularistic values— an application of the principle of "divide and conquer." This government control was further strengthened by giving preferential status to Buddhism during the Tokugawa era and, after the rediscovery of native Japanese values, by the creation of State Shinto during the Meiji period. The latter can be considered a form of "civil religion," differentiated from Sect Shinto but not yet from the State.

That this problem continues to haunt Japan, even after the breakdown of State Shinto, is evident from current attempts to restore a preferential status to Shinto. Bellah has proposed that Shinto be made a "civil religion" similar to the American, that is, a national symbol system differentiated not only from other traditional religious institutions but also, this time, from the State (Bellah 1967). But whether this is a viable solution for a society in which differentiation continues to increase, time will have to show.

The level of personality. The problem that remains concerns the role of religious values at the level of personality. To what extent have such values provided meaning and direction in the biographies of individuals, and how, if at all, has the plurality of religious traditions, confronting individual Japanese, exercised an

7. For a discussion of Bellah's "civil religion" concept in these terms, see Coleman (1970).

integrative function at this level?

To attempt complete answers to these questions is beyond my competence, but I would like to indicate a few of the points that would seem to belong to the answers.

The personality dimension of the Japanese shows many resemblances to the cultural. Its integrative principle both encompasses and transcends the elements furnished by the diverse religious traditions. The average Japanese is not much interested in the doctrinal differences between religions, but he is quick to appreciate their functional specialization (despite many instances of overlapping). Through this compartmentalization he is able to overcome, or at least lessen, their possibly contradictory claims.

Admittedly, it is a vague and possibly unscientific notion to call his being a Japanese the principle that integrates his individual biography, appealing, thus, to the "religion of Japanese-ness." Yet that seems in fact to be the guiding factor in his behavior. The vagueness of this concept, combined with the question whether it can rightly be called religious or sacred, corresponds to the vagueness of Japanese religiosity. One of the results of this mode of perception is that scholars of Japanese religion can logically argue that the individual Japanese is in fact very religiously minded even though the same individual explicitly claims to have no religion! Or should we go along with the Western predilection to see contradictions in individual Japanese religiosity and "explain" them by simply asserting that integrated behavior as such is not characteristic of the Japanese personality (Benedict 1954, pp. 195-227)?

PRESENT CHANGES IN JAPAN

It is this kind of social order that seems to be subject to radical changes in our time. In the West these changes have undermined the traditional role of Christianity as providing a unifying moral basis for the social order. But what do these changes mean in Japan, and what is their impact on Japan's religious

institutions and religious consciousness?

Intra- vs. intercultural pluralism. Earlier it was noted that in present-day Japan the main issue to which the attention of the whole nation is drawn is that of how to preserve Japan's self-identity in the coming world community. Related to this issue is the question of how this tension between national and international tendencies — or could one say between particularism and universalism? — finds echoes in the religious field. Is not this phenomenon a symptom of the fact that Japan's traditional cultural integrity is presently jeopardized by forces that surpass in scope and intensity the outside pressures and influences that previously shook the country at specific periods of its history? It is my judgment that this is the case, so I propose to state my conclusion at the outset: the balance of Japan's traditional *intra*-cultural pluralism, sustained and maintained by the unifying power of the culture religion of "Japanese-ness," nowadays seems profoundly shaken by the forces of *inter*-cultural pluralism.

Till now, Japan has been able to adopt and adapt outside influences selectively so as to fit them into the pluralistic pattern kept in relative balance by its subordination to the particularistic value of "Japanese-ness." Even the universal religion of Buddhism, in the course of its indigenization, became particularized in this way. But what may be one of the most salient features of our time is the increasing frequency of intercivilizational encounters on such a wide scale and with such intensive force that the very *rationales* on which the respective cultural units have been built are now called into question.⁸ Together with factors operating within the various units, particularly increasing differentiation within and among all levels of the social system, the encounter between different sociocultural systems — no

8. For a stimulating discussion of this element in the sociological study of religion and thought, see Nelson (1973). An entire issue of *Sociological analysis* (35/2, Summer 1974) was devoted to a discussion of the problems raised by Nelson.

longer limited to an elite but in which the general public participates more and more — is a factor that exercises tremendous influence on contemporary sociocultural changes. The Western interest in things Oriental is not only a result of Westerners' dissatisfaction with their own cultural values but also an attitude and action that calls these values still more into question. In Japan, encounter with the values of other civilizations, particularly those of the West, already has a long history. But may it not be said that now, for the first time, the critical question is whether Japan is still able to accommodate these values as no more than "means" for the preservation of traditional ends?

Personal and universal values. One indication of this new state of affairs is the subtle change in the pattern of intra-cultural religious pluralism. The trend toward delocalization of Shinto belief and practice (Morioka 1975, pp. 39-72), for example, points to a growing freedom of choice in finding avenues for the expression and satisfaction of religious needs. It implies a growing conviction that religion is ultimately an issue to be decided by the individual conscience. This conviction is made possible, and enhanced, by the fact that social pressures which once allowed only for a fixed pattern of religious pluralism have considerably diminished in recent years. Even if one can discern in this phenomenon similarities to the process of privatization of religion in the West (though as yet in a tentative, beginning stage), it can hardly be called a result of the institutional specialization of religion as such. It is a consequence, rather, of the waning power of the overarching value system to keep the institutionally specialized religions balanced in their traditional fixed pattern — a change concomitant with and consequent upon changes in the integration of individual existence in Japanese society as a whole.

This is not to say that this newly acquired liberty now constitutes a direct menace to the overarching system of value. For the present, at least, it seems as if the changing pattern of reli-

gious belief and behavior is still very much an expression of the "religion of Japanese-ness," though now increasingly shaped by the personal and voluntary decision of the actors. The freer and more personal this decision becomes, however, the greater the possibility that the prime referent for the symbolization of religious needs will diminish the particularistic value of being Japanese and evolve in a direction based on the ethic of the universally human.

The process whereby the institutionally specialized religions gradually become, or start to become, differentiated from the overarching cultural value system poses, needless to say, many problems for these institutions. Their growing activity on the international scene is obviously the outcome of an awareness that only on this level of emphasizing values at once personal and universally human can their future be safeguarded. For Buddhism this means a rediscovery of its essence as a universal religion. For Shinto the challenge is much larger and centers on the question whether it can combine the seemingly contradictory elements of particularism and universalism, that is, whether it can preserve its traditional role of being the symbolization par excellence of Japan's unique communal feelings and at the same time allow sufficient room for nurturing personal faith.

THE WAY AHEAD

These few observations doubtless raise more questions than they answer. Moreover, it would be premature to draw definite conclusions from them or to predict in what direction the future will evolve. But one thing seems certain. In the nascent world community Japan will increasingly be subject to pressures from the outside, and these pressures can hardly fail to have an impact on the peculiar form of Japanese religiosity so intimately connected with the concept of "Japanese-ness."

It has been suggested that religious differentiation or institutional specialization on the social-structural level was not accompanied by religious differentiation on the levels of culture and

personality, but functioned instead (not without tensions) to help maintain cultural integration. The different religious traditions, balanced in a fixed pattern, in fact reinforced the sacred-like nature of the Japanese nation. Changes in this balance, which I would attribute primarily to the rise of individual-centered values resulting from ever-increasing intercivilizational encounters, open the way for the possible development of a new form of civil religion in Japan, perhaps for the enlargement of the "religion of Japanese-ness" to a "religion of humanity" (cf. Bellah 1970, pp. 225-226) — or again for the possible breakdown of integrating religious value systems.

One of the greatest challenges in this process will be the preservation of typically Japanese elements that should constitute Japan's proper contribution to the value system underlying the world community in the making. Universal and particularistic values are, in the last analysis, not contradictory. Is it not true that universalism is viable only with a certain degree of particularism? And will Japan in the future be able to combine these values in a harmonious way as it has hitherto combined the several religious traditions within its particularistic perspective? This is a challenge far more pressing and extensive than any other Japan has so far confronted. It is this challenge deriving from radical sociocultural changes of growing intensity and scope that contemporary Japan is starting to face.

A last remark: even a glance at what is actually occurring in Asia and other parts of the world should convince us that in these changes during the coming years, Marxism is likely to play a strategic role. Its impact on the traditional religious values of the East may well become the main factor in determining the direction and forms of sociocultural change we now speak of in terms of "secularization."

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