

**Reflections**  
**A Response to Professors Yanagawa and Abe**

David REID

DESPITE its outrageous title, the paper "Cross-Cultural Implications of a Behavioral Response" constitutes, in my opinion, a refreshing and significant contribution to the literature on secularization. This assessment, however, calls for immediate qualification. In these reflections I propose to specify, briefly, what I see in this paper that should commend it to a wide range of social scientists, and to indicate at greater length what I regard as its limitations. But first, it may be useful to summarize my understanding of the argument of Yanagawa and Abe.

In a nutshell their argument has four main points. (1) The immanently oriented community religiosity of traditional Japan has experienced a series of attacks from without; these attacks were initiated by transcendently oriented individual religiosity, which in the Japanese historical experience was introduced mainly by Christianity (especially Protestantism) and was institutionalized with partial success by the Allied Occupation. (2) With the emergence of litigation initiated by community members to prevent violations of the Occupation-imposed principle of separation between religion and state, this threat to the religiosity of natural community has entered a new stage, namely, erosion from within. (3) In the Japanese context the term "secularization" refers precisely to this internal erosion of community religiosity. (4) Secularization theory in general needs to be reshaped to take account of this kind of religiosity and the change it is undergoing.

**Positive assessment.** There is little to quarrel with in this argument. By and large, it constitutes a welcome, indeed overdue, corrective to discussions of secularization that

have focused solely on the Western experience or have applied to Japan analyses based on this experience.<sup>1</sup>

This paper is also commendable, I believe, for its compact presentation of a wide range of empirical data. Not all will agree with the perspective from which the data are presented, but few will fail to benefit from the authors' tightly organized and empirically rich argument.

The paper also contains, however, a number of limitations.

**Problematic points.** The first and most obvious limitation is the sparsity of theoretical discussion. The authors make an impressive case for the need to reformulate secularization theory, and they specify immanent religiosity and community locus as key elements in such a reformulation, but instead of proceeding with the task, they merely offer rhetorical praise for the "daring survival-effort" of community-oriented immanent religiosity. Here much remains to be done.

A second limitation in this paper is its use of ambiguous terms as if their meaning were self-evident. Take, for example, the term "separation of religion and state." In the American context, as Bellah has pointed out (1981), the meaning of this term differed radically depending on whether the nation was conceived as a republic or as a liberal constitutional regime. Where the nation was conceived as a republic, the state had a positive role to play

---

1. A few years ago Professor Yanagawa and I tried our hand at analyzing two Japanese court cases, one of which recurs in the paper under discussion. We sought to see if either case would support the view that secularization implies the decline or marginalization of religious institutions. Our finding was that the religious institutions involved in these cases seemed to be moving not toward the periphery but toward the power center of Japanese society, hence that secularization theory as hitherto formulated could be applied to them "only by standing the theory on its head" (Yanagawa and Reid 1979, p.517). This amounted to a call for reformulation. The paper under discussion initiates this reformulation.

in encouraging the nurture of citizens who would live according to republican virtue. "Separation" meant, negatively, that the state was prohibited from establishing any one religion and from making laws that would interfere with the exercise of religious freedom; positively, it meant that the state took for granted that religious institutions would perform a constructive role in raising citizens informed by republican virtues. But where the nation was conceived as a liberal constitutional regime, the controlling assumption was that actions motivated solely by self-interest would produce a good society (an assumption Bellah calls "the most wildly utopian idea in the history of political thought"). On this view the role of the state was merely to maintain public order, otherwise permitting individual citizens and corporations to pursue their own interests with a minimum of regulation. "Separation" here meant, negatively, that the state took no interest in religion; positively, it meant that religion was a purely private matter.

In the paper under discussion, the matter is even more complex. The authors make a critical distinction between community religiosity on the one hand and individual religiosity on the other. Community religiosity is said to entail **integration**: integration of the kinship community through ancestral rites, integration of the local community through periodic festivals, and integration of the national community through "ceremonies commemorating critical events in the life of the nation." Individual religiosity, characterized as involving a purely personal quest for enlightenment or for tangible benefits (the difference seems negligible), is said to function "in a different and separate dimension." The relationship between community and individual religiosity is that of superordinate to subordinate; community religiosity at once contextualizes and limits individual religious freedom.

But if community religiosity in its most general form refers to the nation institutionally represented by the state, it is difficult to see what could be meant by "separation of religion and state." There is a problem of ambi-

David REID

quity here.

The same problem recurs with regard to other terms. Can a term like "religious freedom" have the same meaning to those who consider it a clever compromise? Does not the term "natural community" imply normative valences that render it useless as a tool of analysis? In these and other formulations the problem becomes clear: ambiguous terms are used as if they had univocal and generally accepted meanings. This causes problems in understanding.

Third, I must confess that I have grave difficulty in understanding why the authors speak of individual religiosity without considering its institutional expression in voluntary association. Community religiosity is consistently linked with its ritual forms, religious specialists, and participants, but individual religiosity is left hanging in midair as if it were little more than a private recreational pursuit. Voluntary associations connected with individual religiosity receive mention only in the course of an explanation that they were among many organizations which the wartime government sought to control, and here we are assured that any persecution they experienced at the hands of the wartime Ministry of Home Affairs had nothing whatever to do with their religious beliefs but related solely to their "anti-social tendencies"—a statement that strains credulity. (One wonders why it was deemed necessary to make such a statement at all. It seems to detract from, rather than advance, the argument.) The "villains" responsible for the erosion of community religiosity are the dissident non-participants. Their refusal to take part in community rituals conducted by Shrine Shinto priests, and their attempts to have government officials legally barred from participating in their official capacity, "rob" these events of their meaning. But haven't the authors made it too easy for themselves by treating individual religiosity in this way? Have they not excluded the possibility that dissident non-participation may be principled, and that these principles, quite apart from whether we agree with them, need to be taken seriously in order to understand the

voluntary associations that embody them?

Fourth, I should like to call in question the theoretical centrality assigned to the concept of integration. This concept, together with analogues like "system," "harmony" and the like, is a venerable one. But as Japanese society grows increasingly complex and differentiated, it becomes increasingly difficult to comprehend as a harmonious entity—an entity filled with struggles and tensions, to be sure, but basically homogeneous. Instead, the increasingly pluralistic character of Japanese society comes more and more into view. Yet if we set aside the harmony or integration model, where do we turn? One idea has been suggested by Jonathan Smith:

As the anthropologist has begun to abandon a functionalist view of culture as a well-articulated, highly integrated mechanism and has slowly turned to accepting the sort of image set forth by F.E. Williams of culture as a "heap of rubbish," a "hotch-potch," only partially organized, so we in religious studies must set about an analogous dismantling of the old theological and imperialistic impulses toward totalization, unification, and integration.<sup>2</sup>

With Ernst Troeltsch, I would prefer to speak of society not as a "heap of rubbish," but as a volatile synthesis of individuals and institutions with changing interests and interconnections. In any case I find the concept of harmony, even "the structure of apportioned harmony" (pace Swyngedouw), an increasingly dubious guide for understanding life in contemporary Japan. It has the effect, in religious studies, of making us regard important dimensions of life in Japan as "exceptional," "irrelevant," or "un-Japanese," thus preventing theoretical access to a significant range of data. This, I suggest, is an important limitation.

---

2. Smith 1981, p.18. The reference is to F.E. Williams, *The Vallala madness and other essays* (Honolulu, 1977), pp.404-5.

David REID

**A proposal.** In closing I would like to offer a suggestion, namely, that the authors' characterization of secularization be made at once broader and more specific. They restrict themselves for the most part to the local community. When they speak of secularization, they refer primarily to its meaning for communities that hold ritual-events conducted by Shrine Shinto priests. In this context their idea that secularization signifies the erosion of community religiosity from within strikes me as highly plausible, though means of testing this idea still need to be devised. I only wish they had extended their analysis to include the kinship and national community levels.

My suggestion, though, is more far-reaching. If an increasingly pluralistic Japan is taking shape, if Japan is becoming increasingly heterogeneous, it follows that the idea of secularization itself will need to be understood not as a homogeneous but as a heterogeneous concept. For Shrine Shinto, secularization may well continue to mean the internal erosion of community religiosity. But for traditional Buddhist institutions, it may refer to the increase in non-Buddhist ways of disposing of and remembering the dead; for an anti-mainstream Buddhist body like Sōka Gakkai, it could refer to the adoption of values other than those of the Nichiren Shōshū; for Japanese Christian bodies it could refer to socio-political engagement for the liberation of oppressed groups. Differing, even opposing, valuations can be placed on each kind of secularization; in each case there will doubtless be some who view it with apprehension, others who view it with hope. But whatever the valuation, the suggestion to be made here is that the approach the authors have opened up, if detached from the idea of integration and attached to a more volatile, open-ended idea, would seem to permit a mode of analysis at once more general and more specific.

I FOUND this paper stimulating and thought-provoking, and I hope it will be widely read and discussed. The remarks above are by no means intended as definitive or exhaustive,

and there is at least some possibility that they may be based on a misreading of the authors' intentions or on insufficient understanding of the cultural milieu they consider. To the extent that this is so, I shall look forward to being set straight in their response.

### References

BELLAH, Robert N.

- 1981 Religion and legitimation in the American republic. In Thomas Robbins and Dick Anthony, eds., *In gods we trust: New patterns of religious pluralism in America*. New York and London: Transaction Books. This article was first published in 1978.

SMITH, Jonathan Z.

- 1982 *Imagining religion: From Babylon to Jonestown*. Chicago and London: University of Chicago Press.

YANAGAWA Keiichi and David REID

- 1979 Between unity and separation: Religion and politics in Japan, 1965-1977. *Japanese journal of religious studies* 6: 500-521.