

Mission and Dialogue

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“No world peace without religious peace. No religious peace without religious dialogue. No religious dialogue without research into basics.” This is the main theme of Prof. Hans Küng’s book entitled *Global Responsibility: In Search of a New World Ethic*. The book contains four very important factors which are as follows:

1. World Peace
2. Religious Peace
3. Religious Dialogue
4. Research into basics, or the eagerness for study on mutual understanding.

The ultimate object of this book is obviously “world peace”. In this connection it is dealing with the contribution of religion and its concrete role in world peace.

Prof. Küng first emphasizes religious peace as a necessary precondition for world peace, and the necessity of religious dialogue as the process to religious peace, as well as research into basics for mutual understanding or the eagerness for study as the starting point towards dialogue among religions. He also points out that the world today is on the threshold of securing comprehensive security and peace. That is, the world is gradually becoming aware that the human species won’t survive without some collaboration and mutual understanding based on a world ethic. Therefore it is urgently necessary to define the content of a world ethic. This might be the task of interreligious dialogue. In this sense, the small book by Prof. Küng is very useful and informative. Therefore, I shall be following Prof. Küng closely.

In recent years many books such as Prof. Küng’s have been published which deal with the problems of the future prospects of our planet and, in connection with this, propose various approaches to truth. These approaches to truth do not begin by rejecting the traditional viewpoint, but by taking it up into what transcends it and replaces it. The globalization and the internationalization of the approach to different world problems including the question of truth is the characteristic basis of these books. The approach these authors have been taking has both deepened and broadened our conceptual understanding. Consequently, it became fruitful for researchers to promote this kind of research based on a more global perspective, as well as rapidly

increasing interconnectedness of the world problems and affairs. That is, the research by the so-called “monochromatic” way (which was used in the pre-modern era) is now showing its limitations in being able to approach the question of truth. Accordingly, we should adopt the multilateral way. This is therefore the consequential attitude toward an approach to different problems. I think it is caused in part by the politically and economically increasing interconnectedness in the world, and also by sociological and cultural plurality. The approach to plurality in connection with the solution of different problems and the investigation of a world ethic and universal truth must begin by recognizing the nature of the problems caused by pluralization. Only then can we construct a new system of values and a world ethic which is most appropriate for our pluralized world. This is our main theme and task. In the religious realm it might be realizable through a dialogue among the religions. This idea simply follows the saying of Prof. Küng: “No religious dialogue without research into basics”. In this context I would like to express to you my heartfelt gratitude and utmost respect for your wonderful efforts for having carried out interreligious meetings, like today, and for your continued involvement in the interreligious dialogue, which should be held not only in Europe, but also in Asia.

Rev. Nikkyo Niwano, founder of Rissho Kosei-kai—a Japanese Buddhist laymovement founded in 1938 whose faith is based upon the teaching of the Lotus Sutra (in Sanskrit *Saddharma Pundarika Sutra*)—has been from the beginning stressing that all people should have some faith and that the faith you believe in depends on your free choice. His statement started a remarkable campaign called “All Japanese having faith” in the fifties and sixties. This campaign was particularly strong among the newly organized religious groups. Consequently, it caused them to gather momentum. The Japan Religions League eventually had over one hundred new religious member organizations. For a long time Rev. Niwano played a very important role in this Religions League as its president

In 1965, the last year of the Second Vatican Council, Rev. Niwano was invited at this historic moment as the unique non-Christian representative. By participating in this council, he was convinced of the importance and the necessity of dialogue among religions. With Pope Paul VI he shared the conviction that “Christians should pray for Buddhists, Buddhists should pray for Christians.” In the light of this Rev. Niwano made up his mind to become a bridge between the religions. His determination led to the first World Conference on Religion and Peace in Kyoto in 1970. His participation in the Second Vatican Council led him to engage in interreligious cooperation.

But I would like to point out that the idea of interreligious cooperation had already been playing in his mind. This idea is based upon and founded in the Lotus Sutra. The Lotus Sutra is the basis of his wholeness and the start of his spiritual activities.

“Manifestation of One in Three (開三頭一)” ; this is the basic teaching of the *T’ien-t’ai* school, which was derived from chapter II “Upaya (Tactfulness 方便)” of the Lotus Sutra. In Buddhism there are three kinds of conceptions of the vehicle (*yana*), which means the ways to enlightenment. These ways, or vehicles, are the *śrāvaka* vehicle, the *pratyekabuddha* vehicle, and the *bodhisattva* vehicle. The *śrāvaka* vehicle is the way to enlightenment through studying, and is accordingly scholarly. The *pratyekabuddha* vehicle is the way to enlightenment through experience, and is empirical. The *bodhisattva* vehicle is the way to enlightenment through bringing people into the state of “salvation” and is accordingly activist.

The Lotus Sutra, however, points out another way, as the following verse in chapter 2 Upaya says: “The Tathagata, by means of the One Buddha vehicle, preaches to all living the law; there is no other vehicle, neither a second nor a third.” And this verse goes on to say “Sariputra! I, at the present time, am also like them. Knowing that all living beings have many kinds of desires deeply attached in their minds, I have, according to their capacity, expounded the laws by various reasonings, parabolic expressions, and tactful powers. Sariputra! Such teachings all are in order to secure perfect knowledge of the One-Buddha vehicle. Sariputra! In the whole universe there are not even two vehicles, how much less a third.”

Rev. Niwano interprets that as follows. I quote again: “The One-vehicle means: All people can become buddhas. The enlightenment obtained by the *śrāvakas*, *pratyekabuddhas*, and *bodhisattvas* alike is one by which they become buddhas, and it is the same in origin. Some can obtain the enlightenment of a *śrāvaka* and others can obtain that of a *pratyekabuddha*. Both aspects of enlightenment are gates to the Buddha-wisdom.” This is allegorically explained as follows: A person who has entered this gate cannot enter the inner room of the Buddha-wisdom until he has first passed through the porch of *bodhisattva* practice. At the same time, it cannot be said that the gate and the porch are not both included within the residence of the Buddha. However, if a person stays at the gate, he will be drenched when it rains and chilled when it snows. “All of you come into the inner room of the Buddha’s residence. The eastern gate, the western gate, and the porch are all entrances that lead to the inner room of the Buddha-wisdom.” This is the

meaning of the Buddha's word, "Besides the One Buddha-vehicle, there is neither a second vehicle nor a third. I have shown the existence of these two vehicles by my tactful powers. There is only one true goal for all." (*Buddhism for Today*)

According to Rev. Niwano's interpretation, the enlightenment obtained via these three vehicles is but the gate to Buddha-wisdom, which means it is not yet true enlightenment. That is, the quality of the enlightenment cannot be limited, but it is very deep and unquantifiable. Therefore it is extremely important for us endlessly to endeavor practicing in order to seek enlightenment. This is, I think, the pivotal point in all that Rev. Niwano would like to emphasize in his interpretation of the teaching of Buddha.

There is a remarkable statement in Rev. Niwano's above interpretation: "A person who has entered this gate cannot enter the inner room of the Buddha-wisdom until he has first passed through the porch of the bodhisattva practice." This is his interpretation in the light of the following words of Buddha Shakyamuni; "The buddha-tathagatas teach only *bodhisattvas*." These words are somehow inconsistent with the Buddha's having said, "The buddhas appear in the world to cause all living beings to apprehend the truth." In other words, *sravakas* and *pratyekabuddhas* are not the true disciples of the Buddha. With regard to these words of Buddha Shakyamuni, Rev. Niwano has interpreted as follows. I will quote from the book *Buddhism for Today* again.

"As long as you think that the fact that you have been able to obtain enlightenment for yourself alone is enough, you cannot attain real enlightenment. If you feel that you yourself have attained enlightenment though many other people have not, such a feeling is positive proof that you are keeping yourself aloof from others. Such a feeling is not a blending with others; it is, rather, isolation from them. You cannot enter the state of "Nothing has an ego" because your egoistic feeling still remains. Therefore, your enlightenment is not real. One can obtain enlightenment for one's own self, and by the same token, all others can do the same. One can be saved from one's own suffering, and at the same time others can be saved from theirs. Your salvation together with that of others is your real salvation. At the very time that you understand this, you can be said to have attained real enlightenment and to have been set free from the bonds of illusion and suffering in the world.

Going together with others on the way to enlightenment and salvation in the full conviction that we can all become buddhas is the *bodhisattva* attitude and practice. And people can attain real enlightenment if they will endlessly continue the endeavor in their practice even though as *sravakas* or *pratyekabuddhas*. From the theoretical point of view concerning the relationship

between these three vehicles, they are parts of the One Buddha-vehicle. These parts are at the same time the basic aspects of Rissho Kosei-kai as well as our principal attitude toward every religious activity. These basic attitudes also apply to our fundamental attitude toward mission and dialogue among the world religions. Once again, the aspect of “Manifestation of One in Three (開三頭一)” and the conception of the “*bodhisattva* practice” is the centre of the Lotus Sutra.

MISSION

I am not going to attempt an academic examination of “mission”, that is, I will not start from missiology. I would like, however, merely to express my view of mission, especially by comparing Christianity and Buddhism.

World religions can be divided into two categories; religions of nature and religions established by a founder. Religions belonging to the former category are Hinduism, Confucianism, and Shintoism, and those which belong to the latter are Christianity, Islam and Buddhism. Both groups are characteristically different in the following two points; dogma and mission. That is, religions of nature have neither obvious dogma nor missionary activities. Compared with that, dogma and mission are the crucial points of the religions established by a founder. Therefore the question on mission arises with regard to religions which are established by a Founder. Hence the question of mission which I am going to deal with is confined to the religions established by a founder, specifically religions in the Abrahamic stream, especially Christianity, which I would like to focus on.

The history of religions established by a Founder is the history of mission resting on the hermeneutics for justification of the claim of universality of God. Therefore the whole outlook of these religions has been both dominated and confined by interpretation of the Holy Scripture. Consequently the claim of the universality of God was induced by the hermeneutics. This claim of universality provoked the claim of Absolutism. Absolutism was an exclusive claim to unquestioning human obedience and acceptance. Exclusivism incited the adherents of a community to missionary activities because the universality of God, which is asserted by each Abrahamic religion. This presupposed universality in the hermeneutics, and at the same time it was thought that the claim of the universality of God could be vindicated. Hence the hermeneutics argued for justification of mission based on the above exclusivism of monotheism. This argument induced the reasonable desire to realize the kingdom of God as evidenced in either kerygma or evangelism. This claim is the pivotal subject of mission. The Church is the base of mission, and mission is the essential vocation of Church and the divine duty of

members of the Church. Therefore the history of the Church is the history of mission, and the Church and mission are very closely interrelated. Mission without the Church is impossible and vice versa. In this context, mission was institutionalized.

To sum up, first we can see that the claim of absolutism was brought about by the belief in the universality of God. Second, this claim implied the missionary attitude of exclusivism. Third, we can say that in the context of Church and mission, mission was institutionalized.

How about Buddhism? Does Buddhism also claim absolutism and admit exclusivism? And what is universality in Buddhism?

It is well known that in Buddhism there is no conception of God in the sense of the Abrahamic religions. In connection with this, I had a very interesting experience when I was invited to an inter-faith meeting held by a German Evangelical seminar house in 1986. A German participant said to me that Buddhism is not a religion because it has no God. Since then I have never heard such an utterance from the Christian side. Thank God! I feel relieved.

First of all, however, before I enter into the question of Buddhist missionary work, I feel it necessary to clarify the Buddhist conception of mission.

I think in Buddhism there is essentially no conception of mission which corresponds to mission in the Christian sense. Furthermore, it is difficult to establish the same definition from its teachings. The reason for this difference lies in the difference between the two religions' views of the universe. The Christian view is that the universe was created by one God, whereas the Buddhism view is that the universe was and is created by the *Dharma*. The word *Dharma* has been generally translated as "law". However this does not mean a definite law in the secular sense, but rather implies a fundamental energy in the dynamic laws of nature, as the Sutra of Innumerable Meanings mentions in chapter 2 *Preaching* "The Innumerable Meanings originate from one law. This law is, namely, nonform. Such nonform is formless and not form. Being not form and formless, it is called the real aspect of things."

That is, Buddhism says that the universe is created by one nonform and formless law, namely by one indefinable law. And additionally, it indicated that man should observe things not fixedly and absolutely, but flexibly and comprehensively.

In this context, the following views can be derived:

1. Universality in Buddhism is the *Dharma*
2. Buddhism does not claim absolutism, because the view of absolutism cannot derive from the aspect of the *Dharma* originated from nonform, namely from the formless, in other words, because the ultimate origin of the *Dharma* is unknowable.

3. Therefore, Buddhism does not view and judge things exclusively.

I would like to add here that all questions between Christianity and Buddhism can always be ascribed to this fundamental difference in their views of the universe. But this is indeed a very difficult and sensitive problem and it is not easy to solve such fundamental differences. Because Christianity and Buddhism have radically different teachings, one would expect that their ideas of mission are also very different, as in fact, they are. In this connection, you cannot promote real dialogue between Christianity and Buddhism without understanding this fact. And the question of mission is an aspect of this problem. For this reason, I was obliged to start with the fundamental issues, namely, with specifying the fundamental differences of the world views held by Christianity and Buddhism. In Buddhism there is no concept of mission for the realization of a kingdom of God. What, then, explains the fact that Buddhism is so widespread?

Buddhism is a religion of internal deliverance, not a religion of external revolution. Therefore, it is a religion which aims at internal spiritual stability and deliverance, which are intimately connected. In order to realize this utmost purpose, you have to practice the teachings of Buddha. Furthermore, Buddhism has the following view; Where you are located is the world of practice, and you should practice here and now. That is, no matter where you are and what you are doing, you are necessarily engaged in some practice. In addition, one's practice should not only be for one's own salvation, but also for the salvation of others. Consequently, the fundamental Buddhist position, from which practice follows, requires that one's will to enlightenment and salvation not be limited to oneself, but rather, that one be understood as intrinsically intertwined with the whole so that my enlightenment and salvation is implied in everyone's. This argument rests upon the *bodhisattva* attitude and practice. From the Buddhist point of view, mission is part of Buddhist practice. The missionary work, specifically in the religions by a founder, should be motivated by joy and emotion, not by an imposed duty. In early Buddhism—even in the Buddha's time—Buddha's disciples went everywhere to transmit the ways of enlightenment and salvation to the people in Hindu society with joy and emotion. Chapter 18, *The Merits of Joyful Acceptance* of the Lotus Sutra illuminates the Buddhist attitude towards mission as follows:

“Ajita! If after the extinction of the Tathagata, any *bhikshu*, *bhikshuni*, *upasika*, or other wise person, whether old or young, on hearing this Sutra, has accepted it with joy, and coming out of the assembly, goes elsewhere to dwell, whether in a monastery or solitary place, or in a city, street, hamlet, or village, to expound what he has heard, according to his ability, to father, mother, kindred, good friends, and acquaintances; all these people, having heard it,

accept it with joy, and again go on to transmit the teaching; these others, having heard it, also accept it with joy, and transmitting the teaching, and on in turns to the fiftieth person.”

Joy and emotion develop the personality and enrich the individual’ s internal nature. One who shares one’ s own joy and emotion obtains double joy and emotion by meeting with the joy and emotion of others. This is the implication of the above verse, and at the same time, this is the basic Buddhist attitude towards mission, and is also the secret of Buddhist missionary work. By this means, Buddhism has become widespread. From this viewpoint, the following Buddhist conception of missionary work can be evidenced:

1. Buddhist missionary work rests on sharing the joy and emotion of enlightenment and salvation. It is not an attempt to proselytize. Consequently, it is not mission implying conversion, but conviction, which I will deal with later on.

2. It is a part of *bodhisattva* practices based on the view of “going together with others on the way to enlightenment and salvation.

3. It is an activity to awaken people to a way of truth. A proviso; Buddhism does not regard truth as one, but as plural, so that truth in this case is not imposed by Buddhism.

CONVERSION AND CONVINCEMENT IN MISSIONARY WORK

In missionary work, I think, there are two conceptions: that of conversion and that of convincement. If God himself carries out the missionary work, then the deed of conversion might be acceptable. However, it is human achievement and not a divine work. From this point of view, conversion means human power which imposed internal transference upon people. Convincement operates at another level. It is spontaneous transference. Consequently, missionary work essentially motivates one to convincement. If convincement is but a justification for the institutionalized mission, it becomes conversion, and at the same time it is misused as an act of religious aggression; it is far from the essential implication of con-vincement. Are aggressive religious activities, namely missionary work for conversion, ever the real will of God, a founder and the claim of the *Dharma*? *Regrettably, most of the monotheistic* religions and even some Buddhist sects have always followed such a tendency because of the universality which each religion stressed, as well as because of the justification of the absolutism, as I pointed out above.

The institutionalization of religion was a historic inevitability, and it undoubtedly brought immense contributions to the salvation of people and the improvement and development of sociological, ideological and

educational systems. At the same time, it has also provoked negative phenomena, and even in the contemporary world it causes grievous occurrences such as religious conflicts, sometimes leads to the spread of serious political and racial problems, e.g. Yugoslavia, Northern Ireland, and Muslim fundamentalism. The reason is that religion has been misused for the benefit of the religious communities, and furthermore, it has been instrumentalized by secular power. For this reason, religion lapsed from its essential significance (*aberratio*). The aberration of religion caused people to have some distrust of religion. This is a crisis for all religions. Those who are concerned with religion must return to the basics of each religion, and comprehensively rethink its substance beyond the fence of each denomination.

CONCLUSION

Religion is facing a crisis, namely the crisis of people's distrust of religion, and the crisis of religious conflicts. As I already mentioned above, these crisis is caused by a religion deviating from its proper course. Religions should essentially offer peace, particularly inner peace. Its failure to accomplish this task is in fact responsible for the world's problems. The cause of religion's failure in this task does not lie in the relationship between religion and other realms, but rather, within the field of religion itself. As Prof. Hans Küng points out, it is our urgent task to realize peace between religions. Religious dialogue is more urgent due to the politically and economically increasing interconnectedness and due to sociological and cultural plurality. Consequently, we have to start with dialogue among religions. Let's begin the encounter.

We the members of Rissho-kai are ready to be involved with interfaith dialogue from the following points of view:

1. We are convinced that, despite all differences, a common ground can be found, which the teachings of "Manifestation of One in Three (開三頭一)" shows. That is, this teaching represents that in the world there are many different ideas, thoughts, religions, cultures and so on, which contribute to world peace. They have the same objective in different forms. This idea is our basis for dialogue among religions.
2. We are capable of sharing our experiences and teachings, at the same time we are also capable of learning from others, because of the view that the quality of enlightenment cannot be limited.
3. We are eager to understand others, because of the basic attitude of bodhissatva, so that we can share joy and emotion.
4. We are extremely hopeful that inter-faith dialogue can contribute to removing distrust of religion, so that all people will have some faith.

5. We are also ready to investigate the basics of religions together with others, as well as to support the improvement and development of interfaith dialogue.
6. Dialogue is part of our practice.

My statement concerning missionary work is that:

- a. We should distinguish conversion from conviction.
- b. I support the missionary work of each religion in the sense of conviction, but not in the sense of conversion.
- c. We have to rethink the essence of mission in the light of institutionalized religion, and furthermore, investigate the cause of the historic misuse of religion.

I am of the opinion that the most important and significant issue for dialogue is mutual understanding and the attitude which allows for mutual understanding. Dialogue without mutual understanding—which itself rests upon a “right attitude”—could be accompanied by the risk of being institutionalized again, as religion itself has become institutionalized. Again, as with conviction/conversion, the root of this opportunity/problem comes down to the indefinable and nearly indescribable right attitude. If there is no mutual understanding, interreligious dialogue would be only an institution of institutionalized religion. Therefore the concern for mutual understanding must be in the foreground of interreligious dialogue. Understanding others leads to discovering oneself. This is the most rewarding consequence of dialogue.

I would like to indicate what I mean by mutual understanding by sharing with you some of my personal experience of it.

For 15 years I have lived with my wife. In these 15 years we have often quarrelled. But we have also shared some wonderful experiences. Whatever might happen between us, it is thanks to our faith we have never forgotten to endeavor to understand each other. Through this endeavor, we can understand each other very deeply, and I am convinced that she is a spiritual part of me. This can surely apply to interfaith dialogue. In this context, I am convinced that interfaith dialogue can provoke the consciousness that your religion is a part of me, and my religion is a part of you. With this conviction I would like to end my speech.