

The “Eschatology” of Japanese New and New New Religions From Tenri-kyō to Kōfuku no Kagaku

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1. INTRODUCTION

“New Religions” (*shin shūkyō* 新宗教) is a term that is commonly accepted among scholars of religious studies and also by most new religious groups themselves, because the popularly used Japanese phrase *shinkō shūkyō* 新興宗教, which literally means “newly arisen religions,” carries the disparaging nuance of “upstart religions.” The definition and classification of Japanese New Religions, however, can be confusing because different scholars take different approaches. This academic confusion has resulted in the coining of another term, “New New Religions,” which covers the numerous *shinkō shūkyō* groups that have arisen since the mid 1970s. Interestingly enough, these groups, whose followers include many young people, don’t care whether they are called “New Religions,” “New New Religions,” or *shinkō shūkyō*. They are simply proud that theirs is a new religion poised to meet the needs of the age.

There is a gap between academic religious studies of these groups and their actual situation, and this gap is widening. The atmosphere surrounding religion in Japan has recently changed enormously, particularly in the wake of the Aum Shinrikyō affair, which ironically has contributed to a heightened awareness of the realities of Japanese religion and society.

I have been paying close attention to new religions in Japan because they reflect to a large degree the stagnation of “old” established religions and the syncretistic character of Japanese religion in general. Therefore, I use the term New Religions inclusively to cover new religious movements dating from the late Tokugawa and early Meiji eras to the present. Here I will discuss the “eschatology” of the religious groups Tenri-kyō 天理教,

Ōmoto 大本,¹ Honmichi ほんみち, and Kōfuku-no-Kagaku 幸福の科学, each of which is a uniquely influential religion that will be important in this discussion of “eschatology.”

Since eschatology and millenarianism are fundamentally Judaeo-Christian concepts, there are many scholars working on these subjects in Western countries. In recent decades, however, anthropological studies have also identified similar millenarian movements in Asian countries that may be called “salvationist” (COHN 1974: 15), and theoretical studies are proceeding on these. I am not a specialist in this subject, but here I dare to use the term “eschatology” because the Japanese term *shūmatsu-ron* 終末論 is frequently applied to these new religious movements in Japanese scholarly literature, and this term is more similar to the English word “eschatology” than to the concept of millenarianism. Because the meaning of this term in the Japanese context differs from that of the Judaeo-Christian tradition, as we shall see later, I use it in quotes. The Japanese concept dates only from the Meiji era to the present, a period in which drastic social change has occurred.

I have chosen to focus on the new religious movements Tenri-kyō, Ōmoto-kyō, and Honmichi for four reasons

- (a) These new religions rise from Japan’s Shinto religious climate, but are distinguished from it by virtue of their “eschatological” beliefs, which Shinto lacks.
- (b) Their beliefs caused them to criticize the prewar state Shinto system, which required the whole nation to worship the *tennō* (emperor) as a living god.
- (c) They have a common “world renewal” (*yonaooshi* 世なおし) element that is also found in Kōfuku no Kagaku, one of the newest and biggest religious groups that sees the end of the twentieth century as a time of great change. The content of this “world renewal” element reflects their non-Western (non-Christian) concept of time and space.
- (d) They are important in the religious history of modern Japan despite their modest beginnings. Nakayama Miki 中山みき (1798-1887), founder of Tenri-kyō, and Deguchi Nao 出口なか (1837-1918), founder of Ōmoto, were women who received no formal education but whose religions became major starting points for many New Religions in Japan.

I shall examine the “eschatological” movements within these religions in their socio-historical contexts, and also consider their beliefs concerning

God² or Buddha.

2. MIKI IN THE DOORWAY OF MODERN JAPAN: THE “ESCHATOLOGY” OF TENRI-KYŌ

Nakayama Miki left a seventeen volume collection of prose-poems later given the name *Ofudesaki* おふごさき (words of God in the form of poetry) by Miki’s disciples. *O* is an honorific prefix, and *fude* and *saki* respectively mean writing brush and tip. This collection contains the following verses:

The universe can be explained by the truth.
I shall explain all things through the truth of my verses.

In explaining them, I shall not use My power, nor My tongue,
but the tip of My writing brush. (*Ofudesaki* I: 21-22)³

Miki also presented her teachings in the twelve chapters of *Mikagura-uta* みかぐらうた (sacred songs for the service) and the *tsutome* つとめ (the *kagurazutome* かぐらづとめ and the *teodori* 手踊り, ritual services of symbolic dance and instrumental music accompanied by the *Mikagura-uta*). The *tsutome* dance expresses the core teaching of Miki that differently talented individuals “help others in single-heartedness” (*tasuke ichijō* たすけ一條). According to Miki, this “helping others” is the starting point and fundamental reason (*moto no innen* 元の因縁) for the creation of humankind. Her teaching of the *tasuke ichijō* shows that she turned away from Pure Land Buddhism and traditional Shinto.

After Miki’s death in 1887, her first disciple, Iburi Izō 飯降伊藏 (1833-1907), is said to have received revelations from the late foundress, the Oyasama, and they were recorded as the *Osashizu* おさしづ (Directions). Tenri-kyō now designates the three works, the *Ofudesaki*, the *Mikagura-uta*, and the *Osashizu*, as its Original Scriptures (*genten* 原典).

The Original Scriptures differ considerably from subsequent teachings, which tried to accommodate Miki’s teachings to official Shinto in order to obtain state authorization to be an independent religious group. These later teachings were put forth in the Meiji Doctrine (*Meiji kyōten* 明治教典), which was written by Tenri-kyō scholars in 1903 but was abolished by Tenri-kyō in 1949. It seems to me, however, that the present *Doctrine of Tenri-kyō* (*Tenri-kyō kyōten* 天理教教典) is still discordant with these original texts. The present Doctrine is an interpretation of the original texts and traditions by the Tenri-kyō Headquarters. But its tone (rather than its content) is quite different from that of the Original Scriptures. In fact, it rather resembles Pure Land Buddhism, which emphasizes dependency on Amida Buddha for salvation. For example, when interpreting the *Ofudesaki*, the present *Doctrine*

of *Tenri-kyō* states “That is, when we live together joyfully in the perfect union of mutual service, ever relying on him [God the Parent], ever yearning to go the way of the Foundress and ever taking His teachings seriously to heart, then a promising road will open and the joy of journeying along it will spread to all parts of the world.” (HEADQUARTERS OF TENRIKYO CHURCH 1958: 100) This mutually “helping each other” stands in sharp contrast to the basic teaching of *tasuke ichijō*, or spontaneously “helping others,” which lacks the implication of reciprocity. Furthermore, in the present *Doctrine*, Miki is portrayed as the model believer and referred to as Oyasama (honorable parent, written as 教祖様). Such a passive interpretation of the *Ofudesaki* hides the strong will and determination of Miki, who turned her back on Pure Land Buddhist faith and created a new religion as a reaction to State Shinto. The reason for such an interpretation is probably that Tenri-kyō’s leaders were trying to build up a closed church structure centered on Miki, who is enshrined as a living goddess and as such is their savior. This is a very common phenomenon in the development of Japanese religious groups because of the important role blood and family relationships play in Japan.

Seen from the perspective of our interest in eschatology, the present Tenri-kyō *Doctrine* displays few traces of the harsh warnings and prophecies of retribution given by Miki at the beginning of Japan’s modern era. Current scholars of Tenri-kyō also tend to de-emphasize eschatology. In a paper entitled “Eschatological Thought and the Historical View of Tenri-kyō,” IIDA Teruaki (1982: 81f) writes:

... as Professor Takano says, we cannot find this kind of eschatological thought in the *Doctrine* of Tenri-kyō. Unlike these dark, closed historical views, in the *Doctrine* of Tenri-kyō the future of history is full of hope and freedom. It is a constructive and creative view that history is eternally making progress toward the realization and perfection of the joyous life. It is certain that Tenri-kyō also has precepts that teach that God the Parent may cause a rain of fire to fall or a flood to flow over the people to admonish them for their wrong thoughts or evil deeds. But after all, these were mere warnings and we can find no records that they were actually carried out. So these precepts are essentially different from the semitic ideas of the end of the world, when those who are disobedient to God will be destroyed.

IIDA is correct that the idea of a great catastrophe that leads to the end of history that is held by some adventist movements does not appear in the current *Doctrine of Tenri-kyō*. This is consistent with *Ofudesaki* and other sacred texts in which we find “eschatological” urgings toward the realization of *yonaoshi* and human salvation so that all may live joyful lives. This *yonaoshi*

idea is very important because it gives rise to a new eschatological concept of time and space. I am sure that Miki lived a life in “eschatological” expectation, as a bodily shrine of God for the salvation of all, and in opposition to the imperial Meiji polity. From 1874 until just before her death at the age of ninety, Miki was detained and questioned eighteen times by state authorities, who tried to force her to cease her religious activities because they were outside both Shinto and Buddhism. The *Ofudesaki* chronologically recounts her concrete struggles, both with officials and with her family, especially her eldest son Shūji 秀司 who tried to establish a safer, this-worldly-profit type of religious group by making use of Miki’s name.⁴

Part III of *Ofudesaki* was written in 1874, when Miki was aged seventy-seven, at the time when she was first summoned to Enshō-ji (temple) by the Nara Prefectural Office and questioned by the official in charge of shrines and temples. The interference with and suppression of Tenri-kyō by the authorities had begun,⁵ and in Part III we can see her reaction to it:

The authorities think that they can control the entire world,
but their self-centered way of thinking is mistaken. (III: 124)

The bodies of all human beings are things lent by God.
Are you unaware of God’s omnipotence? (III: 126)

Since I am preparing to save all people quickly,
I will inspire the hearts of both the leaders and commoners. (III: 142)

In addition to criticizing Japan’s leaders, throughout the *Ofudesaki* Miki also warns of impending disaster

What are you thinking as you listen to my words?
The sky will rain fire and the sea swell into tidal waves! (VI: 116)

Hitherto, God’s disappointment has piled up like mountains,
as the dust has piled up in your hearts. (VII: 3)

Therefore, since the appointed time has at last arrived,
I cannot help but give My retributions now. (XVI: 8)

Do not ever regard My retributions as insignificant.
They will appear in various forms, here and there. (XVI: 9)

The last two quotes are from Part XVI of *Ofudesaki*, which was written in 1881 when Miki was age eighty-four and at the time of Shūji’s death at the age of sixty-one. Six months before his death he formed an esoteric Buddhist fraternity called Tenrin-ōkōsha 轉輪王講社 to avoid official persecution, which Miki criticized harshly and angrily:

What do you think the purpose of this path is ?

It is to sweep clean the hearts of everyone in the world. (XVII: 57)

What do you think this sweeping is?

It is a matter of clearing away God's disappointment. (XVII: 58)

The *Ofudesaki* was completed in 1882, when Miki was eighty-five. The last part ends with the verse "I plead with all of you to reflect upon this truth" (XVII: 75). The words "disappointment" and "retribution" are conspicuous throughout the last section, and the words "the appointed time" and "sweeping" recur frequently. Its tone is urgent, and it stresses the importance of equal salvation for all human beings. According to Tenri-kyō teaching, this salvation will take the form of life in a joyful world where everyone will have eternal youth. But this can only be achieved by the "sweeping clean" of the hearts of all people.

The above quotes reflect the sense of urgency Miki felt about her mission. She often used the phrase "the appointed time," and the *Doctrine of Tenri-kyō* therefore presents the appearance of the Parent God, *Oyagami* 親神 to Nakayama Miki on 26 October 1838 as "the arrival of the very appointed time," *shun kokugen* 旬刻限. From that time onwards Miki is believed to have lived for fifty years as the "bodily shrine of God." It may be said that she lived her life in "eschatological" expectation, and that the religion she founded was much more than just a culturo-moral movement. She expected her followers to devotedly follow the same path, each as a bodily shrine of God, since the "appointed time" had already arrived.

This type of eschatology is not biblical, since it does not mean the end of the world nor a new heaven and earth. Rather, the mystical arrival of a divine appointed time parallels the forward direction of ordinary human time.

After the death of the foundress, Tenri-kyō attained government authorization, first as a local branch of the Shinto Shrine Headquarters and then as an independent sect of *Kyōha Shintō* 教派神道 (Sect Shinto) in 1908. Tenri-kyō was the last religion to be legalized within the official limits of Shinto and Buddhism. Tenri-kyō eagerly committed itself to, and took a leading role in advancing the state policy of "edifying the people" (*kokumin kyōka* 國民教化) under State Shinto. The subsequent growth of Tenri-kyō was enormous and according to government statistics its membership reached some 4.5 million (5 million according to Tenri-kyō) by 1937.

However, in order to gain authorized status, Tenri-kyō had to change the content of its original teachings. The Meiji Doctrine, constructed to make Tenri-kyō appear to conform to official Shinto, was composed at this time, and from 1938 to the end of World War II, circulation of the *Ofudesaki*

was totally forbidden, all copies of the *Osashizu* were recalled by the Headquarters, and the creation myths, the *Doroumi koki* 泥海古記, were suppressed. Much could be said about the later changes and developments of Tenri-kyō (for more information on this topic see YAMASHITA 1995), but in order to pursue our interest in eschatology, we need to focus on Honmichi, which became the largest of the many groups that split from and opposed Tenri-kyō over the interpretation of its teachings and also the succession of its mediator, Iburo Izō.

3. TO BUILD AN ETERNAL WORLD: THE “ESCHATOLOGY” OF HONMICHI

Honmichi (literally, “authentic way”) was started in 1913 when Ōnishi Aijirō 大西愛次郎 (1881-1958) received a revelation that he was the successor to Miki, Shrine of the Parent God. The most important point on which Ōnishi’s interpretation of Tenri-kyō doctrine differed from that of the mainline sect was that he understood the *kanrodai* 甘露台 as referring to a human being rather than a place. Tenri-kyō teaches that the Sacred Pillar is to be installed only at the *jiba* ぎば the site of the *kanrodai*, the original place of human creation, and that it is the center of the *tsutome*, the Sacred Service. Thus the *jiba* with the *kanrodai* installed is the immovable center of human salvation.⁷ Ōnishi’s claim that he himself embodies the *kanrodai* is therefore untenable from the viewpoint of the official Doctrine. Nevertheless, Honmichi criticized Tenri-kyō, claiming that it created a false doctrine based on the *Kiki shinwa* 記紀神話 (myths written in the *Kojiki* 古事記, the Record of Ancient Matters, and the *Nihon shoki* 日本書記, the Chronicles of Japan) and the Imperial Constitution. Honmichi declared the *Doroumi koki* (or *Koki*) to be its foundation, the *Ofudesaki* to be its constitution, and the *Osashizu* to be its law code.

The *Koki*, the myth of human creation, first appeared in the *Ofudesaki* (VI: 29-51), with an urgent, divine imperative to oppose the imperial state power that depended on the *Kiki shinwa*. The Ise Shrine was legally designated as the place of the Imperial ancestor Amaterasu Ōmikami, and traditional folk beliefs and worship at Ise were forbidden.⁸

Miki encouraged her disciples to write down the *Koki*, which is why there are a number of different versions still extant. The *Koki* emphasizes the equality of all humans, both in their creation and their salvation, and teaches that the time of salvation has now arrived. The *Koki* in the *Ōfudesaki* is highly original because this idea of equality stood in sharp contrast to the reality of contemporary society, in which the concept of karma was used to justify unequal treatment of people. In this regard, the teachings of Miki’s *Koki* may be seen as a “liberative” theology. By contrast, groups led by Shūji brought recognition of imperial and Buddhist deities into mainline Tenri-kyō, and worship of them was made part of its authorized religious activities

under the Meiji Doctrine. This does not agree with Miki's original teachings, however, because before 1881 the expression "[gods] in heaven" (*ten nite wa* [Kami] 天にては[神]) does not appear either in her sermons or in the *Koki*. (YASHIMA 1987: 211 f). Honmichi's interpretation of the *Doroumi koki* is much more accommodating and is also more syncretic than Miki's original teachings.

Nevertheless, as MURAKAMI Shigeyoshi (1974: 3) points out, "Honmichi is the rare religious group that held a doctrine of denial of the Emperor despite arising from the indigenous Japanese spiritual climate." Furthermore, it bravely carried out nonviolent actions against the imperial state. Most notable of these were the Honmichi Affairs of 1928 and 1938, which constitute one of the two greatest suppressions of a religious group carried out by the imperial state. The other noteworthy suppression of a religious group was carried out against Ōmoto, in the Ōmoto Affairs of 1921 and 1935. However, the character of this latter suppression was basically different from that directed against Honmichi, because Ōmoto criticized the state in the name of traditional Shinto and had attracted many military officers and even some members of the imperial family. In the end, both groups were declared innocent and cleared after Japan was defeated in World War II.

In 1928 members of Honmichi (at that time known as Tenri Kenkyūkai 天理研究會) visited police and other public offices and distributed the *Kenkyū shiryō* 研究資料 (Study Materials), which had been completed by Ōnishi in March of that year and which contained the first systematic doctrine of Honmichi. Japan was at that time suffering a severe economic depression as well as social anxiety in the wake of the Great Kanto Earthquake and the world financial crash. The *Kenkyū shiryō* are filled with intense warnings and eschatological prophecies of salvation.

This is the impasse of the world. Have we not finally come to the point at which human wisdom and power can do nothing? Think calmly. Unless heavenly light appears, the world will be ruined. Showa 3 (1928) is the very year. Heaven will all the more have the *kanrodai* tell the whole solution.

We must accept that the absolute day draws near. The present imperial family and new emperor say that they don't know anything. But even if they don't know anything, unfortunately they won't be able to hear this rebuke because they have inherited the karma (*innen*) that opposes the path. (quoted from MURAKAMI 1974: 150, 151)

This criticism of the Emperor is the concluding sentence of the *Kenkyū shiryō*. Honmichi predicted a major national calamity and world war would be the unavoidable retribution that would fall on the sinful society which

persecuted its founder, Nakayama Miki.

Ōnishi and some five hundred followers of Honmichi were immediately arrested for distributing the *Kenkyū shiryō* to public offices and celebrities across the country. The mass media, following police information, sensationally reported the Tenri Kenkyūkai as an indecent heresy. One hundred and eighty persons out of the five hundred arrested were prosecuted on charges of blasphemy, and most of them were found guilty and given suspended sentences. Ōnishi continued to sue; he was finally certified as mentally unfit and never questioned. According to MURAKAMI (1974: 180), this was because the state did not want to bring any discussion of the authenticity of the imperial creation myths into the trial, which was carried out in the name of the Emperor.

In 1938, Honmichi (known since 1936 as Tenri Honmichi 天理本道) again took action by distributing the *Shoshin* 書信 (Letters), this time not only to public offices but also to various institutions and the general public. Several million copies in all were said to have been printed beforehand and distributed by followers across the nation. The sixth letter is a pamphlet, *Yūkoku no shi ni tsugu* 憂國の士に告ぐ (To People Concerned about the Nation), in which the *Kenkyū shiryō* was outlined. Its distribution caused the second Honmichi Affair. The year before, Japan had gone to war with China and the fascist atmosphere of that time had taken hold throughout the country. Members of Honmichi acted upon their beliefs in the tense atmosphere of prewar Japan and were arrested, whereas Tenri-kyō establishment chose to follow and support imperial state policy.

Honmichi adopted a patriotic tone and asserted that the Emperor would be replaced by the living *kanrodai* in Japan. It predicted a coming world calamity unless the whole nation accepted the leadership of the *kanrodai* instead of the Emperor in order to deal with the disaster and prepare for the eternal, ideal world that would follow. As a result, Honmichi was completely banned by the state. By contrast, at the end of 1938 Tenri-kyō issued a directive in the name of its leader Nakayama Shōzen 中山正善 recalling all the original texts, including the *Doroumi koki* and books concerning their interpretation, from its followers and ordering them all destroyed with the exception of the Meiji Doctrine.

Today there are about 400,000 believers in Honmichi. They keep the “eschatological” faith and its daily disciplines, and say that even people who have already died can be born into the eternal *kanrodai* world (UMEHARA 1986: 328). This “eschatological” faith is based upon a rather patriotic and mystical interpretation of Narayama Miki’s writings as well as upon Ōnishi’s divine revelations.

4. ANTI-MODERNISM: THE ESCHATOLOGY OF ŌMOTO

If it can be said that Nakayama Miki stood firmly in the open door of modern Japan and held ideas that can be called both indigenous and modern, Deguchi Nao (1837-1918) can be said to have firmly resisted the oppressive side of Meiji era Japan. Nao was born the year after Miki was god-possessed, and became god-possessed herself in 1892, five years after Miki's death. Their personal and historical backgrounds were different, but both of them were empowered by their particular Gods. Both women appeared as messengers of God in order to bring about world reconstruction and renewal, which would be accomplished by the reformation and salvation of human minds and lead to an ideal world.

Ōmoto had another founder, Deguchi Ōnisaburō 出口王仁三郎 (1871-1948), who had received an academic education and claimed to possess his own spiritual powers. He systematized Nao's teachings and edited and published her *Ofudesaki*,⁹ originally written on 200,000 sheets of paper, along with his spiritual interpretations of it. This unique co-leadership made Ōmoto develop in an exceptionally dynamic form, attracting a variety of personalities from society both within Japan and overseas. In a very different way from Tenri-kyō, Ōmoto became the origin of many Japanese New and New New Religions.¹⁰ Deguchi Ōnisaburō and his teachings have also become popular among young people in the 1990s, as I shall discuss later.

There are many studies and articles which treat Ōmoto as a millennial movement. Such ideas were well known to be part of Ōmoto teaching, because of Onisaburo's active publicity efforts,¹¹ and also because of the Ōmoto Affairs, which were sparked primarily by the millennial cast of Ōmoto's ideology. This does not mean, however, that they have been studied sufficiently. After unprecedented suppression and destruction by the imperial state, post-war Ōmoto has developed into a relatively small, peaceful, arts-oriented religious group with a membership of about 180,000. As such, the current group probably has little motivation to carry out its own research into its development. It is therefore worth examining here the millennial or eschatological thought of Ōmoto in order to compare it with that of Tenri-kyō and Honmichi.

According to YASUMARU Yoshio (1977: 10), the doctrine of Ōmoto occupies a special position in Japanese society because it appeared at a time when vague desires for salvation were prevalent among the people of Japan but eschatological revolutionary thought had not yet matured. He maintains that Ōmoto-kyō was the religion that could best realize such eschatological revolutionary desires, because the life-history of Nao is the most

hopelessly miserable of all the founders of popular religions. In this respect I do not necessarily agree with him, but it does seem to be true that the eschatology of Ōmoto-kyō held special meaning for its adherents owing to Nao's experiences during her lifetime.

Nao's famous oracle, the *Initial Divine Words* (*Shohatsu no shinyu* 初鱗の神諭), written in 1892, describes how she was chosen by the *kami* Ushitora-no-konjin 良之金神; it also clearly reflects her "eschatological" thinking:

The Greater World shall burst into full bloom like plum blossoms do – simultaneously. The time for Me, *Ushitora no Konjin*, to reign has come at last! This means the World opened like plum-blossoms shall be Heaven-ruled as evergreen pine trees; this is the World where things shall never go well without *Kami's* care. Know you, the World has hitherto been and is that of beasts, the stronger preying on the weaker – quite devilish. Alas, the world of beasts! You are so cheated by the Devil as to be quite unconscious of the truth, a dark age. If things are left as they stand, order shall not be kept in the World. Therefore, through the manifestation of Divine Power, the Greater World shall be reconstructed and transformed into an entirely New World. After going through an over-all cleansing, the Greater World shall be changed into the kingdom of Heaven where peace will reign through all ages to come. Be prepared for peace to reign through all ages coming. Prepare yourself for that, humanity! Never shall the word of *Kami* fail; there shall be nothing that comes untrue even by the breadth of a single hair. Know that should *Kami* err, He would be non-existent in the World. (January 1892, OOMOTO 1974: 1)

The original Japanese of Nao is far more vivid and strong in tone. The *kami* who came to Nao was Ushitora-no-Konjin, a deity who lived in the direction of Ushitora (northeast) and was feared as an evil guardian god who brought illnesses and misfortunes to the folk. According to Nao, however, Ushitora no Konjin is actually the eclipsed Original God (*Moto no Kami* 元の神) who has broken his three-thousand-year-long silence so that the fallen deities and suppressed people may be restored. She also said that "the prosperity of Buddhism hitherto had weakened the Divine Power" (*Ofudesaki*, June 16, 1898). Nao thought that she was chosen by the *kami* because she was typical of the suppressed who were to be restored.

As we saw above in the teachings of Nakayama Miki, Tenri-kyō originally had no concept of evil spirits or fallen gods, or of their revival. Even under the strongly Shinto-influenced Meiji Doctrine that introduced various imperial gods into Tenri-kyō, the idea of salvation was basically monotheistic, earthly, and human-centered, and linked to the truth of human creation by the Parent God. Miki in fact did not want people to become dependent

on any particular god, though she used names of gods as teaching tools to represent different human talents. This is also true for Honmichi, which stood up to the Emperor system on the basis of its doctrine, according to which Miki is Izanami-no-Mikoko and Amaterasu Ōmikami, who in State Shinto is the ancestral as well as the living goddess of the imperial family. By contrast, the thought of Nao and Ōmoto-kyō was based on ancient Shinto and challenged the form of Shinto that had long been united with imported Buddhism and used to rule the Japanese populace. Nao identified Ushitora-no-Konjin as Susanoo-no-Mikoto, the ousted brother of Amaterasu Ōmikami.

When “eschatological” revolutionary trends came to the fore within Ōnisaburō-led Ōmoto-kyō, political fear led the state to carry out major religious suppressions in 1921 and 1935. YASUMARU (1977: 11) thinks that although Ōmoto-kyō evolved rapidly after the Taishō period (1912-26), its basic character had already been established by Nao during the Meiji era. We cannot, however, think of Ōmoto without Ōnisaburō. Ōmoto belief is based on the combination of the *henjo nanshi* 變性男子 (“transformed male,” Nao) and the *henjo nyoshi* 變性女子 (“transformed female,” Ōnisaburō) (YAMASHITA 1990: 17-20). While Ōnisaburō’s revolutionary mind was “feminine” and spiritual, Nao’s was realistic and symbolic.¹² Interestingly, this idea bears witness to how feminine and masculine principles work in modern Japanese society. (YAMASHITA 1990: 17-20)

Deguchi Kiyoko 出口清子 (1935-), the present and fourth Spiritual Leader, once gave an interview about the core teachings of Ōmoto. In this interview, she said, “We are taught that this world is the place of practice. We were born to practice. Death is not the end. [In death] we go back to the spiritual world and live there prosperously. For that purpose this world is the place of practice for fifty to eighty years. Our daily family and social lives are connected to practice. We warn against the egoism of *wareyoshi* (selfishness) most of all” (*Mainichi Shinbun*, 19 March 1992). This way of thinking, *tatekae tatenaooshi* 立て替え立て直し (“reconstruction of the world”), leads us to the teachings of Kōfuku no Kagaku, one of the newest and fastest-growing religions today.

5. WITH A “NEW HOPE” INTO THE TWENTY-FIRST CENTURY: THE “ESCHATOLOGY” OF KŌFUKU NO KAGAKU

I have hitherto dealt with religions whose founders or initial spiritual leaders have already passed away. Accordingly I have tried to grasp their “eschatological” views and actions through their writings and religious manifestations in the light of the socio-historical background of prewar modern Japan. I identified a process of creation and change, both for those leaders

and for the religious groups concerned. Before concluding what this means with respect to “eschatological movements” in modern Japan, I shall compare the above groups with Kōfuku no Kagaku (“The Institute for Research in Human Happiness”).

The founder and leader of this group, Ōkawa Ryūhō 大川隆法 (1956-) has written many best-selling books since its establishment in 1986. His wife, Ōkawa Kyōko 大川きょう子, has taken a similar role as a spiritual leader alongside her husband since 1987. Both are graduates of Tokyo University and display a new approach to religion. As a result of this new approach, many of its adherents are students, young salaried men and women, independent workers, and converts from other religions who become members after having read Ōkawa Ryūhō’s books.

Because Kōfuku no Kagaku’s young, well-educated membership resembled that of Aum Shinrikyō, and because both groups were established in the 1980s, media and scholars regarded them as twin movements until the early 1990s. In an effort to distance itself from Aum, however, Kōfuku no Kagaku has recently announced that its membership has expanded to as many as fifteen million people both inside and outside Japan. It is not possible to rely on the figures provided by new religions themselves, but it is clear that this group is definitely coming into its own as a unique religious group, and as such is a reflection upon contemporary Japanese society.

Ōkawa Ryūhō writes as follows:

A generation ago the words ‘religion’ and ‘state,’ used in combination, were likely connected with the Emperor system. These days the word ‘religion’ is devoid of such a connotation; rather, interest in it is about to boom. Eventually the word will change from the negative to the positive and become one of affirmation. (ŌKAWA 1993: 12f)

The growth of Kōfuku no Kagaku might be basically consistent with this prediction, but the above was actually written in the second period of the development of the group. I have directly witnessed the process of the creation of this group and the changes it has undergone almost from its beginning, with the exception of a stage prior to its founding when Ōkawa worked as an elite businessman for five years after his first god-possession in 1981. I have attended Ōkawa’s public lectures, listened to his tapes and read his books; I have also read the journals published by Kōfuku no Kagaku, in addition to witnessing the changing character of its followers.

In the group’s first period the emphasis was on channeling, which strongly attracted young people. Many books were published which claimed to contain the words of spirits from another dimension, such as Nichiren, Dōgen, Deguchi Ōnisaburō, Swedenborg, Kant, and many others. One of

these spirits was Nostradamus. Two books, *New Prophecies* by Nostradamus and *Terrible Revelations* by Nostradamus (Ōkawa 1988 and 1991), which Ōkawa claimed to have channeled, were quite sensational and caused a storm of criticism of him, mainly in the mass media, which portrayed him as mentally unstable. A mass protest undertaken by his followers against the Kodansha publishing house and other publishers as a result of this made the group still more conspicuous.

Kōfuku no Kagaku's second period began subsequent to this incident. Ōkawa started to publish a revised series of his books on doctrine, such as *The New Laws of the Sun* and *The New Laws of Gold* (Ōkawa 1994 and 1995). The group embarked on a course toward becoming a Buddhist organization and it published many books on the theory and practice of religion. Followers were admonished to be interested in, and to depend on, supernatural power. Its teachings on the spirit world, especially concerning the spirit world's hierarchical structures, remain central to the group's doctrine for attaining happiness both in this world and the next. Now, however, Ōkawa has divided the heavenly spiritual powers into two types those of the "front," which are altruistic and teach the real truth and those of the "back," which may be self-serving or put themselves first. According to Ōkawa, Deguchi Ōnisaburō is one of the "back" powers, as is Takahashi Shinji, founder of GLA (God's Light Association), which Ōkawa's father had contact with at one time, as well as Saibaba in India. This concept of "front" and "back" powers seems to have been part of an effort by Kōfuku no Kagaku to control the occult boom among the young, a boom caused by their own activities and also by the publication of comic books (*manga*) by others. It was also because of this boom that the name of Deguchi Ōnisaburō became popular among young people. These heavenly spiritual powers are, however, strictly distinguished from evil spirits. According to Ōkawa, Aum Shinrikyō and Sōka Gakkai are the most extreme examples of the latter, and their existence will worsen the coming eschatological crisis. For this reason he has published many books that explicitly criticize the doctrines of these and other religious groups. During this period Kōfuku no Kagaku tried to influence leading politicians, openly organized meetings and demonstrations, and issued various publications in an attempt to avert the coming catastrophe by means of the conversion of political leaders.

In the latter half of 1996, however, Ōkawa ceased giving public lectures and making open predictions as a result of changes in Japan's politico-religious atmosphere.¹³ According to Ōkawa's last public lecture in 1995, it is now too late and there is little hope left for Japanese politics. In 1997 the group embarked on a three-year plan of "New Hope" for the twenty-first century, which it claims will be an effort to overcome the inevitable crisis

that will occur at the end of the century. *Kōfuku no Kagaku* has stopped making eschatological predictions and encouraging such fears so as not to invite a crisis caused by negative thoughts. This posture is completely different from that of its second period (to mid-1996), when manuals published by the group on how to avoid or survive major disasters were selling well in bookshops.¹⁴ These days, however, it is faith and practice that are most emphasized.

Whereas in Christian belief the *eschaton* marks the end of time and the appearance of a new dimension, the rise of the ideal world that is predicted by *Kōfuku no Kagaku* will take place in continuity with current time and space. The latter is concerned with the spirit world and its relation to the meaning of human life on this earth. In this sense, it belongs to the same stream as the “eschatological” New Religions of modern Japan discussed earlier. The 1990s religion of *Kōfuku no Kagaku* can be said to reflect the emphasis on individual practice and salvation that is widespread in present-day Japan.

6. CONCLUSION

As I have outlined above, there was a complex relationship between the “eschatologically” oriented religions of pre-war Japan and the imperial state, the religious policy of which required the *tennō* to be regarded as a living god with supreme, and under which aggressive capitalism expanded into other Asian countries in rivalry with the West. Some of these new religious groups accepted this status quo, but others led some Japanese people to sever their ties with established Buddhist temples and Shinto shrines in order to seek a better world. Their protests against the political and social oppression of prewar Japan, and the anti-authoritarian feelings that gave rise to revolutionary movements whose goal is to transform the world and construct a new kind of society, would seem to have aspects in common with other millennial movements worldwide.

As Ōkawa Ryūhō has written, in post-war Japan the religious situation has changed drastically. However, another problem has arisen, mainly as a result of the uncritical co-existence of Japanese religions with centralized economic development in post-war Japanese politics and society. This is related to the *wa* 和 (harmony) groupism associated with the symbolic Emperor system. Young people have been deprived of any meaning in their lives by oppression such as that embodied by school entrance examinations in particular, as well as by the strict social control they experience in Japanese society in general. They seek relief from their daily frustrations through such things as supernatural power, clairvoyance, and the media have taken advantage of this. According to a newspaper statistics, in the

early 1990s, approximately 70-80% of businessmen reported that they wanted the end of the world to come, and the same can be said for young men and boys. Books on Nostradamus have become bestsellers and the term *harumagedon* ハルマゲドン (Armageddon) has become familiar to young people through comic books and animated movies. These phenomena are similar to what was happening in the Taishō era (1912-26), when Tenri-kyō, Honmichi and Ōmoto prospered. In this context I agree with Emily G. OOMS (1993: 77) when she says, “Millenarian movements and sects thus constitute an intellectually constructive and culturally innovative response to oppression and social change.”

In conclusion, I would like to propose here a consideration of “eschatology” from three perspectives. The first is a socio-political perspective. With this viewpoint, one can learn about an “eschatological” way of living from the founders and spiritual leaders of these movements, leaders who tried to meet the needs of people even when their understanding of God’s truth led them to oppose the state authorities. Focusing on “eschatology,” then, appears to be one means of ensuring a relationship with God. Living in “eschatological” expectation therefore means existing here and now in the midst of time, the way that the writings of Miki and Nao present them as having lived.

The second perspective is theological. Deguchi Ōnisaburō and Ōkawa Ryūhō both describe the spirit world as the real world, a description that has attracted many educated individuals in modern times. It is therefore worth considering whether or not the “eschatological” prophecies with which they present us are manifestations of cosmic truth. The lesson for Christianity here is that it must be able to see beyond the barriers of its own absolutism, absolutism that often keeps young people away (YAMASHITA 1997: 92).

The third perspective, which is related to the second one, is philosophical. I have tried to show here that the eschatological movements in Japan are basically of a human-centered, world renewal type, because this world is understood to be in continuity with the spirit world, or the world of the kami and Buddha. That is, they are seen as existing in the same time and space. I believe, therefore, that dialogue between Christianity and other contemporary religions of today requires a reexamination of the Christian concepts of time and space.

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NOTES

- 1 Previously also called Ōmoto-kyō among other names.
- 2 I follow here the use of new religions in their English sources which render *kami* (god, spirit) as “God.”
- 3 These and subsequent translations are taken from INOUE and EYMON 1987.
- 4 Concerning Miki’s struggle, see YAMASHITA 1990.
- 5 Concerning Tenri-kyō’s difficulties and development during Miki’s lifetime, see HAYASAKA 1987.
- 6 “Pillar of Sweet Dew,” originally the pillar in the main sanctuary (*shinden* 神殿) of Tenri-kyō. It marks the site of creation of humankind. Miki gave detailed directions concerning how the kanrodai had to be made, in order to symbolize the meaning of human life.
- 7 Tenri-kyō’s idea that there is only one *kanrodai* located on one *jiba* is opposed by the Ichinomoto Bunshoato Hozonkai 標本分署跡保存會 represented by Yashima Hideo 八島英雄, head of Hondawara bun kyōkai 本婦原分教會 in Tokyo, who was dismissed by the Tenri-kyō Headquarters on the grounds that his action is against the *Doctrine of Tenri-kyō*. He sued in 1988 and succeeded in retaining his right of residence and position as *de facto* church leader, but lost the right to be a legal representative of his congregation in a verdict in 1996. The court refused to intervene in matters of doctrine. According to Yashima, the kanrodai service (dance) is the core of Miki’s teaching and it can be performed at other places besides the central *jiba*. He claims that it should be done at every church, meaning that as many *jibas* as possible should be replicated. In February 1997 Nakayama Zenei 中山善衛, the third *shinbashira* 真柱 (True Pillar), a direct descendant of the foundress and chief priest of Tenri-kyō who was in very bad health at the time, in a surprising move ordered the performance of the *kanrodai* service everywhere, probably as a way to have believers pray for his recovery. But this signals a drastic change for Tenri-kyō and a possible revival of Miki’s original teaching.
- 8 Opposing this, Miki wrote “Izanagi and Izanami are significant deities of the grand shrine of Tenshōkō 天照皇 who are also under My Providence” (*Ofudesaki* VI: 52). “Tenshōkō” refers to Tenshōkōtai Jingu in Ise. See MURAKAMI 1980: 84-86.
- 9 Nao’s *Ofudesaki* is unrelated to Nakayama Miki’s writings of the same name.
- 10 For example, Seichō-no-Ie, Sekai Kyūsei-kyō, and GLA (God’s Light Association), which themselves have spawned other new religious groups.
- 11 In 1935, when the second Ōmoto Affair occurred, the circulation of the Ōmoto newspaper *Jūnri Aizen Shimbun* (published three times a month) had reached one million, and there were other popular Ōmoto publications at that time as well.

- 12 MATSUMOTO (1986: 48) regards Ōnisaburō as a “Japan-fundamentalist.” This type of fundamentalism opposes Japanese imperial nationalism because the ideology of a modern male-identified nation deprives Japan of its original feminine power.
- 13 Following the Aum incident in 1995, public opinion toward religion turned negative. This fact and the subsequent government revision of the Law for Religious Corporations resulted in increased pressure on religious groups, both traditional and new.
- 14 See for example *Kōfuku no Kagaku Kōhō-Kyoku* 1995. This book covers the reasons for the coming great disasters, directions for survival, and further directions for the reader’s spirit to follow after death in the case the former instructions should prove ineffective.