

World Religion: Its Conditions and Tasks

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LET ME BEGIN my talk today with a word of thanks to Professor Nakano, who was kind enough to suggest for my consideration the following five topics, all of which I found not only interesting but extremely relevant to the questions that face the Soka Gakkai International (S.G.I.) today.

1. Desirable qualities for a world religion of the future
2. Idol worship and folk religiosity
3. The characteristics and roles of “religious professionals”
(*seishokusha* 聖職者)
4. The relation between religion and society, particularly with regard to politics
5. Tolerance and religious truth

These topics are not, I believe, of merely academic interest to all of you here today. They concern issues that are quite practical, and that touch upon the very existence of the S.G.I. For me—an outsider and a Christian to boot—to speak on these topics is therefore a bit delicate. Still, my words this afternoon will be of value only if they provide insight and pose a challenge. And for that to happen I must tell you quite frankly how I see things.

I have no hope, of course, of being able to treat all five of these topics in any satisfactory way, but let me begin and see how far I can get within my allotted seventy minutes.

Desirable Qualities for a World Religion

WHAT IS A WORLD RELIGION?

The term *world religion* can take on different meanings according to the circumstances. With regard to the S.G.I., which every year sees the birth of new

branches in various countries, the meaning that comes directly to mind is: “A religion that extends over the whole world.” Indeed the idea and spirit of the S.G.I. seems to be that the Nichiren school of Buddhism, which until now has been mostly restricted to Japan, must spread over the entire globe. Seen from the outside, this is apt to provoke the reaction, “These people are a bit ambitious!” But then, without a sound dose of ambition no great works are ever accomplished....

There is, however, a more common or classical meaning of the term “world religion,” to which it might be good to give a moment’s attention. Scholars of religion, as you know, tend to distinguish world religion or historical religion from tribal religion or primitive religion. Its distinctive traits are: having a historical origin, having a founder (Śākyamuni, Christ, Muhammad, etc.), and having a scriptural basis. There is, however, a more basic and important trait: in contrast to tribal religions, which move within the tribe and are indistinguishable from the life of the tribe, world religions envisage an Absolute that transcends the tribe. The relationship with this transcendent reality allowed the “human being as such,” or the “individual,” to arise, which enabled religion to become “universal.” And, to add a final point, the so-called world religions have all become established religions, that is, religions whose possibilities and limits have been known over a long period of time and which can therefore offer their faithful an identity that is wide in scope, both spatially and historically. This may be the point wherein they differ most clearly from the New Religions.

It is thus true, I believe, that the different world religions have a kind of common character, but it is also undeniable that they differ from one another in many respects. One of the most important differences could be described as follows. On the one hand, there are world religions whose main interest appears to be the individual spiritual enhancement of their followers. The most classical example of this type might be Buddhism—although Nichiren Shōnin might not so easily fit this definition. On the other hand, there are religions that aim rather directly at ordering all the different aspects of human life and human society. Here Islam might be the best example, but Confucianism, insofar as it is a religion, might also qualify. This leads to my first question: Which of the two would you choose as a model for S.G.I.?

Permit me, at this point, to make a little “excursion” into the topic of idol worship and folk religiosity, which I shall surely not have time to treat at length. All of the world religions share one trait that is closely tied to folk religiosity. Six years ago Tamaru Noriyoshi, then professor at the University

of Tokyo, touched upon the matter in your institute's journal, *The Journal of Oriental Studies*:

Those religions that are considered to be universal certainly transcend the walls between peoples, but when it comes to their implantation, they must conform to and inculturate into the different peoples and societies they encounter. If not, they will find it practically impossible to play their role as a religion.

I am wont to say that the world religions are “secondary entities,” in the sense that they are newcomers: they were not first on the scene, but arrived after the tribal religions had taken deep root in the hearts of the people. It is, I think, a characteristic of these primitive religions that they respond to the primary needs of people: health, fertility, liberation from all kinds of fear, etc. I believe that a religion that does not take care of these basic or primitive needs can never succeed in reaching a people's innermost heart. This means, then, that world religions too must embrace these very down-to-earth human concerns; they must, in other words, envisage a salvation that is not unilaterally spiritual but saves the whole human person, body and soul. The important thing is that a certain continuity be presented in the religious quest between the rather self-centered primary needs and the more lofty spiritual desires, so that the religious life of the ordinary person can grow from one to the other by a process of gradual purification. Since, as a Catholic, I am accustomed to seeing religion in this way, I was a bit shocked when I first came to Japan and heard with what contempt the Japanese established religions spoke about so-called *genze riyaku* 現世利益 (prayers for worldly benefits).

Returning to our subject of history, there first was a (probably very long) period when there were only tribal religions; then, from about 600 BCE, the world religions appeared among them and in many cases supplanted them, and began exerting a deep influence on humanity that has continued until the present day. Recently, however, the conditions of human society have changed rather drastically because of secularization and other trends, so that the world religions appear to be rapidly losing their hold on individuals and society. Could it be that we are entering a third period in the religious history of the world, and that now a third kind of religion awaits birth?

In the last few years, the S.G.I. publications have been making frequent use of the terms “religious reformation” and “religious revolution,” which prompts me to ask what might very well be an unanswerable question at the moment: When you speak of the necessity of a “religious revolution,” what do you at S.G.I. envision this revolution as—a reformation within the framework of a definite religious age and type of religion, or a more radical revo-

lution, one that would ring in a new age of religion? Unanswerable though it may be, this question will lurk in the background of many of the problems we shall encounter further on. I can already indicate one consequence: S.G.I. often takes the Protestant Reformation as its model, but this is evidently off target if a “revolution” in the second sense is aimed at.

THE S.G.I., THE NICHIREN SECT, AND BUDDHISM

It is clear, I think, that Sōka Gakkai and S.G.I., while being relatively new movements, developed from the long traditions of Nichiren Buddhism and Buddhism in general. Therein lies a tricky problem for the sympathetic observer who hears it said that S.G.I. wants to develop into a world religion. The Nichiren sect may not have developed yet into a world religion, but Buddhism is generally considered to have become a world religion long ago. How then is one to see the relationships among the various sides of the S.G.I.—Nichiren sect—Buddhism triangle? Or to put it more directly as a question to you: Do you envisage the development of S.G.I. into a world religion within the Nichiren sect and Buddhism or apart from them? In the second case, the pattern would be similar to that of Christianity, which developed into a world religion via a break with its “womb,” Judaism.

When one sees things as evolving *within* Buddhism, the following might be considered. It is certainly true that Buddhism is a world religion, but it can also be said that for a long time Buddhism has not really been functioning as one since it has lost the necessary doctrinal and organizational unity. Instead, it has developed into a conglomerate of national and sectarian Buddhisms, partly due to an overly radical inculturation into different peoples. Seen from that perspective, the S.G.I. revolution seems bound to take the reunification of Buddhism as one of its main aims. Was not gathering all Buddhists within Lotus Buddhism the dream of Nichiren Shōnin? And could not a return to the original universal ideal free Buddhism from the grip of the different tribal religions with which it has tied itself?

On the other hand, I could well understand it if the S.G.I. considered the present situation of Buddhism to be so complicated and hard to reform that it decided that would be much simpler to start from scratch, as it were. In that case, however, the following two considerations might be important. First, this would mean that the number of world religions would grow by one. That is okay, of course, but only if it does not aggravate the already existing tensions among the religions. We are all convinced, I think, that in our global village a certain unity and mutual cooperation among the religions is of the greatest and most urgent importance if world peace is to be

achieved. It may then be wise to reflect a moment on how we envisage this “unity” among the religions. Roughly speaking, there are three possibilities:

1. All religions will shed their particularities and come together in the rational, universal core of religion (the dream of the *Aufklärung*);
2. Each religion, while remaining independent, will come to see all religions as mutually complementary and equally deserving of cooperation;
3. All religions will be unified through absorption into one’s own religion. This was the more or less conscious vision of Christianity until about forty years ago. I guess, without really knowing, that it was also the vision of Nichiren Shōnin. Is it the vision of the S.G.I.?

A second consideration touches upon the topic of “tolerance and religious truth,” which I shall consider in a bit more detail later. In attempting to become a world religion, it is of the utmost importance that one’s motives be as “pure” as possible. If not, the ambition is certain to give rise to a mountain of problems. “Pure” motives might include the desire to share with others the salvation one has received or the desire to spread a religion that truly responds to the needs of the times. As “impure” must be considered the desire for the glory and victory of one’s own “group,” for this is nothing but collective egoism and is just as dangerous as that other kind of collective egoism, “nationalism.”

And here we come to another delicate point. When looking back on the modern European zeal for spreading Christianity, it must be confessed that the desire for the salvation of all people often became intermingled with the desire to glorify European countries and Western civilization—a desire that militated against the true international spirit of a world religion and caused untold damage. Buddhism was born in a small tribe or kingdom, just like Christianity was born in a backwater of the Roman Empire. In those cases the temptation to glorify was of course not there. But the situation of the S.G.I. is different. Historically speaking, it is probably not mere chance that the expansion of the S.G.I. coincides with Japan’s attainment of world power status, economically and politically. It is thus important to keep two things carefully apart: one’s zeal for the growth of the S.G.I. and one’s desire to see Japan flourish and its spirit spread throughout the world. In that connection, I have been struck by the following fancy: Would it not be splendid if, in order to express that separation symbolically, the S.G.I. decided to have its headquarters, not in Japan, but for example in Bodh Gaya, the place of the enlightenment of the Buddha!

Or, to express this question differently, how should a future world religion differ from the established religions of today? This is, of course, quite a big issue, but, with a bit of wishful thinking, I came up with the following points.

First of all, I rather agree with a point that is strongly stressed nowadays by Sōka Gakkai: that the religion of the future should be religion of and by *lay people*. Since we shall return to this problem in our next section, I will limit myself here to two short remarks. First, the spread of education has certainly enabled more and more ordinary people to take responsibility for themselves in religious matters, instead of depending upon religious specialists. Second, the distinction between monks (clerics) and lay people has certainly been an important one in Buddhism, and it cannot be denied that, throughout Buddhist history, the monks have been the dominant influence. I too would feel happy if in the future a true “lay Buddhism” is born.

Secondly, in the past, world religions have been thought of as aiming almost exclusively for the salvation of the individual (mostly in the afterlife). In the future, the *social responsibility* of religion must become more central (“religious institutions as well as religious individuals must be in the service of human society”). One could say that the social element was there in Christianity from the beginning in the idea of the “reign of God,” but one might then have to add that this idea was really brought to life only recently, for example in the famous theology of liberation. In Buddhism, too, we find the somewhat similar idea of the Buddha Land, but has this not been interpreted as primarily something for the afterlife? It may be that, within Buddhism, the social responsibility of religion was most strongly stressed by Nichiren Shōnin’s *Risshō Ankokuuron* 立正安国論.

A third characteristic that a future world religion should show is the capacity to appreciate other religions *religiously*. By “religiously” I mean something that is essentially more than a civil tolerance: I am referring to a recognition of the other that originates in one’s own religiosity and finds a basis in one’s religious doctrine. This is a difficult requirement, one that demands a kind of “conversion” from all of us and a thorough reinvestigation of our respective traditions. In Christianity, the intellectual part of this task is now underway in the discipline known as the theology of religions. I surmise that for Nichiren Buddhism, and thus for Sōka Gakkai, that task is not much easier than for Christianity.

Besides these three, there are quite a few more characteristics or desiderata that could be considered, but since I am far from able to bring all of these future qualities into focus, I shall just touch briefly on three of them.

First, it is a fact that until now the world religions have been strongly

patriarchal or “male chauvinist.” Christianity and Buddhism have certainly not been exceptions. A greater equality between man and woman is to be expected of and demanded from religions in the future.

Second, as far as we can foresee, the role of technology in the world is not going to diminish. The rise of the New New Religions appears to testify to the increasing influence of a certain “technological mentality” on religiosity as well. Strangely enough, technology and magic seem to come together in the demand for a specific cause and specific remedy for each particular problem in life. The world religions, which have been based on a basic global entrusting of one’s total person to a transcendent reality, will have to accommodate in some way to that mentality

And finally, as the Sōka Gakkai and S.G.I. publications emphasize, the religion of the future should be *humanistic*. This is in agreement with the spirit of Jesus’ words, “The Sabbath was made for man and not man for the Sabbath” (Mark 2: 27)—whereby the particular law of the Sabbath can be taken to stand for God’s commandments in general, or for all religious precepts. Indeed, religious salvation must be “liberative”: it must lead to spiritual freedom. On the other hand, religion must not become anthropocentric or human-centered. What religion takes as its core must be something that finally transcends the human. There must, in other words, remain a tension between religion and what in each age and clime is considered to be most human. Only then can religion contribute to the betterment of human society.

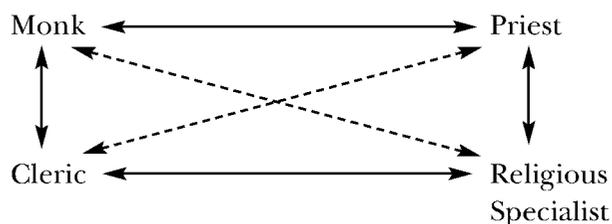
The Need of Religion for *Seishokusha*

WHAT IS A *SEISHOKUSHA*?

This is an important and quite complex problem. It is important especially in the present context, since, depending on the answer to this question, one might conclude that a lay movement is, by definition, a religious movement without *seishokusha*. The problem’s complexity first appears in the difficulty one encounters in translating the key terms from one language into another. Above I have translated *seishokusha* as “religious professionals,” but I do not feel at all confident that this is right. The simplest and clearest example of this difficulty is the fact that one never knows how to translate the Buddhist terms *sō* 僧 and *obōsan* お坊さん into a Western language. Should they be “monk” or should they be “priest”? Within the framework of Christianity, both can be called religious professionals, but their specific character differs greatly. A provisional answer could be that it is best to call

the Buddha and his immediate disciples “monks,” and the Japanese *obōsan* of today “priests.”

In a more analytical vein, we could say that the term *seishokusha* covers four different elements or aspects, and that its meaning will in each case depend on where one puts the accent. Ordinarily, where the accent will be put in a particular religion depends on the nature or structure of that religion and, especially, on the role the religious community or institution is supposed to play in it. Graphically, the four elements could be presented in the following way:



Let me attempt a short definition of these terms:

Monk suggests a special religious charisma and/or an ascetic (celibate) lifestyle, whereby the person “specializes” in the praxis of the religion and comes to be considered as “holy” (set apart). There is here no direct implication of “office” in the community or of serving the ordinary faithful in their life of faith.

Priest, in contrast, conveys a direct implication of service to the community. The “sacredness” of priests lies in the role they are called to play: their power to perform holy rituals (most centrally, the sacrifice) in the place of the faithful. The priest is the intermediary between the lay people and the Transcendent.

It could be said that originally Buddhism, because of its nature as a religion, did not know any other “sacred profession” than the monkhood. Very soon, however, the monks had to take upon themselves a priestly role, in answer to the laity’s need to be cared for. As a result, in Buddhism the concept of priest always seems to be coupled to that of monk; there never was a place for sacred mediators outside of the monks. The case of Christianity is very different. Here, the idea of a caretaker and, in a sense, a mediator between God and the faithful was there from very early on, while the concept of monkhood originated much later.

In the next two terms, the idea of “profession” (職 *shoku*) could be said to be more central than the idea of the “holy” or “sacred” (聖 *sei*).

Cleric refers directly to the leadership of the religion as a social organization. But since clerics (men and women) are leaders of a *religious* organization, they are in a sense sacred and their power a “sacred authority.”

Religious specialist here refers to people (scholars) who make the things of the religion the special field of their studies. In Christianity, this category comprises Bible scholars, theologians, church historians, etc. In Buddhism, one soon finds mention of the *sangaku* 三学 (although this had originally more to do with praxis than with theory): specialization in the *vinaya* (the precepts), meditation, and wisdom. World religions appear to need, not only leaders, but also “think tanks,” endowed with a certain sacred authority.

This dry and by no means authoritative analysis of the “professionals of the sacred” brings up a few practical points. First of all, when looking at the history of the world religions, it soon becomes apparent that these four categories of *seishokusha*, which we have nicely separated, show a strong tendency to conglutinate in the same persons. Thus in Christianity, and in Buddhism as well, the latter two roles have been traditionally reserved for the priests (which the Buddhist monks also soon became). The religious position of the priest is indeed a strong one: only through him—historically, we can just as well leave out the “her”—is contact with the Sacred made. In many cases also the link with the founder is supposed to run through him, examples being the apostolic succession in Christianity and the *kechimyaku* 血脈 (dharma line) in Japanese Buddhism. In most of Christianity, the sacred rituals, performable only by the priesthood, center on the sacraments. In my view, which may be mistaken, what corresponds in Nichiren Buddhism to the Christian sacraments is the *Gohonzon* 御本尊 (and, in practice, also the funerals). As a result, the priests have succeeded in gathering all religious power into their hands and have in several cases become a socially distinct class within the religion. In the West this is called “clericalism.”

Still, the facts of history notwithstanding, it can be maintained that there is no theoretical or logical necessity for the conglutination of the different categories of the “sacred profession.” Religions are also imaginable wherein not all four elements are found, but only one, two, or three of them; or wherein the different elements are represented by different people. In case, however, one wants to reform an existing situation of clericalism or too great a conglutination of spiritual powers, one needs to be armed with a well-thought-out theory of the religious community or church. In Christianity, this aspect of the religion has received much theological attention in what we call *ecclesiology*. Buddhism, however, is said to have well-developed theories

of the Dharma and of the Buddha, but practically no theory of the sangha. The task of elaborating a “Buddhist ecclesiology” thus awaits you.

The history of Christianity certainly shows a strong case of the conglutination of the different roles mentioned above, but there may be one redeeming point: in many phases of church history the monks have been able to resist the conglutination and to keep their identity intact (although in other periods they have shared in the powers and privileges of the clerical class). They have thus lain at the basis of many a reformation of the church. It may be remembered here that Luther was a monk.

THE PROTESTANT REFORMATION AS A MODEL

The reformation that took place in Western Christianity during the sixteenth century has often been cited as a model in Sōka Gakkai circles these last few years. I have already suggested that it may not be radical enough to serve as a model for what the S.G.I. wants to do at present. Here I want to add one more word of warning regarding use of the Protestant Reformation as a model. First, a very general remark: we should use to the full the advantage that historical hindsight offers and carefully investigate such questions as whether the Reformation brought only progress and whether the successive generations of Protestants were able to maintain the true aims of the Reformation, etc. And, more directly with regard to the *seishokusha* problem, we should study carefully which elements of the established situation the reformers wanted to discard.

Not being a specialist in the history of the Reformation, I can offer only two points that I think are well established. First, what the reformers wanted to reject was the usurpation by the priests of all contact with God. This is the basis for their insistence that all Christian faithful have the priestly character, and that the Bible represents a direct link with God (this claim was made possible by the invention of printing, and it made translation of the Bible into the vernacular a necessity). They also rejected, of course, the monopolization of all ecclesiastical power in the hands of a special clerical class. They did not necessarily reject, however, the existence of specially ordained (set apart, made “sacred”) ministry for the service of the faithful. Luther and Calvin appear to have recognized the necessity of such a group for the purpose of administering the sacraments. Later some Protestant groups, like the Quakers (and possibly Japan’s *Mukyōkai* 無教会 people), rejected even that role in favor of a purely inner contact with God.

Second, it seems clear to me that the reformers made at least one big mistake, namely, the rejection of the monastic ideal. It may be true that at the time the monks participated too much in the powers and privileges of the

clerical class, but that was not sufficient reason to throw the precious baby out with the bathwater.

WHAT DOES THE S.G.I. NEED AS *SEISHOKUSHA*?

Here we come to the crux of the problem, and I shall make my points starting with the relatively straightforward and proceeding to the more debatable.

1. It is clear that, as a social organization, the S.G.I. needs leaders, and that, since the authority of these leaders rests on religious considerations, they will have some kind of “sacred” character and thus be, in a sense, *seishokusha*. The all-important thing will then be that all faithful have access to positions in that leadership, provided they have the necessary intellectual and moral qualifications, and that the leadership does not become the monopoly of one special group. However, denying the “priests” that monopoly does not of itself guarantee general accessibility. One has to be very careful also that no other “special group” appropriates that position.

2. I believe that the S.G.I., like all religions nowadays, stands in need of religious specialists for the purification, adaptation, and defense of its doctrine and so on. This involves two problems. First, since we refer here to the study of sacred doctrine, a merely “objective” study is not sufficient: it must be a study informed by faith—not a mere “buddhology,” but “theology” in the true sense. The people who do that obtain thereby to a kind of sacred character and authority (i.e., they become *seishokusha*). This, however, leads to a second problem: What happens in case the interpretation of the doctrine these specialists come up with differs from the interpretation desired by the leadership? Will the final right of interpretation of the doctrine rest with the leadership, and, if so, whereon would that right (“magisterium” in Christian terms) be based? On this point, the “struggles” in the Catholic Church between Rome and some theologians may be instructive.

3. We now come to a more delicate question: Does the S.G.I. need priests? It needs, and I believe already has, ministers: local caretakers of the faithful. But the real problem is whether it will need ordained ministers, people endowed with special religious powers in the service of the faithful. I hesitate to say this, but my feeling is that the S.G.I. will be hard-pressed to avoid this kind of priesthood. There is on the one hand the question of the administration of the *Gohonzon*, and, on the other, the psychological need of ordinary people for a kind of mediatorship, especially with regard to memorial services for the ancestors.

4. What, finally, about monks (*shukke* 出家)? Here we must remember that the ideal of monastic life denotes an institution of people who, away from all

social powers and priestly privileges, endeavor to live in a radical way the religion they believe in. They can thereby become models for the community and safeguard the quality of the community's religious life. Seen in that light, would not the existence of a monkhood be a great plus also for the S.G.I.? Always on condition, of course, that it be a monkhood divested of all the other roles it came to assume in later Buddhism. This is another of my fantasies: Would it not be splendid if the first real lay Buddhism would reintroduce the Buddhist monkhood in its real sense!

All in all, I think that the S.G.I. should not be afraid of *seishokusha*, as long as it can implement the good democratic principle of the division of the different powers and keep the different roles of the *seishokusha* apart.

Religion and Society (Especially Politics)

This issue might, in Nichiren Buddhist terms, involve the problem of the contemporary meaning of Nichiren Shōnin's *Risshō Ankokuron*. Of course, history shows, both in the case of Christianity and of Buddhism, that all kinds of relationships, collusions, compromises, and struggles exist between religion and the powers that be. But what triggers the question in our case is, evidently, the renewed discussion about the relationship of Sōka Gakkai and Kōmeitō, now that the latter has passed from the opposition to the governing coalition. Since time is getting short, a few elementary remarks will have to do here.

What is the real meaning of the principle of the separation of religion and state? I, as an amateur in the field, would think that its basic meaning lies in the following two points. First of all, the principle attempts to safeguard the autonomy of the secular realms of human society. Historically speaking, these secular realms—law, politics, science, art, etc.—developed, in a sense, out of religion or at least in intimate connection with religion. Once they grew up, however, they had to claim and obtain independence from their parent in order to reach full development and maturity. That kind of thinking developed in the European Aufklärung. It was bitterly opposed by the Christian establishment for a rather long time, but in our twentieth century the main Christian churches have come to admit its validity. It may be important to remark here that even today Islam (and Communism) does not recognize this principle and continues to hold that religion (or ideology) must regulate all aspects of social life.

In most milieus, however, the problem lies in the interpretation of the principle. The original thesis of the Aufklärers was: "Religion is a totally private matter (one that belongs to the "inner chambers" or the "sacristy") and

must not interfere in society.” I do not really know, but I fear that most Japanese intellectuals still carry that interpretation in their heads. It can safely be said, however, that this interpretation is by now out of date. As I stressed before, it is becoming commonly accepted that religion is not limited to the individual but carries a responsibility toward society. On the one hand, it is certainly true that religion has no political authority, neither toward the individual nor toward society, and that religious doctrine cannot directly become a political (or scientific, legal, aesthetic) principle. On the other hand, since religious salvation concerns the whole human being (including the “political animal”), it is only natural that religion indirectly influence politics. This has in fact been recognized since the beginning of this century in most European countries, where, for example, the existence of political parties with the word “Christian” in their names is taken for granted. In other words, from the moment Christianity gave up all “absolutist” claims over politics, people no longer saw any contradiction in the desire to do politics on the basis of a Christian spirit. The surrender of such absolutist claims was, indeed, the necessary condition for the subsequent evolution in the European mentality.

Another purpose of the separation of religion and state is, of course, the protection of the freedom of all religions in a particular society. Thus, assuming that one can still speak of a “Christian country” (in that the mores of the country are deeply imbued by Christianity), this term should no longer mean that people of other religions are oppressed or reduced to second-class citizenship in that country.

One more aspect of the church-state division may be important for our discussion, an aspect that, in a Buddhist context, could be best formulated this way: There should be a tension between “Buddha Law” (*buppō* 仏法) and “King’s Law” (*ōbō* 王法). In other words, a religion should not identify itself too intimately with any established political regime. The reason for this is that religion can contribute to the sound development of a human society mainly by offering a second, independent standpoint from which existing situations can be criticized and, from there, corrected. In that respect, the theories of the identity of Buddha Law and King’s Law, which have been so influential in the history of Chinese and Japanese Buddhism, must be judged rather severely. They have greatly contributed to the demise of Buddhism as an efficient social force in these countries.

Tolerance and Religious Truth

This time I must be really brief, but the question of tolerance has become so

important nowadays that we cannot simply leave it out of consideration. Many religions—each with its own, often very different, truth—must now coexist on our “spaceship earth.” The nature of this coexistence will determine whether the religions threaten peace in the world or contribute to it. The existential question is, then, whether the zeal to propagate our own religion does not imply the desire to overcome the “truth” of other religions for the sake of the “truth” of our own. I want to briefly introduce to you the reflections on this point that have been going on recently in Christianity, in the hope that you may find pointers for your own reflection.

I have already remarked that this kind of reflection is taking place in Christianity in the discipline known as the theology of religions. As you probably know, during the Second Vatican Council in 1965 the Catholic Church proclaimed a rather radical change in its attitude and way of thinking with regard to other religions: “Until now we saw the other religions only as objects of mission (proclamation, conversion—*kōsen rufu* 広宣流布); from now on we want to see them also as partners in dialogue.” The delicate question is whether these two do not imply contradictory attitudes—in other words, whether proclamation and dialogue can coexist. (The Roman curia has recently promulgated an interesting document on this precise point, called “Dialogue and Proclamation” [1991].)

I suppose that the traditional way of thinking of Christianity was rather similar to that of Nichiren Buddhism—correct me if I am wrong—and could be roughly described as follows: The truth, which we possess, is absolute; there is no other truth that can save people and lead them to true happiness; to do away with everything that opposes this truth is necessary for the true good of humankind. At first sight, this looks like a quite immovable position. In which direction, then, could the Christian “rethinking” be going? Presented in my own way, the picture is more or less as follows.

Borrowing a Buddhist paradigm, the present problem could be said to be the contemporary edition of the contradiction between wisdom (*chie* 知恵) and mercy (*jihi* 慈悲) in the bodhisattva path. The truth of religion remains absolute as before, and the faithful must entrust themselves to the truth of their religion, uphold it as their own true life, and try to share it with other people. *However*, two important points should not be forgotten.

First, the truth that we “possess” is, in a sense, *partial truth*; there can be other truths besides it. For me, however, the partial truth of my religion is the one that can lead me to the full truth, the one that is entrusted to me, the one that I must represent and spread in the world. Furthermore, there is a real sense wherein the absolute truth, which my religion possesses, is a *relative* truth, a truth contained in all-too-human “vessels of clay.” The con-

sciousness that we humans cannot “hold” the full truth in our concepts and words—so strongly present in the Buddhist tradition, with its concept of *upāya*, its theory of the “two truths,” etc., and to a lesser degree also in Christianity’s “negative theology”—must come to life in a new way today.

Second, truth not accompanied by love is not yet real truth. This, as far as I can see, is *the* big lesson Mahāyāna Buddhism learned and proclaimed. In a Christian context, the reflection could go somewhat as follows. Seen on the level of praxis, the truth that Jesus taught was love. Love is recognizing the other as other. In our traditional attitude toward other religions, we Christians, therefore, sinned against the truth of Jesus’s commandment of love. For while we may have done our best to recognize other people as fellow humans, we excluded them in their religious identity from that attitude. In other words, we have not been able to love others in their otherness, *ari no mama ni*. In history, this attitude has been conducive to a Christian “collective egoism” and has led to terrible consequences: religious war, the destruction of culture, etc.

Could it be that also for Nichiren Buddhism, and in particular for Sōka Gakkai, the time for a similar reflection has come: “Have we really understood Nichiren Shōnin’s message, or have we gone against its true spirit?”