

Religion in Japan 2002

Shunning Religion, Questioning National Identity

MAEKAWA Michiko

前川理子

International Institute for the Study of Religion

This report on religion in Japan in 2002 is a slightly abridged translation of a report first published in Japanese as 「宗教忌避とナショナル・アイデンティティをめぐる宗教の今時の状況」 in 『現代宗教 2003』, 248–63, a journal published annually by the International Institute for the Study of Religion. As in recent years, we received permission from the author to translate her report into English in order to provide information on the current state of religious issues in Japanese society for our readers.

9/11 and Religion in Japan

IN THE FIRST year of the twenty-first century, the 9/11 terror attacks and the following invasion of Afghanistan have drawn the world's attention. In Japan as well, interest in terrorism and Islam has increased sharply. In larger bookstores sections have been devoted to the topic, and books that offer simple explanations of Islam or other religions have appeared one after the other. Magazines have offered special features on the topic, and thus almost doubled their circulation. Religious terms such as “fundamentalism” and “jihad” have entered common usage.

Immediately after the terrorist attacks, Conrad Raiser, the General Secretary of the WCC, and others called for a non-violent, peaceful solution to the world's problems, and within Japan as well religious leaders issued statements condemning the use of terror. A statement issued by the Japan Committee of the WCRP on 18 September 2001, “A Statement Regarding the Terrorist Attacks on the United States,” is one example. The statement offers condolences to the victims of the attacks, and, at the same time, urges that the attacks be understood apart from any religious justifications. After the attack on the Taliban regime in Afghanistan began on 7 October, the Japanese Association of Religious Organizations issued a statement denouncing both terrorism and the British and American military response. Buddhism, Shinto, Christianity, and the New Religions have adopted a common stance

in opposition to the use of force. Although the Japanese government supported the invasion of Afghanistan, and passed an Anti-Terrorism Special Measures Law, most religious leaders in Japan have opposed these measures, and have issued statements to Prime Minister Koizumi, the Japanese government, and the American president calling the “war of revenge” a mistake and asking for a peaceful resolution. A fund was also set up to assist the victims of the terrorist attacks and Afghanistan refugees. In this regard, a survey taken in September 2002 indicated that only thirty-seven percent of the people believed that the invasion of Afghanistan would help to end terror (sixty-two percent said it wouldn’t), and only fourteen percent favored an invasion of Iraq, while seventy-seven percent opposed it (*Asahi Shinbun*, 8 September 2002).

It appears that the 9/11 attacks reaffirmed the need for interreligious dialogue for many religious leaders. Since September 11, there have been frequent exchanges among religious groups, and prayers for the victims and prayers for peace have been offered in interreligious services throughout the country. A number of symposia as well as less formal study meetings have also been held. Many of these, such as “Islam’s Meaning for Japanese” (Japanese Association of Religious Organizations) and “Understanding Islam: Dialogue and Cooperation for Peace” (Japan Committee of the WCRP Youth Group), were held for the purpose of deepening the understanding of Islam in Japan, where the religion is not yet well known. There have been numerous joint efforts sponsored by religious groups, and joint sponsorship in these events by the Japan Muslim Association has been prominent. The ceremony held to commemorate the fifteenth anniversary of the Mt. Hiei Religious Summit on 5 August 2002, titled “Prayer for Peace and Dialogue with Islam,” had an attendance of 2200, including religious leaders from Japan and abroad, as well as the general public. Japanese religious leaders have also participated in similar meetings held abroad. Thirty representatives of the Tendai sect, Risshō Kōseikai, Jinrui Aizenkai, and the Japanese Association of Religious Organizations responded to the call of the Pope in Rome and participated in the Vatican Forum. About one hundred Japanese also attended the Sixth Meeting of the Asian Conference for Religion and Peace in Indonesia.

9/11 and subsequent developments created an atmosphere where approval of the War Contingency Legislation seems likely, and concerns about this development have spurred the activities of religious leaders. The “Christian Network for Peace” and the “Meeting of Religious Leaders Seeking Peace” brought together by Nipponzan Myōhōji led to the launching of the “Network of Religious Leaders for Peace” in April 2002 as a peace effort of religious leaders opposed to the War Contingency Legislation. 170 people from nine religious organizations participate in the network. On 24 May a conference titled “Stop the War Contingency Legislation!” cosponsored by labor unions was held in Tokyo, followed by a demonstration rally that attracted forty thousand people. In addition, Shinshū Ōtaniha,

Honzan Shūgendō, and Tendai Jimonshū have each adopted resolutions at their denominational assemblies opposing the legislation. The reasons given for the opposition were that the legislation is unconstitutional, that it violates the Buddhist precept against the taking of life, and that it threatens the foundations of democratic society. At a meeting in July of the special committee of the Lower House of the Diet considering the War Contingency Legislation the question was asked as to whether religious facilities such as churches, shrines or temples might be expropriated in time of war. Since the head of the Cabinet Legislation Bureau responded that they “could possibly be expropriated,” some have pointed out that the War Contingency Legislation raises problems with regard to the freedom of religion.

The American government has called the 9/11 terrorist attacks a “new war.” The military operation was at one time given the name “Infinite Justice,” and President Bush has also made reference to a “Crusade.” On the other hand, Bin Laden has called for a “Holy War.” Fearful that Islam might be used in order to martial forces against the Americans, leaders of Islam have been eager to condemn violence and terror as against the teaching of Islam, and separate Islam from any connection with terrorism.

Observing all this from a distance here in Japan a certain tone of argument is frequently heard. That is, that we should stress the values of harmony, typical of Japan from the time of Shōtoku Taishi, and the Buddhist spirit of “absolute pacifism.” This argument takes pride in Japan’s polytheism, or pantheism. It points out that the behind the 9/11 terrorism and its revenge lies a “theistic value system,” that is, “the mistaken idea that only our God is right.” This kind of argument is easy to understand, and it is attractive in that it posits Japanese “tolerance” in opposition to what we see happening in the world. However, this kind of dualism is not that far removed from that which presses the choice, “Do you stand with America, or with the terrorists?” When you look around the world, you see that polytheistic Hinduism and tolerant Buddhism have also been involved in conflict. On the other hand, Islam has also had a history of tolerance, and Christianity teaches that “if you are hit on the right cheek, turn and offer the other.” Even if Japan is a “tolerant” country, that is no reason to see ourselves as unique.

Regarding this point, the activity of the Myōshin-ji group of the Rinzai sect is worth mention. The group used the 9/11 terrorist attacks as an opportunity to reflect on their responsibility for participation in World War II, and to repent for that activity. Many of the Buddhist groups in Japan carry the burdens of a past marked by cooperation in the prewar period, and are well aware of how easily religion can be used in times of war. Their opposition to war is based on an understanding of human conduct and the shadowy side of human nature. Based on their experience of coexistence with other religions, and somewhat removed from the conflict, they feel that they should have something to offer the world today.

World Cup Fever: Sports Nationalism and Religious Customs

The World Cup started on 31 May, and the festival played out over the course of a month. During this period, Christian and Shinto activities stood out. Some of the Christian churches cooperated in promoting World Cup missionary activities called "Goal 2002." Centering on the ten cities where World Cup matches were played, over 130 events, from small-scale to those attracting over one thousand participants, were held, with the cooperation of five hundred overseas volunteers and six hundred volunteers from Japan. It is reported that a total of more than ninety thousand people participated in these events. Friendly matches were held with foreign Christian teams; missionaries were sent to schools to teach soccer; people gathered in churches to watch the World Cup matches and listen to the missionaries give witness; and tracts, Bibles, videos and CDs containing testimonials by soccer players were distributed. A missionary team also came to Japan specifically to preach to Arabs, and efforts were made to promote the difficult mission to Arabs in the Islamic world.

The 3300 members of the National Shinto Young People's Association adopted as a main part of their action program for 2002 the use of the opportunity of the World Cup to promote the national flag and national anthem. Instead of their identification with Japanese militarism, the wars of invasion, and the right wing, the Shinto group sought to use the World Cup as an opportunity to make the Rising Star flag and the anthem in praise of the emperor a more natural part of the Japanese identity. They had children from around the country draw the flag and write a message to the players on the Japan national team on the reverse side. These were then collected and distributed to supporters at the games. The children saw the flags they had made on television, and the supporters in the stadium came to appreciate the flag more through their connection with the children that had made them—quite an idea.

It is said that soccer promotes nationalism. People claim that the spread of soccer in Central and South America in the first half of the twentieth century contributed to national unity and laid the foundations for the development of national identity. What about Japan and the World Cup? Young people painted the Rising Sun on their face, waved the flag and joined the players in singing the national anthem. Although the flag and anthem are often identified with militarism, "kamikaze," and the "undefeatable Land of the Gods," during the World Cup young and old alike waved the flag while shouting "Nippon, Nippon!" While some saw in this style of cheering a turn to the right or a resurgence of nationalism, others saw it as a hopeful sign that a new generation of young people who love their country was emerging. In addition, there were those who pointed to the young people who went so far as to wear the uniforms of other national teams and cheer

for those teams as “appropriate for the new international age,” and saw here “the Japanese of the future” who have overcome the boundaries of nationalism.

Although in this way various meanings have been attached to Japanese behavior during the World Cup, one gets the impression that much ado has been made of nothing. A recent national survey indicates that although 53% of the people have favorable feelings towards the flag and national anthem, when asked if they would “take up arms and oppose” an invasion by another country only 19% responded positively, while those who said they “would run away” were 33.7%—ten percent more than in a previous survey; adding those who said they would surrender, this figure becomes 39.7% (*Yomiuri Shinbun*, 14 November 2002). Leaving aside the question of whether the World Cup led to a resurgence of Japanese nationalism, it would appear that the Japanese consciousness is still far removed from a “return to militarism.”

At any rate, the coming together of athletes from all over the world for the World Cup provided an opportunity to see all kinds of religious customs. Among those customs, what particularly attracted the attention of the Japanese was the “sorcerers” of the African teams. There was a rumor that supporters of the African teams brought along dozens of sorcerers to sit in the stands to use “juju” magic during the matches. It was said that juju is a serious problem in Africa, and that it was banned during the qualifying matches there. During the World Cup, whenever a player from Senegal scored a goal the players would gather at the corner flag and do a mysterious dance, and some wondered whether this also didn’t have some religious meaning.

Beginning with the soccer superpowers of Italy and Brazil, the countries of Europe and South America are Christian countries. One of the most popular members of the Italian team in Japan, their coach Giovanni Trapattoni, is a Catholic. It was said that his sister, a nun, sent him bottled *aqua santa* (holy water) for the World Cup. Before the matches he would use the holy water to make a sign of the cross. Once when he touched the bottle of holy water Totti took a shot at the goal, and although it hit the post and was returned it was said that Trapattoni attributed the chance to the holy water. The Anglican Church produced a special prayer for the victory of the English team. Although it is perhaps all right to pray for victory for the national team, to the surprise of many it was reported that the prayer included phrases like, “God, strike fear in the hearts of the Brazilian players,” “God, raise your hand to take away the strength of Ronaldo and Rivaldo, to confuse Ronaldinho.” Not only were mass times changed to accommodate the timing of the matches, some churches came under criticism for going too far by broadcasting the games in church for the believers. In the neighboring country of Korea, it was said that the curse of Tangun—believed to be the founder of the country—was used to defeat the Korean team’s opponents, and that it worked!

What about Japan, the home of the religious emphasis on “this-worldly benefits?” Shrines close to places where the national teams had their camps or close to the stadiums were extremely busy during the World Cup. Supporters crowded Ashiō-sha in Aichi-ken, where the “Soccer god” is worshipped, and Yatagarasu Jinja in Nara-ken, where a stone statue of a 90 centimeter Yatagarasu with a soccer ball on its head can be found, to pray for the success of their team. The Yatagarasu is a god in the form of a bird that can be found on the Japan national team emblem and uniform. It is a large bird that appears in Japanese mythology, an appearance of the god Kamotaketsunumi no mikoto 賀茂建角身命, sent by Amaterasu Omikami to guide Emperor Jinmu when he was lost on Mt. Kumano. It is said that this was adopted as the emblem of the Japan national team because the founder of Japanese soccer was from the area near Kumano Nachi Shrine. The World Cup also saw the appearance of *ema* and *omamori* officially sanctioned by the Japan Soccer Association.

The Troussier Shrine made its appearance in Shibuya—a place for prayers to the coach of the national team, Troussier, who is seen as the one who turned the Japanese squad into a world-class team. It has a torii, and the *shintai* (神体 representation of the god) is a golden soccer ball. Messages can be left in a box much like a collection box at a shrine, or fans can record their messages of support, to be delivered to Troussier. In any competition people will turn to the gods to assure victory, but the World Cup is special. After the month of matches many people suffered symptoms of World-Cup burnout. Just three years to the next festival!

*Litigation concerning the Constitutionality of Official Visits
to Yasukuni Shrine: Questions from the Frontiers of Nationalism*

Following the official visit to Yasukuni Shrine by Prime Minister Koizumi in August 2001, litigation was filed in courts throughout the country starting in November of the same year asking for confirmation that this practice is unconstitutional, for the award of damages, and for an injunction to stop further visits. A total of over 2200 plaintiffs filed cases in the six district courts of Osaka, Fukuoka, Matsuyama, Tokyo, Chiba, and Naha. In the cases filed in Matsuyama and Naha, the return visit by the Prime Minister for the Spring festival at the shrine in April 2002 is also part of the litigation. In the Osaka, Fukuoka, and Matsuyama cases Yasukuni Shrine is listed among the defendants; the Fukuoka case also includes the government bureaucracy; and in Tokyo the metropolitan government and the governor have also been sued. Another unique feature of the case in Tokyo is that not only does it ask for confirmation of the unconstitutionality of official visits to the Shrine, but it also asks that legislative nonfeasance be confirmed as unconstitutional.

In the past, four cases were filed with the courts following the official visit of Prime Minister Nakasone. One thing worth mentioning regarding the present cases, however, is that they include among the plaintiffs the families of victims of the war now residing in Korea. The case filed in the Tokyo District Court includes 724 Korean plaintiffs. The Korean plaintiffs argue that the fact that their family members were not only forced to participate in the war of aggression but on top of that are now enshrined at Yasukuni is a violation of ethnic rights. One should also note that in the current cases for the first time Yasukuni Shrine is included as a defendant, based on Article 20 of the constitution, which states that “No religious organization shall receive any privileges from the State.”

In reviewing the issue, it is mainly the following four points that are identified as problems with the Prime Minister’s visit to the shrine.

1. Yasukuni Shrine was a major spiritual support of prewar militarism and the war of aggression, and included among the spirits enshrined there are the so-called Class A War Criminals. Therefore, visits to the shrine glorify the war of aggression and will lead to a revival of prewar State Shinto and militarism.
2. Visits by the Prime Minister to Yasukuni Shrine, a religious corporation, run counter to the principle of separation of religion and state prescribed in the constitution.
3. The visits ignore the feelings of the families of those enshrined against their will, for religious and other reasons.
4. Visits to the Shrine where Class A War Criminals are enshrined are an offense to the feelings of the people of Asia.

Especially in regards to the second point, the issue of constitutionality, the argument has already been considerably developed. Although the government at the time made the claim that the visit by former Prime Minister Nakasone in 1985 was not unconstitutional, the courts have made other judgments. In the decision handed down by the Sendai High Court regarding the Iwate Yasukuni Litigation (1991), official visits by Cabinet ministers were ruled unconstitutional, and the Osaka and Fukuoka High Courts (1992) ruled that such visits might be unconstitutional. The request by the current plaintiffs for a “confirmation of unconstitutionality” is based on these previous judgments. If there is no change in this judgment, the point of contention in the case will be whether Prime Minister Koizumi’s visit was “official” or not. If it was a “private” visit, then there is a good chance that it will be deemed to lie within the limits of the freedom of religious expression of Koizumi Junichirō, as a private individual. Regarding the third point, the problem is one of religious freedom, that is, the right to honor the dead without interference from others. In previous cases the families of the dead have argued that visits by Cabinet ministers is a violation of their religious freedom, but until now courts have not recognized such visits as a violation of this right.

Let's take a look at the opinion polls. In a survey conducted by the *Asahi Shinbun* in August 2001, roughly sixty percent said that Prime Minister Koizumi should "deal cautiously" with the issue of visits to Yasukuni Shrine, and only twenty-six percent said that he should "take a positive stand." In a national telephone survey conducted by *Kyōdō tsūshin* the next year (May 2002), fifty-three percent supported the Prime Minister's visit to the Shrine, and forty percent opposed it. If we look at the break-down according to sex and age, the highest percentage of those expressing support was among women over 70 years old (66.4%), and a majority of men in their 40s and 50s opposed the visit. More men in the 30s opposed rather than supported the visit, but fully 62.5% of men in their 20s supported the visit.

Attention should also be paid to the case in the Naha District Court, which will have a different perspective from the rest of the country. Here emphasis is paid to the fact that regular citizens became victims of the war, some murdered by the Japanese military, others through collective suicides as a result of being educated to become loyal imperial subjects. "The Japanese soldiers worshipped as heroes at Yasukuni Shrine murdered citizens suspected of being spies during the War for Okinawa, and forced others into collective suicide." Koizumi's visit to pay respect for such "heroes" is absolutely unacceptable, they say. And, with regard to the fact that the victims of the War for Okinawa are also enshrined at Yasukuni, they point out that "these people were victims, and now they are treated like those who cooperated in the war." Although they were killed as spies, now they have been forcefully enshrined at Yasukuni. We wait to see what kind of statement the country will make regarding the reality of the War for Okinawa, and how the courts will react to their suit, which claims that Koizumi's visit was just another attempt to glorify and justify prewar policy regarding Okinawa and the War for Okinawa itself.

The nationalism of the modern period was built on the premise that Japan was a homogenous, united country. Prime Minister Koizumi claims that, "Visiting Yasukuni is fundamental to what it means to be Japanese," but the questions raised in Okinawa, on the "frontier" of Japan, undermine the foundations of this premise of modern nationalism and raise doubts regarding the tendency to see all citizens equally as victims of the war.

In general, shrines do not need the permission of the deceased's relatives to enshrine the dead as heroes. All they need to do is include the name of the deceased in the rolls of the dead at the shrine in order to have them worshipped there. Among the more than two million war dead worshipped at Yasukuni almost fifty thousand conscripts from Korea are included, and in their cases as well permission to worship them at the shrine was not sought from their families. Some of the plaintiffs in the present cases are family members from Korea who had previously sought to have their relatives' names removed from the rolls in the shrine and who had had their request refused. "To be included with Class A War Criminals and to have the Prime Minister of the aggressor country come to worship means that my

father supported the invaders,” they say. This is also a question from the “frontier” of those Koreans who, while they were forced to become soldiers of the old Imperial Army, did not identify themselves as Japanese.

In a slightly different matter, it seems that some people who are still alive have mistakenly been included in the rolls of the dead at Yasukuni. Two Koreans realized recently that this had happened to them, and they brought a case last year to have their names removed from the rolls. As an independent religious corporation one can argue that Yasukuni Shrine has the freedom to decide who will be worshipped at the shrine. Regarding the Class A War Criminals, the argument has been made that once they are included in the spirits worshipped at the shrine they cannot later be separated out again. What will happen, however, in the case of those still alive who have mistakenly been included in these spirits?

Regarding having been named as a defendant in these suits, Prime Minister Koizumi said, “Its just ridiculous. You will always have some strange people carrying on in this way.” In reaction, some of the plaintiffs brought further suits demanding compensation and a public apology to be published in newspapers in both Korea and Japan. In February of the following year, when President Bush included a visit to Meiji Shrine as part of his itinerary in Japan, Prime Minister Koizumi did not accompany him, but just two months later he took the opportunity of the Spring festival at Yasukuni Shrine to make another visit there. The hearings in these suits have not yet begun.

*Memorial/Peace Roundtable Discussions
and the Plan for a New National Memorial*

Following the domestic and foreign criticism of Prime Minister Koizumi’s visit to Yasukuni Shrine, a Round-Table Discussion on the Construction of a New National Memorial/Peace Monument was established as an advisory group to the Cabinet Secretary in December 2001. Composed of lawyers, people from the business world, journalists, and others, the group was commissioned by the Prime Minister to “discuss how it is possible to memorialize the dead without arousing any ill feelings on the part of Japanese and other peoples.” Six meetings were held until the end of May last year, and since then “study meetings” have been held as necessary. Although there is general agreement that a new national memorial facility should be built, the group remains divided over who should be memorialized there.

In terms of present memorial facilities, in addition to Yasukuni Shrine there is already the Chidorigafuchi Memorial Park. Although the remains of most of the soldiers that died in the previous war are buried in local cemeteries, the remains of those who have not been identified, for example, are buried at Chidorigafuchi (about 348,000 are buried there). In contrast, 2,466,000 spirits of those who died in

the wars from the beginning of the Meiji Period are memorialized at Yasukuni. Chidorigafuchi is a non-religious national facility and, at present, Yasukuni is a private religious corporation.

Although there are no other facilities to memorialize the war dead, there are memorial ceremonies, such as the ceremony held annually on 15 August at the Budokan, conducted by the national government. Those memorialized at this ceremony are not remembered by name, as with the official roll at Yasukuni Shrine, but rather under the comprehensive concept of “all national war dead.” Of course, Class A War Criminals are included in this category, and their survivors are invited to the ceremony. In addition to soldiers and other military personnel, regular citizens that died either abroad or on the home front during the war are included, and the comprehensive nature of the memorial service is one of its characteristics.

Although the round-table discussion group has agreed that it is the right of the nation to memorialize the war dead and that there is a need to have some kind of official prayers for peace, the point of controversy has become just who should be memorialized. Should those who died in the bombing of Japanese cities be included? How about foreigners who died in the war? And the Class A War Criminals? What about fire personnel, police, and others who sacrificed their lives for the country, and volunteers? And how about those who might die in future conflicts, or as members of Peace Keeping Forces or Peace Keeping Operations, or people who work for NGO's in connection with government sanctioned operations?

How would this new national facility compare with Yasukuni? In principle only soldiers and military personnel are memorialized at Yasukuni, while at the new facility regular citizens, and perhaps even foreigners such as those who died in the Nanking Massacre, might be included. Some argue that as a sign of a new internationalized Japan the time has come to memorialize all the war dead, including foreigners, and that this might include foreign soldiers who killed Japanese. This would broaden the concept of who was being memorialized even further than the present annual national ceremony. However, there is not much support for including non-Japanese who have died since the previous war. For example, most people would presumably be opposed to including in any memorial the North Korean sailors who died recently when their ship was sunk after an exchange of gunfire in Japanese territorial waters. Regarding the controversial Class A War Criminals, the most likely plan is to avoid any specific mention of who is and isn't included among those memorialized and leave it up to the individuals who come to pray at the facility to decide who they are memorializing.

To memorialize both friend and foe without distinction is certainly an interesting idea to come out of the round-table discussion group. However, at the heart of the movement to build a new national memorial facility lies the idea that the country has an obligation to memorialize its own war dead, and this idea is based on 19th century nationalism. The idea of memorializing foreigners as well is somewhat

removed from this fundamental purpose, and thus requires some kind of justification. The round-table discussion group has suggested “Japanese tradition” as this justification. That is, the tradition that one should respect the dead, no matter who they are. Yasukuni Shrine was built out of 19th century nationalism, under the influence of the West, but the idea that “we pay respect to all the dead, be they Chinese, Korean, Taiwanese, American, friend or foe” is “a noble custom of our country” that transcends the idea behind the creation of Yasukuni, or, rather, is truly a return to our roots.

In fact, the German practice of memorializing both their own military dead and the victims of the concentration camps together already offers an example of this kind of practice outside of Japan. Or, treating prisoners of war in accord with the principles of the Red Cross is another indication that fair treatment of the enemy is an idea seen broadly throughout the world. However, as one of the participants in the round-table discussion group has pointed out, for example, Hojo Tokimune’s decision to memorialize the fallen enemy along with his own soldiers at Enkakuji is based on a distinguishing characteristic of Japanese religiosity. That is, the Buddhist idea of impartiality, or the Japanese folk belief in *goryō*, or vengeful spirits. The first comes from the idea of *jihī*, treating both those who do you well and those who do you harm impartially. The latter is the belief that those who have died under unfortunate circumstances can cause harm through *tatari*, or curses, and to prevent such curses Japanese treat the spirits of the dead with respect. The *Shinsen goryōe* was formed to appease the spirits of Sawaranomiko and his companions, and Sugawara Michizane was similarly memorialized, and is believed to have become the god Tenman-tenjin. Some religious researches say that the memorialization of the war dead is also based on *goryō* belief. Putting aside the question as to whether the idea that the spirits of the enemy should be memorialized in order to prevent them from doing harm through curses can be called “a noble custom of our country,” as one member of the round-table discussion group has claimed, it is nevertheless an interesting proposal.

However, there are those who are opposed to any new national memorial facility, saying that the whole concept goes against the sensitivities of the Japanese people. Included in this group are members of the coalition parties in the current administration, the members of “Parliamentarians to Promote Visits to Yasukuni Shrine” (led by the former head of the Defense Agency, Kawara Tsutomu) and the Bereaved Families Association. Based on their position that any new facility is unnecessary, they have formed the “Citizens’ Group to Urge the Prime Minister to Visit Yasukuni Shrine.” Along with the “Action Group to Respond to our Heroes” this group sponsored a protest march against the idea of a new facility that attracted about 2200 participants, who marched behind a banner proclaiming, “Opposition to a National Memorial Facility that Betrays the Heroes of Yasukuni Shrine.”

In turn, opponents of Yasukuni Shrine were spurred to form their own organization, “The Assembly to Build a New National Memorial Facility.” Leading this group are the head of the Jōdo Shinshū Honganjiha, the religious commentator Hiro Sachiya, the head of Risshō Kōseikai’s Public Relations Office, lawyers and journalists, and they have promoted the establishment of a facility where anybody can remember the dead in whatever way they see fit, and have called for an end to visits of Yasukuni Shrine by the Prime Minister. However, not all religious leaders have adopted the same position regarding the new facility. The idea that any new facility will be “preparation for another war, for more war dead” or “a second Yasukuni” remains strong, and they oppose any new establishment because of the fear that there is no way to exclude the possibility that it will become a new, national Yasukuni Shrine.

In the round-table discussion group it has been argued that, “Many have given their lives since the Meiji Restoration to preserve national peace and independence, and there is no guarantee that more will not be called upon to sacrifice in the future. Our present peace and prosperity is built on the honorable sacrifices of the war dead.” Religious leaders who oppose the new facility point out that such arguments are based on the assumption that there will be “future sacrifices” and, in conjunction with legislation regarding Self Defense Force participation in UN peacekeeping activities and the new War Contingency Legislation, any new facility could become a mechanism for producing new national heroes, meaning new war dead. In addition, probably without thinking of the implications, members of the round-table discussion group use the word “worship” in speaking of the war dead. Such usage indicates that even a “non-religious” facility will have religious overtones, and there is no way to exclude the possibility that it will just become a “new, national Yasukuni Shrine.” At present, members of the Self Defense Forces who die in connection with their job are not enshrined at Yasukuni, but if a new non-religious facility is built there is the possibility that they might be included there, without fear of violating the constitutional separation of religion and state.

Families of the war dead remember their relatives not only at Yasukuni or at some possible new facility, but also at their own local temples and churches. So, religious leaders ask, why do we need a national memorial? No one has yet attempted to answer this question.

Religion as a Social Problem: The Court Cases

For the past few years, problem religious groups have been the focus of attention, and criminal charges have been brought against several such groups. Several of these cases against groups such as Aum Shinrikyō, Hōnohana, and Life Space have come to a conclusion, or are now arriving at such a resolution. However, some of

the groups continue to exist as religious organizations, and, as in the case of Aum, even as the court cases wind up conflict continues between the group and society. Here I will try to summarize the present situation of Aum and describe some of the conclusions from the other court cases.

AUM SHINRIKYŌ (ALEPH)

Activities: Aum headquarters are now found in Setagaya, in Tokyo, where the director, Jōyu Fumihiro, lives with ninety other members in three apartment blocks. In the aftermath of 9/11 Aum attracted much attention, and commentators made much of comparisons between Aum and al-Qaida. In response, Aum opened its facilities to the public and tried to “present an image of reformation, in order to achieve public understanding.” Jōyu’s activities have been prominent. He has set up his own homepage and published his own works; in 2002 he received the title of Seitashi, the highest rank in the group; and he has formally been appointed the representative for the group. In the summer a *shaktipat* ceremony was held—the first time since the Aum Affair in 1995—and he has started bestowing “holy names” upon the members, a practice that in the past was something that only Asahara, the former founder, was allowed to perform. As of August 2002 there were about 1200 believers in the group. The Public Security Investigation Agency reports that there are also believers in Russia.

Cases Regarding the Refusal of Local Authorities to Allow Aleph Believers to Register as Residents: Judgments in court cases brought by Aleph believers against local officials who have not allowed them to register as residents have also begun to be handed down. Of twenty-nine cases brought nationwide, as of August 2002 twelve have already issued in a judgment, and four cases on appeal have likewise been decided. In all of these cases the local authorities have lost, including the case in Setagaya-ku, where Jōyu and the other members are living. The ward has decided not to appeal the case, but instead it has enacted a new law aimed at Aum, the first of its kind in the country. Called the “Ordinance to Secure a Safe and Peaceful Neighborhood” it is in fact directed against Aleph, and it allows for public funding of anti-Aleph activities.

Court Cases Related to the Aum Affair: Of a total of nearly two hundred believers charged with crimes related to the Aum Affair, only three yet await initial judgment. Over two hundred hearings have been held on the thirteen charges brought against the former founder, and the defense began to make its case in May of last year. However, Asahara continues to refuse to meet with his lawyers, and so they have been forced to base their defense on the answer given to the charges by Asahara in 1997, when he claimed innocence for all the crimes. A total of 163 people were called as witnesses by the prosecution during the course of the five years and nine months it took to make its case. The lawyers for the defense had presented a

list of almost two hundred potential witnesses, but the vast majority refused to appear in court, and in the end only eighteen witnesses have been called. Most of these have been former or present leaders of the group, but Asahara's former wife, Matsumoto Tomoko herself refused to appear in court at the last minute, making things even more difficult for the defense lawyers. It is still unknown if Asahara himself will testify, and it is expected that the prosecutors will make their request for sentencing sometime next year. (Translator's note: Asahara did refuse to testify, as expected, and on 24 April 2003 the prosecutors called for a sentence of death. A judgment will likely be made early in 2004.)

Most of the other former leaders of Aum refused to testify while judgment was still pending in their own cases. However, now that we have arrived at the stage where Asahara himself will be called to testify, some have begun to come forward. One of these is Niimi Tomomitsu, who proclaimed his continuing belief in the former founder, and freely offered testimony that was damaging both to himself and to Asahara. He declared that their position as religious believers puts them beyond the reach of any worldly courts, and gave as his reason for testifying freely his wish to leave a "factual history" of Aum. The death sentence has also been handed down in his case, and he seems to want to become a "martyr" by remaining faithful to his beliefs. Last year death sentences were handed down in two cases involving former leaders of the group, including Niimi's case, bringing to nine the total number already sentenced to death.

LIFE SPACE AND KAEDA JUKU

We are beginning to see judgments in cases involving two groups that attracted a lot of attention in 1999 and 2000 for incidents involving mummification—Life Space in Narita and Kaeda Juku in Miyazaki. The former representative of Life Space was charged with murder for removing a sixty-six year old man who had suffered a stroke from the hospital and for leaving the man unattended after performing a "shaktipat." He has received a prison sentence of fifteen years. Kaeda Juku began as a self-enhancement seminar and is now a group of about fifty members, about half of whom live a commune lifestyle. In 2000, the mummified bodies of two children were found, and the representative of the juku and others have been charged with negligence in their deaths. Defense lawyers entered a plea of innocent, saying that the defendants tried to protect the children by religious means. Judgment was made against the defendants, however, saying that prayers are not sufficient and that medical care should have been given, and that the bodies should not have been left to mummify for a year or two. A prison sentence of seven years was given. The defendants in both cases are appealing the decisions.

HŌNOHANA

Hōnohana Sanpōgyō was a religious organization with a headquarters consisting of eight buildings on land over six thousand square meters in Shizuoka, and self-reported membership of one hundred thousand. However, 1280 former believers sued the group for damages amounting to 6,900,000,000 yen for engaging in the unscientific practice of “foot reading” and demanding exorbitant donations to engage in religious practices. In 2000, the founder, Fukunaga Hōgen, was arrested on charges of fraud, and his case continues. Within a year of the arrest of the founder the group was forced into bankruptcy and disbanded. A group of believers formed a new organization, “The Harmony of the Happy Family” (*Yorokobi kazoku no wa*), but it appears that this organization has also disappeared. The charge of fraud is based on the fact that recordings of interviews with the group’s leaders were made with hidden cameras, and after viewing the tape the founder would surprise the new recruit with his knowledge of their problems and urge them to join and make large contributions by threats such as, “You’re going to get cancer if you continue as you are!” A pyramid scheme of paying recruiters for each new member that joined was also employed. Former leaders of the group have already been sentenced to between three to five years for participating in these schemes, but the sentencing of the founder will take some time yet.

TAIDŌ

There has also been a case in Kyushu where the founder of a new religious movement has been sued for damages by a group of former believers, that of the Kenkō o Mamoru Kai/Taidō, which used the practice of *tekazashi* to attract new believers. 120 former believers brought cases in three district courts (Nagasaki, Saga, and Fukuoka) in 1996 against the former president of the group, and although the cases continue in court, a judgment was made this past year by the Nagasaki court. The court decided that the founder took advantage of people’s ill health to make them anxious, and used miracle-like performances (such as changing the taste of sake and juice) to fool people into joining the group, and ordered that 33,200,000 yen in damages be paid. The group charged a membership fee of 1,400,000 yen/person, offered five levels of courses for which members were charged from 200,000 to 1,000,000 yen, and members were assigned a norm of new recruits as a condition for promotion. This system of recruitment and collection of funds was deemed to be “a clear deviation from social norms, and against the law” by the court. Doubt was also expressed regarding the effect of *tekazashi*, and it was called “merely a means to get money,” which has led the defendants to appeal the case on the grounds that there is some kind of “life function” that gives a healing power to *tekazashi*, and its use is therefore not against the law. Although Taidō was disbanded in 1999, other groups associated with it continue to operate. The lawyers

working against the group have asked that these groups be forcefully disbanded.

The lawyers have also been critical of the Agency for Cultural Affairs. They claim that Taidō and the other groups associated with it are merely “businesses under the guise of religion,” and they are using their status as a religious corporation to hide their true intent. The government took no action in the case of Hōnohana, and it was the victims and their lawyers who had to force it into bankruptcy, they claim. The Religious Affairs Section of the Agency for Cultural Affairs, for its part, claims that a decision made in civil court is not grounds to order the disbanding of a religious corporation.

(The foregoing is based on information retrieved from the database—articles culled from newspapers, magazines, and religious journals—of the Religious Information Research Center of The International Institute for the Study of Religion.)

[translated by Robert Kisala]