

# RELIGION AND MODERN LIFE II

Prepared by Yoshiro Tamura

(A report of three Round Table Conferences)

(Concluded from Vol. III No. 1)

**Note:** The designations used to identify the religious traditions of the participants are as follows : B—Buddhist, (Tendai [t], Shingon [sg], Jōdo [j], Zen [z], Shin [s], Nichiren [n]), C—Christian (Catholic [c], Protestant [p]), SS—Shrine Shintō, S—Shinto sects (Fusō-kyō [f], Misogi-kyō [m]), O—others (Konkō-kyō [k], Tenri-kyō [t], World Messianity [m], Seichō-no-Ie [s]).

## VIII. Social Ethics

### Religion and ethics

**O<sub>m</sub>:** The problems taken up in the field of morals, from the standpoint of our religion (World Messianity) are mostly concerned with the practice of faith. In other words, faith when transformed into conduct becomes ethics. Conversely, ethics when probed deeply reaches faith. We think that religion and ethics are one.

Ethics, as we use the term, however, does not mean precepts. We regard a way of living restrained by precepts as bad. Precepts are to prevent evil acts from the outside, but we take this up as a problem of a mind intending to commit evil acts. We deem it necessary to make people naturally aware that doing evil is not good, and doing good is pleasant. In this sense, we are guiding believers from a very liberal standpoint, keeping precepts to a minimum.

**B<sub>j</sub>:** I think that it is questionable whether or not any principle

giving a foundation to daily life or ethics can be derived from religion itself. For example, in Pure Land Buddhism, Hōnen<sup>a</sup> says, "Livelihood in the present life shall be made in such a way that the *nembutsu*<sup>b</sup> can be practised." What impresses us in these words is that the *nembutsu* is first and actual life is nothing but a means for the *nembutsu*; or that, whatever actual life may be, we should accept it as it is, and practice only the *nembutsu*. In other words, actual life is only temporal without any essential significance. It is felt that such an idea can be found in Buddhism as a whole.

In Christianity, it is taught that God's love accords with love of neighbor. This seems to be a strong point in Christianity which is lacking in Buddhism. What is your view?

**C<sub>p</sub>**: In Christianity attitudes also seem to vary with the times, schools, and theologians. In the Bible Christ gives two great precepts. The first is, "You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your mind," and the second is, "Love your neighbor as yourself." Thus we know that to love God and to love our neighbors are inseparable. To meet our neighbors is to meet God, and to worship God and to serve others are inseparable in Christianity. Therefore, Christianity especially emphasizes that religion and morals should not be divided.

**B<sub>sg</sub>**: From the viewpoint of Buddhism, it can also be said that religion and ethics are not alien to each other. For example, Buddhist precepts are the foundation for morals.

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a. 法然    b. 念佛

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**S<sub>m</sub>**: State and society are maintained by morals. This must be the true way that our (Misogi-kyō<sup>a</sup>) founder showed. I am convinced that nothing but religion gives the greatest dignity and infinite strength to ethics.

**P<sub>sg</sub>**: I think that the general position of Buddhism moves from ethics to religion. But it is felt that Shinran<sup>b</sup> moves conversely from religion to ethics. In other words, ethics is destroyed by religion and through religion it is restored. The characteristic of ethics, that is, "ought to do . . . ." is changed to "to be caused naturally to do . . . ." through religion.

In Shinran ethics rooted in human reason is given up in the consciousness of deep sinfulness and then restored as an act which in Buddhism we are to do naturally.

**C<sub>p</sub>**: The same thing may be said in Christianity. The problem, however, is that ethical principles thus produced from religion are fixed, and their observance is enforced in the name of religious authority as absolute. So-called ethical norms are to be denied by religion as a relative matter limited by time and society. It is doubtful, however, whether or not even the ethical norms produced by religion are unchangeable and fixed regardless of the time.

**B<sub>s</sub>**: I think that religion fundamentally should destroy such fixed ethical norms incessantly, but there are examples also in Buddhism that they are fixed for the reason that they have been produced by religion. For instance, the Buddhist precepts were established one by one in order to prevent the disciples from repeating wrong acts committed by them. They

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a. 釈教      b. 親鸞

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were not established at once as unchangeable and compulsory. However, once adopted they were regarded as absolute and fixed. Finding it impossible to practice such precepts, Shinran in the consciousness of deep sinfulness gave them up.

**C<sub>p</sub>** : We think that something should always be created anew by touching the Buddha or Christ. Many religions, however, are conservative and try to keep the things of the past as they are.

**C<sub>p</sub>** : Christianity considers that we are living in the present through the light of a revelation that appeared in the past. In other words, God, who appeared in the past, is still working here in the present. We are answering God in the present. The historic world is, in the view of Christianity, the stage of the atonement drama, that is, Christ's crucifixion and resurrection. And we are living in this historic and actual world for the purpose of realizing God's kingdom in the future. From this viewpoint Christianity attaches importance to the historic world of God's revelation instead of ignoring it.

**B<sub>s</sub>** : Buddhism regards the present as the manifestation of karma of the long past (accumulated karma<sup>a</sup>) which is connected with the future or the other shore (*higan*<sup>b</sup>). In this sense Buddhism always places the center of the developing of the three lives\* in the present.

**B<sub>s</sub>** : As a religion, however, Buddhism seems to have the future as its objective. I think that religion should consist

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a. shuku-gō 宿業      b. 彼岸

\* Sanze 三世 past, present and future. Sometimes the past is considered as the life before birth and the future the life after death.

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in how to attain the goal in the future\*. This is different from ethics. If ethics is to be derived from Buddhism, it should be regarded as something concerning the future.

**B<sub>sg</sub>**: That may be an idea from the standpoint of Jōdo Shin Buddhism. But I am doubtful of it as right from the standpoint of Buddhism in general. For example, I think that the Five Precepts (*gokai<sup>a</sup>*) and the Ten Virtuous Acts\*\* (*jūzen<sup>b</sup>*) are moral norms themselves in close touch with this actual life.

**B<sub>s</sub>**: I think that even the Five Precepts and the Ten Virtuous Acts were established only for the purpose of religious practices such as Buddhist disciplines. Therefore, they are different from the actual ethical norms.

**B<sub>s</sub>**: General ethics is produced through the medium of wisdom or reason, isn't it?

**B<sub>sg</sub>**: What Buddhism is aiming at, however, is the perfection of human nature. Therefore, it may be understood that the Five Precepts and the Ten Virtuous Acts are the norms of actual life which we ourselves should observe.

**B<sub>s</sub>**: Buddhism sets up the Ten Virtuous Acts as the ethical standards for life, but Pure Land Buddhism starts at the point where these Ten Virtuous Acts are actually broken. In other words, this teaching is based upon the self-awakening

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a. 五戒    b. 十善

\* Here, the future means the life after death, the other shore, the Pure land, which transcends the present, that is, this actual life.

\*\* The Five Precepts are: to not kill, to not steal, to not commit adultery, to not lie, and to not take intoxicants. The Ten Virtuous Actions are: to not kill, to not steal, to not commit adultery, to not lie, to not slander, to not be double-tongued, to not exaggerate, to not be greedy, to not be angry, and to not be heretical.

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of the sinfulness that such ethics cannot be observed, and it regards the self-awakening to sinfulness as the way to salvation.

**B<sub>s</sub>**: Jōdo Shin Buddhism stands on the consciousness that ethics based on human reason cannot exist in a perfect form. However, we don't escape from this world, but live in it with the view that this world is the manifestation of our own accumulated karma for which we must assume responsibility.

**O<sub>m</sub>**: Our religion (World Messianity) teaches the norms for what ought to be done in actual social life. There occurs, however, the problem of whether it is possible or not to save man only by this means. Accordingly, a way of teaching very much like Mahayama Buddhism comes into use. In other words, freedom of conduct is completely given over to let man act voluntarily. The next stage is something like the Middle Way which means *musubu* ("to tie"), *hodoku* ("to untie"), or the establishment of a neutral point. Lastly, there develops an awareness of what should be done or should not be done by man, and through this awakening rules are spontaneously established. We try to verify this with them.

**B<sub>s</sub>**: How do you set the standard for what should or should not be done?

**O<sub>m</sub>**: Great nature is so created; so to speak, it is divine law.

**C<sub>p</sub>**: Can ordinary man know such a thing?

**O<sub>m</sub>**: When one attains the Middle Way, one can spontaneously be aware of this.

**B<sub>s</sub>**: Does Tenri-kyō emphasize ethics very much?

**O<sub>t</sub>**: Tenri-kyō teaches that obeying the divine teachings in faith makes one become a good man and realize a good life. The good life means a happy life (*yōki-gurashi<sup>a</sup>*). The happy life seems to imply sociality, that is, to be alive together with all other people. Tenri-kyō has many such doctrines as to love and aid each other, or “brotherly equality” (*ichiretsu kyōdai<sup>b</sup>*). These are emphasized as the standard for moral practices.

**C<sub>p</sub>**: When you speak of brotherly equality, do you mean also the equality of even those who are opposed to your teaching?

**O<sub>t</sub>**: Yes, we do, although this may be a very difficult problem in reality.

### Individual ethics and social ethics

**C<sub>c</sub>**: When Buddhism teaches spiritual peace and enlightenment and Christianity salvation, the problems dealt with by them seem to concern the relations between individuals or the inner problems of man.

Present society, however, involves fields which do not belong to these relationships. In other words, present-day society has become so powerful that it has become questionable as to what extent individual ethics is influential in controlling such a society.

**C<sub>p</sub>**: I think, on the contrary, that the problems of everyday life at present should appear a little more on the surface.

**Chairman** Jōdo Shin Buddhism set forth social ethics at the time of Ren'nyo,<sup>c</sup> didn't it?

<sup>a</sup>. 陽氣ぐらし    <sup>b</sup>. 一列兄弟    <sup>c</sup>. 蓮如 (1415~1499)

**B<sub>s</sub>:** When a religious organization matures, social ethics begins to be advocated in order to maintain and protect the organization. This was the case with Ren'nyo. For example, the idea of the repayment of kindness and gratitude is properly explained in the relation between the individual and Buddha, but at the time of Ren'nyo this was explained as the relation to worldly social authority. I think that the true character of Jōdo Shin Buddhism is not Ren'nyo's way but Shinran's.

**C<sub>p</sub>:** Christianity attaches importance to the historic fact that Jesus lived, died, and rose again on this earth. There is in Jesus a warning to neighbors. Love is a positive warning to neighbors. Moreover, the justice that Jesus teaches is the order of society.

**B<sub>s</sub>:** Jōdo Shin Buddhism strictly holds the individual faith as the center. In relation to the problem of love of neighbor, this sect has the word *go-dōgyō*<sup>a</sup> ("fellow-travellers") and *go-dōbō*<sup>b</sup> ("fellow-followers"). These terms, however, mean that the individuals of the same mind assemble freely.

In any case Pure Land Buddhism has its starting point at the place where ethics is denied. In regard to the Ten Virtuous Acts, they are based on the viewpoint that it is impossible to realize them. This can be said to be a very negative man-view, which is opposed to the positive view that man is developing and growing. In view of the fact that present society is filled with unrest, crimes, and increasing suicides, the standpoint of Jōdo Shin Buddhism should be reconsidered.

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a. 御同行    b. 御同朋

**Appendix : A Chairman's Impression**

*by Dr. Fumio Masutani*

There is something in the spirit of the times that has made it possible for a group of persons, no two of whom belonged to the same religious sect, to talk to one another without reserve. I feel that the opportunity has arrived for such conversations. The alienation of sects and religions, which we used to feel or thought to exist, is now changing. Religious tolerance is being actively called for. This an age in which tolerance and mutual understanding between religions is being established.

We cannot make any report as to what conclusions were reached through these discussions. From the beginning it was not the intention of these meeting to draw any conclusions. The important elements of understanding lie in the exchange of mutual opinions, understanding each other, and finding at what points differences exist. However, some remarkable tendencies seem to have clearly appeared.

In the first place, one theme concerned the relationship of religion and social life and, a second was the problem of modernization. Therefore, although the expression was different, in the last analysis they involved many common problems which in a sense pointed in the same direction. In regard to the speeches on these two subjects, there was relatively little concrete comment. On the contrary, all participants strongly insisted upon such things as the establishment of independent

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\* See *Contemporary Religions in Japan* Vol. II, No. 1, p. 63.

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subjectivity as religious leaders in case of confronting these problems, and they really seemed to feel strongly about this matter.

For example, concerning the relationship between religion and social life, some participants emphasized that the first problem was to establish the fundamental attitude of each religion or sect. Others stated that we should be very cautious regarding the tendency of modern society to deny religion, when we are facing the present society. Then there were others who emphasized (this may be the same opinion) that the present economic system on the whole shows a tendency toward depersonalization, which we should keep in view, and that the independent subjectivity of religious leaders should have been established in order to keep a critical eye on such a tendency.

Concerning modernization, some participants sought to consider modernization by observing both the traditional side of religion and its changing side. Others expressed it as "the establishment of a modernized age." This means that one's own real modernization should be the primary foundation for a religious person.

A similar inclination was evident in those who tried to deal with the problem of modernization by keeping an eye on the sufferings of the people, and the primitive racial sentiment, which exists even in the course of modernization. Moreover, one said that non-modernization was nothing but modernization!

In regard to the problem of modernization there were very many critical comments on what modern society should be

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like. I think that this is one important tendency. Taking up a few critical speeches, it was said that the modern age itself is one of the things which should be overcome. Another participant tried to consider the problem of the modernization of religion by means of the idea that the modern age is at a crisis. Someone presented the question of what was definitely new, because even the modern age would become old in the 21st or 22nd century. Another said that we should advocate breaking through the modern age. There was also a speech to the effect that we should have considered the problem of the minority and the majority. In other words, he questioned whether a religious leader involved in the majority stream could fulfill the role of a religious leader. It was felt that a religious leader in some sense or other should always be aware of the minority position. That is, in order to stand before many people as an enlightened man, he must of necessity become one of the minority.

Taking all things together, they were very critical toward not being thoroughgoing in modernization and rationalization. And, in relation to such criticism, the problems of religion's backwardness, of religion's adaptability to the times, and of religion's responsibility for the progress of society were discussed. The spirit of the younger generation was felt especially when they stressed that religion should take the lead in the times. Therefore, we look forward with keen anticipation to the activities which all the participants will engage in as they seek to break through the modern age into the future in the next five or ten years.

What interested me very much was the fact that in the

course of the discussion it was disclosed that the importance of the problem of modernization was viewed differently by Christians, Shintoists, and Buddhists. There was a speech from the Christian side to the effect that, to tell the truth, the problem of modernization was not so important for them. It seemed to be very important for Shinto and Buddhism, but not for Christianity. The most important question was how Christianity could adjust itself to the climate of Japan.

Finally, I considered the religious nature of the speeches. Each of them had a very distinctive character. For example, the Shinto speeches could be said to be full of confidence and faith. The Buddhist speeches had a strange mixture of intuition and logic. The speeches of the Christians indicated that they had been under European influence.

I think, that the greatest value of these conferences was the precious human contact which arose naturally from the harmonious and calm discussion of genuine problems.

THE PARTICIPANTS\* AND THEIR  
ASSIGNED SUBJECTS

**The Second Round Table Conference (Lake Biwa)**

Chairman : Tetsutarō Ariga (Professor, Kyoto University)

Consultant : Jikai Fujiyoshi (Associate Professor, Kyoto University)

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|---------------------------------|----|--|
| Religion &<br>Social Life       | I  | Jikai Fujiyoshi (Jōdo Sect)            |
|                                 |    | Naoyuki Kawai (Sekai Meshiya-kyō)      |
|                                 |    | Hideo Nakajima (Tenri-kyō)             |
| Religion & its<br>Modernization | II | Toshiyuki Sakai (Shrine Shinto)        |
|                                 |    | Ryushū Takai (Shingon Sect)            |
|                                 |    | Masao Takenaka (Nihon Kirisuto Kyōdan) |
| Religion & its<br>Modernization | I  | Shinji Adachi (Shrine Shinto)          |
|                                 |    | Toshihiko Hayami (Episcopal Church)    |
|                                 |    | Noriyoshi Nishimura (Konko-kyō)        |
| Religion & its<br>Modernization | II | Yōichi Ōbuchi (Jōdo Shin Sect)         |
|                                 |    | Shōkō Takeuchi (Jōdo Shin Sect)        |

**The Third Round Table Conference (Gōra, Hakone)**

Chairman : Fumio Masutani (Professor, Tokyo University of Foreign Studies)

Consultant : Ichirō Hori (Professor, Tōhoku University)

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|---------------------------------|----|---|
| Religion &<br>Social Life       | I  | Tadamichi Iida (Episcopal Church)           |
|                                 |    | Endō Asai (Nichiren Sect)                   |
|                                 |    | Ryōdō Shioiri (Tendai Sect)                 |
| Religion & its<br>Modernization | II | Jun'ichi Okada (Catholic Church)            |
|                                 |    | Yasuyoshi Sakata (Misogi-kyō)               |
|                                 |    | Haruo Ogasawara (Shrine Shinto)             |
| Religion & its<br>Modernization | I  | Shōjun Bandō (Jōdo Shin Sect)               |
|                                 |    | Ryūmin Akizuki (Zen-Rinzai Sect)            |
|                                 |    | Motoyuki Naganuma (Risshō Kōsei Kai)        |
| Religion & its<br>Modernization | II | Ichitarō Sugiyama (Fusō-kyō)                |
|                                 |    | Kōkichi Okada (Evangelical Lutheran Church) |

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\* The positions indicated are those held at the time the conferences.

