Interreligious Education and Dialogue in Japan

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Current State of Religious and Interreligious Education in Japan

Public Schools

Because of the separation of state and religion, as proclaimed in Article 20 of the 1947 Constitution of Japan, religious education is not allowed in Japanese public schools. A heated debate has continued for the last few years on the revision of the Constitution. However, at this stage it is doubtful that Article 20 will be revised. While the conservative politicians advocate moral/religious education modelled on the pre-war moral education (*shushin*, which stressed Confucian values of loyalty, filial piety, subservience to authority, the cult of the emperor and nationalism), the public is suspicious of a hidden agenda behind the proposal to teach religion at school. Some critics argue that it will only serve the interests of the politicians to manipulate the religious sentiments and the social disappointments of the Japanese people. Parents in general oppose religious education and are cautious even about some aspects of the current moral education, allowed at public schools since 1958.

The current public school curriculum offers a fair amount of knowledge on the history of religions, including Buddhism, Christianity, Islam, Hinduism and even Jainism, especially in the liberal arts programme that secondary schools offer. However, as teachers do not possess the necessary knowledge adequate to cover material on various religions, they often skip such lessons and use them for other activities or as preparation time for various exams. In the event that the classes on the history of religions are performed, they offer only factual knowledge and do not aim at inculcation of traditional moral and religious values, which is a fact bemoaned by the conservative politicians.

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Private Schools

The Japanese Constitution stipulates a separation of state and religion and, consequently, forbids religious education in public schools but it allows religion to be taught in private schools due to the proclamation of religious freedom in Article 20. Private religious schools are allowed to conduct religious education, but they usually refrain from doing so. There is enormous pressure on such schools to prepare their students for entrance exams to institutions of higher education. Students and their parents choose a school based on its academic ranking with little or no interest in the religious teachings of the organization that runs the school. As religious education is not an examination subject, neither students nor parents have much interest in classes in religion (Filus, 2006, p. 1041).

Some private religious schools actually conduct religious education but, in such cases, they conduct classes exclusively in relation to their own religion. Thus, for example, Christian private schools usually teach courses on the Bible and Buddhist schools teach courses on the life and teachings of Buddha Sakyamuni and on the founder of their own sect, for example Shinran, the founder of Jodo Shin (True Pure Land) Sect, or Nichiren, the founder of Nichiren Sect of Buddhism. Consequently, there is no interreligious education in private religious schools in Japan.

The most comprehensive interreligious education that I have encountered in Japan is not offered by a Japanese school but by a foreign school, namely the British School in Tokyo. The school follows the British curriculum and offers religious education based on three volumes of a textbook titled "Skills in Religious Studies" by J. Fageant and S.C. Mercier. This school, which provides education for international and Japanese students, is an interesting example of a global community.

Revision of the Fundamental Law of Education and Religious Culture in Education

While the debate over the revision of the Japanese Constitution is ongoing, the government, under the leadership of the conservative Liberal Democratic Party, pushed for the revision of the Fundamental Law of Education. The new Fundamental Law of Education was eventually promulgated on December 22, 2006, after 190 hours of Diet deliberations (Ministry of Education, Culture, Sports, Science and Technology, 2006, Establishment of the Revised Basic Act on Education). A new phrase, which reads as follows: "General education on religion should be pursued" (my translation, in Japanese it reads as follows: *Shukyo ni kansuru ippantekina kyoyo*), was incorporated into Article 15 (Ministry of Education, Culture, Sports, Science and Technology, n.d., p. 8).

Thus this opens the door to the possibility of teaching some aspects of religion in public schools. However, as for designing a new curriculum based on the revised Law, it will take a few years and at this stage it is not clear in what form religion will be taught. Taking into account the stipulation of the separation of state and religion, it is doubtful that a new subject "religious education" will be added to

the current curriculum. Rather, the present proposal suggests teaching "religious culture" (*shukyo bunka*) within currently taught subjects, such as history, geography, English, art, music, science and so on. The major obstacle in the implementation of a religious culture education is the teachers' lack of knowledge and skills. Thus, the most urgent need is creation of courses at tertiary institutions to train instructors.

Recently the Japanese Ministry of Education, in accord with the revised Fundamental Law of Education, offered a generous grant over a period of three years to the Japanese Association for Religious Studies and the Japanese Association for the Study of Religion and Society in order to institute a tertiary system enabling teachers to obtain the qualifications necessary to teach religious culture within the current system. There are some 30 universities affiliated with both associations, which participate in this task under the leadership of Kokugakuin University of Shinto affiliation and Taisho University of Buddhist affiliation (numerous personal communications with Professor Nobutaka Inoue of Kokugakuin University, the leading proponent of "religious culture education").[1]

The content of the courses on religious culture remains an issue. The general idea is to teach students the importance of religion through its influence on culture and society. The courses will not be much concerned with doctrines of a particular religion, but rather with its social aspects, such as cultural differences in religiosity, knowledge of religious festivals, customs and observances, such as abstinence from certain foods and activities, ethical codes of behaviour, and so on. Such knowledge will hopefully lead to a better understanding of people of different religions. It can contribute to the appreciation of the religious beliefs and sentiments of others and to the development of empathy, which is an important task in the era of globalization (cf. Inoue, 2002, pp. 15–16; Inoue, 2004, pp. 7, 13–15).

It is hoped that courses on religious culture will lead to smooth international cooperation and intercultural exchange. Knowledge of codes of behaviour, etiquette and dietary restrictions, as influenced by religious beliefs, is important especially when doing business in countries where they play an important role, mainly in countries where Islam and Hinduism have a large following. Muslims and Hindus constitute one-third of the world's population; so knowing their religious beliefs is crucial for appropriate marketing. Executives who have appropriate knowledge of their business partners' customs, etiquette and manners are much more successful in business dealings. Such knowledge allows companies to avoid embarrassment, such as that of the Japanese company, Ajinomoto, a company that manufactures flavour-enhancing products. Ajinomoto marketed its pork-based monosodium glutamate (MSG) in Indonesia, the predominantly Muslim country, in 2001. This enterprise proved a total fiasco. Consequently, 3000 tons of the flavour enhancer had to be retracted (Deming, 2005, p. 8).

Knowledge of religious culture will also be useful in everyday dealings among members of multicultural societies. In order to live peacefully in global society, it is important not to cause friction by disrespecting other people's beliefs or customs.

[1] I am a member of Kokugakuin University research group led by Professor Nobutaka Inoue.

However, knowledge of customs will not explain the motivation behind action, for example, the September 11 attack, Bosnian–Serbian or Israeli–Palestinian conflict and other interreligious incidents of violence and wars. Therefore the study of customs and behaviour without adequate knowledge of teachings and rhetoric, which motivate that behaviour, does not lead to resolution of conflict caused by different religious values and does not offer guidance regarding reconciliation.

Interreligious Dialogue: A Substitute for Interreligious Education

Introduction

As discussed above, there is no interreligious education in Japanese schools. However, in contemporary Japan, interreligious dialogue and cooperation display a high level of ecumenism. Dialogue, understood literally as discussion, has been promoted predominantly by Christianity, which has been preoccupied with debating doctrines and other theoretical issues. Japanese religions, on the other hand, tend to emphasize interreligious cooperation, as expressed in the anti-nuclear, disarmament and peace movement, human rights movement and charity. In general, it is at the level of leadership that the dialogue, cooperation, social and political engagement are conducted. Ordinary members become educated in interreligious issues through reading books written by their leaders, through attending lectures, participating in conferences and through the engagement in social and charity activities organized by their religions.

Let us first examine the long history of the interreligious dialogue in Japan, which, before achieving its peaceful state of religious coexistence in contemporary Japan, had rather violent record, from which some valuable lessons can be learnt and be useful for the interreligious dialogue in the twenty-first century.

History of the Interreligious Dialogue in Japan

When did interreligious dialogue begin in Japan? Most scholars mention the 1960s as the beginnings of dialogue. The question corresponds to a similar one, namely, when did globalization start? The term "globalization" apparently first appeared in 1981. However, whenever a religion migrated to a different country, it brought with it foreign culture, and thus religion acted as a means of globalization of culture. Therefore, if we understand globalization as diffusion of culture, including religion, then it had started thousands of years ago. In this sense, it may be argued that interreligious dialogue in Japan has begun with the arrival of Buddhism and Confucianism in Japan in the sixth century from China via Korea.

Minegishi (2008, pp. 18–20) argues that in order to proselytize, one needs to understand the potential convert and, thus, proselytization always starts with dialogue. In the sixth century, dialogue first took a violent form between the proponents

of Buddhism (Soga family) and the protectors of the indigenous faith, Shinto (Mononobe and Nakatomi families). As the victorious ruling faction supported Buddhism, it soon became the state religion. Both Buddhism and Confucianism were used for political reasons to unify Japan under the leadership of the emperor. They also aided in promoting cultural advancement of the Japanese nation (Tamaru, 1996, p. 49). Apparently, articles one and ten of the Seventeen-Article Constitution of Japan, promulgated in 604, postulate dialogue and harmony (Kitagawa, 2006; Aston, 1998, Vol. 2, pp. 128–133).

For the first few centuries, Buddhism remained the religion of the nobility. Its popularization began in the late twelfth century. The new socio-political environment of the Kamakura period (1185–1333) created by the rise to power of the samurai (military) class contributed to the emergence of the Pure Land (Jodo), Zen and Nichiren sects. The Pure Land sects are further divided into the original Jodo and its offspring, Jodo Shin (True Pure Land) Sect. The Zen sects are divided into Rinzai and Soto. These Kamakura sects all had their roots in Tendai Buddhism; their founders were all monks of Tendai sect, founded in 805. In order to establish themselves and to prove the superiority of their teachings, the leaders of these religious movements became involved in polemics with monks of Tendai and other religions. This was a form of interreligious dialogue, which however did not lead to reconciliation but to eventual schism from the parent religion, Tendai, and development of independent teachings, rituals and gaining followers who secured financial support.

The doctrine of Tendai is a synthesis of teachings of various Buddhist schools. However, the new sects of the Kamakura period were created through the founders' emphasis on one aspect of Tendai, such as the Jodo sect's emphasis on faith in Amida Buddha, the Nichiren sect's emphasis on the Lotus Sutra and the Zen sect's stress on meditation. The founders of this new tradition emphasized exclusive practices in the pursuit of enlightenment and salvation. In this sense, the leaders of these new religious movements broke the golden rule in Japan, i.e. religious pluralism, for which they were persecuted. The founders were banished from Kyoto, the capital, their disciples were persecuted and some were even executed, their temples were burnt and this state of affairs continued for a few centuries until the end of the sixteenth century. When Christianity arrived in Japan in the mid-sixteenth century during the so-called Country in War Period (*Sengoku Jidai*), it took advantage of the civil wars and fighting of the military leaders against religious uprisings.

Davis (1992, p. 33) argues that while in the European tradition harmony in the community was achieved through the emphasis on monopraxis (single religious practice) and monotheism, in Japan it was achieved through syncretism and polytheism. Thus, in Europe "it was heresy (or pluralism, as it is called today) which seemed to threaten the unity of Christendom, in Japan, it was monopraxis. . .that posed the greatest spiritual menace to the traditional integration of society" (Davis, 1992, p. 33). Consequently, in Europe it was pluralism that was suppressed throughout European history, and in Japan, it was monopraxis. In both European and Japanese history there have appeared religious movements that endangered the unity of the community and/or society but they were either destroyed or forced to accommodate to the existing ethos. Sometimes the ethos changed in order to accommodate the

movements, as in the case of the Protestant sects in Europe. Sometimes the sects went underground as was the case in Japan during the Tokugawa period with religions such as Hidden Christians (Kakure Kirishitan), Hidden Jodo Shin sect (Kakure Nembutsu), and Hidden Nichiren sects (Kakure Daimoku and Fuju Fuse sects, cf. Davis, 1992, pp. 74–75).

In Japan, if monopraxis religions wished to be tolerated, they had to give up their exclusiveness and accede to the role of supplementing rather than substituting the existing religious system. Monopraxis religions such as Jodo Shin or Nichiren Buddhism eventually assimilated themselves into religious matrices by incorporating elements of folk religion into their religious practices, thanks to which they gained social acceptance and gradually developed into the most popular Buddhist denominations of contemporary Japan, superseding their parent religion, Tendai.

It is widely believed in Japan, even among scholars, that conventional Japanese religions, such as Shinto and Buddhism, have coexisted harmoniously and peacefully with each other and with society throughout Japanese history (Sonoda 1987, pp. 3–5). By contrast, foreign religions, such as Christianity, are believed in Japan to be the sources of many social conflicts and even wars. In this context, the violent history of Christianity in Japan is often presented as evidence of Western arrogance, imperialism and the incompatibility of Christian and Japanese values. Christian doctrine and missionary activities are widely viewed as having determined the fate of Christianity in Japan. However, various Japanese religions, especially monopraxis religions, such as Jodo Shin and Nichiren, were also involved in various conflicts, rivalries, armed fighting and bloodshed throughout the centuries. The current peaceful coexistence of religions in Japan has been achieved through a long history of religious persecution, violent religious wars, religious extermination, banishment and so on. But eventually the model of peaceful existence of religions within their own boundaries has been created. This model of religious coexistence can actually be quite helpful and instructive for the global societies of the twenty-first century.

It is true that Christianity was a source of much conflict in Japan, such as the destruction of Buddhist temples, idol burning and forced conversions, which caused quite a stir and opposition. Therefore, Father Valignano, Visitor of the Jesuit Mission in Asia, who first arrived in Japan in 1579 and spent in Japan almost ten years, was in favour of dialogue. In his *Advertimentos*,[2] which was written in 1582, he advised that Jesuits must study Japanese language, customs and etiquette in order not to disrespect the Japanese and thus not to alienate them. He promoted indigenization of Christianity and called for its adaptation to Japanese culture and creation of a Japanese Church. Valignano called for studying Buddhism, Confucianism, Shinto and other religions (Ross, 1994, pp. 55–65). However, for Valignano the final goal of the dialogue was to refute Buddhist and Shinto teachings and eventually Christianize the whole Japan.

[2]The original document is entitled *Advertimentos e Avisos acerca dos Costumes a Catagues de Jappao*. There is no English translation of this document. Jennes (1973, p. 48) has called it *The Code of Behaviour*.

Japan is said to be the location of the greatest missionary success of the Portuguese and Spanish Jesuits. However, after the initial success and growth of Christian mission for almost a century, the missionaries were expelled from Japan and all Christians were forced to convert to Buddhism or face persecution. Some 5000 Christians were martyred, many suffered torture and privations. Under such severe persecutions, most Christians apostatized; however, some went underground and practiced their faith without priestly supervision in constant fear of persecution, which continued until the freedom of religion was proclaimed in 1873 and eventually guaranteed in the Japanese Imperial Constitution of 1889. However, the Constitution of Japan of 1889 offered only conditional freedom of religion to the Japanese. Article 28 stated: "Japanese subjects shall, within limits not prejudicial to peace and order, and not antagonistic to their duties as subjects, enjoy freedom of religious belief." (Reischauer et al., 1993, p. 233). The political duties to the emperor, the state and the law were given priority over personal faith. This stipulation justified control, and eventually persecution in the name of maintaining peace and order.

From the Meiji period, which began in 1868, until 1945 religions were controlled by the government through the criminal laws of 1880 and 1907, with provisions against the crimes of *lese majeste* (*fukeizai*) and the offence against police regulations (*ikeizai*), and other subsequent laws, such as the Public Peace Police Law (*Chian Keisatsu Ho*) of 1900, the Peace Preservation Law (*Chian Iji Ho*) of 1925 and the Religious Organizations Law (*Shukyo Dantai Ho*) enacted in 1939 (Inoue et al., 1990, pp. 473–484; Nakano, 1996, p. 116; Mitchell, 1976, pp. 39–68, 121–126, 167, 201–203). These laws provided grounds for religious persecution during Japan's militaristic expansion in Asia. In response to such controls, many believers and their leaders chose compromise, adaptation and collaboration, or confrontation and resistance. The accommodating stand was taken by Shrine Shinto, Sect Shinto, most traditional Buddhist denominations, mainstream Christian denominations, such as the Roman Catholic Church and most Protestant denominations, and by some of the New Religions (the so-called *ruiji shukyo*, quasi-religions, which were not officially recognized by the authorities, such as Reiyukai and Seicho-no Ie). Those who refused to collaborate with the imperial regime suffered dire consequences. Their members were persecuted, imprisoned and some even died in jail; their temples or shrines were destroyed and their lands and possessions confiscated; some of these religions were ordered to disband (Nakano, 1996, pp. 116–119; Mullins, 1994, pp. 264–266; Inoue et al., 1990, pp. 30–32, 61–62).[3]

Religious Dialogue Since World War II

Religions which are most actively involved in the interreligious dialogue in contemporary Japan are those which in the past were most involved in religious conflict,

[3]The oppositional stand was taken by Omoto-kyo, Honmichi, Hito-no Michi, Soka Gakkai, Sekai Kyusei-kyo and minor Christian sects, such as Jehovah's Witnesses, Seventh-Day Adventists, Plymouth Brethren and Holiness Church.

persecution and wars, such as Christianity, Nichiren and Jodo Shin denominations of Buddhism. They most aggressively propagated monotheism (Christianity) or monopraxis (Nichiren and Jodo Shin denominations), for which they were persecuted.

As explained above religious pluralism has a long tradition in Japan. Many various religions coexisted together but there was not much involvement or cooperation between them, as they saw each other as rivals. However, through the experiences of oppression and persecution throughout Japanese religious history, and particularly during Japan's militaristic expansionism since the 1930s, many New Religions and Christian denominations learnt a lesson, namely, that other religions, when compared to the political agencies, were lesser of two evils, and thus these religions came to the realization of the importance of cooperation between religions in order to protect themselves from a possible future political interference and oppression. Therefore, when the post-war Japanese Constitution of 1947 guaranteed religious freedom and the separation of state and religion (Article 20), religions took advantage of these postulates and organized themselves in various organizations for the purpose of cooperation with each other.

In 1946, the Japanese Association of Religious Organizations (JAORO, Nihon Shukyo Renmei) was organized. Then in 1951, the Federation of New Religious Organizations of Japan (Shin Nihon Shukyo Dantai Rengokai, usually abbreviated as Shinshuren) was formed and the following year it joined the Japanese Association of Religious Organizations, which thus came to represent five federations of Japanese religions, namely, Japan Buddhist Federation, Association of Shinto Shrines, Federation of Shinto Sects, Japan Confederation of Christian Churches and Federation of New Religious Organizations of Japan.

Another major organization that has contributed to interreligious dialogue in Japan was the International Religious Fellowship (Kokusai Shukyo Doshi Kai). It was founded in 1947 by the following religious leaders: Toraji Makino – president of the Protestant Doshisha University in Kyoto, Toshio Miyake – leader of Konko Church of Izuo, Yoshiyuki Furuya – bishop of Kyoto Catholic Church, Isao Deguchi – leader of Omoto-kyo, Tenko Nishida – leader of Ittoen, Yoshimasa Ookuni of Japan Episcopal Church, and Yoshitada Takahara of Yasaka Jinja (Miyake, 1988). As this early example of religious cooperation presents, these were mainly New Religions and Christianity, which were predominantly interested in cooperation and dialogue.

New Religions of Japan and Their Involvement in Interreligious Cooperation and the Peace Movement

Once the interreligious cooperation had been established, the primary object of that cooperation became the anti-nuclear movement, which was a hot issue among the Japanese people in the post-war period. As Japan experienced firsthand the horrors of the nuclear bomb, with the threat of nuclear war quite real during the cold war

period, and as the Japanese Constitution forbade the Japanese to maintain an army, the concerns of the Japanese public and their interest in disarmament were only natural.

During the Pacific War, most religions supported the militaristic policies of the Japanese government. While some religions did so in order to avoid political oppression, it seems that in the end most religions in Japan became permeated with the ultranationalistic spirit and supported the war effort rather voluntarily. In particular, the Nichiren tradition of Buddhism produced thinkers such as Chigaku Tanaka or Jimon Ogasawara, who, drawing on the political aspects of Nichiren's teaching, created ultranationalist ideologies legitimizing Japanese military policies of expansionism and colonization. These ideologies were then adopted by many Japanese religions. Reiyukai, which, through schismatic movements, produced many New Religions, such as Rissho Koseikai, was one of those religions which embraced Tanaka's ideology and, thus, avoided wartime oppression. Consequently, after the war many Japanese religions were most likely embarrassed by their involvement in the war effort. This, according to Swyngedouw (1982), may have been one of the reasons behind their engagement in the anti-nuclear movement after the war.

With the collapse in 1945 of the militaristic regime and its ideology as epitomized in State Shinto, Japanese national religion, the Japanese people found themselves in a religious vacuum. There was a great demand for a new religion to give meaning to life and provide new ethics and values able to explain the post-war reality. Japanese New Religions had mushroomed in the post-war period and many were very successful in attracting large numbers of followers. Between 1935 and 1977 some fifty percent of the Japanese moved from the rural into urban areas (Kisala, 2006, p. 15). They were deprived of the rural close-knit community support and separated from their Buddhist temples, which have traditionally cared for their ancestors. As ancestor worship is the core of Japanese religiosity, being separated from their ancestors' temples, graves and altars made the migrants to the city feel guilty for neglecting their ancestors and, also, exposed them to the wrath of their ancestors. Traditionally, illness, misfortune and unhappiness have been attributed to spirits' curses caused by the neglect and these popular beliefs have been exploited by most New Religions, which offered new lay forms of veneration for the ancestors and new forms of communal unity where the rural sense of extended family and neighbourly closeness have been substituted with the religious community.

The two religions most actively involved in the anti-nuclear and peace movement and at the same time two largest New Religions have been Soka Gakkai and Rissho Koseikai. Both are New Religions of the Nichiren tradition and, thus, there are many similarities between them, but there are also many differences and antagonisms. While Rissho Koseikai cooperates with other religions, Soka Gakkai has traditionally kept aloof from other religions and has conducted its peace activities on its own. In this Soka Gakkai manifests an exclusive and aggressive tradition of Nichiren, as expressed in the *shakubuku* (literally "to break and subdue") method of proselytization, and the *fuju fuse* (literally "do not receive, do not give") doctrine. The *shakubuku* is a method of prosetylization by ridiculing the potential convert's beliefs and insisting on the superiority of Nichiren's teachings. The doctrine of *fuju fuse* is

emphasized by some Nichiren schools, such as Nichiren Shoshu, a 700-year-old purist and exclusive Nichiren sect. Soka Gakkai had been associated with Nichiren Shoshu since its beginnings in 1930 (Thomsen, 1963). The teaching of *fuju-fuse* precludes involvement with other religions and with some secular authorities which are considered amoral and most likely was the factor behind the Soka Gakkai's refraining from interreligious cooperation

The association with Nichiren Shoshu gave Soka Gakkai a sense of establishment through an existing tradition with direct connection to Saint Nichiren and a sense of respectability. However, in 1991, Soka Gakkai was excommunicated from Nichiren Shoshu. The membership of Soka Gakkai decreased by two million households from over ten million in the mid-1980s to eight million in 1995 (Clarke, 1999, pp. 236–238). Going through a major turmoil and looking for new ways to regain respectability and to increase its membership, Soka Gakkai began an interreligious dialogue with Catholic Nanzan Institute for Religion and Culture in 1995 (Heisig, 1996). Since then, Soka Gakkai has been actively involved in interreligious dialogue, organizing conferences for interfaith and intercultural understanding and cooperation for peace. However, Soka Gakkai still refrains from interreligious dialogue with Japanese religions, and instead conducts its interreligious activities with Christianity, Islam, Chinese and other foreign denominations of Buddhism, Hinduism and Judaism, and not in Japan, but overseas (SGI Office of Public Information, 2007, March).

Soka Gakkai has traditionally derived its membership from the lower classes. Since Soka Gakkai gained its political, social and economic influences in the 1950s and the 1960s, it became less aggressive and more accepting of Japanese wider society and in particular to the middle class norms and values. It has gradually transformed from a sect type of religious organization, a religion of the lower class, to a denomination, a religion of the middle class. In the same period, the lower class in Japan decreased in size and the so-called new middle class expanded. Soka Gakkai has been making a constant effort to address this large class in a variety of ways (Filus, 1999, pp. 275–287).

Soka Gakkai has gradually changed its moderate progressive political outlook, and became more conservative and traditional. This is evident in the development of Soka Gakkai's political party, Komeito (Clean Government Party), which moved from the left towards the political right. In 1999 Komeito became a member of the conservative coalition government led by the Prime Minister Obuchi of the Liberal Democratic Party (LDP). Interestingly, Rissho Koseikai, which has traditionally supported the LDP, has refused to give support to the LDP politicians who were in favour of the coalition with Komeito (Maekawa, 2001, pp. 49–50). Thus, in spite of the fact that both Soka Gakkai and Rissho Koseikai preach peace, they refuse to cooperate with each other.

The activities of the two leaders, Nikkyo Niwano of Rissho Koseikai and Daisaku Ikeda of Soka Gakkai, reflect the general attitudes of their religions. Both leaders have travelled the world on a peace mission. While Niwano (who died in 1999) moved mainly in religious circles, Ikeda tended (until 1991) to meet mainly scholars, philosophers and politicians. Swyngedouw (1982, pp. 27–28) argues that the

reason behind the involvement of both Ikeda and Niwano in peace activities was their aspiration to receive the Nobel Prize.

Rissho Koseikai was established in 1938 by Nikkyo Niwano and Myoko Naganuma, as a result of a schism from the parent organization, Reiyukai. Naganuma dominated Rissho Koseikai until her death in 1957. She was a shaman able to communicate with gods and spirits and to heal the sick. She had charisma, which Niwano lacked. It was at the time when Rissho Koseikai was going through the crisis caused by the death of Naganuma, and was searching for new ways of attracting followers without the shaman-type charismatic personality of Naganuma, that it became involved in interreligious cooperation and the anti-nuclear movement. This is in accord with Swyngedouw's (1982, p. 38) claim that, "religions only feel compelled to cooperate when they find themselves in a situation of weakness". As demonstrated above, this was also the case with Soka Gakkai, which started interreligious dialogue after it was excommunicated by Nichiren Shoshu.

It was through the Federation of New Religious Organizations of Japan, which in 1954 adopted the resolution against nuclear weapons and nuclear testing, that Niwano became involved in the anti-nuclear and peace movement, and from where Niwano gained many of his inspirations for the successful development of Rissho Koseikai. In 1963, Niwano travelled to Europe and the United States as a member of a Japanese Peace Delegation of Religious Leaders for Banning Nuclear Weapons. They presented a proposal for a complete ban on nuclear weapons and also aimed at developing bonds with world's religions ("Landmarks in the Pursuit of Peace by Religionists of the World", 2001, p. 5). In March 1965, a papal envoy travelled to Japan on account of the centennial discovering of Hidden Christians in Japan and to meet Japan's religious leaders. This was in accord with the new ecumenical approach of the Vatican, which in 1964 established the Secretariat for non-Christians (renamed Pontifical Council for Interreligious Dialogue in 1988). Consequently Niwano, who in 1965 became chairman of the Federation of New Religious Organizations of Japan (the post that he held until 1992), was invited to attend the opening of the last session of the Second Vatican Council in September 1965. Niwano was also granted a private audience with Pope Paul VI (Fitzgerald, 2006, pp. 10–11). Thus, Rissho Koseikai has taken an ecumenical approach to other religions, cooperating with the Catholic Church, Unitarian Universalist Association and other religious organizations worldwide.

In 1968, Dana McLean Greeley, president of the Unitarian Universalist Association, visited Japan and on that occasion the US–Japan Conference of Religions for Peace was held in Kyoto. During that conference, Nikkyo Niwano met Toshio Miyake of Konko Church of Izuo and the cooperation between the two leaders thus began, which led to the establishing the World Conference of Religions for Peace (WCRP), as described below. Miyake is another outstanding leader of a New Religion, Konko Church of Izuo, who pioneered interreligious cooperation. Apparently, Miyake's inspiration for interreligious dialogue came from his friendship with a Catholic priest, Father Patrick J. Byrne who worked in Kyoto during World War II. In 1947, Miyake, together with Christian leaders, established International Religious Fellowship, as described above (Miyake, 1988).

In 1969, Niwano and Miyake were invited to attend the 20th World Congress of the International Association for Religious Freedom (IARF) in Boston, where they established relations with Unitarians and other religions. To secure interreligious cooperation and support for the peace movement, Miyake met with Pope Paul VI, Archbishop of Canterbury and Patriarch of Greek Orthodox Church. This interreligious cooperation then led to organizing the first World Conference of Religions for Peace (WCRP) in 1970 in Kyoto, where 300 representatives of ten major religions from 39 countries gathered to discuss how religions could contribute to peace, disarmament, justice, human rights and human development. WCRP grew to be the largest international federation of various religions promoting peace. In 1976 WCRP gave birth to Asian Council of Religions for Peace (ACRP). ((Nukaga, 2000; Landmarks in the Pursuit of Peace by Religionists of the World, 2001; Sekai Shukyosha Kaigi Nihon Iinkai, 1973).

Since 1975, Rissho Koseikai has conducted the Donate a Meal Campaign. The participants skip one meal a day on particular days every month and contribute the saved money to the Rissho Koseikai Peace Fund. The money is utilized for a variety of activities for world peace. For example, in 1978, Rissho Koseikai established the Niwano Peace Foundation. Since 1980, the foundation has awarded the Niwano Peace Prize to honour religious leaders or associations that contribute to world peace through interreligious dialogue, human rights movement and conflict resolution. The foundation also provides financial assistance for religiously inspired research activities and projects concerning thought, culture, science and education (Rissho Koseikai, 2006).

Since Niwano assumed the leadership of the Federation of New Religious Organizations, he was able to use the infrastructure and support of many New Religions to conduct ecumenical and peace activities. Rissho Koseikai and the Federation of New Religious Organizations collected an impressive 37 million signatures for their anti-nuclear signature campaign to be submitted to the UN Second Special Session on Disarmament in 1982 (Swyngedouw, 1982, p. 36). In 1988 they cooperated in organizing peace march in New York for the UN Third Special Session on Disarmament, campaign for preservation of the environment in 1990, relief project for refugees of the Gulf war in 1991 and relief project for war refugees in former Yugoslavia in 1994 (Rissho Koseikai, 2006, 2008; Shinshuren, 2008).

Considering the reasons that religions have for involving themselves in the anti-nuclear and peace movement and interreligious cooperation, it is doubtful that the feelings of embarrassment and repentance for supporting the war effort were behind the involvement, as Swyngedouw (1982) wishes to argue. It is unlikely that religions could purge themselves of nationalism and conservatism in such a short period of time. It seems that New Religions had another agenda when engaging in the anti-nuclear movement. They were searching for new ways of diffusing their teachings, for attracting new followers, for gaining recognition and respectability in Japanese society and overseas. Therefore, the peace activities of New Religions, just as the interreligious dialogue promoted by Christianity (which will be discussed below), should rather be seen as a proselytization tactic and, more importantly, as a stratagem to get rid of the stigma of a cult and to elevate their social status.

In the post-war turmoil, Japanese New Religions, Soka Gakkai and Rissho Koseikai in particular, grew enormously and soon had millions of followers. With followers came money and voting power. However, just like nouveau riches, who enjoy affluence but suffer comparatively low social status, New Religions were lacking a history to prove their noble descent and, thus, had little authority. Most New Religions jumped at the opportunity of international interreligious cooperation to establish themselves as respectable religions.

Christianity and Interreligious Dialogue

After the defeat of Japan in 1945 and the collapse of State Shinto as national religion, many Japanese people experienced religious vacuum and confusion. Various Christian missions, societies and educators arrived in Japan, hoping to take advantage of the situation. In order to conduct their missionary work more effectively, they soon engaged in research on Japanese religions, Japanese sense of spirituality and religiosity.

One such example is the Congregation of the Immaculate Heart of Mary (CICM), who came to Japan in 1948, established Oriens Institute for Religious Research in 1954 and started to publish Missionary Bulletin the following year. The Missionary Bulletin later changed its name to The Japan Mission Journal in 1985 and now publishes many articles on interreligious dialogue. Two CICM missionaries who arrived in 1948, Joseph Spae and Joseph Jennes, engaged in research, which resulted in two major publications: "A History of the Catholic Church in Japan from Its Beginnings to the Early Meiji Era" authored by Jennes and published by Oriens in 1959, and "Catholicism in Japan: A Sociological Study" authored by Joseph Spae, published in 1964.

Another example of a Christian missionary body involved first in research and, later, in interreligious dialogue is the NCC Center for the Study of Japanese Religions in Kyoto. Harry Thomsen, who came to Japan in 1956 as a missionary working for Christian Mission to the Buddhists, established the Kyoto Christian Institute, which in 1959, the centennial year of the beginning of the Protestant mission to Japan, was approved by the National Christian Council in Japan (NCC-J) and renamed Christian Center for the Study of Japanese Religion. Thomsen became its first director. His vision for the Center was that it should be ecumenical in its outlooks and activities, cooperating with other Christian denominations and academic institutions and contributing to a better understanding of non-Christian religions. Also, in 1959, the Center began publishing a journal *Japanese Religions.* Its first issues dealt with the problems of differences between Christianity and Japanese religions, with difficulties in communication between the two traditions, with the intolerance of Christianity and its inability to indigenize, and with the issue of Japanese New Religions, which were mushrooming and growing at an amazing rate in the post-war period. The success of the Japanese New Religions was in contrast to Christianity, which was failing to attract followers. The number of Japanese Christians since the Meiji period (1868–1912) stayed at the same rate, a mere one

percent of the Japanese population. New Religions were of a particular interest to Thomsen, who in 1963 published a book titled *The New Religions of Japan* (Repp, 2000, pp. 135–137).

After Thomsen left Japan in December 1959, the tasks of the Center were more clearly defined in missionary terms, as serving the purpose of proselytization, as follows: "The purpose of this Center is to promote the study of Japanese religions for the sake of effective witness to the Gospel of Jesus Christ" (quoted in Repp, 2000, p. 137). In other words, the Center's task, as paraphrased by Thelle (2000, p. 14), was: "to promote dialogue for the sake of an effective monologue". However, since 1965, the activities of the Center became more clearly ecumenical. This initiative was aided by the spirit of ecumenism which accompanied the Second Vatican Council, and was reflected in Japan in cooperation between Catholic and Protestant research institutes.

In 1969, the Japan Ecumenical Society was established within Oriens Institute for Religious Research. Currently, within the Oriens Institute there is a Dialogue group involved in "interreligious dialogue of life". Oriens Institute is also involved in cross-cultural debates on topics, such as ancestor worship, Zen meditation, the meaning and role of Shinto customs, the writings of Shusaku Endo (a Catholic writer famous for his comparative analysis of Christian and Japanese religious values and ethics in award-winning novels "White Man", "Yellow Man" and the most famous "Silence") and other Christian authors. The most recent research and activities of Oriens Institute focus on intercultural and interreligious dialogue in order to find solutions to the growing poverty (Oriens, 2000).

The Society of Jesus, which was the first Christian missionary group to arrive in Japan in 1549, established the first Catholic university in Japan, Sophia University, in Tokyo in 1913. In 1969, two institutes were established at Sophia University: the Institute of Oriental Religions and the Institute for Christian Culture. Both were amalgamated into Sophia University Institute for Christian Culture in 1993. Although the Jesuits were the first Christian missionaries in Japan, it was not until 1995 that the Jesuits eventually officially recognized the necessity of interreligious dialogue at their 34th conference. However, this does not mean that individual Jesuits were not interested in interreligious dialogue. Johnston, a Jesuit scholar working at Sophia University, describes his experience of participating in the dialogue between Zen Buddhists and Christians in Kyoto in 1968 as follows: "There was not a single philosophical or theological tenet that we held in common. . .. what united us was not philosophy but religious experience. . .. Indeed it is amazing that such diverse philosophies should produce such similar experiences" (1970, pp. xi–xii). Johnston (1971, p. 14) envisions the future relationship between Christianity and Buddhism as follows: "Just as a whole new era opened up for Christianity when Thomas introduced Aristotle in the thirteenth century, so a new era, an even bigger one, could be opened by the assimilation of some Buddhist ideas and attitudes".

In 1970, another interreligious organization was founded, the Conference on Religion and Modern Society (CORMOS, Gendai ni Okeru Shukyo no Yakuwari Kenkyukai), which was the outcome of the collaboration between the Protestant NCC Center for the Study of Japanese Religions and the Catholic Oriens Institute

(Van Bragt, 2000, p. 6). This organization consists of members of research institutes belonging to major religious organizations in Japan and also of various secular experts of religions. According to Ashina (2004), the exchange of opinions between the religious and non-religious researchers of CORMOS is apparently very enlightening.

In 1976, another important interreligious research institute, Nanzan Institute for Religion and Culture, was established at Nanzan University in Nagoya. This Catholic university was founded in 1949 by the Society for the Divine Word (Societas Verbi Divini). The Institute has been actively engaged in interreligious dialogue, organizing interfaith symposia and conducting interreligious research projects. The reports on the interreligious activities are published in the annual *Bulletin of the Nanzan Institute for Religion and Culture*, in English and Japanese. The Institute also publishes the Japanese Journal of Religious Studies, the most prominent English-language source for current research in the field of Japanese Religions and other major publications in the area of religion and philosophy. The Nanzan Institute for Religion and Culture together with other Catholic institutes, such as Oriens Institute for Religious Research, the Institute of Oriental Religions and the Protestant NCC Centre for the Study of Japanese Religions, initiated the Ecumenical Group for the Study of Interreligious Dialogue (EGSID), as a joint venture of the four "Dialogue Institutes". Nanzan Institute also edits and publishes the Journal of the Japan Society for Buddhist–Christian Studies (Tozai Shukyo Kenkyu). The Society for Buddhist–Christian Studies has its roots in the "East–West Religions Project" of the University of Hawaii.

Those involved in interreligious dialogue for an extended period of time go through a transformation. In 1978, Thelle, an associate director of the NCC Center from 1974 to 1985, wrote about his experience of the interreligious dialogue, as follows:

> Those who engage in the study of other religions enter a process; they become engaged in a dialogue that forces them to change attitudes. The contact becomes a mutual search, and Christians become also receivers. . ..A true dialogue will not yield to the temptation of propaganda and apologetics. But it will inevitably involve the risk of conversion. (p. 70)

The above statement indicates a new direction in the interreligious dialogue. Christians began to see non-Christians as equal partners and stopped treating them as objects of proselytization.

Traditional Buddhist Denominations' Attitude Towards the Peace Movement and Interreligious Dialogue

After the Second World War, traditional (old) Buddhism denominations affiliated themselves with Japan Buddhist Federation (Zen Nihon Bukkyo Kai), established in 1957. The status and authority of each traditional religion have been historically established with the entire population of Japan being divided into parishioners of the True Pure Land (Jodo Shin), Pure Land (Jodo), Nichiren, Zen, Shingon

and Tendai denominations of Buddhism. Traditional Buddhist denominations are often referred to as "funeral Buddhism", as they are preoccupied with funeral and memorial services for the ancestors and have not been active in current social issues.

In the early post-war period traditional religions had no interest in cooperating with New Religions in the anti-nuclear movement or other social movements. Being conservative in their outlook, they refused to support the anti-nuclear movement, suspecting it was sponsored by international communism (Swyngedouw (1982, pp. 36–37). Swyngedouw (1982) argues that if traditional religions ever participated in the anti-nuclear movement, it was under pressure. Such was the case when Pope John Paul II came to Japan in 1981 and made a peace appeal in Hiroshima. Apparently, some conservative circles resented the fact that it took a foreign religious leader to take an anti-nuclear stance, while the Japanese traditional religious leaders were aloof. The following year, the chief abbot of the Honganji branch of Jodo Shin (True Pure Land), the largest of the traditional Buddhist denominations, travelled to Hiroshima with more than ten thousand followers and made an anti-nuclear plea.

The traditional Buddhist denominations were also not interested in dialogue with Christianity. When the proposal for dialogue came in 1965 from the Vatican, the traditional Buddhsit denominations declined the invitation. Yamaori in his 1994 article titled "The Falsehood of Interreligious Dialogue – in Comparison with Religious Coexistence" discusses the position of traditional Japanese religions towards Christian demand for dialogue. Van Bragt (2003, p. 178) translated and summarized Yamaori's arguments as follows:

> All endeavours of one religion to approach or communicate with another religion are necessarily of an aggressive nature, and therefore of negative value. For such contacts necessarily bring tension and confrontation. Interreligious dialogue, no matter how beautiful the term sounds, always contains the thorn of religious polemic. The desire to approach other religions is a monotheistic impulse, and serves the aspiration of such a religion to find a unity among the faiths and to affirm its own uniqueness and superiority. The so-called turn of Christianity from an openly aggressive to a dialogical approach is, in fact, only a change in strategy. The Catholic project of world conquest remains unaltered.

Thus, the invitation to dialogue was seen by the traditional Buddhist denominations as a disguised method of proselytizing and spreading Christian ideas. Besides, such dialogue would involve operating in English or other foreign languages and the traditional Buddhist denominations had no such resources available (Personal communication with Rev. Yoshiharu Tomatsu, Jodo Shu Research Institute of Buddhism, August 4, 2008 and September 10, 2008).

It was Tendai, one of the oldest and least popular Buddhist denominations, which first started the dialogue with other religions. This is in accord with Swyngedouw's (1982) argument that Japanese religions become involved in cooperation when in a weak position. Tendai has traditionally been associated with aristocracy and it also shared its fate, meaning that it has gradually been losing its influence since the Kamakura period (1185–1333), when the so-called Kamakura Buddhist sects (Pure Land, Zen and Nichiren), popular among the masses, were established. Also, Tendai

had been in the past one of the most aggressive religions (in spite of its syncretistic teaching), involved in religious wars with other religions and secular authorities.

But it also must be acknowledged that Tendai's involvement in interreligious dialogue is indebted to its head priest Etai Yamada's personality and open mindedness. Yamada claimed that: "There are two ways to Lotus Sutra: the way of refutation and the way of integration. I believe the Lotus Sutra is a sutra of integration. In other words, it is good for us to walk together as we aim for the top. Getting to the top by knocking down one's rivals is questionable" (quoted in Sugitani 2006, p. 13). In this way, every religion has some aspects of exclusiveness and aggressiveness. The role of leaders is important to emphasize inclusiveness, what religions have in common, and not what divides them. In 1976, Tendai joined the Asian Conference of Religions for Peace (ACRP). In 1986 Yamada, being invited by Pope John Paul II, attended the first World Day of Prayer in Assisi at the age of 91. A year later in 1987 he organized the first Religious Summit meeting for prayer for world peace on Mount Hiei near Kyoto, where the headquarters of Tendai are situated. In 1989 Yamada travelled to Australia to participate in the Fifth World Assembly of the World Conference of Religions for Peace.

Interreligious Dialogue in the New Millennium and the Agenda for the Future

Since September 11, there has hardly been any religion in Japan not involved in some kind of interreligious dialogue or cooperation. Below I will describe some of the more important initiatives and outcomes of dialogue.

In 2002, the NCC Center for the Study of Japanese Religions in Kyoto established the "Interreligious Studies in Japan Program" for students of religious studies, theology, philosophy and Japanese studies. During the programme, students develop practical skills in interreligious dialogue. The programme is an ecumenical enterprise financially supported by Protestant Association of Churches and Missions in Southwestern Germany, World Christian Churches, Lutheran World Federation, Catholic CICM Order and Rissho Koseikai's Niwano Peace Foundation (Repp, 2002, 2004; also M. Repp, personal communication, March 27, 2007).

In March 2005, the XIXth World Congress of the International Association for the History of Religions took place in Tokyo. During that conference, taking advantage of the fact that it was attended by some 1700 scholars of religion from all over the world, the Nanzan Institute for Religion and Culture organized two international symposia on interreligious dialogue (Heisig, 2005). This 2005 initiative was then followed by the international symposium in Tunisia in 2007 on "The Challenges of Religious Pluralism and Dialogue: The West, the Middle East, and Japan". The conclusion of the symposium was that the dialogue on "religious truth" and "universal values" should be discontinued. Instead, diversity among humanity must be appreciated. International and interreligious research on dialogue, tolerance and pluralism should be promoted. School education should encourage tolerance and peaceful coexistence. Exchange and cooperation programmes for children of

different cultural and religious backgrounds should be organized. A suggestion was made that, as Japan has never been part of the conflict between three monotheistic religions, Judaism, Christianity and Islam, Japan's neutrality may qualify it to "serve as a mediator to promote peace and mutual understanding between different religions and civilizations" (Sumi, 2008, p. 38).

The very recent development in the interreligious dialogue is the establishment of the G8 Religious Leaders Summit in 2006. These summits are modelled on the G8 political leaders' summits and organized one month or so prior to the political leaders' summits. As the 2008 G8 Political Leaders Summit took place in Hokkaido, Japan, in July, the third G8 Religious Leaders Summit was organized by Konko Church of Izuo in late June in Kyoto and Osaka. The theme of the summit was "Living with the Earth: Message from World Religions". Other issues that the "Religious Leaders Summit's Proposal to Leaders of the Group of Eight" included were ethnic and religious oppression in Tibet and Myanmar, and education, student exchange and scholarship programme as solutions to ease poverty in Africa (Shackleton, 2008, p. 5).

Until the present, interreligious dialogue has been dominated by religious leaders, officials and scholars representing their respective religions' positions. Clearly, there is tension between commitment to one's religion and treating other religions as equal and, thus, accepting religious pluralism (cf. Matata, 2002, p. 155). Unfortunately, those involved in the dialogue still think locally and not globally, that is they think what is beneficial for their own religion and not what will benefit humanity and global society in the future. Accepting diversity and pluralism, which are crucial for peaceful living in global society, seems to be difficult for many people at this stage.

Recently, voices can be heard demanding the involvement of the grassroots and non-religious groups in the dialogue. Ashina (2004) claims that ordinary believers must be involved in the dialogue and be willing to accept people of other beliefs and their rituals. Ashina is particularly concerned with the issue of ancestor worship, as it is the foundation of Japanese religiosity and an important aspect of social relations and unity. Christian missionaries have traditionally instructed their Japanese converts to refrain from ancestor worship, which has been perceived as idolatry. The new converts to Christianity were forbidden to participate in Buddhist funerals and memorial services, which caused a great deal of friction between the new converts, their families and social groups they belonged to. Recently, in order to reconcile Christian beliefs and Japanese traditional religious ethos, churches began to treat the issue of ancestor worship in a more tolerant way (Repp, 2000, p. 148). Ashina (2004) argues that the Christian attitude towards the ancestor worship is a test of Christian tolerance. If in practice Christians are not tolerant towards ancestor worship, then it seems that the interreligious dialogue is nothing but hypocrisy.

Although the involvement of the grassroots will most likely change the focus of the interreligious dialogue, it is doubtful that the ordinary believers will bring much desired progress to the interreligious dialogue. For example, conversion to Christianity or to some New Religions in Japan requires a lot of sacrifices on the part of the new converts, in terms of rupture of social relationships, changed lifestyle

and adjustments to the demands of the new faith. In this sense, borrowing the terminology of the rational choice theory, Christianity and some New Religions are "expensive" religions. The new converts, who have paid the high price for their conversion, would find it hard to accept the fact that all religions are equal and all represent ultimate truth.

Christian attitudes towards ancestor worship are also indices of the ability of Christianity to indigenize and assimilate to Japanese culture. Failure of Christianity to indigenize is blamed for its lack of popularity in Japan. Other issues related to the problem of indigenization involve different conceptions of spirituality, religiosity and religious needs of the Japanese people. These issues are currently studied by the Catholic and Protestant research centres, such as Nanzan Institute, Oriens Institute, the NCC Study Center for Japanese Religions.

The interreligious dialogue was originated by Christian authorities as a pre-proselytization tactic. Now after forty odd years of dialogue, it is clear that its hidden agenda to Christianize Japan failed, however not totally. It is through the dialogue and education (private Christian schools) among other areas that Christianity has been promoting its philosophy and ideals, thus influencing Japanese value system and having its say on important issues, such as bioethics, environment, human rights, lifestyle and so on.

But it is not only Christianity which has exerted influence on Japanese society and religions. Dialogue, being a two-way communication, has contributed to the emergence of new religious consciousness among Christians involved in it. Some Catholic and Protestant missionaries/scholars have developed respect for Japanese religions, the appreciation of religious diversity, and they seem to be gradually leaning towards religious pluralism, which, looking from the perspective of their Christian superiors, in a way indicates the betrayal of the interests of their respective churches.

Van Bragt, a Catholic missionary and a scholar, being influenced by his extensive study of Buddhism and Japanese philosophy, proposes some major reforms of Christian dogmas and conceptions, stating boldly: "I really think that we ought to examine our traditional doctrines very carefully. . . If a doctrine, no matter how 'traditional,' instead of conveying the Gospel of Christ to the Japanese, hides it from them, it is our strict obligation to throw it out" (1969, pp. 529–30). Van Bragt is particularly critical of the violent aspects of Christian God (2002, p. 81). He also suggests that the Christian conception of Trinity would benefit from the incorporation of the Buddhist idea of the non-ego (1999, p. 15), while the Christian conception of the afterlife could be redefined in terms of Buddhist "emptiness" (*ku*) (Van Bragt as cited in Heisig, 2008, p. 16).

Heisig (2004, p. 52), Van Bragt's collaborator and another bold critic, describes the alleged ecumenical intentions of Christian Churches, as follows:

> True, the World Council of Churches and the Vatican Council had issued dramatic statements in support of peaceful coexistence among religions, and even hinted at the need to dismantle the theological modes of thought that had validated the missionary dream of conquering the world for Christianity. But when it came to actually setting out in that direction,

> to reallocating resources and personnel away from established institutions to enter into dialogue with non-Christian religious traditions, or to propose theological models suited to the fact of religious pluralism, the churches were quick to draw on the reins and temper the enthusiasm for making a clean break with the past.

Repp (2002) describes the scepticism the Protestant authorities have towards the effectiveness of the interreligious dialogue. According to Repp, Protestants are unprepared for dialogue as far as their theological knowledge is concerned. The result is such that many Protestants find Buddhism more attractive than Christianity.

Therefore some Protestant Church officials argue against dialogue, which they perceive as a threat of losing one's faith and a possible conversion to Buddhism. Even though there have been some instances of this, there are also various and important benefits of dialogue. The most apparent is rediscovering and reformulating one's own identity. Repp keeps emphasizing that interreligious dialogue contributes to openness to other religions and poses no risk to one's Christian commitment, provided the participants in the dialogue have sufficient knowledge of Christian teachings. Repp also talks about other benefits of dialogue, such as, the changing profile of the ecumenical movement which, in Europe until recently, was concerned only with differences among various Christian Churches. However in Asia, in the presence of Asian religions, these differences seem less important, and on the other hand similarities become more obvious. Therefore, Protestant and Catholic institutes cooperate in Inter-Religio network in East Asia, or in Ecumenical Group for the Study of Interreligious Dialogue (EGSID) in Japan. This kind of cooperation gives new insights into possibilities of the ecumenical movement.

Unfortunately, Repp does not seem to see beyond the benefits to his religion, that is Christianity. This position is predominant among representatives of not only Christianity but also of various Japanese religions that become involved in dialogue only for the benefit of their own respective religions. Only very few independently minded religious scholars, like Van Bragt or Heisig, are bold enough to think in terms of religious pluralism or even religious altruism (support for a religion other than one's own, if that religion seems to work better for some people, providing better explanations of life and death and offering deeper insights into spirituality). Heisig (2008, pp. 10–15) summarizes Van Bragt's thoughts on the interreligious dialogue as follows:

> . . . one does not give precedence to the benefits of the dialogue for one's own affiliated religion but rather tries instead to shift the focus to what will be profitable for the religious dimension of humanity in the future. . .
>
> the dialogue is. . . compromised when it is given concrete goals, used to solve particular problems, or measured in terms of its fruits for those who participate in it. The aim of dialogue. . . is to be "aimless". . .
>
> our allegiance to a particular religion by itself cannot constitute our final identity because "our religious belonging is at the same time a deprivation". . .
>
> "the dialogue among religions cannot be restricted to the world of the religions themselves but belongs first and foremost to society at large. . .religion forfeits its raison d'être when it ceases to enter into the life of people today".

Van Bragt (2003) discusses the suitability of dialogue for interreligious communication and its ability to bring about understanding and peace among religions as follows: "dialogue far from being a universal concept and value, is a product of Western culture... Meanwhile in the East...the conviction is that language, far from bringing truth to light, necessarily distorts it, and instead of linking people together erects barriers between them. The real place for truth is then not language but (meditative) silence" (p. 177).

Thus, rather than interreligious dialogue, Van Bragt (1983, p. 29) advocates "interfaith spirituality" as a more appropriate tool of interreligious communication. Also, Heisig (2004, p. 57) calls for looking for solutions to problems faced by interreligious dialogue in mystical traditions as a factor uniting all religions. Moreover, rather than polemics, religious cooperation for peace, protection of human rights and environment, elimination of poverty and oppression of minorities is more desirable and it brings more positive results (Heisig, 1993, p. 41). But Heisig (1996) also sees a positive role in verbal dialogue. He insists that "the leading role that Japanese Christianity has played in interreligious dialogue is partly a function of its concern with facing up to its own failures to acculturate" (p. 23). He continues:

> If there is one distinctive element that the Christian tradition has brought to dialogue with other religions, it is the willingness to face up to the inherent sinfulness of our institutions, and the willingness to see the correction or failure to correct as something that affects the role of religion within society as a whole. If it is not out of place for me to say so, this is an attitude that our Buddhist counterparts... have yet to accept as fully in the dialogue (pp. 27–28).

The Buddhist participants in the dialogue also note certain positive outcomes of the dialogue. Kitagawa (2006), head priest of Kokei-ji temple at Koya-san, the headquarters of Shingon Buddhism, argues that the interreligious dialogue can bring about the realization of one's religion's deficiencies. He admits that there is a discrepancy between Buddhist teachings and reality in relation to the treatment of women. Clearly Buddhism, being influenced by secular social values, discriminates against women. And this is an issue not only in Buddhism but also in other Japanese religions which consider women as inferior. Kitagawa claims that the interreligious dialogue can actually contribute to the improvement of social relations. In opposition to other Buddhists, who see the interreligious dialogue as a form of Christian attack on Japanese religions, Kitagawa understands the importance of it, and its role in creating common consciousness and values among people of various cultures and religions. Kitagawa claims that there is a need for religious people to talk and work together and become involved in social issues, such as education, welfare, environment and peace.

Conclusion

Because of the constitutional separation of state and religion in Japan, there is no religious education in public schools. Private international (secular) schools do not teach religious education, and private religious schools teach only their own religion.

Consequently, there is no interreligious education in Japanese schools. However, the dialogue between various religions is flourishing. Unfortunately, at this stage the interreligious dialogue is limited to the religious leaders and scholars affiliated with religious research institutes. However, ordinary believers are, to some extent, being educated in interreligious and intercultural issues through reading the publications, lectures and involvement in social and cultural activities of their religions.

As demonstrated, the interreligious dialogue has a long history in Japan. Dialogue is an integral part of any attempt to proselytize. Thus, when Buddhism and Confucianism arrived in Japan in the sixth century, when new Buddhist sects were created by schismatic movements in the twelfth–thirteenth centuries, when Christianity came to Japan in the sixteenth century, when in the mid-nineteenth century Japan was reopened after 250 years of national seclusion and Christianity was reintroduced by Catholic and Protestant missions, and when New Religions appeared in the nineteenth–twentieth centuries, on each such occasion there was an interreligious dialogue. However, the religious history of Japan shows that those dialogues in the past often ended up in violence, wars and persecution. It is only since the unconditional religious freedom was guaranteed by the Japanese Constitution of 1947 that peaceful religious dialogue prospers. There are some lessons to be learnt from the religious history of Japan, namely, that global unity must be based on diversity. When the unity is achieved at the expense of diversity, as was the case in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries in Japan, it only creates hatred, persecution and bloodshed. The future of religion is religious pluralism.

After World War II, there have been a few interrelated movements/initiatives that established the foundations of the current interreligious dialogue. Christian bodies were the ones who started the dialogue, usually in the form of academic research and activities which, however, had the hidden agenda – to contribute to the targets of the Christian mission and, thus, Christianize Japan. Christianity, with its foreign belief and value systems, was badly equipped to cater to the Japanese religious needs of ancestor worship, which is the core of the Japanese religiosity and social unity. Also, because of its exclusivism and intolerance, Christianity was unsuccessful in attracting converts, except for a limited number of intellectuals. Thus, Christianizing Japan turned out to be a rather difficult task. The aim of the academic pursuits of the Christian missions has gradually resigned itself to exerting Christian influence on various areas of Japanese society, namely, its ethical and value systems through education (Christian schools), political and legal systems, especially in regard to democracy, equality and non-discrimination laws, bioethics and so on.

But it is not only Christianity, which had a hidden agenda behind the official dialogue. Looking at the history of interreligious dialogue, it is evident that other religions have also had a hidden agenda when entering into dialogue. In general, religions become involved in dialogue for the purpose of gaining profits, such as new converts, respectability, connections, influence, power or new knowledge. In spite of proclamations to the contrary, it is doubtful that this attitude has changed.

Through the interreligious dialogue, Christians are getting rid of their superiority complex, gaining respect for other religions and realizing that Christianity is not the only “true” religion. Gradually Christians are accepting the fact that in

order to live in harmony and peace in multicultural society, Christianity must accept the fact that it is no longer the dominant religion but only a complementary one. Both Christians and Buddhists see faults in their own religions and, consequently, call for self-reflection and reformation. Buddhism is coming out of its reclusiveness and becoming engaged in social issues. Thus, Japanese Buddhism is going through a major transformation from the so-called funeral Buddhism to engaged Buddhism. New Religions, through the interreligious dialogue, gain social acceptance, respectability and transform themselves from cults and sects into established denominations.

The major obstacle to a further progress in the interreligious dialogue is that it is conducted by religious authorities who depend both financially and emotionally on their parent religious institutions. While there is a handful of independently minded intellectuals who seem to care more about the interest of humanity, rather than the interest of their own religion, the rest of the involved religious participants seem constrained by their religious affiliation and identity. The interreligious dialogue would benefit from involving people religiously neutral and independent of the religious institutions. These people may include scholars of religions, journalists, social scientists, activists and basically anyone versed in religious issues.

However, in spite of various difficulties, there is an evident proof that dialogue has inspired a positive spiritual metamorphosis in some individuals involved in it for a prolonged period of time. Their writings show increased acceptance of religious pluralism. Following the bold criticisms of Christian dogmas by Van Bragt, regarding the violent image of Christian God, as discussed above, I would like to argue that all religions must examine their teachings whether they are appropriate for the twenty-first century to live peacefully in a global village. Religions should dispose of any references to violence, intolerance and discrimination in their teachings, and of violence in their rituals. Religions cannot preach peace if they have teachings referring to violence, which may become justification or seeds of violence.

Since intense globalization started in the 1980s, prompting the term "globalization" to be coined in 1981, counter-movements in politics and religions can be observed since the 1990s in the form of growing conservatism, nationalism, fundamentalism and rising xenophobia. It seems that there is a long way before we can live in a global village where religious pluralism is accepted and where plural religious affiliation is tolerated. However, in the same way as political systems must deal with multiple citizenships, religions must develop ways of coping with multiple religious affiliations. In Japan religious pluralism has a long tradition of fifteen centuries and a multiple religious affiliation has been practiced for many centuries. Polytheistic beliefs in Japan have, of course, helped in processes of a broader acceptance of multiple religious affiliations, which may be challenging for monotheistic religions.

As discussed above, Christianity tends to engage in the interreligious dialogue on a rather philosophical level, where often issues of truth, theology and doctrines play an important role in the dialogue. Japanese religions on the other hand try to avoid these philosophical debates and rather engage in a more concrete cooperation oriented at social activism. It seems that the latter approach is more fruitful and

able to bring a change to the world. The competitive comparison of doctrines and polemics only produce misunderstanding, tension, frustration, animosity and unnecessary confrontation. Religions should refrain from emphasizing differences, as these differences only reflect cultural differences. Rather, religions should recognize the essential similarities in interreligious experience and mysticism, as expressed in trans-religious spirituality. Also cooperation in social, political, educational and cultural activities, particularly in areas such as human rights, welfare, charity, disarmament, social justice, gender and racial equality, and environmental protection, is more profitable for both religions and society, than polemics.

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