

## Future Challenge for Shinshū Followers in America

by Kenkō Futaba, translated by Shojo Oi

As the twentieth century is nearing an end, what is in store for mankind in the 21st century? There are wishful visions being projected by many people from many circles. I can foresee that there will be two dominating issues: the continued development of science and technology, and the enforcement and expansion of state authority. What the world will be like when these two forces confront themselves concerns me.

Presently we witness a situation wherein the expansion of state authority seems to be taking the lead, of which the Soviet Union is representative. The political movement of Marxism, initiated to liberate man from state authority, has actually developed into an unprecedented force.

This situation has become a formidable threat on an international level, extending a tight grip on its people and reducing them to the manipulation of tools. It has deprived them of all liberty in speech and religious beliefs and it has denied existence itself to those who have opposed this system. Isn't this the very thing they had opposed as being the cause of all evil and had branded as the power of capitalism; the very thing into which they are transforming themselves?

What about the countries of the free world? I am inclined to believe that they, too, are pursuing a way to gain more power by the state and are getting closer to that which they have opposed; that which is called the "Soviet threat." Such an unusual expansion of state power and the resulting confrontation among countries, coupled with the rapid development of science and technology, has brought about an unprecedented potential for warfare based on nuclear weapons and has fostered

intense fearfulness among the peoples of the world.

Under the pretense of protection, countries have come to regard themselves as enemies, making every effort, literally, to crush the opposition. From the time when prehistoric man used rocks to kill to the present day when battles are fought with nuclear weapons, I truly wonder whether, in the "wisdom" of man, he has ever reached for a higher objective. I regret to say that this defective cognancy can lead only to impure deeds. Such impure knowledge is borne of egoism: the inferior mind that rejects others and is devoid of the warmth and friendliness to embrace others.

The core of the problem is not only the expansion of national egoism. Moreover, it is the sum total of individual, group and national egoisms which tends to keep on expanding and developing into an imperfect wisdom that has no bounds, which is nothing more than a total lack of universal wisdom and total absence of real human love and compassion. In this situation there remains no trace of the sincere wish to see a world where every person will be respected as an equal. Inevitably, all hope is shattered.

It is striking to note that this same adverse attitude of human egoism is seen as mankind confronts nature and it is now taking its toll. The air, water, land and seas are so polluted that they, too, have turned against man and are threatening his very existence. If we allow this horrible trend to continue its course, mankind's existence will definitely be hastened toward hell by the turn of the new century.

This being the case, I wish to pose a question: What role can religion play at this critical period in time? Further, is it possible that religion will enable mankind to overcome national egoism and bring about a peaceful world where an individual's dignity is upheld, a world where racial prejudice and other injustices are overcome?

In clarifying religion, we find that there are many definitions which may be broadly classified into two categories. One is religion that cultivates self-love and the other is religion that teaches the overcoming of self-love and strives to realize universal wisdom and universal love for humanity.

Mankind has exhibited a religious attitude, cultivated over a long period of time, in the pursuit of his basic desires. In order to realize the more noble of his desires, he has conceived the existence of that which surpasses all human power and he has developed prayer for the realization of it. Calamities due to natural causes have been weeded out and, in turn, "blessings" of nature are looked upon with great expectation. Man has prayed for release from poverty and sickness, adverse conditions which tend to obstruct his way to prosperity have been shunned, and "enemies" who have caused anxiety to man have been destroyed.

History has provided many instances of this self-love, from the most primitive time to this modern day and age. The religions borne from this attitude of self-love are none other than the religions of the cultists. This religiosity seeks to pursue benefits for a particular group, people or country and to establish supremacy over all others.

Oftentimes, this leads man to cultivate his own consciousness of supremacy and it even, on occasion, leads to a desire to rule the world. Within the group, the inclination to divinify the ruling power exists while, on the other hand, the personal integrity of the ruler is lowered. In this unequal relationship, respect for man's dignity is denied.

A religion based on self-love can never be expected to lead to the cultivation of universal

wisdom, nor can there be a realization of the realm of universal love for mankind. What actually emerges from such a relationship is simply the egoism of the group or people, a condition which is far from equality of personality and is definitely discriminatory and resistive. Unfortunately, such a religious attitude seems now to be the order of the day and gaining momentum.

The other category of religion is based on an absolute, universal truth and aspires to establish man and society in a world based on this truth. It further aspires to overcome egoism by universal wisdom and universal, all embracing, love. Both Christianity and Buddhism were originally structured to have these basic characteristics. It is truly universal religions such as these which nurture wisdom, give guidance to universal judgment and actions, and have provided a firm foundation for the future.

However, can we say with sincere conviction that either Buddhism or Christianity are fulfilling these roles so desired by mankind? As we reflect upon the history of religions throughout the world, we regretfully find that Buddhism as well as Christianity has been applied as a tool for man's attempt to realize his desires, degenerating into prayer merely for the purpose of satisfying man's egoism, both individually and nationalistically.

Historical instances appear where individual gains were put before consideration for others and acts of human discrimination were executed with no self-reflection at all. Even wars have been religiously justified when tied to state authority; the annihilation of the enemy has been prayed for and the people have been drafted into battle. Christian organizations have fought among themselves and Buddhists have fought against Christians, each praying for victory for his side.

Even in the daily lives of Buddhists and Christians, we see evidence of religious attitudes which reveal the manner in which they have pursued their own welfare and happiness. Even if they have not prayed for the misfortune of others, there have been many who have attempted to

escape from society to pursue their individual spiritual peace and happiness. Such attitudes of Buddhists and Christians, regardless of what labels they may be given, are indications that these religions have fallen from the heights of universal religion into the depths of self-love.

The critical question must now be asked: What kind of religion should Jōdo Shinshū be if it hopes to react effectively against these changes throughout the world? According to Shinran Shōnin, we are told that it is by the workings of Amida Buddha's Primal Vow that individuals may be given trusting faith (*shinjin*) and a truly pure mind (*shinjitsu shin*). The name Amida Buddha, which means unlimited light and life, is expressive of unlimited compassion and wisdom. The activity of Amida Buddha, which transcends all limitations, works on all that is basic to existence. It is characterized by the nature of being inconceivable and absolute and appears in the minds of sentient beings as the aspiration to seek purest wisdom and compassion.

It is only when one is able to overcome ego-centric views and attachments to self-power that one becomes aware of the absolute and unlimited power which transcends human capacities. This, in turn, enables the individual to overcome self-love and self-centeredness and finally come to have the pure mind of absolute trust. In actuality, all value judgments and practices, if they apply only to the individual's convenience, cannot be considered true and real. It is only when wisdom and compassion become applicable to all beings that they may be appreciated as being true and real.

The Primal Vow of Amida Buddha promises that all sentient beings may equally realize Buddhahood. It is, indeed, by the working of this Primal Vow that the mind of Buddha, which aspires to enable all sentient beings to realize the same level of wisdom and compassion, becomes manifest as the absolute trust (*shinjin*) and mind that is true and real (*shinjitsu shin*) on the part of the individual. When this occurs, the mind of the sentient being is then sustained by the Primal Vow.

It is through the Primal Vow that this trusting mind (*shinjin*) is made to exist in Jōdo Shinshū, and sentient beings actually exist in this total embrace of the Primal Vow. In the *Kyōgyōshinshō* we can find Shinran's belief stated as follows:

The True Faith is the Adamantine Mind. The Adamantine Mind is the Mind Aspiring for Buddhahood. The Mind Aspiring for Buddhahood is the Mind to Save Sentient Beings. The Mind to Save Sentient Beings is the Mind which embraces sentient beings to make them attain Birth in the Pure Land of Peace and Bliss. This Mind [Faith] is the Great Bodhi-Mind; this Mind is the Great Compassionate Mind. This Mind arises from the Wisdom of Infinite Light.

The Ocean-like Vow being equal, our aspiration is equal. The aspiration being equal, the Bodhi is equal. The Bodhi being equal, the Great Compassion is equal. The Great Compassion is the right cause for the attainment of Buddha's Enlightenment.<sup>1</sup>

As Shinran indicated, it is truly by the wisdom of Amida Buddha, which is light unlimited, that we may all become persons with minds aspiring to realize birth in the Pure Land. Equally, the great compassionate mind of Buddha vows to enable all sentient beings to realize birth in the Land of Amida Buddha. For all of us to realize wisdom and compassion at this same level and to pursue the path of purity, truth and reality is also our own basic desire and aspiration. Thus, for those who are able to receive such faith, both true and real, it means to live as human beings who keep in their minds the highest, ultimate aspiration: birth in the Pure Land.

Revealing the spiritual foundation which enables one to convert self-love based on ego-consciousness into universal love, along with the path to do so, is Shinran Shōnin's Jōdo Shinshū Buddhism. In this sense, Jōdo Shinshū is the true and real system of the Buddha's teaching. Once we become aware that the absolute trust presented in the Primal Vow is the mind which sustains the

basic core of human existence and its meaning, then the harmfulness and impurities which are brought about through mankind's ego consciousness and the pursuit of selfishness and well-being are brought clearly into focus.

In our self-reflection as Shinshū followers of today, can we sincerely say that we are bearers who hold this ultimate aspiration based on the Primal Vow of Amida Buddha? Shouldn't we consider whether we have become beings who pursue only our own spiritual peace, or who have become self-love pursuers who think only of our spiritual well-being in our next existence? Or, have we resigned ourselves to the thought that we are "only" sentient beings and thus it would be natural that we would not have any trace of great compassion in our hearts and, for this reason, we have abandoned all efforts to realize the goals of man's ultimate aspiration?

If we once again stand with Shinran's absolute faith in our minds, we can become the human lights in the world which originate in the wisdom of Amida Buddha's unlimited light and wisdom. However, if this trusting mind is allowed to degenerate into self-love, it then becomes a trusting mind completely different from the mind Shinran

showed us. This degenerated mind becomes one which accepts self-attachment and direct opposition with others and can no longer become a human light to be shared with others.

If the religions of the world do not stand up for or emphasize the faith based on the wisdom of the unlimited light of Amida Buddha as indicated in the Primal Vow, and as shown us by Shinran Shōnin, then it becomes impossible to hope to realize a world based on true and real wisdom and compassion transcending all human self-attachments. If Shinshū followers in America will once again study the significance of Shinshū trust (*shinjin*) from social and world-wide perspectives, aspire to enable all sentient beings to realize ultimate wisdom and compassion (the attainment of Buddhahood), and strive to realize true harmony throughout the whole world, they will be presenting to the world a religion which still has true meaning for all the peoples of the world.

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#### FOOTNOTE:

1. *Kyōgyōshinshō*, Ryūkoku Translation Series (1966), Vol. Shin ("True Faith"), pp. 123-24.