

## The Buddhist Churches of America: Challenges for Change in the 21st Century

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The Buddhist Churches of America (BCA) celebrates its centennial anniversary in 1999. For almost a century, this collection of Jodo Shinshu temples and churches has successfully maintained a constancy of organization while facing numerous challenges that emerged from both internal sources within the Japanese American group and externally from the larger, often hostile religious environment (Kashima, 1977).

Internally, varying levels of pressures confronted the BCA and the sangha (Buddhist fellowship), for which they had to find acceptable solutions. The following three main areas of responsibilities were involved: the initial religious needs of the Issei (first generation), the changing needs of the Nisei (second generation), and the escalating need to reorient the Jodo Shinshu presentation toward an English-speaking group.

Externally, from the early 1900's, especially in California, the BCA faced an extremely hostile anti-Japanese environment. A majority of the society — politicians, publishers and the general public — whipped up this social hostility. Everything Japanese was suspect. For example, Valentine McClatchy, publisher of the *Sacramento Bee* newspaper, publicly called into question the practice of Buddhism and mistakenly identified it as a form of Mikado worship (Kashima, 1977:32). During the 1920's, the passage of the Immigration Act of 1924 in effect cut off Japanese immigration. By the 1930's the anti-Japanese forces in California claimed achievement in four important areas: nullifying the Gentlemen's Agreement, stopping the practice of "picture brides," denying the Issei

the right of naturalization and denying the Issei the right to own land in California and in nine other states. The declaration of war on Japan, in December 1941, led to the later mass incarceration of the Issei and Nisei along with their religious institutions and their ministers. Since then, through the present, major readjustments occurred while the BCA and its sangha worked diligently to sustain and maintain themselves.

This paper will focus on the possible future course of the BCA. From its inception, the BCA and its sangha have triumphed over numerous crises and now face an uncertain future. Important changes through the years have led to the formation of a religious organization markedly different, in significant ways, from that initiated by its originators. In 1977, I published a socio-historical study of the BCA from its inception through 1975, leading up to the entrance and emergent importance of the third-generation Japanese Americans to the organization. Now, fifteen years later, what can be said about the future of the BCA as its members and its priests look forward to the next century?

### UNCERTAIN FUTURE

In discussing the future of the BCA, any prognostication should be viewed with extreme skepticism. As I pointed out:

At any particular point, individuals have the option of choosing a multiplicity of realities. We can literally choose the reality that we

desire to perceive and interact with the surrounding social world at any particular moment.... The future of the BCA is shrouded in uncertainties because the members can choose from any present realities, all of which would produce different future conditions (1977: 203-204).

The perspective here is not to view the future through a sociological or historical lens superimposed or supposing *a priori* any trends, patterns or cycles within the history of the organization. Rather, the perspective should be one in which the social actors try to "make sense of" the larger world in which they live and, in so doing, come to create their own world and their future. Moreover, one must understand one's past and present actions before being able to predict one's future.

A true understanding of the BCA necessitates an awareness of its unique history as it acted and reacted to the myriad social events that it created or encountered. This article, then, will focus on two types of challenges facing the BCA as it wends its way to the next centennial. The first originates from internal sources: (1) a decreasing and changing membership, (2) the ethnic character of the membership, (3) economic problems facing the temples and the BCA administrative level, (4) the proper technique for teaching Buddhism and (5) and the interrelated problems of the ministry. The second is an ever present externally imposed challenge — America's civil religion.

The emphasis here is on the BCA as a national institution rather than on the individual temples. The main reason for this level of analysis is space limitation. All temples face collectively the challenges facing the BCA itself. It is impossible to document all the changes at each temple, and the temple's character will continue to change. The emphasis on the BCA at its national level does not denigrate the importance of the local temples since, collectively, they make up the entity known as the BCA.

Let us start with the following internal challenges confronting the BCA: membership, the ethnic character of the BCA, economic issues, propagation of Jodo Shinshu, and ministerial concerns.

1. *Membership.* First, with the membership numbers as reported, the count remains quite steady for a number of years. The definition of membership includes both families — husband and wife (children are not officially counted in this category) — and single members. In 1988, for example, there were 20,021 paid members, compared with 21,421 for 1981 and 21,540 for 1971 (*BCA Annual Report*, 1988). Between 1976 and 1981, the average membership was 21,556, and between 1982 to 1985 it was 21,256. However, according to the 1980 United States Census, the Japanese Americans mainland population increased 18.9%, to 561,129.<sup>1</sup> Discounting the fact that some of the BCA population is composed of non-Japanese, the BCA generally has not kept up with the overall increase in the Japanese American population figures.

A detailed examination reveals a more complex picture. First, there are increasing numbers of Issei passing on. In 1972, those between 60-99 years of age represented 18% of the BCA membership (Kashima, 1977:149). Even those who were in the early 60's then are now in their 80's today. The consistent membership figure comes from three main sources: Sansei (third generation) and Yonsei (fourth generation), joining as individuals and families but separate from their parents; post-war Japanese immigrants; and the increasing number of non-Japanese seeking alternative religious practices. Historically, the BCA has not relied on active proselytization to increase its sangha numbers, although it has had to face the problem of contending with an increasing proselytizing efforts effectively carried out by non-Buddhist religious organizations within the Japanese American population.

Nevertheless, new BCA temples have and are being established. In 1982 and 1983, the BCA granted independent status to the Vista (California) Buddhist Temple, the San Fernando Valley (California) Hongwanji Buddhist Temple, and the Ekoji (Springfield, VA) Buddhist Temple. Moreover three new fellowships, defined as a gathering of Buddhists but not a temple nor a dues-paying independent member of the BCA, joined the BCA: in Columbus, Ohio; Richmond, Virginia; and Las Vegas, Nevada. These new sanghas, except for the one in Las Vegas, are much more ethnically diverse.

Beyond just membership numbers, the increasing importance of the Sansei to the BCA is becoming obvious. As the older generation pass on, more Sansei are taking leadership roles in various temple activities. It appears that no drastic or revolutionary changes are occurring simply because more Sansei are in the temple's decision-making bodies. In fact, the present leadership base is still largely composed of Nisei. Thus, in many instances, when a Sansei enters the temple's leadership, he or she might feel that extraordinary effort is required to convince the existing board of the worth or merit of any proposed change or suggestion.

2. *Ethnic Character.* Thesecond concernis with the ethnic character of the BCA. For example, Rev. Kenryu Tsuji, the past BCA Bishop, advocated the desirability of opening the sangha for the purpose of propagating the Buddhist teachings to more non-Japanese members: "The BCA cannot remain an ethnic organization if it is to become a vital religious organization in the United States" (*BCA Annual Report*, 1980:5).

In 1983, the Ekoji Buddhist Temple, committed to caring for the religious needs of Jodo Shinshu believers and to spreading the Jodo Shinshu teachings among other Americans, was established in Springfield, Virginia, near Washington D.C. This temple, dedicated by Rev. Kenryu Tsuji, was built with the financial support of the Bukkyō Dendō Kyōkai. In May, 1986, the BCA accepted

the Ekoji Buddhist Sangha, of Richmond, Virginia as a fellowship (*Wheel of Dharma*, Vol. 13, No. 6, June, 1986, p. 4).

Thus, one possible solution for opening the BCA membership to non-Japanese is to create programs or temples for those outside the ethnic communities. From early 1970, several attempts were made by Rev. Kenneth O'Neill and underwritten by the San Jose Betsuin and the BCA to institute programs — such as the New Horizons Program and the Dharmadana Fellowship — aimed at propagating Jodo Shinshu outside the regular temple membership. These programs included lectures at various colleges, small meetings, home visitations, etc. Although both programs disbanded in 1982, further efforts have been made and are currently being made to make Jodo Shinshu Buddhism available to a larger religious group. If successful, this culturally integrated sangha will differ greatly from its historically Japanese American base.

One example of this effort to recruit new groups into the sangha can be witnessed at the Cleveland, Ohio, Buddhist Temple. Because of the small number of Japanese American Buddhists in the region, a substantially different approach was instituted to attract new members. The local Buddhists in Ohio established the temple during World War II with other Japanese Americans from the Relocation Camps who came to Cleveland to fill a war-time labor shortage. Since then, the Japanese American population has steadily dwindled. Yet, the Buddhist Temple continues to operate and, under Rev. Koshin Ogui, has even increased its sangha size. Rev. Ronald Nakasone visited the Temple in 1985 and made these observations:

The Cleveland Buddhist Temple under the leadership of Rev. Koshin Ogui has evolved, by far, the most novel approach to establishing a viable American Buddhist temple. Rev. Ogui has established a parallel organizational structure — one for the ethnic Japanese and another for the non-Japanese — under one

umbrella of the Cleveland temple. Rev. Ogui has been remarkably successful in bringing non-Japanese into the Buddhist fold. At this time about half of the membership is non-Japanese. To the Japanese American Sangha, Rev. Ogui conducts his services in the traditional BCA manner. To the non-Japanese Sangha, the Zenshin Sangha, Rev. Ogui has introduced Jodoshin liturgical forms and Zen meditations. *Zenshokada*, an ancient chant is recited regularly by this group and has great appeal. In addition, he has transformed the traditional *gojokesa* [into] an "American" form. All the elements of the original *kesa* are present but in slightly altered form. Like the Japanese pagoda which contains all of the elements of its parent stupa, Ogui's new *kesa* is an attempt to translate tradition into a modern medium. This "modern" is presented to his more advanced meditation students. Meditation, the disciplinary aspect of the Dharma, which traditional Jodoshin theology has abandoned is a great draw for non-Japanese. The Chicago or Midwest and Ekoji Buddhist temples have also found meditation sessions an enhancement (*BCA Annual Report*, 1985:101).

Since various BCA *kaikyōshi* (ministers) have instituted the use of meditation, or *seiza*, through the years, this is not a radical change. However, Nakasone points out, "no other temple within the BCA has been as successful in bringing non-Japanese into the Jodo Shinshu fold ... . The BCA can learn from his approach and methods if it wishes to appeal more broadly to non-Japanese" (*BCA Annual Report*, 1985:101). To learn, however, does not mean to emulate or implement these examples. It does mean that the BCA should be cognizant of the various techniques in use at its temple services so that it can assess the efficacy or applicability of the methods to the particular or general situation.

For most BCA temples, the Japanese American character and population will probably still continue. This has been the tradition and will remain a dominant feature as the BCA tries to meet the religious and social needs of the Japanese Americans wherever they are found. For example, in April, 1985, the Las Vegas (Nevada) Buddhist sangha observed a *Nyubutsushiki* (Altar Dedication) and first *Hanamatsuri* (Buddha Day) service. Nearly 25 families comprise the core group of this new sangha. Although not yet a regular member of the BCA organization, its members are planning to construct a temple to hold their services and meetings and eventually attain independent temple status (*Wheel of Dharma*, Vol. 12, No. 6, June 1985, p. 8).

3. *Economic Issues*. The third area of concern is with the economic problems of the BCA and its temples. From the mid-1970's to the early 1980's, the United States saw a steady economic inflationary pattern. This resulted in increased costs for basic materials and services — from telephones and electricity, to paper and stamps. The basic upkeep has increased — from the operations and general upkeep of the temple buildings and the *kaikyōshi's* house, to the purchasing of automobiles as well as real estate for temple expansion. Lately, with the dollar decreasing in strength relative to a stronger *yen*, the basic costs for purchases or replacements of religious items from Japan — altars, incense burners and *ojuzus* — have also increased.

Even to maintain a no-growth budget within a time of inflated costs requires more income. Earlier, BCA's economic programs helped its temples but its influence was only modestly felt. The Fraternal Benefit Association, for example, from 1973 to 1988, allocated \$462,000 to the BCA budget and \$152,726.03 to the individual temples (*BCA Annual Report*, 1988:169). The Sustaining Membership Program, instituted to supplement BCA programs, still continues. By December, 1988, there were 777 renewals and 33 new mem-

bers. From the pledges, which is set at \$25 per year with varying amounts given, plus interest earnings and other sources, it disbursed \$24,097 through the Bishop's office for unbudgeted expenses. These expenses in 1988 included covering the costs for various Buddhist publications and emergency monies needed by various BCA ministers (*BCA Annual Report*, 1988:196).

In the last five years, the BCA examined suggestions to decrease the size of the budget for the BCA and the Institute for Buddhist Studies (IBS), a seminary and graduate school. The 1984 budget request equaled \$482,000; in 1985, it was \$798,000 and in 1986 it was \$805,000. The increase from 1984 to 1985 represents a melding of the BCA budget with the IBS budget. Subtracting the 1985 IBS budget of \$295,642 leaves \$502,358 as the BCA portion (*BCA Annual Report*, 1985:127). The actual income for 1985 was \$848,078 with a disbursement of \$841,867.

The 1986 BCA income was \$864,263; in 1987, it was \$890,846; and for 1988, \$954,273. The BCA kept the disbursements within the parameters of the the actual income. For example, in 1988, it was \$912,389 (*BCA Annual Report*, 1988:250). The fiscal situation appears to be healthy, and the BCA annual budget, given the many programs it supports and the overhead for its staff, is a parsimonious one. And, although some members complain about the size of the support budget, the BCA members are asked to donate on a per capita basis far less amounts than many other American churches and religious organizations.

There is a dramatic invigoration of an earlier BCA project, the *Hokubei Kaikyo Zaidan*, or the BCA Endowment Foundation. The initial 1929 *Zaidan* goal was for \$500,000; in 1964 it was raised to 1 million dollars. Through the intervening years, the Endowment capital slowly increased but inflation eroded the purchasing power of the accumulated amount. In 1983 the BCA Endowment Foundation started "The Campaign for Buddhism in America" to raise fifteen million dollars. This campaign, with an initial projected

five year life-span, had three main priorities: propagation and development of Jodo Shinshu Buddhism, Jodo Shinshu education (especially to support the Institute of Buddhist Studies), and ministerial concerns. The plan included nearly two-thirds of the contributions (\$5.4 million for Dharma School, IBS programs, etc.) placed in an endowment fund and a capital investment (\$4 million for IBS and Ministerial retirement homes) fund where the annual interest income would be available for use. The Campaign budgeted an additional \$5.6 million dollars for particular programs and projects such as pensions and support for ministers, membership development, Dharma School, Youth/Adult Education, IBS Library, etc., (*BCA Annual Report*, 1977:48). The new campaign combined the original *Zaidan* monies, totaling \$443,317 in December, 1985, with cash gifts from new solicitation, appreciated securities or real estate, life insurance with the BCA as the beneficiary, trust accounts for the BCA, life income gifts, trustees savings account, and wills or bequests to the BCA. By December, 1988, the Campaign had \$6,740,195 in gifts or pledges and \$5,114,243 in actual receipts (*BCA Annual Report*, 1988:36). The Campaign committee also decided to continue the program past 1988, with the hope that the campaign would eventually reach its stated monetary goal.<sup>2</sup>

**4. Propagation of Buddhism**. The fourth challenge deals with the necessity of an adequate and proper method to impart the teachings of Jodo Shinshu Buddhism to an English speaking audience. Although the need for more English Jodo Shinshu texts has been apparent for some time, available materials were difficult to find before 1975. There have been dramatic changes since then. For example, the Tri-State Buddhist Church, Denver, Colorado, made a significant addition through an edited compilation of the *Shinshu Seiten* (Jodo Shinshu Scriptures). This major Jodo Shinshu Buddhist text includes excerpts from out-of-print as well as new writings. It is a comprehensive, readable and authoritative version endorsed

by the BCA. It is used now by many BCA temples and churches as the basis for Buddhist study classes.

The Nishi Hongwanji Kokusai (International) Center in Kyoto published a number of significant translations of Shinran's works since 1978: *Mattōshō* (Translation of Letters of Shinran), 1978; *Yuishinshō-mon'i* (Notes on Essentials of Faith Alone), 1979; *Ichinen-tanen mon'i* (Notes on Once-Calling and Many Calling), 1980; and *Songō Shinzō Meimon* (Notes on the Inscription on Sacred Scrolls), 1981; *Jōdo monrui jushō* (Passages on the Pure Land Way), 1982; and his major work *Kyōgyōshinshō* (The True teaching, Practice and Realization of the Pure Land Way), 1983-1989.<sup>3</sup> This translation series promises to be one important means for increasing the availability of Buddhist literature.

Another important outlet for English Jodo Shinshu texts was the BCA Literary Publication Department. This Department published such works as *Insights: A Collection of Essays by Jodo Shinshu Ministers in America* (1980), and *Dharma School Teacher's Guide* (1981). Current BCA publications are being issued by its Department of Buddhist Education.

Moreover, other publication sources are also available. In Hawaii, the Buddhist Study Center published a number of important books through the years. Some examples are *One Man's Journey: A Spiritual Autobiography* (1981) by Kazuo Miyamoto, a noted Nisei doctor and Buddhist; *Tannisho: Resource for Modern Living* (1981) and *Shoshinge: the Heart of Shin Buddhism* (1986) by Dr. Alfred Bloom. One publisher, with close ties to the BCA, is Heian International of Union City, California, which publishes many important works on Buddhism and Jodo Shinshu.

Another BCA sponsored organization that has played a vital role in the propagation of Buddhism is the Institute of Buddhist Studies. It has undergone various transformations through the years of its existence. Its main function is to offer instruction in Buddhist studies, both to the

general population and to BCA ministerial candidates. The IBS offered numerous programs and summer institutes, e.g., IBS Summer Sessions, Ministers' Post Graduate Studies Program, and IBS Orientation Program. From its official beginning in 1966 to 1984, the IBS graduated nineteen students with Master of Arts degrees in Buddhism. Most went to Japan for further study and eleven received *kaikyoshi* ordination and presently minister within the BCA. During 1988, IBS had nine enrolled graduate students plus five more studying in Japan (*BCA Annual Report*, 1987, 1988). In the latter group, many are either women or of non-Japanese American ethnicity. Thus, the future character of the Jodo Shinshu Buddhist clergy in America will be significantly different from the pre-World War II *kaikyōshi* group composed almost entirely of Issei males.

Another significant change for the IBS came about with the success of a protracted negotiation whereby the Institute became an affiliate member of the Graduate Theological Union (GTU) in Berkeley, California, in Fall, 1985.<sup>4</sup> This affiliation affords the IBS closer ties to the University of California, Berkeley, through a sharing of library resources, the possibility of awarding a joint Doctor of Philosophy degree in Eastern Religions, and the opportunity to have other faculty members serve on doctoral committees.

The affiliation also affords other mutual advantages to both institutions. For example, IBS gains scholarly recognition in offering an accredited IBS/GTU Master of Arts degree, acknowledged by the Western Association of Colleges and Universities. This academic association provides the means to further upgrade their academic programs in Buddhist studies; to obtain access to scholarships, financial aid and student loans; and to transfer student credits with other GTU schools. Moreover, additional inter-religious courses outside of IBS are facilitated, as well as access to other libraries. At the same time, IBS does not lose its autonomy; it is still directed by a Board of Trustees appointed by the BCA National Board. For the

GTU, the affiliation with IBS represents their first major step to incorporate Eastern religions into their curriculum. In the past, there had been no systematic introduction of courses and instructors in the Buddhist area (*BCA Annual Report*, 1982).

With the IBS/GTU affiliation, IBS established the first professorial chair presently occupied by Dr. Alfred Bloom. In November 1989, Dr. Kenneth K. Tanaka was appointed to a second chair, the Reverend Yoshitaka Tamai Chair for Jodo Shinshu Studies. His duties include teaching, offering courses at GTU, and researching and writing in the Buddhist area.

IBS also continues its relationship with Ryukoku University of Kyoto, Japan. In 1982, the IBS Board of Trustees and the BCA National Board endorsed the proposal to make IBS a branch headquarters of Ryukoku University. One result was the availability of funds and professors from Ryukoku to the IBS (*BCA Annual Report*, 1982:1). Ryukoku University also provides a visiting professor to teach a seminar in the Spring term; IBS professors, in turn, lecture at Ryukoku University. Efforts continue to strengthen the relationship between them: in 1985, IBS dedicated a suite in the IBS building for use by Ryukoku University professors, and in 1986, Ryukoku University and IBS announced the expansion of the Japanese Culture and Language Program under the Ryukoku University Center for International Exchange. This one year preparatory program of Japanese language study and lectures on Japanese thought and society assists in the transition of IBS students during their sojourn in Japan.

**5. Ministerial Concerns.** The fifth challenge is with the ministry itself. The issue is not with the individual minister but with the different and often contradictory roles he/she must play. The BCA members have high expectations of their ministers, both in their roles as religious leaders and in their personal demeanor. It is often difficult for ministers to meet all these expectations. As one Sansei minister states:

Why are so many ministers leaving the BCA? The most common answer we hear has to do with the substandard salary and living conditions. Certainly they are significant factors in the dissatisfaction felt by ministers and their families. But I believe that the major factor is a condition that mental health professionals have labeled "burnout." Burnout is a depletion of physical, emotional and spiritual resources which most frequently strikes people in the helping professions such as counselors, social workers, police and doctors. Some psychologists claim that clergy run the greatest risk of burnout ... . The main reason ministers are most susceptible to burnout is that their profession really defies any job description. How is a minister supposed to answer anyone who asks him what his responsibilities are? A minister is expected to be a teacher, saint, scholar, counselor, marriage counselor, activities director, secretary, legal and financial advisor, janitor, handyman, entertainer in addition to being everybody's impartial friend. Obviously he cannot meet all of these expectations no matter how hard he tries (Rev. Ryo Imamura, *Wheel of Dharma*, December, 1981, p. 3).

There is no easy solution here. The difficulties inherent in meeting these stringent expectations have been a continual problem faced by all *kaikyoshi* through its history. To alleviate this difficulty the BCA has attempted to influence the attitudes of their members. For example, the Bishop asks continually that the sanghas allow their ministers more time for personal needs or encourage them to take at least one day a week to read, attend classes, etc. But it is one thing to request this and another to have it occur.

Nevertheless, the BCA has been able to effect changes, such as an upgrade in stipends for many ministers. Up to the 1970's, some large salary inequities occurred. The local temples,

however, still retaining control over their respective minister's salary, have prevented previous attempts to create a centralized disbursement of BCA standardized salaries, and equitable treatment is not foreseeable in the near future.

With the addition of new temples since 1977, there is an even greater need for more trained ministers. The ordination of more Sansei and Caucasian ministers, through IBS, meets some needs, but the supply does not meet the present demands. Moreover, since 1977, many BCA Issei ministers have passed away. Those who knew them appreciate and remember their long and dedicated service to the Buddhists sangha, and it is not an easy task to find ministers able to fill the gap left by these talented and experienced religious leaders.

Before 1973, the BCA had twenty-six Nisei and four Sansei ministers. Between 1974 and 1982, two Niseis (Revs. Ken Yamaguchi and Ben Maeda) and ten Sansei ministers (Revs. Kenshin Fujimoto, Russell Hamada, Carol Himaka, Ryo Imamura, Ron Kobata [now in the Hawaii Kyodan], Kanya Okamoto, Bob Oshita, Gerald Sakamoto, George Shibata, Dennis Shinseki and Dennis Yoshikawa) joined the BCA to enhance their visibility. From 1982, other Sanseis have received their *tokudoshiki* (minor ordination) and have gone or are planning to go to Japan to continue their Buddhist education, or are studying for their *kyōshi* (major ordination). Many of them have become part of the BCA organization, e.g., Marvin Harada, Sandra Hiramatsu (now in the Hawaii Kyodan), Jerry Hirano, John Iwohara (in training), Dean Koyama, Julie Hanada-Lee, David Matsumoto, Thomas Okamoto, and Kenneth Tanaka. Compared with the situation only a few years ago, there is now a very dramatic increase in the number of Sansei ministers.

But the increase in their numbers has brought with it a recognition of other problems for their ministers. First, the young Nikkei ministers are entering the BCA organization at a difficult time. The expectations placed upon them are

heavy. They are not only given the usual responsibilities for funerals, memorial services, ceremonial services, working with the Issei and Nisei, etc., but also for initiating programs to attract more Sansei into the sangha. Their training in Japan did not adequately prepare them for this, and they must attempt to find their own solutions to this expectation. Thus, each generation of BCA ministers creates new definitions for their American roles. These roles initially based on an older model, shaped and refined by Issei ministers, must now accommodate the new pressures and needs of the BCA.

For example, the Japan-born ministers coming to the BCA face a Buddhist community where the Issei members are passing away and leaving an ever increasing number of temple members who speak very little or no Japanese. Although their training in Japan included facts about the BCA and the American sangha, the initial adjustment period is usually very difficult. The BCA tries to ease their entrance into the American Buddhist community by allowing each Japanese minister from three to five months of individual study at the IBS. Although many of them are from Jodo Shinshu families and accustomed to the rigors of ministerial life, it is still difficult to adequately prepare them for the move.

The minister's life has always been difficult. The Issei ministers had few career alternatives once they arrived in America, because for most of them, their visas stipulated religious purposes for their immigration. They could not enter other occupations without risking deportation. Today's ministers have a greater number of alternatives to explore. The Japan-born ministers may return to their homeland where their services are vitally needed. Although at least three Sansei and Nisei ministers decided to emigrate to Japan, most Nisei and Sansei ministers do not avail themselves of that option. Rather, they must make personal adjustments according to the varying demands placed upon them and their families. This is not an easy problem to solve; it will take time for



the members and ministers to accept the changing role expectations.

There is a noticeable presence of non-Japanese ministers in the BCA. Rev. Alex White was a pioneer in 1940-41 as the first registered BCA non-Japanese minister, and Rev. Julius Goldwater was a non-registered BCA minister caring for the Buddhist temples in the Los Angeles area while the sangha remained incarcerated during World War II. Since then, Rev. Goldwater continued to serve the BCA members. In 1968 to 1973, five others were registered. Then in 1982, Rev. Don Castro became the resident minister of the Enmanji Buddhist Temple in Sebastopol, California, and ministered there for a number of years before transferring to the Seattle, Washington, Betsuin. Today, Rev. Rebecca MacDonald is the resident minister of the Seabrook, New Jersey, Temple. Thus, the past precedent of assigning Caucasian ministers to strictly multi-ministerial temples is no longer followed.

Moreover, more non-Japanese candidates have taken *tokudoshiki* and received the *kaikyōshi* rank. For example, in 1984, there were four non-Japanese ministerial students enrolled at the IBS: Lee Rosenthal, Jerry Bolick, Greg Gibbs and Lynn Olson (*WheelDharma*, Vol. 11, No. 6, Sept., 1984, p. 6). Where once their presence within the BCA required some adjustments for themselves and the members, this is becoming a routine situation. However, entrance into an ethnically dominated religious organization has never been easy. Some of the early non-Japanese ministers have passed away while others are involved in BCA activities away from ministerial positions in the temple.

Among the hundreds of *kaikyōshi* serving the BCA, most of them have been males. In recent years, more women have entered the ranks. The first woman to receive *tokudo* in the United States was British-born Sunya Pratt in 1936. She was active in the Northwest District (Washington and Oregon), especially at the Tacoma Buddhist Temple, organizing study groups, assisting in religious services, and working in the Dharma

School. In 1969, the BCA honored her for 50 years of work and recognized her as a BCA registered minister. She passed away in 1986. Others who received ordinations include Rev. Yurii Kyogoku in 1955, Revs. Keiko Horii and Seika Okahashi (now with the Hawaii Kyodan) in 1966, and Rev. June King (presently with the Canadian Kyodan) in 1973. In the 1980's two others became ministers: Revs. Carol Himaka (presently Director of the BCA Department of Buddhist Education) and Rebecca MacDonald.

A major structural change that affects the ministerial concerns occurred after 1974. The BCA National Council voted to amend their constitution to allow BCA ministers voting rights at the national meetings. Each temple could have one ministerial vote, and where a temple had more than one minister, the head minister would represent the others. The 1989 amendment went even further to allow all ministers voting rights. Historically, since 1944, elected lay leaders officially controlled the BCA National Council. The new change erases the separation between religious and secular activities and now the *kaikyōshi* can officially discuss and vote on matters of BCA policy, programs and finances.

Here, then, are the five internal challenges facing the BCA: membership, ethnic character, economic problems, propagation of Buddhism and the ministerial role. How the BCA works to meet these challenges will affect, importantly, the character of its future organization.

#### AMERICA'S CIVIL RELIGION

In addition to the above internal challenges, the BCA faces an external challenge in the form of America's civil religion. From the early beginnings of our country to the present — from President Washington to President Bush, politicians have used concepts like, "almighty God," and "the Deity," as ways to legitimize their secular activities with sacred sanctions. This is part of the American heritage. "In God we trust" is stamped

or printed on our currency, and in inaugural ceremonies for government office, elected officials place their hand on the family *Bible* to declare their oath of office. Moreover, the *Declaration of Independence* solemnly states: "They are endowed by their creator with certain inalienable rights, ... to which the Laws of Nature and of Nature's God entitle them ... with a firm reliance on the protection of Divine Providence." These are various instances of a public display of civil religion.

Words such as "creator" and "God" do not connote a specific religion. It is not particular to Catholics, Baptists, Congregationalists or Methodists, but it does offer a collection of beliefs such as "in God we trust," or the use of symbols like the *Christian Bible*, the Christmas tree or even the Easter bunny.

For Robert Bellah, a noted sociologist of religion, such beliefs and symbols, institutionalized in a collective way, constitute a civil religion. This religion is not a sectarian one since the doctrine of religious liberty is expressly given. Individual belief and personal piety is left to the church. However, Bellah asserts that the state transcended the particular and utilized a civil religion:

Though matters of personal religious belief, worship and association are considered to be strictly private affairs, there are, at the same time, certain common elements of religious orientations that the great majority of Americans share. These have played a crucial role in the development of American institutions and still provide a religious dimension for the whole fabric of American life, including the political sphere. This public religious dimension is expressed in a set of beliefs, symbols and rituals I am calling the American civil religion (Bellah, 1970:171).

The significance of America's civil religion is not usually seen by those whose religious belief sys-

tems are consonant with it. Christians, of whatever denomination, often take for granted the legitimacy and correctness of national observances and holidays such as Christmas, Easter, Saint Patrick's Day and even Thanksgiving. Although the profit motive now seems to predominate these observances, some of which are more distant from their roots than others, many of these American sacred days still rest upon a Christian basis.

It is worthwhile noting that it is not only in the observance of these holidays that civil religion is expressed. In the schools, for example, the children recite a pledge of allegiance to the American flag that includes the words, "under God." Other pledges, such as the Boy Scout oath, affirm the common everyday nature of the American civil religion.

For non-Christians, the socio-psychological impact of these sentiments can cause a disturbance in the social relational network. An example that occurs in an home annually concerns the decision to display a gaily decorated tree in late December. If one cannot justify the omission of the tree as penury, all other excuses are tainted with the brush of the incredulous: "What's the matter, aren't you religious?," "What do you mean, you don't believe in Christmas?," "What is a Buddhist?," "Don't you believe in God?"

The First Amendment to the Constitution states, "the Congress shall make no law respecting an establishment of religion or prohibiting the free exercise thereof." Individuals may freely exercise their religious beliefs, but for the state to maintain and perpetuate a particular religious belief system must be called into question. Americans should become aware that at the structural level, this particular civil religion has become an integral part of American life and its collective consciousness.

From the Buddhist's point of view, the supposed separation between the church and state in America does not exist. There is separation between individual churches and the state, but there exists an amalgam between the predominant reli-

religious groups and the state. That is, "Christian" religion becomes the "religion of the Land" and, more importantly, a state sanctioned religion.

The Buddhists in America have always been a minority group. In times past, when the BCA, created by and for immigrants and their children, represented only an ethnic minority population, the isolated nature of the Japanese American community worked as a buffer against a hostile environment of the wider community. Since World War II, a large number of the BCA sangha entered the mainstream social, political and economic activities, and the new dilemma of being a Buddhist within a state-supported civil Christian environment had to be faced. A strong, pervasive, and often blatant push for conformity to the state-supported civil religion has been observed, because the BCA is seen as inherently Japanese, even though many of its adherents are not of Japanese ethnicity.

This external challenge must be brought out into the open and discussed. A solution is needed to maintain a strong Buddhist sangha. Although each individual faces this challenge, this is not an insurmountable problem since the BCA could institute programs to assist its members to deal with this issue. As Buddhists mature, being Buddhist in a civil "Christian" environment does become easier to deal with. It is with the youth, however, where difficulties over peer influences are strongly felt. Early programs should be aimed at helping the young resist such pressures.

Buddhism is a major world religion. Yet, most Americans, knowing that fact, continue to associate its adherents with foreign, exotic lands. Buddhists in America obviously represent only a small fraction of the world Buddhist sangha. The Homba Hongwanji denomination of Jodo Shinshu alone has 10,420 temples, 22,400 priests and over 16.5 million Jodo Shinshu Buddhists in Japan. World-wide, Buddhists are estimated at over 301 million. In Japan there is no awkwardness in being a Buddhist; the religion has permeated the society.

In America, however, the quality of Japanese American distinctiveness has been both part of its strength and a liability to this minority group. From the 1920's, with the pervading anti-Japanese movement in California and the West Coast, the Issei garnered social strength and solidarity by banding together within their ethnic communities. When the road to social acceptance from the American populace was blocked, what was then the forerunner to the BCA, the North American Buddhist Mission, acquired increasing strength as the Issei perspective focused back on things Japanese. The member temples met this need and flourished up to the 1940's.

Negative social pressures on individuals in groups, whether perceived or actual, often result in a heightened form of group awareness. Especially where religion is involved, a common reaction is to form a collective and mutual support system. It was this sense of community and network of social relations that helped make the Buddhist temples both the religious and the social center of many Japanese American communities. Facing real social adversity can help to reinforce solidarity.

Currently, the BCA faces a more benign social climate. Since the 1970's, increasing examples of tolerance for religious diversity have been exhibited. For example, in 1975, Rev. Shoko Masunaga of the Sacramento Buddhist Church was appointed California State Chaplain for that year. Although some Baptist preachers decried the election, the sponsoring Senator continued to support the appointment. Other BCA ministers have participated in pronouncing benedictions at graduation and other public ceremonies, in spite of occasional criticisms from other attendants and participants.

Nevertheless, since the BCA has tasted the sting of social adversity during the greater part of this century, the history of oppression cannot be easily forgotten. Recently, persons committing racist, anti-Semitic and anti-Asian acts seem to be increasing; the specter of past intolerances comes

to loom over the future. Such individual acts should be recognized but not given more serious consideration than they deserve.

The BCA should recognize that facing adversity together can help to strength solidarity but also that there are ways to maintain solidarity without the influence of persecution. The initial step is to raise and discuss the issue overtly, with suggestions for ways to face this challenge coming from the membership. To avoid the issue of America's civil religion is to risk losing adherents through neglect. And, as discussed earlier, in the first internal challenge with respect to membership, the numbers indicate that the sangha is already decreasing. The second step to take is open dialogue and discussions with other religious groups, outside the pale of America's civil religion. By facing certain common challenges and examining different approaches together, the BCA may discover alternative problem-solving techniques. As a third step, preparing an in-depth report, which contrasts and compares the various challenges facing Jodo Shinshu Buddhists in Canada, Hawaii, Brazil, Mexico and Europe, might be illuminating and helpful to all Buddhist communities.

The BCA should strengthen its effort to maintain a strong Buddhist sangha in America by de-emphasizing its ethnic character. Because the Constitution decrees a separation of church and state, each American is guaranteed the right to practice any religion that an individual desires. But the reality of the situation for religious freedom is muted by the existence of America's civil religion. A covert and subtle influence toward making Buddhism conform to Judeo-Christian tenet and belief is pervasive and strongly felt. Whether and how this external challenge is recognized and met by the BCA will affect its future.

### CONCLUSION

Jodo Shinshu Buddhism is relatively unknown in America, and the traditional unwilling-

ness for this religious group to proselytize among the non-Japanese have perpetuated this situation. However, there is some evidence that this situation is changing. At the international level, one example is the establishment of the *Bukkyō Dendō Kyōkai* (Buddhist Promoting Foundation) in 1965 by Mr. Yehan Numata, a Jodo Shinshu follower and the founder of the Mitutoyo Company. Their first project was the compilation of the *Teaching of Buddha* and its translation into twenty-four languages. On September 11, 1981, for instance, an agreement was announced that the Grand Metropolitan Hotel, Ltd., of Great Britain, would place the text in their hotel rooms, worldwide. The Foundation endowed three professorial chairs of Buddhism, one each at the University of California, Berkeley, the University of Chicago, and Harvard University, and plans for two others at Oxford University and in Germany (*Wheel of Dharma*, Vol. 14, No. 1, Jan. 1987, p. 4). Since 1986, other chairs were established at the Institute of Buddhist Studies, Berkeley, and the University of Hawaii. The BCA itself has recently initiated an outreach program to encourage membership among Americans throughout the country.

As stated initially, the BCA will hold its centennial celebration in 1999. If there is anything to be learned from the past, it is that through the years, the BCA has been a mosaic created by met challenges within the context of its unique and dynamic history. There is, thus, every reason to predict that the BCA will face these challenges in meeting the needs of its changing sangha.

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#### FOOTNOTES

1. U.S. Census, *Race of the Population by States: 1980*, PC 80-S1-3.
2. Readers interested in a separate socio-historical analysis of the various methods the BCA

and temples utilize to raise funds for their religious and secular activities should see: Tetsuden Kashima, "An Ethnic Religious Institution's Economic Activities and Structure," *Annual Bulletin of the Research Institute for Social Science*, [Ryukoku University, Kyoto, Japan], 12 (March 1982), 127-142.

3. Yoshifumi Ueda (editor), *Shin Buddhism Translation Series*, Hongwanji International Center, Kyoto, Japan.

4. Affiliation refers to the creation of a joint program leading to a Master of Arts degree. The GTU is an accredited, non-sectarian graduate school for the study of religion; it is the largest ecumenical and inter-religious studies center in the United States and coordinates nine member schools. The aim of GTU is, "to be supportive of each school and its religious heritage, while forging cooperative arrangements and institutional policies that would respect the religious views of all the participants" (*Wheel of Dharma*, September, 1985, p. 4).