

# **An Introduction to Imaoka Shin'ichirō (1881-1988)**

## **My Principles of Living, My Journey of Faith & Other Statements of Faith**

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### **My Principles of Living (revised) [私の生活信条 (訂)] (August 1973)**

“My Principles of Living” consisting of seven articles was first formulated in February of Showa 40 (1965) as my personal statement of faith. However, over time, and with the support and feedback from the members of Tokyo Kiitsu Kyokai (帰一教会 or 帰一教會 “Unity Fellowship” or “Unitarian Church”) and others, it became a practice for the congregation to recite it together at Sunday gatherings, a custom that has continued to the present day. However, since then, I have increasingly felt the need to declare reverence (倍仰) toward nature (自然) as the fundamental source of human existence and the root of life (人間存在の根底、生命の根源). Therefore, a new article has been added after the fourth article in the revised version below, resulting in a total of eight articles. The concept of “freedom” in free-religion (自由宗教) fundamentally refers to inner personal freedom (個人の内的自由) and places the highest value on it. Therefore, these principles of living do not in any way impose constraints on members. However, I hope that they may serve as a reference for those who wish to create their own principles of living (生活条). In this spirit, I would like to invite not only feedback on the new fifth article but also careful consideration and critique of them all.

#### **1. I place trust/have faith in myself (私は自己を信ずる).**

I become aware of my own subjectivity (主体性) and creativity (創造性), and feel the worth of living in life (生きがい). Subjectivity (主体性) and creativity (創造性) can also be expressed as personality (人格), divinity (神性), and Buddha-nature (仏性).

#### **2. I place trust/have faith in my neighbour (私は隣人を信ずる).**

A neighbour is oneself (自己) as a neighbour. If I place trust/have faith in myself, I inevitably have faith in my neighbour.

#### **3. I place trust/have faith in a cooperative society (私は共同社会を信ずる).**

Both oneself and a neighbour, while each possessing a unique personality (特異な個性), are not things that exist in isolation (孤立独存). Because of this uniqueness, a true interdependence (真の相互依存), true solidarity (真の連帯性), and true human love (真の人間愛) are established, and therein a cooperative society (共同社会) is realised.

#### **4. I place trust/have faith in the trinity of self, neighbour, and cooperative society (私は自己・隣人・共同社会の三位一体を信ずる).**

The self, neighbour, and cooperative society, while each having a unique personality (特異な個性), are entirely one. Therefore, there's no differentiation of precedence or of superiority or inferiority between them, and one always contains the other.

**5. I place trust/have faith in the unity of life and nature (私は人生と自然との帰一を信ずる).**  
Life, which consists of the trinity of self, neighbour, and cooperative society, further unites and merges with all of existence—heaven, earth, and all things.

**6. I place trust/have faith in the church (私は教会を信ずる).**

The church (教会 or 教會 *kyōkai*) is the prototype/archetype (原型) and motivating power (原動力) of the cooperative society. I can only be myself by being a member of the church.

**7. I place trust/have faith in a specific religion (私は特定宗教を信ずる).**

In other words, I am a member of the Tokyo Kiitsu Kyōkai (帰一教会 or 帰一教會). However, a specific religion (特定宗教) — including the Tokyo Kiitsu Kyōkai — neither monopolises religious truth nor is it the ultimate embodiment of it.

**8. I place trust/have faith in free-religion (私は自由宗教を信ずる).**

While having faith in a specific religion, the endless pursuit and improvement towards universal (普遍的真理) and ultimate truth (究極的真理) is the core of religious life (宗教生活の中核). Such a dynamic religion (動的宗教) is called a free-religion (自由宗教 *jiyū shūkyō*) [or a creative, inquiring, free and liberative spirituality or religion].

*(August, Showa 48, 1973, “Free Religion” — draft trans. Andrew James Brown)*

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***NOTE:** following piece is an interview for NHK TV with Professor Wakimoto Tsuneya (脇本平也) in which Imaoka-sensei not only talks about his own journey of faith but also talks in more detail about the 1973 version of his “Principles of Living.”*

### **My Journey of Faith – NHK TV Broadcast Summary (1974)**

Interviewer: Wakimoto Tsuneya (脇本平也),<sup>1</sup> Professor at the University of Tokyo.

[Reading] My Principles of Living:

I place trust/have faith in myself.

I place trust/have faith in my neighbour.

I place trust/have faith in a cooperative society.

I place trust/have faith in the unity of self, neighbour, and cooperative society.

I place trust/have faith in the oneness of life and nature.

I place trust/have faith in the church.

I place trust/have faith in specific religions.

I place trust/have faith in free-religion.

**(Wakimoto)** The passage just read consists of the eight principles of living of Imaoka-sensei (今岡先生) and we will discuss these in more detail. Imaoka-sensei, you are 93 years old, and before delving into these articles of faith, I would like to ask you about your spiritual journey of nearly a century (殆んど一世紀に亘る求道遍歴) that led you to your current beliefs. By understanding this background, I hope you can help us grasp the meaning of these faith principles. Sensei, you were born in September of Meiji 14 (1881) in Shimane Prefecture (島根県), but what was your family’s religious background?

**(Imaoka)** My family was a devout Jōdo Shinshū (浄土真宗) one, and from early childhood, I was required to participate in morning Buddhist devotions (お勤め) in front of the household altar (仏壇) alongside my parents before being allowed to eat breakfast. I memorized texts such as the Shōshinge (正信偈) and the Gobunshō (御文章 Rennyō’s Letters) without understanding their meaning. It was entirely external (他律的なもので), not a self-aware faith (自覚的な仰). My first experience of a self-aware faith was when I received Christian baptism (キリスト教の洗礼) in my fourth year at Matsue Middle School (松江中学校). However, even this was not a deeply considered choice—it was simply because I wanted to learn English conversation (英会話), and so I joined an English class taught by a British missionary (イギリス人の牧師). Naturally, in the course of teaching conversation, he would speak about Christ (キリストの話), and gradually, I developed a sense of familiarity with Christianity. So, when I was encouraged to join, I accepted

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<sup>1</sup> Wakimoto Tsuneya (脇本平也) (1921–2008) was a Japanese scholar of religious studies and an emeritus professor at the University of Tokyo (Faculty of Literature). Born in Okayama Prefecture. Graduated from the Department of Religious Studies, Faculty of Letters, Tokyo Imperial University in 1944. After serving as an assistant professor at Rikkyo University, he was appointed as an assistant professor in the Department of Religious Studies, Faculty of Letters, at the University of Tokyo in 1964, promoted to professor in 1970, retired in 1981 and became an emeritus professor, then a professor at Komazawa University, and the President of the International Institute for Religious Studies. In 1989, he was awarded the Purple Ribbon Medal. In the autumn of 1994, he received the Order of the Sacred Treasure, Third Class.

without giving it any deep thought (あまり深く考えもしないで). At the time, in rural areas (農村), being a Christian (クリスチャン) meant being treated as a national traitor (国賊扱い), so my parents were deeply angered and saddened (大変に怒り悲しみ), and the matter even escalated to a potential disownment (勘当問題). However, I did not back down, so perhaps it could be said that this was my first truly self-aware faith (自覚的な入).

**(Wakimoto)** What kind of Christianity was it?

**(Imaoka)** It was the Church of England (イギリスの聖公会), but I followed its teachings almost uncritically (無批判的に), simply accepting what I was taught. However, at its core was the concept of sin (罪悪観)—the idea that when one does something wrong, the pangs of conscience (良心の苛責) are in fact the wrath of God (神の怒り). I believed that through faith in Christ, you could be forgiven and saved. This wrath could be forgiven (許される) and one could be saved (救われる) through believing in Christ (キリストを信ずる). I accepted this exactly as it was taught

**(Wakimoto)** So, your faith (僧仰) was primarily centred around ethical issues (倫理問題), wasn't it? After that, you attended Fifth High School in Kumamoto (熊本の高) and then entered the Philosophy Department (哲学科) at Tokyo Imperial University (東大), where you specialised in Religious Studies (宗教学). In this respect, you are my great senior (大先輩), but during your studies, you received instruction from the famous Professor Anesaki (姉崎教授), didn't you? What kind of influence did he have on you?

**(Imaoka)** Anesaki-sensei's (姉崎先生) first lecture on Religious Studies (宗教学) was on Mysticism (神秘主義), and it was an incredibly fascinating lecture. Although he was a Buddhist, he was also highly knowledgeable about Christianity, and he often said: "I am a Buddhist because I am a Christian, and I am a Christian because I am a Buddhist" (「私は仏教徒なるが故にキリスト教徒であり、キリスト教徒なるが故に仏教徒である。」). In other words, he meant that in the end, both are one and the same. Through this, I, too, came to see Buddhism with new eyes.

**(Wakimoto)** Up until that point, you had been exclusively devoted to Christianity, but under the guidance of Professor Anesaki (姉崎教授), your perspective broadened, and from around that time, the idea that all religions are, at their fundamental (根本的) and ultimate level (究極的), essentially one—a viewpoint in line with free-religion (自由宗教)—began to take root in your mind. By the way, regarding the mysticism (神秘主義) you mentioned earlier, what exactly was it?

**(Imaoka)** Even within mysticism, there is a wide range of meanings and types, from the esoteric (迷的なもの) to the philosophical (哲学的なもの). However, Anesaki-sensei's approach to mysticism was scholarly (学問的) and philosophical (哲学的). For example, he spoke about the profound (深遠な) religious experiences (宗教体験) and philosophical reflections (思索) of figures like Eckhart.

**(Wakimoto)** So, when you talk about mysticism, you are not referring to so-called mystical, incomprehensible miracles (神秘不可思議な奇跡仰), but rather to deep religious experiences (深

い宗教体験), such as encountering God (神との出会い) or union with the Absolute (絶対者との合一), is that correct?

**(Imaoka)** That's right. That was also where Anesaki-sensei placed the emphasis in his lectures, and I, too, was deeply influenced by it.

**(Wakimoto)** From such a mystical standpoint (神秘主義の立場), direct personal experience is inevitably given great importance, meaning that the self (自己, jiko) becomes the central issue, does it not?

**(Imaoka)** That's right. Instead of worshipping God (神様) as something external, one holds God (神) within oneself. God (神) and the self (自分) become one. That is why the self (自己) becomes the central issue.

**(Wakimoto)** Speaking of an encounter with God (神との出会い) and union between God and man (神人合一), wasn't Tsunashima Ryōsen's (綱島梁川) famous "Experiment in Seeing God" (見神の実験) from around that time?

**(Imaoka)** Yes, that was in Meiji 37 (1904), exactly when I was attending lectures on mysticism. I read "Experiment in Seeing God" (見神の実験) in the magazine "Shinjin" (新人), and I was deeply moved, realising that the kind of example being discussed in Anesaki-sensei's lecture—like Eckhart—was actually happening here and now. Filled with emotion, I made a special effort to visit Tsunashima-sensei (綱島先生) at his sickbed and received his guidance.

**(Wakimoto)** Was that experience Christian in nature (キリスト教的のもの)?

**(Imaoka)** For the most part, yes. After all, Ryōsen (梁川) was baptised (洗礼を受けて) in his youth. However, in time, he began to have doubts about Christianity and distanced himself from the Church, dedicating himself instead to the study of literary criticism (文芸評論) and ethics (倫理学). Then, after falling terminally ill, he began to immerse himself in religious thought (宗教的思考), and eventually, he came to have an experience of seeing God (見神の体験を持つ). By that point, it was no longer something that could be labelled (レッテルを貼る) as Christian or Buddhist; rather, it transcended such distinctions. It was a vast (広い) and profound (深い) experience—certainly not something occult-like. Rather, it was a living experience (生き生きした体験) of a mystical union (神秘的な融合) between God (神) and the self (自己), as the deep reality of heaven and earth (天地).

**(Wakimoto)** After such studies, once you graduated from university . . .

**(Imaoka)** After leaving university, I became a pastor (牧師) in Kobe (神戸), but gradually, my doubts about Christianity deepened, and after three years, I resigned and returned to Tokyo. At just the same time, a new assistant position (副手の制度) was created in the Religious Studies

Department at the university, and thanks to Anesaki-sensei, I became its first assistant (初代の副手).

**(Wakimoto)** I see. I also served as an assistant (副手) in the department after the war, so in that respect as well, I am your junior (後輩). I heard that you later went on to study abroad at Harvard University in the United States, is that correct?

**(Imaoka)** Yes, that was because Anesaki-sensei had gone to Harvard as an exchange professor (交換教授), and I accompanied him as his assistant. While working as his assistant, I was also given the opportunity to enroll in the Divinity School at the university.

**(Wakimoto)** At that time, I heard that New Theology (新神学) was flourishing at Harvard.

**(Imaoka)** Not only at Harvard, but around that time, Liberal New Theology (自由主義的な新神学) was thriving in Britain, Germany, and elsewhere. However, at Harvard, it was specifically Unitarian (ユニテリアン). Unitarian[ism] (ユニテリアン) is a form of Christianity, but it opposes the doctrine of the Trinity (三位一体論), which had been considered orthodox theology (正統神学). The Trinity (三位一体) asserts that there are three divine persons (三神): God (神); Christ (キリスト); the Holy Spirit (聖霊), yet, at the same time, these three are one entity (一体). Unitarian[ism] rejects this and instead holds that God (神) is one (唯一) (hence the term “Unity” (ユニテイ), and that Christ is not God but a human being (神ではなく人間である). Beyond that, it also took a rationalist approach (合理的傾向), rejecting many of the miracles (奇跡) described in the Bible (聖書).

**(Wakimoto)** Through such studies, you gradually walked the path toward free-religion (自由宗教 *jiyū shūkyō*) [or a creative, inquiring, free and liberative spirituality or religion] as you understand it today. Apart from these experiences, were there any particular individuals who had a strong influence (強い影響) on you? If so, could you tell us about them?

**(Imaoka)** While working as a pastor in Kobe, I began to have doubts (疑い) about orthodox Christianity (オーソドックスなキリスト教) and lost my sense of purpose in my pastoral work, which left me deeply troubled. It was during that time that I encountered Nishida Tenkō-san (西田天香さん). At that time, he had not yet established Ittōen (一園), but he was profoundly Buddhist (仏教的) and Zen-like (禅的). Observing his way of life and thought, he seemed like a person who lived in an entirely different world compared to the religious figures I had encountered up to that point. At the same time, he also had a Christian-like quality (キリスト教的でもあって)—for example, he literally practised the words of the Sermon on the Mount (山上の垂訓): “Do not worry about tomorrow...” That is, instead of worrying about everyday matters (生活問題), one should first seek the righteousness of the Kingdom of God (先ず神の国の義を求めよ). Watching him live by these words, I became deeply unsettled by the uncertainty (あやふや) of my own life. That was the moment when I finally made the decisive choice to resign as a pastor.

**(Wakimoto)** I see. Did Tenkō-san formally practice Zen (禅)?

**(Imaoka)** Well, I am not sure to what extent. However, after the failure (破綻) of his development project (開拓事業) in Hokkaido (北海道), he was struggling with the question of how to transcend (超する) both the profit-driven competitiveness of modern society (現代社会の営利競争主義) and human egocentric attachments (人間の我執). During this time, it seems he had quite a considerable experience of sitting meditation (坐った経験).

**(Wakimoto)** Sensei, have you ever practised Zazen (坐禅)?

**(Imaoka)** No, I have not. However, at Tenkō-san's recommendation, I practiced Okada-style Seiza Meditation (岡田式静座法). We rented Hongyō-ji Temple (本行寺) in Nippori (日暮里), where we would sit every morning from six to seven. From the late Meiji period until Okada-sensei (岡田先生) passed away in Taishō 9 (1920), I attended diligently for about ten years. We did nothing—just sat. But in a way, it was a form of Zen (禅). It was a fairly important experience in my life. I have continued ever since and still practice it today. It is my only form of discipline (唯一の修業) and also a method for maintaining both mental and physical health (心と体の健康法).

**(Wakimoto)** Sensei, you also seem to have a deep knowledge (造詣が深い) of Japanese Shinto (日本の神道), is that correct?

**(Imaoka)** That was through my encounter with an American journalist named [Joseph Warren Teets] Mason, who was particularly passionate about researching Japan—especially Shinto. His first visit to Japan was in Shōwa 7 (1932), and at the request of Shimomura Juichi-shi (下村寿一氏) who was then Director of the Religious Affairs Bureau (文部省宗教局長) at the Ministry of Education (文部省, Monbushō), I assisted [Mason] with interpreting (通訳) and research arrangements (研究の世話). Through working together, I found him to be an extremely pleasant (愉快) man, and before long, we became so close that we could completely confide in each other (肝胆相照らす仲). After that, he visited Japan twice more, staying for extended periods each time. On one occasion, the two of us spent an entire month traveling across Japan to visit and research (巡拝研究) major Shinto shrines (神社). Together, he published two books on Shinto research (神道研究), which I later translated into Japanese. We remained very close (随分仲よく) for about ten years until his death in New York in Shōwa 15 (1940). He loved Japan, and according to his will, he was buried at Tama Cemetery (多摩霊園) in Tokyo. He insisted that Shinto was originally a pacifist religion (本来平和主義) and strongly criticized (痛慨していました) the actions of the far-right (右翼) and the military (軍部) at that time. Thanks to him, I had an excellent opportunity for study, but in a way, it felt as though I had been taught about Japan by a foreigner (外人).

## II

**(Wakimoto)** As I continue listening, it seems that within you, all religions (あらゆる宗教) are present. And as a result of that, free-religion (自由宗教) was born. What is the fundamental idea (根本の考え) behind this free-religion?

**(Imaoka)** All humans (人間) possess a religious mind (宗教心). The religious impulse (宗教的要求) is something that is fundamental (根源的) and universal (普遍的) to human nature (人間性). This is the core belief (根本の考え). All religions are different from one another (夫々違います), but at their foundation, they can only exist (成り立つ) because of this fundamental religious mind (根源的な宗教心). It manifests in different forms due to various historical (歴史) and environmental (環境) factors, such as climate (風土). These differences are meaningful and necessary, which is why they exist separately. However, at the core (根本的), there is only one foundation (根本は一つ, konpon wa hitotsu). Recognizing this and cherishing it (大切にしていこう) is the essence of free-religion.

**(Wakimoto)** So, while there are various religions, at their core (根本的), there exists a common, universal essence (共通普遍), which, in a sense, could be called “religion itself” (宗教そのもの). And this is something inherent (具わっている) in all people by nature, as long as they are human (人間である限り). That is what became the basis of the first article of the Principles of Living, which was recited at the beginning, namely: “I place trust/have faith in myself” (私は自己をずる).

**(Imaoka)** That’s correct. Even if God (神さま) exists somewhere, rather than clinging to (頼りすぎる) that idea, one should instead trust in one’s own inherent nature (自己の本性を信じ) and strive to realize it (それを実現して行く). The first priority is the establishment of the self (自己の確立). From this, the foundation (根拠) for the dignity of the individual (人格の尊厳) also arises.

**(Wakimoto)** Regarding the article “I place trust/have faith in myself,” you have added the annotation: “I become aware of my own subjectivity (主体性) and creativity (創造性), and feel the worth of living in life (生きがい). Subjectivity (主体性) and creativity (創造性) can also be expressed as personality (人格), divinity (神性), and Buddha-nature (仏性). I believe this connects to the Buddhist idea that “all sentient beings possess Buddha-nature” (一切衆生有仏性), as well as to the Christian belief that “human beings are children of God” (人間は神の子である). So, when you say “I place trust/have faith in myself,” you mean to affirm the sacred nature (聖なるもの) within oneself, correct?

**(Imaoka)** Yes, that’s right. In general, religions consider human beings to be “children of sin” (罪の子) and advocate for self-denial (自己を否定する). It is common to preach selflessness (無私) and self-erasure (没我), so people might say that what I am proposing is contradictory. However, in response to the modern era (現代), where Nietzsche declared “God is dead” (神は死んだ), and where atheistic tendencies are becoming stronger, I say: Even if God does not exist (神は無くても), there is still something sacred (尊といもの). And that sacredness is found in human beings (人間). We should value (大切にしていこう) human beings as human beings. Let us pursue a religion without God (神なき宗教), a humanistic religion (ヒューマニズムの宗教). In doing so, I believe I will find salvation (救われる) for myself, while also addressing the modern trends of alienation from religion (宗教離れ), the idea that religion is unnecessary (宗教無用論), and even anti-religious thought (反宗教論).



**(Wakimoto)** I understand well. Since selfhood (主体性), creativity (創造性), and even Buddha-nature (仏性) are universal (普遍的), it naturally follows that the second article, “I place trust/have faith in my neighbour,” and the third article, “I place trust/have faith in a cooperative society,” must emerge. In other words, one affirms the “self” (自己) within one’s neighbour (隣人), and one affirms the “self” within the cooperative society (共同社会).

**(Imaoka)** That’s right. A human being cannot exist as a human being alone (一人では). Even when considering the essentials of daily life such as clothing, food, and shelter, (衣食住) or one’s spiritual life (精神生活), this remains true. Human beings are fundamentally social beings (人間は根源的に社会的存在). Therefore, the self, the neighbour, and the cooperative society (共同社会) are, at their root (根源的), one (一つ). That is what I mean by my “Trinity” (三位一体).

**(Wakimoto)** However, in the fifth article, the statement, “I place trust/have faith in the oneness of life and nature,” introduces nature (自然). How does this relate to the previous ideas?

**(Imaoka)** That is because human beings cannot exist separately from nature (自然を離れては存在しえない). The self, the neighbour, and the cooperative community all exist only because of (あつての) heaven and earth (天地), the cosmos (宇宙), and great nature (大自然). In other words, that is the root of our existence (我々の生命の根源). Even in ordinary, familiar examples, it is not just humans who form bonds; we also form bonds with birds (鳥), animals (獣), grasses (草), and trees (木). Commonly, people say that nature has no mind (自然には心が無い), but isn’t it possible to think that it does? At the very least, we can form bonds with birds and flowers as well. Even in the teachings of Christ, there are passages such as: “Consider the lilies of the field” and “Consider the birds of the air.” Furthermore, for example, I believe that sleeping (眠ること) is also a kind of returning to nature (自然への帰一). When we sleep, our consciousness disappears (自分の意識は無くて), in other words, the self is gone (つまり自分は無い), making it no different from being dead (死んでいるのと同じ). And yet, of course, we are still breathing (息をしている), and our heart continues to beat (心臓も動いている). Isn’t this one form of unity with nature (自然に帰一している姿)?

**(Wakimoto)** So, the “return to unity” (帰一 *kiitsu*) in Kiitsu Kyōkai (帰一教会 or 帰一教會 “Unity Fellowship” or “Unitarian Church”) means that all religions (あらゆる宗教) are, at their core or in their ultimate sense, fundamentally one (一つである). This aligns with the idea of “All Dharma Returning to One” (万法帰一). But beyond that, it also means that the self, the neighbour, and the cooperative community become one (一つになる). And further still, it implies that heaven and earth (天地) and all things in the universe (万物) also become one (一つになる). In that sense, “return to unity” (帰一 *kiitsu*) is a deeply meaningful term (非常に含みの多い言葉).

**(Imaoka)** Perhaps instead of a Trinity (三位一体), it should be called a Quaternity (四位一体).

**(Wakimoto)** The declaration of this position is found in the eighth article, which states, “I place trust/have faith in free-religion.” However, before that, the seventh article states, “I place trust/have faith in specific religions.” How is it possible to affirm both?

**(Imaoka)** That is a completely understandable question. If specific religions (特定宗教) are inadequate, then surely the whole reason for advocating free-religion (自由宗教) is to move beyond them. In that sense, you could say this seems contradictory, and you wouldn't be wrong. However, as the annotation (注釈) notes, the term “specific religion” (特定宗教) here refers first and foremost to the Kiitsu Kyōkai. Now, the Kiitsu Kyōkai is affiliated with the Japan Free Religion Association (日本自由宗教連盟), so of course, it is a free-religion. However, in the pursuit of the universal (普遍的) ideals and truths (理念・真理) of free-religion, Kiitsu Kyōkai was founded not as Christianity (キリスト教), Buddhism (仏教), or Shinto (神道), but as something that goes beyond (超越した) these traditions. Yet, in reality, any church (教会) that exists in the world inevitably takes on specific characteristics (特殊なもの) in various ways, and thus, even Kiitsu Kyōkai cannot avoid becoming a “specific religion” (特定宗教). However, universality (普遍) can only manifest (現われえない) through the particular (特殊). Thus, we have no choice but to establish a specific Kiitsu Kyōkai and, through it, continue seeking the universal ideals of free-religion (普遍的な自由宗教の理念). That is why the annotation states that “a specific religion (特定宗教) — including the Tokyo Kiitsu Kyokai — neither monopolises religious truth nor is it the ultimate embodiment of it.” And further, to affirm “a specific religion while continuing the endless pursuit and improvement towards universal (普遍的真理) and ultimate truth (究極的真理) is the core of religious life (宗教生活の中核). Such a dynamic religion (動的宗教) is called a free-religion (自由宗教).”

**(Wakimoto)** So, if the various established religions (既成宗教) were to advance with that kind of attitude, then they, too, would be considered free-religion (自由宗教), wouldn't they?

**(Imaoka)** Yes, that's right. In fact, within this [Japan Free Religion] Association, we have members such as Pastor Akashi (赤司牧師) of the Japan Free Christian Church (日本自由キリスト教会), as well as Yamamoto Genshū-shi (山本現雄師) of the Seikai (正会) or Seiji Temple (正寺). Even outside of our Association, there are surprisingly many people, both within (中) and outside (外) of existing religious institutions (既成教団), who adopt an attitude of free thought (自由思索) and free pursuit of the path (自由求道). We refer to them as potential free-religionists (潜在的自由宗教人).

**(Wakimoto)** Recently, with issues such as peace (平和問題), there seems to be an increasing emphasis on religious cooperation (宗教協力) and interfaith dialogue (諸宗教間の対話). But true interfaith cooperation can only be realised when approached in the spirit of free-religion (自由宗教の精神), wouldn't you say?

**(Imaoka)** It is certainly a good thing that cooperation (協力) and alliances (提携) among various religions have become more widespread. However, mere cooperation and alliances alone are not enough. If, at the fundamental level, religious groups continue to cling obstinately (頑固) to their own sacred figures (仏尊) and traditions (伝統), surrounding themselves with impenetrable walls (城壁), then even if they gather together, it will amount to nothing more than mere socialising (単

なる社交). A truly humble attitude (謙虚な態度) is necessary—one that allows each religious organization to honestly face (直視) its own realities (現実). Each must reflect (反省) on the fact that they do not possess (ではない) an exclusive claim to the truth (真理を独占). From there, they must strive toward a higher truth (高い真理), recognizing that this higher truth is common (共通) to all religions. Only when they engage in dialogue for the sake of seeking (求めるため) this greater truth can there be genuine (真の) dialogue (対話) and cooperation (協力).

**(Wakimoto)** As I have been listening to you, I have come to sense that your way of thinking seems to align with pantheism (汎神論) as it is discussed in religious studies (宗教学). That is, the idea that everything in existence (この世に存在するもの)—each individual human being (個々の人間), birds (鳥), beasts (獣), grasses (草), and trees (木)—is an expression of an Absolute (絶対者の現れ).

**(Imaoka)** Yes, that's right. I stopped being able to affirm a personal God (人格神) quite some time ago. In that sense, one might call it atheism (無神論), though if I were to completely identify with that term (言い切ってしまう), it would not entirely sit comfortably with me. Perhaps it is similar to the way that Buddhism and Daoism are sometimes described as atheistic (無神論), yet at other times as polytheistic (多神論). My belief is that the truly sacred (尊いもの), that which is worthy of reverence (拝むべきもの), is humanity itself (人間である). It exists within human beings (人間の内に存在している).

**(Wakimoto)** In your Kiitsu Kyōkai, there are hardly any grand facilities (壮麗な施設,) like those found in ordinary churches (普通の教会) or temples (寺院). Furthermore, there are no clergy (聖職者) such as pastors (牧師). I have heard that you yourself have renounced (お捨てになって) the title of pastor (牧師) and maintain the position of being just another member (みんなと同じ一会員), equal with everyone else. Would it be correct to say that you reject (否定なさる) the distinction (差別) between what is commonly called the sacred world (神聖な世界) and the secular world (世俗)?

**(Imaoka)** There may be some meaning (意味はある) in making a distinction (分けること) between the secular and the sacred world. However, I have encountered many individuals in secular society (世俗の中)—for example, politicians (政治家), economists (経済人), scholars (学者), artists (芸術家), craftsmen (職人), and farmers (お百姓)—whose character and actions have commanded my deep respect (頭の下る). On the other hand, I have also witnessed many base and corrupt elements (俗悪なもの) within the religious world (宗教界). Because of this, I have come to believe that it is a mistake (誤り) to rigidly divide (はっきり二つに分けてしまう) the two based solely on external appearances (形の上から). Ultimately, what truly matters is that as fellow human beings (お互い人間同志), we should mutually respect (敬愛し合い) and support one another (援け合って行く). This secular humanism (俗人主義 lit. “Common-person principle”) is, in my view, the most authentic (本当であり) and also the most democratic (民主的でもある).

**(Wakimoto)** For many years, you devoted yourself to education as the principal (校長) of Seisoku Academy (正則学院). Could you share your thoughts on the relationship between education and religion (教育と宗教の関係)?

**(Imaoka)** That was quite a long time ago. When I first became principal, I had a strong desire to implement religious education (宗教教育). I even established a special religious curriculum (宗教の時間を特設), but it did not go as smoothly as I had hoped. Gradually, I began to feel that perhaps separating religion (宗教を特に教える) from the other academic subjects (各教科) was fundamentally a mistake (間違っている). Instead, I came to believe that religion must exist within the teaching of ordinary subjects (普通の教科を教える中に宗教がなければならぬ). No, in fact, I came to think that true education (真の教育) naturally contains religion (おのずから宗教がある). It does not even have to be explicitly called religion (宗教と言わなくてもよい), nor does it have to be consciously recognized as religious education (宗教教育をしていると自覚しなくてもいい). Of course, when phrased this way, it raises the question: “What, then, is religion?” But as [Paul] Tillich said, if religion is defined as the ultimate concern of human beings (宗教とは人間の究極的な関心事), then surely the most universal concern (関心) is the completion of oneself as a human being (人間として完成すること). Therefore, even if it is not explicitly called “religion” (宗教), any form of education that aims at human fulfillment (人間性の実現) and self-completion (人間完成) is, in itself, religious education (宗教教育). In other words, true education is itself religion (本当の教育は即宗教である). If an educator stands firmly upon the essence of education (教育の本質), pouring in both heart (心) and soul (魂), there is no need (必要はない) to invite religious figures (宗教家を招く) to speak separately.

**(Wakimoto)** We are almost out of time, but before we conclude, I would like to ask about something you wrote in a separate document under the title “Mission Statement” (綱領).

In that document, you state: “We seek harmony between spirituality and intellect (霊性と知性との調和) and reject superstition and fanaticism (迷と狂僧を排斥).” Could you briefly explain what you mean by this?

**(Imaoka)** The conflict between spirituality and intellect (霊性と知性の衝突) is essentially the same as the conflict between religion and science (宗教と科学との衝突). However, at their core, both are simply two different aspects (両面) of a single function of the human mind (我々の一つの心の働き). Since they both arise from the same source, there is no reason they should inherently clash (本来衝突する筈がない); in fact, harmony between them (調和) is only natural. For example, when heliocentrism (地動説) emerged as an unshakable truth (動かすべからざる真理), religion naturally adjusted to it (宗教もそれに調和する). The same applies to evolutionary theory (進化論). To stubbornly resist these truths by clinging to outdated traditions (古い伝統に立って争う) is a grave error (大変な誤り). Even if religion yields ground (宗教が譲歩し負ける) in such disputes, it does not affect the essence of religion (宗教の本質). Rather, knowing the truth (知って) allows religion to purify itself (純化) and advance toward a higher state (向上).

**(Wakimoto)** Next, could you briefly share your thoughts on eternal life (永遠の生命)?

**(Imaoka)** If eternal life (永生) refers to the common notion of the immortality of the soul (靈魂不滅), then I can only say: “I do not know” (わからない), because I have yet to experience death (まだ死んでみないから).” However, I would argue that such knowledge is unnecessary (そんなこと分らなくてもよい). Rather than worrying about whether our souls will persist after death (死後), what matters is how we live each day of our present lives (現世の日々の生き方). To dedicate ourselves earnestly (真剣に) to our responsibilities (つとめ) and live a fulfilling life (充実した人生)—this itself (それがそのまま) is what holds eternal value (永遠の価値) and constitutes immortal life (不滅の生命). A faith/religion (宗教) that arises from the fear of hell (地獄へ落ちるのが恐さ) or the desire for heavenly bliss (極楽の幸せ欲しさ), as if making a selfish calculation of spiritual profit and loss (損得計算の上の信仰), is utterly corrupt (汚ないもの). Such a person is already on the path to hell (それこそ地獄行き).

(*Shōwa 54, 1974, “Mahoroba” 「まほろば」— draft trans. Andrew James Brown*)

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## My Principles of Living — Revised Again (Tentative) (1981)

1. **I affirm myself** [私は自己をずる]  
I am aware of my own subjectivity (主体性), creativity (創造性) and sociability (社会性), and feel the worth of living in life (生きがい) through them. Subjectivity, creativity and sociability can also be expressed as personality (人格), divinity (神性), and Buddha-nature (仏性).
2. **I affirm others** (他者 *ta-sha*)  
Others are neighbours who possess their own selves as others. By affirming myself, I inevitably affirm others.
3. **I affirm the cooperative society** (共同社会)  
Neither self nor others exist in isolation or self-sufficiency; instead, they inevitably establish a mutual dependency, solidarity, and a cooperative society.
4. **I affirm the trinity of self, others, and cooperative society**  
The self, others, and the cooperative society, while each possessing unique individualities, unite into one. Therefore, there is no precedence or superiority among them; each always presupposes the other two.
5. **I affirm the universal cooperative society** (宇宙的共同社会 *uchūteki kyōdō shakai*)  
The trinity of self, others, and the cooperative society further unites with heaven and earth and all things, to form a universal cooperative society.
6. **I affirm the church** (教会 or 教會 *kyōkai*)  
The church is a microcosm of the universal cooperative society. I can only be myself by being a member of the church.

**Addendum:** I interpret the above faith as free-religion (自由宗教 *jiyū shūkyō*) [free-religion or a creative, inquiring, free and liberative spirituality or religion] and, as a Free Religionist (自由宗教人 *jiyū shūkyōjin*), together with my companions, I belong to the Tokyo Kiitsu Kyokai (帰一教会 or 帰一教會 “Unity Fellowship” or “Unitarian Church”), the Japan Free Religion Association (日本自由宗教連盟), and the International Association for Religious Freedom. However, free-religion is neither opposed to established religions nor does it seek to integrate them. Instead, it aims to grasp and realise the essence and ideals, not only of various religions, but also across all human activities. Therefore, these principles are nothing other than the attitude of life I always wish constantly to maintain.

(September 1981— draft trans. Andrew James Brown)

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## **Statement of Faith (Tentative) for my Daily Life (1983)**

*A typewritten statement of faith (in English) to which is attached Imaoka Shin'ichirō's handwritten set of notes (also in English)). Dated January 1st 1983. This typewritten text was published by the Japan Free Religious Association and distributed at the 1984 I.A.R.F. Conference in Tokyo.*

### **1. I BELIEVE IN SELF**

Awakened to the autonomy, sociality and creativity within me, I find my daily life worth living. Autonomy, sociality and creativity may be called Personality, Divinity and Buddhahood.

### **2. I BELIEVE IN OTHERS**

Because of my belief in Self, I can not help but believe in Others who have their own Selves as neighbors.

### **3. I BELIEVE IN COMMUNITY**

Both my Self and other Selves are unique but not absolutely distinct from each other. Hence solidarity, fellowship and Community will be realized.

### **4. I BELIEVE IN THE COSMIC COMMUNITY**

Not only Self, Others and Community, but all nature in addition, are one and constitute the Cosmic Community.

### **5. I BELIEVE IN THE CHURCH**

The Church epitomizes the Cosmic Community and I will be a cosmic man by joining the Church.

### **Handwritten notes added to the [1983] "Statement of Faith for my daily life"**

1. Free religion is not a ready made religion and has not a creed or dogma except a tentative statement.
2. Particular religion is Free Religion if it does not insist on a monopoly of truth and applies itself diligently to seek after truth in others too.
3. Free Religion is neither a new religion that unifies all particular religions but is ~~immanent~~ ~~them~~ ~~within~~ ~~them~~ particular religions as their essence.
4. Because I and others are not quite independent of each other and form a community, Free Religion is both individual and community religion.
5. Because Free Religion is nothing but the realization of the pure and genuine human nature consisting of autonomy, creativity and sociality, all human activities, i.e., politics, economy, education, art, labor and even domestic affairs are also Free Religion as much as they are also realization[s] of the same fundamental human nature. There is no fundamental distinction between the sacred and the secular.
6. Free Religion is more than the cooperation of religions and the world peace movement.

*Shinichiro Imaoka — January 1st, 1983*

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***Jiyū Shūkyō / Free Religion***

<https://andrewjbrown.blogspot.com/p/free-religion.html>

***Kiitsu Kyōkai***

<https://andrewjbrown.blogspot.com/p/kiitsu-kyokai.html>

***Seiza Meditation (Quiet Sitting)***

<https://andrewjbrown.blogspot.com/p/seiza-meditation.html>