

An Introduction to Imaoka Shin'ichirō (1881-1988) Essays on Free-Religion, the Free-Religious Person & the Kiitsu Kyōkai

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The Position of a Free-Religious Person (自由宗教人) (1951)

Since religion (宗教) is an individual experience (各人の体験), it is, as Shinran Shōnin stated in absolute terms, extremely personal (極めて個人的): “Amida’s salvation is for me alone” (彌陀の救は自分一人のためだ). However, the more deeply one pursues the personal aspect (個人的に徹すれば徹するほど), the more religion simultaneously becomes a social matter (宗教は同時に社会的なものとなる). It is not a matter of being saved first (自分だけ先に救われて) and then telling others: “Come this far” (ここまで御出で). Rather, the attitude of Hōzō Bosatsu (法蔵菩薩 i.e. Bodhisattva Dharmākara) — who said: “Until all sentient beings (一切来生) are saved, I too cannot be saved. I am saved together with all others (自分は皆と同時に救われるのだ) — is just as correct as that of Shinran Shōnin. Though these two perspectives may seem contradictory at first glance, they are in fact two sides of the same religious life. With the aim of freely expressing this religious life, the position of the free-religious person (自由宗教人) is one that is: on one hand, deeply individualistic (一面どこまでも個性的), and on the other hand, profoundly universal (他面極めて普遍的). However, if someone were to object, saying: “Isn’t this the stance of all true religious people, not just free-religionists?” I would wholeheartedly agree. The position of the free-religious person is nothing other than the position of a true religious person. The position of a true religious person, bound by nothing, is precisely the position of a free-religious person. Thus, my answer is: “free-religion (自由宗教) is, in fact, nothing other than religion itself (実は宗教そのものを意味する).”

If we apply the above principles to the position of the free-religious person in a more concrete manner, then first and foremost, the church of the freereligious person must be a democratic one (民主主義的教会) that equally respects both the individual (個人) and the collective (集団). That is to say, the church (教会, kyōkai) must not belong to the clergy (教職), such as Buddhist priests (僧侶) or Christian ministers (牧師), but rather, it must belong to the entire congregation (一般教会員) — the laity (レイマン). In other words, the sovereignty of the church (教会の主権) must always remain in the shared hands of all members (全教会員の共有), and the clergy (僧侶・牧師) are simply executive functionaries (執行機関). I believe that the same principle applies to the position of a religious founder (教祖). For example, Shinran Shōnin (親鸞上人) once said: “Shinran has not a single disciple. Everyone is my fellow traveler and friend.” I believe that this attitude is correct. If one does not establish one’s own disciples (弟子) or followers (子分), and if comrades (仲間) form genuine friendships, becoming of one heart and body (一心同体), then the founder (教祖) and the clergy (教職) can simply step into the background (舞台裏に引込んでよい). It is even possible to imagine a situation where the church continues to function without the presence of a religious founder or clergy. Those religious founders and clergy who exert an influence and provide guidance (指導) beyond their visible, public activities (舞台上の活動) are truly great religious figures (真に偉大な教祖) and clergy. Consequently, within the church, the mutual refinement (切磋琢磨)

among the congregation (会員) is even more important than the sermons (説教) and the activities (活動) of the clergy. At the very least, there should be no hierarchical distinction (軽重の差) between the value of the clergy's contributions and that of the congregation.

It is often said that a defining characteristic of the church of the free-religious person is that it does not have a creed/principles of faith (仰箇条). However, no matter how much a free-religious person values freedom (自由), it is impossible for them to have no intellectual expression (知的表現) whatsoever regarding their own faith. Rather, it is both natural (自然) and an expression of freedom (自由) that each person has their own creed/principles of faith. Thus, almost paradoxically, a free-religious person could be said to adhere to a creed/principles of faith even more than those in established religions. However, such a creed/principles of faith is/are personal (私的) and individual (個人的), and it is never a standard statement (劃一的). Furthermore, it goes without saying that it is not something that can be imposed by an external religious authority. In other words, a free-religious person absolutely cannot agree with the idea of believing in a creed/principles of faith such as the Apostles' Creed (使徒信条), the Nicene Creed (ニケア信条), or the Athanasian Creed (アタナシオ信条), as if they were unchangeable, eternal truths (永久不変の真理) that cannot have a single word added or removed. When it is said that a free-religious person does not have a creed/principles of faith, it is meant in this sense, and it certainly does not mean that they reject all creeds/principles of faith. A creed/principles of faith differs from person to person and evolves with time. It does not represent the whole truth (真理の全貌) but merely expresses a part of it. However, even though it is only a partial expression of truth (部分的である), since it is an expression of truth (真理の表現), a free-religious person should have sympathy (共鳴) and resonance (共感) for the sincere beliefs of others. Nevertheless, since a church is an organised entity (組織する), it is naturally necessary to have some kind of charter (綱領) that clarifies the basis of the congregation's unity (教会員結合の根拠). However, this is not really a creed but rather a statement of shared purpose (共通な目的) or a set of practical guiding principles (実践要綱の表明).

The same can be said regarding rituals (儀式). A freereligious person does not hold rituals in the sense that one must receive baptism to be saved, or that one must recite sutras to attain Buddhahood (成仏). However, religious conviction (宗教的信念) does not exist entirely naked (赤裸々に), by itself; it necessarily takes some concrete form (何等かの形態に具体化する). Thus, just as there is no mind apart from material things (物を離れて心なく), and just as there is no life apart from the body (肉体を別にして生命なき), so too, there is no religion without ritual (儀式を離れて宗教は無い). However, since objects and forms (物や形態) are infinitely varied (千差万別) and never uniform, religious rituals are also infinitely diverse (千差万別) and appear to have nothing in common (何等帰一するところが無い). In fact, differences in rituals (儀式の相違) have sometimes even caused schisms among religious sects (宗派の分裂). Therefore, when free-religious people gather in one place to hold a worship service (礼拝式), the question naturally arises: "What kind of ritual should be adopted?" At first glance, this seems like an extremely difficult problem. However, from the fundamental standpoint of free-religious people, it can be resolved with the greatest ease.

The religion of the free-religious person is a universal religion (普遍的宗教), a faith that should be applicable to all people under heaven (天下万人に妥当する宗教). Therefore, it should be impossible for a particular group of people to find it inaccessible because of ritual differences (儀式

の故を以て). If such a situation were to arise, then that free-religion would no longer be a universal religion (普遍的宗教). If it truly possesses universal life (普遍的生命), should it not naturally hold enough power of attraction (魅力) to move even those accustomed to different rituals, allowing them to transcend ritual differences and feel a sense of shared spiritual resonance (共感せしめる)? Is it not precisely the ability to transcend differences in rituals and differences in doctrine, in the place where mutual sympathy (共感) and resonance (共鳴) occur, that we find the essence (妙味) and true aim (目標) of the “fellowship of saints” (聖徒の交わり)—or the “gathering of the sacred multitude” (聖衆集会)—which represents the ideal and profound meaning (目標と妙味) of a Church of Free-Religionists (自由宗教人教会)? Thus, the rituals used in the worship services (礼拝式) of the free-religious person’s church need not be fixed or specific. The most essential thing (肝腎なこと) is not the question of ritual but rather the pulsation of universal great life (普遍の大生命の躍動), powerful enough to move and inspire even those accustomed to different rituals. However, if someone were to insist that in order to make this universal great life pulsate (普遍の大生命を躍動せしめる), it must be done through a particular ritual (特定の儀式)—that no alternative ritual can suffice—then I would begin to doubt whether their religion is truly universal.

Finally, clarifying the differences and similarities between a Church of Free-Religionists and a Religious Association (宗教連盟) will also help explain the characteristics of free-religion. From my perspective, both groups share the principle of advocating for friendly relations (友好関係) among various religions. However, whereas the Religious Association is a collaboration concerned with the secondary aspects (第二義面) of different religions, a Church of Free-Religionists seeks unity (帰一 *kiitsu*) in the essence (本質) of religions. Consequently, while it is difficult for the Religious Association to conduct worship (礼拝), a Church of Free-Religionists can—or rather, must—conduct worship. This is the key point of difference between the two. Whereas the Religious Association functions simply as a liaison body (連絡機関), a Church of Free-Religionists is a firmly autonomous and independent church (厳然たる自主独立の教会). If that is the case, then what is the relationship between established churches (既成教会) and a Church of Free-Religionists? Does one have to leave one’s established church in order to become a member of a Church of Free-Religionists? Or is it possible to belong to both churches at the same time? In other words, is a Church of Free-Religionists a denomination (宗派), or does it move beyond denominational boundaries (宗派を超越する)? To this question, I would like to answer both “yes” and “no.” If an established church is not exclusive (排他的で無く) and, through the symbol of a denomination (宗派というシンボル), embraces a universal religious life (普遍的な宗教的生命), then that church is, in itself, already a Church of Free-Religionists. In such a case, one is free to belong to either church—or, if one has the capacity, to belong to both at the same time. However, in most cases, established churches exist as denominations in an exclusive sense (排他的という意味での宗派). Thus, there is a great need at this moment to found a new Church of Free-Religionists that goes beyond (超越) established churches. Moreover, it is both natural and necessary that, once the connection (関係) with established churches is severed, one should dedicate oneself entirely (専心) to the growth (育成) of a Church of Free-Religionists. Therefore, no matter how supra-denominational (超宗派的) its intent may be, once the Church of Free-Religionists is formed, it will, in a strict sense, cease to be supra-denominational and will become a new denomination (新宗派). However, rather than regressing into an exclusive and self-assertive denomination (排他的・独尊的な宗派), it will become a denomination that constantly evolves in accordance with the times

(常に時代に即応した進歩的発展的形態), striving above all for the growth (伸長) of the universal religious life (普遍的な宗教的生命). In other words, it will become a supra-denominational denomination (超宗派的な宗派).

The above argument is by no means our original idea. At the end of the 18th-century, Gotthold Ephraim Lessing had already depicted, with great fidelity, the position of a free-religionist (自由宗教人の立場) in his dramatic poem “Nathan the Wise,” Therefore, I would like to conclude this paper by quoting a scene from that dramatic poem.

It takes place during the time of the Crusades. Nathan, a Jew, had seen his seven sons slaughtered by the Christian Crusaders. However, by a strange twist of fate (偶然にも), a stable boy appeared, bringing with him an infant—his master’s Christian child—and pleaded for Nathan’s mercy (数を求める lit. “sought salvation”). The child’s mother had already died, and his father had joined the Crusades, leaving no one to care for the infant. Nathan, overjoyed, accepted the child, as if one of his lost sons had returned. He then raised the child in a truly Jewish manner. However, eighteen years later, this act was discovered. The Christian abbot (修道院の長老), outraged that a Jew had raised a Christian child and turned him away from the Christian faith, declared that Nathan must be burned at the stake. The abbot then ordered his subordinate monk (修道僧) to track down Nathan’s whereabouts. However, as fate would have it, the monk tasked with this mission had once been the very stable boy who had brought the infant to Nathan.

He immediately sought out Nathan and spoke these words: “More than anything else, this child needed love (愛)—more than Christianity. Even the love of a wild beast would have sufficed. He could have become a Christian at any time. Had it not been for your compassion, this child would have died. You, a Jew, are the true Christian. I have never known a finer Christian.”

To this, Nathan replied:

“We are both blessed. What you see in me as Christianity, I, in turn, see in you as Judaism.”

The essence of religion (宗教の神髄) is something far greater and more sacred than Christianity, Judaism, Islam, Buddhism, Shintō, doctrines, rituals, or denominations. It is a universal life force (普遍的生命)—which we may, if we so wish, call love (愛). Thus, the free religious person (自由宗教人) dedicates themselves solely to the free unfolding (自由な伸長) of this universal life force—nothing more, nothing less.

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My Position on Free Religion (自由宗教) (1952 NHK Broadcast)

I was raised in a devout [Jōdo] Shinshū (真宗) [Buddhist] family, so as a boy, I was a Buddhist (仏教者). Later, during my senior years (高学年時代) in middle school (中学校), under the guidance of a British missionary (英国官教師), I was baptised (洗礼を受けて) in the Anglican Church (聖公会) and became a Christian (クリスチャン). This happened around Meiji 30 (1897). For my parents, the fact that their Shinshū family had produced a Yaso believer (ヤソ教信者, a derogatory term for Christians) was a far greater humiliation (苦杯) than if they had given birth to a traitor to the nation (国賊)—it was like being forced to drink poison. I myself felt a pain as if my insides had been torn apart. However, I could not bring myself to abandon Christianity. However, I could not bring myself to abandon Christianity and went on to live a devoted Christian life (熱心な基督教徒の生活) throughout high school (高等学校) and university (大学).

After graduating from university, I immediately became the pastor (牧師) of a certain Congregational Church (組合教会) in Kobe (神戸市). However, during my three years as a pastor, I gradually realised that urging Buddhists and Shintōists to convert to Christianity was, in fact, an impossible task for me. I eventually reached the conclusion that true missionary work (真の伝道) toward Buddhists and Shintōists was not about making them abandon (捨てさせる) Buddhism or Shintō, but rather, about encouraging them to become true Buddhists (真の仏教徒) and true Shintōists (真の神道家). In other words, I could no longer, in good conscience, carry out Christian missionary work (基督教の伝道) in its traditional sense. As a result, I resigned from my role as a pastor and became an assistant researcher (副手) at the Religious Studies Department (宗教学研究室) at Tokyo Imperial University (東京大学). Later, I spent two years studying at the Harvard Divinity School.

Upon returning to Japan, I spent over ten years teaching Religious Studies (宗教学) and Christian History (基督教史) at Nihon University (日本大学). At the same time, while working as a middle school principal (中学校長), I conducted research on the essence (本質) and methods (方法) of religious education (宗教教育) in schools. Furthermore, from Shōwa 7 to Shōwa 15 (1932–1940), together with Mr. [J. W. T.] Mason, a researcher of Shintō from the United States, I travelled across Japan, visiting Shintō shrines and meeting with Shintō priests, devoting myself to the study of Shintō. Through this journey, my religious stance (宗教的立場) gradually ceased to be that of Christianity. And yet, I did not feel comfortable calling myself a Buddhist or a Shintōist either. At times, I felt as if I were simultaneously both a Christian, a Buddhist, and a Shintōist (同時に基督教徒でもあり仏教徒でもあり神道家でもある). However, in my view, the most appropriate way to describe the end point (終点, shūten) of my fifty-year-long religious pilgrimage is that it led me to free-religion (自由宗教). This is also why, several years ago, I joined like-minded individuals (同志) in initiating the Free-Religion Movement (自由宗教運動). What, then, is this free-religious stance (自由宗教的立場)? I would now like to offer my humble thoughts on this matter and invite your criticism.

I believe that free-religion has two central principles (二つの中心). The first is freedom (自由) or respect for individuality (個性の尊重). That is, it is a religion (宗教) that is bound by nothing (何物にも束縛されない)—a truly individualised religion (個性的宗教) that has become one's very own life (自分自身の生命になっている). To put it in the strictest and most simple way ((極的に

言えば), it is a faith that is not bound (束縛されない) even by creeds/principles of faith (仰箇条). Of course, articles of faith (信仰箇条), as intellectual expressions of religious experience (宗教的体験の知的表現), are precious. However, they are by no means religion itself (宗教そのもの). Articles of faith, while having important historical significance at the time they were formulated, are by no means eternal and immutable truths (永久不変の真理). As time progresses, articles of faith must also be revised and adapted (変更されなければなりません). That which compels the revision of articles of faith—that alone is true religion (本当の宗教). Therefore, free-religion first and foremost advocates liberation (解放を主張します) from articles of faith. However, it goes without saying that this does not mean rejecting personal principles (個人的な主義主張) that, while not strictly speaking creeds, do not seek to impose restrictions on others. Nor does it mean rejecting going principles (綱領) that have been established for convenience (便宜上) by churches (教会) or religious organisations (教団).

Next, as a natural consequence (当然の結果) of free-religion advocating that religion must not be borrowed (借りものであってはならぬ) but must be one's own personal faith (自分自身の宗教), the role of monks (僧侶) and pastors (牧師) becomes secondary in our religious life (仰生活). If anything, our religious movement (宗教運動) should take the form of a lay movement (平徒運動). Therefore, whether a temple (寺院) or a church (教会), it should not belong to the monks or, but to laypeople (レイマン).

Next, free-religion also seeks liberation from founders (教祖からの解放). In Buddhism and Christianity, Shakyamuni (釈迦) and Christ (基督) are revered as founders (教祖). However, free-religion has no founder. This does not mean, in an egotistical or delusional manner (誇大妄想狂的), that we ignore (無視) or despise (軽蔑) Shakyamuni or Christ. Rather, it simply means that we do not rely upon or cling to (依存執着しない) a single, specific founder (或特定の教祖). Therefore, we revere (尊ぶ) and learn from (学ぶ) not only Shakyamuni and Christ, but also all sages (あらゆる聖賢) from both East and West (東西), from ancient to modern times (古今). However, some may criticise that this blurs the distinctions between Buddhism, Christianity, and Islam (回教). And indeed, that is precisely the case. The uniqueness of free-religion lies precisely in the fact that it does not neatly fit (判らぬところに特色があります) into Buddhism, Christianity, or Islam. After all, the assumption that a religion must be either Buddhism, Christianity, Islam, or Shintō is, in itself, an strange way of thinking (考え方が変).

That way of thinking assumes that religion is acceptable as ready-made (レディーメイド)—that is, as a pre-manufactured product (既成品). Even in the case of clothing, ready-made garments are often extremely ill-fitting (甚だみつともない). How much more so when it comes to religion!

Above all, religion must be made-to-order (メイド・ツー・オーダー or 注文品). It must be something that fits each person's individuality (それぞれの個性) perfectly (ピッタリ). Ultimately, religion must be, above all else, one's own (自分自身の) religion. In this respect, I find Shinran's attitude truly exemplary when he said: "If one carefully reflects on the vow made in Amida's five kalpas of deep contemplation, one realises that it was made solely for me, Shinran, alone" (「弥陀の五劫思惟の願をよくよく案ずれば、ひとへに親鸞一人がためなりけり」). However, some may question whether free-religion, being so individualised — a different faith for every person (万

人万様) — would not inevitably lead to confusion (混乱) and disorder (繁雑). Yet, in reality, the truth (事実) is exactly the opposite (正反対). Having a genuine, personal religion (真の自分自身の宗教) actually leads people to true unity and cooperation (真に協力一致せしめる). Furthermore, it encourages a deeper faith (より深き仰), a broader belief (より広き信仰), and a more universal faith (より普遍的な仰). In this respect, it is the same as how a truly strong society (真に強固な社会) can only be formed by individuals who have awakened to their own uniqueness (個性に目ざめた人々). On one hand, democracy (民主主義) values freedom and individual dignity (個人を尊重). On the other hand, it also values cooperation (協力) and society (社会). This very principle (原理) of democracy is also the principle of free-religion. Therefore, free-religion does not consider individual salvation (個人の救) and social salvation (社会の救) as separate matters. Rather than seeing salvation as a two-step process, where, firstly, individuals are saved (個人が救われた後) and then their cooperation leads to the salvation of society (救われた個々人の協力によって社会が救われる), it considers personal salvation and social salvation to be simultaneous (個人の救と社会の救とは同時). In this regard, I find deep meaning (深い意義) in the Catholic Church's teaching that "there is no salvation outside the Church" (教会を離れて救なし). I am also deeply interested in the fact (事実) that Shinto shrines (神社) serve as the shared religion (共同宗教) of the communities (共同社会) where they are located—what could be called Gemeinschaft (ゲマインシャフト) or Community (コミュニティ). However, even more than these, I am profoundly moved (限りなき感激の情) by the Eighteenth Vow (第十八願) of Hōzō Bosatsu (法蔵菩薩 i.e. Bodhisattva Dharmakara). Hōzō Bosatsu has vowed that unless all beings in the ten directions (十方衆生) — that is, the general public (即ち一般大衆) — are saved (救われないう), he himself (自分) will also not attain salvation (も救われない). He does not first attain enlightenment (悟りを開いて) and become a Buddha (仏), calling out to others from above to "come join me here." Rather, he enters into the suffering of all people (大衆の中に飛び込んで行き), suffers together with them, and shares in their joys (大衆と共に喜ぶ). When children are starving due to a shortage of food, parents divide their own portion and first feed their children. They never put themselves first and eat before their children. A great teacher (立派な教師) never lords over (威張りません) their students. They do not seek to create (造ろう) disciples (弟子) or followers (子分) for themselves. If they create anything, their effort is always to cultivate people (人間を造る) who will surpass themselves (自分以上の). That is to say, they actively enter (這入って行き) into the midst of their students and devote themselves (専心する) to the collaborative work (共同作業) of mutual refinement of character (人格の切磋琢磨). In this regard, I once again find Shinran to be remarkable (矢張りエライ) when he said: "I have not a single disciple" (弟子一人もたず). Thus, I believe that Hōzō Bosatsu has not simply attained enlightenment (悟りすまして) and become a serene Buddha (仏様). Rather, I believe that he still suffers (苦しみがいて) together with all of humanity (全世界の人類), struggling through the hardships caused by war (戦争のため) even at this very moment. Would it not be true that a Bodhisattva (菩薩) who struggles and suffers is more worthy of reverence (より尊とい) than a god (神様) who has already transcended suffering (悟りすました神様)? Could it not be that both salvation (救い) and enlightenment (悟り) are, in truth, only found within love (愛の中にのみ)—a love that struggles and suffers together with the people (大衆と共に苦しみがく)?

As a natural consequence (当然の結果) of free-religion considering individual salvation (個人の救) and social salvation (社会の救) as inseparable (不可分な者), it asserts the absolute necessity (絶対的必要性) of the church (教会). This is the second central principle (第二の中心) of free-religion. That is, free-religion resolutely rejects (断平として排斥します) the intellectual (インテリ), antisocial (非社会的), individualistic (個人主義的), and dogmatic (独善的) non-churchism (無教会主義, *mukyōkai shugi*)—or, at the very least, indifference (無関心) towards the church. However, as I previously stated, free-religion is fundamentally a lay religion (レイマンの宗教). Thus, the church it establishes (その組織する教会) must not be detached from society (現実の社会とかけ離れた), taking on the monastic (僧堂) or cloistered (修道院的) character of a temple (寺院). Rather, it must remain nothing less than a microcosm (縮図) of real society (現実の社会)—or, indeed, an ideal model (模範的) of what society should be. From the standpoint of free-religion, true religious life (真の宗教生活) exists only within actual social life itself (現実の社会生活其者の中にのみ). Thus, we absolutely oppose (絶対に反対であります) the view that while temples and churches are sacred (神聖), real society (現実社会) is secular (世俗). To sanctify real society itself (現実社会其者を神聖化する)—that is true religion. Thus, from the standpoint of free-religion, Paradise (極楽), Heaven (天国), or the Western Pure Land (西方浄土) cannot be found in the afterlife (死後) or the next world (来世). Rather, they must be discovered within real society itself (現実の社会其者の中に見出さるべき). Or, to put it another way, apart from an ideal communal society (理想的な共同社会,) realised in this world (現実の世界に実現される), there is no such thing as Paradise or Heaven (極楽も天国もない).

Finally, I would like to say a few words about the relationship (関係) or differences (異同) between free-religion (自由宗教) and established religions (既成宗教). A free-religionist (自由宗教人) is, above all, someone who seeks to have their own religion (自分の宗教を持とう). However, if they are fortunate (幸にして) enough that an established religion largely meets their needs (自分の要求を満たして呉れる), then naturally, they will become a follower of that established religion (既成宗教の信者). This is no different from being satisfied (間にあえば) with a ready-made suit (既成品の洋服) and seeing no need to go through the trouble of ordering a custom-made one (無理に新調する必要はない). However, in such cases, a free-religionist within an established religion will, just as they respect their own faith (自分の信仰), also respect the freedom (自由を尊重します) of others' beliefs. Thus, they will never (決して) claim the absolute superiority (絶対性) of their own established religious standpoint (既成宗教的立場), nor will they reject (排斥する) other religions or denominations (宗派). I refer to such individuals as Free-Buddhists (自由仏教徒), Free-Christians (自由キリスト教徒), or Free-Shintoists (自由神道者). These are people who, while working toward the free evolution of established religions (既成宗教の自由なる展開), still deeply value (重んずる) the traditions of the past (過去の伝統). However, for the vast majority (大多数) of free-religionists, it is simply no longer possible (最早どうしても) to be fully satisfied (満足することができない) with established religion. Even so, this does not mean that they completely ignore (全然無視する) the traditions of the past (過去の伝統). Rather, they inherit (継承します) what is worthy of respect (尊重すべきもの), but at the same time, they cannot remain satisfied (満足することが出来ず) with that alone. Thus, they also seek to create (造ろうとする) new traditions (新しい伝統). Therefore, while they respect (尊重しつつ) established religions, they also strive to develop (展開しようとする) a new personal standpoint (自己の新しい立場). In

short, while free-religion may exist within (内在する) an established religion, in general, it tends to go beyond (超越する方向に進んでおります) them. From this transcendent standpoint (超越する面), it can be said that free-religion is a new religion (一つの新宗教). However, rather than being a new denomination (新しい宗派) that is merely added on top of (加えられた) the various established denominations (既成宗教の諸宗派), it is more accurately described (寧ろ) as a universal religion (普遍的宗教), one that encompasses (包含しながら) all existing religions and denominations (一切の既成宗派既成宗教) while still continuing to open new horizons (更に新生面を開いて行く).

(September 1952 NHK Broadcast “Creation” (創造) – draft trans. Andrew James Brown)

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The Purpose of Tokyo Kiitsu Kyōkai (帰一協会 or 帰一教會) (1950)

The precise date of the founding of the Tokyo Kiitsu Kyōkai is difficult to determine. The first Sunday meeting was held in the October of Shōwa 23 (1948), but it did not suddenly come into existence at that time. Since then, nearly two years have passed, yet there are still some aspects about it that remain unclear. Therefore, it is difficult to provide a simple explanation of its character, but as one of the individuals involved, I would like to attempt a brief explanation based on my perspective.

Firstly, the name 帰一 (Kiitsu) is translated into English as “Unity,”¹ and it does not exclude the meaning of “Unitarian” (ユニテリアン). However, it’s clear that it’s not “Unitarian” in opposition to “Trinitarian” (トリニテリアン). Recent Unitarian movements in the United States have undergone significant changes, becoming not only a kind of liberal Christianity (自由基督教) but also a movement beyond Christianity (超基督教). In that sense, I believe our Kiitsu Kyōkai [i.e. Unity Fellowship] can also be considered Unitarian.

The Unitarian movement (ユニテリアン運動) in Japan had been quite active during the Meiji and Taisho eras but, due to various circumstances, it gradually declined although it didn’t completely vanish. To be precise, it can be said that the movement still continues today, albeit weakly. As one of the remaining participants in this movement, I strongly feel this to be the case. Therefore, when I established the Kiitsu Kyōkai, my primary consideration was the revival of the Unitarian movement. However, I thought that a mere revival, that is, a mere reproduction of the old Unitarian Church (ユニテリアン教会), would be meaningless. Instead, I sought to establish the Kiitsu Kyōkai as a continuation of the former Unitarian Church but one that had undergone a profound transformation. In other words, I believed that the Kiitsu Kyōkai should be something more than just another Christian denomination (一派). To put it another way, it asserts a free, pure, non-denominational religion (自由純粋な超宗派的宗教) that is non-sectarian (超宗派),² which goes beyond denominational bounds and takes a step further than just being a liberal/free Christianity (自由基督教) in contrast to orthodox Christianity (正統基督教). However, when I mention going beyond denominational bounds, I realise this might be criticised as being an abstract, idealistic notion without any real substance. If the Kiitsu Kyōkai were to become something like that, it would be contrary to our expectations. But when we speak of trans-denominationalism (超宗派), we simply mean that we do not confine ourselves to established traditions such Buddhism or Christianity. As we see it, it’s not that Buddhism or Christianity exists first and then we come into being, but rather that we first exist, and then Buddhism and Christianity follow. Hence, our religion shouldn’t be a ready-made (レディー・メード) Buddhism or Christianity, but a made-to-order (メード・ツ・オーダー) religion that truly responds to our needs. A religion assembled by gathering the best aspects of all faiths may also be called trans-denominational, but such a ready-made religion is absolutely not our religion. So, the trans-denominational religion we envision is the complete opposite of an abstract conceptual one; rather, it represents the most personal, real, and tangible form of faith. And if the religion that best meets our personal needs happens to be Buddhism, then naturally we shall become Buddhists; if it happens to be Christianity, then naturally

¹ Imaoka Shin’ichirō adds the English word “Unity” himself.

² 超宗派 can also be translated as “interdenominational” or “trans-denominational”

we shall become Christians. However, there are many people in the world who cannot find fulfilment in ready-made, established religions. Ultimately, our advocacy of trans-denominationalism is not about rejecting established religions, but rather stems solely from the desire to remain true to our own genuine needs with no ulterior motive. In other words, it's the same as when Shinran Shonin said that "Amida's vow is for me alone."

However, there might be some who worry that if each person's religion becomes so diverse, it will become impossible to organise a religious community. But such concerns are groundless. Just as a true cooperative community (真の共同社会) can be organised only by the gathering of individuals with distinct personalities and characters, a true church can be organised only by those who truly possess a personal and autonomous faith.

Therefore, although we speak of trans-denominationalism, in reality, we do not absolutely transcend all denominations. Strictly speaking, we end up forming a new denomination that is itself trans-denominational. However, the nature of this denomination certainly differs greatly from the usual sense of the word "denomination" (宗派).

To be truly individualistic and free, and at the same time being truly collective and social is, in other words, to be democratic (民主主義的). And this democracy must be consistent, not only in terms of spiritual content (仰内容) but also in terms of church governance (教会政治). Therefore, we advocate for "congregationalism" (会衆主義)³ and "layperson-ism" (平教徒主義). Worship (礼拝) and preaching (説教) are entrusted to willing members of the congregation. Consequently, at our Sunday gatherings (日曜の集会), it is not necessarily the case that we will hear a great preacher's eloquent sermon every time. Nevertheless, we believe that the church does not belong to the pastor but to its members and, therefore, we highly value the mutual encouragement and cooperation of all members. In this respect, one might say our church is in the style of the Quakers (クエーカー).

Another significant aspect of our religion being democratic is our assertion that salvation (救) is both personal and social at the same time. This does not mean that a society is saved only when saved individuals gather together; rather, individual salvation and collective salvation are inseparably linked. I want to say that until all living beings attain Buddhahood, Hōzō Bosatsu (法蔵菩薩)⁴ cannot himself attain Buddhahood. Therefore, in a sense, Hōzō Bosatsu has not yet attained Buddhahood even now. Hōzō Bosatsu can never attain Buddhahood just for himself; his attainment of Buddhahood is simultaneous with that of all sentient beings. I believe this is also the meaning behind the Catholic Church's claim that there is no salvation outside the Church. In this respect, I deeply resonate with the Community Church Movement (コミュニティーチャーチ運動) in the United States, initiated by Dr. J. H. Holmes. For this very reason, before we named our church Kiitsu Kyōkai, we called it for a time the "Community Church of Tokyo" (東京市民教会 lit. "Tokyo Citizens Church").⁵

When considering matters in this way, one finds great significance in the fact that during the Meiji and Taishō periods, the central figure of the Unitarian movement (ユニテリアン運動) in Japan,

³ Imaoka Shin'ichirō adds the English word "Congregationalism" himself.

⁴ Also known as Bodhisattva Dharmakara, the name of Amida Buddha whilst he was still a Bodhisattva.

⁵ Imaoka Shin'ichirō adds the English words "The Community Church of Tokyo" himself.

Abe Isoo-shi (安部磯雄氏), was a leader of the social movement (社会運動) in Japan. Similarly, it is meaningful that Suzuki Bunji-shi (鈴木文治氏), while serving as the secretary of the Japan Unitarian Association (日本ユニテリアン協会), initiated the labour union movement (労働組合運動), and that both Nagai Ryūtarō-shi (永井柳太郎氏) and Uchizaki Sakusaburō-shi (内崎作三郎氏), who both studied at the Unitarian seminary (ユニテリアン神学校) in Oxford,⁶ subsequently made significant strides in Japanese politics. However, if one were to point out a weakness in the Unitarian movement of these predecessors, it might be said that it became too political and social, to the extent that its purely religious character (宗教プロパー) was somewhat diluted. Fundamentally, the Unitarian movement of the Meiji and Taisho eras had more significance within the religious world (宗教界) as an enlightenment movement (啓蒙運動) rather than as a purely religious movement (宗教運動). That said, even today, an enlightenment movement remains necessary. It is greatly needed to eliminate superstition (迷の打破), to harmonise science and religion (科学と宗教との調和), and to promote cultural and peace movements (文化運動平和運動の促進). However, the aspiration of our Kiitsu Kyōkai is to go beyond this and to cultivate a motivating force (原動力) for solving all issues, whether cultural, political, economic, or social, by adhering fully to a free (自由), pure (純粹), democratic (民主的), and universal (普遍的) religious faith (宗教的仰). While we deeply respect intellect (知性を重んずる), it would be entirely wrong for our kyōkai/church (教会), as a religious community (宗教団体), to become merely a forum for intellectual debate (インテリの討論会場). Our kyōkai/church should be a microcosm of an ideal society (理想社会の縮図). It must embrace scholars and the uneducated, business people, labourers, civil servants, students, men, women, the elderly, and the young. My earnest hope is that from among our members, there may emerge people like Prince Shōtoku (聖徳太子) or [Albert] Schweitzer.

(*Showa 25 [1950], September, "Creation" [創造], Issue No. 1 — draft trans. Andrew James Brown*)

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⁶ Manchester College, now Harris Manchester College, Oxford.

What kind of church is Kiitsu Kyōkai? (1959)

Even though ten years have passed since its establishment, Kiitsu Kyōkai (帰一教会 or 帰一教會) has not yet fully formalised itself as a church (教会 kyōkai). Although it continues to meet on Sundays throughout the year, it has not been very successful. It remains unclear whether there even exist members (会員) or those who call themselves followers (徒). Under such circumstances, the common opinion is that the church will probably disappear in time, and as the one responsible, I sincerely feel sorry for this situation. However, from my perspective, before creating an organisation (組織), the foremost issue was to examine the character (性格) and essence (本質) of the free-religion (自由宗教) we advocate. Thus, the past ten years have been a period of experimentation (実験) for this church. Given this, after a decade of seeking the Way (求道) and examination (検討), have I fully grasped the core (神髓) of free-religion? Certainly not. I still see myself as nothing more than a seeker on the path (求道者) and I am by no means a shepherd (牧者) guiding a flock of lost sheep (迷える羊の群れ). My experiment (実験) must continue from now on as well. However, I believe I have at least reached a state of mind in which I can put my experiments into practice whilst still experimenting. Therefore, I will now set forth my personal views on free-religion and my perspective Kiitsu Kyōkai and humbly seek corrections from those more knowledgeable than myself.

Free-religion is a religion that thoroughly emphasises freedom (徹底的に自由を強調する宗教). It not only refuses to be bound by fixed dogmas (ドグマ) or rituals (儀式), but it even advocates for liberation from the authority of a founder (教祖からの解放). Therefore, it is neither so-called Buddhism nor so-called Christianity. It emphasises freedom (自由), autonomy (自主的), and creativity (創造的). Rather than focusing on reaching a final destination (終点), it values the process of progress and development (向上発展の過程),

Even the religion of Jesus (イエスの宗教) and the religion of Śākyamuni (釈迦の宗教) were, in fact, neither so-called Christianity nor so-called Buddhism. The religion of Jesus was not the doctrine of the Trinity (三位一体説) or the theory of atonement (贖罪論) preached by later Christianity, but was simply the gospel of creative love (造的愛の福音). Likewise, the awakening of Śākyamuni (釈迦の悟り) under the Bodhi tree was by no means limited to the Four Noble Truths (四諦) or the Twelve Links of Dependent Origination (十二因縁). Rather, it was the fundamental principle (根本的理法) of creative evolution (創造的進化, sōzōteki shinka), which manifests in infinitely adaptive and transformative ways (臨機応変, 千変万化の妙, rinki ōhen, senpen banka no myō). I believe that this Dharma (ダルマ) can even be interpreted as Humanism (ヒューマニズム). This kind of non-dogmatic, highly flexible religion (ドグマでない柔軟性に富んだ宗教) is precisely the free-religion (自由宗教) that we uphold. However, later Christians and Buddhists confined the ever-evolving spiritual life (流動進展してやまない霊的生命) within the boundaries of dogma (ドグマ), ritual (儀式), and religious authority (教権). The essential task, therefore, is to return these ossified, formalised established religions (固定化・形式化した既成宗教) to their original sources (その源泉に立ち帰らせて) and revive them with free and creative life (自由で創造的な生命に復活せしめる). In other words, to transform orthodox Christianity (オルソドックス基督教) and fixed Buddhism (固定仏教) into Free-Christianity (自由基督教) and Free-Buddhism (自由仏教). However, if Free-Christianity and Free-Buddhism (自由仏教) are

to fully embody true “freedom” (真に「自由」に徹底する), then there is no need to cling to traditional labels (伝統的名称) such as Christianity or Buddhism. It would be sufficient simply to call it free-religion (自由宗教). Thus, through our Kiitsu Kyōkai, we have sought to create a thoroughgoing example (徹底的なエキザンプル) of free-religion (自由宗教).

Since both Jesus and Shakyamuni were great figures of free-religion (偉大なる自由宗教人), we must learn much from both saints (両聖) with an attitude of reverence and humility (敬虔謙虚な態度). However, there is absolutely no need to limit ourselves solely to Jesus and Śākyamuni. We must learn just as much from Augustine, Luther, and Schweitzer, as well as from Ryōkan (竜閑), Shinran (親鸞), and Gandhi. Previously, I dismissed Orthodox Christianity and fixed Buddhism (固定仏教), but if we take a broad historical view (歴史的に大観して) and consider them as steps in the process of evolution (進化の一階段), then I believe we may still have much to learn from them.

From the perspective that the process (過程) of progress (進歩) is more important than the final destination (終点), we should not hastily rank polytheism (多神論), monotheism (一神論), theism (人格神論), impersonal conceptions of God (無人格神論)—a type of atheism (一種の無神論)—or even spiritualism (心霊論) in terms of superiority or inferiority (上下優劣の差別).

Therefore, at the Kiitsu Kyōkai, we include not only Christianity (基督教) and Buddhism (仏教, Bukkyō), but also Shintō (神道), Islam (回教), Zoroastrianism (猫太教), Hinduism (印度教), and all other faiths (一切を包含する). However, this does not mean that all religions are unconditionally unified (一切の宗教が無条件に帰一すると言ずるものでは決してない). Noise and harmony (雑音と和音) must be distinguished. For different religions to truly converge (真に帰一する), they must refine one another (切磋琢磨しあわなければならぬ). Thus, all religions must first become free-religions (自由宗教). That is to say, doctrines (教義), rituals (儀式), and religious institutions (教団) within various religions should not be regarded as ultimate or absolute (終局的・絶対的), but rather as secondary and symbolic (第二義的・象徴的), shaped by the conditions of time and environment (時代的・環境的制約). The essential task is to awaken to what lies beyond these dogmas (ドグマ) and symbols (シムボル).

I often hear critical remarks (批判) that the Kiitsu Kyōkai lacks creeds (信条), scriptures (経典), pastors (牧師), and priests (住職), making it too vague (余りに漠然としていて) and difficult to grasp (つかみどころがない). And indeed, such a criticism (批判) is perfectly reasonable (如何にも尤である). However, since the essence of religion (宗教の神髄) lies in grasping (把握する) the great life force of free and unattainable creative evolution (自由で無得な創造的進化の大生命), such matters are simply peripheral details (枝葉末節). That being said, just because they are peripheral does not mean they are entirely unnecessary (全然無用ではない). So, at some point, our church should also establish (整備すべき) these elements. From the standpoint of the Kiitsu Kyōkai—a faith that is free (自由), tolerant (寛容), universal (普遍的), and all-embracing (一切を包含する)—the Buddhist scriptures (仏典), the Bible (バイブル), the Qur’an (コーラン), the

Vedas (ヴェーダ), and even the Kiitsu Kyōkai's own sacred texts (帰一教会の聖書)⁷ must all be regarded as equally sacred. Likewise, all the saints and sages of East and West, past and present, should be respected as spiritual forebears (祖師) of the Kiitsu Kyōkai. Some may argue that this makes for too many scriptures and too many saints, but this is the same mistake as going to a cafeteria (カフェテリア) and thinking one must eat every single dish available. No matter how broad-minded (雅量) the Kiitsu Kyōkai may be, it would never force someone to overeat (食べすぎを強要する). The only point the Kiitsu Kyōkai emphasises (強調する) is that one must not be a picky eater (唯偏食してはいけない).

(From the January issue of "Creation" 「創造」 magazine, January, Showa 34 [1959], Issue 86 – draft trans. Andrew James Brown)

⁷ It may be that Imaoka-sensei is thinking here of texts by people such as Ralph Waldo Emerson and John Haynes Holmes.

Kiitsu's Faith (漏一の信仰) (1980)

— Summary of a Sermon at Kiitsu Kyōkai (帰一教会 or 帰一教會) —

Since its founding in Shōwa 23 (1948), this church has called itself Kiitsu Kyōkai (帰一教会 or 帰一教會). Let us consider the origin and meaning (語の由来・意味) of the term “Kiitsu” (帰一).

One connection traces back to the Unitarian movement (ユニテリアン運動), which came to Japan in Meiji 20 (1887) and was active until around the time of the Great Kantō Earthquake in Taishō 12 (1923). Unitarianism is a minority branch of Christianity (キリスト教の少数派) that rejects (反対して) the doctrine of the Trinity (三位一体説), which is a core tenet of Christianity. It asserts that Jesus (イエス) was not God (神でなく) but a human being (人間である), and that God is one (神は一つ)—a unity (ユニティ). This rationalist, liberal movement (合理的・自由主義的な一派) had a place of worship in Tokyo known as Yuiitsu-kan (惟一館, Unity Hall). Another origin of the term “Kiitsu” is linked to the Association Concordia (帰一協会, also called *Kiitsu Kyōkai* but using different kanji for *Kyōkai*), which was active from the late Meiji period until around the beginning of the Pacific War. This organization was founded by Anesaki-sensei (姉崎先生) and figures such as Shibusawa Eiichi (渋沢 栄一).⁸ It was a cultural association (文化団体) with the aim of harmonising (帰一) the ideals and cultures of East and West (東西の理想・文化). Naturally, religion (宗教) was also included in this vision.

Since I was involved in both of these movements, after the war, when the remaining Unitarians gathered to establish this Kiitsu Kyōkai, we chose the name Kiitsu (帰一) partly out of a desire to carry forward aspects of both traditions. However, our understanding of Kiitsu carries a completely unique and new meaning, which is also reflected in the “Principles of Living (生活条) that we have just recited together [see “My Principles of Living (revised)” (August 1973)].

First, let us consider the fourth article, which states: “I place trust/have faith in the trinity of self, neighbour, and cooperative society. Although each of us possesses an independent personality and individuality (独立の個性人格), in our essential existence (本質的存在), we are one with our neighbours (隣人と一体). Thus, we are bound to form a cooperative society (共同社会を構成する). This cooperative society (共同社会) begins with the family (家族), expands to local regions (地域), then to the nation (国家), and ultimately must be realized as a global human community (世界人類の共同体). Movements such as the World Federalist Movement (世界連邦建設運動), as well as the World Community Declaration (世界共同体宣言) by our International Association of Religious Freedom (国際自由宗教連盟), along with numerous world peace initiatives (世界平和運動), all arise from this fundamental idea of the unity of humankind (世界人類帰一).

The fifth article states that we 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). It is the belief that heaven, earth, and the self share a common root (天地我と同根), and that all things are one with us (万物我と一体).

⁸ Shibusawa Eiichi, 1st Viscount Shibusawa (1840–1931) was a Japanese industrialist widely known today as the “father of Japanese capitalism”, having introduced Western capitalism to Japan after the Meiji Restoration. He introduced many economic reforms including use of double-entry accounting, joint-stock corporations and modern note-issuing banks.

The seventh article affirms the principle of adhering to a specific religion (特定宗教). This means that whether one follows Buddhism, Christianity, or Shinto, each person may maintain their specific religious affiliation while still participating in free-religion (自由宗教 *jiyū shūkyō*) and Kiitsu Kyōkai) without any conflict. However, it is essential that we reject sectarian exclusivity and religious conflict (対立抗争), where one believes their own religion alone holds absolute truth (真理を独占する). Instead, we should work together with the attitude expressed in the saying: “Though the paths by which the dragons ascend may differ, all gaze upon the same moon from the lofty peak.” In this sense, we affirm the principle of “diversity returns to unity” (万数帰一). It is a unity within diversity. This does not mean erasing differences or reducing everything to a single system (多を無くして一にする). Rather, we recognize and respect the existence of diverse individual identities (色々な個性の存在), while seeking common ground (共通点) and working together in cooperation.

In this sense, the eight article—we place trust/have faith in free-religion—is of great importance. Its annotation states: “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].” The core belief and guiding principle of Kiitsu Kyōkai does not reside merely in doctrines (教義), theological principles (教理), or articles of faith (仰箇条). Rather, it is about grasping the essence of life (生命を掴む). It is not something static, but something in motion—boundless self-cultivation, boundless spiritual pursuit. It is a movement that never ceases, yet within it, there is an ever-unfolding and dynamically consistent growth. That is what we call the unity of life (生命の帰一). If unity with one’s neighbour and humankind (隣人・人類との帰一), as well as unity with nature and the cosmos (天地自然との帰一), can be considered horizontal unification (横の帰一), then this is vertical unification (縦の帰一). Some people criticize free-religion as lacking coherence or a clear focal point—as if it is merely an unstructured collection of various elements. But that is not true. There is unity both horizontally and vertically. There is a living focal point (生ける焦点).

In other words, unity with all humankind (世界人類との帰一) and unity with the vast cosmos and great nature (宇宙大自然との帰一) is one great life force (一大生命) that has ceaselessly advanced and developed from infinite past (無限の過去) to infinite future (無限の未来). And within this great life force, I myself am included. Thus, this vast, eternal history of life itself is also my body (自分の体), my biography (伝記). This is what is meant by Kiitsu (帰一 *returning to oneness*).

According to physiologists, our bodies are composed of approximately 35 billion cells, and while these cells undergo renewal and replacement every few years, they still function as a unified whole, constantly working together. In the same way, I believe that we ourselves are like cells within the vast, infinite life of the entire universe and all humankind (全宇宙、全人類という一大生命). Though our existence may be tiny and fleeting (微小で、はかない存在), in reality, we are integrated (帰一し,) and one (一体となり) with this infinite, eternal great life (無限永遠の大生命). We each have a role to play (役割を分担し) in the unfolding of this great life and contribute in some way (何らかの貢献をしている). Thus, even though our individual existence is small and fleeting, we are able to partake in the greatness and eternity of life itself (偉大で永遠なる生命).

When thinking in this way, studying astronomy (天文学), biology (生物学), Japanese and world history (日本や世界の歴史), and geography (地理) all become forms of studying oneself (自己を勉強すること). If one reads Japanese history (日本史) and world history (世界史) as though they were one's own autobiography (自分の自叙伝), they become deeply fascinating (興味津津). Though I have taken up lifelong learning at the age of one hundred, it comes rather late. With my declining physical strength and eyesight (体力や視力が衰えて), I can no longer study as thoroughly as I would like, but as long as I can still read, I intend to continue. In the university of life, there is no graduation (人生大学に卒業なし).

Recently, I have been reading about ancient Japanese history (日本古代史). Texts such as the Kojiki (古事記), Nihon Shoki (日本書紀), and Fudoki (風土記) are now available in convenient paperback editions, making them easy to obtain, so I have collected and read various volumes. However, there are also foreign texts (外国のもの) that were written a thousand years before the Kojiki, which mention Japan. According to these sources, the origins of the Japanese people (日本民族の起源) lie in Mesopotamia, and Japan's gods (神々) are said to have come through the Silk Road, migrating from ancient Babylon and Egypt, as well as the broader Middle East. As I am only an amateur (素人), I cannot determine how much of this is historical fact (史実), but I do not think it is entirely impossible.

At any rate, humankind is a vast cosmic life force (宇宙的大生命), which has grown and evolved (成長発展) endlessly from the depths of antiquity to the distant future (悠久の大昔から悠遠の未来). Since I, too, am one with this great life force (それに帰一している), even though my individual physical existence has an endpoint (自分の個体の生命には終点), the life of my being, which is connected to the cosmic great life force (宇宙的大生命につながる自分の人生), is eternal (永遠). In my daily life, I am entirely alone (孤独). I have no particular hobbies or amusements (何らの趣味も道楽もなく), and my days are exceedingly simple (単調な生活). However, because I believe that each and every day, each and every moment (一日一日、一瞬一瞬) holds eternal meaning (永遠の意味), I continue my personal efforts (努力). Thus, I feel neither boredom nor loneliness. This is my life of Kiitsu—my life of returning to oneness (私の帰一の仰生活).

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