

The Language of Religion in the Present Age

by HIDEO TAKEMURA

Preface

Our world is diminishing in size, but at the same time it is expanding as never before. These are two contradictory aspects of our world resulting from the brilliant scientific achievements of man.

Our world is shrinking in size because the unit of measuring distance is being shortened by the unit of speed. A news event occurring in one corner of the world is immediately transmitted to all parts of the world, and an object existing in one part of the world can be easily transported to another locality in the world.

These actions are possible through the vast progress attained in the realm of communication which is a basic factor contributing to the formation of a smaller world.

This kind of communication is caused by human contact. In this thesis I would like to discuss a certain communication beyond the world of human perception in relation to the development of science.

Language, as a means of communication, has three different types of "time": past, present, and future. Language also presupposes two different types of "function": description and emotion. The main subject which I want to discuss in this thesis is language of the future (language of religion) and language of emotion. How the language of the future and emotion should be placed in the modern days is very difficult for us to take up as the concrete matter. Anyway a bold attempt should be made in order that we may explore a way toward the enlightenment of ourselves to higher realities (Gods or Buddhas). Thus supra-

mundane communication will correspond with ordinary communication in our actual life.

In order to understand religion we have to possess a kind of religious mind or idea, bringing it down on a par with the ideas of science (language of the past) and of aesthetics (language of the present). In groping for a clue to investigating our inner mind, we come across a religious mind. And this religious mind will be translated into a modern language.

Supra-mundane Communication

If we forget religion completely, it will create some kind of vacuum at least in so far as our spiritual life is concerned. We hardly feel any necessity of religion in our daily life. We feel as if religion in our daily life is not something very relevant to our actual life. But is religion irrelevant to our daily life? I am not concerned with any particular religion in this thesis. I will try to give an analysis of the life that we are leading today. And in the process of the analysis I will give you some point of the comparison.

I need not emphasize that religion is a human creation. The ancient people felt a need to believe in something that is not directly given to our perception. This necessity of something which is beyond our perception comes from psychological need and that need can be translated into various ways. For example, the need for surrender, the need for protection, the need for dependence and so on. There may be different ways in which man may have the need which is beyond the world of perception. And this need must have been at the root of the origin of religion. Whether it may be a religion of the East or the West, it is immaterial. What is important is that there must be some need for belief which can be appealed to in hours of distress, from which we can derive solace.

Such need gives rise to religion. But in spite of this basic psychological need, if we go still deeper, we shall find that this kind of need would arise only when all possible avenues which are normally available to people are not explored. For example, if I am in need of some help, I can approach my friends and get the help. But if I need, for example, something which no one can give me, then I would appeal to some other reality or person to give the help. The need

for supra-mundane reality arises only when all other avenues are closed. This means the need of man presupposes the exploration of contact on the one hand and the failure of contact on the other hand. I want to contact my people and find that my contact has not given any result and therefore, the contact is broken and then we put aside our friends and appeal to some higher authority.

That means the contact is some kind of relationship with fellow beings, which must be broken, if we want to appeal to higher deities. It is breaking one contact at one level and developing another contact at another level. The breaking of the old contact and developing of the new contact can be paraphrased in a modern term as the breaking of communication at one level and developing of the channel of communication at another level.

So when we talk of religion, we always presuppose that there is a possibility of communication at various levels. There is the possibility of the communication at the human level. But when we talk of God or supra-mundane power, there is a different kind of communication.

If we are not able to communicate with higher realities, then religion will become meaningless. As soon as we enter into the field of religion, we begin to talk at different levels in different language. And therefore, religion is essentially science which gives us different possibilities of having communication with higher realities. This is one respect of religion.

Language of Religion

And then there is another aspect of religion which I want to derive your attention. That is, when we are developing our communication with higher realities, our ordinary language becomes ineffective. It is essential that language we use at ordinary level becomes ineffective when we are in the realm of religion. What we ordinarily talk is mostly the description of things. We talk in terms of description and sometimes in terms of evaluation, saying like: This is good, this is bad, etc.

There is a third aspect which also forms the subject matter of our communication. That is: commands, does, undoes. So the entire communication at the ordinary level can be placed under three categories. The major portion is a

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descriptive communication. Then we have evaluation. And then, we have commands. But this is a broad classification of communication. When we think of the kind of communication that is needed for religion, then we find a different type of religious communication. In religious communication we do not describe the world of God. He is not at our command. Instead, we are at His command. We just surrender ourselves to God. It is a kind of surrender to God. This surrender is not description nor asking God to do anything nor asking to evaluate anything. Therefore, the language of religion is the language of surrender to God. And this surrender has been translated in different religious terms. So the language of religion when we want to communicate with God is always the language of emotion. And the language that we use for human communication is the language of three kinds, as mentioned earlier.

These two levels of communication are different in nature, and when we talk of religion, we must try to keep it in mind. If we forget distinction between the two levels of communications, God will be no longer God or man would be no longer man. In the present days we have confused these two levels of communications. We try to talk of Him in the same language in which we talk of ordinary things. And because we are talking of God in the same language, we expect some kind of response from God analogous to the response that we get in our ordinary life.

We pray to God, saying "Oh, God, I am in trouble, help me." And if no help is coming, we will say God is bad. Sometime in anger we say God is dead. This arises from confusion of two levels of communications. Why has this confusion taken place specially in the present days? It seems to be because of the fact that old symbols and myths have become meaningless for us today. Myths have broken down. Symbols have become the objects of antiquity. We have forgotten the meaning of these things.

Language of the Future

When some religion was founded, there developed along with it certain ideas and stories. The objects such as painting, music and literature were also associated with religion. Every religion, thus, has a long history behind it.

Therefore, whenever we want to know about the religion, we have to understand its entire history. Otherwise it would appear meaningless to us.

For example, if we do not know the significance of the yellow robe in Buddhism, it will be only yellow-colored robe to us. This instance will explain how myths and legends associated with different religions have ceased to convey meaning to us. That is why we do not understand the language of religion. So the breaking of communication which results in confusion of the levels of communication is due to the fact that we are not aware of various meanings of symbols and myths which are associated with the history of religion.

When we see a temple, we see many things in it, provided we know what Buddhism is. But if we do not know its tradition, the whole temple will appear like a museum. Thus the breaking of communication takes place because of our ignorance of the history of the idea associated with religion. The breaking of communication is found not only in the field of religion but also in the matter of our ordinary discourse. For example, the conception of "family" has changed in the present days. The word "family" connotes something different from that of the past. Ideas are moving so fast with the rapid changing world that our language lags behind to express fast growing ideas. The way of breaking down of communication results, sometime, in the closing of idea and consequently in alienation. Thus, one has to be careful when using words and concepts specially in the field of science, technology and religion. One has to see that he is conveying the real import of the words and concepts.

Some great religion was born two thousand years or more before our time and developed later on. Because of the emergence of new ideas in the 16th and 17th centuries the old religious ideas ceased to have any relevance thereafter, and new ideas emerged in the field of science and technology. And the man was so much overwhelmed by these new ideas that he gradually forgot the language of religion.

He started using the language of science and technology in the daily life to the extent that the language of religion became outdated for him. Religion developed into a certain point and then it ceased to have its growth. Science started to grow from a certain period in human history and it is still a living

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force. Thereafter if we want to understand the importance of religion in the modern times, we must translate the old language of religion into the new language of our time. If we are not able to do that, we shall not be able to understand the importance of religion for our daily life today.

In order to understand religion we have to service the religious ideas, bringing them down on a par with the ideas of science and technology. This can not be done easily. We can not go back in time but we can make old ideas up-to-date. If old religious ideas are translated into a modern language, the old religion can service. Otherwise it will have no future.

Language of the Past

Idea in science, which is part and parcel of our life, is primarily oriented toward the past. Whenever things are studied scientifically, they are studied with reference to their past. The language of science, is thus, the language of the past.

But the language of aesthetic is the language of the present. And the language of science is, as mentioned earlier, necessarily the language of the past. But the language of religion is quite different from these two.

How to Approach to Religion

In religion we are not so much concerned with what has happened. The first step in religion is to admit "yes." I am what I am. Only at a certain level we shall say "let me be something better than what I am. After having accepted the limitation that is before man a religious man tries to look ahead for the better future. In Buddhism the better is to attain Nirvana. In Hinduism the better is the realization of one's personal identity with the Absolute, the Brahma. Similarly in other religions of the world, there is always an emphasis on the bright future. Thus, the language of religion is necessarily the language of the future.

But usually it happens that when we talk of science we forget aesthetic activity of man, the language of the present and the language of religion which is concerned with the future. We ignore aesthetic activity and religious activity when

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we talk in terms of science. Similarly we talk from the view point of aesthetics, we forget science and religion. Thus man has divided himself into different watertight compartments in the modern times. This is to lead him toward the breaking down of his personality.

In order that man may become man in the strict term, it is necessary that he should integrate himself perfectly. He should not have partial visions of things. He should think of life as a whole, a unity that is indivisible. He should try to integrate science, aesthetics and religion. An attempt should be made to sythesize the past, present and future. Only by this synthesis man can find meaning in life. In the absence of this kind of synthesis man would be alienated, mal-adjusted and far from his real goal of life. Religion would, thus, definitely play an important role in achieving this sort of harmony and would provide meaning to life.

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