The Protestant Imagination: A Note on Maruyama Masao, Robert Bellah, and the Study of Japanese Thought

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In midsummer of 1980, the historian Ienaga Saburō sent Maruyama Masao a copy of his new book, Zoku Shinran o kataru (Speaking of Shinran, Continued), and Maruyama responded with a brief letter of thanks. In part it reads: “My family on my father’s side were Pure Land (Jōdoshū) Buddhists, but my father himself was a thoroughly anti-religious, empirically-minded journalist, while my mother and her elder brother (Inoue Kiroku, a member of the Seikyōsha) were fervent True Pure Land (Shinshū) believers. Until middle school, in the mornings before breakfast I used to put my hands together and pray in front of our household Buddhist altar, but by the time I was an upper classman I had thought to myself, ‘I’m no believer, and it doesn’t make any sense to recite the nenbutsu.’ But if I were asked who among the figures in Japanese intellectual history has had the strongest influence on me, I would answer without hesitation: Shinran. On the other hand, looking through your book…and seeing the passages where you were critical of Christianity, I thought that your way of thinking and mine are different. Your position is extremely close to Buddhism, yet you do not become a believer. In my case, my relation to Christianity is rather similar…”

For modern Japanese thinkers who have reached a certain maturity, or perhaps a crisis, Shinran (1173-1262) has exerted an almost magnetic attraction. Kurata Hyakuzō’s play, Shukke to sono deshi (The Priest and His Disciples, 1917), written out of its young author’s own spiritual torment, created a contemporary Shinran (identified largely with the Tannishō), much as Karl Barth had done for St. Paul and his Epistle to the Romans (1918). Nishida Kitarō, Tanabe Hajime, Miki Kiyoshi, Hattori Shisō, among others, wrote on Shinran. Why? What does Shinran stand for? It could be the spiritual integrity, the existential authenticity of the individual thinker as reflected, however dimly or brightly, in the mirror of Shinran’s own faith. It could be the recognition of radical evil in the soul and the world, and transcendence (through total dependence on Other Power) in facing it. It could be the classic religious paradox of “irrational” faith confounding human wisdom in the ineffable cry of praise to Amitabha Buddha and his Original Vow to show compassion to all sentient beings. In Ienaga’s case, it was Shinran’s embodiment of what he called the “logic of negation” in Kamakura Buddhism, one of the very few moments of “breakthrough” in Japan’s intellectual and spiritual heritage when “values transcending

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1 Maruyama to Ienaga, Maruyama Masao shokan shū (Misuzu Shobō, 2004), 3: 18.
everyday reality became the *nucleus* of Japanese thought.”

At such a moment, culture, society and politics lie subject to judgments whose authority claims an absolutely Other, transcendent referent. But since those judgments must be acted on in the given social world, absolute Otherness must, paradoxically, subsist on fallible human instruments and materials. Otherness must become part of history, one self-consciously but imperfectly made in the image of that Other.

Now Maruyama wrote virtually nothing about Shinran—only a few scattered references in his published works, and an overview of Shinran’s thought in his 1964 university lectures on Japanese political thought. But along with this snippet of testimony, we may find another clue to what the attraction was. It comes from *Jikonai taiwa* (Interior Dialogues), the notebooks collated and published after his death, in a fragment (dated sometime after 1961) on Dostoevsky: “I first read Dostoevsky’s *The Possessed* just after I had graduated from the university. Once having read it, I could never again return to the self I had been before reading it. I was raped [gōkan sareta] by Dostoevsky. To this day I have not recovered from the wounds this caused in me. Again and again it has worked as a brake on my innate tendency toward an emotional radicalism. Not just that; it forced me to become aware of what radical thought really was.”

Maruyama’s comments on Shinran and Dostoevsky suggest that he saw the world as a darker and more desperate place than we are used to associating with him and his thought. The problem of radical evil, Maruyama seems to say, is both personal and political, and must be confronted in both dimensions. It is a kind of hidden, inner lining to his far better known position on personal autonomy or “subjecthood” (shutaisei), which he regarded as the capacity of socialized individuals to make intellectual and ethical judgments; to act on their surroundings, their world, and to take responsibility as they did so. “The human being,” Maruyama once observed, “is an animal endowed with a limitless capacity for self-deception.” In the world of modern politics, the opportunities for self-deception are legion and the consequences can be devastating. On the one hand, the Big Lie becomes the Only Truth; party loyalty (or discipline) justifies betrayal of self and others; physical and psychological violence become loving or stern “correction”; war becomes peace. On the other, “they” control politics (and economics); “I” don’t care about it. As long as “I” am taken care of, and can buy what “I” want (things, feelings, ideas, influence), do “I” need to concern myself with what “they” do? Or we have the

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5 I thank Hiraishi Naoaki for first emphasizing to me Maruyama’s deep sense of “sin.” Personal communication, July 2004.

“let the market decide” fiction, in which there is, as Margaret Thatcher remarked, “no such thing as society.”

In the context of Japanese religious thought and its history, the perception of an innately wounded, defective, depraved or evil human nature has been most closely associated with the Salvationist “reform” Buddhism of the Kamakura era, and, of course, with the more recent import of Christianity. As we know, the historical—political—consequences for Japan of these Salvationist moments have been complex, and have captured the imaginations and critical energies of philosophers, thinkers, and historians to this day. And it is that complex of consequences that sets the framework for my discussion here, which focuses on the problem of social self-transformation in Maruyama’s thought. First, I will sketch briefly what I call Maruyama’s “protestant imagination” and try to account for one crucial line in its development; in the second section of the paper I will compare it with another such imagination—that of the sociologist of religion Robert N. Bellah, with whom Maruyama’s intellectual life was for some time closely bound.

As Maruyama observed, neither he nor Ienaga had made a conversion to the respective “breakthrough” faiths whose influence and significance they both acknowledged. They remained by choice at the limen of organized religious life, of the community of fellow believers. Non-conversion too has a history. Max Weber had famously professed himself to be “tone-deaf” to religious feeling, even as he probed the literally world-altering character of the human type engendered by the Protestant Reformation in a vast comparative enterprise. An almost inverse case would seem to be that of Simone Weil, the Jewish-born French philosopher. A radical Platonist, mystic, and political activist on the left, Weil’s entire spirituality was Catholic. But for well-elaborated reasons she refused baptism, for though “by right” the church was universal, “in fact” it was not. To that extent, the church’s worldly limitations left outside it too much that she loved. There were solidarities and affinities that Weil refused to renounce, precisely on account of her faith.

7 Thatcher’s pronouncement, her most famous, dates from a 1987 interview with Woman’s Own that was later amplified in the Sunday Times. See the original interview transcript on the website of the Margaret Thatcher Foundation (www.margaretthatcher.org/speeches/). The relevant passages read: “I think we have gone through a period when too many children and people have been given to understand ‘I have a problem, it is the Government's job to cope with it!’ or ‘I have a problem, I will go and get a grant to cope with it!’ ‘I am homeless, the Government must house me!’ and so they are casting their problems on society and who is society? There is no such thing! There are individual men and women and there are families and no government can do anything except through people and people look to themselves first…There is no such thing as society. There is living tapestry of men and women and people and the beauty of that tapestry and the quality of our lives will depend upon how much each of us is prepared to take responsibility for ourselves and each of us prepared to turn round and help by our own efforts those who are unfortunate.”

8 On Weil see her Waiting on God (Harper Torchbooks ed., 1973), pp. 61-83, 85-87, 94-98; also Jean-Marie Perrin and Gustave Thibon, Simone Weil as We Knew Her (1953; Routledge, 2003), pp. 146-60; Richard Rees, Simone Weil: A Sketch for a Portrait (Oxford, 1966), pp. 46-47. Note also her comment, in Gravity and Grace: “To contemplate the social scene is as effective a purification as to
Leaving aside Ienaga now, why did Maruyama remain in his liminal relation to Christianity? If he had (lastingly) converted, with what community of believers would he have chosen to affiliate? What were the consequences of his non-conversion? The first question is (for me) not idle, but it is unanswerable. Concerning the second and third, it is possible to speculate with a decent measure of assurance. As Maruyama’s biography shows, he had spent many of his intellectually formative years at the fringes of Uchimura Kanzō’s Mukyōkai, the anti-institutionalist Non-Church wing of Japanese Protestantism. Chiefly this contact was through Nanbara Shigeru, with whom Maruyama studied at the Law Faculty of Tokyo Imperial University, and whom he regarded for the rest of his life as one of his two real teachers. With Nanbara, Maruyama read Hegel, and (despite his mentor’s criticisms of Hegel) was himself “Hegelianized.” It was Nanbara, also, who pressed Maruyama not to follow him into the study of Western political thought, but to confront Japanese political tradition on its own grounds, with and through its own texts, albeit via a historical method that was grafted onto those texts from outside.

Like his near contemporary and university colleague Yanaihara Tadao, Nanbara was a direct disciple of Uchimura, but unlike Yanaihara, Nanbara neither evangelized actively nor established a home-church with himself as spiritual father; nor did Nanbara follow Uchimura and Yanaihara into pacifism. On the other hand, Nanbara does seem to have absorbed something of the later Uchimura’s eschatology, regarding his bureaucratic duties in essentially religious terms; he was to “remain in place,” performing his earthly tasks so as to hand over to the Lord on his return a piece of the world in good order. For Nanbara, religious faith was transmuted into bureaucratic expertise. Perhaps if we substitute “scholarly” for “bureaucratic,” we may have an inkling of Maruyama’s own attitude toward his choice of a way of life.

The Mukyōkai milieu in its various strands did present a coherent face to the Japanese intellectual world that Maruyama had entered: it exalted the individual conscience, the capacity to interpret the divine word without priestly mediation, and the physical inviolability of the person. It had a providential concept of nationality that rejected both traditional and neo-traditional patriarchalism, and the quest for validation and legitimacy through dependence on foreign institutional authority. Uchimura’s Mukyōkai vision, in short, was of a Japan that had been elected as the site for the completion of the

withdraw from the world, and that is why I have not been wrong in mixing for so long a time in politics” (1952; Routledge ed., 1995), pp. xvi, 146.

9 Despite their rejection of emperor-worship as idolatrous, Mukyōkai figures were not hostile to the monarchy. Uchimura was certainly not. One of the sharp dividing lines between Maruyama and Nanbara (along with Yanaihara) was the latter’s intense veneration of the emperor. This was a highly idealized, demythologized and humanized emperor, but nonetheless unacceptable to Maruyama under any circumstances. It is to be noted, on the other hand, that Nanbara did not wait until August 1945 to begin this demythologizing. While acknowledging the traditional identification of the emperor as arahitogami, Nanbara stressed that the “organic unity” between the Japanese emperor and his people stemmed from the “realistic” relation between them, one based on fear and affection directed toward the sovereign as the nucleus of a familial national community with natural, historical origins. See Nanbara Shigeru, “Gendai no seiji risō to Nihon seishin” (1938) in Nanbara Shigeru chosakushū (Iwanami Shoten, 1974), 3: 111-13.
Reformation, in which the “church” lived through households and independent spiritual groupings that suffused and energized the very society.

Whatever his other, and vital, influences—Hegel, Kant, Weber, Fukuzawa—I want to suggest that in the absence of this Mukyōkai “impulse,” Maruyama’s conceptions of selfhood, politics, Japanese democracy, indeed of Japan itself, could not have taken the forms they assumed. On the other hand, if he had actually converted to Christianity, would he have been able to sustain the degree of critical identification—which was sometimes excruciating for him—that allowed him to immerse himself so deeply in the multiple worlds of the Japanese intellectual tradition? My sense is that he could not have done so. Maruyama, that is, became a protestant without becoming a Christian. His imagination, not his faith, was protestant. If Shinran symbolized the confounding of human depravity through the grace of Other Power, and Dostoevsky the capacity of self-deceiving total commitment to generate terror, Maruyama’s protestant imagination offered a means of secular reformation. It led him to conceive a modern (Japanese) personality type capable of acknowledging the “demonic” psychological drives that propelled power-seekers through the world of politics, the massive force of “tradition” and social inertia, and the newer, nearly irresistible pressure to conform generated by mass media. This was a personality that, having said, “I judge you to be wanting,” would then seek to act effectually (in a solidarity of reason) to counteract those forces and to change that world.

The inspiration for this “type” is clear. In his 1948 essay, “Ningen to seiji” (Man and Politics), Maruyama wrote: “Perhaps the one capable of the most thoroughgoing protest from the standpoint of personal interiority [jinkakuteki naimensei] would be a radical Protestant, such as an adherent of the Non-Church.” The “protestant imagination” in Maruyama was repelled by authoritarianism, especially when cloaked in the colonized charisma of the emperor, but also by corrupted “orthodoxies” based on “total” systems of thought, such as Marxism. The “protestant” was a man or woman who has “the sense of being bound by an invisible authority—whether it is God or Reason or an ‘ism’ [shugi] doesn’t matter”—that goes beyond the “world that appears before our eyes as an experiential reality.” The particularly modern danger of losing sight of the invisible, so to speak, is that of “being dragged along by visible authority—political powers, public opinion, reputation.”10 These were the forces that all too often subverted, bleached out, and denatured the “logic of negation” that lay at the core of the protestant imagination. With these forces we are all familiar; we live with their effects every day.

I turn now to the comparison of Maruyama and Bellah.11 Despite major differences in their national, religious and generational backgrounds, the intellectual affinities between

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11 For a recent essay comparing Bellah and Maruyama (focusing on their conceptions of modernization), see Yamamoto Tomohiro, “Robāto N. Berā no Nihon kindaiika ron—Maruyama
Maruyama and Bellah are deep and long running, and constellate around the notion of reformation. In it, explicitly or implicitly, both sought a viable modus and ideology of modernization. Rather than the decadence of tradition requiring a violent, revolutionary, once-and-for-all inversion by an absolutely antagonistic “other,” they both envisioned a modern social order capable of radical self-transformation and constant renewal through the critical reappropriation of its own original form and consciousness—its religio-political archetypes. In this sense, I will suggest, both displayed a “protestant” imagination that—in mutually differing ways—ended as an unfillable promise.

Robert Bellah, of course, is the author of *Tokugawa Religion* (1957), a landmark of Japanese studies. It remains in active service in graduate training not only for its historical findings but just as much as an introduction to an important lineage in American sociological thought. Depending on whether one reads the original or 1985 edition, this was a study of either “the values of preindustrial Japan” or “the cultural roots of modern Japan.” Bellah was a student of Talcott Parsons; and Parsons, as Bellah puts it, “had created an optimistic Weber.”

Synthesizing their approaches, *Tokugawa Religion* developed out of the multifarious strands of Japanese religious traditions an ideal type of attitudes and action that served as a “functional equivalent” of the inner-worldly asceticism of the Protestant ethic in its unintentional but decisively significant (causal?) relation to the spirit of capitalism. Did this “Tokugawa religion,” Bellah asked, promote “rationalization” in the social system, and if so, in which of its domains? And could this “rationalization” be shown to have been extended, institutionalized, formalized in the modern era, thus establishing a direct, positive linkage between traditional and modern Japan? In short, did Tokugawa religion provide the cultural roots of modern Japan? That was the project: and Bellah found what he was looking for, if not entirely where he was expecting to find it. To be sure, he located an impetus toward the “rationalization of means” in the economy, and he identified religious motives, movements, and thinkers—notably Ishida Baigan’s *Shingaku* (Learning of the Mind/Heart) that gave it cultural and moral sanction. But Bellah’s key finding was that economic rationalization played the role of handmaiden (this is my term) to the more consequential process of rationalization that he saw at work in the polity. It was not the directly “universalistic” values of the economy that dominated the process of rationalization resulting in Japan’s industrialization, but, with their support, the “generalized particularism” of the polity, whose values penetrated the economy. Traditional status-demarcated loyalties to the lord, domain and ultimately the emperor were sublated, their social base vastly expanded, and their function “as-if-universal.” The “particularistic-performance values” of the polity, of the “central value system,” were “pushed” by the 1930s, Bellah notes, to an “extreme and pathological limit,” and even at the time of writing were undercutting “the ‘democratic’ ideology of the postwar period.”

But on the whole, no shadow of historical tragedy hangs over the book.

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Masao ni yoru hihan o chūshin ni,” *Shakaigaku kenkyū*, no. 76 (November 2004): 161-187. I am grateful to Shimizu Yasuhisa for bringing this article to my attention.


As Bellah notes in his conclusion, *Tokugawa Religion* does not really treat the post-1868 period. That was not merely a matter of his having chosen one research design among the many conceivable. As an ex-Communist who had failed to cooperate in naming names, Bellah was denied a passport to carry out doctoral work in Japan, and was therefore compelled to pursue a historical inquiry rather than fieldwork.\(^{14}\) We may wonder how different his academic life and the field of Japanese studies would have been had the era’s politics been otherwise. But one fateful consequence of Bellah’s having pursued the Tokugawa “roots” question was his intellectual encounter with Maruyama Masao. Maruyama reviewed *Tokugawa Religion* in the *Kokka Gakkai zasshi* at unusual length, not just recapitulating its arguments but analyzing the Parsonian system of pattern variables, rehearsing the exposition chapter by chapter, and then—in his final pages—boring in on what he termed its “great defect” and “grave misuse of Max Weber’s logic.” Maruyama was roused and excited by Bellah’s work, and enormously respectful of it. His own *Nihon seiji shisōshi kenkyū* (translated as *Studies in the Intellectual History of Tokugawa Japan*, 1979) had appeared in book form only in 1952, and it seemed that the two authors were moving along convergent paths. Both had identified crucial impulses, in Japanese religious and political thought respectively, that pointed toward a process of indigenous modernization in Japan. While Maruyama’s discovery of a “discoverer of politics” in Ogyū Sorai (1666-1728) ended in a thwarted breakthrough to modernity, Bellah seemed more sanguine. Maruyama simply could not accept Bellah’s argument for the “internal relationship between the rationalization of religion and the rationalization of economy and polity” in Tokugawa Japan and its positive impact on modernization. For Maruyama, the “simple” (simplified) emperor worship promoted by the “national learning” or *kokugaku* movement was far from religiously, let alone politically, rational, because it was accompanied by the “penetration of the principle of piety into all social relationships through the incessant reproduction of the output of traditionalism from the integrative system.” “Why in the case of Japan,” Maruyama asks, “was not the process of the unification of the local divinities and folk religions ever a uni-directional course of liberation from magic?” The problem to be pursued, Maruyama argued, was “how the magical character at the top and bottom levels of the society internally characterized the Japanese rationalization and modernization and pushed it forward.” “Pseudo-universalism,” Maruyama urged (Bellah did not use this term), had lowered “the universalistic standard” by sanctifying hierarchy rather than equality under new conditions. The undeniable presence of rationalizing elements in society and in the “structure of personality” merely begged the question as to whether they were being “applied to life *methodisch-systematisch*”: but only if they were could the “ascetic ethic stand in tension with this world” and have the “dynamism to change it.” What Bellah had actually explained was “the tradition of the coexistence and the parallel use of loyalty and egoism, frugality and indulgence, serious endeavor and resignation.”\(^{15}\)

Japan, to put it bluntly, had not experienced a modern Reformation, and could not have done so. Its

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modernization, and therefore its modernity, was tragically incomplete, and as such, deformed.

Bellah’s response to Maruyama’s review was open-handed and accepting, to a point. In a way, he never stopped responding to it. By the early 1960s he had been able to travel to Japan and make up for lost time in examining contemporary Japanese religion and intellectual life. I would say, in fact, that the latter was his real concern, to judge by the series of finely wrought and ambitious essays on Ienaga Saburō, Watsuji Tetsurō, and the general question of intellectual and society in Japan that he produced over the succeeding decade. He acknowledged that Maruyama’s critique had struck to the core of his argument, while also confirming his view of the special significance of Protestantism. “If Maruyama is right, and I am coming increasingly to believe that he is, then it becomes necessary to press beyond motivational and institutional approaches and to view matters in an even broader perspective…The Protestant Reformation is not after all some mere special case of a more general category. It stands…as the symbolic representative of a fundamental change in social and cultural structure with the most radical and far-reaching consequences. The proper analogy in Asia then turns out to be, not this or that motivational or institutional component, but reformation itself.” Bellah went on to point out (drawing on Uchimura Kanzō) that the “failure of structural transformation” had authored disaster in Germany and transferred the mantle of reformation to England—and America, where he clearly believed it had remained.16

For some time, Reformation was the pivotal orientation in Bellah’s thought, and he wrote, as Maruyama never could, from within it, not just in a scholarly sense but religiously as well. There is an almost proprietary feeling in his writings on this theme, as for example when he describes the “tradition of submerged transcendence” in Japan that had to wage a constant, even Sisyphean struggle against the still strongly salient value pattern in which the individual remains embedded in, even indistinct from the social nexus. He also used the metaphor of the “ground bass” to characterize that value pattern; in any case, the image of the Reformed society—that-ought-to-be informs almost everything Bellah wrote about Japan.17

It is interesting, and perhaps a little counterintuitive, that it took an immersion in his own society, rather than the study of an alien one, to dislodge that image. In the late 1960s, Bellah’s long-running concern with religious evolution, with its focus on the “axial” breakthroughs of the first millennium BCE, and a fortuitous but powerful intervention on “civil religion” in the United States combined to put an end (for the most part) to his active study of Japan. Perhaps his last important contribution was a 1978 essay contrasting what he called Ogyū Sorai’s “conceptual consciousness”—abstract, distinction-making, instrumentalist, even manipulative—to the experiential, connection-making, ego-denying “symbolic consciousness” that he saw at work in Ishida Baigan’s

Shingaku teaching. While on the one hand clearly an acknowledgement of Maruyama’s seminal work on the indigenous roots of modern consciousness in Japan, it is no less clear that for Bellah, the essentially religious attitude of Baigan was far more attractive; and, he implied, it was also vitally necessary if Sorai’s “modernizing” impulse was not to be fatally severed from any moral moorings at all. But the key point was that both perspectives, the conceptual and the symbolic, had arisen in Japan without reference to or contact with the West. Both were authentically Japanese and represented the capacity of “tradition” to reform itself in the direction of the modern. To that extent, Bellah reconfigured, but ultimately affirmed, the argument of Tokugawa Religion. He did not, it seems, fully accept Maruyama’s critique after all.18

Yet in a larger sense, the “ground” that Bellah himself stood on had shifted. To account for an indigenous—and incipient—modernity in Japan was fine as far it went. But it begged the question of the realized form of that modernity. More and more it seemed to Bellah that the advent of “the modern” had nowhere brought a protestant paradise (“Calvinism from below”) but various, and variously disastrous, deformations: if Japan in the 1930s and 40s was one (as Maruyama never ceased to believe), that of his own United States, he began to think, was another. But how was one to confront such deformations? With what intellectual resources, from what standpoint?

In retrospect, it might be said that Maruyama and Bellah had each produced an essay that at a crucial juncture shaped their public image and reacted back on their self-image in turn. Maruyama’s was “Theory and Psychology of Ultranationalism,” published in 1946 and succeeded by a string of related analyses of recent and contemporary issues in Japanese politics. Bellah’s was “Civil Religion in America” (1966) which offered a critical affirmation of the immanent/transcendent principles by which Americans could judge their democratic polity and society. They make a nice dialectical pair. “Theory and Psychology” was a critical negation of what Maruyama saw as the pathological last phase of a corrupt and bankrupt imperial system that fully deserved its fate, and was meant to open the way to a new democratic political and moral consciousness. Without wishing to, over the next decade and a half he became an analyst of contemporary politics and a participant in political struggle. Perhaps this was the moment, the period of “Mitabi heīwa ni tsuite” (On Peace for the Third Time), Nihon no shisō (Japanese Thought), and the national movement of 1960 against renewal of the U.S.-Japan Security Treaty that his protestant imagination achieved its fullest, most integral articulation. It is still thrilling to read his writings of that time. Eventually, though, Maruyama came to “protest” that activism and political analysis were only his “side business”; he was really a historian who had been pressed into service. And by the end of the 1960s, as Bellah was beginning his work on contemporary American society, Maruyama had largely removed himself from contemporary analysis. Commentators on his work sometimes express disappointment at this withdrawal, and not merely because it deprived Japan’s public sphere of one of its major voices. Maruyama’s retirement from the fray was accompanied by his immersion in research on what he successively termed the “prototypes,” “ancient layers,” and “basso

ostinato” of Japanese political, religious, and ethical consciousness. It was a flight, some thought, into an ahistorical world of recurring archetypes—and one strikingly similar to Bellah’s own analysis of the basic value patterns at work in Japanese society. Severe collisions with the radical left did indeed play some part in leading Maruyama to close his “side business,” but there were other reasons, of longer gestation, that I will discuss in closing.

For its part, Bellah’s “Civil Religion in America” also touched a nerve. Published just as the American civil rights and antiwar movements converged, it drew its astonished author more and more into simultaneous academic commentary and religious involvements, and into an increasingly visible public role as social science prophet. Although the critical affirmation it offered was put under severe strain—“civil religion,” one writer on the left charged, was nothing less than fascist in spirit—Bellah never relinquished the public stage onto which this fortuitous intervention had propelled him. As the sometimes wayward cultural experimentation of that decade yielded to a harsh neo-liberalism, Bellah undertook an intense and sustained effort to confront—I think for the first time—the inherent, structural problems of the United States as a post-Reform society (Habits of the Heart; The Good Society). His “office” was to expose the global, and no longer merely national failures of America as a “post-axial” society—a failure in terms of both “axial” and “civil” religion, which, in nested fashion, could be brought to bear as sources of critique. There were “flaws in the Protestant code” itself now, however; the individualistic “heart” of American society had become diseased.

Thus, from the Vietnam-war era onward, Bellah moved more and more, not less and less, toward the analysis, often in the spotlight, of his own time and place. Yet in order to do so, he moved and more, not less and less, toward the analysis of the initial “axial” breakthrough. In the process, the radical Protestantism of Beyond Belief gave way. Bellah’s own religious affiliation shifted to Episcopalianism and his associations were frequently with Roman Catholic theologians and social thinkers. Communitarian themes grew stronger, the philosopher Charles Taylor emerging as a particularly kindred spirit. As Bellah himself observed, the substance of his critiques of post-axial individualism may have been informed by his long-nurtured thinking about Japan as a “nonaxial” society, one unriven by the fateful cleavage between self and other, subject and object. Yet in the end, as at the beginning, Bellah was never just a “specialist” on Japan. Fascinated by evolutionary thought, he allowed his own thinking to evolve through Japan as well. Toward what? Toward the “now,” the present: but a present judged in terms of the nova et vetera of axial religious thought.

At his death in 1996, Maruyama left unfinished a work that had been important to him: his collaborative examination of the relationship of orthodoxy and heterodoxy as constitutive ideas in Japanese political thought. Together with Ishida Takeshi (all the way

through) and Fujita Shōzō (part of the way) and various members of the editorial staff of Chikuma Shobō, Maruyama devoted at least one day a month—and many hours of preparation—to the Seito to itan (Orthodoxy and Heresy) project for upwards of thirty years. The examination of the Japanese political tradition in its entirety, but focusing on the modern “emperor system,” formed the core of this project. But the fact that Maruyama structured it in this manner clearly points to the derivation of the problem from histories other than that of Japan, and to the religious (or religio-political) conceptions that directly and in secularized form have continued in complex ways to inform much of modern political life. Maruyama described the prewar Japanese emperor system, for example, as a “dogma lacking a doctrine,” suggesting that it fell short of the intellectual criteria for a true “orthodoxy.” In his famous critique of de-Stalinization, Maruyama followed Sidney Webb in anatomizing the “disease of orthodoxy” in Soviet communism. And he once described the mindset of Japanese followers of Trotsky as “heterodoxy that does not seek to become orthodoxy.”

Maruyama was concerned with the dialectic of orthodoxy and heterodoxy—in Japan, China, Russia, and elsewhere—because he was concerned with the conditions and possibilities for the varieties of freedom in the modern world. As a self-consciously Japanese intellectual, Maruyama was drawn first and foremost to the question of freedom in his own society and tradition. The problem, as he was aware, was that the project’s framing was essentially Christian; even Chinese Confucianism, though it possessed the sort of intellectual “axis” necessary for the construction and maintenance of orthodoxy, lacked the sharp delineation of opposed categories that came naturally, so to speak, to the Christian world. Maruyama and his collaborators struggled manfully with this insoluble problem; even as Japan entered modern times, and though Maruyama believed that thought of Western origin would eventually indigenize, still the framework could not be made to fit. Maruyama stuck with it, however, because he could find no more apposite construct for the understanding of the experience he and others of his generation and earlier had had of the “emperor system” and its ideological absorptive power, its undertow. As Ishida shows, the efforts were not without important analytical results. What passed for “orthodoxy” in Japan lacked dogma or logos; what it was in fact was a principle of legitimacy that was ritually, institutionally, and socially enforced—and hence strongly resistant to “reform.” But as the postwar years proceeded, that “emperor system” itself had changed shape. It had (so Matsushita Keiichi argued), “massified,” the social and political hierarchies that had supported it having either converged toward the “middle” or become economically superfluous. Along with this, Marxism as the anti-emperor-system had itself “weathered” and lost critical bite as its own supporting political apparatus weakened.

20 The following account of the Seito to itan project is based on Ishida Takeshi, “Seito to itan wa naze mikan ni owatta ka,” in id., Maruyama Masao to no taiwa (Misuzu Shobō, 2005), pp. 36-93, with supplementary reference to Karube, Maruyama Masao. Neither Ishida nor Karube discusses the Maruyama/Bellah relationship.

For Maruyama, this loss of referent provoked what he termed “a spiritual slump”: existentially, he had been bound to the tennōsei, and pledged to its critical negation. At the same time, though the very term tennōsei was a Marxist coinage, Maruyama had also defined his own stance via a critique of Marxism as an intellectual system. Facing the postwar tennōsei without a critical antagonist, Ishida relates, was to engage in “noren ni ude-oshi” (literally, “pushing against a shop curtain”)—all one’s strength came to naught against such an apparently pliant object. Indeed Maruyama began to lament the “loss of forms” (kata no sōshitsu) across the board, seeing a “mass” society subject virtually everywhere to the visible powers he warned against, particularly those operating under the sign of the mass-mediatized commodity.22

It would prove to be difficult to reappropriate “origins” and turn them to transformative purpose in the present. Maruyama was too much of a dialectician just to heroize or plunder the past in search of edifying role models. But whether it was Ogyū Sorai discovering that institutions could be made and unmade, the “remonstrating” warrior challenging his lord to his face, or Fukuzawa Yukichi seeking to break his countrymen of the habit of looking to state authority for moral values, Maruyama did not shrink from affirmation when it was possible to offer it. In the dialectic of affirmation and negation that was Maruyama’s method, the latter moment took shape in the studies—also unfinished—of the “archetypal” forms of Japanese consciousness, historical, ethical, and political. While Robert Bellah could turn in the end to the exposition of an axial tradition to which he was positively committed, with Maruyama matters were otherwise. At the deepest layer of his own cultural tradition, Maruyama met his most tenacious antagonist.