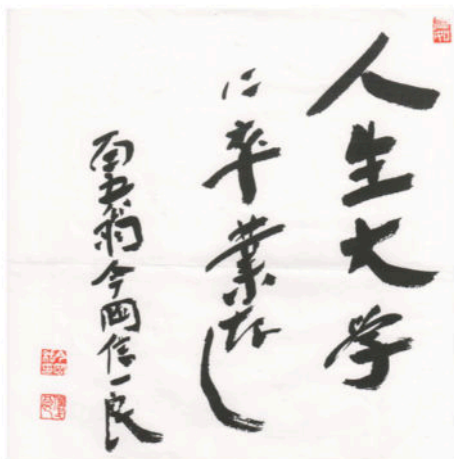


KIITSU KYŌKAI

(歸一教會)



"In the university of human life there is no graduation."

Calligraphy by IMAOKA Shin'ichirō

Cambridge

**A short period of
Seiza Meditation (Quiet Sitting)**

Lighting of a candle

Opening words:

Mindful of truth ever exceeding our knowledge, and
community ever exceeding our practice, reverently we meet
together, beginning with ourselves as we are, to share the
strength of integrity and the heritage of the spirit, in the
unending quest for wisdom and love.

A short reading and/or talk

Music (optional)

A time of conversation

**A moment of silence ended with the following words
(said together):**

We receive fragments of holiness, glimpses of eternity, brief
moments of insight. Let us gather them up for the precious gifts
that they are and, renewed by their grace, begin to walk a path
that is safer than the known way.

Closing words by Imaoka Shin'ichirō:

May we all be persistent in a free, creative, and universal faith,
and go forward for the purpose of realizing the
Kingdom of God, or Pure Land of Buddha,
that is nothing but the Ideal Community.
Amen.

A note about the name *Kiitsu Kyōkai* (帰一教會)

In Japanese, 帰 *kiitsu* means “returning” to “oneness/unity,” and 教會 is a non-standard way of writing *kyōkai*, usually written as either 協会 (which means “assembly”, “association”, “federation” or “society”) or as 教会 (meaning “church” and which is strongly, but not definitively, associated with *Christian* churches). So why did Imaoka Shin’ichirō-sensei (1881-1988) adopt this non-standard way of writing *kyōkai*?

Well, *Kiitsu Kyōkai* (using the more usual term 帰一協会) was the name given to a cultural organization (called in English the *Association Concordia*) founded in 1911 by Jinzō Naruse, Eiichi Shibusawa, Tetsjirō Inoue and Masaharu Anesaki for the purpose of achieving “concord and cooperation between classes, nations, races, and religions.” It ceased to exist in 1942. Imaoka Shin’ichirō-sensei (1881-1988), who was a student of Masaharu Anesaki’s, acted as the association’s secretary.

But *Kiitsu Kyōkai* (using the non-standard rendering 帰一教會) was also the name Imaoka-sensei chose for the free-religious community he founded in Tokyo in 1948. As the essay “*The Purpose of Kiitsu Kyōkai*” printed below reveals, he regarded this new *Kiitsu Kyōkai* as a continuation of the former *Unitarian Church* (ユニテリアン教会 *Yunitarian Kyōkai*) that had developed in Japan between 1890 and 1922, the activities and aims of which had overlapped in various ways with that of the *Association Concordia*. However, he also wanted the new *Kiitsu Kyōkai* to be “a significant transformation” of the earlier Japanese *Unitarian Church*, and he stated he “believed [it] should be something more than just a sect of Christianity. To put it another way, it asserts a free, pure, non-denominational religion (自由純粹な超宗派の宗教) that is non-sectarian (超宗派), taking a step further than just being a liberal Christianity against orthodox Christianity.” To distinguish his new, explicitly free religious *kyōkai* from the *kyōkai* that was the *Unitarian Church* and the *kyōkai* that was the *Association Concordia*, Imaoka-sensei began using different characters for his new *kyōkai*, namely 教會, where 教 means a religious/philosophical teaching, and

where 會 represents an old Chinese character which depicts an ancient temple. This fact, plus the additional one that the Japanese words for association and church (教会 and 協會) are phonetically the same — is why Imaoka-sensei's 教會 (*kyōkai*) is sometimes translated as the *Unity Fellowship*, but more often as the *Unitarian Church*.

So, now knowing all this, drawing on an important passage found in Professor George M. Williams' book, "*Cosmic Sage*" (which was based on personal conversations with Imaoka-sensei himself) it becomes possible to say the following about the name Kiitsu Kyōkai (帰一教會):

The first word, *kiitsu* (帰一) was the same for both the *Association Concordia* and Imaoka-sensei's new community but the translation was different. For him it signified "oneness or unity," rather than "concord or concordia" and, quite naturally and felicitously, it also echoed the word "Unitarian."

However, for the second word, *kyōkai*, he used an older Chinese character for *kai* (會) rather than its simplified form (会). When this was attached to *kyō* (教), meaning a religious/philosophical teaching, he intended his rendering of *kyōkai* (教會) to encompass the meanings of *koinonia* in Greek (meaning fellowship, joint participation, partnership, the share which one has in anything, a gift jointly contributed, a collection, a contribution) and *gemeinschaft* in German (meaning a spontaneously arising organic social relationship characterized by strong reciprocal bonds of sentiment and kinship within a common tradition), but also the views of John Haynes Holmes' and his attempt to create a "community church." And, there was still another influence, namely, *mu-kyōkai* (無教会) or the "non-church" movement of Uchimura Kanzō. Long ago in Kobe, working with the radical Congregationalists and the important non-sectarian religious and spiritual teacher and exemplar, Tenkō-san (Tenkō Nishida), the notion of a non-paid, non-professional ministry without the financial burden of a church building was also something Imaoka-sensei tried to convey through his chosen characters. And linked to all of this was, of course, *jīyū shūkyō* (自由宗教 free religion), the religious and spiritual centre of gravity for his fellowship. Imaoka

wanted his new *Kiitsu Kyōkai* (帰一教會) to be the “community church” of Holmes’ dream, something that united (*kiitsu*) everyone in the common cause of achieving a better, more equitable, more beautiful, more just community (*kyōkai*). That was the name’s local meaning (see George M. Williams, *Cosmic Sage—Imaoka Shin’ichirō: Prophet of Free Religion*, Uniquet Publishing, Hawai’i, p. 285). As Williams sums up, Imaoka-sensei was convinced that:

One becomes human in community (a la Holmes’ *community church* and in progressive *Shinto* or Buddhism’s true *Sangha*). For Imaoka community had four dimensions, as if legs to a table, a metaphor for personal, local, national and international. The perspective for all four was a cosmic interconnection of all beings, animate and inanimate, with the universe. Community was *kyōkai* (教會), in places of learning – in church, school, art, literature, even politics and economics. One must use one’s own freedom in community with others who are also free to transform life toward the good, true and beautiful. Together, through humanizing ethics, we evolve toward becoming cosmic human beings. Through learning and growth together, in a unifying community, *kiitsu kyōkai* is created as a unity of religious and secular (George M. Williams, *Cosmic Sage—Imaoka Shin’ichirō: Prophet of Free Religion*, Uniquet Publishing, Hawai’i, p. 314-315),

As already noted, due to the fact that 教會 was often translated as “church” (as can be seen in the picture of the noticeboard to the right), unfortunately, in the Japanese edition of Imaoka-sensei’s book from 1981, his own, non-standard and highly nuanced way of writing *kyōkai* (that was not easily comprehensible to many modern Japanese readers) was rendered by the editors using a simplified character for 會. This results in a way of writing *kyōkai* (教会) that, again as already noted, is primarily associated only with Christian churches. Thus, in its published written Japanese form anyway, Imaoka-sensei’s attempt

subtly to indicate typographically something of the unique characteristics of his free religious community was lost to modern Japanese readers and modern translators of his published essays. And, with the closure of the *Tokyo Kiitsu Kyōkai* following Imaoka-sensei's death in 1988, excepting the photo reproduced here, the written name 帰一教會 has almost completely disappeared from both view and memory.

Consequently, one of the many challenges for English speaking advocates of Imaoka-sensei's free religious project is how they might once again make this very hard to make, but vital, nuance visible, and expressible.

The Purpose of *Tokyo Kiitsu Kyōkai* (1950)

It is not possible to state precisely when the *Tokyo Kiitsu Kyōkai* (東京 帰一教會) was established. The first Sunday meeting was held in 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 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,” 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.” Recent Unitarian movements in the United States have undergone significant changes, becoming not only liberal Christianity but also a movement beyond Christianity. In that sense, I believe our *Kiitsu Kyōkai* (帰一教會) 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 gradually declined due to various circumstances, although it didn't completely vanish. To be precise, it can be said that the movement still continues today, albeit weakly. I feel this way as one of those who participated in the movement. Therefore, when I established the *Kiitsu Kyōkai* (帰一教會), 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. I regarded the *Kiitsu Kyōkai* (帰一教會) as a continuation of the former Unitarian Church but with a significant transformation. In other words, I believed that the *Kiitsu Kyōkai* (帰一教會) should be something more than just a sect of Christianity. To put it another way, it asserts a free, pure, non-denominational religion (自由純粹な超宗派の宗教) that is non-sectarian (超宗派), which goes beyond denominational bounds, taking a step further than just being a liberal Christianity against orthodox Christianity. However, when I mention going beyond denominational bounds, this might be criticized as being abstract, conceptual, and utterly lacking in realism. If the *Kiitsu Kyōkai* (帰一教會) were to become something like that, it would be contrary to our expectations. Beyond or trans-denominational simply means not being overly attached to established religions like Buddhism or Christianity. In our belief, it's not that Buddhism or Christianity exists first and then we come after. On the contrary, we exist first, and only then comes Buddhism or Christianity. Hence, our religion shouldn't be a ready-made Buddhism or Christianity, but a made-to-order religion that truly responds to our needs. A so-called ideal religion crafted by gathering the best parts from all religions might also be termed as trans-denominational. But still, this would be a ready-made religion and is certainly not our religion. So, the trans-denominational religion we envision is the exact opposite of an abstract conceptual one; rather, it represents the most personal, realistic, and tangible form of faith. And if a personal religion that best responds to our needs happens to be Buddhism or Christianity, then naturally, we would become Buddhists or Christians. However, there are many in the world who can't be satisfied with ready-made, established religions. In essence, our assertion of being trans-denominational is not about rejecting established religions, but solely about being faithful to our genuine demands. In other words, it's the same as when Shinran Shonin said that the teachings of Amida are for Shinran alone. However, there might be some who worry that if each individual's religion

becomes so varied, forming a religious community would be impossible. But such a worry is groundless. Just as a true cooperative community (真の共同社会) can be organized only by the gathering of individuals with distinct personalities and characters, a true church can be organized only by those who truly possess a personal and autonomous religion. Thus, even though it is referred to as trans-denominational, in reality, it doesn't transcend denominations absolutely. To be precise, it ends up creating a new denomination called 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 to be 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 faith content but also in the aspect of church politics. Therefore, we advocate for "Congregationalism" (会衆主義) and layman-ism (平教徒主義). Worship and sermons are entrusted to volunteers from among the members. Consequently, at our Sunday gatherings, it is not guaranteed that we will always have eloquent sermons from great speakers. 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 assistance 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 belief that salvation is both personal and social. We don't believe that a society is saved by the gathering of saved individuals; rather, we believe that individual salvation and societal salvation are two sides of the same coin. I want to believe that until all living beings attain Buddhahood, Hōzō Bosatsu (法蔵菩薩) [i.e. Bodhisattva Dharmakara] cannot himself attain Buddhahood. Therefore, in a sense, Hōzō Bosatsu has not yet attained Buddhahood. Hōzō Bosatsu can never attain Buddhahood just for himself; his attainment is simultaneous with that of all living beings. I believe this is also the meaning behind the Catholic Church's claim that there is no salvation outside the church. In this regard, I deeply resonate with the Community

Church movement in the United States, initiated by Dr. J. H. Holmes. For a while before we named our church *Kūitsu Kyōkai* (帰一教會) it was called “The Community Church of Tokyo” (東京市民教会 *Tōkyō Shimin Kyōkai*, lit. “Tokyo Citizens Church”).

With this perspective in mind, there is profound significance in the fact that during the Meiji and Taisho eras, Abe Isoo-shi (安部磯雄氏), the central figure of the Unitarian movement in Japan, was a leader of the social movement in Japan. Suzuki Bunji-shi (鈴木文治氏) started the labour union movement (労働組合運動) while serving as the secretary of the *Japan Unitarian Association* (日本ユニテリアン協会). Furthermore, 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 in Oxford, subsequently made significant strides in Japanese politics. If one were to point out any shortcomings in the Unitarian movement of these esteemed predecessors, it might be that it leaned too much towards the political and social aspects, leaving the religious aspect somewhat diluted. During the Meiji and Taisho eras, in essence, the Unitarian movement had more significance as an enlightenment movement within the wider religious realm rather than as a religious movement itself. And, even today, enlightenment movements are necessary because the dispelling of superstitions, the encouragement of harmony between science and religion, and the promotion of cultural and peace movements, remain of paramount importance. However, the aspiration of our *Kūitsu Kyōkai* (帰一教會) is to move one step beyond our former high point by fully committing to a free, pure, democratic, and universal religious faith. This faith serves as our driving force to address and solve all issues related to culture, politics, economy, society, etc. While we greatly value intelligence, our church, being a religious organization, must not turn into a mere debating room for intellectuals. Our church should be a microcosm of the ideal society. It must embrace scholars and the uneducated, business people, labourers, civil servants, students, men, women, the elderly, and the young. My secret wish is for individuals like Shōtoku Taishi (聖德太子 Prince Shōtoku) or [Albert] Schweitzer to emerge from our community.

(Showa 25 [1950], September, “Creation” [創造], Issue No. 1)

A biography and some of Imaoka sensei’s writings can be downloaded freely at:

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

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Imaoka Shin’ichirō’s “My Principles of Living”

In 1973, Imaoka-sensei produced a revised version of an earlier “My Principles for Living” written in 1965. As he noted at the time, since the freedom of free religion (自由宗教 *jiyū shūkyō*) primarily signifies individual internal freedom, his principles were not binding in any way upon any person who chose to associate with *Kūitsu Kyokai*. It was simply used in Tokyo as a clear indication of the values and beliefs that guided the life of *Kūitsu Kyokai* and also as a reference point to help individuals formulate their own principles of living and practise of free religion.

1. **I have faith in myself** I recognize my own subjectivity and creativity and feel the worth of living in life (生きがい *ikigai*). Subjectivity and creativity can be rephrased as personality, divinity, and Buddha-nature.
2. **I have faith in my neighbour**
The neighbour is oneself as a neighbour. If I have faith in myself, I inevitably have faith in my neighbour.
3. **I have faith in a cooperative society** (共同社会 *kyōdō shakai*).
Both oneself and a neighbour, while each possessing a unique personality, are not things that exist in isolation. Because of this uniqueness, a true interdependence, true solidarity, and true human love are established, and therein a cooperative society is realized.

4. **I have faith in the trinity of self, neighbour, and cooperative society**

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

5. **I have faith in the unity of life and nature**

Life, which constitutes the trinity of self, neighbour, and cooperative society, further unites with all things in the universe. [What Imaoka-sensei later called a universal or cosmic cooperative society.]

6. **I have faith in “church” (教會 *kyōkai*, i.e. the ideal community)**

The “church” is the prototype/archetype and driving force of the cooperative society. I can only be myself by being a member of the “church.”

7. **I have faith in a specific religion**

In other words, I am a member of the *Tokyo Kūitsu Kyōkai* (帰一教會). However, a specific religion (including the *Tokyo Kūitsu Kyōkai*) neither monopolizes religious truth nor is it the ultimate embodiment of it.

8. **I have faith in free religion (自由宗教 *jiyū shūkyō*)**

While having faith in a specific religion, the endless pursuit and improvement towards universal and ultimate truth is the core of religious life. Such a dynamic religion is called free religion.

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A note about Seiza Meditation

“Do not seek, sit down quietly in the country of unconditioned spontaneity. If there is but a space three feet square to sit, the spring of heaven and earth will fill this space, raising life’s energy and joy within yourself. Seiza-sitting is truly a gate into great rest and happiness.”— Okada Torajiro (1872-1920)

Seiza (静坐 — literally, “quiet sitting”) meditation was developed and established by Okada-sensei in Japan during the early years of the 20th century and was the form of meditation practised by Imaoka-sensei. It is exceptionally minimalistic and does not rely upon any external organizations, temples, churches, tithing, dogma, theory, canon, worship, beliefs, literature, scriptures, calendar, prayers, hymns, priesthood, hierarchy, relics, icons, saints, homage, cults of personality, holidays, myths, cosmology, symbols, architecture, laws or commandments. Neither is Seiza tied to particular intellectual, rational or medical ideas or theories. It does not depend on emotion, piety, nor devotionism. It is not otherworldly, mystical, nor renunciatory. It is not tied to a particular race, ethnicity, or culture. It is not congressional and needs no pilgrimage. Nor does it proselytize or support military aggression. To practise Seiza, one needs no group or leader, no visualization, vocalization, counting, or mantra repetition, and no special symbolic objects, apparatus, or clothing. A video filmed at the Cambridge Unitarian Church introducing Seiza Meditation by Miki Nakura-sensei, and an article about Okada sensei by Joshua Shapiro, can be found at the following web addresses:

Video:

<http://bit.ly/3MTeekB>

Article:

bit.ly/42hnG6Y

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