

Symbiosis of Religious Beliefs

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In the following presentation, I would like to explore the topic of "symbiosis and religion" from the perspective of comparative religious studies, and offer practical suggestions about interfaith dialogue.

Symbiosis is totally different from assimilation — the former is a state of mutual respect for differences. In religion, it can be achieved only through interfaith dialogue.

The 1980s saw a rise in interfaith dialogue based on religious pluralism. In recent years, however, particularism has largely replaced pluralism as the basis for such conversations, shifting the focus away from differences in thought and inner experiences. This new approach depends on grassroots initiatives to be successful. Countering fundamentalism, meanwhile, requires working to engage those who refuse dialogue.

Religion by its very nature transcends the framework of society, but should never be allowed to act against it. Religious leaders need to cultivate their capacity for dialogue with society by continuously addressing social issues, while society must strive to guarantee fairness to all.

Religion arose from human activities, but has since developed into a system that exists above humanity and that can, therefore, easily get out of control. This makes it extremely important for each religious community to be able to relativize, and set limits on, itself.

To use the analogy of drawing, human perspectives can be categorized as near, middle, and far. The near perspective is focused on one's family, the middle on the local community as well as music, literature, and other forms of art, and in the distance is the sacred, including God, the Buddha, deities, and non-physical realms. Much of contemporary Japan seems to lack the middle perspective, leaving itself with only the near and distant views — and an enormous and potentially problematic gap between the personal and the divine. This lack should be addressed through a renewed focus on music, literature, and other arts, as well as on local communities formed around temples and shrines.

Today's society seems to be also short on *kairos*, or unmeasurable time. Possible remedies for this imbalance include joint interfaith rituals, such as prayers, which can serve to extend *kairos*.

Lastly, in order for interfaith dialogue to be meaningful, non-believers must have a mature sense of ownership, and believers must be aware of the possibility that their stories of faith could hurt others.