

## REVIEWS

### **Japanese Contributions to Christian Theology**

by Carl Michalson

*Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1960, pp. 192*

Publication of Dr. Carl Michalson's *Japanese Contributions to Theology* by Westminster Press was an event of special interest to religious scholars in Japan. It has long been felt that more should be done to make the research and writings of Japanese scholars in the field of religion more widely known abroad. In Christian circles there has been considerable interest in publishing the works of Japanese Christian scholars. However, up to the present no one has really undertaken to publish a volume in English on Japanese contributions to Christian theology.

It apparently seemed strange to Dr. Michalson that Christian missionaries have not done this a long time ago, but it does not seem at all strange to this reviewer. The missionary's attention is focused on the Japanese people. He has not, and does not, regard the interpretation of Japanese thought to Westerners as one of his functions,

not even Christian thought. Moreover, it is doubtful whether mission boards would consider themselves justified in releasing one or more of their missionaries for such a task over any extended period of time. Conceivably this may be done in the future, but it is more likely to be done because some foundations have made adequate grants. And it will depend very largely on whether the Christian church and foreign scholars, such as Dr. Michalson, can create a demand for such studies. An added reason why missionaries have not attempted anything of this nature is no doubt the lack of know-how in the publishing game. It is not an easy matter for an unknown scholar to get his work published. The author is an old hand in this field.

In order to prepare this review and evaluate the book from the standpoint of the Japanese scholars who received the most attention, letters regarding the book were sent

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to messrs. Masatoshi Doi<sup>a</sup>, Enkichi Kan<sup>b</sup>, Yoshitaka Kumano<sup>c</sup>, Kazoh Kitamori<sup>d</sup>, and Zenda Watanabe<sup>e</sup> requesting brief comments. Their replies were very enlightening.

Here is what three of the five had to say of a general nature:

"I think this attempt is fairly successful."

"The book is useful not only for foreign students but also for Japanese readers. The fact that in writing the book the author kept his own theological standpoint consistently makes it more valuable than a mere guide or introduction."

"I appreciate the effort of the author and rather admire what he has done."

Only three (Kitamori, Kumano, Watanabe) were asked by the author to read the portions of the manuscript dealing with their thought and to make comments or corrections.

Were the ideas of these scholars correctly interpreted? Dr. Kitamori said, "Yes" The other two said, "fairly correct," and "fairly well." Dr. Kumano would like to have

added some additional ideas. Dr. Watanabe said that although he had sent in comments and corrections, his letter had apparently been received too late.

Neither Dr. Doi nor Dr. Kan were given an opportunity to read the manuscript. Doi said that the article quoted by the author was only a preliminary work for a theology of history which he is writing. His real intention in the article, he said, was "to show that even in the end-*dharma* conception there was a tendency to return to the a-historical point of view, which is characteristic of Buddhism." Kan said that he had been completely misrepresented, and he is unable to understand why the author made no effort to either interview him or to show him the manuscript, although both men were living in Tokyo at the time.

In reference to his book, "Reason and Revelation," Dr. Kan says that the author seems to have utterly missed the point ..... I wonder if anyone reading this section can really understand what I am intending to say. I do not

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a. 土居真俊 b. 菅 円吉 c. 熊野義孝 d. 北森嘉蔵 e. 渡辺善太

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know whether his unintelligible statement of the content of my book comes from the author's inability to grasp my rather subtle philosophical argument, or from mistranslations ..... It is a great mistake to think that he can understand easily a book which deals with rather subtle philosophical problems written in a language of which he has no knowledge.

In regard to whether the presentation of the ideas of other scholars had been done correctly, two said, "nearly correct," but one adds, "although I have different ideas about the works of some people," which would seem to partially negate the "nearly correct!" A third wrote: "to a certain extent, although I have heard some complaints from these treated in a group in the last chapter."

Additional comments of interest from other than Dr. Kan were:

He treats Hatano's philosophy of religion as theology. I suppose this is due to his existentialism. However, in Japan a sharp line is drawn dividing philosophy of religion and theology. The former is based on natural reason, whereas the latter is based on faith, as has been made clear in Barthian theology. But Michal-

son is to be complemented. A friend expressed surprise saying: "For the first time I can understand Hatano's philosophy of religion through reading Michalson's interpretation."

I was rather surprised by his wide view and sensitivity which enabled him to grasp the various aspects of Japanese theology so correctly.

He should have made a thorough examination of the historical development of Japanese theology before he picked up several representative thinkers.

His activities were largely restricted to Tokyo and his assistants were too young to provide him with a broader and fairer view of historical developments. As a result the older scholars in the Kansai areas [that is, Dōshisha], such as Hino, Otsuka, Tominomori, and Uoki, who did meritorious pioneer work, are totally neglected. .... These scholars did more than those introduced by Dr. Michalson in establishing in this country theology as a science.

In regard to matters of a somewhat general nature, it is very obvious that no very critical eye scanned the volume for general comment. Here are some examples of what is meant. (1) The followers of the Non-Church move-

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ment do not necessarily sit cross-legged (p. 21) at their meetings. The founder of the movement, Kanzo Uchimura, and the leader who followed him held meetings in public halls with chairs. If Dr. Michalson had taken the trouble to attend one of the meetings conducted by the late Dr. Tadao Yanaibara<sup>a</sup>, one of the movement's leaders and a former president of Tokyo University, he would have sat on a bench. (2) It is incorrect to say that in the Non-Church movement there are "no church edifices" because Dr. Yanaibara's building itself was almost indistinguishable from many churches in Japan. (3) The author may have thought that the Japanese "must not imply anything good about themselves," but that, as the saying goes, "is for the birds." (4) Finally, he would not have intimated that Christian congregations invariably listen to "pastors supported by Western money." This is cheap journalism unworthy of the author and it is incorrect. There are many hundreds of Christian churches in

Japan that are entirely self-supporting. Unquestionably a majority of the church members in Japan worship in self-supported local churches.

These are not a serious matters, but the statements as they stand are incorrect and create some rather unfortunate false impressions about the actual situation in this country.

In regard to the language barrier, this reviewer thinks that Dr. Michalson was somewhat too optimistic, not to say naive, when he wrote in the Preface: "The fact that I do know the Japanese language, either written or spoken, seems to have been my major advantage." His only advantage would seem to have been that, being *entirely dependent* on the Japanese students and scholars who assisted him for the selection and translation (interpretation) of the material used, he was able to be completely oblivious to everything that his assistants chose to rule out, ignore, or were unaware of. With the field thus limited he could proceed without a qualm and could do in a relatively short time what other scholars

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working in the Japanese language would have taken many years to accomplish.

Generally speaking, the work under review has received favorable comment, and the author deserves full credit for what he has contributed to our knowledge. This, however, should blind no one to the fact that a foreign scholar working in the Japanese language would have to do a great deal more reading and careful checking of his material than did the author. And a book by a missionary, or any foreign scholar for that matter, would have been subjected to far more severe criticism than has this volume. This is no reason why foreign scholars should not undertake to work in this field, but it is a good reason for their not attempting anything unless adequate

time and resources are available. This is seldom the case.

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Note: In order to present Dr. Kan's interpretation of his book, *Revelation and Reason*, he was asked to provide the brief summary which follows.

Editor