“What exactly is our missionary task?” This very practical question sends us back to more general, in a sense more speculative, questions: What is the meaning and role of Christianity in Japan, this highly developed Shinto-Buddhist country? What is the raison d’être and mission of Christianity in the world, among the other Great Religions? And still further: What is the role of religion in the world?

*Jan Van Bragt*

**Interreligious Dialogue and Evangelization**

To start from this last question, religion appears to be in deep trouble or crisis in all the technologically and economically advanced countries, the so-called “First World.” Most of us can tell about some shocking experiences we had of the crisis of Christianity in Europe, where vocations have dried up, church buildings have become much too big for the few people that still gather on Sundays, and young people, including our own nephews and nieces, for whom the language of the Church sounds as alien as, say, Hottentot. We may then sometimes have the impression that our base on earth is being destroyed while we are high up in our space ship.

But it is not only a question of Christianity. Buddhism in Japan, for instance, is certainly in the same boat, and evidently from much earlier on, so that a fitting formulation might be the following: Christianity is rapidly becoming for West-Europeans what Buddhism has been for the Japanese since quite some time: a cultural heritage and a provider of “rites of passage,” especially funerals.

I do not think that the sense of crisis among Japanese Buddhists, especially the clergy, is as strong and general as that among Western Christians. One reason for this might be that the indicators of decline are not so clear in the case of Japan. For most Buddhist temples it is “business as usual,” meaning mostly funerals and memorial services for the dead. Still, I have the impression that a sense of crisis is spreading and becoming acute at least in some Buddhist milieus. For me, one of the signs of this growing misgiving are the following two talks I was invited to give in the course of

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* Former Director of the Nanzan Institute for Religion and Culture, Prof. Em. of Nanzan University, Nagoya.

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last year. In November 1996, I was asked to talk about *dendo* (propagation of the faith) for the members of Nishi Honganji’s Institute of Shinshū Doctrine, and from the reactions I learned that the reason for their demand was a growing feeling that, no matter how fervently they preach or what means they use, they do not reach the people.

And recently, in November 1997, at the Institute for Zen Culture of Hanazono University, I had to address a panel of twelve Zen adherents (mostly priests) especially convened to study the bad situation of Zen in Japan and to find remedies that could be proposed to the headquarters of the different Zen sects. In the case of this Zen group, it was clearly the Aum Shinrikyō case that had triggered the soul-searching: “Why did these young people who, in their religious need, ran to that strange religion not come to the Zen halls for salvation? Is not it rather clear that many of them had the same religious motivation that formerly brought people to the Zen halls (or long ago drove Romans to the Egyptian desert)? A very painful question, indeed.

Let me briefly summarize what I said, basically, on these two occasions. I mostly talked about the crisis of Christianity, with the hope, though, that they would recognize themselves in that mirror. You are not alone in your crisis; you share it with Christianity in the West. The social sciences, such as the sociology of religion, appear to be impotent in this case: unable to define the real nature of this phenomenon or to grasp its causes. Some people blame modern man who, as economic animal, would have become allergic to anything spiritual; others mainly blame the religious institutions that have become ivory towers. However, the only thing we can really say objectively might be the following: the religious message, which the established religions have traditionally conveyed, evokes no echoes anymore in present-day people (*pin to konaku natta*); in other words, there has originated a (provisionally unbridgeable) gap between the religious supply offered by the established religions and the religious demand (or needs) of modern human beings.

Christianity, for one, must have lost somehow the original spirit or “fire,” with which it could set people afire, or at least have covered it up so efficiently with all kinds of tie-ups with the oppressive structures of society that it has become unrecognizable, for present-day young people, as an alternative path, a road to freedom. Seeing the rapid decline of Christianity in the West I cannot help but feel the following: a thing that crumbles so quickly cannot have been a living organism; it must already have been a dried-up shell or husk, from which life had escaped, God only knows for how long, but that was kept in existence by social forces. If that is so, the only hope for Christianity (and maybe also for Japanese Buddhism) is that
sparks of the original fire are still glowing under that thick cover, and that one day young people will discover these sparks, experience them as something completely new, exciting, and liberating, and from there start a new form of Christianity. There have been a few such “happenings” before in the history of Christianity; they usually resulted in the formation of new religious orders. What, then, can we religionists do in the meantime? On this point I have tentatively offered two rules of thumb:

First, as long as we cannot clearly grasp what the real fire of our religions is at present and certainly do not know how to express it in a language understandable to present-day people, we must not think of using big means, originating big campaigns, or launching big reforms. From our present point of view, this might be the biggest lesson Vatican II can teach us: its heroic effort notwithstanding, it was unable to stop the decline of Western Christianity. Our real task today may be a much more indirect and “negative” one: while persevering in the only form of our religion we really know, to patiently try to remove from it those things we gradually come to recognize as layers that cover up the fire, so as to give the fire a better chance of being discovered in the future. I agree that this does not sound very glorious. In scholastic philosophy such an activity was called a *removens prohibens*, a very secondary kind of causality. It is, however, a question of placing our hopes in the right place, not to be disillusioned too often. And the underlying message is an optimistic one: the Spirit will do His work at his own time.

The second “rule of thumb” goes as follows: leaving behind, for the moment, all concern about the survival and growth of our religion or church to providence (or the Buddha), and even considering the spreading of the specific doctrine of our religion as secondary, to put all our efforts in trying to recognize the real needs of our contemporaries (without being too concerned whether these needs can be called religious or not) and to meet these needs as best we can. It is only in the midst of such self-forgetting (*botsuga* 没我) service that we can hope to discover a bridge over the gap between our established religions and the existential needs of contemporary human beings.

The Mission of Christianity in the World

I now want to turn to the second question, about the *raison d'être* and mission of Christianity in the world. I believe that this question has traditionally been treated in the treatise *De Ecclesia*, but since we have become conscious of the existence of the other religions as enduring
realities, this question is now very much central also in the Theology of Religions, the theological reflection on the interreligious dialogue as recommended by Vatican II.

Among the different possible formulations of the mission of the Church in the world, one dear to me is: spreading the euangelion, the Good News that Jesus brought and is. As traditionally interpreted, "bringing all people into the Church, that only Ark of Salvation," however, the message could not possibly be experienced as good news by the people addressed, since it must have sounded as: we tell you that, at least from now on, the access to salvation has been limited to contact with that (geographically and culturally) very particular group of people that is the Christian Church. We thus impose a new obligation on you: to leave your own religion, join us and follow our laws. For me, however, bringing Jesus’ message is an announcement of Good News only if I can see it as containing two distinct elements: 1) the glorious proclamation of, and witness to, the availability of salvation for all people, since God, the Father of Jesus, has shown himself to be Love to the point of offering his only Son for us; and, 2) the honorable invitation (or “vocation”) to join Jesus and his disciples in their work for the Kingdom of God by joining the Church.

Fortunately, and refreshingly, the description of the mission of the Church has become a broader and richer one in recent Roman documents, and it can be said that this broader vision has been provoked in no small measure by the acceptance of the interreligious dialogue as a part of the mission of the Church by Vatican II. Thus, the document on Dialogue and Proclamation, for example, jointly promulgated by the Pontifical Council for Interreligious Dialogue (formerly called “Secretariat for non-Christians”) and the Congregation for the Evangelization of Peoples on the day of Pentecost 1991, has the following:

Following its Plenary Assembly of 1984, the Secretariat issued a document entitled “The Attitude of the Church towards the followers of other religions: Reflections and orientations on dialogue and mission.” The document states that the evangelizing mission of the Church is a “single but complex and articulated reality.” It indicates the principal elements of this mission: presence and witness; commitment to social development and human liberation; liturgical life, prayer and contemplation; interreligious dialogue; and finally, proclamation and catechesis. Proclamation and dialogue are thus both viewed, each in its own place, as component elements and authentic forms of the one evangelizing mission of the Church.” (No. 2)

Refreshing as this new formulation of the mission of the Church is to me, I still would like some more clarity on the following points:
1) My first wish may not be a very essential one, but still it might be good to distinguish more clearly the traditional “works of charity” (working for human promotion on the individual level) à la Mother Teresa and the promotion of justice and peace on the social level (a religious task the Church became conscious of rather recently). Buddhists, for example, easily understand the former as having a religious character: they classify it as the bodhisattva practice of mercy and are willing to call Mother Teresa a bodhisattva; but they find it difficult to consider the latter as religious.

2) The documents tend to refer to the work of bringing new people into the Church through catechesis and baptism (“conversion”) with the term “proclamation.” I would like to see the term understood in a much broader sense, embracing all activity of spreading the Good News (even when not directly intending to bring the listener into the Church). It could then be defined as proclaiming Jesus and his message so that it influences people’s lives and makes them “disciples of Jesus” in a broader sense. As you know, there are in Japan many such disciples of Christ that do not figure in our church registers. In case this broader sense of “proclamation” is accepted, another word must, of course, be found for the more specific activity of bringing people into the Church by baptism. Since a generally accepted word does not seem to exist, let me circumscribe it provisionally as “activity for the numerical growth of the Church.” My idea is that a sound discussion of the relationships among the different elements of the mission of the Church is not possible without a clear distinction between “proclamation” in this broader sense and “Church growth activity.”

3) The above quoted text of Dialogue and Proclamation calls the different components of the mission “authentic forms of the one evangelizing mission of the Church.” As a missionary who has been specializing in the dialogue with the other religions of Japan and in all these years hardly brought anybody into the Church, I find this very consoling: it says that I can still call myself a missionary! Still, the really “liberating” message would be that each of the various components of the mission would be clearly recognized as an integral element of the mission in its own right, without having to be directed towards the bringing of people into the Church. And I fear that there is still much ambiguity on this point in the Roman documents, which tend to find the unity of the various components in their all being finally directed towards “Church growth activity.”

This is of paramount importance, of course, for the works of charity of the missionary. No matter how much the missionary desires the beneficiaries to accept also the final gift of faith, there is no pure charity if the gifts are
used as "bait" towards baptism. It is also of vital importance for the
dialogue: there is no genuine dialogue if it must serve to bring the partner
into our camp. Others still often suspect that the present willingness of
Christianity to dialogue with other religions is nothing but a change in
strategy towards the same goal: conversion of their people. But I want to
state here very clearly that there is no Christian dialogue either if there is no
"proclamation" (in the higher defined broader sense) of Jesus in it, just as
there is no Buddhist dialogue if the Buddhist partner does not witness in it to
his Buddhist convictions and try to convince the Christian partner of their
religious value.

Interreligious Dialogue

Why interreligious dialogue? Here I want to stress that the first answer to
this question is: for no reason beyond itself (ohne Warum). The dialogue is
simply one aspect of Christian universal love, and love has no Warum. It is
merely one component of Christ's dream "that all be one," without
distinction of Jew and Greek - which means for us: without a barrier
between Christian and non-Christian. Dialogue wants to tear down the
barrier which we Christians have been putting up in the past, thereby
limiting and betraying the thrust of Christ's Great Commandment. The spirit
of dialogue permits us, for the first time, to love the non-Christian as he is
in all his concreteness, including his religion.

This does not mean, however, that the dialogue cannot be useful for the
Kingdom of God on a secondary level. It most certainly can be. For example,
it puts the whole missionary endeavor in a different light: when we are ready
to learn and receive from the partners (the religions in the midst of which we
live), then the partners can receive from us without losing self-respect
(“face”). Dialogue thus can also contribute to peace on earth. On this point,
Hans Küng's slogan may say it all: “No peace on earth without peace among
the religions; no peace among the religions without interreligious dialogue.”
Furthermore, on the international level and especially in places where
Christianity is a small minority, the work for the Kingdom of God cannot be
done efficiently by Christians alone; we must try to mobilize all people of
good will, especially the people of other religions who can find motivation
in their own religion. What can we Christians do by ourselves, for instance,
to obtain more social justice for segregated minorities in Japan? Lastly, with
regard to the usefulness of the dialogue, I want to mention that we can learn
from the other religions in our efforts toward inculturation, for example to
come to an indigenous theology.
What is the “present state of interreligious dialogue?” The interreligious dialogue is certainly still at an early stage and faces many problems. To name two among several: theological clarity is largely still lacking, and most of the other religions have not yet shown much eagerness for dialogue. In our Church, we must ask the question in how far the spirit of dialogue, recommended by Vatican II, already pervades the Catholic Church itself on all its levels. And the true answer appears to be: not very much yet; old ways of thinking and practice still strongly survive. At the highest level in Rome, the attitude and work of the Pontifical Council for Interreligious Dialogue has been, I think, admirable, but in how far does it represent the general atmosphere of the curia? Some “slips of the tongue” by high officials, such as Cardinal Ratzinger’s calling Buddhism “spiritual auto-eroticism,” do not bode well on that point.

On the Asian level the balance may be more positive. Since its beginning the FABC (Federation of Asian Bishops Conferences) has been stressing very much the necessity of dialogue for the minority Church in Asia, and the bishops conferences of several countries seem to have protested against the apparent downplaying of the interreligious dialogue in the lineamenta of the upcoming Asian Synod. How, then, does the Japanese Church figure on this point? Here we might say that a general judgment is hard to come by. On the official level very little appears to happen. The central Committee for Interreligious Dialogue has been active only for short periods, committees on the diocesan level do not seem to exist as yet, and it is very well possible that in the eyes of the organizers of FABC meetings for interreligious dialogue Japan appears as a laggard. There is another side to the picture, however. Several bishops have been playing an active role in the dialogue: Mgr. Tanaka has been busy channeling meetings of Japanese religious leaders with the Pope, Mgr. Shirayanagi has been engaged for a long time in the WCRP (World Conference of Religions for Peace) and recently has become its president, and the late bishop Sōma was in continuous contact with other religions in his work for Justice and Peace. As to the dialogue with Buddhism, Japan is mostly considered to be in the vanguard. I cannot here explain the reasons for this and must restrict myself to saying that it is mainly due to the efforts of a few priests and laymen.

An important question is, of course: what is happening on the grassroots or parish level, and what exactly are the possibilities there? I believe that there are sufficient reasons to go slowly there with newly converted Christians but, since I have no experience on this point, I must leave this question for others to ponder.
The main objection against the dialogue is, of course, that it would dampen the fervor for Church growth activity: the effort to bring new people into the church by baptism. Let me first declare, very explicitly, that I consider this effort to be an absolute must for the Church. A living faith must spread, naturally, and it may have been one of the banes of the European church that it has been living for many centuries without that outward reach, since everybody was supposed to be a Christian. And it is *a fortiori* applicable to our little church in Japan. Even when we aim, not at becoming the whole dough but only at being the yeast or leaven in the dough, it looks clear to me that our numbers are still too small to become an efficient leaven, one that can penetrate all strata of Japanese society. And this “proselytizing” activity does not mean that we try to pull true believers away from other religions; as you know very well, there are in Japan plenty of people who have no real link with or spiritual support in any religion.

The fear that the stress on dialogue might diminish the fervor for conversion is not imaginary. There are always people who, in their love of novelty, misinterpret the situation. They will then brandish the slogan “Mission is dialogue,” as if dialogue were the only ingredient, the whole reality, of the mission of the Church from now on. The only authentic meaning of the phrase is that the missionary activity of the Church must not be a one-way affair but must happen in response to the religious needs of each people and culture, and with due attention to the work that God has already been doing there. But, in its technical sense, the interreligious dialogue is only one element of the mission of the Church, to be distinguished from the, equally necessary, conversion or recruitment activity. One could then possibly say that the whole missionary activity of the Church must happen in a “spirit of dialogue.” That is how Pietro Rossano (at the time general secretary of the then Secretariat for non-Christians) understood it when he wrote:

Dialogue...for Christians means basically approaching others with the respect, love, concern, and understanding which Jesus showed to all people.¹

*Missionary Spirituality*

It would seem that at present, all of us, including those engaged in conversion work and those engaged in the religious dialogue, need the same missionary spirituality, one that is new in the sense that it must be open to both recruitment work and to dialogue activity. It is, indeed, a question of spirituality, of a spirituality that is a delicate balancing act of two apparently

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opposite poles or of the two sides of a paradox: the conviction of the truth of our own faith and the openness to the very different faiths of others. This spirituality, now demanded of us, is in a sense new, since the second pole of the paradox was formerly not consciously there. Formerly our conviction of possessing the truth necessary for all humans made us see all other faiths as false, the work of Satan, the enemy. Humanly speaking, it was a straightforward mental attitude, but we can see now that it was not really Christian, since, in the stress on the necessity and the rights of the truth in our possession, it set limits to Jesus’ commandment of universal love. In that frame of mind we could not love the faithful of other religions as they are, in their full concreteness, their religion included.

From this perspective the life of the great missionary, Francis Xavier, looks very tragic to me. He certainly loved the people he was sent to, especially the Japanese people, but as “pagans” he had to call them “enemies of God.” In his case, it is so very clear that the theological tenets of his day did not permit his intellect to go where his heart undoubtedly pointed to. So, for instance, in a letter he had to write about A van, the Chinese captain of the boat that brought him from Malacca to Kagoshima:

The “pirate” (the captain’s nickname) died here in Cangoxima. He was good to us in all the voyage, and we could not be good to him, since he died in his unbelief; nor can we be good to him after his death by recommending him to God, since his soul is in hell.²

Still, new as the present missionary spirituality may seem to be, it is after all nothing but the right consciousness of what being a Christian has always meant. On the one hand, it means being conscious of having been chosen and called by God, and of having received from Him the limitless gift of Christ, the Truth, the Path, the Life. “God is near to us.” This consciousness is supposed to provoke in us an always new gratitude and the desire to witness to that gift and to share it with others. On the other hand, a Christian has always been understood to be deeply conscious that he received this gift in “vessels of clay,” that is, in one’s own (and the Church’s) human and cultural limitation and sinfulness. This consciousness is supposed to provoke a profound humility, a living awareness of the distance that still separates us from God, and a never-abating further “search for God.” As individuals, and also as Church, we are pilgrims on the way to the Kingdom of God, and on this pilgrimage we need the help of all God’s creatures (of God’s presence in all creatures), including the other religions, to bring God’s gift home to us.

Our Catholic tradition has always been conscious that, in our search for God, we need the help of “the book of nature.” The only difference is the awareness that the other religions are also, in a sense, God’s creatures, and that we may need their help to better understand and appreciate the gift of Christ.

In his later years, Father Henri van Straelen SVD turned against interreligious dialogue, arguing roughly as follows: “We cannot learn from the other religions, because we already possess the fullness of God’s revelation in Jesus Christ.” It is this way of thinking that accounts for the arrogant attitude that Christianity has shown toward other religions during the greater part of its history, and I would say that both betray an incomplete, one-sided Christian consciousness. With that kind of consciousness or spirituality, one may be in the service of Christ the King, but certainly not in the service of Christ the humble servant, the “kenotic Christ.”

**Christology**

Let me offer a final point on the relationship between interreligious dialogue and our missionary spirituality. Vatican II recommended the dialogue, but left the task of working out the theological underpinnings of that new attitude to the Theology of Religions. This theology is a new endeavor and has not yet come to any satisfactory conclusions. One thing, however, is already clear enough: the crux of the problem lies in Christology, in our understanding of Christ. In an existential way, this central problem could be formulated as “How to reconcile loyalty to Jesus Christ and his lordship with an openness to other religions, as dictated by Christian love.”

This is an extremely delicate point on which I have never dared to touch before, but here I want, for a moment, to stick my non-theological neck out, and suggest that our attitude towards Christ must be as paradoxical as the figure of Christ itself clearly is. You may know that many theologians nowadays are pleading for a “low Christology” over and against the traditional high Christology. Roughly speaking, a high Christology considers Christ “from on high,” from the doctrine of the Trinity, as the only-begotten Son of the Father. From that point of view, Jesus Christ is, of course, unique; we cannot dream of putting anybody on a par with him as revealer of the Father. A low Christology, on the other hand, considers Jesus Christ from the viewpoint of the historical human figure that walked the “Holy Land” 2000 years ago. From this point of view, it looks silly to claim uniqueness for Jesus Christ, and the way is open to recognize other revealers of the Father besides him.
It is not easy, of course, to maintain the right balance between these two viewpoints, which the doctrine of the Incarnation tells us to hold together. A strange thing is therefore happening in the present Theology of Religions debate. John Hick, an English theologian who is a very influential voice in that debate and who wants to be very open to other religions, argues that we must reject the traditional doctrine of the Incarnation, because it is basically this doctrine that does not permit us to recognize other religions and religious figures. I would say, however, that he can argue that way only because he sees in the doctrine of the Incarnation only the *terminus a quo*: the birth of the only Son within the transcendent Father. But is not the doctrine of the Incarnation precisely about the paradoxical unity of that *terminus a quo* with the *terminus ad quem*, the historical figure of Jesus? It expresses the belief that Jesus Christ could reveal to us humans who the Father is only by "emptying" himself into the figure of a servant.

It is the same Saint Paul, with his high Christology of, for instance, Colossians 1 and Ephesians 1, who teaches us that, for the mystery of the Incarnation, we have to look equally at the *terminus ad quem*, in the passage on Christ's kenosis of Philippians 2:5-8:

...Christ Jesus, who, though existing in the form of God, did not consider his equality with God something to cling to, but emptied himself as He took on the form of a slave and became like us human beings....

By his incarnation as a human being, an individual person in a particular country and at a particular moment of history, Christ "relativized" himself: put himself alongside other human beings, other religious figures. I want to suggest that it is precisely this paradox or mystery of the figure of Jesus Christ which we must stick to, without trying to do away with either of its poles, in order to come to understand the relationship of Jesus Christ to other religious figures. It is only by carrying this paradox in our hearts like a "Zen kōan," that we can hope to come, one day, to theological clarity.

**Christianity in Japan**

I should now embark on my third (or rather first) question: What is the role or task of Christianity in Japan, this Shinto-Buddhist highly developed First-World country? I fear, however, that due to limitations of space I must limit myself to briefly touching on two points which I find very important.

One, I believe that, as missionaries in Japan, we need a double conviction: that the Christian Church needs Japan and its particular genius in order to fulfill its universality; and that Japan needs Christianity — I would say a rather "big dose" of Christianity —, notwithstanding the fact that it has
already a plethora of religions. What strengthens me most in that latter conviction are the “confessions” on this point by Buddhists and members of new religions. One of my most precious memories is the scolding I once got from the late Buddhist philosopher Nishitani Keiji. In the middle of a talk about other things he all of a sudden said to me with great intensity: “What are you Christians doing in Japan? Why don’t you proselytize more fervently?” At the moment I was rather taken aback and at a loss for an answer, but soon I realized that behind those words there lay Nishitani’s own strong conviction of Japan’s need of Christianity.

Two, after having spoken earlier about the established religions having to care only about meeting the real needs of the people, it is only natural to add now that the possible contributions of Christianity to Japanese society must be “deduced” from the real needs of the Japanese people. Granted that we have no sufficient insight as yet into these needs, we still might agree on the following points:

1) What most Japanese lack in this totally economy-and-consumption oriented society is a “spiritual path”: a chance for the individual to discover his/her true self, the deeper dimension of the human. A few Japanese find this opportunity, mainly in Zen halls, but I believe that the time has come for the Church to appeal to the other religions to collaborate to multiply these occasions. The Church itself can do a little bit by opening its retreat houses and centers for spirituality to non-Catholics, thus offering a real chance for a personal encounter with Jesus Christ. All Buddhist sects have their specific meditational or other spiritual practices, but unfortunately these are at present not very accessible to ordinary people.

2) There can be no doubt that a central task of Christianity is that of representing, embodying, and making influential in society the spirit of Jesus Christ. And Japanese society certainly stands in need of Jesus’ concern for justice and of his spirit of active and universal love. Japanese people tend to restrict their love to people of their in-group, and ultimately to their fellow Japanese. For quite a few years now, the Japanese media has been stressing the need for “internationalization” (for exchanging the “island mentality” for a more global outlook). But I heard it said, some twenty years ago now, that “there are only two real agents of internationalization in Japan, namely Communism and Christianity.” I think that this remains true today, although by now Communism has lost much of its salt, and to a modest degree Japanese Buddhism is trying to regain some of the original international character of Buddhism. I have never been more proud of our little Japanese church than when the Vietnamese boat people started drifting to the shores
of Japan and the Catholic church was the first to effectively help them. A little later that example was followed by some non-Christian religious organizations. At that moment one could see the leaven at work in the dough.

In its concern for social justice, Christianity can and must challenge the Japanese religions to discover in their own religiosity motivation for social and ecological action, or at the very least, to open their religiosity to this kind of concern. Indeed, the consciousness that social concern is an integral part of a religious attitude is absent from Japan’s traditional religions. If it is true that the present situation of planet earth demands a general mobilization of the “forces for good,” this could be called a providential role for Christianity in Japan.

3) Christianity in Japan also has the role of offering individuals and groups, including other religions, a standpoint from where to take a critical stance towards the state or the politico-industrial forces that be. It can be said that religions in Japan, according to the motto “religion for the well-being of the state,” have traditionally seen themselves in the service of law and order (“harmony”), and also Buddhism has often forsaken the transcendence of the religious principle by speaking, for instance, of Buddha Law and Imperial law as being identical or as the two wings of a bird. It is here that our Christian (Semitic) stress on the transcendence of God over all things of the world, states and emperors included, is indispensable.

4) Finally, as the last need of Japanese society which Christianity must endeavor to meet, I want to mention the need for spiritual support at the moment of death. The Japanese nation is certainly privileged in many respects, in its climate, human resources, orderly society, economic success, and so on; but there is one point on which the Japanese could be called the most pitiable (kinodoku na 気の毒な) people in the world: the fact that nearly all of them die in the hands of doctors, who take good care of their bodies, but without any spiritual support at the moment they need it most. Our small Christian community cannot, of course, remedy this situation by itself, but if Christianity could convince the “clergy” of the other religions to put care for the dying high on their agenda, it would certainly render a great service to the Japanese people. When I speak to Buddhist monks, I always make it a point to urge them to run to the deathbed of their people a little bit earlier: not after the people die, in order to take care of the funeral, but while they are still alive, to help them die in peace.

My list of needs of the Japanese people to which our little Japanese church must try to respond is of course not exhaustive, but I shall be happy if it offers you some food for thought.