

# KANZŌ UCHIMURA

— Founder of the Non-Church Movement —

Condensed by the editor from  
an unpublished manuscript by  
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## IX

### GROUPS AND DISCIPLES

Uchimura's non-church theories will be introduced later. Here we shall glance briefly at how he actually dealt with every day problems.

The organization was minimal and loose, as one would expect. But some shape and form there had to be. With young followers the method was an adaptation of the old Japanese method of education for young men, the *juku*, the private school centered around the teacher. After Uchimura started regular lectures on the Bible in Tokyo in 1900, he organized a class known as the Tsunohazu Bible Class which met on Sunday afternoons in his home. The attendance was restricted to twenty-five because of the size of the room and also because Uchimura preferred small groups. Students had to submit an application and were on trial for a period before being accepted as members. When they were approved, their names on wooden tags were hung at the entrance to the house. Rules and discipline were in the hands of the *sensei*. There was a small monthly fee. More than two unexplained absences, lack of preparation of the lesson, which included memorization of a passage of scripture, and other delinquencies might mean expulsion — and there was a waiting list. The class consisted

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of prayer, the recitation of the passage memorized — in the early years, the lecture, and discussion. This Tsunohazu class continued for several years. There was a turnover in members of course, but many stayed for considerable periods of time.<sup>49</sup>

The Tsunohazu Bible Class formed the nuclei of other groups. Two members with the assistance of Nitobe, Uchimura's old friend of Sapporo years, now principal of the First Higher School from which Uchimura had been obliged to resign, formed the Kashiwa Kai, the Oak Club. The members of the Oak Club retained control of their own program and organization but wanted Uchimura to lead them in Bible study. This group consisted of over twenty brilliant young men from three of the leading junior colleges in Tokyo. They were so lively and keen that Uchimura said that teaching them was like nursing a nest of vipers' eggs. However some of the students, hearing him for the first time in the Oak Club began to attend his Sunday services and Uchimura's connection with this group continued happily for several years. A breach was occasioned by the wedding of one of the members at a Shinto shrine. The sources do not say whether the groom was a Christian or not, but in any case Uchimura regarded it as a moral issue; there was a row; and he refused to continue as teacher. Members of the Oak Club who were most attached to him begged him to continue and the Emmaus Club — appropriate name — was formed out of the ruins of its predecessor.

The above illustrates the pattern of Uchimura's method — public lectures in rented halls, with smaller groups under discipline in his home or elsewhere. In 1908 the Imai Kan, a

private hall, was built for him near his residence. (The funds for this were contributed by the widow of an Osaka admirer who was a member of Temma Church.)<sup>50</sup> Through the years groups were dissolved and re-formed: there are half a dozen names of small groups similar to those described above. The recruiting was done not only by friends who brought friends, but by the organ *The Bible Studies* which remained the best method of spreading the gospel which Uchimura preached and taught. There were no high-pressure methods of advertising; Uchimura abhorred revivalist and sensational techniques of evangelism.

The steady increase in subscribers to *The Bible Studies* meant that a continuing impact was being made in localities outside of Tokyo; the Kyōyū Kai was a natural development from this. (Kyōyū Kai is a difficult term to translate; "Fellowship of Disciples" is as good a translation as any.) In 1905 enthusiastic out-of-town subscribers suggested that they form local groups and Uchimura welcomed the suggestion. In the October number of the magazine Uchimura published a notice explaining his ideas. The Kyōyū Kai, he said, were to be *Dango* rather than *Dantai*, that is, informal fellowships rather than organized groups. The sole purpose was mutual spiritual aid and encouragement. He drew up a statement of purpose and a set of rules for the guidance of the local groups, which is important enough to be reproduced in full in its translated form. . . . At the end of 1905 there were 14 branches of the Kyōyū Kai with a total membership of 119. The name of the Tsunohazu Bible Class was changed to that of the Tokyo Kyōyū Kai for the sake of uniformity.<sup>51</sup>

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THE AIM (PURPOSE) AND RULES OF THE KYŌYŪ KAI

(Rules can be amended according to local needs.)

**PURPOSE** We who believe in God and His Only Son whom He sent (into the world), uniting together, form the Kyōyū Kai. With the help of God the Father we shall help our comrades and live lives that are in harmony with His sovereign Will.

**RULES**

1. This fellowship can be formed wherever there are two or more comrades.
2. This is a friendly society and not a church. Therefore, anyone who has a strong Christian belief (*shinuen*, not *shinkō*, the usual word for "faith") can be a member.
3. The members of this fellowship shall be restricted to those who have sincerely endeavoured to live a Christian life for at least one year.
4. Those who do not have an independent (means of) livelihood shall not participate in deciding the policies of this fellowship.
5. Members shall gather at least once a month (if possible every Sunday) in one place, praise and give thanks together, inquire after the welfare of the comrades, share their joys and sorrows and consider ways of helping each other.
6. At each meeting from one to three *kanji* (secretaries, executive members), to whom shall be entrusted the business of this fellowship, shall be appointed.
7. Those who wish to become members of this fellowship shall do so on the approval of two-thirds of the members of the fellowship.
8. The Tokyo fellowship shall be the central organization to plan for the unity and federation of all the members.

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### GUIDANCE

1. Though not compulsory, members shall endeavour to abstain from ( the use of ) tobacco and liquor.
2. As far as possible, Sunday shall be spent in the nurture of faith and morals.
3. Each week some money shall be collected for the assistance of the brethren.<sup>52</sup>

From a man who had been denouncing the organization of the churches all this seemed most retrograde, and from the first there were rumblings of discontent among the Tokyo followers. Uchimura was able to carry them with him at first, but word persisted in Tokyo beyond non-church circles that he was planning to form a church with himself as its bishop. In April, 1906, he felt obliged to publish a typical disavowal. "The Kyōyū Kai is not a church and of course it is not an organ for the extension of the power of its officers. . . . We do not want to repeat the error of establishing a new church." . . . The Kyōyū Kai was indeed nothing more than a fellowship created for the sharing of spiritual fellowship. All the members were "ordinary labourers" (*futsū no rōdōsha*), all were laymen, there was not a single minister among them. "Ours is not a licensed faith received from licensed evangelists. . . . The Kyōyū Kai is not engaged in attempts to increase its membership, nor does it hope to do so overtly. Those who wish to join are gladly welcomed. Those who wish to leave are free to do so. We love the quiet, industrious, independent life. . . ." The Kyōyū Kai continued to flourish.

The adventist period in Uchimura's ministry has already been mentioned. One aspect of it is most revealing of Uchimura's

attitude to religious organization and cooperation . . . . His vigorous campaigning stimulated a desire on the part of like-minded Japanese Christians to assist him, and in January, 1918, a group gathered in his lecture hall, the Imai Kan, to plan their assistance. The result of the meeting was the decision to form the Kashiwagi Brotherhood to help in the logistics of the adventist meetings.<sup>54</sup> Eighty-two people pledged their support and signed a roll of names as pledge. Under the circumstances it was felt that some rubric should stand in front of the signatures, and Uchimura proposed the Apostles' Creed. There was objection to this on the part of some non-church Christians ; was this not a backward step into ecclesiasticism? The significant point is that it was Uchimura who proposed the Creed, and his followers who objected. The fact that there were Baptists, Congregationalists and other church members among the eighty-two doubtless was one reason that Uchimura proposed it . . . . It has been noted that he was not a small man.<sup>55</sup>

The Kashiwagi Brotherhood continued to meet for two years. In July, 1920, Uchimura was warned by two of its members that it would be indiscreet for him to associate with Professor Tatsuo Morito, who had been forced to resign from the Imperial University for his radical writings. Uchimura, however, had promised to speak from the same platform as the professor and refused to break his promise. The difference of opinion between Uchimura and the two became inflamed and disturbed the Brotherhood. There were other causes of disharmony . . . . Uchimura's entry in his diary on September 6 is characteristic of him : "During the summer there was considerable unrest

in the Kashiwagi Brotherhood. Because of this a large number have ceased attending. It is sad but I am not dismayed. Things like this have happened many times before. Gatherings form and dissolve and then re-form again. And always those which re-form are better than those which had dissolved. As long as men depend on men, dispersions are inevitable. Only if each one finds God and Christ sufficient can gatherings be formed which will never dissolve."<sup>56</sup>

One of the two disciples concerned in the Morito affair was Nobuzo Nakada. He had been a busy evangelist and had published a magazine which supported Uchimura. After the trouble in the summer of 1920 he turned it against Uchimura, to the great scandal of the brethren. Troubles within the Brotherhood continued and finally it was decided to disband it. On November 4, 1920, Uchimura noted in his diary: "Today a meeting was held to decide the dissolution of the Kashiwagi Brotherhood and I felt relieved. Since last year the Brotherhood has become greatly churchified and we all have been greatly distressed. We are all liberals and cannot abide anything like organized groups. And by dissolving the Brotherhood, which had become a little too much of an organ, we feel that the relation between friends will become much more sincere and intimate. When it comes to arguing about matters like committees, chairmen, the advantage or disadvantage of the society, its honour and so on, we are by that much spiritually dead."<sup>57</sup>

The diary entry for December 5 reads: "To-night the meeting to announce the dissolution of the Kashiwagi Brotherhood was held. With this something that has caused me

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great distress and has been a source of misunderstanding was removed, and a heavy burden fell from my shoulders. A society is a prohibited thing so far as I am concerned. I have never enjoyed benefits from participating in one. I shall end my life as an absolute non-churcher. The Kashiwagi Brotherhood is the last society that I shall join."<sup>58</sup>

But four months later the diary records a meeting at the home of a Dr. Fujimoto, from which was to spring the Samaritan Fellowship, a Bible class for physicians. "Though the name of the Kashiwagi Brotherhood had disappeared, I knew that it was alive and rejoiced," reads the diary. Masaike's comment is worth quoting: "From these things exactly what Uchimura's non-churchism was can be understood. He loved groups, but disliked groups which became organized and cherished form rather than spirit. What he most desired was a group joined to Christ in brotherly love. Therefore later he formed the Feet-Washing Group and the Kashiwagi Young Men's Group."<sup>59</sup>

## X

### LAST YEARS

The General Immigration Act, which was passed by the United States Congress in 1924, was one of the most inept pieces of legislation ever passed in Washington. "You can hardly imagine the change," wrote Uchimura to Bell, "that has come over whole Japan as the result of that law passed by godless politicians in Washington."<sup>60</sup>

Uchimura's feelings can be imagined. He had lost faith in



the United States when she entered the war in 1917; the Exclusion Act convinced him that she had committed "a great international injustice, which I believe to be an indelible blot on your good and honourable name."<sup>61</sup> Once more he started writing articles for the popular press, and in *The Bible Studies* he explained to his followers the significance of the measure. Howes sums up his writings by saying that "the act had been passed because Americans were no longer Christians, and therefore not brothers in faith with Japanese Christians."<sup>62</sup> And yet Uchimura could write to Bell: "Now that politically America is very far apart from Japan, it is doubly sweet to know spiritually we Christian friends remain just as close to each other as at any other time, yea, even closer."<sup>63</sup>

Henceforth, said Uchimura, the United States had nothing to teach Japan, which should turn to small European countries like Denmark to be their models in some respects. Religious guidance should still come of course directly from God and the Bible.

Uchimura's activities in connection with the Exclusion Act were his last incursion into public affairs.

As the years added their number to his age, Uchimura was frequently asked who was to succeed him. He replied characteristically that he did not know and did not care; he left it all to God. "Even if there were a successor, he might not continue my ism and faith. You can understand that if you look at Luther and Wesley, whose heirs proclaimed faiths that were absolutely the opposite of their teachers'. Truth looks after itself. People who worry about the future don't achieve much. The churches worry about the future and neglect the

present."<sup>64</sup>

In spite of these brave opinions, the thought of a succession which might develop did concern him. The personal following he had built up and the magazine subscribers to *The Bible Studies* constituted a vested interest that was as real as the goodwill a successful doctor creates in long years in a community. Hints had been made that Toraji Tsukamoto, one of Uchimura's ablest and most faithful lieutenants, should be appointed as his successor. Probably because of this Uchimura dispensed with Tsukamoto's services, and in his will stated that the publication of the magazine should cease with his death. It was drastic treatment for a faithful disciple, but, inconsistent in many respects, Uchimura was consistent in this: if he could prevent it there was to be nothing in the way of an organization continuing after his death. The magazine did indeed end with him, but of course the non-church movement still flourishes in Japan with Uchimura as its spiritual leader. Tsukamoto, until his retirement, carried on meetings in Tokyo and published a periodical in the best Uchimura tradition.

According to the reports that have been handed down to us, Uchimura left this world in a manner befitting a good Christian. He had suffered a heart attack in 1929, recovered, then again early in 1930 was confined to his bed. Surrounded by members of his family and a few of his disciples, he died on March 28, 1930, a few days after his sixty-ninth birthday.

## NOTES

## IX

- 49—The description of this and succeeding groups is culled from Masaïke pp. 162—165, 228—235 and H & C. pp. 65—71.
- 50—Masaïke, p. 228
- 51—Masaïke. pp. 253ff
- 52—CW., XIX, p. 628.
- 53—Masaïke. pp. 256—257.
- 54—The Kashiwagi Brotherhood is not to be confused with the Kashiwa Kai, the Oak Club. "Kashi" is "oak"; the oak leaf happened to be the crest of the First Higher School, whose students formed the club. "Kashiwagi" was the name of the district where Uchimura's home was located.
- 55—Masaïke, pp. 262—263.
- 56—Masaïke, p. 295. Quoted from the CW., XVII, p. 330.
- 57—Ibid., *ibid.*
- 58—Masaïke, p. 297.
- 59—Ibid. p. 287.

## X

- 60—Letter of July 14, 1924. CW., v. 1149.
- 61—CW., XV, p. 629.
- 62—C & H., p. 83.
- 63—CW., XX, p. 1149.
- 64—Masaïke, p. 365.