

Protestant Theologies in Modern Japan

By Charles Hugh Germany

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cover)*

Several years ago Carl Michalson's "Japanese Contributions to Christian Theology" appeared. It was perhaps the first book which introduced the representative theological thoughts in modern Japan in a foreign language. The author of this book, while teaching at International Christian University and Aoyama Gakuin University, employed Japanese helpers to translate Japanese theological books into English, as he himself did not read Japanese, and depending upon these translations he boldly enough wrote this book. In this book he touched my book "Reason and Revelation," so I read it carefully. But to my regret he (or his helper) utterly misunderstood what I wrote in that

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book. Moreover, I can find nowhere in my book the passages which he is quoting from it. Therefore I wrote the review of this book to the *Journal of Religious Studies* and criticized it severely. The author replied to my criticism in the next number of the same *Journal*. In any way it is almost impossible to write about Japanese theological thoughts without knowing any Japanese at all. If one relies simply upon translations to do it, he must run a terrific risk. When translations are bad, there is no hope. I am afraid that this was the case with Michalson's book.

Dr. Germany, the author of this new book, lived in Japan seventeen years as an American missionary, mastered Japanese language and understood Japanese psychology. He himself read Japanese theological books, but he was so careful in writing this book, that he interviewed with the living theologians and recorded on tape the talks he had with them. After he finished writing manuscript, he sent it to them and asked their criticism and correction.

This book, originally the Ph. D.

dissertation of Columbia University, consists of eight chapters. The first chapter describes the backgrounds of Japanese Protestant Theology 1859-1926, and particularly points out the importance of the social influence upon Protestant Christianity from Meiji to early Taisho periods.

The second chapter, taking up Ebina, Otsuka and Kagawa, describes the development of the modern liberal theology and its social emphasis in modern Japan. It is very interesting to see how the author treats Kagawa. Usually Kagawa is talked about as a saint or a prophet outside Japan and nobody dared to analyse his thought and branded as a liberal theologian. But this author did it candidly. As to Otsuka there may be an objection whether he really influenced upon Protestant Theology in Japan so much as the other two. It seems to me Keiji Ashida of Doshisha was far more influential than Otsuka among Congregationalists. However, Ashida left very few writings. Therefore it may be difficult to know about him for foreigners. In these periods the second chapter treats, we must not forget the Uni-

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tarian Movement headed by Uchigasaki etc., which published "Rikugozasshi." It was a powerful push from behind the liberal theology in Japan at that time.

In the third chapter the author gives full details of the so-called SCM movement and social Christianity. Special attention must be given to this chapter, because the author himself seems to be much interested in the matters related in this chapter. As I myself was involved in the SCM movement, I am one of the figures discussed in this chapter. Objectively speaking, this movement can be said one of the great turning points of the history of Japanese theological thought. It was the time when Marxism started a vehement antireligious movement and many bright students and excellent young men were captivated by Marxist-movement and drawn into the Marxist-Camp. SCM movement was the only attempt on the part of the church to oppose this Marxist attack upon the church. The church as a whole did not know what to do. While we were engaging in this SCM movement we were simply convinced with that if we

stick to the theology by which we were brought up, it would be impossible to oppose Marxist attack. From that time on, the existential reflection upon the church and her theology was started. Until then the theological thought in Japan was simply the direct importation and mere repetition of English-American, or German theology. If there is any effort on the part of Japanese theologians, it was simply how to express foreign theological thought in Japanese way. But when Marxist attack shook the foundation of the church, it was no longer sufficient to repeat the directly imported theological thought. Out of such an existential situation SCM movement emerged as an attempt to rescue the church in Japan. I pay my respect to the author of this book, treating this movement with considerable sympathy and understanding. Among Japanese even now there are some people who misunderstand or misinterpret this movement and criticize us severely, but they are the ones who really do not know what SCM was in its inner circle. The author of this book, in spite of being a

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foreigner understands SCM and writes about it unprejudiced.

The fourth chapter is wholly devoted to Takakura. The author of this book appraises him highly and investigated his thought in detail. But it admits of discussion whether it is necessary to give Takakura a whole chapter. I thought it was a very interesting and sharp remark made by the author when he wrote that Takakura owed more to Brunner than to Barth.

In the fifth chapter the author takes up the rise of dialectical theology and points out the fact that in its early stage Barth and Brunner were treated under the same category. The author also gives attention to Otsuka, a liberal theologian, who was influenced by dialectical theology, but tried to modify it from the standpoint of emphasizing the social and cultural interest. At the end of this chapter the author mentions about those who oppose dialectical theology and as the conclusion of this chapter he says that after Barth-Brunner controversy, the main stream of dialectical theology in Japan followed Barth rather than Brunner. And

he calls it Japanese Barthianism. In the next chapter he criticizes it saying that Japanese Barthians, during the war fell into dualism concerning social and political problems. I cannot agree with this author's opinion. He says that after Barth-Brunner controversy main stream of dialectical theology in Japan followed Barth and calls that stream Japanese Barthianism. But what does that word "Japanese Barthianism" mean? Whom does the author mean by that word? Did those who followed Barth after Barth-Brunner controversy really understand the real meaning of that theological controversy? Did really those whom the author calls "Japanese Barthians" understand Barth correctly? The author not touching upon those problems at all, repeats the word "Japanese Barthians" to the end of the book, but I cannot understand whom the author meant by that word. If in that word the author includes those theologians who are still mixing up Barth and Brunner and do not really understand the difference between Barth's theological thinking and Brunner's theological thinking, I feel sorry for

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Barth. However, if the author calls them "so-called Japanese Barthians" I can stand it. But if he calls them "Japanese Barthians," I must say that he himself does not understand Barth correctly.

The sixth chapter deals with theological thought during the war. I think this chapter would be more interesting especially for foreigners, if the author unmasks what sort of declarations were made by the representatives of "Japanese Christianity" or "Imperialistic Christianity." In connection with the current thought in Japan during the war, the author is quoting Dr. Tanabe's "Logic of Species," but the author does not give enough explanation about it. So it is difficult to understand what the author really meant to say.

In the seventh chapter the author describes the direction of theological thought after the war and tells us how Christianity in Japan after the war, facing the rapid social change maintained itself and developed its theology. The author thinks that the main problems for Japanese church after the war were social problems, but Japanese Bar-

thians and strict Calvinists, devoting themselves to the pure faith itself, he took indifferent attitude toward social problems. On the contrary those who are not satisfied with their attitude, turned to Tillich or Niebuhr and tried to connect theology with cultural and social problems. Along this line, according to the author, Noro and Doe are asserting "the theology of mission."

This is a brief outline of the contents of this book. Up to the sixth chapter the author describes the theological thought in modern Japan chronologically, but in the last two chapters he drops his historical approach and picks up various theologians from the viewpoint of "Christianity and present social problem" quoting what they say, but the way he introduces those theologians is very fragmentary and unsystematic. Therefore it will be very difficult for those who do not know the actual situation of modern Japan.

Anyway there is no other book at present which adequately tells us the theological current of thought in modern Japan. I heartily recommended this book to foreign readers, but I wish the author had analysed the opinion of each theologian more deeply.

Enkichi Kan