

THY KINGDOM COME ON EARTH
SOME REFLECTIONS ON THE SOCIAL GOSPEL
MOVEMENT IN JAPAN

By George B. Bikle, Jr.
University of California

Essentially the particular mode of social protest we will examine in these few pages did not formally get underway until August, 1927. It will be our argument, however, that the roots of the Kingdom of God Movement, so called, lie somewhat deeper in the Japanese past. Its ultimate source of origin we find in the febrile mind of its principal author, Kagawa Toyohiko, social reformer, labor leader, Christian evangelist, and utopian prophet of a better age. Over the course of its development the movement assumed two forms: on the one hand, it constituted a nationwide gospel crusade to enroll new members in the Protestant Christian cause; on the other hand, it covertly served as the vehicle for the realization of Kagawa Toyohiko's private utopian mission to bring into fruition the Kingdom of God on earth. Thus, in the course of our discussion below we must distinguish between the private vision of the movement's architect and leader, Kagawa, and the pragmatic, normative forms it was necessary for the cause to assume in order to prove realizable in action.

With this distinction in mind we will see that during the course of its development the Kingdom of God Movement evolved

through three distinct stages, in the course of its advance running the gamut of organizational forms from religious sect to more sophisticated institutionalized movement.¹ In the process, the personal ideals and moral imperatives of the sect's founder were successfully routinized into a wide variety of structural norms, many of which, it is true, failed when put to the test in action. Although the campaign could scarcely be deemed a failure, granting a modicum of excusable rhetorical license to the movement's publicists, still, in the private sense of our definition above, it failed utterly, for the utopian kingdom Kagawa envisaged was not achieved, and even the multiplicity of practical welfare programs the crusade spawned were one by one snuffed out during the thirties by an increasingly hostile regime.

Our story begins with the organization of the Friends of Jesus sect by Kagawa and 14 companions on October 5, 1921.² As a consequence of the failure of the Kawazaki Dockyard Strike Kagawa had led to achieve any concrete gains and the subsequent unfashionability of his gradualistic doctrines, the beleaguered pacifist, we recall, was then in the process of extradition from the ranks of the Kansai labor movement. Though far from losing interest in the workingman's cause, in fact at that very moment laying plans for the formation of the Japan Farmer's Union, an event destined to take place only 12 days thereafter, Kagawa, nevertheless, found it imperative to reevaluate the

-
1. For a suggestive typology of western Protestant sects see Bryan R. Wilson, "An Analysis of Sect Development," *American Sociological Review*, Vol. 24 (Feb., 1959), pp. 3—15.
 2. Yokoyama Horuichi, *Kagawa Toyohiko Den* (A Biography of Kagawa Toyohiko) (Tokyo: Kirisuto Shimbunsha, 1959), p. 171; Helen F. Topping, *Friends of Jesus* (Sept., 1928), p. 2.

leadership role he had formerly assigned to the urban proletariat. At the juncture he conceived the idea of organizing a small vanguard of lay believers willing to work unstintingly for utopian ends and in the process serve their less fortunate fellows through daily prayer and social service. Thus, the Friends of Jesus modeled upon the Catholic Society of Jesus came into being, dedicated to the ideals of humanitarian activism, monastic pietism, Christian Socialism, and Fabian economics. Thoroughly hostile to capitalism and antipathetic to the established church, the founding fourteen vowed to pursue personal salvation through public service and as living instrumentalities of an immanent God, ultimately bring into being the communal millennium.

The society's vision of the Kingdom of God was highly indebted to the Socialist philosophy Kagawa had evolved during his residence in the Kobe slums and early years of endeavor in the Kansai labor movement. The original fourteen, thus, shared Kagawa's conviction that too rapid industrialization had alienated the Japanese laborer by enmeshing him in a wage economy, locking him up in a factory where he neither owned the tools of production nor set the pace of his labor, where he was forced to assume tasks essentially foreign to his basic drives and instincts, all to the ultimate end of earning funds with which to purchase useless geegaws and gimcracks absolutely unessential to the perfection of his inner self.³ The proximate goal of the Friends of

3. These ideas are scattered throughout all of Kagawa's social writings, but see especially Kagawa Toyohiko, *Rodosha Suhaion* (Treatise on the Adoration of the Laborer) in Muto Tomio, ed., *Kagawa Toyohiko Zenshu* (The Collected Works of Kagawa Toyohiko) (24 vols.; Tokyo: Kirisuto Shim-bunsha, 1962), Vol. 10. *passim*. Herein cited *Zenshu*.

Jesus, therefore, was to free man through selfless welfare activities in order to bring to fruition a world of brotherhood and love where war and violence would become things of the past. These transcendent ends would be achieved through the proliferation of mutual aid societies and cooperatives across the face of the land, the accomplishment of which would reduce the exploitative defects of capitalism, eventually replacing an economy based upon greed with the planned communalism of the Guild Socialist state.⁴ More concretely, the society embraced a wide variety of welfare and reform programs: womens' suffrage, monogamous marriage, slum rehabilitation, child welfare, worker education, prohibition, and the abolition of prostitution.⁵ All of these projects were practical and pragmatic remedies for existing social ills, yet all were means as well to free the oppressed from the restraints of fetish economics and lead the way toward a world of peace, perfection, and eternal love. Such were the ideological trappings with which the movement began.

During the initial period, as with most religious sects, recruitment of new members was by personal invitation of the society, and, hence, was highly selective, somewhat elitist in tone, and moderately formalized. Although the society made no efforts to publicize its activities, news of its formation circulated abroad, and within a short time prospective members were coming forward at such a rate that the brethren found it necessary to devise a three stage novitiate to screen, test, and indoctrinate candidates before passing upon their final admission. Novices were expected

4. For a full exposition of this philosophy see Kagawa Toyohiko, *Shukan Keizai no Genri* (The Principles of Subjective Economics), *Zenshu*, Vol. 9, p. 177 ff.

5. Topping, *Friends of Jesus*, p. 3.

to endure a one year trial period as "Friend", a second as "Brother", and still a third as "Servant" before advancing to final confirmation as a full fledged member of the society.⁶ During their novitiate candidates were required to read a special body of literature by way of introduction into the sect's philosophy of life. Reflecting the broad syncretic approach of the Japanese to Christianity, these works included both the Old and New Testaments, Bunyan's *Pilgrim's Progress*, A Kempis's *Imitation of Christ*, and a history of the persecution of early Christians in Japan. In addition, novices were required to attend dawn prayer services regularly and to prove their mettle in action through participation in any one of a wide variety of social welfare undertakings operated by the society. Following this two year trial period, successful applicants were permitted to take the five vows of piety, work, purity, peace, and service, and to enter the inner circle of the lay priesthood.⁷ Within months of its formation the sect began to change, and it is not difficult to see why this should be so. Evidently the elite character of the organization, based as it was upon pietism and communalism, had wide appeal. Though the Friends made no effort to proselyte, three months from the day of its founding the society counted 86 novices in training and within eight months the organization included 501 enthusiastic catechumens. By 1928, 1300 "Servants" located in five Japanese cities and two overseas branches swelled the Friends of Jesus ranks far beyond the face-to-face intimacy of the original group.⁸ Brothers, of course,

6. *Ibid.*, p. 2.

7. *Loc. cit.*

8. Sumiya Mikio, *Kagawa Toyohiko, Jin to Shiso Shirizu* (Kagawa Toyohiko, The Man and the Sequence of His Thought) (Tokyo: Nihon Kirisuto Kyodan Shuppanbu, 1960), p. 67; Topping, *Friends of Jesus*, p. 2.

were not forced to abandon their lay occupations or even surrender their association with the established church. Each member of the society assumed a heavy commitment to lay evangelism and social service in the work-a-day world. Hence there was little possibility of evolving insulating norms which might have preserved the sect's basic egalitarian and pietistic ideals. Quite to the contrary, the injunction to achieve salvation through service in the secular world made the perpetuation of sect-like intimacy difficult to achieve. Moreover, the unwieldy size of each local organization made it inevitable that some kind of formal organizational structure would emerge, especially as the sect became more directly linked to Kagawa's multifarious welfare programs.

During the years 1922—1924 the Friends of Jesus engaged in a wide variety of social reform activities. Kagawa, who himself had suffered from tuberculosis during his youth, was appalled at the number of people afflicted by this disease, according to his statistics eight and one half million in mid-Taisho, and so the construction of model T.B. sanitoriums and rehabilitation centers became an early goal.⁹ Moreover, the Friends espoused the cause of the leper, who, in Japan as in most societies, was consigned to the status of an outcaste group.¹⁰ To assist these forgotten people the society began the construction of a center for the treatment of leprosy on Innoshima Island in the Inland Sea. Doubtless reflecting Kagawa's life long interest in slum rehabilitation, the sect also devoted a considerable amount of time to educational work among the working classes in the urban ghettos. Moreover, they provided educational opportunities for orphaned

9. Yokoyama, *Kagawa Toyohiko Den*, p. 255.

10. Kagawa Toyohiko, *Shinpen Zakki* (Personal Notes), *Zenshu*, Vol. 24. pp. 17--18.

and delinquent children in three Tokyo centers.¹¹ They also organized clubs to promote Christian settlement activities, started programs aimed at the rehabilitation of convicts, made efforts to educate female factory workers, and launched an attack upon organized prostitution.¹² In addition, the Friends of Jesus played a particularly vital role during the Great Tokyo Earthquake of 1923, setting up shelter areas for the homeless, clinics for the injured, child care centers, field kitchens, clothing distribution centers, orphanages, clean-up squads, and so forth.¹³ Kagawa himself received a special commendation from the Home Ministry for his personal contribution to relief work. However, such sophisticated welfare programs required modes of organization that a simplistic, *Gemeinschaft* sect could not supply. Hence, the nature of the activities in which the Friends of Jesus engaged, as well as the sect's rapidly expanding size, dictated structural changes which the organization's founders were unable to resist.

The Million Souls Movement

From November, 1924, until June, 1925, Kagawa traveled abroad in the United States and Europe, ending his tour in Jerusalem. He returned from his voyage particularly enthusiastic about the role of cooperatives and mutual aid societies in Denmark, Belgium, and Holland and greatly encouraged by his reception by such leaders of the British Labor Party as *Ramsay MacDonald* in England. But above all he returned from his

11. These were the Mizukami Juvenile Home, the Tokyo Negishi Home for Poor Children, and Shinei Church School. Kagawa, *Ibid.*, p. 26.

12. *Loc. cit.*

13. Yokoyama, *Ibid.*, pp. 198—215.

tour abroad brimming over with the religious enthusiasm engendered by his visit to the Holy Land. Perhaps indicative of the increasing dependence of the Friends of Jesus upon his charismatic leadership abilities, Kagawa immediately translated this religious inspiration into action, suggesting at the annual Friends of Jesus Conference at Gotemba in August, 1925, an evangelical crusade to secure one million souls for Christ.¹⁴ Of course, not for one minute did he believe the ranks of the 160,000 existing Protestant Christians would ever swell so extravagantly. Rather he envisaged a nation-wide campaign led by the Friends of Jesus which would garner somewhere in the neighborhood of 10,000 converts per year.¹⁵ This plan was duly put into action, beginning at Sendai in November, 1925, and moving southward into the Kinai by Christmas of that year. Driving himself unmercifully in this initial phase of the movement, Kagawa set a blistering pace for his cadre, preaching 27 consecutive days in January without rest and finally suffering physical collapse in February which was to leave him incapacitated until the following summer.

In August, 1927, Kagawa returned from work the Friends of Jesus had been conducting on behalf of Christian Socialist candidates for the Japanese Diet to place before a religious conference held at Karuizawa a full plan for a united church campaign which envisioned the complete Christianization of Japan and eventual realization of the Kingdom of God on earth.¹⁷ Evidence of the broadening scope of the Million Souls Movement, this meeting included such notables of social protest as Yamamuro

14. *Ibid.*, pp. 247—248.

15. *Loc. cit.*

16. Topping, *Friends of Jesus*, pp. 9—10.

Gumpei of the Salvation Army, Abe Iso of the labor movement, Kimura Seimatsu, Japan's Billy Sunday, Kozaki Michio, the Congregationalist pacifist, Tagawa Daikichiro, president of Meiji Gakuin and member of the Diet, as well as 50 others prominent in the Christian church and proletarian cause in Japan. Heavily under the impress of Kagawa's utopian vision for a new Japan, the One Million Souls Committee proposed evangelizing the working classes by functional vocational groups, rather than by horizontally stratified social classes.¹⁷ Thoroughly trained teams of specialists led by the Friends of Jesus and other participating pastors would approach the factory workers, fishing people, the so-called "water people", the nation's miners, the merchant seamen, the tenant-farmers, and the rural proletariat scattered about Japan in isolated mountain villages. Through the general advocacy of Christian Socialism and the social gospel, these forgotten people would be raised to a new level of self awareness and won over to the cause through the implementation of specific social welfare programs. Trained doctors and nurses would minister unto the sick, the infirm, and the aged. Before their eyes would be dangled the prospect of national health insurance, old age benefits, and exemplary medical care in non-profit, cooperative hospitals. Educational programs would alert the masses to the dangers of tubercular diseases. Teams of agricultural specialists would instruct the farmers in the benefits of conservation and soil engineering. Farm gospel schools would be initiated on the Danish pattern to raise the social and moral consciousness of farmers during the off season. Though this was not the first evangelical campaign in Japanese history,

17. Yokoyama, *Ibid.*, pp. 252—256.

this elaborate program owed its origin largely to Kagawa's imaginative skills, drawing heavily upon ideas he developed in his writings during the labor years. Indeed, it is not too much to say that the presentation of this plan in 1927 saw the mergence of Kagawa's dream for a guild utopia peopled by truly Christ-like personalities with the more immediate aim of the Million Souls Movement to Christianize Japan.

During 1928—1929 the Million Souls Crusade emerged as a support of the Protestant denominations in Japan. This was possible because Kagawa and the Friends of Jesus Band had already amply demonstrated the potential receptivity of the populace, especially the rural masses to this particular brand of grass-roots evangelism. From the organization of Friends of Jesus Sect in 1922 down until August, 1927, they had made 10,238 converts and over the next two years 271,210 worshippers would attend 638 gospel meetings, although only a disappointing 13,505 would make the final decision for Christ.¹⁸ The rhetoric of the movement became curiously revolutionary in tone in these years. Frequently the Friends spoke of a "Christian Revolution" and pamphlets bore the title "The Christian Internationale," while Kagawa himself unabashedly recognized the need to adopt some of the methods of the radical left. As the banking crisis deepened and the rural and urban proletariat increasingly felt the economic pinch, the Million Souls crusaders found conditions ripe for proselytization. A rash of meetings and conferences filled these years as the movement's leadership sought to coordinate the activities of the various regional committees. Meanwhile, Kagawa, now officially elected director of

18. Sumiya, *Kagawa Toyohiko*, p. 173.

the newly named Kingdom of God Movement, expanded operations southward into the Ryukyus and abroad into Manchuria. Thus, optimism was the prevailing mood on the eve of the great depression and Manchurian venture, a mood heightened by a government crackdown on the radical left which left the field open to the moderates.

The Kingdom of God Movement

Reflections in Kagawa's diary during the spring of 1929 suggest that, in spite of the prevailing optimism of the previous fall, the Friends of Jesus quest for "one million souls for Christ" was proving little more than evangelical rhetoric. Proselytization in the field demonstrated to Kagawa that the conversion of one million Japanese in a decade was a somewhat visionary prospect. At the present rate of progress, he hypothesized, 400,000 converts over a ten year period was a much more realistic goal. In his estimation it would take 100 years of persistent evangelization to reach the mythical million mark,¹⁹ a figure, given the population growth rate of that day, which would hardly represent a significant proportion of the total population. The situation was even more discouraging in China where after three centuries of the Christian presence there were only 40,000 confirmed Protestant believers.²⁰ Under the circumstances publicizing a campaign for "one million souls" appeared a trifle bombastic. A change of name more consistent with the rationalization and organization of the movement then under way was certainly in order. Hence, "The Kingdom of God

19. Kagawa, *Ibid.*, pp. 88—89.

20. *Loc. cit.*

Movement", a cognomen far more suggestive of the revolutionary ends the participants actually held in view, made its appearance in the campaign literature. Thus, reflecting the conviction of its author that Japan had fallen upon evil times and the belief that the complete renovation of the Japanese value system through the imitation of Christ was its only salvation, the social gospel crusade entered its third and final phase.

The plan for the Kingdom of God Movement placed by Kawagawa before the National Christian Council in April, 1929, constitutes further evidence of the fact that the campaign was moving into a new organizational phase. Building on the program of 1927 referred to above, in essence the presentation represented an attempt to extend concepts heretofore applied to the Friends of Jesus sect to a massive, nation-wide crusade. All participants numbering now in the hundreds, were to demonstrate their ascetic pietism through dawn prayer and personal evangelism.²¹ This growing priesthood of lay believers was enjoined to envelop the nation in a network of dawn-prayer cells formed within the existing Protestant churches and reporting monthly to 90 district heads who were assigned to coordinate their activities. The district units would meet once annually to report upon the progress of their work to the National Kingdom of God Committee. Teams of lay priests patterned after the Friends of Jesus would utilize every modern technique to approach the masses, combining with this the methods of face-to-face evangelism. Operating from their homes, the lay cadre would invite prospective converts to block meetings where, within the friendly atmosphere of small groups, they would be

21. Yokoyama, *Ibid.*, pp. 281—283. Yokoyama reproduces the plan in full.

exposed to the ideals and goals of the social gospel. In time a patchquilt of such Christian cells would spread across the nation, preparing the way for the transition to a new, communal way of life. Along with this personalistic evangelism, the older practice of occupational evangelism would continue.

Nurses, farmers, fishermen, miners, seamen, factory workers, shopkeepers, policemen, teachers, students, and government employees, all would become the target of specially trained recruiting teams. Moreover, under this plan the role of the farm gospel and urban labor schools would be expanded. In these schools, along with more practical subjects, students would be exposed to the principles of Christian Socialism and Guild Utopian thought. One special wing of the movement would specialize in publicizing the aims of the crusade through the existing mass media. In addition, this group would publish and distribute the Kingdom of God newspaper throughout the hamlets of Japan. Special rural teams would seek to teach over 1200 remote rural villages far out of the mainstream of rapidly modernizing urban society. In sum, what had begun as a prayer association organized upon the principles of monastic communalism was now expanded into a highly structured campaign for the mass conversion of the Japanese people to the ideals of the social gospel.

We do not possess statistics for the following five years, but it is not unreasonable to assume that the Kingdom of God Crusade, in spite of herculean efforts on the part of its prosecutors, seldom exceeded the annual total of 9000 new converts achieved in 1928.²² Assuming that the average over the half decade 1929—

22. Topping, *Ibid.*, p. 32.

1934 was 10,000 new members per year, we are faced with the problem of explaining why the conversion rate was so low. (I estimate only 1 in 20 at best.) Yet, if we pause to reflect upon the growth of the movement for a moment, the source of these difficulties is not far to seek. To begin with, the attempt to routinize particularistic values suitable for a small religious sect into universal norms valid for a mass evangelical movement must have caused difficulty. The spirit of ascetic pietism, the ideal of common prayer, the enjoinder of personal evangelism, and practice of lay conversion, modes of operation entirely suitable for a religious sect, were somewhat incongruously joined with borrowings from more sophisticated church programs. Many of the newly adjoined undertakings required personnel with considerable educational background, trained specialties, or technical expertise in the exploitation of mass media, for example, with very little concern for overall structural coherency. As long as the Friends of Jesus remained the proselyting vanguard of the movement, there were few difficulties. But one has only to read through the program of 1929 to see that it combined the particularism of the original sect with much more structured modes of operation borrowed from the established church. Of course, one can argue this in itself is not enough to explain inoperability, in as much as Soka Gakkai today employs somewhat similar measures. However, the plan does denote a certain lack of realism, since an insufficiency of funds and trained personnel made it very unlikely that the projected teams of specialists outlined in the program would ever come into being. Moreover, while impressive in scope, the plan was far too radical to appeal to members of the established denomina-

tions. Few staid, middle class parishioners could be expected to give up the comforts of home for the life of the lay evangelist. Nor were they likely to work to undermine that capitalism that gave them financial sustenance. Undoubtedly these factors militated against full cooperation among the various Protestant denominations.

Still, structural incoherence does not explain why the movement failed to have broader appeal among the masses at a time when the economic dislocations resulting from the world depression seemed to produce the kinds of anxieties upon which the gospel movement might feed for growth. Perhaps no group in Japan during the late twenties was more sensitive to the economic distress of the masses than the Friends of Jesus. "In this period of depression," Kagawa wrote in November, 1927, "I find suffering among all classes and am very sympathetic. Many of the unemployed come to me for help, but I am at a loss what to do."²³ After a visit to Okinawa during the summer of 1929, Kagawa noted in his diary that economic conditions there were absolutely desperate, a state of affairs he attributed to speculative agricultural practices.²⁴ These were the observations of a man who had spent the past eight years evangelizing through every district in Japan, who had written widely on the plight of the rural villages, and who had in fact helped found the Japan Farmers' Union. Kagawa correctly sensed the growing unrest among the rural proletariat, the need for an emotional outlet for their frustrations and anxieties. Villages turned out en masse to hear the famous man speak, they applauded his

23. Kagawa, *Ibid.*, p. 90.

24. *Ibid.*, p. 101.

sermons, but they did not become Christians. Kagawa puzzled over this matter, but was unable to come to any final conclusions. It is interesting to speculate upon the reasons for the relative lack of success of the social gospel movement in early Showa. To begin with, the power of indigenous religious beliefs was very difficult to overcome. Particularly Tenrikyo and Konkokyo were expanding rapidly in the countryside during these years. The eclectic humanism of the Kingdom of God Movement together with its stress upon welfare and reform programs undoubtedly had its appeal for the rural masses, yet one can scarcely escape the feeling that the ideology and doctrine of the campaign were far too intellectual in tone for their limited powers of comprehension. Even granting the villagers some measure of understanding of the movement's real aims, their ingrained conservatism would certainly have militated against any widespread acceptance of Christian Socialist teachings. Above all, important was the fact, evident to even the most illiterate prospect, that the evangelists were promoting a foreign religion, a religion partially under external control, and one most emphatically associated in the popular mind with colonialism in Asia. In the last analysis we find this to have been the most trenchant reason for the movement's lack of success.

Other aspects of the crusade bear mentioning, but limitations of space forbid such excursions here. We cannot, for example, speculate upon the impact of the movement upon the pre-war rural scene, although we believe the effect of the campaign may have done much to arouse the slumbering social consciousness of the peasant masses. Essentially we have chosen to confine our investigation to an interpretive description of the evolution

George B. Bikle, Jr.

of this social gospel cause from sect to more structured movement. Under the heavy impress of western thought, we have seen the quest for one million souls sought to combine the ardor of monastic pictism and primitive Christian communalism with the utopian futurism implicit in British Guild Socialism and western cooperative forms. Irrational in its final structure, too intellectual in its appeal, the Kingdom of God Movement still might have won over the masses had it not been for the fact that to the average Japanese its doctrines seemed strangely foreign in an age of reviving nationalism. With both its external and domestic sources of financial support cut off in 1934 by the world depression the Kingdom of God Committee quietly surrendered the field to the far less utopian but apparently far more emotionally appealing doctrines of indigenous military-fascism.