

JAPAN AND THE POPE: THE SEAMY SIDE

On February 23, 1981, Pope John Paul II of Rome landed at Tokyo's Haneda Airport for a four-day visit that for most of the inhabitants of Japan can only be described as a spectacular media-event: elaborately prepared, expertly directed, masterfully performed, and promptly forgotten.

One could hardly have expected anything else. The Pope came as a symbolic figure, and the Japan that was laid out for him to see was a symbolic country. The occasional touch of the personal and the spontaneous that he added, with all the genius and timing of a seasoned public personality, helped to relax the tension of the drama and to reassure everyone that everything was going quite according to plan. The result was a carefully woven tapestry of ritualized meanings whose propriety had been decided on well in advance with an eye to avoiding embarrassment to anyone and to promoting an almost other-worldly sentiment of peace, brotherhood, and cooperation. It was a time for repressing the pessimistic everyday wisdom about the state of the world, a time for self-indulgence in romanticism and a brief sigh of hope together for the future.

The official newspaper of the Association of Shinto Shrines, *Jinja Shinpō*, was quick to get into the spirit of the event, responding to the announcement of the papal visit with a front-page commentary on January 26th:

Word has come that for the first time in history a Pope will visit Japan. Speaking of his coming trip, the Pope remarked in an informal conversation, "Catholics in Japan may be very few, but it pleases me to know that their freedom of belief is so warmly protected."

Japan is indeed a non-Christian country, but the freedom of Catholic belief is better preserved here than in Protestant lands (such as England and Switzerland). Mindful of the appreciation he has shown for the religious tolerance of the Japanese people and for the beauty of friendship, we wish to extend a warm welcome to the Pope on his first visit to Japan.

The Shintoistic tolerance of the Japanese permeates the various religions of the Japanese people which do not reckon themselves as belonging to "shinto." It shows a friendliness even for things that lie outside of one's own religious circle. In the past and up to the present many of the highest leaders of Japan's various religions have paid their respects at the

Vatican. Since religion in Japan is so free and diversified, each flower free to bloom and to grow, and since the Pope will hardly be able even to return his respects individually to all who have called upon him, reports suggest that an informal gathering is being planned in a single location, to which representatives of Japan's various religions will be invited.

Just what will be discussed there we do not know, but probably it will come face to face with this one crisis of modern civilization: that moral conscience grounded in man and nature is on the brink of collapse. In such a situation, there must be a common ground for different religious groups to join hands and cooperate for the common end of preserving the morality of man in nature. For those members of the religious groups of Japan (including us in Shrine Shinto) who had paid a friendly visit to the Vatican or entertained thoughts of doing so, surely some such thoughts must come to mind.

Recent years have seen a remarkable trend among our Shinto members in the direction of international and intra-national friendship and co-operation of this sort....

There is great significance to all of this, but it must never come to the point that Shinto gets drowned in the sea of religions. The abrupt and decisive end to Buddhist-Shinto amalgamation that came with the Meiji Restoration, and opened the way to the clear separation of Buddhism and Shinto, must not slip into ambiguity. Friendly cooperation among religions is a desirable thing, but we must never forget that it rests on the necessary precondition of both strict mutual differentiation and the mutual right to equal autonomy.

Such are the thoughts that strike us when we hear news of the visit of the Pope of Rome to Japan and of his plans for a meeting with Japanese religionists.

In the weeks that followed, the press became alerted to faint rumblings of dissent concerning the Pope's scheduled visit to the Emperor, but gave it little coverage. There seemed to be a concerted effort by the media to insure that everything would go smoothly and that Japan would display its best face to the world. The major newspaper of middle Japan, *Chūnichī Shinbun* published an editorial on the day of his arrival voicing these concerns:

John Paul II, Pope of Rome, arrives today in Japan. For the first time in the four and a half centuries that have elapsed since the Japanese came into contact with Christianity with the arrival of Francis Xavier in 1549, and for the first time since the Japanese came into contact with Western civilization with the introduction of the gun to Tanegashima by the Christian adventurer, Fernán Pinto, a Pope is setting foot on Japanese soil. It must be a moment of tremendous emotion for the Pope as well. Though we are not a Catholic country, as Japanese we wish to extend him a heartfelt welcome.

During his four-day stop, the Pope will meet with the Emperor and will visit Hiroshima and Nagasaki, the site of the atomic bombing and the holy land of Japan's Christian martyrs.

The significance of the Pope's trip to Japan is constellated particularly in two areas: the spiritual symbolism of a meeting with the Emperor and the value of the call for peace with an appeal to the end of nuclear arms.

The meeting of the Pope with the Emperor, behind whom stands well over a thousand years of tradition and high spiritual authority, is an historical event. For both sides represent spiritual values of completely different origins and history.

During the Christian period from the latter half of the sixteenth century — the era of Nobunaga, Hideyoshi, and Ieyasu — Japan learned a great deal from Christian civilization. At the time, however, both they and we were intolerant of alien spiritual values. The bishops absolutized their own God, their own notion of virtue and morality, and reviled the religions of Japan (Shinto, Confucianism, Buddhism); and Hideyoshi persecuted Christianity with the penalty of death. But now Pope John Paul II's message on visiting Japan speaks of "friendship to one and all in Japan and esteemed regards to the Japanese government, in particular to His Majesty the Emperor" and of the "respect of the Catholic Church for the spiritual and moral values offered by the eminent culture of Japan and the religions of Japan." It is a greeting of "friendship and peace to all the Japanese."

These past four hundred years, we see, have not passed by in vain. For friendship and peace to come about, one needs to acknowledge spiritual values different from one's own. The Pope's meeting with the Emperor and representatives of other religions will, we hope, serve as a model for such tolerance and friendship.

The prayer for an end to nuclear weapons that the Pope is to make at

the site of the atomic bombing represents the longstanding wish of the Japanese people themselves. As one who knows personally the great atrocity that took place at Auschwitz in his own native Poland, he no doubt feels deeply the tragedy of Nagasaki and Hiroshima and will surely appeal solemnly and eloquently for an end to nuclear arms.

The powers of the world are neither so naive nor so suggestible as to part with their brutal weaponry because of a prayer. But it is not without great meaning that the highest authority of the Catholic Church with its 700 million believers prays for the same end to nuclear arms that the Japanese people wish for. The some twenty percent of the world's population whom the Pope represents know that this is the ideal of the Japanese people. As Japanese, we should set the stage in order that the voice of the Pope resound full and rich with that ideal, we should join our voices in chorus with his.

The way to do so is not necessarily difficult. We can show the Pope that, above all else, the Japanese are a dignified and determined people, worth discussing ideals with.

Long ago, in the Christian period, the high-ranking clergy who accompanied Francis Xavier spoke of the Japanese of that time with high praise, as a people possessed of "the greatest respect for honor," "admirable politeness," and "surpassing understanding and competence." We want to welcome the Pope like those people of old by responding with dignity. When we do not carry ourselves with dignity, our very wish to put an end to nuclear arms turns into the wailings of the weak. We want to show the Pope, who comes as an envoy of peace and friendship, that after four hundred years we have not been corrupted.

If committed dissent be a mark of corruption, then at least one vocal minority brought the very dishonor to the land that the editors of the *Chūnichi Shinbun* had feared, by challenging the Pope's meeting with the Emperor in strong and uncompromising language. Instead of the open enthusiasm with which the Polish Solidarity leader, Lech Walesa, was soon afterwards to be universally welcomed to Japan as a hero of dissent, the popular Buddhist and Shinto press hurled accusations of religious and political subversion against the trouble-makers. In a sense the reaction was entirely predictable, for it was not a matter of the right to dissent against generally acknowledged tyrannies, but of the right to take an occasion when the eyes

of the world were upon Japan and its reception of a pilgrim of peace, to dredge up an issue many would have preferred to let lay dormant and unresolved: the residue of war-guilt lingering symbolically about the person of the Emperor.

The Buddhist newspaper, *Bukkyō Times*, tells most of the story in an editorial published on March 25th:

A month has quickly passed since Pope John Paul II came to Japan, bringing the severe cold wave with him. The highpoint of this bright and energetic Pontiff making his lofty and poetic appeal for peace on the site of the atomic bombing still sticks strongly in the mind. But now that the cold wave has lifted and the warm spring equinox is with us, one hardly hears talk of it any more. One would have thought that for Catholic believers this historical event, coming 430 years after the arrival of Francis Xavier, would have been deeply moving, the sort of thing that would not so quickly fade from memory. But, contrary to expectations, they seem to be suffering from the strange ill effects that followed in its wake.

From the very outset, the visit of the Pope to Japan was marked by sounds of discord. The invitation of the Pope was made by the Japanese Catholic Bishops Conference, while in the wings objections were being raised by the Japanese Catholic Commission for Justice and Peace (headed by Nagoya's Bishop Sōma Nobuo): Why should the Pope come to Japan? Why now and for what purpose? In particular there was a question about scheduling a meeting with His Majesty the Emperor in the course of the Pope's stay in Japan. The explanation of the bishops, that "although the Pope was coming to Japan on a pastoral visit, as head of the Vatican it is only proper and a matter of international courtesy that he pay his respects to His Majesty the Emperor," was rejected by the opposition, who took a firm stance in expressing their fear "that the Pope is being used politically by a power faction."

On the one hand, ever since the Second Vatican Council Catholics have taken the line of an "open Church," at least with regard to their brothers and sisters in the Christian faith, and have come to think that progress was being made in the ecumenical movement to bring Protestants and Catholics closer together. And then they meet this cool reaction of Japanese Protestants, a group of whose concerned pastors joined forces with

the Japanese Catholic Committee for Justice and Peace and the religious critic, Maruyama Teruo, to initiate a "Discussion on the Problem of the Pope's Visit to Japan." Narrowing their focus to the meeting of the Pope with the Emperor, the opposition movement took shape and continued to hold meetings up to the very day that the Pope arrived at Haneda Airport.

The ill effects of all of this revolve particularly about the position taken by the Protestant National Christian Council (NCC) and the United Church of Christ in Japan. On January 23, the NCC sent to Cardinal Sadowaki of the Catholic Bishops Conference an opinion paper expressing the views of the NCC on the visit of the Pope to Japan; and on February 16, a Special Committee of the United Church of Christ in Japan set up to study the "Yasukuni Shrine Problem", along with the Social Action Committee, directed a joint "letter" to the United Church of Christ whose contents were published in the *Kirisutokyō Shinbun*. Objecting to the visit of the Pope with the Emperor, it spoke of the "fear of giving the Emperor the status of a god," and used rather shocking language to speak of "the as yet unsettled matter of the direct responsibility that belongs to the Emperor for the Second World War."

Moreover, on February 24, the day after the Pope's arrival, ten members of the NCC and the United Church of Christ in Japan boycotted the "Ecumenical Gathering" convened at the Vatican Embassy and came together on their own. By way of explanation for this action, Kishimoto Yōichi, head of the NCC, published a statement in the *Kirisutokyō Shinbun* in which he claimed that a certain power faction was using the visit of the Pope for political ends, namely Shrine Shinto in connection with the World Religionists Ethics Congress. To aggravate matters, without even bothering to couch his language in conjecture, he turned an obvious lie into a statement of fact, announcing that the Association of Shinto Shrines, which was behind the promotion of the Congress, had tried to make the visit of the Pope overlap with the event, and that therefore "Fukushima Hiroshi, Assistant Chief Priest of the Meiji Shrine, had finally traveled to the Vatican at the end of last year as a representative of the Association of Shinto Shrines in order to influence final schedule arrangements for the Pope's trip to Japan." Not only for the Association of Shinto Shrines but for the actual sponsors of the Congress, The Japan Conference of Religious Representatives, this is not something that can be passed over in silence. For the Catholic Church, it is a denial of the very spirit

of Vatican II which had opened its ecumenism to religions outside of Christianity as well. If the Catholic Church were to let this pass over in silence, the message of the Pope announcing his visit to Japan in which he stressed the "respect of the Catholic Church for the religions of Japan" would be reduced to a sham.

As expected, the Catholic newspaper, Katorikku Shinbun, did react. In its column, "Platform," for March 22, Sakai Shinji issued a clear rejection of the logic of those critical of the Pope's visit to Japan and their insistence that "by visiting with the Emperor the Pope has acquitted the Emperor of his war responsibilities and accorded international recognition to the rehabilitation of the sacred authority invested in the Emperor system," claiming that this had "brought about a misunderstanding of the Vatican and the Catholic Church." As for the indictment against those in the Vatican responsible for relations with Japan and their alleged involvement in The Ethics Congress and Shinto, the article goes on, it reads like someone talking with something up his sleeve.

Whether or not these ill effects can be healed over, whether or not Japanese Catholics and Christians as a whole can truly emerge as an "open Church" is something we shall have to continue to watch closely.

The story of the World Religionists Ethics Congress has been surrounded by an aura of uncertainty and suspicion from the start. For one thing, Shrine Shinto had taken the lead in organizing the Congress under the umbrella of the Japanese Conference of Religious Representatives, and seemed to be intent on using it to promote prewar nationalistic ideals. It had first been planned for the fall of 1980, to coincide with the anniversaries of Emperor Meiji and his Imperial Rescript on Education which are celebrated across Japan by rightist groups. The Japanese Catholic Council for Justice and Peace issued a paper in May of last year warning of these dangers, with the result that Archbishop Shirayanagi of Tokyo withdrew as vice-chairman of the organizing committee, stating these objections. The Congress was postponed under the tongue-in-cheek pretense of the explosive situation that had since developed in Afghanistan. The next fear was that the rightist element would succeed in arranging for the Congress to coincide with the visit of the Pope and use him indirectly to support their aims. Objections were raised again and it appeared as if the Catholics would withdraw from the Congress altogether, having the opposite effect. Finally the dates were

changed to June of 1981.

None of this figures in the reaction of the Shinto newspaper, *Jinja Shinpō*, to the NCC statement. Instead, as might be expected, more attention is directed to defend the cause of the Emperor. The editorial comment accompanying the front-page coverage they gave to the "nonsensical demands of the NCC" in their February 23 edition reads as follows:

The Pope of Rome, on the occasion of his visit to Japan and acting as Chief of State of the Vatican, will meet with His Majesty the Emperor. In terms of international diplomacy, this is no different from the way in which the Queen of England, the President of the United States, and the Premier of China are received as foreign dignitaries and pay their respects. And in terms of peace diplomacy, it is both entirely proper and dictated by good sense.

But the NCC, claiming to represent Japan's Protestant Christians, is seeking to obstruct this peace diplomacy. Such is the view presented by the head of the NCC, Kishimoto Yōichi, in a letter addressed to the Catholic Cardinal and printed in the Kirisutokyō Shinbun on February 14. On the Catholic side, everyone seems to be ignoring the affair, but surely the wrath of many Japanese nationals will be aroused by the attitude of anti-imperial sentiment disclosed in that letter: "We would like to point out that the Emperor's war responsibility is yet to be resolved. We are concerned that with the Pope's visiting the Emperor, the question of that responsibility will get more and more ambiguous." For our part, it is hard to pass over in silence this rudeness in word and deed on the part of a provocative element within the Christian community.

What does all this loose talk about the "as yet unsettled war responsibility of the Emperor" mean? We are convinced that in the last great war, among the nations of the world the people of Japan, and among the world's leaders His Majesty the Emperor himself, proved themselves most sincere and fervent in their longing for peace and their efforts for peace. Historical accounts on the international scene vary in their assessments of those events without coming to any firm conclusion. Some treat Hitler as the most responsible party, others point to Roosevelt, Stalin, or Chiang Kai Shek. And there are those that point to our own Imperial Majesty. But among those nations that bear a clear responsibility before the rest of the world, a clear decision about the matter of war responsibilities has

been taken and publicly recognized in the San Francisco Treaty, the Sino-Japanese Peace Treaty, and other peace treaties. Japan, for its part, has worked to settle matters by heeding all the conditions of the treaties that affect us as a country that lost the war. But there is not one country of the world that speaks of any unsettled war responsibilities of His Majesty the Emperor. Up to the time of the last great war, peace treaties had been used to handle relationships of enmity, but now we find ourselves in a new period of peace.

This is the sense in which the Queen of England (religiously speaking, the protector of the Protestant faith), the American Presidents Ford and Carter, and China's national representatives Hua Guofeng and Deng Xiaoping invariably paid their respects to the Imperial Household and were in turn warmly and courteously received by His Majesty on the occasion of their visits to Japan, each side doing its part in peace diplomacy. This is the important task of the Emperor as a symbol of the unity of the Japanese people and their efforts to create peace for all times. Where international diplomacy is concerned, troubles are apt to boil up at any moment, but in the Japan of today we are fortunate to have not so much as a single country as our enemy, and to be able to maintain the most peaceful of peace diplomacies.

And this peace diplomacy the NCC seeks to interfere with, ignoring the peace treaties wrought since the San Francisco Peace Treaty and wishing there ever to be countries at enmity with Japan. That Protestant countries like America and England, Islamic countries from the Moslem world, socialist countries like China, and leaders of every country on earth have restored friendship and peace diplomacy with the Imperial Household, is something that leaves them dissatisfied and disgruntled. Deluded in thinking that they have hit upon something, they are running about in the name of the Christian religion trying to keep the Pope of the Vatican at enmity with Japan's Imperial Household. But if the Pope has any common sense at all, he will not find cause to give a second thought to such lunatic rumors.

The Queen of England is by law "Defender of the Protestant Faith." It was this same Queen that invited His Majesty to London and welcomed him when he came; it was she herself who kindly came to Japan and made the appropriate call on His Majesty. There is no reason for Catholic countries to stand apart from the rest of the world and single out the peaceful Imperial Household of Japan for hostile treatment.

Only the nonsensical believers of the NCC, caught in their irrational delusions, are forever tearing down the spiritual unity of the Japanese people and scampering about stirring up public enemies for Japan's Imperial Household. So far we have paid no attention to the handful of such spiritually abnormal groups. But this time an open letter has disrupted the order of international peace diplomacy and thrown popular spirit into a commotion. People of sound sense in Japan, including those who are Christian, will surely agree with us in finding them annoying in the extreme.

We wish to express our strong opposition against the NCC and make a plea for careful self-examination by all concerned.

It is, of course, entirely unlikely that the NCC and their sympathizers will take the scolding submissively, and we may well anticipate further controversy in the wake of the coming Ethics Congress. Meantime I should like to draw attention to criticism of another sort, less polemic in tone but pointing to one of the symbolic anomalies of the Pope's visit that can only have struck a resonant chord in the minds of many of his readers. The remarks were written by Suzuki Norihisa, Professor of Religious Studies at the Protestant Rikkyō University, and appeared in the May 16 edition of the Buddhist newspaper, *Chūgai Nippō*. Its point of view draws us beyond the island of Japan and touches Christianity a bit closer to the bone by questioning the reality of its alignment with the poor of the earth:

This year two representatives of Catholicism in the figures of two great personalities, the Pope of Rome and Mother Teresa of Calcutta, visited Japan in succession.

In advance of the Pope's visit, a display entitled "The Great Vatican Exhibition" was run by one of Japan's large department store chains. No doubt helped by its flashy advertising, great crowds of people went to have a look. Among dazzling Vatican treasures displayed were the golden tiara studded with its magnificent jewels, the shimmering golden throne, and the ivory wrought crozier.

Celebrated Catholic authors wrote introductory articles to the exhibition for a certain newspaper, but even their skills could not hide a certain tormented inability to express their praise with a free hand. University students who went to see the exhibit invariably had their doubts,

too, about the magnificent papal raiments. The authority of the Pope rests on the words of Jesus to Peter, "Upon this rock I will build my Church" (Matt. 6:18). It was the same Peter who was later to say, "Gold and silver I have none" (Acts 3:16). Nonetheless, the successors of Peter have led lives decked out in gold and silver. If the Great Vatican Exhibition was sponsored with the intent of introducing the spirit of Catholicism, it can only be called a failure.

And then Japan welcomed John Paul II, the current Pope, in whose words and deeds as a consummate "apostle of peace", the spirit of Catholicism that was missing in the Great Vatican Exhibition loomed large. But for all that, the face of a "pope" shone through even to the tender-hearted disposition of the Japanese.

If one does not pay close attention, one might well walk out of the Great Vatican Exhibition without noticing a poster close to the exit bearing the photo of Mother Teresa of Calcutta. Born in Yugoslavia in 1910, Mother Teresa has lived since 1948 in India's slums, where she has given over thirty years of service. In 1979 she was awarded the Nobel Prize for Peace, a prize that she deserved more than anyone anywhere on earth.

Mother Teresa came to Japan following on the footsteps of the Pope. For someone who had just received such a considerable award, there was not the faintest hint of prosperity about this seventy-year old woman with a simple blue cardigan over her shoulder. Hers was a short stay, but the poverty of the human spirit she spoke of has left its mark on the economically great country of Japan. She appealed for the dignity of life and touched on the relationship between war and the readily available means for terminating pregnancy. The difference between her attitude and that of those individuals who, under the beautiful name of "mizuko kuyō" [a Buddhist memorial service for aborted infants], are thinking only of their own self-interests, brought to mind a gap literally as great as that between heaven and earth.

In one and the same Church, if there are those who seek to lead the life of a "pope" [in Japanese, literally, "king of the Law"], there are also those who seek to lead the life of a "servant of the law." A society where everyone aspires to "papacy" and no one to "servanthood," will soon become a "lawless" society.

The seamy side of the great ritual celebrations of religion are no less part of the truth of religion than are its most carefully wrought ideals. In a sense, they give us an insight into its irradicable humanity, into that tangle of nobility and ignobility, of consciousness and unconsciousness that we never quite manage to sort out. Contrary to what the editors of the *Bukkyō Times* suggest, it is not at all an act of unecumenical rebellion to turn the tapestry around from time to time and force us to have a look. It is the one thing that can keep inter-religious dialogue from descending to the level of parlor etiquette and sharpen our joint responsibilities for the inhumanities that infect our civilization.

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