

In Memoriam

ARIGA TETSUTARÔ (1899-1977)

On May 25, 1977, the Christian community in Japan suffered a great loss: one of its most genuine and brilliant representatives, professor Ariga, passed away quietly in a hospital in Kyoto.

Prof. Ariga was one of the most respected theologians in Japan, but more still he was an ideal witness for Christ to his compatriots. Strict as he was in the personal observance of his faith, he was extremely receptive to all that is true and beautiful in Japanese culture and Japanese beliefs. In all simplicity, but with rare conviction, he used to say that the other religions had taught him very much.

Prof. Ariga will be remembered as one of the strongest promoters of the post-war interfaith dialogue in Japan: he founded the NCC Center for the Study of Japanese Religions (Kyoto) -- which contributed so much already to that dialogue -- and actively participated in many dialogue sessions. But also his theological studies of the Church Fathers and of Hebrew thought may be said to be his personal endeavors to build a theoretical framework whereby a real encounter of Christianity and the religiosity of his country would become possible.

In other publications, our Institute will have the privilege of introducing some of Professor Ariga's work to the world at large. For now, we want to honor his memory by reprinting here the poem which he wrote (in English) when, in December 1976, he had to spend five days in the hospital.

Prof. Ariga was born in Osaka in 1899. While having to interrupt his highschool studies because of illness, he discovered the gospel and received baptism in the Harajuku church of the United Brethren. He received his theological training at Dôshisha University (Kyoto) (graduation 1922) and at Union Theological Seminary (New York) (1922-1926). From 1926 on he was lecturer and professor of the theological faculty of Dôshisha University; from 1948 till 1962 he occupied the chair of "Study of Christianity" at the State University of Kyoto. After his retirement he was still active for many years as president of Kobe Women's College.

As a fervent ecumenist, he was one of the founding fathers of the United Church of Christ in Japan, and participated in the Evanston World Meeting (1954). In 1962-1963 he was an observer at the Second Vatican Council. In 1953-1954, he was visiting professor at Union

Theological Seminary (New York) and received an honorary doctorate (D.D.) from Chicago University.

MEDITATION

Here in this hospital ward
 from an attack of pain convalescing,
 I suddenly awoke to find myself
 all alone with my own self.
 At the year's end
 this is indeed what I most needed:
 to reflect upon my own past, remote and recent,
 and meditate upon the meaning of my life
 in its allowed span of time.

Here's Presence Divine so close to me,
 so is the message of Christ's birth:
 that the dawn is truly upon the earth,
 even upon ourselves in the city of Kyoto,
 where through my windows across the River Kamo
 a perfect landscape I enjoy
 with foliage still so green.
 and the Hiei mountains farther in the distance.

A certitude most inwardly prehended
 that this whole existence of mine lies
 in the hands of Him who transcends
 yet is ever creatively at work,
 letting all things, even out of nothing, arise
 and be and take their course.

Never a stale dogma, this thought!
 but an inspiration
 supplying ever joy and gratitude,
 love and goodwill, and even
 hope and courage and patience.

Yes, I still love this world so dearly,
 this world of ours on a tiny globe
 floating in the immensity of process four-dimensional.
 And our species!
 Result of nature's evolving for billions of years,
 man is still so uncertain and immature:
 a conglomeration of urges and desires,
 intents and aspirations,
 at variance with each other.

So much intelligence, to be sure,
 has been acquired and accumulated,
 and, from generation to generation, transmitted,
 but is mankind in truth learning?

With so many schools
 in an age called civilized,
 from the most elementary to the most advanced;
 and with sundry methods and systems
 of providing and diffusing information:
 books, journals, programs
 of radio and television —
 how much is humanity therefrom gaining?

Here at the hospital come in nurses on duty
 and inquire after me,
 often with the same queries
 to which nothing but the same answers were due.
 Should even ten of them have gotten
 the same information,
 that might help to confirm it
 but wouldn't increase their knowledge a bit.

Neither does an increasing number
 of those receiving education
 promise mankind necessarily the larger
 share of knowledge.
 And what they thus learn
 is inevitably fragmentary
 covering a limited area only
 of man's ever widening possible experience.

'Tis true experts and specialists,
 superb in their respective fields,
 are being trained, marvels to perform
 for the advancement of civilization —
 but also for the piling up of potencies
 of destruction and pollution
 and wholesale murder.

Actually our world is still full of
 follies and frenzies —
 not so much due to sheer ignorance
 as to soaring intellect losing its balance —
 that we have, with Job, to wonder:
 "Where is wisdom to be found?"
 For wisdom is so rare — like sunshine
 in the rainy season —
 though sunshine, however seldom,

is indeed that and nothing else.

Above the clouds all is bright,
be it storm or blizzard below,
while solar energies all through penetrating,
life on earth sustaining,
under the threatening sky
or in the parching heat.

By no means are we left
without hope, if only a ray of wisdom
coming from its very source
to our mind and heart beams,
to let humanity be truly humane,
that all men and women, old or young,
may learn to live and work together,
ever closer to build ever fuller
community the world over.

Kyoto
Advent 1976