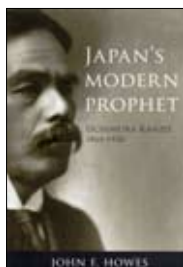


## REVIEW



**John F. Howes, *Japan's Modern Prophet: Uchimura Kanzō***  
Vancouver & Toronto: University of British Columbia Press,  
2006. xvi + 445 pp. \$32.95 paper, ISBN 978-0774811460.

BASED ON his dissertation completed in 1965, which covered the life of Uchimura Kanzō, a Christian leader in modern Japan, up to 1905, John Howes took half a century to complete his biography. The reason for the delay was his commitment to developing a Japanese study program at the University of British Columbia. Then he revised his earlier work and added more research on Uchimura's later days. The book has been truly worth the wait, not only for scholars of Uchimura but also for those interested in the history of Christianity in modern Japan. Together with rare photographs of Uchimura, his family and close friends, this book also provides some information about Uchimura's disciples, both faithful and apostate.

Uchimura Kanzō lived during one of the most turbulent periods in Japanese history: the Meiji Enlightenment when the Meiji government adopted Westernization; the Sino-Japanese War (1894–1895) and the Russo-Japanese War (1904–1905). Uchimura's Christian convictions, as a biblical commentator and a Christian leader, influenced Japanese society across these dramatic periods through his lectures and writings. His lectures on the Book of Job, the Epistle to the Romans, the Life of Jesus, and other topics attracted thousands of people. Over the decades his works have been published and, due to popular demand, republished. His Bible study magazines that were issued over a thirty-one year period were republished in bound volumes in 2001. Most of his works have been translated into Korean and Chinese and his English-language works have been translated into several European languages (p. 8).

One incident Uchimura is purportedly famous for is that he did not bow down before the Emperor's signature on the rescript (*Chokugo hōdokushiki*). Researching the *Official Gazette* (*Kanpō*), Howes reports that there is no official record of Uchimura's disobedience. However, Howes does acknowledge Uchimura's personal letter informing a friend in the US that he did not bow down (p. 74).

The chief sources of information for this book include Uchimura's own writings such as his manuscripts for his lecturers, articles for *Seisho no kenkyū* [Study of the Bible], *Yorozu Chōhō* newspaper, the official records, diary, and personal letters. In

very accessible language, Howes powerfully and compassionately conveys Uchimura's own passionate conviction for God and for Japan.

In some places Howes' own passion for Christianity overrides his primary task of documenting Uchimura's life, particularly when Howes offers his own interpretation of Apostle Paul's mission to the Gentiles as well as to the Jews, and its relation to matters of law and faith (pp. 288–91). However, this aspect, too, helps the reader gain an understanding of Howes' own views as he, in turn, constructs a particular context for Uchimura's declared beliefs.

Throughout this book, Howes illustrates Uchimura's conviction for seeking ways to make Christianity relevant to the Japanese people. In particular, Howes cites Uchimura's observation that "Christianity does not belong to any one nation. When I mention 'Japanese Christianity,' I do not mean that Christianity is changed and made into a Japanese religion...Christianity as it develops through Japanese [individuals], that is, Japanese Christianity" (p. 364).

Building upon the analysis of a close friend, Nitobe Inazō, on Bushido, the source of Japan's traditional morality and religion, Uchimura argued that Bushido was not alien to Christianity but had many affinities with it (p. 315). Howes further explains Uchimura's view that Bushido respects sincerity and requires great courage. Uchimura summed up that "Bushido is the best stock on which to engraft the gospel" (p. 315). Howes also points out Uchimura's open acknowledgement and appreciation of Confucianism and Nichiren (p. 111) that had great influences on the Japanese people's ethics and religious sensibility. All this is evidence of Uchimura's respectful attitude towards people who had their faiths in different religions (pp. 231–32).

Making clear distinctions between Western Christianity and Japanese Christianity, Uchimura stated that "we worship Jesus differently than English and American Christians" (p. 230), and emphatically explained the need for Japanese Christians' independence from the West (pp. 224–26, 232, 240). Uchimura's best known legacy, both abroad and in Japan, Mukyōkai (churchless Christianity), came into being as he sought independence and refused any support from foreign denominations. Uchimura used this term for the first time in 1892 when he felt that his fellow Christians "abandoned" him: "I became without a church" (p. 149).

Uchimura wanted to leave behind "a brave and noble life" (p. 6). Howes has interpreted Uchimura's legacy as that of a prophet who "judges his own community ruthlessly in terms of a transcendent ethic" (p. 11). One month before his death Uchimura wrote that he devoted his life for the salvation of his "country and betterment of its people" (p. 378). This book convincingly demonstrates that Uchimura fulfilled his calling.

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