

Ideology and Utopianism in Wartime Japan

An Essay on the Subversiveness of Christian Eschatology

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From the 1930s Christian churches in Japan were under considerable pressure to participate in the rituals of civil religion (State Shinto) and support Japanese military expansionism. Most official representatives of the Roman Catholic Church and the established Protestant churches gradually accommodated themselves to the nationalistic environment and developed theologies of legitimation. Under the same difficult circumstances, a number of sectarian Christians refused to cooperate or collaborate with the government. Many were arrested and spent two to three years in prison. Several died as a result of this persecution. Drawing on the Special Police (Tokkō) reports, this study explores why the government came to regard these pious Christians as religious deviants. This episode illustrates how eschatological faith can become radically subversive under certain socio-political conditions.

FOR MANY YEARS SOCIOLOGISTS have regarded religion as a primary force for the integration of human societies and maintenance of the status quo. Christianity has certainly played this role in many different times and places. It is often noted that otherworldly religiosity and preoccupation with salvation in the life to come (irreverently referred to as “pie in the sky by-and-by”) encourages individuals to accept this world as it is, rather than challenge the taken-for-granted reality (thus the Marxist critique that religion is the “opiate of the people” and a manifestation of “false consciousness”). The ambiguous and contradictory nature of religion, however, confounds such simple caricatures. Religion has often been a disintegrative force, causing conflict and

* Funding for research leading to this publication was provided by the Research Enablement Program, a grant program for mission scholarship supported by the Pew Charitable Trusts, Philadelphia, Pennsylvania, USA, and administered by the Overseas Ministries Study Center, New Haven, Connecticut.

division. The history of Christianity in Japan provides us with abundant material for considering the disruptive nature and “dysfunctional” consequences of religion for society.

Christianity and the Division of Labor in Japanese Religion

Since the initial transmission of Roman Catholicism to Japan in the sixteenth century, Christianity has generally been regarded as an intrusive force in Japanese society and often referred to as an evil religion (*jakyō* 邪教). The macro-political relations at various stages of the transplantation process have undoubtedly shaped the Japanese perception that Christianity is the deviant religion of incursive foreign powers with designs on Japan. As latecomers to Japan’s religious scene, both Catholic and Protestant churches have experienced considerable difficulty in shedding their reputation as a “foreign religion.” Furthermore, transplanted Christian traditions have tended to clash with Japanese religious sensibilities by demanding exclusive commitment.

It is frequently observed that Japanese religiosity posits a division of labor among the gods and typically consists of a syncretistic system of “layered obligations” (SWYNGEDOUW 1993, p. 66; DAVIS 1992, p. 31). As a rule, Japanese do not commit themselves to one particular religious organization; they tend, rather, to participate in the annual festivals and rituals of both Shinto shrines and Buddhist temples. A religious division of labor also characterizes the rites of passage, with Shinto dominating rituals associated with birth and Buddhism monopolizing rituals connected with death. At least during Japan’s modern century, Japanese have generally been integrated into a system of household (Buddhist) and communal (Shinto) religious obligations.

These pre-existing religious duties and obligations have made it extremely difficult for most Japanese to make a personal commitment to Christianity. When such a commitment has been made, the consequences have often been disruptive. The history of Christianity in Japan abounds with stories of individuals being cut off from their families or isolated in their communities (*mura hachibu* 村八分) because of their newfound faith and consequent refusal to participate in household ancestor rites or community festivals.¹ It has not been uncommon for zealous new Christians, following the instructions of their missionary teachers, to burn their family Buddhist altars (*butsudan*

¹ See MORIOKA 1976, pp. 195–246, for a review of the various types of conflict that occurred in the early Protestant encounter with communal Shinto and establishment Buddhism.

仏壇), ancestral tablets (*ihai* 位牌), and Shinto god shelves (*kamidana* 神棚)—understandably creating innumerable family conflicts.

Over the course of Japan's modernization a layer of civil religious obligations was added to the traditional religious division of labor, generating another dimension of conflict for Christians in Japanese society. From the Meiji Restoration until the end of World War II, the government pursued a policy of uniting the people of Japan under the canopy of a state-sponsored and emperor-centered civil religion. The national religion created by the government bureaucrats was largely an "invention of tradition" (HARDACRE 1989) projected back on Japanese history and differed considerably from the previous forms of Shinto belief and practice. It was used as a device to unify and integrate the heterogeneous population and mobilize the people for nation-building, modernization, and military expansion.

The new layer of religious "obligation" was propagated by various "carriers" (priests, teachers, military leaders) and institutions (shrines, schools) and was eventually enforced by government agencies.² Although the Meiji Constitution guaranteed religious freedom, by the late 1930s the increasingly totalitarian national government required members of every religious group to participate in civil religious rituals and conform to the state-defined orthodoxy. The authorities defined Shinto as a "non-religious" institution of the state, and participation in its rituals came to be viewed as the "patriotic" duty of all Japanese, regardless of personal religious convictions. During the war years these civil religious demands coalesced with traditional religious obligations to create an almost unbearable tension for Christian churches. Christians who did not comply with the government directive to worship at the shrines of State Shinto—the duty of all loyal citizens—faced not only persecution but serious doubt concerning their identity as Japanese.

In order to deal with religious deviants and bring all groups into conformity with the state-defined orthodoxy, the Diet passed the Religious Organizations Law (*Shūkyō dantai hō* 宗教団体法) in 1939. This empowered the state to disband any religious organization whose teachings were in conflict with "the Imperial Way." In addition, the Peace Preservation Law (*Chian-ijihō* 治安維持法) was revised in 1941 to address the subversive potential of various religious groups (MITCHELL 1976, p. 167). Designed initially in 1925 to control radical socialism and the communist movement, this law prohibited the organization of any association or group that denied the right to private property

² This brief synopsis on the development of civil religious obligations draws on material from my introduction to "Religion and the State" in MULLINS 1993.

or sought to overthrow the national polity (*kokutai* 国体). The revised version, however, was extended to suppress a wide variety of “dangerous ideas” (*kikenshisō* 危険思想), i.e., those that showed disrespect toward the Imperial Household and its shrines or were in conflict with the national polity (by this time interpreted to mean Japan as a divine country under the absolute rule of a manifest deity—*arahitogami* 現人神—the emperor).³

The remainder of this essay considers the various responses of Christians to this new religiopolitical situation. Following a brief review of the dominant pattern of accommodation and compromise (the approach taken by most denominations in an effort to avoid direct conflict with the government), our discussion focuses on the nonconformist Christian sectarian groups that resisted the demands of State Shinto. We will consider both why the authorities felt compelled to go after these sectarians and what beliefs they regarded as particularly problematic.

The Dominant Christian Response to Japanese Civil Religion

In light of the legal measures and intense government pressures noted above, it is not surprising that most churches and Christian institutions gradually accommodated themselves to the nationalistic environment. After varying degrees of resistance to the claims of the state, the Roman Catholic Church and most Protestant denominations eventually instructed their members to participate in the rituals of civil religion. By the late 1930s, most churches had also created some form of theological rhetoric to legitimize the Imperial Way, including support for Japanese military expansionism. According to these indigenous theologies, the divine nation of the emperor was none other than the kingdom of God, and the Japanese people were a chosen race destined to establish this kingdom of peace and prosperity throughout Asia (SATŌ 1992, p. 84).⁴

³ Article 7 of the revised law reads as follows: “A person who has organized an association with the object of circulating matters disavowing the national polity or impairing the sanctity and dignity of the shrines and Imperial Household or a person who has performed the work of an officer or other leaders of such an association shall be punished with penal servitude for a limited period of not less than four years, and a person who knowingly has joined such an association or a person who has committed an act contributing to the accomplishment of its objects shall be punished with penal servitude for a limited period of not less than one year.” (quoted in MITCHELL 1976, p. 167).

⁴ EBISAWA Akira, the executive secretary of the National Christian Council of Japan, expressed this civil religious theology quite clearly in a 1939 article commemorating the second anniversary of the war with China:

Writing in the midst of this difficult period, HOLTOM (1963 [originally 1943], p. 95) suggested that the overall weakness of Christianity made this pattern of response almost inevitable:

The Christian movement in Japan today is still too weak, in numbers as well as influence, to take more than a subordinate position when powerful forces in the state set about turning all the resources of the national life into directions that cut across those along which the Christian church has traveled. Under the circumstances the church has only two roads open to it: persecution and martyrdom or compromise and accommodation. The Japanese Christian church has chosen the latter.⁵

The formation and subsequent activities and policies of the United Church of Christ in Japan (Nihon Kirisuto Kyōdan, hereafter referred to as the Kyōdan) provides one of the clearest illustrations of this dominant pattern of accommodation and collaboration.⁶ Formed from a government-directed union of thirty-four denominations, the Kyōdan became the largest Protestant Church in Japan in 1941 and carried out virtually all its activities in accordance with government directives. On 11 January 1942, for example, representatives of the Kyōdan went to Ise Jingū to report the founding of the Kyōdan, pray for its development, and convey the leaders' hope that it would contribute to the nation. The future development of the denomination until the end of the war was largely guided and controlled by numerous

The policy of extending even to the continent our family principle which finds its center in an Imperial House so that all may bathe in its holy benevolence—this policy, can we not see?—is none other than the concrete realization on earth of the spiritual family principle of Christianity which looks up to God as the Father of mankind and regards all men as brethren. This is the Christian concept of the kingdom of God. The basis of the Japanese spirit also consists in this; and thus, wonderful to relate, it is one with Christianity. Nay, this must indeed be the Great Way of Heaven and earth. (Quoted in DOWNS 1946, pp. 32–35, and HOLTOM 1963, pp. 109–10; originally in the *National Christian Council Bulletin* 186, September 1939.)

⁵ Reflecting on the Protestant movement in Japan, Taiwan, and Korea between 1865 and 1945, ION (1993, pp. 5–6) rather critically suggests

that missionaries, even after more than 70 years of Christian work in Japan, had failed to instill courage into Japanese Christians. In sharp contrast to the Japanese, the steadfastness of Korean and Taiwanese Christians in the face of persecution reveals no lack of courage.... The Japanese Christian movement failed to resist the demands of the Japanese government for complete state control over the movement. Despite the long exposure to Christian ideals and values, indigenous cultural values and national concerns remained paramount in determining the reactions of Japanese Christians.

⁶ For another example of this pattern of accommodation, see my recent case study of a Christian school during this same period (MULLINS 1994).

government demands. Before the end of the year (10 December), the head office of the Kyōdan instructed all churches to perform *kokumin no girei* 国民の儀礼 before each worship service, which involved bowing in the direction of the Imperial Palace, singing the *Kimigayo* 君が代, and silently praying for those who had died in service to the emperor. All aspects of church life came under the increasing scrutiny and control of the authorities. The hymnbooks were edited and shortened to about one hundred selected hymns as songs with references to peace or God as Creator and Judge were excised (IGLEHART 1959, pp. 247-49). In order to show that it was fully behind the government's war effort, the Kyōdan even began a fund-raising campaign for the military in November 1943 for a war plane named "Nippon Kirisuto Kyōdan." By 1944, the government went so far as to issue themes for sermon topics to all the churches through the Kyōdan office. The general secretary of the Kyōdan even instructed the churches to choose another date to celebrate Christmas since 25 December was to be observed as a national holiday honoring Emperor Taishō's birth.

While the dominant pattern of response was clearly "compromise and accommodation," there were significant exceptions that often go unnoticed when dealing with this period. Under the same difficult circumstances, a number of sectarian Christian groups clung to their exclusivistic beliefs and practices and refused to collaborate with the government. For the most part these sectarians were looked down on by the established churches as simply misguided or ignorant, but they were regarded as carriers of "dangerous ideas" by the authorities and became the target of police investigation and persecution. Many members of these groups were eventually arrested and put on trial for their deviant beliefs and activities.

*From Political to Religious Deviants:
The Changing Target of the Special Police*

The reports and records of the Japanese Special Higher Police (*Tokubetsu kōtō keisatsu* 特別高等警察, hereafter referred to as Tokkō), the officials who investigated religious minorities and churches during the war, are an important resource for understanding this period. At one time classified, these materials provide us with fascinating documentation of why the government was preoccupied with sectarian Christians and reveal what beliefs were considered heretical.⁷ The

⁷ These primary documents are available in two conveniently edited collections: *Senjika no kirisutokyō undō* (DOSHISHA UNIVERSITY HUMANITIES AND SOCIAL SCIENCES RESEARCH CENTER, ed. 1972-1973), a three-volume work, and in volumes 3 and 4 of *Showa tokkō dan'atsu shi* edited by AKASHI and MATSUURA (1975).

Tokkō were the official agents responsible for identifying deviants and engaged in serious field research activities in order to accomplish this task. These officials attended all kinds of worship services, prayer meetings, and lectures, documenting extensively the history, beliefs, and religious activities of numerous sectarian groups. The reports include doctrinal summaries for each subversive group, records of the refusal of certain individuals to participate in *kokumin no girei*, as well as descriptions of various subversive sermons and prayers that were heard. These materials indicate that many Tokkō had acquired a detailed biblical and theological knowledge of sectarian Christianity and were, in all likelihood, better informed than many of the actual members. Of course, the goal of these investigations was not just documentation, but identification of the deviant beliefs that needed to be suppressed in order to protect the state-defined orthodoxy.⁸

The Tokkō, we should remember, did not at first direct their attention to religious groups. Until the 1930s they had their hands full coping with communists and radical socialists. Only as this situation came under control did the Tokkō put their efforts into identifying and prosecuting religious deviants. As may be seen in table 1, members of religious groups began to be arrested for violations of the Peace Preservation Law from the mid-1930s, coinciding with the rapid decline of political arrests and prosecutions.

Leaving aside for the moment the question of whether the new religious movements and sectarian Christians were in fact “subversive” with regard to the national polity, the Tokkō preoccupation with religious minorities from the 1930s was in part an attempt to justify their own existence. This is not surprising, as ERIKSON (1966, p. 26) suggests in his classic study of deviant behavior:

If the police should somehow learn to contain most of the crimes it now contends with...it is still improbable that the existing control machinery would go unused. More likely, the agencies of control would turn their attention to other forms of behavior, even to the point of *defining as deviant certain styles of conduct which were not regarded so earlier.* [emphasis mine]

⁸ Although Japanese religiosity is sometimes characterized as one that focuses on proper ritual performance with little concern for correct doctrine or beliefs, this historical episode indicates that there are exceptions to this pattern. “Whereas in the West it was heresy (or pluralism, as it is called today) which seemed to threaten the unity of Christendom,” DAVIS (1992, p. 33) writes, “in Japan it was monopraxis (emphasis on a single religious practice) that posed the greatest spiritual menace to the traditional integration of society.” While this was perhaps the case through most of the modern period, government officials became obsessed with the problem of “heresy” from the mid-1930s to the end of the war.

Table 1
Arrests for Violations of the Peace Preservation Law, 1933-1943

[Adapted from TIPTON, 1990: Appendix II]

	Total Arrests	Religious
1933	14,622	0
1934	3,994	0
1935	1,785	67
1936	2,067	860
1937	1,313	13
1938	982	193
1939	722	325
1940	817	33
1941	1,212	107
1942	698	163
1943	159	19

This seems to be what occurred as the Tokkō shifted their concerns from political to religious deviants. GARON's (1986, p. 293) explanation of this shift is worth quoting at length:

By 1933, officials of the Special Higher Police had so thoroughly annihilated the Communist movement that they faced the prospect of drastic retrenchment. *Their* salvation lay in convincing the government and the public of the need for a specialized "religions police" (*shūkyō keisatsu*) to control that other social movement—the new religions. The lobbying paid off in June 1935, when the cabinet centralized jurisdiction over controlling religions within the Police Bureau's Public Security Section and its Special Higher Police units in each prefecture. The scale of the "religions police" was simply extraordinary. Within the Tokyo Metropolitan Police, for example, the Special Higher Police Department in 1936 added a separate religions office, staffed by no fewer than twenty-one agents. Suddenly, previously harmless sects became "evil cults," which could only be controlled by His Majesty's Religions Police.⁹

⁹ MITCHELL (1976, p. 182) similarly observed that "once the efficient state control mechanism had crushed the communists and radical socialists it quite naturally moved on to the others."

In sum, the Tokkō redefined the boundaries of acceptable belief and behavior and reclassified certain individuals and groups as “heterodox” or “deviant” according to the revised criteria.

Operating no doubt with mixed motives, the Tokkō actively pursued their new targets, investigating and arresting leaders and members of seventeen different religious groups between 1935 and 1943 (MURAKAMI 1976, p. 137). The initial efforts of the Tokkō focused on new religious movements, including Omotokyō, Hitonomichi, Sekai Kyūseikyō, and Tenri Honmichi. These New Religions were accused of holding heretical interpretations of the place of the emperor or rejecting outright the emperor’s religious authority. Most of these groups also advocated the “rebuilding and renewal of the world” (*yo no tatekae, tatenaooshi* 世の建て替え, 建て直し), understood by the authorities to involve the revolutionary overturning of the *kokutai*. The strict pacifism advocated by Honmichi, likewise, went against the tide of militarism that had engulfed the nation. By the time the Tokkō had completed their investigation of such New Religions, hundreds of members of these various groups had been arrested and indicted for the crime of *lèse majesté* or for violating the Peace Preservation Law.¹⁰

The Tokkō Preoccupation with Sectarian Christians

With the New Religions largely under control, the Tokkō wasted no time in extending their efforts to Christian groups. In 1938, the Tokkō office in Osaka sent a questionnaire to churches in the area asking them to provide their views on some thirteen topics, including the relationship between the emperor and Christ; the nature of Japan’s gods (*yaoyorozu no kamigami* 八百万の神々); the practices of ancestor veneration and shrine worship; “idol worship” (*gūzō sūhai* 偶像崇拜) in Shinto and Buddhism; Christian education versus education based on the Rescript on Education (*Kyōiku chokugo* 教育勅語); and Christianity vis-à-vis the Japanese spirit (*Nihon seishin* 日本精神).¹¹ It is unclear whether or not the findings of this survey were directly related to subsequent arrests and interrogations of Christians, but the issues remained essentially the same.

A reading of the Tokkō records reveals that individuals from many different Christian organizations were under surveillance, but most of those actually arrested and eventually indicted belonged to rather

¹⁰ For details on the Tokkō treatment of new religions, see TSUSHIMA 1992, GARON 1986 (pp. 290–99), and MURAKAMI 1980 (pp. 95–101).

¹¹ The topics of the questionnaire and response of an Anglican church representative are recorded in AKASHI and MATSUURA 1975, volume 3, pp. 110–15.

small sects. Although numerically insignificant, their obtrusive behavior caught the watchful eyes of the Tokkō. The nature of the persecution illustrates the often quoted-proverb, "The nail that sticks out gets hammered" (*deru kugi wa utareru*). The initial actions provoking Tokkō investigations included anti-war statements and the refusal to participate in shrine visits (*jinja sanpai* 神社参拜), serve in the military, participate in military drills, pay obeisance to the emperor (Jehovah's Witnesses, Plymouth Brethren), or send children to school on the Sabbath (Seventh-Day Adventists). Much as the refusal of Japanese to trample on a plaque of the Madonna or Christ (*fumie* 踏み絵) was used by the authorities in the seventeenth century to identify members of the proscribed Roman Catholic religion, so the Tokkō employed refusal to participate in shrine worship as a litmus test of disloyalty and suspect beliefs.

The Jehovah's Witnesses, or Watch Tower Society (Tōdaisha), was the first Christian-related organization to come under serious investigation by the Tokkō. In January 1939 the eldest son of Akashi Junzō, the founder and leader of this society in Japan, and two other young men were drafted into the military. As was the case throughout Japan, their initial training included shrine worship, obeisance to the emperor, and military drills for the "shedding of blood." These men refused to participate in these various activities because of their religious convictions. This was quickly brought to the attention of the Tokkō, who immediately investigated the religious background of their pacifist ideas. The police discovered that Tōdaisha publications not only contained antiwar declarations but were also full of teachings regarding the Second Coming of Christ and the end of the present order. These ideas were in clear conflict with the *kokutai* 国体. The Tokkō promptly began making arrests in June of the same year, and by 1941 the number of arrested Tōdaisha members reached 122. Of that number, 53 were charged with violating the Peace Preservation Law. One member died during the trial period and another was drafted into the military. The remaining 51 were all found guilty. Akashi was sentenced to 12 years of hard labor on 30 May 1942. He and 29 others appealed their sentences, but to no avail. Akashi was not released from prison until the end of the war.¹²

The Tōdaisha incident alerted the government to the potential subversiveness of groups that emphasized the Second Coming of Christ, and the Tokkō quickly pursued investigations of other Christian sects.

¹² For a more detailed discussion of the Tōdaisha case, see INAGAKI 1972 and AKASHI and MATSUURA 1975, vol. 3, pp. 141-60.

The Tokkō records indicate that the government proceeded to carry out the following actions against other Christian sects over the next three years: 7 members of the Salvation Army were arrested; 38 members of *Iesu Kirisuto no Shin'yaku Kyōkai* (New Testament Church of Jesus Christ) were arrested; 6 members of the Plymouth Brethren group were arrested; 18 Seventh-Day Adventist teachers were arrested and 34 churches closed;¹³ over 100 Holiness pastors were arrested and 275 churches closed. These are just a few examples gleaned from the Tokkō records; the list goes on.

The following dialogue from the opening trial of five Plymouth Brethren members illustrates the range of government concerns noted above:

Judge: Since the Bible says "Thou shalt not kill," believers who are conscripted will refuse to kill on the battlefield, refuse to kill even under direct orders from the emperor?

Kitamoto: That is correct.

Judge: Does this mean that you cannot obey the orders even of the emperor if they are found to be in violation of the Bible?

Kitamoto: That is correct. In the case where orders violate the Bible, we will obey the Bible....

Judge: What are your words of advice to departing members when they are called to arms?

Kitamoto: I caution them not to fire their weapons, so that they will not kill anyone.

Judge: Do you say that the emperor's mandate to rule is something only temporarily permitted by God and that it will have to be returned in the future?

Kitamoto: That is correct.

Judge: I understand that you did not participate in shrine worship.

Kitamoto: That would be idol worship, so I did not....

Judge: What was your membership at the time when the revised Peace Preservation Law was enacted?

Kitamoto: There were just over 30 baptized members, but only about 23 or 24 were active at the time.

¹³ All of the Adventist teachers were arrested together on 30 September 1943. The following year the head of the Japan SDA was charged, all of the churches were ordered to disband, and the Ministry of Education canceled their permits. At the time of the disbandments, there were only 917 members scattered in some 34 churches with 18 leaders. This was hardly a major religious movement that was about to undermine the social order (AKASHI and MATSUURA 1975, vol. 3, pp. 235–37). The same could be said of most of these Christian sects.

Judge: Why did the number of members decline?

Kitamoto: The numbers declined because we were refusing shrine and emperor worship, and this conviction was extremely difficult to follow consistently.

Judge: (To all the defendants) Has the response of Kitamoto regarding doctrine and other matters been without error?

Each defendant: Yes, without error.¹⁴

While the actions that precipitated police action varied from group to group, the Tokkō discovered upon interrogation that all groups shared in common an eschatological vision of an imminent kingdom of God that would overturn the present order. Although Christian pacifist ideas clearly troubled the authorities in wartime Japan, they regarded as the most subversive this belief in the Second Coming of Christ and a future kingdom that would challenge the rule of the emperor. As DESILVA (1992, p. 375) has recently noted, apocalyptic ideas “may serve as a call to action and to protest the dominant societal institutions and values.” At least in wartime Japan, it was primarily the sectarian Christians, those that took their eschatology seriously, who were finally able to resist the demands of civil religion. While their interpretations of such eschatological details as the seven-year tribulation, the battle of Armageddon, and the role of Israel, varied in some cases, all of these groups claimed that Jesus Christ would return to earth with his faithful followers to establish the millennial kingdom. These ideas were clearly incompatible with the *kokutai*, which had room for only one absolute manifest deity, the emperor as *arahitogami*.

The Case of the Holiness Church

For several years the Tokkō concentrated their efforts on those sectarian groups that were too small, or that were unwilling, to be incorporated into the Kyōdan under the Religious Organizations Law. In 1942, however, they cast a wider net to include the Holiness groups that had followed the government directives and were a part of the state-approved Kyōdan. The Holiness leaders had assumed (or at least hoped) that joining this larger organization would shield them from any special attention from the government (DOHI 1980, p. 403). The Tokkō, however, were apparently aware of the clear position against shrine worship taken by the Holiness Christians under the strong

¹⁴ Osaka District Court, 4 February 1943, recorded in AKASHI and MATSUURA 1975, vol. 4, p. 124; translation mine.

leadership of Bishop Nakada Jūji a decade earlier.¹⁵ Holiness members had refused to participate in *jinja sanpai* (shrine worship), and many kept their children from participating in shrine visits sponsored by the public schools. The Tokkō also knew from a number of church publications that many Holiness leaders held essentially the same eschatological views as the sectarian groups that had already been investigated.

While they refused to participate in Shrine visits, the Holiness leaders made every effort to express support for the emperor and (to my knowledge) never made any public statements against the war. As early as the third general assembly of the Holiness Church in 1932 (that is, almost a decade before it entered the Kyōdan), the church declared that it would protect and honor the central place of the emperor in obedience to the Scriptures (Romans 13). Almost a decade later (1941), at the first general meeting of block six (one section of the Holiness congregations that were incorporated into the Kyōdan), the service began with singing the national anthem, obeisance in the direction of the Imperial Palace, and silent prayer for those who had given their lives on the battlefield for the Emperor. On another occasion, the pastor leading a meeting of block six stopped the proceedings during a bombing raid by US planes and asked all those in attendance to pray for Japan's victory and the safety of the emperor. These pastors were hardly political subversives, but their basic eschatological convictions nevertheless clashed with the claims of the state.

In the end, a total of 131 Holiness clergy were arrested for violations

¹⁵ Nakada's statement on the shrine issue appeared in the church publication, *Friends of Holiness*, on 30 January 1930:

Some people in authority in the Bureau of Religions have set forth the idea that Shrine Shinto is not a religion, and thus have disposed of the issues very simply. In the name of ancestor veneration it has been schemed that everyone be required to bow at a Shinto shrine. But religion is not a thing that can be dealt with so simply at the hands of politicians who know nothing about spiritual things.... Even if one skillfully says that the religious content is negligible, to the average person's life there could be nothing more intimately related than this existential religion.

We have no choice but to here and now go on record that no matter what happens we will never bow at a Shinto shrine! The reason we make this clear is that we may be silenced by those who say that we are disloyal and lack filial piety. We are prepared to take Article Twenty-eight of the Constitution, that guarantees religious freedom, as a shield and argue our case *ad infinitum*. If there is an infringement of freedom of religion in any part of the country I hope that you will notify us immediately.

We are prepared to face persecution! If it is the Lord's will, at any time we are completely ready to become a sacrifice. This is the attitude with which we work. (translation by MERWIN 1983, p. 266)

Ten years after this strong statement against shrine worship, Nakada's followers would become the "sacrifice" he had spoken of.

of the Peace Preservation Law and abandoned by the Kyōdan in their time of trial. As DOHI (1987, p. 219) notes, these pastors were all asked the following basic questions under interrogation:

- 1) The Bible says that all human beings are sinners. Does this mean that the emperor is a sinner?
- 2) You teach that sinners will be saved by Christ. Does this include the emperor?
- 3) There is only one God according to Christianity. Does this mean that the emperor is not divine (i.e., an *arahitogami*)?
- 4) Will the emperor be judged and become a servant of Christ when the kingdom of God is established?

The Holiness ministers responding to these questions tried their best not to offend their interrogators, but their ultimate convictions inevitably collided. As a result of the Tokkō investigations, 71 Holiness pastors were charged and 14 actually received sentences.¹⁶

It is interesting to observe that when some of the Holiness ministers appealed their case, their lawyer argued that the coming kingdom of Christ was to be interpreted “spiritually,” i.e., as a reality that would not challenge the emperor and the kingdoms of this world. At the eighth public hearing (29 November 1944), Fujikawa Takurō 藤川百郎, the lawyer for thirteen Holiness ministers, argued that the investigators of this case had an inadequate understanding of Christian doctrine. All Christian churches, he maintained, believe that Christ will come again. In fact, it is included in article five of the constitution of the Kyōdan that was approved by the Ministry of Education. The investigators, however, mistakenly assumed that all Holiness ministers followed the interpretation of Bishop Nakada, who in 1933 developed the position that the salvation of the Jews and earthly return and millennial reign of Christ were indispensable ingredients of a biblical eschatology. According to Fujikawa, it was the belief in a literal one-thousand-year reign of Christ that was creating the conflict with the government. In the appeal, Fujikawa explained that the reference to the millennial reign of Christ appears in apocalyptic literature (Revelation 20:4) and should not be interpreted literally, as Nakada and some other groups had done. Rather, Jesus’ basic teaching concerned a “spiritual kingdom that was within.” The Tokkō, Fujikawa concluded, had mistakenly collected materials that only reflected

¹⁶ See the volume edited by YAMAZAKI (1990) for full documentation of the Holiness experience. In addition to court records, it contains letters and diaries by Holiness pastors and their families, giving us the victims’ point of view.

Nakada's views and not that of the pastors he was representing. Needless to say, the authorities did not fully appreciate these finer distinctions in biblical interpretation. In any case, the war ended before the court issued a final decision on the case. The Holiness ministers remaining in custody were released and pardoned after MacArthur and the Occupation government removed the Peace Preservation Law on 13 November 1945.¹⁷

Conclusion

The history of Christianity in Japan, as we noted in the introduction, provides numerous possibilities for the study of the relationship between religion and conflict. This essay has focused on the wartime period and explored the dilemmas of religious minorities in a time of vigorous religio-political nationalism. Civil-religious demands coalesced with traditional religious obligations during this period to create an extremely difficult situation for Christian churches and sects, which were still perceived as "transplanted" and "foreign." We have argued that the Tokkō were largely responsible for creating conflict with religious minorities during this period. Once the political threat of radical socialists and communists had disappeared, the special police found it necessary to manufacture new enemies of the state in order to justify their continued existence. The Tokkō were essentially engaged in the social construction of religious deviance. Beliefs and activities that had once been permitted were redefined as heretical and subversive. The subsequent Tokkō investigations and arrests, we also argued, were not arbitrary; they targeted groups that had resisted in some way the government's attempt to mobilize religious organizations in service of the Imperial Way.

In his classic study, *Ideology and Utopia: An Introduction to the Sociology of Knowledge*, Karl MANNHEIM (1936) made a basic distinction between "ideological" and "utopian" thought that can usefully be applied to the responses of Christians to the demands of civil religion in wartime Japan.¹⁸ According to Mannheim, ideologies are modes of thought

¹⁷ Interviews with the following two individuals were particularly helpful in this assessment of the Holiness situation: Rev. Oe Suteichi, a Holiness minister who served as general secretary of the Kiyome Kyōkai, which was incorporated into the Kyōdan as block 9 (Oe spent approximately two-and-a-half years in prison and was prohibited from pastoral work for the entire war period); and Rev. Fujikawa Tatsuo, son of Fujikawa Takurō, the lawyer for the thirteen Holiness ministers in Tokyo. Rev. Fujikawa kindly went over his father's legal defense with me (10 July 1993).

¹⁸ This is very similar to the distinction made by Max Weber between "priestly" and "prophetic" forms of religion, the former functioning primarily to maintain the status quo

that support or legitimate the existing social order. As we briefly observed, this approach was taken by the majority of churches during the period under review. Utopianism, on the other hand, refers to modes of thought that challenge the taken-for-granted reality. MANNHEIM points out that utopianism is often closely related to ideas regarding the imminent appearance of a “millennial kingdom on earth” (1936, p. 211). If ideas regarding the kingdom remain “spiritual” or if notions of “paradise” remain otherworldly and external to human history, they lose their “revolutionary edge” (1936, p. 193). Most churches in wartime Japan had a “spiritualized” understanding of the kingdom of God and millennial reign of Jesus Christ. The eschatological ideas of the Kyōdan, for example, placed the kingdom of Christ safely outside of this world and actual human history. As noted above, the lawyer for some of the Holiness ministers likewise argued that the reign of Christ was “spiritual” and was not something that would undermine the rule of the emperor.

It is only when claims regarding a millennial kingdom affect this world, Mannheim maintains, that these ideas become truly utopian and subversive. Subsequent sociological studies of sectarianism have confirmed that movements with adventist or millennial visions are often the ones that find themselves in direct conflict with the state (WILSON 1990, pp. 25–45). Our brief review of sectarianism in wartime Japan provides additional corroboration of this close relationship between eschatological beliefs and tension with the powers that be. While only a few sectarian Christians directly confronted the nationalistic militarism with pacifist ideas, they all shared an eschatological vision that ultimately clashed with the national polity. Plymouth Brethren, Jehovah’s Witnesses, Seventh-Day Adventists, and many of the Holiness pastors maintained that Jesus would return to “this world” and establish a rule over all people, including the emperor. The Holiness experience illustrates that even “*the more narrowly conceived theological stance, that is, a purely confessional attitude, may lead to social consequences that even defy the political attitude of those confessing*” (FEIGE 1989, p. 144) [emphasis mine]. Clearly none of the Holiness ministers intended to take political action against the state and, to my knowledge, none expressed outright opposition to Japan’s military expansion or refused military duty.

In short, all of the efforts and energies of the Tokkō and Japanese courts were way out of proportion to the actual “danger” of these

and legitimate the social order, and the later challenging the existing order and pointing to a new order. See BAUM 1975 for a helpful discussion and extension of Mannheim’s work in light of Weber’s sociology of religion.

pious Christians. While it is true that these sectarians were courageous (or obstinate, depending on one's point of view) and willing to go against the stream, they belonged to marginal groups that were numerically insignificant and never in a position to threaten the internal order or security of the Japanese state. DOHI (1987, p. 215) concludes, therefore, that they were most likely persecuted as a warning or object lesson for others (*miseshime* 見せしめ). This persecution of largely imaginary enemies became a ritual process for reaffirming Japan's collective purposes and precarious identity in a time of testing and uncertainty.

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