

Editor's Notes

WHENEVER ONE PUBLICATION gives way to another, the editors face a daunting task, especially if the former journal has a proud and respected history as does our predecessor, the *Japan Christian Quarterly*. The launching of a new journal in these circumstances demands fidelity to all the efforts and accomplishments of the past while striving to respond to a changing world with different or newly emergent needs. In addition, the editors must strive to maintain the same standards of excellence and competence achieved by our predecessors.

We acknowledge with deep gratitude the many contributions of David L. Swain and Betty Sisk Swain to peace education, scholarship, and quality journalism during their forty-year career in Japan. As senior editor of the *Japan Christian Quarterly*, David envisioned and brought together the current editorial team and generously shared his expertise with us. Betty's editorial and re-writing skills were an integral, though invisible, part of numerous issues, and her frequent book reviews brought the situation of Japanese women to the attention of our readers. We are pleased to include significant contributions from both of them in this first issue of the *Japan Christian Review*, and wish them well as they begin to compose their lives anew in the North American context.

The *Japan Christian Review* carries almost a hundred years of history and tradition of interpretation of Christian mission in Japan into its new venture. The *Japan Christian Review* editors carry this not as a burden, but as vision and inspiration that must be incarnated anew. Different generations, different theologies, different needs, and different audiences require change. What was a relevant

and timely response in past decades cannot be unquestioningly repeated at present or in future years. The world, Japan, and the Christian community have all changed profoundly.

Yet, the task of the *Japan Christian Review*—and its challenge—remains the same: to analyze and interpret the Christian scene in Japan to an interested and observant audience. The scene and its audience have expanded and grown more diverse. What began in 1894 as a journalistic effort by and for Protestant missionaries and their constituencies in North America and Europe has now evolved into a communications ministry that requires more ecumenical inclusion and a broader understanding of Christian mission and ministry in Japan and the world.

The world is only eight years short of a new century and a new millennium. Japan itself occupies an increasingly critical place in the world's political and social affairs. Although numerically small, the Christian community in Japan has greater influence than its numbers would seem to warrant. Japanese Christians have important perspectives to bring to bear on events and situations that shape and influence their country—perspectives that need to be communicated beyond Japan's shores.

As international distances shrink in a figurative sense, more and more people are showing interest in Japan, in its lived fidelity to the gospel of Jesus Christ, and in its response to the life situation of the Japanese people. All of this is, or should be, of vital interest to the global Christian community in the first place, and then also to interested observers of Japan and Japanese religions.

The first aim of the *Japan Christian Review* is to communicate the perspectives and reflections of Japanese Christians and their co-workers from abroad on church life, situations, and events in Japan and the world to a non-Japanese speaking audience. We seek to provide an interpretation of the Japanese Christian context for our readers.

That context is a diverse one—Protestant, Roman Catholic, Orthodox, Evangelical, and conciliar traditions are all represented in the Japanese Christian community today. By becoming as inclusively ecumenical as possible in our editorial approach and choice of authors, articles, and features, we hope to contribute to a more truly global dialogue on the meaning of being Christian and Church as we approach the twenty-first century.

This first issue of the *Japan Christian Review* begins that dialogue. Our first pair of articles details two representative approaches to the task of theology in Japan today. They are not mutually exclusive necessarily, but rather emphasize different methodological starting points. The first article by Ohki Hideo identifies the task of theology as the establishment of the church's selfhood. By this he means overcoming the polarity between indigenous and foreign influences. Ohki is critical of the Japanese tendency to swing back and forth between these two poles. Only by transcending this polarity in such a way as to strengthen and purify the positive elements in both can the church be actualized. The overcoming of polar tensions can only be done through introspection and self-criticism, which is a function of selfhood and therefore the task of theology.

The second article in this pair by Kuribayashi Teruo takes a liberation approach to theology. For Kuribayashi, the contemporary theological task is to reflect critically on the liberating activity of God

amidst oppression. Focusing on Japan's three million outcasts, the Burakumin, he relates their situation to the biblical proclamation of liberation. By articulating the meaning of God's redeeming activity within oppressed communities, theology pinpoints the central theme of Christian faith and legitimates an outcast community's desire for a fully human life.

We have asked three respondents—Clark Pinnock, Richard Drummond, and Matsuoka Fumitaka—to offer a brief commentary and critique on Professor Ohki's and Professor Kuribayashi's articles. Drummond and Matsuoka have long experience and deep knowledge of Japan and Japanese Christianity, while Pinnock is a highly regarded evangelical theologian with strong interests in mission and the theology of religions.

Our second pair of articles actually flow out of the first. They present approaches to evangelization/evangelism from a Catholic and an Evangelical perspective. The Catholic approach, described by Michel Gaultier, outlines a long-term process for a thorough and ongoing renewal of the Catholic Church in Japan. In Catholic terms, evangelization involves the whole spectrum of the church's mission and ministry. It does not focus solely on sacramental and liturgical life, nor on the nurturance and pastoral care of the Catholic community. Rather, it incorporates outreach, service, and the doing of justice as integral to any understanding of evangelization.

Stephen T. Franklin describes the evangelical approach to evangelism. For evangelicals, the proclamation of the gospel everywhere without exception takes priority over other activities of the church. Franklin outlines the shift in evangelism from individual conversion to an emphasis on church growth, and discusses the strategies and social trends that are affecting and will continue to affect evangelism in Japan.

The third pair of articles offer perspectives and critiques of Japanese society as a whole. David L. Swain provides some "conceptual maps" for understanding the dynamics of Japanese society. By outlining what he terms the basic commitments—social and cultural—of Japanese people and by analyzing the centers of power and control in Japan, Swain moves us beyond much of the facile and shallow "interpretations" of Japan now current, both in Japan and abroad, thus allowing for a deeper appreciation of the strengths and weaknesses of this society. He also identifies areas of difficulty and resistance for doing Christian mission in Japan today.

Robert Ramseyer's article complements Swain's by providing a cultural and social critique of some generally held images of what it means to be Japanese. He further critiques the myth that Christianity is alien to and incompatible with Japan—a myth that many Christians have accepted as true. By so doing, he argues, Christians in Japan have not spoken the gospel clearly and directly to those about them. They have acquiesced in being considered outsiders in their own society. Ramseyer raises up the Mennonite experience in Hiroshima as a counterpoint to prevailing church praxis.

Bernardin Schneider gives our readers an excellent article on the state and extent of bible translation in Japan since 1965. In a comprehensive approach to his subject, Schneider details the various Japanese translations of Scripture—individual, denominational, and ecumenical—that are available to Christians and others today. The

article is followed by Noah S. Brannen's translation of a poem by Miyazawa Kenji.

Yugo Suzuki gives interested readers an overview of Christian periodical literature in Japan. He selects representative monthly magazines and journals and offers succinct summaries of their major articles centered around several topical issues. For those of our readers who cannot easily read Japanese, this article on what Japanese Christians are currently reading and thinking provides a welcome service.

Doron B. Cohen provides a short historical article on one of the major figures of Japanese Christianity, Uchimura Kanzō, and Uchimura's understanding and appreciation of Judaism and Zionism.

Beginning with this first issue and continuing hereafter, we will provide current statistics on church membership and the number of church workers—lay and cleric—for our readers. In this issue, Harry Burton-Lewis presents the most current data and adds an interpretative analysis of what those statistics mean. The *Japan Christian Review* will continue to feature book reviews and ecumenical news.

The editors extend a very special word of appreciation to James Heisig of Nanzan Institute for Religion and Culture for his expertise and good humor in guiding us through this new venture of computer composition.

We bid welcome to our new readers and thank our continuing subscribers for staying with us.

Cheryl M. Allam