

Responses from North America

to OHKI Hideo and KURIBAYASHI Teruo

In an effort to elicit broad discussion and perhaps even dialogue in these pages, the editors of the Japan Christian Review requested responses to Professor Ohki's and Professor Kuribayashi's articles from three theologians in North America. We hope to continue this type of format with regard to timely subjects, whether theological, cultural, social, or contextual, in future issues of this journal.

Clark H. PINNOCK

I APPRECIATE THE OPPORTUNITY to respond to these distinguished authors from Japan. The thread uniting my remarks about the two essays will be the theme of mission as the key to the church's selfhood.

RESPONSE TO OHKI HIDEO

The goal of theological education has been much discussed recently in the West. First, there was Gerhard Ebeling's *The Study of Theology*, which addressed a crisis in orientation (Fortress, 1978). Then came Edward Farley's *Theologia: The Fragmentation and Unity of Theological Education*, which called for a recovery of practical wisdom (Fortress, 1983). Alongside them is Wolfhart Pannenberg's unremitting crusade in all his books for a theology with intellectual power.

Professor Ohki identifies the goal of theology in terms of establishing the selfhood of the church. His remarks are designed to help

the church discover its identity in the cultural setting of modern Japan with which he is in dialogue. Being Canadian, I would not presume to evaluate the accuracy of his cultural analysis but can comment on the issue of how Christians establish the selfhood of the church.

I believe the professor would agree with me that the world does not decide what the church is and that the relationship between any church and its culture is a changing one. The church's basic identity is established from the witness of the New Testament, not from purely contextual factors. I would like to call attention to what the scriptures say about church as mission.

A great mistake of Western churches and their theologies, a mistake into which Christianity in Japan ought not to fall, has been a neglect of the priority and centrality of mission in the identity of churches. The mission to evangelize the whole world is the goal of the church (Acts 1:8). The first act of the risen Lord was to pour out the Holy Spirit to empower us for this mission. The church does not exist for its own sake; it is not an end in itself; it should not be introverted. The church exists to spread the good news of the kingdom of God everywhere. Theological

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education, therefore, should be training leaders with a passion and with tools for the discipling of nations. This orientation is relevant to theological education in Canada and (I suspect) in Japan also, if our populations are to be evangelized. We might both benefit from looking toward the churches in Korea that have apparently not forgotten about mission.

I sincerely hope that the churches of Japan will not fall into the mistake of the Western church that has thought of itself as primarily responsible for secular culture and forgotten the true reason for its existence which is mission. We are not so much called to be saved, as Karl Barth said, as called to be witnesses to Jesus Christ in the power of the Holy Spirit. Our identity is a humble one, to be an instrument of and at the disposal of the Spirit as we alert people to the good news of the kingdom of God. Our churches need to recover, both in Canada and in Japan, our identity as a missionary church with good news for the world.

RESPONSE TO KURIBAYASHI TERUO

Following from this, I appreciate the fact that Professor Kuribayashi addresses the issue of mission and sees it as central to churchly identity. In particular, he lifts up God's concern for the suffering Buraku people of Japan. In a skillful way, he locates bridges with that culture and sees ways to take Jesus Christ to them. In the style of liberation theology, he understands God's mission in a holistic sense, as good news to the poor and salvation in a comprehensive way. I agree, the Spirit leads us into battle against all that oppresses and dehumanizes humankind and does not let us limit our concerns to a spiritual realm cut off from the historical conditions of life. This is a truth that conservative evangelical believers in North America like myself have been learning over the last few years.

But I have two concerns in this area. First, Jesus did not limit his preaching to the economically poor or discriminated against. God delivers people from all sorts of bondages in the power of the Spirit. Yes, God wants the Buraku people to enjoy political liberation; but he also wants them to be saved, formed into churches, and become instruments of the gospel in Japan. In this paper, I seem to hear more about political rights than I do about the conversion of a people. I find the silence about conversion typical of the liberation style of thinking in the World Council of Churches today. It is not what I thought "holistic" mission meant. I thought comprehensive salvation meant spiritual salvation *and* social justice. God's goals for the Burakumin go beyond securing their political rights and beyond their successful integration into Japanese society. Being Christian involves more than being involved in a liberation movement.

Second, in connection with the political side of liberation, I am sensitive to the danger of using Christian language to sanctify existing political movements that do not know Jesus in a transforming way, and object to biblical themes being usurped to bolster up essentially this-worldly developments. In Christian theology, God may or may not be active in the liberation struggles of the Burakumin. One must be discerning as to whether God's Spirit is there or not, on the basis of scripture. We have heard too much dangerous nonsense from liberation theologians by now not to be cautious about claims in this area. Like the German theologians of the thirties who claimed God was with Hitler, recent political theologians have told us that God was with the likes of Marx, Mao, and Castro. Claims of this kind are not self-authenticating. Christians should not accept revelation on the basis of experience alone. There has to be discernment on the basis of scripture. This is my general con-

cern. In the case of the Burakumin, however, I trust that the professor has assessed the situation correctly.

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Richard Henry DRUMMOND

RESPONSE TO OHKI HIDEO

I FIRST READ THIS ARTICLE (a lecture originally given in Korea) in its Japanese form; it was printed as an appendix to the book *Nihon no Shingaku* (Theology of Japan) (1989) that Ohki co-authored with his friend and colleague Furuya Yasuo. The depth and sharpness of its theological perceptions were the qualities that struck me especially at the time of my first reading, and I noted how it represented a kind of summation of the themes of the entire book. The book as a whole actually constitutes an impressive critique—it may be considered a follow-up of Furuya's earlier work *Shūkyō no Shingaku* (Theology of Religion) (1985)—first of Japanese Protestant attitudes toward other religious traditions, then of the attitudes of the whole of Japanese society toward its own history and present.

The present article, as well as the co-authored book, begins and continues with a focus on the issue of "the selfhood of the church." I note that in my own review of the book, which I wrote for the *Journal of Ecu-*

menical Studies, I translated this term as "self-identity of the church" (*kyōkai-teki shutaisei*). The Japanese term carries several nuances, including suggestions of freedom and self-determination as well as awareness of personal or corporate identity. I mention this attempt at a definition and also the relationship of Ohki's present article to the larger book because the book itself represents a boldly, indeed courageously, critical analysis-review of the whole history of Japanese people as well as of the role of the Christian church(es) as a part thereof. The few self-critical statements made in this article regarding Japanese colonialism in East Asia and the general capitulation of the Christian church in Japan to complicity in this imperialistic program are properly seen as but a focused reiteration of what comes forth in the book with both forcefulness and abundant detail.

The audience whom Ohki originally addressed in this lecture evidently represented the cream of theological leadership of the Christian church in Korea. The high level of theological sophistication expressed in the article is clearly expressive of Ohki's genuine respect for the Korean church, as is his concern to speak as much, or more, about the larger situation of Northeast Asia as about Japan. This is also the context for Ohki's statements that while the Protestant churches in East Asia may be "younger churches," the countries in which they are placed are not "younger countries." Knowledgeable readers will recognize that the perception with proper pride and gratitude of the depth and richness of the cultural heritage as well as lengthy history of their peoples has become in recent years a significant part of the self-awareness of the nations of Asia, Africa, and the Americas. It has become a basic element of the contemporary process of Christian theologizing in these lands. Of very great significance is that

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much, perhaps most, contemporary theological thought in both East and West now recognizes these histories, which have lived out their courses largely in only peripheral contact with the Christian faith and church, as "embraced" within the loving care as well as located under the sovereign lordship of the God of history and of his Christ.

In the present article Ohki sets the stage by contrasting the traditional Asian tendency to see "nature" as the context both of its religious perceptions as of its political and cultural life over against the Judeo-Christian faith-perception of God as transcendent over both nature and history. Ohki recognizes that this immersion in nature, which has its political expression in ethnocentric nationalism, fails to give its participants adequate capacity for self-relativization before the transcendent in religion, politics, or culture. Much mismanagement in Asia's history can be ascribed to this lack, which in fact constitutes inability adequately to practice self-criticism. Ohki is of course aware and makes brief mention of the fact that Western lands and churches have often distorted their liberation from immersion in nature into abusive dominion thereof, as subjugation of its participants, human and other.

Exploration of the theme of the selfhood of the church is a theological means by which Ohki identifies the central importance for biblical faith past and present of the self-criticism characteristic of the highest levels of the Hebrew prophetic tradition. He sees this faith posture as focused in Amos 9:7, a verse that he observes was a particular favorite of Reinhold Niebuhr, under whom, I believe, Ohki studied at Union Theological Seminary in New York City. This is the verse wherein the prophet proclaims the Lord God as saying to the people of Israel that the Ethiopians (living at the end of the earth to the kin of the Israelites of Amos' time) are no

different to him than they themselves are. The traditional identification of the Great I Am (Yahweh) as the God of Israel (alone?) is confronted with the prophetic self-critical proclamation of Israel's proper place under God as one alongside the Ethiopians, Philistines, and Syrians. The great event of Hebrew salvation history, the Exodus from Egypt, is "bracketed together with the migrations of other peoples" as equally an expression of sovereign lordship and loving care of the Creator of the whole earth.

Ohki makes use of the Hegelian (cosmic?) interpretive principle of thesis, antithesis, synthesis as a means to categorize and relate the basic elements of his perceptions. He identifies nationalism as constituting the thesis of this historic pattern. He notes that in Japanese history there has existed no structured capacity for self-criticism or self-realization of this force in the life of the nation. The Christian church as the direct heir—in spite of many failures over its long history—of Amos' theological relativization of the world and all its parts before the absolute God of Hebrew prophetic faith, properly constitutes an antithesis to the thesis of nationalism. Ohki sees this nationalism as remaining unbridled apart from a counterthrust (antithesis) to check and correct its excesses. The church, however, should not remain only in the role of antithesis or opposition. Properly it should move into the role of synthesis, which is to move forward, at a higher level (*Aufhebung*), with dynamism and knowledge of the right direction of forward movement. Ohki contrasts this prophetic posture of living by a revealed word(s) of God by which indication of direction as well as empowerment toward movement are given with the existential theology of Rudolf Bultmann. He opts for a theology "with a larger historical perspective" rather than a theology that focuses on making decisions moment by moment, presumably

without adequate perception of the larger picture and of right direction.

The role that Ohki envisages for the church can also be said to participate in a process of "historicization." That is, the theological posture of Amos is that which makes "history" possible, history seen as both concept and practice. For history becomes such only as it is theologically desacralized, which is to deabsolutize both nature and human life by seeing all as phenomena accountable to the living God who is transcendent over all. Ohki's article is a clarion call to the churches of Northeast Asia, indeed to the churches of the world, to fulfill this God-given prophetic role of working toward the "historicization" of the life of their peoples. To work in this role is also to find the authentic selfhood of the church. This is indeed a call that Christians in every land should heed.

RESPONSE TO KURIBAYASHI TERUO

The subtitle of this article, "From a Theology of the Crown of Thorns," identifies the significantly imaged terminology of the author's theology. The article itself is exceedingly well written and well structured. It manifests a high level of theological sophistication, including broad and correct knowledge of contemporary trends in ecumenical theology across the world. The author has perceptive knowledge of both the Bible and church history and writes, from my point of view, with a fine feel for the essence of the Christian gospel. This rich background serves him well as he strives to call the churches of Japan, and of the world, to understand and to help in the broad-scaled liberation of the Burakumin in Japanese society.

The word Burakumin is known to only a few knowledgeable persons outside Japan. There are about 3 million persons who belong to this sociological group in a popula-

tion of about 123 million. They have been outcasts in some measure over the whole of recorded Japanese history, that is for over fifteen hundred years. There has been some speculation that originally there was ethnic as well as socio-economic distinction, although most scholars fail to find evidence for such in either historical sources or genetic studies. We may understand as primarily a gesture toward reconciliation the statement made many years ago by the Japanese Christian evangelist and social reformer Kagawa Toyohiko (d. 1960) that the Burakumin tend to be taller and handsomer than the average Japanese! The author, however, reminds his readers that while the Burakumin are not the only "minority" (he also includes women in this category!) groups discriminated against in Japan, the Burakumin constitute the "best illustration of what oppression means in Japanese society today." He describes this oppression as including "every conceivable brutality" — humiliation, persecution, social and economic marginalization — practiced over long years and under the cover of both public and private policies of silence.

The author tries to address this historic problem and to contribute to its solution by biblically based and prophetically insightful theological analysis. This is analysis, however, that properly leads to praxis. The author cannot be satisfied with theoretical discourse; he desires and calls for resolute action. He uses as his primary tool for both analysis and praxis the biblical theme of liberation. I shall not attempt to repeat here even in summary form the content of the article but confine myself to some evaluative comments.

First, it is important to note that the author distinguishes his use of the term "liberation" from that of the liberation theology currently espoused by numbers of Christian theologians and other believers in Latin

America, Korea, and elsewhere. For one thing, the word *kaihō* (liberation) has been used by the Burakumin themselves for over seventy years. They like the word, however, because they feel it well expresses their need to be liberated from a condition of systemic exclusion from majority Japanese society in terms of both social respect and economic opportunity. The Burakumin are pressing for avenues of self-determination on the basis of properly prideful self-awareness. The author himself stresses (rightly, I believe) that biblical faith-understanding of liberation goes beyond individual-interior transformation of personhood and life style to include the corporate structures of society and their activity.

At this point a marginal comment may be in order with reference to the quoted public declaration made in 1922 by the first modern organization of concerned Burakumin, the *Zenkoku Suiheisha* (The National Levelers Society). This includes statements that their goal is to become "divine" (Dr. Kagawa could refer to "Labor" as divine) and that, on the other hand, the ancestors of the Burakumin continue to groan underground over the mistreatment of their descendants. These are expressions of the kind of worldview that Japanese Christians need to learn to consider—without shock and/or condemnation—if they would overcome historic alienation from the Burakumin communities.

A major contribution of this article is its creative use of the imagery of the "Crown of Thorns" that the *Suiheisha* adopted in their 1922 statement as the messianic symbol of the association's self-awareness and program. This was a symbol chosen in full awareness of its historic associations, even though Christian members were few in number, as the best way to indicate Burakumin perception of their condition of oppression and hope for their liberation. The

author of the article works with this symbol to show that the Burakumin do not wish to use this symbol as imagery of militancy or conquest of others but to enhance fellowship among themselves, solidarity with other marginalized persons, and ultimately reconciliation with their oppressors. This is faith in divine activity at work among the outcasts in Japan. This is faith-understanding of God suffering along with his people but also promising them freedom from that oppression. This freedom is looked for in significant measure on the plane of human history, that is, before physical death or final eschatological transformation of heaven and earth.

The theme of God suffering with his people we may note as a contemporary revival of the patripassion theology known in the early centuries of the Christian church and exemplified within and without Japan by such persons as Katamori Kazoh, Jürgen Moltmann, and others. This author, however, is concerned to see the Crown of Thorns as symbol not only of humiliation but also of exaltation. The cross experienced by Jesus was followed by his resurrection. Kuribayashi sees the symbol as "sign of the divine purpose that redeems history from the effects of human evil." He specifically refuses to go along with the descriptions by the well-known Japanese Roman Catholic novelist Endō Shūsaku of Jesus as "merely meek and docile." Kuribayashi sees this perception as a theological and practical dead end and indeed unfaithful to the biblical understanding of liberation. He perceives the biblical proclamation of new life in Jesus to include the overcoming of suffering and bondage. This is not a call to political revolution by violent means, nor is it a put-down of the role of transformation of interior attitudes and feelings in individuals as part of the Christian experience of salvation. It is perception and proclamation of Jesus, in his

public ministry and as the risen Christ of God, as a "source of strength to break the cause of sufferings." It is a call to concrete human efforts to participate in that cause.

There is, as I see it, a finely balanced, properly nuanced perception of the biblical paradox of suffering and victory in this article. The author sees the Christian gospel as an invitation into the joyful fellowship of the kingdom of God, a reality that touches every human need and works toward both individual and communal transformation. In this way the suffering and oppressed may become the *subjects* of evangelization, not merely victimized objects who at best can only be released from their condition of oppression. The author clearly envisages also a process of evangelization of the churches in Japan, a process in which the Burakumin will properly play a positive part. The problem he sees as much theological as practical, for he claims that Japanese theologians acknowledge only a secondary role to the socio-historical life of Jesus with the oppressed of the world. He has great hope, however, for the churches in Japan for he sees them as chosen by God for great causes.

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MATSUOKA Fumitaka

RESPONSE TO OHKI HIDEO

TIME AND GEOGRAPHICAL distance accord a curious shift in a perspective toward a once-familiar scene. It was nearly fifteen years ago when I participated in a monthly theological colloquium with Professor Ohki in the "Black Forest" of Mitaka. His analytical insights and tightly constructed theological articulations often helped stimulate our discussions held over a bowl of noodles. The article "Theology and Theological Education

in Japan" evidences a further refined construction of Professor Ohki's theological analysis.

His topic is curiously timely for those of us who are engaged in theological education on this side of the Pacific Rim. After a quarter of a century of near silence, a sudden burst of writings in the last decade has produced an original and significant body of ideas and perspectives on theological education in North America. Two noteworthy features of the recent discussion on this subject are that (1) theological education is indeed a form of theological inquiry itself and not merely some technical arrangement of the educational curriculum, and that (2) theological education is a form of Christian practice, or *habitus*, in the words of Edward Farley.

The goal of theological education in Japan as "the establishment of the selfhood of the church" speaks to concerns currently addressed here in North America by those of us engaged in theological education. Professor Ohki talks about the church's ability to relativize itself as its theological task. While his choice of the English word "introspection" connotes a narrowly focused self-critical function of theology, the very self-transcending, and therefore "self-relativizing," nature of theological formulation before the presence of the ultimate God is indeed the central, defining task of theological education. Theology is historically incarnated as much as it is radically open to the transcendent God, thus making the church's prophetic role credible in society. Echoing the

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Niebuhrian realism, Professor Ohki speaks to the heart of theological education.

There has been a long-standing functionalist understanding of church leadership as the organizing principle of theological education. This has been particularly true in North America, perhaps less so in Japan. However, the more directly we pursue the goal of cultivating competence to fill the functions of church leadership, the less likely we are to prepare people to be competent leaders of churches over the long haul. An alternative approach is required—rather than defining the overarching goal of theological education by reference to the functions clergy fill, it needs to be defined as it was before the functionalist addition, by reference to theology. Professor Ohki calls us back to this original task of theological education.

Craig Dykstra speaks of the role churches play in today's world as a viable "community of conviction." In such a community people are related to one another across time and space by a body of convictions, language patterns, and practices that they hold in common. It must last over time to have meaning and to be a historical drama. As one becomes a member of such a community, that drama is adopted as one's own. The story of the founding of the community becomes a part of one's own story. Great events that most clearly illuminate the character of the community become events in one's own history, forming one's own character. Professor Ohki speaks of this "adaptable language-world" (Vincent Winbush in *Stony the Road We Trod*) when he says, "Only with awareness of freedom's historical origin, of how it came to Japan, of its meaning and difficulties, does it become possible to consider how this freedom can be defended and brought to life." (p. 17) What follows this statement, the impact and im-

plications of "freedom" in today's Japan, is a noteworthy insight.

Theological education has to do with an articulation of the convictions of those who have been personally and socially transformed by the "community of conviction." Theological education begins with the understanding and "establishment of the selfhood of the church" reflecting upon what the church is and how it lives in the world. It is the task of those who are committed to theological education to develop the theological insights that can help churches better understand the common, but no less theologically significant, activities that constitute their lives. This is to say, theological education must take Christian formation seriously. As the church exists in a society, which stands today at the "polarity" between the old and new, between continuity and discontinuity, Professor Ohki's call speaks powerfully to the North American scene as well as to today's Japan.

RESPONSE TO KURIBAYASHI TERUO

"Theology in a New Key" is the way Robert McAfee Brown once described articulations of faith that are both discontinuous with the past and at the same time foreshadowing the new. Kuribayashi Teruo's *A Theology of the Crown of Thorns* is such a theology in a "new key." Through this work those who have had no voice will be heard. Those who have been silent can burst forth in speaking and those whose selves have been denied can affirm themselves.

Our initial theological task is to take the voices of Burakumin seriously. Perhaps this task is also one of the initial responses to a series of questions and challenges Kuribayashi poses. Why is an act of listening so important for Christians? Because the Burakumin's suffering is not just a problem, it is a theological problem. And when we hear not only that they are hurting but that

the church is the one who is hurting them, that is not only a theological problem, it is our theological problem, precisely because it is a human problem. The primary contribution of Kuribayashi's *Theology of the Crown of Thorns*, a theology in a new key, is to challenge the churches in Japan to hear those cries and reflect on what Christians — most of whom come from a different place — are to do in response to them. For those who are hurting are Christians' sisters and brothers.

Kuribayashi's social analysis of the place of Burakumin in Japanese society is quite insightful regarding the nature of racism. Burakumin's opposition to "integration" and their opting for "liberation" reveal the heart of the matter. Integrated or assimilated into the dominant culture of Japan, Burakumin would abandon their own selfhood and integrity. Stated simply, the seldom stated but deeply shared need in Japanese society to maintain people of minority status — Burakumin, Koreans, Ainu, Okinawans, and women — in subordination serves to maintain stability and solidarity among the dominant group whose own social and economic status varies widely. As a result, progress in the efforts to gain equality is so hard to achieve and so easy to lose precisely because rights for the minority groups such as Burakumin are always vulnerable to sacrifice to the needs of the majority group. No wonder Burakumin opt for their own liberation and not for integration or assimilation into the wider society.

Perhaps the lesson the church in Japan needs to learn from Burakumin and other people of minority status is to stop "fearing

the good" in themselves and others. This may just constitute one of the greatest, necessary indignities that the church must finally "suffer" for the cure of their racism. In this sense, Kuribayashi's statement that Burakumin are not just the object of evangelization but really the subject of "evangelizing the church from which they received the gospel" is an insightful one.

Kuribayashi's theological treatment of the crown of thorns as "the transformation of the lowest into heaven" is an intriguing one. As he acknowledges, Kim Chi Ha's influence is apparent in Kuribayashi's theology. Both suggest an alternative reading of reality, particularly to the churches in Korea and Japan. Kuribayashi's critique of Endō Shūsaku is not only confined to a popular novelist's perception of faith. It questions the culturally laden worldview of the contemporary Japanese Christian, which is represented by Endō.

Kuribayashi argues for the distinctness of his *Theology of the Crown of Thorns* by disclaiming it as a "mere extension of 'liberation theology' that has become fashionable in the ecumenical world." But similarities with "liberation theology" are more apparent than are the dissimilarities in his writing. Admittedly, it is most condescending to generalize about the different strands in liberation theology, but at least they have this in common: there are certain groups of people who have been denied a voice in society and have been without hope; they now demand a voice and that gives them hope. *A Theology of the Crown of Thorns* helps in the clarity of the voices of the outcast in Japan.