

Editor's Notes

INCULTURATION IS a mission imperative that Christians have struggled to understand and actualize for a long time. There are so many different facets to it—ritual, theological, missional, ecclesiological, ministerial—that it is difficult to know where to begin to examine this key issue of late twentieth-century church praxis. In the 1995 issue of the *Japan Christian Review* we looked at inculturation in the churches of Japan through the phenomenon of internationalization. In the 1996 issue, we again return to the issue but from a variety of other approaches.

Our first article by Stephen Bevans examines the similarities and differences in Catholic-Protestant understandings of inculturation. He begins by delineating the differences in classical Protestant and Catholic treatment of the issue. While these classical approaches describe two distinct “spirits,” Bevans finds that these distinctions are not necessarily operative in the work of present-day Catholic and Protestant theologians. Rather, each approach is implicit in and complements the other. He concludes that several basic theological orientations cut across ecclesial boundaries and that Protestant and Catholic thinkers work out of these orientations rather than the distinct “spirit” of their respective traditions.

Mark Luttio's article on the new Japanese Lutheran funeral rite places a spotlight on the centrality of the rituals of death in Japanese society and the challenge these rituals pose to the churches. He argues that a successfully inculturated funeral rite is “an imperative” for any Christian church

and carefully examines the new Lutheran rite in terms of how it inculturates the celebration of Christian death vis-a-vis Japanese cultural expectations. Whatever the limitations of the new funeral liturgy, Luttio is certain that the churches must continue to grapple with the issue.

Jack Nelson offers an insightful study of the Jehovah's Witnesses in Japan and an indirect look at our theme. Japan has the fifth largest population of Jehovah's Witnesses in the world and in 1996 surpassed the number of Protestants in Japan to become second only to the Roman Catholic Church. Yet, it is not highly accommodated to Japanese society and this presents serious problems for the group. Nelson highlights several key issues for the Witnesses—its relations with other religious groups, blood transfusion and medical treatment, freedom of religion and education, defection of members—and the responses of Japanese society. While the Witnesses' stand on these issues will probably prevent it from gaining widespread acceptance or popularity in Japan, it nevertheless will continue to occupy a secure but marginal place.

John Howes focuses on Protestant internationalism in Japan prior to World War II. He draws our attention to the lives of two prominent prewar Japanese Christians—Nitobe Inazō and Uchimura Kanzō—and their very different ways of coping with international relations in their faith. Whereas Nitobe opted for Japan's accommodation to Western culture, Uchimura demanded “fraternal respect” from Western Christians for Japan's traditions. Both perspectives are

part of the ongoing discourse on the meaning and nature of inculturation today.

The last article in this section presents excerpts from the writings of Kagawa Toyohiko, another prominent, prewar Japanese Protestant. Although Kagawa would not be familiar with the term "inculturation," his familiarity and concern for Japan's social and religious heritage indicate his understanding of the imperative to inculturate Christianity in Japan.

The "Perspective" section offers an illuminating study of Endō Shūsaku's struggle to reconcile East and West by Mark Williams. His nuanced treatment of the main characters in *The Samurai* provides helpful insights into Endō's own personal struggle as well as his perspective on the Western missionary enterprise in Japan.

The analysis of Hasekura's transformation through his encounter with Christianity and Velasco's journey of self-discovery over the course of his missionary journey provides an interesting approach to the theme of East/West reconciliation.

The second article in this section is by T. James Koderia. He describes the struggle of Asian Americans in U.S. society and U.S. churches to assert their rightful place, and articulates a prophetic dimension to their role in the church today.

These articles—thematic and perspective—along with the Book Reviews, Church statistics and Christian Year in Review complete our 1996 journal. We hope that our readers enjoy them.

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