

# The Religious Life of the Japanese

Kagawa Toyohiko

*Kagawa Toyohiko (1888–1960) ranks highest among Japanese Christians—perhaps alongside Uchimura Kanzō—in terms of both his influence throughout Japanese society and the international familiarity his name has come to possess. Many people can recall his having been arrested at least four times, immediately before and during World War II, for his peace sentiments and his open apology to China for Japan’s military invasion. Even more people will associate Kagawa with his herculean efforts to relieve the plight of both urban and rural laborers, beginning with his move while a seminary student to the Shinkawa slums of Kobe in 1909. Upon further reflection, many will also note Kagawa’s leading roles in widespread evangelistic campaigns (not unrelated to his so-called “social work”): both the “Kingdom of God Movement” of the early 1930s and the postwar “Christ for All-Japan” campaign, for example, were spearheaded by this indefatigable reformer and preacher.*

*Among Kagawa’s numerous writings, his poetic reflections amidst the struggle of poverty and his theological treatises on the importance of Christian social compassion are perhaps best known. What some readers may not know is that Kagawa also wrote about what could be termed more historical matters. The breadth of Kagawa’s concerns for Japan’s social and religious history can be seen in the materials gathered together here by Hazel Terhune. These excerpts from Kagawa’s *Christ and Japan*, translated and published in English in 1934, will sharpen and teach anew any reader interested in the long and multifaceted heritages undergirding Japan’s complex religious makeup. Kagawa’s sympathies for both the Christian faith and more traditionally Japanese religions do not prevent him from offering critical remarks about either. Whether or not then one fully agrees with all of the assertions included below, the contemporary reader will be stimulated afresh to match Kagawa’s integrity and familiarity with regards to the numerous religious traditions that live on into these days of the later twentieth century.*

—J. Nelson Jennings

## RELIGIOUS TOLERANCE

IN JAPAN, primitive Shinto, the teachings of Buddha and the Analects of Confucius are ranged side by side. In the homes they are accepted without any discord by every member of the household. When a child is

born it is taken to the tutelary Shinto shrine for dedication. When the aged die they are buried according to Buddhist rites. Children on entering school show respect to their teachers in accordance with Confucian-inspired formulas and learn the way of life cast in the Confucian mold. For some unex-

plainable reason the Japanese from ancient times have had a strong dislike for exclusive religious intolerance.

When Buddhism was first introduced in 551 A.D. from China through Korea, it clashed with Shinto. But Kōbō Daishi and Saichō, fathers of the Buddhist faith in Japan, basing their view on a theory of the manifestation of reality, taught that the Shinto gods were incarnations of the Great Buddha. In course of time Shinto was thus absorbed into the Buddhist system and, down to the Meiji Restoration in 1867, a period of about 1,300 years, there was no distinction between Shinto and Buddhism.

Had Christianity recognized the points of merit in Japanese Buddhism and not taken such a firm and uncompromising attitude, the latter faith would have reciprocated by treating Christianity as a revelation of one of the gods of the pantheistic pantheon and Christ as one of the gods of mercy. In a Buddhist temple in the city of Kobe the figure of Christ is actually worshiped under the title of Christ the god of Mercy. There are also instances where Buddhist temples celebrate Christ's birthday, calling the occasion Buddhist Christmas.

The Zen sect is the most tolerant religious group. Its believers are not image worshipers. Since they belong to the Hegelian school of pantheists—rather because they believe in a more mystical type of pantheism—they never speak ill of Christ. They insist on thorough-going tolerance. It is difficult to know whether this spirit of tolerance is inherent in the Zen system or whether it is an instinctive characteristic of the Japanese people. Be that as it may, Japanese who are nurtured in the Zen philosophy are exceedingly tolerant.

The Zen sect, without any compunction whatever, opens its temples for meetings under Christian auspices. This is not because of any feeling that Christianity is a superior religion. Neither are they moved by a sense of super-respect. They believe

that Christianity is an integral part of their total system of belief and that Christ is but one of the Amida Buddhas. The Shinto revival that took place in the eighteenth century, within the Tokugawa period, was greatly influenced by the theology of the Roman Catholic Church and the philosophical conception of theocracy imported from Holland. Such predominant figures as Atsutane Hirata looked upon the ruler of Japan as the unique son of the God of heaven and earth, while Shinyen Satō, a famous scholar, identified the God of Christianity with the Ame-no-Minaka-Nushi of the *Nihongi*. They set up the theory that the Tokugawa Shogunate ought to be overthrown because the Emperor and not the Shogun was the true son of God. The Meiji Revolution was initiated by the controversy over this political theory of Theocracy. There was a time early in the Meiji Restoration when the chief ritualist, who officiated at the worship of this God of the universe, was given a rank above that of the prime minister of his day.

#### JAPANESE BUDDHISM AND CHRISTIANITY

There are Japanese scholars who believe that when Kōbō Daishi, the founder of the Shingon sect, visited China he was greatly influenced by Nestorian Christianity which had been brought to China in the seventh century by missionaries who pressed eastward from Persia over the ancient trade routes through Central Asia. This may be true. Although Buddhism was atheistic in its origin the emphasis on the place and power of prayer in this faith started with the rise of the Shingon sect. How did prayer come to have a place in Buddhism? It can be asserted, without any fear of contradiction, that this is a direct result of the Nestorian influence. There are sections of Genesis incorporated in the Shingon system of doctrine. This makes it difficult to doubt that it came under Christian influence when Kōbō

Daishi visited China during the Tang dynasty.

This spirit of prayer spread from the Shingon sect to other branches of Buddhism. Today all of them have prayer and worship as a part of their regular ritual. In this respect they now resemble Christianity. It is a clear contradiction, but Buddhism, which started as an atheistic system, changed to pantheism. Then pantheistic Buddhism changed to a belief in Amida Buddha—the infinite—which is a close approximation to monotheism. Thus an impersonal absolute is treated as a personality and has become the object of prayer. The fact that the Nestorian influence of thirteen hundred years also still survives in the Buddhist temples in the form of prayer impresses me not only with the influence of Christianity but, even more, with the profound way in which the psychology of prayer is implanted in the human heart.

The philosophical Buddhism, which during the Nara period found an entrance among the upper classes of Japan, did not, however, become the faith of the common people. It took Buddhism fully two hundred years to shed its Chinese characteristics and become thoroughly Japanized. During this period Buddhism imported from China taught the people philosophy and culture. In this way the hitherto barbarian Japanese learned the way of meditation and philanthropy.

#### THE ACTIVE SHIN AND NICHIREN SECTS

At the present time the Shin and Nichiren sects are the most virile Buddhist bodies in Japan. The Zen sect, because of its meditative and ascetic features, does not appeal to the masses. The Shingon sect has degenerated into a religion of pilgrimages and has lost its moral influence. The Tendai sect, because of its extreme mysticism, has lost touch with the people.

In what, then, does the power of the Shin sect lie? It is to be found in its fascinating

tenet of salvation by faith. It firmly believes that there is no sinner, be he or she ever so bad, but will be saved through the benevolence of Amida Buddha.... It is a deplorable fact, however, that because this sect, until recently, taught that Buddha would save, regardless of the moral aspects of right and wrong, every house of prostitution, while reciting *Namu-Amida-Butsu*, the sect's prayer formula, has kept right on with its vice.

It must be admitted that both Japanese Shinto and Buddhism lag far in the rear when it comes to emphasizing the moral aspects of religious education.... Thus Japan's religions, whose avowed purpose is to save men from vice, on the contrary take the form of tolerating it and postpone salvation from sin until the world beyond. This is a most lamentable matter.

#### INFLUENCE OF CHRISTIAN THEOLOGY ON SHINTO

Japanese Shinto has no system of theology. Whatever theological content it possesses has been largely borrowed from Christianity. The various sects of Shinto, such as the more ancient Kurozumi sect, and those originating in comparatively recent times, such as Tenrikyō, Konkokyō and Ōmoto-kyō, have been greatly influenced by Christian ideas and ideals.

Some years ago a young Konkokyō believer applied for the right to circulate one of my Christian pamphlets among the followers of this Shinto sect. Permission was given. A few months later this booklet appeared in a new dress, bearing this youth's name as author, but with its contents word for word as I had written it. In this form it was widely circulated among the believers of the Konkokyō and other Shinto groups. Such instances are not rare. To this daring degree does Shinto borrow its theology from Christianity.

The people of Japan, however, always keen on preserving things of value, will dis-

cover that Japanese Christians take second place to none in their eagerness to conserve the nation's historical traditions. For instance, it was Christians who promoted the movement to preserve the traditional relics of Ninigi-no-Mikoto, the grandson of Ama-Terasu-O-Mikami. If Christians give evidence that they also have a high appreciation of Japan's past and its culture, it will help non-Christians to understand the true spirit of the Christian faith.

#### SHINTO AS A RACIAL RELIGION

On the other hand, religious Shinto is definitely a religion. It spread over the Empire with tremendous rapidity. There are those who wonder why Christianity does not take root in the same rapid way. But that would be an unreasonable expectation.

When a Japanese turns his attention to Christianity the first deterring factors that assail his mind are the Amakusa and Shimabara rebellions plotted by the Roman Catholics during the Tokugawa Shogunate. There is also the lurking fear that the adoption of a foreign faith will result in one's nation and its territory being lost to a foreign power. Moreover, the Bible, having been written some two thousand years ago, has passages which, at first reading, convey the impression of not gearing into the life of present-day Japan. These are some of the things which the student of religious forces will find standing in the way of the progress of Christianity in Japan.

As compared with this, the deities of religious Shinto are worshiped not only in Shinto but by practically all Buddhist families. To become a Shinto believer, therefore, is simply a question of a more whole-souled devotion. It is not a matter of belief in something absolutely new. Faith in Shinto means merely a sort of religious renaissance, a return to Japan's traditional and historical past. Especially does such a Shinto sect as Tenrikyō appeal to the tradi-

tion-loving Japanese, because it took its rise from Yamato, a place which figures in Japanese history as the region first subjugated by Jimmu Tennō, the first Emperor.

Such Shinto sects as Tenrikyō, Kurozumikyō and Konkokyō originated not as moral movements but simply from a desire to find physical healing through the help of religion. It is utterly futile, therefore, to expect that, as a result of the rapid spread of these sects, religious or moral revolutions will occur, world peace will be promoted and economic reforms will be realized.

For this reason there should not be and cannot be any comparison of the spread of Christianity with such religions as these. It is as difficult for a Japanese to become a Christian as it is for a Brahman. Moreover, it takes time to comprehend the fact that the Christianity which plotted the Shimabara rebellion was not real Christianity, and that real Christianity is that of Christ. Furthermore, belief in such a religion as Tenrikyō does not necessarily commit man to participation in anti-prostitution and temperance movements. Compare this with the demand made of the Christian: a new birth which issues in a reborn conscience and the dedication of body, soul and spirit to God. Many falter when they face the difficulties of the Christian way. These Shinto sects, however, do have and teach a strong sense of loyalty and filial piety. Their adherents are ardent nationalists. Beyond this they do not go.

#### THE SECTS OF SHINTO

The modern revival of Shinto is the most significant social phenomenon of today. The same thing occurred at the time of the Meiji Restoration. As Hegel defended Frederick the Great from the standpoint of pantheistic absolutism, so Dr. Y. Kakehi, a Japanese philosopher of the Hegelian school, synthesizing Hegel's philosophy and Shinto teachings has produced a new apologetic for

Shinto. The Japanese Fascists have eagerly appropriated this apologetic, and out of it has emerged a militant Shinto.... In this Hegelian, nationalistic religion there is no element of a new moral renovation. It is simply ancient Shinto fighting under a new apologetic, largely dialectical in content.

Over against this revival, however, stands the indisputable fact that as the natural sciences advance, the faith of the people is drifting more and more away from this shrine-centered culture. This is especially true of the young people.... Their gestures of respect for these shrines are made as a result of compulsion rather than of personal initiative.

The Tenrikyō sect of Shinto has instituted a system of pledging its followers to dedicate labor as a substitute for money. It is a stirring sight to witness this system in operation. At Tamba Ichi, in Yamato, where the sect has its head temple, there are hospices accommodating tens of thousands of people. There the believers assemble by the thousands and, dressed in laboring clothes, perform various kinds of manual toil as their contribution to the cause. Contrast this with the way in which the Christian church treats its fellows in the faith who come in from the country districts. Not even a night's lodging is offered. Christian doctrine may be ever so perfect, but unless there is actual sharing of our possessions with the people around us they will be fascinated and won by the way in which Tenrikyō believers put their preaching into practice.

Christianity introduced from the West, because of its individualism, fails to understand the group life of the Japanese. This failure has greatly retarded Christian progress in this land. The parents of an eminent actress were murdered by burglars. A Christian pastor called after hearing about this tragedy. He entered very formally by the front entrance and endeavored to comfort her with the tenets of his faith. A

Tenrikyō believer also called. She entered by the back door, cleaned up the kitchen and brought order out of the chaos caused by the incident. The outcome was that this actress espoused the Tenrikyō faith. Her reason in interesting. She declared, "Christian teaching is sublime but too difficult for me to grasp. The Tenrikyō believer was kind, not over-dignified, and friendly, so I accepted her faith." The Protestantism introduced into Japan from Europe was strongly intellectualized and over-emphasized its theology. This left a gap between Christianity and the uneducated masses. There is danger therefore of it becoming merely the religion of the intelligentsia, a minority group.

Konkokyō is another popular Shinto sect. It has an especially large following in the city of Osaka.... The term Konko literally means "glittering gold," and a superstition prevails that the followers of this faith will be master moneymakers. It therefore makes a tremendous appeal to the people of this teeming, throbbing, commercial and industrial center.

Ōmotokyō, another popular Shinto sect, attempts to harmonize Shinto and Christianity. It has adopted and adapted Christian eschatology and has a prophetic strain. It captures the imagination and the following of the people by foretelling such upheavals as the periodically recurring earthquakes and other natural calamities.

#### THE SCHOOLS OF CONFUCIAN THOUGHT

Three hundred years ago Japan had three schools of ethical teaching. One was called the Shushi school. It enjoyed the patronage of the Tokugawa Shogunate. It was exceedingly rationalistic and made reason the fundamental principle of the universe. Another, the Oyomei school, made the will central and emphasized behavior. The third school was called the Classical school. It made the spirit central, emphasized the

purification of the emotions and stressed fidelity. This had a large following among the free-lance samurai of that day. The Forty-Seven Ronin, famed in song and story, belonged to this school. (This is a story of feudal days, in which forty-seven loyal retainers avenged the murder of their feudal lord and then followed him into the spirit world by voluntarily committing harakiri.)

Hayashi Ranzan was the leader of the Shushi school and taught a political morality in support of the Tokugawa regime. The Japanese Oyomei school was greatly influenced by Wang Yang-ming, a Chinese idealistic writer of the Ming dynasty. I am, however, fully convinced that this school also came under the influence of the Jesuits who pioneered their way into China during the Ming dynasty.

The father of the Japanese Oyomei school was Toju Nakae. In his *Doctrine of Deus* he definitely declares his faith in the fatherhood of one god who is infinite and absolute. Dr. Tetsujiro Inoue, one of Japan's philosophers, insists that this conception was Nakae's own discovery. I cannot accept this view. It is said that Nakae, until he was thirty-nine years of age, absented himself from all of Japan's shrines. At thirty-nine he paid his first homage at the Great Shrine of Ise.

Why this disinclination to worship at the Shinto shrines? It was undoubtedly the result of Christian influence. He came under the influence of the Christian retainer of Chokusai Nakata whose master, the famous general Yukinaga Konishi, met a martyr's death at Kyoto because of his Christian faith. When the Tokugawa Shogunate decreed a persecution against the Christians, Nakae resigned his government position, retired to Lake Biwa and devoted himself to educational pursuits.

Fear of persecution led him to express his Christian convictions in the terminology of the Oyomei school. His great disciple, Banzan Kumazawa, came under suspicion of

the Tokugawa authorities and was imprisoned in his own home for seven years until his death. He also was greatly drawn to Christianity. Heaven, the idea which Nakae and his school made central in their system, and which to the Japanese mind signifies the fundamental principle of the universe, became the force which finally overthrew the Tokugawa Shogunate.

The great leaders of the Meiji Restoration, such as Takamori Saigō and Shoin Yoshida, belonged to the Oyomei school of thought. Many of this school accepted the Christian faith. Men like Shonan Yokoi and Keiyu Nakamura, outstanding patriots and scholars of that restoration period, believed in a personal, monotheistic god and opened the way towards Christianity for the patriots of that day.

#### CHRISTIANITY AND MODERN CONFUCIANISM

The founder of the Classical school of Japanese Confucianism was Soko Yamaka. This school also produced a long line of eminent men. They were greatly influenced by Dutch culture. Jinsai Itō, a member of this school, interpreted the Confucian conception of benevolence in a way strongly resembling the Christian conception of love. It is a real possibility that Itō received his insight into the Christian idea of love from the Dutch traders who frequented Japan at that time. According to the tradition of his family, Itō hid himself in a warehouse for two weeks and studied Christianity with Dutch Christians as his teachers. Soko Yamaka was the teacher of Yoshio Oishi, the central figure of the Forty-Seven Ronin. His descendants have all been Christians and from them have come some of Japan's most effective Christian pastors.

The Shushi school, enjoying the patronage of the Tokugawa regime, was naturally anti-Christian. Therefore, had it not been for the presence in Tokyo of the Oyomei school and its scholars, it is a question

whether Christianity could have won the place it holds today in the capital. Tokyo has almost two hundred churches. This cannot be paralleled anywhere else in the Empire. The fact that this is largely due to the apologetics put forth by the daring scholars of the Confucian Oyomei school makes one marvel at the on-going influence of thought currents.

#### THE INFLUENCE OF NINOMIYA

Sontoku Ninomiya did not belong to any of these schools of thought, but he was a great sage. In 1832, when famine swept the provinces adjacent to Tokyo, he threw himself into an effort to save the six hundred villages involved. His was a noble personality. Among his sayings are an astonishing number of utterances which in their sublimity approach those of Jesus. Doubtless, however, he was greatly influenced by the conceptions and words of men like Toju Nakae and Banzan Kumazawa who had come under Christian influence.... It is an interesting fact that at the town of Kakegawa, where all his writings are preserved, was organized the first industrial cooperative in Japan.

#### THE POPULARIZATION OF CULTURAL MOVEMENTS

When Confucianism had declined and Buddhist authority began to wane, Christianity became the religion of the Japanese

intelligentsia. There was, however, no force to guide the moral life of the milling masses. In order to supply this need various ethical movements for the masses were launched. The dominant spirits in these movements were Christians.

With a view to popularizing these cultural movements the leaders did not adopt an out-and-out Christian platform, but synthesized the ethical teachings of the different religions and endeavored in this way to give moral leadership to the masses. Today, this innovation has crystallized in such moral culture organizations as the "Shuyo Dan" (the Culture Association), "Kibosha" (The Hope Society), the "Seinen Dan" (The Young Men's Association), and the "Shojo Kai" (the Young Women's Society).

These organizations can justly be charged with being superficial. Yet they are making a real contribution towards furthering ethical and moral culture in a manner harmonious with the Oriental genius. It is a matter of regret that these movements lack a more international outlook and that, from time to time, the reactionary nationalist wing attempts to utilize them in accomplishing its ends; but, in the main, they are walking in the way of the golden mean.

[Excerpted from *Christ and Japan*. Translated by William Axling. New York: Friendship Press, 1934. London: Student Christian Movement Press, 1934, pp. 72-103.]