

Asians in American Society and Church

Their Struggle and Calling

T. James Kodera

HISTORICAL CONTEXT

OVER A CENTURY HAS PASSED since Asians first sailed to the shores of North America. Although the 1990 United States Census showed that Asians represented the largest percentile population increase in the decade of the 1980s, the plight of Asians in the United States is a reminder, often painful, of the political, economic and social realities on both sides of the Pacific. The first wave of Asians that came to America was of humble stock, people from poor farming and fishing villages of southern China, Japan and the Philippines. Many came to the islands of Hawaii, then a protectorate of the United States, to work as indentured servants on sugarcane or pineapple plantations.

Many of their employers were the children and grandchildren of New England missionaries. "They came to Hawaii to do good but their descendants ended up doing well" is an accurate description of the ironic turn of events. Other Asians came to the West Coast of the U.S. mainland to join the frontier society. Chinese coolies worked on the railroads as the frontier expanded its network of trade. Without them, the great railroad tycoons could not have realized their ambition of spanning the continent. Japanese immigrants worked as hired farm laborers and gardeners in the arid semi-desert climate of California. Sooner or later, however, many became urban dwellers as laun-

derers, restaurant workers, domestic servants and seamstresses. Such menial work kept them at the bottom of American society, then a far cry from being the land of opportunity for all. Asians' economic standing hardly enabled them to return triumphantly to their homelands, as most had originally hoped.

Through diligence and patience, the situation of Asians slowly began to change. Hired workers became farmers with their own modest plots of land. Some became owners of neighborhood shops and restaurants. The successful second-generation Asians were soon viewed more as a threat than as hardworking new Americans. Fear of the "Yellow Peril" served as justification for a series of anti-Asian ordinances. Asians could no longer buy land or marry Caucasians. For nearly three decades until 1952, Asian immigrants were not allowed to become citizens of the United States. Shortly after the bombing of Pearl Harbor, persons of Japanese ancestry on the West Coast, including those who were citizens by virtue of birth in the U.S., were sent to relocation centers (detention camps) under the executive order of one of the most beloved American presidents, Franklin Delano Roosevelt.

To the American people, the U.S. victory over Japan in World War II vindicated their domestic policies against the Japanese. Yet the most highly decorated of all

American units during the war was a regiment consisting entirely of Japanese-American soldiers that fought in Italy. For some Americans, such valor dispelled the allegations of disloyalty to or sabotage of the United States—two suspected sentiments the government hoped leading intellectuals would interpret as justification for its internment of Japanese and Japanese-Americans. The historian H. S. Commager, for one, found no evidence to prove either charge.

War was the catalyst for subsequent Asian immigration to the United States, as well as to other Western countries. The Korean War, the Vietnam War and the civil wars that continue in southeast Asia have brought hordes of new immigrants, many as refugees, seeking asylum in the United States. It has proven to be, for many of them, "the land of freedom." The welcoming of refugees marked a turning point from systematic exclusion to guarded acceptance, from suspicion to generosity toward Asian peoples. Churches were among the sponsors of the helpless Vietnamese, Cambodians, Laotians and Hmong.

The valiant effort to survive in their war-ravaged homelands left the refugees physically and psychologically drained and woefully unprepared to start a new life. But Americans were so moved by the newcomers' stories of survival in the old country, as well as in the new, that the refugees came to be hailed as a "model minority." After a few years in a wholly new environment, some of the immigrants and refugees emerged as leading students in high schools and colleges, along with Asian youth born in the U.S.

Although "model minority" seemed flattering to some Asians, it proved to be a highly problematic term. It ignored the fact that many Asians, especially new immigrants, continued to languish on the lower rungs of American society, doing menial jobs, living in crowded quarters in the nation's urban centers and struggling to

learn English and other basic tools for survival. The label is also an implied condemnation of other minorities in the United States such as African-Americans, Hispanics and Native Americans: Why can't you be like the Asians? But most troublesome is that the accolade was accorded because Asian-Americans did not speak out, stand up or create discord in the larger society to assert their Asian identity. From the standpoint of the white majority, who still held the reins of power, although the Asians had endeavored to adopt their values and life style, they were still not quite white. Though exemplary students of white, European-American society, the white majority knew Asians could never become white. This accounts for the fact that while, individually, many Asians have become somewhat successful in the white-dominated society, as a group they continue to have no power or unified voice to reflect their distinct identity as Asians.

Although Asians from many countries have been grouped together in the United States as if they were one nationality, they, especially immigrants, have not functioned as one group whose members mutually assist one another. Powerful barriers have set one Asian group apart from, if not against, another. Contributing factors include not only the dizzying number of languages, cultures and religions but also past memories that do not fade. Animosity still exists between people from North Korea and South Korea, between the Tamils and the Sinhalese, and among the Hindus, the Muslims and the Sikhs; Cambodian and Laotian refugees still remember the brutality of the Thai police.

One of the most vivid memories is colonial Japan's oppression of other Asians, particularly of the Korean people. Ever since warlord Toyotomi Hideyoshi sent troops to invade the Korean Peninsula in 1592, Japan has oppressed and exploited Korea. With its annexation of the country in 1910, the

entire Korean Peninsula became a colony of Japan. During World War II, Korean women, some as young as twelve, were shipped to the war front as *jogun ianfu* (forced military prostitutes called "comfort women"). It is now known that at least fifteen percent of those who died in Hiroshima when the atomic bomb was dropped on August 6, 1945, were Korean laborers who had been brought to Japan against their will to work in the nearby naval factory. To date, however, the Korean victims have yet to be commemorated inside *Heiwa Kōen* (Peace Park). The memorial to the Korean victims stands in a tiny lot along a busy street outside the spacious park; except for Korean visitors, few from Japan or abroad visit the little-known monument. Overcrowdedness has been the official explanation for the exclusion of the Koreans inside Peace Park.

The official excuse was nullified, however, when a stone inscription of a prayer by former Prime Minister Nakasone was erected in the park without difficulty. The action unleashed the hurt and indignation of the Korean people. Similarly, the Atomic Museum inside the park includes all five languages used at the United Nations, but not Korean. To some, this is a painful reminder of Japan's efforts at "internationalization" (*kokusaika*), which only perpetuates Japan's condescension to its Asian neighbors. A reprieve came in November 1993 when Prime Minister Hosokawa publicly acknowledged in Kyongju, South Korea, that World War II was for Japan a "war of aggression" (*shinryaku sensō*). Even as recently as March 1994, however, Nagasaki continued to refuse even to issue death certificates, much less return the remains, of Korean victims of the atomic bomb dropped on that city three days after Hiroshima.

In the United States, improved education and advancement of Asian countries in world trade and politics have made it possible for the general public to realize that

Asians are not necessarily one indistinguishable mass of people. The realization is not based simply on the glaring discrepancies between the "model Americans" and the recent immigrants and refugees from Asia. Asian studies are now an integral part of the curriculum at all levels of American education from elementary school to graduate school, a natural response to the fact that the Pacific has replaced the Atlantic as the central stage of international interchange, economically and culturally. The West Coast today is no longer on the fringe of American society, which once habitually turned toward the East Coast for both older and newer models. The West Coast is now closer to the center of the global human community than the East Coast. The State of California has become the harbinger of the future with the fastest and the most diversified growth of economy and population in the nation. By the turn of the century, four out of five new Californians will be either Hispanic or Asian.

The latest stage of Asian experience in the United States again involves a crisis. Violence against Asians has risen sharply across the country. The symbolic beginning of the present stage was the murder in the 1980s of Vincent Chin, a Chinese-American engineer from California. While on a business trip to Detroit, he was mistaken for a Japanese national by two white men, father and son, who blamed lost jobs in the automobile industry on market inroads by Japanese companies. When they saw Chin dining in a restaurant, they called him out, chased him and eventually beat him to death with a baseball bat, under the assumption that any Asian in Detroit was an enemy of America. When the father and son were acquitted in Detroit, Asian Americans became publicly irate. The retrial was held in Cincinnati, supposedly to ensure fairness, but the sentence was a modest fine without a jail term.

Asians have been the targets of violence countless times since. In 1992 a Japanese high school student was shot on his way to a Halloween party when he approached the wrong house. The incident and the Louisiana jury's unanimous acquittal of the alleged assailant were well-publicized in Japan. It is entirely possible to view the rise of anti-Asian violence as a direct result of resentment toward the prosperity of some Asian nations, particularly Japan, and toward successful Asian Americans. The disproportionately large portion of Asian students in the most selective U.S. institutions of higher learning would seem to justify this interpretation.

Although they comprise just four percent of the population, Asians comprise over ten percent of the undergraduate population at most of the Ivy League schools. At the Massachusetts Institute of Technology and at Stanford, one third of the undergraduates are Asian, and at the University of California, Berkeley, one half; at many graduate schools, the majority of science and engineering students are Asian. These facts provide ample reason for resentment. In the minds of many, Asians have replaced the Jews as the high achievers in American society. The determination of both groups is attributed to the highly developed work ethic of their respective religious and cultural backgrounds, namely, Judaism and Confucianism. Some even suggest their superior native intelligence. Few, however, mention the long history of persecution that both Jews and Asians have endured in American society.

THE PLACE OF ASIANS IN AMERICAN CHURCHES

On the one hand, Asia has emerged as a major center of Christendom in the twentieth century. The centers of Christian population and influence during the century have shifted from Western Europe and

North America to Latin America, Africa and Asia. Today roughly two-thirds of Roman Catholics in the world are Latin Americans; more than one half of all Anglicans are black Africans. Archbishop Jaime Sin of Manila led the heavily Roman Catholic Philippines in criticizing Ferdinand Marcos' regime and supporting Corazon Aquino's presidency. The growing influence of Christianity in Korea, particularly of the Presbyterian Church, is known to anyone concerned with the future of Protestantism. The largest local Christian church of any denomination in the world is an Assemblies of God church in Seoul with 600,000 members and a team of ministers who conduct services all day Sunday. Presbyterian seminaries in the United States, particularly in Princeton, New Jersey, and Berkeley, California, have enrolled large numbers of Korean and Korean American students.

In the metropolitan New York area, Korean Christians established an interdenominational Protestant seminary to serve the growing number of Korean-speaking Christians. A few years ago the Pacific School of Religion in Berkeley, California, considered only Asians for the position of dean—a symbolic gesture of their resolve to become a leader in the twenty-first century, which school leaders as well as Arnold Toynbee consider to be Asia's century.

The institution of the church, however, remains largely as it has been. The top leadership positions continue to be occupied by white males of a particular background and thinking. This is especially true of the Episcopal Church. At present, Asian clergy with an immigrant background—those who speak Asian languages—serve only Asian congregations that are either bilingual or largely other language-speaking. American-born Asian clergy, who typically have little or no facility in their ancestral languages, have little, if any, involvement in Asian congregations.

Most Asian congregations in the Episcopal Church have a "mission" status, as they are unable to support themselves financially. Of those with a historical connection with Japanese and Japanese-American communities, only two—St. Mary's in Los Angeles and St. Peter's in Seattle—have "parish" status. And yet both face severe crises ahead. Following the recent departure of the beloved, Canadian-born Japanese-American who served for twenty-five years as rector, St. Peter's has been in a prolonged state of soul-searching, trying to redefine its identity. The members are almost totally English-speaking, although it is located in the heart of the "international district" where Asian immigrants were placed, regardless of cultural background.

The church must discover how to minister to newer Asian groups, such as the Vietnamese, and at the same time modify the church's historic Japanese identity to develop a more pluralistic and yet Asian identity. The interim rector appointed by the presiding bishop has no background and seemingly no interest in Asian concerns; his presence is stalling, if not stifling, the progress of the parish's inner journey. Except for a small but farsighted parish-based ministry to Cambodians, the diocese has allowed the decline of all other Asian ministries. Seattle has one of the oldest Asian communities—the first Japanese immigration—in the continental United States. The Diocese of Olympia's apparent neglect of Asians in their midst is disquieting.

St. Mary's, the other church with parish status, is located in an area of Los Angeles once heavily populated by working-class *nisei* and *sansei* (first- and second-generation sons and daughters of Japanese immigrants) who have now moved to prosperous, integrated suburban communities. The area around the church has since become a crime-ridden neighborhood of largely

Mexican laborers that borders Korea Town in south-central Los Angeles. The children and grandchildren of the *issei* (Japanese immigrants) have become well assimilated into the English-speaking American society and feel, if anything, only nostalgia for the Japan of their grandparents and great grandparents.

The widening gulf between the older and younger generations is more than linguistic and cultural. What separates them decisively is the historic reality of the internment camp experience to which Japanese Americans were subjected from 1942 to 1945. St. Mary's stained glass windows depict the desolation of its parishioners' camp experience. The church's first two rectors—John Yamazaki, Sr. and John, Jr.—had both been interned. With the coming of the third rector, a native of Japan, the old Meiji (1868–1912) and Taishō (1912–26) Japan and contemporary Japan openly clashed. To St. Mary's senior leadership the young pastor's lack of camp experience was a major detriment. The parish welcomed as its fourth rector a white woman, a native of Los Angeles with experience as a lay missionary in Africa. She has helped shape a vision of the future that does not confine St. Mary's to its memory of the past. The present success places St. Mary's well on its course as a vibrant, urban, multiethnic parish. Its pluralistic self-identity is decidedly American, with English as the common language. Though traditional Japanese dance continues to be a popular parish activity, the congregation is not merely a transitional, immigrant community.

Other Episcopal churches that have served Japanese immigrants are struggling financially, while at the same time groping for an identity. After they were released from internment camps, Japanese-Americans flocked to certain areas of the country to begin a second life. That is how small Japanese mission churches were established in places other than Hawaii and the

West Coast. As issei and nisei died and their offspring assimilated into the larger American society, the membership of the churches inevitably declined, in turn forcing many of them to close their doors. Therefore, the Japanese mission churches in the dioceses of Minnesota, Nebraska and Chicago no longer exist.

The struggle and decline of churches with historic Japanese identity are, however, unique among Asian Episcopal churches. Other Asian churches have more or less grown in direct proportion to the number of new Asian immigrants to the United States. According to the 1990 United States Census, all Asian groups except the Japanese increased during the decade of the 1980s. The demographic argument alone cannot explain why Japanese churches struggle to exist while churches of other ethnic groups continue to grow. Another influential factor is the history of Christianity in Asia since the sixteenth century, when the Jesuits went to India, China and Japan as the first Christian missionaries to Asia.

THE HISTORY OF CHRISTIANITY IN ASIA

No other Asian country made the concerted effort of Tokugawa Japan to stifle the mission initiatives of the time. Even after freedom of religion was constitutionally mandated following the Meiji Restoration in 1868, Christianity remained a foreign element in the Japanese social climate. In modern Japan, Christianity may be an important subject of general education but there is a sustained resistance to Christianity as an object of faith and social reform. In a recent study, Professor Teshirogi of Ferris Women's College in Yokohama argues that many of the songs taught in elementary schools during the past century were originally composed by Christian missionaries in the Meiji period at the request of Mori Arinori, then Minister of Education. Japanese verses were added to

transform Christian music into something appropriately secular and Japanese. Among his examples are *Usagi oishi*, *Tan tan tanuki*, *Sumidagawa* and *Aogeba totoishi*. Today the quintessential Japanese intellectual knows the cultural manifestations of Christianity but displays blissful, if not naive, neglect of its faith tradition. The art and literary works of Michelangelo and Bach, Dante and Milton, Dostoevski and Kierkegaard are widely appreciated in Japan but not as yearnings for and expressions of faith.

Once reduced to a cultural heritage and object of learning, Christianity is harmless. Christianity as a faith, on the other hand, is a potential threat to the social stability that Japanese leaders since the Tokugawa period have zealously pursued and maintained. Uchimura Kanzō's *Mukyōkai* (non-church Christianity) was an attempt to reverse the historic attitude toward Christianity. He sought to preserve only the Christian faith without the cultural and institutional trappings. "Crucifixiology" (*jūjikakyō*) is Uchimura's term for Christianity as an object of faith without the burden of the institutionalized church.

Christianity has been accorded a secure place on the fringe of modern Japanese society, where it is safely categorized as part of what is considered "Western." Protestant seminaries, in particular, accept as definitive the works of Western European and North American theologians, especially Barth, and rarely consider Asian theological works. By choice, Japanese Protestantism remains under German captivity. It is not an exaggeration to suggest that Japanese Christians live in an artificially controlled environment, in much the same way that Westerners in the late Tokugawa period lived within the confines of the foreign settlement on the island of Deshima in Nagasaki Bay, connected to the mainland only by a tightly controlled bridge. Apart from isolated exceptions such as Endō

Shūsaku, no systematic, sustained or credible effort has been made to incorporate Christianity as a religion into Japanese culture and society. Japanese Christians appear content to live in seclusion within Japan. The handful of *kakure kirishitan* (clandestine Christians) who remain on the Gōtō islands and a few other remote places near Nagasaki and such obscure indigenous movements as *Genshi Kirisutokyō* seem to isolate themselves in defiance against the hostile outside world. Internal accountability alone offers little hope for the validation of Christianity in a pluralistic society, to say nothing of its ability to transform the larger society.

Many Japanese Christians are ignorant about the native religious traditions of Japan; some even consider themselves Western in mind-set and life style. Thus the Christian version of the Tokugawa policy of self-imposed isolationism (*sakoku*) continues, which accounts for an otherwise puzzling phenomenon of modern Japan: over ten percent of the Japanese population attend "mission schools" founded by missionaries or their Japanese converts but the number of Christians remains well below one percent.

Christianity is not the only religion that was expediently changed into a safe repository of culture in Japan. Peasant uprisings (*ikki ikki*), instigated by the True Pure Land Buddhists (*Jōdo Shinshū*), greatly added to the social turmoil that even the mighty warlords of the time could do little to squelch. Neither Oda Nobunaga nor Hideyoshi (1585–98) could counter their campaigns for reform. The Tokugawa Shogunate's ingenious solution was first to split the power of the Pure Land School in half and then to relegate the Buddhist clergy to the sideline of society by making them specialists in funerals. It is much safer for the government when religious leaders are in charge of the dead rather than of the living. The close alliance between Buddhism and

the world of the dead is one of the most peculiar features of Japanese Buddhism, found in no other major Buddhist country. Perhaps Christianity has failed to take root in Japan because it would not, or could not, fit into religion's primary role in the society as caretakers of the departed.

In other Asian countries, on the other hand, Christianity has fared quite differently. Christians of the Eastern, Jacobite tradition have lived in India since the time of the apostles. The Mar Thoma Christians of Kerala, in the southwestern corner of the Indian subcontinent, trace the beginning of their tradition to St. Thomas. (While maintaining many of the Jacobite rites and polity, they are now in full communion with the Anglican Communion.) The arrival of Jesuit Francis Xavier in India in the mid-sixteenth century was part and parcel of the Portuguese colonial expansion in Asia. Success in mission work in Goa and Macao depended on the colonizers. Given the circumstances of the time, Christianity was perhaps rightly viewed in Japan as a pretext for Western colonialism. Therefore, both had to be expunged from Japan, although the warlords of the time eagerly acquired firearms from the Portuguese.

In China, the clash with Christianity was most notably philosophical. The Jesuit Matteo Ricci so dazzled the Chinese intellectuals with his intellect and Western astronomy that in the early eighteenth century the K'ang-hsi Emperor, arguably the greatest of Ch'ing emperors, was still educated by the Jesuits. In the end, however, the unrelenting indigenization policy of the Jesuits in China incurred the disapproval of the doctrinaire hardliners in Rome and mission activity in China was curtailed. Ricci dressed as a Confucian official, spoke Chinese and celebrated Mass in the Chinese vernacular in the imperial court. Moreover, he had incorporated the Confucian rites for the ancestors into the liturgy. At the time, the translation of the Bible into German and

English was reason enough for excommunication and execution. In the judgment of the Western church, Ricci had gone too far. Unlike Japan, which insists on racial purity and ideological uniformity to an extent unknown elsewhere, China has been historically pluralistic and its implicit tolerance has allowed the continued existence of Christian, Jewish and Islamic communities into the twentieth century. In fact, the Jews in China were never subjected to the kind of persecution they met in Europe. Protestantism came to China in tandem with Western colonialism, sharing a common fate. But even under the Communist Revolution, Christianity—and particularly the “Three-self Movement”—came to be accepted as an aspect of indigenous community-building by and for the Chinese.

In the twentieth century, few other countries in the world have seen Christianity develop to the extent it has in Korea. Many have pointed to the uncanny parallels between Korea’s Confucian background and the evangelical Christianity of nineteenth-century New England. But other Asian countries had a similar intellectual background, though perhaps not quite as strong, when the missionaries came.

A key factor in the particular success of Christian mission in Korea is its unique relationship with colonialism. While Japan had to reject Christianity in order to reject Western colonialism, the colonial onslaught in Korea was Japanese, not Western. Moreover, some of the Christian missionaries aided the Korean anti-colonialists. This helps to account for the conservative tendency of Korean Christianity to this day, both theologically and politically. Koreans have developed their own distinct Christian heritage by accommodating indigenous Korean traditions, particularly Confucian and shamanist. In addition, Korean Christians have been active in social movements not only against Japanese colonialism but also in opposition to communism and to the

American military presence in Korea. They also participate in the movement for the reunification of the Korean Peninsula.

ASIAN CHRISTIANITY IN NORTH AMERICA

The vastly different responses to Christianity in modern Asia set the pattern for the development of Christianity in Asian communities in the United States. The history of the Episcopal Church’s work with Asian immigrants is a good illustration.

Until about twenty years ago, some dioceses made isolated efforts to minister to Chinese and Japanese immigrants as part of their mission programs. Among the Chinese churches are True Sunshine in San Francisco’s Chinatown, St. Peter’s and St. Elizabeth’s in Honolulu and the Church of Our Savior in Chinatown, New York. Japanese churches include Christ Church in San Francisco, St. Mary’s in Los Angeles, St. Peter’s in Seattle and Good Samaritan in Honolulu. In 1993, a few bishops from Province Eight, which consists of the West Coast and Hawaii, met in San Francisco to hear the pleas of James Poon, vicar of True Sunshine, and John Yamazaki, Jr., rector of St. Mary’s, for a provincial if not national program of Asian ministry. Presiding Bishop John Hines responded positively to the plea and established the Episcopal Asiamerica Ministry (EAM) as part of the national church program in New York. The Reverend Winston Ching, originally from St. Elizabeth’s, Honolulu, and then serving as a parish priest in San Francisco, was appointed staff officer in charge of Asian ministry, directly responsible to the presiding bishop. Under his farsighted, self-effacing leadership, EAM has grown to include six distinct but mutually supporting convocations: Chinese, Japanese, Korean, Filipino, Mar Thoma and Southeast Asian.

From the start, EAM has concentrated its financial and human resources on congregational development. Each convocation

brought its own challenges and promises. With each wave of new immigrants, a handful of Christians gathered. If there was no minister among the immigrants, one who understood the language and culture had to be found. The typical new Asian congregation has been small and poor but fervent in faith, hope and love. The larger the immigrant group, the greater was its need for support from the national headquarters. This is how Korean and Filipino congregations have mushroomed. Every year at least a few new Korean congregations have been formed. At present, all Mar Thoma and Korean congregations are served not by American-born or American-trained priests, but by clergy brought from the homelands. EAM has helped find and finance the new clergy and their families. Thus far, the Mar Thoma Church in Kerala and the Korean Anglican Church have willingly supplied them. (Mar Thoma priests, however, return to India after a two-year term.)

The situation with Southeast Asians is vastly different. Except for those who worked for the U.S. military in Vietnam, many of whom are financially stable, virtually all have come to the United States during the last two decades as refugees. Leaving their war-ravaged homelands spared their lives, but left deep memories of tragic civil wars and the death of many family members. Practically none were Christian when they arrived and no ministers could be located in their homelands if communists were in control. For those struggling to survive in an unfamiliar culture, training for the ordained ministry was a luxury that few could afford.

The three Vietnamese Episcopal priests, all of whom are based in southern California, cannot meet the present need. Of the three, two are brothers; the third, to escape the abject poverty of his family in Vietnam, aspired to attain a better life by becoming a Roman Catholic priest. The majority of the Vietnamese have been

served by priests of good will who have little firsthand familiarity with the Vietnamese language, culture or painful past. In the case of other Southeast Asians, the situation is even worse. At present there is not a single Cambodian, Laotian or Hmong priest to serve one of the fastest growing Asian communities in the United States.

For reasons previously noted, Episcopal churches begun as ministries to Japanese-speaking issei and nisei are either groping for new identity or in decline, if not already out of existence. In the remaining churches, the children of the original members have already grown out of the immigrant subculture and have been assimilated into the larger English-speaking American society. While the number of Japanese-Americans still needing a Japanese-language ministry has sharply declined, the advance of Japan's economy has sent many Japanese nationals to the commercial and industrial centers of North America. The number of Japanese students on American campuses is second only to those from China. Thus there has emerged an acute need for a specialized ministry catering to Japanese nationals studying and working away from home.

The first response to this need was the establishment of the Metropolitan Japanese Ministry (MJM) in the early 1980s serving Japanese nationals in the metropolitan New York area, including Long Island and New Jersey. Since the majority of these are not Christians, the main focus of the ministry is Bible study for inquirers, most of whom are businessmen's wives with visas that do not permit employment in the United States. The Boston Japanese Ministry (BJM), begun in 1990, is a smaller version of MJM. Most of the Japanese residents in the Boston area are students or are associated with universities, hospitals and museums; many of them are single. BJM focuses its ministry equally on Bible study and the pastoral counseling of

lonely students who lack friends or the financial means of businessmen. There are plans to start similar programs soon in other American cities with large Japanese populations. Ministry to Japanese people requires Japanese ministers; therefore, a greater degree of coordination of efforts is essential with the Nippon Seikōkai, which already faces a shortage of ordained clergy.

Asian Episcopalians face formidable financial, social and human problems that affect not only the church as a whole but also the Asian communities that continue to grow, but struggle. One problem is the diminishing financial resources to meet the ever-growing needs in the United States. Despite the sharp rise in church attendance and church influence on society and politics since the presidency of Jimmy Carter, the growth has largely been confined to evangelical, fundamentalist and Pentecostal churches. Following a period of growth in the 1950s, the mainline Protestant churches have been in steady decline. No one can deny that the Episcopal Church has sustained a considerable loss of membership as a result of introducing innovations, including the ordination of women priests in 1972, the introduction of the new book of Common Prayer in 1979, the ordination of openly homosexual men and women, and in recent years, active involvement in issues of social justice within and outside the United States.

Many laud the changes as the Episcopal Church's faithful response to God's call to transform the once elite, if not elitist, church into an instrument of healing and reform; others regard the moves as outside the boundaries of the church's historic role and thus are calling the church to return to the grace and orderliness of the past. A small faction has tried to secede from the Episcopal Church to form a non-geographical "Episcopal Synod of America" that would adamantly forbid not only the ordination of women but also bar women

already ordained from administering the sacraments. The presiding bishop has declared that the secessionist group must either leave the church or, if they want to remain, cease trying to override the existing diocesan structure. No compromise, much less reconciliation, has occurred to date. The lively debate continues.

A second problem is the continuing heavy reliance on clergy from Asia and on non-Asian clergy due to a severe shortage of seminary students from the immigrant and American-born Asian population. Moreover, the situation is becoming more serious for, as the children and grandchildren of immigrants become more American and less Asian, the middle-aged clergy from Asia are less and less able to serve them effectively. This problem manifests itself most acutely in the language used by each party. It is not uncommon for an Asian congregation to be split between the older generation that speaks its own ethnic language and the English-speaking, American-born younger generation, though the differences are deeper than language. As the younger generation increases, so does the need for the emergence of priests from among them; but few are entering the ministry.

Why is there a continued shortage of young Asian seminarians and clergy despite growth in the number of Asian congregations? First, the value system of Asian immigrants and their descendants places a priority on the education of offspring for such occupations as medicine, dentistry, engineering and accounting. The common denominators among these preferred occupations are high income and relative independence in a society with a history of discrimination against Asians. Service vocations, such as the ministry, expose Asians and make them vulnerable to the whims of the public, in addition to providing low income and little job security. Unlike the Nippon Seikōkai clergy, who are guaranteed lifetime employment, the suc-

cess of American Episcopal Church clergy depends on wealthy, powerful and often temperamental parishioners. With the oversupply of American clergy and a shrinking laity, this unfortunate trend seems to be on the rise. Given the lack of job security, it is unlikely that hardworking immigrants from Asia would want a son or daughter to enter the ministry.

SIGNS OF CHANGE

Asians are slowly but steadily learning to assert their rightful place in the corporate life of the church, a hopeful sign of change. They are also beginning to actively participate in movements that promote equality for others as well.

One such movement is the Pacific and Asian American Center for Theologies and Strategies (PACTS), a consortium of Pacific and Asian-American Christians mainly from the West Coast and the Pacific Islands, that encompasses a wide range of Protestant denominations. PACTS was founded in 1973 by Roy Sano, a Japanese American who taught theology and culture at the Pacific School of Religion. Following his election as the first Asian American bishop in the United Methodist Church, the leadership of PACTS was passed to Julia Matsui Estrella, a Japanese American as well as a graduate of the seminary. Denominational offices at first supported its national and regional activities, but PACTS later changed its organization and character to become a gathering of individuals involved with their own issues. From the beginning, however, PACTS has called the attention of concerned individuals across denominational lines to issues that affect Pacific Islanders and Asians in America. In the recent past, PACTS helped the Japanese American missionary Ron Fujiyoshi in his campaign against the fingerprinting of foreign residents in Japan. Fujiyoshi argued that the practice was a symbol of the Japanese government's con-

tinued mistreatment of Korean residents. At present, PACTS is working hard to expose the injustice done to indigenous Hawaiians when it became a territory of the United States in 1900.

Asians also participate in the Episcopal Asiamerica Ministry Advocates (EAM Advocates), established during EAM's annual National Consultation in 1991 to ensure the continuance of EAM's ministries in the event that diminishing financial resources forced the national Episcopal Church to suspend EAM. Founders also envisioned that the Advocates would organize and oversee advocacy activities that EAM, as part of the presiding bishop's staff, was constitutionally unable to undertake. EAM Advocates was formed, therefore, apart from the official church structure so that it could function independently of it.

The five-member Executive Committee immediately identified two primary objectives. One is to campaign for the nomination and election of Asians to key positions of the Episcopal Church, both locally and nationally. At present three Asians serve on the executive council that governs the Episcopal Church between triennial general conventions; the three Asian members are all of Chinese background, one American-born and the other two from Hong Kong. Asian delegates to the convention have also been elected from several dioceses. More were nominated for key national church positions to be filled by election during the 1994 General Convention. A second objective is to address issues of injustice inside and outside the church, including the growing instances of violence against and by Asians, the prostitution of Asian women on U.S. military bases in Asia, and the discrimination against Koreans in Japan.

Against the backdrop of Asian peoples' struggles and aspirations, both on their familiar Asian soil and in the United States—at once hospitable and hostile—the following few compelling reflections may

indicate a perspective for future projection. First, an examination of the place of Asians in the life of the church to this point reveals a significant change. Asians were once the objects of the missionaries' messianic dream, a complex aspiration that combined love and conquest. After conversion, whether by faith or for expediency, Asians became the church's second-class citizens. With the increase in numbers and influence of Asians and the accompanying decline of Western Europe and North America as centers of Christian witness, however, the church has been reconditioned to regard people of color—people of the "third world"—as equal partners in the corporate life of the church.

The same change has taken place for Africans and Latin Americans. Today the towering ecclesiastical edifices of Europe function less as hallowed halls of worship than as the repositories of rare art treasures from the past. The mission churches built in the remote villages of Korea and the Philippines of prefabricated materials, cardboard and tin are now crowded with believers. Seoul, Manila and Singapore join Cape Town and Managua as the new centers of Christian witness and reform, while Rome, Istanbul, Geneva, Canterbury and New York are reminders of why and how the old ushered in the new. This remarkable transition appears to be a fulfillment of the biblical vision and teaching: "Blessed are the meek, for they shall inherit the earth; blessed are those who are persecuted for righteousness' sake, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven."

The same prophetic dynamic applies to the historic relationship within Asia, particularly to Japan's place in Asia. From the mid-sixteenth century until well into the twentieth century, Asia was viewed by the West as a gold mine for its acquisitive pursuit. The spread of Christianity has had much to do with the territorial interests of Spain and Portugal, Holland and France,

Great Britain and the United States. And yet within Asia, Japan looked upon the rest of Asia with much the same expansionist interest, though without Christian mission. Japan's attempt to subjugate the Korean Peninsula predates the establishment of English colonies in Jamestown and Plymouth. Japan's expansion into Manchuria and other parts of China from the late nineteenth century resulted in pillage and carnage no less devastating than its assault on Korea.

The recurrent biblical theme of God's intervention in history to raise up the weak and the persecuted and to reprimand the mighty and the proud was reenacted in the aftermath of Japan's aggressive advances against its Asian neighbors. Japan's military aggression may have ceased when it formally surrendered to Allied forces on August 15, 1945, but its continued silence regarding the Pacific War coupled with its neglect of the countless Korean, Chinese and Southeast Asian victims puts Japan under a sentence similar to God's judgment of David and Solomon. Japan's economic expansion into Asia, indeed into the rest of the world, strikes some today as a variation on the same aggressive theme.

When history is viewed from such a prophetic biblical perspective, it opens wide the possibility of explaining, in ways other than mere statistics, why Christianity has taken root in South Korea but not in Japan. And yet the time is always ripe to do right. Japan's challenge seems to be to cultivate a global vision and perspective, to learn to remember the past not only as the victim of the only atomic bombs dropped on the human race but also as the victimizer of the many still burdened with painful war memories. Few Japanese Christians realize the roles their own church denominations played. How many Japanese Anglicans know, for example, that Nippon Seikōkai moved into Korea to seize control of the Korean Anglican Church to help advance

Japan's colonial, military and imperial policy in Korea? Well-informed and well-intentioned penitence is an act of faith. Japan can and must learn that repentance

heals not only the victim but also the victimizer, that repentance signals not just another beginning but a whole new era.

A Biographical Dictionary
of Methodist Missionaries
to Japan: 1873-1993

Edited by
John W. Krummel

includes all 1534 persons who served in Japan
under the Methodist Churches

bilingual, expensive binding, 358p, 8500yen

Oversea Retailer:

Cokesbury

Order Department

201 Eighth Avenue South

P.O.Box 801

Nashville, Tennessee 37202-801

USA

Tel: (800)843-1789

KYO-BUN-KWAN