

Postwar Protestant Missionary Work in Japan

A Retrospective Account and Theological Appraisal

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I WILL MAINLY discuss under the above title the work of North American missionaries related to the United Church of Christ in Japan (Kyōdan). My theological education started in 1946 at Tokyo Union Theological Seminary, which was founded as a Kyōdan seminary. After completing my doctoral studies at Princeton Theological Seminary, I was ordained by the Presbyterian Church in the USA. But since 1965 my status has always been that of educational minister (*kyōmukyōshi*) of the Kyōdan, although I had been a professor of theology at International Christian University and the minister of ICU Church, an ecumenical congregation, for 37 years, from 1959 to 1997. Also, my discussion of the Japanese church and Christians will include my personal encounters and my personal experiences.

PREWAR MISSIONARIES IN JAPAN

Postwar Protestant missionary work began as a work of "Love Among the Ruins." Thus Charles W. Iglehart, a Methodist missionary who returned to Japan after the war, described the years from 1945 to 1952, in his book *A Century of Protestant Christianity in Japan* (Iglehart 1959, 258).

In order to understand postwar missionary work as "love among the ruins," one must know about the missionaries' attitudes toward Japan and Japanese Christians during the war, at least.

A.K. Reischauer, a Presbyterian missionary who had worked in Japan from 1905 to 1941, for instance, said that he and his family left Japan in March 1941 for health rea-

sons. This means that he could not imagine that Japan and America would be at war with each other and fully intended to return as soon as possible.

So his missionary career in Japan was ended abruptly, while he was in America. What was his attitude toward Japan and Japanese Christians? He wrote about it in his autobiographical sketch as follows:

Now while our lives in Japan thus came to an end, this did not mean that our interest in Japan and its people had also come to an end. In fact, our friends in Japan and the institutions with which we had been connected were, perhaps, even more in our hearts than they had ever been.

Our main work for the first two years after returning to the U.S. consisted of speaking in various churches on missions and our work in Japan. It was not altogether easy to talk to American audiences about 'the enemy' in Japan. While we never condoned the Pearl Harbor attack or the aggression of Japanese militarists, we always stressed the fact that many Japanese never wanted or expected this war with our country. And we also told our audiences that if there were any real Christians in the modern world, some of them were in Japan (Reischauer 1961, 27).

While teaching at Union Theological Seminary in New York City as a professor of the History of Religion, Reischauer served also as executive secretary of the Tokyo Woman's Christian College Cooperating Committee

and collected during the war about \$75,000, by which he helped the college right after the war.

Another example is John Coventry Smith, another Presbyterian missionary, who had worked in Japan for twelve years, from 1929 to 1941. When Pearl Harbor was attacked, he was near Hawaii, aboard the S.S. Tatsutamaru, which had sailed from Yokohama on December 2, 1941. After being returned to Yokohama, where he was interned for more than a half year, he later joined his family in New York as a passenger on the S.S. Gripsholm, a Swedish ship that had brought Japanese refugees from the United States to exchange. In his memoir entitled *From Colonialism to World Community* (1982), he called himself a "Missionary to the United States (1942–1948)." The following story is a good example of most of the missionaries, if not all.

My speaking was aimed at reporting what happened to me personally and how Japanese Christians had stood the test of war and would prove to be loyal to their faith. I found many American Christians thinking that all was lost in Japan. Repeatedly they said, 'Too bad those twelve years you spent in Japan were wasted.' I tried to answer and to lead people to pray for Japan and its people that peace would come soon and we could resume our work. Many people were surprised to hear my story and some of them were glad.

I had one experience with the superintendent of schools in Pittsburgh. He had me address all the principals of schools on the subject, 'How Japan Got into the War.' I stated the case and answered questions. The superintendent then said to all of us, 'If I am ever tried for murder, I hope I will have Mr. Smith to defend me.' He said it with a smile, but I never knew just how he meant it (Smith 1982, 114ff.).¹

These examples show clearly how prewar missionaries loved Japan and its Christians.

These two missionaries were already critical of their senior missionaries' paternalistic attitudes and they sincerely respected Japanese Christians. Since Japan was not a colonized country and its church was also nationalistic, these missionaries' attitudes were rather exceptional in comparison to missionaries who were sent to other countries in Asia before the war.

It was good that Japanese churches were so fortunate to have had such missionaries even before the war.

NO TIME FOR JAPANESE CHRISTIANS TO REPENT

It was, therefore, rather natural that those missionaries who returned to Japan after the war were so glad to meet again with Japanese Christians, from whom they had been separated by the war. As many churches were destroyed by the bombing of the American planes, missionaries were eager to help Japanese Christians. Works of "love among the ruins" were carried out by all missionaries, old and new, including the so-called "J-3's" (Japan-3-year term missionaries).

Yes, the postwar missionary activities began with great love and sympathy for Japanese "Christians in Suffering, 1941–1945" (Iglehart 1959, 239–58). It was indeed wonderful love, for which Japanese churches and Christians are most grateful.

Yet, the problem is this. Japanese churches and Christians were treated so well by the missionaries that they missed a chance to repent of what they had done during the war. This is one of the reasons why the problem of so-called "war responsibility" was taken up by the Kyōdan as late as 1967.

In other words, there was no time for Japanese Christians to repent of what they had done or what they had not done during the war. The missionaries were so happy to see them and were overwhelmed by the joy of reestablishing prewar bonds of fellowship, and began to work together for rebuilding

the ruined churches and to evangelize Japan.

Both missionaries and Japanese Christians were very busy in the so-called "Christian Boom," during which so many Japanese came to church that all the churches were packed by people who were hungry for spiritual food. I still remember the evangelistic meetings held at a public high school in Numazu, Shizuoka-ken, conducted by American ministers of "Youth for Christ," a few months before the Peace Treaty was signed in September 1951. Although the meetings were held for about a week, a big auditorium was packed with people hearing for the first time the music of an electric guitar and a very simple message—which I myself translated—every night.

It was true that Prince Higashikuni, who became the prime minister after the war, declared the first month after the surrender, September 1945, to be a "Month of Penitence" at the suggestion of Toyohiko Kagawa. Although Kagawa was placed under police surveillance during the war, he was called to assist Prince Higashikuni, being expected to handle the matter of the occupation army, especially with the "Christian General," Douglas MacArthur.

Afterward, *ichioku sozange* ("penitence of all one hundred million") became a national slogan, instead of the wartime slogan *ichioku isshin* ("one heart of one hundred million"). It sounds good. But that slogan made the problem of war responsibility ambiguous. If all one hundred million are to be penitent, what about the wartime leaders' responsibility? Are not they especially responsible and guilty?

War responsibility was not only a national and political issue but also a problem for Christians and the Japanese church. Richard H. Drummond, a postwar missionary, wrote about the first postwar meeting of the Kyōdan Board of Trustees as follows:

Japanese Christians are now able to evaluate the events of this period with per-

spectives that the leaders then could apparently not summon. They acknowledge with deep regret as well as candor that the leadership of the Kyōdan by no means gave evidence of sufficient reflection on past events, nor did it sufficiently repent for the church's uncritical complicity with the government or make adequate efforts toward a truly new start in keeping with the situation of the nation. The statement issued by the Board of Trustees on August 28 indicated repentance more for having failed the nation than God (Drummond 1971, 271).

Accordingly, at the General Assembly of the Kyōdan, which was held in June 1946, the question of the wartime leadership was raised by younger ministers who wished a thorough replacement of officers. But on the vote the wartime moderator was succeeded by the minister who had been the head of the Great East Asia Bureau during the war. So Iglehart wrote: "No other officers were changed. Apparently the delegates felt that their leaders had done as well as anyone could and should not be set aside in favor of an untried group. No recriminations were made, and no rifts of feeling registered in any of the debates (Iglehart 1959, 285).

To be sure, there was a different feeling at a large laymen's conference, which was held on the day following the assembly. Drummond noticed this, saying, "At this conference we note the first clear expression of repentance before God and man of the church's betrayal and neglect of its Christian mission during the war" (Drummond 1971, 275). However, they had to wait more than 20 years until the Kyōdan issued its "Confession on the Responsibility of the United Church of Christ in Japan during World War II."

The Kyōdan had never given the impression that it had truly repented at least in the sense of *metanoia*, which literally means "change of mind." Although neither Iglehart nor Drummond mentioned it in their

books—intentionally or not, I do not know—the Kyōdan sent out “The Epistle from the Church of Christ in Japan to the Christians in the Greater East Asia Co-Prosperty Sphere” on Easter of 1944. It is a sad letter. Why had the Kyōdan issued such a letter even as late as 1944, when the outcome of the war was obvious? Anyway, this is a letter of justification for the war against the United States. Referring to Kanzo Uchimura, the founder of the *Mukyōkai* (“Non-Church”), it says as follows:

Kanzo Uchimura, one of our Christian leaders, in the trend of the times dominated by importation and admiration of Euro-American civilization, declared, saying ‘the world is to be saved by Christianity, but Christianity which was grafted into Bushido (the samurai spirit).’ He was a pioneer of Japanese Christianity made by Japanese, rejecting American Christianity, which seeks success in power, profit and pleasure, hoping the missionary would be driven away from Japan as soon as possible (Furuya and Ohki 1989, 160).

As I said before, I do not know why both Iglehart and Drummond failed to mention this letter, even though they knew about it. Anyway, it is hard to find any critical comments by missionaries on Japanese churches and Christians during the war. Is it because of their love for Japan as missionaries? Or is it because of their guilt-consciousness for the atomic bombs dropped on Hiroshima and Nagasaki, which Japanese call the “Baptism of the Atomic Bomb” (Furuya 1980)?

AMAE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN MISSIONARIES AND JAPANESE CHURCH

It is a fact that postwar Japanese theology lacks an element of repentance. It is quite noticeable, when you learn what happened in Japanese philosophy right after the war.

In 1946 Hajime Tanabe, the leading philosopher of the so-called Kyoto School, published a book entitled *The Philosophy of the Penitential Way* (*Zangedō no tetsugaku*). Unlike Martin Heidegger, the German philosopher who had never made confession of his relation with Nazism, Tanabe declared publicly that he had made a mistake in supporting the war and that the philosopher must repent, following the way of the prophet Jeremiah. Some years later, he had “a philosophical conversion” to Christianity, having written a book entitled *The Apologetic of Christianity* (*Kirisutokyō no beshō*).

In the same year Kazoh Kitamori’s *Theology of the Pain of God* (*Kami no itami no shingaku*) was published. Kitamori was a student of Tanabe at Kyoto University. As we now know, Kitamori’s theology became ecumenically well-known, and it is said to have brought “a revolution in the concept of God.”

From the title of his book, one expects that the author will deal with the pain and suffering of people in the war. But there is almost none of that, not even a mention of an atomic bomb. Of course, there is no mention at all of the pain and suffering of Asian people brought on by Japanese colonialism and imperialism.

It was Carl Michalson, a theologian from the United States, who first introduced Japanese theology to the world, saying that “of all the younger churches, it (the Japanese church) is apparently the first to have developed a significant theology.” He also noted, “The theology of Kazoh Kitamori is the most self-consciously Japanese of the current theological tendencies in Japan” (Michalson 1960, 9, 73). Yet Michalson failed to notice that Kitamori had no idea whatever about the suffering of Asian people caused by the Japanese, although Kitamori said that the suffering of man is a symbol of the pain of God.

Michalson spent a half year as a guest professor of Tokyo Union Theological Seminary and Aoyama Gakuin University in 1958. He was assisted in the writing of this book by young Japanese theologians who translated for him theological books written in Japanese. He must have had lengthy discussions with older Japanese theologians and American missionaries about Japanese churches and theology. Probably none of the two groups pointed out to him the problem of repentance.

Of the average ministers in Japan and the United States in those days, probably the Japanese were more interested in theology, especially Karl Barth's theology, than their U.S. counterparts. As John C. Smith wrote in his memoir, he often told how he had learned for the first time about the theology of P.T. Forsyth, a forerunner of Barth, from a Japanese minister and he had great respect for Japanese "Barthian" theologians (Smith 1982, 19ff., 53ff.).

Yet those theologians of "Japanese Barthianism," to use Charles H. Germany's term (Germany 1965, 169),² had never openly resisted nor fought against militarism during the war, while Karl Barth himself had led the German Confessing Church and had been expelled from Germany. Of course, the situations of both church and state were quite different in the two countries. To be sure, Japanese Christians are more like the Jews than the Christians in Nazi Germany. A simple comparison of German Christians and Japanese Christians during the war is impossible.

Nevertheless, Japanese theologians should publicly confess that they did not do what they should have done and did what they should not have done during the war. There was, however, no single case of this kind of confession or repentance, nor even of regret. They were busily engaged in rebuilding the churches and evangelizing people during the Christian boom, with U.S. missionaries who were willing to help

and work with them. I have called this elsewhere the relation of *amae* between Japanese and American churches in the postwar years (Furuya 1984, 165ff.).

As is well-known, *amae* is a keyword of Takeo Doi's bestseller book *Amae no kōzō*, 1965 (*The Anatomy of Dependence*, 1970). According to this Catholic psychoanalyst, *amae* is a uniquely Japanese psychological phenomenon and the basis of Japanese human relationships. Although its psychological prototype is the psychology of dependence of infant to mother, it is not only the infant who has *amae* to the mother, but also the mother has *amae* to the infant. So not only does the infant *amaeru* (presume upon the love of) the mother, but also the mother *amayakasu* (is indulgent of) the infant. The relationship is mutual.

This means that within the *amae* relationship, there is no mutual criticism. One does not criticize the other. One expects the other to accept him or her without criticism. That happened and is still happening between Japanese Christians and American missionaries. To be more exact, American Christians *amayakasu* (are indulgent of) Japanese without making any critical comment and Japanese Christians *amaeru* (presume upon the indulgence) of Americans with the expectation that they will be accepted without criticism.

Is this the only kind of relationship missionaries can have besides paternalism? It is understandable that missionaries love the country to which they are sent and tend to identify themselves with it. That is why missionaries in Japan love Japanese, while missionaries in Korea, for instance, love Koreans. But missionaries are the people who have information about other countries through their colleagues. Missionaries in Japan are supposed to know much more than the Japanese do how the Koreans, Chinese or other Asians feel about Japan. But because of the *amae* relationship, mission-

aries have not told Japanese people about these feelings.

Or is it the case that missionaries in Japan, especially those who have stayed here many years, are Japanized? To use Isaiah Ben-Dasan's phrase, have they become members of a Christian branch of "Nihonism"? Or have they become the exact prototype of a missionary, of whom the Japanese are likely to say, "That man is a missionary, but he doesn't seem like one at all. He is a fine person with a rich sense of humanity"? (Ben-Dasan 1972, 107ff.).

NEW RELATIONSHIP IS NEEDED

Twenty years after the end of the war, the Kyōdan finally began to change. James M. Phillips describes this beginning as follows:

Isamu Ōmura as the Kyōdan's moderator was shocked to find out in September 1965 when he was invited to speak to a general assembly of the Korean Presbyterian Church that a large number of that assembly's commissioners were opposed to letting him bring greetings. As Ōmura and other Kyōdan leaders conscientiously wrestled with the meaning of that incident afterward, their conclusion was that the Kyōdan had never fully come to grips with its historical beginnings at the hands of Japanese state power, and hence had never confessed its complicity with state power (*kokka kenryoku*) during World War II, with all the harm that had been caused to other Christians in Asia and to Christians in Japan as well (Phillips 1981, 33ff.).

Apparently no missionaries had explained to Ōmura how Korean Christians felt about Japanese Christians. Were they afraid of telling the truth?

Ōmura was succeeded as moderator of the Kyōdan in 1996 by Masahisa Suzuki, whom Drummond called "formerly one of the 'angry young men' of Japanese Protes-

tantism" (Drummond 1971, 291). He was the moderator who released on Easter Sunday, 1967, the "Confession of Responsibility During World War II," which became a source of controversy and a cause of Kyōdan strife.

Thus did the Kyōdan confess its sins to the Asian Christian neighbors 22 years after the end of the war. Unfortunately, however, the Confession was not the beginning of a new and bright era of the Kyōdan but the foretaste of even greater division and turmoil.

There were disputes over the Christian Pavilion at the Osaka World Exposition in 1970 and the students' strike when riot police were called in at Tokyo Union Theological Seminary. The strife in the Kyōdan resembled the turmoil on college campuses around the world during the period of 1968–1971. Radical students and ministers, who called themselves "problem posers" (*mondai teikisha*), were violent and undemocratic at the general assemblies, just like the kangaroo courts on campus (Nakajima 1991).

When I faced those radical students who were Christians at the International Christian University as a chaplain and professor, I recalled what Robert Fitch, an American Christian ethicist, had said:

The strength of Catholicism, its name is order.

The sickness of Catholicism, its name is tyranny.

The strength of Protestantism, its name is freedom.

The sickness of Protestantism, its name is anarchy (Bennett 1967).

I remember thinking that what those radical students were doing was a combination of the two sicknesses, namely, tyranny and anarchy (Furuya 1973, 70-76).

Many missionaries were present at the general assemblies and other meetings of the Kyōdan where these two sicknesses were

almost killing the Kyōdan as a church. But they were all silent. Was it because they were, after all, foreigners?

I am reminded of the incident of "The Japanese Bride" ("Nihon no Hanayome"), which was not mentioned by either Iglehart or Drummond in their history books. Naomichi Tamura, one of the first ministers of the Nihon Kirisuto Kyōkai (Japanese Presbyterian Church), published in 1893 a booklet entitled *The Japanese Bride*, by Harper and Brothers. Having studied at Auburn Theological Seminary and Princeton College, he was interested in the differences between Japanese women and American women in those days. In his book, Tamura described objectively the kind of roles Japanese women played in their homes and society and the status they had in Japan and compared these with the lives of American women.

Since it was published in the Meiji 20s, a nationalistic period after an international period, many newspapers picked it up and criticized its disclosure of the inside story of Japan. The government, therefore, prohibited the translation of the book in Japan.

It was, however, his own church that began to criticize it bitterly, even after the newspapers had ceased. Finally he was sued at the church court for libel against his fellow countrymen. The assembly approved the indictment and voted to deprive him of his ministerial status. Although it was passed by 20 to 14 of the delegates, missionaries like James Ballagh and Guido Verbeck were opposed to the verdict, shouting "Murder of the Church Court!" (Furuya and Ohki 1989, 119-126).

I never heard of protesting shouts like this by missionaries at the Kyōdan's recent assemblies and meetings. Is it because missionaries today are no longer paternalistic like the old missionaries in the early days of Protestantism in Japan?

As the title of John C. Smith's book suggests, certainly the church made a pilgrim-

age from colonialism to world community after World War II. The Japanese church was very fortunate to have had many missionaries who had already made a sort of "paradigm shift" in their way of thinking.

But when we look back on postwar missionary activity in relation to the Kyōdan, I wonder whether postwar missionaries are mere "guests" and not real co-workers and partners. At best, they have been *enryō-shiteiru* (reserved) co-workers and partners.

Is that the missionary's limitation and destiny? Or is it because the missionary in Japan has been Japanized?

My 37 years' experience at International Christian University, where there are supposed to be no foreigners, has taught me that both missionaries and Japanese Christians should and can break down the *amae* relationship in order to work together for the ecumenical church and world community. Otherwise, the Japanese church will never be ecumenical and concerned about its neighbors, especially with Asian peoples and Asian churches.

More than 20 years ago, Charles H. Germany, who was a postwar Methodist missionary in Japan, wrote as follows: "Today and tomorrow younger Japanese Christians will be more likely to speak with a directness and frankness at times refreshing, at times painful, but always within the bonds of Christian fellowship and responsibility. In turn, they will expect this from Christian people of North America and the West" (Germany 1967, 169).

I do still expect that this kind of relationship will be developed, especially between missionaries and Japanese Christians.

NOTES

¹ This memoir by Smith was translated into Japanese under the title *Nihon kara sekai senkyō e*, 1997.

² Germany as well does not mention the notorious "Epistle" of the Kyōdan that was written by

several theologians, including a "Barthian" theologian.

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