

Christianity and the Postwar Changes in the Welfare System*

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DURING THE PAST 50 years, tremendous economic, political and cultural changes have occurred in Japanese society. The process began after World War II with the new constitution mandated by the Allied occupation forces and the social welfare system established on that basis, and it continued during the period of rapid economic growth through the late 1970s. The economic stagnation that has followed, together with the rapid aging of society, is bringing about additional dramatic change.

Within this context, Christian social work has ridden the waves of change and has itself been changed in the process. As we stand poised to enter the twenty-first century, I want to summarize the changes that have taken place in Christian social work and consider the challenges we will face in the future.

POSTWAR CONFUSION AND THE ESTABLISHMENT OF THE SOCIAL WELFARE SYSTEM

The modern social welfare system was formed within the framework of military occupation in the period that followed the Potsdam Declaration in 1945.

The Public Subsidy System of the Immediate Postwar Period

In 1945, governmental cabinet ministers met to establish the "Emergency Aid Program for People in Dire Need." The word "emergency" referred to the desperate need for food and housing immediately following the end of World War II for persons repatri-

ated from overseas, civilians made homeless by the war, the unemployed and former military personnel, especially those injured during the war. The welfare assistance program focused on housing people in institutions, where they were given basic supplies and job training and helped to find employment. The fundamental structures of this early postwar welfare system basically were a continuation of what had been in effect during the war years.

LARA Relief Supplies

During the immediate postwar confusion, the church-related agency that had the greatest impact on relief efforts was the "Licensed Agencies for Relief in Asia" (LARA). The "LARA relief supplies," as they were known, poured in from North American churches and other organizations to help the Japanese people who had suffered so much during the war. This organization was quite ecumenical in orientation, with numerous organizations from both the Protestant and Roman Catholic traditions working together. They demonstrated the words of the Bible: "When I was hungry, you gave me food; when I was thirsty, you gave me drink...." And after saying that, Jesus added: "Truly I say to you, when you do this unto the least of these my brethren, you do it unto me" (Matthew 25:35, 40). The fact that Christians of North America worked very hard to send relief supplies to their former enemy Japan, and that these supplies were a great stimulus to Japanese social work, must not be forgotten. The supplies donated by the

non-governmental organization LARA were distributed fairly by the Welfare Agency of Japan. As the only governmental agency dealing with the situation, the agency was greatly indebted to this Christian organization and the aid was well used. Another important factor was the large influx of missionaries into postwar Japan. They not only contributed physical aid but also greatly helped Japan's recovery by becoming involved in a variety of ways in public welfare activities.

The system of public welfare established by the government was based on the philosophy of protecting people's livelihoods. It was instituted in three stages through the provision of "three welfare laws": the Livelihood Protection Law (1946), which provided basic aid to people who had lost their means of livelihood during the war; the Child Protection Law (1947), which primarily benefited children who had lost their parents during the war; and the Welfare Law for Persons with Physical Disabilities (1949), which basically extended the existing system of aid for injured veterans to include other persons with physical disabilities, with the aim of rehabilitation for life in society.

Child Welfare

During the Meiji and Taisho eras many Christians, including Ishii Jūji (1865-1914), founded numerous Christian orphanages around the country and thus were at the forefront of the development of social work with children. These leaders were able to garner the support of not only local church members but also of many influential people in the areas served by the orphanages, many of whom provided financial support. In this way, they successfully established close ties with their surrounding communities.

With the enactment of the postwar Child Protect Law and the resultant availability of public funding, Christian orphanages were

no longer totally dependent on the financial and personnel support of Christian churches and local communities. In fact, they could exist without any help from them at all. So over time, churches and Christian welfare institutions became more and more separated from each other.

Prior to 1945, when practically no public funding was available, churches and Christian welfare institutions shared a common purpose: the Christian workers in the institutions were intimately involved in the life of the local churches and local church members assisted in meeting the needs of the children in the institutions. When public funds became available, it was easier for the institutions to look to the government for aid.

Matthew discusses the choice "between wealth and God." Christian welfare institutions have chosen "wealth" within the framework of the national government. With the establishment of the national welfare system, social work was absorbed into the state system. State financial support not only provided these institutions with ordinary operating expenses but also allowed them to expand considerably, with the net result that the Christian emphasis on prayer and even the contacts with local churches have decreased considerably.

Welfare for the Physically Challenged

The Welfare Law for Persons with Physical Disabilities was initially enacted to deal with former military personnel who had incurred disabilities. However, by the 1950s the rehabilitation of that group had basically been completed and the emphasis shifted to other people in the general population with physical disabilities. It was at that point that Christians became involved in this area of social work. The "Agape Workplace for Persons with Disabilities" in Kanagawa Prefecture, a pioneer project in this field, began when several Christians

transformed a corner of a warehouse into a workplace for people with disabling conditions. Missionaries also helped by securing financial aid from North American churches and coordinating job placement for trainees.

Like others, this enterprise started with Christians taking the lead and dedicating themselves to accomplishing a task and then became an institution within the framework of the national Welfare Law for Persons with Physical Disabilities. To take advantage of the government's treasuries, which had been fattened by rapid economic growth, the Agape Workplace too began to switch over to public funding through what is called a "public measure." Before long this institution also began to drift away from its Christian roots.

What is a "Public Measure"?

According to the legal jargon used in government circles, the word "measure" refers to an official action taken to implement a policy defined by law. In reality, it simply means to deal with a problem in a way deemed convenient by the government. For example, the government's concept of helping people in need of livelihood support is very different from the Christian concept. Although as Christians we are called to love other people as we love ourselves and to see Jesus himself in those we serve, there is little place in government "measures" for such attitudes as service, dedication or humility.

The government "takes measures" to utilize Christian and other private institutions to deal with welfare cases while requiring those institutions to follow government regulations and accept government supervision, which changes the institutions in the process. Specifically, the institutions are required to follow guidelines for construction, composition of staff and budget allocations and in fact must adjust their programs to fit government regulations to

qualify for government funding. In the process, the institutions are changed through a shift of emphasis from Christian principles to government control.

The welfare system of the postwar period of confusion was the product of a flood of new ideas on welfare from North America that were adopted into the pre-1945 governmental system. This pouring of "new wine into old wineskins" led to numerous problems as the "wineskins" began to burst in various ways.

THE PERIOD OF RAPID ECONOMIC GROWTH

The 1964 Tokyo Olympics, coupled with the general rapid economic growth of the 1960s, brought about what is generally considered to be the end of the postwar period. The economic expansion rapidly added funds to government coffers, which in turn highly increased the funds available for welfare programs. Welfare institutions expanded greatly during this period as they increasingly took advantage of public funding.

Background of the Six Welfare Laws

In addition to the three welfare laws introduced above, three new categories of welfare recipients were created in the 1960s through the enactment of new legislation: the Welfare Law for Persons with Mental Disorders (1960), the Welfare Law for Aging Persons (1963) and the Welfare Law for Widows with Children (1964). Just as in other ways, Christians were active in these areas of welfare work since before World War II by founding private organizations. During the Meiji Era (1868–1912), a Christian by the name of Ishii Ryōichi (1867–1937) founded Takinogawa Gakuen, the first educational institution established in Japan for persons with mental disorders. Its early beginnings can be traced to Christians who opened their homes to take in such per-

sons. So as with orphanages, this work also was begun and supported by the prayers and sacrifices of local church members. Through dependence of public funding, however, these institutions were gradually bureaucratized. The Welfare Law for Aging Persons was primarily a response to the needs of aging people who had lost their children during the war. The institutions established under this law were called "institutions for the care of the elderly."

The basic philosophy behind the six welfare laws was institutionalization: the policy of meeting people's needs by putting them into group facilities. The "measure" taken by the government was to separate welfare recipients from their families and communities by placing them in group facilities where they could be managed more easily.

The Welfare Law for Widows with Children was enacted in accordance with Article 25 of the Constitution, which states that "people should be helped to attain a reasonable standard of living." The focus of aid, however, was on widows with dependent children. As with other areas of welfare, although many of the institutions governed by this law had been founded and operated by Christians, they became only nominally Christian as management was assumed by non-Christians and Christian influence waned. Presently the number of institutions under the Welfare Law for Widows with Children is declining.

THE END OF THE RAPID ECONOMIC GROWTH PERIOD AND SOCIAL WELFARE

The devaluation of the yen against the dollar (the "dollar shock") in 1971 ended the period of miraculous economic growth. With the economy stalemated and even registering periods of decline, the expansion of social work institutions also ground to a halt.

Alignment with Segregation Policy

During the period of economic growth during the 1960s, the Ministry of Public Welfare developed a policy based on the premise that towns and cities were places where working people lived, implying that aging persons and persons with disabilities should be separated from that environment. The stated rationale was that they would experience discrimination but, in actuality, their presence was considered a hindrance to progress. In late 1960, the Ministry of Public Welfare opened an office to promote the establishment of colonies for persons with mental impairments and began to encourage each municipality in Japan to build such colonies for persons with disabilities.

Despite the slowing economy the policy of removing persons with disabilities from Japan's towns and cities continued during the 1970s, and institutions were constructed throughout the country: from Hokkaido's giant, 400-person capacity *Taiyo no sono* (Garden of the Sun) in the far north to the Okinawan Colony in the far south. The policy of segregating persons with disabilities was continued and strengthened during this period.

Within that context, Christians in social work aligned themselves with government policy, building institutions in outlying areas according to the "colony plan." In fact, a well publicized public relations tactic at that time was to point to "special communities in Europe where dedicated Christians serve persons with disabilities in a utopian atmosphere where provision is made for all their needs." Many Christian institutions were founded at that time based on this philosophical concept.

Background of the Change to Home-based Care

While the policy of establishing segregated colonies was being pursued in Japan, the focus in North America had already shifted

to one of encouraging self-reliance and independence, on the basis that "the segregation of persons with disabilities within an institution is a violation of their basic human rights and of their rights as citizens." Consequently, people surged out of institutions and returned to their home environments.

As a result, the United Nations designated 1981 as the International Year of the Disabled with the motto "Full Participation and Equality." The basic principle was that all persons, with or without disabling conditions, have the basic right to enjoy the same lifestyle as the general population.

The Ministry of Public Welfare of that era realized that with Japan's rapidly aging society and the emerging financial crisis, there were limits to the policy of institutionalization. In fact, studies showed that a continuation of this policy would lead to state bankruptcy, so the Ministry began switching priorities from institutional welfare to home-based care.

The prime minister at that time made the following statement: "As we Japanese have a wonderful heritage in our families, persons with disabilities and aging persons should be cared for in the homes of their families, where they can receive warm affection. Families themselves should care for their members who are aging or have disabling conditions." The public welfare policy was thus shifted to home-based care, but the main reason for the change was, in reality, financial.

THE PRINCIPLE OF NORMALIZATION

By the 1980s, however, it had become apparent that the traditional extended-family structure had essentially been replaced by the nuclear-family structure, which weakened the family's ability to perform its former role of care provider for aging members or those with disabilities. Hence the policy pursued in the 1990s has been that of

encouraging the development of 'public welfare communities' where local people themselves help the aging persons and persons with disabilities in their communities.

Since the International Year of the Disabled, phrases such as "normalization" and "integration" have become common. In this context, "normalization" refers to the movement of people out of the large institutions to their own communities and "integration" to the assimilation of people from colonies and other institutions into their home towns or elsewhere.

In the West, as the emphasis shifted to encouraging persons formerly housed in institutions to become functional within their communities, many institutions closed. Only in Japan has this not taken place. Unlike North America and Europe, not one welfare institution or colony in Japan has closed its doors, although the concept of normalization has been emphasized for over 15 years. Many people voice concern but, strangely, no concrete action is taken.

There are now grass-roots movements to help persons with disabling conditions become independent. A number of small community-centered work areas have been formed and small "group homes" have been established. In many cases, Christians have taken the initiative on their own. It is generally individual Christians who participate in these efforts because the large welfare institutions, even those that are church-related, have not given these small undertakings much support.

The sad reality is that once Christian institutions come under the government umbrella, the focus changes from Christian teachings to the directives of the government. There are even cases where the present head of the institution is not a Christian and few members of the board of directors are Christians. Many such institutions are Christian in name only. A few have even removed all specifically Christian references in their publications. The historical

fact is that when Christian institutions become part of the welfare state, the result is the loss of their Christian identity.

THE ADVENT OF THE AGING SOCIETY

Home Care and the Gold Plan

By the middle of the 1990s the government had hammered out a new welfare policy. While retaining the institutional housing plan (the colony policy that is called the “plan for persons with disabilities”), a program has been developed to enable persons with disabling conditions to live in their local areas. Through the establishment of day-care centers and programs of “home helpers” for personal care and “home assistance” for household chores, persons with disability can utilize welfare service while living in their local communities. The “new gold plan” established for aging persons provides home helpers and an increased number of day-care centers that allow short-term stays for elderly person, thereby providing temporary relief for weary family members.

Child-Care and the Angel Plan

The present birth rate in Japan is 1.4 children per family. The continuing decline in the number of small children is related to the decreasing number of working-age persons. Children especially need to be with their mothers during the period of infancy through one and two years of age, as this is a vital time for the transmission of the parents’ lifestyle, faith and religious attitudes. However, with the entrance of married women into the work force, the trend is to place young children in preschools. The government’s “angel plan” helps underwrite the costs of such care.

Until recently preschools did not provide care for children under two years of age. With the current lower birthrate and

subsequent decrease in the number of young children, preschools are accepting infants and one-year-olds to supplement their incomes. Christian preschools as well are accepting children of this age. The original purpose of the church-run preschools was child evangelism, that is imparting to children the teachings of Christianity. Now the concern is for funds in order to survive.

Recently I was asked to speak at a Christian preschool. I still remember the displeasure on the face of the administrator when I told the mothers gathered there that they should keep their infants and one-year-old children at home, if at all possible, rather than entrust their care to a preschool because interaction with a parent is better for the development of their children’s character. Is the true goal of Christian social work the practice of the Christian faith by supporting children, mothers and the family or the care of infants to support the management of a preschool?

ISSUES FOR THE TWENTY-FIRST CENTURY

The Position of Social Workers and the Institutions

The Christian social work that was developed through the consecration, dedication and prayers of Christians in the Meiji, Taisho and early Showa eras (1868–1940) has become bureaucratized since the end of World War II due to government supervision and separation from the church. Further, since institutions themselves tend toward bureaucratization, their staffs have become salaried workers whose purpose is gaining income instead of performing a service. A social work institution has two structures: that of the employees and that of the recipients of its services. As in a caste system, the employees and the clients become two classes of people within one institution.

Even Christian staff members, as employees of the institution, view the clients as the

objects of welfare rather than as neighbors. It is hard to show love for your neighbor within such a system. Socializing with individual clients becomes increasingly difficult as the institution expands to include 50 or 100 persons. At the heart of Christian social welfare is the biblical injunction, "If you are told to go one mile, go two," but this is hardly possible. It has not been recognized that the sin of the costly system of supervised welfare is the loss of time for fellowship with the clients themselves.

An additional problem is that fewer Christians are training to enter social work. Christian social work organizations try to recruit Christians, but they rarely get applicants. This is due to the decrease in the number of persons in churches and Christian schools who want to live out their Christian beliefs within a social work setting. It would be a mistake to think that the increase in the numbers of employees in Christian social work institutions is a manifestation of the dissemination of Christianity within society.

The rapid progress in scientific technology and the late development of bioethics also has had a great influence on the field of social work. For example, current laws do not provide for the welfare or medical expenses of persons with the most severe disabilities (those who exist in a vegetable state or are brain dead), thus treating them as "things" rather than as human beings. Therefore those of us involved in Christian social work must deal with the most basic of questions: What is a human being? This is particularly an issue when a person has been pronounced brain dead or when a DNA examination results in a fairly accurate prognosis that the fetus has a disabling condition and an abortion is possible.

The Role of Hospices

The hospice movement developed naturally from Christian medical work. "Hospice"

comes from *hospitium*, the word used during the Middle Ages for monasteries that hosted travelers and treated the sick and dying. The place travelers stay is now termed a hotel; the place that treats the sick is called a hospital; and the place that cares for the dying has become the hospice.

Until now, Christian institutions for the elderly and institutions for persons with disabilities have simply sent people to a hospital when they became very ill and near death and left the care of dying patients to the professionals at the hospitals. The care of persons near death by Christian social work institutions is a serious issue that must now be addressed, but I think the greater issue for the twenty-first century is whether those involved in Christian social work have the kind of faith to deal with people's basic questions about death and resurrection.

The Grass-roots Welfare Movement

Within the system of centralized institutions, there are many Christians who have spearheaded citizens' movements for social welfare. One example is the Ralsh Movement founded by Canadian John Banie in which people live in communities in family-like situations with mentally challenged persons. It has become a significant international movement, although it has not yet gathered momentum in Japan.

The mission of Jesus was a grass-roots movement and from now on the social welfare movement, especially among Christians, must also be a grass-roots movement. The way it develops will be the key to social work in the twenty-first century.

Aiding the Whole Person

Another key to welfare in the twenty-first century is whether a change can be made from specialist-centered medical social work to a wholistic approach that honors

the dignity of the human person. The body of Christ is presently divided among specialists in such fields as external medicine, internal medicine, neurosurgery, physical therapy, occupational therapy, social work and case work. There are also divisions within the social work community among social workers, caregivers, preschool teachers, nutritionists and clerical staff. Under the system of national supervision, the people in these various areas work separately rather than cooperatively.

In Romans 12 and II Corinthians 12 we are cautioned not to consider the members of the body of Christ separately. Likewise, a person who has become the object of social welfare must be dealt with wholistically as a person with a body, heart and spirit who is a citizen, a family member and a neighbor. Japanese Christian social work will not progress until there is a reexamination of welfare as aid to the whole person.

The Heart of Asia

Japanese social workers are gaining new insights from other Asian people. In countries that are not as advanced as Japan in the area of institutional housing, the children, the elderly and family members with disabilities live with the family. The basis of Christian social work—loving your neighbor as yourself—is no doubt practiced throughout the rest of Asia, so Japanese Christians have much to learn from their faith and way of life, especially at the point of really loving your neighbor as yourself in times of poverty and adversity.

Christians in social work in the Meiji era sacrificially opened up their homes to orphans and persons with disabilities, raising these children as their own. People lived and worked in the same building and no difference was made between employer and employee, which is a reminder of the image of one family under God. To approach the present international standard, social work

in Japan, especially Christian social work, must meet the needs that are close at hand and “think globally, act locally.”

Mission of Healing

Since the Meiji era, with its education-centered Confucian mentality, Christian schools and church schools have been the focus of Christian mission. Today, as we confront the issues of an aging society, the emphasis of Christian mission must be on healing. Especially as society ages, people will be struggling with matters of the body, the heart (family) and the spirit (death) as they become more and more isolated from those around them.

Being present to heal the spiritual thirst of aging people and to share their loneliness and pain provides opportunities to build God’s kingdom. Whether Christians of diversified fields can work together to meet this challenge is dependent on the grounding of our Christian social work in Jesus. Certainly Christian social work in the twenty-first century will be a time of testing for our Christian faith.

The present age can be likened to the time of Jesus almost 2,000 years ago. Systematized Judaism with its national, bureaucratized structure created many regulations that kept people from experiencing the love of God. God’s only son, Jesus Christ, did not use that kind of systematized, bureaucratized structure but ministered to persons with disabilities, outcasts and persons regarded as sinners through a grass-roots movement, eating with them and interacting with them. As this kind of mass liberation movement grew larger, the scribes, Pharisees and the Jewish king requested the Roman governor to have Jesus crucified.

Christian organizations in Japan have become systematized and bureaucratized and it is the grass-roots movements like those for independent housing for persons with disabilities and for the human rights of

foreign persons and others that are challenging the discrimination of the structuralized Christian social work system. We must not forget that Jesus himself was among those considered the “lowest” members of society.

The church, like the social work system, is institutionalized and bureaucratized, as are the Christian schools. We must turn

from seeking wealth and national status to institute a social welfare system in which people meet person-to-person on equal terms. Our ability to develop a Christ-centered model of grass-roots social work described in the Bible is the key to mission in the twenty-first century.

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