In Memoriam

ARIGA TETSUTARÔ (1899-1977)

On May 25, 1977, the Christian community in Japan suffered a great loss: one of its most genuine and brilliant representatives, professor Ariga, passed away quietly in a hospital in Kyoto.

Prof. Ariga was one of the most respected theologians in Japan, but more still he was an ideal witness for Christ to his compatriots. Strict as he was in the personal observance of his faith, he was extremely receptive to all that is true and beautiful in Japanese culture and Japanese beliefs. In all simplicity, but with rare conviction, he used to say that the other religions had taught him very much.

Prof. Ariga will be remembered as one of the strongest promotors of the post-war interfaith dialogue in Japan: he founded the NCC Center for the Study of Japanese Religions (Kyoto) -- which contributed so much already to that dialogue -- and actively participated in many dialogue sessions. But also his theological studies of the Church Fathers and of Hebrew thought may be said to be his personal endeavors to build a theoretical framework whereby a real encounter of Christianity and the religiosity of his country would become possible.

In other publications, our Institute will have the privilege of introducing some of Professor Ariga's work to the world at large. For now, we want to honor his memory by reprinting here the poem which he wrote (in English) when, in December 1976, he had to spend five days in the hospital.

Prof. Ariga was born in Osaka in 1899. While having to interrupt his highschool studies because of illness, he discovered the gospel and received baptism in the Harajuku church of the United Brethren.

He received his theological training at Doshisha University (Kyoto) (graduation 1922) and at Union Theological Seminary (New York) (1922-1926). From 1926 on he was lecturer and professor of the theological faculty of Doshisha University; from 1948 till 1962 he occupied the chair of "Study of Christianity" at the State University of Kyoto. After his retirement he was still active for many years as president of Kobe Women's College.

As a fervent ecumenist, he was one of the founding fathers of the United Church of Christ in Japan, and participated in the Evanston World Meeting (1954). In 1962-1963 he was an observer at the Second Vatican Council. In 1953-1954, he was visiting professor at Union
Theological Seminary (New York) and received an honorary doctorate (D.D.) from Chicago University.

MEDITATION

Here in this hospital ward
from an attack of pain convalescing,
I suddenly awoke to find myself
all alone with my own self.
At the year's end
this is indeed what I most needed:
to reflect upon my own past, remote and recent,
and meditate upon the meaning of my life
in its allowed span of time.

Here's Presence Divine so close to me,
so is the message of Christ's birth:
that the dawn is truly upon the earth,
even upon ourselves in the city of Kyoto,
where through my windows across the River Kamo
a perfect landscape I enjoy
with foliage still so green.
and the Hiei mountains farther in the distance.

A certitude most inwardly prehended
that this whole existence of mine lies
in the hands of Him who transcends
yet is ever creatively at work,
letting all things, even out of nothing, arise
and be and take their course.

Never a stale dogma, this thought!
but an inspiration
supplying ever joy and gratitude,
love and goodwill, and even
hope and courage and patience.

Yes, I still love this world so dearly,
this world of ours on a tiny globe
floating in the immensity of process four-dimensional.
And our species!
Result of nature's evolving for billions of years,
man is still so uncertain and immature:
a conglomeration of urges and desires,
intents and aspirations,
at variance with each other.
So much intelligence, to be sure, has been acquired and accumulated, and, from generation to generation, transmitted, but is mankind in truth learning?

With so many schools in an age called civilized, from the most elementary to the most advanced; and with sundry methods and systems of providing and diffusing information: books, journals, programs of radio and television — how much is humanity therefrom gaining?

Here at the hospital come in nurses on duty and inquire after me, often with the same queries to which nothing but the same answers were due. Should even ten of them have gotten the same information, that might help to confirm it but wouldn't increase their knowledge a bit.

Neither does an increasing number of those receiving education promise mankind necessarily the larger share of knowledge. And what they thus learn is inevitably fragmentary covering a limited area only of man's ever widening possible experience.

'Tis true experts and specialists, superb in their respective fields, are being trained, marvels to perform for the advancement of civilization — but also for the piling up of potencies of destruction and pollution and wholesale murder.

Actually our world is still full of follies and frenzies — not so much due to sheer ignorance as to soaring intellect losing its balance — that we have, with Job, to wonder: "Where is wisdom to be found?" For wisdom is so rare — like sunshine in the rainy season — though sunshine, however seldom,
is indeed that and nothing else.

Above the clouds all is bright,
be it storm or blizzard below,
while solar energies all through penetrating,
life on earth sustaining,
under the threatening sky
or in the parching heat.

By no means are we left
without hope, if only a ray of wisdom
coming from its very source
to our mind and heart beams,
to let humanity be truly humane,
that all men and women, old or young,
may learn to live and work together,
ever closer to build ever fuller
community the world over.

Kyoto
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