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Nihon ni okeru Kirisuto-kyō to Nihon no Sho-shūkyō to no Sesshoku no Mondai

("The Encounter between Christianity and other Religions in Japan")

by Masatoshi Doi, Yasuo Mizoguchi, Sakae Kobayashi
Tokyo: United Church of Christ in Japan, 1961,
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Purpose and Content

The purpose and content of this book may be most readily understood by a quotation from the preface. There the Reverend Kan Oyama, a member of the committee in charge of the institute, writes:

"A branch of the Institute on the Mission of the United Church of Christ in Japan has recently been established in the Kansai district where the influence of various religions is strong. Therefore, it seemed most appropriate to take up the problem of the encounter between Christianity and other Japanese religions as the first subject to be studied. This problem has a special relevance for the future of the Christian mission in Japan, be-

cause only through a confrontation with other Japanese religions can the Gospel permeate this country. It is for this reason that we have chosen this subject."

Having this in view, Prof. Masatoshi Doi of the Theological School of Dōshisha University, Prof. Yasuo Mizoguchi of Kobe College (Kobe Jogakuin) and Mr. Sakae Kobayashi, lecturer at the Theological School of Kwansei Gakuin University, conducted research which included: (1) a study of the history of Japanese Christianity, (5) a survey of the new religions, and (3) a survey of conversions within several denominations and churches.

Based on the results of these studies each author contributed an

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essay: Prof. Doi on "Theological Interpretation," Prof. Mizoguchi on "Socio-cultural Interpretation," and Mr. Kobayashi on "The Teachings of the New Religions."

The volume, comprising 223 pages, is divided as follows: "Theological Interpretation" by Prof. Doi (50 pages) sub-divided into (1) an historical survey, (2) theological interpretation, and (3) practical considerations; "Socio-cultural Interpretation" by Prof. Mizoguchi (43 pages); and "The Teachings of the New Religions" by Mr. Kobayashi (83 pages including 7 pages of notes), covering (1) doctrines (the view of deity, the view of man, and religious tolerance), (2) practice (guidance in religious life, indoctrination, and miracles and magic), and (3) organization (founders, teachers, and believers, group organization, and finance).

The remaining 47 pages give statistical data regarding twenty items in questionnaires.

As the term "Christianity" in the title is replaced by "the Gospel" in the table of contents, it is clear that "Christianity" must be under-

stood as meaning "the Gospel."

Theological Interpretation

At the very outset Prof. Doi writes:

"As the encounter between Christianity and other religions takes place only through the medium of Japanese mentality, it becomes our important task to analyse this mentality first, but unfortunately we do not have enough space to discuss this point in full detail. Roughly speaking, however, it may be characterized as *lacking in the consciousness of the Ultimate*. Let me, therefore, consider our problem from this angle."

Having thus presented his conclusion at the beginning, he clarifies what he means by the lack of consciousness of the Ultimate:

"In Christianity there is a division between God and man. For a Christian, therefore, God is a matter of consciousness of the Ultimate. A Japanese, on the contrary, conceives of the holy and the secular as being in continuity. Continuity and not discontinuity being thus important to them, the Japanese (naturally) lack in the consciousness of the Ultimate."

Prof. Doi then goes on to enumerate the following as charac-

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teristic traits of the Japanese which, according to him, derive from this lack. (1) The ancient Japanese were rather optimistic. They did not criticise the present and, accordingly, they did not have any definite idea of the future life. This trait exists even today. (2) The Japanese lack in the consciousness of sin and the dignity of human personality. (3) They are rather inclined to dispose of things emotionally or conventionally rather than to doubt and criticize. (4) They show a syncretistic tendency.

To support this position he puts forth some examples taken from history:

"With the introduction of Christianity in the 16th century the Japanese people first came into contact with the consciousness of the Ultimate in the true sense of the word ... This is evidenced by the courage with which the martyrs faced the temptation of abandoning their faith and endured persecution."

After mentioning several Shintoists and Buddhists converted to Christianity, he then remarks:

"From the preceding study it may be concluded that, in the encounter

between Christianity and other religions, both the moment of continuity and discontinuity are at work, and that the latter is based on the lack of a consciousness of the Ultimate in the mentality of Japanese people. Our theological interpretation, too, is based on this historical observation."

In the second chapter, in elucidation of his standpoint, the author says that in a scientific study dogmatism of any kind must be rejected. And, since faith means existential commitment, he maintains that science, which lays emphasis on the objective approach, must also be rejected from the study of religion. "However, it cannot be denied that religion has some aspect which is open to the objective approach." And, "in so far as faith as existential commitment is concerned, there must be a discontinuity between Christianity and other religions. At the same, however, in so far as its historical expression is concerned, it must be admitted that there is a moment of continuity between them."

From this point of view he argues that

"if the critical side is given too

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much emphasis in order to keep dogma intact, Christianity may become abstract and the church may be separated from the religious and cultural situation in which it stands. The cause of the retarded indigenization of Christianity in Japan may be found in this circumstance. If, on the other hand, the constructive side is given too much emphasis in order to accelerate cultural adjustment, Christianity runs the risk of having its essence distorted. The failure of the Chinese mission in the 17th century, which is connected with the name of Mateo Ricci, is said to have arisen from this."

Prof. Doi begins his last chapter by saying that

"the motivating power of Christian practice is to be found in love, which includes both the principle of criticism and the principle of solidarity in itself. Without such love, the mission in Japan cannot be considered at all."

Paraphrasing this, he continues:

"In principle, the more we participate in this Divine Love, the more we are qualified to penetrate into the pagan world and to come into contact with it. Aloofness and exclusiveness do not necessarily prove the strength of faith. At the same time, however, the critical moment in the Gospel

functions as a criterion by which to judge the self-absolutizing and personality-destroying elements in pagan society, and puts them under God's judgement. A Japanization of Christianity based on a compromise is no proof of the strength of love."

In this connection, also, the problem of modernization is discussed. He contends that, if the modernization and Christianization of Japan are of the same nature and proceed parallel to each other, there may be great hope for the Christianization of Japan. However, he cannot be very optimistic because, in spite of much progress in material civilization, the modernization of the Japanese mentality has not gone very far. Moreover, since there exist both modern and pre-modern elements in Japan side by side, Christianity, he believes, must, on the one hand, champion the struggle for modernization and, on the other, protect the religious character of Japanese culture against the secularization and de-humanization which may be brought about by modernization.

Having further dealt with the problems of religious charisma and

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of rationalization in religion, the chapter closes with a discussion of a point raised by Mr. Hiroo Takagi, who finds, in its lack of the idea of indebtedness and of ancestor worship, the reason for Christianity's inability to penetrate the Japanese people.

Socio-cultural Interpretation

According to Prof. Mizoguchi, the encounter of Christianity with other religions has its basis in the essence of the gospel, that is, in the Divine Love. However, since there can be no encounter, either theoretical or actual, where there is no distance, distance is a presupposition of encounter.

One may conceive of two kinds of distance: the distance between religions themselves and the distance between their believers. And since the gospel is directed toward men, it is towards the overcoming of the distance between God and man that the distance between Christianity and other religions comes into question. At the same time, one cannot adequately treat the problem of distance without considering various factors of

human existence (natural, biological, psychological and socio-cultural), which constitute historical reality. From this point of view, the author attempts to discuss the encounter.

In this connection he first discusses the Gospel, that is divine love and might, as the original power enabling the encounter. Then he goes on to analyse the historical circumstances of the introduction of Christianity into Japan and explains several kinds of feeling of distance. Also he discusses, how and for what purpose the Japanese people came to accept Christianity and how the missionaries treated them. He further deals with the confrontation of Christianity with Buddhism, Confucianism and other religions of Japan down to the early Taisho Period.

Finally, on the future relation of Christianity to Japanese pagan society and its people, he remarks as follows:

“The primitive Japanese lived in a natural and affirmative attitude towards reality. Consequently, their religion, Shinto, showed the traits of natural religion living in reconciliation with

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reality. Later, Confucianism provided the theoretical basis for this attitude, and Buddhism, with its negative spirit, contributed much to the deepening of the thinking of the Japanese people."

It is now the task of Christianity, says the author, to give them a spirit which can at the same time both deny and reform reality. He contends that

"What is needed in the present-day situation is a spirit of service for the masses, a universal spirit which, standing on a national basis, can transcend it: a constructive spirit based on the consciousness of crisis instead of an optimistic progressivism. By means of such a spirit the seed of the gospel can be sowed in the pagan soil of Japanese society and religion and the gospel may overcome the distance lying between itself and the objects toward which it is directed. When all essential distances have disappeared, the gospel will have been completely appropriated by the Japanese, and the Japanese, will then live by the gospel.

Teachings of New Religions.

The purpose of this essay in the words of the author, is to analyse the doctrines, practices and organi-

zations of New Religions in order to make clear "what attitude Christianity should take in dealing with them in its second century in Japan; whether there is something to be profitably learned by Christianity which lies behind the surprisingly rapid expansion of new religions; and what criticisms Christianity should advance against their direct challenge."

From this point of view, nine representative "new religions" are made the object of minute study: Tenri-kyō, Konkō-kyō, Ōmoto, Sekai Kyūsei-kyō, Seichō-no-Ie, Risshō Kōsei Kai, Sōka Gakkai, PL, and Tenshō Kōtai Jingū-kyō. These are investigated in regard to the eight topics enumerated above.

Critical Comment

In general, not only Christians, but also several other groups belonging to the established religions of Japan, have founded institutes to study the problems of their own and other religions for missionary purposes. Already some publications of these institutes have been made accessible to the public. However, it does not seem probable that

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these groups put special emphasis on this kind of activity. Either these established groups are too much occupied with their own internal affairs, which have become very complicated in consequence of their stagnation, to give attention to this kind of study, or else they have too much confidence in their firmly established believer-organization to feel a need of it.

Moreover, the newly arisen religious groups are still laying their foundations and have little time for research activity. At the same time as their groups are growing daily and acquiring new members, they need not care about promotional activities. Consequently, they have not yet started similar projects.

In the contemporary situation, however, all religions, whether established or new, need a research institute for every kind of promotional purpose. This is indispensable. Yet, most of the religious organizations in Japan are not yet in possession of such indispensable organs.

In view of this, even though this may be a matter of course, it is noteworthy that the United Church

of Christ in Japan has established an institute to promote research in the field of its extension activities. Supposedly other Christian groups, such as the Catholic Church and Anglican Episcopal Church of Japan etc., also have institutions of the same sort. But, so far as I know, they have not yet made the products of their research accessible to the public. The Institute on the Mission of the United Church of Christ in Japan appears to be the first to do this. If so, it is to be congratulated for the sake of the Church in the future.

As the study was done by Christians for the sake of the evangelization of Japan and the Japanese, and the book was intended, in the first place, for those within the Church, we outsiders have no right nor need to comment on it. However, it may not be altogether useless to state some critical opinions for the readers of this journal and the future readers of the book, as well as for Christians in general.

First of all, it must be pointed out that the book is marked by a certain attitude of superiority

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that, since the Japanese people have not yet made enough progress and modernized, it is necessary to evangelize them in order that they may be relieved from this evil and get modernized. True, this kind of superiority feeling is characteristic to some extent of all religions, but when it becomes too articulate, assuming the form of self-righteousness, nothing interferes more with its mission than this.

Moreover, owing to the lack of careful study, some of the interpretation of quoted passages does not seem to be quite adequate. If this is the case, it will have a negative rather than a positive effect for Christians, because their view will then be based on a false interpretation. Furthermore, the explanations in part are not altogether clear. Probably this was inevitable because of the limited space in which to deal with difficult problems. Most readers would have liked to have a fuller exposition of the subject without any space limitation.

Concerning the Theological Interpretation

So long as Christians talk about Christian theology, no one can make any objections, but as soon as they begin to criticise the Japanese mentality and other religions by their own criteria, as does this author, difficult problems occur.

As we have already seen, it is the contention of the author that, while Christianity is characterized by a consciousness of the Ultimate, this is lacking in Japanese mentality. He further ascribes various defects of the Japanese to this fundamental trait. I have no hesitation in recognizing that the Japanese do have these defects. The problem is whether they can be properly attributed to the lack of a consciousness of the Ultimate.

The author asserts that Christianity has a consciousness of the of the Ultimate. Cannot it be that the very assertion of such a consciousness is in itself a proof of its absence?

In one passage the author says "This kind of absoluteness cannot have objective validity because it cannot be proved objectively as in natural sciences. It can only be proved by a total commitment in

the person of the believer." In short, faith is not philosophy, not a matter of mere theory. If so, why should this not apply to Japanese religions as well? I see no reason why the religious life of the Japanese should lack in a consciousness of the Ultimate.

Maybe the first cause of this controversy, including the issue of continuity-discontinuity, lies in the difference of the Eastern and the Western ways of thinking.

The next point has to do with the so-called syncretistic tendency of the Japanese. Prof. Doi puts this in relation to the above-discussed lack of a sense of the Ultimate. Apart from the problem of whether it is adequate to apply the Western idea of syncretism to the Japanese phenomena, it may at least be noted that his analysis of the religious life of the Japanese seems insufficient in several points. This may be due to a difference in the view of the spiritual world. Therefore, a more detailed study of the Japanese view of the spiritual world and of the so-called syncretism may be anticipated.

He further quotes from Mr. Hi-

roo Takagi, who makes two characteristics of Christianity above all responsible for its failure to win the hearts of the Japanese masses; namely, its lack of the idea of indebtedness and of ancestor-worship. This seems to me to be open to question. Mr. Takagi, to be sure, is one of the few scholars of religion particularly interested in "new religions," and his argument is somewhat plausible. However, what he points out as reasons for Christianity's failure is recognized also by laymen and they are not necessarily the only ones. In other words, there may be other reasons more important than these, and the success of future Christian evangelism may depend upon whether more adequate studies of this point are made.

In order to support his argument, Prof. Doi makes reference to two Pure Land Buddhist priests converted to Christianity, saying: "A more profound understanding of Christianity is shown by converts from Buddhism. Both hold the Christ to be the true Tathagata (*Nyorai*) and consider Christianity as something which fulfills Bud-

dhism." However, judging from the remarks of these two ex-Buddhists, one cannot but doubt if they had a real grasp of Buddhism either in doctrine or faith before their conversion. Moreover, one is inevitably led to ask whether they really understood their own faith, the teaching of the Pure Land Buddhism. To rely on such dubious witnesses for documentation is of no profit for the author.

Towards the end of his paper he writes: "The critical element in the gospel functions as a criterion by which to criticize the self-absolutizing and personality-destroying factors in pagan society and puts them under God's judgement. A Japanization of Christianity based on a compromise does not necessarily prove the strength of its love."

I can approve of his view that a true Japanization should not be based on a compromise. At the same time, however, one must take into consideration the fact that Christianity, as it is today, is something other than primitive Christianity. It may well be asked whether Christianity, during its

expansion in Europe, could have Christianized European people without the slightest compromise and whether it did not undergo any changes in its contact with European people. Is it not necessary to reconsider the problem of the Christianization of the Japanese people in the light of the history of the Christian evangelization of these other people?

I believe there must be a way to come truly into contact with the Japanese people without falling into compromise. This point needs further investigation. Should Christians then find themselves incapable of applying such a method, they must reproach themselves for their lack of power.

Concerning the Socio-cultural Interpretation Regarding this chapter I have no special remarks to make since it deals with the problem of distance as the presupposition of contact, and traces the various cases of contact between Christianity and other religions in the history of Japanese religions.

Concerning the Teachings of New Religions In the preface of this essay the author explains his stand-

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point as follows:

"From the point of view of the gospel, a study of other religions may be regarded as a waste of time. Indeed, I know many ministers in our churches who insist that one should devote oneself to the study of the Bible or theology rather than to other religions. Under such circumstances, I am fully aware of the possibility of my being criticised by these people. Nevertheless, I regard it as one of the tasks of Christian churches to study and evaluate the new religions without any prejudice."

If there really are such ministers as those described by the author, would it not be the most urgent business of Christians to modernize and rationalize them before setting to work on modernizing and rationalizing the Japanese? And, this being the case, I can all the more appreciate the work of the author who was courageous enough to take up the subject in such an atmosphere and attempted to analyse and evaluate new religions without prejudice. It can easily be imagined that task creates many difficulties for him. I have a full understanding of these circumstances and

hope that his studies may be continued with increasing effort.

As regards the conclusions he reached, however, I certainly find some inadequacies, which may be ascribed to the lack space, but which also undoubtedly come from insufficient understanding. For instance, the problem of tolerance in religion or the theory of the ultimate unity of all religions needs further investigation. The question of whether Tenshō Kōtai Jingū-kyō is pure or not, must be discussed also.

Seen as a whole, however, this paper with its sharp analysis and criticism is surely one of the best studies ever published on the new religions.

Shūten Ōishi.

Tokyo