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Exiles in their Own Land:
Japanese Protestant Mission History and Theory in Conversation with
Practical Theology

by Thomas John Hastings

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SLIDE 1**Introduction:**

In 1988, Carol and I were appointed as a PC (USA) Mission Co-workers in Kanazawa, Japan. I was Lecturer at Hokuriku Gakuin University, a Kindergarten-college “mission school” founded by an American Presbyterian named Mary Hesser in 1885 as Kanazawa’s first educational institution for girls and young women. Kanazawa is located on the Japan Sea where the Jodo-Shinshu sect of Buddhism is the dominant religious affiliation of most families. During my official interview, Rev. Osumi Keizo, a veteran pastor who had served more than 40 years in Kanazawa, offered me some sage advice. Looking me in the eye, he said with a smile, “Hastings-kun, welcome to Rome in A.D. 130.” While I never forgot his words, it took many years to grasp their depth of meaning.

I hope the following brief historical introduction will give those of you who are not so familiar with Japanese Christianity a better sense of the meaning of Rev. Osumi’s cryptic words.

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As Martin Scorsese’s recent interpretation of Endo Shusaku’s 1966 novel *Silence* attests, Japan’s first encounter with Roman Catholic Christianity from 1549–1639 came to a sudden halt when the Tokugawa shogunate expelled the foreign missionaries and outlawed Christianity, instituting a systematic persecution of converts and issuing a series of national seclusion (*sakoku*) edicts. During the so-called “Christian Century,” the number of Japanese converts is thought to have reached as many as 400,000, and estimates of martyrs vary greatly from a few hundred to several thousand. While some “hidden Christians” (*Kakure Kirishitan*) tried to keep faith in secrecy, Japanese rulers effectively stamped out the Christian movement, and with it, the threat of Western political domination they rightly feared would accompany it.¹

¹ As they had witnessed, for example, in the nearby Philippine Islands.

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Japan's second ambiguous encounter with Christianity occurred after 1853 and 1854, when the U.S. Navy's "Black Ships" delivered presidential ultimatums to Japan's rulers to open their ports for foreign trade. Soon Catholic and Protestant missionaries began arriving in the late 1850's, and Russian Orthodox came in 1861. Many "hidden Christians" resurfaced in Nagasaki, but sporadic persecutions continued until 1873 when the new Meiji government lifted the ban under foreign pressure.

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Protestant missionaries engaged in Bible translation, medical work, evangelism, and education. Coming from elite *samurai* (warrior) families who had been stripped of their income and privilege, the youthful first generation Japanese Protestants felt that the old traditions of Japan were impotent for responding to the new demands of the modern world. Hence, the "civilizing" Gospel proclaimed by the mostly American missionaries, seemed to offer the best hope for the future progress and success of their beloved homeland. Looking back on his initial motivations for baptism, one first-generation Protestant leader confessed,

I was a thorough-going nationalist and did not become a Christian because of any deep conviction. I had not yet had even the slightest taste of spiritual Christianity. It was simply because Christianity was the religion of civilized nations, making Shinto and Buddhism useless. I was only convinced in my heart that without Christianity Japan could never become civilized like the Western countries.²

These young converts also perceived a happy affinity between the samurai spirit (*Bushido*) and the Puritan spirit of the missionaries.³

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The Meiji government rushed to promote Western technology and capitalism, and cultivate a strong nationalist sentiment. In 1889, a Constitution was promulgated,

² Tamura Naomi, *Fifty Years of Faith* [in Japanese] (Tokyo: Keiseisha, 1924), pp. 24–25.

³ Roman Catholic and Russian Orthodox missionaries also attracted former *samurai* and other ambitious youth. Unlike the Protestant converts who were drawn to Bible study and ethics, Catholic and Orthodox converts were attracted by spiritual practices and obedience to church teaching.

followed in 1890 by the Imperial Rescript on Education. The 1890's witnessed a nationalistic backlash to Christianity as a foreign faith, and Japanese converts were hard-pressed to offer a contextual *apologia* for the faith. Tensions surrounding issues such as denominationalism, modern science, and the "new theology" grew between Japanese church leaders and missionaries. Public opinion turned against Christianity with some intellectuals proclaiming Christianity incompatible with Japan's emperor-centered piety. The "mission schools" were hit hard by the government's 1899 ban on religious instruction and observance in all public and private schools, yet they managed to survive.

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In the early 1900's, under the influence of modern psychology, Christian socialism, and liberal theology, churches sponsored the work of Sunday schools, hospitals, orphanages, and leprosaria. The 8th World's Sunday School Convention was held in Tokyo in 1920! Some Christian innovators advocated for the rights of children, women, industrial laborers, and farmers.⁴ For mainline Protestant theology, the shift to a strong and enduring interest in dialectical theology, and especially in Karl Barth, began in the late 1920's and early 1930's.

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The Christian cause met its next major test in the 1930's and 40's when the government mandated participation in the Shinto "Rite of Imperial Subjects" (*kokumin girei*), both in Japan and the countries of its expanding empire. The government tightened its grip on religious groups with the 1939 passage of the Religious Organization Law, and in 1941, all Protestant denominations were placed within the United Church of Christ in Japan (*Kyodan*). While some Holiness Church pastors were imprisoned for their views on the Second Coming, most churches cooperated with the government during the war.

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⁴ Japan's Orthodox church fell on hard times in the wake of the Russian revolution of 1917.

While most Baptists, Episcopalians, Lutherans, and other groups left the *Kyodan* immediately following Japan's defeat in WW II, the largest prewar denominations (Presbyterian, Reformed, Congregationalist, and Methodist) opted to remain together in what continues to be Japan's largest Protestant group. There was a brief upswing in the number of conversions during the U.S. Occupation (1945-1952), and enrollment in the former "mission schools" (now called "Christian schools") increased dramatically.

Over 80 new evangelical mission groups and Catholic orders arrived after WWII. The 1967 Confession of War Responsibility and student unrest of the late 1960's and early 1970's created a deep and still unhealed division within the *Kyodan*. With the dramatic decrease in the number of mainline Protestant missionaries and disappearing financial support, in 2005, JNAC (Japan-North American Commission on Cooperative Mission), the body representing the North American mainline denominations, closed its Tokyo offices, effectively severing official ties with the *Kyodan*.

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Of the 2.6 million Christians in Japan today, roughly 1.1 million are Independent, 600,000 are Protestant, 533,000 are Catholic, and 31,000 are Orthodox.⁵ The Independent category includes Mormons, Jehovah's Witnesses, etc. In spite of its status as a predominantly urban and middle-class minority faith, Christianity's influence on ethical and social issues has not been insignificant.

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Continuities and Discontinuities in Mission Theory and Practice

As the curtain was closing on the first generation of Protestant missionary work in Japan,⁶ about 400 missionaries, representing forty-two denominations and church-related groups such as the YMCA, gathered in Tokyo in October, 1900 for the General Conference of Protestant Missionaries. The massive 1048-page record of the meeting assesses the

⁵ Todd M. Johnson & Gina A. Zurlo, General Editors, *World Christian Encyclopedia*, 2015.

⁶ The first Protestant missionaries arrived in Japan in 1859, and the first-generation Japanese converts refers to those born in the 1850's and 1860's.

progress and future outlook of activities in evangelism, education, literature, and social movements. If these activities were pictured as concentric circles, there was a clear consensus among the missionaries that evangelism was the unnegotiable center and goal of every facet of their work. Given the fact that Japanese Protestants numbered only 41,808 at the time (less than 0.1% of the population), the business-like reports reflect a somewhat surprising sense of confidence and optimism.

As for Japanese evangelistic efforts, Nakata Juji (Holiness) and Uchimura Kanzo (*Mukyokai*) were prominent among the first generation, but it was in Kagawa Toyohiko (1888–1960), a second-generation convert, that Japan’s Protestant movement found its greatest evangelist.

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Like the missionaries, Kagawa was committed to education, literature, and social reform movements as proper partners for evangelism, but in contrast to the missionaries who placed the task of evangelism at the center of their theory, Kagawa focused on the person.⁷ In addition to elevating the person over the task, Kagawa pictured evangelism, education, literature, and social reforms as four intersecting circles. Like the early Christian apologists, Kagawa was trying to work out a contemporary approach to evangelism that made positive use of the linguistic, aesthetic, religious, philosophical, and ethical ways of knowing in which he and his audiences had been nurtured, while showing positive appreciation for the insights of modern culture (i.e., discoveries in science).⁸

⁷ Kagawa refers to his personalist approach in “Christianity and Buddhism,” which was quoted and entered into the record at the Jerusalem IMC of 1928. He said, “It is very difficult to get a victory for Christianity over Buddhism from the philosophical side, because the philosophical trend in Japan is identical with that of Western philosophy, and if the latter inclines to pantheism, Buddhism will rise in Japan; while if Western thought becomes more personalistic, Christianity will prosper.” “Christianity and Buddhism,” *The Christian Life and Message in Relation to Non-Christian Systems of Thought and Life*, The Jerusalem Meeting of the International Missionary Council, March 24–April 8, 1928 (New York, IMC, 1928), 124. For an extended discussion, see Thomas John Hastings, *Seeing All Things Whole: The Scientific Mysticism of Kagawa Toyohiko (1888–1960)* (Eugene: Wipf & Stock, Pickwick, 2015), 53–60.

⁸ Kagawa Toyohiko, *A Few Words in the Dark*, Translated by Thomas John Hastings (Princeton: Bridges to Peace, 2015).

Of course, the missionary theory of evangelism was not unaffected by historical, political, and cultural influences. Five years before the Tokyo Conference, Imperial Japan had demonstrated its industrial and military power in the First Sino-Japanese War (1894–95), displacing China as the dominant power in Northeast Asia. Impressed by the vigor and ambition of this young nation state, the mostly American missionaries who gathered in Tokyo were impressed with Japan’s progress as a materially advanced nation. They were also convinced that this material progress only lacked the complement of Christian spiritual progress. They boldly imagined a new Japan, a Christian Japan, that would go on to evangelize China and Korea. Speaking to a gathering of youth two years after the Tokyo Conference, one of its Presbyterian attendees painted the following picture of this “new Japan:”

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I lift my eyes to that old Empire, - so lately reckoned in our geographies as a semi-civilized nation, now a part of Christendom, admitted on terms of equality because of her own unparalleled achievements, - and I see there, in place of old heathen Japan a new Japan, a Christian nation. I see there the great Christian Church of the future, - a great Christian Church addressing itself more and more, first to the evangelization of the native land, and then to the paramount duty of filling Eastern Asia with Christian truth and Christian civilization. In other words, Japan will be a Christian nation and the Christian Church of Japan will be a great missionary Church. God will make of this Sunrise Kingdom the gate of Asia through which shall flow into China and Korea and other lands the life-giving influences which shall solve that old Eastern problem and deliver the world from the terrors of the so-called “Yellow Peril.” Do foreign missions pay? Is there a Christian in North America that still dares to ask that question? Let him candidly look upon Japan of to-day compared with the Japan of forty years ago and take full account of the real causes of that marvelous change, and he will never ask it again.⁹

The particular view of evangelism expressed here is not untainted by national and cultural assumptions, motivations, and prejudices. It is very tempting to hear in this vision of the “New Japan” a Christianized, internationalized version of American continentalism or manifest destiny. Based on this alluring missionary imaginary, which combined national

⁹ “The Recent Revival in Japan,” in *The Urgent Business of the Church: Addresses Delivered Before the Fourth International Convention of the Student Volunteer Movement for Foreign Missions, Toronto Canada, March 26–April 2, 1902* (New York: Student Volunteer Movement for Foreign Missions, 1902), 393.

identity with a “civilizing discourse” of moral progress inspired by Protestant piety,¹⁰ it is no surprise that Japan was long seen as the lynchpin of Protestant mission strategy in Northeast Asia.¹¹

Not surprisingly, the vision of a “new Japan,” minus the racist overtones, also found a positive reception among many early Japanese Christian leaders. Indeed, it fit very well with Japan’s own national ambitions and growing sense of destiny as a regional power. While it would be too much of a stretch to lay the blame for Japan’s imperial expansionism at the feet of the missionaries, just four years after the Tokyo Conference Japan was at war with Russia and ten years after had annexed Korea. Notably, Uemura Masahisa, the leader of the Church of Christ (Presbyterian), opposed the Russo-Japanese War, but he saw the annexation of Korea as providential.¹² As for the pacifist Kagawa, his later involvements in China reveal that even he was not free from the influence of this discourse.¹³

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¹⁰ Jon Thares Davidann, *A World of Crisis and Progress: The American YMCA in Japan, 1890–1930* (Bethlehem and London: Lehigh University Press and Associated University Presses, 1998), 20–22.

¹¹ For example, following the Jerusalem Conference of 1928, when it had become obvious that Japan’s churches would not be up to the task of reaching the homeland, to say nothing of China, Korea, and Taiwan, the International Missionary Council joined with Japanese church agencies to conduct a survey, which concluded that Japan’s Christian schools were much more likely to succeed than the churches. The 1932 report concludes that “The greatest factor in creating this large unnumbered body of Christians is these Christian schools.” As for the churches, the report concludes, “If one were to judge the power of Christianity by the strength of the churches, nothing but disappointment would await him. The Christian church as a local institution has not yet become indigenous to Japan. There are serious doubts as to whether the Church, as it is known in the West, ever will become native to Japan.” It is remarkable that the report was endorsed by eight leading Japanese Christians, including such luminaries as Ibuka Kajinosuke, Hani Moto, and Nitobe Inazo, as well as four foreigners.

Christian Education in Japan: A Study (New York: The International Missionary Council, 1932), 149–50.

¹² Helen J. Ballhatchet, *The Modern Missionary Movement in Japan, Roman Catholic, Protestant, Orthodox*, in *Handbook of Christianity in Japan*, Edited by Mark R. Mullins (Leiden, Boston: Brill, 2003), 52.

¹³ Kurahashi Masanao 倉橋正直 “Kagawa Toyohiko to Manshu Kirisuto Kaitakudan 「賀川豊彦と満州キリスト教開拓団」 [Kagawa Toyohiko and the Manchurian Christian Pioneers] *Quarterly AT* 15 (2009), 63–71.

Matsutani Yosuke 松谷暉介 “Kagawa Toyohiko to Chugoku: Shukyo Shidan Mondai wo Megutte” 「賀川豊彦と中国—「宗教使節」問題を巡って—」 [Toyohiko Kagawa and His Visit to China as “Religious Envoy”] 『キリスト教史学』 67, 2013, 101–133.

Another theoretical assumption put forward by the missionaries at the Tokyo Conference was a version of Alexander Duff's "downward filter theory." In his "General Historic Review," D. C. Greene, veteran Congregational missionary of the ABCFM, said that while the number of Japanese Christians may represent "a comparatively small body," their relatively high numbers in leadership positions in government, political parties, military, universities and colleges, newspapers, and charity work, boded well for the future of the Christian movement. Green says,

This prominence of Christian men in so many departments of life is not due—it cannot be due—to accident; it must be attributed to a certain stimulus which is the product of their Christian faith. They have made a deep impression upon society. They fill these numerous positions of influence because, in spite of much prejudice, they have proved themselves worthy and have won the confidence of their countrymen. The influence accorded them is an unconscious tribute to the faith that has made them what they are.¹⁴

One dissenting voice to the "downward filter theory" was Rev. E. H. Jones of the American Baptist Union. Citing biblical warrant in "The common people heard Him gladly" (Mark 12:37), and "Not many wise after the flesh, not many mighty, not many noble are called" (1 Corinthians 1:26), Jones added, "As in all the world so here you will find that evangelization must begin with the common people and work from them upward."¹⁵

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The theory that Christian influence would gradually trickle down from the upper to the lower classes also resonated with first-generation Japanese Protestant leaders, most of whom had hailed from the educated *samurai* class. But by the second generation, this theory was being challenged by leaders like Kagawa, who had witnessed the devastating effects of Japan's rapid industrialization. Kagawa made a dramatic decision as a 21-year-old seminarian to move into Kobe's worst slum, and from there he and his wife Haru devoted themselves for more than ten years to evangelism, education, literature, and social reform movements. Like the Baptist at the Tokyo Conference,

¹⁴ D. C. Greene, "General Historic Overview," *Proceedings of the General Conference of Protestant Missionaries in Japan* (Tokyo: Methodist Publishing House, 1901), 95–96.

¹⁵ *Ibid.*, 342.

Kagawa rejected Duff's "downward filter theory," and believed Christians had an obligation to follow the pattern Christ's ministry, as well as his teachings. This put him at sharp odds with Japanese church leaders and theologians. Theologian Kuribayashi Teruo comments,

If we think of the boast of Uemura Masahisa, the leader of the Japanese church in the Meiji and Taisho Eras, who said, "My churches don't need the likes of rickshaw drivers or factory workers," Kagawa proclaimed, "The poorest of the poor are the heart of the church. The most obscure must become the treasure of the church," it is no surprise that pastors did not welcome him. When Kagawa said, "Faith is not about intellectually swallowing the creeds," it is no surprise he was not viewed favorably by Japan's systematic theologians.¹⁶

"Religion of the Intelligentsia" and "Partial Christians" within the "Religious Division of Labor" of Japanese Society

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Worried about the Japanese churches' captivity to an imported, abstract theology that could not move the Japanese mind and heart, Kagawa told the following story.

Christianity introduced from the West, because of its individualism, fails to understand the group life of the Japanese. This failure has greatly retarded Christian progress in this land. The parents of an eminent actress were murdered by burglars. A Christian pastor called after hearing about this tragedy. He entered very formally by the front entrance and endeavored to comfort her with the tenets of his faith. A Shinto believer also called. She entered by the back door, cleaned up the kitchen and brought order out of the chaos caused by the incident. The outcome was that this actress espoused the Shinto faith. Her reason is interesting. She declared, "Christian teaching is sublime but too difficult for me to grasp. The Shinto believer was kind, not over dignified, and friendly, so I accepted her faith." The Protestantism, introduced into Japan from Europe was strongly intellectualized and over-emphasized its theology. This left a gap between Christianity and the uneducated masses. There is danger therefore of it becoming merely the religion of the intelligentsia, a minority group.¹⁷

Kagawa's fear that Christianity would become "merely the religion of the intelligentsia, a minority group" was prescient, because in spite of massive foreign and indigenous efforts,

¹⁶ Kuribayashi, Teruo 栗林輝夫. "Fukyō no naka de Kagawa no shingaku wo saidoku suru" 「不況の中で賀川の神学を再読する」 [Rereading Kagawa's theology in the midst of a recession]. *Quarterly AT* 15 (2009) 55.

¹⁷ Toyohiko Kagawa, *Christ and Japan* (New York: Friendship, 1934), 95–96.

Japanese Christians today constitute a tiny religious minority of about 1% of the population who are still highly concentrated in the port cities where the missionaries originally settled.¹⁸ Further, theologian Furuya Yauo points out that Japanese Christianity has developed with little relation to Shinto and Buddhism, the religions of the masses (大衆宗教).¹⁹ With the exception of some tiny indigenous Christian groups who have attempted to interact more directly with the inherited traditions,²⁰ Japanese Christianity is still a Westward-leaning, individualistic, urban, middle-class phenomenon that has not fared well among the masses.

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In contrast to Kagawa's concern that Christian faith would forever remain foreign to Japan, philosophically-minded historian Ishihara Ken (1882–1976) offers the following characterization of the psychological or spiritual predicament of the Japanese Christian, presumably including himself.

While being attracted to the hearing of the exposition of gospel teaching, and accepting this as a welcome teaching, this does not lead to a basic restructuring of the self or the birth of a new human being. Thus, the old and new persons continue to coexist in conflict within the self, and while perhaps behaving at times like a Christian, one usually acts within the old environment as a full-fledged member of that society. By and large, this is the kind of 'partial-Christian' we have seen... As a result, Japanese Christianity occupies a kind of marginal 'intermediate zone' within which a limited sphere of Christian influence is developed and a certain social influence is maintained, yet while this appears to be Christian, it is no more than an embellished façade. Not only laypersons, but clergy with leadership responsibilities also tend to be seduced by such a situation.²¹

Whereas Kagawa worried about an excessively foreign faith, Ishihara worried about the Christian's psychological captivity to "the old environment." As an evangelist, Kagawa was concerned about the Gospel's public witness, whereas the bookish Ishihara focused on

¹⁸ As of 2002, approximately 80% of Japanese Christians were residing in one of the port cities where the early missionaries first settled! *Religion Yearbook* (Tokyo: Gyosei, 2004), 45.

¹⁹ 古屋安雄、『日本のキリスト教』（東京：教文館、2003年）、22。

²⁰ See Mark R. Mullins, *Christianity Made in Japan: A Study of Indigenous Movements* (Honolulu: Hawaii, 1998).

²¹ 石原謙『石原謙著作集 第十巻 日本キリスト教史』岩波書店、一九七八年、二一七一―二一八ページ。

the inner existential conflict that seemed to relegate the Christian to an impotent, spiritual “intermediate zone.” Kagawa called for a faith more finely tuned to Japanese cultural and social sensibilities, while Ishihara was anxious about the existential dilemma of the “partial Christian.” Of course, the sticky cultural, social, and psychological problems Kagawa and Ishihara point to are in no way unique to Japan or to Japanese Christians.

To help you understand the issues that vexed Kagawa and Ishihara, in this next section, we want to provide a sense of the religious milieu of Japan, within which Christianity functions as a Western-oriented, individualistic phenomenon with an ambiguous relation to the family, local community, nation, and humanity.

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One of the characteristics of the religious and ethical division of labor in Japan is the fact that several traditions intersect social relationships across a lifetime. As a general rule, Japanese relate to Shinto on festive occasions that celebrate life or the power of the natural world, Christianity when in love or when advocating for social reforms, Buddhism when contemplating the meaning of life or facing death, and Confucianism when thinking, speaking, and acting in family, school, and workplace. Babies and children are blessed at local Shinto shrines, and a significant majority of Japanese make the annual *hatsumode* visit to a Shinto shrine at New Year, fathers take home Christmas cakes, couples go on a Christmas date and many choose a “church-style” wedding ceremony, and Buddhist priests are traditionally called to offer prayers for the dead who are buried in graveyards owned and managed by Buddhist temples. At set times such as *obon*, *ohigan*, and cyclical remembrances of deceased family members, most Japanese observe Buddhist rituals at the family graveside. The tacit ethical ideal for social relationships is still the “five bonds” of Confucianism, characterized by a continuum of benevolence (仁) and justice (義) between Ruler and Ruled, Father and Son, Husband and Wife, Elder Brother and Younger Brother, and Friend and Friend. (儒教の五倫：君臣，父子，夫婦，長幼，朋友)

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Among these various kinds of ritual observance, wedding and funeral patterns have undergone the greatest change in recent years. For example, in 1982, an estimated

90% of all weddings were performed in the “Shinto-style” and only 5.1 were “church-style.” By 1998 “church-style” ceremonies had increased to 53.1% while “Shinto-style” weddings had declined to 32.3%.²² Estimates for “church-style” weddings today run between 75 and 80%. As for funerals, fewer and fewer are being performed in the traditional Buddhist style. Especially in urban settings, there is a marked increase in non-religious, civil funerals and burials and so-called “natural funerals and burials” (自然葬), which refers to interment in the soil in a manner that allows the ashes to recycle naturally.²³ In spite of these dramatic societal shifts in wedding and funeral practices, the total number of Christians has remained more or less constant.

Through such changes, Japanese continue to draw their religious identity from multiple sources. And while some are embarrassed to admit it, Christians are not immune to this phenomenon. For example, David Reid’s 1989 study reported that 25% of Japanese Protestants kept a Buddhist altar (*butsudan* • 仏壇) in their homes.²⁴ Sociologist Roland Robertson offers the following analysis:

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In any case, the critical point is that the very structure of Japanese religion as a whole and the syncretism of everyday individual life are both based upon and encourage the tendency to make an identity from various sources, which themselves vary in terms of ‘native’ and ‘foreign’ references. Thus the popularity of “Christian” marriages ritualistically confirms selective Japanese orientations to the West, while involvement in Buddhism confirms, *inter re*, an orientation to the universal and humanity in general.²⁵

Even after more than 150 years of evangelistic outreach by missionaries and Japanese, I think Robertson is correct to assert that it is Buddhism, not Christianity, that links the Japanese people to “the universal and humanity in general.” This may sound surprising,

²² Mark R. Mullins, “Japanese Christianity,” *Nanzan Guide to Japanese Religions*, Edited by Swanson and Chilson (Honolulu: University of Hawaii, 2005), 124.

²³ Murakami Kōkyō, “Changes in Japanese Funeral Customs during the Twentieth Century,” *Japanese Journal of Religious Studies*, Vol. 27, No. 3/4, (Fall, 2000), pp. 335–352

²⁴ David Reid, “Japanese Christians and the Ancestors,” *Japanese Journal of Religious Studies* 16(4): 259-289.

²⁵ Roland Robertson, “Japanese Globality and Japanese Religion” in *Globalization: Social Theory and Global Culture* (London: Sage Publications, 1992), 94–95.

counterintuitive, or even ironic, since Christianity of course confesses a strong notion of “catholicity” or “universality” as a mark of the church.²⁶

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While struggling to negotiate, for example, the difficult questions of how Christians and churches should approach traditional community and family-based rituals, Christianity and Christians have continued to be identified with the West. In *The Japanese and the Bible*, “pain of God” theologian Kitamori Kazoh tells a personal story that illustrates this issue.

Actually, in my own case, since I was born into a Buddhist family with absolutely no connection whatsoever with Christianity, I remember the first time seeing a church as a child and feeling immediately, as I walked by, that this must be the foreigners’ residence... I remember thinking that the people who congregated in those churches were somehow different from the rest of us Japanese. I remember feeling offended because I knew that “un-Japanese” Japanese people were attending that church. I think this is still the normative view of Christianity among the Japanese. Without a doubt, part of this reaction is a result of the guardedness Japanese have felt toward Christianity since it was declared an outlawed faith in the Edo Era, but if we dig deeper, we find that there is some sense in which being Christianized means losing one’s Japanese-ness and becoming non-Japanese.²⁷

Perhaps because of the early and strong identification of Protestant Christianity with modernity, Japanese Protestants have tended to reinforce this identification with the West, rather than seeking ways to identify, for example, with developing churches and theologies in neighboring Korea, China, or Taiwan.

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I found warrant for this claim when I examined Japanese books in biblical studies, and historical, systematic, and practical theology that were in circulation as of December, 2003.²⁸ Out of 765 theological books, 53% (405) were translations, mainly from English or

²⁶ Because of the emphasis on the worldwide fellowship and the presence in Japan of so many Catholics from South East Asia, Japanese Roman Catholics may be in a slightly different situation than Protestants regarding this “orientation to the universal and humanity in general.”

²⁷ 北森嘉藏、*日本人と聖書*（東京：教文会，1995）、6。Author’s translation.

²⁸ There were about 3,200 Japanese Christian books in circulation as of December, 2003. *Comprehensive List of Christian Books* (Tokyo: Comprehensive List of Christian Books Publishers Association, 2004).

German. Of the remainder written by Japanese authors, the overwhelming majority of these treated Western theological figures and subjects. This impressive output of translated theological work is staggering by any global standard.²⁹ Given this virtually exclusive interest in the theology of Europe and North America, one might minimally expect to find Japanese theologians writing articles and books in English or German. However, with few exceptions, Japanese theologians have not contributed their own distinctive voices to the global chorus of Christ's followers.

Given this situation, one cannot avoid the conclusion that Japanese Christians still see themselves as receivers more than contributors to the *ecumene* or to international theological discussion.³⁰ Today, especially with the shrinking number of missionaries to report in English on the situation of the Japanese churches and Japanese theology, European and North American theologians know almost nothing about Japanese theology, but the opposite is clearly not the case. In spite of theologian Ohki Hideo's 1961 call for Japanese theology to break free from its "Germanic captivity,"³¹ seminaries and churches in Japan continue to rely on theologies forged in Europe and North America.

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The problematic of this enduring dependence on the Western theological canon becomes clearer when we situate Japanese Christianity in relation to the broader religious division of labor.

²⁹ Japan's strong tradition of translation began in earnest with the Chinese classics and Dutch texts during the Tokugawa Era and then turned almost exclusively to Western texts in the Meiji Era. 丸山真男と加藤周一、『翻訳と日本の近代』（東京：岩波新書、1998）。

³⁰ As well as the identification of Christianity with modernity, one wonders if this dependency on Western theology is, in part, a legacy of the pattern of financial dependency established and maintained by the mostly North American missionaries? The following represents a snapshot from 1937 of the financial situation after 75 years of massive foreign and native efforts. In spite of a strong independent spirit among the first generation of Japanese Protestant leaders, *The Japan Christian Yearbook of 1938* reports that of the 1,874 organized Protestant churches in 1937, only 950 (only slightly more than one-half) were "self-supporting." *The Japanese Christian Yearbook 1938* (Tokyo: Kyo Bun Kan), 376–77.

³¹ Furuya Yasuo, ed. and trans., *A History of Japanese Theology* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1997), 6.

1. SHINTŌ AS THE RELIGION OF THE LAND／領土の宗教（神道） : Local and national identity is sustained by cyclical events at local shrines, the emperor system, and Yasukuni Shrine（地元の神社行事、天皇制、靖国神社）.

2. BUDDHISM AS THE RELIGION OF THE HOUSEHOLD／家の宗教（仏教） : Familial and transgenerational (“universal”) identity is sustained by regular remembrance of ancestors at the family altar in the home and seasonal rituals at the family grave（仏壇とお墓）.

3. CHRISTIANITY AS THE RELIGION OF INDIVIDUAL CHOICE／個人的選択の宗教（キリスト教） : Individual identity is mediated by interaction with like-minded individuals in the church and a strong intellectual identification with the Western theological canon.

I will now share a story that illustrates Japanese Christianity’s ambiguous relationship to the family system. Several years ago, I was invited to preach and give a lecture at a Japanese church, and since I was Professor of Practical Theology (Christian education) at Tokyo Union Theological Seminary（東京神学大学） at the time, I spoke on the theme of “passing on the faith to the next generation.”（信仰継承） Several years before my visit, the church’s pastor and elders had come to the painful recognition that they were failing to retain even the children of Christian families, so they had initiated a serious exploration of passing on the faith. Since they knew I had written on this subject, the decision to invite me to speak was a consensus decision of the whole church.

Beginning with biblical passages, I spoke on the pivotal role of the family in passing on faith in Israel and on the history of catechesis and Christian education in the churches up until the present. After my lecture ended, a middle-aged man who seemed deeply troubled by my lecture stood up and passionately recounted the following story:

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From the Meiji Era until today, most Japanese Protestants had encountered some sort of discouragement in the midst of life, and at that time happened to meet a pastor. And then under the teaching of that pastor, we heard the message of the Bible for the first time, and in most cases—contrary to the will our families—at some point we surrendered to Christ. In today’s world, when I think for example of my two daughters who are living their lives happily, I doubt very much that they

will experience the kind of personal setback that led me to Christ. Honestly, as a parent, I do not want them to go through that kind of painful setback. As an individual, I am certainly grateful that I surrendered to Christ and was led to the church, but I think your lecture about the important role of the family in passing on the Christian faith is completely irrelevant given the realities of Japanese Christianity.³²

It goes without saying that, while I was grateful for his honest response and confession, it did little to strengthen my identity as a Professor of Practical Theology. I pondered these challenging words as I rode the train back to Tokyo. Of course, this one story does not represent a complete picture of the Japanese churches, however I think it clearly and honestly captures the problem of how Christianity as a “religion of individual decision” functions, in effect, “in exile” outside of the religious ecology of the household and land.

I hope this analysis gives you a better understanding of why Kagawa and Ishihara were so concerned about Japanese Christians becoming cultural or psychological exiles in their own land.

Final Comments

In closing, I ask you to recall Rev. Osumi’s words, “Welcome to Rome in A.D. 130.” When seen from both the perspectives of human history and salvation history, perhaps the Japanese churches’ situation is not so desolate as we may be tempted to conclude. In terms of Lamin Sanneh’s description of the translation of the gospel as a process that embraces the complementary movements of relativization and destigmatization, Japanese Christians have been seeking ways to relativize the missionary roots of their new faith while destigmatizing and adopting Japanese culture “as a natural extension of the life of the new religion.”³³ And as Scorsese’s *Silence* attests, Japan has been engaged in this daunting process since Francis Xavier arrived in Kagoshima in 1549.

From Christianity’s initial missionary movement out of first-century Palestine into and beyond the cultures of the Greco-Roman world, the task of translation has always been a painstaking process that has more often proceeded by slow fits and starts than by

³² Anonymous Japanese Protestant church member.

³³ Lamin Sanneh, *Translating the Message: The Missionary Impact on Culture* (New York: Orbis, 1989), p. 1.

sudden and dramatic revolutions. For a range of historical, cultural, social, and psychological reasons—only a few of which we have touched on—perhaps this process will take longer in Japan than in other places. God only knows.

But it seems clear that the dependence on the conceptual *Weltanschauung* of the Western theological canon and other factors still leaves many Japanese Christians feeling exiled from their own people or “dressed up in ill-fitting western clothes,” to borrow a favorite metaphor of Endō Shūsaku. In his recently published *Silence and Beauty: Hidden Faith Born of Suffering*,³⁴ Japanese-American artist Makoto Fujimura poignantly and hopefully characterizes modern Japan as a “Christ-hidden culture.” It seems Japanese novelists and other artists have often been more eloquent than theologians in addressing the depth dimension of Japan’s ambivalent relationship to Christ and Christianity. Throughout a history of ambiguous interactions with Western Christianity—including a devastating war with the nations who had sent the missionaries—the Japanese churches have remained focused on Christ’s cross. In this post-missionary and post-colonial era, I fully expect Japanese Christians, who have often felt like exiles in their own land, will be gifted with new ways to express their own distinctive experience of the Gospel of Jesus Christ, and when this happens, the worldwide Christian movement will be challenged and encouraged as Christ is refracted in new lights through the prism of Japan’s beautiful culture.

³⁴ Makoto Fujimura, *Silence and Beauty: Hidden Faith Born of Suffering* (IVP, 2016).