

**A CONTEXTUAL THEOLOGICAL REFLECTION
ON ARTICLE OF FAITH VIII, "REPENTANCE,"
IN THE MANUAL OF THE CHURCH OF THE NAZARENE:
FROM JAPANESE PERSPECTIVE**

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I. PRELIMINARY EXPLANATION

Any term as a linguistic symbol, either theological or non-theological, may be interpreted by a particular socio-cultural and a historical context of the one who engages in the interpretation. While the basic grammar of the term is shared and presupposed, a conceptual and practical usage of it can differ in different culture and in different circumstances. In that sense, it is desirable to engage in inter-cultural dialogue, especially when we try to define and/or clarify a meaning of any Christian symbol. It is true too to the fundamental Christian term "repentance." What I will present in this brief paper is a Japanese Christian reflection on the eighth Article of Faith "repentance" in *Manual of the Church of the Nazarene*.

The Church of the Nazarene officially adopted and published, in the District Assembly in 1993, "Confession of Responsibility of the Church of the Nazarene in Japan During the Second World War." The Confession was soon translated into English, Korean and Chinese. A Commentary on the Confession, *Live Peace*, was published in 1994 to let the Church members know the meaning and importance of the Confession.¹ The District Superintendent and other representatives

¹ ISHIDA Manabu, *Live Peace: A Commentary on "Confession of Responsibility of the Church of the Nazarene in Japan During the Second World War,"* (Okayama: Church of the Nazarene in Japan, Committee of Social Affairs, 1994).

from the Japan district visited Korean Church of the Nazarene with the Confession and the Commentary in 1995, to express official repentance and to beg their pardon on the deed of our country and the Church in Japan. It was a church-historically a significant occasion. Official relationship between Korean and Japanese Church of the Nazarene was restored at that moment. Since then Japanese delegates to international conferences brought the Confession and expressed their apology. These action opened a new relationship between Japanese Church and Churches in Asian countries but when we turn our eyes to the Church in Japan, we have not engaged in deepening the theological reflection on repentance nor had developed a theology of repentance though we held study sessions of the Commentary in many churches at least first several years.

This paper is my personal reflection on the eighth article of faith, "repentance," in the Articles of Faith of *Manual* of the Church of the Nazarene, from Japanese historical and theological perspective. To present a comprehensive interpretation is beyond the scope of this paper. I would like to present a small suggestion for the future theological discussion on the Articles of Faith.

But before starting the argument, it is necessary to clarify what Articles of Faith may theologically mean to be. *Manual* describes the Articles of Faith "the fundamental law or Constitution of the Church of the Nazarene." In what sense are we to interpret the definition? We should note that the Articles of Faith is not considered to be un-revisable dogma of the Church. The process of amendments is stated at the end of Church Constitution (Article 32). Probably it is best to understand the Articles of Faith, as George A. Lindbeck would put it, that they are, following "the basic grammars" of the Christian faith, "communally authoritative teachings regarding beliefs and practices that are considered essential to the identity or welfare" of the Church of the Nazarene.² That is, the Articles of Faith are, in its nature, "the interaction of changing selves in changing circumstances with the selfsame story" of Jesus.³ We may say that it

² George A. Lindbeck, *The Nature of Doctrine: Religion and Theology in a Postliberal Age*, (Philadelphia: the Westminster Press, 1984), p.83, 74.

³ Lindbeck, p.83.

is meaningful for us to reflect on the Articles of Faith from contextual theological perspective, provisioning the possibilities of the amendments of the Articles. Such a process must be both ecumenical and inter-cultural.

II. Some Issues Concerning the Article VIII, Repentance

Article VIII, Repentance

We believe that repentance, which is a sincere and thorough change of the mind in regard to sin, involving a sense of personal guilt and a voluntary turning away from sin, is demanded of all who have by act or purpose become sinners against God. The Spirit of God gives to all who will repent the gracious help of penitence of heart and hope of mercy that they may believe unto pardon and spiritual life.

1. What Do We Repent on?

This rather classical definition of repentance in our *Manual* must have been already existed as the Article of Faith in the first half of the twentieth century, since the same Article with exactly the same words is seen in Orton Wiley's three volume work, *Christian Theology*, first published in 1943. Almost all orthodox Christian traditions would agree that repentance is an essential biblical demand and it is what Jesus called us for. The point I will discuss in this paper is the Article's interpretation of the repentance as "a sense of personal guilt" and "a voluntary turning away from sin." It has much to do with another Article on "Sin, Original and Personal" (Article V), an Article that was once widely enlarged,⁴ for "repentance presupposes the sinful condition of mankind."⁵ Church of the Nazarene has interpreted sin in two-fold way, original sin and personal sin. It can clearly be seen in the title of the Article VIII, "Sin, original and Personal." John Wesley's theological understanding of sin and

⁴ The Article V in 1976 edition of *Manual* is much shorter, and the title of the Article is "Original Sin, or Depravity," not "Sin, Original and Personal" as seen in 2001 edition.

⁵ H. Orton Wiley, *Christian Theology*, (Kansas City, Mo.: Beacon Hill Press, 1943), vol. II, p.360.

a commonly shared traditional view of sin among major orthodox Protestants are the ground of this definition. It was a reasonable theological conclusion drawn from the Scriptures and classical understanding of humanity and the world in Wesley's period. And up to the early twentieth century in which Church of the Nazarene was established, there was not much theological development on the doctrine of sin. And such was the presupposition of the doctrine of repentance.

We must not forget that Wesley was, in every sense, a man of eighteenth century. And, early twentieth century was, generally speaking, an optimistic period that the western Christian people believed in the development of humanity based on the Christian moral teachings. They also expected the Christianization of the world by the progress of Christian world evangelism. Of course Wesley knew social problems and injustice very well. He was also aware of and opposed against the evil of slavery. Some scholars would see Wesley as one of the orthopractical pioneers of a kind of theology that modern people would call it liberation theology.⁶ We should not forget that Wesley lived in the days in which there was no concept nor vocabulary of "structural evil" despite his acute awareness of various social problems and injustice. There are two presuppositions in Wesley's faith and theology. The first is that the English society at Wesley's days was that of Christian, or at least widely believed so. The eighteenth century western European society was, in general, that of the "Christendom." Vast majority of the members of the society was, whether actual or nominal, Christians. It was natural for Wesley, therefore, to believe that the revival of Christian faith and restoration of Christian moral living through evangelism would make it possible to Christianize the entire society by converting each member of it. NORO Yoshio summarizes Wesley's belief on this point in relation to the concept of the Kingdom of God:

We note that there are threefold meanings in Wesley's understanding of the Kingdom of God. The first can analogically be called a vertical line. Every people in every period can enter the kingdom of God after the death only if he/she believes in God. The second

⁶ On Theodore Runyon and his interpretation of Wesley's theology, see, NORO Yoshio, *John Wesley*, (Tokyo: Shokaku-tei, 2005), pp.231-241.

is that people living in time is cut off from this horizontal line by death, and enter the eternal Kingdom of God that also can analogically be called a horizontal line. The third is the Kingdom of God that will be realized in history before the end of it, that will be realized when the Gospel is brought to the entire world through Methodist movement. It is a kind of Methodist version of Millennialism.⁷

Wesley was highly optimistic on the third point. It was true that Methodist movement realized a certain degree of revival in England and in the New World. Nevertheless, it is also true that Methodist movement did not Christianize the world but rather, contrary to Wesley's expectation, the western society has been rapidly de-Christianized in modern period, as NORO points out.⁸

The second presupposition is, somewhat related to the first, that Wesley regarded the society as the collection of individuals. According to Wesley, Christian faith should Christianize, not only individual life but also the society itself to realize social justice. Wesley believed it can and should be done through restoring individual Christian life and morality. Social problems and injustice were to be remedied by evangelical restoration of individual members of the society. William R. Cannon describes this Wesleyan conviction:

Social reformation can be realized through personal transformation of individual members of the society by the grace of God, because Christian society is a collection of individuals who consist of the society.⁹

Let us recall that there was no concept or understanding of "structural evil" in Wesley's days. Since Constantine period, both church and state were regarded as God's holy methods of establishing order in the world and were essentially good institutions blessed by God. It

⁷ NORO, p.275.

⁸ NORO, p.275.

⁹ William R. Cannon, *The Theology of John Wesley*, (N.Y., Nashville: Abingdon, 1946), pp.227-239. Cited from Cannon, "Doctrine of Salvation" in YAMAUCHI Ichiro, ed., *Mesojizumu no Genryu*, (Tokyo: Kirisuto-Shinbun-sha, 2003, p.151.

was only after the emergence of fascism in twentieth century that some people began to question the traditional view of society and began to develop a kind of sociological notion which was later named "structural evil."¹⁰ The concept that social justice and order are established through personal Christian conversion of the people in society was widely shared by both Roman Catholics and Protestants from the Reformation era to modern period.¹¹ For Wesley and leaders of early Methodist movement sin was personal and inner issue of each individual, as most of the mainline Christians had thought. Wesley distinguished between voluntary transgressions and mistakes. Only willful violation of the law was liable for condemnation. This Wesleyan distinction is basically accepted in the doctrine of the Church of the Nazarene today. People are responsible for sins of omission and have to confess and correct it when it is revealed. But they are guilty of only willful sins.¹² 2001 version of *Manual* defines sin as follows in the Article of Faith V, Sin (5.3):

We believe that actual or personal sin is a voluntary violation of a known law of God by a morally responsible person. It is therefore not to be confused with involuntary failures, or other deviations from a standard of perfect conduct that are the residual effects of the Fall.

Mistakes and shortcomings also require Christ's atonement but only voluntary transgression is sin in a strict sense. This Article clearly indicates that sin is essentially personal.

2. Structural Evil and Humans As Social Existence

One of the most significantly developed theological themes in

¹⁰ ISHIDA Manabu, *Nihon ni okeru Senkyou-teki Kyoudoutai no Keisei: Shito-Shinjou no Bunmyaku-teki Chuukai* (A Contextual Commentary on Apostles' Creed), (Tokyo: Shinkyo-Shuppan, 2004), p.105f.

¹¹ Anabaptists and their descendants generally did not share this kind of optimism. It has to do with their being extreme minority in society. The significance of being minority as Christians may be briefly discussed later.

¹² John A. Knight, *In His Likeness*, (Kansas City, Mo., Beacon Hill Press, 1976), p.61.

twentieth century would be the problem of evil.

As modern western European countries had developed capitalistic economic systems, it was necessary to have colonies as the providers of resources and as the consumers of their industrial products. Asia, South America and Africa were soon colonized by the western imperialistic capitalist nations. The advanced capitalist countries of England, France and Holland colonized most of the non-western lands. Not much area was left for the latecomers like Germany, Italy and Japan. As those countries tried to obtain their own colonies, international conflicts and military confrontations became inevitable. Within Germany, Italy and Japan, nationalistic fascism and totalitarianism had risen to compete against the advanced western industrial countries.¹³

Fascism shook the traditional concept of the state which had been fostered in the western society for almost 1600 years. Since Constantine, the state was a divine agent of God to rule the secular dimension of the society. State was fundamentally a good institution to which people should be obedient, even though there might occasionally be tyrants and evil rulers. Struggle between the church and the state in western history was basically over the issue of domination. Neither the church nor the state saw the other as evil institution. The church was to rule over the spiritual realm and the state over the secular. No one doubted that good Christian was to be obedient both to the church and to the state.

If such a presupposition is collapsed and the nation engages in evil structurally, what should be the Christian obligation, obedience or resistance? Christians experienced the new reality that the very system of the nation has a certain dimension of structural evil, or at least the possibility of it. Experiencing the rise of such structural evil, Christians no longer could live as if the faith was only an individual matter. After the rise of fascism it became impossible for the church to say that the church should not be concerned with politics. It became obvious that indifference and neutralism

¹³ NAKAMURA Masanori, "Meiji Ishin no Sekai-teki Ichi (World Historical Position of the Meiji Restoration)," in NAKAMURA Masanori ed., *Nihon no Kindai to Shihon-shugi (Capitalism and Modern Japan)*, (Tokyo: University of Tokyo, 1992), pp.1-38.

was nothing less than to help and cooperate with fascism. No Christian can be free from the structural evil in modern period after experiencing fascism.¹⁴ Theological paradigms of the relationship between church and state, individual and society, evil and sin, has clearly shifted from western classical theological framework to a new paradigm like various liberation theologies. Human existence is both individual and social being at the same time, and individually moral people may produce an immoral society, as Reinhold Niebuhr observed more than seventy years ago.¹⁵ Church may have to live in a society that is structurally anti-Christian. In such society, Christian church is doomed to be oppressed and persecuted. Nevertheless, Christians living in the society belong to that society as constituting members of the society. This fact makes the situation highly complicated. If Christians are in extremely minority position, there is no practical possibility to Christianize the society through Christian evangelism. Christians are to live in much an antagonistic society as the members of the society.

In history of Japan, Christian faith was brought to Japan twice. The first occasion was from middle of the sixteenth century to early seventeenth century, by Catholic missionary endeavor. The second great tide of evangelism is in modern period, from the latter half of nineteenth century to the present days. In the first occasion, Christians were virtually extinguished in Japan by severe persecution. And now, Christian population in Japan is said to be a little lower than one percent after one hundred thirty years of missionary activities. Christians never became majority in the society, both numerically and socio-politically. Christians have always been a extreme minority group in Japan. Such was the social reality of Christians in Japan, They experienced the structural evil of national Shintoistic, imperialistic-militaristic colonialism as a Japanese national polity in the first half of the twentieth century. What Japanese Christianity experienced during that period was what the western Christianity had never experienced over one thousand and six hundred years. It was a kind of both theological and practical question

¹⁴ ISHIDA, *Senkyouteki Kyoudoutai*, pp.105ff.

¹⁵ Reinhold Niebuhr, *Moral Man and Immoral Society*, (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1932).

which western Christians had not been asked nor given answer, the very question that Japanese Christians had to face. It means that the western theological and ecclesiastical paradigm had no answer to the question that Japanese church was asked. What kind of theological and practical behavior could the Christians in Japan who live as extreme minority in the society take against the structural evil of the very society in which they were living? What kind of attitude should they have taken after the difficult period was gone? To ask these questions was to seek a theology of repentance for Japanese church. One thing is obvious. If we define sin as only personal, we Japanese Christians are not taking repentance seriously both historically and realistically.

III. Text of Confession of Responsibility of the Church of the Nazarene in Japan During the Second World War, and Christian Experience in Japan During Second World War:¹⁶

CONFESSION OF RESPONSIBILITY OF THE CHURCH OF THE NAZARENE IN JAPAN DURING THE SECOND WORLD WAR

We, the Church of the Nazarene in Japan, as a faith community called and gathered by our only Lord Jesus Christ, confess the following with aspiration to peace:

We recognize that our country caused great sorrow and pain among Asian and other countries and people living in those countries and regions including our own during the War of aggression.

The churches who belong to the Church of the Nazarene regret and repent the fact that we did not resist the aggression but rather cooperated with it.

In addition, we of the Church of the Nazarene are sorry for the fact that we did not express our repentance officially for forty-eight years after the War, and we ask forgiveness for this also.

We promise that we will always remember the fact that our country invaded our neighboring countries, and that we will do our best not

¹⁶ This chapter is cited from Ishida's Live Peace!, "the Fourth Day," with slight modifications.

to repeat the same sins.

We seek for reconciliation with people in Asian and other countries, and with resident foreigners in Japan, in whatever circumstance, on the basis of this repentance.

fifteenth of March, 1993,

District Superintendent of the Church of the Nazarene in Japan, Higuchi Shigeru.

1. The Church of the Nazarene and the United Church of Christ (Kyodan)

The Church of the Nazarene was founded in the United States as a result of the Holiness Movement in the latter half of the 19th century. It arrived in Japan and started missionary work in 1908,¹⁷ and the Church of the Nazarene in Japan was established in 1915. The Church grew rapidly through revival movements in its early period. In 1940, four denominations, the Church of the Nazarene in Japan, Free Methodist Church, Alliance Church and World Mission, formed Nihon Seika Kirisuto Kyodan (Japan Holiness Church of Christ), and the Church of the Nazarene ceased to exist in 1941 as an organization. In June of that year, the Founding General Assembly was held to start the Nihon Kirisuto Kyodan (United Church of Christ in Japan), under governmental pressure. Seika Kirisuto Kyodan became the eighth bloc of the United Church among eleven of such blocs based on denominational traditions. At the first General Assembly of the Kyodan, held in November 1942, the bloc system was abolished into a unified single church order. Thus, there was no Church of the Nazarene existing as a denominational organization in Japan from 1941 until 1946 when the Church of the Nazarene in Japan was re-established. If our confession says the Church of the Nazarene, it inevitably implies that our Confession would be concerned only with the period through the formation of Seika Kyodan in 1941. Accordingly, we could ignore the responsibility of our Church during the crucial years from 1942 to 1945. But even though the Church

¹⁷ In 1905, two missionaries of Christ's Holiness Church, which was later united into the Church of the Nazarene, came to Japan and started missionary work.

of the Nazarene in Japan did not exist as a denomination in those years, we need to be aware of our responsibility during those years, for the local churches continued to exist as members of Seika Kyodan and Nihon Kirisuto Kyodan during the period. So we are still responsible for the words and deeds of Seika Kyodan and Nihon Kirisuto Kyodan. We belonged to them and participated in the actions. Our Confession consciously uses the expression "the churches who belong to the Church of the Nazarene" in order to include the responsibility of the church during the period when we were assimilated in Seika Kyodan and Nihon Kirisuto Kyodan.

Some might say that the Church of the Nazarene was forced to be assimilated into the Kyodan against our will and therefore has no positive responsibility for the actions which the Kyodan took during the War. This is not correct. Let us briefly follow the course of the unification of the church up to the assimilation into Nihon Kirisuto Kyodan by means of denominational bulletins of the Church of the Nazarene, *Tengoku no Michi* (the Heavenly Way), and of Seika Kyodan, *Mattaki Ai and Seikwa* (the title of the bulletin was changed from *Mattaki Ai* or *Perfect Love* to *Seikwa* or Sanctification from the number two issue).

In an article of the November 1940 issue of *Tengoku no Michi*, the district superintendent of the Church of the Nazarene writes as follows:

When the four denominations are united, we will be Japan Seika Kirisuto Kyodan, and once all denominations are successfully united into a single church organization, it will be Nihon Kirisuto Kyodan. There will be no Nazarene as a denominational name, and we will not have our bulletin nor our denominational seminary. Though we miss them, it is an inevitable change corresponding to the great progress of our country. We do have hope in this change. We also must cooperate in order to extend our work to the continent... It is a very important time for us Christians, a good chance to contribute to our country through our religion.

The new denomination, Nihon Seika Kyodan was founded in the beginning of 1941, electing the former president of the Free Methodist Church

in Japan, Tsuchiyama Tetsuji as the first director. He writes in the first official denominational bulletin, *Mattaki Ai* (January 1941 issue):

The 2600th year of the imperial rule was not merely a year of celebration to remember the past history of our nation. It was the epoch making year in which our nation had re-started a great mission to become the prompter of the world history... It was why the churches in Japan sought to become a single entity, corresponding to the new world order. We too have to carry on the great mission of our nation. Before realizing the great unity of all churches, the Church of the Nazarene, the Alliance Church in Japan, the World Mission and Free Methodist Church in Japan had decided to organize Nihon Seika Kirisuto Kyodan as a step toward the great unity.

Those two articles cited above make it clear that the purpose of unifying movements of the churches was to cooperate with Japanese polity and militaristic policy. It is true that the Christian church in Japan was in a difficult situation at that time. For example, Christianity was regarded as the religion of enemies (Western countries), negative attitude toward worshipping of Shinto shrines was considered to be impious to the traditional gods, and eventually to the emperor as living god.¹⁸ The church was restricted to obedience to the national order. Once suspected as disobedient, there was a possibility of arrest and persecution.¹⁹ Nevertheless, there was more than a fear of arrest or persecution in the motivation of the unifying movement of the church in Japan. The Christians at that time intended to support and cooperate in the national policy and the War of aggression.

The founding of Seika Kyodan was regarded as a step toward the great unification of the all churches in Japan. When various problems

¹⁸ EBISAWA Arimichi and OOUCHI Saburo, *Nihon Kirisutokyou-shi* (*History of Christianity in Japan*), (Tokyo: Nihon Kirisuto Kyoudan Shuppan-kyoku, 1970), pp.550-54.

¹⁹ On Christian persecution during the War, see, Doshisha Daigaku Jinbun-Kagaku Kenkyu-jo and Kirisuto-kyo Shakai Mondai kenkyuu-kai, eds., *Senji-ka no Kirisuto-kyo Undou* (*Christian movements during the War*), 3 vols., (Tokyo: Shinkyo Shuppan-sha, 1972).

and opposition prevented the churches from forming Nihon Kirisuto Kyodan, the Director of Seika Kyodan, Tsuchiyama Tetsuji criticized the delay and wrote as follows in the April issue of *Seikwa* in 1941:

We cannot wait for the day of the actualization of the great unification. We should not hesitate... Our expectation of the glorious future has been betrayed so far by various problems since Shukyo Dantai-Hou (Religious organizations Law--governmental regulations of all religious organizations. This law set the lower limit of 50 churches with over 5,000 members for governmental recognition as a denomination. It accelerated the unifying movement of Christian churches. *supplemented by Ishida) has been passed. A half year has already passed since the unifying movement of the church has started wasting much time and expense. Yet it has not been realized so far. The Founding General Assembly of the new church organization has very significant meaning in this age, and we have a great responsibility... We would like to work for the salvation of the spirits of one hundred million people in our nation, and not only that, we are responsible for the salvation of several hundred million people living in the Co-prosperity Sphere in Asia.

The leader of Seika Kyodan eagerly asserted the necessity to be assimilated into Nihon Kirisuto Kyodan in order to cooperate with the new national structure. In June of 1941, the Founding General Assembly of the Kyodan was held and the representatives of all denominations sung Kimigayo (the national anthem at that time), worshipped the imperial palace from afar, prayed for the war dead silently, and took an oath to be faithful to the "Imperialist National Polity (Kokutai)." ²⁰ Upon the founding of the Nihon Kirisuto Kyodan, it was reported in the August issue of *Seikwa* (denominational bulletin of Seika Kyodan) as follows:

At Nihon Kirisuto Fujimi-cho Kyokai (church), the Founding General

²⁰ DOHI Akio, *Nihon Purotesutanto Kirisutokyou-shi (Protestant Christian History in Japan)*, (Tokyo: Shinkyo Shuppan-sha, 1980), p.352.

Assembly of Nihon Kirisuto Kyodan was held and we witnessed this historical organizing moment when the Kyodan was founded by a unanimous vote.

Three hundred nineteen delegates for the General Assembly were elected from all thirty-four denominations except the Anglican Church. Those denominations formed eleven blocs in the Kyodan, based on similarities of their traditions. This epoch making event, which had not been realized in any country in the history of the church, was realized in our imperial nation. It is truly a glorious event in world history.

The author of the article then continues that the unification was realized not by governmental pressure but by free will:

Many journalists comment that "the Christian church was forced to become a unified organization." It is absurd and not correct. It is not such an easy task to realize the unification of the church... It has been realized through our heavenly Father's providence and blessing so that we finally founded this unity under one name and one organization by a unanimous vote. We now must uphold the divine polity of our nation and seek to contribute to it religiously, being entirely renewed by the Holy Spirit.

We have briefly surveyed the history of the formation of Nihon Kirisuto Kyodan from the point of view of the Church of the Nazarene and Seika Kyodan, through our denominational records. It is obvious that both Nazarene and Seika Kyodan eagerly agreed and cooperated with the formation of the Kyodan. After the Kyodan was formed with a bloc system, the Department of Education which regulated religious organizations suspected that the bloc system of the Kyodan was a way to secure each denomination's identity and thus the Kyodan is merely an alliance of different denominations. The government requested that the blocs be dissolved as soon as possible and arrested some Christians who formerly belonged to the Holiness Church and were now in the sixth and eighth blocs. The true purpose of this arrest by the government was to warn the Christians that the government would arrest them if they were not obedient to the governmental regulations. At the First

General Assembly of the Kyodan in 1942, the Kyodan dissolved the bloc system and became a single organizational entity without agreeing on a unifying Confession of faith.²¹

Once the church was unified into a single organization under strict governmental control, there was no real opposition within the Kyodan against cooperation with the militarist government. The former Nazarene churches, now in the Kyodan, were no exception to this cooperation. We may not regard ourselves free from the sins of the cooperation of the Kyodan with the imperialism and military aggression, because we belonged to the Kyodan at that time.²² Our Confession intends to include not only the period when the Church of the Nazarene existed as a denomination but also the period when Nazarene churches were included in the Kyodan.

2. The History of Cooperation with Invasion

The Confession expresses and confesses the fact that our Church supported and cooperated with invasion before and during the War. We need to see the historical evidence to support the assertion of the Confession on this matter. But we also need to notice that the Church of the Nazarene contributed to evangelism in Japan, and people struggled hard to keep their faith and support the church. What we intend to clarify here is, firstly, the fact that the church in Japan at that time not only failed to resist the aggressive policy and colonialism of the nation, but even actively cooperated with it, and secondly, the reason why the church fell into such error. We would like to clarify those matters not in order to condemn the war time Christians but in order to find the key to the future direction of our Christian walk and to the starting point of our missiological task.

When we follow the articles of our official denominational bulletin *Tengoku no Michi (The Heavenly Way)*, we find that a decisive turning

²¹ GU Riimin and DOHI Akio, et al, *Ajia Kirisutokyou-shi (Asian History of Christianity)* 1, (Tokyo: Kyobunkwan, 1981), p.189., and DOHI, *Nihon Purotesutanto Kirisutokyou-shi*, p.352.

²² Even if the church had not been participating in those deeds and declarations of the Kyodan, we are responsible for what the Kyodan said or did, for our churches were existing as part of the Kyodan during the War time.

point comes in 1937. Until that year, there is no positive argument to support the War of aggression on the Continent, even though no opposition is stated. The war on the Continent is simply used as a metaphor for their spiritual battle. The August 15th issue of *Tengoku no Michi* was prohibited from publication by the government for reason of anti-governmental tendency. After that, the attitude of the denomination toward the imperialistic nationalism and the militarist policy shifted to support them more positively than before. The revised version of the prohibited issue of *Tengoku no Michi* states:

We also pray for our imperial army, for its perpetual victory. We also pray that Japan may pursue our mission in the Orient. We pray that Asian people may be saved from darkness and anti-religious power, and serve God in peace, receiving the favor of the emperor. Our prayer is, "Thy Kingdom come, thy will be done on earth as it is in heaven."

Until the prohibition of the publication of the issue by the government, there was no substantial political opinion expressed in the denominational bulletin. When the governmental regulation on freedom of speech and publication was strengthened as a way to promote the fascist system, and the church was so confronted by the government, the church leaders did not have a clear Christian standpoint to cope with the new and threatening situation. Japanese Protestant churches, especially the evangelicals, failed to evaluate the secular authority based on the critical point of view of the Scriptures. The reason is that their faith was dualistically limited to the realm of spiritual matters, and was not concerned for the political and/or secular matters. When the church was confronted by the government and forced to make some political decision, they accepted the policy of the Japanese government and agreed to cooperate with it. They dressed the militarist policy with a religious garment and identified the governmental slogan of "for peace and prosperity," used to justify invasion of Japanese imperialistic militarism, with the Christian concept of the Kingdom of God. The October 15, 1937 issue of *Tengoku no Michi* expresses the thought that the church supports the invasion as a necessary policy of Japan to establish peace:

We Christians willingly participate in the Spiritual Mobilization of the Japanese People issued by the government. We are Christians but at the same time we are Japanese. We cannot but love our country because of the Japanese blood in us. We stand in the biblical faith because we love our country. We hope to make our nation the best in the world and expect that our country will fulfill God's mission given to us. We rejoice that we are born in Japan, and we thank God that we have the holy emperor who is the successor of the one family line through all generations... The reason why we took weapons at this time is to achieve peace in Asia, and to achieve the purpose of coalition between Japan and China. We cannot afford to lose, we must win the battle. We pray for the victory of our imperial army and for early achievement of our purpose. When the peace is achieved, we Japanese Christians intend to lead and guide the Asian peoples and cooperate with them. Any Japanese who does not love Japan cannot be a true Christian... We should not forget to be obedient to the emperor's holy will and to pray for the prime minister and other officials that God help and guide them.

The church taught that the realization of the spirit of Hakkou Ichiu (the world becoming one family under Japanese leadership) was the way for the world to become one family of God the Father.²³ Japanese churches did not realize that it was one of the functions of the church to make critical and theological evaluation of the policy and practice of the government based on the gospel. The result was uncritical acceptance of the governmental assertions and slogans. This fact is

²³ *Tengoku no Michi*, published on February 15 of 1938 reads as follows:

The founding spirit of our nation is Hakkou Ichiu. It is quite different from an insular spirit. It is the spirit of regarding the world as one family. There is one heavenly Father and the Creator, who created the universe, and people are family under God. It is the mission of Japan to modify the world to realize this idea. We are to remove any obstacle for achievement of the idea. This is the spirit of Japan, and it is identical with the Christian spirit... We advance with the spirit of Hakkou Ichiu. Then, we shall overcome the dark spirit, unclean spirit and the spirit of narrow perspective.

clearly seen in the article published on April 15, 1939 in *Tengoku no Michi*:

During the (Manchurian) Incident, Christians worked very well... Today, Japanese people begin to realize that Christianity indeed fits very well in Japanese mentality. The spirit of Hakkou Ichiu shows that. We are not fighting, as the Japanese government repeatedly expressed, for territorial ambition. We are fighting because we love Chinese people and we wish to construct a peaceful Asia together.

This tendency of the Church to support the policy of the Japanese government was accelerated when four denominations, including the Church of the Nazarene in Japan, formed Nihon Seika Kirisuto Kyodan (the Holiness Church of Christ in Japan). Cooperation of the church with the government was one of the major purposes of the unifying movement of the church in Japan, and the church eagerly expressed its support of this and prayed for Japanese imperialism and its success. Once Japan entered the Second World War, Christians considered it as the war for "the mission of the eternal imperial nation," and the leaders of the church exhorted believers to work together for victory in the War.²⁴

²⁴ *Mattaki Ai* published on January 1, 1942 speaks concerning Japan's entering the Second World War by attacking Pearl Harbor as follows.

In spite of our sincere negotiations, America, cooperating with England, delayed the negotiation and expanded its military power to prepare the War,... There is no peaceful honesty on the side of America and England. We cannot tolerate their injustice and ambition... It is natural for those two countries to fall in such a situation. It is the result of the American government departing from the Puritan spirit of the founders of the nation and from God, and opposing a Christian spirit, being controlled by communism, boasting of their material wealth, and expanding their ambition to rule the world... The time has come for them to repent. It is God's providence to make the Western people repent their sins and come back to God and purify the secularized church... All we servant people of the emperor will fight for the eternal mission of our imperial Japan, unifying the hearts of all one hundred million Japanese people. We need to endure all kinds of difficulties in order to achieve our goal. Let all churches be united, be alert and stand for the nation.

Through this brief survey, we find that the church willingly supported and cooperated with the national policy and invasion of Asia. The church might not have had an evil intention but the result was still serious. What we need to question is not the eagerness of the faith of Japanese war-time Christians but the theological nature of their faith. This is a necessary task for us in order to make the point clear about our theological identity as Christians in Japan and to envision our future missionary activities.

We also need to see how Japanese churches cooperated with the invasion of the Continent through the activities of the church. Japanese government utilized not only military and economic power but also religious authority to control Asia, japanize the peoples in Asia, and make them obedient to the Japanese regime. In 1938 the government officially requested the church to cooperate with the governmental strategy in controlling the Asian peoples. Responding to this request, an article in the June 15th issue of *Tengoku no Michi* complains that the Church of the Nazarene so far has not fulfilled the obligation that "the church should plant on the ground which has been cultivated by the army." When four pastors were sent to China to start new missionary churches, it was highly celebrated as the "historical year."²⁵ The church spread its activities to the Continent with the intention of supporting and cooperating with the colonization of the Continent and with the national ambition to establish the "Co-prosperity Sphere." An article of March issue of *Seiwka* (*Sanctification*) in 1942 says:

Our way to contribute to the nation in a religious manner is that we cooperate with the government and lead the Asian peoples in accordance with the basic direction of Japan through our specific mode of Christian faith. We are the leading people. We are to open our hearts with the love of God to the junior nations and peoples, leading and teaching them with the gospel of the cross, uniting our hearts with them, and we are to work at bearing the spiritual fruit of co-prosperity in Asia.

²⁵ *Tengoku no Michi*, Jan. 14, 1940.

After founding the Nihon Kirisuto Kyodan (United Church of Christ in Japan) as a single organization, all Japanese Protestant churches actually devoted themselves to supporting the Imperialist National Polity and praised the War as the "holy war." On Easter of 1944, the Kyodan sent an official ecclesiastical letter to all Asian churches claiming that their obedience to the Japanese church was the will of God. This letter, known as "the Epistle of Nihon Kirisuto Kyodan to all Asian Christians in the Co-prosperity Sphere," criticizes Western Christianity and the Western nations, and upholds Japanese Christianity based on the "ever majestic" national polity of Japan as the true Christianity. It advocates the Co-prosperity Sphere and calls the Asian Christians to ally with the Japanese church as their leader to fight the holy war against Western individualism and communism, citing biblical passages for the support of the claim.²⁶ Sending this letter to the Asian churches was one of the most demonic actions taken by the Kyodan during the War. The church in Japan did not think that cooperation with the militarist government and the purpose of the War was a sinful deed against Asian people. They believed the governmental propaganda that the War was to "establish independence and peace in Asia." They also tried to protect and secure the church organization by cooperating with the government.²⁷

3. Why Did It Happen?

We need to analyze the reason why the Japanese church accepted the imperialist historical view and cooperated with the War policy. The problem lies in the mode of the faith of the church at that time.

First, we must pay attention to the characteristic interpretation of history among the Holiness Churches based on the expectation of the Second Coming of Jesus and the Revival Movement of the early 1930s. It was an age of conflicts and economic depression in the entire world. Japan, too, was not an exception. People felt social anxiety and unrest. Having such reality as a background, the leaders of the Revival Movement

²⁶ This letter consists of four chapters and introduction, and was published under the name of the director of Nihon Kirisuto Kyodan, TOMITA Mitsuru.

²⁷ GU and DOHI, *Ajia kirisutokyou-shi*, p.191f. Concerning how the Kyodan cooperated with the governmental policy, see, DOHI, *Nihon Purotesutanto Kirisutokyou-shi*, pp.357-64.

preached the eschatological hope and expectation that the Second Coming of Jesus Christ would solve all kinds of problems which people were facing at that time.²⁸ The January 15th of 1932 issue of *Tengoku no Michi* proclaims:

... in Asia, there is conflict between Japan and China, and trade is declining. There is no country in the world not facing difficulty... When Christ comes the second time, all problems of finance, war, Jews, livelihood will be solved. Until then, there is no way out of the problems... Since the former World War, the world has been enduring labor pains... We are not holding a vain hope that the situation of the world would become better. Rather, it will be worsened. Then, the end of the world will come soon... Now is the time of labor pains. Soon, the age of real hardships will come. Nevertheless, we who trust in God as our refuge do not need to fear... No matter what depression, war, or starvation come, we do not worry nor fear, because God will protect us always. And, before the final collapse, our Lord Jesus will take us up into the air and we will meet and be with the Lord, observing the end of the world from the air.

On the one hand, the Revival Movement brought many people to the Christian church. On the other, it had a peculiar theological tendency. The general attitude of the revival leaders toward the world was very pessimistic. Instead of reflecting on the meaning of Christian life in the present world, they anticipated escape from the world as soon as possible. The realities of confusion, turmoil and suffering in the world had no relevancy to their theological framework except for utilizing them as ethical/spiritual parables. The result was that salvation was limited to the spiritual realm. They failed to analyze and evaluate the world based on the Christian point of view, because the church did not provide nor foster a critical ability to interpret

²⁸ On Revivalism and Church of the Nazarene, see Kitagawa Shin, "Horines Ribaibaru Undou to Nazaren Kyoukai no Hassei (Holiness Revival and the Church of the Nazarene in Japan)," *Theological Trends*, III (1965), 18-27.

history through the gospel.²⁹ The meaning of faith was limited to the realm of each individual life. In the September 15th 1940 issue of *Tengoku no Michi*, Christian life in "such a critical time" is discussed and it concludes that "we found that there must be some modifications of our method of evangelism in the way that the gospel is to permeate into people's life and morality to purify and improve them." In short, Christians did not have a biblically and theologically critical point of view to analyze the trends of the age and national policy. On the one hand they aimed to reform Christian individual morality, and on the other, they failed to grasp Christian social morality. The result was their uncritical cooperation with the government.

Second, they tended to interpret socio-political phenomena in such a way as to ascribe to them some spiritual meanings. A historical event was taken directly as some spiritual "parable" to teach either moral or religious lessons. *Tengoku no Michi* published on April 15, 1933, presupposing the Japan-China War to be a "holy war," used it as a religious parable in the following manner:

We were called to be the soldiers of the cross, being sanctified by the Holy Spirit and equipped with the Scriptures, in order to fight against our enemy Satan. We should never betray God by surrendering to Satan. We do not want to behave like Chinese soldiers. We want to be, like Japanese soldiers, either "life or death."

By interpreting the events in the world spiritually, Christians in Japan lost the ability to evaluate and criticize the meaning of the event itself. Such a tendency of the church prompted them to identify the Kingdom of God with the Japanese concept of the imperialist holy nation.

Third, the primary interest of the church at that time was how to make larger numbers of converts and how Christian faith could be made acceptable to Japanese people, gaining social recognition for Christianity. The church in Japan had an illusion that adjusting the Christian mode of faith to the thoughts of the majority of Japanese

²⁹ DOHI, *Nihon Purotesutanto Kirisutokyou-shi*, p.339.

people would increase the number of people who would accept Christian faith. The result was that the church tried to be accepted by accepting Hakkou Ichiu and Imperialist National Polity. There was no theological integration between personal and social Christian life. While the necessity of individual salvation was enthusiastically proclaimed on a biblical base, the socio-political proclamations and attitudes of the church were constructed from the governmental myths and claims, colored with some biblical/theological language and symbols. The purpose of evangelism was to win mere numbers of souls. The socio-historical and political dimension of the Christian faith in the life of the church was replaced by the national ideology. The church failed to hold to and practice what Christ had commissioned the church to be.

Our Church acted as if cooperating with the aggressive policy of the government was a faithful task of the church. Remembering that such words and deeds caused pain and sorrow among Asian brothers and sisters, we regret and repent before God and the people. Because the church in Japan failed to stand firmly on the teaching of Christ without compromising with the world, the church testified to the Japanese people what was not truly the gospel. The church testified instead to what really was the Japanese ideology of aggression coated with Christian language. We want to start by recognizing those facts and repenting before God. I will cite from a concluding part of Paul Tillich's sermon, "Do Not Be Conformed."

A church in which this divine protest does not find a human voice through which it can speak has become conformed to this eon. Here we see what non-conformity ultimately is--the resistance to idolatry, to making ultimates of ourselves and our world, our civilization and our church... But it is hard not to be conformed to anything, not even to oneself, and to pronounce the divine judgment against idolatry, not so much because the courageous act may lead to suffering and martyrdom, but because of the risk of failure. It is hard because something in our conscience, a feeling of guilt, tries to prevent us from becoming non-conformist.

But even this feeling of guilt we must take upon ourselves. He who risks and fails can be forgiven. He who never risks and

never fails is a failure in his whole being. He is not forgiven because he does not feel that he needs forgiveness. Therefore, dare to be not conformed to this eon, but transform it courageously first in yourselves, then in your world--in the spirit and the power of love.³⁰

IV. Repentance, both Personal and Communal

After experiencing imperialistic militant nationalism, it is not sufficient for Japanese church to define sin as only personal. National and ecclesiastical sin committed during the Second World War cannot be separated from the Christian citizens as the constituting members of the nation and the church. And as we have seen, one of the reasons that the Japanese church failed to resist such a great structural evil had to do with their concept of sin. They regarded sin as only personal both theologically and practically. It prevented Japanese Christians from noticing the evil conduct of the nation as sin.

Three other reasons that made Japanese church to cooperate with the structural evil should be clarified. First, Japanese Christians were afraid of the possible threat and persecution by the government. Being an extreme minority in Japanese society, any kind of Christian behavior or opinion which could be critical to the national polity had been regarded as anti-national and anti-social. Secondly, a kind of theology that Japanese church succeeded from the western church was the product of socio-politically majority people. Theology itself presupposed a Christian society. Therefore, it was natural for Japanese Christians, whether conscious or unconscious, to gain social majority position. They struggled hard to be accepted by Japanese people and government as members of the majority of the society. They wished to be seen that they were in accordance with the majority people in Japanese society. It resulted for the church to adjust their morality and ideology to those of the society at that time. Thirdly, Japanese church was well aware of their powerlessness in

³⁰ Paul Tillich, "Do not Be Conformed" in *The Eternal Now*, (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1963), pp.142-44.

socio-political sense. Only few percent of the entire population was Christians, the society was in general anti-Christian, and the government clearly anti-Christian. For Japanese Christians living in such circumstances, it was nothing but an illusion to expect that the whole society would be Christianized through evangelical effort and missionary activities. If Christianity does not become majority's belief, what would be an alternative way for Christians to become a part of majority? The only possible way was that they would adjust themselves to the majority of the society.

Those were the driving force for Japanese church to cooperate with the War and the structural evil of the nation during the War. Japanese church was aware of their compromise with Asian invasion, national Shinto, and imperialism. They participated in them willingly. The experience and memories of these facts do not allow Japanese Christians to limit sin and repentance only to personal realm.

We also must point out that there was not much option at that time for Japanese Christians as extreme minority group. Virtually there were only two ways, either being persecuted by the government and the whole society, or compromising their faith and cooperate with the government. We cannot imagine how difficult it was to choose either way. They made a wrong choice and our repentance took form in 1993 as our "Confession."

We Japanese Christians have experienced that sin is both personal and communal. We are convinced that it is our responsibility for the Christian communities in the world to tell that both personal and communal sin must be confessed if we wish to be honest to our faith. This is what we learned through our bitter experience in our history.

Repentance is in its nature contextual, and its theological reflection must be practical rather than contemplative. The necessity of repentance is universal, but the contents of repentance are personally, socially, culturally and historically conditioned. Only through ecumenical dialogue among Christians with different history, culture and experience, can deepen our understanding of the Christian symbol "repentance" and can make its theological definition more comprehensive.

In our modern society, various kind of structural evils are overlayed in highly complex manner. Today, we are the residents

of uncountable number of different kind of communities, from local to global, and we are more or less participating all of those communal activities behaviors and ideologies. Governments, industries, commercial activities, life styles are more or less tainted by various degrees of structural evil. We no longer can be ignorant to the structural problems today. Injustice, socio-economical gap, poverty, oppression, discrimination, pollution, destruction of environments, economical prosperity, munitions industry, military operation, luxury and hunger, and all other issues are obviously related to the structural evil. And we know that no one can say that he/she has nothing to do with those issues. We are aware of, for example, the fact that our relaxation in a well air-conditioned room is increasing a danger of the south pacific islanders to lose their lands into the ocean water.

Japan is at the corner of historical turning point today. Majority of the Japanese politicians and of the citizens are now in favor of the Constitutional amendments, abolishing our absolute pacifism declared in the present Constitution. It is a clear movement to depart from our national repentance on the past imperialism. We Japanese Christians, though generally opposing this kind of movement, cannot say that it is not an issue of our faith. To repent is to do something against this kind of evil in the society. But at the same time, we are aware of our powerlessness because of our being minority in Japanese society. We know that some serious evil is going on in our society and we are responsible of it. But, we cannot stop it nor we can be unrelated to the evil, unless we cut off ourselves from the society. So, we repent. And in that sense, repentance is theologically and practically both personal and communal for Japanese Christians.