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The Christian Concept of God and Japan
An Examination of the Christian Concept of God in Japanese Culture,
Utilizing the Two
Realms Theology of the Lutheran Framework

A thesis presented to the Faculty of
Concordia Theological Seminary, St. Louis, Missouri,
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In particular fulfillment of the requirement for the degree of
Master of Arts in Theology

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Chapter One: Introduction

At the beginning of the 21st century, people throughout the world are surrounded by and encounter various cultures, including groups of different ages, ethnicity, social classes, and races. They are often confused by those cultures and face an identity crisis as a result of the cultural dynamics. Because they are surrounded by various beliefs, thoughts and values of life, they hope to be and know “who I am.” They also insist upon “my” situation and values as they desire to stand in or belong to society and attempt to relate with others at the same time. Often people lose their basic identity; they are at a loss as to which identity comes first among others such as father/mother, husband/wife, parent, child, individual, citizen, or Christian. Especially after the tragedy of September 11, 2001, people have come to reconsider the meaning of their religious faith or core values in the midst of their cultures. In particular, people have come to be confused in various settings by questions such as how to be both a citizen of their nation and a believer of their religion at the same time. The clash of responsibilities to God and His church on the one hand, and on the other to the nation and people of which He has made a person a part, creates divided loyalties in the believer. Christians in all lands are faced with this dilemma, but in some lands the struggle is more acute than in others.

In the case of Japan, the majority of the population on the islands of Japan is of Japanese ethnicity. However, belief, thought, and religious practice are quite complicated in the lives of the Japanese. They have traditionally been mainly influenced by Shintoism, Buddhism, and Confucianism. Typically, the majority of Japanese participate in various religious events during their life; for example, a Japanese may visit a Shinto shrine to receive a blessing for a newly born child; one may be married in a chapel, Western-style; and Japanese commonly attend funerals at a Buddhist temple. Almost all Japanese participate in these events without any feeling of conflict. The Japanese religious system has a unique character at this point. In addition, western culture and lifestyle have been influential in modern Japan. Japanese people think that Japanese life has been Americanized, especially since World War II.

Even though the Japanese life style seems to be more Westernized now, Christianity is still foreign to Japanese belief. According to Isaiah Ben-Dasan, Japanese are faithful followers of “Nihonism,” that is, Japanese are both Buddhist and Shintoist at the same time. Moreover, Japanese have created the native spirituality and practice which are “based on human experience instead of a covenant or body of dogma.”¹ Therefore, Ben-Dasan thinks that there is no “true Christian” in Japan.² Furthermore, Ben-Dasan believes that Japanese humanity is based on “the abacus way” of simple thinking; “the Western and Hebraic concepts of God do not exist for the Japanese.”³ Japanese accept many gods but not one divine God in their belief system. These gods may be egocentricity, nature, heroes, spirits or nearly anything else. Most importantly, Japanese are very concerned to maintain their identity as Japanese.

This idea is also seen in the work of Shusaku Endo. In his novel, *Chinmoku (Silence)*, Endo asserts through the mouth of Ferreira, an apostate and a former Raman Catholic father, that Christianity will never take root in Japan since its culture is like a swamp rotting Christianity’s root.⁴ That Japanese have a strong identity is also seen in Koujin Karatani’s quote from Ryunosuke Akutagawa’s⁵ *Kamigami no Hohoemi (Smiles of the Gods)*. Akutagawa states that every system of thought from outside of Japan, including even Buddhism and Confucianism, has been re-molded by Japanese who believe power means changing something rather than destroying it.⁶

Ben-Dasan’s assertion that the concept of identity is crucial for Japanese may very well be true. However, this may not be the case only for Japanese. Although how to relate with others in society is

¹ Isaiah Ben-Dasan, *The Japanese and the Jew*, translated by Richard L. Gage (Tokyo: Yamamoto Shoten, 1972), 91. This book is a bestseller in Japan and received a “Oyake Souichi non-fiction award” in 1970. However, Ben Dasan never appeared in public. It is said that Isaiah Ben Dasan is a pen name of Shichihei Yamamoto (1921-1991), Joseph Lora (American) and Misha Horensky (Jewish). Shichihei Yamamoto (Japanese customarily write the family name first, followed by the given name; but I shall write the family name second throughout this thesis), a Christian critic, is thought to have written the majority of the text. However, some think he is the sole author. Yamamoto devoted his life to introducing Christianity and Western thought to Japanese. Many prominent Japanese authors and thinkers are still influenced by this book, and it is considered a reliable source for Japanese study.

² *Ibid.*, 56.

³ *Ibid.*, 192.

⁴ Shusaku Endo, *Chinmoku [Silence]* (Tokyo: Kodansha, 1999), 189.

⁵ Ryunosuke Akutagawa (1892-1927), who was a prominent Japanese author but committed suicide.

⁶ Koujin Karatani, *Nihon Seishin Bunseki* (Tokyo, Bungeishunju, 2002), 56.

often a challenge for Christians, they are able to hold their identity as a child of God in faith without being bound to the culture.

Christians in Japan are occasionally forced to lead a dualistic way of daily life. As a minority, Christians may face difficulty in choosing and maintaining their Christian values among the 99 % non-Christian majority in society. Christians experience conflict as they choose how to participate in society and relate with their friends, family and neighbors, or as they may choose to isolate themselves from the culture around them. God, who is the author of life, has placed Japanese into a particular culture, which is a gift of God. However, Christians must distinguish between rejoicing over God's gift and acting with an idolatrous attitude.

The relationship of Christians to their culture rests upon biblical presuppositions regarding the way in which God calls them to relate with others in the midst of the surroundings in which He places them. When we examine the concept of God and Japanese culture, Luther's doctrine of creation and his distinction between the two kinds of righteousness may be particularly beneficial. Luther's doctrine of creation and his distinction between the two kinds of righteousness shaped his social thinking and his doctrine of the human creature. Luther distinguished between the realm of faith and the realm of works. Luther established Christian identity through the doctrine of creation and the doctrine of redemption (re-creation), and he defines Christian action through two kinds of righteousness. Furthermore, Luther understood God's righteousness as steadfast love and mercy.⁷

Robert Kolb describes the relationship between God's grace and human works by using the concept of two kinds of righteousness from Luther's theology. Righteousness in the two dimensions describes the relationship between God and humans, and between human beings in faith and in life.⁸ Faith finds its sphere of activities as we serve the world through our faith in the horizontal realm. Faith is the

⁷ Robert Kolb, "Niebuhr's Christ and Culture in Paradox Revisited," *Lutheran Quarterly*, NS 10, 4 (1996): 260.

⁸ Robert Kolb, "Luther on the Two Kinds of Righteousness: Reflections of His Two-Dimensional definition of Humanity at the Heart of His Theology," *Lutheran Quarterly* NS 13.4 (1999), 449-466.

human response to God's love in the vertical realm, which is a gift of the Gospel bringing an eschatological message.

Kolb also states that "Christianity and culture in paradox" is not an adequate description of Luther's teaching on the relationships between trust in Christ and life in the world, contrary to Niebuhr's view.⁹ God places us in various cultures and permits us to work to bring His peace and joy to the world. Wingren says the power of evil remains on the earth, but believers fight against evil and use their power to serve others through vocation.¹⁰ The Gospel holds an eschatological message of hope for the future. God's Word of the Gospel will flow to one's neighbor as Christians love God and serve the neighbor in love. However, the Christian must learn to distinguish what can be changed in his or her service to the world and what elements of culture are not affected by his or her belief.

Therefore, it is essential to recognize that God, the author of the earth and heavens, has placed people in cultures with a variety of lifestyles and values. Even though circumstances may differ, our Christian identity remains unchanged because of faith in Christ. It is also crucial to appreciate culture as God's gift to human beings. At the same time, however, Christians need to recognize the idolatrous attitudes in their lives. Christians uniquely possess the character of living within and beyond cultures. This prompts us to consider what it means to live as a Christian while also belonging to a particular culture. The "two realms" theology of Luther assists thinking in missiological terms as it serves as a framework to demonstrate the purpose of Christians living with God and with neighbors, both believers and non-believers. The aim of this thesis is to examine the life of the Japanese, especially to study how Christian belief leads them as followers of Christ to contribute in their lives as both Christians and Japanese nationals.

⁹ Kolb, "Niebuhr's 'Christ and Culture'," 269.

¹⁰ Gustaf Wingren, *Luther on Vocation*, translated by C. Rasmusen (Evansville: Ballast Press 1994), 142-143.

Chapter Two: Japanese Religion and Its Practice

1. Introduction

God is the creator of the heavens and earth. God sent his only son Jesus to the world according to his plan of re-creation. Everything will be renewed through Jesus Christ, and the new beginning has already come among us.

The gospel of Jesus Christ is unchangeable, but people differ according to their time and place in this world. Every culture has its own background, characteristics, and identity. Japanese culture also holds its meaning for Japanese people. For example, Japanese think, evaluate, and have a sense of security which differs from the way American, African, or Chinese people think of and seek security. It is helpful to observe other people and their perceived meaning of existence in order to understand our differences and communicate with each other. It is crucial to become a Japanese to Japanese in order to bring the gospel into the culture (1 Corinthians 9:19-23).

The lifestyle of Japanese may seem very Westernized when we observe their way of dressing, eating, and working; however, their hearts are deeply Japanese. Japanese people hope to unite with nature, remain close to family, participate in traditional religious events, and so on. This life style is described as *wakonyosai*, which signifies “having a Japanese soul but Western knowledge.”

When people view another culture, they usually look through their own cultural viewfinder. Japanese also see the world through their own cultural viewfinder. Each culture and the history of all people influences and mingles with other cultures; all cultures are under God’s sovereignty, and he has a purpose for both Christians and non-believers. Although Japanese seem to be living in a pre-Christian era, their history is participating in God’s history of salvation, which we see only partially. In this chapter, the ways in which the structure of Japanese religious thinking has been established in the course of history will be surveyed. Then the voices of Japanese people who live in the present will be heard in order to begin an evangelical dialog.

2. The Establishment of the Japanese Religious System in the Course of History

It is hard to trace the beginning of Japan and her people. If people try to study the beginning of the nation, it may be possible to understand some elements through archeological excavation and some classic mythological history books such as the *Kojiki* (completed in 712 A.D.) and *Nihonshoki*, “The Chronicles of Japan” (completed in 720 A.D.).

It is said that *Jomon* civilization may have started about twelve thousand years ago, although research on it is still continuing today. According to Saburo Ienaga, people at this time were establishing their own customs within the islands of Japan in distinction to those of the continent.¹ We can see that these people already had the gift of artistic skills if we observe the thousands of pottery motifs discovered through archeological excavation. These skills are thought to have been used for “religious activities of folk religion.”² People worshiped nature as gods and sought for abundant production and life-giving power.

From the *Jomon* to the *Yayoi* period, people were developing a folk religion which may have provided the foundations of Shintoism. Especially during the *Yayoi* period around the second century B.C., the economic base of the Japanese changed from hunting and gathering to farming rice. As a result, a strong sense of the spiritual developed, bound to nature. The community was ruled by religious figures such as shamans or magicians. Religious ceremonies were an important factor in seeking an abundant harvest. Therefore people tended to focus on the life of the community, “not for their own salvation of the soul.”³ During the fourth century A.D., the Yamato imperial court appeared and started to unite Japan as a nation. The imperial court tried to exert its political power and “justify its superiority”⁴ around the sixth century by using mythology such as that found in the *Nihonshoki*, which designated the emperor as a divine being, a descendant of the gods. This view was later very influential in Japanese thinking about Japan as a divine nation. At the same time it shows us how the people of the time saw the world.

¹ Saburo Ienaga, *Nihonbunkashi* (Tokyo: Iwanamishinsho, 1999), 12.

² *Ibid.*, 14.

³ *Ibid.*, 30.

⁴ *Ibid.*, 37.

The heart of Japanese myth may be summarized as follows.

... [T]he deities were born amidst the chaotic time when heaven and earth had just separated. Izanagi and Izanami were respectively the seventh **male and female gods**. Both of them thrust a halberd from the Bridge of Heaven into the sea. As they withdrew it, droplets trickling of the halberd **formed an island**. Izanagi and Izanami **descended to it** and brought forth island after island: **Japan was created**. Izanami gives birth to various gods, but is **burned to death** while delivering the god of fire. After seeing her dead body, Izanagi proceeds to a river to **purify himself**, whereupon three more deities are born. One is Amaterasu-o-mikami, the sun goddess and queen of the divine country Takamagahara. Another is Tsukuyomi-no-mikoto, the moon god and **the ruler of the kingdom of darkness**. The third is the rogue Susano-o-no-mikoto, the tyrant of the seas. Amaterasu-o-mikami sends her grandson Ninigi-no-mikoto **down from heaven to the mountain pass called Takachiho to rule over the islands of Japan**. **His progeny beget the first Japanese Emperor.**⁵ [translation the author's, emphasis mine]

According to Tokuko Oyama,⁶ Japanese try to seek for and discover gods throughout their lives.

Although Shinto gods do not have clear identities or personalities, Japanese gods are considered to be superior beings. There is no concept of God as Creator. Shinto has described two types of gods, the mortal and the immortal. They control both good and evil, even bringing uncleanness, death, sickness, disaster, or something evil to humans. These concepts are called "*kegare*" and are often compared to sins. It is possible for humans to cleanse away the *kegare*, which are then absorbed into time and forgotten. Evil is considered somewhat necessary for the ordering of the world. Shinto gods have contact with the human world and place either a blessing or a curse upon life. Therefore, it is important to placate the gods through an offering or a ceremony to avoid cursing and to receive a blessing. However, the realm of the gods and the realm of humans are separated, and each has its own activities. Moreover, Japanese think it is impossible to express or capture the nature of gods with words. Japanese gods are veiled with mystery and are spiritual in nature. These gods give an opportunity for people to treat every object as a god. In addition, the human spirit is believed to return to nature after death. There is no clear line between this world and the after-life.

⁵ Quote from *Pictorial Encyclopedia of Japanese Culture* (Tokyo: Japan, Gakken Co., Ltd., 1987).

⁶ Tokuko Oyama's *Nihonjin no Miidashita Kami* (Tokyo: Perikansha, 1988) analyzes a concept of Japanese gods, explaining the process of how Japanese found their gods.

It is interesting to view a Shinto web site (by a non-profit organization) stating, "Shinto is a general term for the activities of the Japanese people to worship all the deities of heaven and earth, and its origin is as old as the history of the Japanese."⁷ It states that Shinto is a "tradition of their own faith" for all Japanese nationals. This explanation says that people worship many gods of "heaven and earth," not the Creator of "heaven and earth." It also states that Shinto's history begins with the origin of the Japanese nation.

In 530 A.D., Buddhism came from China via Korea, which at that time had a prospering civilization and exerted influence over Japan. Japanese understood Buddha as a "pagan god in the beginning."⁸ Buddhism also brought Chinese characters to Japan where the people had no writing system yet. Political leaders such as Emperor Shotoku Taishi (574-622) tried to reform Japan under the influence of Buddhism, and contributed to the creation of Buddhist statues, prominent temples, architecture, and the education for monks and nobles. Prior to Buddhism, Japanese folk religion practiced ceremonies for the prosperity of life in the farming community. Thus, until the introduction of Buddhism, there was no need of any special religious facilities. Buddhism was introduced from the continent and brought with it continental culture. In this respect, Buddhism brought philosophy and social reform to the nation.

"Between the late 8th century to the 11th century Shinto and Buddhism gradually coalesced with each other (*shinbutsu shugo*) or, more precisely, veneration of the *kami* (gods) was absorbed into Buddhism through a variety of doctrinal innovations and new religious forms."⁹ The thought was that "the *Kami* are benevolent deities who protect Buddhism, the *kami* are the pure spirits of the Buddhas (*hongaku*)."¹⁰ Shinto was used to supervise imperial succession ceremonies, administration of government shrines, and so on. Shinto was also able to survive in society when it combined with

⁷<http://www.jinja.or.jp> (Mar, 2003). They explain Shinto has developed in four main forms: Shinto of the Imperial House, Shrine Shinto, Sect Shinto and Folk Shinto. However, the head of the shrine system is also the Emperor.

⁸ Ienaga, *Nihonbunkashi*, 54.

⁹ Mark R. Mullins, *Religion & Society in Modern Japan* (Nagoya, Japan: Nanzan Institute for Religion and Culture, Asian Humanities Press, 1993), 15.

¹⁰ *Ibid.*, 15.

Buddhism to form guidelines for life. This belief and piety was acceptable to society as it secured and ruled people like other state religions in the world. Shinto and Buddhism did not clash with each other since Buddhism does not have a concept of God. Buddha never claimed to be a god, but meant to be an “enlightened one” who broke the chain or circle of life vis-à-vis Hindu teaching. In Japan, the dead are called “*hotoke*” (Buddha) as spirits are considered to be finally free from the body. Japanese even believe that the living are able to rescue a dead soul through the power of chanting. All in all, this brings Japanese to the optimistic view of an after-life in a good place without focusing on the salvation of individual persons.

As a feudal society developed, aristocratic Buddhism began to fade as Buddhism became more popularized. The aristocrats felt their prosperity was not permanent and came to hope for their salvation in the Land of Happiness (paradise). However, as social disorder brought chaos and fear, people thirsted for popular Buddhist teaching. Hounen (1133-1212) appeared and taught that every person could be saved if one only said the name of Amida (*Amitabuha*). Shinran (1173-1262), a disciple of Honen, taught that humans were affected by evil and could not save themselves. Therefore salvation came only from Buddha. Interestingly, Japanese Lutherans sometime compare Luther to Shinran for their similar approaches to salvation. Shinran taught salvation was totally dependent on the other, not on the self.¹¹ Ienaga says that Buddhism became the Japanese faith at this point as an answer to the Japanese quest for religion in reality. “After 700 years from the introduction of Buddhism, the foreign thought-system of Buddhism finally became Japanese thought.”¹² Japanese, therefore, tend to believe that over time any religion will be molded until it becomes “Japanese.”

The Japanese did not know any other belief except their mixture of Buddhism and nature Shintoism until the 16th century when God gave the opportunity for the Japanese to encounter Him.¹³

¹¹ Ienaga, *Nihonbunkashi*, 128.

¹² Ibid.

¹³ There is a theory that Japanese such as the famous monk Kukai (774-835) encountered Nestorians in China. According to this theory, many sources mentioned historical and cultural influences of the Nestorians but do not mention Christian teaching.

Japanese also came to realize that a different world outside their own country existed. At this time, many saw Portuguese and other commercial ships appear around Japan. On August 15, 1549, Francisco de Xavier (1506-1552), a Jesuit monk, arrived in Japan with Cosme de Torres and Juan Fernandez. The motivation of Xavier's decision to visit Japan was his encounter with a Japanese called Anjiro in Maraca in 1547. Anjiro was in a foreign land because he had committed a crime in Japan and escaped aboard a Portuguese ship. He was looking for someone to whom he could confess his sin. Anjiro was baptized the following year and became the first Japanese Christian. This encounter influenced not only Xavier's life but also Japan as it resulted in Christianity coming to the islands. Interestingly, Rome's counter-reformation movement, which established the Jesuit order in 1543, led Christianity to Japan.

Catholic missionaries devoted themselves to Japan; they built a seminary, baptized feudal lords, gave to the poor, and organized other support systems. As Christianity expanded in Japan, it was seen as a dangerous factor in the eyes of the feudal leaders. For Shogun Hideyoshi, the incident involving the Spanish ship *San Felipe* provided good reason to exile the missionaries. An upset sailor from the Spanish ship *San Felipe* stated that sending missionaries was preparation for an invasion of Japan. In addition there was rivalry between the Portuguese Jesuits and the Spanish Franciscans. As a result, in 1587 Hideyoshi promulgated the *Vateren tsuihourei*, or the "Regulations of Exile for Padres." This document was significant also in that it declared Japan a divine nation. Hideyoshi was later again angered by Franciscans who sent missionaries after the *Vateren tsuihourei*, and as a result, twenty-six Japanese Christians were crucified. Norihisa Suzuki states they were "scapegoats" for Japanese society.¹⁴ Although Japan enjoyed Western culture through commerce for a while, the door was later closed to all foreign countries except Holland in 1639. Although Japanese Christians were the salt of Japan, they suffered in the midst of political maneuvering.

On the other hand, around the seventeenth century Buddhism became secularized and lost its core meaning. In time, Buddhism became the religion of the household rather than of the individual. According to Mullins, "Buddhism took on the role of guiding, through the performance of rituals and the

¹⁴ Norihisa Suzuki, *Nihon Kirisuokyoushi monogatari* (Tokyo: Kyobunkan, 2001), 35.

use of Buddhist prayers and incantations, the souls of the dead to the ancestral world, from which they would guard and protect the living.”¹⁵ It became the religion of the family. Mullins also states that “Buddhism became ritualistic and social, concerned with the processes of death and of upholding the extended family and household, which was traditionally seen in Japan as a fusion of the living and the watchful, protecting spirits of the dead.”¹⁶ Additionally, during the Tokugawa Period (1600-1897), “Buddhism received state patronage in exchange for services to the shogunate. By administering the *danka seido*, a system in which all the residents of a given area were required to register their household with a local temple and record birth, marriages, and deaths, Buddhist priests were used by the Tokugawa regime to monitor and control the entire population. Priests also issued certificates (*tera-uke*) to individuals each year attesting that the person in question was not member of the proscribed religion (Christianity).”¹⁷ This system secured the power of the Buddhist temple, and at the same time, it made Buddhism a funeral religion bound to the family, which has since been the core Japanese social structure.

Around the eighteenth century, Neo-Confucianism (*Shushigaku*), as well as history, mathematics, and the study of ancient Japanese thought and culture, developed. According to Ienaga, *Shushigaku* within the feudal structure responded to the social demand for academic study among the ruling class. It was convenient for the ruling class to support the dualistic social order of upper and lower classes with *Shushigaku*'s dualistic contrast of nature between heaven and earth and between the positive and negative. It provided support for the thought that order comes when the lower is obedient to the upper.¹⁸ It also helped in establishing the samurai spirit of loyalty to their feudal lords. About the same time Norinaga Motoori appeared. He was a scholar of the National Learning, *Kokugaku*, and contributed to the study of Japanese classics such as *Kojiki*. Motoori's nationalistic interest was influential in the restoration movement of Shintoism.

¹⁵ *Religion & Society in Modern Japan*, 141.

¹⁶ *Ibid*, 141-142.

¹⁷ *Ibid.*, 75.

¹⁸ Ienaga, *Nihonbunkashi*, 181-182.

The expansionist policies of the Western nations influenced Japan as U.S. Admiral Perry came in 1853, requiring Japan to open the door to the world once again in 1858. Japanese ruling power then switched from a feudal shogunate to an imperial government. Protestantism, which was openly introduced to Japan, started to influence the way in which Japanese lived. Missionaries opened many prominent schools. In the period 1863-1889, more than 60 schools were built and opened, providing equal study opportunity for both girls and boys (sixty percent were for girls' education).¹⁹ Most of these schools have now become prestigious colleges or universities. It is interesting to see that many Japanese were graduated from Christian schools without becoming Christian. Rather, many people were attracted by the ethical aspects of Christianity. Protestant missionaries also tried to translate the Bible²⁰ and hymns into Japanese even before the prohibition of Christianity was abolished in 1873. The melodies of Western hymns found their way into Japanese music textbooks and became popular among Japanese.²¹

Under pressure from Western nations, the Meiji imperial government gave the opportunity for Japanese people to practice their personal religious faith. Article 28 of the 1889 Meiji Constitution states: "Japanese subjects shall, within limits not prejudicial to the peace and order, and not antagonistic to their duties as subjects, enjoy freedom of religious belief."²²

Ironically, this constitution also contains the ideology of supporting the emperor as a divine being and establishing loyalty to the emperor (Article 3). People could believe anything as long as they also believed the emperor was divine. Japanese government also tried to build a "system of ruling people by Imperial authority."²³ For Example, the Imperial Rescript on Education (1890) states:

Our Imperial Ancestors have founded Our Empire on a basis broad and everlasting and have deeply and firmly implanted virtue; Our subjects ever united in loyalty and filial piety have from generation to generation illustrated the beauty thereof. This is the glory of the fundamental character of our Empire, and herein also lies the source of Our education. Ye, our subjects, be filial to your parents, affectionate to your brothers and sisters; as husbands and wives be

¹⁹ Suzuki, *Nihoin Kiristokyoshi Monogatari*, 88.

²⁰ The first translation of "The Gospel of St. Matthew" was published by Jonathan Goble in 1871.

²¹ It is said that Luther W. Mason, who was invited by the Ministry of Education to help in making music textbooks, intended to have a Christian influence this way.

²² *Religion & Society in Modern Japan*, 81.

²³ *Ibid.*, 81.

harmonious, as friends true; bear yourselves in modesty and moderation; extend your benevolence to all; pursue learning and cultivate arts, and thereby develop intellectual faculties and perfect moral power; furthermore, advance public good and promote common interests; always respect the Constitution and observe the laws; should emergency arise, offer yourselves courageously to the State; **and thus guard and the maintain the prosperity of our Imperial Throne coeval with heaven and earth** [emphasis mine]. So shall ye not only be Our good and faithful subjects, but render illustrious the best traditions of your forefathers.

The Way here set forth is indeed the teaching bequeathed by Our Imperial Ancestors, to be observed alike by Their Descendants and the subjects, infallible for all ages and true in all places. It is Our subjects, that We may thus attain to the same virtue.²⁴

(The 30th of October 1890) [emphasis mine]

With such a grandiloquent explanation, Japanese virtues were impressed on the people. Japanese were considered as one family under the emperor, who claimed to be a descendant of the gods. Additionally, the imperial Meiji government tried to systematize Shinto with doctrines, which they felt it needed in order to be a religion equal to Christianity. Shinto thus secured the status of a state religion. The Meiji separation of Buddhism and Shintoism (*shin butsu bunri*) took place and people were forced to convert to being Shinto followers (*haibutsu kishaku*). It was a coercive and destructive movement which “pressed forward by the hand of government.”²⁵ This attitude was a slippery slope as it produced a nationalistic military spirit among the people and justified “a war of expansion.”²⁶ According to Charles W. Iglehart, “during the war, religious forces were carefully utilized by the government for maintaining national morale.”²⁷

After the experience of defeat in World War II, Japanese came to doubt their national identity. People came to disbelieve in their own nation and its belief system through suffering the collapse of the Japanese nation and because of their despair regarding the future. The land of the gods was occupied by a foreign power. Japanese were told that neither the emperor, nor their leadership, was divine. As a result, many came to fear the danger of mind control by a religious ideology that directed people’s way of life.

²⁴ Ibid., 81.

²⁵ Ibid., 26.

²⁶ Ibid., 82.

²⁷ Charles W. Iglehart, *A Century of Protestant Christianity in Japan* (Tokyo: Charles E. Tuttle Company, 1959), 344.

Moreover, people came to believe that war itself was an evil action. This period provided a good opportunity for Christian missionaries to evangelize Japanese, who were lost and suffering in poverty amidst the devastation. Many had lost family members, and in the social disorder many had no food or place to live. The Protestant church established its status in Japan as mainly “an urban, middle class intellectual’s religion.”²⁸ On the other hand, Japanese Christians who experienced the war also were affected: “in thought and in practice [Christianity] came from without rather than from the inner ponderings of free spirits or from the unconscious experimentation in everyday living of a Christian in his own hereditary non-Christian society. [Christianity in Japan] was patriotic and political rather than cultural.”²⁹

Today, Japanese are skeptical about religion and rather enjoy simply being Japanese in comfortable surroundings. Japan has been busy concerning itself with globalization and building a successful economy, and most Japanese now belong to the middle class. People openly receive elements of foreign cultures and foreign goods but reject Christianity as alien, insisting upon being a Japanese individual in belief system. Interestingly, while Japanese openly claim that they have no religion, Shinto, as well as other thoughts and beliefs in their daily living, occupy a religious place in their lives.

Iglehart was right to say that “though most Japanese would have been unable precisely to say who or what the [g]ods were, the shrine system was their own, Japanese and precious, and participation in its ceremonies was an essential element of community living.”³⁰ And Christmas is also added in this respect, becoming a popular secular event at school, company and home.

In short, Japanese lead a highly humanized and systematized religious life without doubting its meanings. However, the only certain thing is that people are all created under the work of God’s creation according to the Scriptures (Gen 1:1, 26, 31). He sustains the Japanese people and uses everything, even human reason, for his re-creation. People are permitted to enjoy their cultural gifts as long as “there are no

²⁸ Ibid., 346.

²⁹ Ibid., 346.

³⁰ Iglehart, *A century of Protestant Christianity*, 344.

other gods.” It is also crucial to see “what the thing is”³¹ by viewing the world and ourselves through the cross of Christ. The majority of Japanese still live in the world of Law; they have no encounter with Jesus Christ in their own life at this present time. Shinran and Hounen may have been wise in their approach, but without the Gospel of Jesus Christ, Shinran’s and Honen’s teaching is idolatrous. If Japanese think time is the answer in order to mold every religion into something suitable for the Japanese, or that *kegare* (impurity) is washed away in time, this optimistic view of the future or after life is different from the Christian hope of salvation brought by the gospel.

3. Japanese Religious Practice as a Cultural Event In Japan

Today there are basically five elements in Japanese religion and thought: Buddhism, Shintoism, Confucism, Japanese socialism, and philosophy, such as that of Nishida.³² Each group insists on its own belief and explanation of being Japanese, and even within each group various teachings exist.

At the end of 2001, the total number of people in Japan who claimed a religious belief is 215,365,872; 50.1% (107,952,589) are Shintoists, 44.3% (95,420,178) are Buddhists, 0.8% (1,771,651) are Christians and 4.7% (10,221,454) are of other religious bodies.³³ If one adds up the number of the individual believers, the total is more than the Japanese population of 127,300,000.³⁴ This is due to the fact that a person may be counted by more than one religious organization. Whether people recognize it or not, often they are automatically treated as local residents under a divine shrine (*Ujiko*) or as a supporter of the Buddhist temple (*Danka*).

³¹ Gerhard O. Forde, *On Being a Theologian of the Cross* (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1997), X.

³² Kitaro, Nishida (1870-1945), a Japanese contemporary philosopher who founded the Kyoto school of philosophy. He tried to dialogue between Buddhism and Christianity as he combined the Eastern philosophy of “nothingness” and the Western philosophy of “dialectic.” His prominent thoughts: “To know is to love and to love is to know. To love something is to cast away the self and unite with that other,” “God is none other than the world, the world is none other than God,” “because time and space are established by the unity of consciousness, God transcends time and space, God is external and indestructible, and exists everywhere.”

³³ *Shukyo Nenkan* (Tokyo: the Agency of the Cultural Affairs, December 25, 2001).

³⁴ Information from the Consulate General of Japan (Kansas City, MO) in October, 2001.

Moreover, these ideologies never exist purely or individually among the Japanese. Rather “religion and thought are accepted when they are molded and adopted culturally.”³⁵ For example, according to Ito, “Japanese Buddhism is different from Indian Buddhism in that Japanese Buddhism has taken in ancestral spirits.”³⁶ The dead are worshiped as ancestors, who later become the guardian gods of the household. The Japanese religious system is pluralistic, a melting pot of religious realities. This is contrary to Christianity, which claims to be “the only way to God.” As Tokuko Oyama’s quote from professor Ishida³⁷ states, it was difficult for Christianity to be adopted in Japanese culture because it was “against the direction of development of the Japanese religious heart.”³⁸ This has led Japanese like Susumu Ono to wonder “how the concept of God which has appeared in the desert can take root in Japanese life, which is directed by a mild and gentle nature.”³⁹ Ono also says that the reason Christianity will never exceed one percent of the Japanese population in Japan is that the concept of the Christian God is not suitable for the basic Japanese sense of life.⁴⁰ This idea is found even among Japanese in general. One lady from a Japanese gathering in New Jersey said, “Japan has its own way to believe; if you think that is irrational, it is because your point of view is Western.”⁴¹

There are many Japanese voices to which one needs to listen as one presents the gospel.

Voice 1: Shinto gods stand at the heart of Japanese everyday life, but that is a cultural matter rather than a personal faith.

A Japanese newspaper⁴² asked 225 people about New Year worship at a Shinto shrine or Buddhist temple: 62.7% said they went to worship or prayed at home but 22.2% said they did not go anywhere. Most responded, “New Year worship is a Japanese tradition but not a matter of faith;” “it is an

³⁵ Yuishin Ito, *Nihonjin to Minzoku Shinkou* (Tokyo: Houzoukan, 2001), 59.

³⁶ *Ibid.*, 59.

³⁷ Kazuyoshi Ishida. Professor at Tohoku Gakuin University, Japan. Oyama quoted from his paper at a symposium. 258-9.

³⁸ Tokuko Oyama, *Nihonji no Midashita Kami* (Tokyo: Perikansha, 1988), 118.

³⁹ Susumu Ono, *Nihonjin no Kami* (Tokyo: Shinchobunko, 2002), 190-1.

⁴⁰ *Ibid.*, 190-191.

⁴¹ S.D is a middle aged house wife from Japanese gathering in New Jersey. She was thinking of baptism but decided she was not ready.

⁴² *Inage Shinbun*, Chiba, Japan, February 4, 2001.

expression of my feeling” or, “I do not like religion but go to the shrine on New Year’s Day. It is a part of the New Year event.” There were also many who responded polytheistically: “I went to the shrine and greeted the gods on New Year’s Day because I am Japanese. It is the heart of Japan.”

Voice 2: Buddhism is universal and peaceful, not only for humans.

S.D. from a Japanese gathering in New Jersey again said, “Christianity is exclusive. It also causes religious wars. I cannot believe God says ‘I am a jealous God, visiting the iniquity of the fathers upon the children to the third and fourth generation of those who hate Me.’ On the other hand, Buddhism is inclusive and peaceful.” Followers of Buddha do not hesitate to celebrate Christmas. There is no Creator but all creatures are on the same level. Some Buddhist temples hold funerals and have graves for animals or erect memorial towers for valuable things such as used sewing needles or dolls. N. M. from the Japanese gathering in New Jersey says, “my go-between person for our marriage was a Zen monk. He said it is okay to have a wedding at a chapel, a shrine or anywhere because everyone possesses the Buddah in his/her mind.”⁴³

Voice 3: Japanese believe they have no religion but are not atheists.

Oda states that for a Japanese, religion means belonging to a religious organization or sect.⁴⁴ Therefore, Japanese do not hesitate to say “I have no religion” even though they participate in religious activities or have a belief individually. The Japanese response of “I have no religion” contrasts uniquely with the population of believers in various religious expressions.

Voice 4: Religion is dangerous.

T. P. says, “I believe in the existence of God and am thankful. But I do not understand why people think I am an atheist if I do not go to church, read the Bible, speak about God, nor follow the teaching, pray or be baptized. Even people who believe in God kill each other, have prejudice against

⁴³ N.M is a middle-aged housewife. She shared her insight during dinnertime at her house in September, 2002.

⁴⁴ Oda, *Shukyo to Nihonjin*, 62-63.

another, or do some great evil. Why can you say that only Christians are able to see God?"⁴⁵ Japanese also still remember the mind control practiced by the nationalistic Shinto propaganda during wartime. Many also see religious wars in history and in the present time. S.D., who has no personal experience of war, says, "Christianity is a warlike religion."⁴⁶

Voice 5: Christian living is not suitable in Japan.

In general, Japanese have a good impression of Christians and Christianity. K.T. says, "I think Christians are good people and that church is a holy place. I feel sorry to enter a church if I am not a believer."⁴⁷ One lady from a Japanese gathering says, "I think Christian teaching is right, but it is difficult to be a Christian in Japan. I do not know how I can relate with my friends, relatives, and society in any celebration or religious event. You, as a woman married to an American, have a way to escape from the Japanese social pressure. But the place I have to return to and live is Japan. I am impressed with Christian teaching, but I can not live like that in Japan."⁴⁸

Japanese think that the essence of being Japanese is not only of birth and blood, but also living in the Japanese community and following the practice of occasional Japanese religious habits such as New Year's Day, funerals and so on. Japanese also think that belief is very personal and no one can force them to believe. God has an unknown existence, and people can only try to find God through their own thoughts. Toshiro Kuroda, quoting Hori, states that Shinto is "the underlying will of Japanese culture" and has been the crucial element bringing the great mix of religions and rituals absorbed by the Japanese people into coexistence. It has forced them to become Japanese in character."⁴⁹

⁴⁵ T. P. Conversation through email on April 12, 2001.

⁴⁶ Conversation with S.D during a Japanese gathering around March 2002 in New Jersey.

⁴⁷ Several conversations while she and her husband lived temporarily in St. Louis around 2001.

⁴⁸ Conversation with Mrs. S, who is probably in her 50s, has stayed in New Jersey for fifteen years. She and her husband plan to return to Japan in the future.

⁴⁹ Kuroda Toshio, "Shinto in the History of Japanese Religion," in *Religion & Society in Modern Japan*, 8.

It is also true that since religion has become just matter of custom, and doctrine is no longer important, “it is no longer considered religion”⁵⁰ in society. Japanese tend to think that Christianity is Western religion and, therefore, cannot co-exist with “Japanese-ness.” Moreover, because there is no strong concept of a personal God, being “righteous in God’s sight” is not a concern of their lives. Rather, being Japanese in society is the most important issue for Japanese. Finally, Japanese seem to think Christ died only for Christians, and that the gospel does not reach people in the depth of their lives.

4. Conclusion

Japanese are careful to maintain their “Japanese-ness” by observing traditional religious events, honoring Japanese ancestors, keeping harmony in society and so on. Japanese have for centuries shaped religion and thought to their lives. If Christ is introduced as a cultural religion, Japanese treat it comfortably within their culture. Many young people like American culture. Japanese are also interested in reading the Bible as an English book or textbook, and many try to master it to learn about Western thought or the English language. But if they feel religious pressure, they are quick to run away. Some people oppose Western culture and may try to shape a Japanese form of Christianity.

Contrary to the cultural approach, Christians cannot invent or mold God culturally. Rather, God is the One who changes people’s lives. At the same time, God never asks believers to abandon their culture but rather to enjoy it as long as they have no other gods in their lives. God’s word is effective, and the Holy Spirit is able to open a person’s heart. Therefore, a Christian only needs to bring the pure gospel that is not bounded by culture but reaches into the culture.

The Lord God of Israel came down to save us all. God showed his mercy for all who believe in Christ as “the promise comes by faith ... the faith of Abraham. He is the father of us all”(Roman 4:16). Christians love and accept their neighbors in faith just as Christ loved, whatever their conditions are (1John 4:10 -11). Every child of God also is given responsibility to bring the gospel to the lives of others.

⁵⁰ Toshihiro Ama, *Nihonjin wa Naze Mushukyou Nanoka* (Tokyo: Chikuma Shobo, 2000), 16-17, 22.

From person to person, the gospel of Jesus Christ passed from Jewish culture into Greek culture, from Greek to Western culture, African culture and Asian culture without stopping. It is important to explore the way in which Japanese treat their religion, and what Japanese believe it means to be Japanese in order to bring the gospel into their culture. The following section will examine the condition of Christianity among a non-Christian society.

Chapter Three: Christians in Japanese Culture

1. Introduction

As seen in Chapter II, Japan developed her own history of civilization in which she possessed a unique perspective on reality, which defined her cultural history in ways significantly different than the Western world. Japanese people always see things within this reality. When Japanese people encountered Christianity, it was already dressed up in Western clothes. Thus Japanese people have misunderstood Christianity to be a part of Western culture.

However, it was God who worked through those Western missionaries and revealed Himself in the stream of Japanese history. Christians are able to accept their surroundings as part of the purpose of God; namely, that he has placed them into a particular time and setting. Therefore, it is also crucial to confront the present problems that Japanese Christians face in daily life as their response to God as his children who live in this time in this world and look to the future with hope in Christ.

Japanese Christians must face the reality of the existence of evil and human powers in the world, both in history and in their individual lives. In the past, severe persecution took place in Japan. Tens of thousands of Japanese Christians, including children, were either tortured to make them recant or killed. Although Xavier attempted to vernacularize the church, some are critical of the Catholic missionaries' exclusiveness or aggressive faith over against other cultures in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, and believe their attitude brought people to martyrdom. Others seek to find an underlying reason for the persecution. Keith Webb states, "I was horrified and angered by the ruthless persecution of Christians in 17th century Japan ... and had trouble understanding why God would allow it to happen."¹

God Almighty created everything perfect; however, even so, those Japanese Christians had to suffer. Japanese Christians also need to overcome with faith the "why" questions regarding the fate and destination of their non-believing family and ancestors. Japanese Christians need to focus on the invisible

¹ Keith E. Webb, *Overcoming Spiritual Barriers in Japan* (Washington: NextChurch Resources, 1999), 9.

reality beyond visible reality, on victory over evil in Christ. Without this assurance, it is hard for Japanese Christians to trust in God's will and endure the visible reality. Through faith we are able to know that people who lived and died in Christ live eternally, for a Christian possesses another reality as a child of God. A Christian knows who holds the future.

Additionally, at the present time, Japanese Christians still must face some challenges in society as a minority group. Their challenges arise from conflict between the Christian faith and the structures of Japanese living. Luther once categorized the situations in Christian living as "family," "state," "church," and "economy."² These categories are helpful in evaluating the Japanese situation as we examine: 1) the conflict between state and faith in a non-Christian society; and, 2) the tension between Christian living and family responsibility in Japan.

2. The Conflict between Faith and Life in Christ: Being a Christian or/and a Japanese

1) The State and Faith: Under Modernization and Westernization

It is difficult to observe Japanese Christians in society since the relationship between the individual and the state has changed rapidly. Japan as a nation has also changed its stance in the world, especially after 1945. Most significantly, Japanese discovered that the emperor, whom they regarded as the son of Shinto gods, was a man. Robert Lee describes this situation as a Japanese self-identity crisis when challenged by modernity. Japanese were forced to face the questions, "Who are we?" and "How ought we to live?"³ Especially, some Japanese Christians have confused the proper spheres of loyalty to the state and to Christianity.

When the shift of authority took place from the Tokugawa Shogunate to the Meiji imperial government in the mid-19th century, Japan began to modernize. However, the Meiji leaders tried to establish the identity of Japanese under the emperor system without rejecting the traditional filial piety

² Robert Kolb, "God Calling, 'Take Care of My People': Luther's Concept of Vocation in the Augsburg Confession and Its Apology," *Concordia Journal* 8 (1982): 5-6.

³ Robert Lee, *The Clash of Civilizations* (Pennsylvania: Trinity Press International, 1999), 38. Robert Lee is a professor at the Tokyo Biblical Seminary and the Asian Graduate School of Theology.

and the traditional worship of ancestors and gods. Robert Lee says that the Japanese mentality was transformed into a new cultural identity that transcended local and “matriarchal” dimensions derived from Shinto and the hierarchical and patriarchal dimensions of the Confucian tradition.⁴ Therefore, while people had a model for being Japanese, it was a system that excluded Japanese Christians.

Since 1945 when Japan began a second modernization, Japanese Christians have been able to enjoy religious freedom within the nation as the Japanese constitution defines the emperor as a symbol of Japan with no power to exercise authority over people. However, this freedom of religion for Japanese was given through the power of foreign nations rather than won by the Japanese themselves. “The Allied Powers had made it clear from the time of the Potsdam Declaration that they would seek to establish freedom of religion in Japan.”⁵ Because of this point, Japanese have started to walk the path of religious freedom without changing their spiritual core. The Shintoist spirit still has a firm hold on the Japanese mind. However, although state Shinto is no longer considered as a religious system, many saw the revival of the emperor system and its function in the events surrounding the death of the Showa emperor in 1990.⁶ Even now, Japanese Christians are still a minority in society and have to face conflict between the Christian faith and the life of the majority in society.

Interestingly, the modernization of the Japanese state under the Meiji imperial government was different from Westernization in some aspects. Robert Lee states that the emperor system in modernity is an “inescapable missiological issue”⁷ for Japanese Christians. Throughout history, even Japanese Christians have considered themselves as family members of the emperor’s household. This system also requires loyalty to the emperor, and the system establishes the family, political, economic and the cultural orders of society. Robert Lee believes that when Christianity brought individualism from the West, Japanese Christians tried to shape their Christian identity with Western values. For example, Japanese

⁴Ibid., 29.

⁵ James M. Phillips. *From the Rising of the Sun* (Maryknoll, New York, Orbis Books 1981), 4.

⁶ E.g. Through Emperor Showa’s serious illness leading to death, Japan entered a time of self-restraint. Schools and communities canceled festivals or joyous events government officials terminated trips abroad. Many saw the people’s emotional attachment to the emperor.

⁷ Lee, *The Clash of Civilizations*, 31.

Christians adopted largely Western religious traditions such as church membership, Western style church architecture, Western educational curriculums and so on. In some respects this led Christianity to become discontinuous with Japanese cultural history. It maybe said that a Westernized Christian identity clashed with an internal Japanese identity, or some Japanese Christians clashed with Western values.

The clash between western individualism and the Japanese collectivistic tendencies in the state is seen in sociologist Eshun Hamaguchi's insistence that "the idiomatic usages of the Japanese language bear strong evidence that the Japanese think of man in his relationship with others,"⁸ that is, as seeking their identity among others, rather than seeking the individual right. Japanese people are thought of as relational beings who find meaning in a network of relationships in a particular social context. When Christianity came with Western cultural concepts such as individualism, democracy, the concept of self, and the superior view of Western civilization, many Japanese hardened their minds and rejected Western values and teachings as well. In short, Japanese modernization was promoted through its own national pride and maintained the collectivistic identity.

In addition, a Japanese version of the Enlightenment view emerged among the Japanese. Kurakichi Shiratori⁹ thought that if Western history was the framework in which to see the world, Japan, which did not appear until the sixteenth century in Western history, was only of secondary importance. Interestingly, while trying to find the meaning of the existence of the East, Shiratori established an Asian view of history (*Toyoshi*) as an alternative to the Enlightenment views of Western history (*Seiyoshi*). *Toyoshi* differentiated Japan from the West and valued the emperor system in Meiji era. Even though the authority of the emperor as a ruler of the nation has since been removed, this view supports the Japanese mind and identity and binds it to the old culture.

Nonetheless, some Japanese Christians, such as Kanzo Uchimura, have struggled with the proper interpretation or definition of the setting of the gospel under the Meiji imperial government. Uchimura

⁸ Lee, *The Clash of Civilizations*, 12.

⁹ Kurakichi Shiratori (1865-1942) studied in Europe and became a professor of history at the prestigious Tokyo Imperial University in 1904. He treated Japanese as the Ural Altai linguistic group and believed civilization developed in a North-South axis instead of an East-West axis.

strongly felt the need to contextualize the gospel for Japanese culture. In Uchimura's case, he treated Japanese religion and its history as steps to the truth in Christ; every good virtue was preparation to be a Christian. For instance, Uchimura thought that Christianity should be grafted into the Samurai spirit. His concern was salvation for the Japanese as Japanese nationals, proclaiming the gospel as Japanese Christianity. For this purpose, Uchimura tried to avoid the institutionalization of the Church and refused its dogma as Western tradition. Uchimura also held an anti-missionary stance and concluded his interpretation of the gospel in the Mukyokai Shugi Kirisutokyo movement (No Church Christianity), which focuses on a high level of biblical studies and personal fellowship. On the other hand, he believed the Protestant church needed to be reformed once again with "a salvation by faith alone". For this, he rejected the sacraments of baptism and the Lord's Supper as part of Western ritual. As a result, Uchimura and his followers were free from attempts by the imperial Japanese government to control the institutional church.

In addition, Uchimura believed that his faith shared the same heart and religious experience with Shinran and Honen as Japanese. He wrote a short piece, "Buddha is the Moon; Christ is the Sun. Buddha is the Mother; Christ is the Father. Buddha is Mercy; Christ is Righteousness...I know that the love of the Moon is included in the love of the Sun, and that he who loves the Sun loves the Moon also."¹⁰ Ultimately, Uchimura contextualized Christianity and treated religion as a cultural symbol which man had developed toward life. Uchimura tried to be free from Western influence through the "No Church Christianity" movement. He was not able to be free from Japanese pluralism, however, as his interpretation of the gospel apart from Christian doctrines became synthesized with Samurai spirit and Buddhist thought, thus weakening his confession in society.

Although current-day Japanese Christians are free from loyalty to the emperor or state in comparison with Uchimura's time, the challenge for Japanese Christians of how to live and to reflect the Christian faith in society still continues.

¹⁰ Mark R. Mullins, *Christianity Made in Japan* (Honolulu: University of Hawai'i Press, 1988), 61.

2) Tension between Christian Living and Family Responsibility in Japan.

Japanese people view Japan as one large family of Japanese under a single social structure. Whether people realize it or not, the majority of Japanese are attached emotionally to the country and to the emperor system. The smallest social unit in Japan may be said to be the family or clan, contrary to the Western culture, in which the smallest social unit is the self or individual. Authority for decision-making usually lies with the head of the family, the father or the oldest person. Although this authority is shifting or seems to be fading away compared with the past, it still binds Japanese life. For example, arranging a marriage to satisfy the family is still welcomed. My friend M.C., a Christian lady who studied abroad in the USA and a very positive person, was married to a man whom she did not know in order to please the family. Although she could not deceive herself any longer and later divorced the man, it is discouraging to know that daughters of the family, especially the eldest, are expected to be obedient to family authority even in the twenty-first century.

The main issues of family which pose challenges to Christian faith are maintaining the family name, taking care of the family grave, and maintaining the family altar for their ancestors. These responsibilities are part of the duty of a faithful family member and a faithful citizen of Japan. One lady friend¹¹ is interested in Christianity, but her mother is unhappy because of this interest. In response, her mother bought and gave her expensive Buddhist prayer beads and told her to be a good daughter, to be responsible for her family religion. Another Japanese family wrote a farewell card and said "It was certainly a tough decision to make since we knew we would miss our friends in the U.S. and the quality of life in New Jersey. But we thought it would be very important for our children to be raised in Japanese culture at one point of their childhood."¹² The wife in this family used to attend Sunday school when she was a little and says she likes the Christian atmosphere. But becoming a Christian appears to be painful

¹¹ S.S is currently attending a Japanese friendship circle in New Jersey. She has her own Bible and interested in study.

¹² A family with two children, aged four and six, who lived in New Jersey. They returned to Japan in January, 2003.

for her family. She has sacrificed her interest in the Christian faith on the altar of being a faithful mother, daughter, and citizen of Japan.

These difficulties have been noted by Yuzo Matsuki, a Japan Holiness Church pastor and Tokyo Biblical Seminary professor, who presented this concern in his doctor of ministry dissertation on first generation Christians. Matsuki said that “they often could not be sustained if the family members were not Christians.”¹³ He found that that two out of three first-generation converts leave the church at the first signs of family conflict, company disapproval, or community opposition.¹⁴ This suggests the reality that converted Japanese Christians experience alienation from their family, friends and society. Faith produces action, but often this action, or Christian values, become problematic in society. Here, the realm of faith and realm of daily life is discontinuous, and faith is not able to find right language into the daily life.

To approach the life of Japanese people, a study of Jan-Martin Berentsen¹⁵ will be presented in the next chapter. The cases below are not intended to reorganize the religious system or bring judgment, but to attempt to find the expression of human existence as a social phenomenon. Jan-Martin Berentsen has provided an analysis of the ways in which Christians in Japan integrate their faith and their culture, sometimes in acceptable ways sometimes in unacceptable ways.

3. Christian Faith and Ancestors

An article in the book *Japanese Religion*, by the Agency for Cultural Affairs of the Ministry of Education in 1972, states, “One of the reasons Christianity is not more generally accepted may be that to the Japanese religious consciousness, with its orientation toward family and household religion as opposed to a religion of individual choice and commitment and with its almost instinctive inclination to affirm an essential continuity between the divine and the human, Christianity simply seems utterly alien.”¹⁶

¹³ Lee, *The Clash of Civilizations*, 46.

¹⁴ *Ibid.*, 47. Matsuki 1994: Part 2, Chapter 3.

¹⁵ Jan-Martin Berentsen, *Grave and Gospel* (Leiden: I.J. Brill, 1985).

¹⁶ *Ibid.*, 119.

Berentsen makes several observations of Christian faith and traditional practices which show the Japanese tendency of attachment with their ancestors in daily life. In short, the Japanese religious consciousness and its problem are seen in bondage to the family and their dead.

Case 1: Professor Masatoshi Doi's study group with the United Church of Christ's Study Center of Mission in the late 1950s.

The group raised the question of how ancestral rites pertaining to the old family system influence the everyday life of the Christian. Questionnaires were sent to two hundred churches of the United Church of Christ all over Japan, including rural and urban, and eighty responded. Of the respondents, 57.8% explained their participation in traditional rites/festivals as paying respect to the ancestors, while 3.3% said it was worship and supplication. This study group commented that **“even after they have become Christians the mood of ancestor worship remains rather strong”**¹⁷ (emphasis mine).

Doi's analysis: “[T]hrough the instruction of the church, worship is consciously changed to respect...Christianity is based on monotheism and must evade all animistic practices. However, based on its view of the world to come, which – different from Buddhism—is a faith in the resurrection of the dead and the continuation of individual personality, **it is both possible and desirable for evangelism in Japan to create – in agreement with Japanese mentality – a pattern for the expression of feelings of love and respect to the dead that may be unique for the Christian Church in Japan**”¹⁸ (emphasis mine).

Case 2: Shigeru Nishiyama's study of the Fukuda Anglican Church in the agricultural village of Shimo Fukuda in Chiba prefecture in 1975.

In 1971, twenty-one households (38.9%) were Christian out of fifty-four household units. The church was established in 1887 and had a hundred and eight members in 1971. Seventy-nine members were actually living in the village and their families were known as Christians. A study shows that the typical Christian family in Shimo Fukuda had changed its attitude of traditional ancestor worship. Most

¹⁷ Ibid., 138.

¹⁸ Ibid., 138.

of the families removed their Buddhist family altar (*butsudan*) in the Meiji era or at least by the end of the 1920s. However, the tradition of setting up the Buddhist altar came back after the Manchuria Incident in 1931.

Nishiyama's analysis: "Christianity, which in principle is based on personal confession of faith and personal belonging to the church, has difficulties in finding stability unless it becomes a religion belonging to the social unit of the *ie* [household].... Christianity is profoundly influenced by the ancestor-faith.... whether one has a *butsudan* [Buddhist altar] or not.... **the dominant factor behind the essential change in Christian faith is the ancestor-faith**"¹⁹ (emphasis mine).

Case 3: A study by Roman Catholic missionary David L. Doerner.

Doerner conducted a survey [date not given] among one hundred practicing Catholics, both men and women, from various age groups and social backgrounds and varying years of experience as Christians. Doerner found some interesting aspects in answers to the question "Where do you think your ancestors are?" Only three people responded '*tengoku*' (the Catholic term for heaven)...sixty-one people, thirty-three women and twenty-eight men responded, "They are near," "They are around us," "They are always guarding and helping us."²⁰

Doerner's analysis is based on Roman Catholic view of accommodation: "It is necessary that **any incompatible element in order to be accepted into the culture must be compatible with the already existing indigenous elements**"²¹(emphasis mine).

Case 4: The Catholic Church attempt to perform services for the dead.

According to Catholic tradition, November 2nd was designated as "All Souls Day" and special services are conducted for the deceased. The rest of the month is also set aside for praying for them. However, forty-four people out of one hundred Catholics said they remember their dead at '*higan*' and

¹⁹ Ibid., 139.

²⁰ Ibid., 140.

²¹ Ibid., 140.

'*bon*' [the equinox and the Buddhist festival for the dead]; twenty-nine people said they remember their dead when they return to their hometowns.

Doerner's analysis: "[T]he Catholic tradition of remembering the dead on November 2nd has never become a tradition among the Japanese Catholics...they continue to remember their dead according to the early custom which comes from Shinto and later adopted by Buddhism..."²² "A Christian adaptation to Japanese ancestor veneration is very much something possible. It is not too late for the Church in Japan to develop a tract on death and afterlife which incorporates the traditional practices of the people and is compatible with the indigenous beliefs of the Japanese."²³

These case studies show different approaches and suggestions but all suggest that ancestor-faith is problematic to Japanese Christian faith. Doerner's and the Roman Catholic view of contextualizing ancestor spirits incorporated into Christianity brings the danger of neglecting the Triune God and his teaching. Indeed, sensitivity may be needed in regard to Japanese feelings toward their dead in Japanese culture. At the same time, we are not be able to compromise biblical teachings of creation and life, death and resurrection according to the biblical eschatological message. The gospel of Jesus Christ makes people new; dying with Christ, living with Him. Berentsen points out that the examples presented in these case studies eventually lead to a secularization of Christianity. Berentsen also quotes from Jan Swyngedouw, a Roman Catholic missionary and professor of Nanzan University in Nagoya, Japan, and J. Wach, a historian of religions, as he comments that one has to distinguish between the accommodation of doctrine – 'theological expression of religious experience' and accommodation of cultus – 'practical expression' which 'both have a common denominator in the religious experience.'²⁴ It is important to know which cultural elements will be possible to use in reinterpretation of the gospel and which not.

²² Ibid., 140.

²³ Ibid., 141.

²⁴ Ibid., 143.

4. Other Aspects of Japanese Christians

Even though indigenous movements or different approaches to expression of the faith arise among Japanese Christians, many Japanese Christians are active believers and have been trying to shape their faith positively within the Japanese cultural context. Some even take notes during the sermon. Mission schools and churches have also worked hard to indigenize the faith. They have continually handed out Bibles to their students, with the result that the Bible has been a best seller in Japan.²⁵ Although Christian faith and Christian living are not separate issues, the manner of believing Christianity is considered either as a personal matter between God and man, or considered as only a man to man relationship. Even though the Japanese Roman Catholic Church has attempted to indigenize Christianity in Japan, and though many Christians are active believers, and though the Bible is spreading in society, Christians still have never exceeded more than one percent of the Japanese population. The Biblical faith seems to be losing its power to work in community life and in the average person's life.

5. Conclusion

Japanese Christians have to face these difficulties as problems which create a clash between Christianity and culture in Japan. There are various suggestions regarding how to contextualize Christianity within the Japanese culture. However, Christianity does not set a goal for a better life on the earth or for the fulfillment of culture. Rather, the Christian faith brings the gospel to the culture and into peoples' lives. The Christian faith reflects itself into people's lives and the world according to their calling. Although the Church is holy because of Jesus Christ, it is also impossible to build any Church apart from human culture as long as people live on the earth.

The gospel of Jesus Christ will enter every culture, however. God's forgiveness has no limits or boundaries, but is higher than the sky and deeper than the sea; it surrounds human beings from west to

²⁵ According to Priest Kenji Yamauchi who works at St. Paul publishing in Tokyo, the reasons for the Bible being a bestseller include: 1) Protestant and Catholic mission schools are giving away Bibles to every graduate or new student (This is about half of the entire sales); 2) intellectual fulfillment: people who are willing to study Western culture purchase them; 3) people who are interested in the Bible itself purchase it for Sunday school or for Bible study.

east and north to south. The gospel creates a new life in Christ, making people die and come alive in Him. Therefore, it is better for the Japanese identity to be crucified and renewed in Christ in daily living. When Japanese Christians receive their true identities as a children of God, they are truly able to be faithful citizens, daughters, sons, and so on in the community. If the larger community moves in the wrong direction, Christians can be salt among the people, walking with Christ and with hope. The next chapter offers an interpretation of the gospel of Jesus Christ for a Japanese cultural context; it seek a way of bringing the gospel into the Japanese heart and mind while assessing which cultural elements are possible to reinterpret and which are not affected by faith.

Chapter Four:

Christian Identity As a Child of God – An Interpretation of God and Human Beings, Human Beings and Human Beings Relationship in The Japanese Context

1. Introduction of Chapter IV

Japanese identity is based on ethnicity. Japanese are Japanese because of their blood, because they are born in Japan to a Japanese family, because they maintain the family name, participate in traditional religious events, and share the Japanese mind or way of thinking. This mind is influenced by Shinto, Buddhism, and Confucianism. This identity begins to totter when Japanese live outside of Japanese environs since it is rooted in a humanistic, Japanese-centered environment. This may be one of the reasons why Japanese struggle with interpersonal relationships when they live in a foreign land.¹ Either they tend to ignore their own nationality and live isolated from their fellow Japanese, trying to adapt to the land in which they are living, or they only live within their own small Japanese community in order to preserve their identity.

According to Luther in his interpretation of the biblical message, Christian identity is based on a vertical relationship between God and humans and a horizontal relationship between humans and humans. Therefore, Japanese Christians must first of all grasp the meaning of who God is and what role he plays as Creator and Savior in their lives, and then they must grasp the nature of their relationships with other human beings. Christians are then able to help non-Christians to know who God is and who they are.

This Christian identity rests upon biblical teaching, particularly the doctrine of Creation and the Christian eschatological message, as well as the personal relationship with a gracious God in the vertical dimension. Behind each of these lays the presumption that the Ultimate and Absolute is a personal God who creates and engages his creatures through his Word. At the same time this relationship with God creates responsibility within society, becoming the reason for responsible actions to others and producing

¹ Japanese people in New Jersey usually live in a foreign country from three to seven years as their company rotates them.

faithful citizenship. All people belong to some state as a citizen or culture-group, Christians included. Christians do not give up their earthly citizenship when the gospel reaches them; for example, the gospel reached Jews and Greeks in their culture and they were brought to God as they were in the history. God never denies their citizenship or expects us to be of one particular race or culture while we are living. Rather, God speaks to Germans, Americans, Koreans, Chinese and all other races in their own tongues. The gospel will be brought to all races and tribes as Scripture says, “And this gospel of the kingdom will be proclaimed throughout the whole world as a testimony to all nations, and then the end will come” (Matthew 24:14). God’s plan of salvation is dynamic, breaking through the walls of nations, yet He also calls his children to remain within their cultures faithfully.

There is always a way for Christianity to enter different cultures and be translated into their respective languages. As Lamin Sanneh states, “the translatability of the gospel, with a commitment to the pluralist merit of culture within God’s universal purpose” is seen in the contribution of St. Paul.² St. Paul bridged Christianity and Gentile culture as he recognized God’s working hand in history and in culture. He saw cultural settings as of secondary importance, yet under God’s purpose. It was possible for St. Paul to interpret the gospel into his cultural context. St. Paul appealed to pagans in Greece by using Greek culture, such as unknown gods and philosophical conversation, in order to show the way of Jesus Christ (Acts 17:16-34). He showed the reality that God’s Word came in the midst of our lives and lived among us. God’s Word is not just a concept or idea, but it has life and makes us alive.

Robert Kolb also states that St. Paul proclaimed the crucified and risen Lord Jesus Christ “using [culture’s] language even as He used human flesh as the vehicle of the climax and perfecting of His revelation to us” as God must come from outside of every culture into the culture.³ So, too, God has permitted Japanese Christians to enjoy and use their cultural gifts just as Western Christians rejoice in

² Lamin Sanneh, *Translating the Message – The Missionary Impact On Culture* (Maryknoll, New York: Orbis Books, 2001), 1.

³ Robert Kolb, “Nothing but Christ Crucified,” in *The Theology of the Cross for the 21st Century*, edited by Alberto L. Garcia and A.R. Victor Raj (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 2002), 40.

theirs. And as language is one of God's gifts that is closely tied with culture, it is possible for the gospel to be spoken in Japanese to Japanese hearts and minds.

Although God's word is certainly powerful in and of itself, it is crucial to learn the context of the hearers in order to communicate it properly. If people do not have the concept of "Agape love" and only know 'love' as "Eros," we are not able to bring the message "God is love" to these people. Therefore, we need to know what "there are no other gods," or "love your neighbor" means in Japanese society and explore the differences between its idolatrous attitudes and Christian faith. At the same time, we rejoice in God's gift of humanity which we share with other creatures. Christians must seek an interpretation of the gospel of Jesus Christ for the Japanese culture, a way of bringing the gospel into the Japanese heart and mind while recognizing which cultural elements are possible to reinterpret in a Christian manner and which are neutral in relationships to religious commitment and faith.

2. Concern over the God and Human relationship – Comparison between the Biblical View versus the Japanese View

1) Japanese belief on what God is and who we are

First, as seen in Chapter 1, Japanese myth does not mention God as a creator but presumes that the world already existed even before any god was born. The world of nature is something already existing from the beginning, and nature itself is the parent of gods, sustaining both gods and humans. In fact, nature, in the forms of wind, fire, thunder, and the ocean, is treated as gods or spirits, and they are objects of awe and worship in the Japanese mind. Harvest is treated as the grace of nature, and sacrifices of thanksgiving are offered to the gods of nature, such as the sun, moon, and rain. These gods control production, produce rice, give life to offspring, and sustain human life.

Shinto gods do not have any specific character but are mysterious figures. They are considered to have the form of spirits. Japanese in general feel spirits are in wood, rivers, the air, and existing everywhere else in nature; the spirits of the dead also are believed to be present among the living. When

people visit a shrine, they do not have a sense of believing or participating in religious practice, but regard it as a part of normal daily life.

Shinto treats humans as a part of the universe; living humans are a part of nature, not subjects who are supposed to conquer or control nature. Security is considered to be accessible only in the harmony and order of the community, in a natural way. It is not something established by humans. Spirits of the dead are also hovering in nature and dead heroes are also lifted up on high as gods. Shinto power is seen as the power of life, exhibited as rice grows or flowers bloom in the course of a life cycle.⁴

Second, Confucianism and Neo-Confucianism are philosophical moral teachings which also have no concept of the Creator God. Confucianism established an ethical system in Japanese tradition. It dictated politeness, generosity, honor, loyalty and self-control. It influenced the way of the warrior (*Bushido*) and led Japan into an ultra-nationalistic state as people accorded loyalty only to human authority. It ordered people to be blindly obedient as subjects to their feudal lord, the shogun and emperor. It was easy to follow the wrong path with the wrong leaders. Confucianism is a well-established system for leaders to control their people who are concerned with social order in this world.

Third, Buddhism is the wisdom of man, telling us how to deal with problems in life practically, within the natural order. But as with Shinto, it has no concept of a Creator God. Buddha claimed he was “a father to all the world;”⁵ and said, “[t]his world of change and suffering belongs to me; all these ignorant, heedless people are my children; I am the only one who can save them from their delusion and misery.”⁶ Buddha was totally confident in his enlightened mind and distinguished himself from the rest of humans.

Buddha’s teaching suggests that struggling with daily problems and peace of mind is a more important matter than knowing a personal Creator God. Buddha’s teaching says, “The question of whether the universe has limits or is eternal can wait until some way is found to extinguish the fires of

⁴ For resources for an introduction to Shintoism, see Tetsuo Yamamori. *Chinju no Mori wa Naiteiru* (Tokyo: PHP Kenkyusho, 2001), and Susumu Ono. *Nihonjin no Kami*, (Tokyo: Shinchobunko, 1997).

⁵ *The Teaching of Buddha*, English & Japanese version (Tokyo: Bukkyo Dendo Kyokai, 1966), 70.

⁶ *Ibid.*, 70.

birth, old age, sickness and death; ...one should first search for a way to solve these problems and devote oneself to the practice of that way...[t]o do all this, they must first undertake to train their minds; that is, they must first seek mind-control”⁷ because “[b]oth delusion and Enlightenment originate within the mind, and every existence or phenomenon arises from the functions of the mind.”⁸

Buddha also established a philosophical system for the well-being of humans. Although the various sects claim Buddha to have taught enough material to fill more than the five thousand recorded volumes of his teaching, this system of thought has no concept of humanity. Buddha says, “There are four truths in this world; first, all living beings rise from ignorance; second, all objects of desire are impermanent, uncertain and suffering; third, all existing things are also impermanent, uncertain and suffering; fourth, there is nothing that can be called an ‘ego,’ and there is no such thing as ‘mine’ in all the world.”⁹ After all, Buddhist teaching says that the world is created by the mind, so people need to free themselves from every substance, even from the self, by “knowing that things neither exist nor do not exist.”¹⁰ His teaching suggests humans can be free from the all sufferings and be content after death, which frees us from our physical being as well as our souls. Buddhism views the body in the world as the source of evil. But this manner of thought is not able to help adherents explain where Buddha’s life came from, who or what existed before Buddha, or what a human being actually is.

In Japan, Buddhism bound itself to ancestor worship, something different from the original teaching of Buddha. Original Buddhism in India is beyond nature and the world, but Japanese Buddhism came together with Shinto belief. People treat the dead spirits of ancestors as their gods, living close to them even though they have departed this world.

⁷Ibid., 298 - 300.

⁸ Ibid., 96.

⁹ Ibid., 95- 96.

¹⁰Ibid., 114.

2) The Biblical Understanding of What God Is and Humans Are

God revealed himself in Scripture, introducing himself to us as a person. The Christian confession of the creeds reflects this relationship, although some Japanese Christians may wonder if the creeds are a universal belief or not just as Kanzo Uchimura thought of the sacraments as a Western innovation. It is certain, however, that Christians need a summary expression regarding the God in whom they believe that is valid for every time and every place. The creeds are such a summary of the biblical message.

Because the three ecumenical creeds are a reflection of the Scriptures, they help us to know who God is beyond any cultural context or time. One concern, however, is how to bring the creedal message to hearers accurately. For example, Luther was concerned about the word 'flesh' when he translated the creed into German as he wrote, "When we hear the word *Fleisch* we think no farther than the butcher shop. In proper German we would say "resurrection of the body."¹¹ So he did not hesitate to use the expression "resurrection of the body" to explain "humanity, body and soul, according to the usage of Scripture which calls man 'flesh,'"¹² He also puts stress on the meaning behind the translating of vocabulary itself to make people understand God's Word properly. God the Creator has made us by his word, through his own communication of and regarding himself. He has made us to communicate with one another and with himself. Therefore, the Creed is helpful to grasp who God is and what the Christian church believes.

First, we confess that God is good and that he created everything perfect and in beautiful harmony. The Apostles Creed says God is "the Father almighty, Creator of heaven and earth", "Christ is our Creator," and "we are God's creatures."¹³ These expressions tell people there are no other gods.¹⁴

¹¹ *The Book of Concord*, edited by Robert Kolb and Timothy J. Wengert (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2000), 439.

¹² *Ibid.*, 439. see note 161.

¹³ *Ibid.*, 19-25. They answer our fundamental questions of what we believe. See the three ecumenical creeds: The Apostles' Creed, the Nicene Creed, and the Athanasian Creed.

¹⁴ Luther says in *Large Catechism* that "the Ten Commandments do not succeed in making us Christians, for God's wrath and displeasure still remain upon us because we cannot fulfill what God demands of us. But the Creed brings pure grace and makes us righteous and acceptable to God. Through this knowledge

Moreover, they tell us that God gives us everything to sustain our “body, soul and life... sun, moon, and stars in the heavens; day and night; air, fire, water, the earth and all that it yields and brings forth; ... he gives all physical and temporal blessings – good government, peace, security.”¹⁵ God is almighty, absolute and powerful. Believers respond to God for all of his blessings with their thanksgiving. Their sinfulness prevents them from recognizing his gifts and causes them to ignore his plan of re-creating them to be his children.

Secondly, Christians believe that Jesus Christ is their Lord as Redeemer through His death on the cross. They are unable to call God as their heavenly Father through Jesus Christ. Christians believe they are able to know God only through Scripture. God is a personal God who creates and engages his creatures through his Word (John 1:1-3, Colossians.1:16, Hebrews. 1:2, Psalms 33:6), particularly through His Word Incarnate, Jesus Christ. They are able to regain the fullness of their humanity only through him. They are not able to reach out to God by themselves, but God came down to the earth for their salvation. In love, God created everything perfect and in love Jesus showed the way to the Father for each human. People are only able to grasp God’s fatherly boundless love for them through his Son Jesus Christ.

Finally, when believers encounter God’s Word, God’s Spirit, that is the Holy Spirit, leads them to believe all things and protects them as they continue to live as children of God until the Last Day comes. They are not able to receive faith without the Holy Spirit, nor are they able to accept Jesus as their Lord. When they receive their new identities as children of God through His love, God also desires them to live as children of God. Knowing God’s love means knowing who ‘I’ am and where ‘we’ belong. After knowing their true identity, believers are able to truly love.

we come to love and delight in all the commandments of God because we see here in the Creed how God gives himself completely to us...”.

¹⁵ A quote from *The Large Catechism: The Book of Concord*, 432.

3) The Japanese Worldview versus Creation and Redemption

Not only do Shinto, Confucianism and Buddhism all lack the concept of a Creator God who created everything out of nothing, but they also ignore the question of the origin of the world. The three most influential Japanese religions treat the visible world as the reality for humans; they teach that the ultimate and absolute matters, such as the power of life or the enlightened mind, are beyond our consciousness. There is no way to personally communicate with gods or with the ultimate power beyond us. Rather, humans start to occupy the place of God and act as God.

Moreover, both Shinto and Buddhism do not have clear view of humanity. There is no relationship with a Creator God. Humans are part of nature in Shinto and the non-ego, neither an object nor a subject, in Buddhism. Buddhism unites religion and philosophy wholly as one philosophical presupposition.

Contrary to the Japanese worldview, God as Creator brings us to focus on one God who is the source of all things. God and creatures may both be said to have life, but God has life in and of himself. There is no room for any other god or for many other gods. Although the Christian God is seen in nature as are the so-called Japanese gods, God alone is the giver of life, and, above all, creation.

When we misunderstand or lack an understanding of the Creator God, there is danger of misinterpreting who his Son is. Japanese have no concept of the Creator God in history and are missing the worldview of creation. It is easier to learn about the man Jesus but difficult to accept Jesus as God for the Japanese mind. Shinto may treat Jesus as a supreme being or one of the godly heroes; Buddhism may treat Jesus as a great teacher or moral man; and Confucianism may treat Jesus as an ethical leader. But he is the Lord and Savior of all people and all of creation (Colossians 1:15ff).

Therefore, it is first of all very important to show the Creator God and his redemptive purpose as they fit together for Japanese non-believers in order to bring them to Christ; hence one could say that God's starting point is always the gospel. When Japanese people are able to grasp the big picture of creation and redemption, it may be easier to understand that God's salvation is universal, reaching into every nation and culture. Japanese may come to know Christianity is not simply a Western religion when

they come to know God is the Lord of all creation, including nature, animals and humans, and also that he is a personal God, who communicates with each person. Then Japanese are able to focus on the only way to the Father, Jesus Christ, without misunderstanding the biblical message under the influence of cultural values. On the other hand, when Jesus Christ is interpreted simply as a man who brings political freedom, individualism/individual rights or justice to society, he becomes a representative of Western man.

Moreover, the Christian hope and joy is that God created everything good, including humans. He created human beings in his image, with immortality, under the unity of God, as his children (Genesis 1:26). Death was unnatural for humans. Every human possessed God's image and was meant to live forever in the beginning. When we see God's perfection, we must now see our imperfection, that we have failed to respond to his expectations.

If people do not know God as Creator, they are not able to cling to one God, nor are they able to perceive what is wrong with life, because they do not have him as a reference point for evaluating life. Nor are they able to grasp God's plan of salvation or even his plan of basic human living for them. People will miss God's blueprint for their future as they are not able to know who they are, who they are supposed to be, who they belong to, where they are to return, or why God calls them. In this blueprint, Jesus Christ showed the way to the Father. When people are unable to know God's future plan in an eschatological time line, they are not able to plan for themselves or for others in the present. But God has not left us desperate. God gave us the gift of salvation in Christ to restore our true identities as children of God. God shows us the way we are supposed to come to the Father, namely through his Son Jesus Christ as Savior. Salvation is totally a gift from God, a gift we are never able to earn by ourselves. People will not have a true self-identity without knowing this gospel assurance.

This character of God, a merciful and loving personal God, is peculiar in comparison with the Japanese views of god. Japanese major religions do not have a personal God who forgives the sin of people. Biblically, humanity is tainted by sin, which is the failure to trust in God, or rebellion against God. Sin is something immoral, impure, evil or bad in one's behavior against other humans. However, there is no concept of sin affecting a relationship between God and humans in the Japanese mind.

Japanese understand sin (*tsumi*) as a crime or ‘wrongdoing.’ The major Japanese religions do not expect people to be children of God or to have the image of God. Rather, leading a happy, long life without conflict with others and living with harmony in Japanese society in the present time provides significant meaning for Japanese belief in general.

4) Where Are We Going? The Japanese Life Cycle and Christian Eschatology

The major Japanese religions also have a different view of life and of life after death. It is logical to say that there is no end when there is no beginning. Even though ‘beginning’ means something which man is able to comprehend, Japanese thought does not have the beginning point of a creation, so its world has also no clear view of its end. Kakichi Kadowaki points out that Shinto’s life cycle repeats a circle as the four seasons.¹⁶ Shinto rituals follow this cycle, and the god of the mountains comes down at every festival time. These events are repeated over and over annually without creating any history.

According to Buddhist teaching, a pure and free world is created by the pure mind of Buddha, but this world is impure from man’s greed and ignorance, so people need to exert control over their minds. Buddhism states our bodies are impermanent as well as our minds, so a wise man is able to attain Enlightenment when he breaks away from any attachment to the body or mind. This is the ideal stage for a Buddhist.

In this world, Buddhism divides time into two major periods—before and after the death of Buddha, or *Zaisei* and *Metsugo*.¹⁷ Moreover, Buddhism teaches that there are three periods to time after the death of Buddha (*Metsugo*): *Shoubou*, *Zoubou* and *Mappou*. *Shobou* is the time when the Buddha’s teaching spread properly for one thousand years after Buddha’s death. *Zoubou* is the following thousand years when only the right teaching of Buddha remains even though he had passed away. *Mappou* is the next period after the *Zoubou* when even though the right teaching remains, no one reaches enlightenment.

¹⁶ Kakichi Kadowaki, *Nihon no Shukyo to Kirisuto no Michi* [Japanese religion and the way of Christ] (Tokyo: Iwnami Shoten, 1997), 37.

¹⁷ Buddhist Internet site, www.hct.zaq.ne.jp/renjouji/ji.html (March 2003).

Though some may divide time differently, all share in common the idea that Buddha's teaching itself disappears in the course of time.

Many Japanese believe that there is a heaven-like land after death. They believe when people die, they become god-like Buddhas. Japanese usually buy a Buddhist name for their dead family members from the temple at their funerals. Japanese hope to have longer names as each Chinese letter has its own meaning and is valuable. People simply think their dead have a rank even after death.

Japanese seem to interact with the spirits of their dead through ceremony or rituals. The family feels close to their dead so that the family altar and grave become special place for them. Living people care for their dead family, possessing a family altar in the household with a mortuary tablet called *ihai*. Japanese treat the bones of the dead (the cremated body) with respect, and visiting the grave is an important event. Memorial services for the dead are also important and take place in designated years. Finally, Japanese often say the birth of a child is actually the rebirth of somebody in the family who has died.

Contrary to the typical Japanese view, Christians believe there is a beginning and an end to the world. Christians believe that there is a purpose to human life and that God is the only author of history from the beginning to the end. Christians have the promise of receiving eternal life through faith in Christ, and the Holy Spirit sustains them in holiness until the Last Day comes. Death has no power over them any longer. Moreover, they are able to be themselves, holding their own identities even after death and receiving of eternal life. The resurrection of the body is promised. No one will be reborn as another person, nor will a Christian return to nature or the cosmos. A Christian is able to walk each day with joy and hope for eternity because he or she believes and trusts the promise of Jesus Christ.

The Japanese major belief systems, Shinto, Buddhism and Confucianism, each lack a way to understand the Creator God as well as to have a personal relationship with the Savior. When the concept of the Creator God and Savior is not present, the concept of humanity is not present either, nor is a concept of the relationship between God and humans. Therefore, Christian eschatology is an alien concept to the Japanese mind. The resurrected body is especially a stumbling block, as it is not part of the

natural cycle. Eternity is also somewhat a blur since Japanese religions do not have a clear line between this world and life beyond. Eternity usually means that there will be no end. For example, a Japanese dictionary says, “eternity is time continuing into the future endlessly.”¹⁸ The concept of God’s plan of recreation is missing in the Japanese view. We are able to believe this only through God’s word and the work of the Holy Spirit. But it may be helpful to explain natural power as God’s power through which makes everything possible. Christianity has no meaning without the resurrection of Jesus Christ.

5) Communicating with the Biblical God in the Japanese Mind:

It seems that people in Japan hold strong sense of the distinction between “self” and “other” rather than “self” and “utmost power.” When we observe Japanese expression and communication in life, we find many words for “I” in the Japanese language although English has only one word. For example, “boku” (male), “ore” (male, informal), “atai” (female, informal), “wate” (Western direct), “washi” (rare to use, mainly elderly persons), “watashi” (no gender), “watakushi” (no gender, formal), “ware” (literary) and so on.

The way in which Japanese express themselves depends upon the object with whom they are communicating. “I” is changeable according to the hearers’ situation and does not have strong sense of identity as in the English language. Japanese even omit the subject often and speak only using verbs as in these sentences: “Just got a minute,” “Saw it yesterday” and so on.

It is easier to communicate among family or in a specific community in which everyone is of similar status; but it is difficult to communicate in a diverse culture. For example, it is usually difficult for Japanese to speak a different opinion or present a conflicting view to others.

Japanese people and their culture were influenced by many beliefs and thought patterns which mingled with each other in the course of history. The process of combining things together may be a characteristic of the Japanese people. In this process, Japanese distinguish what is their own from what is not, and start molding foreign things, even God, into their own way of thinking. The Japanese way is the

¹⁸ *Nihongo Jiten* (Tokyo: Fukutake), 1989.

most significant matter, and they value a relationship of harmony with other community members. A personal relationship with the Creator God is missing, however.

This Japanese way of thinking is also seen in the Japanese writing system. Japanese has three styles of letters: *kanji*, *hira-gana*, and *kata-kana*. *Kanji* are characters imported from China around the fifth century.¹⁹ There are two ways of reading *kanji*. The first is an “*on*” reading in which pronunciation is based on Chinese and is usually used for compound words made up of two or more *kanji*. A second way of reading *kanji* is *kun*, in which the meaning of the *kanji* is expressed in Japanese words. In addition, Japanese also have *hira-gana* and *kata-kana* style of lettering. These letters were created originally from *kanji* around the tenth century. A unique aspect is that *kata-kana* is used for foreign objects for which Japanese have no concepts to express either sound or meaning. When Japanese encounter a new concept, they distinguish whether the thing is foreign or domestic and then begin to mold or improve the concept.

This thinking is also reflected in the Japanese Bible: God and the Holy Spirit are written in *kanji*, but the name “Jesus” is written in *katakana* as if he were a foreigner. Although it may be better for Japanese to know Jesus as a totally new concept of God, it is also important for Jesus to enter Japanese hearts as their personal Savior. When God is seen as a personal, communicative God, who entered into our world with a human body, this difficulty will be overcome. The Japanese word for Japanese Shinto gods, *kami* is also used for the Christian God as Triune or as Creator. Japanese Christians may be able to use *kami* and Japanese thought in order to start a conversation with a non-believer in Japan while holding the proper understanding of God’s blueprint of salvation through creation, redemption and eschatology.

It is also better to avoid Buddhist or Shinto terms as much as possible when translating biblical teaching since their respective worldviews are deeply rooted in the life of Japanese. For example, some missionaries in the early sixteenth century translated God as *Dainichi*. This *Dainichi* is actually a Buddhist term and means, roughly, “an image of the Sun-like Buddha” in *Shingonshu*, one of the

¹⁹ *The Japanese-English Dictionary for Conversation about Japan*, edited by Yoshiyuki Araiso and Jean Moore (Tokyo: Oubun-sha, 1989).

Mahayana sects of Buddhism in Japan. Although a Buddhist monk became a good friend of Francis Xavier, the Japanese might have thought Xavier to be a foreign Buddhist monk.²⁰

Christians may be able to use a Buddhist approach for faith in order to get the attention of Japanese people but then compare and point out the differences between it and Christianity. The way Shinran and Honen taught salvation through the benevolence of Buddha is helpful to illustrate the attitude of faith alone. However, it is crucial to point out that Jesus, who died on the cross, was more than a man of religion but God and a Savior for human beings.

God gives the believer an identity as his child through Jesus Christ, who is the way to the Father in heaven. In Jesus, Christians are able to build their true identities as children of God. When Japanese people receive their identity as children of God, they become good citizens of Japan, who truly love their neighbors as Jesus taught us in relating with God and one another. Though the expression of “I” switches depending on the place or situation among others in Japanese culture, the relationship between “God” and “I,” God and “watashi” or whatever word used, the relationship between God and Self, remains the same.

God calls each person individually by name, and he is with each. Japanese are able to rejoice in their ethnicity as a gift from God because of this fundamental identity of knowing that God grants birth, life, and a particular place to live. Japanese people will know it is a blessing to be both Christian and Japanese citizens simultaneously. This identity then decides how we live with friends, neighbors and even with enemies who have differences from us.

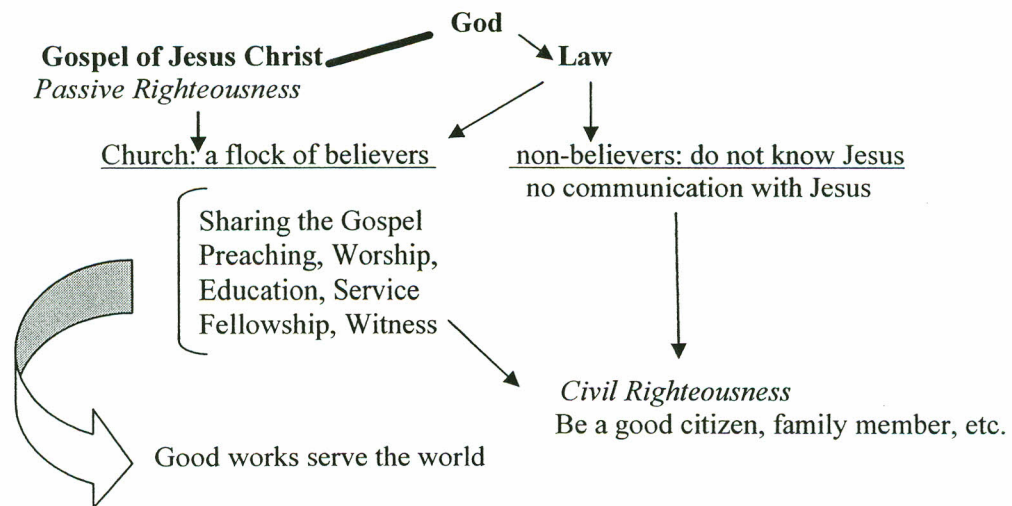
3. The Concern over Humans and Human Relationship in Japanese Context

God calls each believer according to his/her individual call, and she responds to it wherever she may be. In Japan, the “family” or “clan” is the significant social unit binding Japanese together. When people follow the family order before God’s order, the family becomes an object of idolatry even though

²⁰ Norihisa Suzuki, *Nihon Kirisuto Monogatari* (Tokyo: Kyobunkan, 2001), 18. Suzuki points out the communication difficulty between Anjiro and Xavier.

Lamin Sanneh also mentions the difficulty of receiving proper information regarding indigenous terms or knowledge of religion. According to Sanneh, although Xavier tried to establish an indigenous movement, he relied on information from the Japanese convert Anjiro too much.

the family is a gift of God. Japanese Christians, especially first generation Christians, need to recognize that their personal call is not their parent's, sister's, brother's or somebody else's, but a call to a relationship between God and "myself." This personal relationship with God the Lord and Savior brings "me" into His people. In this sense, God is our God among His people. God also created believers to live with his other creatures, so they are not able to ignore other humans as they respond to God while they are in the world. Once they receive their identities as children of God with Christian righteousness through faith, they also receive the responsibility to act according to His voice. For instance, God's children are to share the gospel with others through their various vocations in society. Christians are given responsibility from God to reflect His love in society or in the family, wherever they are placed (see below).



<Explanation of two kinds of righteousness and human response>

Luther prized civil righteousness highly in daily living. In his biblical understanding, Luther recognized that God works through people, both Christians and non-believers, to sustain human lives. God showers rain and shines sun over Christians and non-Christians equally. The smiles and laughter of children are reminders of the existence of God and heaven, even though these children are not Christian yet. Christians trust God's embrace in every part of the world and in every moment of life with thanksgiving.

Japanese people have developed a modern society with works of civil righteousness such as a stable government, good medical care with beneficial health insurance, well-organized schools, an efficient transportation system, and so on. Japanese Christians are sustained in their lives and vocations by these blessings. Christians are able to receive these First Article gifts with thanksgiving while joyfully giving to others.

However, Japanese Christians have struggled for their identity between the realm of faith and the realm of works. Living together with other humans is God's commandment; yet Christians living among a majority of non-believers elicits conflict because of the temptation to compromise the faith: Christians must face the clash between their values, actions and loyalty to God and loyalty to their neighbors. Some Christians have blended both realms in the past; for example, faith was blended with Japanese cultural beliefs such as a form of veneration of the dead with ancestor worship, or the church that tried to cooperate with the imperial government in the Meiji period.

The study below examines the soil of Japanese culture in order to build a bridge and interpret the gospel for people in Japan. In the end, it is the Holy Spirit who pedals the bicycle if people are able to ride across upon that soil.

1) Living on non-Christian soil – living within the culture or against it? State, church and Christian living in the Japanese case

Japanese Christians only number one percent of the society; they are quite a small minority group of people. The biggest challenge of Christians in Japan may be relationships with surrounding non-Christian family members, neighbors and the state. Should Japanese Christians give up their relationship with their family and friends in society and live quietly apart from them? Should they become “cultural Christians” and participate in every Japanese event or activity even if it conflicts with their Christian faith? Should they live within their Christian community without participating in any activities in society? How can Japanese Christians reflect their faith in the non-Christian culture? Truly, conflicts between faith and life as a Christian in a non-Christian society are to be expected. There is a time when Christians must

say “no” to their neighbors if it is contrary to the faith and what is best for their neighbors. All human beings have difficulties and limitations which prevent them from clearly discerning all the situations in life when “yes” or “no” is more appropriate, although it is the Christian’s responsibility to be completely faithful to the Lord. It is also crucial to consider how Japanese Christians are able to be a witness to reflect God’s love to all people even in the midst of conflict. Being a faithful citizen, or making an effort to work together or to serve others by the actual practicing of “love your neighbor” within the cultural practices and institutions in Japanese society, are good examples of witnessing to non-believers rather than taking stances that create hostility or isolation.

In the case of the relationship between the Japanese people and the state, Japan has its characteristic emperor system. Though some things have changed since World War II, it still has an impact on Christians in Japan. While the government did not recognize Shinto as a religion, Christians in Japan are now forced to accept Shinto as part of their national heritage. In this background, a Japanese Christian’s role of responsibility within society still seems to focus on political issues.

During the Meiji period (1868-1911), it may be said that many Christians were patriotic in their faith. For instance, Masahisa Uemura (1858-1925)²¹ thought the state was a moral structure or framework that could be influenced by Christian evangelization. Because of this view, he thought Christianity was a patriotic way of reforming society into an ideal Japan.²² As a result, Uemura did not deny the emperor system but accepted it totally as a Japanese Christian. Uemura believed that if the citizenry were transformed by the gospel, the nation would also be transformed. This was his interpretation of being a Christian in society, treating Christianity as a way to advance Japanese society. According to Akio Doi, Uemura’s interpretation of “Christ and Culture” is of the “Christ the transformer of Culture” type in

²¹ Masahisa Uemura founded the school which later became Tokyo Shingaku Daigaku (Tokyo Union Theological Seminary) in 1904. He also helped to found Meiji Gakuin University, and was a founder of Fujimi-cho Kyokai (United Church of Christ – Fujimi-cho Church, Iidabashi, Tokyo in present). He established the Presbyterian tradition, and attempted to be free from missionary control. He debated against the liberal theology of Danjo Ebina (Doshisha university), which denied the divinity of Christ.

²² Akio Doi, *Nihon Protestant Kirisutokyo-shi* (Tokyo: Shinkyoshuppan-sha, 1994), 185.

Niebuhr's terms.²³ However, it seems to me that Uemura is closer to the "Christ of Culture" type as he believed that transformation of the culture would be possible within the emperor system in Japan and thought Christ to be the fulfillment of culture. He tried "to affirm both Christ and culture and deny any necessary opposition between the two."²⁴ Uemura attempted to live within Japanese culture with complete obedience to the emperor as a Japanese citizen. Uemura was therefore not able to confess Jesus as the Lord of all things, as every culture has its own idols even at its best.

In 1928 Christians in society faced further conflict when the Ministry of Education required Christians to worship at the Shinto shrines such as Ise Shrine and Meiji Shrine. When students of the Jesuit Sofia University in Tokyo (*Jochi Daigaku*) refused to visit and worship at Yasukuni Shrine after consulting with a school official in 1932, it caused a problem between the church and state as a result. Sofia University responded by saying, "We are not a school of religion." Moreover, the Roman Catholic Archbishop called on students of Catholic mission schools to visit Yasukuni Shrine and Meiji Shrine. The issue was solved in 1936 when the Roman Catholic Church formulated an answer for the imperial government: "Shrine visits and bowing is nothing but an expression of loyalty to the nation."²⁵ The Vatican also recognized and accepted this resolution. Roman Catholics tried to build the cooperation of church and state through synthesis. This may be close to the "Christ above culture" type in Richard Niebuhr's terms.

In this context, the Meiji imperial government prohibited the officiating and ministry of Shinto priests, saying that Shinto was an institution for national cultural rites, a topic already discussed in 1882. An inquiry committee of the imperial government claimed publicly that "shrine visiting is not religion" in 1930. This made the majority of people believe Shinto was no longer a religion. Unfortunately, Christianity's attachment to the emperor system seen in Masahisa Uemura's interpretation, and the

²³ Ibid., 184.

²⁴ See Angus J. L. Menuge, "Niebuhr's Christ and Culture Reexamined," *Christ and Culture in Dialogue* (St. Louis: Concordia Academic Press, 1999), 36.

²⁵ Takashi Gono, *Nihon Kirisutokyo-shi* (Tokyo: Yoshikawa Koubunkan, 1990), 295. The imperial government answered a question from Catholic Newspaper vol. 562 (July 26, 1936).

capitulation of Roman Catholics, led the church to become more submissive to the culture because members attempted to be Japanese Christians obedient to the authorities.

The submissive collaboration with the culture was further seen when there followed a period of time in which the Japanese Church was obedient to the government rather than to God, and neither distinguished between the church and state. For example, the Japanese government built a Shinto Shrine in Seoul, Korea, in 1911 after Japan invaded its Asian neighbors. The Japanese church cooperated with government policy to Japanize Korean people during wartime. Japanese Christians did not oppose the government policy, which led to Koreans worshipping at Shinto shrines, the prohibition of the Korean language and the requiring of Japanese language in schools, and the adoption of Japanese names. The church in Japan itself persuaded Korean people to worship at shrines, explaining that Shinto was not a religion.²⁶ Furthermore, unless Korean churches in Japan were authorized and supervised by the Japanese church, they could not hold services. It is said that Japanese pastors preached and led the worship services at Korean churches in Japan. In the case where this was not possible, the Korean church was asked to unite with a local Japanese church.²⁷ With such unqualified obedience to the government, Japanese Christians fell under the complete control of humanly devised powers. As a result, the Japanese church exercised evil over Korean Christians and her Asian neighbors. Many Japanese Christians still have a guilty conscience over this past mistake. Today, this is a sensitive emotional problem between Japanese and other Asian nations.

Another angle of confrontation with the culture and faith is seen among Japanese Christians themselves in wartime. In 1938, Osaka military police (special secret service police) asked churches in Osaka their view of the following: 1) the Christian God; 2) Japanese gods; 3) the relationship between the Japanese emperor and Christianity; 4) the relationship between foreign emperors and God; 5) the relation between the Imperial Rescript (Japanese constitution under the Meiji Imperial government) and the Bible; 6) the difference between the educational guideline of the Imperial Rescript and Christian education; 7)

²⁶ Doi, *Nihon Protestant Kirisutokyo-shi*, 322.

²⁷ *Ibid.*, 328.

ancestor worship; 8) the emperor's ancestral spirit; 9) the absolute faith; 10) freedom of faith; 11) the reason why Christianity treats Shinto and Buddhism as idolatrous worship; and, 12) the relationship between Christianity and Japanese spirits.²⁸ These questions were given to Christians who were suspected of violating the so-called "Maintenance of the Public Order." These questions easily trapped Christians since they were not able to affirm both their faith and their loyalty as citizens. They had to choose either faith or citizenship. Although interpretation of respect or worshiping the emperor is varied among Japanese Christians, it shows that the governmental view was that faithful Japanese citizens could not be a Christians under the fascist government policies of that time.

In 1940, the Japanese government enforced the *Shukyo Dantai Hou* (Religious Organization Law). The following year, 34 protestant churches combined into one institution with eleven blocks and the *Nihon Kiristo Kyodan* (United Church of Christ in Japan) was established. Japanese Christians welcomed this law as they thought Christianity had won a place in society among Japanese. Ironically, this law forced the loyalty and obedience of Christians to the government and emperor, contrary to their will. The Religious Organization Law itself was actually made in preparation for war, and it paved the way for the Japanization of the church.

However, there were many Japanese who fought against emperor worship during the chaotic wartime. Kanzo Uchimura was a prominent individual who also loved his nation but, contrary to Uemura, struggled to be both a Christian and Japanese citizen during wartime. He struggled with emperor worship as a Japanese Christian without compromising his faith through idolatrous attitudes. He also expressed his opinions against the war and for the freedom of all people in the sight of God.

Uchimura professed his faith within the non-church movement. Because of his disappointment with the world, he came to hope in the second coming of Christ in his later years. Uchimura tried to focus on the continuity between Christianity and the Japanese mind but not between Christianity and the state. In this sense, he somewhat avoided the real world. However, his efforts to be a faithful Christian during a wartime atmosphere should be recognized.

²⁸ Norihisa Suzuki, *Nihon Kirisutokyo Monogatari* (Tokyo: Kyobunkan, 2001), 183-4.

Others who struggled with the state included the Japan Holiness Church, which fought against emperor worship during World War II. It held Shinto to be a religion. As a result, 134 Japan Holiness Church members were arrested and seven members were killed because of their faith around 1942.

The Japan Holiness Church was established in 1901. Its leader, Shigeji Nakata, influenced Kanzo Uchimura. The members of the church strongly believed in the revival of the Spirit and prayed that the Holy Spirit would purify Japan for revival and that God's kingdom would come. They focused on the Old Testament view of the restoration of Israel and believed that when Christ came, every problem would be solved. The Japan Holiness Church was a growing denomination, but it was split by theological and leadership problems in 1932. It further divided into six more sects after World War II. Ironically, when the Japan Holiness Church expanded, it could not avoid politics and worldly power struggles within the church itself.

Uchimura and the Japan Holiness Church could preserve their faith during wartime because of their strong assurance that "There are no other gods." But each expressed their faith in a different way against the synthesis of Christianity and Japanese cultural principles. Uchimura did so by a non-church movement that recognized Scripture as the only authority. On the other hand, the Japan Holiness Church did so by a revival movement that believed in the purification of Japan by the Holy Spirit. If both could truly have had no other gods, not only in relation to emperor but also within their own teaching (such as the synthesizing of Christianity with Japanese indigenous beliefs in the case of Uchimura or the authority of Nakata in the case of the Japan Holiness Church), their churches could have developed differently during this time. They also could have properly proclaimed the meaning of humanity as relationship with others among Japanese society. In each case, these idolatrous factors resulted in a weakening of their confession in society.

A different kind of collaboration with the society is seen in the Osaka World Exposition in 1970 (Expo'70). It too, reflects the controversial issues of relationship between the church and society. A special "Christian Pavilion" had been planned for Expo '70 as the expression of ecumenicity under

Vatican Council II. Protestants and Catholics as Christian believers came together to witness to their faith among the 99 % of non-Christian people in Japan.

One would think it a chance to witness to non-Christian people, but others interpreted it as “the Church selling out to a materialistic ‘festival of capitalism’ that sought to celebrate the exploitations of postwar Japan’s economic oppression of other nations rather than to denounce them with prophetic scorn.”²⁹

The advantage of Expo was that it showed there have been and continue to be opportunities for Christians to witness in the society as a faithful citizen of Japan. The presence of the Japanese church among non-believers is a very difficult situation since there is usually not much opportunity to reflect its Christian opinions and to relate it to others in society. Japanese people are not able to see the work of faith in their surroundings, nor do they notice what is significantly different about living in Christ. The church in Japan needs courage to be a witness to the world in various ways whenever God gives it an opportunity so that God’s kingdom may increase. The purpose of the Expo ’70 event focused on arousing people’s interest in Christianity.

On the other hand, the Christian church in Japan must keep in mind that Jesus Christ is the Savior, not an entertainer. The disadvantage of the Expo was that it brought the danger of weakening the purpose of the church and His people. It spent money for its own exhibition, but it was doubtful that the church could have a continuous relationship or conversation with those whom it met in society. Japanese society itself exists sufficiently without God and the Christian faith. Although Christians need to decide what is best for their neighbors in society, the Christian church has a mission to bring the gospel of the crucified and risen Jesus Christ to our neighbor, which is its primary concern.

The responsibility of the church and how to witness in society has been discussed in the past and even still at the present time. The church needs to continue to think theologically and act realistically on each occasion, time to time and place by place.

²⁹ James M. Phillips, *From the Rising of the Sun* (Maryknoll, New York: Orbis Books, 1981), 35.

Presently, what is the situation of the state and church? The Japanese emperor is seen as a symbol of national unity since Emperor Showa renounced his divinity in 1946. The Japanese government treats Shinto as a Japanese cultural heritage, but not as the state religion. Shinto has survived by being treated as part of Japanese culture.

This situation is very vague in comparison with the Western view of separation of religion and state. For example, non-believers in Japan seem to feel at ease over the Prime Minister's visits to Yasukuni Shrine, considering them national events. According to public opinion, 65% answered "good" and 28% answered "bad" when asked to evaluate the Prime Minister's Yasukuni visit of August 13, 2001.³⁰ More recently, 47% answered "approve" and 43% answered "disapprove" about the action of the Prime Minister paying a surprise visit at Yasukuni Shrine on January 14, 2003.³¹ People think that visiting a Shrine shows respect for their dead and honor for their sacrifice for the present peace. The Shinto tradition is seen as part of the natural community life in Japan even though Asian neighbor nations see it as a threat of nationalism. China's and South Korea's concern over the Prime Minister's visitation to Yasukuni Shrine stems from fear since it enshrines war dead including convicted Class-A war criminals and is a constant reminder of Japanese imperial brutality. Yet the Japanese majority holds an anti-war attitude as evidenced in the recent public opinion poll in which 80% said "no support for military action over Iraq" and 67% hope for a solution by dialogue, not by force, over the North Korean nuclear issue.

Prime Minister Junichiro Koizumi naively states that he paid respect to the nation's war dead to remind himself of the significance of peace and that Japan would never wage war again.³² Although the Japanese government keeps stating that Yasukuni Shrine is not a religious institution, this interpretation itself is a deceitful violation of the constitutional separation of state and religion.

³⁰ Mainichi News paper, January 15, 2003.

³¹ Mainichi News paper, January 27, 2003. Although Prime Minister Koizumi paid a surprise visit to Yasukuni Shrine in order to avoid controversy, it caused an uproar among neighboring Asian nations. Prime Minister Koizumi did not visit Yasukuni Shrine on the anniversary of the end of the war in August 15, 2003 in order to show his consideration for China and Korea.

³² Mainichi Daily News, February 17, 2003.

There have been suits against the state concerning this issue, alleging that this is a problem of an entire society. For example, a Christian, a Buddhist, and some citizen groups asked for compensation to the nation because of the Prime Minister's Yasukuni visit in August 2001. They claimed that the Prime Minister violated the Constitution Articles 20 and 99.³³ Another example of such suits is that brought by more than 120 Taiwanese, including relatives of those who died after being forced to join troops during World War II, who sued Prime Minister Koizumi over his visits to Yasukuni Shrine. Those Taiwanese plaintiffs said "Koizumi's visits to the shrine damaged their national pride and religious rights apparently because the visits were made to an institution where their relatives' remains were forcibly enshrined."³⁴ As mentioned before, Asian neighbors such as China and South Korea also showed concern over Koizumi's action. It is evident that the voice of protest is still stronger outside of Japan in the twenty-first century. A majority of Japanese seem still to accept Shinto as their heritage and culture.

Although most Japanese do not doubt that the emperor is a symbol of Japan and feel that Shinto and visits to shrines are not religious (e.g., voices 1 and 3 in chapter 1B), some Japanese Christians realize the emperor system is somewhat problematic because of its attachment to Shinto beliefs. Christians in Japan consider such visits to Yasukuni Shrine a serious issue because within the government the Imperial Household Agency (*Kunaicho*) currently maintains religious authority for the emperor and his clan. Festivals and rites are institutionalized as part of the imperial family tradition with the emperor acting as high priest during the ceremony. For example, in November 1990, Emperor Akihito celebrated the *Sokui-no-rei* as part of the succession process following the death of the Showa Emperor. On the evening of November 22, 1990, he also participated in the *Daijosai* (Great Food Offering Ceremony), which was formerly viewed as a Shinto rite in which the new emperor assumes divine character.

This status of Shinto among the Japanese is vague and like the "swamp" to which Shusaku Endo likens to Japan. The statement of the government, "Shinto is not a religion," makes people blind and unconcerned over the issues. Shinto has religious content. Shinto expects all Japanese nationals to be its

³³ Mainichi Daily News, August 28, 2001.

³⁴ Mainichi Daily News, February 17, 2003.

members. Christians are never able to worship either emperor or the war dead. It is unclear if the Japanese government supports the religious Shinto rites in which the emperor acts as a high priest, even though he is only a “symbol” of the nation under the Japanese constitution. In short, according to the interpretation of the Japanese government, state and religion are separated only if people believe that Shinto is not a religion. However, it clearly is a religion. The church, therefore, should not give a false impression and obscure the faith by honoring the emperor or dead in public. The church also has tried to use Japanese culture by reinterpreting elements within a Christian framework; Shinto tradition eventually could possibly be reinterpreted in a Christian way,³⁵ but only if all traces of idolatry are in fact gone.

Meanwhile, it must be noted that these political problems are not only dilemmas for Japanese Christians but also for all Japanese concerned with their society. The state and politics are moved by the power of humans, such as the majority of people or a man of authority like the Prime Minister when he makes decisions. There are two realms under the one Lord, and the Christian church’s primary responsibility is not to accuse people, to become another political institution, or to reform the government and social structure, but to bring the gospel into the lives of people around.³⁶ This is the power of the gospel, which is clearly distinguished from the power of man; God’s gift, the gospel, restores our humanity and brings each person to the Father. And it is especially important for the church in Japan to spread the message of the gospel as its primary responsibility. Japanese people are living in a pluralistic society where people’s religious consciousness is ill-defined by many beliefs so they need to know who God is and what He has done for them. When people receive salvation in Christ, their actions start to perform a good work, restoring humanity totally as God intended us to be, and thus benefiting their neighbors in society.

³⁵ For example, Takenotsuka Lutheran Church in Tokyo has a day for children called “thanksgiving for growth” instead of *Shichigosan* (Shinto visiting for seven, three year old girls and for five year old boys to receive a blessing). Children wearing a kimono often receive a blessing at church and feel more secure since the majority of non-believer children go to a Shrine as a significant ceremony.

³⁶ *Render unto Caesar ... and Unto God - A Lutheran View of Church and State*, A Report of the Commission on Theology and Church Relations of The Lutheran Church-Missouri Synod, 1995), 91. Although this is written for an American context, this statement applies to the Japanese setting as well.

2) The Family and Christian Faith

In Japanese cultural ancestor worship, rituals including Buddhist funerals and visiting a shrine or grave are very important activities for Japanese people. These activities bind Japanese into a community, especially among their relatives and family. This factor causes people to think, "I cannot be a Christian in Japan because I have a responsibility to my family, friends and relatives." Religious rites and rituals are tied up with culture and society very closely in Japan.

The family is the important factor that maintains these religious rites and rituals. Japanese people value their family and relatives. Although American people seem to move many times in their lives, many Japanese stay in the same house or rebuild a house in the same place from generation to generation. Usually the oldest son in the family takes care of the parents as his responsibility. If there is no son, the oldest daughter has that responsibility. The family name or religious ceremonies are also carried out by the oldest sons. The oldest sons are bound to maintain the family ritual and family altar and have the responsibility to maintain the clan's name. This is often the reason given for rejecting Christian baptism. The family's decision is more powerful than the individual's. This decision-making system is in the shape of a pyramid in Japanese society as a wife obeys her husband's decision and children obey their parents' decision in most instances (voice 5 in chapter 1B, 2 of Chapter 2).

Christians in Japan face the problem of how they can support their families without compromising their faith. There is always a temptation to interpret the gospel on the basis of idolatrous attitudes among Christians such as the interpretation seen in Chapter 2. It is important to care for and respect one's family. But how are believers able to deal with ancestor worship and Buddhist rites as Christians in a Japanese context? It is helpful to see the problems of cultural behavior and concern involved in the interpretation of such things.

The problem of ancestor worship and Christianity has been seen in other nations through history as well. Europeans, Africans and other Asian people have dealt with the problem of ancestor worship.³⁷

³⁷ Jan-Martin Berentsen, *Grave and Gospel* (Leiden: I.J. Brill, 1985), 132-3. For example, a German council dealt with pagan practices in 742 A.D.

However, there is always a danger of going in the wrong direction toward the cult of the dead, such as in the Roman Catholic practices of trying to rescue dead souls through intercessory prayers and preaching. This religious practice has something in common with Buddhist rites that depend upon human power to rescue the dead.

The Christian faith decides whether a religious practice is appropriate or not. Christians go astray when the dialogue between theological expressions and practical expressions is not continued. When expression of religious practice is separated from theological expression (doctrine), Christian life starts drifting away from the Christian faith. In other words, the Christian faith will reject or adopt religious practice on the basis of the dialogue between the theological expressions and cultural context. If the theological expression is so abstract that it does not take its cultural context into consideration, the connection with daily life and the purpose of that life which God intended may be lost. Hence the theological expression must not lose contact with everyday life and practice.

The important relationship between Christian faith and ancestor worship in a Japanese context depend upon the proper understanding of what part of the faith cannot be compromised with cultural values. Those factors that are vital to a proper relationship between biblical belief and cultural practice are the doctrines of Creator and creation, salvation, afterlife, and the meaning of family as a fundamental theological expression.

First, in regard to the relationship between God the Creator and human beings: a Buddhist funeral focuses on the dead and the responsibility of the survivors to take care of the dead. Buddhists believe that the dead becomes "*Hotoke*"—an enlightened Buddha-like existence in the afterlife. However, God, who is beyond our power and who created every existing thing out of nothing, is the origin of life. Even after death, the Christian soul and the new body are bound together as our totality. The issue of the afterlife cannot be treated apart from God the Creator. God rules both the living and dead. The expression of love toward the departed and the contrast between his/her humanity and God's divinity may be helpful guidance for the church to use in ministering to the bereaved.

Secondly, in regard to the salvation of man: God is personal, communicable, a revealed God. We are able to know him closely in the reality of our daily lives. God wills and calls humans by his purpose while we are living; he calls each believer to be saved and live with him forever. God restores humanity wholly through Jesus Christ. Human beings have no power to save a dead non-believer by their own strength, by prayers, by good works, and so on, since the power of the salvation comes from God alone. What Japanese Christians are permitted to do for their dead family is to trust in God and commit the dead to the mercy of the Lord. When the church needs to pray regarding the dead in the funeral or memorial service, it is also important to focus on God's sovereignty without begging for the salvation of the dead person's soul in order to avoid confusion among people about salvation.

Thirdly, in regard to the earthly family and heavenly family: God placed human beings among family and within a community to rejoice in his creation with other humans. Japanese Christians sometimes have conflicts between family obligation and their faith. If a person is asked to take care of the family altar as his/her responsibility, what the person should do? Scripture says, "Honor your parents," but how does this apply to this Japanese context?

In the Old Testament, Israel worshiped their father's God as a family. In the New Testament, Jesus tried to send people back into their own family rather separate them from the family (1 Timothy 5:4, Mark 5:18-20). In the fourth commandment, God tells us that our life comes from our parents as part of God's order to sustain our life.

On the other hand, there is another aspect of family in Christianity, namely being a member of God's family. Jesus tells his disciples that they will be set against parents because of His name (Matthew 10:37). Christians join the communion of saints as a member of God's family in this regard. Jesus even commanded someone to follow him instead of returning to bury his parent (Matthew 8:21 -22).

Japanese Christians need to consider their position between this earthly family and God's family. "Honor your father and mother;" respect for father, mother or authority in the family always flow from the first commandment, "There are no other gods." Christians are to respect and be obedient to their parents. Yet faithfulness to God is greater than anything else. Family members need to serve and love

each other mutually according to God's commandment. Whatever the circumstance is, Christians are free from all things under the name of God.

Japanese Christians do not have to imitate the same structure of a Western family style as an ideal model. For example, although the majority of women have an occupation outside the home in the USA, most Japanese housewives stay home, keep the house, and take care of children. Japanese housewives do not complain about this situation; rather, they feel it is an important role for their family. On the other hand, Christianity should not develop as a Japanese *ie* (family) religion, which dictates maintaining of the family tradition and funerals influenced by Buddhism.³⁸

Finally, it is important for Japanese Christians to live as members of the family of God, trust in God Almighty, and commit their dead to the Lord's mercy as all authority concerning the final judgment and condemnation belong to God alone. It should be no problem for Japanese believers to respect and love their family and the dead as long as one follows Christian teaching. Yet Christians must avoid worship of the departed as well as creating circumstances for idolatrous worship.

Because of their faith in Christ, each Christian in Japan must face the moment of decision regarding how to participate in or else reject the Buddhist funeral of family and friends as well as Shinto festivals in society. Even if the Japanese church changes the practice of how a Christian participates during a Buddhist funeral, for example, by offering flowers instead of Buddhist incense to the dead, God sees whether there are any other gods in their hearts or not.

Japanese Christians need not trouble their hearts concerning the state of salvation or condemnation of dead family members. Rather, the Christian's responsibility is to overcome death, as the Lord has already done, to proclaim the good news of Jesus Christ to the world, and live together with their neighbors according to God's will. Christianity is not able to be *ie* (family) religion or a funeral religion. It is for the living.

³⁸The *Ie* system under the Meiji Constitution gave a right and heavy responsibility to the head of the household, namely to fathers; eldest sons were designated the only heir and successor. The present constitution and civil law suggests equal individual rights, but Buddhist religious rituals still remain unchanged. In general, eldest sons need to maintain the family grave and family altar. It may change in the future as husband and wife have become the smallest social unit as a family under civil law.

Christians believe God is living among us as Creator, the Lord and Savior. Japanese people must face a gulf between life in the Bible and their daily lives when they encounter God. Japanese people hesitate to receive Christian teachings when a Japanese lifestyle does not find continuity within the teaching. However, Christians must face this conflict as part of the process of introducing Christ into society. Japanese Christians definitely need support and prayers by other Christians to hold their faith firmly among non-believers. Otherwise Christian thinking, especially that of first generation Christians, is easily absorbed into Japanese beliefs and cultural values, or believers may become discouraged in being Christian. Children of God have received the commandment to love God and their neighbors and even to step outside comfortable territory while they are living.

3) The Japanese Christians' First Priority - Sharing the Gospel - Interpreting the Christian Message to Japanese Society

When people have no concept of God the Creator and Savior, it is easy to misunderstand the meaning of human existence. Because Christians may become blind to the conflict between loyalty to church and state, or confuse personal Christian belief and family, it is crucial to distinguish two realms – “the vertical for faith, the horizontal for works of love.”³⁹ Sharing the gospel through the living out of one's humanity is a work of love.

God created each person special and different in humanity and has placed Christians into different settings. God sends us to the world. Christians are living in a tension between the spiritual and temporal. Yet our Christian responsibility is living with other creatures of God around us with the action of God's love rather than keeping our Christian identity to ourselves as our own privilege. We live together with Christians and non-believers in society, knowing that God created us to support each other.

Although trying to build a bridge between people for the Christian message is often a very difficult process and more complicated than expected, Christians have the responsibility to bring the

³⁹ Robert Kolb, “Niebuhr's ‘Christ and Culture in Paradox’ Revisited,” *Lutheran Quarterly*, NS 10.4 (1996): 259-279.

message to people outside the Church. Christians often face the reality of the different soils of non-believing hearts: some like a desert, some like a swamp, and others like a jungle. Hearts need to be plowed or cultivated according to their condition even before Christians sow seed of the message of Christ. Some people have never even heard of the gospel in their lives. Christians raised within a Christian family probably heard God's word through loving parents in their daily lives from childhood. It is unrealistic and even cruel to expect non-believers to understand God's word automatically without knowing its context. For example, the placard 'John 3:16' often appears on front lawns. This is a very popular Bible verse for Christians. However, one Japanese friend interpreted it as 'Mr. John will have an open house on March 16.'

A trusting relationship with each person is a very important factor in building a bridge for the gospel. It may take a long time to create, but it will be the most effective foundation for reaching out. The world may be a better place when one lives with a childlike trusting heart, trusting in the love of God rather than insisting upon one's own knowledge of God's word and of one's faith. Even Christians easily forget to love, trust, and be honest with each other in daily life. When believers witness to God's power of salvation to non-believers, they should not rely on their own strength, but instead, their own personal power should be minimized and distinguished from God's. Witness should never be motivated by desires for self-realization or self-righteousness, but by the reality of the love of God for our fellow humans.

There is only one truth: God is absolute and the way to God is Jesus alone. However, there are many ways of approaching people before sowing the seed itself. When Christians try to reach out and bring the gospel to their non-Christian neighbors, it is helpful to learn the channel to bring God's word to people's hearts since every culture has its own interpretation of human existence. If Christians are able to know what kind of "soil" they have to work with, it is better for cultivation. They need to be prepared for whenever God gives them an opening to proclaim the gospel by understanding the hearer's background or culture and by interpreting the message according to the hearer's context.

When individual human beings receive the message, it comes through their own filters or mediums in different contexts. Even if the same Bible verse is spoken, each person receives the message

differently according to his or her situation. For example, if a believer uses a passage of Scripture such as “Seek, and you will find; knock and it will be opened to you” (Matthew 7:7), one person may feel desperate and try to hide from God, knowing that he has the wrong motivation in asking. Others may optimistically believe that God allows every desire even though the action is contrary to God’s will. For Christians the answer is always in Christ, not in the world and we need to bring the message clearly to our neighbors.

There are many non-believers who know about the Bible and Jesus, but few come to faith in Japan. God’s word is living among us when we receive it in our hearts and let it move our hands in our daily lives. God’s word is able to enter every culture and people. We are created to live together with others as we share the laughter, sorrows, joys and grief of our lives. Christians also need to remember that we approach people based on the love of God, as each person is valuable in God’s sight. Christians should never dare to treat non-believers as a means to an end in God’s mission. Christians play a role in God’s re-creation of making people alive through Jesus Christ. When they know who God is and who they are as part of the family of God, they live according to His will and participate in God’s plan of salvation to all people – God’s desire to make us alive – in their ordinary yet precious daily living. A child of God who has received the gospel needs to nurture his or her own faith and that of others continuously. Christ taught us to “love God” and “love your neighbor” while we are living. But then, how are Christians able to share this message if society does not know the value of agape love? It may be helpful to look at the meaning of “love your neighbor” in a Japanese context in order to share the love of God.

4) Interpretation of “Love Your Neighbor” in the Japanese Situation

The Love of God - agape - is a central and very significant message for Christians. No other religion teaches that God’s Son died for the salvation of human beings and that God declares, “You are mine eternally.” Christianity is the only religion in which God raised his Son from death. Jesus Christ is

the essence of love himself. God gave us life through His sacrifice on the cross, which changed our view of the wrathful judging God to that of a merciful loving Father.⁴⁰

Love fulfills all the laws. Christians do not love our neighbors for our benefit or as a means to a goal. Rather the act of love is God's commandment for us. Human beings are never able to imitate the love of God by their own knowledge or strength. Agape love even reaches to the unclean, unfaithful, ungodly, undeserved, undesirable, rejected, harmed, and fragile people, and it reaches beyond cultural values. In God's sight each person is precious and worthy. The love of God is the motivation and purpose for Christians to live and serve others. God teaches us to love our neighbors, including our enemies. When we love even without being conscious of it, love becomes our virtue. Love multiplies in a repentant heart with good fruits. Our humanity is restored by God's sacrificial love. God's love proceeds from faith in Christ; there is no faith without love. Love of God connects the vertical realm of faith and the horizontal realm of works.

This love of God is a rather new concept in Japanese society, although historically there has been a similar but nonetheless quite different concept. Confucius describes love as "compassion and grace."⁴¹ According to a Japanese-Chinese dictionary, love means "to feel compassion for, to like, to feel remorse" and it explains love as the blessing God bestows on man in Christianity.⁴² Buddhist concepts of love have the sense of passion which binds sympathy for all sentient beings.⁴³ Love in the Japanese expression is understood as an emotion in human beings and their relationships. Yet God's sacrificial love is God's essence that is beyond human understanding. The Buddhist way of love flows from the context of acknowledging that the world suffers while it exists. Buddhism believes that nothing in the world ever had an image of God. So this Buddhist term of "love with sympathy" is unnecessary after freeing one's self from the suffering in this world. Therefore when the Buddhist way of love is synthesized with agape,

⁴⁰ See Anders Nygren, *Agape and Eros*, translated by Phip S. Watson (Philadelphia: The Westminster Press, 1953).

⁴¹ Charles Corwin, *Biblical Encounter with Japanese Culture*: (Tokyo: Shinsei Undo [New Life League], 1977), 77.

⁴² *Ibid.*, 78.

⁴³ *Ibid.*, 79.

it brings a misinterpretation of the gospel. Focus is placed on the suffering of Christ and not on the promise of a new life. Suffering is never the permanent condition of a child of God or God's intention or disposition towards human beings. It is natural to love neighbors with our feelings, but loving as Jesus loves human beings is beyond our ability, which comes from God alone. Human beings are not able to love their enemies by nature, but it is possible with God's love as model and power.

In Japanese society, people also love and care for each other; children faithfully care for their parents, parents love their children and others. The feelings and emotions of people are not so different in any corner of the world. But how and when people feel or respond may be different in every culture. It may be said that Japanese people seldom say, "I love you" to others, even to one's own parents or spouse. Japanese people are not accustomed to expressing "love" verbally since expressing one's emotion openly became a habit only in recent modern times. Japanese people used to stifle or endure their own feelings of sadness, joy or anger for others in the society, an action which was considered a virtue.

Although the manner of expressing love may be different from place to place, Japanese may have a different understanding of love for one's neighbors in the Japanese context. For example, even though Japanese dislike being considered patriotic, they feel special about being Japanese nationals. Japanese love their food, arts, clothes, nature and culture, the Japanese way of thinking and way of life. Japanese often say their culture is valuable in the world. This attachment to culture is natural not only for Japanese people but for people everywhere, for human beings tend to regard the visible, tangible and audible things around them as reality, truth and the best way of doing things.

The manner in which people serve others in Japanese society reveals that there is marvelous and sufficient service all over Japan. Waitresses, office clerks, and sales people are very kind and care for customers at restaurants, at banks, or at the store. However, when the focus of society is solely that of sufficiency, problems arise sooner or later. For example, a businessman's loyalty and service to his company is great in Japan. However, the relationship between businessmen and their companies is similar to the relationship between a samurai and his feudal lord. It is as if the old castle has been transformed into a modern company building.

Japanese businessmen sometimes are more devoted to the company than to their families. Japanese people tend to support a group or an organization from which they receive their identities and a place for self-realization. People often ask the name of the company where one works instead of one's occupation. Where one works is more important than what one does. The name of the group is more valuable than individual talents. Group consciousness or the harmony of the group is prized. A strong individuality is not suitable in the group, as the old saying shows, "A protruding nail should be pounded down." On the other hand, a group is easily moved by a charismatic character.

Many Japanese businessmen feel a great responsibility for their jobs, so much so that it becomes a burden and a cause of suicide⁴⁴ or death through overwork in Japan. Japanese fathers may be missing the opportunity to share their weakness or faults among their families in order to keep their dignity. In the worst cases, fathers play a minimal role in the family.

Working hard is believed to be a virtue which creates good for the society. However, Japanese people seem to lack the fundamental motivation to love neighbors in society. Even the best virtue and actions of the culture become a cause of destruction to the self and society without the love of God. It may be said that businessmen are sacrificing their energy to support their families and society, but in reality they depend upon their job as their god. Japanese people are busy justifying themselves; in other words, they seek self-righteousness in society. Even though society mustered the very best system of support and sufficiency, it will not be a source of strength for the future unless one maintains a vertical relationship with God.

Japanese people love their group, company, family, relatives, friends and whatever keeps them in a close relationship with others. The Japanese individual is sustained by community or groups. The self finds meaning as it exists among others, among family and community. However, people in Japan create walls and distinguish between insiders and outsiders. When Japanese accept God as their Lord and Savior, they learn the meaning of love of neighbor, even of those who are strangers. There will be a

⁴⁴ According to Mainichi Newspaper (August 2002), 31,042 people committed suicide in Japan in 2001. Most of them were men in their 40s and 50s and the primary reasons were losing a job, bankruptcy, debts, the slump of their company and so on.

balance between self and others which will connect people to people on a firm foundation, and it will be more beneficial to society as well. This love toward neighbor flows from the love of God who is the Creator and the Redeemer.

Each human being is created by God to love God and to love neighbors. Christians have the mission to present the love of God for the sake of their friends and for that of society. When Japanese Christians truly care for their friends and family, they love as Jesus loves them in society as well.

4. Conclusion

The Church needs to make a clear distinction between the realm of faith and the realm of works, especially for a nation like Japan, where the lives of people in society are influenced by Buddhism, Shinto, and Confucianism. The church in Japan must hold to biblical teaching without compromising with cultural idols, such as the veneration of the souls of the dead, or synthesizing Christian faith with ancestor worship or other Japanese beliefs. Christians also need to know that their identities as a children of God make them fully human and thus make them free. It is difficult for Japanese people to find the meaning of humanity without knowing the Creator God.

Christians know where they fit on the eschatological time line. People are under God's sovereignty as he brings his people into one stream in his kingdom. On the other hand, one problem is that people are not able to see their sins when they are in the depths of sin, and so they think this sinful state without God is the only reality and their final way. This leads Japanese non-believers to strive to eliminate the essence of their humanity as the only way out, as Buddhism recommends. Therefore, Christians need to display the blueprint of God's salvation beginning with the Creator, and so let Japanese non-believers know how deeply God loves them, caring for both body and soul. People also must look to Jesus Christ on the cross as God's sacrificial love for his creation.

At the same time, the entire Christian life is never separate from our life with God;⁴⁵ they are closely related. A child of God has the mission to spread the gospel of the crucified and risen Lord, and to

⁴⁵ Kolb, "Niebuhr's "Christ and Culture in Paradox," 107.

witness to his or her faith in society in order to be obedient to God's commandment of loving God and neighbors. Christians, both clergy and laity, even though their roles may differ, have the responsibility to share the gospel and witness to their neighbors through their lives and vocations in the society.

Especially laity in the Japanese church must be encouraged to reflect their faith to people around them in the realm of their daily work. The church in Japan and society will be healthier with the increased involvement of the laity.

Christian faith is a gift from God. The Holy Spirit opens hearts and minds and sustains faith. Furthermore, since believers alone cannot open their hearts without the Holy Spirit, Christians need to pray for each other. It is important to continue the dialogue between Christian faith and Japanese belief in order to bring the gospel to others with the help of the Holy Spirit. And so all Christians need to pray without ceasing on every occasion.

Christians must first focus on the crucified and risen Jesus Christ and then proceed forward in daily life. Jesus who died on the cross for our sin, who was resurrected from death, and who makes us a new creature in himself, died for non-believers as well. Japanese Christians also need to concern themselves with the spiritual and physical living conditions of non-believers.

There is a real conflict between Japanese culture and Christianity. Japanese people are leading their lives within the ancient religious tradition as a part of their culture. The family system and social values and events reflect the long-held traditional Japanese culture. On the other hand, Christianity brings a new worldview and new values into people's lives. When Christians in Japan face the gulf between Christianity and lifestyle, they must decide how to live both as Christians and as Japanese according to the biblical teaching. One may even choose to reject Japanese tradition when it is contrary to Christian faith. Although Japanese Christians tend to be serious about faith and try to preserve their belief, it is difficult for non-believers to accept Christian teaching that seems to be remote from their daily living.

Christians hope to tell non-believers the "truth" or "right message," but it is important to take a gradual approach with the non-believers in their lives. Japanese Christians have the responsibility to bring the gospel into their own culture in order to be digested. Moreover, it is important that new converts be

nurtured in their faith. Christians need to nurture newborn Christians after their baptism as well, for God created them and still sustains and cares for them through the love of fellow believers. Instruction for Christians and developing ways for growing together in faith are one of the significant missions of the Japanese church and Christians. This will contribute to good works in Japanese society as a result.

Jesus comes from outside of the culture to the inside. Japanese people do not have to be like Americans, Europeans or Africans. Every culture has gifts from God which cause believers to rejoice and give thanks. When believers misuse their cultural gifts or treat them as of primary importance, they become idols, even if they are the best products of the culture. Christians in Japan need to be concerned with the hearer's context in order to bring the gospel of Jesus Christ into their lives without altering the biblical teaching.

Once Japanese Christians know "who I am – a child of God," their lives will change. Japanese Christians are able to witness to non-believers through their daily living in order to share the joy of salvation. Because God first loved them, they are able to participate his mission, following Jesus who completed God's love. When they follow in his footsteps as his children, living according to the biblical teaching, accepting their responsibility, they are able to truly love their neighbors.

Chapter Five: Aspects of Mission for Japanese People

1. Introduction

As we have seen, the majority of Japanese people do not know the Creator God who is the source of life, nor the personal Savior who restores humanity. Buddhism, Shinto and Confucianism are still influential and each is flexible enough to permit other objects to be god in the Japanese mind and heart. It is very difficult to receive Jesus as divine, the only and exclusive Lord and Savior under these circumstances since people are not able to see the significant difference between one God and other gods. Sin makes people blind to their need for salvation and God's gift of new life, either for this earth or for eternity. Japanese people do not even know the different views of Jesus in Protestant teaching versus that of Mormonism or the teaching of the Jehovah's Witnesses. Mormon evangelists who dress nicely in a suit and tie are found on every corner of town and easily deceive many Japanese. When people are not able to know the Creator God, they also cannot understand and evaluate God's plan for our humanity and the meaning of their lives.

As with all peoples, Japanese people have their own cultural norms and values which bind society together.¹ It is also important for Christian witness to learn factors which help cross the gulf between the Church and people. Japanese people care for their nationality and values. When Japanese become Christian, they do not have to pull up their Japanese roots and graft them into Western culture. Interestingly, Japanese Christians feel Christianity is their very own, but non-believers claim Christianity is Western. Japanese Christians need to bring the Christian message to their neighbors in order to bring people to Christ.

¹ Also see "Comparing Cultural Norms and Values" by Kenneth W. Behnken in *Planting Missions Across Cultures* (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1999), 76.

2. Possibility to Start Evangelism Through Relationships with People:

Although there is no clear cut scale for measuring how much people know about God, it is crucial for Christian to listen to their non-believer friends in daily conversation and observe how they think, what they believe or what is troublesome to them in believing. It helps to sense people's awareness of God and their relationship with God in order to bridge the gap between Christians and non-believers.

Human beings tend to pass on their messages as one-way communication without listening because they tend to think, "My way is the right one." A good listener can be a good communicator since one is able to know the correct direction in which to throw and catch the ball. It is helpful to determine where a person is on the scale of awareness of God in order to start conversation as well. A key factor is "networking" with others, knowing people rather than being bound by a specific technique. Paul Tillich says, "[T]he first duty of love – is to listen."²

The relationship between God and people, and between people and people is very important. God uses the humanity of believers to share the gospel. Japanese people will find a place to be accepted and begin to experience peace in Christ when they know that Christians care for each person as God's creature and not solely for their theories of belief or reasons of faith. It is helpful to make an observation of Japanese culture in order to communicate. These cultural values below are tips for breaking through the cultural barrier in order to evangelize a Japanese non-believer.

² Garry Poole, *Seeker Small Groups* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2003).

Observation of Core Values within Japanese Society

Being Japanese (identity)	-having Japanese blood, living, and being raised in Japan -speaking and expressing oneself as Japanese (educated as Japanese) -observing religious events as a member of the community (Shinto and Buddhism)
Family	-family as the smallest cell in society -distinctive roles for males and females -males dominate decision making -oldest son has a responsibility for family tradition -father has authority and responsibility for family tradition
State	-democracy which holds the emperor system
Happiness factors in Japan ³	-fulfilling the expectations of family -meeting social responsibilities -self-discipline -cooperation and friendliness

In evangelism, Christians are able to use cultural values and other elements of the culture in their witness. They will introduce Japanese Christian literature which is not contrary to sound doctrine, gather a small group to create a family atmosphere, and study the Bible. Or with Japanese in the USA, holding an English conversation class or a friendship circle in order to serve the needs of Japanese may provide points of contact. However, those who conduct such classes or circles must be aware of potential problems. When Japanese seekers gather for fellowship, they may be afraid of disrupting the harmony of the group. Japanese hesitate to voluntarily take the initiative. On the other hand, if one person dominates the group, free dialogue ceases, for in Japan people are expected to be obedient to authority in the hierarchical *ie-system*. Everyone needs to participate in discussion or other activities freely.

Additionally, a congregation needs to be aware of the points below. Witnessing cannot usually command attention if two factors or needs are not recognized: the need to break through cultural barriers and the need to show human care and concern.

The need to break through cultural barriers: Development of an “insider-outsider” mentality should be avoided among Japanese Christians. If the church becomes a closed group and isolated in



³ According to an article from Reuters, YaHoo! News (internet), Oct 01, 03. USA: personal success, self-expression, pride and high sense of self-esteem are important factors.

society, the church begins to focus on self-preservation and fails to follow Jesus Christ, who breaks through the barriers of society.⁴

The need for human care and concern: It is helpful to utilize Japanese values such as a “group-orientation” which finds identity and security in harmony in a community. “Networking” and “relationships” with other Christians are important for the body of Christ in Japanese society. Believers are able to use cultural values as a gift from God when they are not contrary to Scripture. Thus a “small group” approach may appeal to Japanese people. This small group also needs to keep openness to others in order to avoid becoming a closed group.

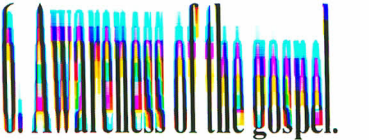
It is also helpful to know where to start a conversation in order to follow God’s commandment to “love God” and “love your neighbor.” This brings the gospel into people’s hearts and minds.

Seeking a Way to Start Conversation: Where to Start? People’s Awareness of God⁵

<u>Stage of awareness</u>	<u>Helpful topics to emphasize</u>
1. No awareness of gods or supernatural power at all. “I exist by chance or coincidence.”	Existence of God, creation and life cycle  Bringing to the Creator and Savior
2. Awareness of some kind of supernatural power or Supreme Being: for example, “Nature as gods or spirits. Buddha or his teaching as the ultimate and absolute power as “I think spirits are active in nature” or “For me, ultimate and absolute power are found in Buddha and his teaching.”	
<p>[For example: Objection voice 1: <i>Shinto gods are the heart of every Japanese, but there is faith.</i> Objection Voice 3: <i>Japanese have no religion but are not atheists.</i>]</p>	

⁴ See Michael J. Sherrill’s argument in *Church and Society: Japanese Protestantism 1950-2000*. <http://christianityinjapan.com/research/articles/2001.04Sherrill-church-soc.html?lang=jse>

⁵ Adapted from James F. Engel & Wilbert Norton. *What’s Gone Wrong With The Harvest?* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan Publishing House, 1975). Also see Charles H. Kraft, *Anthropology for Christian Witness* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1996), 454.

3. Initial awareness of Christianity but “I still do not know who God is.”	<p style="text-align: center;">Jesus Christ as the Lord</p> <p style="text-align: center;">↓</p> <p style="text-align: center;">Bring to Jesus</p>
<p>[For example: Objection Voice 2: <i>Buddhism is universal and peaceful, not only for humans.</i></p> <p style="padding-left: 40px;">Objection Voice 4: <i>Religion is dangerous.</i></p> <p style="padding-left: 40px;">Objection Voice 5: <i>Christian living is not suitable in Japan.</i>]</p>	
4. Interest in Christianity. “I think Christianity is something positive.”	<p style="text-align: center;">The gospel of Jesus Christ</p> <p style="text-align: center;">↓</p>
5. Encounter with God as Lord of all creation or as Savior. “Now I know where life comes from.”	<p style="text-align: center;">Jesus Christ as a personal Savior</p> <p style="text-align: center;">↓</p>
 <p>“I believe my life came from God as well.”</p>	<p style="text-align: center;">↓</p>
7. Grasp of the implications of the Gospel as the reality among us as “I believe that God is working in my life.”	<p style="text-align: center;">The person’s life issues</p> <p style="text-align: center;">↓</p>
8. Openness to the gospel. “It is strange to know that God loves me.”	<p style="text-align: center;">↓</p>
9. Awareness of the gospel as personal need. “I believe that God cares for me and I need help from Him.”	<p style="text-align: center;">↓</p>
10. Accepting the gospel “He died for me (my sin).”	<p style="text-align: center;">Teaching and fellowship</p> <p style="text-align: center;">↓</p> <p style="text-align: center;">Commitment to Jesus</p>
11. Repentance. “I’m sorry, God” and dying and living with Christ.	<p style="text-align: center;">↓</p> <p style="text-align: center;">Starting a relationship with God & His people</p>
12. Discipleship begins. “Now I know who I am so that I hope to live as His child.”	<p style="text-align: center;">↓</p> <p style="text-align: center;">Witness to the world</p>

God revealed himself at a level where people were—God’s word exists in the form of human language. It is a crucial and difficult transition to form a seeker group. The term “seeker” is used in a broad sense here, meaning not only people who are willing to be Christians but also those who are

interested in Christianity. God matters, so God's people matter, including the bodies and souls of non-believers who are still outside of the church.

Sample of an Approach: Forming a Seeker Gathering Group - Trying to Gather People Who Are Non-Christians

Stages 1 and 2:

GOAL:

Ice-breaking for people who have had no encounter with their Creator and Savior God at all in their lives.

HOW:

At this level, one should simply be a friend. Introduce yourself, and begin conversation. Seek to find common ground or differences through listening. As a neighbor, discover their needs or difficulties. Share joys and sorrows together.

TIPS:

At this level, there are a variety of ways to point out the Creator God through nature, a new baby, and Christian people like ourselves.

EXAMPLE:

Invite them over for a BBQ, tea party or other social activities.

Stages 3 and 4:

GOAL:

Friendship building.

HOW:

Continue to get to know each other; be friends with people. God always gives us an opportunity to share the gospel so be aware of it.

TIPS:

Japanese people are often afraid to enter a church because they consider it a holy place. One needs to tell Japanese non-believers, “You are welcome at church. It is totally okay for you to be here.” At this stage, Christians encounter various reactions toward Christianity. Generally, people are often interested in Christianity, but some are afraid of being evangelized.

EXAMPLE:

Invite to church activities such as VBS, fish and chips dinner at church, friendship Sunday and so on. Introducing people at church, making connections between Christians and non-believer friends. For example, in New Jersey there are three friendship circles for Japanese people hosted by volunteers from the local churches. Those circles probably fit this stage. These circles have a short devotion at the beginning and fellowship after the day’s program each time. Japanese who attend seem to have gotten used to the devotion as part of the daily routine. The day’s program is based on the interests of the people.

Stages 5 - 11:

GOAL:

Forming a “Seeker Group.” These small groups will focus on fellowship and discipleship in order to grow in faith together and reach out to new people as the body of Christ.

HOW:

When people start asking about Scripture or about God, it may be time for those people to consider their beliefs and issues of faith. If there are some people who are interested in discussing Christian beliefs, it is time to prepare for a Bible study group or small group activities.⁶ Seekers are encouraged to attend worship services with Christian leaders in order to lead them to the promise of Baptism. Once believers know people and friendship is developed, there will be an opportunity to gather

⁶ There has been research concerning small groups within the LCMS. For example, Pastor Richard E. Nelson, former missionary to Japan, wrote a paper entitled: “*The Cell Church: New and Old*” for the Circle of twelve in Japan. It is an ongoing movement in Japan now even though Pastor Nelson had to return from Japan due to synodical budget cuts. For more information, please contact Pastor Nelson. Another study has been done by Missions International, *Strategic Growth for Small Groups (SG)2* which has been adapted for use by The Lutheran Church-Missouri Synod. www.missions.com

a seeker group to study the Bible. It is also important to set the day and time to fit people's schedules. Each cycle of Bible study topics should continue for a month or two.

TIPS:

When friendship is developed and people come to trust each other, Japanese will usually accept an invitation. It is better to explain honestly that we will discuss our life and faith and learn from the Bible. One important point is the awareness of volunteers who host the Japanese non-believers; they must particularly recognize how important it is to share the gospel and proclaim Jesus as Savior. The attitude of the church volunteers is influential among non-believers. Education of the Christian leaders is the first step in forming a small group. In inviting Japanese seekers, the key words are, "Are you able to attend just once?" This way people will not feel too much pressure to involve themselves.

EXAMPLE:

The sample Bible study in the Appendix may be beneficial for Japanese who study the Bible for the *first time or at the very beginning* of their Christian lives. Human beings are not able to know God until they encounter his revelation. Garry Poole mentions, "[t]he seekers' level of biblical understanding needs to be taken into account....most non-Christians do not know what the Bible actually says."⁷ Therefore, Christians need to present God's word in the midst of a seeker's life. Be patient with seekers, listen to them, allow them to share their questions and doubts about Christianity honestly. It is normal to stumble with the truth since the truth crushes an old worldview, an old identity and meaning of life, a fact which a seeker must wrestle with. We also need to walk to the truth with a seeker as Jesus walks with us every day of our lives.

Points of Concern for the Japanese Mind:

- Missing God as Creator and Savior; examine definition of humanity.
- Christianity is considered Western.
- The eschatological message and resurrection are foreign concepts to the Japanese mind.
- Love is understood in the Japanese context as an emotional and relational matter within human understanding rather than as a gift from God.

⁷ Garry Poole, *Seeker Small Groups* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2003), 36.

First, it is important to show the Creator to Japanese people since the main religions of the Japanese, such as Buddhism, Shinto and Confucianism, do not have the concept of a Creator God. Second, it is necessary to treat the Christian concept of sin carefully and precisely since Japanese treat sin as a crime in society, or as impurity, or as a forgettable matter. Third, it is also helpful to introduce the Christian concept of love in words and deeds, since Japanese usually understand love as an emotional and relational matter among people. Fourth, because ancestor worship is influential in Japanese life and the line between the dead and living is unclear, it is important to discuss the topic of life after death. Additionally, Japanese people do not recognize the authority of the Bible. Some treat the Bible as a book among books. Therefore, it is helpful begin by examining what the Bible is before we begin to study topics.

3. Seeker Groups and the Christian Life Among Japanese People

Salvation is a gift from God as he descended to us on the earth. According to Henry Cloud and John Townsend, a small group is a powerful expression of grace which comes from outside of the self unconditionally⁸ as a non-believer experiences forgiveness through other people. Christians are forgiven; therefore we are able to forgive and accept others.

Moreover, God created each one of us differently, and as persons we each are special in his eyes. We are able to maintain our identity as Christians together, but our roles in the church may vary. It is unnecessary to wear the same uniform or T-shirt in order to serve others. Each Christian is given freedom to serve Jesus Christ in various ways according to their talents and calls from God. For example, elderly volunteers host Japanese friendship circles in New Jersey and share their love with those around them. Japanese Christians also need to prepare to be a witness to the world, ready to share the gospel wherever God provides the opportunity in society.

⁸ Henry Cloud and John Townsend, *Making Small Groups Work* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2003), 43.

Poole states, “Our seeking friends will be impacted by the love of Christ they see in us. We don’t have to pretend to be something we’re not. We don’t have to appear to know all the answers.”⁹ It is important for believers to be honest about themselves with seekers, including their imperfections and hopes.

4. Growing Together Prayerfully: Study + Fellowship + Making Connections with Jesus and Others

It is not easy for the Japanese mind to consider who Jesus is. Japanese tend to think religion is dangerous and Christianity a Western belief. There have been attempts to mold Christianity into a Japanese lifestyle, synthesizing the belief and teaching with Japanese culture or attempting to free the Church from missionary influence. Thus it is better to describe Jesus and his background according to the Scriptures than to share Western ideology or lifestyle.

Although synthesizing the gospel and culture is not appropriate, the gospel of Jesus Christ does enter into cultures. Therefore it is important to present the gospel itself as free as possible from any cultural baggage. Even so, some Japanese are fond of Western paintings, music, culture and so on in Japan, so a Western flavor may serve as an introduction to those people. However, people are never able to truly understand who God is and what He has done without an encounter with the crucified and risen Christ. Teaching the Creator God, who Jesus is and what he has done for us through creation, redemption and the eschatological message will be effective for the Japanese mind. When we approach Japanese people, different activities with a gradual approach, including building trustful relationships, will be necessary in order to bring people to faith with the help of the Holy Spirit.

In regard to evangelism for Japanese, it is difficult to plan the growth of a seeker group, especially to know when part of the group should break off and start a new group. However, God is the one who holds the timing and plan for the future. The purpose of a seeker group is to bring seekers to his

⁹ Poole, *Seeker Small Groups*, 207.

Church; a seeker group may stay together longer than a Christian small group. It is crucial to instruct seekers until they develop a life-long relationship to Christ and his people.

5. Conclusion

The gospel of Jesus Christ is unchangeable truth. However, people change and differ from one another according to time and place. God still meets people in the midst of their everyday lives. It is helpful to make people “feel at home,” that aids them in reinterpreting the Bible’s message in order to bring the gospel into the culture. It is also helpful to know how much people know about God. Some people have never heard of the gospel of Jesus Christ. Listening and supporting each other prayerfully are crucial to building relationships and nurturing faith, rather than focusing on study itself. It is helpful to start a dialog with the Japanese mind to provide guidance for their reason and a cultural context in order to know them.

When non-believer friends seem interested in Christianity after a friendship has developed, we may try forming a small group. Both relationships and witness are very important to bring people into the Christian family. However, we do not know how long we are able to be with them, so our non-believer friends need to encounter the revealed God as their Lord. We need to give them an opportunity to encounter God through his Word. God’s Word will live among them.

When we have a Bible study with Japanese friends, it may be helpful to show the Creator God, redemption, the eschatological message, the message “Christianity is not only for Westerners,” and the depth of God’s love, in order to overcome their difficulty in accepting Christianity. We are careful not to present mere knowledge about God or Western culture, for our knowledge does not equal belief. True knowledge and wisdom come from God alone. Knowing God is the beginning of knowing “who I am.” God is the one who gives us our nationality, placing us into a particular land. Japanese people are able to be Japanese and Christian at the same time. God leads us to respond to the commands, “love God” and “love your neighbor” wherever we are. God speaks to us through faith in him. And God desires us to respond and live with him and with his people according to his voice.

Chapter Six: Conclusion

Thus far chapters two through five have considered Japanese religion and its practice, Japanese Christians and their conflict and Christian identity and life as children of God, and the aspects of mission for Japanese people under the framework of Luther's two realms theology.

In Japan, the Lutheran church is a minority within a minority.¹ However, the two realms theology and Luther's interpretation of two kinds of righteousness helps explain how the relationship between God and people and the Christian life under one Lord function in every nation.

The second chapter observed that the Japanese have an ancient man-made religious structure that has developed through the course of history. Buddhism, Shinto, and Confucianism have had a strong influence over Japanese life up to the present time. On the other hand, the message of the Triune God entered into Japanese history through a Roman Catholic missionary named Francis Xavier in the sixteenth century. God uses many elements and events to recreate His kingdom in a mysterious way.

Critical factors in outreach to Japanese are Japanese culture, the Japanese concern for personal identity as a Japanese national, maintaining "Japanese-ness" by acknowledging Japanese ancestors, and by practicing religious events as a part of family tradition and duty in society. Many Japanese claim that Christianity is a foreign and Western religion which Japanese are not able to hold to in daily life in Japan.

When Christians attempt to shape their faith according to cultural values, it may make the Christian faith easier for Japanese people to accept. However, God shapes his human creatures; they dare not try to reshape him or his message for them. The gospel of Jesus Christ is unchangeable truth and has nothing to do with our own efforts. Therefore Christians need to bring the gospel into Japanese hearts with help of the Holy Spirit, apart from Western values and culture.

The third chapter was a description of Christians in Japan. In this chapter, the conflict between state and faith in a non-Christian society and the tension between Christian living and family

¹ According to Christian Yearbook 1999, the total number of all the Lutheran churches in Japan is 418 out of a total number of Christian churches 7,918 (the Protestant church is 6,932 and Catholic Church is 986) in Japan.

responsibility in Japan became clear. This chapter explored the history of the Japanese church between the periods of modernization and Westernization. The interpretation of the gospel by Uchimura under the Meiji imperial government is also explored as an example. Christians in Japan currently enjoy living in a democratic society; however, they still encounter conflicts between Christian faith and daily living among non-Christians in society.

As a duty imposed by social custom, Japanese have a family obligation to maintain Buddhist religious rituals and the family altar. This is problematic for the Christian faith, and therefore individuals often hesitate to be baptized for this reason. Contextualizing ancestor spirits by incorporating some form of veneration of the dead into Christianity, such as the Roman Catholic Church has done, brings the danger of neglecting the Triune God and his teaching. Christians are not to compromise biblical teachings of creation and life, death and resurrection to the biblical eschatological message. Sensitivity toward departed family members is, however, needed for Japanese Christians.

The fourth chapter presented Christian identity as based on a vertical relationship between God and humans, and a horizontal relationship between humans and humans. This was according to Luther in his interpretation of the biblical message.

The majority of Japanese people do not know the Creator God who is the source of life nor the personal Savior who restores humanity. Buddhism, Shinto and Confucianism are still influential and each is flexible enough to permit other objects to be god in the Japanese mind and heart. When people are not able to know the Creator God, they also miss God's plan for our humanity and the meaning of our lives. It is helpful to introduce Japanese people to the Creator God in order to understand the meaning of humanity and who is the source of all life.

The Christian faith is a gift from God. Once a Christian knows "who I am"—a child of God—he or she will change his or her way of life, and true good works flow from this. Christians are not able to stop witnessing to the world in order to share the joy of salvation. Their hope is that all creatures will confess the Lord as their Savior. God first loved sinners, and therefore believers are able to love our neighbors as we follow in His footsteps as his children.

The fifth chapter presented an aspect of mission for Japanese people. The Christian church in Japan is able to enjoy Japanese culture but must distinguish idolatrous attitudes in human cultures.

“I have been crucified with Christ; it is no longer I who live, but Christ lives in me; and the life which I now live in the flesh I live by faith in the Son of God, who love me and gave Himself for me” (Galatians 2:20). Every child of God is given a joyous call and mission to participate in His re-creation. People also may see the nature of God through believers (2 Corinthians 5:17-18). When that happens, they can pass on the gospel, for God revealed Himself as human flesh in order to let us know His purpose and plan toward all humans. It is possible to share the gospel with Japanese hearts and minds in real life without culturally synthesizing or molding its teaching.

In thinking about the many aspects of mission to Japanese people, it becomes clear that a personal relationship with non-believers is a very important factor for evangelism. This relationship forms in listening, sharing joy and sorrow, and supporting each other. Japanese are afraid of religion and mind control. But Japanese people usually feel comfortable with Christian culture such as arts or literature. We need to consider the balance between Christian culture and its teaching. If we keep passing Christianity only through a cultural message, it becomes more and more difficult to share the gospel of Jesus Christ so that it reaches into their lives. Rather, a base of friendship must be built in order to be honest with each other regarding “who I am.” Cultural factors can serve as a tool in doing so.

In the case of Japanese Christians, believers must be careful not to present Christian teaching as a Western product to non-believers but share the message that “Christ died for all people”. It may be helpful to show the Creator God, redemption, and the eschatological message with “God loves you very much” in order to bring the gospel message. It is important to encourage people to know that God is the one who gives us our nationality, placing us into a particular land. Only then will Japanese be able to be Japanese and Christian simultaneously. As God has spoken through the prophet Hosea and repeated by St. Paul: “I will call them ‘my people’ who are not my people; and I will call her ‘my loved one’ who is not my loved one,” and, “It will happen that in the every place where it was said to them. ‘You are not my people,’ they will be called ‘sons of the living God’ ” (Romans 9:25-26).

Appendix:
<A Sample Bible Study for a Small Group>

1. Introduction: Why do we read the Bible?
2. God created heavens, earth, you and me.
3. We have all failed.
4. God's love is greater than anything else; God still loves you and me.
5. Our hope in Christ: to live eternally.
6. Summary

Start with Prayer:

1. Introduction: Why do we read the Bible?

Please share your thoughts ...

Question: When or where do you feel God's existence?

- a) Through nature? When you are walking in the beautiful forest? When you see the stars and moon? When you see lovely flowers?
- b) Through people? When you see godly people? When you are helped by someone? When you feel you are loved by someone?

It may be true that we are able to feel God through nature or through people. But when we see the world through our eyes, we always see the world within our human ability through our own screens. Even when we say that we are not able to grasp God, we are treating something as god, or expressing God from our own perspective. So we need to see through God's eyes in order to see the world. Is it possible? Yes, God speaks through the Bible which was written by inspiration of the Holy Spirit. He hopes we know him and return to him. You will also encounter many people in the Bible. Those people testify to Jesus Christ and that God is the center of the story from the beginning to the end in the Bible.

Let's listen to what God says ...

About nature: Psalm 19:1-2, Isaiah 40:7-8, Matthew 6:28-30.

About humans: Genesis 1:26, Isaiah 43:1, 4.

About God: Acts 17:24-28.

2. God created the heavens and earth, you and me.

Dietrich Bonhoeffer once said that we are in the middle of time so that we are not able to see the beginning or the end of the world.¹ God created everything good with harmony and beauty. Even though science is not able to show us the beginning, we always imagine it from the data. However, the Bible says that God is the creator of all things visible and invisible, including you! Nowadays, we are able to see a baby in the womb through ultrasound. Isn't it amazing that a baby already has such detail and shape as a human being! Do you think this is an accident?

Please share your thoughts ...

Question 1. Have you ever thought how the universe was formed?

Question 2. Have you ever thought about who you are? Japanese? Mother or father? Child? Or is your job equal to your identity?

Let's listen to what the Bible says ...

Genesis 1:1, John 1:1-3, Genesis 1:31, Colossians 1:16, Hebrews 1:2, Psalm 33:6, Colossians 1:17, Psalm 104:30, Genesis 1:26, Genesis 2:7, Psalm 139:13-14.

Question: What does the Bible say about the world? Who created it? What/who existed from the beginning? How about you? (If someone raises the question about the personhood of God, it will be better to hold it for a later time since Trinity makes seekers confused. Or explain simply in order to avoid philosophical discussion at this time.)

Adam was the first human being, which means he and his wife Eve were ancestors of all humans. God created us in his image from the start! Besides, every good thing comes from God including the

¹ Dietrich Bonhoeffer, *Creation and Fall: Temptation*, translated by John C. Fletcher and Kathleen Downham (New York: Simon & Schuster Adult Publishing Group, 1997).

universe, nature, your life, family, your nationality and your job, too. Yes, those are gifts from God but never should be a god which binds you.

3. We have all failed.

God is good, perfect, knowing everything, and he never fails since he is the creator of all things. He created everything good. But what do you see in this world? Pollution? War? Bad people prospering? Poverty? Prejudice? There are so many problems in the world. How about ourselves? Do we trust in God? Do we love ourselves, our family, or our neighbor? Have you ever thought, “I am better than that person,” “I want to live better life than others,” “I do not care about my poor neighbor” or “I want to put myself first”? Those bad things or thoughts come from us and not from God. We are not able to deceive God as to what we have in our hearts, even if we are able to lead our life sufficiently and look good in society (Matthew 23:28).

Let’s listen to what the Bible says ...

Genesis 2:9, Genesis 2:17, Genesis 3, Romans 5:12.

Question 1. Who is the “snake”?

Question 2. Is the snake accurate in what he says God said? What is he promising?

Question 3. How has the woman’s trust in God changed? What did she trust?

Question 4. Compare their attitude in Genesis 2:25 to Genesis 3:7.

Question 5. What is the bad news for the snake and for the woman?

God knew what would happen to Adam and Eve. God created Adam and Eve not as his robots nor as angels but as humans who had the image of God. Adam and Eve could not choose to trust in God by their own ability, however. The Bible tells us that humans have all failed since then. But God still continued to dialogue with them, asking, “Where are you?” even after they failed to trust him.

4. God’s love is greater than anything else; God still loves you and me.

God still loved Adam and Eve and gave them another life, a new birth through this re-creating Word. God himself is love. It is his will that his creatures will live with him. God chose one man and made him a promise. This person was named Abraham, who was the ancestor of the Jews. Through the Israelites, God blessed all people everywhere. God again chose one man and made him a promise. His name was David. And then Jesus, the promise, came! In Jesus Christ, God says yes to us; “Yes, you are mine,” “Yes, you are all right” and “Yes, your sin is forgiven.”

Please share your thoughts ...

Question 1. Do you have somebody you love? Or do you think you are loved?

Question 2. Have you ever experienced that you failed to do things or were rejected by someone?

Question 3. Have you ever experienced that you were forgiven after you failed? How did you feel? Or are you able to forgive other people who make you up set?

Let's see what the Bible says ...

Genesis 12:1-4, 2 Samuel 7:12-23, Matthew 1:1, Luke 3:23-38, 1 Corinthians 15:22, 2 Timothy 1:9 –10, Galatians 3:6-9, John 3:16.

We are able to know how patient God is and how deeply he loves us. He even sent his only Son to die for us. Yes, God's son Jesus died for you and for me. This is God's love. We also call it “good news” as God forgave us through this event. God shows us the way to live with him forever as his children through Jesus. God loves you very much. Can you hear that God is calling, “Where are you?” since he is the one who created you, and gave you life? This is the greatest gift from God.

5. Our hope in Christ: to live eternally

We often talk about eternity. Some famous brand even named a perfume “eternity.” Although people hope to somehow capture eternity while they are in love, their feeling or emotion is changeable. What is eternity in the Bible? Is it our imagination?

Please share your thoughts ...

Question 1. Is there any moment you feel eternity?

Let's listen to what the Bible says ...

Ecclesiastes 3:11

Question 2. Why are you able to think of eternity?

Genesis 2:17, Genesis 3:19, Romans 5:12.

Question 3. Who caused death?

2 Kings 20:1-6, Psalm 90:3, Luke 7:14-15, Hebrews. 2:14-15, Hebrews. 9:27.

Question 4. Who defeated death?

Matthew 28:6, Mark 16:6, Luke 24:5-7, Romans 6:23, Romans 5:12, Revelation 21:3-4,

1 Corinthians 15:20-22, 1 Corinthians 15:42-44.

Question 5. What happened to Jesus who was crucified and died on the cross?

Is death the last event of life?

The Bible tells us that eternity means time with God forever. Jesus Christ promised us to live forever in Him. God certainly has a purpose and plan for your life.

6. Summary:

God is the creator who formed the universe, the earth, moon, nature, and you and me. God allows us to enjoy his gifts. His Son Jesus showed us the way to our Heavenly Father, by dying on the cross for us. This is the greatest gift of all. Through Him, we are able to restore the true "self", to restore the image of God which God intended us to have. You are loved so much that you are precious! We are able to love God and other people whom God created when God restore our true selves in Christ. God shows us the way to live with him eternally from today while we are living with other people in the place where God has put us. God is calling you right here!

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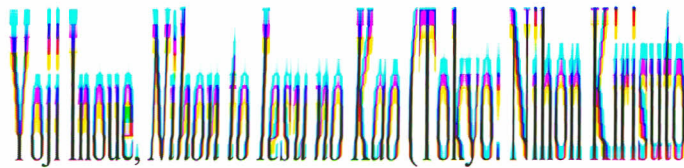
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