

# Concordia Theological Monthly

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Volume 37

Article 52

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10-1-1966

## Theological Observer

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### Recommended Citation

Schriever, Henry R. (1966) "Theological Observer," *Concordia Theological Monthly*. Vol. 37, Article 52.  
Available at: <https://scholar.csl.edu/ctm/vol37/iss1/52>

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## THEOLOGICAL OBSERVER

### REPORT FROM JAPAN

At its annual convention on April 28, 1966, the Nihon Ruteru Kyodan, the organization of churches that has grown out of the mission endeavors of The Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod in Japan, formally declared pulpit and altar fellowship with the Japan Evangelical Lutheran Church. In a resolution that acknowledged the Kyodan's negligence in recognizing and seeking unity in the past the church through its delegates resolved to pledge itself "to continue fellowship in worship and study of the Sacred Scriptures, speaking the truth in love," and also "to work and plan together, finding every possible avenue to strengthen the Church and giving practical expression to the unity that our Lord has given us." In a situation where non-Christians tend to wonder whether the different churches worship different gods, the importance of a declaration such as that of the Nihon Ruteru Kyodan and the JELC is obvious. While there certainly are obstacles to full agreement among Lutherans, Protestants, Roman Catholics, and Orthodox Christians in Japan, as everywhere, there is a noticeable spirit of growing openness and willingness to listen and talk together on an official and unofficial level. There are several nonofficial ecumenical study groups meeting regularly in Tokyo alone. One recent product of this spirit is the appointment of a Franciscan friar, Campion Lally, as a regular lecturer during the spring term at the Central Theological College of the Episcopal Church in Japan. While continuing his teaching schedule at the Franciscan Seminary, Father Lally will lecture to seminarians of the Episcopal Church on the History of Moral Theology.

Unfortunately, however, there are still problems that are bound to make the road to unity a rocky one. One such problem is

the recent case involving a pastor of the United Church of Christ in Japan. In a book entitled *Exodus from Christianity*, Rev. Sakae Akaiwa, pastor of one of the United Church's Tokyo congregations, stated that "for man to live as an autonomous individual . . . it is most important to be set free from 'Christ,' the authority of past mythology." The book is a sort of spiritual diary in which the author tells how he has been "set free from the curse of Scriptural authority." He argues that the time has now come for man to execute the death sentence upon God. The thoughts, of course, are not new to Americans, who have recently been bombarded with the death-of-God theology. They are not new to Buddhists in Japan either, who have never believed that God was alive. Buddhist leaders have long taught that quasi-historical personages such as Amida had no real historical existence and serve a purpose only in simplifying a deeply philosophical faith for those who cannot comprehend it. For Buddhists, what lies behind the universe is some sort of life-force, which is certainly not to be identified with a personal God. Rev. Akaiwa regards Jesus as a great humanist with whom agreement is both possible and desirable. The question is "Why Jesus? Why not some other great humanist or religious leader like Buddha?" His views have caused quite a stir and the *Japan Christian Activity News* reports

The Kyodan (United Church of Christ in Japan), reluctant at all times to dispute points of doctrine, received the problem posed by *Exodus from Christianity* from the Tokyo Kyoku (Presbytery or Conference). The Kyoku's application for judgment went to the denomination's Faith and Order Commission, which noted, "although Mr. Akaiwa's ideas can be viewed as ONE interpretation of the Confession of Faith, (we) . . . had to conclude that his interpretation and expression were over and beyond the 'limits' of freedom and could not be sanctioned. . . ."

The report went on to say that "no judicial challenge has been raised to the Rev. Akaiwa's continuance in his United Church of Christ pulpit."

At this point it seems that the Akaiwa problem is rather isolated and will probably pass over, but it indicates again that it is only a matter of time before theological fads of the West make their way into Japan. Meanwhile those who are seriously committed to the unity and mission of the church in this largely secular culture are coming to a greater mutual understanding if not agreement. There is no doubt that the Holy Spirit is stirring things up in Japan, and one looks forward to the future of the church here with much anticipation.

**DECLARATION OF ALTAR  
AND PULPIT FELLOWSHIP  
WITH THE JAPAN EVANGELICAL  
LUTHERAN CHURCH**

**WHEREAS:** Our Lord prayed that the Church be one, even as He and the Father are one, so that all men might know that He is sent by the Father; and

**WHEREAS,** The Holy Apostles faithfully witnessed to this unity, teaching that the Body of Christ is one; and

**WHEREAS,** The Fathers of the Church constantly strove for the unity of the Church, zealously eradicating all schism and division; and

**WHEREAS,** The Reformers of the Church, in their concern for the true unity of Christ's Body, confessed their unity with the universal Church in the Lutheran Symbols; and

**WHEREAS,** We, as sons of the Reformation, confess our unity with all those who subscribe to these Symbols and pledge ourselves to unending efforts for the unity of the Church; and

**WHEREAS,** We have been led by the Holy Spirit to profess the unity that exists between

us and our brothers in Christ, the Japan Evangelical Lutheran Church, on the basis of Holy Scripture and the Lutheran Symbols; therefore be it

*Resolved,* That we repent of our sin against the unity of the Church in failing to recognize unity where it existed and in not working for unity where it does not exist; and be it further

*Resolved,* That we give unending thanks to our Lord for the guidance of His Holy Spirit and for the unity that He has given with our brothers, the Japan Evangelical Lutheran Church; and be it further

*Resolved,* That in accord with this unity we declare ourselves to be in altar and pulpit fellowship with the Japan Evangelical Lutheran Church; and be it further

*Resolved,* That we pledge ourselves to continued fellowship in worship and study of the Sacred Scriptures, speaking the truth in love and thereby deepening the unity that exists; and be it further

*Resolved,* That we pledge ourselves to work and plan together, finding every possible avenue to strengthen the Church and giving practical expression to the unity that our Lord has given us; and be it further

*Resolved,* That we consummate this altar and pulpit fellowship with joint Eucharistic services in the various areas; and be it further

*Resolved,* That we extend the right hand of fellowship to the president of the Japan Evangelical Lutheran Church present with us and ask him to convey our greetings to his church now assembled in convention and to inform them of our declaration of altar and pulpit fellowship with them; and be it finally

*Resolved,* That we offer our thanksgiving and praise to the Lord of the Church with the singing of "Now Thank We All Our God."

*Action:* This resolution was adopted.

Tokyo, Japan      HENRY R. SCHRIEVER