

Japanese Observe World Christianity

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Left to right: front, Rev. Sakae Endo, Rev. Young Oon Kim, Mayor Kijuro Sugawara; back, Johnny Sonneborn, Rev. Royal G. Davis, Rev. Tvtすuya Amano

America may think of herself as a new and independent culture, but an Asian can easily recognize how the new world is actually an extension of European civilization. At least this was one observation of a Japanese Protestant leader, Rev. Sakae Endo of the Japanese United Church of Christ (Aizu Takada Church), on his second visit to the United States. Previously, he believed that America represented a distinct culture. However, he has since discovered in the big cities that many nationality groups have kept their own languages and have continued to eat the traditional foods of their mother countries. Sometimes, it seemed to him as though only in the universities were Americans speaking a common English language.

Reverend Endo visited Washington while on a world tour with Rev. Tetsuya Amano of the Union Christian Academy Center of Tokyo and Mayor Kijuro Sugawara of Higashiyama. They were hosted in Washington by the Unification Church theological study committee.

According to Reverend Endo, the spokesman for the group, Christianity merged with Hellenism to produce the Greek Orthodox and Roman Catholic churches. With the Reformation, Protestants attempted to purify the church of non-biblical ideas and practices. But at the same time, the Reformers' efforts entailed the birth of many differing and conflicting denominations. And now almost anyone can form his own church. Yet, the Japanese Christians do not consider this variety of denominations totally bad.

America -- heaven and hell

Religiously the United States represents an extension of European culture. Many denominations which divide the church trace their beginnings to an earlier day overseas. In the United States we find Italian, French, Polish, German and Spanish churches, for example. While native languages, forms of worship, and traditional practices divide Americans, the Bible, which all Christians revere, unites them. It is a common scripture which unifies otherwise divided people, and it is the Bible alone that guarantees internal unity for the American people.

According to the Japanese observer, Christianity has played and must continue to play a unique role in U.S. history. After all, he asks, if the church fails here, where can God find a better foothold?

Nevertheless, in the eyes of Oriental Christians, America reveals a vast conglomeration of heaven and hell. Because of at least three major social problems, America faces a crisis and appears as hell. If she could solve the black/white problem, restore peace among conflicting social classes, and establish the proper relationship between male and female, the United States would reveal a foretaste of heaven. To tackle any of these matters, America could use help from men of good will and Christians from other lands.

Reformation comes late to Russia

Karl Marx wrote *Das Kapital* in England, which he predicted would be the first Communist state. But the revolution he expected took place in Russia, and England was saved from bloody social upheaval because of the moral power of the Christian faith. The transformation of Great Britain by Oliver Cromwell and the establishment of parliamentary government came about because of practical Christianity in an earlier age.

Russia, by contrast, had no Protestant Reformation, which altered European life and even somewhat changed the character of Roman Catholicism. In the Czarist empire, Christianity as a social or prophetic force was nonexistent. Although Russian Christians adored the Bible as a sacred book, they seldom read it. The church therefore had little real love and even less power. Revolution came to fill the vacuum. Without positive Christian love, people turn to violent substitutes. As even Russian Orthodox clergymen told Reverend Endo when he visited the Soviet Union, since the church would not reform herself, Communism forced her to change.

A tour of Communist countries behind the iron curtain convinced the Japanese minister that revolution and persecution have failed to destroy real Christianity. Despite all her troubles since 1917 the church can still help the Russian people. The crowds of worshippers at Moscow churches are deceptive, however, because there are so few places left open where believers can worship. The Communist revolution did not solve the serious social problems of the Soviet Union nor could it destroy Christianity, for when Christianity and Marxism meet in battle, in the long run the church will win. Communism became a factor in Christian renewal because it forced the reformation of the Orthodox church, which Western Europe had previously experienced by the birth of Protestantism.

Asian Christians must win China

In Japan, too, the church faces serious problems. Even after a hundred years of Protestant missions, Asia has yet to see the sort of Christianity which can improve the social order. Japanese Christianity depends too much on translation theology, an import from Germany or America, and a century of missionary activity has failed to reform Japanese society. There should be a Christian force in the Diet, for example, to give Christian perspective to the government. Individual clergymen and laymen can criticize national policies without difficulty, but the actual work of running Japan originates with the government.

For Asian Christians the paramount issue involves the challenge to reintroduce the church in mainland China. People in the countries of free Asia must dedicate themselves to the evangelization of the land of dictator Mao. Nevertheless, the restoration of the church in China also requires deepening the faith and commitment of Americans.

Communists are well aware of the long range plans of the churches. Already in Japan the Communists have petitioned the government to curb Christian activities of a practical and prophetic nature. Christians must realize that Marxists are now trying to cripple the churches and will continue to attack Christian believers.

According to Reverend Endo, theological books or even Bibles will not cause the church to expand her witness. It will require a strong and dedicated movement who will take upon herself the difficult task of planting Christianity anew in the People's Republic of China.