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## Articles

### Unique Factors of Pastoral Care and Church Growth in the Lutheran Churches in Japan

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The Protestant churches in Japan have been greatly influenced by the ideas and ideals of the American churches in the middle of the last century, and especially by the influence of Puritanism. Christianity had an enormous impact on the young men who experienced the rapid changes in the first part of the Meiji era (1868-1912). At the same time, Puritan influence formed and fixed in the minds of the Japanese people the image of what it means to be a Protestant Christian. That image has since been handed down unchanged to this present day. The form of the church service, life-style and many customs from the American past are still to be found in Japan. For example, fifty-two percent of the words and sixty-one percent of the tunes of the hymns in the Protestant hymnbook (Sambika) now used in Japan have been derived from the 19th century. Perhaps we have to think about whether the church has become too tied to the Protestantism which came from America in the end of the 19th century.

However, generally the Japanese churches are not only puritanical but also "samurai-like." Among them one has to mention especially the churches of the holiness tradition because they have reached the masses of common people with their evangelistic activities and penetrated to the roots of society. This is one more aspect which we must examine carefully today. This particular movement made use of the gifts of the believers in spreading the Gospel. By contrast the Japanese churches today are pastor-centered or church-worker-centered, and consequently have lost much of their evangelizing character. That is why there are some good things that can be learned from the early history of the holiness churches.

*The problems of the Lutheran Church in Japan and the possibilities of their developing further*

There are six Lutheran church bodies in Japan:

- a. The Evangelical Lutheran Church in Japan (*Fukuin Ruteru*)—The United Lutheran Church in America (U.L.C.A.) sent the first missionaries to Japan

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in 1892. They started to work in the city of Saga. As of this writing there are 152 congregations, 21,025 members and 152 church workers in this church.

- b. Japan Lutheran Church (*Nihon Ruteru*)—The Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod started its work in 1948 and is now working in the Kanto, Niigata and Hokkaido areas. There are thirty-seven congregations and 3,131 church members in this church.
- c. Japan Lutheran Brethren Church (*Ruteru Doho*)—Lutheran Brethren missionaries started to work in the Tohoku area in 1949. There are twenty-two congregations and 1,023 members in this church.
- d. Evangelical Fellowship Deaconry Church (*Feroshippu Dikonri*)—When the Deutsch Marburg Mission was forced to leave China in 1951, these sisters came to Japan. Their work is centered around Kobe. There are nine congregations and 452 members in this church.
- e. West Japan Evangelical Lutheran Church (*Nishi-Nippon Ruteru*)—The Norwegian Lutheran Mission started to work in Hyogo Prefecture and Chugoku area in 1949. Later the FLM (Finnish Lutheran Mission) and FLOM (Finnish Lutheran Overseas Mission) joined in. There are thirty-two congregations and 2,556 members in this church.
- f. Kinki Evangelical Lutheran Church (*Kinki Ruteru*) was started in 1957 by the Norwegian Missionary Society and the Norwegian Free Church. There are thirty congregations and 2,415 members in this church.

As of 1990 altogether there are 255 Lutheran congregations and 30,652 Lutheran Christians in Japan. As is seen from the above, the Lutheran churches here are typical examples of churches started by foreign missions. Put in concrete numbers, in the three Lutheran churches in the Kansai area—Nishi-Nippon, Kinki and Deaconry—forty-two percent of the church-workers are missionaries, and the degree of self-support is thirty-five percent. One can easily see from this how much these churches are dependent on the missions both for their personnel and their economic assistance.

The Lutheran Reformation was the radical reformation of rediscovering the Gospel. The new churches in Germany were organized as Landeskirchen, and in Northern Europe as state churches. Luther's distinction between Law and Gospel and his doctrine of the two kingdoms were used for separating the worldly authority from the spiritual authority. The state was supported by the church, and the church became an organization which included and took care of the whole population. It is therefore said that if the Lutheran church had been introduced to Japan during the great changes of the early Meiji era, it certainly would have made a big impact on Japanese society and its youth.

The Lutheran Church started in a situation where Christians already existed. Also in America the Lutheran immigrants built their churches which became focal centers of their respective communities. Therefore, taking care of the

existing church members was more important than reaching out to new people. The pastor's work was considered to consist of preaching on Sundays and taking care of the spiritual problems of the church members. Such was the image of a good pastor.

A survey conducted in 1987 in the West Japan Lutheran Church revealed that the answers given to the question about an ideal pastor are quite in accordance with the Lutheran tradition. For example, in multiple answers to the question "Which of the activities of your pastor do you respect most?", eighty-two percent checked the Sunday sermon; fifty-three percent checked pastoral care of the believers; and forty-six percent checked the follow-up of the "seekers of the truth" (*kyudoshu*). To the question "What are the most desirable talents and abilities the pastor should have?", sixty-nine percent checked a strong sense of calling; forty-seven percent human warmth; forty-one percent abundant spirituality (*yutakana reisei*); forty-one percent broad-mindedness. It is clear that pastors are expected to have warm human qualities. On the other hand, charismatic appeal, office skills, a leadership with administrative skills, the ability to organize, planning skills, and the ability to teach are not so much asked for. This is definitely the image of a pastor whose church is already in existence, since from the perspective of church growth the abilities to lead, organize, plan and teach are very important. There is a basic problem here which becomes evident especially when it is observed that only twenty-five percent of the participants wanted their pastor to be an ardent soul winner. This shows that the church members don't regard their pastor as an evangelist, but rather as one who takes care of them.

We have already shown what a great influence Puritanism had on the Japanese churches. The question arises as to what degree Puritanism has helped to create an elite consciousness among Christians while making an ethical impact on Japanese society. Especially since so many samurais were converted to Christianity, Christianity became considered to be a rigid, legalistic religion with a high sense of morality and an intellectual quality about it. That is why many common people find it difficult even now to enter a church. They feel that Christianity has a cold and critical attitude towards Japanese culture and religions while being itself an idealistic, highbrow religion. This kind of feeling arises when Christianity is propagated in a legalistic way. The Japanese churches are overpoweringly under the influence of the Reformed and Puritan trends. The Lutheran emphasis on grace alone and the clear distinction between Law and Gospel are simply not known by the general public. When good deeds are preached before the grace of God has been thoroughly grasped, Christianity becomes a religion of good works.

In Japanese churches it is important to return to Luther's concept of Christian freedom. It is also important to learn Christian behavior in the environment of Christian fellowship. Philosopher Arimasa Mori characterizes the

the Lutheran church in the following way: "From the mysticism of the Lutheran church there flows a stream of pure warmth." The religiosity described here is very meaningful to the Japanese people. Mysticism, which is a negative term for many Japanese Protestants, becomes wholesome when it conveys Christ to us. In his book *The Theology of the Pain of God*, Kazo Kitamori has written a chapter called "The Pain of God and Mysticism." There he discusses mysticism in the context of Lutheran tradition. While the Lutheran church in Japan is deepening its understanding of Lutheran theology, it has a unique possibility to develop it so that it takes into consideration reaching out to new people.

*The church formation which is based on the priesthood of all believers*

Christians who have been redeemed by Christ become a praising and serving people. Luther called this "the joyful fellowship between Christ and the Christians." In Japanese it is called *arigatai majiwari* which means "thankful fellowship." Kitamori calls it "thanking for grace."

It is strange that so little is said about praise in theology. The item of praise is not found in many standard reference works. One cannot help thinking that the silence about praise as a response to grace has a subtle influence on concrete ethical problems. This cannot be excused by saying that theology tries to be strictly objective. There is a danger especially in Japan that while ignoring praise and *ho-on* (repaying the kindness received), which are very important elements in the religious culture of this country, we lose the point of contact with people. Says Kitamori: "We cannot find any point of contact as long as we don't reach the hearts of the common people."

Kichio Hayashi has commented on the changes in the consciousness of the Japanese people. His observations are based on a country-wide survey made on this subject. According to him there are things that are changing and other things that are not changing in the Japanese consciousness. Young people are abandoning the old Meiji standard of "either the traditional or the modern viewpoint." They tend to make decisions on the basis of the goodness or badness of the thing in question. The thing which has not changed, however, is the importance put on the *giri-ninjo* relationships (friction between public and private responsibilities) and that of deep religiousness (*yutakana shukyoshin*). The characteristically Japanese way of thinking has not changed, as far as the importance of human relationships and longing for something greater than man is concerned.

If that is true, we have a great opportunity for reaching also the new type of Japanese people with the Gospel message. At this point, the concept of Christian praise becomes important. The thankfulness toward Christ takes its concrete form in Christian service (*hoshi*). Christ himself didn't come to be served but to serve. Consequently Christians do the same. This is what Luther

called "the priesthood of all believers." For him it was something very important. We must, however, ask ourselves whether the principle of all believers being ministers has ever been fully functional during the history of the Lutheran church.

As far as concrete evangelization is concerned, most Christians seem to regard it as something done by pastors and missionaries. The question remains whether the principles of the priesthood of all believers, the gifts of grace and the importance of the laity have ever been fully put into place in the evangelistic activities of the Lutheran churches in Japan, or whether they are only dead letters in the churches' constitutions. When gifts of grace are put into concrete use in a church, the system of pastors, elders and deacons usually evolves as a result. It is, however, not enough that this system fulfills its administrative function. It should also fulfill its evangelizing function.

The pastors of the Meiji era were burning with evangelistic fervor. Uemura Masahisa is a typical example of the Japanese pastors of that time. He defined the church as "a perpetual movement of groups which have made evangelization their great calling (*shimei*)." Uemura himself arranged evangelistic activities. Unfortunately, even the churches that were born as a result of his activity became administrative organizations, or "closed groups," where the elders functioned only in the administrative field. This happened because Uemura used American and European churches as models for his church planting. Even an outstanding pastor like Uemura struggled between evangelization as a perpetual movement and the church which easily becomes only an administrative organization. We can learn from this that the Japanese churches have to undergo a structural change if they want to get rid of their closed character.

The meaning of the American church growth movement is very important. In Japan the churches that are committed to the church growth movement are the ones with a comparatively short history and an evangelical background, whereas the more traditional denominations are keeping at a distance. This is because the people usually don't see how the structure of a church is very important as far as church growth is concerned. In addition, the Lutheran church should connect its traditional doctrine of the church to theories of church growth and put them into use in this way. Kent Hunter is pursuing church growth based on the Lutheran doctrine of the priesthood of all believers. First, he tries to change the responsibilities of the pastor. The pastor has to work in order to build up all the saints ("...to prepare God's people for works of service, so that the body of Christ may be built up"—Eph. 4:12). The actual work of the church is left in the hands of believers. What, then, is the pastor good for now? He must study more and carry a greater responsibility than ever before. Now he is expected to have high-level abilities not only for educating the believers, but also for training them.

In the heart of the constitution of the West Japan Lutheran Church is evangelization (*dendo*). Moreover, the gifts of grace are emphasized because of

the idea of a laity-centered church. The importance of the laity has always been a kind of motto of this church. It is neither derived from the Pentecostal movement of the first part of the 20th century, nor from the charismatic movement, but from the tradition of a Norwegian laity movement. The movement was started in Norway in the midst of strained relations with the state church. This movement developed a sense of mission which wanted to "reach out perpetually." In Japan, however, there existed neither a church which would be the basis of such a movement, nor a support for church workers dedicated to such a movement. So, in Japan, out of this movement there grew only small meetings around missionaries.

When we call something a "laity movement," we are not talking about administrative functions, but a movement where Christians are responsible for and serve as vehicles of evangelization. The question still remains, however, as to whether the small churches in Japan haven't become only administrative organizations. Shouldn't also the focus of the West Japan Lutheran Church be changed to a more evangelical emphasis? This idea is supported by the evidence of what is happening in other present-day churches.

Yves Congar, a Catholic priest, wrote a book in 1954 called *Theology of the Laity*. In 1958, H. Kraemer, a Dutch Protestant, claimed likewise in his book *Theology of Believers* that it is the common Christians who form the essence of any church. The Second Vatican Council (1962) emphasized the apostolic task of the laity. The Pentecostal movement has expanded so as to become a movement of masses. It has entered into traditional denominations through the charismatic movement and deepened there the interest in "spiritual gifts." Peter Wagner says that all those elements have become motivating forces in the church growth movement.

The problem is how to move the central focus of a church from the pastor to the believers and how to use this change as an opportunity for promoting evangelization. What is needed first is a change in the consciousness of the pastors.

### *Advocating pastoral evangelization and evangelistic pastoral care*

Yasuo Furuya advocates "at least 10%" as a goal of the evangelization endeavor in Japan. He emphasizes the importance of home meetings as well as that of reaching the common people. Mamoru Nakajima would plant as many churches with a membership of forty to fifty people as possible. He thinks that the evangelization of Japan goes forward best through planting new churches.

We have, however, already seen that the problems of the Japanese churches are of a structural kind. As for the Lutheran churches, their average attendance in Sunday services is around thirty people. What they should do, in my opinion,

is make concrete plans how to raise that number from twenty to thirty, from thirty to forty and so on. This, I think, is the urgent problem in our churches.

For that purpose we must readjust the traditional Lutheran concept of pastoral care as "the soul-care" of the church members and make it usable also when reaching out to new people. Both evangelization and pastoral care should be in the process of becoming more "Gospel-like." These two elements should also be in balance and contribute to the building of churches that are able to be "perpetually evangelizing."

In order to make this happen, pastors must mainly work in training the leaders of the laity because their existence is of crucial importance. The leaders should be responsible for their groups and practice both Bible study and pastoral care inside the groups. This is the pattern inherited from the tradition of Pietism. On Sundays the groups gather in the church, while on weekdays they have home meetings. It is expected that constantly new people are invited to those meetings. In other words, the place of evangelization is moved from the church building to houses, to the midst of the everyday life of Christians. To use an extreme example, both evangelizing activities and pastoral care are going on, even if the church is closed on weekdays. The pastor visits various groups and home meetings, where the Christians learn to conduct group activities and pastoral care, as well as to put into *practice* the things they have learned.

The concentration around the church service on Sunday and the expanding on weekdays to other areas—this alternating movement puts the battle front constantly farther and farther out.

Consequently, the responsibility of the church board consists not so much of the administration of the church as of functioning as a workshop of new ideas about how to go forward. There is a deep meaning in that the Bible lists the gift of administration without further ado together with the other gifts of grace. In our day, when administrative organizations are becoming more and more gigantic and authoritarian, it is important that the church boards give all the more preference to soul-care and evangelization. The pastors, on their part, must decide on the direction in which the church is heading, give visions to Christians, and otherwise be their spiritual leaders.

The West Japan, Kinki and Deaconry Churches are neither intellectual- nor experience-centered church bodies. If the things characteristic to them are put into positive use, these churches may develop a way of evangelizing and church planting which would be unique among Japanese churches.

### *Conclusion*

The constitution of the West Japan Church states as follows: "The church and all its members try with their words and deeds to lead other people to Christ." Up to this day many overseas churches have offered and prayed much for the evangelization of Japan. As far as we can see, spreading the Good News

in Japan is extremely difficult even now. The reason for this lies not only in Japanese history, culture and some religious factors, but also in the structure of the churches themselves. In this essay I have tried to examine the problems in the structures of churches as well as those in the consciousness of believers and pastors. At the same time, I studied the possibilities of evangelization and church growth.

I came to realize that the Puritanical faith of 19th-century America, and the image of the church it has brought about, are still in existence in Japan. One has to think about ways of getting rid of this element.

The Lutheran church doesn't differ outwardly in any special way from the other Japanese churches. However, where the contents of faith are concerned, it has two unique features, namely its Christ-centered mysticism and the priesthood of all believers. In this respect the Lutheran church can make a contribution to Japanese culture. The church must be protected against becoming an administrative organization. Instead, it must become "a perpetual movement" which combines evangelization with pastoral care and counseling.

In order to reach this goal, Christians must become the center of the church and carry the responsibility for both the pastoral care and the evangelization. The pastor, on the other hand, must take care of the building up of the other Christians. In the midst of the alternation of Sunday services and weekday meetings, the church can become a movement which is truly committed to the salvation of souls and caring for them.



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