

TRUTH TRIUMPHANT: CHAPTER 23

The Church In Japan and the Philippines

The spread of Buddhism did not destroy, though it may have transformed, the ancient beliefs of the Japanese; nor did it prevent them from practicing other forms of religion. The ancient Chinese cult of heaven worship was not neglected, as is clear from its official chronicles.¹

JAPAN owes much of her civilization to the Church of the East. This may come as a surprise to many. If so, there will be more surprises in store for those who are not informed as to how strong a determining factor Christianity was in the career of the Island Empire.

The religion indigenous to Japan is Shintoism. The meaning of "Shinto" is "the way of the gods." Dr. Nitabe does not hesitate to say that Shintoism is the most polytheistic of polytheisms.² It sees a god in everything, whether in the sublime operations of nature or in the humble objects of furniture in the kitchen. Shintoism remained the sole proprietor of the Japanese religious soul until Christian doctrines and Buddhistic organization brought their influences to bear upon it.

The answer to the query as to how Shintoism could maintain its hold upon the Nipponese with its limited offerings, is found in the fact that it makes a strong bond for national unity. Though the records upon which a history of Japan is built are of comparatively recent origin, the traditions of the people go back more than six hundred years before Christ. The veneration in which the emperor is held has always been the leading Japanese tradition. In every period of the nation's life he has been recognized as a true descendant of the sun-goddess. To that extent he has been considered divine. Shintoism is the expression of this cult. All points of national existence center around the supreme figure of the emperor.

Amazing transformations have taken place in the social, political, and religious life of the people; but these two elements - emperor worship and Shintoism - have persisted through Japan's history. Developments have affected even these. Japanese scholars have been graduated with highest honors from Western universities only to return home without the slightest change in their religious convictions regarding the imperial family. This is an illustration of the principle that the head can talk to the head, but the head cannot talk to the heart. Education does not necessarily change the heart.

Japan's records of the past are both written and traditional. The earliest written documents relating to history are the Kojiki, penned in mingled archaic Japanese and Chinese and the Nihongi, written wholly in Chinese. Both date from the eighth century C. E. The historian Underwood writes:

The Kojiki has sometimes been called the "Bible of the Japanese," but it is difficult to find a religious motive behind its compilation, save in so far as it sets forth the old stories of the 'origin of deities and the establishment of men.'¹ The predominant aim of the compilation was to demonstrate the divine origin of the ruling family and the remote antiquity of the foundation of the state.³

Of the Nihongi, he says that it covers in part the same ground as the other document, with alternate versions of the same myth or event.

For the first twelve centuries of the Christian Era, the inescapable trait of Japan's history was its servile imitation and copying of the ways and life of China. It received the penetration of Chinese thought and language. In this respect, Japan was practically a province of the Celestial Empire. As P. Y. Saeki puts it:

If the court buildings in Hsianfu were painted red, so were those at Nara. If a temple was built and supported by the Chinese government in each province, so must it be in Japan. If the birthday of the Chinese emperor was observed as a national holiday in China, so was it here. If the nobles and upper class in the Chinese capital played football, it was soon imitated by the Japanese aristocracy in Nara, and Asuka-oka.⁴

Buddhism was among the influences from China deeply affecting Japan. How Buddhism itself was profoundly transformed by Christianity and how this force dominated Japanese history will be related.

The emperor is looked upon as a direct descendant from the sun-goddess, Amaterasu. Shinto priests assert that the temple at Ise, the national shrine of Amaterasu, was erected by revelation at the very time Christ was born.⁵ They claim incarnation for their sun-goddess as Christians do for the Messiah. There are many points of similarity, if not of identity, between Christianity and Shintoism. The Shintoists are, therefore, in a position to contend that their revelation is the original which the apostles counterfeited, or that both religions have a common origin. Ise, a religious center, is the holy of holies to the Nipponese. Millions daily turn to it in prayer as in other lands religionists do to Mecca or Jerusalem. In solving the problems which are bound to come in the clash between the Orient and the Occident, it is important to study how the national religion of Japan came to approximate Christianity in doctrine and in religious ceremonies. How did Shintoism and Buddhism come to fuse in Japan, and how did this national religion set out to rival Bible revelations?

Counterfeiting Christianity in the Orient

Buddhism, in general, is not today what it was at the time of its founder's death. The original doctrine taught by Buddha lacked the depth, breadth, and force of the messages of the Bible. If it had not obtained in Asoka (emperor of the great Hindu Empire in India about 273 B.C.) a patron and an apostle, it probably would not have survived. Although Buddhism in India enjoyed imperial support from many different emperors, such as the true church of Christ never enjoyed, it was so sterile and so unresponsive to the needs of the human soul that if it had not appropriated the satisfying doctrines and the productive machinery of Christianity, it would be a dead issue today. As it now stands, Buddhism is one of the greatest religions of the world.

Buddhism, the new faith which its founder placed in the midst of a cruel, filthy, primitive Hinduism, was quite an advance over the crude idolatries in his native land. Yet it was a meager and unsatisfying doctrine of man's relation to God and of his hopes in the future. It was, moreover, too weak to stand up against a rejuvenated Hinduism and an advancing Christianity. In its earlier form, it had no trinity.⁶ It presented a clearer idea of divinity than had previously come to India through Hinduism, but it left a great gulf between man and God. It had no Savior. It had no person of the Godhead akin to the Christian's conception of the Holy Ghost. Man was left to find within himself the power to bridge the chasm between himself and his Creator. Vincent Smith writes: "The primitive Buddhism which ignored the divine was known in later times as Hina-yana, or Lesser Vehicle of salvation, while the modified religion which recognized the value of prayer and acknowledged Buddha as the Savior of mankind was

called the Maha-yana, or the Greater Vehicle."⁷ The great doctrine of salvation through faith alone, or Mahayana, appeared in Buddhism about a thousand years after the death of its founder.

Buddhism entered China in the year A.D. 67. Six years prior, Emperor Ming Ti had had a dream which produced in his soul a consternation as profound as that which alarmed Nebuchadnezzar. The Chinese ruler, so the legend goes, beheld a great golden image flying from the heights to pause over the palace in which he slept. At that spot it halted long enough to sway backward and forward. The sun and the moon falling in radiant splendor upon the heavenly visitant made it glow with a light supernal. The emperor called for one of his able ministers, who promptly interpreted the event as a visit from the Indian deity Buddha. Whereupon the monarch commissioned a deputation of eighteen men to travel west for information about this Buddha.

The commission returned, accompanied by white horses laden with writings and relics, to Loyang, capital of China at that time. Thereupon the emperor built to the new faith a temple, and called it the White Horse, on account of the animals which carried back from India the relics and writings of Buddhism.

Karl Reichelt adds, "Thus began the invading stream of Buddhist monks from India to China, which continued for over seven hundred years, and which became of such great significance to the 'Middle Kingdom.'"⁸

While Buddhism was making its way into China, it was undergoing a transformation. Though supported in the beginning by imperial patronage, it found itself too cold and sterile as a doctrine to compete with Confucianism, the leading indigenous religion in China.⁹ Contact with the Church of the East was an opportunity for Buddhism to assimilate the invincible doctrines of a religion whose founder, Christ, had appeared nearly six centuries after Buddha lived.

This is exactly what took place. Shan-tao, a prominent Chinese Buddhist priest who died in 681, began to proclaim through China salvation by faith in Buddha under his new name, Amitabha. Shan-tao also taught the doctrine of a trinity so successfully that it was said of him, "when he preached, the three Buddhas appeared in his breath."¹⁰ He promoted the idea of a vicarious savior of an unlimited light or of eternal life by faith in Amitabha. Where did he get this conception? Evidently from Christian missionaries.

To prove that Christian missionaries and the Buddhist leader Shan-tao were both present in the capital of China during the same generation, it is only necessary to notice, in the following quotation, that "Kao-Tsung (A.D. 650-683), who was a great friend of Shan-tao, was the very emperor who most helped the Assyrian Church in China."¹¹ Buddhism under the direction of the Chinese, a race more creative than the Hindu, was guided by New Testament truths. Thus it raised itself from a cold doctrine of salvation by works to the heights of the good news of salvation by faith. Reichelt says of Amitabha, the new name in Buddhism, "What has been said here of Amitabha will be sufficient to give an impression of the tremendous significance his name acquired in China, and will show how all the threads in the web of Mahayana lead back to him."¹²

"We have thus," writes Arthur Lloyd, "as it were, three different Buddhist trinities., all claiming to come from the beginnings of Mahayana, all supposed to have appeared simultaneously in China, just at the time when Christian missions first made their way to that empire, and all three brought over to Japan

during the early years of the Nara period. At bottom the three sets meant pretty much the same thing."¹³ There is a Chinese Buddhism and a Japanese Buddhism, as well as an Indian Buddhism.

Buddhism Adopts the Second Coming of Buddha

The Buddhists, In Adding Amitabha To Their Godhead, Had Been Enabled To preach a redeemer. In order to satisfy the longings of the sinful soul, they went further. They were compelled to prophesy a second coming or a glorious return of their new mediator who had been translated to nirvana, their heaven. After the flight of centuries, he would return, they said, to earth. One Orientalist writes of the second coming of Buddha under this Japanese title, "Maitreya (Miroku) the Loving One who is Returning."¹⁴

In order to behold the influence of this teaching in Japan as well as in China, let one journey from Changan, the ancient capital of China, to Kyoto, the former capital of Japan, and ascend by the inclined railway to Matthew Koya, the holy mountain of Japan. In the famous cemetery at the top of the mountain he will find a replica of the celebrated stone monument in Changan, China, Concerning the famous cemetery and the Buddhist monastery therein, founded by Kobo Daishi (A.D. 816), Saeki writes:

It [the stone] stands just within the entrance to the wonderful cemetery of the Okuno-in, where tens of thousands of the Japanese, from emperors to peasants, have been laid to rest in expectation of the coming of Miroku - the expected Messias of the Buddhists - during the eleven hundred years since their beloved and venerated saint Kobo Daishi returned from Ch'ang-an, where he is supposed to have seen that "Speaking Stone" which the Nestorian monks had erected there only twenty-three years before his arrival.¹⁵

Where did Buddhism in general and Japanese Buddhism in particular conceive the idea of the second coming of Miroku, the Japanese Buddhist messiah? As they witnessed the amazing grip of Christianity on the human race, they recognized how ethereal and illusive was their picture of an immortal soul without a body watching the years fly by in an endless chain somewhere. They recognized how gripping was the teaching of the believers in the New Testament when they pictured the Lord Jesus Christ returning in the clouds of heaven with power and great glow. It was then that they moved to enrich the body of their teachings with a similar Messiah who would at the end of a limited number of years descend from heaven to usher in a Buddhist millennium. The deepest and liveliest thoughts of Buddhism were bound up in Miroku, as the Japanese called him, the man of the future.

The Eclipse of Shintoism by a Christianized Buddhism

The profound transformation of Shintoism in Japan by a Christianized Buddhism centers around the figure of Kobo Daishi, Japan's mightiest intellect. It was he who founded on Matthew Koya a monastery which is now the largest and perhaps the most flourishing in Japan.¹⁶ Having evinced in early youth unusual intellectual brilliancy, he was sent by the Japanese emperor to Changan, the capital of China, to make an effort to reconcile Buddhism and Shintoism. Saeki maintains that the Buddhist convent where Kobo Daishi dwelt for two years ¹⁷ was only one street from the great Christian training center built by imperial order for the Church of the East in Changan.

Thus, in the capital city of China, when China was the greatest empire in the world, the Christian delegations from their Persian headquarters were placed face to face with the learned delegation from

Japan. The question now arises, Did the Christians from Persia learn from Kobo Daishi, or did the Japanese delegation learn from the Christian missionaries? The Chinese civilization had been raised to a higher level by the Church of the East through the arrival of the gospel missionaries from Persia. Therefore, the Christian leaders came to China to give; Kobo Daishi, the heathen leader from Japan, came to China to receive.

What did he get? It is reasonably safe to conclude that this Kobo Daishi, whose name is a household word today throughout Japan, returned to the Sunrise Kingdom with the higher teachings of a civilization which had dawned upon China when Christianity came.

First, he simplified the Japanese style of writing, which up to then had been an obstacle in translating the best works from other lands into Japanese thought and literature. When he was in China he was most impressed with the teaching of Amitabha or, as the Japanese named him, Amita. Amitabha was the divinity who obtained the supreme position in the Buddhist body of doctrine. Kobo Daishi had been sent to Japan not to reconcile Christianity with Shintoism, but to reconcile Buddhism with Shintoism. Nevertheless, he was so powerfully impressed by Christianity that when he returned to his native land he introduced a new body of doctrine which he called Shingon, or true word. In the course of time this Shingon sect was destined to become the largest sect in Japan. Baptism became an important rite in the mysteries of Shingon. Kobo Daishi succeeded in reconciling the native gods of Japan with the Buddhist divinity. Thus, he could identify the Japanese sun-goddess with Amita, the great illuminator.

"Shinto architecture took many hints from Buddhist temples," says Sansom.¹⁸ Many other items might be enumerated to show how Kobo Daishi, mightily influenced by Christianity, brought about such a reconciliation between his native idolatry of Japan and Buddhism that from that day forward Japanese civilization was indebted to Christianity through the medium of China.

The Church of the East Monument in Japan

The church monument in stone on the summit of Matthew Koya, Japan, is a replica of the famous stone unearthed in Changan, China's capital, about 1625; and it is the Oriental key to the halls of the Christian past in the Orient. In these halls the modern world may walk and see again the vast work which the Church of the East did in the Celestial Empire. The stories engraved there present Bible facts touching patriarchs, prophets, Christ, and the apostles. The Chinese Christian leaders, whose names were engraved by the chisel, resided in the spacious Bible training center only a short distance from the Buddhist temple in China in which Kobo Daishi dwelt. Christian evangelists came to China to bring the spiritual light and civilization of the West. Kobo Daishi came to China to bring back from her to Japan the best civilization which she had. M. Anesaki says:

Here at Koya-san hundreds of people are seen day in and day out, many of whom are pious pilgrims in white robes, chanting their diverse formulas, but there are also many who are curious visitors.... This cemetery stretches for more than a mile from the center to the mausoleum of Kobo Daishi, where, according to the legend, he caused himself to be buried alive in his sammai, or posture of meditation.¹⁹

In the centuries immediately preceding and following 804, Japan from a cultural standpoint could reasonably be considered a part of China. The lanes of civilizing culture which ran from the capital to the eastern province of China extended across the water to the Sunrise Kingdom. As before mentioned, the monument to the Church of the East was erected under imperial favor. The echoes of

its magnificent dedicatory ceremonies were still reverberating when Kobo Daishi resided in the same city. Like some chapters in the Bible which give much in rapid sentences, this stone discloses the teachings which raised China from the depths of ignorance to its position as a mighty civilization; and which in so doing, raised Japan with it. "It brings to light," writes P. Y. Saeki, speaking of the original monument in Changan, "the background of the Ch'ang-an civilization which influenced the neighboring countries of High Asia.... Besides the stone is actually the great torch which reveals the nature of the civilization which the Japanese received from the Asiatic continent as the result of their intercourse with China during the T'ang dynasty."²⁰

There are three turning points which changed the history of Japan prior to the nineteenth century. The first is the return of Kobo Daishi from China to give his report to the government and become the author of influential works. By his powerful preaching he brought into existence a new sect which even today is the largest religious association in Japan. Before the arrival of Christianity, China's civilization and religious conceptions had been devoid of the best in scholarship and in the graces of the gospel which the Church in the Wilderness had already brought forth in Persia and in Ireland. Now Japan, as well as China, was feasting on the treasures brought forth by the West and imprinted upon China. China had been going to school to the Church of the East for two hundred years when the Japanese scholar came to spy out Changan's glory. There he encountered the "Pure Land School," the strongest and most influential of the Buddhist sects. It had been brought to perfection by Shan-tao who developed his teachings while the Nestorian mission flourished.²¹

It was Shan-tao who brought the Amitabha doctrine, or the conception of a compassionate savior in the Buddhist godhead, to its fullest presentation. "The holy trinity from the West appears more distinctly."²² Kobo Daishi went a step further. He appropriated all this, and with it amalgamated Shintoism. His new sect, the Shingonshu, did not destroy the Shinto deities, it only transformed them. Of Kobo Daishi, G. B. Sansom writes:

His memory lives all over the country, his name is a household word in the remotest places, not only as a saint, but as a preacher, a scholar, a poet, a sculptor, a painter, an inventor, and explorer, and - sure passport to fame - a great calligrapher. Many miraculous legends cluster about his name.²³

The brilliant ceremonies which accompanied the setting up of the Christian memorial monument in Changan in 781, found their re-duplication in 1911 when the replica stone was erected on Matthew Koya, Japan. Because of the galaxy of circumstances clustering around the sojourn of Kobo Daishi in Changan near to the original stone, an exact copy of it was erected with dedicatory ceremonies near the grave of the great teacher. The duplicate was set up to call to the mind of Japan, and particularly to the Buddhist church, the source from which their brilliant leader drew his inspiration. As an example of how the Church of the East penetrated the thought and life of modern Japan, see how the doctrine of the second coming of Christ in glory was counterfeited by Buddhism. Thus, Sansom writes of Kobo Daishi:

When he passed out of this life on Koya he did not die, for he lies uncorrupted in his sepulcher, awaiting the coming of Maitreya, the Buddhist Messiah. More authentic, if less wonderful, merits ascribed to him are the introduction of tea into Japan, much useful work like bridge building and path making, and the invention of the kana syllabary. Such traditions of excellence cling only to the memory of truly exceptional men, and we may be sure that in him Japan nourished a genius, probably one of the greatest in her history.²⁴

The Crushing Defeat of China by Japan

The second decisive turning point in the history of Japan was her repulse of China's large armada about 1284. More than four hundred years had passed since the transformation in Japan's civilization was accomplished by Kobo Daishi and his associates. During this time she continued to look up to China as her superior. There was no other worthwhile nation whom she could contact, and so possess an opportunity of comparison. During the first twelve hundred years of the Christian Era, China had never taken enough notice of Japan to desire to subdue it territorially. The hour was reached, however, when a Mongolian occupied the throne of the Orient. Kublai Khan, succeeding to the throne of the Mongolian empire, removed his capital to Peking, China.

The first attempt of Kublai Khan against Japan, when his fleet carried thirty thousand troops against that country, was not a success. As the island rang with triumph, the central administration was satisfied that the Chinese monarch would renew his assault with larger forces. Seven years passed by, and during that time the whole empire, whether nobles, farmers, or slaves, responded as one man in preparation. The blow fell June, 1281. Two formidable armies sailed away for Japan composed of more than one hundred thousand Chinese, Mongolians, and Koreans. The second invasion was a crushing defeat for China. It meant more than that; it meant the loss of prestige. Japan henceforth ceased to look with respect and trust upon her big neighbor. It was a great turning point in Japanese history. During the centuries from 1200 to 1500, the Island Empire sprang forward independently in government, war, architecture, literature, and religion.

The Church of the East also reached its peak, especially during the supremacy of the Chinese Mongolian rulers when Christian teachers enjoyed not only tolerance and freedom of movement, but even the favor of the emperors. It had ministered in Asia to many more nations and peoples than had the Papacy. During these same centuries the Reformation arose to check ecclesiastical tyranny in the West. But now the Church of the East faced its greatest temptations and trials. Prosperity at length undermined it. Reliance upon inner inspiration and upon ceremonies gradually came to be substituted for the Sacred Scriptures. Although looseness of doctrine did not particularly manifest itself, the spirit of urgency and definiteness declined. Simplicity of living ceased to be a characteristic of the people so long devoted to their task. The structure of the faith, generally speaking, remained; but the early spirit of devotion had disappeared. Such was its condition when the fierceness of Mohammedan fanaticism under Tamerlane overwhelmed it in central Asia.

How Tamerlane wreaked his cruelty on all nations from Russia to China has already been related. When the devastating storm had passed, there could be found only a few hundred thousand members of the glorious Church of the East which once counted the faithful by millions. It will be told later what marvelous means God had in reserve to compensate this loss.

Japan's Struggle With the Jesuits

The third turning point in the history of Japan is the arrival of the Jesuit missionaries in the middle of the sixteenth century, which was followed by the rapid progress of their propaganda, the bloody persecution of their converts, and the final expulsion. The restoration of peace and political unity at the beginning of the seventeenth century was followed by the extermination of Catholic propaganda and foreign intercourse.²⁵

How did the entrance of Jesuit power into Japan and the Philippines influence these countries as far as Christianity is concerned? William E. Griffis, authoritative writer upon Japan, says:

Christianity, in the sixteenth century, came to Japan only in its papal or Roman Catholic form. While in it was infused much of the power and spirit of Loyola and Xavier, yet the impartial critic must confess that this form was military, oppressive and political. Nevertheless, though it was impure and saturated with the false principles, the vices and the embodied superstitions of corrupt southern Europe, yet, such as it was, Portuguese Christianity confronted the worst condition of affairs, morally, intellectually and materially which Japan has known in historic times.... In the presence of soldierlike Buddhist priests, who had made war their calling, it would have been better if the Christian missionaries had avoided their bad example, and followed only in the footsteps of the Prince of Peace; but they did not. On the contrary, they brought with them the spirit of the Inquisition then in full blast in Spain and Portugal, and the machinery with which they had been familiar for the reclamation of native and Dutch 'heretics.' Xavier, while at Goa, had even invoked the secular arm to set up the Inquisition in India, and doubtless he and his followers would have put up this infernal engine in Japan if they could have done so. They had stamped and crushed out 'heresy' in their own country, by a system of hellish tortures which in its horrible details is almost indescribable.²⁶

The same writer attests concerning the work of the Jesuits in Japan: "Whole districts were ordered to become Christians. The bonzes [Buddhist priests] were exiled or killed, and fire and sword as well as preaching were employed as a means of conversion."²⁷

No history of Japan would be complete without the record of the century-long work of the Jesuits in that country, their methods, and above all, the disastrous effect they produced upon the nation with respect to Christianity. It was the dread of the uprisings caused by the characteristic cruel work of this organization which produced the final decision of the rulers to shut the doors of the nation to Christianity.²⁸

It is greatly to the credit of the Japanese people that they manifested such patience with a religious movement which they linked with foreign suppression. They believed that the safety of the realm was at stake. When at last they put up the signboards all over Japan, "Christians to the sea," it was because their conception of the gospel was from an organization bearing the name of Christ but so opposed to progress as to lead Sansom to write:

Those were the days when Leonardo da Vinci had laid the foundations of the experimental method and therefore of modern scientific inquiry; Copernicus had taught a new theory of the universe; Harvey had lighted on the circulation of the blood; and Gilbert had commenced the study of electricity. But since these discoveries were unpalatable to the Inquisition, which burned Bruno at the stake and imprisoned Galileo, it is unlikely that the Japanese gained any inkling of them from the missionaries.²⁹

Japan now took the resolution to shut herself off from the rest of the world. For nearly two centuries no foreigner was allowed to approach her shores. She knew nothing of the outside world, which in turn knew practically nothing of her until Commodore Perry of the United States Navy anchored his fleet in Uraga harbor. That was the time when mothers hushed their fretful children with the question, "Do you think the Mongols are coming?" The immediate result of the negotiations between the American representative and the agent of the Japanese government was the opening of the ports to foreign commerce in 1859. After that, Japan sent to England to organize her navy; to Germany to organize her

army; and to America to organize her system of education. Had Nippon been favored early with the light of the great Protestant Reformation, and had she continued with it as it moved on to liberty and the Bible, there might now be a different story to tell.

The Subjection of the Philippines

There is evidence that before the Spaniards brought the Philippine Islands under their dominion, education was, comparatively speaking, on a high level. As the Philippines had had no contact with the civilization of the West except through Christianity, the only conclusion that can be drawn is that the splendid state of education at the time of the Spanish conquest (1569), was due to the Church of the East.

What, however, was the condition of things after the Islands were taken over by the Spaniards? We quote from Blair and Robertson:

If, as is credibly asserted, the knowledge of reading and writing was more generally diffused in the Philippines than among the common people of Europe, we have the singular result that the islands contained relatively more people who could read, and less reading matter of any but purely religious interests, than any other community in the world.³⁰

The same authors add that it was a singular fact that in all the lists there is no translation of the parts of the Bible.³¹

The rise, growth, and retreat of the Church of the East has been recounted that it might be an inspiration for the Remnant Church today.