

## EVANGELISM TOWARD ATHEISTS

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### 1. Introduction: atheists in Japan

When I was given this subject my first thought was of the virtual non-existence of real atheists in Japan. It is, of course, true that many Japanese do not believe in either God or gods. The fact that they do not believe in them however, is not the same as denying the existence of a deity. For instance, they participate in Shintoistic rights. They feel it is good and necessary to take part. Failure to participate is regarded as a socially despicable attitude.

Their attitude toward Buddhism is almost the same. To an average Japanese, religion is a matter of ethos, i.e., it is a matter of the customs and ethics of the society. Japanese "atheists" do not have a god whom they *have* to deny or whom they *have* to rebel against. The nation of Japan possesses so many gods and religions that probably the number is so large that it is difficult to find a similar phenomenon in any other developed country. Truly Japanese are a "religious people" (Acts 17:22-23). Here, I cite Paul's words concerning the Greeks because I feel Japanese are similar to the Greeks of those days in that the thinking of Japanese is realistic, worldly, and optimistic.

The religious attitude of many Japanese is that they recognize a god or gods only when it is necessary to do so. They do not relate their actual daily lives to their god's blessings. They ignore god or gods entirely. They are totally indifferent. I would call Japanese indifferent atheists.

There are two types of indifference. One type regards all religions the same. Another type is the simple indifferent attitude toward any god. The usual Japanese "atheists" belong to the second type. Theoretically, if we analyze them according to categories of thought they are simply agnostics. Probably what I have been describing can be applied to almost all cultures and nations of the world, but it is perhaps most evident in Japan.

Evangelism toward atheists in Japan is, therefore, virtually the same as evangelism among the youth in today's world. Today's youth evangelism is directed to the kind of young people whose characteristics are that of anti-establishment and anti-conventionalism. Today's youth in Japan are very anti-traditional. Because of that, we might judge them and say that they have gone away from old Japanese thinking. They themselves might use borrowed atheistic terms, but these are only "borrowed capital." When they reach middle-age, we see them fast turning back to liking things "Japanese." They start wearing a kimono and live with godshelves in their homes.

It is my desire to set up guidelines for evangelism among atheists in Japan considering the above mentioned factors. Twenty years ago I was a card-carrying member of the Japan Communist Party. At that time I was

a belligerent atheist. Nobody can speak away from one's own background, and I will have to give these proposed guidelines with my own background in mind.

### 2. Problems facing Japanese youth

It is impossible to treat all the problems in this small treatise. I will deal with some of the most important aspects.

a. *Estrangement* — Youth is suffering from estrangement. The word estrangement is used in various meanings. Here, we will use it in its comprehensive sense.

According to the investigation of one leading medical school in Japan (Jikei Medical School) it is reported that 24.5 percent of 7, 8, and 9th graders have thought of suicide at least once. They also report 34.1 percent of 10, 11 and 12th graders and 40.6 percent of college students in Japan have pondered suicide. *Mainichi Shimbun* in its February 8, 1974, editorial reports that 65 percent of Kyoto University students have desired to commit suicide at least once, and that every year five or six actually do so. Kyoto University is one of the best schools in Japan. Recently its president in his inaugural message appealed to all the freshmen not to try suicide. Estrangement is a real problem. What are the causes of this estrangement into which so many people are driven?

(i) There is estrangement in urban society — Roughly 10 percent of the whole population of Japan is living in Tokyo. The 350 miles between Tokyo and Osaka is a long chain of big cities. This strip city called "Tokaido Megalopolis" contains more than 30 percent of the whole population of Japan. We can say that most all Japanese are forced to live in big cities. Hence it is no longer possible for Japanese to enjoy community life. A small village-like-community around the paddy field has disappeared. The "tonari-gumi" (neighborhood group) community unit of 6-10 households in village life is gone for good. In the modern urban society of Japan, nothing substitutes for these historical community units of society. People have left community gods back in their village. These protector gods and goddesses were the Baal of Japan. The old Japanese life was strongly knit together by an imposed "gonin-gumi" (obligation) group. This was a powerful weapon for feudalistic Japan. Now, as these have disappeared, Japanese are not able to maintain a sense of solidarity, because they lack faith in the "creator God." When modern Japan began, and the people started to live as individuals, each one lived an uncontrolled and highly individualistic existence without any regard for other individuals as well as society. This style of living is harmful; therefore, in the Japanese language, the word "individualism" has taken on a very undesirable flavor.

Thus, in Japan, urban society is a conglomeration of individuals without any sense of solidarity, and the size is just enormous. In these days we witness various sorts of citizens' movements, and almost all of them are protest movements, negative in character. We can call them corporate egotism and they have failed to produce or create a new community life. (Common among people in urban life is the "victim" complex. With this complex in their mentality, estrangement is further strengthened. In a society like this, the youth feel they are the worst of the victims.)

(ii) There is estrangement in technological society — The cause of estrangement in Japan is found right in these conglomerates of godless individuals. This estrangement is further enhanced by the characteristic features of modern society. Although modern technological developments with the aid of computers have produced great results, they have also produced a kind of society that tends to ignore the human individual and his value, and this immeasurably enhances estrangement of human individuals. Discontentment among the workers in highly automated factories has already been portrayed thirty years ago in Charlie Chaplin's *Modern Times*. The present technological society is much worse than that of Chaplin's day.

The concept of systems engineering was given birth by wartime necessities. Together with PART technique, this concept regards a human being as a mere factor, the most fragile in the whole system, and bound to make errors. The main concept is that the laying out of the master plan would be taken up by computers. Then this highly calculated and well-analyzed master plan is executed through human individuals. These people are not required to possess any creativity. The only creativity necessary is at the top level. Thus most human individuals are not playing a vital role. In fact, it is one factor which could be detrimental to the whole system. This is typical of the principle underlying the modern concept of systems and technology.

In the computer-controlled society, each individual is regarded as a mere sheet of punch card or a code number, and no more than that. The well-known play on words "computopia" is rather nothing more than the society of estranged people. It seems that our modern society is moving toward this destiny, and there is a strong reaction against this tendency from the young people.

(iii) There is estrangement in work — This, according to Karl Marx, is the situation in which the labor of one individual is sold to others completely, and the said worker has no claim on or share in his own product. If we ask the same question of a blue collar or white collar worker of today's society he will give us the same answer, though with a slightly different nuance. He feels that neither his labor nor his product is creating the bond which unites human individuals. In times past, artisans and manufacturers had pride and contentment as they saw other people using their products. Can we see this today? Look at a woman worker in a Sony color TV factory assembling TV sets. During any given day she has to solder the same part to a TV set over and over again. Can she be proud of the fact that her color TV will go to the US and that a certain family will watch the set? Various research reveals that when Japanese are asked about the value and purpose of life, most of them answer that it is to have a "meaningful" life. Also, according to United Nations research, of all nationalities the Japanese are known to express their dissatisfaction with the present condition of their lives to the greatest degree. This made Japanese politicians quite embarrassed at one time. In the present Japanese society, the only thing people can claim as a result of labor is "yen." We see people working just for money. It is clearly evident that "ugly Japanese" are being born this way, and that an "economic animal" also is being born. We may be able to interpret the

"workaholic" condition of the Japanese as a screaming cry of a nation which does not possess the knowledge of God. Because of this lack of knowledge of God it has no way of rescue from this horrible estrangement.

(iv) There is estrangement from self — This most horrible fate is exactly the condition of the Japanese youth now. Among them "sommushugi" is found. This might be translated as "three-nothingism" or the style of living which continues to lack three things. It is a purpose-less, interest-less, and vigor-less living. They do not find purpose in their lives, they do not have interest in what is happening around them, and their lives lack vigor. They live just by inertia. It seems that though they are living in society, in fact they are not. They are estranged from themselves.

The problem is that this is seen among not only part but almost all of the youth in Japanese society. The problem of suicide and the desire for suicide indicate this fact. Frustration is the password among them. Though this might be said of all youth throughout the world, many people point out that the infamous Japanese school system, especially its examination system, aggravates these facts. I agree with this. However, the true reason for this tendency is that they do not know God and they never think about God. Even the Delphic oracle "Know Thyself" is not a concern or interest to these young people. It is much more so with the true Word of God. It is a matter of course that they have been estranged from themselves and that they do not know themselves. They have completely lost sight of themselves.

b. *They have lost logic or certainty* — Another problem they face is that they have lost the principle of logic or the criteria of judgment. This also can be seen throughout the world. However, again I feel this is most evident in Japan.

(i) They have lost logic because of a dualistic world view — Francis A. Schaeffer has pointed out this factor sharply in his books, especially, *Escape from Reason*. When we deny God and when we hold the dualistic world view that this world is divided into two spheres, spiritual and natural, we find at once that we cannot understand this world logically. As Schaeffer rightly points out, immediately young people find that there are "boundaries of despair." They desperately find that they cannot understand the world, human life, and themselves. And they discontinue the effort to understand these, either by reason or by logic.

It is easily understood that this loss of ability to understand will take place much easier in Japanese society where people did not know God from the beginning. In such a society things are not judged according to truthfulness, but according to merit or demerit.

(ii) There is disbelief of tradition in adult society — Each one has his own world. They have to keep that world. The world in which today's youth have been reared is one of confusion and disorder. Adults did not act with authority because the establishment lost their confidence altogether after World War II. Youths of any age would disbelieve adults, and this disbelief and reaction became deep-rooted in Japanese society because of the postwar disorder and confusion. Doubts and disbelief were thrown at everything old, everything established, and every-

thing outside themselves. What had been highly regarded and believed in was rejected without first being examined. Everything that tended to bind youth was rejected. In connection with this refusal of tradition and established society there arose the disbelief and refusal of logic and reasonableness itself. Finally the youths started to believe only in themselves. To them recognition of the possibility of logic is to recognize what is surely outside themselves. Therefore they refused logic too. What was left, then, was to make their feelings and sentiments absolute, and to recognize nothing else. Present youth is called a "feeling generation." Their motto is "feeling" and they live exclusively according to that "feeling."

It is utterly difficult to reach them from the outside world. They ought to be reached from within themselves. This is what we face when we want to approach them. By vetoing logic they lost the way to reach all that is sure.

c. *Distortions found in society* — Young people have lost sight of themselves in their solitariness. They do not know what to depend on and in that condition they are injected into society. What shape is the society they are thrown into? The society they are thrown into is filled with contradictions and dishonesty. It is a distorted society, one in which they feel they are estranged. Their "victim-consciousness" reacts sharply to the dishonesty and the distortion in the society. The infamous pollution problem, profiteering by big business and oil companies, and very detrimental social welfare policies in Japan all make them more irritated and more militant toward the established society.

We also have to recognize the "criminal-consciousness" among university students. Japan has become rich. It became rich by exploiting Southeast Asian countries, they say. These are the countries Japan once trod down during the war. They say we are treading them down again, this time in the form of economic invasion. Students feel they are a part of this criminal Japan which is threatening Southeast Asia for a second time. Their guilt consciousness is multiplied when they see that, as elite, they themselves might be sent out of the country to exploit or become involved in such exploitation in one form or another. Because of this guilt complex, they feel they are criminal, and they feel they have to do something in order to atone for these past and future sins. The duplex of victim complex and crime complex overwhelms them and they crazily look for an atoning part which they feel they ought to play in the present society.

### 3. *Marxism a proposed solution*

To these hordes of frustrated students, Marxism appears as the only system of thought which offers solution. When these students touch Marxism, they feel that for the first time they have grasped a perfect world view. Here for the first time in their lives is certainty. Let us discuss what kind of role Marxism is playing for them.

According to Arnold J. Toynbee, Marxism to them is "a mere ersatz Christianity." In his book *A Study of History*, Toynbee says that "Communism is a secular ideology which aims to substitute for Christianity." He says Russia adopted this because it was regarded as a formidable

heresy by Western Europe. The situation is very similar in Japan. Japan tried to import everything from the Western world except Christianity. In the past 100 years Japan covetously imported and digested all the thoughts, knowledge, technology, and systems of operations from Western culture, but because Japan has carefully avoided importing Christianity, all these thoughts and technology came to Japan without the roots which upheld them when they were in the Western world. In the Western world, I feel, that whenever there is a system of thought or organization, it is always existing or functioning in relation to the existence of God and his revelation either positively or negatively. When Japan imported those ideas it was like a vase full of cut flowers without roots. But I had to have roots. In Japan, Marxism was accepted as the root.

Thus in Japanese society people choose Marxism not in contrast to the Gospel of God, but rather as its substitute. Sometimes an earnest young man in this country will say it like this, "I am now trying to choose either Marxism or Christianity. I have been thinking carefully about their pros and cons." When he says this, his consciousness is not that he is making a lifetime decision, but rather that to him the two are very similar good things and he is trying to evaluate the two and choose the better one. This sounds very incongruous to the Western mind.

Why does something like this happen? Beside the Gospel, only Marxism provides Japanese youth with the sureness of logic. Because Japan does not know God and his work, to those godless Japanese youth Marxism appears to be the only answer. Let me quote from Professor Kawai's book, *What is Marxism?* Kawai was a pre-war professor at the Tokyo Imperial University. He was a noted anti-Marxist scholar, an aggressive liberal, and was persecuted by the government because of his liberal views. He says, "Marxism is such a great system of thought. Did Japan have in its culture a corresponding system of thought? No, it never had one." Any thoughts which existed in Japanese society never rivaled itself with even a part of the Marxist system. When Marxism reached Japan, it did not have to fight its own way in, nor did it have to drive out the former inhabitants of the house, because it found the house completely empty. Therefore it just easily walked into the house, sat down there and started to live. Kawai continues, "The average Japanese youth has never thought systematically about the universe, history or ethics." He says that "although in Japanese schools morality and ethics were taught, they were never taught in connection with the present reality. Marxism was the only system of thought that taught people to think in terms of complete reality."

This book was published in 1931 and it does not necessarily give us the up-to-date information about the Japanese situation. However, in essence the situation has not changed during the past four decades. Then, in what aspect does Marxism substitute for Christianity?

Is it in the philosophical and historical phase only? No, Marxism gives people the exact principles of love and righteousness. Once I showed James 5:1-6 to a Marxist student. When I finished reading the passage, he asked me, "Whose word is that? Neither Marx nor Lenin accused the rich that fiercely." Up to that moment this young student

thought Marx and Marxists were the only ones who sought social justice, and he was utterly surprised. Young people seek social justice by way of Marxism, but they do not know that the Marxist's concept of social justice was actually stolen from the Bible.

We said that the youth of today is estranged from society and from themselves as well. When these young people are finally tossed into society to take jobs, they find the society full of distortion and injustices. Many of them find Marxism the sure bond which binds young people together. At least this is what they feel. The above statement would be utterly unthinkable and unacceptable to those who do not know Marxism and to those who associate Marxism only with violence and treachery. But to those of us who read the partial truth of the Bible squashed into *Das Kapital* and were enchanted by it, this is a real statement. It is significant that in the history of Japanese society and the Japanese Labor Movement, it was Christians who first became the force to start the labor union. Almost all social work and social movements were begun by Christians. The concept of social justice was introduced into Japan through the church and the Bible.

The same thing can be said of the concept of love. If you look through the Japanese encyclopedia to study the concept of love, you will find the Christian explanation of love. The reason is that the present connotation of the Japanese word "love" was formed by Christian thought. Before Christianity was introduced into Japan, the Japanese word for love meant only the sexual relationship. However, Japanese culture successfully adopted the concept of love without understanding Christianity and the true knowledge of God. Love needs the understructure which supports the concept. What was the underlying concept Japanese culture adopted? It was at first a mere humanism and later Marxism. Japanese people feel they have found true love in Marxism.

Before the churches and Christians found out what the situation really was, Marxism had come into Japanese culture and occupied the place the church, or rather God, should have occupied. Thus Marxism became the ersatz "Christianity" for Japan.

To many youth, Marxism appears to be the answer to social problems. Marxism asserts that it will form and realize the society in which peace and love preside, but it teaches that this society will come only through hatred and struggle. Thus their theme is beset with essential contradiction within itself. In order to overcome this contradiction Marxism employs a unique view of history. However, this unique view of history that utopia will surely come is merely an asset borrowed from the Bible. It is a deformation of the biblical teaching of the millennium.

We can now say that in Japan Marxism was accepted into Japanese culture as a substitute for Christianity. It is a substitute that only resembles the truth, but also it functions somewhat like the truth. Marxism is now functioning like a certain kind of insecticide which has a similar chemical structure to an element which the insect needs for its own body. Therefore the insecticide is accepted into the insect's body and it resides there as an indispensable material. And because the chemical molecular structure is similar to the indispensable material which the bug needs, it stays on and accumulates as more and more insecticide is ingested until

the day the metabolism of its life is destroyed and brings the life of the host to the end. Marxism is exactly the same, it has caught and killed so many people and the souls of so many more people.

#### 4. *Evangelizing atheists*

I have been talking thus far about Japan. This is my country, the country I know best. However, there is another reason why I bring this before you: similar phenomena appear in different degrees in all the Afro-Asian countries. It is my conviction that the following guidelines of evangelism will apply in evangelism of youth throughout the world, and especially for those of Afro-Asian countries.

a. *Faith* — What should be the approach to these young people? I have been stating that most of them have accepted Marxism because Marxism is so similar to the structure of Bible doctrines. Therefore you can almost say that their Marxist beliefs and the evangelical faith can attract each other. By way of example, I will mention one episode. In the early days of the Japan Communist Party, I found that *all* the leaders of the Party had the experience of attending a Christian church at one time or another. Considering the current statistics that the average Sunday morning attendance of Protestant churches in Japan (including the evangelicals and non-evangelicals) is a mere 12.5 persons per church, this is an astonishing fact. I wish somebody had approached them with the real message of the Gospel and they had been led to the Lord at that time.

If my presupposition is right, we can say Marxist sympathizers are the best seekers of the Gospel. Then, how about a dyed-in-the-wool Communist? Looking back on my own experience, I can say that the Party members and convinced Marxists could also be the object of our evangelism. In our witness to them, God is the one who saves. God is unlimited (Mark 10:27).

b. *Love* — The second thing is love and affection to those who have been estranged. With love and affection we have to understand them and become their friends. This love must be true and sincere and it should not be the imposition of our goodwill. This love must be full of long-suffering (I Cor. 13:4). This love might even lead us to study Marxism in order that we can talk with them better.

The study of Marxism is not the same as reading inside stories about Soviet Russia, but rather the study of Marxism itself and what it teaches; its philosophy, its view of history, and its theory of economics. Of course, we do not have to do careful research. All we need to do is read some introductory material written from the critical standpoint and yet academically acceptable. I do not know very many non-Japanese books, but certainly Lester DeKoster's, *Communism and the Christian Faith* would be very suitable.

Let us remember that the purpose of our studying Marxism is not so that we can win an argument. We can never change people's opinions by arguing, nor is it possible to save people's souls through arguing. Argumentation is sterile. To study Marxism is effective and necessary only so that we can point out the problems in their thinking and let them think together with us. For this purpose the right kind of knowledge is effective.

Here I have to refer to one rather important point. I realize that there is a wrong concept of the relationship between Marxism and Christianity. I know also that this wrong concept has a large following. However, I am not proposing that there is harmony between Marxism and Christianity, nor am I proposing the cooperation of Marxists and Christians. Concerning this, Paul says there is no fellowship between light and darkness (II Cor. 6:14). I am only proposing that witnessing ought to be done in love and affection, and that love contain understanding.

c. *Salvation* — We have to remember always that our purpose is the salvation of their souls. We should remember that our purpose is to proclaim Christ in the power of the Holy Spirit, expecting God to do great and mighty things.

The great commandment of our Lord is not an anti-communist movement or a capitalism protection movement. Neither did the Lord call us to fight for private ownership of property. Professor Iijima of Tokyo University says in his book *Christian Concept of Society*, that the concept of private ownership came from Roman law. According to Roman law we can proclaim that a certain thing is mine because I have won it. However, he says, according to the Bible everything is the Lord's. We are just entrusted by God with our present possessions and have administrative power over them. It is well to remember this basic concept.

We are against godless Communism. However, it is not necessary for us to say that God is always with capitalism either. We do not proclaim that God recognizes only capitalism. Our task is higher than protecting any one system of economics. It is our duty to proclaim the Gospel to souls, who are more precious than the whole world itself.

d. *The Gospel* — What we have to preach is the simple Gospel. Professor Kawai argues in his book, "Once a man becomes Marxist, neither parents nor teachers nor state can reconvert him." Kawai had to admit that Japan and he himself never possessed any system of thought which was superior to Marxism. In his book he proposes that in order to find out *the true system* of thought it would be necessary to gather together the best kind of men and the best kind of research organization into one place.

We have, however, already been given that which is superior to Marxism. This is the Gospel with the converting power of the Holy Spirit. Do not forget that every Marxist and every Marxist sympathizer is attracted to love and righteousness. Speak this Gospel to their conscience. Let them realize the big gap between their ideal and their thinking.

Their beloved theme is that they will introduce a world of peace and love, but that it will come only through hatred and class struggle. Let them ponder this, and let them decide if such self-contradiction is really possible or realistic.

The final word is the Gospel of Jesus Christ. The Gospel of the Cross and the Resurrection alone has the power to save souls. Twenty years ago for the first time in my life I heard the message of the Gospel. It was not "persuasive words of wisdom," but the simple preaching of the Gospel, depending on the power of the Holy Spirit. It was the Gospel of "Jesus Christ who was crucified," and that Gospel changed me.

It is my conviction that evangelism among atheists is done only through witnessing to the grace of Jesus Christ by the power of the Holy Spirit.

e. *Prayer* — In closing, I would add one more thing. It is the matter of prayer. I was saved through the preaching of the Gospel to which I was exposed for the first time in my life. Why was that? It was because deep in my heart I already had a kind of conviction of my own sins, and had been suffering from it. Why was that so? It was because my family and the friends of my family were praying specifically for me. There was one person who prayed for me for sixteen years and because of these prayers the Holy Spirit worked within me.

This is my appeal as from the lips of an ex-Marxist, toward the brothers and sisters in the Lord. Pray for those who are under Marxist influence and still are looking for the truth.