

A Theology of Japan and the Post-War Japan: On the Sixtieth Anniversary of the Defeat in World War II

This year we are commemorating the sixtieth anniversary of Japan's defeat in World War II on August 15, 1945. In Japan, we attach special importance to our 60th birthday as the time of completing a cycle and beginning a new one in the traditional calendar. In celebrating this special birthday of a new-born Japan this year, we are launching the project of publishing a new monograph series, *A Theology of Japan*. This first issue of the journal explores a theology that arose in post-war Japan and moved out to Asia and the rest of the world. We also will ponder from a theological perspective the sixty years following the end of the war. The Seigakuin University General Research Institute, as a center of theological research in Japan, will continue to communicate to the rest of the world on the basis of our hitherto achievement in the studies of Japan in the context of globalization and in conversation with the theology of the west.

(a) "All 100-Million Repent"

Immediately after we conceded defeat in the Pacific War, heard the slogan "All 100 Million People Repent." Up until the last minute of the war, the slogans had been: "100 Million People, One Mind," "100 Million Rise to Action," and "100 Million People Fight to the Last Man." Once defeated in the war, however, the entire population was to start over again with penitence. This slogan is ascribed to Toyohiko Kagawa, a pacifist Christian, social reformer and labor leader, who was invited to serve as an advisor to the first post-war cabinet, which was headed by Prince Naruhito Higashikuni. In his first press interview on August 28, Prime Minister Higashikuni stated: "For every one of us to repent is the first step of the reconstruction of our country, and the first step in the unification of our country."

The Japanese word used for penitence is a Buddhist concept, equivalent to the Christian term for conversion. The reaction of the press can be seen in the editorial of *The Asahi Shimbun* on August 30, which opined: “This is the very time for all 100 million to be penitent. It is also time to help each other to attain the rebirth of the nation.” This was the “original intention” and the starting point of post-war Japan.

(b) Prototype of the division of the nation, and ‘conscientious objectors’

However, we soon saw this intention erode. First, there was criticism against the editorial of the *Asahi Shimbun*. Its logic was that the article only dumped the newspaper’s own responsibility on the general populace without ever accounting for its own crimes in having exalted the war effort during the wartime. The population became divided into the guilty and the guiltless. This division destroyed the “original intention” of seeking a unified nation in post-war Japan, and became the prototype of the division of the country that was to beset Japan for many years to come.

This division was effected against the background of the Cold War that was beginning to emerge in the post-war world scene. In North-East Asia it was a Hot War in the forms of the Revolution in China and the Korean Conflict. Intent on mobilizing the guiltless of the population under its wing, the political left of the new Japan criticized the *Asahi Shimbun* editorial. But America was not without blame. The Occupation Authorities with America at its helm did dissolve the military clique. However, it never charged the bureaucratic clique with the responsibility for the war, although the latter apparently was as ‘guilty’ as the military. Instead, America left Japan’s bureaucracy intact and ‘used’ it for occupation purposes. Secretary of State John F. Dulles visited Japan soon after and demanded Japan to rearm. Although this demand was not met, it effectively destroyed the moral and ethical sense embodied in the concept of total repentance.

Japanese nationalism was carried on by her conservative political forces in collusion with the bureaucracy. Nationalism in Japan thus survived the defeat of 8/15 and revived its own life with the high economic growth engineered by

the same forces. Insolently enough, the conservative forces eventually came to consider Japan's new historical identity based in repentance as masochistic and self-incriminating. They even started to demand its revision.

But we must not lose sight that a thin thread of that perspective survived. It is widely dispersed among the population, but its signs of persistence are found, for instance, in a number of opinion polls that show a large majority of the people in favor of defending the present peace constitution of the country. These people could be called a type of "conscientious objector" who are protesting the loss of the nation's conscience.

(c) Contradictions in the Koizumi Policy

Japan's leftist movement lost its momentum as its Red Army Faction engaged in rampant and lawless infighting, and the Marxian influence on the country's intellectuals waned as the Berlin Wall fell. Prime Minister Nakasone, riding high on the wave of on-going economic growth, started triumphantly to call for a "closing of all accounts of post-war politics." He explicitly advocated a revision of the *Constitution*, now no longer a hidden agenda of the Liberal Democratic Party of Japan. The mass media in Japan dubbed the era as that of "Ron-Yasu Relations," capitalizing on Nakasone's first-name relationship with President Reagan. But underneath this euphoria lay plainly unethical dealings, with America putting her national interests first and Japan selfishly calculating her own interests. Nakasone's real intention was nothing but the undermining the 'original intention' of post-war Japan.

"There is nothing covered that shall not be revealed" (Matt. 10:26). The hidden aspect of the policy of the Liberal Democratic Party of Japan is revealed in the chimerical politics of Prime Minister Koizumi. In his political maneuverings we see an evil rider on a good horse. The "good" is his attempt, under his call for structural reform, to destroy the dominance of the bureaucracy, a constant reality ever since the Meiji Reformation on through the crisis of 8/15. But this good is coupled with evil. It is revealed in Koizumi's very traditional and formal attire in which he visits the Yasukuni Shrine, the ultimate manifestation of Nakasone's nationalism. Koizumi is driving the nation's political bus, seated backwards,

talking with the conservative passengers on board.

Koizumi's political contradictions are apparent more recently in the rising tensions between Japan and her two neighbors, China and South Korea. No easy dissolution of the tensions is in sight.

Why is it that Prime Minister Koizumi follows President Bush with such docility? At the risk of oversimplification, we must point out that this attitude is related to his diplomatic blunders. We even hear a Chinese academic make the ironic observation that maybe Bush could stop Koizumi's visit of the shrine because America once crushed the old Japan and sponsored the Tokyo War Criminals Trial. If the Bush Administration truly is intent on expanding freedom and democracy in the entire world as a matter of fundamental policy, it will surely have to be concerned with Japan's nationalism, which has survived in the post-war Japanese conservative politics. Herein is the ethical ambiguity of the American policy. America's disregard of ethical principles in pursuit of national interests above all else often puzzles friends of America abroad. Koizumi's enthusiasm in supporting Bush looks increasingly as simply an attempt to cover up the contradictions of his policy by placating America.

Germany has recovered its relations with France and other neighbors. Germany was able to achieve this because it adopted a very clear-cut attitude about its responsibility for the war. This served as the basis for the contemporary development of the European Union. By contrast, the Koizumi policy faces a diplomatic stalemate in Northeast Asia, rendering the AU (Asian Union) impossible.

(d) Closing of a Cycle of Sixty Years, and a Theology of Japan

Is the AU utterly impossible? If possible at all, in what sense is it possible? This possibility will arise out of Japan's endeavor to return to its 'original intention' and to place itself in the context of East Asian international relations and, furthermore, in the world historical context. August 15, 1945 was the date of Japan's surrender (phonologically "Kofuku" in Japanese), and it was the day of regaining independence (also 'Kofuku' phonologically but with different

ideographs) for Korea. Solidarity via democracy among Korea, America, and Japan will serve as the pivot for other relations. Thereby will be born a possibility of an AU. Once such a Union is formed in this part of Asia, it will surely have the possibility of extending further into Southeast and South Asia.

Our proposal for the creation of the Asian Union (or, in the words of Prime Minister Koizumi, the East Asian Community) can be summarized in the following three points.

First, we need to clarify the meaning of “democracy.” This task goes beyond the realm of ideas and has intense practical and policy implications. There still remains a fundamental tension between the concept of liberal democracy and a people’s democracy in Asia, which used to loom large in the Europe of the Cold-War days. No union of nations can be formed on the basis of old Asiatic cultural values. It can only be, and it must be, a union of nations, sharing the universal cultural values of freedom and human rights.

Second, Prime Minister needs to stop visiting the Yasukuni Shrine. This change is needed not only to break the current diplomatic stalemate, but also to clarify the pivotal nature of the Korea-US-Japan relationship. America should not underestimate the meaning of this political gesture of the Prime Minister. This change would establish momentum for a spiritual structural reform of Japan. It will also determine the direction in which Japan will work toward better relations with China, whose record in civil liberties and human rights still arouses some suspicion.

Third, the creation of the Northeast Asian Union calls for something akin to what the EU demanded Turkey as it sought membership: Japan in particular must establish and ensure definite ethics. It cannot be merely economic relations with an ethical infrastructure.

There are still are a fairly large number of people in Japan today who take the defeat in the past war in good faith, albeit only as a silent majority. If our eyes are opened again through “conversion,” we will see the objective world historical trend of globalization clearly enough. Japan’s new historical identity

based in repentance reflects this trend of globalization and cannot be nullified by the ‘masochistic’ interpretation of the right-wing. Indeed, this interpretation threatens to deprive Japan from the possibility of the formation of the AU. We have oscillated between right and left during the past 60 years. There has always been, however, a silent majority of “conscientious objectors” who have not forgotten the “original intention” of 8/15. It is high time these people had a clear and unambiguous language. This language will be able to grasp Japan both totally and radically in the context of globalization. We have called this language a “theology of Japan.” We will develop this theology into specific policies.

In order for Japan to become a country to be trusted by our surrounding nations, it is essential that we firmly secure the ethical nature for our state. This word from the Bible is eternally valid: “Righteousness exalteth a nation.”

1 March, 2005

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