PARADIGM SHIFTS FROM ANCIENT JERUSALEM TO MODERN TOKYO: A CRITICAL EXPANSION OF BOSCH [1]

Robert Lee

Synopsis: In this study the expansion of Bosch's paradigm shifts provides a rubric for contextualization of missio dei *in Japanese civilization–a macro-societal, historical and comparative study of travel from ancient to modern times and from western to Asian civilization, in short, the road from ancient Jerusalem to modern Tokyo.*

On the occasion of its publication in 1991, David Bosch's book, *Transforming Mission: Paradigm Shifts in Theology of Mission,* was heralded as a "truly magisterial book," "a kind of *Summa Missiologica*" (Lesslie Newbigin), and "the most comprehensive and thorough study of the Christian mission" (Alan Neely).[2] Since then, those superlative judgments have been vindicated by its many reprintings and translations into different languages, including Chinese,[3] Korean[4] and Japanese.[5]

Because of how Bosch redefined mission, *Transforming Mission* became a basic textbook in the core curriculum of the advanced missiology programs of the Asia Graduate School of Theology/Japan. Instead of defining mission as a unit in practical theology or locating mission under the doctrine of the church, Bosch understood mission as *missio dei* [mission of God], which is theologically prior to ecclesiology and practical theology. Interpreting *missio dei* as the central theme of the immanent activity of the triune God, he integrated biblical, historical and contemporary theology into a theology of mission that overcame the traditional piecemeal study of mission distributed throughout the discrete fields of biblical, historical and theological studies. Even though *Transforming Mission* is divided into three parts–biblical, historical and contemporary–it must be read as a single

---

[1] Parts of this paper appeared as the "Preface: From Volume I to Volume II" in Volume II of the two-volume Japanese translation of *Transforming Mission: Paradigm Shifts in Theology of Mission,*" 2001. Also, material on Japan is taken from my more detailed study, *The Clash of Civilizations: An Intrusive Gospel in Japanese Civilization.* Harrisonburg, PA: Trinity Press International, 1999

[2] Citations are from the back cover of David J. Bosch, *Transforming Mission: Paradigm Shifts in Theology of Mission.* Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1991.

[3] Taipei, Taiwan: China Evangelical Seminary, 1996

[4] Seoul, Korea: Christian Literature Crusade, 2000

[5] In two volumes. Tokyo, Japan: Tokyo Mission Research Institute, Vol. 1, 1996; Vol. 2, 2001

Robert Lee is International Director of the Tokyo Mission Research Institute, attached to Tokyo Biblical Seminary, Japan. Retired missionary under Mennonite Board of Missions (now Mennonite Mission Network), he was Founding Director of TMRI. leebobnan@aol.com

work, integrated by the concept stated in its subtitle, *Paradigm Shifts in Theology of Mission*. In fact, the two-volume Japanese translation of David Bosch's book is entitled simply "Paradigm Shifts in Mission [*senkyo no paradaimu tenkan*], Volume I: From the Biblical Period to the Reformation; Volume II: From the Enlightenment Towards the 21st Century."

Paradigm and Paradigm Shifts

As the Japanese title above suggests, "paradigm shifts" in mission history is the critical concept that struck the Japanese imagination. They noted that Bosch speaks of "paradigm shifts" rather than a new paradigm or "paradigm transformation." The latter represents a revolutionary change, an abandonment of the old for the new as Thomas Kuhn has argued for the history of science.[6] Accordingly, for mission history Bosch would see the discontinuity between the Old and New Testaments as a "paradigm transformation" of a religion that is centered upon the Torah and its history in the Old Testament to a religion that is centered upon "the person and the cross of Jesus Christ" according to the New Testament. Thus, "for Jesus the decisive principle of action" is now not the Torah but the reign of God, "an absolutely new thing in the religious history of humankind."[7] For Bosch this New Testament paradigm becomes the primordial paradigm of mission, and the subsequent five paradigm shifts in the theology of mission can be seen as contextualizations of the New Testament paradigm in different time and space.

Because Bosch begins his history of paradigm shifts from the New Testament, his series of paradigm shifts seems to imply that *missio dei* begins with the first century Jesus. As a consequence critics have noted that Bosch has omitted the entire Old Testament history of ancient Israel in his study of paradigm shifts. Bosch is fully aware that "there is no New Testament divorced from the Old;"[8] however, "the decisive difference between the Old and the New Testament is mission. The New Testament is essentially a book about mission."[9] Bosch continues, if there is "missionary" in the Old Testament, it is God himself, who is acting historically to create the people of God, because "*history* is the area of God's activity."[10]

In passing, I note that Bosch's omission of the Old Testament history of ancient Israel is extremely problematic for Asian Christians, whose historical identities are rooted in ancient civilizations that are discontinuous with the western one. This issue will be addressed indirectly below and directly later in this paper in relation to the emergence of the

---

[6] Thomas S. Kuhn, *The Structure of Scientific Revolutions, Third Edition,* pp. 92f. Chicago: The University of Chicago, 1996.
[7] Bosch, pp. 35-36.
[8] Bosch, p. 16.
[9] Bosch quoting Rzepkowski, p. 16.
[10] Bosch, pp. 19, 17.

postmodern paradigm. Here, my discussion follows the order of the narrative of paradigm shifts in Bosch's book.

Bosch's New Testament paradigm and the subsequent series of paradigm shifts immediately raised in Japan two related issues: (1) the perennial hermeneutical question regarding the biblical paradigm, namely, "what it meant" in ancient Jerusalem and "what it means" today in modern Tokyo;[11] and (2) the meaning and relation of the series of historical paradigm shifts in western history to the history of the Japanese people.

The first or descriptive part of the hermeneutical question of discovering "what it meant" is the easier part. The Japanese have acquired the critical tools of contemporary biblical studies that enable them to leave temporarily their contemporary world to enter empathetically into the world of first century Christians. Through these studies they can increasingly understand within limits "what it meant." But "what it meant" can never be sufficient because the Bible becomes gospel only when we communicate, "what it means" to our listeners. For the Japanese the hermeneutical task of bridging the first and the twenty-first centuries becomes problematic and perhaps impossible, when the road from ancient Jerusalem to modern Tokyo is limited to that depicted by Bosch's historical paradigm shifts.

Nevertheless, Japanese Christians cannot simply bypass or ignore this history to return to the New Testament because there is no short cut or direct flight from ancient Jerusalem to modern Tokyo, and also because Japanese have indeed traveled along this western route in becoming Christians. Hence, the road from ancient Jerusalem to modern Tokyo –the fundamental missiological task for Christians in Japan today–must include critical examination of Bosch's history of paradigm shifts as a necessary step on this journey.

"Paradigm Shift in Theology of Mission"

Although Bosch describes six paradigms and five shifts in the history of mission, he sees two radical shifts in the first shift from the biblical to the early church, which continues through to the Protestant Reformation, and in the fourth shift from the Reformation to the modern Enlightenment, which finally leads towards an emerging postmodern paradigm. Accordingly, the division of the two-volume Japanese edition of *Transforming Mission* follows this logic, in which Volume II begins with Chapter 9, "Mission in the Wake of the Enlightenment" as the way to introduce Part 3, Chapter 10,

---

[11] The distinction between the descriptive task, "what it meant," and the hermeneutical task, "what it means," is taken from Krister Stendahl's celebrated dictionary article, "Biblical Theology, Contemporary," *Interpreter's Dictionary of the Bible,* Vol. 1: 418-32. Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1962. Stendahl graphically illustrates the significance of this distinction in his journal article, "The Apostle Paul and the Introspective Conscience of the West," *Harvard Theological Review* 56 (1963): 199-215. For missiological usage, see my essay, "From Ancient Jerusalem to Modern Tokyo: Contextualization In Japanese Culture and Society," chap. 1 in *The Clash of Civilizations*.

"The Emergence of a Postmodern Paradigm."

The first paradigm shift represented a radical break from the biblical to the patristic understanding of God. Instead of the soteriological and ethical categories of biblical theology, Greek philosophical categories of being (ontology) were introduced to define the attributes of God. Thus, theology shifted from a historical understanding of God's salvific activity in this world to a metaphysical understanding of the nature of God. As shown by Bosch, in subsequent development the doctrine of God became the legitimation of Christendom in the formation of western civilization, in which mission was submerged into Christendom's ecclesiology. In Bosch's words, "What began in primitive Christianity as a bold confession in the face of the emperor cult that Jesus was Lord ended in compromise where the emperor was to rule in 'time' and Christ in 'eternity.'"[12] As I have argued elsewhere, this patristic and later medieval understanding of *missio dei* became foundational to Christendom and the rise of western civilization.[13]

Beyond a Mono-linear History: Paradigm Shifts in Asia

From the perspective of Asian and Japanese history, which have independent beginnings before the formation of western (Christian) civilization, Bosch's book takes the form of a mono-linear history, a triumphal history that reduces Asia and Japan, and especially the Christians, to precipitates of the western impacts of the 16th (medieval), 18th and 19th centuries. Such a history begins its triumphal march from the primitive biblical church through the patristic Greek, medieval Latin, and European Reformation churches to the Enlightenment, modern and postmodern periods of church history–a westward movement that coincided with the formation and expansion of western civilization. This observation, given the enormous size and scope of Bosch's work, is not meant to be a criticism but to point out a limitation requiring an extension of Bosch's work into Asia, as I shall develop below.

Despite Bosch's concern for *missio dei*, God's mission in this world, Bosch's mono-linear history reduces mission history to western Christendom, namely that of the "orthodox" in doctrine, while dropping those considered "schismatic" or "heretical." Thus, during the post-apostolic period, the formation of Christendom under Constantine's synthesis of church and state defined the boundaries of mission. The early and medieval church viewed the Roman Empire and its expansion as the limits of its "world mission." Even with the breakup of the Holy Roman Empire during the Reformation, the magisterial reformers, as Bosch pointed out, continued to view the great commission as completed in the apostolic period. Hence, with the exception of the "schismatic" Anabaptists, the reformers not only limited but also tied their mission efforts to the extension of the

---

[12] Bosch, p. 202.
[13] Cf. *The Clash of Civilizations*.

boundaries of the emerging nation-states in Europe.[14]

Mission in Non-Roman Asia: The Patristic Paradigm

Bosch was aware of the limitations of the Christendom (patristic) paradigm for mission, as illustrated in his brief discussion of "Mission in Non-Roman Asia."[15] In contrast to the increasingly monolithic expansion of western Christianity via the Greek to the Latin and other European churches, he pointed out the missionary fervor of the Christian churches outside the boundaries of the Roman Empire, especially the work of the Nestorians.

When Nestorius was condemned as a "heretic" by the Council of Ephesus (431CE), he was banished to Egypt and his name was dropped from the history of the western church. However, his followers fled to the East to become the major missionary force throughout Central Asia, reaching even into India and China. Always a minority group in East Asia, Nestorian Christianity flourished in its various non-Constantinian forms until it vanished into the sands of history by the end of the 14th century, replaced by missionary Islamic and Buddhist movements.[16] Although beyond the scope of this paper, further study of the lessons of contextualization in the rise and fall of non-Constantinian forms of Christianity is needed for the non-Constantinian churches in Asia today.

Mission in the Age of Discovery: The Medieval Paradigm

When the overland routes of Christian mission from Europe to Asia were blocked by the rise of Islam, the discovery of overseas routes by Columbus (1492), Vasco da Gama (1498) and others explorers opened new paths to Asia as well as to the New World for the expansion of medieval Christendom. For us in Japan Bosch's brief discussions of the medieval paradigm of mission and colonialism[17] is important and warrants further research to understand the lessons of the massive failure of the first direct encounter with western Christianity in Japan.

As Bosch has shown, the "Age of Discovery" precipitated an unprecedented era of mission activity in the form of colonialism. "Christendom discovered with a shock that, fifteen centuries after the Christian church was founded, there were still millions of people who knew nothing about salvation and who, since they were not baptized, were all headed for eternal punishment." In response Pope Alexander VI issued a papal bull to establish a dual patronage system by dividing the world outside of Europe into two and granting to the kings of Spain and Portugal full authority over these "newly discovered" territories. Full authority meant dominion over the new colonies, not only politically but also

---

[14] For Bosch's comments on the Anabaptists, see pp. 245-247.

[15] Bosch, pp. 202-205.

[16] For a recent study, see Samuel Hugh Moffett, *A History of Christianity in Asia, Volume I: Beginnings to 1500*. San Francisco: HarperCollins, 1992.

[17] On "Colonialism and Mission," see Bosch, pp. 226-230.

ecclesiastically. Thus, colonialism and mission became interdependent; the right to colonize included the duty to Christianize.[18] Under this medieval Roman Catholic paradigm, the Christian mission came to Japan.

The "Christian Century" in Japan

Christianity arrived in Japan during the middle of the 16th century at the final stages of the dissolution of medieval society. Beneath the surface of a country rent by war, Japan was undergoing institutional changes similar to that of the breakdown of feudalism in Europe. Even more rapidly than in Europe, drastic changes–such as growing domestic and international trade, secularization of the tenor life, and the final military-political centralization–were giving form to Japan's early modern period. In the Japanese context, the ethos and doctrine of medieval Christianity clashed with these developments.

The first Portuguese traders arrived in Japan in 1543, and six years later on August 15, 1549, Jesuit missionary Francis Xavier arrived to begin what Roman Catholics called the "Christian Century" in Japan.[19] At first the traders and the missionaries, who served as intermediaries for the traders, were welcomed by local Japanese feudal domains, which eagerly sought and even competed for trade and western arms, as well as for knowledge of the larger world. Under Jesuit leadership Christianity grew rapidly in the southern most island of Kyushu. Decades of genuine Christian fervor led to mass conversions in some Christian domains, leading to the desecration of Buddhist and Shinto sanctuaries. Christianity thus became a divisive force in Kyushu, causing crusade-like wars between Christian and non-Christian domains.[20] At its peak sixty years later Christians numbered as many as 500,000 believers–thus constituting a greater percentage (2%) of the population than Christians do today–mostly under the care of the Society of Jesus in Japan.[21]

The divisive political threat of Christians in Kyushu called forth a response. On July 27, 1587, Hideyoshi issued the first edict condemning Christianity as a "pernicious doctrine" that was undermining society. According to George Elison:[22]

> The Japanese critic found the notion of an omnipotent deity specious, its consequence disastrous. The foreign religion could be accused of other worldliness; for the Christians removed justification of human action

---

[18] Bosch, p. 227f.

[19] See C.R. Boxer, *The Christian Century in Japan: 1549-1650.* Berkeley: University of California Press, 1951.

[20] Mary Elizabeth Berry, *Hideyoshi*, pp. 87-89. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1982.

[21] Figures vary widely; one Roman Catholic source indicted that in 1606 there were 750,000 believers with an average annual increase of 5000-6000. The Harvard "rice-patty" textbook estimated the Christian population at about 150,000 around 1582, 300,000 by the end of the century, and perhaps as many as 500,000 in 1615. See John F. Fairbank, et al., *East Asia Tradition and Transformation,* pp. 394, 527. Boston: Houghton Mifflin Co, 1978.

[22] George Elison, *Deus Destroyed: The Image of Christianity in Early Modern Japan,* p. 1. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1973.

from the social sphere to an extraterrestrial locus. The Christian dictate
of a supernal loyalty pre-empted loyalty to a secular sovereign.
[Japanese] philosophy, ethics, and politics rejected the Christian claim
that the One God existed and acted to determine the moral order.

The first bloody persecution of Christians in Japan followed on February 5, 1597,
when twenty-six Christians, including six Franciscan missionaries, three Jesuits, and
seventeen Japanese laymen, were crucified in Nagasaki. Beginning in 1612, the ensuing
Tokugawa government promulgated a series of decrees prohibiting Christianity, leading by
1614 to systematic persecutions.[23] Finally, the series of Tokugawa *sakoku* [seclusion]
decrees from 1633 to 1639 closed Japan to the West for the next 230 years.

By 1644 there were no missionaries left; they had all been rounded up, tortured and
killed or forced to apostatize. By the 1660's there were practically no Christians left in
Japan. More than 3000 Japanese Christians had been martyred for their "pernicious faith."
Many more were driven into apostasy. Others became the *kakure kirishitan* [crypto-
Christians], "isolated groups [who] imperceptibly drifted from Catholicism into a syncretic
folk creed tinctured with Buddhism and Shinto."[24] These groups remained hidden until the
return of Roman Catholic missionaries in the nineteenth century.

As historian Jurgis Elisonas (aka George Elison) summarizes this period,
Christianity was first introduced into Japan when that country's medieval political order was
collapsing. Consequently, the Portuguese sponsored colonial (Jesuit) mission, dependent
upon a transitional political order, also collapsed:

Paradoxically, the significance of this ["Christian Century"] is not in the
triumph of Christianity but in the effect of its defeat. The Christian
intrusion left few Christian traces; it was but the exotic element in an
already gaudy period of Japanese history. But upon the "Christian
Century" follow more than two centuries of *Sakoku,* the Closed Country.
The Christian aberration would be a mere interlude were it not for its
causal relation to the *Sakoku* policy. The total rejection of Christianity
helps to define [the early modern] era.[25]

Thus, the first encounter of Japanese civilization with western civilization ended
in a "clash of civilizations,"[26] in which mission according to the medieval paradigm of the
Society of Jesus was defeated. Jesuit Father Andrew C. Ross in his study, *A Vision
Betrayed: The Jesuits in Japan and China*, describes these events as a missiological failure.

---

[23] Jurgis Elisonas (aka George Elison), "Christianity and the *daimyo," The Cambridge History of
Japan*, *Vol 4: Early Modern Japan*, pp. 360, 364f, 370. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1991.
   [24] Elisonas, p. 369f.
   [25] Elison, p.1.
   [26] The phrase is from Samuel P. Huntington, *The Clash of Civilizations and the Remaking of the World
Order.* NY: Simon and Schuster, 1996.

The visionary principles of Francis Xavier and especially of Alessandro Valignano, Visitor of the East for the Society, for establishing a truly indigenous church were compromised by the intrusion of European civilization. According to Ross, "at times the leadership of the Portuguese Province of the Jesuits...seemed incapable of distinguishing the incidentals of European culture and the essential elements of the Christian faith."[27]

The Modern Mission Paradigm

Among Bosch's six paradigm shifts, two stand out as radical changes: the first paradigm shift from the biblical to the patristic period, and the fourth from the Protestant Reformation to the modern Enlightenment period. As discussed earlier, Bosch's first paradigm shift was from the biblical perspective of God's acting in human history, creating a people of God, to the perspective of Greek philosophy of metaphysical dualism. In this shift salvation was found not in human history but beyond history–a salvation of an eternal soul incarcerated in a human (depraved) body, seeking release from the bondage of this world to unite with God, a view that was incomprehensible to the Japanese at the end of medieval Japan.

According to Bosch, the second major paradigm shift, from the Reformation to modern Enlightenment, saw the collapse of metaphysical dualism into a desacralized world now defined by scientific and positivistic historical thinking. In sociological terms, the modern period or modernization was characterized by secularization in which social, political and economic institutions became freed from the domination of religious authority, such as that of divine kings. Society became differentiated and rationalized according to the internal logic of the differentiated spheres of society, creating the modern nation-state with a civil society and a market economy.

In the West the most radical changes of modernization occurred in the desacralization of the Holy Roman Empire (form of Christendom) of the medieval period. This, already begun in the Reformation period, was consummated in two bloody revolutions in the 18th century in the formation of modern nation-states, wherein the divine authority of kings and pope/priests of Christendom shifted to the sovereignty of the people. In the American version, a civil religion based upon the Puritan vision of the Kingdom of God on earth functioned as the guiding religious culture, while a more secular ideology of humanism in France and later socialism in Russia served a similar function.

In each case, the nation-state became the center for personal identity and highest human authority. Although secularization in western modernization shifted the locus of ultimate authority from kings/priests to the people, in the end the new socio-political order, the modern nation-state itself, claimed the highest authority. Whereas under Christendom,

---

[27] Andrew C. Ross, *A Vision Betrayed: The Jesuits in Japan and China 1542-1742,* p. xiii. Maryknoll , NY: Orbis Books, 1994.

popes and kings vied for the highest (divine) authority, in modernity the church in public life often was submerged into the nation-state, whose claims of the highest authority ironically made the "secular" state sacred.

Modernization in Asia and Japan

In this context we can begin to understand and contrast modernization in Asia and Japan. In historical terms western modernization has fundamentally altered the conditions of the world. No non-western civilization could ignore or avoid the impact of western modernization. However, modernity did not converge.[28] Modernization, which originated in the West, did not lead to the convergence of human history toward a single, universal history.[29] According to Samuel Huntington:[30]

> Modernization...does not necessarily mean Westernization. Non-Western
> societies can modernize and have modernized without abandoning their
> own cultures.....Modernization, instead, strengthens those cultures and
> reduces the relative power of the West. In fundamental ways, the world
> is becoming more modern and less Western.

In Asia India, China, and Japan each responded differently to the impact of western modernization; each rejected in part or radically altered western modernity to create a distinctive modern civilization. For example, the Indian response to western imperialism (British colonialism) was to reform the British legacy of western-style democracy into an Indian one. In China the rejection of western imperialism (the foreign enclaves established by the unequal treaties) led to a "socialist revolution with Chinese characteristics." But the earliest, most rapid and thorough response to the impact of western modernization in Asia was the Japanese neo-traditional response in the Meiji period (1868-1912) as discussed below.

What undergirds the formation of the nation-state, whether western or Asian, is a mono-linear history, a history created to legitimate the uniqueness or origins of the nation, its highest values and its sovereignty. Such histories have been codified in constitutions, as in the US and French constitutions, which have become models for many new nation-states. In spite of its uniqueness, Japan was no exception. Japan created its own mono-linear history,[31] which culminated in a western style constitution, although with unique features.

---

[28] This thesis was first developed fully by S.N. Eisenstadt, *Tradition, Change, and Modernity.* New York: John Wiley and Sons, 1973.

[29] As argued by Francis Fukuyama at the end of the Cold War, "We may be witnessing the end of history as such: that is, the end point of mankind's ideological evolution and the universalization of Western liberal democracy as the final form of human government," quoted by Huntington, p. 31.

[30] Huntington, p. 78.

[31] For a Japanese contra-western version of a mono-linear view of history, created at the beginning of the 20th century, see Stefan Tanaka, *Japan's Orient: Rendering Pasts into History.* Berkeley: University of California, 1993.

After 230 years of self-imposed national seclusion, in the middle of the 19th century Japan abruptly opened itself to the full impact of western modernization.[32] Within thirty years Japan was transformed from a feudal to a modern nation-state with the creation of State Shinto at its center.[33] Instead of western secularization of the monarchy, the Meiji oligarchy chose to fabricate a divine nation with a divine emperor, who is also the high priest of State Shinto. Based upon an ancient mythological theory, the emperor was the direct lineal descendent of the founding sun-goddess, Amaterasu, and was "co-eval with heaven and earth" (Imperial Rescript on Education, 1890), the living link between time immemorial and the present. As *kami* [god] the emperor was eternal, pure, "inviolable and sacred" (Meiji Constitution, 1889), the divine channel for blessings and nurture from the ancestral gods to their descendants.

Simultaneously, in the name of the divine emperor, the feudal hierarchical class structures were abolished by the elimination of the samurai elite classes (1869). In their place the State prescribed western models of universal military conscription (1873) and universal education (1872), thus providing paths of upward mobility for the development of modern leadership based upon modern values of merit and achievement (instead of the traditional values of ascription and prestige). Society, however, was integrated by retaining Confucian values, that is, by motivating the people to "loyalty to the emperor and filial piety" (Imperial Rescript on Education), *bushido* values of the former samurai class. Further, society and state were integrated into a familial system, with the Emperor as its head and the people as branch families of the Imperial family. Thus Emperor, state, society, and individual identity became fused in a divinized nation-state.[34] In the postwar era, in spite of a shift of the locus of sovereignty from the emperor to the people in the postwar constitution, the idea of sacred nation remained the locus of highest loyalty and personal identity for its citizenry.[35]

Modern Christian Mission in Japan

As described above, the modern or Meiji period brought an end to 230 year of *sakoku* policy. For the second time Japanese and western history intertwined; this time modern missionaries followed the western modernizers to Japan. The first missionaries, mostly Protestants, arrived illegally in 1859. By 1873 there were eighty-seven missionaries

---

[32] The Charter Oath of 1868 at the beginning of the Meiji Restoration stated: "Knowledge shall be sought throughout the world so as to strengthen the foundations of imperial rule."

[33] For discussion, see Helen Hardacre, *Shinto and State, 1868-1988*. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1989.

[34] Described in greater detail in *The Japanese Emperor System: The Inescapable Missiological Issue*, edited by Robert Lee. Tokyo: Tokyo Mission Research Institute, 1995. (E.T. of *Tennosei no kensho*: *Nihon senkyo ni okeru fukahi no kadai.* Tokyo: TMRI, 1990).

[35] For another discussion of modernization in Japan, see the essay, "Historical Significance of Japan's Modernization," by Takanobu Tojo in this volume.

but only eleven converts. When the edict against Christianity was finally repealed in 1873, Christianity grew rapidly, reaching a climax in popularity in the late 1880's, when missionaries began predicting that Japan would become a Christian nation by the end of the century.[36]

However, after the Chinese and the Russians were successively defeated in war (1894-95, 1904-05), Japanese nationalism surged, and most Japanese rejected western civilization, especially Christianity. By the liberal Taisho Period (1912-1926) Christianity had recovered and continued to grow modestly until the 1930's and early 1940's, the period of ultra-nationalism. As Japan embarked upon its Pacific War, leading to World War II and the "Greater East Asia Co-prosperity Sphere," Christianity was again rejected.[37] The Pacific War was in effect another *sakoku* period for the Japanese.

The third major period of Christian expansion into Japan began after World War II when the Supreme Commander of the Allied Powers (SCAP), the "Christian General" Douglas MacArthur, issued a call for thousands of missionaries to "Christianize" Japan. MacArthur believed that before Japan could be truly democratized, it needed to become a Christian nation. Thus the immediate years after World War II witnessed another "Christian boom," in which great optimism was expressed by the missionaries about the future of Japan as a Christian nation.

In summary, the statistical history of the modern Christian mission in Japan reveals that nearly sixty years after the end of World War II an indigenous church exists that has more than tripled its size from 324,000 to 1,132,334 members in 2004, or has slightly doubled from 0.43% to 0.89% of the population.[38] In general terms the modest church growth in Japan, ranging from a high of 2% in the medieval period to the current growth of less than 1%, has been contingent upon historical conditions. Today Japanese Christians are aware of the statistics that reveal an invisible ceiling that has limited church growth to less than 1%, marking the end of the rapid growth of the earlier postwar era.

The Problem of Modern Mission Paradigm in Japan

The problem of modern mission in Japan today can be described in historical and quantitative or in cultural and qualitative terms. Here I continue with the quantitative analysis. While many in both conciliar and evangelical churches pray for a church growth of 10% percent of the population, in reality church growth has been limited to less than 1% of the population, or precisely a flat 0.9 % of the population since 1995. In contrast, the

---

[36] The Harvard textbook estimates the Christian population in 1889 at less than one quarter of 1%, or 40,000 Roman Catholics, 29,000 Protestants, 18,000 Russian Orthodox. Fairbank, et al., p. 527.

[37] In 1939 the Religious Organization Law required all religious bodies, except State Shinto, to register under the jurisdiction of the Ministry of Home Affairs. Most of the Protestant denominations united to form in 1941 the *Nihon Kirisuto Kyodan* [United Church of Christ].

[38] Data from *Nihon Kirisutokyo Nenkan* [Japan Christian Yearbook], 2004.

expansion of Christianity in postwar South Korea has been estimated between 25-30% of the population, although Korean church leaders now also speak of "stagnation."[39] Even on Mainland China, where religious freedom is severely restricted, today registered and unregistered church membership has been estimated to be between 0.3-0.5% of the population.[40] How are we to account for this absence of church growth in Japan?

The historical data reveal that church growth in Japan has gone through cyclical periods of rapid growth followed by periods of lesser and even negative growth. Robert Bellah has described this pendulum character as alternating periods of xenophobia and xenophilia in Japanese history:

> Two periods of xenophobia had severely pathological consequences for Japanese society: the closing of the country *[sakoku]* near the beginning of the Tokugawa Period and the period of ultra-nationalism in the 1930's and early 1940's....[B]oth periods of xenophobia were marked by vigorous persecutions. The persecution–including the large-scale execution–of Christians in early Tokugawa Japan was among the greatest religious persecutions in world history....In the later period, severe persecutions of liberals [including Christians] and Marxists followed. In both cases a renunciation of alien commitment and a return to purely Japanese group life were primarily demanded....In both cases the persecuted groups were felt to have had loyalties that transcended and were incompatible with the Japanese *kokutai* [national polity]....But Japan has also suffered from an opposite malady–extreme xenophilia. On occasion at least some Japanese, overwhelmed by a sense of Japan's backwardness, have seemed willing to jettison the entire national heritage. There were those, for example, in the early Meiji Period who wanted to abandon the Japanese language and learn English instead or to abandon Buddhism for Christianity.[41]

To update Bellah's historical schema, we need to note again the period of openness to western culture following the end of World War II. Totally defeated in war and disgraced by an unconditional surrender, occupied for the first time in their history, reduced to poverty and famine, and hearing the Emperor publicly renounce his divinity, the Japanese, to their surprise, faced a benevolent occupation. In this time of defeat, poverty and loss of meaning, many Japanese sought comfort in the otherworldly religion of their benevolent conquerors.

---

[39] According to Professor Seok-Won Sohn of Sung Kyul University, the takeoff of phenomenal growth in Korea began in 1967, peaked in 1995, and was followed by stagnation at 25% of the population. See his paper, "History and Prospective for Korean Protestant Missions," in this volume.

[40] For a review of the current rapid growth of the Chinese church, see the paper by Shi Guo (Peter) Yuan in this volume.

[41] Robert N. Bellah, "Continuity and Change in Japanese Society" in *Stability and Social Change,* edited by Bernard Barber and Alex Inkeles, pp. 338ff. Boston: Little, Brown, 1971. Reprinted in Robert N. Bellah, *Imaging Japan: The Japanese Tradition and Its Modern Interpretation*, pp. 192f, Berkeley: University of California Press, 2003.

However, the pendulum began to swing in the opposite direction, beginning in the late 1960's, as the Japanese regained their self-confidence with their remarkable economic growth. In contrast to the late 19th century and again in the 1930's and early 1940's, when Japan sought to emulate the West by establishing military and political imperialism in Asia to gain equality of status in the western world, in the latter half of the 20th century Japan again sought parity of status by emulating the West, this time by an economic hegemony in Asia.

In passing, one should note that the periods of open acceptance of Christianity in the mid-16th to early 17th and again in the late 19th to early 20th centuries lasted about sixty years. The third and current post-World War II Christian "boom" has already slowed rapidly as it reaches its 60th year.

Uchimura and the Search for Meaning in Modern Japan[42]

To illustrate the cultural or qualitative problematic of Christianity in modern Japan, I shall quote extensively below from one of the earliest and most sensitive Japanese Christians in the modern era, Uchimura Kanzo (1861-1930). With the abrupt end of 230 years of isolation Uchimura, proud son of a declassed samurai, debated endlessly with his generation about their future role in nation-building. Immersed in a flood of western ideas and institutions, the "new generation" in Meiji Japan encountered a new world view governed by the laws of science, and a new concept of society based upon the values of nationalism, both of which undermined their traditional Confucian world view and feudal social order that had for centuries provided the Japanese their self identity. Although intellectually this "new generation" repudiated the world view of its discredited past, emotionally they could not easily adopt the new and more universal western values, which to them seemed to deny their extreme self-consciousness, derived from their Confucian heritage, as Japanese elite. In short the "new generation" faced a severe cultural identity crisis.[43]

For many of the "new generation," much of the tension was resolved after Japan's dramatic victory in the Russo-Japanese war (1904-1905), which led to Japan's recognition as a modern nation by the West. However, Uchimura, who had converted to Christianity, for conscience sake became notoriously famous in his public rejections of the (western-like) imperialistic direction of his nation. At the same time neither could he accept the Christianity of his missionary mentors. In sharp criticism of his contemporary missionaries,

---

[42] The following material is taken from my earlier study of Uchimura Kanzo, "Service to Christ and Country: Uchimura's Search for Meaning" in *Culture and Religion in Japanese-American Relations: Essays on Uchimura Kanzo, 1861-1930*, edited by Ray A Moore, pp.71-99. Ann Arbor, MI: The University of Michigan, 1981. Reprinted in *The Japanese Christian Quarterly,* 54 (1988): 92-110.

[43] For discussion of the "new generation," see Kenneth B. Pyle, *The New Generation in Meiji Japan: Problems of Cultural Identity, 1885-1895,* pp. 6-22. Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 1969.

he proclaimed a "Japanese Christianity," later known as the *mukyokai* [non- church] movement.

> When a Japanese truly and independently believes in Christ, he is a Japanese Christian, and his Christianity is Japanese Christianity....A Japanese by becoming a Christian does not cease to be a Japanese. On the contrary, he becomes more Japanese by becoming a Christian. A Japanese who becomes an American or an Englishman or an amorphous universal man, is neither a true Japanese nor a true Christian.[44]

> Does Christianity lose by bringing the spirit of samurai into it? Was not Luther's German Christianity a valuable and distinct contribution to Christianity? So, then, pray be careful that you call your American or English Christianity a universal religion, and condemn my Japanese Christianity as national or sectional....I have seen no more sorrowful figures than Japanese who imitate their American or European missionary teachers by being converted to the faith of the latter.[45]

> My friends are Honen rather than Wesley, Shinran rather than Moody. Those of the same religion do not necessarily have the same direction of faith. The heart with which I turn to Jesus is like the heart with which Honen and Shinran relied on Amida. It is not the heart with which English and Americans believe in Christ.[46]

For many Japanese, both Christian and non-Christian, Uchimura became a paradigmatic figure, a conscience for the nation, because in his intense loyalty to transcendent reality he also intensely loved his own country with great personal integrity and independence. His personal cultural identity crisis, shared by many Japanese today, reflected the crisis of modernity. Uchimura's famous "two J's" statement is often quoted by Christians to express their dilemma:

> I love two J's and no third; one is Jesus, and the other is Japan. I do not know which I love more, Jesus or Japan. I am hated by my countrymen for Jesus' sake as *yaso* [derogatory term for a Christian], and I am disliked by foreign missionaries for Japan's sake as national and narrow. No matter, I may lose all my friends but I cannot lose Jesus and Japan.
>
>   Jesus and Japan; my faith is not a circle with one centre: it is an ellipse with two centres. My heart and mind revolve around the two dear names. And I know that one strengthens the other; Jesus strengthens and purifies my love for Japan; and Japan clarifies and objectifies my love for Jesus. Were it not for the two, I would become a mere dreamer, a fanatic, and an amorphous universal man. Jesus makes me a world-man, a friend

---

[44] *Uchimura Kanzo Zenshu* [Complete Works of Uchimura Kanzo], 1932, XV, 578f.

[45] *Zenshu*, 1932, XV, 579.

[46] *Shinko chosaku zenshu* [Complete Theological Works of Uchimura Kanzo], 1961, XVI, 130. Honen and Shinran are founders of Pure Land and True Pure Land Buddhism in 13th C.

of humanity; Japan makes me a lover of my country, and through it binds
me firmly to the terrestrial globe, I am neither too narrow nor too broad
by loving the two at the same time.[47]

As the extensive quotations above illustrated, Uchimura was a unique individual, a man far ahead of his times. He understood that an authentic gospel message must be contextualized in Japanese culture and history. He rejected the Enlightenment view of a "universal man" as an abstraction in which his spiritual heritage was reduced. Instead, in agreement with contemporary anthropology, he insisted that culture, his Japanese heritage, was not an external disposable trait, but constitutive to human existence. That is, Japanese human identity is both culturally and historically created, just as are the identities of American, English, or German human beings.[48] For Uchimura becoming a Christian did not obliterate his cultural or spiritual heritage, and his spiritual heritage did not corrupt his Christian faith. In fact, becoming a Christian only strengthened or fulfilled his Japanese spiritual heritage. Hence, Uchimura called for a "Japanese Christianity" that incorporated the spiritual heritage of Honen and Shinran.[49]

To summarize, in the modern period the continuous Japanese self-identity crisis has either favored or inhibited the growth of Christianity. At times this search for national meaning has favored borrowing from the West, not only its technology, but also its values and religion. At other times Japanese identity has returned to its traditional cultural heritage, established in its modern form in the Meiji period. For Japanese Christians today Uchimura's legacy represents an unfinished agenda, one that requires further contextualization historically and analytically. In this context Christian mission will require radical rethinking to confront the Japanese inescapable missiological issues, such as their continuing search for meaning in modern or postmodern Japan.

---

[47] *Zenshu,* 1932, XV, 599f.

[48] For theoretical discussion see Clfford Geertz, *The Interpretation of Cultures: Selected Essays*, esp. chap. 4, "Religion As a Cultural System," and chap. 2, "The Impact of the Concept of Culture on the Concept of Man." NY: Basic Books, Inc., Publishers, 1973.

[49] Uchimara's selection of Honen and Shinran from the Japanese Buddhist (Pure Land) tradition as significant to his Christian faith long anticipated contemporary Christian interest, such as by Karl Barth, *Church Dogmatics*, Vol. 1/2, pp 342ff (Edinburgh: T. and T, Clark, 1956); Alfred Bloom, *Shinran's Gospel of Pure Grace* (Tucson: University of Arizona Press, 1965); my essay, "The Problem of Transcendence in Comparative Religion: The Quest for the Sacred in Kamakura Buddhism," in *Transcendence and the Sacred,* edited by Alan M. Olson and Leroy S. Rouner, pp.115-137 (South Bend, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 1981); and in the Buddhist-Christian dialogue today by such theologians as Gordon D. Kaufman, "Pure Land Buddhism Today: Some Methodological Issues in Recent Revisionist Interpretations," and John B. Cobb, Jr., "A Christian Critique of Pure Land Buddhism, " chaps. 4 and 5 in *Toward a Contemporary Understanding of Pure Land Buddhism: Creating a Shin Buddhist Theology in a Religiously Plural World,"* edited by Dennis Horota. Albany, NY: State University of New York, 2000.

Toward an Emerging Postmodern Paradigm: From Ancient Jerusalem to Modern Tokyo

According to Wilbert Shenk, during the period of 1972-1987, the collapse of the modern mission paradigm signaled both the end of an era of mission history and a paradigmatic shift in the understanding of *missio dei* in the postmodern era.[50] Although not yet clearly defined, the new paradigm must begin with the end of the "one-way movement" of the mono-linear history of western triumphalism, not only in theory but also in practice. In short, to reiterate, how does one travel from ancient Jerusalem to modern Tokyo, a journey from ancient to modern times and from western to Asian civilization?

Bosch has already traced for us the road traveled by the typical missionary in Japan, one that may have begun in ancient Jerusalem (*e.g.*, in his/her seminary study of "what it meant") and continued successively to Antioch, Rome, Alexandria, Germany, England, and New England before reaching Japan, where this entire heritage was transplanted in a new environment. The path taken by Japanese pastors may be not too different, for they discover their Christian faith somewhere along this road, from which they, too, transplant and adapt to their environment a largely western religious tradition. The issue here is *not* whether or not this has been a proper or authentic route, for Christianity has indeed been established in Japan in this way. Rather, the problem is that following this route has created a gospel that "smells like butter" [foreign], causing alienation because it is fundamentally discontinuous with Japanese cultural history. Further the issue is *not* whether or not there is a shortcut or direct flight from Jerusalem to Tokyo because at this late date there is no way to bypass the western religious traditions already in Japan. As one senior Japanese biblical scholar stated after reading Bosch, he now understands better his Lutheran roots.[51] Rather the issue is whether or not the Christian message in Japan can continue to ignore the cultural and religious history of civilizations that began in ancient India and China and were later transplanted by cultural diffusion to Japan during the sixth to ninth centuries CE to form a new Asian civilization.

From Ancient Israel to Modern Japan

For Japanese Christians the Old Testament offers an alternative route for both a critical and comparative understanding of their own religious heritage because the history of ancient Israel parallels the history of ancient India and China. Further, the transformation of early Japanese tribal society by Chinese culture parallels the transformation of European tribes by cultural diffusion in the formation of medieval Christendom.

For simplicity here, the Old Testament history of ancient Israel can be read as a series of "paradigm shifts," beginning with the primordial paradigm of the formation of

---

[50] Wilbert Shenk, "Mission in Transition, 1972-1987*." Missiology*, 15 (1987): 419-430.
[51] Remark by Gyoji Nabetani, editor-in-chief of the Japanese translation of *Transforming Mission.*

ancient Israel as the people of God in the Exodus experience. Caught between ancient Egypt and Babylon, two great Bronze-age civilizations with divine kingship and a rigidly hierarchical society, ancient Israel, a small, insignificant society, in worshiping a transcendent warrior-king dedicated to holy war became a totally different type of society, an egalitarian community of brothers. Under King David in a radical paradigm shift, Israel abandoned the direct rule of Yahweh and holy war to become a petty monarchy not unlike her neighbors. It became a theocratic kingdom with a hereditary kingship that extended its borders with military conquest, with a hereditary temple-priesthood that both mediated salvation and legitimated the kingdom, and with the beginnings of a hierarchical society. Except for occasional prophetic interventions, Israel, in turning to idolatry, submerged the transcendence of Yahweh.

A second major paradigm shift occurred in the prophetic judgments of Jeremiah and II Isaiah that culminated in the dissolution of the system of kingship and war, temple and priesthood, and hierarchical society. Instead, in exile without a king or military force, without a priest or temple, without privileged social status, the people of Israel once more worshiped a transcendent deity now unattached to a particular social nexus. Israel became "resident aliens" and "suffering servant" in *diaspora*.[52] Finally, in another paradigm shift in the return of people of God to Jerusalem and in the second temple experience, Judaism was born, which later became the context for the "paradigm transformation" in the rise of the primitive Christian church. Thus, although transformed, the spiritual heritage of ancient Israel was not abandoned in the New Testament but fulfilled. Accordingly, Japanese Christians now read the Old Testament in critical comparison to discover how their own religious heritage can be transformed and fulfilled.

Axial Age: The Rise of Historic (World) Religion

For Japanese and Asian Christians the inclusion of the Old Testament history of ancient Israel extends *missio dei* back to the first millennium BCE, to the time when the historic or world religions arose nearly simultaneously and independently in three widely separated valley civilizations in ancient India, China and Israel, a period the philosopher Karl Jaspers named the "axial age" of human history. For Jaspers[53]

> this axis of history is to be found in the spiritual process that occurred between 800 and 200 BC. It is there that we meet with the most deep cut dividing line in history. Man, as we know him today, came into being. For short we may style this the "Axial Period."
>
> What is new about this age, in all three areas of the world, is that man becomes conscious of Being as a whole, of himself and his

---

[52] For the significance of the concept of *diaspora*, see John H.Yoder, "See How They Go with Their Face to the Sun," *For the Nations*, chap. 3. Grand Rapids, MI 1997: Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1997.
[53] Karl Jaspers, *The Origin and Goal of History*, p. 1f. New Haven: Yale University Press, 1953.

limitations. He experiences the terror of the world and his own powerlessness. He asks radical questions. Face to face with the void he strives for liberation and redemption....In this Age were born the fundamental categories within which we still think today, and the beginnings of the world religions, by which human beings still live, were created.

During the axial age in India the religion of the wandering ascetics or forest hermits led to the Buddha (563-483 BCE); in China the teachings of the peripatetic sage-teachers led to Confucius (551-479 BCE); and in the ancient Near East the message of Moses and later the Hebrew prophets (760-538 BCE) culminated in Jesus of Nazareth. These charismatic figures all radically rejected the social, political and religious conditions of their own times and offered in their personhood or in their message a way of salvation, liberation or enlightenment. They became the founders of the world religions, sometimes called historic religions, world-rejecting religions or salvation religions. As Jaspers indicated, the world religions provided the "fundamental categories" by which human beings today continue to think and to live.

The historic religions that arose all across the ancient world were characterized by a world rejection that denied ultimate value to the individual, family, community, society or king. Before, in archaic religion and society, such as in early Japan, the individual's personal identity was fused with one's social identity. One's identity was defined primarily by one's role in the family, the group, the community or caste. In a historic or world-rejecting religion the locus of the individual's identity shifted from the mundane social world to a transcendent or universal realm. The individual's religious goal was no longer found in an affirmation of this world as celebrated in the religious rituals of the archaic civilizations. Instead, the religious path of world rejection led to a new identity found by a denial of, a release from, or a salvation from this world.

This religious rejection of the world in the historic religions allowed–for the first time in human history–the rise of an autonomous centered self that was clearly differentiated from one's social identity. This independent self-identity became possible because of the discovery of a new personal identity in a transcendent or ultimate reality. Thus, all historic religions are also salvation religions that offer individuals a new self-identity freed from the established social-political order. At the same time, the world religions related their adherents to their social and natural environments in new ways, each in a strikingly different way.[54]

---

[54] The classic study is Max Weber, *Sociology of Religion*. See esp. chap XI: "Asceticism, Mysticism, and Salvation Religion," pp.166-183. Boston: Beacon Press, 1963.

Historic Religion and the Rise of Imperial Civilizations in Asia and Japan

Here we note that the rise of imperial civilizations in Asia parallel those in the West. Just as primitive Christianity was transformed in its first paradigm shift into a great civilizational religion with the rise of Christendom in the West, the historic religious traditions of Asia, even before Constantine in the West, became state religions in the formation of great imperial civilizations. In India after nearly a century of conquest and consolidation, Ashoka (r. 270-232 BCE), the third ruler in the Mauryan dynasty, established the first pan-Indian empire through bloody military conquest. To pacify and to legitimate his empire, Ashoka renounced further violence and adopted Buddhism as the official religion. During his reign, Ashoka transformed primitive (monastic) Buddhism into a civilizational religion and made Buddhism a missionary religion,[55] which spread throughout Asia, including to China in the first century CE and to Japan via Korea in the sixth century CE.

In China after nearly two centuries of warring states, the Qin emperor, *Shi Huang-ti* [First Emperor][56] unified China by military conquest in 221 BCE to begin an imperial civilization that lasted through many dynastic changes until its collapse in 1911 with the formation of the Republic of China. Begun as a harsh Legalist state, the Qin-Han Dynasty (221 BCE-220 CE) gradually reverted to the use of Confucianism, which became the official state religion in 136 BCE under emperor Han Wu-ti (r. 141-87 BCE). Although not a missionary religion, Confucian thought and practice spread Chinese civilization throughout East Asia, especially to Korea and Japan.

In Japan the history of religious development (paradigm shifts) was quite different from that of the other Asian axial-age religions discussed above. In ancient India and China independent religious innovations led to the radical transformation of archaic religion and society into a world-rejecting, salvation religion, in which individual self-identity clearly developed before the rise of an imperial civilization. Instead, like ancient Israel, early Japan was an insignificant society on the periphery of the great imperial civilizations of Sui (581-618 CE) and T'ang (618-907 CE) dynasties of China. In successive waves of diffusion of advanced civilizations, Japan added to its nativistic tradition the Buddhist religion and Confucian statecraft and social ethics from China via Korea, beginning from the sixth century to create a clan-based centralized (*ritsuryo*) monarchy.

However, unlike in ancient Israel, early Japan did not have a prophetic tradition of critical world-rejection in the name of transcendent deity. Hence, instead of a religion of

---

[55] Like Constantine, some scholars questioned whether or not Ashoka was a true believer, since the practices that he advocated differed from the teachings of the Buddha. For discussion, see "History and Legend of the Ashokan Impact," *Buddhism and Asian History: Religion, History, and Culture– Readings from the Encyclopedia of Religion,* pp. 8-10. NY: Macmillan Publishing Co, 1989.

[56] In 1974 near Xian peasants discovered the famous tomb of the Qin First Emperor, containing an 8000-strong army of buried terracotta soldiers.

personal salvation as in primitive Buddhism, Buddhism in early Japan served as a "nation-protecting" [*gokoku*] religion, a religion that functioned to protect the nation from the forces of evil and to insure its prosperity. In philosophical terms, since the monistic (non-dual) character of Buddhism identified the phenomenal world, in this instance Japan, with the absolute, the Buddhist teachings served well to legitimize the imperial state by sacralizing the phenomenal world of nature, throne, and society. In other words, the Japanese, despite the influence of Buddhist and Confucian ideas and Chinese civilization from the sixth century, did not abandon their archaic, pre-axial civilizational premises.

Honen and Shinran: Historic (Axial) Religion in Japan

The clear exception or breakthrough of archaic religion was the radical transcendent character of the Kamakura (1190-1300) Buddhism of Honen and Shinran,[57] to whom Uchimura Kanzo in a later age instinctively turned to find solace. Honen ruptured the Japanese Buddhist monistic identification of the absolute and the nation by radically devaluating Japan as *edo*, the defiled land, in contrast to *jodo*, the Pure land abode of Amida Buddha. However, his teaching of the radical transcendence of Amida, although freeing the individual from socially ascribed identities, left the meaning of human existence problematic in this world because true meaning could be found only in the next life in another world.

In wrestling with this problem, Shinran universalized the concept of Amida Buddha as not only the eternal ruler of the Pure Land but also as universal truth and power that permeated all beings. Hence, the heart (or mind) of each individual is simultaneously the repository of the Buddha mind and the earthly mind. Instead of humanity's aspiring for Buddhahood in a future life, Amida Buddha has already descended into the human heart. In fulfillment of his original vow, Amida has already transferred his true mind to the human mind; he has planted into the human heart the seed of truth that brings forth sincerity, faith, and desire for birth in the Pure Land. In effect Shinran collapsed the distance between Amida and humankind, as taught by Honen, by uniting the Buddha mind and the earthly mind, thus promising salvation in this existence instead of a future existence. Hence, the *nembutsu* (chant) was no longer a petition of a hopelessly lost person but now an expression of gratitude for the mercies of Amida Buddha. Thus Shinran made Honen's transcendent Amida Buddha immediately immanent in every individual being in this world. This view provided his followers not only with the symbols for a self-identity independent of the social order, as in Honen's case, but also a basis for a meaningful existence in this world and in this lifetime. In effect, Shinran, for the sake of Amida Buddha, relativized both the sacred Buddhist monastic orders (Shinran married) and the quasi-sacred sociopolitical order to

---

[57] For a more thorough account see my essay, "The Problem of Transcendence in Comparative Religion: The Quest for the Sacred in Kamakura (Japanese) Buddhism."

offer personal salvation and meaning to all classes in all vocations.[58]

However, in later years the followers of Shinran organized themselves into tightly knit feudal units. Whereas Shinran urged his followers to make every act of life an act of thanksgiving to Amida Buddha, in later years these acts of gratitude became acts of obligation redirected to Shinran's lineal descendants, who were identified as Amida's official representatives on earth. Instead of a radical religious faith that led to a highly individuated self, as in Shinran's case, the later Pure Land followers organized themselves in a religious faith that led to the subordination of the personal self to the demands of group solidarity, that is, to a sacralized social order, now the Pure Land feudal (*ikko ikki*) sects.

Shinran's followers represent a case of the "tradition of submerged transcendence" that has been replicated many times in Japanese history. "Submerged transcendence" refers to the Japanese preference for receiving and adapting the great religious traditions and civilizations of the world without abandoning their own pre-axial age religious premises, which Bellah has called the "ground bass" of Japanese religion.[59]

Tennosei [The Japanese Emperor System]

Although the Japanese have been influenced by Buddhist and Confucian ideas and Chinese civilization since the sixth century, by Christian and western medieval civilization in the 16th century, and again by Christianity and modern society since the 19th century, they did not abandon their pre-axial age religious commitments. Instead the "ground bass" of Japanese tradition continuously permeated the imported foreign traditions, reformulating these cultures to bolster their archaic heritage, now codified in the contemporary emperor system.

Thus, as discussed earlier, during the Meiji Restoration, Japan in thirty years transformed itself from a quasi-feudal society to a modern nation state by instituting a divine emperor. During the Showa era (1926-1989) after World War II, the noted historian John Whiney Hall wrote thus:[60]

> Few Asian nations entered the modern world by strengthening a
> monarchical system rather than destroying it [in the Meiji era]....Reborn
> out of the ashes of military defeat and wartime disillusionment, the Showa
> emperor by virtue of retaining the same body under a new constitutional
> system, has again become the symbol of continuity despite drastic
> change.

---

[58] Anachronistically some Christian theologians have called Shinran the Martin Luther of Japan.

[59] Robert N. Bellah has used "ground bass" and "submerged transcendence" to describe Japanese religion from the beginning of his work on Japan. For the most recent explanation, see his *Imaging Japan: The Japanese Tradition and its Modern Interpretation,* p. 7. Berkeley, CA: University of California, 2003.

[60] John Whitney Hall, "A Monarch for Modern Japan," p. 63f in *Political Developments in Modern Japan,* edited by Robert E. Ward. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1968.

Professor John Hall's comment on the continuity of the Japanese emperor system was written in 1968, twenty-three years after that fateful date, August 15, 1945, at high noon, when many Japanese heard on the radio for the first time the (pre-recorded) voice of Emperor Showa, announcing in an imperial proclamation the unconditional surrender and defeat of Japan. In spite of that shock and the subsequent drastic changes made by the American military occupation (SCAP), the Japanese emperor system continued to provide the national stability.

That stability and continuity was tested twenty years later on September 19, 1988, when the Showa emperor's serious illness was revealed publicly. The nation went into *jishuku,* a long period of self-restraint. Government officials terminated trips abroad; local communities, companies and schools cancelled annual festivals, sporting events, parties, concerts and other joyous events. On the morning of January 7, 1989, when the emperor died, the Showa era ended. The new emperor immediately assumed the throne, and on the following day the calendar changed to the new era, the first year of Heisei. On February 4, 1989, ten thousand mourners–including 700 foreign dignitaries and heads of state, representing 164 nations–attended a televised, dual funeral ceremony, a screened-off, private (traditional) Shinto ceremony, followed by a (modern) public ceremony.

Finally, after a year of national mourning, two enthronement ceremonies took place on November 10 and 14-15, 1990, to culminate the imperial change. Traditionally both ceremonies–one a Buddhist and the other a Shinto–were rites of the deification of the emperor, but under current Shinto influence the Buddhist ritual has been secularized and the older *daijosai*, the Shinto great thanksgiving festival, became the more important ceremony.

The *daijosai,* which began on the evening of November 14th from eight o'clock until the dawn of the next day, recapitulated ritually the ancient myth of the descent of Prince Ninigi, the first emperor of Japan, who was the grandson of the sun-goddess, Amaterasu. Originally a fertility rite in the agricultural cycle, in this ritual the new emperor becomes prince Ninigi, who communes with the mother sun-goddess and unites with her and is thus transformed into a female who is impregnated by the gods, and then is reborn as a deified ancestor, a "living god" [*ara hito gami*].

What is the meaning of all these succession ceremonies, to which the Japanese attach great emotion? Here both the traditional and the modern are held together in both the funeral and enthronement ceremonies. The modern symbolizes the passing of one emperor and the enthronement of the new emperor, but the traditional is more complex. In the *daijosai* what is celebrated is not the passing of one individual and the inauguration of a second individual, but the continuity of the imperial lineage, which is "co-eval with heaven and earth." That is, succession is not biological but the religious extension of time back to the ancestral founder, Amaterasu.

Thus, the contemporary term *emperor* has both modern and traditional connotations. The *emperor* at once symbolizes the modern political notion of nationhood

and simultaneously symbolizes the (traditional) eternal moral order, all that is eternally pure, true, and beneficent. The *emperor* thus provides ultimate meaning to the land, the people, and society of Japan. It includes the traditional notions that the spirit of human personality is pure and true, that human relations are based upon a hierarchy of loyalty, and that the Japanese land, its people and society are unique in human history. In mythical terms all Japanese are seen as descendants of gods and as branch families of the Yamato or sun-goddess line. In other words, the Japanese self-identity is embodied in the emperor, whose being coincides with the history of Japan. In summary, the emperor system has become the symbol of national pride, moral purity and historical continuity, which has maintained national stability in times of great social, political and economic change.

"The Inescapable Missiological Issue"

Because purity, truth, the land, the people and society all coincide in the symbol of the *emperor*, the Japanese self-identity is totally enclosed. Hence, to repudiate the emperor is, in a sense, to repudiate part of one's being as a Japanese. For Christians in Japan the emperor system has indeed become the "inescapable missiological issue," reflected upon in many statements of confession, repentance, and apologies for wartime responsibilities of the church. Below I quote from a typical statement, which Tokyo Mission Research Institute participated in writing.

> During World War II,[61]
>
> worshipers in Japanese Christian churches–before the beginning of the Sunday service–without hesitation would face the Imperial Palace and bow low in deep respect in a patriotic ceremony. The churches during the war not only foolishly practiced emperor worship, but seemed totally unaware that their deeds were in fundamental conflict with the first commandment.…These were sinful acts by the churches that had acted cautiously to avoid public criticism during a wartime atmosphere, in which Christianity was seen as the religion of an enemy nation. Without much thought it became common practice in many Japanese Christian churches to accept the idea of the church conforming to the state.…
>
> [T]he United Church in Japan even demanded that the members of the Christian churches of colonized Koreans in Japan visit Shinto shrines and pay homage to the emperor, arguing that these "were not religious acts but proper duties of the Emperor's subjects".… Nevertheless, among these Christians not a few refused to obey.… Because of their refusal, they were persecuted with indescribable brutality and finally martyred. Many Japanese did not know about these deeds until long after the war.…

---

[61] From "Reflections on the Fiftieth Anniversary of World War II and the Tasks of Japanese Christians (April, 10, 1995)," A joint committee statement by eight Christian groups in "Appendix" (added to E.T., 1995), *The Japanese Emperor System: The Inescapable Missiological Issue.*

> As we face the fiftieth anniversary of the war, we openly confess our war responsibilities, sincerely repent of our sins, which have been forgiven, and in Christ set forth on the path peace making. - April 10, 1995.

Toward an Emerging Postmodern Paradigm: Issues of Contextualization in Japanese Civilization

In this study of the contextualization of *missio dei* in Japanese civilization, Bosch's concept of paradigm shifts in the history of western Christendom was expanded both temporally and spatially to include the history of the civilizations of ancient Israel of the Old Testament and the parallel Asian civilizations in ancient India and China, which became the precursors of Japanese civilization. This expanded version of Bosch's paradigm shifts highlighted two major paradigmatic changes–the rise of axial-age religions and imperial civilizations (including the rise of Christianity and western civilization) and the impact of western modernity in Asia during the 19th century.

Beginning with the western maritime expansion at the end of the 15th century, the world became increasingly one with the intrusion of the West into nearly every part of the world. Before the 15th century Asian history could have been written without significant reference to the West; however, by the 19th century expansion of western modernization, writing such a history had become impossible. Every non-western civilization has had to respond to the western intrusion. Hence, Japanese Christians have responded by critically contextualizing both their roots in western Christianity and their heritage in Asian civilization, that is, by traveling from ancient to modern times and from western to Asian civilization, or in short, the road from ancient Jerusalem to modern Tokyo. Below is a review of ten contemporary missiological issues of contextualization and responses raised in this study.[62]

Modern Japan

First, modernization in Japan did not converge into a western form of modern or postmodern culture and society. Instead, Japan's own Asian religious heritage continues to provide the "fundamental categories" (Jaspers) for understanding Japanese personality and identity. Therefore, understanding the meaning of human existence in Japan will require knowing how these categories continue to function as the first models of reality for the Japanese.

Second, culturally and religiously, Japanese Christians are still confronted by the Japanese emperor system [*tennosei*], a Shinto version of "Christendom," as their inescapable

---

[62] My list does not intend to replace Bosch's list of 13 "Elements of an Emerging Ecumenical Missionary Paradigm" (pp. 368-510), but to highlight 10 elements critical to an emerging missionary paradigm for Japan.

missiological issue. That is, Japanese self-identity remains embedded in a sacred Japanese society, which in turn is embedded in an immanental culture that sacralizes the nation, its people and its emperor. Because this immanental character of Japanese civilization lacks transcendental reference, it is self-referential and particularistic in contrast to western civilizational claims of transcendental, universal values and individual human rights. Appropriately, Huntington has described such civilizations–one based upon a Christendom and the other on a "Shintodom" type of culture–as "the clash of civilizations."

Third, although not studied, the perennial issue of the relation of church and state, or church and society, needs a fresh examination contextualized in world history. In the past, in both Japan and in the West, church and society have been debated in terms of the typologies of Ernst Troeltsch and/or H. Richard Niebuhr.[63] As helpful as these and other western typologies are for analysis, they presuppose a Christendom context and provide Christendom-type solutions. Such understandings make little sense in a civilization that has a Christian population of less than one percent, and in a society that is sacralized by its divine king, a Shinto high priest, who in principle is hostile to Christianity.

Fourth, Japanese society and its socialization practices today consist of both modern and traditional elements held in tension and at times in contradiction. When socialization practices are congruent with the traditional elements, as in the development of *shudan seikatsu* [group life] in kindergarten and primary social groups, Japanese identity and social order may become "tyrannical."[64] On the other hand, the continuing secularization of Japanese society creates anomie, which threatens the fabric of society. The choice, of course, is neither a dysfunctional nor a "tyrannical" society, but rather a message of a holistic gospel that offers personal salvation, an individuation of the self leading to a new personal and social identity in a new social order (church) that is free from tyranny and disorder.

The Modern Missionary Legacy

Fifth, as Asian and western histories became intertwined, not surprisingly, the development of the modern missionary movement in this same period was inseparable from the expansion of western modernization into the non-western world. Hence, the historical intrusion of a western gospel into Japan not only cannot be ignored in the study of the Christian mission in a postmodern world, but needs to be examined critically in the context of Japanese civilization.

Sixth, the legacy of the modern Protestant missionaries to the Japanese church

---

[63]The classic reference works are Ernst Troeltsch, *The Social Teachings of the Christian Churches.* NY: Harper & Brothers, 1960, and H. Richard Niebuhr, *Christ and Culture.* NY: Harper and Brothers, 1951.

[64] For discussion, see Robert L. Ramseyer, "When Society Itself Is the Tyrant" in *The Japan Christian Review,* 58 (1992): 75-84. In Japanese, see chap 1, part II of *Korekara no nihon no senkyo: hasso no dai tenkan*. Tokyo, TMRI, 1994.

since the Meiji Restoration has been a Eurocentric understanding of history and civilization that has been in fact an extension of modern western culture over all the world. Enlightenment in the West envisioned the world as homogeneous entity, a vision reinforced by the rise of the world market in the 19th century after the earlier industrial revolution. According to the leading Japanese post-modernist, Kojin Karatani,[65] in the West

> world history [was] narrated within a fundamental identity, and successive, heterogeneous "worlds" [were] appropriated into this as "stages"....What made this development possible was the nineteenth century of the West.

Seventh, today, Japanese theologians are aware of this western understanding of "world" history in which Japanese history is reduced to a "stage" of western history. They are critical of the western enlightenment legacy and Christendom presuppositions of their received theological traditions. Thus, they have turned to the idea of contextualization as a way out. But the way out in the West has been a historical and cultural relativization of its own historical understandings, including radical deconstruction in theology–a challenge much of orthodox (both liberal and conservative) Christianity in America and missionaries in Japan are unwilling to accept–an example of the great denial. In short, deconstruction is intrinsic to the contextualization process.

Eighth, for example, instead of a theology plagued by western individualism, a Japanese theology must speak to the Japanese sensitivity to human relations–the need for harmony in the face of broken relationships, competitive factionalism, and exclusiveness that discriminates. Japanese harmony [*wa*] needs transformation by biblical models for reconciliation [*wakai*] of broken relationships, for peace [*heiwa*] among feuding factions, and for justice instead of discrimination against the outsider, the outcaste, or the dispossessed. Such a gospel message will require a reconsideration of much of the individualistic western theology inherited from Saint Augustine through the Reformation to much of evangelical theology in Japan today.

Ninth, the discovery of culture[66] as a significant variable in contemporary missiology offers a new agenda of missiological issues – such as the scope of the gospel, the meaning of personal conversion, the structure of the church and its relation to society – each in its own historical and social context. Although all these issues have been encountered at one time or another in the West, as well as passed on as Christian heritage to non-western sister churches, none can be taken for granted. In other words, the recognition that culture

---

[65]For a postmodern critique from a Japanese perspective, see Karatani Kojin, "One Spirit, Two Nineteenth Centuries," in *Postmodernism and Japan*, edited by Masao Miyoshi and H.D. Harootunian, pp. 259-272. Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 1989.

[66] For discussion, see Clifford Geertz, *op. cit.* and Charles R. Taber, *The World Is Too Much With Us: "Culture" in Protestant Missions*. Macon, GA: Mercer University Press, 1991.

is socially and historically conditioned requires every generation in every society to face these issues afresh.

"The Clash of Civilizations"

Finally and tenth, the Christian missiological response cannot accept the clash of civilizations as inevitable or final. Because in a postmodern or post-Christendom era church and state have become increasingly differentiated, freeing the Christian church from the civil religion of Christendom or "Shintodom." Therefore, Christians in Japan and the West can seek to become a voluntary community of "resident aliens," who are not reducible to a western or a Japanese civilization, but are the eschatological community, the first fruits of the Kingdom. Such a community nourishes the transforming experiences of freely loving beings gathered in a new social order to witness to state and society, because neither state nor society can know the reality of the first fruits of the Kingdom apart from the witness of the visible faithful church.