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Christianity as a Transnational Social Movement: Kagawa Toyohiko and the Friends of Jesus

Introduction

For a number of years I have been interested in the role of Japanese leaders in the development of new indigenous Christian movements and traditions in modern Japan. Early on in missionary circles there were serious discussions on developing indigenous churches, but this was understood primarily in terms of the “three-selves”: self-support, self-control, and self-propagation. The idea that Japanese Christians might have their own insights and ways of organizing and practicing the faith was not generally entertained. Transmission of the missionary culture without corruption or addition was the primary concern.

After Japanese converts were introduced to the Scriptures and went on to pursue serious theological studies, many realized that it was possible to distinguish the Christian faith and biblical traditions from the theology, church polity, and cultural values that were embedded in the transplanted American and European mission churches. The fact that numerous denominations were competing for converts on Japanese soil (each with its own doctrinal peculiarities and forms of government) indicated to many leaders that there might be room for Japanese interpretations and cultural expressions of Christianity.

Carlo Caldarola’s *Christianity: The Japanese Way* (1979) represents a pioneering work in the sociological study of independent and indigenous forms of Christianity in Japan and was particularly helpful to me in the early stages of my own research in this field. This book focused on Uchimura Kanzō and the Nonchurch movement (*Mukyōkai*), the first independent expression of Japanese Christianity founded in 1901, which subsequently functioned as the fountainhead of other indigenous Christian movements in Japan. Uchimura’s version of Christianity was a Confucian one, grafted on to *bushidō*, and had particular appeal to the educated members of Japanese society. While Caldarola’s monograph provided an important beginning in the sociological study of indigenous Christian movements, his misleading subtitle “the Japanese Way” implied that there was one authentic Japanese version of Christianity. The successive appearance of numerous indigenous movements over the past century, however, indicates that there are other ways to be both Japanese and Christian.

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In *Christianity Made in Japan* (1998), I attempted to provide basic documentation of what might be called “missing persons and movements,” which had been largely ignored by representative historical and sociological studies. These movements were also founded by Japanese leaders who accepted the Christian faith (on their own terms), but who rejected the missionary carriers and their particular Western and denominational understanding of religion. Drawing on the work of Werner Stark (1970) and Anthony Blasi (1991), I adopted the term “minor founder” to consider the role of these Japanese Christian innovators. These charismatic individuals gave birth to alternative movements in their efforts to address the needs of a new type of member or a neglected concern, while at the same time conceiving of the movement as an extension, elaboration, or fulfillment of an existing religious tradition. The religious experiences of these leaders and their unique combination of foreign and native religious and cultural elements produced a number of alternative Japanese Christian traditions. Alongside a variety of transplanted denominations and sects of Western origins, a variety of indigenous Christian groups – Confucian, shamanistic, pentecostal, evangelical, and so on – have become a part of the religious landscape of modern Japan. These movements provide clear evidence that Japanese were not passive recipients of transplanted Christianity, but active agents who reinterpreted and reconstructed the faith in terms that made sense to them.

This article focuses on one important figure not included in my earlier study: Kagawa Toyohiko (1888-1960), a Protestant leader known for his wide range of activities and contributions to society during Japan’s modern century.¹ He was also the founder of the Friends of Jesus movement (*Iesu no Tomo Kai* イエスの友会) in 1921. Although few might recognize his name today, Kagawa had a significant influence on many people both within and outside the church through his work as an evangelist, social worker, writer, and labor union organizer. In a recent book, Furuya Yasuo (2003) reminds us that Kagawa was once a household name and one of the best-known Japanese in the Western world. His work in Japan and lecture tours in the United States were covered by the *New York Times*, the *Christian Century*, and even in the mass market *Readers’ Digest*.

¹ An earlier draft of this paper was presented at a symposium titled, “Experiences With and Within: Christians in Japan from the 16th Century to the Present Day,” organized by Professor Peter Nosco, Department of Asian Studies, University of British Columbia, and co-sponsored by the Japan Society for the Promotion of Science. I gratefully acknowledge financial support from the Shadan Hōjin Tokyo Club 社団法人東京倶楽部 for a research project on “Kagawa Toyohiko: Toward an International and Comparative Perspective” (2005-2008), which has enabled me to gather additional archive materials from numerous institutions both within and outside of Japan. Finally, I would like to express appreciation to Dr. Hisao Kayama, Executive Director of the Matsuzawa Shiryōkan Kagawa Toyohiko Resource Center, Tokyo, for many hours of helpful conversations and for arranging my affiliation as a Research Associate of the Center, which has allowed me full access to the archives.

Many have regarded him as the “Saint Francis of Japan” for his identification with the poor and for his compassionate work in the slums. In his own time, however, there were others who regarded him as a dangerous social activist and rabble-rouser. Kagawa was a problem for the authorities at various stages of his career and arrested a number of times because of his social and political activism and pacifist views. Although he is clearly a controversial figure, he was nevertheless recognized toward the end of his life for his wide-ranging contributions to both church and society. In 1955, he still had many supporters and became one of the few Japanese to have ever been nominated for the Nobel Peace Prize. Shortly after his death in 1960, he was also posthumously awarded the First Order of the Sacred Treasure.² Given his remarkable career and wide-range of activities, Kagawa can be approached from many different angles. My concern here is with Kagawa in his role as a charismatic leader and founder of a new religious movement.³ Needless to say, I am hardly the first to draw attention to Kagawa’s charismatic leadership and the Friends of Jesus movement, but it is a worthwhile exercise to place him and his movement in comparative perspective.

The Making of a Minor Founder

Kagawa’s spiritual biography may be a familiar story, but a brief synopsis is in order here. Kagawa was born in Kobe in 1888 under less than ideal circumstances. His mother was a geisha, one of many his father kept for entertainment. Both parents died when he was only four years old. Although illegitimate, Kagawa had been legally adopted by his father and was therefore sent to live in the family home with his father’s neglected wife in Awa, a village in Tokushima Prefecture. It is not surprising that he recounts his childhood as difficult and lonely in this rather awkward living situation. Inauspicious beginnings to say the least.

Life only became more difficult for the young Kagawa. Due to his brother’s irresponsible behavior and lifestyle, the family went bankrupt in 1903. Kagawa was only fifteen at the time and was having serious doubts about the meaning and value

² Ota Yuzo (1978: 181-182) reminds us that Kagawa was a complicated personality, and it is often difficult to penetrate beneath the “myth” and “sugary picture” that was created by his followers and sympathetic missionary interpreters (see the treatments by Kuroda (1983), Axling (1946) and Bradshaw (1952), for example). While a number of publications are very much in the vein of founder veneration (*sūbai*), he was clearly a remarkable man, with many abilities and wide-ranging interests. I have found Sumiya (1995) and Bikle (1976) to be the most helpful and balanced guides to understanding Kagawa and his social impact.

³ In referring to the Friends of Jesus, I have used the term “new religious movement” (*shin shūkyō*), following Sumiya Mikio (1995: 170), rather than Bikle’s (1976: 173-174) category of “reform sect.” While Kagawa was certainly concerned with social reform, he was hardly sectarian or exclusive in orientation. In fact, he seemed more comfortable engaging people outside of sectarian or institutional church settings.

of life. The financial support of an uncle allowed him to continue his education at a middle school in Tokushima, which is where he encountered two missionaries of the Southern Presbyterian Church, Dr. H. W. Myers and Dr. C. A. Logan, with whom he studied English and the Bible. He was attracted to the Christian faith by the reassuring teaching of Jesus that “God was his heavenly father” and by the warmth and kindness of the Myers and Logan families. One consequence of his decision to receive baptism from Dr. Myers in 1904 was rejection by his uncle and the loss of the only remaining financial support from his family.

Funds provided by his missionary mentors and the small Christian community in Tokushima made it possible for him to move to Tokyo in 1905 and enroll in the theology department of Meiji Gakuin, a college with connections to the Northern Presbyterian and Dutch-Reformed churches. Kagawa quickly earned a reputation as a voracious reader and extremely bright student, but also one who had difficulty fitting in. Already deeply influenced by Tolstoy and other pacifist thinkers, Kagawa resisted the military training that was part of student life at Meiji Gakuin during this time and faced the negative social and physical repercussions of being regarded as a “traitor” by his fellow students. After two years at Meiji Gakuin, Kagawa transferred to Kobe Theological Seminary, a new school organized by the Southern Presbyterian Church, where his mentor, Dr. Myers, had joined the faculty.

A significant turning point occurred in Kagawa’s life during the time between these two institutions. While spending the summer break preaching in the Toyohashi area (near Nagoya), he encountered an impoverished pastor, Nagao Ken, who spent each day engaged in a ministry among the poor and disenfranchised. His example so impressed Kagawa that thereafter he looked to him as the inspiring model of the “imitation of Christ,” a life-style and ministry he would soon seek to duplicate in the Shinkawa slums of Kobe.

Toward the end of the summer, after some forty days of street preaching, Kagawa became deathly ill with an advanced case of tubercular pneumonia. After days of high fever and coughing up blood, he and those gathered around him assumed he would not recover. In the midst of this situation, Kagawa had a powerful religious experience, one that was certainly more overwhelming than his initial conversion to the Christian faith. As he prayed and waited for death, Kagawa recounts that “there came a peculiar, mysterious experience – an ecstatic consciousness of God; a feeling that God was inside of me and all around me. I felt a great ecstasy and joy.”⁴ It was this first-hand religious experience and remarkable recovery that would become the foundation for Kagawa’s confidence to pursue an independent path of ministry.

After a month of recuperation, Kagawa began his studies at Kobe Theological Seminary. He immediately resumed street preaching and, following the example of Nagao Ken, focused his efforts on the urban poor. For Kagawa, this meant the

⁴ Quoted in Bikle (1976: 50), who adds the comment that “in this unadorned sentence Kagawa described his ‘leap across the death-line’ and the first inner consciousness of the presence of God.”

nearby Shinkawa slums. The schedule of study and preaching was too much for him and he quickly had a relapse and spent almost a year out of school to recover. Upon returning to school, however, he immediately resumed his ministry in the slums and his relationships and activities there quickly became the primary focus of his life. On Christmas Eve of 1909, at the age of 21, he moved out of his dormitory room and carried his few belongings into an old rented house in Shinkawa.

In 1911, Kagawa graduated from Kobe Seminary and was ordained as an evangelist in the Japan Presbyterian Church. He continued his ministry in the slums and in due course was able to attract a number of able supporters and collaborators, including a young woman by the name of Haru, who was also baptized by Dr. Myers. She married Kagawa and moved into his Shinkawa home in May 1913. The following year, both were given the opportunity to continue their education, Haru at a Bible School for women in Yokohama, and Kagawa at Princeton University and Theological Seminary in the United States.

The two years and nine months in the United States was a formative period for Kagawa. He completed an M.A. in Experimental Psychology in 1915, and a Bachelor of Divinity Degree in 1916. More important than his studies, however, was exposure to the labor movement in New York and his realization that labor unions and collective action represented important means for improving the living conditions of the working poor. He also gained some initial experience organizing laborers in the U.S. In order to earn funds for his passage home, he moved to Ogden, Utah, and worked for the Japanese Association for some eight months before returning to Japan. During his stay in Ogden, he helped the Japanese and Mormon tenant farmers organize a union, an experience that would be put to good use in the years ahead.

Upon his return to Japan in 1917, he resumed his work in Shinkawa. He was deeply disappointed and grieved to discover that many of the children he had cared for and worked with had either died, been forced into prostitution, or pursued various illegal means to survive. It was at this point that Kagawa shifted his efforts from a focus on evangelism and relief work to methods and strategies for the prevention of poverty, which meant involvement in the labor movement and the organization of cooperatives. He quickly became one of the leading intellectuals in the labor movement and was elected to the council of the Kansai branch of Yūaikai (友愛会関西労働同盟会), the labor union founded by Suzuki Bunji 鈴木文治. For the next three years Kagawa devoted much of his time to the cause of the labor movement and was involved in efforts to organize workers in various industries.

Kagawa's involvement with the labor movement was to change dramatically in 1921. In July he was elected by union members as one of the leaders to represent workers in connection with the Kawasaki-Mitsubishi Shipbuilders strike. After participating in a march with striking laborers, Kagawa was arrested with other leaders and spent almost two weeks in jail. It was during this time that he seemed to realize that he was in a movement beyond his control. What was particularly problematic for Kagawa, the "pacifist," was that strikers with legitimate concerns could be transformed into a violent mob. It became increasingly clear to him that

this was a movement that would not abide by his Christian principles of non-violence. His optimism regarding the potential for social change was seriously tempered as he faced this darker side of the human condition. He was not only disillusioned with the movement, but according to most interpreters he was basically “knocked out” of his position in the inner circle of labor leaders as the radical left-wing – who endorsed revolutionary action – took over the movement. Although he was re-elected to the Central Committee in October 1921, Sumiya points out that he stopped attending meetings once he realized he was no longer needed in the labor movement and faced the fact that it was moving in a direction that was incompatible with his ideals and values.⁵

As it turns out, Kagawa already was making other plans. At a gathering of fourteen young pastors attending the Presbyterian Pastors National Meeting on October 5, 1921, he launched the *Iesu no Tomo Kai* – just two months after the labor conflict in Kobe. Kagawa’s sense of crisis over the direction of the labor movement may have been the precipitating event that helps to explain the timing of this movement, but it was his sense of disillusionment and despair over the state of the Japanese church that motivated him to call for an alternative movement. New movements, of course, require strong charismatic leadership and a compelling new vision and mission, not just a shared sense of alienation from the religious establishment.

From a sociological perspective, “charisma” and “charismatic authority” can only be understood in terms of the social relationship between leaders and followers. An individual may claim to have had direct contact with God or to have received new revelations or a vision of a divine mission, but a movement will not be born unless the new message meets the needs and aspirations of a significant audience. The message must have some appeal, and potential followers must be convinced that the messenger has some special connection with the sacred. While minor founders vary in the degree to which they reject existing traditions and introduce new elements, at the very least they claim to have direct access to the sacred and an independent basis of religious authority.

By all accounts, Kagawa was a charismatic leader whose self-understanding was shaped by profound religious experiences. As noted already, Kagawa had a powerful experience of divine presence and healing as a young theological student. This was not a one-time event, but something he claims to have experienced over the course of his life. He mentions such mystical encounters in *Meditations on the Holy Spirit*: “I have had my share of religious exaltation that comes of being

⁵ See Sumiya (1995: 118-26), Kuroda (1983: 155). As the labor movement came under the domination of more radical leaders, Kagawa faced the following “religion as opiate” Marxist critique for his moderate position: “Bury him! Bury Kagawa, the hypocrite, who is unceasingly striving to make dupes of us, of the property-less class. This false humanitarian taking advantage of us, hides behind the beautiful name of religion and scatters a deadening anesthetic among us. Here in Kobe he appears in the form of a savior, but his message has no relation whatever to the life of the property-less class” (Takenaka 1955: 222).

bathed in the light over many times. It is an ecstasy that defies description. We feel intuitively an absolute joy, which neither sex nor selfish desire nor covetousness for fame can ever give us.”⁶ These experiences no doubt gave Kagawa his own sense of religious calling and the confidence required for his independent mission, but it was his life-style and authentic practice of religion in the slums that established his legitimacy and authority for others.

The appearance of *Shisen o Koete* 死線を越えて (Crossing the Deathline), Kagawa’s autobiographical novel, clearly contributed to his charismatic status and public recognition. Initially published in installments in the magazine *Kaizō* 改造 in January 1919, it was published in book form in October the following year. Kagawa was still a young man of thirty-two. The initial 5,000 copies sold out quickly and by December an eighth edition was printed. Although the literary establishment was rather critical of the novel, very positive reviews appeared in the major newspapers of the time, including *Asahi*, *Fiji*, and the *Kokumin Shinbun*, which encouraged a wide readership. In the summer of 1921, when Kagawa became a very public figure through his role as one of the labor leaders in the Kobe strike, the publisher used the opportunity to advertise Kagawa’s novel again, at which time it met with even greater success. Muto (1966: 244-55) reports that it went through over 200 printings in a year and a half, which according to his estimate meant that over a million copies were in circulation.

The success of this novel made Kagawa a household name and he was thereafter able to attract large audiences to his lectures and evangelistic meetings when he traveled throughout the country. The royalties from this publication, likewise, provided Kagawa the financial means to support his various social projects and religious activities.⁷ This independent source of funding is one factor that also helps to explain the timing of Kagawa’s movement and his ability to

⁶ This statement is quoted in Muto (1966: 67) from Kagawa’s book, *Seirei ni tsuite no meisō*. In addition to powerful religious experiences, claims of miraculous healing have been important evidence of the religious authority for most founders in the early stages of independent movements. Most of the minor founders claim to have either experienced personal healing or been used by God to heal others. In Kagawa’s case, it was not only his own experience of unexpected healing and recovery but also some claims of healing by those he ministered to in the slums that supported his identity as an “instrument” of God.

⁷ According to one recent estimate, the royalties Kagawa received for this one novel would be equivalent to over ¥1,000,000,000 today or some 8 million US dollars (see the article, “Kagawa Toyohiko o debyūsaseta zasshi *Kaizō* de no rensai” 賀川豊彦をデビューさせた雑誌 改造」での連載, *Yorozu Banpō* 萬晩報, May 7, 2003, <http://www.yorozubp.com/0305/030507.htm>). Yokoyama (1959: 140) discusses the popularity of *Shisen o Koete*, which was not only a best-selling novel but also was adapted for plays and dramatic productions. He notes that Kagawa received 10 percent on the set price of the book (*teika*) for his royalty payment, which was a considerable amount of money at the time. From these royalty payments, Kagawa donated to the labor movement and provided financial support to each of the families who had a member in jail as a result of the strikes and conflict with the police. The salary of the *Nōmin Kumiai* (農民組合, Farmers’ Union) staff was also initially paid from Kagawa’s royalties.

launch the Friends of Jesus without consultation or permission from established churches and missionaries. After publishing his best-selling novel, *Shisen o Koete*, he was motivated to keep publishing books because the royalties provided the financial base for his many projects and activities. In spite of his heavy workload as an evangelist, social worker, and union organizer, Kagawa was incredibly productive as a writer. Tabulating the books and number of pages of Kagawa's publications listed in Yokoyama (1961) – and this does not include his magazine and newspaper articles – the total number of pages in print comes to 50,348.⁸

Kagawa's Alternative Vision: Christianity as a Social Movement

Although Kagawa maintained cooperative relationships with missionaries and was an ordained minister in good standing in the Presbyterian Church, he was extremely critical of the established churches on a number of grounds. Several points should be considered here. Like other Japanese minor founders, Kagawa was critical of the theology of the established churches, which he considered to be too abstract and disconnected from the realities of everyday life. He did not abandon the institutional church and reject the sacraments and ordained clergy as did Uchimura Kanzō, for example, but did insist that preoccupation with specific creeds, catechisms, and denominational traditions was not what Jesus intended for his followers. In a message addressed to young foreign missionaries at a Language School Retreat in Tamagawa some years after the formation of the Friends of Jesus, Kagawa reaffirmed his stance: "I want to say, let us start from Christ, not from Pharisaism, nor the Nicene Creed, nor from the Westminster Catechism, but from Christ himself."⁹

A second problem Kagawa had with the established churches was their individualistic interpretation of the faith – something he thought was due to the excessive influence of European and American thought on the Christian faith. As Sumiya (1995: 168) points out, there was a tendency at the time for Christianity to be interpreted in most Japanese churches as an individualistic spiritual movement (*seishin undō*). While Kagawa agreed that individual salvation was one important dimension of the faith, he maintained that for Christianity to be faithful to its founder's vision and example it must also be a social movement.¹⁰

⁸ His publications can be divided into the following categories: 62 religious books (13,334 pages); 40 books/pamphlets dealing with economics, poverty, labor, and cooperatives (8,917 pages); and 58 books of fiction, including novels, poetry, and childrens' stories (17,825 pages). In addition, 23 of his books were published in English translation (some of which were also published in various European languages). In addition to his own writing, Kagawa was also involved in translation work. In 1929 alone, for example, the following translations by Kagawa appeared: *John Wesley's Journal* (575 pages), J. R. Smith, *The World's Food Resources* (664 pages), and F. A. Lange, *History of Materialism* (949 pages).

⁹ This message is reported in a *Friends of Jesus* publication (estimated date, 1928 or 1929).

¹⁰ It is interesting to note that Kagawa's perspective – though somewhat unique in the

In 1919, about two years before the formation of the Friends of Jesus movement, Kagawa published *Seishin undō to shakai undō* (Spiritual and Social Movements), a title that captured his concern for both individual and social transformation. This vision was also central to his lectures published as *Seisho shakaigaku no kenkyū* (Studies in the Sociology of the Bible) in 1922.¹¹ The person of Jesus is at the center of Kagawa's faith, but it is faith in one who taught the path of redemptive love and formed a movement to bring about God's kingdom and rule of peace and justice on this earth. The whole of scripture, he argues, points to the conclusion that a biblical religious movement is a social movement of emancipation. Some years later Kagawa offered the following commentary on Luke 4: 18-19, which is surely the *locus classicus* for his view: "Jesus' understanding of the Gospel included economic emancipation (preaching to the poor); psychological emancipation (healing the broken-hearted); social emancipation (preaching deliverance to the captives); physical emancipation (recovery of sight to the blind); and political emancipation (setting at liberty them that are bruised). The Gospel of Christ means not merely individualistic mental healing. It means a healing of everything. It means an emancipation from all sorts of evil."¹²

Kagawa never abandoned the church and continued to serve as a pastor, but he was extremely critical of a church that failed to practice redemptive love (*shokuzai ai no jissen* 贖罪の実践), which for him meant moving outside the walls of the church to live and work with those in greatest need. The membership composition of established churches tended to be dominated by the educated or white-collar classes and those groups of people who were in most critical need – the "underside of modern Japan," to borrow a phrase from Mikiso Hane (1982) – were largely missing. Kagawa reasoned that clergy were failing to cultivate lay leaders and mobilize them for ministry to the poor and the larger work of the Kingdom. It was Jesus' vision of the Kingdom of God that captured Kagawa's imagination and commitment, and for him this was an inclusive notion that not only included the preaching and evangelistic work of the church, but all of those social movements that addressed the needs of humankind.¹³ While some critics accused him of being nothing more than a social activist, the corpus of his writings make it clear that he

Japanese Christian world at the time – has parallels within the larger world of Japanese religions. A number of other Japanese new religions (Omotokyō, for example) similarly emphasized both *kokoro naoshi* and *yonaoishi* or the healing of the heart and the world, which is sometimes referred to as *yo no tatekae tatenaoishi* or the "rebuilding and renewal of the world." (See Shimazono 1993: 223; Mullins 1994)

¹¹ These lectures were given to Sunday School teachers in Osaka and originally published by Nichiyō Sekaisha in Osaka. The volume is included in the *Kagawa Zenshū*, Vol. 7, 8-83. See Muto (1966: 117 ff.) for a helpful synopsis.

¹² "Following in His Steps," *Friends of Jesus*, Vol. 4, No. 1. January 1931, 6.

¹³ Kayama (2004) makes a convincing case that the "Kingdom of God" was the central concept in Kagawa's thought, which enabled him to integrate his understanding of the individual and social dimensions of the Gospel. For Kagawa, in other words, the scope of the sacred extends to all spheres of life and is not confined to the institutional church.

never abandoned the conviction that individual transformation was also required. The improvement of material conditions alone, Kagawa maintained, does not eliminate the need for spiritual transformation.

The Organization of the Friends of Jesus

The organization and principles of the Friends of Jesus, launched in 1921, fully reflected Kagawa's vision of individual and social transformation as well as his eclectic and ecumenical orientation. In spite of his Protestant Reformed theological training, he clearly recognized the richness of the Catholic tradition and even modeled his organization after the third order of the Franciscans. Kagawa recounts the early days and nature of the movement as follows:

In 1921 I met with fourteen of my former schoolmates and we founded the Society for the Friends of Jesus. This is a type of Francisco-Jesuit-Protestant Order that combines St. Francis' loving service to the poor and the Jesuits' loyalty to the church in a way that would enable us to develop and fulfill a practical program of true Christian living designed to fit the needs of modern life in Japan. We have never been much concerned about having a large membership in the Society of the Friends of Jesus; we wanted to have only those who were really dedicated to Christ. ... The first year he would be a Friend, [the] second year a Brother, and [the] third year he would reach the highest class of service. The five principles of the Friends of Jesus are: Piety (Devotion to God in Christ), Work (of Mind and Hand), Purity (including War on Vice and Liquor), Peace (including War on War), and Service (Social, Religious, Political).¹⁴

These five principles are concrete expressions of Kagawa's vision for both individual spirituality and social engagement. Members of this new order were expected to cultivate their own spirituality and piety through Bible study, prayer, and a reading of such classics as *Imitation of Christ* (Thomas a Kempis) and *Pilgrim's Progress* (Bunyan). While personal piety and purity were central concerns, it would be a mistake to construe this movement as another example of a sectarian withdrawal from sinful society. Membership also involved a commitment to live fully in the "world" and work for the transformation of society according to Christian principles and values. "It does not take people out of the world," as explained in one publication, but rather "carries the spirit of the monastery into home and office, and makes every common duty an act of worship."¹⁵

Although the movement began with a small group of fourteen clergy members of the Church of Christ in Japan (Presbyterian), it spread rapidly throughout the country and cross denominational boundaries. In January 1922, several months after the formation of the movement, Kagawa had attracted a membership of 86. That month he began publishing his own magazine, *Kumo no Hashira* 雲の柱

¹⁴ This explanation by Kagawa is recorded in Bradshaw (1952: 123).

¹⁵ *Friends of Jesus* (1928: 2).

(Pillar of Cloud), which quickly circulated the ideals of the movement, and by July the membership had mushroomed to 501. The report on new members in May 1922 lists individuals from Hokkaido, Akita, Niigata, Kyoto, Osaka, Kumamoto, Aichi, Chiba, and even one member from Korea. The movement attracted Christians from all sorts of occupational groups, and the list of new members in May of the first year included nurses, students, store clerks, carpenters, factory workers, teachers, bank employees, laborers, postal workers, and secretaries. Needless to say, this was a more diverse membership base than one usually found in the established churches. Although the Friends of Jesus began with a core group of clergy, within several years it became a movement in which lay people constituted the majority of members. By 1928, there were some 1,300 members.¹⁶

One important feature of the Friends of Jesus that distinguishes it from other independent movements is that Kagawa did not advocate a complete break from the missionaries and their churches, but maintained both an ecumenical and international orientation. His intention was for the Friends of Jesus to revitalize the churches by training and mobilizing Christians to engage in the full range of activities implied by the Gospel of emancipation. In the very first issues of his movement magazine, *Kumo no Hashira*, Kagawa writes with warm affection about his missionary mentors in the faith, Myers and Logan, and explains that he learned the true meaning of Christian love by the way he was welcomed in their homes over the years. Also, the name of a missionary from Kyushu appears in the listing of Friends of Jesus members in the very first year. What is remarkable is that Kagawa had such a presence and compelling vision that many missionaries were attracted to his movement and supported his work. He gladly welcomed the support and cooperation of missionary colleagues. An examination of the Friends of Jesus seminar and conference programs through the late 1920s and 1930s reveals that missionaries were regularly included as lecturers (Dr. Harry Myers and Helen Topping, for example). According to one report, some forty-three missionaries were already contributing financially to Kagawa's work in 1928-1929.¹⁷

The international connections and support expanded rapidly following Kagawa's lecture tour to the United States from late 1924 to early 1925. In fact, a branch of the Friends of Jesus was organized in Los Angeles on January 16, 1925, with the purpose of providing financial support for Kagawa's work in Japan. Two years later, the Kagawa Fellowship in the United States sent Helen Topping to serve as Kagawa's personal secretary, assisting with English correspondence and translations.¹⁸ Topping was the child of American Baptist missionaries in Japan

¹⁶ Membership information has been gleaned from *Kumo no Hashira* Vol. 1, Nos. 1-7, 1922; see also Kuroda (1983: 210) and Bikle (1976: 170-171).

¹⁷ See "Missionary Attitudes Toward Dr. Kagawa," File A101-E00176, Matsuzawa Shiryōkan Kagawa Toyohiko Resource Center, Tokyo.

¹⁸ Support for Kagawa spread quickly across the United States. In 1929, Galen M. Fisher, Chairman of the Kagawa Cooperators in the Eastern United States, wrote his fellow-supporters that they had already raised \$ 4,000 for Kagawa and his work and reported that the Methodist Episcopal Mission and United Church of Canada Mission were also

who had also become staunch supporters of Kagawa. She became the editor of the English publication, *Friends of Jesus*, which was published from 1928–1937. In 1929, Marion Draper, who at one time had served as principal of the Methodist Episcopal Women's Bible School in Yokohama, became the first missionary to be assigned by a denominational mission board to Kagawa's movement.¹⁹ Even the Southern Presbyterian Church Mission Board assigned one of Kagawa's former missionary mentors to work with his program of rural evangelism in the 1930s. A report from a Committee of Kagawa Cooperators in Berkeley heralded that Kagawa and his movement were bringing about a "new era in foreign missions" through its "principle of democratic cooperation with indigenous oriental leadership, which binds together its members in a deep mutual interest in international, inter-class and interdenominational Christianity."²⁰

International support for Kagawa's wide-ranging ministry in Japan was cultivated by missionary supporters through their contacts and church connections in the United States and Europe and through numerous articles in Christian magazines and church newsletters. In addition, between 1925 and 1941 some fifteen of Kagawa's books were translated and published in English.²¹ The international recognition and support was also heightened by Kagawa's trips abroad and numerous speaking engagements in church circles, colleges, universities, and seminaries, and to groups connected with the labor movement and cooperatives. Overseas trips and speaking tours include the United States (1924, 1935, 1941), Europe (1924), China (1927, 1930, 1931), Canada (1931), Philippines (1934), Australia and Holland (1935), Norway (1936), and India (1938).²²

endorsing Kagawa and making arrangements to provide financial support. See "Letter from GMF (Galen M. Fisher), Chairman of the Kagawa Cooperators (Eastern Group) to the Kagawa Cooperators in the Eastern States, May 17, 1929," Toyohiko Kagawa Papers, The Burke Library Archives, Union Theological Seminary in the City of New York. (Missionary Research Library) 7: Kagawa, Correspondence, Telegrams, Box 1, Folder 7.

¹⁹ Reported in *Friends of Jesus*, Vol. 6, No. 1, Friends of Jesus Library No. 3, June 1933.

²⁰ This was reported in an English publication of the *Friends of Jesus* (from the contents it would appear to have been published in 1928). While in the postwar period it became common for missionaries to be invited to Japan to work cooperatively and under the authority of the Japanese Church (mainline Protestant missionaries have been assigned to the United Church of Christ in Japan, for example), but this was an unusual pattern for missionary assignment in the pre-war period.

²¹ In May 1932, for example, Kagawa received a letter from Hugh Martin of SCM Press in England that indicated 9,842 of his books had sold and included a check for 127 Pounds (Letter to Kagawa from Hugh Martin, May 30, 1932; File TA101-E00018, Matsuzawa Shiryōkan, Kagawa Toyohiko Resource Center, Tokyo).

²² During his trip to the United States in 1941, Kagawa toured for months and with the cooperation of his American supporters was able to raise considerable funds for his work back in Japan. Given his political situation and the difficult economic conditions in wartime Japan, the royalty income from his publications had declined considerably and he was rather desperate for funds to support the work in Japan. The nationalistic and militaristic environment made it difficult for Kagawa to gain much income from his Japanese

The Evolution of a Movement

It was through the Friends of Jesus movement that Kagawa's vision of individual and social transformation was expanded far beyond the Shinkawa slums. The concerns and emphases of the movement also evolved in the process. Several key developments deserve consideration here.

Although Kagawa's leadership in the urban labor movement diminished rapidly in 1921, he did not abandon his concern for laborers but simply shifted his attention to the plight of tenant farmers.²³ In 1922 Kagawa and Sugiyama Genjirō organized the Japan Farmers' Union (*Nihon Nōmin Kumiai*) to address the difficulties of peasants in rural areas and to slow down the flow of displaced farmers into urban centers of unemployment and poverty. His *Iesu Dan* イエス団 (Jesus Band) in Shinkawa served initially as the promotion headquarters of the union, and most of the early leaders were Christians. This union expanded rapidly and by the second annual meeting in February 1923 it had grown to include some 10,000 members and 100 branches throughout the country. The following year it increased to over 50,000. Not surprisingly, a struggle over leadership accompanied this rapid growth. Much to Kagawa's dismay, the communist leadership quickly penetrated and took over this union. Just like his earlier exclusion from the labor movement prompted him to launch the Friends of Jesus movement, the communist take-over of the Farmers' Union seems to have influenced a shift in Kagawa's mission strategy.²⁴

Through this experience Kagawa became convinced that it would be impossible to have a significant impact on Japanese society as long as Christians remained such a small minority group. He sensed even more keenly the need to cultivate people who would work for social reform according to the ideals and values of Christianity. This is what brought him to the decision to focus his efforts more on evangelistic work. At the Friends of Jesus retreat on July 30, 1925, Kagawa made his famous statement offering "one million souls to God." This ambitious resolution was passed and a rather detailed plan of evangelism was prepared. It included nation-wide evangelistic tours and strategies to reach out to many neglected groups in Japanese society, including the organization of Gospel Schools for farmers, which aimed at training lay Christian leaders for rural areas.²⁵

publications at this time and he became more dependent upon American supporters for his various settlements, social welfare institutions, and evangelistic outreach.

²³ This new focus of attention is not difficult to comprehend, as Mikiso Hane (1982: 110) points out: "The most startling jump in tenant disputes in the post-World War I period came in 1921, where there were 1,680 incidents involving 145,898 tenant farmers."

²⁴ As Bikle (1976: 174-175) notes: "During the year 1925 the pendulum of Kagawa's interest commenced its slow recoil from social to religious antipode. In these, the declining years of the Taishō, he had seen his hopes for the Christianization of the Farmers' Union dashed to pieces by Communist penetration."

²⁵ Kagawa's writings during this period also reflect this shift in emphasis. As Kuroda (1983: 88) notes, Kagawa published over 60 religious books between 1923 and 1932.

This new emphasis on evangelistic outreach enabled Kagawa to reconnect with many of the churches. In 1928 a number of churches agreed to support and cooperate with him for a one-year evangelistic campaign. The following year this initiative received international endorsement when John R. Mott visited Japan and participated in a consultation with the Council on Cooperation (*Kirisutokyō Renmei no Kyōgikai* キリスト教連盟協議会).²⁶ It was at this meeting in April 1929 that Kagawa proposed the “Kingdom of God Movement” (*Kami no Kuni Undō*) and a three-year period of evangelistic cooperation for “one million souls” to start from 1930. This proposal was adopted by almost all Protestant denominations, and in Sumiya’s (1995: 177-178) assessment it became the most significant and successful evangelistic movement in Japan since the Meiji period.²⁷ Kagawa defined the Kingdom of God Movement as “A Mutual Aid Society in Every Church, a Cooperative in Every Village, and a Million Souls for Christ in Japan.” Without the “practical expression of love” through mutual aid and cooperatives “church worship will be a mere rainbow in the air, its organization an empty carcass of individualism.”²⁸

This evangelistic campaign over several years produced some remarkable statistics. Kagawa was a well-known and popular speaker who attracted large audiences and had no difficulty filling halls with 500 to 1,000 people. Kuroda (1983: 191-192) reports that 1,859 special meetings were held, which were attended by a total of 787,223 persons. Of that number 62,410 decision cards were collected. While these appear to be impressive results, Yamamori (1974: 115) argues that in the end “only a small segment of the audience actually fed into church membership.” He goes on to explain that: “In spite of the laborious efforts on the part of the church, the unreached masses of Japan stayed irresponsive to the Christian faith. So, ‘after two years more, in 1934 the movement quietly ended, without any public report.’ Christianity’s appeal was again limited to the white-collar class and students as before.” While many observers had hoped for better results, it is important to bear in mind that the 1930s represented an increasingly difficult situation for Christian evangelistic work. Ultra-nationalism

²⁶ Mott was an enthusiastic supporter of Kagawa who proclaimed, “I am completely a disciple of this great Oriental Christian.” By 1928, Mott was sending \$ 6,000 a year to support Kagawa’s ministries (see the report “Kagawa Cooperators—Finance,” A101-E00175, 1928: 6, in the Matsuzawa Shiryōkan Kagawa Toyohiko Resource Center, Tokyo).

²⁷ Nakada Jūji and the Holiness churches, however, remained separate and boycotted the movement. The fact that growth was peaking for the Holiness Church at the time Kagawa was launching the Kingdom of God Movement may be a significant factor related to Nakada Jūji’s boycott. Of course, Nakada had been referring to Kagawa as the devil (*akuma*) and a communist for some years. The Holiness Church emerged from the mission work of the Oriental Missionary Society and was organized in 1917. It experienced rapid growth in the 1920s and 1930s, from 2,987 members in 1924 to 19,523 in 1932 (Yamamori, 1974: 118).

²⁸ From Toyohiko Kagawa, “The Cooperative Movement in Japan and its Part in the Christian Social Program,” Typescript, n.d., File TA101-E00005, Matsuzawa Shiryōkan Kagawa Toyohiko Resource Center, Tokyo.

and militarism were on the rise, and this was hardly an environment in which the Christian movement could flourish.

While the emphasis of Kagawa and the Friends of Jesus had clearly shifted to evangelistic activities for close to a decade, this hardly meant that social concerns had been abandoned. In contrast to many established churches – whose buildings and facilities often remained unused and empty on days other than Sunday – the settlements organized in Kobe, Osaka, and Tokyo continued to host a wide-range of activities during this period. In addition to regular religious services, most settlements included cooperatives, labor union offices, credit unions, schools, and medical clinics. In 1928, for example, the Shikanjima Settlement Building in the factory district of Osaka was sponsoring the meeting of the Nurses Mission of the Friends of Jesus, Toyo Spinning Company Trade Union meetings, Metal Workers Union, a Day Nursery for children, a weekend program for adolescent boys, and a trade union meeting for Koreans in the neighborhood.²⁹

Most Protestant churches supported Kagawa's evangelistic vision, and some agreed with his concern to educate lay leaders through the Gospel Schools, but very few could embrace his vision of work with the poor and social transformation through cooperatives and labor unions. Although the Kingdom of God movement ended without fanfare, the mission of Kagawa and the Friends of Jesus continued, albeit in an environment inhospitable to Christianity. In 1937, for example, there were some thirty-five institutions and over one hundred projects under Kagawa's supervision. At that time, Kagawa supplied "over two-thirds of the annual budget by his own earnings" and the balance from supporters and friends.³⁰ In 1940, Kagawa was jailed for eighteen days for anti-war speeches, and he was forced to suspend publication of *Kumo na hashira*, the monthly magazine inaugurated in 1922. Survival until the end of the war essentially meant keeping a low profile.

Conclusion

In this exploratory article, I have focused on Kagawa's role as a minor founder and the early development of the Friends of Jesus movement as an alternative version of Christianity that combined individual and social transformation. While

²⁹ The following report on daily life in this settlement provides a sharp contrast to the typical Japanese church scene: "The Workers in the Toyo Spinning Factory of Shikanjima are striking for higher wages and better working conditions. For the past week they have had almost daily meetings, overfilling the small rooms of the Settlement with five hundred and more in attendance... One of the leaders among the men is a member of the Settlement Church, and came last week to prayer meeting and prayed with tears for success in the strike. Then he apologized to God, saying, 'This is a place for love and service, and we are forced to use it as a place for class-struggle. But God is God and He will bring justice!'" (*Friends of Jesus*, English publication, p. 14; estimated date of publication, 1928).

³⁰ Reported in *Friends of Jesus*, Vol. 9, No. 1, June 1937, 1.

the founders of other indigenous Christian movements largely severed relations with established churches and foreign missionaries, Kagawa nurtured cooperative relationships that were transdenominational. Although some observers feared he would follow a sectarian impulse and break with the Protestant establishment, the Friends of Jesus remained within the established churches as a “reform” or “revitalization” movement (*ecclesiola in ecclesia*) that effectively mobilized its members for social engagement and cultivated both ecumenical and international relationships and support. While other minor founders created new religious communities and subcultures, they were largely movements that stressed personal spirituality and cultivation and did not seriously address the many problems faced by Japan during the difficult early stages of modernization.³¹

Although the literature about Kagawa has often been sprinkled with generous accolades – the “Saint Francis of Japan” or the “great Oriental Christian,” since his death in 1960 there has been a movement within the United Church of Christ in Japan to critically reassess the man and his life in light of the “discriminatory” language and attitudes toward *burakumin*, which permeated his first book, *Hinmin shinri no kenkyū* 貧民心理の研究 (A Study of the Psychology of the Poor). This book was first published in 1915, when Kagawa was still in his late twenties. The inclusion of this book as volume 8 in the publication of Kagawa’s collected works in 1962 – in spite of the widely recognized discriminatory language – became the precipitating event that led to a critical re-evaluation of Kagawa and to the problem of discrimination within Japanese Protestant churches as a whole. This is a complicated issue that has generated an extensive literature of its own and is beyond the scope of this present study, but I mention it here only to point out that there is a considerable diversity of opinion regarding Kagawa’s legacy. Whatever conclusion one reaches regarding Kagawa’s shortcomings, the Protestant Church in Japan – divided between such groups as the social activist faction (*shakai-ba* 社会派), the church-oriented faction (*kyōkai-ba* 教会派), and evangelicals (*fukuin-ba* 福音派) – can only benefit from a serious and critical reconsideration of his ecumenical vision and model for the practice of individual and social transformation.

³¹ See Amemiya (1988) for a helpful comparison of Kagawa and Uchimura. He points out that both Uchimura and Kagawa were critical of the churches and denominationalism. In the case of Uchimura, the primary criticisms were related to accumulated Western church traditions, sacraments, and clericalism (priesthood), which were regarded as unnecessary for Biblical faith. Kagawa, by contrast, was concerned that the theology in the churches was too conceptual or abstract and lacked an adequate expression of love (*ai no jissen* 愛の実践). Amemiya also notes that the “stance” of these two minor founders was fundamentally different. Uchimura’s standpoint was that of the elite, whereas Kagawa saw things from below, from the standpoint of those in positions of weakness and vulnerability.

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