

Who Is the God That Christians Believe In?

– Between Kojiki and the Bible –

Toshifumi Uemura

Introduction

God, in the Christian framework, is none other than the God revealed in Jesus Christ. The Christological and Trinitarian controversies of the fourth century were provoked largely in reaction to the theology of Arius, which denied the divinity of Jesus. Thousands of ideas about God have been brought forward since then. William G. Rusch points out that, “responsible scholarship now recognizes that Christianity has always been a more complex phenomenon than some have realized with a variety of worship services, theological languages, and structures of organization.”⁽¹⁾

The question “Who is God?” seems an impertinent one for me to answer. There is of course no perfect answer for it. No great theologian can solve this most difficult question. Martin Luther even mentioned the impossibility of bringing this question to a conclusion.⁽²⁾

This is a rhetorical correction. Paul corrects his first sentence (“now that you have come to know God”) or rather inverts it this way: “or rather to be known by God.” For he was afraid that they might lose God altogether. It is as though he were saying: “Alas, the situation has now come to the point that you do not even know God correctly, because you are returning from grace to the Law.”⁽³⁾

However, it might be beneficial to deepen to develop our understanding of the differences between Western and Eastern (especially Japanese) theologies for interpreting God in their respective cultural contexts. Such an inquiry also affords us the opportunity

to identify how our understanding of God differs or changes from time to time, from place to place, and from people to people.

Before I examine “Who is God?” , I shall briefly state my honest feelings during my stay in the United States.⁽⁴⁾ One thing that has frustrated me when attending chapel or watching TV in the United States is that the word “God” is used too many times in sermons. Why do preachers at such frequent intervals use the Holy Name in their message? Even mentioning Jesus Christ so often has bothered me. I know the goal of preaching is to proclaim the gospel. It is understandable, then, to speak loudly about the deeds or words of Jesus. Some preachers use the name of God more than thirty times in one sermon. Not only in preaching, but also in daily conversation, we hear “Oh, Jesus,” or “Oh, my God,” without any respect. As Jews do not speak the name YAWH, Japanese⁽⁵⁾ generally do not like to say the name of God in front of people.

The crowning work of Shusaku Endo⁽⁶⁾ was *Deep River*. In this novel, the dialogue between Mitsuko, a cynical woman struggling with her inner emptiness, and Otsu, a seminarian wrestling with Western theology,

Mitsuko: You really are a strange one, aren't you?

Otsu: Maybe I am. But ... I didn't change myself. I was transformed by the conjurings of God.

Mitsuko: Listen, could you please stop using that word “God”? It makes me nervous, I can't relate to it, and it doesn't mean anything to me. Ever since I was in college, I've felt distant from that word “God” which the foreign priests used.

When I was a high school student,⁽⁷⁾ missionaries of the Mormon Church asked me, “*Anata ha Kami wo Shinjimasuka?* (Do you believe in God?)” This question, to a greater or lesser degree, embarrassed me. Without any explanation, it was difficult for me to answer that question. And without the work of the Holy Spirit, it is difficult to change one's belief.

Some Japanese comedians made fun of missionaries as “*Amen somen hiyasomen.*” Both *somen* and *hiyasomen* are Japanese noodles. These have nothing to do with the

word “Amen”, but the sound of “Amen” gave Japanese comedians the image of those noodles. When a pastor suggested those in attendance say “Amen” in a wedding ceremony in the chapel of a hotel,⁽⁸⁾ I watched some people stifle their laughter⁽⁹⁾. “Amen” is identified as a Christian word, but is not popular in daily Japanese life.

Several years ago, there was a symposium entitled, “Why Christianity Does Not Take Root in Japan” held in a Lutheran church in Tokyo.⁽¹⁰⁾ An older person attending the symposium claimed that the theological terms used in church were too difficult to understand; they are not words that Japanese use very often. For a Christian who was not born in a Christian family, they may be perplexing. The first generation who encountered Christianity was probably in a dilemma like this gentleman.

It seems, at the same time, that the Japanese language is much more changeable than English. Many in the young generation can not read novels and essays of the fifteenth century. An American teacher of English, in contrast, mentioned that he could enjoy Shakespeare in the original language when he was a high school student. Although there is much controversy about the translation of the Bible, a revision of the Bible is unavoidable.

If a word is used frequently, its original meaning is sometimes lost or altered. For example, *kisama* was the second person, honorific title in Japan about one hundred years ago. But at present, it is a fighting word used to confront another person when in anger. Another good example is *namamekashi*, which means “coquettish” or “sexy”, but originally it was used as “fresh” or “unspoiled” one thousand ago. The more a word is used, the more the meaning seems to be totally changed.

The word “God” also should be treated much more carefully and gently, especially in the Japanese context. Otherwise, the sacredness of the name might be perverted.

Translation problems of “God”

“It would be easy enough to translate if I only could really know the meaning.”

This is the way one Bible translator expressed both his frustration and his insight into the essential problem of producing functional equivalents in translating. Functional equivalence, however, means thoroughly understanding not only the meaning of the source text but also the manner in which the intended

receptors of a text are likely to understand it in the receptor language.⁽¹¹⁾

In some ways, Christianity is a religion of words. Christianity has developed within diverse cultural contexts, and through the great efforts of missionaries, the Bible has been translated into almost every language. “In the beginning was the Word, and the word was with God, and the Word was God” (John 1:1). The Word of God is truly the essence of Christianity, so a translation of the Bible is a matter of vital importance. However, after the Tower of Babel, the language of the earth was confused by the Lord (Gen 11: 9). How many books have been written up until now about Christianity in not only English but also in every other language? How many controversies have there been from the early church up until now? This will be as likely as not an unending subject.

In China there was a big friction among missionaries about the translation of the Bible from the 1840s to 1850s. It was called the “Term question.” The list of terms that required careful translation into Chinese were:

Angel, apostle, baptism, church, conscience, conversion, covenant, devil, election, evangelist, God, hell, holiness, heart, mercy, messenger, Messiah, mind, mystery, offerings, prayer, priest, prophet, preacher, repentance, Sabbath, sacrifice, saint, soul.⁽¹²⁾

The London Missionary Society, American Board of Commissioners for Foreign Missions, American Baptist Board of Foreign Missions, and the American Presbyterian Board of Foreign Missions held a conference in Hong Kong in 1843. The focus was the translation of the word “God”. As a result of long discussion, confrontation broke out among the missionaries. In 1847, a conference in Shanghai again took up the subject of translation of the word “God”. In this conference, Bridgman of the American Board proposed *Shin* as the translation. To the contrary, Walter Medhurst of the London Missionary Society declared himself to be against that translation. In his argument,⁽¹³⁾ he mentioned *Shin* in Chinese is “spirit” rather than “gods”. *Shin* is not the proper term for God as the Supreme Being, so he insisted that *Shangdi* would be more appropriate.

As a counterargument against Medhurst, the American Bible Society published, “Report on the Chinese Version” (October, 1850), in which several possibilities for the translation of the word “God” were examined. As a conclusion, American missionaries accepted *Shin* as the translation for “God”. Reasons to avoid using *Shangdi* were as follows:⁽¹⁴⁾

- 1) *Shangdi* is the Ruler on High or the supreme Ruler. It is a political title rather than a Deity;
- 2) *Shangdi* also means the five emperors of the five heavens in Chinese tradition;
- 3) People in China also believe in *Shangdi* as a material idol;
- 4) Successive emperors also have been called *Shangdi*;

The missionaries to Japan at the beginning stage in the middle of the nineteenth century were mainly from America. As a time-tested discussion on Chinese Bible translation, there seemed little opposition for the translation of “God” into Japanese “*Kami*” which Japan accept Chinese character for Shin. American missionaries already had a good knowledge of Chinese religion. Although there are many similarities between Chinese and Japanese, the differences of these nations are much greater than Western people think. Some scholars question the translation of “God”. Although the Japanese accepted Chinese characters, Shin in Japanese is not the same idea as the Chinese idea. We must also examine the meaning of Shin in Japanese.

God and *kami*⁽¹⁵⁾

Japan’s first direct contact with Christianity dates back to August 15, 1549 when Francisco de Xavier (1506-1552)⁽¹⁶⁾ arrived at southern island of Japan. Before his journey to Japan, he expressed the desire to examine all Japanese religions, but as the power of Buddhism was so strong, he almost overlooked the existence of Shinto. At first, some Japanese mistook Christianity as a new Buddhist group and Xavier was welcomed. Furthermore, Xavier translated God’s name as *Dainichi* (*Mahavairocana* in Sanskrit). He adopted the translation of God as a Buddhist concept⁽¹⁷⁾ and, as a result, Japanese

people easily accepted his teachings. Xavier quickly understood that he had to change the translation from *Dainichi* to *Deus* due to theological concerns. The pronunciation of *Deus* was not suitable for Japanese: it is close to *Daiuso*, which means, “a big liar.” Buddhist monks seized this opportunity to accuse Christians of being falsifiers.

Not only Roman Catholics, but also Protestants have brought confusion in the translation of “God”. After the confrontation of translation in China, American missionaries did not hesitate to adopt *kami* as a translation of God. As a result, *kami* has been widely adopted to mean God. But it is somewhat strange to translate God in this way. *kami* is basically a Shinto concept, not Christian. At the same time *kami* is not an equal idea with the Chinese *Shin*. However, lacking the ability to elucidate this was one of the biggest and touchy issues for the Japanese side at that time, missionaries of the first generation in the Meiji era (1868-1912) translated God as *kami*.

What is *kami*?

Kami (gods) are the object of worship in Shinto. However, *kami* have been defined as:

- 1) sacred spirits;
- 2) natural phenomena or objects such as wind, thunder, sun, trees, rocks;
- 3) some animals such as snake, bear, or wolf ;
- 4) ancestral spirits;
- 5) national heroes of outstanding deeds or virtues;
- 6) those who have contributed to Japanese society;
- 7) guardian spirits of the land;
- 8) persons who died for the state or community;
- 9) those who died pitifully;
- 10) *Tenno* (emperor) or *Shogun*.

Each *kami* has its own special characteristics, capacity, and mission. For example, one is concerned with the distribution of water, another with the manufacture of medicine, and another with the healing process. In modern Shinto, *kami* are rather spirits⁽⁸⁾ with nobility and authority. As Dr. Ono, a leading Shinto priest, mentioned,

It is true, that in many instances there are *kami*⁽¹⁹⁾ which apparently cannot be distinguished from the deities or spirits of animism or animatism, but in modern Shinto all *kami* are conceived in a refined sense to be spirits with nobility and authority. The *kami*-concept today includes the idea of justice, order, and divine favor (blessing), and implies the basic principle that the *kami* function harmoniously in cooperation with one another and rejoice in the evidence of harmony and cooperation in this world.⁽²⁰⁾

The result of the translation of God as *kami* led Dr. Ono to point out that modern Shinto seemed be influenced by Christianity. When Dr. Ueda, the former president of Kokugakuin University, which was founded for qualifying Shinto priests, asked students in his class about *kami*, half of the students thought that *kami* was God. Confusion between *kami* and God is, in fact, a serious problem even for Shinto schools.

Since ancient times, Japanese people have lived in harmony with nature. All over Japan, there are consecrated rocks and evergreen trees in which *kami* reside or drop in for a short visit. A *Jinja*, which usually consists of buildings surrounded by a grove of trees, is a kind of sanctuary in which to encounter and honor *kami*. According to Shinto, literally “the way of *kami*”, *kami* are worshiped in *matsuri* (festivals), which include solemn ceremonial occasions as well as local festivals. The more than 60,000⁽²¹⁾ Shinto sanctuaries in Japan are at the center of Japanese spiritual life. Historically, *Ise Jingu*, one of the largest shrines, is the worship center and spiritual home of the Japanese people. In the Edo period (1603-1868), most people made a pilgrimage to *Ise* at least once in their life. Although the zeal to visit *Ise* might be on the ebb, more than six million still go there every year.

Ama-terasu-o-mi-kami, who is supposed to be the goddess of the sun, is worshiped as the main *kami* of *Ise Jingu*. Originally, a round-shaped mirror as her image of the sun was displayed within the imperial palace by successive *Tennos* (emperors). In the era of the tenth *Tenno*, however, in awe of the divine authority of *Amaterasu*, *Goshintai*, the symbol of the goddess [a mirror], was moved from the imperial palace to *Ise*, where the Imperial princess *Yamato-hime* decided upon the present sanctuary

as the place in which it was to be enshrined. This is believed to have taken place around 4 B.C.E.⁽²²⁾

Since the seventh century C.E., with only a few exceptions, the shrine at *Ise* has been rebuilt and renewed, including all its symbols and accouterments. The ceremonial system connected to this is referred to as a *Shikinen-sengu*. By performing the *Shikinen-sengu* every twenty years, it has been believed that people and the Jingu receive renewed blessing from *kami*.

Under the influence of China and Korea, shrine buildings were constructed to include an oratory, an ablution pavilion, and several auxiliary buildings. The ceremonial dress, *Gagaku* (music), and *Kagura* (dance) of Shinto were also influenced by Chinese and Korean culture.

From the beginning of the eighth century, *Ise Jingu* became the first “state” Shinto shrine. This concept is my original idea and is not generally accepted yet. However, an examination of the preface of *Kojiki*, the oldest book in Japan, makes clear that the imperial court was aiming at consolidating the power of the *Tenno*, but this trial ended in failure. Buddhism was widely accepted, and the *Tenno* also believed in Buddhism. At last, it became the Japanese state religion and many temples were built. Students sponsored by the imperial court were sent to China to study Buddhism. It is said that *Keika-ajari* (746-805), who was a proper traditional Buddhist monk in China, gave the *Kairitsu* (religious precepts or “the law”) to *Kukai*, a Japanese monk. Moreover, *Ganjin* (688-763), one of the greatest Chinese Buddhist leaders of the *Tang* dynasty, later came to Japan to give the *Kairitsu* in person.

As a result, Shrine Shinto became largely dormant. School Shinto was established with the purpose of bringing about a renaissance of Shinto. In order to strengthen the Shinto system, not only Buddhism the ideology of Confucianism was adopted.

The introduction of Chinese civilization brought about remarkable transformation in the life of the Japanese people, and, although the indigenous beliefs showed great tenacity, Shinto gradually absorbed elements of Taoism, Confucianism, dualism, and Buddhism.⁽²³⁾

The simplicity of Shinto was then transformed or disappeared because of the adoption

of various Chinese ideas, cultural aspects, and religions. Motoori Norinaga (1730-1801) wrote the *Kojikiden*⁽²⁴⁾ to eliminate the influence of foreign religions.

Creatures in Genesis and *Kojiki*⁽²⁵⁾

Many scholars repeatedly emphasize the differences between Western and Eastern cultures and religions. One of them is how to creation story. In this section, I want to highlight the crucial difference by comparing two typical stories. One is from Genesis, the other from the *Kojiki*.

The preface of the *Kojiki* briefly summarizes the creation story:

When chaos had already congealed but ether (breath)⁽²⁶⁾ and form had not yet separated, there were no names and no action. Who can know its form? When heaven and earth were divided, the three deities became the first of all creation.⁽²⁷⁾

As the opening chapter of Genesis is believed to be added after what is called J material, the preface of the *Kojiki* is also supposed to be written after the body of the text was compiled. The philosophy that we can infer from the preface is apparently influenced by Taoism.⁽²⁸⁾ More than any other part of the *Kojiki*, this preface has important links to parallel literature in ancient China. The uniqueness of the *Kojiki*, however, is the existence of three deities.

At the time of the beginning of heaven and earth, there coming into existence in *Takama-no-hara* a deity named *Ame-no-mi-naka-nushi-no-kami*; next, *Taka-mi-musu-hi-no-kami*; next, *Kami-musu-hi-no-kami*. These three deities all came into existence as single deities and their forms were not visible. (*Kojiki* 1:1)⁽²⁹⁾

The first deity is *Ame-no-mi-naka-nushi-no-kami*, according to its literal sense, that is to say, “master of deities of the center of heaven.” Due to the lack of source, it is difficult to discern what kind of deity it is. *Ame-no-mi-naka-nushi-no-kami*, however,

seems to be an exactly transcendent “God” from its given name.

<i>Ame</i>	Heaven
<i>no</i>	of
<i>mi</i>	eulogistic word
<i>naka</i>	center
<i>nushi</i>	master
<i>no</i>	of
<i>kami</i>	deity

Ame-no-mi-naka-nushi-no-kami stands aloof from the world. It explicitly appeared at the beginning and was scarcely involved in creation. The next two deities that appear are gods of creation:

Taka-mi-musu-hi-no-kami (deity of creation appearing first)

Kami-musu-hi-no-kami (deity of creation appearing next)

Musu-hi-no-kami is a god who gives birth to all things,⁽³⁰⁾ but not like the story of Genesis. God in Genesis created everything with His words: “Let there be light,” “Let there be a dome in the midst of the waters,” “Let the waters under the sky be gathered together into one place, and let the dry land appear.” Nothing was created without God’s words. On the contrary, *Musu-hi-no-kami* did not issue an order to bring forth at all for the initial creation story. The three deities just appeared and immediately faded away. As Williams points out, “God is in some sense free of any particular body”⁽³¹⁾, *Musu-hi-no-kami* “relates sympathetically to the world, just as we relate sympathetically to our bodies.”⁽³²⁾

Eight years after the *Kojiki*, the *Nihonshoki*⁽³³⁾ was edited. The *Nihonshoki* is much more influenced by Chinese or Korean philosophy. Not only philosophy but also the Chinese style itself was adopted.

Of old, Heaven and Earth were not yet separated, and the Yin and Yang

not yet divided. They formed a chaotic mass like an egg⁽³⁴⁾, which was of obscurely defined limits and contained germs. The purer and clearer part became a united body, but the consolidation of the heavy and gross element was accomplished with difficulty. Heaven was therefore formed first, and Earth was established subsequently. Thereafter divine beings were produced between them.⁽³⁵⁾

It is interesting that divine beings themselves were produced in the process of creation. Divine beings themselves even serve human beings. Chinese Taoism is basically a philosophy of the way, the absolute truth of the world and human life⁽³⁶⁾. The way to receive eternal life is the essential concept. The difference from Christianity is found in the emphasis on a human being getting eternal life in the body in this world. *Shangdi*⁽³⁷⁾ that is absolute deity of Taoism justifies those who follow his way and punishes those who do not follow his way. Concerning the creation story, however, *Shangdi* or *Musu-hi-no-kami* is not actively involved with the world.

Here, translation seems a knotty problem. The interpretation of the Japanese term “*naru*” which is translated as “become” in *Kojiki* and “produce” in *Nihonshoki* remains unclear. The meaning of “*naru*” is not only to produce but also to become, grow, begin to, transform, consist of, be accomplished, result in, amount to, and elapse. It contains a variety of meanings. The previous paragraph, for example, continued by opening sentences of the *Nihonshoki*,

Hence it is said that when the world began to be created, the soil of which lands were composed floated about in a manner, which might be compared to the floating of a fish sporting on the surface of the water. At this time certain things were produced between Heaven and Earth. It was in form like a reed-shoot. Now this became transformed into⁽³⁸⁾ a God, and was called *Kuni-no-toko-tachi-no-mikoto*.

This paragraph presents several theological issues. First of all Aston accepted “God” as a translation of “*mikoto*”, which may cause misapprehension. The capitalized God is now conceived as a Christian concept. As a creator, “God created the heavens and

the earth” (Gen. 1:1). God is not created at all. God has already existed as a given prerequisite in the Old Testament. *Kuni-no-toko-tachi-no-mikoto* is not the God of Christianity.

Secondly, the name of the deity accepted in the *Nihonshoki* is different from *Ame-no-mi-naka-nushi-no-kami*, the first deity in the *Kojiki*.

<i>Kuni</i>	Nation or land
<i>no</i>	of
<i>toko</i>	eternal
<i>tachi</i>	stand
<i>no</i>	of
<i>mikoto</i>	deity

There is a comment for *Kuni-no-toko-tachi-no-mikoto* in *Nihonshoki*; the character *mikoto* for *Kuni-no-toko-tachi-no-mikoto* is used owing to the extreme dignity of this deity⁽³⁹⁾. The question is why the name of these deities is different from the *Kojiki*. Although there has been no definite opinion on this question, they are not proper nouns to identify the deities. They are names to indicate their character or status.

In the Old Testament, an immutable existence, God reigns over all creatures. Furthermore, God has no name but, “I AM WHO I AM” (Exodus 3:14). It was the incarnation of God in Christ that gave God a name. As the one and only God, we traditionally interpret that one God created the world. Fretheim, however, points out that the deity is not single⁽⁴⁰⁾; “Let us make humankind in our image, according to our likeness”⁽⁴¹⁾ (Gen. 1: 26) and at the same time he assumes that “the essential metaphorical process is revealed to us.”⁽⁴²⁾ There is no doubt that there are several deities in the Genesis creation story. In this sense, there seems to be something in common with *Kojiki*.

But we can see crucial differences between Genesis and the *Kojiki*. In Genesis God creates the heavens and earth; on the contrary, deities in the *Kojiki* themselves were produced between heaven and earth.

When the land was young, resembling floating oil and drifting a jellyfish,

there sprouted forth something like reed-shoots. From these came into existence the deity *Umashi-ashi-kabi-hiko-ji-no-kami*; next, *Ame-no-toko-tachi-no-kami*. (*Kojiki* 1: 2)

From this section the creation story begins. The birth of all things originated from reed-shoots.

<i>Umashi</i>	eulogistic word
<i>ashi</i>	reed-shoots
<i>kabi</i>	germ
<i>hiko</i>	male
<i>ji</i>	suffix for male
<i>no</i>	of
<i>kami</i>	deity

First of all, the divinity of the male appears. It is said that this divinity is a symbol of growth. As the reed grows fast, it becomes a metaphor for power and augmentation in Japanese. Fretheim repeatedly refers to the metaphor of God.⁽⁴³⁾

It is not enough to say that one believes in God. What is important finally is the kind of God in whom one believes. Or, to use different language: metaphors matter. The images used to speak of god not only decisively determine the way one thinks about God, they have a powerful impact on the shape of the life of the believer.⁽⁴⁴⁾

The creation story of *Kojiki* or *Nihonshoki* uses many metaphors. The divinities themselves, we can say, are images of creatures.

Although I agree with Williams' "God as artist,"⁽⁴⁵⁾ I doubt his implication about "a certain detachment in God's judgment of the world."⁽⁴⁶⁾ Not only is God an artist, but He is also a scientist, scholar, and great leader, the transcendent God who reigns over the world. But God still immanently relates with creatures. From the stand point

of the Japanese creation story, the deities themselves are creatures!

***Kyoushu* (Master) Sueko Mita and the Holy Spirit**

It was in 1981 that I first met Master Sueko Mita. Master Mita was a great Shinto priest. But she was not a qualified teacher who had graduated from a Shinto University such as Kokugakuin College in Tokyo or Kougakukan College in Ise. Her education was only limited to elementary school. However, I know no greater religious person than she. *Kyoushu* Mita had never written papers and attended any kind of academic meeting. Almost all her life, she seldom went out from her residence in Tokyo.

When I was an undergraduate student of University of Tsukuba (former Tokyo University of Education), I made a spiritual journey near Mt. Fuji. At the foot of Mt. Fuji, I met one person who attended Master Mita's house. He recommended to that I visited her. At first I had no intention to call on her. I was interested in Yoga⁽⁴⁷⁾ at that time. Through meditation, fasting, or practicing Yoga, I felt some satisfactions. I attended Yoga school for several years using my vacations. It also satisfied my intellectual curiosity and felt some kind of attainment through practicing religious austerities. But I gradually felt some sense of futility in asceticism. Finally I decided to visit *Kyoushu* Mita's house in Tokyo, following my religious leader who recommended me joining the gathering.

After chanting *Norito*⁽⁴⁸⁾, I met her individually. Her first words were, "if you believe or not, *Kami*^(God) exists." Continuing these words, she mentioned about Jesus Christ who was the only Son of God. I was strongly impressed with her voice, which was full of authority. There was no room for me to doubt. Immediately, I believed in *kami*^(God) and Jesus Christ. It was a marvelous incident for me. Generally speaking, Japanese university students do not believe in *Kami*^(God). Although we may show respect for some higher existence, most students avoid believing in something invisible. After World War II, the Japanese Constitution prohibits religious education in public schools. Neither is there religious instruction given at home now. There is a freedom of faith or freedom not to believe anything. The influence of materialism, on the other hand, has been strong in Japan. One retired missionary who served more than thirty years told me that the biggest obstacle for his mission work was strong materialism

deep-rooted in Japanese soil in these modern days. I was not an exception.

When I was ten years old, I went to a church voluntarily near my house. I vividly remember it. All I learned from the pastor was a song. But I enjoyed the atmosphere and sweetness. However, I was too young to understanding the words of God. And the story and miracles of Jesus Christ seemed nonsensical for me at that time.

It was contradictory enough, but through the words of the Shinto master, I accepted Christianity. Since then, I called on *Kyoushu Mita's* house for ten years. Her way of practice was so unique. It was a dialogue without any text. She did not allow me to read any religious book. There was question and answer after her lecture⁽⁴⁹⁾. She had never compelled me to do some special training such as fasting, meditation, or sitting. One day I asked her, "Why are Christians so eager to engage in mission work." She answered, "It is essential to preach the gospel for them. If you believe in Jesus Christ, without doubt, you must engage in mission work." Another day when I asked about faith, she immediately answered, "Now faith is the assurance of things hoped for, the conviction of things not seen." It was surprising that her teaching was Bible itself (Hebrews 11:1).

After I commuted for ten years to *Kyoushu Mita*, I thought it was already enough for me and I wanted to deepen the idea of Shintoism and to become a Shinto priest. I entered Kokugakuin College⁽⁵⁰⁾. But I was so confused by the difference between *Kyoushu Mita's* teaching and Shinto college. At the same time, I learned that the theories of Shinto were so complicated. The training itself was not so difficult. It was enough to learn how to serve in the shrine. After I finished my training at Kokugakuin College as a student of Shinto, I met one Christian who had studied in the United States. Through the series of teachings at *Kyoushu Mita's* place, I was ready to become a Christian. I am so surprised with the agreement of her teaching with the Bible.

Does the Holy Spirit only work on Christians? Then how did *Kyoushu Mita* find out that Jesus Christ is the only Son of God. Without the work of the Holy Spirit, it seems difficult for me to understand. And without the help of the Holy Spirit, it was difficult for me to believe in God.

Once again, the general question here is one concerning the bridge between

the world and the transcendent God; and for Professor Lampe, the superfluous term is the Word, conceived as eternally distinct from Spirit. God interprets himself through Spirit: Jesus as supremely the recipient and transmitter of grace, the paradigm of 'graced' relationship with God as Father (and Professor Lampe is very far from being arid or intellectualist here), is himself a source of grace because of his consistent 'transparency' to Spirit.⁽⁵¹⁾

What is "the bridge between the world and the transcendent God"? It is no doubt as every Christian believes that Jesus Christ is the "bridge". As Williams pointed out Jesus was consistently transparent to Spirit. The big question is the uniqueness of Christianity. John Hick pointed out the idea of a "Copernican revolution" in the theology of religions that is: a paradigm shift from a Christianity-centered or Jesus-centered model to a God-centered model of the universe of faiths.⁽⁵²⁾ He felt "the immense spiritual depth and power"⁽⁵³⁾ from Hinduism and Buddhism when he visited India and Sri Lanka. I can not become familiar with his idea that "the idea of divine incarnation is to be understood metaphorically rather than literally, as an essentially poetic expression of the Christian's devotion to his Lord."⁽⁵⁴⁾ However, if we try to dialogue with other religions, it is necessary to understand from the point of "a God-centered model" with the relation to the Holy Spirit.

The study of the Holy Spirit has a lot of possibilities for all human beings in the world. It is not necessary to limit the Holy Spirit only in the Christian world. There are possibilities that the Holy Spirit works all over the world.

Conclusion

The advantage of Western theologians is distinguished by their analytical talents. Most of the ideas about God have been developed by Western theologians since early church days. One can not enumerate all the scholars in just one paper. And also we can see an enormous collection of books in the library. Those are the results especially after the Reformation. The efforts to analyze will continue without end.

One of the exceptions is Kitamori's 'Pain of God'. It was in 1936 that Kitamori found a new meaning of the gospel through the 'Pain of God'⁽⁵⁵⁾. Is God really immune

from suffering or pain? The general consensus now seems that the idea of a God who beyond suffering may represent the Greek philosophies. The result of rapid expansion of Christianity into other areas brought the encounter with Hellenistic culture. Some says “Palestinian gospel become distorted by being refracted through a Hellenistic prism.”⁶⁶⁾

Akira-meru is one of the ways that Japanese have done for a long history. Literally, *akira-meru* gives up something. It is, however, not only a negative meaning. *Akira-meru* has, in some way, a preferably positive sense. We do not know that it is from the influence of Buddhism idea. Through meditation, the philosophy of Zen Buddhism recommends us to become *Ku* (empty). Most Japanese do avoid analysis. The virtue of man was silence. Parents taught boy not to be talkative. It was just after the Meiji Restoration⁶⁷⁾ that Japanese accepted western thinking way. Historically, people seldom asked who was *Kami*^(God) in Japan even in the Shintoism.

Kenzaburo Ooe, a Nobel laureate of literature, made a memorial speech titled “A Vague Japan and I”. In that speech, he mentioned about the characteristics of Japanese. It was important for Japanese to maintain the relationship in the community. Ambiguity was common. Without giving clear answers, people guess each other. Surrounded by the Sea of Japan and the Pacific Ocean, Japan relatively enjoyed being an independent country. Japan closed communication with other countries to escape from the influence of other countries. An isolation policy in Edo period (1603-1867) was one of the good examples⁶⁸⁾. As a result, tacit understanding became important virtue.

After World War II, Professor Maruyama, a prominent critic and scholar of Tokyo University, predicted that Japanese would not accept both Marxism and Christianity. He, contradictory enough, pointed out that the reason was both have firm systematic theories. Although many missionaries from every denomination from America and Europe were sent to Japan and established churches, it is said that the population of Christianity is still less than one percent. There was a boom to go to church several times⁶⁹⁾, not only adults but also children attended church. But now most of the churches except for Pentecostal or Assembly and some other groups suffer from a severe aging problem. There are few children in Sunday school. It is contradictory enough, however, the characteristic of Christianity to articulate may not fit the soil of Japan. It is enough

for us to proclaim that “Christians believe that God bestows the fullness of divine life in the person of Jesus Christ and that through the person of Christ and the action of the Holy Spirit we are made intimate partakers of the living God.”⁽⁶⁰⁾

Notes

- (1) Richard A. Norris, Jr. translated and edited, *The Christological Controversy* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1980) vii.
- (2) Shigehiko Sato, *Luther No TAKUJOUGOROKU* (Tokyo: Guroriya, 1981)76.
- (3) Jaroslav Pelikan ed. Luther’s Works Vol. 26, 401.
- (4) From September 2001 to May 2003, I got a chance to study at Luther Seminary in St. Paul sponsored by the ELCA (Evangelical Lutheran Church of America), and Japan Lutheran College to develop my study about Christianity.
- (5) It might be oversimplifying to say “Japanese”. It does not mean all Japanese think like this. But the tendency of Japanese feels like this.
- (6) Endo is a leading contemporary Japanese writer. *Silence* is another important work to think of Japanese Christian Society in the feudal period.
- (7) I lived in Toyama Prefecture in Japan from 1970 to 1978. The missionary work of the Mormons was very energetic.
- (8) A wedding in the chapel of a hotel is popular for young Japanese couples. Some hotels recruit retired pastors, others employ a good appearance and white Americans who sometimes are not qualified as a clergyman as a service for the wedding.
- (9) Some denominations in Japan use “Amen” in church service lots of times.
- (10) The symposium was held at Musashino Church, which was one of the biggest Japan Evangelical Lutheran Churches in Japan.
- (11) Jan de Waard and Eugene A. Nida, *From One Language to Another: Functional Equivalence in Bible Translating* (New York: Thomas Nelson, 1986) 9.
- (12) Chinese Repository, Vol. XV, February, 1846, No. 2, pp. 108-110.
- (13) Ibid., Vol. XIX, February, 1850, No. 2, 95.
- (14) Ibid., Vol. XX, April, 1851, No. 4, 217.
- (15) *Kami* is Japanese as a translation of God or gods. The Chinese character of *Shin* was adapted for *Kami* in the middle of sixth century.
- (16) Francisco de Xavier was the first missionary of the Jesuit, (the Society of Jesus).
- (17) As Xavier did not understand Japanese, he followed his Japanese translator’s advice.
- (18) It might be an influence of Chinese philosophy. Further examination is necessary.
- (19) As Dr. Ono does not italicize, I followed him in this quotation.
- (20) Sokyō Ono, *Shinto: The Kami Way* (Tokyo: Charles E. Tuttle Company, 1962)7.
- (21) The difficulty of getting a successor for Shinto priests is a big problem for Shinto shrines. Female priests are gradually becoming popular these days.
- (22) It is estimated from *Nihonshoki* (Chronology of Japan) compiled in 720 C.E. Most historians now do not believe this date is correct. There is no evidence other

- than *Nihonshoki*.
- (23) William K. Bunce, *Religions in Japan: Buddhism, Shinto, Christianity* (Tokyo: Charles E. Tuttle, 1955)104.
 - (24) It is an annotated edition consisting of forty-four volumes.
 - (25) It is conventional that the *Kojiki* is the oldest book in Japan written in 712 C.E.
 - (26) Original term *Ki* (Chi in Chinese pronunciation) is translated as breath by Donald L. Philippi.
 - (27) Based on the translation of Donald L. Philippi *KOJIKI* (Tokyo: University of Tokyo Press, 1968), I tried to translate the *Kojiki* closely following the original.
 - (28) Lao-tzu mentioned, "No name is the beginning heaven and earth."
 - (29) There is no numbering for the original text. I follow Philippi's *KOJIKI* for convenience.
 - (30) There is no explanation the difference of these two deities. Some scholars, however, presume *Taka-mi musu-hi-no-kami* is the lineage of *Yamato*, the same tribe with *Tenno* family and *Kami-musu-hi-no-kami* is of *Izumo*, which was a big rival of *Yamato*.
 - (31) Rowan Williams, *On Christian Theology* (Oxford: Blackwell, 2000) 66.
 - (32) *Ibid.*, 66.
 - (33) *Chronicles of Japan from the earliest times to A.D. 697* compiled by prince *Toneri* in 720 C.E. Although it is pointed out unreliability from historians, *Nihonshoki* provides positive dates, names, and facts.
 - (34) Here we can see the influence of Korean mythology. The metaphor of the egg is widely used from East Asia to Northern Europe.
 - (35) I mainly followed the translation of W.G.Aston, *NIHONGI* (Rutland and Tokyo: Charles E. Tuttle, 1972) and underlined by me.
 - (36) See Mitsuji Fukunaga, *Dokyo to Nihonbunka* (Taoism and Japanese culture) (Japan: Jinbunshoin, 1982)246.
 - (37) *Shangdi* is accepted as a translation of God in the Chinese Bible.
 - (38) Underlined by me
 - (39) See Aston, *NIHONGI*, 3.
 - (40) Dr. Freitheim emphasized that God was not singular in the Genesis story in the Pentateuch autumn class at Luther Seminary in 2001.
 - (41) Underlined by me
 - (42) Freitheim, *The Suffering of God* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1984),11
 - (43) See Freitheim, *The Suffering of God*, preface and chapter 1.
 - (44) *Ibid.*, 1.
 - (45) Williams, *On Christian Theology*, 65.
 - (46) *Ibid.* ,65.
 - (47) There was a Yoga school named "Oki Yoga" at Misima city in Sizuoka Prefecture.
 - (48) The blessing words of Shinto at the beginning of a ritual.
 - (49) It was not a lecture held at a university. There was no organized curriculum. It was usually a story or parable.
 - (50) I took the eighty-fifth intensive summer course at Kokugakuin College in which

I met a lot of young Shinto priests.

- (51) Rowan Williams, *On Christian Theology* (Massachusetts: Blackwell, 2000)116.
- (52) John Hick, *God Has Many Names* (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1980)18.
- (53) *Ibid.*, 18.
- (54) *Ibid.*, 19.
- (55) Kazo Kitamori, *Shingakuteki Jiden I*, 108.
- (56) Alter E.MacGrath, *Christian Theology: An Introduction* (Oxford: Blackwell, 2001)274.
- (57) It is a process of modernization after 1868.
- (58) To eliminate the influence of Christianity was the main purpose to close the country.
- (59) Especially after World War II, people rushed to church service or Sunday school every Sunday. In a future study, we must examine why most of them stopped attending church.
- (60) Catherine Mowry LaCugna, *God For Us: The Trinity and Christian Life* (San Francisco: HarperCollins, 1973)3.