

idols and ghosts of the dead and to mediums and spiritists."

Suggestions For Contextualizing In Japan

A form of contextualization that has appealed to some Japanese Christians recommends working from the hearer's acknowledged interest and ignorance, as did Paul at Athens (Acts 17:23). We refer to Japanese Buddhism considered from the point of view of early Christian influence on its first centuries here. In 804 Kobo Daishi went to Hsian, China, and lived near the Christian (Nestorian) church where its pastor was translating a manuscript with a famous Indian Buddhist priest, Prajna, in that city. When Kobo returned to Japan in 806, he brought new doctrines back with him. His new Shingon (True Word) sect taught of a soul that could be saved by faith, of a heavenly paradise, and of masses for the dead, all more similar to Christian concepts than to original Buddhism?⁵ Is it not appropriate to ask Buddhists why these changes were made? Kobo must have found something in China's capital that he felt the older Buddhism lacked, something more satisfying and meaningful. Thus we find in the early missionary story of China the gospel as the source of the unadulterated message of salvation by faith.

We are told that 82% of the Japanese do not accept religions for their content, indeed "do not believe in any religion", but that "there are many who have a deep religious sentiment (*shukyoshin*)".⁶ The first covenant was introduced by the statement that God made man in his own image. Indelibly stamped in men is the "seed of religion, the sense of deity", to use Calvin's phrases, so that, as they look out on the nature the Japanese love so well, their God-consciousness whispers, "Something (*nanika*) is there." As Basabe says, the older, thinking man will attempt to cross the barrier of a total relativity to reach the *nanika* even though he believes it is not possible since it is inexpressible. Religious doctrines, to him, are not immutable truth and all religions are man-made.⁷ Yet that very reaching out, that "deep religious sentiment", in spite of the despair, is evidence that the Japanese man cannot escape the God in whose image he has been made; and that nature itself is God's general revelation of himself and will always bear witness that he is there (Ps 19:1-4; Rom 1:18-25). It is this God-consciousness in man which is our point of contact with him and the ground of our expectation that our message is being heard -- at least on the intellectual level for only the Holy Spirit can open the heart to hear it internally.

Christians have a two-layer concept of reality, the eternal and the temporal; the Creator and the created. The Japanese intellectual mind, however, is monistic, rejecting all that is not temporal, tending to reject even the subject-object relation. Truth can be falsehood and sin virtue, while it makes little difference whether one is a religious believer or an unbeliever as both must accept that all things are relative.⁸ This is a world and life view with tragic implications and built-in despair. There is no soil more foreign to the Christian message than one rejecting all eternal reality and holding to an earthly monism. The more we go to such a system to find