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Hidden Christians and Non-Churches: Indigenized Christian Practices in Japan

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**Hidden Christians and Non-Churches:
Indigenized Christian Practices in Japan**

by

Shayne Naoyuki Yano

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Abstract

Throughout Christianity's tumultuous history in Japan, there have been several traditions that have stood independent from Western missionary churches. Two such traditions are the Kakure Kirishitan (“Hidden Christians”) and Uchimura Kanzō's Non-Church Movement. Both have interpreted Christianity in ways that make sense within their own historical and cultural contexts. Highlighting these communities is an important way to give a voice and proper agency to “unofficial” and indigenized ways of practicing Christianity. Japanese Christian communities have forged their own religious practices that force us to expand our understanding of what it means to be Christian and what Christianity can look like in the lives of everyday people. The focus shifts away from church authorities and dogmatic proclamations, thus empowering and recognizing the authority of lay practitioners to make their own meaning from the Christian tradition.

To Mark and Mary Ann Yano

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Prologue

In the summer of 2019, my aunt Sally passed away rather unexpectedly, and a funeral in her memory was held a couple of weeks later. Many extended family members and I gathered in the main hall of the Hompa Hongwanji Buddhist Temple in Downtown Los Angeles. It was a beautiful ceremony consisting of *nembutsu* recitation, chanting of Buddhist sutras, and the lighting of incense sticks. While standing outside of the hall afterwards, I remember reflecting on how comfortable I felt in that distinctly Buddhist space and that I would not have wanted to honor Aunt Sally's life and legacy in any other way. She was by no means a devout Buddhist practitioner, but for my Japanese American family, a Buddhist funeral at a Jodo Shinshu temple is quite common and often assumed. As a practicing Christian and a Japanese American, I have long had an interest in exploring what it means to be a Christian while also maintaining Japanese cultural and familial traditions—many of which are tied to Shinto and Buddhism.

My experience at Aunt Sally's funeral was just one example in a long line of experiences in which I began to wrestle with the connections and tensions inherent in the relationship between Christianity and Japanese culture. After experiencing Shinto and Buddhist traditions firsthand during trips to Japan and engaging in undergraduate coursework on Japanese religions, I knew coming into the graduate program that I wanted to incorporate my interest in Japanese culture, history, and religion into this thesis project. The spark was fully lit when Professor Daniel Smith-Christopher, hearing of my interest in Japan, pointed me towards two key areas of interest that he thought I may be interested in exploring further. The first concerned the examination of the *hole hole bushi*, folk songs sung by Japanese immigrants as they worked in the sugarcane fields of Hawaii, which I spent the summer of 2020 researching as part of Professor Smith-Christopher's "Bible and the Blues" course. The other work that Professor

Smith-Christopher pointed me towards was Mark Mullins' work on indigenous Christian movements in Japan, specifically his book *Christianity Made in Japan: A Study of Indigenous Movements*. This was my first introduction to Japanese expressions of Christianity, and after reading through the various movements that Mullins examines, I decided to build upon his work for my own research project.

This particular book caught my attention because Mullins describes a number of Christian movements in Japan that bear little resemblance to the American, evangelical form of Christianity that I was raised in. Through my various classes in the program such as Liturgical Theology, Comparative Theology, The Bible and the Blues, and many more, I have come to understand that there is not one true and pure Christianity, but instead myriad ways of practicing and participating in the religion. This project examines just a few of the ways that Christianity has been interpreted by Japanese Christian communities throughout the past few centuries. After completing the Graduate Theology program at LMU, I plan to move to Japan for two years in order to build my language skills, develop my teaching abilities, obtain first-hand experience with the religious cultures there, and expand on my current project to build the foundation for future doctoral research.

Introduction

Japan is not necessarily a place that instantly comes to mind when thinking of developments and contributions to Christian thought and practice. Zen meditation or an ancient Shinto animism are often considered representative of Japanese religiosity in the West. However, Japanese Christian communities have much to teach us about what Christian belief and practice can look like. Several independent Christian traditions have developed in Japan, borrowing from existing cultural practices and inventing their own rituals in order to create a form of Christianity that made sense for their own circumstances. The developments of Christian thought and practice within the context of Japan's rich historical and religious landscape has produced several movements deserving of serious theological reflection.

Religious studies scholar Mark R. Mullins has done pioneering work in studying and giving credibility to these types of indigenous Christian traditions in Japan. The closing decades of the twentieth century brought a flood of scholarly interest in such traditions, with many religious studies scholars such as Stephen Turnbull, Christal Whelan, and Miyazaki Kentaro all choosing to focus extensively on Japan's "Hidden Christians." Though a few sporadic studies and articles have been published more recently, scholarship and interest in these types of indigenous Japanese Christian movements has died down. The present essay seeks to build from this previous scholarship while also propelling the study of such traditions forward for a new generation of scholars and anyone curious enough to encounter a new world of religious thought and practice.

It may be tempting to brush off Japanese expressions of Christianity as distorted versions of the faith or merely syncretistic collections of incoherent traditions. However, when these communities are considered on their own terms and within their own historical contexts, their

interpretations of Christianity point to a set of poignant questions. How should theologians, religious scholars, church leaders, and lay persons alike make sense of Christian communities that do not fit neatly into the presumed Western categories of what “Christianity” and religious practice itself ought to look like? Who gets to decide what constitutes authentic Christian belief and tradition?

Thesis

The diverse ways that Christianity has been received and practiced by people in Japan challenge typical Western notions of expected Christian belief and practice. Through an examination of two case studies: the Kakure Kirishitan and the Non-Church Movement, I argue that Christianity has been creatively interpreted by Christian communities in Japan in a way that makes sense within their own particular cultural contexts and contributes to (rather than replaces) the existing religious landscape in Japan and beyond.

Significance of Indigenous Japanese Christianity

This project has implications for both the way that Christianity is viewed and understood within Japan’s religious landscape, as well as the how we might give proper agency and legitimacy to “unofficial” and indigenized ways of practicing Christianity. Surveys from the past few decades indicate that less than 1% of the Japanese population identifies as Christian.¹ This could lead one to believe that Christianity is insignificant within the broader landscape of Japanese religion and culture. While it is true that Christianity has had little impact in the sense of conversions and official membership in churches, its contribution to Japan’s cultural, spiritual,

¹ Mark R. Mullins, “Japanese Christianity,” in *Nanzan Guide to Japanese Religions*, eds. Paul L. Swanson and Clark Chilson (Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press, 2006), 118.

and political landscape has been highly influential. Mark Mullins, in his introduction to the *Handbook of Christianity in Japan*, remarks:

It is evident that Christian churches represent a small population in Japan, but a focus on membership figures alone may hinder us from fully appreciating its significance in Japanese history...the significance of Christianity in Japan extends beyond what one may initially suppose on the basis of meager church statistics, and it is this wider impact that also needs serious consideration.²

The present essay seeks to explore some of those wider impacts and proposes a different way to think about both what it means to be Christian and the role that Christianity plays in Japan's religious landscape. The work of Mullins and other scholars of Japanese Christianity has opened new pathways to explore the impact that Christianity has had when it is interpreted by lay communities in Japan. In what follows, I emphasize the ways that Japanese Christians have shaped and reimagined their own understanding of the faith. The focus will be on the lived experience and grassroots development of belief and praxis, not on organizational structures, church dogma, and membership numbers. This reimagining of the faith challenges Western notions of "religion" and "conversion" by taking seriously the voices of these individuals and communities that defy simple metrics like church attendance or baptisms.

The ways that people in Japan have received and interpreted Christianity challenge Western and American assumptions about what proper and orthodox Christianity is supposed to look like. For nearly five hundred years, many Christian communities in Japan have not focused on getting people to attend church on Sunday mornings, participate in sacraments, or leave behind their existing beliefs and rituals for an exclusive practice of Christianity. Instead, Japanese Christian communities have forged their own practices of the religion that, when taken seriously, force us to expand our understanding of what it means to be Christian and what

² Mark R. Mullins, "Preface and Acknowledgements," in *Handbook of Christianity in Japan*, ed. Mark R. Mullins (Boston: Brill, 2003), ix.

Christianity can look like in the lives of everyday people. The focus shifts away from church authorities and dogmatic proclamations, thus empowering and recognizing the authority of lay practitioners to make their own meaning from the Christian tradition.

Method

I primarily utilize the discipline of religious studies, drawing heavily from the previous work of scholars engaged in the study of religion in Japan. The field of religious studies seeks to understand the origins, development, and content of the religious practices, beliefs, and themes of the world's religions. It also seeks in a broader sense to investigate the significance that religious life and tradition plays within particular societies (though, as will be discussed below through Josephson's work, the category of what is considered "religion" is in itself complex and problematic). Religious studies scholars may also incorporate a variety of other disciplines such as (but not limited to) sociology, ethnography, textual studies, ritual studies, and history in order to research and gain insight into religious traditions and the phenomenon of "religion" more generally.

Though the field of religious studies does not evaluate truth claims or prescribe new practices or interpretations for the religious believer, scholars do examine and pay attention to the human experiences and connections that characterize religious belief and practice. Some religious studies scholars, such as Jonathan Z. Smith, have argued against the use of experience as an effective tool in the study of religion. Smith preferred the research of reading books and articles over experiencing what he read about for himself. He explains: "I have consistently made a choice of the map over the territory... That is, reading, as a privileged mode of mediated rather

than of *immediate* sight or experience.”³ However, others like Sam Gill have claimed more recently that the experiences of both the scholar and those being studied must be an integral consideration when studying religions.⁴ Gill describes the academic study of religions as a “creative encounter” whereby the individuals and communities being discussed are “considered in the terms of their own histories and perspectives in the interest of articulating a humane method for the study of people, cultures, and religions.”⁵ Gill’s description serves as a succinct summary of my own goals in relation to Christian communities in Japan.

Traditions like the Kakure Kirishitan and the Non-Church movement find themselves on the margins of two communities simultaneously. To the global Christian community, they appear as, at best, novel Japanese interpretations of the faith that are ultimately nonsensical outside of Japan. For some these traditions may even appear to be merely unrecognizable distortions of “authentic” Christian practice. From the broader perspective of Japanese society, these indigenous Christian practices may be curiosities that attract tourists to museums, but they remain outliers when compared to the more prominent and popular religious customs. For these reasons I hope to take on Gill’s approach so that I may listen and consider these communities on their own terms. The present essay will attempt to let these easily forgotten communities speak for themselves, so that they may share their own histories and perspectives.

In the argument that follows, I examine two case studies: the Kakure Kirshitan (“Hidden Christian”) communities and Uchimura Kanzō’s Non-Church Movement. These two traditions are examples of Japanese Christians interpreting Christianity on their own terms, rather than

³ Jonathan Z. Smith, “Reading Religion: A Life in Scholarship,” (October 31, 2010), quoted in Sam Gill, *The Proper Study of Religion: Building on Jonathan Z. Smith* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2020), 119. Original quote: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=K8ZuJ3BdHFk>

⁴ Gill, *The Proper Study of Religion*, 16.

⁵ Gill, *The Proper Study of Religion*, 19.

passively accepting the teachings and traditions established by Western missionaries. I have chosen to focus on these two traditions because both were born out of key historical moments in the relationship between Japan and Christianity. This is not to say these are necessarily the most “important” Japanese Christian traditions, but they are both seminal communities in their own right that paved the way for future Christian movements in Japan. The use of two distinct case studies is important in order to demonstrate that there is not one “Japanese Christianity” that can be discussed or analyzed. Over the centuries, several distinct Japanese Christian traditions have developed in response to their own social, cultural, and historical circumstances. The examples of the Kakure Kirishitan and Non-Church Movement break the traditional boxes of what constitutes “religion” and “Christianity” and instead imagining these traditions complexly—with all of their nuance and tensions that defy neat categorization.

In this respect, the current essay also seeks to build upon the previous work of religious studies scholar Mark R. Mullins, who has previously conducted a significant amount of research in the area of indigenous Japanese Christian traditions. In his 1998 monograph *Christianity Made in Japan: A Study of Indigenous Movements*, Mullins details nearly a dozen of these traditions through his extensive ethnographic fieldwork in Japan. His study highlights the specific beliefs, practices, and concerns of Christian communities in Japan that are institutionally independent from Western traditions. As he examines the implementation of Christian praxis within Japanese society, Mullins makes it clear from the outset that:

Religion only exists in the vernacular, or, to adapt a biblical phrase, the “treasure” only exists in “earthen vessels” (2 Corinthians 4:7). There is no such things as a “pure” transcultural expression of Christianity or any other world religion—there are only particular cultural manifestations.⁶

⁶ Mark R. Mullins, *Christianity Made in Japan: A Study of Indigenous Movements*, (Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press, 1998), 3.

There is no pure form of any religion that exists outside of a particular historical and cultural context. Religious traditions both shape and are shaped by the particular communities that they take root in. Gerald Arbuckle, similar to Mullins' comments, also asserts that "[r]eligions are not something purely otherworldly, because they are encased in cultures of their own making. Religions have their own cultures, influence other cultures, and are influenced by them."⁷ With this understanding of religion in mind, I seek to consider the ways that Christianity in Japan has manifested in ways that respond to specific historical and cultural circumstances.

Overview

I begin with a brief historical overview covering Japan's first points of contact with Christianity, the persecution and ban of the religion, and the reemergence of Christian communities during the Meiji era after the ban was lifted. I then focus on the first case study of Christianity in Japan: the Kakure Kirishitan ("Hidden Christian") communities. In this section I will describe three aspects of Kakure Kirishitan belief and practice: (1) their sacred images and symbols; (2) their liturgical and ritual practices; and (3) their sacred written text. The second case study will focus on Uchimura Kanzō and the Non-Church Movement, the first Japanese Christian community to break away from the missionary traditions during the Meiji era. I pay particular attention to: (1) Kanzō's decision to separate from the missionary traditions; (2) the content of Kanzō's own writings and teachings; and (3) the rituals and practices of the Non-Church Movement. In the third and final section, I propose a new way of understanding the role of Christianity in Japan and explore how these indigenous forms of practice challenge the typical Western categories of what constitutes "religion" in general and "Christianity" specifically.

⁷ Gerald Arbuckle, *Culture, Inculturation, and Theologians: A Postmodern Critique* (Collegeville, MN: Liturgical Press, 2010), 123.

Chapter 1

Historical Context

Japan's First Encounter with Christianity

Christianity first arrived on the shores of Japan in 1549 when a group of Jesuit missionaries from Spain and Portugal landed in the Satsuma domain (present-day Kagoshima Prefecture). They initially found success in spreading the newly introduced religion across the southern regions of Japan, with prominent *daimyo* (samurai rulers of a particular clan or domain) and even some entire domains being largely converted to the new faith brought by the European missionaries.⁸ This period when Christianity spread throughout Japan through Spanish and Portuguese missionary activity is commonly referred to as the “Christian Century” of Japan’s history.⁹ Yet despite the initial surge of successful conversions, the spread of Christianity in Japan during this time was ultimately short-lived. As influential leaders from among the samurai class began to consolidate political control over the country, they came to see Christianity as a threat to their power. It was feared that Christian allegiance to God and the Pope would supersede the authority of Japanese rulers and destabilize unification efforts.¹⁰

One of the most notorious instances that signaled the end of the acceptance of Christianity in Japan was the execution of twenty-six Christian (nine foreign missionaries and seventeen native Japanese practitioners) who were crucified on the shores of Nagasaki in 1597.¹¹

⁸ Miyazaki Kentaro, “The Kakure Kirishitan Tradition,” in *Handbook of Christianity in Japan*, ed. Mark R. Mullins (Boston: Brill, 2003), 20.

⁹ Mullins “Japanese Christianity,” 116.

¹⁰ Duncan Ryuken Williams, “Religion in Early Modern Japan,” in *Nanzan Guide to Japanese Religions*, eds. Paul L. Swanson and Clark Chilson (Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press, 2006), 190.

¹¹ Kirk Sandvig, *Hidden Christians in Japan: Breaking the Silence* (Lanham, MD: Lexington Books, 2020), 39.

Toyotomi Hideyoshi, the de facto ruler of Japan at the time, was initially accepting of Christianity, but as fears of Christian insubordination grew, he had these Christians executed in an effort to quell any remaining opposition to his rule. Those who were crucified came to be known as the “Twenty-Six Martyrs.”¹² In 1600, Tokugawa Ieyasu gained power after Hideyoshi’s death and established the Tokugawa shogunate, a military government that would rule Japan for the next 250 years. Ieyasu and his successors were equally as hostile towards Christianity.

Persecution and Hiding

On the heels of such intense persecution, the Tokugawa shogunate issued a decree officially outlawing the practice of Christianity in 1614.¹³ All foreign missionaries were forced to leave the country and Christianity was branded as an “evil religion” (*jakyo*).¹⁴ In addition to the decree, several ongoing measures were put in place by the shogunate in order to root out any remaining Christian believers and prevent the further spread of the “heresy” of Christianity. Such measures included the *danka-seido* system and *fumie* practices. *Fumie* were copper plates with an image of either Jesus or Mary, and those suspected of being Christian were forced to trample on them once a year in order to prove they were not faithful followers of the figures they were stepping on.¹⁵ The *danka-seido* system was a mandatory registration system that required every household in the country to be registered with a local Buddhist temple. Each household needed

¹² Christal Whelan, *The Beginning of Heaven and Earth: The Sacred Book of Japan’s Hidden Christians* (Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press, 1996), 7.

¹³ Sandvig, *Hidden Christians in Japan*, 39.

¹⁴ Mullins, “Japanese Christianity,” 116.

¹⁵ Miyazaki, “The Kakure Kirishitan Tradition,” 21.

to certify that they were not Christians and participate in Buddhist ceremonies such as funerals.¹⁶ Like the *fumie* practice, the *danka* system was another way for the Tokugawa shogunate to monitor its citizens and suppress any Christian activity. Faced with such intense surveillance and persecution, those who choose to maintain their Christian faith were forced to go into hiding, disguising their practices and avoiding any outward appearance that they were practitioners of Christianity. These underground communities would remain hidden in the shadows for nearly 250 years.

Meiji Restoration and the Second Encounter with Christianity

In 1868, under immense pressure from both rival domains and the threat of foreign invasion, the Tokugawa shogun abdicated his title and returned political power back to the emperor in a transfer of power known as the Meiji Restoration. The new era that followed brought a number of sweeping political, economic, cultural, and religious changes to Japanese society. As Japan continued to expand its diplomatic relations with foreign countries, pressure mounted on the newly established Meiji government to permit the practice of Christianity. Leaders both within and outside of Japan considered the establishment of religious freedom to be a key step in the country becoming a modern state that could stand on equal footing with the Western powers.¹⁷ The ban of Christianity was officially lifted by the new Meiji government in 1873.¹⁸ The legalization of Christianity and the increased amount of foreign interaction and influence in Japan ushered in a new wave of missionary activity. The lift of the ban also allowed

¹⁶ Jacqueline Stone, "Buddhism," in *Nanzan Guide to Japanese Religions*, eds. Paul L. Swanson and Clark Chilson (Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press), 51.

¹⁷ Jason Ananda Josephson, *The Invention of Religion in Japan* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2012), 92.

¹⁸ Mullins, "Japanese Christianity," 117.

the underground Christian communities to emerge after over two hundred years of hiding. Many decided to join (or in a sense “return to”) the Catholic Church, which was the Christian tradition most related to the Kakure Kirishitan faith. Others however chose not to join the Catholic Church, opting instead to remain separate from the Western denominations and maintain the traditions and practices that their communities had developed and upheld while in hiding.¹⁹ These Kirishitan communities remain in the islands surrounding Nagasaki to this day, though their numbers have steadily declined over recent decades. Meanwhile, the Meiji era (1868–1912) was the first encounter between Japan and Protestant forms of Christianity. A significant portion of the Japanese population was initially very enthusiastic about these Protestant missionary churches, with large numbers of conversion happening in the 1870s and 1880s. However, as the new Meiji government grew stronger in its control over the country, this initial growth largely stagnated as national focus turned more towards Shinto rituals and worship of the emperor.²⁰

¹⁹ Miyazaki, “The Kakure Kirishitan Tradition,” 19.

²⁰ Mullins, “Japanese Christianity,” 117.

Chapter 2

Kakure Kirishitan: Hidden Christians

The Kakure Kirishitan community was the first and, for a couple of centuries, the only Christian tradition in Japan to develop separately from Western missionary forms of Christianity. This tradition developed in secret during the Edo period (1603–1867) in the context of the Tokugawa shogunate's ban and persecution of Christianity. Although the earliest Christian converts in Japan had inherited the teachings of Western missionaries, the majority of Kakure Kirishitan beliefs and practices were developed while in hiding. It is a primarily oral tradition given that the majority of the practitioners were illiterate and that any written or material evidence of Christian practice was punishable by death.²¹ However, their time in secrecy and isolation led them to innovate new practices and beliefs that were suited to their own daily lives and understanding. They could not practice their faith openly, but they worked with what they had to create a Christian tradition that made sense for a community in hiding. The symbols, ritual practices, and texts of the Kakure Kirishitan communities give a glimpse into the ways they built upon the foundation established by the European missionaries and reinterpreted Christian tradition in light of Buddhism, Shinto, and the broader Japanese religious landscape.

It is important to note that the Kakure Kirishitan were not a single monolithic group. Separate hidden Christian communities were spread throughout the various islands and seaside communities in the Nagasaki area. For example, the islands of Goto and Ikitsuki along with the coastal regions of Hirado and Sotome were all home to distinct communities.²² Meiji-era missionaries and contemporary scholars alike have been struck by the rigid sectarianism amongst

²¹ Whelan, *The Beginning of Heaven and Earth*, 20.

²² Miyazaki, "The Kakure Kirishitan Tradition," 22.

Kirishitan communities despite their relatively small numbers.²³ There are many shared beliefs and practices among them, but the specific rituals, prayers, stories, and interpretations of one group could differ greatly from that of a neighboring island. Christal Whelan details the Christmas Eve ritual celebrations among the Kakure Kirishitan of Narushima in her 1997 documentary *Otaiya*. Despite the dwindling number of practicing Kirishitan and the presence of only two remaining trained officials on the island, Whelan found that these two officials refused to celebrate the ceremonies together due to disagreements over proper practice.²⁴

Lacking a central authority or governing body, Kakure Kirishitan groups relied on the leadership and loyalty of the families in their own local communities to keep up their practices and pass along the faith to the next generation. This lack of ecclesiastical organization and isolation from broader society meant that each group was able to interpret beliefs for themselves and develop practices that made sense for the local community. Their complete isolation from any other Christian traditions and doctrine (other than the initial instruction by European missionaries) meant that Kirishitan communities had no sense of Christianity outside of Japan and therefore were not afraid to innovate and reinvent the tradition in ways that perhaps would not make sense outside of their own context of secrecy and persecution.²⁵ Many of the previous studies of the Kakure Kirishitan tradition have focused on one primary aspect of their practices, such as Christal Whelan's *The Beginning of Heaven and Earth* or Maria Resi-Habito's "Maria-Kannon: Mary, Mother of God, in Buddhist Guise." Instead, I will take a more broad approach, discussing three central aspects of their belief and practice that provide a foundational overview

²³ Whelan, *The Beginning of Heaven and Earth*, 17.

²⁴ Christal Whelan, *Otaiya*, (Watertown, MA: Documentary Educational Resources, 1997). DVD

²⁵ Whelan, *The Beginning of Heaven and Earth*, 11–12.

of these secretive communities: (1) material culture and visual imagery; (2) liturgical rituals and prayers; and (3) sacred texts.

Secret Symbols: Maria Kannon

For Kakure Kirishitan members, material objects of devotion and ritual played a central role in their faith and practice. Statues, artwork, and medallions all played key roles in the daily lives of the practitioners and the preservation of the faith during their time in hiding. They found themselves cut off not just from the missionaries and the Western world that had introduced them to Christianity, but also remained isolated from the rest of Japanese society. In many cases, devotional objects served as the only tangible reminders of their connection to Christianity. However, while these may have been the most important reminders of their religious heritage, they were at the same time extremely dangerous. Such Christian devotional objects could easily identify someone as Christian, and anyone found in possession of such an item would be put to death by government authorities. As a result, the Kakure Kirishitan communities needed to find a way to disguise their Christian objects in clever ways to avoid suspicion. Having explicitly Christian imagery and artwork depicting figures like Jesus and Mary was not an option prior to the Meiji era.

One of the innovative ways that they developed to disguise their figures of worship and devotion was to use depictions of Buddhist bodhisattvas instead. This allowed Kakure Kirishitan practitioners to hide their Christian objects in plain sight while outwardly appearing as faithful Buddhists to government authorities. The most prominent among these disguised images was the figure known as “Maria Kannon.” Maria Kannon is a representation of the Virgin Mary depicted as the Buddhist bodhisattva Kannon. Kannon is the Japanese name and form of the bodhisattva

of compassion, known in Chinese as *Guan-Yin* and in Sanskrit as *Avalokiteshvara*.²⁶ The image of Maria Kannon was depicted in both drawings and as porcelain figures used for devotional practice. She is often depicted holding a baby, a form of Kannon known as Koyasu Kannon that parallels depictions of Mary holding the infant Jesus.²⁷ Mary, in the form of Maria Kannon, emerged as the central figure of worship and devotion (*honzon*), while depictions of Jesus and the Father were considered accompanying images (*wakibutsu*).²⁸ Statues of another bodhisattva, *Jizo*, were also used to represent Jesus. *Jizo* is the Japanese interpretation of the bodhisattva *Ksitigarbha*, renowned throughout Japan as a protector of children. Statues depicting *Jizo* as a bald monk are commonplace, especially in cemeteries and along roadsides, where fruit is offered periodically at certain points in the year.²⁹ However, due to the Kirishitan tradition's emphasis on Mary instead of Christ, images of a *Jizo* Jesus are not as common as Maria Kannon.

In the sacred Kirishitan text known as the *Tenchi Hajimari no Koto* ("The Beginning of Heaven and Earth"; discussed at length below), the character of Mary, named "Maruya" in the text, is elevated to the third member of the Holy Trinity.³⁰ Amongst the Kakure Kirishitan, Mary in her depictions as both Maria Kannon and Maruya was elevated to a position equal to or in many cases higher than that of Jesus Christ and God the Father. Reis-Habito suggests that this may have occurred largely because the Kakure Kirishitan were already familiar with Kannon,

²⁶ Sandvig, *Hidden Christians in Japan*, 63.

²⁷ Miyazaki, "The Kakure Kirishitan Tradition," 21.

²⁸ Miyazaki, "The Kakure Kirishitan Tradition," 22.

²⁹ John K. Nelson, "Freedom of Expression: The Very Modern Practice of Visiting a Shinto Shrine," in *Enduring Identities: The Guise of Shinto in Contemporary Japan* (Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press, 2000), 45.

³⁰ Reis-Habito, "Maria-Kannon: Mary, Mother of God, in Buddhist Guise," *Marian Studies* 47, no. 1 (1996): 62, https://ecommons.udayton.edu/marian_studies/vol47/iss1/8.

and they found in Mary a figure very similar to the Buddhist bodhisattva.³¹ In addition to the parallels evident between Kannon and Mary, the focus on Mary above Jesus and the Father was also linked to the nature and disposition the Kakure Kirishitan attributed to the different persons of the Trinity. Miyazaki notes that God the Father was associated with judgement and punishment, while Mary was associated with compassion, healing, and care for children.³² The persecuted worshipers were afraid of the Father but drawn to the motherly comfort of Maria Kannon.

Secret Practices

Much like the images of Maria Kannon, the Kakure Kirishitan developed other devotional practices that were both informed by the early contact with Western missionaries and adapted specifically for a Christian faith lived out in secrecy. A distinguishing practice of these hidden communities is the recitation of *orashio* (a loan-word that comes from the Latin *oratio*, meaning “prayer”).³³ The *orashio* were specific prayers passed down through oral tradition and recited by memory either out loud or silently. When they were recited aloud, *orashio* sounded very close in style to ritual Shinto or Buddhist chanting, so anyone who happened to hear them would not have any suspicions.³⁴ Much like the images of Maria Kannon, the *orashio* were a combination of early missionary teachings and existing Japanese religious ritual that allowed the Kirishitan to hide their faith in plain sight. The prayers may be in Japanese, Latin, or a mix

³¹ Reis-Habito, “Maria-Kannon,” 62.

³² Miyazaki, “The Kakure Kirishitan Tradition,” 21.

³³ Miyazaki, “The Kakure Kirishitan Tradition,” 24.

³⁴ Sandvig, *Hidden Christians in Japan*, 74.

between the two and may also include Portuguese loan words originating from the missionaries. They also contain a number of “unintelligible expressions” whose original meanings have been lost.³⁵ Though some of the individual words may not have been understood by the community, each *orashio* served a specific ritual or practical purpose.

One of the ritual purposes that the *orashio* prayers served was as a funerary rite to honor the deceased. In order to maintain the outward appearance of Buddhist loyalty and not arouse suspicion, the Kirishitan were forced to have a traditional Buddhist funeral for community members who died. However, while the Buddhist ceremony occurred, Kirishitan members would gather separately in a nearby building to say their own funerary *orashio* prayers. The purpose was to cancel out the effects of the Buddhist sutra chanting through the repeated and concurrent chanting of *orashio*. This type of prayer is known as *kyokeshi orashio*: “*orashio* to eliminate the effects of the sutra.”³⁶ In addition, a separate Kirishitan funeral service would be held in secret for the deceased after the “official” Buddhist ceremony. The chanting of specific *orashio* during the funeral were believed to ensure that the recently deceased would reach Heaven.³⁷ Though a Buddhist funeral is no longer required today, the practice of holding a “double funeral” (one Buddhist and one Kirishitan) has continued into the present day as Kirishitan communities honor their dead.³⁸

The use of *orashio* in funeral rites demonstrates the magical nature attributed to these prayers, as the simple act of chanting them was believed to have powerful effects both in this

³⁵ Miyazaki, “The Kakure Kirishitan Tradition,” 24.

³⁶ Miyazaki, “The Kakure Kirishitan Tradition,” 26.

³⁷ Sandvig, *Hidden Christians in Japan*, 74.

³⁸ Miyazaki, “The Kakure Kirishitan Tradition,” 26

world and the spiritual realm. Some Kirishitan communities used the *orashio* as a way to call upon and invoke the presence of deities during their rituals. In this respect, the *orashio* served a role commonly found in other Japanese religious traditions known as *kamiyose*: “to call down a deity.”³⁹ This use of the *orashio* was likely carried over from the practice of invoking Shinto gods, commonly practiced as a way to gain favor for this-worldly benefits. The invocation of the deity was often accompanied by a traditional food offering that could include items such as sake, rice, or fish.⁴⁰ The practices of the Kirishitan communities integrate the recitation of their distinctive *orashio* prayers with common Shinto and Buddhist traditions. In adopting Christianity, these communities did not see the need to completely abandon their previous cultural and spiritual practices. Kirishitan practitioners saw no contradiction in the mixing of their Christian faith with existing Shinto ritual offerings.

Secret Text: Tenchi Hajimari no Koto

As a predominantly oral tradition, the Kakure Kirishitan do not have many written texts, but the most prominent—perhaps only—original text that they have produced does much to illuminate the inherent creativity and innovation present in their tradition and history. The *Tenchi Hajimari no Koto* (“The Beginning of Heaven and Earth”) is a collection of stories loosely based on biblical narratives such as the Genesis account of Adam and Eve, Noah and the flood, the birth of Jesus, Judas’ betrayal, and the crucifixion. The text itself is relatively short and divided into fifteen chapters, with each chapter containing a short vignette. A general overarching storyline can be traced within the text, but there is a lack of narrative structure and consistency.

³⁹ Miyazaki, “The Kakure Kirishitan Tradition,” 25.

⁴⁰ Miyazaki, “The Kakure Kirishitan Tradition,” 25.

This lack of narrative consistency points towards the rather mysterious and unknown origins of the work itself. Though often referred to as the “bible” of the Kakure Kirishitan community, it is possible that the *Tenchi* began as simply a collection of entertaining stories or even the tale chanted by a *biwa hoshi*, a wandering musician and entertainer.⁴¹

Likewise, the original function and significance of the text to the Kirishitan communities while they were in hiding during the Edo period remains unclear. Previous scholarship on the potential origins and use of the *Tenchi* have yielded important insights and possibilities but no definitive conclusions. One thing that does seem to be clear is that the text originated as a series of stories passed down through oral tradition, being written down and collected at a later point in time.⁴² A translation of the actual Bible in Japanese did not exist at the time, so this collection of stories served as the only connection to Christian scripture for Kirishitan communities.⁴³ Whelan and Kojima have put forth the possibility that the *Tenchi* originated from a series of popular stories that were originally told only for entertainment purposes, serving no doctrinal or scriptural role. However, as the years in hiding passed and without many other Christian materials, the *Tenchi* gradually took on a more authoritative and doctrinal role within the Kirishitan communities.⁴⁴ The language and style used throughout the text provide much evidence for its origins as a collection of entertaining stories that only later took on a scriptural role. Unlike most other Japanese religious texts, the *Tenchi* is written in a colloquial style with a

⁴¹ Whelan, *The Beginning of Heaven and Earth*, 25.

⁴² Whelan, *The Beginning of Heaven and Earth*, 20.

⁴³ Whelan, *The Beginning of Heaven and Earth*, 11.

⁴⁴ Whelan, *The Beginning of Heaven and Earth*, 23.

mix of *kana* (phonetic characters that spell out words), *kanji* (traditional Chinese characters), and foreign loan words.⁴⁵

Even amongst the remaining Kakure Kirishitan community today, there is no uniform consensus on the significance of the *Tenchi*. Scholars like Cristal Whelan and Stephen Turnbull, who have conducted field work among existing Kakure Kirishitan communities in order to research the *Tenchi*, have found that the text no longer serves any authoritative role today—if it is even known about at all. Whelan tells the story of visiting a small town with a Kakure Kirishitan community during her fieldwork in the early nineties. The local town hall informed one of the Kakure Kirishitan leaders that Whelan was interested in discussing the *Tenchi*. The Kirishitan leader had never heard of the work before, but he consulted with a local Catholic nun on the island, who recommended that he read the book of Genesis. Thus, he copied down the entire book of Genesis by hand and presented it to Whelan as the “*Tenchi Hajimari no Koto*.”⁴⁶ This somewhat comical story illustrates that, whatever purpose the text may have served during the years of hiding, use of the *Tenchi* was never uniform and it has fallen out of use throughout the remaining communities today.

One of the particularly important aspects of the text is the way that it combines biblical narratives with Buddhist and Japanese folk traditions. Christal Whelan describes the *Tenchi* as:

[A] compilation of Christian legends, a fusion of Buddhist and Christian cosmology and theology, as well as myths explaining the origin of many Japanese customs interpreted in light of a divine plan allegedly held to be Christian by the Kakure Kirishitan.⁴⁷

⁴⁵ Whelan, *The Beginning of Heaven and Earth*, 20.

⁴⁶ Whelan, *The Beginning of Heaven and Earth*, 26.

⁴⁷ Whelan, *The Beginning of Heaven and Earth*, 27–28.

The *Tenchi* gives us a glimpse into the creative religious imagination of the hidden Christians during a time when they were forced to live out their faith in complete isolation from the outside world. It is a text that is both uniquely Christian and uniquely Japanese, and something that could only be produced by this particular community. With no missionaries left to provide guidance or correction, the hidden Christians were forced (or perhaps freed) to combine what they had learned of the Bible with their existing familiarity with Buddhist, Shinto, and other Japanese folk traditions. The *Tenchi* makes little to no sense outside of the Kakure Kirishitan context, but that does not take anything away from significance of this text for contemporary scholarship on Japanese Christianity.

Much like its origins, the *Tenchi*'s reception and significance since the hidden Christians came out of hiding has been rather varied and disputed. Father Bernard Petitjean, the French priest who was the first to discover the Kakure Kirishitan at Oura Cathedral in 1865, received a copy of the *Tenchi* from Domingo Mataichi, a member of this Kirishitan group. Petitjean viewed the text favorably and was impressed with the knowledge of Christian doctrine that it demonstrated. He is even recorded to have commented that, “We have found in it some errors, but they are of little importance.”⁴⁸ Another priest on the other hand, Father Salmon of Nagasaki, reportedly described the text as “worthless,” likely due to the elements that deviate from standard Christian doctrine and narratives.⁴⁹ However, Stephen Turnbull has illustrated that many elements of the stories that may at first appear as Kirishitan additions can actually be

⁴⁸ Stephen Turnbull, “Acculturation among the *Kakure Kirishitan*: Some Conclusions from the *Tenchi Hajimari no Koto*,” in *Japan and Christianity*, eds. John Breen and Mark Williams (New York: St. Martin’s Press, 1996), 65.

⁴⁹ Whelan, *The Beginning of Heaven and Earth*, 14.

traced back to stories that the earliest Japanese Christians would have heard from the European missionaries.

The *Tenchi*'s versions of biblical narratives contain many additions that scholars have tended to categorize as unique "Japanese" additions to the stories; however, Turnbull warns that "many of the additions are not quite what they seem to be."⁵⁰ Turnbull points to a number of stories previously labeled as Japanese folk-inspired additions that actually come from apocryphal Christian texts. One such example of this is the story immediately following Jesus' birth, in which Maruya (Mary) heals the innkeeper's ill son by having him bathe in the bathwater she just used:

After three days had passed, Maruya requested a bath. When the bath was over she said to the lady of the house, "Please, let your son bathe in the same water." But the woman answered, "I am grateful for your thoughtfulness, but my son is diseased and his life is hanging by a thread. Excuse my rudeness if I refuse." But Maruya encouraged her, saying, "Please, let him get in." So the boy's mother put her sickly son in the bath and his disease vanished and he was cured instantly. The power of that water had restored his very life.⁵¹

Turnbull points out that nearly identical versions of this story appear in the *Gospel of Nicodemus* and the *Arabic Infancy Gospel*, two apocryphal gospel narratives. The inclusion of this story therefore represents extrabiblical material that the early European missionaries would have passed onto the early Christian converts, rather than a "charming Japanese addition to the story."⁵² Perhaps then many of the "errors" that Father Petitjean found and much of what Father Salmon considered "worthless" had actually not been considered so erroneous or useless to their sixteenth century counterparts who had arrived in Japan a couple of centuries earlier. Turnbull

⁵⁰ Turnbull, "Acculturation among the *Kakure Kirishitan*," 68.

⁵¹ Whelan, *The Beginning of Heaven and Earth*, 50.

⁵² Turnbull, "Acculturation among the *Kakure Kirishitan*," 69.

describes the Tenchi as “a time capsule, wherein are preserved many features of doctrine that were taught to the Christians in the sixteenth and early seventeenth centuries.”⁵³

Kirishitan Communities and Implications

The Kakure Kirishitan have always found themselves simultaneously on the margins of two separate communities. From the perspective of Western Christianity, they are a peculiar and eccentric variation whose beliefs and practices have strayed so far from Christian tradition that they should not even be considered Christians. From the perspective of traditional Japanese society, they are also a peculiarity whose affiliation with Christianity classifies them as a radical “other.” However, instead of treating the Kakure Kirishitan as an outlier, oddity, or an extremely marginal case as they so often are by scholars and tourists alike—what if this tradition was treated as one just as authoritative and legitimate as any other?

The French Catholic missionaries who first discovered the Kakure Kirshitan as they reemerged into the open in the 1860s celebrated the fact that Christianity had retained a presence in Japan, but they were also baffled and frustrated by the adaptations that made Kirishitan practice different from that of European Catholicism. Kirishitan practitioners were told that they would have to leave behind many of their central practices, including the veneration of ancestors, in order to join the newly established missionary churches in Japan. While some Kirishitan members did end up joining Catholic parishes, many were unwilling to give up their traditional family traditions and therefore chose to remain separate and continue their traditions even though the need to practice in secret no longer remained.⁵⁴

⁵³ Turnbull, “Acculturation among the *Kakure Kirishitan*,” 69.

⁵⁴ Ann M. Harrington, *Japan’s Hidden Christians* (Chicago: Loyola University Press, 1993), 103.

Contemporary scholars have also called into question whether the Kakure Kirishitan can accurately be described as a Christian tradition. Miyazaki Kentaro argues that the Kakure Kirishitan belief and practice should not be considered a proper form of Christianity at all, classifying it instead as a form of “Japanese folk religion.”⁵⁵ I agree with Miyazaki that there certainly are elements of Kirishitan practice and belief that could be categorized as “folk religion” and that have much in common with other grassroots religious movements that have developed in Japan. However, I would not go as far as he does in concluding that these added elements therefore exclude Kakure Kirishitan from being considered first and foremost an authentic expression of Christianity. Ann Harrington, in her monograph *Japan’s Hidden Christians*, also concludes:

[O]ne sees no other option but to call them [Kakure Kirishitan] an indigenous type of Japanese folk religion...They are an example of a largely unconscious blending of Christianity with traditional Japanese folk religion creating a new entity that by its very nature, village-bound and secret, prevents its continuance.⁵⁶

Harrington’s comments take away from the agency of the Kakure Kirishitan in what I would argue was indeed a conscious and deliberate process of adapting the Christian teachings they received to their own specific needs and context. While it is true that the traditions of Kakure Kirishitan communities were influenced by factors largely outside of their control, such as missionary activity and government persecution, it is important to not forget that these outcast communities were active agents in shaping their own beliefs and rituals.

It is understandable that many missionaries and scholars alike have concluded that the Kakure Kirishitan ought to be categorized as a Japanese folk religion rather than a Christian

⁵⁵ Miyazaki, “The Kakure Kirishitan Tradition,” 30.

⁵⁶ Harrington, *Japan’s Hidden Christians*, 159–60.

tradition. The integration of early missionary teachings, elements from Buddhism and Shinto, and the original contributions of Kirishitan members have all combined to create a system of beliefs and practices that do not fit neatly into the category of “Christian.” As explored above, elements such as the devotion to Kannon, the function of *orashio*, and some contents of the *Tenchi Hajimari no Koto* are perhaps beyond the scope of what many would identify as Christian beliefs and practices. However, the integration of these elements with more familiar Christian traditions is an indication that our category of what counts as “Christianity” is too small, rather than the Kakure Kirishitan being in the wrong category.

Chapter 3

Uchimura Kanzō and the Non-Church Movement

I for Japan; Japan for the World; the World for Christ; and all for God.

—Uchimura Kanzō (self-written epitaph that appears on his gravestone)

The Non-Church Movement was the first Meiji-era Christian movement to separate themselves from flood of missionaries that arrived during the second wave of Christian activity in Japan beginning in the second half of the nineteenth century. Mark Mullins refers to the movement as “the fountainhead of indigenous Christianity in Japan.”⁵⁷ Influenced by his own upbringing in a samurai family, Uchimura Kanzō’s form of Christianity was heavily influenced by both Confucianism and *bushido* (the ethical and behavioral code of the samurai class in feudal Japan). The Non-Church Movement is similar to the Kakure Kirishitan tradition in that it represents another expression of Christianity that integrates elements from other religious and cultural traditions to reimagine the faith for a particular community. However, the two movements are radically different regarding their historical and social context. Uchimura’s movement was allowed to develop out in the open, without need to disguise their practices for fear of death. It was also developed in the context of nineteenth and early twentieth century American Protestantism, as opposed to the Kirishitan who received their early teachings from European Catholic missionaries.

Uchimura Kanzō’s Conversion to Christianity

The life of Uchimura Kanzō (1861–1930) may at the surface level look like a series of contradictions. He was a committed Christian mentored in New England Puritanism and a

⁵⁷ Mullins, *Christianity Made in Japan*, 54.

patriotic political figure who loved his country of Japan; he was a staunch pacifist from an old samurai family; he was the leader of a Christian community that he called the “Non-Church Movement.” These contradictions are not easily reconciled, and Uchimura’s own writings acknowledge these tensions within his life. His conversion to Christianity itself may initially appear rather coincidental, but within his own spiritual journey and theological development one can see the multi-layered complexities of a man seeking to make sense of his Christian faith while remaining true to his own country and culture.

Uchimura Kanzō was born in 1861 as the eldest son of a lower-class samurai family. His first exposure to Christianity came while he was a student at Sapporo Agricultural College (the beginnings of what has today become Hokkaido University). The college’s founding president, Dr. W. S. Clark, was a passionate Christian evangelist who managed to establish a strong presence of Christian teaching throughout the school and convert the entire first class of students to Christianity. Uchimura never met Clark directly, but after entering the school in its second year, he decided to become a Christian alongside many of his classmates.⁵⁸ This initial decision however was made quite begrudgingly and mostly a result of pressure from his peers. In his own words, Uchimura admits: “my first step toward Christianity was a forced one, against my will, and I must confess, somewhat against my conscience too.”⁵⁹

Despite his initial hesitations, Uchimura gradually came to embrace the new religion and identity that he was at first merely forced into. Aside from the practical advantages he saw in it (as a teenager he was glad to no longer have to stop and pray at every Buddhist temple that he

⁵⁸ Shibuya Hiroshi, “Uchimura and his *Mukyokai-Shugi*,” in *Living for Jesus and Japan: The Social and Theological Thought of Uchimura Kanzō*, eds. Shibuya Hiroshi and Chiba Shin (Grand Rapids, MI: W. B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2013), 2.

⁵⁹ Uchimura Kanzō, *Diary of a Japanese Convert*, (1895; repr., Las Vegas: CreateSpace Independent Publishing, 2017), 14.

passed by), he began to feel an increased vigor and joy in life: “Rejoicing in the newly-imparted activity of my body I roamed over fields and mountains, observed the lilies of the valley and birds of the air, and sought to commune through Nature with Nature’s God.”⁶⁰ Upon graduating from Sapporo Agricultural College, he and his classmates established their own small church community known as the Sapporo Independent Church.⁶¹ Though this church was led by his friends and formed in a similar ethos to Uchimura’s principles, he never ended up fully involved with the Sapporo Independent Church. Instead, following a brief and tumultuous marriage to Asada Take, Uchimura left for America in order to refresh himself and embark on a new adventure.

Uchimura was brought up with a highly romanticized view of America as a result of the influence of missionary traditions and the Meiji governments modernization efforts. Upon his arrival to the United States in 1884 however, he discovered that the country (“Christendom” as he refers to it) was not a perfect “Christian” nation as he previously envisioned. Uchimura initially felt betrayed by his newly adopted faith after being a victim of pickpocketing upon his arrival and witnesses the racism present within American society. “Is this the civilization we were taught by missionaries to accept as evidence of the superiority of Christian Religion over other religions? With what shamefulness did they declare unto us that the religion which made Europe and America must surely be from on high?” Uchimura asks, “Peace is the last thing we can find in Christendom.”⁶²

⁶⁰ Uchimura, *Diary of a Japanese Convert*, 16.

⁶¹ Shibuya, “Uchimura and his *Mukyokai-Shugi*,” 129.

⁶² Uchimura, *Diary of a Japanese Convert*, 76.

Though initially disillusioned by the realities of American society, Uchimura's travels and studies over the course of a four-year stay in America proved highly influential in Uchimura's theological outlook and development of the Non-Church Movement. He would be particularly influenced by New England Puritanism, spending most of his time in America in Pennsylvania working at a children's asylum and in Massachusetts as a student at Amherst College. Upon his arrival in Pennsylvania, Uchimura became friends with a Quaker couple, Mr. and Mrs. Morris. They helped him to get the job at the children's asylum and shared their Quaker beliefs and lifestyle with the young Japanese Christian. This Quaker influence is notable in Uchimura's later theological development, especially in relation to his pacificism and opposition to the Russo-Japanese war a couple decades later.⁶³

Due to Uchimura's formative years in America, it would be inaccurate to claim that his brand of Christianity was uniquely Japanese and completely devoid of Western influence.⁶⁴ At the same time, he was not content to passively transplant his experience of American Christianity directly to Japan without making major modifications to fit what he believed to be the ideal expression of Christianity for the Japanese people. Today we can see and understand the vision that Uchimura had for what a Japanese Christian faith and practice could look like through the abundant writings that he left behind.

Uchimura Kanzō's Writings

Uchimura Kanzō was a prolific writer who published around fifty volumes of works during his lifetime, with texts including biblical exegesis, theological treatises, and diary

⁶³ Mullins, *Christianity Made in Japan*, 57.

⁶⁴ Mullins, *Christianity Made in Japan*, 56.

entries.⁶⁵ One of his most prominent works is his autobiographical account titled *Diary of a Japanese Convert*, in which he details his conversion to Christianity and his vision for what the faith ought to look like in Japan. In addition, he also published numerous monthly magazines that included further editorials and bible reflection. Instead of using sermons or homilies, Uchimura predominantly used his self-published magazine editorials to share his ideas and teachings with the community.

Throughout his writings, Uchimura acknowledges the two passions that pervade all of his thought: faith in Jesus Christ and a deep love for his country of Japan. He is often described as a very patriotic figure. One of Uchimura's most famous writings is a description of his love for both Jesus and Japan together: "I love two Js and no third; one is Jesus, and the other is Japan...Jesus and Japan; my faith is not a circle with one center; it is an ellipse with two centers."⁶⁶ However, his Christian perspective and particularly the Quaker influence from his days in New England caused him to push back against a Japanese government that at the time was becoming increasingly more militaristic and empire-minded. This was displayed clearly in Uchimura's outspoken opposition to the Russo-Japanese war.

A decade prior, Uchimura had originally been a supporter of Japan's engagement in the conflict known as the Sino-Japanese war. Having been exposed to ideas of social Darwinism while at Amherst, he initially saw the war as a natural consequence of such principles and saw Japan as a nation that could "enlighten the backward Asian civilization."⁶⁷ However, Uchimura

⁶⁵ Mullins, *Christianity Made in Japan*, 55.

⁶⁶ Uchimura Kanzō, "Two J's" (1926), quoted in Shibuya Hiroshi and Chiba Shin, "Editors' Preface," in *Living for Jesus and Japan: The Social and Theological Thought of Uchimura Kanzō*, eds. Shibuya Hiroshi and Chiba Shin, (Grand Rapids, MI: W. B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2013), x.

realized after the conflict was over that war was only detrimental both to the well-being of Japan, the world, and the practice of Christian faith. Takahashi Yasuhiro describes Uchimura's change of heart as his "conversion to Christian pacifism."⁶⁸ When the Meiji government started to gear up for a military conflict against Russia in 1905, Uchimura spoke out strongly against the government's increasingly militaristic tendencies.

Throughout his life and work, Uchimura did not seek to create a new denomination of "Non-Church" (Jp. *mukyokai*) Christianity. Though he used this term to define himself as a practicing Christian without a specific church affiliation, it was never intended to become a full-fledged "non-church" system.⁶⁹ Simply establishing his own church organization would not have been aligned with his rejection of institutionalism. Uchimura himself never fully defined his conception of "*mukyokai*" in order to prevent this from happening. Instead, Uchimura focused his efforts on creating a monthly magazine publication, *Seisho no Kenkyu* ("Bible study"), in which he published commentary on biblical passages and communicated letters of instruction to his subscribers. John F. Howes explains that though Uchimura did not intend to create a new church from his publication of the *Seisho no Kenkyu*, a community of followers naturally began to form around his writings.⁷⁰

Uchimura recognized the importance of integrating Christianity with existing Japanese religious traditions rather than simply replacing one with the other. Though fully committed to Christianity, Uchimura embraced the elements of religions like Buddhism that were already an

⁶⁷ Takahashi Yasuhiro, "Uchimura Kanzō and His Pacifism," in *Living for Jesus and Japan: The Social and Theological Thought of Uchimura Kanzō*, eds. Shibuya Hiroshi and Chiba Shin, (Grand Rapids, MI: W. B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2013), 55.

⁶⁸ Takahashi, "Uchimura Kanzō and His Pacifism," 55.

⁶⁹ John F. Howes, *Japan's Modern Prophet: Uchimura Kanzō (1861-1930)* (Vancouver: UBC Press, 2014), 386.

⁷⁰ Howes, *Japan's Modern Prophet*, 384.

integrated part of his own life and the lives of Non-Church disciples. In one of his monthly editorials, he composed this short poem relating the Buddha and Jesus Christ:

*Buddha is the Moon; Christ is the sun.
Buddha is the Mother; Christ is the father.
Buddha is Mercy; Christ is Righteousness.*⁷¹

The poem conveys Uchimura's sentiment that the paths of Buddhism and Christianity are not mutually exclusive. He goes on to explain: "I know that the love of the Moon is included in the love of the Sun, and that he who loves the Sun loves the Moon also."⁷² In this view, Japanese Christians have no need to completely abandon their connection with the Buddha. The Buddha and Jesus Christ have plenty of room to live side by side. Though Uchimura does not give a detailed theological account of how Christian faith and practice integrates with other Japanese religions, the structure and teachings of the Non-Church Movement demonstrates his understanding of how they can and ought to work together.

Non-Church Faith and Fellowship

As its name implies, Uchimura Kanzō sought to establish a Christian movement without the usual trappings of a church structure and organization. In the Non-Church Movement there are no priests, no pastors, and no deacons. In Uchimura's own words, he envisioned a "new Protestantism...perfectly free without a trace of ecclesiasticism in it—a fellowship, not an institution—free communion of souls, not a system or an organization."⁷³ It is this vision that gave the Non-Church Movement its name and radically distinguished it from the variety of

⁷¹ Mullins, *Christianity Made in Japan*, 61.

⁷² Mullins, *Christianity Made in Japan*, 61

⁷³ Mullins, *Christianity Made in Japan*, 59.

denominational churches that were established in Japan during the Meiji era. Uchimura saw all of the institutional aspects of church structure as Western additions to the faith that were unnecessary for Christianity to find full expression among the Japanese people.

Instead of following the Western denominational traditions, Uchimura looked to Japan's history (and indeed his own childhood) for ideological and pedagogical systems that would better suit the lives of Japanese people. He considered *bushido* (the ethical code and lifestyle of the samurai) to be a fitting basis for Christianity in Japan and thus worked to “graft Christianity on to *bushido*.”⁷⁴ Uchimura considered the combination of *bushido* and Christianity to be the culmination of how God had been at work throughout Japan's history even before the arrival of Western missionaries.⁷⁵ He had been exposed to the teachings and practices of *bushido* as a child and, much like his contemporary (and former classmate at Sapporo Agricultural College) Nitobe Inazo, Uchimura worked to reinterpret this old feudal system so that it could be integrated with modern Japanese society and Christian faith. He considered this *bushido*-Christianity to be Japan's spiritual gift to the rest of the world.⁷⁶

Without a professional clergy or even dedicated facilities, the establishment and growth of the Non-Church Movement relied heavily upon the *sensei-deshi*, or teacher-student model. Uchimura would sometimes hold larger *mukyokai* gatherings in rented halls where he would lead large-scale bible studies. The focus of spiritual development however is based on the personal connections between individual bible study leaders and their students. Anyone who feels called to lead a bible study group is permitted to do so, with no formal trainings or specified

⁷⁴ Mullins, *Christianity Made in Japan*, 62.

⁷⁵ See Inazo Nitobe's *Bushido*, for a detailed account of the Meiji-era interpretation of *bushido* that Uchimura was working with.

⁷⁶ Mullins, *Christianity Made in Japan*, 62.

requirements for leaders. A typical bible study meeting consists of singing, a study and discussion of scripture, and ends with a short time of prayer.⁷⁷ In terms of format and structure, these meetings are very reminiscent of the bible studies held by many American churches. However, while these small-scale bible studies are often peripheral to other services and initiatives of American church communities, they serve as the basis of Non-Church teaching, fellowship, and community.

Uchimura turned to forms of teaching and community organization that were more familiar to him, rather than rely on the methods employed by the Western missionary traditions. The bible study format and *sensei-deshi* relationships are inspired by the *kangaku-juku* system. *Kangaku-juku* were small private schools where students would study Confucianism and other classical Chinese traditions.⁷⁸ Uchimura would have been very familiar with this system as he attended one such school as child in his hometown at the end of the Edo period. These smaller, intimate meetings were much more appealing to Uchimura than mass-conversions and Sunday morning gatherings in great cathedrals.

Uchimura held firm in his non-churchism throughout his life—never joining an established church denomination or tradition. However, in the long term he hoped to see a Japanese Christian Church develop and take root, but such a Church would need to be built by the Japanese people themselves without the interference of American and European missionaries. Uchimura argues:

Therefore, if there is a church in 20th century Japan...It should be the church that rises naturally without foreign interference...However eager we may be, we

⁷⁷ Carlos Caldarola, “Non-Church Christianity in Japan,” in *Culture and Religion in Japanese-American Relations: Essay on Uchimura Kanzō, 1861–1930*, ed. Ray A. Moore (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Center for Japanese Studies, 1981), 104.

⁷⁸ Shibuya, “Uchimura and his *Mukyokai-Shugi*,” 138.

cannot have an Englishman's or an American's flesh make us: so however eager we may be, we cannot have the churches made by them make ours.⁷⁹

Uchimura envisioned a Christian tradition built up specifically by and for the Japanese people. In the meantime, he remained adamant in rejecting the kind of structures and denominationalism that characterized Western Christianity. Such a Japanese Christian church as Uchimura envisioned is yet to emerge. Along with a dwindling membership amongst the Non-Church Movement today, one may be tempted to look at Uchimura's aspirations as having ultimately failed. This however is not the whole story. In order to properly understand the significance of these indigenous Japanese Christian traditions, one must be willing to put aside the prevailing Western notions of how religion functions and look instead through the lens of the Japanese religious understanding.

⁷⁹ Shibuya, "Uchimura and his *Mukyokai-Shugi*," 133–34.

Chapter 4

Japanese Christianities and Why They Matter

Rethinking “Religion” in Japan

“Religion” itself is not a universal category that can be applied or assumed in all societies throughout history. This is made especially evident through what Jason Ananda Josephson’s work, in which he contends that Japanese officials needed to invent the category of “religion” in Japanese society during the nineteenth century encounters with Western diplomats and missionaries (beginning in 1853).⁸⁰ Prior to the arrival of Western missionaries, there was no singular word in the Japanese language with the equivalent meaning of the word “religion.” Beyond just the word itself, Josephson argues that the conceptual understanding of “religion” did not exist in Japan until it was introduced by foreigners during the reopening of the country in the late nineteenth century.⁸¹ Without an existing equivalent concept or translation, Japanese leaders invented the category of religion in Japan as part of their modernization efforts in response to the arrival of Western merchants and missionaries. Josephson critiques previous religious studies scholarship that assumes a “Christian universalism” and instead focuses on Japan as a “non-Western nation [that] made the discourse of ‘religion’ its own.”⁸²

When government translators first encountered the word “religion” in treaties written by American diplomats, there was no clear understanding of what the word meant and how to properly convey its meaning in Japanese. In the translation of early treaties with American envoys, a variety of different Japanese terms were used. One such term was “*shuhō*” or “sect

⁸⁰ Josephson, *The Invention of Religion in Japan*, 1.

⁸¹ Josephson, *The Invention of Religion in Japan*, 79.

⁸² Josephson, *The Invention of Religion in Japan*, 4.

law,” a Buddhist term referring to the specific ritual practices and regulations governing a particular Buddhist sect.⁸³ Another term used was “*shūshi*” or “sect doctrine,” referring to the specific beliefs and doctrines of a Buddhist sect.⁸⁴ Within these early treaties between Japan and America, these once specifically Buddhist terms were expanded to refer to the non-Buddhist practices and beliefs of the Americans who would be entering Japan. From 1873 onward, the term “*shūkyō*” was established as the standard translation for “religion,” though what this term meant precisely still needed to be worked out as Japan entered into more open contact and exchange with other countries as the Meiji period progressed.⁸⁵

That the term “*shukyo*” was only coined after contact with Western diplomats does not mean that these foreigners brought religion to Japan however. The Japanese have long had systemized understandings of deities, spirits, and ritual practices that fit under the category of “religion.” There is also clear evidence that Japan had a conception of religious systems such as those that developed in India and China, at least since the time of Buddhism’s introduction to the islands of Japan.⁸⁶ Such practices and beliefs have long held an essential place amongst the lives of people in Japan, but it was the distinction or separation of these traditions as something “religious” as opposed to a separate realm of the “secular” that was generally not part of the Japanese understanding of their own customs and beliefs. In the context of his discussion of the variety of activities that takes place on the grounds of Shinto shrines, John K. Nelson observes

⁸³ Josephson, *The Invention of Religion in Japan*, 90.

⁸⁴ Josephson, *The Invention of Religion in Japan*, 90–91.

⁸⁵ Robert Kisala, “Japanese Religions,” in *Nanzan Guide to Japanese Religions*, eds. Paul L. Swanson and Clark Chilson (Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press, 2005), 6.

⁸⁶ Erica Baffelli, Andrea Castiglioni, and Fabio Rambelli, “Introduction,” in *The Bloomsbury Handbook of Japanese Religions*, eds. Erica Baffelli, Andrea Castiglioni, and Fabio Rambelli (New York: Bloomsbury Academic, 2021), 5.

that “‘sacred’ and ‘profane’ are not seen as categorial opposites in Japanese society.”⁸⁷ Religious practice in this sense then does not necessarily equate to an aspect of life separate from the mundane customs and habits of everyday life.

Whether it be the Tokugawa requirement that a Buddhist funeral must be held for the dead, the veneration of the emperor as descendant of the gods in the Meiji era (a practice that caused controversy for Uchimura Kanzō), to the contemporary popularity of *matsuri*, or festivals held by Shinto shrines, simple dichotomies like “sacred” and “secular” have always been problematic in describing Japanese traditions. Aike P. Rots argues that “in the Japanese context it is not always possible to distinguish between what is merely ‘cultural’ and what is indeed a ‘religious’ expression... Therefore, such distinctions are often to a certain degree artificial and arbitrary.”⁸⁸ Are offerings to Shinto *kami* as many Kakure Kirishitan communities continued to practice a “religious” or “cultural”? Questions like this presume that the two can easily be distinguished and pulled apart when they instead are completely integrated.

Rethinking Christianity in Japan

Indigenous Christian traditions can only be fully understood in light of the Japanese understanding of religion. When evaluated by Western understandings of religion, communities like the Kakure Kirishitan and Non-Church Movement can easily be labeled as strange and exotic forms of Christianity. However, when considered in the context of their Buddhist and Shinto counterparts, these movements fit into the cultural attitudes and understandings of the Japanese people. Indigenous Japanese Christian movements take on forms that make them

⁸⁷ John K. Nelson, “Freedom of Expression,” 51.

⁸⁸ Aike P. Rots, “Ambiguous Identities: Negotiating Christianity and ‘Japaneseness,’” in *Handbook of Contemporary Japanese Religions*, eds. Inken Prohl and John K. Nelson (Boston: Brill, 2012), 338.

distinct in important ways from their European and American counterparts. We are not dealing here with the same Western Christian tradition with a few enculturated decorations to make it more appealing to the Japanese people. This is a different understanding of what Christianity can and ought to be within the historical and social context of Japan.

The Kakure Kirishitan and Non-Church Movement on their own do not encapsulate all of the diverse ways that Christianity has been expressed and adapted in Japan. Indeed, my goal in considering these two traditions together is to highlight the fact that there is not a single, uniform way to be Christian in Japan. There is not just one monolithic “Japanese Christianity” but rather a multitude of Japanese Christianities. There are as many ways to be both Japanese and Christian as there are unique interpretations and practices that have arisen from within the lives of lay communities. The two traditions I have considered above provide insights into the diverse ways that Japanese Christians have reinvented Christianity as a Japanese religion rather than merely adopting it passively as a foreign import. The beauty of these traditions lies the ways that lay practitioners forged their own meanings and rituals from the basis of Western Christianity that was introduced to them. This process is not limited to the two case studies considered above but extends to the myriad of additional Japanese Christian communities.

It is also important to note that there are also several Christian communities in Japan that have developed in close association with the missionary churches, adopting their ecclesiastical structures, beliefs, and practices. Emily Anderson points out that “most Japanese Protestants developed their beliefs and practices within a conventional religious and ecclesiastical framework,” and warns that anti-structural movements like that of Uchimura Kanzō should not be taken as representative of all of Japanese Christianity.⁸⁹ With this in mind, I have chosen to

⁸⁹ Emily Anderson, *Christianity and Imperialism in Modern Japan: Empire for God* (New York: Bloomsbury Academic, 2014), 8.

focus on the Kakure Kirishitan communities and the thought of Uchimura as a way to highlight what Mark Mullins describes as “the ‘other side’ of the Christian story in Japan.”⁹⁰

The portion of the Japanese population that identifies as Christian has held as around 1% for the past few decades. Despite the efforts of various missionary organizations, who use this statistic as a rallying cry, this number likely will not increase anytime soon.⁹¹ Statistics like this may be important from the perspective of Western missionaries, but they are practically irrelevant when considering Christianity within the broader religious sensibilities of Japan. Japan is not a place that is “spiritually poor”—it is a country and a culture rich in religious heritage and tradition.⁹² It is naive to propose that the Japanese population as a whole ought to leave behind all of their existing beliefs and rituals in order to convert to Christianity. In Japan, Christianity serves as an added layer to an already well-established set of cultural and religious practices—not a totalizing force that the population needs to devote their lives to.

An example of how Christianity functions as a layer of the Japanese religious landscape is the contemporary state of the Kakure Kirishitan communities. As the current generation of practitioners pass away, their children and grandchildren are choosing to leave their religion and hometowns behind. It is very likely that the lived tradition will die out within the coming decades. These small but tight-knit communities are being forced to work out the tension of preserving the memory of their faith for future generations while the actual lived religion and way of life is quickly fading into history. For some, this has meant continuing to practice their religion and continue to be as “hidden” as possible. For others, they have decided that it is time

⁹⁰ Mullins, *Christianity Made in Japan*, 4.

⁹¹ “Missions,” Japanese Evangelical Missionary Society, accessed March 18, 2022, <https://www.jems.org/missions>.

⁹² “Less than 1%,” Japanese Evangelical Missionary Society, accessed March 18, 2022, <https://www.jems.org/>.

to leave the tradition behind, donating their religious paraphernalia to museums and allowing the Kakure Kirishitan to pass from lived religion into a historical memory. In an interview with Kirk Sandvig, one Kirishitan leader reflects on his local community's decision to leave their faith behind:

I am proud of the fact that ultimately we had continued it for 350, almost 400 years, despite having some changes. I think it's something quite magnificent. Even though it came down to us ending it, we can still end with pride. It's nothing that we should receive rebuke from other people about, or be spoken ill about. If anything, I feel that people should see it as quite an accomplishment to have come this far.⁹³

He does not see it as a failure to have the tradition come to an end; instead, he focuses on the community's pride in having lasted so long in the first place. It has now been over 150 years since the Hidden Christians came out of hiding. The social, cultural, and political landscape has changed rapidly over the course of the past century and a half, and the Kirishitan communities have had to wrestle with what it means to be a "hidden" tradition no longer in hiding. As the Kirishitan leader's quote above demonstrates, a religious tradition does not have to carry on in perpetuity in order to be successful. If the leaders within the Kakure Kirishitan communities feel that the religion has served them well but is no longer necessary, who are we as scholars and outsiders to tell them that they are wrong? Whether or not there continue to be living practitioners, the Kakure Kirishitan tradition will always hold an important place in Japan's religious heritage.

Buddhism and Shinto as they function in the lives of the general Japanese population do not ask practitioners to adhere to strict doctrines and practices as American forms of Christianity tend to do. Instead, there is much more room for visitors to Shinto shrines and Buddhist temples

⁹³ Sandvig, *Hidden Christians in Japan*, 180.

to make their own meanings and develop their own habits of spiritual practice. Though there may be an “official” procedure that visitors can follow, shrines and temples in Japan are often a gathering place in the local community where different people come seeking different things. Nelson notes that “[o]ne cannot overemphasize the importance Japanese place on action, custom, and etiquette rather than on belief and structure.”⁹⁴ In light of this attitude, traditions like the Kakure Kirishitan and Non-Church Movement begin to appear as natural Japanese adaptations of Christianity.

The Kakure Kirishitan tradition exemplifies a set of communities that may lack a systematic belief system by Western standards, but customs, stories, and faith that they have created for themselves is undeniably rich and empowering for a community that survived for centuries in the shadows. The Non-Church Movement has done away with clergy, buildings, and hierarchies in favor of a fellowship based on small independent gatherings and bible studies. Christianity has a place in Japan alongside Buddhism and Shinto, but not as a replacement for them.

The Japanese people have been developing their own interpretations of Christian faith ever since the first missionaries set foot in Japan in the sixteenth century. Any form of Christianity in Japan that does not take into account the existing traditions, rituals, and beliefs that have grown as part of the country’s religious heritage does a massive disservice to the very people that it would purport to “save.” Religious traditions only fully take on meaning when they are allowed to be developed, changed, and reinterpreted by lay communities and leaders. Lay communities and leaders have much to contribute to global dialogues involving Christian faith

⁹⁴ Nelson, “Freedom of Expression,” 26.

and interfaith initiatives, and thus ought to be considered as equal partners with their counterparts from other nations.

Indigenous Japanese traditions should be considered just as authentically Christian as their Western counterparts. Though perhaps numerically insignificant compared to the Christian populations in places like America and Europe, the Christian communities of Japan are important to a full understanding of what Christian religion can look like. To ignore the contributions of traditions like the Kakure Kirishitan and Non-Church Movement is to have an incomplete picture of global Christianity.

To be a Christian does not mean you need to go to a worship service every Sunday morning, nor do you need priests, executive boards, and a dedicated building in order to form a faith community. As a faithful Christian you can still pay devotion to the image of a bodhisattva or prepare ritual offerings to Shinto gods. To understand communities like the Kakure Kirishitan or pioneering leaders like Uchimura Kanzō on their own terms is to realize that our boxes of what constitutes “Christianity” and “religion” are too small. When we let lay communities express their faith in the ways that make the most sense for them, instead of telling them what to believe and what to do, religious practice becomes much more than just empty rituals, church hierarchies, and social gatherings. It becomes something that permeates everyday life, breaks down the artificial barriers we construct between “secular” and “sacred”, between one religion and another. Japan’s indigenous Christian traditions provide new visions and new possibilities of what religious faith and practice can be.

Conclusion

Communities like the Kakure Kirishitan and Non-Church Movement defy simple categorization. In doing so, they point towards a more expansive understanding of what it means to be Christian and the role of religion in the lives of lay practitioners. Christianity has become an important part of the Japanese religious landscape, but it does not replace or stand on its own as mutually exclusive from the other traditions. Japan's indigenous Christian traditions demonstrate the rich religious innovation that occurs when lay communities and individuals are allowed to make their own meaning from an existing religious heritage. These meanings often operate independently of any one religious denomination and can even transcend the typical boundaries imagined between different religious traditions as a whole. Within the indigenous Japanese Christian context, the lines separating Christianity, Buddhism, Shinto, Confucianism, and *bushido* are malleable and fluid.

The Kakure Kirishitan communities used centuries spent in hiding to incorporate images, prayers, and stories into a faith and practice suitable for a community that had to remain invisible to the outside world. The combination of sixteenth century European missionary teachings, Buddhist symbolism, Shinto rituals, and their own innovations makes the Kirishitan tradition difficult to fully comprehend from the outside, but it has for nearly four hundred years provided a shared life and heritage that has allowed marginalized communities to move forward.

Uchimura Kanzō was a lay practitioner who forged his own spiritual path that looked to the past to find the wisdom in traditional systems of Confucianism and *bushido* while simultaneously imagining a new way for Christianity to develop in Japan into the future. His interpretation of Christianity was at once rooted in New England puritanism and also deeply reflective of his love of Japan. In his efforts to graft *bushido* onto Christianity, Uchimura began

the Non-Church Movement, foregoing all church structure and hierarchy in favor of a community of independent bible study groups.

These two traditions arose out of different historical contexts while demonstrating the ways in which lay Christians are able to adapt the religion to fit their own specific circumstances and existing cultural sensibilities. Communities such as these are authentically Christian in their faith commitments while at the same time contributing to the larger interplay of religious traditions within Japanese society through their willingness to combine their faith with other elements of their surrounding culture. It is important to consider Japan's indigenous Christian traditions as an integrated layer of the religious landscape rather than a totalizing religion that must win converts and displace other existing traditions. The 1%-Christian statistic is not reflective of the rich heritage and traditions of Christianity that have been developed by Japanese communities over the past four centuries.⁹⁵ Though the Kakure Kirishitan communities and Uchimura Kanzō were both influenced and taught by Western missionaries, they ultimately went on to develop their own religious understandings and practices independent of existing structures and denominations.

Further work on indigenous Christian movements in Japan ought to consider how they interact with the country's many "New Religious Movements" that have emerged over the past century. The New Religious Movements are in themselves an important layer of Japan's religious landscape and can thus provide further insights into Christianity's role in Japanese society. Some scholars have drawn noteworthy comparisons between Christianity and these New Religious Movements as their patterns of growth and roles in Japanese society have been similar in many respects.⁹⁶ Further ethnographic studies also need to be done in order to hear the first-

⁹⁵ Mullins, "Japanese Christianity," 118.

hand perspectives of Japanese Christians and to explore more recent developments in their communities. Mark Mullins performed extensive field work for his monograph *Christianity Made in Japan: A Study of Indigenous Religions*. His study however was published in 1998, and no other work—in English at least—seems to have checked in with these traditions since then. There have likely been several changes and developments in the intervening decades that could help to give a deeper understanding of the ways that indigenous Christian communities in Japan are responding to contemporary changes and challenges.

As scholars, tourists, or just curious learners, we must let the faith and practices of lay communities and leaders speak for themselves. To get caught up in whether they are right or wrong, authentic or inauthentic, a model to follow or avoid is to miss the point. What matters is that we learn from them and listen to their voices. They must be acknowledged on their own terms and not relegated to the margins of our religious and theological discussions. Whether it be the mysteries of the Hidden Christians or the non-church approach of Uchimura Kanzō, these traditions pave the way for new understandings of our own traditions and the traditions of others. I end with the words of Uchimura, in hopes that new worlds and possibilities may continuously come into view:

Paradoxical though it may seem, we go into the world that we may learn more about ourselves. Self is revealed to us nowhere more clearly than when we come in contact with other peoples and other countries. Introspection begins when another world is presented to our view.⁹⁷

⁹⁶ Shimazono Susumu, “New Religions and Christianity,” in *Handbook of Christianity in Japan*, ed. Mark R. Mullins ((Boston: Brill, 2003), 282.

⁹⁷ Uchimura, *Diary of a Japanese Convert*, 78.

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