

Occupying the “Vacuum” — Conflicting Interpretations of Christianity in Post-War Japan —

Hilary Elmendorf *

With Japan’s surrender, formalized on September 2, 1945 aboard the U.S.S. Missouri, came the Allied Occupation of the defeated home islands. American President Harry S. Truman charged General Douglas MacArthur, lionized for his “return” to the Philippines, with the task of embedding democracy in Japan’s postwar politics and culture. MacArthur’s September 2 speech aboard the Missouri foreshadowed the general’s goals for the Occupation, indicating the role religion would play as the U.S. guided Japan away from militarism and toward democracy. “The entire world is quietly at peace,” intoned MacArthur. “The holy mission has been completed. . . . I thank a merciful God that he has given us the faith, the courage and the power from which to mold victory.”⁽¹⁾ Warning that the failure of politics, “military alliances,” and “leagues of nations” in the past might result in a new “Armageddon,” MacArthur tied theology both to civilization’s rebirth and to the West’s own triumph:

The problem basically is theological and involves a spiritual recrudescence and improvement of human character that will synchronize with our almost matchless advance in science, art, literature and all material and cultural

* As a graduate student at Washington State University, Hilary Elmendorf spent six months as a COE Guest Research Fellow at International Christian University. She would like to sincerely thank the faculty, staff, and other research fellows at ICU for their generosity. Elmendorf now works as an assistant professor of history at Pacific Union College.

developments of the past 2,000 years. It must be of the spirit if we are to save the flesh. ⁽²⁾

Nascent Cold War rhetoric, hinged on Christian ideals of democracy and freedom in the face of iconoclastic Communism, soon saturated perceptions of the U.S.'s role in vanquished Japan. Bradford Perkins contextualized the growth of the U.S.'s moral exceptionalism: "During World War II the Americans developed a sense of power, righteous power. On the whole . . . they considered it their right, their duty, and their opportunity to lead the world." ⁽³⁾ For many Americans, emboldened by their nation's recent victory, the triumph of the atomic bombs confirmed the righteousness of the U.S.'s actions, past and present. "[V]ictory, when it came," Tom Engelhardt explained, "was guaranteed to bathe all preceding American acts in a purifying glow." ⁽⁴⁾ As one historian contended, with the exception of "a small minority of Protestant ministers" and "some Catholic just-war believers," American Christians "had little difficulty endorsing the atomic bombings of Japan in 1945." ⁽⁵⁾ Divinely defeated Japan now became a testing ground for American democracy in Asia and exemplified the ideology behind President Harry S. Truman's diplomatic overtures. Truman's State of the Union speech on January 7, 1948 reminded the U.S. again of what the President implied was a "God-given duty" as the leader of the free world. "For we are a people with a faith," said Truman, "The faith of our people has particular meaning at this time in history." ⁽⁶⁾ As Supreme Commander of the Allied Powers (SCAP), MacArthur made use of America's unique Protestant heritage, and Truman's belief in it, as he administered Japan.

The Allied Occupation provided Americans of varied political and religious bents with opportunities for activism within the borders of their wartime adversary. While MacArthur's goals for the Occupation — and for his own place in history as well — intertwined Christianity and ideology to create a democratic stronghold across the Pacific, more nuanced reasons guided other Christian-led projects in Japan. Though MacArthur identified the challenges facing Japan in 1945 as "basically . . . theological," the seven-year duration of the Allied

Occupation witnessed reversals in American policy and in American attitudes toward the Japanese that complicated attempts to strengthen Christian influence in Japan.⁽⁷⁾ Moreover, enthusiastic support by Japanese and American Christians for evangelism and religious education within Japan did not guarantee that all activists shared MacArthur's — and thus the U.S.'s — visions or supported his interpretation of the U.S.'s influence over Japan. An examination of the foundation of International Christian University (ICU) in Mitaka, a ward of Tokyo, along with the activism of its founders — including Ralph Diffendorfer, Charles Iglehart, Luman Shafer, and others — illustrates the complex relationships between reconciliation, peace, democracy, and Christianity in postwar Japan and America. For some, Christianity became a means to protest and to resist both American justifications for the atomic bombings and MacArthur's administration of the Occupation. Even as MacArthur heralded the triumphs of American civilization and Christianity, a vocal minority aired concerns regarding the potential for renewed Western imperialism and lamented past blunders under the auspices of religion. Aware of the justifiably cautious views of Western religion within Japan, many Christian activists and evangelists conscientiously worked to achieve reconciliation between former enemies, reminding their audiences that the Japanese were not the lone perpetrators of atrocity during World War II.⁽⁸⁾ These activists presented a counter-narrative to what Engelhardt labeled the "purifying glow" of American victory.⁽⁹⁾ As Charles I. McLaren concluded, "[T]he record of the Church has not been predominantly, whether during the war or before it, on these highest levels of specifically Christian choice and conduct. . . . The so-called Christian nations of the West have had power and they have very often used it in the interests of military and economic imperialism. They have exploited weak peoples. They have strutted in arrogant assumption of their own innate superiority."⁽¹⁰⁾

For those in occupied Japan, Christian faith harkened back to wartime propaganda that accentuated the stark differences between Japan's pure *Yamato* race and its enemies. During the war, the Japanese viewed the Allies as devils and demons, a portrayal consistent with the nineteenth century folklore

surrounding Western foreigners that depicted the interlopers — missionaries and imperialists — as humans, demons, or beings with “superior powers” who both cursed and blessed those they encountered.⁽¹¹⁾ Foreigners might exhibit all of these characteristics, or only one. This interpretation of foreigners eased Japan’s acceptance of its former enemy, the Allied forces, as a foe transformed to a friend.⁽¹²⁾ Letters written to MacArthur during the Occupation reflected tenets of this dualism as the Japanese responded to the presence of the Supreme Commander. One such letter from December 13, 1945 read, “I regret my early convictions; I am filled with gratitude now. Especially, when I think of the generous measures Your Excellency has taken instead of exacting vengeance, I am struck with reverent awe as if I were in the presence of God.”⁽¹³⁾ Once a villain in the South Pacific, MacArthur now represented, for some in Japan, a redeemer of sorts. Following an assassination attempt against MacArthur in summer 1946, SCAP headquarters received numerous letters commending the general’s leadership. One concluded, “I have read the words ‘to love the enemy’ and now I feel that I can see it in reality in the policies of His Excellency MacArthur and of America and also in the attitude and conduct of American troops.”⁽¹⁴⁾

The same ideology that justified the atomic blasts rooted itself in the reconstruction of Japan. Some American observers viewed the flattening of Japan’s cities during the war as a means for the nation’s redemption afterward. Such sentiments hinted at the imperialistic nature of the Allied Occupation and the “cleansing” fires that preceded it. “It is easy to forget, or not to know,” suggested Paul Fussell in “Thank God for the Atomic Bomb,” “what Japan was like before it was first destroyed, and then humiliated, tamed, and constitutionalized by the West. ‘Implacable, treacherous, barbaric’— those were Admiral Halsey’s characterizations of the enemy, and at the time few facing the Japanese would deny that they fit to a T.”⁽¹⁵⁾ To bring true democracy to the citizens of the “barbaric” home islands, and to effectively rebuild the nation’s ideology, MacArthur ironically turned to Christianity, even as he sought to separate the Shinto religion from state affairs. Official Occupation policy, stated

in both SCAP’s goals and the Potsdam Proclamation, supported freedom of religion in Japan, separation of church and state, and an end to Emperor Hirohito’s divinity.⁽¹⁶⁾ As SCAP, MacArthur was well aware of his political mission in Japan. His religious mission, however, shadowed the official goals of the Occupation.

When the Pacific War ended, 900 Christian missionaries lived in Japan; by the end of the Occupation in 1952, approximately 1700 missionaries worked toward MacArthur’s goal of Christianizing the newly democratic country.⁽¹⁷⁾ Viewing himself as a soldier of God, MacArthur implemented policies that benefited Christianity, particularly in education. Predicting, “the world will remember that America gave to Japan two major concepts of American civilization – Christianity and democracy,” MacArthur took measures to ensure that the Occupation implanted Western religion in the East.⁽¹⁸⁾ In a December 1946 letter to Dr. Louis D. Newton, President of the Southern Baptist Convention, the general explained that “those guiding tenets of our Christian faith” – which he labeled “justice, tolerance, understanding” – directed his Occupation “policies.”⁽¹⁹⁾ Always conscious of history and his potential place in it, MacArthur sketched both past and present for Louis:

Due to a vacuum which events have left in the spiritual phase of Japanese life, there now exists an opportunity without counterpart since the birth of Christ for the spread of Christianity among the peoples of the Far East. . . . If this opportunity is fully availed of by the leaders of our Christian faith, a revolution of spirit may be expected to ensue which will more favorably alter the course of civilization than has any economic or political revolution accomplished in the history of the world.⁽²⁰⁾

Part of this revolution thus included the participation of Western missionaries, evangelists, and educators who, like MacArthur, perceived postwar conditions as a potential boon for increasing the Christian fold. As we shall see, the campaign to found International Christian University garnered support through its promise to transform Japan’s future through Christian leadership.

An impassioned crusader, MacArthur compared Christianity and the “basic principles underlying the Oriental faiths,” surmising that “each [religion] might well be strengthened by a better understanding of the other,” MacArthur recalled in his *Reminiscences* that “I asked for missionaries, and more missionaries.”⁽²¹⁾ In December 1945, in the early days of Allied rule, the Supreme Commander expedited the arrival of missionaries by changing the guidelines that screened their entrance into occupied territory. MacArthur’s headquarters explained, “It is the policy of this theater to increase greatly the Christian influence and every effort will be made here to absorb missionaries as rapidly as the church can send them into the area;”⁽²²⁾ President Truman and the Joint Chiefs of Staff supported MacArthur’s overtly religious mission in Japan. When MacArthur sent a memorandum to Washington, D.C. announcing his plans “to increase greatly Christian influence in Japan,” Truman, after reading the memo, wrote in the margin, “I approve.”⁽²³⁾

MacArthur personally asked the Pocket Testament League to pass out ten million Bibles, translated into Japanese, and used military facilities to aid the distribution.⁽²⁴⁾ The general maintained that missionary work was the keystone to prolonged peace in Japan: “The more missionaries we can bring out here, and the more occupation troops we can send home, the better.”⁽²⁵⁾ This attitude revealed a considerable memory lapse on the part of the American occupiers. When Western missionaries first reached the East in the mid-sixteenth century, the Japanese viewed the foreigners with considerable suspicion. Deemed barbarians who utilized “demonic trickery,” Christian missionaries were soon part of a mythology that endowed them with supernatural powers. These myths alluded as well to atrocity as popular tales portrayed European Christians eating children and forcing converts to whip themselves to absolve their sins, among other acts of violence. The Japanese perceived Christians as heretics and vice versa;⁽²⁶⁾ centuries of such animosity would not easily be swept away by the sudden arrival of American military and missionary forces, especially when the conquerors viewed their religion as superior to that of the defeated. Indeed, Christian activists familiar with Japan predicted that past blunders by

missionaries might create considerable obstacles for MacArthur's desired present. In 1952, Charles Iglehart, an avid supporter of International Christian University's creation and later a faculty member there, concluded, "Christianity made a bad start in Japan in the sixteenth century and has had to live down the general reputation of forming a part of the undesirable western exploitation in Asia and of producing people who are not good citizens . . . Entrance into the Church has meant for many some loss of opportunity and status."⁽²⁷⁾ C. Burnett Olds critiqued MacArthur's approach to the two tenets of the Allied Occupation. First, Olds objected to MacArthur's means of relying on foreigners to implement Christianity among the Japanese: "General MacArthur did the obvious thing when, as he began his formidable task, he called for a thousand missionaries to help him meet the challenge. But he was mistaken if he thought that any lasting good could be accomplished even for those who knew how desperate was their need, except through those who were bone of their bone and flesh of their flesh." Burns then turned to the ironies of democracy as practiced during Japan's Occupation, for even as MacArthur and others advocated ideals such as "the right of free speech and free press" as a means for Japan's salvation, officials censored any unflattering portrayals of American policy.⁽²⁸⁾

MacArthur adhered to wartime perceptions of Japan's religious inferiority, a long-held belief for a majority of Americans. Japan's humiliating loss of the war it had instigated proved its moral instability for MacArthur, and his "private crusade" during the Occupation worked to fill what he viewed as a moral void in Japan's culture.⁽²⁹⁾ Describing the vanquished, MacArthur returned to a frequently used metaphor, the vacuum:

It was not merely the overthrow of their military might — it was the collapse of a faith, it was the disintegration of everything they had believed in and lived by and fought for. It left a complete vacuum, morally, mentally, and physically. And into this vacuum flowed the democratic way of life.⁽³⁰⁾

MacArthur insisted that his Christianizing mission in this purported "vacuum" did not constitute revived imperialism. As the Allies looked ahead to Japan's

capitulation, MacArthur foreshadowed America's role in the homeland of its defeated enemy. If the U.S. ruled Japan democratically, argued MacArthur, it "will make us the greatest influence on the future development of Asia." MacArthur sketched out the perils of imperialism: "If we exert that influence in an imperialistic manner, or for the sole purpose of commercial advantage, then we shall lose our golden opportunity, but if our influence and our strength are expressed in terms of essential liberalism, we shall have the friendship and the cooperation of the Asiatic people far into the future."⁽³¹⁾ Newspapers at home supported the notion that the Allied Occupation held no facets of imperialism. In *The Christian Science Monitor*, editor Erwin D. Canham recalled the "friendly and cooperative" atmosphere in Japan, adding, "These people are trying to learn the ways of democracy. The conqueror and the conquered are having a zestful time teaching and learning the ways of democracy."⁽³²⁾

MacArthur's claim that his Occupation was free from any traces of imperialism convinced neither activists nor historians familiar with Japan. The general admitted that President William McKinley's imperialism, coupled with his own tenure in the Philippines, inspired his rule of Japan. McKinley's speech justifying U.S. colonization of the Philippines, noted MacArthur, significantly affected him: "Little did I dream . . . that nearly fifty years later it was to guide my conduct in the occupation."⁽³³⁾ Confident that true democracy existed only under the auspices of Christianity, MacArthur failed to recognize the great irony of his Occupation's legacy. By turning to religion to enact democracy, MacArthur "ran the risk of causing the Japanese to reject democracy as a front for a foreign religion . . . and a modern form of Western colonialism."⁽³⁴⁾ Even MacArthur's rhetoric smacked of imperialism. As a "soldier of God," his promise to free the Japanese from "slavery" that precluded individual thought cast the U.S. in the role of savior of a backwards nation, a justification voiced in countless other imperialistic endeavors.⁽³⁵⁾

While MacArthur himself struggled to foster a democracy grounded in Christianity without resorting to overt imperialism, Japanese and Western Christians recognized the perils and the opportunities present for religious

movements in the years after Japan's defeat. Frequently, their commentary acted as a counterpoint, subtle and otherwise, to MacArthur's own hopes for the Occupation. In a November 1945 article in the *Nippon Times*, Rikkyo University Professor Enkichi Suga surveyed the influences of Buddhism and Christianity in Japan. Cognizant of former attempts to evangelize Japan, Suga warned, "I am rather inclined to think that the attempt to send many foreign missionaries to evangelize the Japanese people would have the effect opposite to what is intended." Suga then connected foreign culture to Christianity:

It is, nevertheless, wrong to utilize religions for the promotion of cultural and social activities, for such a method will have the pernicious effect of vitiating sound cultural and social activities.

Because prewar foreign evangelists lacked a clear conception of the distinctive nature of religion and culture, their efforts ended merely in helping the importation of foreign culture into this country, failing to make any real contribution toward inculcating the true Christian faith into the minds of Japanese converts. The result was that the Christians in this country were generally regarded by the Japanese public as capricious worshippers of foreign culture. The day is past when Christian propagandism among the Japanese people should be left in foreign hands. ⁽³⁶⁾

Other observers well acquainted with Japan, such as Luman Shafer, remarked on the interconnectedness of culture, democracy, and religion. During his 1945 visit to Japan, Shafer reminded Japanese Christians of their role in what the *Nippon Times* paraphrased as "the moral reshaping of the country" and in the "developing of true democracy in Japan." ⁽³⁷⁾ Writing in 1946, Shafer turned to the familiar symbol of the "most popular man in Japan," ⁽³⁸⁾ the "American soldier," whom he viewed as the visible antithesis to Japan's former militarism. The Japanese, suggested Shafer, "find [the American soldier] an open-hearted, kindly person, possessing few of those unpleasant traits usually associated with a soldier. They credit this to the democratic way of life and, in some measure at least, to Christianity as the religious force underlying democracy." ⁽³⁹⁾ But for

Shafer, the presence of the American soldier was not enough to transform Japanese culture. Instead, he preferred education, and advocated new Christian universities for Japan based on Japan's own desire for such institutions. Arguing that the Japanese particularly "valued" superb education, Shafer hinted at International Christian University's future: "Christianity can never really affect the whole culture of the country until it enter the field of education at the highest level, with sufficient efficiency and skill to challenge the best in the country."⁽⁴⁰⁾ He concluded, as had countless others, that Christians might never again have such "a unique opportunity" to "give new life to the whole Christian movement in Japan." This activism required balance, however, as Shafer warned that Westerners must not, in their enthusiasm for education or evangelism, allow Japanese "church leaders" "to be reduced to a colonial status."⁽⁴¹⁾

In "What We Expect of the Missionaries," published in 1951 in *The Japan Christian Quarterly*, Katsumi Matsumura indicated the need for equality in any interactions between foreign missionaries and Japanese Christians. "When we say co-operation, we expect a relationship that is well-balanced," explained Matsumura. "When one party is very strong, and the other party weak, co-operation is not, as a matter of fact, realized."⁽⁴²⁾ Matsumura's nuanced interpretation served as a reminder that Western missionaries arriving in post-war Japan needed to consider a complicated past along with the tenuous living conditions that followed the surrender. Matsumura's article voiced admiration for missionaries who, knowing Japan's history, nonetheless returned to take part in spreading Christianity during the Occupation. Yet, Matsumura was equally aware of what he labeled the "colonial" identity of the "Japanese church" and he worried that this might curtail the growth of Christianity. Closing his article with practical advice for the missionaries, Matsumura concluded, "The missionary must be a friend of the Japanese. Any one who cannot regard the Japanese as his friends cannot do Christian work among them."⁽⁴³⁾ This friendship, according to Matsumura's definition, included living as the Japanese did while in Japan, speaking Japanese, and recognizing "that the true Japanese heart is to be found among Japanese who cannot speak English. Basing your knowledge of the

Japanese only on the acquaintanceship of those who are educated in mission schools and can speak English means a limited knowledge of them.”⁽⁴⁴⁾

Although other essays of the era echoed some of the cautions against imperialism expressed by Matsumura, Zensuke Hinohara's Autumn 1951 essay, "The Place of the Missionary in The Churches," offered a markedly different perspective than Matsumura's. Lamenting that only 200,000 Protestants lived in Japan by 1951, Hinohara suggested that missionaries maintain their unique identities, at least within their homes: "I say in sincerity that I would remain completely American, speaking English, when you meet with your Japanese friends in your own home. Thus they may learn about your own way of living and thinking. . . . At the same time do your best to try to be like a Japanese in their homes."⁽⁴⁵⁾ Hinohara connected the role of missionaries to MacArthur's own popularity among the Japanese, arguing that if American soldiers and the general had convinced Japan "to know and love America," then missionaries from the same nation might succeed as well. Hinohara's conclusion returned to the Occupation's preeminent goal — democracy. "English is a great language," wrote Hinohara. "In a way, it is a missionary language conveying so much of Christian ideals and sentiments." For this reason, missionaries who taught English had yet "another unique and wonderful opportunity" through education: "Your pupils are to grow up into manhood to be more useful and effective democratic citizens of the New Japan."⁽⁴⁶⁾

Contemporaries of Matsumura and Hinohara attempted to achieve balance between Western and Japanese leadership of Christian endeavors, a theme reflected throughout the birth of International Christian University. Charles Iglehart's *International Christian University: An Adventure in Christian Higher Education in Japan* delineated the early decades of ICU's existence and explained the intentions of its supporters in Japan and in the U.S. Iglehart possessed decades of first-hand knowledge of Christianity in Japan; before World War II, he spent thirty years in Japan as a Methodist missionary, though he returned to the U.S. in 1941. In 1946, he accepted an invitation to work for the Allied Occupation as a "liaison between these authorities and leaders of the Christian movement in

Japan.”⁽⁴⁷⁾ Noting that Luman Shafer, who had visited Japan in Fall 1945 with three other Western men on behalf of both the Foreign Missions Conference and the Federal Council of Churches of Christ in North America, reported on “Japanese desires for a high-level Christian university,” Iglehart connected the impetus for the school to the desire for reconciliation between Japan and the U.S.⁽⁴⁸⁾ As Iglehart narrated, a January 1946 newspaper article published by the Associated Press reported on Dr. John A. MacLean’s sermon “Love Thy Neighbor;” preaching in Richmond, Virginia, MacLean had “expressed sorrow over Hiroshima and Nagasaki and suggested that Christians make gifts for rebuilding, as a tangible expression of the desire for reconciliation.”⁽⁴⁹⁾ Fellow Virginians, connected to the “ministerial association of Richmond,” met with members from the Foreign Missions Conference and the Federal Council of Churches. Ultimately, Iglehart explained, “As a result of full discussion it was concluded that inasmuch as the war damage in Japan was general throughout all the major cities, and since the desire of Japanese Christians placed a new university in a position of high priority, this should be a reconciliation project.”⁽⁵⁰⁾ Japanese press coverage of the Methodist Board of Mission’s approval of International Christian University’s establishment indicated this purpose. In an article published on December 14, 1947, a reporter quoted an unnamed source who described ICU “as a voluntary gift and a gesture of goodwill from the Christian people of America to the people of Japan.”⁽⁵¹⁾ Contending that a Christian university would contribute more to Japan than might “monuments of stone or bronze,” chairman of ICU’s fundraising committee James L. Fieser predicted that various factors would motivate Americans to provide financial support for the university. “Some may feel this will show our friendship and brotherhood,” wrote Fieser. “Others may feel we need to offset the Hiroshima and Nagasaki bombings with evidence of our true, kindly, and generous selves.”⁽⁵²⁾ As the most visible representative of the victors, MacArthur favored an unapologetic Christianity that promoted democracy and peace within Japan rather than one that apologized for American-led atrocities and sought forgiveness. Calls for reconciliation by ICU’s supporters thus marked a

noteworthy shift from earlier Occupation rhetoric.

Iglehart was no stranger to the hope for reconciliation and partnership between Japan and the United States. Iglehart's "The Challenge of Our Christian Vocation in Japan" exposed the ties between Western Christianity and Western nationalism; in Iglehart's interpretation, Christian missionary endeavors historically — since the "fifteenth century" in his estimation — supported "national policy." This propensity of Western Christianity to "[go] with the flag" proved particularly damaging for Japanese Christians during World War II, when "Japan's enemy countries were precisely those with which the Christian churches were affiliated."⁽⁵³⁾ Moreover, the war's conclusion prompted American Christians to "g[ive] thanks to God for victory" as they "took its consequences as belonging to their country by right" even as the Japanese existed in "the ruin of fire and sword and bomb . . . [and] the loss of national sovereignty."⁽⁵⁴⁾ Nevertheless, in a postwar environs that might have fostered antagonism and resentment, the Japanese, with what Iglehart called "a humbleness that is almost beyond our comprehension," had "accept[ed] the role of tutelage from the west once more," and that tutelage included Christianity.⁽⁵⁵⁾ Labeling the Occupation a "twofold miracle" — both for its "unbelievable benignity" and "its incredible acceptance by the Japanese people" — Iglehart turned to Japan's "recovery" and the U.S.'s responsibilities: "We must never take it for granted, nor cease to thank [God] that we have been given an opportunity in a measure to make amends for our common sins against one another, and so give our Christian witness amongst a people who by and large are offering us forgiveness and reconciliation."⁽⁵⁶⁾ Iglehart reversed the role of victor and vanquished, overturning Westerners' past colonial perceptions of Japanese Christians by reminding his audience "how less costly has been our Christian experience than theirs. By all the test of Christian maturity we are the juniors."⁽⁵⁷⁾

Genuine reconciliation was not without major obstacles, for both sides had much to forgive. Iglehart and American Christians were not alone in their desire for reconciliation, for many Japanese Christians struggled to contextualize their nation's militarism with their own religious beliefs. Akira Ebizawa voiced his

unease with the Pacific War and hoped that Japanese Christians might apologize to other nations in Asia through renewed evangelism: “We Japanese Christians will never forget our failures of the past. We deeply regret that we could not avert the mistaken national policy of our nation.”⁽⁵⁸⁾ Interviews with Japanese members of the Christians’ Peace Society revealed markedly disparate responses to the issue of the wartime role of “the church in Japan” and indicated potential challenges to reconciliation amongst Christianity.⁽⁵⁹⁾ Reverend Ryoichi Kato was blunt in his assessment of culpability: “The cause of the Pacific War was that the Japanese race was threatened by the ABCD line, that is to say, the Anglo-Saxon countries acted against the will of God despite their own pride in Christendom.”⁽⁶⁰⁾ Even as some pastors spoke of “regret,” or “a deep sense of repentance,” others remembered the mistakes of all the belligerents. “We ought to repent before God for the war,” admitted president of the Japan Bible Society Shinko Imaizumi, “but there is no respect in which we need to feel inferior to England or America. Condemnations are indicated on both sides.”⁽⁶¹⁾

Though in the years following 1945 some American Christians had cited Hiroshima and Nagasaki as the impetus for their activism, *The International Review of Missions* had predicted that the events might actually hinder reconciliation, as the “concentration of the overwhelming horror of atomic warfare on her territory may well have produced in Japan an effect that will not predispose her to rapid re-entry into international relations.” The authors then added: “Nor . . . can the memory of wholesale acts of cruelty — some of them too terrible for thought — perpetrated by Japan help her late enemies to meet her with equanimity or love.” True reconciliation between the two nations might take place, suggested the journal’s editors, only through the work of “the Christian Church.”⁽⁶²⁾ The major goal for Christianity in the post-war world, posited Kenneth S. Latourette, was not the search for justice, but rather the implementation of peace and reconciliation. Christians, admonished Latourette, “must seek to give relief to the sufferers from war and its aftermath, without regard for the side on which they fought in the late struggle. They must endeavour [sic] to obtain equal opportunity for the good things of life both for the

victors and for the vanquished.”⁽⁶³⁾ Working to provide “good things” for a former enemy, however, generated controversy as those who called for contrition and reconciliation — particularly regarding the atomic bomb — discovered.

In his analysis of the variations between scientific and theological stances toward atomic warfare, Edward Leroy Long, Jr., concluded, “The theologians’ call for contrition aroused interest, but only to net a barrage of arguments trying to apologize for our use of the atomic bomb in such a way as to deny any need for contrition.”⁽⁶⁴⁾ These arguments included, Long, Jr. noted, the assumption that had Nazi Germany manufactured such a weapon, Hitler certainly would have used it to the Reich’s advantage; yet, this ignored the reality that the U.S. bombed Hiroshima and Nagasaki — decidedly Japanese targets — after Germany’s own defeat, and at a time when Japan herself stood at the brink of total disaster. As Long, Jr. asked, “What kind of universe would not call for, and what kind of individual does not feel the need of, contrition and repentance after action like [Hiroshima and Nagasaki], quite apart from the fact that it may have appeared necessary at the time?”⁽⁶⁵⁾ While Long’s calls for contrition remained philosophical in nature, in an echo of Latourette’s work Ernest Fremont Tittle called for Christian activism to result from contrition. Not only should the church “voice contrition for the policy of obliteration bombings” that led to Hiroshima and Nagasaki, but it should also “provide aid for the survivors of such bombing wherever found.”⁽⁶⁶⁾ Tittle described conditions under which true reconciliation — what he perceived as Christianity’s “distinctive work” — would not occur between individuals or nations. “There is,” warned Tittle, “no possibility of reconciliation at the level of mutual recrimination, mutual fear and mistrust . . . at the level of announcing that we are ‘the greatest military power on earth’ and must ‘relentlessly preserve superiority on land and sea and in the air.’”⁽⁶⁷⁾

As demonstrated by a notable voice of dissent, not everyone enthusiastically embraced International Christian University as a symbol of reconciliation, peace, and democracy. In 1949, Joseph C. Grew asked Brigadier General Carlos P. Romulo, serving as the United Nations General Assembly President, to join “a

committee sponsoring an International Christian University in Japan.” Grew’s letter to Romulo reflected the growing fissure between democratic and communist nations; as the former Ambassador explained, “A democratic and friendly Japan can serve as a bastion to the cause of peace in the troubled period through which Asia is now passing.” Romulo nonetheless refused, citing his Filipino citizenship as the major impetus for his decision and disagreeing with Grew’s portrayal of Japan’s key position in the hemisphere. “Without detracting in any way from the importance of the humanitarian project which you are sponsoring,” replied Romulo, “I feel that our own destroyed and damaged schools have a prior claim on whatever time and energy I can devote to educational rehabilitation.” General Romulo “did not agree with the view that Japan “is potentially the strongest bulwark of peace in the Far East.”” As Romulo succinctly asserted, “I prefer to go by the record and place my hopes in the proven friends of democracy, in those whose devotion to freedom impelled them during the war to risk extinction in its defense and preservation.” Romulo’s letter did admit that his own experiences during Japan’s Fifteen Years’ War had “somewhat tempered” his desire to aid the former invaders of the Philippines. In 1944, while Allied troops fought at Leyte Gulf, Japanese troops had interrogated Romulo’s mother in Manila to determine if she had been in recent contact with her son. Though in her eighties, the Japanese soldiers still used a rifle butt to break her legs, and “she was never able to walk again.”⁽⁶⁸⁾ As President of ICU, Dr. Hachiro Yuasa’s reaction to Romulo’s letter indicated the goals of peace and reconciliation that became integral to his university’s purpose. Yuasa himself had opposed “Japan’s war policies” and believed “that a democratic Japan was important to the cause of world peace.” Rather than condemn Romulo’s reaction to Grew’s request, Yuasa instead suggested that Romulo join the faculty at ICU. Yuasa explained, “I like a man who speaks out his mind unafraid.”⁽⁶⁹⁾

As time passed, American attitudes toward the defeated Japanese shifted as both nations engaged in what appeared to be a collective forgetting and as the burgeoning Cold War altered the American Occupation of Japan. Indeed, as Iglehart contended, by late 1948, the “first postwar shock over the atomic bombs,

over Hiroshima and Nagasaki, was no longer an open wound of conscience for multitudes as it had been" and apathy threatened to replace activism and financial support for overseas mission work.⁽⁷⁰⁾ By 1952, Iglehart lamented the dilution of Christian activism, particularly regarding nuclear warfare and "obliteration bombing," for churches had retreated to "safer and saner" positions that clearly dissatisfied Iglehart. "[W]hen the smoke clears," he argued, "the churches are found backing the national objectives straight down the line."⁽⁷¹⁾ In other words, American Christians returned "to the flag" as tensions heightened between democratic and communistic ideologies. ICU officials had to both distance themselves from and connect themselves with the Allied Occupation and the U.S.'s national objectives. This tightrope revealed itself in General MacArthur's involvement with the nascent university and in the selection of its president. Although MacArthur served as the "honorary chairman of the ICU campaign committee," others associated with ICU's foundation worked to establish the school as an independent, international entity.⁽⁷²⁾ Ralph Diffendorfer, for example, advocated that the school's president be selected from the Japanese Christian community for two main reasons. First, Diffendorfer pointed to nearly "a century of splendid history" of Christian education in Japan that facilitated finding an appropriate Japanese candidate; second, Diffendorfer "wished to avoid any possible impression being given to the public that this project was officially American or under the directing influence of the Occupation authorities."⁽⁷³⁾ During a May 1949 press conference in Tokyo, Diffendorfer addressed the subtext of colonialism, assuring his audience that the American members of ICU's board would, as *The Mainichi* paraphrased, " 'preserve' American interest in the university, but they would not in any way control it."⁽⁷⁴⁾ Thus, Diffendorfer attempted to avoid the charges of imperialism leveled at other aspects of American involvement in postwar Japan.

Despite cautions against conflating culture and religion, American Christian and democratic ideals intertwined during the Allied Occupation as Japan became a bulwark against Soviet encroachment in East Asia or interference in U.S. interests in the region. When Tetsu Katayama, head of the Japan Socialist Party,

became Japan's first Christian prime minister in May 1947, MacArthur's praise for Katayama included rhetoric that again conflated religion and democracy. "Of possibly even greater significance than the political implications of Mr. Katayama's emergence as Prime Minister of Japan are its spiritual implications," MacArthur stated before alluding to democracy's counterpoint to the Iron Curtain: "[It] offers hope for the ultimate erection of an invincible spiritual barrier against the infiltration of ideologies which seek by suppression the way to power and advancement."⁽⁷⁵⁾

Others perceived the spread of purportedly monolithic Communism as proof of the need for reinvigorated missionary efforts within occupied Japan. Commending MacArthur — "that providential person" — for his "miracles in promoting the growth of Christian democracy in Japan," Catholic author Everett J. Briggs nonetheless campaigned for increased Christian vigilance in Japan, a nation he portrayed as the "battleground of two diametrically opposed ideologies — Christian democracy and atheistic communism."⁽⁷⁶⁾ Imprisoned in Japan during World War II, and then evacuated to the U.S., Briggs remained an advocate of the Christian mission in Japan:

As genuine Americans, believing in the fundamental verities and virtues of our Christian democracy, imperfect though it still may be, we cannot remain indifferent to the inroads of atheistic communism in Japan. Americans have a stake in Japan's destiny. Every country lost to the cause of Christian democracy is another nail in our collective coffin.⁽⁷⁷⁾

As secretary for the Methodist Church's division of foreign missions and president of the Japan Christian University Foundation, Ralph E. Diffendorfer also publicly supported using religion to curtail Communism's spread when, in May 1948, he announced that missionaries would be sent to Japan, Korea, China, India, the Philippines, and Latin America to stave off the "millions of Communists who in all languages are seeking to batter down the work of Christ."⁽⁷⁸⁾ Anti-Communist sentiment permeated numerous discussions of Christianity, even appearing in connection to the foundation of International Christian University.

The *Nippon Times*, in a 1946 article announcing the early stages of planning ICU, summarized the founders' goals: "In order to push forward the education of Japan in line with democratic principles and raise the level of university education, educators and Christian workers in both countries are speeding up preparations for the establishment of the university."⁽⁷⁹⁾ Keizo Mitsuzumi, a reader of *The Mainichi*, demonstrated his enthusiasm for ICU's establishment, along with the pervasiveness of the Occupation's pairing of Christianity and democracy, by reminding others of the "great contributions to the progress of civilization and culture" brought to Japan by Christian education. Suggesting that other Japanese citizens contribute financially to the university, Mitsuzumi briefly traced the historical roots of democracy: "It is a fundamental truth and yet a commonly neglected one by our people that Western democracy has the Christian view of life and the world at its very root."⁽⁸⁰⁾ By November 1949, Secretary of State Dean Acheson had voiced his approval of the university's creation at a press conference, stating, "A university of this character can do a great deal of constructive good in an educational way and for the development of democracy in Japan."⁽⁸¹⁾ While the *New York Times*' summary of Acheson's press conference invoked democracy without directly referencing Communism's "Red Menace," a different article published on the same day relied on starker contrasts between the two ideologies. In a speech delivered to a small group of ICU supporters in New York City, Joseph C. Grew, who had worked both as Under-Secretary of State and Ambassador to Japan during his career, delineated the major obstacles facing democracy's surge in Japan. The "factors . . . aiding communism" included "inflation, a shortage of consumer goods, the lack of appreciable foreign trade, a housing shortage and the destruction of national ideals," according to Grew.⁽⁸²⁾ The article paraphrased the former ambassador's remarks: "Japanese youth stands at the crossroads leading in one direction to peace and democracy and on the other hand to communism and totalitarianism." Hope existed, however, in the "new university" as it "would become an important stabilizing influence where leaders could be trained to preserve the principles of democracy after the United States forces of occupation have departed."⁽⁸³⁾ At the

Japan International Christian University Foundation's luncheon, held one month later, Grew remarked that ICU would not only counter "the siren's voice of communism," but would also "help a great deal to bring young people on the true road to democracy." Speaking at the same luncheon, ICU's president Dr. Hachiro Yuasa suggested that the campus "will be a living laboratory on universal brotherhood."⁽⁸⁴⁾

Diffendorfer concurred that the Allied Occupation's goals inexorably tied democracy, Christianity, and education, though unlike Grew and Acheson, he did not directly reference Communism in his "International Christian University: A Preliminary Report." Instead, Diffendorfer suggested that Japan's "transition" out of militarism and toward democracy remained incomplete without substantial educational democratization as well; for Diffendorfer, the establishment of ICU provided a unique chance to realize these goals, and to blend "public service"—via "a graduate school of citizenship and public affairs, and a graduate school of social work"—with "opportunities for the training of Japanese youth which may well become the turning point in Japan's future course."⁽⁸⁵⁾ Remarking that of those who donated 154,000,000 yen to ICU's campaign drive in Japan, ninety-five percent "were non-Christians," Diffendorfer returned to a common theme: "This is a telling indication of how closely democracy and Christianity are linked in Japanese post-war thinking."⁽⁸⁶⁾

MacArthur genuinely believed that his recruitment of missionaries and distribution of Bibles made a lasting contribution to Japanese spirituality, that he had indeed intertwined Christianity in Japan's new democracy. As he recorded in his memoir, "Gradually, a spiritual regeneration in Japan began to grow."⁽⁸⁷⁾ In speeches he delivered during the Occupation, MacArthur exuberantly announced, "Christianity is spreading all over Japan. Christians in Japan are now two million." This number proved something of an overstatement, and MacArthur's hopes for both a democratic and a Christian Japan never materialized. When MacArthur asked general headquarters' Religious Division to tally the number of Christians in Japan, the staff estimated 200,000 Christians lived in Japan before the outbreak of war, with only 20,000 present after the

surrender. Colonel Donald R. Nugent, seeing the results of the survey and astutely recognizing what MacArthur’s reaction to the decrease might be, told the Religious Division “that’s not enough.” An employee, irritated by Nugent’s response, simply tucked extra zeros into the estimate, convincing MacArthur that his religious campaign succeeded in converting over one million Japanese citizens.⁽⁸⁸⁾ In actuality, the Christian movement in Japan, comprised of less than one percent of the population, experienced considerable setbacks until the unified church, Kyodan, collapsed.⁽⁸⁹⁾

Although MacArthur’s own hopes to pair Christian evangelism with American democracy ultimately failed to take root, the activism of ICU’s founders, and the university itself, revealed the far more nuanced interplay between political ideology, Christianity, and reconciliation in post-war Japan. Despite MacArthur’s numerous assertions to the contrary, post-war Japan was not a vacuum waiting to be filled by purely American political or religious ideology; rather, as activists long-acquainted with Japan realized, decades of contention regarding religion, imperialism, and war stood between victor and vanquished. Diffendorfer, Iglehart, Shafer, and other activists of the era advocated a Christian mission that included Japanese leadership and agency, that sought lasting peace between two former enemies, and that would indeed alter Japan’s future without renewing Western imperialism. As the Occupation stretched on, however, political realities resulted in a delicate balance between personal goals and national objectives, a reality lamented by Iglehart when he noted that American churches had returned to support a new iteration of nationalism during the Cold War. Now past its fifth decade as an institution, ICU continues its crucial work in the field of peace studies. This legacy of active reconciliation between Japan and the U.S. serves as a reminder that neither the citizens of Occupied Japan nor activist American Christians were ready to accept all of MacArthur’s claims about Japan’s past or his visions for Japan’s future.

Notes

- (1) "New Freedom Era Here, Gen. MacArthur Asserts," p. 1.
- (2) "New Freedom Era Here, Gen. MacArthur Asserts," p. 1.
- (3) Perkins, "Unequal Partners: The Truman Administration and Great Britain," in *The "Special Relationship": Anglo-American Relations since 1945*, eds. William Roger Louis and Hedley Bull (Oxford 1986), 43. Quoted in Dianne Kirby "Divinely Sanctioned: The Anglo-American Cold War Alliance and the Defence of Western Civilization and Christianity, 1948," *Journal of Contemporary History* 35 (July 2000).
- (4) Engelhardt, p. 4.
- (5) Bernstein, "Reconsidering the 'Atomic General': Leslie R. Groves," p. 911.
- (6) Kirby, p. 406.
- (7) "New Freedom Era Here, Gen. MacArthur Asserts," p. 1.
- (8) McLaren, p. 300.
- (9) Engelhardt, p. 4.
- (10) McLaren, p. 294.
- (11) Dower, p. 236.
- (12) Dower, p. 236.
- (13) Sodei, *Dear General MacArthur: Letters from the Japanese during the American Occupation*, p. 70.
- (14) "General MacArthur Daily Snowed Under With Fan Mail Avalanche From Japanese," p. 3.
- (15) Fussell, p. 216.
- (16) Moore, p. 728.
- (17) Finn, p. 63.
- (18) Moore and Robinson, p. 45.
- (19) "MacArthur Stresses Role of Christianity in Far East," p. 1.
- (20) "MacArthur Stresses Role of Christianity in Far East," p. 1.
- (21) MacArthur, p. 310.
- (22) Moore and Robinson, p. 44, 45.
- (23) Finn, p. 62.
- (24) Sodei, "Hiroshima/Nagasaki as History and Politics," p. 1118. The exact numbers of Bibles disseminated in Japan can be somewhat difficult to track; Charles Iglehart, in his article "The Christian Church in Japan," published in the July 1952 edition of *The International Review of Missions*, cites 3.5 million as the number of Bible "portions having been distributed during 1951" (285).

- (25) MacArthur, p. 311.
- (26) Dower, pp. 237-238.
- (27) Iglehart, "The Christian Church in Japan," p. 276.
- (28) Olds, p. 290, 291.
- (29) Moore, p. 734. Moore describes MacArthur's goal as "a private crusade to spread the Christian faith in Japan."
- (30) MacArthur, p. 311.
- (31) Finn, p. 16.
- (32) "MacArthur Tells U.S. Newsmen Job in Japan to Be Completed," p. 10A.
- (33) Moore, p. 724.
- (34) Moore and Robinson, p. 330.
- (35) Orr, p. 19.
- (36) Suga, p. 4.
- (37) "US Christians Here Predict Church Role," p. 3.
- (38) Tittle, p. 558.
- (39) Shafer, p. 126.
- (40) Shafer, p. 128.
- (41) Shafer, p. 129.
- (42) Matsumura, p. 25.
- (43) Matsumura, p. 28.
- (44) Matsumura, p. 29.
- (45) Hinohara, p. 116.
- (46) Hinohara, p. 118.
- (47) "Dr. Iglehart, Old-Time Missionary in Japan, En Route Here as Religious Advisor to SCAP," p. 2.
- (48) Iglehart, *International Christian University*, p. 16.
- (49) Iglehart, *International Christian University*, p. 17.
- (50) Iglehart, *International Christian University*, p. 17.
- (51) "Christian Univ. For Japan Approved By US Methodist Board of Missions," p. 1.
- (52) "Founding of Christian Univ. In Japan Will Have Enduring Purpose — Fieser," p. 2.
- (53) Iglehart, "The Challenge of Our Christian Vocation in Japan," p. 108, 109.
- (54) Iglehart, "The Challenge of Our Christian Vocation in Japan," p. 109.
- (55) Iglehart, "The Challenge of Our Christian Vocation in Japan," p. 110.
- (56) Iglehart, "The Challenge of Our Christian Vocation in Japan," p. 110.

- (57) Iglehart, "The Challenge of Our Christian Vocation in Japan," p. 110.
- (58) Ebizawa, pp. 154-155.
- (59) "The Japanese Church During the Pacific War," p. 51.
- (60) "The Japanese Church During the Pacific War," pp. 51-52.
- (61) "The Japanese Church During the Pacific War," p. 54.
- (62) "Year of Grace 1945," p. 14.
- (63) Latourette, p. 85.
- (64) Long, Jr., p. 16.
- (65) Long, Jr., p. 17, 18.
- (66) Tittle, p. 557.
- (67) Tittle, p. 557.
- (68) "Romulo, Refusing to Sponsor University in Japan, Points to Ruins of Philippines," p. 4.
- (69) "Japanese Hails Romulo: Dr. Yuasa Would Like General on New University Staff," p. 18.
- (70) Iglehart, *International Christian University*, p. 55.
- (71) Iglehart, "The Church and War Time Pressures," p. 41.
- (72) Iglehart, *International Christian University*, p. 54.
- (73) Iglehart, *International Christian University*, p. 78. ICU did at times benefit from the experiences of Allied Occupation officials, such as when, in late 1948 or early 1949, the founders hired Richard Day as a public-relations specialist. Employed as part of "SCAP's public-relations staff," Day and his wife helped generate what Iglehart refers to as "information and propaganda material" that was translated and published in "the big dailies and their prefectural editions. By skillful nuances and emphases these conveyed a heightened impression of the magnitude of the enterprise and certainty of its support in America, and served doubly to confirm the already general impression held by the public that the first ten million dollars had been voted by the authoritative bodies overseas and could not fail of performance." See Iglehart, *International Christian University*, p. 57.
- (74) "Christian University: Board of Trustees Planned in June, Says Diffendorfer," p. 2.
- (75) "Christian Leader Chosen For 1st Time: 'Middle-Of-Road Course' Followed, Says Gen. MacArthur in Statement," p. 1.
- (76) Briggs, p. 202, 206. The Catholic Foreign Missionary Society of America held the copyright to Briggs' work.
- (77) Briggs, p. 208.
- (78) "US Methodist Church to Fight Communism," p. 1.
- (79) "Christian University Opening Here in 1947," p. 3. Setting 1947 as a date for the

university's opening proved to be a bit premature, as the dedication services occurred in April 1952.

(80) Mitsuzumi, "Readers' Forum: Re Christian University," p. 2.

(81) "Special to the New York Times," p. 6.

(82) "Inflation In Japan Seen As Aid To Reds," p. 6.

(83) "Inflation In Japan Seen As Aid to Reds," p. 6.

(84) "Invites Students to Enter New University in Japan," p. 17.

(85) Diffendorfer, p. 214.

(86) Diffendorfer, p. 215.

(87) MacArthur, p. 311.

(88) Sodei, "Hiroshima/Nagasaki as History and Politics," p. 1118.

(89) Moore and Robinson, p. 330; Moore, p. 729.

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Occupying the “Vacuum”

— Conflicting Interpretations of Christianity in Post-War Japan —

〈Summary〉

Hilary Elmendorf

American portrayals of the August 1945 end of the Pacific War often included an emphasis on the righteous defeat of Japan at the hands of the Christian, democratic U.S. As the U.S. began the Occupation of Japan under the leadership of General Douglas MacArthur, the Supreme Commander for the Allied Powers (SCAP), many Americans argued that American democracy remained unique — and triumphed in World War II — because of its intermingling of political and religious ideology. Indeed, MacArthur publicly announced his intentions to remake postwar Japan not only by establishing democracy in the formerly militaristic nation, but also by creating an environment in which Christian evangelists might convert large numbers of Japanese. To this end, MacArthur encouraged American missionaries to work distributing Bibles to the Japanese and eased restrictions on visiting the home islands for those involved in the Christianizing mission. As the U.S. and the U.S.S.R. transformed from wartime allies to ideological enemies during the early stages of the Cold War, Japan’s position as a potential bulwark against Communism became all the more crucial for its Occupier, and discussions of democracy within Japan became even more grounded in debates over the role Christianity might play in fostering new political ideology. The foundation of International Christian University in Mitaka, Tokyo during the Occupation indicated the nuanced responses, on both sides of the Pacific, to fostering Christianity within postwar Japan. Moreover, the activism of its founders — including Ralph Diffendorfer, Charles Iglehart, and Luman Schafer — revealed

counter-narratives to MacArthur's own interpretations of American Christianity's purpose in Japan. Some turned to Christianity as a way to resist both American justifications of the atomic bombings and MacArthur's administration of the Occupation. Even as MacArthur heralded the triumphs of American civilization and Christianity, a vocal minority aired concerns about the potential for renewed Western imperialism and lamented past blunders under the auspices of religion. Although MacArthur's own hopes to pair Christian evangelism with American democracy ultimately failed to take root in Japan, the activism of ICU's founders, and the university itself, revealed the far more nuanced interplay between political ideology, Christianity, and reconciliation. In spite of MacArthur's arguments to the contrary, post-war Japan was not a vacuum ready to be filled by purely American political or religious ideology; instead, as activists familiar with Japan realized, decades of contention regarding religion, imperialism, and war stood between the Occupation forces and the Japanese. Diffendorfer, Iglehart, Shafer, and other activists of the era advocated a Christian mission that included Japanese leadership and agency, that sought lasting peace between two former enemies, and that would indeed alter Japan's future without renewing Western imperialism. As the Occupation stretched on, political realities resulted in a compromise between personal goals and national objectives, a reality lamented by Iglehart when he noted that American churches supported renewed nationalism during the Cold War. Now past its fifth decade as an institution, ICU continues its crucial work in the field of peace studies. This legacy of active reconciliation between Japan and the U.S. serves as a reminder that neither the citizens of Occupied Japan nor activist American Christians were ready to accept all of MacArthur's claims about Japan's past or visions for Japan's future.