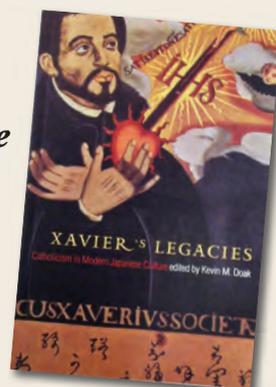


BOOK REVIEW

*Xavier's Legacies:
Catholicism in Modern Japanese Culture*

Edited by Kevin Doak

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Coming from a non-English language background, the reviewer finds the opening argument of the volume under review, namely that “Christianity in modern Japan is largely told as a story of the advent of Protestantism” (p. 2), somewhat less convincing than the editor of the volume, Kevin Doak. Certainly, if one considers scholarship on Japanese Christianity published in German, French, and, of course, Japanese, the dominance of the Protestant view might seem much less daunting than a vista informed primarily by English language scholarship might suggest. The Introduction to the volume by Kevin Doak, however, offers a much more interesting thesis than just that of the underrepresentation of Catholicism in secondary literature. Doak argues that “Catholicism has provided Japanese from the mid-nineteenth century to the present with an important, alternative way of negotiating with modernity” (p. 3), a way constituting “one of the broadest yet least studied sources of critical attitudes towards modernity in Meiji Japan” (p. 13).

The major disappointment of the volume as a whole is that too few of the contributions that come after Doak’s inspiring Introduction follow the *Erkenntnisinteresse* laid out by him. In fact, the main chapter to do so is the one on “Tanaka Kōtarō and Natural Law,” penned by Doak himself. In this chapter, Tanaka emerges as an interwar and early postwar thinker fully engaged with the intellectual currents of his time, but defending natural law against them. In the 1930s, Tanaka argued against the neo-Kantian mainstream in Japanese philosophy and legal theory, holding that it ultimately led to ethical relativism. Even though propounded by Japanese liberals since the 1910s, neo-Kantianism had eliminated the possibility of an absolute standard for values and norms by presuming their subjective determination. Ironically, then, this thinking also made possible, in Tanaka’s mind, the radical illiberalism of the 1930s. In contrast, Tanaka advocated natural law “from a Catholic position that held out the universality of human dignity and principles of human rights” (p. 72).

Other contributions to the volume, while offering interesting glimpses into the fate of Catholic nuns, Christian scientists, or Catholic diplomats in modern Japan, by and large fail to connect to the larger issues raised by Doak and thus remain somewhat anecdotal. Three chapters, however, hidden at the end of the volume, deserve separate mention as all of them debate the issue of the adaptation of (Catholic) Christianity to Japanese culture. This is an issue that touches upon the specific Japanese Catholic way of coming to terms with modernity, as Doak points out in the Introduction: the “depth of investiture in Japanese

tradition gives Catholicism in modern Japan a very different cultural significance than that of Protestantism” (p. 3).

Endō Shūsaku is the Japanese author best known for his articulation of an inculturated form of the foreign faith adapted to the Japanese cultural setting. Mark Williams tackles the question of the meaning of Christianity for the works of Catholic novelist Endō from a new angle. Instead of approaching Endō from the point of view of inculturation, Williams sees in Endō’s later works a “literary embodiment of the attitude of religious pluralism” (p. 116). Williams introduces the work of theologian John Hick on religious pluralism that Endō is known to have studied. Just as Hick sees a common ground in all of the “great world traditions”—they recognize a higher reality, they aim at “final salvation/liberation/enlightenment/fulfillment,” they formulate the goal of “the transformation of human existence from self-centredness to Reality-centredness”—Endō, particularly in his last novel, *Deep River* (*Fukai kawa*), situates the spiritual quests of his protagonists within a situation of religious pluralism. Although the central character of the novel is a Christian, he leaves behind almost all of the outward appearances associated with that faith, and Endō rather stresses how Christian belief may be strengthened “by attending to other traditions than one’s own” (p. 132).

Yamamoto Yoshihisa’s chapter on Inoue Yōji introduces another Catholic Japanese intellectual who went to pre-Vatican II Europe in order to study his faith close to its source, only to end up disappointed, with an urge to discover a version of Christianity more compatible with Japanese culture. Inoue was satisfied neither with the intellectualism he encountered in the Carmelite Order he had entered in France, nor with the image of a wrathful and severe God. Instead, as Yamamoto in his insightful chapter “The Theory and Practice of Inculturation by Father Inoue Yōji: From Panentheism to *Namu Abba*” describes, Inoue emphasized the aspect of the loving father (Aramaic: *abba*) inherent in the Christian God and the compassionate love of Jesus for the pitiful (*agape*; translated by Inoue into Japanese as *hiai* 悲愛). Furthermore, based on his conviction that “religious truth is not a universal truth in thinking but a subjective truth in practice” (p. 150), Inoue rejected a facile embrace of the universalist approach to religious pluralism: one can only follow one path of practice at a time, and on this practical plane it is impossible to judge a plurality of traditions. More than Williams, Yamamoto tends to identify with the cultural essentialism of his object of study Inoue, a typical formulation being that modern Japan faced the loss of its “traditional national (cultural) identity” (p. 145). This leads to a somewhat flat notion of “inculturation” in interpreting Inoue. Nonetheless, Inoue is a fascinating case of the “intercultural” (p. 164) of Christianity in Japan.

Yet another perspective on inculturation is offered by Mark Mullins, who addresses the tasks faced by the Catholic Church in the age of globalization. While theories of inculturation have usually presupposed “a ‘homogenous’ and relatively isolated culture and society” (p. 188), the reality for the Catholic Church in Japan today is that the number of foreign adherents surpassed that of those with Japanese nationality for the first time in 2005. For this reason, Mullins argues, the “Church in Japan can no longer focus primarily on Japanese cultural concerns” (p. 180). Influences mainly from Latin American and South East Asian Catholicism such as new styles of worship, a laxer attitude towards formalities, an emphasis on worshipping Mary, and more participatory forms of celebration all contribute to transforming the Church. All of this forces the Church and its members to rethink the whole issue

of inculturation of their faith in Japan, a process which, Mullins argues, has only just begun.

Kevin Doak is to be commended for having collected a variety of perspectives on modern Catholicism in Japan. As has been noted, however, the integration of these perspectives is not entirely successful. Furthermore, this reviewer feels compelled to point out certain issues missing from the volume. Among the more crucial ones is the complete lack of any reference to the more mainstream conservative response to modernity by the Catholic Church at least in the pre-Vatican II era. The position of the prewar theologian Iwashita Sōichi is summarized by Doak as “implying a sense of the Church as an alternative to modernist society but one not premised on a rejection of history, reason, or awareness of global responsibility” (p. 18). Contrary to this, one could argue that the mainstream of the Church hierarchy followed just that anti-modernist path up to 1945, if not the 1960s. Although admittedly less intellectually stimulating than the subtle positions of Iwashita, Tanaka, and others, a better sense of the orthodox position underlying most of the politics of the official Church in the first half of the twentieth century is needed, if only to understand better the interesting variant views presented here by Doak and the contributors to his volume.

Reviewed by Hans Martin Krämer