Book Review

Christianity and Imperialism in Modern Japan: Empire for God

Emily Anderson

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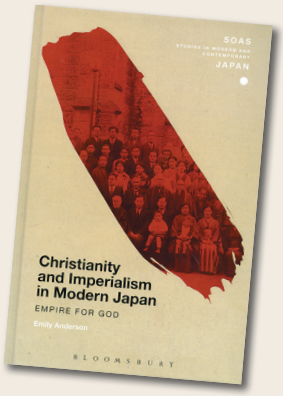

Christianity has been ill served and relatively peripheral in both the history and the historiography of Japan. Although suppression of Christian missionizing and prohibition of Christian beliefs and observances occupied the attention of the Tokugawa shoguns in the seventeenth century, and although there exists some scholarship around American, British, and European Christian missionaries, educators, reformers, and conversions to Christianity in Japan in the decades after the collapse of the *sakoku* system beginning in 1853, for the most part, Christianity and Christians in Japan are sidebars to Japanese history and to what we say and write about it, even when discoursing on Japanese belief systems, practices of faith, spirituality, and sectarian history. Despite tight restriction of analysis to the Protestant Congregationalist denomination in Japan, Emily Anderson's study of Christian political and theological engagements with the pre-1945 construction of the modern Japanese state, and especially with modern Japanese imperialism between the first Sino-Japanese War (1894–1895) and 1945, seeks to remedy this poor showing of Japanese Christianity in English-language scholarship.

And for the most part, she succeeds. Anderson's careful detailing of Japanese Congregationalist attempts to position Christian theology and Christian citizenship in secure relation to official discourses about *minzoku*, the family state, loyalty and fealty to the imperial institution, and the logics of imperial expansion, is often revelatory. Who knew, as just one example of revelation, that the Congregationalist Kumiai Kyōkai evangelist, Murakami Tadakichi, spied on Korean exiles in Shanghai and reported his intelligence to the Government General of Korea and that he justified his espionage with a pragmatic synthesis of Christian thought and imperial ideology? Anderson centers her discussions on the two mutually opposed streams of thought and action which divided but did not rend Japanese Congregationalists: on the one hand mostly urban ministers, like Ebina Danjō, the theologian and pastor at the Hongō church in Tokyo, sought to shore up Japanese Christianity in the face of criticism of its loyalty to the emperor by shaping it as an instrument for the creation of ideal Japanese subjects, and by arguing that the empire itself could be the kingdom of God. On the other hand, Congregationalist leaders based in rural communities, such as Kashiwagi Gien, criticized the family state and Japanese imperial expansion fiercely, arguing that the kingdom of God could only be realized in small, rural Japanese communities. Paying considerably more attention to pro-imperialist

Congregationalist thinking rather than dissident ideas, Anderson examines the chronology of these two different ways of engaging with Japanese imperialism across three sites: the Japanese metropole; the Japanese colonies, especially Korea and Manchuria; and the Japanese diaspora in North America.

What she uncovers are parallel histories, both destined for irrelevance. The criticism and resistance of Kashiwagi Gien and his circle was astute, and articulate, and much influenced by the work and theories of non-Christian socialists and anarchists, such as Kōtoku Shūsui. Kashiwagi's sermons and publications were a constant thorn in the side of the Japanese government and its policies for militarization, capitalist economics, and imperial expansion. His vision of a local, agrarian kingdom of God in rural Japan, and of a small Japanese nation-state, had its roots in the dissident and anti-authoritarian Christian traditions stretching back as far as Jesus Christ's criticism of the Judeo-Roman state. In the city, however, Ebina and his colleagues developed and promoted an exceptionally pragmatic set of ideas about the inevitable and theologically natural overlap of Christian ideals with Japanese imperial ideals. According to Anderson, this contortion began with attempts to fend off criticisms of Christian loyalty after promulgation of the Imperial Rescript on Education in 1890, and continued as Ebina and others attempted to engage the church with key developments in Japanese imperialism: the first Sino-Japanese War, the war with Russia and its settlement, annexation of Korea, and increasing Japanese hegemony in northeast China. While Kashiwagi Gien and others talked of localization, Ebina and his ilk aided and abetted Japanese expansion, using missions in the colonies and in North America to convert Koreans into willing Japanese subjects and to undermine Korean resistance to the imperium wherever it might be found. In the end, both Christian strategies for engagement with imperialism and the state came to nothing much, as they were foreclosed, silenced, or pushed to the margins by increasing authoritarianism wedded to extravagant Shinto, ethnocentric, and secular pan-Asianist ideas circulating among the elite.

Anderson's research provides numerous insights into Christian history in Japan before 1945, but there are a couple of difficulties to do with the framework she uses and with one of her central claims. In a number of places, she points out that the Congregationalists buttressed their claims about Christian loyalty to the imperial state by arguing that the Japanese churches were independent and free of outside influences; that the era of missionary sway was over. Although there is no doubt that by 1900 Japanese Christians had begun to manage things for themselves and to build their own doctrinal and theological identities, given the highly ecumenical, global networks of Christianity and the current scholarly discussions about the role of Christian churches and leaders in British and U.S. imperialisms, a broader analytical frame encompassing other Christian engagements with other modern empires, if only sketchily, would have widened and enriched Anderson's account and what we know after reading it. Second, although she claims that the Japanese Congregationalists' engagements with imperialism were "crucial" to national discourses and debates about imperial subjectivity, legitimation of imperial expansion, and transactions between colonial and metropolitan spaces, Anderson's analysis never quite manages to demonstrate such a high level of impact and importance. Indeed, the picture that emerges from this study leads to an obverse conclusion. While Japanese imperialism had an enormous impact on Japanese Christians and their thinking about politics, and was crucial to the construction of an independent Japanese church, there is little evidence to suggest

that this small band of believers and their highly vocal and active leaders did very much that actually affected the course of Japan's modern state formation and imperial expansion. Even so, despite these caveats, Emily Anderson has given us a well-researched and original investigation into a part of Japanese history too long neglected.

Reviewed by Vivian Blaxell