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KAGAWA OF JAPAN AND THE
KINGDOM OF GOD MOVEMENT



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Toyohiko Kagawa

Kagawa of Japan and The Kingdom of God Movement

by

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It is a fact of more than passing interest that the eyes of the world should be turned today to one of the so-called Mission fields, for a new and more adequate interpretation of the religion that our forefathers have known for centuries, but that was prohibited in Japan on pain of death until some sixty years ago.

Today, however, a movement is under way in that twice born land that promises to be the greatest revival of religion since the days of Wesley, and a prophet, or, more properly, an apostle, has arisen whose name and fame are world wide, and who has been called "the world's most influential Christian," a living flame to light the world.

The movement is known as "The Kingdom of God Movement in Japan," and the man is Dr. Toyohiko Kagawa.

The Kingdom of God Movement.

This movement has challenged the attention of the Christian world because of (1) the boldness of its name, (2) the extent of cooperation of the different churches and missions in Japan in the prosecution of its great objective, and (3) the personality and achievements of its outstanding representative, Dr. Kagawa.

The name. As its name indicates, the Kingdom of God Movement is not simply a revival of individual religion, much less of individualistic religion, but an acceptance of the social programme of Jesus as the remedy for the social and economic ills of the present day and the only effective answer to the materialistic communism of Karl Marx.

The unifying influence of the Movement. To an extent hitherto unknown, the Church as a whole is behind the Movement. Presbyterians and Methodists, Congregationalists and Quakers, Baptists and Episcopalians, Fundamentalists and Modernists are cooperating in the work of the Movement and are represented on the Central Committee and the eighty-five local committees now set up through the country.

On January 1st, 1930, the campaign was opened with prayer meetings, followed by promotion mass meetings in the six big cities of Tokyo, Yokohama, Nagoya, Kyoto, Osaka and Kobe. At the end of the first year of cooperative effort, it was reported at a workers' conference held in January that local committees had been organized in eighty-five places, 1,300 meetings had been held in 250 places with an attendance of 265,000 people.

While it is true, as the Secretary of the Central Committee says, that "this Movement is not the work of one man or of one church," it is still more true that the Movement has found its soul in the personality of the man to whom the Christian world is looking today for leadership in this searching time in the world's history, and in whom it is finding light for the solution of its problems.

There have been times when a person has appeared who has expressed the very soul and significance of an age or a movement—such as Erasmus, Luther, Wesley, Frances Willard—when a new start has been made in the life of the world—when the theological difficulties, the philosophical problems, the moral conflicts of mankind have been solved not by arguments but by a life. That is what Kagawa is doing for the Kingdom of God Movement in Japan. If he had not inaugurated his "Million Souls for Christ Campaign" there would probably have been one year's cooperative evangelistic effort—a good thing but not the challenge to the nation that the Kingdom of God Movement has become.

Japan's Outstanding Christian.

Kagawa is Japan's outstanding Christian. Prof. Rufus Jones, in his Foreword to Kagawa's "Love the Law of Life," says, "Kagawa is one of the striking phenomena of the Christian world today. He is not a man behind a pulpit; he is a demonstrator in a laboratory. He is showing once more that Christianity is not talk, it is action; it is not words, it is soul-force, creative energy, redemptive might."

Kagawa is recognized as one of the world's greatest social workers, labour organizers and economists—and is known by those who know him best as a profound scholar, a brilliant writer, a gifted artist, and the greatest preacher in the Japanese language, one who is able to hold the attention of the largest audiences and to entertain, to instruct, to convict and to inspire with the Sermon on the Mount, or the Story of the Good Samaritan, with their implications for and applications to a social order reconstructed on the basis of the principles of Jesus. Whether the audience be composed of students or professors, working men, Christian ministers, foreign missionaries or Buddhist and Shinto priests, Dr. Kagawa never fails to awaken their interest with his challenging message.

Kagawa's Message of Emancipation.

And what is the message that has quickened the attention of a hostile, indifferent or Gospel-hardened world?

It is the message of emancipation that is contained in the words applied by Jesus himself at the beginning of his ministry (Luke 4: 18):

“The Spirit of the Lord is upon me
Because he hath anointed me to preach the Gospel to the poor;
He hath sent me to heal the broken hearted,
To preach deliverance to the captives,
And recovering of sight to the blind,
To set at liberty them that are bruised.”

The Gospel, says Kagawa, means (1) *Economic emancipation*—preaching to the poor, not preaching contentment in poverty, but relief of poverty, not mocking the poor in their distresses by ignoring their physical needs, nor pampering them by offering them food in place of fellowship. “Man shall not live by bread alone but by every word that proceedeth out of the mouth of God.” The poor must be fed or helped to feed themselves, but their souls must be fed as well as their bodies. It is friendship and fellowship that the heart of man desires.

(2) *Psychological emancipation*—healing the broken hearted—casting out the demons of anxiety and fear that cause despair and in Japan, perhaps more than elsewhere, lead to suicide. On the seashore west of the city of Kobe, at a spot where the railway almost touches the water, there is a notice board lighted by night with electricity which says, “Stop—wait a moment. If you are in trouble, come and see Mrs. Jo in Kobe.” By that means Mrs. Jo, who is the founder of a Rescue Home in Kobe, has saved over two thousand girls from suicide. And still more pathetic are the family suicides, when fathers and mothers and children agree to die together to escape the privations of life. “He hath sent me to heal the broken hearted.”

(3) *Social emancipation*—preaching deliverance to the captives—the emancipation of the slaves. Let us not think that slavery is even yet entirely abolished. There are said to be five million slaves in Africa. In Japan there are 334 villages of descendants of outcasts. They are now legally on the same basis as the common people, but the old caste prejudice against them persists. They make up the slum population in Japan, for the most part, although from among them have arisen many men and women of capacity and successful achievement.

The abolition of licensed prostitution is one form of social emancipation most urgently needed in Japan. There are 545 licensed quarters in Japan with 50,000 licensed prostitutes. And, in addition, 80,000 geisha or singing girls whose work is to afford whatever entertainment men desire of them. These women are virtually slaves, because they are kept in debt by their employers, who hold them in service until their debt is paid, which usually means death unless some patron buys them off by paying the debt. It is a sad story and is the dark side of “beautiful Japan.”

(4) *Physical emancipation*—"recovering of sight to the blind," which means healing the sick, the erection of Christian hospitals and sanatoria to care for the sick—not their bodies only but their souls as well. There are twelve leper hospitals in Japan. Six of them are Christian. There are three deadly diseases still ravaging menaces to the health of Japan. They are tuberculosis, syphilis and leprosy. The government is doing splendid work in combating these diseases. The death rate from tuberculosis in Japan is twice as great as in Ontario. The infantile death rate in the city of Osaka is twice as high as in Toronto. Much still remains to be done.

(5) *Political emancipation*—setting at liberty them that are bruised. This means freedom and democracy, that democracy in which every man is a son of God. "In Soviet Russia every one is brought down to pauperism, to the proletarian level. The democracy of Christ, however, brings man up to the level of a king. More than that, every one is a Son of God."

The Apostle to the Slums.

Kagawa became known to the world as "The Apostle to the Slums" because of his life of loving service in the worst slums of the city of Kobe, for over fifteen years, at first alone, then with his consecrated wife, a factory girl whose kindness to the poor attracted his attention. His home was a room six feet wide by nine feet long. This he shared with any and all comers. At one time three others occupied the room with himself.

"When I was about twenty-two years of age," he says, "reading the lives of Charles Kingsley and Frederick Maurice, and inspired also by Henry Drummond, I plunged into one of the slums of Kobe." He was then a student in the Southern Presbyterian Theological Seminary in Kobe.

"In connection with preaching in the slums," he writes, "I had to do these things: First, to help the needy, the physically weak and wounded. To this end I opened a free clinic. Second, to educate the slum boys. I began, therefore, to teach arithmetic and algebra for two hours in the morning, beginning at five o'clock, and again from seven to eight in the evening. Third, to preach. At eight o'clock, after the evening classes, I would go out with the students for street preaching. For the first four years of my residence in the slums I never stopped preaching in the slums."

Kagawa's income was five dollars and a half a month, a scholarship he received from the Theological School. While he was able to support himself on that meagre income, he was not able to support his guests, who never paid their board bill. So he took on the job of cleaning the chimneys of the Seminary and the missionaries' homes. This brought in another five dollars, making a total income of ten dollars and a half a month, with which in some mysterious way he fed himself and three others for several years. And who were these others? One was an ex-convict haunted by the ghost of his victim whom he had murdered. Another one was nicknamed "the statue," because he could stand still all day long, and a third was one who came to him for food. "Teacher," he said, "I haven't filled my stomach for a long, long time." "What do you eat?" "Nothing but water," he replied.

Cause and Effect.

Can you not picture that scene? One of the most brilliant men intellectually in Japan, son of the Secretary of the Privy Council, brought up in luxury, living in poverty and all that goes with poverty. And for what reason? Hear what he answers, "It was not only the Bible which taught me the love of God and Christ and led me to take this step. It was a missionary, Dr. H. W. Myers, of Kobe. He baptized me. If he had not come to Japan probably I would not have found Christ. It was through Dr. Myers' kindness that I learned to love. When I suffered from tuberculosis my Japanese friends did not love me—therefore, I had to depart and live alone. But Dr. Myers showed his love in many ways. . . . Soon after that I went into the slums of Kobe and then practised the love with which Dr. Myers had loved me." "The manifestation of Christianity is not by simply preaching. Love will win the world."

"What are the results of my life in the slums?" Kagawa asks. "Has the sacrifice after all been worth while?" And answers, "As for results—everybody likes Christianity now in Shimkawa (the slum district). Murder and violence have decreased and many homes have established family prayers." "I have not done any sacrifice," he added, "I suffered a little with eye trouble." (The fact is that he contracted trachoma from a man who slept with him, and is now totally blind in the left eye and partially blind in the right, having to use a magnifying glass for reading.) "And lost part of my teeth from the attack of a poor ruffian, but, on the other hand, the slums have enriched me greatly. My whole theology and the message which God is enabling me to give elsewhere are based on my life experience of befriending the slum people. As Christ emptied himself and became a servant, bearing the cross for humanity, I have endeavoured to follow him."

Kagawa's Conversion to Christianity.

What was it that led this exceptional man to become a Christian? Let him tell his own story as he told it recently in China. "I became a Christian at fifteen—we received Confucianism from China and Buddhism but both are so hard to understand. This I found when, eleven, I was sent to study them from a Buddhist priest. Therefore, I thought that I could never become a good man, for my surroundings were so bad I feared it was hopeless. My father and brother both lived immoral lives. Therefore, I found out that it is necessary to live a pure life."

"I began to go to an English class to learn English. My father was dead and my brother told me, 'You may study English, but I forbid you to become a Christian.' But, looking at my brother's life and looking back at my father's life, I thought that I wanted to live a pure life—I began to read the Bible and to pray. Seven months after beginning to pray, I was baptized." "My prayer was, 'Make me a great man like Christ.' God answered my prayer and gave me

the gift of holiness." "After I became a Christian, I found that Christ is the example for life. He is the Son of God who completed what is lacking in the ethics of Confucius, of Buddha and of all the saints of the world."

"After I found Christ I studied harder than ever. This was because I found that this world, this great universe, is a created letter from God. I must read the universe—so everything became very mysterious. I loved to study mathematics, physics, chemistry, bacteriology and biology. And fine arts, too, and many systems of ethics."

"If I had not been able to find Christ probably my life would have been a very dark one."

Kagawa as an Author. While living in the slums Dr. Kagawa leaped into sudden and lasting fame as an author. His first book to attract attention was a scholarly work entitled, "The Psychology of Poverty," which led the government to appropriate ten million dollars for the betterment of housing conditions among the poor.

The book which brought him nation-wide popularity was an autobiographical novel called, "Crossing the Death Line," published in America under the title, "Before the Dawn." It took Japan by storm. Over 200,000 copies were sold in a few months, and his royalties on the book amounted to several thousand dollars a month, all of which went into settlement work for the poor and not a cent into Kagawa's own pocket or to improve his personal condition. The title, "Crossing the Death Line," was so named from a mystical experience he had during extreme illness when he felt that he was lifted "Across the Death Line" back into active service for the poor.

Kagawa is now the author of over sixty books of various sorts and sizes, of which not less than a million copies have been sold. In addition to the one mentioned above, three others have appeared in English: "Shooter at the Gun," "Love the Law of Life" and "The Religion of Jesus."*

Kagawa in Prison. It was while living in the slums that Kagawa had his first experience of arrest and imprisonment. That was because he took part in a labour strike and procession in Kobe when strikes were contrary to law. He thought the labourers' quarrel just and encouraged them to strike, so had to spend a few weeks in prison. From that time on he was suspected by the police and was under constant surveillance by the police, but now the police go to him for assistance in dealing with labour problems, and the government authorities send school teachers, Shinto and Buddhist priests and local authorities to hear his addresses on how to deal with Communism.

*Order from Dr. F. C. Stephenson.

Kagawa and the Tokyo Earthquake.

terrible earthquake and fire in Tokyo and Yokohama. Acting without delay, he went to Tokyo, saw the situation with his own eyes, came back to Osaka and Kobe and made an appeal for clothing, bedding, household utensils, etc., and soon gathered together a boat-load of the necessaries of life for thousands of homeless people. With the good will and assistance of the city authorities, he opened a relief settlement close to the scene of one of the worst tragedies that humanity has ever known, when thirty-six thousand people were burned to death in an open place in the city of Tokyo. Aided by his trained co-workers from the slums, and some picked students from the universities, Dr. Kagawa established milk depots, clinics, bath houses, barber shops, boys' clubs, temporary workshops and meeting places and through all "the poor had the Gospel preached to them." Night after night, inspired by a passion to declare the love of God in the midst of the horrors of an inferno of disaster, Kagawa preached to thousands in the churches that had survived, and over 5,000 people were converted to Christianity by his preaching. Here were no abject terror, no craven fear, no doubts, no pessimistic paralysis of initiative but a triumphant optimism that recognized a unique opportunity for loving service, "to justify the ways of God to man."

Kagawa and Communism.

and consulted with Mr. Ramsay MacDonald privately as to the organization of a labour party in Japan. When Kagawa returned to Japan, however, he found to his great surprise that in the office of the Farmers' Union which he had organized there was a young man who was receiving money from Communist headquarters as a propagandist of Soviet ideas. The students of Japan had been getting more and more interested in Marxism, and these students were permeating the Farmer and Labour Unions with communistic propaganda.

Ten years previously Dr. Kagawa had helped to organize the Japan Federation of Labour. But on account of the activity of Communism the federation split into Right and Left wings. One half of the federation withdrew and organized Soviet unions which were broken up by the Government in 1924. Recognizing the ability of Kagawa in the leadership of labour and resenting his effective opposition to Communism the Communists persist in doing their best to break up any organizations that he may form. For that reason the peasant unions which Kagawa organized have dwindled. Nevertheless, this dauntless spirit continues to try to spiritualize the labour movement in Japan and to keep it from being drawn into the current of Sovietism. "From the start," he says, "I did not like Communism because it is against culture and civilization. Russian Communism is failing in four ways, (1) It is against democracy, (2) It is against freedom of thought, (3) It is against the independence of the minority, (4) It is against free discussion—against parliamentarianism.

In September, 1923, a new opportunity for action and service in his chosen field of social work was afforded to Kagawa by the great and

In 1925 Dr. Kagawa attended the missionary Conference at Washington, then went on to Great Britain

Dr. Kagawa is specially qualified to speak on this subject for two reasons, (1) he has made a careful study of Marxism, something very few people have the courage to do, and (2) he knows at first hand what the labouring classes are thinking and feeling. Today when Kagawa goes to a town to speak the Government authorities send out secret instruction to the local officials, school teachers and Buddhist and Shinto priests to attend his meetings and to send students because they wish the people to hear what he has to say about Marxism.

Kagawa's social and Economic programme.

To many people both in Japan and outside it is Kagawa's social and economic programme that makes the greatest appeal. His love for the poor, his courageous attempt not only to understand but to solve the problem of poverty, his careful study of the economics of Marx and Lenin, his acceptance of the challenge of Russian Communism, and his courageous meeting of that challenge not only by destructive criticism but by a constructive programme of cooperation to take the place of individualistic, competitive capitalism, and to obviate the danger of the acceptance of the programme of Russian Communism.

"A Million Souls for Christ, a Cooperative Society in every village and a Mutual Aid Society in every Church" is Kagawa's latest definition of the kingdom of God Movement.

But to carry on the Cooperatives successfully it is necessary to have the spirit of cooperation. It is impossible to carry on the Cooperatives with the spirit of competition. Individualistic preferment and profit must be replaced by the spirit of social solidarity and when necessary sacrificial sharing to meet one another's need.

The Motive of the Kingdom of God Movement.

"The Cross is the motive of the Kingdom of God Movement" said Dr. Kagawa at the Workers' Conference in January last. "The motive is that Christ died for us." "Christ himself is the centre of the Kingdom of God Movement. And the centre of Christ is the Cross . . . modern churches, forgetting the Cross are scattered and individualistic. The more they forget the Cross, the more God punishes them. In the tenth century, when Christianity forgot the Cross, it was scourged by Mohammedanism, and in the nineteenth century when it surrendered to capitalism, came the Marxian challenge. Marxism is the punitive admonition. If Christ's Cross had been thoroughly embraced by the Church there would have been no chance for Marxism to appear."

"It is a common, but serious, mistake to assume that the essential values of society have nothing to do with the Cross. But without the Cross-principle society cannot remain in permanent integration. I am convinced that the Cross is the fundamental truth of the organization of society, and of the social movement. For society cannot exist without love."

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