VI. A THEORETICAL (JMB) AND MISSIONARY (JCQ) ARTICLE

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TOWARD A JAPANESE CHRISTIAN THEOLOGY?
— "Japan and the Face of Jesus" by Y. Inoue —
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"Japan and the Face of Jesus" is an attractive title, and the book itself is delightful reading. It is a kind of informal theology, an attempt to present the major facets of Jesus' life in the Japanese context. Father Inoue combines his reflections generating from his studies in France and travels in Palestine with his good command of Japanese intellectual tradition and of contemporary European theology and exegesis. Father Inoue's connection with Endo Shusaku and his circle is clear even without waiting for the recommendations by the three writers attached to the end of the book. As a matter of fact the title derives from the opening section of Endo's *Life of Jesus*. "His face we have not seen. His voice we have not heard. We do not know what kind of face the Jesus had, that we are going to talk about." Endo then refers to different features drawn by different ages. But there is almost no description of Jesus' face in the Bible. Father Inoue's position, as I take it, is at once agreement and answer to the attitude implicit in Endo's formulation. Endo's permanent problem seems to be: Can Christianity become part and parcel of the Japanese? He seems again to have an implicit answer: If and when Jesus assumes the Japanese features, then it is possible. At least dudging from the present book, Father Inoue shares more or less this position.

My task here is to make a "theological" comment on the intellectual situation of Japanese Catholicism and see in which direction the possibility for often called-for Japanese theology exists, based indirectly on the reading of the book.

Theology and Catholicism in Japan

Theology seems to have been for a long while virtually a no man's land for Japan's Catholicism. This is indeed a strange phenomenon amidst all the cries for the Church's need of incarnation in the culture, adaptation, indigenization, acculturation and most recently of "inculturation". For some reason or other, it seems we have taken it for granted, that the personal decision of faith has nothing to do with the highly specialized intellectual activities of theologizing. The absence of theology in the present-day Catholic fold is actually the result of the working of complex factors. It is easy to point out a scapegoat for the

1 井上洋治, 『日本とイエスの顔』, 北沢社, 東京, 1976, 243 p.
3 In his short article on this book Endō remarks that his creative activities so far seem now to have found their theological foundation by Father Inoue's book. See Sōzō 記事, vol. I, Oct. 1976, p. 92.
situation and put all the blame on, say, the past seminary education, its discipline and curriculum, which, thorough as it may have been, was hardly preparation for producing something original.

But I would say that this rather limiting type of training was only a small surface manifestation of historical reality, the Church's inability, to understand modern intellectual forces and, even long after all kinds of renewal after Vatican II, a certain anti-intellectualism is still alive within the Church. It can take various forms, which are usually regarded as measuring up to the signs of the times. An additional, yet not totally unrelated, factor is to be seen in the Church's late coming to modern Japan and her failure to become part of Japan's modernization. Further related factors are that the late-coming has determined her missionary tactics to concentrate on the areas of possibilities left by the Protestant denominations, and that even among intellectual converts the matter of faith tends to be considered something to be explained to them by missionaries and not to be sought by their intellectual acumen. It looks like there is an agreement on the saying: "Theology does not matter, but piety is endless." In abstract terms this is true, for theology does not save! Still, such a simplistic attitude will ultimately work counter to the Church's overall mission to plant Christ on the Japanese soil.

The no man's land situation of theology and unguarded anti-intellectualism can be found together with an earnest desire for Japanese theology and the integration of Christianity and Japanese culture. The Catholic mind at the present juncture of Japan's intellectual history, and of the Post-Vatican Church's history is a complicated affair. In any mission land there used to be and still is to a certain extent an inclination to accept faithfully whatever is decided in Rome without the tradition of its own. This centralist mentality can be adapted to the Post-Vatican situation. The Vatican II constitutions and decrees can be quoted amply without changing one's basic attitude. Or one may think that speaking about Vatican II is enough and make no further efforts to advance theologically and solve the problems left by the Council. I was once flabbergasted by a pastoral theologian who was giving a lecture on Post-Vatican ecclesiology. He made a rather inspiring remark about the open Church after Vatican II. "All the doors are open,—unlocked", he said. His understanding of the nature of the Church, however, was actually as stale as the one embodied in Canon Law. It must here be emphasized that what counts is the overall structure of theological thinking, and without that, no enthusiastic talk is of any avail. It is not my purpose to criticize, but if I see a scientist-priest still availing himself of the B.A.C., what should I say? Present-day Japan's culture indicates the height of sophistication. If one means by Japanese theology something like "waterbuffalo theology", it would have no means of contact with the elaborate currents of modern Japanese thought. As a matter of fact, it seems dangerous that in some quarters there is a tendency to equate

4 K. Koyama, Waterbuffalo Theology, N.Y. (Orbis Books), 1974. I am using the title of the book simply in order to epitomize a tendency of indigenous theology. The content of Dr. Koyama's book is far from naive. It is based on the author's experience in encountering the a-historical Asian mentality with the history of the Bible and its God, who intervenes in history (see esp. pp. 95-105). In the book the author shows his remarkable knowledge of theological trends and sense of synthesis.