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Toward a Japanese Theology:
Kitamori's Theology of the Pain of God

RICHARD MEYER

Freud's Superego and the Biblical *Syneidesis*

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By RICHARD MEYER

CHRISTIAN theologians of the younger churches in Asia have complained, perhaps facetiously, perhaps seriously, that they have not yet produced a serious indigenous heresy.¹ Behind this is the realization that Christianity is still largely a foreign, an imported, religion for most people of Asia. Christians gather in buildings of foreign architecture, sing unfamiliar melodies, and hear the Gospel preached in strangely foreign thought patterns. Their concern is not merely nationalistic but also evangelical. They want the Gospel to be meaningful and relevant also in Asia. As Anteï Hiyane of Japan has written:

While Christianity is a universal religion, when it is actually believed it becomes the Christianity of particular individuals, peoples, and nations, takes on their respective characteristics. . . . The universality of Christianity becomes particularized in becoming immanent within a race or nation.²

Unfortunately, however, very little has been accomplished in the field of indigenous theology by the Asian churches. Oosthuizen's thorough study maintains that while some efforts have been made by the India Church, the Christians of China and Japan have done very little, and the African churches have produced practically nothing.

¹ P. David is so quoted by G. C. Oosthuizen, *Theological Discussions and Confessional Developments in the Churches of Asia and Africa*, pp. 46 f., and Bishop Rajah B. Manikam made a similar statement in his address to the Foreign Missions Conference, 1959.

² Quoted by Oosthuizen, p. 21.

That Japan has made so little progress in this field is surprising to anyone who knows the extreme national consciousness of the Japanese, their high rate of literacy, and their keen intellectual ability. In other fields the Japanese ability to adapt, always with distinctive variations, has become well known. From earliest times Japan has also succeeded in adapting the religions which have come to its shores. In discussing the development of Shintoism, Fairservis says:

The amalgamation of Japanese and Chinese beliefs demonstrates the individualistic character of the island culture, for through the centuries of its existence it has accepted a great many Chinese traits and utilized them as essential parts of its civilization. But in each case there is a Japanese interpretation and character which is pronounced.³

This adaptation is even more apparent in the case of Buddhism. The change that has taken place in Buddhism is phenomenal. Buddhist scholars have doubted even whether the largest sect of Japanese Buddhism should be classified as Buddhism.⁴ About Christianity, however, surprisingly little original theological thinking has been done in Japan.

It is true that Japan has produced the nonchurch movement by Kanzo Uchimura, who was interested "in making Christianity a Japanese religion rather than an im-

³ Walther A. Fairservis, Jr., *The Origins of Oriental Civilization*, p. 153.

⁴ Christmas Humphreys, *Buddhism*, p. 177.

ported foreign religion."⁵ Brunner declares that the nonchurch Christianity is "a purely Japanese type of Christianity which truly meets and understands the Japanese spirit."⁶ This movement, however, is primarily a protest against the evils which Uchimura saw in denominationalism and organized churches, and his contribution is not so much in the area of theology as in church polity and Bible study methods. Uchimura expressed his own attitude in an article entitled "I Hate Theology!"⁷

The Japanese name most familiar to the American church is Toyohiko Kagawa. Although his crusading zeal has left a lasting imprint upon the labor and cooperative movements in Japan, he has contributed very little in the field of theology. Michalson has only this passing remark: "Kagawa's essential contribution to the Christian life of Japan is not theological but evangelistic and social." (P. 149)

Thus at the critical point of defining the Gospel in specifically Japanese thought still very little has been done. A present-day Christian leader in Japan complains:

Our theologians are no better than distributors of imported theologies who proclaim those theological ideas with as much enthusiasm as if they were their own. Compared with other fields of study today, such a tragedy in theology is quite a shame.⁸

The dominant theology in Japan today is Barthianism. Observers have seen a close

⁵ Masao Takenaka, *Reconciliation and Renewal in Japan*, p. 68.

⁶ Carl Michalson, *Japanese Contributions to Christian Theology*, p. 20.

⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 34.

⁸ Kazuo Mutoh, "Kitamorian Theology," *Japan Christian Quarterly*, XIX (Autumn 1953), 318.

affinity between the Japanese and Germans, and Japan has leaned on Germany for theological thought more than upon any other specific country. During the war Barth, especially the pre-1932 Barth, became extremely influential among the churches.⁹ At the present time all of Barth's works are translated into Japanese as well as many works on Barth. There is also a highly vocal criticism of Barthianism going on in Japan at this time, but this protest comes mainly from fiercely sectarian groups who have entered Japan since the war, and their spokesmen are largely American missionaries, not the Japanese. Emil Brunner became extremely popular among the Japanese when he taught at the International Christian University in Tokyo, but it seems that this fascination is quickly passing, and the Japanese pastors are turning again to the more solid theology of Barth.

At the same time liberal theology has played an important part in Japan. Doshisha University's theological department became the center for German rationalism and the American social gospel. This liberal tradition pervaded many churches in Japan. It played a great part in the social awakening of Japan in the 1920s, but has become, in the words of Doshisha's Takenaka, "an ethic which has lost its theological moorings." With the dreadful disillusionment coming from Japan's defeat, this optimistic view of man has been largely discredited. The ferment of liberalism is still active, however, especially among those whose spiritual heritage flows from Congregationalist or Methodist activity—a large segment of the church in Japan.

Into this breach, challenging both Barthianism and liberalism, has stepped a

⁹ Oosthuizen, p. 143.

young Japanese theologian, Kazoh Kitamori. He attempts to define the Christian Gospel with insights gained through his Lutheran background and training but to enunciate it in a manner distinctly Japanese. According to Oosthuizen, Kitamori is "the first one who attempted to work intensively on an indigenous theology for Japan" (p. 149), and more than half of the entire section on Japanese theology in Oosthuizen's survey is devoted to the theology of Kitamori. Another young Japanese scholar, Yoshio Noro, declares: "Many Christians claim that at last the Japanese Christian Church has produced her own original theology in this theology of the pain of God."¹⁰

Professor Kitamori became famous in Japan upon the publication of *The Theology of the Pain of God* in 1946. The young assistant professor of theology at Tokyo Union Seminary had previously written other books on much the same subject (*The Lord of the Cross* in 1940 at 24; *Theology and Creeds*, 1943). But *The Theology of the Pain of God*, coming about a year after Japan's surrender, was enthusiastically welcomed by a people who suffered from defeat and disillusionment. His name soon became known far beyond the limited number of Christians. In preparing the Crown Prince's visit to America and England in 1950, the educators in the palace requested Professor Kitamori to brief the future emperor on Christianity.

At this time Kitamori was lecturing simultaneously at Tokyo Union Theological Seminary, Doshisha Theological Seminary, Japan Women's Christian University, and the Japan Evangelical Lutheran Seminary. He was also serving as pastor of a church

on the outskirts of Tokyo. Yet other books flowed from his pen in quick succession: *The Character of the Gospel*, 1948; *Martin Luther*, 1951; *The Logic of Salvation*, 1953; *God*, 1953; *Lectures on Pauline Letters*, 1955; *Introduction to the Bible*, 1955; *The Explanation of the Confession of Faith of the Church of Christ in Japan*, 1955; *Theology Today*, 1956; *God and Man*, 1956; *Happiness*, 1957. He also collaborated on *Christianity in Asia*, 1955; *What Kind of Men Are We?* 1958; and *Human Freedom and Happiness*, 1958. No other Japanese theologian has been so prolific. His writings touch upon everything from "Marxism to Haiku [a classical form of Japanese poetry restricted to 17 syllables]," and Michalson asserts that he could succeed in Japan as a poet, novelist, or essayist were he not a theologian (p. 73). But a theologian he is—and bound to his "theology of the pain of God." All that he has written follows the theological axioms of the book with this title or is application of this theology to current theological and social problems.

The term "the pain of God" is taken from Jer. 31:20: "My heart *yearns* for him." The Japanese translation Kitamori used has the word for "pain" (lit., "I have pain in My bowels"). Kitamori maintains that the Hebrew word *אָנָה* as it is used in the Old Testament connotes intense pain. Luther translates *Darum bricht mir mein Herz*. Calvin used the Latin *dolor*. This pain of God, God struggling against Himself, letting His Son suffer and die—this is the key with which Kitamori would unlock present-day Japan's understanding of the Gospel and communicate God's love and man's forgiveness to our generation.

The character of the love of the Cross is

¹⁰ Yoshio Noro, *Impassibilitas Dei*, p. 29.

more clearly shown in this pain of God than in any other way. We are commanded to love and serve the Lord of the Cross with all our heart and soul, but there is no other way to do it except by witnessing to the love of the Cross. Today the love of the Cross demands that we testify to its character, and the theology of the pain of God is one attempt to make such a testimony.¹¹

Mutoh calls this Kitamorian theology (p. 321). Kitamori, however, disavows any "originality" for his theology. He sees himself simply proclaiming the old truth of the Gospel of the cross, as Luther did for his age, in a form understandable to the people of our age, especially in Japan. He quotes P. T. Forsyth's statement that the task of theology is "the pronouncement of the Gospel" and says: "It may well be said that the task of my theology is the new enunciation of the theology of the cross (*theologia crucis*) in the light of the present-day situation" (p. 318). This does not mean simply expressing the faith in easily comprehensible or moving language. It means rethinking the faith and reformulating it in the dimensions in which faith speaks to the fundamental predicament. The Gospel remains the mainspring! "Theology is nothing but the exact understanding of the Gospel."¹² His theological axiom, says Oosthuizen, is: "I determined not to know anything among you save Jesus Christ and Him crucified (1 Cor. 2:2)" (p. 154). "All theological thinking is deduced from the cross, as it was in Paul," Kitamori writes (p. 4).

¹¹ Kazoh Kitamori, "The Theology of the Pain of God," *Japan Christian Quarterly*, XIX (Autumn 1953), 318 f.

¹² Kitamori, p. 18.

His Lutheran background is apparent. Since his conversion through the ministry of the Lutheran Church the dominant theological influence upon him has been Lutheran (Michalson, p. 77). He had read a thesis on Luther by Shigehiko Sato, who also had become a Lutheran through the study of the works of Luther and who enthusiastically introduced Luther to the Japanese. Sato was then professor of the Lutheran Theological Seminary in Tokyo. Kitamori enrolled in this seminary strictly for the sake of a fuller study of Luther. There he read the Bible over and over and came to know the meaning of grace for himself. In September 1942 Kitamori also became a professor at this seminary.¹³ Following the organization of the United Church of Christ in Japan (the *Kyodan*), into which the Lutheran Church was also forced, this school became the seminary for the *Kyodan*. After the war the Japan Evangelical Lutheran Church withdrew from the *Kyodan*, but Kitamori continued with the United Church.¹⁴ His theological foundations, however, have continued to be Lutheran. He quotes Luther more than any other non-Biblical author. Michalson states:

¹³ Paul Huddle, *A Brief History of the Japan Lutheran Theological Seminary*, p. 40. Kitamori's graduation picture is on p. 47, and pictures of him as a faculty member are on pp. 52 and 54.

¹⁴ Noro, pp. 83 f.: "He remained within the United Church of Japan when the Lutheran Church separated itself from the former, his explanation being that the essence of Lutheranism, which he believes to be the pain of God, is not what stands in opposition to something, but what embraces everything through its pains. He believes that when Lutheranism claims its absoluteness in opposition to the other churches, it becomes a sect."

In a theology built on the *analogia doloris* it is quite evident that the Lutheran tradition dominates. Soteriology becomes formative of the whole theology. Trinity and Christology tend to become doctrinal safeguards for the methodologically more central concern, salvation. [P. 93]

It is not enough, however, simply to repeat the theology of Europe in the 16th century, no matter how clearly the Gospel was understood in that day and by that people. Liberalism and Barthianism, according to Kitamori, have concealed the depth of the love of God, because they have not fully appreciated the pain of God. Now it is for the Japanese to proclaim that love with greater clarity because of their experience and understanding of suffering.

Kitamori has developed his concept of *Heilsgeschichte* from Acts 17:26, 27:

And God hath made of one blood all nations of men for to dwell on all the face of the earth and hath determined the times before appointed and the bounds of their habitation, that they should seek the Lord if haply they might feel after Him, and find Him.

Kitamori argues that there are two factors involved here, the time factor and the space factor. He reasons this way: When (time factor) Israel stumbled against the truth of God, God rejected her, and salvation went to the Gentiles (space factor); when (time factor) the Graeco-Roman world, represented by the Roman Catholic Church, stumbled against the truth of God, the truth went to the Germans (space factor). Therefore, according to Kitamori, "the preservation and the development of the Gospel are achieved not only by individuals but also by races and nations as

units."¹⁵ Kitamori feels that now, after the failure of Western liberalism and Barthianism, the Japanese, coming through the depth of suffering, have been given the responsibility to proclaim the Gospel with new depth and meaning through "the theology of the pain of God."

The basic Japanese insight, which is able to grasp the depth of the pain of God, according to Kitamori, is their appreciation of *tsurasa*, which is translated "pain, painfulness, bitterness, sorrow." It is not a physical pain alone. More than that, it has the connotation of deep emotion of suffering. It is an intense inner pain from the struggle within or against oneself. This type of suffering runs through Japanese character and culture.¹⁶ It is the basic component of Japanese classical drama. In Greek drama, the classic tragic drama of the West, the tragedy comes in the unresolved conflict with the superhuman power or fate, which controls men and events. In Japanese drama this is lacking, and the tragedy comes from some dilemma in human relationships, e. g., the conflicting obligation toward a superior and one's feeling for himself or his loved ones.

Tsurasa, which shows the fundamental character of the Japanese dramas, is used when one lets himself or his child suffer and die in order to let someone else live. We hear his crying in spite of his efforts to hide and constrain the sufferings he endures. When this constrained crying is

¹⁵ Kitamori, p. 170, quoted by Noro, pp. 54 f. Oosthuizen, p. 155, contrasts this attitude with that of Hoekendijk.

¹⁶ In the collection of essays, edited by Kato, *Japanese Popular Culture*, it is indicated that this fascination with inner suffering or pain is the most common element in Japanese popular songs, movies, novels, soap operas, and even comics.

heard, the Japanese does not spare tears. In a strict sense he is not moved except by such a scene.¹⁷

It should be noted that *tsurasa* is *not* the word Kitamori uses for the "pain" of God. In the case of God's pain he uses the word *itami*. The meanings are quite similar. *Itami* may also convey the meaning of emotional as well as physical suffering. But Kitamori emphasizes that there is still a very basic difference between human *tsurasa* and the *itami* of God. The pain of the Japanese tragedy is essentially an expression of ἔρωσ, the sacrifice which is made is for a loved one. God's pain, however, is precisely in loving the rebellious sinner.

Tsurasa in Japanese tragic dramas expresses the feeling that one experiences when one lets himself or his own child die in order that another may live. But this other person must be the dearest person to him. On the other hand, the pain of God means two things. First, it means that God loves him who does not deserve to be loved. Secondly, it means that the Father sacrifices the Son. And the former is the cause of the latter. But in the Japanese tragic dramas the pain is expressed only in the latter relation. The pain — which comes from the love which loves even the worthless, the one who is not worthy of love, and loves even its enemies — is not known to the Japanese. [Pp. 180 ff.]

Thus Kitamori does not equate the pain of God and the suffering of man. But the pains which we suffer are a *witness* to the love of God, who, in order to save man, sacrificed His own Son.

In the Gospel the primary importance should be given to the fact that the Father

¹⁷ Kitamori, p. 177, quoted by Noro, p. 57.

let the Son die. Only secondary importance is to be given to the fact that the Father begets the Son. The latter exists only in order to speak about the former. The essential word of the Gospel is the pain of God. When God wanted to let man know about His pain, He chose to do it by using the expressions of human pain. And in our world we know, as the most painful situation among us, about the fact that a father sacrifices his beloved son. Therefore the relation between a father and a son is used by God in order to express the essential fact that God has pain. [Pp. 46, 47]

Similarly Kitamori sees in Buddhism a certain preparation for the understanding of the Gospel, although it is still a limited groping for the Love of God. Buddhism began with the search of Gautama, the Buddha, for enlightenment after seeing "the four sufferings," and Buddhism has always been fascinated by the problem of pain.¹⁸ Kitamori is especially impressed with a comment by Shotoku Taishi, the great patron of Japanese Buddhism during the sixth century. In Shotoku's *Notes on the Yuima-Kyo*, a commentary on Buddhist scriptures, he states that the Bodhisatva suffers because of the suffering of the masses and seeks to save the people from their suffering through suffering. Kitamori says enthusiastically:

The closest thought to the Gospel that "through His wounds we are healed" is found in the words "affliction is saved through affliction." We cannot appreciate enough the insight brought out by the precious religious forerunner of our moth-

¹⁸ Cf. George Grimm, *The Doctrine of the Buddha* (Berlin: Akademie Verlag, 1958), Part I: "The Most Excellent Truth of Suffering," p. 59 ff.

erland. The depth of Japanese insight certainly was born after the assimilation of this insight. [Pp. 29 f.]

This suffering of the Boddhisatva, however, is not real suffering, according to Kitamori, but only sympathetic suffering. Buddhist "sorrow" or "mercy," he states, "cannot be put into the same category with the 'pain' of God, for Buddhism knows no god or the wrath of an absolute Being." Buddhism can never know the real pain, even in the advanced insight of Amida's mercy according to the Jodo Sect or Jodo Shin Sect, which teaches salvation by faith in the mercy of Amida. These insights are finally only "groping for the theology of the pain of God." (P. 33)

Thus the insights of the Japanese are never sufficient in themselves. But they can be witnesses to the Gospel, and Kitamori is convinced that because of their suffering the Japanese may play a unique role in the history of Christianity, as the German spirit did in the 16th century, recapturing the central meaning of the cross, the pain God suffers in order to redeem the sinner. This is necessary because liberalism speaks only of the love of God and not His wrath. The theology of the pain of God is deliberately intended to challenge the modern theology of Schleiermacher, Ritschl, and others (*JCQ*, p. 318). With biting sarcasm Kitamori writes:

According to the modern theology, following Schleiermacher, "God's love" is nothing more than the soprano of "happy people." They had no ear to hear the bass of God's pain "out of the depths." The "love of God" which they saw pushed aside the Mediator (*Mittler*) of God's pain and invented nothing but the immediate (*unmittelbar*) love of God.

. . . Turning to Harnack, in the words of Jesus from the Gospel which he (Harnack) views with the greatest love, I would like to ask: "How is it written of the Son of Man that He must suffer many, many things and be set at naught?" (Matt. 9:17). Church history knows no example of the denial of God's pain on such a large scale as modernistic theology. The spirit of Satan, expressed in Peter's words against the cross, "Lord, this shall not be unto Thee" (Matt. 16:22), is nowhere else working so actively. [P. 25]

The theology of the pain of God is also intended to be "a criticism and corrective of the theology of K. Barth" (*JCQ*, p. 318). Although Barth also criticizes liberalism, this is done on the basis of the First Commandment rather than the theology of the cross and therefore is inadequate. "In this theology [of Barth], even when the 'Gospel' is spoken, the formality which determines the truth of its content is always the Law, the First Commandment (p. 23)." Barth proclaims God is "a whole without tear or pain" (*ein Ganzes ohne Risse u. Schmerzen*)—far different from the God, "wounded and bruised" to heal the wounds of man. For Kitamori there must be *Schmerzen*. He quotes Theodosius Harnack's *Luthers Theologie*:

In the cross, from the two things, God's love and God's wrath, a third thing is born. This "third thing" is the pain of God. According to Luther, at Golgotha "God fought against God" (*da streydet Gott mit Gott*, WA 45, 370). [P. 21]

He also quotes the staunchly orthodox Masahisa Uemura, who said: "God experienced unspeakable agony, going through the painful process, sacrificing Himself,

opening a way of redemption for man." P. T. Forsyth is also fondly quoted: "The cross is in the heart of God. On the cross God died."¹⁹

In this connection it is of interest to see how Kitamori deals with other teachings of the atonement. This can be seen in an essay "Concerning the Theory of Redemption" in *The Character of the Gospel*, pp. 7—35.²⁰ Kitamori finds sound elements in the satisfaction theory of the atonement as elaborated in Anselm's *Cur Deus Homo* but he also agrees with Aulén (*Christus Victor*) in criticizing Anselm's theory as lacking "a certain furiousness, a certain passionate quality." This is, of course, for Kitamori the intensity conveyed in "the pain of God." Anselm's theory is too legal, too rational, too much a logical compromise, and therefore lacks the pathos and irrationality of the fact that God Himself came to save men from their sins. Kitamori commends Aulén for bringing this pathos and irrationality back to the theory of redemption and for showing that redemption is thought of by Aulén exclusively as God's act. Kitamori also appreciates Aulén's understanding of atonement as a conflict between God's love and His wrath in which love is the victor. But Kitamori feels there is an inadequate treat-

ment of the combat itself because of the rather exclusive emphasis on the victory. The atonement for Kitamori's theology is not so much in the victory as it is in the conflict itself. The conflict is the pain of God.

The theory which, according to Kitamori, has more Biblical and existential support is the penal theory, or substitutionary theory, advocated particularly by the Reformers. Kitamori criticizes the mechanical or impersonal aspects of this explanation of the atonement, but it is the theory best suited to the theology of the pain of God. In His crucifixion Christ receives the punishment of God that might justly have been directed against men as sinners. The key passage for the atonement, according to Kitamori, is Rom. 3:21 ff.

A righteous God ought not to love a sinner. According to the Law, there is a fundamental either/or that says God and man cannot both stand. But Jesus Christ is the righteousness *apart* from the Law. In Him the either/or is overcome by a both/and. Through Christ, God can remain righteous because man is declared righteous.

Having effectively criticized opposing theologies and insights, Kitamori does not, however, reject them. Rather because the theology of the pain of God is the witness to the God who "wraps" what is *extra*, outside Himself, in order to save man, so this theology "must wrap itself in together with its opposing positions to the extreme and make them live once more." (P. 27)

This terminology and concept of "wrapping" or "embracing the *extra*" runs throughout Kitamori's writings. This essential part of his thinking is also another

¹⁹ Noro accuses Kitamori of patripassianism, and this is accepted by Oosthuizen, who leans heavily upon Noro's work. Michalson, however, with greater theological acumen, defends Kitamori on this score. Noro's bibliography lists only one book directly concerned with Luther's theology. It is this lack of understanding of Lutheran Christology, including the doctrine of the communication of attributes, which makes him unsympathetic to Kitamori on this point.

²⁰ This discussion is based on Noro, pp. 89—92, and Michalson, pp. 93—95.

element which makes his theology "indigenous" to the Japanese.²¹

Perhaps Kitamori has taken this concept from Hegelian philosophy in which all antinomies in thought and in life were *aufgehoben*, synthesized, "wrapped up," by Hegel. Kitamori learned this method of dialectical synthesis from his philosophy professor at the University of Kyoto, Hajime Tanabe, a Hegelian philosopher with a Buddhist background. But this way of thinking is also so completely Japanese, says Michalson, that it has been called a *furoshiki* theology (p. 74). A *furoshiki* is a square cloth housewives wrap their groceries in, students their books, tradesmen their tools, or practically any object no matter what the size or shape. So Kitamori "wraps up" every area of theology and even opposing theologies into his theology of pain. Michalson calls this the least convincing and most banal element in Kitamori's work (p. 74). The reviewer in the *Japan Christian Literature Review* is even more severe:

The "wrapping" type of thought may expect universal support from the Japanese people who are apt to avoid severe antagonism and favor cheap tolerance and mediation. They endeavor to escape from radical, consistent thought which makes deadly struggle inevitable. Thus, in Kitamori's theology, Barthianism and liberalism are brought to a lukewarm compromise to live peacefully in an ecumenical church by means of the magic procedure of his logic of "wrapped in."

Although this aspect of Kitamori's theol-

²¹ *Japan Christian Literature Review*. The review is very critical of this aspect of Kitamori's theology but recognizes that it is one of the ways "this theology has a vivid contact with the Japanese mind."

ogy requires careful examination, we recognize that it is akin to the fundamental thinking of the Japanese. In a series of articles discussing the differences between Oriental and Western thought, Kitamori emphasizes that the West thinks in opposites, distinguishing between differences; Oriental absoluteness accepts the opposing elements *at the same time*.²²

Kitamori seeks to justify this type of synthesis of opposites by reference to the incarnation, to "God, who on the cross wraps man's brokenness into Himself," or even to the Lutheran understanding of the *est* in the words of institution of the Lord's Supper. This *est* signifies that even in the midst of the disobedience of the church God gives Himself there in the Lord's Supper as showing His embracing love for the church. The Zwinglian *significat* does not show the depth of God's love and tries to keep God away from human disobedience.²³

Applied to the division of the churches, this "wrapping theology" demands an ecumenicity which "embraces that which ought not to be embraced." This does not mean that there should be indifference to the truth of the Gospel or to differences which exist. Although Kitamori has remained

²² Kitamori, "The Japanese Mentality and Christianity" and "Christianity and Other Religions in Japan," in *Japan Christian Quarterly*, XXVI (1960, No. 3), 167—174, and (1960, No. 4), 230—237. In this article Kitamori admits: "This (esthetic contemplativeness and the lack of single-minded engagement) is precisely the fatal weakness of the Japanese intelligensia." Cf. the remark in "An Interview with a Japanese Buddhist Convert," *The Cresset*, XXIV (Jan. 1961), 8—12: "We are a both/and people."

²³ Kitamori, "Marburg Colloquy" and "The Lord's Supper," in *The Character of the Gospel*, quoted by Noro, pp. 86 f.

within the United Church of Christ in Japan, he does not advocate a latitudinarian church. He believes that while "embracing that which is outside" one can and must testify to the insights of the Gospel which he possesses. He does not advocate that the church pretend a unity of doctrine when that unity does not exist in actuality. It is part of the theology of the pain of God, however, that while recognizing the "brokenness" and "outsideness" of other denominations, we embrace those "outside" and seek to heal the "brokenness." This unquestionably appeals to the people of Japan, where the church includes less than .5 percent of the population and yet is splintered into numerous tiny groups, often competing against one another.

The ethical implications of this theology are even more convincing when applied to the individual's life. Here they become strikingly similar to the characteristic ethics of Luther, the forgiving love freely given. This motivation has prompted Kitamori to emphasize that the Christian and the church must not isolate itself from the social and political problems of our day but must extend and embrace the *extra* in order to witness to the love of God. He has written penetrating articles on "The Separation and the Solidarity Between Politics and the Church"²⁴ or "That Which Mediates for the Culture."²⁵ He has taken part in frequent panel discussions on the government radio programs, discussing current issues, eloquently witnessing to the relevance of Christianity.

In order that this witness to the pain of God may be clear in a time of history

²⁴ *Christ Weekly* (Newspaper), Aug. 15 and 22, 1953.

²⁵ *The Character of the Gospel*.

permeated with joy, Kitamori feels there must be "particular individuals" who by a disciplined life actively symbolize the pain of God. For this he is willing to revive the virtues of monasticism, including celibacy, on a voluntary basis. Kitamori himself has remained single. The pain which men suffer, then, is not merely an illustration with which God explains His love for man but also, in some mystical way, the *witness* to the pain of God. Kitamori uses such examples as Abraham's offering of Isaac or the killing of the Innocents by Herod. In the case of Abraham, as in the case of believers, the suffering which he endured drew him closer to God; for Herod and for unbelievers the opposite is the case. But in both instances the suffering of man was connected in some way with the pain of God. "The suffering and pain are the paths through which the unbelievers are transformed into believers. Pain is the uniting point between God and man."²⁶

It is obvious that Kitamori has gone beyond the bare text of Scripture. Michalson quotes Kitamori as saying: "My theological thinking is to the end bound by the text." But Michalson continues to comment: "What it means for Kitamori to be 'bound by the text,' however, has yet to be determined" (p. 84). In a private conversation I once asked Kitamori about his concept of the inspiration of Scriptures. His ambiguous answer was: "I believe, as Luther said, that the Scriptures are 'the swaddling clothes' in which the Christ Child lay." He insists that he is doing nothing that Luther did not do. He has grasped the truth of the Gospel, he con-

²⁶ Noro, p. 70.

tends, in the insight of the pain of God and has made that his theological axiom throughout.

Another criticism must be made. We have seen (p. 266 above) that Kitamori attributes "only secondary importance" to the Father's generation of the Son and that he asserts that the Father begot the Son only that the Gospel might be able to speak about the Son's death. In the same context he has declared that "the relation of a father and a son is used by God in order to express the essential fact that God has pain." Kitamori has thus—apparently, at least—subordinated an aspect of the Being of God, the Father's eternal generation of the Son, to a contingent and temporal development, the need of saving fallen mankind.

We are convinced that Kitamori has carried his axiom *too* far. He has been too fascinated with his own insight. What provides an excellent insight into the love of God becomes less convincing when it becomes the beginning and end of the theology. This is a risk anyone takes who seeks to communicate the Gospel. It is especially dangerous when one seeks to communicate the Gospel to people far removed from the traditions of the Western church in time, distance, and culture.

To what extent can we take the truths of the Gospel and translate them into a particular cultural setting without endangering the basic truth? Kitamori seems aware of the risk involved and the inevitability of failure. There is this incisive paragraph:

Logic of Salvation is the conversion of *pathos* into *logos*. . . . This conversion is an attempt to convert into *logos* what is originally incapable of being rendered such, or an attempt to put into form what

refuses to be treated so. Therefore this task is destined never to succeed. The minute we have succeeded in converting *pathos* into *logos* without ruining *logos*, we have altered *pathos* into what is not *pathos* at all. Therefore our success is nothing but our failure. Then the question may arise why we should concern ourselves with such a doomed task. The answer is that the substance of this *pathos* is *salvation* itself. Evidently salvation must be *communicated* to those who will receive salvation, and such a communication can be done only by the medium of *logos*. This is why the *pathos* of salvation must be converted into *logos*.²⁷

In *The Theology of the Pain of God* (p. 36) Kitamori refers to silence as one of the golden virtues of man, but adds that the "pain" of God is so dramatic a word that it cannot keep silent! "Even when man's vocabulary is utilized to the highest degree to draw out this matter it is infinitely troublesome," he says. But "The witness to the Gospel is required to dare to have this trouble." Especially the Japanese are known for their control over their feelings. This is a Japanese virtue. But Kitamori points out that, according to the *Kojiki-den*, when the hero of ancient Japan, Yamato Takeru-no-Mikoto, was broken with sorrow, he did not remain silent but with vehement weeping gave vent to his sorrow.

In our generation a heroic Japanese theologian has been overwhelmed at the insight of the suffering of God for sinful mankind. He has not kept silent! He has perhaps made overstatements, been guilty of oversimplification, and in his resolve to

²⁷ Kitamori, *Logic of Salvation*, Introduction, Sec. 4, quoted by Mutoh, p. 322.

be consistent throughout he has been inconsistent. But what is important, he has not been silent! When so quickly we have forgotten the suffering of man and only hear the high soprano of "happy people" singing of the "love of God," we must listen again to the cry *de profundis*. Kazoh Kitamori stands in the tradition of the apostle who wrote:

Now I rejoice in my sufferings for your sake, and in my flesh I complete what is lacking in Christ's afflictions for the sake of His body, that is, the church, of which I became a minister according to the divine office which was given to me for you, to make the Word of God fully known, the mystery hidden for ages and generations but now made manifest to His saints. To them God chose to make known how great among the Gentiles are the riches of the glory of this mystery, which is Christ in you, the Hope of glory. Him we proclaim, warning every man and teaching every man in all wisdom, that we may present every man mature in Christ. For this I toil, striving with all the energy which he mightily inspires within me. [Col. 1: 24-29 RSV]

Hokkaido, Japan

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