

philippine studies

Ateneo de Manila University • Loyola Heights, Quezon City • 1108 Philippines

Impressions of Japanese Catholicity

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Philippine Studies vol. 1, no. 3 (1953): 272-273

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of God, born of the Father before all ages, God of God, Light of Light, true God of true God. . . . Who for us men, and for our salvation came down from heaven, was incarnate through the Holy Ghost of the Virgin Mary, and was made Man.

For as Robert Browning wrote:

That Jesus Christ is God
Solves all things in this world and out of it!

JOSEPH J. KAVANAGH

Impressions of Japanese Catholicity

With the upsurge in conversions after the war, it should not be forgotten that the Japanese Church is still in its Bethlehem. But one-fifth of one percent of the nation is Catholic and there remains yet so much to do. Therefore, it was most gratifying for this writer to find on the seventh floor of one of the Mitsukoshi department stores in Tokyo a Catholic chapel which, it was stated, was having a good effect, although something more pretentious in ornamentation and decoration might have been wished for in so public and so central a show-case of the Faith.

In one chapel a young man served Mass so devoutly and perfectly that he attracted attention. He was a student in a local university, who had converted his professor and the professor's whole family. In that chapel there were flat cushions, each about a yard square, in a pile to be taken by the Japanese who came to Mass, while there were kneelers in a corner for the Europeans. The Japanese removed their shoes on entering and took a cushion to an empty spot on the floor. There they squatted and knelt and prayed, often completely bowed to the floor in most profound adoration. Surely, such faith will bring the Gift of Faith to those who still sit in the shadow of darkness, mumbling their prayers before the pagan gods.

The rate of conversions has decreased, it seems, recently. Many begin instructions, but not all finish. Vestiges of a feudal mentality can cause complications. For example, if a person asks

a priest about the Church and starts instruction, that priest is expected to guide the inquirer for a considerable time. Otherwise, that soul may be lost since he would find it most difficult to go to another priest. Moreover business has increased and so the men feel Catholic life demands too much. They see that God and Mammon cannot be served together, and Mammon is so sure and close. With temporal prosperity so instant, Eternal Verity is less important. Interestingly, one pastor stated that in mixed marriages the Catholic boy was likely to lose his faith, while the Catholic girl most probably would convert her pagan husband.

Seeing the genuine devotion of the faithful and the way they attend Mass, one knows that grace abounds. Evening Mass has been introduced on Feasts. This is a wonderful help to the Japanese mother who spends a long time preparing breakfast, a real meal, and for workers who cannot come early in the morning. A real thrill it was to notice a very young altar-boy read off the prayers at Mass in fine Latin from Japanese characters. Certainly "His praise is on every tongue."

Sophia, the Catholic University in Tokyo under the Jesuits, saw the start of a new life at the war's end. Although compared with other universities it is small and has not been as influential and as well-known as a Catholic would desire, now, as a member of the Association of Accredited Universities of Japan, it looks forward to greater future achievement. The sowing took place in sorrow, may the reaping be in gladness.

One cannot avoid thinking what the new day will bring to this industrious and courteous people who have experienced such changes in the last hundred years. Theirs is a nature capable of great sacrifices. Will its generousities be channeled to loyalties that bid fair to make the morrow a new spring of warmth and light and joyous color that will lead to Eternal Day? Certainly, there is every present hope that their future will be linked in comradeship and even communion with ours. For the work of forging lasting ties between a Christian Japan and a Christian World, let it not be "too little and too late." Mistake it not, a democratic Christianity to the core is Japan's solution as it is the world's.

FRANCIS M. O'BYRNE