

Shinto, Nationalism and the Catholic Church in the Early Showa Era

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1. Introduction

On December 8th, 1939, the Sacred Congregation for the Propagation of the Faith (Sacra Congregatio de Propaganda Fide) issued a decree known as *Plane compertum est*. This instruction nullified prescriptions that prohibited the presence of Christians at ceremonies in honor of Confucius at “Confucian Shrines” (文廟 *Wen Miao*) or at schools, and abolished the oath against the Chinese rites imposed in 1742 by

the bull *Ex quo singulari*. Francis Rouleau SJ, a historian of the Chinese rites controversy considers the bull *Plane compertum est* as a truly “liberating decree” for the mission in China.¹⁾ By putting an end to the painful consequences that had flowed from the Chinese rites controversy, the decree was seen as offering a vital opportunity for the Catholic Church to relax its intolerant attitude towards indigenous cultures and non-Christian religions, and begin an opening of the door towards inculturation.

Reconsideration of, and a change in policy respecting the prescriptions of the 1742 bull *Ex quo singulari* came about in part because of the “Sophia University (上智大学 *Jochi Daigaku*) and the Yasukuni Shrine Incident” in Japan in 1932. Already since the beginning of the 20th century the Holy See had begun promoting a policy of indigenization, and in line with this policy the Catholic Church in Japan agreed in condoning “offering reverence at a shrine” (神社参拜, *Jinja sanpai*) as being ‘just’ a civic gesture, an expression of patriotism. The “Shrine Question” had been a long-standing question for the Catholic Church since the Meiji era, now it could be resolved from the perspective of accommodation with regard to the Church’s attitude to non-Christian religions.

In the history of Christianity, as the gospel was accepted and transformed by each local culture, at the same time it transformed and evangelized each local culture and its values. Such “accommodation”,

1) Peter C. Phan, “Culture and Liturgy: Ancestor Veneration as a Test Case”, *In Our Own Tongues: Perspective from Asia on Mission and Inculturation* (Maryknoll: Orbis, 2003), 116. This article is available on <<http://members.cox.net/vientrietdao/bao/ancestor.html>>.

based on respect for the customs and cultures of each place, becomes also an opening for attempts at integrating Christian values with the inherent values of the local culture. Such attempts at “accommodation” demand discernment between the invariable essence of the Gospel, and the relative, changeable historical dimensions of each culture. In addition to discernment, mutual acceptance and transformation of both the local culture and Christianity, without loss of the essence of the Gospel, becomes essential.

A review of the results of the “Sophia University-Yasukuni Shrine Incident”, while asking whether the essence of the Gospel was preserved and respected, leaves one however with questions and reservations. Taking a lead from Rome’s policy of promoting a more tolerant attitude to religions in Asia, the Catholic Church in Japan intended just to accept the Shinto rites as non-superstitious, but in reality the Church accommodated itself to Japanese ultra nationalism and cooperated in the war effort in the name of loyalty and patriotism. In this article I would like to focus on the topic of “accommodation” as understood by the Japanese Catholic Church in the early Showa era when nationalism was so influential.

2. How the Catholic Church dealt with Loyalty, Patriotism, and Shinto

At the beginning of the Meiji era a ban on Christianity was still in place. This resulted in the persecution of some 4,000 *Kirishitan* (so called old/hidden Christians) who were “discovered” in Nagasaki. A strong, unified protest at Japanese government policy was made by the four envoys from the United Kingdom, the United States,

France and Germany. In a formal response, five Japanese delegates stated.²⁾

Kirishitans openly scorn Japanese religion and the Mikado (帝 or Tennno 天皇 the Emperor), whom all Japanese people regard as sacred.... They refuse to visit and offer reverence at shrines dedicated to the Sun goddess Amaterasu-Omikami(天照大神), this means they insult Shinto and the Mikado.... Kirishitans never pass under the torii(鳥居)³⁾ and they adamantly refuse to set up a kamidana(神棚)⁴⁾ and ofuda(御札)⁵⁾ or a butsudan(仏壇)⁶⁾ and ihai(位牌)⁷⁾ in their homes as is customary, because they have contempt for them.

Accordingly, the delegates concluded, Kirishitans warrant persecution.

Two significant questions emerge from the response of the Japanese delegates, first the question of one's attitude to the Tenno, and secondly there is that question of one's attitude to Shinto. One's attitude towards the Tenno was considered as including, not just one's loyalty to the Tenno, but also one's loyalty to Japan. The equivalence of the one with the other, their essential unity was expressed "Loyalty and Patriotism"(忠君愛国 *chukun aikoku*). Consequently, could the Catholic Church be considered patriotic enough? A key question was, 'Is it possible for the Church, the

2) Yoshio Yasumaru, Miyaji Masato eds. *Nihon kindaisiso taikei 5: Shukyo to kokka* (Tokyo: Iwanami Shoten, 1988), 309.

3) The gate most commonly found at the entrance or the road leading to Shrine.

4) A kind of small Shinto shrine.

5) Talisman cards issued by shrines.

6) A wooden cabinet in which are placed religious icons.

7) Memorial tablets for deceased relatives.

individual Christian to actively participate in state nationalism?’ First, I would like to focus on the question of patriotism and the Church, then move on to the question of the Church and Shinto.

2.1 “Loyalty and Patriotism” and Catholic Church in Japan

In the Edo period, nation(国民 *kokumin*) included only the warriors (*samurai*) of hundreds domains(藩 *han*) and generally excluded all others, especially peasants who were majority of the people. Hence, within the area we today think of as Japan, there were hundreds of different domains and hundreds of different *kokumin* groups.

In 1868, when the Boshin war⁸⁾ broke out, future Meiji elites really shocked by a scene that all the people excepts samurai in the domain of Aizu ran away without minding crisis of their domain. They found that there was no nation who wanted to sacrifice his life for their state(*kokka*). Fukuzawa Yukichi(福沢諭吉) wrote famous statement in his book *An Outline of a Theory of Civilization*(文明論之概略 *Bummeiron no gairyaku*) in 1875: “while there is a government in Japan, there is no nation (*kokumin*).”⁹⁾

They felt that building *kokumin* was the urgent task for the government, because they aimed to build nation-state. Yet, the concept and reality of nation, as a unification of all the people in Japan, was still obscure during 1880s.

8) This war was a civil war between Tokugawa Shogunate supporters and those seeking to return political power to the Emperor.

9) Cited from Kevin M Doak, *A History of Nationalism in Modern Japan: Placing the People* (Leiden/Boston: Brill, 2007), 166.

“Our nation” or “We” was strongly felt when people was conscious of “foreigner” or “They”, especially when people felt that “we” were victims. In 1884, Gapsin Coup occurred in Korea, forty Japanese lived there were killed. The Japanese newspapers agitated people’s hostility against Korea, then, the hostility engendered “We Japanese” consciousness(「我々日本人」意識) and contempt for China and Korea among people.¹⁰⁾

Besides, when the Meiji Imperial Constitution, which defined the people of Japan as “imperial subject(s)”(臣民 *shinmin*), was promulgated on 2 February, 1889, the symbolic gesture of raising both hands and shouting “Banzai”(万歳) was promoted as helpful in creating a sense of unity among a diverse population, particularly when used as an expression of best wishes directed towards the Tenno. This gesture created a sense of unity among “fellow strangers”, and related their sentiment to the emperor directly.

Then Imperial portraits(御真影 *Goshinei*) were prominently displayed where the public assembled for meetings and celebrations, and showing respect to these pictures was deemed appropriate, as the first act in order of business, before anything else happened. The *Hinomaru*(日の丸) flag began to take on the role of a “national” flag, and was often to be seen on display during ceremonies or on public holidays.

Also in schools, children were taught to sing “*Kimigayo*”(君が代), an anthem expressing best wishes for the Tenno, as the de

10) Norio Makihara, *Kyakubun to kokumin no aida: Kindai minshu no seiji ishiki* (Tokyo: Yoshikawa kobunkan, 1998), 139-143.

facto “national anthem”.¹¹⁾ A national flag, a national anthem, the imperial portrait, proclaiming *banzai* were seen as a “four-piece set” for unifying the nation, for promoting a sense of national unity among the people of Japan(日本国民 *Nihon Kokumin*).¹²⁾ Moreover, in 1890 came the “Imperial Rescript on Education”(教育勅語 *Kyoiku Chokugo*) in which the Tenno was designated as the moral head of the Japanese nation, and the relationship of the Tenno with his subjects was seen as the foundation for all moral principles. While not explicitly “religious”, Maruyama Masao was led to note that, since it proclaimed “the Japanese State, as a moral entity has the monopoly right to determine values ... so it is hardly surprising that there was a clash between Christianity and the national policy on education.”¹³⁾

As a sense of national identity grew and deepened among the Japanese people, and as the state promoted the Tenno as a source of morality, how did the Catholic Church respond to the situation?

An initial response was offered already in 1890 at the First Synod of Japan and Korea held in Nagasaki. In a synod declaration, offering a reflection on the First Commandment, some principles of guidance were offered. Displaying the Hinomaru, and placing a ceremonial lantern next to it, on national holidays like National Foundation Day(紀元節 *Kigensetu*),¹⁴⁾ was considered

11) Though long customarily considered Japan’s “national flag” and “national anthem”, the “Hinomaru” and “Kimigayo” only achieved such status formally and legally with a law passed in August 1999.

12) Makihara, *Kyakubun to kokumin no aida*, 159-172.

13) Doak, *A History of Nationalism in Modern Japan*, 94.

14) In 1872 the Meiji government designated February 11 as a national holiday to

permissible. Such acts were patriotic acts and not religious; as the declaration stated, they were not symbols of superstition, and if there were signs that witnessed to the Christian religion it was acceptable. As a general principle it was suggested that if an act could not be considered “superstition”, then it was acceptable. So the Synod opened the way to some degree of “political” accommodation.

The following year, 1891, however, gave witness to the strength of an emerging Tenno centered nationalism. *Uchimura Kanzo*(内村鑑三), a leading Christian thinker and activist was accused of “lese-majesty” failing to show due respect to the Tenno. During a ceremony of welcome for a copy of the “Imperial Rescript on Education”, that had been sent to the Imperial First High School (第一高等中学校), Uchimura, who was a teacher there at that time, was adjudged to have failed to show appropriate respect for the Rescript that carried the signature of the Tenno. The “*Uchimura Kanzo Lese-majesty Incident*”, (内村鑑三不敬事件) drew a storm of criticism against Christianity, and resulted in Uchimura’s resignation from his teaching post. Inoue Tetsujiro, Professor of Philosophy at Tokyo Imperial University, attacked Christianity in his book “*The Clash Between Religion and Education*”(教育と宗教の衝突 *Kyouiku to Shukyou no Shoutotsu*). He declared that, since the “Imperial Rescript on Education”, which “puts into writings Japan’s unique morals,” was incompatible with the values of Christians, “who make no distinction of race or state, taking all

celebrate the foundation of Japan by Jimmu Tenno, the first Tenno.

people to be the children of God.” He concluded, “Christianity was harmful to the state, because it was incompatible with the spirit of the Imperial Rescript.”¹⁵⁾

Two Catholic priests, François Linguel (a French Paris Mission Father) and Maeda Chota (a Japanese diocesan priest)¹⁶⁾ rejected Inoue’s position on the incompatibility of Christianity and respect for the Tenno — the “Imperial Rescript on Education”. In their joint work *Religion and the State*(宗教と国家 *Shuukyō to Kokka*) published in 1893, they insisted that “support for the state, the monarch and the Imperial Rescript on Education were in no way incompatible with Catholicism.”¹⁷⁾ A charge of disloyalty to the Tenno did not apply to Catholics. They cited Jesus’ command “*Render therefore to Caesar the things that are Caesar’s, and to God the things that are God’s*”(Matt. 22,21) as evidence that Catholics could be loyal subjects of the Tenno. Furthermore, they asserted that disrespect of the state or the Tenno was contrary to the teachings of the Catholic Church, and Catholic respect and honor for His Majesty was beyond question.¹⁸⁾ Their effort to offer a refutation met with incomprehension, the book was banned immediately upon publication, and a negative image of the Catholic Church, as potentially disloyal, remained present in Japanese society.

Any further attempts, at defending the loyalty of Japanese

15) Doak, *A History of Nationalism in Modern Japan*, 98.

16) Maeda Chota 前田長太 was one of the first Japanese priests ordained for the Tokyo diocese.

17) Doak, *A History of Nationalism in Modern Japan*, 99.

18) *Ibid.*

Catholics, were overshadowed by Japanese involvement in a series of international conflicts, which also served to promote a strong sense of national identity. The First *Sino-Japanese War* (1894-1895) saw a “war fever” grip on the whole country with news of a series of victories over China. Countless celebrations of victory were held throughout the country. People walked in parades down avenues decorated with the *Hinomaru*, shouting “Hurrah for the Emperor”(天皇陛下万歳 *Tenno Heika Banzai*). A strong sense of national unity was palpable during these celebrations of victory.

In such an atmosphere, pervaded by a strong sense of national consciousness, Christians of all shades and denominations had their patriotism questioned. Expressions of doubt at the loyalty and patriotism of Christians increased as the war brought out ever stronger expressions of nationalism. In order to dispel such doubts Christians, in turn, sought a reputation for being patriotic, by engaging in open and public shows of co-operation in the war effort.¹⁹⁾ In Catholic churches Masses were offered for Japan’s victory.²⁰⁾

During the Russo-Japanese War (1904-1905) the Russian Orthodox Church in Japan and its faithful were denounced as spies and traitors. Fidelity to Russian Orthodoxy was deemed equivalent to loyalty to Russia, the nation. Japanese Russian Orthodox faithful in turn insisted that they were “loyal and faithful,” and that there was no contradiction between their fidelity to Russian Orthodoxy, and their

19) Masamichi Ogawara, *Kindai nihon no sensou to syukyoku* (Tokyo: Kodansha, 2010), 115-117.

20) Takashi Gono, *Nihon kirisutokyo shi* (Tokyo: Yoshikawa Kobunkan, 1990), 286.

loyalty to the nation of Japan.²¹⁾ The Catholic Church, for its part, increased contributions to the war effort, as a show of their unstinting cooperation with the Tenno and the nation. There was no evidence of an anti-war sentiment from the Catholic Church; such patriotic shows of loyalty to the nation at war give witness to the level of accommodation that was seen as acceptable in wartime.

2.2 “Offering reverence at shrines” and the Catholic Church since the Meiji Restoration

The Catholic Church showed a different attitude to Shinto, compared to its position regarding the Tenno and the nation state. Beginning in 1898, the Church forbade the participation of the faithful in rites that were considered “superstitions”. That same year, in response to an inquiry from the newly established Vicariate for Japan regarding participation in “Funeral Rites”, the Holy See responded:

Provided they hold themselves truly passive by not cooperating in the superstitious rite in any manner and by not being present, if this is possible, this can be permitted as explained in the example.²²⁾

This instruction, from the Holy Office, was obviously based on the principles established in the bulls, *Ex illa die*(1715) and *Ex quo singulari*(1742). However, a decision by the Vicariate, in 1868, gave special attention to the subsequent problem of “paying

21) See Ogawara, *Kindai nihon no sensou to syukyoku*, 138-146.

22) George Minamiki, *The Chinese Rites Controversy: From Its Beginning to Modern Times* (Chicago: Loyola University Press, 1985), 125.

reverence at a shrine”, since the focus of the Roman instruction was on “passive participation” in a “superstitious rite.” The key question was, are “shrine rites” to be considered “superstitions”?

Consequently, as mentioned above, at the First Synod of Japan and Korea, certain principles were laid down:

- a. Nothing is to be condemned unless it is contrary to religion or good behavior.
- b. Any rite ... is now performed without a superstitious intension according to the common understanding of the people, is not to be prohibited as superstitious.
- c. It is permissible to tolerate a rite which may be of some superstitious origin and which up to now may have been practiced by pagans with a superstitious intension provided that some meaning agreeable to reason ... has been attributed to the act and provided that into its practice some change has been introduced by which in the common understanding of the people or in the judgment of the state it is no longer looked upon as pagan (ethnicus).²³⁾

Following these principles, later statements by the Vicariate talked about cooperation in superstitious acts.

Such cooperation is to be judged formal and intrinsically evil if it is part of the superstitious act — otherwise it can be judged as material cooperation; and the latter is permissible if the omission of the act would entail a grave burden to the person — and this holds even if it might be a source of “scandal to the weak”.²⁴⁾

23) Minamiki, *The Chinese Rites Controversy*, 126.

24) *Ibid.*

Hence, by just material presence at “superstitious rites”, such as a Buddhist funeral, a Christian is not open to correction, admonishment, if a previous confession of faith is made, and there is no danger of scandal, or a perversion of faith.

While the Catholic Church was willing to accept the possibility of a conditional presence, at some “superstitious acts”, it continued to maintain a strict line regarding worship at a shrine or temple. In 1896 the first provincial synod of Tokyo was held, and it was decided that a common catechism and prayer book should be published. One finds more precise guideline regarding shrine visitation in the catechism published in 1896.

In the catechism “*Tenshu Kokyo Yori*”(天主公教要理)²⁵⁾, this matter is treated in the section dealing with the first commandment. The catechism states that, in accord with

the first commandment, blind belief(盲信 moshin), and sacrilege(瀆聖 tokusei) are prohibited. Blind belief-moshin here means believing in the [Shinto] gods and Buddha as found in our society(世間 seken), worshipping idols, believing in talisman cards(札fuda), charms, fortune telling, and the like. Worshipping(詣で mode) at temples, offering incense and flowers [to the dead], contributing to shrines and temples, and the like are regarded as sins of blind belief-moshin.²⁶⁾

The prayer book, published in the same year, offered similar guidelines regarding funerals and shrine visits. These guidelines,

25) It was published by Hakodate Catholic Church in 1896 in Hakodate.

26) Minamiki, *The Chinese Rites Controversy*, 127.

which deal with the first commandment, appear in the section devoted to preparation for confession, as part of a list to assist in examination of conscience:

Sins of moshin. Worshiping idols. Setting up kamidana, a butsudana, an ihai, or possessing talisman cards or charms. Offering a tomyo (a taper or flowers to the gods or to Buddha), or worshipping at a shrine or temple, or making a contribution for these purposes.²⁷⁾

The substance of these answers, given in both the catechism and the list for examination of conscience in the prayer book, remained the same through all editions of both books issued up till 1930s. They served as a reminder to the Japanese faithful of their duties with regard to funerals and shrine visits. Added emphasis was given by the fact that they were given as part of the explanation offered or commentary given on the first commandment.

Such prohibitions came to be seen as a hallmark of the stance of the Catholic Church in Japan. The faithful were not permitted to offer incense at funerals, neither could students offer a sign of reverence in front of shrines.

The Japanese government tried to gain acceptance for the practice of shrine visitation by Catholics, as a symbol of loyalty and patriotism, by pointing to the 1900 separation of the *Bureau of Shrines*(神社局 *Jinjakyoku*) and the *Bureau of Religions*(宗教局 *Shukyokyoku*). Shinto, they said, was exclusively a patriotic cult, and its rites were purely civil in nature, be they in honor of the

27) Minamiki, *The Chinese Rites Controversy*, 128.

ancestors of the Imperial family, or of the war dead. However the Catholic Church continued to forbid participation by the faithful in shrine ceremonies. The insisted, however, that such non-participation in Shinto rites should not be interpreted as a lack of patriotism. There was a categorical difference between the two matters: shrine visitation and patriotism.

On the other hand, following the First World War, certain shifts in Catholic mission theology and policy began to emerge. Indigenization became a policy priority, particularly with regard to the formation of an indigenous clergy. On November 30th 1919 Pope Benedict XV issued an apostolic letter *Maximum illud*, in which he stated:

[I]t is absolutely necessary to mold and build up an indigenous clergy.... Neither should the indigenous priest be reared for the sole purpose of assisting foreign missionaries in subordinate ministry, but he should be fitted for his divine task.²⁸⁾

One early result of this shift saw the ordination by Pius XI of five Chinese bishops in 1926.

Also prior to World War I, missionary activities by the Catholic Church had been intimately linked with Western colonial policy. For instance, in China, this link was most conspicuous. Missionaries working in China gained strong diplomatic protection under the treaties that China was forced to sign by western military powers. European governments, especially the French government behaved as if it was the protector, over against the Chinese government, of all

28) Minamiki, *The Chinese Rites Controversy*, 191.

missionaries and Chinese Catholic faithful. Missionaries in turn accepted this arrangement as normal and in no way untoward or compromising.

While missionaries themselves were seldom eager supporters of imperialism, they were always willing to utilize and accept help from Western powers in Africa and Asia. Many saw a link between the military, commercial and diplomatic superiority of the West and the moral superiority of Christianity. Most were also contaminated, at least unconsciously, by a self-righteous mentality that saw Western culture as the best and only true culture on earth. They assumed equivalence between propagating Christianity and propagating Western culture, its life style and values. The emergence of an attitude of respect for the cultural uniqueness of each mission country at the Holy See, and in the field, was possibly the best antidote to such thinking.

Also, after World War I, following a request from Rear Admiral Yamamoto Shinjiro(山本信次郎)²⁹⁾, the Catholic Church in Japan appealed once more to Rome for guidance on the topic of the difficulties faced by the Japanese faithful regarding participation in Shinto rites. Msgr. Tiberghien of Propaganda Fide responded to this request by commissioning two French historians, Louis Brehier and Pierre Battifol, to investigate what precedents could be established,

29) Yamamoto Shinjiro was born in 1877 and educated by the Marists in Tokyo. He was baptized by a Marist in 1891, and after graduation he entered the Japanese navy. Rising to rank of Rear Admiral Yamamoto attended the Paris Peace Conference in 1918, and on return to Japan from the conference, he became the Emperor's tutor.

from the historical case of the relationship of the Church to the ancient Roman and later Byzantine Empire, particularly with regard to the Imperial cult. The results of the two historians research were published in 1920 in *Les Survivances du cults impérial Romain*.

The book described the gradual secularization of the Imperial cult that saw it emptied of its superstitious character, becoming purely civil and political. One of the authors wrote that it would be good to keep in mind the Apostolic Constitution *Ex illa die* of Clement XI (1715), issued in response to the funeral rites dispute, which while it rejected participation in all that was clearly superstitious, also went on to note possible exceptions, so leading the writer to note:

The Christian emperors had declared their rejection of all superstition ... in order that the analogy between the imperial Roman cult and Shinto might be made, it would be necessary that official Shinto be declared a purely civil and political matter by the imperial authority on which it depends.³⁰⁾

One further result of the appeal by Rear Admiral Yamamoto was an agreement that, all future problems, regarding the Catholic Church and participation in Shinto rites, would be handled directly by the Apostolic Delegate, the official representative of the Holy See in Tokyo.

It is in the context of this historical background that the Sophia University-Yasukuni Shrine Incident occurred.

30) Minamiki, *The Chinese Rites Controversy*, 133.

3. Sophia University and the Yasukuni Shrine Incident

This incident has its roots in a refusal, by students of the Jesuit run Sophia University, to pay reverence to the war dead when they visited Yasukuni Shrine.

The students visit to Yasukuni Shrine, on May 5, 1932 took place in a historical context marked by increasing militarism in the Japanese army, and in particular in the Kwantung Army. On September 18th 1931 occurred the Manchurian Incident(the September 18 Incident), followed in 1932 by the January 28th Incident, and the establishment of puppet state of Manchukuo in Manchuria in February of that year, leading eventually to the full scale invasion of China by the Japanese army in 1937.

Beginning in 1923, following an agreement between the Ministry of the Army and the Ministry of Education, military officers were assigned to all secondary schools and universities to supervise programs in basic military training for all male students. By 1925 a military officer(配属将校 *haizoku shoko*) was assigned to both middle and high schools, and also to universities. His main duties were to supervise military drill and a program of studies in military science.³¹⁾ The latter focused on indoctrinating the students respecting the need for a strong national defense. He was authorized to overrule the Principal, or the President of the school or university, on matters that touched on what the Ministry of the Army considered its area of competence. In the following year,

31) Mami Kurihara, "Haizoku shoko no zii tai". *Kirisutokyo shakai mondai kenkyu* 55 (December, 2006), 107-111.

1929, Sophia University agreed to the assignment of a military officer.

1930 saw the establishment of the “Shrine System Investigation Committee”(神社制度調査会 *Jinja chosakai*). Since the early years of the Meiji period, the “religious” identity of Shinto had been an ongoing topic of dispute. Through the investigation committee, the government sought to offer a definitive ruling on this topic. In its presentation to the committee the Home Ministry insisted that “revering the deities and treasuring the rites was the great Way of the nation, and had been since its foundation”, and it declared: “The anchor of the people’s lives and the source of their ethics are to be found here. It is essential for those in power to explain as widely as possible, and in the most thorough-going manner, the significance of shrine rites.”³²⁾ In conclusion, the committee proclaimed the official position that shrines were non-religious, and Shinto is above religion in its nature.

Further strict government controls of religion were already in place, particularly with respect to “new” religions such as *Oomoto*, which, while being rooted in Shinto, had an alternative myth that conflicted with the official mythology³³⁾ and also with Christianity where worship of God was prioritized over reverence paid to the

32) Koremaru Sakamoto, “The structure of state Shinto: its creation, development and demise” in *Shinto in History: Ways of the Kami*, eds. John Breen and Mark Teeuwen (Richmond: Curzon Press, 2000), 283.

33) About the persecution of *Oomoto*, see Keiichi Hayase, *Oomoto shugeki* (Tokyo: Mainichi Shinbunsha, 2007).

Tenno. All these considerations delineate the social and historical context of the Sophia/Yasukuni incident.

On May 5th, 1932, Colonel Kitahara Hitomi(北原一視), the military officer assigned to Sophia, led a party of some 60 students to Yasukuni Shrine. On entering the shrine precincts, the two or three Catholic students in the group (according to reports the numbers vary) declined to make the customary acts of reverence before the main shrine. Consequently on returning to the university Colonel Kitahara recommended to Fr. Henry Hoffman, President of Sophia, that the students be disciplined. Fr. Hoffmann declined, replying that Catholics were neither accustomed nor permitted to offer reverence to one's ancestors or the war dead. His refusal was reported to the Ministry for the Army, setting up a confrontation between the two sides.

The Ministry of Education initially supported Sophia, but the Ministry for the Army took an increasingly hard line, which resulted in the Ministry of Education's act on June 14,th informing Fr. Hoffmann that Colonel Kitahara was going to be recalled. The reason offered for the recall was that, "the spirit of Sophia University did not conform to the principals of Japanese education."³⁴) Recall of Colonel Kitahara carried with it the implicit threat of loss of accreditation for the university.

Fr. Hoffman sought the advice of Bishop Johannes Ross, fellow Jesuit and Bishop of Hiroshima, who had been struggling with a

34) Minamiki, *The Chinese Rites Controversy*, 141.

related problem. Crucial to this problem was *canon 1258*, of the Code of Canon Law, promulgated by Benedict XV in 1917. *Canon 1258, §1* placed restrictions on active participation of Catholics in the rites of other religions, but *canon 1258, §2* noted possible exceptions. Bishop Ross in turn consulted Archbishop Jean Alexis Chambon of Tokyo, who on July 5th indicated orally, on the basis of *canon 1258, §2* that it was permissible for Catholic students to participate in the rites at shrines where the war dead were commemorated. Notification to this effect was then made to the Ministry of the Army and similarly, Archbishop Chambon's opinion was communicated to the Catholic students.

September 18th 1932, the first anniversary of the "Manchurian Incident", saw special celebrations to mark the recognition of Manchukuo. Students from universities in Tokyo, including some 100 from Sophia University gathered in front of the Imperial Palace, and then marched to Yasukuni Shrine to pay their respect to the war dead on the Manchurian front; at the agreed signal arms were presented. Permission for participation by Catholic students in the act of homage was presumed on the basis of the opinion expressed by Archbishop Chambon on July 5th.

On September 22nd Archbishop Chambon sent a formal letter to the Minister of Education, Hatoyama Ichiro(鳩山一郎), seeking clarification of the reasoning behind and the meaning of Shrine ceremonies. In his letter the Archbishop inquired specifically about the "religious" aspects of the rite.

Are we take it for certain that the reasons for requiring participation in these ceremonies are patriotic and not religious? Moreover, I assure your excellency that we would experience less difficulty in the matter if it could be clearly stated that the inclination of the head — which the students are called upon to do — has a patriotic and in no way a religious meaning.³⁵⁾

What the church needed above all was a written official declaration from the Japanese government, stating that ceremonies at the shrine were not religious acts.

On September 30, 1932, the vice minister Awaya Ken forwarded to the Archbishop the official response from the Ministry of Education, which stated that

the visit to the national shrines is required of the students of the higher schools and the students of the middle and primary schools for reasons which conform to the program of education. In this instance, the bow that is required of the group of students of the higher schools and the students of the middle and primary schools has no other purpose than that of manifesting the sentiments of patriotism and loyalty.³⁶⁾

Both the Church and the Ministry of Education thought that this official response had brought the affair to an amicable conclusion. However, the Ministry of the Army and the various news agencies,

35) Minamiki, *The Chinese Rites Controversy*, 145. This letter is discussed in detail in Toshihiko Nishiyama, *Katoriiku kyokai no sensou sekinin* (Tokyo: San Pauro, 2000), 40-45.

36) Minamiki, *The Chinese Rites Controversy*, 145. See also Nishiyama, *Katoriiku kyokai no sensou sekinin*, 45-49.

which were controlled by the Ministry, thought otherwise. The following day, *Hochi Shimbun*, published out of Tokyo, printed an article on the “May 5th Yasukuni Incident”, which was picked up by other agencies and newspapers. In the ensuing furor, in December Colonel Kitahara was recalled, and no replacement was assigned. Graduates were unable to find employment, many students left the university, and only some 30 students enrolled as freshmen for the new academic year. Sophia suddenly saw the threat of closure looming on its horizon.

This strain continued for a year, and during this period Fr. Hoffman and some other Jesuit professors and students of Sophia voluntarily visited Yasukuni shrine several times in order to show their patriotism and loyalty. Finally on December 12th, 1933 the Ministry of the Army assigned a new officer to the university, bringing final closure to the whole incident.

4. The Aftermath: Accommodation to Nationalism

The incident itself came to an end, but the real problem for the Catholic Church actually began after the incident. On receiving the official response from the Ministry of Education, on 1 December, 1932, Fr. Taguchi Yoshigoro(田口芳五郎), who was then the director general of the Catholic Press Center and became Bishop of Osaka in 1941, published a handbook regarding the official response: “The Catholic View about the State”(カトリック的 国家観 *Katoriiku teki kokka kan*).

In this book, Fr. Taguchi wrote:

The Catholics was second to none in keeping a spirit of loyalty and patriotism. The Catholics could faithfully show their loyalty and patriotism in accord with natural law and divine law. If it is necessary to die for Tenno or Japan, the Catholics will go into the jaws of the death in high spirits with their whole heart as if they were martyrs. Furthermore, the Catholic is never inferior to adherents of other religions regarding showing its respect for people who died for the Tenno and their motherland.³⁷⁾

He explained that offering reverence at shrines includes two aspects, “loyal and patriotic” and religious, and that the inclination of the head, which students are called upon to do, has patriotic meaning but no religious meaning at all. Hence, he wrote, students can show their loyalty and patriotism as other religious students do by saluting in front of Shinto shrines.³⁸⁾

In 1933, Archbishop Paul Marella came to Japan as the new Apostolic Delegate. He was soon convinced that the numerous problems related to Shinto were the main obstacle to the work of the Catholic Church in Japan. If the Shinto rites no longer had specific religious significance but just a civil meaning and value, the problems could be resolved. On May 8, 1935, he wrote a long report to Propaganda Fide explaining his view, and asked Rome to revise their decision on the Japanese rites.

On 8 December, 1935 Archbishop Marella issued an instruction sent to all superiors of religious institutes and educational facilities

37) Yoshigoro Taguchi, *Katoriiku teki kokka kan* (Tokyo: Katoriiku Chuou Shuppanbu, 1932), 149.

38) *Ibid.*, 147.

in Japan. The first section of this document dealt with “the patriotic and nationalistic spirit” declared that the general principal was “great open-mindedness with regard to activities which are not opposed to the Catholic faith, and at the same time sincere cooperation with those activities that can be understood as manifestations of love towards the country.”³⁹⁾ Thus, if some activities no longer have a special religious character such as raising the Hinomaru on national holidays, the Catholics could do them. And when activities have patriotic and religious character at the same time, then, if they can be interpreted “as a civil expression of the national sentiment”, they should not be condemned or prohibited.⁴⁰⁾

The next year, on 26 May, Propaganda Fide issued the instruction *Pluries instanterque* with regard to the duties of the Catholics towards their country. *Pluries instanterque* not only allowed Catholics to attend Shinto shrines but also encouraged them to attend. The reason was;

[T]he ceremonies usually performed in the Jinja administered civilly by the Government, the civil authorities, ... as well as the common opinions of persons of a certain culture, attribute only a significance of love of country; that is, of filial reverence toward the Imperial Family and the benefactors of the fatherland. Hence, they must instruct the faithful that, since these ceremonies have only a purely civil value, it is lawful for Catholics to take part in them and comfort themselves like the other citizens.⁴¹⁾

39) Minamiki, *The Chinese Rites Controversy*, 152.

40) *Ibid.*, 153.

41) *Ibid.*, 156.

In order to offer a model to the faithful, in February, 1937, when Cardinal Dennis Dougherty of Philadelphia, who was the papal delegate at the International Eucharistic Congress in Manila, visited Japan on his way back to the USA from the Philippines, he visited the Yasukuni and the Meiji Shrines along with the apostolic delegate Archbishop Paul Marella, Archbishop Chambon of Tokyo, and some prominent members of the clergy and the laity. At last, for the Catholic Church in Japan, it seemed, the Shrine question was settled. Eventually, in 1942, “Visits to shrines” was deleted from the list of sins given for examination conscience on the first commandment in the prayer book, and the Q & A about blind belief in the Catechism was changed to the effect of not mentioning visitation of shrines.

As I mentioned earlier, the Catholic Church in Japan was so cautious regarding superstition, non-Christian religion and its rites that it strictly prohibited the faithful from taking part in shrine ceremonies or in Buddhist funerals. At the same time, however, the Church showed a positive and quite contrary attitude to nationalism, patriotism, and loyalty towards the Tenno, and sought to prove that Catholics were loyal subjects of Tenno and Japan. Accordingly, when the government officially confirmed that Shinto rites were not “religious” per se, but rather should be considered “civil”, state rites, and that visits to national shrines were merely a means of manifesting sentiments of patriotism and loyalty, the boundary between patriotic activities like raising *Hinomaru* on national holidays and superstitious activities like visiting shrine was rendered invisible.

On the other hand, within the same period, the Vatican was promoting worldwide a policy of indigenization. So once the Japanese government offered guarantees that “offering reverence at shrines” had a patriotic and in no way a religious meaning, the Church could interpret Shinto rites as no longer “religious”, nor as superstition, but mere “civil” ceremonies rooted in Japanese traditions and possessing a strong integrating function in society. Further, the Catholic Church was able to argue that, in line with Vatican policy, its own interpretation of both the Vatican decree, and the official government understanding of Shinto, it was doing no more than engaging in an act of accommodation. It was doing no more than demonstrating its loyalty and patriotism. However, by choosing to demonstrate its loyalty and patriotism, it was quietly ignoring an even more crucial problem.

One of the primary aims of the Meiji government had been to create a new centralized nation-state founded on the authority of Tenno. Within this world view, Tenno was not only a secular monarch but also “a god who is a human being”(現人神 *Ara hitogami*). The Tenno was regarded as a living god a direct descendant of *Amaterasu-Omikami*(天照大神), the Sun goddess and a central *kami* in the Shinto pantheon. Furthermore, the authority of the Tenno was based on the idea expressed in the “reigned since time immemorial”(万世一系 *bansei ikkei*) myth. The Meiji constitution affirmed that the affirmation *bansei-ikkei* was the foundation of the sovereignty of Tenno. In a word, the state as an object of patriotism, which the Catholic Church was prepared to

accommodate to, was a state founded on the unique religious authority of the Tenno, the highest authority in Shinto.

At the core of the Japanese government ideology was the conviction that the essence of patriotism was to “guard and maintain the prosperity of Our Imperial Throne with heaven and earth.”⁴²⁾ Obedience to the Tenno was the most important virtue to be promoted among the Japanese, among the Tenno’s imperial subjects. Public witness of patriotic sentiment by the Church became unavoidably acts of obedience to a living god, the Tenno. In the catechism of 1942, the Church went as far as teaching that Catholics must understand Christian doctrine in accord with the way(道 *michi*) of the Empire(皇国 *kokoku*), since they were subjects of the Empire. In addition, it said that adherents of Catholicism could not be considered good and faithful members of the Japanese Catholic Church, until they demonstrated a commitment to “guard and maintain the prosperity of Our Imperial Throne with heaven and earth.” Such instruction contradicts the very essence of the Christianity and its belief in following the one God.

In the particular historical context of 1942 to “guard and maintain the prosperity of Our Imperial Throne” meant nothing less than total support and cooperation in the war effort in the name of the Tenno. In 1943 the Catholic Church in Japan issued a policy document stating that the Church’s guiding principle was success in completing the aims of the “Greater East Asia War”(大東亞戦争 *Dai Toa*

42) These words are from the “Rescript on Education.”

Senso), using all its energy and resources. The Catholic Church cooperated in the war effort, for example, by sending a group of Japanese Catholic priests and seminarians to the Philippines as part of the Japanese Imperial Army in 1942. They were known as “The Religious Section for propaganda”(宗教宣撫班 *Shukyo Senbuan*) and their task was to solicit the support of the Catholic Church in the Philippines through its propaganda activities.⁴³⁾

In accord with the instruction of 1936, the Catholic Church in Japan intended to seek ways of accommodation with the Japanese culture, but what the Church actually did resulted in accommodating to the demands of Japanese ultra nationalism. Such accommodation is in direct conflict with the original, guiding principle of accommodation, that is to accommodate “without changing the essence of gospel.” From the very beginning this was the real challenge, the real question that lay at the heart of the Yasukuni Shrine Incident.

43) The work on this topic is Terada, Takefumi, “Shukyo senbu seisaku to Kirisuto kyokai”, in *Nihon senryoka no Philippines*, ed. Setsuho Ikehata (Tokyo: Iwanami Shoten, 1996), 225-290.

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초기 쇼와시대(昭和時代)의 신토, 국가주의 그리고 가톨릭교회

미요시 치하루(三好 千春) S.A.

이 논문은 극단적 국가주의가 크게 영향을 미치고 있었던 초기 쇼와시대에 일본 가톨릭교회의 교회 선교정책인 ‘적응주의’를 재검토한다. 일본 가톨릭교회는 신사 참배가 죄, 또는 신사예식이 미신행위라고 간주하였기 때문에, 신사를 방문하는 관행(‘신사참배’)에 참여하는 것을 거부하였다. 그러나 1932년의 ‘상지대학교-야스쿠니신사 사건’과 그 여파는 교회의 정책에 변화를 촉발하였다. 바티칸의 신앙 교리 성성(Propaganda Fide)은 ‘Pluries instanterque’라는 교령을 발표하면서 신사 예식이 단지 시민사회와 관련된 가치만을 가진다는 이유로 가톨릭 신자들에게 신사참배를 허용할 뿐 아니라 격려하였다. 이 바티칸 교령과 더불어 일본정부도 신사참배는 애국적인 행위이지 결코 종교적인 의미가 아니라고 보증하였기에, 가톨릭교회는 신사참배를 적응주의의 한 행위에 불과하다고 보았다. 그러나 이 논문은 ‘국가 신토’가 천황의 유일무이한 종교적 권위위에 세워졌다는 문제를 지적한다. 그래서 교회의 애국적 감정의 표현들은 살아있는 신인 천황에 대한 복종의 행위로 불가피하게 귀결되었다. 그러기에 일본의 가톨릭교회는 일본 문화에의 적응의 방법을 찾으려고 하였지만 실제로는 일본의 극단적 국가주의의 요구에 적응하는 결과를 낳게 되었다.

주제어: 적응주의, 일본의 가톨릭교회, 국가주의, 상지대학교, 국가 신토, 야스쿠니 신사 사건

Abstract

Shinto, Nationalism and the Catholic Church in the Early Showa Era

Miyoshi Chiharu, S.A.

This article discusses the topic of ‘accommodation’ in the Church's policy in mission as it was understood by the Japanese Catholic Church in the early Showa era when ultra nationalism was very influential. The Catholic Church in Japan had rejected participation in the practice of shrine visitation since worshipping at shrines was regarded as a sin, and shrine rites were considered superstition. However, the ‘Sophia University -Yasukuni Shrine Incident’ in 1932 and its aftermath precipitated a shift in the Church's policy. The Vatican's *Propaganda Fide* issued an instruction *Pluries instanterque* that not only allowed but also encouraged Catholics to attend the Shinto shrine rites, since ceremonies at shrines, it maintained, had only civil values. With the Vatican decree and also guarantees by the Japanese government stating that offering reverence at shrines had patriotic but in no way religious meaning, shrine visits were seen by the Catholic Church as no more than an act of accommodation. However, this article points out, the problem was that the ‘State Shinto’ was founded on the unique religious authority of the Tenno(Emperor). Expressions of patriotic sentiment by the Church became unavoidably acts of obedience to a living god, the Tenno. Thus, although the Catholic Church in Japan intended to seek ways of accommodating to the

Japanese culture, what the Church actually did resulted in accommodation to the demands of Japan's ultra nationalism.

Key Words: Accommodation, Catholic Church in Japan, Nationalism, Sophia University, State Shinto, Yasukuni Shrine Incident

논문 접수일: 2010년 9월 26일

논문 수정일: 2011년 5월 9일

논문게재 확정일: 2011년 5월 13일
