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How We Japanese Become Christians

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Abstract: I have studied the Bible “academically,” namely according to the method of Biblical Criticism. It was traditionally called “historical-critical” claiming simply that it could be “objective.” But recently it has a new trend, which takes into consideration the various readers, even including “I myself” as a “real reader.” In my opinion, this trend is not accidental, but hermeneutically inevitable.

It is useful to do a case study of this new trend of Biblical Criticism, examining the thought of Uchimura Kanzō (内村鑑三; 1861–1930), a famous scholar and founder of a very Japanese Christianity “Mukyōkai [無教会]”=“Non-Church” movement in the Meiji era, especially his commentary on the Gospel of John in the Bible. From today’s viewpoint, we can find many interesting, rather bizarre, comments in it. We might say that his commentaries are simple introductions to European or American Biblical academism. Ironically, they have a kind of academic exoticism, which probably his contemporaries could have accepted willingly. Also we could say that his interpretations about the verses of the Gospel are sometimes very manly and moralistic in a Confucian sense.

His interpretations of the Bible have a close connection with many aspects of his thought. He wanted to exclude not only local but also impure elements of American or European Christianity to extract “the most purely spiritual” Christianity. And he had a conviction that only the Japanese can do it, in fact that it was Japan’s calling to do so. But in reality Uchimura made a kind of amalgamation with Christianity and some Japanese ideals or mentalities at that time: Nationalism, (Confucian) Authoritarianism, Uprightness (especially with his hatred for money), Spiritualism (as opposed to materialism in the U.S.), and also probably a kind of Pragmatism (even if he doesn’t like the word and concept in a sense).

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Introduction

I have been studying the Bible, especially the Gospel of John, academically for years. By the word “academically,” I mean that I do research according to “Biblical Criticism.”¹ Its main modern method has been called the “historical-critical” method. “Historical” criticism of the Bible aims “to achieve historical understanding of the Bible. To accomplish this, the New

Testament documents have to be viewed in their historical and cultural context. The critics were concerned with historical events, and *the literature of the NT was used in historical reconstruction*. Actually, the reconstruction had two foci: *the historical situation which the text described* and *the historical situation of the author and recipients of the NT books.*²

But recently, there is a new trend in Biblical Criticism, which is quite different from the past “historical” one. This new trend can be collectively called “Recent (or New) Literary Criticism (of the Bible).” It began through the influence of some secular literary criticisms, called “New Criticism,” “Formalism,” or “Structuralism.”³ It attempts to treat “*the literature of the NT*” not as “*used in historical reconstruction*,” but as itself. Although traditional literary criticism is apt to treat “*the literature of the NT*” as a way to find traces, for example sources of the Gospels, for “*historical reconstruction*,” the new one consciously tries to read through “*the literature of the NT*” as a completed whole. And this new methodological trend is still developing even to the point that it has claimed that Biblical critics should take into consideration the various readers, not only the first “*recipients of the NT books*,” but also the “implied reader” or the “encoded reader” and the “real reader” even including us ourselves.⁴

In my opinion, this direction of methodological development is not accidental, but inevitable.⁵ In other words, this is a deep hermeneutical change of the method. The traditional “historical” Biblical Criticism presupposes that any critics should/could be objective about the Bible or the “*historical reconstruction*.” But the new method denies such a naïve presupposition and in turn argues that “the interests and ideologies of the scholars doing the research are always replicated in their”⁶ products. It admits that no critic can be completely objective about the Bible. We critics should carry out our criticism while considering ourselves “—either the elite, professionally trained, late twentieth century Western (Eastern, neither American nor European, or mongoloid; Sasaki) male reader, or the feminist reader, or the third-world postcolonial reader.”⁷ This is very self-reflective consciousness of the discipline and now we cannot flee from this self-reflectiveness. So I say that this is a deep hermeneutical or cognitive-philosophical change of any criticisms.⁸

1. A case study of the new method in Biblical Criticism

So my ultimate project is to show how this “I myself” (just as described above) can read the Bible, especially the Gospel of John, here (in a local area of Japan) and now (in the 21st century). But before that, as practice for such a Biblical Criticism in order to keep the “real reader” in sight, I would like to do a case study about a Japanese scholar of the Bible in the Meiji era (1868–1911). His name is Uchimura Kanzō (内村鑑三; 1861–1930), and he is the famous founder and missionary of a very Japanese Christian denomination called “Mukyōkai [無教会]” or in English, “Non-Church” Christianity.⁹

Uchimura was not a Biblical scholar by profession and did not hold any professional posts at any institutes. But he authored a huge collection of writings including massive commentaries on the Bible, which we can consider “scientific” in the exact meaning of the word in his time.¹⁰ So we call him a Biblical scholar and even a pioneer of academic Biblical scholarship in Japan.

At that time, it couldn't be said that we had any academic biblical scholars by occupation in Japan.

To know directly and literally how he became a Christian, it is enough for us to read his book written in English, *How I Became a Christian: Out of my Diary* (1895). But, his Christianity continued to evolve throughout his life and we can say that the first generation of academic and professional Biblical scholars was produced under his influence.¹¹ Also produced under Uchimura's influence were many famous intellectuals, writers, presidents of colleges and universities.¹² So it is extremely suitable to examine Uchimura's life and thoughts as a typical case in order to know how we Japanese became/become Christians.

In this paper, by focusing on Uchimura's attitude to the Biblical Criticism of Europe and the U.S., especially examining his Commentary on the Gospel of John minutely, which is my other field of research, I will find a clue to answer the question of "How we Japanese become Christians."

2. Uchimura and academic or "scientific" Biblical Criticism

Uchimura wrote many commentaries on almost all of the books of the Bible throughout his life. (They amount to 17 volumes, which are only part of his 50-volume complete works [Kyoubunkan version]).¹³ He wrote commentaries on some (not all) parts of the Gospel of John constantly for 29 years from the beginning of his missionary enterprise. The editor of his complete works (Kyoubunkan version), Yamamoto Taijirou (山本泰次郎; 1900-1979) wrote "the Gospel of John was always the center of his interests and efforts" and "the writer's [Uchimura's] faith is that of the Letter to the Romans and the Gospel of John." This editor also says that for Uchimura, the Gospel of John was very important precisely because it is such a spiritual book.¹⁴ Yamamoto introduces Uchimura's letter to his American friend:

Now I am reading the commentary on the Gospel of John written by Prof. Godet, 3 vols. with deep emotion. I think that this is the greatest in commentaries, which I have ever read about every book of the Bible. This Swiss scholar is a mentor of the faith and the knowledge of the Bible. He is thoroughly a believer in the Gospel and the best as a scholar at the same time. — This combination is truly rare at the age when the faith and the knowledge are separated. . . . After all in Europe, as the higher criticism [of the Bible] holds the prime position, also truly steady evangelicalism is holding the same position.¹⁵

With this letter, we find out that Uchimura was so moved by the commentary of Frédéric Louie Godet (1821-1900)¹⁶ and was much interested not only in his Evangelical faith but also in his academic or "scientific" criticism.

Next, let's consider some points of academic or "scientific" criticism of the Gospel of John.

Uchimura wrote the general remarks on the Gospel of John titled "What can the Gospel of John teach?" in which he discusses the so-called Johannine problem, namely the problem of its author. Even at present, we cannot say that this problem has been solved completely. But the recent general tendency is that the author of the Gospel is not the Apostle John. Uchimura

already introduced this idea, but his way of writing is very interesting:

We can call the problem of the authorship of the Gospel of John “Sekigahara (関ヶ原) [no Tatakai; 戦い] (the Battle of Sekigahara).”¹⁷

The Battle of Sekigahara in 1616 could be compared to the Battle of Gettysburg in the Civil War in the U.S. as it was the most critical battle to establish the Edo-Bakuhū [江戸幕府]¹⁸ by Shōgun [将軍] Tokugawa Ieyasu (徳川家康). Uchimura’s rhetoric is excellent:

To the Western Forces who advance that the authorship is not the Apostle John belong the prominent famous generals (Daimyō [大名]) in Biblical scholarship, just like Konishi Yukinaga (小西行長), Otani Yoshitaka (大谷吉隆), and Ukita Hideie (浮田秀家). among them is Ferdinand Christian Baur, the originator of modern Biblical Criticism.¹⁹

His knowledge is right and novel enough, especially in Japan at that time. In this context he refers to some European Biblical critics like Theodore Karl Keim (1825–1878) at Gießen and Tübingen,²⁰ Carl Heinrich von Weizsäcker (1822–1899) who is a member of so-called “Tübingen School,” Jan Hendrik Scholten (1811–1885) at Leiden, Heinrich Julius Holtzman (1832–1910) at Heidelberg and Strasburg, Joseph Ernest Renan (1823–1892) at Paris,²¹ and Karl August Hase (1800–1890) at Jena. But we should keep in mind what a manly (namely warrior-like [武士的]) metaphor his is. Uchimura compares the Eastern Forces, who advance that the author is John the Apostle, to the orthodox churches, namely foreign missionaries. Uchimura wrote:

We cannot but say that it is really a very weak point for the Eastern Forces to have the help of the churches. The churches have power and money. If you get their help, you cannot be free from their powers. So it is the agreement of churches that the fair scholars hate and stay away from them. They should keep away from the churches and engage themselves in studies. Especially when a scholar’s opinion is the same as the legend of the churches. The churches are temptations to scholarship. To maintain independence, to keep from being caught by the churches, is very difficult.²²

These words express rather his own opinion as the founder of “Non-Church” Christianity. But he acknowledges himself to be “a soldier of the Eastern Forces.”²³ So he has to defend his own position in a slightly complicated way.

At first, Uchimura mentions some, “not necessarily caught by the churches” and “keeping the purely academic position,”²⁴ Unitarian scholars²⁵ like Ezra Abbot (1819–1862) in the United States (where, Uchimura says, “we can find few scholars”) and James Drummond (1835–1860) at Manchester and other scholars like William Sanday (1843–1920) at Oxford, Christoph Ernst Luthardt (1823–1902) at Leipzig, Willibald Beyschlag (1823–1900) at Halle, Heinrich Georg August Ewald (1803–1875) at Göttingen and Tübingen, Christian Karl Josias von Bunsen (1791–1860) in Preußen, Johann August Wilhelm Neander (1789–1850) at Berlin, Wolfgang Friedrich Gess (1819–1891) at Göttingen, F. L. Godet [see above] at Paris, and Adolf Schlatter (1852–1938)

who was born in Switzerland and taught mainly at Tübingen. They all assert that the Gospel was written by John the Apostle. As a result, Uchimura wrote:

I think that there is not any other way than to admit that the Gospel of John is the work of the Apostle John. . . . But might I be injured seriously because the churches have the same opinion? . . . For me to maintain that the Gospel of John is the work of the Apostle John is not a benefit to the churches at all.²⁶

The reason for the decision above is mainly that the Gospel is “the most purely spiritual”²⁷ and so “I can claim ‘Non-Church’ Christianity on the basis of it.”²⁸ But, in my opinion, his way of discussion is not academic or “scientific” in the sense of the traditional, namely historical Biblical Criticism, but intuitional or “spiritual.”

But on this point, his assertion is shaky. Just after writing the sentence above, he wrote also:

If there might be someone who wants to follow my opinion (that the author is the Apostle) without any close academic examinations (of the Gospel), I would think that I should belong to the Western Forces to maintain that the author is not the Apostle John.²⁹

Which is his real position? Anyway we come to understand that he hates to ally himself with any kind of groups like “churches.” We can see here that for him the independence, too extreme in a sense, is very important as well as “any close academic [or “scientific”] examinations.” In my opinion, this is also a kind of warrior-like attitude, which doesn’t have any direct connections with the academic one such as Uchimura’s positioning the Eastern against the Western Forces. In fact, his approach to this Johannine problem of the authorship is not so historical-critical nor “scientific” in detail. He did not scrutinize so vigorously any internal or external evidence to answer the question “Who is the author of John’s Gospel?” but only showed some American and European scholars’ opinions and divided them into two Forces, the Eastern and the Western. His reason for the answer that it is the Apostle John is simply that “it is most purely spiritual.”³⁰

3. Some examples of Uchimura’s commentaries on the Gospel of John

Uchimura argues this Johannine problem for only three of the 25-pages of his general remarks: “What can the Gospel of John teach?” in his commentary. Posthumously, his book was edited and the commentary was put in order of the verses of the Gospel. After these general remarks, he comments on some sections but not all verses of the Gospel. And curiously, some of them are on the same sections (two times on 1:1, 6:39, 40, 44, 54, 8:2-11, 13:34-35, and 14:15; three times on 1:17, 2:1-11, 3:16, and 8:32; four times on 16:33) on different occasions. Looking at these sections, we can tell which subjects he was much interested in. He wrote general remarks on the Gospel two times, on Jesus’ miracles and deeds eight times, on Jesus’ words and teachings twenty-eight times, and on the author’s (so-called John’s) words or John the Baptist’s words ten times. I cannot examine minutely all of his commentaries on these sections in this essay, but I

would like to introduce a few typical examples of his comments.

Uchimura once wrote a commentary on John 11:1–57, the famous pericope of “the raising of Lazarus.” At first he introduces the rationalizing explanations of this account by some scholars, but he rejects such rationalizations in the end, writing:

If you want to speak with supposed academic authority, you had better drive yourself to follow these German theological masters. Who can be against their interpretations? But what benefit to our lives of faith does it have to accept such interpretations about the account of Lazarus as theirs?³¹

What rhetorical sentences these are! Which is his position or where is his historical-critical or “scientific” mind? But he has his own criterion of judgment.

But the conviction needs necessarily the deep reason. The reason accompanying our faith is superior to that of German theologians. At first, this account itself makes it clear that it cannot be any fiction.³² All people who have any experience in writing something know that you can find the clear distinction between the writings based on real experience and simply fictional descriptions. It is this case with the Lazarus’ account, too;

just like, for example, in verse 20: When Martha heard that Jesus was coming, she went and met him, while Mary sat in the house (*RSV*);

or in verse 31: When the Jews who were with her in the house, consoling her, saw Mary rise quickly and go out, they followed her, supposing that she was going to the tomb to weep there (*RSV*);

and in verse 35: Jesus wept (*RSV*).

All these writings don’t have anything to do with the subject of the account. If it was a fiction with any purpose, to insert these tiny descriptions would be completely needless. So it is the description of the real experience because it has them. The description of chapter 11 of the Gospel of John is itself the very evidence to prove that the event is real fact.³³

In my opinion, it is too naïve as historical-critical or “scientific” method. For example, Keim, whose name Uchimura mentioned and whose work he had probably read in English, wrote this about “the raising of Lazarus:”

This enrichment [of the life of Jesus by the Johannine account] is no history, but the destruction of the history. These journeys, these deeds and miracles, these addresses, these murderous attacks are unhistorical.³⁴

Uchimura’s commentaries are fundamentally expositions with a little academic flavor. He is surely very sensitive to the Greek original text of the Gospel.³⁵ But he is not so interested in many issues of contemporary Biblical Criticism (= Bibelwissenschaft), for example, the problems of literary criticism on the Gospel of John, which includes discussing any historical processes or any sources of the text,³⁶ or the research on its religious-historical backgrounds.³⁷ The works

presenting these issues rushed onto the biblical critical scene at the end of the 19th century and the beginning of the 20th century. So even though Uchimura might have possibly known them, he never mentions them.³⁸ So his commentaries are, in a good light, the product of his industrious studies on Europe and American Biblical scholarship. But at the same time, we cannot forget that he holds these countries in contempt.³⁹ We might say that his commentaries are simple introductions to European or American Biblical academism. Ironically, they have a kind of academic exoticism, which probably his Japanese contemporaries could have accepted willingly.

Looking at another commentary of Uchimura's, we may find it very interesting to know his fundamental thoughts. The title of the commentary on 2:13-17: "the cleansing of the temple" is "Manly Christianity: The Deity of Wrath" and it is already so symbolic that we need not read it. He wrote:

Contemporary people generally think that Christianity is the religion of love and Christ is a wholly loving messiah. . . . In their eyes, Jesus looks like a Lady. . . . But it is a mistaken way of thinking. Christ is not a messiah like a Lady.⁴⁰

After he criticized modern secular literature in the Western and the Eastern world as womanish, he continues:

And contemporary people, rather younger, especially those younger people who call themselves Christians, under its [namely modern literature's] influence, fell into this miserable weakness.

But this is not the Christian spirit.⁴¹

At last, Uchimura quotes even the words of "der Eiserne Kanzler" Bismarck (!):

"Gentlemen! I will never hit back, when someone hits me. But if someone hits our Emperor and disgraces the majesty of the German Empire, I will shower him with abuse against his abuse, give him blows against his blows."

Like this should be the fortitude and steadiness of the Iron Chancellor. We should have righteousness, purity, zeal to the deity. We should have zeal to have indignation against unrighteousness, to dislike filthiness, to rage against disgrace. Without these, men must be rough and cannot be any warriors who are not afraid to die for the truth.⁴²

How brave, still manly, Uchimura's words are! Also how moralistic they are! Uchimura's interpretation is one interpretation but I doubt that his interpretation has much true connection with the words of John's verses. He wrote a little note in English, titled "Johannine Thoughts Condensed" in 1917. We can find sentences like the following:

Jesus is the Son of God's love: he is the light of the world; he is the truth itself.

Christians as God's children must love; i.e. *must do good work*, must shine, and must be

always and forever true.⁴³

We can also see here that Uchimura even understands love in a very moralistic light.

Conclusion: faith or misunderstanding?

As the mentioned above in Uchimura's commentaries on the Gospel of John, we can find many interesting assertions, which could sometimes seem bizarre for modern Christians, even for us Japanese. Nobody could say that a great Japanese Christian scholar and missionary like Uchimura Kanzō misunderstood Christianity. But as a typical Christian in the Meiji era, it is very useful to reevaluate HIS Christianity in detail.

He authored a huge amount of writings as I already mentioned. There is a famous photo, in which he stands with his own books piled up beside him; the stack of books is taller than himself. But from such a huge volume of books, we might extract the kernel of his thoughts.

He asserted many times in his writings that "the purest Christianity" can grow only in Japan. And he had a conviction that the religiosity of Japanese people is superior to Americans' and even Europeans'. He wrote in the English essay titled "Can Americans Teach Japanese in Religion?"

As for my own country-men Japanese I, of course, claim no perfection, in religion as in other matters. Next to my own imperfections, I know the imperfections of my country-men most; I know that they are many and grievous. *But I do not speak an error, I think, if I say that Japanese in general are very religious people. Atheists and indifferentists there are among them, but not so many as among Americans. And these Japanese atheists are not indigenous to the soil; they were made atheists by Westerners or by Western civilization.* For atheists in Japan, you must seek among university professors, students who come under their instructions, politicians who studied politics in Europe and America, or who imitate the political methods of Westerners, especially of the American politicians.⁴⁴

His definition of religion is rather simple; "Belief in God, and belief in future life, two cornerstones of every religion."⁴⁵

On these points, he claims, Japanese are far more religious than American and European people. I don't know whether Uchimura's evaluation about our Japanese religiosity was right or not.⁴⁶ But at present, no Japanese regard themselves more religious than other nation's people. At least today, the greater part of them must say that they don't belong to any religions. In my opinion, his high estimation of Japanese religiosity rather derives from his love for Japan itself. His epitaph written and selected by himself is famous; "I for Japan; Japan for the World; The World for Christ: And All for God." And he wrote elsewhere:

There are two beautiful names, one of which is Jesus and the other Japan. The former is an ideal person, the latter an ideal nation. We worked for both, it could not be that our lives are not ideal.⁴⁷

Uchimura was a tried and true nationalist. But we have to say that we contemporary Japanese, Christians or not, cannot share such a nationalistic feeling as Uchimura, especially after World War II.

Another important point is Uchimura's dislike of Christian societies in the U.S. and Europe. He severely criticizes American Christian churches. His disgust with them made him start his own unique Christian movement, namely the "Non-Church" movement, which is independent, specifically from foreign missionaries. Or perhaps the blunt fact was that he was too proud to accept their economical support.⁴⁸

We can see his disgust with the U.S. society in his main English work, *How I Became a Christian: Out of my Diary* (1895), especially in Chapter 5. His criticism is incisive. But in a word he hates American recent materialism and the worship of mammon. He also detests the idea of American churches as a kind of sociable place. He himself pointed this out in English simply and concretely in his short work titled "American Christianity:"

A friend of ours was recently in Chicago. One Sunday morning, he attended a Christian church there, and the sermon he heard from its pulpit on that day was on this topic: How to Make Success in Business! Remarkable! But it is essentially a modern American Christianity! We on our part would rather be Buddhists of Honen and Shinran type, than be Christians who make so much of this world and so little of the other world. We are entirely disgusted with the "social", "ethical",⁴⁹ this-worldly, business-like Christianity of modern American Christians.⁵⁰

In my opinion, his "disgusted" feeling directed towards "Americanism" could also be derived from his 武士的=warrior-like spirit. We have a traditional saying about 武士=warrior, which means that warriors should endure many things out of a kind of pride even if they are in want. I think that his thought was deeply rooted in the spirit of 武士=warrior.⁵¹

Paul a Jew and a disciple of Jesus the Christ, was a true samurai (warrior), the embodiment of the spirit of Bushidō. . . . Independent, moneyhating, loyal,—Paul was a type of old samurai, not be found among modern Christians, both in America and Europe, and alas also in samurai's Japan.⁵²

Also Uchimura is "disgusted with" American "social" churches. So in the movement founded by him, namely the "Non-Church" movement, the place of his "Non-Church" was called "講義所"="a kind of classroom for lecture," where men and women had to be seated separately. This is the traditional Japanese school style and also has a close connection with the values of Confucianism. The Confucian relationship between teachers and students is very personal, but with authoritarianism. Mark R. Mullins wrote that we can cite some cases that the "teachers" of the "Non-Church" movement have special status. He also wrote that those charismatic teachers' religious authority is considerable.⁵³ With this we have some important values of traditional Japanese Confucianism: "忠"="a kind of loyalty (between Lord/Master and retainer/disciple),"

“孝”=“a kind of filial piety,” etc. It is desperately difficult for me to explain all of these Confucian words and concepts in a foreign language. The relevant distinction between men and women was also a very important value in traditional Confucian Japan. The style of the classroom in the “Non-Church” movement mentioned above was an expression of such a value. And I have already pointed out Uchimura’s machismo in his commentaries on John.

I discussed elsewhere⁵⁴ the concept of “孝” in Uchimura’s writings. I introduced one of Uchimura’s Japanese friend’s stories written by Uchimura himself in English. The basic outline of the story is as follows:

One of Uchimura’s Japanese friend’s got interested in Christianity and began to go to church “Sabbath-school.” But his parents hated Christianity as a foreign religion (耶蘇教) and his father whipped him every time when he knew of his church-going. So on one Sunday Uchimura’s friend asked his parents voluntarily to whip him before going to church not because he was afraid of them, but because he could worship in peace. But his parents were so moved by this behavior of his and became much interested in Christianity, which they thought make their son act in such a (Confucian) moralistic way. Uchimura wrote:

“Son,” sobbed the father, “we cannot beat you any more. *Is this Christianity?* I will go with you and hear the teaching which has made you such a *noble* boy.”⁵⁵

So at last his parents decided to go to church with him and they became all “earnest believers.”

I think this is a very typical Japanese (Confucian) moral story, which today’s younger Japanese would laugh at, or would not be able to understand the point of the story. It is the very spirit of “孝” = “Filial piety” (Uchimura’s translation).

Even more curiously, Uchimura recommended foreign missionaries to use this kind of extreme Japanese moralistic character, which I would want to call a kind of misunderstanding. I hope that his friend’s parents reached the correct understanding of the Christian faith before having become “earnest believers.”

When I reported this story at the panel of IAHR 2005 Tokyo, I thought that Uchimura was so practical that he would even use a misunderstanding to promote Christianity. But this might be MY misunderstanding. He might have thought that this typical Confucian moral is equal without any contradictions to the genuine spirit of Christianity itself.

Uchimura wanted to exclude not only local but also impure elements of American or European Christianity to extract “the most purely spiritual” Christianity. And he had a conviction that only the Japanese can do it, in fact that it was Japan’s calling to do so.⁵⁶ But in reality he made a kind of amalgamation with Christianity and some Japanese ideals or mentalities at that time: Nationalism, (Confucian) Authoritarianism, Uprightness (especially with his hatred for money), Spiritualism (as opposed to materialism in the U. S.), and also probably a kind of Pragmatism (even if he doesn’t like the word and concept in a sense).⁵⁷

But it might be also the nature of Christianity itself to be an amalgamation in every historical-cultural context, in which it was accepted. Anyway we Japanese, who were influenced so much by such an authentic Japanese Christian as Uchimura Kanzō, might have become Christians not in any “pure” faith but by way of a kind of misunderstanding.⁵⁸

Notes

- 1 It is an interesting issue to distinguish the German word “Bibelwissenschaft” and the English word “Biblical Criticism.” Curiously enough, in the most authoritative Japanese dictionary of Christianity (O. Takashi, et. al. [eds.] *Iwanami Kirisutokyou Jiten*), we cannot find the English heading “Biblical Criticism,” but only the German “Bibelwissenschaft” as “Seishogaku [聖書学].” I would like to reserve this discussion for another occasion.
- 2 D. N. Freedman (ed. in chief), *The Anchor Bible Dictionary*, 1992, Vol. 1, p. 732. The emphasis in italics is by Sasaki.
- 3 Cf. E. J. Epp and G. W. MacRae (eds.), *The New Testament and Its Modern Interpretation*, pp. 175–198; J. F. Staley, *Reading with a Passion*, pp. 1–23. But others call this method “Narrative Criticism.” (See, for example, J. Ashton, *Studying John*). But in Germany these kinds of methods seem to be included subordinately in the traditional “historical” criticism. It means that these are not really “new” methods and are only parts of it. Cf. for example, W. Egger, *Methodenlehre zum Neuen Testament*.
- 4 The method which focuses on any kind of readers is called “Reader-Response Criticism” and belongs to the newest branch of the “New Literary Criticism.” Unfortunately there is no room to discuss this in detail here. Cf. J. F. Staley, *Reading with a Passion*, pp. 1–23; K. Sasaki, “Reader (s) in the Gospel of John,” pp. 1–30.
- 5 Cf. K. Sasaki, “What did the ‘Historical’ Studies of John’s Gospel Achieve?” p. 45–74.
- 6 J. F. Staley, *Reading with a Passion*, p. 15.
- 7 *ibid.*, pp. 4f.
- 8 These methods were influenced by the philosophical hermeneutics of Hans-Georg Gadamer and Paul Ricoeur. See bibliography and Sasaki’s paper: “What did the ‘Historical’ Studies of John’s Gospel Achieve?”
- 9 Of course I realize that this is not real study about a “real reader” of the Bible or the Gospel because I have to examine “I” as a “real reader” examining Uchimura as another “real reader.” So this method is very self-reflective.
- 10 “The method of science is also that of religion. Faith is experiment. The differing point between science and religion exists not in the mind-set of method, but in the field of investigation.” K. Uchimura, “Nougaku ka Shingaku ka” (「農学耶神学耶」) (“The Science of Agriculture or Theology”), *Uchimura Kanzō Zenshuu*, Vol. 14, p. 294.
- 11 “The most sharply trained and rigorous philologists and historical critics in Japanese Christianity are in the Non-Church group.” C. Michalson, *Japanese Contributions to Christian Theology*, p. 31.
- 12 For example, see N. Suzuki, *Uchimura Kanzō*, p. 159–160.
- 13 The most recent set of Uchimura’s complete works, published by Iwanami Shoten is the complete version and is used as the authority when doing research about Uchimura. An older complete works was published by Kyoubunkan and is arranged by theme therefore all of his Biblical commentaries are grouped together. In this essay for the purpose of looking closely at all of Uchimura’s commentaries on the Gospel of John it was expedient to use the Kyoubunkan version of Uchimura’s complete works. See bibliography.
- 14 *Uchimura Kanzō Seisho-Chuukai Zenshuu*, Vol. 10, p. 252.
- 15 *Uchimura Kanzō Nikki Shokan Zenshuu*, Vol. 7, Shokan (書簡) (Letters III), pp. 55f.
- 16 His commentary is a huge one, which cannot have any high academic reputation at present. It would be very interesting to compare Godet’s writings to Uchimura’s in both commentaries. But I must set this project aside for the future. Uchimura probably read this commentary in English translation because he wrote “3 volumes.” It was originally 2 volumes in French; F. L. Godet, *Commentaire sur l’évangile de saint Jean*; Eng. Trans.: F. Godet, *Commentary on the Gospel of St. John*.
- 17 *Uchimura Kanzō Seisho-Chuukai Zenshuu*, Vol. 10, p. 67.
- 18 The Edo-Bakuhū was also called the Edo era and began under the reign of Tokugawa Ieyasu in 1603 and ended

- under Tokugawa Yoshinobu (徳川慶喜) in 1867, lasting a total of 264 years.
- 19 *Uchimura Kanzō Seisho-Chuukai Zenshuu*, Vol. 10, p. 67.
- 20 With other sentences of his commentary, we can guess that Uchimura had read Keim's work, *Geschichte Jesu von Nazara*, in English. These German books were soon translated into English. About the relationship between Uchimura's thought and Keim's, and also the method of Uchimura's commentaries on the books of the Bible, see M. LaFay, *Uchimura Kanzō niokeru Seisho "Chuukai" no Houhou* (『内村鑑三における聖書「註解」の方法』) (*Uchimura Kanzo's Method of Biblical Commentary* [unpublished dissertation]). Chapter 5, is especially suggestive. LaFay also pointed out that many of his commentaries are originally spoken lectures. I think this character of the spoken language of his many commentaries has some essential connections with its very nature, which I would like to call a kind of "pragmatism." And probably his spoken Japanese must have had a very powerful character, which had unique rhythms and cadence. I'm sorry that I could not translate exactly these characteristics into English in my translations of Uchimura's many writings in this essay. About Uchimura's "pragmatism," see the text in this essay.
- 21 But Renan had supported the opinion that the author of the substance of the Gospel was the Apostle John before publishing the second edition of his *La vie de Jésus*. Like this some scholars would change their position on this problem.
- 22 *Uchimura Kanzō Seisho-Chuukai Zenshuu*, Vol. 10, p. 68.
- 23 *ibid.*
- 24 *ibid.*
- 25 We know that Uchimura was strongly against Unitarianism. "Sanmi-Ittai no Kyougi" (『三位一躰の教義』) ("The Doctrine of the Trinity"), in *Uchimura Kanzō Zenshuu*, Vol. 12, p. 45; "Yunitariyan-teki Shinkou ni tsuite" (『ユニテリヤンの信仰に就て』) ("On Unitarian Faith"), in *Uchimura Kanzō Zenshuu*, Vol. 29, p. 248. "Kirisuto-den Kenkyuu [Gariraya no Michi]" (キリスト伝研究 [ガリラヤの道]) ("Studies on the Life of Jesus [The Way of Galilee]"), in *Uchimura Kanzō Zenshuu*, Vol. 27, p. 313.
- 26 *Uchimura Kanzō Seisho-Chuukai Zenshuu*, Vol. 10, p. 70.
- 27 *ibid.*, p. 70.
- 28 *ibid.*, p. 71.
- 29 *ibid.*
- 30 To be fair, he did point out some evidence. For example, he mentioned a textual-critical issue about 3:5 of the Gospel of John. He wrote that some manuscripts had omitted the word "water=ὕδατος" in Jesus' words; "Truly, truly, I say to you, unless one is born of *water* and the Spirit, he cannot enter the kingdom of God" (*Revised Standard Version*; italicized by Sasaki). By this evidence, he wants to say "the Gospel of John seems to be written to correct the superstitions and corruptions of the so-called "Two Sacraments (namely Baptism and Eucharist; Sasaki)" practiced usually by the (Protestant at present; Sasaki) churches" to be purely spiritual. But today's standard Greek original text of Nestle-Aland (27th edition) has it in the text. The argument appears to be a circular one.
- 31 *Uchimura Kanzō Seisho-Chuukai Zenshuu*, Vol. 10, p. 183.
- 32 So Uchimura might be sympathetic to Keim because Keim had the same attitude to the Jesus' miracles. He could be historical and pious at the same time. See, W. Baird, *History of New Testament Research*, p. 387.
- 33 *Uchimura Kanzō Seisho-Chuukai Zenshuu*, Vol. 10, pp. 183f.
- 34 T. Keim, *The History of Jesus of Nazara*, Vol. 5, p. 76.
- 35 For example, the title of the commentary on John 12:27 is "Evasion or Passage: Distinction between EK and APO." *Uchimura Kanzō Seisho-Chuukai Zenshuu*, Vol. 10, pp. 186-189. "EK" and "APO" are the Greek prepositions, on which Uchimura's interpretation of the verses are based.
- 36 For example, J. Wellhausen (1907); E. Schwatrz (1907, 1908); F. Spitta (1910); G. C. W. Soltau (1916). See bibliography.
- 37 For example, on the relationship with gnosticism, A. Hilgenfeld (1849), W. Wrede (1903); with Hermetic literature, W. Bousset (1913); with Judaism, A. Schlatter, (1902). The last work of Schlatter, whose name he mentioned, seems to have occupied Uchimura's interest very little. See bibliography.
- 38 For example, Uchimura's last commentary on John is in 1930, which is a few decades after the publication of the very important works of J. Wellhausen treating John's literary critical issues. But he didn't mention such problems. See also n. 36.

- 39 Uchimura had an ambivalent relationship with European countries and especially with America. He resented the control of Western churches and sought to find a “Japanese Christianity.” He also resented Western countries for being hypocritical. See, for example, “A Dialogue Nichi-Bei Taiwa [日米対話],” *Uchimura Kanzō Zenshuu*, Vol. 28, p. 352 and many other writings of Uchimura.
- 40 *Uchimura Kanzō Seisho-Chuukai Zenshuu*, Vol. 10, p. 120.
- 41 *ibid.*, p. 124.
- 42 *ibid.*, p. 125.
- 43 *Uchimura Kanzō Zenshuu*, Vol. 23, p. 328 (italicized by Sasaki).
- 44 *Uchimura Kanzō Zenshuu*, Vol. 30, p. 102 (italicized by Sasaki).
- 45 *ibid.*, p. 103.
- 46 On this point, he is sometimes ambivalent. For example, he even wrote; “About religion, Japanese regard it as praying for happiness, offering, having rituals like invocations (念仏), and never regard it as spiritual communication between persons and the ‘persona’ beyond them. They Japanese think that a man of religion is a kind of monk and that any commitments to a religion mean to renounce the world and live in the mountains far from human habitation. *In their view of religion, Japanese are still not beyond inferior people like Mongols or in the western Siberia.*” (*Uchimura Kanzō Zenshuu*, Vol. 7, P. 109; italicized by Sasaki). The last racial-discriminative sentence means that even Uchimura was within the limit of the age. He might mean any religious activities like shamanism to refer to “the western Siberia.” Anyway it could be very interesting and also demands of us to scrutinize his way of using the word and concept “religion,” which is a serious topic today in the context of Religious Studies with reference to “Orientalism.”
- 47 *Uchimura Kanzō Zenshuu*, Vol. 9, p. 168.
- 48 K. Uchimura, *How I Became a Christian: Out of my Diary*, *passim*. From another angle, I also noticed that this kind of pride is very similar to Fukuzawa Yukichi (福沢諭吉; 1834–1901), another Japanese great thinker of the Meiji era, who claimed practical science in Japan and founded Keio University. But Uchimura hated him very much for his practical thought and for his dependence on “Mammon.” But Fukuzawa maintained that to be independent in mind (from foreign countries) we had to be independent first economically. About a practical aspect of Uchimura’s thought, see the text in this essay.
- 49 I feel uneasy about the negative use of the word “ethical” in this sentence. But unfortunately I cannot examine it minutely in this essay.
- 50 *Uchimura Kanzō Zenshuu*, Vol. 21, p. 374.
- 51 But I have to confess that I don’t know the spirit of 武士=warrior exactly because such kind of spirit has been almost completely eliminated in Japanese society since World War II. But recently many books reevaluating “武士道=The Way of the Warrior” are being published. Interestingly, Uchimura translate the Greek word “λόγος” to the Japanese “ことば=kotoba [word or language],” using the same character “道” as “武士道” in his commentary on John 1:1 (*Uchimura Kanzō Seisho-Chuukai Zenshuu*, Vol. 10, pp. 93ff.) the same way as 明治訳 (A translation of the Bible in Meiji-era [1880]). But this pronunciation “ことば=kotoba” is unusual to this character “道,” which is usually pronounced “みち=michi” or “どう=dou.” The character “道” means simply “road” or “way,” but you could imagine a peculiar connotation of “The Way (道) of the Warrior (武士)” from his unique translation “道”=“λόγος,” which we know has many meanings.
- 52 *Uchimura Kanzō Zenshuu*, Vol. 25, p. 362.
- 53 M. R. Mullins, *Christianity Made in Japan*. Unfortunately I could not check the English original at this time. Trans. into Japanese by Takasaki Megumi 『メイド・イン・ジャパンのキリスト教』, pp. 87–90.
- 54 See the report of the panel we have in The 19th World Congress of the International Association for the History of Religions (IAHR 2005 Tokyo); M. W. Dube, K. Sasaki, J. L. Staley, and, R. S. Sugirtharajah, *Methods of Interpreting Christian Scriptures in the Contemporary World: Different Voices, Different Places, Different Times*. Also see, *Uchimura Kanzō Zenshuu*, Vol. 1, pp. 113–135.
- 55 *Uchimura Kanzō Zenshuu*, Vol. 1, pp. 120 (*noble* was italicized by Sasaki)
- 56 “Nihon no Tenshoku” (「日本の天職」) (“Japan’s Calling”), *Uchimura Kanzō Zenshuu*, Vol. 28, pp. 400–408.
- 57 I think we can see a kind of pragmatism by Uchimura in his way of using European and American academic achievements in Biblical Criticism, parts of which I argued in this essay while reading his commentary on the Gospel of John. But further discussion on this subject would be required in the future.
- 58 But at the same time, We ourselves, who read the writings of Uchimura and the Bible through Uchimura, should

not forget Sugirtharajah's remarks: "Anyone who engages with texts knows that they are not innocent and that they reflect the cultural, religious, political, and ideological interests and contexts out of which they emerge." R. S. Sugirtharajah, *Postcolonial Criticism and Biblical Interpretation*, p. 79.

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