

**JAPANESE ANCESTRAL PRACTICES: A CONTEXTUALIZED
TEACHING TOOL ON THE AFTERLIFE IN THE LOCAL CHURCH
(HIBACHI THEOLOGY)**

by

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DECLARATION

I hereby acknowledge that the work contained in this thesis is my own original work and has not previously in its entirety or in part been submitted to any academic institution for degree purposes.

__Mariana Nesbitt_____

July, 2007

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SUMMARY

The vexing multi-dimensional question of Japanese Ancestral Practices is central to most missiological studies in the Japanese church. Statistics show the need for new strategies and a new movement of the Holy Spirit in the local church.

We examine the background of Ancestor Practices in the folk religion, Buddhism, Shintoo, Confucianism and Taoism, which all go to make up traditional Japanese religion. The actual rites are listed and details explained. The nexus is the *ie*, the household. Later additions in Japanese religion are the New Religions, which also emphasize ancestor practices, and new developments, such as living funerals, ash-scattering and further developments in popular occult practices and the influence of the media and the arts.

Focus groups of typical city dwellers have indisputably shown the effects of secularisation, the change from 'worship' to 'respect' and a looser attitude towards the *butsudan* and the rising importance of grave visits.

After examining the above, the abiding emergent themes of ancestor practices are seen to be those of respect, family, gratitude, memorialism, ethics and identity. Are Scripturally forbidden issues involved here? Does necromancy take place, what about offerings and prayer to the dead? And is worship of the spirit and the mortuary tablet involved? Input about ancestor practices in other lands gives perspective and new insights here.

Japanese Christian indigenous movements also show the same themes and they go further than 'orthodox' Christian churches in their evangelism of the dead and their care for their ancestors. We examine the teaching about the afterlife in Japanese seminaries, the training given to missionaries by missions, what the denominations teach and practice and in particular, what OMF International missionaries are teaching and practicing with regard to the dead. Space is given to the basic Biblical teaching on life after death with reference to issues that require attention in the Japanese worldview.

Perhaps the best contextualised part of the Japanese church are the funeral services, showing the importance it holds in Japanese society, but basic theology and worldview applications are lagging far behind. Japanese ministers and missionaries have been slow to contextualise. Ethnocentric judgements have led to a lack of seriousness towards the socio-cultural context. Various useful models are described and the way in which syncretism and dual systems occur. Guidelines to contextualisation suitable to Japan is proffered where emotion, intuition, nature, *mono aware*, *wabi* are central. Ritual and the inclusion of the Japanese 3-layered worldview is central, and logical propositions are avoided, which are negated in imported Christianity.

To achieve cultural sensitivity we use the poetic tool, metaphor. The metaphor of the warm *hibachi* is chosen, theoretically explained, and elaborated as a feature of Japanese culture. *Hibachi* theology is then described and information given for discussion around the '*hibachi*' in the local church. Gathering is a constitutive aspect of being Japanese and this would seem to be the place for foundational substantive notions to be "taught" and discussed.

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APPENDIX 1 FOCUS GROUP No 2

(Questions appear on page 47)

This focus group interview was conducted in Japanese with a close-knit group of volunteer Japanese language teachers. They were relaxed, except for one man who spoke little, but whose attitude showed he despised religious money makers and seemed generally skeptical and one who was pushing his exclusively Shintoo background. Numbers seen here are the order in which conversation flowed.

- (1) Some said they had none. The eldest son system is breaking up. Now the *bunke* is making a house, so who is the ancestor? It's more than the grandparents, it is roots, far back. My husband is from Shikoku, we moved the grave, don't know how far back. 3 generations back, far back is the ancestors. My wife's people are very old. The war influenced our knowledge of our ancestors. I have ancestors, 4 generations, I have looked into it. My family 3 generations were Christians, I didn't have 3-5-7. My grandchildren complained that there are no photos. My elder brother has started to go into Buddhism. I go to a western style lawn cemetery for grave visits.
- (2) (2)Hokkaidoo, strange, both my parents were from Hokkaidoo. Shikoku. I married. Osaka. (word 'roots' is used a few times.)
- (3) No, we went as young children. Generally it is a custom that is slowly stopping, those that have a *furusato*, have living parents or relatives there. My parents put their hands together, went to the graves, but now, the religious type of grave visits are stopping. Japan was originally Shintoo, in the home was the *kamisama*. The *kami* came and went, *kami* of mountains, nature. When you die you become *kami*. (All disagreed; this man's family is Shintoo.) At World War II the *kami* idea my family is Shinto, but I don't believe it.

Are they *kami* or Buddhist? Everyone talked together about amalgamation. Japanese are mixed up, so they marry the Christian way, receive many ideas. Not serious, even people who don't, say they're Buddhists, we do things unconsciously, not as religion, but as customs that our parents did.

No. Family home is in the country, I've just assimilated it. If people have no child they adopt, but both the relatives, one generation after another, had no kids, so they gave up and stopped the line. Can't adopt everybody to continue the name. My father refused to do it. My family too, the generation is finished, no kids, no continuance. If you think of the *ie*, (household) we will have *eitai*, (eternal sutras) there is a grave but ... *sankotsu suru*. (natural grave) We spoke of adopting a

foreigner's child, but then decided to leave it to nature, not force it, we're not *honke*. (main household). My husband's friend, they adopted, but he hated it and went back to his family. So they gave up. Years ago the parents decided this. We've become a free country.

- (9) Thinking is changing, people want it simple, even famous people. "no funeral" is increasing, *sankotsu*, in the sea, at a bridge, like in the book. Funerals cost too much, it's just big business. The *kaimyoo* (posthumous name) Shintoo is very cheap. My father believed and asked for a Christian funeral. Most of us have parents living, but still generally you have pressure to have a funeral. If you don't the relatives will complain. Some organize their own funeral. The *ihai*, what will happen to that? The main way is still a funeral. They don't clap at a Shintoo funeral, mustn't make a sound. You don't understand the proceedings at a Buddhist funeral. Shintoo is very simple and the *kaimyoo* is cheap. They become the protector god of the house. My Dad is Shintoo.

The bones are buried. It's a problem of your feelings, going to clean. I usually don't think of the grandparents, but if the day is fixed then we think of them, *natsukashii*. (*nostalgic*) *Giri*. (obligation) If we don't go to the *haka*, feel *giri*. I moved my *haka* close by and now go every week. My husband (we don't have the *butsudan*) has photos of his parents and every morning I offer water and... Like when the kids graduated, we put the graduation certificate in front of it. *Kamidana* is high up in the corner. We have house gods. I don't know these things, I'm not a Japanese. (said by the Japanese lady whose Mother was a Christian, with 3 generations of Christians).

We go to show respect to the ancestors, really it's cleaning it, yes. Heard it's not good to have a plant hanging over it. It's just custom, no heart in it. Annual custom. Like a picnic. To calm the heart. Warm feeling. Not really doing it for the dead, but for oneself. Making report: I'm still well. Pre-war ideas had it, but the young don't have it. If the parents don't do it, the kids don't. It's just a framework, a skeleton now. Pressure. You're the only one here who really respects the ancestors. My husband is swanking, he wants his own grave, goes to report, feels responsibility. Men and women are different.

- (11) I pray for family health every day. Basically Japanese are not seriously religious. Hindus are more religious. It's another world, another dimension, different world, a mental thing. Hell and heaven, more than that. Our belief is thin. We report, feel they protect. I don't (she goes once a week). It's a good thing, I want to tell them. Oh, I went to the grave, reported and cleaned, had communication, so this good thing happened and I thought the ancestor is watching me – people believe that. (Yeah we're *kurushii toki kamidonomi* kind of people - when in trouble pray to the gods)

Not many people think like that, I don't think like that. I feel protected. I forgot my parents.

- (16) *Tatari* question: I haven't heard of anyone, maybe very sensitive people. If you have strong belief. My grandparents *haka* is far away and I never went. When I had 3 miscarriages, thought it's maybe because I didn't, I should go, never went. Religion is feeling right.
- (10) Incense: I don't know. I give flowers, various flowers are said to be good, the perfume. Gives nice smell, so they can enjoy it. I've never thought of it. *Gimlnu*. 義務 (obligation)
- (11) Communication: I put hands together at the gravesite. The daughter of the Christian said: sometimes I suddenly think of her, and talk to her. One man mentions *Osoreyama* (sacred mountain) where he went twice to consult the mediums there, they shouted like mad people.

I don't speak to my husband's ancestors, but to my mother. I've got this far in good health, soon I'm *kanreki*. (60 years old) (Everybody laughs.) I've heard it's bad to petition. I think of her and a happy verse of a hymn.

My mother is 93, I say Why are you still living? And she can't hear a thing. (Everybody roars with laughter.) When people are soon to die, they talk to one, but I haven't experienced it. When my Dad died I was in the 3rd year of university, after struggling with studies, I was talking about him and I heard his voice. He died soon afterwards. After my mother died, she was next to me and said "Don't worry, I'll always look after you." Maybe it was a dream. If you concentrate on it, you can see a dream. When you're in trouble, I think of my father, I need his advice. Yeah, spiritual inspiration

- (12) Yes. We threw out the *kamidana*, while we were cleaning out. I don't believe it!

Not so serious. It's my husband's family, so not. It's different at my mother's. I don't think much about it. *Gishiki*. (ceremony) It's for giving rhythm to your life. Nothing to do with the ancestors. I change the water, if you don't it smells, no *kimochi*. (feeling) bad. Unusual stuff, we first put it there.

- (13) Different levels. *Otsutome* 御勤め (reading of the scriptures before the Buddha) *Gimu de mo* 義務 even obligation I think. There's no Buddha there. Ancestors. Dead people are *hotoke*. (Buddha) Got nothing to do with *Amida Nyoorai*. Incense: you give one to *Amida Nyoorai* and two for *hotoke*. It's very different to Christianity. He is always up there. Who's the most important person in Japan? It depends on the group, there are many gods, *hotoke*, not like Christianity. Buddha is one. The group's top person is Buddha, every sect is different.

Muri. (cant be done) By worshiping the ancestors the family line can continue. It's lineage. 49 days then *joobutsu*. (nirvana) It's got nothing to do with *kuyoo*. (pacification) Hell and heaven in Buddhism? For bad people, I hear it often. I don't know Buddhism. What about *jihī*? 慈悲 (mercy) It's just stuff you believe from being born and then passes on to

you. I know of a woman who was baptized as a baby – me too – and then when she was older she resented it. *Jibun de awanai kimono o kiseta.* (wear a kimono that doesn't fit) Yes.

APPENDIX 2 FOCUS GROUP No 3.

These 5 ladies are an English language group, they have a long-standing relationship and are slightly upper-middle class.

- (1) Some have none. The *choonan* system is breaking up. The 2nd son is making a home, so who is 'senzo'? (ancestor) More than grandparents, our roots. We have genealogies. My husband is from Shikoku and we moved the grave. *Senzo* is 3 generations back, don't really know.

My close ancestors, grandparents. Further I don't think about, haven't met them, but I have heard many things. I lived with my grandmother, so when I think of ancestor it is "Ikegawa". I think far back from Shikoku, Tokushima Ken. They are mentioned in Genji Heike, the Heian period. *Gempei no takaki de yaburete.* They lived in the mountains. The Heike are the farm's ancestors. In Edo period they moved to Fukagawa, trading with the Edo *Bakufu* in sea-food, maybe Shikoku mikan (tangerine) and medicine. In Meiji they were *goyooshoonin*, (purveyor to the government) in the middle of that they went bankrupt. My grandfather's father died bankrupt. There were 3 sisters and each was adopted. My grandmother's mother remarried, but her husband died, my grandmother started teacher-training with support from relatives. They rebuilt the house, the name and observed the grave. She also married a teacher and adopted the husband. The gravestone is about 400 years old and is in Meguro, Tokyo.

I have our genealogy.

I was born in Hyogo, but moved to Ichikawa; my father grew up in Nagasaki, grandfather was in the navy. (Mrs Okazawa brought out the genealogical papers which came from Miyagi castle. They were Fujiwara and the end of the Heian period. In Ooshu, near Sendai.)

My family had 3 countries: China, Taiwan and Japan. My father's father was from Fuchou in China and moved to Taiwan, studied a medical course at a Japanese university and got nationalized in Japan.

- (9) I don't go. I go to the graves.

Sometimes; my family is not important to me, but I am getting older and so after my parents passed away, I started to think, I should go to the tomb. It's the first time I've been asked this question.

To respect the departed, for respect. It's a custom, but April 1st my family gathered at the Ryuusoon temple for *hooji*, about 15 members. It was my father's brother and his wife, their 17th and 13th *kaiki*. (memorial)

She is a Christian. I have 1, 3, 7 *kinenkai*, the pastor goes to the grave. She's Anglican. We don't it so they pass away happily to the next world. *Hatten*, to continue the family body, happiness and peace. We live happily every day because of the ancestors, we show our appreciation. To meet my ancestor in my heart. The Christian: I remember my ancestor.

I exist because of them. I have no religion. When someone passes away it's instant religion. (Everybody laughs) It began in the Kamakura period. Why?

We give flowers and incense, food, sake, tea, rice, their favourite things, cigarettes. Nowadays I have no religion. I feel very quiet, relaxed, feel strange, especially for my parents, my parents are always there. I report to them if I have trouble or happy things. It is basic to many Japanese people, is the Buddhist viewpoint, morality, but Christians are different.

In China there was Zen and Confucianism. Especially as you get older. It's a feeling, and all we have is different to foreign ideas. Like the different feeling for colour. It's in my heart. Like in flower arranging, only 3 flowers, a small amount shows the universe, simple architecture, shows the seasons, that's the Japanese heart. The world of tea. Foreigners find this different to understand. At night we light a candle, no flowers, because a candle becomes the flowers in the tea-room. Zen. Christian only give flowers and pray to the ancestors.

- (10) The smell cleans, cleanses, the smell reaches the ancestors. Shows respect and my appreciation, it kills the smell. It's both. It's different now. *Koo o taku*. (to burn incense)
- (12) .Once a day at the *butsudan*. It depends on the house. I do this in my mind or at the *butsudan* and the temple.

I have a good thing, or trouble, and then report it. I ask for the safety of my family, say, "Please take the tea."

Buddhists: Yes, all have. The Christian has not. There is 1 *kamidana*. The Christian has not.

Nothing, but after parents passed away, you feel their existence there. There is an ancestor in the *butsudan*. I see the face of my grandparents and parents in my heart. Not your husband's. *Butsudan* is husband's parents', so I report and pray at the same time to my parents.

Christian: before God. *Hotokesama*, they return to nature. What is heaven? There is a hell. That comes from Confucianism. They return

to nature. I don't ask things, like winning a lottery – definitely not. For the safety of the kids.

Everybody has connections. The Christian: Same as when worshiping in church. The grave: the bones are there. I think of my existence. They go back to the earth, go back to the ground, become water – not soon, but the calcium dissolves. How long does it take? From the 1940 period, my husband's grandparents bones have dissolved. The priest says, they don't last forever, the bones are wet. When we moved the bones, took them on the bullet train and put them in the *tokonoma* – it was all wet through.

It's different at the temple and shrine. At the shrine you only ask.
(Laughter).

We don't believe it, but on TV, spiritualists like it to train children.

Now? We wash the gravestone, behave well, observe the grave, continue to observe the ancestors. So that we won't have *tatari* and not go bankrupt. When we went bankrupt, it was not *tatari*, it was the flow of history, as the period changed. They took loans, they lived well in Fukagawa. We took the *ihai* wherever we moved, but we lost the house. The *ihai* is a big one, all the generations are together there.

Christian: a calm heart and ask for something. Buddhist: thanks to the ancestors, thanks, for one's own life. I feel tense. I respect the ancestors. The ancestors are near to god/kami, feel they are close, not the Christian God, maybe the universe, not Christian. I studied Christianity, but what is inside you is different. (Two studies at missions schools and universities.) I went into the chapel often, I went every day to services, it was voluntary. The missionary's talk was very interesting, but I didn't become a Christian. Originally it was a good thing that is written in the Bible, but afterwards sects started and then wars.

- (5) It is not a law. Ebara-san, they say if we don't show respect, bad things will hit our family. Long time ago they said so. I believe in *tatari*. (Much laughter.) If I do bad things. But haven't experienced it. You did bad things? It is punishment, in money matters. *Rinne*, 慈悲 (endless cycle of birth and death) recycle (everybody laughs). Is Buddhist, *renen kaisei* (resurrection) – from childhood we are told. They use it to educate the kids for morality. Confucian type of things. We use it.

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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

1.1 Relevance

Ichijoo Shinya, vice-president of the Moon Rise funeral company suggests that a monument be built on the moon so that all can gaze up and commune with the dead on the moon. This is the contemporizing of part of an important element of Japanese culture. (Suzuki a 2000:7) This difficult question of ancestor practices goes back to the days of Matteo Ricci when Christianity confronted it in China.

In this chapter we will look at the relevance of and need for the study, give the hypothesis, assumptions held, state the design and methodology of the study, state the research problem and questions to be studied. We will give the religious and cultural background to the question of ancestor practices by surveying the origins in Shinto, Confucianism and Buddhism as a historical background. The ancestral rites will also be sketched, so that the reader can soon see what the missionaries met when they first arrived in Japan.

Missionary activity in Japan dates back to 1549, but although there has been a long history of missions, heavy expenditure in terms of personnel (Japanese and foreign) the church is not growing. The relevance of the study will quickly be seen in the following statistics and comments by missionaries, Japanese pastors and academics.

The Church Information Service published the following: in 1982 total membership of the Protestant Church was 371 865 and Sunday attendance 198 288. For (1995) and 2005: of a population of (124 655 498) 126 869 397, with a total of churches (7 633) 7 799, membership is at (537 945), 555 742 that (268 217) 279 750 attend regularly; the number of baptisms were 8 844 in 2005. Church School attendance in 2005 was 66 080. Number of churches (7 633) 7 799. This is similar for many churches. In 1972 the Religion Yearbook

of the Japanese Agency of Cultural Affairs stated that Christian believers were numbered at 825 991 and in 1987 at 1 438 699. (Hayama Missionary Seminar 1987:74)

In 2003 the Christian Newspaper reported that “less than 0,3 % are active members of a Protestant church”, Strand (2004:283) puts this down to a lack of dealing with the worldview of the Japanese. This surely includes the central issue of the afterlife. Later on he goes on to say that deep level changes are needed. “The afterlife is basic to the Japanese worldview” (Strand:284).

A Gallup poll done in March 2006 showed a surprising high number of teens who claimed the Christian faith; “of the 20% who professed to have a religion, 60% called themselves Buddhists, 36% Christians and followers of Shintoo.” This statement is unclear. Poll: 75% Buddhists, 19% Shinto and 12% of those polled said they were Christians. George Gallup Jr. said projections meant that 7% of total teenagers say they are Christians. This could be exciting, except that there is doubt about the methodology and we need to be reminded that in 1983 much the same percentages were given by the Church Information Service statistics. Where are these people now? (McKay, 2005:)

The average time that a baptized believer stays in the church is 2 years. Human relationships and lack of further teaching are said to be the cause for this attrition. The largest denomination, the Japan Christ Kyoodan (Nikki Kyoodan) reports that 200 churches have no pastors and within 10 years they project that 500 will be without pastors. What really matters to the Japanese? And what important issues are not being dealt with?

Central to Japanese life and worldview is the afterlife. New Christians wrestle with the questions that come up, are too reserved to ask the pastor; and very little or no answers (or answers that make sense in their world) are given in sermons and Bible studies – this leaves the parishioner with many Buddhist funerals and rituals to attend and take part in – and what to do? How to think about it? Cognitive dissonance takes over and the embarrassed new Christian gives up attending church. One mature Christian member of a Bible study was asked if she had been taught about the afterlife in the 3 different denominations

she had been involved in since becoming a Christian. “Nothing, not in any of them.”

In 1983 Berentsen, the Norwegian missionary-scholar, attempted to come to grips with the issue. He wrote the following: “with regard to a contextualized practice and liturgy (sic) is a question which points beyond the task we set before us and is most confidently left to competent and mature Japanese churches to answer” (1984:277). Other foreign writers have written in the same vein, but in 2007 we still have no educational tool in the Japanese church concerning life after death that is contextualised for missionaries to use. Bong Rin Ro in *Christian Alternatives to Ancestor Practices* in 1985 wrote, “we hope that this statement will be a stimulant (sic) this study with other evangelical scholars, pastors and church leaders “ (Bong Rin Ro 1985:10).

“Ancestral practices are central to the Japanese way of life” (Ooms, 1975), yet this aspect of Japanese religious life has been little studied by the Christian church. The afterlife is also a central topic in the New Testament. Strand (2004:3) quoted Iwasaka and Toelken:

Death is not only a common subject in Japanese folklore but seems indeed to be the principal topic in Japanese tradition; nearly every festival, every ritual, every custom is bound up in some way with relationships between the living and the dead...[death] brings into focus a number of other very important elements in the Japanese world: obligation, duty, debt, honour and personal responsibility.

Japanese Christian believers are taking part in ancestral practices in the Buddhist fashion as well as in Christian rites. One of the reasons being that there is no strong guidance given in the churches and no alternatives. I propose to show that the church is not being taught clearly, that seminaries are not tackling the problem and that scholars write on the subject every 2 decades and that the problem is then ignored again. Rowe (2000:374) called for an already overdue new study of ancestor worship that will take into account new approaches for memorial services

Further, in teaching situations with Japanese we have often been stumped for a really satisfying, organized body of teaching on the subject. Most missionaries and ministers in Japan find that when considering what the central problems are in mission in Japan, that they are always brought back to ancestor

practices. Theological reflection is needed at this point where tension is felt the most strongly. A contextualised teaching tool on the afterlife in the local church is long overdue. Studies have been done in ethics, systematic theology, New and Old Testament studies and Church History, but just about no contextualisation. Furuya Yasuo (1996:6) cited the reason for this as dependence on Western theology and even shame at Japanese written works being cited in bibliographies. (We feel this attitude is changing.)

Furuya (1996:6) stated that there is a poor view of “Japanese theology”, among Japanese theologians, who are reminded of the attempt to develop a “Japanese theology” during the war, mixing Christianity and Shintoism. The need for a contextualised teaching tool is urgent, as can be seen from church statistics, the present theological status in Japan and from the spoken heart-felt needs of the Japanese Christians and seekers.

1.2 The Problem and Questions to be Answered

I will do an enquiry to discover how to deal with the issues that need to be addressed in a Japanese contextualised teaching tool on the afterlife in the local church. This is the Research Problem. (Mouton 2001) In order to discover these issues, we need to investigate:

- (1) What is the history of ancestral practices in Japan? Historically, what do the Japanese believe and what rituals have been practised concerning life after death? (Traditional religions, indigenous groups.)
- (2) What do contemporary Japanese believe and what rituals are currently being practised concerning life after death? What do Japanese Christians believe about life after death.
- (3) What do the churches, mission agencies and theological institutions teach concerning life after death?
- (4) What does the Bible teach about life after death?
- (5) How would the principles of contemporary contextualisation assist us?
- (6) What are the relevant issues to be addressed?

The objective is to attempt to write a contextualised teaching tool, on life after death, suitable to the Japanese worldview which will help solve an entrenched missiological problem in the Japanese church.

1.3 Design and Methodology

This study is a conceptual study in Missiology. The general design will be a literature study with emergent, interactive, interpretive, qualitative instruments. A study in Missiology, in its essential nature, will include cultural-anthropological, historical, ethnographic, linguistic and religious studies. The reasoning will be largely inductive. (Mouton 2001)

- (1) A literature study will be done to introduce the subject, give the background and motivation for the study and also a historical background to scholarship on the subject.
- (2) Secondary data of Japanese church statistics will give background, illustrating the need for the study. Letters, e-mail and phone will be used to enquire into what is actually being taught in churches, mission agencies and theological seminaries. Primary analysis of information will also be done. The expected paucity of results will further give weight to the urgency of the need for the study.
- (3) Contextualisation, in order to seek to understand how to deal with the problem of a Japanese contextualised teaching tool on life after death. It will be useful to hear the current debate and compare views in the West, from those who have been missionaries and especially from Japanese and other Asian writers. The next logical step will be to do a literature review on the background to ancestor practices. Analysis of ideas needs to be done.
- (4) We will explore the contemporary scene in Japanese religion and culture to find out what change is happening. (Creswell 2003) Here analysis of the basic issues involved should appear. There will be some polemic, complementary and comparative discussion. Content analysis will produce the essential elements to be contextualised. A literature review is appropriate because an analysis of trends and the current debate on the subject is necessary. We are in the midst of rapid change in Japan.
- (5) Textual analysis of Scripture will be done: in order to have the basic guideposts of the faith for a teaching tool on life after death and for interaction with principles of contextualisation and culture. I foresee a dialectical movement of ideas here.

After this we will engage in interviews (Mouton 2001) with Japanese cooperative focus groups and individuals and use newspaper comments to

engage in what insiders are thinking and feeling. This is suitable action, because as a foreigner I cannot hope to solve a problem in contextualisation alone. People will be selected with whom there is an existing good, long-standing relationship to hopefully obviate the effect of *tatemae* 建て前 (public face, not real feelings) so as to ensure accurate information. Questions will be framed in an open way and comprehensive notes will be taken.

(6) Observation will be done in homes, at funerals, both Christian and traditional Japanese, and in graveyards. This will ensure accuracy, as unusual aspects can be noticed and we will take notes. Useful too, in exploring topics that may be uncomfortable for participants to discuss. Limitations here could be the perception of intrusiveness, but advantages will be that we can make personal observations.

Limitations here could be a degree of lack of transparency which is common and acceptable in the culture. Space to cover such a vast subject will also be a limitation.

From the literature study and qualitative instruments used, the essential elements necessary for the contextualised teaching tool will be drawn. A Japanese contextualised teaching tool on the afterlife can be constructed

1.4 Hypothesis, Assumptions and Limitations

The study will draw heavily on cultural ideas and Japanese religion and the teaching tool will be less systematic than western theologies. It will deal more with ritual; group action than beliefs.

This study will probably reveal other related areas that need urgent attention.

Our assumptions held before further study are:

- (1) that speaking to spirits involves prayer and Biblically forbidden necromancy
- (2) that burning incense involves worship
- (3) deep bowing before a wooden tablet looks like idol worship

The outcome should produce criteria for the desired teaching tool. There will be areas in which there might not be any answers. We are also limited by being a foreigner. I trust that Japanese will accept our attempts, provide correction and dialogue further in their scholarship. I speak Japanese and have lived in close contact with Japanese for 24 years.

The next section will give the historical background to our study, giving the necessary setting and feel for the subject, leading in to contemporary ideas and practice.

1.5 Historical Background

The vast majority of Japanese say they have no religious belief, while at census time most respondents tick both boxes for Buddhism and Shinto. Why? Nagasawa Mikito (2003:353) explained that for the Japanese “a religion is not identified with affirming specific belief as much as participating in rituals in traditional festivals and performing religious actions demanded by certain situations”. I will first give the historical background to the traditional religions of Japan and describe the ancestral practices that have developed out of this history.

1.5.1 Shintoo

The history of Shintoo ancestral rites are hidden in ancient history. Religious life during the Jomon period, which began 12 000 years ago, can be followed by clues, such as the pit cave dwellings and earthenware implements. In the *Nanzan Guide to Japanese Religions*, edited by Swanson and Chilson, (2006:133) Matsumaru Kazuo quoted Kobayashi, who wrote that villages were built in a circle and graves were dug inbetween. This rice-growing community, the uji, 氏 (clan) was grouped around their involvement in agriculture, and their protecting deity, who was perhaps the actual lineal ascendant head of the uji. (Smith 1974:8) This system was established in the rice-growing Yayoi era (B.C. 3c–A.D. 3). At this early stage ancestor practices were based mostly on the uji community. Later this was integrated into the house-lineage system, the ie. 家 (household) (Yoshimoto Makito 1987:84).

Care of the *ie* dead was linked with worship designed to ensure good harvests and general fertility. The spirit of the new dead “shirei” needed to be cleansed and treated appropriately. Otherwise the *shirei* will not be a calm ancestral spirit, but *nigitama*, 二義玉 (a malevolent spirit who wanders and brings harm to the family and harvests.) Good treatment by the family ensures that the spirit will be the guardian of the family or community. As time progressed, these spirits became *uji-kami*. 氏神 The community of the *uji*, dead, alive and unborn were linked.

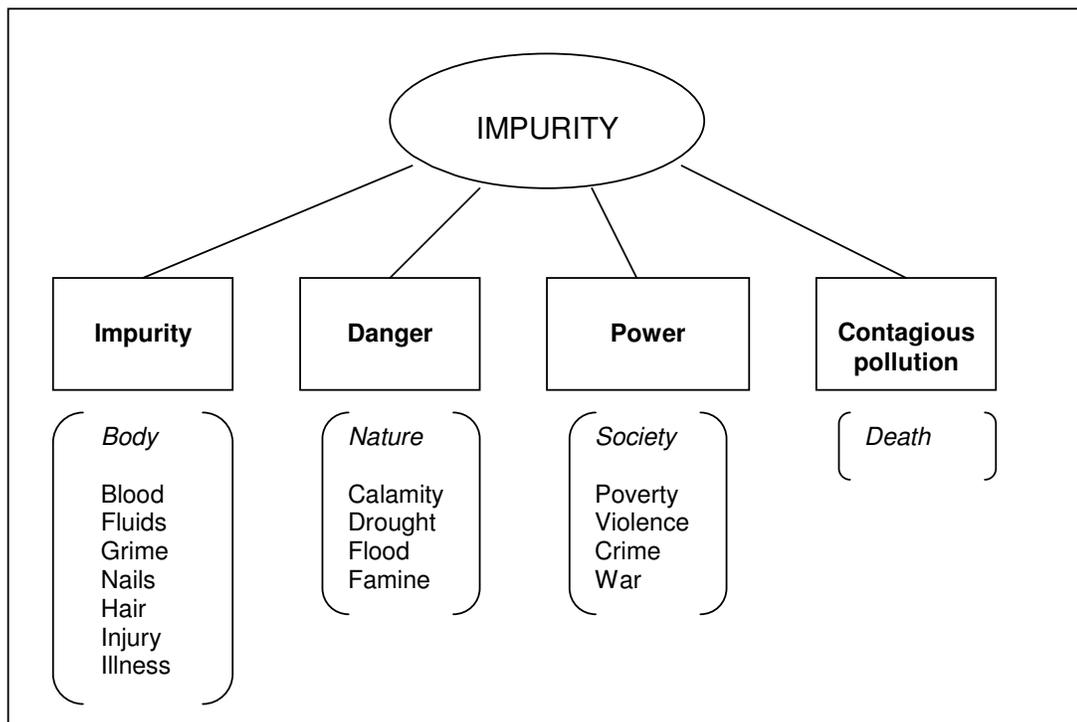
Before the unification of the clans under the Yamato dynasty, in prehistoric Japan, the ancient Japanese people believed in mysterious spiritual power. This “*tama*” 玉 (spirit) is possessed by humans; objects such as trees, ships, natural objects. According to ethnologist, Origuchi Shinobu, (Yoshimoto Makito, 79) there are two kinds of *tama*: one benevolent and the other with malevolent power. *Hito dama* 人魂 speaks of the human spirit and *koto dama* 言霊 of the spiritual power of words. *Tama* supports all life, dwells in humans as *tamashii* 魂 (soul) and departs at death (Murata Okinori 1993:1385).

After the Yayoi era, Japan was invaded by Altaic and Tungusic people from north-east Asia. There was also immigration from southern Asia. Yoshimoto quoted Hori Ichiroo: These people “became the ancestors of the imperial family and the accompanying priest clans” (Yoshimoto Makito, 86). who were assumed to be shamans, who were mostly of the female possession type and Hori has proved that these features have continued through the generations up till modern times.

During the Kofun period (the last half of the 3rd century to around the 7th century) the *kofun* 古墳 were the graves built for the powerful, (with chair and serving table figurines placed in front of the mansion figurine) and these are thought to have been used for ritual feasts for the dead. Warring *uji* near the end of the Kofun era (A.D. 6 – 7) were finally conquered and ruled over by the Yamato clan, who became the ancestors of the imperial dynasty. This clan systematized old myths, using Chinese philosophy and Buddhism to create a national myth for their power system This is the “myth of national foundation, not cosmological myth” (Yoshimoto, 87). This is written in the *Kojiki* 古事記 the Record of Ancient Matters (712) and *Nihon Shoki*. 日本書紀 (720).

Buddhism and Shinto amalgamated in the 8th and 9th century and rites for the purpose of pacifying the vengeful spirits were developed in Kyooto. In 863 the government conducted these rituals to pacify the spirits of the Emperor Suido and 6 others who met tragic untimely deaths in the courts struggle for power. (Koyama Koosuke a 1984:180) Purification was done against sullyng elements of *kegare* 穢れ (pollution) like disease and death (As seen in figure 1) and *harae*, 払え (pacification) restoration of proper relationship after wrongdoing. *Tamashizume* 玉沈め means the pacification (*shizume*) of the spirit. In all these ritual practices the spirit of the dead will become a spirit of the ancestors after 33 or 49 years and submerge among the ancient gods” (Koyama, 16).

FIGURE 1. The classification of impurity.



(from Figure 5: (Suzuki a 2000:28) Source: Data from Shintani.)

Ueda Masaaki also identified *mono* もの (something strange or awesome) as playing an important role in ancient Japan. (Koyama, 146) “Spirits of all things other than human are called *mono*.” The implication is that *mono* is an animistic spiritual substance, uncanny and strange, which can threaten people. This feeling for the strange and mysterious is very important in Japanese religion and popular beliefs.

Divine spirits, the “*kami*”, beings with super-human, supernatural power evoked a thrill of emotion, awe and mystery and are able to change history.

These *kami* possess supernatural power. They were the source of harvests and most of the rites were concerned with fertility. It is not simple to define *kami*; broadly defined “as something sacred with a supernatural existence” (Swanson & Childay, 140), and also special natural objects, especially mountains and trees, animals like foxes and snakes, white deer or white snakes. These categories are not objectively determined but are “determined by sensory or subjective standards” (Matsumura, 141). Men too, by reason of their supernatural powers could be *kami* and these were often the shaman in the community.

This account of Shintoo has given the history and practices of Shinto. Fixed doctrine is lacking, but deeply felt emotion is central to Shinto. It is seen that it is a religion of practice. The next religion/philosophy that has had great influence on ancestral practices is Confucianism.

1.5.2 Confucianism

Confucianism, is basic to thinking, society, family life and ancestral practices. Confucianism is said to have come to Japan in the 5th century at the same time as Buddhism. There are religious aspects, but it is mainly a social, political, philosophical and ethical teaching. It was important during the 6th – 9th centuries, also from the Edo period (1600-1868) with the Meiji Restoration and then in the early Shoowa period (1926-1929).

In China, during the Chou dynasty, the early Chinese worshiped ‘the land god, their patron god, as well as their ancestors’ (Wei Yuan-Kwei wrote in *Christian Alternatives to Ancestor Practices*, 121). In the *Bamboo Chronology* Wei saw evidence of ancestor worship: “Huang-dih passed away and his minister Tzuo Cheh took his clothes, headgear, and sceptre and worshiped them in the temple” (Ro, 122). Successive emperors followed this practice, and men of virtue were honoured and worshiped. The worship of ancestors of the blood line began in the Hsia Dynasty. The use of the wooden tablet is recorded to have started inbetween 206 BC and 220 AD. With this historical background, we turn to Confucius.

K'ung Ch'iu (1027 BC –256 BC) wanted society to return to the harmonious state he felt it had been at the beginning of the Zhou dynasty in China. (Koyama a 152) Confucius brought the principle of harmony which underlies all social relationships to Japan. The concept of *wa* 和 (harmony) and that of Buddhist *jishi* 慈悲 (mercy) has been on the forefront of Japanese philosophy ever since. As important to the Japanese as the Ten Commandments is to the Jew or Christian. (Koyama, 156)

Since Confucius believed that good government and society could be attained by the moral example of officials, he sought the education of state officials. The source of each individual's standards of morality lay in filial piety: respect and obedience to parents. A knowledge of literature and the arts produced loyalty, uprightness and moderation. *Ren*, or benevolence, was most sought after.

Tradition ascribes various texts to him and his disciples also wrote a number of his sayings and commentaries on his works. The most important of which for our study is the Book on Filiality and the Confucian Analects.

Kim Eun Chul wrote that Confucius is said to have encouraged a cult towards the deceased father or mother with sacrificial offering (Ana 2.5; 10.15), offerings of food and drink (Ana 3.10), in a shrine or tomb (Ana 10 10.5) for their remembrance (Anal.9; 4.21), or to consult or to seek favours from them (Ana 11.21 ...5.22) (Kim Eun Chul 2003:2). Elaborating, Chow Lien-Hwa gives the filial son's five requirements, as recorded in the *Confucian Analects*: "When dead, they (the parents) should be buried according to propriety; and they should be sacrificed (sic) according to propriety" (Bong, 141).

During the Han dynasty Confucius himself became an object of worship and state sacrifices. At the time a cosmology was developed that saw the universe as being under the control of Heaven with man, the ruler, as "mediator between Heaven and the natural order" (Murata Okinori, 222). Heaven sent omens, auspicious events and this then developed into a literature which named taboos and calendrical restrictions. It was actually against Confucius' teaching, but has had a profound effect on the Chinese, Koreans and Japanese.

Confucianism arrived in Japan from China. With the centralisation of the Japanese state, Confucianism flourished. Minabuchi no Shooan (early 7th

century) and the scholar monk Soomin (d 653) spread Confucianism on their return from China. Although not fully adopted as a state ritual, Japanese emperors also accepted moral responsibility for their citizens' welfare, encouraged Confucian values for their officials and a tradition of ritual propriety in order to maintain social order.

The most important influence, however, was State-sponsored education. As in China, a system of provincial and city examinations were instituted to produce bureaucrats. At the end of the 9th century this system of government and education started to lose influence because of the growth of the Fujiwara family's interests. Buddhism penetrated the universities.

With the long period of peace during the Tokugawa era, there was more interest in issues of society and government and Confucianism stepped in to answer these questions. Given official recognition under Iemitsu (r 1623-51) and more under Tsunayoshi (r 1680-1709), Confucianism fitted in well with this feudal society: *Samurai* became bureaucrats and more wealth and leisure fostered the printing of Confucian literature, leading to the golden age of this tradition in Japan. The official domain schools, led by Confucian scholars, also influenced the rise of *terakoya* – the village commoner education, based in the temples.

4th-generation leader of the Confucianist *Kaitokudoo* Merchant Academy in Osaka, purist, Nakai Chikuzan (1730-1804) spoke harshly of 'folk religion'

for a physican, or [telling people to] stop using medicines, thus leading to their deaths; worshiping Ebisu and Daikko as a pretext for lust and wickedness, making the shrine Tenmanguu a medium for lasciviousness, substituting [the bodhisattva] kannon in place of auguring weal and woe and praying for healing, divining propitious directions, midwives; and with reckless talk of badgers and foxes and baseless fictions about *tengu* 天狗 imputing all kinds of marvellous wonders about insignificant *kami* and trivial buddhas; divining dreams of *kami* and buddhas and huckstering worthless drug and base concoctions, performing divinations of mutual compatibility for men and women, divinations of physiognomy, swords, the geomancy of houses – these kinds of deviant beliefs [*jakyoo*] are rampant, and nothing but techniques to confound the ignorant masses. (Havens a 1997:3)

Confucianism spread into a background of such popular religion. Various schools of thought emerged during the Edo era, but the most conspicuous was the final phase, where there was a combination of Confucianism, Shinto and

imperial ideology. The *Mito* school emphasised obedience to the emperor. The Meiji Restoration opened the way for western influence, the emperor himself, heavily influenced by Confucianism mixed with western thought. The Imperial Rescript on Education of 1890 was promulgated. 1937 saw the emperor presented in the Confucian style, receiving loyalty, filial piety. Since the 2nd world war there has been a decline in interest in Confucianism.

The philosophy of filial piety and the Analects that have taught sacrifices to the elders are basic to ancestral practices and form the very basis of Japanese society.

1.5.3 Buddhism

Buddhism came to Japan as a philosophy that had already been used to promote ancestral practices. In the last century there has been disagreement as to the historical origins of ancestor worship. The latest scholarship, as shown in 2.1 shows that after Buddhism reached Japan, the ancestor worship of the *uji* continued, dressed up as Buddhism. We will show how all these three, plus Taoism, combined to give the present-day traditional Japanese religious scene.

Gigaku was performed and Prince Shotoku, the great protector of Buddhism combined the newly arrived teaching with the art in 612. According to *Nihon Shoki*, Buddhism took advantage of the exotic and spectacular performance to propagate Buddhism. (Noma Shogi (n.d., 5)

Prince Shotoku, a devoted Buddhist scholar is said to have written commentaries on three scriptures. The central emphasis of the Three Sutra Commentary is the image of the bodhisattva of Mahayana Buddhism who practices mercy. The bodhisattva empties himself for the salvation of others, the image of a selfless saviour figure. "The concept of negation came to Japan with Buddhism, through the person of Prince Shotoku when he said *Seken Koke, Yui Butsu Zeshin*, or This World is Illusory. Only the Buddha is Real" (Koyama a 79). Dialectical thinking entered Japan, and with it the ability of the Japanese to hold seeming paradoxes in their mind quite comfortably and a dislike for comparisons.

Various Buddhist sects were founded. The following can be compared to 16th century reformers in Europe (Koyama a 158) Jodo-Shuu (Hoonen 1133-

1212), Joodo-Shin-shuu (Shinran) 1173-1262, Ranzai-Shuu (Yoosai 1141-1215), Zen Sooto-Shuu (Doogen 1200-1253), Nichiren-Shuu (Nichiren 1222-1282).

Confucian, Buddhist, Hindu, and Taoist elements were added to indigenous Japanese beliefs and rites and by the latter half of the 12th century, were observed throughout the country. Buddhism entered Japan while the clan government was shifting to imperial government. It put down roots during another period of reorientation, when the imperial government changed to a military government.

Various threads of belief ensued. The Joodoo sect founded by Hoonen, chanted masses for the salvation of the dead and were popular among the common people. The concept of negation was given a profound expression in the thought and experience of the Japanese soul. Grace, *tariki* 他力 (salvation by someone else's power). (Koyama a 162) Negation has affirmed grace. Joodo-Shin-Shuu followers saw this as a break away from pure Buddhist teaching and trusted only in Amida Buttsu's merciful vow to save all. The *nembutsu* 念仏 school (*Namu Amida Buttsu* "I take my refuge in the Buddha Amida"), was seen as an easy way and Shinran spent 30 years in exile.

Berentsen, traced the development further, through the Kamakura era (1185-1333) when, linked to the *uji* temple, masses for the dead, funeral services and the Bon festival spread. The *bon* dancing in summer evolved out of *Nembutsu odori* which were popular Buddhist chants and folk dancing of the late Heian and Kamakura eras. Koyama feels that Kamakura Buddhism "is a demonstration that the Japanese people, through their own religious thinking and experience, had digested the unfamiliar contents of the universal religion, Buddhism" (Koyama a, 158).

Koyama then quotes Watsuji Tetsuro, Japanese scholar of religion, history and culture (Koyama, 159)

This orientation presents Buddhism as The doctrine of *Nembutsu* (recitation of the name of Buddha) of Hoonen and Shinran intimates a faith of absolute trust in mercy which is understood to be the Absolute. This doctrine has profound similarities with Christianity which teaches absolute trust in knowledge which begins with the insight of absolute emptiness. God who is love. The Zen tradition of Eisai and Dogen is a religion of practical religion of enlightenment. Nichiren's Lotus School, with its emphasis on absolute trust in the *sutra* and on intentional practice of what the adherents believe, is

more like Islam with its confidence in the Qur'an and submission to God. Thus in Kamakura Buddhism we discern three types which reflect the spirit of world religions. That these manifestations arose out of the soil of Japanese Buddhism must be seen as one of its unusual achievements."

To the degree that the teaching enabled ancestor worship and funerals to be popularized, the sect of Buddhism spread. In the Tokugawa era (1603-1868) Christianity was suppressed and an edict promulgated; 15 rules for priestly supervision, one of which was that those who didn't attend the numerous ancestor rituals and festivals were to be interrogated and reported. Every household had to register with the local temple and in this way the legal and compulsory relationship between the household and the Buddhist temple was initiated: the *danka*-system. 檀家 (Suzuki b 2000:30). Suzuki rightly commented that the *ie* is "the elementary structure on which Japanese society was based." "The blending of ancestor worship and systematic Buddhist rituals occurred gradually, as more people chose to have Buddhist priests officiate at funerals) during this era" (Suzuki a ,179).

Leading into the Meiji era, ancestor practices were written in legal terms into the Meiji Civil Code, promulgated in 1898. With particular reference to our study is Article 987: "Ownership of the genealogical record, articles of worship and tomb is a spiritual right pertaining to the succession of a house." To an intensely law-abiding country such a law in its history is of great importance.

In 1940 the Religious Organisations law (*shuukyoo dantai hoo*) was introduced and non-conformist organizations were severely persecuted.

The New Civil Code of 1948

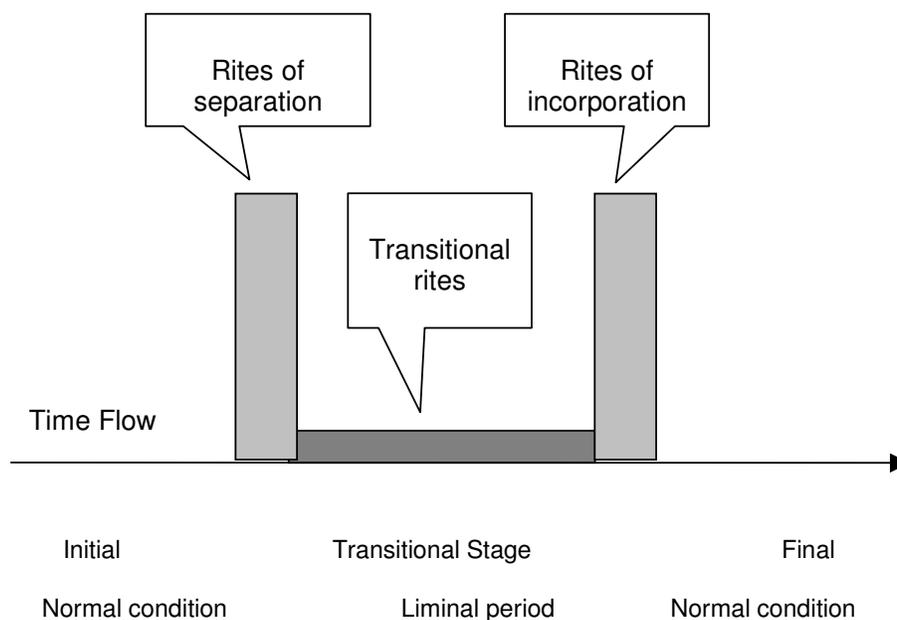
provides, in most respects, for a very different kind of family structure. The household is no longer a legal entity and its head is stripped of its powers. [L]egally Japan turned away from the old *ie*-structure to that of the Western nuclear family. To be noted is that the genealogical records, rite utensils, tombs and burial grounds are inherited by the person who is the "president" in the worship of the memory of the ancestors (Berentsen, 18).

Koyama says that over time, the three great traditions of Confucianism, Buddhism and Christianity have been synthesized and become to various degrees, part of Japan. Buddhism entered Japan, was eagerly accepted as a vehicle for the incipient ancestor worship and continues to this day as funeral Buddhism.

1.6 Ancestral Rites

A Buddhist proverb: *Shindareba, koso ikitare*, meaning, "Only by reason of having died does one enter into life." (Japanese Buddhist proverbs, 16). Japanese take part in ancestral rites for this purpose. In doing these rites, pollution is cleansed; and there is a means to deal with pollution, danger and the deceased can move forwards towards Nirvana. The ritual stages are shown below in figure 2.

FIGURE 2. Van Gennep's rites of passage. *Source:* Data from Edmund



(From Figure 4, Suzuki a 2000:17)

How are the ancestor practices carried out today? Suzuki tells of her experience during research at the Moon Rise Company: first of all final water is place on the lips of the deceased, the body is washed, beautified. A small sword or its replica is placed on top of the body to avoid evil spirits. Sutras are read at the house, the body is ceremoniously placed in the coffin with loved items. (One man took his croquet mallet with him.) (Suzuki, 41)

The wake is held the night before the funeral and cash as an incense offering is given by visitors. Sutras are recited by the priest and mourners offer incense one by one. Posthumous ordination is also attained and the deceased

is ordained a Buddhist monk. Speeches are made in memory of the deceased and all share a meal together afterwards.

The next day the funeral takes place. Sutras are read, maybe a brief sermon is given by the priest, and in the Zen school, (*Zen-shuu*) the sermon is preached to the deceased to help him or her attain enlightenment. Eulogies are given, incense is burnt by the priest and mourners and offered to the body and the spirit. At the next stage of the funeral, the *kokubetsu shiki* 告別式 where those that are not close family, will burn incense. Flowers may be placed in the coffin and it is then closed. The chief mourner makes a speech, thanking all the guests, while the family stands near holding the deceased's photograph, and the *ihai* 位牌 (mortuary tablet) and maybe food offerings. After a funeral, salt is scattered to purify. And the priest once more chants sutras at the house. (Kenny & Gilday, 169-173)

The cremation takes place at a distant crematorium. "Death" is timed from the time that the switch is pressed. Here again an altar is set up, incense burnt. The body is moved into the oven while mourners have a meal. Picking up the bones is done by close relatives and placed into an urn, then into a box with a silk covering. The bones will remain at the house on a temporary altar for 49 days. One mortuary table is prepared for the temple and one for the house. With this the deceased, called *hotoke* 仏 (Buddha) is integrated into the realm of departed spirits. All men become buddhas just by dying. *Joobutsu* (nirvana) is identified with the supernatural condition of the spirits in the indigenous worldview

Rowe (2000:371) quoted Fujii that the change from flesh into white bones at the crematorium signals the attainment of buddhahood. (Fujii1988:115) So clearly when the change is effected is not generally agreed upon. Rowe feels that the changes at the crematorium, particularly in the rite of placing the bones into the urn - a really powerful moment - also shows there has been a shift from the religious to the scientific or medical sphere.

A long period of memorial rites to enable the spirit to progress, begins: after the first week the posthumous name *kaimyoo* 戒名 is handed over to the family. Further rites take place: once every week, for 7 weeks, then after 100 days, 1 year, two years and then at 6, 12, 17, 22, 26, 32, 48 and 100 years. This varies depending on the Buddhist sect and the area. These memorial rites,

hooji, 法事 are attended by family, friends and acquaintances. These are stopped at the 50th year when the spirit reaches maturity and enters Nirvana. The process of the spirit maturing towards Nirvana depends on the living.

Internment of the ashes takes place 49 days after death. Pollution is strongest at this time. The urn is taken to the grave and placed inside the tombstone. Here again a priest will recite sutras. Family members will visit the grave at the two equinoxes, *higan* “the other shore or Pure Land” at Obon and at New Year. The grave is cleaned, tidied and food and flower and incense offerings are given and the family talks to the dead.

Other rites are grave visits at the two equinoxes when the graves are cleaned, incense burnt and prayer offered. *Bon* 盆 is the main ancestor annual festival when the spirits of the dead are guided by fire into the house, convivial meals are eaten in front of the house altar and they are then sent off again. Grave visiting also occurs. Obon dancing in public places consoles and pacifies the spirits.

Buddhism has a highly developed philosophical structure and scholastic tradition; however, this is entirely irrelevant to most Japanese. It may sound strange, but many Japanese participate in temple worship and depend on the temple for funeral rites, but do not even know to which Buddhist sect their temple belongs. It is just ‘their temple’; that cares for the consolation and peace of the dead; there they ‘send’ the spirits of their dead relatives and there the priest will conduct his daily worship, reading sutras morning and evening.

CHAPTER 2

CONTEMPORARY BELIEFS AND PRACTICES

The study of Shintoo, Confucianism and Buddhism gives insight into the development of contemporary beliefs and practices. A long history of ancestor practices is today developing in different directions. Chapter 2 gives insight into the New Religions, contemporary beliefs, popular culture and practices and a focus group shows how attitudes and practices have changed within the last decade.

2.1 The New Religions

The so-called “New Religions”, *Shin Shuukyoo*, are based on religious and magical practices: shamanism, purification rites, exorcism and ancestor worship – revitalization movements which incorporate Shinto, Buddhism and Western philosophy and Christianity. (Davis 1992:247) The New Religions developed apart from the organised religions and became new socio-religious organizations. These organizations have been extensively studied in general, but virtually no investigation of the manner in which the ancestors are viewed. They emphasize ancestral practices. (Koomoto Mitsugi 1991, 1997:1) There are hundreds of these groups, and statistics are highly speculative, although there are a few with millions of members. (Swanson & Chillday, 97).

They have sent out missionaries to Europe, Asia and America. The reason for their success: because they communicated their message at the worldview level of the Japanese masses. *Omotokyoo* demonstrates the power of the spirit through supernatural means such as healing and foretelling. Through these supernatural demonstrations of power, the masses were convinced that *Omotokyoo* was really in touch with the reality of the spirit world. (Hayama 1983:47).

The first identifiable group was *Nyooraikyoo* (1812), then *Kurozukomyoo* (1814) and then *Tenrikyoo* (1939). *Risshoo Kooseikai* and *Sooka Gakkai*, *Nichiren* offshoots, grew quickly post-war.

The New Religions usually emphasize this-worldly values, the acquiring of health and prosperity, “self-improvement and happiness through faith or through magical practices. Some were founded by individuals, usually women, possessed by deities.” “The membership is in the tens of millions” (Reischauer, 214). Hori said that most of the new Religions’ founders were very shamanistic and that the thought is that such leaders inherited the tradition of *hito-gami* (man-god) in ancient religions. (Yoshimoto, 109)

Most of the groups can trace their origins to *Reiyuukai*, which originated in Taisho (1912-1926). *Reiyuukai*, *Risshoo Koosaikai* and *Myoochikai* will be described as representative of most of the New Religions. How do the groups present the ancestral concept to their members?

The founder of *Reiyuukai*, Kubo, followed Nishida, who emphasized ancestral worship. He saw funerary rites for all spirits being a means of ridding oneself of bad karma. Recognizing that the family is established by both husband and wife, both sides of the family ancestors are enshrined and also *muen-botoke* 無縁仏 (wandering spirits). A general posthumous name *sookaimyoo* is given to all the ancestors of the family.

In addition lay *kaimyoo* (*hoomyoo*) are given to family members, so that they all have personal names in the spirit world. “The spirit world and visible world are two sides of a mirror” as in *Myoochikai* (Koomoto Mitsugi, 8).

The register of family dead is important and friends may be added. The Buddhist names collected here and masses offered to the ancestors allow them to achieve buddhahood and the devotee accumulates merit. So it is clear that ancestor revering and thankful service is important. The atmosphere of the home is promised to change to happiness.

Illnesses are caused by *karma* and doing the rites will help. Merit-making is done for the ancestors, twice-daily domestic religious practices, family behavioral norms and religious group-member norms are stipulated. Filial piety: knowing the depth of the parents’ love, offering them delicacies and pleasant memories and further adopting the correct religious faith is necessary to wipe out the parents’ evil karma and prevent their suffering.

Leading others to the group will bring ancestors to buddhahood and the sick in this world will also get better. “Leading” others is linked to ancestral rites and one’s own personality.

The safety and prosperity of the *ie* is involved in the rites, social order is maintained and *tatari* 祟り (cursing) is prevented. The theme of vindictive spirits *onryoo*, 厭離王, (unrelated souls) *muenbotoke* 無縁仏 (hungry ghosts) *gaki botoke* 餓鬼道 and unnatural deaths caused followers to sometimes build a “shrine to hungry ghosts (Koomoto Mitsugi, 15); “in order to contain their spiritual power, placating them and dispelling their curse.” “The curse is the lives of suffering we live, due to the suffering of the ancestors who are continuing individual personalities and are unable to achieve buddhahood” (Koomoto Mitsugi, 15). Temporal suffering is explained by this. Curses may come from recent or ancestors several generations back.

Later a greater accent on the benevolence of ancestors was noted by Morioka who said that descendants have their loving mothers and fathers standing guard over them. This was like being under the benevolence and protection of the emperor and his heavenly ancestor.

In current New Religions we see a selective use of the Bible being made. A Nagoya-based messianic movement, *Tookookyo*, “draws on Buddhist and Christian traditions” writes Mullins, the authority on indigenous movements (Swanson & Chillday, 125). Its sacred text *La Vocode Sfinkso* (The Voice of the Sphinx) is saturated with themes and ideas mostly from Genesis and Revelation.

The largest group is *Sooka Gakkai* (the Value Creating Association) which is a branch of Nichiren Buddhism. This group founded the political party, *Koomeitoo* and is influential in the coalition government now as New Koomeitoo. It also has schools and a university. They use forms of worship which require little intellectual effort to understand, such as the repeated chanting of the phrase, ‘Glory be to the Lotus of the Supreme Law’ *Namu Myoohoo Renge Kyoo*. (Lewis 1993:286) Rapid growth is attributed to the use of small groups, *zadankai* 座談会

A notorious group is that of Asahara Shookoo, founder of *Aum Shinrikyo*. This group features violence with Buddhist teachings, trance messages from Jesus Christ and an apocalyptic vision characterizes the movement. The notoriety of *Aum Shinrikyoo* is one of the reasons that people find religion distasteful.

Departures from original teachings are indicative of dissatisfaction with the status quo and also of those features that are enduring and strong in the minds of the populace. Next, insight is given into contemporary ancestor practices as seen close up during 6 months of research in a funeral company.

2.2 Changes in Death Practices

Changes in death practices have been noted and point to trends in society that are quite far removed from the practices described in Chapter 1.

When Suzuki worked in a funeral company during research, she realized that the deceased were no longer looked upon as polluted corpses. Her emic study provides new insights. The president of the company had discarded most of the religious aspects that “treated the deceased as physically and spiritually impure or dangerous” (Suzuki b 2001 189). The bathing ceremony was only performed during the day; the staff do not wear headbands to hold off evil spirits; no water is thrown under the house or onto the fields, no rice wine is drunk to purify during or before the ceremony and the family are not told to bathe after the ceremony.

Corpse purifying has turned into a bath and sometimes a very luxurious, relaxing, well-perfumed bath is provided. Values such as refreshment for the deceased, sympathy for the deceased, resolution of past grudges and conflicts and the generosity and benevolence of the living were emphasized instead. (Suzuki 2001, Clark 1992)

Moon Rise Funeral Hall makes contact with future customers by holding events at the funeral hall – it is a place to visit. Parties, seminars and exhibitions are held. In the mid 1980’s a *bon-odori* was inaugurated: a summer dance party, food stands offering popcorn, cotton candy, beer and fast foods. The next day there were exhibitions and seminars about death, funerals and a Buddhist memorial service. In the afternoon a film celebrity gave his or her opinions about life and death. The dread of funerals is fading and this is being aided by commercial motives.

2.2.1 Living Funeral

Some are opting for a living funeral, which is conducted by the living person, while still healthy. People want to participate before they are ill and bedridden. The singer, Mizunoe Takiko was the first to do this with wide media coverage. “I wanted to express my appreciation to all those who have been dear to me while I am still alive.” Here Suzuki quoted from Ei. (Suzuki 2003:66:)

In this parody of the common funeral ceremony there was burning of incense to the deceased and memorial addresses. The sutras were chanted with music interspersed: Japanese and Tibetan Buddhist sutras, Koran prayers, Chopin’s Funeral Procession, Christmas carols and Mozart’s Requiem. Finally, with “Santa Claus is coming to town”, the audience started to clap and a happy party ensued. Other bizarre and interesting, champagne filled funerals are recorded.

Kosugi told of a university president’s non-religious funeral, which opened with the university symphony orchestra playing, a slide show giving the deceased’s personal history given by a professional narrator, a film of his later life, a chorus sung, a Bach aria; a large photograph was projected onto the screen and flowers were presented instead of incense burning. “Throughout the evening, participants’ feeling towards the deceased enveloped the ceremony” (Suzuki d, 68).

Customers are willing to pay for ‘meaningfulness’. Sometimes a formal funeral is held and then later at a hotel the “freedom funeral” is held at a hotel; a boxed altar is used where the bereaved can display items. A deceased golf-player’s golf clubs decorated the altar, another fisherman’s fishing rod, reel and net were displayed at the hall entrance, a well-known piano player’s funeral was decorated with a grand piano, placed in the front, used as a funeral altar. Clearly the meaning of funerals is changing. “Thus the living funerals are intended to assert one’s own importance as an individual in a context where the value of the deceased as ancestors has declined” (Suzuki c, 670).

Some thought providing a funeral for one’s parents is still considered a duty, descendants have come to see it not as an obligation to household ancestors as such, but as returning a favour to their parents. So gratitude, obligation dominates. With longevity, there is very little money left to be grateful

for, so even that might disappear. An erosion of earlier practices is seen, but traditional religious ideas are appearing in new forms.

Poet, Matsunaga Goichi praises the non-religious funeral of writer Nakano Shigeharu: "There was no chanting of the sutras, but it was one of the rare funerals in which I was moved beyond expression" (Suzuki a 177).

A non-religious funeral undermines the fundamental belief system revolving around the production of household ancestors. A non-religious funeral also devalues the role of Buddhist priests in the transitional process of the spirits and denies the existence of malevolent spirits (Suzuki a, 180).

Some shrines and temples have internet websites and invite devotees to buy charms and receive prayers. Temples encourage people to "visit" the temple and receive prayers for the dead. We are in the process of rapid change and change that will affect the Christian church, especially if they rise to meet the challenges.

In a personal email to us, Prof Suzuki confirms that the changes are not only in the big cities, but in rural areas, which is a surprise to hear. We need to comment that Suzuki has lived most of her life outside of Japan and maybe does not realize that bringing the bodies home would mean more rituals, negating what she is saying about rural areas also having large changes.

I conducted my fieldwork at Kita-Kyushu. The headquarter was very close to the center of the city, but the same company has about 5 branches that covers the whole area of Kita-Kyushu - meaning it covers the suburbs and rural areas as well. Because it is the same company, they offer the same services. The only differences I can think of right now is that in the rural areas (1) there are more families who want to have their funerals at their home instead of at the funeral halls, (2) more families want their deceased carried back to their home even if they decide to have a funeral at the funeral hall, (3) there are more neighboring people who come to help (offerings and staying with the family and so forth) (4) rural areas tend to imply more elderly, and so their funerals are smaller because (a) most of their friends are deceased and (b) children are older and are often retired so they don't have to invite their bosses and colleagues as well. Dec. 2006

A change in death pollution ideas, funeral options, has led to changes in beliefs about the bones too.

2.2.2 Ash Scattering (*Shizensoo*)

Midori Kotani, a researcher at the Life Design Institute, a Tokyo think-tank tells of ash-scattering. The incidence of ash scattering is increasing; it being the most non-religious form of disposing of relative's remains. Some go to picturesque cliff sites after the funeral. One wife took her husband's ashes to his favourite overseas spots, another to places he hadn't travelled to yet. Ashes have been used to make pendants to make reminders of the loved one. Scattering ashes are not only a memory of the deceased, it also continues to create and provide occasions to share memories with the deceased. (Suzuki c, 669)

“the act of scattering implies disposing of the bones and eliminating the graves that were the focal point for ancestor veneration: “By the very act of dispersing the bones, the continuation of household ancestors is rendered impossible” Suzuki a, 183).

Shizensoo also goes contrary to the commoditization of death and the huge cost of a funeral, usually an average of over \$20 000. *Shizensoo* costs about \$1 000 according to the Asahi Shinbun 1997. (Formanek and LaFleur, 425) The majority are held at sea, the rest in the mountains, in the sky, in a river and in the garden of the deceased's home. Tokyo City has changed a development plan near a source of water supply in a remote wooded area into a development of a natural park for *shizensoo*. The term *shizensoo*, rather than *sankotsu* 散骨(ash scattering) is used, indicating this allows the dead to be part of nature again. The first proposal for *shizensoo* used this slogan: “Leave nature to our descendants instead of graves” (Formanek and LaFleur, 433).

2.2.3 Eternally-worshipped graves (*Eitai kuyoobo*)

These graves are not a family affair, but bought by individuals. Some bones are buried alone, some with unrelated people. Those with no descendants, those who do not wish to be buried with their mothers-in-law or their husbands, or homosexual or heterosexual couples who were not allowed to be married in life, rely on private companies, temples and other religious or non-religious organisations to assume the maintenance and worship of the

dead to be carried out. This shows that the grave is now maybe the individual's eternal resting place and not an *ie* symbol.

Many Japanese companies are building collective graves for deceased employees. Regular meetings held by participants creates community, and also provides psychological comfort in following the tradition. To respond to the anxiety of not having a grave or a caretaker of their after-life, half-page advertisements for *eitai kuyoo* 永代供養 are placed in national newspapers and many how-to books are published. A comic movie was even made showing the frenzied search for a grave by an single, aging actress: "There is No Grave for Me!"

The love for the exotic is combining with age-old traditions in surprising ways.

2.2.4 Death practices for aborted babies (*Mizuko kuyoo*)

Abortion and culled babies has always been a feature of life, but with the legalisation of abortion in 1948, numbers increased to a high of 30% in the 1970's. *Mizuko kuyoo* 水子供養 became a boom then and continues. Within 20 years it has appeared in most Japanese religious institutions, with Buddhist, Shugendoo, Shinto, new religions and prayer healer forms.

As before it involves *Jizoo* 地藏尊 statues, but now there is wide-scale commercialisation, because of an intense marketing campaign involving mass media and religious entrepreneurs. Media promoting the "occult boom" has changed the idea of a benevolent baby into a malevolent character. "Sensational articles in tabloids and magazines for young unmarried women illustrate *mizuko tatari* or retribution and preached the importance of performing *mizuko kuyoo* to show repentance for killing the foetus and to avert *mizuko's* vengeance" (Formanek and LaFleur, 426).

Before the abortion was an *ie* interest, but now is typically viewed as a consequence of the individual's irresponsible behaviour and as a woman's personal choice for contraception. The foetocentric rhetoric behind the malevolent foetus seems to suggest its independent existence and rights, separate from its mother. Non-community-based, most clients today want to

receive a solution to their own feelings of guilt, fear and ambivalence in a one-time-only cash transaction.

Another change shows a collective orientation in that the family as the basic social unit is involved: *Tatari* falls more frequently on the siblings and their children, than on the parents. *Karma* here does not transfer to the individual, but to someone else. Men also are taking part as head of the family. One abbot at a prestigious Buddhist temple “denying the efficacy of *mizuko-Jizoo* as not anchored in Buddhist texts, maintains *mizuko* needs a material form in order to receive any benefit and preaches the importance of giving it an *ihai* (a spirit tablet) with *kaimyoo* (a posthumous name)” (Formanek and LaFleur, 430).

Tsuji notes that although there is this shift from collectivity to individuality that it is not occurring in a linear, progressive fashion and that the two are not necessarily in opposition.

2.3 Popular Culture

Trends always need watching and the trends of 1995 are now popular culture for a large number of urban dwellers. Urban dwellers are then followed by rural dwellers to some extent. Manga, animation and films and focus groups are a window to popular thinking.

2.3.1 Manga/cartoons

The artist Hokusai (1760-1849) coined the term *manga*’ “*man*” (in spite of oneself, whimsical or lax) and “*ga*”, picture. The first examples of this art are found in the *Shosoin* in Nara. Comic pictures were often done on picture scrolls by Buddhist monks satirizing themselves, then in the early 17th century as woodblocks became popular, Hokusai used the genre for representing the age’s pleasures, clothes, places to visit. Books of cartoons developed over the centuries and these days many read *manga* - children from 18 months old to senior citizens.

In animation adult themes are used, life and death and the fear of death. (Craig 2000:126) The immanence of the supernatural within the normal and familiar is a popular theme. Tezuka, a popular writer used nature to express

existential longings, giving nature sad, dark and violent expressions of people's emotions.

Material that “normally only can be found in *The X Files* or *Unsolved Mysteries* in the US routinely winds up in mainstream Japanese comics” (Izawa Eri 1996, 1997, 2001:1). Among the themes are a preoccupation with those that have recently died, banishing demons, and *muenbotoke*. Heaven and Buddhist hell is often mixed. A typical plot is that of a human who needs to protect the human world from those from the demon world. The souls of those who die often end up Somewhere Else that is neither the demon world nor the human world. (Izawa Eri, 5) Good and evil in characters are often switched, evil and psychic powers are glamorised and often the good wins. “It would be folly to use *manga* and *anime* (animation) as guidebooks to the supernatural, but for many people, it's the main source of information” (Izawa, 6). Miyazaki, famous animation writer, expresses the underlying belief of the continuity between humanity and nature. This concept is encapsulated in the word *nagare*, 流れ meaning to flow.

Manga seem to have found a significant half-way position between print and television in mass communication. (Kodansha Encyclopaedia 1993: 918)

2.3.2 Films

Two vastly popular cinematic events are an interesting indication of popular belief - resurrection without God and a choice of how you are judged: in 2003 “Yomigaeri”, 蘇り (Resurrection), a film about strange sightings of already dead people who live again in a mountain village; and “Skyhigh” a TV series. There individuals can determine their life after death as they reflect on their lives just before they die. At the Begrudgement Gate each person is a victim of some kind – either murdered or killed in a drunk driving traffic accident. They are offered three paths to the afterlife. They can accept or refuse their destiny or return to earth once more to curse and kill a living human.

Christian and Buddhist terms “rebirth” and “*tengoku*” 天国 the Christian word for heaven is used introducing heaven and a kind of purgatory at the Gate. This promotes the idea “that one's sense of the spiritual and the afterlife can be

just about anything you want it to be” (Fujino 2005:6). A bulletin board posting service gives opinions that some have found meaning or purpose in their lives.

Three key themes stand out: relationships, revenge and restitution. Relationships stretch beyond life as in the scene where the elderly gentlemen whose pre-school grandchildren and himself were killed in a traffic accident for the purpose of cursing the girls’ parents, so that they may all be together, even in hell.

In both films, the dead do not know they have died and the assumption is “that the afterlife is so like this life that one cannot tell the difference” (Fujino a, 29).

The second choice after death is revenge, which is a strong feeling amongst Christian and non-Christians. Apologies and restitution form a big part in the films: the man comes back to life and it is the first word he utters, the bullied boy apologizes for dying on them. Someone’s untimely death still leaves a sense of indebtedness on his part. Respondents to the shows; BBS on the Internet, asked whether they would accept or refuse their destiny or return to earth once more to curse and kill a living human - most choose revenge.

Japanese may tolerate and encourage “deviant” thinking in their popular culture because they are not able to change very much in the conservative culture. Manga and films cannot be censored at the time of writing. (Manga were banned pre-war and during the war.)

The following experiment is indicative of traditional beliefs that have been eroded, but that show a surprising tendency to hold ideas that are religious, while strongly denying being “religious.”

2.3.3 Images of the Soul and its Passage after Death

Yamada Yooko and Kato Yoshinobu’s experiment with Japanese and French students is described in “Practising the Afterlife: Perspectives from Japan”. In 1995, 327 Japanese students (96 males, 231 females) participated in this study. They were students at a university in the Tokyo metropolitan area, and 2 in Nagoya – French students from Paris also participated and were compared. On the basis of their drawings, a model was constructed to show: (1) the relationship of the form of the soul to that of the human being’s body, and (2) the relationship of the type of the soul’s transformation to its location between this world and the other world.

Summarising: The Japanese students were more likely to depict the soul as moving back and forth between two worlds, whereas French students tended to depict the soul as moving only in the direction of the other world. In addition, Japanese students were more likely to produce images of rebirth. French images of the soul tended to depict eternal lives of immortal souls with the same everlasting identity in a constant world, whereas Japanese images seemed to be continuously changing from death to rebirth and from birth to death in different individuals and in successively different generations. This has been shown to be consistent with the form of the soul in the drawings: whereas French students' depictions tended to fall into the dichotomy *Human For/Air Form*, Japanese students much more frequently drew *Fireball Forms* which are characterized by a transitional quality and might be considered to be metaphoric roots of life that do not have human body or individual identity, but still keep something continuing after death.

These, however are only characteristic trends; wide variation was found within both the Japanese and the French sample, and despite differences in the overall trends, students of both countries made quite similar drawings despite their different cultural backgrounds. The preference of the Japanese students for representing rebirth of the soul might in part be rooted in the Japanese religious traditions which accommodates various notions of communication with the deceased person's soul and of rebirth, and might partly be reinforced by current trends in Japanese society, such as the emphasis put on similar notions both by contemporary *manga* comics or renowned academic writers such as Umehara Takeshi (1996). However, important departures from this tradition were also to be observed: Japanese youth no longer share a clear-cut belief in reincarnation nor in a strong interconnection between the living and their dead ancestors. However, what still seems to be important to Japanese youth is to feel themselves associated with a cycle of life including former and future generations. These feelings are based on a sense of being loosely linked to others, of being part of a larger cycle of Life from generation to generation, an ongoing project (Formanek and LaFleur, 455-456).

This is very informative, especially when considered with the following findings.

2.4 Focus Group

27th December 2007: A meeting was held with 5 Japanese friends from an interpreters' group, living in an urban area, Ichikawa, just outside Tokyo. We have had a relationship with some of these ladies for nearly 12 years. Ages varied, one in her early thirties and the rest over 50, into their early sixties. They came to our house, spoke in English, as an English speaking opportunity.

Whenever any words that meant “worship” or “respect” or other salient terms that needed clarification were used, I asked for the Japanese word they meant. 2 out of 5 had lived in foreign countries. We talked for two hours.

(1) Who does the term “ancestor” apply to?

Grandfather. Direct parents, everything linked to me (her parents are very strong in ancestor practices) Agree. The blood line, individual ancestor, 3 – 5 generations back.

ie: everybody. Only the youngest. No. Urban: married to the choonan, 長男 (eldest son) so no sense of *ie*. Stopped that. At weddings, funerals the *ie* is emphasized, then everybody is thought of. We think of family ties then. (We are married, so we don't feel such *ie* feeling to our husband's family.)

(2) Where is your *furusato*? 故里 (original family home town)

Yokohama, Narashino in Chiba. *Furusato* means *inaka* (country) to her. Hokkaido. Tokyo: so she envies someone who has a *furusato* to go to. Doesn't feel she has one. Should be the countryside. Kanagawa.

(3) . Do you go home for New Year and Obon?

Used to. Don't have such a home. Once a year, but not at New Year, etc, but at easier booking time.

(4) Does your *ie* play a big role in your thinking and actions?

No. Married, so into another *ie*, don't have influence in mother's *ie*. Yes, married to eldest son. Yes, I am connected to *ie*. I married into. At *hooji* (memorial rites) times we think of the *ie*.

Grandfather's funeral. People came who did not know him, it was a strange feeling. They had to do it because of saving her brother's face as he was the *moshu*, 喪主 (chief mourner). Relationships in the company are complicated and you had to be careful who you notified and to notify everyone.

To some other occasion you can send money, but a funeral you must go. (Nirvana at 49 days) 2 meanings, (1) just after death, (2) becoming Buddha, becoming detachment.

(5) Is it illegal not to do ancestor worship?

(This needed some explanation about the laws) No. *Choonan* has responsibility because of inheritance, so has responsibility of ancestor worship. *Kanshuu*. (customary law)

“ancestor respect” or “ancestor worship”?

Ancestor practice and respect: need to choose between these two. Not veneration. Worship in church is *zenzen* different – completely different. (very)

(6) Would you prefer me to call the custom “ancestor veneration” No. (emphatic) atmosphere is different in church, and temples and cemeteries. At the grave: respect, more, this is my origin of myself, came back attend personally. The funeral means respect for the deceased, to express relationships.

(7) What is the importance of a grave visit? What is the meaning?

I go to do ancestor worship, *sosen suuhai*. 祖先崇拜 Myself: makes me feel better, calm, comfortable. I offer *osenkoo*, 線香 (incense) feel so *kimochi ga ii*. (feel so good) When I start a business, or enter school, or there is a family event, then we go. Some people leave the graves untidy, it doesn't look good.

(8) What are you grateful for?

Yes. Grateful to the dead person. It is different to *sosen suuhai*. Not ancestor worship. We pray that they please go to heaven.

(9) What do you do at the grave site?

In Hokkaido, we are different. At Obon we offer food, clean, put mat out and there, have a picnic. We offer food and then eat it, and then you will be healthy. We eat with the ancestors, share.

In Tokyo we clean the grave, the tombstone, change the water, put in flowers, burn incense, pray. We go twice a year; I'm married to the *choonan*, (eldest son) but I go alone, even if the family doesn't go. We pay money to the temple, to caretake the grave. Twice and for *Obon*. I know of a business that does the cleaning, offers flowers, water and takes a photo of the grave and sends the photo to the owner.

Then there are homepages, you can click and the *ihai* (mortuary tablet) as it comes up on the screen. (all laugh) You click and that click lights the incense. Is it free?

I feel guilty if no offering of incense for years. So homepage is useful, if the grave is at a distance, it is expensive to go and also to buy a gravesite.

(10) Why do you burn incense, what is the meaning?

Sooryoo, the priest. “The smoke is the only food for the deceased” the priest told us when my gran died. *Tabemono*. (food) There is a connection with the dead. It needs to burn continuously, starting right after death. In Hokkaido we stay over the night at the temple and

keep the incense burning. We keep incense burning at the house. That is Nichiren. Yet it is generally like that in Hokkaido, never mind the sect.

In Yawata (Ichikawa) at the Shoowa Funeral Hall there is a *tatami* mat room, but maybe that is for people who come from far away.

Why do you burn incense? (me) Giggles. To respect. Giggles, most people don't know the meaning, they all agree. 70% of people don't know funeral procedures, they just imitate. Shintoo offers leaves.

Joodoo-shin-shuu break the incense stick in half, lay it down. The priest told us to do that. Why? Don't know. You usually put the hot water into a cup before ... to make tea, well at funerals you do it opposite, put the hot water in

(11) When do you speak to your ancestors? .What is the importance of the funeral? What is the meaning?

(Seemed confused at the meaning of the question). Company funerals, many attend. Are they different to family funerals? (Me) They make much of his soul. *tomorau* we share sorrow. Mrs N's family wanted a small funeral for her 91 year old father. But the news of his death spread and it ended up as a big funeral.

When I'm in trouble, ask him to help, protect. I decided not to do that, but only words of appreciation, of how I spend my days without injury or sickness. I say thank you, I love you. When I visit the grave I speak to them. You usually pray for them at home, not speak to them.

When I sit in front of the *butsudan* I say thank you to my grandparents, or report to them. My parents prayed before my exams at the *butsudan*. They announce my healthy growth. Usually to grandparents, not ancestors. The third generation back I don't know them, so don't feel they are close.

(12) Do you have a *butsudan* or a *kamidana* where you live?

(Only I person didn't.) Another is in a flat and hasn't one. It is small so neither. When they move to a larger place she talked of getting a *butsudan*. Her husband, who is the *choonan*, said, Why?!! Those in their 30's and 40's do not have a *butsudan* or *kamidana*. Friends they visit do not have them. Friends' parents are still alive, when they die, they will get a *butsudan*.

One woman's 3 sons, even the eldest, do not have a *butsudan*. They will buy when the parents die.

(13) What are your feelings when you are before the *butsudan*?

Meditate. I feel calm. I pray in a different place. (this person is Ba'hai). I have a quick memory of my mother. We have photos, so we can remember. Someone keeps a cat's photo too. Giggles. One younger

woman tells of a room in the *urusato* where the *butsudan* is, with photos around the walls and is reminded of black kimono at funerals. She found it scary in childhood.

(14) Is it a feeling of worship?

One woman said her genealogy goes back past Edo and they have only kept the tombstones from Edo, earlier than that they have broken down. Do not use “*suuhai*”, this sounds like Shintoo. *Sosen o agameru*. 崇める (respect the ancestors) *Sosen o omou* 思う (think of the ancestors) *natsukashii* 懐かしい (nostalgic). *Kamisama ja nai*. (not a god) Never look at ancestor as god in our generation. (very emphatic). *Sosen* is closer than kami or Buddha. Don't worship to Buddha or God, but pray to ancestors, but it is respect. We exist because they lived. “*Ogame*” (respect) *Kimochi toshite, agameru*. (as a feeling it is respect) In electric dictionary “worship” is given the meaning of *omatsuri suru* –祭る to deify, to enshrine, to worship. Here I feel it is the following kanji: to respect, 祭る (to present, to do, respectfully) More Shintoo maybe. Maybe that is the origin. It has different meanings, and are slowly changing.

To revere, more than respect, not worship. Worship is not clear. Worship is something different, too strong.

(15) Is it the same feeling as when you pray at the shrine??

Different, more close (*mijika*). At the *butsudan*: we honor, adore – adoration as when we see a baby (the idea, the unspoken idea was: how precious, how dear)

(16) Have you ever experienced *tatari*? (cursing)

(laughs) No. If you don't clean the grave, then you get it. If I have no feeling of guilt I won't get it. (I asked: what produces guilt?) Things I should do: like to go to the shrine and temples and cemeteries. Some people feel like that. Not related to grave visiting, depends on the person.

I tried to open an *omamori*: (safety charm) and my parents told me I would be cursed. It's a bad feeling. It is something that has come from legends, old people used it as a warning. Buy *omamori*, お守り go back to the same shrine, take it back and ask them to burn it.

There is a TV fortune-teller on twice a week. She says: you don't do ancestor customs and that is why you are in trouble, have fights with mother-in-law. It is an effective means to encourage you to do ancestor customs. Older people and those in the countryside where there is strong inter-connectedness, tell each other to do ancestor customs. Old people tell me to do the old things. In the city we still talk of *tatari*. People love such TV programmes, interested but not so serious about it, it's entertainment. In rural areas the idea is strong, *ojizoosama*, conservative religious. *Shinkooshin ga tsuyoi*, 信仰心 強い more

religious, more gullible idea. *Shinjin bukai* 信心深い is better to say. (deep belief)

(17) Can you help your ancestors?

(Puzzlement) Only as I pray, that they can cross the river, *kami ni chikazuku*. (go close to the gods) *Moo shite iru deshoo*. (are close already, hey?) *Yori kami ni chikaku*.

Okyoo: 經(sutra) prayer, same as prayer. Very few do it. At the funeral: *okyoo is for shisha no tamashii o iyasu*, 癒す (sutras are to heal the spirit of the deceased) *nagusameru*, 慰める (to comfort them) *joobutsu saseru tame* (to enable them to reach nirvana), *hotoke ni suru*, Detachment from this world, become Buddha.

Sanzu no kawa (river of death) a few days after death. Memorial *tame*, (for a memorial) not to forget them. 50 years, ashes into soil. 49 years, *joobutsu ni natta?* (do they reach nirvana) Wander around, *shijuu ku nichii*, *joobutsu*: to origin of my personality, kind of *ie* feeling. (People agree)

Not too much worship, feeling of closeness, close to custom or worship or veneration. Respect: they always protect us, (so do they have power?) (me) they have no power. They can help us, but it's not into that, yes, no logic to it.

Natsukashii. (nostalgic) One says not *natsukashii*, not power like God, but we feel like that.

Goriyaku, 御利益 that's Buddhist, *omegumi*, 恵み (blessings) benefits. You receive benefits from ancestors. Not religious. It's a sense, of belonging, family, *natsukashii*, it's a *mijika* na feeling. (a feeling of closeness)

So the 3 ideas: are *oboeru*, 覚える (remembrance) *kansha* 感謝 for health (gratitude) and respect. A combination.

A large change is seen to have taken place from traditional ancestor worship in past generations, to the views and customs of present city-dwellers. These changes are of importance for the church. Trends should be noted and the necessary theologising done. Obviously reductionist views of the issue will cause the church to miss where the people are and adjusting for mission and discipling.

This leads us to the themes that have emerged from study. What are these themes? How should we react to them? How do we use this knowledge

for contextualising? What are the key questions that need to be clarified before we can proceed to an examination of the teaching and practices of the Christian church in Japan? Necromancy, prayer, and idol worship will be examined too.

CHAPTER 3

EMERGENT THEMES AND KEY QUESTIONS

After reviewing the involved cultural background of ancestor practices and then proceeding to contemporary beliefs and practices we are able in Chapter 3 to identify and clarify the key themes needed to be contextualised. Focus is laid on contemporary opinions and ideas, shifts in terminology and the change in the nexus around which society is structured.

3.1 Emergent Themes

Any approach to culture must be able to address the problem of *social change*. Many approaches to the study of culture have been criticized because they can account for stable situations, but find themselves unable to deal with the dynamics of change. Social change is often the reason why local theologies need developing in the first place. Received notions of what it means to be a Christian, accepted models of Christian behaviour, formulations about the relation of the Christian to God may all be called into question by the emergence of new circumstances or by awareness of social relationships not previously understood (Schreiter 1996: 44).

The last decade alone has produced changes in attitude and practices to ancestor practices, as is clear when reading Smith (1974), Berentsen (1985). There is no doubt that attitudes are very different in rural areas, but the majority of the population live in cities. In reviewing the New Religions, popular culture and urban attitudes, the following themes emerge.

3.1.1 *The ie/household/family*

Yanagita Kunio, the pre-war nativistic scholar, wrote that Japanese find it difficult to see themselves as Japanese without the *ie*. Further, Chie Nakane felt that the core of the Japanese family has always been that between parent and child, not the relationship between husband and wife. Clearly the nexus has changed. Although attitudes have changed, gravesites, funerals and other

death-related subjects are still seen as family matters in Japan. The gravesite is the symbol of the family. Japan is in a state where the matter of the gravesite is the only aspect of the family system that has not changed along with the progress of the trend toward a nuclear family society

Putting together these comments, Suzuki's findings about the *ie*, and focus group urban dwellers, saying that they think about the *ie* only at weddings and funerals, one can say that the concept and functions of the *ie*, while still existing, has weakened. Nevertheless, it is still an issue that the church should include in its theologising.

3.1.2 Interdependence of the Living and the Dead

The interdependence of the *ie*, has been written about at length; conflating with animist views of the inter-connected of the universe – families and nature. “The concept that all life shares a single world without drawing lines between man and the supernatural or man and the natural world is one of the most fundamental of those concepts” (Fanny Hagin Mayer 1974:101). It is precisely this fuzziness between the living and the dead that makes for difficulty for the western mind to unravel questions in ancestor practices.

Paul de Nuei in “Sharing Jesus in the Buddhist World”, suggested that we need to recognize that the major barriers to Christ are social not religious. Chua argues too that the reason for the enduring nature of ancestor practices is the social nature, not the religious aspects – which used to be very strongly held throughout Japan. The dead and the living depend on each other.

3.1.2.1 Dependence of the Dead on the Living

There is still interdependence in some ways, but the urban dweller's puzzled response to the question: “How do you help your ancestors?” illustrates the fact that the overwhelming obligation to help the ancestors gain nirvana is not uppermost in their minds anymore. There is a sense of obligation, but it is nominal custom which does not seem to be of existential importance anymore.

3.1.2.2 *Dependence of the Living on the Dead*

Here it is obvious that there is still a sense of dependence on the dead, but mainly for psychological comfort. The comfort seems to be found in knowing that the customs have been observed satisfactorily. Receiving health and protection is important.

3.1.3 *Gratitude*

So gratitude is expressed for the gift of life, health, protection and for inheritance received – land and houses, as well as wealth. Gratitude for one's existence is a Japanese virtue.

3.1.4 *Memorialism*

Chua (2005) observes that to be forgotten is to be condemned to torment. Even in 1974, when Smith was writing, he had noticed an increase in the importance of memorialism and Morioka in 1999 that the *ie* obligations are being replaced, partly by personal and psychological functions, seeking comfort and inner peace through affectionately remembering the dead.

Comparatively, Mbiti in Africa speaks of the importance of preserving the ancestral memory by the living community. (Dyrness 1991)

In ancient times, Morioka (1999) Japanese referred to their ancestors as *kokoro no yoridokoro*, “the place where one's heart finds refuge and comfort” - much the same feelings are evoked today” (Chua, 19). Maybe missionaries have missed the importance of the emotionally comforting role of the traditional memorial rites, the *natsukashii* 懐かしい (longing) a socially-sanctioned means to find comfort that takes place as the years go by - and Lewis noted that in their quest for doctrinal correctness, missionaries have overlooked this issue.

Suzuki described current developments showing emphasis on the memorial addresses, the introduction of a farewell video of the deceased. (2003) “The more intimate, sympathetic and heart-warming the message addressed to the deceased, the more meaningful a funeral will be” (Suzuki c, 58). She wrote as early as 1998, concluding that there is a decline of ancestor

worship on the one hand, and the growing desire in Japan to be remembered as a unique, individual person upon one's death" (Suzuki a, 173).

3.1.5 Fear

The idea of *tatari*, cursing with misfortune, has been kept alive by the influential media and the elderly. Even Christians give pause – showing subliminal fear arising - when the word is mentioned. The idea is ingrained through numerous children's stories too, that it is still a feature in the thought world of the urban Japanese.

Suzuki found that the funeral company offered a refreshing, perfumed bath; the deceased is treated as being alive till the crematorium switch is pressed and because night vigils with the body are no longer done, deduced that the idea of the deceased being a haunting spirit is no longer so strong. She found that those at the funeral expressed fear and uncertainty rather about what happens after death.

3.1.6 Ethics

Motivation by heavy fear used to be joined to Confucian thought. Ancestor practices are now seen as a virtue. In history, government decrees made it a practice which every good citizen observed. Even in a society where situation ethics rules, ancestor practices are still an enduring virtue.

3.1.7 Identity

Another reason for observing ancestor practices is simply "because I am a Japanese, it is part of our customs." A parallel situation exists in Thailand. (Paul deNeui 2003:122) The church has not unravelled these two issues and clarified its position. Issues of Japanese Christian identity are becoming more urgent with the introduction of the Fundamental law of Education 2006 and the rise of right-wing nationalism in various forms. The reality of being in Christ, with citizenship in heaven is going to become more important in discipleship

3.1.8 Respect/Honour

The last is probably the theme that needs the closest attention as the focus group respondents (Chapter 2) emphasized respect, rather than worship. The concept of respect, which in the west would be termed honour, was the main impression of the interviewer.

From the above it is clear that identity, ethics, fear, the *ie*, respect, gratitude, psychological dependence and memorialism are issues that need to be addressed in a contextualised teaching tool in the local church in Japan.

3.2 Are Scripturally Forbidden Issues Involved?

In seeking to contextualize these identified themes of importance, are there Scripturally forbidden issues involved? The following key issues need to be clarified.

3.2.1 Necromancy

Here two activities need attention: firstly, talking to ancestors has often been labelled necromancy by missionaries. It is undoubtedly communication, but it would seem that according to the definition given by the Concise Oxford Dictionary (1982), “the art of predicting by means of communication with the dead; witchcraft”; that “reporting” to the ancestor (usually parents or grandparents) is not by definition, necromancy. “Obaachan, I passed the exam.” “Mom, I got promoted.” “I love you.”

The second activity would be consulting spiritualist shamanesses *kuchiyose miko* or *kuchiyose* 寄世 of which there are 3 types, the *kami kuchi*, *iki kuchi*, *shi kuchi*. The latter is relevant here. This medium can be called upon at a funeral or at festival like Obon. The purpose would be to know the will and unfulfilled wishes of the newly dead, or for communication and advice concerning the family, or to give reasons for family misfortune.

There are many ways that Japanese participate in divination *uranai* 占い. General “reporting” or “talking to” at the *butsudan* does not appear to fall under the necromancy nomenclature.

Chua cites the film *Saving Private Ryan*, where James Ryan, then an old man, standing at the tombstone of Captain John Miller, who sacrificed his own life to save him in battle, speaks to the dead man and then salutes the tombstone. (Would westerners have no problem with this?) (Chua, 9)

Benson Igboin gives a comparative view into similar issues: In Afrel the idea of the conscious state of the dead is a complex one. The African world is one of terrestrial blending. People in general believe that the dead are conscious of themselves as well as the world they left behind.

This is why the issue of the dead conversing with themselves is held to be true. Conversation requires some dints of consciousness. But for the living, the consciousness of the dead is a metaphysical and psychical one. There are claims of dreams, apparitions and trances of the dead. In these, it is claimed that messages are passed on to the living. There are myths that are replete with the conscious state of the dead (Igboin, 264).

Some pastors are not clear about this issue, but Yoshimoto “Concerning ancestor worship (sic) the communication with the dead must be strictly judged” (Yoshimoto, 138-39) – meaning “clearly forbidden”. and Takimoto, who wrote one of the few books published for lay Christians, also takes a very strong stand against all communication.

There are numerous warnings. Deut.18:10-11 “Let no one be found among you who sacrifices his son or daughter in the fire, who practices divination or sorcery, interprets omens, engages in witchcraft, or casts spells, or who is a medium or spiritist or who consults the dead.”

The “Complete Word Study Dictionary of the Old Testament” lists the word “consult” sa'al, verb meaning to ask. One could ask another person or even God for something (I Sam. 23:2; Ps. 122:6; 137:3; Ecc. 7:10) People sometimes sought information by asking Urim and Thummim (Num. 27:21), or an occult wooden object (Ezek 21:21[26]; Hos. 4:12. Asking could be done as a begging request or a stern demand (I Kings 2:16; Job 38:3; Ps. 109:10; Mic 7:3). The Hebrew expression of asking about someone's peace is similar to the English expression, “How are you?” (Gen 43:27; Judg. 18:15; Jer. 15:5). Very rarely, the term could refer to borrow or lending (Baker and Carpenter 2003:1085).

Although the word primarily means to ask, yet the context of Deut 18:11 includes 3 other prohibitions to necromancy, given that the meaning of the phrase in Hebrew parlance is the same, namely necromancy, and so is forbidden.

Other instances of this word's usage: in Is 8:19 it is used thus: "When men tell you to consult mediums and spiritists, who whisper and mutter, should not a people inquire of their God? Why consult the dead on behalf of the living?"

The word used in Ps 122:6 is translated as "pray" *sa al*; in Ps 137:3 it is a request to do something. Ezek 21:21 it is used in a context of divination, wanting advice; Hos 4:12, asking advice; I Kings 21:6 a request.

Looking at the meaning of the word used and the contexts, it would appear that this is one of the disputable issues that are best avoided.

3.2.2 Prayer to the dead

According to respondents' answers, asking ancestors for help is still being done even in urban centres. In reply to the question about the ancestor's having "power to help", there was strong denial. Asking for help (praying) was not linked in their minds to any clear idea of strength *chikara* 力. It is not a logical connection, which they admitted. Here we see an example of the phenomena that Japanese are able to hold paradoxical views in their minds – both/and. Yet there is some expectation of ability to help.

Suzuki felt there is evidence to suggest that the act of praying to or praying for the deceased is being replaced by a growing emphasis on the memories of the deceased. Smith, who leant strongly in the direction of "idolatory", wrote that although the ancestors were strong agents of social control in the *ie*, they are more rather "sources of emotional support." The fact that there is a haziness between the living and the dead, where the dead are felt to be "living dead", clouds the issue more. If grandmother, who helped you in life, is still "alive", why not ask her for help now that she is still around, but in another dimension? A difficult concept for westerners maybe, but theologians are dealing here with categories in a different culture and thought system.

Deut. 18:11 is usually the first reference examined about prayer to the dead. (See the word exposition in the previous section.)

The practice of prayer to the dead has historically been a problem: moving from the Roman empire's cult of the dead and the early martyrs; the Christians asked them to mediate for them to God, whereas their

contemporaries regarded the dead as being able to intervene directly in their lives.

3.2.3 Offerings to the Dead

Japanese offer incense, food and drink to the deceased and often open the *butsudan* doors and “eat with the ancestors”. When gifts of food are brought to the house by visitors they are often placed on the altar or *kamidana*. When a festive meal begins, food is taken off the *butsudan* and eaten by everyone. Leach suggests how an anthropologist can discover meaning out of cultural phenomena. Firstly, “the indices in non-verbal communication systems, like the sound elements in spoken language, do not have meaning as isolates but only as members of sets”. Totality is important for meaning communication. Further, “A sign or symbol only acquires meaning when it is discriminated from some other contrary sign or symbol”. This relates “to the issue of a classifying scheme in the mind and in cultural phenomena. The cultural phenomenon is an externalized form bearing meaning in concept.” Leach feels that we engage in rituals in order to transmit collective messages to ourselves” (Nishioka1997:73). (By starting to hold non-religious funerals, the Japanese are signalling that the incense burning means nothing to them, people admit they don’t know the meaning, it is something to do with the ritual, but exactly what it means they do not know.)

Hiebert concentrates on “public meaning”, that which exists in the minds of the majority of the members of a society. Nishioka insists that according to critical contextualization, the subjective understanding of the reality evoked by a particular symbol such as incense burning should be examined and judged according to Scripture. Certain culturally conditioned reality is called forth at a funeral concerning departed spirits, and one’s attitude to spirits and this understanding should be examined in the light of biblical truth. Kraft refers in this instance to the “user’s meaning”.

Psalms 106:28 “They yoked themselves to the Baal of Peor and ate sacrifices offered to lifeless gods” The Hebrew word translated here “lifeless gods” is again the word for “the dead” as in Deut 18:11.

When speaking of the use of tithes Dt.26:14 “I have not eaten any of the sacred portion while I was in mourning, nor have I removed any of it while I was

unclean, nor have I offered any of it to the dead. I have obeyed the Lord my God.”. The Israelites must have been aware of an ancestral cult and also of the ancestral dead being useful to consult for advice as in I Sam 28. There are similarities here with Japanese family meals/party practices. These practices are forbidden in the Old Testament. The basic incompatibility with a death cult is also shown in the forbidding of burying their kings in the temple, Ezek. 43:7-9

In the New Testament Paul teaches the Corinthians and Roman churches that feasting in temples in front of the idols is forbidden, 1 Cor. 10: 14-22, meat sold from shops that bought from temples was permitted to eat, but that one had to make sure that another Christian was not harmed by the eating. I Cor 10:23 The idol is “nothing”, not a god, but someone new to the faith, did not see it as such. Offerings to idols (which are nothing, non-existent gods) are offered to demons (I Cor 10:21) and therefore clearly forbidden.

Therefore it would seem if relatives or friends make a point of mentioning something about the food having been offered to the dead, that the Christian should refrain from eating, but otherwise, with a prayer of thanksgiving and blessing in their hearts, it is acceptable to eat. Attending a festival meal in a temple or shrine would be out of the spirit of the teaching.

Eating in front of the butsudān at a shrine or temple is interpreted as a participative act of union. (Nishioka, 283) A key term in understanding the mystic linkage in the passage is *koinonia*, which is usually translated as ‘participation; impartation or fellowship.’ In the Hellenistic usage, this term is often used for the notion of the direct union with deity expressed in sacrificial meals (Hauck). Paul’s concern in I Cor 10 14-22 is a dual allegiance signified by their multiple participation in different religious meals. “ According to trope analysis the eating of religious foods in a certain context (at the church supper or before cultic altar) is viewed as an act of forming a union” (Nishioka, 283). Paul is trying to develop a new symbolic universe with a solid boundary between Jesus and other demonic beings. (Nishioka, 285).

Eating a meal “in memory” of someone (and memorialism seems to be where death practices are heading) should not be seen as a problem. This is giving honour and respect to the ancestor. (Could the western custom of presenting a park bench “in memory” of a relative, or a church hall built “in memory of”, or a donation “in memory of” carry the same meaning?) A similar

question has been thoroughly studied by Rabban Sauma in “*Ancestor Practices in the Muslim World: a Problem of Contextualisation from Central Asia.*”

3.2.4 Worship of the *ihai*, Bones, Tombstone, Ancestor Spirit

The belief is that the deceased’s spirit returns to live in the memorial tablet. The priest will conduct a ceremony promoting this. After time elapses, the spirit exists in the tablet, in the grave and the tombstone. Relatives kneel before the tablet and at the grave, offer food, flowers, candles and incense and pray to the deceased because of respect, love and for favours. This would appear to contravene the 2nd Commandment “Thou shall not make for yourself an idol... You shall not bow down to them or worship them...” (Ex. 20: 4,5).

“They deify ancestors. But their cosmology, mytholody (sic) and ancestors are judged by the First Commandment” (Yoshimoto, 137). Deep bowing to relatives or important people is a day-to-day Japanese custom. If bowing these days shows person-to-person respect, can this bowing be taken to be worship? Is worship involved, is it idolatory? What is the bower thinking and doing? What is the purpose in the Japanese context? Chua presented this study on “bow”:

Similarly, the Hebrew word *hwXTvh*, as the Eshtaphal stem of *hwX*, has two meanings. Depending on the context, it can mean either “to worship: or simply “to prostrate oneself: Harris *et al.*, 2003: item 619, Theological Word Book of the Old Testament). For instance, in Exodus 2:5, 2 Kings 17:35, and Nehemiah 8:6, the word is translated in the New International Version as “to bow down and worship, but in Genesis 23:7 and 42:6, it is translated simply as “to bow down.” In the latter, there is no religious connotation whatsoever. 2 Kings 15:18 presents an interesting case in which the word appears twice. From the context, it would appear that the first instance refers to a religious act of worship on the part of Naaman’s master, and the second instance refers to a simple act of bowing on the part of Naaman. This Hebrew word in translated **proskunew** in the Septuagint. In the New Testament, *proskunew* has similarly the two sets of meanings, as in Matthew 4:9 and 2:20 respectively. I was alerted to the polysemous nature of these biblical words by Dr Robert Priest. (Chua a 2005, 24)

Smith felt in 1974 that he had no doubt that the family’s dead are its gods, which are worshiped and petitioned. Towards the end of his book he

admitted that although the ancestors were “strong agents of social control within the household”, they are now rather “sources of emotional support” (Chua a, 19).

Terminology is important in considering the issues involved. The term “ancestor worship” commonly used till recently is problematic as a translation of the various aspects of ancestral practices. There are eight expressions in Japanese to cover this phrase. Chua takes issue with Berentsen (27-28) who admits that a religious worship concept and a concept of veneration/respect is included. What term is to be used in English? Berentsen in 1985 decides against the term “ancestor veneration”, in case the term might convey just memorialism.

Reid took a semantic historical view of the term, and said that Takeda (1973) mentions that *sosen suuhai* as a Japanese term for ancestor worship is not “natural” to Japan as it was “coined to accommodate a Western import”. Fujii at a lecture in Tokyo in 1989 said that anthropologists do not use this term any longer. Neutral terms such as *sosen girei* 儀礼 (dictionary: courtesy, etiquette) or *sosen saishi* 祭式 (dictionary:rites, rituals) “ancestral rites’ are used. Both these scholars agree that the English “ancestor worship” is not adequate to describe what is happening in Japan. (Reid, 130). Focus group respondents clearly preferred the term “ancestor respect” in English.

Suuhai 崇拜 is translated as “worship” (dictionary: worship, admiration, adoration) in English and indicates a “profound, reverential feels toward another person, whether living or dead, is not the criterion. In other contexts, it is better translated admiration or adoration. – as to poring over a baby. (The focus groups respondents also preferred the use of this idea.)

Maeda points out that *suuhai* “implies a recognition that the object of *suuhai* is superior to man and is in a position to control the life of the ‘worshipper’” (Berentsen, 27-28), but Chua reminds us that Kagawa used this word of the common worker, showing respect and admiration for a worker. Not worship. So *suuhai* need not necessarily be translated into “worship”. Chua warns us that we need to understand the inner feelings of the “worshipper” before making pronouncements as to the religiosity or otherwise of the practices. Here we could add Rabban Sauma’s notes in his work on Central Asian Ancestral practices: “Muslims believe that every religious act, to be valid, must be undertaken with a ‘pure intention’ (Tk. *Naxa niyet* >Pers. *Taze*, Ar.

Niyya), which one declares to God in advance.” And “17. “in your heart” (*jurekpen*) is a crucial modifier because of cultural peculiarities in the meaning of worship. The argument applying the lesson of Elisha and Naaman to the Central Asian context is convincing only if the MBB reader believes that joining with Muslims in their ancestor worship is not worship in the sense that matters to believers in their heart.” (Rabban Sauma, Note 17, 344) Intention of the heart is an important concept to Japanese too.

Chua argued that “ancestor veneration” would cover all the Japanese expressions; worship and all the non-religious phenomena that the Japanese expressions may imply. (Chua, 23) (He is a Singaporean missiologist, brought up in a traditional Chinese home and whose wife is a Japanese.) Spae in 1971 spoke of these momentous distinctions that need to be made concerning the religious motivation that we make using parallel Christian standards of religiosity. He writes that people whose religiosity is not interiorised can behave ‘religiously’ for non-religious motives, such as social customs, and pressures.

Offner in 1979, felt that we are too hasty to decide that everything that happens at a shrine or temple violates the First Commandment and that the English “worship” is not static in its meaning. Chua chided Protestant scholars who uncritically “assess ancestral practices in wholly religious terms, in other words, as idol worship” (Chua, a 24).

Spae, spoke of the internalisation of religiosity and the criteria that can help us “evaluate religious phenomena from the sociological and theological point of view”, and gave 3 aspects:

“1) a religious view of life, 2) of a referential ethic, derived from, and connected with that view of life of which it is the source and inspiration and, finally, 3) of religious practices, private and communal, which assume sundry characteristics, e.g. a mystic, intellectual, affective or social, commitment towards one’s religion” (Spae1971:18).

Stark and Glock spoke of some sort of encounter, contact between themselves and supernatural consciousness. Wach’s definition of religious experience is (1) a response to what is experienced as Ultimate Reality; (2) a total response most powerful, comprehensive, shattering, and profound experience of which man is capable; and (4) the most powerful source of motivation and action. Professor Doi Masatoshi has often remarked that the “basic trait of the Japanese mentality is the absence of the sense of ultimacy”

(Spae, 30). (This was the impression we got while discussing with the focus group – a big void in their spiritual being.)

Smith agreed that there are two aspects, respect and worship. Respect arising from civic duty and worship involving religious rites. The first is legitimate and allows for ancestral veneration, not involving fear or worship. Respect includes appropriate acts of filial piety involving honour, esteem, reverence, devotion, love and homage to ancestors as humans, but excludes any worship or deification of them. The focus group insisted on the primacy of respect, not worship – are we here seeing “blinded” idol-worshippers or people objectively evaluating complex feelings? Questions were directed in 2006 at not-yet-Christians and not to Japanese converts because they have already imbibed stereotypes.

Prof. Doi Masatoshi’s study group in the late 1950’s for the United Church of Christ’s Study Centre for Mission sent out a questionnaire to 200 of that church’s congregations and 80 responses were received. The wording took care to distinguish between respect/*keii* and worship with petition/*ogamu*, 拜む *kigan suru* 奇岩する. 57.8% cited respect as the explanation for their participation in ancestor rites, while 3.3% cited it as worship and supplication. (This now is the position found in 2006 of non-Christian focus groups’ statements.) Berentsen argues that it is not enough to look at the consciousness of people, because if the rites are still functioning institutionally in a part of the population, that there is the possibility of a revival of the religious values in the minds of people at large. There needs to be significant changes at the institutional level “which are draining the rites of their religious content” (Berentsen, 142). Secularization happens as a dialectic between the phenomena of consciousness and the institutional nature of the rites. The writer feels that in 2007 we have reached a point of no return in Buddhist strength, but not of that of Shintoo beliefs.

The dates of this scholarship show that more could be done currently on a linguistic basis. It would appear from Suzuki’s writings that the element of “worship”, translated as *suuhai* has diminished in popular practice and understanding. Even the idea of ‘respect’ in Japanese usage has changed over time. We are arguing over the meaning of words, but what are the Japanese

actually doing, according to themselves? The focus group insists it is respect. Deep respect.

In Japan the close inter-changeability between humans and kami makes the question more difficult to answer. The paradox in the Japanese mind is not one difficult to hold, whereas to the Westerner it is more clear.

This kind of confusion is not peculiar to Japan alone:

In Central Asia, (Rabban Sauma, 325) amongst Muslims “the terms for worship in Turkic languages also confuse the issue because they cover everything from simple dedication in the memorial sense (Uz *bagishlamak*; Kz. *Baishtau*), to honour and reverence (*sivinu*), to veneration and worship (*tabinu*.) All these words are from Old Turkic roots and unfortunately the English translations above are only approximate. All these words can be used to describe human ritual behaviour in reference to the ancestor spirits. In addition, there is the Qur’anic term that is reserved for worship of God (Uz. *Ibodat*; Kz. *gibat*<Ar. *ibada*), which is understood in Islam primarily in the sense of saying the prescribed five daily prayers (Pers./Tk. *Namaz*; Ar. *Salat*). The Arabic word *ibada* is unfamiliar to most Central Asian Muslims, so it is translated literally with the Turkic word *qulshiliq*, meaning service or slavery. Applying the distinction between *ibada* and other terms, it is possible to argue that Central Asian Muslims do not actually worship but only honour or memorialize the dead, because the *namax* alone is true worship or *ibada* for Muslims.

If this answer were acceptable to all, it might absolve Muslims of the accusation of worshipping spirits. The problem with it is that the entire Turkic semantic domain specified above is applied in popular discourse to the worship both of God and the ancestor spirits, except for *bagishlama* which applies only to God. The problem lies with the middle terms in the semantic range. In Central Asia one frequently hears Muslims using the words *sivinu* and *tabinu* for worship both of God and of the ancestor spirits. Those capable of critical reflection then confess sheepishly that this way of confusing the objects of worship is contrary to the Shariah, the law of Islam.

Suzuki in “McFunerals” concludes

that to state that the Japanese McFuneral is proliferating does not deny the existence of religious practices nor does it refute the presence of religious elements in practice. The functions of religious practice indicated by Durkheim is ‘its concentrated expression of the whole collective life’: and the representation of the ‘system of ideas’ held by a society (Suzuki 2003:72-73).

Worship? In his survey, Offner, reports that “in performing these rites, respondents felt “no sense of a humble creatureliness nor a feeling of awe

before an all-powerful deity, no sense of divine glory which praise nor an idea of holiness that stimulates confession of sin”, so not “worship” in the Biblical sense. (Chua a, 21).

TABLE 1
OVERT AND COVERT CULTURE; FORM AND VARIATION
(based on Voget 1975:747)

	Form	Psychological Processes	Change Rates	Extrapolated Change Processes
Overt/Variation	Periphery	Habituations subjected to conscious control	Rapid (no deep-seated conflicts)	Variation (History)
Covert/Structure	Core	Unconscious conditioning of motivations	Gradual (conflict)	Structural (Evolution)

(Nishioka 1997:16)

As seen above, covert or unconscious aspects of culture change slowly, whereas overt or conscious parts tend to change rapidly. Much Japanese “ancestor worship” is “worship” no longer.

The conclusion is that for many in the cities that what they physically do or think while observing the traditional rites, is no longer worship in the Biblical sense. Many perhaps would be glad to not have the Buddhist priest there as a representative of his religion. Could we say that if there were other ways of showing respect and observing a rite of passage, that Japanese would do so? The “living funeral” is already first step in this direction. Could it be that in 20 years’ time the non-religious funeral will be at a 50% level in the cities? Has the time come for the popularisation of Christian funerals as the wedding has been popularised, bringing wide opportunities for evangelism and pastoral care?

3.2.5 Religion

Are ancestor practices religious? It goes beyond the scope of this paper to examine the enormous concept of “religion”, but we may briefly cite Geertz, Chua and Ooms. In 1973 Geertz defined religion as a system of symbols that formulate “conceptions of a general order of existence.” (Chua a, 10) Ooms

regarded ancestor rites as “a religious phenomenon which has more modest ambitions” and concludes that the religious dimension in a religion is not to be found in the expectation of either blessings or punishments from the ancestors, but rather in the experience of an emotion or an encounter. He gives 3 levels of intimacy: (1) a feeling of fulfilment of duty, thankfulness (2) experiencing the ancestor’s presence (3) mutual awareness of each other’s presence. He predicts that with secularisation that the 2nd and 3rd levels of encounter will decrease, but that 1 will continue, as it provides way to cope with the fundamental problem of death. (Chua a, 10-11) Chua here argues that the first level cannot be regarded as religious just because it is a way of coping with death and that a feeling of fulfilment of duty. Spae argued that if people’s religiosity is institutionalised without being interiorised, they may behave “religiously: for non-religious motives – and these, as Chua emphasized could be the reason why the ancestor customs continue, although the Buddhist meaning/content seems to be disappearing. Enns reported in 2001 that the religion is dependant on funerary rites for its survival.

The argument about what is religion has been dealt with at length in the literature. “The rubric of *shuukyoo* 宗教 religion is rather elastic, depending on the context, its semantic range expands or contracts” (Chua a 29). Chua agreed with Reader and Tanabe that a western definition applied to Japan will give us unreliable results. There is a clear distinction “between religious belief and religious feelings” according to a 1992 evaluation of a Japanese government survey. And the Japanese themselves may not be cognitively aware of this distinction. Yet many thinking people disassociate the ancestral rites from “religion”.

Chua tended to see the religious elements located in the funeral, mourning rites, 49th day memorial service, and anniversary services. The observances at the *butsudan* and grave visits seem to include both religious and non-religious elements.

Clearly the final word on these issues has not been given and one would hope that the Church in Japan would plan up-to-date studies, plus the missionary community would humbly and sympathetically listen to the Japanese, both those inside and outside the Church in this changing situation.

Next we will examine how the indigenous Christian Japanese groups have handled the subject in response to their culture and history. Surveys and questions to Church denominations, mission groups, Seminaries and Bible Colleges will show what they are teaching and practising with reference to life after death. The Biblical teaching on life after death with relevant mention of Japanese issues will be given.

CHAPTER 4

CHRISTIAN BELIEFS AND PRACTICES

The Japanese have not been passive recipients of Christianity, but active agents who reinterpreted and reconstructed the faith in terms that made sense to them. Nowhere is this better seen than in the so-called 'indigenous groups'. We will examine the indigenous movements with special regard for their contextualisation of ancestor practices.

4.1 Indigenous Movements

The indigenous groups developed in the 1930's and 1940's started to read the Bible with Japanese insights and in the light of Japanese folk religion. Most representative of the indigenous groups that tried to indigenize were the Glorious Gospel Christian Church, the Spirit of Jesus Church, the Original Gospel and the Holy Ecclesia of Jesus. Some would view these as syncretistic groups, but the founders and followers see these as Holy Spirit-led progressive revelation to the Japanese. (Some are included in statistics and lists in the general Christian Yearbook.)

Some clearly shun the ancestor practices as idol worship. The Spirit of Jesus Church sees the *butsudan* and ancestral tablets as indwelt by evil spirits. Buddhist utensils and altars are burnt. Many other groups are more tolerant. The Holy Ecclesia of Jesus published a handbook, where much attention is given to the problem of ancestors; a chapter, "Concerning Ancestor Venerations" gives their position:

In accordance with the Scriptures, the orthodox Christian church teaches that we are to respect our parents and truly honour our ancestors, and for this reason we reverently hold memorial services and festivals for the comforting of the spirits. Although we take special care of the dead and have high regard for our ancestors, in Christianity we do not *worship* the dead. As human beings, we should only worship the one true God who is the creator of heaven and earth and the source of our being; although we pray to God for the eternal peace of the dead, we do not worship the dead (Mullins, 139).

Also the Original Gospel, at a symposium on ancestral rites and memorial services, reiterated these feelings, but said that an “expression of gratefulness and respect toward those to whom the living are indebted” is necessary in ancestral rites” (Mullins, 139). The movements vary in their teachings concerning traditional ancestor practices, but all have initiated “alternative functionally equivalent practices to remember and care for the dead” (Mullins, 139). Respect and memorialism go together in their practices

4.1.1 Memorialism

Where the founder has died, the group has instituted memorial rites. The Non-Church movement holds memorial lectures and banquets on the Sunday nearest to the death of Uchimura Kanzoo, which are mainly evangelistic opportunities, yet they provide expressions of respect for Uchimura. Christ Heart Church holds a service for the founder, Kawai Shinsui after a 3-day retreat of lectures, church and grave cleaning. Likewise the founder of the Original Gospel Church is memorialized in annual services, plus at the founding church, elderly members still clean the grave and offer flowers every 3 days at the grave of Teshima.

Attention is also given to the families and members of the movements. They have adopted the cyclical and linear rites for the dead which are observed in Japanese practice. Often during Obon they have a Common Memorial Service for Comforting the Spirits – *godoireisai* 合同例祭 At one church there is a service remembering the death of the Shoowa emperor and in addition to Bible readings and hymns, the names of all deceased members are read. A taped sermon by the founder, words of comfort and remembrance, respects at the grave, goes before a lunch when memories and stories are shared about the deceased.

The Holy Ecclesia of Jesus hold services on the day that Roman Catholics memorialize the dead and also at *Obon* お盆 and *Higan* 彼岸 Members hold a photograph of the deceased relative, bring them forward, place them on a table and there are pastoral prayers. A Lord's Supper on behalf of the dead is then held. The dead are then receiving this communion in heaven. Memorial services do not generally have a set liturgy. Some groups provide

memorial services for the fallen of the war on Okinawa and also for the Christian martyrs of the 17th century on Kyuushuu.

Table 2 Memorialism and Ritual Care of the Dead in Japanese Christian Movements (Mullins, 140)

INDIGENOUS MOVEMENT	YEAR ORGANIZED	FOUNDER MEMORIALS	CYCLICAL RITES	LINEAR RITES	HYMNS	EXTENSION OF SALVATION TO THE SPIRIT WORLD	FAMILY ALTARS (<i>BUTSUDAN</i> OR CHRISTIAN EQUIVALENT)
Nonchurch movement	1901	▽					
The Way	1907						
Christ Heart Church	1927						
Glorious Gospel Christian Church	1936						
Living Christ One Ear of Wheat Church	1939						
Christian Canaan Church	1940						
Japan Ecclesia of Christ	1940						
Spirit of Jesus Church	1941						
Holy Ecclesia of Jesus	1946	*Founder living					
The Sanctifying Christ Church	1948	Founder living					
Original Gospel (Tabernacle Movement)	1948						
Life-Giving Christ	1966	Founder living					
Okinawa Christian Gospel	1977	Founder living					

Shaded cells indicate presence of phenomena in contemporary religious practice.

*The wife of the founder, referred to as *reiboosama*, spiritual mother, is remembered each year at a memorial service.

▽ In the case of the Nonchurch movement, memorial lectures are held on the Sunday nearest 28 March, the anniversary of the death of Uchimura.

Many indigenous movements allow followers to keep a *butsudan* and to join family members in their rites. The Original Gospel allows followers to pray in front of the *butsudan*, where their ancestors prayed. When they hold a meeting in such a home, the menorah (symbol of God and light) is placed in front and the *butsudan* doors left open. The Holy Ecclesia of Jesus, leads members to have an alternative Christian family altar for worship and prayer. Small wooden crosses have the names or “spiritual names” of the family deceased written on them.

4.1.2 Evangelism of the ie

Feelings of family solidarity in the *ie* are very strong and one leader said that he has confidence that his ancestors are saved, because of Christ’s grace to him when he was saved. This idea is linked to Abraham becoming a source of blessing for all the families of the earth.

4.1.2.1 Vicarious Baptism

Vicarious baptism is done in the Spirit of Jesus Church. (Another indigenous group in the west that pays attention to genealogy and the household, are the Mormons and there is also baptism for the dead.) In Buddhism, one of the acts of mercy of the Buddha was to go into hell and preach to those lingering there. According to 1 Cor. 15:29 “Now if there is no resurrection, what will those do who are baptized for the dead? If the dead are not raised at all, why are people baptized for them?” According to Murai there is salvation for ancestors and family members through baptism – and Murai invites newcomers to believe and bring their *ie* into the kingdom as well. They also provide baptism for *mizuko* 水子 (aborted, miscarried and stillborn children). Newcomers are encouraged to accept the gospel for their own salvation and told that they may perhaps receive salvation for ancestors through vicarious baptism. At baptism, the ancestor’s name is given and the relationship to the deceased and then they receive baptism by immersion for the deceased. Believers can then put aside all worries about their relatives’ salvation.

A hymn reads, 1st, 5th and 6th verses:

The spirits of our long-sleeping ancestors
Still now are weeping in sorrow.
Spring passes, summer comes, autumn goes and winter comes,
But hades is eternally winter's dead of night.

By and by the gates of hades are opened
Through the name of Jesus.
The substitutionary baptism of descendants in the world –
Oh, what immeasurable grace!....

[Oh,] the cries of joy reverberate!
Our ancestors have been saved!
The light of grace shines all around,
The songs of the angels thunder throughout heaven and earth.
(Mullins, 151,152).

4.1.2.2 Vicarious Communion

Reading the Bible independently, Christians have seen hope for those who have died without hearing the gospel. 1 Pet 3:18-22 “For Christ also suffered for sins once for all, the righteous for the unrighteous, in order to bring you to God. He was put to death in the flesh, but made alive in the spirit, in which also He went and made a proclamation to the spirits in prison, who in former times did not obey, when God waited patiently in the days of Noah, during the building of the ark, in which a few, that is eight persons, were saved through water.” Also 1 Pet. 4:6 “For this reason the gospel was proclaimed even to the dead, so that, though they had been judged in the flesh, they might live in the spirit as God does.”

This ministry to the dead is understood as a continuation of the work of Jesus in His descent into hades and preaching to the imprisoned spirits.

4.1.2.3 Prayers for the Dead

The Glorious Gospel Christian Church encourages followers to pray on behalf of their deceased relatives. In Vol 2 of “*The Glorious Gospel*”, Sugita wrote of his certainty that

offering prayers of intercession on behalf of the dead is a good and proper thing for believers to do. Although there is no Scriptural text stating that those prayed for will necessarily be saved, neither is there a text instructing us not to pray for the dead (Mullins, 148).

The fact that Jesus descended into hades to preach to the spirits there, is a clear indication of God's love to them. God will decide about their salvation.

4.1.2.4 *Preaching to the Dead*

Teshima (Original Gospel) said that

the spirits cannot eat material bread, but they can eat the word of God. That is why the most appropriate memorial rite to read to them is the word of God. Through our prayerful reading of the Bible, the 'wandering spirits' receive guidance and are pointed in the direction of Christ" (Mullins, 148)

He also taught that it is not necessary to throw out the Buddhist altar and memorial tablets, rather open the *butsudan* and "preach the gospel to the ancestors" (Mullins, 148). A disciple of Teshima explained to Mullins that the first thing he did after conversion and healing was to go to the *butsudan* and report his conversion to his ancestors and he prayed they would receive Christ's light.

Another group to be mentioned would be the *Kakure Kirishitan* on Kyuushuu. After the edict banning Christianity in the early 17th century, under Tokugawa, these believers denied their faith by stepping on a tablet of Christian images, *fumie* 踏み絵 and recanting yet they continued to practice their faith in Jesus in private and when Roman Catholic and Japanese officials organized a meeting in 1865 a sizeable group of descendants appeared at the meeting. Folk Catholicism and traditional orthodox Christian teaching blended over the years. Whelan has translated their sacred text *Tenchi no hajimari no koto* (The Beginning of Heaven and Earth) and scholars today are showing interest again in their history and current practice.

Although these movements have developed from Japanese leadership and indigenized practices, Mullins shows that the only church which is still growing is the Holy Ecclesia of Jesus, but that demographics of the general country and the drop in Sunday School numbers, suggest that future growth is doubtful. What has attracted people over a few decades ago is not doing so anymore, as these movements are growing less rapidly than mission planted churches. (Mullins, 166)

The Indigenous Movements illustrate the importance of ancestor practices to Japanese. In various ways the indigenous movements care for the dead and care for the salvation of the spirit world. After baptism, spirits of the dead go to heaven and become benevolent ancestors, pray for their *ie and* protect them. In these ways the Japanese indigenous movement provides comfort for that inner loneliness that the Japanese feels when cut off from the system of the ancestor cult by becoming a Christian. What are the 'orthodox' churches and missionary groups teaching and practising?

4.2 The Church: Teaching and Practice

The largest denominations are: (*Christian Yearbook of 2006*) Roman Catholic Church 448 316, Japan, United Church 97 352, Anglican Church 27 950, Assemblies of God Church 9759, Holiness 8403, Japan Evangelical Church Alliance 8037. Telephone enquiries revealed the following: All the churches have memorial services for the dead, once, some twice a year. Some of the JECA (Japan Evangelical Church Alliance) churches did not do this as a denomination. The Anglican Church commemorates the dead at the All Saints service in November; the dead are remembered as part of the communion service and they send out notices to the families concerning the once-monthly memorial service which is conducted for those who died within that month. One or 2 months after death, the bones are interred at a service conducted at the grave. They do not emphasize the ancestors but the concept of the "family of God". Until recently they did not hold a wake ceremony, but they do now. Their book of liturgy was updated in 1999.

All churches would conduct services at the grave, some only if requested by the family. Most had their own church grave or cemeteries. Mainline denominations have a set liturgy, the Immanuel Church uses a book of prayers.

All except the Anglican discourage members from offering incense at Buddhist funerals and encourage them rather to stand with bowed head, praying quietly for the bereaved family and maybe to give flowers. Some mainline churches allow members to observe the offering at the *butsudan* if they are living with non-Christian family, because of the feelings of the family, or some churches say individuals can decide. Members can stand and pray to God for the salvation of their families. (Japan Lutheran Church encourages members to have a special place in the house where they remember the dead. A cross can be used, flowers and a photo. This is for the sake of the feelings of the family.) Some teach about Christ's victory over *tatari*, but not all. Some teach as the need arises in Bible studies and sermons.

No church has any special service on the 49th day after death. (A local Nishi Evangelical Lutheran church pastor did so upon request.) Documents to prepare for their own funeral are used by all, with variations in the Anglican Church.

More details are given on the following churches:

4.2.1 *Nihon Kyoodan (United Church)*

The handbook of the church on funerals starts with "the funeral is not worship towards the dead" (Berentsen, 170). So there is a clear desire not to direct worship towards the dead. Yoshimoto (1987:110) cites Doi Masatoshi's case study in the late 1950's. They raised the question how ancestral rites pertaining to the old family system influences the everyday life of the Christian. Questionnaires were sent to 200 churches. Responses came from 80. Of special interest is the fact that the questionnaire operates with a clear distinction between respect *keii* 敬意 towards the ancestors and worship with supplication *ogamu*, 敬意 *kigan suru*. 祈願 In accordance with this distinction, 57.8 % explained their

participation in traditional rites/festivals as paying respect to the ancestors, while 3.3% said it to be worship and supplication. To these figures the study group adds the comment that even after they have become Christians, the mood of ancestor worship remains rather strong. However, through the instruction of the church, worship *suuhai* is consciously changed to respect *keii*. According to our 2007 focus group's response, this attitude of respect is now prevalent amongst urban traditional Japanese. Concerning "worship", in the 1970's the debate about the offering of flowers instead of incense was brought up again and Yamamoto Naotaka writes that it is a practice which should rather be done away with. This gives insight into the dilemma.

4.2.2 Roman Catholic Church

In the guide to the funeral, the foreword explains the use of incense, saying it is offered "in order to express respect towards the body of the dead as a sanctuary of the Holy Spirit." The priest offers incense facing both the altar and the coffin. At the close, prayer is given that the "dead may be added to the saints", silent prayer and then another offering of incense to the coffin. In the general Mass the priest and acolytes bow in front of the altar and offer incense and this is explained as conduct expressing religious respect "to the altar" (Berentsen 167).

A clear eschatological view is found on the first page of the guide to the funeral: "the Christian funeral is to be seen in the perspective of the fulfilment of the kingdom of God, the second coming of Christ and resurrection of the dead." On November 2nd All Saints' Day is observed and services are conducted for the deceased and they are prayed for in this month.

4.2.3 Evangelical Lutheran Church

In the Lutheran handbook, before the various funerary rites, it states that the Christian funeral is "not – as in other religions – to pray for the happiness of the dead and/or to worship the deceased." Further

warnings are given lest the rite or atmosphere goes into worship of the dead or idolatry in any aspect, from encoffinement to the memorial services.“

The following is our observation on All Saints Day in November 2007 at the All Souls' Memorial Service *Zenseitoobi*. There was a table with several steps, covered with white cloth at the front right of the sanctuary. Here church members had placed photos of deceased family members (both church members and non-church members) in plain wooden frames. Older photos were black and white, more recent were in colour. There were 3 small vases of flowers decorating the table.

During the morning service, Rev Ikegami Yasushi led a short service of remembrance, reading from the liturgy of the West Japan Evangelical Lutheran Church. At the start of the service there was solemn reading of the full name and date of death of each deceased family member, otherwise there were no contextualised features in actual wording. There was no incense offered, no bowing to the photos, no prayers to the deceased or prayers for their salvation. Prayers were offered to God, giving thanks for the deceased and their salvation. No mention was made of the communion of the saints. (We noted that the children's story for the day was the history of the ten plagues, the last being the killing of the eldest son and wondered how the many visiting non-Christian relatives would perceive this.) "*Mitama o kudarite*", (Come Holy Spirit) was sung. *Mitama* 御霊 is also the word for an ancestor's spirit.

Non-Christian relatives attending the service were offered a Christian calendar as a gift on leaving. After a simple lunch together, church members went 1 and a half hours by car to the Christian cemetery where the church maintains a grave. There the gravesite was weeded, tidied and fresh flowers placed before the tombstone. Rev Ikegami read from the Scriptures, "What a friend we have in Jesus", was sung and the Lord's Prayer was prayed together with the minister ending in a short prayer. All stood behind the tombstone to have a memorial photo taken.

Some months later "Note to Heaven" *Tengoku ni nooto* was included in the church bulletin, the purpose explained by the minister and

Christians were asked to fill it in and return it to the church. Here personal preferences for their own funerals were noted and details of agreements with family members recorded. (This prevents difficulties with relatives and Buddhist priests over Christian rites.) This pastoral request has led to some not attending church anymore.

Luttio objected to the JELC opening up the Christian funeral to non-believers. (Strand, 245) Although church funerals would at this stage be a very good opportunity for evangelism and pastoral care, in Japan many are against giving Christian funerals for non-believers, forgetting that if they were in the ministry in their home churches, they would be doing many funerals for non-believers. "It would take so much work!"

4.2.4 Mission organisations

What are missions doing with regard to ancestor practices? The following were questions posed to leaders or experienced representatives of the 11 largest missions in Japan. Some were chosen because of length of work in the country.

- (1) Does your organization have a memorial service for deceased family members?
- (2) Do you have services at the graves?
- (3) Do your churches have it's own cemetery or grave?
- (4) Is any specific teaching given to missionaries about the issue of ancestor worship?
- (5) Do you recommend a substitute for the *butsudan*?
- (6) Do you see what happens at funerals and the *butsudan* as worship or respect?
- (6) Do you teach the Japanese to stop offering incense?
- (7) Do your missionaries lay emphasis on the *ie*, the household or family respect.
- (8) Would you welcome a contextualised teaching tool on the afterlife for your missionaries to use?

None except one group's missionaries had any training concerning ancestor practices before coming to Japan. One had a little. None gave specific on-the-job training. Some used the Japan Evangelical Missionary Association's resources, some pick it up, some admitted "We don't do enough" and one group whose missionaries work under Japanese pastors, entrust any training to them.

Memorial services were held by all, except 2 – one not knowing what I meant. Services at the graves are conducted by 3, others said it varied, and one did not observe anything. Churches varied a good deal about possessing graves or cemeteries. Asked about introducing a substitute for the *butsudan*, all except one said, "No." Ancestor practices are seen as worship, by all except one, who did not mind activity in front of the *butsudan*. All except one group teaches Christians to stop burning incense to the dead. The question regarding the *ie* had the most divergence in answers. 3 did not understand the term used in the question, one had never been asked that before. Only 4 answered in the affirmative, but this could mean only family respect because of the way the question was formulated. Two mentioned the element of respect. From the way in which respondents answered, we think more than 3 did not know the term *ie*. One group teaches very strict separation at death: "No more *amae* 甘え dependance on the parents, a real break."

All replied that they would welcome a contextualised teaching tool, given due review as to doctrine (2), if it would be helpful for evangelism (1), and if there were no syncretism (1)

4.2.5 OMF Church Members

My own organization's practices were investigated. The following questions were posed by Strand in 2004 to 5 different church groups and are used here with his permission. Christians from missionary-led churches and Japanese minister-led churches answered. A total of 33 responded.

- (1) What do you think the term 'ancestor' applies to?
- (2) Are the souls of the ancestors alive today?
- (3) Do you think their souls are changing?
- (4) Where do you think your ancestors are, close to you or far away?
- (5) What do you think about the spiritual world?
- (6) Do you observe your ancestors' memorial days?
- (7) How do you observe these days?
- (8) Do you visit the graves, have a special meal with your relatives?
- (9) Do you burn incense or pray?
- (10) What is the content of these prayers?
- (11) When you speak to the ancestors, what sort of things do you say?
- (11) What do you do during the spring and fall equinox?
- (12) What do you do during obon in the summer?
- (13) Do you have a *butsudan* or a *kamidana* where you live?
- (14) How do you take care of it?
- (15) Do you offer flowers or food, do you light a candle, do you talk in front of the *butsudan* or *kamidana*?
- (16) How often do you think of your ancestors? Every day, often or sometimes? In what situations do you think of your ancestors?
- (17) Do you think your ancestors can have any influence on you. That is, can they hurt you or help you?
- (18) Have you ever experienced being cursed by any of your ancestors?
- (19) Do you think you can change the destination of your ancestors through worship and dedication?
- (20) Do you think it matters for your ancestors if you do not do anything of this kind?

(21) Do you think you can change the destination of your ancestors through worship and dedication?

(22) Do you think it matters to your ancestors if you do not do anything of this kind?

Ancestors? Most thought of their parents or grand-parents as ancestors. No-one mentioned anyone further back. 15 said the ancestors are living; there were many variations as to how they are living.

16 said the spirit does not change, 8 said they are nearby, 17 felt that there is a spiritual world (I think they misunderstood question no. 7). 21 said they do not observe any death day *hooji* memorial for family dead. 19 do not go for grave visits with their families. 24 do not offer incense or pray to the ancestor. 12 do not pray to them, 10 did not answer. 25 do nothing at *higan*. 26 do nothing at Obon. 27 do not have a *butsudan* in the home. 24 say they do nothing at the *butsudan* (Probably meaning their original family home *butsudan*).

30 believed that ancestors do not help or harm them. 28 say they have not experienced any cursing by the ancestors. 29 feel that nothing they do can influence the ancestors. All, without exception feel that they cannot influence the dead and 32 felt that if they do not offer incense or food, etc that the final destination of the ancestor is not changed.

The answers given indicate a Christian worldview, that incense and merit-making is no longer believed and also that their knowledge of the condition of dead spirits is hazy, needing more teaching and emphasis. Nor do they have detailed knowledge of Buddhism.

4.2.6 OMF missionary-led Churches and Japanese-led Churches

The following questions were put to missionaries and to pastors:

- (1) Do have a memorial service for the dead?
- (2) Do you include amongst those remembered the non-Christian family of believers?
- (3) Do you have a grave plot?

- (4) Do you have an ossuary?
- (5) Do you take services at the graves?
- (6) Do you hold memorial services on the 49th day?
- (7) Do you hold memorial services at 1 year after death?
- (8) Do you hold special discussion or teaching meetings to teach about life after death and to talk about funeral plans?
- (9) Do you hand out forms to members to fill in concerning their plans for a funeral?
- (10) Do you have a New Year service?
- (11) Do you say anything about the believing departed at that service?
- (12) Do you have a service at Obon?

There were 13 missionaries respondents and 20 pastors, making a total of 33. 8 missionaries hold memorial services; those who didn't, did not yet have any dead in their young churches. Only 1 missionary would not hold memorial services. All pastors except 1 hold such services and one said he would, if requested to do so.

One missionary had performed a funeral for a non-Christian and 6 pastors said he would if he were requested to do so. It seemed to be a foreign concept to memorialize non-Christian people to all respondents. 5 out of 13 missionary-led churches have gravesites, but the rest would do so later. All pastor-led churches either have one or share one. One missionary-led church has an ossuary and all the pastor-led churches deposit the bones into the grave.

5 out of 13 missionaries do services at the graves, but it was not clear whether this is on a separate occasion from the annual memorial service. The same percentage accounts for the pastors' actions. Only 2 missionaries would do a service at the 49th day if requested and none at 1 year. I felt that most did not understand the significance of the 49th day and did not ask why I asked that particular question. Some pastors were very firm about not doing anything on the 49th day (7 out of 20 would if asked). 4 out of 20 missionaries give teaching on life after death and

funeral plans, 1 would if asked and 1 did this individually. 17 distribute funeral planning documents to be filled in. 10 pastors teach on this subject, others teach at memorial services, funerals and at Easter. 11 out of 13 missionaries hold New Year services. Only 3 pastors do not. No-one speaks about the departed believers at New Year. 2 missionaries have services at Obon. 3 pastors have services at Obon, 1 going to the grave. In Hokkaido there is a 2-day conference over the Obon holidays to which many go.

So attention is being given to the ancestors, but in the writer's opinion, following the lead of other denominations, more should be done. More teaching, more contextualisation of traditional customs – boldly and wisely done, led by Christian experts in Buddhism who are able to guard against syncretism. More emphasis should be laid on teaching on the family, the family of God, family activities and care of and genuine love of the elderly.

4.2.7 Seminaries, Bible Colleges

The following were questions posed to principals, of the main Seminaries and Bible Colleges in Japan:

- (1) Do you give teaching on the *ie*?
- (2) Do you teach a liturgy for grave visits?
- (3) Do you recommend memorial services?
- (4) Do you recommend a substitute for the *butsudan*?
- (5) Do you give specific teaching on the bones? *ikotsu*
- (6) Do you give teaching about curses? *Tatari*
- (7) Do you give teaching about those who have never heard the gospel?
- (8) Do you give teaching about stillborn and aborted babies? *Mizuko*

There are over 200 Bible colleges of various sizes. 7 of the larger ones were interviewed, but the impression is that older denominations had clearer theological thinking, that much seemed to be left to the churches to

do as they wished, that the issues were not systematically dealt with, some leaving it to “Missiology lecturers”. In Japan this is hardly an issue for Missiology only. Most were helpful, 1 in particular, very quickly and systematically forthcoming on all relevant issues, 1 told me “we are evangelical, it is rude to ask about this.” The conclusion is that as a subject, life after death is not systematically and contextually taught and is not seriously grappled with by theological educators. (Fukuda 1991:10-11)

4.3 Biblical Teaching on Relevant Issues of Life After Death

We have examined the indigenous groups’ teaching and practices, those of the churches, missions and the seminaries in Japan. We will now examine relevant Biblical teaching on life after death.

4.3.1 *Life After Death*

In ancestor worship, death does not constitute a final barrier between the living and the dead. The family closeness continues. In both Buddhism and Shintoo. The radical distinction between life and death is lacking. Although not wanting to be known as a “funeral religion” death needs to be clearly theologised and the message of the living who triumph over death because of Christ the Victor, needs to be clearly preached.

Biblically, death is seen as a result of sin, (Althaus), not as being part of man’s material nature and a biological phenomenon. (Wachter) Heroic death is not found in the New Testament, because of sin and judgement, death is a terrible thing. Christ vicariously bore the biological death of man as his last enemy and after atoning for sin, he rose from death. The power of death was taken away. (1 Cor. 15:26, Acts 2:24, Rom 6:23) With no afterlife, there is no final justification or final social reconciliation.

Kumano Yoshitake made a clear point when he writes that “a clear eschatological understanding of Christian faith – of death, resurrection, judgment, and eternal life – is a prerequisite for a proper funeral”

(Berentsen, 179). Vagueness is responsible for confusion about proper forms in Japanese churches.

The afterlife is variously viewed - Freud sees a regressive idea, Karl Marx a ploy of the elite class – an avoidance technique. Evolutionary psychologists and socio-biologists posit that genetic survival is all that matters. Even theists locate heaven as a reality in the mind – a state of mind; a godly humanist sees a symbol for socialised human beings as they receive rewards for enduring activities that benefit their societies. (Roberts, 132)

Greeks like Plato and the Jewish scholar Philo, whose thoughts of immateriality as the true reality – which would fit in well with Buddhist ideas - moved towards a “continuance of self-consciousness through souls, which upon death would join other non-material entities, like angels” (Roberts 2003:23). A co-existent spiritual reality is seen, a “parallel universe” where souls are immortal, but not to be resurrected as a personal body, but this does not reach the Biblical teaching. Even heaven in the mind of God, being absorbed in the Absolute, the joy of mystics, does not.

Smith saw heaven as “the abode of God, which picture he finds reinforced by such biblical terms as *tabernacle, temple and sanctuary* (Roberts, 206)

4.3.1.1 *God, Man and Spirits*

It is precisely because the Japanese concentrate on the ancestral spirits that there is difficulty in getting a biblical understanding of the afterlife. The afterlife is not afterlife per se, it is the afterlife with God, with Christ. Paul wrote, that he desired to depart and be with Christ. Phil 1:23

The Bible shows God to be the Father of mankind, benevolent, involved, merciful, righteous. He is the One by whom all families on earth are named. He is different from His creation and creatures and created all things *ex nihilo*. God rules His creation. He rules heaven and hell. Even hell does not belong to Satan.

God is immanent. He is our Guide and Friend. We can talk to Him and expect his help. (The Japanese are more avid to get guidance from various occult means than to practise any religion. There is a general distrust for organized religion. Yet there seems to be a hunger for direction and interest in the unseen.)

The basic teaching of God as man's Creator in Gen. 1 and 2 goes against the idea of human and divine coalescing in cosmic oneness, because we see God who does not belong to the cosmos, who brings it all into being in a personal way. Not only is pantheism rejected, but the transcendent God is close at hand. Not immanent in the sense of dwelling in all. As Stauffer points out, only in Acts 17:22 ff do we come close to such an idea, but it was put into a new context, "in the light of their Jewish-Christian belief in God" (Berentsen, 152). Words and phrases were borrowed from pagan writers, but new meaning put into them. God is close at hand, the life-giver and sustainer. (Fukuda, 56)

Berentsen suggested a similar contextualising approach to a family in front of their *butsudan*.

He (Paul) might have said that he understands from their activities at the family altar that they are not only concerned with the memory of their forefathers, but with the intimate fellowship in gratefulness with their ancestral spirits – their *kami* and their *hotoke* – to whom they believe they owe their very existence. He might have said that this gratefulness of theirs should first of all be directed to God 'the King of kings and Lord of lords', who 'does not live in shrines made by man' but is the maker of heaven and earth, and who – at the same time – is close at hand to every one of them as their life-giver and sustainer, as one of their own sages has said: 'The heart of man is the abode of God; think not that God is something distant', then he might have used this homiletical point of contact to go on to talk of God who dwells 'in the high and holy place, and also with him who is of a contrite and humble spirit; (Is. 57:15), on the closeness of God and the fellowship with him in Christ, and then ended his address with a serious call to repentance (Berentsen, 153).

The nature of man too needs clarification: ancestor rites seek to bring the innate Buddha-nature, *bussho* 仏性 of man to Buddha status in the afterlife, *joobutsu*. 成仏 One could argue that 2 Pet. 1:4 could be

interpreted in this way, but in Israel their God's divinity and their forefathers' humanity were never confused in this way.

While confessing the *imago dei*, we nevertheless would not follow Origen and Clemens in their idea of the $\phi\epsilon\iota\omega\sigma\iota\varsigma$ of man, trying to synchronize Greek philosophy and Christian faith; or the Greek Orthodox anthropology, unifying the divine and human nature through the incarnation of Christ, but agree with New Testament authors that the fellowship of God and man extends further than fellowship of this world, and extends into complete renewal and glorifying of one's sinful and mortal nature. Even 1 John 3:2 is intended to show man in his ultimate coalescence with the divine, so that man is no longer man. (Berentsen 159). Tertullian also saw a 'holistic' view of the human person, but rejected any deification of man in the afterlife. (Roberts, 207)

Yoshimoto writes,

Japanese term for god *kami* actually does not mean God or the Creator. In Christian literature *kami* is given the biblical concept. There *kami* is somewhat equivalent to angels or children of gods. 11 Cor 3:18 we read that we are going to be changed into the glory of the Lord. I think this state of human beings seem to be far higher than the state of *kami*" (Yoshimoto, 138).

He also wrote that the Japanese concept *tamashii* 魂しい for soul should be redefined. *Tama* 魂 is originally a notion for mystic power in nature. Therefore the concept of personality is vague. According to the image of Christ the concept of personality must be clarified. The understanding of personality is also important in terms of the community. "They must find the balance of individuality and community" (Yoshimoto, 138).

4.3.1.2 *Sheol, Hades and Paradise*

Traditional Japanese religion teaches that 49 days after death the dead pass through mountains and cross a river before being judged by Emma, the lord of hell. The world of the dead is referred to as *Ano yo* あの世 "that world." Also referred to as *shigo no sekai* 死後の世界 the world

of the dead, *Yomi no kuni* 読みの国 land of darkness. Spirits of the dead gradually lose their individuality after the 33rd year anniversary of death and merge with spirits of the ancestors and reside in the mountains in *Yama no kuni* 山の国

Biblical progressive revelation in the OT teaches first an intermediate state. *Sheol* is a place under or in the earth: (Prov 9:18, Ps 55:15) Personal and national identity are kept (Ezek 32 and Isa 14:9), but the dead are only shadows of what they were on earth. Man becomes a *rephaim*, disembodied spirit, or shade. (Prov 2:18; Isa14:9, Job 26:5). Death was not annihilation.

Sheol is the opposite of life, an existence separated from God, and life is a blessed condition. Those in the OT who died did not all go to Sheol. God speaks of the patriarchs as being alive (Ex 3:6). David was assured of dwelling in the house of the Lord forever and the godly went to be with God, such as Moses and Elijah. (Pss 23:6, 17:15) So it would appear that there were two parts, a division in Sheol.

Jesus promised paradise to the thief beside him on the cross. The word paradise παραδεισος is loaned from Middle Iranian *paradez*, “a garden or a place of blessedness” (Strand, 136). Jesus used the word “today”, σημερον, giving a temporal meaning of time, not a figurative meaning.

It is a pity that the question of ancestor practices, which seems to be widespread all over the world, has not caused more scholarship on the parable of the rich man and Lazarus as Jesus told it in Luke 16:19-31. It is possible that Jesus used a common Jewish story and reworked it to teach his hearers. The idea of Hades (used in the NT to denote Sheol) is borrowed from a folk-tale, yet Jesus utilized it in a biblically faithful way because of the manner in which he told it. He has “given it a stamp of His own” (Regalado, 345, Morris, 252). There is a clear distinction made between Hades and Paradise.

Care needs to be taken that we do not limit the revelation on the afterlife to Luke 16. Ladd argues that because Luke 16:19-31 is a parable we should not take this to be definitive revelation about the afterlife

(Strand, 136), yet two conditions are implied which describe a degree of either punishment or reward. With Erickson we would agree that although it might not be a doctrinal statement, He nevertheless would not lead us astray on this important point. (Strand, 137)

What is clear, is that one could not cross from the one side to the other. Also the possibility of help from earth was ruled out. Lazarus was in a position of comfort and love in Abraham's bosom κσλπων, and the rich man's condition was the opposite where he is suffering in great pain. Morey wrote,

Peter says that the wicked are "kept" unto the day of judgement. This word is in the present, active, infinitive form, which means that the wicked are being held captive continuously. Second, Peter says that the wicked are "being tormented": This word is in the present, passive, participle form and means that the wicked are continuously being tormented as an on-going activity" (Strand, 138).

There is awareness of others, on both sides of the chasm and of those living. There is a possibility of communication, but restrictions are placed on this. "If they do not listen to Moses and the Prophets they will not be convinced even if someone rises from the dead", 'indicates little or no opening for any dead to communicate with the living', but it would seem this does not exclude communication from the dead, but emphasizes that the dead will not listen to any warnings and that it is indeed too late for such warnings. (Strand, 138) Howard Marshall takes the view that the main intent of the passage is to show the finality of Hades. (Strand, 139) Again, this is important because of Japanese practices that are intended to give progression towards nirvana.

Regalado quoted Plummer:

But it is no purpose of the parable to give information about the unseen world. The general principle is maintained that bliss and misery after death are determined by conduct previous to death; but the details of the picture are taken from Jewish believers as to the condition of souls in Sheol, and must not be understood as confirming those beliefs. The properties of bodies are attributed to souls in order to enable us to realize the picture. (Plummer, 344)

Luke implies that “after a person dies his or her condition is irreversible” (Regalado, 345). This is a necessary consequence of their respective conditions in this life and nothing after death can change it. Verse 26 shows that after death the character cannot be changed. “The motif of the finality of reversals in this parable is strongly evoked.” (Regalado, 345) Regalado pointed out that Jesus spoke of people’s obedience to the Scripture as the turning-point which decided their eternal destiny. Luke 16:31 This is important in the Japanese context regarding *kuyoo*, the chanting of the sutras to make merit for the deceased and also concerning *karma*, where the actions of the person determines afterlife conditions.

This parable has not received the attention that the Good Samaritan and the Prodigal Son has, and what studies have been done, have been concerning those extra-biblical stories this parable is the parallel. The “distinctive features of the parable has been overlooked” (Regalado, 341). For the Jews too, to care for the dead was a primary obligation, so it is fitting that Jesus told this parable.

From an African perspective, where ancestors are also important, Igboin writes that the rich man, who traditionally would be loving and hospitable to his family, was unable to secure them a better future alternative for his relatives, he didn’t have power, “unlike the African ancestor, to communicate directly or indirectly with his brothers to warn them of the impending suffering that awaited them should they refuse to repent of their riotous life. Heb 9:27 “It is appointed that man should die once and afterwards judgement” (Igboin, 263).

Igboin points out that to them too, the idea that death is not the end but a transition in the rites of passage, changing status and a further life with the living dead. Death is not extinction but it is a “separation, transition and re-incorporation” (Igboin, 259). Care of the dead is important in Africa too. “A man might have a hundred children and live to be very old. But if he finds no satisfaction in life and in the end does not even get a decent burial, I say he would have been better off born dead.” Ecc 6:33ff The big difference, compared with the Japanese traditional

view, is that in Africa there are monotheistic beliefs, whereas there is a future of cosmic oneness, unrelated to the Creator in Japan.

4.3.1.3 *Heaven and the Resurrection*

“But our citizenship is in heaven.” Phil 3:20 Being in Christ is a continuous state, not ceasing at physical death. Gal 2:20, Rom 6:22, Cor 6:19, Rom 6:1-6, Col 2:12-13, Gal 2:11, 9,20. In the NIV there are 422 entries where *heaven* or *heavens* are mentioned and 737 for *earth*. The Hebrew *samayim* and the Greek οὐρανός are used. This NT word depicts the glorious future resurrection life. Arthur Roberts gave the following ways in which *heaven* is used in the Bible:

The skies above the earth; the abode of God; a synonym for God’s will; the total reality; the locus of revelation; the capital of God’s kingdom; the ultimate judiciary; the repository for prayer; petitions; the place where saints go for eternal life; the energizing centre for natural phenomena; the standard for righteousness and social order; the purposive context for historical events; the archives for good deeds; the container for modes of existence; the future reality; the arena for the struggle between good and evil and the furnace for reshaping the cosmos. (Roberts, 4-5)

Roberts saw heaven “as a reality located within creation, of which the cosmos itself is the part now open to our (limited) understanding.” (Roberts, 31) He sees heaven as signifying the divine driving force behind space/time reality, embodying the foundation and goal for the cosmos.” He also saw heaven as having continuity with the created order and the renewed heaven and earth, characterised by righteous character and providing increased dimensions for fuller life. (Roberts, 34)

When writing for pantheists we need to remember that for them there is “no heaven that God rules, other than the present universe. There is no God who judges the sinful” (Takamizawa 2003:39). Pantheists long for the immanence of the transcendent God, yet issues of life after death, which are crucial to them, remain elusive. (Takamizawa, 47).

Yoshimoto writes that “the Japanese think that they will go back to the ancestors”. Isobe called it a reversion to the ancestors. Therefore the

concept of time could be biased by past orientation. “Reversion to the ancestors” must be transformed to reversion or conversion to the Father. God the Father is not only the Originator, but also the Completer and the Eternal One “(Yoshimoto, 140). He makes the interesting statement that Japanese history must be rewritten in terms of salvation history. Especially the Japanese mythology must be accepted as unhistorical stories even though some accounts probably indicate historical events. of history, God intervenes human history and judges it” (Yoshimoto, 140).

Igboin tells of the Yoruba of Nigeria whose eschatological belief features “relatives and associates who have gone before and come to meet them in rejoicing welcome” (Igboin, 264).

Life in heaven leads us to the Biblical teaching of the resurrection of the body. “If for this life only we have hoped in Christ, we are of all people most to be pitied. But in fact Christ has been raised from the dead, the first fruits of those who have died” 1 Cor 15. “I have a hope in God – a hope that they themselves also accept – that there will be a resurrection of both the righteous and the unrighteous” Acts 24:15.

Our view of the resurrection of the body is based on the resurrection of Jesus, the event which is central to history and kingdom spirituality. Justin, the 2nd century Samaritan scholar had a holistic view of human nature, which agreed with Moltmann, the German scholar “the human being lives *wholly*, the *whole* human being dies, God will *wholly* raise the human being” (Roberts, 78). The idea of bodily resurrection is basically foreign to Japanese, brought up to the idea of oneness in nirvana, basically a spiritual, non-physical idea. The resurrection of Jesus is often cited as a difficulty for belief by Japanese. Initially, it is not attractive and very foreign.

4.3.1.4 Hell and Judgement

“And these will go away into eternal punishment, but the righteous into eternal life” (Matt 25:26). A Japanese proverb reads: “It’s only when the lid of the coffin is closed that a person’s life is evaluated. (*Kan or ooite kotosadamaru*)”

Hell was originally γέννα, the name of the Jerusalem valley where children were sacrificed to Moloch. The meaning later was associated with final judgement and was so used by Jesus. God's holiness is here revealed in his righteous wrath.

Ordinary Japanese rarely speak of hell and are mostly universalists in common belief, because Amida Buddha will save all. Funeral Buddhism has given a way for all to reach nirvana and the thought that any relative would end up in hell is too much for the Japanese psyche to cope with. If the finality of hell and judgement were preached more – it is socially a very difficult thing to do here, maybe a better attitude would develop towards personal evangelism. (But discontented would leave the church too.) It should be noted that Buddhism teaches the notion of hell and most are familiar with the idea of Emma, the lord of hell dispensing judgement.

4.3.1.5 Purgatory?

Views of purgatory need to be visited as it has meaning in the Japanese view of the afterlife. Views of the interim state include the following: “A state of limbo; a punitive purgatory; final sanctification at death; complete earthly sanctification, thus no transitional state needed; hell as ultimate purgation; purgatory as preparation” (Yoshimoto, 146). Hell as purgation: those who believe that God's love will ultimately overpower the most recalcitrant sinners. As preparation: fearing antinomianism, some Christians have held to a more inclusive understanding of God's power both to forgive sins and to purge the disposition to sin.

Theologians throughout the centuries have pondered how persons can make a proper transition into heaven, how they can be perfected in faith, how they can be made holy. Is sanctification sufficient, or is something more required before admission to heaven? An interim or transitional state is perhaps required to prepare people for eternal things. Assume 3 things: first, that there will be an interim time before the final judgement (see I Thess 4:13) second, that most persons enter heaven with lots of worldly baggage to unload at the gate and hence need help

overcoming a moral or spiritual shortfall; and third, that God will do whatever is needed on behalf of persons whose hearts are right. (Roberts, 57)

The medieval church, (Protestant Christians rejected the doctrine of punitive purgatory and indulgences), generally concluded that in death: believers are instantaneously purified from whatever remains of sinful propensity or habit. The righteousness of Christ suffices. Robert Barclay, a 17th c theologian, challenged the Westminster Confession which asserted that no one can keep God's commandments perfectly, that even the best actions, thoughts and prayers of the saints are impure and polluted. The Holy Spirit cleanses believers from the body of death and gives power to overcome sin. John Wesley taught that although most people who have died in faith have not been perfected in love, he believed that at death, entire sanctification must occur, why not sooner for those who seek it?

4.3.1.6 *The Communion of Saints*

In the Lutheran reformers *Confessio Augustana's* Article XXI, dealing with faith and doctrine, the right veneration of the saints (departed Christians) is dealt with: they are to "be recollected in order to serve as examples for Christians in faith and conduct." There is no Biblical basis for asking their help through prayer, "Jesus being our only mediator to whom we bring all our supplications" (Berentsen, 168). The corresponding article in the *Apology* states that there is the possibility of the saints praying, together with the angels, for the living church, just as living Christians do. There is no evidence for this in Scripture however. This attempt to include the dead in mediation is refuted in the Confutation.

"The living and the dead in Christ are partaking in a community which bridges the chasm of death and is heading towards consummation" (Berentsen, 244-245).

It is the opinion of the contextualisation theologian, Fukuda Mitsuo, that expanding and emphasizing the concept of the communion of saints is too near to the idea of departed ancestors to be safely expanded and

usefully used in the Japanese church. Offner however has written about this subject at length.

4.3.1.7 Family

In 1973 Berentsen statistics recorded that one out of 4 Christians receive stiff opposition on baptism. Experience since then would point to the number being the same now. The Church has a responsibility to teach and practice family values, carrying on the tradition of the OT and the NT.

In this section I am indebted to Berentsen's masterful handling of the subject in Chapter 3 of *Grave and Gospel*.

In Genesis 2 we see that man is a social being, but that family institutions operate in a fallen world. Ex. 20:12 "Honour your father and mother", is again emphasized by Jesus in Mark 7: 1-5 and again in Eph 6: 1-4. Jesus, instead of taking people away from their family, often sent them back to them. Parents are given a special place of honour in the Decalogue and Barth comments that that honour is not dependant on the quality of the parents. (Berentsen, 225). In Eph.6:4 parents are commanded to instruct children to know the Lord and they are not free to behave as they please.

The vertical family in all its generations is shown in the OT and the NT to be important (Gen 47). The ancestors have a prominent place and the idea of being buried with the ancestors was important. The unity of the family, in present and future generations is also seen in the blessings and curses—precautionary measures are given to ensure the continuity of the family in Deut. 25:5ff.

Horizontally, there is "the primary solidarity-group of the living generation" (Berentsen, 227). In 1 Tim 5:4 instruction is given for looking after widows. The Japanese text uses the actual term for filial piety in the older translation: *jibun no kazoku o taisetsu ni shi, oya ni ongaeshi o suru koto*. This biblical teaching is exactly that of the traditional family obligations of *ho-on*, repaying of one's debts. In 2 Tim 1:3 the text is translated using the word *senzo*, ancestor. προγονος here refers not only to

one's parents, but to the forefathers too. (Berentsen, 228) So Japanese values are not alien to Biblical thinking.

Yet, how far does a Christian have to go in obedience in the family? Are there instances where one does not obey? The OT speaks out against individualism, clinging to its rights and freedom. In Micah 7:6 the family members are criticized for anti-family behaviour and Jesus rejects individual piety that ignores family obligations. The question of tensions between individual rights and family obligations is a difficult one for Japanese.

The injunction to love God comes first in the Decalogue. Faith in God as the ultimate authority above the individual and the family keeps the two in balance. The new man in Christ is neither slave nor free, male nor female, Gal 3:28, but a slave of Christ, submissive in human relationships, imitating Christ. The Christian belongs to a natural family and to the family of God without confusing the two. (Berentsen, 242)

On the one hand, it implies that when we approach the problem of the individual and collective in the family context from the eschatological point of view, Christianity cannot simply be conceived of in terms of a revolutionary, ideological movement which breaks the walls of the Japanese family-structure. Christianity in Japan should not be identified as the main proponent of some kind of Western, nuclear family-system introduced as "The Christian family". Just as the New Testament *Haustafeln* testifies to the apostolic affirmation of the Christians' 'concrete position within the process of history. Christians in the Japanese family context have to affirm their particular 'finitude within the social order'. The new life in Christ – the discipleship's *imitatio* Christ in terms of service and self-sacrifice in love – is to be realized within the framework of the particular family-collective to which one belongs and within the family-structure of the social order of which one is a part. Saying this we are not contradicting or minimizing the possibility of conflict which the religious aspects of family life centered around ancestral rites may create for a Christian. (Berentsen, 237).

On the other hand, also in a Japanese family-structure, Christianity brings about a motion that changes existing orders from within. The point we just made does not mean that Christianity may be employed as an effective force for the conservation of old structures, because after all – one might think – a patriarchal, extended family-system seems more akin to the structures of the Bible than does the individualistic, nuclear family of the West. As we have seen, in Christian

thinking, the family as such is put decisively into eschatological perspective by being subordinate to the lordship of Christ and the individual members of the family – each in one’s particular position sharing in the new creation in Christ through faith – is a disciple living the daily struggle of *imitatio Christi*. Thus the change that takes place from within is not a simple, once-and-for-all substitution of an old set of structures with a new one. Rather is it a process that reveals itself in changes towards an ever greater realization of a family-fellowship in reciprocal service and self-sacrifice of the one for the other under the common authority of the lordship of Christ. (Berentsen 237-238).

From the above arguments about the family, one could say that covenant theology would seem to be of great value in Japan, where God’s interest in generations of families is emphasized. The theology of the family is something the church should be exploring, both in education, practice and in missionary practice.

As was seen in the focus groups, the abiding reason for ancestor practices is not religious, but social, in agreement with Chua who wrote in 2005. “it is precisely the non-religious aspects of the ancestral tradition that have withstood the battering forces of ‘secularisation’ (Chua, 34).

Chapter 3 has shown what indigenous Japanese Christian groups are doing, especially in the area of Ancestor Practices, what the churches, missions and seminaries are teaching and practicing as regards to the afterlife. In chapter 4 the concept of Contextualisation in the Japanese church is explored before we attempt any actual contextualisation of the after-life in the last chapter.

CHAPTER 5

CONTEXTUALISATION, HIBACHI METAPHOR

In this chapter we will confirm the necessity for contextualisation in Japan, survey the most useful models of contextualisation, consider syncretism and dual systems, and discuss the way in which Japanese see theology and religious truth. The writings of Japanese will be given preference.

5.1 Failure and New Ways of Doing Theology

We need to communicate the gospel at the worldview level of the Japanese if we are to make an impact on Japanese society. What little contextualising has been done has seldom been disseminated. Uchimura Kanzoo wrote, “We might receive germs of the truth from abroad, but we cannot save both ourselves and our fellow men with the truth which has not been cultivated at the bottom of our heart. Japanese Christianity is not a Japanese religion, Japanese Christianity is the Christian truth explained from a standpoint peculiar to the Japanese” (Miura Hiroshi 1996:66).

Kearney’s definition of worldview is a people’s “way of looking at reality”. A world view

consists of basic assumptions and images that provide a more or less coherent thought, not necessarily accurate way of thinking about the world. A world view comprises images of Self and of all that is recognized as non-Self, plus ideas about relationship between them, as well as other ideas. (Nishioka, 37).

Traditional Japanese religions have actually been successfully indigenising over the centuries – *shuugo* 修吾– Shintoo and Buddhism moving together dialectically, backwards and forwards. Christianity has found contextualisation hard to accomplish.

5.1.1 *Self-Theologizing*

The church, being bound by the need and desire for theological orthodoxy, has found it more difficult to self-theologize. Unfortunately, missionaries have often thought that if the Three-Self model of Rufus Anderson and Henry Venn were followed that indigenisation was complete. Self-theologizing is forgotten. (Song Minho 2005:12) Yoshimoto commented that missions moved from the Three Self's theory into the direction of the cultural identity of the younger churches, then enlarging to self-hood, including politics, economics and social innovation. Now the selfhood of the church is beginning to deal with the fourth Self: self-theologizing. The Tokyo Missions Research Institute is leading Japan in this and numbers of young Japanese are studying Missiology overseas and writing dissertations from a Japanese point of view.

Contextualising was done during the war by the United Church and has perhaps been the reason why Japanese theologians have mostly, until the 60's and 70's, kept to other branches of theology. The following was produced to show support for the war effort.

- (1) Since *Mikuni* (kingdom of the emperor) and *Mikuni* (kingdom of God) are pronounced in the same way, serving the emperor and cooperation in Japan's advance into China serves the advancement of the kingdom of God.
- (1) The emperor and Christ are identical, otherwise Japanese would not believe in Christianity.
- (2) For the Japanese, if not for Westerners, Shintoist ancient writings such as *Kojiki* and *Nihonshoki* are the Old Testament.
- (3) Yahweh, the God of the Old Testament, and the god *Amenominakanushi no kami* of the *Kojiki* are identical.
- (4) As it is written in the Old Testament, especially in the book of Isaiah, the mission of the Japanese is to restore Israel, and the war against China is part of that mission (Furuya, 57).

It must be added that the NKK apologized for this theologizing and its part in supporting the war effort.

David Lewis wrote in *The Unseen Face of Japan* (1993:289) that Aikawa and Leavenworth related a story which was told by Father Organtino, a Roman Catholic missionary to Japan in the mid-16th century. He had a vision of the indigenous gods of the country. One of them, a minor deity, told him how they absorb, but change the foreign gods out of all recognition into Japanese ones. This spirit concluded by commenting, 'Perhaps in the long run, your Christian God will be changed into an indigenous god of this country. As Chinese and Indian gods were once changed, the Western god must likewise be changed... beware of us.'" Efforts to contextualize have sometimes been disastrous. How do we contextualize with fidelity to the Scriptures?

5.1.2 Culture and Theology

We first look at culture, then theology. In 2007 do we see the role culture plays in the shaping of theology any clearer than before? Geertz defines culture as that "system of inherited conceptions expressed in symbolic forms by means of which people communicate, perpetuate and develop their knowledge about and attitudes toward life" (Bevans 2003:6).

Bevans spoke of theology as having 3 sources: Scripture, tradition and present human experience - the context. (Tradition is interpreted as being the Christian theological past.) He also says that we cannot speak of "one, right, unchanging theology. We can only speak about a theology that makes sense at a certain place and in a certain time" (Bevans, 4). Context includes the experience of a person's or group's personal life, which is possible only within the context of culture and in terms of a person's location. This context is not static and is affected by modernity and the idealism of modernity.

He agreed with Bouillard that a theology that is not reflexive of our times, our culture and our current concerns – and so contextual – is also a false theology. Bediako stated that "the universal character of the Gospel lies in the fact that it tests all cultures, but also in the fact that it allows

every people to make their contribution to the kingdom of God” (Dyrness 1993:66).

Nowhere else do we see the need to really connect with the Japanese culture as in this thorny question of ancestor practices. (Geertz recommends a thick description) (Schreiter, 28). Oduyoye pointed out that Nile basin (Ethiopian) Christianity may have survived because it reflected the primal religion of that region.

James and Johnson correctly commented that

Christianity does not necessarily spread as an organic entity; partial elements, themes and practices, are characteristically taken up by a particular culture or civilization, ethnic, class or interest group, at a particular time (Swanson & Chillday, 126).

Bevans says that this use of the context is a departure from the traditional way of doing theology. Flemming would disagree with this, as he showed so clearly in “Contextualisation in the New Testament”, that the New Testament was a completely contextualized book. (Flemmings:2005)

5.1.3 Compelling Factors for Contextualising

In 2007 two sets of factors compel us to do contextual theologising once more. The external being general dissatisfaction in the South with classic approaches to theology, the oppressive nature of earlier theologies, the growing identity of local churches, the social sciences’ contribution to our understanding of culture. Internal factors are the incarnational nature of Christianity, the rich, diverse, universal nature of the church. Bevans here mentioned the revitalization of Trinitarian theologising, but this would be a stumbling block, rather than a help in Japan as the main description of Christianity that everyone can express is “Christianity, oh yes, the Trinity” and the idea is very off-putting and puzzling to the polytheistic Japanese

5.1.4 Who Does Contextualizing?

Who does this contextual local theology? Can the foreign missionary? Bevans feels the answer, from one point of view is “No”. Yet in limited ways, to a certain extent, those who do not share the full experience of the other are able to contribute to contextual theology (Bevans, 19) The outsider’s etic description may be phenomenological, but he is “setting the stage for explanation” (Schreiter, 58). He can provide a counterpoint in his critique of a situation, he can stimulate people from the culture to do their theologizing. Humility and honesty is necessary. Bob Goldman disagrees and stated that “foreigners are unreliable guides for what is appropriate for believers in a particular ethno-religious situation” (Goldman 2006:12) In the beginning, the theologian’s knowledge is necessary. Later, when Japanese cultural difficulties of hierarchy (which prevents change and innovation, lack of freedom for free speech) and prevents natives from doing the contextualising, the foreigner is still needed. Despite paternalism dangers, the local church can turn on itself and become self-satisfied; so the link to the world-wide church is needed. Life-long local leadership can be just as oppressive as foreigners and not “see” (Schreiter, 20). Key questions in an outer description should be: What is the purpose of the translation of the sign system?” Who is being served by this translation? How is the translation being authenticated (Schreiter, 59)?

Etic analysis may not always be the best, especially when there has not been opportunity to experience other cultures and gain perspective. The structuralist, Claude Levi-Strauss discounted the value of native exegesis, especially when it goes into the “deep, unconscious structures that govern change and identity in a culture” (Schreiter, 41). Charles Taylor wrote that the native’s point of view is not always perfectly adequate or that “it cannot be corrected from the outside” (Dyrness b, 21). He suggests a middle-way, neither ethnocentric nor incorrigible, the interpretive view. One seeks to find a means of understanding and description that challenges the observer and the native. A dialogue

between the two could be mutually corrective. Benjamin Nelson has argued that because of the inter-connectedness of the global world that all knowledge will be cross-cultural in the future.

Inner and outer descriptions are necessary: inner descriptions provide the sign systems that make up the identity of a people; outer descriptions help with social change, and with linkage to the larger reality of the Christian church (Schreiter, 59).

But the record of serious evangelical interaction with the major religions has not been good. Many Western missionaries are sent to Asian countries with superficial preparation. (As borne out in my survey of missions.) Because they think a-historically, in terms of belief-systems, they have not taken Christian or other religions' historicity seriously.

Bevans went on to say that we can do contextual theology from a redemption-centred (the human experience is in need of radical transformation) or a creation-centred perspective. His favour towards the latter is built on his view that creation is sacramental, that human experience is good, that this world is where God reveals God, very much like Rahner's "anonymous Christianity" and Panikkar's "unknown Christ of Hinduism. It is the same kind of thinking that produced the Shintoo/Christian thinking of the wartime United Church. Gilland speaks of bringing "elements of the cultural milieu under the lordship of Christ". The church must "challenge, incorporate and transform, the elements of culture so as to bring these under the lordship of Christ" (Song, 13). The receptor's mind is not empty or free and needs to go through a hard battle for Scripture's truths to be internalised.

What are the criteria that would prevent us mixing Christianity and culture in a way that would compromise us? Schreiter, in "Constructing Local Theologies" gave five criteria. There should be inner consistency, it should be translatable into worship, practice should be ethical and non-oppressive, it should be open to criticism from other churches and it should be able to challenge other theologies. Much has been written on contextualisation *per se*, but it is the way it is practised that is lacking, not

the theory. Before actual contextualisation, we will look at models to assist us in clearer thinking.

5.2 The Use of Models

Dulles described a model as “a relatively simple, artificially constructed case which is found to be useful and illuminating for dealing with realities that are more complex and differentiated (Bevans, 29). Models that do not supply intelligible explanations of phenomena in one model can be found in another model. Different models give a unique way of theologising that takes a certain context seriously. Although models are distinct, they can be used in tandem with others. Bevans felt that only one should not be used exclusively as this will distort the theological enterprise. He describes the Translation, the Anthropological, the Praxis, the Synthetic, the Transcendental and the Countercultural models in his book, *“Models of Contextual Theology”*. Nishioka, the Japanese missiologist, argued that actual missionary activities and human experiences cannot be encapsulated in one unified single theory and any one theory cannot foretell actual human experience with certainty. For reasons of suitability to Japan we review the Translation, the Anthropological and the Synthetic Models.

5.2.1 The Translation Model

The most often employed model is the Translation model and the Adaptation model. Kraft said that this is a recovery of the original spirit of Christian theologising. The message of the Bible is seen as an unchanging message. (Acts 17) Kraft “suggested that the dynamic-equivalence approach might be extended beyond Bible translation to become a theological procedure” (Schreiter, 17). It is often used first by missionaries in urgent situations, allowing “some initial missionary adaptation to the local culture”.

This model teaches that “something” must be “put into” other terms. The key presupposition is that the gospel is supra-cultural. The supra-

contextual message can be separated from the contextual mode of expression. The starting point is the supra-contextual message, which affects culture and social context, "putting the gospel into", (Bevans, 40). The basic structure of all cultures is also presupposed. The translation model takes Scripture seriously, it sees the ambivalence of contextual reality, can be used by anyone committed to a particular culture.

Criticisms would be that it is a positivist approach, assuming "that culture can be quickly decoded and understood by foreigners. There may not be cultural parallels or the same significance in both cultures. (e.g . bells and drums) Space prevents a discussion about whether there is such a thing as the "naked gospel" and Krikor Halebian suggested that "culture is more like an onion with various layers" (Bevans, 43). Instead of finding an essential core, (the kernel and husk idea - the onion idea is better) the aim is to discover cultural patterns that can incarnate Christian existence and meaning" (Bevans, 43). Another criticism is that revelation is not propositional, but the manifestation of God's presence in life and society, the Bible representing that record of manifestation in particular times and society, Israel and the early Christian era.

Numbers of theologians practise this model, but Hesselgrave is mentioned because of his experience as a missionary to Japan for 12 years. He chooses the Translation model, but his approach seems "to be limited to the first encounter with a non-Christian culture" (Bevans, 45) probably stemming from his missionary experience. He mentions "the source, the act of encoding, the message, the act of decoding the message and the receiver" (Bevans, 45-46). The core teaching is put into terms the receptor can understand.

5.2.2 The Anthropological Model

Justin Martyr taught that other religions and cultures contain "seeds of the word" and here the Anthropological Model recognizes the value of human culture, the human person; it makes use of anthropological science, provides fresh perspectives of Christianity, it starts where the people are -

searching for treasures in the culture. At the heart of this model is sacramentalist Catholic thinking. The primacy of culture is recognized. Culture shapes the way Christianity is articulated. It sees Scripture and tradition as a “series of local theologies”. (Bevans, 59).

The weakness here is that often the local theology is not carried out beyond the first couple of steps. Identified problems and questions may be addressed, but dialogue has not yet continued. In seeking to maintain identity and stability, conflictual factors are overlooked for the sake of keeping harmony. (This is where we are in Japan.) The model becomes a conservative force, instead of a force for needed change. Another danger is cultural romanticism, where critical thinking about the culture is not done as it also requires great effort and it does not happen by serendipitous discovery. Also much of the cultural analysis can only be done by experts and not at grassroots. A close working dialectic between Biblical traditions and local cultural traditions will avoid these dangers.

5.2.3 The Synthetic Model

This model endeavours to balance the insights of the Translation, the Synthetic and the Praxis Model (which has a strong epistemological basis) and also the Counter-cultural model which provides strong context and gospel fidelity. This model mentions translating the faith into other cultural contexts, but seems to go beyond the Translation model, “in that it acknowledges mutual enrichment of cultures” (Bevans, 89).

The importance of reflection and intellectual activity to theologise is necessary - there is a synthesis with one’s own cultural viewpoint and those of others, and it develops a creative dialectical, acceptable to them. Here every context has unique elements and common elements with others. Therefore cultures can borrow and learn from other cultures and still be unique. Content is ambivalent, some features being neutral, some good and some bad

Schreier argued that out of a thick description of listening to the culture for basic patterns and structures and analysis to find its basic symbol system, basic themes for local theology will emerge and be understood to be operative in one's own context, calling for transformation and social change. We are warned that the inculturation of theology cannot be limited to the 'first insertion' of a faith into a culture. Contextualisation needs to become an attitude, coping with ongoing change. Dialoguing with the North churches will give South churches a sense of equal status.

Interestingly, Koyama Kosuke, the Japanese missionary to Thailand, and others such as Vitaliano Gorospe, Jose de Mesa, Aylward Shorter and Charles Nyamiti used this model.

Koyama had a creative and imaginative way of doing theology, which might not even be classified as theology by some western theologians, but perfectly intelligible and valid to Japanese. Koyama "tends to see the possibility of a supracultural message, a 'universal word' that can become meaningful (and so translated) when it is spoken with reverence to a particular cultural and religious context" (Bevans, 97). Bevans found more than just a translation of doctrinal categories into the Asian cultural world – he finds a strong dialectic between a high sensitivity to cultural reality and the strong sense of gospel truth. A real dialogue is progressing with Buddhist values, which are treated with respect and also critiqued by the gospel. "*Mt Fuji and Mt. Sina*" bears out this attitude. "Japanese world-negating Buddhism and Judaeo-Christian tradition have positive points that need the benefit of a two-way traffic between them" (Bevans, 98).

5.3 Syncretism and Dual Systems

Before going on to a contextualisation that is suitable to Japan, we examine the question of syncretism and dual systems. Syncretism is hard to define. Louis Luzbetak offers "a theologically untenable amalgam" and it is a good one.

Bevans lists 3 kinds of syncretism. (1) that which is practised on the NE coast of South America and the Caribbean, where Christian deity and saints are synthesized; (2) where Christian elements and non-Christian elements are blended, using a Christian framework, such as the IEC of Africa, Rastafarians and the cargo movement; (3) where the system is highly selective in its use of Christian elements, such as the New Religions of Japan.

In these forms of syncretism, Christianity is given a new reality with the basic framework given by the other tradition; (2) where the framework is given by Christianity for the syncretistic system, then reinterpreted and independently reshaped; (3) where only selected Christian elements are incorporated.

Dual systems need examination because this is the situation in Japan with ancestral practices and Christian practices observed alongside each other. He lists 3 kinds of dual systems: (1) where the Christian and other tradition operates side by side, with many native American groups in both North and South America. People follow 2 sets of rituals, seeing no contradiction; (2) selected elements of another system, plus traditional Christianity is practised – local leaders see these as contradictory, but the people, in time of stress will revert to the original religion; (3) often seen in Asia where citizenship and a religious tradition are inextricably bound up. Religious tradition and culture are so interwoven that it is difficult to see the boundaries. The Japanese have a particular problem with (2) and (3).

In the first, the tradition and Christianity are seen as two distinct entities, in the second, Christian elements are primary with selected elements from the local tradition practised separately; in the third, Christians try to be faithful to their national identity and to Christ.

Questions that arise are ones concerning the original conversion of the person and what is religion? In fact, what is religion to this person? Barth's faith and religion distinction is not helpful as in some countries there is no word for "religion" and a faith system is seen as a way of life,

another one merely expanding one's quality of life. Another question is about the seriousness of our contextualisation? Can world-view and group boundaries easily be forsaken and do we tolerate the product of true contextualisation – the heart of the culture – and not just the equivalent of an artificial heart.

True preaching of the gospel will effect change, but how deep? Behaviour change, social change, but also semiotic change, introducing the new message without creating change in the sign system. An incomplete coming together of the gospel and the church could be the cause of syncretism or a dual system. Why do certain people seem quite happy to live in a dual system? Christianity has often borrowed ceremonies from other traditions over the centuries, could it be that now the same thing is happening much faster and in too many places – “who determines what is proper and improper borrowing?” (Schreiter, 151).

An incomplete existential encounter between two systems results in syncretism or dual systems. Using the principles of the Anthropological Model, we look at it from the point of view of the dynamics of culture change in the culture. It could be that the church/missions do not deeply understand the culture – as in Japan.

5.3.1 Ways of Encounter

The first manner of incorporation is to look at similarities between the sign systems of Christianity and the culture. “Analogous” elements of the invading culture such as holy water, prayers, healing, communion of the saints are seen as similar to signs in the local culture and are taken over, according to its own codes and then could bear its own messages. So Christian signs of grace were understood then as signs of local power. (Perhaps one reason why Japanese theological seminary/college principals adamantly refused the idea of a substitute for the *butsudan*. “Japanese easily see these things as magical.” Missionaries see these signs as being helpful, as the easiest method of accommodation, not realizing that the signs now bear different meanings. (A Translation Model

difficulty.) They are lulled into thinking that quick contextualisation has occurred since parallels are played upon.

Another manner of incorporation is that of filling gaps: problems that are not being properly solved in a culture is catered for when the invading culture provides signs and even codes for dealing with these problems. Hori mentioned Buddhism more successfully dealing with the question of the spirits of the dead than Shintoo did. Not only does the sign carry the meaning, but also codes are involved in filling the gap.

Indiscriminate mixing happens when the receiving culture is at a “low level of social and cultural organisation” (Schreiter, 153). and it is susceptible to new sign systems, codes and messages. Here the problem is that the culture will often reconstitute the new sign systems to agree with its entire culture. A resilient culture will produce indiscriminate mixing which Christians often label “syncretism”, especially where the culture wants to use Christianity’s signs, mixing will be acute. Here the dynamics are the clearest. Japanese are famous for being able to do this. Historically and culturally we seem to be in this kind of social condition.

Domination is another manner of incorporation where the local culture is in a weakened state regarding signs and the invading culture’s sign system takes over, replacing the local signs.

British social anthropology sees dual systems growing out of “culture clash”, not “acculturation.” Why does this happen? Firstly, because of an incomplete encounter with the invading culture, if the culture does not feel that the incoming culture’s signs are dealing with the same issues which its own sign systems are signalling. So real contact is not established and it remains a foreign system – the accusation of most Japanese about Christianity. This could be caused by a lack of sufficient contact, through a lack of the sign systems making contact with one another. This has happened in Japan “where many missionaries never achieved the linguistic ability to bring about a genuine contact” (Schreiter, 155). More importantly maybe, that there is often not heart’s

communication occurring, apart from linguistic ability. A closely related reason is that the local culture's sign system's value is enhanced by the presence of the invading culture (as during Meiji in Japan and after military defeat in World War II) when the outsiders are seen as more powerful, and one needs to placate them, by outward appearances.

Another scenario is that, although there is acceptance of the sign system, the receiving culture feels that the invading culture's sign systems cannot adequately handle all of its problems. So older forms of magic and divination continue to meet the concrete needs of the believers. Another, similar to the first: the local sign system and the invading sign system are perceived as dealing with differing things. The person feels that he cannot pray for his ancestors like a Christian because his ancestors were Buddhist. Only Buddhist practices provide the right respect. Buddhism will include Christianity, but Christianity seems to be intolerant of it. Are such limits necessary? So perceptions are that the invading culture's sign system is alien, inferior, inadequate, or not to the point – an accurate way of looking at the Japanese view of Christianity. (Japanese Christians protest that they do respect the ancestors, but Japanese feel that the church's way of memorialising the ancestors is not adequate.)

How to deal with these perspectives? We need to realize that good evangelization will bring about culture change, that religion is a way of life, that "religion" varies in different cultures, it's not just a set of ideas. For whom is the dual system in Japan a problem? Maybe the conversion process takes longer than we imagined; what we see as "syncretism or a dual system may be but reflective of the stages of the conversion process." "The firm foundations we experience today were not easily achieved. No doubt they may have looked a dangerous syncretism to an earlier generation" (Schreier, 157-158). One only has to read Flemming to see how dangerous the New Testament must have looked to Jews, Greeks and Romans.

5.4 Guidelines to Contextualisation in Japan

What are our guidelines in contextualising here? First, we examine cautions before listing the guidelines - simple guidelines could be: no idolatry, no immorality, no injustice or individualism.

5.4.1 *Emotion, not Logical Propositions*

Yoshimoto states that:

The theology of the Kingdom of God should deal with all necessary themes in Japan's culture such as ancestor worship. Apologetics, epistemology and expression should be appropriate for the Japanese people. For example power encounter is a very significant point to apologetics. Emotionality should be considered in terms of epistemology. Japanese think very emotionally. For example, Kitamori Kazuo's "Theology of the Pain of God" can be called emotional soteriology. Through this emotional concept of pain the Japanese can really feel the love of God. Concerning expression, concrete expression is usually very appropriate to the Japanese. In this respect I think that many Christian theologians must rethink their style of theology. Mostly, they imitate the styles of western theologians too much (Yoshimoto, 145).

Bearing in mind the above 3 models, we need to remember that Japanese, as Yoshimoto explained above, think in terms of emotion and not in terms of doctrinal statements. Western Christians may find this strange, because "it does not fit into their presupposition of the form of truth" (Yoshimoto, 25). He argues that theology from the west is the product of long interaction between Graeco-Roman philosophy and Hebraism. "Its rationalistic character is sometimes inappropriate to the mentality of other cultures" (Yoshimoto, 25).

5.4.2 *A Three-Layered World-view*

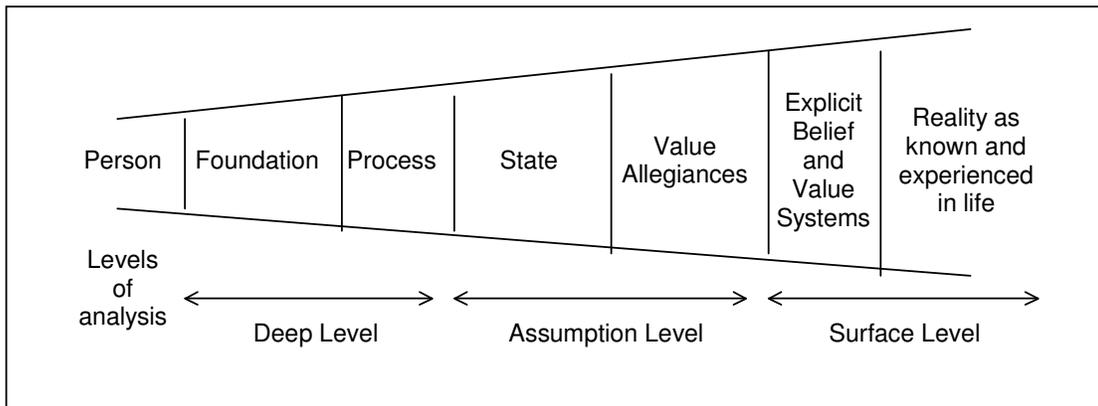
Yoshimoto quotes Munakata

people are living in a world of three layers. The first layer consists of the symbolic relationship between nature and the human being. This is a feeling of mystery in nature, a feeling of

unity of man and nature. We can identify it as mythological, cosmological world view like as (sic) Ko-Shintoo. The second layer consists of the continual relationship of human spirits. This chain of life includes not only living men, but also spirits of the dead ancestors and un-born descendants. It is a cosmological community of all spirits. These two levels are often unconscious. The third level is the world of individuals. It is a world at the conscious level. At this level people believe in different ideologies or value systems. Munakata brings clarification here in saying that people live in the great spiritual whole world at an unconscious level. He defined it as “the Spiritual Communal Body (Yoshimoto, 104-05).

See Hiebert’s similar evaluation below:

Figure 3 Hiebert’s Three Layered Model For Analyzing Worldview (Clinton 1986:68) (Yoshioka, 97)



Yet, Yoshimoto, in examination of the Japanese worldview, with reference to ancestor worship, said that “manipulation of worldview does not seem to be the right way”. He points to the individual’s power encounter with Jesus as being more important. (Yoshimoto, 148)

5.4.3 Transformation of Ancestor Practices

Ancestor practices are not only changed in some way, but Yoshimoto wrote that

ancestor worship must be ultimately transformed. In the process of transformation, we analyze the custom, compare it with the biblical norm, evaluate it, reject unbiblical elements, find a functional substitute, find a new form in a transformed worldview and try to transform it. Thus the ultimate principle would be transformation, but in a practical procedure of each

case we need to employ complex attitudes (Yoshimoto, 135-136).

Yoshimoto stated that the Japanese national church should have a right self-consciousness that she is a part of the universal church, the Body of Christ.

I think that when the Japanese can really identify themselves with the universal community of the People of God, they can dissolve the old world view and integrate themselves in to the new world view. This transformation of the spiritual community seems to be the most important issue to the Japanese people. Then the Japanese will be truly liberated from their ethnocentric world view (Yoshimoto, 1443).

5.4.4 Self-Negation of Western Christianity

More, metamorphosis is needed; the self-negation of Western traditional Christianity, which is originally an element in Jesus' crucifixion is necessary. (Furuya, 137) Endo Shuusaku also said "If Christianity was to become indigenous in non-Christian countries, metamorphosis through self-negation is necessary" (Furuya, 138). The mission that does not anticipate this is haughty by nature, no matter how humble its attitude may appear towards indigenous religion.

5.4.5 Japanese View of Religious Truth

People participate in religious activities because of socio-cultural belongings. not because of well thought out beliefs. *Hatsumode* 初も出 and *obon* are good examples of this: many Japanese people take part in the former because it is the thing to do at New Year and the latter because of household obligations. They can therefore pray to the deities and the ancestors because the situation and circumstance demand it, yet need not express beliefs in either. Participation thus cuts across religious boundaries. (Nagasawa, 53)

5.4.6 Believing Through Doing

Japanese come to believe through doing; not come to doing through believing. For Japanese, a religion is that which is lived out, and knowing truth is bound with doing truth. Lived truth, *religio vera* versus experienced truth, *intellectus verus*. (Nagasawa, 135) The recent rapid growth of charismatic type churches underlines this. Doctrine is not the starting, but the end point in the life of faith.'

5.4.7 Not Logic, but Emotion and Intuition

"Unlike the absolute either/or dichotomies of western logic, Japanese culture – at the *implicitor structural level* – is based on a "logic of relative contrasts....[E]ven when religious customs change – at the *explicit level of culture* there is a tendency for the original implicit categories to reassert themselves in a new guise" (Davis, 247).

Nagasawa advised that "We must help the targeted people to discover truth in such a way that it is meaningful for their cultural context. Therefore we have to examine the cultural background of the targeted people regarding a concept of religious truth" (Nagasawa, 44). Every truth strives for verification. However, the type of truth that the Japanese seek as being true and pure in heart is subjective, and seems to be aloof from the verification itself as well. Indeed, the experimental and critical method of verification is not valid for this type of truth. Yet, verification of this truth could take place within the life-process itself. (Nagasawa, 61)

Nagasawa went on to give the example of Celtic Christianity, quoting Hunter, saying that Celtic Christians experienced God as the Triune dweller in their hearts and companion in daily life, while they emphasized the immanence of God. Roman Christians exclusively experience the divine presence in the sacraments, if at all. Analyzing their thinking methods, she writes further that Celtic Christians predominantly used the right-brain, (same as the Japanese) that they did well intuiting, feeling imaging and in experiential activities. (Nagasawa, 56)

So while Roman Christianity spoke in concepts, Celtic Christians spoke from their imaginations to the imaginations of their hearers through poetry and storytelling. Based on what we have discussed above, we suggest the Spirit-centric, subjective, sensuous or experiential approach, because the foremost religious concern of the Japanese is of brightness and purity of heart and open-minded awareness of reality.

Words and sentences have no fixed meaning, and logic is often irrelevant. Words have meaning only in relation to who is using them, who they are talking to, and in what situation they are used. Some positings are indeed nonsense; other positings appear to be nonsense at first, but this is because the meaning is all between the lines. Zen and poetry have gone hand in hand for centuries.

Nagasawa further writes that what Richardson says about the “postmodern world is cogently valid for Japanese too.” Today people often come to Jesus by first trying to live by his wisdom and follow his lifestyle” (Nagasawa, 59).

Often theologians focus more on Jesus’ work than on His person. Third world theologians, in contrast to Western theologians, conceive of it relationally and communally rather than individualistically (e.g. with concern about defining Christ’s divine-human nature). (Dyrness, 180). People are looking not for a message to believe in, but for a community to belong to.

5.4.8 Nature, *Mono aware* and *Wabi*

A study of Japanese history, art and literature shows that the Japanese intuit the eternal present in the ephemeral beauty of nature. This intuitive or aesthetic sensitivity, in itself, is a religious element and is related to the concept of religious truth. Sensitivity to beauty is the pathway by which one reaches religious truth, that is, the eternal present.

As such, it describes a particular orientation of the Japanese to intuitive experience rather than to objective description or reason as the major mode of knowing or apprehending reality. *Mono-aware* 物の哀れ is a way of perceiving reality and a mode of being in the world that

emphasizes aesthetic intuition, experiential sensitivity to the invisible and unspoken, openness to depth and mystery, and appreciation of the pathos of passing beauty.

Theologian Takenaka Masao, who wrote of “Zen-like” experiences where, not by study, but by sudden inspiration, something triggers illumination into the depths of reality. He believed that such experiences are the secret not only of our relation to God but also of a new theological method.

Whenever two or three Western theologian are gathered together, there is argumentation about God,’ he jokes. As an alternative to this, he proposed the ‘Ah-hah!’ method. In the Bible, he argues, people did not come to know God by discussion or argument, but by experiencing him.” “This means developing deep sensitivity toward the ‘atmosphere: of the place where we live, as the basis for knowing God. (Dyrness, 146).

Insight should be provoked, rather than argued. Koyama tells that thinking in images is not a strategy of communication (like sermon illustrations to drive home a point); it is a special mode of thought that is at home with proverbs and parables, which make up evocative power what they lose in precision. (Dyrness a,149)

All of Japanese art, grows from a basis characteristic of Japanese life called *wabi*. 侘び This is beauty expressed without pretension, in a meek spirit and with harmony. Takenaka believes that Christ can best be understood by Japanese in these terms. He often kept silence, He wept at death, He was troubled, and He found His friends in table fellowship, Phil 2 (Dyrness b, 146). It has been novelists that have captured the value of Christ’s suffering like Shusaku Endoo, and Miura Ayako.

5.4.9 Ritual not Proposition

Miyake states that ritual is an integral part of Japanese cultural schema, as the greatest emphasis is not on ideas but on rituals. In general, Indian thinkers point out, Western thought patterns are

fundamentally dualistic, therefore analysis is the primary mode of critical thought. Eastern patterns favor non-dualistic modes, therefore thinking tends to be synthetic. (Dyrness, 131) In the west we have a tendency towards abstraction and analysis, the desire for synthesis can again have a role to play – as it is God’s plan to ‘unite’” Rodrigues Tano said, the idea of non-duality will “provide a clue to viewing reality as a whole” Dyrness, 161).

In this regard, based on the primacy of action, we would like to suggest a role or a function of the Bible in the context of Japanese religiosity. We think it is more appropriate for Japanese to define the Bible as the canon designed for teaching what is to be practiced, than that designed for teaching what to be accepted as beliefs. In other words, it must be emphasized for Japanese that the Bible is read for the sake of being true by doing. It seems to us that this suggestion coincides with virtual components of the Bible.

Still another way to suggest poetic reality in Shintoo is to consider the centrality of ritual action and the importance of direct experience of the presence of kami (deity) in and through ritual. Shinto ritual is not only a process of purification (internal and external) but also a process of waiting for and waiting on the presence of kami in the tranquil stillness of nature. It demands an experiential sensitivity to see, hear, or feel the coming and going of kami. As one Shinto priest told me, Shinto ritual (especially individual worship) is primarily a matter of waiting in the right state of mind for the coming of kami and then being a proper host for the sacred guest (Nagasawa, 59).

In general, Japanese begin with form in act, then reach the meaning with respect to religious life. Thus, in introducing the Christian life, it is necessary to develop such forms of religious practices or rituals for individuals as Islamic prayer practiced with bowing down every day or prayer practiced with invocation as in the *nembutsu* before the altar every morning. Japanese are highly need and situation-oriented people. There is antecedent ritual in the history of Christianity applicable to the Japanese context -the Celtic contemplative prayer - prayer for ordinary, everyday events.

5.4.10 Community, not Doctrine

A movement away from cold doctrine to the warmth of community is suggested by Nagasawa, who has emphasized that

spiritual realizations must be communal and transformational. The spiritual realizations include a deeper sensitivity to self and others, a feeling of equanimity toward all, self acceptance, a subtle sense of the holy, freeness from material attachment, a deep awareness of human predicament and dignity, genuine compassion and love and so on. In other words, it is these experiences that help overcome the negative forces, impulses and tendencies that lie within us. I believe only Christian fellowship within which the Spirit is active can cultivate these spiritual experiences within the Japanese as they participate. In addition, it might be useful to develop Christianized rituals to assist Japanese people in creating an atmosphere that is helpful for the spiritual state of mind longing for experiencing divine presence (Nagasawa, 58).

Strand warns about an age in which truth about reality is hidden forever and that the refusal of any religion to claim truth is as remarkable as admitting its own falsity. (Strand, 118)

As individuals we are not able to present an objective theology. But as critical realists, we believe we are dealing with reality, in this case parts of God's theology. Thus when we inform and correct each other in the international hermeneutical community, we get a better picture of the revealed facts. (Strand, 119).

We suggested models of contextualisation, examined syncretism and dual systems and why they occur in Japan. Contextualisation needs to take into consideration the special phenomena we find in Japan: those of emotion and ritual taking precedence over logical propositions and *mono aware* and *wabi* 侘び that influences Japanese thinking. Logical, propositional thinking is foreign to Japanese-style thinking. This leads to the suitability of using poetic tools to contextualise and the use of metaphor. Ritual needs to be emphasized, not 'teaching' as 'teaching' is achieved by ritual. The schema that holds all together is community – warm group interactivity.

We will examine metaphor and how to use it in meaning and form, constructing contextualisation about the afterlife in the Japanese church.

Emergent themes of memorialism, respect, the *ie*, gratitude, fear, interdependence of the living and the dead, ethics, identity, and respect in ancestor practices, both for traditional Japanese and for Christian Japanese, an overview of contextualisation, suitable models and the problems of dualism and syncretism, led us to understanding the way contextualisation should occur in Japan

Here the use of metaphor can set the emotional stage for warm, caring, discussion by a Japanese group – the metaphor of warmth from the *hibachi*.

5.5 Metaphor

Japanese use right brain thinking and are susceptible to intuitive thinking, prefer emotive thinking to logical propositions. *Mono aware* is revealed in all Japanese literature, art, architecture and music. Poetry is particularly useful in this regard. This leads us to make use of metaphor to express meaning in Japanese contextualisation.

The theory of metaphor can contribute to developing a theology which is sensitive to tangible human experiences. Metaphor plays a significant role in integrating these two aspects of human experience, body (practice) and mind (reflection). Metaphorical mapping which is not a mode or figure of speech, is one dominant process of construction of new realities. According to this view, theology can be seen as a human reflection on the scriptures (and/or spiritual experiences) through recurrent tangible experiences.

. Studies in metaphor are old and yet very contemporary philosophically, starting with Aristotle to the 1970's. Aristotle wrote: "a good metaphor implies an intuitive perception of the similarity in the dissimilar" (Nishioka, 126) but he did not provide a distinction between metaphor and simile. Empiricism or rationalism caused prolonged negligence of the importance of metaphor and prepositional statements were therefore thought to be the only appropriate way of coping with objective reality. Johnson wrote that substitution and comparison theory treats metaphor in a reductionist manner. (Nishioka, 127) Richards' study

has brought about a paradigm shift in the study of metaphor (Nishioka, 128) He proposed a “dynamic perspective for understanding metaphor as a means of constructing knowledge.” Metaphor is characterized, he wrote by the interaction between the ‘underlying idea or principal subject which the vehicle or figure means” (Nishioka, 128).

According to Wheelwright, a metaphor “is an active thought process, not just a simile between two entities, nor a grammatical rule, but rather it is ‘the quality of semantic transformation that is brought about’ or ‘semantic motion”” (Nishioka, 128).

For Sapir, metaphor is a mode of linkage, for Turner, root metaphor is a function by means of which new knowledge is constructed. Turner’s process oriented view on metaphor is significant for exploring how people construct cultural knowledge. (Nishioka, 186).

According to the cognitive theory of metaphor, comprehension of new ideas is attained through the mapping process of certain old knowledge (source domain) onto the new idea (target domain.) The construction of new reality is grounded on a receptor’s ability to evoke certain related knowledge (secondary source) out of mutually manifested stimuli (primary source) and to discover a certain correspondence between correspondence source domain (primary and secondary and target domain. All these processes are crucial for both communicator and receptor (Nishioka, 214).

Beardsley in 1981 introduced a theory underlining the moment at which one identifies a metaphor. The step is needed in the exploration of the marginal meaning – that is, meanings which are implied or associated with a certain word in various contexts. This involves a shift from the central meaning to the marginal meaning which is triggered by tension between subject and modifier. “To understand metaphor is to explore these marginal meanings for discovering meaningful connections” (Nishioka, 131).

Metaphorical process is selective. If one uses “body” as root metaphor for conceptualising the reality of a local church, specific aspects of social and relational reality are emphasized, such as: internal unity, harmony in diversity, authority of head. When this metaphorical process is

repeated and shared by a majority of members, the root metaphor becomes symbol for the group. (Nishioka, 190)

In trope theory, metaphor is treated as one mode of linkage in a meaning system. The focus is, as Sapir suggested,

directed toward *patterns* of linkage in culturally constructed meaning systems. (*product*) Metaphor is viewed as *cross-domain linkage* between signifier and signified by means of which symbols are constructed. At the same time, as Turner (1974) maintained, metaphor is viewed in terms of the process of constructing knowledge or meaning” (Nishioka, 191).

The root metaphor is used for understanding something new. In this case, the *hibachi* metaphor is used to link the idea of communal warmth to a generally taboo, cold subject, to enable discussion, sharing and learning. If one object, such as a *hibachi*, which “is recurrently and tacitly used in a society, it is most likely a key symbol (Ortner 1973:134)” (Nishioka 193). The *hibachi* is no longer used but will be a symbol for a long time.

Recurrent bodily domestic experiences often become symbols having (in familial or communal setting) religious dimensions. The conventionalised metaphor or simple metaphor can be used as a source for new metaphor. Knowledge which is commonly shared and deeply internalized is most likely to be used as the source of metaphor. The Japanese mind will move from ‘the warmth and comfort of the *hibachi* idea’ to the possibility of discussing a taboo subject, because of the warmth metaphorized in the *hibachi*. According to Sperber, knowledge about life after death, which is not really empirical, and only half-understood, is highly susceptible to the cultural interpretation’s influence. The level of susceptibility to influence varies according to the validity of the person who has taught the knowledge. Therefore although, the average Japanese do not like the Buddhist priest (because they see him as being money-grabbing and representing death) one would hope that the attitude to the minister, missionary or church leader would be different.

Following these insights, we can see how the *hibachi*, which signifies warmth and a pleasant feeling to a Japanese, is a powerful metaphor that can lead us in constructing a teaching tool about life after death. A common human experience is used. The *hibachi* group is a means of

constructing knowledge, a mode of linkage, linking warm feelings to a usually cold, fearful subject. Old knowledge is connected to new knowledge – the 3-layered worldview of life after death is connected to the transformed Christian ritual and belief by strong, positive feelings. An old symbol is used as a root metaphor, bringing it to a new target domain, so that the old symbolic system is transformed. Japanese are able, in a Zen-like way, to suddenly see the link in thought, the poetic feeling invoked by the metaphor. It is a culturally practised way of understanding. The hibachi group metaphor can become a symbol for the church community meeting and sharing in discussion. This object is one recurrently used, a physical object that is often used in a family space – a very good metaphor to introduce into the new life after death schema.

We are not advocating a teaching tool in the western sense, and also not a teaching tool as such, but a *manner* of sharing ideas, sharing experience in a warm environment.

The household is the most important space in Japanese history. Japanese society is in crisis. In such a period of social change, various metaphors are needed and will play an important role because the available symbolic systems do not provide appropriate meaning structures,

We are not advising ‘teaching’, but there must be a certain root metaphor in the process of constructing the reality of “institutionalised practice.” For example, a large part of Protestant local church ministry is constructed through a schematic knowledge of “school”. The existence of the pulpit, ways of organizing pews, lecture-style preaching, and the content of preaching are closely related to school, rather than to family or household. Ministry constructed through the model of school also is associated with certain value systems and language. It also affects time orientation, space orientations, and relational orientations in various church practices. (Nishioka, 367) Usage of the school model itself is not problematic, but an uncritical adoption of one model over the other while neglecting its limitations, is a problem. Thus for Japanese church ministry we need to critically assess what is a root metaphor for social and

religious realities in both contemporary Japanese society and Japanese local churches. (Nishioka, 367-368)

We have made it clear that the teaching domain is not the one to use, but it has become clear from the surveys done that both churches, mission groups and young pioneer churches are on the whole observing necessary ritual, but that actual discussion and information that people are curious about and need to know to provide a theological background to their transformed actions, are lacking. So we will explore the concept of the *hibachi*, and then go on to the contextualisation.

5.5.1 The Japanese Hibachi

Although the *hibachi* 火鉢 is not in common use anymore, all Japanese are familiar with this household article of yesteryear. *Hibachis* were used from the Heian period, first by the nobility. Then during the Edo period, commoners started to use them. *Hibachis* were used for heating, made in circular and rectangular shapes, from ceramic, metal or wood.. Another usage was heating water for green tea, heating *sake* or selected cooking, (*omochi*, rice-cakes or grilling fish.) Food cooked on the hibachi charcoal has a special nostalgic taste. (Metal hibachis are still used for the tea ceremony.)

Rectangular wooden ones were considered very chic *iki*. 粋 The owner of the house monopolised it when he was thinking. The wood was lined with copper. Wooden containers were sometimes elaborately carved and used for entertaining guests. Broken hibachis were repaired by itinerant craftsmen who used a bronze or copper clip to repair cracks. Glue was also used.

Charcoal was placed inside the hibachi after it had been allowed to burn till there was no more poisonous blue flame. The family maid or one of the young children would see to the charcoal each morning, or put out the coals at night. She would polish the *nagahibachi's* copper lining with powder till clean and shining. The rules regarding fire were very strict around the wooden houses. At night the maid would use *hihashi*, fire-chopsticks, to pick up the coals, put them in a clay pot and close the lid.

Used charcoal from the night before were used again the next morning and only lazy people left the coals burning all night. Gas was used to start the fire in the morning and the technique was to keep the fire burning slowly by covering the charcoal with ash. Wasteful housewives kept the kettle aboil, not simmering. The *hibachi* needed careful attention and visitors who used the *hihashi* to change the heat or move charcoal to another side, were not appreciated. The *hibachi served* as the family's central meeting place where people would gather and sit, enjoying the warmth, making conversation; where harmony prevailed and people usually did not argue. It was the central point of the home for conversation and eating. Here the elders would tell the younger family members traditional stories and sometimes a local ghost story. Occasionally a naughty child would be banned from the warmth of the *hibachi* circle and be sent outside to stand in the cold.

When small rooms were built onto the house for separate bedrooms and people moved a small *hibachi* into their private rooms, perhaps one can see the beginning of family breakdown. The *hibachi* kept the family together. The immediate area around the *hibachi* was warm, but elsewhere cold.

The following might be suggested content for discussion around the *hibachi*.

5.5.2 Hibachi Theology – The “Teaching Tool”

We are not advocating a teaching tool in the western sense, and also not a teaching tool as such, but a *manner* of sharing ideas, sharing experience in a warm environment which is Japanese to the core.

Domestic experience is filled with such repetitious, bodily and imagery qualities. The household is the most important space in Japanese history. Japanese society is in crisis. In such a period of social change various metaphors are needed; play an important role because the available

symbolic systems do not provide appropriate meaning structures, especially in a chaotic stage of liminality and anomie.

Eating around a *hibachi* is important. In some Japanese local churches the value of actual eating practices in the religious community has been overlooked. How can the *hibachi* be used to construct knowledge and order experience of other domains? “This cross-domain activity is possible when a certain schema functions as a symbol, because a symbol is metaphorically projected to other domains of experience” (Nishioka, 182).

The *hibachi* is the quintessential metaphor to the Japanese, denoting warmth. When they are outside in the cold, they long for that warm, comforting space. Outside the Japanese suffer from the cold and dream of the mild, tender feeling that awaits them around the *hibachi*. Others in the church are suffering the same coldness, so there is empathy, sympathy and friendliness around the *hibachi*. Japanese will react strongly if someone takes the *hibachi* away. The *hibachi* has been the communal space of warmth for the Japanese family for thousands of years.

- (1) *Hibachis* were first used by the nobility – the church member is a priest in the priesthood of believers. Special people, specially loved by God.
- (2) Wooden *hibachis* that are carved could be spoken about, linking it to the schema of the Cross, where His body was carved so that it would be given meaning, eternal significance and beauty.
- (3) *Hibachis* are made of malleable clay and then fired to produce a durable, beautiful ceramic. The Christian and the church are fired by trial and become beautiful and persevering.
- (1) Sitting around one *hibachi* gives meaning to the idea of one body, with diverse parts, where each one has a place and is welcomed.
- (2) Rice wine is warmed, and rice cakes are grilled over the *hibachi* – the Lord’s Supper could be given meaning.
- (3) *Hibachis* can be fixed, are not thrown away. The Christian is safe with God, not thrown away and rejected when one makes mistakes.

- (4) The *hibachi* lining is polished – God polishes the Christian so that the face of Jesus can be seen in the Christian.
- (5) One needs to be careful with the use of the charcoal – so we need to be careful in our relationship with the Holy Spirit. Also we need to appreciate the church, “discern the body”, not stir up trouble, as when we stir up the charcoal.
- (6) Conversation around the *hibachi* could be seen as *nemawashi* 根回し (preparatory discussion), before going to speak to the family about death-related matters. The senior of the group would gently interject subjects for conversation or necessary information and then the normal dynamics of Japanese group discussion would take over. This gives decision-making and learning in a culturally non-threatening way.
- (7) *Hibachis* had various uses – the *hibachi* group can be used to discuss and bring the church together
- (8) A *hibachi* would be displayed as an artefact of beauty instead of a flower arrangement.
- (9) A small *hibachi* would be used as an offering plate, again conjuring up the feeling of warmth, beauty and togetherness.
- (10) A *hibachi* could be used as a baptismal font.
- (11) Teaching could be given on the necessity for regular church attendance, using the metaphor of the *hibachi*: if you move away from the *hibachi* and stay away, you become spiritually cold.
- (12) The *hibachi* represents the warm Body of Christ, where the family are welcomed; where there is empathy and a warm feeling towards each other. There is a feeling of safety – safety, which the top emotional need in the hierarchy of needs in Japan. Death can safely be discussed and thought about. Hard truths can be reflected on, existential matters can be faced in the company of others. These matters should not be faced alone, or in the company of an unsympathetic, un-believing family.
- (13) Here the family of God can help each other by speaking, sharing, listening, lapsing into intimate silence together, practising *haragei* 腹芸

intuitive communication, and knowing that others understand and accept their fears and complex difficulties concerning their family situation – family funerals, *hooji*, grave visits and matters of personal fears and stumbling blocks.

5.5.3 Discussion Material

Content for discussion around the hibachi is written in Frequently asked Questions style. The basic emotions are treated first, the Japanese order of interest and importance is given. Someone not knowing their worldview or their basic culture background about life after death would perhaps start with: “Here’s how to get to heaven”, when issues of the *ie* and family should come first; issues of ancestor “blessings” that are the Creator God’s blessings. A whole new dimension will be opened here to the Japanese believer, coming from his 3-layered worldview, acceptable to what is in his mind (not the missionary’s mind) because we start at the right place.

Q. Do I need to fear death?

A. “Oh death, where is your sting, Oh grave where is your victory?” The horror of death, the deep unease is taken away by Jesus.

Q. Who brings the rains and gives the harvests?

A. The Lord God, the Creator of the heavens and earth.

Q. Who gives the blessings of health, the ability to work and protection for the family?

A. The Lord, our Creator and Protector.

Q. What about the future of my ‘ie’?

A. In His covenant God promises blessings to the descendants of believers. So we put effort into praying for them and sharing Jesus.

Q. What is my relationship to the ‘ie’?

A It is unbroken. Sincere thanksgiving and respect is appropriate.

Q. Does my church relationship replace this?

A It enriches it and enables me to be a better relative.

Q. What is the function of the eldest son?

A. He has a special place in the family. Our priest and mediator is Jesus.

Q. Are genealogies important to God?

A. Yes, there are many genealogies in the Bible, especially that of Jesus, and people's ancestors are often mentioned.

Q. What is my role in the family?

A I imitate Jesus in sacrificial service and love, forgiveness, in deep respect of my parents in patient training of my children, of mutual partnership with my spouse.

Q. When will I remember my ancestors?

A. Every day I will thank God for their *on* (favours) and for their lives in my prayers. I will thank God for them at visits to the graveyard as appropriate, (on the day of their death, their birthday, at Higan, Easter and Christmas).

Q How do I show honour to my parents?

A. By strong, creative efforts while they are alive.

Q. Who is my original ancestor?

A. Adam and Eve

Q. Will I be forgotten?

A. No. There will be annual church memorials, graveyard visits, (Christmas, Easter, New Year, death days, All Saints Day, *higan*) family memorials, and regular remembrance and thanks at communion.

Q. What is appropriate to my memory?

A. Thanks, respect, gratitude for my contribution to the family and society.
Worship to God for my salvation and life

Q. Where will the church keep my ashes?

A. In the church graveyard or ossuary

Q. Why do I receive an inheritance? What will I do with my inheritance?

A. I will use it wisely to provide for my family, especially those, who through no fault of their own are suffering financial stringency. I will provide for our old age and I will tithe it in thankfulness to God my heavenly Father. I will use it for the spread of Christ's kingdom I will use it for the upkeep of the family grave.

Q. What will I do to repay my parents for my inheritance?

A. I will honour their memories in thanks and respect. I will make extra efforts to show love and honor while they are alive. I will regularly visit their graves.

Q. Do my descendants ever need to fear me?

A. No, I am in bliss with Jesus in heaven. I cannot return.

Q. Can I bring misfortune to my family?

A. Viruses, bacteria and accidents, bring bodily harm. Sinful relationships and events of history, e.g. bankruptcy, brings harm to people.

Q. Can I come back and bring misfortune to my family?

A. No. Jesus said a great gulf exists between those in the after life and those on earth – there is no return or possibility of contact.

Q. How will I handle difficult family relationship?

A. I will value forgiveness and practise it, leaving no place for revenge.

Q. Who protects me from 'tatari'?

A. In His death, Jesus broke all power of evil against me.

Q. What about the unseen powers that cannot be seen?

A. Jesus disarmed these powers and authorities, triumphing over them by the cross.

Q. Do I need *tsuizen kuyoo*?

A. No. My salvation is fixed when I call on the Name of Jesus, repent and confess my sin. On the cross Jesus declared that salvation is accomplished.

Q. Do I become 'kami' after death?

A. No, only Jesus is God.

Q. Do I stay connected to my husband's family in heaven?

A. We become the Bride of Jesus.

Q. What assurance do I have of heaven?

A. God gives me His Holy Spirit, His 'down-payment', Christ in me, the hope of glory.

Q. Will I be lonely?

A. In heaven we join with billions of believers who worship Jesus.

Q. What is my function in heaven?

A. It is part mystery, what is clear, we will be worshipping Jesus

Q. Do I hunger or thirst in heaven?

A. There will be no hunger or thirst in heaven.

Q. Are the believing people dead or alive?

A. God is the God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob, so the dead are alive.

Q. Why is your spirit important?

A. I am made in God's image, my spirit stays personal after death.

Q. Is there any purgatory '*chuuin*'?

A. Jesus told the thief that he would be with Him in heaven that same day.

Q. Is the *danka* system still law?

A. It was revoked.

Q. Is the *butsudan* inheritance still law?

A. Yes, I will sensitively discuss with my family the issue of *butsudan* inheritance.

Q. My parents never heard the gospel, what is my attitude to God about this?

A. "Righteous art Thou, O God." God is just when He judges and full of mercy. He will judge them according to their thoughts and actions regarding His law in their consciences. This is also a mystery, but we can trust Him.

Q. The gospel reached Japan for the first time (so far as we definitely know) in the 15th century. What is my attitude?

A. Righteous art Thou, O Lord." God will judge them according to their secret thoughts, their consciences, actions and according to His great mercy.

Q. What about Christians who commit suicide?

A. God knows their hearts, their sufferings and loves them. They are not a danger to their families. They are accepted in mercy and are in heaven.

Q. What about the unsaved who commit suicide?

A. They were a danger to themselves, but cannot be a danger to us, protected by the blood of Jesus.

Q. What about the future of aborted babies?

A. God is a God of mercy and love. The church accepts that babies who have died are in God's loving care. There is no need to think that they are suffering or will be a danger to their families.

These FAQ should cover most of the questions that a Japanese Christian thinks about, but will probably not readily ask.

What about *hibachi* discussing how one can give honour to the elders before they die and so be a witness for Christ?

McGavran, (*Christian alternatives to Ancestor Practices*), admitting he doesn't know the Japanese situation intimately suggests the following: a daily Christian ritual to remember and honour the ancestors; a book telling of the good, great deeds of ancestors, reaching back in the genealogy; a large board, with names recorded, hung in a prominent place in the doorway; a daily reading of a section of the family history, together with family prayers be read with thanks for the whole family, and prayers for God's guidance for the family in the future. A memorial service on the anniversary of their death: a photo with Bible verses displayed near it.

Respect to the living family could be shown by those over 70: having comfortable chairs at the front of the church, by ceremonies on Mother's and Father's Day being more personal: the children go forward and give presents to their own parents; special efforts taught and made to honour and show love: birthday cards, gifts, special favourite tid-bits taken to grandmother, going to read to those who now struggle to read, parties on their birthdays, frequent visits, systematic church visiting of the elderly, marriage enrichment seminars, family-building retreats, home dedication ceremonies,

In using *hibachi* metaphor as the place and manner for discussing and ultimately teaching about life after death we have attempted to reach a contextualisation suitable to the Japanese religious and social problem of life after death – not using western methods of teaching doctrine, using the advice of experienced Japanese missiologists and taking seriously Japanese culture and concerns.

5.6 Conclusion

Japanese ideas about the afterlife and Japanese funeral rites are in a state of change, together with many other commonly held attitudes in the society. The church needs to take heed of the popular desire for positive remembrance of the dead, the lesser fear of death pollution, the ties that are further forged with companies by company funerals, the individuation trend that is happening in commercial funerals. People have found value and meaning in the commercial funeral.

Can the Church do the same, can they do better? Should the Church start a drive for popularising funerals, as they did weddings, not shrinking at the extra effort and thought that will be needed to take a funeral for traditional Japanese, not Christians? (In fact a group of Kinki ministers have decided to perform Church funerals for all. In doing this would we run the risk of being seen as funeral Christianity, or is this the next step in spreading Christianity among the masses - something which is not happening now. Buddhism filled the vacuum that Shintoo had concerning death rituals. Has Buddhism backed itself into a vacuum that Christianity can fill? Should fill? Is this the *kairos* moment for a new method of evangelism? It should be perfectly clear that churches and missionaries would not charge anything at all for their church funeral services. Making it clear that we separate ourselves from any moneymaking intentions. Few are stepping into a wide-open opportunity where society is ready for a new way of doing funerals: emphasizing family and the individual, who is respected, remembered and honoured in a peaceful, meaningful way. This is perhaps the clearest insight we have had in doing this study. Church funerals for all Japanese, Christian or non-Christian.

Evangelicals would benefit from a handbook of liturgy and practices, discussed and agreed by the Japanese church and mission and skilfully written.

Is the Church giving a solid base to its members concerning their existential problem of life after death? This study has shown that more is needed, both in seminaries, missionary preparation and in churches.

The hypotheses that the teaching tool could be constructed from the data studied was borne out, as well as the notion that the teaching tool would be less systematic than western doctrinal statements, dealing more with ritual, group action, than with beliefs.

Assumptions were Held concerning speaking to spirits and necromancy, that incense burning involves worship and that deep bowing before the *ihai* looks like idol worship were....

5.6.1 Further Research

Further questions for research flowing from this study could be the theology of those who have never heard the gospel in Japan, a theology of funerals, of the communion of the saints, of death, the intermediate state, worship, nature, history, *karma*, rites of passage, issues of Japanese identity and the church. Also a terminological study around the use of '*rei*' and '*tamashii*', (the words currently used for 'spirit') a study of universalism, as related to Japanese attitudes. A theology of the Gospel of John 1 – the *Logos*, needs contextualisation and should be valuable. A study on covenant theology and the Japanese family would seem to be useful. More will appear.

But it is clear that we need to take universally common human phenomena seriously, such as human life (birth-growth-marriage-death), family relationships (household), pain/suffering, food/eating, light/darkness, pilgrimage, basic natural entities (water, air, storm, mountain, river) and so on. Nishioka says the problem lies in the Japanese church, whose members are often obedient to the church as if to God. The problem is not in the society, but in the church.

We examined traditional Japanese religion and rites, and were able to produce the criteria necessary for the desired 'teaching tool'. Although

criteria were produced, our hypothesis of producing a teaching tool was not confirmed, as this did not prove to be culturally acceptable.

The beliefs and activities of the Church in Japan were examined and we came to the conclusion that 'family' is the central ideational notion. Moving from there to the family of God, a metaphor was found in the *hibachi*, mapping an idea of family warmth and using this in a manner in which the Church can, in a suitable Japanese cultural manner, include the members in a family discussion of a serious family issue – life after death. This is not a personal matter, but a family matter and within the family of God, the household of God, it is a matter, shared by all, from the minister leading the rites, to the funeral committee, organizing the practical aspects of church participation, to the women who will cook and serve the teas and meals. Everyone is involved, because when one mourns, we all mourn. We prepare for this around the warm *hibachi*.