Toyohiko Kagawa speaks

Probably the world's greatest living Christian is Toyohiko Kagawa, a short, disease-ridden Japanese whose life has been a continuous crusade to eradicate the slums, to organize the farmers and laborers, and to Christianize the people of his native land.

He was born out of wedlock, with a prominent politician for a father and a geisha girl for a mother. Both of his parents died when he was very young, and he was reared by his father's legal wife and his grandmother, in whose home he passed an unhappy existence.

His first contact with Christianity came in the home of American missionaries while he was attending boarding school in Tokushima. Eventually he flouted his family's advice and became a Christian, and was disowned and disinherited for his disobedience.

At the age of 21 he voluntarily moved into a narrow room in the slums of Kobe. In that "laboratory of life" he lived and worked for nearly fifteen years. There he became convinced that "one individual working for individuals cannot change society." It must be done by group action, he felt, by movements. After a period of study in the United States, he returned to Japan, determined to help remove society's basic evil, poverty, by raising the standard of living for the farmer and laborer, largely through cooperatives. Into this work he brought a passionate belief in the practicability and necessity of Christian ideals.

Through the following excerpts from his voluminous writings he speaks to us today:

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Leonard S. Kenworthy
ON RELIGION . . .

"Religion is like one of the senses. It is the power of the perfect human being to perceive the ultimate values. It is a special sense, like the senses of pain and of emotion, which only higher animals possess."

"The religion of imposing edifices is a heart-breaking affair. A religion which builds men rather than temples is much to be preferred. For this reason I reject everything connected with the religion of imposing architecture. . . . Well would it be if the world's churches and temples were razed to the ground. Then possibly we would understand genuine religion. True religion must invade the bedroom, the study, the street, the factory, invention, our outings, our toil, our recreation, our meals, yes, even our sleep."

ON GOD . . .

"God dwells among the lowliest of men. He sits on the dust-heap among the prison convicts. With the juvenile delinquents He stands at the door, begging bread. He throngs with the beggars at the place of alms. He is among the sick. He stands in line with the unemployed in front of the free employment bureaus. * * Therefore, let him who would meet God visit the prison cell before going to the temple. Before he goes to church let him visit the hospital. Before he reads his Bible let him help the beggar standing at his door. * * If he visits the prison after going to the temple, does he not by so much delay his meeting with God? If he goes first to the church and then to the hospital, does he not by so much postpone beholding God? If he fails to help the beggar at his door, and indulges himself in Bible-reading, there is danger lest God, who lives among the men, will go elsewhere. In truth, he who forgets the unemployed, forgets God."

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ON JESUS...

(Quotations from BEHOLD THE MAN: A Life of Christ in the Form of a Novel, by Toyohiko Kagawa, Harpers, 1941.)

"There I stood apart from the crowd, some distance from the speaker, possessed by the curious feeling that if I could walk a full furlong away, I would still be approaching and not departing from him."

"But this man! He had no one outstanding quality, either of mortality or spirituality. He was smiling, young, and extraordinarily good looking. Tall, lean and muscular. He appeared to be in a vastly cheerful frame of mind and occasionally would laugh. John the Baptist, seldom, if ever, laughed. Jesus, freely and easily. It was not unpleasant to hear, such laughter, but Akkub could not understand how any man, knowing all the weight of sin upon the world, could have the heart to laugh."

"Nor, to Koanna's surprise, did he always speak of the things of religion and God. Often his stories were merry little anecdotes, suited to the understanding and appreciation of his hearers. When others laughed, he joined wholeheartedly. Only when the conversation took an unpleasant or pessimistic turn, did he, gently but insistently, steer it into more wholesome channels."

"Baasha said of John the Baptist, 'He sees right into your mind.' To which Akkub replied, 'But Jesus sees into your heart.'"

"'Now,' shrugged Simon the Zealot, 'he is in the garden. He is always that way—as hard to hold as a sunbeam.'"

"On the other hand, it was said of Jesus that he spoke little of sin. He did not look for it. Instead he looked for love and seemed to find it everywhere, even in sinners."
ON PRAYER . . .

"When our heart has reached the boiling point, everything is turned into prayer."

"Prayer, at the very least, uplifts the heart of the one who prays, and develops high ideals in his mind. Jesus prayed with his hands and feet. He prayed on the cross. His daily life was worship. In Him, labour was completely prayer. It should be with us, too. We must take our gladness and sorrow and all of everything to God, and look into the world where God and man melt together."

(Referring to the Lord's Prayer) "Our prayer must not be more than this. It is selfish to pray beyond the limits of this prayer."

ON SIMPLICITY . . .

"I enjoy poverty. Many possessions are to be deplored. If one has nothing, one's troubles are few. By this I do not mean that I want to lack the bare necessities of life. If in some way I can manage to live, a grand house is no attraction. Rather give me a hut among the trees. While the snail, the killifish, and the lotus leaf are my friends, I have no desire to be rich."

ON CHRISTIANITY AND COMMUNISM . . .

"If we do not discount the Gospel, but take it seriously and live it adventurously, we will be able to do far more than Russian communism ever dreams of doing in building a better world."

ON PACIFISM . . .

Asked what he considered his greatest contribution to Japan, Kagawa replied: "Well, without question, it is a simplification of the teachings of Christ which include pacifism and making war upon war."
ON TEMPTATIONS . . .

"Man's greatest temptation in youth is sex, in middle age money, and in old age power."

ON SICKNESS . . .

"I feel that it is half mental and half physical. If you believe, come what may, you can overcome it and recover. This is religion. I have peace because my heart is easy. I have crossed the deadline, so nothing matters. Since I have as good as died once, the rest is all gain. What is living to me is merely the spirit."

ON CONTACT WITH NATURE . . .

"This civilization of steel and concrete separates mankind from the soil. The soil is God's footstool. The scent of the soil heals me. I have no desire to become a civilized man. I want to live close to the soil."

ON THE IMPORTANCE OF EVERY INDIVIDUAL . . .

"In the heart of the God of the universe, each child of His is as necessary to Him as the fingers are to the hand."

"I am fond of men. The worst, most fear-inspiring, demonized murderer somewhere in his makeup has that which is irresistible."

"The nearer to God we come, the more conscious we grow of our responsibility towards those worthless folk who are regarded as the very dirt under one's finger-nail."

"Those who have no love of humanity have no way of knowing the love of God."

"We must show ourselves Christians in the details of daily life, even in the way we light the kitchen fire."
ON FORGIVENESS BY THE CHINESE . . .

(From a letter addressed to the Chinese people in 1931, after the invasion by Japan.)

"Dear Brothers and Sisters,

"I ask your pardon for my nation. . . We Christians were bitterly opposed to it. Therefore pardon us, pardon me especially, because our Christian forces were not strong enough to get the victory over the militarists. But the day will come when we shall be strong enough to do so, and when both nations will be harmonious and peaceful in the name of Christ. . .

. . . "Therefore, we who know the facts love China.

“But unless we, in both Japan and China, become more Christian, we shall never have permanent peace. . . Sometimes we are very selfish and even some Christians do not see the need of praying. . . When you are contented, and have no holy ambition to build up the nation, you may have no desire to pray. . . Oppressed by wars, oppressed by capitalism, oppressed by the injustice of the present economic-social system, can we ignore the needs of men? If we are contented with the sort of world we have at present, there is no use of praying to God. But if we want real peace, and real humanity, real Godliness, there are many problems for the solution of which we must pray. We must pray for each of the nations. . . We must pray for world peace, for the uplifting of the poor, for the desert to be green, for the New Age, for the New Society. We must pray for science to be controlled by conscience. . .

“Unless Christ is glorified in the Orient, the fate of our continent will be very dismal. Unless we believe in Christ, and deepen our spiritual life with Christian idealism, peace will never come. . . May the Prince of Peace come thus in the Orient, and bless China on the one hand and Japan on the other!

TOYOHIKO KAGAWA."
ON THE SLUMS . . .

"The slums are a laboratory of life and human society. From one point of view, I am doing research work with the slums as my laboratory and man as my major. Some people think of me as administering palliative remedies, but I am an industrious scientist. I am researching life at one of its outbreakings in the social order."

ON COOPERATIVES . . .

"How can we stop war? The way to stop war is by cooperative movements, by cooperative international trade, cooperative marketing. Between Denmark and England they have a wonderful scheme of cooperative international trade. If we can have that kind of cooperative scheme, probably the next war will be postponed eternally."

"So with the same courageous spirit that drove millions of men to dedicate their lives to the Crusades and the reclamation of the Holy Land, let us without delay endeavor to cooperatize the economic system of the world."

ON LABOR . . .

"Laborers are personalities. They are not commodities to be bought and sold according to a scale of wages based on the market price. Furthermore, they must be given the right to organize."

"There is but one course open for the laborers. That is production motivated by love. The blind aping of imported ideas regarding labor unions, owners' unions, and the diversification of labor will never save the day. . . Unions are necessary, but labor problems can only be solved by the inner awakening of the laborer."
ON A "DISCOVERY" . . .

"I cannot invent
New things,
Like the airships
Which sail
On silver wings;
But today
A wonderful thought
In the dawn was given,
And the stripes of my robe,
Shining from wear,
Were suddenly fair,
Bright with a light
Falling from Heaven—
Gold and silver, and bronze
Lights from the windows of Heaven.

And the thought
Was this:
That a secret plan
Is hid in my hand;
That my hand is big,
Big,
Because of this plan.

That God,
Who dwells in my hand,
Knows this secret plan
Of the things He will do for the world
Using my hand!"

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