

CHARACTERISTICS OF LEADERSHIP IN THE JAPANESE UNITED CHURCH IN CANADA

— Case Study of Yoshimitsu Akagawa and Kosaburo Shimizu —

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PREFACE

In the evolving of any religious organization, leadership plays the determining role. The leaders' characteristics affect the features of the organization. Religious organizations are also concerned with the balanced development of the organization from within and without.

This paper examines the characteristics of two of the leading pastors of the Japanese United Church in Canada as they influenced the development of this church.

Many would agree that if Rev. Goro Kaburagi is the founding father of the Japanese Canadian Methodist Church, two pastors, Yoshimitsu Akagawa (1880-1956) and Kosaburo Shimizu (1893-1962) are the distinguished middle-period leaders who made vital contributions to the development of the Japanese Canadian Methodist Church, now a part of the United Church of Canada.

Several materials already deal with the biographies of the two pastors. On Akagawa, aside from T. Mayeda's major work,¹⁾ we have a brief biographical sketch by his nephew Gordon G. Nakayama.²⁾ About Shimizu,³⁾ there are two references, one is the collection of recollections

written by those who interacted with Rev. Shimizu, and the other is a popular sketch of his work by Isobel McFadden.⁴⁾ Furthermore, we find some historical analysis of the contributions of Akagawa and Shimizu in Tadashi Mitsui's paper.⁵⁾ We also have a description of the churches in which the two pastors worked, in *Kanada Nikkeijin Godo Kyokai-shi* [A History of Japanese Congregations of the United Church of Canada, 1982-1959.⁶⁾]

RESOURCES AND INTERVIEW

In the course of our research trip in the summer of 1990, we located several original documents related to the life and work of Akagawa and Shimizu, such as the Yamaga Yasutaro Documents, An Inventory in the Yohimitsu Akagawa Collection, and Rev. Kosaburo Shimizu's papers in the U.B.C. Special Collections. Some of these we arranged to have on microfilm. When they become available for our use, they will provide the primary grass roots material for our study. We also located Rev. Shimizu's diary which is at present in the possession of Mrs. Hide Shimizu in Toronto.

During the trip, I also conducted interviews with people who knew Rev. Akagawa and Rev. Shimizu in order to gain personal impressions and first hand experiences. These include extensive interviews with Mrs. Hide Shimizu, the wife of Rev. Shimizu in Toronto, Ms. Grace Tagako Namba, who knew Rev. Akagawa when she was a young girl in Haney in Fraser Valley, and Rev. Yoshimichi Masaki, pastor of Manitoba Japanese United Church of Canada who was inspired by Akagawa's in Manitoba with the ministry which Akagawa began.

COMMON CHARACTERISTICS

Both ministers worked with dedication to advance the growth of the Japanese United Church in Canada. They emphasized visitation with members of the church as the highest expression of pastoral ministry. It is very impressive how Akagawa and Shimizu displayed their selfless devotion to their pastoral calling, particularly during the crisis of the evacuation from British Columbia to Manitoba (in the case of Rev. Akagawa) and to Ontario (in the case of Rev. Shimizu). Both increasingly exhibited the spirit of pastoral care and service by their presence. They extended visitations, regardless of whether one belonged to their church or not. They determined that their small Japanese Christian church should not be isolated from that of the Japanese community (in the case of Akagawa) and from the rest of Canadian society (in the case of Shimizu). Another similarity of the two is the fact that both influenced and trained future leaders of the church. Akagawa produced leaders like Canon Goichi Nakayama, Rev. Kosaburo Shimizu, Rev. Kyuichi Nomoto, Ms Grace Namba, and Captain Masanori Yamada of the Salvation Army. Among Shimizu's legacy, we can count men like Rev. Kyuichi Nomoto, Rev. Yoshio Ono, Rev. Takashi Komiyama, and Rev. Kenneth Matsugu.

Both Akagawa and Shimizu had experience the scene of the tragedy of death, through which each made the decision to dedicate his life to the church. It can be critical for religious leaders to have such a meaningful experience from which one emerges and to which one returns continuously. For Akagawa it was his participation in the Russo-Japanese War (1904-1905) in which he witnessed the horror of war and death. He had repeatedly referred to this basic experience in his ministry.⁷⁾ For Shimizu, the decisive moment was getting up from the death bed of

Spanish flu in 1918. In fact, he lay ill, side by side with his friend Katakata Hikita who died in the course of helping patients at the clinic which was organized under the leadership of Rev. Akagawa.⁸⁾ Both Akagawa and Shimizu could never forget these irreducible encounters with the dimensions of life and death which impelled them to dedicate their lives in service to the ministry of the church.

Incidentally, the two men shared a further common destiny at the end of their earthly journey, namely, both died in the city of Winnipeg, Manitoba. Akagawa died in 1956 after his retirement from his ministry in Manitoba, leaving the words, "My life is my message". These are the same words used by Jerome D. Davis (1838-1910), one of the early missionaries of the American Board of Commissioners For Foreign Missions to Japan, when he died in Oberlin in 1910.⁹⁾

Shimizu died suddenly and unexpectedly at the Conference of the Japanese United Church in Canada in June of 1962, shortly after he had chaired the meeting and celebrated holy communion on the first day of the Conference. He was 69.

UNIQUENESS

While they shared certain similarities, the two pastors bore entirely contrasting personal characteristics and styles of work. In his personal character, Akagawa was a compassionate man, and on occasion, full of zeal and passion. He was an idealist and a passionate poet, and sometimes a man of tears. Shimizu had a calm character. He analyzed matters carefully and arranged his affairs meticulously. His desk and study were always neat.¹⁰⁾ He was a realist and a consummate organizer.

Akagawa was a prophetic pastor who assailed the conservative and nationalistic segment of the Japanese community. His idealism prompted

him to build a commune called *Beulah Home*, meaning the house of covenant and marriage with God (Isaiah 62:4).¹¹⁾ While Akagawa preferred to work in the countryside in the midst of nature, as he did on three separate occasions in New Westminster, Shimizu was more fitted to work in big cities like Vancouver, Toronto, and Montreal. Where Akagawa emphasized the contribution of Issei Christians in the upliftment of the Japanese community in Canada, Shimizu was more apt to stress the strategic significance of working with Nisei Christians, strengthening their commitment to Canadian society.

With Biblical allusiveness, Akagawa often referred to prophetic messages of exile, as the case of Beulah House, which was a metaphor for God's togetherness with his people in exile. Shimizu liked to point to the story of Joseph's adventure in Egypt, according to one of his biographers:

Dr. Shimizu stressed two things about Joseph. First, with God's help, Joseph turned misfortune into opportunity. I had to agree that Joseph had a lot of misfortune and like me, he was separated from his father. Secondly, he told us kids, Joseph was enabled to forgive his brothers who had wronged him, both points stuck with me.¹²⁾

POST SCRIPT

We have briefly sketched the characteristics of two distinguished leaders of the Japanese United Church in Canada, pointing out the similarities and uniquenesses of each in their contribution to Japanese and Canadian communities. We need to conduct further investigation into their backgrounds in Japan and the concrete processes of their struggling ministries by utilizing the raw data which will become available in

due time.

NOTES

- 1) Harold T. Mayeda ed., *Akagawa Yoshimitsu* [Yoshimitsu Akagawa] (1972, 350pp., in Japanese).
- 2) Gordon G. Nakayama, Yoshimitsu Akagawa, *Missionary and Pastor in Issei, Stories of Japanese Canadian Pioneers* (NC Press Limited, 1984, pp. 113-121).
- 3) *Ko Shimizu Kosaburo Bokushi Omoideshu* [Collection of Recollections of the Late Pastor Kosaburo Shimizu], ed. the committee on the project (Toronto Japanese United Church, 1965, 1950pp., in Japanese).
- 4) Isobel McFadden, *The Man Who Knew The Difference, Kosaburo Shimizu* (The United Church of Canada, 1965), p. 46.
- 5) Tadashi Mitui, "The Ministry of the United Church of Canada Amongst Japanese Canadians in British Columbia, 1892-1949" (Vancouver: STM Thesis Union College of British Columbia, 1964). See especially Chapters Ⅴ and Ⅵ.
- 6) *Kanada Nikkeijin Godo Kyokai-shi*, p. 183.
- 7) Harold Mayeda, op. cit., pp. 18-19.
- 8) Recollection of the Late Pastor Kosaburo Shimizu, op. cit., p. 178.
- 9) J. Merele Davis, *Davis Soldier Missionary, 1916, A Biography of Rev. Jerome D. Davis, D.D.*, P.345.
- 10) *Ko Shimizu Kosaburo Bokushi Omoideshu*.
- 11) Harold Mayeda, op. cit., pp. 134-137.
- 12) Isobel McFadden, op. cit., p. 44.