



Some people may ask, "Who was Toyohiko Kagawa?" Toyohiko Kagawa (1888-1960) was a dedicated Japanese Christian pastor, evangelist, pacifist, social reformer, humanitarian, labor activist, writer, and founder of the Friends of Jesus Movement. Before World War II, he was considered the most famous Japanese in the western world and was often compared with Albert Schweitzer in Africa and Mahatma Gandhi in India as one of the greatest modern saints.

Kagawa was born in Kobe on July 10, 1888 to the concubine of a wealthy businessman. Both parents died while he was only four years old and he was consequently sent to Shikoku to live with his father's legal wife (his step mother) and her family. He attended junior high school in Tokushima and studied English with American Presbyterian missionaries. He was baptized a Christian at the age of 15. As a strong pacifist, Kagawa often spoke out against Japan's involvement in the war with Russia (1904-1905), which put him at odds with the other students. When he finished high school, he felt a strong call to be a minister, so one of the missionaries enrolled him in the Presbyterian college, Meiji Gakuin, in Tokyo. After two years at Meiji Gakuin, he transferred to the Kobe Theological Seminary. Kagawa was greatly influenced by his readings of John Wesley, St. Francis of Assisi, and Leo Tolstoy. Kagawa believed that love was the essence of Christianity.

In seminary, he became troubled by what seemed to be the seminarians' over-concern for doctrine and lack of practicing Christianity by deeds instead of words, as commanded in the New Testament. On Dec. 24th, 1909, 21 year- old Toyohiko Kagawa moved to the Shinkawa slum area to offer brotherly aid to those in the most dire need.

From 1909 to 1923 (except for 1914-17 when he was in the U.S.), he lived among the poor in a small, broken-down shack, shared with others. Haru Shiba, who became his wife in 1913, was one of the volunteers who worked alongside him. Part of Kagawa's concern for workers came about when he went to the U.S. to study theology at Princeton Theological Seminary, while taking courses in psychology, mathematics, and biology at Princeton University. He visited an economically depressed area in New York City where he observed a demonstration of 60,000 workers and realized that to change the situation of the economically oppressed, he had to be in solidarity with working people.

Upon his return to Japan, he worked for the organized labor movement, economic cooperatives, and universal suffrage. He also led strikes against major factories in Kobe, but was arrested in 1921 and again in 1922 for his participation in the strikes.

He wrote a book about the cooperative movement, *Brotherhood Economics*, in English while on board a ship to the United States in 1936 and also wrote a three-part autobiographical series of novels, *Crossing the Death line (Before the Dawn)*, *A Shooter at the Sun*, *I* and *Time to Hear the Voice of the Wall*. These books became best sellers in Japan with sales of over 4 million copies. He used the revenues from his substantial book sales to fund his work in the slum, cooperative movements, and other activities.

In 1923, a powerful earthquake hit Tokyo and Yokohama. The day after the earthquake, Kagawa went to Tokyo to help. The government was so overwhelmed by the many needs and they asked Kagawa to be the Chief of Social Welfare. He agreed and helped rebuild the areas devastated by the earthquake. For this he was honored, despite his insistence that he was only doing what God had called him to do.

As a strong pacifist and community organizer, he started the National Anti-War League in 1928, and also organized the Federation of Labor. In the 1930s, he addressed rural problems, such as soil erosion, by persuading many of Japan's farmers to plant fodder trees to conserve soil, supply food, and feed animals (the three "dimensions" of his system). His interest in helping farmers sell their produce and getting food to the people was among the many reasons he was involved in establishing retail food cooperatives.

During his 1935–36 visit to the U.S., Kagawa was estimated to have spoken “in 150 cities and 44 states before audiences totaling 750,000 persons” according to *Christian Century* 53, no. 29 (July 15, 1936).

After Japan's invasion of China, Kagawa publically asked the Chinese people for forgiveness. On August 25, 1940 he was arrested for anti-war activities and questioned by the Military Police (*Kempeitai*). After his release from prison, he visited the United States in April, 1941 in order to try to avert war as a member of the Christian Peace Mission from Japan. Later, after returning to Japan, E. Stanley Jones (a Methodist missionary who had been serving in India) sent a cable to Kagawa on Dec. 1, 1941 asking to him to hold a weeklong anti-war prayer vigil on both sides of the ocean.

After the war, Kagawa was part of the transitional Japanese government and became a leader in the postwar movement for democracy in Japan. In 1945, he established the International Peace Society in Tokyo. Japan was also experiencing severe food shortages and exceptional inflation in 1945 and Kagawa helped establish Co-ops across Japan. Within two years, over three million people became Co-op members.

In 1946, Emperor Hirohito asked Kagawa to visit him. During that visit, Kagawa urged the Emperor to get closer to the people and fill them with a desire for democracy and justice. About a week later, the Emperor appeared in public for the first time and visited Kagawa at a settlement he had established in Tokyo where 20,000 war refugees were located. Kagawa had established many such settlements in the larger cities and country areas of Japan.

While in the U.S. on a preaching tour in 1950, Kagawa visited 37 places and gave 400 lectures in five months to an estimated audience of 350,000 people. Although he suffered from ill health off and on (tuberculosis, and later trachoma which he contracted in the slums), he continued speaking and writing extensively throughout his life, publishing over 300 books and leaflets.

Kagawa was nominated for the Nobel Prize in Literature in 1947 and 1948, and the Nobel Peace Prize in 1954, 1955, 1956, and 1960. After his death at the age of 71, on April 23, 1960, he was awarded the second-highest honor of Japan, induction into the Order of the Sacred Treasure. On April 23 every year, he is commemorated in the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America and Episcopal Church as a “renewer of society.” His writings have been translated into over 38 languages in more than 600 books. There are many books and articles about him. (One recommended book is: *Toyohiko Kagawa: An Apostle of Love and Social Justice* by Robert D. Schildgen.) Even a Japanese comic book (*manga*) has been written about him, as well as a movie (sold as a DVD) made about his life. His last book, *Cosmic Purpose*, was published in 1958 in Japanese and has been translated into English recently.

There are presently five Kagawa resource centers/museums in Japan; two in Tokyo, one in Shikoku, and two in Hyogo Prefecture. Interest in Rev. Kagawa has been revived as people read his books and visit the museums. It is with sincere hope that future generations will learn about and be inspired by Kagawa's life work and its tremendous impact on society. Kagawa was a man who truly lived his Christian faith.

- -By Rev. Claudia Genung-Yamamoto
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