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Religion: The Future of Jap Missions

For three war years the 800-odd U.S. missionaries repatriated from Japan have kept virtually silent. They have had little or nothing to say about the strength of the Christian church in Japan or the prospects for postwar missionary work.

One of the first to speak out was Dr. Charles W. Iglehart, longtime (35 years) Methodist missionary to Japan, now Professor of Missions at Manhattan's Union Theological Seminary. In a frank article written for the current issue of the Duke Divinity School Bulletin, Dr. Iglehart looked through a thick layer of gloom at the chances for reviving Jap missions after the war.

The war in Asia, he said, "has sunk to subhuman depths of ferocity. Race antagonisms lie behind it. We are now creating a generation of American and Japanese youth seared with the brand of mutual hate and contempt." Invasion, bombing and unconditional surrender will be followed by the outlawry, duplicity and mutual suspicion which military occupation is bound to bring. And this may lead to a nationalistic government cool to foreign Christianity and firmly behind Japan's ancient and ingrained ancestor-emperor worship.

Missionary Iglehart believes that, no matter what happens, emperor worship cannot be wiped out for decades. Thus, those who favor lynching Hirohito should think twice, because "disgrace or harm to the present emperor would probably serve merely to augment the honor of the imperial line. ... No foreigner can hope to [disentangle] the politico-religious element in Japanese life. . . ."

The war will leave Japanese and American Christians farther apart than they have ever been before. "Japanese Christians will love their land and people in defeat with a more profound love than ever before. They will probably trust their leaders with less criticism and more loyalty." Missionaries returning to Japan will be greeted with deep suspicion. Young Americans who could replace them may balk at giving their lives to missionary service in an enemy country.

Dr. Iglehart's in-the-long-run conclusion: missions will survive in Japan because Christianity is much sounder there than it appears to be. When the wounds of war heal, Japanese Christians will ask for help from American Christians, who by then "will surely have the good will to offer the kind of service and fellowship that is wished and that can be received."

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