
Japan's Modern Prophet

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John F. Howes

Japan's Modern Prophet:
Uchimura Kanzô, 1861-1930



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To the memory of

Fukatsu Fumio

Hatano Kazuo

Nakazawa Kôki

Ozawa Saburô

Shinagawa Tsutomu

and my beloved Lyn

each of whom kindly walked the slow path with me.

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Preface and Acknowledgments

Very few books take half a century to gestate, but this one did. During these years, I have received great help from numerous organizations and individuals, some young and excited by the mechanics of research, others with great wisdom born of long experience and various specialties. To them all, as well as those who brought me up, I owe thanks.

My upbringing, beginning with earliest memories, predisposed me to the topic. The study of Uchimura developed in reaction to this upbringing and education, my further experience as a graduate student, and developments since then as I taught at the University of British Columbia.

My family considered the development of Christianity in Asia important. On my mother's side of the family, three generations had spent much of their lives and careers as missionaries in India. My maternal great-grandfather had founded a college in Lahore. His son, my grandfather, had been born there, and his wife, my grandmother, had lived there more than three decades. My mother had been born there. These women in our suburban Chicago home spoke Hindustani among themselves. Missionary friends visited our home. When they travelled from coast to coast on their year-long sabbaticals, they changed trains in Chicago and visited us. Their conversations made conditions in various Asian countries come to life. To become a missionary seemed a good and necessary career and a natural choice for me.

When the Second World War swept me into service, I studied Japanese at the Naval School of Oriental Languages. This led to work in the Allied Occupation of Japan in Tokyo. There I found myself relieved to be in Asia but not as a missionary. This sense increased as a missionary friend, Egon Hessel, relayed to me a request from a Japanese pastor. He sought a choirmaster for his church. I had spent many years in choirs and played the pipe organ, so the request pleased me. It seemed a good way to escape from the military milieu of my work and meet Japanese as individuals. It also seemed better to be asked to participate in Christian work by Japanese Christians than to

push myself on them. Hessel introduced me to Fukatsu Fumio, the pastor of the church.

Fukatsu wanted his choir to sing Bach cantatas at Christmas and Easter. That was quite an order, considering that the congregation averaged about thirty and that the only instrument was a wheezy pump organ. Thursday-night rehearsals were conducted by candlelight since Tokyo lacked sufficient electricity to provide both illumination and heat. Somehow we managed, and through the experience I developed great respect for Fukatsu and Japanese Christians.

Then a strange thing happened. Fukatsu had been in charge of his church during the war. He had decided ideas about how to run it. Hessel represented the mission board that had developed the church before the war. Each man felt a proprietary interest. I found myself, a complete outsider, a confidant of both. Fukatsu talked about how missionaries did not understand certain things. At other times, Hessel patiently explained how Japanese pastors misunderstood certain other factors. I heard independently from the two of them different views of the same phenomena. Ôtake Masuko helped to explain the difference. She had studied at Union Theological Seminary in New York and later became the first female professor in the arts faculty of a Japanese national university. These contacts taught me the difficulty of cooperation in evangelization. At the same time, I inclined toward the Japanese viewpoint.

Influenced by this experience, I cast about in 1951 for a research topic in the East Asian Institute of Columbia University. I told a Japanese studying at Union Theological Seminary that I wanted to study a Japanese Christian who had differentiated Christianity from Western culture. The student, Nakazawa Kôki, suggested Uchimura. Nakazawa subsequently became one of Japan's leading scholars of the Bible, with a specialty in the Old Testament.

Faculty members at Columbia appreciated my initiative in finding the topic but could offer little guidance. The only reference to Uchimura in available English-language scholarly literature was a footnote in George Sansom's *The Western World and Japan*.¹ It considered the works of Uchimura "important for the study of Christianity in Japan"² but offered no further information or guidance.

Conversations with Sir George produced little more. Tsunoda Ryûsaku encouraged me with the observation that Uchimura had come from the same part of Japan as Tsunoda himself. And Hugh Borton, ever accepting and patiently instructive, helped me to put together a brief first biography. Quietly assisting them was Miwa Kai at the East Asiatic Library. She set the first Japanese-language biography of Uchimura on my desk within days after it arrived in 1953.

When my introduction to Uchimura finished the requirements for my master's degree, I thought I was done with the problem and applied for one

of the first Fulbright student fellowship grants to Japan. There I planned to paint a composite picture of Japanese Christianity through a comparison of the lives and works of Ebina Danjō, the great Congregational leader, Uemura Masahisa, the Presbyterian theologian, and Uchimura. In Japan, I worked on this assumption for over a year, but events changed my plans.

The switch resulted from the calibre of the Japanese individuals I met. Takagi Yasaka had been the chair professor of American studies at Tokyo Imperial University before his retirement. Yanaihara Tadao was the current president of Tokyo University. He appointed Maeda Yōichi and Maeda Gorō as my advisors. All were distinguished scholars known throughout the world. Matsumoto Shigeharu was developing what would become the International House of Japan. They and other individuals who had studied under the leading prewar Japanese internationalist, Nitobe Inazō, aimed to make of the International House a Japanese equivalent of the American Foreign Policy Association, Britain's Chatham House, or the Canadian Institute of International Affairs. Each of these people demonstrated a sophisticated dedication to internationalism. And each of them, along with many others I met, attributed many of their ideas to the influence of Uchimura. This image differed greatly from that which had emerged from my earlier study. I could only conclude either that I was mistaken or that these individuals of great accomplishment and integrity were mistaken. I decided in consequence to give up my plan to compare the three Christian leaders for my dissertation and concentrate instead on Uchimura.

During these three years in Japan, Ienaga Saburō introduced me to the patient analysis of documents that intellectual history requires. Ienaga later became famous through his confrontation with the Ministry of Education over whether Uchimura's refusal to accept government interference in his thought should be mentioned in high school textbooks. Through a translation and adaptation of a book that they had written in part, I also became acquainted with Kishimoto Hideo and Ikado Fujio at the Department of Religious Studies at Tokyo University. Ikado introduced me to the Purotesutanto Shi Gakkai (Protestant Historical Association). Its director, Ozawa Saburō, and numerous other members – including Suzuki Toshirō, Takahashi Masao, and Hatano Kazuo – helped me to find my way about in the field. The bookseller and bibliographer Shinagawa Tsutomu found new sources for me. Six months at Kyoto University introduced me to Minamoto Ryōden and brought me into prolonged contact with Otis Cary. George De Vos helped me to clarify my thoughts and introduced me to Erik Erikson's *Young Man Luther*.³ When I started to write, it became clear that Uchimura's development until the Russo-Japanese War in 1904-5 would fill up my dissertation. Herschel Webb and William T. deBary, part of a new generation of faculty at Columbia, led me through the requirements. To each of these individuals, I express thanks.

Shortly after my defence in 1965, the East Asian Institute of Columbia University accepted the dissertation for publication. At the same time, two referees suggested that to introduce only the first half of the life of an unknown writer did not seem to be in the best interests of scholarship. They proposed one chapter to sketch in Uchimura's later career. Their suggestion seemed better than their tentative solution. What impressed me was that Uchimura's very important mature career followed the perturbed psychological state of his youth. That could be documented only with much greater study, but the greatness of Uchimura in fact lay in the combination of quite different careers in the span of one lifetime. I decided to expand the original work rather than publish a shorter but incomplete one.

To implement this change in plans took time. In every way, the mature Uchimura posed more demanding questions than the youthful *Kanzô*. The sources were more extensive: about 90 percent of his works dated from after he became a pacifist. There were practically no secondary studies. Almost everything had to be worked up from the beginning. The reward has come in the fruitful cooperation with other scholars who became interested in related topics.

A year as a visiting professor at Tokyo University introduced me to Hirakawa Sukehiro and Yuzo Ota. They shared an interest in the comparison of Japanese and Western cultures. Ota later became a researcher for one year at the University of British Columbia, and Hirakawa spent a year at UBC as a visiting professor. Hirakawa made numerous valuable suggestions on the original draft of this manuscript. Eugene Langston and Herschel Webb offered helpful comments. Bamba Nobuya and I also edited the volume *Pacifism in Japan: The Christian and Socialist Tradition*.⁴ The collaboration allowed me to deal with this aspect of Uchimura's thought in the context of similar writings by others.

Many organizations have helped to fund this research. On two occasions, the Fulbright Commission provided fellowships, first when I was a student and again when I was a faculty member. Nishimura Iwao, Maki Yukiko, and Jane Bowles went far beyond their normal duties as members of the Fulbright secretariat to assist me. The Canada Council brought Yuzo Ota to Vancouver as a research assistant. The Japan Foundation enabled me to spend a year in Japan to finish the pacifism book with Bamba. The University of British Columbia and the Ôhira Commemorative Fund at its Institute of Asian Research provided assistance to prepare a computer-assisted publication of the first draft, a revolutionary technique in the early 1980s. The assistants, Richard Cleary and George Oshiro, shared generously of their talents as nascent biographers. And Gonnamî Tsuneharu, the Japanese-language librarian at the University of British Columbia, found new materials and patiently answered queries.

My colleagues at the University of British Columbia and elsewhere also offered welcome support. Frank Langdon commented on the first section. Keith Clifford, Charles Anderson, and Joseph Richardson of the Department of Religious Studies helped me to understand the dynamics of the religious life and teaching as exemplified by Uchimura. E. John Hamlin and Richard J. Graham, both specialists on the Old Testament, commented on large portions of the text. Cyril Powles commented on the whole manuscript from his vantage point as a Canadian specialist on the histories of both Japan and the world missionary movement. Hatano Kazuo contributed from his valuable leave time to attend the graduate seminar in which we went over the whole text. And the students in the seminar provided many insights from their less specialized points of view.

During these years, a family grew, I enjoyed helping to develop the study of Japan at the University of British Columbia, and my wife, Lyn, endured my enthusiasm about the topic with just the right amount of skepticism to improve it greatly.

The above words were finished on 7 March 1983. During the succeeding years, for reasons understandable only in terms of an academic career, the manuscript slept undisturbed. Then without warning, in the fall of 2000, a young colleague, Darrell Allen, followed up a footnote in another of my publications with a request to read the whole manuscript. His enquiry led me to shorten and tighten it for publication.

Then several individuals who had expressed interest in the manuscript over the years read it and shared their opinions with me during the summer of 2001. Along with Allen, they deserve my thanks: Kenneth Coates, provost and vice president, academic, professor of history, Sea to Sky University; Charles N. Forman, the D. Willis James professor emeritus of missions, Yale University Divinity School; William L. Holland, the first chairperson of the Department of Asian Studies at the University of British Columbia, an expert on many aspects of Asian history, and the founding manager of UBC Press; Yuzo Ota, professor of Japanese history, McGill University; Kenneth Pyle, director, the Henry Jackson School of International Affairs, University of Washington; and Thomas Rimer, Department of Japanese Language and Literature, University of Pittsburgh. Bert Benade went over the introduction with a fine-tooth comb. Each encouraged me to complete the script quickly for publication and suggested ways to better it.

And during the final preparation, anonymous readers for UBC Press made suggestions that will increase the numbers of those interested in the text. Cyril Powles and Charles Forman helped me with one of the additions that one of the readers suggested: a glossary. Their insights into church history in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries provide necessary background for understanding Uchimura for those not acquainted with it. And Suzuki

Norihisa, Japan's preeminent scholar on Uchimura, has answered numerous questions and kindly shared his own collection of photographs. The staff at UBC Press, and in particular my editor Darcy Cullen, quickly and effectively solved all the problems that must accompany publication.

Notwithstanding all this assistance over the years, the ideas expressed are mine alone.

It is ironic that my wife of forty-seven years, Lyn, died suddenly and unexpectedly shortly after the manuscript went to press. For half a century, she had endured and abetted my enthusiasm for Uchimura's significance only to leave us a few months before the publication of my conclusions.

Japan's Modern Prophet



Map of Japan, showing cities and places mentioned in the text.

Introduction

Uchimura Kanzō¹ was a Christian writer whose acts and words vividly portrayed how hard it was for a loyal Japanese to live true to both the ideals of his people and the commandments of his foreign God. He was born in 1861, a few years before the fall of the Tokugawa government that signalled the opening of Japanese society to massive influences from the Western world. He died in 1930, one year before the Japanese militarists started their nation on its road to near suicide in the Second World War. The period through which Uchimura lived was exciting and confused, particularly in the realm of social ethics and the ultimate loyalty, whether to the nation or the individual conscience, of each person. Uchimura earned the twin reputations as the most consistent critic of his society and the most knowledgeable Japanese interpreter of Christianity and its Bible. One of the most drawn-out court battles in Japanese history resulted from the attempt by the historian Ienaga Saburō to inform high school students of Uchimura's heroic respect for the individual conscience against unjust state authority.²

Ienaga believed that a textbook on modern Japanese history should mention this courage. Bureaucrats in the Ministry of Education who had commissioned the textbook disagreed and excised Ienaga's reference to Uchimura. Ienaga took the matter to court. The national teachers' union agreed with him, and regular contributions from individual members helped to bankroll his expensive legal battles.³ Ienaga died at eighty-nine in 2002 after decades⁴ of occasional victories and numerous appeals before the Supreme Court of Japan. Through the many years, he continued to praise Uchimura's criticism of officials in their defence of unquestioned state authority.

This study introduces Uchimura's spiritual odyssey as a teacher and writer. From early childhood interested in religious matters, Uchimura turned this innate interest in religion to the implications of Christian faith for one like himself born a "heathen," to use, as he did, the nineteenth-century term. And he wanted Christians in the countries that sent missionaries to know how his conversion had influenced his life. He aimed what became his most

widely read book at Western readers, and in it he described his life until the end of prolonged study in the United States. For the rest of his life, correspondence with trusting friends provided a record of his ongoing attempts to live his faith. This work uses these autobiographical revelations plus the reactions of numerous followers who preserved letters from him and noted their reactions to him. During his long and distinguished career as a writer, Uchimura commented on much that was going on around him in Japanese society. I mention these contacts but leave their analysis to others. By my simple reference to them, I aim to demonstrate the breadth of his interests and to suggest directions for further research.

Uchimura gained fame in Japan because he so vividly analyzed the inner tensions that resulted from his love for homeland and his love for God. In his English-language autobiography, he described his family and early life, his training as a civil servant, his conversion to Christianity, and his subsequent study in the United States. The actions of American Christians convinced him that they would never accept him as a brother in the faith, yet once converted he could not abandon his faith. He returned home to Japan. His final words promise that he will later write “another book, *How I Worked a Christian*.”⁵ He never wrote the sequel and so left the task to others.



Uchimura lived as Japan passed through periods of quick change, particularly in its citizens' attitudes toward the worth of the individual and the individual's relation to society and God. Two related developments affected him directly.

The first was Japan's entrance into formal relations with other nations. Uchimura was born just eight years after the commander of an American naval squadron had bullied the Japanese government into opening foreign relations with the United States. For the preceding two centuries, Japanese rulers had used Japan's insularity to constrain contacts with foreigners. During those years, improved transportation had increased the movement of people and goods throughout the rest of the world. Improved handling of relations between nations reduced the friction inherent in international commerce. Japan's agreement to the stationing of a representative of the United States on its territory seemed at first to be a slight and innocuous affair, but it portended a whole new relationship between Japan and citizens of other lands. The young Uchimura, whom we can call by his given name Kanzô, grew up in a nation undergoing profound changes subsequent to this shift in Japan's foreign relations.

With the opening of relations came a second force that shaped Kanzô's life. That was the movement from Christians in the leading nations of the world to extend the benefits of their faith to areas where it was unknown or

suspect. Many denominations had what they called “boards” to select and train individuals who volunteered to become missionaries. Those selected by these mission boards preached, taught, and healed throughout the world. They moved easily to and from their home countries by the same trains and ships that facilitated the movement of goods. Kanzô first observed missionaries in action as a boy and later received baptism from one. He took his vows seriously, even as he came to recognize in the foibles of individual missionaries much that he disliked. He became known as an enemy of missionaries, and unflattering references to them peppered his writings.

The strains between his ambition to succeed in the internationalization of Japan and his dedication to his Christian God formed a creative tension that goaded Kanzô on. He wanted modern Japan to act according to his ideals of a benevolent nation. When its leaders failed to perform as he thought Christian rulers should, he berated them. When Christian missionaries failed to accord him what he considered due respect for his achievements as a Christian leader, he berated *them*. Always prickly, he criticized all those in positions of authority who appeared to disregard God’s high standards. And he expressed his criticism in extremely effective language, both Japanese and English.

Uchimura came to his ability with words as part of his government’s need to train individuals to deal with foreigners. His father lost his position as an able government administrator as a result of the changes introduced by the Meiji Restoration. His ability with languages led Kanzô to English lessons and then appointment to a new government school, where he took almost all his courses in English. He later studied in the United States for three years. There he met and worked under leading intellectuals who lavished care and affection upon him. When he arrived home, he had the ability to write in publishable English. Very few Japanese had this skill, and he is remembered as one of three Japanese in his generation who had mastered it. Not only did he demonstrate great skill in English, he also utilized a system in Japanese that was developing at the time to replicate the English use of italics and boldface for emphasis (see figure on page 122). Throughout this book, I have used italics in passages from Uchimura’s Japanese-language publications in which he applied emphasis using a number of special indicators.

So his *métier* was words. During four decades before his death in 1930, Uchimura wrote nonfiction for a living. During the years 1893-97, as he sought a profession, he wrote eight books and started a ninth. Two of them were in English and were later translated into Japanese. At the same time, he wrote eight major essays. The last one criticized the government’s hypocrisy when it claimed that Japan attacked China in 1894-95 to better the lot of the Chinese people and then in victory demanded the cession of Taiwan. The article caused a sensation and prompted a job offer from the largest newspaper

of the day. Once on the staff in 1897, Kanzô started what would become his career pattern: editing and writing for periodicals. During the six years that he served with the newspaper, he started in addition three magazines. He left the newspaper in 1903 to devote his time to the most robust of the magazines. He dedicated it to the study of the Bible and continued it until his death. Between 1926 and 1928, he also edited, published, and wrote much of the text for an English-language monthly intended for missionaries and their backers. He lacked time to write books, and the numerous volumes under his name that appeared in the twentieth century consisted mainly of reprints of material in his periodicals.

With these words, Uchimura taught. At first, he found jobs in the new schools that sought someone with his training. None of these jobs worked out well, and the most famous among them ended in disaster. He found his loyalty to his nation and his loyalty to his God at odds when he was required to bow at a school assembly before a formal document signed in person by the emperor. A similar text within a different context would seem to be the American Pledge of Allegiance. Although the text signed by the emperor simply restated what Japanese take for granted, Uchimura did not want to bow before an idol. Hesitating, he bobbed his head but did not bow, as etiquette demanded, from the waist. His act started a whirlwind of controversy, prompting thousands of articles both praising and reviling him. It also ended any possibility of teaching in a government school. In retrospect, it has become the most compelling incident in modern Japanese history of principle in the face of bureaucratic demands to conform. Uchimura could no longer teach as a career. The historian Ienaga in his turn ran afoul of similar pressure when he wanted to tell high school students about Uchimura's act. Uchimura, after much struggle, decided to teach through his writings.

His books published during four years in Kyoto between 1893 and 1897 (1) introduced Christopher Columbus and propounded a theory of world history to Japanese readers; (2) outlined a theory of Christian evangelism; (3) meditated on the problems that the conversion to Christianity introduced into one's life; and (4) answered in English and as a Japanese many questions about Japan otherwise known to foreigners only through the travel diaries of other foreigners. This list includes the titles that continue to sell in paperback form seventy years after his death. The single volume that dealt with his conversion and how it did not lead to acceptance by American Christians heads the list in Japanese translation. Kanzô has succeeded for generations in his aim to impart the best of a deeply personal Christian faith through the written word.

Readers approach Uchimura because of the topics that he discusses and the way in which he discusses them. Most have found him as young people who seek to define themselves as individuals. They feel conflicting forces

that pull them in opposing directions. They find in mentors that continue the Uchimura tradition men of great probity and strength. Their reaction to the teaching itself differs. Uchimura's emphasis on the attempt to attune one's life to God's will turns off some of the young "seekers," to use a missionary term. They turn to other interests. Others find in the same study the basis for lifetime commitment. Both start by reading his accounts of his own conversion. Those who remain with Uchimura mature in their own faith until they can appreciate the massive commentary on Paul's Letter to the Romans that reflects Uchimura's thought at the height of his career. All who turn to Uchimura find the core of his thought presented in clear Japanese. His sentences link the logic of English-language grammar to the ornamentation of apt Chinese characters. Readers do not experience difficulty in deciding exactly who did what to whom, a problem that characterizes many Japanese texts. And as they understand, readers admire the grace with which Uchimura presents his case. Few writers deal so convincingly with problems of ultimate commitment and cultural difference. And this is not a translation of some famous Western scholar but the words of a Japanese shaped by the same forces that shape the reader. Readers feel at home with the author; he is comfortably "Japanese."

This is what struck me when I arrived in Japan to study Japanese Christianity twenty-two years after Uchimura's death. I had already written a biographical sketch of Uchimura. It was the first year of the Fulbright graduate student program, and numerous leading Japanese attended social occasions to introduce one group to the other. When I told these leaders of my interest in Uchimura, they responded fervently with their own interpretations of him. Some found him deadly dull, pedantic, and overrated. Others waxed eloquent and described him, along with Fukuzawa Yukichi, as a warm and dedicated teacher who shared in his works remarkable insights into the human condition. The diversity of these opinions did not impress one as much as the unanimity that they reflected. All those who discussed him had read Uchimura, and all had reflected on what he said in terms of their own lives. Whether they still agreed with him or not, he had at one time influenced them greatly. One concludes that well into the middle of the twentieth century many Japanese had found in Uchimura's words inspiration for their own lives.

One then asks what they found when they turned to Uchimura. A brief description of his career precedes an answer to this question. After his refusal to bow and his subsequent dismissal, he took odd jobs and then settled down to write. I have mentioned the profusion of works that resulted. As a result of them, Uchimura was invited to Tokyo, where he served as an editor of Japan's most influential newspaper. For the first time, as he turned forty, he had employment that utilized his talents and promised a worthwhile career. After six years and along with the columnists who had joined

him at the newspaper, he suddenly resigned in 1903. The government, determined to attack Russia in what would become the Russo-Japanese War, forced the publisher of the newspaper where Uchimura worked to agree with its plans. Uchimura and the columnists disagreed. They declared their belief in absolute pacifism and with him resigned. This is the second of Uchimura's two brave acts that the historian Ienaga wanted high school students to study. These new pacifists indeed required courage since the government was determined to silence opposition. Among them, Kôtoku Shûsui died on the gallows eight years later, convicted, though wrongly, of plotting to assassinate the immensely popular Emperor Meiji.

Whereas the others moved on to encourage socialism, Uchimura took a different tack and built on a decision that he had made three years earlier. At that time, he had started a monthly magazine of his own devoted to Bible study. Over the remainder of his life, this magazine published the major portion of his works. They remain the largest single contribution by a Japanese to Bible study. Of particular importance were his studies on the Old Testament. Those who read his magazine developed, along with him, a theory of church, or *mukyôkai*, for which he became famous.

We now return to ask what readers found in his works. Those that attracted the most attention come from his early years when Uchimura had time to write books with sustained themes. By far the most influential among them were his three autobiographical works, in particular *How I Became a Christian*. They dealt with the experience of a sincere convert. Uchimura shared what had happened to him in order to help others. The second most popular among his works deals with the legacy that an individual bequeaths future generations at the time of death. It urges youths to choose their occupations from the standpoint of looking back over life. What do you want to leave to those who follow you? He concludes with the answer that the job makes little difference compared with the way in which one pursues it. Try to leave behind "a brave and noble life."⁶ The most influential among his works thus deal with career choice, the results of career choice, and dedication.

A second category of writings occupied most of his energies when Uchimura moved to the newspaper job in Tokyo in 1897. He became the English-language editor of what was otherwise a Japanese-language newspaper. This requires explanation. At the time, port cities had local English-language newspapers. Their authors catered to the interests of expatriates who viewed the world in terms of benefits to the countries from which they came. Their readers never learned what Japanese thought about international developments. Yet during these years, the conclusions of Asians and those of foreigners differed greatly as they looked out on the world around them. Uchimura observed the gradual lessening independence of Japan's cultural mentor, China; the subjugation of the principalities of India under

the British; the takeover of Southeast Asia's wealth by the French; and the United States's substitution for Spain as the ruler of the Philippines. His frequent columns posed uncomfortable questions about how the Western powers, with the ideals that they proclaimed, could justify this takeover of others' lands. Uchimura was not alone in his concern. Five weeks after his first article, the Japanese government launched an entirely English-language newspaper to achieve the same ends. It continues more than a century later.⁷ Uchimura's newspaper articles answered a need felt by Japanese to present their story to Westerners.

Uchimura also slowly turned his energies to other matters. He started in 1898 a journal of opinion that foundered within two years as its backers disagreed among themselves. He whipped up resistance to government policies that permitted a greedy mining corporation to ruin the agriculture of a whole valley with copper tailings. And two months after the journal started with several other individuals ceased publication, he launched in 1900 the Bible study magazine controlled by him alone. He had found his voice. Rather than rant against unjust government policies, he turned to help individuals change their hearts and work on behalf of a just society. Readers lost an effective social critic but gained a forceful guide to their inner lives.

The constricted focus on a specialized monthly attracted fewer regular readers than Japan's largest newspaper, perhaps as many as 20,000. What they lacked in number they gained in dedication. Uchimura saw the magazine as a monthly letter to his followers, and they responded in kind. He maintained a large correspondence. The format of his magazine encouraged the slow development of individual faith but did not give him leisure to write books. Almost all the bound volumes he did publish reprinted detailed notes of massive lecture series that he prepared in the 1920s. They dealt with biblical texts.

They did not make easy going, but it was their loyal readers who effectively fostered many of Uchimura's principles in their own careers. Leaders among them used their experience with Uchimura to craft the more liberal Japanese social institutions encouraged by the new Constitution of 1947. After their massive defeat, Japanese were open to his ideas. His writings inspired and challenged them. Shortly after the Second World War, they bought massive numbers of his works in paperback.

In 1962, Uchimura had more titles available in paperback than any other Japanese nonfiction writer. At the same time, of all the writers in the world, he ranked highly. Five Japanese novelists, not surprisingly, headed the list with more titles available than Uchimura. The three Russian writers Leo Tolstoy, Anton Chekhov, and Maksim Gorky were complemented by the French Guy de Maupassant and André Gide, the German Hermann Hesse, and the American Ellery Queen, along with the political philosophers Marx

and Lenin.⁸ This fascinating list could become the basis for fruitful study of comparative reading habits in postwar Japan. My purpose here is to invoke them simply to show that Uchimura was in good company. I first heard lavish praise for Uchimura and his works from influential senior Japanese leaders who granted me interviews as I started my research. The number of Uchimura's works available in paperback taught me that they represented great general interest among Japanese readers.

Four decades later, Uchimura has receded from the popular consciousness and morphed into a subject of general research. This has resulted in a continuing demand for collectanea of his writings. The first definitive *Complete Works* – over 17,000 pages in twenty volumes – appeared before the Second World War. Since then three publishers have issued at least five more sets of selections by him. One of them, the publisher of the original *Complete Works*, issued between 1981 and 1985 a second updated complete works. It runs to more than 21,000 pages in forty volumes. A third one by another publisher is organized by subjects to make it more accessible for use as a guide to the Christian life.

In addition, the whole file of Uchimura's Bible study magazine, 357 issues over thirty-one years, has been republished in bound volumes. In 2001, a twelve-volume compendium used Uchimura's letters and published diaries to give an almost day-by-day record of his life. These remarkable study aids are of a complexity and completeness only given to the greatest works in the Japanese tradition, such as Lady Murasaki's *The Tale of Genji*, the haiku poetry of Matsuo Basho, and, perhaps to a lesser extent, the novels of Natsume Soseki.⁹

Uchimura is also studied outside Japan. Most of his works have been translated into Korean. A Korean journal, *Studies of Uchimura Kanzô*, reflects ongoing interest in him. Taiwanese publishers have translated at least two of his books into Chinese. Translations of his English-language works into several European languages were published in the early twentieth century. The works of few Japanese authors have become available to such diverse audiences.



Few can doubt that Uchimura has found a ready audience among members of his own and succeeding generations. One might then ask how, in a land not known for its Christianity, he attracted such wide readership. There is no quick answer to this question, and detailed analysis of the problem awaits another study. Three short points illustrate the direction that such a study would take.

The first deals with statistics. The most handy guide supports the assumption that Christianity is unimportant in Japan because so few people identify themselves as "Christian." The total of those who belong to any Christian

group constitutes at the most about 1 percent of the population. But statistics of church membership do not constitute in this instance a good guide. People everywhere do not reveal their most basic convictions to others. Japanese, on the whole, keep their innermost convictions to themselves. The lack of common definition of the Christian faith further works against the commitment of an individual to it.

In contrast to this hesitation to commit themselves to the faith, large numbers of Japanese buy Bibles. They have accepted it as a contemporary classic. The total number of Bibles or portions thereof sold between 1945 and the end of 1963 amounts to more than one-third of the population.¹⁰ This is considerably more than one per family unit, and the influence of the wide dispersion that it reflects can be seen in the daily newspapers. One who follows them believes that they require readers to understand references to the Bible to about the same degree as readers of cosmopolitan newspapers such as the *New York Times*, though regional newspapers in the American Bible Belt might assume more. One can assume that educated Japanese readers know the general contents of the Bible. This does not mean that they accept it as a basis for their beliefs. For most, their reading has led them to reject rather than to accept organized Christianity. But before they reject it, they have become aware of the challenge that it presents to contemporary individuals. They frequently know more about the Bible than many others who call themselves Christians but have less knowledge of its basic text.

Uchimura's works acquire a new relevance when examined in this context. As a commentator on the Bible, Uchimura both met the need that such interest reflects and encouraged it. His method of exegesis approximated the traditional approach to Chinese and Japanese classics, and many of the moral conclusions that he drew responded to questions posed in his traditional society. As a result, his interpretation of Christianity seemed relevant to many of his fellow Japanese.

At the same time, Uchimura rejected much about Christianity that seemed puzzlingly foreign in Japan. He wondered how one justified the many denominations of Christians. Missionaries often seemed more interested that a convert join their denomination than that the convert accept Christianity as a whole. This problem did not arise at first when Japanese knew little about Christianity, and the novelty of those who brought it attracted Japanese who sought change. With the passage of time, two problems emerged: the assumptions of missionaries about church organization and their roles in the Japanese churches.

Most puzzling was their insistence on denominational affiliation. They came from societies where not Christianity but particular interpretations of Christianity defined one's position in local society. The Anglicans (Episcopalians), Methodists, Congregationalists, and many others each represented

distinct groups in the countries that sent them. To those socialized in the very different society of Japan, these distinctions made little difference compared to the great challenge posed by conversion itself. Uchimura saw the origins of denominations not as hard-won differences in the interpretation of Christianity but as reflections of secular history in the country concerned. He asked which of their teachings actually represented Jesus' ideas as opposed to historical accretions of almost two millennia. Missionaries disagreed with Uchimura's interpretation. They knew the subtle distinctions within Christianity that had led to the founding of their denominations. They further often counted the number of converts who joined "their" group as a measure of their success. In a discussion of Christianity within the general society of Japan, the splits within the Christian community could only confuse Japanese otherwise attracted by Christian teachings.

From the beginning of his Christian experience, Uchimura objected. Less than four years after his baptism, he led his small group of fellow Christians to rebel against the request of a missionary who wanted to include the names of all of them as converts to his denomination in return for a loan to build a church. At considerable cost to themselves, members of the struggling congregation paid off the loan within a year. They thus declared their independence from the denominational differences of countries that sent missionaries. Uchimura did not change his opinion. He went on to identify lack of concern for denominations as a characteristic of Japanese Christianity.

These three points – knowledge of the Bible, disregard of denominations, and respect for Japanese individuals and society – set Uchimura's interpretation of Christianity apart from those of others. To his followers, they represented what set Japanese Christianity apart from what had developed in other countries. As a result, they called it "Japanese" Christianity.

Uchimura lived through the most exciting years of modern Japan, but he did not contribute directly to the secular developments around him. Readers who seek information on the main historical trends of these years will find them in general histories. As Uchimura acquired the ability to support himself by his writings, he increasingly retired from contact with Japanese society. For more than a quarter of a century, he reacted on the sidelines to contemporary developments as what one may call "Japan's Modern Prophet." Like the Old Testament prophets, he expressed deep concern with the infidelity and sin of his people that would hasten the coming judgment of God. He became a grand and respected old man of letters, but his words of admonition had his desired effect on society only after the end of the Second World War.

Let us look briefly at one of his disciples: Takagi Yasaka, the first professor of American studies in Japan. He held an endowed chair at Tokyo University. In this role, he was called to advise the Shôwa emperor (Hirohito) on

whether he should convert to Christianity and force conversion upon his people.¹¹ This would have taken his famous disavowal of his divinity as a god under the prewar regime a step further. We do not know what Takagi advised, but Hirohito seems at least to have considered the option of Christianity. Takagi continued for years to read in his spare time the biblical interpretations of Uchimura. At the same time, he worked to develop a nongovernmental institution that would prevent another takeover by the military and help to ease Japan back into the comity of nations.¹² In these acts, Takagi was one of many among Uchimura's students who helped to form new democratic institutions for Japan under the postwar Constitution. Study of others among them is just beginning.¹³



His writings locate Uchimura well within the history of Japan, but he himself can best be viewed in comparison with two very different groups of individuals outside Japan. There are few if any Japanese with whom he can be compared. One cannot make of him a case study for some facet of modern Japanese intellectual history. One who seeks to consider him as representative of a group must go beyond the bounds of Japan and of the modern world to the few intellectuals in history who have attempted what he attempted. Every now and then an individual appears who judges his or her community ruthlessly in terms of a transcendent ethic. Any period in history can tolerate only so many such individuals. Uchimura was one of them, and if we are to find a group of individuals he seems to resemble we must look into the lives of others who embraced similar ideals in different historical surroundings. Any list of such persons would include the Old Testament prophets, Dante, Luther, Kierkegaard, Carlyle, and Gandhi. Uchimura identified with each of them, and consideration of his life leads to the conclusion that he more nearly resembled them than any Japanese. He stands among Japanese aloof and alone, a rare man of genius who incorporated the spirit and concerns of his times into his pursuit of truth. Those he admired identified with their own societies and tried to justify them before God and their fellow citizens.

While he resembles great men in history, Uchimura also provides an excellent example of the leadership that has emerged as Christianity spread through the world during the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. It has changed even as it changed societies into which it moved. Much of Christianity's vitality has shifted from Europe and North America. Christianity is the largest single religion in Korea. In answers to the government census of 1995 confirmed by a Gallup poll two years later, about 30 percent of Koreans stated that they were Christians, 50 percent more than those who said they were Buddhists. If one includes those who described themselves as

lapsed Christians with those who consider themselves still active, those whose lives have been influenced by Christianity form a majority.¹⁴ There are more members of the Anglican Church in Nigeria than in all of Great Britain and Western Europe.¹⁵ Many of the more thoughtful among these converts will find in Uchimura's words reflections of their own experience. The story of these remarkable developments lies beyond the scope of this study. Suffice it to say here that, while Uchimura spoke primarily to his fellow Japanese and the Christians in the countries from which Christianity came to Japan, he dealt with problems faced by new Christians throughout the world. He takes his place along with the leaders in other developing Christian movements as they modify the nature of Christianity itself.



What follows constitutes the most comprehensive research on Uchimura in any language and results from an interest that dates back to chance comments from friends in 1951. It is shortened from a 1982 draft and does not include comprehensive references to the published research on related topics that has appeared in the meantime. That awaits the attention of further researchers.

This book is organized around three dramatic shifts in Uchimura's life, each of which led to marked changes in his work. The first is Kanzô's conclusion that the Meiji government could not act as an instrument of God's will. He arrived at this conclusion after hesitating in 1891 to conform to central government demands that all schoolchildren agree with its ideas of national purpose. The government demanded that he and other teachers bow before a document to which the emperor had affixed his signature. He did not bow deeply enough. His apparent lack of sufficient respect convinced conservatives that Christians wanted to subvert traditional ways. The ensuing furor forced him out of public school teaching.

Another act, twelve years later, derived from the first. In 1900, convinced that Japan as a nation could undertake its role to do God's will on earth only under leaders themselves steeped in the Christian faith, he started a monthly magazine devoted to Bible study. He hoped to produce through his magazine and lectures individuals equal to this task. At the same time, he started to accept as students bright young individuals interested in religion and its application to their lives. Then in 1903, as an influential editor and leading authority on international relations, he publicly declared his conversion to pacifism just as the Japanese government prepared to attack Russia.

In 1918, the carnage of the First World War convinced Uchimura that it heralded the imminent end of the world with Christ's return to judge all individuals and institutions. He abruptly ended his life of quiet concentration and writing. For a brief period, he lectured on the second coming to

large audiences throughout Japan. Although this belief in Christ's impending return remained an important element in his thought until his death twelve years later, he came to realize that believers risk their sanity if they follow the logic of their convictions to predict when history will end. His consequent more relaxed belief in the second coming led him from his career as an editor working individually with a few students to regular appearances as a widely regarded public speaker. He shared his conclusion about the various books of the Bible with members of large weekly audiences, who paid substantial lecture fees to hear him, in a spacious lecture hall across the street from the Imperial Palace. In these lectures he modified and expanded what he had taught and written over three decades on the nature of Japanese Christianity. His interpretation had come to be known as *mukyôkai*. The word consists of three Chinese characters: the first means "absence of" and the other two together form the Japanese word for "church." The three characters taken together, as a phrase, reflect Uchimura's conviction of the unimportance of church organization in Christian belief. The study of the gradual change in his use of this word rounds out the understanding of his contribution to Japanese and world history.