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Religious **Similarities**

A friend of mine took a college course in Comparative Religions, and was so shocked by the similarities between pagan religions and Catholicism that he lost the Faith for a while.

Many things in all religions are similar. Many noble concepts, e.g. in Buddhism and Confuciunism, are similar to Christianity. Some mythological stories are similar to biblical accounts.

While in Japan we were struck by certain ritualistic similarities at the Maiji and other shrines we visited. Catholics enter the church conscious of the Presence of God in the Sacrament in the tabernacle. We touch blessed water as a sign of purification. We genufiect in an act of reverence. We prav.

At the Shinto shrine the believers take a dipper of water, pour some on their hands and drink a little as an act of purification. Then they go to the shrine, bow reverently, clap their hands twice to attract the spirit; toss a coin in the offering box, pray, and end up with another double clap and final bow of reverence.

I am always moved by the devotion of people of other religions, and am sad that they do not have Christ. That pagans and Christians should find similar modes of expression in worship is as natural as man's nature expressing love between husband and wife, or parents and children.

The difference is divine revelation, for God sent His Son with the message of love and redemption. He gave us the Church to teach us, the Bible to inspire and instruct us. the Sacraments to continue His sanctification, the Eucharist as the supreme act of worship and community.

"How does one go about forming a new religion?" He replied: "Be crucified and rise from the dead."

While we acknowledge Jesus as Lord, we are also commissioned to bring the Faith and His Lordship to the whole world. We have not been very successful in Japan. St. Francis Xavier brought it first in 1549, but whatever was begun was

pretty much destroyed by subsequent shoguns.

Of the 100 million souls in Japan, only 500,000 are Catholics. This is one half of one percent, the same percentile for near-beer allowed during prohibition days. There are about the same number of Protestants of many denominations. All the bishops are native Japanese and are very conservative. About 40 percent of the clergy are natives.

The Jesuits have the greatly honored University of St. Sophia in Tokyo. I have no statistics on religious Sisters, but think they are higher. More than half the Catholic population is concentrated at Nagasaki and Hiroshima, where the faith was planted centuries ago. Both cities were atombombed by the Americans.

When we got to Kyoto, a city of about 1.5 million, I met young Mike Nakai, head receptionist of the New Miyako Hotel, and asked: "Is there a Catholic church here where they speak English?" "Yes. St. Francis Xavier Cathedral." There are 13 Catholic churches in Kyoto.

He phoned for me and got Father Dominic, an American Capuchin from Boston and New York. He joined us for dinner. He is about 50 years old, knows our Capuchins at Interlakens has been in Japan 21 years. is now a Japanese citizen, and his new name is Father Shintoku Takayama.

I was still puzzled that Japanese rarely physically touch one another. He explained that "they explained that communicate through a kind of sixth sense, studying the face, especially the eyes. When Pope John Paul came to Japan the TV networks were full of him all week. He celebrated Mass in Japanese five times, and was taught by a nun before coming to Japan. The people were fascinated by his face and eyes: full of goodness and love and sincerity. The Japanese say that words can Voltaire was once asked: deceive, but the eyes do not."

Dominic arranged for us to celebrate Mass at the beautiful cathedral years old, seating about 400 people, with native architecture. They have five Masses every Sunday. After daily Mass in the hotel room, it was good to celebrate in the house of God, and we all relished the sacredness of the cathedral.

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