Hearing the Gospel with Asian American Ears

by Stanley K. Inouye

In spite of the fact that God's Spirit is working in unprecedented and amazing ways among certain segments of the Asian American community, well over 90 percent are still without Christ. Among Japanese Americans, 97 percent are not yet Christian. There is an urgent need to develop more effective ways of relating the Gospel to this rapidly growing and increasingly influential minority population here in the United States.

To do so, we need to focus on the people hearing the Gospel rather than on those sharing it. We need to be "hearer-oriented." We need to know their hopes and dreams, needs and dysfunctions, values and relational patterns, spiritual perspectives and ways of decision making, if we are going to know how to shape the Gospel message and our approach so it is most deeply relevant, profoundly convicting, and joyously good news to those God has burdened us to reach for Jesus Christ.

However, the Asian American population is incredibly diverse and ever-changing. To present a concrete example of how more effective means of evangelism can be developed for all Asian Americans, and, for that matter, any other specific ethnic group, this unit will focus on how we might go about developing more effective evangelistic approaches for one segment of the Asian American population, namely Japanese Americans.

Bicultural Nature of Japanese Americans

One important characteristic that we must understand about Japanese Americans is that they are bicultural. They are on a cultural journey from being culturally Japanese to being culturally American. To understand them, we must know where they are on that cultural journey and how each culture making up their bicultural natures influences them, both their Japanese-ness and their American-ness.

An estimation of relative acculturation rates

People of Japanese ancestry here in America are early in their journey from total Japanese-ness to total American-ness, the journey taking many generations to complete. In support of this view are one scholar's estimates of relative acculturation rates. For northern Europeans like the Germans, Swedes, British and French, middle-America's closest cultural cousins, it would take three to five generations for immigrant families from these cultures to completely acculturate to what has now become American culture. For southern Europeans like the Greeks, Italians, Basques and Spanish, America's second cousins, it would take five to seven generations. And, for those from Asian cultures like Japan, China and Korea, cultural polar opposites to Western cultures, it would take in excess of seven to nine generations for complete cultural melt down to occur.[1]

At the same time, all these cultural groups lose the language of their source culture between the third and fifth generation. Apparently, long after many outward signs like food, dress, patterns of behavior and language distinguishing them as coming from a certain culture disappear, a considerable part of what makes them members of that cultural group continues to exist. This is because what makes a person cultural is not just a matter of language, food and dress, but, at deeper levels, a matter of values, of "culturally derived notions of right and wrong, good and bad, beautiful and ugly, true and false, positive and negative and so on,"[2] notions of how to think, behave and relate, notions more caught than taught during early childhood development, largely before the acquisition of any language at all. These notions are what persist after generations since immigration to this country.

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[1] These estimates come from Dr. Paul G. Hiebert, a professor at the School of World Mission, Fuller Seminary

[2] Larry A. Samovar and Richard E. Porter, *Intercultural Communication: A Reader* (Belmont, CA, Wadsworth, 1972)

Many factors, such as intercultural marriage, can significantly accelerate acculturation and shorten his estimates. However, the purpose for making these projections was to simply stress the very slow nature of acculturation at this deep level referred to as "culturally derived notions" or by others as basic cultural assumptions or absolute values.
All this is to say that the Japanese in America are influenced far more by their Japanese background than they themselves might think. Even though each successive generation of Japanese Americans is significantly further along on the journey from total Japanese-ness to total American-ness, whether Issei, Nisei, Sansei or Yonsei (first, second, third or fourth generation), they are all still predominantly Japanese at the "notions" level of culture.

A comparative study of Japanese and American childrearing practices
A key study that gives us profound insight into how these culturally derived notions become part of our "intuitive" selves and get passed on from generation to generation was one in which the differences between Japanese and American childrearing practices were compared.[3]

In this study, it was found that American mothers tended to designate certain times for certain activities. When it was play time, the infant was to learn it was time to play. Likewise, when it was time to eat, sleep, or time for Mommy to have her time, baby was to learn what was appropriate for baby to do at that particular time. This is why, I believe, many first-time American mommies find themselves in agony, not going into the nursery, as their babies continue to cry. They believe it best for their child to learn it is time to sleep, and that baby can survive on his or her own. If, however, baby is in dire need, baby must experiment with different cries until it finds out what will convince mommy or daddy that death is eminent unless they come quickly. As a consequence, baby learns early the art of verbal negotiation.

Japanese mothers, on the other hand, are almost in constant physical contact with their babies. It is not unusual for the mother not only to lie down with the baby until it is asleep, but actually sleep with the infant all night. The father will often sleep with the second youngest. The parenting objective seems to be that the baby cry as little as possible, that they need not verbally express their needs and desires in order for those needs and desires to be met. This is accomplished by the parents trying to anticipate the baby's needs and desires and meet them before the baby feels it necessary to express them.

This study helps us readily understand why American babies and Japanese babies turn out to be such culturally different adults. This study also gives us valuable insight into why the Japanese, and even third and forth generation Japanese Americans, turn out to be what we might call"omoiyari" people.

Japanese Americans as Omoiyari People
"Omoiyari" is a key concept Christians must grasp if we are ever going to be effective relating the Gospel to people of Japanese cultural backgrounds. The Japanese word, omoiyari, roughly translated means empathy. In *Japanese Patterns of Behavior*, Takie Sugiyama Lebra writes,

> For the Japanese, empathy (omoiyari) ranks high among the virtues considered indispensable for one to be really human, morally mature, and deserving of respect. I am even tempted to call Japanese culture an omoiyari culture. ...Omoiyari refers to the ability and willingness to feel what others are feeling, to vicariously experience the pleasure or pain that they are undergoing, and to help them satisfy their wishes.[4]

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[3] See William Caudill and Helen Weinstein, *Maternal Care and Infant Behavior in Japan and America*, *Psychiatry* 32:12-43. Reprinted in Takie Sugiyama Lebra and William P. Lebra, *Japanese Culture and Behavior: Selected Readings* (Honolulu, HI, University Press of Hawaii, 1974), 225-276.

[4] Takie Sugiyama Lebra, *Japanese Patterns of Behavior* (Honolulu, HI, University Press of Hawaii, 1976), 38

This defining characteristic reflects the natural outcome we would expect from the Japanese childrearing practices revealed in the study described above.

Behavioral Patterns of Omoiyari People

There are four behavioral patterns characteristic of omoiyari people.[5]

One, they seek to maintain consensus or agreement by deferring to the fulfillment of each other's needs and desires. Consider the follow example: When a group of Japanese Americans tries to decide where to go for a bite to eat, they take an informal poll. They each tend to make their suggestions in order of personal preference but end by saying something like, "But it really doesn't matter to me. Wherever is fine." When they have probed each other for some sense of consensus, someone poses the apparent group leaning. With the favorable nodding of heads, it is decided. But chances are, the final selection is seldom someone's first choice, protecting anyone from feeling guilty for not deferring enough to everyone else. Obviously, this is in direct contrast to when white, majority Americans seek to make the same decision. They also tend to poll one another, but, once done, they vote and majority rules. Those getting their way feel free to be glad if not victorious. And, those who don't accept the decision with the attitude, "Oh well, you win some and lose some." The "winners" are not made to feel guilty for being insensitive to the desires of others as is the case with Japanese Americans.

Two, they seek to optimize each other's comfort by seeking to provide pleasure or prevent displeasure by anticipating the other's needs and desires and taking initiative to meet those needs and fulfill those desires without the other person having to overtly express them in some obvious manner.

For instance, it has been observed that when Japanese Americans are dining in a group, others are responsible to notice when someone no longer has something to eat and offer it to them. In response, that person must refuse the offer several times before accepting. If the quantity of what is being offered is limited, they should also offer it to others before accepting it, especially to the person offering it. There is a good chance the person making the offer, if not the host, wants most what is being offered. The more adamant the offer, the more insistent the response should be that they eat it. Consistently, a bit of every dish should remain at meal's end so no one feels they deprived anyone else. This is also so the host, if there is one, isn't made to feel there wasn't enough to satisfy everybody, embarrassing the host. Whoever finishes a dish is considered self-centered or unsophisticated, the opposite of an omoiyari (empathetic) person. This is not only true for formal dining, but also every day at informal meals.

In contrast, at the home of a white American raised in the farmlands of northern Ohio, it can be a free for all. Once grace is said, everyone helps themselves. Within a short time, the food is gone. The speed in which the food is devoured and the absence of food afterwards are the tell-tale signs that the food is good. And when that happens, "Mom" is happy and everyone around the table is expected to "kiss the cook" in appreciation. Likewise, mealtime guests are invited to "help themselves," "dig right in," and "not stand on ceremony." This is the "neighborly" thing to do because they are being treated just like family.

Another variation involves preserving another's pleasure or preventing displeasure by not revealing one's own discomfort or suffering. It is the other person's responsibility to realize when someone is uncomfortable or suffering. When asked if they are in such a state, the sufferer is to nobly reply that they are "fine." It is only after repeated probing that they may admit to any discomfort or suffering. Their pain is to be communicated in such a way that it is read from behind their forbearance. If their discomfort is too obvious, they will be viewed as self-centered, immature, inconsiderate of others. If they are too subtle, their need for help or consideration will go unheeded and they will be left to suffer alone. This non-verbal means of asking without asking is referred to as *amaeru*.

This dynamic can be clearly seen in the following personal example of a Sansei: "As a child, when I was sick, I remember those times when my Japanese American mother and Japanese grandmother

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[5] Ibid., 38-49

would hover over me day and night, seeking to meet my every need and desire, alleviating my pain and suffering without one request from me. My duty was to express my appreciation by denying my subtle but obvious agony, telling them they shouldn't be going to so much trouble because 'I am just fine.' On the other hand, my wife, a Caucasian from the mid-west, was treated quite differently when she got sick as a child. Middle-America's brand of empathy is guarding one another's individual freedom by leaving each other alone unless explicitly asked for help. Self-determination is such a high value in this part of the United States. But, once asked, aid and comfort are given immediately and generously.

And so, when the sick, little Japanese child comes out in me as an ill adult and is met by the nurturing Middle American mother in my wife, our cultures collide. I find myself suffering alone in the bedroom, feeling abandoned and unloved, wondering when my heartless wife is going to come in, see to my dire needs, and allow me to be the brave little samurai who says he is "just fine, and doesn't need a thing." But she doesn't come in. She is anxiously just outside my door, waiting for permission to invade my space with loving help and support, but my voice is not heard. Sometimes she finds some excuse to come into the bedroom and asks if I need anything, but when she hears her little samurai say "No, I'm fine," she takes what I say at face value and leaves. There I am, very much loved but feeling totally unloved and abandoned once again."

The term mentioned earlier, *amaeru*, meaning "asking without asking," is very important here. When his wife asked him whether he was fine, and he answered he was, he really wasn't fine and he really didn't think that's what he was communicating to her. In his mind, the inflection of his voice and his non-verbal behavior, was telling her in no uncertain terms that he was not fine, that he needed and wanted help. Japanese culture values the implicit and non-verbal, while American culture values the explicit and verbal. American culture is a "tell it like it is" culture. His wife often tells him, "Well, why didn't you just say so," or "All you had to do is ask." But the Japanese inside of this American Sansei, that's much easier said than done.

Another example of how amaeru works is when this same Sansei parent asks his daughter whether she would like some ice cream. Her response is always supposed to be something like "No, that's all right. Thanks just the same." When asked again several times, her response should continue to be, "No thank you. Please don't go to any trouble." While her words may say one thing, everything else, the look in her eye, the tilt of her head, the inflection of her voice, tells you, "Yes, I want ice cream!" That's amaeru.

Three, they can control each other very effectively in non-verbal ways. One of the ways Japanese Americans can constrain or punish one another is by refusing to respond to another's expression of *amae*. When one person non-verbally expresses need for comfort or assistance, and the other person wants to punish or constrain the person, the other simply refuses omoiyari or empathy and does nothing. For example, some Christians involved in campus ministry expressed distraught puzzlement over the suicide of a Japanese American student who was both a Christian and leader in their predominantly Caucasian group on campus. Before he ended his own life, this student seemed so "together." They commented on how sensitive he was to the needs of others. He was always caring for others so much, they assumed he didn't have need of much care. Apparently, a lot of miscommunication was going on in this cross-cultural situation. How does a person from an empathetic culture ask for empathy? By giving empathy. Evidently, this Japanese American student was asking for understanding and help in the most emphatic way he knew how, by being very sympathetic to the needs of others. When others didn't respond in like measure, he might have felt not only uncared for, unloved, but that he was actually being punished as well. This is what is called *sentimental vulnerability*.[6] The Japanese are extremely vulnerable in this way. Americans generally are not. A Japanese American may attempt to control or punish a Caucasian American by withholding empathy or omoiyari and the Caucasian won't even miss it.

Four, they believe that non-verbal communication is the most powerful form of communication. The following expresses this dynamic of Japanese culture:

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[6] Ibid., 43-44

> ...(the Japanese attach priority) to implicit, non-verbal intuitive communication over explicit, verbal, rational exchange of information...Omoiyari makes explicit, verbal communication redundant and superfluous... The Japanese find esthetic refinement and sophistication in a person who sends non-verbal, indirect, implicit, subtle messages...The message of a conversation is not what is said, but what is not said; silence is communication...Among the reasons for the priority of non-verbal communication is that an intuitive, roundabout form of communication is based upon empathy as necessary to maintain the Japanese way of life; a verbal, explicit form may disrupt it.[7]

In the following passage, two well known Japanese scholars are quoted, Inazo Nitobe being a noted Christian. Think about how it might relate to effective evangelism among Japanese Americans.

> In the words of Inazo Nitobe, "To give in so many articulate words one's innermost thoughts and feelings is taken among us as an unmistakable sign that they are neither profound nor very sincere." This thought is put more bluntly still by Hidetoshi Kato when he says, "In Japan speech is not silver or copper or brass -- but scrap." Intuitive communication, through means other than words, is praised and revered. Articulate persons, especially talkative ones, are seen as foolish or even dangerous. Eloquence can even disqualify one for positions of authority and influence.[8]

How are these people going to be reached with the Gospel when so much of the traditional approaches to doing evangelism are contrary to what is culturally natural to them? The evangelistic method, media, as well as the message must be in forms appropriate to the audience to be maximally effective in relating the Good News to them. Western approaches to evangelism have fit dominant American culture quite well, but go against the grain of people of Japanese ancestry. We must begin with who we are called to reach and serve for Jesus Christ and shape ministry accordingly. What follows is a practical tool to help us do just that.

Major Traits of Omoiyari People

While one Asian culture will vary from another, how they differ will be, not so much in direction as to the extent of their orientation. For example, while Chinese and Koreans may be more verbal than Japanese, in comparison to the broad spectrum of world cultures, far eastern cultures are relatively more non-verbal than western cultures. So then, what are the major characteristics of Japanese and other Asian Americans that should determine the shape of effective evangelism and ministry among them? They are concrete, group-oriented, non-confrontational, non-verbal and oriented toward belonging.

What does this mean? They are group-oriented in that the will and welfare of the group is more important to them than their own will and welfare, especially when it comes to family. Being group-oriented, they are very relational. They are highly concerned about what other people think and feel about them and the networks to which they belong. Their own needs are met by meeting the needs of others through reciprocity. They tend to be consensual, the goal of their decision making being that all agree and relational harmony is maintained. They are non-confrontational, tending to avoid bringing up anything between themselves that will jeopardize or cause disruption to valued relationships. They focus only on those things that bond and build relationships, or, at least, maintain peaceful coexistence. They are non-verbal, believing talk to be cheap. They measure what is said by the integrity of the person saying it. They follow a leader because of who that person is rather than what that person says. They are concrete and situational in their orientation. What maintains or positively

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[7] Ibid., 46-48

[8] Dean C. Barnlund, *Public and Private Self in Japan and the United States* (Tokyo, Japan, Simul Press, 1975), 89

serves relationships is what dictates how they respond to a given concrete situation. They tend to be pragmatic and practical rather than abstract and philosophical.

Implications upon Major Components of Evangelism
Now let's explore the implications of these major traits of omoiyari people upon each of the component parts of evangelism, namely the method, message, messenger, media and milieu, to maximize effectiveness to Japanese Americans.

Method - approach

Evangelistic approaches most effective among these people are more relational than rational. They focus more on being and belonging than on believing. Although the content of the evangelistic message is important, the character of the Christian sharing it is more pivotal. In this cultural context, the credibility of the content is evaluated almost completely on the character of the communicator. The non-Christian's receptivity to the Gospel is so dependent on the integrity of the witnessing Christian, the depth and quality of the relationship between them is crucial. They need to be close enough to enable the non-Christian to judge the quality of the Christian's life. Their relationship must be sufficiently deep or be built to that level for conversion to become a serious option for the non-Christian. And, if the relationship must be built, its going to take some time. As long as the relational approach is not used to rationalize failure to share the Gospel or invite others to accept Christ, and is applied with intentionality and focused prayer, then the omoiyari non-Christian will be reached for Christ at the earliest and most appropriate open moment, no matter how long it takes.

Corporate witness is also a key element of effective evangelism to omoiyari people. Because they are so group-oriented to begin with, non-Christians even slightly open to becoming Christians will almost immediately begin to assess the consequences of such a decision upon their relationships to family, friends and the groups to which they belong. Such close relationships with other non-Christians offer both the greatest obstacles as well as the greatest opportunities to evangelism.

Effective evangelism to such extremely group-oriented people must either overpower the groups to which they belong or embrace them. Among animistic cultures, overt spiritual warfare between the forces of good and evil, known as "power encounters" are often waged, battling over the souls of non-Christians. Similarly, power encounters necessary to win omoiyari people might well be group at war with group, human family pitted against spiritual family.

Power encounters, however, will hopefully be avoided by seeing the close relational ties of non-Christians as opportunities instead of obstacles, avenues for the spread of the Gospel. Such was the case in the early church as recorded in Acts. Repeatedly, there were instances of individuals becoming Christians together with their households. Such biblical accounts offer two precedences helpful for reaching group-oriented people; one, targeting groups instead of individuals, and two, reaching opinion leaders, those most influential within groups, in order to reach the groups themselves.

In order to become Christians, omoiyari people need to be able to weigh the differences between their current non-Christian family and group relationships with those of Christian families and groups. For this to occur, they must be allowed a glimpse into Christian family, church and group life. Just as we explored earlier how important it is for Christians to develop personal relationships with omoiyari people so they can become Christians, it is also important for Christian families and groups to embrace non-Christian families and groups so, together, they can grasp how much closer they can become through Christ's Spirit. The Gospel will then be viewed as a way of making their family and other relationships stronger rather than something that will split them apart.

To be able to exclaim to each other, "My, how they love one another," members of non-Christian groups need to be able to view Christian family and group relationships in contexts that do not threaten their own group solidarity. The encounter should not be in "we/they" situations where group boundaries are accentuated. One example is being on opposing athletic teams, one entirely Christian, the other non-Christian. Instead group distinctions should be diminished by providing or participating in informal, non-threatening situations conducive to interpersonal interaction, where

Christians and non-Christians can freely intermingle, like Christians and non-Christians being on the same athletic team. As individual members of the groups mingle together and develop relationships, the groups have opportunity to merge, enabling non-Christians, both as individuals and as a group, to consider becoming Christian. Reaching out to groups in this way allows the consensual decision-making process so indicative of group-oriented cultures to function in favor of conversion rather than against it. Such a process would allow them to come to a gradual consensus to become Christian.

It is important for Christians and non-Christians, both as individuals and as groups, to relate in "side-by-side" situations where they are working, playing and struggling with life together rather than in "face-to-face" confrontations where they are comparing abstract beliefs and seeking to change each other's minds. Omoiyari people are empathetic people. As Christians live their lives as salt and light along with such people and share naturally and consistently what life with Christ is like along the way, non-Christians will read the message of their lives and respond to Christ. Here in the United States, the way most of us have been taught to do evangelism is to communicate the truth of the Gospel (the abstract plan of salvation), challenge the individual to make a conversion decision, and then once the decision is made, to incorporate that individual into the church. However, for those who are culturally so very relationship- and group-oriented, the process has to be reversed.

We need to incorporate these people into relationships within the church first, with Christians and Christ Himself, and then focus our attention on conversion. This reversal in which relational incorporation is sought before conversion, should not be seen as an attempt to secure church membership before a person becomes a professing Christian. What is being encouraged, however, is the need to see conversion for omoiyari people as a relational process. We need to enable the non-Christian to get to know Christ better and better, little by little, becoming more and more committed to Him as they come to appreciate, admire and trust Him in small relational increments, not demanding that the non-Christian be on a fast track to commitment encompassing primarily a pat set of beliefs and an abstract apologetic for faith.

This relational process to evangelism is, after all, consistent with the way Jesus himself related with those around him in the Bible. He invited people to discover who he was and is. Jesus asked Peter, "Who do you say I am?" To which Peter replied, "You are the Christ, the Son of the Living God!" (Matthew 16:15-16 NIV) How did Peter arrive at this discovery? By spending time with Jesus.

Message - content, emphasis and particular interest, issue, need or desire addressed.

It is as we invite non-Christians to live life side-by-side with us and are invited in return to live life with them, as individuals, groups and families, that we communicate much of the content that will motivate them most to consider becoming Christians themselves. Much of our evangelistic message is non-verbal and non-confrontational, communicated by our attitudes and actions in everyday, concrete relational situations.

This kind of quiet witness, however, is only effective if our non-Christian friends are aware all along that we are Christians. This is accomplished by consistently and naturally sharing with them our experiences with our Lord along the way, as Christ helps us deal with both the mundane and the monumental challenges of our lives. We give reason for the hope that is within us in small bits. If God answers a prayer, we tell them. If a particular verse from the Bible rattles our cage, affirming or convicting us, we share it. If we pray for them, we mention it. But, we don't make a big deal of any of it. We share the stories of our spiritual journey just like the trip we took on vacation. And, from time to time, incidentally or when they are in personal crisis, we invite them to ask us how they too can know Jesus Christ.

When they do ask, we introduce them to a person, a person who lived and lives now, not a plan of salvation or set of air-tight philosophical arguments, but a person who came to save relationships as much as individual people, to reconcile us to his heavenly Father, to one another, and the whole of his creation. Just as we share his life as revealed in the Bible, we share his life as it is revealed in our lives, especially our families. Repeatedly Christians have been told by non-Christians, "If my family won't be in heaven, I don't want to go there." It is my belief Jesus must be presented and seen as able

to save and bond families before widespread openness to the Gospel will occur among omoiyari people.

Finally, we don't push too soon for a traditional, individual conversion decision but rather guide them toward developing a closer relationship with God through Christ while helping them influence others they love to do the same. As a result, they do commit their lives to Christ, but not in a form that will alienate them from others close to them.

Many early Japanese immigrants to the United States came to Christ through the message of Christian lives lived rather than Christian words spoken. It is not that they did not have a Biblically-based faith. It is just that their cognitive beliefs came later. They became Christians first and studied the Bible second. They were so impressed by the lives of Christians, and their actions toward them, that they wanted to be like them and belong to their group. "If they are Christians, we want to be Christians. What do we have to believe?" Japanese tend to believe because they belong rather than belong because they believe.

Messenger - who or what group

Omoiyari people are so relationally oriented that it is difficult for them to separate the message from the messenger, if at all. To them, the messenger is the message. They believe those whom they trust. "So-and-so says it, so I believe it. It must be true." They are extremely hesitant to question or disbelieve the views of those they admire and follow for fear of damaging their relationships with them. The group they belong to, assumed permanent and valued over personal will and welfare, is also thought undermined by the seeming disloyalty of questioning the beliefs of others in the group. It is very difficult for them to perceive truth as something abstract and absolute, separate from relationships. To them, what is true unites. What is true serves relationships.

It has been stressed throughout our discussion that the Christian's power to influence an omoiyari person toward faith in God is directly proportional to the degree to which the Christian's life reflects the truth of the Gospel. Essentially, we are Christ to these people who see message and messenger as synonymous. We are the only Christ they know up that point. However, since our ability to reflect Christ will always be limited no matter how close our relationship with Him, our primary responsibility is to introduce the non-Christian to Jesus Christ himself, who is "the way, the truth and the life," the perfect match between message and messenger.

The incarnate Christ is God's ideal way of communicating all he desires to omoiyari people. By becoming familiar with Jesus' life, death and resurrection as recorded in the Bible, they themselves can come to empathize with the anguish our Lord suffers as he yearns to embrace them with his love. As Japanese theologian Kazoh Kitamori envisions it, our Lord's love is so great that the cross of Christ is but a window, a passing glance, into the pain our God has suffered and endured from the fall of humankind until now in order to bring us back to himself.[9] With such a bent for omoiyari (empathy), the non-Christian Japanese will join the centurion "who stood there in front of Jesus, heard his cry and saw how he died" and be moved to exclaim, "Surely this man was (and is) the Son of God!" (Mark 15:38 NIV)

It is interesting to note that after the incarnate Christ died, rose and ascended, he sent his very own Spirit to invade the lives of believers, not so they could be a bunch of separate little Christ's running around, but to become parts of one body, the body of Christ. In this way, they, together as a group, could give witness to God's love and forgiveness. Also, the heavenly Father sends his only Son to do what is painfully necessary to adopt us into his family. God provides a family paradigm for family-centered people. God demonstrates he is an omoiyari God who knows how to communicate most convincingly to family- and group-centered, omoiyari people. And, he wants us to do likewise, communicate his love as groups and families to non-Christian groups and families.

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[9] Kazoh Kitamori, *Theology of the Pain of God* (Richmond, VA, John Knox Press, 1965)

Western evangelism has largely been an individual matter, individuals witnessing to other individuals. Even at large evangelistic gatherings, the evangelist is primarily one individual appealing to isolated individuals in the audience to make isolated individual decisions for Jesus Christ. Among omoiyari people, we must learn how to be Christian groups appealing to non-Christian groups, families appealing to families, to become Christians as families and groups. We need to see the Christian group and family as messenger and evangelist.

Media - forms

If omoiyari people tend to see the message and messenger as synonymous, then the messenger is also the most effective media for the message. This is what Christ was saying when he said, "I am the way, the truth and the life." Essentially, he was saying that he is message, messenger and media all wrapped into one. "What you see is what you get." So, also, the Christian individual, family, group and church are the most effective evangelistic media for omoiyari people.

Non-Christians need people and groups to concretely model for them the difference Christ can make in areas of life they value most, namely family and group life. Therefore, the Christian family, group, and church must be visible to the non-Christian family and group in ways that do not threaten their solidarity. Christians need to be genuinely who they are together in Christ while being with non-Christians, loving and serving them together.

While life-on-life witness, whether person-to-person, group-to-group, and family-to-family, is most effective for communicating the Gospel to omoiyari people, sometimes it is not possible, or needs to be supplemented with other forms of witness. Other media such as audio and video tapes, and reading material can be effectively used if the content is appropriate. These evangelistic tools will only be as effective as they enable non-Christians to empathize with the lives of those Christians focused upon in the piece. They need to give an inside look into the lives of Christian individuals, families and groups and document their life stories. Over a decade ago, Iwa, conducted a research project among Japanese American churches in Los Angeles and Orange Counties and found that those active in these congregations overwhelmingly preferred biographies over any other form of reading material.[10] Why is this so? I believe it is because they prefer to identify and empathize with real life people. Drama, too, can be powerfully used for the same reason. What such forms of material enable non-Christians to do is have close encounters with the lives of Christians without any risk to their present relationships. They can be confronted with their own need for Christ and be invited to ask him into their lives as Savior and Lord without the immediate threat of estrangement from others significant to them. Video tapes can be an especially powerful tool because of this. Through video tapes, Christians can openly share their faith, "face-to-face," with non-Christians, and non-Christians can freely accept or reject the invitation to receive Christ without a threat of offending or being rejected by anyone. Also, such evangelistic tools can be shared by new Christians or open non-Christians seeking to influence their families or groups to consider becoming Christian. These tools provide an effective way of confronting people with the Gospel in a non-confrontational manner.

An apparent contradiction to much of what has been said so far is the fact that God will sometimes use a Christian stranger to finally bring an omoiyari person to Christ. Similarly, seemingly impersonal means such as Christian radio and television programs, and public evangelistic events may be what enables an omoiyari person to make a Christian commitment. The probable reason for these occurrences is there is no significant relationship, with either Christian or non-Christian, that is directly threatened by making such a faith commitment. Prolonged prior exposure to Christians and Christian relationships, together with the work of the Holy Spirit, probably preceded their act of commitment. The anonymity of the crowd or the inconsequential nature of their relationship to the Christian stranger is what made it easier for them to take the major step to accept Christ as Savior and Lord.

Milieu - situations and relationships

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[10] See Stanley Inouye, Arlene Inouye and Sharon Uyeda Fong, *Final Report of the 1982 Survey of Japanese Churches in Los Angeles and Orange Counties* (Pasadena, CA, Iwa, 1982)

By this time much has already been said or implied as to the situations and relationships most appropriate for effective evangelism to take place among omoiyari people. The most effective witness will occur in settings with Christian individuals, families and groups where the quality of their lives and relationships can be observed and, to some extent, experienced by non-Christians. Initial exposure should be in life-on-life personal, group and family situations common to the everyday experience of both Christians and non-Christians, whether work, school, play or community. As non-Christians and Christians develop relationships in these neutral and shared settings, Christians can then reach out and invite non-Christians to participate with them in informal and more personal activities like going on a picnic, seeing a movie together, or coming over for a barbecue. Thought should be given as to whether several non-Christians from the same group or network should be invited so they don't feel alone or outnumbered. Omoiyari people often decide whether they will go to a particular event based on whether they know anyone who will be there and how they feel about them. The assurance others they know and like are likely to attend has a lot to do with whether or not they will show up at an event new and unfamiliar to them.

Gradually, the doors will open to invite non-Christians to participate beyond such informal, non-threatening activities to events more specifically Christian in nature like fellowship groups, Bible study meetings or church retreats. Finally, non-Christians can be invited to more formal Christian activities at church like Sunday School classes, worship services, or evangelistic events.

The problem has often been that the last place we should invite omoiyari people is the first place we tend to invite them. And, we tend to invite them alone. No wonder many, who would otherwise be open to the Gospel, seem closed because we naively intimidate them into declining our rightly motivated invitations to the wrong activities and events.

And, ironically, when all is said and done, the omoiyari non-Christian may well make the decision to follow Christ when alone, with a Christian stranger or at a mass event like an evangelistic crusade. Anonymity is the common reason for each case. And, consistently, they probably won't go forward for an alter call at a crusade for the same reason, to guarantee their anonymity. They don't want others to know prematurely of their decision. They want to see what happens first, making sure their commitment is genuine and validated by their experience. Once sure their Christian experience is real, they will try to carefully control how their decision is communicated to others. They do this, not because they are ashamed of their decision or Christ, but because they don't want to estrange, disappoint, or dishonor anyone, non-Christian, Christian or even Christ himself. They make sure, as much as possible, that the outcome will be positive, honoring to all and shaming none. That's their desire and objective, even though it may not always be possible. They are not risk-takers, especially when it comes to relationships. They always try their best to strengthen and not destroy relationships, to bring honor and not shame. Once bonded to the Lord, this bent in human relationships is directed toward Christ, their relationship with him is viewed as permanent and their principle motivation is, not to embarrass, but to bring honor to his Name.

Conclusion

It is hoped that by focusing on how we might develop more effective ways of reaching Japanese Americans for Jesus Christ and seeing a spiritual breakthrough to the 97% who do not yet know Him, a glimpse has also been gained into how we might improve our effectiveness in evangelism to other Asian Americans or whomever we are burdened to reach and serve for Jesus Christ. It is more the process we just went through with Japanese Americans as case study, rather than the outcome of the process, meaning the specific improvements to evangelism we discussed, that we believe contributes most to that end. While there are many similarities between Asian American subgroups, there are also many differences. Chinese Americans, Korean Americans and so forth should each be looked at in similar fashion and practical ministry implications worked out for each unique group. In any case, hopefully what has been shared is of practical help so that the Gospel will be shared in a way that will be heard more clearly with Asian American ears and responded to by Asian American hearts...and, for that matter, that this developmental process would also contribute to the more effective reaching of everybody else in the world who needs Christ!

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