

Baptists Begin Again in Japan

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The action of the *Shinsei Kai* during its 1957 annual convention, whereby all churches in the *Shinsei Kai* would decide in a three-year period whether they would work in the *Kyodan* (United Church of Christ) or in a new Baptist denomination, was received by many missionaries with questions and doubt lest this be another delaying tactic employed in hopes that somehow 'time' would eventually solve the problems. But this fear and skepticism was quickly extinguished by the rapid and decisive course of events which were concluded in 1958. With unprecedented speed and unexpected acceleration, decisions were made and implemented in 1958 which had been latent or postponed during the nine-year history of reorganization. There are hopes now that the time and effort lost to evangelism because of the consuming nature of solving reorganizational problems will shortly be turned into a program of church extension and church expansion.

Early in 1958 (January 30-31) over seventy-five delegates from twenty-four churches, six schools, and five other organizations gathered at the elementary school of Kanto Gakuin in Hayama for the purpose of organizing a new Baptist denomination. This was in response to an invitation extended by eleven leaders of the *Shinsei Kai* to all non-*Kyodan* members of the *Shinsei Kai*. In order "to resolve the contradiction created by local churches belonging to the denominational-like *Kyodan* and the *Shinsei Kai* at the same time, and to promote cooperative evangelism" the delegates organized the *Nihon Baputesuto Domei* (Japan Baptist Union). A constitution was drafted and adopted, incorporating the following expressed aim (Article 3): "*The purpose of the Union shall be to witness and to propagate the Gospel of Christ in accordance with the Baptist faith in churches preaching places, schools, and other institutions in Japan through fellowship and cooperation for the purpose of world evangelization.*"

It was decided that the administration and affairs of the Union would be administered by a nine-member Executive Committee (*rijikai*) and two secretaries (*shuji*). The directors and the Japanese secretary are to be elected at the annual meetings, and the missionary secretary is to be appointed by the A.B.F.M.S. and accepted by the Union. Questions concerning meetings, representation, departments, etc., were well defined in the constitution.

A full report of this meeting and the founding of the Japan Baptist Union was reported to the *Shinsei Kai* Central Committee on March 4, 1959. A question was raised at this time concerning the organization of the Union without consulting the newly formed Organization Study Committee of the *Shinsei Kai*. The answer came when it was clarified that the responsibilities of the Organization Study Committee were those of organizing the new *Shinsei Kai*, not the impending new Baptist denomination. By the time of the March 19, 1958, meeting of the *Shinsei Kai* Standing Committee, a feeling of mutual understanding had been reached by members of the Organization Study Committee and representatives of the Baptist Union.

During the annual conference of the missionary fellowship (held in Yokohama Chapel Center, March 31 to April 4) considerable time was spent discussing the new Baptist Union: its organization, its relationship to the *Shinsei Kai*, possible reactions of the Boards, and the future relationship which missionaries would have to it. Dr. Dana Albaugh was in attendance at the conference and expressed the attitude of the Boards up to that time. He indicated the following general principles as those representative of the Boards' thinking. The matter of relationships should be settled by the Japanese churches and leaders in their own way, not by the Boards or the missionaries. Decisions should be made by the Japanese without any undue pressure, either from a property or financial point of view, or from the Boards, or from the missionaries. The Board does not wish to cut off the *Kyodan* churches from fellowship or possible financial assistance so long as Baptist leaders think there is the possibility to have a Baptist witness in the *Kyodan*. The Boards will take cognizance of the Baptist Union and its importance and will study all the developments and related problems continually, but probably will not act until there is a definite proposal in more specific terms from the field. The hope of the Board is that the issues will not be so consolidated by missionary attitudes so as to hamper or predetermine the course of developments. Dr. Albaugh also indicated that the organic nature of the *Kyodan* had not yet been faced by the Boards and that the Boards were participating in the *Kyodan* (indirectly *via* the churches) on the belief that the Baptist witness could still be heard in this "ecumenical witness." The annual conference of the Fellowship brought forth no actions or suggestions relative to this problem; but the result of the conference was a complete and adequate sharing of views and opinions, as well as a better understanding of the attitude and actions of the Boards.

However, decisions were being made in the *Shinsei Kai*. At the annual meeting of the *Shinsei Shadan* April 15, 1958, it was voted to

approve the plan submitted by the Organization Study Committee whereby all decisions concerning property would be made hereafter by the *Shadan* or legal property holding body. This action, coupled with the "Modified Property Policy" adopted by the Boards on November 22, 1957, brought to an end the fears and charges that the issue of property would become a means to pressure churches into the new Baptist denomination. Two Baptist churches, however, received letters from an official in the *Kyodan* requesting them to pay for their property inasmuch as they had withdrawn from the *Kyodan*. This problem was discussed at the April 16, 1958 meeting of the *Shinsei Kai* Central Committee with a proposal that the 1958 *Shinsei Kai* Convention come to a decision concerning the relationship of property to individual churches.

Upon the recommendation of the Organization Study Committee, the Standing Committee of the *Shinsei Kai* on April 30, 1958, gave approval to the tentative constitution for the "reorganized" *Shinsei Kai*. In accordance with the "Fellowship Plan" adopted at the 1957 convention, the new constitution provides for the *Shinsei Kai* to continue as an organ of fellowship for those churches related to the Japan Baptist Union and churches of Baptist heritage related to the *Kyodan*. Article 3 reads, "*The purpose of this organization is to keep a close relationship and a warm fellowship among the churches and the organizations which will cherish the historical traditions of the Baptist heritage.*"

The tenth annual *Shinsei Kai* convention was held August 26-28, 1958, at Kanto Gakuin University. Relative to the question of reorganization two extremely significant actions were taken. First, it was voted unanimously to approve the forming of the Japan Baptist Union and to recognize it as an autonomous Baptist denomination. This "approval" permitted the Japan Baptist Union to begin immediate implementation of its constitution and organization, for the Union had decided to wait for this understanding of the *Shinsei Kai* before it would begin to function. The second major action was the unanimous approval of the new constitution, to become effective from April 1, 1959. Basically, the adopted constitution was the same as that recommended by the Organization Study Committee. Provision was made for a "Cooperation Committee" which would be responsible for liason with the offices of the A.B.F.M.S., and conventions would be every other year instead of annually.

Under the new *Shinsei Kai* constitution provisions for programs of evangelism and leadership training were purposely omitted. Such programs would be carried out independently by the Japan Baptist Union and the *Kyodan*. Property matters were referred to the *Shadan*.

Pastors' training was referred to a special committee within Kanto Gakuin University, and each group was to assume the responsibility of providing benefits for pastors. Plans were made for continuing the "revolving fund" of the Mutual Aid Building Society, but because of the uncertainty in the future of the property question (as well as a *Shinsei Kai* deficit) it was decided in late November to discontinue the receiving of funds for this purpose. The establishing of the Old People's Home on the Kanoedai, Yokohama, property will, however, remain a cooperative enterprise of both groups. This last "annual" convention of the *Shinsei Kai* closed in a fine spirit of agreement, accomplishment, and Christian fellowship.

The first annual meeting of the Japan Baptist Union convened immediately upon the closing of the *Shinsei Kai* conference. On August 28-29, 1958, basic plans to fully implement its constitution were laid now that it had received the understanding and "approval" of the *Shinsei Kai*. Further discussion on the constitution itself was unnecessary since the constitution adopted at the Hayama meeting was not a tentative constitution. Officers for the Union were elected as follows: an *Executive Committee* consisting of four pastors (Dr. Chiba, Rev. Sawano, Rev. M. Suzuki, and Rev. Ishii), four lay persons (Mr. Shirayama, Mr. Mukotani, Mrs. Yamamoto, and Mrs. Hino), and two missionaries (Miss Post and Dr. Jennings); *heads of departments* including the General Affairs Department (Dr. Chiba), Evangelism Department (Rev. M. Sawano), Women's Department (Mrs. Hino), Youth Department (Dr. Jennings), and Treasury Department (Mr. Mukotani); a *Standing Committee* (Dr. Chiba, Mr. Mukotani, Mrs. Hino, Rev. Sugaya, and Rev. Hinchman); and the *Japanese Secretary*, Rev. Sugaya.

The Japan Baptist Union voted to apply for membership in the National Christian Council of Japan. The decision was also expressed that this body should be related to the Baptist World Alliance, but definite action to apply for membership was delayed until the relationship of the new *Shinsei Kai* to the Baptist World Alliance was clarified.

The actual implementation of a Baptist Program was delayed until April, 1, 1959, at which time the new *Shinsei Kai* constitution will go into effect. In the interim, plans will be made so that when the 1959 annual conference of the Japan Baptist Union convenes in April, 1959, it will be possible to enter immediately into a program of evangelism and Christian education.

The 1958 conference of the Union was marked by a feeling of thanksgiving and expectation. Many expressed their convictions that at last prayers had been answered and that again the Baptist witness would be used of God to reach the Japanese for the Christian faith.

The key words of the conference seem to have been *evangelism* and *stewardship*. The conference closed with a strong feeling that this *first* conference of the Japan Baptist Union would be of utmost significance in the future evangelization of Japan.

Now that the *Shinsei Kai* and the Japan Baptist Union knew where they were going, the remaining questions were only two: "What course of action would the A.B.F.M.S. and W.A.B.F.M.S. take?" and, "What would be the response of the missionaries?" The answers to these questions came in rather quick time considering the nine-year history of the problem.

On August 30, 1958, the Committee on Relations held an extended meeting with twenty-two of the thirty missionaries on the field present. After a report on the developments of the two conferences by the Field Secretary and a full discussion by all present, the Committee on Relations unanimously voted to recommend some suggestions to the Boards for consideration. These may be summarized as follows: funds should now be transferred to the Japan Baptist Union instead of the *Shinsei Kai*, missionaries should henceforth be assigned directly to the Union (but individual missionaries should be free to assist *Kyodan*-related churches, if requested), property be released to the local congregation without reference to *Kyodan* or Baptist affiliation except where conditions of the donor would prohibit this, a division in American Baptist effort should be avoided if at all possible, and that American Baptist missionaries make every possible effort to strengthen the fellowship of the two groups of Churches. This action of the Committee on Relations reflected the desires of the vast majority of the missionary fellowship (only two out of the thirty missionaries on the field registered a negative vote).

This action from the field received the immediate attention of the Boards. At meetings of the Boards on November 17-20 and December 2, 1958, the Boards issued the following statement:

The above actions make it necessary that the Boards state clearly the ways in which they will cooperate administratively with the churches in Japan in the future. The request from the missionary group will modify to some degree the Boards' policies, both in regard to administrative procedures and property. However, in the light of the relationships which the Boards have had to the churches in Japan, and the confidence which the Boards impose in them, the Overseas Committee made a recommendation which was approved, as follows:

Voted: (1) That the Boards express sincere appreciation for the Christian spirit which has prevailed in recent discussions in Japan, for the efforts to preserve and strengthen the fellowship between the *Domei* and the *Kyodan* related churches, and for the purpose to engage in certain joint projects.

(2) That the Boards recognize the newly created Japan Baptist Union as the organization through which missionary personnel will be designated and assigned with the understanding that individual missionaries will be free to cooperate with and to assist *Kyodan* related churches as may be requested. (3) That the newly created Baptist Union be recognized as the agency through which financial assistance, made available by the Boards for the churches in the Japan Baptist Union and those not officially related to the *Kyodan*, will be administered. (4) That the Boards will continue to study future administrative and financial relationships to the churches that have had an historical tie with the Baptist program but which decided to remain in the *Kyodan* and will give careful consideration to requests received, in the light of resources available. (5) That the property of the *Domei* churches and *Kyodan* churches historically related to the Baptist work and program will remain in the Japanese property holding body, the *Shadan*, for the present with the hope that as rapidly as possible such property can be transferred to the respective local congregations and organizations without reference to *Kyodan* or Baptist affiliation. (6) That the constitution of the newly organized *Shinsei Kai* will be studied as soon as possible in light of the above listed principles. (7) That in view of the challenging opportunities for presenting the Gospel and the need for a united Christian witness to millions of non-Christians in Japan, the Boards urge that all possible steps be taken to preserve the unity of purpose and fellowship among the missionaries and between the *Domei* and *Kyodan* churches and all churches within the National Christian Council in Japan.

This action of the Boards answered the two remaining questions. The final paragraph of the chapter on the post-war reorganization of churches related to the work of the American Baptists had finally been written. It is still too soon to give an accurate evaluation to the full chapter. Time may well show that it was a wise and well-written one. It is a fair evaluation to say that the churches in Japan made the ultimate decisions by themselves without pressure. The missionaries and the mission Boards waited for these churches in their Christian maturity to decide and act. Only after the churches had showed the way, did the missionaries and mission Boards make the decisions relative to themselves. As 1958 closes this chapter of our Baptist work in Japan, we are counting on the years ahead to write new and greater chapters of evangelism in all parts of Japan!