

[Summary]

Absolutes and Relativities in Christian Social Ethics: For Japanese Christianity in Times of War in the 21st Century

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Abstract

For nearly 80 years after World War II, the Church in Japan has been able to maintain the ideal of pacifism. It has been virtually assumed that if pacifism was upheld, war would not occur. However, acts of aggression can indeed happen, as witnessed in recent years.

Fortunately, post-war Japan was not subjected to any military invasions due to a combination of factors. However, Japan now finds itself in a situation where a neighbouring country has started a war and has mentioned the use of nuclear weapons. Furthermore, there are two more nuclear-armed states with dictatorial regimes located in the immediate area.

Christian theology discusses absolute matters as well as relative issues. The churches have taken a variety of positions on social ethical issues in its 2000-year history. Both the church and the state should be committed to ensuring that people's lives are protected, war is avoided, and peace is created. And they need to know what is effective for this, as a "relative issue." In order to find one's own position in anticipation of "that time," it is necessary to engage in deep theological reflection, to grasp the reality of the great evil, and to think about how to respond to it.

Is the pacifism on which the majority of Japanese churches stand steadfast? Or will it be swallowed up by public opinion, which may take a sharp turn towards realism if something happens? This essay is a theological discussion that encourages them to prepare for this. It argues that the absolute must not be relativised and the relative must not be absolutised. The Japanese Church has made such mistakes in the past. As examples, "*the Japanese Bride* incident" and "EXPO'70 issue" are discussed.