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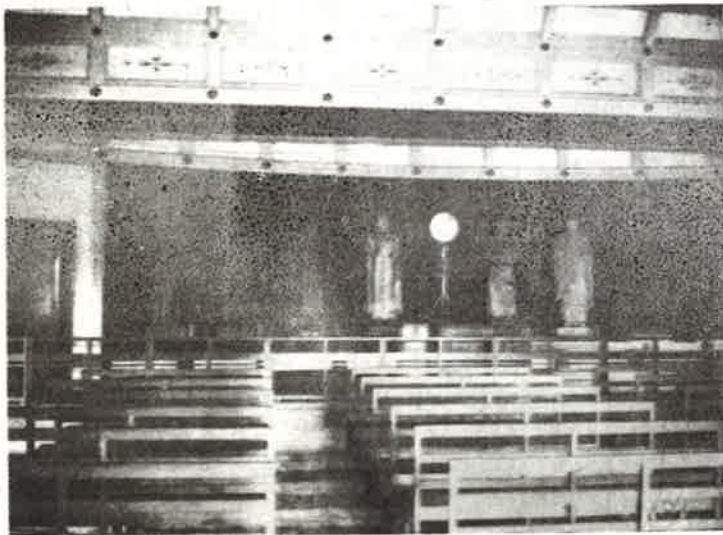
CONTRIBUTORS' BULLETIN -- DECEMBER 1967

Dear Friend:

As the Christmas Season approaches, it seems proper to give some special consideration to the meaning of this familiar festival. Sometimes "the stranger without the gate" has an intuitive appreciation for values which, for us, have become too familiar and commonplace. They say that some of our best citizens were born in other lands and have voluntarily proclaimed their allegiance to the American way of life. By the same token, there are a great many who are practicing Christianity who are still, and always will be, devout members of other faiths.

In recent years, Christmas shopping has become increasingly popular among non-Christian people throughout the world. Even in areas where Christians are comparatively few, shops and stores are doing a thriving business and members of many sects and creeds are doing their Christmas shopping early to avoid the last-minute rush. As a result of some discreet inquiries, I have gathered some interesting points of view relating to this subject, which I would like to share with you at this most appropriate time.

First of all, the life and teachings of Jesus are better known throughout the world than we might suspect. While this has not always resulted in conversion, it is safe to say that it has led to a deep respect and appreciation for the integrity of Jesus and the nobility of his doctrines. He is regarded as a holy person, dedicated to the unselfish service of humanity, and therefore worthy of respect by every honorable person.



For example, we could mention an unusual octagonal sanctuary that stands near the Sankeien Garden in Yokohama. It was built by an eminent Japanese statesman, Adachi Kenzo, and has since become the property of the nation. On my recent trip, I was able to visit this most unusual religious monument and, through good fortune, was allowed to enter even though it was temporarily closed to the public for repairs. On the second floor of the Hassei-den, as it is called, is a kind of chapel with benches for worshippers. Across the far end of the room is a raised platform, on which stand eight life-size

statues of venerated spiritual leaders. They are arranged in two groups of four, with a metal mirror on a stand between the groups. The mirror perhaps suggests Shintoism; in any event, it is supposed to symbolize Eternal Truth.



Jesus Socrates Confucius Buddha

From left to right the statues are as follows: Jesus, Socrates, Confucius, Buddha, Prince Shotoku, Kobo Daishi, and the priests Shinran and Nichiren. This altar is probably unique, so we are including two views of it herewith. For those not entirely familiar with the last four teachers mentioned, we may add that Prince Shotoku was the benevolent patron who brought Buddhism to Japan; Kobo Daishi established the esoteric Buddhism of India and China among the Japanese; Shinran was the inspired leader of the Amidist Sect, which teaches the religion of the Pure Land (Western Paradise); and Nichiren was the founder of the only Buddhist sect that was derived completely from Japanese sources.

The noble liberality represented by the Hassei-den also contributes to the Japanese attitude on Christmas shopping. Actually, any opportunity to exchange gifts is regarded with extreme favor. Christmas is only another opportunity to bring happiness to loved ones, remember friends who have performed thoughtful kindnesses for us over years of association, and most of all, it is a wonderful exercise for the soul. It invites us to develop discrimination and to select lovingly and wisely gifts that really express our deepest and most sincere affection and regard. Because of its religious overtones, Christmas is not a proper time for frantic buying or extravagant expenditures. It is a traditional exchange of meaningful symbols, according to an established ritual, and proof that we have taken time out of a busy life to perform a meaningful and gracious gesture that should bring gentle pleasure to all concerned.

The Japanese have the largest department stores in the world. They are complete cities in themselves. Some have railroad stations in the basement, several floors of shops and departments, restaurants, art galleries, museums and theaters, children's playgrounds, and on the roof, a Buddhist or Shinto sanctuary for rest and refreshment of spirit. Like our own stores, these vast establishments are crowded from morning to night, although many of the visitors have no real intention of purchasing. They are not looking for bargains, but consider the occasion a great adventure. There would be no reason, therefore, why the shopper should not follow our best Western policy. He could be overwhelmed and confused and, before the day is out, weary and foot-sore.

The real principle involves a certain amount of Zen. Quietly and calmly, and with full concentration of consciousness, he must meditate upon the exactly proper and entirely appropriate gift for that particular person. Utility is seldom the major consideration, as this might subtly imply that we feel the recipient cannot supply his own needs. According to the subtle etiquette of the Far East, this would be a serious faux pas. On a spiritual occasion, it is better to bring nourishment to the soul. We must prove beyond all doubt that we have an inner realization of the heart and mind of our friend or relative. Toys and bright gadgets are appropriate for children, but to bestow them upon an adult is far from flattering; it would suggest we regard him as immature. To give an expensive present to a person of limited means is the worst of

bad taste, because it places him under an obligation that may cause him embarrassment. This is bad enough, but it further reveals our own lack of discrimination.

Symbolism often suggests the perfect gift. Even to give a small child a lovely book of classical poetry which he cannot possibly read, testifies that we have complete faith that the little one, when he grows up, will love great literature and appreciate noble sentiments. There is a story of a young woman who brought her aged father a small dwarf tree. Of course, he immediately realized the meaning -- such trees grow very slowly and require many years of care. It was her way of wishing him long life and expressing her conviction that he would live a long time to care for the precious tree. There is also the story of a young Japanese businessman who received, as a Christmas present, a year's subscription to the "New York Times." This was a magnificent gesture, in view of the fact that the young man could not read a word of English. It implied that he would soon become a linguist and would appreciate this coverage of world news.



Such procedures would exhaust the contemplative powers of most Westerners; but there is a valid principle that is especially appropriate to the Christmas Season. Instead of regarding an exchange of presents as a dismal duty or as a needless expense, consider the occasion one valuable for the development of insight. Our efforts might not always be appreciated, but we can try sincerely to contribute something meaningful and inspirational to our friends. This is not a pagan Roman festival with its excesses and dissipations; it is based on the most sacred occurrence in the Christian world -- the birth of the Messiah. The realization of this overtone of spiritual significance should never be forgotten and, when buying gifts or wrapping them, or receiving presents from others, the principal concern is the love and fellowship in our own hearts. If these are absent, it may truly be said that the gift without the giver is no part of the Christmas Mystery.

In these trying times, when there is so much confusion in the world, we hope that each of you will have a very wise and kindly Christmas, seeking to find expression during this season for that love and understanding which will preserve the spiritual meaning of Christmas with its promise of final peace and brotherhood.

Always most sincerely,

Marilyn P. Hall

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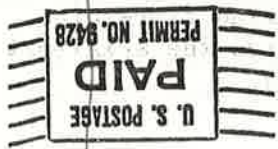
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*Merry Christmas
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