

How Christians Responded to the East Japan Earthquake: Voices from Leaders of Christian Denominations and Local Churches Who Were in Charge of the Disaster Relief Administration.

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Research Context

March 11, 2011, the earthquake created a massive tsunami which caused tremendous damage in the Tohoku and Kanto regions. It also caused the Fukushima Daiichi nuclear plant disaster. The Fukushima Daiichi nuclear plant disaster caused damage beyond the scale of any natural disaster. Relief teams were immediately sent by administrations, volunteer organizations, and notably, from the Christian community. It has been a year since the incident, and in order to decide the future activities, it is important to summarize what the churches have done thus far. The activities of each church are highly diverse and because many churches have done relief simultaneously, it is impossible to report every activity. In order to capture a general view, interviews were done with Christian leaders of several Christian denominations which could be taken as representative examples of the disaster relief.

Those interviewees are leaders of United Church of Christ in Japan, Japan Baptist Convention (JBC), Southern Baptist Convention, Japan Baptist Church Association, Japan Baptist Union, Japan Alliance Christ Church, Japan Holiness Church, and Japan Assemblies of God. These denominations actively organized their relief teams, and their leaders have been directly involved in administration of relief activities. Interviews were usually one-on-one, but there were cases where an on-sight coordinator joined the conversation. Each interview was about an hour long and the interview was conducted using a rough interview guide asking about their experiences and opinions of this disaster relief effort. The interview was conducted from January 2012 to early May 2012. All the interviews were recorded with an IC recorder.¹

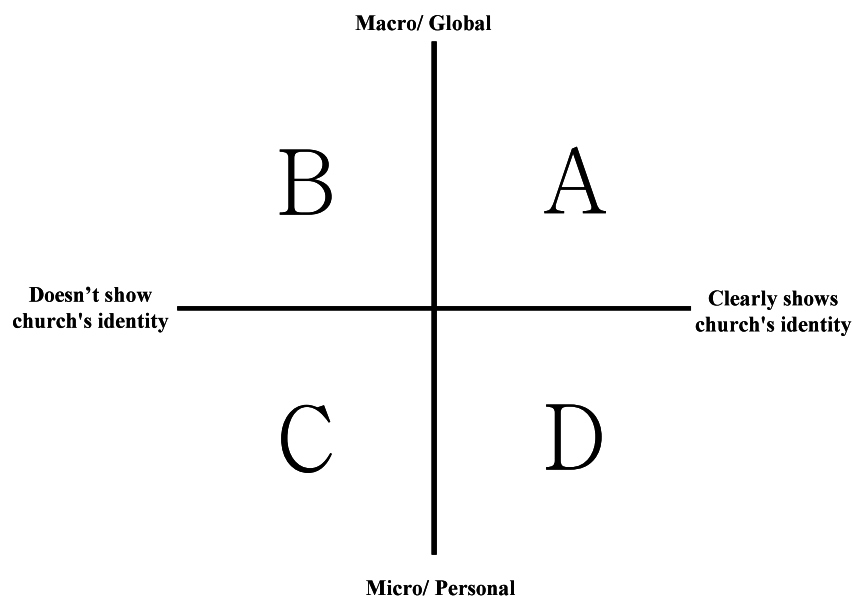
Regarding JBC, we asked not only the leader of the convention, but also the Evangelism Pastor of Tokyo Baptist Church (TBC) which is a member of JBC. I interviewed the pastor of TBC also because their activities were unique and independently done from JBC.

¹Only exception is Southern Baptist Convention. Interview was made in July, 2011 and recorded in field notes.

Defining Four categories

Groups were categorized into four groups. The vertical axis indicates the groups whose interest in social issues is global or micro. Global interest is defined by the fact that the group sent protest notes to the government, or gave public warnings that March 11th was a divine punishment for the decadence and idolatry of Japan. The groups which have global interest have tendency for the relationship with the victims to be distant. To the contrary, micro interest is the type of people who decide on a particular community and commit to that community, making a personal relationship with those in the community and providing relief. Whether a church belongs to the global interest or micro interest was decided by the answer to the question “Does your group send the government protest notes, or do lecture meetings on the nuclear problem?” This categorization may determine if the group is distant with the victims or the group has a personal relationship.

The horizontal axis indicates the groups’ opinion toward evangelism. There are groups which evangelize boldly, clearly proclaiming about repentance and salvation to the people in the affected areas. At the same time, there are groups which only show Christ’s love in a loving manner and do not evangelize at all. One group suggests that their spoken messages are more valuable, and others seem to place more value in their activities. This category was made by asking the question in the interview, “Does your group evangelize verbally, stating the importance of repenting of sin and believing in Christ during the relief effort?”



The four categories are below: Type A(First Quadrant): Group that emphasizes Divine Judgment and seeks repentance of people, but it is not done in a personal relationship but by public words as a proclamation. The people who need to repent are the Japanese citizens and rulers who are responsible for the morally corrupt culture. As an example, *Christian Shinbun* (Christian Newspaper) reported the fact that the members of heretical groups which come from Germany went to churches in Tokyo, Osaka, and stricken areas, and even refuge camps, and confused the scene. They declared “This Disaster is the punishment by God,” “Punishment is the love of God,” and “Christians who do not speak of the punishment will be punished” during sermons and after they finished their speech they left.² However, no church from Type A was available to be interviewed for this research. Type B(Second Quadrant): Like A, type B is global but is more interested in social-political issues, and they protest toward the government and government agencies. This group is more interested in public speeches and symposiums rather than having personal relationships with the victims. Type C(Third Quadrant):Spends time with the victims and supports them mentally and physically while avoiding verbally sharing the gospel. Type D(Fourth Quadrant): Like Type A, they put forth their religious identity but the method is more personal and they support the victims personally.

Even though they were categorized, the categories do not indicate that Type B does not do food distribution or mental care. Type D not only does evangelism but it also supports them with necessary goods. Also, we see that as time progresses, Type C becomes more like Type D, and Type B becomes more like Type C.

Also, the categorization is not done by overall assessment of the group, but by interviewing an individual. Also, for the sake of anonymity, each group is not named but labeled with their category and if there is more than one group in the category, it is numbered(Example B-1, B-2, C-1,C-2, and so on). If there is more than one interviewee from a certain group, the interviewee is recognized by labeling in the following way (B-1-1,B-1-2).

Process of the Disaster Relief

After the confusion caused by March 11th, each church started its relief activities from scratch. Most groups first inquired about the safety of related churches in the Tohoku area. While information was still confused, some pastors went to the

² 「注意。『神のさばき』『あなたの罪のせい』主張のグループに被災地困惑」
<http://jpnews.org/pc/modules/mysection/item.php?itemid=223>

disaster area to see first hand what was going on. A pastor in Type B talked about their first time trip, saying, “We went to northern Japan via Route 6. The opposite lane was crowded with cars of victims going south for refuge. The press propagating that volunteers should not go to the disaster area and there were voices from our group that going to the disaster area would just cause annoyance but when we got there, there were so many things to do that they would borrow the hand of a cat” (B-1).

The churches in the disaster area were in deeper confusion. A pastor from Type C said, “In the midst of all that was happening, we had no clue to what was going on. News came in a couple of days after the occurrence. It was as if we were being tossed around by a monster or a giant. It took till midnight to confirm our church members’ safety and taking the childcare children to their parents. Many have died from my local community. It was time of confusion and stress” (C-1).

The Fukushima nuclear disaster added another layer of confusion. Type D who sent supplies to Iwaki district said, “While we had no information, we wore radiation exposure meters when going to churches in the affected area. The churches we visited did not know about the radiation. We were worried about radiation exposure and everybody was tense”(D-1). Even outside of Fukushima prefecture, the affected area could not get accurate information so everything was confused. “The information about Onagawa(nuclear site) was a threat for us. We could only get fragmented information regarding Fukushima. There were false rumors that this area was also dangerous because of the Fukushima nuclear explosion. There were rumors that the Self Defense Force actually didn’t come to our area and this means we were in reality abandoned. When we got an e-mail from overseas, all it said was “Evacuate!.” The mood was intense, and it continued like that until June”(C-1).

In such confusion, many Christian groups quickly established headquarters for Tohoku disaster relief. They received funding from their local churches and sent information, relief supplies, and volunteer workers to the disaster areas. In the earlier stage, information gathering and relief activities were done within the same denomination, but eventually, activities were taken collectively beyond the boundary of denominations. In creating a network beyond denominations, leaders from Type B said that “Face book and Twitter became a very powerful tool, and a pastors’ network from a seminary allowed the network to happen” (B-1),

In some cases, the postmortem examination of Great Hanshin Earthquake was effectively used. “We regret that following the Great Hanshin Earthquake, we did activities only within our denomination. We thought there is a need to act beyond denominations. So we created new relief support manuals and sent them to all local

churches in our denomination showing the need to help the churches outside of own denomination. Thus, we were able to react quickly compared to before.” the leader of Type C said (C-2-1).

The primary action taken by the churches was supplying food and necessities to the shelters. When Christian NGOs entered the affected area, a number of churches and Christian denominations supported them by sending volunteers. Churches in the affected area offered beds, housings, and even office rooms to help volunteer workers.

As the season approached summer, relief moved from shelters to temporary housings. At the same time, necessities of those whose house was still usable became evident. As roads were fixed and logistics for food was restored, support moved from food distribution to debris removal and restoring broken buildings. As the end of summer came near, those activities started to settle also and activities moved onto hand massage, counseling, and helping children’s education. The support moved from material supply to mental care. Entering year 2012, the number of volunteers within the country and overseas decreased and support changed from immediate help to long term support. In the midst of this change, churches must think over the way they are going to continue support from now on.

Encounters with The People

The leader of Type B considered their support as “restoring a relationship with God”, “restoring relationships between people,” and “restoring a relationship with the people facing inconveniences because of the nuclear power plant”(B-2-1). They went to the affected area in order to “Serve Jesus Christ and serve people in need. Jesus Christ was already at work so we went to find Jesus.” He also says, “We went to confirm Jesus’ presence in the affected area”(B-2-1). “We are not going to go to pity the victims but by restoring our relationship with the victims, we wanted to change our lives. We should discover the best way to live in Tokyo (where the earthquake did not directly hit”(B-2-1). As we saw, the motivation for the support was not only serving people but also the opportunity for self-examination as Christians.

When I asked, “Which Bible verse has the most significant meaning when doing relief activities?” an interviewee in Type B responded saying, “(Jesus) first felt the pain of man and wept. He took the same action (as the victims) and prayed to God. Thus, Jesus’ prayer resonated with the people”(B-2-1), A different leader from the same group referred to Acts 27, saying. “Even after a ship wreck, Paul believed without any evidence that he would arrive at some island. This caught my eye. He wanted to

encourage and cheer up the people who were in anxiety. We want our works to be like that”(B-2-2).

As we saw, this Type emphasizes the fact that during their relief activities, they stand beside the victims and share their pain. Also, for all the interviews with Type B, I felt that they were having a more macro view than a personal relationship with the victims. When they talked about the relationship with the victims, they said, “The early honeymoon stage continued, but we realized that every time we went to the area, the community leader was exhausted.” The leadership that they had supported became detested by their group. They realized with regret that “Because we supported the community leaders, we have destroyed the community,” They also said “We realized that the fishing villages were rivals”(B-2-2), The view of this group does not focus on having a personal relationship but rather it focuses on investigating the dynamics of the entire community.

Type B considers physical support as one of their many activities. “March 11th relief should end and end early. We need to make a situation so that relief would be unnecessary and then we would be able to support people with other needs such as the homeless. But homeless support is also coming to an end since administrations are doing more. Then we would find something else to do, such as making something new; Then we would handover the job to non-Christians and start praying for the next group of people that needs healing”(B-3), These words basically sum up Type B’s opinion. A leader in Type B said that they “tried to go to different places in order to have a big perspective” and “Changed partner organizations often”(B-1), However, this kind of strategy seems to reduce their opportunity for building personal relationships. In fact, B-1 said, “Because we decided to go to any place that asked for help, there were many places we went only once, so in many cases we couldn’t make deep human relationships with the people in communities because we could not go there again.”

When type B groups meet victims, they try to be thoughtful of their privacy. They kept rules like “No cameras,” or “Do not ask too many questions and listen to what they have to say.” They would not instigate talk because “We didn’t want to remind them of their shocking memories”(B-2-1), Almost all church relief workers tried to be considerate of this point, but when it is taken too far, volunteers are unable to talk with the victims and church relief becomes bystanders carrying supplies.

In contrast, Type C leader talked about a more personal relationship with the victims. “In the early stage there was a personal encounter. A child was talking with a person, smiling for the first time since the disaster and the mother was grateful” (C-3). Such experience directed their further support. C-3 says, “Because of the

mother's request, our group put an emphasis on child support and educational support."

The project leader of the church in Type D also spoke of a personal experience. "I said 'Hello' to every one and shook hands. To people in hardship I could not say 'How do you do?' but to ladies I said 'You are lovely', 'You look wonderful', 'How old are you?', 'You look young' and we were able to make them start giggling. I did not ask about tsunami but I took hands of those in the food distribution lines and prayed. Our church members gave a short Bible speech there. The member said 'We are from a Church. We want to begin this food distribution with prayer' and nobody was adverse to it"(D-1). He also said, "Our group actively spoke about the gospel and in May 2011, one of the victims became a believer and as people were waiting in the food distribution line, within the debris, the baptism was done."(D-1)

Different Approaches toward Evangelism

It was February 2012 when I interviewed B-2-1, and B-2-1 thought handing out evangelism tracts was too early. He said "I saw volunteers from missions overseas handing out evangelism tracts and I thought it was wrong to do that." He thinks that "giving a Bible with food is taking advantage of their weakness. We don't want to be seen as though we are taking advantage; we want to draw close to the victims and evangelize through understanding their pain."

C-3 and his on-sight coordinator think the same as B-2. He wants to "Show his Christian lifestyle and belief at the affected area and support them by showing an example." In other words it means "walking together." He emphasizes the fact that, "They want the victims to recover" and "We are not leading them because they are the protagonists."(C-3) We could see from those words that they don't want to make their faith something absolute.

Considering evangelism strategy of Type B and Type C, they take a similar basic stance. The leader in Type B says "They do not want to cultivate a church in the affected area"(B-1), Another leader of Type B claims that "Churches should occur naturally"(B-2-1), In the same way, Type C does not work actively in forming churches. "There were not too many situations where we became close with the people of the area. Rather, we want the churches located in the area to become close with the people of the district. We are going to withdraw in two years so we don't want to evangelize there. If the people ask 'Why are you here?' we may say 'because we are Christians' but our policy is not propagation of our faith. Also, the churches in the area told us not to evangelize people there"(C-2-1). Another leader of the same denomination says "We do not evangelize. If they ask for the gospel we would love to teach them, but the

importance is working diligently without words. We consider our activity as planting seeds for the future”(C-2-2),

Avoiding evangelism was completely nailed down for some groups of type B and type C. For example, if there were supplies with cards written with scriptures, the order was to take them off before handing supplies to the victims. In some cases such a decision was made by the field coordinator (B-2-1). In other cases they did it because it was part of a directive from an alliance group (C-2-1). A leader said “The word, “Easter,” on an Easter egg is a Christian term so we took the words off and simply give them as boiled eggs”(C-2-2).

In contrast, Type D says “Now is the time to start churches since the door will be closed in a short time” and showed his strong determination to start a new church in disaster area. Another leader in Type D also said “From the beginning we were considering evangelism. We were planning that the support centers were to become evangelism centers eventually”(D-3). D-3 added, “When we first arrived, I introduced myself as a Christian but I was unable to evangelize at that time. But after we built personal relationships, we started getting opportunities for evangelism. After half a year, our monthly food distribution center became something like a Christian house church”(D-3). And D-3 said “After we built relationships with hand massages, I asked if we could meet again and invited people to the church”(D-3). Another leader in Type D said, “From the beginning the idea was to take the gospel along with supplies”(D-1). “By September, we made it clear that we were going to evangelize while doing hand massages and we gave the volunteers evangelism training. However, the shelter had no negative feelings about our change to evangelism. From the beginning evangelism with words and support was a set and it was easy to make the change. Currently we have 20 new believers, and we hold services at the local meeting place,” D-1 says.

Type D seems to differ significantly from Type B and Type C but as we continued the interview, it became obvious that even though Type B and Type C decided not to evangelize, when they were given the opportunity to evangelize, they embraced it with joy. When they went to the victims with Christmas presents, they were asked by the victims, “Because you are with us always and since you are Christians, we want to hear a story from the Bible.” At a different opportunity the victims told them “I believe in the God you believe in.” Members of Type B are happy to hear those confessions from the victims(B-2-1). This is the same as members of Type D. Type D groups emphasize evangelism but the opportunity is scarce while they serve among the temporary housing. One day because of rain it became difficult to do the planned mud

raking so the leader of the temporary housing said, "Since we cannot mud rake, we want to hear about your faith" and the volunteers were overjoyed that they could comply with their wish(D-1). As I pointed out, the two groups have different stances toward evangelism but each finds joy in the same experience.

Also, right after the March 11th disaster, most churches were hesitant to evangelize but gradually they became freer in speaking of the God they believe in. A pastor in the affected area said, "People asked, 'Are you doing this support for evangelism?' and I would like to answer, 'Yes, we want you to believe in Christ.' but I feared they will reject the message and I was unable to do so. I pondered what 'supporting for evangelism' was as we carried on with the relief activities. Now I can answer that we are not doing this for evangelism but we are doing relief because God gives us refuge and we want to do the same for others. Now a year has passed and there are more opportunities to share the gospel directly. At first I did not know the relationship between the relief activity and evangelism so I was troubled. Now when I meet new people I can say 'God has blessed me and I am thankful so I am doing this relief. It is not 'to convert the people'. The importance is 'why.' 'To make others believe' or 'Because of what drives us' is a big difference"(C-1).

Operation with other religions

Different opinions and attitudes were observed among Denominations concerning working together with other religions (especially with Buddhism). These differences were observed especially in incidents relating to the treatment of the dead. Considering a relationship with Buddhists, Type B took partnership, Type C was ambivalent, and type D refused partnership with Buddhists.

The leader in Type B said, "90 percent of the citizens in this area are Buddhists. Thus, Buddhist funeral should be provided. While we pray together with people from other beliefs, we need to present how Christians pray. When we were holding emotional counseling at a crematory there were some people who asked for us to pray, and we delightedly answered their request"(B-2-1). Another interviewee in Type B said "Any religion needs an answer to the problem of death. When we go to the affected areas they may ask, "Who are you?" If we tell them, "We are Christians, "they do not know what Christianity is and it would be pointless to tell them that their religion is wrong"(B-1).

Another leader in Type B talks of pity towards the dead and said, "We ponder that maybe the weakest and most brought down low are the dead under the pile

of rubbles. We wanted to at least cover their bodies."³ There are also tactical reasons why they focus on cremation. The leader in Type B said, "What we worried about was that people might commit suicide to follow the dead relatives, due to lack of care for the dead."(B-3) ⁴

Type C said that as a church it is difficult to work together with Buddhists but as an individual he/she would like to have partnerships with other religions. According to the leader, a relief Christmas party was held by Catholics, Protestants, and a Buddhist group working together and the Buddhist priest helped the Christmas party by wearing a Santa's costume. However, the leader said, "As a single church we might be able to work together with other religious groups but at the denominational level it would be difficult"(C-3). Another leader in Type C said, "I wondered how 'Tomurai' (burial condolences) matches the Christian worldview but if it's cremation, it makes sense and we could help them out. There was a time where a church member's mother died, and there were many corpses at the morgue. We saw so many dead bodies that my heart ached. When I asked the undertaker if I could pray for the dead as a pastor, the undertaker thanked me. We were giving words of comfort. We don't offer weddings for non-believers but we can do funerals because anybody wants to be vitalized by God"(C-3). In these words we can see the feeling that they want to be involved in funerals for unbelievers although they have some strangeness in their words. Also, I heard cases where the Christians were asked to look for mortuary tablets. An interviewee in Type C did not reject their request. He said, "We never said, 'We can't help you because we are Christian. We believe that searching for their Buddhist altar would connect to evangelism. This volunteer work may bring an evangelistic opportunity in the future"(C-2-1). We see that to build relationships they acknowledge any effort as a support and do whatever is requested.

Type D agrees that they would not work together with other religions. "We have not worked with other religions and we didn't even think about it. We can't see the point of working with other religions" says interviewee D-1. I asked about cremation and he answered, "The dead are already dead. Rather than focusing on the dead we want to work together with the living and support them in other ways"(D-1). Contrary to Type B who says "We ponder that maybe the weakest and most brought down low are the dead under the pile of rubbles," Type D wants to care for the living.

However, even in Type D there is a case in which they did not completely

³This comment is cited not from the interview with B-3 but from his words seen on his church's website.

⁴Ibid.

block out other religions. D-2 said "When the community leader realized that they were making the Christian volunteers clean the Buddhist temple for the *Obon* festival, he apologized for making Christians do such a thing. Then we answered that we came as volunteers and your job is our job. He was very grateful. That is what we wanted and building a relationship is the key"(D-2). But at the same time D-1 did not agree with D-2. We asked interviewee D-1, "What would you do if you were asked to search for Buddhist altars and to clean the temple?" and he answered, "Idol worship is not Biblical so we would explain carefully and would decline the request."

Relation with the Government Arm

In order to support Tohoku efficiently it is necessary to work together with the government branches. Most organizations worked as a volunteer organization that responded to the request by the prefecture and municipal governments, doing distribution of materials, mental care, and debris removal. Also, organizations that worked with the government were able to attend meetings that allowed them to collect information. But it was obvious that as a religious organization, there were restrictions when working with the government. One pastor said "I know it is difficult for the local government to collaborate with religious groups who are beyond their responsibility. So I made a disaster relief NGO which is independent from my church and entered the community saying my organization is just a disaster relief organization"(C-1).

Government branches responded differently about Christian organizations doing relief work. "In one relief site, religious organizations were banned because there was a church that suddenly came in and started handing out tracts. In such places there was tension but, on the contrary, there were relief camps that said "Churches do an awesome job for us" and were very welcoming"(C-1). As church group worked together with the government, their support activities diversified. B-2-1 said "We worked with a local council of social welfare. The officers asked us to confirm that our purpose was not religious propagation. So we tried not to give them any trouble." Groups from Type B and Type C which only did volunteer activities followed the instruction of the government and they went to temporary housing and evacuation sites that were officially registered, but type D went to places that the government did not reach, like people who lived in houses hit by the tsunami, living in the habitable second floor since the first floor was damaged (Since these people decided to stay in the affected site, they did not get support from the government). Type D's basic strategy was to search for acquaintances of church members who were hit by the tsunami and laying a

stronghold with them and sending support teams there. With that activity, they would build relationships with the leader of the site, and with the support of the leaders, they would do food distribution and material distribution (D-3). D-1 who worked in Ishinomaki built a relationship with the site leader who was an apartment owner, and in order to help him, they rebuilt his apartment and held worship there with the people of the district.

But some groups who pushed on with evangelism were not accepted by the council of social welfare and they were not able to expand their activity and would only be able to do activity at certain areas. D-1 wanted to do support work for people who evacuated from Fukushima but because they were slow in submitting their application and since they were a Christian organization, they were not allowed to have personal contact with the people and all they were able to do was give a donation to the city. On the contrary D-3 already had a relationship with a public facility. When refugees came they were able to start support at that evacuation site smoothly. They built relationships with the people at the site and when some people were ready to leave the site, they were able to hand some support materials as a personal gift.

Theological Prospect

One thing that aroused my interest was the fact that a type D would take their theology as it is but Type B and C seem to try to critically evaluate their own theology. First, Type B and C tend to reconsider the traditional ways of their own evangelism. As a matter of fact, all groups in Type C are Evangelicals but they want to overcome their mindset on evangelism. One of the interviewees said, "At the time of the Hanshin Great Earthquake my denomination could not make any effective disaster relief. Through learning The Lausanne Covenant, we realized that we need to change our structure through a holistic way"(C-2-1). C-3 said, "I was thinking of the relationship between evangelism and relief activity while I was doing relief. And I concluded that I did not want to use one for the sake of other. I want to make something beyond traditional evangelism which only focuses on God, sin, and forgiveness"(C-3). These ideas become evident when they are doing actual relief work. "When we consider what we could do for the public, we need to reconsider our view on salvation. A man attacked by a burglar was saved by a Samaritan who is gentile. For a Jew that was an unbelievable story. When we were doing relief work, we saw non-Christians doing better service than Christians. When we think of this, as Christians I want to be more humble in doing my work"(C-3). Type C pastors quote The Good Samaritan(Luke 10:30-37) and Jesus saying in verse 37 "Go do likewise".

Type C seems to be attracted by active evangelism in contrast to traditional evangelism only by word. When C-3 says, “I want to be the Good Samaritan, and God’s love is there,” he may think that the ultimate purpose in evangelism which is accepted by people is action. In short, Type C tries to define Christian by a functional definition based on the social component which consists of social interaction, not by a substantive definition based on the ideational component which consists of belief and doctrine.⁵

Secondly they want to treat non-Christians fairly. A Type B Church leader said about their experience of the Hanshin Earthquake, “Back then, we used our church as a refugee camp accepting victims but we did not evangelize the refugees since we thought it would be taking advantage over them. We started evangelism only when they could go back to their homes”(B-2-1).

Type B logically concludes that they should show respect for others’ beliefs, and not evangelize non-believers aggressively, which is a line that type C pastors would not cross. B-3, after considering their activity at the Hanshin Earthquake said “When Korean missionaries went to Kobe, their forceful methods caused confusion in the affected area. Koreans have a monotheistic background so they do not feel quirky about religions going against each other. On the contrary, Japanese culture is influenced by a syncretistic fusion of Shintoism and Buddhism, so Japanese people value harmony. They become intimidated by competitive arguments and even become aggressive against the exclusive religions. But when they see harmony among religions they value it. When we collaborated with Buddhist priests to have a cafe for the refugees, we introduced the Buddhist priest when the people wanted to hear Buddhist sermons. The Buddhist priest also told them, ‘The Christian pastor also has good stories to tell’ and he introduced me. We lose when we fight each other, but when we show harmony we gain”(B-3). I asked B-3 if there is a line of defense that he cannot retreat as a Christian and he answered, “I take a position of agnosticism. I told a Buddhist priest, ‘Although I don’t know what enlightenment you have, I respect you’”(B-3). Also on his website he shows his own standpoint. According to his article on the website, an Anglican patriarch visited Sendai in June, 2011, and preached, “There are many people who don’t know church and who don’t have Christian friends. When such people died, Christians have to clearly say to their relatives, ‘OK. They are in heaven now’. In this way the true faith is tested now.” I asked B-3, “What do you

⁵This kind of idea was already found in traditional Japanese theology. For example, in his work, *Daihyoteki Nihonjinn* [Representative Men of Japan](koudan-sya, 2002), Kanzo Uchimura tries to find that an essence of Christian life was vital in actions of Japanese non-Christians who could not become Christian because of historical and cultural restriction

think about that idea?. He replied to me, “It is wonderful.” B-3 is studying the theology of Forsyth in order to reevaluate purgatory which “Modern Christian Theology has forsaken.”

After the Interview

After March 11th, many Japanese churches have entered the affected area with integrity and did relief work. We found through this research that there are many churches that decided not to do evangelism. Some pastors say, “We don’t want it to seem as though we came here just to evangelize”(B-2-1) and other says, “We did not come here for commerce, we are not thinking about getting church members”(B-3). This idea has been evident not only to social gospel groups but also to evangelical groups. I understand that through The Lausanne Covenant, Evangelicals have started thinking about social responsibilities in evangelism, but they will be using the practices of social gospel groups if they do that. There are several reasons affecting this. There are cases that the church was small and when they worked with Christian NGO’s they were asked not to evangelize and they followed that request(C-2-2). C-3 said, “We think that normal people may think ‘Christians are gathering only by their group’”(C-3) and does not want to display their faith too strongly in order not to be considered strange. He also said “We want to work with the local government and make our activities known”(C-3). As a group works closely together with government agencies, they would have to mute their religious nature. In such situations, it becomes more important for evangelicals to synthesize social ministry with evangelism through words. Unless they do so, the Japanese Christianity would lose its diversity and head the same direction as non-Christian groups.

When I review the interview, I could see the process of privatization occurring in Japan. Privatization denoted here is a term in the sociology of religion meaning “The process by which certain institutional spheres (including religion) become removed from effective roles in the public sphere.”⁶ There seem to be two directions in the process of privatization in Japan. One, like seen in type D, separates from the government and focuses on personal faith and mental care and reduces their activity domain. For example, D-1 was not able to work with the local council of social welfare since they wanted to evangelize, and then they had to stay away from the domain where the government agency had influence. D-1 went looking for areas that had receptivity to the gospel and focused on such an area. Their activity was private and considering

⁶Meredith B. McGuire, *Religion: The Social Context*, (Belmont, CA: Wadsworth Publishing Company, 1997), 58 and 315.

society as a whole, their impact and influence was limited. The other direction is seen in type B, which diminishes their voice and faith in order to work with the pluralistic society and other religions. In other words, when they pursue this direction, they would become religiously invisible, losing their uniqueness.⁷ They are given the opportunity to work with people in many areas but their activity becomes basically the same as those done by non-religious groups. They are unable to show their own Christian identity to the public.

As for type C, they are timid about voicing their religious belief and they accept the society the way it is and, like type B, push forward the process of privatization. Also they avoid social activities at macro level and focus on personal relationships. They emphasize the privatization process done by type D as well. Privatization continues without any barriers in the way, and Christianity has lost its role in the society. What is now wanted from Christianity is only hand massage and counseling.

Given these positions and ideas, I would like to conclude this report with one case study a group has experienced. This is an experience of Type C-1. After the earthquake, the church first started giving well water that was drawn from a church member's home to neighbors. First they were going to share the water only with church members but they eventually gave it away to non-Christians as well. They first feared the well would run dry, but the church member said "If the well water was going to run dry, just let it" and the church agreed to do so. When they started giving the water away to the community, the well did not run dry, but actually water started to well up in it.

The local senate heard that the churches were giving away materials and the pastor and the senators went to Minami-Sanrikucho for inspection. When they talked with the victims they started hearing about the income of the victims. They wondered if they could provide some manual piecework that they could do at home, mainly for the wives. The victims of the area not only were hit but were isolated and had nothing to do. The church decided that they could provide a place for communication and active work for them. They thought leatherworking would be easy to start, so the church and the victims worked together to develop products and find sales methods. The senators they met were involved as well. Currently there are 10 leatherworkers. The people of the region would talk about this process with tears in their eyes and by Christmas in 2011, the locals were able to have a good community

⁷This phenomenon can be observed not only in Christianity but also in Buddhism. I learned this through the interview with B-3.

relationship with the church members. C-1 says that “We focus on building the community through working together along with making leatherwork products.” He says that “Among us there no boundaries between supporters and users. Church members and victims are one as fellow workers. We are one team working on the same project with one goal”(C-1). C-1 desires to start a church at Minami-Sanrikucho in the future. Currently they are working at Ozika peninsula to help the fishermen farm fish.

C-1 says that “As we get involved in the Tohoku region, we are not focusing on evangelizing individuals but the entire community.” At the same time, they were careful with timing. One way was in making their boundaries clear. C-1 said, “We would not do relief work on Sunday morning, and it was important for them to understand our position”.

As we could see here, Type C mixes type D and type B in a way since they value personal relationships and clearly communicate their identity yet support a community basis of living at a macro level. It is important that such work was done by an evangelical church. This support work has deepened the support work done by other churches, and such work should be the key to stop the privatization in Japan.

Appendix

It is obvious that it is important to include the voices of the victims in this report. We did indeed get some voices for certain groups but we could not get a comprehensive report from the victims. It is inappropriate to take only a few groups' opinion which relate to a certain Christian group's relief activities. It may create a lack of objectivity in this report. Thus, unfortunately in this report, the voices of the victims are not represented.