Christian Pacifism and Conscientious Objection in Japan, Part II -Ishiga Osamu-

【Articles】

Christian Pacifism and Conscientious Objection in Japan, Part II: Ishiga Osamu *

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Abstract:

This is the second of a two-part article that examines how Christian pacifism in Japan encouraged and set a limit on opposition to war in general and conscientious objection in particular at the turn of the twentieth century through WWII. Following an examination of one of the most prominent Christian pacifists of the nation, Uchimura Kanzo, in Part I, the second part focuses on one of the very rare conscientious objectors during WWII, Ishiga Osamu. The sources consulted are all primary: essays, articles, a diary, and a memoir, written by them, all published in Japanese. By interpreting the subjective meaning of war, peace, and conscientious objection, this article finds that Christian pacifism played an ambiguous role in opposition to war in Japan: on the one hand, the pacifists' reading of the Bible—especially the idea of nonresistance—provided a solid spiritual foundation for their belief and action; on the other hand, however, their overly religious interpretations of war and peace limited their ideas of war objection to develop fully. The limitation could be better understood as a part of the way war objection existed in the totalitarian society.

Keywords: Christian pacifism; conscientious objection; the Japanese society, 1905-1945

In Part I, we reviewed Uchimura Kanzo's view on war, peace, and conscientious objection, and saw how his Christian pacifism became the basis and the limitation of his objection to war.[1] Whereas Uchimura's firm belief in nonresistance made him an exceptional opponent of war, his overly religious interpretations of world affairs—with "God's blessing" and the "Second Coming"—did limit his understanding of the making, and unmaking, of war, and the role of conscientious objectors in particular. In addition, Uchimura's sense of national identity is rather unique among Christian pacifists in the United States; his strong and passionate attachment to the country of Japan hindered his pacifism from detaching clearly the authority of this world from that of God. Here in Part II, we shall investigate one of the rare conscientious objectors during the Asia-Pacific War, Ishiga Osamu (1910-1994). Unlike Uchimura's time, by the 1930s and the 1940s, public criticism of war was impossible; public opposition to war unthinkable.

* I would like to thank Prof. Brett Davies for reviewing an entire manuscript.

1 Moroi (2017).

Then, how could he hold on to his Christian pacifism to become a conscientious objector? How did he see the war-making state, Imperial Japan, and understand his relation to it? And finally, how did his Christian pacifism set a limit to his objection to war?[2]

I. Ishiga Osamu's Conscientious Objection during WWII

A few months after the bombing of Pearl Harbor, Ishiga started mentioning conscientious objection to war in his diary.[3] Then a thirty-two year old, recovering from long illnesses, he had little chance of induction sometime soon; but his concern was to become a part of the war, whether in the home front or on the battlefield. He could successfully avoid an annual roll call for the military with a doctor's note at that time; however, the following year, in 1943, Ishiga made up his mind to declare his conscientious objection openly by surrendering himself to the Military Police, rather than attending or evading the roll call. In a way it was a draft resistance. His direct action put him in jail for about four months before he changed his mind to agree to serve in the military—as a medic, if he could be given a choice.

A counterpart in the United States might have been granted a CO status (I-A-O) by the government; Ishiga, while he heard about cases of conscientious objectors overseas, was in Imperial Japan where there was no legal framework for such dissenters of rare occurrence. He characterized his change of mind as "conversion," dropping out of war resistance, not fully a conscientious objector of his imaging. Being surrounded by few who could understand his position, Ishiga had to struggle himself to uphold it. His awareness of death, his frequent mention of it in his diary, is unique and rarely seen in the experience of American conscientious objectors. But that was a reality of becoming a war objector in the totalitarian state.

There are three sources that made Ishiga a conscientious objector: his passion for Esperanto and humanism; his association with an international antiwar organization, the War Resisters' International (WRI); and his faith in Christianity. All of these helped him see the war

2 For an obvious reason, not very many systematic—analytic or interpretive or both—studies have been conducted on the subject of Christian pacifism and conscientious objection in Japan. The absence of religious (Christian)—still less secular—antiwar organizations made the war protest and resistance more scattered to rare and isolated individual endeavor. There might have been a number of unreported and lesser-known instances of Christian conscientious objectors, the existence of which was known only among the local congregation and authority (see, for example, Abe [1969], pp. 156-157). One of the unique cases with a nascent organizational base involves Akashi Junzo of the Jehovah's Witnesses. There are in-depth studies on his and his followers' conscientious objection (see Sasaki [1968]; Inagaki [1972]). Regarding the case of Ishiga Osamu, it has been briefly mentioned, rather episodically, in Abe (1969), pp. 161-163; Yamamura (1987), pp. 63-88; and Kasahara (2004), pp. 30-32, among others. None of these brief descriptions of Ishiga's case goes so far as analyzing the subjective meaning of his conscientious objection. This article attempts to fill this void.

3 Ishiga (1991).

and conscription from a different angle than that of the majority of the nation and made him a rare case of the conscientious objector during WWII.

II. Esperanto and Humanism

After graduating from the University of Tokyo with a major in European history in 1932, Ishiga was forced to take a rest due to pulmonary infiltration and chronic kidney disease. In his sickbed, he actively communicated in Esperanto, through which he came to contact with Quakers and members of the War Resisters' International. He became a member of WRI when he was 23, in 1934.[4] For ten years after that, while he was recovering from the illnesses, the war in China dragged on and expanded—to become a part of the Second World War. About six months after Japan started fighting against the Allies, Ishiga recorded his resolution in his diary: "Determined: I shall declare my conscientious objection to military service on the basis of WRI and Quakerism. This is my honest stand, and they are everything."[5]

Exactly how Quakerism influenced him to become a conscientious objector is not clear from the diary; however, his humanism—nurtured by Esperanto—surely helped him transcend the strong national identity and patriotism at the time of war. He said: "How stupid it is to regard animalistic signs such as the color and shape of human face, the place of residence, and the language as the things that matter most!"[6] "Unlike ordinary Japanese," he also said in his diary, "I cannot favor Japanese only."[7] Ishiga elaborates his position on patriotism, humanism, and war in the following monologue:

> Don't you fight in war?—I will fight in war against disease and disaster, but not against humans.
>
> Don't you love your country?—I love all the countries.
>
> Don't you love your country of birth in particular?—I don't as much as to destroy other countries.
>
> Are you all right if your country would perish?—It would never perish if they stop war; never perish if all of the nation would determine not to destroy it; never perish if they don't destroy other countries.[8]

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4 Ibid., pp. 13, 21, 22.

5 Ibid., p. 128, May 21, 1942. This and following dates indicate the date of entry in his diary. Here, as in Part I, all translations are mine.

6 Ibid., p. 69, May 26, 1940.

7 Ibid., p. 143, August 4, 1942.

8 Ibid., pp. 183-4, March 3, 1943.

It is clear that Ishiga maintains objective distance—indeed to the degree of cool detachment—from his own country, which makes an interesting contrast with Uchimura's attachment to it. Ishiga's detachment from the state and his cosmopolitan view of the human world are strengthened with his interest in Esperanto. With this international language, he was able to see himself beyond the boundary of the nation-state. He said: "We can become more than Japanese with Esperanto—that is, a member of human beings."[9] And with Esperanto, he could find someone overseas whose view on war and peace is much closer to his own: "The language of Japan is not necessarily one language. Certain thoughts of mine can only reach a certain kind of people in Japan. My joy of using Esperanto is that I can find the fellows who understand me as soon as I learn this language."[10]

III. The War Resisters' International

While his communication in Esperanto helped him transcend nationalism and war fever and strengthen his idea of humanism, the direct contact with the overseas antiwar organization, WRI, kept him informed of the thought and practice of conscientious objection. As he was preparing for reporting himself to the Military Police to declare his conscientious objection, he found among the documents from WRI a pink slip that listed the names of French conscientious objectors and their punishments—"Fousille" for those objectors during war. Finding out the meaning in the dictionary ("execution by shooting"), Ishiga nonetheless would not change his mind, saying to himself: "I cannot go back. I cannot go back."[11] Once in the military custody, explaining his position, he referred to cases overseas: that several hundred conscientious objectors were put in jail in Britain and other countries during WWI.[12] But most of all, it was the founding spirit of the organization that motivated Ishiga to become a conscientious objector. He brought an original copy of the Declaration of War Resisters' International with him when he reported himself to the Military Police in August 1943; being made to translate the pamphlet, he said to himself: "I have accepted the following few lines [of the Declaration] and cherished the idea, which led me to what I am today: 'War is a crime against humanity. I am therefore determined not to support any kind of war, and to strive for the removal of all causes of war.'"[13]

9 Ibid., pp. 120-1, April 28, 1942.
10 Ibid., p. 261, February 29, 1944.
11 Ibid., p. 211.
12 Ibid., p. 229.
13 Ibid., p. 231.

IV. Faith in Christianity

In addition to Esperanto and WRI, Ishiga's faith in Christianity is an indispensable factor for his becoming a conscientious objector. His faith became the source of power to act upon his conscience and provided him with peace of mind. He said in his diary: "If the purpose of life is to praise God (following Luther), it cannot be praised just by mouth; we must praise Him with all of our fibers of existence. It is therefore to pray and seek the life that would suit His will."[14] Under the pressing circumstances during war time, Ishiga's question is how to deal with war in a way that "would suit His will." He hears the voice of God for his action:

> To make a war humanitarian, we must throw humanitarian elements in it—I believe that objection to military service is such a humanitarian element. People may wonder why I believe so; "the voice of God" may be the clearest response. In fact, I feel that is the order from God—I can at least believe in it.[15]

Without having a role model nearby and supporting organizations in the country, Ishiga had to struggle for his unusual belief. It was difficult for him to maintain his emotional and mental stability. Faith gave him peace of mind as well as the strength for action. He recorded the fluctuations of his mental state on becoming a war objector:

> Unceasing anxiety; the doubtful thought of "Would this be good?"; the frightening feeling for the detection of evil deeds; and the lack of confidence... and these make my mind unstable. The external measure of resting well would work, but I think that internally (albeit nominal) faith has surely been sustained me.[16]

"If I did not believe in God," he said, "I would have suffered a nervous breakdown."[17] He also expressed his anxiety:

> I feel that it [call-up to military service] is finally coming. When I count the number of friends around, few of them still remain. Each day, many times, I'm afraid, I'm content, I'm resolved, and I'm shaken. I almost feel like leaning on to the Bible. I'm surely empowered when I read the Bible. Being afraid of getting better; my sense of relief when my urine

14 Ibid., p. 113, February 18, 1942.
15 Ibid., p. 126, May 8, 1942.
16 Ibid., p. 130, May 30-June 1, 1942.
17 Ibid., p. 129, May 30, 1942.

gets worse. Holding my physical life dear, and holding my spiritual life dear. Not knowing where it leads, I keep taking a step day by day.[18]

Finally,

In the evening, not because of the rain, but I feel like quitting this [conscientious objection], thinking about the confiscation of my books and worrying about the food, etc. This feeling may be real. But the obedience to His will—only this has given me power. I shall follow through that determination [of becoming a conscientious objector]—even if it would be to threaten people for a moment; I believe that I have been following in that direction through my life, if deviating from it momentarily. To act upon the eternity, aiming at the eternity; not to be deceived by newspapers and the radio.[19]

While his faith gives him the strength to stand his ground, it was also tied to a sense of resignation. Ishiga was ready to accept whatever the consequences of his "obedience to His will." On the same day as the previous quote, March 1, 1943, he recorded in his diary: "If I were among those who were slain by the falling tower in Siloam (Luke 13), I could feel the God's will in resignation." And: "My position: the Golden Rule and resignation—I'll do what I believe is right and resign the result to God."[20] Here, Ishiga's assertion clearly exemplifies an ethic of conviction, which is shared by religious war objectors of World Wars in the United States.[21] He further registered this sense of resignation:

Like soldiers fighting with arms, we [pacifists] cannot help but fight with thoughts. I don't want to endanger myself, but it cannot be helped if I were led to certain circumstances because of my effort of living for the truth. God will take responsibility for this. (Even if "He" does not take, we find a model in the words of the Lord: "My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me.")[22]

18 Ibid., pp. 140-1, August 14, 1942.
19 Ibid., p. 181, March 1, 1943.
20 Ibid., pp. 180, 179.
21 See Moroi (2008).
22 Ishiga (1991), p. 189, March 19, 1943.

V. The Thought of Death and the Way of Cross

The consequence of his action was his internment in jail. Ishiga saw it as service in the form of punishment. Under the circumstances of the time, without any legal provisions for conscientious objection, to become a conscientious objector meant breaking the conscription law:

> I'm not feeling well if I consider my action would be to "break the law" of the duty of the military service, but to think about establishing a new order (of non-military service) has taken a weight off my mind. Unless it is recognized by law, it cannot be helped that it would be "service in the form of punishment."[23]

He could differentiate working for the country from working for war, and he did not mind, or was, in fact, willing to work for the former.[24] However, with no alternative civilian work available in the country, he had no choice if he wanted to follow through his conscience. He said in his diary:

> I wonder if I could act upon what my heart desires beyond laws. I'd like to serve my sentence rather than the military. I'd like to die in prison rather than on the battlefield. For I believe that war is a sin. I believe it right not to be a part of a sin. And I believe that I was born for this.[25]

Unlike his counterparts in the United States during the same war, Ishiga found the idea of death in prison not unimaginable; it was rather close. About a year before his surrender to the Military Police, Ishiga put his thoughts this way: "I wonder if I could not leave my family a greater honor than dying resisting war. And I am secretly hoping that I could escape that honor by becoming sick."[26] And yet, on the previous day, he recorded: "When the old-time *samurai* faced his lord's order which (seemed to him) was wrong, he either followed it quietly

23 Ibid., p. 192, April 25, 1943.

24 "It's not that I will not work for my country; I refuse to work for war. It's not that I spare my life; I mind killing each other" (Ibid., p. 203, June 19, 1943). Also he said: "Here is my assertion, after all: I will not participate in war because it is wrong. It cannot be helped if I were killed because of it. I am willing to work for a job that is not directly related to war. 'Would it be all right if the country is destroyed?' 'I don't think it would perish even if it loses the war.' 'What about the honor of the nation?' 'I don't think it honor to win the war'" (Ibid., pp. 195-6, May 19, 1943).

25 Ibid., pp. 199-200, June 7, 1943.

26 Ibid., p. 155, September 29, 1942.

or insisted upon remonstration to his death. I'd prefer the death by remonstration."[27] About three months before his surrender, Ishiga said:

> I'd die in jail under the law rather than on the battlefield. The law is a product of reason; in this sense, the death under the law is a human death that would be helpful for the progress of human beings. And this is a good way to die, so as not to gain any honor from war.[28]

When we remember Uchimura's pacifists' death on the battlefield, Ishiga's determination not to be a part of war even at the time of his death is clear here. And this form of war objection, without becoming a part of the military and war, willing to accept the jail term, is something beyond Uchimura's idea and is testament to Ishiga's uniqueness. About six weeks before his surrender, Ishiga ponders over jail, death, and his pacifism:

> I'm heading to jail—then, what would come? Life or death? Even if the life in jail would increase physical pain more or less, it does not seem so bad, after all, compared to the current life in the world outside of jail. Death in jail...if we look at it as death by capital punishment, there does not seem to be a better way of dying for the sake of peace than by the death penalty (not by hanging, but by shooting). Whether dying of TB, dying becoming insane, committing suicide, or being killed in war, none would be very attractive. Then, I should go to jail lifting my head up high.[29]

Ishiga's resistance to war was based on his humanism, cultivated in learning and using Esperanto, his association with WRI, and, most fundamental of all, his faith in Christianity. However, to take a position that few had taken in the country, Ishiga considers his draft resistance as the way of the cross—a mission that he has to follow through. He said about a year before his surrender:

> There is no wonder if the way of the mission is the way of the cross. It may be natural that the way of the cross should be given as the way of the mission to those who respect Jesus more than anything and try to lead their lives "following Jesus Christ."[30]

27 Ibid., p. 154, September 28, 1942.
28 Ibid., p. 193, May 5, 1943.
29 Ibid., p. 201, June 15, 1943.
30 Ibid., p. 137, August 3, 1942.

It surely became a burden to him, and he recognized it.[31] Having changed his mind to participate in the military (hoping to become a medic), and being released from jail, he reflected upon his "conversion" as "quitting the cross": "Now I have become insensitive and cynical as if the term 'living dead' would seem to fit.... This may be the natural fate of someone who quit the cross that should be shouldered on the way."[32]

For Ishiga, war resistance as a way of the cross, it was too heavy to shoulder alone. He summarizes his becoming a war resister in three words: obligation, overwork, and God's will.[33] As almost the only active member of WRI in Japan at the time, he felt responsibility to express his view on war in public; but the direct action of war resistance was a little too much for him. Once he fulfilled his obligation (to declare his conscientious objection), he felt that he would not want to repeat it and recommend it to others. But it was God's will that brought him to the action—"I can just take a step a day, without hoping to see a faraway destination."[34]

Among the factors that contributed to Ishiga's war resistance, his faith in Christianity and its pacifism is the most fundamental. His sense of the will of God became the major guide to declare his conscientious objection to war in a society where serving the military was deemed the ultimate service to the public. It was his sense of God's will that sustained him, strengthened him, and pushed him to the direct action of the refusal to participate in war. However, it was also his sense of God's will that provided him with the meaning of war when he changed his mind to participate in it. Feeling the weight of war resistance as a way of the cross in jail, Ishiga pondered over the will of God—and realized that war was also a part of God's will, as the whole world and its affairs were under God's will.[35] He said:

> Before, I was thinking only about my will to resist war being led by God's will; however, now, I have come to think that it might also be God's will to manifest the weakness of man and the sin of man, in the fact that someone like me who dislikes and hates war is thrown into war, fights against his will, and, in some cases, even have to kill others whom they do not have any spite. I wonder it is God's will to expose such a depth of human sin and human miseries. My objection to war, of course, is the right thing to do. It surely is the will of God. But I wonder if the will of God is also in the works when even I cannot complete the right thing because of the human weakness and human sin in me, and participate in

31 "The cross can become the cross only when it was laid upon our shoulder" (Ibid., p. 141, August 15, 1942). "How distressful 'the way of the cross' has been!" (Ibid., p. 165, November 17, 1942)
32 Ibid., pp. 275-6, November 28, 1944.
33 Ibid., pp. 272-3.
34 Ibid., p. 273.
35 Ibid., pp. 273, 245.

> war as a tool without will, and may come to even commit murder—in this way it makes humans realize their limitations and be humble in front of God.[36]

The will of God is a double-edged sword for Ishiga's conscientious objection. It was, on the one hand, the main source of his action of war resistance. On the other hand, however, it was used to explain and justify, in a way, and accept what was happening—i.e., war—in the world. This is a similar kind of limitation we saw in Uchimura when he reduces world affairs to the will of God.[37]

Such a religious interpretation of the objection to and the participation in war does set a limit to Ishiga's pacifism in practice. His interpretation of the issue of war with God's will, however, could be seen as his resignation to the will of God in a society where the state had an enormous power. The enormity of the state and country in the pacifist's consciousness is clear in another similarity in the war objection of Uchimura and that of Ishiga: the dichotomy between physical obedience and spiritual independence. Reflecting upon his draft resistance and "conversion," Ishiga said:

> After reporting myself to the Military Police and expressing my stand, I have found that my life has been in their hand, whether they make me live or die. The fact that I have been fed and been able to sustain life so far until today is like I've been receiving life from them. Thus, I am now not a person who had his free will before coming here, but rather someone like the living dead—and I wonder it may be excused if this living dead does not live with his own will and leads a life of a tool without his will.... So long as I have my body which depends on food in this world, the body has no choice but to obey this world. My body cannot be helped being used as a soldier. However, I would like to keep my soul intact and free.[38]

This dichotomy should be understood in the social context of the enormity of the totalitarian state: the lack of rights of the individual—such as freedom of speech and liberty of conscience. "The Military Police," "they," and "this world" loom large in Ishiga's consciousness, as if to dominate the entire public life and the external "body." The only remaining area one could control seemed one's inner life, "the soul." The weight and constraint of the totalitarian state and society forced the exceptional war objector Ishiga to flee to the realm of the spiritual freedom.

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36 Ibid., pp. 273-4.
37 See also Ishiga (1953).
38 Ishiga (1991), pp. 274-5.

VI. Conclusion

Practicing Christian pacifism and conscientious objection at the time of war requires strong belief and commitment to one's pacifist ideal—strong enough to transcend the state's imperative for war and the societal support for it. As we have seen in this two-part article, both Uchimura and Ishiga held firm belief in Christian pacifism in their own ways in different social contexts. Based on his reading of the Bible, Uchimura upheld the idea of nonresistance and denounced war in public; whereas Ishiga, living in the society where any public denunciation of war was no longer possible, did carry out his conscientious objection based on his humanitarian ideas developed by Esperanto, his association with WRI, and his belief in Christian pacifism.

The different socio-historical context is the backdrop of their different views of and expectations for the country of Japan. Uchimura held high expectation, which was commonly shared in the society of the emerging and growing country in the Meiji era, at the turn of the twentieth century; he hoped for her to develop in the right direction (to be a Christian, moral nation). By contrast, Ishiga's cool, detached view of the country—deriving, in part, from his humanism with Esperanto—has also to do with his disillusionment of the time, especially after the expansion of war in China in 1931. Their different stances toward their country, in part, led to their different views on conscientious objection. In spite of their differences, however, their interpretations of war and peace, and their view on war objection, come closer.

Uchimura's religious interpretations of war and peace beclouded the social making of them. For him, war happens like natural disaster, beyond human control, with some divine intentions; peace could be brought closer through atonement, following Jesus, and brought into reality by the Second Coming. The human responsibility of making war is less an issue, so is the human effort to abolish—or at least, not to be a part of—the machinery of war. Ishiga's belief in Christian pacifism, his faith in "God's will" in particular, provided him strength to declare his conscientious objection; however, it was also the will of God with which Ishiga interpreted and justified the war and his participation in it. Here as well, a religious interpretation of the issues of war and peace became a double-edged sword—on the one hand, it motivates strong war objection, and yet, on the other hand, it explains war away as the will of God.

Furthermore, both Uchimura's conscientious objector (in "The Death of Pacifists in War") and Ishiga himself had to limit the sphere of objection. With the dichotomy between outer (behavioral) obedience and inner (spiritual) freedom, the line between participation in and objection to war is blurred. For Uchimura, this dichotomy is explained in religious terms ("peace through atonement") and is influenced by his attachment to the country of Japan; for Ishiga, in spite of his detachment from the country in his mind, the reality of living in a totalitarian

society overwhelms his consciousness and makes him draw a line between the physical obedience and the spiritual freedom.

These limitations of Christian pacifism in Uchimura and Ishiga—their overly religious interpretations of the matters of war and peace and the divided spheres of obedience and disobedience—should be understood in the context of the society where the authority of the state enjoyed stupendous power over the individual. The enormity of the state and country of Japan in the first half of the twentieth century overshadowed their pacifism.

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