



## Asian critics of Western missionaries From the World's Parliament of Religions (1893)

*The World's Parliament of Religions was a pioneering multifaith gathering held in Chicago in 1893, to which speakers from around the world were invited to lecture on their religions. The gathering was staged as a display of interreligious respect and friendship. At the same time, it provided a platform from which some Christian speakers proclaimed the superiority of their religion and its civilizing influences, while some non-Christian speakers pushed back against those claims.*

*One session took the form of a panel on the question, "How can the methods of Christian missionaries be improved?" Two Asian panelists—one Buddhist, one Hindu—spoke critically of Christian missionaries. Four white missionaries—one British, three Americans—replied in defense. Presented here are selections from the remarks of both Asian panelists, Anagarika Dharmapala and Narasimhacharya, and two of the American panelists, R. A. Hume and B. C. Haworth. Included also are selections from a paper that had been read at an earlier session by Kozaki Hiromichi, a Japanese Protestant, who advocated that Western missionaries in Japan take a role subordinate to native Christians. Kozaki was not on the panel about missionary methods, but B. C. Haworth used his time on that panel to counter Kozaki's earlier remarks.*

### The critics speak

#### 1. Anagarika Dharmapala, Theravada Buddhist teacher from Ceylon (present-day Sri Lanka)

This question of foreign missions constitutes an important problem that requires solution before the 20th century dawns [...] For nineteen centuries, you have had Christianity in Europe, but only during the last three centuries have attempts been made to propagate it in the East. [...] The program that has been constructed, the platform you have built up, must be entirely reconstructed if Christianity is to make progress in the East. [...]

The conditions of our country are different from those of yours. Your great slaughterhouse here<sup>a</sup> is a shame and a curse to civilization, and we do not want any such Christianity in Ceylon, in Burma, in Japan, or in China. We want the lowly and meek and gentle teachings of Christ, not because we do not have them now, but we want more of them. I tell you, if you want to make Christianity an influence in the East, you must send there men of gentleness, lowliness, meekness, and tolerance. The missionaries sent to Ceylon, China, or Burma, as a rule, have not the tolerance that we need. The missionary is intolerant; he is selfish. Why do not the natives mix with him? Because he has not the tolerance and unselfishness that he should have. Who are his converts? They are all men of low type. Seeing the selfishness and intolerance of the missionary, not an intelligent man will accept Christianity.

Buddhism had its missionaries before Christianity was preached. It conquered all Asia and made the Mongolians mild. Its preachers do not go in this grand, fashionable costume of yours but in the simple garb you see upon this platform. They did not go with a Bible in one hand and a rum

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<sup>a</sup> The Union Stock Yard, an industrial meat processing plant in Chicago that was a tourist attraction.

bottle in the other, but they went full of love and compassion and sympathy. With these attributes, they conquered, and they made Asia mild. Slaughterhouses were abolished, public houses were abolished, but they are now on the increase because of the influence of Western civilization.

It is left for you, this younger family of European nations, to change this. [...] I warn you that if you want to establish Christianity in the East, it can only be done on the principles of Christ's love and meekness. Let the missionary study all the religions; let them be a type of meekness and lowliness, and they will find a welcome in all lands.

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## **2. Narasimhacharya, a Brahmin and Sri Vaishnava from Madras, India (present-day Chennai)**

If success be the criterion by which to gauge an undertaking, and if missionary success mean the conversion of the Hindus, then it must be confessed that missionary work in India is a failure. [...] Why [...] does not Christianity in India spread faster? Why don't the natives adopt it in numbers? For this, there are many reasons. [...]

The religion which a conquering nation, with an exasperating consciousness of superiority, condescendingly offers to the conquered must ever be disgusting to the recipient, however good it may be. Suppose the early apostles of Christ, with a band of victorious marauders at their back, had gone about Europe with a sword in one hand and a Bible in the other, saying, "Accept the Bible, or you die." Do you think their religion would have been as generally acceptable as it was? [...]

Then there is the difference between your temperament and ours. We are brought up so differently from you that the things that affect you do not affect us. [...] No wonder [...] that a religion like Christianity—a religion of foreigners, containing ideas, some of them new, some of them strange, and some of them repugnant to our preconceived notions—meets with such scanty welcome.

Again, your missionaries, in their iconoclastic eagerness, attack some of our prejudices which are not necessarily un-Christian. Thus our intermingling with other castes is made a necessary article of faith of the converted Hindu—and let me tell you, from my own experience, that it is to us a physical repugnance. Eating with lower castes is a nauseating process to us; we cannot do it if we try. [...]

There is another custom of the Brahmins far more deeply ingrained and far more difficult to uproot: I mean their prejudice against animal food. I remember, myself, how I felt when first I tried to accustom myself to it. Words cannot describe the nauseating disgust and repugnance of my whole soul. So long as Christians, by tacit silence, make people believe that the eating of animal food is a necessary preparatory course to be gone through before baptism, so long then will you find you have a stumbling block in the way of the evangelization of India. Oh, tell your missionaries to preach, from street to street, that Christ never said: "You must kill and eat to be a Christian." Let them din into the people's ear that a man may be a Christian without being a carnivorous one.

I shall close this address with a few words as to how Christian missionaries ought to work. They complain that they cannot get a hearing; but suppose one hundred of your zealous young Christians, clad in the saffron robes of humble mendicants, preach from house to house, singing the praise of Him who died for love—do you think the people would refuse to hear them?

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**3. Kozaki Hiromichi**, *Congregational minister and president of a Christian college in Kyoto, Japan*

The progress of Christianity in Japan is quite remarkable. It is only thirty-four years since the first Protestant missionary put his foot on its shore. [...] Yet now there are more Christians here than in Turkey, where missionaries have been working more than seventy years, and there are more self-supporting churches here than in China, where a double or thrice number of missionaries have been working nearly a century. [...]

Christianity in Japan has already reached a stage that no other missionary fields have ever attained. [Japan's] native Christians [...] are leading not only in all kinds of Christian work—literary and evangelistic, educational and charitable—but they are also leading Christian thought in Japan. [...] Some six or seven years ago, when we were contemplating the union of the Itchi and Kumiai denominations,<sup>b</sup> the two most powerful Christian bodies in Japan, among twenty members of a joint committee appointed by the synod of one and the general council of the other, there were only four missionaries. When, a few years ago, the Kumiai denomination adopted a new confession of faith, the missionaries took almost no part. [...] In Japan, missionaries are really “helpers,” and, I should say to their credit, they in most cases willingly take secondary position in all Christian works. [...]

That Japan will not become a Christian nation in a few years is a plain fact. But that it will become one in the course of time is almost above doubt [...] But there are many difficult problems pressing us hard for their solution. [...]

The first problem [...] is that of the relation between Christianity and our nationality, namely, our national habit and spirit. Professor Inouye<sup>c</sup> and others have been raising their voices against Christianity, claiming it is in conflict with our national spirit. [...] But in my belief, this problem is not so hard as it looks. What outsiders think to be the real conflict seems to us only shadow and vapor.

The relation between missionaries and native Christians is another problem. How must they be related? [...] Japanese Christians will never be satisfied under missionary auspices. To be useful

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<sup>b</sup> A Presbyterian and a Congregational denomination, respectively. The denominations' full names were *Nihon Kirisuto Itchi Kyōkai* (“Japanese Christian United Church”) and *Nihon Kumiai Kirisuto Kyōkai* (“Japanese Associated Christian Churches”).

<sup>c</sup> *Inoue Tetsujirō*, a philosophy professor and Japanese nationalist who, in the early 1890s, attacked Christianity in the Japanese press.

to our country, the missionaries must either cooperate with or join native churches and become like one of the native workers.

The problem of denominations and church government is another difficulty. [...] It is needless to say that we need not or ought not to copy in any way the exact forms of church governments which are in vogue in the United States or any other countries. [...] Whether we need any written creed—and, if so, what kind of creed is best to have—is also a question. In all teachings of missionaries and others, there is always more or less of husks mixed with genuine truth. And at the same time, every form of Christianity has some excellent truth in it. And it is hard to make distinctions between essentials and non-essentials, between creed and husks. This is a hard problem for Japanese theologians to solve.

Japanese Christians must solve all these problems by themselves. I believe there is a grand mission for Japanese Christians. I believe that it is our mission to solve all these problems, which have been and are still stumbling blocks in all lands; and it is also our mission to give to all the Oriental nations, and the rest of the world, a guide to true progress and a realization of the glorious gospel which is in Jesus Christ.

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### The missionaries reply

#### 4. Robert A. Hume, *American Congregational missionary working in India*

It would be far pleasanter to my heart to tell some of the victories of missions than to attempt suggestions as to how we might do our work better, if that were the subject which was assigned to me. I would tell my brother from Madras what he does not know. [...] I would tell him that in the decade from 1871 to 1881, the census of the British government, not missionary reports, says that when the population increased 6 percent, the Christian population increased 32 percent. I would tell him that [...] in the decade from 1881 to 1891, when the population of the country increased 10 percent, the native Christian community increased 23 percent; and [...] the director of public instruction in his own city [...] prophesies that in a generation, all the positions of influence and of responsibility will be in the hands of the Christian community of India. [...]

As the subject is “How We Might Do Our Work Better,” I will say a few words, first, on the relations of missionaries and non-Christians, and the first thing is: we might, some of us, know their thoughts better. We ought to study their books more deeply, more intelligently, more constantly. [...] Where we recognize truth, we should more cordially and more gladly recognize it. When we fail to do so, it is disloyalty to our God [...], for, at bottom, it means that we suppose that this great Father of our Indian and our Chinese and our Japanese brethren had not yet given them those kindergarten lessons which we supposed we had to give and find that he had taught them [...] We should not be afraid of the halfway houses to Christianity, as we sometimes are. We should feel that it is a help to us, when we recognize [how God] has been influencing the hearts and the minds of these men to give them thus knowledge of himself.

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### 5. Barnabas C. Haworth, *American Presbyterian missionary working in Japan*

Those who heard the very interesting paper of Professor Kozaki [...] will be ready to believe that in Japan, at least, it is high time for missionaries to [either] mend their ways or get out and let Brother Kozaki and his Christian countrymen work out their own salvation.

If, in the great problems before the church in Japan, [...] the missionaries can be of no service, as Mr. Kozaki says; if the Japanese must work out these difficult problems alone and are able to do it—the explanation of this strange situation must be either that the missionary has done his work so well that the pupil is equal in all respects to the teacher, who might as well withdraw, or else the missionary has spent thirty-five years in grappling with the great problem of Christianizing Japan only to prove himself, in the end, a colossal and preposterous failure.

And further, if the Congregationalists of Japan are substantially on the side of the very theology which the American Board emphatically discountenances; if the Japanese Presbyterians, almost to a man, are on the side of Professors Briggs and Smith,<sup>d</sup> while the General Assembly in America persistently declares that those learned men are dangerous leaders; if these two great churches in Japan, which include the large majority of the Christian population of the country, are so wide of the mark of American orthodoxy—the inference will be either that the missionaries are untrue to the churches that sent them out or that they are unable to influence, to any considerable extent, the converts they have made.

And if the missionaries' influence in Japan is so startlingly small, it is only a question of a little time when the church of America will withdraw its support and leave the church in Japan to do its own teaching and preaching and pay its own bills. The Christians of America will not give money to maintain missionaries in a land where they can be only subordinate helpers, utterly impotent in solving the vital questions of the church, while so many other fields are drawing us with Macedonian cries which must be answered.

[...T]o those who may feel like advising us to leave the work to the Japanese workers, there ought to be sufficient answer in Brother Kozaki's frank portrayal of the unsteady gait of the national advance and in the pathetic confession that in all the troublous questions before the church, no light appears—no prophet has yet arisen in Japan who is able to lead the church through the wilderness. [...] I am here to say that, in my judgment, Japan does need the missionary as much and more than ever before.

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<sup>d</sup> Charles A. Briggs, a Presbyterian in the United States, and William Robertson Smith, a Presbyterian in Scotland, who were tried by their churches for heresy due to their theologically liberal views of the Bible.

**Sources:**

1. “Foreign Missionary Methods,” in *Neely’s History of the Parliament of Religions* [...], ed. Walter R. Houghton (Chicago: Frank Tennyson Neely, 1893), 607-608, <https://hdl.handle.net/2027/cool.ark:/13960/t6m04pp2r>. Public domain.
2. *Neely’s History*, 610-612.
3. Harnichi Kozaki, “Christianity in Japan; Its Present Condition and Future Prospects,” in *Neely’s History*, 489-494.
4. *Neely’s History*, 612-613.
5. *Neely’s History*, 615-617.

Excerpts edited and annotated by John-Charles Duffy. An additional paragraph break inserted for readability; two other paragraph breaks omitted to keep thematically related material together. Numerals preceding some paragraphs omitted. Some grammatical emendations made for clarity, consistency, or improved parallelism. *General Association* emended to *General Assembly*, based on context. Spelling corrected, regularized, or modernized, including spellings of foreign names to facilitate recognition. A numeral spelled out for stylistic consistency. Punctuation emended in line with modern conventions. Divine pronouns, inconsistently capitalized in Hume’s address, are consistently lowercase here; but a capitalized divine pronoun is retained in Narasimhacharya’s address to avoid ambiguity about the referent. The word *board*, lowercase in the source publication, is capitalized here to signal more clearly a reference to the ABCFM.

These edited excerpts from addresses to the World’s Parliament of Religions are intended for *teaching* purposes only. For *research* purposes, you should consult, quote, and cite the sources listed above.

**Additional source notes:**

*Neely’s History* was used as the source of these addresses because the official proceedings of the World’s Parliament of Religions published only digests of the addresses to save space. John Henry Barrows, ed., *The World’s Parliament of Religions* (Chicago: Parliament Publishing Co., 1893), 2:1012-1014, 1093-1096, 1098-1100, <https://hdl.handle.net/2027/uc1.b3316178>. The longer texts in *Neely’s History* were recorded by stenographers while the addresses were being delivered.

*Neely’s History* misidentifies Robert A. Hume as “R. E. Hume.” The same error is made in Barrows, *World’s Parliament*, 1:140, but the speaker is correctly listed as “R. A. Hume” in Barrows, *World’s Parliament*, 2:1095. *Neely’s History* incorrectly prints Kozaki’s first name as Harnichi; the name is correctly given as Hiromichi in Barrows, *World’s Parliament*, 2:1015.

The title of the panel on Christian missions is listed as “How Can the Methods of Christian Missionaries be Improved?” in Barrows, *World’s Parliament*, 1:140. A different title, “Criticism and Discussion of Missionary Methods,” heads the published addresses in Barrows, *World’s Parliament*, 2:1093. *Neely’s History* titles the panel “Foreign Missionary Methods.” *Neely’s History* titles panelists’ addresses in such a way as to give the erroneous impression that Haworth’s address was part of a different session.



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