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The Rise of Wedding Churches

The Nonreligious Transformation of Japanese Christianity

Jesse R. LeFebvre | ORCID: 0000-0003-0441-3104
Harvard University, Cambridge, MA, USA
jesselefebvre@g.harvard.edu

Abstract

The popularity of Christian weddings represents the new widespread acceptance and popularity of a religious ceremony that sits at the intersection the familial, social, commercial, political, and religious. These rites challenge established preconceptions concerning both Christianity and Japanese identity. The postwar history of Christian wedding ceremonies is best understood in light of the efforts made by traditional Christian churches and the bridal industry to meet the religious demands of Japan's largely "nonreligious" constituency. In responding to the needs and desires of nonreligious Japanese, commercial and religious institutions not only cooperate to produce and provide Christian weddings, but also compete to satisfy expectations for religious authenticity. There are no better examples of this than the efforts made by Christian churches to open their doors to individuals with no espoused Christian faith and the production of the bridal industry's fleet of "wedding churches." As such, Japan's massive nonreligious constituency has contributed to the creation of a unique form of Christianity particular to Japan.

Keywords

Japanese Christianity – wedding churches – nonreligiousness – ritual

The mention of Notre Dame and Christian relics no doubt conjures images of the Notre Dame de Paris, which, until recently, housed some of Catholicism's most important relics—including the purported Crown of Thorns, a fragment of the True Cross, and one of the Holy Nails. On the other hand, one is less likely to imagine Yamaguchi Prefecture at the southern tip of Honshu, Japan,

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as the site for Christian relics. However, adjacent to Shimonoseki station is the Notre Dame Shimonoseki (formerly the Grand Place Saint Valentine), which houses and displays relics of Saint Valentine (Igarashi 2007: 120). Notre Dame Shimonoseki claims to be one of Japan's largest "great cathedrals" (*daiseidō* 大聖堂), but there are no parishioners or church members who regularly attend services at Notre Dame Shimonoseki—at least not in the conventional sense. Moreover, despite the rich Christian environment it boasts, Notre Dame Shimonoseki is not even technically a "church" in the legal sense of the term. It is also not registered as a religious juridical person (*shūkyō hōjin* 宗教法人), but is rather a commercial entity devoted to meeting consumer demand for wedding ceremonies. It is a space that I, borrowing the terminology of Japanese architect Igarashi Tarō (2007), refer to as a "wedding church" (*kekkonshiki kyōkai* 結婚式教会).

Wedding churches are by no means the first Christian buildings erected in Japan but, as with earlier appearances of religious architecture, the number and centrality of wedding churches testify to a dramatic transformation in Japanese religious culture. Wedding churches are but one expression of a unique form of Japanese Christianity that has proliferated in contemporary Japan as a part of, and in response to, the nonreligious (*mushūkyō* 無宗教) demand for Christian weddings.

1 Neither Simply Seeing nor Merely Believing: Understanding Interactions with the Built Landscape of Contemporary Japanese Christianity

As part of his diplomatic mission to Japan in the late 1850s, Townsend Harris (1804–1878) sought concessions from the Tokugawa shogunate for the American citizens set to arrive in newly opened Japan. As one of his top priorities, Harris looked to secure guarantees of religious freedoms for citizens of the United States. Interestingly, this meant specifically that he would "boldly demand for Americans the free exercise of their religion in Japan with the right to build churches" (Harris 1959: 466). With Harris as the diplomatic representative of the United States, the United States-Japan Treaty of Amity and Commerce was signed in July 1858 and included the right for Americans to freely practice their religion, a freedom actualized through the "right to erect suitable places of worship" to which "no injury shall be done."[1] This "right to

1 The full text of Article VIII of the treaty reads as follows: "Americans in Japan shall be allowed

erect suitable places of worship" marked the beginning of a shift in Japanese state policy toward Christianity in particular, and religion in general.

The mere presence of churches and foreign residents with extraterritorial rights were a visual testament to the failed political agenda of the Tokugawa shogunate and almost certainly a contributing factor to the subsequent "restoration" of the Meiji emperor. In the late Edo period, and for the first time in over two centuries, the Japanese state was forced to legally recognize forms of Christianity that were not subject to complete state control.[2] Simple homes and halls initially served as places of worship but, by 1865, churches took on a more public presence, beginning with the Ōura Cathedral in Nagasaki, Japan's first cathedral. Ōura Cathedral is also known as "The Basilica of the Twenty-Six Holy Martyrs of Japan" (*Nihon nijūroku seijunkyōsha dō* 日本二十六聖殉教者堂). The twenty-six martyrs from which this church's name is derived consists of nine European priests and seventeen Japanese Christians who were crucified in 1597 by order of Toyotomi Hideyoshi (1537–1598), beatified in 1627 by Pope Urban VIII (1588–1644), and canonized by Pope Pius IX (1792–1878) in 1862. As with the building of the church itself, the canonization of these figures was part of a larger effort to renew the propagation of Christianity in Japan. Drawn to the construction of a Christian building outfitted with a cross, the first group of "hidden Christians" (*kakure kirishitan* 隠れキリシタン) came out of hiding and visited Ōura Cathedral to profess their faith to French Roman Catholic priest Bernard Thaddée Petitjean (1829–1884), who later became Japan's first vicar apostolic. Interestingly, it was the church building that seems to have made such an encounter possible. In terms of historical significance, the new set of churches built in the following years throughout Japan were as much places of worship as they were monuments that testified to the political and cultural changes underway.

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the free exercise of their religion, and for this purpose shall have the right to erect suitable places of worship. No injury shall be done to such buildings, nor any insult be offered to the religious worship of the Americans. American citizens shall not injure any Japanese temple or mia [sic], or offer any insult or injury to Japanese religious ceremonies, or to the objects of their worship. The Americans and Japanese shall not do anything that may be calculated to excite religious animosity. The government of Japan has already abolished the practice of trampling on religious emblems." For the full text of the treaty, see *Treaties and Conventions Concluded Between Japan and Foreign Nations* 1871.

2 Christianity's history in Japan is long, and for much of that time, Christianity served as a state religion in the form of officially mandated rites of disassociation, permissible anti-Christian narratives, and acceptable and unacceptable legal associations. Under the Tokugawa shogunate, these "Christian" rites and narratives were utilized in the effort to construct and maintain the legal boundaries of Japanese subjecthood. The arrival of Christian imperial powers ended the state monopoly on Christian ritual and discourse. For details see LeFebvre (2021).

At this early stage, Christian buildings were first confined to the ports and harbors designated for foreign use through treaty agreements. In contrast, the physical locations of Christian religious spaces today speak directly to the centrality of Christian wedding ceremonies to life in contemporary Japan. Wedding churches and chapels are a commonplace feature of the Japanese urban landscape and not limited to any particular location or banished to the periphery of populated areas. Wedding churches and other buildings that are equipped with wedding chapels dot the cityscape and, like Notre Dame Shimonoseki, often occupy lucrative property near major train stations or are part of the buildings that do so. Buildings that lie at the heart of communities often play an important role in the life of those communities—their geographical centrality serves as a testament to their cultural centrality.[3] The centrality of Christian wedding churches and chapels is a reflection of the indispensable role they play in community and family life through the performance of wedding rites as well as their ability to facilitate unique experiences and interactions with culturally postulated supernatural agents and their representatives.

That being said, wedding churches have received little attention from the scholarly community despite their nearly ubiquitous presence. The research of architect Igarashi Tarō (2007) mentioned above is the only scholarly work in any language of which this author is aware. Christian wedding chapels—smaller wedding halls within larger buildings—themselves have also gone largely unnoticed. When the chapel and church environments of Christian weddings do receive attention, they are described as "scenery," "stages," or "sets" for photo shoots—an extravagant but largely irrelevant "Christian-style" window dressing.[4] Perhaps owing to the fact that they were designed to catch and please the eye, the scholarly analysis of Christian wedding churches and chapels has been dominated by their outward appearance. Ironically, the con-

3 Kim de Wildt et al. (2019) and her team have used Germany as a case study to show that the number religious buildings and position of religious architecture within urban space directly mirrors the cultural centrality of that religion among the population at large. For example, the recent appearance and rapid growth in the number of mosques does indicate a new role for Islam and Muslims in Germany society, but their position at the periphery of urban centers speaks directly to their marginalization. The fact that wedding churches and chapels often occupy some of the most economically and culturally valuable real estate in Japan demonstrates not only their acceptance but centrality in contemporary Japanese society.

4 Fisch (2004), Goldstein-Gidoni (1997), and Inoue (2004) each discuss Christian weddings as largely scenery. Igarashi (2007) also falls largely into this same camp. Ishii (2005) is more sympathetic to the sincerity with which Japanese attend weddings, and therefore, largely avoids such language. Fujiwara (2019) discusses the Christian elements as mere styling but does so in order to create and reinforce a transhistorical Japanese (i.e., not Christian) identity. For a full discussion of this tendency in the preceding literature, see LeFebvre (2015) and (2021).

templation of the visual has obscured much of what might otherwise be noticed about Christian weddings. It is as if chapels are meant to be seen and nothing else.

In contrast to the emphasis on the visual within scholarship, it would seem that the Japanese themselves rarely notice Christian wedding environments at all. Many Japanese see wedding churches and chapels as a religious but ultimately normative or ordinary feature of the contemporary Japanese cityscape, and outside of the weddings of friends and family, not extraordinary or strange enough to warrant further discussion.[5] For the Japanese, it seems that these religious locations are viewed and appropriated in a state of distraction rather than contemplation. As religious spaces, wedding churches and chapels are often indistinguishable from official Christian churches, but—like Buddhist temples and Shinto shrines—they are too ordinary to warrant the same kind of attention garnered by the facilities or confessional spaces of the perceptually more marginal "new religions" (*shinshūkyō* 新宗教) or alien foreign religions such as Islam or Hinduism.

In his seminal essay on art in the modern age, Walter Benjamin (1968) makes an interesting observation concerning the role of architecture as the first art form available for mass consumption by human beings. Indeed, given that people will always require shelter of some kind, buildings have been with human society more consistently and for longer than any other art form. In addition, the fact that buildings normally sit out in the open within their communities ensures that they are frequently part of a shared experience in ways that many other art forms are not. Yet Benjamin's argument goes beyond the simple recognition of architecture's ancient history of shared exposure, with important implications for buildings that are seen and used so regularly as to blend in with their surroundings. Benjamin argues that people engage buildings in two modes—through *use* and by *perception*—in a way that is markedly different from "the attentive concentration of a tourist before a famous building" (Benjamin 1968: 195). According to Benjamin, the *perceptual* appropriation of a building happens through optical reception and contemplation; however, it is a building's *use* that determines to a large extent the optical reception and

5 My argument throughout is based on a series of in-depth interviews with sixty-eight different individuals, each of whom has had a Christian wedding or was planning a Christian wedding at the time of the interview, and twenty single individuals who have either attended the ceremony of a friend or family member, or were considering marriage. These interviews also include statements from six chapel ministers, one Catholic priest, ten choir members, ten musical performers, and the owner of a company that is subcontracted by venues to provide ministers, vocalists, and musicians who conduct Christian wedding ceremonies. For details of these interviews and their results see LeFebvre (2015).

potential range of contemplative interpretation. This is because architecture is appropriated through acts of physical engagement with those spaces that create habit: "For the tasks which face the human apparatus of perception at the turning points of history cannot be solved by optical means, that is, by contemplation, alone. They are mastered gradually by habit, under the guidance of tactile appropriation [i.e., use]" (Benjamin 1968: 196). Moreover, Benjamin asserts that when architecture goes unnoticed and is consumed in a state of distracted (ap)perception, one ought to consider this as evidence that those buildings and their features have dissolved more fully into the habits of the groups with whom they engage. This is even more the case for buildings that are centrally placed and receive heavy engagement, but nonetheless remain mysteriously normal and undeserving of special attention.

One might argue that there is nothing paradoxical about the fact that wedding churches are centrally placed and readily visible and the fact that they are so "natural" a feature of contemporary Japan that they barely merit special contemplative attention. Both attest to the centrality of Christian weddings in the life of individuals in contemporary Japan. Scholars may gaze upon them as "tourists" lost in the contemplation of their outward features and, therefore, conclude that wedding churches and chapels are mere "sets" for performance or photography, but the tactile engagement of the individuals who attend Christian wedding ceremonies speaks to the formation of a habit with decidedly different implications for contemplation.[6] This is not to say that visual cues play no role in the Japanese experience—they certainly do—but that acts of contemplation cannot be separated from the ritual and customary actions associated with the space under question. Through habit and use, the visual and the ritual aspects of Christian wedding environments are mutually constitutive and ultimately inseparable.

In their popularity, Christian wedding ceremonies have become commonplace and the religious spaces where they are performed appear to have dis-

6 Statistics show that there has been ample opportunity for the Japanese to develop the tactile sense of habit described by Benjamin. The Christian wedding continues to be the most popular wedding ceremony in Japan, as it has been for the last twenty-five years. Even decidedly conservative estimates report that at least 9.5 million Christian wedding ceremonies have occurred between 1994 and 2019. With each wedding being attended by the conservative average of sixty-seven guests, Christian weddings were attended by at least 636.5 million guests—enough for every living person in Japan to attend a Christian wedding roughly five times during that same period (Zexy 2019). The fact that the Christian weddings of foreign and domestic celebrities are frequently given extensive coverage in the media also provides numerous opportunities for Japanese to "attend" such rites on a regular and reoccurring basis without even leaving home.

solved into the fabric of contemporary Japanese society, but this would only be possible if they were, in part, made of that same fabric. As the amount of expertise and labor involved in the performance of Christian weddings and the maintenance of Christian wedding spaces attest, the popularity of Christian weddings is by no means the result of some sort of preordained natural process. Christian weddings became the dominant form of wedding ceremony in the mid-1990s, but the acts that led to their widespread acceptance are part of complex historical processes that gave rise to unique forms of Japanese Christianity and to a unique culture of nonreligiousness prior to that point (LeFebvre 2021). What follows here is the story of how the Catholic and Protestant Churches of Japan pioneered efforts to popularize the Christian wedding ceremony among the nonreligious (*mushūkyō*) Japanese majority in the postwar period. This account includes the story of how such efforts to popularize Christian weddings led to collaboration between the traditional Christian Churches and the Japanese bridal industry as well as the appearance of new Christian organizations and edifices dedicated exclusively to providing Christian weddings. Interactions between religious and secular groups produced unique religious sensibilities, forms of expression, and experiences that in turn have given rise to new religious environments and new religious institutions. These all testify to the centrality of Christianity in contemporary Japanese culture, and to the influence of Japan's massive nonreligious constituency and its power to transform Christianity, both domestically and worldwide.

2 Japanese State Religious Policy, the Formation of Japanese Christianity, and the Cultures of Nonreligiousness

In the first half of the 20th century, the Catholic and Protestant Churches of Japan experienced a series of intense state interventions, culminating in a series of laws such as the 1939 Religious Organizations Law (Shūkyō dantai hō 宗教団体法). These laws were designed to harmonize the beliefs of Japanese Christian Churches and other recognized religious organizations with state-sponsored shrine rites and the non-negotiable religious aspects of the imperial cult through discourses of "not religion" or *hishūkyō* 非宗教.

This intense state intervention led to several important changes in the character of Japanese Christianity. First, Christian Churches were forced to make a series of changes in doctrine and practice that were initially designed to preserve the unique identity and integrity of the Japanese imperial cult, but ultimately led to a new set of more ecumenically minded Christian Churches

unique to Japan (Krämer 2011; LeFebvre 2021). In its "advisory" role, the Ministry of Education ensured that Christian doctrine and practice would not serve as an obstacle to Japanese Christians' participation in imperial rites, and worked to enhance the potential for the simultaneous acceptance of the articles of Christian faith, and a belief in the divinity of the imperial person and the divine legacy of the imperial lineage, on the behalf of Japanese Christians (Krämer 2011; Nakai 2013). This retooling of Christian Churches at the hands of the modern Japanese state would set it on a path for postwar success in a religious culture where the majority of individuals juggle multiple religious affiliations and, therefore, tend to avoid exclusive faith claims and affiliation. In the following paragraphs, I show how the Christian Churches expanded upon wartime precedents in the postwar period, extending them to the entire Japanese population in unique ways. State policy designed to isolate and limit the influence of Christianity in the prewar and wartime period helped create Christian Churches that were prepared to serve even those who were not its own members (or even Christian) by making marriage available to all Japanese, regardless of statements of faith or overt forms of affiliation.

Second, prewar and wartime state policies, and the implication of violence or retribution, created an atmosphere of unique forms of coercion, to which Christian Churches responded with cooperation in order to ensure their survival. Undertaken to facilitate interaction between the state and religious organizations, much of the restructuring of the Japanese Churches under the auspices of the Ministry of Education was preserved—albeit in an altered form—in the postwar period (Krämer 2011). Japanese Churches were familiar with the necessity and advantages of cooperating with secular institutions when it came to long-term survival and acceptance (Nakai 2013). Japanese Christian Churches and clergy frequently worked hand-in-hand with the government ministries to create statements and policies that were mutually palatable in the early decades of the 20th century (Nakai 2013; LeFebvre 2021). These coauthored statements of Church positions regarding the state imperial cult were often crafted so as to be intentionally ambiguous and leave room for multiple interpretations, some of which were satisfactory to Christian interests and some to the interests of Japanese authorities. In the most dramatic cases of state brinkmanship, Christian Churches even took positions that seemed to compromise their own doctrinal positions. The Catholic Church's decision to authorize the existence of "National Shintō" and declare its thoroughly "nonreligious" character when the Japanese state itself would not take such steps speaks to this situation of compromise. When it meant continued survival and the opportunity to maintain an influential presence in Japan, the Churches urged cooperation with secular authorities (Holtom 1935).

At present, Christian Churches and members of the clergy work closely with the bridal industry owners of chapels and wedding churches to provide Christian wedding ceremonies that meet the demands of marrying individuals, religious organizations, and for-profit companies. Although no longer under the threat of state sanctioned violence or discrimination, and much more likely to negotiate with corporate entities of a commercial nature than to appease the state, earlier interactions with the state most likely familiarized Christian Churches and clergy with the benefits of partnerships with secular power brokers, even when these nominally secular entities engage in the maintenance of religious spaces and rites of their own for their own reasons. The prewar and wartime Japanese state helped cultivate Christian institutions and clergy that were comfortable striking bargains with institutions that were "not religion," and augmenting their own doctrinal interpretations, practices, and institutions in order to facilitate collaboration in exchange for improved social standing, institutional survival, or acceptance.

It is important to remember that *hishūkyō* was not simply a designation applied to certain institutions or practices during an ongoing debate over what the state should code as "religion" or "not religion." Rather, it was a rhetorical and legal strategy for extending state authority to all aspects of life while preserving nonnegotiable, mandatory religious beliefs and practices that were to be embraced in one form or another by all Japanese subjects (Thal 2002). As such, the largest shared field of religious practices and beliefs was coded "not religion" by the state.[7] The legal conflation of Japanese subjecthood with "nonreligious" (*hishūkyō*) religious practices was the beginning of Japan's shared culture of discursive nonreligiousness (LeFebvre 2021). Following Japan's defeat in World War II, the policies enacted by the Allied Occupation and the adoption of a new constitution shattered the state monopoly on nonreligious discourse, refracting it across the populace.

Nowhere is this more clear than in the emergence in the postwar period of a new discourse of nonreligion, wherein Japanese individuals or groups themselves now determine which religious practices meet the criteria for normative Japanese behavior by employing the discourse of "without religion" (*mushūkyō*). The fact that the most broadly shared religious practices are still discussed as nonreligion is one legacy of the discourse established by the

7 Aside from legal abstraction, it was often difficult to tell the difference between what was religion on the ground and what was not. As time progressed, the state's position came under increasing scrutiny from scholars, politicians, and clerics, who began to suggest the religious character of the imperial cult and state ritual (Scheid 2013), and ultimately, the effort to characterize the imperial cult as "not religion" failed to remain convincing (Thal 2002: 110).

Japanese state in the prewar and postwar periods. However, with a shift in discursive power from the state to individuals, individuals themselves now tend to say they are "without religion" (*mushūkyō*) as long they are engaging only in those religious practices or holding only those beliefs they perceive to be widely embraced, ordinary, or acceptable for someone who is Japanese (LeFebvre 2015).

3 *Mushūkyō*: The New Nonreligion and Christian Wedding Ceremonies

Statistically speaking, nonreligiousness (*mushūkyō*) is an undeniable reality in contemporary Japan, and the vast majority of Japanese identify as nonreligious.[8] This identity is dynamic and often employed to both reject and affirm certain religious behaviors and identities (LeFebvre 2015). Most typically, nonreligious attitudes reject religious dispositions perceived as deviant, foreign, or unhealthy while simultaneously affirming the importance of religion to affective acts of belief. Furthermore, nonreligious individuals tend to rely heavily on religious professionals and to vicariously entrust specialized acts of prayer and ritual to religious authorities when deemed desirable and appropriate.[9] Despite the fact that certain aspects of contemporary "nonreligiousness" (*mushūkyō*) are indeed part of an inherited set of discourses on *hishūkyō* from an earlier period, it would be inaccurate to suggest that they are identical or even equivalent. The Japanese, through their individual and collective perceptions, now have much greater latitude in determining for themselves what behaviors are or are not compatible with a normative "nonreligious" identity, and the role of the state in officially recognizing religious groups under the law is only one factor that plays a much diminished and somewhat insignificant role.

8 There is a wealth of data available attesting to the pervasive character of nonreligiousness among the Japanese. This was confirmed again most recently in the latest International Social Survey Programme (ISSP) conducted through a partnership with NHK, in which the majority of Japanese continue to express an absence of an exclusive faith (NHK 2019).

9 Generally speaking, vicarious religion is the notion of religion performed by an active minority on the behalf of a much larger number, who not only understand, but quite clearly approve of what the minority is doing. Specifically, religious vicariousness is most evident when religious institutions and religious professionals perform ritual on behalf of others; in what religious institutions and religious professionals believe on behalf of others; and how religious institutions and religious professionals embody moral codes on behalf of others (Davie 2007).

As a result, statements used to express a nonreligious (*mushūkyō*) identity are frequently employed by individuals who readily engage in nearly every kind of act that the prewar and wartime Japanese state had previously labeled "religion" or "superstition." Expressions of *mushūkyō* are typically considered appropriate for those who make personal visits to shrines, request purifications, engage in prayer, attend funerals, believe in horoscopes, consult fortune-tellers, and participate in religious weddings. Postwar statements of nonreligiousness are used by individuals who engage in religious practices of a far greater range than those preserved under the prewar and postwar discourse of *hishūkyō*. Interestingly, however, even in the absence of state-backed *hishūkyō* and threat of legalized violence implicit in the ultimately incontestable character of "not religion," Japan's Christian Churches have continued to grant unprecedented access and display remarkable innovation with regard to Japan's nonreligious (*mushūkyō*) majority in a manner that would otherwise be unthinkable in other contexts.

In one form or another, the pervasive nature of nonreligiousness (*mushūkyō*) in contemporary Japan is a reality that religious professionals and institutions must confront. The ability to appeal to affective religious sensibilities without causing problematic cognitive burden is part of any recipe for widespread popular success among the majority in contemporary Japan (Reader and Tanabe 1998, LeFebvre 2015). Nonreligiousness is a force that often shapes religious organizations and religious groups who must contend with the complicated task of providing sincere religious experiences to individuals who frequently prefer to remain nonexclusive and unaffiliated. It is also an environment that presents unique opportunities wherein certain religious phenomenon and groups come to thrive.

In many ways, the story of contemporary Japanese Christianity is one of success and failure in the face of overwhelming nonreligiousness. The story of failure typically depicts the inability of Christian churches to acquire and retain a large number of Japanese converts (Mullins 1998). Despite a boost in numbers for some groups through immigration, both transplant and domestic Japanese churches face an aging membership and a dwindling number of baptisms. In contrast, according to several different surveys (Ishii 2005: 31), by the mid-1990s, the Christian wedding had surpassed the Shinto wedding and has, since 1999, continued to be the wedding ceremony of choice among roughly sixty percent of couples in Tokyo and the surrounding areas, with similar trends in popularity in most other regions throughout the country (Zexy 2019). The prevalence of Christian wedding ceremonies reveals that the majority of all Japanese are, as Ian Reader (1991) has stated, "Born Shinto, Die Buddhist," but I would add that they also "Identify as nonreligious, Wed Christian."

Nonreligiousness has transformed the traditional Christian Churches of Japan and the bridal industry. On the one hand, these institutions have taken steps to relieve the cognitive burden of obtaining a Christian marriage, and thus, facilitated its broader acceptance within the nonreligious context that characterizes contemporary Japan as a whole. On the other hand, the success of Christian wedding ceremonies has provided new opportunities for innovation and given rise to new religious institutions and powerful partnerships between commercial and religious groups, frequently rendering the legal distinction between the two meaningless to most parties involved. In the lucrative business of Christian weddings, religious and commercial institutions and professionals now collaborate, compete, and copy one another in attempts to satisfy the religious sensibilities of the nonreligious. At the risk of oversimplification, the story of Christian weddings in contemporary Japan is one of churches becoming wedding chapels and of wedding chapels becoming churches.

4 A Church Opened by God: Church Directives and Catholic Marriages for Non-Christians

There are churches throughout Japan that do not offer wedding ceremonies and, specifically, do not offer them to nonmembers (i.e., individuals who are not officially affiliated believers). One such group of churches is the Orthodox Church in Japan, which considers the act of marriage one of its seven sacraments (*kimitsu* 機密), only one of which, baptism, is open to non-members. All other sacraments, including marriage, are available only to baptized members of the Orthodox Church (Orthodox Church in Japan 2016).

Unexpectedly, the Japanese Catholic Church is not among the churches sealed off to all but formal believers. Although the Catholic Church claims that the Protestant Churches and the bridal industry first popularized Christian weddings in Japan (Catholic Bishops' Conference of Japan 2006), the Catholic Church was a forerunner of the Christian wedding industry and one of the first Christian institutions to respond enthusiastically to Japanese individuals pursing Christian weddings in the postwar period. This early and rather unprecedented stance assisted in popularizing Christian weddings prior to the relatively late bridal industry response. Although there is undoubtedly a commercial dimension to opening the Catholic Church—all religious organizations must deal with financial realities—the strategies employed by the Catholic Church should be considered a direct response to a nonreligious religious outlook that tends to avoid cognitive-heavy faith claims or religious affiliations. Given its prewar and wartime experience with *hishūkyō*, the Catholic

Church was in a unique position to appeal to Japan's postwar *mushūkyō* constituencies. Before and throughout the war, Catholic Church had been forced to recognize and certify the "nonreligious" (*hishūkyō*) character of religious rites of the Japanese imperial state. In the postwar period, however, the Catholic Church was to use a rite of its own to reach out to individuals who did not claim any Christian identity and who were "without a religion" (*mushūkyō*)—that is, without an exclusive faith or affiliation. *Hishūkyō* policies had created "nonreligious" religious rites for Japanese Catholics; subsequently, the Church came to offer a Catholic rite to appeal to the "nonreligious" religious outlook of the Japanese.

On 1 March 1975, the Vatican issued the Japanese Catholic Church a special dispensation granting permission to conduct wedding ceremonies for non-Catholic couples. These ceremonies had previously been officially available only to baptized members of the Catholic Church and their spouses to be, regardless of their spouse's faith. However, this new exemption gave priests the authority to conduct wedding ceremonies for unbaptized, non-Christian couples as well. This unprecedented opening of the Catholic Church doors occurred long before the nation-wide explosion of Christian ceremonies, which began during the years of the "bubble economy" in the 1980s.[10] Officially, then, Catholic weddings have been available to non-Christian couples in Japan for at least the past forty odd years—in some cases much earlier—and with the express intent of attracting nonbelievers (Igarashi 2007: 188).

With the growing popularity of Christian weddings, the Pastoral and Evangelization Committee of the Catholic Bishops' Conference (Senkyō Shikyō Iinkai 宣教司教委員会) met in January 1990 to discuss and clarify the Church's position on making the sacrament of marriage available to non-believers. The discussion led to a debate over the unique potential of wedding ceremonies to reach members of Japanese society who would otherwise fall outside the current missionary efforts and never associate with the Church, but also included some concerns over the issue of church commercialization (Ishii 2005: 46–47).

10 Fisch (2004) has argued that the popularization of Christian weddings is the direct result of the bursting of the Japanese economic bubble and a corresponding delegitimization of Japanese culture. This is a somewhat tantalizing prospect, but as Ishii (2005) points out, Christian wedding ceremonies had already started to attract significant numbers of Japanese during the 1980s, at the height of Japan's economic success. Furthermore, as I will demonstrate in this section, the Catholic Church had already formalized and institutionalized its stance regarding marriage by nonbelievers in 1990, well before the collapse of the bubble in 1992. These documents state an explicit desire to take advantage of the religiosity of nonreligious Japanese and make no mention of Japan's economic situation. This is true for the Protestant Churches discussed below as well.

The position of this 1990 council was collected, organized, and published in 1992 as a fourteen page directive, *Wedding Ceremonies of Non-Christian Couples in the Catholic Church of Japan* (*Nihon no katorikku kyōkai ni okeru hikirisutosha dōshi no kekkon ni tsuite* 日本のカトリック教会における非キリスト者同士の結婚式について, hereafter *Wedding Ceremonies*) outlining the Church's position on Christian weddings for non-Christians. *Wedding Ceremonies* describes the Japanese Catholic Church as one with few members and faced with the unrealistic task of limiting marriage to only those who have received baptism within the Church. This 1992 directive continues on to describe marriages as the "best opportunity for the Japanese Church to preach the gospel" (*Nihon no kyōkai ni totte fukuin senkyō no tame no sairyō no kikai* 日本の教会にとって福音宣教のための最良の機会) (Japanese Catholic Pastoral and Evangelization Committee 1992: 3).

Although marriage is typically considered one of seven sacraments in the Catholic Church, the word "sacrament" (*hiseki* 秘跡) appears only once in the 1992 directive. Furthermore, when it appears, the term "sacrament" does not refer to an exclusive rite for church members only, but rather emphasizes the direct involvement of God in the blessing of a couple's union—regardless of their faith. This radical shift follows in the footsteps of similar alterations undertaken in the 1942 catechism to reduce exclusivity (Krämer 2011), but these new measures were voluntary and not state imposed. The result is that sacraments are portrayed as extremely potent, but ultimately, readily accessible religious rites where God is directly engaged in the activity at hand.

Wedding Ceremonies of Non-Christian Couples in the Catholic Church of Japan demonstrates that the Catholic clergy, at this early point in the popularity of the Christian nuptials, was already handling a large number of Christian weddings. Despite a few statements expressing concern that a focus on weddings could distract the church from its true mission—that is, caring for and providing for their cognitively affiliated community of believers—the Catholic Church overwhelmingly justified and embraced the opportunity to offer wedding ceremonies to non-Christians. In short, the Church made the decision to embrace the "nonreligious" culture of postwar Japan. In order to "create a church open to all people" (*subete no hito ni hirakareta kyōkaizukuri* すべての人に開かれた教会づくり), the Pastoral and Evangelization Committee outlined a position asserting that to provide Christian weddings for non-Christians is consistent with the mission of the Church as established by the First National Assembly on the Promotion and Evangelization of the Gospel (Dai Ikkai Fukuin Senkyō Suishin Zenkoku Kaigi 第一回福音宣教推進全国会議) and the Second National Assembly on the Promotion and Evangelization of the Gospel (Dai Nikai Fukuin Senkyō Suishin Zenkoku Kaigi 第二回福音宣教推進全国会議),

which emphasized domestic issues under the theme of "the home" (*katei* 家庭) (Japanese Catholic Pastoral and Evangelization Committee 1992: 5). The Japanese Catholic Church thus expressed the view that Christian weddings represent a rare opportunity for the Church to enter the lives and homes of non-Christians in a manner deemed appropriate and coherent with the Church's various missions.

In addition to the claim that providing Christian weddings to non-Christians was consistent with the institutional and programmatic agenda of the Church, the Pastoral and Evangelization Committee set out the Church's theological rationale for opening their doors to non-Christians. The Committee was aware that, although a small number of these individuals may have some knowledge of Christianity and Christian weddings, the vast majority of individuals seeking a Christian wedding probably have little or no proper understanding of doctrine or practice (Japanese Catholic Pastoral and Evangelization Committee 1992: 4). Furthermore, the Committee was realistic about the condition of faith in contemporary Japanese society and recognized that the apparent diversity of religious action among a large number of Japanese—e.g., Christmas celebrations, New Year's visits to shrines, Buddhist funerals, etc.—may even serve as evidence that "although the Japanese are religious, they lack faith" (*Nihonjin ni wa shūkyōshin wa atte mo shinkōshin ga nai* 日本人には宗教心はあっても信仰心がない) (Japanese Catholic Pastoral and Evangelization Committee 1992: 6). In this respect, the Pastoral and Evangelization Committee demonstrated a familiarity with crucial aspects of modern Japanese religiosity.

Citing the Acts of the Apostles, Gospel of Luke and the Second Edict of Pope John Paul II, the Pastoral and Evangelization Committee (1992) suggested that the increasing number of nonbelievers seeking Christian weddings was the result of nothing less than an act of God, because it was God who desires to meet these individuals and bring them blessings. Even if their reasons for desiring a Christian wedding are not entirely clear, their choice to do so can and should be understood as a search for the truth in which God has led them to "knock on the Church's doors" (*kyōkai no tobira o tataku* 教会の扉をたたく) (Japanese Catholic Pastoral and Evangelization Committee 1992: 7). Therefore, it is the Church's responsibility, as God's intermediary on earth, to acknowledge the value of the "religious feelings" (*shūkyōteki shinjō* 宗教的心情) these non-Christian Japanese couples possess and to respond positively in order to demonstrate that God has blessed their union in the same way that he blessed the union of man and woman as portrayed in Genesis (Japanese Catholic Pastoral and Evangelization Committee 1992: 7–8).

The Committee clarifies that there is no requirement which states that priests must perform wedding ceremonies for non-Christians, but it empha-

sizes the fact that Christian wedding ceremonies are a unique opportunity to fulfill the true mission of the Church by praying for the happiness and prosperity of all through God's blessings. Moreover, it is the Catholic Church's belief that Christian weddings may serve as a catalyst to transform unfocused "religious feelings" into exclusive Christian faith, as part of God's master plan. In this way, the strategy used by the Church to appeal to the Japanese population also bears a striking resemblance to certain aspects of the *hishūkyō* policies of the preceding period, in which participating in Shinto rites was as much a sign that someone believed in the Japanese imperial cult as it was an opportunity to cultivate such beliefs (Shimazono 2009).

The Catholic wedding ceremony performed for non-Christian couples is no watered-down version of the original sacrament. The text used to conduct the ceremony is *Rite for the Celebration of Marriage* (*Kekkonshiki* 結婚式) (Japanese Catholic Pastoral and Evangelization Committee 1996), which is the official Japanese translation of the Latin text for marriage, *Ordo celebrandi Matrimonium*, and is the same version most commonly used for Catholic and mixed Catholic/non-Christian couples.[11] This manual contains two possible programs for the ceremony: Rite for the Celebration of Marriage within Mass, and Rite for the Celebration of Marriage Outside of Mass. The latter is typically used for the wedding of Catholic and non-Catholic mixed couples as well as non-Christian couples. According to Toshimitsu Miyakoshi, secretary of the Japanese Catholic Committee for the Liturgy, Catholics are believed to be the normal participants in Church ceremonies and no separate marriage rite was designed for non-Christians; rather, it was intended that the Rite for Celebration of Marriage Outside of Mass be adapted for non-Christians on a case by case basis at discretion of the priest (Catholic Bishop's Conference of Japan 2006). Thus, non-Christians who marry in the Catholic Church receive the same blessing for their marital unions as do many Catholics.

In fulfilling its mission, the 1992 directive states that the Church shall only grant wedding ceremonies to those that meet all of the requirements for preparation, both legal and religious. Individual churches are given some freedom to establish requisite preparation, but generally a three to six month period of visits to the church on a weekly or twice-weekly basis is recommended (Catholic Bishop's Conference of Japan 2006).[12] This period of preparation is considered

11 The Japanese and Latin versions are identical aside from the addition of the prayer of St. Francis, which was thought suitable for Japan.

12 Despite the recommendation of a three-to-six-month period of visits and participation, it appears that there is a great deal of disparity among individual churches. For example, the Yamate Catholic Church—one of the oldest Catholic churches in Japan—only requires

essential to obtain the couple's consent and to assist them in developing what the Catholic Church believes to be a basic knowledge concerning the relationship between and responsibilities of husband and wife, and the mystery of life. Through this period of attendance, the couple experiences the church atmosphere, prayer, and ultimately, an opportunity to desire God's blessings from their own hearts.

Following the publication of the 1992 *Wedding Ceremonies of Non-Christian Couples in Japan*, it appears the Japanese Catholic Church has taken steps to implement programs that meet the demand for Christian wedding ceremonies by non-Christians as detailed in its pages. For example, seven Hiroshima churches participate in the World Peace Memorial Cathedral Marriage Committee, which holds pre-marriage seminars at Noboricho Church. In 2005, this committee held such seminars eleven times and celebrated the marriage of 45 couples (Catholic Bishop's Conference of Japan 2006). Noboricho Church began these pre-marriage seminars in 2000, and with the help of seventeen couples from the congregation, continues to prepare non-Christians to wed in the Catholic Church. One couple that assists in conducting these seminars describes the experience as bringing "to people the true meaning of the Catholic wedding ceremony" (Catholic Bishop's Conference of Japan 2006). Assisting couples prepare handouts for the participants, aid discussions of each of the seminars' themes, and help to fill gaps in the priest's knowledge, as he has no experience with married life.

Some of the non-Christian Japanese who are participating in order to receive permission to marry within the Church do at times seem to express uneasiness with the process and question the purpose of the seminars (Catholic Bishop's Conference of Japan 2006). Coordinator couples attempt to overcome this tension and reach the participants by striving "to establish a deep relationship with them," and one coordinating couple even attempts to place the pre-wedding seminar newcomers at ease by telling them "the purpose of the seminar is not to baptize people" (Catholic Bishop's Conference of Japan 2006). This interesting tactic seems at odds with the mission aspect of the program put forth in the 1992 directive of the Pastoral and Evangelization Committee. However, as is the case with the opening of the Church itself, this demonstrates nothing less than a direct appeal to "nonreligious" couples and the Catholic Church's transformation in the face of that same nonreligiousness, as affiliated believers themselves implement strategies to reduce cognitive pressure.

participation in three lectures before approving a couple's desire to have a Catholic wedding ceremony (Katorikku Yamate Kyokai 2016).

5 The Decline of Catholic Weddings

Undoubtedly, the widely televised celebrity weddings of actor Miura Tomokazu 三浦友和 and singer Yamaguchi Momoe 山口百恵 in 1980 and the superstars Kanda Masaki 神田正輝 and Matsuda Seiko 松田聖子 in 1985 did much to inspire consumer trends and generate interest in Christian weddings. However, as the number of Christian weddings ballooned, it was the Catholic Church and not the bridal industry that reaped the early rewards. The Catholic Church had the facilities, staff (especially religious professionals), and tradition necessary to handle the new demand and was a step ahead of the bridal industry, which remained predominantly oriented toward Shinto. Catholicism also played a critical role in providing the imagery that popularized the Christian wedding. For example, the Catholic Church featured in Kanda Masaki and Matsuda Seiko's "wedding ceremony of sacred shining" (*seiki no kekkon* 聖輝の結婚) even became the setting of the 1991 Japanese television series *Itsuka sarejio kyōkai de* いつかサレジオ教会で (Someday at Salesio Cathedral) as well as one of the more popular venues in the early years of Christian weddings. Unlike many more modest or secular looking Protestant churches, Catholic churches look like "real churches"—a point of particular attraction in Japan (Farnetti 2019: 121).

The Christian Churches, rather than the bridal industry, were the first to respond to the demand for Christian weddings, and the early years of Christian wedding popularity form the peak years for Catholic ceremonies. By reducing the demands for cognitive faith and strict affiliation while providing novelty and authenticity, the Catholic Church successfully moved from the margins to the mainstream of Japanese religious culture by offering weddings to those in pursuit of them. However, as the bridal industry aggressively responded to meet the demand for Christian weddings with facilities and staff of its own, the number of Catholic weddings began to drop sharply. In 1993, there were 1085 weddings in which both bride and groom were Catholic and only 291 in 2004. Similarly, the number of weddings among couples composed of one Catholic and one non-Christian was 3299 in 1993, compared to 1643 in 2004. Most dramatically, weddings among non-Christian couples dropped from 9829 in 1993 to 2141 in 2004. By 2007, these numbers dropped still further, with Catholic weddings totaling a mere 2899 ceremonies, of which non-Christian couples formed only 1066 unions, while ceremonies for mixed Catholic and non-Christian couples totaled 1389 (Catholic Bishop's Conference of Japan 2007). This is a ninety percent decrease in the number of Catholic weddings in just fifteen years. A decline in numbers remains the dominant trend. In 2017, there were a total of only 1529 Catholic weddings: 246 Catholic couples, 70 Catholic and Protestant

mixed couples, 831 Catholic and non-Christian couples, and only 382 weddings for non-Christian couples (Secretariat 2018).

As discussed above, the Christian wedding remains the preferred wedding ceremony for a clear majority of Japanese couples, and nonreligious Japanese continue to prefer the unique blend of religious authenticity, sincerity, and happiness the Christian ceremony offers (LeFebvre 2015). Catholic churches, though quick to react to the initial demand for Christian wedding ceremonies, were slow to adapt to intense competition from both Protestant Churches and the bridal industry, which, in the eyes of "nonreligious" individuals, provides roughly the same traditional Christian wedding without the time consuming preparation and cognitive burdens (seminars, etc.). Commercial institutions and some Protestant churches offer weddings without requiring couples do anything but show up for the ceremony. This has made the Catholic ceremony, which formerly benefitted from an advantage in facilities and human resources, unique in both its requirements and inconvenience.

Nonreligious forces have played a critical role in the Church's decision to reformat, strategize, and offer weddings to the general population. Given its experience with the "nonreligious" Japanese state in the 1930s and 1940s, the Church was equipped to capitalize on its increased ecumenicalism and familiarity with the Japanese religious landscape as inherited in postwar Japan. Although the Church experienced initial success in introducing Christian weddings, the Catholic Church is now only one of a wide number of options for a Christian wedding ceremony and has failed to remain competitive.

6 Easy Access: Protestant Churches and Weddings

Protestant Churches have taken similar and sometimes even more drastic steps to grant wedding ceremony access to non-Christians. Protestant organizations and ministers have fewer reservations about conducting marriage rites for non-Christians and seem less hesitant about engaging in partnerships with the bridal industry. Protestant ministers have not only opened their church doors to non-Christian couples, but also set out to bring their traditions to hotels, chapels and restaurants throughout the country. With the diffusion of Protestant liturgies and the ready exchange of personnel between Protestant Churches and bridal industry companies, it would not be entirely inaccurate to say that Japanese Christian wedding ceremonies are by and large Protestant in character.

The United Church of Christ in Japan (Nihon Kirisuto Kyōdan 日本基督教団), which is the largest confederation of Protestant Churches in Japan,

publishes guides for ministers and churches to use in proselytizing, running churches, and performing ceremonies.[13] Instructions for wedding ceremonies espoused by the United Church of Christ are included in their ritual handbook *Liturgical Handbook* (*shikibun* 式文). *Liturgical Handbook* lists six points for the composition of its sample wedding ceremony, along with an explanation of each.[14] The last of these points state that *Liturgical Handbook* and its explanations and guidelines regarding wedding ceremonies were designed to serve not only as a text for the presiding minister, but also for the congregation and the couple (Nihon Kirisuto Kyōdan 2006: 89). This manual provides a relatively comprehensive explanation of the Protestant position vis-à-vis marriage ceremonies and is comparable to the 1992 directive issued by the Catholic Church.

Unlike the Orthodox and Catholic Churches, Protestant Churches do not consider marriage to be one of the holy sacraments. However, according to *Liturgical Handbook*, the decision to marry is an important moment in one's life and marks a new point of departure. It is the Church's position that having a wedding is not simply a process whereby individuals publicize their private affections or heighten the awareness of familial connections. Rather, marriage and wedding ceremonies "should be treasured as a time to realize God's plan and guidance, to deepen one's faith, and for prayer" (*kami no keikaku to michibiki o oboe, shinkō o fukame, mata inoru toki to shite kore o omonzu beki de aru* 神の計画と導きを覚え、信仰を深め、また祈る時としてこれを重んずべきで

13 As Krämer (2011) explains, the United Church of Christ in Japan, like the catechism reform of the Catholic Church, is also a product of the organizational program of the Religious Organizations Law of 1939.

14 *Liturgical Handbook* lists the following six points: 1) To offer up guidelines for marriage, which include a simple explanation of the meaning of marriage as it occurs within the Church and its liturgical proceedings, and provide a liturgical text based on those guidelines. 2) To ensure that marriage ceremonies remain simple and follow the basic structure of a church service. 3) To incorporate the successes obtained through the recent worldwide liturgical reform movement, including changes to the liturgical structure of the marriage ceremony, the use of terminology, the involvement of the congregation and the structure of the vows, etc. 4) To present a number of biblical passages so as to facilitate the diverse selection of readings for use in marriage ceremonies. These passages should be places that discuss the meaning of marriage and should not preach the one-sided oppression of either men or women, but rather illuminate the reconciliation of the gospel in Jesus Christ and explicate the blessings and responsibility obtained through marriage vows. 5) To ensure that the proceedings of the ceremony are not rigidly established and beyond change, but follow the guidelines with relative flexibility, allowing ministers to incorporate the wishes of parties being married. 6) To ensure that the guidelines and explanation contained herein are capable of serving the needs of not only the ministers who perform marriages, but also church members and the marrying parties as a text for learning about Christian marriage.

ある) (Nihon Kirisuto Kyōdan, 2006: 89). As with the story of Adam and Eve in Genesis, weddings are the public proclamation of the formation of a new house through God's blessing. At its basis, weddings consist of vows made by husband and wife based on and in response to the blessings of Jesus Christ and the death of Jesus on the cross. As such, the vows made between man and woman, who are "equal before God" (*kami no mae ni oite byōdō de aru* 神の前において平等である), reflect the spirit of the promise made by God and written in the Bible. *Liturgical Handbook* states the relationship between husband and wife should be modeled on the precedent of Christ and the Church—a proclamation and promise rooted in a relationship of mutual dedication and limitless love (Nihon Kirisuto Kyōdan 2006: 90).

Liturgical Handbook reminds ministers that for many of those in attendance at a wedding ceremony, this may be their first experience at a Christian service and to experience the gospel. Consequently, *Liturgical Handbook* recommends that passages from the Bible concerning the Old Testament laws describing the duties between husband and wife be avoided. Rather, *Liturgical Handbook* suggests passages from the gospel that discuss marriage as set of responsibilities that bring blessings to loyal and sincere couples (Nihon Kirisuto Kyōdan 2006: 95). Sample wedding ceremonies enclosed in *Liturgical Handbook* make use of verses taken from the book of Genesis concerning the creation and union of man and woman, and from Corinthians regarding love.[15] The recommended strategies for selecting biblical verses mirrors the sense of obligation within Japan's nonreligious culture, where lists of duties and obligations to the religious tradition are downplayed while sincerity, mutual cooperation, caretaking, and divine blessings are emphasized.

In addition to avoiding certain portions of the Bible, *Liturgical Handbook* states that preaching should be kept to a minimum to ensure the overall simplicity of the ceremony. These brief messages should focus on a short but important list of items: the value of individual people's personalities, the mystery of man and woman's creation, the equality of the sexes, and the victory and transcendence found in unconditional, all-forgiving love (Nihon Kirisuto Kyōdan 2006: 96). Furthermore, a focus on these topics will help to emphasize

15 The suggested biblical passages included in *Liturgical Handbook* (Nihon Kirisuto Kyōdan 2006) are Genesis 1:26-31, Genesis 2:18-24, Proverbs 3:3-6, Isaiah 61:10-11, Jeremiah 31:31-34 from the Old Testament, and Colossians 3:12-17, Matthew 5:1-10, Matthew 5:13-16, Matthew 19:3-6, Mark 10:6-9, Romans 12:1-2, Philippians 2:1-11, Philippians 4:4-9, John 2:1-11, John 15:1-10, I John 4:7-12, and I Corinthians 13:1-13 from the New Testament. Based on my field research and interviews, I Corinthians 13:1-13 appears to enjoy the greatest popularity and its recitation at Christian wedding ceremonies in Japan is virtually ubiquitous.

that the new household created by marriage will be filled with the blessings of God and serve as a vessel for God's glory. Statements that might invoke a sense of exclusivity are consciously avoided in order to introduce Christian themes, messages, beliefs, and divinities.

The guidance offered by *Liturgical Handbook* regarding weddings concludes by stating that wedding ceremonies should be properly rooted in and consistent with the aims of Church. However, at this point, *Liturgical Handbook* also insists explicitly that it is possible to conduct Christian weddings for couples or individuals that do not possess a clear Christian faith. The Church, who receives the petition from and grants approval to these non-believers, should strive to bring their marriage under the prayers and blessings of the Church. Thus, as seen above with the Catholic Church, Protestant groups have also attempted to take advantage of the religious opportunities that an environment of non-religiousness provides in order to proselytize through religious rituals. In cases where Christian weddings are performed in facilities other than a church—i.e., hotel, chapel, restaurant, etc.—it is essential that the minister adhere to the contents of *Liturgical Handbook* and endeavor to protect and maintain the quality and faith expressed in the Christian wedding ceremony. Although the couple, guests and other participants may not possess faith, *Liturgical Handbook* considers their sincere participation in the ceremony's vow and prayers a necessity for the proper performance of the ritual. In other words, Protestant churches also recognize the religiosity of the nonreligious and tailor weddings to match their needs.

7 Christian Wedding No Questions Asked: Christian Bridal Mission

Ishii Kenji suggests that traditional Catholic and Protestant Churches have attempted to provide nonbelievers with Christian wedding ceremonies since the 1950s, and in the decades that followed, relationships between Protestant clergy and the commercial institutions of the bridal industry developed rapidly (Ishii 2005: 49–50). One of the most successful examples of religious and commercial partnership is the Christian Bridal Mission (Kirisutokyō Buraidaru Senkyōdan キリスト教ブライダル宣教団), which was originally founded in 1980, and despite referring to itself as a limited liability corporation (*yūgen gaisha* 有限会社), incorporated as a religious juridical person in 1986 (Ishii 2005: 49–50). In the beginning, the Christian Bridal Mission was composed of a group of twenty-three Protestant ministers who worked in cooperation with fifty-seven different bridal venues. After formalizing a relationship with a particular venue, the Christian Bridal Mission dispatches a minister (and, typically,

choir members and musicians) to handle any and all requests for a Christian marriage—no questions asked.

In the 1980s, when Christian weddings were still emerging as an alternative to the more popular Shinto ceremony, hotels and chapels had not yet created the appropriate spaces within their facilities for conducting Christian weddings (Ishii 2005: 49–50). In effect, if one wanted a Christian wedding, one would have to approach a church and complete whatever preliminary requirements existed before being granted a Christian wedding service. However, Honda Sadao 本多定雄, Protestant minister and founder of the Christian Bridal Mission, felt that churches and their requirements prevented nonbelievers from gaining exposure to Christianity, and in a 1984 interview with *Yomiuri Shinbun*, stated, "For regular people it is a pain and they stop going half way through and it just results in them avoiding [Christianity]. On this once in a lifetime day, I did not want to refuse people in the same manner as a church" (*Futsū no hito wa mendō ni natte tochū de yamete shimai, kekkateki ni tōzakete iru koto ni naru. Isshō ni ichido no hi o, kyōkai ga kobamu yō na katachi ni shitaku nai.* ふつうの人はめんどうになって途中でやめてしまい、結果的に遠ざけていることになる。一生に一度の日を、教会が拒むような形にしたくない. Ishii 2005: 50).

In this way, the first Christian organization devoted exclusively to the production of weddings was born and, from these humble beginnings, has grown to national proportions with the explosion of the popularity of Christian weddings. In sharp contrast to its early local affiliations in the Kanto region, by 1990, the Christian Bridal Mission had two hundred and sixty partner hotels and performed fifteen thousand weddings annually. For the sake of comparison, in 1984, the Christian Bridal Mission performed a mere eight hundred weddings. A similar story can be told for the number of members: in 1990, what was originally a group of twenty-three ministers grew to an organization with over four hundred members, of which nearly one hundred were ministers, with an additional three hundred coordinating choir members and musicians (Ishii 2005: 50). However, with the Christian ceremony on the rise in the 1990s, the growth did not stop there.

Even a glance at the Christian Bridal Mission website shows that this unique Christian Church's growth parallels the overall popularity of Christian weddings. As of 2016, the Christian Bridal Mission is an organization with over thirty years of experience and a network of over three thousand trained professionals, one thousand of which are ministers. According to their website, these professionals form a "nation-wide institutional network" (*zenkoku soshiki nettowāku* 全国組織ネットワーク) that stretches from Hokkaidō to Okinawa (Christian Bridal Mission 2016). Additionally, the Christian Bridal Mission is

a nondenominational Evangelical Protestant Church that provides a "twenty-four hour around the clock response system" (*nijūyojikan taiō taisei* 24時間対応体制), boasting that it is "capable of responding immediately to any emergencies or other needs" (*kinkyū nado no arayuru nīzu ni taisho dekiru* 緊急などのあらゆるニーズに対処できる), and offers flexible, experienced service with a "heart" (*kokoro* 心) (Christian Bridal Mission 2016). The Christian Bridal Mission claims to specialize in Christian weddings that incorporate originality while simultaneously ensuring the authentic, orthodox character of those wedding ceremonies. Perhaps anticipating customer concerns about rumors of "fake ministers" (*nise bokushi* 偽牧師), the Christian Bridal Mission includes a segment on their webpage informing readers that they receive their non-Japanese ministers through the world's largest missionary organization, Youth With a Mission.[16]

The Christian Bridal Mission's advertisement of services and use of terminology in a form that might typically be considered commercial is obvious. However, the success of the Christian Bridal Mission is not simply a product of commercialization, but rather of successful marketing of a high-demand religious product. The Christian Bridal Mission reduces pre- and post-ceremonial cognitive demands placed on customers to a minimum and makes concessions to customers' aesthetic requests while simultaneously reassuring them of the authenticity and orthodoxy of their wedding services. This winning combination is very popular with hotels, chapels, wedding churches, and guesthouses, which are the Christian Bridal Mission's primary partners, because it matches the flexibility offered by these commercial venues while at the same time providing quality assurance in the form of guaranteed religious authenticity.

8 Chapels and "Wedding Churches" (*Kekkonshiki Kyōkai*): The Architecture of Contemporary Japanese Christianity

As my bridal industry insiders attest, authentic religious locations and professionals are in high demand, but often in short supply. In this section, I will

16 One of my interviewees was a wedding minister who worked for the Christian Bridal Mission, and he claimed that he was hired in Japan despite having no official training from any church or seminary. This minister was not affiliated with Youth With a Mission, and stated that he believed that there were many ministers who were hired but had no training or affiliation. He did state, however, that such institutional affiliations help to place marrying couples' minds at ease by convincing them that ministers have a proper pedigree, even when that may not necessarily be the case.

discuss this problem and bridal industry solutions to it. Even with a shortage in supply, the startling truth is that the bridal industry is better equipped to meet consumer demands for religious authenticity than are churches. Hotels, chapels, and guesthouses are outfitted with various facilities to maximize convenience. However, this is not the bridal industry's only advantage over most churches. The architectural features and interior decor of wedding churches are understood to be part of the Christian wedding rites that take place within their walls and one of the surest ways to confirm the authenticity of the ritual itself. Visual and auditory cues—such as the minister's race, the architectural style of the setting, and the musical talent of performers—have become one of the primary ways to not only generate a connection with the Christian tradition, but for customers to verify that such a connection does indeed exist. The bridal industry is fully aware of the fact that the perceptual and the habitual appropriation of spaces form a mutually constitutive pair, with the result that commercial institutions also play a crucial role in the success and continued popularity of the Christian wedding.

According to a 2003–2004 survey conducted by bridal informational service Kekkon Pia, when asked about what aspect of the wedding they felt was most important, the top response of couples was location (*kaijō* 会場) followed by ceremonial style (*kyoshiki no sutairu* 挙式のスタイル), indicating the importance of sensory experience (Igarashi 2007: 27). Taking into account the decisive popularity of Christian wedding ceremonies, it is reasonable to assume that this means the majority of individuals want a Christian ceremony at a Christian location.[17] The industry response to this demand has manifested in a number of ways—the most visible of which includes the production of at least 1285 locations, many centrally located—for the performance of Christian weddings (Zexy 2021). Although this number is limited to those registered with bridal industry giant Zexy, this statistic alone indicates an institutional presence that is at least as influential as the Catholic Church, with 969 churches, and United Church of Christ in Japan, with 1699 churches (Tōkyō Kirisutokyō Daigaku 2019). Moreover, nearly half of these locations are freestanding wedding churches that are designed to meet expectations for aesthetic beauty and religious authenticity deemed appropriate for the production of Christian weddings, and in ways most community churches could not hope to match. The architectural splendor of wedding churches is not simply part of a set designed to make weddings look Christian, but an essential feature of what makes them Christian to Japanese audiences.

17 My interviews corroborate this interpretation of the data.

Igarashi Tarō's (2007) book length study into the rapid appearance of wedding churches—free-standing commercially owned chapels - demonstrates that they rival or surpass most churches in architectural splendor. The vast majority of wedding churches are built in one of two Western architectural styles: classical or gothic. Christian architectural forms, along with the use of stained glass, pulpits and pipe organs, are common fixtures in both wedding churches and hotel chapels (Igarashi 2007: 53). Wedding churches are also typically designed with a large-scale vaulted-arch ceiling, flying buttresses, steeples, a rose window, and extended virgin road. Some wedding churches are actually built from the ground up using traditional materials, and in some cases, materials taken from gothic churches that were torn down in Europe, imported, and reconstructed in Japan (Igarashi 2007: 52). The bridal industry is building gothic-style churches at scales and in numbers that Catholic and Protestant Churches in Japan could probably never afford or justify, at the same time that churches are being deconsecrated, repurposed, sold, or torn down in other countries (de Wildt et al. 2019).

Igarashi, an architect by training, states that the bridal industry has been the source of an unprecedented revival of gothic and classic architecture in contemporary Japan that cannot be witnessed elsewhere in the contemporary world (Igarashi 2007: 57). The quest for marital happiness has become embedded in the physical landscape of Japan in much the same way as it has become embedded in the religious landscape as a life-cycle ritual. Gothic and classical wedding churches dot the cityscape, and in some cases, wedding chapels have even replaced the Shinto shrines that were once located on the top of department store buildings—for instance, one such chapel resides on the top of the Nagoya Parco. Igarashi states, "in Japan, faux churches do more to pursue authenticity, causing an inversion of roles [with real churches], and this is because image is so important for wedding churches" (*Nihon de wa nisemono no kyōkai no hō ga honmono rashisa o motomeru to iu gyakuten genshō ga hassei shite iru* 日本では、偽物の教会の方が本物らしさを求めるという逆転現象が発生している. Igarashi: 2007: 54–55).

Many Japanese appear to know relatively little about Christian doctrine or history, but as part of a nonreligious religious outlook, ritual experiences and visual cues are one way by which Japanese considering a Christian wedding ceremony felt they were able to verify the religious authenticity of a location or person. For example, rumors concerning the existence of non-Japanese posing as ministers—i.e., "fake ministers" (*nisemono bokushi* 偽物牧師)—and concerns as to whether or not such ministers were actually licensed were common. Many Japanese are put at ease by the fact that the hotel chapel had stained glass, an organ, and that the choir and the Caucasian minister seem to know

exactly what they were doing and appear to be quite proficient in the execution of the ceremony. The environment and the professionals have the power to convince individuals of the legitimacy of Christian ceremonies and invoke feelings of reassurance and gratitude (LeFebvre 2015). In addition, many Japanese entrust the selection of a minister to a commercial institution they can hold accountable and trust to vet potential religious specialists in ways that they themselves cannot. As experts in the production of wedding ceremonies, it is believed that bridal planners and commercial venues have the connections necessary to find legitimate Christian ministers and choir members and to properly assess their credentials.

In addition to décor and minister phenotype, other tactics are employed to enhance the religious authenticity, and therefore, marketability of wedding churches. Wedding churches, hotels, and chapels alike readily use Western names, and they also refer to themselves as "churches" (*kyōkai*) or "great cathedrals" (*daiseidō*). Wedding churches sometimes establish official relationships with churches from around the world. The gothic churches of Ai Group, a bridal industry corporation, are affiliated with the World Wide Fellowship, which also includes such churches as Saint Paul's in London, Westminster Abbey, and Saint Patrick's Cathedral in New York (Igarashi 2007: 83). Similarly, Saint Paul's Park PRIMROSE claims to have received permission to use the name "Saint Paul's" directly from the Anglican Church, and it also claims that its cathedral was blessed by the Pope. Inconsistencies concerning denominational affiliation appear to matter less than claims of legitimization through famous Christian organizations or offices. According to the pamphlet they disseminate, Saint Paul's Park is a "cathedral with a proper pedigree" (*yuisho tadashii daiseidō* 由緒正しい大聖堂. Igarashi 2007: 127).

The effort to establish religious authenticity does not stop there. The reader may recall that Notre Dame Shimonoseki has apparently acquired relics of the actual Saint Valentine from Saint Valentine Church in Italy, which are kept on display. But this is not the only wedding church that possesses actual Christian relics. Another instance is documented on Westminster's Park's homepage (Ai Group 2021) in its statements concerning the stones of its altar, which are said to contain the clothing of the seventh-century saint, St. Hubertus. The relics of saints from Christianity's historical past are said to bless the unions of those who make their vows before them.

In addition to the ubiquitous use of crosses, altars, and the Bible as well as other Christian décor, some chapels even possess their own full-time resident ministers. One such wedding church is the Abbey la Tour Church, whose resident minister participates in the community choir and even conducts Sunday church services at the commercially owned and operated chapel where wed-

dings occur (Wedding Central Park 2016). Other wedding churches, such as the Saint Mary Church in Azabu, possess resident ministers who conduct lectures on the Bible, marriage seminars, and Christmas mass (Mary Company 2016). Given that Christian wedding ceremonies and the package of services with which they are bundled are the sole source of income for wedding churches, there can be no doubt that the additional annual and weekly religious services mentioned here are offered precisely because they are believed to make the wedding church a more appealing option for hosting Christian weddings. However, if wedding churches and chapels are simply sets for the filming or photographing of weddings designed to look like Christian weddings and nothing more, the presence of resident ministers and a ritual calendar are inexplicable.

Wedding churches and, to a lesser but convincing extent, hotel chapels make powerful visual and conceptual overtures that customers will—given their experience and understanding of how churches are utilized—accept as cues of authenticity, and consequently, ensure the affective religious success of their officially commercial spaces. This obvious blurring of the lines between commercial and religious entities is part of a larger effort to lend religious credence to churches that are part of commercial industry, making them more attractive venues to a nonreligious consumer base who still expects an authentic religious experience. It would appear that, in much the same way as Japanese individuals and groups inherited the right to determine for themselves what makes someone nonreligious in postwar Japan, Japanese corporations and commercial industries are free to market religious products without defining themselves as religious juridical persons under the law.

9 The Nonreligious Transformation of Japanese Christianity

Nonreligiousness is the normal, non-exclusive religious outlook that helps to explain the continued wealth of religious diversity in the Japan and the recent acceptance of new religious rituals such as Christian weddings (LeFebvre 2015). In postwar Japan, wedding ceremonies have arguably become more and not less religious as the Shinto ceremony, and now the Christian ceremony, have come to replace older communal celebrations (Ishii 2005). Nonreligious acceptance of Christianity is, in part, responsible for significant transformations in both Christian Churches of Japan and the bridal industry. Catholic and Protestant Churches opened their doors and offered their services to nonbelievers in unprecedented and striking ways. New Christian organizations have emerged to supply the ritual specialists essential to the performance of this

Christian rite, and the bridal industry now operates an entire armada of wedding churches and employs a veritable army of Christian ministers. In predominantly nonreligious Japan, religion not only retains its value; in fact, the demand for it ensures that it will continue to create lucrative opportunities for those who are able to meet people's religious needs in ways that are perceived as acceptable and can be experienced as authentic, regardless of the legal categorization of venue.

Christian weddings are complicated undertakings that bring commercial, religious, and nonreligious actors together in ways that are often bewilderingly complex. As such, any analysis of Christian wedding ceremonies must account for the manner in which they weave together the personal and public, individual and familial, perceptual and habitual, historic and contemporary, and the religious and commercial. In the case of Christian wedding ceremonies, an exclusion of the role of religion could very well lead to deceptively simple descriptions of historical change within Japanese Christianity, politics, society, and identity.

The story of Ōura Cathedral did not end in the 19th century with the emergence of the hidden Christian communities of Urakami mentioned earlier. Ōura Cathedral was designated a national treasure (*kokuhō* 国宝) in 1953 and was the first and only Western-style building to receive that honor until 2009, when Akasaka Palace was also designated a national treasure. At the time of its erection, the site represented no less than a foreign invasion to those in power, but it now represents the cultural achievements and history of the Japanese nation itself.

Despite being Japan's oldest standing gothic cathedral and a Catholic church, Ōura Cathedral has continued to evolve and it, too, has become a wedding church. Wedding Park online includes the comments of a thirty-four year-old female who begins her post by stating that Ōura Cathedral is "Japan's oldest church where one can marry even if one is not a believer" (*shinja de nakute mo kyoshiki dekiru Nihon saiko no kyōkai* 信者でなくても挙式できる日本最古の教会) letting other potential couples know that, luckily, the venue is available to everyone (Wedding Park 2016). The post tells how this individual married under the high ceiling, in the environment of stained glass, with live organ music and a choir singing. She received the blessing of tourists (*kankōkyaku* 観光客) who were present, but she was not a tourist herself. The fact that her wedding planner had previously worked at Ōura Cathedral and understood the process meant that she did not have to rely exclusively on the volunteer faithful (*shinjasan* 信者さん) who ran the pre-wedding seminar, but knew less about the logistics concerning lodging and food. She had one meeting with the priest, who agreed to conduct their wedding without requesting any additional meet-

ing aside from the rehearsal before performing the service and giving his benediction. As a wedding church, Ōura Cathedral is religious space that matches the "gravity and substance" (*jūkōkan* 重厚感) of the moment of marriage.

In much the same form as these comments, I hope that the discussion above points to the substance of the developments in postwar Japanese Christianity under the auspices of a largely nonreligious constituency and to the gravity of those changes.

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