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The Evangelization of Japan and Religious Syncretism

Therefore go and make disciples of all nations ... (Matthew 28, 19).

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Abstract. The Japanese people have practical, syncretic, and polytheistic approach toward religion. Therefore, the aim of this work is to consider a difficult process of the evangelization of Japan in the context of a syncretic religious approach relating Buddhism with indigenous polytheistic beliefs of *shintō*. According to the main assumption of this dissertation we show that religious syncretism, difference of Japanese and European cultures, and the Christian exclusivism have been obstacles to understanding of the monotheistic belief based on the Old and New Testaments. Therefore, Japanese Christians suffered here very cruel persecutions in the past. In addition, it appears that even though these persecutions have ceased for more than a century, the Catholic Church is still not developing here in a substantial way. The traditional proclamation of the Gospel is foreign to Japanese mentality, which in turn is often not quite understood by foreigners.

Fortunately, on a small scale admittedly, one can still find promising examples of interreligious dialogue that not necessarily lead to a superficial religious syncretism, but to a depth of the essence of religiousness, which is a constitutive element of the human nature. Namely, the amicable and model relations between the *Focolare* Movement, founded within the Catholic Church during Second World War, and a new syncretic (established just before the war) religious movement of *Risshō Kōsei-kai*, originated from a classical Buddhism, substantially contributes to strengthening of the peace in the whole world. This extremely friendly interreligious relation is a good example of the realization of the new paradigm of Evangelization, in the light of the teaching of Second Vatican Council.

It seems that acceptance of the Gospel in Japan on a much larger scale would require an effort to explain this Evangelical message in terms of the Japanese culture. Certainly, this would allow further development of the missions in the Far East. We sincerely hope that the present work devoted to the issue of religious syncretism considered in the light of the Japanese culture could, to a certain degree, contribute to achievement of this noble objective.