Christianity Transplanted and Transformed: The Case of Kagawa Toyohiko and the Friends of Jesus Movement

Talk by Mark Mullins
December 2, 1:30pm

Moore Hall 319 (Tokioka Room)

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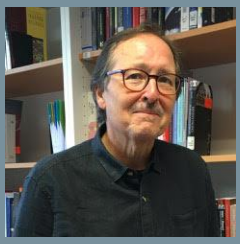
The transplantation of Western Christianity represents only aspect of the development of this foreign-born religion in Japan. Japanese were not passive recipients of this late comer, but critically engaged the new religion and created their own independent and indigenous expressions of the faith. This presentation will focus on the charismatic founder of one of these of these movements, Kagawa Toyohiko (1888-1960), who established the Friends of Jesus Movement in 1921. As a Protestant leader, prolific author, and social reformer, his influence extended far beyond this minority religious community as members were mobilized to implement his vision of Christianity as a religion of individual and social transformation. The Friends of Jesus membership steadily declined after Kagawa's death in 1960, but his vision and priorities had already been "routinized" into two social welfare organizations, the Unchūsha Foundation (1953) in Tokyo and Jesus Band (Iesu Dan) Foundation (1954) in Kobe, which are now funded largely by municipal and national governments. This development suggests the possibility of a wider diffusion of a minority religious movement's moral vision and values upon the larger society and public institutions in postwar Japan.



Mark R Mullins is Professor of Japanese Studies & Director of the Japan Studies Centre at the University of Auckland. Prior to this appointment in 2013, he was engaged in academic work in Japan for 27 years. He is the author and co-editor of a number of works, including *Christianity Made in Japan* (UH Press, 1998), *Disasters and Social Crisis in Contemporary Japan* (Palgrave, 2016), and *Yasukuni Fundamentalism: Japanese Religions and the Politics of Restoration* (UH Press, 2021).