

The Biblical Influences on Toson's Works

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THE BIBLICAL INFLUENCES ON TŌSON'S WORKS

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Shimazaki Tōson (1872-1943) achieved distinction both as a poet and as a novelist in a literary career of fifty years. Tōson's dedication to a philosophy of literature based on naturalism and realism extended over three eras - Meiji, Taishō, and Shōwa - which collectively represent the entire period of modern creative writing in Japan. The success of his early career as a romantic lyric poet was assured with his recognition as a founder of the modern poem, while subsequently, in the novel, he progressively revealed new perspectives. Of these, his approach to naturalism can be retrospectively seen as a watershed in Japanese fiction.

The influence of Christianity on Tōson seems to have been given less importance than it deserves by scholars in the past. Most have concentrated more on assessment of Tōson as a writer. According to the critic Sasabuchi Tomoichi one of the reasons for this is that Tōson's contact with church activities was said to have ceased by the time he began publishing his poems on *Bungakkai* (Literary world) and before he left on his wanderings in 1893, ⁽¹⁾ which produced emotional experiences that stimulated both poems and novels.

Because most Japanese have no concrete idea about Christian beliefs, they would probably consider that Tōson had then lost his Christian identity. However, Sasabuchi thinks that the Christian influence on Tōson was equally important as the literary influence of Bashō. Tōson himself recalled in essays of his later years that those from whom he received the most important literary and philosophical guidance in his formative years were the 17th century *haiku* poet Bashō, the Meiji philosopher Kitamura Tōkoku, and the Christian school-master Kimura Kumaji. ⁽²⁾ Itō Kazuo thinks that this reflected Tōson's eclectic belief in Christian theology and Japanese pantheism-atheism, according to which Tōson saw Bashō as representing the oriental outlook on life, and Kitamura and Kimura that of western philosophy. ⁽³⁾

We cannot ignore the fact that the Bible played an important role in the development of Tōson's writing, as well as in providing spiritual comfort for him. He often took verses of themes from the Bible which he used as the motifs of works such as *Sakura no Mi* (When the Cherries Ripen), 1919, *Haru* (Spring), 1908, *Hakai* (The Broken Commandment), 1906, *Ie* (The Family), 1910, and *Shinsei* (New Life), 1919.

According to Itō, even after Tōson cancelled his membership of the church and went on his long wandering journey, the Bible was his constant companion. No doubt the Bible had figured prominently during the early stage of his Christian experience at the Meiji Gakuin (a Christian Missionary school in Tokyo founded in 1887); significantly, it was one of the personal belongings he took with him on his journey. In *Katatumuri* (Snail), 1893, he wrote:

I carried the Bible and a book of
the *Fumonbon* No.25⁽⁴⁾ with me in my
rucksack to Suma.⁽⁵⁾

It seems that the reason Tōson kept the Bible with him was not so much from religious motives as from the interest in held for him as a source of literary inspiration. For instance, during his stay at Sendai in the northeast of Japan between 1896 and 1897, when he produced some of the most refreshing and modern poetry of that time, the books of the Old Testament seem to have provided him with many of his ideas.⁽⁶⁾ Hasegawa Sen in his *Tōson to Kirisuto-kyō* (Tōson and Christianity) expresses a similar view to Itō's.⁽⁷⁾ Itō points out that Tōson relied greatly on the Song of Solomon especially in writing the poem *Kitsune no Waza* (The Fox's Masic) in *Wakana-shū*, 1897, and his essay *Shunshi* (The Poetry of Spring) in *Hitohabune*, 1898.

Itō explains that one of the reasons for Tōson's admiration of the Old Testament was his experiences when he attended the fourth Summer Christian Seminar at Hakone with Togawa Shūkotsu in July 1892. He was particularly inspired by the lectures on the Old Testament by Yuasa Kichirō (Hangetsu), a professor of Dōshisha University in Kyōto.⁽⁸⁾ The lecture, on the theory of the Song of Solomon, in particular, gave Tōson a new insight into the study of the Bible as a piece of literature. Because of the amorous nature of the language used in the Song of Solomon, which is a lovesong between a bride and groom, his book has been frequently criticized even among

Christians. Itō states that Yuasa stressed an interpretation of the Song of Solomon as religious literature, teaching the beauty of *ren'ai*, love between a man and a woman. He claimed there had been the tendency among Christian theologians to interpret it simply as a spiritual allegory, representing the holy affection existing between God and his Chosen People, or Christ and his Church. Yuasa's then controversial theory stimulated Tōson's thinking on the beauty of love, particularly in his first essay, *Ensei Shinka to Josei* (The Philosophical Poet and Woman),⁽⁹⁾ already inspired by Tōkoku's writings. Itō quotes Sasabuchi's comment on Tōson: "Most of the images created by Tōson in his poetry relied on the Song of Solomon." He adds that the allegorical significance of words in Tōson's poetry such as "deer" (*shika*), "grapes" (*budō*), and "apple" (*ringo*) is similar to Yuasa's interpretations of them as symbols of *ren'ai*.⁽¹⁰⁾

The story on Genesis (Chapter 3) of the temptation of Adam and Eve in Eden clearly provided the themes for such works as the play *Kusamakura* (Pillow of Grass), *Bungakkai*, 1894,⁽¹¹⁾ and the poems *Nigemizu* (The Mirage),⁽¹²⁾ and *Hatsukoi* (My First Love).⁽¹³⁾

Kusamakura provides a good illustration of the way in which Tōson absorbed the influence of western literature. It is the story of a young man, Adam, who is tempted by the Devil, and a young maiden, Eve. No description of the appearance of the Devil is given, except that Adam is for some reason scared of him, but he obviously takes human form. The temptation is direct incitement to Adam to fall in love with Eve, and the Devil, after gaining Adam's confidence, behaves like a go-between in an Elizabethan play, inflaming Adam's desire to the point of pain. There is a prohibited tree, a stream of "living" water, a red flower (which must represent passion) that the Devil gives Adam to present to Eve, and a luscious apple which is introduced as an illustration of what excites man's appetite, while God is replaced by a goddess. There is also a strong echo from the love-story of Hamlet and Ophelia, for the Devil tells Adam how Eve wanders about the fields singing snatches of sad songs. Eve's finding Adam asleep on a bank recalls Titania's waking and seeing Bottom in *A Midsummer Night's Dream*. Eve even imitates Ruth's words in her determination to follow Naomi, when she pledges herself to follow Adam "whithersoever he goeth". And all this is shot through with Buddhist overtones. Verbal adaptations are numerous: the foreign proverb "throwing pearls before swine" replaces the Japanese "gold coins before cats" (*neko ni koban*). Adam succumbs to the Devil's persuasion and falls in love with Eve, who is at first somewhat alarmed at the change in him. While they are

sleeping, the Devil endeavours to create doubts in Eve's mind about Adam's sincerity, and she wakes as from a nightmare. Thunder and lightning apparently indicate some kind of divine disapproval, and Eve is driven blind by worry and the intensity of her feelings - a stock twist in *kabuki* plots. In their unhappiness, she and Adam decide to leave Eden - the typical *kabuki* "michiyuki" or journey scene is here interpolated and Eve says, "As long as I can be with Adam, I don't care whether I go to Hell or to perpetual darkness." Finally, she opts, not for suicide, the usual goal of *michiyuki*, but for life, Tōson putting in to her mouth the phrase, "I want to live - as full a life as I can," which he repeated many times in his later works. The play is, as can be seen, a mishmash of bits and pieces, all integrated into the framework of a conventional *kabuki* plot, and doubtless highly titillating to the youthful Meiji reading public, who relished exotic foreign flavours. The dialogue, like the verses of *Natsugusa* (Summer Grasses), Tōson's very literal rendering of Shakespeare's *Venus and Adonis*, is written in the unmistakable *Jōruri* style. Commonplace conversational trivialities are strung together to impart an almost comical quality to the discourse by the sheer prolixity of the interchanges, and the whole is dominated by the rhythm of the samisen.

The following examples illustrate the influence of biblical expression on Tōson's verse. Hasegawa claims that Tōson has changed certain words and phrases, copied from verses in the Bible and some hymns, into romantic expressions in his poems. ⁽¹⁴⁾

Tōson's Poem

Biblical Source

(1) Wakamizu
(Spring Water)

John 4:14

Kumedo tsukisenu
Wakamizu
Kimi to Kumamashi
Kano zumi
Kawaki mo shiranu
Wakamizu
Kimi to nomamashi
Kano zumi

Waga atauru mizu
Nomu mono wa
Eien ni kawaku koto nashi.
Waga atauru mizu wa
Kare no naka nite
(zumi) to nari,
Eien no inochi no mizu
Waki izubeshi.

(I shall draw with you
the pure water.
However much we draw,
it shall never cease
to flow.

I shall drink with you
of the water and we
shall never thirst.
I shall drink with you
of that pure spring.)

(Whosoever drinketh of the
water that I shall give
him shall never thirst;
but the water that I shall
give him shall be in him
a well of water springing
up into everlasting life.)

[Wakana-shū
(Green Leaves),
1898]

[The New Testament]

(2) Banshun no Betsuri

(Parting in the Late
Spring)

Kano Babiron no mizu aoku

Chitose no iro o utsusu
tomo

Yanagi ni kakeshi inishie
no

Koto wa munashiku nagare
keri

(The waters of Babylon
are green
with the reflections of
10,000 years,
yet out harps of times
past,
we hung upon the
willows,
send forth sad notes.)

[*Natsugusa*
(Summer Grass),
1898]

Psalms 137

Warera

Babiron no kawa no hotori
ni

Suwari,

Shion o omoi idete

Namida o nagashinu.

Warera

Sono atari no yanagi ni

Waga koto o kaketari.

(By the rivers of Babylon,
There we sat down, yea
We wept, when we remembered
Zion.
We hung our harps upon
the willows in the midst
thereof.)

[The Old Testament]

(3) *Gekkō Goshū*
(Five Poems in the
Moonlight)

Matthew 2:17

Augeba mune ni shinobi iru

Fue fukitaredo

*Kiyoki hikari ni
terasarete*

Nanji-ra odorazu,

*Ware nomi hitori fue
fukedo*

Nageki tare do,

Kimi odorazuba

Nanji-ra nakazariki.

Ikani semu.

(When I raise my eyes,
they are filled with
a pure brilliance which
steals into my heart.
All alone I have piped
to you,
yet you have not danced,
alas, for me.)

(We have piped unto you,
and ye have not danced;
we have mourned unto you,
and ye have not lamented.)

[*Natsugusa*]

[The New Testament]

(4) Mune yori Mune ni
(Heart to Heart)

Matthew 15:15

Ana kanashi koi no yami
niwa,

Karera o sute oke

Meshi ⁽¹⁵⁾ o

Kimi mo mata onaji

meshi ka

Tebikisuru meshi nari

Tebiki se yo

Meshi moshi meshi o

Meshi no mi ni wa

Tebiki-seba, futari tomo

Meshi koso ureshi kari
kere.

Ana ni ochin.

(In that dark night of
unhappy love,
you are as blind as I.
Let the blind take the
hand of the blind and
lead him,
Then blind though they
both be,
They will be happy too.)

(Let them alone; they be
blind leaders of the blind.
And if the blind lead the
blind, both shall fall
into the ditch.)

[*Rakubai-shu*
(Fallen Plum Blossoms),
1901]

[The New Testament]

(5) Shunshi

(The Poetry of Spring)

Toshi wakaki otoko yo,

Uruwashiki otome yo

Nanji ni waga kokoro o

Tsugezu shite

Dare ni ka haru o

Tsugu beki ya.

Sora uraraka ni

Hare-watarite,

Yawarakaki kaze

atarashiki

Midori o fuku,

Ah, nanji, nanji wa

Kore o hitotose no

Ikanaru toki to

omoeru zo ya.

Sakura no hana wa

yasashiku

Momo no hana wa

omoshiroku,

Hyakka saki-midarete,

Yūbe no hoshi no hikari ni

Utsurō,

Ah, nanji, nanji wa

Kore o hitotose no

Ikanaru toki to

Omoeru zo ya.

Song of Solomon 2:10-13

Waga tomo yo

Waga uruwashiki mono yo

Okite ide kitare, miyo,

Fuyu sude ni sugi,

Ame mo yammite haya sarinu

Moromoro no hana wa

Chini araware,

Tori no saezuru toki

Sude ni itari,

Yamabato no koe

Warera no chi ni kikoyu.

Ichijiku wa sono aoki mi o

Akarame,

Budo no ki wa hana sakite

Sono kōbashiki nioi o

Hanatsu

Waga tomo yo,

Waga utsukushiki mono yo

Tachite ide kitare.

Ame no oto shime-yaka
ni shite,

Haruru ka to mireba furi,

Furu kato mireba hare,

Uguisu no hana no kozue ni

Atarashiki shirabe o utau,

Ah, nanji, nanji wa

Kore o hitotose no

Ikanaru toki to

Omoeru zo ya.

※Refer p. 10, line 5.

(“Ame mo yamite haya sarinu.”)

※Refer p.10, line 8.

(“Tori no saezuru toki”)

[Shunshi] (continued) ...

(Harken, young Lover!

Harken, fair maid!

This heart that not yet
spoke to you,

To whom shall it speak
of its young love?

Clear shining skies
stretch overhead,

Soft breezes the noon
verdure stir,

Oh my love, my love,

What time of year is this?

Soft glow the cherry
flowers

And the peach flaunts its
allure,

All nature in profusion
blooms

(My beloved spake, and
said unto me, Rise up,
my love, my fair one,
and come away.

For lo, the winter is past,
the rain is over and gone;
the flowers appear on the
earth; the time of the
singing of birds is come,
and the voice of the turtle
is heard in our land;
the fig tree putteth forth
her green figs,
and the vines with the tender
grape give a good smell.
Arise, my love, my fair one,
and come away.)

In the quiet light of the evening star.

Oh my love, my love,

What time of year is this?

So softly falls the gentle

rain,

We think it ceased yet see

it fall;

We think it falls yet see

it's gone,

The warbler, hid beneath

the flower

Pipes for us his newest

lay.

Oh my love, my love,

What time of year is this?)

[*Hitohabune*

(The Leaf Boat),

1898]

[The Ole Testament]

(6) Chikumagawa Ryojō no Uta

(Song of Melancholy at
the Chikuma River)

Kino mata kakute arikeri

Kyō mo mata kakute arinamu

Kono inochi nani o akuseku

Asu o nomi omoi-wazurau

(Yesterday also this was
how it was;
And there will be no
difference today.
Why do we waste this
little life of ours,
Ceaselessly fretting
about tomorrow?)

[*Rakubai-shu*]

Matthew 6:34

Kono yue ni asu no koto o

omoi-wazurau na

Asu wa asu mizu kara

omoi-awzurawan.

Ichinichi no kurō wa

Ichinichi nite tareri.

(Take therefore no thought
for the morrow; for the
morrow shall take thought
for the things of itself.
Sufficient unto the day
is the evil thereof.)

[The New Testament]

Psalms 90:4

Ah, kojō nani o ka katari

Kishi no nami nani o ka

kotau

Inishi yo o shizuka ni

omoe

Momotose mo kinō no

gotoshi

Nanji no mokuzen ni wa

Sen-nen mo sude ni suguru

Kinō no gotoku

(Ah, what is the ruined
castle saying?

What do the ripples by
the shore reply?

“Think quietly of the
ages that are passed.”

“A hundred years are but
as yesterday.”

(For a thousand years
in thy sight are but as
yesterday when it is past,
and as a watch in the
night.)

[*Rakubai-shu*]

[The Old Testament]

(7) *Nige-mizu*
(The Mirage)

Hymn
(The Evening Prayer)

<i>Yūgure shizuka ni</i>	—————	<i>Yōgure shizuka ni</i>
<i>Yume min tote</i>	-----	<i>Inori sen tote</i>
<i>Yono wazurai yori</i>	—————	<i>Yono wazurai yori</i>
<i>Shibashi nogaru</i>	—————	<i>Shibashi nogaru</i>
<i>Kim yori hoka niwa</i>	—————	<i>Kami yori hoka ni wa</i>
<i>Shiru mono naki</i>	-----	<i>Kiku mono naki</i>
<i>Hana kage ni yukite</i>	-----	<i>Kokage ni hirefushi</i>
<i>Koi o nakinu</i>	-----	<i>Tsumi o kui mu</i>
<i>Sugikoshi yume-ji o</i>		<i>Sugikoshi megumi o</i>
<i>Omoi miru ni</i>		<i>Omoi tsuzuke</i>
<i>Koi koso tsumi nare</i>		<i>Iyo-yo yukusue no</i>
<i>Tsumi koso koi</i>		<i>Sachi o zo negau</i>

(I steal a brief respite
from worldly pain,
And in the still twilight
pursue a fitful dream.
For no one knew but you
How in a flowery grove
I wept for love.
I see again the dream
road we did rove.
Love as our only sin,
But sin itself was
love.)⁽¹⁷⁾

[*Wakana-shū*]

(I steal a brief respite
from worldly pain,
And in the still twilight
pursue a prayer.
For no one hears my prayer
but God,
How in a green shade
I kneel before Him,
Repent my sin.
I remember the blessings
He vouchsafed.
And pray for the happiness
to come.)

[*Shinsen Sanbika*
(New Selected Hymn) -
translated in Japanese by
Uemura Masahisa)⁽¹⁸⁾]

It is worthwhile noting that as Tōson's interest shifted from poetry to prose, he gradually moved from the Old to the New Testament as a source of quotation. His interest in the New Testament was particularly notable in *Hakai*, his study of the outcaste, and during the aftermath of the *Shinsei* incident relating to incest with his niece, when he was suffering from the pangs of remorse and the contempt of contemporary critics. For example, such words as *kaigo* (repentance), *shokuzai* (redemption), *zange* or *kokuhaku* (confession), *tsumi* (sin), *tsumibito* (sinner), and *fukuin* (the Gospels) are prominent in *Shinsei*. Even the expression “*Saigo no Shimpan*” (“the final judgment”) shows his reliance on biblical expressions as is seen in the following example from *Shinsei*, Part II, 115:

Since everything about the relationship
Between Kishimoto and Setsuko was exposed,
he felt there was nothing he could do but
stand and face the final judgment.⁽¹⁹⁾

Other examples of parallels between Tōson's lines and biblical verses have been noted. The following passage from *Hakai* showing Ushimatsu's delay in confession is held to have been derived from the Book of Matthew 2:69-75:⁽²⁰⁾

Ushimatsu, sitting down on one of the
benches (in the assembly hall), took out
the newspaper from his pocket. As he
began reading it, he suddenly remembered
his conversations with Takayanagi; not
only once but three times he had lied
about his association with Rentarō,
saying, “I do not know the man. I have
no association with him. I know nothing
about him at all.” He denied three times
to know the man whom he respected as his
teacher and to whom he owed so much,
as if he were a total stranger to him.

“Please forgive me, Mr Inoko!” he said to himself remorsefully, as he began to read the paper once again. ⁽²¹⁾

And from the Bible:

Now peter was sitting outside in the courtyard. And a maid came up to him, and said, “You also were with Jesus the Galilean.” But he denied it before them all, saying, “I do not know what you mean.” And when he went out to the porch, another maid saw him, and she said to the bystanders, “This man was with Jesus of Nazareth.” And again he denied it with an oath, “I do not know the man.” After a little while the bystanders came up and said to peter, “Certainly you are also one of them, for your accent betrays you.” Then he began to invoke a curse on himself and to swear, “I do not know the man.” And immediately the cock crowed. And Peter remembered the saying of Jesus, “Before the cock crows, you will deny me three times.” And he went out and wept bitterly. ⁽²²⁾

The connecting link here is probably the idea of ultimate peril under the attack of the multitude. Itō thinks the basic principles developed in *Hakai* and *Shinsei* correspond with the following scriptures of Romans 2:1: ⁽²³⁾

Therefore you have no excuse, O man,
whoever you are, when you judge another;

for in passing judgment upon him you
condemn yourself, because you, the
judge, are doing the very same things. ⁽²⁴⁾

At the outset Tōson used the Bible only as a source of stories, but he gradually began to draw on it for philosophical and ethical ideas. During the Shōwa period, his interest in the Bible was more theological than literary, as his wife from his second marriage, Katō Shizuko, was an ardent Christian. He made comparative studies of Christian theology and the principles of Shintō and Buddhism. Ito's studies have indicated that Tōson was particularly attracted to the Books of Matthew, Mark, Luke, Romans, First Corinthians, Galatians, Ephesians, Philippians, Colossians, First Timothy and Hebrews. It appears that Tōson had read most of the important books of the New Testament. Judging by the degree of underlining in red in the small Bible he had treasured, the ones he gave special attention to were Romans, Colossians, and Timothy. The subjects he was most interested in, according to Ito's conclusions, were: Faith and Practice; Eternal Life; Sin and Rebirth; Love and Resurrection; Law and Duty; Sin and Judgment; Sin and Forgiveness; Women's Expectations from Life; Man's Actions; The Nature of Man's Faith; Punishment; Absolute Love; Ethics in Love; and God's Blessings. It is clear his thinking was profoundly affected by the section dealing with Sin and Love in the New Testament. ⁽²⁵⁾

Whatever the correct interpretation is, there can be no doubt that Christianity was one of the main influences in Tōson's life, particularly in the literary field. However, uncertainties regarding the spiritual aspect of faith always remained with him.

NOTES

- (1) Sasabuchi Tomoichi, *Shimazaki Tōson to Protestantism* (Shimazaki Tōson and Protestantism), Nippon Bungaku Kenkyū Shiryō Sōsho (Tokyo: Yuseidō, 1971), p.18.
Tōson was twenty-two years old when he set off on an aimless journey through the Kansai area. This desultory journey was in imitation of the wanderings of Bashō, a great haiku poet of the Edo period (1603-1867), and Saigyō, a naturalistic waka poet and philosopher of the Kamakura period (1192-1333).
- (2) Kimura Kumaji (1845-1927) was Tōson's English teacher at Kyōritsu school in Tokyo, became a minister of the Takanawa Christian Church, and later established the Komoro School in Kiso, Nagano Prefecture where Tōson taught for a while.
- (3) Itō, Kazuo. *Shimazaki Tōson Kenkyū: Kindai Bungaku Kenkyū no Shomondai* (A Study of Shimazaki Tōson: from various aspects in Modern Literature). Tokyo: Meiji shoin, 1989(1st Edition 1969), p.300.
- (4) One of the *Hokkeke-kyō* (The Sutra of the Lotus) Prayer No.25 in abbreviated form of the sutra *Myōhō Renge Kyō Kanzeon Bosatsuin*. Also called *Kan-non-kyō*, it is the teachings of the Kannon for man's salvation.
- (5) Shimazaki Tōson. *Tōson Zenshū*. 18 vols. Tokyo: Chikuma shobo, 1966-1971 (hereafter referred to as *Zenshū*), vol. xvi, p.132.
- (6) Itō, p. 330.
- (7) Hasegawa Sen, *Tōson to Kirisuto-kyō* (Tōson and Christianity), in *Shimazaki Tōson Hikkei* (Shimazaki Tōson Handbook), ed. by Miyoshi Yukio Tokyo: Gakutō-sha, 1997 (1st Edition 1969), p. 33.
- (8) A professor in theology, who taught Hebrew and translated biblical literature. His works of translation included the Proverbs, The Book of Job, Song of Solomon, the Lamentations of Jeremiah, and the Psalms.
- (9) Tokoku's first essay was published in *Jogaku Zasshi* (Magazine for Female Instruction) twice in February, 1892, and received sensational recognition. His revolutionary views on romantic love greatly inspired young people of that time.
- (10) Itō, p. 330.
- (11) It was published under the pen-name *Mumeishi* (Mr. No-name) in *Bungakkai*, January issue, No.13 of 1894. It is included in *Zenshū*, vol. xvi, pp. 236-245. Tōson also published a lyric poem under the same title in *Bungakkai*, February, No. 50 of 1897.
- (12) In *Wakana-shō*, 1897. (*Zenshū*, vol. 1, p. 60.)
- (13) *Ibid.*, p.54.
- (14) Hasegawa, p.34.
- (15) The word *Meshii* in Japanese Bible is also read as *Mekura*.
- (16) Ackroyd, Joyce I. *An Attempt at a Reassessment of the Poetry of Shimazaki Tōson with Special Reference to Problems of Translation*. University of Queensland. Paper presented at the National Conference of Asian Studies, May 1978, p. 41.

- (17) Ackroyd, p.20.
- (18) Hasegawa, p. 36. (It was popular at that time. Tōson quotes the first stanza of this hymn in *Sakura no Mi.*)
- (19) *Zenshū*, vol. ii, p. 176.
- (20) Itō, p. 375.
- (21) *Zenshū*, vol. ii, p. 176.
- (22) Matthew 26:69-75.
- (23) Itō, p. 383.
- (24) Romans 2:1
- (25) Itō, pp. 295-297.