

Through the generous support of the Diocese of Southwark and Sion College, I was able to spend ten weeks in October to December 2009 on a period of sabbatical leave in Japan. I was staying at the Central Theological College in Tokyo, one of two seminaries of the Nippon Seikōkai, the Anglican Church in Japan, in which I had served for two years as an assistant priest more than twenty years ago. Grandly titled Visiting Lecturer, I was required to lecture once a week, to a small but lively seminar, on Anglican theology of inter faith relations, generating some fascinating discussions in a mixture of English and Japanese. My place at CTC also gave me membership of a community, a framework of meals and meetings, an ordered rhythm of daily office and regular eucharist, and a network of relationships and friendships. At the same time, it gave me plenty of freedom to enjoy the primary purpose of my visit to Japan, which was simply to enjoy and to benefit from a sabbatical space.

I had decided that I would make the most of this opportunity through exploring traditional Japanese perceptions of the linkage between landscape, spirituality, and well-being, as this is developed in the art of Japanese garden design. This interest had grown for me through an awareness of the way in which humanly shaped natural environments affect my own spirituality and those of clergy in the very urban archdeaconry of Southwark. I believe that the configuration of the spaces in which we live, think and rest has a significant influence on the way in which we relate to God and to one another; having recently been inspired by reading the *Sakuteiki*, a medieval treatise on these subjects, I wanted to have the depth and space to experience at first hand the wisdom on this embedded in Japanese attitudes to green space. While many people, both here and in Japan, urged me to spend much of my time visiting Kyoto, the centre of traditional Japanese culture famed for its gardens, the contemporary and urban reference made me want to focus rather on Tokyo and its hinterland, and so in the space of ten weeks I visited 31 Japanese landscape gardens, 26 urban parks, 30 Buddhist temples, 12 Shintō shrines, 12 Christian churches, 18 museums and art galleries and 18 other historic sites, and walked along 22 urban green walks. To list places like this perhaps shows the extent to which I began to think in a Japanese way, where a fondness for cataloguing and classifying has always been prominent; but it would also be misleading if it obscured the connections between these various sites. Temples and shrines in particular are embedded in, and generative of, the historic built-and-natural townscape of Tokyo, as their buildings are set in and interact with green precincts.

The importance of gardens in the monastic tradition is primarily as places to induce meditation. Fortunately, the weather was warm enough for me to appreciate this at some length as I sat on several temple terraces looking at ponds, rocks, gravel and other features laid out in a way to lead the viewer, through focus on motifs abstracted from Buddhist iconography, towards the realm of the formless. These are the type of Japanese gardens which are perhaps most familiar in the West, and their apogee coincided with the wave of Zen influence in the later middle ages. As I visited gardens and parks in and around Tokyo, however, I came to understand that there are at least three other strands which feed into the Japanese sense of landscape.

One, dating back to the courtly Heian culture of the early middle ages, is the desire to create an arena for spectacle. It is this which is charted in detail in the *Sakuteiki*, and which originated the motif of the waterfall; I was intrigued to learn that the rather fearsome looking god Fudō had announced that all waterfalls over 30cm high were manifestations of himself. Later, from the eighteenth century onwards, the growth of urban culture in Tokyo (then known as Edo)

meant that wealthy merchants, bureaucrats and samurai began to construct large gardens designed to be walked around, each turn of the path revealing a new micro-landscape, with many of the views intended to recall famous sights from other parts of the country. These so-called *kaiyūshiki* ('pleasant strolling') gardens are still well-represented in Tokyo; rather than meditation or spectacle, their predominant motif is one of evocation. In contrast to this, many other green spaces in the poorer parts of the city were created for much more functional purposes: to serve as fire-breaks among the tightly packed wooden houses, so subject to disastrous conflagrations, or to provide refuges for displaced people during typhoons, earthquakes and other disasters.

In contemporary Tokyo, these different strands are interwoven and fused in the various green spaces, large and small, which interpenetrate the urban sprawl. I had plenty of time to learn more of this rich and complex history during my ten weeks sabbatical, and I came to a new appreciation of this mega-metropolis, surely one of the most underrated of the world's great cities. More than an academic knowledge, though, I also came deeply to value the importance which is given to a sense of space in Japanese culture, in the setting aside of both space and time to complement and refresh the busy and crowded realities of daily life. The opportunity which I was given to inhabit that space was enormously beneficial for me, and has led me to think further about the importance of space in our ministry, and in the mission which we share. If, as I believe, mission is a sharing in what God is doing in the world, then it must in some sense flow from the space of peace and repose which is the life of God. Since my return from sabbatical, I have begun to notice how one-sidedly activist we can too easily be in our missiology: we speak of the *missio Dei* as a sharing in the activity of God in the world, but surely we should also think of it as an invitation to share in his rest. So my reflections on my sabbatical lead me to three personal learning points on what mission might mean.

First, there is the importance of the physical space, mostly in our culture represented by the garden. The Biblical narrative begins with Eden, and the theme of the walled garden, the *paradeisis*, as a space of tranquillity and refreshment amidst the harsh aridity of its surroundings provides one of the most potent eschatological symbols of Christian faith, that of Paradise. In our urban contexts, in London or Southwark, part of our mission may be to create sacred mini-landscapes. Second, we need to safeguard space within the flow of time also. The Letter to the Hebrews says memorably: 'There remains yet a Sabbath rest for the people of God; for those who enter God's rest also cease from their labours as God did from his' (4.9–10). The Church's structuring of sacred time is of enormous value here. I have come increasingly to value the rhythms of liturgical life as part of our mission: rightly commended, they hold out to people who want it a chance to enter God's rest. Thirdly, at the point where space and time intersect with our own selves, there is the missionary question of how we live our lives. My sabbatical has shown me the importance of *otium*, which we lamely translate as 'leisure'. *Otium* is more than this; it is a classical ideal of restful yet active attentiveness, taken up and transformed in monastic literature and still a source of wise living today. Even in the Church, we live in age of *negotium*, of frenetic busyness; but I have learned that if I am to be a disciple of Christ my activity must flow from an inner space where I find rest in God.