

Christian Periodical Literature in Japan

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THE THEMES OF EDUCATION, family, happiness, creation and death received significant treatment in Christian periodical literature from January 1994 to March 1995. With the advance of technology and market enterprises throughout the world, the Japanese educational system and the importance of the family bond were highlighted and reviewed as foundational to society. Despite its reputation, the Japanese educational system is heavily distorted and experiences serious problems. Numerous articles questioned the propriety of the current system and the society that tightly adheres to it. Many magazines and journals carried articles on the family in 1994 as it was designated the International Year of the Family. In the family one receives the education necessary to live in society. Happiness is what every person has sought since the beginning of human history. This broad subject is repeatedly treated in the literature, inviting readers to give serious thought to this eternal theme both on the personal level and in relation to others. Following closely on the theme of human happiness is that of the environment because human beings cannot obtain happiness while ignoring the environment. Environmental issues relate deeply to individual life, although they may seem unrelated on the surface. The November 1994 issue of most periodical literature dealt with death and dying as November is the month when

the dead are commemorated. Reflections on how to cope with the death of loved ones and what can be learned through the experience were featured in those issues.

EDUCATION

The distorted nature of Japanese education is apparent in a series of *ijime* (bullying) incidents that affected students in elementary and junior high schools. The intensity of harassment is so serious that many students resort to suicide as the only solution. The *ijime* problem has been extensively and sometimes irresponsibly treated in the media. However, this problem is only an outward symptom of the disease, which is the education system itself. Knowledge and technology have made life convenient and provided many consumer products, but the need for an appropriate education has been increasing for the last fifty years. Writers point to the recent increase in students' powerlessness (*muryōkuka*) and protest a society based on academic achievement (*gakureki shakai*). These writers suggest a reevaluation of the purpose of education in Japanese society. Education is frequently treated in the periodical literature because reorganization of the education system is so seriously needed for a healthier society.

In the February 1995 issue of *Katei no Tomo* (Family Friend), Tanaka Sumie writes of the bullying incident that occurred in

Okayama Prefecture in May 1994 and another incident that happened in Aichi Prefecture in December 1994. In both cases, a fourteen-year-old junior high school boy committed suicide because he was badly bullied by school classmates. In the Aichi case, one million yen was extorted from the student in question by his classmates. This incident is no longer simply ijime; it is criminal behavior. Among the students attending the boy's school, four out of fifteen say their teachers cannot be depended on for counseling in times of need. Tanaka expresses regret that for years the educational system has lacked any teaching on religion, and she blames the ijime problem on this neglect. School teachers do not perceive the students' troubles or else they ignore their plight. Neither teachers nor students can speak out on the injustice that takes place so flagrantly at educational institutions. Tanaka further laments that young people who do not value their own lives and easily seek death as a solution. She views their attitude as rather arrogant because students seem to think that they own their lives and are able to do anything they want with them. There seems to be no attitude of humbly placing oneself before a being that is beyond one's self. She asks why the students who have committed suicide did not have courage to speak out, if only to their brothers and sisters.

The March 1994 issue of *Akebono* (Dawn) features articles on what parents wish to hand on to their children. Some mothers featured in this issue reflected on their attitudes toward their children. They write of their attempts to raise their children with unbiased viewpoints and of their endeavors to view their children as individuals. A Japanese lawyer currently living in Washington, D.C., shares with his two sons the same joy of traveling by train and ship that he had shared with his own father. A mother who enjoys cooking teaches her children the importance of appreciating life

in their daily meals. She writes that nourishing meals help provide for her children's physical and mental health while at the same time teaching them to respect life through food. Her conclusion is that education is also found in the family's daily meals. Another father, employed at a grade school, tries to teach his children about nature and the environment through such things as the falling and sprouting of acorns. A psychologist and mother of two children explains the difficulty of raising children with freedom as well as principles, but yet not spoiling them. It is more and more difficult for children today to develop social skills, creativity and spontaneity because they are so busy going to "cram" schools or playing computer games. If a person's academic background is the only achievement valued by society, then children growing up in such a society become adults who lack the essential ability to care for others and appreciate both other people and themselves. Today's parents are more significant in their children's lives than ever before in history.

The April issue of the same magazine features high school education. In this issue, three high school teachers discuss the state of current high school education. They admit the weaknesses that distort the Japanese educational system. As a result of this distortion, many high school students lose the desire to go to school and drop out. School children lose interest in choosing a career because of society's exclusive emphasis on academic background. Too many students lose interest in learning by the age of fifteen or so. School grades decide the future of Japanese children; future jobs and salary levels are determined while children are still in elementary school. Educational institutions and academies that stress the value of searching and the individual's learning process seem to be ignored in the current system. The distortions in the educational system are widely recognized, but

as long as society places top priority on academic background, children will be caught in a vicious cycle between society, school and home, and the situation will only worsen.

In the February 1994 issue of *Koe* (Voice), Inoue Hirotsugu, President of Eichi University, wrote a special feature entitled "Thoughts on a society controlled by academic background." The issue featured a questionnaire distributed to one thousand senior high school students in Japan and the United States in 1990. One question was, "What will you do or be when you are 30?" Many American students answered that they would have job at a large company or would be self-employed. They would own their own home and probably have a vacation house also. However, more than half of the Japanese students answered that they would work for a small- or medium-sized firm. Japanese students do not have grand dreams because they have been ranked by grade and have been struggling in the examination system from a young age. In addition to students, questionnaires were also given to university presidents and academic deans and the personnel departments of business firms. To the statement "Academic background will continue to be significant in society," 74.1 percent of Japanese students agreed, while 61.1 percent of university presidents and deans agreed and 57 percent of the personnel departments agreed. To the statement, "Academic background will no longer be important," only 25.1 percent of Japanese students agreed, while 36.9 percent of university presidents and deans agreed, and 41 percent of personnel offices agreed. As the results of this questionnaire show, academic background will continue to be important in Japanese society in the future.

Regarding their attitudes toward the purpose of college, the answers were: college is the place to make friends (40%) and the place to obtain special (professional) knowledge (39%). Surprisingly, the third

most frequent answer was that college is the place where students can do anything they want. When tested at the time they enter college, the IQs of Japanese students are among the highest in the world, but they rank only twentieth at the time of graduation. As a member of a university faculty, Inoue questions whether Japanese colleges and universities are doing their duty as educational institutions. Can "careerism" lead one to happiness? Inoue asserts that finding one's own potential will lead to the kind of personal happiness that cannot be defined by others. Recent research reveals that fifty percent of business people between the ages of 20 and 49 have changed jobs and seventy percent of those in their twenties had changed jobs after only a few years. This tells us that the younger generation is trying to find, in their own way, something to which they can commit themselves. Business is also changing its attitude from an emphasis on academic background to an emphasis on human resources. God, the Creator, creates us as individuals with a unique existence and role in society. What God expects of us is not the grades we achieve but how we respond to His respective call to each of us.

The March 1995 issue of *Akebono* highlights the relationship between parents and children. Present-day society requires that children be guided in developing their individuality and creativity. This creativity and individuality will always give new perspectives to parents. A two-year-old girl has the ability to personify a Christmas tree or candy bar and create a subjective relation with these objects. In watching her daughter as she did this, a mother realized that commercial toys may sometimes have an adverse effect on a child's education. A singer and song writer writes of his belief that in the sharing of a meal and exchanging simple conversation of the day's happenings, a family deepens their bonds. Some of the authors in this issue regret that there are parents who are unable to love their own

children. A study was done in 1994–1995 of 2,865 mothers with children under the age of one year. More than ninety percent of the mothers answered that child-raising gave them nothing but bitterness, and almost eighty percent responded that they do not think of children as being affectionate. A mother's love has been considered the foundation of a child's life in conventional Japanese society, so the results of this questionnaire shocked people. Some people actually insisted that the results had to be mistaken—surely no more than ten to twenty percent of today's mothers could not love their children. Furthermore, the results of the questionnaire disclosed the reality of child abuse in Japan. These mothers actually revealed the distortion of modern society.

The same issue also focused on the current situation of “busy” children. Their daily schedule is filled with cram schools and private lessons in addition to their regular school curricula and activities. When and how do they find time to broaden their minds and hearts as well as stimulate their brain cells? It is not beneficial for parents to rationalize that this kind of schedule is good for the children. Parents who have begun to use a trial-and-error method to overcome the deficiencies of the educational system must also have the guidance of local support groups and programs. Regaining confidence in themselves as parents is the initial requirement. Only then can they find the best way for an individual child to develop at his or her own pace.

Mere discussion on how to reform school education, the family or society does not lead to a solution of this serious problem. It only touches the branches and leaves of the problem, but the trunks and roots are left untouched. In writing this overview of Christian periodical literature, I could not help thinking of the absence of essential relationships between human beings in society. The need for quality relationships and significant communication has been

neglected in the advanced world. Pursuing only what is visible, such as grades or materialistic success, does not lead us to eternal happiness. The present education system places too much emphasis on surface matters. An educational emphasis on the intangible would create an existential bond in the relationship between society, school and family. If a real bond was built between parents and children and between teachers and students, what else would be needed to build and improve society? Things we see or possess may vanish instantly. This concept is not alien to Japanese tradition; for many years it has appeared repeatedly in Japanese thought and literature. What is needed now is individual reflection and examination of our self-identity and our responsibility toward others.

FAMILY

The significance of the family was featured in many periodicals during 1994 as it was the International Year of the Family. Each family has its own characteristic feature as a unit and assumes its own responsibility in society. The writers appearing in these periodicals share their thoughts and personal experience as members of their respective families.

The novelist and winner of the 1994 Nobel prize for literature, Ōe Kenzaburō, spoke on family bonds at Sophia University in November 1994. The January and February 1995 issue of *Katei no Tomo* carried his entire speech. In the first part, Ōe gives two examples of family: one is nonfictional and the other is taken from one of his novels. He defines the family as a role model for individuals' interaction with society. From that standpoint, he speaks of how he relates to people of faith and to church. When he thinks of church, Ōe imagines a rescue ship that saves him when he is wrecked and adrift. At the same time, he confesses that he somehow wishes to

escape from the ship. That is the kind of relationship he seeks to keep with the church and a person of faith. It is a well-known fact that Ōe has a mentally impaired son named Hikaru (meaning “to illuminate”). He writes about his family, particularly his son, in one of his novels. He admits in his Sophia speech that, as a father, he has unconsciously dominated his children. He realized this when he suffered from gout. At that time, he was unable to do anything but rest, and his son Hikaru seemed excited about his temporarily disabled father and ran around taking care of him. Ōe realized that his son knew, at that moment, that the relationship between father and son had reversed itself. After Ōe’s recovery, Hikaru resumed being a quiet child, composing his music alongside his father. Ōe regrets that there seems to be a hierarchical relationship between his son and himself because he wants a relationship of equality with his children. Ōe suggests that this family relationship of equals should share the same goal or direction—one that transcends ordinary life, such as religious faith. For Ōe, the ideal family is one that is related through the sharing of the same faith. He also speaks of the family as the place where we learn the virtue of modesty. He jokes that the only occupation in Japan in which one is able to survive without modesty is that of politician. He concludes his speech with the assertion that real democracy can only be actualized in a family relationships of equals, where family members have a heart to heart relationship in the same faith.

In an article entitled “Mary, Mother of the Family” in the May 1994 issue of *Koe*, Tanaka Teruyoshi, a Carmelite priest, writes that the family is the basic unit in which we learn how to live together in society. Tanaka describes how the Blessed Virgin Mary relates to us. Tanaka refers to the disciples who were dispersed by the death of Christ but then united with him in Mary, who became the Mother of all. He says that

the Holy Family is not just an object of worship or a role model but also relates deeply with those of us who are united in the same faith. When we accept Mary as the Mother of all, we become a family in Christ.

In the same issue of *Koe*, Kaneko Takanori, an assistant professor at Kurume Shinai Women’s Junior College, writes on Mary and her significance for the inner life of the family. In a lecture to his students on religion, he clarified the role of Mary as follows:

1. Outer and inner essence in religion,
2. Outer and inner essence in Christianity, and
3. Mary as the “inner existence” in the family.

Kaneko had his students write a paper on whether people can live an ethical life without religion. Fifty percent of his students thought that people could not live an ethical life without religion, while the other fifty percent asserted that they could. However, neither group of students considered religion objectively. Professor Kaneko then had his students write on Mary. Surprisingly, all of his students viewed her positively and considered her a role model for themselves. Thus he discovered a way for his students to understand religion subjectively. Nowadays, people are afraid of being lost in the system called “religion”; on the other hand, they also keep their distance from “faith” even while trying to reform economic and political systems. Kaneko sees that people are at a loss for “salvation,” whether it is salvation of their souls or the reformation of social systems. We seem to be lost and blind to truth. We are just like Jesus’ disciples. Human herself, Mary can help us find a way. Mary stood before God as a humble servant. Her humility is not self-abasement but the profound knowledge of herself before God and the obedience she owed to God as creature to Creator.

In the February 1995 issue of *Katorikku Seikatsu* (Catholic Life), Mori Kazuhiro, auxiliary bishop of Tokyo, writes that the significance of family relationships is that they reveal the naked self. Family life is not just concerned with the performance of a familial role or responsibility. The give-and-take that surrounds the most basic human needs is what creates the bonds between husband and wife and other family members. It is this bond that extends into our relationships in society.

HAPPINESS

The January 1995 issue of *Akebono* is devoted to the theme of happiness. Alfons Deeken, a professor at Sophia University, and Sono Ayako, a writer, discuss happiness and how it is pursued. Their discussion begins with Sono's question of whether Japanese people are truly happy when they are surrounded by affluence and material goods. Both agree with the statement that inner maturity is needed to attain happiness. True happiness is not attained if one pursues only one's own happiness. It is attainable only when one also considers the happiness of another person. Happiness is subjective; therefore, seeking objective happiness can only lead to unhappiness. Feeling appreciated is also necessary in order to attain happiness. Deeken mentions that, for a Japanese, the purpose of prayer is to ask for benefits for oneself, but for a Catholic, prayer is to give thanks and praise to God. Appreciation and encouragement of others is the way to strengthen relationships between people. The first phase of life is the educational period; the second is work; and the fourth phase is life in heaven. The third phase is the period in which people review their life experiences and deepen their understanding of their accomplishments during the second phase. Deeken recommends reflection during the third phase of life. In the positive confrontation of

loss and grief, such as the death of a loved one or other difficulties, people reach a turning point in the search for happiness.

In the same issue, Kumagai Fuminori, a businessman, speaks of the experience of reflecting on his life, which he began at the age of forty-two. His daily life was a constant refrain of work, golf and *karaoke*. Every day he faced the advance of technology. Although he worked diligently, he felt a contradiction in his job. He realized that the problems of humankind, such as nuclear weapons, ecology and population pressures, were strongly connected to his daily life. His individual pursuit of happiness and fulfillment were rooted in a more universal concept. He willingly worked hard at this pursuit and has published several books on the theme. He now has a sense of satisfaction and fulfillment in life and thinks this is what people call "happiness." Although he admits that such happiness does not last forever, he concludes that to live involves facing continual challenge in one's public and private life.

Miwa Ryōsaku, a potter, does not follow a particular religion. He confesses that he wishes to deepen his life and become a strong person; he is trying to do this by seeking nurture through the teachings of various religious masters. One day he asked a priest to show him a way to prevent unhappiness. The priest told him that he would know how to prevent it when he experienced unhappiness. He was upset at the priest and challenged him, saying that a priest's job to help people, so he should teach them how to stay happy. Miwa was quite angry at the priest. Later, while mixing clay, he realized that there was no remedy for unhappiness. God would be with the unhappy who regretted their actions and worked to overcome their unhappiness. One could only become strong by working through life's difficulties and burdens. Miwa apologized to the priest and told him his conclusion: that happiness and unhap-

piness were two sides of the same coin. They can never become separate. When one is most unhappy, ultimate happiness has already budded within. The question is whether this bud of happiness will blossom into happiness.

Haga Manabu, lecturer at Sophia University, questions whether people who live in the age of mass media can really know peace of mind. The younger generation is always surrounded by a surfeit of information. They all seem to look alike, no matter what they intend. They believe that they are different from other people. The Japanese educational system forces students to be individualistic or rather to believe in their own efforts and not in the help of others. The young do not invade one another's privacy and even refer to themselves in the third person in a conversation. They are afraid to intervene in other people's lives and afraid to have honest communication with others. They keep their distance in any relationship. Because of technological developments, people do not have to communicate in person today. Personal communication skills have been lost because computer networks and other media provide information. People are afraid of being hurt by deep relationships; however, we need other people and close relationships. We do not live alone or isolated in cells. We always recognize ourselves in relation to our parents, family and friends. We find ourselves in relation to other people. We can only realize our existence as we are loved by the people around us. Otherwise, we lose our real selves. People today seem to tolerate other people only on the surface. They are crying "who am I," but the search to find the answer to this question has never been so painful. No materialistic life furnishes peace of mind. Close relationships with others provide fulfillment, although relationships are not always comfortable or joyful.

Kanba Kiyoko, a psychiatrist and mother of two children, discusses happiness within the family. Happiness that is built on sacrificing another's happiness is not true happiness. Some difficulties between husband and wife are due to a deficiency in the relationship. There is no such thing as a one-way relationship. A relationship begins when each of the partners involved is able to consider the other's situation and show flexibility. The continuance of a relationship is dependent on whether one can change oneself. Controlling one's negative feelings, such as hatred, jealousy and anger, is more important than the relationship itself. It is difficult to overcome negative feelings within oneself. Families may experience more serious pressure on their personal relationships than in other types of relationships because the family lives so unavoidable close together. Happiness pursued in close relationships is only attainable by overcoming self-centeredness and the negative feelings that emerge in the relationship. Considering one's own and others' happiness is a tremendous task for any individual.

CREATION

When the subject of creation is broached, St. Francis of Assisi comes to mind. Matsunaga Masao, a Franciscan priest, writes about the teaching of St. Francis in the August 1994 issue of *Koe*. Francis is a saint who lived in harmony with nature. He praised and gave thanks for various natural phenomena—the sun, moon, stars, trees, flowers and animals—because they are the work of God. According to Matsunaga, Matsuo Bashō and Ryōkan, who lived four hundred years ago, also knew how to appreciate nature. In the teaching of St. Francis, humankind must realize that we are also a part of creation and that we should live in a harmony with nature. In the same issue, Funabiki Haruko, a Catholic sister, asserts that God's love is

revealed in nature in a way that is beyond human thought and reason. Despite being a part of nature, humankind acts to destroy creation. Nevertheless, in creation we can regain our sense of self. An appreciation of nature relates to caring and loving other people. She concludes by saying that a storm may cruelly destroy what exists in an area, but it also leaves the beauty of nature and creates new life.

Kinjō Hiroko, a layperson from Naha, reports that the Yambaru Forest in Okinawa is under development. *Yambaru* means mountain fields and refers to Ōgimison, Higashison and Kunigamison, in the northern part of the main island of Okinawa. The original forest (*genseirin*) is still alive in this Yambaru area. Animal life is abundant, and the forest is often referred to as the Asian Galapagos. The planned construction of a national highway through the forest has been postponed since May 18, 1994, due to landslides. Yambaru is a treasure for all people. Soil removed for the making of the road will be dumped in the sea, which will cause further damage. Only by living in harmony with nature can we survive. It is a well-known fact that politicians receive money every time they give a contractor permission to construct national highways. We need to protest the destruction of nature. The earth is not only for human beings but for all of God's creation and for future generations.

Takahashi Satoshi, a seminary student in Osaka, writes of how convenient our lives have become. When he was born in 1966, color television had just come on the market. He grew up in an age that had every convenience. In Japanese, the word *mottainai* has three meanings: 1) insolence to the gods and buddhas; 2) negative feelings when receiving appreciation or blessings for something exceeding one's status or situation; and 3) wasting something or not appreciating its value. The Japanese concept of nature reflects these meanings of *mottainai*,

but people today do not have space in their hearts or minds to appreciate the value of things. To live biblically is not a contradiction of the Japanese spirit. The advances of science are not only for the benefit of human beings. If we boast that technology is only the result of human effort and ability, we are wrong. We should think about what we have sacrificed for what we have accomplished. Christ was always close to nature. He was born in a manger; he was the son of carpenter; he told many parables using themes from nature. We should not forget God's grace in what he has given us, and we should assist God's work in creation.

DEATH

The November 1994 issue of *Akebono* focuses on coping with the death of a loved one. Ishikawa Hiroyoshi, a professor of Seijō University, experienced unbearable anger at the death of his wife and sought comfort by studying death. Through this study, he was able to confront the reality of loss and to handle the issue of death more objectively. He asserts that the experience of the death of a loved one deepens our character. The February 1995 issue of *Katorikku Seikatsu* features the importance of life. It commemorates the fiftieth anniversary of the end of World War II. A laywoman recalls her experience during and after the war. She experienced the deaths of many family members and feels the burden of their loss as a heavy weight that must be handed on to succeeding generations in the name of peace.

The November 1994 issue of *Katei no Tomo*, entitled "At the Bedside of the Dying," carries an impressive article written by Iwase Shizuko, a nurse who took care of Father Paganini in his final days. Paganini suffered from Parkinson's disease and only had control of his eye movement. He could open his mouth but could barely communicate. When he contracted pneumonia and

suffered continual bouts of coughing and difficulty in breathing, the nurse tried everything she could to make him comfortable. However, there was nothing she could do besides gently patting his back. Helplessly, she said to the priest, "I am so sorry, Father, but there is nothing I can do to make you feel better." Then, the priest said to her, "It is all right, just be there for me (*Soko ni iru dake de ii*)." She realized that just being beside someone who was suffering could encourage and comfort that person. Suddenly, the image of the Holy Mother who stood at the foot of the Cross came to her mind. She answered the priest that she would always be there for him along with Mary. The nurse could not help asking God to remove the priest's cross even for a short period and let him rest easy for a while. She told the priest her thoughts. Gazing at her, he said, "All [burden and pain] is fine, is it not (*Zenbu ii deshō*)"? Again, she felt struck by lightning in realizing at she was observing a man whose life had been totally given to God. Her eyes cleared, and she was able to see what he meant. A year has passed since his death. At the time she realized that she had understood him only intellectually and felt she could clearly understand the principle of his life. The nurse told the priest that she wished to be able to live as he did, in total openness to God. The priest did not say anything then, as he had no energy. In the evening of the same day, when the nurse was about to leave the room after giving him his medication, the priest said to her, "You can (*nareru deshō*)." His word was a

great gift to her. Every day, every minute, every second he gave himself to God. Unable to move any part of his body except for his eyes, he still guided and encouraged people. His life was expressed in one phrase, "All is fine." It was awkward, but the nurse was finally able to tell him frankly that God would take him soon. On the day she told him, the priest seemed peaceful because the continuous agonizing pain was gone. The nurse thought he has passed away. Suddenly he opened his eyes widely and stared at one corner of the ceiling. She cried, "Do you see the Blessed Mother?" He took a deep breath and then three last gasps. The death of the priest was the death of a martyr as far as the nurse was concerned.

CONCLUSION

The articles introduced above are only a few of those available. All the themes addressed the subject of relationships and dealt with building existential relationships. Education, family and happiness are stages of self-development and elements of living in society. Creation and death relate us to generations yet to come. The last article on Father Paganini's death indicates that unity with God has the power to create in the Spirit. The nurse inherits the priest's spirit of self-devotion to God. His body no longer exists in this world, but he lives on as a pure spirit in other people's lives. This spirit is the power of creation, which creates the being that God wishes us to be—God's own image. In this way, death is no longer a grief but a joy.