

Christian Periodical Literature in Japan

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EDUCATION HAS BEEN the most featured topic in Japanese periodical literature for the last few years. That trend continued during the annual period from April 1996 to March 1997. This widespread concern indicates not only the serious defects of the Japanese education system, but also that immediate action must be taken to bring about constructive change.

Similarly, recent periodical literature has shown the need for significant changes relative to the place of children in society, specifically in relation to the education system, for example. Some of the literature has dealt with concerns for the elderly, especially in relation to such issues as nursing care, death preparation, funerals and elderly wisdom. All of these issues together lead us to ask questions about the overall quality of life in Japan. What follows, then, is a summary of these concerns as Japanese periodicals have considered them.

CHILDREN AND THEIR PLACE

Children's Place

The July 1996 issue of *Katei no tomo* (Family Friend) features "Places for Children" (*Kodomotachi no ibasho*). Nowadays's children have no place to be themselves. In particular, today's day school is that part of society which takes away smiles from children, asserts Okuchi Keiko, the principal of a school founded in 1985 for dropouts. Okuchi tells how children show their beau-

tiful smile when they feel secure. She was the mother of a dropout herself. Her nine-year-old son resisted going to school after having been the target of *ijime* (bullying) by his classmates. He could not rely on his school teacher, who was unable to understand him. Even as his mother, Okuchi also did not understand her son, since she highly valued his going to school for the studies' sake. She now regrets that she did not notice her son's cry for help, and that she and her husband did not realize that their minds were restricted by the value of "school." She started to seek a place where children could come of their own free will, meet friends, study and discover their own interests. The school she founded is a place where dropouts are accepted as themselves and supported in their growing process. Currently with three locations, she has 180 students and twenty staff in her schools. She criticizes the current school system for an education that only restrains students with rules and takes away their independence and creativity. It is Okuchi's joy to see children smile. She wishes Japanese society would accept children in a more well-rounded way, and not see their significance only in how they perform in school.

The April issue of *Akebono* (Dawn) features "Children who Agonize over School" (*Gakkō ni nayamu kodomotachi*). This article asks parents and teachers to reflect on the realities and goals of their respective roles. The article is in a discussion format in which Yamamoto Tomoko, a school teacher,

Okamoto Fujita, an actor playing a school teacher on a television program, and Yamatani Eriko, a newspaper editor, assert that control and restriction by schools do not match the true meaning of education. Okamoto suggests that the current *ijime* problem at school is a reflection of adult society. He understands children to have deep insight into adults; they know if he or she puts on a facade. Yamamoto says that both students and teachers are restrained and even choked by the expectations of society. Parents expect teachers to educate their children, while teachers expect parents to do the educating. Teachers lose their enthusiasm for understanding students, thus disabling themselves from being crucial mentors for children who are not understood by their parents. Children are only accepted under certain conditions that take away their respect (so says Aoki Nobuto, a probation officer, in the same issue). Afraid of being differentiated from each other, children want to be identical with their peers. On the other hand, there is no real solidarity between them because they are insincere towards each other since, within the competitive school system, today's friend might be tomorrow's enemy.

What are the goals of Japanese education (or, where is Japanese education heading)? Critical to determining this is a reconsideration of the roles of teachers and parents.

Teachers

The April 1996, issue of *Koe* (Voice) features "Education at the Crossroads" (*Kiro ni tatsu kyōiku*). Watanabe Kazuko, a Sister of Notre Dame de Namur, asserts that there are many instructors who have a license to teach, but there are not many teachers who really guide students. Only those who have self-discipline, a sense of responsibility to students, and a passion for education are able to be teachers. The teacher who does not bear responsibility or possess a mature per-

sonality is incapable of giving anything to students. Teachers should be able to acknowledge and guide children's abilities to listen to God's voice and their will to follow that voice. One is not able to give others what one does not have. Teachers and parents are thus now standing at a crossroads. It is their choice as to whether they choose the easy way or the way whereby they are forced to confront themselves. Children are asking for love, acknowledgment and understanding. The warmth that they require is not given by a computer or robot. It is given only by human beings and this is what current education should do.

The September issue of *Shinto no tomo* (Friends of the Laity) features "The Lord's Prayer" (*Shu no inori*). Azumi Rikiya, a school principal, writes about the agony of his experience as a school teacher. He first encountered the Lord's Prayer when he was a college student. He discovered the world of being himself in front of God through prayer. It was a world of God and himself where he did not have to pretend or be false. It was a world of prayer for "me." When he became a school teacher, he confronted many problems, including the death of a student and a murder incident. He understood that it was not possible for him to overcome those problems that students were facing. He realized that a true teacher is a human being who gives one's life over to students and their problems. When he realized what a powerless being he was, he could not keep himself going on without prayer. Then the world between God and himself became a world where he talked to God about the peace and agony of others as well as his own struggles. It became a world of prayer for "us." When he was assigned as principal of a school for the hearing and speech impaired, he was overwhelmed by the enormous responsibility to educate the students. He felt utterly powerless, and all he could do was to listen to God. Finally he prayed, "Thy Will be done." He thus reached

a world of prayer for "God." For Azumi Rikiya, the Lord's Prayer has thus become the principle of his life.

Okonogi Keigo, a medical doctor, writes in the April issue of *Akebono* that a teacher first should be expected to have firm principles of education based on faith in his or her own life in relation to present-day society. Second, a teacher is expected to be a precise information provider. A teacher provides students with what they are aiming to learn in a term and a year. Relying on the ability of the children, a teacher provides enough information for them to be able to understand what they have to do and to choose what they want to do. The most important thing of all for a teacher is to build trust with students. As mentioned earlier, children have the necessary insight as to whether or not they can trust and be guided by a teacher. Teachers must thus speak and act in a consistent manner. Each teacher has his or her own abilities and personality. It is their hurdle as to how they respond to the expectation concerning the above requirements for improving their individual ability.

Parents

In the April issue of *Koe*, Enami Keiji, a school teacher, regrets the current state of the environment surrounding children. Technology eases the difficulties of our lives, and money solves any inconvenience. Students

pursue only the best result (since that is what is required of them), therefore they do not find significance in the process of learning. While we buy the conveniences of daily life, we sacrifice more basic and important matters, such as caring for other people, modest lifestyles, and courtesy towards others. Parents are the very first and best teachers for a child. The personality of a child is formed in a family. The most important thing for children is thus what parents think of education. What children desire from parents is not indulgence but love that supports and secures them, love that is strong enough for them to rely on their parents. Based upon this reliable bond between parents and children, parents could educate their children. It is the ideal that families give various living experiences to children so that they can develop compassion for others, values of right and wrong, financial values and self-discipline.

Enami includes a chart indicating the results of a survey of Japanese and American mothers of junior high students (see table 1). From the above data, Enami points out the accuracy of the common image of a Japanese mother who desires a child to study hard and enter a good high school and college, and thereby get a job in a first-class firm. But is that the only way for a child to obtain happiness? Can any child find true happiness this way? Children have already shown by their oppo-

Table 1

	Japan	U.S.A.
Parents are role models in daily life	33%	81%
Praise a child when he/she has good marks	41%	70%
Send a child to cram school (<i>juku</i>)	48%	7%
Have a child participate in sports activities	11%	56%
Have a child participate in cultural activities	3%	17%
Have a child participate in Boy/Girl Scouts	1%	18%
Have a child help at home	45%	70%
Allow a child to watch any TV program	48%	20%
Forbid a child to watch certain TV programs	6%	46%

sition the answer to these questions. It is obvious that there is a necessity for an immediate reconsideration of the current educational system.

The May 1996 issue of *Koe* features "The Bond Between a Mother and Child" (*Haha to ko no kizuna*). Kasagi Sumio, a priest, writes how nowadays parents agonize over their powerlessness in relation to the powerful influence of the mass media, such as television. He encourages those parents by saying that they are the most powerful teachers for their children. Trusting themselves, parents are able to communicate positively with their children, be responsible to them, give them discipline and guide them in realizing their abilities to the utmost. Parents can teach children the value of right and wrong, both for life in the home and in society. Knowing their child's weaknesses and strengths, parents can support and encourage accordingly. The bond of family gives parents the power to support themselves and to grow together with their children by learning from each other. Children will find God's Love in the unconditional love given by parents.

In the January issue of *Akebono*, Matsuura Gorō, also a priest, points out that what makes children feel empty is that many adults in today's society try to fill this emptiness by meeting only children's outer needs. Children's inner needs are thus not satisfied. To live is to live as oneself and to be needed. Education should be to educate people who can point out wrong as wrong, advocate what is right, and work for change and improvement. The human soul that knows what it is truly to live is one whose inner self is satisfied and is filled with joy.

Mission of Christian Schools

The December issue of *Koe* features "Search for Salvation: In the Wilderness of Modern Society" (*Sukui o motomete—gendai shakai no kōya ni oite*"), by Archbishop Ikenaga

Jun. Ikenaga writes that human beings are despised or neglected in current society, while finance and benefit are given top priority. If Christ were in Japan, He would have to confront the current social facts. There is a definite conflict between God's Kingdom and our society. What would happen to our society in the future if one whose vocation is the mission of the "Evangel of God's Kingdom" could not accomplish that mission? It would be regrettable if Catholic schools lost their purpose of providing Catholic values of a humanistic education and became just like any other prep school (*jukenkō*) that simply reflects social preferences. If we fail to be God's witness as the salt of the earth and the light of the world, we would be of no use to others and lose our reason to exist.

AGING AND LIFE FULFILLMENT

The Elderly and Nursing Care

The September issue of *Akebono* features "Learning from Old Wisdom" (*Rōchi ni kiku*). This article seeks to understand from various angles how the elderly are to live and be accepted in contemporary society. Haneda Sumiko, a movie director, gives an example of a husband who has given nursing care to his wife at home. This is still quite unusual since, generally speaking, it used to be assumed that the person who nurses older parents in a family was a daughter-in-law. When Haneda asked a town representative what he would do if he needed nursing care, the reply was that he has a daughter-in-law who would care for him. Larger families are a thing of the past, however; today people live for the most part as nuclear families. Home care has much room for improvement and there is still much to learn from that of Europe. The Japanese preference still is to be surrounded by many others, while in Europe people are individuals

and maintain their privacy. The Japanese nursing care system is in a transition period from an Asian, Confucian family style to a more European style.

Hayashi Kyoko, a writer, thinks that to live as she is doing now, in her old age, is to live her own life more fully and deeply. She recognizes what Nature has given us, and she can relax and enjoy life. She warns that human beings put too much confidence in human knowledge. She cannot help having respect for what Nature does for all creatures, even for the tiniest insect. It is necessary for us as a society to be mature enough to know this grace of Nature in order to live our individual lives as fully as possible.

Yamazaki Maya, Director of the Japan Nursing Association, points out data on an aging society. As of April 1996, Japanese elderly people constituted 14.8 percent of the total population. The average life span for Japanese is the longest in the world, and there are more than 6,500 people who are over 100 years old. The increasing percentage of the elderly population is expected to reach 17 percent in the year 2000, and 25 percent in 2025. According to these figures, there will then be easily two million elderly people who require serious nursing care. This fact shows how the issue of a nursing care system will be everybody's issue in the near future. It is noteworthy that most young people who have the experience of providing nursing care for the elderly have a positive impression, such as, "Why do we feel so comfortable being with the elderly, as if we are being given a gift?" Those young people understand that elderly people are giving something good to their caretakers while they themselves are receiving care.

However, it is necessary for us to understand aging. People have difficulty accepting their own aging because of a lack of understanding and discussion in society on what aging is, and because of a lack of a sense of solidarity between generations. Moreover, we need to think about nursing care of the

elderly. Lastly, we have to think of the quality of life of elderly people who only have a limited time before death. These issues are essential for understanding the aged and life in old age. We all wish to live independently until our last day. All levels of nursing care are thus required to seek and support the aged individual's independence. Each individual is cared for by respecting that person's independence. All of the abilities remaining with an elderly individual need to be used. Care workers need to secure the aged individual's social relationships until the last day. In order to actualize these ideals, we must establish firm policies in our society. Consensus and creativity are required to build up such social service. It is important to set into place the proper social welfare and medical care infrastructure of the society.

The September 1996, issue of *Katei no tomo* also features nursing care service. It introduces the comments of some of its beneficiaries on the welfare system's daytime service. For example, a 64-year-old woman has nursed her 74-year-old husband for ten years. She applied for the daytime service for her husband once a week, so that he could have some rehabilitation and bathing. She thinks that she needs a refreshing day, too. Care for the care giver is important as well as care for the patient. Another user of the daytime service is a 70-year-old woman who has nursed her 79-year-old husband for twelve years. She uses the daytime service and home help service. By using these welfare services, she is trying to avoid an accumulation of stress from nursing. The reality of providing nursing care at home is thus also a serious issue that Japanese people are facing now. It requires policies that improve the current welfare system, as well as our education system, as described earlier.

In light of the often harsh realities of nursing care as mentioned above, the article in the February issue of *Shinto no tomo*,

which features "Volunteers," is a welcome piece. Enomoto Mana of the Community Support Center in Kobe writes about the staff in her organization. They are elderly retirees who desire to use their professional skills and abilities for society. A former executive of a radio station works for the opening of local radio stations. A 74-year-old lady studying computers wants to become a computer instructor. Young Enomoto thinks that the elderly are the most reliable people in society, for their work is professional and responsible and their patience is much more durable than hers.

Telling the Truth—Fatal Diagnoses

The November issue of *Koe* features doctors telling their patients the truth. Yamagata Kenji, medical doctor, asserts the importance of building a bond of trust between doctor and patient. If there are lies and secrets between doctor and patient and also between patient and family, it would be difficult for both sides since energy is wasted in hiding the truth. Yamagata says that more tragic than a patient being diagnosed as terminally ill is the situation of a patient being left alone in insincerity and loneliness without having been told the truth. Being told the truth is necessary for a patient to live until the ultimate completion of his or her own life. A patient can prepare his or her own way to complete life and meet the final day by saying goodbye to loved ones. Yamagata notes that cancer is a dreadful disease, but it has one redeeming feature: it usually allows the patient time to prepare for death. The purpose of telling the truth about fatal diagnoses is not to tell the name of the disease per se, but it is for the patient to be able to live his or her life fulfilled and significantly completed.

In the same issue of *Koe*, a mother whose daughter suffers from leukemia writes of her experience with her daughter. She also asserts that telling the truth is necessary for

the family and her daughter to be able to share their agony and the importance of life, as well as other matters related to the disease. Her daughter lost self-confidence when she did not know the name of her disease, but she regained her self-confidence when she learned of it. The writer hopes Japanese medical care would give not only medical care but also spiritual care, such that a patient could choose to be told or not about his or her illness. Moreover, she asks for the improvement of social systems that give spiritual support and provide environments that accept terminally ill patients. She wishes that telling the truth about fatal diagnoses would make those young patients' lives better, so that they would be able to fulfill their lives.

To fulfill one's life in order to be able to prepare for one's own death is featured in the April issue of *Katei no tomo*. Miura Isao, a Jesuit priest, asserts that the best preparation for death is to experience the security of totally relying on God. People are completed by dying, he says. He has seen many deaths, and he understands that the everyday accumulation of a life of faith appears at one's death. God created people as His children. God guides His children in various ways to return to their Creator. Desire for reconciliation with God at the last moment makes the dead inseparable from God. "Death and Life" is featured most in the April and November issues of periodical literature (due to April's proximity to Easter and November's association in Japan with death): *Katei no tomo* in April and November, *Kattorikku seikatsu* (Catholic Life) in April, *Akebono* on April and November, *Koe* in November.

Funerals

The winter issue of the quarterly publication *Reihai to Ongaku* (Worship and Music) features funerals. Kaku Shūichi, a professor of theology, and Yoshioka Mitsuhito, a minister, discuss how to convey comfort at funerals.

The funeral of someone who committed suicide is particularly tragic because the family of the deceased experiences the guilt that they possibly could have done something to prevent what happened. Kaku tells those families that, like so many other events in this world, no one except God knows why someone commits suicide. All we can do then is to let God take care of this. It is important for the family to be assured that their loved one had lived a diligent life and should thus be respected for it. Yoshioka tells of the importance of the grieving process for those who have lost loved ones. If the family is told that the deceased is in the presence of God, or that what happened is God's Will, without allowing time for grieving, the reality of the death of a loved one becomes unacceptable. Therefore it is important for the minister of a funeral to understand and to comfort this agony of the family. Yoshioka says that if Jesus were present at a funeral, He would be grieving and angry over the loss along with the family. After families go through such a grieving process, they are able to have a hope for resurrection. Yoshioka asserts that the hope for resurrection is not attainable without going through the grieving process emotionally and in faith.

AS IT FLOWS—IN GOD'S WILL

Nature

The January issue of *Katei no tomo* features "As It Flows" (*Nagare ni makaseru*) and introduces Shinmeikutsu, a Zen exercise center opened by Jesuits and located outside Tokyo. A beginner writes of the feeling of God's existence simply in one's own breathing by experiencing Zen. It is as if one can be reconciled with Nature.

In the August issue of *Akebono*, featuring "A Heart that Heals the Earth—Seeking the Resurrection of Humanity and the Earth"

(*Chikyū o iyasu kokoro—ningen to chikyū no saisei o mezashite*), Ishimure Michiko, a writer, tries to seek a healing spring in the midst of modern civilization. She writes of how we are not fully able to use our five senses living in the world of paved, asphalt roads. We have ruined the ecology of Nature and so that of ourselves as well. Rationalized society eventually makes the world a deserted place. Everybody seeks the comforts and shortcuts of a rationalized life. On the other hand, human history has left legends of experience and wisdom; otherwise, there would not be any religion or Bible. We have an ability to respond to this wisdom that our ancestors left for us. Ishimure believes that the healing spring exists somewhere within us. There are genuine abilities to be exercised by human beings, whose deep innerness responds to the Truth. The healing spring exists in such a deep place. However, we are living in an environment in which we hardly see the healing spring. Young people may not be able to see the healing spring itself anymore, but she believes that the healing spring exists somewhere in our hearts.

God's Will

When one finds the healing spring and so finds God's work within oneself, there is no fear and there is the ability to live in a flowing manner in humble dependence on God's will. The May issue of *Shinto no tomo* features Pentecost. Ojima Seishi, a minister, asserts that it is neither his ability nor his will to speak the truth, but insofar as he is able to speak out God's word it is God Who enables him to do so. He modestly admits that no human tongue could testify to God's glory. No matter how he tries he is not strong enough to speak out, but it is God who uses his body when he speaks truth (Matthew 10: 17–20). Human power is limited and weak. When Christians have suffered or been persecuted throughout history, it

was God within them who spoke out and testified to the divine Glory. It was only God's work within them. When we have been proceeding in faith against opposing winds, it has been the Holy Spirit working within us. Believing in God, Ojima prays that God's will prevails on the Earth.

Vocation

Vocation is God's work within the person in order fully to utilize oneself for God. God knows the best use of individuals. Echizen Kiroku, a Jesuit priest, explains how to know one's vocation in the January issue of *Koe*. He explains God's will as follows: (a) experiencing enlightenment by faith in God's Blessed Wisdom; (b) exercising sublime human love by praying for merciful love (*agape*), praising God's glory by loving all people with *agape*, and practicing righteousness in society; and (c) using one's abilities through work for other people and the praise of God's glory. Vocation is to know how God desires one to use his or her abilities. In order to know the vocation of God, the Absolute Pure Goodness, one has to make oneself utterly unselfish. Vocation has to be something that assists God's work of creation. Both the ordained ministry and married life are ways or tools of God's creation. We tend to have interests in how to live; however, Echizen hopes that Japanese will find the importance of finding their "vocation" for the pure purpose of "praising God's glory," because that is what is

significant for God's glory and for the salvation of our souls.

CONCLUDING THOUGHTS

As mentioned earlier, a turning point for the Japanese education system is imminent. Over the last few years, Christian periodicals have been standing firm in their position on this issue, using words strongly rooted in Christianity. There has never been a time when Christian education was needed more than it is now. The Christian school stands steadily as an immovable rock in the river of a society which easily flows according to earthly phenomena. As Archbishop Ikenaga has written, I also strongly wish that those schools that have a Christian mission would never lose sight of their purpose of giving students a humanistic education penetrated by God's will, no matter how hard the opposing winds blow. Listening only to God, each one of us can find our vocation and be able to be a part of God's creation. Minister Sawa Hideo writes in the July issue of *Shinto no tomo*, in his article "The Journey of Life" (*Jinsei no tabi*), one's life is like a polyphony, wherein different lives overlap each other and pass like waves over others. One journey of life encounters some and crosses over others. If each of us could live in humble reliance on God despite our weakness, God would listen to our polyphony praising the divine glory and maybe sport a grin when we are out of tune.