

# Christian Periodical Literature in Japan - 1997

Kayano Mizuno

CURRENT TRENDS IN Japanese education have been featured in Japanese periodical literature for the last few years. The increasing trend of bullying has escalated as has the incidence of crime by Japanese youth. An example is the arrest on June 28, 1997 of a 14-year old boy in Kobe, Japan for the murder of a twelve-year old boy.

I felt cold shivers run down my spine when I heard the news of this crime. I imagined a sneering faced devil sneaking into our lives. How has this devil crept into our lives? Has it been through the crack in our hearts caused by the lack of love for our fellow creatures, our lack of compassion and our focus on physical and material needs?

In Christian literature of 1997 the principles of faith and spirit were discussed under various themes. The value and dignity of life was affirmed along with the necessity to act now to change the present for the sake of the future. To do this we must make God, Infinite Being of Goodness and Love, our life's priority.

1997 marked the 400th anniversary of the martyrdom of the 26 saints of Nagasaki. In remembering that for which they died, and understanding the significance of their martyrdom, we can begin to realize what is missing in our lives today.

As members of society each of us has responsibilities in various areas of our daily lives. Our children are a reflection of ourselves and of all our actions. Yet our children have been sending us danger signals for a long time, signs from God to return to His word: "Man shall not live by bread alone, but by every word that proceeds from the

mouth of God" (Matthew 4:4). Could my image of the sneering devil be God's signal to awaken us, a warning from Him to take immediate action to change our way of life?

## MARTYRDOM - FAITH & SPIRIT

The July issue of *Koe (Voice)* examines the depth of faith required to undergo martyrdom, in particular that of the 26 Christians in Nagasaki as remembered on that event's 400th anniversary, February 5, 1997. Yoshiko Takaki, a nun and professor at Eichi University, is the great granddaughter of Senemon Takaki, a leader of the Urakami Christians. Senemon Takaki suffered persecution at Tsuwano where the most brutal torture was inflicted on Christians in the early Meiji era. Yoshiko asserts that this dark period of gross torture and inhuman persecution of Christians in Japan's history can also be seen as a time of spiritual heroism and manifestation of deep faith. According to Takaki Japan's severe hardship became a blessing and testimony to God's glory as the martyrs' lives and deaths beautifully witnessed the faith given to them by God.

The July issue of *Katei no tomo (Family Friend)* features "Martyrs - Past and Present." When Hideyoshi Toyotomi prohibited Christianity, all foreign Christian missionaries were expelled from Japan. During that era, in situations of defeat by the enemy samurai chose death (committing *seppuku*) to avoid humiliating torture and persecution. However, Ukon Takayama, a well known Christian daimyo, was forced to escape abroad as his Christian faith prohibited him

from committing suicide. Kenngo Ishii, a Franciscan priest, says that Takayama must have endured a life even harder than death after his exile. This was also a kind of martyrdom. The word *martyr* in ancient Greek means "to bear witness" and "to testify." What one does in daily life testifies to Jesus. Theologians consider death by martyrdom as the highest grace which can be granted to anyone. Ishii asserts that willingly carrying our cross as we live our daily lives as martyrs for Jesus unites us with Jesus' death and the martyrdom of the 26 saints. As St. Paul wrote, our weakness becomes our strength (II Corinthians 12:10). God most pointedly manifests His glory as He works through our weaknesses, making us worthy to join the martyrs and saints.

#### THE NEXT GENERATION

The June issue of *Katei no tomo* features "Young People Who Got Left Behind." Fujiya Tomita, Associate Director of the Tokyo Mental Health Academy, discusses *hikikomori* ("seclusion"). *Hikikomori* is not just a problem of a child who refuses to go to school but also a problem for young adults who refuse to join society. One example is that of a 22-year old youth who could not bring himself to go to work, saying he had pretended all his life to be a good boy as his mother expected and could no longer conform. Like this young man, *hikikomori* children often come from families who never experienced conflict followed by reconciliation, Tomita says. These children thus did not learn how to communicate openly with others and became *hikikomori*. They are so vulnerable and sensitive that they only think of protecting themselves and never learn to trust others. Tomita is an advisor at Friend Space, a private support group which provides counseling to such young people. Friend Space is a forum for *hikikomori* to meet each other and increase their confidence and maturity so they can stand on

their own feet. Gradually the youth become able to work for a few hours, often stopping by Friend Space afterwards to grumble about what happened on the job site. Through this process, they are strengthened. Tomita concludes that his goal for these young people is not simply social independence, but the psychological liberty to trust people and not give up on communicating. It may take a while for them to find their true potential which has gone neglected, but eventually they will gain confidence in themselves and reintegrate as capable young adults into society.

In the February, 1998 issue of *Shinto no tomo* (*Friends of the Laity*), Nobuyo Kinoshita, a female minister in Chiba, asserts the urgent need to listen to the voices of children. Children desperately want to be heard, but adults often become annoyed by them. More and more frequently, children have been sending us an SOS sign. After World War II Japanese citizens worked hard and aimed to be number one in everything. Because of this drive, however, we destroyed the environment along with traditional moral values and manners. Today's Church cannot deal with the result—a people in mourning. Despite the increase of suffering and disturbed children, adults find it hard to resist the overwhelming wave of materialism and self-centeredness in society. Kinoshita urges each individual Christian to begin caring for those who are closest even if it is in small ways. Sometimes we think we are good Christians of deep faith while at church, but once we go home we tend to deal with immediate reality by taking the easy way out, often spoiling our kids materially instead of spending quality time with them. To acquire knowledge and learning is important to survive in society, but the most important thing is to acquire God's message, Who gave totally of Himself for us in such a humiliating way. It is difficult to practice God's law of love in daily life, but with the confidence that we are constantly

receiving His love and strength, we can confront society together with our children and be true to our calling as Christians. This is the first step towards modifying the present.

Iwao Kushida, a professor of theology, writes with resentment regarding the trend of the increasing crime among young people. What is needed for children right now, he asserts, are not experts discussing data or ideology resulting in numerous psychological, philosophical or spiritual analyses, but rather the courage and emotional fortitude to cry and agonize with children—i.e., the literal definition of compassion. He wonders if we can bear the responsibility of sharing the pain of children in today's society and mourn along with them. We need to reeducate adults on how to enter into the emotional lives of children, to suffer with them, befriend them and ultimately bring back to the fold these lost and scattered souls.

In the April issue of *Kattorikku seikatsu* (*Catholic Life*) Eiichi Kajita, a professor at Kyoto University, describes three principles to be required subjects in Catholic education, namely awareness of the interconnectedness of all humanity, the ability to reflect on one's actions and self-transcendence. Awareness of the interconnectedness of all humanity teaches students to view all human beings as friends beyond borders and race, sharing each others' pain and struggles despite the distances between them. The ability to reflect gives students the necessary skills to ponder and examine in depth their actions and words. This could be taught in class or as an extracurricular activity. The third principle of self-transcendence is educating the human personality based on Christian tenets. Students learn to overcome their egos, transcending earthly values and aim instead for the higher, divine values of "faith, hope, and love."

The April issue of *Akebono* (*Dawn*) features "Children Who Learn the Wrong Way." Children in Japan are afraid of making mistakes during the learning process, yet mak-

ing mistakes is recognized as a crucial element of education. Children who are able to learn from their mistakes can think by themselves as individuals, creatively and without fear. Masami Ōinata, a professor at Keisenjo Gakuen University, illustrates the point using her daughter's experience in England. While in Japan, her daughter was "allergic" to mathematics and fearful about making a mistake or not using the correct formula to arrive at a given answer. While studying in England, however, mathematics became her favorite subject. She was taught to think step-by-step and to enjoy the process itself which leads to a solution. Ōinata says that children like to learn when it is fun. It would be ideal for Japan's school teachers to teach children the joy of learning, but in reality the teachers themselves have no time and no peace of mind to enjoy their daily work. Japanese education has become so programmed and formulated that everyone has to come out with the same answer, otherwise a student will flunk. On the contrary, using a more creative type of thinking process, children would learn the difference between "what I think" and "what others think" and would be able to choose their own solution.

Atsuko Sagara, a professor at Shiga University, says in the April issue of *Kattorikku seikatsu* that small children have a strong desire to learn. If adults misdirect this desire, children will lose the innate ability to learn by themselves. For example, a young mother who wants her child to acquire the habit of learning English teaches English vocabulary while feeding the child with a spoon. However, Sagara states, this young mother is failing to teach the child to learn by himself. Small children are naturally interested in almost everything that surrounds them. If parents or teachers would ignite this desire and teach the skill appropriate for the circumstance (i.e. how to climb a tree or how to make a crane with folded paper), children would happily acquire

this new skill, go on to apply it in other ways and even teach it to others. In short, when adults carefully observe the tiny workings of a child's mind in everyday life, they can help him to acquire skills for independent learning.

#### SPIRIT OF CHRISTMAS

The December issue of *Koe* features "To Live in a Christmas Spirit." Noboru Susukida, a Jesuit priest, introduces Christmas to orphanage children by encouraging them to collect straws and make a crib for the baby Jesus. During Advent, every time the children do something good, such as washing their face, brushing their teeth, being kind to other kids or giving up something they desire for someone else, they "earn" one piece of straw. Thus, by sacrificing their own desires, they contribute towards Jesus' birth on earth. Peace is born when love is both freely given and modestly accepted, just as Jesus born in a lowly manger received so much love from the poor shepherds around Him. Jesus came into the world poor to show God's love for and invitation to all people to inherit salvation.

In *Shinto no tomo* Masago Asahara, a minister in Tokyo, explains the meaning of Christmas by quoting, "For you know the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, that though he was rich, yet for your sake he became poor, so that by his poverty you might become rich" (II Corinthians 8:9). Because of Jesus' incarnation and coming into the world, the world became rich. God who was rich became man who was poor. Thus a radiant light was bestowed upon the world, casting out darkness through the power of the death and glorious resurrection of the Son of God. However the world today is in a period of spiritual darkness. People must reunite themselves with the Creator and restore their spiritual richness through the grace of Jesus' victory over death. Christmas celebrates this joy.

Tadashi Matsui, an advisor at Fukuinkan Books, talks about the Spirit. He states that where words are not alive and bear no fruit, the Holy Spirit is not at work. Prayer is the essence of words, and church is where words (prayers) are handed down from generation to generation. It is where people listen, eat and share words (pray together). However, he feels that people in church have lost the ability to really listen to the words. When this happens, the Holy Spirit is not allowed to work freely. Yet if we open our ears and hearts to fully hear God's message for us, the Spirit can come alive and move within us working numerous graces.

*Akebono* features "Christmas: Christ's Love Manifested among Us." Hiroshi Kanda, a priest in Osaka, recalls a sermon given the Christmas before the Great Earthquake in Kobe. According to that talk, the nativity scene was comfy and peaceful as we usually imagine it. However, in reality it must have been a very difficult setting for a new born baby to spend the first days of life: the smell of cows and barnyard animals, horses threatening to kick the baby with their back feet, no warm cloth to wrap the baby, only straw in a manger, etc. Yet Kanda is convinced that God's grace and truth exist only in the midst of the worst and poorest of situations. After the Kobe earthquake everybody became equal as they all lost their belongings. But as soon as some people became financially strong, financially weak people were abandoned and left behind. Kanda asserts that among those unfortunate people the spirit of the Nativity was undoubtedly alive; it is from these people that we can relearn Christ's important message of love.

In the December issue of *Katorikku seikatsu* Chieko Suemori, President of Suemori Books, reports on Archbishop Cipriani's speech held at the Hatsudai Catholic Church. Archbishop Cipriani said that people crave peace as if it is something that comes from outside ourselves, but actually peace resides within our own hearts. When

one has inner peace and faith it flows outward naturally to our friends and others around us.

Archbishop Cipriani talked about freedom which is a search for the truth. If we do not search for the truth, we lose our freedom and become slaves to our sins. Freedom in today's world, however, often translates into selfishness and pursuit of one's own benefit, using other people to satisfy our own desires. Cipriani is concerned that Japanese are losing themselves in their busy lives, not pausing to reflect on the direction their lives are taking. We must constantly ask ourselves: Who or what is God in my life? Who or what is my family? What does God desire for me? To know oneself is to acquire liberty.

Cipriani next talked about solidarity. True solidarity occurs when love and hardship coexist in harmony. To sacrifice out of love turns hardship into joy, and solidarity is born. One can grow by giving up one's own desires for others. Financial affluence might lead to us become poor in heart. He also spoke about forgiveness. Like Jesus who came into the world to save us from sin, Archbishop Cipriani learned to love the terrorists who took over the Japanese Embassy in Peru although not condoning their actions. He said the important thing is to search for God's presence within the various events of our lives. We can find God's imprint everywhere—at work, at sports and in our encounters with people.

Suemori finishes her report by stating that when watching TV news reports during the occupation of the Japanese Embassy, it was seeing Archbishop Cipriani holding his luggage cart everyday that was the only light of hope.

#### "FAMILY" AND "CHURCH"

The August issue of *Koe* features "Fostering Faith among Youth." Yoshiko Takaki, a nun and professor at Eichi University, deplors the fact that one rarely sees young people in

church today. Takaki wonders why the Church doesn't face this fact and take action. Young children cannot function and develop well if their parents or role models are physically and financially strong yet emotionally immature. Adults have a responsibility to care for their little ones and educate them properly. Likewise the Church must be responsible and care for its young people. Fostering faith among youth, therefore, is of paramount importance for the Church and humankind. One concrete way to encourage youth to grow in their faith is for adult Christians to familiarize their children with church rituals from early on. As long as adults continue to say with a negative attitude, "Today's youth..." open communication between both youth and adults will be choked off.

Masahide Haresaku, a priest in Tokyo, writes in "Joyous Faith, Pleasant Faith" that young people live to have fun and experience joy. If adults are of the opinion that faith is incompatible with fun and joy, they are mistaken. Instead, adults should realize that people of faith are naturally people of joy. Haresaku admits the kind of joy young people pursue can change over time, especially with advances in technology. It is easy to criticize and blame materialism for these changes, but doing so doesn't solve anything. Haresaku asserts that if we firmly envision God's reign on earth, we will be able to see clearly amidst contradictions and discord and work towards the evolution and renewal of the Church. Haresaku concludes that the emphasis should be on youth fostering the faith of the Church instead of the Church fostering the faith of youth. Harnessing young people's energy and optimism, we can create a Church of joy for the twenty-first century.

In the June issue of *Koe* Jun Ikenaga, Archbishop of Osaka, states that Christians attending mass are both fewer and older, and he speaks about the difficulty of getting young people back in church. The most

important thing, he feels, is to change people's concept of worship. Perhaps, for example, there could be a room specifically for young people where they could gather and engage in creative projects with the handicapped. Ideas for projects like this should be encouraged and sought out among young people. He wishes the Church in Japan could follow such a model. As in the family, where parents sometimes confront their children over wrongdoing, teach them to communicate and raise them to be responsible, so should the Church live up to its call and likewise care for its worshippers. Priests are not alone in this task. Rather, all of God's family are called to support each other manifesting a true spirit of Christian love and forgiveness. The Church is like a big family. Encounters based on truth and acceptance bring about the fruits of peace and unity.

In the same issue Akiko Miura, an essayist, writes "Days at Home that Feel like Church," an article about the similarity between church and home. Yes, in obvious ways they are totally different: church is a sacred and tranquil place; home is full of much noise and confusion with regard to work, money and school issues. Yet this is where members of the same family can laugh, cry, hate and run around the house. According to Miura these moments of ordinary daily family life are poignant with the divine presence. No one ever thinks it's wrong to pray because he is at home and not at church. On the contrary, it is because we are at home that we feel free to pray. Miura thus feels like she is in church when at home and that basically there is little difference between the two. When Miura experiences these blessed moments, she immediately wants to share them with her family. She may decide to make a curry dinner (her husband's favorite) or cheer up her son who failed at school. In such minor ways one can easily see God at work blessing us in our daily life and giving us much for which to be thankful.

Finally I would like to introduce an article in the July issue of *Shinto no tomo*, "Fishermen who Plant Trees" by Haruo Ōta. Ōta introduces Shigeatsu Hatakeyama, a fisherman from the town of Karakuwa, Miyagi Prefecture who cultivates oysters in Moun Bay. Shigeatsu, a Christian, is known for his environmental concern and tree-planting activities in the mountains of Nemuro Village. During the ten years he has been planting bradleaf trees in Iwate, news of his efforts have gradually spread nationwide. Recently Shigeatsu invited more than 3,000 children to Moun Bay to share his understanding of forests, rivers and oceans. The children were able to experience by themselves the processes of nature. Hatakeyama wonders why the Japanese Church has not yet dealt with urgent environmental issues. Ōta concludes his article by expressing Hatakeyama's wish that like this fisherman all children work to save nature, God's creation, and to plant trees of hope in people's hearts for a restored and healthy environment.

## CONCLUSION

For the last three years this section has carried warnings about current trends in Japanese society, especially with regard to Japan's education system. Our children and future generations are essential to continue humanity on earth. Both Roman Catholic and Protestant churches have been criticized for their inability to attract and motivate Christians. In some cases the Church seems to have lost her ability to form the body of Christ and be God's instrument. Yet the Holy Spirit, encompassing the virtues of faith, hope and love, is at work on earth and coexists eternally with God. If each one of us through our actions and thoughts becomes faith, hope and love for our fellow brothers and sisters, the Holy Spirit will be manifested. God has sent us role models over the centuries, from the 26 martyrs to Mother

Teresa. Each one of us, as a child of God, has also inherited the duty and right to convey the same message which testifies to our Almighty Father.

This may be the final opportunity for me to write for this journal. I am very grateful to Sr. Nobuko Morimura for giving me the

opportunity to write for the *Japan Christian Review* and to be an editorial member; to our editor, Sr. Cheryl Allam, for her great patience; and, to all the JCR editorial members for their friendship and love. Au revoir, JCR readers!