

# Christian Periodical Literature in Japan 1995

Mizuno Kayano

MOST JAPANESE will never forget what happened on January 17 and on March 20, 1995. The Hanshin Earthquake in January and the sarin gas incident of March shook all Japanese who had thought that the long, postwar peace would continue without interruption. Ironically, both incidents caused survivors of World War II to recall those harsh times. People standing on the site of buildings destroyed in the earthquake spoke of the similarity of this event to the postwar situation. The awesome power of Nature displayed in the earthquake devastated many lives in a matter of moments. Likewise, the sarin gas incident on Tokyo subways in the early rush hour was a horror for all Japanese. While observing the fiftieth anniversary of the end of World War II in the same year as the occurrence of these two tragedies, Japanese were forced to ask themselves, "What is a human being? What is the most important concern for human beings?"

## THE FIFTIETH ANNIVERSARY OF THE END OF WORLD WAR II

The August editions of many periodicals dealt with the war. In this memorial year, many issues in regard to the war were highlighted. Some of these are controversial and others provide an opportunity to reconsider peace. Among these concerns, it is regrettable to discover that tensions still exist between former enemies even fifty years later. The anniversary year offered the

opportunity for former enemies to reconcile, but it also aired latent tensions. It is important to build peace on the wisdom that has been gained from the wounds of war.

Motojima Hitoshi, Mayor of Nagasaki, talks about peace in the August issue of *Akebono* (Dawn). He addresses the cancellation of the atomic bomb exhibition at the Smithsonian Museum, mentioning the fact that when museum officials initially changed the objects for exhibition, the first piece eliminated was a melted rosary. The bombs may have stopped the war, but the reality of the massive destructive power of the atomic bomb and its inhuman effect should also be displayed. The reality of the war cannot be conveyed to those who never experienced it simply by putting some objects on display. There can be neither good or bad wars in the twenty-first century because such a war would not be between enemies; rather, this war would be one between human beings and nuclear weapons. The only legacy to leave descendants is a peace which is difficult to build and harder to protect from those who would destroy it. Motojima considers that the mission of Nagasaki and Hiroshima is not only to eradicate nuclear weapons on a global scale, but also to cause Japanese themselves to reflect. He writes that Japanese should give more attention to peace that can become a reality in Japanese society today. For instance, he

points out the racial prejudice that Japanese have against foreigners in local areas. He indicates that such discriminatory attitudes are primary factors preventing Japanese from building a lasting peace.

The May issue of *Katei no tomo* (Family Friend) features "Determination for Peace." The December issue features "Responsibility for Peace." In these issues, a son of Dr. Nagai expresses his wish that the atomic bomb had never been used in any part of the world. Fortunately, he says, it has not been employed again for fifty years. He is also critical of the fact that Japan has not apologized for its role in the war or compensated those who suffered from Japanese invasion. It is also imperative to offer the younger generation peace education; unfortunately, the Japanese educational system has neglected to educate for peace. It is vital to understand the reality of what Japan did during World War II and to compensate for it. This becomes a question of ethics. On the other hand, it is also important to convey the reality of what an atomic bomb can do to human beings. Never another Hiroshima and Nagasaki, Nagai asserts. (August) 6 + (August) 9 = (August) 15, the day the war ended and the feast of Mary's Assumption. His father, Dr. Nagai, used to say that the fifteenth was the day God heard Christians' prayers. Why do countries still want to possess nuclear arms? Why do people allow this? Allowing it is the same as agreeing with it. No righteousness exists if people in the world only listen to the opinions of rich countries or give ear to countries that have nuclear weapons. He refers to Pope John Paul II's words when the pontiff visited Hiroshima: war is an act of human beings; it is the destruction of human life; war is death itself, while reflecting on the past is to take responsibility for the future. Agreeing with those words, Nagai concludes that, "the responsibility for the future" is to offer peace education to children. This is the task

and responsibility of the generation which experienced the war.

In a similar vein, the August issue of *Koe* (Voice) features "A Church For the Twenty-first Century—Fifty Years After World War II," and the August issue of *Shinto no tomo* (Friends of the Laity) features "Fifty Years After Defeat in War."

#### THE GREAT HANSHIN EARTHQUAKE—REBIRTH

The Great Hanshin Earthquake occurred at 5:46 a.m. on January 17, 1995 and took the lives of more than 5,500 people. Takagi Emiko, a Spinola sister, was in the middle of her morning prayers. In only twenty seconds, the earthquake destroyed many things, including the will of people who survived. Sister Takagi writes in the April issue of *Koe* that the days of the earthquake and its aftermath were a time of anxiety and inconvenience, but, at the same time, these days were a time of experiencing the support and warmth of kind thoughts and help. She did not cry for fear of the quake but did cry from gratitude for those who extended their helping hand, giving prayers and love. She felt that her life was protected, encouraged and supported. In between life and death, she was able to be a witness to human beauty. Hardship is closely connected to God's grace. She was inspired "to love" through her own pain. When she heard one person say, "because I am in hardship, I can relate to those who are suffering from pain," she was able to recognize that another pain is God's grace to us. Sister Takagi truly understood the meaning of why the Son of God was incarnated.

The earthquake destroyed many irretrievable things, but it was also a personal quake that shook one's mind into discerning the truth. A tremendous shaking of one's ego causes a person to see his/her real selves and the truth for which one can live and die. The June issue of *Akebono* features

“The Way to ‘Rebirth.’” In this article, people share their experiences as a result of the earthquake and insights into what they have gained from the incident.

Yokokawa Kazuo, a journalist, reported changes in the people of Kobe. He attended Takatori Catholic Church two months after the quake and found that church building had completely vanished. However, approximately 300 people gathered together for Mass and no division separated Catholics from non-Catholics. This congregation resembled the early Christian community; there were no such things as buildings, but only people who wanted to gather in the name of Jesus. For the past 2,000 years, people have built ideological walls between Catholic and non-Catholic. With the physical walls of the church building destroyed, the invisible wall between Catholic and non-Catholic also vanished. The bishop of Osaka encouraged a rehabilitation plan for the Kobe churches that emphasized not mere restoration of church buildings, but the rebirth of a Catholic community that responded deeply to the suffering of all Kobe residents—foreign workers, the disabled and homeless. Many volunteers gathered at the churches to implement the principle of being one with the weak and powerless. Goodness emerged from the quake, but, on the other hand, the quake demonstrated serious problems in Japanese society. As recovery efforts proceeded, the walls between people also began to be rebuilt. Yokokawa reported the anger of a nun from Peru who drew attention to the situation of foreign workers who had suffered the most from the earthquake: the victims of discrimination and omitted from official recovery plans. Yokokawa expects a reborn church to be a church that identifies with the people who suffered the most.

The June issue of *Koe* featured “Mutual Understanding and Tolerance” by Takahashi Sumio, an Osaka layman. Takahashi offered his thoughts on the understanding and tolerance that emerged from the tragedy. He confesses that his experience of

the earthquake left him wondering how to live his second, postquake life. He may have to search for the answer to this question for the rest of his life, but he has shared his current thinking. The earthquake deprived so many of basic things and brought grief and agony. At the same time, however, it gave many people the opportunity to realize the value of the unseen. Many people found a reason to live in the encouragement, kindness and tolerance of others. Takahashi experienced the Word of God in the mutual understanding and tolerance that arose a few days after the earthquake. Often when suffering hardship, one finds the best time to listen to the Good News and the best time to discover unseen evidence of the Reign of God.

Despite the loss of homes, furniture and all goods thought necessary for life, people found joy in their relationship with others. People cared for other lives as if they were their own. Being released from materialistic concerns, people were awakened to their own humanity by helping and sharing with each other, for God gives life to share with others. Takatori Church in Nagata-ku was destroyed by fire in the quake’s aftermath. It was a “dead” place; however, people started to gather together and worked for others by bringing food and daily necessities, asking after the health of neighbors, and taking them to clinics. The more the church became open, the more alive it became and the “dead” place became the “a living” place. A parishioner of Takatori Church said that while the visible church vanished, the real church is being built as many people gather and grow in relationships. Takahashi concludes that this real church heralds the advent of God’s Reign and wishes that it existed not only on the site of the old church building, but everywhere.

In the same issue of *Koe*, Dokiya Kayoko, a lay person in Osaka, relates that experiencing the quake on the morning of January 17 was almost like being bombed. Despite the hardship and grief, she also testified that people found real beauty and joy in relating to oth-

ers. She was encouraged by the words of a Vietnamese person who had suffered much. This person said that although there was no longer a church building, the people themselves were the church, and should not be anxious about anything because God is always with them. This is what "the day" awakened in her.

#### HUMAN LIFE

Most periodicals did not carry features directly concerning the sarin gas attack, also known as the Aum Incident. The November issue of *Akebono* took as its theme, "Hardly See 'Life'—A 'Virtualized Society' that Covers Life and Death." In this issue, Fujiwara Shinya, a photographer and writer, and Henmi Yuh, a journalist, discussed current society and the Aum-related incidents. Henmi was waiting in a subway station when the incident occurred. He relates that the real time experience was different from what the media reported. The dreadful incident was a tragedy caused by a group whose believers may live in virtual reality, but what he fears most is that Japanese society itself lives in a virtual reality as a result of mass communication, education and big business. In such a society, any sense of ethical values disappears and a destructive power enters in its stead. A positive sense of individuality can hardly grow in this present-day society. Under the influence of economics, people pursue materialism, ignore the importance of life and become themselves virtual human beings. The Aum-related incident revealed this aspect of the Japanese social system.

In the same issue, Yamazaki Tetsu, writer and director of plays, asserts that both the earthquake and the subway incident revealed human life. Our lives are hidden from others' eyes by a peaceful, daily life that has been erected over the past fifty years. He thinks that Aum believers have grown up without having experienced the importance

of life. As a result of prevalent materialism, society has transformed individual life and hidden people's true selves. He was deeply shocked to see the lives of others revealed by the incidents.

Kamba Kiyoko, a psychiatrist reflecting on the Aum-related incidents, suggests education for life including religion. She realizes that religious education is necessary for children who live in a society which holds an ambiguous sense of values. When she sees her grade school daughter, she realizes that the daughter finds God as her essential supporter. Her daughter goes to church not only because she finds friends and enjoyable activities there, but also because she relies unconsciously on God's support which is fundamentally different from her parents' support. Kamba understands that children have a concept of God within themselves although it may be obscure. If such spiritual needs are felt by children who do not have the opportunity for religious education, then the church should consider those children and provide them with a Christian education.

Hamamoto Midori, a lay person from Osaka, wrote an article called "The Life Gained from the Earthquake" in the April issue of *Koe*. Shaken by the quake, she prayed that she and her husband would die together. When she realized that she was still alive, she thanked God. She and her husband then realized how many material possessions they had. They also witnessed the change in people's hearts that allowed them to share life. One of her friends, the parent of a disabled child, told her that she asked God the question, "why me?" and secondly, "Why Kobe?" Her friend's questions reminded Hamamoto of the book *The Bell of Nagasaki (Nagasaki no Kane)*, written by Dr. Nagai Takashi, a victim of the Nagasaki atomic bombing. In his book, Nagai wrote that he was asked, "Why has your God allowed the bomb to fall upon the Japanese city where His believers are the

most numerous? Is your Creator a false god?" She remembers how Dr. Nagai answered this question: God did not wish to have the bomb used, but chose His people to be sacrificed by the actions of human beings using their free will in wrong ways. God believed Nagasaki Catholics capable of finding meaning for sacrifice in Christ's death and resurrection. Hamamoto does not completely accept this rationale for understanding the earthquake, but she wants to comprehend the significance of the tragedy as Dr. Nagai did and wants to discover what God has revealed to individuals through the quake. She believes that the Spirit is at work even when people are totally shattered and lost. To accept the life that God given us is to truly live that life.

#### PARENTAL ROLES

The May issue of *Akebono* carries an article "When a Child Seeks a 'Mother's' Heart." Shiomi Toshiyuki, assistant professor of Education at Tokyo University, asserts that "mother" and "father" are absent in family life today. Parents used to manifest both sides of parenting, i.e., both mother and father, but today's parents seem to be one-dimensional. It appears that parents encourage a child to be strong and smart, but no one says to a child, "It is all right to rest....Don't push yourself too hard...." A child needs, however, both aspects of parenting. One dimension encourages a child and instructs that child in how to endure hardship; the other teaches the child to retain warmth. It is difficult to hold both facets in balance. It used to be that a father took the first role and a mother accepted the latter. For example, in the Edo era, fathers of samurai educated their sons according to the very strict discipline of literature or *kendō* (Japanese fencing) but, at the same time, a child was cuddled by his mother at bed time. Nowadays, there is no need to divide parental roles as they once were, but it is necessary to preserve

both dimensions. The question of what constitutes motherhood is also a question of what defines fatherhood. It is necessary for parents to reflect on how they act towards their children. When Shiomi heard the news of a boy who committed suicide, he wondered why the boy did not turn to his parents for help. This caused Shiomi to reflect on his own role as father when he thought of this boy.

In the November issue of *Fukuin Senkyō* (Evangelization), Matsumoto Kazukimi, a religion teacher at a Catholic school, modestly describes how he teaches peace to his children at home. The most important aspect regarding peace and human rights is "to know reality." He regrets the ignorance of his belief in "Japan as a country of peace and equal rights," but he now realizes the reality of discrimination in society and the world. He was especially shocked when he realized that he himself uses the privileges of a system based on other people's victimization. Acting on the basis of upbringing and viewing others from this vantage point, Matsumoto writes that we can change our viewpoint to a more equitable one by "knowing" reality. He wishes "to know" this reality with his children, searching for the methods and objects best suited to each child's age. The next important thing regarding peace and human rights is "to educate for a sense of human rights." It cannot be said that there is peace if there is no war. Peace is the state of no violence, no unrighteousness and no poverty. God wants peace in a world in which the least and most humble are cared for. Matsumoto remembers that he was brought up watching how his mother treated other people. She always treated others with fairness. He admits that it may not be easy to eliminate discrimination within oneself. Whenever he realizes his unfairness to others, he tries to maintain a fair point of view himself and cannot help praying that his children grow in God's justice (fairness). He said that to create fair rela-

tions with his wife is the "starting point" of "faith education" for their children.

In the July issue of *Akebono*, Kashima Takashi, manager of a major newspaper company, writes that fathers who grew up in the postwar period of high economic growth have to change their perspective and relate to their children who are coming to adulthood in an era of steady but slow growth. The fathers tend to find stability and security in a materialistic society with high academic achievement. However, the current economic situation does not always allow these fathers the opportunity to provide a secure life for their children. In addition, academic achievement no longer secures children a passport to employment by the best companies or guarantees high incomes. Kashima confesses that a change of perspective in dealing with his children is the challenge he faces himself.

The February 1996 issue of *Katei no tomo* carries an article entitled, "Fathers and Husbands in the Prime of Life" by Higuchi Keiko, a professor at Tokyo Kasei University. Higuchi advocates that fathers and husbands who have been the breadwinners all their lives have forgotten how to be a partner, son or father in their family. She mentions several cases of elderly couples where husbands experience retaliation from their wives. A nurse wondered why new bruises were obvious on a man's hip when she changed his diaper. The husband said it was because he had been nasty to his wife when he was young. The wife confessed that she pinched her husband's hip when she changed his diaper because the bruise would fade away in a week or so, but the wounds inflicted by her husband and which she carried in her heart would never fade until death. With longer life expectancies, a woman who has endured a husband's selfishness for many years cannot help seeking some sort of revenge. Higuchi warns husbands who think their wives meek and obedient that these women have

despaired of changing their husbands and no longer consider them as life partners. She also advises wives to openly criticize and not to make vengeful attacks when they reach their eighties. Higuchi also asserts that men who are now in their forties, fifties and sixties will face the problem of taking care of their own parents. She warns husbands and fathers who are in the prime of their life that they should reconsider their roles as a partner, son and father in the family.

#### PRAYER

The January 1996 issue of *Katei no tomo* features an article by Oshida Shigeto, a Dominican priest in Nagano Prefecture. Writing "Echo of Breath—Prayers," Oshida writes about prayer as an echo of breathing, the very natural breathing of human beings whatever the occasion. It is important to relate with others for relationships nurture the heart where prayer takes place. Oshida explains his own experience as a newcomer to the place where he now lives. He writes that God's hand touched him through local people. He was able to communicate with God only when he left all his belongings behind. He presented his stripped down self in front of God and let his breathing flow naturally. When a person totally gives oneself to the Absolute, the person becomes a real human being. Oshida calls this a miracle. People can then respect each others' lives and treasure their relationships. The simple heartfelt breath of prayer arises from such relationships.

The July issue of *Shinto no tomo* also focuses on the theme of prayer. Fukada Mikio, a university professor, asserts that prayer is the breath of a Christian. He writes that when Christian prayer is silent, Christian faith dies just as the body dies when breathing stops. Although Christian mumblings do not seem to be prayer, it is a way to communicate with God. He mentions that Job relies on God while he seems to be

complaining to God. Fukada feels that prayer is the breath with which to animate the church.

#### CONCLUSION

Will the year 1995 mark a turning point for the Japanese? Can we take the lessons of the past fifty years, including a false sense of security, and build a new society? 1995 was a year in which to reflect on how we have lived the past five decades. We are urged to consider whether we really live in peace,

and to reflect on what we have done to other people. Two tragic incidents have shaken our lives and given all Japanese a chance to reflect and see if we are truly rooted to this earth and to others. Fifty years ago, not only Japanese but all the world's people suffered from the tragedy of war. In this unforgettable year of 1995, all of us should remember those who suffered then and promise those who lost their lives that we will live today to actualize God's Reign on earth.