

The Death of an Emperor **— Reactions in the Religious Press of Japan —**

The following five editorials, drawn from major religious newspapers of Japan, indicate the range of reactions to the recent passing of Emperor Hirohito (posthumously known as Emperor Shōwa, after the era name). The Jinja Shinpō is a weekly publication of the Association of Shinto Shrines; Bukkyō Times is a general Buddhist newspaper; Chūgai Nippō is an independent religious newspaper, originally of a Buddhist stamp; The Catholic Weekly is Roman Catholic; and the Kirisuto Shinbun is an independent Protestant publication.

While English is not always suited to communicating the nuances of language that treat the emperor as an ordinary person or show him special deference, we have endeavored to keep as much of the flavor of the original as we could.

The Demise of His Majesty the Emperor

[Editorial from the *Jinja Shinpō* for January 8, Heisei 1]

RESPECTFUL WORDS OF CONDOLENCE

On January 7 of the 64th year of Shōwa, at 6:33 A.M., His Majesty the Emperor passed away. The whole population is grieved and driven to tears, as if the sun had lost its light. On hearing the news of the demise of His Most August and Benevolent Majesty, many people gathered at the Nihonbashi Bridge in front of the Imperial Palace, while many more others stayed at home in mourning and gave themselves to reminiscing over the days of His Majesty's reign, shedding tears and passing the time in respectful grief.

In his young days the Sovereign, distressed over the illness of his father Emperor Taishō, accepted the regency and finally succeeded to the throne. It was a time that, both inside and outside the country,

symptoms of coming troubles were deeply felt. Together with enacting the Universal Suffrage Act which showed the development of constitutional government, the government also believed in the necessity of enacting a Law for the Preservation of Peace—a good example of how deep-seated were the expectations in the political world of trouble to come. Meantime, Japan was feeling increasing pressure in its relations with foreign countries and the international economy was in a state of unprecedented panic. Public sentiment for saving the country and initiating reform was on the rise. But before this could be kept under control the Manchurian Incident took place and the military dispute with China escalated. The distress of His Majesty was deep and he often proclaimed his Imperial Will—an eager longing for the great cause of peace in the Orient. But with neither the government nor the army having the capability to realize this Imperial Will, we were driven against our will to enter the catastrophe of the Greater East Asia War in which three million loyal citizens would lose their lives. How deeply must His Most Benevolent Majesty's heart have suffered at that time! His words, "My whole inner self is torn apart because of what happened," uttered in the proclamation ending the war, are forever etched in the memory of the people.

In tracing back over the story of that tragic and sorrowful past, we get a sense of how grave and momentous the responsibility of the officials assisting His Majesty was. Present-day historians often criticize the government and military authorities of that time for having lacked confidence in outsiders, politicians for their inability to see through the plots of foreign countries, and strategists and others for having failed to gauge Japan's strength accurately. Such ongoing discussions about history certainly provide useful material for thinking about our country's future course. But on this day of His Majesty's demise, such discussion is out of place. Right or wrong, all of these people were subjects viewed with equal benevolence by the eyes of His Majesty. That they brought his great heart affliction and failed at the noble task of saving the country is a fact. But in these days, any discussion that smacks of a family quarrel risks doing irreverence to the divine spirits and looking disloyal towards His Majesty's heart. Not that we should disregard questions of such persons's relative merits and demerits, but our words should be couched in generalities about the darker side of our country's destiny. In fact, already at the time that prosperity was on a rapid rise in our Empire, Emperor Meiji refused to be carried

away by optimism but looked to the future and foresaw the possibility of a dark side in the destiny of our country, which gave him grave cause for concern. "When the time comes that the authority of the Emperor is shaken, you my subjects will grieve together with me."

His Majesty declared that "his inner self was completely torn apart because of what happened," and afterwards visited the whole country. In a special way the whole population shared the grief of His Majesty at that time. It was a time when all of us, in one accord with the Imperial Will to establish a lasting peace, were eager to reestablish a new Imperial Authority. And when His Majesty spoke on New Year's Day of 1946 [renouncing his divinity], he repeatedly referred to this legacy from Emperor Meiji. In a press conference at his villa in Nasu in later years, he hinted at how he had wished at the time to stress particularly the five articles of the Charter Oath of Emperor Meiji in January of 1868.

As it turned out, the dark side of our country's destiny was much more severe than had been expected. The new Constitution stipulates that the Emperor has no political power. All that remains is a merely formal role in affairs of State. It has been decided that this role can only be carried out in accord with the will of the government, thus inaugurating a period in which the people are no longer able to hear the Imperial Will as they once could. Only occasionally are they allowed to hear a poem of Imperial composition or look up at his August Figure. All one can do is try to fathom the thoughts of His Imperial Mind, which is always thinking about the country and the people, by piecing together rumors and gossip circulating at large. Still, if it can but fathom a small part of the heart of the Most August and Benevolent Emperor, the Japanese people's national spirit purifies and strengthens itself thereby. His Majesty only very seldom speaks out on affairs related to the State, but he continues to fulfill the noble duties bequeathed to him by the Foundress and ancestors of the Imperial Family as supreme unifier of the national spirit.

Hearing the news of his demise and remembering the sorrows he suffered amidst the troubles during his reign, a thousand emotions crowd in on our minds. His Majesty's reign was the longest to grace our nation's history. But it was also one filled with deep sorrow and pain. In respectfully offering our condolences, we can only ask: Why must a human life be so full of sorrow?

THE TRANSMISSION OF THE SACRED REGALIA:
THE SOLEMN ANCIENT RITES OF THE UNBROKEN IMPERIAL LINE

On January 7 of the 64th year of Shōwa, after the demise of His Majesty, His Imperial Highness the Crown Prince received the three sacred regalia of his Imperial Ancestors.

Looking back to the time when the Imperial House Law of Emperor Meiji was issued (1889), the unwritten traditional law of the Imperial House was clearly enunciated in the article stipulating that “upon the demise of the Emperor, the Imperial heir shall ascend the Throne, and shall acquire the Divine Treasures of the Imperial Ancestors.” This important ceremony had been strictly performed from of old as a sacred great unwritten law of the Imperial House. As such, the transmission of the Divine Treasures signifies succession to the throne and all emperors of the unbroken Imperial line have regarded this ritual as their first obligation. This unwritten law was scrupulously observed and the new emperor performed it as the first act in acceding to the throne. The fact that this ancient rite of the transmission of the Imperial Regalia has been kept up clearly shows that there was no wavering at all in the sacred tradition of the unbroken imperial line. That very fact is profoundly touching, and we do not hesitate to stress the point again and again.

At the time that the new Imperial House Law was promulgated (1947), the stipulation of the Meiji Imperial House Law quoted above was left out. The patriotic members of both houses of the Diet were deeply grieved over the fact and questioned the government about it. The government authorities who sponsored the new proposal (the Yoshida Shigeru government) understood very well the important reason for this great unwritten law. But in forging laws under the eye of the Occupation Forces, might it not be that even as they adhered as far as possible to the spirit of the Meiji Imperial House Law in its essentials, the government considered it more expedient from the viewpoint of foreign diplomacy to give the article, and particularly the clause in question, a new tone? This certainly did not imply a denial of the great unwritten law. As is clear from the principles in the new Constitution governing inheritance in the Imperial line, the government was of the opinion that this great unwritten law had to be preserved by transferring this stipulation to Article 7 of the Imperial House Economy Law [which states in rather complicated terms that “objects of cherished historical value to be handed down with the

throne shall vest in the Imperial heir along with the throne”]. With the understanding of the Diet members, this law was made a reality.

In looking more closely at what is actually stated in the law, not a few of the legal specialists who had misunderstood the weight of the fundamental legal principles in the “unwritten law” noticed the deletion of the term “sacred treasures” and thus came to champion the view that the rite of the transmission of the sacred regalia had therefore become obsolete. It has always been our content from a legal viewpoint that “the great unwritten law cannot disappear.” In affirming the inviolable bond between the sacred regalia and the Imperial Throne, we have gained the understanding and agreement of all people of good will. What is more, the new Emperor has resolutely shown that this “great unwritten law” is as solid as granite.

At the time the new Imperial House Law was promulgated, the term *senso* 踐祚, which had been used even since the time of Emperor Tenji (7th century), was discontinued and replaced with the term *sokui* 即位. While we agree that both terms have the same meaning of “accession to the Throne” of the new emperor and bear a similar legal significance, we also think it more appropriate and socially acceptable to keep the term *senso*, since this was the word that has been used in the Imperial House since Emperor Tenji.

Since the time of the Imperial Ancestors, the enthronement rituals have been considered the first and most decisive requirement for accession to the Imperial Throne. It is a dogma of the Japanese people that a “legitimate emperor in the unbroken line of emperors” is only someone who “has been handed down the divine treasures of the Imperial Ancestors.” The fact that immediately after the demise of His Majesty this dogma was solemnly acknowledged and the rites of transmission of the Sacred Sword and Jewel performed demonstrates that the tradition of the unbroken line of emperors is firmly in place and that the noble spirit of the late Emperor has been transferred as such to the new Emperor. The very heart that grieves over the passing of the former Emperor must strengthen and increase our loyalty towards the new Emperor.

According to the “Meiji Imperial Records” compiled at the Imperial Household Agency, friendly nations expressed their condolences upon being informed of the death of His Majesty and extended their congratulations for the accession to the throne of the new Emperor. It is reported in detail that when Emperor Kōmei passed away and Emperor

Meiji ascended to the throne (1866), the whole body of officials of the Imperial Palace and the Shogunate visited the palace, presented their wishes to the new emperor, and offered him gold and silver swords and other presents. They also expressed in poetry their mixture of sorrow and joy at the occasion. Compared to people of 120 years ago, our sense of language may have changed to the point that we find it hard to use the term “joy” at such times. But when we look up at the solemn figure of the new Emperor, who has strictly preserved the sacred spirit of the unbroken line of emperors, it is hard not to feel unbounded gratitude amidst the sorrow we feel in these days.

THE CHOICE OF THE ERA NAME *HEISEI*:
THE PRESERVATION OF JAPAN'S CULTURAL HERITAGE

Immediately after the new Emperor acceded to the throne, the government passed a decree, and promulgated it in the name of the new Emperor, officially adopting the new era name of Heisei from midnight of January 8th. Era names have a history deeply connected with the cultural tradition of Japan's Imperial Family. The decision that each reign should have its own era name was a good one, and we pledge to respectfully defend this era name.

The system of era names was originally introduced from China. Regarding the calendar prior to that time, we have excellent studies by such great scholars as Motoori Norinaga. Even today scholars and intellectuals who read his writings on this question stand in awe of his argumentation. Since the Taika Reform, when the system of era names was introduced, it underwent various changes, but in each age deep bonds with the Imperial institution were preserved and for some 1,350 years it has been a cultural tradition of the Imperial House. Under the Occupation, William Bunce, one of those responsible for the Shinto Directive which disestablished Shinto's ties with the State, argued that “this system of era names is objectionable because it is too closely linked to the traditions of the Imperial House,” and took steps to have it abolished by the Upper House. Even though this was only a private instruction and not an official order, we took a firm stance against such an unforgivable interference into the heart of our culture by a foreign power seeking to do away with a cultural heritage which has been so intimately connected with the Imperial Family and preserved by the Japanese people for more than thirteen centuries. The President of the Association of Shinto Shrines went to the Upper House and publicly

expressed his opposition in fierce terms. Countless voices of people from all over the country joined in chorus to express their opposition. In the light of this deeply rooted resistance at the grass-roots level, the proposal to adopt the Western calendar uniformly was defeated.

With that, it seemed, the matter was settled. But once again the idea of abolishing the system of era names surfaced and government policy towards the future became ambiguous. All across the country movements were initiated to preserve the nation's cultural heritage and to have the system of era names more clearly defined into law. We also participated in those movements. Our readers gave considerable active cooperation and in the end a law on adopting the system was passed. The law currently in force stipulates that "a new era name shall be given at the succession to the throne and be kept during the whole reign of the new Emperor."

When the Japanese think of history, they always think in terms of Meiji, Taishō, Shōwa, and now Heisei—that is, they think in terms of the reign of the Emperor. The era name of Heisei will always be inseparably connected with our ideas of the reign of the new Emperor. This is also why we adhere so firmly to this system of era names and have continued promoting it assertively.

The promulgation of the new era name of Heisei heralds the beginning "time" of the reign of the new Emperor who accedes to the throne after the demise of the late Emperor. Accordingly, it is with profound sentiments that we date these remarks "January 8th of the First Year of Heisei." The sense that this will not be an ordinary time is strong. We pray that the reign of Heisei may be one of tranquility and peace.

Farewell to Shōwa and . . .

[Editorial from the *Bukkyō Times* dated 15 January 1989
by Satō Mitsuo, President]

Those of us who have lived in the Shōwa era receive the news of the passing of Emperor Hirohito with our own deep emotions.

On September 22 of Shōwa 62 [1987], the Emperor was admitted into the Imperial Household Agency Hospital with a blocked intestinal

passage (actually an ulcer in the duodenal region) and began his long struggle against illness that lasted until his demise on January 7 of Shōwa 64, at a time when most of the country had just welcomed the New Year joining in prayer for his recovery.

At several times throughout his struggle his condition became critical and there were forebodings of his impending demise and with that of the deep emotion that “our Shōwa” was coming to its end.

The Shōwa era, which began after the death of Emperor Taishō, marks not only the 64 years that Emperor Hirohito occupied the Imperial throne but also a period in our intellectual history. There is in us the undeniable and deep emotion of having lived through the Shōwa era, we ourselves, our parents, and our grandparents, as contemporaries of the Emperor.

How many there were who appeared on television or in newspaper interviews after the Emperor’s demise that spoke of their real sense of having lived at the same time as the Emperor!

The Shōwa era can be divided into three periods: from the enthronement of the new Emperor to the Pacific War, during the bitter Pacific War itself, and from the time of defeat until the present.

I myself was called up into the armed forces in the final draft of Shōwa 20 (1945) as a Class B recruit. At the time, I was a lecturer at Taishō University. Kōtoku-ji temple, with which I had special connections, served then as a bureau for the ground division of the Imperial Navy. Upon hearing that I would be assigned to the Army, the commanding officer at the bureau recommended that I be assigned to his office, but I declined and entered the ranks of the Army. With the rest of our Setagaya Regiment, I passed through Hiroshima, which had just been hit by the atomic bomb; and when we reached Kumamoto, we heard that Nagasaki had just been hit as well. The line we walked between life and death was paper-thin.

And today we face the coming end of the century, a time when things are not transparent but which is being boldly proclaimed as “the age of the heart.”

The *Bukkyō Times* began in the third period of the Shōwa era to raise a voice here and there from the rubble of Hiroshima. As a look at the achievements of its founding editor, Tsunemitsu Kōzen, makes plain, it made a variety of proposals for the Buddhist world and the world of thought in general.

As we recall the oppression of Buddhism in the past and the course

towards State Shinto steered after the Meiji Reformation, there is some fear of a trend towards revisionism and nationalism in the coming age.

But today, with the symbolic Emperor system in place, we feel it a matter of course that the present state of the country grounded in a life of democracy, freedom, and international cooperation should continue and that the folly of the early Shōwa years is behind us. We would like to step into the coming age with faith in the good sense of the Japanese people. The *Bukkyō Times* was born at the same time as Japan's renewal and now, on the occasion of the dawn of the Heisei era, we do well to mull over the pledge of the founder and pledge ourselves to give new meaning to our paper for the next generation.

The Symbolic Emperor System in the Future Destiny of Japan and the World

[Editorial from the *Chūgai Nippō*, dated January 11, Heisei 1]

Emperor Shōwa has passed away and we are now in the honorable era of the Emperor Heisei [*sic*]. The late Emperor was 87. His transition marks the end of the longest-living and longest-ruling emperor in history. The new Emperor is 55. . . .

The present nucleus of Shōwa society is inhabited by those born in the post-war years with no experience at all of the Pacific War. Those who were born at the start of the Shōwa period were raised venerating the very shadow of the Imperial Commander-in-chief astride his white horse. . . They learned to die fighting for the sake of the Emperor against “the British and American devils.”

Yet it was only in a radio broadcast on 15 August 1945 that the people were granted audience to the Emperor's voice for the first time. “The war is over; . . . we are at peace,” it said – but no one had any idea what the end of the war or being at peace meant, or even what “peace” itself meant. There had been no direct contact with peace in fact nor had any thought been given to the ideal of peace. Little wonder that people had a hard time grasping what was being said. . . .

At the time that the feudal clan system was dismantled and a single country unified around the emperor system, how would Japan have

turned out if it had not been folk religion but world religion that had been the leading current of thought? When we speak of the roots of Shrine Shinto, one must needs think not only of things peculiar to the islands of Japan but also bring into the picture the area from north-eastern China to the Korean peninsula. There are even those who argue that Shinto should be reawakened to the depths of its world dimension, but the fact is that from the Meiji period to the end of the war, the “way of the Gods” has been tied up with racism and militarism.

Among the generations of emperors there are several who maintained the religion of the court and yet had their own personal religion (Buddhism, Taoism, etc.). Like Prince Shōtoku who wrote a commentary on three Buddhist sūtras and planted the idea of “harmony” firmly in a seventeen-article constitution. . . .

The Emperor, his august figure dressed in a Western suit, did not face his ministers but the people at large. Reading in the newspapers how the Emperor paid a call on General MacArthur at the GHQ located across from the imperial palace, one was struck with a sense of impropriety: “How can that be if the Emperor is of nobler rank?” For a brief period after the end of the war, it was hard to see the Emperor as a national leader on a par with Roosevelt, Churchill, Stalin, Chiang Kai-shek, or with Hitler and Mussolini. Tōjō, Konoe, and the ministers of state were one thing, but, as foolish as it sounds, it took several years to break with the idea of the Emperor as in a different class altogether.

The Emperor had descended from the Gods to the world of human beings, and authority passed from the Emperor to the hands of the people. Thus the Emperor was changed from a single ruling authority figure to a symbol. Land reforms, the breakup of the financial cliques, the dissolution of the army, the doing away with the nobility system, the establishment of freedom of religion (Shrine Shinto reverted to the rank of a religion, and with it a new step was taken towards an opening to the world and humanity), freedom of the press and of expression, women’s suffrage, the erection of labor unions, the abolition under law of monopolies—all these things worked to transform Japan into a free, peaceful, democratic country. Indeed this spelled a “democratic revolution” and the liberation of Japan. . . .

The goal at the time of this new beginning was to erect a country of culture, of peace, and of morality. For a small land poor in natural resources with 100 million people squeezed into co-subsistence, there was no choice, it seemed, but to throw all its effort into promoting

manufacturing and trade. . . . In any case, post-war Japan had also to grapple with the holy task of rebuilding a nation in a spirit of repentance. As a recipient of the pledge to form a foundation for the peace and prosperity of the world and its peoples unarmed and defenseless, Japan's initial ideal was to maintain public tranquility at home through moral and cultural strength, and to contribute to the peace of the world. The reason for repeating it here is to call Japan's religious world to self-awareness of its duty to shoulder a heavier responsibility for peace and morals—and to remember that this applies to us as well. . . .

In the sense of divining the direction that the symbolic emperor system will take in our country, we watch with great interest what is happening in the effort to unify Europe and its relations with the royal household of England. Through the good graces of the fruitful and honorable efforts of Emperor Shōwa, the symbolic emperor system seems to have found a place both among the people of Japan and the world. Through Empress Michiko the “blood of the people” has been introduced into the royal line and given it new strength and vitality.

For the greater part of the long history of Japan, have not the emperors belonged to a symbolic emperor system? The continuance from now on into the future of the more than forty post-war years of uncontested rule by the Liberal Democratic Party, in which the star of the symbolic emperor is made to shine ever brighter and brighter over popular sovereignty, is hardly a welcome prospect. A “feudalistic” presence must not be allowed to come to birth. Moreover, governments that stay in power too long invariably decay. But even if the emperor is preserved as a healthy symbol of the people as a whole, the task that remains for the people from here on is to continue laying the ground for the regular transitions of political power.

A New Resolve for Peace

[Editorial by Bishop Hamao Fumio, *The Catholic Weekly*, 22 January 1989]

We pray for the eternal rest of the Emperor, who was called by God on January 7, and express our sincere condolences. Now is a time to remember the Emperor with tenderness as a man who during his long

reign of sixty-two years had to bear heavy responsibilities, and we entrust his soul to the hands of God, who alone is the rightful judge of a person's life. But at the same time, the responsibility of looking back at the period called Shōwa and building up a better future is our own, since "remembering the past means committing oneself to the future" (Peace Appeal of Pope John-Paul at Hiroshima).

THE PERIOD OF THE OLD CONSTITUTION

From the beginning up to the middle of the Shōwa Era, there was a period of war lasting some fifteen years. In the name of the Emperor, who was head of state under the old Constitution of the Japanese Empire (Meiji Constitution) and supreme commander of land and sea forces, the Japanese Army invaded the countries of our Asian neighbors and other areas of the Pacific, and carried out a policy of colonization. Meantime, within Japan people were discriminated against because of their social status, their race, or religion, and inhuman pressures were put on them—all based on the principle that "the Emperor is sacred and inviolable" (Article 3 of the Meiji Constitution) and the absolutization of State Shinto thought. The victims of the war are said to number more than twenty million. The scars it left in Asia and throughout the Pacific are yet to be fully healed. As Japanese and members of the Church, once again we have to acknowledge the wrongdoing and to ask God and those many people for forgiveness.

THE PERIOD OF THE NEW CONSTITUTION

On August 15, 1945, Japan was defeated. On November 3, 1946, a new Constitution was promulgated, taking effect on May 3rd of the following year. Article 1 of this postwar Constitution states that "the Emperor is the symbol of the State and the unity of the people, deriving his position from the will of the people with whom resides sovereign power." The Emperor also denied his own divinity. Since then, the Emperor has become a symbol in the strict sense of the term, neither a head of state nor possessed of any political power.

THE END OF THE SHŌWA ERA

The war had ended and a new Constitution stipulating Japan's renunciation of war was in place. Since that time, Japan has not used military force to invade any other country. In no time, however, Japan became an economic superpower, so that by the close of the Shōwa Era "human dignity was impaired, the logic of industrial enterprises had begun to

hold sway over the lives of people and their families, the natural environment became gradually destroyed, peace was put into jeopardy, and true solidarity with the world and especially with the people of other Asian nations was questioned." In addition, discrimination on the ground of nationality and social standing has not been duly rectified.

OUR FAITH

As Christians, we believe that human beings are created and saved by God's love, and that therefore each and every human being without exception deserves to be esteemed as an "inalienable person." At the same time, we believe that each individual has been created to form community with others, a society where peace, justice, trust, sincerity and love can reign. It is here, both for individuals and for society, that true happiness is to be found, for it is only in such community that the divine lordship is present, that the Kingdom of the God of love begins. Jesus Christ, who died on the cross and was resurrected on the third day, shows us human beings the way to this Kingdom and empowers us to reach it.

SEPARATION OF RELIGION AND STATE

When made subservient to totalitarian tendencies and the power of the State, the presence of the Emperor as a "symbol of the unity of the people" harbors the danger of menacing and violating the "inalienable rights" of the individual. We experienced this in all its stark reality prior to the outbreak of the war. As people endowed with the sovereign power of self-rule, it is our responsibility to see that this danger is never allowed to recur. Beginning these days, and for a certain period of time, ceremonies and observances connected with the burial of the Shōwa Emperor and the accession to the throne of the new Emperor will be held, accompanied by various social movements. On January 9, the Japan Bishops' Conference sent a petition to the Prime Minister requesting that in those ceremonies and observances the principles of freedom of religion and separation of religion and State, guaranteed by the Constitution, be strictly adhered to and that human rights not be infringed upon. Let us also recall that Article 20 of the Constitution stipulates that "freedom of religion is guaranteed to all. No religious organization shall receive any privileges from the State, nor exercise any political authority. No person shall be compelled to take part in any religious act, celebration, rite or practice. The State and its organs shall refrain from religious education or any other religious activity."

A RESOLVE FOR PEACE

The Shōwa Era has ended, but in the name of the future course of the world and the growth of God's Kingdom we must not pen a full period just yet. It should not be a time to *forget* the mistakes of the past but rather to carve them into our hearts as painful reminders, to repent of them, and to renew our resolve to look on our neighbors in Asian and Pacific countries in a special way as our own brothers and sisters, and so to contribute to world peace. The world has become so linked together that it is almost impossible for any human being or nation to survive on its own any longer. On the one hand, we are in possession of nuclear weapons capable of obliterating the planet; and on the other, the development of transportation and communication techniques keep us informed at each instant of what is happening all over the world. In spite of this, the fact remains that these developments have hardly brought about in us the inner conviction that we constitute one single human community. We still await the birth of a society of full peace, justice, trust and sincerity. We still search for a principle of human unity and sharing. It is not fear, power, and oppression, but only God's love that will accomplish this. Our efforts for peace are steps putting God's love into words and practice. May God bless these steps of ours and guide them.

The Death of the Emperor and the Response of the Church

[Editorial from the *Kirisuto Shinbun* for 21 January 1989]

From the morning of January 7, the day on which the emperor passed away, resolutions in the form of "declarations," "symposia," and "appeals" began to pour out of the FAX machine at our editorial offices one after another. Each statement had its own style and special flavor, depending on the church or group from which it originated. Differences of nuance apart, there were strong and angry statements against the emperor for having passed away in ambiguity and ultimately having failed to make a clear declaration about his own responsibilities for the war from early on, statements about the need to sum up the

Shōwa period and shoulder the task of examining what it all meant for us and for the other peoples of Asia, and appeals calling for concrete action in the form of not using the new era name or resisting the trend to praise the emperor and gloss over his image.

In contrast, the mood of self-restraint that began last September 19 when the emperor's condition became serious and took over television, radio, newspapers, and the news media, as well as society at large, was something out of the ordinary. Particularly after January 7th, it even looked as if the mass media were further exaggerating a situation that was already out of the ordinary.

Certainly this was how we viewed the ultimately powerless people who were burdened with the pressures of a "self-restraint" in which there was no room for the subjective self—a fact which of itself should serve to remind us of our own responsibility, as witnesses of the momentous events of post-war history, to keep the discussion alive. It is a responsibility that must not be forgotten.

Reading and rereading the various statements at hand, looking at the meetings and demonstrations organized by Christian groups to question the emperor system, and lining up the news releases and reports filed, and then taking all of this and laying it over the picture of the large numbers of people pressed into self-restraint like a double-exposure, one cannot but feel that the ranks of those engaged in the fight to rethink the emperor system here and now, and to resist the trend towards idealizing the emperor, are becoming ever more of a minority. At the same time, however difficult it is to continue to witnessing in this struggle against the stream as a minority, it is our way to fulfill the responsibility that is ours as Christians sent by the Lord to be peacemakers.

Seen from the wider perspective of society and the nation, Christians are literally a weak minority, but the pluralism of opinion and sentiment within the Christian minority has also become known. Even news reports dealing with the emperor in this newspaper have elicited a considerable response. Some were encouraging; many accused us of one-sided reporting. Among the critical opinions, some were theoretical but few were disputatious or denunciatory. One of the common views was this: "At this time, with the emperor on his sickbed, the words and actions of the Christian world run counter to the feelings of ordinary citizens, which will not only make our preaching activities more and more difficult from now on, but will have the opposite effect

from what people want.” These views seem to make sense at first glance, but there are many misunderstandings to be pointed out. The contents of various statements contain rather serious errors of fact, some of them related to matters taken up in the news section of this edition. At the same time, it has made us aware once again of how deep-rooted things like the emperor system and praise for the emperor, which go beyond the principle that sovereignty resides in the people, are in the mind of Christians, too, as invisible as the air they breathe.

The new era name has been decided. No doubt there are many who think of it as announcing an end to the “turbulent Shōwa” years and the advent of a new “Heisei” age. But when we talk of the history of the Shōwa period, it is not only before and during the war years that many errors were made, but in the post-war years of Shōwa as well. There is no need to turn to the history of invasions against Asian countries. Even after the war, our country has in effect been taking advantage of the people of Asia in the name of what, from the position of economic strength, is called advancement or economic assistance, all of which is geared to increase our own strength in the process. Inside the country, too, we seem to have piled up offenses with a social order whose scale of values measures things in terms of utility and productivity, discriminating against the weak and increasing their suffering. Unless we wrap up this “turbulent Shōwa history” it may never become a “thing of the past.”

*[translated by Jan Swyngedouw,
James Heisig, and Watanabe Manabu]*