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INTRODUCTION
by
CHARLES MCJILTON

For some, the term "Japanese Christianity" may conjure up exotic images of an "Eastern Christianity" replete with wafting incense, green tea and rice crackers used in the communion service, and melodic chanting during services. Others would say that the term "Japanese Christianity" is inconsistent, because Christianity is a Western religion. However, lest we forget our geography, Jesus was from Asia; Christianity did not start in the West. Here we let the Japanese tell their story and what this term means to them.

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2200-4/27/99

Osaka to Tokyo on the Shinkansen

I reread my notes I wrote while coming down to Osaka on the Shinkansen (Bullet Train) and I feel foolish at what I wrote. I focused so much on the minority aspect and foreignness of Christianity that I completely missed the point. However, if I were to print what I wrote this morning, quite a few people would probably regard it as "Gospel." It sounds plausible and logical: Because Christians are a minority in Japan and because Christianity is a foreign religion, becoming a Christian means giving up a part of one's Japanese identity and becoming a minority. How wrong. How very wrong.

None of the people I interviewed felt, or even began to consider themselves, to be a minority. None. In fact in my very first interview, I was blown completely away by this statement: "To become Christian is to become more Japanese." Wow. I would have never, never in my wildest dreams come up with that statement. And yet this came from a person who has been a Christian for a long time. Who is a thinker. Who is well-educated.

Or how about the Catholic Sister who saw Christianity as wearing a new pair of lenses to see reality better? Or how about the Franciscan priest who lived among the day-laborers in Osaka? He rewrote the Gospels to reflect the stance of the poor and the language they use, when he realized they could not relate to his sermons. He certainly was not aping the West.

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What I saw in Osaka were people whose identity had become clearer through their Christian experience. All of them saw their experience as adding to their life rather than taking away from it. And this could be seen in the flame that seemed to glow faintly from their faces.

True enough, they had demographically entered a minority group. However, unlike in western countries where this term carries a pejorative meaning, they in no way entertained that thought. Their "minority status" had far from constricted their power base or standing in society. It had changed them internally in a way that is not often seen in the West.

"Lest I use this word too strongly, let me say we must 'resist' to be Christians. In the West you just accept." And there lies the crux; to be Christian in a non-Christian country demands so much more. However, we should not necessarily confuse this demand with external circumstances, such as political pressure. And while it does not necessarily mean the demand to completely reconcile one's own Japanese-ness and one's faith, it does ask them to clarify what is Christian and what is not Christian when it comes to customs, beliefs, values, and faith. In other words, the demand is internal.

For too long I have believed, and said, that to become Christian is to lose a part of one's Japanese identity, because one has to take on a foreign religion. However, according to the people I interviewed, I was very much wrong. It was a pleasant shift, a paradigm shift.

So then, what does Japanese Christian identity mean? Read ahead and make your own decision...

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1. INTERVIEW WITH PROF. HIDEO YUKI

(Director of NCC Center for the Study of Japanese Religions, Professor Emeritus of Doshisha University, Kyoto.)

JCAN: I understand you were born in 1926 and became a Christian during the war.

Rev, Yuki: Yes, that is correct.

JCAN: How did you become a Christian?

Y: A missionary visited my mother and she became interested in Christianity. However, it wasn't until a small church was built nearby that I started attending Sunday school. I was in elementary school then, and I was finally baptized in middle school.

JCAN: That must have been right in the middle of the war. What was it like?

Y: It was terrible. There were very few parishioners and fewer pastors. Sometimes pastors had to work in other places just to support themselves.

JCAN: How did this shape your faith?

Y: During the war, with the atmosphere being filled with ultra-nationalistic talk, reading the Bible and listening to teaching from the church leaders gave me a clear sense of being a Christian. *That* is being Christian.

JCAN: But didn't you feel you were a minority?

Y: I have two things to say. The first is what a lay leader told us. "There is much talk from the government about what it means to be patriotic. However, that is not patriotism. Patriotism is believing in the true God and praying for Japan." At that moment I felt I was in a minority group, but also felt I was truly loving Japan. The second point is that I was against Japanese actions and ideology, but I never lost my Japaneseness. I did not become western when I became Christian.

JCAN: But weren't you accused of becoming western?

Y: Yes, but that is a matter of style. American style. English style. German style. But we still felt we were Japanese. 1942 was the worst of the ultra-nationalism, particularly the Christmas of that year. Therefore, the Christian boom after the war was something that I hated.

JCAN: Hated?

Y: You have to understand. We persevered during the worst period. Of course, at any time in history each person's choice of baptism is an individual struggle. However, in general, in the post-war period society accommodated many of these new Christians. It was almost a fad, a way to show you were democratic, modern. That might be considered "style." Society never accommodated us during the war. We had to struggle to change Japan; however, we were not opposed to Japan.

Of course in the post-war period the number of Christians was rising. However, the real meaning of becoming Christian is to change. Not to become American. Not to become western. But to make Japan more Japanese.

JCAN: Is that the meaning of Christianity?

Y: Yes. To me, it is for each person and each group to become more of what God has made them to be. So for Koreans, it is not throwing off their national identity, but to become more Korean.

However, there is a criterion. It cannot mean for Japan to glorify and deify the emperor out of ultra-nationalism. When we recognize God, then good things will come about. Again, this does not mean throwing everything Japanese out. We must also ask, "What are the social implications?" "What is my new identity?"

God, as Creator, made many different varieties. And it is not meant for those varieties to be simplified into a set type. Previous missionaries asked us to become one type: modern. But now we see the value of variety and the efficacy of our profession, "We believe in one God, Creator of heaven and earth..."

JCAN: What is the difference between Japanese and Western Christianity?
Y: Westerners are born into a Christian society and, therefore, they are raised in a culture that has Christianity and Christendom together. However, for countries, like Japan, that have had Christianity brought to them, they have both the religion and the culture to contend with.

The good point is that Japanese Christians must clarify what Christian religion means to them, while western Christians do not necessarily need to do this, because their religion is a part of the culture. In a sense, if Japanese Christians do not clarify their faith, they will not become Christian. The person must search for his/her faith. Therefore, in a non-Christian world one's identity as a Christian becomes clearer. Whereas, in the West a church member may be considered to be enrolled, even if they do not attend the church.

The good point for westerners in Christendom is that, even if they themselves do not struggle, they can still take in the teachings of Christianity. They can have a Christian way of life. However, if Japanese Christians do not struggle to be Christian, they will not have that "Christian way of life." Their identity will suffer. Westerners do not face this problem of losing their Christian identity, because Christianity permeates throughout society; at home, among friends, and at holiday celebrations.

But for Japanese to become Christian does not mean giving up their Japaneseness.

JCAN: My previous image was that for Japanese to become Christian they must lose some of their Japaneseness. However, you are saying that is not so. You have stated, "For Japanese, being Christian is making Japan more Japanese."

Y: Yes, that is true. However, previous missionaries made the mistake of thinking that to become Christian was to be modern. Among other things, they would advocate throwing away everything. And those who could throw away their Japanese identity were most welcomed by these missionaries. That is a western way of life. Coffee in the morning. No public baths. Sleeping in beds.

There is a presumption behind your question of identity. If there were none, then there would be no problem with Japanese Christian identity and Japanese identity. I am sure you are thinking that there are aspects of Japaneseness that are incompatible with Christianity. The biggest example is the deification of the Emperor and the present emperor system.

A better example for westerners to understand would be the custom of honoring the dead. It is difficult to say where culture ends and religion begins when people fold their hands together and worship the dead. Westerners have never had this custom, and therefore there is no problem for them to confront. Of course, Christians must never worship the dead, but some will say that if you do not worship, then you are not Japanese. Therefore, the problem becomes what to do at a Buddhist funeral.

This takes us back to the problem of the conflict between Japanese

Christian identity and Japanese identity. I think one way to begin to work through these problems is to ask, "What are the criteria here?" "What is the intent?" "What is the meaning behind the actions?" It may mean to honor the memory of the dead. To show respect. Recall good times spent together.

From a standardized western Christian perspective the actions of the Japanese Christian may appear to be worshipping. However, these Christians have analyzed what they are doing, and the implications of their actions, and have come to the conclusion that "what they are doing is not necessarily worshipping."

However, some churches say that following standardized Christian teaching means that you must not worship when you go to a Buddhist funeral. And while we must not worship, we must take the time to analyze our own actions and make our own decision as to what they mean.

If Japanese only look to the west to take their cues for behavior, then they will never be able to hue out their own Christian identity.

JCAN: The image many have of Japanese becoming Christian is what Paul says, "Throwing off the old self and putting on the new self." How is this carried out in Japan?

Y: I believe Paul was referring to a spiritual point.

JCAN: OK. But some conservative western missionaries would say that all family shrines need to be thrown out as they are symbols of the devil.

Y: When Protestant missionaries came here more than 100 years ago, that was the first stage of evangelism. They did not understand the culture and simply sought to throw out everything Japanese. However, we need to have some criteria for keeping what is Japanese, based on the gospels. Again, funerals are a good example of this. What are the criteria for attending a Buddhist funeral? What is my intent? What do my actions mean?

JCAN: I think I have similar experience. My mission is interdenominational, but I am not the only Roman Catholic in Japan. I often hear criticism that we worship Mary. However, for us nothing could be further from the truth. It may appear to be worshipping, but for us it is clearly not.

Y: Yes, that is a good example for us Christians. We need to ask what are the criteria and intent of my actions instead of just throwing out the baby with the bath water.

JCAN: How have missionaries missed this point in the past?

Y: Previously, missionaries came not only to spread the Good News but to "ask the Japanese to change their old-fashioned and uncivilized ways."

These missionaries could not notice the different lifestyles because they lived in western-style housing, huge houses compared to Japanese. For example, shortly after the war there was a young couple who wanted to live as the Japanese did, but their mission board refused to grant them permission. "You cannot sleep on the floor. You can not use the same bath for the whole family. These things are unhealthy." These days there would be no problem, but it does illustrate the misunderstanding of what mission means.

by CEM

2. INTERVIEW WITH SISTER EIKO ABE

Society of Helpers, Osaka

(I ran into Sister Abe while visiting Kibo no Ie (House of Hope) located in Kamagasaki, Osaka. The facility works with recovering alcoholics, the homeless and other people in need. It is located in the biggest concentration of day-laborers in Japan. Her easy attitude and warm smile spoke volumes.)

JCAN: When were you baptized?

Sister Abe: That would have been my second year of high school. I was 17.

JCAN: How did you get interested in Christianity?

A: I was studying opera and a group was formed to sing at a church. The priest there asked if I wanted to know what the Latin meant. That was the beginning point.

JCAN: Was there an experience that shifted your thinking?

A: In talking with this priest I could see there was a different world out there, a world of faith. When the priest said faith was viewing the world through different lenses, well, that really clicked inside.

JCAN: How did your parents react?

A: Mother was worried that the sisters were going to take me away. My father was more practical, as he could not see how I would be able to get married if I became a Christian. You see, he had studied Catholicism before and was worried that I would not be happy.

JCAN: Well, you didn't get married and you seem quite happy.

A: Entering the convent was a journey. I went to a Catholic university, so that helped to strengthen my faith and help me see that I was called to be a Sister.

JCAN: I take it your parents were not so happy about your calling.

A: No, they were against it. They even said, "Why don't you just kill us and go?" After college I came home to take care of my ailing father. But for six months I heard nothing but talk about marriage.

One day my father came to me and said, "I said earlier you should just kill us and go. I may not understand your way, but if this is the path that you think will make you happy, then go. You have our blessings." I cried when I heard that. In fact, We both cried.

JCAN: That's quite a moving story. It seems that your faith was made stronger in each period: baptism, college, and finally waiting for approval from your parents.

A: When I was first baptized, my experience of being with Christ was not so strong. I had a strong sense of meeting the Father, but much less of Jesus. The first mass I went to, I really didn't understand Holy Communion. At that time it was pre-Vatican II, so the priest was facing the altar. However, the person next to me showed me the Japanese translation of the Latin and it said, "We give praise to Jesus who was crucified for all humanity." Those words "all humanity" struck a chord deep within me, as I could imagine my

neighbors in that small countryside town.

It was after I entered the convent that those words took on a greater meaning, that Jesus is always with us.

JCAN: Since you were baptized, have you ever thought there are contradictions between Christianity and Japanese traditions, and that maybe choosing a more Japanese religion, Shinto or Buddhism, would have been better?

A: Since I met Christ?

JCAN: Yes.

A: We don't need religion.

JCAN: Don't need? Just believe in God?

A: Yes, that's right.

JCAN: Did you ever feel that you were losing part of your Japanese identity as a Christian because it is considered a foreign religion?

A: Hmm. No, I never felt that way, because through Christ there are many ways of living, changing (conversion) and growing.

JCAN: But many of your fellow sisters are foreigners.

A: Yes, that is true. However, there was a time when Japan threw everything Christian out and closed the country. When Japan reopened, we had these people coming here to give us the Good News. They gave up their former lives, and in some cases put their lives on the line for their faith. That impressed me. So if you insist on calling it a foreign religion, I have to consider that their actions were a powerful testament to me.

JCAN: What do you think of the present Japanese Christian identity? Specifically, I am thinking about the emperor system.

A: For me I feel that the emperor system gets in my way. I don't feel free. We have no need for such a system.

JCAN: Does Shintoism or Buddhism have any influence on your faith?

A: Yes. I have many good friends of these faiths who have taught me much, especially Shinto.

When I was five I was very sick, and so my mother went to the Shinto shrine in our small village and prayed that I would recover. It was common then for mothers to sacrifice something, like eating food, to show their seriousness. When it was apparent that I was going to recover, my mother put me on her back and went to the shrine. 100 times she entered the gate of the shrine, climbed the stairs, bowed and offered a single flower at the shrine. 100 times, with me on her back! That taught me a lot about faith and prayer.

JCAN: Final thoughts?

A: Many young people are separated from the church. However, there are many who want to meet Christ, who have a spiritual hunger inside. Christ has yet to be introduced to them.

by CEM

3. IDENTITY IN SHARING ONE'S FAITH: DR. TOSHI ARAI

(Rev. Dr. Toshi Arai, Director of Christian Academy (Tokyo office). Before that, he worked at the World Council of Churches in Geneva and at the Christian Conference of Asia in Singapore and Hong Kong.)

I first met Dr. Arai in Singapore in 1978 while he was working at the Christian Conference of Asia (CCA). I remember how enthusiastic he was about his work at CCA. His work involved visiting other churches in Asia. In his travels he often apologized for what Japan had done during the war. "We not only invaded Asian countries but we glorify these war criminals at the Yasukuni Shrine," Dr. Arai said. "I have told the Japanese churches that saying 'sorry' is not enough; we must show evidence of our apology."

He also believes it is important to collect hymns from all around the world and use them in hymnals in Japan. Some of these hymns can be found in the new hymnals for the *Kyodan* (United Church of Christ in Japan) and the *Seikokai* (Anglican/Episcopal) churches. While preaching three years ago at West Tokyo Union Church, he began singing a hymn in the middle of his sermon. And today we were serenaded during our interview with him.

He has a wide background of ecumenical experiences. He studied at *Aoyama Gakuin* (a Methodist-related university in Tokyo). He later went to the U.S.A. for seminary, where he majored in American church history and minored in ecumenism. Returning to Japan, he became one of the pastors at the International Christian University Church. He was also the chairperson of NCC's Youth Committee. Dr. Arai said, "This was in the 60s and I encouraged young people to go to Asia. Finally, I thought I should practice what I preach, and I joined the CCA."

Besides his deep commitment to ecumenism, the Reverend Arai is a strong advocate of interfaith dialogue. "I am a Christian pastor but feel the ecumenical movement should go into the area of interfaith cooperation and dialogue. Because Christians are only 1% of the population in Japan and 3% in Asia, if we want to do anything for peace and justice, we must cooperate with people of other faiths."

He went on to explain that interfaith dialogue was not "just smiling at one another" but contributing out of our honest Christian identity. The ecumenical movement is not just limited to church cooperation. In Greek *oikumene* means "the whole inhabited world." God is working and spreading the Good News, healing and caring for people of other faiths and people without faith." When asked about evangelism the Reverend Arai responded, "Instead of evangelism, we should do more assimilation of non-Christians to churches and Christian institutions. The skirt of the church should be extended wider as we become friends with others." by CGY & CEM

Claudia Gemury-Yamamoto (CGY) and CEM

4. INTERVIEW WITH YOKO NOBIRA

Kagoshima, Japan

(Yoko Nobira is a young adult active in the Catholic Church)

JCAN: Yoko, were you always a Christian? If not, at what age did you convert, and why?

Yoko: I was baptized at Christmas, 1996. I was 22 at the time. It would take too long to explain all the reasons why, but I feel my whole life was one continuous journey towards baptism. I had always yearned for "the light," and for help from somewhere outside myself. As a child, I was afraid of death and darkness, and often couldn't sleep the whole night. I felt the constant passage of time, and it seemed to me that all things were short-lived and quickly faded away. I desired some sort of permanence, something that would last beyond death.

While attending Kagoshima University, I met Father Frank Sottocornola, an Italian priest, who taught religion at my university. Before taking his course, I never thought about religion or about its role in our lives. He said that "religion is the way our lives pursue the truth. Thus, religion is life." These words were exactly what I had been longing to hear since my childhood. During the course, we watched a video on Jesus' life." I was so moved I began to cry. Finally, it was his warm smile, both mysterious and peaceful, that captivated me, promising me something of the "infinite," and led me to make the choice to become Christian.

JCAN: Are your parents religious? How do they feel about your conversion to Catholicism?

Y: My parents are not particularly interested in religion. You could say we are a traditional Japanese family who feel connected to the national Shinto religion. My parents were not too happy about my conversion and warned me not to get too involved, as it might be dangerous. They were influenced, I am sure, by the mass media coverage of religious cults, following the Aum Shinrikyo sarin gas attack in Tokyo in March, 1995.

JCAN: How has your life, thinking, feeling changed since you became Christian?

Y: I feel I've changed a lot. I am much happier than before. I am no longer afraid like I was as a child. I've come to know God's love for me and for others, and believe that Christ is always with each and every one of us. To love is to hope and to live in the light. I have a desire to love people as Christ did.

JCAN: what do you think of young people today in Japan? Do you have hope for a good future for Japan? Are you afraid?

Y: I think we must pay close attention. I have the impression that there is a tendency today among Japanese youth to ignore the meaning of life, or not even to reflect upon it. I don't think young people realize what a gift it is to be alive, and the responsibility it carries. We live in such a fast-paced world of information and materialism. But we must make good choices and not

accept blindly everything put in front of us. I can't predict the future, because society changes so rapidly. One thing is certain. It is the present moment we are living that counts and that requires our full attention.

by Patrice Van Hyle

5. LIVING AMONG NON-CHRISTIANS IN RESPONSE TO JESUS: CHIEMI ISHII

(Ms. Ishii is a researcher and director of several programs at the Tomisaka Christian Center. The Center is a place where researchers can come and look at issues in East Asia. In addition to sponsoring seminars, forums and other discussion panels, they publish books covering a wide range of topics from the environment to the emperor system.)

JCAN: When did you become Christian?

Ishii: My mother was Christian, and so she took me to church when I was young. Later, when I was 16, I was baptized.

JCAN: I guess your mother must have been happy.

I: Well, she was not going to church at that time, so I am not sure she had much reaction.

JCAN: And your father?

I: He's Buddhist, so he thought it would be best if I gave it up. He was not against it but he was not for it either.

JCAN: What influenced you to become Christian?

I: When I was in my first year at high school, my senior, who was an atheist, said that Christians are cowards, and that those who do not rely on God are the truly free and happy people. She had been influenced by Jean Paul Sartre. I was shocked because I thought that Christians had the right answers to life.

I was also influenced by the Japanese author Dasai. Some of his writings are close to Christianity, even though he was not a believer. He talked about living a sincere and true life as much as possible, even though in his real life he was a womanizer.

For six months I worried and thought about what I should do. I could either become like my friend and not believe in God, or I could become a Christian.

I then saw the movie about Saint Francis called, "Brother Sun Sister Moon," and realized that that was what God's love was all about. I became baptized.

JCAN: Well, you should have become Catholic.

I: You're probably right, but I was going to a Protestant church at that time.

JCAN: What did your senior say when you became baptized?

I: Hmm, I may have told her, but I don't remember.

JCAN: Did your friends know?

I: Most knew I was a Christian.

JCAN: What did they think?

I: Most thought it was strange that I was getting involved in a religion that

usually only senior citizens get involved in.

JCAN: That is an interesting take.

I: At that time most of my friends were non-Christians. And this is true even today. I cannot agree with limiting my friends to only Christians, or those in my own church. I feel that God calls us to be among the people.

JCAN: Do you belong to a church?

I: Yes.

JCAN: When you became a Christian, did you feel that you might be becoming a minority?

I: Hmm, at 16 I don't think I gave it much thought.

JCAN: Then when did you feel that you were indeed different?

I: I was a part of a fundamentalist Baptist church started by an American. They said that we definitely could not go to a Buddhist temple and pray. And even for my grandfather's funeral, they said I should not go and offer my prayers for them.

JCAN: You were in high school?

I: Yes.

JCAN: As a Christian what were you thinking?

I: As a relative, I felt obligated to go. But I also wanted to do something. And so I really worried about it. I was lucky that the Buddhist priest was really open. In fact, his son had become a Christian after attending a Christian university.

JCAN: What did the priest say?

I: He said that the heart of Christianity and Buddhism were the same, so there was no problem. He also said that the Buddhist prayers could be interpreted in Christianity as the Lord's Prayer.

JCAN: So did you tell the pastor this revelation.

I: No, I passed on that. But I did talk to the son, and he said that this was not exactly true. However, he did say that on a deep level they did have many things in common. I was really happy to hear this.

JCAN: At that time did you believe in the doctrine of that fundamentalist church?

I: Yes, but I gradually began having my doubts. I realized that that kind of thinking was very narrow-minded.

JCAN: So, in a sense it was that funeral that led you to reconsider your beliefs.

I: Yes. But even before that I had a shocking experience. When the Jewish athletes were killed at the 1972 Munich Olympics, the pastor's wife said that she felt sorry for the "Jews," because even in this age, they are still paying for the sin of killing Jesus.

I just couldn't understand how present-day people could still carry the sin of killing Jesus, or how that could be a justification for killing those people. That is when I started to realize my beliefs were different from the doctrines they held.

JCAN: When else did you have a significant experience of clarifying your

Christian identity?

I: When I was in theology school, I was exposed to reading the Bible in a different light. The Baptist read the Bible literally, word for word.

JCAN: Who influenced you to seriously consider interacting with other religions and learning from them?

I: I went to a rural community started by a Dominican priest, Father Oshida. He often would say, "I am Buddhist. A Buddhist who has met Christ." It was a revelation to hear that. Everything in that community represented the heart of Japan, the chapel, and the house. Everything had Japaneseness to it. I also could feel that people of other religions would have been welcome there.

JCAN: I see. However, the path you have chosen is a Christian one. Why? Why not be Buddhist? Muslim? Shinto?

I: That is a good question; but for me I feel that God has called me to be Christian. But I can get a lot out of Buddhist ways of meditating.

JCAN: Some people say that once you become Christian, you lose part of your Japanese identity. What do you think?

I: Unfortunately, there are a lot of people who think that way. And there was a time I thought the same way. It was very hard for me. However, when I saw the way Fr. Oshida was living, I realized there was something different; that is the way to really live, with one's identity and faith intact. There was freedom there. For some reason many Protestants try to take the Japaneseness out of Japanese Christianity.

by CEM

6. NO MATTER WHAT, LIFE IS WORTH LIVING: SHIZUKO HIGUCHI

(She is active in the Catholic Church and works as a translator.)

Born after the end of World War II in Tokyo, Japan, Shizuko Higuchi, the youngest child in a family of six was raised in an environment of hardship and struggle. "I remember having little to eat and being given treats of chocolate candy from American soldiers and volunteers who were in Japan during its reconstruction period."

In spite of growing up in a Buddhist family atmosphere, she admits to not fully understanding Buddhist rituals and practices. During her college years, Shizuko attended Sophia Catholic University in Tokyo and was exposed to Christianity for the first time. Although somewhat intrigued by Christian beliefs, she didn't feel a desire to probe any further. "I was young and carefree. My whole life was ahead of me. I was full of self-confidence and hope for my future. Personally, I didn't find anything lacking."

Yet, life's seams quickly unraveled for Shizuko when she was about 40 years of age. "A turning point in many women's lives," she explains. To those on the outside, her life seemed perfect. She had a good marriage, faithful husband and smart young daughter. But now surrounded by elderly parents and in-laws, Shizuko began to experience an increasing angst and

dissatisfaction. Realizing the harsh fact of human mortality and feebleness that often comes with old age, she questioned her own life and its meaning.

"How will it be to get old?" "Has my life until now been all I had imagined it to be?" "Is life worth living at all?" These were some of the questions Shizuko asked herself repeatedly. She was in a desperate spiritual state, with no solution in sight.

A relative encouraged her to study Buddhism and its tenets more deeply in an effort to chase away the hopelessness and emptiness inside. "I read many books on Buddhism during roughly a one-year period. At first, I was taken in by its philosophical approach, and thought I had perhaps found what I was searching for." Quickly, however, doubts crept into Shizuko's mind. "Sadly, I reached the conclusion that I still hadn't found the TRUTH. My search continued for something concrete to hold on to."

Because the translation job Shizuko was working on at the time required biblical knowledge, she enrolled in a beginner's Bible class. "I had no intention of becoming a Christian, just mild curiosity and interest out of necessity for my work." Within a few short months, however, Shizuko had agreed to receive a private catechism from the Bible teacher, American missionary priest Fr. John McKechney. Soon after, she was baptized by him in a chapel on the grounds of her alma mater, Sophia University.

"Before I was a Christian, I was rather of a pessimistic nature, always worrying about myself and my own concerns. Now, I am freed from self-absorption and am happy, thanks to God and my faith," says Shizuko. "Moreover, I have hope that one day my husband will be baptized and join me in attending Sunday church services."

When asked about her present view of death and growing old, twelve years after her conversion to Christianity, Shizuko emphatically responds, "Now, I am of the opinion that even getting old can be seen as a gift from God as it helps us to empathize with others and their sufferings. I firmly believe that no matter what, life is worth living." *by Patrice Van Hyle*

7. MY SECOND BAPTISM WAS MY REAL CONVERSION: HIRO FUKUMOTO
(Fifty-three year old Hiro Fukumoto, born in Yokohama, recounts his journey to Christianity.)

As a child, I became familiar with the teachings of Christianity through my Protestant mother who was a faithful churchgoer. During my teenage years, I attended services with her on and off, but lacked a personal commitment to Jesus or real understanding of what it meant to be a Christian. At the age of twenty, a minister friend of my mother's suggested I be baptized.

Although I wasn't against the idea, the choice to become Christian didn't come from my own heart. I went through the procedures, received baptism, to my mother's and the minister's delight, but inside felt no sincere desire to live a Christian life or explore my faith more deeply. As a consequence, I soon drifted away from the church, stopped attending services and pursued a rather worldly lifestyle. I focused on my profession as an acupuncturist, my interest in painting and photography, made money and enjoyed material pleasures.

Some time later, I began to ponder the spiritual dimension of life and undertook an intensive personal study of Buddhism, Shinto and New Age religions. I wholeheartedly launched a search for my own life's path. I needed to find out which direction to go in. This search lasted many years; and although I did appreciate and put into practice some of the tenets of other religious traditions, I still harbored a longing for something more.

Then two years ago, a Catholic friend of mine suggested I take a course entitled, "To Meet Yourself," conducted by a Belgian missionary priest, Fr. Bogaert. This course opened my heart to the truth of Jesus' message — To Love One Another. I decided to be baptized a second time, this time of my own will. On Holy Saturday, 1998, during the Easter Vigil Mass, I experienced a rebirth into God's family. I became a child of God.

Since that time, my whole outlook has changed, affecting every aspect of my daily life, especially my work as an acupuncturist. Now, I pray before each treatment session and ask for Jesus' healing power to assist me. I consider other peoples' happiness more and my own selfish desires less. I try to keep my soul genuine and pure, and not get caught up in former worries about money, health, the future, etc. I am much more content now and accept myself and my weaknesses. I possess a desire to share Christ's love and peace with my friends and all those I meet. Like Jesus during his earthly life, I want to heal and anoint people. I have a mission to fulfill, and my life has a deeper meaning.

by *Patrice Van Hyle*

8. A NEW IDENTITY FROM AN OLD SYSTEM: DR. HISAKO KINUKAWA
(*Professor at Tokyo Women's Christian University, a member of NCC-J's Commission on Faith and Order and on NCC-J's Women's Committee.*)

JCAN: What does Christian identity mean to you?

Kinukawa: I should say first that Christian faith is a commitment, not a

* Dr. Kinukawa is the author of *Women and Jesus in Mark — A Japanese Feminist Perspective*, by Orbis Books. Available in English and German, and now in Japanese.

conversion. I decided to commit myself to the Christian faith and identify myself with a Christian church when I was in college. Till then, I was raised in a family which had different religions. My parents are not identified with any religion, but they are very spiritual and interested in religion. So I cannot tell which part of my body and soul is immersed in Buddhist traditions, Shinto customs, or a Confucianistic way of life. All of these, and other disciplinary things, are fused into my body and soul. I decided to commit myself to the Christian faith. So in me, my Christian faith has been my right to determine my way of living, and to depend on whatever I need to make my decisions.

JCAN: When you say your Shintoism and Buddhism were fused together, I am reminded of Dr. Chung Hyun Kyung, who said that even today after she became a Christian, there are things still fused to her body from her past. Do you find that a part of your Christianity comes from those experiences before becoming Christian?

K: Yes. I can not separate me from all of those religions. And if there is richness in my spirituality, it came from those religions. I don't think I really felt that fusion until very recently, when I began doing interfaith conversations and encounters. I realized, "Oh, my spirituality is not only from Christianity."

JCAN: Where did you become Christian?

K: In college, but I was first exposed to church life in elementary school. A little background about my family is needed. My father was an officer in the Japanese Army in WWII. My mother faithfully followed him and expected that Japan would win the war. When the war ended, their world was turned upside down. They then decided that they wanted to give their five children a new way of life, one much different from the one they had. When a Kyodan church was built in our neighborhood, they sent all of us to Sunday school. I continued until middle school, when my homework became too much and I had to quit.

The first Bible I read was the one my father had used. He had underlined many sections, and you could tell that he was seeking spiritual answers.

JCAN: Changing the subject, have you been able to have meaningful discussion with people in the church who espouse a patriarchal system?

K: It is very hard to have a meaningful discussion with those patriarchal men, because they refuse to expose themselves to the reality of their actions. And they are very quick to defend themselves.

JCAN: But the people I knew would just say that they are indeed patriarchal.

K: And they just say, "Why don't you just accept this?" But I cannot accept that reality. That type of thinking pervades the Japanese culture and church. Part of the roots are in this shame culture where men must be honored and woman must carry the shame. As I analyzed my culture, I saw similarities to 1st Century Palestine.

In my book* I looked at Mark and the role of women. One thing I had to do was change the lens. All the gospels are written using a male lens. When I used a women's lens, a whole new world opened up in seeing how women were active.

JCAN: Can you give us an example?

K: Well, we know that Jesus grew up in this very patriarchal culture. So when he encounters the Phoenician woman (Mark 7:24-30), he initially rejects her. That is a pattern here. But she persisted and he was sensitive to what she said and he transformed himself.

In a sense, she set the stage for these patriarchal men to change themselves. In my book I tried to write of Jesus as the model for change: He was sensitive and he was inclusive.

JCAN: You see this change as being crucial.

K: Yes. First, I try to get them to think about and become aware of how they are immersed in the patriarchal system, whether that may be a woman's attitude that she knows best about raising children or a man's expectation that women should serve him tea at the company. Both are wrong. Both are exclusive. Both are not mutual.

JCAN: And how successful have you been?

K: Well, I have had a so-called "15-year war" with my husband over this issue.

JCAN: Who won?

K: Well, we mutually won. I like to think I helped to transform him, but I should say that he has transformed himself. I teach at a women's university and most of my students are women. I tell them, "If you can succeed in transforming one man, that would be a big undertaking for your life."

JCAN: But this is mutual?

K: Yes, mutual. For example, he likes to do housework even though he may not be good at it, but I do not criticize when he does it. It is a part of our unwritten agreement to recognize the other person's efforts.

Let me give another example of transforming a man. My husband is the president of a university, and so he has a secretary who will serve him tea at 10 and 3 each day. However, he has been trained by me at home to get his own tea. I never do that at home. So at work it is natural for him that whenever he wants tea he makes it himself. The vice president, other officials, and secretaries could see him coming and going from the kitchen with his tea. This made them think about why he was doing that, and soon everyone started getting their own tea. That is transformation of one man impacting many other people.

JCAN: They must have been shocked to see that.

K: I guess you could say that.

JCAN: What is the root of this patriarchal thinking?

K: The emperor system is the real foundation of patriarchy in this society. The system is the problem, not the emperor as a person.

JCAN: So to what extent do you think women here have a role in defining

Japanese Christian identity? Primarily from the perspective that women make up 70-75% of the congregation but often do not have positions of leadership within the church. In the Catholic Church this is quite pronounced. K: Well , I can only speak for the Protestant church. While a church will vote on a new minister, the first choice is for a man with his family, not a single man.

JCAN: But some women are happy with the patriarchal system.

K: I agree. But at the same time, if that is the only way they can be or have religious position, then they have compromised themselves. But if you allow us to have women churches, it would be quite different from the current system.

JCAN: Talking about Christian identity in Japan, given that the majority of believers are women and that Japan is primarily a patriarchal system, how does this affect the Christian identity of women? In other words, how is your identity shaped, given you are a minority in society and a minority in the leadership of the church?

K: Up to now it has just happened that way.

JCAN: Well, let me ask this: Are women aware of their status? Or, are women excluded from decision-making and forming their own Christian identity here?

K: Well, that has been my struggle all along. That is what I have been doing in Feminist Theology. When I came back to Japan after studying in the U.S.A., I started preaching at my church which is a non-church church (*mukyokai*). This movement was started by a Japanese who wanted to read the Bible with his own eyes and free from missionary influence. I think that is good.

The one problem I had was that he was still influenced by the Japanese patriarchal mind-set, and publicly said that his faith was grafted onto the warrior spirit. That is a very patriarchal system.

I didn't realize I was a feminist when I read the Bible with my own eyes and preached that. But then I was called into my teacher's office to explain why I had strayed from the correct doctrine. Eventually I was pushed out.

JCAN: How do you think that might be related to early missionaries telling Japanese what is "correct doctrine"? They may have had these same types of conversations, " Our way is correct." And this gets into Western Christianity and Japanese Christianity.

K: Yes, I think there is a relationship there. Often the leadership will want to tell the others what is "correct doctrine," but in fact they are just protecting their own power position.

JCAN: In the beginning you said that you have many other religions fused in your body. Do you think most Japanese Christians view that as wrapped up in their identity?

K: They won't say that openly. But these days, interfaith dialog is more common.

JCAN: Do you think it is difficult because people feel they are betraying

their identity?

K: Sure, that might be a reason. They have a tradition of people asking them to abolish their pagan ways. Also, some just want to be westernized.

JCAN: I guess that is what I am driving at. Is there a unique Japanese Christian identity?

K: Sure, I think you could say that.

JCAN: What would that be? Opposite of western?

K: What I try to do is cultural hermeneutics. We can never be free from our culture; so how else can we read the Bible?

JCAN: But it seems to me that Japan has had a long, long history of the patriarchal system.

K: True, that is right.

JCAN: It would seem to me that would much more influence you to read from that perspective. But you haven't chosen to read it from that perspective. You read it from a feminist perspective.

K: Oh, femininity includes that patriarchal society. But because I found myself immersed in that patriarchal mind-set, I wanted to get out of it, because I don't think it is inclusive. Rather, women had been excluded.

JCAN: But couldn't you just say that feminism is a very western concept?

K: No. Why?

JCAN: Well, I'm just thinking that historically your culture has been primarily shaped by men — a patriarchal structure — and women had no power or position within that structure. If your only frame of reference is that kind of culture, how can you see a different paradigm?

K: But what is your perception? There have always been women who have had minds that said this is not the way it should be. There are always hidden women who have acted contrary to your perception — even in the Bible.

JCAN: A culture within a culture.

K: Yes.

JCAN: The primary culture might be patriarchal, but the other culture under that might be, for a lack of a different word, feminist.

K: Yes, that is a way of looking at it.

9. JOURNEY WITH CHRIST TO THE MARGINALIZED: FATHER TETSURO HONDA
(Fr. Honda is a Franciscan priest who has lived in and near Kamagaseki for many years. Located in Osaka, Kamagaseki is the biggest yoseba (gathering place) for day-laborers in Japan. There are approximately 25,000 men inhabiting the flophouses of that area. On any given night there are more than 1000 men on the streets.)

He was born in 1942 in Taiwan to a Catholic family whose Christian roots stretched back four generations to the Meiji era. His mother and father were in Taiwan working in a sugar plant. Even early in his life, he knew he wanted to become a priest.

Growing up, Father Honda never experienced discrimination for being a Christian, much less heard a harsh word that he was a Christian. Moreover, he never felt that he was losing his Japanese identity in being a Christian.

However, in the last several years of living in Kamagaseki his ideas have changed: What it means to be a Christian, to live out the Gospels, and to reach out to the least of our brothers and sisters.

The first thing that would strike you about him is the peacefulness of his face and the humble way he speaks with honesty. He led me up a steep set of stairs and down a long hall past the communal toilet, to his small two-mat room located in the corner of the building. Voices from the street below wafted upwards into the room and added an extra spice to the air. The room was in an odd triangle shape making me wonder how he stretched out at night to sleep.

Talking to Father Honda, you get the impression that he has lived through many inward journeys, and has thought deeply about his experience. One concrete evidence is that he retranslated the four Gospels from the perspectives of the poor and marginalized of society. He did this when he realized that the day-laborers who came to mass on Sunday could not understand or relate to the words in the Gospel. This was ironic in that the whole message Jesus originally preached was to these very same marginalized people. I am now the proud owner of his three-volume set, "Gospel for the Marginalized."

Personally, he is completely against the emperor system. And yet he clearly says that the Catholic system and the emperor system have much in common, and vibrate off each other. Both are a top-down system, where those farther up the ladder attempt to give and teach those at the bottom. The only problem is that it is un-Christian. "The farther up you go, the less you come in contact with the poor, the marginalized of society. You become alienated," he said. "Because God exists among the poor and marginalized, you stop seeing God. Jesus did not come from the top and go down. He started out among the poorest and went up. That is the major difference. Jesus always goes to the lowest point. How can the Emperor do that? Or those in the hierarchy of the Church?"

Even though he came to Kamagaseki to be with the poor, he has come to realize that he cannot become one of them. He found his limitations. "I realized I could not become one of these people here. First I am a priest and have the Church to support me. I also have many friends and other resources. However, Jesus, in spite of who he was, was able to come and be with the poor in a way that made himself one of them. I think that is the best

we can do, become like Jesus. And that is different from being religious."

He gives one idea as how to do this. "Isn't it better that we live out the Gospels rather than try to convert people? What good does it do if we have a church full of people but they do not know or live out the Gospels?"

Leaving his small flat, I could not help but feel that I gained much more than the gift of the three-volume set. I saw a simple man coming to terms with his own limitations and the call of Christ in his life. That is something I think we all can identify with. by CEM

**10. BLAZING NEW TRAILS BOTH INWARDLY AND OUTWARDLY:
REV. MAKI FUSHII**

(Rev. Maki Fushii is an ordained Baptist pastor, serving an interdenominational, ecumenical, international church on the campus of International Christian University.)

Rev. Maki Fushii is a soft-spoken woman whose passion for ministry is manifested by the commitment she has made to serve God as one of the three associate pastors and chaplains at the International Christian University (ICU) Church in Mitaka. She is the first woman pastor to serve at the ICU Church and at ICU's Religious Center. Her journey to become a pastor has not always been easy.

Her father died when she was six, and that is when she started to question the meaning of life. Being Buddhist, she prayed and prayed at their family altar but never got an answer to her question about the meaning of life, or why her father had to die.

At 16 she started going to church and to a Bible class. She read the Bible daily, "...but this particular church was rather strict about how you could become a Christian (it was an independent denomination), so I didn't get baptized." She says with a warm smile, "I still had my childhood question about the meaning of life, and yet, when I prayed to God, I felt forgiveness and acceptance." Soon after she was baptized at a Baptist Church in Kyoto.

Rev. Fushii attended Seiwa Daigaku in Kobe. Then went to Seinan Gakuen in Fukuoka, Kyushu, where she studied counseling, went through clinical pastoral counseling education, did hospice work, and took other courses to prepare herself to be a pastor. "There were not many openings for women pastors, and we were not being encouraged to become pastors at that time," she said.

Returning to Tokyo, she found work as an associate pastor at a Baptist

church. She also worked part-time at NCC's Christian Education Center and with NCC's Women's Committee. She also worked at the Japan Women's Christian Temperance Union on issues related to women. That is when Rev. Fushii became interested in the ecumenical movement, and so she feels quite comfortable at the ICU Church, where the members and students attending church come from many different backgrounds and denominations.

Her marriage and divorce five years ago to another pastor also has served as a vehicle to counsel students and people in the church. Many women (and men) come to her with their problems and feel they can talk freely with her. "I am not the same person I was before my marriage. Both my faith and identity have become stronger as a result. This may be a reason that some people feel more comfortable opening up to me."

Much of her identity and struggle was shaped by facing the patriarchal system firmly entrenched in the church in Japan. "When I was married, I was not a pastor on equal footing with my husband. Rather, I was 'the pastor's wife.' There was no expectation that I would have anything to say at meetings. I was expected to run the office and home. If anything went wrong, it was my fault. If we succeeded it was due to his effort. Ironically, he liked working in the office and I was more suited to going out and doing pastoral work. However, when I came home, I had to face the reality that I was now expected to do the work of the wife. I realized I had very little time for myself."

Rev. Fushii currently lives on campus, and deals with such topics as sexual harassment, problems with relationships, and various crises in the lives of the students and teachers on campus. Her journey has been filled with many struggles, but her experiences have given her a gift to reach out to others. "Though many dangers, toils, and snares, I have already come; 'tis grace hath brought me safe thus far, and grace will lead me home" (3rd stanza, hymn "Amazing Grace").
by CGY & CEM

11. EAST AND WEST IDENTITY: REV. ANRI MORIMOTO
(Pastor at the International Christianity University Church)

JCAN: How did you become a Christian?

M: I was a dissident, a rebel.

JCAN: Can you explain?

M: I went to a Marxist meeting in high school and heard that religion was the cause of many problems, so I decided to go to church to see for myself. Over the years my heart changed and I began to like it. I then enrolled at ICU.

JCAN: After your Marxist experience, were you involved with any Christian social movements?

M: I was involved with the Buraku Liberation Movement at ICU, and later when I joined the Tokyo Union Theological Seminary.

JCAN: What propelled you to become a pastor?

M: While at ICU, I began to worry that once I graduated, I would lose my faith. Moreover, I wanted to have something meaningful in life. Could I devote my whole life to a company? That is when I realized that I wanted to become a pastor.

JCAN: You spent five years in the U.S.A. getting your doctorate and during that time you were an interim pastor at a church in a small town in Pennsylvania.

M: Yes, that is correct. The town was about 1500 people.

JCAN: Having experienced both types of Christianity, what is the difference in your experience?

M: In that church it was natural for people to attend church on Sunday, whereas in Japan it is not natural, and it is hard for people to manifest their Christianity here.

JCAN: What kind of problems does this pose for the Japanese believer?

M: A common problem is that they try to be so spiritual, so religious, and then eventually they "graduate" out of Christianity. In the U.S.A. people stay around longer. However, once a Japanese leaves the church, it is hard for him to go back.

JCAN: Do you mean that there is shame in not showing up at church on Sunday?

M: No, it is something more mundane than that. For example, Americans go back to the church for life transitions: weddings, baptisms, confirmations, and funerals. While many Japanese attend western-style weddings, the other three remaining ceremonies would hold no appeal, unless that person was an active member in a church. However, an American may stop going to church at some point, and then return for one of these transition "events."

JCAN: So what would you like to see the Japanese Christian change?

M: I would like them to have Christianity become a part of their whole life. I would like them to remember. "Remember" as in re+member: All the members (parts of their faith) come back together again.

JCAN: In terms of Christian faith, how do you counsel Christian students regarding Buddhist funerals?

M: I often get this question. I tell them to act discreetly. Show respect. Show sincerity. Do the minimal ritual that does not make God angry. Honor the faith of the deceased.

JCAN: But what about my Christian faith?

M: In this case it is not necessary to show your Christian faith extensively. On the the other hand, if you merely follow the funeral and bury [sic] yourself in the Japanese customs, all the relatives who know you are Christian will be confused. The reason is that you are identified by your rituals.

JCAN: With regards to your non-Christian students, what is a common question you get?

M: Probably the most common question I get is: "Why did you choose to become Christian?" I tell them that I didn't choose. Every great religion of the world knows that you are the one who is being chosen. You don't compare Islam, Buddhism or Christianity, and then choose one. You just encounter something that you didn't choose. In my case, through other people, friends, and teachers I encountered Christianity.

JCAN: Who has influenced your thinking in this area?

M: That would have to be Emil Brunner. He was a theologian who once taught at ICU and quarrelled with Barth. He wrote a book called *Truth as Encounter*.

12. AN IDENTITY SHAPED BY ACTION: REV. TSUTOMU SHOJI
(*He is the pastor of Inagi Church (Kyodan) and former General Secretary of the National Christian Council of Japan.*)

Rev. Shoji is a calm, quiet and gentle man, with a deep sense of spirituality. "I grew up in a Christian home," he began, after showing me a piece of brush calligraphy (*shodo*) which he had just finished, and was waiting for his teacher to come and pick up. "My parents were Christians before the war — they were Methodist. After the war, when I was sixteen, I contracted tuberculosis, and my parents divorced (which was unusual for Japanese, and especially for Christians). As a result, I felt myself engaged in an existential search for truth and salvation. At the age of nineteen, I examined all the negative conditions of my environment and felt that I couldn't accept myself. However, I did feel that Jesus accepted my existence, and this healed me. All people who are healed by Jesus are fully and completely accepted. So at nineteen years of age I started a new life as a child of God."

Rev. Shoji explained how he realized that his existential crisis was related to his social crisis. He had graduated from Waseda University and entered graduate school there, but left the doctoral course to transfer to Tokyo Union Theological Seminary, and became assistant minister of a church in downtown Tokyo.

"I had my eyes opened to the difficulties people were grappling with, and their turmoil," he said. Rev. Shoji then went to the United States and studied at Union Theological Seminary in New York. His roommate there was the chairperson of the UTS Social Action Committee, and had been a short-term missionary (a "J-3") to Japan.

"His name was Malcolm Hulslander," Rev. Shoji recalled, "and the committee he headed was very active in 1965, since that was when bombs were dropping on North Vietnam on the orders of President Johnson." Rev. Shoji was impressed with the dedication both of his roommate and of the other students. "Half of them joined in a three-day fast to pray for the forgiveness

of the American people and the safety of the people of Vietnam. At that time, the churches in Japan were not too socially conscious."

After Rev. Shoji returned to Tokyo, he started his ministry at a Kyodan church in Bunkyo-ku, as well as chaplain and a dorm parent at the Waseda Student YMCA dormitory. "Living with the students again opened my eyes," he said. "Many were active with the Save the Soh Brothers Society." (The Soh brothers were Korean students from Japan who had been arrested in Korea while protesting in favor of human rights. Amnesty International adopted them as political prisoners.) "I was invited to go to Korea as a representative of this committee, and had my eyes opened even further to the oppressive situation there. I met several Christian leaders there who were arrested a year after I returned to Japan, when the Korean democratization movement broke out."

Rev. Shoji became interested in Korean Minjung liberation theology, which helped him understand the situation in Asia generally. With Rev. John Nakajima and others at NCC-J, he started a solidarity movement called the "Emergency Christian Conference on Korean Issues" to help those suffering in Korea. In 1978 he was elected general secretary of NCC-J, a position he held for the next seven years. "It was a very busy time," he reminisced. "The political situation in Asia was unstable. There were oppressive regimes everywhere — Philippines, Korea, Taiwan....I was kept busy strengthening ties with other Asian churches and organizing international conferences with both Christian and secular groups."

Korean Cultural and Historical Museum

After leaving NCC-J, Rev. Shoji taught ecumenism and Asian Christianity at *Noson Dendo* ("Rural Mission") Seminary. He then became a pastor, while continuing to teach part-time. He is still active in peace issues, (he is presently a member of NCC-J's Peace and Nuclear Issues Committee), and is learning Korean. His church houses a secular citizens' organization which is working to establish a Korean Museum in Tokyo so that Japanese people can learn about Korean culture and history.

"Most Japanese are ignorant about the history of Koreans and the contributions Korea made to Japan. If Japanese are unaware of the reality, we can't change their prejudices towards Koreans and other Asians. So far the museum building hasn't been built, because of lack of funds, but we've produced photo panels and held a series of lectures on the history and relationship between Korea and Japan. We have also organized historical and cultural tours to Korea as another way to raise people's historical consciousness. We are undertaking museum activities without yet having a museum," Shoji said with a smile.

"In my life, I have never chosen what to do; I have always been asked to do something, and the decision was mine to accept or refuse the request. So, through other people, God has been asking me to do things — or maybe demanding that I do something."

I asked Rev. Shoji about the differences between Japanese and North American Christians. He replied, "One clear, simple difference is that Christians in North America are not a minority. In Japan, we are; so we have the constant temptation to close in on ourselves and be satisfied to live within the church. To be a minority is not a negative factor. Our hope is to be a creative minority. If the majority is mistaken, we have to hone our task as a minority to show the majority the truth."

Rev. Shoji explained that the Jewish tradition of monotheism, belief in only one God, is criticized by Japanese as a cause of self-righteousness and exclusivism. "We have to listen to their criticism and examine ourselves and see in what sense they are right. Yet, I believe that faith in the one God is most important in order for a human being to be a true self or a responsible subject before God. If Abraham had not been called by God (Gen. 12:1 ff and Gen. 17:17) he would probably have just lived out his life as a natural person," he said. "But he was called by Yahweh to enter into a relationship. So are we."

Japanese Morality and the True Self

"I would like to tie this into the basis of ethics in Japan," he continued. "Sometimes I feel that Japanese morals are very vague — Japanese watch how others feel and act, and then follow suit to the average. At the same time, there are strong restrictions on what to do and what not to do; the average represents a sort of authority behind which they have to obey. Therefore, simply to be themselves is very difficult for Japanese. It is not just a matter of culture — it is a religious issue. If we don't encounter God, and are not called by God, we cannot be ourselves. It is difficult to be responsive subjects to God's call, and thus to be our own true selves."

"God is the real Self. God says 'I am who I am.' To encounter this Self is the basis of being self, and therefore of morals, but the Japanese don't have this experience of faith in God found in the Judeo-Christian tradition. We just live by trying not to cause any trouble (*meiwaku*) to those around us. It can hardly be called 'moral'."

"As a Christian," Rev. Shoji said, "I hold to my belief in the one God. I do know and respect many Buddhist monks, and work together with them on many anti-nuclear issues and peace protests. I feel very at home with them, more so than with some Christian ministers!" he said with a smile.

"The Christians, who are a minority in Japan, should keep a sense of how to be their true selves in their daily lives, and share this belief in the one God."

Emperor System in Japan

I asked Rev. Shoji about the emperor system in Japan. "I am against it. Of course he's a human being, but he is regarded as divine. If he is indeed non-human, then he is a monster, which means he is treated inhumanly. When the previous emperor Hirohito was about to die, you may remember that his life was prolonged until the government could prepare all the proper ceremonies. The government wants to use the emperor as divine.

"If a people regard the emperor as divine, he cannot confess any sin or mistake. Emperor Hirohito never confessed his war crimes, so these were never clarified after the war. Since he did not confess his sins, other Japanese wouldn't confess theirs either, and we all go on pretending to be happy. This is the post-war atmosphere, and the emperor's avoidance of confessing any crimes or sins during the war is very immoral.

"The emperor has taken the role of oppressing the moral sense of the Japanese people. During the Meiji Era, the Imperial Rescript on Education was issued, based on Confucian values and emperor worship. The emperor seized the people's morality and returned it to them in the form of his gift, in such a way that the people could not refuse. In this way Japanese grassroots morality was confiscated and given back by the emperor system, and it was very difficult to oppose it. Only if they obeyed it could they find their lives safe and easy. People did not have personal morality but rather a sense of obedience," Rev. Shoji said.

"These days, this is not quite so clear," he said. "Ruling elites have held up the present emperor as the symbol of economic prosperity and happy living. But at this moment of economic difficulty, a new nationalism is gaining force rapidly among the people. The elites are trying to use the emperor as the symbol of the integration of the people — a glorious strong nation again."

"In April of this year, the government pushed the Parliament to pass bills concerning new guidelines for UD/Japan Military Cooperation. Under this legislation, activities of the Japanese Self-Defense Force (SDF) are not restricted to the defense of Japan; they can now be sent overseas if the U.S.A. commander-in-chief should so request. If war breaks out, the SDF must go even if Japan is not involved."

"Tied into this new guideline is the government's attempt to legalize *Kimigayo* (the de facto national anthem) and national flag. By doing this,

Japan is returning to the morality of the emperor system. There is controversy about school children being pressured to sing *Kimigayo*. Nearly 1000 teachers who oppose this have been punished by their local education board, controlled by the Ministry of Education. Clearly the government is imposing the emperor system ideology," Rev. Shoji explained.

"The government says 'we must protect this wonderful country where we respect the emperor'." In order to wage war they need the people's loyalty to the nation. But singing *Kimigayo* is very much tied up with emperor worship," he said. "It is the hymn to praise the eternal lineage of emperors. Through legislation, the government is attempting to force schools to use *Kimigayo* at important ceremonies. The time when the government compels us to sing, it is the time we must refuse it, as we confess our belief in the One God and his Son Jesus Christ.

"The government does not have any moral standards," Rev. Shoji said. "To fear those who have power is a harkening back to Samurai culture — if you are strong, you win. By singing *Kimigayo*, worshiping the emperor and accepting the revised guidelines, Japan is on the road to becoming a military power again."

We have entered a new stage of testing for our faith. My hope is that friends and churches in the United States will be concerned about how the strengthening of the US-Japan military alliance is now threatening the lives of the churches and people of Japan. by CGY

13. INTERVIEW WITH REV. SHIGEKO YAMANO

(Rev. Shigeko Yamano is presently teaching theological education at the Nippon Sei Ko Kai (Anglican/Episcopal Church of Japan) Central Theological College in Setagaya-ku, Tokyo. She was ordained a priest on Jan. 6, 1999, and is one of the first three ordained women of the Anglican Church in Japan.)

Rev. Shigeko Yamano was born in a Christian home, where her mother was a Christian. After the war, the family all went to church and along with many people they were trying to rebuild their lives. She was around four at that time. Later, she attended mission schools and then St. Paul (*Rikkyo*) University in Tokyo. "I stopped attending church for a while because of my doubts," she said. After university she married, and when her daughter was born, she started going to church again. "My daughter was a sickly child with many health problems, so I started a play group for children like her in the church."

Her next turning point was when she separated from her husband, and left for England with her daughter for four years to study theology. After

returning to Japan she went to work for the Center for Asian Women Workers. "I learned about oppression and saw Asian women struggling for liberation of Asian women and wanted to be a leader. That was when I became the director of the Christian Center for Response to Asian Issues (CCRAI), which is under the National Christian Council in Japan," she said.

She goes on: "I quit when I turned 50 and changed to teaching at the Anglican seminary here in Tokyo. When I started this job, I also made an application for the ordained ministry, and finally was ordained this year." Rev. Yamano teaches "Mission in Japan's Context" and "History of Asian Christianity," while also supervising field education students. She is also assigned a church where she is the priest-in-charge.

I asked her about the differences between Christianity during her time in England, as compared with Japan. She laughed and said: "The one thing that I experienced in England is that worship is so much more creative! There it seemed to be an open attitude for different ways of understanding the Bible. In comparison, the Anglican Church in Japan seemed a bit more 'fixed' or 'rigid' in their style of worship. However, I am interested in exploring creative ways." She joined a group called "Ruah," an international women's (and sometimes men's) worship group that met each month. "This was exciting for me when we looked at different styles of worship through songs and liturgical dance."

"Although the 'Ruah' group no longer exists, I now have found inspiration with a group called 'Concerned Women in the Anglican Church,' which is a group I started in 1988. We meet monthly for prayer, sharing resources, doing programs for women, and Bible study. Last year we were particularly busy as we worked for the ordination of women in the Anglican Church in Japan. Every time we meet, we are creative. Also, our group organizes a nationwide meeting for Anglican women once a year. I find it important for women to be able to express themselves."

"There is a committee in the Anglican Church in Japan called the 'Justice and Peace Committee,' of which I am a member. We have a close relationship with the Okinawa Diocese and have learned a lot from them, especially about issues pertaining to women and war and the suffering of Okinawans under Japan's emperor, especially during the war. We are encouraged to work for peace and justice and have been networking with a group in the U.S.A. called the 'Episcopal Peace Fellowship.' I hope we can continue to develop a closer network with other Asian groups as well. The suffering many Asians had under the emperor system cannot be ignored," she said.

"In the Japanese Anglican Book of Common Prayer there was a prayer

for the Emperor, but it was abolished in 1986 through the voices of students, youth, and others who pressured for change. From 1990 the new and revised Japanese Anglican Book of Common Prayer has been in use. We now say this prayer instead: 'We pray for all the people of all countries; give them wisdom so that they can work for justice and peace.' " Rev. Yamano closed with a wish that all of us would continue to work for peace and justice.

by CGY

14. CALL TO BE GREATER THAN ONE'S OWN VISION: REV. TAZU SASAMORI (*Rev. Tazu Sasamori is a full-time rector at St. Patrick's Church. It was originally started at the U.S.A. base in Fussa as a place for Anglican worship. It became separate from the base 40 years ago, and is now located nearby in Tachikawa. In the beginning it was a bilingual church. However, now the service is mostly in Japanese, with some translation of the sermon.*)

Rev. Sasamori was baptized at three months of age. Her father was an Anglican priest in the Tohoko diocese in northeastern Japan. She went to Tohoku Gakuen University and majored in the Old Testament, then to Tokyo Union Theological Seminary for a Master's of Theology. She had planned to be a Bible teacher.

Rev. Sasamori then went to the Philippines for an internship. There she met a number of Anglicans, some of whom were women deacons and women church workers. "It was then that I felt a call to the priesthood," she said. "In the Philippines, I learned another way to read the Bible. The Filipinos believe in the peace and justice of God, and this was very impressive for me."

After returning to Japan, she finished seminary and worked at the Tokyo Diocese in a staff position. She was the coordinator for activities, which included starting *Kapitiran* — an organization which helps foreign migrant workers in Japan — as well as being the coordinator of activities for the disabled and youth.

Although Rev. Sasamori had decided to become a priest in the Philippines, she was hesitant at first to bring it up to her church. But with the support of many friends, in December 1993 she became a deacon along with another woman, Shiegko Yamano, and was ordained a priest in 1999.

"I remember seeing you do a liturgical dance at our monthly Women Church gatherings," she said to me. "I was so surprised to hear you say that you had learned liturgical dance in seminary. The seminaries here do not teach that!"

When asked about the differences between the Anglican/Episcopal

church in Japan (*Seikokai* in Japanese) and in western countries, she said, "We are a minority in Japan, so it is hard to deal with social and community problems in the church. Often we just concentrate on the worship service and Bible study. It is hard to make the connection between the church and social issues and the community issues at times."

I pressed her for an example, and Rev. Sasamori responded: "The Fussa Air Base is nearby and we have two nice families who come to our church from the air base. This makes it difficult to talk about problems of the U.S.A. bases and the new U.S.A./ Japan Security guidelines. Of course, the majority of the church members support peace in general but don't address the problem specifically."

I asked Rev. Sasamori about women priests since she was one of the first three women Anglican priests to be ordained in Japan. "England and the U.S.A. have a lot of women priests but in Japan there are only we three. One of the reasons is Japan's traditional thinking and customs. Girls growing up here are told, 'Be quiet,' 'Don't stand out,' etc. This type of thinking still prevails and is part of the typical education in Japan." However, Rev. Sasamori sounded hopeful that more women would become priests in the future.

The discussion gradually moved to what she thought about the Emperor system. "I also believe that the Emperor system should end. Because of WWII. Japan committed many atrocities in the name of the Emperor and hurt many Asian people, so the Emperor system should be abolished. Not only the Anglican church, but other churches in Japan also admitted that they were part of the system that supported the Emperor during the war. So the Anglican Church of Japan confessed its sins at the Annual Synod in 1996, and also came out with a statement that we should abolish the Emperor system."
by CGY

15. IDENTITY AND BURAKU DISCRIMINATION: REV. HEIICHI SUMIHI
*(Interview with Rev. Heiichi Sumihi, Director of the Kyodan
Buraku Liberation Center, Osaka)*

Early in the interview with Rev. Sumihi I got the strong sense of his Japanese identity. He was cordially polite, but reserved. There was none of the over-friendliness that one encounters among some westerners and westernized Japanese.

My intuition was confirmed when I asked him about his own cultural identity and becoming a Christian. "I have never considered that I might be losing my Japanese identity when I became Christian, nor that Christianity was a foreign religion. I simply wanted to learn about Jesus. This has nothing do to with the west."

He freely admits that most people have the image of Christianity as something connected to the U.S.A. or Europe. However, for him there is no connection. Christianity is first and foremost a meeting with Jesus and undergoing some type of conversion experience. This is different than taking on the cloak of another country.

Rev. Sumihi was first exposed to Christianity when he was in his second year at high school. Faced with mounting questions about why he was studying, what life meant, and what his future held for him, he turned to studying about Jesus. A year later in 1970 he was baptized. After completing high school he went on the seminary to become a pastor.

One of his first assignments after seminary was working in a church that was located next to a discriminated-against *buraku* area. There was also a nursery school at the same location, and children from the discriminated-against *buraku* attended it. Rev. Sumihi believes that a church grows along with its community, and he began to deal with the *buraku* discrimination problem.

While individual Christians and churches have been involved with the *buraku* problem since the 1950s, it wasn't until 1975 that the *Nihon Kirisuto Kyodan* (The United Church of Christ in Japan) formally became involved. Today, as then, there are many people in the church who feel that this is something the church need not involve itself with. "Unfortunately," Rev. Sumihi says, "there is *buraku* discrimination within the church itself. Helping people inside and outside the church become concerned with this problem is our (the *Kyodan Buraku Liberation Center's*) role."

For those accustomed to thinking of discrimination as being related to something readily seen, such as skin color, age or sex, *buraku* discrimination may be very hard to imagine. And it may be equally hard for those who imagine Japan being just one race. Yet Rev. Sumihi explains, "The discrimination is all too real. Japan is an emperor system-based society in which family lineage is reacted as pure or defiled. Persons of the discriminated-against *buraku* are discriminated against by that society."

"There are many within the church who say that the church should separate itself from being involved in *buraku* discrimination. They say we should be focusing on evangelizing. They say: 'If everyone were to become Christian, then there would be no problem.' Well, remember there were Christian eras in America and European countries and they had just as many problems. Maybe that is not the only answer. Plus, that does not even take into account that even today there is discrimination within the church here."

For Rev. Sumihi the reality that discrimination still exists within and

outside the church is directly related to Christian identity. How we define and understand our Christian identity will determine how we approach these problems.

One way is to acknowledge that everyone is unique, and that uniqueness should be respected. He points out: "Our Christian identity says that we will respect that uniqueness. And in the end when we face God, all of our unique points will become relative to other people, so the no one will be unique in a way that sets them above others. In fact, we will see how much more similar than dissimilar we are."

Another track is to recognize that people discriminate. "We have to recognize that fact. We cannot just say, 'Let's get rid of discrimination,' without acknowledging that discrimination exists in our hearts. This faith seeking process will heal us." And certainly one can see this as a reflection of how God sees us: even in our sin he loves us and accepts us. by CEM

16. FINDING ONE'S EASTERN IDENTITY IN THE WEST: REV. IZURU ARATANI (*Rev. Izuru Aratani is a United Methodist minister and the director of the Student Christian Fellowship Centre in Nakano, Tokyo. He spent 17 years in the U.S.A. as a pastor of Japanese churches. It was there that he became involved with issues concerning the imprisonment of Japanese-Americans in WWII. This became a life-transforming experience for him.*)

Rev. Aratani comes from a long line of ministers. His father was part of the Holiness Church, as well as his grandfather and many uncles and relatives. With so many of his relatives steeped in the church, it seemed that he could not escape the reality that he was Christian. For him this label of being Christian gave him a feeling of being set apart and different from other kids. "I don't think I felt, or even understood, that I was a minority then. However, I had a low self-image and didn't want to admit that I was Christian. Kids often asked me strange questions about how I prayed, when I prayed."

He went on to Doshisha, which is one of the oldest universities in Japan, and studied theology. While he was able to graduate, those years were very difficult for him. It seemed that he could not get away from his melancholy. "I had a Korean friend and he would tell me the discrimination he was going through, and I could not relate or understand. Something was missing in my heart."

Deciding he could not stay in Japan, he left for America, not to further study theology but to "find out why Christianity was giving (him) a headache." The move proved to be the gentle hand of God.

In America, Rev. Aratani started working in a Japanese church. It was

not long before he became involved with *issei* (first generation) and *nissei* (second generation) Japanese demanding the U.S.A. government pay compensation for being imprisoned during WWII. In hearing them tell their painful stories he began to identify with their pain. "They recounted their stories to heal the wounds, not to get money from the government."

Through this experience he was able to look at his own difficult childhood and come to terms with his painful experiences. Out of this process came an understanding of God's healing touch and a new theology for himself: "Even in your weakness there is potential to realize God's power, healing, and love." He came to understand Christian faith as change: change in self and change in society.

Returning to Japan after being away for so many years has been a bit of an adjustment. Rev. Aratani says there is a big difference between churches in the U.S.A. and Japan. In the U.S.A. the churches are much more open and lively. However, in Japan "the churches are stuck in the Meiji era. It is like nothing has changed in the last 100 years. The pastor is way on top. The sermon is the main part of the service, and the people begin the service by praying fervently that God will speak through that minister today. That is so foreign to me."

This top-down approach has its roots among Protestant churches in the wide acceptance of the teachings of the German theologian, Karl Barth. In addition to this was the early connection of the church with the samurai class, Puritanism, and a strong pietism among believers. "All this leads to a very dry and morbid atmosphere in the Protestant churches. I feel like I am at a funeral sometimes, when I go to a service."

Part of the reason for this strong reaction to Christianity by Christians in Japan is that "(they) must struggle every day to remind themselves that they are Christians." One telling sign of the struggle is the controversial issue of the open or closed Eucharist in Protestant churches — who should be able to receive it. He does not think it is merely a theological issue that could be worked out. Rather, he thinks it is "people wanting to feel that they are part of an exclusive club."

He realizes that in America this would not be such an issue because people take it for granted that they are Christian, and thus there is not much of a day-to-day struggle to maintain one's Christian identity, or to do things that separate themselves from society.

Ironically, it was his traveling to America, and working among the Japanese churches and *issei* and *nissei* in America, that helped him to form a clearer understanding of his own Christian identity — an identity that is

life-giving and sustaining in a land that does not always recognize the deeper implications and gifts of Christianity. by CEM

17. A MINORITY WITHIN A MINORITY: MOTOI KOIZUMI
(NCC-J's Secretary for Youth and Human Rights)

"I am a minority within a minority," says Motoi Koizumi. Not only is he a Christian but his father is a Lutheran minister. Thus, he was baptized as an infant, and made his confirmation when he was in junior high school. However, it wasn't until his university days that his faith became deeper.

Growing up as a pastor's kid, he felt that the other kids treated him differently. He did experience bullying, but writes that off as kids being kids. Unfortunately, he did not have any friends at school who were Christian.

When he went to the Philippines for a month of study he had his first experience of being a part of a "majority" in terms of faith. Yet, he was struck by the fact that there was not much difference in the churches. He concluded that this was probably because he was born and raised in a Christian home.

However, one of the biggest things he has come to realize is that there is a difference between those who are raised in a Christian home and those who make a decision to become Christian. Like most Christians in the Philippines, he did not "choose" to become Christian. However, when young persons decide to become Christians in Japan, they must face a whole host of issues. The biggest is how their parents will react. Will they understand? How much will they try to convince the person that this is not good? Will this affect their chances of getting married? These are questions that Koizumi has not had to confront. "Being born Christian, it is a way life."

Koizumi's religious consciousness was not really awakened until he got into college. For example, as a child he would participate in local festivals that were Shinto in nature. For him it was more custom than anything else. However, if he were faced with attending a Buddhist funeral today, he would attend but instead of praying to the idol, he would pray to God. He readily admits that it may appear from the outside that he is worshiping the idol, but he knows in his heart that he is praying to God.

Even though his faith is different, he cannot consider that these other faiths are of the devil. "There are many paths up Mt. Fuji. Who am I to say that there is only one way?" However, he does say that we must be careful not to lump Buddhism and Shintoism into one pile. The reason being that the latter has been long associated with the emperor system. It is this system that has caused so much harm to society, he says.

He does not necessarily think that Japan would be a better country if it were completely Christian. He points out: "There are many western Christian countries that wage war and have a lot of crime. There are good Buddhist countries and good Christian countries. Likewise, there are good believers and non-believers alike." In fact, he works with many Buddhists on issues concerning peace and justice.

Koizumi is clear that he does not feel Christianity is a western religion. Of course, there may be parts that are related to the west or influenced by the west, but overall it speaks to him as a Japanese. "Don't confuse style with internal values."

And he is right: sometimes it is hard to see what is in a person's heart, or the map they use in life to climb Mt. Fuji. For Koizumi his map has been influenced by his Christian background and experiences. by CEM

18. A UNIVERSAL CHRISTIANITY: DR. YASUO FURUYA

(Dr. Furuya was a professor at International Christian University for over 30 years and was the senior pastor at the church there until last year. He now lectures at various universities, seminaries and churches. He is also the author of many books dealing with the theology of missions and the theology of religions.)

Dr. Furuya had just come back from Princeton when we were able to sit down together. He had been teaching a course called, "The Theology of Religions." Therefore, many of his ideas were still fresh in his mind.

Raised in a Christian family, Dr. Furuya had a distinct feeling of being a part of a minority as a young man. "My father was a minister in Shanghai during the war. When I went to rejoin my parents, I had to go to the police to get my passport stamped. The police there half-jokingly asked if I was a spy. I was also attending a Freedom School, and that also set me apart."

He makes an interesting observation from Isaiah Ben-Basan (author of *Japanese and Jews*). "We are like the Jews. We are a minority and have become a ghetto here." He goes on to quote Ben-Dasan directly: "The Japanese like to say that they have no religion. In fact they have *Nihonkyo* (Japanism). Furthermore, Marxism, Buddhism, and Christianity can all be considered just sects of this Japanism."

According to Dr. Furuya there is evidence of this in the different images of God in Christianity in Japan. Whereas early Protestant missionaries portrayed God as severe, exclusive, and lacking in forgiving love, the Roman Catholic Church has portrayed God as being inclusive and merciful. And what is the most prevalent image of Christianity among non-believers in Japan? Mary.

The uncanny resemblance of the Buddhist god Kanon and Mary is not lost on anyone who has seen both. And they speak of the maternal, earth-quality, side of God. However, Dr. Furuya asks, "Is this change in the image of God a good and desirable evidence of the indigenization of Christianity, or is it rather evidence of the Japanization of Christianity?"

Another issue that must be taken into account when considering Christianity in Japan is the role of nationalism. According to Dr. Furuya, many Japanese (non-believers) feel that those who become Christian are no longer pure Japanese. Ironically, "Japanese who become Christian overseas come back and find that they have no place to go to church. They are not accepted and do not fit in. They are not considered to be 'real' Christians; they are 'European Christians' or 'American Christians'." He goes on to say: "The Church in Japan is so close-minded and narrow. They feel they must prove they are Japanese, and thus they reject anything that might call that into question — people coming in with 'new ideas'."

He believes that the root of this rejection of things outside comes from nationalism. "We try to show how patriotic we are. We try to make Japanese Christians Japanese. This led us to support the government in the war. That is dangerous. I don't believe in this 'Japanese Christian identity' stuff, or those who try to make a theology out of it."

He then makes a dramatic point: "To me Christianity is universal. It should transcend Philippinism, Americanism and Japanism. I am a Christian who happens to be Japanese. You are a Christian who happens to be American. At the base, Japanese are no different from Americans, Europeans, or anyone else." He quickly brushes aside any notion that the other religious traditions in Japan may have influenced Christianity here.

Rather, he says that where nationalism and Christianity have combined, the number of Christians have increased. Therefore, it is this conflict between nationalism and religion that is the reason that Christianity has yet to take root, and not necessarily any conflict with other religious traditions.

This problem between nationalism and Christianity would also explain why Korea has seen so many more people become Christian, whereas Japan remains at 1%. "In Korea, Christianity was seen as a form of protest against the invader — Japan. In spite of the many Japanese Shinto shrines built in Asia before and during the war, none stand today. Whereas with Christianity, even with the withdrawal of missionaries, the churches remained. This is one of the 'redeeming features' of Christianity." He also points out that in Korea Christianity has been linked with the struggle against North Korea.

One can, therefore, extrapolate that if the Emperor is the symbol of the

state, and the head of *Nihonkyo*, then the call for his removal by some Christians would only add more suspicion as to their loyalty. Here he parts with many other Christians who call for the abolishment of the emperor system.

Instead, Dr. Furuya says there is already Christian influence in the Imperial Household. His mother taught Empress Michiko's mother Sunday school in Shanghai. Crown Princess Masako was educated by Catholic nuns. The Emperor was educated after the war by a Quaker, and his son has spent a significant amount of time in England studying. Furthermore, after the war many Christians were hired to work in the Household in order to please MacArthur.

Dr. Furuya holds on to hope in the younger generation, that they will no longer need this "Japanese soul," and can thus accept Christianity as a part of their life. "(The young people) do not make a distinction between western and Japanese as the older generation has. Therefore, there is not this conflict between nationalism and Christianity as before."

And this seems to go to the root of his criticism of the Japanese churches' insular attitude and his hope for the future. To him there is no such thing as a "Christian identity."

"Instead of focusing on making the church more Japanese, the church should look to other Christians to make it more universal. It should start showing concern for social issues. It should start recognizing anonymous Christians of other faiths and walks of life. It should become more truly international."

"You know, I was surprised when I went to a Catholic seminary in Nagoya. There were seminarians from all over the world. Now, that is internationalizaion. You won't find that in Protestant seminaries here. They just say, 'We don't need foreigners.' "

For Dr. Furuya, Christianity should transcend cultures and borders. It should be a place where we are looking outwards to one another to help us see the world as God created it. It should be a place where we look to our brothers and sisters and say, "I need you. I need to learn from you."

by CEM

19. MEETING HARUE WATANABE

(She was married to the late Japanese Christian artist, Sadao Watanabe (1913-1996).)

Unable to meet us at the station, we make our way through her neigh-

borhood. Located in the heart of many universities, the neighborhood is busy with young people going to and from school. Waiting patiently at the corner is 80 year-old Harue Watanabe. She leads us to her house, a short block away. One imagines that she indeed must have spent much time waiting in the shadow of her husband, the Japanese Christian artist, Sadao Watanabe. In fact, we had to convince her several times that we were here to talk to her about her Christian experience and not her famous husband.

Born in 1919, she spent her first 15 years away from her parents with relatives in the countryside before joining her parents in Kanda, Tokyo. "Those were very difficult years for me. I didn't experience a parent's love until I joined them. So when I was reunited with them, I was quite selfish for their love." "I guess it has taken a long time to get over that," she says with a mischievous smile.

Her father was adopted by a Buddhist priest and raised in the temple. Even though he helped out at the temple, he never became a priest. Instead, he became a maker of traditional Japanese paper. Later, he would sell this paper to his future son-in-law — Sadao Watanabe.

Ms. Watanabe married in 1943 after a brief, very brief *omiai* (arranged courtship). "We passed each other along the street. He was on one side and I was on the other going in opposite directions. That was it." Even though her husband had been raised in a Christian home, the fact that she was a non-believer was not an obstacle to marriage. In fact, it was not until Christmas, 1966, that she became a Christian. "Of course during those 23 years we went to church each Sunday. And my mother-in-law invited me many times to the women's meeting, but I don't like being around so many people." Her husband respected her choice to remain unbaptized, and according to her, he never pressured her to become a Christian.

She often would help her husband with his work, such as setting up his canvas. The process would begin with him reading and rereading a passage over and over to get the essence of the meaning, and what it spoke to him. Then he would begin his work. A work could take a week or longer depending on many factors.

When we commented that his art had a distinctive Japanese flavor, her eyes lit up. "Well, he was Japanese." But we point out that Leonardo da Vinci never thought of using sushi and rice balls in his depiction of the Last Supper. You could see pride slip out from behind that quiet face.

She said her faith has surely been influenced by her husband's art, but declined to elaborate. However, she did recount his untimely death, right before her eyes after working too hard on his last picture. Even today, it still

weighs heavily on her heart. In our brief visit, it was a tangible expression of her love for him.

Before we leave, she places postcards her husband had created into our hands. "My husband would want these used to express his view of Christianity." And anyone who has seen his art knows there is no mistaking that it indeed expresses a very real Japanese Christian identity.

by CGY & CEM

20. NEW OUTLOOK: AKIKO NAKAHARA

When Akiko Nakahara became the head of the Religious Activities Committee of *kansei gakuin* in 1989, she was once more pioneering. She was the first woman (and only woman so far) to serve in this capacity. The following year she retired, but she continues to teach, advise, and stir people to action regarding minority education, women's roles in today's society, and Christianity addressing the whole person.

In a recent conversation she spoke of growing up in a family of brothers who always let her know where her "place" was. Other experiences out in society and on university campuses have been likewise repressive in intent. Nevertheless, she has found strength to surface, to swim another lap, and have air to spare. Her eyes twinkling, she went on to speak with boldness about the continuing challenges for women and men in learning to live as equals at home, in school, and in church.

Dr. Nakahara has raised a family, after graduating from *kansei gakuin* in 1950. All along she continued to do research, teach in the classroom, advise in the community, and attend international conferences, for example, in Sweden and Australia. In 1965 she was baptized in a Kyodan church, earned a doctorate in 1977, and upon her retirement was designated an "honorary professor."

Tremendously knowledgeable, she remains easy to talk with. It is obvious that she has lost none of the clarity, none of the commitment that found written expression in 1989: "Finding values that transcend earthly wealth can be a new discovery of life, a new understanding of human beings... For a new outlook on life, a new outlook on education is needed."

Dr. Nakahara's students embrace the newness, as well as the soundness, of her principles. One told me the other day, "She opened my eyes and changed my life; she's still my mentor." May she continue to help make it happen — God's transformation of all things into a newness of grace.

by Judith May Newton, UMC Missionary in Japan

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78. Christ, Faith and the Challenge of Cultures, by Cardinal Joseph Ratzinger; and, Twenty-Five Years of Inculturation in Asia, the Federation of Asian Bishops' Conferences, 1970-1995, by Stephen Bevans, SVD, 1997.
79. Charisms, Movements and Communities in the Church. A Pastoral Overview, 1997.
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