

## **“Kobe and the Bible”**

**Publishing Date: May 30, 2001**

**Publisher: Kobe Shimbun Publishing Center**

**Contributor: Yoshio Iwamura**

### **Title: Christianity under the War time**

About two thousand years ago from now, Peter was an apostate. He denied the Lord three times, and he had no courage to confess that he was a disciple of Christ. Although he received love from Christ, before Christ crucified on the Cross, and he betrayed it when the time had come. Other disciples also scattered and escaped striving to be the first when Jesus was caught by Roman soldiers. Cowardly, ungrateful disciples, and among them, it is easy to accuse Peter.

At the time of World War II, Japan's main Christian church compromised as if they were all. They voluntary joined the “National Spiritual Mobilization Movement” and prayed for the victory of the war and also celebrated the home Shinto shrine at the Christian schools. They stood on the side to support Japanese military activities. In general, there are three unforgivable sins that Japanese churches committed. The discrimination of Koreans in Japan, the division of “discriminated community”, and Okinawa problems will be pointed. It was under the wartime that three scurviness appeared clearly. Not only Christianity didn't have a power to stop discrimination, bullying and persecutions that were carried by the people of the country to worship the Emperor as a God, but rather they joined in.

Most Christian churches showed their undeletable weakness like Peter, during the war.

### **Immature Christianity**

Christianity was thought to be “heresy, bad religion” from higher class people, it was regarded as “foreign religion, tacit permission religion” by the middle class people, and “magic, Kirishitan” by lower class people. To Japanese people, the consciousness of “Yaso-Kyo (Christianity)” is the bad religion and it had been passed down from Edo period by pressured from the top. “Yaso” is Chinese word “耶蘇” and it means Jesus. The history of persecution tells us. There was an air that Christianity got a label of “淫祠邪宗 (In-Shi-Jya-Shu)” and became a target of victim. Leaders of the Christianity would have been afraid to become out of the community. Therefore, there must have been a desire to appeal for them to appeal themselves as a good citizen while removing prejudice to Christianity.

I think there are three reasons why the church got on the rail of war.

First, it is probably because the establishment of “individual” was immature. The fixed view of

A certain expression “We Japanese” makes something stand out if you do something different others. The sense of security that everyone else is doing made people got into invasion without thinking carefully. It was impossible to confess “I don’t do it even if everyone else does” properly.

The fixed method of fascism is a system that citizens watch over others. The state brought it to a restraint condition under the mutual cooperation with the neighborhood association and the women’s association at each region. For example, when we sent soldiers out of own town to the battlefield, everyone in the area celebrated. However, for the soldiers from “discriminated community”, people didn’t wave any flags or give any cheering voice. Christians also act cold attitude as they do around them.

In Okinawa, the church limited confession, so neither church nor believer remained.

Secondly, it is too indifferent to the movement of history. Once you believe in Christ and gain peace, you will only see evangelism to convert others. The Public Security Preservation Laws was established in 1925 (Taisho 14), and since after the accomplishment of crackdown on communists in 1935 (Showa 10), the tone of treating Christians as non-Japanese citizen became prominent. Some movies, novels and picture-story at that time treated missionaries and Japanese pastors as spy.

Both of the Protestant that the hands of “鬼畜米英 (Ki-Chiku-Bei-Hei / Devil-Pig-America-England)” and the Catholic church, which was the ally of the Tripartite Pact of Japan, Germany and Italy, were treated badly. In fact, my grandmother who was a Catholic believer at Yotsuya in Tokyo also told me when I was a child that she was called as “Yaso, Miso, Kuso (Shit), and Spy”.

There is Mitsuru Tomita who was regarded as a leading theologian and he was the first student who graduates from the Central Seminary in Kobe. In June 1938 (Showa 13), Pastor Tomita, General Affair Dean of National Christian Council Japan, was invited from the Governor-General of Korea. He had been used as a tool for Asia. Tomita told in front of pastors in Pyongyang. He told them that visiting Shrine is a national ceremony, and it is not sinful biblically. Audience who heard about this protested at that time. For 36 years, Japan colonized the peninsula, forced people to change their family name from “朴(Park)” to “木下(Kinoshita)”, and severely punished if the person did not use Japanese language. They even did not know that they hurt other people, but it was too dull. Japanese planted hatred that will never disappear to the people of Asia. We have become a hand of ruling other people.

Thirdly, we recognized the system which makes absolute the Emperor System. When the National Christian Council Japan was established, it determined the policy of life in Article 7 of the rule.

“皇国ノ道ニ從イテ信仰ニ徹シ各其ノ分ヲ尽シテ皇運ヲ扶翼シ奉ルベシ

*(Koukokunomichini shitagaite, shinkouni tetsushi kakusonobunwo tukushite houunwo hiyokushi tatematsurubeshi / Obey to the principle of Emperor and believe in. Pray for the victory of Emperor and worship him)*” is listed first. How Toyohiko Kagawa was, who made his decision to spend his entire life at “Arakawa, Fukiai”, while he was a student at the Central Seminary in Kobe?

He praised the Emperor, “We celebrate the glorious era of 2,600 years of the Emperor. The Omnipotent One give providence of non-thinking to Japan and he gave a leader to Japan who cannot compare with anyone in the world, and he love and care of people of Emperor”.

(“*Kumono Hashira*”. No.10. Last volume)

### **Compromise under the wartime**

By around 1929 (Showa 4), the Christian church had still sent a voice saying that not to be involved in war. In 1923 (Taisho 12), the National Christian Council Japan was established as the coordinating association of the church sects and dominations. The council is considering the “Social creed” at the 6th General Assembly in 1928.

Among them, it decided to realize the minimum wage act, the agricultural law, the social insurance law, the reasonable working hour’s law and the non-war world policy. However, the Manchurian Incident began in 1931, and the policy of the council crashed. In July 1937, the council standing committee declared in the “Declaration of the Emergency Time” that “Upon the incident of this time, we will work on the purpose of the government statement and cooperate with it”. Moreover, at the “Declaration on the Manchurian Incident” in September, they supported the military action as “Respectfully receive the words of Emperor and in order to secure the stability of East Asia, Japan and China tie up together and try hard to overcome the difficult situation by encouraging each other tenaciously until we acquire the glory. We will pray in one and join in the service of the country in reward our spiritual movement with loyalty to the country”.

In 1939, the Religious Organization Law was established and in the following year of the glorious era of 2,600 years of the Emperor, Ministry of Education and Religion began to give pressure to the Christian churches. The church leaders avoided friction as much as possible, and try to protect churches and their sheep. They eliminated the influence of missionaries from abroad and set up the emperor Christianity. It was an excuse even they tried to protect their churches and members that were like the candle in the wind. They chose “Japanese-style” respecting harmony than individual beliefs that even abandon their own life to be a witnesses. Some of the people suggested on the newspaper of National Christian Council Japan at that time that all the churches should gather at the national celebration ceremony of the glorious era of

2,600 years of the Emperor. Gouji Tanaka and Minoru Okada from the Kobe Central Theological Seminar suggested the autonomy of the church. Tanaka showed himself that “Especially teacher Gouji Tanaka passionately acted as the suggestion speaker on the amendment proposal on all items”. However, a few conscientious voices were pushed out in harmony of the society.

In 1942 (Showa 17), with the establishment of the United Church of Christ in Japan, Tomita accompanied the Director General Suzuki to visit Ise Shrine. It was not a matter of individual Tomita, but it was a mistake that church made. It is like getting rid of the futon cover of sick person on the bed and pouring cold water on him / her, if you criticize the powerlessness of the church that had participated in the war. In Kobe area, it is the region where Hanshin Baseball team fans are majority. But it doesn't mean that there are no other team's fans. They just don't say publically that they support other teams. It is a fact that there are few Christians who confess that “Jesus is my Lord” before, during and after the war. On the other hand, in Germany and South Korea, thorough resistance was made by confession.

### **Wartime resistance movement**

Generally, as Christianity three war resistance group movement were the Todaisha (Pre-War Watch Tower), the Plymouth Brethren (captured in 1941), and Yaso Kitokuno Shinyaku Church (captured in 1941). Junzo Akashi and the Watch Tower are the greatest individual and group that did resistance during the wartime in Japanese Christian society. (1973. “*Fukuinno Sekai*”. August)

The original place of the Watch Tower that led by Akashi is Kobe. The first issue of the magazine “*Todai* (issued in February 1927)” is from Goto watch store at Daikaidouri in Kobe City. Shigetaro Koda who was a student at Doshisha University and had studied abroad at Wisconsin State University, he presided over the Sumaura Seishyo Koudou after his return. Among the 20 people who participated in this group, there were sincere Protestant family of Goto from his parent time, Doctor Teikichi Irimata (later younger pupil of Kokichi Kurosaki), and Goro Nishimatsu from Kobe Shimbun. Koda is a branch of the family of Hyoemon Koda, the first president of the Kobe City Council. Hyoemon founded the first elementary school “*Meijinkan*” in 1868 (Keiou 4), and created the Hyogo Canal. His memorial service was conducted as the memorial ceremony of establishing Kobe Shoukou Kaigishyo (now the Chamber of Commerce) in 1921 (Taisho 10), and it was the first memorial service that had done by City council. Shigetaro was a wealthy man who got married with American woman. His father was a deacon of the Hyogo church and he built a great house in Suma for his international married son. The modern appearance of Shigetaro and his wife on rickshaw was very famous at the local area. Shigetaro was the principal of the Sunday school of Suma church (Pastor Toranosuke Moriyama).

He moved by the Second Coming of the Lord by Kanzo Uchimura at Kobe YMCA, 1918, and he deepened friendship with Uchimura. Ms. Maud (English teacher at Palmore, Maud Kanda Memorial Scholarship Academy, first Jehovah's Witness after the war) was the third person who Uchimura directly gave baptism.

However, after the return of Junzo Akashi in 1926 (Taisho 15), his belief swung by Akashi's practical evangelism, and Sumaura Seishyo Koudon became the center of the activity stage. Akashi who was born in Shiga Prefecture received baptism when he was the reporter of the Japanese newspaper in America, "Rafu Shinpo" and "Nichibei Shimbun". He was sent from the Watch Tower headquarters as an Asian director. He was short, wearing Lloyd glasses, and he had an attitude to let other people step back. Moreover, he had excellent translation skills and a genius capability of writing plays and historical novels. Through cooperation play of Akashi and Koda, starting from the lecture at Kobe YMCA, "God's kingdom movement" began, and they moved to Tokyo. And it became a factor that makes anger Uchimura who has a strong susceptibility. The timber company that Kouda was managing bankrupted because he devoted into the Watch Tower too much. Koda got a sick disease, and it made his life to be end. Koda's older brother Yujiro died in young. Shizue, who was a widow, remarried with Akashi and later she died in prison. Shizue was a Christian with a slender appearance and gentle dignity. Koda suffered from preaching of between Uchimura and Akashi, but he made apology to Uchimura later. He returned to Kobe with Ryo Gotou (executive manager of Goto Shyokai), and he spent his life with keeping a hidden seclusion of the Second Coming faith in his heart.

Akashi kept writing severe criticism against Japan-German-Italy fascism in the magazine "Golden Age (now "Awake!")", after the Manchurian Incident in 1931 (Showa 6). In February 1933 (Showa 8), he lectured criticizing the weak act of Christian church as "Judgement will done on fake Christianity" at Gyeongseong in Korea. He was caught by Chiba Prefectural Special Higher Police in May due to the violation of lese-majesty, and it was the first religious crackdown in Japan. All publications were banned to be sold or distributed, and remaining publications were also taken.

In other Christian religions, the Salvation Army Japan (captured in 1940), the 6 and 9 sector of the United Church of Christ in Japan (captured in 1942, recent Holiness movement), the 7 of the Nihon Kitoku Sairindan (captured in 1943) would be listed. Beside of Christianity, Shinsei Ryujinkai, Hitonomichi, Amatsukyo, Shinkou Butsukyo Seinendoumei, Dainihonkannonkai (now the Church of World Messianity) were caught in 1936, and Dainihonkyo, the Honmon Butsuryū-shū in Katukawa headquarter, and Souka Kyoikukai (now Soka Gakkai) were caught in 1942. The reason that Shintoism, Buddhism was also caught, entrained, and imprisoned because it was regarded as having problems toward Emperor.

The Watch Tower was caught for second time on June 21, 1939. The whole Japan investigation

arrested 91 people in one time, and 9 people were arrested in Taiwan and 2 people lost their lives in prison out of 9. 38 people were arrested in Korea and 5 people out of 38 died in prison that was including a branch officer. Akashi spoke boldly at his trial on March 1942 as the place of testimony of faith. He confessed, “I love my Japanese Imperial family and Japanese people. I came to rescue my beloved Japanese Imperial family and fellow Japanese people by giving warning”. He fulfilled his mission as the watch person to give warning.

*The Chief Judge* “Well, defendant, did you acknowledge the dignity of the Emperor and his Imperial family?”

*Defendant: Akashi* “I never acknowledge anything like dignity and sacredness at all.”

*The Chief Judge* “How about the position of the Emperor?”

*Defendant: Akashi* “I never approve the status of the Emperor.”

Not only the Holiness movement church and the Seventh-day Adventist Church that strongly believed in the Second Coming, but also any Christian church did not admit the Emperor as the living god, and many people died in the prison. However, it was not because they fought boldly against the Imperial system state. (Michinobu Tsuji. “*Arashinonakano Bokushitachi*”. Shinkyō Shyupan). Akashi stood along in God faith, and he not only rejected to visit shrines and worship the Emperor, but also denied the Imperial system state completely. Akashi was the only person who sentenced to ten years imprisonment for violation of the Public Security Preservation Laws. Speaking of other members of the Watch Tower, there are 13 people have been approved that they died in prison. Akashi and many other members of the Watch Tower that maintained their faithfulness, after they were released, they noticed a change in interpretation on the Second Coming of the Watch Tower headquarter, and they resented and criticized. For that reason, he was expelled and so he stopped evangelism, and he reached a religious point of staying from moving.

### **Imperial System**

The idea that a person becomes a god is a low level of “god view”. Because humans are sinful existence. The Genesis in the Bible depicts that if the person become like a god that is the work of Satan. We must be aware of “You shall have no other gods before me” (Deuteronomy 5:7). Even though the Emperor is a human being, the Emperor’s Spirit enters into it, and he becomes “a god to be worshipped”. The Emperor is a ritual lord to carry shrine rituals, so it is a pagan god from the viewpoint of Christianity. For example, when the Emperor Showa died, there were two ritual ceremonies. One is a ceremony that the successor inherits the three Imperial Regalia. It is the enthronement ceremony (即位礼 Soku-I-Rei). It means the inheritance of “blood” of an

unbroken line of Emperors. Another ceremony is the 大嘗祭(Dai-Jyo-Sai. The first ceremonial offering of rice by newly-enthroned Emperor) as an act of “private affairs” at the Imperial House at midnight. While the first ceremony has a political aspect, the Dai-Jyo-Sai is a religious ceremony. It is a Shinto ritual to confirm that the spirit of Amaterasu-ōmikami has entered the body of the new Emperor. Through this ritual ceremony, human will become a god, that is, they will be a single personal with two character of humanity and divinity. There is a contrast between Christianity and become Buddha that human become a god. Christianity is an incarnation type that God becomes human.

Well, I am not claiming to persist in denying a pagan god immediately. It is also necessary to respect other religious possessions of religion. However, there is a mission of becoming a guard who strongly deny the pagan god if it is acknowledged as the state god and become an inviolable existence to suppress people.

Even now, Japanese prime minister believes that it is a country of imperial rule, and also foreign people understand so. (1999. Time. July 12)

In the future, in order for Christianity to be accepted by the hearts of Japanese people, we must keep walking straight on the right pass, not going into assimilation or immersion. Do not forget the trials which had come down before and during the war. I would like to pray that Japan will never change into contextualization under the Japanese flag of preserving state religion.

History proves that apostate Peter also repented and used as a tool to tell the gospel.