"In this world you will have trouble. But take heart! I have overcome the world." (John 16:33)

This past April 5, the strong voice of a pastor participating in a protest sang out, "We shall overcome, we shall overcome, we shall overcome some day...." They had gathered in support of Rev. Otani and 3 others who were being unjustly arrested by the police for their activity in July of last year at the Haginohaya polling station, where they had gathered to protest the treatment of the day laborers of Kamagasaki. As homeless people without a residence certificate, these people were not eligible to vote, and so the basic human rights they were supposedly guaranteed by the Japanese constitution were not being extended to them.

This reasonable protest, however, was viewed by the state as a treasonous act, and so they used their power to squash that protest in the name of that same constitution. For those of us watching this, it was a chilling example of state violence. At the trial, however, Rev. Otani declared that his actions were not simply a political statement in the face of such state oppression, but that they were a statement of faith based in obedience to Jesus Christ. He powerfully demonstrated to all who heard him that it is the victory of Christ over death on the cross that is our hope in the face of the "powers of this world" that would suppress voices of righteousness.

From this past March, Japan has been battered by the natural disasters of earthquakes, tsunamis and typhoons together with the manmade disaster at the nuclear power plant. The label of "nuclear contamination" pinned on Fukushima and surrounding areas has led to various acts of discrimination. But in the face of all of this, politicians and financiers have been focused on selfish interests and have left behind the poor and the weak. The state has taken advantage of this situation to further solidify their authoritarian power. (Just recently, I heard that another pastor was unjustly arrested in Otsu.) So, what kind of hope can we see in a world in which people live only for their own personal interests and basic human rights are ignored?

The song "We shall overcome" was born out of the victory of Jesus at the cross, and it is in that that we find hope. Our hope is in Christ, who bore that crown of thorns, and so I want to walk with those who are unjustly suffering as I follow Jesus.
Looking Back at Those 111 Days in Jail
Rev. Takao Otani (pastor of the Settsutonda Church of the Kyodan and head of the Kansai Committee on Evangelism of Laborers)

Together with 3 compatriots, I spent 111 days, from April 5 to July 25, 2011, in the Osaka Detention Center after being arrested and indicted on charges by the Takatsuki Police. The charges were that we had engaged in the crime of “forcible obstruction of business,” a ridiculous charge based in our efforts to encourage day laborers in Kamagasaki, who have no “certificate of residence” since they have no permanent address, to go to the Haginochaya Polling Station and vote in the July 11, 2010 election. The action of organizing the workers to go and vote is a justifiable action designed to protect their rights. After all, the right to vote is guaranteed in Article 15 of the Japanese Constitution and is also included in Article 25 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, which the Japanese government has ratified. Thus, to be arrested for only doing that and then to be indicted and held in captivity for 111 days is something that I simply cannot accept as justifiable. At the Takatsuki Police Station, we were subjected to daily interrogation, but because the arrest was so blatantly undeserved, I refused to cooperate and maintained my silence. There was thus a “time of silence” during the 2 to 3 hours of daily interrogations that lasted until the formal indictment was made. It was a very “boring” time indeed, and it certainly did cause me a lot of undue stress.

We were formally indicted on April 26, 2011, and from that time were incarcerated in the Osaka Detention Center. This was just before the long “Golden Week” holidays, and since prisoners are confined to their rooms on weekends and holidays, that meant that the holidays for everyone else were especially tough on us. The room I was placed in was a single, 1.8 by 2.7 meter (6 by 9 feet) room with a simple toilet and sink, and so the first 10 days or so were really difficult in getting used to life in a detention center.

When I finally was getting adjusted to life there, the hot and muggy rainy season began.

On the outside, we take for granted having an air conditioner or at least an electric fan, but at the detention center, nothing like that was allowed, and we were only provided with a hand-held fan to cool ourselves with. Additionally, we were allowed to wipe ourselves with a wet towel 3 times a day for about 5 minutes, but that was like putting a drop of water on a hot rock. Needless to say, in such conditions, it was impossible to get a good night’s sleep. Our sleep time was scheduled from 9 pm until 7:30 am the next morning, but during the hot season, one simply couldn’t get to sleep until early morning. There is much I could write about the treatment we received at the Osaka Detention Center, which is under the Department of Justice, concerning basic human rights, but suffice it to say that this treatment made me realize how poor an understanding the Japanese government really has of human rights.

While life in the detention center was really difficult in many ways, it certainly did provide a lot of time for reading, and so I was able to read a number of books that were passed on to me from the outside. Among those were books written by Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. on
the civil rights struggle for blacks in America. I was again drawn to the speech he gave in Washington DC on Aug. 28, 1963, "I have a dream." The words that stood out the most for me were those alluding to Amos 5:24, when he said, "No, no, we are not satisfied, and we will not be satisfied until justice rolls down like waters and righteousness like a mighty stream."

We now live in Japanese society some 50 years after Rev. King’s speech, and for us, the situation is similar. As I have just described, we have these conditions in which the basic voting rights of the day laborers in Kamagasaki are not respected and no thought whatsoever seems to be given to the basic human rights of those incarcerated in the Osaka Detention Center. So, that “righteous river” within Japanese society is blocked and stagnated. Thus, with strong resolve, I will continue to speak those same words that Rev. King spoke some 50 years ago. I renew my pledge to fight for the elimination of all forms of discrimination that result from that “river of justice” being blocked and stagnant and to join in solidarity with like-minded people to continue this struggle.

Religion and Buraku Discrimination

By Rev. Mitsuhiro Inukai
[Adapted from a sermon preached at the Kiryu Tobu Church in Gunma Prefecture during the Buraku Liberation Caravan]

The theme “Religion and Buraku Discrimination” may be a kind of worn-out theme, but looking at my own experience, if I were asked whether “religion” has really studied the “buraku issue,” I would have to reply that it really hasn’t. If we look at this from the standpoint of the thesis proposed by Takeji Hayashi that “the only real evidence of having studied an issue is the resulting change,” then we need to ask how much the Church has changed.

The event that really sparked a critical analysis of the issue of religion and buraku discrimination took place at the Third Assembly of the World Conference on Religion and Peace held in Princeton, New Jersey in from Aug. 29 to Sept. 7, 1979. There, a Buddhist priest named Munoe Machida, who was the head of the board of regents for the All Japan Buddhist Federation and head of the Soto Sect, made a statement to the effect that there was no buraku discrimination in Japan. Shortly thereafter, the Buraku Liberation League published a pamphlet entitled, “A Statement Concerning the Discriminatory Remarks at the World Conference on Religion and Peace,” in which they detailed the context of the remarks and their implications. Here is what Machida said (translated from the Japanese):

"There is no longer any buraku problem in Japan. There are, however, those who are trying to make an issue of it for the purpose of "buraku liberation." But there is no such discrimination within Japan. The government is doing that, and neither is anyone else."

This statement was made in the year following the year in which the “Special Law Dealing With Buraku Areas” (instituted in 1969) was extended for another 3 years, in which it was declared that the issue was a “national issue.”

The BLL pamphlet included the following statement by Tsutomu Mizukami under the subtitle of "Taking off the Priestly Garments and Doing Acts of Mercy."

There were two thoughts that came to mind when I heard about the Machida statement. The first thought related to the conversation I had with Keigyou Shin, the head of the Eihei Temple of the Soto Sect. He was wearing an elaborate costume, and so having remembered that their founder Dogen had discarded his “purple robe,” I asked him the following question. “As the head of the Eihei Temple, what position do
you hold within the sect as a whole? Would it be something equivalent to the Prime Minister?" He answered, "No, here I am the emperor." I recorded that conversation in my dialog series published by the Mainichi Newspaper, but that statement crystallized my impressions as to the character of the Soto Sect of Buddhism.

The other thought that came to mind was the research done by the Buraku Liberation League on the discriminatory posthumous names on Buddhist graves in Gunma and Nagano prefectures. For example, the meanings of the characters given by the temples to those from a buraku background included such names as "leather man" and "grass woman," indicating the defiled status they were given. That likewise was representative of the Soto Sect.

When leaders of a sect who should be in the position of looking back at their past practices and thinking seriously about how they should address these issues in the future as an organization instead make statements that totally ignore those realities and hark back to those feudalistic ideas, I find it not just sad but beyond words to express. These people sitting in their temples decked out in purple robes are absurdly personified. I have for a long time been seeking answers to the questions of how the actions of these priests, who are so taken up with the power and money involved in running their temples, relate to the concepts of equality, etc. espoused by Sakyamuni (the Buddha). But in hearing Machida's response, I strongly felt that these temple-managing priests are just making fools out of us laity.

Just sitting there in their garish costumes is not following in the Buddha's footsteps. It is just living off the riches gained in the past and taking it easy. I want to tell them to take off their robes, leave their temples and actually get busy in works of mercy. For example, how about getting involved in the Minamata Movement? [Minamata was the area polluted with mercury that caused many to develop mercury poisoning ("Minamata disease").] Did these Soto Sect priests ever don their mendicant priests' clothes and ask for alms to help the victims? Or how about discrimination issues or those involving people with various handicaps? All I see is them holed up in their temples.

Frankly, I am sick of the Buddhism that serves the rich and distains the poor and would set up a system of placing additional discrimination after death on those very people who in life had to struggle just to "gasp for air" in a world where it was "difficult to breathe."

There is something I'd like to say about discriminatory posthumous names. There were some really horrendous posthumous names given, as Mizukami pointed out, to people who had no education and couldn't read the characters, and because this act of receiving a posthumous name for one's
deceased loved ones cost a lot of money, just as it still does today, this was a doubly discriminatory. However, if as the Christian Church, we claim that “we don’t do anything bad like that,” I think we need to reconsider. It depends on how you look at it, of course, but in one sense the fact that there isn’t anything analogous to discriminatory posthumous names in the Church may just relate to an even deeper form of discrimination.

I don’t really like saying this, but the fact that Buddhism put discriminatory posthumous names on people from the buraku was because they were in a relationship with the buraku that made such discrimination possible. In comparison to that, while there are exceptions, Christian churches as a whole have simply neglected to have any relationship with people from the buraku. The fact that there isn’t a discriminatory action equivalent to discriminatory posthumous names in the Church isn’t necessarily because Christians don’t have discriminatory attitudes but may just be because they don’t have any relationships with the buraku at all.

Toshio Nagasue, the former director of the Tagawa Coal Mine Museum, said, “When I began, I was thinking in terms of studying the general history of coal mining, but as I looked at the history of coal mines in the Chikuho district, in every case I discovered discriminated-against buraku communities. Thus, I was forced to delve into that history.” For instance, all of the rail lines to the mines in Chikuho went right through the buraku communities.

The reason I bring this subject up is because it seems likely that when we study the history of Buddhism, we will find a similar scenario vis a vis buraku communities. However, it also makes me wonder whether there might be something similar in the histories of Christian churches in Japan. Prof. Eiichi Kudo began to do research into that very thing, but unfortunately passed away. Professors Akio Dohi and Masao Takenaka of Doshisha University also attempted similar research but found too little data to reach firm conclusions. At any rate, with a very few exceptions, Christian churches developed in areas where little contact would occur with discriminated-against buraku communities.

My perception is that the fact that this issue is not clearly or widely recognized is one reason that the buraku discrimination issue is not taken up with much enthusiasm within the Church. When looking back at Japanese history, there is no connection between the Christian Church and the buraku people, who were forced into such a difficult position. Thus, no matter how often the mantra about this issue being a “national problem” has been repeated by the “Council on Antidiscrimination Measures,” Christian churches have difficulty in perceiving it as there own issue. Thus, I think we must begin with a recognition of the structure of this whole issue.

Many churches have the words, “Come unto me all you who labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest,” displayed on signs on their churches. Those are the words of Jesus, and because Jesus is in that place, the church thinks that these words will communicate to those on the outside. But that isn’t the case. Churches generally don’t realize that the only people they can really relate to are those who come from the same social class as themselves.

Some 30 years ago, I remember being surprised to hear that churches in India are structured along the lines of castes, and I also heard that in the US, when someone’s social status goes up to a higher status, they often change church denominations. But at that time, I thought these were a inferior churches and felt pride that Japanese churches were much more open than that. That, however, was simply my lack of understanding, as in reality Japanese churches aren’t any better.

For instance, my home church, Minami Osaka Church, has a kindergarten that many members attended as children, and so I always felt that it was a church that was open to all. I went to pastor a church in the Chikuho area, where I had a Bible class for
middle school aged students, and after graduating in March, many of these students went off to the Osaka area to work. As they had been learning the Bible there in Chikuho, I encouraged them to continue that study in Osaka and introduced them to my home church, Minami Osaka Church. None of them, however, lasted more than a month, saying to me, “Pastor, we don’t like going to that church.” I never did find out the specific reasons why this happened, but the Minami Osaka Church simply wasn’t a place where these young people who had been raised in Chikuho felt comfortable being. I think that the Minami Osaka Church people tried to help them fit in, but it was just too difficult.

The Miyata Church in Chikuho was begun by Rev. Danjiro Hattori, who, after the war, worked as a coal miner as a kind of penance for his war responsibility. From this humble beginning, a church of coal miners was founded, and I remember him telling me that they were not open to the people from the outside to be a part of their church. I didn’t really understand what that meant then, but I do now. As I look back at the 46 years of history of the Fukuyoshi Church where I now serve, I see how I was not able to focus on that one group of people for whom the church was started, and so the result has been the development of a church with very few of the original local people, but instead a church of newcomers from Fukuoka and Yamaguchi who have moved in. I think we all need to recognize that our local churches tend not to be open to all levels of society, but instead are limited to pretty much one class of people.

Well, let’s look at how that works out in actuality in a local church. This is a rather dated example, but it serves as a useful illustration. It involves a discriminatory act by Rev. Kichiya Kikuchi, a person most people don’t remember now. He was the chairperson of the Commission on Mission of the Kyodan and a conscientious member at that. In a column in the Christ Newspaper published in the Sept. 3, 1983 edition, he wrote the following:

The Prayer of the Cross
Jesus said, ‘Father, forgive them, for they don’t know what they are doing.’” (Luke 23:34) The people who dragged Jesus out to the hill of Golgotha and nailed him to a cross in between two thieves were people the equivalent of which in Japan would be the uncultured people called “hinin” [literally meaning “non-persons,” a discriminated-against class in feudal times closely related to the burakumin], those people of a class that can’t recognize defilement for what it is. After nailing Jesus to the cross, they set about dividing up the clothes of the condemned. That was more important to them than the executions themselves. The robe that Jesus had worn was seamless, and so there was a dispute as to who would get it. But the dispute was finally settled by a drawing of lots. Who this prisoner was, what he had done and what they were doing was not something they even thought about.

The crowds were standing by watching while the religious leaders flung insults, “He save others, now let his save himself,” and the authorities ridiculed him with “If you are the king of the Jews, then save yourself.”

The world was dark. But this is the reality when someone was crucified on a cross. And in the midst of this darkness, Jesus prayed, “Father, forgive them, for they don’t know what they are doing.”

One week later, in the issue, the following apology appeared:

Apology for the use of discriminatory language

In last week’s column, through my own carelessness, I ended up using discriminatory language, which I deeply regret. I am chagrined by my lack of understanding, and I tremble in fear at my own discriminatory attitude, which cannot simply be overlooked because it was due to ignorance. I deeply regret my lack of understanding of the basics of the buraku discrimination issue and how my words fit into that. I deeply apologize to those I
have offended, beginning with those who are involved in the struggle against buraku discrimination and the readers of the Christ Newspaper.

I will immediately refrain from writing further columns and dedicate myself to making this issue of unjust discrimination my own issue and to learning about the issue.

Kichiya Kikuchi

Not many people today remember Rev. Kikuchi, but I would like to share with you something he wrote that deeply moved me, entitled, "The Intercessory Church," from a collection called "The Church and Its Evangelistic Focus."

When I left Yokohama to begin an evangelistic work in the Tsugaru area of Aomori, at the northern tip of Honshu, it was early spring 1946, just after the war ended. The plum blossoms were in bloom in warm Yokohama, but in this farming area of Goshogawara, the snow was still piled up to the eves of the houses. The church building that was there was dilapidated, having been used as a childcare center during the war, and so they were continuing that work. However, there were almost no believers there, or at least they were not coming together for fellowship.

As I began my service there, I myself was not in very good shape, as I was depressed and had deep feelings of hopelessness. Nobody was there to send me off or to welcome me as I arrived. That was because I had avoided a formal sendoff, and there were no church members there to give me a welcoming. In reality, I was not being "called" to this church, but was evacuating from the church I had served during the war to operate this childcare facility. I was basically accompanying my wife, who would be serving there as a teacher, along with our two small children. If I were moving to a different church in the normal sense, it wasn't as though there were no city churches that would call me to be pastor. So, why was I passing up on those opportunities and moving to a country church not far from my own hometown?

In the cities one year after the war, there was renewed optimism, and many of the evacuees were returning. Christianity, which had been repressed, along with a freed-up communism, were both riding a wave, and Christianity also had the advantage of having America behind it. Those were the "boom years," but I myself did not like it and could not accept a Christianity that was merely riding a wave.

I told the members of our church administration committee, as they discussed the rebuilding of our war-destroyed church, "The Japanese church has been put to the test during this war. The visible image of the church has disappeared and our church was burned to the ground. God has destroyed the old church in Japan, and if you examine your own life of faith, I think you can understand that. As your pastor, I feel that pain profusely. God has destroyed that church that doesn't value its members. So, we are not resurrecting the old church, but instead giving birth to a new church. We should begin this task with the resolve to tear it down and begin again if we realize that the new church is not pleasing to God. If it is a church just like what we have had, I don't doubt that God will destroy it again. Unfortunately, they did not really understand, and the ones that would have were already dead. The church wasn't moving towards true renewal but only towards riding the wave of the boom. While it's outward form might change, its inward form was basically unchanged.

It wasn't just my church that was like this, but the whole Christian world in Japan. I could not accept that, and so it was with a heavy heart that I submitted my resignation and went to do evangelism in such an out-or-the-way place.

Even though I was frustrated and discouraged and even felt that God had destroyed me, I did not die but lived on in those postwar years. Many of my close friends had died on the battlefield or in the
bombings. Those who had just graduated from seminary had surely wanted to do evangelism, but they all died, leaving only myself, I felt. The problem I faced was how a destroyed church and an evangelist who had faced his judgment, indeed a ravaged nation, would rise again — or rather continue to live at all.

The words I heard in my mind were, “I have judged you along with your country and your church. Japan, a nation of lies, a church of unbelief and you, a false evangelist.” It was as though God was speaking these words of judgment from the flames of war, and I could not escape from them. It was that voice that pursued me and led me to Goshogawara.

The postwar society in the cities was indeed a bustling time, but in the farming villages of rural Japan, the night continued. The cities were transformed by the wave of change, but the ripples that reached the villages only brought decline and further confusion. The old feudalistic society resisted change but also began falling apart. However, that did not lead to the expected democratic society. The dissolution of the old communal spirit was highly touted, but its new replacement was nowhere to be found. On the contrary, what came out of that were contradictions, evils and tragedies of increasing proportion: imbalances in life and culture, increasing juvenile delinquency, collapse of farming families and even killings of family members. Elections that were supposed to bring democratic politics to rural towns and villages instead brought decay.

To there, the “Christian boom” did not come, as problems and walls awaited it. I struggled in that situation both inwardly and outwardly for 15 years, but in that struggle, I discovered the “church.”

Obviously, I knew the word “church,” as I had become a believer and then a minister in that context. But that church I had known before was not a church that stood on the sovereignty of Christ and him alone, that preached Christ and him alone, and that fought to establish that sovereignty on the earth. There was not the foundation on which to establish such a church in Japan, and in reality, such a church did not exist in Japan. I learned that unless such a church is established, Japanese society cannot be transformed. Yet, at the same time, I learned that unless such a society is developed, the Japanese church cannot truly form.

This inseparable nature of church and society is a concept that I could not have imagined prior to the war, and so it was a new experience for me to discover this after the war. It was during my years of rural evangelism and serving in a rural church that I came to clearly understand the Japanese church in this new postwar age. I believe that today’s rural evangelism is challenging the Japanese church to consider what it means to be a new church. This is not simply a matter of thinking about evangelistic strategy, but a more radical opinion. For it is within the concept of an evangelistic focus that we find a basic theological assertion concerning a “new church.”

This was a rather long quotation, but anyone who looks at this sincere journey Rev. Kikuchi had travelled would certainly say that a man such as him would never have made such a discriminatory remark. Others have said that there surely must have been some sort of mistake or misunderstanding. But that was not the case, as even in this sincere man of faith, feelings of buraku discrimination lurked, which is why he said in his apology, “I tremble in fear at my own discriminatory attitude, which cannot simply be overlooked because it was due to ignorance.” I think it is important the world hears the testimony of how his discriminatory attitude was changed after that, but unfortunately, I was not able to find any record of how he changed in this regard after that.

Now, if I were to talk about this at the Goshogawara Church, I would imagine that
someone would challenge me with, “Rev. Inukai, what are you saying? Are you implying that Rev. Kikuchi, who had such a wonderful ministry at Goshogawara Church, was never questioned him about such things? Whenever he held an evangelistic service, he always preached about the cross of Jesus like that, and so you’re saying that no one challenged him on that?”

The fact is that there weren’t any people who had experienced such discrimination among his audience, or at least within the context of faith such an attitude was considered of little significance, and so no one pointed out the problem. Thus, he never realized what he had been doing all along prior to him having written that column and then being challenged on it.

In that very same issue of the Christ Newspaper that Kikuchi had placed his apology, Rev. Hideyasu Nakagawa of the Anglican Church also wrote an article entitled “My Apology Over a Discriminatory Remark About People of Buraku Descent.” Nakayama’s remarks were made at the 1983 General Assembly of the Anglican Church held in May, in which he had stated, “As I look back on my life, I would certainly have been very reluctant to allow my daughter to marry a man who I knew to be of buraku descent. ... “Even for a church member, I would thoroughly check on that person’s background.”

In his apology, he stated,

The reason is that the roots of this problem lie in my own sinful condition. When I look at my own heart, I fear the depths where the light of consciousness does not reach. It is dark, bottomless pit.

I was baptized in 1909 at the age of 2, and since then I have been a member of the Anglican Church, active in its life. I majored in philosophy and theology and have been a college professor for 50 years. During all of those years, I also served in numerous positions of responsibility in the church. As I reflected on my recent comments, however, I have come to realize that I have not really lived according to the gospel message, and so I prostrate myself before God and man in repentance for my sin.

All persons are born into this world as persons of equal worth, and I believe that it is only as God’s mercy works in our lives and as His Spirit fills our hearts that it becomes possible to live a life where one does not commit such discrimination.

I also do not know what occurred in Rev. Nakagawa’s life after this apology, but as I read his words, there is something that concerns me about them. I wonder whether it is accurate to state that buraku discrimination is a sin born out of a “dark, bottomless pit” that comes from “not really living according to the gospel message.” When it is stated in the Church “discrimination is a sin,” one tends to think that the sin is being dealt with sincerely, but that is not necessarily the case. I think it is not really possible to be really cognizant of buraku discrimination by simply “looking into one’s own heart.”

If one does not even interact with a discriminated-against buraku, no matter how much prayer is involved, can such cognizance actually be achieved? I think the only way it to actually put into practice the kind of thing that Tsutomu Mizukami was referring to when he said of the Buddhist priests, “I want to tell them to take off their robes, leave their temples and actually get busy in works of mercy.”

I don’t have time to deal with other important incidents of a similar nature, such as those of Toyohiko Kagawa and Shozo Tanaka [a famous Meiji-era politician]. I’ll just mention that unlike these cases in the Church where there was no contact with discriminated-against buraku and therefore they didn’t realize it, in Kagawa’s case, he made discriminatory remarks from within the context of actually working with these people. In closing, I want to share with you a story related to my ministry in Chikugo through a special literacy class, where my exposure to the buraku discrimination issue began. Teachers there have reported numerous such experiences working with these people
outside of the classroom — as they figuratively "take off their robes, leave their 'temples' to do acts of mercy." One such example was reported in work published by the Asahi Newspaper in 1985 entitled "An Apology to the Children." Written by a teacher named Michiya Murakami, it tells of his encounters with buraku children in the form of letters to them.

"We have no electricity"

To Sakiko

It was after school, after I had returned your social studies test with a score that was less than half of what I had expected of you. I had thought you could do much better than you did, and so I asked you, "Sakiko, what's the matter? I thought you'd be able to do much better than you did." But you just stared at the floor saying nothing.

You were such a serious student normally, and so I thought that if you just studied, you could get much better grades. So, I asked you once again, "Sakiko, what's the matter?"

Large tears droped fell from your eyes as you said, "Sensei [teacher], we don't have any electricity at our house."

I was so careless and foolish! Just shortly before that test, I had visited your house there at the foot of the mountain as a part of my duties to visit student's homes, but I hadn't even noticed that there was no electricity there. Back in the 60's, that whole area was poor, but I just assumed that even if life was difficult there, you would at least have electricity.

You told me as you continued to cry, "I lit a candle and studied until it burned out." I couldn't say anything. I was so angry with myself, at my lack of care as a teacher.

"A Wakeup Call"

To Yoichi (#1)

Yoichi. It was my intention to be aware of things, but I really wasn't. But when I heard what you said, that was a wakeup call. It was one day after class, when you said, "I just can't understand all of this, and to sit here for 6 hours; it's more than I can take."

I can see why you'd feel that way. From early morning, Japanese language, mathematics, English, science, social studies, music ... It was the most difficult day of the week for classes. Japanese was just about grammar, and even the music class was music grammar. Kind of hard to put up with, for sure!

Prior to that, I had intended to keep you in my sights, but that showed me that I hadn't really done so.

But, Yoichi, those words you spoke really woke me up!

"The Phone Call"

To Yoichi (#2)

"Hello, is this Murakami Sensei's house?"

"Yes, it is."

"Hello, is this really Murakami Sensei's house?"

"Yes, I am Murakami."

"Hello, I'm trying to reach Michiya Murakami."

"Yes, I am Michiya Murakami."

As I had had throat trouble, my voice had changed a lot, and so for a moment, there was no recognition, but when you finally realized it was actually me on phone, you said, "Sensei, what has happened to your voice?"

Then after a pause, you said with a trembling voice, "I'm going to end up crying. I just got back from a long trip to Tokyo. I hadn't been to my brother's house for some time, and so I went there for a drink. We talked for a while, and then he mentioned that you had quit as a teacher at our school. I was really surprised, and so that is why I'm calling. What's the matter? I heard that you have been ill, and that really makes me sad."

After I explained to you what my illness was and how that had forced me to resign my job, you said, "I want to come and visit right away."

I told you, "It's late and so don't come today. Enjoy yourself tonight and come visit me another day."
After I convinced you, you said, "Okay, I won't come tonight. Please take care of yourself. But if you have any need, please give me a call. I'll drive you to wherever you need to go." And so I gave you my new address and phone number.

Yoichi, you may have done a few bad things before, but you sure to have a kind heart. I remember telling you about the school janitor having an operation for appendicitis, and you convinced your friends to go with you that very day to visit him in the hospital.

There may be quite a few students who would put aside what they're doing to go visit their teacher or friend in the hospital. But it would probably have only been you who would do that upon hearing that the school janitor had been hospitalized.

What a call that was from you that day. Yoichi, thank you.

The Nuclear Accident and Discrimination

Ever since the nuclear accident, there have been numerous reports of acts of discrimination taking place that are related to that. For people outside of Fukushima prefecture, the issue may seem to be rather straightforward and simple, but I find it difficult to separate out all of the entangled strands involved in this complicated issue. In other words, the more I look at the situation in detail, the more I see the complicated nature of the issue, with Fukushima residents being discriminated against by others, while at the same time they are discriminating against each other and even against themselves.

Incidents of Fukushima residents being discriminated against by others:
These are the incidents that were first reported on by the media and that were first discussed amongst ourselves. There were reports of cars with Fukushima license plates being vandalized, and also reports of children from the evacuation zones being bullied at the schools they transferred to. We even heard reports that in some cities, people who had evacuated from Fukushima were being asked to wear a tag when walking about so that other people would know who they are, because the local people didn't want radiation to spread over to them. A lot of these were rumors, but some people said they were true. A member of the Aizu Radiation Information Center said that when he was visiting a relative in a neighboring prefecture, he was told to park his car out of sight because there had been vandalism in the neighborhood done to cars with Fukushima license plates. I also heard of incidents of people from Fukushima being
refused lodging at inns while on summer vacation.

**Discrimination incidents among Fukushima residents:** People from the town of Okuma evacuated to the city of Aizu Wakamatsu, where I live, in April. Presently, the people of two towns are living together in one city. In the beginning, when the people of Okuma were forced to evacuate, they elicited a lot of sympathy and were warmly welcomed. But as we lived together, inevitably, various rumors began to spread, such as rumors about a drunken brawl or about actions that abused the good will of the people of Aizu Wakamatsu.

There was supposedly an incident where someone from Okuma dropped their bankbook in the street, and it indicated a large sum of money had been deposited. So, this became a topic of discussion around drinks at the bar, etc., with the conclusions that Tokyo Electric (the owner of the crippled power plant) had paid them all of this money. But when you think about it, was this really true? Was there such a person who dropped their bankbook and even if so, how would they know that person was from Okuma? There were reports that the figure was 30 million yen, while other reports had it at 100 million.

I had considered the concept of discrimination to be based in people who perceived themselves as being above others in the societal pecking order looking down upon those they placed below themselves. However, when it came to this bankbook incident, there was something different going on. There is also prejudice against people you think have more money than yourself, which likewise can result in discrimination by those less well-off against those one thinks are financially better off. The cause of that is simple jealousy, which raises its ugly head when there is discontent towards those who appear to be better off financially. On top of that, then, there is also likely to be the added factor of the inconveniences caused by the presence of people that ordinarily wouldn’t be there. Job placement for disaster victims are given priority over local residents, and with all of the available housing being taken up by the evacuees, there aren’t any vacancies for Aizu Wakamatsu residents looking for apartments. And when evacuees make noise at night, the locals get annoyed, with the result that feeling of jealousy against those perceived to have gotten lots of money well up. You want to put them down, back in their place.

However, if you actually ask local residents how much money they think the people of Okuma actually received from Tokyo Electric, no one seems to really know. In other words, the “people who you think are above you economically” doesn’t seem to really have a valid basis, and yet it was the basis for discriminatory attitudes. So one of the legacies of the nuclear accident is this situation of Fukushima residents being discriminated against by those outside Fukushima while at the same time they discriminate against their fellow Fukushima residents. I wonder if this isn’t a result of the stress building up due to the anxiety of future health worries etc. In fact, I think that in addition to this stress buildup, it’s indicative of just how difficult it is for human beings to really be able to harmoniously live together when under stress. I can’t help but think that that is basically impossible.
Fukushima residents' fear of being discriminated against: Specific examples of these fears include children who are beginning to think that they won't be able to get married when the grow up, high school students on their school trip that feel they probably should hide the fact that they're from Fukushima, and Fukushima residents who wonder if sending vegetables or rice grown in Fukushima to someone might not be well received. Likewise, someone from Okuma who notices cars with license plates from their region parked in a pachinko parlor may think, "I bet the people here just think that Okuma people don't want to work." When I thought about these manifestations of this syndrome, I found it rather pathetic, but then I realized that I've had the same feelings, as when I felt unsure about taking a trip overseas because I was worried about Fukushima residents being subjected to Geiger Counters at Narita airport. That was due to a rumor I had heard to that effect, and so I was worried about that and that I might not be welcomed by my host because of such fears on their part. Those, however, were simply my preconceived notions, which were quickly dispelled by discussions with my family.

Thus, what we all need to do is not give countenance to rumors but instead to make an effort to determine the truth of the matter. Especially when one considers the harsh reality of those who have lost so much and have had to abandon their homes and their livelihoods, there can be no excuse for discrimination based on a rumor. It is just the height of absurdity. When you have been the victim of radiation exposure, you must not allow yourself to be bound by acts of discrimination but instead you need to search out the truth as to why you were put in this situation and to join in the struggle to call to account those who were responsible. In light of inability to bring the nuclear accident to a successful conclusion, we should of course be joining in the effort to rid ourselves of dependence on nuclear energy. But this entire situation also clearly reveals the fundamental weakness of we humans, who so easily discriminate against each other. While we want to support those who suffer so from the nuclear accident, discrimination and prejudice spread out just like nuclear radiation, entering into the hearts of people. That is just the sad reality. Nevertheless, as we walk that road of testing, what gives us hope is the belief that Jesus walks between "you and me" and prepares the road of life ahead of us. Likewise, it is the belief that our struggle to protect the lives of our children is what God wants of us — this God who loved us so much as to give the world his only son to be sacrificed on the cross for us — and it is that which gives us the hope to walk this path of testing. "We, who have committed this great sin against both our Creator and our descendants, desire of the Lord this one thing, and that is strength for this struggle to protect life. While I contemplate the gravity of this sin, I want to walk that path of struggle.
Life or Nuclear Power: Standing on the Brink of 100 Million People Being Exposed to Radiation

By Tsutomu Shoji, former General Secretary of the NCCJ representing the Association of Religious Organizations Against Nuclear Power

1. Being forgiven and starting again
When the March 11 earthquake hit eastern Japan, I was at the Korean Christian Center in the Ikuno Ward of Osaka listening to a talk by the head of the center, Chong-Il Lee. We felt only a strange slow roll of the building there, but later as I headed back to Tokyo and arrived home, I was horrified by the scenes I beheld on TV. Then I began seeing reports of the nuclear accident and realized how serious the situation was. My immediate thoughts were to get my two grandchildren, who lived with us, out of harms way by sending them to western Japan. My daughter’s and her husband’s jobs didn’t allow them to simply leave, and so we took the kids with us, leaving on the 16th. Their parents were later able to follow, and with the kindness of some relatives, we spent 6 days away from the scene in safety. Nevertheless, I felt convicted, asking myself, “What on earth have you up until now?” I had been involved with the nuclear issue for some time, but it was always about someone else. Now, it wasn’t about the exposed workers or residents in Wakasa or Rokkasho-mura, but it was about my own grandkids. I was getting quite depressed, but then I talked with Dr. Toshiyuki Yamazaki, who helped care for the children of Chernobyl and now serves on the committee dealing with the nuclear issue in the Osaka District. He told me that it was a really good idea that I got my grandkids out of the area so quickly. Yes, we must first protect our own and then reach out to others to help them so that we can protect humans and indeed all life from the threat of the nuclear industry. We must demand that they be shut down and deactivated. My own complacency had been shaken up, but through Dr. Yamazaki, I felt God’s forgiveness and a renewed commitment to continue on. After that, I also received confirmation of God’s forgiveness and encouragement from my friend Mitsuhiro Tanaka.

2. The deception and violence of nuclear power
On April 23, representatives from various Buddhist sects and both Protestant and Catholic Christians met at the Japan Christian Center in Nishi Waseda (Tokyo) for an emergency conference sponsored by the NCCJ Committee on Peace and Nuclear Issues. The featured speaker was Kazuhiko Tanaka, a nuclear engineer who had directed the design and building of nuclear reactors. He went into great detail explaining that Tokyo Electric’s explanation of the nuclear accident being the result of the tsunami is actually a ruse designed to deceive the public. The official story has been that the tsunami knocked out all of the pumps that circulate water to cool down the reactors were disabled by the tsunami and that it was this lack of ability to cool the reactors that led to the meltdown. In response to this, Tanaka stated that the exposing of the rods due to the lack of water was in fact due to the earthquake damage prior to the arrival of the tsunami. Tanaka deduced that the pipes connecting the pumps to the reactor, along with other equipment, had been damaged by the earthquake itself, which led to this very dangerous situation. I say, “deduced” because Tokyo Electric and the government have been hiding essential data. Now, however, more than 7 months after the disaster, that data is being made public. TE and the government had admitted to some of the issues pointed out by Tanaka and other experts, but they still are holding to the tsunami explanation. This, however, is not a trifling matter, since the very lives of everyone in this nation are tied up in this. Tanaka’s take on things is that nuclear reactor system itself could not withstand the
force of the quake, and so the problem isn’t limited to the Fukushima Daiiichi reactors but, in this narrow, earthquake prone archipelago, the more than 50 other nuclear power plants are likewise vulnerable. Moreover, Tanaka and other engineers have been pointing out that most of Japan’s nuclear power plants have design flaws, plus they are aging and deteriorating, necessitating more frequent inspections. But as there are insufficient numbers of experienced technicians and their morale is low, among other issues, the situation is indeed serious. On top of this, then, is the added problem of human error. No matter how many protection measures are taken, can we really deal with situations resulting from such errors when the “opponent” is unseen radioactive materials that have uncontrollable properties? Moreover, Tokyo Electric and the government have not taken protective steps that cost a lot of money, and simply ignored the risks, all along spending their money to promote the idea of nuclear power’s safety. Tanaka and his cohorts woke up to this reality early on and have been making their appeal to take actions to prevent a disastrous nuclear accident. But even now, after the myth of nuclear safety should have crumbled, various financial, industrial, governmental and academic sectors are still promoting nuclear power. Why is that the case? Nuclear power generation, of course, uses the same nuclear fission process that made possible the horrific weapons of mass destruction used in war. It is simply coupled together with huge equipment to utilize for “peaceful purposes,” the “spoon full of sugar that helps the medicine go down.” Beginning with the 5 major nuclear powers, all of the countries that have this capability have pursued the development of both nuclear power and nuclear weapon capability, as the technology for both civilian and military use have developed together. In Japan, Yasuhiro Nakasone and other political leaders began the nuclear policy in 1953, and by 1969, under Prime Minister Eisaku Sato, they had decided on two points: 1) for the time being, Japan would not possess nuclear weapons, but 2) that they would develop the economic and technological capability of producing such weapons. As long as this second point is in force, the government will continue to pursue nuclear reprocessing plants and fast breeder reactors in order to maintain the future capability of producing nuclear weapons. These 2 facilities are for the purpose of obtaining highly refined plutonium, which in turn makes possible strategic nuclear weapons that can pinpoint and destroy enemy military facilities. The radioactive materials that have been produced by nuclear power generation in Japan since 1966 total some 1.2 million times the total of the “ashes of death” produced by the atomic bombing of Hiroshima. So, even if we say that these will all be sequestered deep under the ground, it will take a million years or more for their poison to dissipate. In an earthquake-prone region such as Japan, we can’t guarantee that these materials will be quarantined for even a thousand years. On top of that, Japanese politicians and bureaucrats have bragged of this “dormant capability of future production of nuclear weapons.” This is the reason that they have continued to pursue development of the Rokkasho Reprocessing Plant and the fast breeder reactor “Monju” at Tsuruga for years without them actually being used. In fact, there is little prospect of them ever being used, and indeed, we must not allow that to happen. They are both examples of extreme wastefulness as well as extreme danger. Even as I say these things, however, I realize that I have become used to the “comfortableness” of electric power use, and so my involvement I the peace movement and the antinuclear movement has been somewhat half-hearted. We need to clarify the close relationship there is between nuclear power generation and nuclear weapons, and we need to realize that the former is also a form of violence against the dignity of humans and the value of all life. Thus, we all need to promote the movement to move away from nuclear energy. We must demand that people in the “nuclear villages” close down the nuclear reprocessing plant
and the fast breeder reactor, as well as deal with prodigious amounts of nuclear waste.

3. Discrimination against workers
The severe accident at the Fukushima power plant has clearly shown that nuclear power can come against human life just as nuclear bombs do.

The threat against life posed by nuclear power begins the mining of uranium.

Uranium companies displace native people from their lands in order to mine the uranium, and when those people are employed in the minds, they are exposed to radiation. People in the area, then, are forced to live with mountains of mine tailings that expose them to further radiation, and people who live downstream or downwind likewise are exposed. Native peoples in Canada, Australia and Africa have suffered such destruction, and their numbers are indeed great. Thus, the procurement of the uranium that powers our nuclear power plants is based upon a great deal of human sacrifice. Similarly, the enrichment process, along with the manufacture and transport of the fuel rods, produces more nuclear pollution. On top of that, then, is the radiation produced by the actual operation of the plants. This is especially so during the 2 month process of regular inspection, when thousands of workers are exposed.

Media coverage of the aftermath of the March 11 accident has really highlighted the reality of the workers involved in nuclear plants. Workers at such plants are gathered through a system of subcontractors, with the jobs subject to high radiation exposure being parceled out to unskilled workers. The more dangerous work, such as removing radioactive materials and doing maintenance on the reactors involves high radiation and high heat conditions, and so workers are sent in for only a few minutes at a time, with frequent replacements. Thus, they are in effect “throwaway commodities” gathered from the lowest classes of society, often from the ranks of the poor and homeless. The subcontractors often engage in practices such as using the resident certificates of other people to gather such workers, and in order to avoid making it difficult to get new contracts, send these unsuspecting people into harm’s way without the proper radiation meters and alarms. The number of power company employees who are exposed to significant radiation is few, with more than 96% of those exposed coming from those employed by these subcontractors.

Regular employees of nuclear power plants have a radiation exposure limit of 50 mSv over a 5-year period, or an average of 10 mSv per year. But with the accident at Fukushima Daiichi, that limit was raised to 100 mSv per year up to a total of 250 mSv allowable. This amounts to a form of murder. Unless these workers overcame their fears and went all out, there was the danger that the reactors could explode, leading to a truly monumental disaster. Since the accident up until mid-October, a total of 450,000 people worked on this situation, with most of them being exposed to harsh conditions and grave danger.

Some of the technicians have likewise been exposed to high levels as they labored feverishly to fix broken equipment, etc. Their strong sense of responsibility led them to sacrificially give of themselves to bring things under control and back to a safe condition. Even knowing the dangers, they have willingly sacrificed their own safety to prevent further damage to all of us.

Now, let’s turn to the issue of compensation and health maintenance for workers exposed to radiation. Prior to the March 11 earthquake, there were more than 400,000 workers who were registered with the center established by the Radiation Effects Association, a foundation established with funds from the electric power industry. This number exceeds the number of radiation sufferers from the Hiroshima and Nagasaki bombs, and that number has grown further to some 470,000. However, unlike the “hibakusha health card” received by the atomic bomb victims, along with similar health cards for victims of industrial exposure to benzene, inhaled dust, etc., the “radiation management health cards” received by these
workers have no legal backing, and so they are of little value in helping these workers receive workers’ compensation or actually manage their own health. This system mainly serves as a means to help the nuclear industry keep track of the amount of radiation workers are exposed to and determine what those effects are on the health of these people. Prior to March 11, of the approximately 400,000 workers registered in the system, only about 10 had been recognized by workers’ compensation insurance. Those in the system, particularly the day laborers who are sent into the most dangerous jobs, are basically abandoned. Recently, the voice of these workers is finally beginning to be heard, and so the Ministry of Health, Labor and Welfare appears to be moving towards a system of care for these people. We beneficiaries of electric power have a responsibility to encourage our government to protect the lives and human rights of these workers who have been exposed to radiation.

4. Discrimination against local citizens
The very act of the central authorities having brought nuclear power plants to rural areas is a form of discrimination against the local residents. They bulldozed places of beauty in the Sanriku area, with its bountiful sea and mountains, its peaceful fishing villages, established local industries, and the local and varied cultures, along with the bonds that tied communities together and replaced them with the authoritarian rule of national interest, the “drug” of financial subsidies, poisonous radiation and falsehood of safety. What remains after the hydrogen explosions of the reactors is the serious radiation pollution, the split-up of families and communities as they evacuate the area, and the fear of genetic damage particularly in unborn babies and even young children.

Even within this situation, however, the government claims they’ll be able to stabilize the situation by getting the reactor temperatures below 100º C, but this is really a posturing to support the contract they have to export two nuclear reactors to Vietnam. This exporting of nuclear technology has as its showpiece economic development, but its real effect is just a new form of colonialism, as it puts the economy, industry and culture of the receiving countries under the influence of Japan. We need to ask whether Japan, which can’t even maintain its own nuclear safety, isn’t bringing in great danger to a country that doesn’t have the technical skills to deal with it.

Coming back to the situation in Japan, the government took the step of broadening the disaster evacuation zones around nuclear power plants in late October. The immediate evacuation zone was left the same radius of 5 km, but the zone in which evacuation or remaining indoors was expanded from 8 – 10 km up to 30 km, and the region in which iodine tablets would be stored for immediate use was expanded to 50 km. When one considers the danger of radioactive materials, these actions are way too late and way too narrow in scope. Immediately after the accident, when the radiation was at its highest, they did not let people know of the danger or immediately evacuate the, instead letting them be exposed. What I see in these measures is simply a further attempt to hide the seriousness of the damage. What takes precedence is the promotion of nuclear power, which only makes matters worse.

Likewise, at the end of October, they announced the plan to store radiation-polluted materials in a medium-term storage area to be built by 2014. It would be made of concrete and have an area of between 3 and 5 square kilometers. Materials from within the prefecture would be stored there for 30 years prior to being finally disposed of outside of the prefecture. In reality, these materials would be stored for there for at least 30 years, because there is no guarantee that they would be disposed of outside the prefecture.

5. A ray of hope
Citizens who have been consigned to live with radiation are now beginning to lift their voices in anger, as they band together with like-minded fellow citizens to join forces against the deception and violence of the nuclear industry and to demand their rights:
What are you going to do with our home towns? Don’t fudge on the radioactive cesium pollution! We’re going to fight for compensation! Etc. These are basic to the fight for justice, but they also are a self-recognition of their own human dignity. Such citizens are standing up in Fukushima, but also from around the nation. We may be a minority still, but this just may be the beginnings of a kind of revolution. We may be just “small herds” and even individual “small persons,” but we are of value still and we value each other. Unfortunately, we may be faced with only the two choices of “life or nuclear power,” but this is what brings us together and pushes us forward. In reality, the radiation is not only in eastern Japan, but has been carried far and wide by air and sea currents, and through foods, cars and equipment shipped from there. So we are all in this together, and this is what draws citizens from around the nation together in solidarity. We are different as individuals and groups, but we recognize and value each, all the while being united by our decision to “choose life over nuclear power.” It is my hope that through this we can build a new society, where the most valued people will be those who have suffered under the reign of deception and violence of the powerful. It is those people who long for and search after a just society that values human lives. These are the kinds of people that the Lord Jesus stood with as he shared their grief, and that gave them the strength to stand up against tyranny.

Support is certainly not limited to this country, as words of encouragement have come from around the world. Crossing barriers of ethnicity and nationality, they say, “You are not alone. We are standing with you.” Likewise, they are generous with logistic support, even though we don’t really deserve it. After all, as a people we were ignorant and passive about our nation’s reckless pursuit of nuclear energy, which resulted in suffering in other nations from radiation exposure. And now, we haven’t been able to prevent those in power in our nation from exporting that technology to other countries. Thus, we see a sense of forgiveness in the support we get from people of other countries. God is leading us into a new life through his Spirit as he too forgives us of our wrongs. That new life is one of receiving one another and cooperating together rather than trying to outcompete with others in a colonial-style domination.

As a result of the “Christian Forum for Abolition of Nuclear Power” held last April that I mentioned above, Seungkoo Choi, who has been leading the human rights movement for Koreans in Kawasaki for many years, founded a new network, called the “Christian Network for Nuke-Free Earth.” [This is the English title they give it. The Japanese name literally translates as “Network of Christians Critical of the Nuclear Power System.”] This network focuses on the issue of nations such as Japan, Korea and the US competing with each other to export nuclear power technology to developing countries and in the process dominating them economically. In consultation with members of the network and with the support of the NCCJ Committee on Peace and Nuclear issues, Choi is planning on travelling to Korea and Mongolia to establish solidarity with grass root movements against nuclear power in these countries. Korea has plans to double the 27 reactors it already has and to increase its efforts to export that technology abroad. Mongolia is a uranium producing country and both Japan and the US are looking towards it as a site for nuclear waste disposal.

I think that my experiencing the quake of March 11 with Chong-II Lee while in Osaka and then working with Seungkoo Choi to found the Christian Network for Nuke-Free Earth were not just coincidences. Colonialism and nuclear power share a relationship. Thus, I feel that one message the Church as a whole has a responsibility to disseminate around the world through its worldwide connections concerns this issue. It is not that I have confidence in our ability to do that, but that I pray that God will have compassion on us and use us as a means to that end.
Both from within and outside of Japan, the demands for liberalization of electric power through new forms of generation and improvements in efficiency, along with movements towards local production and consumption of energy designed to reduce the need to send power over long distances, is showing that we can get along without nuclear power. Moreover, more and more people are now seeing it for what it is, namely the immoral and anti-human imposition of poisonous waste on future generations for hundreds of thousands of years. Several countries have already declared their intentions to eliminated nuclear power, and I think it is only a matter of time before our country does too.

Jesus taught us to learn the most important things from flowers of the field, the birds of the air and little children (Mat. 6:26-30, Mark 10:13-16). The small living things in nature praise their Creator, and little children know from the time they are born to depend on their elders and also on the God of love and blessings. Adults protecting children from radiation and the unborn from genetic damage leads to a life in which the small and vulnerable are the center of society and in effect lead us forward.

In the midst of nations vying for power, the prophet Isaiah shared his vision of a future with no exploitation and a world of love, freedom and equality.

The wolf will live with the lamb, the leopard will lie down with the goat, the calf and the lion and the yearling together; and a little child will lead them. The cow will feed with the bear, their young will lie down together, and the lion will eat straw like the ox. The infant will play near the hole of the cobra, and the young child put his hand into the viper’s nest. They will neither harm nor destroy all on my holy mountain, for the earth will be full of the knowledge of the LORD as the waters cover the sea. (Isa 11:6-9)

Isaiah calls on us to a world of life dependent on God, who will have compassion on his people, forgive their sins and bring a world of peace. In the words of Isaiah, we can see them leading to the manger of Jesus.

Buraku Liberation Center Report

Akira Kobayashi, Director

The 37th General Assembly Period of the Kyodan began last October and will continue for 2 years until the next General Assembly in October 2012. The BLC management committee meetings are held every January and June, and are made up of the 17 district representatives elected at the General Assembly plus the chairperson of the BLC Activities Committee, for a total of 18 members. This year, due to the Great Eastern Japan Earthquake and resulting nuclear power plant disaster, the June meeting had to be postponed until late August.

This year’s activities included the yearly events BLC prepares, such as the “Day of Prayer (for the end of discrimination)” Worship Service Outline for local churches to use, the Youth Seminar, the various presentations of the “Liberation Play,” and the publication of our pamphlets and newsletters, but the highlight of this year was the “2011 Kanto District Buraku Liberation Caravan.” The planning for this caravan was a joint venture between the Kanto District and the BLC that began about 2 years earlier.

The caravan took place during the 10 days from June 25 to July 4, beginning at the Omiya Church and travelling through the 5 prefectures of the Kanto District (Saitama, Gunma, Tochigi, Ibaraki and Niigata) for a total of 1177 km, holding events in 22 locations with a total attendance of 1373. The 5 members of the entourage included 1 student intern, and their route circled around the district, beginning in Omiya (Saitama),
going on to Mito (Ibaraki), the former Ashio Copper Mine (Tochigi), Sado Island (Niigata), Kiryu Tobu (Gunma) and ending up at the Sayama Church back in Saitama. The route included 3 educational field trips for participants to learn about the history of specific instances of discrimination, and the various meetings along the way were well received. The participants were: Makoto Higashitani (the leader from Osaka), Mitsuhiro Inukai (from Chikuho in Fukuoka), Kensuke Koito (from Sakai, Osaka), Masataka Yamaguchi (a seminary student at the Rural Evangelism Seminary in Tokyo), and Shoki Masuda (a student at Doshisha University, living in Shiga). A full report of the caravan is in the process of editing and is due to be released next spring.

In other news, the incident reported elsewhere in this issue of the arrest of Rev. Takao Otani and 6 others on April 5 in response to their involvement in the July 2010 demonstration at the Haginochaya Polling Station at the time of the upper house election is of particular concern. The pretext is that this was obstruction of the duties of the polling officers. Rev. Otani and 3 others were held for 111 days, while the other 3 were released earlier, after only 21 days in confinement. Voices of protest have been raised from the Osaka District and other supporters from around the nation, and preparations are being made for the defense to be made at the joint trial coming up next January.

A similar instance of the abuse of governmental powers designed to suppress citizen movements occurred recently in relation to the “Lake Biwa ‘Sayonara’ to Nuclear Power Plants” gathering in Shiga. A group of rightwing racists tried to attack a Christian youth leaving the gathering, and when a pastor we’ll refer to as Rev. T tried to prevent that, he injured an attacker, who then filed a complaint against Rev. T. The police held Rev. T in custody for 12 days. These represent the kind of repression that is happening around the nation, and so while governmental officials are encouraging civic spirit in the recovery from the recent earthquake with slogans like “Hang in there Japan,” these kinds of incidents are also occurring with increasing frequency.

This year is the 30th anniversary of the beginning of the Buraku Liberation Center, as we have endeavored to learn from Jesus, who walked together with the weak and oppressed, and to seek his gospel. We want to continue our efforts to prayerfully pursue the elimination of buraku discrimination and indeed all forms of discrimination.

Crowned With Thorns Editorial Committee


We appreciate your comments and suggestions concerning this newsletter and how to make improvements.

Like so many deserving ministries around the world in this time of economic uncertainty, the BLC is likewise feeling the budget squeeze. We ask for your prayer support, that God will give us the wisdom to make the best use of the resources we have, as well as increasing those resources. As always, contributions from sources both inside and outside of Japan are deeply appreciated. We now have a means for cashing US dollar checks without incurring banking fees, and so even small contributions are helpful.