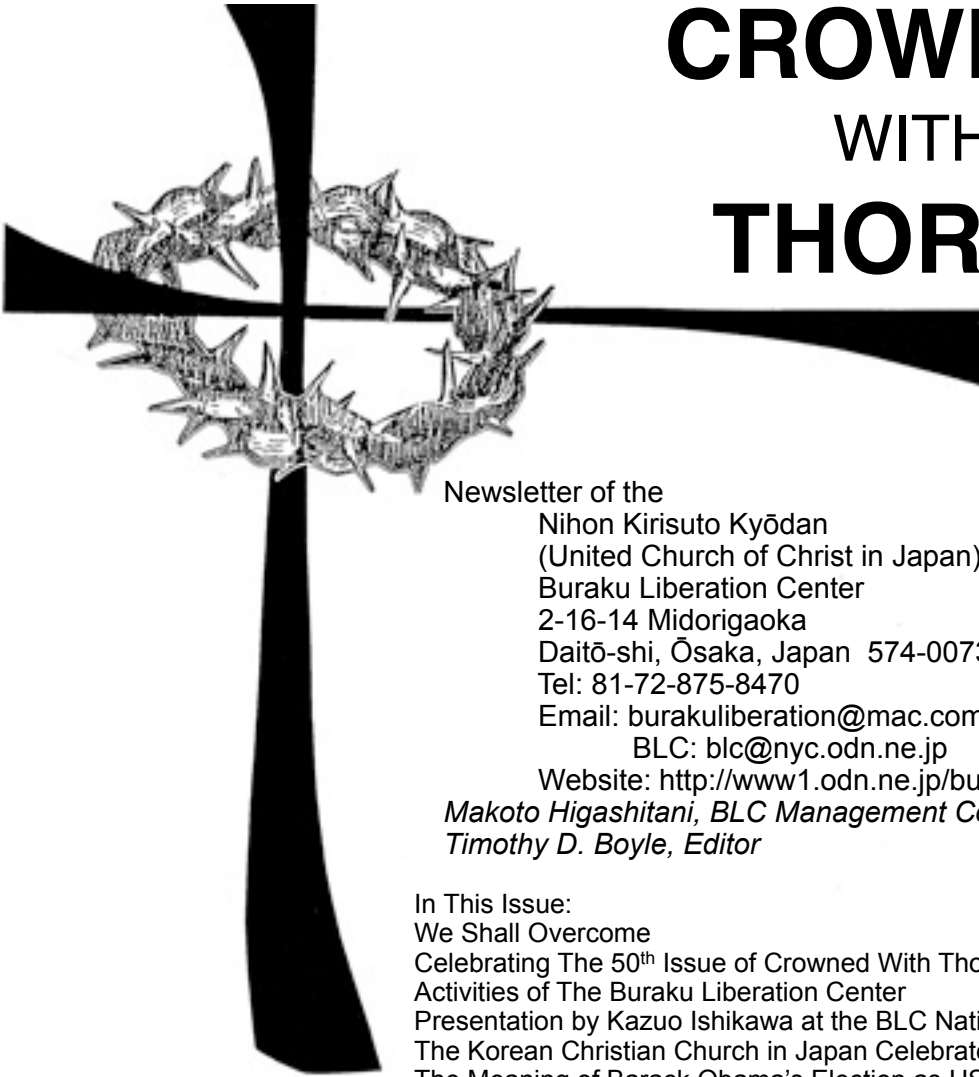




CROWNED WITH THORNS



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We Shall Overcome



The two main ways that buraku discrimination occurs in today's Japan is through marriage and employment discrimination. If someone of buraku descent intends to marry someone of non-buraku descent, the non-buraku person's parents often utilize a "background check" to determine ancestry, and if buraku roots are detected, they then put great pressure on the couple to break the relationship off. Companies also use such "background checks" to weed out "undesirables," of which buraku descent is high on the list, irrespective of that person's abilities. Needless to say, while the ideal is to have an egalitarian society that doesn't judge a person by his or her ancestry, one practical solution to the abuse of these "background checks" would be to make it much more difficult to do. The *koseki* (family registry) system is what allows these ancestry checks, and while recent improvements have made it illegal for 3rd parties to see one's *koseki*, the very existence of this information guarantees that those seeking to abuse the system will find a way. Japan's *koseki* system is a throwback to its feudal past, and its continued existence has been a major obstacle in the road towards eliminating another throwback to its feudal past — that of buraku discrimination. A major overhaul of this system would certainly go a long way towards reducing buraku discrimination.



Celebrating The 50th Issue of Crowned With Thorns

It has been 25 years since the first issue of CWT was issued on Feb. 1, 1984. In commemoration of this milestone, CWT asked Kyōdan moderator, Rev. Nobuhisa Yamakita, to write a brief statement for our international audience.

It is a great joy for the Kyōdan that Crowned With Thorns is publishing its 50th issue, and I am very thankful for that. This is because “Buraku Liberation” is a very important mission issue for the Kyōdan that CWT has consistently dealt with. And because it is in English, CWT opens up a window of communication to the world at large in promoting an “open Kyōdan,” in which discrimination is overcome — something that we long for deeply.

We can never forget the great impact missionary Robert Stieber had in promoting this cause, and I thank God that he has raised up others to carry on the work in a variety of ways. Since there were several years when no issues of CWT were published, it is a great joy to see it now continuing.

While the reality of discrimination, which is produced by the darkness of sin, continues on, we nevertheless continue to place our trust in the Lord Jesus Christ and his atonement as symbolized in his “crown of thorns” and his

cross. It is my hope that those connected with this publication will continue their efforts to carry on the fight to eliminate buraku discrimination.

As the Kyōdan will soon be taking on the leadership role in the “Dōshuren” [The Association of Religious Faiths Dealing With the Problem of “Dōwa” (a euphemism for buraku discrimination)], we will need to increase our efforts in this area of mission. Rev. Makoto Kobayashi will be installed as the chair of the Dōshuren, and the Kyōdan will take the responsibility for its office for the next 2 years. We will be working together with not only other Christian denominations but also other faiths, such as Buddhism and Shintoism, in this effort. I look forward to “Crowned With Thorns” publicizing this widely to its readers around the world.

May the “Lord of the Crown of Thorns” bless this publication and use it mightily in promoting his goals of a society without discrimination.

Activities of The Buraku Liberation Center

We want to commemorate this 50th issue of CWT with an overview of the numerous activities that the BLC engages in, which are all designed to further our overarching goal of eliminating buraku discrimination both in the Japanese church and the society at large. There are numerous ways, of course, that the staff and committee members are involved in liberation activities on an individual basis in their churches and elsewhere, but the following is a list of specific events and activities of the BLC.

1. Involvement with the UCCJ as a whole
In 2000, the Kyōdan adopted a “Buraku Liberation Policy” and committed itself to finding ways to actualizing it through such events as local seminars on buraku discrimination. The BLC participates in these to the extent possible. As an

example, we performed our “liberation play,” entitled “The First Sign” at such a seminar on Nov. 20, 2007 at such a seminar in Sendai in the Tōhoku District. On the national scale, another important activity is the annual “Day of Prayer for Buraku Liberation” held on the second Sunday of July. Every Kyōdan church is encouraged to set aside this Sunday for an emphasis on buraku liberation, and the BLC produces a pamphlet with worship aids and information to help churches to do this. We are thankful that numerous churches around the country participated in this.

2. Liberation Plays
Every 2 years, the BLC produces a full-length “liberation play” that appeals to people to rid themselves of discriminatory



attitudes. The present play, “40 Days in the Wilderness,” was first presented at the 2008 General Assembly on Oct. 21. It was well received by the 215 people in attendance and the “Kyōdan Shinpō” newspaper gave it a glowing review. (See article on page 13.)

3. National Conferences

Begun in 1987, the BLC has put together a national conference every other year, with one exception. We held our 10th such conference June 6-11, 2008, under the banner, “Buraku Discrimination Within Myself: A Link to Liberation.” Working closely together with the Higashi Chūgoku District to organize the conference at the Okayama Church, this was our most successful conference to date, with a total attendance of 203.

4. Overnight Seminars

Begun in 1982, the BLC organizes overnight seminars at a variety of locations. Our 2008 overnight seminar was in Shiga. At these seminars, participants listen to various presentations and discuss the issues involved.

5. Monthly Prayer Breakfast

Every first Friday of the month, clergy and laity from churches in the area (including non-Kyōdan churches) gather at the BLC office for a prayer meeting followed by a simple breakfast. Typically, 10 to 15 persons attend, with one person giving a meditation or short sermon followed by a time of prayer.



6. Youth Seminars

Also begun in 1996, the BLC has held a youth seminar every summer to help develop leadership for the future. Through a study of the buraku discrimination issue and the buraku liberation movement, young people are challenged to think of how they will live

their lives. The 11th such seminar was held from August 5 – 8, 2008 at the Izumi church with a total participation of 74.



7. Volunteers and Interns

Last summer, the BLC hosted a summer intern from a Kyōdan-related seminary, who was involved in the youth seminar and other such activities, in addition to helping out with office work. Likewise, we have other volunteers who come in on occasion to help with mailing and sorting, etc.

8. Publications

Copies of “Kaihō e no Habataki” (“The Fluttering of Wings Towards Liberation”) are sent to each of the 1726 local churches of the Kyōdan and to some 1300 individuals, organizations, schools etc. A total of 5000 copies are printed 3 issues per year. In addition, copies of “Buraku Kaihō Zenkoku Tsūshin” (“Buraku Liberation National Communications”) are sent as a “fellowship newsletter” to people and organizations that have attended BLC events or donated money for BLC activities. We feature article series on such things as specific reports on how we are implementing the “Buraku Liberation Policies” of the BLC, case studies of buraku discrimination with testimonies as to how that affected the people involved, and “Seeking Solidarity in the Midst of a Discriminatory Society.” We print 3600 copies of this publication 3 times per year. Lastly, then, is this English newsletter you are reading, “Crowned With Thorns,” which is likewise published 3 times per year. We print 900 or 1000 copies, depending on timing.

9. Website

While the BLC has had a simple Japanese website for several years, a much more



sophisticated website that will include an English section is coming on line sometime in 2009. The web address will be: <http://www1.odn.ne.jp/burakuliberation>

10. The Movement to Demand a Retrial in the Sayama Incident Case

The BLC is continuing its efforts to contribute to the movement to demand the courts to grant a retrial to Kazuo Ishikawa, who was clearly convicted for a crime he had nothing to do with based solely on the convenience of pinning the blame on someone deemed expendable due to their being from the local buraku. This is a critically important case because it represents the discriminatory attitudes of Japanese society as a whole, and thus the BLC, along with the Kyōdan as a whole, is involved in numerous activities in support of this goal. For instance, we collected signatures in our churches and on the streets on a petition to the court, and were part of a team that delivered more than 1 million signatures to the court on May 23, 2007.

11. Human Rights Education at Seminaries and other schools

Begun in 1996, this program aims at raising awareness of buraku discrimination and other discrimination issues among future pastors by doing seminars in Kyōdan-related seminaries and other schools. The 21st such seminar was held on November 10, 2008 in Tokyo, with ten students in attendance. BLC's Kazuhiro Tanimoto was the main speaker, with Tōkyō Union Theological Seminary professor Yuichi Ōzumi giving the opening worship service message and Tomio Takayanagi of the Rural Evangelism Seminary giving a report on human rights education in seminaries.

12. Caravan

This coming June, the BLC will be embarking on a 10-day "caravan" in which a team of participants will travel around the island of Shikoku holding a variety of meetings in Kyōdan churches throughout the island. A much more ambitious 82-day caravan was held in 1992 and went throughout Japan, but this will be the first time since then.

13. BLC cooperation with other organizations

The BLC works in solidarity with a number of other anti-discrimination and human rights organizations. The following is a list of organizations the BLC is directly involved in.

- a. Association of Christian Organizations
Dealing With the Buraku Issue
- b. National Association of Christian Schools
Human Rights Education Conference
- c. The National Christian Council in Japan
and the NCC's Kansai Youth Council
- d. The Association of Religious Faiths
Dealing With the Problem of "Dōwa" (a euphemism for buraku discrimination)
- e. The Council on Buraku Liberation for the Daitō and Shijōnawate Region (the area that the BLC is located in)

There are numerous other organizations we cooperate with in somewhat less direct ways. These include organizing a national campaign to raise funds for tsunami relief in India, particularly to help the discriminated-against Dalit community. Approximately \$70,000 was raised to help the Church of South India deal with both the immediate needs as well as the long-term needs, such as building a school to educate Dalit and other disadvantaged children.

Likewise, when it comes to other discrimination issues, the BLC actively supports organizations working on those issues. Within the Kyōdan, there have been various incidents of discrimination based on such things as gender and sexual orientation. For instance, at the 2006 General Assembly of the Kyōdan, there was a discriminatory statement made against homosexuals, and so partially in response to that, the BLC sponsored a series of 5 seminars on the issue of homosexual discrimination.

Another long-standing issue the Kyōdan has been involved in is that of seeking war reparations, and the BLC has participated in that as a member of the larger committee. Primary among the various issues related to that has been the issue of the so-called "comfort women" (sexual slavery) instituted by the Japanese military during WWII. Other such involvements, both as an organization and as individuals associated with the BLC, are too numerous to mention.



Presentation by Kazuo Ishikawa at the BLC National Conference

(The following is an abbreviated translation of Kazuo Ishikawa's presentation to a full house at the Okayama Church on the opening evening of the BLC National Conference last June. He shared many interesting and inspiring details of his relationship with his benefactor guard that we are not at liberty to put in print, and so what we share with our readers is the rest of his talk, which detailed why he was made into the scapegoat and what happened to him in prison.)

Introduction by Toshikazu Hihara

The "Sayama Incident" dates back some 45 years ago, when Mr. Ishikawa was first arrested on an unrelated charge. But there was the perception that this murder must surely have been the work of someone from the buraku, and so the police concentrated their investigation on the local buraku. It was clearly a case of buraku discrimination, and so we have invited Mr. Ishikawa to give his presentation to us.

My name is Toshikazu Hihara, and I'm a member of the Akashi Church in Hyōgo. I first met Ishikawa in 1990 when I visited him in the Chiba Prison. There were 5 of us from the Kyōdan, and when he came into the room we were in, he was smiling and thanked us for coming. I was really attracted to his voice and my first thought was that this man was certainly not guilty of the Sayama murder. I had, of course, studied about the incident at the Akashi Church, but as I saw his smiling face, that was my first thought.

This year, as usual, we had the big rally on May 23 in Tōkyō, and I went to it. Ishikawa san is now 69 years old. Maybe I shouldn't say his age, but he is in very good health. Nevertheless, we want to make this push for our third appeal for a retrial our final push. He has told us this many times, but he wants his victory through a non-guilty verdict to be shared by us all. So, let's welcome Mr. Ishikawa now.

Ishikawa

First I would like to thank you all for inviting me to this 2008 National Conference to make my presentation. I look forward to being with you these three days.

It has been 14 years now since I was finally paroled from prison due to your efforts and that of my other supporters. Nevertheless, I was

arrested and sentenced for a crime I had nothing to do with, and so in order to even come here to be with you, I had to go the parole officer to get permission. If I plan to travel outside of Saitama prefecture for more than a week, and of course, if I wanted to travel outside of Japan, I must first get written permission from the parole officer. Thus, I am still forced to live this difficult and inconvenient life. As I look back at all that happened, I believe that it was because I had so little education and knowledge of society that it was my fate to be made the scapegoat for this crime.

While I myself am totally innocent of that crime, there was someone else out there who did commit this murder. But the crux of the problem was that when the culprit came to pick up the ransom money he had demanded for the kidnapped victim, the police botched the trap they had set for him. He interacted with the victim's older sister for some 10 minutes that night, while about 40 police were stationed in the area to try to catch him. But somehow, he was able to escape, and they missed their chance to catch him. Thus, they were under severe pressure to solve the case quickly, and so that is why they picked our near-by buraku to look for someone without an alibi. I was one of 4 such buraku men who were apprehended.

One thing that really bothers me still is that I was led to believe that my older brother was the culprit. The only things the culprit left behind during his escape were his footprints. The police told me that the plaster casts they took of the culprit's shoes matched those taken from shoes they had confiscated from our house. I could see that they were my brother's, but they told me to try them on. Now, even though I am rather short in stature, I have relatively large feet, and I could not get into them. While I later doubted that there was



really a match at all, this made me think that my brother might have done it. The investigator told me that these shoes matched the prints left by the culprit, and that they were confiscated from our house.

Now, I was arrested on May 23, but the kidnapping had occurred on May 1 and the next night, May 2, is when the ransom exchange was to take place. I remember that on the day of the kidnapping, my older brother was not at home with the rest of us. The 6 other members of our family shared a meal together in front of the TV. Thus, that also was a factor. I still didn't want to give in to their interrogation, and I resisted their psychological torture for almost a month. But I was told that they would then arrest my brother, which presented a real problem, because he was the only one with an income and he supported our family. So, that was foremost on my mind.

The main interrogator, Detective Hasebe, bargained with me, saying, "If you plead guilty, we won't arrest your brother." He also promised I'd be released in ten years. And so I agreed to "become the culprit." [Editor's note: This was all done in isolation with no lawyer to defend him and nothing recorded for later verification. They also broke their verbal "promise" by demanding the death penalty.]

Under normal circumstances, I would have had a team of lawyers who would have defended me. But at the time, I had no understanding of judges, prosecutors and lawyers. In fact, I had been duped into trusting the police and distrusting the lawyers who became involved. During the initial trial, nobody but my immediate family members were allowed to visit me, and after my parents and sisters came separately, my older brother was finally

allowed to visit. Naturally, I asked him if he had done it. I asked him where he was on May 1, as he had come back very late. He said that he to collect payments at 4 different places, which took a lot of time, and so that is why he was so late in getting back. I then found out that he had been able to prove his alibi through that very fact to the Sayama police, and so I then realized that he also could not have been involved. Frankly, I now realize that if my older brother had not been able to visit me, I probably would have gone to my execution believing I was protecting him and my family.

I realized that in order to appeal to the public, I would have to learn how to read and write. The guard who was in charge of me was the one who taught me. I had to practice the characters I was learning by writing on the stiff tissue paper that was available in the prison.

I was one of about 80 deathrow prisoners in the Tōkyō prison. But I used that time to practice writing. I don't know how many thousands of characters per day that I practiced, but in copying characters, I gradually learned them. Everyday, at 5 pm, my benefactor guard would take all of the paper I had used, as I was not supposed to have more than 7 sheets of paper a day. So, I made sure to never have more than 7 sheets of paper in view at one time, putting any more than that in my drawer and giving them to the guard the next morning. That routine continued for 8 years.

I grew up in a section of the town of Sayama that was on one side of the railroad tracks of the Shinjuku Seibu Line running from Shinjuku (Tōkyō) out to Kawagoe (in Saitama). There were just 58 households in our discriminated-against buraku, with not one of our people residing outside of those narrow confines. Even when I was going to school, I wasn't allowed to buy anything at shops outside of that district. And if I ever tried to go across to the other side of the tracks, older boys living over there would always chase me, calling out something like, "Don't come over here. You all stink!"

At that time, however, I did not understand the reasons for this. If I came near, they would throw rocks at me and if I didn't run away, they would even chase me with sticks. I always seemed to have scrapes and bruises that were healing. Naturally, I would tell my parents about



what had happened, but they never did tell me that the real reason was that we were burakumin and so were discriminated against on that basis. It wasn't until I began to be able to read and write that I found out the truth through the Buraku Liberation League. It was in 1969, when they sent me a book on buraku history, that I learned about it and first realized that I had been born into a discriminated-against buraku. And if the supporters I had from the Japan Communist Party had been the only ones involved, I just might not have ever known the true nature of a discriminated-against buraku and that I had been born into one.

In that book of buraku history, I learned that Sugawara 4-chome, Irumagawa-machi, Irumagun, Saitama Prefecture, was a discriminated-against buraku, and that it was because I was born there that the kids from outside that district had bullied me. So, the next time my parents came to visit me, I asked them about it. They apologized for not telling me, but they said that they were afraid that if they went to complain, it would just lead to more bullying. They had decided that they would raise their children thinking that if they didn't tell them about buraku discrimination they wouldn't know about it. They were sorry about that then, and asked for my forgiveness.

But there was something in me that didn't want to let go of this. When my father died, I, of course, was saddened, and it was at that time that I wrote my own "farewell message" with quite mixed emotions. It took me a whole night to write out my letter, "To all of those to whom I am indebted during my lifetime," and I belabored the point about not being informed that our district was a discriminated-against buraku when I was bullied, putting the blame on my father. I think he must be in heaven now still regretting that he couldn't tell me.

When my father died, he was 88 years old, and, in fact, not one in my family has died before turning 80. Thus, I think that is one reason I am still so healthy now. My father's father lived to be 96 and so did my father's older brother. They all lived a long time, and so I think I may even make it to 100.

But I do have diabetes. While in prison, I was concentrating on studying so much that I

almost never exercised. I wanted so much to be able to communicate the truth to the outside world that I focused solely on learning how to read and write, and so I simply didn't exercise. The result was that my weight ballooned to over 70 kg. When the doctor said I had diabetes, I knew I had to do something about it for the sake of all my supporters on the outside. I concentrated on building up my health, and I cut my calorie intake by eating only twice a day. I still continue that practice of eating only 2 meals per day. A fellow sufferer of diabetes sent me some herbal medicine, and I learned how to count calories and what to eat and not to eat. I weigh in now at only about 44 kg and eat almost no meat or fish.

Of course, when I came out of prison, I was faced with many temptations. For the first 3 months or so, I wanted so much to eat this or that, but I felt that to give in would be to lose. Thus, I was barely able to resist, and now I eat only two 600-calorie meals each day. I have brought with me 6 meals for our time together, and so no matter how delicious the food you all are eating looks, I won't be eating anything else.

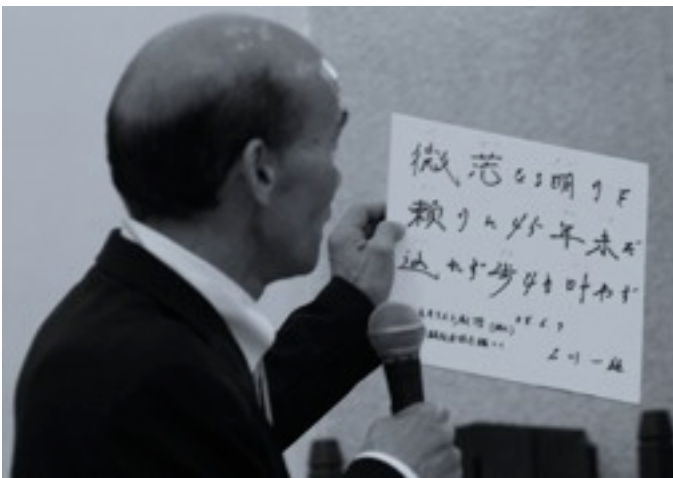
When I was paroled from prison 14 years ago, I was already down to 52 kg in weight. Another reason I had been able to do that was that I engaged in heavy labor. In fact, I asked to do hard labor because of my diabetes, and I worked in the laundry where I carried loads of up to 100 kg. But as I've come out into society, I no longer do such heavy labor. So I really watch my diet, avoiding meat, and I jog 5 km every day. Now, before I got married, I typically ran those 5 km in about 16 minutes, but now it takes about 20. Even though I have dropped down another 8 or 9 kg in weight, my time is getting slower. But I really want to maintain my strength, and so even though I can't go jogging so easily while at a conference like this, I do 200 pushups. And so I'm able to maintain my weight at 43 or 44 kg.

One of the reasons I want so much to do this is that I feel a great debt of gratitude to you all for your support in helping me fight for a retrial and a verdict of innocent. One way of repaying that debt of gratitude is to maintain my health so that I can continue the fight. That is why I didn't eat the prepared meal with you



tonight but only what I had brought with me in accordance with my strict diet. It looked good, and so of course I wanted to eat it, but I have made this commitment to stick to my diet.

Whenever I am invited to make a presentation such as this, I write a short poem like this. It was my guard who not only taught me how to write but also encouraged me study a Chinese character dictionary to learn classical writing style and expression. It took me some 15 years of reading and practicing every day, but I learned all of those characters while sitting in prison.



Now, I was not able to go to middle school even one day while growing up, and so when I win a retrial and am proved innocent, I think I would like to take 4 years and work my way through night school. I already know how to write characters on the same level as most of you. But if I could go to middle school, I could learn math, science, social studies and English. If I get the chance to go, I promise you that I'll be able to show you a report card I could be proud of. While there isn't such a night school in Saitama, there are 6 in Tōkyō. In fact, the principals of those 6 schools have actually visited me to personally invite me to enroll. The only one in reasonable commuting distance from my home, however, is the one in Arakawa, and so once my name is cleared, that is what I would like to do.

I have here two poems that I'd like to share with you. The first one says, "Spring is near. 45 years of seeking freedom; hope through sweat." Now, the image of "spring"

here is not referring to a season of the year but to my being declared innocent.

The other one is, "Getting direction from that vague light for 45 years, but not yet reaching it. The journey is not yet over." [The word translated as "vague" ("bibō") is itself an obscure word not commonly used.] You may wonder why someone like me with so little formal education would use such a word as "bibō," but I've written on the back here the dictionary definition.

The point I'm making is that it is through this that I've become well educated and have learned about the world. Now, if I had not been dragged into this Sayama Incident, I can very well imagine myself as a 69-year-old man who would have known little of the movement to eliminate discrimination that you are all involved in. Thus, while those 32 years behind bars were indeed difficult ones, there was also much good that came about because of it. Learning how to read and write was of such inestimable value that it was worth 32 years of my life. My life is one in which I have received so much.

I'd like to speak now a bit about why it was that I was the one chosen for this frame-up. After the victim's body was discovered and the family acquaintance committed suicide shortly thereafter, the National Public Safety Commissioner told those under him that he wanted a live suspect for this crime. I still have a copy of the paper in which his words were reported. It was because of that pressure that the Sayama police changed their focus to look for a live suspect, in spite of the fact that there were 4 suicides that took place in that time frame. But a dead culprit was not going to be of use to them and so, in the end, they decided to focus on the local discriminated-against buraku.

One of the persons who had committed suicide was a man who had been living at the victim's house, and so during those 32 years in prison, I thought it likely that he was the real culprit. I had learned that for one thing, it is clear that the culprit knew where the victim always parked the new bicycle her father had bought for her when she entered high school. Likewise, we know that this man who later



committed suicide had left his company early that day at about 3 pm. Many other relevant facts, including that his blood type was B, and the various facts concerning the layout of the land, would all come out if the court would just do a fact-finding investigation. And in addition to this man, there were 3 other men who had also committed suicide during that time frame who could also possibly be the culprit. One jumped in front of a train, one stabbed himself with a knife and the other drank poison. At any rate, a thorough investigation would reveal the truth.

From my perspective, whether the judge is lenient or strict, if the judge would proceed according to the law, there would be a thorough fact-finding investigation. Likewise, with the advances in scientific investigation techniques during the last 45 years, I have confidence that I could easily be exonerated by such things as DNA analysis. The various crime-scene evidence that was collected presumably still exists and could be analyzed. Certainly, the real culprit's DNA would be shown to be different from my own. If I were the real culprit, then DNA from my sweat or whatever would still be present on her clothing. And I've heard that police have been able to do such analysis on samples several decades old.

In fact, along a different line of evidence, a former police investigator who has retired did such a scientific analysis on the handwriting of the ransom note and submitted his findings to the court in support of my innocence. He attested to the fact that my handwriting on the statement I had submitted and that of the ransom note was not written by the same person. [Editor's note: At the time of his arrest, Ishikawa's writing skills were very limited, and totally unlike the free-flowing, cursive style of writing in the ransom note, which could only have been written by someone with at least a standard high-school education.]

Such an investigation would not just end with my exoneration, however, as we still need to find out who the real culprit was. He is probably dead, of course, but still, a thorough fact-finding investigation might be able to figure that out too. For instance, both

the plaster casts of the culprit's footprints and the shoes that were confiscated from my home are still in the court's possession. 3-D scanners now available are able to carefully analyze those, and they will show that my brother's shoes are not the same as those of the culprit. These are the kinds of things technological advances over the last 30 years will allow, and so if they actually do it, these would all naturally be included. And the answer to the question of which is true — the evidence the police presented to show my guilt or the expert testimony of my defense team — will naturally follow.

Needless to say, I really want to be able to present a statement to the court asking judge Hiroshi Kadono to reopen the case. A thorough fact-finding investigation will surely show my innocence. The original ruling states that the victim's fountain pen was found at my house in accordance with my confession. While it is true that the police claim to have found such a pen on top of the doorframe, this was during their third search. Seven detectives had thoroughly searched the house twice before, and one of them testified that there was no such item on the doorframe during those two searches. He testified that he thought it very suspicious, but couldn't say anything about his doubts at the time, due to the gravity of the situation.

The evidence of the victim's watch, which was also said to have been discovered in accordance with my confession, is the same thing. The watch they actually found is a different type than the one the victim's brother is reported to have bought for her as a present. So, again, a thorough fact-finding investigation will reveal that these pieces of evidence were, in fact, manufactured evidence.

I have been appealing to people all over Japan to add their voices to those demanding that the court reopen this case and do a thorough fact-finding investigation. The judge is the one who made the conviction based on this false evidence, and he is the only one who can reopen the case and allow the investigation that will exonerate me. I wish to thank you all for your continued support and for allowing me to share with you this evening.



The Korean Christian Church in Japan Celebrates Its 100th Anniversary in 2008

By Rev. Hideo Tateyama

As I look back on the history of Japanese and Korean relations, one thing that stands out in my mind is summed up in the first article of the constitution of the KCCJ — namely, “freedom of conscience.” It begins with the statement, “Only God has jurisdiction over our conscience,” and it then declares, “We each have the freedom to decide on matters of faith based on our individual consciences.” This not only refers to past history, but it also speaks to our future as well, both as individual Christians and as churches. Every issue we speak to relates back to this basic principle.

Last May, KCCJ moderator Younwon Chung gave the message at the opening worship service of the district conference of the Osaka District of the Kyodan. In his message, he referred to the cooperation of not only the Kyodan and the KCCJ but also to our solidarity with other Christian denominations in the struggle for human rights. He began with an historical overview, beginning with the 1905 Japan-Korea Protection Treaty that in essence took away Korean sovereignty, and he described how many Koreans were forced by circumstances to migrate to Japan. During WWII, that number swelled to over 2.3 million, and after the war, many had little choice but to remain in Japan for economic survival.

These Koreans in Japan faced various forms of political and societal discrimination, and so they had to rise up to fight for their human rights, as was symbolized in the struggle to eliminate the fingerprinting system in the 1980's. Two passages he quoted were Exodus 22:21, “Do not mistreat an alien or oppress him, for you were aliens in Egypt,” and Jeremiah 29:7, “Also, seek the peace and prosperity of the city to which I have carried you into exile.” He said that as Korean Christians “exiled” in Japan, they seek to be a biblical people in the midst of their struggles.

Even though they are a small group with many issues before them, they seek guidance through viewing their history in light of the Bible, seeking to live their lives as God would have them live. Rev. Chung presented to us an image of Christ and his Church living in the reality of history, as he described the struggles of the Korean Christian Church in Japan.

In his message, he also referred to the enforcement of the new immigration regulations from Nov. 2007, in which all foreigners entering Japan, even those with a general permanent residence status, must be fingerprinted and photographed. The rationale was that following the Sept. 11, 2001 terrorist strikes, the US had instituted these same regulations, and so the Japanese government took this opportunity to strengthen its control over foreign nationals in its midst.

The KCCJ held its 14th human rights symposium in April, 2008, with the theme, “Human Rights and the 100th Anniversary of the Korean Christian Church in Japan: Our Calling as a Minority Church.” The main address was given by attorney Masao Niwa under the title, “The New Immigration System and the Human Rights of Koreans in Japan.” He raised several warnings concerning this new system, as he analyzed it from several angles, pointing out the irony of 2008 being the 60th anniversary of the adoption by the United Nations of the “Universal Declaration of Human Rights.”

In addition to this address, numerous other noteworthy reports and proposals were made at this symposium. These included Rev. Chungil Lee's report on how Korean pastors speaking to the freedom and liberation of the Korean people during the years Japan occupied Korea became an underground river that welled up into the human rights mission of the KCCJ today. He also described how



continued efforts to make a reality of the ecumenical movement led to a vision of a multicultural, multiethnic society. Likewise, Nobuyuki Sato gave a presentation on the importance of the experiences of Koreans in Japan in relating to the present influx of foreign workers in Japan. Next, Eunja Lee focused on the ideological role played by the post-war “emperor-as-national-symbol” system and how in light of that, Koreans in Japan need to reevaluate their experiences of discrimination. Finally, Rev. Moonhong Choo spoke from the perspective of the ministries of local Korean Churches in Japan and how the concept of “the minority diaspora” gave it meaning. All of these presentations helped us more fully realize the importance of the KCCJ as a minority church in Japan.

It was with all of this as a background that I approached the special day of October 13, 2008, for that is the day that we gathered together at Hale Chapel on the Osaka Jogakuin College campus to celebrate the 100th Anniversary of the founding of the KCCJ. The chapel was overflowing with KCCJ clergy and laity, along with various guests from both inside Japan and from around the world. The participants responded to a program filled with fervent prayers and praise with great enthusiasm and

joy under a banner that read, “100 Years of Thanksgiving, 100 Year of Hope (1 Thessalonians 5:18).” As a sub-theme, it said, “A Church That Participates in the Mission of the Land to Which It Was Sent (Genesis 45:5).”

What I would like to focus on is that through the witness of the KCCJ, as reported in this convention, testifies to their being in the plan of God through their difficult walk and their commitment to continue to participate in God’s mission — “because it was to save lives that God sent me ahead of you.” (Gen. 45:5) This understanding is also referred to in the 10th article in the proclamation of the convention, which states, “We recognize the mission God has sent us to in this place, and we declare our resolve to put it into action.” It is also stated in the “Mission Principles of the 100th Anniversary” as it gave an overview of the past 100 years and stated in the “Three Characteristics of the KCCJ and Its Calling in Mission” — namely being (1) a minority church participating in the mission of the God who values life, (2) a church that blesses diversity and continues to transform itself into a “servant of reconciliation,” and (3) an ecumenical church seeking to be uniting. It also gives the biblical rationale for these points, and it is my hope that this will be read by many people.

I would like to close my thoughts on this 100th Anniversary Celebration with the first article in the “Mission Principles of the 100th Anniversary,” which states, “The Church is a sign of and forerunner to the Kingdom of God in this world. It is also the vessel through which the Kingdom of God is realized in this world. God has been working in history going ahead of the Church and he has given this calling to the ‘Mission Dei’ to his Church.”





The Meaning of Barack Obama's Election as US President

Rev. Hisashi Kajiwara

[Translator's note: The quotations below are translations back into English from the Japanese translations of the original English, and therefore may be somewhat different from the originals. Likewise, names were written in the "katakana" phonetic system of Japanese, and so they may be misspelled.]

The November 6 issue of the Asahi Shinbun (newspaper) gave the following account of the reactions to the announcements of Barack Obama's election. "Countless African Americans were weeping tears of joy. Holding their placards high, they hugged each other, and sat on the lawns. On that evening of Nov. 4 in Illinois, when Obama stood on the platform to give his victory speech, one wonders how many tears of joy were shed."

The article continued by introducing 59-year-old Gwen Webb, a female pastor in Birmingham, Alabama, telling of how she had shed tears as she recalled the time when as a 14-year-old she had responded to the call from civil rights leader Martin Luther King, Jr. to participate in a demonstration march only to be attacked by police dogs and fire hoses, arrested and then placed in a holding pen for farm animals. She said, "What we did then, and indeed our very lives, was not in vain. Rev. King spoke of his dream, and Obama has become the realization of that dream."

I am now in the process of translating into Japanese an autobiography by Rev. King's father, Martin Luther King Sr. It's entitled, "Daddy King: Autobiography" (William Morrow And Company, Inc., New York, 1980). It contains the following quote from page 102, "Our great sense of frustration, in virtually every area of the South where Negroes lived, came from feeling, at times, that the world we knew should exist might not appear in time for us to see even a part of it."

King Sr. was from the same generation as 106-year-old Ann Nixon Cooper, a black resident of Atlanta, who President-elect Obama referred to in his victory speech as he described her voting in the election. The "great sense of frustration" King referred to was born out of the policies of segregation that

had continued from the days of slavery. Not only did the great expectations weigh heavily upon the minds of African Americans who lived through so many years of this, it also deeply affected those of us on this side of the ocean. While believing in and having strong expectations of Obama's victory, there was still that lingering doubt that caused us to be anxious about the possibility of an upset loss. Thus, we couldn't help but feel a deep sense of relief as we watched the scene of him giving his victory speech.

I am still savoring the realization in Obama's election of the fulfillment of the closing words of Martin Luther King Jr.'s final speech. "I just want to do God's will. And He's allowed me to go up to the mountain. And I've looked over. And I've seen the promised land. I may not get there with you. But I want you to know tonight, that we, as a people, will get to the promised land." It has been 40 years since King spoke these words. In the meantime, we've seen our world plunged into chaos and lived through times when the hope for a future world has almost disappeared in feelings of frustration and emptiness. But now, it is as though a "resurrection" has occurred in world history. It truly is a "miracle."

Here in Japan, minorities, such as the discriminated-against burakumin, Koreans living in Japan and victims of Hansen's disease, have experienced a frustration similar to that of African Americans. The election of Barack Hussein Obama as the next president of the United States has, however, not only become like a "beacon light" to these minorities but also to those of us who would join together with them in solidarity. It testifies to us that indeed, our struggles have not been in vain.

Liberation Play, “Forty Days in the Wilderness”

The following is a free translation of an article presented in the “Kyōdan Shimpō” newsletter of the Kyōdan in its 11/15 issue.



Pastor Beppu confessing to his congregation that he has realized his own unconscious prejudice and how that resulted in great pain on one family in the church. He expresses his desire to see his church take action to deal with the buraku discrimination issue and bring justice to those who suffer as a result.

Attempting to help his parishioner Toyohiko Mizutani's son apply for a job, Pastor Wataru Beppu decides to call an acquaintance, Shiori Nakajima, to ask for her help. It is in the discussion that ensues that his own, unconscious prejudice becomes apparent. He ends up being severely criticized for his discriminatory attitude and even considers resigning from the ministry. On the other hand, Makoto Saitō, along with other church members, approach this issue from the perspective of giving priority to maintaining the church's reputation. As Beppu struggles with what to do, he contemplates Jesus' experience of 40 days in the wilderness, and as he honestly faces up to his own prejudiced heart, he gradually realizes what it means for the church to wrestle with the issue of discrimination.

The following is a rough outline of the play, as is introduced in the flier distributed at the General Assembly. Over 200 people watched the play on the evening of Oct. 22 on the second day of the General Assembly.

The play begins with several flashbacks to set the scene, as Rev. Beppu attempts to smooth the way for the son of a parishioner to land a job in a company. He calls a friend who works in that company, and as he stumbles through his way in getting to ask her to put in a good word for the young man, he let's slip the big secret — that the young man is of buraku descent.

As this is a play, it is only natural that the story-line and actors are a bit exaggerated at times, but irrespective of that, the actual story-line is representative of the reality such people often face in Japanese society. However one views the merits of the



pastor's professed motivation for stepping in to "help" the young man land a position in the company, the result of intervention was that the company passed the young man over in spite of his apparent promise as a future employee. Lying beneath Beppu's desire to help was the fact that he looked down on people of buraku background and was motivated by feelings of pity on them.

He showed his underlying prejudice by stating, "He is from the buraku, but he's not a bad person," which, when translated, means he thinks buraku people are generally bad, but this young man is an exception. Thus, his own, subconscious prejudice comes to the fore. It was as his parishioner confronted him that he finally realized his own prejudice and the great

harm he had inadvertently caused.

In one sense, this was a difficult play to watch, as it forced us to think about our own hidden attitudes. As we watched the 55-minute play under the banner of the assembly, "The Kyodan, Unity and Solidarity as the Church Universal," this play certainly did cause us to think deeply.



Makoto Saitō leads the protest of those members who feel the churches reputation is at stake, and therefore they mustn't get involved in such issues.

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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.