

For the **Life of the World**

Concordia Theological Seminary, Fort Wayne

November 2008, Volume Twelve, Number Four



The Gospel, Lutheran Missions, and the Paradox of the Far East

By Rev. Dr. Daniel N. Harmelink

The Struggle of Lutheran Identity in Africa

By Rev. Dr. Timothy C. J. Quill

Faith through God's Mercy

By Deaconess Grace V. Rao

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Believing, Teaching, and

Mention the word *Lutheran*, and for most people images of lederhosen, steins, and bratwurst come to mind. But not all Lutherans are of German descent, and Dr. Naomichi Masaki stands as one who knows. Raised as the son of a Japanese Lutheran pastor, it was his upbringing in Kobe, Japan, that was formative in his growth as a Lutheran pastor and professor.

“My father is a well-known pastor and evangelist not only among Lutherans but also among Christians in many other denominations in Japan,” he noted, “but he was raised non-Christian until the end of World War II.” Converted in a Methodist circle, he was soon given a burning desire to become a pastor to proclaim the Gospel. Giving up his study to be a medical doctor and many other obstacles, he finally attended a divinity

school at a Methodist university only to be disappointed in the liberal teachings.

It was then that he and other classmates heard rumors that the “Vikings” had arrived in Kobe, a city that was reduced to ashes during the war. Those Vikings turned out to be missionaries from Norway who, after China closed its doors to them, had found their way to Japan in the hopes of continuing to spread the Gospel. Through meetings with this

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Christ Bearing His Cross, 1976 Watanabe Sadao
From the collection of Anne H.H. Pyle. Photo: Eduardo Calderón

Confessing

By Adriane Dorr

missionary family, Dr. Masaki's father eventually became a Lutheran. As a Lutheran pastor, he planted many congregations, served as the Lutheran Hour Speaker, taught at the seminary, authored numerous books, and later in life colloquized into The Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod.

A young Dr. Masaki was given a desire to be a pastor as he grew up on the campus of Kobe Lutheran Theological Seminary while watching his father's joy in preaching the Gospel. Passionate about bringing the Gospel to others, besides serving actively in a local congregation, he joined an inter-denominational group of young Christians on his university campus. "I was a Lutheran, but did not yet have a profound appreciation of confessional Lutheran theology. Still, it was a valuable experience to work with students of Mennonite, Baptist, Methodist, Evangelical Free, and many other Protestant backgrounds in order to win souls. When the Lord converted our non-Christian friends, however, often we had an argument about which church they should belong to!" he jokes.

When he was ready to go to seminary, Dr. Masaki was unsure of which school to attend. Then in Kobe he met Dr. Robert Preus, former president of Concordia Theological Seminary, who told him, "We have the *best* seminary in the whole world!" He became a student in Fort Wayne and spent his vicarage year in northeastern New Jersey, a suburb of New York city. Realizing the large number of Japanese in the area, he began to take inventory of the situation. Many young Japanese executives working for corporations like Sony lived nearby. While they toiled through twenty-hour work days, their wives struggled with understanding language and culture, dealing with loneliness, and making friends.

With the blessing of his vicarage congregation, he worked to form the *Japanese in U.S. Culture* program, which helped the wives learn about everything from grocery shopping to the PTA. During

these lessons, he also held a chapel time with preaching and prayer, and attendance was strong. "I always proclaimed the Gospel to them," he notes, "and as I became friends with the people, the Lord prompted them to be interested in learning more about Him, gathering them to Bible classes, giving them a desire to be baptized." Seeing the need, eight surrounding congregations eventually banded together to reach more Japanese people with the Gospel. The district then issued a call on behalf of those congregations, asking Dr. Masaki to be a missionary-at-large to the Japanese people in New Jersey upon his graduation from the seminary.

Ministering to the Japanese, he notes, was essentially no different from preaching to lifelong Lutherans. "In every culture, the problem of human beings is still the same and the solution is also the same. We are sinners before God, bottomlessly sinful, as Dr. Luther described our condition. We can't even comprehend how sinful we truly are in our lifetime! But our Lord Jesus has answered for all our sins and sinfulness on the cross. There is no sin greater than what our Lord has answered for on Calvary. Not only that, He also bestows on us freely that forgiveness He achieved on the cross for us in such a way that we are not left in any doubt. Through the pastoral office, Jesus baptizes us, absolves us, and puts on our tongues His body and blood for our forgiveness. The gift of forgiveness and life is for us all whether we are Americans, Germans, or Japanese!"

There are differences in culture, to be sure, which cannot be dismissed. In Japan, Dr. Masaki explains, people "are surrounded by Buddhism, Shintoism, Confucianism, and sects of all these, not to

mention secularism, and post-modernism. Shintoism is a way of life. Buddhism is embedded in the culture. Confucianism is a silent religion permeating all facets of life. They all give the people suggestions on the wisdom of life, but they cannot deal with sin. The people are then left in a regrettable darkness of uncertainty, and their deepest needs are never touched. While people live in such an advanced technology and strong economy, they live in a false security."

There is much that should be done for the vast majority of Japanese people who are not Christians. To that end, Concordia Theological Seminary began to facilitate regular visits from faculty to the seminary there. Dr. Timothy Quill, Dean of International Studies, will begin by visiting Kobe this fall.

There is also a need for solid Lutheran literature in the Japanese language. Japanese love to read, but finding Lutheran material is not easy. "The Christian population in Japan is less than one percent," Dr. Masaki notes, so few Lutheran books can be found and even fewer to be used as textbooks at the seminary. "We desperately need resources in that area in that language. We pray that the Word of the Lord may grow also in Japan."

In the end, Lutherans can help to engage the Japanese and their culture by doing what they are given to do best: "We Lutherans are deeply blessed with the saving Gospel. We are also means of grace Christians. The dynamic flow of our Lord's giving and our receiving of forgiveness is all

His doing. Jesus is the speaker and the giver of the gifts; we confess Him in doctrine, liturgy, and daily living. His blessings move us out into our calling and also into the Japanese people where His gifts have their fruition." 



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