

Bula-Konnichiwa - A View from Japan

Professors Yamamoto and Murata

In this series of interviews we introduce two Japanese academics to our readers. Every so often we hope to make available an informative interview with Professor Eiichi Yamamoto, who teaches economics at Kwansai Gakuin University in Nishinomiya to the east of Kobe, and Professor Michiya Murata, who teaches sociology of religion and ethics at Hannan University in South Osaka. We will explore how these two Christian academics follow political and social developments in their own country. But not only that. As part of their university work they have to keep track of developments world-wide. That is part of their work. But as members of the small Christian church in Japan, they are often asked to help their church members understand the developments that are going on around them. Our interview is an opportunity for us in the South West Pacific to read their Japanese Christian perspectives on world events. We are glad to extend the audience of our two professors - now to Fiji and wherever else this interview is finally read.

Japan is a country of 127 million people. Japan's islands occupy 20 times the area covered by the islands of Fiji. So 127 times Fiji's population has to live in an area only 20 times as large. The Christian Church in Japan is small, seeking a path in a culture that has long worshipped other gods. Many Christians in Japan are very concerned about the rise of militaristic attitudes at home and around the globe. Japan, like other industrialized nations, is trying to find a sustainable future with problems that arise from diminished resources, increased energy costs, escalating environmental degradation and pollution, let alone the intense personal and social problems that confront many people young and old.

1. Current Trends in Japan.

BCW: Welcome Professor Yamamoto and Professor Murata. Thank you for being available for this Fiji Daily Post interview. A mixed Fijian-Japanese greeting might say: Bula Eiichi sensei (teacher)! Bula Michiya sensei!

MM: Konnichiwa. This is our usual greeting for people we meet. Thank you very much for this interview with the *Fiji Daily Post*.

EY: Konnichiwa.

BCW: Bula-Konnichiwa! Michiya sensei. Can you tell us about the major religious faiths of Japan?

MM: In 2004 census figures, Christians amount to 0.892% of the total Japanese population. That means about 1.127 million Christians, and of those 625,000 are Protestant, 476,000 are Roman Catholics, and 25,000 are Orthodox. Christianity is the religious minority. It is also said that about 80 % of the total Japanese population believe in Shintoism, which is a Japanese folk religion, indigenous to our country. 43% believe in Buddhism. So we can say that many Japanese believe in *both* Shintoism and Buddhism. Japan's major religious views are Shinto and Buddhism. On New Year's Day about 80 to 90 million Japanese people visit to the famous shrines in their neighbouring towns.

BCW: Is this Japan's "civil religion"- are local mayors and politicians involved in such ceremonies?

***MM:** Of course most mayors and politicians are not Christian. With respect to Japanese folk religion and such celebrations, their conduct is usually just the same as an ordinary Japanese citizen. Their policies are oriented to what ordinary Japanese citizens believe and of course as politicians they are keen to maintain their votes when elections come around. You have probably heard that our Prime Minister and some members of the cabinet make visits to the Ise Shrine at the beginning of January. The Ise Shrine is most prestigious, more so than any other Shinto shrine. It is surely true that some Japanese politicians make great use of religious organizations and some religious bodies have their own political parties. For example "Komeito" is very prominent.

BCW: Tell us about Komeito.

MM: The Komei Party was set up by Soka Gakkai. Komei means fairness or justice or cleanliness. So it is the Clean Party and Soka Gakkai is a New Religion based on the teachings of Buddhism. "Komeito" now has 31 members in the House of Representatives and 24 in the House of Councillors. It is said that throughout the country there are 3255 local assembly members who represent "Komeito" and membership of the party is about 400,000 (as of April 30, 2006). But of course politicians have many different kinds of support organizations, some of which are based on some or other religion.

BCW: That sounds impressive. We must investigate the Clean Party in a future interview. Eiichi Yamamoto sensei, how do Christians respond to the situation in which many non-Christian religions are active in public life? How does the Christian Church respond? How do Christians view these large scale New Year's Day shrine visitations?

EY: Christians will not attend a Shinto shrine on New Year's Day. Japanese people often go to Shinto shrines at various times of the year for special events, and that is because Shintoism is deeply embedded in Japanese culture. It is part of the Japanese way of life to relate to many other religions. People do not take much notice who attends. The Shinto shrine is the place for the celebration of a birth and a birthday. A wedding ceremony is often held at the Christian Church while a funeral service is often performed at the Buddhist temple.

BCW: I once heard it said by Professor Mark Mullins of Meiji Gakuin University (now Sophia University in Tokyo) that Japanese are born Shinto, married as Christian, and die as Buddhist.

MM: I had read Mark Mullin's book, "Christianity made in Japan: a study of indigenous movements". I recommend it to people who want to know about our Japanese Christianity and how Christianity has been acculturated as it has spread throughout Japan in contact with indigenous religiosity.

BCW: Do Christian churches organize a Christian service on New Year's Day as a Christian contribution to the beginning of the New Year? And what does the Christian Church do to show publicly its prayerful concern for the life of the nation and the Government?

MM: Most churches have a New Year's Day service in order to greet the New Year in their churches, gathering together with the church's members. In the New Year's service we may pray for the peace of our world and country but the most important reason for our gathering is to pray for the development of God's Kingdom and for the work of preaching the gospel in the New Year. Perhaps the Japanese churches show a tendency not to pray for social and political issues, in comparison with the religious issues that we do pray about in our church.

EY: Our Church has a New Year's Day service.

BCW: Please tell our readers about the way Japanese people view their society. How do Japanese people today see themselves in relation to Japanese history?

***MM:** In Japan the centre of the people's sentiment is firmly focused by consideration for other people, by supporting the weak and loving and respecting our seniors. But this traditional approach has shifted since the Japanese government began promoting a system based upon personal achievement. As a result it also develops policies that keep government as small as possible. I think that this system should be called libertarian or "economics for the sake of economics".

BCW: This sounds like politicians in many other countries too.

MM: For the most part politicians consider the management of the Japanese financial system to be their most important priority. **THEY** have done this by cutting down on expenses for social services for our people. And then the government says that self help is the way for Japan to overcome this crisis. It is economic development that is pursued by our government, and so it doesn't side with the weak. Instead it cuts benefits (livelihood protection) or the old age pension.

BCW: So economic development is what Government promotes but there seems to be some other strong pressures developing.

MM: Since the end of World War Two, Japan has had no military engagement for 61 years. But now some Japanese people desire to become a strong nation again. There are various meanings given to the concept of "strong nation". A recent book, "The dignity of our nation" went straight to the top of the best seller list in the first half of this year. It advocates a revival of what Ezra Vogel the sociologist called "Japan as Number One". Since Japan's search for Number One has come to an end, many Japanese people throughout the country want to see a reversal. **THEY** want to revive a strong Japan. But in this process Japanese peoples seek a powerful leader by comparing the present with the past. For Japan lost its self confidence when it experienced economic depression and now it sees itself falling behind when it compares its development and growth with the economies of other Asian countries.

***EY:** It may sound strange to say that Shintoism and Buddhism go very deep into the ground of our life but they are firmly embedded in the Japanese mental structure. This mental structure has not been changed by the increase in Japanese economic power. Indeed, the economic influence is very strong, but the religious

backbone of the Japanese mentality has not been changed. Japanese people have continued with the same religious sentiment, and they cling to it as something they believe in. In this sense, Japanese people are indeed religious people.

BCW: So, Eiichi sensei, you are saying that the strengths and weaknesses of the Japanese economy have much to do with traditional attitudes that are confirmed by Japanese religious views.

EY: The basis of Japan's economic power is in the cooperative spirit of Japanese people, in their diligence, respect and loyalty.

BCW: What community support is there for those who are not able to get involved in the workplace, let us say, because they have deep psychological problems?

EY: In a large corporation this problem emerges as a most important one, but the small and medium sized enterprises cannot easily cope with such problems. To give an example: it is the law that any enterprise with more than 50 workers must employ an industrial doctor in order to attend to the health needs of workers.

BCW: So are all of Japan's young people "work ready" when they finish their schooling or university?

EY: Yes, the students of the fourth year in Japanese universities will begin to hunt for a job and they are busy looking for a job half a year before the commencement.

***BCW:** Let me explain "Commencement". In Japan, as in the USA, "Commencement" is the end of the academic year, when students graduate. As the last act of the old academic year, it is also the first act of the new one.

MM: Commencement is the graduation ceremony in Japan. And after the ceremony most of students will enter a company and work until they retire, that is until they are about 60 years old. Some students will go on to the next stage of education.

***EY:** But recently there are many students who are not able to hunt down a job that corresponds to their qualifications. They become "free-arbiters" even after commencement and this is especially the case if they are from a University which is somewhat lower in prestige. In some universities about the 30 % of graduates will not be able to find full time work. They may be able to work as free-arbiters and we will also find them among the "NEETS" - "Not in Education, Employment or Training."

***BCW:** "Free arbiters"? NEETS? Michiya sensei does Hannan University have many "free arbiters" and NEETs? Please explain this social category for us.

***MM:** "Free arbiter" is similar to "free lance". In Japan after students graduate, many can't find full time employment and many take on a variety of part-time jobs. This is just like it is for poorer students who have to work to provide bread for themselves and pay for their school fees. In Japan such a worker is called a "free arbiter", or a "freeter". They don't get bonuses like a full time workers and they also can't receive benefits from the medical insurance system. The status of the "free arbiter" is very insecure.

BCW: You seem to suggest that the "free arbiter" group is growing larger.

MM: I would also add that the prosperity of Japan's economy depends to some extent upon the work of such "free arbiters". They have to rely upon their parents for financial support and so they are often called "parasitic worms", relying on their parents when according to traditional views as parents get older they should rely more and more upon their children.

BCW: So tell us the "freeter" figures for your university.

MM: In our university the employment rate is comparatively satisfactory because our university's employment office gives top priority to getting jobs for our students. But it is clear that the rate is low when compared with the rate of Kwansai Gakuin University of Prof. Eiichi Yamamoto. At our university there is a marketing slogan, "Don't become a freeter - this University doesn't produce freeters!"

BCW: Thank you Michiya sensei. This is an important facet of the libertarian society you say has been promoted by the government and which Japanese people are happy to accept.

***MM:** Yes. We can see the effect of this attitude in the developing bipolarization between rich and poor - the gap is very large indeed and growing. In the 1970s it was not like that. Then, when all Japanese people amounted to 100 million, including those in Korea, Formosa, Sakhalin and the Kuril Islands, we were mainly a "middle class" society. But now in the 2000s we are told by a recent OECD report that Japan has the highest rate of poverty among all developed countries. The percentage of people who are unable to obtain the

country's average income is second only to the USA among all developed countries. This is what we call "the working poor".

BCW: And like the USA and Australia, the number of "working poor" is also growing.

MM: Yes, the number of the people ranked in the lower class is slowly but surely on the increase. I am sad to say that I anticipate many gaps are opening up, and wage differentials are expanding. In the past, Japan had small gaps between the many different income groups, but now I am in deep grief over the disparities in wealth. In my opinion part of the responsibility for this situation must lie with the policies of the current government under Prime Minister Koizumi and his followers which the Japanese people continue to support.

Thank you Professors for this initial interview. Next time we will continue and explore the world of work, the life of the student and family life.

2. Work, Study and Family Life

Professor Eiichi Yamamoto, who teaches economics at Kwansai Gakuin University in Nishinomiya to the east of Kobe, and Professor Michiya Murata, who teaches sociology of religion and ethics at Hannan University in South Osaka have discussed with us recent political and social developments in their country. Professors Yamamoto and Murata told us in our first interview how social life in Japan is drifting from prosperity, in which wealth was relatively equally distributed, to a bipolar society in which there is a growing number of working poor, people in work who cannot get out of poverty.

BCW: This bipolarisation must have a political impact. How do Japanese people, Japanese voters, see this trend?

MM: Most Japanese people think now that the bipolarization has been caused by Koizumi's government and even some politicians in his cabinet see the gap growing and realize that it is one of negative results of Koizumi's time in office. Of course there are many Japanese people who think they cannot live on their present income. In the opinion survey of the Asahi News this last April, it was found that 45 % said that they were worse off than they were before five years of Koizumi's government. And only 18% said that they were better off than before. Only 10% of 50 year olds said that they were now better off. The number of households supported by the Livelihood Protection Act (social welfare payments) growing; it is greater than the 10 million of October, 2004.

BCW: Do you see this policy having an effect upon your students?

***MM:** As my colleague has said, many university graduates are still working at part time jobs as free arbiters even after their graduation ceremony. They do so because they are unable to obtain a permanent job in a company. In the Government 2006 "white paper" about Japan's youth, there are about 2 million "free arbiters" and 600,000 "NEETs". This report states that more than 70 % of junior high school graduates and about 50 % of a high school graduates have changed jobs after only three years.

EY: But some students, it should be said, are determined to live an easier life and therefore reject the constraints of a regular job in the professional line in which they have studied. Many graduates these days are happy to change jobs and this trend has been on the increase in recent years.

BCW: So many students challenge the competitive spirit and the idea that achievement is the way ahead. How else does the dominant competitive spirit influence the way students approach their studies?

EY: In job hunting one's school record may prove very important. Most important among recent graduates is the ability to communicate and at any oral examination of the employment interview it is important to present a good personality.

MM: Many students want to have a stable job, but when they can't find well-paying jobs they often lose hope, and their future becomes bleak. Most of the younger generation is swamped with study. They are all expected to work as hard as possible to gain entry to a prestigious university because that is the first step towards finding a nice job in a famous and powerful company. The other side of this is that most of the students at the famous universities are children from wealthy families, children of those who have also attended such Universities.

BCW: Are there signs that the younger generation in Japan rejects materialism? Is the church challenging young people?

EY: Well, like the Japanese people overall, most of the younger generation are corrupted by materialism. But there are some young people who make a strong stand against materialism in pursuit of a truly human way of

life. Among evangelical churches many congregations have well developed programmes for helping the younger generation. Of course, in Japan many churches suffer because of the problems associated with an ageing society. I think some churches have shifted to serving old people rather than the younger generation. The ageing problem is, I think, a problem of the Christian church world wide.

BCW: Yes indeed. Michiya sensei, let us get a bit more specific about the religious views of young Japanese people. Is Christianity attractive to students and young people?

MM: These days it is often said that younger Japanese people are generally conservative in their views. This holds across all the classes despite the gaps in opportunities between richer and poorer young people. In the sphere of religion, many younger persons say they are not interested in spiritual matters but many seem to prefer occult arts nevertheless. In this situation there must be something attractive about the New Religions of the occult type for younger people.

BCW: And when younger people are attracted to New Age religions what does your church do?

MM: In our church it is not too hard to notice when a younger person has become dissatisfied with Christianity. As an elder I must think a lot about helping younger people, to help them get their beliefs on a firm foundation from the Bible. But it is not always easy.

***BCW:** Are some perhaps attracted to Christianity because they think it will bring them success? I have read studies of Korean Christianity and in Korea it seems that the search for success has meant church has grown enormously.

MM: Korea, unlike Japan, has no background of Shinto, but does have Confucianism in its basic religious ground motive. Then there is also a common basis in Buddhism. Shinto is peculiar in Japan.

***EY:** I think that if people want the Church to provide concrete fruit and immediate outcomes then they won't last long. But most Japanese Christians want to attend their church regularly and they also want to follow a good path.

***BCW:** Michiya sensei, are there those within Christianity in Japan who proclaim the "Prosperity Gospel".

***MM:** Of course our church does see the proclamation of the "Prosperity Gospel" here and there. But Japanese Christians have many kinds of hopes for their church membership, for example to meet some friends in a sociable place. But even in our church there is a bipolarization in wealth and academic background. Many younger people feel that their life outside the church - in sport, or music, or courtship, or a part-time job - is in conflict with their Christian commitment. And so the world outside the church makes an appeal to them. I am sorry to admit that perhaps our church has little for younger people, for students, for example, who have dropped out of their school without graduating.

BCW: And how does this bipolarization among the younger people compare with the attitudes of older people, their parents and grand-parents?

EY: I think there is a generation-gap in every age. The most important and serious problem is that the younger generation is so very small and the number of Sunday School students is tiny. Anyway, the problem of the number of the younger members in church is not the problem that separates the older people from the younger generation.

***MM:** As I mentioned above, in our church some students had dropped out from their university without completing the course because they couldn't find much purpose in their school-work. I think their power of endurance is very small and there is no ambition to get a nice job or even to help maintain our church for the younger generation that is coming along after them. As a parent, I often find myself saying to my son, who is in second grade at junior high school, that he will have the task of developing and maintaining our church when he becomes an adult.

BCW: So this is a serious problem for your church?

MM: Yes. in our denomination, in many congregations throughout the country, there are only a few young people who regularly come to church. And there are some churches which only have old people. Some of these were closed down recently. From the viewpoint of the sociology of religion, it may be that the Christian church in Japan will in future become a place where only retired people can be found.

BCW: How has the traditional Japanese family been challenged by industrialization and consumerism?

***MM:** In this 21st century most of the nation's younger people, to a greater or lesser degree, have a wide variety of foods to choose from and many, many goods to enjoy. But they cannot be satisfied with their life if

they feel uneasy about their future. And as I've mentioned already, Japanese young people must spend most of their time from infancy preparing for examinations so they can gain a place in a good school. And this process starts from when they are very young.

BCW: It sounds like all of life is organised to get a job.

MM: It's all about getting a nice permanent job and a good income. Anyway, the Japanese family must somehow cope with this severe competition in every field. For example, in a society which sets a greater value on academic success than on an individual's real ability, families have to find ways to take the emotional and psychological strain. In recent times we have seen many, many young people in such stressful situations everywhere throughout the country, even in our church. Recently schools have begun to employ counsellors because there are so many students who are injured spiritually in their hearts.

***BCW:** Eiichi sensei. Do you see this educational tension as a problem for the Japanese economy overall? Or is it a tension that the economy depends upon for it to flourish?

***EY:** To tell the truth, my perceptions are based on my own university which has a higher prestige than the school of Murata sensei. It is necessary for us to weigh the relative difficulty of the entrance examination. I think the situation in our university does not show the same degree of tension about becoming a member of the economic world that is evident in Murata sensei's school.

BCW: So there is differences between universities ranked higher and lower in prestige?

EY: Anyway, the ranking of Japanese universities is one of the most, if not the most, important indicator of value in our society. Japan, like other countries, puts a greater value upon the academic career of the individual than on that person's real ability. Of course you should keep in mind that our school is of lower ranking than some other more prestigious universities to which it is even more difficult to pass the entrance examination, and then with the graduates of those more famous universities our students will have their own hurdles to overcome in order to achieve their "good jobs".

BCW: What percentage of Japan's high-school graduates go on to university?

***EY:** The ratio is about the half of each generation. In precise terms the ratio of students who go on to the next stage of education is about 52.3 %, of all 18 year-olds as of May 2006. It has to be said that among university graduates, 14.7% have no job and no plans to go further in education. The figure for junior college graduates is 11.9 % and for those completing high school 18.0 %.

BCW: Is it university graduates who are attracted to New Age religions?

MM: No. Not graduates, students. It is students who are attracted to the New Age religions. But then we note that the number of adherents drops markedly among those who have graduated. The statistics tell us that the number of graduates in New Age religions is very small. These religious groups, like other cults, require the use of mind control techniques as part of their outreach and organization.

BCW: Can you describe the Japanese family structure for us?

MM: In Japan the bonds of family life have become weaker and the divorce rate shows a persistent upward tendency. In the Japanese family structure there are many problems. Think for example of domestic violence, child and elder abuse, neglect, social withdrawal, the problems that result from workers being discouraged.

BCW: And what do the statistics tell us?

MM: The number of divorced people is increasing and has done so for some decades. This may lead to big changes in our family structure in Japan. Divorce has increased in every year since 1964 in every year although in recent times it has begun to decrease. In 1971 the number was over 100,000 in 1971. In 1983 the number peaked and then decreased but for a decade but from 1991 has increased again to 289,836 in 2002. After that it has decreased slightly to 270,815 (2004). Over all it has been 119,135 (1975) 166,640 (1980) 199,016 (1995) 283,854 (2003) 270815 (2004). These are the yearly figures from the Ministry of Health, Labor and Welfare.

BCW: And in terms of percentages, Japan is also becoming an ageing society, isn't it?

***MM:** Yes, in Japan the ageing of our society is a very important issue. At June 2004, the number of the households was 46.323 million. And the number of the households, which had family members who were more than 65 years old was 17.864 million. That is 38.6% of total households. In June 1986 the number was 9.769 million. That means that in a period of less than 20 years ago the number has doubled. The number of

single person households for persons aged over 65, is 3.73 million. The problem of ageing in Japan can be clearly seen in these figures. There is a persistent increase of households in which elderly people live and also in the number of single elderly persons living on their own. And then the other most important statistic is the decline of the birthrate. In future, Japan's ageing society will be a very serious problem for our younger generation because they will have to support many old people in nursing care and on old age pensions.

EY: The family community has been breaking down and also each family member has become isolated from the others. It is the economic way of life that has weakened family ties. And younger families, which at one time were called "parasites", have moved away and now do not want to depend on their parents, particularly in financial and economic aspects of their lives.

BCW: So you seem to be suggesting that the family structure continues to change despite the fact that younger families and married couples are isolated from their parents. Parents still like to be involved in the lives of their children and grandchildren. Is that how you see it?

***MM:** My view is that privatization or me-ism or selfishness had gradually enlarged itself in every aspect of Japanese life. Except for wealthy families, I think that most elderly family members find that they cannot afford to live close to their children and grand children. Now the number of families which have enough and a little to spare is decreasing. And in these circumstances younger people may be attracted to quasi-family or pseudo-family relations which are offered by the New Age religions with their promises of spiritual peace.

BCW: And this is also political in some way?

MM: Not exactly but I think the tendency is connected with the sentiment of the younger generation who are seeking a strong leader and are basically conservative.

***EY:** The problems of the nuclear family are well known, and they are discussed in many spheres of our society. In recent years the problem has been regularly featured in newspapers, again and again. But most young people in Japan often depend on their parents for support as they did in previous generations. And I think that most parents would deeply want to live together with their children under the same roof. At that point we can't say that the ideology of Japanese family has totally dissolved.

BCW: And does this mean the young people are in rebellion against their parents, or are their parents generally able to accept these changes?

MM: I do not think that the search for spiritual peace, or joining a New Age Religion, should be interpreted as a rebellion. Many parents will not be able to accept the spiritual aspects, but some of them may even join these spiritual movements because of their own feelings of dissatisfaction with their own lives.

3. Religion, Politics and Japan's Peace Constitution.

Professor Eiichi Yamamoto, who teaches economics at Kwansai Gakuin University in Nishinomiya to the east of Kobe, and Professor Michiya Murata, who teaches sociology of religion and ethics at Hannan University in South Osaka have explored for us some recent social and economic developments of their country. Professors Yamamoto and Murata told us in our first interview how social life in Japan is drifting away from being a prosperous society in which wealth was relatively equally distributed, to one in which there is a growing number of working poor. In the second interview we explored the fraying web of Japanese family life. Young people, particularly those who feel there is something wrong with the relentless pressure to study and find a nice job, are looking around for answers to the many questions that confront them. New Age Religions are especially prominent. No doubt such a trend among young people can be seen elsewhere around the world. Does it have any connection with militarism, that other major trend that has emerged since the 11th of September 2001? In this third interview we discuss recent events in Japan that indicate a deeply held desire to restore nationalist values.

BCW: I wonder if this search for a sense of spirituality is in some way related to the current Prime Minister's visit to the Yasukuni war shrine. I mean is this his attempt to revive a kind of traditional Shinto spirituality, a spirituality that wants to revive militarism?

***MM:** I think the action of going to the Yasukuni Shrine by the Prime Minister has to be interpreted carefully, but his policies are clearly designed to appeal to a national sentiment of dissatisfaction. I think he wants to resolve that. And I think Prime Minister Koizumi thinks that he can work with a centripetal force among Japanese people to bind them together to the state. This, in my opinion, generates an atmosphere that is conducive to the revival of militarism.

BCW: We understand that this is how you see it, and that many of your fellow citizens will interpret his

visits in a positive way. Can you explain your view further for us please?

***MM:** First, I must say that there is a lot of debate currently about our history and the historical problems related to the Yasukuni Shrine. The Shrine is now at the centre of the current political debate. And yes this is my view as a Christian in Japan. The Yasukuni Shrine was constructed by the Japanese government in 1869. It is a place in which the war dead are enshrined. The enshrining, according to the precepts of Shintoism, makes the war dead into gods worthy of ongoing veneration. Before World War Two, the shrine was the most important place for national Shintoism and it was then under the control of the Department of War and the Department of the Navy. The Japanese armed forces administered it. This Shinto enshrining says that the souls of soldiers who have fought against the armies of foreign countries in Japan's military conflicts are now gods. The names and the soul of the fallen soldier is enshrined as a god and worshiped as a god according to Shinto beliefs. The selection of names has been the responsibility of the army. Even after World War Two this shrine retained its strong symbolic tie with Japanese militarism. But now the shrine is an independent religious corporation. It is no longer under state control.

BCW: But as a religious shrine it still collects names and enshrines deceased soldiers as gods.

***MM:** Yes, even after the war, the Yasukuni Shrine continues to enshrine the soul of the fallen soldier. In this instance we can say that it the practise ignores the strong desire of the Japanese Christians who were bereaved in the war. And keep in mind that even Christians have been enshrined according to Shinto rites by this means. The number of the enshrined gods is more than 2½ million.

***BCW:** So tell us more about the current controversy.

***MM:** On the morning of August 15, the day of the anniversary of the end of the Pacific War, PM Koizumi made his visit to the Yasukuni Shrine. Such attendance is not a private visit, because his visit was via his official vehicle and in visiting to the Shrine he has carried out his previous campaign pledge to do so. For me, his attitude is clearly in violation of the principle of separation of government and religion that is clearly stated in the Constitution of Japan.

BCW: But there are also many protests from Japanese citizens as well, aren't there?

MM: Yes, but it has to be said that public opinion polls conducted by the newspapers indicate strong support for the PM. It seems that just on half of the Japanese population are in support of his attendance. I can't really comprehend Koizumi's conduct and our Japanese attitude.

BCW: What did the opinion poll say?

MM: In the opinion survey of the Asahi Newspaper, 49 % agree with Mr. Koizumi's visit, and only 37 % are opposed to it. I also think, to that extent, that the Japanese political situation has new dangers for the peace of the world. In my opinion Japanese democracy has not yet become politically mature. But beyond that, I suspect that the performance of Mr. Koizumi and his supporters may be part of a shrewd trick to take the Japanese people into "Koizumi's theatre".

***BCW:** So you think that there is more that is involved here. The shrine was once part of an "established" religion and now the shrine is kept legally separate from the state, is that right?

***MM:** Yes. The Yasukuni Shrine was supported by the Government, and especially by the Japanese Army, until the end of World War Two. And even after the war it has continued to be related to the Japanese government. Actually, it is now the Ministry of Welfare which presents the names of the fallen soldiers to the shrine so that enshrining can proceed. The government has no formal legal control, but it is obviously unconstitutional for the Prime Minister Koizumi and other members of his cabinet, and many National Diet members, to make visits to the Yasukuni Shrine in their capacity as elected officials. They do so every year in spite of the limitations required by the Constitution. In this situation it appears that the members of our present government, and its supporters, want the Yasukuni Shrine to once more become a national institution which praises the fallen soldier publicly for his efforts.

***BCW:** So you are not opposed to Government respecting the efforts of Japan's military. It is the way it is paying its respects that gives you, and others, cause for concern.

***MM:** Yes. Of course we must have a feeling of thanks to the people who contribute to our country. But, as a Christian, I will not pray for the people enshrined as a god in the Yasukuni Shrine. I suspect the government will also try to enshrine those persons who have died after going to a foreign country as part of our national self-defense force contribution. I think the Prime Minister should not make visits to the private shrine as a public man. I think there may be no problem if Mr. Koizumi goes to the Yasukuni Shrine as a

private religious action by himself, because then such action shows our freedom of religion. But in Japan there is a big and problematical history about the Yasukuni Shrine after World War Two, and it has split public opinion in two. The Prime Minister should not visit the Yasukuni Shrine because he holds public office and our Constitution prevents us from making war.

BCW: And so the Yasukuni Shrine was already involved in public controversy long before the current Prime Minister chose to visit to it?

***MM:** It is true that "Yasukuni" is a term that refers to the peace and security of the nation. But essentially the Yasukuni Shrine is too strongly tied to militarism and is too closely related to the national Shinto religion. And in the shrine in 1978, 14 A-Class war criminals - as defined by the International Military Tribunal for the Far East - were enshrined as gods. They were not fallen soldiers but in fact were criminals.

BCW: So how was the Yasukuni Shrine changed after the war and Japan's new constitution?

MM: After World War Two, the Japanese corporation of those bereaved by the war wanted to continue state control but were thwarted because of the constitutional principle of the separation of government and religion. The planned revival of state control did not occur. That is to say, there remains to this day a desire to revive state control of the Yasukuni Shrine and at this time this is strongly related to efforts that would also revive a militaristic state. The Prime Minister wants to justify his visit to the Yasukuni Shrine by appealing to the freedom of religion but he makes his visit as the Prime Minister and that is the problem.

BCW: And China and the Republic of Korea have also protested haven't they?

MM: Yes. The People's Republic of China and the Republic of Korea have protested very strongly. Why? Because the Yasukuni Shrine is the symbol of Japanese aggression against both countries. I can understand the feelings of both countries about Japanese aggression. I think Japan must listen to these people's feeling about our country, even in our generation which was not involved in the war. Anyway, Japan invaded the Asian countries and we have to have a deep repentance to them. Can you understand that there are Japanese people who still say to each other that Japan did not invade Asia? I can't understand them. The invasion of Asian countries by Japan is proved clearly as a historical fact. And so this is another reason why the Prime Minister of Japan should not go on a visit to the Yasukuni Shrine. To put it another way, a visit to the shrine is a refusal to take proper responsibility for the Pacific War. Such visit is a sign that one agrees with the war.

EY: Prime Minister Koizumi is younger than I am and it is said that the next candidate for Prime Minister, to be decided this October, is even younger than Koizumi. But he is a key person who has also visited the Shrine this last spring in secret fashion. He also has shown a positive desire to maintain official visits to the shrine.

BCW: In your discussion you have mentioned the age of the politicians involved. Presumably Koizumi was only a young boy in the 1950s. What has his age to do with it? What relevance is the fact that he is a post World War II person?

***EY:** We can't see any reason why the generations who have not experienced the Pacific War should want to revive official attendance at the Yasukuni Shrine. Let me put it plainly in this way. The simplest explanation for the conduct of the Prime Minister and other political leaders who want to pay their respects at the Yasukuni Shrine is a problem of the 'heart'.

BCW: You are saying it is a deeply spiritual problem.

EY: Yes. They believe that the enshrining of the fallen soldier is evidence of Japanese virtue and that simply is how they view it. In this situation I am of the view that this is a religious sentiment, or a fountainhead, which doesn't know and can't understand what God requires of us.

BCW: So even the visits are a controversial part of the process of choosing a new Prime Minister? And are these Shrine visitors in some ways showing loyalty to Koizumi by their secret visits?

EY: Some candidates keep quiet and others deny that they visit. Currently in the newspapers we read reports of passages in the diaries of the former emperor Hirohito who chose not to visit to the Shrine after the war criminals were enshrined in 1978. Now this attitude of the former emperor has become part of the current debate. It is a problem that arises from the Imperial System itself and in my view these controversies simply demonstrate why the imperial system has failed.

BCW: So is the system of Emperor Worship still adhered to by some? Is the Shrine a part of people's Shinto religious beliefs that many want to "re-establish"?

***EY:** The Emperor today will openly deny Emperor Worship because he experienced Anglo–American education under the supervision of his private teacher who was a Quaker, a member of the Society of Friends. But the tendency of thought, that is illustrated by the novelist, Mr. Yukio Mishima who killed himself by performing hara-kiri (seppuku), is deeply militaristic. The simple sentiments of Japanese people allows them to show their respect for the Emperor, but there is still has a strong latent power at work in Japan. Militarism is deeply ingrained..

BCW: Michiya sensei, you in Japan are preparing for a new Prime Minister later this year. No doubt, visits to the Shrine are also part of the political discussion. What can you tell us about the candidates?

MM: Yes, we will have an election for Prime Minister in October after Prime Minister Koizumi steps down in September. Most of the candidates will already be members of Koizumi's Cabinet. But the likeliest winner is Mr. Shinzou Abe, 51 years old, a senior secretary of Koizumi's Cabinet. He is conservative in his opinions and nationalistic like the neo-conservatism of the U. S. A. Japanese people are not wise to trust nationalistic politicians. Mr. Abe attended the Yasukuni Shrine this last spring and has proclaimed that he would work to revise the constitution. Mr. Abe is a grandson of Mr. Nobusuke Kishi, a one-time Prime Minister, who was prosecuted as an A class war criminal after World War Two. Mr. Abe is a son of Mr. Shintaro Abe who was a former Minister for Foreign Affairs.

BCW: What do the polls say?

MM: Support runs at 53% for Mr. Abe as the most favoured candidate according to the survEY of the Asahi News (August 22-23). The current rate of support for Mr. Abe, I suspect, is a surprise. Another candidate is Mr. Sadakazu Tanigaki, 61 years old, who is now a minister of the Department of Treasury and in my view he is a better candidate than Mr. Abe. This is also, I must say, because Mr. Tanigaki does not make visits to the Yasukuni Shrine. I repeat - I am sorry to repeat myself so often but it is important - a visit to the Yasukuni Shrine endorses Japan's World War Two aggression. Mr. Taro Asou, 65 years old, the Foreign Minister, is also a candidate. He is a grandson of a one-time Prime Minister Shigeru Yoshida and has a nationalistic approach. Of the three, Mr. Tanigaki is my preference but I do not think he has enough support.

BCW: So how will he be elected?

MM: The Prime Minister will be selected by 403 members of the national Diet and 300 regional representatives, of the major party, the Liberal Democratic Party. This party has promised to initiate a constitutional amendment of our “Peace Constitution” and they promote attendance at the Yasukuni Shrine.

***BCW:** So, it is also as the leader of the Liberal Democratic Party that Mr. Koizumi has made the visits.

***MM:** Yes. Mr. Koizumi must be supported by the LDP members and he made this promise publicly about five years ago before he became PM. So he must listen to the LDP's intentions. He often says that his visits to the Yasukuni shrine is a matter of his heart. But, as I have said, I think there has to be a limitation upon the actions of the PM because he is a public man. Especially the PM must obey our constitution. Already a district court has found that Mr. Koizumi's conduct is unconstitutional. He hasn't accepted this decision and so, just two weeks ago on August 15th, he has gone ahead and carried out his campaign promise.

EY: I agree with the views of Murata sensei. They are consistent with my own.

BCW: May I change the topic slightly? Japan sent troops to Iraq to help the Americans. The Australian troops in the south of Iraq have supported the Japanese contingent. How did this come about? Is this consistent with the Peace Constitution the Japanese people have lived by since the end of the Second World War?

MM: When the Japanese self-defense force was dispatched to Iraq, I wrote to Prime Minister Koizumi and expressed my disagreement. It was by e-mail letter. I guess nobody read it. But my intention was to say to the PM that there was neither reason nor justice in the decision. Of course, Japan is proud of its Peace Constitution. But the constitution is now stretched to allow our troops to serve in Iraq. In regard to the support from the Australian troops we Japanese must say thanks to the Australian people and Government, but it is important to remember that our Peace Constitution limits the ability of our self-defense forces to non-combatant duties and helping with repairs.

EY: The dispatch of our self defense force is the most recent result of a broad interpretation of Article 9 in our constitution which is about the renunciation of war and the prohibition of building up the military to a fighting power. The Government party would also like to revise this part of the Constitution. As I mentioned above, Mr Abe, the candidate for Prime Minister, has often said he would like to revise our constitution. This is an important policy for him.

BCW: So what about Japanese politics? How do Christians respond to Japan's political challenges? Are there Christian political groups at work throughout the country?

MM: It is said that our country is, strictly speaking, a democracy. In my opinion there are only a few politicians who are true statesmen; there are many who seek popularity from politics. One of my friends in my high school days is a member of the Diet in the Liberal Democratic Party. I keep good company with him as a friend but I am sorry to say that he has often changed his mind in order to stay elected.

BCW: I assume from what you have both said that you are not supporters of the Liberal Democratic Party of Prime Minister Junichiro Koizumi.

MM: Yes, I strongly disagree with the policies of Mr. Koizumi about the constitution, about peace and diplomacy, about our relations with Asian countries and his policies that have serious effect on the lower income groups. I support the Social Democratic Party, which is a party that strongly defends the Constitution.

EY: I supported the Socialist Party and support now one of the small off-shoots from this party that have formed in recent years.

BCW: We must work on a future interview that discusses Japanese politics in more detail. But for the moment tell us about any Christian involvement in Japanese politics.

EY: There are a few Christian members of the Diet, and there is some group activity, which is across party political lines. Christian Diet members belong to both non-government and government parties. Christian members have very many different opinions among themselves. There are Christians all along the spectrum from left to right.

MM: I would answer in exactly the same way. At one time there was a Christian leader of the Socialist Party and his son was also a member. He was an excellent, modest statesman, and a scholar. I looked up to him as a young man.

BCW: So there are many different political viewpoints among Christians.

MM: Yes. Take our church, just as a minor example: there are many different opinions about the Yasukuni Shrine visits and Article 9 of the Constitution and the revision of the Constitution and the Emperor System.

BCW: These things will be useful for future discussions. Let's conclude with a brief discussion of Christianity in Japan. In Christian circles these days we hear a lot of criticism of "dualism". This is the idea that one is a Christian only in certain areas of life, only at certain times. For the rest, well, it's just a matter of living like every one else. I take it that both of you reject "dualism", but how do you see yourselves as Christian scholars, as a sociologist and as an economist? How do you relate your faith to the theories you teach and write about?

MM: My leading Professor, a Japanese Christian, Dr. Yoshitomo Yamanaka often said that we should try to avoid dualism between beliefs and reason. These views were published in his famous book, "Reason and Belief". And in all fields I have been cautiously aware of my dualistic thinking ever since my conversion at 23 years of age when I was a student. As a sociologist, I admit that I suffer from the problems of dualism. But I always intend to study and teach in order to glorify God, to be a faithful servant, as a Christian teacher and scholar looking out the dualistic tendencies.

BCW: So what about other Christian colleagues?

MM: Yesterday, as a matter of fact, I had a discussion with a fellow Christian professor, who was critical of my approach. He said that my sociology was not good and precise because I was confusing the scientific field with my belief system. He said that what I developed in sociology was always converging with my beliefs. He thought that was a criticism and I replied that, of course, as a Christian I needed to work at bringing my theories in line with my beliefs. The next day I discussed this with an emeritus professor from Professor Yamamoto's university, Kwansai Gakuin University, at our church. He told me that my approach was right to seek to avoid dualism. The problem with the dualist approach is that the dualist has to believe that his beliefs should be left out of his theories. My approach is that I want to maintain an academic approach in finding a point of agreement between scientific theorising and my beliefs as a sociologist.

BCW: We've mentioned the search for a new sense of spirituality. Do you find that the Christian view of environmental stewardship is attractive to students?

EY: In our University the discipline of environmental studies is taken up by students with great enthusiasm.

But the concrete practice of addressing environmental problems leaves something to be desired. But our younger people do agree that our country has serious environmental problems and want to do something about it. However, the younger generation may not yet have the necessary understanding of stewardship that they will need to environmental problems.

BCW: Japanese whalers are given a lot of attention in the media in the South Pacific. These are the waters in which they seek to capture whales. What is the Japanese attitude to whales, especially species of whales that are close to extinction?

MM: In my younger days I often ate whale meat more than any other variety. But now I cannot eat whale because of the high cost. Of course, in order to protect the whales, I agree that whale fishing should be limited. But usually Japanese young people have not had the experience I have had of eating whale meat.

EY: Japanese people who have experienced whale meat from a young age will perhaps not welcome a moratorium on whale hunting.

BCW: And in the churches of which you are members, is it possible to develop these environmental and political perspectives with your fellow Christians?

MM: In our church it is very difficult for us to discuss an anti-whaling campaign. Of course if we have a chance, we will discuss whale fishing as an environmental problem.

EY: Personally there are some people who are conscious of the environmental problem, but it is difficult for our church to discuss such problems and make it into an important issue.

BCW: Thank you Professors for your time and effort. We're delighted to have your interview.

MM: Thank you Bruce sensei. Your questions have called our attention to important problems for our church and for Japan. And I appreciate your kindness and patience.

EY: The most important lifelong problem for me is this: who are we as Japanese people? What should Christianity mean for us? These questions have been always with me and I am preoccupied with them. The national characteristics of Japan are very strange for me as a Japanese person. I have told you something of what I think about your questions. I hope it proves helpful to our readers!

BCW: *Doumo arigatou gozaimasu* (thank you very much) and in Fijian *Vinaka* (thanks), *ni sa moce* (goodbye).

MM: Sayounara

EY: Sayounara

There will be further interviews with Professors Yamamoto and Murata in the months ahead. Look out for them!

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Thursday, 24 August 2006