

The Responsibility of Meiji Gakuin during and after the War:
A Confession

Before You, Lord God, on the fiftieth anniversary of Japan's defeat in the War, I hereby confess the sin of Meiji Gakuin's involvement in the last war, and acknowledge our faults toward the peoples of Korea, China and other countries.

As we approach the fiftieth anniversary of the defeat of Japan, the disastrous nature of the last war is coming to light in greater detail as time passes, and is far from fading from our memory. The wounds of the War—the experience of the “comfort women”, the vivisections carried out by the “731” Bio-Chemical Experiment Brigade—these wounds are still vividly real, and the survivors and their families are still now suffering day by day.

The victims of Japanese war crimes include peoples of many countries. In as much as it was in Japan, Meiji Gakuin could not remain uninvolved in the war, though it was founded in the name of the love of Jesus.

Although it is true that private schools had a weak position in relation to the power of the State, Meiji Gakuin had preserved the Founders' Spirit of "Education based on Christianity" throughout its distinguished history. However we cannot offer any excuse before Our Lord Jesus Christ for the guilt that Meiji Gakuin bears for involvement in that war of invasion.

Of course we later generations who did not actually experience the hardships of that period have no right to cast the first stone at the war-time leaders. Needless to say, it is only Our Lord God who has the right to judge them and their organizations. However we are in a position to have a wider and deeper knowledge the catastrophic nature of the War through the increasing number of testimonies from the victims of invasion and oppression, and from martyrs, so that we are in a much better position than the leaders at the time to see all the facts objectively. Therefore we must make confession before the Lord for the sins committed by the leaders of that time and acknowledge our faults to the victims. The reason for doing this is not to castigate the leaders but in order to ensure that we ourselves do not commit similar errors.

Following the Manchurian Incident of 1931 and the outbreak of the Sino-Japanese war in 1937, the government passed the Law of Religious Organizations of 1939, on basis of which it established the United Church of Christ in Japan (UCCJ -Nihon Kirisuto Kyodan) in June, 1941, in order to enforce the cooperation of religious

organizations with state policy. Reverend Mitsuru Tomita himself, the chief executive of UCCJ (Tori), visited Ise Shinto Shrine and made Korean Christians visit Pyongyang Shinto Shrine in 1938. There is no doubt that this act drove many Korean Christians to martyrdom, and created a deep rift between Korean and Japanese Christians. Many missionary schools in Korea and Taiwan faced a severe crisis over the problem of worship at shrines. Tomita was the chairman of the Board of Trustees of Meiji Gakuin for a number of years both during and after the war.

Tsuraki Yano, who became Chancellor of Meiji Gakuin in 1939, was an enthusiastic supporter of practices such as bowing in the direction of the Imperial Palace, visiting Yasukuni Shrine, and obeisance before the Imperial portrait. Without publicly confessing his sins to the Lord, he remained in office for some time after the war. Meiji Gakuin has until today never publicly confessed these sins before the Lord or acknowledged its faults to the peoples of the countries which were invaded by Japan. Tomita and others were in the highest position of authority in the United Church of Christ in Japan (UCCJ) when it called for donations for combat planes under the slogan of "Fly! UCCJ Airplane!" and when its official newspaper (Kyodan Jiho) called in the name of the association the unconditional obedience of Christians to the Emperor's state, claiming that "sacrifice for the country is equivalent to martyrdom." Even if we take in consideration the harsh, totalitarian atmosphere of the times, and the struggles of the leaders to preserve the church organization under heavy pressure, we cannot deny the fact that they were involved in crimes committed by the nation-state of Japan that brought about the sufferings referred to earlier. When I think of the student conscripts who were sent to fight under these circumstances and involved in a war of invasion, I cannot help feeling a deep sorrow as a teacher and Chancellor. It also makes me aware of the great mental suffering of the war-time teachers who sent to the front so many young people, including students from Korea and Taiwan. Surely the leaders of the university should have reflected on their conduct, confessed their sins and acknowledged their faults immediately after Japan's defeat in the war, when the Lord had shown His judgment .

There was, however, no public statement of regret or apology at all after the war. Instead, the idea of praying to the spirit of the Japanese who died in the war of aggression as war heroes did not disappear in Meiji Gakuin.

Joji Tagami, a member of the Board of Trustees whose role was and is to protect the Founders' Spirit of Meiji Gakuin, strongly recommended that the government should take part in visits of shrines of the war heroes, even though . This is evidence that Meiji Gakuin continued after the war to be associated with the same sin Tomita committed during the war, namely worshipping the dead as gods, idol worship which is the sin most

reviled by our Lord God, who revealed Himself to us in the Bible.

In this way the issue of war responsibility is directly linked to confession of post-war responsibility. Unless these issues are solved, Meiji Gakuin will not be able to find the way forward into the future.

Yet as we look back at the war-time history of Meiji Gakuin today, fifty years after Japan's defeat, we can find a ray of hope that there were students of good conscience like Shin Hasegawa. His anguish at being sent to the front and his spirit of inner independence from the imperial state suggests the future direction that must be taken by Meiji Gakuin, which is based on the teaching of Jesus Christ alone. I would like to believe that there more than a few students who struggled to live their lives as he did.

As it looks to the 21st century and re-affirms the Founders' Spirit, Meiji Gakuin must move forward not on the "wide road" taken by Tomita, Yano and others but rather the "narrow road" taken by Hasegawa, a student at the time. As the idea of "sacrifice for the nation" is gradually spreading through Japanese society again in modern form with Japan beginning to send troops overseas under the fine-sounding name of "international contribution", I cannot help feeling a sense of danger that the dead will again be worshipped as "war heroes". We must first deeply consider the responsibility of this university during and after the war, make confession for it before Our Lord Jesus and make it known publicly. By acknowledging our faults toward the people whose countries were drawn into the terrible war, we can resolutely come to terms with this era, so that we may be "blameless and innocent, God's faultless children in the midst of a crooked and perverse generation, among whom [we] shine like stars in the world" (Philip. 2:15).

We make this confession to Our Lord God and express our remorse to those who were victims of the war so that Meiji Gakuin can make even greater efforts to create true peace in Jesus Christ.

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On the Fiftieth Anniversary of Japan's Defeat in the War

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