

Nagai Takashi's Urakami Holocaust  
and  
The Atomic Memory of Nagasaki



Emily Koya

Honors 230D Hiroshima and Nagasaki

December 13, 2017

## Introduction

On May 27, 1949, a physician named Nagai Takashi – a man suffering from radiation-induced leukemia as a result of the atomic bombing of Nagasaki, Japan – received an unexpected visit from the Japanese Emperor, Hirohito.<sup>1</sup> Emperor Hirohito told Nagai that he had read Nagai's book. Nagai was in tears after the meeting as he was so moved and honored by the Emperor's presence. Three days later, Nagai welcomed an envoy from the Vatican, led by Cardinal Sir Norman Thomas Gilroy, carrying the relics of Saint Francis Xavier, whose mummified right arm Nagai kissed.<sup>2</sup> And just one year earlier, on October 8, 1948, Nagai had received the famous American educator and political-activist, Helen Keller.<sup>3</sup> Nagai Takashi earned the respect and gratitude of world leaders and common people throughout the world because he forever shaped public perception and understanding of the horrors of the Nagasaki atomic bomb. Even though Nagai Takashi passed away at the age of 43, he was still able to serve Japan as a convert to Roman Catholicism, a radiologist, a medical doctor, an atomic bomb survivor, a popular writer, and a nationally and internationally revered public figure.

---

<sup>1</sup> Harano Joji, "The Bells of Nagasaki Ring On Nagai Takashi and His Record of the Atomic Bombing" last modified August 7, 2015, <https://www.nippon.com/en/features/c02301/>.

<sup>2</sup> Ibid. Sir Norman Thomas Gilroy was the emissary of Pope Pius XII. He was the first Australian-born cardinal of the Roman Catholic Church. Saint Francis Xavier was a Navarrese Basque Roman Catholic missionary who was the first to bring Christianity to Japan.

<sup>3</sup> Helen Adams Keller (June 27, 1880 – June 1, 1968) was an American author, political activist, and lecturer. She was the first deaf-blind person to earn a Bachelor of Arts degree. A prolific author, Keller was well-traveled and outspoken in her convictions. Working as a member of the Socialist party of America and the Industrial Workers of the World, campaigned for women's suffrage, labor rights, socialism and anti-militarism. See, Helen Keller, *The Story of My Life* (Doubleday Press: New York, N.Y., 1905).

Dr. Nagai Takashi's charisma and unconventional interpretation of the atomic bomb left a profound impact on both Christian and non-Christian victims, and the rest of Japan's memory of the Nagasaki's atomic experience. However, as his religious theory gained popularity and dominated the discourse of the Nagasaki atomic history, it overshadowed the non-religious voices and presented an incomplete representation of Nagasaki's story to the rest of Japan and the world. In the end, the people of Nagasaki were left with shattered narratives, preventing the construction of a coherent memory to identify with.

### **Nagasaki – A Christian City**

The origin of Christianity in Japan dates back to 1549, when the Basque Jesuit missionary Francis Xavier arrived in Kagoshima. Christianity flourished for about ninety years during a time labeled as the "Christian Century," and when a new port opened to Europeans in Nagasaki, it became one of the most significant Christian centers in Asia, earning the name "Little Rome."<sup>4</sup> On August 15, 1549, Xavier commented that the Japanese were "the best who have as yet been discovered," and his Italian successor Alessandro Valignano believed Japan to be the most significant missionary ground of the East.<sup>5</sup> Soon afterwards, many other missionaries from the Society of Jesus and other religious orders arrived in Nagasaki, converting the local people in trading ports including Amakusa and Kuchinotsu.

---

<sup>4</sup> Simon Hull, "Discovering Nagasaki's secret Christian past," *Japan Times*, January 20, 2018, accessed December 11, 2017, <https://www.japantimes.co.jp/news/2016/01/20/business/discovering-nagasakis-secret-christian-past/#.WjFgXN-nEuU>.

<sup>5</sup> Stephen Turnbull, *The Kakure Kirishitan of Japan: A Study of Their Development, Beliefs and Rituals to the Present Day* (Richmond, Surrey: Japan Library, 1998), p. 28.

From 1600 until 1850, however, the Christians were heavily prosecuted by the Japanese government, as those who refused to recant their new faith were tortured and crucified. When Toyotomi Hideyoshi, a powerful *daimyo* (feudal lord) reunified Japan in 1583, he became increasingly concerned with the aggressive expansion of Christianity and its threat to his Buddhist faith. In 1587 he issued an edict expelling Jesuit missionaries, and on February 5, 1597, six Franciscan missionaries and 20 laymen including young boys were crucified on a hill of Nishizaka, Nagasaki.<sup>6</sup> When *shogun* Tokugawa Ieyasu came to power, he tightened Hideyoshi's persecution of Christians in 1614 by prohibiting Christianity in Japan. Christians who refused to renounce their faith were exiled, severely tortured, martyred in mass public crucifixions, and it seemed as Christianity in Japan went extinct as not a single priest was left in the entire country by the 1640s.<sup>7</sup>

But when Commodore Matthew C. Perry arrived 250 years later when Japan was reopened again, it was discovered that thousands of baptized Christians were hiding in Nagasaki, practicing their faith while feigning apostasy. Those who went underground were referred to as "*kakure kirishitan*", hidden Christians. And because there was not a single missionary left, there were no communications with the outside world. Texts of Christian teachings and prayers were almost all destroyed due to their supposed threat, and all Christian religion were transmitted solely by word of mouth, thus changing the Christian belief by merging with indigenous Japanese ones.<sup>8</sup> In 1865, a few Japanese from the Urakami village visited the newly constructed Oura Cathedral and confessed their faith to Father Petitjean. As thousands more came out to confess their faith, this

---

<sup>6</sup> "The History of Christianity in Nagasaki," *Nagasaki Prefectural World Heritage Registration Promotion Division*, accessed December 11, 2017, [https://www.pref.nagasaki.jp/s\\_isan/en/outline/02.html](https://www.pref.nagasaki.jp/s_isan/en/outline/02.html).

<sup>7</sup> Hull, "Discovering Nagasaki's secret Christian past."

<sup>8</sup> Miyazaki Kentaro, "Roman Catholic Mission in Pre-Modern Japan," in *Handbook of Christianity in Japan*, ed. Mark R. Mullins (Boston: Brill, 2003), p.16.

surprising news went back to Europe, and the miraculous event came to be known as the “Discovery of Christians.”

In response, the Japanese government orchestrated another purge, but persecution ended because of increasing international pressure demanding its religious freedom. The ban on Christianity was officially lifted in 1873 by the new Meiji government. As churches were built all over Nagasaki, the Urakami Cathedral, built in 1917, became the largest in East Asia. Nagasaki’s social dynamics and foreign culture are greatly shaped by the long Christian history of persecution and concealment experienced by many generations.

### **Nagai Takashi – Scientist and the Saint of Nagasaki**

Nagai Takashi was born on February 3, 1908 in Matsune City, Shimane Prefecture. Nagai was raised according to Shinto and Confucian teachings in an affluent household. His father and grandfather were both physicians, and Nagai also aspired to become a doctor, entering Nagasaki Medical College in April of 1928. Originally, Nagai firmly believed in science—the driving force of human progress—as the future of the human race, and Japan, whose history and literature he greatly admired.<sup>9</sup> He was also interested in atheism, but later he would find himself on a spiritual journey toward Catholicism. Nagai was a top graduate of his school and was supposed to deliver a graduation speech, but just five days before the event he contracted a disease on the right ear, which made him partially deaf. This changed the course of his life, as he had to give up becoming a physician and was directed toward radiology research.

---

<sup>9</sup> Paul Glynn, *A Song for Nagasaki: The Story of Takashi Nagai: Scientist, Convert, and Survivor of the Atomic Bomb* (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 2009), pp. 27-28.

Immediately after the outbreak of war between Japan and China in 1937, Nagai was dispatched to China as a surgeon in the Imperial Japanese Army 5<sup>th</sup> division. During his time in China, he read a catechism and drew close to Catholicism. On his return, on June 9, 1934, Nagai was baptized, and he chose the Christian first name Paul. He married Maria Midori Moriyama, whose family was the head of the *Kakure Kirishitan* for many generations.

In June 1945, Nagai found out that he had developed leukemia due to his occupational exposure to radiation.<sup>10</sup> Just two months later, the atomic bomb was dropped on Nagasaki. He and his children miraculously survived, and Nagai examined atomic bomb patients and continued his radiology research until he fell very ill. Nagai wrote in his novel *Leaving These Children Behind* (*Kono Ko wo Nokoshite*):

From that day to the present the illness has gradually gained momentum. Now I have to rely on other people even to fetch pieces of paper for me. I barely have the strength to look into a microscope, let alone to examine patients. Fortunately, though, my topic of research—atomic bomb disease—is right here in my own body.<sup>11</sup>

Nagai Takashi, who was a pioneer in the field of radiology in Japan, a man coming from a strong scientific background, would later formulate a very unconventionally religious interpretation of the atomic bomb that would capture the attention of Japan and the world.

---

<sup>10</sup> “Under the Mushroom Cloud,” *Nagasaki Atomic Bomb Museum*, accessed December 11, 2017, [http://www.city.nagasaki.lg.jp/peace/japanese/abm/insti/nagai/nagai\\_s/nagai002e.html](http://www.city.nagasaki.lg.jp/peace/japanese/abm/insti/nagai/nagai_s/nagai002e.html).

<sup>11</sup> Nagai Takashi, *Kono Ko wo Nokoshite* この子を残して [Leaving These Children Behind] (Tokyo: St. Paul サンパウロ, 2006), quoted in “Under the Mushroom Cloud,” *Nagasaki Atomic Bomb Museum*.

## Christian Interpretation – Nagai Takashi and the Atomic Holocaust

When the United States dropped the second atomic bomb on August 9, 1945, the Urakami Valley – which was the area in Japan most heavily populated by Christians – became ground zero for the resulting nuclear devastation. The bomb exploded some 500 meters above the Matsuyama-machi neighborhood in the northern section of Nagasaki killing roughly 8,500 out of the 120,000 resident Christians.<sup>12</sup> Additionally, 300 of the 900 *burakumin*, social outcasts who were forcefully relocated to the Urakami District in the 18<sup>th</sup> century to act as barriers between the hidden Christians and the general population, were killed by the bomb. Thus it became a known taboo among the people of Nagasaki that the most under-privileged people ostracized by society were the ones hit the hardest by the bomb.<sup>13</sup> The bomb obliterated the Urakami Cathedral which was located 500 meters from the hypocenter and the surrounding Catholic neighborhoods.

One of the Christian victims who were incinerated instantly was Nagai Takashi's wife, Midori Moriyama. Dr. Nagai eventually learned that his wife had been praying at the time because he found her charred skeleton with the burnt remnants of her rosary in her hand.<sup>14</sup> With less than a quarter of the Urakami parish's members left, Nagai's Catholic community was physically and spiritually defeated.<sup>15</sup> The initial Christian interpretation of the atomic bomb was that God was

---

<sup>12</sup> Otake Tomoko, "Nagasaki's 'providential' nightmare shaped by religious, ethnic undercurrents," *Japan Times*, August 7, 2015, Accessed December 11, 2017, <https://www.japantimes.co.jp/news/2015/08/07/national/history/nagasakis-providential-nightmare-shaped-religious-ethnic-undercurrents/#.Wi8y-d-nE2y>.

<sup>13</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>14</sup> Miyamoto Yuki, *Beyond the Mushroom Cloud: Commemoration, Religion, and Responsibility after Hiroshima*, Fordham University Press, 2011, p. 127.

<sup>15</sup> *Ibid.*, p.128.

punishing the people. Nagai, however, later developed and preached an entirely opposite interpretation that would influence not only his Christian community but also the rest of Japan and the world. His theory, in fact, originated as a reaction to the common non-Christian interpretation of the bomb dropping on Urakami. What prompted him to reflect on the nature of the bomb was when his Catholic friend, Yamada Ichitaro, came to ask Nagai for a theological explanation for the annihilation of Urakami. Mr. Yamada had returned from battle only to find his wife and children incinerated. Yamada heard that the non-Christians of Nagasaki believed that the bomb was a *tenbatsu* (divine punishment) sent by a *kami* (Japanese deity) to punish the Christians for worshipping a foreign religion. Yamada asked Nagai if his wife and children were heretics for believing in Christianity.

This view of *tenbatsu* was quite popular among the non-Christian survivors because people pointed to the fact that the Urakami Cathedral and the surrounding Christian community was the center of destruction, while the major Shinto shrine, the Suwa Shrine, survived with no major damage. The Shinto followers, desperate for an explanation, believed that the Japanese *kami* had protected them from the bomb while the Christian community was punished by annihilation. They also took it as an omen that America, a Christian nation, dropped the atomic bomb on the most Christian area in the entire Japan.<sup>16</sup>

Dr. Nagai rejected this interpretation and gradually came to a different understanding of the atomic bombing of Urakami. Nagai was asked to write a speech for his community's Requiem Mass scheduled for November 23, 1945, and in that speech he presented the following religious interpretation of the disaster:

---

<sup>16</sup> John K. Nelson, *A Year in the Life of a Shinto Shrine*, Seattle: University of Washington Press, 2006, p. 22.

It is significant to reflect that Japan is a country dedicated to the Virgin Mary and our Urakami Cathedral was especially dedicated to her also. And we must ask if this convergence of events – the ending of the war and the celebration of her feast [of the Assumption of the Virgin Mary] – was merely coincidental or if there was here some mysterious providence of God.<sup>17</sup>

Nagai also spoke of those who were killed by the bomb—“Were the Christians in Urakami not, then, chosen from all over the world, unblemished lambs that had to be offered on the altar of God?”<sup>18</sup> Nagai emphasized that the atomic bomb was divine providence and that the victims were God’s sacrificial lambs. The survivors, on the other hand, were sinners who have not yet expiated their sins and were left behind, and have to thank God for the opportunity to expiate their sins in the coming pain and suffering in the aftermath of the bomb. He also stated that God must have “inspired the Emperor to issue the sacred decree” to end the war.<sup>19</sup> It must be understood that although these views are very extreme and seemingly outrageous, it was formulated by Nagai as a way to comfort his people at a time of deep crisis and confusion. This so-called “holocaust theory,” *Urakami hansai setsu*, must be carefully analyzed from a very particular religious context. On Christmas Eve of that year, 1945, Nagai conceived the ideas for his most famous novel *The Bells of Nagasaki (Nagasaki no Kane)*.<sup>20</sup> He completed the novel around August 9, 1946, a year after

---

<sup>17</sup> Konishi Tetsuro, “The Original Manuscript of Takashi Nagai’s Funeral Address at a Mass for the victims of the Nagasaki Atomic Bomb,” *The Journal of Nagasaki University of Foreign Studies*, Vol. 18, p. 61. Photocopies of Nagai’s manuscript of the speech and a full English translation can be found here.

<sup>18</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 62.

<sup>19</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>20</sup> John W. Dower, “The Bombed: Hiroshimas and Nagasakis in Japanese Memory.” *Diplomatic History*, Vol. 19, No. 2, (1995), p. 286.

his wife and many of his medical co-workers and members of his Catholic community were incinerated.<sup>21</sup>

### **The Significance of Nagai's Holocaust Theory in Japan**

The significance of Nagai's interpretation contains multiple facets that go well beyond an extreme Christian apocalyptic outlook on the atomic bomb. First, because his novel was published in 1949 after the print media's censorship began to ease in late 1948, it became the seminal example of atomic literature and the dominant interpretation of that time. He was one of the earliest *hibakusha* to bring his view of the atomic bomb to the public. Only one year later, on September 23, 1950, a movie adaptation of *The Bells of Nagasaki* – including a remarkably popular theme song – was released to mainstream audiences throughout Japan.

Second, his personal tragedy, combined with his charisma, captured the minds of the Japanese people. Historian John Dower notes that,

Nagai was extraordinarily charismatic in his prolonged death agony and captured popular imagination to a degree unsurpassed by any other Japanese writer about the bombs until the mid-1960s, when the distinguished elderly novelist Ibuse Masuji, a native son of Hiroshima prefecture, published *Black Rain (Kuroi Ame)*.<sup>22</sup>

Nagai's personal tragedy of losing his wife, facing death and leaving his children behind for the greater good of society helped him garner the sympathy of the people because so many others shared a similar experience. Dower elaborates on this idea noting that,

There is no evidence that the Japanese who flocked to buy Nagai's writings, or wrote him in great numbers, or made pilgrimages to his bedside, were fundamentally moved by his Christianity. More obviously, they were moved by

---

<sup>21</sup> Ibid.

<sup>22</sup> Ibid. p. 285. See "The Bombed" for details of Hiroshima atomic literature and its comparison to Nagasaki literature.

his courage, his struggle to make sense of his fate, and the pathos of the two youngsters he soon would leave orphaned.<sup>23</sup>

Nagai's calm and thoughtful response, combined with his good will of dedicating himself in treating the *hibakusha* despite his own physical and emotional sufferings, touched the hearts and minds of people around Japan.

Third, although not everyone agreed with his Christian theological interpretation, Nagai's analogy of bomb victims being a sacrifice to end the war spoke to many Japanese who were looking for a new, post-war identity. Japan's victim consciousness after surrender, especially concerning the atomic bombs, allowed for the Japanese to arrive at national unity on war history.<sup>24</sup> Dower writes, "Nagai's sermon that Japan had been divinely chosen to endure unique and world-redemptive suffering clearly struck a resonant chord in the Japanese psyche."<sup>25</sup> The theme of martyrdom and the parallel idea of the Japanese being the sacrificial lamb to end the war appealed to the Japanese people outside of Nagasaki.

### **Atomic Holocaust and the Historical Memory**

*The Bells of Nagasaki* played a major role in the construction of Japan's popular historical memory of the Nagasaki atomic bomb. The widely acknowledged phrase, "*Ikari no Hiroshima, Inori no Nagasaki*" (wrathful Hiroshima, prayerful Nagasaki), which came to be emphasized after

---

<sup>23</sup> Ibid., p. 285. With Nagai's worsening leukemia and the death of his beloved wife Midori, Nagai was distressed over the fact that his two surviving children Makoto and Kayano would soon be left orphaned. This concern became a driving force behind his extensive writing. Just six years after the atomic bombing, Nagai passed away on May 1, 1951, when Makoto was sixteen and Kayano was nine.

<sup>24</sup> Philip A. Seaton, *Japan's Contested War Memories: The 'Memory Rifts' in Historical Consciousness of World War II*. London: Routledge, 2007, pp. 27-28.

<sup>25</sup> Dower, "The Bombed," pp. 285-286.

the Emperor's visit to Nagasaki in May 1949, represented the generalization of sentiments of both cities, and the prayer aspect can be drawn directly back to Nagai's holocaust theory.<sup>26</sup> However, by societal constructs such as taboos, censorships, and divisions between religious groups, public historical memory can be shaped to only favor a certain view and omit other truths. As Nagai's interpretation of the atomic experience was popularized over time, it overshadowed those of other *hibakusha*, specifically the non-Christians and the Christians who disagreed with Nagai. Japan's popular historical memory of the Nagasaki atomic bomb in reality is very different from that of Nagasaki citizens, yet the "prayerful Nagasaki" came out louder to silence the other voices. Originally, Nagai Takashi formulated the holocaust theory to help his fellow Christians come to some form of comforting understanding of their fate. This is rather a narrow and specific view only explaining the fate of Christian *hibakusha* of Nagasaki, excluding those other non-Christian Nagasaki *hibakusha* who were also affected by the bomb. Yet, its extreme religious view had turned the dominant Japanese public memory of Nagasaki bomb into a religious narrative.

One instance of this can be observed is in the lack of Nagasaki atomic literature, especially when compared to Hiroshima's large anti-bomb literature movement. Historian John W. Treat writes that, "the Christian heritage of Nagasaki is the factor most frequently cited as the root cause for the paucity of the city's contributions to atomic-bomb literature."<sup>27</sup> He explains that the specific reason why this alienated people from writing atomic-literature in Nagasaki "lies in the

---

<sup>26</sup> Okuyama Michiaki 奥山倫明, "Religious Responses to the Atomic Bombing in Nagasaki," *Nanzan Institute for Religion and Culture*, Vol. 37 (2013), p 74, accessed December 11, 2017, <https://nirc.nanzan-u.ac.jp/nfile/4258>.

<sup>27</sup> John W. Treat, *Writing Ground Zero: Japanese Literature and the Atomic Bomb*, Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1995, p. 306.

widespread impression that Christianity is a religion which exploits guilt and which countenances extreme violence as legitimate within the ken of divine action.”<sup>28</sup> Hence, Treat states that the Japanese contempt for a foreign religion with unacceptable beliefs led to the aversion of atomic-bomb literature as well, which was seen as unnecessary and morose.<sup>29</sup> Some people did not want to associate with atomic literature because in addition to the topic by itself being difficult, the Christian narrative was causing much controversy.

On the other hand, many Nagasaki *hibakusha* were simply silenced on their opinion on Nagai or their own atomic experience because many nationally and globally revered figures such as Emperor Hirohito and Hellen Keller, as well as the Japanese public, favored him. Professor of Philosophy at Nagasaki University, Takahashi Shinji, criticized Nagai because, “It became taboo to discuss Nagai and his views of the A-bomb, and deprived Nagasaki victims of the option to rage, pursue accountability and seek compensation.”<sup>30</sup> Takahashi’s book, published in 1994, *Philosophizing in Nagasaki, (Nagasaki ni atte Tetsugakusuru)* was one of the first academic efforts to criticize Nagai.<sup>31</sup> The fact that one of the first academic books criticizing Nagai’s view came as late as 1994 reflects on how accepted Nagai’s works were. Takahashi argued that Nagai’s theory not only negated American responsibility for dropping the atomic bomb but went so far as to

---

<sup>28</sup> Ibid., p. 306.

<sup>29</sup> Ibid., p. 306. See, *Writing Ground Zero* for more details on Christian atomic literature.

<sup>30</sup> Otake Tomoko, “Nagasaki’s ‘providential’ nightmare shaped by religious, ethnic undercurrents,” *Japan Times*, August 7, 2015.  
<https://www.japantimes.co.jp/news/2015/08/07/national/history/nagasaki-providential-nightmare-shaped-religious-ethnic-undercurrents/#.WiScK0qnE2x>.

<sup>31</sup> Takahashi Shinji, *Nagasaki ni atte Tetsugakusuru* 長崎にあつて哲学する [Philosophizing in Nagasaki] (Tokyo: Hokuju Shuppan 北樹出版, 1994), passim.

actively endorse the decision. Takahashi also pointed out that Nagai did not analyze the war responsibility or the atomic bomb responsibility and only stated that, “We started the war,” thus appealing to the General Headquarters and the American government. Furthermore, because the Japanese ruling class praised Nagai, Takahashi claimed that the voices of the *hibakusha* were silenced and consequently the governmental aid for the *hibakusha* was delayed.<sup>32</sup>

There has been an ongoing debate over Nagai’s holocaust theory and its influence on Nagasaki’s historical memory. There were several others who publicly voiced their opinions against Nagai’s theory before Takahashi. In the 1960s, a student of Nagai, Akizuki Tatsuichiro, a doctor and later the President of St. Francisco Hospital, publicly stated, “I cannot follow” (*tsuiteikenai*) regarding Nagai’s holocaust view.<sup>33</sup> Although at the time, Akizuki mostly kept to himself his views against Nagai’s interpretation. Akizuki Tatsuichiro was another famous Catholic doctor of Urakami, and in just the first three days after the bombing, Akizuki by himself treated over three hundred patients.<sup>34</sup> Before working at the First Hospital in Urakami, Akizuki was an assistant in the Radiology Department of the Medical University of Nagasaki, where he was introduced to Nagai Takashi, then an associate professor and the head of the department. Although

---

<sup>32</sup> Ibid.

<sup>33</sup> Okamoto Hiroyuki 岡本洋之, “Nagai Takashi wa naze genbakushi ga kamino setsuri dato kyouchou shitanoka? Kegare kara kangaeru kokoromi” 永井隆はなぜ原爆死が神の摂理だと強調したのか? 「ケガレ」から考える試み [Why did Nagai Takashi emphasize that the atomic bomb was divine providence? Interpreting from “Kegare”], *Kyouiku Kagaku Seminary* 教育科学セミナー, Vol. 42 (2011), p. 2, Accessed December 11, 2017. <http://hdl.handle.net/10112/4865>.  
Original Japanese: *tsuiteikenai* ついていけない。

<sup>34</sup> Okuyama Michiaki 奥山倫明, “Religious Responses,” p. 73.

Akizuki respected Nagai's scientific and medical accomplishments and his strength to write and speak out after the disaster, Akizuki could not concur with Nagai's religious view or sympathize with other Catholics claiming the bomb was "God's providence". Akizuki states:

Dr. Nagai has produced an enormous achievement in reporting widely the aftermath of the atomic bombing in Nagasaki. The images of "the atomic-bombed Nagasaki" and "Nagai in Nagasaki" have spread all over Japan. I could not but feel, however, that his appeal was too sentimental, and inclined to be too religious. And accordingly, the result has been as if Dr. Nagai has been the only witness to report the atomic bomb of Nagasaki. Exhausted physically for the double suffering from radiation sickness, he could not have any other way of facing the atomic bombing but a religious way.<sup>35</sup>

Akizuki recognized how Nagai's voice had masked other victims' voices, and he began his own anti-bomb movement by writing about his experience, joining the anti-nuclear peace movement, and urging others to document their atomic bomb and war survival stories.<sup>36</sup>

The more vocal and harsher criticism of Nagai emphasized the political significance of Nagai's interpretation. In the 1970s, Kan Yamada, a poet, criticized Nagai as "a demagogue who helps to hide the anti-human principle inherent to the atomic bomb and ignores the people's enduring grudge, and supports the American political ideologies."<sup>37</sup> It is recorded that Yamada was the first *hibakusha* residing in Nagasaki to formally and publicly criticize Nagai. The lack of open disapproval and discourse even decades after Nagai passed away demonstrates how

---

<sup>35</sup> Ibid., p. 73.

<sup>36</sup> Ibid., p. 75.

<sup>37</sup> Okamoto Hiroyuki 岡本洋之, "Nagai Takashi", p. 3. Original Japanese: *Genbaku no naishitsu to shitearu hanjinruitekina genriwo ooikakusubeki katan ni hokanaranaku, minshu no iyashigatai enkon wo sorashi ibusuru, amerika no seijitekihassouwo hokyoushi sasaeru demagogi* 「原爆」の内質としてある反人類的な原理をおおい隠すべき加担にほかならず、民衆の癒しがたい怨恨をそらし慰撫する、アメリカの政治的発想を補強し支えるデマゴギー。

dominating his interpretations were. In the 1980s, Hisashi Inoue, a writer criticized, “According to Nagai’s theory, America can argue that the atomic bombings were acts of justice.”<sup>38</sup> He also stated, “By bringing out the God’s providence, it is possible to dismiss the people with responsibility in the human world. There is no better narrative for political leaders than this.”<sup>39</sup> The majority of the public criticism following Nagai’s death emphasized the political aspect and Nagai’s dismissal of American responsibility for dropping the atomic bomb.

Nagai Takashi’s atomic holocaust theory was much more far-reaching than he initially expected. It gave hope to the Catholic members of Urakami, by invalidating their initial confusion that their God was punishing them and by disproving the non-Christians’ claim that the Japanese *Kami* was cracking down on the Christians. However, as *The Bells of Nagasaki* became the leading literature and Nagai became a prominent public figure in the post-war shaping of the atomic memory, his fame and controversy effectively prevented other members of the *hibakusha* from commenting on the atomic bombing. Furthermore, the debate over Nagai’s holocaust theory overshadowed the other aspects of the Nagasaki atomic bombing discourse. In the debate, the critics of Nagai focused on the political impact of the theory regarding the American responsibility and the Catholics who supported Nagai’s teachings were coming strictly from a religious point of view, thus making it hard for the two sides to a common understanding. Meanwhile, the other *hibakusha* who did not agree with Nagai were left out of the spotlight and had to internalize their

---

<sup>38</sup>Ibid., p. 3. Original Japanese: *Nagaisetsu ni yorunaraba amerika wa genbakutouka wo seigono okonaide atta to kyouben dekiru* 永井説に拠るならばアメリカは原爆投下を正誤の行いであったと強弁できる。

<sup>39</sup>Ibid. Original Japanese: “kami no setsuri wo mochidaseba ningensekai kara sekininsha wo dasazuni sumuwakeda. Iseisha ni totte konna tsugou no ii hanashi wanai” 神の摂理を持ち出せば人間世界から責任者を出さずにすむわけだ。為政者にとってこんな都合のいい話はない。

sentiments of pain, anger, and confusion. There was no collective identity the non-Christian *hibakusha* especially could come back to due to the extreme nature of Nagai's theory that skewed the common ground.

When it comes to Nagasaki's atomic experience, the attention largely is directed toward the religious aspect, because of the history of Nagasaki being the hub of Japanese Christianity. The atomic discourse, even before Nagai, was already carrying a religious undertone, with the Shinto followers claiming the *tenbatsu* (divine punishment) of Christians. Instead of uniting as victims, the *hibakusha* were pointing fingers at each other and could not come together to form a shared understanding of the bomb. For this reason, when Nagai introduced his *Urakami hansai setsu*, the non-Christians found this view to be alarmingly extreme as to remain silent. While the rest of Japan embraced Nagai's interpretation as the one that stands out the most, generalizing the Nagasaki experience as *Inori no Nagasaki*, the people of Nagasaki are divided over this memory to this day.

## Bibliographical Essay

Japanese texts were very helpful in the writing of this paper, particularly when directly analyzing Nagai's interpretations (as presented in the Mass Requiem speech) and the various critics' opposition against Nagai. In the document titled "The Original Manuscript of Takashi Nagai's Funeral Address at a Mass for the Victims of the Nagasaki Atomic Bomb" by Konishi Tetsuro, photocopies of Nagai's original manuscript, the Japanese text in type, and the English translations are provided. Furthermore, the source provided the comparison between Nagai's funeral address manuscript and the manuscript of the original *The Bells of Nagasaki*. Konishi analyzed what Nagai decided to keep or omit from the Requiem Mass speech for his new novel, which will be more widely known than the speech. This is a very unique and significant comparison as it goes through Nagai's thought process in deciding what major points of his holocaust theory he wants to emphasize in the novel. The words on *The Bells of Nagasaki* would eventually be read by the world, even Nagai obviously did not know that at the time of the drafting of the novel. Konishi even created a pie chart of the number of common and different characters in the speech manuscript and *The Bells* manuscript.

Another significant Japanese document that gave important analysis on Nagai's interpretation is titled "Why did Nagai Takashi emphasize that the atomic bomb was divine providence? Interpreting from 'Kegare,'" by Okamoto Hiroyuki. In this document, Okamoto quoted statements by multiple critics of Nagai's holocaust theory and statements by the Catholic community in response to the criticism of Nagai. Okamoto further analyzed the nature of the debate in that the political viewpoint against Nagai and religious viewpoint in support of Nagai do not allow for a shared agreement. A notable factor is that in Okamoto's thirteen-page article, he paid close attention to the linguistics of Nagai's and the critic's analysis, such as by looking into word

choice and the context in which claims are given. Okamoto also cited a significant number of original Japanese sources that have not been used by western scholars in analyzing this topic.

## Bibliography

- Dower, John W. "The Bombed: Hiroshimas and Nagasakis in Japanese Memory." *Diplomatic History*, Vol. 19, No. 2, (1995), pp. 275-295.
- Glynn, Paul. *A Song for Nagasaki: The Story of Takashi Nagai: Scientist, Convert, and Survivor of the Atomic Bomb*. San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 2009.
- Harano, Joji. "The Bells of Nagasaki Ring On Nagai Takashi and His Record of the Atomic Bombing" last modified August 7, 2015. <https://www.nippon.com/en/features/c02301/>.
- Hull, Simon. "Discovering Nagasaki's secret Christian past." *Japan Times*. January 20, 2018, accessed December 11, 2017. <https://www.japantimes.co.jp/news/2016/01/20/business/discovering-nagasakis-secret-christian-past/#.WjFgXN-nEuU>.
- Konishi, Tetsuro. "The Original Manuscript of Takashi Nagai's Funeral Address at a Mass for the victims of the Nagasaki Atomic Bomb," *The Journal of Nagasaki University of Foreign Studies*, Vol. 18, pp. 55-68.
- Miyamoto, Yuki. *Beyond the Mushroom Cloud: Commemoration, Religion, and Responsibility after Hiroshima*. Fordham University Press, 2011.
- Nagai, Takashi. *Kono Ko wo Nokoshite* この子を残して [Leaving These Children Behind] (Tokyo: St. Paul サンパウロ, 2006), quoted in "Under the Mushroom Cloud," *Nagasaki Atomic Bomb Museum*.
- Nelson, John K. *A Year in the Life of a Shinto Shrine*. Seattle: University of Washington Press, 2006.
- Okamoto, Hiroyuki 岡本洋之. "Nagai Takashi wa naze genbakushi ga kamino setsuri dato kyouchou shitanoka? Kegare kara kangaeru kokoromi" 永井隆はなぜ原爆死が神の摂理だと強調したのか? 「ケガレ」から考える試み [Why did Nagai Takashi emphasize that the atomic bomb was divine providence? Interpreting from "Kegare"], *Kyouiku Kagaku Seminary* 教育科学セミナー, Vol. 42 (2011), pp. 1-13. Accessed December 11, 2017. <http://hdl.handle.net/10112/4865>.
- Okuyama, Michiaki 奥山倫明. "Religious Responses to the Atomic Bombing in Nagasaki," *Nanzan Institute for Religion and Culture*, Vol. 37 (2013), pp. 64-76. Accessed December 11, 2017. <https://nirc.nanzan-u.ac.jp/nfile/4258>.
- Otake, Tomoko. "Nagasaki's 'providential' nightmare shaped by religious, ethnic undercurrents," *Japan Times*. August 7, 2015. Accessed December 11, 2017. <https://www.japantimes.co.jp/news/2015/08/07/national/history/nagasakis-providential-nightmare-shaped-religious-ethnic-undercurrents/#.Wi8y-d-nE2y>.

- Seaton, Philip A. *Japan's Contested War Memories: The 'Memory Rifts' in Historical Consciousness of World War II*. London: Routledge, 2007.
- Takahashi, Shinji. *Nagasaki ni atte Tetsugakusuru* 長崎にあつて哲学する [Philosophizing in Nagasaki]. Tokyo: Hokuju Shuppan 北樹出版, 1994.
- Treat, John W. *Writing Ground Zero: Japanese Literature and the Atomic Bomb*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1995.
- Turnbull, Stephen. *The Kakure Kirishitan of Japan: A Study of Their Development, Beliefs and Rituals to the Present Day*. Richmond, Surrey: Japan Library, 1998.
- “The History of Christianity in Nagasaki.” Nagasaki Prefectural World Heritage Registration Promotion Division. Accessed December 11, 2017.  
[https://www.pref.nagasaki.jp/s\\_isan/en/outline/02.html](https://www.pref.nagasaki.jp/s_isan/en/outline/02.html).
- “Under the Mushroom Cloud.” *Nagasaki Atomic Bomb Museum*. Accessed December 11, 2017.  
[http://www.city.nagasaki.lg.jp/peace/japanese/abm/insti/nagai/nagai\\_s/nagai002e.html](http://www.city.nagasaki.lg.jp/peace/japanese/abm/insti/nagai/nagai_s/nagai002e.html).