

Toward the End of the War

After four years of study in Europe, I came back to my homeland in June, 1934 full of patriotism. I could not imagine that there were any Japanese who did not love their country. But at midnight, a few days after my return from abroad, I was awakened by a shrill voice: "You traitor!" I wondered what this reproach meant, only to be reminded that there was a practice blackout in progress, and that some light could be seen coming from our chapel. Japan's preparation for war began eleven years before that fateful day when the Bomb was dropped.

Hardly had the new Junshin school been built at Ieno-machi when in July, 1937, the Sino-Japanese war broke out. The authorities of the Special Police Division came repeatedly and asked such questions as these: "Where does your money come from? Don't you have any connections with foreigners now?"

I told the police that our congregation was only for Japanese and that no money had ever been given to us by foreigners, but they would not believe what I said. The police even suggested that we should not have a chapel, but that rather a charm from the Ise Shrine should be dedicated and worshipped every morning in the teacher's room. They also asked me whom I thought was greater-Christ, or the sun goddess Amaterasu O-mikami.

I didn't like being looked upon as a traitor, as one who opposed the national policy. I could bear the shame for myself, but I couldn't see my students humiliated. All the students and teachers worked earnestly to increase food production by cultivating the school grounds and regularly took part in air raid maneuvers. One by one our male teachers left for the front.

Meanwhile Monsignor Ideguchi who was in charge of the Kagoshima diocese came to our school with a request: "Could you come to Kagoshima and take charge of the Seimei Girls' High School? I ask this of you because the Junshin Sisters are a Japanese order devoted to education." Before this the Seimei High School in Kagoshima had been established and managed by the Holy Name Sisters from Canada, but they had been under constant surveillance by the police, and had finally been forced to withdraw. The police had even harrassed the students. I wanted to refuse, but I felt compelled to accept.

In those days anti-British and anti-American sentiment prevailed throughout

Japan. Once when I was in a streetcar reading from a Latin prayer book, I was abused loudly by a man opposite me, "Look, she's reading English. . . the traitor!" Often while we were praying in the chapel, passersby could be heard shouting, "Japanese are you? Why do you dress like foreigners?" This aversion to our religious habit was so strong that finally we were obliged to change to mompe, the traditional women's working clothes.

As the war progressed, classes had to be discontinued at the school; our students were sent to work at various munitions factories. They would get up at 4 : 30 in the morning, go to the Urakami Cathedral for Mass, and then after a light breakfast, be ready for morning assembly at seven. There they would stand dressed in their working clothes, proudly wearing the arm-bands that marked them off as mobilized students. They would salute the imperial portrait and set off singing a song they had composed.

We the young budding cherries
With the blood of youth stirring
In our hearts,
This is our sacred duty
To give ourselves joyfully
In this time of national crisis.

Even in the coldest season there were no window panes in the factory to protect the girls from the biting winds. The floor was cold concrete lined with row upon row of machines. In those days both wool jackets and cotton clothing were not available; the girls wore only two thin layers of clothes. In the depth of winter the machines would be as cold as ice, but gloves could not be worn because of the danger of entanglement in the machines. The hands of the girls became frost-bitten.

When work was finished for the day, neither soap nor hot water were available to clean the dirt and oil from their hands. At night completely exhausted the girls would come back to the dormitory to a skimpy ration of rice. At times to satisfy their hunger they ate the stems of radishes or the leaves of sweet potatoes. Sugar had already been requisitioned for use as airplane fuel. Parched peas or popped rice sent by the mothers of the girls were quickly consumed. They lived by the poster that could be seen on every street corner: GIVE ALL UNTIL VICTORY IS OURS!

Although living on poor and scanty food, the girls also had to dig air raid

shelters and work in the school fields. Unaccustomed to such work, many of them took sick. At midnight air raid alarms would drive us to the shelters where there was very little water. Some of the students would say to me, "Mother, if I die, please baptize me." Then when the all clear was sounded, we would hardly be back in our beds when the alarm would go off again. Often the alarm went off several times in one night; yet all would be up for Mass the following morning ready to go to work at the factory. Such was the tension, such was the work. No one complained but constantly said, "If we don't work, what will become of our country!" They sent their wages to their families as soon as they received them from the factory authorities.

They are no longer with us—these wonderful young people; they are with the Good God Who has wiped away their tears and turned their suffering into joy forever. May they rest in heavenly peace.

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