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The Cross and the Bomb: Two Catholic Dramas in Response to Nagasaki

Written by
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Ikani no Hiroshima, inori no Nagasaki.
(Hiroshima rages, Nagasaki prays.)
Japanese proverb

On 9 August 1945, at 11:02 in the morning, the American plane "Bock's Car" dropped an atomic bomb, powered by plutonium and nicknamed "Fat Man," which exploded half a kilometer above the Urakami district of Nagasaki. It was the second atomic bomb to be deployed in Japan, after an uranium bomb had devastated Hiroshima three days earlier. As John Whittier Treat notes, apart from being "a redundant act," the Nagasaki bomb was unique in that ground zero was the largest Roman Catholic cathedral in Japan and Nagasaki itself had the largest Catholic and Christian population in Japan.[1] In an instant, 73,000 people died, over 8000 of whom were Christian. Less than one percent of the Japanese population was Christian, yet they comprised over ten percent of the bomb's victims. A larger issue for the victims, as well as for subsequent generations of Japanese and Christians, was why the West would target the most Christian city in Japan, and why would God allow His people to be so afflicted?

The Japanese theatre has offered two Catholic-centered responses to the latter question: Tanaka Chikao's *Maria no kubi* (*The Head of Mary*) and Father Ernest Ferlita's adaptation of Nagai Takashi's *The Bells of Nagasaki*.[2] I will first consider the Catholic context of the bombing of Nagasaki, and the Church's response (or lack thereof). Then, the two Catholic plays will be considered in the religious and dramatic contexts. Tanaka's play theologizes the Nagasaki experience in essentially Western, Christian terms. Ferlita's adaptation, on the other hand, uses the structure and style of Noh (itself rooted in the cultures of Shinto and Buddhism) to create another Catholic response to Nagasaki. Both plays, each using an amalgam of Eastern and

[1] John Whittier Treat, *Writing Ground Zero: Japanese Literature and the Atomic Bomb* (Chicago: U Chicago P, 1995) 302.

[2] It should be noted that all Japanese names used in this article are given Japanese style, with surname first and given name second.

Western religious elements, attempt to theologize the Nagasaki experience from the Catholic point of view.

In the mid-twentieth century, less than one percent of the Japanese population was Christian, and only a small portion of that number were Catholic.[3] In the early seventeenth century, the Tokugawa government outlawed Christianity, missionaries, and the practice of Western religion, beginning a period of persecution that would last until the mid-nineteenth century. As the early Catholic and Protestant missionaries had worked out of Nagasaki, one of the Southernmost port cities in Japan, the converts there eventually created a large Christian population which went underground with the banning of their religion. These adherents were called *kakure kirishitan* ("hidden Christians").

With the opening of Japanese society under the Meiji Restoration, beginning in 1873 with the legalization of Christianity, however, Nagasaki became an open center of that religion. Urakami Cathedral, the largest Roman Catholic church in Japan, was built in the city, and consecrated to the Virgin Mary. The bomb detonated directly above this cathedral.

Even though its cathedral was inadvertently ground zero for "Fat Man", the Catholic Church never spoke out against the atomic bombings of Hiroshima and Nagasaki. The Catholic Church's silence was not without precedent. Its silence on the Jewish Holocaust of World War II was the subject of Rolf Hochhuth's play *The Deputy*. In 1963, it was one of the first post-war works to criticize the Catholic Church and the Pope for failing to openly criticize Hitler's genocide. Although the specific charges leveled against Pius XII by Hochhuth were proven incorrect, the basic charge that the Church's supreme Pontiff did nothing publicly to stop the Jewish Holocaust remains a controversial accusation, first brought to light in the theatre.[4]

No such play as *The Deputy* exists for the bombings of Hiroshima and Nagasaki. Instead of asking why the Vatican remained silent, the plays dealing with the nuclear bombs dropped on Hiroshima and Nagasaki tend to focus on the theology needed to explain the events – to

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[3] David Reid, *New Wine: The Cultural Shaping of Japanese Christianity* (Berkeley: Asian Humanities, 1991) 7.

[4] Hochhuth's play posits that Pius XII valued Vatican stockholdings over the safety and lives of Europe's Jews. While this charge is ultimately not borne out by the facts, recent controversial scholarship has demonstrated Pius's anti-Semitism and willingness to place maintaining the power of the Papacy over all other concerns. See John Cornwall's *Hitler's Pope: The Secret History of Pius XII* for both a summation of the influence of the play *The Deputy* and the possible reasons why Pius XII never spoke out against the Holocaust during the war.

attempt to justify how an all-loving, all-powerful, all-knowing God could allow such a thing to happen. In short, Catholic (indeed, all Christian) responses to the bombs must become theodicies – explaining the presence of this greatest of evils, which stands in opposition to the Church teachings on the goodness of God and His creation.

As for the Church's stance on nuclear weapons in general, Pope John XXIII addressed atomic weapons in his last encyclical *Pacem et terris* (*Peace on Earth*), issued on 11 April 1963; but he did not address Hiroshima or Nagasaki directly. Likewise, the Second Vatican Council, under Paul VI, issued a statement about nuclear weapons in *Gaudium et spes* in 1965:

> Every act of war directed to the indiscriminate destruction of whole cities or vast areas with their inhabitants is a crime against God and man, which merits firm and unequivocal condemnation. A danger of modern weapons is that it provides the opportunity to those who possess modern weapons – especially atomic, biological or chemical weapons – to commit such crimes.[5]

More recently, the National Conference of Catholic Bishops promulgated their 1983 letter, *The Challenge of Peace: God's Promise and Our Response*, which was an American Catholic response to the arms race under President Reagan. What none of these documents do, however, is explain, in theological terms, why God allowed the Hiroshima and Nagasaki bombs to be dropped. These two plays offer theodicies that explain the Nagasaki event – theatre as theology, as it were.

This analysis will focus on the two Nagasaki plays for several reasons. First, as noted above, Nagasaki was Japan's most Catholic city, with "the most active parish in the country."[6] Second, ground zero was a church, albeit not intentionally. (The bomb drifted in the wind from its original target in the business/industrial district). Treat reports a local saying in Nagasaki: "The bomb was not dropped on Nagasaki; it was dropped on Urakami."[7] These plays, if they are to be true theodices, must explain why God would allow His church to be the site of the explosion. (After all, that was where His priests, nuns, and active laity were at the moment of detonation.) Third, Nagasaki produces Catholic drama and literature while Hiroshima does

[5] Part II, Chapter V, section 1.

[6] James M. Philips, *From the Rising of the Sun: Christians and Society in Contemporary Japan* (Maryknoll: Orbis, 1981) 3.

[7] Treat 305.

not, which makes Ernest Ferlita's *Mask of Hiroshima* all the more interesting for featuring a Catholic family in Hiroshima. Treat also argues that literary authors tend to ignore Nagasaki in comparison with its predecessor, noting that there is "a hierarchy" in the discussion of atomic bomb literature: "Hiroshima, and then, only sometimes, Nagasaki."[8]

In *Writing Ground Zero*, John Whittier Treat argues that the major theme of much of Nagasaki's literature is the desire "to be a sacrifice, one consecrated not only for his fellow human beings, but for his abiding faith in the greater, unknowable designs of God."[9] In other words, martyrdom for the Catholic faith was already a theme in the literature of Nagasaki even before the bomb. The atomic bombing of the Cathedral, therefore, was read in the light of a literary history of martyrdom.

For centuries in Japan, the authorities regularly hunted down and publicly tortured and/or executed Christians. With the Meiji Restoration, Christianity was not only legalized, but people also embraced the Christian as the fashionable, Western thing to be; the religion was perceived by the educated elite as a gateway to the West and to modernization. However, during World War II Christianity fell into disrepute again and Christians once more found themselves in the role of the martyr, dying for their faith.[10] This martyrdom for the faith is a major theme in both plays. However, the two dramas treat very differently both the purpose of martyrdom and the role the survivors of the bomb found that they must play.

In 1958, Tanaka Chikao, a Japanese Catholic playwright, wrote what is considered by many to be his finest work: *Maria no kubi*. The play is an example of *shingeki*, the modern Japanese theatre modeled after Western realism. David G. Goodman, however, argues that Tanaka's play is an early form of *angura*, the underground theatre of the 1960s that developed in opposition to the Westocentrism of *shingeki*.[11] Subtitled "A Nagasaki Fantasia," the play presents the story of a conspiracy of Catholics who plan to steal and rebuild the statue of the Virgin Mary that stood outside the cathedral. The conspirators, a motley group at best, have all of the pieces

[8] Treat 301-3.

[9] Treat 313.

[10] For a more complete history of Japanese Christianity and the Nagasaki martyrs, see Reid, Phillips, and Caldarola.

[11] David G. Goodman , ed. *After Apocalypse: Four Japanese Plays of Hiroshima and Nagasaki* (Ithaca: Cornell East Asia, 1994) 112.

of the statue, except the head, which is too heavy to move. Yet, as the cathedral is scheduled for demolition, it soon must be moved.

The conspirators are led by two women: Shika, a nurse and prostitute, and Shinobu (whose name means "endurance"), a housewife whose husband is bedridden. Both women are Catholic, both dedicated to Mary (both the person and the statue), and both live lives disconnected from their Catholicism. Shika is a prostitute; Shinobu yearns to kill a young thug named Jigoro who has made her aware of "a necessity outside myself!"[12] All of the characters lead fractured lives, made symbolic in the pieces of the statue of Mary. And yet these pieces can be reassembled. Indeed, in the second scene of the first act in Shika's closet is the nearly reassembled statue missing its head and arm. Man III enters with an arm and reattaches it, having said the password, "*In Nomine*" ("In the name of…", a phrase that begins many Catholic blessings and prayers).[13] Tanaka presents a visual response to the bomb: the role of survivors is to rebuild the faith, a metaphor literalized in the reconstruction of the statue.

Tanaka's play deals very little with the bomb's dead victims. Instead, we see the keloid scars from the bomb on Shika. Mary is referred to as "the keloid Madonna," and clearly Shika's scars are meant to link her with Mary.[14] Through faith and action – belief in Mary and God and rebuilding the statue – the survivors of the bomb will preserve the faith and be offered the opportunity to "act meaningfully in response to the atomic bomb experience," as Goodman argues.[15]

Goodman's analysis of the play in his introduction to the English-language version in *After Apocalpse* is somewhat problematic. Goodman argues that the play is more Buddhist than it seems, and that the play posits the Nagasaki bomb as a theophany – a moment when God enters human history in order to make His presence felt or seen. While certainly the statue of Mary coming to life at the end of the play demonstrates the presence of a real and supernatural God, the focus of the play is not on God (or Mary) justifying the bomb by His (or her) presence. Rather, it is the actions of the characters, as noted above, that generate meaning in a world

[12] Tanaka Chikao, "The Head of Mary," in Goodman, 119.

[13] Tanaka 126.

[14] Tanaka 179.

[15] Goodman 113.

where God himself is silent and inscrutable, even if His emissaries are obvious and open. As with much of the Nagasaki literature about the Christian experience, the message of the play seems to be one of perseverance – accepting one's suffering and continuing in the faith in hopes of reaching Heaven after death.

Goodman sees the play as a "Catholic drama couched in Buddhist terms," arguing primarily that the character of Shinobu expresses the Buddhist desire to extinguish the Self and escape the cycle of *karma*.[16] Certainly there are Buddhist elements in the play, including these expressions. It might be argued, however, that *The Head of Mary* is much more of a Christian drama, couched in the material culture of Christianity than in Buddhist culture and theology.

In his analysis of the play, J. Thomas Rimer sees the play "constructed in the form of a prayer," a rather Christian prayer (although Rimer never offers any evidence of this assertion).[17] More accurately, perhaps, the play contains prayers, mostly in the fourth and final act, which begins with a prayer to the Virgin Mary by Shika:

> Shika (murmuring):
>
> Mary!
> Only you, who have escaped sin,
> Can see into the reaches of our soul.
> Only you know us!
> That is why before you alone
> I would be truly me![18]

She then stops praying, feeling that it has no effect: "Aaaah, it's no good! No good!"[19] Miraculously, the head of Mary begins speaking in answer to the prayer. If prayer is indeed a conversation with the divine, Tanaka dramatizes it as a conversation between the believer (Shika) and the miraculous speaking stone head. Mary engages Shika and the other petitioners, offering them comfort, offering several times to let them "suckle at my breast," saying, "First

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[16] Goodman 110-112.

[17] J. Thomas Rimer, "Four Plays by Tanaka Chikao," *Monumenta Nipponica* 31.3 (1976) 290.

[18] Tanaka 177.

[19] Tanaka 177.

drink, then I will listen to your prayers."[20] A prayer to the "Sweet Mother" is then heard being sung off stage as Shinobu begins to lift the giant head. The play ends with this complex symbol of prayer being answer through action of the petitioner.

While Rimer argues for a prayer structure for this drama, I see the drama as being constructed more in the manner of a well-made play, a form which the playwright has previously employed. Tanaka's previous work, *Kyoiku*, argues Rimer, is a well-made play.[21] I also see *The Head of Mary* as a well-made play, with its four act structure (with a concluding confrontation in each), its last act short and climactic, and its secret knowledge that the audience learns but that the characters do not always become aware. I have argued elsewhere that this play owes a dramatic debt to the well-made plays of Ibsen, a playwright who often utilized the well-made play structure in his dramas.[22] I also suggest that the lifting of Mary's head may be equated in some ways with Nora's door slam or Hedda's final shot. I have further argued elsewhere that *shingeki* is essentially a Christian form, rooted in the Christian drama of the West.[23] While Buddhist elements will naturally occur in a play written and performed in a culture dominated in many ways by Buddhism, *The Head of Mary* does not use as many Buddhist terms and symbols as Goodman suggests. *Shingeki* is a form rooted in the Western, Christian tradition, and Tanaka's play remains equally rooted in that form.

Nagai Takashi's book, *Nagasaki no kane* (*The Bells of Nagasaki*) is, according to Treat, "without a doubt the single best-known work of Nagasaki atomic bomb literature."[24] Written over the year following the dropping of the bomb, the book is part autobiography, part summary of the effect of the atomic bomb on human anatomy (Nagai was a doctor and university professor), and part theological exploration of the nature and purpose of the suffering of Nagai and other victims of the bomb. Nagai completed the book in August of 1946, but because of the objections of the American occupation censors it was not published until

[20] Tanaka 178, 181.

[21] Rimer, "Four Plays" 284.

[22] See my "Healing the (Metaphysically) Sick: A Buddhist Ibsen in Christian Japan" for this argument.

[23] See my "Dancing at the Shrine of Jesus: Christianity and *Shingek*i" for this argument.

[24] Treat 310.

1949.[25] An immediate best seller, the book was subsequently made into a narrative film. Nagai wrote twenty more books between 1946 and his death in 1951, but *The Bells of Nagasaki* remains his greatest work. It is a distinctly Christian work, full of prayers, thanks given to God, and discussions of His nature, purposes, and will.

In 1996, Father Ernest Ferlita S.J., a playwright with a Doctor of Fine Arts in playwriting from Yale, and a professor of drama and speech at Loyola University in New Orleans, adapted Nagai's book into a one-act drama to accompany his earlier work, *The Mask of Hiroshima*. The Spectrum Theatre in New York presented both plays as a double-bill in that same year, directed by Ken Lowstetter. Whereas Tanaka's play is a *shingeki* or proto-*angura* piece rooted in Western, Christian drama, *The Bells of Nagasaki* is an adaptation of a Japanese autobiography, rooted in the Noh theatre of Japan, adapted by an American playwright, for an American company, to be presented to an American audience.

The companion piece, *The Mask of Hiroshima*, which had won the Christian Theatre Artist Guild Prize in 1977 and was subsequently adapted for radio under the title *The City of Seven Rivers* (taking third prize in the International Catholic Radio Drama competition in 1982 and first prize in the 1985 American Radio Theatre Scriptwriting Competition), had been written almost two decades before the Nagai adaptation. It was published as *The Mask of Hiroshima* in *The Best Short Plays of 1989*, and subsequently in a single volume with *Bells of Nagasaki* entitled *Two Cities*.

This first play, *The Mask of Hiroshima*, tells the story of a young couple in Hiroshima, dying from the effects of the bomb while the wife gives birth to a baby she will not live to see grow up. Set in 1952, seven years after the bombing, the play waivers between poetic symbolism and realistic conversation as the characters debate the approaching birth. Hisa, the wife, dies after giving birth to their son while the chorus recites imagery from the Book of Revelation. Interestingly, Ferlita made the family in *The Mask of Hiroshima* Catholic as well, quoting from sermons, and the Bible, crossing themselves, and praying; though statistically speaking there were far fewer Christians in Hiroshima than there were in Nagasaki. Nagasaki, as noted above, was known for its active Catholic parish and its huge cathedral. Ferlita's choice

[25] The information about and history of Nagai's text is largely taken from translator William Johnston's introduction to the English language edition. Treat also briefly discusses the history of the book.

was interesting, if not unlikely, for the Church was almost non-existent in Hiroshima at the time.

I should note that *The Mask of Hiroshima* displays an affinity for Noh. The script contains lines from *Nishikigi*, *Awoi no uye* and *Genjo*, classic Noh plays that Ferlita found in translation in *The Classic Noh Theatre in Japan* by Ezra Pound and Ernest Fenollosa. The set is described as a bare stage with a raised platform at the rear: "On the wooden panels behind the platform is a painting of a Japanese pine tree."[26] The pine tree suggests a Noh stage, which also features a painted pine tree on the rear wall. Lastly, the play is structured episodically, with a chorus and choral leader chanting songs of commentary and narrative in between the dialogues of the main characters. While the play does not follow a standard Noh structure corresponding to *jo-ha-kyu*, nor do the characters reflect the roles of *shite* or *waki* or *kyogen*, for example, this earlier play of Ferlita's unmistakably carries the influence of Noh and combines elements from that theatre with the realistic theatre of the West to create an original fusion piece about the effects of the Hiroshima bomb.

The Bells of Nagasaki is very loosely adapted from Nagai's book, following a similar psuedo-Noh structure, complete with chorus singing evocative songs, alternating with narrative episodes from the main characters. While I have argued that Goodman is inaccurate when he states *Maria no kubi* is a Japanese Catholic play couched in Buddhist terms, I also argue that this adaptation of Nagai's book is an American Catholic play couched in Noh (and therefore Buddhist and Shinto) styles.

Noh is a medieval Japanese theatrical form whose aesthetic comes from Zen Buddhism. Goto Hajime sees in Noh the "harmonization...of entertainment and religion."[27] Benito Ortolani, in his comprehensive survey *The Japanese Theatre* observes that the Noh has origins in both *Kagura* shamanistic rituals and Buddhist temple performances. Noh, he concludes, represents a blend of the performative cultures and aesthetics of both Buddhism and Shinto.[28] In his treatises, Zeami turns to the language and concepts of Buddhism to explain how to write and

[26] Earnest Ferlita, *Two Cities* (Quincy: Baker's Plays, 1999) 39.

[27] Quoted in Benito Ortolani, *The Japanese Theatre: From Shamanistic Ritual to Contemporary Pluralism,* rev. ed. (Princeton: Princeton UP, 1995) 90.

[28] Ortolani 87-93.

perform Noh. As Shingeki is a distinctly Western, Christian form, so Noh is a distinctly Japanese, Buddhist form.[29]

As noted above, this adaptation is very free in its handling of Nagai's text. The book begins with a narrative of August 9th, before, during, and after the detonation of the bomb. Chapter Two, entitled "The Bomb", begins with the story of Chimoto-san, an acquaintance of Nagai's. Ferlita begins his adaptation with the chorus leader relating the story of Chimoto-san watching the bomb drop and experiencing its effects, while the actor playing Chimoto-san mimes the action and dances, as would a character in a Noh play. Nagai's text also relates many others' experiences of the moment of detonation – Tagawa, Furue, Kato, Takami, etc. – while Ferlita's adaptation moves from Chimoto at the moment of the burst to Nagai, sitting in the ruins of Urakami Cathedral seven weeks later, without mentioning any of the other accounts.

The rest of the adaptation is largely a conversation between Nagai and his friend Yamada Ichitaro, in which they discuss the events of the bomb and the days that followed. Eventually, Yamada reads the text of Nagai's funeral oration for the Catholic victims of the bomb, which is included in the original book.

Ferlita employs several dramaturgical strategies to adapt this polymorphous narrative and medical analysis into a Noh-like drama of less than an hour. The chorus and the chorus leader narrate much of the story and provide strong images through language. For example, they describe Nagai finding the body of his wife three days after the bomb fell:

> Something glinted
> in the powdered bones of her right hand.
> Though the beads were melted into a blob,
> the bits of chain and the bent cross
> told him what it was.
> Midori had been holding her rosary.
> "Dear God, thank you for letting her die

[29] J. Thomas Rimer, in the introduction to Zeami's treatises notes, "In the later treatises there seems to be an increasing predilection for searching out metaphysical explanations, often Buddhist in tone, for the kinds of practical insights that Zeami had learned both as a writer and a performer" (xxi). This assertion is borne out in such writings as *Yegaku shudo fuken* ("Disciplines for the Joy of Art"), which draws from Buddhist sutras and Confucian maxims, *Kyui* ("Nine Levels") which uses the terminology of Zen, and *Shugyoku tokka* ("Finding Gems and Bringing the Flower"), which relies upon Buddhist concepts. See Zeami's treatises as translated by Rimer and Yamazaki.

with a prayer on her lips.
Mother of Sorrows, thank you."[30]

As in Noh, the chorus occasionally speaks for the characters. Also as in Noh, the chorus describes action that has already taken place off-stage or in the past. The powerful image of the burned and melted rosary suggest the destructive power and heat of the bomb. But even in the image of the destroyed rosary, Nagai (and Ferlita) find a positive interpretation: she died praying.

As Yamada and Nagai discuss the bombing, Yamada offers one interpretation: "some people say the A-bomb was *tenbatsu*, a punishment from heaven."[31] In response, the chorus quotes from the Bible a passage not found in Nagai's text:

Those eighteen who were killed
when the tower of siloam fell on them,
do you think they were worse sinners
Than all the others living in Jerusalem?[32]

This passage, from the Gospel of Luke (13:4) is an interpolation from Ferlita, offering a biblical response to the argument put forth by some Japanese (and mouthed in the play by Yamada) that death and destruction are punishments from God for sinners. All can and will die, only those who repent and live in faith will go to Heaven upon death.

Having introduced this theme, Ferlita returns to Nagai's narrative, in which he relates the death by burning of twenty-seven nuns who sang "Salve Regina" as they died, "just like our first Christian martyrs / when they were crucified on Nishizaka hill."[33] Here Ferlita, after Nagai, connects the victims of the A-bomb with the Nagasaki martyrs under the Tokugawa persecutions. This linkage generates meaning by making those who died in the bomb's explosion martyrs for their faith. As its major theme, the play asserts that the bomb was not proof that God does not care, or worse, does not exist. Conversely, the play asserts that the

[30] Ferlita 9.

[31] Ferlita 25.

[32] Ferlita 25.

[33] Ferlita 27.

bomb allowed Nagasaki Christians to witness to others by dying for their faith. In other words, the martyrdom that the bomb brought is proof of God, God's love, and the faith of those who died.

Nagai (and Ferlita) see Nagasaki's Christians as sacrificial victims: "the lamb without blemish," whose deaths imitate Christ's death on the cross.[34] As promised in the Gospels, Nagai sees those who have died in Christ as receiving eternal life:

> 8000 people together with their priests,
> rising in the smoke of the holocaust
> into the life that only God can give.[35]

Nagai, in the original text, sees the Christians killed by the bomb as those worthy of sacrifice and eternal life. Those who survived are not in heaven, but rather left in a living purgatory, giving the opportunity to repent and become better Christians before it is too late. The victims are not victims but martyrs, witnesses, and models of Christian behavior to be emulated. Nagai's closing speech, as written by Ferlita, invokes the language and imagery of the rapture: sinners have been left behind, while worthy Christians have ascended into God's presence.[36]

Nagai ends his book with a prayer for Nagasaki and a prayer for humankind. Ferlita, however, ends the play with two conflicting yet complimentary biblical quotations that Nagai had employed earlier in his work: "Blessed are they that mourn, for they shall be comforted" (Matthew 5:4), and "The Lord has given, the Lord has taken away, Blessed be the name of the Lord" (Job 1:21). Both thoughts are Nagai's (and Ferlita's) ultimate responses to the bombing of Nagasaki: those who mourn will be comforted, and all has happened as part of the greater plan of the Lord from whom all things come. The last line of the play is also a biblical call-and-response:

> Chorus: And the Word was made flesh
> Nagai: And dwelt among us.[37]

[34] Ferlita 31.

[35] Ferlita 32.

[36] Ferlita 34.

[37] Ferlita 35.

The play then ends with the characters joining together onstage as the bells of Urakami Cathedral ring.

Like *The Head of Mary*, the title *The Bells of Nagasaki* ultimately refers to a piece of Catholic material culture that the bomb destroyed and that a group of Catholics worked to recover and restore. Where Tanaka's play is wholly fictional (no such group existed), Ferlita's play draws on real events; a group of Catholics did work to retrieve the bells from the rubble and ring them. In Ferlita's play, they ring on August 15th, not only the day that Japan surrendered, but also the Feast of the Assumption of the Virgin Mary. In Ferlita's play, Yamada Ichitaro, reading from Nagai's statement that was published in Nagai's original text, asks "Was this convergence of events, the end of the war and the celebration of her feast day merely coincidental or was it some mysterious providence of God?"[38] Ferlita (and Nagai) also see the atomic bombing in terms of the Catholic doctrine of double effect. Double effect states that bad things may occur as the result of an action, but the good that results outweighs the bad. Nagai seems to suggest that, on a theological level, God allows the bomb to kill his virtuous believers, sending them to heaven, and providing a model and a warning for sinners, while also ending the war on a day sacred to Mary, thus calling further attention for the need to repent. The negative effects of the bomb are outweighed under this double effect doctrine by the positive outcomes. Interestingly, the bells ringing on August 15 is purely Ferlita's invention. In both history and Nagai's text they did not ring until Christmas, 1945.[39]

Both of these dramas attempt to formulate a Catholic theological response to the bombing of Nagasaki. Both embrace, to varying levels, the theme of martyrdom, although both argue for a different purpose for the survivors. Both plays involve the recovery of material aspects of Catholicism – a statue of Mary and the cathedral bells, respectively. Both plays engage in the active worship of the Virgin Mary which is appropriate considering that Urakami Cathedral was consecrated to her and the war did end on the Feast of the Assumption. Both plays utilize Buddhist elements, but it seems more accurate to state that *Maria no kubi* is rooted firmly in the Western, Christian tradition of *shingeki*, whereas Ferlita's play is rooted in the Buddhist and Shinto traditions of Noh. Both plays use their respective dramaturgical traditions

[38] Ferlita 30.

[39] Takashi Nagai, *The Bells of Nagasaki*, trans. William Johnston (Tokyo: Kodansha, 1984) 117.

to offer a firmly Catholic response to the bombing of Nagasaki. Both plays ultimately utilize theology to offer a theodicy that consists primarily of a theophany.

Where the plays most strongly differ is in their original contexts of performance. The intended audience of Tanaka's play was the sophisticated, highly educated, left-leaning theatregoers of Tokyo in the late fifties. His was a Japanese audience that had lived through the war and come of age after it. Many in the audience had been alive when the bomb was dropped. Conversely, the intended audience of Ferlita's play is an American one, specifically a New York one, in the mid-nineties, over 50 years after the bomb had been dropped. Whereas Tanaka's play is a Japanese response to the Catholic problem of Nagasaki, written, performed, and witnessed by Japanese, Ferlita's play is an American adaptation of a Japanese book, written, performed, and witnessed by Americans. Ferlita writes the names of the characters Western style with given name first and family name second (Takashi Nagai and Ichitaro Yamada, for example). We can critique Ferlita's play on one hand for its Othering of the Japanese characters and experience, relying on the exoticism of Noh to tell the story (and not even true Noh, but an Americanized Noh – so we might also critique the appropriation of a Japanese form to present a narrative to an American audience).[40] Yet in doing so we should not deny Ferlita's attempt to present a lengthy narrative / documentary text in a highly theatrical form for the purposes of theodicy. Ferlita makes no claim that his play is authentic Noh, or even a modern Noh play. Instead, the Noh is used as a framing device to present Nagai's (and Ferlita's) theological arguments. Theology can make for a very dry performance (try to watch a straightforward production of *Everyman*, for example); Ferlita's use of Noh is designed to present both story and philosophy in a manner that is interesting and watchable, both expressive of the Japanese experience and accessible to contemporary American audiences. Ferilta's play is cultural

[40] The text is further problematized (or Americanized) through several significant errors. The script, for example, notes that the action is set on "August 6th, 1945," which is actually the date of the Hiroshima bomb (p. 6). Nagasaki was bombed on August 9. The chorus leader remarks in the opening story that Chimoto was "in his rice patty" [sic] (p.7). One assumes that "rice paddy" is what was intended. Lastly, and perhaps most problematic, is Yamada's wish that "another kamikase will come and save Japan" (p. 23). Ferlita means *kamikazi*, the "divine wind." "Kamikase" literally translates to mean "divine handcuffs" or "divine reel," not what is intended here at all. While these are all simple errors, they compound into a text that displays an ignorance of things Japanese, highly problematic when writing a play about Japan. While we might be tempted to overlook these errors, one should still note that they indicate a writer who remains distanced from Japan and Japanese culture, and who may be in danger of Othering the very people he wants to represent. The author presents these points in a note, as they are tangential to the main argument of *Bells of Nagasaki* as theology, but their significance in the creation of cross-cultural or intercultural theatre cannot be downplayed.

appropriation, yes; but an interesting performance experience as well that serves the larger purpose of offering a theodicy in the face of Nagasaki.

In conclusion, we might note that in the silence of Pius XII, Tanaka and Nagai (through Ferlita) cry out in prayer, thanksgiving, and supplication. While the supreme pontiff does not speak out on the specific use of atomic weapons against Catholics in Japan, other Catholics use the tragedy as an opportunity to speak out and justify faith. Rather than condemn the Earthly powers that wage war, or drop bombs on Catholics, or condemn a God who would treat His children so terribly, these Catholics use theatre to reaffirm their faith in the divine and in Catholicism. Sainthood in the Church has always begun at the popular and local level; veneration of local martyrs eventually brings the attention of Rome to particularly sanctified individuals. The theatre as well has served as rallying cry, information system, and communal representation when other structures and systems would not. These two plays are Catholic dramas in response to the bombing of Nagasaki that ultimately do what theology could not: put a human face on the suffering and redemption of the victims, and offer a visual prayer and theodicy that restores faith in the vacuum of the bomb and the "official" silence which followed it.

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