

The least of my brothers; Kamagasaki kirisutokyō kyōyūkai

Christian M. Hermansen

"Japanese are little accustomed to Christianity (1 percent of the Japanese population is Christian!) but this [religion] alone is involved in Kamagasaki, whereas well-acquainted Buddhism and Shinto are invisible." (Tawaki 2005, [vol. 7 uploaded 3 Dec. 2004]).

Tawaki's observation matches the impression I got when I came to Kamagasaki for the first time in 1987. It made me wonder why at that time, and I am still in search of connections between faith, community and the marginalized. From this perspective it is interesting to analyze the connection between Christianity and Kamagasaki, and here I shall focus on an ecumenical network that celebrated its thirtieth anniversary a few years ago. The network is called the *Kamagasaki kirisutokyō kyōyūkai* 釜ヶ崎キリスト教協友会. Of particular interest to me are 1) the experiences of thirty years, 2) the influence of Kamagasaki on i) those directly involved, ii) their churches, and 3) the prospects for the future. The three points are examined below following a brief introduction to Kamagasaki. The second point in particular invites for thoughts on *if* and *why* Christianity should involve themselves with groups on society's fringe.

What is Kamagasaki

The insignificant 0.62 square kilometer south of central Osaka is known as Kamagasaki and has attracted the attention of sociologists and Japanologists over the last twenty years. It has its own niche within the studies on marginality and discrimination in Japan, and the annual *Yoseba* often includes studies on this particular quarter of the city (*Yoseba* is published by Nihon Yoseba Gakkai since 1988). It sometimes attract media attention, when confrontations between day laborers and the police heat up for instance, or when winter approaches the Japanese isles and the fate of the homeless surfaces on page 32 for a few days. Above all, however, Kamagasaki has attracted men and some women from all over Japan who for individual reasons have chosen to live or have been forced by circumstances in their life to survive on the margin of mainstream society.

Kamagasaki is the unofficial designation commonly used by the inhabitants. The area covers the postal districts Haginochaya 1, 2, and 3 in Nishinari Ward. The authorities have dubbed it Airin District 愛隣地区 (literally "Next-door Love"). The area is characterized by the many cheap long-stay hotels, the towering Nishinari police headquarter, impoverished men, and what seems to be an ever increasing number of fences meant to keep out the homeless from walls or bridges that could offer a shield against rain and coldness.

Historically speaking, the southern part of Osaka has been poor. In the Edo period, an east-west belt stretching from south of Shitennō temple towards the sea and pierced by the Nipponbashi road covered ordinary villages, hamlets of marginalized people, and graveyards along with places for executions. By the 1850s, the southern half of what is now called Nipponbashi was known for cheap inns, poor people, and cheap lodgings called *doya* ドヤ. In 1903, a

National Industrial Exhibition was opened in Osaka in the area between what is now the Tennōji Station and the Shin'imamiya Station on the JR Circleline (Kanjōsen 環状線). It included the southern part of the Nipponbashi district, and to make room for the latest progress in technology, the inhabitants were moved a kilometer or so to the southwest, and thus began the history of Kamagasaki. The local history of Nishinari District testifies to the poverty of Kamagasaki and its vicinities in the description of Osaka City's health policy aimed at the area (Nishinari-ku 1951, pp.102-103). Inhabitants included permanent residents and newly arrivers who might stay for shorter or longer periods of time. On the one hand poverty, illness, and a flow of residents have been constant factors for more than a century (cf. Mainichi 2004 on the decrease of TB-patients in Kamagasaki within the last five years, down from a rate twice as high as that in Cambodia). On the other hand, a long term inhabitant and observer of Kamagasaki has noted how within the last forty years the composition of residents has shifted from families with young children to single men who are on average 56 years old (Mizuno 2002, p.26).

Work

Kamagasaki has a population of about 30,000 and 20,000 of them are day laborers. Kamagasaki is a *yoseba*, which today means a place where day laborers gather and contractors come to pick the workforce they want (like the situation in Matthews 20: 1-15, but the contractors in this world are of course less generous). With a few periodic exceptions it has always been buyer's marked. The seller = the day laborers have lived with the uncertainty of not knowing if today will be a day of income or not. During the postwar resurrection of Japan and even more during the following economic boom there were generally speaking jobs to get, if not throughout the whole year. The

1970 World Expo in Osaka, and the 1973 oil shock are two often-mentioned examples of events with a huge impact — positive and negative respectively — on the day labor market. Like the Tokyo Olympics in 1964 the 1970 World Expo was a make-up for an event originally scheduled before the Pacific War. Lots of investments in infrastructures created a drastic need for laborers, making contractors travel all over Japan to invite them to Osaka. The oil shock three years later put brakes on the economy, and the post-Expo unemployment worsened.

The bubble economy of the 1980s reversed that situation. When I first stayed in Kamagasaki in the spring 1988, the area was brimming of vitality and young male day laborers were everywhere. The price tag then was often above 10,000 yen/day — 20,000 for skilled laborers. Even then, however, seasonal unemployment inevitably began with the new financial year in April, because public employers would put brakes on their budget for some months, then release them a bit, change gear and accelerate investments as year-end came in sight in March. However, the economic recession since 1990 has made unemployment an almost constant condition. Japan had 1,874,507 day laborers in 1989; in 1999 there were 673,318 (Kami 2000, p.38). The young ones ceased to go to Kamagasaki as did, of course, the contractors, thus the graying society that is forecast for Japan twenty years from now, is a reality in Kamagasaki now. Kamagasaki together with and its sisters in Tokyo (San'ya), Yokohama (Kotobukichō), and Nagoya (Sasajima) are said to be economic barometers of Japan.

Work conditions

It is one thing whether one gets a job or not, it is another under what condition the job must be done. In Japanese, the day labor's job conditions are

abbreviated as 3K (*sankei*) — *Kitanai, Kitsui, Kiken*. In English we may translate them as 3D — Dirty, Demanding and Dangerous. According to Hirai (2002), a veteran worker and labor union man, Kamagasaki is controlled by the Japanese gangster syndicates, the *yakuza*. They are involved in construction work etc., and organize the contractors. In the 1950s and 1960s many day laborers worked in the docks of Osaka. They were often under duress to work at a certain place, contractors cheated them of their money, and work accidents or deaths were never the employer's problem. In defense some day laborers organized themselves. I shall leave out the finer details here, but the organization evolved into Kamagasaki Labor Union. The union supports its members in labor matters, of course, but it also takes a holistic approach to the day laborers and organizes soup kitchens, arranges funerals, and annual events at New Years and *Obon* (Strohm 1988, p.74).

...and life conditions

Today half of Kamagasaki's twenty thousand day laborers can make a fair if modest living of their work. The other half struggles for survival (cf. Kami 2000, p.39). As long as the day labor has a relatively steady income he also has access to a room with a roof. It may not be a very big room. In older pictures of the *doya*, the cheap lodgings, rooms are often only slightly bigger than a coffin — a space of one or two *tatami* and a ceiling halfway up, so the inhabitant could hardly stand in it. From the outside one sees two windows, one above the other, for every floor. A manifestation of the common attitude towards day laborers. In the days of the bubble economy, many *doya* were rebuilt with more spacious rooms and individual facilities like color television sets and air-conditioner. The improvements meant higher prices.

There are many stalls of food, regular local restaurants, and *izakaya* in

Kamagasaki and vending machines providing milk, soft drinks, and liquor are ubiquitous. The last fifteen years has seen more convenience stores, and recently some discount supermarkets in the area. Neither food nor lodging are very expensive for one with a regular income. For entertainment most bars have *karaoke* and there are several pachinko parlors, mahjong halls, and illegal gambling stalls. The police headquarter aside, public facilities include a primary school, a secondary school, a fire station, three parks (rather "dirt grounds" if translation of *kōen* shall reflect the nature of the areas in this case) and last, but not least, the Airin General Center — *Airin sōgō sentaa* — which houses an employment security office, a medical center, and other services to the day laborers. In 1988 the center bustled with life from five to eight in the morning when contractors would pick up workers, but now, in 2005, the center is soaked in quiet men who have not much to do and do it here.

There are many kinds of people in Kamagasaki, but the day laborers are the most visible. Among them, the homeless are particularly so. The homeless in Japan numbered 25,296 in 2003, of whom 7,757 lived in Osaka Prefecture (Ministry of Health and Work 2003. Osaka city's contribution to the survey was conducted in January 2003. It showed that most of the city's 6,603 homeless lived in five places: in numerical descending order: Kita District (1388), Nishinari District (1218), Naniwa District (940), Central District (787), and Tennōji District (508).

Obviously there are many kinds of social needs to address and several groups do so. Above, I have mentioned the Labor Union. Since the law on NGO was established in 1998, a number of new organizations have appeared on the scene. But between 1970 and 1993, the major actor besides the union was Kamagasaki the *Kyōyūkai* the topic of this paper.

Kamagasaki (Kirisutokyō) the Kyōyūkai

“Please wake up. We are from the Kyōyūkai night patrol. I am sorry to disturb you, but this is a cold place, so you may need a piece of cardboard and a thick blanket.” My voice is low as I am talking to the person covered in what seems to be a thin white plastic raincoat. He is asleep on the ground next to a steel shutter. It is Friday 14 January 2005. The midnight air is cold in Kamagasaki, Osaka. I am with a group of seven volunteers on a winter patrol organized by *Kibo no ie*, a Christian institution and a member of the ecumenical network Kamagasaki Kirisutokyō the Kyōyūkai.

Since the winter patrols began about thirty years ago the fundamental goal has been to assure “That nobody dies on the street.” Therefore, we check if people sleeping on the street are breathing, and if they have a minimum of protection against the cold. The patrol will not wake up any who seems fine, because they may have a hard time getting back to sleep. Excepted are those who sleep directly on the street.

The person by the shutter is such an exception. He wakes up. He seems to be my age — forty-some years old. Judged by the glimpse of him, he is not badly dressed. While one from our group fetches cardboard and blanket, we ask him if he feels all right. He says he does, so once he has got whatever little protection against the winter cold we can provide, we say good night and proceed.

The history

In 1933 the Catholic order of nuns *Aitoku shimai kai* organized the first Christian relief work in Kamagasaki. It was suspended in 1942. The sisters

resumed their activities in December 1945 (Aitoku 2005). Their target group was the children in the slums.

In 1964, Elisabeth Strohm moved into the area. Not in Kamagasaki per se, but in the neighboring Sannō located between Kamagasaki and the red-light district Tobita. The German Midnight Mission had sent Frau Strohm to the Japan Evangelical Lutheran Church (JELC) in 1953 to work among prostitutes. After ten years she gave up that work. JELC encouraged her to search for a new field and a visit to Kamagasaki in 1962 was decisive for her later move there. By coincidence she started a baby center. Within a couple of years her affiliation in Germany changed from the Midnight Mission to the Evangelical Lutheran Landeskirche in Braunschweig.

In her autobiography, Frau Strohm describes her encounters at the end of the 1960s with pastor Kanai, The United Church of Christ in Japan, Father Tani, Sister Katarina, Aitoku Shimai, and Father Heinrich, a Franciscan. Together they wanted to do something in Kamagasaki. In 1970 they held a Christmas party for 160 children, and thus began Kamagasaki the Kyōyūkai (Strohm 1988, 61–66; Strohm 2002 is a brief version).

Five years later pastor Koyanagi, Kansai Urban Industrial Mission (KUIM) and a pastor of the United Church of Christ in Japan, joined the group.

An open-minded and responsive attitude characterize the way Frau Strohm and the Kyōyūkai engaged themselves in Kamagasaki. Three examples will serve to illustrate this point.

First, Frau Strohm's baby center came about when the local anti-crime office asked her if she would take care of a young child while its mother gave birth to a second child, because the father was blind and thus incapable of handling the older child alone. At that point Strohm had no intention to focus her efforts on children in particular, but within a short span of time she had eight children to take care of and she continued this work till she retired from Japan twenty

years later. The Christmas party mentioned above can be said to be a natural growth of her work. But once the Kyōyūkai had been formed it continued to look for needs it could serve in Kamagasaki. The group consulted with a medical doctor, who drew its attention to the malnutrition among people there. This induced the Kyōyūkai to open a low-priced cantina serving healthy food, and run it for some years (Strohm 1988, pp.66ff.).

Second, in 1973 the City of Osaka asked the group to organize facilities to accommodate unemployed day laborers during New Year 1974 (Strohm 1988, pp.125ff.). As mentioned in the general description of Kamagasaki, even in years where most get employment there is periodic unemployment, and New Year is one of those periods. Kamagasaki being the biggest day laborers' area in Japan is, or was, like their hometown, so whereas other Japanese rush to the old home the day laborers gather in Kamagasaki. Thirty years ago many of them would not have the means for survival, and to handle this situation the City of Osaka took what it called "Year's end Year's Beginning Measures" (*nenmatsu nenshi taisaku* 年末年始対策). As part of its measures the City provided bed and board for ten days. In the very early 1970s, the City had channeled this aid through the Salvation Army, but the workers were unsatisfied with the rules imposed on them by the army, and therefore the City approached the Kyōyūkai in 1973. It took the invitation. So the Kyōyūkai was contracted for five days to host one thousand men in three empty houses owned by the City in the harbor area. Another group, the Jikyōkan 自働館, was responsible for two houses. The workers/the labor union held meetings in the facilities. Jikyōkan cracked down on those meetings and called the police to have them stopped. The Kyōyūkai, on the other hand, took the opposite stance and participated in the meetings. As a consequence, Jikyōkan was labeled "good kid" and the Kyōyūkai "naughty kid". When the five-day contract ended, Tenrikyō took over for the remaining five days, but eventually gave up after

two. The City then wanted the Kyōyūkai to manage what was left but the group declined. In the end the Kyōyūkai was paid a reward of six hundred thousand yen by the City, but the authorities did not ask for the group's assistance again. By contrast, the workers and their union gained a more favorable impression of the group. This was probably further improved when the Kyōyūkai decided to spend the City's reward on life-supportive actions for the following six or eight weeks in cooperation with the labor union. Their actions included winter patrols in the streets, soup kitchens, and a futon service, whereby the homeless were provided with a futon and a blanket to sleep in the porch to the medical clinic on the backside of Airin General Center. Together these actions were called *ettō* (越冬 Pass Winter) and they were executed under the slogan "That not a single person will die on the street". The *ettō* has since been a recurring annual event. It now starts on Christmas Day under the auspice of the labor union and is continued by the Kyōyūkai from mid-January to the end of February.

Third, a psychiatrist and friend of Frau Strohm, Dr. Kosugi, asked her to care for an alcoholic patient K (Strohm 1988, pp.79ff.). K had been given medical treatment at a hospital. The normal procedure would have been to send K back where he came from once the medicine had subdued the symptoms of alcoholism. Outside the hospital most alcoholics would return to their former life and sooner or later also to their former lifestyle. Dr. Kosugi believed that alcoholism could be cured. But to meet that end the patient needed a halfway facility. Together with Father Tani, Frau Strohm agreed to care for K. They were not successful but the experience prompted Strohm and the Kyōyūkai to look into the needs of alcoholics and the treatment they received in Japan — in psychiatric hospitals and clinics as well as the abstainers' circles (*danshukai* 断酒会). The research eventually led Frau Strohm to open another institution called *Kibo no ie* that specializes in alcohol therapy and re-socializing of the

clients.

The three examples are listed chronologically. Separately they illustrate the open mindedness and together I think they demonstrate the Kyōyūkai's dynamic and holistic approach to a challenge.

Now, it would be wrong to think that every case is a success, far from it. K in example three did not remain dry, for instance. Frau Strohm recounts how she would often return from a night patrol and feel utterly helpless and useless in the face of the street's misery, where homeless then and now die for want of heat and food (Strohm 1988, p.134).

The examples also show how the Kyōyūkai, itself a network, is part of a still greater network that includes the labor union and, not directly mentioned before, many volunteers and supporters outside Kamagasaki. The network has strengthened the individual member organization in several ways. First of all, it has been a forum where people with a common goal have been able to brainstorm ideas, encourage each other, and find consolation during days of defeat. Second, it has enabled some degree of coordination of the institutions' activities: The Franciscan house for elderly workers over 60, *Furusato no ie*, the children's center, *Kodomo no sato*, the Jesuit house for workers in transition from hard to lighter work, *Tabiji no sato*, the JELC supported alcohol therapy center, *Kibō no ie*, the UCC supported soup kitchen — formerly a health restaurant — *Ikoī no ie*, etc. Given that between 1970 and 1990 little social work took place in Kamagasaki aside from what the City, the Labor Union, and the Kyōyūkai did it made good sense to “work share” in the Kyōyūkai network instead of competing with one another. Third, the Kyōyūkai fundraises and channels money to the more needy of its members. A specific example is a self-support program offered by the alcohol therapy center *Kibō no ie* to its clients. Under certain conditions the client gets a combine of allowance and loan to reestablish his life. The money for this program mostly comes from the

Kyōyūkai.

Christians in Kamagasaki, Kamagasaki in Christianity

Given the *Kamagasaki kirisutokyō kyōyūkai*'s thirty years of history, and given the receptive attitude I have argued is characteristic of the network and its members, it seems relevant to ask about the Christian influence on Kamagasaki and Kamagasaki's influence on Christianity.

Here it should be noted that whereas the Kyōyūkai members are Christians neither the joined nor their individual activities aim to proselytize the workers, homeless, children, or anyone else. Their Christian identity is expressed in worship services, a Catholic and a Protestant, open to anyone, and in their work in Kamagasaki. In other words, the identity is manifested but not imposed. As described above, on the winter patrol one identifies oneself to the homeless as coming from the Kyōyūkai, and this is done to induce calm in the homeless person, who might be fearing an unprovoked attack by a gang of youths when aroused in the middle of the night. The identification also taps into the reputability that has been built up over thirty years. There is no bargaining of food for faith.

Some of the new Christian groups active in Kamagasaki since 1990 are known for doing the latter. According to one young observer, 25 years old, there are currently four evangelizing groups in Kamagasaki, and they attract some one hundred homeless/day labors for their services. "No doubt a high percentage participate in the mission meetings to get food, but there are also deeply committed people among them." (Tawaki 2005, [vol. 7 uploaded 3 Dec. 2004]). Not having investigated these newer groups myself, they will remain untouched here, but future research will doubtless add nuances to the following discussion.

Focusing our attention on the case of the Kyōyūkai, all its initiators and central members have on one occasion or another noted how the encounter with Kamagasaki benefited their Christianity. In the autumn 2004 I interviewed some of the leaders and the following summarizes their observations, but first a digress.

Religion — Individual — Marginalized

Should a religious person involve him or herself in the fate of others? Why?

These questions may seem odd and quaint. Odd, because religion is a social phenomenon so a religious person is always involved in the lives of others. Quaint, because individuals long ago started challenging the authority of the religious body they belonged to by seeking a direct contact or union with the ultimate reality. Jesus of Nazareth and Martin Luther are examples, as is the historical Buddha Gautama for that matter. In other words, both absolute social involvement and absolute abstaining from social interaction find justification in the religions' past. However, neither Buddha, Jesus, nor Luther recommended disregard of one's fellow human beings and their needs.

Actually, the opposite is true. This is testified to by the oft quoted dialogue between Jesus of Nazareth and a rabbi on "who is my neighbor" that includes the parable on the Good Samaritan and ends 'And Jesus said to him, "You go, and do likewise"' (Luke 10: 25-37). In another instance, Jesus says that we shall be judged by what we do to "the least of my brothers" (Matt. 25: 40). And whereas Luther protested against the Church's business in "Good Deeds," he argued that when one receives the holy communion "One must take the weakness and needs of others to one's heart, as were they one's own and offer one's talent to them as if it were theirs, just like Christ does to you in the

sacrament¹" (Luther 1519, my translation). In other words, Luther argued that reception of the Holy Communion should lead to acts of service (cf. Foss 1992, p.75). Later this was the impetus for the development of *diakonia* in the Evangelical Church in Germany. In the proponents' eyes *diakonia* (which means *service*) was to be regarded on par with the rituals and the teaching in the Church, but this equality is generally not practiced by the Protestant denominations.

Space does not permit a discussion here on the relationship between the Church, people in need, and local cultures, so I refer to Charles Bremner's study on charity and philanthropy (Bremner 1996), that clarifies how in Europe and North America, at least, two contrasting views competed for influence on the proper way to deal with the poor. One held it better to do nothing, because help merely encouraged the idleness of the poor. The other advocated social commitment. The debate was also informed by a distinction between the deserving and the un-deserving poor.

A review of policies for/against the poor in Japan throughout her history will be reserved for another occasion. In a study on *hinin* (貧人 the very poor) in early modern Osaka (1600–1873), I have argued that the local administration in principle wanted to get rid of them without further ado (Hermansen 2001). Preferable by sending them back to where they came from. When that option was ruled out, another means was to integrate them in one of the stratified societies orders called *hinin* (written with the characters 非人 that signify "non-

1 Zum neunzehnten. Sodann siehe zu, daß du dich in Gemeinschaft mit jedermann begibst und ja niemanden in Haß oder Zorn von dir absonderst. Denn dieses Sakrament der Gemeinschaft, Liebe und Einigkeit kann nicht Zwietracht und Uneinigkeit dulden. Du mußt die Gebrechen und Bedürfnisse der ändern dir zu Herzen gehen lassen, als wären sie deine eigenen, und dein Vermögen darbiehen, als wäre es ihr eigenes, ebenso wie dir Christus im Sakrament tut. Das heißt durch Liebe ineinander verwandelt werden, aus vielen Stücken ein Brot und ein Trank werden, seine Gestalt verlassen und eine gemeinsame annehmen.

human" or "a-human"). From the mid-1850s integration was sought by housing them in very cheap lodgings and have them work from Nagamachi, the narrow lane that protruded south of Osaka and was renamed Nipponbashi in 1872 (Den-den town 2005). I do not imply any biological connection between the *hinin* in Nagamachi and the homeless and the day laborers in Kamagasaki. But the latter sometimes feel treated in an inhuman (Jp. *hinin-teki* 非人的) way by the modern bureaucracy, so the attitudes of the authorities then and now share some similarities (for cases see *Tsūshin* 47, pp.33-34, 48-49).

Now, returning to the connection between Kamagasaki and Christianity, I have so far introduced individual groups working in Kamagasaki and their network. Their attitude to the suffering is that every human being should be treated like a human being, and among those in need of help, the Kyōyūkai chooses "the least of my brothers". In my view the network and its members are in tune with the principles of Christianity and carry on the Catholic tradition of *caritas* and the Protestant tradition of *diakonia*. Few Christians in Japan would disagree on the principles. However, far from all Christians agree with the way the Kyōyūkai practices the principles. Even among the members of the Kyōyūkai opinions differ when it comes to recent trends.

The crux of conflict seems to be the degree of involvement in work among the least. The denominations' headquarters and most church members simply ignore the problem. They are engaged in a struggle of their own to survive as a minority religion. To be sure, there are individual church members all over Japan including theologians who engage themselves in the issue and without whose generous support little would be achieved. But from an institutional point of view, Kamagasaki is a local problem. The members of the Kyōyūkai attempt to change this attitude — getting attention and positive action. They will speak at regional and national assemblies of their own denomination, preach in local congregations, produce pamphlets and organize hands-on

seminars in Kamagasaki.

It is my notion that if among those who engage themselves we were to measure the degree of involvement they can accept, we would have to devise two kinds of scales, because they would not agree on a single kind. One scale would have two extremes identified as “truly evangelical” and “political” respectively, while the other would resemble a stone thrown into water and the rings of ripples spreading out. The stone is the core of all levels of action is Christ. But like the concentric circles spreads and covers still more water so the solidarity with “the least” changes from sympathy and “soup kitchen” to “political actions.” In other words, the first scale is exclusive and the second inclusive in nature, and based on my interviews with members of the Kyōyūkai I assume the network would employ the inclusive scale. Illustrative of the previous and this point is the Franciscan Father Honda Tetsurō.

Until 1989, Honda was a high-ranking priest in Tokyo, who, in his own words, participated in international forums where he never really understood the talk about liberation theology. He also participated in the Catholic-Protestant joint new Bible translation. Then he came to Kamagasaki in 1989. This made him aware of the meaning of liberation, and it threw a new light on the Bible. As a consequence, Honda involved himself in the struggle for work to the un- or underemployed day laborers who are often homeless. This struggle was organized in 1994 and called *Kamagasaki hanshitsuigyō renrakukai* (Kamagasaki liaison of anti-unemployment movements). He also began and still works on a new translation of the New Testament from the perspective of the belittled ones (e.g. Honda 2001). He argues this is how the Bible first was told and think the message has been distorted by later translations = retellings that were made from the perspective of the powerful.

An evaluation of his results is outside the scope of this paper. His actions reveal deep sincerity and on the inclusive scale he would be at a fair distance

from the center. His engagement in struggles on a political structural level might lead some to label him a left wing, one might as well say that he adheres to the Japanese Constitution that states, "(1) All people shall have the right to maintain the minimum standards of wholesome and cultured living." (Japan 1946, par. 25). Honda is well aware that the anti-unemployment organization should not forget the needs of the individual person.

To what extent Honda's and other the Kyōyūkai members' efforts reverberate in their denominations remain to be investigated. The hierarchical structure of the Catholic Church means that the Catholic groups' activities have the approval of their superiors otherwise they would probably not be tolerated. The organizational structures Protestant denominations differ from one another, so it is possible, if not desirable, for individuals to go against the tides. Frau Strohm at one point was told she was no longer welcome in her local church, and for some time she tried out the possibilities in Zen Buddhism but did not feel at home in that tradition (Strohm 1988, pp. 151–156).

The future

In interviews with Rev. Akiyama (*Kibo no ie*/JELC), Rev. Koyanagi (KUIM/UCCJ), Father Honda (*Furusato no ie*/*Hanshitsuren*/Franciscan) and Mr. Sonoda (*Kibo no ie*/JELC) I asked about the significance for the Kyōyūkai to be an Ecumenical network? What theological lessons can be learned from Kamagasaki? What is the future of the Kyōyūkai? Digesting their answers, over the years they seem to have been left with little time to discuss the ecumenical dimension of their work. My impression is that their common goals, the urgency of their work, and the aspect of mutual encouragement by far outweighed confessional differences. Concerning theological consequences of their work, their engagement in lectures, preaching and Bible translation bespeak the

importance.

The future is of course a concern. As I have described, the change of the Japanese economy has seriously changed the nature of Kamagasaki, and the laws on Non-Governmental Organizations (NGO) have also had a significant impact on the area. It is an integrated part of the Kyōyūkai's work regularly to reflect on the past experiences in order to improve future involvement. I have experienced how the winter patrols were adjusted between 1988 and 2005 as a result of those reflections. Another outcome has been the formation of an annual forum for persons involved in work in *yoseba* all over Japan (*Zenkoku chiiki yoseba kōryūkai* 全国地域・寄せ場交流会). The 21st forum was held at the True Pure Land Buddhist Higashi Honganji temple in Kyoto in June 2004.

The Kyōyūkai is rethinking its role in a Kamagasaki under the changed conditions. The member organizations are individually very busy, so a suggestion for new activities rarely finds collective energy for its realization. The many new organizations in Kamagasaki and a general increase in voluntarism in Japan makes it harder to fundraise, and less money necessarily means less activities.

It is not for me to say if the Kyōyūkai had better stop now, but I do not think so. Rather, the flexibility that I argue is characteristic of the Kyōyūkai makes it suitable for some years with little activities during which close observation and new analysis of the situation may reveal needs that others are ignoring. While the effect of the Kyōyūkai's work may leave few and only vague impressions on the mother churches, it is nevertheless important to impress them — for the sake of the churches.

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