

NAGAI TAKASHI AND THE MEANING OF SUFFERING

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Prologue

At 11:02am on the morning of August 9, 1945, a 9000 pound plutonium bomb was detonated some 500 meters above Urakami district in downtown Nagasaki. The bomb, nicknamed "Fat Man" for the resemblance it apparently bore to the corpulent physique of British Prime Minister Winston Churchill, had not originally been intended for Nagasaki. When the United States government made its decision to use the atomic bomb against Japan and drew up its list of potential targets, Nagasaki was the third of four cities listed. Three days earlier, at 8:15am, the city of Hiroshima had been destroyed in the first ever detonation of an atomic bomb against a civilian target in war time. When the American B-29 "Bock's Car" left the island of Tinian early in the morning of August 9, it proceeded to its intended destination, the city of Kokura on the northeast shore of the island of Kyushu. The aircraft made several passes over Kokura but, hindered by smoke and clouds, was unable to acquire its target. Running short on fuel, Bock's Car's crew decided to proceed to the secondary target, Nagasaki. This city had been chosen because of the Mitsubishi Heavy Industries shipyards and several munitions factories located around Nagasaki harbor. Passing again over a city obscured by clouds, Bock's Car was unable to locate its target, but just as it was about to abandon the mission, a brief opening revealed the city below and the bomb was dropped. Unknown to the pilots, poor targeting and winds put the bomb almost two miles north of its target, where it finally detonated over Urakami.

In a matter of seconds the city was reduced to rubble and of the structures left standing, many were later consumed by the extensive fires ignited by the explosion's intense heat. The human costs of the bombing are well known: 73,884 dead, 74,909

injured, and 120,820 "sufferers." Although the bombing of Nagasaki has historically been justified in American government circles in the name of bringing a quick end to the war and avoiding an even more massive loss of life, it carries with it a tremendous historical irony in that with one explosion, the spiritual center of Catholicism in Japan was destroyed. From Saint Francis Xavier's first mission to Japan in 1549, western Kyushu and the region around Nagasaki had been the center of Catholicism in Japan. When attempts to ban Christianity in Japan were intensified in the 1590s, the Catholics of Nagasaki were harshly persecuted and the 26 martyrs who gave their lives in 1597 rather than renounce their faith are still commemorated in Nagasaki today. When the bomb exploded, an estimated 9,000 of Nagasaki's 17,000 Catholics were killed (Treat 1995:306), and the Urakami Cathedral, the largest cathedral in Asia and the central parish for Nagasaki Catholics, was destroyed.¹ A local priest was in fact celebrating Mass in the cathedral when the bomb detonated and the rosaries of parishioners were later found in the rubble.

Theoretical Orientations

Max Weber, in *The Sociology of Religion*, identifies one of the most important problems that confronts every system of religious knowledge: how can it "face the problem of the world's imperfections" (Weber 1978:519). Human life is punctuated with death, suffering, and pain, experiences that often challenge the basic principles of religion. In order for a religious system to remain compelling, it must provide a satisfactory explanation for why these events occur. Such religious systems of explanation are described in the social sciences and theology as *theodicy*. A theodicy articulates reasons for death, suffering, and misfortune. Theodicies often vary between religions. Among Theravada Buddhists, for example, the concept of karma is used to account for death and suffering (cf. Obeyesekere 1968). In Viet Nam, the ideas of "fate" (*so phan*) or "chance" (*may rui*) are employed for similar purposes. Theodicy, as Weber notes, not only provides an explanation, it is also critical to the

maintenance of a "meaningful world order"(Weber 1978:519). Theodicy takes the seemingly arbitrary and meaningless experience and, ideally, provides it with a compelling meaning. Such meanings help to lessen the personal and existential crises that "anomic experiences"(cf. Berger 1967) produce and renders them sensible. As Peter Berger has aptly noted, "It is not happiness that theodicy primarily provides, but meaning"(Berger 1967:58).

The atomic bombings of Hiroshima and Nagasaki represent two instances of the most incomprehensible death and suffering that have occurred in human history. The experience of such intense horror and suffering had profound physiological and psychological consequences for the victims. Known in Japanese as the *hibakusha*, alternatively glossed as "explosion-affected person"(Lifton 1967:6) or "'survivor' or 'exposed one'"(Lindee 1994:5), these men and women suffered the debilitating effects of severe burns, radiation sickness, and other physical complications, as well as the loss of family members and loved ones. Many also faced intense crises of faith and meaning as they sought to comprehend how it was that such terrible violence and suffering could be inflicted on humans.² People's responses were indeed varied. Robert Jay Lifton records that in Hiroshima a Protestant minister's response was that "This was God's judgment on man"(Lifton 1967:22), while for another person he describes as "a devoutly religious domestic worker," the immediate response was that "There is no God, no Buddha"(Lifton 1967:23). In Nagasaki, one person asked in a haiku, "I look across wide and far, where is the Lord, autumn wind"(Selden and Selden 1989:14). Another painfully declared in a tanka, "In the Cathedral in the ruins of boundless expanse, I stayed one night criticizing God"(Selden and Selden 1989:139). For many Nagasaki Catholics, their crisis of faith was compounded as they were faced with the question of how it was that their church and so many of their co-religionists could have been destroyed in such violent and seemingly meaningless fashion.

Personal religious responses to the atomic bombings have not been a major

focus of research. Although some psychologists, particularly Lifton, have detailed a number of important psychological responses to the bombings, such as the existence of guilt over having survived, "psychic closing off," and others (see Lifton 1967), the manner in which people appropriated theodicies and other elements from their own religious faiths to make sense of the destruction and create a meaningful explanation has been given only anecdotal treatment. One individual Catholic's religious response to the bombing, however, is recorded in Nagai Takashi's *The Bells of Nagasaki* (*Nagasaki no Kane*). In this book, Nagai recounts his own experiences of surviving the bombing and his involvement in treating the victims afterward.³ The story he tells is one of transformation. A Japanese patriot, Nagai faced a crisis of meaning as the empire he believed in crumbled. However, as he gradually came to terms with the tragedy he had experienced, he found new meaning in his life, largely through his role as doctor and researcher. Later, through his deep Catholic faith, he also developed a compelling answer to why Nagasaki and its Catholics were destroyed. The remainder of this article will be devoted to analyzing these changes. The construction of his explanation, I will then argue in the conclusion, provides a vivid example of how one man appropriated Catholic theodicy to make sense of the terrible suffering he and his city had endured.

The Life of Nagai Takashi

Nagai Takashi was born in February of 1908 in Matsue City, Shimane Prefecture, on the Japan Sea side of western Honshu. His father, Nagai Hiroshi, was a well-to-do physician. The young Nagai was by all accounts a good student and, following his father, chose a career in medicine. In 1928 he enrolled at the Nagasaki Medical College. After four years of study, Nagai graduated in March of 1932 but remained at the college, working as an assistant in the Physical Rehabilitation Department where he pursued a specialization in radiology. As a young man, Nagai was heavily influenced by the ideology of the Japanese empire. After the Manchurian

Incident of 18 September 1931, he enlisted in the Hiroshima Infantry Regiment and was shipped to China where he served as a medical corpsman. During his stay in China, Nagai became intensely interested in Catholicism after discovering a Catholic catechism that was included in his medical kit. When he was demobilized from the army in February 1934, he returned to his position at the Nagasaki Medical College. Following his new faith, he was baptized a Roman Catholic in June and took the name Paul. Around this time, he also met Moriyama Midori, a Nagasaki Catholic whose ancestors had been martyred (Johnston 1984:viii). They married in August of that year.

For the next several years Nagai continued his work at the medical college and in early 1937 was appointed as a lecturer. In July, however, he was recalled to the military and returned to China as a military physician. He soon found himself with the Imperial Army in the Shanghai Incident of August 1937. He spent the next three years in China until he was released from active service in 1940. Soon after his return to Nagasaki, Nagai was appointed as an assistant professor of radiology in the medical college and chief of the Physical Rehabilitation Department. Several years later he would also become the dean of the radiology department. As the war intensified, Nagai remained committed to the Imperial cause. Although he was no longer serving in the military abroad, he was active in the civil defense forces and ultimately became the head of the Eleventh Medical Corps. One of his main responsibilities while serving in this capacity was treating the wounded from the air-raids on Nagasaki.

As the war drew to a close, Nagai's health declined. For many years he had engaged in radiological research which, unknown to him at the time, had exposed him to dangerous levels of radiation. The cumulative effects of this research caught up with him and in June 1945 he was diagnosed with leukemia. His doctors initially predicted that he had only three years to live. Still healthy enough to work, Nagai maintained his teaching position and deanship at the medical college as well as the directorship of the Eleventh Medical Corps.

The defining moment of Nagai's life came on the morning of August 9, 1945 when the bomb was detonated over Nagasaki. Working in his university office at the time, he was severely injured in the blast by flying shards of glass and wood, suffering a severed artery near his right temple that led to extensive blood loss. His wife Midori was killed instantly in their home although his two children, Kayano and Makoto, who had days before been sent to the nearby community of Koba to avoid the air-raids, survived. His actions in the days and weeks after the bombing will be discussed in detail below. Suffice to say, after surviving the blast, he immediately organized a relief effort to help the victims. On 20 September, after extraordinary efforts, he collapsed and lapsed into a coma from infection, exhaustion, radiation sickness, and loss of blood. Expected to die by all of his friends and colleagues, Nagai unexpectedly recovered a week later. After a marginal return to health, Nagai continued his active care of bomb victims. On January 28, 1945, he was promoted to full professor at the medical college. In July, during one of his many trips to tend to victims, he collapsed at the Nagasaki train station and had to be carried home by a friend. From that point on, Nagai was unable to walk for the rest of his life. Although confined to bed, he remained active in both writing and research. In August, he completed the manuscript for *The Bells of Nagasaki* and then on November 17 presented his research report, "Atomic Illness and Atomic Medicine" to the Nagasaki Medical College. He would complete eleven more books before his death.

In March of 1948, Nagai moved into the simple, one room house in central Nagasaki he named the *Nyokodo*, the "love your neighbor as you love yourself" house. Over the next three years he became recognized as an opponent of nuclear weapons and a champion of world peace. His passionate plea to "Grant that Nagasaki may be the last atomic wilderness in the history of the world"(Nagai 1984:118), was heard around the world and earned him a string of illustrious visitors such as Helen Keller, the Showa Emperor, and several Vatican envoys. By early February 1951, however, the delayed effects of the leukemia and radiation sickness became overwhelming and

his health went into severe decline. At the end of April he suffered a series of severe internal hemorrhages and on May 1 was taken to Nagasaki University Hospital. At 9:50 pm, Nagai said a final prayer and quietly passed away at the age of 43. Two days later, a funeral Mass was held for him in the ruins of Urakami Cathedral. On May 14, the city of Nagasaki organized a public remembrance ceremony for him and he was laid to final rest at Sakamoto International Cemetery in Nagasaki.

Nagai, the Bomb, and the Meaning of Empire

Nagai Takashi was a patriot. He enlisted in the Imperial Army, served for some four years in China, and throughout *The Bells of Nagasaki*, makes it clear that he was a firm supporter of Japan's empire and war effort. His view of the importance of the war for Japan and its future were made clear when he asked himself on the morning just before the bombing, "But wasn't Japan, our fatherland, locked in a life-and-death struggle?" (Nagai 1984:2). The dropping of the bomb did not immediately lead him to reject this position. Looking down on the burning remains of Nagasaki University on the evening of August 9th, he describes himself and his colleagues from the medical school who had struggled to help the victims as "the heroic soldiers of the era of Showa" (Nagai 1984:43). Then, in an act of defiance, he took a white sheet a colleague had brought, and, with the blood flowing from his face, drew a red circle on it. This "rising sun" was then tied to a bamboo pole and hoisted above the survivors (Nagai 1984:43).

Nagai's faith in the war effort remained. Faced on August 15th with a number of crises among the wounded, Nagai and his colleagues rallied each other with the call, "It's a war! Stick it out!" (Nagai 1984:77). However, he had already begun to realize that the war was over for Japan. On August 10 he was given a leaflet dropped by the American military. At that moment he learned for certain that an atomic bomb had been dropped. Given his background in radiology and nuclear physics, he understood the magnitude of what had been accomplished, yet for him, the moment was

doubly poignant as the completion of the bomb represented, "The victory of science: the defeat of my country. The triumph of physics: tragedy for Japan"(Nagai 1984:51). He described himself as openly crying after reading the pamphlet. Later, after a lengthy discussion about the probable course of development of the atomic bomb with his colleagues, he summed up their collective state of mind as, "Crushed with grief because of the defeat of Japan, filled with anger and resentment"(Nagai 1984:60).

When Nagai finally learned that Japan had surrendered unconditionally and fully accepted the stipulations of the Potsdam Declaration, his grief was further magnified. On the evening of August 15, the day of surrender, one of his colleagues returned to their relief station after a resupply trip to the university. Upon arriving, the young man announced that according to radio broadcasts and word of mouth, the war was over and Japan had surrendered. Nagai immediately denounced the story as a lie and a false rumor(Nagai 1984:78). The next day, however, another colleague returned with a newspaper. Nagai's own account best explains his reaction:

With a single glance I saw the whole story. These were words I never wanted to see. For years I had fought and struggled not to see them: By a sacred imperial decree the war is over. Japan was defeated! Raising my voice, I began to weep. The tears overflowed and I covered my ears. For twenty minutes, for thirty minutes I wept like a child. When my tears dried, my sobbing would not stop (Nagai 1984:79).

Nagai's grief was all consuming. He and his colleagues wept throughout the day, neither eating nor drinking. "Our faces, white as milk," he said, "sank into a sea of tears"(Nagai 1984:80). For him, Japan's defeat represented the end of what he had spent over a decade fighting for. With the others, he felt, "Our faith in the eternal stability of the Japanese Empire had crumbled in a moment"(Nagai 1984:80). Before the words "It's a war" had inspired him to keep on fighting, yet after learning of Japan's surrender, "such words would no longer move us"(Nagai 1984:81).

Nagai's grief did not quickly subside. On August 18 he commented, "But we were sad and heavy at heart. Our Japan --- the Japan symbolized by Mount Fuji piercing the clouds and enlightened by the sun that rose in the eastern sea --- was dead. Our people, the people of Yamato, were cast to the very depths of an abyss. We who were alive lived only in shame. Happy indeed were our companions who had left this world in the holocaust of the atomic bomb"(Nagai 1984:82). Visited by a distraught friend in October who declared to him, "I have no joy in life," Nagai responded, "Who has joy in life when you've been defeated in war?"(Nagai 1984:106).

The Glory of Medicine

Defeat and the end of empire were a tremendous blow to Nagai. All he had been fighting for was gone, leaving a gaping void in his life. Despite his grief and sense of loss, in the process of treating the victims he began to see the intimations of a new purpose in his life: caring for atomic bomb victims and meticulously studying the physical effects of the bomb so that the best treatments could be developed. At the same moment as he was declaring his anger and despair over Japan's defeat, he noted that for him and his colleagues, "we nevertheless felt rising within us a new drive and a new motivation in our search for truth. In this devastated atomic desert, fresh and vigorous scientific life began to flourish"(Nagai 1984:60). He carefully studied the many different afflictions that survivors suffered, particularly the terrible burns and the different manifestations and progressions of radiation sickness, all of which are described in chilling detail in the book. As he and the other doctors struggled along in the first week after the blast, in a moment of doubt he rallied himself by thinking, "we were still the faculty of a university. We were dedicated to the truth. We were determined to come to the assistance of the needy, using all our resources. In the heat and the din, searching for the wounded, it was still the pursuit of truth that gave our lives meaning"(Nagai 1984:73). As a physician, Nagai also recognized that the circumstance he found himself in placed a heavy moral burden on him. "What-

ever symptoms might appear, the fact was that the patients we were now treating had diseases that were completely new in the annals of medical history. To ignore these patients would not only be an act of cruelty against individual persons, it would be an unforgivable crime against science, a neglect of precious research material for the future"(Nagai 1984:73). He declared, "And yet my academic conscience gave strength to my body. Examine the patients!" it said. Observe them carefully! Grasp the evidence! Discover the best method of treatment!"(Nagai 1984:73).

Nagai's commitment to truth and science was momentarily abandoned on the morning after he first learned the news of Japan's surrender. Lying exhausted on the floor of a house, languidly looking out at the passing clouds and planes, he was approached by a man who asked if he could go visit a wounded person. Nagai thought to himself, "Japan has lost. Why talk about the wounded? There are a hundred million people today in tears. Are we to make a fuss about the life of one or two of them? Even if we do help them, will it make any difference? Japan will never rise again....Refuse!"(Nagai 1984:80), so he rudely turned the man away. However, as the man walked off, Nagai recognized not only his own mistake, he also began to more deeply understand his new purpose in life while beginning to articulate his understanding of why so much misfortune had befallen Japan. He stated:

Then I suddenly jumped to my feet and told Little Bean to call him back. In a flash I had a change of heart. Even one precious life was worth saving. Japan was defeated; but the wounded were still alive. The war was over; but the work of the relief team remained. Our country was destroyed; but medical science still existed. Wasn't our work only beginning? Irrespective of the rise and fall of our country, wasn't our main duty to attend to the life and death of each single person? The very basis of the Red Cross was to attend to the wounded, be they friend or foe. *Precisely because we Japanese had treated human life so simply and carelessly --- precisely for this reason we*

were reduced to our present miserable plight. Respect for the life of every person --- this must be the foundation stone upon which to build a new society (Nagai 1984:81; emphasis added).

At that moment Nagai realized that human life, not Japan nor empire, was what truly held the greatest value and what he should devote his life to. Because Japan had conducted itself otherwise, tragedy had struck them. Interestingly, in this passage, Nagai has already begun to describe his actions in terms of carrying out the mission of the Red Cross. Unlike on the night of August 9, Nagai no longer describes himself as a "heroic soldier" of the Showa era. He is instead simply a physician helping others in the Red Cross spirit.

One month after his revelation, on September 20, Nagai's health had almost completely left him. Yet, faced with a request for help from a village on a mountaintop, he headed off anyway. "I knew that if I went," he concluded, "I would probably die but, thinking that to offer my life for one unknown person would be a worthwhile sacrifice, I set out on the journey"(Nagai 1984:83). Nagai almost did die from this trip for it was on his return that he collapsed and slipped into a coma. Nevertheless, his faith in the honor and nobility of his actions never left him after his recovery. At the end of the book, he makes a final comment on the nobility of what he and others have done, clearly noting that their mission was noble, even if Japan's was not.

During the war I obeyed my country faithfully and I fought with everything I had. Our university also fought with the utmost determination to the very end. In the most savage air raids we went courageously to the rescue of the wounded; we were true to the spirit of the Red Cross. Till the very moment the atomic bomb exploded over our heads, we were prepared to go anywhere at any time to give relief to suffering people. What's more, we were always faithful to our basic mission of a university: to hold our classes and to conduct our medical research. When the university was destroyed by the atomic bomb,

we remained firmly at our post, not abandoning the university until we had done all that was humanly possible. Our young people continued their relief work with the utmost dedication and without a trace of cowardice --- that's something beautiful, something splendid. And that holds true even if Japan is defeated; even if it is shown that our motive for war was unjust (Nagai 1984:101).

After the explosion, Nagai underwent a significant transformation. Whereas before he had been a dedicated soldier of the empire, he later saw his mission as one of giving assistance to those who suffered and meticulously studying the after-effects of the bombing. On this later point, despite the collapse of his health, he remained active until the time of his death. For him, human life had become undeniably sacred, and its protection and preservation were not only paramount but also provided meaning and purpose to his life.

Why Nagasaki?

Nagai's personal reorientation from soldier of the empire to one dedicated to caring for others while also advancing medical knowledge undoubtedly relieved much of the psychological burden brought on by the bombing and the collapse of Japan. However, Nagai still struggled with one major question related to the bombing: why had Nagasaki, along with the thousands of Catholics and the Urakami Cathedral, been destroyed? Phrased another way, why had Nagasaki and its Catholics been the victims while dozens of other Japanese cities had not? To this question, Nagai develops what one can describe as his own theology of suffering. Drawing from his Catholic faith and Christian conceptions of martyrdom, he articulated an explanation in which Nagasaki is not the recipient of God's punishment but is instead the beneficiary of God's grace. As he himself stated, "The atomic bomb falling on Nagasaki was a great act of Divine Providence. It was a grace from God. Nagasaki must give thanks to God"(Nagai 1984:106).

Nagai's explanation for Nagasaki's destruction is presented in the book through a conversation with a young friend who, recently demobilized from the army, has returned to Nagasaki and found that his wife and five children were killed in the blast. Struggling to make sense of what has happened, he declares to Nagai that, "The atomic bomb was a punishment from heaven. Those who died were evil people; those who survived received a special grace from God"(Nagai 1984:106). He quickly recognized, however, the logical implications of what he said and plaintively asked Nagai, "But then...does that mean that my wife and children were evil people?"(Nagai 1984:106). To this Nagai offered his contrary explanation. The bombing of Nagasaki was not divine punishment but was instead a manifestation of God's grace. To prove this to his friend, he offered him the text of a eulogy that he had written to deliver at a funeral service at Urakami Cathedral for bomb victims.⁴

Nagai's recognition that there was a divine hand in the bombing of Nagasaki is initially based upon three curious coincidences. At 10:30am on August 9th, the Supreme Council of War convened at Imperial Headquarters to discuss whether to surrender or fight on. "At that moment," Nagai states, "the world was at a crossroads. A decision was being made that would either bring about a new and lasting peace or throw the human family into further cruel bloodshed and carnage"(Nagai 1984:106). Thirty two minutes later, what Nagai with obvious Christian reference described as the "sacred territory of the East"(Nagai 1984:106), was destroyed. News of the bombing was immediately relayed to the government and the emperor. Around midnight of that day, the emperor announced his decision to end the war. Strikingly, around the same time, the remains of Urakami Cathedral spontaneously burst into flames and burned down.⁵ Finally, the peace declaration was signed on August 15th. This day, for Roman Catholics, is the feast of the Assumption of the Virgin Mary, the day which they celebrate Christ's raising Mary into heaven after her death. Urakami Cathedral was dedicated to the Virgin Mary. Nagai asked, "And we must ask if this convergence of events --- the ending of the war and the celebration of her feast ---

was merely coincidental or if there was some mysterious providence of God"(Nagai 1984:107).

Nagai then confronted the strange set of circumstances that took the bomb away from its initially intended target of Kokura, and its secondary target of the Mitsubishi shipyards and the munitions factories, and placed the explosion's hypo-center in the middle of predominately Catholic Urakami, only 500 meters from the Urakami Cathedral. For Nagai, "It was the providence of God that carried the bomb to that destination"(Nagai 1984:107). Still, the question remained of why it was carried to that destination. To explain this Nagai then asked, "Is there not a profound relationship between the destruction of Nagasaki and the end of the war?"(Nagai 1984:107).

To explain this he developed what can be described as a distinctly Christian response to the bombing. He stated, "Nagasaki, the only holy place in all Japan --- was it not chosen as a victim, a pure lamb, to be slaughtered and burned on the altar of sacrifice to expiate the sins committed by humanity in the Second World War?"(Nagai 1984:107). He continued:

The human family has inherited the sin of Adam who ate the fruit of the forbidden tree; we have inherited the sin of Cain who killed his younger brother; we have forgotten that we are children of God; we have believed in idols; we have disobeyed the law of love. Joyfully we have hated one another; joyfully we have killed one another. And now at last we have brought this great and evil war to an end. But in order to restore peace to the world it was not sufficient to repent. We had to obtain God's pardon through the offering of a great sacrifice(Nagai 1984:107ff.).

Just as Jesus Christ, free of sin, was the only suitable sacrifice who could die and take away the sins of the world, so it was that only through the destruction of Nagasaki, and not the other cities that were destroyed before, could the war be brought to an

end. Nagasaki's virtue and purity were the result of its firm commitment to the Catholic faith even through years of persecution. Nagai comments:

Our church of Nagasaki kept the faith during four hundred years of persecution when religion was proscribed and the blood of martyrs flowed freely. During the war this same church never ceased to pray day and night for a lasting peace. Was it not, then, the one unblemished lamb that had to be offered on the altar of God? Thanks to the sacrifice of this lamb many millions who would otherwise have fallen victim to the ravages of war have been saved (Nagai 1984:108)

For Nagai the ultimate sacrifice of Nagasaki was glorious, for through it peace finally came, and for it, Nagasaki's Catholics should be grateful. "Let us give thanks that Nagasaki was chosen for the sacrifice. Let us give thanks that through this sacrifice peace was given to the world and freedom of religion to Japan"(Nagai 1984:109).

Nagai's eulogy clearly explains why Nagasaki was destroyed. God required a pure sacrifice that would absolve the world of the sins committed during the Second World War. Nagasaki, holy and pure because of its unshakeable commitment to faith, even at the price of torture, death, and persecution, was the only suitable lamb to be sacrificed. By giving up their lives, the Catholics of Nagasaki had brought peace and, hopefully, helped reestablish God's kingdom on earth. Their destruction was neither meaningless annihilation nor God's punishment. Instead, it was his grace and providence that helped make peace reign again. For all of the Catholics who died and suffered during and after the bombing, they were all simply doing God's will on earth. In that, for Nagai, lay the true meaning of Nagasaki's destruction.

Conclusion: Nagai Takashi and the Study of Theodicy

Nagai Takashi's explanation for the destruction of Nagasaki draws heavily on Catholic theodicy. The suffering of Nagasaki's Catholics was not, as in the Book of Job in the Old Testament, the result of an arbitrary punishment by God. Instead, it

was rooted in the sins committed by humanity during the Second World War. Sin, as elaborated in Catholic theology, can bring misfortune but also necessitates some form of atonement. For the Catholics of Nagasaki, it was sin that brought suffering to Nagasaki, but it was the sacrifice of the Nagasaki Catholics that expiated those sins. At the end of the book, Nagai is very direct about the relative state of sin of those who died and those who survived. The dead, he states, "All without exception were good people whom we deeply mourn"(Nagai 1984:108). Carrying the New Testament imagery further, he also describes them as "pure lambs"(Nagai 1984:108). Conversely, he directly confronts the survivors. "Why did we not die with them on that day, at that time, in this house of God? Why must we alone continue this miserable existence? It is because we are sinners. Ah! Now we are indeed forced to see the enormity of our sins! It is because I have not made expiation for my sins that I am left behind. Those who are left were so deeply rooted in sin that they were not worthy to be offered to God"(Nagai 1984:109). Sin not only explains why many were taken from the earth, it also explains why others remained behind to suffer in the post-atomic world.

Nagai Takashi's *The Bells of Nagasaki* provides an extraordinary glimpse into how one man came to grips with the tragedy of Nagasaki. Initially committed to the Japanese Empire, Nagai recognizes that there is a deeper purpose to his life: saving lives, treating atomic bomb victims, and working to ensure that atomic weapons are never used in warfare again. Despite the nobility of this vocation, it is through the theodicy provided by his Catholic faith that Nagai creates a personally satisfying explanation for why Nagasaki was destroyed and why so many Catholics died and suffered in the bombing. Nagai's explanation, it should be noted, was not accepted by all of his co-religionists in Nagasaki. John Whittier Treat notes that later, "his sanguine views would be ridiculed and would embarrass and even anger other Nagasaki citizens"(Treat 1995:315). Nagai himself, writing in the later 1951 volume *We of Nagasaki*, also indicates that despite arriving at a compelling answer for why Nagasaki

was destroyed, he was still tormented by the fact that he did not immediately rush to see his wife after the explosion (Nagai 1951:200, 204-205). "I was out to win praise from everybody," he declared, "I wanted to be a hero for saving people from the very thick of the blaze" (Nagai 1951:200). This act of vanity continued to haunt him, even though his wife was killed instantly and he probably saved more lives by staying at the medical college. His explanation was compelling, but it could not remove all the pain and anguish caused by the explosion. Speaking of all Nagasaki survivors, Nagai commented, "We carry deep in our hearts, every one of us, stubborn, unhealing wounds. When we are alone we brood upon them, and when we see our neighbors we are again reminded of them; theirs as well as ours" (Nagai 1951:207).

Max Weber, as quoted above, commented that every religious system must "face the problem of the world's imperfections" (Weber 1978:519). The atomic bombings of Hiroshima and Nagasaki radically challenged the religious faiths of all survivors. For many, the bombings shattered their faith and gave conclusive proof that there was no god (see also Treat 1995:315). For Nagai, the bombing provided definitive proof of the opposite. God had a grand design, and through Nagasaki's Catholics, he had realized it. This disjuncture between Nagai and others provides a final, important point regarding the nature of theodicy. Weber is correct in asserting that theodicy must answer for the pain and suffering of this world. However, the plausibility of such an explanation is ultimately resolved at the level of the individual. Theological studies of theodicy can articulate their content and systematicity, but anthropological and sociological studies must move beyond content and examine how people either renounce or appropriate theodicy to make sense of their own trials and suffering. For some, theodicy can be meaningless and unpersuasive. For Nagai Takashi, it was used to construct a meaningful explanation for why so much suffering had befallen him, his co-religionists, and their city. The study of theodicy, therefore, must include not only its content and the nature of its explanatory system, but also how it is challenged and transformed by the vicissitudes of human life.

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Notes

1. The number of Catholics killed in the bombing is difficult to determine. The number given by Nagai Takashi in *The Bells of Nagasaki* is 10,000 (Nagai 1984:106).
2. Lifton notes that survivors are also called *higaisha*, "which means victim or injured party, and definitely conveys the idea of suffering" (Lifton 1967:7).
3. *The Bells of Nagasaki* was completed in 1946 but only authorized for publication by the Allied Occupation headquarters in 1949, with the proviso that an account of Japanese atrocities in the Philippines be included at the end. Accounts of Japanese atrocities were omitted from editions published after the end of the Occupation.
4. Nagai does not make clear what date this address was actually delivered.
5. Given the intense heat generated by the explosion, spontaneous combustion among the wreckage occurred frequently during the first twenty four hours afterwards.

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永井隆と苦難の意味

<要 約>

シャウン・マラーニー

本論文は、長崎に対する原子爆弾攻撃の生存者である永井隆博士が、原爆の結果もたらされた多くの死と苦難の意味をどのように理解したかを説明する。宗教学の理論的概念、つまり宗教が世界の苦難と死を説明する方法に基づき、本論文は、永井が、原爆により長崎において引き起こされた死と破壊に関し、一個人としてやむにやまれぬ説明を構築する目的で、カトリックの神義論をどのように用い、適用したかを説明する。