

Alive and Weil in Fukushima

an interview with Hinako Imaizumi, CND

What drew the Congregation de Notre Dame (CND) to Japan?

Originally it was the appeal of the Holy Father Pius XI who repeated in early 20th Century: "Spread the Good News to Asia!" that stimulated the hearts of the CND Sisters. More concretely, on November 24, 1927, Bishop Jean-Alexis Chambon of Tokyo visited the CND Mother House in Montreal, and told the Sisters about his own diocese with much enthusiasm. Bishop Chambon quoted St. Francis Xavier who wrote "The Japanese are the joy of my heart" and added "I shall pray that one day this will also become your own statement."

How long have members of the CND been active in Japan?

I wish I could answer, "Until this moment, ever since the day they arrived in 1932," but, unfortunately, things did not turn out precisely that way.

Since their first arrival in Japan in 1932, the CND Sisters immediately started working, teaching music, French, English, cooking and so on, and, as they learned Japanese, they had the happiness of making friends, visiting the sick, and particularly of instructing non-Christians and welcoming new converts, and they were greatly encouraged by the arrival of the "supporting arms" of nine more CND missionaries within the next six years. In 1935, these capable Sisters even built a magnificent convent in the middle of rice fields, which immediately became a landmark of Fukushima City. A kindergarten was opened in the south end of the first floor of the building, and the other end served as a dispensary. Some native women, well-qualified and cultured, started to join in the novitiate. However, God had another plan for this lively group.

In 1937, the China-Japan War broke out, and the freedom of the Canadian Sisters was more and more restricted as nationalism grew stronger and years passed. A policeman would come every day and ask them the same questions, such as where they were from, their names, and their ages. Every visitor to the house was checked, and when Sisters went out shopping, someone was always following, to check what they were buying.

Finally, on December 8, 1941, Japan declared war against the United States and its allies. To the deep chagrin of their Japanese friends, the Canadian citizens, including priests and nuns, were classified as adversaries. Their possessions were confiscated by Japanese policemen, and the Canadian Sisters were placed under house arrest. The Japanese lay staff were dismissed by the local government, and police officers stayed in the convent to supervise the words and actions of the Sisters twenty-four hours a day. The Sisters suffered hunger and cold and communication with the rest of the CND in Montreal was cut off for the next four years, until the war ended.

While the Japanese nuns with temporary vows had all left, three young Japanese aspirants— Saito, Samamori and Ogata— were eager to stay. They were accepted as postulants in March 1942, in the midst of this critical situation.

In July 1942, the Sisters were suddenly told by the local government to leave Fukushima and move to Aizu Wakamatsu, a historical city situated west of Fukushima. There, the CND survived until the war ended, courageously and cheerfully enduring extreme hunger and poverty.

Should we count the years the Sisters were in Aizu as a part of their apostolic life, or was this a time of contemplative life for them? Although, structure-wise, their apostolate was closed for a few years, one would be inclined to include this time in their active apostolic life, since they must have made the most of the opportunity to manifest the love of God. We should also add here that the canonical requirement for the formation of the three new postulants was being observed conscientiously. The bishop sent competent Japanese priests from the diocesan city, incognito, to visit the three CND candidates.

There is another historical fact that needs to be mentioned here. After our Sisters left Fukushima, vacating the large convent building, the Japanese government used it to hold people of adversary countries who had been removed from ships sailing on the Japanese territorial seas. In one day, over a hundred men, women and children of various countries were forced to disembark in Yokohama. They were all taken to the empty CND house in Fukushima, where they had to live until the end of the war.

In September 1945, the emancipated Sisters at last returned to their own convent in Fukushima, after our 100 "international guests" had cleared out. The helping hands of the American occupation forces in Fukushima were much appreciated for the immense task of cleaning and reorganization. The dispensary was opened almost immediately, as the fatigue-stricken country needed much medical help. To the great joy of the Sisters, the three novices, who had endured the years of privation with the CND, received permission from Montreal to pronounce their first vows in May 1946. Now that there was freedom of religion, many applicants followed the three Sisters.

The war had devastated big cities like Tokyo, Yokohama and Osaka, not to mention Hiroshima and Nagasaki. Train stations and streets were often flooded with war orphans who had no home to which they could return. The local government searched for educational institutions for such orphans. The CND Sisters were more than happy to answer the need. The first group of orphans consisted of nineteen girls, who came to live with the Sisters, who sewed their dresses and coats from the parachutes and blankets donated to us by the American army.

For these orphans, in 1946, the Sisters founded a formal school, named Sakura No Seibo School, meaning "The School of Our Lady of Cherry Blossoms," the basis of today's Sakura no Seibo Kindergarten, Sakura no Seibo Elementary School, Sakura no Seibo Junior-Senior High School, and Sakura no Seibo Junior College, all situated in Fukushima.

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God Help the Child

by Toni Morrison
Hardcover, 192 pages
Knopf Canada, 2015

It is not surprising the words or phrases, "riveting", "disturbing violence" (against children), "vivid detail", and "numbing imagery" simultaneously come to mind as woven descriptions of this intense, turbulent novel written by Toni Morrison, a Nobel prize winner.

The characters are passionately portrayed. Each chapter unfolds as the protagonist does a self-assessment, in terms of the past or present, discussing the influence of the principal individual, a young woman who calls herself Bride. As the book is set in the present, the reader immediately gets caught in its atmosphere of human ambition and human degradation.

The novel opens with Sweetness, Bride's mother, who is aghast that her newborn, "was so black she scared me," midnight black. Both Sweetness and her husband are light skinned. "To protect Bride, Sweetness treats the child with utter disdain, no touching, call me Sweetness not Mother," all under the altar of protection from the fact that black skin scares people who, in turn, will hurt her. To the child, even an unnecessary slap was better than avoidance. In the next chapter we meet Bride who has just been jettisoned by her then-unnamed lover.

Bride, it turns out, maximises the benefit of her stunning blue-black skin. She becomes a successful business woman planning to launch her cosmetic line, dressing exclusively in white or shades thereof, a bombshell driving a Jaguar, head-turning for men and enjoying her sexual freedom until the arrival of the lover, Booker.

Two months of life with Booker is halted when Bride tells him of a plan to give a gift to a soon-to-be-released convict whom she had identified in court as a heinous female to children. Guilt-ridden, Bride drives to the prison to give this female a ride. She is ignored, but intentionally follows the woman to a motel room. When Bride gives her original name, Lula-Ann, and is about to offer her gifts of remorse, she is knocked almost senseless by the felon Sofia. Face bruised and battered, wearing one stiletto, the other in her hand, Bride calls on her friend Brooklyn to pick her up for medical assistance, not giving the full and true story of the encounter.

Finding an overdue pawn stub for Booker, Bride visits the pawn shop and retrieves a trumpet after settling the bill. Her pride hurt, she embarks immediately on a long journey to find Booker, whose address she now knows from the pawn shop owner. En route she misses a turn, the car rolls off the road and her foot is stuck under the brake pedal. After a night in the darkness of rural United States, a young girl named Rain finds her.

Rain lives with a couple of ex-protesters against the establishment who eschew modern-day fixtures and features. They found Rain one rainy night, nameless and illiterate, running away from a mother who had allowed her to be sexually exploited from childhood. She learns about caring from Bride. Confirmed with a broken ankle, Bride is forced to spend six weeks with this couple, bereft of modern-day conveniences, bored and likely eating poorly, she discovers that her breasts (90% fat) no longer exist at end of the stay. Panic ensues.

Booker has retreated to a mobile home village to be near an aunt who provided solace when his brother was found dead, tortured, raped and thrown into a ravine at the start of one winter. Booker attends university and is interested in many subjects. He concludes that, "(the) real answer concerning slavery, lynching....civil rights and Black revolutions were all about money." He accidentally gleams a love for trumpet playing, with happy recollections as a busker.

Later, in Whiskey, Bride meets Queen Olive, a redhead, (who had seven husbands without the bother of divorce), Booker's aunt, in the midst of burning her bedposts to kill the eggs of bed bugs. Bride jeans where he lives and marches into his home with the "to kilt" frame of mind. A few days later Queen Olive is trapped in trailer home set on fire by lingering embers. Bride and Booker both provide care, but a virus curtails her life.

As Booker and Bride continue their conversations, he learns that Bride's court antics were merely to appease her stone-hearted mother so that she would hold Bride's hand! Bride shares her future, by letter, with Sweetness, who mulls regret but then lashes out, "Find out how the world works when you are parent." Good luck and God help the child.)O

Secretary-Treasurer of W/CC June James. O.M., a retired allergist and former Assistant Professor in Medicine, was born in Trinidad at a time when skin colour influenced one's career choices and advancement.

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What was Fukushima like before the disaster in 2011?

Japan is a small country, but you may be surprised that it was only a small portion of the country that was very severely damaged. Since the tsunami hit the north east part of the country, even Fukushima Prefecture was damaged only partially. Although the earthquake destroyed some buildings, the city of Fukushima, which is quite distant from the coast, was restored in a considerably short time. However, the population of

Fukushima has seriously decreased, mainly because of the radiation caused by the accidents at the atomic power plant, which scared citizens to an almost exaggerated degree. Actually, this psychological effect is more harmful. It is depriving the city of enthusiasm and a joyful atmosphere, and the CND schools have lost one-third of the registration since the earthquake, and seems to keep declining. Those who leave Fukushima move to other cities or prefectures, and some even to other countries in

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