

The Vision



Peter Shimada

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Preface

Many have asked us about Kohitsuji no Mure (A Flock of the Lamb). A number of articles on this subject have been published in Japanese. Through this English article I desire to convey some essence of the vision of Kohitsuji no Mure. Instead of a mission-statement, we call it a vision. A mission-statement like creeds and dogmas connotes human understanding of God, while a vision refers to faith unto the Lord God as well as heavenly revelation. This ministry is based on our faith in and vision for the redemptive love of the Lord Jesus Christ. In order to receive divine love and reality, God has given us faith. Faith is to see and touch God's reality. God's vision is so real. Once seen, it never escapes.

To share the vision, I feel I have to start with my own testimony, for the vision is deeply integrated in my quest to know God's reality. I feel that my life has been nothing but a journey to know something so real, so tangible, and so mysterious. I met Jesus and He has been guiding me to new dimensions. He is the one who kindles my inner vision. Something is burning deep inside of my heart. It may be a bit of an exaggeration to say that the vision to me is like a burning bush to Moses. But it's close. My inner vision still burns; and the

flame is growing, shining brighter.

I pray that the Spirit of the Lord as poured out in the day of Pentecost may fill your heart and engulf the whole earth in His Light and Love.

I divide this article into two parts. The first half describes my own journey on God's path. The second half explains how we have seen the unfolding mystery of God, which is directly related to the vision of Kohitsuji no Mure.

April 3, 1997 On my 57th Birthday

For the Second Edition

Christ is the Lord for all. He is the Lord God also for the Oriental, even for one "untimely born" like me. I have seen Christ as the absolute Love, the ultimate Reality. He is the Redeemer not only for us humans but also for the entire creation.

Once you see the vision of Christ, you will never be the same. You will be completely free from legalism and find a new dimension of life (resurrection life) in the whole universe.

On this second edition, I have added a few articles on the Revelation. I believe that the Eternity is challenging us now to find out what "the end of time (*eshaton*)" means to each one of us.

I sincerely pray that the Lord will reveal you a new vision.

August 15, 2002

Peter

Chapter I Quest for the Reality

Encounter

I was 18 years old and a high school junior in Moji, a northern city of Kyushu. As a typical Japanese boy, I was pushing myself hard to get into a national university. Coming from a poor family, it's the only way to get a college education. A national university provided good education and was considered to be very prestigious. Getting into a national institution was the first step to climbing the ladder of success in Japanese society. Fortunately I was smart enough to be ranked within the elite group of students assured to pass the fierce entrance-examinations for the next year. I wanted to get in at any cost.

But lightning struck. As soon as I started junior year in the spring semester, I was diagnosed with acute tuberculosis at the annual health checkup. Worse, it was in the advanced stage. I had been feeling sick, but I hid it. I was afraid I would be delayed from the competition. But after the checkup, I was immediately hospitalized. The sanitarium was large, with 600 beds. Lying on a bed, I thought about how quickly life could change.

I could not believe the sudden twist in my life. I was an ambitious young man within reach of a prized goal. Why me? A poor boy like me had to get an edge to remain afloat in the survival game. Why not someone else? Rich boys should have problems. Me? O, this should've never happened! I was furious but did not know to whom I should address my anger and

frustrations.

The first year passed swiftly. The sanitarium had rigorous regulations for all the patients. No book. No radio. (TV was not popular yet.) The doctors at the sanitarium had a consensus view on tuberculosis patients. Give the best medication possible, but make patients lie down like pigs! No physical movement was allowed. They believed reading books would consume unnecessary energy and slow down the body's healing process. Well, I'm not sure if medical doctors would hold the same view today. In any event, I was literally bedridden, no walking, no loud talking with others, and of course, no reading at all. I was so frustrated with no books to read. I was like a drug-addict who desperately sought a high!

One day, I asked a nurse to get me some ointment from the drug store. I had athlete's feet. Though no one had told me that cheap ointment would be effective on my athlete's feet, I thought it would be a good cure. Upon opening the tiny ointment box, I discovered a fine-printed medical note. It was something you would usually discard into a trash basket. But I was desperate for any printed matter. The highlight of my day was to read it when no nurse was around. And I read it through with utmost care!

My eyes caught a strange statement at the very end of the note, which read, "A free copy of New Testament Bible is offered upon request." Indeed, it's strange. Why on earth was the pharmaceutical company offering a Bible! Later on, I learned that Ohmi Brethren (the manufacturer of the ointment) was a mission company that distributed free Bibles all over Japan.

I requested a Bible immediately by mail and made sure that it would be sent to my home. Two weeks later, my mother brought it and smuggled it under the blanket. She had a puzzled

look. "You aren't permitted to read yet, are you? Don't be a trouble-maker." "Don't worry, Mother. I'm in good hands." Little did I know what I was saying!

More than a year of hospital life had made me a skillful 'escape artist' to sneak out from the nurses' watchful eyes. But I had been caught twice for reading books. Each time, I had received a severe warning. They threatened to kick me out with one more violation. I had to be very careful, but I was able to read through the entire New Testament without any hindrance.

"A strange book!" murmured as I finished reading it. "Is this the book which is said to be a holy scripture? It's neither fiction nor a historical document. It's not mythology. It's not philosophy. It's not ----- . Well, what is it?"

Puzzled, I gave up reading it. But truly a strange thing happened. A curious thought was circulating my mind. It was like a fly around my head. It was so annoying, but it refused to go away. "Is there a God?" "Is there a God?" "Is there a God?"

At first I tried to brush it off. But no matter how hard I tried to think other things, the thought returned persistently. "Is there a God?" "Is there a God?" "Is there a God?"

It went on nearly for three months. With my little brain, I started to think about the existence of God. *If a supernatural Being like God exists, why are there so much evil in the world? Why doesn't God wipe out all evil at once? Why is there sickness? Why is there so much misery in the world? Yeah, why am I suffering from tuberculosis? Why was I born in a poor home, with constantly quarrelling parents? Why is there so much unfairness in the world? By the way, why do Christian people think they are superior to Buddhists? Wasn't Buddha God? What's wrong with idol-worship?*

Questions, questions, questions----but no answer came. I

became restless. I did not know why these questions occupied my mind to that extent. Finally I thought I had to have a definite answer to the question one way or another. "Is there a God or not?"

I chose July 7th as the day of reckoning. I was 19 years old. I waited until the others in my room fell sound asleep. The final check by the nurse was around 11:30 PM. After she returned to her station, I got up slowly from the bed. For the first time in my young life, I experimented a prayer.

I had been very negative about religious people. I always thought they were weaklings, escaping into their imaginary worlds. Besides that, I also hated my family religion, Tenri-kyo, a kind of Shintoism. My parents prayed every morning in front of our family altar. But they did not like each other and I never had a day go by without hearing cursing words. If religion could not change my parents, what was it for?

But this night was different. It was just for me. I did not care what others had to say on religion or God. Their views wouldn't help me. I had to find the answer for myself.

"Dear God, are you there? If you are, please show me who You are. I just want to know if there is a God or Buddha or Anything. I really mean that. Please answer me."

I pressed my palms together showing my respect to God if He existed. I expectantly waited, waited and waited for some kind of response. I thought God or Something should respond to my sincere quest. I waited for a long time, but nothing happened. Finally I concluded that God was man's fabrication, a product of man's imagination. The issue was now settled: there was neither God nor Buddha. The brief, but dead serious, experiment was over.

Suddenly, I felt tremendous void within. I had been a lonely

boy, but had never felt such an acute pain at this moment. *O, I am alone in the world. I'm alone in the endless universe!* It was too painful even to cry. Discouraged, I was about to put down my hands, but to my astonishment I couldn't! Both palms were stuck together as if they were glued.

Prior to this night, I had never experienced supernatural phenomena in my life. I was not panicky, just curious about what was going on around me. My brain was alert. I was not emotional. I just sensed something was about to happen.

And it happened. I felt something so warm descend upon my head. It went down to my chest, and then to my stomach and finally, through my entire body. As it went through, it washed out all my obstructions within and throughout. That's how I felt; I had not realized my spiritual veins were so clogged. But in a few seconds, all my dark feelings such as anger, hatred, jealousy, and lust were drained out. An unspeakable joy bubbled out from my stomach, and my whole being was saturated with tender love.

At last a thought came to me. It actually hit my forehead, in between my eyes. **"Jesus Christ is God."**

With this, I started to cry. I wanted to shout, but I knew it was midnight and somehow I controlled myself. Tremendous joy overwhelmed me. Now I was deeply conscious that I finally met the One who knew everything about me and loved me unconditionally. I voiced softly, "Dear Jesus Christ" and tears rolled down. The name was so sweet and so kind to my heart. I did not want to go to sleep at all. Excitedly, I wanted to shout with happiness, but I guess I went to sleep.

When I woke up the next morning, the three others in the room were still asleep. My bed was by the window. I pulled the mission-blind and saw the yard outside. Japan was poor at that

time, and I guess they didn't have enough in the budget to care for the yard in the sanitarium. It contained bunches of weeds and shabby wild flowers. It had a look of sadness. But that morning was different. The most beautiful golden rays were floating over every weed and flower. Everything was engulfed with light. I saw sky. White clouds were glittering with joy. The very air was full of life. Even the ground seemed to be breathing with life. In a split second, I glimpsed into the secret of the world. I was enlightened to see that the whole universe was of God. God created everything and the entire universe was God's manifestation. *O God, Lord Jesus Christ. You are God!*

Everything came so fast to my heart. Somehow, I knew the difference between the analytical mind and heart. It was the heart's knowing, not intellectual cognition. Calling the name of Jesus was the most natural thing of my heart. That morning I jotted down to my journal: "O, I have finally discovered the secret of life." The statement may sound like a youthful exaggeration, but to this date that conviction has never left me. I had surely discovered the secret of life, which is the Person of Jesus Christ.

My overnight conversion brought forth another mysterious phenomenon. Somehow I knew I was healed from tuberculosis. I just knew it. When my doctor paid morning visit as routine, I asked him to take an X-ray picture. Regular check-ups were once a month and I had one only two weeks ago. Dr. Shigemitsu was a gentle man. I liked him. Two weeks before, he had told me that it would take another two years for me to return to the society. "Be patient, young man, life is long." And I remembered how discouraged I was then. But this morning, I summoned all my courage to request a special X-ray to be taken. "Why so rush? You know it would cost your parents extra expense. Wait for two

weeks.” “But Doctor, I feel I am recovered already. Please take an X-ray to check.”

I was very persistent. I didn't say God had healed me. He would have thought that I had gone off the deep-end. Finally, he consented to take a picture at my parents' expense. That afternoon, they took an X-ray of me. On the next morning Dr. Shigemitsu came to me with puzzled look. “O, I must take another X-ray for you today. Something strange is happening.” I did not ask what it was. A nurse came with the trolley and took me to the X-ray room and they took pictures from various angles. I also went through the bacterium test. The following day, Dr. Shigemitsu came with a few X-ray pictures.

“Shimada-kun, I can't explain this. But every picture that we have taken shows that you are completely healed. And the bacterium test was also negative.”

“Thank you, Doctor. Does this mean that I can be discharged from the sanitarium?”

“Yeah, I have to agree. I never thought the streptomycin (antibiotics) would be this effective.” Maybe, my cure resulted from medicine. I believe in medical science. But what changed me was more than science or any human resource. It was the absolute love. Jesus Christ came into my life and I knew I had entered a new dimension: The encounter with the Person of Love.

Philadelphia

After becoming Christian, I went to University of Kumamoto and earned BA in Philosophy. Desiring to know more about God, I came to the United States to study theology. Though I knew the reality of God was beyond human understanding, I wanted to study intellectual research about God. I went through four seminaries: charismatic, conservative, liberal and evangelical. Some studies were very interesting. But I did not receive any spiritual satisfaction from the seminaries. I was a good student at the school, but did not feel these studies having any spiritual impact upon my heart. I knew my heart was desiring more than intellectual knowledge of God.

I knew I was going the wrong way. I had met the living Lord, not God of intellectual speculation. And yet I was heading into intellectual fields. I started to study psychology. I learned about some counseling techniques, but they seemed too shallow to see the human mind in depth. For a while, I was intrigued by Jungian psychology, but again I found out it was not the answer. The more I drove myself into intellectual study, the less I felt spiritually. Something was wrong. The Lord God was very patient with me.

Then I met an old lady by the name of Evelyn Morgenthal who was engaged in mission work in the black slums of Philadelphia. She was the most amazing woman. With no formal education, she had started an independent ministry after the Lord appeared and healed her cancer. Not desiring to become a big evangelist, she devoted herself to working in the slums. I witnessed almost daily the miraculous healing of alcoholics and the deliverance of drug addicts. Such was the reality of God's presence!

The charismatic movement was rising up all over America. The Spirit of God was descending. A record-breaking number of traditional Christians were experiencing spiritual renewal. People were talking about speaking-in-tongue, prophetic gift, healing and so on. People who received the fullness of the Holy Spirit seemed to sense profound transformation in their lives. I was very interested in them.

I desired to know the fullness of the Holy Spirit if that would quench my spiritual thirst. Though Evelyn had various gifts of the Holy Spirit, she was not able to show me how I should receive the Spirit. I went to considerable lengths seeking the Holy Spirit with no visible response from heaven.

One afternoon, I came back from the seminary to the mission, which was located in the dense slum of north Philadelphia. I did not like the area. It was so dangerous. You could see the drug-dealers around the corners. Teenage gangs were playing deadly game with guns. I ran to the second floor and lay down on the bed. A piece of paper on the floor caught my attention. I picked it up. It was a small tract. With no anticipation, I looked it over. Suddenly, one sentence popped up in front of my eyes. "All gifts of God are given to us by faith." By faith! Something clicked inside of me. Oh, it's the faith!

I saw what was wrong. I was seeking an experience for the sake of experience, while God just wanted me to believe in Him. I went into the bathroom. Even though no one was in the mission, I did not want any interference. I prayed. "Dear Jesus, You know how thirsty I have been. I have prayed much for the fullness of the Holy Spirit. But I did not receive the Spirit by faith. I now receive the Holy Spirit by faith. I believe that the Holy Spirit is in me. Thank you for the Holy Spirit." A second later I heard myself speaking in strange language.

Glossier (speaking-in-tongues) was coming out of my mouth so naturally. I was neither hysterical nor emotional. Calm as ever. Though I did not understand the language, it sounded very beautiful.

I do not hold the view that glossier is the only sign of the fullness of the Spirit. You don't have to speak in tongue. Anyone who believes in the Lord Jesus Christ has the Holy Spirit. Without the Holy Spirit, how could you confess the Lord Jesus?

And it is wonderful and beautiful blessing to praise the Lord in the unknown language as well as in the known language. As I prayed in tongues, I sensed that my spirit was directly connected with heaven. The transcendental peace of God filled my heart.

As my faith progressed, I learned a lot of things about the Holy Spirit. I do not wish to over emphasize one particular gift, but to me it was the gateway for the power of the Spirit. This experience opened my eyes to the things of the Spirit. I started to pray for healing and the healing started to happen. But more than anything else, it opened my eyes to Biblical faith, further commitment to the Person of Jesus Christ. And the Holy Spirit made my inner vision clearer to see the depth of the Word of God. I, of course, had believed in the cross and the resurrection of Jesus Christ. As I started to read the Bible with renewed interest, the cross of Jesus became very meaningful. I seemed to have a deeper understanding of the death of Jesus. As Jesus cried out on the cross, "Eli, Eli, lama sabachthani?" I saw my spirit crying with him "My God, My God, why hath Thou forsaken Me?" I was there on the cross. Even as Paul said that our old man was crucified with Him, I now believed deep in my spirit that I died with the Lord. Life was exchanged on the cross. It was not a doctrinal confession. It was a spiritual experience

by faith.

The Lord God also revealed the mystery of the cross. It may not be a mystery to others, but surely it was to me. Jesus, the Lamb of God, had to be totally identified with our darkness to the point that his entire being was cut off from the life-giving Father. Jesus tasted the most horrible darkness and loneliness. He went to the uttermost darkness in the universe. The Spirit said to me, “You have never gone and will never go to this ultimate loneliness where the Lamb of God alone went. Because He tasted loneliness, you rejoice in the new life.” Such is the resurrected-life in Christ.

House Church

I was married. Hisako was a Japanese born and devoted Christian.

I graduated from Gordon-Conwell Theological Seminary, Philadelphia in 1969. But we did not know in which direction we should go. We prayed for guidance. And both of us felt that the Lord was leading us to work in the States for a while. But we did not have a visa. My student visa was to expire, and we did not have money to hire a lawyer. I applied for a permanent visa anyhow.

I was not receiving any compensation from the mission work in the slum. To apply for a permanent visa, you must show the Immigration Office a financial statement from your work. We could not produce such a document. We prayed a lot. Finally the Immigration Office summoned us.

An elderly officer opened our file. He was going through the

papers, but he stopped. “What is this?” He pointed at the sheet in the financial section, blank except for the sponsor column, in which I had written, “GOD.” Prayerfully, I opened the Bible to him.

“Sir, this is our financial statement. It says that we should not worry about what to eat and where to dwell. The Lord God will supply all our needs. We have worked among the blacks in northern Philadelphia. And this time, He is leading us to work among the Asians. Since the Lord God is our Sponsor, we believe He would take care of our financial needs. We want to be faithful to His calling.....”

I did not know how and what he understood. He looked at us for a while. He smiled and said, “Young man, we need your kind of people.” He took our fingerprints, and a half hour later, he came back with green cards (permanent visa)! We were utterly amazed. The Lord God, who opened the Red Sea for the Israelites, opened a gate for us. And we entered.

We started an independent mission work in the Philadelphia area. Soon after we began, we met various Asian people; Vietnamese, Korean, Chinese and Japanese. And one by one, they accepted the Lord Jesus Christ as their Savior.

One of the first Japanese I met was a woman who was contemplating suicide. Later, she told us that she was going to the top of her apartment building that night. Had we come a half hour later, she would have thrown herself to the ground. The Lord stepped in. These people seemed to be waiting for us. The door was opened.

Since we did not have a church building, we had meetings at home. And I found out that worship in informal settings had an advantage over Church worship. People came freely. We could

talk a lot of things. In Church worship, you would not have such freedom as this. We had simple Bible study and prayer. Everyone had a problem or two. We talked about the love of Christ and prayed together. And the Lord answered our prayers. People received healing of all sorts. When they saw the reality of God, they did not hesitate in becoming Christians.

Later, I became a pastor of an old Japanese Church in Philadelphia. We had only seven or eight people. They were all very old and told me they could not pay me. That wasn't a problem at all. The Lord taught us how to live by faith. So beside Sunday service, we continued house meetings at various locations. Scholars and their families visiting from Japan were the first group, which caught the fire of the Holy Spirit. Many were baptized.

I had a strong belief in baptism. My conviction was not based on seminary studies, for I had a radically different view from the traditional Church. I do not know how it came to me, but I believe that the Lord opened my eyes to see the spiritual significance of baptism. I believed and still believe that a person would receive eternal life, as he believes Jesus Christ as Savior. Faith and faith alone enables a person to receive eternal life. Baptism is an outward seal of the inner transformation that the Holy Spirit brings. Baptism is not the rite for enrollment into Church. It is far more. I often feel that all heaven rejoices as a soul being baptized. I often sense a special flow of the Spirit on the occasion of baptism, as if the Lord God puts a seal upon the soul while saying, "My child, you are mine for eternity. I have put My seal upon you." I did not hesitate to baptize anyone upon request. I did not see any discrepancy in biblical point of view, for the Bible is full of examples of "immediate baptism." As soon as people believed in the Lord, they were baptized. No lecture

class. No committee appearance. I did not see even one instance of baptism rite at which a candidate swears his or her faithful commitment unto the church. The baptism in the Early Church was simple. It looked upon the Lord alone. If the Early Church found no problem with that, I find no problem with it either. Why the rush? I don't know the answer except to say that if the Lord God desires immediate baptism, there must be a good reason for it.

I became a firm believer in baptism. Baptism to me was a spiritual seal for the heavenly Church. It had very little to do with the earthly Church.

Even after I became a Presbyterian minister, I continued to hold this view of baptism. I did not follow the Book of Order (Presbyterian Regulation). I thought that the biblical view was more important than the Presbyterian view. And no one from the hierarchy challenged me.

During the early stage of the ministry, the Lord taught us the concept of House Church. I never discredited the traditional church style with a building and a rigid organization. It has the merit of being visible in the community. But for us, the Lord has shown the way of House Church. While the church building is compared to the Temple of the Lord in the Old Testament, the House Church is like a tabernacle in the wilderness. The Temple was so visible and magnificent that people were utterly amazed at the sight. Solomon dedicated the Temple to the Lord. But we know the history of Israel and how their kings failed to worship the Lord at the Temple. On the other hand, worship at the tabernacle was simple; people worshipped the Lord whenever the Presence of the Lord was on the tabernacle. They moved out whenever the Presence moved. It was the Spirit's leading. House

Church follows the same pattern. We do not need expensive building. We can worship the Lord in simple manner.

In the latter part of my ministry at the Japanese Church in Philadelphia, we acquired an old mansion, which was converted into sanctuary. But I continued the ministry of House Church style. The Lord added many souls to His kingdom.

Chapter II White Dove

Dark Night

I was enjoying the ministry in Philadelphia. The Japanese Church joined to the denomination of the United Presbyterian Church and I was ordained as a Presbyterian minister in 1980. For the first time in my life I started to receive salary and the benefit of health insurance. They were nice. I was glad that I could support my family now with a little security.

But strange things were happening inside of me. It seemed that the Spirit within was mourning and groaning. I argued with myself: “Come on, Peter, it’s not wrong to have a church building and solid congregation. They all support you. They like you. We may have lost a little bit of salt, but we are still spiritual. Look, people are being saved and healed. They are learning the Bible and the prayer meeting is going strong. After all, even Israelites had to settle down. You cannot live in a tabernacle forever. And remember that you have the family to take care of.” I tried to pursue the Spirit within. But I became restless.

The more I had outward structure, the less I felt the presence of the Lord. I knew I had been compromised. I was not satisfied with my spiritual life. I had to accommodate a kind of Christianity which the majority of Christendom would approve of even at the expense of my heartfelt conviction. My heart was again yearning for God’s reality.

I also started to ponder the validity of traditional Christian concepts. The majority of them were based on Western ways of

thinking, reflections of centuries old Western cultures. Regardless of denominational difference, Christian theologies are deeply rooted in Greek philosophy and Roman judiciary principle: both of them are foreign to pure biblical faith. Some Christians are eager to condemn other Christians as heretical, while they themselves are standing on Greek and Roman ways of thinking, never noticing their own hypocrisies. The Christian Church has allowed the arrogance of human reasoning over spirituality while the Bible is full of God's reality.

I had no illusion of Japanese Christianity either. Japan's Christians had just imported Western style of Christianity and blindly followed it over 100 years. Can you imagine the entire Christian population in Japan is less than one percent of the total population? We are not in a number game, but it is hard to swallow the fact that evangelical effort over 100 years has amounted to such a small segment of believers.

I was dismayed not only by my spiritual life but also by established Christianity in general. Surely I witnessed the mighty charismatic movement in the States and many great men of God, but I also saw in them Westernized Christian mentality, a kind of crusade mentality which would wage wars against all others. I wanted to see pure faith, pure love. But no one appeared on the horizon.

I felt like I was wandering into the dark night. Yet I did not forget the presence of the Lord and His reality. I just wanted to know more of His reality. I was sick and tired of the deceptive, hypocritical ways of Christian people. That included myself.

In those days I sought light in Christian literature. I often found myself in the library of nearby Catholic institution, Saint Charles Seminary in Philadelphia. When tired of reading books,

I could take a walk in the garden. No one bothered me. I spent hours there thinking and seeking a pure form of faith.

I found a little joy in the books by Catholic mystics such as St. Teresa of Avila, St. Francis of Assisi, The Cloud of Unknowing, St. John of the Cross, Meister Eckhart and other Middle Age monks. In spite of Catholic dogmas, I saw pure souls who took hold of God's reality. In the Protestant field, I saw only a few men who could fascinate my spirit. One was Sadhu Sunder-Singh, an Indian Saint from the turn of the century who encountered the Risen Christ at the age of 16. He spent most of his time in Tibet spreading the Gospel. Among the recent Christians, I liked Agnes Sanford. She was unorthodox. This Episcopalian was not afraid to go beyond the traditional Christian barrier until she found tangible truth. She was a sincere soul on quest for God's reality.

These people and many others nourished my soul. "Blessed are the pure in heart, for they shall see God." (Matt 5:8) I desired a pure heart whatever it meant. I desired to have "a single eye." (Matt 6:22) I wanted to meet someone who had "Christ-eye," a divine perspective to see pure reality, someone who had a transparent perception. I was not looking for a man. I was looking for a soul with deeper reality who could show me the absolute mystery of the innermost Christ.

I knew Christ. I knew His amazing love. I knew the power of the Holy Spirit. But I needed more. I was again on the journey. I had to find out what my soul was longing for. Without discovering it, my life would be a complete disaster. I saw an abyss of nothingness. I could have fallen into that bottomless pit. Night was dark.

As a Catholic mystic said, a soul grew in the dark night. And the dawn was so near. To me, the initial meeting with the

Lord was the first encounter, and the experience of the Holy Spirit was the second encounter. And “the encounter of the third kind” was just around the corner.

Night was dark. Yet I felt twinkling anticipation.

White Dove

In 1987, a new door opened. I started Bible Study in Connecticut and New Jersey. A bunch of housewives whose husbands worked in business center of New York attended. Some were already Christians and very eager to invite others. Some came just out of curiosity. Some came hoping to find a solution to their family problems. I believed God would use any opportunity to reach a soul.

When I first had a meeting in Connecticut, a few women accepted the Lord Jesus Christ. They asked me to pray for their children. One child in particular was said to be having a hard time. She refused to see others and did not come out of her room. The mother cried as she related the story to me. I took her hand and said, “You can pray with me. When the two of us agree, heaven shall open.” And together we prayed. A miracle happened only two hours later! When the mother came home, her daughter came out of the room and said, “O, I feel good. I’m going to school tomorrow.” When she heard of our prayer, she said, “Why would a perfect stranger pray for me?” She came to see me two weeks later, and she returned home as a Christian.

Word spread among the Japanese wives. More came to the following meeting, and one by one they accepted the Lord Jesus. Even though I was in the middle of this, I was like a spectator

who just stood and watched the amazing work of the Holy Spirit. And in the true sense of the word, I was a spectator.

The fire of the Holy Spirit spread to Fort Lee, New Jersey. I visited the town once a month. The meeting was so lively with many women and their small children. Practically everyone who came the first time accepted the Lord. I prayed for healing, and the supernatural work of the Holy Spirit was visible.

One day, we were just enjoying teatime after the meeting. Just a few of the core Christians remained. Out of the blue sky one veteran Christian asked me, “What is speaking-in-tongues? Can you tell me a little more of the work of the Holy Spirit?” She was a member of an evangelical church. For a moment, I hesitated to respond, for I saw a face that was not Christian in the corner of the room. Even the majority of Christians would not comprehend it. Hearing of the supernatural, she might misunderstand us. But I proceeded to talk along the things of the Spirit. I shared my experiences with them. After an hour of talk, I proposed to pray for their fullness of the Spirit. They all received the fullness of the Spirit. Their faces were radiant. One or two of them spoke in clear tongues. I forgot about the lady in the corner of the room. She must have gone home before the prayer. Somehow I felt relieved.

The name of “the lady in the corner of the room” was Mitsuko. Later she told me how her curiosity rose up when we began talking on the subject of tongues. After all, she was a language teacher. To her regret, she had to leave for another engagement. The Lord started His move.

Mitsuko was a housewife with a loving husband and two kids. She had been an English teacher in Japan and was working as a liaison between the New Jersey school board and Japanese kids, for many of them were suffering cultural

alienation. She was also a specialist in helping emotionally disturbed children. She was an active woman. Being near the United Nations, she was attending at a Woman's Committee, for her life-long dream was realizing women's liberation from men's dominance. She used to be an activist for the feminist movement. Yet you could never see an aggressive fighter in her. Instead you would see a polite, elegant, charming lady who was well versed in classical music. After meeting the Lord, she confessed that all her life she had acted as if she was on the peak of happiness. Behind her smiling face had hidden a desperately lonely soul who was looking for the Absolute. She was also on a journey to find the reality.

She came to our Bible Study out of curiosity, thinking, "How could anyone believe in one particular religion? How could anyone bind herself to one narrow way of thinking? Believing in one religion may be OK for others, but I would be the last person on earth to choose one limited way. I want to learn from many philosophies and religions, and I definitely want to be free from any prejudice. I am a free woman."

Prior to this meeting, she had attended our Bible Study on a few occasions, but I did not recognize her. So many women attended, and Mitsuko said she tried to hide herself from me. She had a premonition that something unthinkable might happen if she approached me.

At the second meeting, which she attended, she heard me talking about my life by faith. No salary, no insurance, but the Lord was supplying all our physical needs on a daily basis. "Here actually a man who believes in the Invisible and depends on God for money!" It was too much. But my miracle stories had great impact upon her, as did my final remark, "You can have the same life. Try God."

The following weekend, she and her family went cherry picking with four other Japanese families in upstate New York. Driving along the highway, they hit a downpour. Cars had to slow down to snail's speed. And finally they stopped. Suddenly she remembered the remark, "Try God." She made sure no one was noticing her, and silently she prayed, "Oh, God, if You exist, would You stop the rain just for an hour until we arrive at the orchard?"

The rain subsided. They made to the orchard. As soon as they got to the gate, the rain stopped completely and they could see the blue sky. The Japanese families were so excited. None of them had ever been cherry picking. The children excitedly picked up cleaned cherries, for the rain had washed everything. They all had a great time. As they all returned to their cars, look! It started to rain again. "Hmmm....This must be some kind of coincidence."

Next weekend, the same group of people went fishing in South Jersey. Mitsuko loved fishing, but she had one regret; she had never caught a flounder during her six years staying in the States. The ship stopped. All the anglers cast fishing lines. Everybody was hoping for a big flounder. Someone said in thrilled voice, "I gotcha!" No one in the Japanese group, including Mitsuko, had luck. Suddenly that strange remark came to her mind, "Try God."

Mitsuko silently prayed, "O God, if You exist, would You let me catch one flounder, just one." Even before she completed the prayer, her pole felt "a biggie." Here it was. She caught one of the biggest flounder of the day. Everybody was excited and happy for her, "Oh, you're great!" But she felt uncomfortable. "Oh, no, this must be another coincidence."

The ship was now en route to the harbor. Suddenly it

stopped and the voice of the captain said, “Ladies and gentlemen, I give you a special treat today. You can fish here for another 15 minutes.” Shouting, they all started to cast fishing lines into the sea. Now she was nervous. “O, it was just coincidence. Nothing to it. Anyone with good luck can catch one. Am I a nut?” But again the remark echoed inside her, “Try God.”

Finally she said, but this time with reverence, “Dear God, if You so grant, please let me catch another flounder.” And again it happened even before she had finished the whole sentence. She caught a big flounder! All her friends and her family were excited. “Oh, fishing lady, you’re the greatest!” They had no idea how depressed she was.

“Now what? I must admit that God exist. I may have to change my whole life... What should I do?” She had this unexplainable feeling that her life was about to turn upside down. And she was frightened.

The more she saw signs of God’s existence, the more she tried to keep her distance from me. She didn’t share her anxiety with anyone. She couldn’t.

She was very intrigued by the stories of the Holy Spirit. The subject of “speaking-in-tongues” got her attention, for she had never heard of it. “Speaking-in-tongues? What kind of language is it? Could linguistic scholars analyze it? A holy spirit? Is that different from a fairy spirit?”

Yet it was more than an interesting topic. These incidents triggered her deep-seated desire to know the reality, her life-long quest for the Absolute. She thought she was perfectly happy, but that was only the surface. A moment of truth was coming. “I want to be honest to myself, to my heart, and to my deep desire to know the reality.”

In the fall of 1987, God led her through a series of events, which were like an avalanche of supernatural incidents. God carefully prepared a chain of events. If one incident did not take place, she might have missed Him. For example, she and her husband went to pick up their daughter at the Japanese weekend school on Saturday afternoon. She realized they had come ten minutes early. She got out of the car and wondered into the school bazaar. Only three Japanese books were left over. Someone grabbed one book. Afraid she might not get any, she grabbed one of the last two Japanese books and paid only a quarter for it. It was the translation of *From Prison to Praise* by Marilyn Carothers. Glancing at a few pages, she exclaimed, "Wow! This is the book on the Holy Spirit!"

Around that time, she was taking care of two Japanese children. Their mothers begged for her assistance. One was a Junior High girl. She suddenly refused to go to school. Her mother did not know the reason and felt worried. The other one was a boy who was suffering from a horrible skin disease. When a specialist examined him, he took Mitsuko who was interpreting to the next room and said, "This is not my patient. Take him to the psychiatrist. I've never seen a case like this. You'd better keep your eyes on him." The doctor was afraid the boy might take his own life.

"I wonder if I could help these two kids with the power described in the book, *From Prison to Praise*. It tells of all kinds of miracle that happen if a person is filled with the Holy Spirit."

Her sympathy for these kids was too strong to think otherwise. One night in late November, Mitsuko prayed. "Dear God, please fill me with the Holy Spirit. I really want to help two children."

She waited for a while. Nothing spectacular happened. But

she was not disappointed either, for she felt deep serenity.

Meantime, I got a phone call from one of the “zealots” who wanted Mitsuko to become Christian. “Reverend, you’ve got to call Mitsuko-san right away. She’s really interested in the Holy Spirit. I saw her reading a book on the Holy Spirit. Don’t you think this is the chance?” Speaking frankly, I didn’t like “the zealot’s crusader”; many eager Christians were too pushy and they did destroy the Spirit’s delicate work. So I ignored her plea in spite of given a phone number. A few days later, the “zealot” called me again and urged me to call Mitsuko. She even gave me her phone number for the second time. Oh, how pushy she was! A bit angry, I reluctantly picked up the phone and dialed Mitsuko’s home in Fort Lee.

It was a little past 11 o’clock in the morning, December 3rd, 1987.

Mitsuko was so surprised, for the first time in her life she was receiving a call from a minister.

“Mitsuko-san, I heard something had happened to you.”

“Oh...Oh, no. Nothing in particular...Whoever told you such a thing...? Oh, I got it! Must be Miwako! She’s asked you to call me. That’s her. I got a Christian book at the bazaar sale. She saw me getting the book. That’s all. It’s funny how she got so mixed up. Pastor, I got a Christian book by chance.”

I knew she was somehow very embarrassed and I didn’t want to aggravate the situation. I wanted to finish our conversation as quickly as possible.

“Mitsuko-san. Remember this: Nothing happens by chance. No coincident in God’s world.”

“.....”

“Do you mind if I pray for you before I hang up?”

“Oh, certainly not. Please do.”

And I voiced a brief prayer, “Dear God, I thank you for Mitsuko-san. She may not be aware of her thirst and hunger for Your reality and love. I pray You may fill her with the Spirit of Jesus Christ.” And at the next moment I surprised myself, for I started to pray in tongues! *Oh, No, No, No! What are you doing, Peter? She isn’t even Christian.*

I abruptly stopped tongue praying. Now it was me who was really embarrassed. And foolishly enough I embarrassed myself further by asking a stupid question, “Oh, how.... how.... did you feel?” How did you feel? That was the stupidest question. I had to be crazy.

“Oh,” she said, “I thought it was beautiful.”

“Is that right?” I replied, and hung up. I was a little bit angry at myself.

She was surprised, not only by receiving a phone call from a minister and being prayed for over the phone but also by his abrupt way of hanging up. She thought, “I should have said more to him. All I managed to say was ‘*It was beautiful.*’”

Strangely, however, she felt she understood immediately the meaning of my tongue prayer. She perceived the sound as something so beautiful and familiar.

She came back to herself. It was around 11:30 AM. She had a lunch appointment with her Jewish friend. Hurriedly she opened the front door. As she stepped out on the porch, light struck her. A sunray gleamed through the branches of the giant tree in front of her house. But it was no mere sunray. She fell to the porch, and a word struck her forehead, “A white dove.”

She stood up. And again the word, “A white dove” echoed through her mind. And from this moment on, the same words repeated themselves. It continued during the entire afternoon.

Only while she was conversing with her friend, did it seem to cease. As soon as she was aware, however, the word “A white dove” resounded.

She returned home and called her “zealot” friend to get my phone number. She did not have the luxury of feeling embarrassed for calling a minister. It was urgent.

“Rev. Shimada, teach me, please. What’s a white dove?”

I gulped. “It’s the Holy Spirit. There’s a narration in the New Testament. When Jesus was baptized in the river Jordan, the Holy Spirit descended in the shape of a dove. But something has happened to you, hasn’t it?” She told me about what had happened a few hours before.

“I knew what you were saying in your speaking-in-tongue. You said, ‘A White Dove is the very foundation of my faith.’”

“.....”

Our conversation ended briefly. But I sensed something extraordinary happened and was still happening. Silently I prayed for Mitsuko, asking the Lord to cover her with the Blood of Jesus.

That night, December 3, 1987, Mitsuko entered into a new dimension of life.

She closed the door so that no one would come. She closed her eyes and prayed. She saw pitch darkness. It was not horrifying. Rather it was very sweet and dear to her being. The darkness was thicker than anything she had ever seen on earth. It was like the darkness of the universe. I believe it was the same darkness that covered the face of the deep in Genesis.

Behold, from the center of the darkness came the shape of a dove. She was watching the dark universe. There was the most beautiful white light in the shape of a bird. Glittering in white

(whiter than anything on earth), the dove flew to Mitsuko and just in front of her, it scattered away. A second dove floated from the light and came to her, then a third one. The process repeated over and over again.

It was magnificent and spectacular. Mitsuko was awe-stricken. Hours passed. But she did not feel it. In eternity, she discovered that time ceased and yet time flew. Time moved and yet time stopped. Later, she remembered hearing a deep voice say again and again, "Receive the eternal life... Receive the eternal life... Receive the eternal life..."

The vision lasted two nights. A new dawn came. She knew that the most important thing in her whole life had just happened.

She immediately wrote down all these experiences. From this day on, she wrote everything her mind and heart felt and experienced. For many days, she wrote 20 pages or more. I used to recommend that people should keep spiritual journals if they were serious about their inner lives. Writing would give you an objective perception, and you would find how the living God lead you to the divine reality. Mitsuko, however, was not told to do so by me. The Spirit bade her.

I met her two weeks later in Fort Lee. After Bible Study, I took her to the next room and prayed for her. Immediately she was filled in the Holy Spirit, but she seemed struggling and feeling pain. She felt the blood in her body reverse in circulation. I left her alone in the room, for I knew the Holy Spirit was cleansing her inner being. Then she was released from pain and spoke in tongues.

A few weeks later, she had to return to Japan. Her son was to enroll in High School and her daughter in Kindergarten.

She no longer doubted the existence of God and her own supernatural experience, but it was entirely another matter for her to become Christian. Her lifelong philosophy would not allow her to recognize Christ as the only God. “God must be bigger than Jesus Christ. Jesus is one of many manifestations of God the Unlimited, as is Buddha. I must find out the truth.”

Now in Japan, she had no one to talk with about the spiritual matters, so she wrote a long letter to me, she expressed her doubt that Christ was the only way, and that her lifelong belief was that there were many valid manifestations of the Unlimited God.

I prayed earnestly for her. I knew the danger of the spiritual world. A sensitive soul like her could become a victim of “the elemental spirits” which Apostle Paul talked about in the book of Colossians. I wrote her back: “Don’t be deceived. Jesus Christ should not be regarded as one of many gods. He is the way and life, the very manifestation of the Invisible God. Who else died for you? I do not have any other God but God the Father, His crucified Son, and the Holy Spirit.” I finished the letter with, “Only Christ Jesus. That’s my spiritual conviction.”

My lengthy letter did not persuade her to believe in only Christ, but she pondered my final remark for a long time; “Only Christ Jesus. That’s my spiritual conviction.”

After the “White Dove” incident, she went through radical changes. She did not feel like eating at all, nor did she feel like sleeping. Since she was a housewife, she pretended to eat and sleep with the family, but she needed no food, no sleep. It lasted 40 days to be precise.

When she returned to Japan for her son’s High School enrollment, she had a plenty of time for herself and she decided to read all kinds of religious books. With little sleep and her

children at school, she devoured various books on Buddhism, books on philosophies, even on books on the dangerous cults. With exception of Christian book, every book she read seemed to approve her pantheistic view. But when a writer quoted a scripture to repudiate the uniqueness of Christ, her eyes were drawn to a biblical passage and she found her heart yearning to Christ. "By reading Buddhist books, how could I come to Christ? This is ridiculous." Her quest continued.

One morning, the idea came to her like an inspiration. "When Pastor Shimada prayed for me in the unknown language, I received interpretation. It was as if God were speaking to me directly. Why can I not do it for myself?" So she prayed in tongues, desiring to know which way she should go. Immediately, she heard an inner voice. "Are you ready?" Frightened she replied, "Oh, no, I'm not."

On another occasion, she prayed again in tongues and the interpretation came forcefully, "It's about time for you to give up all your sins. See that My Son was crucified for your sake."

Then the third time, the message seemed stronger, "Live. Why don't you live?"

They all seemed simple enough to be understood. But Mitsuko took the third message in a wrong way. "O, this is terrible. What does God mean by "Live"? Doesn't He see me living with my uttermost sincerity? I've seeking for truth desperately, and now He abandons me?" Mitsuko was mysteriously horrified, feeling like she had been left alone.

Then she grew angry. "Oh, this God-business is too much for me. I can't take it any more. I was really serious about knowing the truth. Oh, I give up." She put all her religious books, including the Bible, into trash bags. Feeling like this, for the first time in months, she went shopping. "For many days and

weeks, I have not touched anything but of God. Be gone with the wind! I've got to enjoy life." She went on shopping.

On the way back, she passed by a bookstore. "No more book," she said to herself. But her legs carried her into the store. One book popped out in front of her. "Well, the title looks interesting. Oh, I may get it. This is absolutely the last book I would read." So she bought it. "*Spiritual Departure*." The author Takako Takahashi was a Catholic, and she wrote her spiritual journey. Reading a few paragraphs, Mitsuko's eyes were caught by a biblical passage,

I have been crucified with Christ; it is no longer I who live, but Christ who lives in me; and the life I now live in the flesh I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave himself for me.
(Galatians 2:20)

Tears rolled down. "Oh, this is what God meant. He did not mean to forsake me. I have misunderstood Him. He wants me to live a life of Christ by faith." It was a difficult passage to many Christians, but she knew what it meant deep in her heart. "I live. I live by faith. Oh, what a tremendous liberation!"

Soon after the incident, God revealed to her the mystery of the cross. She saw the vision of the cross on which the Savior was crucified, and she cried like Thomas, "My God and my Lord."

"White Dove" brought unexpected joy to me. From the initial encounter, I knew that Mitsuko was more than a new convert with supernatural experiences. When you are presenting the Gospel, you meet all kinds of people, including psychics who see the invisible and hear the inaudible. I never refuse anyone who comes to Christ, no matter how weird his or her experience might be. Mitsuko is not psychic, even though she has experienced all kinds of supernatural phenomena. For an

instance, she could see through other's physical body and pinpoint where a sickness was. She could see and hear all kinds of supernatural things. She was born a "curious George" who got enjoyed everything on her way. Of course, she was amused at the supernatural phenomena, but to my surprise she never indicated her attachment to any of them. That was a quite revelation to me, for I had known a lot of people who got supernatural gifts and got deeply involved with them. If someone got healing experience, he would go after more of healing gift. If prophetic gift once, then more of prophetic manifestation.

Somehow she knew that she should not be distracted with supernatural things. From the very beginning, she showed her zeal to know the truth, nothing but truth. Her quest was only for the substance, not peripheries.

As soon as she accepted the Christ crucified as her only Savior, the Lord led her to walk on a narrow road. So narrow, she sometimes traveled on the razor's edge. Knowing the danger, I was often frightened. And I constantly prayed for her.

She was to renounce everything and everyone, including her family. It was easy to say, but it was hard to crucify everything on the earth, even herself, her own very existence. She saw the cross of Jesus Christ absorbed everything, everyone, and herself.

I have never seen the Lord try and refine a soul in such a narrow and severe way. Time after time, His dealing with her frightened me. Surely it was severe love. Now I know that God's severe refining was not only for Mitsuko's soul but also for the entire Kohitsuji no Mure, men and women to follow the Lord.

For while we live we are always being given up to death for Jesus' sake, so that the life of Jesus may be manifested in our mortal flesh. So death is at work in us, but life in you.

(2 Corinthians 4:11-12)

Wounded Sheep

In the spring of 1989, I visited Japan as an evangelist. I had been visiting the country at two or three year intervals. I was invited to various churches: evangelical churches, liberal churches, Catholic churches and seminaries. I was welcomed to bring the fresh air of the Holy Spirit. In every church, people were surprised and happy to see the healing love of Christ. They were not used to seeing the actual work of the Holy Spirit. The wine skins were old and stiff. The Spirit had to come little by little. But to many churches, it was a tremendous change. In most Japanese churches, only a handful of people got baptized each year, if any. I was a kind of “repairer of the breach” (Isaiah 58:12) and I enjoyed the role.

Near the end of the evangelical trip, I called Mitsuko, who lived in Nishinomiya, near Osaka. I asked her to join me at Tsukuba, the academic center of Japan. There for the first time, she made a public ministry with me. She was just a year old in faith, and did not think she should stand alongside with a “professional” minister. Yet I pushed her. She was a babe all right. But what a babe she was! She did not preach. She simply shared her experiences with the people and the Spirit took over. It was like an open gated dam. The flood of the Holy Spirit overwhelmed people at the meetings. People got saved and healed. Many received profound inner healing. One professor at the University of Tsukuba was astounded at the sight of healing. He had been Christian for over 40 years but had never seen divine healing. He immediately called his fellow professor, who lived in Fukuoka, the southern part of Japan. “You’ve got to come here with your daughter. She will be healed. This is genuine.”

The next day was our last day at Tsukuba. A number of people came for prayer. In the afternoon, the professor from Fukuoka came with his daughter, Mariko. She was suffering from a rare sickness, which was eroding her nervous system. We prayed. She was not instantly healed, but Mariko felt warm love all over her. Two years later she received complete healing and she is now our dedicated worker.

Tsukuba ministry was a turning point. I had been ministering for a long time; a lot of people had been saved and healed. But nothing like this had ever taken place. It was like the difference between a creek and a river.

The evangelical trip in 1989 was the most fruitful. When I visited my parents' home in Kyushu, my sisters, my brother, and their children joined me. They had a special party for my father's 88th birthday. I had not seen them for a long time. The night turned out to be most moving. The adults were all drinkers! And the Holy Spirit worked in the midst of drinking party. One by one, they accepted the Lord Jesus and got baptized: thirteen all together. The last one was my father.

On the way back to the States, I was so excited and grateful for the Lord. I was filled with joy. I was seated at the window and I was watching vast layers of white clouds. Suddenly I was overcome with sadness. It was so strong. Why this sadness? Should I not feel joy and happiness? But even the layers of white clouds looked full of sadness.

A gentle voice spoke.

My child, do you not know my sadness?

Know my sadness as well as my joy.

When I got home in Philadelphia, I made an international

call to Mitsuko and shared my sadness with her. We prayed together over the phone, and the Lord was in our prayer. We saw the vision.

Hundreds and thousands of lost sheep were wandering in a field, while a few of sheep were inside fence. Every one of them had scars and wounds. They were wandering without direction, and there was no one to take care of them. Sheep inside of the fence were wounded, too. A voice said, stern but compassionate, "Go, my children. Go outside of the fence. Save and heal them."

I knew that the fence indicated the church. The Lord God was saying that we should go outside the church-barrier to the multitude of people who did not know Christ. And I understood why I was overwhelmed with sadness after the fruitful trip. The Lord seemed to be saying to me, "You are happy to see only a bucketful of people be saved while the rest of the ocean is left."

I started to ponder the meaning of the vision. "How could I reach the multitude? Even if I dedicated myself to being a full time evangelist for the rest of my life, I could draw only a few bucketful of water in the ocean."

As I prayed, however, the Lord reminded me of the House Church. How people came to the Lord through the house meetings. That was the key. One man's ministry would be limited. But if a number of ordinary people received the vision, then what would happen?

My eyes were opening and I got excited. "This is it!" Excitedly I shared my conviction with anyone around me. But no Christian showed any understanding. I was publishing a periodical, *Budo-no-Ki (The Vine)*, and I wrote an article on the vision and the concept of House Church. The periodical had a

circulation of about 1,000, both in the States and in Japan. Again, I received no response at all. Only one young man wrote to me with enthusiasm from California. By the way, that young man was Yasushi Suzuki, who is now our staff worker.

Was I crushed with disappointment? No. Not at all. I did not expect Christians to understand the vision. When you are in the old skin and drink the age-old wine, you will say that the old wine tastes better. I do not mean to ridicule Christians who are in the traditional churches. I have no problem with Christians who are convinced their task as “the repairer of the breach” is to be faithful to their churches. Different churches, but One Lord. As for us, the Lord has commanded to go outside of the fence and prepare a new wineskin, so that’s what we’ll obey and do.

I used to have a number of minister friends. None of them not even one, showed any understanding for the vision. They were cool. Some of our friends in Japan thought that I was moving into dangerous territory, or I was becoming radical! They meant to give me wise advice. One friend even came to Philadelphia from Japan, just to stop me. I could see her sincerity. “Peter, remain as a Presbyterian minister. You can visit us once every two years or so as you have been doing and minister to the various denominational churches with the power of the Holy Spirit. We all love you and your ministry. But if you become independent and try to establish a new church over there, you will be criticized and attacked. I know these ministers and I can anticipate how they will react to a so-called faith-movement.” That advice came from the person who had been working at the headquarters of a large denomination. She was a very good friend of my wife. She was also worried about our financial situation if we were to leave the Japanese church.

But I was not moved. My heart was fixed. The vision was

now burning deep in my heart.

The people in the Japanese Church of Philadelphia worried about my change. Some got angry with me for they thought I was abandoning them. I had been a popular pastor, and I took advantage of my popularity to minister the congregation. My popularity was now gone. I felt rough wind. Smiling faces turned into angry faces. A dove turned into a snake! But I was not discouraged.

I had just turned 50. My life as a pastor had been comfortably established. My children were still in school. Now everything had to be cleared out. My wife cried a lot, not because financial anxiety, but because of the angry voices in the church. But she finally stood with me. It took me another two years to resign from the church, but I left it at the end of July 1991.

A new dawn began.

Kohitsuji no Mure

New wine must be poured into a new wineskin. Soon a new name came for the new wineskin, Kohitsuji no Mure, meaning “A Flock of the Lamb.”

Kohitsuji no Mure had its inception in Japan. Mitsuko had been holding a home meeting since 1989 at the house of her friend in Kobe, which became first official house meeting for Kohitsuji no Mure. I started the American chapter in 1991 at the house of the Hayasaka, Hasbrouck Heights, New Jersey.

We did not create a church constitution. Later we adopted the guideline for our leaders and workers, which stated the

vision and showed how to conduct a house church.

I did not adopt traditional church style. No membership should be required. I had seen people bound by church-membership and lose spiritual freedom. Churches may need a membership system to hold their own flock, but I did not see such a system in the Early Church. Anyone who has accepted the Lord belongs to the church in heaven (Church Universal), and Christ Jesus should be the only Shepherd.

Since we do not have membership, we do not ask people to make pledges. Most churches secure financial resources and thus make their budgets through pledges. Usually it is a job for church elders and deacons; they ask each member of the congregation to make a monthly pledge of money. I am not against the traditional practice. But for us it is unnecessary practice. If we need money, why not ask the Lord? Is it that simple? Sure it is. It was that simple for the Early Church. And if that simplicity was good for the Early Church, it must be good for us, too.

Since our worship is in houses, we do not need huge funds to operate. It is like a tabernacle in the Old Testament. We just seek the Lord's presence.

One big problem with our simple style as some Christians pointed out, is that we don't have a trained pastor to lead the meeting. Isn't it dangerous to worship without a professional minister?

Let's go back to the Bible. Did the Early Church have a professional minister, a trained pastor? No, not in my Bible. If you study the Acts and Paul's epistles carefully, you'll find a completely different view of Church from what we had down through the centuries and what we have today. In the Early Church, a few elders oversaw the flock. They were spiritual

leaders so to speak. In later times, I believe, a full time pastor was chosen. As for the term of “pastor,” you can find only once in the New Testament, Ephesians 4:11, which many scholars believe a title role in latter development.

Again, I am not against the one-pastor-over-one-church system. But for us, the Lord God has led us to a primitive way of the Early Church. We do not depend upon one gifted leader. We sincerely believe that Jesus Christ is the only and sufficient Shepherd. We believe that everyone should have direct access to the Lord and the Holy Spirit will teach us concerning all things. (1 John 2:27)

I did not and still do not believe that we need a set doctrine or dogmas to guard our faith. If you believe Jesus Christ died for you and He was risen from the dead, you are my sister and brother, for you share the same life with me. You may have different views from me on the gifts of the Holy Spirit, on the End Time, on the evangelism and so on. I have no problem accepting you as my fellow brother or sister in Christ, for our fellowship is based not on doctrine or dogmas, nor is it based on any particular experience. It isn't based on a great leader, Church tradition, or culture. Our fellowship is solely based on the Person of Jesus Christ.

When Kohitsuji no Mure started, I had one strong conviction; this new flock would be the people of praise. All my Christian thinking and experiences came to one focal point; that was to worship the Lord in pure heart.

But the hour is coming, and now is, when the true worshipers will worship the Father in spirit and truth, for such the Father seeks to worship him. God is spirit, and those who worship him must worship in spirit and truth.

(John 4:23-24)

When you worship the Lord, you will see the unfolding mystery of God, the very mystery of the redemption by the Lord Jesus Christ. And God is calling people of praise.

It was natural that our first retreat turned out to be full of praising. In the summer of 1992, Kohitsuji no Mure had a summer retreat for the first time, both in the States and in Japan. The Americans are familiar with retreat, but the Japanese were not. Japanese Christians used to have summer meetings, which they called “Shuyo-kai,” roughly translated as, “Session to nurse morality.” I didn’t like its tone of Confucianism, which had dominated Oriental mentality for centuries. So I introduced the English word, “Retreat,” explaining that we should withdraw from the world and be quiet before the Lord. This was not to study the Bible under a great teacher, but this was to praise the Lord in spirit and truth. I also chose quiet music. I did not think it was necessary to agitate human emotions by singing aloud.

We rented Tozanso, the YMCA retreat center in Shizuoka. I did not know how many people would participate in the three-day, two-night gathering, for Kohitsuji no Mure was practically unknown at that time. The rental fee was expensive. Worse, we did not have even one worker yet to prepare the event. We had to depend on volunteer work of the young people in the Tokyo area. I didn’t even know their names for I was in the States and had little knowledge of the situation. We talk about praise, but I didn’t even know who would play the piano.

But God prepared everything. We had one simple aim; to praise the Lord in spirit and truth. When Tozanso retreat opened in the middle of August, we all sensed a new beginning. Right from the start, the presence of the Lord overwhelmed us.

Quietly, quietly, we praised the Lord God. I saw many weeping. It was far more than an emotional experience. Praising may touch your emotion, but it should be originated in the Spirit.

The second day of the retreat was dedicated to the healing service. But it, too, was part of praising the Lord. The same Lord Jesus who walked on the shore of Galilee was now in the midst of our praising. The compassionate One, who had walked on the earth two thousand years ago, was now healing people in our generation.

Mitsuko prayed with us. About 180 people were at the worship. So many received the Lord and got baptized. So many received healing. One memorial healing at Tozanso was on the Ito family.

Mr. & Mrs. Ito used to be evangelists themselves. But so many hardships had crushed their spirits that they had finally quit. They had lost their first-born baby. They had cried for God's mercy, but her life was taken. They had moved to Tokyo. To support the family Mr. Ito was working as a janitor. When they heard of Kohitsuji no Mure Retreat from a friend, they did not have sufficient money and were not interested in healing ministry any more. Whenever they heard a famous healing minister coming from abroad to Tokyo, they would take their second child for prayer. She was suffering from severe skin disease. Nothing happened. But they had a funny feeling, almost an itching to attend the retreat. They prayed and made a decision to try healing prayer one more time. "Lord God, we will return to your field if You heal our daughter."

As we were praying for people who were waiting in line, Mitsuko took a microphone and said in a puzzled voice, "Someone here has a problem with the liver. I don't know why, but I am seeing someone's liver whose upper part is whitened.

Please come forward if it's you." We continued praying.

When a couple carrying a little girl came before us, Mitsuko exclaimed, "Oh, here you are! She is the one." She laid hands on the child and thanked the Lord for her healing. But the unexpected happened when Mitsuko prayed for her father. He fell on the floor and started to cry so loudly when Mitsuko conveyed to him the message from the Lord, "My child, no one has betrayed you. I have been with you." Japanese man was not supposed to weep in public place. But he couldn't help but cry at the top of his voice, for he had thought that his friends, his family, and the Lord Himself had betrayed him. Now he was hearing an entirely different message from the Lord, which touched the depth of his heart.

The next morning, Mr. & Mrs. Ito noticed their daughter's face had changed and believed she was healed. They found her eating miso-soup, which used to trigger rashes in her immediately. Nothing happened. God healed her in answer to her parents' prayer. And the inner healing of the father was so great. Mr. & Mrs. Ito decided to be the workers for Kohitsuji no Mure. Surely, they have returned to God's field with a new vision.

Our first retreat started in praise and ended in praise. The praise set a key tone for the Kohitsuji no Mure in subsequent meetings. When we opened our central church in Ashiya in 1993, we just had praise. No program, no guest speaker, no refreshment: nothing but praise. As we were praising in the opening worship, Mitsuko heard the voice of the Spirit whisper, "Everything is completed in praise." That confirmed what we had been convinced of from the first retreat.

As we progressed on the path of praise, the Holy Spirit showed us that praise was the key for all things and the Lord

God would unfold the mystery of God through praising. The Holy Spirit may distribute various gifts upon the body of Jesus Christ, and there is nothing wrong with members of the body seeking certain gifts. Some people are obviously bestowed with powerful gifts, such as healing, prophecy, discerning of evil spirits, word of knowledge and so on. They are all great for the body of Christ. But we have found out that the Lord God meets all our needs when we simply praise Him with gifts or without. In this way, we don't have to depend on gifted men. We depend on the Lord alone. Truly, the Lord God meets all our physical and spiritual needs when we come to Him in praise.

Kohitsuji no Mure is the mission of house church. We can worship the Lord without church building. It is a kind of grass-rooted movement. In 1992 we had our first "Leaders Conference" with 7 representatives (house church leaders). Last year we had 104 representatives in Japan alone. Kohitsuji no Mure has been spreading like wild fire. Since the initial gathering at Tozanso, I had known the Lord would provide a central church for this movement. Many house churches and one central church. That was the image I had for this grass-rooted movement of the Holy Spirit.

In the summer of 1993, I came to Japan for the summer retreat and I was to return to the States at the beginning of September. An unbelievable number of people were coming to the Lord in Nishinomiya area where Mitsuko resided. The core members of the new converts were seven housewives who called themselves, "Intercessory Sisters." (They looked a bit older to be called so!) They had no Christian background, but they all became Christians when they met Mitsuko. Once they tasted the goodness of the Lord, they became powerful prayer warriors. Oh,

did they pray! When they heard a kid in neighborhood was having a hard time, or was sick, they got together and prayed. Soon after, the mother of the kid, the kid himself and his father would come to believe in the Lord. At the end of one year, more than 200 people got baptized.

Japanese houses are small. "House Church" was a good idea, but how could we gather these people for common worship? We started to pray for a place for the regular service.

After the summer retreat, a lady called me and said, "Do you know Mr. Yoneda's building has an empty office-floor. It's in Ashiya, only a few minutes' walk from the railroad station." I was in Tokyo. I called the owner and talked with him. "Well, Reverend, I wish we could rent it for you. But it's too expensive for your church to rent the office-floor. The security deposit (such a thing exists!) alone costs 7 million yen (equivalent of about seventy thousand dollars). Plus, the monthly rental fee is four thousand dollars, and of course you would have to renovate the office at your own expense." It was a good thing that I did not understand at all these astronomical figures for I had been out of the country too long.

I called Mitsuko and asked her to see the owner and his building. I also called our treasurer to find out how much we had in bank. She replied, "Oh, a little bit over of one million yen (about ten thousand dollars)." Hum, hum. Maybe a little bit short.

The next evening, Mitsuko called me at the hotel. "It looks very good. I feel His presence. I've talked with Mr. Yoneda. He has offered to cut both the security deposit and the monthly rent in half. Don't you think the Lord is saying, "Go and take it?"

"Amen."

With that, I returned to the States. In two and half months

later, I came back to Japan for the opening worship! We had no building committee, and to my joy no one claimed to take credit for the swift opening. We prayed, and asked subscribers of our periodical, *Budo-no-Ki* for donations. We were able to pay our total expense of 10 million yen (one hundred thousand dollars) by Christmas. We were utterly amazed at His provision.

As mentioned above, the opening service was nothing but praise. That continues to this day. Right after the Great Hanshin Earthquake in 1995, next office room became available, and we expanded our sanctuary.

Having a sanctuary is nice. Having gifts of the Spirit is nice. But we are not to get attached to them. For that matter, we are not to be attached even to God's gifts. With or without them, you can always praise the Lord, who brings all things work for good. Everything is completed in praise. Everything is perfected in Christ's redemption.

April 10, 1997

Appendix

The Vision of Our Faith

This is to state our faith in the Lord and the church-life. We prefer to call it a vision. This is neither dogmatic statement nor manifesto of certainism. A vision is originated in heaven while dogmas and manifestos are human opinions. They look alike to many, but they are radically different in essence. Christ is the very manifestation of God's love and He is the same Lord God who touches and heals many as in the days of the Bible. We are to see this Jesus instead of manipulating Christian creeds and theologies. To have the vision is to have direct access to the Lord Jesus Christ by faith. We need no medium between God and men.

You can summarize our faith in one statement, "Everything is completed in praise." It is simple, very simple. And yet this simple revelation contains the most profound life in Christ. The revelation is like a sunray. The transparent ray can be reflected into various colors when shone through a prism. You may see seven aspects in this revelation.

Worship

We believe that worshipping the Lord is of supreme importance. Everything is made complete in praise. When we praise the Lord in spirit and truth, He will reveal to us who He is. We may have various needs to be addressed, but He will meet

all our needs in His time when we praise and worship the Lord in heart.

We believe various kinds of praise. Sometimes we sing quietly. Sometimes we praise joyfully. Sometimes we worship in silence. Everyone has direct access to the Lord through praise. Many people experience the Lord's direct touch through praise.

Healing

We believe the Lord God heals us from sickness and disease. We see the Lord heal various kinds of sickness, including mental and spiritual sickness. We pray for inner healing. This does not exclude medical treatment. We believe in medical science as well.

We do not insist on divine healing. Though many people receive miraculous healing, the Lord takes some to heaven. We believe that death is healing in a deep sense. The Lord answers every prayer. Therefore, we do not demand healing on our own term. He works all things for good when we simply praise Him.

Church

We believe One Shepherd and One Pastor, Lord Jesus Christ. We gather in homes and sometimes in buildings to worship the Lord, but meeting places mean little. When a person wants to open his or her home for praising service, this person becomes a leader, who oversees the meeting (House Church). The leader is not so-called pastor who takes care of and controls a flock by authority. House Church leader is to assist people to praise the Lord. The leader is neither a teacher of the Bible nor a counselor. The Holy Spirit will teach the truth to any one who

desires to learn. And the Holy Spirit is the Counselor. (John 14:26)

We do not believe in church-membership. Our membership is in heaven. And we do not ask people for monthly pledges. The Lord will meet all our financial needs.

The Word

The Bible is the word of God. Since it is divinely inspired, we have to open ourselves to the Holy Spirit to understand. We do not need professionals to teach the Word, for every one of us has direct access to the Holy Spirit.

We practice “Bible Study in the Wilderness”; everyone is to be alone before the Lord and meditates on the Word. Everyone may have different interpretations, and we believe every interpretation is valid as long as he or she “sees Christ” in Scriptures.

Fullness of the Holy Spirit

We believe in the Holy Spirit who empowers us to be His witnesses. We do not teach methods of evangelism, but people who have been filled with the Spirit can go out and share the Lord with others. This is evangelism in action.

Some may speak in tongues as the Spirit fills them, but we do not insist speaking-in-tongues as the initial sign of the fullness of the Spirit. Praise is the very manifestation of the Spirit.

Baptism

Anyone who believes in the Lord Jesus Christ can be baptized. We believe it is God's divine seal upon a soul. Since it is God's initial act, we do not want to interfere with baptism by imposing a burden of lengthy study. The Holy Spirit will take care of any baptized soul and feed each one of them.

The Way of the Cross

Everything is completed in praise. As we walk in the path of praise, the Lord reveals His cross upon us and we experience crucified life. In God's glorious praise, we are reduced, and He, and only He, will increase. We may be tolerant of believers' mistakes and sins, for the Lord God will forgive all our sins if they are exposed in His light. But we are alert to any manifestations of the flesh that insist upon self-righteousness.

As we decide to praise the Lord today, our old lives die and we are reborn.

Indeed, all things are completed in His praise.

February 3, 1996

The Lord's Prayer

*Our Farther which art in heaven,
Hallowed be thy name.
Thy kingdom come.
Thy will be done in earth, as it is in heaven.*

God's very desire for the earth is manifested in the Lord's Prayer. As we pray it, we are to be in harmony with heavenly desire. And it is also the soul's sincere desire that we the earth may be harmonized with heaven. Heaven must be united with the earth. The Lord's Prayer is to unify heavenly reality with the earthly life that we may be children of the Light and Love.

As we come before the Lord God, we realize that everything is perfect and completed in His presence. So we worship Him in Spirit and truth, knowing that everything is perfect and completed in His praise. The Lord God manifests Himself in the midst of our praise.

When we pray the Lord's Prayer, we are confessing faith of all-inclusive praise. Truly, everything is perfected in the mystery of God's praise. God in heaven is seeking for those who come before Him with praise, for heavenly reality will be realized on the earth only through praising-hearts, only with faith-seeing eyes.

God is not asking for our profound knowledge, or saint-like personalities. He is seeking simply for souls who worship and praise Him in Spirit and truth. And worshipping and praising are the soul's deepest desire. As we praise Him in heart, we find out who and what we are. Without praising the Lord God, we

never know our own destiny.

Man is a spiritual being. It is hard to define what spirit is, but one thing is clear. Man's spirit will never rest, not until it meets the living Lord and worships Him. Spirit or soul, whatever you may call man's innermost being, is constantly seeking an opportunity to praise the Lord God.

As we pray that thy will be done here in earth as it is in heaven, our spirits rejoice with heavenly joy. It is the most moving prayer ever uttered in this universe. As the Lord's Prayer is prayed, heaven shakes and the universe vibrates in joy. The very heart of the Lord God is pleased and the angels sing together with us.

Seek first the kingdom of God and His righteousness. Call upon the most holy Name in the universe. Let Christ the Lord be the Lord of all.

Praise first, and the rest of our needs will be supplied accordingly. All things and everything are perfect and completed in God's glorious praise. God in His eternal wisdom engineers all things for our good.

We know that in everything God works for good with those who love him, who are called according to his purpose.

(Romans 8:28)

We find the unfolding mystery of God as we praise Him. Everything, no matter how insignificant and absurd it looks, is glittering in the holy light of Christ, for the Lord God has redeemed the whole earth for His glory.

Yes, we are surrounded with the evils and ugliness of this world, and we all share the burden of bitter life. And yet, you will see the transparent reality of God's love beneath of all phenomena, for the Lord God died for the entire creation, and has redeemed all of us. Faith is to have divine perception in

everything.

*Give us this day our daily bread.
And forgive us our debts
As we forgive our debtors.
And lead us not into temptation,
but deliver us from evil:
For thine is the kingdom, and the power,
and the glory, for ever, Amen.*

When we are attuned to the Lord's desire by praying that His will be done on the earth as it is in heaven, we will see heaven united with the earth. And it is the most natural thing to pray for our daily needs. It is also God's very desire that we will receive our earthly necessities as well as our spiritual needs. In this harmonized dimension, there should be no conflict between heaven and the earth. Heaven and the earth are one in Christ.

Notice the little word, "daily". Our earthly flesh often demands more than what we need. And the Lord God in His infinite wisdom reminds us that we are to be content with daily portions. When we are looking for tomorrow instead of living for today, we are missing God's eternal plane. God's focus is always "now". His eternity quietly merges in this day. A secret of happiness is to discover God's desire for this day, to be content with what we have now.

This does not mean we can't pray for tomorrow's needs. Our life on the earth may dictate our prayer for tomorrow's needs. Pray then, and leave everything in His hands. Try not to manipulate God.

*Therefore do not be anxious about tomorrow, for tomorrow
will be anxious for itself. Let the day's own trouble be
sufficient for the day.* (Matthew 6:34)

You may ask how you could live just for one day while so many things have to be planned and carried out accordingly.

Jesus answers, “Just take a look at the flowers in the field.” Take His word seriously and take a good look at wild flowers in the field. They neither toil nor spin; and yet even Solomon in all his glory was not arrayed like one of these. Seeing God’s hand in wild flowers, you will see His sovereign love in all His creations. God is indeed at work in everything for the best. See it by faith.

Faith is to see all things through divine perspective. Faith is to praise the Lord in all circumstances. The more we praise Him, the more transparently our relationship with God becomes. Light shines, wind blows.

Oh, just one more thing. Your relationship with God could be mired with your relationship with fellow humans. There is nothing more difficult than our relationship with our fellow humans. None of us is a master of human relationship. We have all failed one way or another. For the course of our lives, we accumulate a good portion of resentments and angers against others.

Take a tiny portion of anger. Soon it develops into full grown hatred. It’s like a cancer cell; overtaking the entire body in due time. Our spiritual life is full of bumps. An unexpected enemy will assault us. The enemy is hiding behind hatred.

And the Lord in His mercy teaches us to be parted with the dangerous will of resentment and hatred before they consume our entire beings. Some may say it’s very difficult to forgive others. If you find it hard to forgive others, pray simply for God’s mercy. He knows your emotions and understands your situation. I often find myself praying like this: O Lord, I cannot forgive others, but I am willing to be made to forgive them according to Your will.

Don't give the Evil One an opportunity to hold on to you.

We hide ourselves behind the cross of Jesus Christ when we confess His Lordship over us. We renounce our righteous selves. We know how weak and fragile we are. No one can coop up with the Evil force that is storming all over the world.

O, Lord, deliver us from the Evil One.

Only Christ, only Christ Jesus can prevail over the dark forces.

So we praise the Lord God who holds heaven and the earth. His eternal love is unfolding as we pray the Lord's prayer.

February 5, 1997

Revelation

The Third Typed Church

Aiming Church of Revelation Praise

Most Christians believe that there should be a pastor in a church. The notion has been down the century. However, the Scriptures do not support the idea itself. At least, there is no teaching in the New Testament that a church should have a pastor. The system is not based on the Bible, but I must say it is Christendom's wisdom throughout centuries. Church tradition and men's wisdom are not necessarily bad but valuable all their own. But I remind you that the system itself is not rooted in the Bible.

When you turn to the New Testament, you will see a gifts-oriented church. You can see a typical gift-orientated church in I Corinthians chapter 12 and 14. The Early Church did not have the “one pastor for a church” system. She depended on the Holy Spirit who sovereignty ruled over the body of Christ.

What then, brethren? When you come together, each one has a hymn, a lesson, a revelation, a tongue, or an interpretation. Let all things be done for edification. (I Corinthians 14:26)

“Each one” means everyone who participates. No one should be omitted. And everyone can manifest different gifts of the Holy Spirit. A hymn, a teaching, a revelation, a tongue and an interpretation are mentioned here as typical gifts. There are counted nine gifts of the Spirit in the Corinthians, and the Bible indicates that there are other gifts such as healing, prophesy, service, charity and so on. Forget your Christian careers and experiences. If you believe in Christ, you are entitled to receive

gifts of the Spirit. These gifts are not for individuals but for edification of the church. In other words, the body of Jesus Christ is to be filled with the presence of the Holy Spirit and manifests various gifts of the Holy Spirit. With spontaneous manifestation of the Spirit, you can see how the Body of Christ works actually. Visible gifts are manifestation of the Invisible One.

A characteristic of the Early Church Service was dynamics of the Spirit that worked through each person in the congregation; one spoke in tongue, another prayed for healing, another taught the Word of God, another told a revelation, and so on. It was not carried out by one pastor's discretion. They did not depend on people but the Holy Spirit.

It sounds simple and great. But if you adopt the Early Church style and practice it at your gathering to worship the Lord, you will find out quite problems soon. People may abuse their gifts even as the Corinthians did. They spoke tongues all right, but what a confusion they got!

What we should know is that we could abuse the things of God. That's why Paul told them to limit their usage of gifts of the Spirit to some extent. Even gifts of God should be under the control of the person who uses them. "The spirits of prophets are subject to prophets." (I Corinthians 14:32) No matter how strong the Spirit is pouring, it should be under man's control, for the Lord "God is not a God of disorder but of peace." (I Corinthians 14:33)

But you will find out how difficult it is to know how to use Spirit's gifts in proper way. Paul said that everyone should be a prophet, but he also said that a few prophets should speak and others should examine carefully what is said.

I have attended a lot of charismatic meetings where tongues

and prophecies were prominent, but I have never seen that they examined prophetic utterances as instructed as in the Corinthians: “Let two or three prophets speak, and let the others weigh what is said.” (I Corinthians 14:29) And I imagine it may be a bit difficult under one-pastor-system.

The Early Church was carried out by dynamics of the Spirit, but everyone was not necessarily aware of the significance of the cross. They insisted on their flesh desires even during the service, and their worship was mixture of the Spirit and the flesh. The Early Church may have had more biblical form of worship than ours, which is one pastor for the whole congregation. I have nothing against some churches’ adopting the charismatic style of worship. I am just cautious, for it would not work unless majority of congregation would go through the cross and walk by faith in the cross, which exposes our flesh and makes fleshly power null. The purpose of gifts is to edify the church.

The worship style of the Early Church declined even in the early stage of Christendom. And in the place of the Holy Spirit, men’s works came in. Instead of depending on the Spirit, people depended on leaders, and it did not take a lot of time for church to adopt human system of hierarchy: a priest or a pastor should rule over the congregation. No more confusion over gifts. A group of elders or church hierarchy would instruct lay-people how to read the Bible, how to interpret it, how to behave as believers and so on. You got pretty orderly service, but you’ve got to admit the worship service almost dead.

Again, I have nothing against the system and style majority of Christian churches have adopted. One pastor for the whole congregation may work well, if the pastor or priest really believe in the work of the cross and he let the cross go through his life

thoroughly. A message of the cross must come out only through a crucified man.

I have high esteem for the Early Church style of worship. I could live with one-man-style of worship as well. But I have found third way of worshipping the Lord, which I find in the Revelation.

This church is modeled after a celestial ecclesia where a multitude of people from all over the world come together to praise and worship the One who sits on the throne and the Lamb. She is the church in heaven.

And I heard every creature in heaven and on earth and under the earth and in the sea, and all therein, saying, "To him who sits upon the throne and to the Lamb be blessing and honor and glory and might for ever and ever!" (Revelation 5:13)

After this I looked, and behold, a great multitude which no man could number, from every nation, from all tribes and peoples and tongues, standing before the throne and before the Lamb, clothed in white robes, with palm branches in their hands, and crying out with a loud voice, "Salvation belongs to our God who sits upon the throne, and to the Lamb!"

(Revelation 7:9-10)

All creatures are singing to the Lord God. Here in heaven, a multitude of people and every creation including all animals and plants, even stones and rocks must be praising God, for they have been earnestly waiting for perfect liberation from all kinds of futilities and for real communion with the Life. In a praise-centered church in heaven, salvation for all creatures is fulfilled.

For the creation waits with eager longing for the revealing of the sons of God; for the creation was subjected to futility, not of its own will but by the will of him who subjected it in hope; because the creation itself will be set free from its bondage to decay and obtain the glorious liberty of the children of God.

(Romans 8:19-21)

When grass and flowers, animals and fish, water and clouds, stars in the Milky Way and all His creation make joyful noise, the creation is liberated from its bondage to decay and enjoy the glorious freedom.

And we are the people, numbering thousands and thousands, ten thousands and ten thousands, who join the praise of all creation in the cosmos and worship the Lord our God Jesus Christ. Our praise and worship God in spirit and truth on earth reaches at climax in heaven. How happy we are as well as other His creation to be delivered from the bondage to decay and to be brought into the glorious freedom in front of the Lord Jesus Christ. We sing praises and joy to be redeemed with all our heart, soul, mind and strength. God's original plan at the time when He created man will be fulfilled.

Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has blessed us in Christ with every spiritual blessing in the heavenly places, even as he chose us in him before the foundation of the world, that we should be holy and blameless before him. He destined us in love to be his sons through Jesus Christ, according to the purpose of his will, to the praise of his glorious grace which he freely bestowed on us in the Beloved.
(Ephesians 1:3-6)

God's plan that had been prepared in eternity would be fulfilled now. See God's original plan and enter into a new dimension of the Spirit. You will have divine perspective to see everything in God's light. You no longer crave for spiritual gifts, for you are already blessed with every spiritual blessing here in the heavenly dimension. All your concern is to praise the One who sits on the throne and the Lamb. Truly, everything is completed and perfected in His praise.

The heavenly ecclesia is not a human institution where man can exercise his authority over others. We no longer need a

“pastor” and a “teacher,” for the Lord Himself is our Pastor and Teacher. We no longer need “spiritual gifts,” for the Lord Himself is our Gift. Only praises to the Lamb of God are there. The heavenly church is a gathering of the people who know that everything would be completed in praise. There are no humanistic elements such as racial, cultural, and gender differences.

Kohitsuji no Mure is a group of people that models themselves on the heavenly church in the Revelation. They worship the Lord our God in spirit and truth. Their very praise is the act of faith in the redemptive work of the Lord Jesus Christ. They have pure faith in praising, for they believe that in everything God works for good with those who love him, who are called to his divine purpose. Praising God is praising the Redeemer.

In Kohitsuji no Mure, our central purpose is to worship the Lord God in purest form as possible. Though Spiritual gifts are often manifested in our service, they are never objects of our praising. We may or may not have gifts. We simply believe that everything will be completed in praise. The heavenly ecclesia in the Revelation is church of praise. We want the earthly church to be centered in praise as well.

Only when we praise the Lord Jesus Christ in spirit and truth, the heavenly plan is fulfilled on earth.

He destined us in love to be his sons through Jesus Christ, according to the purpose of his will, to the praise of his glorious grace which he freely bestowed on us in the Beloved. In him we have redemption through his blood, the forgiveness of our trespasses, according to the riches of his grace which he lavished upon us. For he has made known to us in all wisdom and insight the mystery of his will, according to his purpose which he set forth in Christ as a plan for the fulness of time, to unite all things in him, things in heaven and things on

earth. In him, according to the purpose of him who accomplishes all things according to the counsel of his will, we who first hoped in Christ have been destined and appointed to live for the praise of his glory. (Ephesians 1:5-12)

The mystery of God is now revealed. The heavenly Church is now taking a form on earth. Praise the Lord Jesus Christ with our whole heart.

July 9, 1998

The Praise to Heal the Earth

Four years ago, I forecasted that the goal of the Kohitsuji no Mure church would be the third typed church, which is described in the Book of Revelation. It is my terminology. If the Early Church, which is described in 1 Corinthians as gifts-orientated, is the first typed church, then the hierarchical church which the professional few lead the congregation should be the second type. And the second typed church has dominated the whole Christendom for centuries. I propose “the third typed church,” which is centered neither on gifts of the Holy Spirit nor on particular leaders such as priests or pastors, but on praise and worship the Lord alone. God’s people gather together for the sake of the Lord alone to praise and worship God in spirit and truth.

This forecast was not for the purpose of the church growth. We are not interested in the growth of the church in numbers. Now at the end time, we are convinced that the Lord God has revealed what the Revelation typed church should be through Kohitsuji no Mure. She is no longer the stereotyped archaic church that centers the clergy and the selected few with traditions or dogmas, nor the church that centers the particular gift such as healing, prophecy and teaching, but she is the church that centers praising and worshipping the Lord in Spirit and truth. Praising the Lord has such magnitude as to manifest the presence of God at the worship service. All the people, young and old, regardless of nationality and background, are melted in

one in the body of Christ. The One who sits on the Throne and the Lamb are to be glorified. Though spiritual gifts are not focused, they are manifested in praising service. Everything is completed in heavenly praise.

We do not mean that we are exclusive group to realize the Revelation typed church.

Not that I have already obtained all this, or have already made perfect, but I press on to take hold of that for which Christ Jesus took hold of me. (Philippians 3:12 NIV)

The vision of the Book of Revelation took hold of us, thus we are praying to realize the Revelation typed church on the earth.

On January 2000 when we began to receive a flood of heavenly songs, the Revelation praises, all of us sensed that we were entering into a new dimension. And truly enough, we have come to the era of the Revelation. The church described in the Revelation has started revealing her magnificent structure.

The abundant flood of heavenly praises is, I believe, not to entertain us but to save the earth in this critical time. The sound of the Revelation songs echoes not only in our hearts but also in the sky, on the ocean and the earth in depth. It is vibrating and resounding in the universe. When we sing praise, the river of life in heaven flows down to the earth. Thus, the praise from heaven becomes the healing for the earth.

Thus the church of the Revelation is engaged in the mission work with heavenly power.

Then he showed me the river of the water of life, bright as crystal, flowing from the throne of God and of the Lamb through the middle of the street of the city; also, on either side of the river, the tree of life with its twelve kinds of fruit, yielding its fruit each month; and the leaves of the tree were for the healing of the nations. (Revelation 22:1-2)

The tree of life stands on each side of the heavenly river. And the leaves have the power to heal the sick of all nations on earth. I believe healing virtue of the leaves will cover the entire earth.

The Revelation is to tell us the beginning of a new heaven and a new earth. New Jerusalem is coming down out of heaven, prepared as a bride, beautifully dressed for her husband. The time is coming soon when the ultimate unity with the heaven and the earth will be realized.

We are, now as the first born, having a shower of the heavenly praises. We were called to be the forerunner to proclaim that a new earth is coming when the heaven and the earth are united together to sing and magnify the Lord God.

Now, when we are the people on earth resound together with the praises in heaven, God extends His healing hand to restore the wounded land and the earth.

The present condition of the earth is becoming awfully miserable by the minute, incompatible with God's ongoing restoration process. (Our earth is suffering from ferocious torment.) We experience unbearably abnormal weather as the global warming is speeding up fiercely, but still it is the beginning stage (of the tribulation). The glaciers in the Arctic and the Antarctic have started melting, and the most of the big cities in the world will be sunk under the sea. Most part of the earth will become subtropics, and the plagues and the strange diseases might be spread out in the foreseeable future.

The world of the Revelation is coming upon us faster than any one has expected. As the nations will fight against one another, warfare and chaos may proceed into the extreme.

In our days we will understand the meaning of "it was sweet as honey in my mouth, but when I had eaten it my stomach

made bitter” (Revelation 10:10) as that the heavenly praises are to bring something “sweet” to our spirit, but something “bitter” to the life of the people in the world.

No matter how difficult the tribulation will be, the plan of God will surely proceed. God’s plan is not for the destruction of the earth. God is not to come to destroy the earth with anger, even though the fallen earth is full of wicked.

The more difficult suffering may continue on the earth, and the further chaos may continue as well. However, all these tribulations are for the Divine Project by Holy God to be realized fully. The stream of life is surely flowing into one direction, toward the One who said, “I am the Alpha and the Omega” at great speed. The rush of water of life is accelerated by the Revelation praises. Every time when we sing the heavenly praise, we are step by step reaching the Omega point (the goal), that is, likeness of Christ the Lord our God. This is the preparation for the coming new world to be built up again.

The praise is the forerunner of heaven on the earth. We are surely experiencing “the powers of the coming age.”(Hebrew 6:5) As the Revelation church, we are to exercise divine authority over the earth, which is rapidly decaying. We call upon the holy name through the divine praises, “Come, the Lord!” We call out the sky and the sea, the wind and the water, as we sing, “Let the praise fill the earth!”

As we are harmonized in heavenly tune, the river of water of life flows down to the earth out of heaven. When two people praise together with their hearts to be united, the earth resounds with the heaven, and then the Lord pours His mercy and healing love into the earth like gushing water. We are called to praise the Lord to heal the land and to save the earth.

When the praise in heaven resounds, the Divine Project

steps forward. No one can stop flowing this stream of life any more. In the time when the earth is in trouble and people are in sorrow day and night, wandering in emptiness, the Revelation church through heavenly praises, as the forerunner on this earth, bring forth divine healing to the land and the people.

Now is the time. His *parousia* (coming) is approaching rapidly. The planet earth may clothe off her wickedness, confusion, sickness and sorrow, and she may welcome the Lord with delight and joy like a bride welcomes the bridegroom. The Revelation church is here on the earth as God's bride.

July 22, 2001

Fear Not! Stop the Enemy with Praise

September 11, 2001. When the Twin Towers of the World Trade Center in Manhattan collapsed with a great crash, which was caused by the terrorists' simultaneous attacks to the U.S. key places, World Trade Center in NY and Pentagon in Washington, D.C. the whole world was stunned and shaken. What an awful time we have got into.

For these years the Lord has made us turn to the Book of Revelation, and He opened our eyes to the incredible world, which is represented by the Church described in the Revelation and the praise songs of the Revelation. The workers at our office have been reading through the Revelation for a several months in order to prepare for their Special Message Training session.

Revelation is a fearful book, which describes dreadful tribulations one after another at the end time. Nobody likes it. Yet, whether you like it or not, we have entered into the days of the Revelation. The tragedies in the United States might be just the opening of the dreadful drama in "The End Time." We had strange anticipation when the Lord began to pour out heavenly praises on the Revelation. Something extraordinary was coming soon. The Lord God would reveal Himself to our generation. It was great and exciting anticipation. At the same time, He would show that His judgment days should be harsh and severe. However, we did not know that the scope of destruction was as horrible as this. Worse. This might be the beginning of the great tribulation, which is described in the Book of Revelation.

The Lord gives His spiritual power to His people first, and then He allows the disasters to happen around their world. This is God's consideration to His people when prophesy of the Scriptures is fulfilled.

At the time of the US disasters, Rev. Billy Graham prayed in front of the President, the highly placed government officials, and the Congress members, and honestly confessed his distress, "Why did the Lord allow such tragedies to happen? I don't know. I don't understand it." And said he, "But we America will never give up. We will prove that terrorism has only the reverse effects."

I wish it were so. The disasters will take place not only in the United States but also all over the world. The world economy will be out of order, and everything will get in disorder and chaotic situation. The root of the problem will not be resolved by wiping out the terrorism. There are much deeper issues lay under the present world crisis.

One intellect says, "This is the civilization crash between the West against the Islam. We must learn more about the Muslim and understand the Islamic culture. The problem is rooted on the religious and cultural differences for centuries and centuries."

That may be so. But there is more.

I think it is the fundamental problem between God and men. The difference among cultural and religious views is surely a problem that is deeply rooted. However, we now face the crisis in collapse of the foundation, to which various races, cultures and religions hold on. Our earth herself faces the crisis of her doom. The issue is survival of mankind and the earth itself. It's not enough to understand other culture and religion. The world in

general and the earth are rapidly approaching to the great destruction in biblical proportion.

The financial problem is enormous. The Great Depression may come again. Politicians do not know what to do at this crisis. Yet, the current difficulties are still the beginning of tribulations. Devastation of the children is terrible. What will happen when the bottom of the slough opens the mouth of vanity and swallows everything? If the foundation of the earth collapses, everything on the earth shall be vanished.

Religions do not save us. Knowledge and money mean nothing. The time of the Revelation is the hour of the world's greatest crisis.

The time of Revelation, the time of Seraphim, time of the Holy Spirit... all these words we have adopted in recent months indicate the end time. Now it is the very hour, as the Lord said, "In the last days ... I will pour out my Spirit upon all flesh, and your sons and your daughters shall prophesy, and your young men shall see visions, your old men shall dream dreams." (Acts 2:17)

The reason why the Lord poured out His Spirit on a small and unknown group of people like us is not for the sake of our own happiness, but for us to fulfill the divine mission set by the Lord Himself. We must save the world. We must rescue the sinking earth. We are the salt of the earth and the light in the darkness.

I do not mean that we are saviors. But dying to ourselves, we are to carry the divine message of the Crucified One and to announce that His time has come here on the earth. This is our mission. I sincerely believe that our proclamation will quicken fainthearted ones, slow down the hideous acts of the Evil One on

the world stage, and heal the wounded earth to some extent.

Now is the most critical hour.

And the LORD answered me: "Write the vision; make it plain upon tablets, so he may run who reads it. For still the vision awaits its time; it hastens to the end - it will not lie. If it seem slow, wait for it; it will surely come, it will not delay. Behold, he whose soul is not upright in him shall fail, but the righteous shall live by his faith. (Habakkuk 2:2-4)

His revelation waits for an appointed time, speaks of the end and will not lie. The judgment day is near. The one who does not recognize the hour of the Lord may perish. But the righteous will live by his faith.

Those who worship the Lord Jesus Christ in Spirit and truth may live. Those who believe in the power of His praise may live by faith. Anything but faith amounts to nothing. Praise is our proclamation of the Sacrificial Lamb before the foundation of the world and that He is now coming. The heavenly praise is the benediction in "The End Time." Believe in the power of praise. Sing praise of heaven. Proclaim your mission in the last days.

The prophet Habakkuk sings praise quietly on 'Shigionoth' about His revelation on the last days. Isn't this also our song of praise because we received the pouring of the Holy Spirit as well as we pray for healing the earth with the heavenly praise?

O LORD, I have heard the report of thee, and thy work, O LORD, do I fear. In the midst of the years renew it; in the midst of the years make it known; in wrath remember mercy. God came from Teman, and the Holy One from Mount Paran. His glory covered the heavens, and the earth was full of his praise. His brightness was like the light, rays flashed from his hand; and there he veiled his power. Before him went pestilence, and plague followed close behind.

He stood and measured the earth; he looked and shook the nations; then the eternal mountains were scattered, the everlasting hills sank low. His ways were as of old.

(Habakkuk 3:2-6)

All the people in the world, the nations of Islam, the people of the West and the East, are in great fear. Everybody is drunk with bad wine. They do not know what they are doing, and are rushing headlong from collapse to ruin at full speed.

We must pray. Rescue the world and the earth through prayer and praise.

Surely the last days will come without fail. Now we, as God's first born, as the people of praise, restrain the horrible and fearful power. Now those who have the secret power of lawlessness have appeared everywhere.

Just as guerrillas are called "invisible enemies," the secret power of lawlessness is invisible, but he shows off his existence by raising his head and blowing the poisonous breath.

Let no one deceive you in any way; for that day will not come, unless the rebellion comes first, and the man of lawlessness is revealed, the son of perdition, who opposes and exalts himself against every so-called god or object of worship, so that he takes his seat in the temple of God, proclaiming himself to be God. Do you not remember that when I was still with you I told you this? And you know what is restraining him now so that he may be revealed in his time. For the mystery of lawlessness is already at work; only he who now restrains it will do so until he is out of the way. And then the lawless one will be revealed, and the Lord Jesus will slay him with the breath of his mouth and destroy him by his appearing and his coming.

(2 Thessalonians 2:3-8 RSV)

Many people went insane, poisoned by the secret power of lawlessness, the one who doomed to destruction. Even those who used to be with us little while ago are wavered by his poison. Insanity drives some of them to persecute the people of praise.

They behave disgracefully and shamefully.

There arise many false prophets and religious fanatics who claim to be of God but prove otherwise. They ridicule people of praise.

Don't be afraid. Let them yell, as they want to. We don't have much time left. Don't get associated with them.

As the first born of His praise, we certainly have the most important mission. We have to restrain the prince of the Darkness who has the secret power of lawlessness. We must restrain it for a while.

It is you and I, the people of praise that restrain the secret power of lawlessness.

The reason why the Lord poured out His Spirit on us and gave His praise abundantly before the End Time is that we have the most essential and inevitable mission to engage in.

We have no time.

I will praise the Lord quietly like Habakkuk, and pray for healing the earth until the very hour when the Lord Jesus comes back.

September 11, 2001

Prayer for the World Crisis

(The following is from the first session of Rev. Peter Shimada's "New Bible Study" on September 12, 2001.)

Peter: Let me read scriptures.

In the year that King Uzzi'ah died I saw the Lord sitting upon a throne, high and lifted up; and his train filled the temple. Above him stood the seraphim; each had six wings: with two he covered his face, and with two he covered his feet, and with two he flew. And one called to another and said: "Holy, holy, holy is the LORD of hosts; the whole earth is full of his glory."
(Isaiah 6:1-3)

And I heard the voice of the Lord saying, "Whom shall I send, and who will go for us?" Then I said, "Here am I! Send me." And he said, "Go, and say to this people: 'Hear and hear, but do not understand; see and see, but do not perceive.'"
(Isaiah 6:8-9)

Then I said, "How long, O Lord?" And he said: "Until cities lie waste without inhabitant, and houses without men, and the land is utterly desolate, and the LORD removes men far away, and the forsaken places are many in the midst of the land."
(Isaiah 6:11-12)

Lord, our God, we have never imagined that we would witness the dreadful destruction in America, which happened on September 11, 2001. The whole world community is stunned and nations are trembling and shaking. People, old and young, do not know what to do now.

What an awful time this is! Lord, is this the time that You have spoken in the Bible as the day of the Lord? The End Time has come?

At our Retreat in Tsumagoi, Shizuoka (August 29-31, 2001), we felt the Spirit indicating, “The time of Seraphim has come.” Oh, the hour has come. As You said, the day of the Lord, the time of Seraphim has come on the earth. From collapse to ruin, from ravage to destruction, cities are laid waste and no inhabitant. Such a dreadful time has come on the earth.

Who wants to see the earth desolate? We want to see only things good and pleasant. But Your glory as it descends on the earth brings forth hideous destruction and calamity upon the earth. Oh, Lord, is this the way You judge us, humankind?

True that be, the tragic calamity and destruction have been more than we could bear.

And yet, Your word indicates this is the beginning of birth pain.

O Lord, we call upon Your holy Name now. We have no hiding place but You, living God Christ Jesus. Holy, holy, holy, holy is the Lord God Almighty. The whole earth is full of His glory.

And in the last days it shall be, God declares, that I will pour out my Spirit upon all flesh, and your sons and your daughters shall prophesy, and your young men shall see visions, and your old men shall dream dreams; yea, and on my menservants and my maidservants in those days I will pour out my Spirit; and they shall prophesy. And I will show wonders in the heaven above and signs on the earth beneath, blood, and fire, and vapor of smoke; the sun shall be turned into darkness and the moon into blood, before the day of the Lord comes, the great and manifest day. And it shall be that whoever calls on the name of the Lord shall be saved.

(Acts 2:17-21)

The prophesy of Joel is fulfilled. The day of Pentecost was the beginning of fulfillment and the prophecy is reaching to its final fulfillment. The Holy Spirit has been poured out like the last days. I believe that we are witnessing the final fulfillment of the prophecy.

Today we have the first session of "New Bible Study." I don't think this is a coincident. I believe that we are entering into a new age. I feel as if the Lord has opened the curtain on the stage where a great, and probably the last drama, is going to be performed.

Did you think what I said was exaggeration? The world is aflame and rapidly approaching to the End Time. I will no longer try to restrain my words. Do you think this is the mere tragic disaster that happened in the US? No, no, we have arrived to the point of human history to which no past incident can be compared: none in parallel.

This is like the catastrophe at the Great Hanshin Earthquakes. Right after the disaster happened, even the dwellers of the land did not know how big the calamity was. Today is right next day of the tragic catastrophe in the US. And people here are not aware of the impact of the disaster.

I am not a student of economy and have very little knowledge of it, but I can tell you that the economical panic may hit the world soon. Before the US disaster, world economy had been bad enough, but aftermath of the disaster may be far worse than ever. I can see only chaos and chaos in worldwide scope.

The environmental destruction has already started. Mass media informs us that the mad cow disease has been found in Japan as well. It is a dreadful time now. It is the result of the sin of mankind. It was caused by the sin of mankind that made cows eat other cows that normally eat grass only. Foolish mankind

has turned man's best friend into hideous monster.

Behold, mankind is trying to destroy him with his own hand.

Global warming is progressed at a fierce speed, and the earth may not be sustained for a few decades. Yet, the very foolish mankind does not stop it. Why don't you wake up now?

Finally the time is up. I sincerely do not want to see it. I am the last person who would like to see this beautiful earth wrecked, contaminated and ablaze.

At Tsumagoi Retreat, I said the time of Seraphim has come here on the earth. Believe me, I did not want to speak out and write about this dreadful time. The subject has been the most remote from my concern. But the heavy burden has come upon me. I cry like prophet Jeremiah.

My anguish, my anguish! I writhe in pain! Oh, the walls of my heart! My heart is beating wildly; I cannot keep silent; for I hear the sound of the trumpet, the alarm of war.

(Jeremiah 4:19)

The time of Seraphim is the special time of God's visitation. We shall see the glorious presence of the Lord even as prophet Isaiah saw. Seraphim flied and cried each other:

Holy, holy, holy, is the LORD of hosts; the whole earth is full of His glory.

And this magnificent presence of the Lord brought force the harsh judgment on the earth. The prophet heard the Lord's stern prediction. The prophet had to declare God's pronouncement: "until cities lie waste without inhabitant, and houses without men, and the land is utterly desolate."

I see the exact prediction for the present world.

The presence of the Lord is ever closer now, and at the same time it means that the chaotic natural phenomena will prevail.

Destructions one after another, we are getting into the days of great chaos and dreadful destruction, which men have never seen.

I am delivering you the most important message, for we do not have time left. Return to the Lord our God.

Can you say sincerely, “Only Christ Jesus is all and all for me”? Do you make up your mind to stand still on the foundation of your faith in the Lord alone?

Even now if there is anyone who insists on his/her own way, I will warn you: soon you will be removed far away by the judgment blow of the Lord.

As I forecasted that our earth might not sustain until the days of our grandchildren, we are surely in the midst of the fearful days. The destined time of our earth is close to countdown of one minute before midnight, or it may be less than one minute. To the great fearful things, countries antagonize one another, nations battle against one another; wars may be taken place in everywhere. Yet, the totally different type of wars from what we have known would take place. This war is against the invisible enemy. America, the most powerful nation on the earth, got lost and cannot find the effective means against the terrorists. They say it evoked the Pearl Harbor Attack over 50 years ago, but this one is much more than that. At that time they could clearly see the enemy, Japan, and it was easy to assail. However, this time is different. America has decided to strike back the invisible enemy. Insanity and fanaticism are driving the whole world crazy. Japan and many other nations shall be involved.

No time to waste. If you do not return to God right now, if you do not pray for the earth, our earth will be destroyed in ruins.

Oh, I wish what I am saying were my pure imagination and delusion... But I am afraid it is not.

The time of Seraphim is the time of the Holy Spirit. Yes, it is. It is the great pouring of the Holy Spirit just like the Pentecost.

On the day of the Pentecost God poured out fiercely His Spirit for the first time on the earth. The new history started at that point now is approaching toward the end. The Biblical prophecy is just like throwing a stone into a pond, which cause the first ripple and continually cause the ripple after ripple. Finally the ripples reach the rim of the pond, which will end the ripples.

On the day of the Pentecost, God poured out the Holy Spirit. Peter stood up and preached, "In the last days, God says, 'I will pour out My Spirit on all people....'" This was the beginning of the Last Days. This was the first ripple. On the day of the Pentecost there was no convulsion of nature. Only the Spirit of God was fiercely poured out on the earth. However, this time not only the great pouring of the Holy Spirit, but also a convulsion of nature is taken place just like the Joel's prophesy. Do you think it is a small thing that the Lord has abundantly poured out His life and the Spirit upon little and nameless people like us?

And in the last days it shall be, God declares, that I will pour out my Spirit upon all flesh, and your sons and your daughters shall prophesy, and your young men shall see visions, and your old men shall dream dreams. (Acts 2:17)

The Spirit of God was poured out. We have seen the amazing things for ten years. But the Lord has said, "Do you think you've seen great and amazing things enough? You have just arrived at the threshold of My glorious Kingdom. If you see everything, you sure will die overwhelmed with splendor of My

glory.”

To me, Book “White Dove” is a heavenly sign. We rejoice it.

But another sign does not look good. The earth is in blood and fire, when the Twin Towers of the World Trade Center in Manhattan collapsed with a great crash, the solid cloud of smoke was like hell's agony.

And I will show wonders in the heaven above and signs on the earth beneath, blood, and fire, and vapor of smoke; the sun shall be turned into darkness and the moon into blood, before the day of the Lord comes, the great and manifest day.

(Acts 2:19-20)

Last night, I spent a sleepless night until the break of dawn. I now realize that the dreadful time has finally come. When I watched on TV the Twin Towers of the World Trade Center collapsed, I saw the civilization we had built up collapsed with a great crash. People including you and me have run the show as if we could fool God. “I want to have this.” “I want to have that,” “I want to make more money.” “I want...” “I want...” Look, the symbols of our desires have gone like smoke.

As we mentioned a little at this Summer Retreat, Mitsuko and I acknowledged that it should not be just another annual retreat. In a sense, we went to Tsumagoi with the final preparation, of which meaning we did not understand, though. God tells us that He will protect the people of praise even by sending the Seraphim.

I tell you my sincere conviction: the praise God has given to Kohitsuji no Mure is the last hope for the world and for the earth. The Lord God has prepared for us with heavenly weapons to combat with destructive forces on the earth. As we praise the Lord with heavenly hosts, God not only protects His people but also heals the wounded earth.

Since the tragedies last night, we have already received a few faxes from the United States. This outbreak of disaster is not only the tragedy of the United States. Yasuko Noguchi who participated in this Tsumagoi Retreat works near the World Trade Center in New York, and she had a narrow escape from the death at the time of outbreak. God protected her. This is the sign of His promise: the Lord promised that He protects His people. God protected her just as He promised.

He who dwells in the shelter of the Most High, who abides in the shadow of the Almighty, will say to the Lord, "My refuge and my fortress; my God, in whom I trust." For he will deliver you from the snare of the fowler and from the deadly pestilence; he will cover you with his pinions, and under his wings you will find refuge; his faithfulness is a shield and buckler. You will not fear the terror of the night, nor the arrow that flies by day, nor the pestilence that stalks in darkness, nor the destruction that wastes at noonday.

(Psalm 91:1-6)

Listen to the Word of God!

A thousand may fall at your side, ten thousand at your right hand; but it will not come near you. You will only look with your eyes and see the recompense of the wicked. Because you have made the Lord your refuge, the Most High your habitation, no evil shall befall you, no scourge come near your tent. For he will give his angels charge of you to guard you in all your ways. On their hands they will bear you up, lest you dash your foot against a stone. You will tread on the lion and the adder; the young lion and the serpent you will trample under foot. Because he cleaves to me in love, I will deliver him; I will protect him, because he knows my name. When he calls to me, I will answer him; I will be with him in trouble, I will rescue him and honor him. With long life I will satisfy him, and show him my salvation.

(Psalm 91:7-16)

This is God's promise as well as His message to you. A

thousand may fall at your left side, and ten thousand at your right hand, but don't be afraid. Take refuge under the wings of the Lord and praise the holy God. Know that it is not only you that will be saved when you call upon the holy name of the Lord, the Lamb of God who was slain.

We don't pray and praise for the sake of ourselves to be saved and placed in a safe place. At the end time, the Lord will protect His people. It is because God hopes no one will perish but everyone will have the eternal life. He hopes that as many people as possible will be saved. Our praise is for the sake of His salvation of the earth.

The time has come. The Lord turned the last page to mankind and the earth. It is the time of the Book of Revelation. The light of Christ Jesus now came into the earth with the last sparkle. Walk in the light while you have the light. The darkness will surely come soon. Even if you search for the light after the darkness comes, you will never find it. No time to wait. Now is the urgent time. Pray now. Pray for the earth now. Pray for the United States, pray for Japan, pray for Russia, pray for Africa, and pray for other countries. How can we allow them to destroy the earth God created with His love? Make apologies to the Lord for the sins of our mankind. We want to praise and pray for His healing the earth.

Praise: The Ones You Love I, II

Mitsuko: Kyrie eleison.

Let me read E-mail from Shoko O'Neil who works in Manhattan:

“I cannot grasp what is really going on out there right now, for there is no TV in our office. I feel like crying. I was

so worried about my husband who works right near the World Trade Center that I immediately prayed the Lord. Then I've got assurance that he was definitely all right, and my worries diminished and went away from me. It was around 10:30pm that I finally could get a contact with my husband. He told me that the authority ordered everybody to evacuate from the vicinity areas of the World Trade Center in downtown. The subway services have been stopped. I heard that those who lived in Brooklyn tried to run away through the Brooklyn Bridge, which was overflowed by thousands of people. And when they turned around, they saw that the Twin Towers of the World Trade Center collapsed, that reminded me of the fall story of Gomorrah in the Bible.

I have no idea what would happen to us next. I do not think I can go home in Brooklyn; I will stay with my friends in Manhattan. I am worried about the sequential disasters, which will make people panicky. Please pray for us. I will keep on praying, too. Lord, protect the ones you love, pray for them. Kyrie eleison. Shoko"

Lord, the terrifying time has come upon us. Not only the United States, but also the whole world, no, the whole earth is in crisis now. I believe this time, which is filled with anxiety and fear on the earth, is the time of the Lord. We sang the praise, "Return to our God" and prayed at the Summer Retreat the other day that this praise would fill the earth and that all people on earth would return to God. Salvation is in Jesus Christ alone. Whoever calls on the name of the Lord will be saved. His name can save the earth. Lord, the Bible tells the following:

The sun shall be turned into darkness and the moon into blood, before the day of the Lord comes, the great and

manifest day. And it shall be that whoever calls on the name of the Lord shall be saved.’ “Men of Israel, hear these words: Jesus of Nazareth, a man attested to you by God with mighty works and wonders and signs which God did through him in your midst, as you yourselves know — this Jesus, delivered up according to the definite plan and foreknowledge of God, you crucified and killed by the hands of lawless men. But God raised him up, having loosed the pangs of death, because it was not possible for him to be held by it. For David says concerning him, ‘I saw the Lord always before me, for he is at my right hand that I may not be shaken; therefore my heart was glad, and my tongue rejoiced; moreover my flesh will dwell in hope. For thou wilt not abandon my soul to Hades, nor let thy Holy One see corruption. Thou hast made known to me the ways of life; thou wilt make me full of gladness with thy presence. (Acts2:20-28)

Lord, just as David did, we want to see You always before us. “He is at my right hand, that I may not be shaken. Therefore my heart is glad, and my tongue rejoices; my body also will live in hope. The praise you have given to us is our hope, yes, hope for all mankind and hope for the whole earth. Lord, You have given us Your praises, and leave them on our earth. The Lord our God, no matter what will happen to us, we sing Your praises to exalt Jesus Christ the Son of God for the rest of our life and forever. The Lord our God, who has made His name known to us, may Your will be done. The Lord our God, who has sent Your Only Son, Jesus Christ to the earth to save Your beloved ones, again we thank You and pray to You. Please protect and heal the ones You love. Kyrie eleison. In the name of Jesus I pray, amen.

Peter: And I believe that our praises and prayers to Jesus Christ will permeate the earth and that heal the earth. They slow down decade of the earth, for we people of praise are the salt of the earth. Nobody knows when the last day will come. Of course I do

not know when it will come. Jesus Himself said, “Even the Son of Man does not know when the last day will be, only the heavenly Father knows it.” But at the same time, Jesus said, “Watch, for the time has drawn near.” This is not to make you panic. Nothing but just one thing is essential. We shall return to our God the Lord and hold on to His mercy. Jesus said that the heavens and the earth will pass away, but there is just one thing that will never pass. It is the everlasting Word of God, Eternal Love of Jesus Christ. The hour has come, even the time of Seraphim. Let us praise the Lord God in Spirit and in truth.

As the Wind Blows

I

The summer of 2001 will find the Tenth Annual Retreat for Kohitsuji no Mure. Ten years can be a chapter of the heavenly movement of praise, should I say, celestial hymn. The words are not enough to express the depth, width and the quantities of what the Lord has done for us during these 10 years. It is impossible to know how many people have been touched by heavenly life. The people touched by God's love could not help telling others about it. The fire of the Holy Spirit has been spreading throughout Japan and worldwide just like wildfire. The wind from heaven has blown and is blowing ever strongly.

Kohitsuji no Mure started as the House Church Ministry. From its own inception, it did not have organizational background. It lacked organizational perspective, but deliberately it adopted the Early Church style. Some mega churches have "house churches" as their cell groups in the lower level of their organization. However, we did not have ambition to become a large church and therefore felt no need to organize God's people. For one instance, we did not and still do not have church-membership. We believe that our heavenly membership is sufficient. Since there is no membership, we need not soliciting systematic fundraising such as monthly pledge. The Lord will provide our needs. At this point, we have about 100 staff workers who are engaged in various kinds of evangelical works.

What is the reason why Kohitsuji no Mure has grown so

fast? What is the difference between the organizational churches and that of Kohitsuji no Mure church? The answer is only one: from the start of Kohitsuji no Mure church, we have had the simple conviction that the Lord God has called us to be “a flock of praising the Lord.” Our style of praising worship has fitted into “the House Church Ministry” as it were a custom-made container. Where two or three are gathered in the name of Jesus, the Lord Himself stands in the midst of them, and that is “church,” manifestation of the invisible body of Christ. She may not wear ecclesiastical clothing, but she is a church in the purest sense of the word. She may not have a pastor, but she has praising people.

They are to read the Scriptures, to give testimonies, and to pray for one another. They are all meant to praise the Lord in a simple and spontaneous worship. Without any authoritative teachers nor trained pastors, the Lord is where the joyful people who praise God are gathered: the Holy Spirit teaches the Words to the people, and the people have direct access to the Lord. Healing gifts are abundant, but they should never be focused. Various gifts of the Spirit are being manifested, but they should never take place of pure worship. This is such a simple church dedicated for praising the Lord. This is the house church, and this is the church for the Lord Jesus Christ.

Nine years ago when we had the first Retreat at Tozanso Inn in Gotenba, Shizuoka, Japan, I did not know who would participate with us. We had a few helpers and not a single trained worker as we have now. With anticipation and fear, I just stepped into the hall of Tozanso. I had no idea who was in charge of the registration and reception. How about the room assignment? Who is going to play the piano? Do we have enough money to compensate with the cost, in case of less than 50

participants?

You talk about starting without solid foundation. We had none. And yet we had one thing going strong with us. It was our deep conviction that the Lord was calling His people for His praises. We had neither an organization nor campaign. Deep in our hearts we had an unshakable conviction that the Lord was to do great and marvelous things in the midst of praise.

What the Lord prepared for us was not to establish another church in a traditional style. It was not to follow the complicated theological doctrines and the old fashioned church structure. New wine is to put into a new wineskin. Life from heaven is to put into a wineskin of His praise.

“Retreat” in Japanese for the traditional church term is “Shuyo-kai” (disciplinary training), which might be borrowed from the Confucian terms and give the impression of moral training. I preferred an English term, “Retreat,” which means to be still before the Lord. I think this is far more biblical.

Normally a nation-wide convention like our retreat is to be held sometimes after establishing its local organizations. But we did it in reverse order. At first we had a big national retreat, and then the local house churches started in various areas in Japan and worldwide.

Come to think about it. It was biblical, wasn't it? If men prepare an organizational system, the first thing is to establish the fundamental part of the organization, and then the national convention would be held. The way of the Holy Spirit is totally different and it does not depend upon man's organized system. First, God poured the Holy Spirit into the central city, Jerusalem at the Pentecost. Then, the fire and wind of the Holy Spirit was spread out in Judea, Samaria and to the world's end. It was not the order of that the local house churches had started first in

various areas in Israel and then the central church was established in Jerusalem, where the pouring of the Holy Spirit was taken place as the symptoms of the Pentecost.

It was the way 2000 years ago and it is the way for us today. And it was quite natural sequence that first fire ignited at Tozanso spread all over Japan in a short period of time. The wind was blowing.

The first Retreat was far beyond our expectations. The number of people who stayed at Tozanso was 90. The number of participants for the Retreat was about 180. We had no advertisement. No one knew about “Kohitsuji no Mure.” The people who heard about the Retreat by word of mouth came as if irons were attracted to the magnet.

The Lord gave tremendous miraculous healings from the beginning. Many people experienced miracles and they were overwhelmed with the healing presence of Jesus Christ. To this day I still remember a middle-aged man in line for a healing prayer standing in front of me. As soon as he got a chance, he asked me, “I am the representative of the supporting members of a Buddhist parishioner. Do you mind praying to Jesus Christ for me?” No, of course not. I prayed for him as he accepted the Lord Jesus Christ as his Savior.

As the Lord gave the amazing miraculous healing to those who were Buddhists or to those who knew nothing about Christ, we enjoyed the world of heaven as if we were drunken by the Holy Spirit at the Pentecost.

There was a family of the Itoh, who were among the healed at the time. Now Mr. and Mrs. Itoh are our staff-workers. I thought it was worthy to have held the Retreat even just for this family. (Their heart-moving story has appeared in our periodicals.)

II

As we were never interested in establishing an organizational system, we did not think about what to do next after the Retreat. We were sure what God had started would be done by the Lord Himself. At least we could expect that “house churches” would be started in various places in Japan. The wind was blowing and we sensed it.

This wind carried heavenly praise, and we knew that the Lord was calling His people in heavenly praises. Thus started the house church ministry of Kohitsuji no Mure.

After the first Retreat at Tozanso Inn, moving to the west, we held another similar type of retreat at Nigawa, Nishinomiya. It seemed the wind of the Holy Spirit was blowing even stronger here at Nigawa than at Tozanso. A great number of people attended the three-days retreat. I was excited to see majority of them were those who had never been to a Christian church. The Spirit was realizing the very vision of Kohitsuji no Mure; we are going out to the sheep that are not in the fence with good news of Jesus Christ. To this day, it is still a talk among us: at the time of the Communion there was a person who took a big chunk of bread as the bread basket came around, asking, “Oh! Are we having bread for lunch?”

I love it! Such people who knew nothing about Christian church got together at Nigawa Retreat. You would never expect so many of first-timers in one place.

The Lord told Mitsuko and me, “Go and feed my sheep outside of the fence.” We have to go and keep thousands and thousands of sheep which are outside of Christian churches.

The people who participated the Nigawa Retreat did not

comprehend intellectually what was happening, nor we who held the Retreat did have any specific plan how to move on from this point. However, we were convinced that the Lord gathered and raised “the people of praise” to worship God in spirit and truth. And that was sufficient.

During the Nigawa Retreat, one old lady who did not speak English exclaimed, “Oh, this is Paradise!” in English. Praising songs were so beautiful and moving, bringing tears from many. A number of people received healing during the Retreat. No one could forget the magnificent presence of the Lord in the midst of praising.

The first Retreat was held in summer of 1992.

And in November 1993, we obtained a sanctuary in Ashiya. At its opening service, the Lord spoke to us: “Everything is completed in praise.” When Mitsuko told me what the Lord told her, I sensed that something extremely important was just spoken. And it was clear confirmation by the Holy Spirit for my conviction: the time of sincere praising in the Spirit had come here upon us.

Praise is not merely singing a song. There is a silent praise. There is a joyful praise. There is a quiet praise. No matter what style you may adopt, praise is to exalt and glorify the Lord who died on the cross and resurrected in three days. Praise is our profession to believe in the redemptive work through the Lord Jesus Christ.

We can praise Him without melody. But it is nicer when the Holy Spirit provides harmonizing melody. When we read the Scriptures through our intellect, it is inevitable that the flow of life is limited. When the Scripture verses sound with melody, heavenly life seems to descend in full content. It seems that a man’s spirit directly opens as we praise the Lord, passing

intellect and emotion. Praising is not emotional entertainment as some assume. When we sing a heavenly praise, man's spirit is fully open to the Lord, and his intellect and emotion become obedient as well.

At the Retreat we sang many praise songs from Taize Community in France as well as the new praise songs from the Catholic Renewal Movement by the Spirit in the U.S., which I translated into Japanese.

Every song was so quiet and very different from conventional Christian singing. People at the Retreat had no trouble to sing these new praise songs. And some remarked, "These praising are flowing directly from the heaven rather than offering from men to God." It was indeed so.

Later many of the original praise songs for Kohitsuji no Mure came out one after another. They, too, shared heavenly tune. They were simple and lovely, and heavenly wind was softly breezing. I believe that a high quality of the praise songs of Kohitsuji no Mure is worthy of a special mention in the Japanese Christian history since Meiji era. The vision of Kohitsuji no Mure, "Everything is completed in praise," has made it possible for us to receive such a heavenly transparent tune of praise.

Prior to January 2000, we received hundreds of original praise songs. Many of these new songs came through the people who had no music background at all. One submitted more than 300 songs.

As each new praise song was introduced, we stepped onto a new stage of spiritual world. The Lord God revealed many things through these songs.

However, we came to the entirely new dimension of praise in January 2000. Suddenly the floodgate opened. Mitsuko

started to receive Revelation praise. These were so different from our previous praise songs.

III

I would like to make an analogy. The praise songs prior to the Revelation praise are like the climate of Galilee.

They have life abundant around the Lake Galilee. A gentle slope is carpeted with the green grass and the wheat field. Birds are happily swift through the beautiful bush. In early spring you can see a heavy growth of anemone, which was noted as “the wild flower” in the Book of Matthew. Then gradually the splendid flowers of Almond trees start blooming, and the airy breeze carry the joy of the praise. In the lakes are the many small fish. Yes, the spring in Galilee is abundant in life, just like the praise songs of Kohitsuji no Mure. It seems to be symbolizing the flow of our praises that Jesus spent His boyhood in Galilee.

The beautiful praise songs before the Revelation era gave us the heavenly flow and life just like the wind from Galilee. Those praises brought the countless people with divine healing and the hope to live. It was God’s consideration that boy Jesus was brought up in the beautiful climate of Galilee. I believe that it was Heaven’s special consideration that our souls were brought up in gentle and lovely praises in the early stages.

However, when the time has come, Jesus had to go to the desert. Before He started his official ministry as a Messiah, Jesus alone had to go under ordeals in the desert. No man can survive in the desert. Wild and bleak dessert and wilderness hold off men. The desert is the place for the cross. It shaves off

man's flesh. Man has to confront directly with his death.

When Revelation praise came out, I said to myself, "This is the praise in the wilderness!"

And we plunged into the next stage of our praise.

The wilderness is a totally different world from abundant life in Galilee. It holds off anything humanistic. No warmth at all. There is no contact point with this world. If the life rich Galilean praise is a beautiful lyric, the wilderness Revelation praise is prosaic.

As Jesus was led by the Spirit from life rich Galilee to the wilderness where presents nothing but severe solitude, it seems to me that Kohitsuji no Mure has to go through the wilderness Revelation praise which presents nothing but severe reality of the cross after the rich life of Galilean praise. It was to personify the mystery of the cross. The Revelation praise is in prose that we had to read the truth of the cross.

Who dares to appreciate the cross? Man's flesh intuitively detests the cross.

Who has believed what we have heard? And to whom has the arm of the LORD been revealed? For he grew up before him like a young plant, and like a root out of dry ground; he had no form or comeliness that we should look at him, and no beauty that we should desire him. He was despised and rejected by men; a man of sorrows, and acquainted with grief; and as one from whom men hide their faces he was despised, and we esteemed him not. Surely he has borne our griefs and carried our sorrows; yet we esteemed him stricken, smitten by God, and afflicted.

(Isaiah 53:1-4)

No matter how much man's flesh would detest the cross, his spirit knows that he has neither salvation nor life without the cross of Christ Jesus. Man's spirit intuitively rejoices in the cross.

The Revelation praise is purely spiritual in the deepest

sense of the word. They are incarnated songs of the cross. Once your spirit is tuned into them, she recognizes immediately that they are derived from the Holy of Holiness in heaven. You shall exclaim in joy, “This is from heaven. The door of heaven is open!”

However, man’s ego does not necessarily rejoice what the spirit rejoices in lighted truth. Rather it rebels against new flow and gets angry. Man’s ego consists of emotion and intellect, and the emotion occupies greater portion of the ego. Most of man’s motivation is based upon emotion. A man’s inner being is split in two; ego and spirit. The spirit rejoices in spite of the ego’s strong aversion.

As soon as the Revelation praise started to sound in our services, those who used to enjoy the previous praise songs were perplexed, annoyed and finally exploded in anger saying, “We don’t want to attend the service unless we can sing beautiful songs as we did before.”

Calm down, my friend. Don’t you see that you are in heavenly dispensation? Don’t you know that you are being baptized in the Holy Spirit and fire? You are in the barren wildness to behold yourself being crucified with the Lord Jesus Christ. The vision of the cross is pressing on you.

After the trial in the wilderness, Jesus got baptized in the River Jordan, and started his official ministry. Once his ministry started, Jesus went to the Northern Caesarea and Samaria, as well as to the bank of Lake Galilee where he spent his boyhood. One time Jesus made his ministry base around Peter’s house by the Lake, and he went on to Jerusalem.

Comparing the flow of our praise songs to the ministry course Jesus took, there is some similarity. After the wilderness, the Lord Jesus went on to the entire Israel. We have received and are still receiving the flood of praise songs right after the

Revelation praise. This time people did not react so negatively as to the Revelation praise. They can praise the Lord in the beauty of cherry blossoms and they are moved to tears in the deep prayers of “Kyrie.” Some praise songs from the Psalms sounded epic and others revealed the deep mystery of the Book of Isaiah.

The praise songs after the Revelation are poetic hymn and prayers. Although they are from the Psalms, the Book of Isaiah and other Scripture verses, all of the praise songs are “theophany,” visible manifestation of the very Divine. Jesus went through the whole land and touched the sick, healed the wounded and gave the great light to those who crouched down in the darkness. As if to follow the ministerial life of Jesus, the praise songs after the Revelation have opened the huge gates of healing-dam. Hundred and hundred people have received and are still receiving divine-healing right in the middle of praise-worship. Evidently we have entered into another new dimension.

We believe that these praise songs are not only healing for the individuals, but also for the land and the earth.

We do not have to remind anyone that our generation is facing the most dangerous and critical challenge in human history. The earth is reaching to the critical stage of global warming. Present earth-environment will go through the drastic change. Life-threatening plagues shall invade every country and nation. And yet this generation is still indulged in pleasure-hunting and economical wars, least caring the welfare of generations to come on this beautiful planet. Oh, how egocentric we are! Do you not hear moaning cry of the agonizing earth?

This is the reason why the merciful Lord sends abundance

of praise songs to us. These praise songs are to heal the earth. These songs are to sweep the surface on the earth and penetrate deeply into the crusts and plates.

These songs are to soothe the raging magna and to control the catastrophic earthquakes.

IV

We believe that praise songs the Lord has given to us shall resound in heaven and on the earth and bring forth God's grand purpose to be realized in this end-time. Now our salvation is nearer than when we first believed. (Romans 13:11)

We do not implicate that we could change God's predestined course for humanity, but we believe that we could be God's instruments to curve endangering crisis by means of praise and prayer. God's children are the salt on the earth. We are to prevent corruption from invading into all segments of our society through our sincere sacrifice of praising.

In the days of the Old Testaments people of Israel battled against the enemy with the divine tool, which was praise unto the Lord. So is the time of the Holy Spirit. We are to battle the invisible enemy with mighty power of heavenly praise.

The scripture says that in due time the most horrible and lawless One will appear in human history and exercise the most hideous, savage violence upon humanity, especially on Christians. But, thanks to God, He will delay the appearance of the Evil One.

And you know what is restraining him now so that he may be revealed in his time. For the mystery of lawlessness is already at work; only he who now restrains it will do so until he is out of the way.
(2 Thessalonians 2:6-7)

I agree with many that the Restrainer here talked about is the Holy Spirit. But it is something more. I believe that it could also refer to “the Spirit-filled people,” for these people are the agents of the Holy Spirit to battle against the uncanny power of the Darkness. They are co-workers of the Holy Spirit here on the earth and dare to oppose the mystery of Lawless One who is at large.

Who are “the Spirit-filled people”?

These are people who are called for praise, children of the Light who are willing to go through the wilderness and to become God’s instruments to heal the earth. They are the salt on the earth. They are the light in the darkness.

Our present time is “evil” because of the rising power of Lawlessness. Down the human history, you could see glimpses of his appearance onto the world stage, but it has never been so close as to our present time. The Wicked One is at the corner.

Look carefully then how you walk, not as unwise men but as wise, making the most of the time, because the days are evil. Therefore do not be foolish, but understand what the will of the Lord is. And do not get drunk with wine, for that is debauchery; but be filled with the Spirit, addressing one another in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing and making melody to the Lord with all your heart, always and for everything giving thanks in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ to God the Father. (Ephesians 5:15-20)

People who praise the Lord in Spirit are wise and they are to redeem our time. The word “redeem” means to buy back, to ransom. Even as our Lord redeemed us, we are to redeem our time, buy back this corrupt world to the Creator.

Jesus Christ walked through some areas that were a corner of a small country Israel, but what Jesus said and did became a current of life that has covered all the earth and the entire

cosmos, and it still keeps on flowing nowadays. The praise songs we Kohitsuji received are just a few drops in the ocean on the earth, but I believe that these praise songs will be the salt of the land and the healing for the earth. Do not underestimate the power of praise songs. We do not conduct a crusade. We are not loudspeakers on the street. Rather we praise the Lord God in quietness even as the Lord walked quietly and healed the wounded.

He will not cry or lift up his voice, or make it heard in the street; a bruised reed he will not break, and a dimly burning wick he will not quench. (Isaiah 42:2-3)

That's how the divine songs work. Heavenly songs are healing for the earth and the wounded.

The Lord God has led us all the way; from Galilee to the wilderness and to the entire land of Israel.

Nobody knows what will happen next for the praise songs of Kohitsuji no Mure. As Jesus Christ had his last moment in Jerusalem, our praise songs may also reach the climax something similar to the incident in Jerusalem. I have no idea for what would be, but I believe that these praise songs would redeem this current time and this earth, just like the life of Jesus Christ was and is to redeem many on earth.

Let me have freedom to paraphrase the above Ephesians, for I sincerely believe these scriptures are specially versed for our present generation:

Be wise, Oh, My people.

The world is aflame; the earth is contaminated with evil.

Who is willing to go and redeem this generation?

Awake, awake and see God's divine purpose.

You cannot afford the luxury of pride and arguments

In which many are indulged.

This is the Lord's command:

Be filled in the Holy Spirit,

Worship the Lord God in psalms, hymns and spiritual songs.

Resound in heavens and on the earth.

The Redeemer Himself is committing “redeeming work” to us. Praising people are to redeem this generation and heal the earth. Some say it is far-fetched. If that's what you want to hold, so be it. For me I do not have the luxury of fruitless argument with you. Time is near. “Are we really insane? It is for God's sake. Or are we sane? Then it is for your sake.” (2 Corinthians. 5:13 TEV)

Looking back these 10 years, you can see the stream of heavenly praise songs have become the current of a large river. This huge river of praise will go thorough not only the earth but also the entire solar system, even to the vast Galaxies in our universe. “To go to Jerusalem” might mean that praise is magnified to the ultimate limits of cosmos.

August 6, 2001

The Time Circulated

I

“Revelation” means to reveal the secret that is sealed and concealed for many years, as its seal is open. The Book of Revelation is the last book in the New Testament, and many people find it difficult to understand because the image of the Book of Revelation is weird and scary due to its content.

January 17, 2000. It was the fifth year anniversary of the Great Hanshin Earthquakes, and it was the day that the praise songs on the Revelation started flooding over to us from the heaven. The flood of praise songs on the Revelation that revealed the oldest as well as the newest mystery of the Bible overwhelmed us and brought renewal of faith to many people. It was the world of pure light of God and love of Christ.

The Book of Revelation is certainly filled with the words of God’s judgment and wrath. The purpose of this book is to let the people turn to God, which is the basics of the Bible. Going back to the basics of the Bible is the same as to return to the beginning of the Bible, Genesis, that is, the world of Revelation is related to the world of Genesis, even though the Book of Revelation is to prophesy the end of the world. The message of the end of the world is pointed to the atonement of Christ Jesus, that is, the message of Love of God. When we see the One who says, “I am the Alpha (Beginning) and the Omega (End)” in the time circulated rather than on a straight line of time, we can comprehend the love of God more clearly.

The timeframe of the Bible is often considered as the straight line that has the beginning and the end. Compared to

the Oriental understanding of the time that is the everlasting stream that has no beginning and the end, it clearly explains the beginning and the end. The creation account and the end-world account in the Bible are respectively quite alike to the big bang theory to explain the beginning of the universe and the entropy theory for its end in the modern physics.

However, I am convinced as I listened to the praise songs on the Revelation that the absolute time of God is endless and circulated; it is not the straight line but it is a circle or looped; when it reaches at the end, it returns to the beginning.

The human words express God as the One “Who was, is, and is to come,” that is based on the straight line of timeframe. However, there is no difference among the past, the present and the future in the world of the absolute time of God. The absolute love of God is not on the straight line but a circle, a whole.

The praise songs of the Revelation turned my hunch into my conviction.

II

A circle means perfection (completion) or wholeness. The perfect love of God is not related to the perfectionism that implies the ethical connotation even though the word “perfect” is used. The nuance of the word is more likely to “mature.” The love of God is the circulated current of love, a flow of life that is always harmonized as a whole.

Mitsuko, whose pen name is Hatoko has received all tunes of the heavenly praises starting from the songs on the Revelation. She often mentions about the “praise in sound,” or “to praise in breathing.” She also talks about “to praise in round breathing.” Intellectually we do not comprehend what it meant.

However, as this is how to breathe in spirit, we seem to understand it by faith in Christ.

The heavenly praises starting from the praise songs on the Revelation resound in the universe as if it were circulated over there. It is the same as blood that comes out of the heart circulates around the entire body and comes back to the heart. There might be some correlation between the circulated current of blood and the circulated tune of praises in the universe. The Word of God says, “The blood is life.”

The music notes of Hato Praise Songs (the heavenly praises Hatoko received) are unusual and extraordinary. Mitsuko wants some music notes without time signature like the Gregorian chant. Further she wants “the looped music notes” of which beginning meets with the end in a circle if such notes should exist. “Looped music note” is for round breathing. Of course, it is impossible to make such notes. She wishes to have a special music note to express a quarter scale difference or a further subtle difference of the scale. Even though we do not understand what the difference is, this fantastic idea itself makes us smile and happy.

We listened to the praise songs on the Revelation in the time of straight line. Then we see a different dimension; judgment is changed into forgiveness, righteousness and love kiss each other, sorrow is assimilated by joy, and the end meets with the beginning.

This is the new world that was brought by the praise songs on the Revelation.

May 1, 2002

Baptism into the Revelation Praise

In the Sunday service last week, I made a remark of a new term, “Baptism into the Revelation Praise.” Some people seemed shocked to hear it, but many accepted it as a new and biblical revelation from the Lord for our present time.

The Lord God “speaks.” If we only have listening ears, we can hear Him speaking and catch His message.

I am always surprised at Mitsuko’s hearing faith. She is so attentive to the gentle voice of the Holy Spirit. I will not forget my great astonishment when I heard her saying, “Everything is completed in praise.” She said she was hearing it during the first service at Ashiya Church of Kohitsuji no Mure. As soon as I heard it, I knew that something very crucial had just been spoken. I sensed the Lord God spoke it to set the tone for Kohitsuji no Mure to go. Sure enough it has set us ablaze with avalanche of new praises ever since.

When you are in the old wineskin too long, you may not be able to catch new wine, the new revelation from the heaven. The first thing you ask is, “Where is it written in the Bible?” You won’t be in peace unless you find the precisely same term in the Bible. But why do you use the word of God to measure up for your way of understanding? Don’t you know the Holy Spirit is free from your way of biblical understanding? The Holy Spirit is the One who illuminates the word and points out to the Person of Jesus Christ. When you are in Christ, you are, “ministers of a new covenant, not in a written code but in the Spirit; for the written code kills, but the Spirit gives life.” (2 Corinthians 3:6)

The Bible is the Word of God because it directs us to the living God Jesus Christ our Lord. It is the work of the Holy Spirit, and there is no way for us to understand the Bible without the help of the Spirit. The words in the Bible are “spiritual.” Intellectual understanding is far short of spiritual one. They are “not taught by human wisdom but taught by the Spirit, interpreting spiritual truths to those who possess the Spirit.” (1 Corinthians 2:13)

When the Lord God revealed us, “Everything is completed in praise,” we responded to it with our uttermost faith. And it has been the cornerstone of our faith.

Since the Lord Jesus Christ completed His redemptive work on the cross once for all, we simply believe in the cross which is all-inclusive because everything is atoned. We praise and worship the Lord in spirit and truth, for we know that “everything works for good.” Faith in praise is the faith in Christ on the cross. We believe that everything is completed in praise because “we know that in everything God works for good with those who love him, who are called according to his purpose.” (Romans 8:28)

Mitsuko herself was not clear what it meant when she related the word unto me. Soon she caught the vision of praise. If you are sincere on your quest to know the truth, the Lord God will reveal what your spirit understands to your intellect in due time.

I received a letter yesterday. Let me quote a few lines of it, for his conviction and experience may help you to understand what I mean by Baptism into the Revelation Praise.

I can testify from the bottom of my heart. All I have desired and wanted is to be made wholly unto the Lord. I have so many bumps in my life, but now I feel I have come to the new plateau

through the Revelation praise. This is what I have been seeking all my life.” “There was a time I was contemplating to run away from the Lord, away from Kohitsuji no Mure. Then the Revelation praise came in, and I was re-born! The praise is the Lord Himself, and I am thoroughly convinced that I could no longer live without this praise. I am a child of the Revelation praise.”

I don't think he is exaggerating. Revelation praise is not just another beautiful praise. It is to turn your life upside down. Your spiritual life will be completely revolutionized. That's the reason why I introduce a new term, “Baptism into the Revelation Praise.”

Let me explain it a little more. Baptism is the outward expression of what inner man has gone through in Christ's cross. It is the funeral rite for the old man with all formal practice.

We were buried therefore with him by baptism into death.
(Romans 6:4)

If you bury somebody who is not dead, it is a problem. Many people say, “I was baptized, but I don't feel like I was dead.” You do not necessarily feel it because it is not to be understood in your intellect and emotion. Regardless you feel it or not, regardless you understand it or not, the fact of God is that you are dead on the cross of Jesus. If God says so, I have no position to say anything else.

There are many references on baptism in the New Testament, but nowhere you can find the old practices such as “learning sessions for baptism,” or “swearing your faithfulness to a local church through baptism.”

We, Kohitsuji no Mure, approve anyone who confesses the Lord Jesus Christ to get baptized immediately. Do you know this is more “biblical” than traditional Church's demand on baptism?

On the day of Pentecost, listening to Peter's message, more than three thousand people got baptized. (In general, they only count men in the Bible. If women and children were added, then no less than 5,000 people might have got baptized on this day alone. No preparation class must have been held.) They believed in God at site and got baptized at site. Not only the day of Pentecost, but also in various places in the Book of Acts, people got baptized at the moment they believed.

We believe that it is better to be baptized as soon as possible. Why does the Bible seem to hurry baptism? For baptism is very important in the eyes of God. Our human understanding is not important. When you realize how the Lord God sees it, you will no longer insist the institutionalized way of baptism.

Baptism is so precious in the eyes of God. It is to put a divine seal on a man's soul, for the soul who has confessed the Lord Jesus Christ in his or her mouth has automatically included in God's greatest fact, the redemptive work by the Lord Jesus Christ. When a calf is born at a ranch, the owner of the ranch immediately brands the calf on his hip, even though the calf does not know which ranch it belongs to. But the owner surely knows it. Branding is a seal to declare, "This cow belongs to me." In the same token, the Lord God put a seal of the Spirit on our soul, saying, "This one belongs to Me."

Like the branded calves, men may not know the new Owner immediately even after they get heavenly seal upon their souls. Think of it, don't you see it is more natural? In any way, you don't have to go through lengthy preparation period to receive this wonderful seal upon your soul, for God has accepted you already through Jesus Christ.

It is God's very will for man to be baptized, and it is God's sincere desire for a man to receive this divine seal as soon as

possible. After you get baptized, your inner eyes will be opened to the mystery of baptism. As you understand it more, the more you realize the importance of baptism, the more you appreciate the Lord Jesus Christ indescribably.

St. Paul talks about the mystery of baptism in the letter to the Romans.

Do you not know that all of us who have been baptized into Christ Jesus were baptized into his death? We were buried therefore with him by baptism into death, so that as Christ was raised from the dead by the glory of the Father, we too might walk in newness of life. (Romans 6:3-4)

Baptism is to be incorporated into the mystery of Christ's death. This is an essence of the redemption. How can we understand such a profound mystery with our limited intellect and emotion? However, our spirit knows and accepts the mystery of God joyfully. Through baptism, we are set in the mystery of Christ's death and resurrection.

That is the reason why God wants a man to be baptized as soon as possible. The sooner you open your eyes to the mystery, the more greatly your life would be enriched. Surely it is the matter of death and life, and the life would be drastically changed.

With this understanding of baptism, you will see what I mean by the Baptism into the Revelation Praise.

Since the Revelation praise came out, many people, even people who liked many of original praise songs of Kohitsuji, felt something inside of them reacting against those special praises. Our flesh might have resisted against transparently pure life from heaven.

However, the Revelation songs are neither ordinary praise songs nor merely "one of many gifts God gave us." The Revelation praise is "baptism" in the deepest sense of the word,

for it makes you go through death and life of the Christ's cross.

In old days, Israelis led by Moses got in panic when they faced the overhanging crisis that the great forces of the Egyptians approached behind them. As Moses interceded, the Lord God parted the Red Sea for them to pass it through, and they finally could reach to the new world. The Egyptian forces were dead in the water. The Israelis remember the fact from generations to generations, for it was the event of their death and life.

*I want you to know, brethren, that our fathers were all under the cloud, and all passed through the sea, and all were **baptized into Moses** in the cloud and in the sea.*

(1 Corinthians 10:1-2)

“Baptism into Moses” is a strange expression to say the least. But the Bible does not support any suggestion to idolize a person Moses. But the Bible recognizes the fact that it was by Moses' faith that the waters of the Red Sea were divided into two and that the Israelis could narrowly escaped from death. God performed the tremendous miracle to respond Moses' faith.

The Revelation praise has the same effect as the Israelis were baptized into Moses.

Christian baptism is given individually, but the baptism into the Revelation praise is given in the mass even as the baptism into Moses was in the mass. We were all baptized in the mass into the Revelation praise. As we praised the Lord with the Revelation praise, we were all baptized and incorporated into the mystery of the cross. Whether or not you understand it, we were all included in Christ's mystery.

I am more than sure that a time will tell you how true the above statement is. Some may react against it and leave us. Nevertheless, no matter how much you may resist against it, you have received already the Revelation baptism. You have

entered into the most beautiful and wonderful land. Why don't you enjoy it now? Once you've seen the extra celestial life through the Baptism into the Revelation praise, you will never be the same.

Baptism is a funeral. This Baptism into the Revelation praise is also a funeral. You may notice that your old self has collapsed and been dead on the cross in you. Then completely new life is brought in you.

For by one Spirit we were all baptized into one body - Jews or Greeks, slaves or free - and all were made to drink of one Spirit.
(1 Corinthians 12:13)

Let me paraphrase the above scripture to emphasize the nuance of the Greek.

In the presence of the One Spirit, we recognize that we are one – whether Jews or Greeks. We recognize that we have already incorporated into the Body of Christ. (We are all baptized with a seal that we are members of Christ's body.) We were all made to drink of one Spirit in one baptism.

As Christian baptism brings forth the mystery of the cross upon an individual soul, so does the Baptism into the Revelation praise forth the depth of our souls. Those who are in the Spirit surely see what it means to belong to one body in Christ. Their eyes will be opened to the mystery hidden in one body in Christ.

I am for the one who proclaim the mystery of Christ through this most beautiful and wonderful Baptism into the Revelation praise, for I have passed death and entered into a completely renewed life in Christ. Surely I was made to drink the most delicious wine.

August 6, 2002

God's Project, "To the End of the Earth"

Mitsuko and I visited Chicago and New York together with our staffs in the beginning of June. Before our departure, we had a hunch this trip might be a warfare with darkness. We prayed hard. There happened nothing on the surface and we came back in safe. However, we were all exhausted. After we returned, Mitsuko said, "I thought I might die during this trip. I was scared to death that I prayed for God's mercy. Then I heard a gentle voice saying, 'You have not gone to the end of the earth.'"

In these days, Japan has been in the midst of excitement with the World Cup soccer games. Did you know that the planet earth was in the real trouble? NASA announced while we were in the States, "A meteorite sized a soccer stadium approached to the earth much closer than the moon, and passed by without collision." If the meteorite were collided with the earth, the world would have been in a greater chaos than the terrorists' simultaneous attacks in the U.S. last fall, and there would have been no way for soccer excitement now. It would have the power equals to the super mega sized nuclear explosion. If the collision were near Japan, most cities and towns would have been annihilated by the great tidal waves. Why did nobody realize the approach of such a huge meteorite? Yes, of course, I think specialists should have known it. I suspect that they made a decision that they should keep silent rather than speaking the truth that would cause a great panic in the world.

It might have been this possibility of a meteorite collision that we had a hunch something would happen. Or, perhaps it

might have been another new terrorists' attack. This extraordinary time, or the dangerous time has not been over yet.

When we stood at Ground Zero in New York, we were astonished at the great sorrow arising from the ground. We were familiar with this kind of sorrow. The sorrow of Ground Zero was limited in a part of Manhattan. However, when we had the Great Hanshin Earthquakes, the more we went by, the greater the sorrow of the ground increased and it never disappeared. This sorrow at Ground Zero was the same as the Great Hanshin Earthquakes.

In these days there are earthquakes in various places, lawlessness prevails all over the world, and fears of economy collapse increase more and more. Thus we are now living in the extraordinary days.

That is the reason why we have to stand still by "faith in praise for redeeming Love," only that can save us as well as the earth. I strongly believe that the Lord saved the planet earth from the nearing meteorite through praises of His people.

If we stand still by faith in praise for Christ, the Lord God will save not only ourselves but also our family, our friends, our community, our country, and our planet earth. Nothing but the faith in Christ's praise can redeem our present time. What Paul says, "Make good use of every opportunity you have..." (Ephesians 5:16 TEV) does not mean just not to waste time. Literally it should read, "Redeem the time." As Christ Jesus our Lord redeemed us, we are responsible to redeem thousands and thousands of lost souls for God. Of course, only Christ can redeem a soul. But when God commands us to redeem our own time, it means that the Lord God entrusts us the most important work on the earth. He commissions us to save this dangerous generation through the work of divine praising.

We do not conduct a crusade with a lot of fanfare, nor do we get into a showy TV ministry. But as each of us is filled with the Holy Spirit, the flow of the Spirit, the streams of praises are always there with us. These streams of praises become a current of life, which sanctify the very air we breath in, and it flows out of us to our town, our school, and to the mountains and the sea.

Redeem the time, because the days are evil. Therefore do not be unwise, but understand what the will of the Lord is. And do not be drunk with wine, in which is dissipation; but be filled with the Spirit, speaking to one another in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing and making melody in your heart to the Lord.
(Ephesians 5:16-19 NKJ)

There is such a thing as divine praise: that is, the praise filled in the Holy Spirit. Anyone who is filled in the Holy Spirit will surely sing praises unto the Lord. Oh, you may be in silence, but your heart will sing divine praise and His mighty power and love will overflow you. And the heavenly praises will heal your beloved ones and your planet earth. No wonder the Lord God has commissioned us to carry this praise to the end of the earth.

But you shall receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you; and you shall be my witnesses in Jerusalem and in all Judea and Sama'ria and to the end of the earth.
(Acts 1:8)

The Holy Spirit empowers us to become the witnesses of Christ to the end of the earth. Our task is to convey the heavenly praises to every corner of the world. I think that we, Kohitsuji-no-Mure, are surely set into God's project, "To the End of the Earth."

NHK program "Project X" describes the pioneers of the Japanese companies who overcame difficulties with their courage. This popular TV program is quite moving. However, much more important tasks are waiting for the ones who are

called for God's Project, "To the End of the Earth." Nobody will give you applause and admiration. Even you may die in a ditch. Yet, you have to go to the end of the earth to convey the praise of the Lord. It is not only one company's destiny, but the destiny of a planet earth depends upon your praises. "Be a witness of the Lord to the end of the earth!"

I will tell you, all workers, all leaders, and all people of Kohitsuji-no-Mure, "Be filled with the Holy Spirit, conveying the heavenly praises. It depends upon your worship and praise the Lord in spirit and truth to redeem this time. Be a witness of the Lord Jesus Christ to the end of the earth."

"Witness" in Greek is derived from the etymology of "martyr." "Martyrdom" sounds scary for everybody. A martyr may come out among us in future. But through the Revelation praises, we have come to realize that the scary things in the Revelation point out one direction, and that is love of God in heavenly dimension. Therefore I feel a fresh breath in 'witness,' which may mean even to be a martyr.

In order to contend with Satan, the Revelation says "And they have conquered him by the blood of the Lamb and by the word of their testimony, for they loved not their lives even unto death." (Revelation 12:11)

Yes, it is scary, but I take liberty in the Spirit and understand it that I should be aware of my real status in Christ. My real status in Christ is that I have been crucified together with the Lord on the cross. When I stand on this fact, I really mean to stand on God's fact; I know what it means "not to love their lives to the death." It is not a halfway life but truly a committed life. It is to know the mystery of Christ's cross in a deeper dimension. A devoted soul to the will of God, like the completely burnt offering, is the one who died self completely.

The old self died in the cross of Jesus. It is no longer I to live but the Lord Jesus Christ lives in me.

The new self in me lives in new praises. As a member of God's Project "To the End of the Earth," My heart is steadfast. I will wake up in the dawn and sing praises of the Lord to the whole earth.

July 7, 2002