

HIROSHIMA

August 6, 1945

8:15 a.m.

by

The Reverend Dr. Kiyoshi Tanimoto

Delivered at Emory University January 18, 1949

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1945

an eye-witness account by REV. KIYOSHI TANIMOTO
Methodist Pastor in Hiroshima

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The address reproduced here was given by the Rev. Kiyoshi Tanimoto, an ordained Methodist Minister, at the eleven o'clock lecture hour at "Ministers' Week", Emory University, Candler School of Theology, Atlanta Ga. The date of delivery: Tuesday, Jan. 18, 1949. This is a transcript of a recording of his address.

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I happened to be in the city of Hiroshima at the time of the atomic bomb. It was August 6, 8:15am that the world's first atomic bomb was dropped. I passed by the Central Post Office, what is supposed to be the center of the explosion, about 30 minutes before that catastrophe, so, I saw the city's condition quite well. I went through the city and reached the western edge of it. When I arrived there I saw the flash. I was behind a hill standing in the valley in front of a house. The flash ran suddenly from the east to the west. I took a couple of steps into the garden to lie down on the ground between two rocks and then felt a strong blast of wind. When I got up, the house behind me was destroyed and the concrete wall standing at the entrance was turned over. I saw few people appearing from under the debris. An old woman appeared before me saying, "I'm hurt! I'm hurt!" She was bleeding from her head. I took her to the first aid station 3 blocks away and there I saw many more injured people.

I was so surprised! Up until that time Hiroshima was bombed by B-29s with small shells and just 10 people had been killed, but this time so many were injured. Yet I did not hear an explosion! As a matter of fact there was a tremendous explosion. My mother-in-law lived in a village 25 miles away from Hiroshima and they heard a tremendous explosion, much greater than that which was heard in another town about 5 miles away from this place. But we, inside the city, couldn't hear a sound, yet

such a tremendous destruction was made!

Wondering what happened, I went to the edge of the garden from where I could catch a panoramic view of the city and found the whole city on fire! Being much anxious of my church, my parsonage and my people, I rushed into the street.

I met a long and endless line of injured people heading for the hillside away from the city. They were all injured. Strange to say they were naked! And their hair and eyebrows burned off, and their skin from faces, from arms, from breast peeling off, hanging loose. Even today the survivors of Hiroshima tell you that these people have four hands -- no not actually four hands, but skin of hands, hanging loose, as though they had four hands. I thought it was a procession of ghosts. They didn't show any expression on their faces: just looking toward hillside and escape.

When I crossed the bridges, first and second, I saw that whole houses over there were completely smashed to the ground and I heard people crying for help underneath the debris from here and there and everywhere and smoke and fire covered all the city. I tried to help some of them, but I couldn't. None could! These people who were buried under the houses were burned to death. One of my friends entered into the city right after the explosion and came to the central part of the city and saw a street car in which he saw a pile of human ashes. A body of a man was still standing at the entrance, holding the handle, putting his foot on the step; this man was merely a skeleton. In other words, all unfortunate passengers on that car were burned to ashes in a moment.

I have brought with me a piece of tile from the ruins of Hiroshima and this is made of clay, of soil, and yet melted like this. A scientist said 6,000 degrees of heat hit the surface of earth. So this story is not merely exaggeration of our experiences.

The people right after the catastrophe started to use the expression, "White bone in a moment". To some extent this expression of our experiences was true. So many people were turned to "white bone in a moment"!

Hiroshima was built on a delta where 7 rivers run through. The people tried to make a big fire zone cutting through the city from east to west. So many people, young and old, even high school students, boys and girls,

were on the streets in the outdoors, working for evacuation, that they got the full blast and turned to ashes. Some fortunate people could escape from the destruction and went to the outskirts of the city, but they could not escape from the destructive power of the A-bomb. In a few days, or a couple of weeks, they also passed away.

One of my friends and his wife were buried under their smashed house. The husband somehow crawled out from the debris but his wife was still caught under it. He tried hard to save her, but fire blocked his efforts. She said, "Please run away," but her husband said, "No, I can't." He tried again and again, but couldn't save her. Finally, his wife said, "We have only one son," (about 9 years old, at that time, at Kio about 40 miles away from the city for evacuation), "if you and I die in this place, who can take care of our son? Please run away!" Then this man left the place, but in a few days he also passed away.

Our census bureau said that in the first 2 months after the catastrophe, 80,000 people passed away on account of the radioactivity. So we saw this kind of catastrophe to the extent of the total destruction of a whole city. Therefore, we are now praying from the bottom of our hearts that no more such experiences will ever happen anywhere on this earth, never again!

While I was saving people in the river, I suddenly found someone crying for help and I approached and found about 15 people all drowning. I neared with my boat and said to them, "Get in." They were trembling. I took one of them by the hand and pulled -- and the skin came off! Then I put my arm on his back and pulled -- my arm slipped and I found a total burn all over his body.

I landed on the bank which was full of injured people. I almost stepped on them. I tried to pass a cup of water to them from one to another. They were terribly burned and swollen -- sometimes twice as large as normal size. No one could be recognized from the other. But with much trouble they raised their upper bodies to accept a cup of water with their terribly swollen hands. They couldn't bend their fingers! After they drank their water they returned the cup with most gracious expression of thanks. I was deeply impressed! They were not out of their heads. They had not lost consciousness.

Since I was thoroughly exhausted, I lay down among the injured and (4)
spent the whole night. Next morning I saw some of them were dead, but I
could not hear anyone crying or wailing all the night. Of course they
suffered tremendous pain, but they overcame.

I found the destruction terrible, but the more terrible thing was not
in the catastrophe itself, but in the hearts of human beings. After a
half of one year I heard many Hiroshima people say that it was fortunate
after all for us to have been defeated by the Americans. A great change
was made in the hearts of the people. The once fighting spirit was turned
into peaceful minds, not certainly by the atomic bomb, but by the
sense of humanity shown by the Americans.

The first troops of American Occupation were excellent, especially the
Christian members of the forces, who created a wonderful atmosphere among
our people through their wonderful behavior.

One day I was invited to the American Army Camp and visited the Head
Chaplain of that Division, Chaplain Clifton Pond, Methodist Chaplain with
Army. He took me to the Chapel which was full of soldiers, and he took
me to the pulpit and said, "Tanimoto, speak to my men." I was deeply
impressed and overcome by his attitude. I couldn't say anything. I asked
him to excuse me. After he spoke, I gave a brief greeting. After the
service, many soldiers came up to the altar and shook my hand and I felt
warm-hearted. After the Chapel Service, this Chaplain took me to the
Officers' Mess and gave me a wonderful dinner. At the table there were
many officers. Whenever they happened to have conversation on Hiroshima
they suddenly kept silent. That silence touched my heart deeply. After
the meal, this Chaplain took me to his dormitory and showed me all his
belongings and said, "Tanimoto, you must have great difficulty. Take
anything you want from here." Of course, I couldn't! But he put what-
ever he could handle in a box and gave it to me. This was my first
experience with an American Chaplain and his soldiers.

As a matter of fact, all Japanese were afraid of occupation forces,
greatly. They thought they would be treated terribly. "America will
hurt us, and so we had better take our daughters and young ladies into
the country!"

Right after the occupation I went to my native home and one day while ⁽⁵⁾ I was on the street car I saw American airplanes flying over our heads dropping parachutes: colorful parachutes with packages. In the afternoon I saw a group of American War Prisoners marching through the streets. Little children and men and women were looking at them from the corner of the street with much curiosity as well as fear. Those war prisoners must have received many sweets from the airplanes. Some threw pieces of chocolate or chewing gum to the children, but the children were terribly afraid of them. The soldier who was about to give up that group of war prisoners, a Japanese soldier, said to them, "Come on, take these, they are not poison." (Up until that time they were taught that anything dropped from an airplane was poison.) Then the children picked up the chewing gum, but they did not know how to chew it -- and they swallowed it all (laughter).

In this way, the people in our city and all over Japan experienced wonderful treatment -- received wonderful treatment -- humanitarian treatment from the occupation forces.

We found these people were not merely Americans -- they were Christians! They showed a wonderful Christian spirit.

We were told that the people of America were surprised when they heard that the atom bomb was dropped on Hiroshima. At the same time we were deeply impressed when we heard that the leaders of American churches opposed the use of the atomic bomb in war.. At that time, such a thing as the ethical problem of the use of an atomic bomb was entirely out of our minds. We thought it was war, and we expected we must suffer any kind of sacrifices on our side. Yet the American people, leaders, showed a wonderful spirit: so wonderful we had never seen in our Country!

During the war and before the war, no one opposed the army or military leaders in Japan. But America saw something high above this earth! We were so thrilled and impressed, our hearts were lifted up by it -- our eyes were opened by your spirit!

We were so impressed by the great sympathy shown by the American people to the people of Hiroshima. Then, again, Church World Service sent their

emissaries for relief work in Japan and distributed many food packages and clothing throughout the Country. (6)

One day I visited one of the War Orphanages and the orphans were so grateful to America because they were supported by the Relief Agencies of the American Churches in Japan.

Being deeply inspired and impressed by the sympathy and the great Christian conscience of the American people, our people are now praying for world peace. At the same time we realize a sense of repentance growing in our hearts.

Right after the catastrophe, while I was still lying on the bed on account of a high fever, one of my church members called on me and said, "Pastor, this terrible thing happened upon us because we had no faith in God." This kind of repentance penetrated into our hearts deeply.

On the first anniversary of our catastrophe, many people gathered in the ruin of our church and expressed regret saying, "Our life was not Christian enough to prevent obliteration of our Country." And then we reviewed the fateful nature of our city, Hiroshima.

Our city was, a long time ago, a little village. About 300 years ago Tanimoto Gori built his castle and ruled that section of the country for 250 years and many feudalistic war crimes were committed. Later, this place was transferred into the hands of modern military leaders and became the seat of war crimes. A great number of soldiers were sent forth into the continent of China and Southern Pacific Islands to make the great massacre of Nanking and the great devastation at Manao.

The fate of Hiroshima has been cursed in the face of the sovereign God and of Universal Love.

The people of Hiroshima today think that their catastrophe was the Divine judgement upon themselves on account of their own Country's sinful nature.

And, again, being so impressed by your sympathy and the wonderful policy of General MacArthur, we have come to have better living conditions, and now there is a religious awakening.

The defeat of Japan itself resulted in a religious awakening for our people, especially for those in Hiroshima.

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Right after the catastrophe I was there in the ruin of my Parsonage and was trying to dig out some food which had been kept in cellar under the ground when one of my neighbors came and asked for some help. I went there and found a man who had been the head of our town's Naval Assn. He was terribly burned and swollen -- and he smelled like a dead man! Sitting beside his pillow I read Psalm 90, "Lord, Thou hast been our dwelling place in all generations, before the mountains were brought forth, or ever Thou hadst formed the earth and the world, even from everlasting to everlasting Thou art God. Thou turnest man to destruction and sayest, 'Return ye children of men'. For a thousand years in Thy sight are but as yesterday when it is passed, and Thou carriest them away as with a flood."

After I read this Psalm, I gave a prayer. While I was praying, this man took his last breath -- this man once spread the rumor among our people that Tanimoto was a spy for America; yet at the threshold of his death, this man asked the one whom he had hated so much, for reconciliation of his soul with God! I found a beautiful spirit still enshrined in this town's number-one boss.

Right after this catastrophe I had no place to preach, so I went to the Hiroshima Railway Station and preached on the street. A great number of hungry, homeless refugees gathered around us and listened to us. This was our first time to receive such an intense response of the people to our Christian messages. There was nothing left in the ruin of Hiroshima. They lost houses, parents, children, hope in the future -- but they found something imperishable in their souls!

Right at the end of hostilities the black market mushroomed in front of the Station. Many crimes were committed in that black market. But instead of the black market those many homeless and wandering people, including some demobilized or repatriated soldiers, showed a beautiful spirit of mutual help and sympathy, and displayed their deepest desire -- not for pork -- not for butter -- but for eternal life.

Today these war-torn people are hungering for the Word of the Living God. Buddhism and Shintoism lost their spiritual benefit entirely and people are now coming into the Church of Christianity.

One day the Chaplain and I were invited to the Buddhist Temple and 30,000 people gathered from the towns around and listened to this Chaplain talk on Christianity and Democracy -- I translated. After the meeting the Buddhist Priest asked us to stay in the Temple. Next morning many Priests and young people, and leaders came and discussed Christianity for 4 hours. After the meeting a young man came to me and said, "We can't trust in Buddhist Priest or Shintoist Priest, please come often to our village and lead us." This is the situation today.

Dr. Kagawa say we have the greatest opportunity for Christian evangelism in our history.

We are now trying to Christianize whole Country under the American occupation.

We have now two dangerous tendencies: One, Communist, and the other Nationalist. But if we have a strong program of Christian evangelism, we can win the whole Country for Christ, and Japan can be a member of the world community!

Still supported by the sympathy of the American people, now the people of Hiroshima are praying for the world and trying to make Hiroshima a Peace Center for the world.

We experienced the tremendous catastrophe of new era, but it is not enough! How terrible it was! We ought to do something for the world, but we have nothing to do with -- but we can pray -- pray for American Christians. You have the power and you have the keen Christian conscience. We are praying for you that America may lead the whole world for eternal peace.

=End=

(The following introduction and prayer preceeded the address of Rev. Tanimoto.)

(Dr. Floyd): "And here at my left is a man of Jacksonville, Florida, now a student in the Candler School of Theology. On that tragic morning, he was in an American plane over Hiroshima. So, we bring together this morning, on this platform, in this Christian Methodist Church, one who was aloft that morning in the air, and one who was on the ground. Again

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it is heartily gratifying to us that in a CHRISTIAN Church, in THIS Church, we can bring these two men together in a CHRISTIAN Service, symbolizing that deep bond which prevails among Christians to come together in spite of all ... I bring them to you as close together as I can, to symbolize that there IS NO DIVISION AMONG CHRISTIANS!" He will lead our prayer.

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(Prayer) "Our God and heavenly Father ... we thank Thee that Thou hast brought us here in a scene of peace and searching of Thy wisdom. We pray that we may be so brought together in heart and mind and deed in this fellowship with others who seek to serve Thee, that our lives may reflect Thy glory in all that we do. We thank Thee that we can come together, and that we have a common bond of unity between us. We thank Thee that we have a messenger who has come from afar, not only to bring us a message of events, but a message with the Spirit of Christ in it ... Use us mightily in all things, Father, and lift up our efforts to Thee, we ask in Jesus' Name. Amen."

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NOTES: The Reverend Kiyoshi Tanimoto is the product of Christian missions in Japan. He is Pastor of the Nagerakawa United Christian Church (Methodist) in Hiroshima, one of Japan's largest Christian Churches.

This famed survivor of the first atomic bomb attack was prominently mentioned by John Hershey in his report and book, "Hiroshima". He is the founder of the Hiroshima Peace Center Foundation and Associates and was instrumental in bringing the "Hiroshima Maidens" to the U.S.A. for treatment of the injuries they sustained in the blast.

He graduated from the Candler School of Theology, Emory University, Atlanta, Georgia in 1940 with a Master of Divinity degree.

A Japanese-born Buddhist, he converted to Christianity and was called to preach on August 6, 1927 upon the death of his sainted mother, just 18 years to the day that the bomb fell.

He was Guest Chaplain in the U.S. Senate in 1951 and in 1955 appeared on Ralph Edwards' TV Show, "This Is Your Life -- Kiyoshi Tanimoto".

His wife's name is Chesa. They retired from the active Ministry this year after some 40 years of service to the Nagerakawa Methodist Church.

In his introductory remarks, Rev. Tanimoto recalled some humorous experiences during his years at Emory when he was in his twenties.

You were so gracious to us -- Himura, Uzaki, and I -- while we were on this campus. You taught us many things and our hearts were opened to the world. Sometimes you were so nice -- sometime too nice -- to teach me many other things. One of my friends taught me a new word -- "Bat in belfry", without explanation of its meaning. He said, "Say, Tanimoto, 'Bat in belfry! Bat in belfry!'" I repeated that word, and finally got "Bat in the belfry." Meanwhile a certain young lady came toward us and he said, "Say to her 'Bat in the belfry'." And I said, "Are you bat in the belfry?" -- And since then I have a hard time with her!

One of our friends taught again some other things. He showed me something strange looking and I asked him, "What do you have?" He said, "You don't know?" "No. I don't." Then he said, "Show me your hand." I opened my hand and he put something in my hand, and he said, "Put it in your mouth." I put it in my mouth and he said, "Chew it." I chewed it, and he said, "How do you like it?" I said, "Umm, this is sweet." And I tried to swallow, and he said, "Don't swallow! Don't swallow! That is chewing tobacco!"

At Emory, they taught me to "pitch woo", Very interesting!

In my Country, wife is very obedient. When she is a small girl she is obedient to her parents; when she is married, she is very obedient to her husband; when her children are grown, she is obedient to them! Very good custom!

In describing the meaning of his name to a group of children he said, "Tani" means "valley", and "moto" means "origin". "Tanimoto" means, "the origin of the valley".

Americans sometimes find my name difficult, and instead of saying "Tanimoto" they call me "Tomato"!

Sometimes you taught me the great institutions of America, such as "hitch-hiking". One day right at the first Christmas vacation, one of our friends said to me, "Where are you going to spend your Christmas vacation?" I said, "Nowhere. I have nowhere to go." He said, "Are you going back to Japan?" "No, no, I have to stay here." Then he said, "Why don't you come to my home and spend Christmas vacation there?" "Oh, that is wonderful. I would like to go." He said, "Well, I'll take you with me." And then I asked, "How far is it?" He said, "About 300 miles from here." And then I pulled out my purse and tried to examine the contents of it. He said, "What are you doing?" "Well-l-l, it must be quite expensive, isn't it?" He said, "Oh don't you worry about that. You are my guest. I will take care of you." And next morning he took me to the highway. I thought he'd take me to the station or some bus terminal. But, while standing on the highway, I asked him, "What are you doing here?" He said, "Ah-h-h-h -----" (*motioning to thumb a ride*). I ask him, "What do you mean by this? (*motion*)" "Hitchahike." "What do you mean by 'Hitchahike'?" "Oh, you don't know?" "No." Then he said, "Look at me." And he did this way. (*motioning to thumb a ride*) Soon to my great surprise, a beautiful car stopped before us and door was opened and he said, "Let's go," and we got in. I asked my friend, "Say, how much shall I pay?" He said, "No pay. You see, this is 'hitchahike'!"

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Right after the surrender of our Country, I went to headquarters of the American Occupation Forces and asked them to find out someone who graduated from Emory. Unfortunately, I couldn't find out. I asked them, "Do you have anyone who graduated from Emory?" He said, "What school?" "Emory University!" "No-o-o, I never heard of such a school." So I said, "Oh, you must be Yankee. I'm Southerner!"

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(*The flowers in Japan are much the same as the flowers of Florida.*)
 "With flowers, there is no difference between the East and the West."