

# An Era of Preschool Christian Education Conducted by Non-Christians : The Possibilities of Preschool Christian Education in Japan in the *New Christian Preschool Education Guidelines* (2010)

Jun Fukaya

## **Abstract**

The realities of modern Japanese society dictate that non-Christians make up the majority of Christian preschool educators. It is now time to explore new modes of Christian preschool education which take into account those realities. An examination of this issue first requires a review of the relevant history. The directions that protestant Christian preschool education in Japan has taken since the middle of the 20<sup>th</sup> century fall into the following three categories : 1) In the 1950s and 1960s, in the decades following the Second World War, these decades also overlap Japan's era of rapid economic growth. The main purpose of Christian preschool education was the mission of young children. 2) After experiencing a phenomenal period of economic growth, from the 1970s to the 2000s, a certain focus came to be placed on individual affluence and individual personalities. The purpose of Christian preschool education was not just mission. Rather, the focus was placed on such education as a means for broadly developing well-rounded individuals. 3) From 2010 to the present, low birth rates and secularizing trends have contributed to a sharp decrease in numbers

of Christian preschool educators. As a result, Christian preschool education conducted by non-Christian educators is increasingly becoming the norm. The purpose of this paper is to explore new possibilities for Christian preschool education in Japan through an examination of the *Shin-Kiristokyō Hoiku Shishin* (“*New Christian Preschool Education Guidelines*”), which were published in 2010, in light of the characteristics of these three eras.

## Introduction

When statistics were first compiled in 1948, the number of Protestants, Catholics, and Orthodox Church members in Japan totaled about 330,000 people (about 0.42 percent of the total population). That number rose to about 750,000 people (0.76 percent) in 1968, to about one million (0.83 percent) in 1988, and to about 1,125,700 (0.88 percent) in 2006. Although from these figures we can see that Japan’s Christian population topped one million people in the late 1980s and has continued to show steady growth since then, the number of teachers trained to provide Christian education has declined due to such factors as low birth rates, an aging population, and secularizing trends. Some likely reasons are that churches are attracting fewer children and young adults, and that the ability of churches to educate young people is waning.

In recent years we have seen a major change in the makeup of teachers in charge of Christian preschool education. Previously, the task of Christian preschool education was given primarily to teachers with ties to churches. Now, however, in many cases that task has fallen to non-Christians. According to questionnaire surveys conducted by Kihoren, which is an association of Christian kindergartens and daycare facilities, the percentage of Christians working in Christian preschool education settings plummeted from 47.8 percent in 1981 to 27.2 percent in 2004. It is not uncommon to have Christian kindergartens at which all of the teaching staff except for the principal and the head teacher are

non-Christians. Neither is it uncommon to encounter people whose only exposure to Christianity in their entire lives in the context of Japanese society was when they were in kindergarten. If we look at this situation from a different perspective, we will see that Christian preschool education serves the important role of providing children some exposure to Christianity in the first stages of their lives, in a country where non-Christians make up the overwhelming majority of the population. For that reason, the situation is serious. Given that the ideal of Christian education—preschool or otherwise—being administered by Christians alone is no longer presumed and that there is no choice but to continue Christian preschool education administered by non-Christians, the only thing that church and school officials can do is encourage people to attend church and work toward increasing the ranks of Christians.

To put it simply, conventional methods of Christian education treated all non-Christians as “seekers” who are subject to proselytization. Those methods, however, have proved to be a substantial physical and mental burden for contemporary preschool educators, who must meet a range of demands. One young educator, for example, attended a Christian preschool education workshop and afterward reported in a questionnaire that he or she felt psychological pressure during the workshop, namely that he or she would have to become a Christian after the workshop’s completion. One teacher told me that he or she was hired on the condition that he or she would convert to Christianity within three years, but ended up quitting three years later because he or she had not become a Christian.

The realities of modern Japanese society dictate that non-Christians make up the majority of Christian preschool educators. It is now time to explore new modes of Christian preschool education which take into account those realities. An examination of this issue first requires a review of the relevant history. In this paper I shall review the ideals pursued in Japanese preschool education as outlined in a series of works published as Christian preschool education guide-

lines. I will examine the sets of guidelines published from 1965, when the first one came out, through 2000, and conclude with an analysis of the most recent guideline, published in 2010. In doing so, I aim to explore the issues that modern Japanese Christian preschool education is facing as well as the possibilities therein.

## 1. The evolution of the Christian preschool education guidelines

One nationwide organization that has given its support to Christian preschool education in Japan since the 1930s is Kihoren. It is Kihoren that edits and publishes the Christian preschool education guidelines. The first one, published in 1965, was *Yōji no Kirisutokyō Kyōiku Shishin* (“*Christian Education Guidelines for Small Children*”), followed by *Zoku Yōji no Kirisutokyō Kyōiku Shishin* (“*Further Christian Education Guidelines for Small Children*”, 1976), *Kirisutokyō Hoiku Shishin* (“*Christian Preschool Education Guidelines*”, 1989), *Kaitei Kirisutokyō Hoiku Shishin* (“*Christian Preschool Education Guidelines—Revised*”, 2000), and most recently by *Shin-Kirisutokyō Hoiku Shishin* (“*New Christian Preschool Education Guidelines*”, 2010). Kazuhiro Okuda, Kihoren’s research committee chairman, summarized the features of the first four volumes of guidelines as follows.

The two *Christian Education Guidelines for Small Children* volumes were intended to address the significance and necessity of preschool education and to provide a general direction for putting it into practice at a time when the educational role of kindergartens and nursery schools had yet to be sufficiently recognized. They also aimed to identify the type of “Christian education” that small children should receive.

The *Christian Preschool Education Guidelines* was written with a view to the environments that children at the time would be exposed to and to

their future growth, and with an urgent sense of the need to restore to childcare environments the richness of scope that the word “childcare” embodies, including education and sensitivity. In the revised edition of *Christian Preschool Education Guidelines*, our wish was to seek modes of childcare that would allow children, their caretakers, and parents to all grow together in the increasingly complex environments children were exposed to. In these two sets of guidelines, thought was also given to the “public good” aspects that should be present in childcare provided by private kindergartens and nursery schools. (*Shin-Kirisutokyō Hoiku Shishin*, p. 2)

This explanation by Okuda divides the four sets of guidelines into two groups, namely the two published in 1965 and 1976 and the two published in 1989 and 2000, and characterizes each of them. The fact that the title of the guidelines was changed from *Yōji...Kyōiku* (“Education...for Small Children”) to *Hoiku* (“Preschool Education”) in 1989 corroborates this classification. When one looks at Japan’s educational system as a whole, it can be concluded that the major changes affecting the environments that children faced took place more than a decade before in the 1970s. In 1971, for example, a report by the Ministry of Education’s Central Council for Education (“*Kyōiku Kaikaku no tame no Kihonteki Shisaku : Kōgo ni okeru Gakkō Kyōiku no Sōgōteki na Kakuju Seibi no tame no Kihonteki Shisaku ni tsuite*”; “Fundamental Measures for Education Reform: Fundamental Measures for the purpose of Comprehensive Expansions and Improvements to be made in future School Education”) called for improvements to educational methods tailored to individual traits, which led to higher gaps in academic achievement among students, and in turn to competence-based systems of selection. Furthermore, *the Megumi ni yotte Ikiru* (“Live by the Grace”) curriculum guidebook compiled by the United Church of Christ in Japan’s Committee on Education in 1971 featured changes

to curricula that were intended not just for those in the church, but for people outside as well. This signified a broadening of the scope of purpose of Christian education, from evangelism aimed at increasing church membership to Christian education as a means of character-building. The 1970s was an era in Japan in which industry had developed and the country had gone through a period of rapid economic growth, and in which most ordinary citizens were beginning to see the fruits of affluence. Concurrent with this development, the aims of education underwent changes: from the populace as a whole to individuals, and from those within church communities to those outside. In addition, as I explore in more detail below, signs of major changes in ways of thinking about preschool educational content were already present in the guidelines themselves in this era.

From the examination above, I would like to postulate that there was a significant turn in the direction that education in Japan took in the 1970s, and for this reason, although it differs from Okuda's classification, I wish to place the four published guidelines into two groups, the first group comprising the guidelines published in 1965, and the second the guidelines published in 1976, 1989, and 2000. In truth, the three volumes that make up the second group each have characteristics that make them distinct from one another, so classifying them into a single group may seem somewhat a stretch. Nevertheless, I consider such differences among the three relatively minor when compared with the 1965 version, so for the scope of this argument I treat them as one group. Furthermore, as a third classification, I introduce into this examination the 2010 *Shin-Kirisutokyō Hoiku Shishin*. My reason for doing so is that these guidelines are the first to reflect an acknowledgement of the fact that non-Christian teachers have come to occupy the majority of educators in Christian preschool education settings, which is clear from the 2004 questionnaire data cited above. Following that, I wish to provide an overview of the changes in the direction that Christian preschool education should take as prescribed by the

guidelines, as well as changes regarding views of children and preschool curricula according to each era classification.

## **2. Modern Japanese society and the features of past Guidelines**

### **2.1. The 1965 *Christian Education Guidelines for Small Children***

The 1950s and 1960s were characterized by a nationwide effort for rebuilding and restoration in the wake of World War II. These decades also overlap Japan's era of rapid economic growth. Symbolic of this level of development was the fact that in 1964 Tokyo hosted the first-ever Olympic Games held in Asia. One of the more consequential developments in the world of Christian education during this period was the return of foreign missionaries to their home countries, and the ensuing sudden necessity for Japanese Christians to manage church congregations, preschool facilities, and denominational/religious schools on their own. In the realm of Christian preschool education, committees were formed chiefly to study very fundamental questions, such as, "What is Christian preschool education?" The major concerns of the churches at the time dealt with how well children could comprehend the Christian faith and with the issue of leading young children to Christianity.

The *Guidelines* made their first appearance in a Christian preschool education setting in 1965. The *Guidelines* themselves speak of young children as "weak in mind and body", and as immature souls "who do not possess the ability to confess their faith". The tract nevertheless says that, in their own way, children are capable of "receiving God's graces, answering, and having faith". Hence, the stated purpose of Christian education is to "bring young children to communion with God as manifest by Jesus Christ, and to guide them to act only in accordance with the will of God", a statement which clearly reveals the intent to proselytize young children (*Yōji no Kirisutokyō Kyōiku Shishin*, p. 4).

In 1956, the Ministry of Education issued a document titled *Yōchien Kyōiku Yōryō* (*Course of Study for Kindergarten*) as a set of guidelines for kindergartens. These guidelines were revised in 1964 and included in their curricula the “six areas” of health, society, nature, language, music, and artistic expression. In the field of Christian preschool education, priority was placed on the ease of applicability in the field, and the preschool educational content was made to conform to the national guidelines. This move would later come under fire and subsequently necessitate major changes in the guidelines the next time they were revised.

## 2.2. The “Guidelines” from 1976 to 2000

The 1970s was a decade in which, after experiencing a phenomenal period of economic growth, a certain focus came to be placed on individual affluence and individual personalities. At the same time, problems with the country’s educational system came to light, such as the excessive emphasis on knowledge-based performance. Ivan Illich’s *Deschooling Society* was translated into Japanese in 1977 (tr. Shūzo Ozawa, Tokyo Sogensha Co.), and Michiko Koyasu’s story *Myunhen no Shōgakusei* (“*Primary School Students in Munich*” Chuokoron-sha, 1975) brought the philosophy of Rudolph Steiner to Japan.

Amid these developments, substantial changes occurred in preschool Christian education. In terms of educational content, rather than conforming to the guidelines outlined for Japanese school education in general as in the previous guidelines, preschool Christian education drew even closer to its own doctrines. This transformation was not limited to the realm of preschool education; rather, it entailed a fundamental change in ways of living.

The 1976 *Zoku Yōji no Kirisutokyō Kyōiku Shishin* states, “(In the 1965 *Guidelines*) there are six fields taught in terms of subjects in preschool settings that tend to have an effect on the lives of young children.” Under Japan’s School Education Act, which has been in force since the end of the Second



World War, kindergartens are seen as “schools” that are hierarchically below primary schools according to law. Nevertheless, with the rising presence of the “deschooling” movement, it can at least be claimed that through preschool educational content, Christian kindergartens offer the potential for advancement alternatives that are different from their public school counterparts. This potential played some part in the change in guideline titles in 1989 from *Yōji...Kyōiku* (“Education...for Small Children”) to *Hoiku* (“Preschool Education”).

“Small children” in the *Guidelines* are characterized as “extremely subjective”, “possessing an undifferentiated facet”, and as “developing extremely rapidly”. And as in the guidelines mentioned above, there is a change in the description of young children, as they are no longer subjects to be guided to faith, but rather to be respected for their autonomy as people who “know the grace of God and accept it”.

Another substantial change is evident in the stated purposes of Christian education. “In Christian education, *all people* should be brought to communion with God as manifest by Jesus Christ, should be led to live only according to the will of God, and should be taught to love their *neighbors*” (emphasis added ; *Zoku Yōji no Kirisutokyō Kyōiku Shishin*, p. 4).

As is clear from the phrases indicating “all people” and “neighbors” above, we should take note not just of Christian education initiatives within churches, but also of those designed to reach people outside. Kindergartens and daycare facilities have ties not only to the relevant churches but also to the larger society. This fact has finally been incorporated into the “Guidelines”.

As stated above, the “areas” of preschool curricula were replaced by “lifestyles”. They refer to the four lifestyles that constitute Christian preschool education : health, communion, exploration, and expression.

Lifestyle of health : Our bodies are gifts from God. They are given life by Him and are precious. We should respect and help one another and work

toward better health mentally and physically.

Lifestyle of expression : It is important to praise God, give thanks, and to pray to Him in our everyday lives.

Lifestyle of communion : One must learn through communion filled with love that God loves us.

Lifestyle of exploration : It is important to be engaged in one's environment, to explore it, and to learn of, fear, and respect God from it. (cf. *Zoku Yojinokirisutokyō kyōiku Shishin*, p. 7-)

Each of these modes of living, while dependent upon one the others, is fundamentally rooted in worship. These lifestyles constitute important, fundamental structures that support Christian preschool education even today.

The material excesses of the “bubble economy” of the late 1980s made it an age to question the true meaning of spiritual fulfillment. In-school violence and suicides caused by bullying were perceived as major social issues at the time. This was an era in which the economic growth of the 1970s resulted in a backlash that began to cause numerous problems in children's lives.

*Kirisutokyō Hoiku Shishin*, published in 1989, addressed the problem of disabled children, a topic that was given scant attention in the previous volume. Furthermore, there is a shift from the traditional focus on childhood development to a focus on children “living in the present”. Also, the term “Christian education” previously used was changed to the term “Christian preschool education (or Christian childcare)” from this volume. Part of the reason behind this change was that there was too much focus in the guidelines on the education of small children, and it was therefore necessary to reassess and restore the potential of preschool education to evaluate, cultivate, and protect children. Christian education as a means of proselytization had largely lost its potency, and aims were focused on the realistic goal of co-existing (with people outside

Christian churches). As stated above, Christian preschool education was based on “four lifestyles”.

Since the second half of the 1990s, Japan has joined the information age society. The age has come in which all kinds of information can be communicated via the Internet. In the context of school education, there was a shift in focus from intellectual prowess to emotional cultivation. Deterioration of academic performance by university students is also pointed out. It was also around this time that the public disclosure of information became the norm, even from schools. At the same time, people saw educational endeavors in a new, tangible light, and sought to substantially increase the quality of those endeavors.

The 2000 *Kaitei Kirisutokyō Hoiku Shishin* sought to reevaluate the methods of Christian preschool education employed thus far. In order to implement richer, more fulfilling forms of preschool education, this set of guidelines called for a process by which curricula would be rethought, reworked, re-implemented, and reassessed, after which the curricula be rethought again to implement a “cyclical process”. (*Kaitei Kirisutokyō Hoiku Shishin*, p. 4)

In addition, although it is in keeping with the four established lifestyles, this work substantially outlined three aspects of practice (“environment, leisure, and lifestyle”; *Kaitei Kirisutokyō Hoiku Shishin*, p. 63), while reaffirming the view of children that they should “live (joyfully) in the moment”. Also given as an aim for Christian preschool education is the rearing of independent-minded people, which indicates a recognition of the potential for preschool education to aid in the development of self-reliant children.

Another aspect that should be noted is the notion that Christian preschool education is “created by Christians and non-Christians together”, something which had not previously been mentioned (*Kaitei Kirisutokyō Hoiku Shishin*, p. 84). By extension, this could be construed to mean the acceptance of non-Christians among those who teach preschool Christianity. Needless to say, they

(i.e., non-Christians) are not able to teach Christianity in preschool settings on their own. Rather, according to the guidelines, they are encouraged to “consult with ministers and pray together with them” and to have the “humility and courage to surrender to God” (*Kaitei Kirisutokyō Hoiku Shishin*, pp. 86–87).

### **3. Characteristics of the 2010 *Shin-Kirisutokyō Hoiku Shishin***

#### **3.1. What is Christian preschool education**

*Shin-Kirisutokyō Hoiku Shishin*, which was published in July 2010, takes on the notion that Christian preschool education is “created by Christians and non-Christians together” that was outlined in the 2000 guidelines. Furthermore, it is written not just with its traditional readership of Christian preschool educators in mind, but also—and perhaps to a greater extent—with young non-Christian teachers in mind. The most notable feature of the work is that in both content and expression it is written with the clear intent of being accessible to non-Christians. The second most prominent feature of the work is its aim of a mode of education that is created together, i.e., in conjunction with educators and parents, and even with members of the local community and elementary schools.

There is, in fact, a definition of Christian preschool education provided in these guidelines, which is defined as follows.

Christian preschool education is :

A situation in which each and every child, having been given life by God, is reared in Jesus Christ with God’s love and grace, lives in the moment with joy and thanks, and as a consequence cultivates the fundamentals of living needed for a lifetime. To nurture an independent human being capable of creating a world and society with which he may peacefully coexist, he, together with his educator, in communion with Jesus Christ,

works together with intent, continuously, and upon proper reflection. (*Shin-Kirisutokyō Hoiku Shishin*, p. 23)

In short, Christian preschool education is preschool education conducted with the help of Jesus Christ. Elaborations on the above would include, for example, life given by God (mankind as God's creation), the love and grace of God as revealed by Jesus Christ (the life of Christ), a society and world that people living in harmony with others (God's vision for His kingdom), and other essential elements of the Bible. In addition, among the multiple purposes of Christian preschool education is the creation of a peaceful world in which people live together harmoniously and, to that purpose, the nurturing of the precious, God-given lives of children and the facilitation of their self-reliance.

Christian preschool education is seen in the guidelines as lives of infants and small children as before. However, in addition to the four modes of life presented above, the "three aspects of practice", namely the environment, leisure, and lifestyle, outlined in the 2000 guidelines, plus the element of culture, are given as the fundamentals of preschool education. More specifically, in this version of the guidelines, the environment, leisure, lifestyle, and culture are presented as the fundamental educational content for infants, while the traditional four modes of living are given as the fundamentals for young children (*Shin-Kirisutokyō Hoiku Shishin*, p. 43, pp. 59 - 68).

In the following, I examine the conditions necessary for non-Christian educators to understand the purpose and meaning of the above and to put these ideas into practice in a Christian educational setting.

### **3.2. A transformation in the way children are seen**

In the interest of full disclosure, I accepted an offer by Kihoren to be a contributing author to the most recent guidelines (2010). I produced drafts concerning the aims and meaning of Christian preschool education. One of the

questions I kept asking myself during this task was, “What is necessary for a non-Christian preschool educator to provide a Christian education?” This meant thinking about what someone could do besides going to church and cultivating his or her Christian faith. Surprisingly enough, it is not rare for non-Christians at Christian kindergartens or daycare facilities to teach Christianity to children and have those children develop faith in Christianity.

One young non-Christian teacher attending a summer 2010 Christian preschool education workshop related the following anecdote in a questionnaire.

During free play, the children brought me a dead insect. “We should bury it,” they said, so I helped them bury it, and right after we were finished and I started to walk away, they all asked me, as if it was the most natural thing in the world, “Could you please pray for it?” Right then I knew that they believed in God. It was at that very moment I realized that not just services, but everything [about their belief system] was rooted in their Christian preschool education. (August 19, 2010, Japan Baptist Convention workshop questionnaire, Kindergarten M.)

This example demonstrates how children had come to feel the existence of God through their everyday kindergarten education, and through prayer had already found a means to be close to God. For the non-Christian educator, the act of prayer did not stop at the daily prayer service for the children. Instead, it was a day-to-day “educational activity” of sorts, something done regularly at gatherings in the morning and before the children went home, before meals, before going on outings, and before and after all kinds of events. Despite not being religious, prayer was something that the teacher did routinely as part of the job. Still, through the actions initiated by the children, to his or her surprise the non-Christian teacher reported feeling that God existed in the hearts of the children. A similar experience was relayed to me by a mid-level non-

Christian teacher at the kindergarten where I served as principal. That teacher, who was responsible for three year olds, expressed it by saying, “God seems to go straight into the minds of the children.” What is noteworthy here is that a non-Christian, despite not having faith himself or herself, was to his or her surprise conducting “effective” Christian preschool education.

Unfortunately, to the best of my knowledge there is no theory of Christian preschool education in Japan that explains this kind of educational practice. At least since 2004, non-Christians have accounted for the vast majority of teachers (more than about 70 percent) administering Christian preschool education. There is a limit to what can be done when people fail to consider this fact and instead try to solve the situation by just swelling the ranks of Christians.

The 2010 guidelines were the first to recognize humbly the realities of Christian preschool education by non-Christian teachers and to mention the significance of teachers’ willingness to learn of faith from children.

From children to teachers :

There are, from time to time, cases of teachers conversely feeling and receiving the love of God through children, even as the teachers think that they are the ones giving children love in the course of their jobs as educators. Seeing the smiling faces and vigor of children, and watching them grow and change, is a source of encouragement to teachers. It can relieve the fatigue of work and sooth their minds. Without even knowing it, children show in their daily lives how they live under the guidance of God. The capacity in teachers to see the grace of God behind their radiance, vibrancy, and smiles makes interaction with children a much richer experience. *Through themselves, children perform the function of making adults realize God’s love.* (Emphasis added ; *Shin-Kirisutokyō Hoiku Shishin*, p. 21.)

Children are not aware of their belief in God, nor are they conscious Christians. However, in the words of Christ, “Verily I say unto you, whosoever shall not receive the kingdom of God as a little child shall in no wise enter therein” (Luke 18 : 17). Japanese theologian and Barth scholar Yoshiki Tera-zono argues that “child” here does not describe an actual child, but is rather a metaphor for the beginning of new life in people (Newsletter of the Kyushū chapter of Kihoren, No. 78, March 31, 2011, p. 4). Nevertheless, as we have seen in the two examples above, there is little doubt that we as adults should learn from their acceptance and attainment of the kingdom of God. In that sense, one can say that the 2010 guidelines paint a picture of children as embodiments of God’s love. Put differently, in the 1965 guidelines, children are pictured as recipients of Christian education and Christian teachings, but in the guidelines published from 1976 to 2000, they are pictured on more of an equal footing with adults in that both are to be guided by Christ. In the 2010 guidelines, however, one can see yet another transition : children are recognized as important for their ability to show adults the spirit of Christ.

## **4. Issues for a new era in preschool Christian education**

### **4.1. The significance of Christian sympathizers**

The conventional stance taken in Christian education, in which all non-Christians are “seekers” subject to proselytization, may not be the right one in this age in which preschool Christian education is conducted by non-Christians. Referring to non-Christians as “unbelievers” is likewise undesirable because this word carries with it connotations of people who are insufficient to be Christians. People who demonstrate an understanding of Christianity, enjoy their jobs as preschool teachers of Christianity, and who personally agree with the values and ethics of Christianity are Christian sympathizers, and are distinguished from people who are uninterested or even opposed to Christianity. Kat-



sumi Matsumura discussed Christian sympathizers more than 50 years ago. Matsumura defined them as “people who have an understanding of and sympathy toward the truth of Christianity and the gospels and who help Christians”. Furthermore, he argues that sympathizers act as a kind of “buffer zone” and “place of transition” between Christianity and the world of nonbelievers (Matsumura, p. 396).

In a Kihoren Research Committee Report, Okuda recognizes the importance of this group of people, noting, “It is possible to argue that Christian preschool education is entrusted to young people—whom we might call Christian sympathizers—who are interested in Christianity but do not wish to become too deeply involved with a church” (Kirisutokyō Hoiku Kenkyūkai; “Christian Preschool Education Conference” proceedings, pp. 113 – 114).

Christian sympathizers are, on one hand, considered by churches to be seekers who have not yet come to the faith, but on the other hand, as teachers of Christianity at kindergartens and daycare centers they play key roles and take on major responsibilities in the development of Christian faith in preschool children. One point that has been made is that the only reason people not of the Christian faith are able to teach Christianity is that the learners are preschool children, i.e., are very young (Jun Fukaya, “Kirisutokyō Shimpa-sō no Ichizuke ni kan-suru Ichi-kōsatsu”; “Observations on the Position of Christian Sympathizers”, general research presentation, meeting of the Japan Society of Christian Education, Hokuriku Gakuin University, May 30, 2009). That theological and biblical debate, however, is beyond the scope of this paper. What should be identified as a practical issue in Christian preschool education is the necessity—not just for Christian sympathizers but for Christians as well—of creating environments conducive to acquiring the knowledge and skills needed to actually experience Christianity in preschool education and to teach preschool children the love and truth of Jesus Christ.

#### 4.2. The formation of “Christian educational spaces”

Unlike churches, Christian daycare centers and kindergartens in Japan have a reach in their activities that extends to both churches and society at large, as well as educational principles whose centers are rooted in both. In fact, the “Guidelines for Nursing at Nursery Schools” and the “Course of Study for Kindergartens in Japan”, which are guidelines issued by the government, serve as the general standards, while the *Kirisutokyō Hoiku Shishin* (“*Christian Preschool Education Guidelines*”) provides standards for education rooted in Christianity. Kanzo Uchimura, who founded the Non-church Movement in Japan, advocated in an article in *Seisho no Kenkyū* (*Biblical Study*; 1921) honoring the “two J’s”: Jesus and Japan (Uchimura, p. 49). It is true that one cannot make simple comparisons of Japan nearly 100 years ago with Japan today. Nevertheless, at present, preschools and daycare centers with recognized religious institution status associated with churches are closing their doors one after another. And as these schools seek and attain incorporated school status instead and are therefore forced to operate under the constraints of government-imposed standards, practicing the educational principles of honoring Jesus while honoring Japan is no easy matter.

For these reasons, what we should think about is to create places for the study of Christianity in kindergartens and daycare centers. In the latter half of the 1950s, Christian education at preschool facilities or schools in Japan was considered to be an “educational function of churches” (Takasaki, p. 172). At the time, the concept of Christian education for children was thought of in terms of its functions as such, and non-Christian teachers and preschool educators were not included in its scope of purpose. It is necessary to stress the need to rethink preschool and general Christian education in a way that recognizes the potential place for kindergartens and daycare facilities as forums not only for children but for teachers and other adults to learn about Christianity.

This is important because at today’s Christian preschool education facili-

ties, where non-Christians make up the majority of teachers, there is a logical need for adults not only to feel the love of God through children, but also to learn about Christianity as they teach the Biblical stories to children, pray with them, and instruct them. In the same vein, if Christian educators could also deepen their knowledge of Christianity in the context of professional educational settings, rather than merely attending church, they could deepen their faith in the process and become better equipped to advise their Christian sympathizer colleagues. In that respect, in the words of Donald A. Schön, teachers, regardless of whether they are Christians or non-Christians, should be “reflective practitioners”.

There are at least two conceivable elements necessary for creating such spaces conducive to Christian education. One is the presence of symbols and forms indicating that the place exists as a Christian space. This would include crosses, paintings of Christ and scenes from Biblical stories, calendars, etc. Elements like these rich in audiovisual imagery are media from which children in particular feel an affinity with Christianity that is stronger than what words could otherwise offer, and children can feel the existence of a visible God. The other element is the human environment made up of the teaching staff. They do not all have to be Christian. They may include Christian sympathizers, but they should possess systems of values and ethics that are consistent with Christianity. Such people are often said to have the “aroma of Christ” (cf. Corinthians II, 2 : 15).

The theoretical foundations for the formation of such spaces should be discussed in the future. Concepts such as John Westerhoff’s “religious socialization”, O.F. Bollnow’s “pedagogical atmosphere”, and Philip Jackson’s “hidden curriculum” would all prove to be resources for hints from a pedagogical perspective.

## Conclusion

No matter how well-prepared in terms of curricula and facilities, nothing is better than a good human environment in the field of education. For that reason, it is essential to provide the conditions necessary for non-Christian preschool educators to teach comfortably. These educators should be accepted as “Christian sympathizers”, freed for the time being from any psychological pressure to become Christians, and should be exposed in a natural manner in preschool to opportunities for study and prayer provided by Christians such as the principal or ministers. This is the first step in weathering these times.

## References :

- Bollnow, Otto Friedrich (1999). *Anthropologische Pädagogik*, (tr. Hamada Tadahide) *Ningengakutekinimita Kyōikugaku*, (revised) Tamagawadaigaku Shuppanbu.
- Illich, Ivan (1977). *Deschooling Society* (tr. Shūzo Ozawa), Tokyo Sogensha Co..
- Kirisutokyō Hoikurenmei Kenkyūhinkai (1965). *Yōji no Kirisutokyō Kyōiku Shishin*, (*Christian Education Guidelines for Small Children*), Kirisutokyō Hoikurenmei.
- Kirisutokyō Hoikurenmei Kenkyūhinkai (1976). *Zoku Yōji no Kirisutokyō Kyōiku hishin* (*Further Christian Education Guidelines for Small Children*), Kirisutokyō Hoikurenmei.
- Kirisutokyō Hoikurenmei Kenkyūhinkai (1989). *Kirisutokyō Hoiku Shishin* (*Christian Christian Preschool Education Guidelines*), Kirisutokyō Hoikurenmei.
- Kirisutokyō Hoikurenmei Kenkyūhinkai (2000). *Kaitei Kirisutokyō Hoiku Shishin* (*Christian Preschool Education Guidelines —Revised*), Kirisutokyō

Hoikurenmei.

Kirisutokyō Hoiku Kenkyūkai (2006). “Christian Preschool Education Conference” proceedings, Kirisutokyō Hoikurenmei.

Kirisutokyō Hoikukenkyuhkai (2010). *Shin-Kirisutokyō Hoiku Shishin*, Kirisutokyō Hoikurenmei.

Kirisutokyō-Nenkan Henshūbu (2006). 2007nen Kirisutokyōnenkan, Kirisuto-shinbunsha.

Koyasu, Michiko (1975). *Myunhen no Shōgakusei (Primary School Students in Munich)*, Chuokoron-sha.

Matsumura, Katsumi (1958). *Shuhkyō to Kyohiku (Religion and Education)*, Singakukenkyū Vol. 7, Department of Theology Kansai Gakuin University.

NihonKirisutokyōdan Kyōikuiinkai (1971). *Meguminiyotteikirukyōan (“Live by the Grace” curriculum) Guidebook*, Kyōshi no Tomo, Feb. NihonKirisutokyōdan Shuppanyoku.

Schön, Donald A. (1983). *The Reflective Practitioner*, Basic Books, Inc., USA.

Takasaki, Takeshi and Ohta, Toshio (ed.) (1958). *Kirisutokyō Kyōikukouza II*, Shinkyōshuppansha.

Uchimura, Kanzo (1971). *Biblical Study*, Nov. No.256, Seishonokennyū Fukkokubankankōkai.

Westerhoff, John H. (1976). *Will our children have faith?* The Seabury Press, Inc., New York.

Division of Childhood Education  
Department of Human Sciences  
Seinan Gakuin University