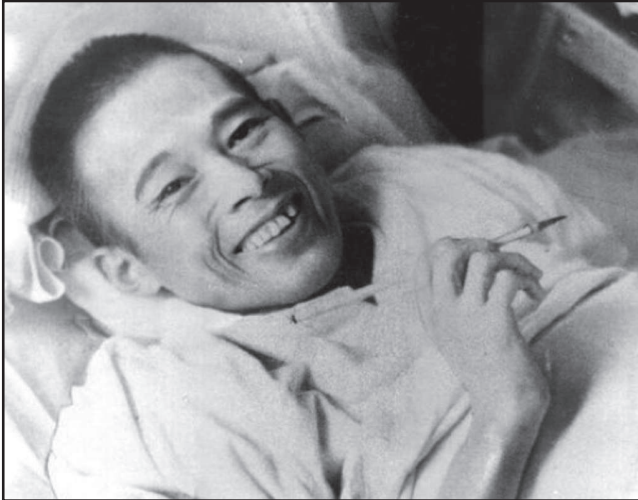


FAITH IN MEDICINE

THE LIFE OF NAGAI TAKASHI

PIA JOLLIFFE



On August 9 1945 the atomic bomb was dropped on Nagasaki. In an instant, the bomb killed tens of thousands of people. Among the survivors was Nagai Takashi (his surname Nagai is given first in the Japanese manner), the then Dean of Radiology at Nagasaki University. This man of heroic virtue offered his life for the proclamation of peace and justice amidst Japan's war and post war society.

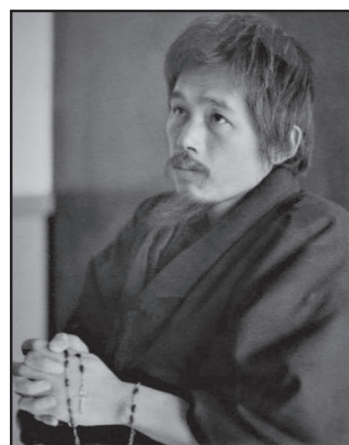
Nagai Takashi was born on 3 February 1908 in Matsue, a village located in Shimane prefecture, Japan. His grandfather, Nagai Fumitaka was a practitioner of traditional Chinese herb medicine (*kampo yaku*) and his father, Nagai Noboru, studied Western medicine and worked as a medical doctor in a local hospital. Nagai Takashi's mother Nagai Tsune was a member of an old samurai family. Takashi was her first born son. At the time of delivery her husband was on sick call and Tsune found herself alone with the birth attendant. Labour was difficult and Tsune struggled with pressing the baby out. The birth attendant found that the head of the child was too big and suggested crushing Takashi's head. At this moment the mother vehemently opposed the killing of her child and after a while indeed gave birth to her son (Glynn 1988: 18).

Takashi grew up with the teachings of Shintoism. After graduating from high school, he entered in 1928 at the age of 20 years Nagasaki Medical College. During his time as a medical student he became interested in Christianity. So as to learn more about Christian life style, he started renting a room with the Moriyama family whose ancestors were local leaders of the "hidden" Church throughout the Tokugawa period (1603-1867). After his graduation in 1932 Nagai suffered an acute infection of the middle ear. This accident had serious consequences for his future medical career because his hearing turned out to be permanently impaired. This, in turn, meant that work with a stethoscope would be impossible. Therefore, Nagai Takashi decided to specialize in Radiology.

From 1933 to 1934 Nagai served as an army physician in Northeast China, known to foreigners as Manchuria, which was invaded by the Japanese in 1931. Moriyama Midori, the only daughter of his host family in Nagasaki, sent Takashi a Catholic Catechism to Manchuria. Takashi subsequently studied the teaching of the Church. After his return to Japan he converted to Catholicism and was baptized on 9 June 1934 taking the baptismal name Paul. He married Moriyama Midori in August of the same year. Takashi and Midori had four children of whom only son Makoto (born in 1935) and daughter Kayano (born in 1941) survived infancy.

After confirmation in 1934, Nagai became a member of the Saint Vincent de Paul Society and served the medical needs of the poor of Nagasaki. He received his doctorate in medicine in 1944. One year later, in June 1945, he was found to be suffering from chronic myeloid leukaemia and was given three more years to live. Two months after this diagnosis, Nagai survived the atomic bombing of Hiroshima whilst at work in the university hospital. Although he suffered from a severed artery on the right side of his head, he engaged with his colleagues in medical relief work. His first-hand observations of the experience of the atomic bomb have been translated and published in English under the title *Atomic Bomb Rescue and Relief Report* (Nagai 2000).^[3]

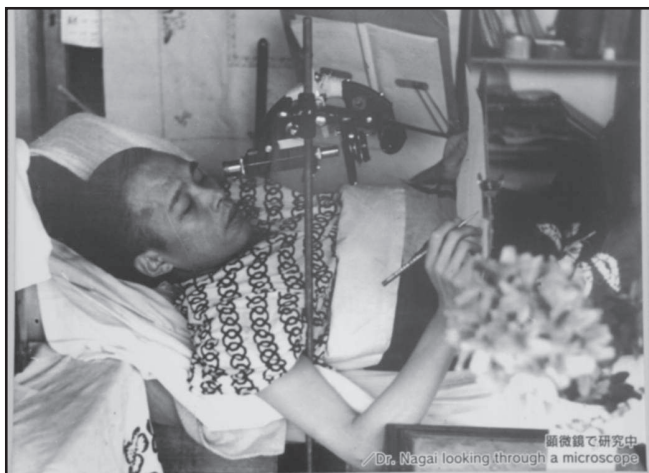
Sadly, Nagai's wife Midori did not survive the atomic bombing. When Takashi returned to the ruins of their home on 11 August he retrieved Midori's remains, including a melted rosary which she held in her carbonized hands. Their children Makoto and Kayano happily survived the atomic disaster because at the time of the atomic blast they were staying with relatives on the countryside outside of Nagasaki.



After the end of the war, Nagai and his two children resumed their lives in Nagasaki's Urakami district. In 1946, Nagai completed his well known book *Nagasaki no kane* (*The Bells of Nagasaki*) which expressed the thoughts and feelings of millions of Japanese in regards to the atomic bombing.

Because Japan was occupied by the US Americans at that time, the publisher who accepted the manuscript for publication had to request from the US censorship office permission to print the book. This permission was not granted until 1949 under the condition that the book carried a number of pages from the U.S. military court's

documentation of the Japanese attack of American bases and of Manila on the Philippines (Glynn 1988: 208-209). In 1948 Nagai moved to a small hut which his friends had built for him. It was called Nyokodo (“As Yourself Hermitage”) and consisted of a small room with an altar, a book case and a bed. Importantly, the hermitage had a view on Urakami Cathedral. The two children lived with relatives close-by Nyokodo and visited their father regularly. Thus bed ridden in his small hut, Nagai wrote most of his thirteen books. He also continued his medical research (see photograph).



He also continued his medical research.

Photo taken by Pia Jolliffe during a visit to the Nagai Takashi Memorial Museum, Mynkodo in December 2017

In May 1950 Nagai Takashi received a gift of a rosary from Pope Pius XII. In his biography of Nagai Takashi, Fr Paul Glynn (1988)^[1] notes that this rosary never left Nagai’s bed until he died holding it on 1 May 1951. In his preface to Fr Glynn’s book the Japanese Catholic author Endō Shūsaku notes:

“Christians and non-Christians alike were deeply moved by Nagai’s faith in Christ that made him like Job of the Scriptures: in the midst of the nuclear wilderness he kept his heart in tranquillity and peace, neither bearing resentment to any man nor cursing God” (Endō 1988: 10)

Indeed, Nagai Takashi was a man who practiced the heroic virtues. A person of heroic virtue typically practices the moral virtues with ease whilst the three theological virtues – faith, hope and charity – are practiced to an eminent degree. Nagai was a man of faith who in the midst of Japan’s war with China found the serenity to read and study the Catechism. As a consequence he became a Christian and put his faith into practice. He did not abandon his belief in the salvific message of Jesus Christ and the Church even in the midst of great personal and social suffering and bereavement. In a speech given on November 23, 1945 during a Requiem Mass at Urakami Cathedral Nagai compared Nagasaki to “the chosen victim, the lamb without blemish, slain as a whole burnt offering on the altar of sacrifice, atoning for the sins of all the nations during World War II” (Nagai quoted in Glynn 1988: 188). He concluded his speech saying “Let us be thankful that Nagasaki was chosen for the whole burnt sacrifice! Let us be thankful that through this sacrifice, peace was granted to the world and religious freedom to Japan” (Nagai

quoted in Glynn 1988: 189-190). Of course, many of his fellow Catholics found it difficult to see – like Nagai Takashi – God’s providence at work even in the atomic bombing. And yet, Nagai repeated his message in subsequent writings (e.g. Nagai 1995) thus touching the hearts and minds of thousands of Japanese citizens, Christian and non-Christian alike.

Because of his heroic virtues and offering of life to God, there exists today among the faithful a considerable interest for the initiation of Takai Nagashi’s beatification process. However, he is not yet officially called a “Servant of God”^[4]. For this to happen, the Congregation for the Causes of Saints needs the Catholic bishops of Japan to clearly explain Nagai’s heroic virtues and thus to ask for an initiation of his beatification process.

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- [4] Congregation for the Causes of Saints, personal correspondence, 13 February 2018.

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