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# So I Went to Manzanar



A sermon delivered by the  
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An "inside" view of life at the Japanese  
Relocation Center, Manzanar, California

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## SO I WENT TO MANZANAR

There is no problem in America upon which there has been more heat and less light shed than that of the Japanese relocation situation. The expressed attitudes toward our evacuated Japanese-Americans range all the way from fanatical bitterness and hatred to the cynical affirmation that "A Jap is a Jap." With very few exceptions the Press has accelerated and intensified this feeling until the announcement that one is to speak on the subject brings veiled threats and warnings that he is dealing with "a hot potato."

If anyone ought to be tolerant and understanding, even in the heat of war propaganda, it is the one who call himself Christian. Yet we are finding its difficult to reconcile the so called Christian attitudes of some folk with the mind of Christ. It is, however, a source of inexpressible satisfaction to know that thousands of Christian men and women have kept their sense of balance and fair play in relation to this delicate Japanese relocation problem.

At this point I am asking you to do something extremely difficult. For some it may require patience, for others the exercise of considerable will power. You are being asked to set aside your prejudices for the next half hour—and this is not an easy thing to do if your sons are fighting in the Pacific war area. Dismiss from your mind the propaganda you have read on the subject, and let us consider the suggested problem solely in terms of human values and human beings.

It is unfortunate that so many Americans see no difference between the Japanese war lords and soldiers who have been trained to kill, and the Japanese who have lived peaceably in our midst for a generation. It is assumed that there is inherent in the Japanese character an element of distrust, sadism and brutality that is not to be found in any other race. This assumption, of course, is based on propaganda or the statements of so called "experts," rather than upon the testimony of science. The fact is that science has well exploded the theory of racial superiority or inferiority. The one thousand most brilliant men in the world would include representatives from every race and creed. The assumption that God would put something vicious into the Japanese character that is

found in no other people is ridiculous, to say the least. Do not misunderstand—I am offering no defense for Japanese militarism, brutality or sadism. The thing I am saying is that this is a product of training, environment and national culture, and is no more true of every Japanese than it is true that every American is a criminal. Kagawa, the distinguished Japanese-Christian, is everywhere recognized as one of the world's truly great Christian leaders.

The history of Japan is one of a feudal system, a system in which the chief end of man has been loyalty. Most Caucasians disburse their emotions through occasional anger, grumbling, individual achievement and effort, etc. This is not true of the Japanese people; they store up and discharge their emotions all at once. There is very little in Japanese life—in Japan—that offers a harmless diffusion of emotion; rather, everything represses, thwarts and frustrates it. Thus the Japanese people have but little opportunity for self-expression, simply because they do not exist as individuals. They exist as a family unit, a unit that can know but one loyalty—the state. It was Confucius who suggested that younger sons should obey older sons, that older sons should obey fathers, and fathers their fathers. The psychologist will explain, then, that in this simplicity and severity of Japanese life seem to be the forces that produce powerful explosions of pent-up emotion. Men who carry themselves with dignity when sober, go mad when drunk. War, likewise, gives outlet to this emotion. It so intoxicates the mind that disciplined soldiers, when put on their own, will go berserk and commit atrocities that stagger the imagination.

Mr. H. G. Bouvenkirk, our host at Manzanar, was stationed in Japan for sixteen years as a missionary for the Presbyterian Church. He was on a boat heading for America when Pearl Harbor was attacked. The ship returned to Japan and Mr. Bouvenkirk was imprisoned. During the succeeding months he was transferred from one prison to another, and states that it is impossible to generalize concerning the treatment of prisoners of war in Japan. In one prison the treatment is good, in another fair, in still another bad—depending upon the personnel, their background experience and training. Poor conditions in one prison camp may be counteracted by gracious treatment in another.

There is increasing evidence that the common people of Japan are becoming extremely restless under the oppressive war party.

Wataru Kaji, antimilitarist Japanese who has worked with the Chinese government among Japanese prisoners since 1938, has warned that unless the United States and Great Britain "alter their present propaganda tactics they will not be able to cash in on widespread Japanese disaffection for militarists." (L.A. Times, 5-7-44). According to Kaji, the Japanese military maintains its hold on the people through oppression rather than loyalty, that many would resist but there is no other place to which one can turn. The failure of the Allies to make any differentiation between the Japanese people and the militarists leads to such despondency that entire families have committed suicide. We are not to be blinded by sheer prejudice to the fact that there are many good, yes Christian, people in Japan, just as there are in Germany and Italy.

In 1861 there was one Japanese in America. In fact, it was not until 1880 that Japan permitted the migration of her people to America. By 1898 two thousand had come in response to a west coast labor shortage, and by 1900 this number had increased to ten thousand. They were, of course, received with open arms, though it is interesting to note that the first anti-Japanese book came off the press in 1901. During the first World War resentment against the Japanese was completely lacking since Japan was our ally. Following the war pressure groups began their work, which finally resulted in the passing of the Exclusion Act of 1923. The American Legion, since its inception in 1919, has never once failed to pass an annual resolution against the Japanese-Americans, according to a most illuminating article in the April 1944 issue of Fortune magazine. Says Fortune, "It did not require a war to make the farmers, the Legion, the Native Sons and Daughters of the Golden West, and the politicians resent and hate the Japanese-Americans." For decades the Hearst press has campaigned against the so called "Yellow Peril" (1% of the total population) within the state of California. When war came Hearst's campaign of hate and bitterness broke all bounds. It continues unabated to this day. The motive behind this opposition has been largely economic, since the Japanese grew vegetables on 70 million dollars worth of California land. The result—keen competition.

Since 1881 a generation of Japanese has grown up in America which knows no ideological loyalty to Japan. They have grown up in a Democracy, not under a Feudal system. Their education and environment has differed from that of their ancestors. A friend

high in government service tells me that one of Japan's greatest disappointments of the war has been in the fact that Japanese-Americans did not rise up to paralyze the war effort on the Pacific Coast. Someone immediately says, "Well, we didn't give them a chance." But . . . we did! It was not until March 29th, 1942 that our 110,000 Japanese-Americans were herded into assembly centers nearly four months after Pearl Harbor. My friend, Richard B. Hood, FBI Chief for this area, tells me that within a few days after Pearl Harbor some 1,500 potential Japanese saboteurs had been rounded up. Then followed the removal of all enemy aliens and citizens alike from such strategic areas as Terminal Island, and spots near war plants, power stations, etc.

Those imprisoned were Japanese language school teachers, representatives of Japanese commercial firms, those with criminal records and other suspects. Some 108,000 of these people were judged to be loyal—two-thirds of them were American citizens, born in the U.S. The fact that not a single act of sabotage was committed on the west coast prior to the evacuation in March, 1942 indicates that the Department of Justice knew what it was doing. 108,000 Japanese-Americans knew but one loyalty—the United States of America.

The Army, in twenty-eight days, rigged up primitive barracks in fifteen assembly centers to provide temporary quarters. Each evacuee made a mattress of straw, took his place in the crowded barracks and began his adjustment to the new life. A civilian agency, the War Relocation Authority, was created, whose job was to hold the people until they could be relocated in orderly fashion. The WRA has taken a terrific beating for thus far having relocated 17,000 Japanese-Americans through the midwest and east. In doing so the WRA is fulfilling the function for which it was created. Of the 17,000 thus far released not one has been convicted on anti-American activity. Under pressure of the Hearst and other papers the general public has closed its eyes to these facts. The Dies Committee has fumed at the WRA. Herman Eberharter, a member of the Dies Committee, said of its report, "It is prejudiced and most of its statement are not proven." The Committee closed its so called investigation by suggesting three policies, all of which the WRA had already adopted. The Committee accused the Manzanar Relocation Center of pampering the in-

ternees. To this day not one member of the Dies Committee has set foot within the Center.

To begin with the internees were bitter over their loss of freedom, land, homes and money. They were aware that German and Italian aliens had not been imprisoned; in fact, the 17,000 Japanese in other sections of the country had not been locked up unless the FBI suspected them. This bitterness has largely been supplanted by a hope for the future. Rev. Seiya Sakai, former pastor of the Japanese Christian Church in Glendale, expressed the sentiment of many in saying, "My people now realize that this internment is a product of war. As Japanese it was to be expected that something like this would happen to us. We are not complaining. We believe in America's sense of justice and fair play and are living for the future."

Manzanar is one of nine relocation centers. Like the others it is located in the midst of a lonely desert valley. The breath-taking Sierra Nevada mountains are to the west. Said Mr. Sakai, "When we first came here and were discouraged, we lifted our eyes unto the hills and from there came our strength." At present there are six thousand internees at Manzanar, some twelve hundred having been already relocated from this Center. Miss Nogahama, one of the splendid girls from the Glendale Church, is to enter our Methodist Kansas City Training School within a few weeks. Those who have been relocated are primarily young people. The older folk are more reticent about leaving the Centers, and there are several reasons for this: 1. Having lost everything it isn't easy to begin life anew in a strange section of the country. 2. The resentment of public opinion makes normal living difficult. 3. The Centers provide security for the present at least, so why leave security for uncertainty?

Those who leave the Center are fortified with official papers, a numbered identification card bearing pictures and fingerprints. They get their railroad fare, \$3 a day travel money, and if they have no savings receive \$25 in cash. It requires a great deal of courage to enter a society that rejected you just two years ago. The Center Bulletin Board lists many attractive jobs in the midwest and east. Illinois has taken more relocated Japanese than any other state—4,000 of them. Many of these people find their way into fine professions. In New York they eat in any restaurant,

and there has been very little prejudice manifested against them in Chicago. This consideration encourages others to try their luck in the outside world. Tacked to the Bulletin Board is this notice from the Ethiopian Selective Service: "Married men may bring wives to cook for them. Men without wives bring any available women with them. Anyone found at home will be hung." These young folks have not lost their sense of humor.

Many "patriots" are fretting over the eventual return of the Japanese to Southern California. The fact is that perhaps not more than one-third of these people will desire to return here. One lovely Japanese-American girl, a high school graduate, expressed it this way, "In the midwest and east we are finding professions open to us that denied us entrance in California. Here we have been a servant people, gardeners and laundry workers. At the close of the war why should we turn our backs upon these promising careers to again become gardeners in California? The Glendale Japanese-Americans do not anticipate enough of their people will want to return here to warrant the continuance of the Christian Church, thus they are giving serious consideration to disposition of the property.

The WRA Administration, according to the Rev. Mr. Bouvenkirk, has been amazed at the basic honesty and frankness of these people. Most of the staff consists of Caucasian leadership. Every able bodied man must work, as must the women if not hindered by family responsibilities. Many industries are represented within the Center: there is the shoe shop, clothing manufacturing and re-conditioning division, barber shop, co-op store, etc. We were interested in watching the Japanese make Tofu, a favorite delicacy of these people. It is made from the milk of the crushed soya bean, and from the residue of the bean a soya sauce is made which gives flavor to the Tofu. From 4 to 8 A.M. daily it is processed, though it is not possible for all mess halls to serve Tofu on the same day. We also watched the manufacture of mattresses. California grown cotton is used and blown into the mattress. Also, there is a government experimental station, operated by Japanese Americans, for Guayule, the widely publicized rubber plant. A most interesting piece of work is being done at this point.

The maximum wage is \$19 per month (doctor's salary), the minimum is \$12 and the average \$16. There is a clothing allowance

of \$3.75 per month for each adult. Medical care and meals are provided by the Government. Lest this sounds too attractive, imagine a physician, distinguished in his profession, who lived in comfort and luxury before the war, now huddled in a small room with his family, and serving under a Caucasian of lesser accomplishments.

The people are jammed together in frame barracks. A family of seven has an "apartment" (one room) which would measure about 20 by 25 feet. It is a bare room, without partitions. Your only privacy from the next family is achieved by hanging a flimsy curtain between the crowded beds. Scrap lumber is used for furniture and a box serves as a table. Young children do not get the proper rest at night because of this lack of privacy, thus there is considerable restlessness among the youngsters. This creates a disciplinary problem for the school teachers. There is no running water in the barracks, no cooking facilities or toilet facilities. In spite of the unending wind and dust, the barracks are spotless, typical Japanese cleanliness. Clothes are stuffed under the beds, or on shelves if scrap lumber is available. Run off water from the nearby Sierra Nevada has been utilized, thus irrigation has made possible attractive lawns, and a picturesque park in the center of the camp. It is remarkable what these people have been able to create from practically nothing.

The hospital facilities are quite complete and new equipment is being added as time goes on. We were fascinated by the children—kids are kids whatever the race may be. It is pretty difficult to look into the faces of these lovely little ones and think all of the mean things about them that you read in the papers. We visited a young lad who was isolated from the others. We inquired as to the trouble and he grinned, "Measeles!" (Our retreat was hasty). The Children's Village for orphans houses fifty-two young people at present, ranging in age from a few months to seventeen. Orphaned youngsters are brought here from other Centers. It might be added that oil heat is used throughout the buildings and barracks.

Many activities are planned for the evacuees by the Administration and the Rev. Mr. Bouvenkirk (who is at Manzanar under the auspices of the Presbyterian Church). The activities include sports, forums, panel discussions, night school courses, hobby interests and so on. The night we were at the Center a panel discussion

was held between two Caucasian members of the staff and two fine Japanese-Americans. The discussion topic was, "The Japanese in America." The history of the people here was traced, with particular emphasis upon the adjustment that is taking place in family life. This family life adjustment is perhaps the most important transition that is now taking place in the Center. Of this I will have more to say next week in relation to our Family Sunday theme. Also, an insight into the Tule Lake situation will be given, since it is closely identified with the family pattern.

The Museum contains a display of the creative genius of these people. Here one will find inspiring examples of what can be accomplished when individual initiative is encouraged as it is here in America. Articles of every kind and description are to be seen. One budding genius decided to illustrate posture—good, bad, and medium—by pictures and poetry. Under the first picture one reads:

"First with slinky backward crouch, enters Debutante Sylvia slouch  
Up with hips and down with seat, here is Sylvia all complete  
Saggy shoulders and sunken chest, poor old diaphragm quite depressed  
Who is Sylvia?—She's a sight!

So long as a people keep their sense of humor there is hope for them.

I can say to you very honestly that no one who has visited a Relocation Center, seen the living space and eaten the meals could apply the word "pampering" to the WRA's administration of the camps. We ate our meals with the evacuees. We were guests of the Japanese-Christian colony for dinner Tuesday evening. The menu included rice, fish, a vegetable called goba, soya sauce, tea and an apple. The next noon we ate rice, a "chow mein" mixture, cabbage salad, soya residue, bread and tea. The food is adequate though monotonous. However, the evacuees think the food is O.K. As one girl put it, "The food is satisfactory; it's the way it is prepared!" The meals are not tasty or appetizing, and there is little variation of menu. There is very little sickness within the Center, which indicates that the food is apparently nourishing, though it is on the border-line of decent nutrition. The "luxury meals" you've read about just don't exist. There is no butter at any time. Oleo-margarine is served for breakfast only. Milk is served the youngsters only—when it is available. We visited the refrigeration department where the fresh meat is kept. The Caucasian staff—Ad-

ministration officers and Military Police—enjoy grade one meats, while the Japanese-Americans get that which ranges from grade three to six—meat that is suitable for stewing only. Thus when you hear of "delicious steaks" being served at Manzanar remember that it is sustaining the officers and MP's rather than the evacuees. Some one-third of the food requirements are grown on the 350 acres under irrigation at the Center, thus reducing the actual cash outlay for food to thirty-one cents per day per person.

It can be said that many people here are enjoying a social life and educational opportunities that they have never known before—this in spite of the fact that not one of us would care to change places with them. No one has ever sought to escape from the Center. Manzanar is considered to be one of the very best of the relocation centers, and certainly even this Center is far from ideal considering the breakdown in family life and traditions that is resulting from confinement here.

That this is and will continue to be one of America's most pressing problems is beyond question. As far as the FBI, WRA and Army are concerned, the loyalty of those remaining at the Center is unquestioned; in fact, the younger men are now being drafted into the Army. For instance, you will find here the Japanese-Americans who boycotted the Japanese Embassy in San Francisco when the Nanking incident became known. Here are the young men and women who day after day boycotted the San Pedro and San Francisco docks when "patriots" were shipping scrap metal and aviation fuel to Japan. These Japanese-Americans protested with all the earnestness of their souls because they sensed what was coming. They understood the psychology behind the military mind of Japan and realized that disaster would be upon us if we persisted in this policy. Here at Manzanar you will find over eight hundred Christians, and many others are being converted to our faith as the weeks pass. Here is that brilliant young man, who prior to the war was one of the most respected members of the Inglewood Chamber of Commerce. Listen to his stirring words, "I have always been an American, and will always be an American. I know no other loyalty!"

It is time, then, that Christians began to think intelligently and sympathetically concerning the human values and lives at stake here. Too long we have given lip-service to Jesus of Nazareth

without incorporating into our attitudes and actions His understanding of kindness, love and forgiveness which we have so loudly proclaimed. Permit me to close with a thought-provoking statement from the issue of Fortune to which reference has already been made:

“When future historians review the record, they may have difficulty reconciling the Army’s policy in California with that pursued in Hawaii. People of Japanese blood make up more than one-third of the Hawaiian Island’s population, yet no large-scale evacuation was ordered after Pearl Harbor and Hickam Field became a shambles. Martial law was declared . . . the Department of Justice and military authorities went about their business, rounded up a few thousand suspects. In Hawaii, unlike California, there was no strong political or economic pressure demanding evacuation of the Japanese-Americans. Indeed, had they been removed the very foundation of peacetime Hawaiian life, sugar and pineapple growing, would have been wrecked. General Delos C. Emmons, who commanded the Hawaiian district in 1942 (and now commands our Western Defense zone), has said of the Japanese-Americans there, ‘They added materially to the strength of the area.’ By continuing to keep American citizens in ‘protective custody’ the U. S. is holding to a policy as ominous as it is new. The American custom in the past has been to lock up the citizen who commits violence, not the victim of his threats and blows.”

To sum it up, then, in the words of one splendid Japanese-American at Manzanar, “We have been here for two years now. We have adjusted ourselves to what probably was a necessity. We hold no bitterness toward anyone. We believe America’s sense of justice will do for us that which is right. We do not ask to return to California cities now, but we pray we shall not be denied that right at the close of the war.”

Let us pray God that this young man and the many others like him will realize this great hope.