

Missing Japanese Man Suspected Victim of Kidnapping and Faith-Breaking

Dan Fefferman
October 4, 2011



The Martyrs of Nagasaki depicts the 26 converts and missionaries of Christianity who were crucified on February 5, 1597.

Religious-freedom activists have expressed concern about a new case of a suspected kidnapping and secret confinement of a Unification Church member in Japan. The International Coalition for Religious Freedom (ICRF) announced the disappearance of the 32-year-old man from the city of Nagoya in Japan's Aichi Prefecture. Mr. "K.M." has not been seen by fellow church members since September 5, 2011.

Local church leaders have reported Mr. "K.M." as a missing person to the police. His place of work also reported him absent, and colleagues from the local Okazaki Unification Church, with which he is affiliated, found his residence empty. However, Japanese police routinely reject such reports on the grounds that a church pastor is not a relative. The situation is exacerbated by the fact that in hundreds of such cases, it is the victim's relatives who kidnap and confine him, with the intent to force him or her out of the church.



A Monument in Kyushu, Japan, dedicated to the 26 Christian Martyrs.

The practice of kidnapping religious believers for "deprogramming" was widespread in the United States in the 1970s and 1980s but came to an end after courts made it clear that such actions were illegal, even when committed by family members. Scientologists, Krishna devotees, Pentecostal Christians and Unificationists were among the victims. Today, the Unification Church remains highly controversial in Japan, and the nation's traditional values hold that "family matters" — such as spousal abuse, rape, incest

and forcing an adult relative to renounce his religion — should be kept private.

The issue of religious kidnapping in Japan recently has gained international attention as the result of the case of Mr. Toru Goto, who was held against his will in a secret location in Tokyo and another city for 12 years because he refused to renounce his Unificationist faith. He sued the alleged perpetrators, who include relatives and a Christian minister, and the case is currently being tried in a Japanese civil court.

Out of respect for his privacy, the church is not releasing the current victim's full name, but accredited researchers may learn additional details by contacting ICRF.

Scholars of Japanese history note that forced conversion has a long history peculiar to Japan. In February, 1597, 26 saints were martyred in Nagasaki. That marked the beginning of the era of persecution in Japan. Mr. Yakichi Kataoka, a Christian history scholar, states the following: "Three hundred years of Christian persecution under the Roman Empire is well known in world history. But even that was not as severe as Christian persecution under the Tokugawa regime. In the case of the Roman Empire, some emperors were generous and there were periods of time when persecution was discontinued. There were Popes and priests who survived and performed rituals. But the Tokugawa family never stopped persecuting during their 250-year reign, continued to search from corner to corner and made sure they got rid of all of them until there was not a single living priest for seven long generations." [Investigating Japan in the Age of Geographical Discovery---Tragedy of Christians, Shogakukan P.36]

Mr. Kataoka continues: "The reason why Christian persecution in Japan was incomparable to others was that persecutors didn't allow believers to become martyrs, but chose to keep torturing them until they abandoned their faith. Orfanel, a missionary who came to Japan in 1607, reported after witnessing the persecution at the time: 'It was not so difficult to just kill all the Christians but the persecutors decided to force them to give up their faith. Just killing them would mean they could not control the Christians and would result in humiliation and defeat on their part. The persecutors only wanted Christians to obey their orders.'" [op. cit P.40]

From a press release of the International Coalition for Religious Freedom and the Japanese Unificationist website: /kidnapping.jp/index-e.html