

An Historical Ordination

Reported by ROBERT INGLIS

ON JUNE 11, 1942 an ecclesiastical council of Congregational Churches and ministers assembled at the Tanforan Assembly Center at the Tanforan race track near San Bruno just south of San Francisco. Tanforan Assembly Center is a temporary concentration camp for Japanese aliens and citizens who have been evacuated from their homes in the military zone along the Pacific coast.

The council was called cooperatively by two churches: the Independent Japanese Congregational Church of Oakland (the membership of which is in exile at Tanforan) and the Plymouth Congregational Church of Oakland. Its purpose was to examine and ordain Mr. George Aki, member of the Independent Japanese Church, and Mr. Masayoshi Wakai, member of Plymouth Church. Both of these young men had recently graduated *in absentia* from the Pacific School of Religion since the military authority had taken charge of them just a few days before their commencement day.

Eleven churches and four individuals responded to the roll call. Dr. Herman F. Swartz, president emeritus of the Pacific School of Religion, was elected moderator and Mr. Eugene Sill of the Ocean View Church in San Francisco was elected scribe. After examining the credentials of the two young men and hearing their fine statements of experience and belief, the council agreed heartily but with unusual seriousness to proceed with the ordination. In calling the people together, all of whom were Japanese Christians of Tanforan except the members of the council, Dr. Swartz spoke the following words:

"We are here for a noble adventure of faith. It is at any time a solemn matter to induct a young man into a life of religious service. In these times this dedication is of supreme significance and of immeasurable difficulty.

"These are the days which glorify commanders of men, and especially those whose power is abundantly backed by tanks and planes. In the latter days of peace we were elated by our control of the power of steam and water and electricity. Now we are suddenly plunged into the wild whirl of power in terms of military might. In either case we have found that the men who control the power are they who command the people. To command is the highest success among all the peoples of the world today.

"The Christian minister is not a commander of men. He is doubly a servant, first of Christ, whose will is ever his, and consequently of his fellowmen. This dedication runs counter to the emotions and the ambitions of the whole human race, and it is in avowed conflict with all that dominates the purposes of our times. It is nothing less than divine foolishness for able young men, richly trained, and with every promise of large and effective life, to seek ordination as ministers of him whom we call not General nor President, not Fuehrer nor Em-

peror, but Savior and Friend.

"Here before us are two young men, filled with the spirit of the servant of God, asking that they may be set aside as Ministers of the Gospel. Again we say that theirs is a noble adventure of faith.

"Furthermore, we all recognize that the field of service they purpose to enter is one of peculiar restrictions. They mean to serve a minority group, which by the tragic exigencies of war, is in a position of extreme difficulty. The imposed limitations upon this group not only affect the whole economic foundation but, what is more serious, they constrain the social and spiritual life of all its members.

"If we read history aright, we may be prepared to see the early emergence of able and ambitious leaders who will seek to capitalize for themselves and their followers a truculent resistance directed against the larger group which they will hold responsible for their misfortunes. Such leaders would crystallize the difficulties which grow out of the war into a permanent and hard difference, with ultimate mutual suspicion and animosity. This is the way of disaster.

"In glowing contrast stand these two young servants of Christ. They and we are dedicated to the principle that Godward loyalty is not constrained by the boundaries of political states or even by the honored heritages of culture or race. They will serve as wise and understanding exponents of effective good will and of Christian fellowship among us all.

"As this is no day for ordinary service in the spirit of Christ, so is this no ordinary event."

The Sermon was delivered by Dr. Clarence Reidenbach of the First Congregational Church of Oakland on the subject "The Function of the Church in a World at War."

The ordination prayer was offered by Professor James Muilenburg of the Pacific School of Religion, while both Caucasian and Japanese ministers, several of the latter representing other denominations, participated in the laying on of hands. We quote in part:

For the riches wherewith Thou hast endowed these sons of Thine we rejoice: for serenity and confidence amid trying hours, for steadiness and patience amid our reeling times, for that inner wisdom that doth not cry aloud nor cause its voice to be heard in the street, for the way in which they have put their hand to the plow without ever a look backwards, for their employment of knowledge as an instrument for the growth of Thy kingdom—for all these do we bow before Thee in grateful recognition. . . .

O God, who hast commissioned all those who would by Thy servants to be burden-bearers, make these shoulders strong to bear the burdens of others. Grant them the grace of laughter and the joy of music. Restrain them from self-pity. Equip them with such forgetfulness of self and such concern for others that the vast ranges of Christian faith may be their own precious reality. . . . Almighty and everlasting God, in this hour we would commend George and Masayoshi into Thy hands that they may be led and

inspired of Thee. Be Thou to them a refuge and strength, a very present help in time of trouble. So lead them that when the road ends they may reach forth anew for the grasp of Thy hand.

Fill Thou their hearts with faith like theirs
Who served the days they could not see,
And give us grace through ampler years,
To build the kingdom yet to be.

At the conclusion of the prayer, and while the congregation remained bowed, a uniformed sailor, Petty Officer Lloyd Hanson sang Mallot's arrangement of *The Lord's Prayer*.

Dr. Pearson Parker, minister of North Church, Berkeley, gave the charge to the candidates. He said, in part:

"I wonder whether this is what you have been thinking during the past few hours: that this ordination is unlike any other in the history of the world. Quite possibly, that is true. We are not in a church. We did not come together by the usual routes. Our council is not made up in just the ordinary way. And while you do not know what ministerial tasks await you, certainly they will be strange ones, not what a clergyman normally expects, nor what you yourselves must have envisaged a few months ago. . . .

"Give what you have! That is my charge to you this afternoon, and my only charge. Give what you have, of knowledge of God. You are to minister at a time when, as perhaps never before, people need their faith in God strengthened. Of all the obstacles to faith in God, you and I have now to contend with the greatest: the problem of suffering. The people whom we wish to serve may sometimes be troubled by intellectual doubts, but those are usually not hard to resolve. They may be hindered by their own shortcomings, yet we can find a way to help them. But let them behold man's inhumanity to man, and the foundations of their faith frequently give way. And there is only one answer to that. If the greatest obstacle to faith is man's cruelty, then the greatest aid to faith must be man's loving-kindness. . . . Give what you know, of God.

"Give what you have, of fellowship with Christ Jesus. In your examinations, the question has been asked, What is the point of superiority of Christianity over the religion of your fathers? We of Anglo-Saxon descent have been most interested in your answers to that. But after all, you and I know where the real difference lies: it is in Jesus himself. . . . Let us give what we have, of fellowship with him.

"Give what you have, of a sense of world mission. Here is the other point where Christianity is peculiar: it feels its ineluctable responsibility for the world. When the world goes to war, Christianity bows in shame, that it has failed. But why do we say that *Christianity* has failed? Why not lay the blame on Buddhism, or Hinduism, or Judaism? Again, we know the answer only

too well. It is Christianity, and not the others, that is under a divine commission, to make the world fit for the sons of God to live in. It is Christianity's Lord who is the Prince of Peace. It is the Christian minister who must keep bright the vision of a world for Christ.

"And finally, my friends, you and I must give what we have, of ourselves. We cannot give the other things, if we hold back that thing. And what is it to give oneself? It is to offer to our task bodies that are physically fit. I know that one aspect of Christianity appeals very strongly to many Japanese Christians: the idea of sacrifice. But if we are to sacrifice—and that is the Christian's business—at this point we must not do so. We have no business attempting the Lord's work with blunted instruments. There is a phrase in the 'Morning Resolve,' used by some of our Episcopalian friends, which ought to be memorized by every Christian minister: 'I will . . . be faithful in those habits of . . . physical exercise, eating and sleep which I believe the Holy Spirit has shown me to be right. Amen.'

"To give ourselves is to offer to our task minds alert, and well-trained. We all know the story of the boy who came home from commencement, tacked his diploma on the wall, and said, 'There, I'm educated.' Now you and I hold diplomas from a very fine theological school, and we might say, 'There, we're trained for the Christian ministry.' But we are not, and we never will be; for however much we achieve, the vista of what we have *not* attained grows ever larger. . . .

"But most of all, to mediate to our people the message of the Kingdom of God, you and I have got to be steeped in the Spirit of God, and that means the cultivation of our own devotional life. Without cavil, this is the one most important thing for you and me to do. . . .

"George Meredith once said of mountain climbing, that every step is a debate between what you are and what you might become. My friends, you and I are engaged in a great debate with mankind. For here is mankind the world around, shouting its lungs out, shooting its life out, over what it is; and our little voices sometimes seem ineffectual in the din. Yet ours is the victory, for Christ is the Judge, and He knows, and we know, what man may become."

Two persons spoke to the Christians of Tanforan. Rev. Masamoto Nishimura spoke in Japanese in this manner:

I congratulate Mr. Wakai and Mr. Aki on this sacred occasion. There are reasons why I call this service sacred. First, this is God's response to the consecration of these two young people. They are capable and talented people who would be able to succeed in any field of activity. Yet they gladly offered themselves on the altar of God for his service. Second, this occasion was made possible by ceaseless efforts and prayers of their leaders—professors, ministers and teachers. Third, this is an answer to the prayers and devotion of their parents and friends. Years of devotions of Mr. Wakai's parents and unselfish daily living of Mr. Aki's father and mother inspired their sons to a glorious decision. Personally I owe to the late Mr. Okue a great deal. He is Mr. Aki's grandfather. I was a very young boy when I first met him in a country town of Japan. His influence has been lingering and helping in my work ever since. I was at the funeral of the late Mr. Okue and was told that his fortune was spent almost entirely for God's work.

Now we have these young ministers ready to serve us. It is our glorious duty to support them with our efforts and prayers. We wish to see them succeed in the ministry. Of course they can do so by intelligent study, constant devotions, and fervent prayers, but they need your considerate cooperations. By the lack of understanding and cooperation, many young ministers who could have made a success were driven to other fields. It is our duty to let them realize their visions and hopes. I know that you can do it. May God bless you all.

Rev. Donald Gaylord, minister of Grace Church, San Francisco, speaking in English, concluded his address to the Christians of Tanforan with these words:

Finally, brethren, to you of the Church who face days and months of hardship and trial, we charge you to keep the fellowship of the Church unbroken. We are profoundly aware of the strain which has been put upon that tie, and we who remain humbly acknowledge our share in those events which have brought us all where we are. But this occasion is a symbol of our continuing love for you. We shall not forget you; and we shall await the opportunity of giving any brotherly aid we may. We implore you to hold us as your brothers and call upon us for the helping hand as brothers would. We shall be grateful for the privilege.

We charge you to remember that wherever you go you ARE the Church, and the true Church of Christ always has been strongest in adversity. Strengthen one another, and strengthen these your chosen and appointed servants. Thus may you bear glorious witness in faith and hope and charity to our Master and Lord who constraineth and sustaineth his Church.

For in this fellowship through that Church, if it remain unbroken throughout the world, lies the greatest of all our hope for the future. I charge you on your part faithfully to cherish that tie which binds our hearts in Christian love. "For we know that we have passed from death into life because we love the brotherhood." Amen!

The writer of this article had the privilege of welcoming the two young men into the fellowship of Congregational and Christian ministers. In extending the right hand to them I suggested that "the Church reaches through the fences and past the sentries to take hold of the hands of your people. This handclasp as a symbol is an open challenge by the Church of Christ of the racial bigotry, prejudice and fear which sets one racial stock against another, one above another. It is an open challenge by the Church of Christ of that spirit, fanned by the flames of war, which, like old maid's gossip, besmirches the honor and loyalty of men by whisperings and without trial. It is an open challenge by the Church of Christ of those economic, political and spiritual forces which are tearing this fair earth into bloody shreds. We pit the might of the Church against the disintegration of social order. This handclasp is a symbol of the fact that the Christian church reaching across all racial, national, cultural barriers, right in the midst of war, holds the world together. All the fear, enmity, prejudice, self-interest, threatenings, accusations, coercions, prisons, death, cannot break this handclasp. Only one thing can break it: disloyalty, by word or deed, to Christ."

In closing the service the Rev. George Aki lead in the following prayer:

Almighty and most merciful Father, whose power and whose love eternally work together for the protection of Thy children, we thank Thee for the grace of this day. We are sincerely thankful for the experiences of this day and for the

personalities who have come here to enlarge the ministry. For those loved ones who physically were not able to come here on this occasion, we ask Thy guidance and special blessings.

From this day on let us not refuse thy leading or quench this light which Thou hast kindled within us, but rather let us grow in grace and in the knowledge of our Lord and Master.

We beseech Thee to make over our souls to Thy keeping for we pledge our lives to Thy service. May the days ahead be days of obedience and of charity, happiness and peace. May all our walk and conversation be such as becometh the gospel of Christ. Fence round our lives with a rampart of pure aspirations, and let Christ be formed in our hearts through faith. We beseech Thee to make us wise to see all things under the form of eternity, and make us brave to face all the changes in our lives which such a vision may entail: through the grace of Christ our Saviour.

The Rev. Masayoshi Wakai pronounced the benediction. Others who participated in the service were Rev. Norio Ozaki and Dr. Holland Burr.

In the midst of war two churches, one composed of persons of Japanese ancestry, the other mainly caucasian, united in calling a council to meet in a mess hall, the usual place of worship for Protestant Christians, in a concentration camp—formerly a race track—to ordain two young men, one an alien (because of the exclusion act) and the other an American citizen. Going to and from the council members had to be checked in and out by soldiers and as we went to our homes we waved goodbye to our friends through the barbed wire fence.

Our churches represented in the council were: The First Congregational Churches of San Mateo, San Carlos, Campbell, Berkeley, Oakland, and San Francisco; Ocean View Congregational Church, San Francisco; Grace United Church, San Francisco; and North Congregational Church, Berkeley.

Four Books of Value

The Associates in Religious Reading, Thinking and Discussion met at Deering August 13 and 14 and wrestled with the problem of books that may be most valuable for our fellowship this year.

For information of a factual nature concerning the Western World just now our choice fell on *The Making of Tomorrow* by de Sales.

The choice of *The Church and the New Order* by Paton gives the world view from a Christian point of view. Both books carry a distinct prejudice, the one moral and the other religious. Both authors have knowledge quite beyond the American mind and will prove highly stimulating and illuminating.

The Logic of Belief by Trueblood is of equal value just now because it will press men to discriminate between good and bad religion. The emotional atmosphere of the times puts us under bonds to intelligence and sanity.

The fourth choice falls inevitably upon *The History of American Congregationalism* by Atkins and Fagley. We believe every minister in our fellowship should have this book on his desk that he may know our origin; its struggles and its achievements brightly written. The last half of the book shows our struggle to meet the collective and cooperative necessities of our times.

In the next issue of *Advance* we hope to have a better description of these titles.