

# August Ninth: The Atomic Bomb dropped on Nagasaki, August 9, 1945: Christians Killing Christians in the Name of Christ

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Theme: [History](#), [Religion](#)

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*On the 9<sup>th</sup> of August, 1945, an all-Christian B-29 bomber crew, took off from Tinian Island in the South Pacific, with the blessings of its Catholic and Protestant chaplains. In the plane’s hold was the second of the only two nuclear bombs to ever be used against human targets in wartime. The primary target, Kokura, Japan, was clouded over, so the plane, named Bock’s Car, headed for the secondary target, Nagasaki.*

*St. Mary’s Cathedral, located in Nagasaki City’s Urakami River district, was a massive structure and a landmark easily visible from 31,000 feet above. The cathedral was one of the landmarks on which the Bock’s Car’s bombardier had been briefed for weeks before the mission. The cathedral was briefly seen through a break in the clouds, and the drop was ordered. The bomb exploded in a searing fireball as hot as the sun 500 meters above the church.*

## **The legendary Urakami Cathedral was Ground Zero for the Nagasaki bomb on August 9, 1945**

The Urakami Cathedral was Ground Zero for the second atomic bomb ever used against civilian populations in war time, and most Nagasaki Christians who lived in the area did not survive. 6,000 of the church members died instantly, including all who were at confession at 11:02 that morning. Of the 12,000 members of the church, eventually 8,500 died as a direct result of the bomb. Three orders of nuns and a Christian girl’s school were incinerated. Tens of thousands of innocent people died instantly and hundreds of thousands were mortally wounded, some of whose progeny are still living in agony as a result of the cross-generational contagiousness of the deadly plutonium. An irradiated crucifix was photographed in the days following the blast, lying helpless and forlorn and lying on its back, a deeply profound symbol of a religion gone wrong.

The Urakami Cathedral was the oldest and largest Christian church in the Orient, and

Nagasaki was the oldest, largest and most influential Christian community in Japan, having been founded by the Jesuit missionary, Francis Xavier, in 1549. The Nagasaki Christian community is legendary in the history of Japanese Christianity because of its two centuries of catacomb-like existence during the horrible persecutions by the Imperial Japanese government – including mass crucifixions of faithful Christians who refused to give up the faith. Despite the persecutions and the formal outlawing of the religion (it was a capital crime to be a Christian – as it was for the original nonviolent form of Christianity – for over 2 centuries), Nagasaki Christianity survived and ultimately flourished – until 11:02 am, August 9, 1945.

What Imperial Japan could not do for over two centuries of brutal persecution and the arbitrary use of the death penalty, fellow Christians from America did in 9 seconds. The Cathedral was totally destroyed by the plutonium bomb and thousands of Nagasaki Christians were instantly boiled, incinerated, carbonized or vaporized. Radiation-induced disease and deformities among the “surviving” victims and their progeny continues to this day as a gruesome testament to the horrors of nuclear war.

### **Franz Jaegerstaetter was beheaded for refusing to join Hitler’s military on August 9, 1943**

Image on the right: Franz Jaegerstaetter (Licensed under the public domain)



**On the 9<sup>th</sup> of August, 1943, Franz Jaegerstaetter**, a devout Austrian Christian pacifist, was beheaded by German Christians for refusing to join Hitler’s army. Because of his gospel-based conscientious objection to war and killing, he had been abandoned by his spiritual leaders, as well as by his family and friends, all of whom had tried to convince him to do his patriotic duty and kill for “Volk, Fuhrer und Vaterland.” They all tried to convince him that his commitment to gospel nonviolence was futile – and, in the context of the national militarism operating at the time, also fatal. Instead, being obedient to the God of love rather than to men, he refused to relent and was murdered at Brandenburg Prison, at the hands of obedient baptized Christian soldiers, whose belt buckles read “**Gott Mit Uns**” (God With Us).

### **The Jewish Carmelite Nun, Sister Teresia Benedicta of the Cross was murdered at Auschwitz on August 9, 1942**

**On the 9<sup>th</sup> of August, 1942, Sister Teresia Benedicta of the Cross**, a Jewish Catholic Carmelite nun, was murdered by fellow German Christians at Auschwitz. “Gott Mit Uns” was also stamped on their belt buckles. Most of German Christianity had, by its collaboration and/or by its silence, endorsed the Nazi’s ruthless forms of nationalism, militarism, racism, anti-Semitism, xenophobia and its “legal” right to kill the enemies of the state.

**On the 9<sup>th</sup> of August, 1945**, Lutheran Chaplain **William B. Downey**, of Hope Evangelical Lutheran Church in Minneapolis, MN, prayed for the safety of the crew and for world peace just before the Nagasaki bombing mission. (Downey was attached to the US Army Air Force’s 509<sup>th</sup> Composite Group, whose major responsibility on Tinian was the delivery of the atomic bombs.)

## Pastor Downey's prayer

"Almighty God, Father of all mercies, we pray Thee to be gracious with those who fly this night. Guard and protect those of us who venture out into the darkness of Thy heaven. Uphold them on Thy wings. Keep them safe both in body and soul and bring them back to us. Give to us all courage and strength for the hours that are ahead; give to them rewards according to their efforts. Above all else, our Father, bring peace to Thy world. May we go forward trusting in Thee and knowing we are in Thy presence now and forever. Amen."

After the war ended, Downey, in counseling those soldiers who still had their consciences intact and were therefore troubled by the mass killing of innocent civilians by the bombs, said:

"The wrong was the killing, whether by fire bombs from hundreds of planes, by one atomic bomb or by a single rifle bullet. War itself is the evil that man must conquer."

## Father Zabelka blessed the Nagasaki bombing mission on August 9, 1945

**On the 9<sup>th</sup> of August, 1945**, the 509<sup>th</sup> Composite Group's Catholic chaplain, **Father George Zabelka**, was just one of millions of victims of societal attitudes at the time: "The whole structure of secular, religious and military society told me clearly that it was all right to 'let the Japs have it.' God was on our side." Father Zabelka knew what his bomber crews were doing to innocent civilians and their defenseless cities with conventional incendiary bombs in the spring and summer of 1945, and yet **"I said nothing."** He regretted that silence for the rest of his life, but spent the remaining two decades of his life working tirelessly for world peace and denouncing militarism as being clearly anti-Christian. A contrite Father Zabelka was in Nagasaki on August 1995 asking for forgiveness from the Japanese people for his role in what is now recognized to be a crime against humanity and an international war crime.

**Father Emmanuel Charles McCarthy**, the foremost apostle of Christian nonviolence in America today, and the person most responsible for Zabelka's conversion to gospel nonviolence, has dedicated his life and ministry to raising the consciousness of the church to the truths of Jesus's nonviolent teachings. McCarthy says:

"Today, as for most of the last 1700 years, most Christians continue to justify as consistent with the spirit of Christ those energies, understandings, and emotions which lead inevitably to August 9. Today most Christians still do not unequivocally teach what Jesus unequivocally taught on the subject of violence. Today most Christians still refuse to proclaim that violence is not the Christian way, that violence is not the Holy way, that violence is not the way of Jesus."

Every July 1st, to call the Christian community to repent and to return to the truth of the original form of Christianity, ie, that violence is not the way of Christ, Father McCarthy leads a 40 day fast from solid foods, solemnly breaking it on August 9<sup>th</sup> at the site of the first atomic bomb detonation at Alamogordo, New Mexico. The test was blasphemously code-named "Trinity".

McCarthy suggests that sincere Christians remember **all** the victims of past August 9ths (as well as other infamous dates in the history of war) in their thoughts and prayers on Nagasaki Sunday, August 8, 2010 by attending any of the various anniversary commemorations that may be available during the Hiroshima/Nagasaki week of August 6 - 9, the 65<sup>th</sup> anniversaries of the bombings. Those devoted to the truth of gospel nonviolence hope that all ethically-conscious people, especially Christians, consider a day-long fast on August 9 lamenting the hundreds of millions of war dead, the hundreds of millions of physically, psychologically and spiritually dead and dying survivors of war violence (especially those most severely afflicted: the military veterans of war, their secondarily traumatized families and their loved ones and their civilian- and soldier-victims who were on the other side of the battle lines).

And, of course, we must remember the billions of those all over this war-torn world who continue to suffer, generation after generation, from the totally preventable, war-caused starvation, malnutrition, poisoning from Agent Orange, depleted uranium, legal and illicit drugs and other military toxins and the homelessness, joblessness, poverty, suicidality, homicidality, domestic abuse, national bankruptcies and hopelessness that follows all wars.

## **The War Prayer by Mark Twain**

It seems appropriate to end this essay on Nagasaki with the following excerpt from Mark Twain's "The War Prayer", which, interestingly, Twain requested not be published until after his death. It is suspected that he felt that he would be castigated for a lack of patriotism by writing such a deeply truthful allegory. The excerpt starts as the Pro-War/ Justified War Theory pastor was praying for the troops. The pastor prayed:

"Watch over our noble young soldiers, and aid, comfort, and encourage them in their patriotic work; bless them, shield them in the day of battle and the hour of peril, bear them in His mighty hand, make them strong and confident, invincible in the bloody onset; help them crush the foe, grant to them and to their flag and country imperishable honor and glory-

"An aged stranger entered and moved with slow and noiseless step up the main aisle, his eyes fixed upon the minister, his long body clothed in a robe that reached to his feet, his head bare, his white hair descending in a frothy cataract to his shoulders, his seamy face unnaturally pale, pale even to ghastliness. With all eyes following him and wondering, he made his silent way; without pausing, he ascended to the preacher's side and stood there waiting. With shut lids the preacher, unconscious of his presence, continued his moving prayer, and at last finished it with the words, uttered in fervent appeal, "Bless our arms, grant us the victory, O Lord and God, Father and Protector of our land and flag!"

"The stranger touched his arm, motioned him to step aside-which the startled minister did-and took his place. During some moments he surveyed the spellbound audience with solemn eyes, in which burned an uncanny light; then in a deep voice he said:

"'I come from the Throne-bearing a message from Almighty God!' The words smote the house with a shock; if the stranger perceived it he gave no attention. 'He has heard the prayer of His servant your shepherd, and will grant it if such be your desire after I, His messenger, shall have explained to you its import-that is to say, its full import. For it is like unto many of the prayers of men, in that it asks for more than he who utters it is aware of-except he pause and think. 'God's servant and yours has prayed his prayer.

Has he paused and taken thought? Is it one prayer? No, it is two—one uttered, and the other not. Both have reached the ear of Him who heareth all supplications, the spoken and the unspoken. Ponder this—keep it in mind. If you would beseech a blessing upon yourself, beware, lest without intent you invoke a curse upon your neighbor at the same time. If you pray for the blessing of rain on your crop which needs it, by that act you are possibly praying for a curse on some neighbor's crop which may not need rain and can be injured by it.

“You have heard your servant's prayer—the uttered part of it. I am commissioned by God to put into words the other part of it—that part which the pastor—and also you in your hearts—ferently prayed silently—and ignorantly and unthinkingly. God grant that it was so! You heard the words ‘Grant us the victory, O Lord our God!’ That is sufficient. The whole of the uttered prayer is compact into those pregnant words. Elaborations were not necessary. When you have prayed for victory you have prayed for many unmentioned results that follow victory—must follow it, cannot help but follow it. Upon the listening spirit of God fell also the unspoken part of the prayer. He commandeth me to put it into words. Listen!

*“Lord our Father, our young patriots, idols of our hearts, go forth into battle—be Thou near them! With them—in spirit—we also go forth from the sweet peace of our beloved firesides to smite the foe. O Lord our God, help us tear their soldiers to bloody shreds with our shells; help us to cover their smiling fields with the pale forms of their patriot dead; help us to drown the thunder of the guns with the shrieks of their wounded, writhing in pain; help us to lay waste their humble homes with a hurricane of fire; help us to wring the hearts of their unoffending widows with unavailing grief; help us to turn them out roofless with their little children to wander friendless in the wastes of their desolated land in rags and hunger and thirst, sports of the sun flames in summer and the icy winds of winter, broken in spirit, worn with travail, imploring thee for the refuge of the grave and denied it—*

“For our sakes who adore Thee, Lord, blast their hopes, blight their lives, protract their bitter pilgrimage, make heavy their steps, water their way with their tears, stain the white snow with the blood of their wounded feet!

“We ask it, in the spirit of love, of Him Who is the Source of Love, and Who is the ever-faithful refuge and friend of all that are sore beset and seek His aid with humble and contrite hearts. Amen.

“(After a pause.) ‘Ye have prayed it; if ye still desire it, speak! The messenger of the Most High waits.’

“It was believed afterward that the man was a lunatic, because there was no sense in what he said.”

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