

Creating a Context for Spiritual Formation through Interview Reports at Hokusei Gakuen Women's Junior College, Part III

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CONTENTS

- I. INTRODUCTION
- II. PURPOSES
- III. GOALS AND STRATEGY
- IV. METHODOLOGY
- V. ANALYSIS OF SURVEY RESULTS
- VI. CONCLUSION
- VII. APPENDIX

INTRODUCTION

Articles in preceding Hokusei Review issues have shed light on the interviewer aspect of this project. They also give an indirect view of the interviewee side of the interviews. The Interviewee Reflection Survey, however, provides a more direct look at the interviewees by detailing their thoughts on the interview process. It supplies additional information on the interviews themselves, as well. The appendix shows exact wording of survey questions and details on its findings.

PURPOSES

Like the student interviewers, interviewees also completed post-interview surveys. These were an attempt to determine whether or not and to what extent interviewees' experiences proved the interview process to be an effective means of spiritual formation for themselves. The survey was also designed to reveal how successful the interviewees believed the dialogues had been in achieving the larger objective of communication of the Gospel of Christ. I intended to elicit responses which would show to what extent interviewees had born Christian witness in a relevant, understandable, positive, and acceptable way through their own life experiences as cultural insider Christians.

Key words: Cross-Cultural Communication, Contextualized Ministry, Indigenous Christian Ministry, Spiritual Formation

GOALS AND STRATEGY

I hoped that the survey results would document as precisely as possible any lasting effects these interviews have had on those who received them. An additional goal was to generate ideas for future improvement of the project by examining it with greater clarity from the perspective of the interviewees. The approach to achieving these goals was asking for written feedback from interviewees, with special attention focused on two areas: growth in their lives as believers in Christ and as His witnesses, and the interview process itself, including any obstacles to communication and an overall evaluation of each interview.

METHODOLOGY

In the first term, two days after the last interview report was due, I mailed follow-up surveys to the interviewees.¹⁾ There would have been some merit to waiting until after the second term to administer these (since some would receive interviews in the second term, and documenting their experience at that point would give a somewhat broader base of data to measure). Nevertheless, I decided to perform the survey at this point for certain reasons.

There were many issues to consider. First, seven of the eleven first-term interviewees had participated in the project before (most more than once), which would reduce the possibility that their experience would be greatly different after one more term's interviews. Second, two interviewees had already indicated that they would not be available after the first term, so their service as interviewees was nearly or fully complete already. Third, all the other interviewees had been requested largely either because they knew a particular student personally or because the location of their home or church was close to a certain student who lived in a somewhat remote location. Thus, there was little possibility that they would be asked to be partners in the second term. The fourth reason was simply the pressure to finish this study on time.

In order to receive feedback and insights from as many interviewees as possible, I contacted them all again by mail in the last week, regardless of whether they had perhaps already sent their completed forms or not. In this reminder, the interviewees were thanked for their cooperation and some were requested to participate in interviews during the second term. I asked interviewees to return their completed surveys as soon as possible. One interviewee responded to the request and mailed her responses, bringing the total for the first term to nine of eleven.

In the second term, two weeks after the deadline for interviews and reports to be completed and submitted, I sent survey forms to each of the six interviewees who participated in the project in the second term but not the first one. Approximately one month after the interviews were held, though individual cases varied somewhat, three of six interviewees had returned survey forms, bringing the final total to twelve of seventeen for both terms combined. Interviewee responses appear in the appendix.

ANALYSIS OF SURVEY RESULTS

Question One: Interviewee Background

The first question of the series deals with how interviewees came to Christ. In order to best understand their responses to survey questions, it is necessary to know a little about their backgrounds and how long each has been a believer in Christ. In gauging whether the interview project has been successful in encouraging further evangelistic activity on the part of the interviewee, it is helpful to know how much they had done in the past.

Length of the Interviewee's Christian Life (1A)

In terms of a spiritual walk with Jesus, the youngest Christian's is eighteen months, while the longest is eleven years (two interviewees). On the whole, this is a group of comparatively new Christians (seven of twelve have been Christians for under five years). Consequently, their conversion experiences are still relatively recent events. This may give them an advantage in identifying with the ideas, feelings, and situations of interviewers and expressing this understanding in a way which interviewers are more easily able to recognize.

Confession of Faith Given at Conversion or Not (1B)

This question involves a tradition of most churches in Japan. New believers read aloud the testimony of their journey to faith at the time they are baptized and become church members. As a result, the vast majority of Japanese Christians have at least some experience in giving their testimony, although this is done typically for believers rather than non-believers. This group of interviewees' responses show that they are no exception.

Experience in Witnessing in Public Since Conversion (1C)

This question seeks an indication of interviewees' degree of public witnessing experience. Everyone in this group of interviewees, with one exception, has had at least some continuing experience in testifying about their faith in public.

Experience in Informal Witnessing to Non-Believers (1D)

Every interviewee but one states that she had spoken informally about faith with a non-Christian. Of seventeen, eight had served as interviewees in this project prior to this year, so giving a testimony was not totally new for them. The wording of the answers to 1D does not specify the exact number of times interviewees have shared their faith.

On the other hand, several comments indicate minimal experience in telling the message of what Christ has done in their lives. One had never given her testimony in front of a group, another had never talked about her faith with anyone but Christians, and the experience of another was limited to a particular situation at work. These comments point to the need not only for interviewers to hear the message of salvation in Christ but also for interviewees to gain more practical experience in giving it.

Question Two: New Insights into the Interviewee's Christian Life

Responses reveal that two-thirds of the interviewees believe the interviews have helped them to discover something about their own life of faith. The growth to which they point in two cases includes basic elements of Christian life applying to all Christians: reading Scripture and a realization of Christ's existence, for example.

It is not entirely clear whether these were new realizations or rediscoveries of aspects of their Christian lives, as asked in the third question. However, since these interviewees write the responses in this section dealing with the second question, the answers appear there in the appendix. Five comments involve aspects more related to interviewees' individual faith (for example, the discovery of a desire to do more discussion in a testimony setting).

Question Three: Renewed Awareness in Christian Life

Of ten interviewees who respond positively to this question, five focus specifically on recalling their conversion experience and subsequent growth into Christlikeness (for example, encountering Christ and gaining increasing assurance of His constant presence). A reexamining of that experience through the interview served as an occasion for reaffirmation of faith in retracing their life's journey with Christ. An equal number of comments include different matters involved in returning to close fellowship with God, such as a rediscovered recognition of the need for thankfulness.

Question Four: Interviews' Effectiveness in Evangelism Training

This question deals with the interviewees' growth as Christian witnesses. Half of those responding relevantly indicate growth which relates to their capacity for bearing Christian witness. Three of these five have been Christians under five years. The relative newness of the matter of giving testimonies may explain in part their need for and openness to growth in this area. The maturation which they note consists of changes which could contribute indirectly but significantly to effective communication of their faith experience: assurance of salvation, recognition of the uniqueness of each testimony opportunity, discovery of things to say in testifying, and a desire to say them.

Question Five: Deeper Understanding of the Interviewer or Young People

Although two-thirds of the interviewees respond affirmatively to this question, no predominant pattern of responses emerges. Rather than holding a common perception of the interviewers (or Japanese young people), interviewees demonstrate quite diverse views of them. For example, responses range from seeing interviewers as "forward-looking" to somewhat interested in Christian faith.

Some answers are more relevant to the question than others, although they all relate to a degree. Those which deal with matters other than deepening awareness of the interviewer or Japanese young people, describe what the interviewee said or did in the interview, or the impression of the interviewer which she received.

Question Six: Spiritual Growth through the Interview(s)

In responding to this question, though all twelve interviewees point to a deepening of their relationships with God through the interviews, the comments do not fall into easily divisible categories. The pattern of movement closer to God is different in each unique faith relationship. No predominant pattern appears among these interviewees as the one normative way in which bearing testimony nourishes Christian faith.

Question Seven: Cultural Barriers in the Interview(s)

With only one exception, all interviewees responding to the question indicate that these cultural matters presented no significant communication barriers. The fact that all the interviewees are Japanese no doubt played a role in this perception. Likewise, the ability to speak female-to-female also made possible more significant communication without traditional gender issues being involved. Even the one who notes an age difference does not specifically state that it impacted the interview negatively.

The weight of the evidence provided by the opinions of those who actually received the interviews suggests that the project achieves its central goals related to culture and communication of the Gospel. These Japanese-to-Japanese, woman-to-woman, and often youth-to-youth and Hokusei-person-to-Hokusei-person testimonies appear to successfully overcome many of the obstacles which so prevalently inhibit clear communication of Christ's message, hindering non-Christians' ability to respond to it positively.

Question Eight: Other Comments or Impressions

Comments Regarding Interviewees and Interviewers

Answers to this open-ended question vary widely, with a great deal of overlap between them. The contents include both positive and negative evaluative comments related to issues such as the interviewers' attitudes toward the interviews and their background in biblical learning. Other interviewees express feelings regarding the interviewers.

Although the Interviewee Reflection Survey deals primarily with interviewees, its results in certain sections yield some information regarding the interviewers as well. These comments shed light indirectly on how the interviews impacted interviewers' perceptions of Christian faith and related matters. Some reveal growth toward Christian faith, indicating their intent to continue pursuing spiritual maturity or discipleship. Others indicate lingering issues which serve to block their acceptance of and development in Christian faith. A list of these responses is provided at the end of the appendix. They generally match similarly stated intentions in the results of the interviewer reports and surveys.

Suggestions for Improvement of the Interview System

Two interviewees include suggestions for improvement, one of which is allotting more time for scheduling interviews. This remark speaks to a real need which has surfaced occasionally in the past. Certainly more time would alleviate this problem; however, it

would also reduce the time available for students to continue interviews with their partners after the first one. Also, there is a clear possibility that the student who could not schedule a Sunday meeting had this difficulty because she allowed too much time to pass between receiving her interviewee's contact information and actually making contact. Some interviewers were late in originally stating their willingness to participate in the project, which greatly reduced the available time for scheduling interviews. In addition, some students may simply resist going to church due to an aversion to places where overtly religious activities take place, as suggested by information provided in Appendix 2 (Tables 2.1 and 4.1) of the first article in this series. Nevertheless, in light of this knowledge I subsequently moved the report due date back by two weeks for future interview projects to allow more time for scheduling the first interviews rather than greater time for continuing them.

Another suggestion involves giving students suggested questions to ask versus having them create their own, it may be that the interviewee is correct in suggesting the latter. Interview students in the past actually did create their own questions (aside from the first two required questions, which I had written). As students noted their own questions in reports, I compiled the list which students used in 2001.

Although the questions may be especially helpful for students who find it difficult to know where to begin in discussing a topic so unfamiliar to them as Christian faith, giving them a question list may simultaneously present at least two problems. The first is the one which the interviewer suggests, that taking away the need for students to be creative in their approach to the interview reduces the overall value. The second, also noted in previous project years, is that some students fear they may not have enough material to write their report. For this reason, they may depend on the lengthy list of questions rather than on a genuine desire to know. With this in mind, I decided in future classes to encourage interviewers to create their own questions, yet I would also make available to them questions from former students, if the time of the interview came near and they still encountered trouble developing their own questions.

CONCLUSION

Overall, the group of interviewees is one of young Japanese women (most in their twenties or thirties) who are also young in their faith (most Christians five years or less) and who have a great deal in common with the Hokusei Gakuen students in terms of sociocultural background. Before these interviews, they had a degree of experience in giving testimonies, but it was not extensive.

Regarding their personal spiritual lives, on the whole this group finds that the interview process has helped them to discover something significant about their Christian life. The interviews have enabled them to recover awareness of something of which they had lost sight, often through retracing their steps from their personal conversion through subsequent growth in discipleship. Nearly all interviewees affirm that the interview process has deepened their

relationship with God, although the specific form this growth takes varies widely.

Related to their lives as witnesses to the Gospel of Christ, relatively few in this group find that the interviews have yielded any particular growth in skill or power to testify to God's work in their lives. Those who do are generally younger believers, likely more inexperienced in evangelism. Nearly all the interviewees indicate that they have gained a deeper understanding of their partners or today's Japanese young people, although the particular insight they have gained varies widely and is usually specific to the individual.

By and large, interviewees state that the interview process has been free of significant obstacles to communication in the areas of age, gender, language, or educational background. They note several clear opportunities or intentions for ministry to their interviewers or other Hokusei Gakuen Women's Junior College students to continue. This includes the desire to keep praying for their partners. Interviewees offer a wide variety of comments regarding the interviews, including numerous affirmations and an occasional suggestion for improvement.

APPENDIX

INTERVIEWEE REFLECTION SURVEY RESULTS

Considerable overlap between the survey's questions obviously exists, for example between the interviewees' newly discovered aspects of their Christian life, those aspects which were rediscovered, and their deepened relationships with God. Interviewees' responses to a given question occasionally relate not to that question exclusively but to others instead or others in addition to it. The relevant answers have been compiled into the categories to which they correspond in terms of content, with interviewees' responses listed first just as they wrote them. When responses deal with more than one category, they are so noted and included in each relevant category, thus appearing more than once. Words in brackets [] are my explanatory comments, including interviewee responses which appear in different sections of the survey but are repeated here to clarify the context of the entire answer. Words in braces { } appear in the lists where interviewees have originally recorded them; however, because they appear to relate in terms of content to other questions, they also appear there. As noted above, a total of twelve interviewees participated in the survey.

1. Background

A. How long have you been a Christian?

(1) Number of interviewees participating in the survey responding to 1A	12
a. interviewee has been a Christian less than five years.....	7
b. interviewee has been a Christian between five and ten years	3
c. interviewee has been a Christian over ten years	2

B. When you became a believer in Christ and joined a church, did you give your confession of faith to the other members of your church (either orally or in written form)?	
(1) Number of interviewees responding to 1B	12
a. Yes	11
b. No	1
C. Since becoming a church member, before this interview project, had you ever again written or spoken before a group of people about your personal faith?	
(1) Number of interviewees responding to 1C	12
a. Yes	11
b. No	1
D. Before being interviewed for this project, had you ever talked with a non-Christian or someone outside your church in a non-formal situation about your faith?	
(1) Number of interviewees responding to 1D	12
a. Yes	11
b. No	1
2. Did this project lead you to see anything about your Christian life which you had not seen before? If yes, explain.	
(1) Number of interviewees responding to 2	11
a. Yes	8
b. No (or Not Particularly)	3
(2) Number of interviewees responding relevantly and affirmatively	8
(3) Positive responses:	
a. Regarding aspects of Christian life which apply to all believers:	
(i) I was made aware in a new way of the existence of Christ.	
(ii) the importance of reading the Bible and praying daily and the importance of walking through life filled with the Holy Spirit.	
b. Regarding interviewee's individual Christian life:	
(i) It is something I thought about both at the time of the interview and later, but I have joy. [This interviewee comments in 3, "In the 11 years since I was saved, many different things have happened, but I was brought to the realization that in my life there has never been a time when Jesus Christ was not with me in all things which happen or have happened." In 4 she writes: "I received further assurance of salvation." The same interviewee remarks in 6, "Through this interview, the fact that God rejoices over my testifying for Him has become a joy for me, too."]	
(ii) When I was a student, I did not believe in the existence of God, either. But for a long, long time I kept turning it over again and again in a corner of my mind.	

Because of this, I think that the students will certainly not forget the things they heard about God in their life at junior college. [In 4, this interviewee writes: “. . . I am just thankful that this kind of a work was given to a person so undeserving as I.” In 6 she writes: “It’s only for a short time each day, but I read the Bible before going to sleep. This time, I was able to take a little more time for that and for praying for her. I am glad that in this way maybe I was able to move a little closer to following God’s will.”]

- (iii) I felt that I was being used by God to give testimony. [This interviewee adds in 6, “When I testify for God, I always think that little by little the distance between us becomes shorter.”]
- (iv) I found more and more things I wanted to talk about, and I realized how long it had been since I began my life of faith. [In 4 this interviewee writes: “I understand that God is alive and working in me.” She adds in 6: “Each time I finish these interviews, I feel that I want to thank God for enabling me to grow to the point where I now am.”]
- (v) The thing of which I was made most aware was that I do not know much about Christianity. [This interviewee adds in 6, “Before (about three years ago), I wanted to hid the fact that I was a Christian, but now I don’t particularly think I want to hide it, and I was able to reaffirm that feeling.”]
- (vi) {I fairly often become distant from God and live my life apart from Him. Through a time when I was stumbling in my faith, I was able, in receiving this interview as a person of faith, to return to my original spirit of faith.} [Despite this comment, which appears more relevant to Question 3 and appears there as well, this interviewee states in 6 about her relationship with God, “I am certain that it deepened. Because God strengthened my faith, watching over and protecting me, I was also able to answer the interview questions naturally. I think that God used me in this way.”]

(4) Negative responses:

- a. Nothing in particular 1
- b. Not in particular 1
- c. Not particularly 1

3. Did this project lead you to any renewed awareness of something in your Christian life of which you had lost sight. If yes, explain.

- (1) Number of interviewees responding to 311
 - a. Yes10
 - b. No (no recovered awareness in particular) 1
- (2) Total number of interviewees responding relevantly10

(3) Positive responses:

a. Responses focusing on interviewee's salvation experience:

- (i) I was thankful for this chance to look back on my life again when I received the question, "Did your life change when you became a Christian?" I thought that I want more and more to read the Bible and know the depths of God's word.
- (ii) It caused me to think again about the meaning of life as a Christian (at what points I can live a life which differs from a non-Christian). [This interviewee remarks in 6, "I thought again about the importance of living always seeking God, of turning my ears toward the call of God."]
- (iii) It's the love of God which I felt for the first time. I want to take with me the joy of the memory of that time, which I recalled through the interview.
- (iv) In the eleven years since I was saved, many different things have happened, but I was brought to the realization that in my life there has never been a time when Jesus Christ was not with me in all things which happen or have happened.
- (v) I was thankful to see again how much grace and mercy I receive from God. Also, I was able to look again at myself and my life as a Christian and hold strongly to my faith. [This interviewee also states in 2, "I fairly often become distant from God and live my life apart from Him. Through a time when I was stumbling in my faith, I was able, in receiving this interview as a person of faith, to return to my original spirit of faith."]

b. Other responses focusing on returning to close fellowship with God:

- (i) to give thanks to Christ. [This person writes in 2 about something which may be more of a rediscovered awareness (3) than a newly discovered one (2), that is, "the importance of reading the Bible and praying daily (and) the importance of walking through life filled with the Holy Spirit."]
- (ii) nothing [Despite this response, the interviewee states in 6, "In opening the Bible for myself for the first time in a long time, it seemed that my emotions were softened."]
- (iii) I was made to think again about what it means that I am a Christian. I thought that I have to have more conversation with God. [This interviewee adds in 6, "Through talking about my Christian life, I had a chance to think about the condition of my relationship with God is in now. In this way I was able to look again at my relationship with God by looking again at myself and seeing how I sometimes get caught up in the flow of everyday life."]
- (iv) Bible Study
- (v) When I heard that the person who interviewed me was a Catholic Christian, I asked her, "Why did you come to Hokusei and not to Fuji [a local Catholic university]?" She said, "It's because the God Catholics and Protestants believe in is the same." I was made to realize again that I was seeing her with the stereotypical idea in mind that because she is Catholic she is different from

Protestants, even though God loves both kinds of people.

(4) Negative response:

- a. Nothing in particular 1

4. Did this develop in you any greater skill or power in testifying to God's work in your life? If so, explain.

(1) Number of interviewees responding to 411

- a. number of interviewees noting changes 5
- b. number of interviewees noting little or no particular change 5
- c. number of irrelevant responses 1

(2) Number of interviewees responding relevantly and affirmatively 5

(3) Positive responses:

- a. I received further assurance of salvation.
- b. Not especially, but a testimony about living with joy differs according to the occasion (as the experiences and processes increase). I understand that God is alive and working in me. [This interviewee notes in 2, "I found more and more things I wanted to talk about . . ."]
- c. After this interview, I became more conscious of the existence of God, even through little things. [This interviewee adds in 6, "Before (about three years ago), I wanted to hide the fact that I was a Christian, but now I don't particularly think I want to hide it, and I was able to reaffirm that feeling."]
- d. I am thankful to have had this interview at a very good time. I am sure that this is God's present for me, to strengthen my weak faith. [This interviewee also states in 6 regarding her relationship with God, "I am certain that it deepened. Because God strengthened my faith, watching over and protecting me, I was also able to answer the interview questions naturally. I think that God used me in this way." In 8 this interviewee adds, "This time, in both interviews my partner came to my home. I think that in fact because of that we were able to hold the interviews in a very relaxed atmosphere. More than before, I was able to allow myself to speak from my heart. The students, too, were very comfortable as they gave the interview. I thought that, when you give a testimony of faith to a stranger, it is important to open your heart enough to show almost everything about yourself to the other person, as I would do before God."]
- e. During the interview, I was giving testimony on a certain matter, but what I said was illogical. I was unable to admit it on my own, and soon guilt began welling up in me, and it was very painful. However, in a way of which I was not conscious, the Lord made me stop. I did not talk about it much to anyone, but in this interview, I talked about it for the first time, and I felt again that God was working to give me joy and peace. [This interviewee adds in 8, "I did the interview at my home, but I think I may have made my partner feel uncomfortable."]

- (4) Negative responses:
- a. It is unchanged 1
 - b. Nothing especially 3
 - c. Not in particular 1
- (5) Apparently irrelevant response:
- a. {There is no change in my believing. However, I am just thankful that this kind of a work was given to a person so undeserving as I.} 1

5. Did this project give you any deepened awareness of the thoughts, feelings, values, and lives of your partner and/or today's Japanese young people? If yes, explain.

- (1) Number of interviewees responding to 510
- a. Yes 8
 - b. No (little or no growth) 2
- (2) Total number of interviewees responding positively and relevantly 8
- (3) Positive responses:
- a. Responses related to the interviewer in particular:
 - (i) At the end, I prayed for her. It was a very short prayer, but she was very glad about it. In the interview, I read several Bible passages, and I hope that they remain at least a little while in her heart.
 - (ii) I think so. I was able to testify as to how I decide when I make a decision. I hope she was able to take interest in what I was saying from the Bible. [This partner adds in 8, “The person who came to interview me talked with me about her worries, which was very good.”]
 - (iii) I think so. The Holy Spirit was in me when I talked with my partner, too, so through the working of the Holy Spirit, I think my partner was able to think, “Maybe God really does exist.”
 - (iv) When we spoke individually, she was thinking of various things, and I realized that it was not like she was totally without interest in Christianity. I think it is important to relate to people individually. [This interviewee also comments in Question 2, “When I was a student, I did not believe in the existence of God, either. But for a long, long time I kept turning it over again and again in a corner of my mind. Because of this, I think that the students will certainly not forget the things they heard about God in their life at junior college.”]
 - (v) I think so. My interview partner asked questions with very deep interest, and I think that the little stereotypes and irrational perceptions which she had, disappeared somewhat (stereotypes about Christianity). [This person adds in 8, “I was made to realize, ‘People who have no knowledge of Christianity really do know nothing about it.’ I realized that things which are common sense to us do not make sense to others around us.”]
 - (vi) The students are close to me in age, and because I am a graduate of Hokusei

Junior College, it seemed that they had a very familiar feeling for me.

b. Responses related to Japanese young people (or others) in general:

(i) Yes, I believe it did. In this world (in the present age in which we are made to live), each person has a life from God. In testifying to the existence and work of the God who works through my life, what can be joined on earth can also be joined in heaven.

(ii) I learned that there are some young people who are interested in Christians and try to understand us.

(4) Negative responses:

- a. Nothing special 1
- b. Not very much. I didn't think so. 1

6. Did this project deepen your relationship with God in some way? If yes, explain.

- (1) Number of interviewees responding to 610
 - a. Yes10
 - b. No 2
- (2) Total number of interviewees responding relevantly²⁾12

(3) Positive responses:

- a. It's only for a short time each day, but I read the Bible before going to sleep. This time, I was able to take a little more time for that and for praying for her. I am glad that in this way maybe I was able to move a little closer to following God's will. [This interviewee states in 3, "I was thankful for this chance to look back on my life again when I received the question, 'Did your life change when you became a Christian?' I thought that I want more and more to read the Bible and know the depths of God's word." In 4 she writes: ". . . I am just thankful that this kind of work was given to a person so undeserving as I."]
- b. In opening the Bible for myself for the first time in a long time, it seemed that my emotions were softened. [This interview partner writes in 2: "I was made aware in a new way of the existence of Christ."]
- c. I thought again about the importance of living always seeking God, of turning my ears toward the call of God.
- d. No response. [Despite the lack of response, this interviewee writes in 2 about "the importance of reading the Bible and praying daily" and "the importance of walking through life filled with the Holy Spirit." In 3 she notes that the interview(s) led her to rediscover the need "to give thanks to Christ."]
- e. Through this interview, the fact that God rejoices over my testifying for Him has become a joy for me, too. [This interviewee writes in 3: "In the 11 years since I was saved, many different things have happened, but I was brought to the realization that in my life there has never been a time when Jesus Christ was not with me in all things which happen or have happened." In 4 she writes: "I received further

assurance of salvation.” Finally, in 8 she notes a point of growth in relationship with God, writing, “. . . I myself am praying for the salvation of the student who came for the interview.”]

- f. I think it deepened. When I testify for God, I always think that little by little the distance between us becomes shorter. [This interviewee notes in 2, “I felt that I was being used by God to give testimony.”]
- g. Each time I finish these interviews, I feel that I want to thank God for enabling me to grow to the point where I now am. [This interviewee writes in 3 about, “. . . the love of God which I felt for the first time. I want to take with me the joy of the memory of that time, which I recalled through the interview.” In 4 she writes: “I understand that God is alive and working in me.”]
- h. Through talking about my Christian life, I had a chance to think about the condition my relationship with God is in now. In this way I was able to look again at my relationship with God by looking again at myself and seeing how I sometimes get caught up in the flow of everyday life. [This interviewee also writes in 3: “I was made to think again about what it means that I am a Christian. I thought that I have to have more conversation with God.”]
- i. I am certain that it deepened. Because God strengthened my faith, watching over and protecting me, I was also able to answer the interview questions naturally. I think that God used me in this way. [This interviewee also states in 3, “I was thankful to see again how much grace and mercy I receive from God.” A comment in 4 is also relevant: “I am thankful to have had this interview at a very good time. I am sure that this is God’s present for me, to strengthen my weak faith.”]
- j. Before (about three years ago), I wanted to hide the fact that I was a Christian, but now I don’t particularly think I want to hide it, and I was able to reaffirm that feeling. [This person also writes in 4: “After this interview, I became more conscious of the existence of God, even through little things.”]
- k. It seems like it has not deepened. [Despite this response, the interviewee states in 4, “During the interview, I was giving testimony on a certain matter, but what I said was illogical. I was unable to admit it on my own, and soon guilt began welling up in me, and it was very painful. However, in a way of which I was not conscious, the Lord made me stop. I did not talk about it much to anyone, but in this interview, I talked about it for the first time, and I felt again that God was working to give me joy and peace.”]

7. Do you think that age, gender, language, educational background, or other culture-related matters were barriers to your communication with your partner? If yes, explain.

- (1) Number of interviewees responding to 7 9
 - a. Yes, there were barriers present 1
 - b. No, there were no barriers present 8

- (2) Total number of interviewees responded relevantly indicating no culture-related difficulties 8
- (3) Responses indicating few or no barriers:
 - a. Not especially 2
 - b. None. 1
 - c. No. 2
 - d. I did not feel these very much. [This interviewee also states in 8, "This time, in both interviews my partner came to my home. I think that in fact because of that we were able to hold the interviews in a very relaxed atmosphere. More than before, I was also able to allow myself to speak from my heart. The students, too, were very comfortable as they gave the interview. I thought that, when you give a testimony of faith to a stranger, it is important to open your heart enough to show almost everything about yourself to the other person, as I would do before God." The interviewee also states in 5, "The students are close to me in age, and because I am a graduate of Hokusei Junior College, it seemed that they had a very familiar feeling for me."] 1
 - e. Not particularly. 2

8. What other thoughts or impressions do you have about this project? Please write what you see as strong points or areas of weakness.

- (1) Number of interviewees responding to 812
 - a. interviewees responding with comments11
 - b. interviewees responding without comments 1
- (2) Feelings and impressions regarding interviewers:
 - a. The student had a very forward-looking sense about her as she approached her interview, so it was good.
 - b. It was easy to do the interview because the person who interviewed me had a certain degree of understanding of Christianity.
 - c. I was made to realize, "People who have no knowledge of Christianity really do know nothing about it." I realized that things which are common sense to us do not make sense to others around us.
- (3) Feelings regarding the interviews:
 - a. I was very nervous, wondering if I would be misunderstood. But the things I did not know, I simply answered that I did not know, so my partner may have thought that Christians have not learned Christian faith well enough, either. I am sorry. I want to pray that through this interview, she will be able to think at least a little about God. [This interviewee writes in 4, "... I am just thankful that this kind of work was a given to a person so undeserving as I."]
 - b. "It's fun! I am glad to be able to interact with the students even more though I have already graduated!! I hope you will let me do more interviews in the future."

- c. This time, in both interviews my partner came to my home. I think that in fact because of that we were able to hold the interviews in a very relaxed atmosphere. More than before, I was also able to allow myself to speak from my heart. The students, too, were very comfortable as they gave the interview. I thought that, when you give a testimony of faith to a stranger, it is important to open your heart enough to show almost everything about yourself to the other person, as I would do before God.
 - d. I did the interview at my home, but I think I may have made my partner feel uncomfortable.
- (4) Suggestions for improvement:
- a. I thought it would be better for the students not only to ask the questions they were given on the handout in class but to ask their own questions. The person who came to interview me talked with me about her worries, which was very good. I am happy to be able to pray for her specifically.
 - b. I thought that if we had had a little more time before the report's due date, we might have been able to ask, "How about next week?" when the student said that it was impossible to schedule a time to come to church on Sunday. It may have been possible for her to come to church. In my case, too, my partner said that Sunday was too late and so wanted to meet on a weekday. Because she hoped to do that, we met at a tea shop.
- (5) No particular thoughts or impressions:
- a. Nothing in particular 1
- (6) Other comments:
- a. It is not a point which should be improved or anything like that, but I myself am praying for the salvation of the student who came for the interview.
 - b. I was born into a Christian home, and though I did refuse to be baptized without considering it seriously, I became ill with a disease from which one in one hundred people suffer. My relationship with my partner changed, and when I had my breakdown, I met a pastor who opened my eyes, and I realized that love does exist and outgrew being ashamed of Christians. When I went over the list of possible questions which you sent me before this interview, I realized again the depth of meaning. That is all.³⁾

9. Remaining Barriers to Interviewers' Accepting the Gospel

The following are not direct responses to a question in the survey, but intentions which interviewees state in various sections of their responses. In them are indications of difficulties which need to be overcome in order to make the greatest possible opportunity for interviewers to receive the message of Christ or (in the case of a Christian interviewer) find the fullest growth in faith.

- (1) When I heard that the person who interviewed me was a Catholic Christian, I asked her, “Why did you come to Hokusei and not to Fuji [a local Catholic university]?” She said, “It’s because the God Catholics and Protestants believe in is the same.” I was made to realize again that I was seeing her with the stereotypical idea in mind that because she is Catholic she is different from Protestants, even though God loves both kinds of people [from 3].
- (2) [Referring to demographic barriers which may have impacted the interviews] I think there is a difference in our ages. Should I even call it a difference in values? I do not know, but in our church the problem of the tendency for the number of people in our Young People’s Division to decrease is becoming stronger. I understand that the only ones increasing are the Senior Citizens’ Division. The Middle Aged Division is temporarily closed down, I understand. [from 8]

10. Stated Openness or Intention to Continue Actively Supporting Interviewers in Pursuing Faith

The following are not direct responses to a question in the survey but willingness or plans to continue ministering to interviewers, which interviewees express in various sections of their responses.

- (1) I am happy to be able to pray for her specifically. [from 8]
- (2) I hope you will let me do more interviews in the future. [from 8]
- (3) . . . I myself am praying for the salvation of the student who came for the interview. [from 8]
- (4) I want to pray that through this interview, she will be able to think at least a little about God. [from 8]

11. Interviewees’ Perspectives on Change in Interviewers’ Impressions of Christian Faith and Related Matters through the Interviews

- (1) My interview partner asked questions with very deep interest, and I think that the little stereotypes and irrational perceptions which she had, disappeared somewhat (stereotypes about Christianity). [from 5]
- (2) The Holy Spirit was in me when I talked with my partner, too, so through the working of the Holy Spirit, I think my partner was able to think, “Maybe God really does exist.” [from 5]

[NOTES]

- 1) Exceptions included the interviewee whose partner had requested that she be allowed to continue their interview. I elected to wait in this case until the student had finished all the interviewing with this partner before sending the survey. When this student later said that she chose not to continue the interview, I mailed the survey to her interviewee that day and extended by one week the time by which the interviewee was allowed to complete and return the survey. Another delay occurred due to an interviewee's failing to mail her authorization form and thus not providing a contact address at which she could receive the survey. It took several days to search out her mailing address, but she received the survey within two weeks of the interview report due date. Also, I excluded the surveys of the two non-Japanese interviewees from the examination of this survey results.
- 2) Ten of twelve interviewees respond to the question here; however, the two who do not, in fact, do give responses in other sections of the survey which amount to positive reactions to this one. As a result, the total number of relevant, positive results may be counted as twelve of twelve.
- 3) The Japanese is quite vague at several points, leaving it unclear grammatically as to whether: the interviewee was actually baptized (or with what motivation); whether the "partner" she mentions is the interview report partner or some other one; whether that love exists for people in general or also for her; and whether "depth of meaning" refers to her own struggles, Christian faith in general, the question list she received, or what. However, this interviewee has indicated that she is a local church member, baptized into the faith by a community of believers. It is likely that the "partner" is a Hokusei Gakuen Women's Junior College student who requested this interviewee. The other vague points in this comment remain unclear.

[Abstract]

Creating a Context for Spiritual Formation through Interview Reports at Hokusei Gakuen Women's Junior College, Part III

James E. ALLISON

This article is the final one in a series which has presented an interview and reporting process as a means of teaching the Bible in the cross-cultural context of English Bible classes at Hokusei Gakuen Women's Junior College. Whereas previous works have dealt with the interviewers and their reflections on the learning process, the present one examines the project from interviewees' viewpoint. Their responses to Interviewee Reflection Survey questions indicate generally that, from their perspective, the interviews achieved their primary objective of clear communication of interviewees' stories of personal faith in Christ. They demonstrate that in addition to effectively creating a context for interviewers' learning, the interviews likewise contributed to the personal spiritual development of the interviewees.

Key words: Cross-Cultural Communication, Contextualized Ministry, Indigenous Christian Ministry, Spiritual Formation