Africa is the birthplace of humans. If this theory of human evolution is correct, I came here from one of the farthest human footpaths, from North East Asia. I am home after 100 thousands years. I am happy!

This personal and rather naive nostalgia of mine leads me naturally to think of our arche, namely the beginning and the original design from which we all originated albeit very long ago and far away. I would like to invite you to join me in an archaeological study of our knowledge and once again to think about the relationship of humanity with nature. I hope this can contribute something to our discussion about “Caring for Creation —— Caring for People”.

I am going to discuss three facets of the relationship between nature and humanity: namely, palliative care to end stage cancer patients; spiritual care to the survivors of Tsunami after the Great East Japan Earthquake 2011, and energy policy after the nuclear power plant failure.

keywords: Spiritual Care, Palliative Care, Great East Japan Earthquake and Tsunami, Nuclear Power, Despair of the Foil
PALLIATIVE CARE

Let me begin with a resent personal story about my friendship with a former colleague, Professor Rick.

Professor Rick (pseudonym) is my former colleague. He suffered from advanced pancreatic cancer and was in his hospice bed near his home. Professor Rick trained schoolteachers and he loved educating children and youths. He is not necessarily a type of scholar who has produced numerous books and articles. A small number of undergraduate students had recognized his deep insights, and respected him. They visited his office for a while with questions and to seek advice. They graduated to go on with their lives to be schoolteachers. In this sense, Rick did not have disciples.

He cherished not only Japanese pupils and students. He also spent most of his spare time and money to visit a child welfare organization in a small village in Indonesia. I accompanied him during summer holidays for my first years as a new faculty member at the university. He was a charming old man there. More than a hundred children loved Professor Rick. Everybody in the village knew that the children in the orphanage were his "sons and daughters."

Professor Rick and I were not necessarily close friends. He did not invite me on his visits to Indonesia after the first years. We seldom talked since we belong to different faculties. He retired some years ago and I thought we would not meet again.

One day, however, I received a telephone call from a friend of mine who is much closer to Professor Rick, asking for advice for the hospice care. Professor Rick's wife visited a hospice care facility that I introduced to her, and met the director physician with whom I worked in recent years. Mrs. Rick brought the medical data to the doctor as part of the
intersection. The next day in the evening, Professor Rick was carried to that hospice by ambulance because he had a sudden change of condition.

High quality care in the hospice was able to stabilize Professor Rick’s condition. I visited him. He thanked me for the arrangements of the facility. We reestablished our relationship. I visited him once in a while. Often, he sat on the bed and talked cheerfully about what he had experienced, whom he had met, and what he was planning to do. We enjoyed remembering some students with their particular characteristics. Professor Rick told me one day that one of those students visited him after noticing the Facebook notes he kept on his bed. The most impressive comment Professor Rick made the other day was, “I am having the happiest time in my life now. Old friends visit me. Former students come to tell how they had successfully run their classes at schools following my pedagogical advice. Some even became headmasters. I am able to chat through Skype with beautiful wives of the grown up children of the Indonesian orphanage. I did not know that I had been so blessed. I have so many who love me.”

Professor Rick lived his last moments that were illuminated by his own approaching death. He does not look back to regret or to be proud. He just enjoys being himself: being visited by family members, friends and old students, and freely talking about his memories and dreams. It does not matter how many visitors he had, in fact. His moments seemed to be filled with excitement and happiness. I am sure, according to his state of mind and spirit, even a single telephone call can cause him to feel bliss. This was the time for him to restructure his memories and compose the final version of his story where he was the happy protagonist.

This is one of the great achievements of humanity. Advanced medical science and technology relieved excruciating cancerous pain and gave a
peaceful time to Professor Rick. I can speak, as a hospital chaplain by training and as a spiritual care specialist for cancer patients, in saying that the palliative care given to Professor Rick was exemplary. As a friend of Rick’s, I am very thankful to the level of modern medicine.

He passed away. He was 72 years old. This is one of happiest cases of modern dying.

I share my personal experience because it tells much about the intersection between nature and modern technology.

Modern medicine itself, however, presupposes the clear division between life and death. Science keeps silent about death. Within the closed system of the life science, medicine finds laws and mechanism of life and intervenes to prolong life.

Nevertheless, we may need to have a wider perspective. One in two Japanese experience cancer in their lifetime and one in three die of cancer. The increase in cancer is an inescapable corollary of aging of the population. The longer one lives, the higher the risk of getting damaged DNA. Cancer cells are those with damaged DNA. Life is the process of replacing old cells with new ones. Healthy life is ensured only by the orderly deaths of the older cells and their replacements. Cancer cells refuse to die in an orderly way. They, rather, grow and use up nutrition necessary for other organs. They also metastasize to expand their domain. Cancer cells are originally parts of the body, but their refusal of dying endangers the life of the body. If we deny death, just like cancer cells, we cannot live. In this closer look, death is a part of living. Life is sustained by death.

This is the mystery of life. We have to meditate on this mystery of death/life, from a spiritual perspective. Caring for people is neither a manipulation of nature in order to meet endless human needs, nor an
Intersection of Nature and Humanity Japanese Reflection

intervention by human technology for the sake of human desire. We do not know, in the long run, what is really good for humanity. My friend Rick can find the sharp sparks of his life in the midst of severe limitation. It is at these quality Kairos moments that we have to seek the care for people. It is not just the length of life, governed by the all swallowing Greek god, Cronos. Our care for the dying is for the purpose of creating a Kairos moment.

TSUNAMI

At the other end of the spectrum, we experience a very different kind of death. Sixteen month ago, on the 11th of March 2011, we had the Great East Japan Earthquake. The following Tsunami swallowed nearly 20,000 people (15,863 deaths and 2,949 missing). All of them were just participating in the midst of their usual daily life activities when they were swept away.

Trying to understand the spiritual process experienced by the Tsunami victims and survivors, I have introduced a negative concept of “despair of the foil” in a paper I read at International Congress on Pastoral Care and Counselling, held in Rotorua, New Zealand, in August 2011[2]. I focused on the despair that the Tsunami victims may feel and the survivors experienced. I have characterized their state of being as the “foils”. Oxford Dictionary of English defines the word “foil” as

A person or thing that contrasts with and so emphasizes and enhances the qualities of another:
• a thin leaf of metal placed under a precious stone to increase its brilliancy.
  – origin Middle English: via Old French from Latin folium ‘leaf’.

Those “foils” or leaves, do not exist, or in this case do not die, for their
own sake. They live or die in order to give meaning to someone else with whom they had nothing to do personally. Just like a fish I had last night for my dinner, or a zebra that feeds a lion family, their lives are not their own. The meaning of their lives belongs to someone else. Tsunami victims are foils. They die only to characterize the Tsunami, only to impress the power and dominance nature has over humanity. I have developed the concept of “despair of the foil” in remembering the victims of natural disaster such as Tsunami and earthquake. But the same despair may be found among the victims of drought and epidemic. This despair may also be experienced by the victims of wars, socio-economic upheaval, or political actions, if people’s living and dying in the midst those vicious human deeds are utterly beyond their control. They have no idea why they are to suffer now. Their life-long stories and cherished relationships were just ignored. The value of each individual has not been accounted for.

In the modern world with its global complexity, it is often very hard to distinguish between natural causes and human causes of calamitous events. Is famine natural or human? Climate surely affects agricultural productivity. However, it is mainly an issue of allocation of available foods that causes famine in the modern world: Weapons, drugs and oil travel swiftly without borders behind the scenes. Weapons can reach even a hidden corner of a small remote village. Why can we not deliver food properly in the same way? The whole world is responsible for the shortage of food. Geographical distance or lack of awareness of local needs cannot be used as excuses. I am not even sure whether humans can justify the amount of money and resources used for cancer research that gave my friend Rick happiness and sense of completion at the end of his life.
I do not intend to go back to the old discussion of North–South conflict. The reality is much more complex and it is becoming more “glocal”, that is, the interrelated and mutually enabling system of global and local issues. The more complex the situation is, the less easy for each of us to find the meaning of life in that complexity. In this sense, most of us are foils. Good and meaningful deaths are hardly possible. It may be only in the private sphere, where one can find meaning in life and death.

Japanese traditional belief is called Shinto, which literally means the Divine Way. We can understand Shinto as the system of beliefs consisting of an animistic worldview and ancestor worship. Folklorists and cultural anthropologists have recorded that there are typically three stages that the souls of the deceased follow in popular Shinto beliefs.

At the first stage, the souls still have strong attachment to the living world and relationships. They have the power to influence and the power may harm on the living world. The souls at this stage are, therefore, extremely dangerous. We need rituals to pacify them, in the form of funeral and related rites, so that they accept the fact that they do not belong to this world any longer. The initial intention of the death ritual is to allow for the proper separation between the living and the dead, and defense from the influence of strong emotions (sadness, anger, remorse, despair, etc.) of the deceased. At the same time, Japanese believe those deceased have the just eyes. Since they are closer to the divinity, they can see what is really good and what is not. Prayers, which are offered to the deceased, often demand that justice be restored, if there were any elements of injustice behind the death.

Dynamic interaction between spirits of the living and the dead characterize the period. The living and the dead grieve in their distinct
and separated spheres, yet together. The souls are still around. Survivors tend to stay with the fact of death of the loved ones.

Rick and his family will provably pass through this stage smoothly. The victim and survivors of the Tsunami may need a significantly longer time to mourn. Violent deaths, including accidents, often require professional support in this stage.

In the second stage, those souls find the places in the other world. This stage begins when the living members in close relationship sense the peace of the deceased. We could argue, of course, that the sense of peace of the deceased is just the projection of the gained sense of peace within the living members. It may be so. But the expressions we encounter among grievers in the care setting are very “inter-active.” At this stage, the sense of being together with the departed is the ritual focus. Simple rituals, expressing the continued and strengthened relationship, such as saying “good morning” to the picture of the deceased, are observed. The emotion of the dead has been eased and they do no harm. They are now, in a sense, guardians. People will never forget the loved ones. They cherish good memories and keep empowered by ever-renewed interpretations of the memories. Causes of the death are not important any more, as long as the deceased have found their peace.

In those first two stages, the souls are those of deceased individuals. At the third stage, the souls are fused with the ancestors. Mid-August is a special period in the Japanese calendar. Ancestors come back home to stay with us. This is the time to pay tribute to the family tomb.

Japanese have built special shrines in order to worship the powerful souls of the particular historic individuals who died bad deaths, such as trapping or assassination. They will never attain peace. They stay at the first stage of the soul’s journey. Those souls stay active behind the scenes
of the living world. Many have forgotten that the original nature of the power of these souls is negative. People pray to those souls at shrines because they believe those souls are powerful. It is still very popular to visit those shrines for good luck, for peace in the family, academic success, happy marriages, etc. However, the original prayers for those souls must have been protection from the evil power.

The souls of the foils, namely the Tsunami victims, have extreme power and are dangerous, unless they are pacified. It is a political issue to commemorate the victims of natural disaster properly so that all the deceased souls can attain peace. The goal is that all the survivors can sense that the Tsunami victims have attained peace. From my perspective, all of the public actions commemorating the Tsunami and the Earthquake were necessary to facilitate the souls’ transition from the first stage to the second.

All living Japanese people know very well what is like being foils in the face of gigantic power of nature: earthquakes, tsunamis, typhoons, massive snowfall, landslides, etc. They are always with us. We sympathize with despair and commemorate the lives of the victims. The strategy to cope with the sense of being “the foil” is the act of remembering. Kenzaburo Oe, a Nobel Prize Laureate novelist, argued that remembering is our way not to accept the senselessness of death. What Oe suggests and what I am proposing here is the necessity of the painstaking effort of remembering the sense of despair of each and all foils. We all are invited to work with the remembered wisdom of the loved one, who was deceased, to find the way out from the despair. We remember the despair of the foil in order for the power of nature not to overshadow the beauty and the subtle texture of each foil. It is the task of the survivors to keep seeking for the
hope of the foils, namely their loved ones. Deceased souls at the second stage may be smiling always. But we have to remember the living face of each individual. We are destined to despair together with the fellow foils. We are also destined to arrive at hope.

It is difficult to have an image of “hope of the foil”. However, I think I know, at least, what is NOT the hope of the foil. If we politicize the foils as victims of a system or policy and try to discuss the possibility of compensation in the midst of a deprived meaning of life, it may end up with blaming someone or retribution. “Hope of the foil” can never be sought in revenge. Politicized foils will be forgotten once their case is settled. It may sound strange, but the hope of the foil is, in fact, in the remembering of their despair. Our brothers and sisters in South Africa are making courageous efforts, through the Truth and Reconciliation Commissions, to find their new social order. I need more study before commenting on this, which seems for me to be very theological. Here, I see hope in what we have discussed. Yet, I would say that no human effort could play God’s role to ensure the meaning of life and death.

NUCLEAR POWER

It is absurd to think that the nuclear energy was considered to be one of the most probable answers in energy technology to move against the problems of global warming and climate change, up until the 11th March 2011. On the 11th March 2011, because of the Great East Japan Earthquake and Tsunami, the largest nuclear accident in human history happened in Japan, the only country that experienced the atrocity of nuclear weapons. It is very sad. It is very strange to know that Japan has had 54 nuclear power plants out of 436 in the world. Japan has 12.4% of world nuclear power plants. Only the USA and France have more than
Japan.

A respected friend of mine, a German ecologically oriented theologian, was surprised to learn that there are so many nuclear power plants in Japan. She has literally shouted at me, saying, “how can you forget Hiroshima and Nagasaki!!”

The nuclear power plants produce about 25% of Japanese electricity. For obvious reasons, most of them are not active today. The Japanese have had a second summer with a shortage of electricity now. But so what? Concern about inconvenience and cost, though they are important, should not stunt the far more important discussion of how we relate with nuclear power.

The electricity generated at the Fukushima nuclear power plant was not used in Fukushima Prefecture. The generator belongs to the Tokyo Electronic Power Company, more than 300 kilometers away. A small town without any major industry had accepted the offer to build the generator because it provides the area not only with job opportunities but also with governmental subsidies. Now, the people who live within a radius of 30 kilometers from the reactor were to evacuate. They were dislocated from their place of living, from their resources of earning, from relationships, and from their homes. They are contemporary foils. The issue is not only one of compensation and restoration of life, but also one of lifting up the need to listen to their despair in order for the whole world to remember.

According to Oxford Dictionary of English, the “half-life period” is “the time taken for the radioactivity of a specified isotope to fall to half its original value”. The “half-life period” of typical fuel for nuclear generator (Uranium 235) is more than 700 million years. If the first human born in Africa had happened to find a piece of Uranium 235\(^3\), the level of radioactivity of that particular piece would be almost same even today.
Together with the issues around the global warming, this piece of nature must be considered to be very refractory to humans. The Fukushima area will be closed to life for decades.

“Care for Creation” is fine with me. However, if the phrasing were “Care for Nature”, it could not make sense to me. Nature has its laws and systems. The destruction of the Ozone Layer is one of the simple results of excess emissions of Carbon Dioxide. Likewise, human evolution and possible extinction occur, if there are causes. It is only when we take responsibility to maintain certain conditions of nature and human in favorable existence that we can care for them. In this discussion, I have called the favorable state of nature and humanity, “the creation”. As the assigned stewards, we have to take care of both nature and humans. Under this form of stewardship, neither can claim dominance over the other. However, relationships between nature and human are tense. So far, we did not pay much attention to the difference of scale of clock that nature and human have. We cannot work with the nature with the clock that is designed to guide individual psychological wellbeing. We have to expand our sense of wellbeing if we choose to be the stewards of nature, as well.

Kenzaburo Oe, the above-mentioned novelist, is right. Remembering the distressful fact that we are the foils is important. Foils constitute history. The memory of despair of the foils is excruciating. But if we pay attention only to the emotional process of individuals and try to appease them, we might miss the important aspect our life that is closely linked with nature. There are memories we should not forget, even how painful to do so. Memories of the despair of the victims of the nuclear warfare, memories of the despair of tsunamis to the eastern Japan, memories of the despair of
the people in Chernobyl and Fuskushima (all three of them happened within 100 years): they should have been kept alive. Instead of just counting the numbers of the foils for political purposes, and instead of politicians making their agenda on the basis of those numbers of dead and survivors, we should keep listening the dreadful voices of despair of the foils.

Pastoral and spiritual care providers are called to listen. As mental health care providers, chaplains listen for catharsis and for the process of regaining a suffering patient’s own authentic narrative and personal identity. As practical theologian, however, the pastoral and spiritual care providers listen for witnessing. Voices of despair of the foils are records of human encounter with nature. We can listen despair to the people, or the foils, because God listens. Jesus, on the cross, was a foil. He knew the despair of the foil in person. We cannot forget the details of despair of each one of those foils, because God will not forget.

We are called to care for creation and people. But the relationship between nature and humanity is refractory. In the face of the gigantic power of nature, we often feel that we are just foils.

Note
1) This paper was read as one of the keynote addresses at the 24th International Seminar of Society for intercultural Pastoral Care and Counselling: 15-21 September, 2012, at Moshi, Tanzania. The theme of the seminar was “Caring for Creation? Caring for People.”
2) Daniel Louw, Takaaki David Ito, and Ulrike Elsdorfer, Encounter in Pastoral Care and Spiritual Healing: Towards an Integrative and Intercultural Approach, Lit Verlag (2012); Takaaki David Ito, “Despair

3) Fortunately, there was no such possibility, because Uranium 235 is produce by human in 20th century.
Intersection of Nature and Humanity: Japanese Reflection

Takaaki David ITO

This is the paper read as one of the keynote addresses at the 24th International Seminar of Society for intercultural Pastoral Care and Counselling: 15–21 September, 2012, at Moshi, Tanzania. The theme of the seminar was “Caring for Creation? Caring for People.” Three facets of the relationship between nature and humanity are discussed: namely, palliative care to end stage cancer patients; spiritual care to the survivors of Tsunami after the Great East Japan Earthquake 2011, and energy policy after the nuclear power plant failure. A spiritual care concept “despair of the foil” is discussed again in this paper as the linking perspective for those three facets.