

管 区 事 務 所
〒162-0805
東京都新宿区矢来町65番
電話 (03)5228-3171
FAX (03)5228-3175

日 本 聖 公 会

NIPPON SEI KO KAI

PROVINCIAL OFFICE
65, Yarai-cho, Shinjuku-ku
Tokyo 162-0805, Japan
Tel. 81-3-5228-3171
Fax. 81-3-5228-3175

October 18, 2005

To: Mr. Junichiro Koizumi,
Prime Minister of Japan

From: The Rt. Rev'd Shoji Tani, Chairman
Peace and Justice Commission,
Nippon Sei Ko Kai

Objection to the Prime Minister's Visit to Yasukuni Shrine; Call to Desist From Future Visits

At the 55th (Regular) General Synod of the Nippon Sei Ko Kai held on May 27, 2004, our Church passed a resolution entitled "Objection to Prime Minister Koizumi's Visit to Yasukuni Shrine," and sent a statement to the Prime Minister's office calling upon you to desist from such visits. Notwithstanding, this past October 17, to mark the annual autumn festival, you visited Yasukuni Shrine, your fifth such visit since your appointment to this office.

On this occasion, although you did not clearly state that you were undertaking this visit as a private citizen, your actions were of such a form as to indicate the private nature of the visit. For example, you did not proceed to the Main Shrine but rather paid reverence at the nearer lesser shrine, and deposited a monetary offering in the offering box. Nevertheless, the grave reality remains that the current Prime Minister of Japan in fact made a visit to Yasukuni Shrine. Once again, we object vigorously to such an act on your part.

Article 20 of Japan's Constitution states that "neither the State nor any of its entities may carry out religious education or any other religious activities," thereby establishing the principle of separation between state and religion. Just this past September 30, the Supreme Court of Osaka, Judge Seiji Otani presiding, found that "such visits continue to be made, despite strong domestic and international criticism. The State has thereby given the impression of providing special support to Yasukuni Shrine, and promoted one particular religion." The court found that the Prime Minister's visit to the shrine qualifies as a religious activity prohibited under Article 20, and therefore ruled that such an act violates the Constitution.

The governments of China and South Korea have reacted strongly against your recent visit, for instance suggesting a possible review of scheduled diplomatic engagements with Japan. Both China and Korea are countries which suffered invasion and colonial rule at the hands of Japan's pre-war government. It seems only natural for these two countries to perceive any visit by the current Japanese Prime Minister to Yasukuni Shrine, a place which glorifies the militaristic rule of pre-war Japan and regards those who died in the war as fallen heroes, to be an act affirming the pre-war Japanese government.

Concerning your aim in visiting Yasukuni Shrine, you stated once again that it was "in order to keep the vow of renouncing war." We believe that fulfilling this aim will necessarily entail you yourself carefully reconsidering Japan's past history, firmly upholding the country's Peace Constitution, and promoting negotiations for peace.

The members of the Peace and Justice Commission of the Nippon Sei Ko Kai call upon you sincerely to heed the verdict of the Osaka Supreme Court as well as the voices of criticism raised by the Chinese and Korean governments, and to desist from future visits to Yasukuni Shrine as the acting Prime Minister.

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— THE ANGLICAN CHURCH IN JAPAN —