

Faith Succession in the Church : From Pastor's Wife to Pastor's Wife

Toshinori KAWAMATA*

Abstract

In this paper I will discuss the problem of faith succession of a pastor's wife. Through interview data the life histories of four pastors' wives are related. Consequently, as for the success factor of (1) faith succession, the posture in which encouragement of worship attendance, duty and parents are steadfast is mentioned. (2) If intention understanding of parent and child can be aimed at well, the style of educational instruction is various and good. (3) The role assignment of a pastor and a pastor's wife and pastors' wives' role assignment are effective. This is the first part of a research project into faith succession.

Keywords; faith succession, pastor's wife, role conflict, church

1. Introduction

Christians have been, for a long time, a religious minority in Japan. Most of the churches are small-scale, counting 50 members or less. Church members have many within this community pastors' wives hold unique roles while they contribute a great deal to the Church have no clear position, when compared to the Pastor or Priest. We can also find, among pastors' wives, they individuals who, due to their work in the Church, become physically and spiritually exhausted.

While in America it is not difficult to find publications related to Pastors' wives, in Japan they are almost nonexistent. In this sense the following attempts to fill this gap by collecting materials and making an effort to make public this discussion.

2. Purpose

In this Study, the basic data consists of interviews conducted with the pastors' wives about their life history, about the way they received the Christian teachings from their mothers, and how they passed the teaching on to their daughters. We would like to emphasize here the

*本学非常勤講師・鈴鹿短期大学、宗教社会学 (Sociology of Religion)

differences between the speeches of the mother and her daughter.

This study is the first part of a research project investigating the generational passing of faith within Japanese churches, As we will see, faith is not necessarily passed successfully to the next generation. This will be investigated in greater detail in a later study. Here we would like to analyze a case where faith was successfully passed on. Thus ours is not a case study which intends to verify a work hypothesis. There is no intention of, through the exposition of a few cases, exposing the general problems regarding the role of pastors' wives in Japan. Our intention here is to find many problems.

3. Method and Participants

As our main purpose here is to find problems, we would like to focus on the “individual narratives”, analyzing the question through a life history approach. The subjects of our research are as follows:

- Mrs. A, born in 1949. She is a lay person, she had some experience in teaching at High School. Along with her husband, she changed the denomination she used to belong to.
- Mrs. B, born in 1949. She is licensed as a minister, and has experience as a part-time nurse.
- Mrs. C, born in 1951. She is also licensed as a female evangelist.
- Mrs. D, born in 1976. She is also licensed as a female evangelist. The cases of Mrs. C and D will be described in full detail later on.

In the following section of our presentation, we would like to present the general problems regarding pastor's wives, through the cases of Mrs. A and B. Following, we would like to discuss the problem of Faith Succession, through the cases of Mrs. C and D.

4. Some problems regarding pastor's wives

After careful investigation and examination of the questionnaires handed to each Church, three areas of concern became apparent: domestic economy and privacy; education of the children and role conflicts.

① Domestic Economy and Privacy

In small churches, it's impossible to make ends meet only through the donations made by the church members, which forces some pastor's wives to find work outside, to help with the expenses. They also hope to be able to enroll their children in a public school, where the expenses are cheaper. There are only a few churches where a division between the “Church” and the

“Pastor’s Residence” can actually be seen, and thus problems such as “the position of the Pastor’s Residence” and “a life without privacy” soon develop.

Mrs. A: By the time the kids were one, two and six years old, we used to live in the [Church] Hall. They were only kids, so they’d carelessly scatter the toys around, playing with the kitchen utensils and so on. It was very hard, and I could never put everything back in order [before the church meetings]. Then, one of the members whose kid was attending [our] English classes told me something like: “on Sundays [the church] is clean, but it’s usually dirty on other days”. Since I was young, those words hurt me.

In this case, renting another place for the pastor’s residence the following year solved the problem. However, the pastor’s wife had to find a job as a High School English teacher. Nevertheless, the afore-mentioned case may be a problem for pastors and church members who value the presence of the pastors’ wives inside the church.

② Education of the Children

The pastor’s children will be forcibly exposed to the Church atmosphere. There are children who manage to live their lives without great issues, but cases such as the following are not an exception:

Mrs. B: (When my eldest daughter confirmed her baptism during the second grade of Junior High School), she said: “for me, church was a rival”. As a parent, it was very painful to hear that. As expected, there was the feeling that “my parents are being taken away from me by the church”.

After the second year of Junior High School, Mrs. B’s eldest son stopped attending all the religious services, giving extracurricular activities as an excuse. After many conflicts, he finally returned to the church. Other interviewees also stated that it’s very common, during Junior and Senior High School years for children, to stop attending the Church. Friendships and school activities take priority and lead to many kinds of trouble. In the cases we have analyzed, the children were able to overcome these problems, and by the time of our survey the children, now grown up, were working either as pastors or had become pastor’s wives. Still, there are also cases of children who leave the church. According to some studies, young people abandon Christianity

mainly because of work, disease, and quarrels inside the Church.

③ Role Conflicts

There are some big churches where the follower's role is clear, but in most of the small-scale churches, it's very difficult to determine what is expected from the Pastor's wife, both by the followers and by the pastor himself. Pastors' wives act in order to make their role more clear, but when they are not sufficiently recognized, conflicts arise.

Mrs. A: There is a woman who would always speak ill of others. For example, about someone who recently was not showing up at the Church as usual, she would say something like: "that person is absent a lot, hey", and I replied "that person's faith is not diligent". Soon all members knew I had said that, and I became known as a coldhearted woman. That's something to be careful about... I heard that one of the believers told my husband: "[your wife] is over-diligent with the missionary work, we can't keep pace with her". I wonder if it is because I tend to say too many things like, "Let's meet at the Bible Class", or, "You're welcome at the meetings!" The believers are not able to do everything like me.

Mrs. B: I was working as a nurse at a small kindergarten for disabled children. It's an institution attended by both the children and their mothers... I went to work there first for economic reasons and second, for social welfare and direct missionary work. Although I once stopped, I realized that this kind of welfare work is necessary for the church. I thought that it would be nice to build a relationship with these kinds of people, and to have something I could help with.

Mrs. A, who was very diligent about the church matters, kept worrying about her relationship with the church members. After all, she found an occupation outside the church, thus solving her conflicts by changing her activities into an indirect form of missionary work. Mrs. B, even though busy with her marriage and the church affairs, found time to engage in a social welfare related job, thus finding self-realization at the same time as helping with the family expenses. Working as a part time nurse, she lived her days to the full.

5. Case Studies

① Subjects

The following case concerns Mrs. C and D. They belong to an evangelical church in the northern area of Tokyo. Their church, which has approximately 150 members, was founded in 1948. Mrs. C's husband assumed the Church in 1984, and remains until today as the responsible Pastor. Mrs. C was born in 1950, in Shizuoka Prefecture, the second of five children. Though her mother and all her brothers became Christians, her father did not convert. She lived in her hometown until High School, and she came to Tokyo in order to attend nursery school. She lived in a dormitory for a year, but to devote herself more to Christianity, she moved to the Church, where she lived for another year. After graduating from college, she attended, for one year, the Theology School that belonged to her Church. She became engaged to her present husband at the age of 21. At that time her future husband was in America, studying at a Theology School. Mrs. C also went to the United States, where she was admitted to the same school as her husband. When she was 22, she returned to Japan where they were married. They had 3 daughters.

Mrs. D is the eldest daughter of Mrs. C. She was born in Tokyo, in 1975. After graduating from the Nursery School of a Christian College, she attended a Biblical school in Kobe for one year, after which she returned to Tokyo to look for a job. At the age of 23 she married a Theology student.

Both Mrs. C and D have the qualification of female evangelist given by their denomination. Presently, they are both acting as co-pastors. Next, we would like to present the interviews conducted with Mrs. C and D, calling special attention to questions like "becoming a Pastor's Wife", "mental attitude" and so on. From these questions, we would like to discuss the problem of faith succession.

② Discussion

[Becoming a Pastor's Wife]

Mrs. C: I decided to devote myself to God when I was 15. By that time, to devote oneself to God meant to become a Pastor was all I could think about... My husband's sister is married to a Pastor, and when I was between elementary and junior high school, I would watch the way they conducted the Church School and dealt with Children. That made me think: "I want to become like that". When I saw the way they took care of the children, I used

to think: “what an amazing job”.

Mrs. D: (When I got back from the Bible School in Kobe), I used to work at the Church, but once I wondered: “If I’m not here, who is going to do this job?” Then I chose for me the same path my parents walked in. I would to work for the people to come to church with out having to worry about anything. I was only 23 years old, and without thinking too much all I could feel was: “I will keep doing this”. I still don’t know if it was something I chose from the bottom of my heart. If I hadn’t been born in this house, things might also have been different.

Mrs. C, who decided to devote herself in her mid teens, admired the pastor’s wife of her Church. Mrs. C, who liked dealing with children, went to nursery school, and upon graduation she lived for one year at the Church, as a devotee. During this period, she met the Pastor’s son, who she would marry with, becoming herself a Pastor’s wife. As the eldest daughter of the succession candidate of the church, Mrs. D was secretly held expectations against even by her grandmother. Mrs. D would start to feel that these expectations grew stronger by the time she graduated from college, and was studying for a year at the Bible School in Kobe. After that, she returned to the Church, where she kept working. Her parents then introduced her to her husband, a Theology student. They were married and now play a very important role at the church.

In terms of Faith, what kind of education did Mrs. C give Mrs. D?

[Church Life]

Mrs. C: First of all, I had the conscience to raise the children with a healthy body, so they’d never have to be absent from the church meetings. Even during times the children had a very high fever, they were not allowed to miss church, and I didn’t let them rest. It wasn’t that I was severe with that but I felt that attending the services was the least thing the children should do. I really don’t know if they felt pressure or not.

Mrs. D: I felt that attending the religious services was half an obligation and half fun. By now, it is really good that it has become a habit... My father would always repeat that: “If we don’t attend the church properly, our job is gone...” He would always recommend to the members a lifestyle in which

the church was the center, so if his own kids didn't attend the church properly, they wouldn't be able to live at the church anymore. After understanding my father's job it made me realize that I couldn't miss the services... No matter what, my parents' opinion would not change. "It is unconditional, and you're the one who is wrong", they would always say. If they had taken a vague attitude, I probably wouldn't think that attending the church was that important. That was their greatest challenge as parents. I think that this might be why I never opposed too much.

Always emphasizing their childrens' presence at the services, Mrs. C and her husband's intentions were satisfactorily passed on to Mrs. D, to the point of making her say, "it is really good that it became a habit". As a result, we can say that Faith was successfully passed on. Presently, Mrs. D's sisters also work at the Church. There were a few conflicts between the parents and their daughters, related to things such as make-up, but according to both sides, they never lead to that much opposition. Mrs. C and Mrs. D are the kind of mother and daughter who usually talk about everything.

Next, I would like to discuss the pastor's wife's orientation and concrete role.

[Orientation of Pastor's wives]

Mrs. C: (My mother-in-law) would always say: "You should not believe with your head". I would live here for a year, and even though I had a job she would always take me every time there was some work to do. During the year I lived with her, we would never just sit and talk, because she would soon say: "let's go clean up that house", or "let's help that person". I think it's not about saying difficult things; it's about learning by yourself what's written in the bible. She would say: "superficial things are useless". She enjoyed teaching a lot, so I think I learned a lot just by being with her, from the morning to the evening. I learned with her by cooking, by engaging in everyday conversation... but there were also times when I cried. I still can't forget when she said: "Working hard is not something we do just for people to think good about us".

(Presently, me, Mrs. D and D's husband) have a (guidance) meeting once a week. After that, I talk alone to D, while my husband talks to D's husband.

Mrs. D: In the beginning, once I was enthusiastic, thinking that it was something I had to do, people told me “your expression is serious”. I was told: “you shouldn’t put yourself above the person you’re guiding, but rather walk along as a friend, growing up together”. “Talk more to people”, or when I used to sit, “stand up and go talk to those people”. It’s about the way you talk to and care about people. I’m always being told a lot, but these are the most emphasized ones. “I’d like you to talk to that person”, or “That person is not coming recently. Maybe it’d be better if we sent him something”, always detailed things like those...

Mrs. C’s mother-in-law used to emphasize actions over words. Once the Pastor and his wife were very strict. There were also times when Mrs. C cried, but in the end Mrs. C became herself like that. Mrs. C meets Mrs. D and her husband every week in a pre-determined time, and that’s when the guidance takes place. Other than that, we can infer that Mrs. D also learns from C in everyday conversation.

[The Role as Pastor’s Wife]

Mrs. C: (The pastor wife’s) main activities are the ones that can’t be performed by the Pastor. During the meetings and church services, I always look to the members from behind. I pay attention to their condition, and if they don’t look so well I go talk to them. When my daughters were small, I’d always be with them during the services, but after they grew up I always tried to stay at the back of the church. So the Pastor can preach easier, I always pay attention and make people move along the seats (so everyone can be comfortable). I always try to talk as much as possible to the people who attend the services. If I still can’t talk to them, I send e-mails, or fax, or even letters... rather than working outside, I work at home. For example, if a member can’t come to the meetings because of her children, I usually offer to take care of them myself. I would feed their kids and then check if they were doing their homework properly, and so on. It was very convenient; because these were things I’d have to do for my own children anyway. Once they got old enough to work, the kids would take part in the Brass Band (which is

one of the church activities), and so on... (For me) it's very convenient. Just when I had to raise my own kids, I also had to look after other people's children. It was something like "bring your kids, there's no problem", so by that time there were always lots of people at home. Now, these kids (are married) and have their own home. They keep coming to the church and bringing their kids with them, for that I am very thankful.

Mrs. D: (During the religious services) I have to take care of the children, so I sit right in the front... When I talk to my friends, rather than saying that "I took over my mom's religion", I'd rather explain my situation by saying that "I took over the family business"... It doesn't matter if it's a Church or a Liquor Shop... (I'm responsible) for everything related (to the young people's meetings and so on), even putting things back in order in the very end. If it's possible, I leave some details for the (church) members (to deal with). It's not that I do everything by myself; I just help them with the most difficult things. Once a month I'm organizing a lunch meeting, for young people. Someone informs all the others, then another person writes down everyone's names for me, and so on. They take some of my responsibility... Someone even collects the money, but I'm the one responsible for the final account.

Both Mrs. C and her mother in law would hold meetings to discuss the pastor's wife's role. There are many cases in which either the Pastor or his wife have to find work outside the church, but in the case of Mrs. C, she would rather stay at home to take care of the church member's children. Even today, she holds tea parties with the people who live nearby, at the cafeteria-like space located on the second floor of the Church. Mrs. D, who is intended to become the young people's leader, is responsible for the Brass Band and other youth related activities. Through the interview's we have just presented, it becomes clear that in her life, Mrs. D already has a lot to take care of.

[About the Parents]

Mrs. D: My parents are very happy, but I think it's due to the wonders of being a Christian. Of course the doctrine is there, but the fact that they will remain happy no matter what, has a lot of value for them as Christians.

That's something I'd like to continue.

As we can see, the way Mrs. D sees her parents is very clear.

6. Conclusion

Through a series of detailed interviews conducted with pastors' wives the issue of faith succession has been analyzed. The information collected in these interviews leads to three main observations.

- (1) One of the reasons for the success of faith succession is the resolution shown by the parents in inducing the children to take part in the religious services.
- (2) If parents and their children can understand each other well, the style of the education becomes manifold and effective.
- (3) The division of roles between the pastor and his wife, and between pastor's wife and pastor's wife can be very fruitful.

In all three observations, the importance of the pastors' wives roll concerning faith succession is made very clear. Without the efforts of the wife, there would be little guarantee of faith succession. This should be investigated further in future interviews. As well, future research should also include observations of the roll of the pastor related to faith succession.