

## **Abe a blind man who doesn't want to see**

Dec 29 , 2013 by Daniel J. Bauer

News reports in recent hours have focused on reactions primarily from China, but other Asian countries (including Taiwan) as well, to Japanese Prime Minister Shinzo Abe's visit to Yasukuni Shrine, dedicated to the memory of some 2 ½ million Japanese soldiers killed at war. For much of Asia, a visit by Mr. Abe to any shrine honoring his country's soldiers, vintage World War II, would have been provocation enough. To rub salt into old wounds, however, Yasukuni Shrine includes a tribute to 14 men an allied tribunal found guilty of atrocities ("war crimes" is the sanitized term) at the end of World War II.

These reactions are both important and interesting.

They are important because emotions attached to nationalism are already bubbling hot in our part of the world. We've got that on-going dispute over islands involving Taiwan, Japan, the Philippines and, heaven help us, China. We've got fragile tempers between Washington and Beijing, following the near collision that occurred on December 5 between the *Cowpens* and the *Liaoning*, two war ships in the South China Sea. US Defense Secretary Chuck Hagel called the incident this week "irresponsible" on China's side. We've got that silly huffing and puffing mere weeks ago by China about new-fangled rights to air space.

Should we also toss political machinations in Pyongyang into the picture? A pretty scary sight that is, the sudden condemnation and execution of an elderly, smiling uncle the world had assumed was second in command in North Korea, and a benign family-minded mentor, to boot.

No Sir, Mr. Abe, we really don't need more to worry about.

The controversy over Abe's visit to Yasukuni Shrine is interesting personally to me because of what it suggests about the durability of the damage that still survives so long after the end of World War II. That is a war whose scars, at least here in Asia, seem fated to last forever.

What is it about killing on behalf of one's country, forcing an enemy to its knees, and then shaming it to the moon and back, that makes the aftermath so unforgettable?

The Abe flare-up just happens to be on my mind as I contemplate an article Georgiana Prodhon published

this past week from Vienna for Reuters. Prodhon wrote of efforts the Vienna Philharmonic Orchestra made last October to face shameful and deeply uncomfortable truths about its involvement with the Third Reich.

Prodhon reminds us that nearly 75 years have passed since Hitler's war machine annexed Austria, and nearly 70 years since the Vienna Philharmonic Orchestra unabashedly "cleansed" itself (my wording) of Jewish members or members who had Jewish relatives.

Imagine: the lives of 13 musicians were changed in one quick and ugly turn of history. Of the 13, 5 eventually died in Nazi-run concentration camps, and 6 escaped into exile. Up to 11 other orchestra members, married to Jews, lived in constant fear of reprisals or lesser forms of persecution.

The Vienna Philharmonic Orchestra, arguably the most celebrated group of musicians in the world, publicly announced this past fall the revocation of its coveted awards to six prominent Nazis.

It took three-quarters of a century - - far too long, to be sure - - but the move in Vienna marks a significant step toward truth and healing for all countries directly affected by fanatical anti-Semitism during the World War II era. The Vienna rectification offers as well a challenge to right-minded people everywhere today, regardless of their nationality.

One of the Nazis stripped now of his Vienna Philharmonic honors, Baldur von Schirach, governor of Vienna from 1940 - 1945, reportedly once described his overseeing of the deportation of tens of thousands of Jews as "a contribution to European culture." Just how blind can a person be?

Back now to Mr. Abe. His visit to Yasukuni Shrine shows that he suffers from an appalling blind spot. He is perhaps proof of the old saw that no man is as blind as the man who does not want to see.

With a beloved old hymn, the Vienna Philharmonic Orchestra can however say, "I once was blind, but now I see." (Father Daniel J. Bauer SVD is a priest and associate professor in the English Department at Fu Jen Catholic University.)

## **Talking points :**

1. This column talks about the recent visit by the Prime Minister of Japan to a SOLDIERS' WAR MEMORIAL, which includes honors for soldiers guilty of horrible acts against innocent people in China and Korea and possibly other countries. How much about Japan do you know from the World War II era?
2. For the rest of our discussion today, may we talk about next semester and the future of our "Let's look at Father Bauer's China Post column on Sundays discussion group"? We are all very busy with so many things. What advantages and disadvantages do we face for the future of our discussion group at lunch times on Thursdays?
3. Should we reduce the TALKING POINTS to 1 or 2, instead of 3, to allow for more time to relax?

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