

特別賞/日米協会会長賞/  
アルムナイ特別賞

立石 瑛士さん 慶應義塾湘南藤沢高等部 3年

神奈川県

小学生の頃の海外での経験をもとに、このエッセイを書きました。物事を客観的にかつ偏見なく正しく捉えるために必要な、何事も経験し、知識を得ようとする大切さが伝わればと思っています。

### Looking Through the Glass

As the glaring sun diffuses through the stained glass, displaying a kaleidoscope of colors, a resounding “Amen” resonates around the chapel and I am liberated from my cage of despair and despondency. While the other students trot out of the chapel, I grudgingly stand up and trudge towards the exit shaking my head in disbelief, muttering “Jesus is fake”.

It had been three weeks since I was tossed into this Catholic school in Michigan. The eight-year-old me was engulfed with skepticism and repulsion towards religion. Since I grew up in a non-religious household in Japan, I could not fathom why people would fervently worship a non-existent being. Their dependence on God seemed to be a sign of impotence to me because I regarded religious practice as a form of escapism. Moreover, my condescending attitude towards religion was also stimulated because of the terrorist attacks carried out by Aum Shinrikyo, a religious cult. In Japan where the occasional interaction with Buddhist monks is the only contact the majority of us have with religion, these attacks seemed to epitomize the results of excessive religious practices. My innate prejudice had led me to label the people at my school as single-minded fanatics.

As time went on, the nest of aversion towards religion I harbored in my mind distanced me from my surroundings. I felt imprisoned in a distorted, fogged, and colored glass cube. Everything surrounding me seemed “evil”. I refused to acclimate to the new environment. I recoiled at the thought of talking to my classmates. I alienated myself from my surroundings. There was one person who was an exception, nevertheless. As hard as I tried to sever relationships with everyone, Mrs. Love, my teacher, always managed to tape things back up. She would talk to me about everything, with topics ranging from math problems to Japanese cuisine while never letting go of the English-Japanese dictionary she bought for me. After the conversations she would always ask me “Tanoshii syaberu?” and I could not help but reluctantly

nod each time with a grin. She was the sun, radiating rays of gentle and comforting sunlight onto my glass cube.

So I grimaced when I looked up and Mrs. Love materialized right in front of me as I was muttering, "Jesus is fake". I froze as if I was petrified and knowing that she was an avid churchgoer, braced myself for the end of all the comforting moments we had together. I was taken aback when, contrary to the admonishment I thought I would face, Mrs. Love started to apologize and said "I was wrong. I wasn't able to understand your struggle because I'm Catholic myself. I should have realized." She accepted me for who I was, and explained that I did not need to feel pressured to worship the same religion. The fact that a devout Christian accepted me even when I had disrespected her God astonished me. I felt ashamed that even though she had showered me with rays of benevolence, I would not even try to understand or show respect to her beliefs. Realizing how ignorant and naive I was, this experience led me to open my heart and I vowed to grasp the true nature of religion. As time progressed, the bizarre abstraction of the stained glass patterns slowly turned into a beautiful portrait of Jesus, a heavenly symbol of compassion and understanding. Reflecting on this experience, I believe that both Mrs. Love and I understood how as the Bible says, people "are darkened in their understanding...because of the ignorance that is in them". It changed my perspective, and I can now perceive how prejudice derives from ignorance and how this is not constrained to religion. In fact, it is analogous to the world's problems, where conflicts, racism, and disinformation are all fostered by misconceptions resulting from ignorance clouding people's perspective. Humans are shaped into beings wearing opaquely colored glasses. In the rapidly evolving modern world, where information is easily accessible, it is critical for people to acknowledge their lack of knowledge and strive towards making the glass transparent. After all, the lesson Mrs. Love taught me is that life deprived of clear sight is a life wasted.

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