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MOVIE REVIEW

Children of Nagasaki

'NAGASAKI' EARNEST, BUT DULL

By KEVIN THOMAS,
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As an anti-nuclear protest, "Children of Nagasaki" (at the Koku-sai) is nowhere as effective as "Testament" or even "The Day After." Drawn from essays by Dr. Takashi Nagai, a radiologist who survived the atomic bombing of Nagasaki, it is a slow, grueling experience, its preachiness compounded by an insistent emphasis on Nagai's faith, which was Roman Catholic. (The picture begins with the Pope giving an anti-nuclear speech in Japan.)

Having experienced Hiroshima and Nagasaki, the Japanese obviously are in a unique position to protest nuclear weapons and to plead for disarmament. They have done so on the screen from time to time, most notably in Kurosawa's remarkable "Record of a Living Being" (1955) in which Toshiro Mifune played an elderly tycoon thought mad for his crusade against atomic testing. Therefore, "Children of Nagasaki" is of interest not so much for its subject but for having been directed by the veteran Keisuke Kinoshita, long regarded as one of Japan's major film makers. Yet aside from the sincerity and dignity Kinoshita imparts to it, "Children of Nagasaki" is a routine and heavy-handed message movie.

Already dying from leukemia contracted through his work, Nagai (Go Kato) in the Nagasaki aftermath has two goals: to record his experience, both as a scientist and a man of God, and to instill in his two small children—who had been evacuated before the blast—qualities of character and ethics that will enable them to survive without him in a world in ruins.

Kinoshita remains a gifted director of actors, especially of Chikage Awashima (as the children's resilient grandmother), who attained stardom in the '50s under Kinoshita's guidance. But "Children of Nagasaki" (Times-rated Mature because of themes and realistic depiction of A-bomb victims) is too uninspired not to be a turnoff instead of the consciousness-raiser it struggles so earnestly to be.