



GOD BEYOND OUR BRAIN AND LANGUAGE

A Goldfish Story

For many years I kept goldfish in an aquarium in Fukuoka. If goldfish could talk, I would ask them what they thought of human beings. The goldfish see our chest and arms as we walk by everyday. If they bothered to look down, they saw our feet. When we stared into the aquarium they saw our head. They did not know how our head, chest, and feet were connected. But goldfish would not care about that. The goldfish would say, “More than anything else human beings are giant hands that drop fish food into the fish tank.”

We would laugh and laugh at such a description of humans. Giant hands dropping fish food! How can human beings be understood without talking about heart or face? We would scold the goldfish saying, that is not understanding, but misunderstanding—a joke or an insult to human beings. If you can’t do any better why don’t you shut up?

The goldfish apologize. “Our eyesight is so weak and our brain is so feeble that we can’t do any better. But human beings are so important to us. Please allow us to talk about human beings in our own way. Without the hands that drop the food we would die. Although what we say may be an insult to human ears, it is the highest understanding and the best possible message for us stupid goldfish.”

In the same way, angels in heaven must hold their stomachs, laughing at the theology of Christians. The best descriptions of God in all the religions of the world are merely jokes or insults to the ears of angels. Angels would say, “If you can’t do better than that, please shut up!” But we would say, “God is so important to us, please allow us to talk about God **in our own way**.” “What we say may be an insult to angel ears, but for us inferior humans, it is **marvelous Good News**—the power of God for salvation!” (Romans 1:16).

Limitations of Human Religious Language

1 John 1:3 says, “We proclaim to you what we have seen and heard, so that you also may have fellowship with us.” What did they see and hear? They saw God! They heard God! Can human beings understand with human brains and express with human language a God who is far beyond our human experience? Isaiah 55:9 “As the heavens are higher than the earth, so are my ways higher than your ways and my thoughts than your thoughts.” NIV

The Model of a Rock

We sing that our God is “the Rock of Ages.” How is our God like a rock or boulder? A rock is **cold and heavy**. Is God cold and heavy? No. A rock or boulder is **indestructible** and **unmovable**; therefore, it is **dependable**. Yes, that is what we mean to say—that God is dependable. Of four meanings of rock, we reject two and accept three.

The Model of a Son

- 1) A son is the fruit of sexual relations between his father and mother. Is this the meaning of Jesus being the Son of God? No.
- 2) A son **begins to exist at birth**. Did Jesus begin to exist on Christmas Day in the Bethlehem manger? No. The Gospel of John has Jesus as the Word existing before Christmas from the very beginning with God (John 1:1).
- 3) A son in youth is **weaker than his father**. Is this the meaning we want? No.
- 4) A son is **obedient to his father**. Yes, that is how Jesus is the Son of God. As the Good Shepherd (John 10:11-16), Jesus defends the flock even when hired shepherds would have fled in fear of an attack by wild wolves. Having emptied himself out, Jesus descended to earth as a servant obedient unto death, even death on the Cross (Philippians 2:7-8).
- 5) A son **knows his father most intimately**. Yes, Jesus knows God the father more intimately than others do.
- 6) A son **inherits the wealth and authority of the father**. Yes, Jesus inherits the spiritual wisdom and compassion of God the Father.

Of six meanings of the model “son,” we reject three and accept three.

This need to reject some meanings of “rock” and “son” while we accept other meanings can lead to confusion and misunderstanding. Why not reject rock and son as imperfect models and find other models that fit God and Jesus exactly? No such luck! As the heavens are high above the earth, so are His ways and thoughts than our ways and thoughts (Isaiah 55:8,9). **There is no word or image or symbol in our human world that fits God exactly**—whether Judge, Pillars of Cloud and Fire, Lamb of God, Redeemer, Word of God, Spirit of God, Betrayed Husband (Hosea), Prophet, Priest, King, Great Physician, or Father.

A Thousand Times Better Than Christian Theology

I was a junior in high school. My hero was Yoshimasa (names altered), a sophomore at the junior college. He was brilliant in mind, charming in spirit, and totally committed to Jesus Christ. Why couldn't I be gifted like Yoshimasa? There was also Mildred, an attractive high school sophomore so concerned for the salvation of her father. Then there was Ronald, totally serious and totally committed to the Gospel. A whole lifetime has now passed by. Yoshimasa, Mildred, and Ronald have not gone to church for perhaps over fifty years. They saw some problem in the Christian logic of salvation. So they threw Jesus away. Why must it be the most sincere ones who leave the church?

They thought that the problems in Christian salvation logic were problems in God. 1% of the Japan population going up; 99% going down. How can you stand that? But I learned that the problems in Christian salvation logic are problems in the **limitations of the human brain to understand and human language to express. God is not the problem; we are the problem.**

God is a hundred times, a thousand times more wonderful than the best Christian theology. Yoshimasa, Mildred, and Ronald didn't know that. That's why they threw Jesus away. I knew that. That's why I am still running hard after Jesus, 74 years after I first believed as a 9 year old kid in Hilo, Hawaii. What do you think?

Dickson Kazuo Yagi

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Dickson taught Christian Theology for 27 years at Seinan Gakuin University in Fukuoka, Japan, where he is Professor Emeritus of Christian Studies. He also taught Intro. to World Religions, Christian Ethics, Bible, Outstanding Christian Activists, and a seminar in Buddhist-Christian Studies. He was Head Chaplain of the university, one term. Until retirement he was a member of Tōzai Shūkyō Kōryū Gakkai, one of the highest levels of Buddhist-Christian Dialogue in Japan.

In Los Angeles he is Chair of the Council for Pacific Asian Theology (CPAT) and Chair of Nikkei Interfaith Fellowship. Rev. Yagi is a retired minister at Sage Granada Park United Methodist Church in Alhambra, CA. He is retired at Pilgrim Place, Claremont, CA, where he is Chair of the Religions Committee. He can be reached at dkyagi@icloud.com

GOD BEYOND BUDDHISM AND CHRISTIANITY: UPAYA, HÖBEN, AND MODELS

Buddhism teaches the inadequacy of the human brain and human language to directly grasp the world of spirit. Buddhists teach this as the first step in theology by the slogan **upaya** (Sanskrit), and **hōben** (方便 Chinese/Korean/Japanese). Christians teach the very opposite. Christians are taught that the message of other religions are only **relative truths** devised by fruitless human effort groping after God in the dark. Christians have received **absolute truth** on Mt. Sinai revealed by God from heaven on tablets of stone written by the finger of God. Christian Philosophy class in seminary and graduate seminars in Religious Language finally teach something deeper.

Christian professors do not say **upaya** or **hōben**, but they teach exactly the same thing using the word, **models**. God is not exactly like a human father, but “father” is the best **model** for God in a patriarchal church in a patriarchal society. God is not a human being so **God could not be a human father**. Humans need a human model for God or they cannot think about God at all. So God as father is a lie, but perhaps the best model for humans in a patriarchal society if humans are to think at all about God—a **necessary lie**. This lie, using human concepts for God who is beyond human, is the tricky symbolic use of human language. This deep, necessary understanding of the truth/lie double aspect of all religious language is the first step that makes interreligious dialogue possible. Those Buddhists and Christians who understand **upaya, hōben, and models** can do interfaith dialogue. Others cannot.

I complained to a Buddhist priest that Christians think of God too much as a human father. He laughed and said that almost all Buddhist images look like male human beings, too. God as mother, God as parent, or Mother/Father God might be more appropriate for non-patriarchal societies. Notice the major role of Mary veneration in Catholic societies. Psycho-socially Mother Mary is perhaps a fourth addition to the Catholic Trinity? If God is not really male, what is wrong with a Mother God?

Tenrikyō and Konkōkyō, both Shinto based Japanese religions, refer to **God as Parent** (Oya-gami). Shin Buddhism sometimes refers to Amida Buddha also as Parent. Shūsaku Endo, Catholic novelist, is famous for best-selling novels including biographies of Jesus Christ. Bible scholars point to the Father God of the Bible. He readily confesses that the God of his Jesus is a “Mother God”.

When criticized by Bible theologians, he, as a novelist, simply explains that “Japanese love their mothers more than their fathers”. The Japanese public buy 100 times more of his books than books of the Bible scholars. They need a Mother God more than a Father God. The logic of novelists differs from the logic of academics.

Buddhists, who understand that the Buddhas are a thousand times more wonderful than Buddhist teaching, and Christians, who understand that the Christian God is a thousand times more wonderful than Christian teaching, can do interfaith dialogue. Buddhists and Christians who think that their theology is absolute truth cannot. **Upaya=hōben=models** is the key to probing the depths and limitations of religious language.

Christian systems of thought—“**theology**”—can be compared with Buddhist systems of thought—“**Buddhology**”. But how would Buddhology relate to the Christian God, who is a thousand times more wonderful than Christian theology? And how would Christian theology relate to the Buddhas, who are a thousand times more wonderful than Buddhology?

Furthermore, how would the Christian God, who is a thousand times more wonderful than Christian theology relate to the Buddhas, who are a thousand times more wonderful than Buddhology? Of course, these questions are by nature far beyond the power of the human brain to understand and far beyond the power of human language to express. The best that Christians can produce by their mind and language is Christian systems of thought. The best that Buddhists can produce by their mind and language is Buddhology—Buddhist systems of thought.

Perhaps **transformed living** is far more convincing than words—systems of thought coming from the head and mouth—**the Walk, not the Talk**. Buddhist and Christian **mystics sitting in silence** is another world of shared experience. Some Japan Zen Buddhists studying in the West have found amazing similarity in Quaker worship in silence.

What do you think?

Dickson Kazuo Yagi

Becoming Nothing and Seeing All

Ralph Waldo Emerson (1803-1882)

Standing on the bare ground...

a mean egotism vanishes.

I become a transparent eyeball;

I am nothing;

I see all;

the currents of the Universal Being

circulate through me.

I am part or particle of God.

(The Holy Spirit is the door of the Trinity
to the silence of Christian mystics.) DKYagi



Junípero Serra: A Sorry Saint

Dr. Leroy Seat

Written October 5, 2020

Even though he has little name recognition in most circles, this article is about a man of considerable importance in the history of California and of marked religious interest since he was canonized by Pope Francis five years ago on September 23, 2015.

Who Was Junípero Serra?

Miguel José Serra was born in November 1713 on the Spanish island of Mallorca in the Mediterranean Sea. When he took his vows to become a Franciscan priest in 1737, Serra took the name Junípero, which was the name of one of St. Francis's devoted friends.

From his childhood, Serra dreamed of becoming a missionary. After teaching philosophy for several years in Spain, in 1749 he finally was able to make the 6,000-mile trip to Mexico and to begin missionary work there.



On December 15 of that year, Father Serra and another priest started walking from the coastal city of Veracruz to Mexico City, some 260 miles away. On the journey, he was bitten by a mosquito and his left foot became infected. He suffered for the rest of his life from that malady.

Serra spent 38½ years as a missionary in Mexico, Baja California, and in what was then known as Alta California. He died in what is now Monterey County, California, in August 1784 at the age of 70.

The Noble Junípero Serra

Serra's main claim to fame is as the founder of nine "missions" along the coast of California, from San Diego de Alcalá (in 1769) in the south to San Francisco de Asís (in 1776) on the north. The current cities of San Diego and San Francisco, of course, grew out of Serra's missions.

In 1769, it is estimated that there were around 300,000 Native Americans in what is now California. Through the indefatigable efforts of Serra and his co-workers, about one-third of those became Roman Catholics. Because of his meritorious missionary work, Serra became the first Hispanic person to be canonized—by the first Hispanic Pope in the first canonization mass held in the United States.

Even though he was a Franciscan priest and missionary, Serra is sometimes called "the father of California" ([see here](#), for example). Pope Francis has said that he sees Serra as "one of the founding fathers of the United States." Many Californians through the years have agreed. As you probably know, each state chooses statues of two of the most important persons in their states to stand in the U.S. Capitol Building. California's statues are of Ronald Regan and the noble Junípero Serra.

The Ignoble Junípero Serra

There are many who disagree with Serra's adulation, however. At the time of his canonization, there were serious protests in California, especially by Native Americans. Serra's statue in a city park in Monterey was decapitated at that time.

Interestingly, in sympathy with the protests against Confederate statues this year, Serra's monuments again became targets of protest. On June 19 activists pulled down a Serra statue in San Francisco's Golden Gate Park, and the next day, a Serra statue in Los Angeles was toppled.

A 9/29/15 [New York Times article](#) frankly states, "Historians agree that [Serra] forced Native Americans to abandon their tribal culture and convert to Christianity, and that he had them whipped and imprisoned and sometimes worked or tortured to death."



Ten weeks before Serra's canonization, [Pope Francis publicly apologized](#) for the "grave sins" of colonialism against Indigenous Peoples of America. But that did not keep him from following through with his making Serra a saint.

Although there is much to admire about Junípero Serra, it was probably a mistake for him to be canonized—but since he was, it is fitting to call Serra a sorry saint.



Dan Horan is a Franciscan priest and a theology professor whom I cited at some length in my [August 25 blog post](#). On July 8 he had a thought-provoking article largely about Serra in the National Catholic Reporter, and I recommend the careful reading of [that perceptive article](#) titled "The preferential option for the removal of statues." Leroy Seat

This essay was first published in Dr. Seat's blog,

The View From This Seat.blogspot.com

Dr. Leroy Seat and I studied together under the same professors for some years in graduate school in Louisville. Then we taught together for several decades on the same faculty of Seinan Gakuin University in Fukuoka, Japan. An outstanding professor, pastor, and administrator, he was elevated as Chancellor of the university for many years. You can enjoy the inspiring and insightful writings of this incurable reformer, creative thinker, and follower of Jesus by reading his blog. *D.K. Yagi*

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INTIMACY

Dr. William Malcomson

There are a lot of ways to think about intimacy. Men often make a connection between sexual intercourse and intimacy. Their focus is on sexual performance. After intercourse, they go downstairs, turn on TV and watch pro football. Women, on the other hand, think of intimacy as connected with communication. Women often want intimate communication with their spouse.

When my second wife and I were beginning to get to know each other, she said that it is very rare to find another person who shares with you everything that you are and everything that you care about. What she was saying to me was I was that person.

The relationship that we had was true intimacy, in that who I am at the center of my being connected to who she was at the center of her being. We spent a lot of time discussing those things that we thought were important to deal with. I was once in a men's group, which dealt with communication. But it was communication with their fathers that was a problem for them. I think that often is true, that we men pattern our lives after our primary mentor, mainly our fathers.

There are many forms of intimacy. Communication on a deep level is one of the most important ones. Let me give you a possible dialogue between two spouses.

She - "When you come home from work, and I ask you how it went, all you say is "FINE". I can't believe that to be so, because you've changed jobs 3 times in the last 10 years. Also when you come home and you ask how I'm doing, I say fine, but I could say terrible. If I said terrible, you wouldn't discuss it with me, you would just say "that's too bad"."

He - "That's because, as a man I have to solve your problem. If I can't solve your problem, or a problem at work, I don't say anything."

She - "I don't want you to solve my problems, I just want you to listen. But I want you to listen in a way that shows that you deeply care about me."

What would you talk about that would indicate that you are experiencing intimacy?

Certainly your children, your future together, your home and your jobs. What you care about in terms of what is happening in the country, your religious views. To talk about these things, you have to be in some sense, intimate. My wife used to say the main thing in discussion with another person is TRUTH.

In other words, unless we speak the truth to each other, we are not being truly intimate. Is that what is central to your life, in touch with the life of another? I can think of three friends for whom that is true. That isn't very many, but that is the way it is.

Bill

Dr. William Malcomson is retired in Washington State. He was Dean of the American Baptist Seminary of the West, a founder of the School of Theology and Ministry of Seattle University, former President of the Council for Pacific Asian Theology, and former Theologian-in-Residence at Seattle First Baptist Church. He is blessed with two sons, one of whom is a Christian Buddhist, one daughter, and 5 grandchildren. Bill has a Ph.D. from Princeton in World Religions. **He recently suffered a stroke, 2/05/20.** We rejoice in his survival. We pray for his full recovery and his further ministry among us. The source of his wisdom is not religious logic, but experience—the joys and tears of the briar patch of life that is our real life journey. Many of us are his secret disciples.

DKYagi

Some Core Values of CPAT

Black Lives Matter

Reform Police Brutality. (No choke holds, forbid no knock entries, no quasi police immunity, nat'l data base so convicted police cannot be hired in the next city, no shootings without body cameras, no rubber bullets, no political donations by police unions, no private prisons, social worker specialists to replace police dealing with homeless and mentally ill, no bicycle stops escalating to pointless killings.

Protecting Mother Earth, our only Space Ship

Keep the oil in the ground.

Stop the Keystone XL Pipeline.

Protect the Arctic Sanctuary from oil and gas drilling.

Protect National Parks and Monuments (Trump Administration opened Bear Ears and Grand Staircase-Excalante to oil drilling, fracking, and mining, 2/10/20).

Gender Equality

Equality for LGBTQ. (Supreme Court ruled LGBTQ cannot be fired from work for being gay 6/20.)

Equal pay for equal work (US women's soccer?)

Citizenship for DACA.

(Supreme Court temporarily stopped DACA deportation 6/20).

America's Original Sins:

Stealing land from Native Americans by betraying treaties and genocide.

National economy built on 400 years of Black slave labor.

No Separation of Children from Refugee Parents on Southern Border.

Numerous large detention centers are being built to warehouse these children. These replicate WW2 concentration camps for Japanese Americans.

Racial Equality: No White Supremacy

No racial profiling by police stop-and-search (vs. Afro-Americans).

No infiltration of mosques by FBI, CIA, Homeland Security.

No mass incarceration of Afro-Americans through unfair drug laws. (Rehabilitation instead of incarceration, fix drug laws.)

Freedom of Religion

Freedom for Uyghur Muslims in Xinjian Province.

Freedom for Tibetans in religion and politics.

Freedom for Rohingyas in Rakhine Province in Myanmar.

Religions waging peace, instead of war.

Preemptive strikes as crimes against humanity. (Iraq invasion)

Nuclear Weapons, Biological Weapons, Chemical Weapons,

Neutron Bombs as Crimes Against Humanity.

Disarmament of Nuclear Weapons (No More Hiroshima-Nagasaki)

Religions networking for social justice in major cities (Jews, Muslims, Christians. Buddhists, and Hindus Together).

Power to the People, democracy.

Priority of the Poor.

(Safety nets for the poor and vulnerable, Social Security, Medicare, food stamps, food banks, health insurance)

No US Visa Bans against Muslim majority nations.

(Sudan, Tanzania, Eritrea, Myanmar, Kyrgyzstan, and Nigeria were added to the visa ban, in addition to the 7 previous Muslim nations. 2/05/20).

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