

## CHRISTIAN PRAYERS TO DAINICHI BUDDHA

Rev. Dickson Kazuo Yagi

In the hassle of graduate studies at the Baptist seminary in Louisville, I received a phone call from Dad in Hawaii. My Grandpa, Seiryū, patriarch of the Yagi clan in Hilo, was dying and needed to see me.

Landing at Hilo Airport, I was rushed to the hospital room. The whole family including several uncles and aunts were assembled. Having waited for my arrival, Grandpa sat up in his bed. He motioned everybody to come closer. He had something important to ask. He asked me in Japanese whether I would pray for the family. Being an ordained Baptist minister, I, of course, said, "**Hai**" (Yes). Greatly relieved, he lay down again in his bed.

On the drive home, my brother, Jimmy, asked whether I knew what Grandpa had asked me. I said, "No." He said that Grandpa all these years upheld the Yagi clan before the Buddhas in intercessory prayers. That is why Dad's business flourished. That is why there was no divorce in the family. He worried that after he died there would be no one to stand before the Buddhas to intercede for the Yagi clan.

Grandpa had five sons. none were religious. He asked each son to take over the role of Intercessor. They all said, "No," firmly, including my Dad. Dad even said that eventually he might become a Christian. That surprised Mom and me even more than surprising Grandpa.

There is an instinctual fear about religion centering in the Buddha altar. Then there is the proverb "**Sawaranu kami ni tatari nashi**," (Keeping safe distance from the gods, you won't get cursed). The Buddha altar as something sacred instinctively generates fear. We had a Buddha altar in our living room. In Shingon Buddhism that would be **Dainichi Nyorai** Japanese, (**Maha-Vairochana Buddha** Sanskrit), (The Sun Buddha English). There is a psychological difference between families that keep Buddha altars and those that don't--an unspoken fear.

Grandpa as a first generation immigrant was pre-automotive. That is, Mom drove him here and there, spending much time with him. She saw Grandpa's worry grow when he contracted terminal lung cancer. She said that Kazu (me) would certainly take over the role as Yagi clan intercessor. The Buddhas have to accept Kazu's Christian prayers. Just by immigrating from Okinawa to Hawaii, the language changes from Japanese to English, the culture changes from Asian to Western, and the religion often changes from Buddhist to Christian.

The Buddhas being even smarter than us, certainly would understand. Grandpa, nothing is your fault. You did your best as intercessor. Now it must be Kazu's turn as Yagi clan intercessor. The Buddhas will, of course, accept Christian intercessory prayers. It would be a question, rather, whether the Christian God will accept Buddhist prayers if the immigration tide reverses direction. Dickson's cousin once-removed is an ordained Shin Buddhist minister in Honolulu.

Are the Buddhas and Christian God culturally sophisticated (understanding) or **culturally infantile**? Convinced that the deities of both religions are culturally sophisticated, Grandpa Seiryū Yagi 屋宜盛隆 laid down and died in peace. What do you think?--unintended results of immigration.

## LEGASY

DK Yagi

At a meeting of many ministers, an older retired pastor asked each one what legacy they were leaving their children and grandchildren? He himself had just published a book of his entire life and ministry. That question stirred each minister. The younger ministers had not yet given it a thought. Some older ministers were embarrassed for their vague intentions. But they all tried to say something when their turn came to speak. I was Chair of the meeting and the last to speak.

When my turn finally came. I said that by my ego-centered obsessions I had caused so much trouble to so many people throughout my lifetime. So at least when I am finally dead and gone, nobody needs to be troubled any more by my self-centered need for attention. When I die, I want to be forgotten **as soon as possible**.

No Christian minister had ever heard such unexpected words. For a few seconds there was a gasp of unbelieving silence. Then Pastor Mark burst out in loud laughter. He laughed and laughed and laughed and would not stop laughing. Finally, he calmed down. He explained that 20 years ago he heard a Buddhist priest say almost the exact same words as Dickson. This desire of Buddhist priests to be forgotten as soon as possible is exactly the opposite of the American Christian desire expressed in the saying, "**Gone but not forgotten**."

The basic human problem is self-centered living. Amazingly Buddhism attacks self-centered living head-on by teaching **anatta** (Sanskrit), **no-self**. It can be said that there is no such thing as a **house**; that a house is only a combination of wood, cement, windows, roof, nails, walls, stairs, heater, stove, refrigerator, and a bathtub. In the same way there is **no such thing as a human self**. By accident and karma, 5 basic elements of human beings (shiki, jū, sō, gyō, shiki)--called 5 aggregates came together and you were born. When you die, these 5 aggregates scatter, and you disappear forever. This basic explanation of No Self is called **Go-On**<sup>1</sup>, also **Go-Un**.

If you hang around for 30 years, you realise that what they said about no-self is only 50% of the story. I hung around longer so I heard the whole story. The Self that needs to disappear is the **false self**. When the false self disappears, the True Self is born. You become a Buddha, that is, you wake up. Anyone who wakes up is called a Buddha. Shingon Buddhism teaches Ga (**self**), Mu-ga (**no-self**), Dai-ga (**giant true-self**).

We are not Buddhists, but Christians. The false self disappears so the true self can appear. This awakening is "Christ living through me." Listen to Paul the Apostle in Galatians 2:20. "*I am crucified with Christ, nevertheless I live. Yet not I, but Christ liveth in me. And the life which I now live in the flesh, I live by the faith of the Son of God, who loved me and gave himself for me.*" (KJV).

When I die, I want to be forgotten as soon as possible, so that Christ can be seen instead of me.

<sup>1</sup> Hisao Inagaki, *A Dictionary of Japanese Buddhist Terms*, 1985, pp. 78, 83. Five aggregates: "form, perception, conception, volition, consciousness."

Dickson K. Yagi (屋宜和夫) is a 3<sup>rd</sup> generation Okinawan-American from Hilo, Hawaii. He graduated George Washington Univ. in D.C. After a year of language school, he earned Bachelor and Masters degrees at Tokyo Union Theological Seminary (1965). He then earned another Masters degree and a Ph.D. at Southern Baptist Theo. Seminary (Louisville, 1972). He also studied Buddhism at Univ. of Hawaii in post-grad. studies from David Kalupahana (Theravada), David Chappell, and Alfred Bloom (both Mahayana). He taught for some 27 years at Seinan Gakuin University in Fukuoka, where he is Prof. Emeritus in Christian Studies. He served a term as Head Chaplain of the university. For a decade he was a member of **Tōzai Shūkyō Kōryū Gakkai**, an advanced level of Buddhist Christian Dialogue mainly by university professors.

Dickson is Chair of the Council for Pacific Asian Theology (CPAT), Nikkei Interfaith Fellowship, and the Religions Committee of Pilgrim Place Retirement Community. He can be reached at [dkyagi@icloud.com](mailto:dkyagi@icloud.com)

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## To Connect with Gold

by Jeffrey Mensendiek, May 11, 2021.

J.F. Oberlin University, Tokyo

Recently I have been thinking a lot about the traditional Japanese art form called “**kintsugi**,” used to fix broken pottery by using a special tree sap lacquer dusted with powdered gold, silver, and platinum. Once completed, the seams of gold glint reveal a beautiful and one-of-a-kind appearance to a repaired ceramic piece.

The beauty of this art form is that it celebrates the unique history of each piece by emphasizing the breaks and fractures instead of hiding or camouflaging them. In fact, Kintsugi often makes the piece look more beautiful than the original, revitalizing it and giving it a second life. Kintsugi means to connect with gold. For me, it symbolizes the way God works in our deeply fractured world.

God brings us together to witness in new and meaningful ways. One such endeavor that involves Japanese Christians is a lawsuit launched last March called “Interfaith Class Action Against Nuclear Fuel Cycle.” Hundreds of Buddhist, Shinto, and Christian clergy and lay leaders have come together around a common religious vision of protecting life.

The nuclear fuel cycle refers to the Rokkasho Processing Plant built under the premise that depleted uranium can be reprocessed to generate a consistent source of energy. Many citizen groups have filed for injunctions on nuclear facilities such as the Rokkasho Plant, but this is the first time for religious organizations to file a lawsuit in Japan.

Without going into the details of the lawsuit, I want to point out the interesting ethical argument being made by the plaintiffs. They argue that the nuclear processing plant (and the nuclear industry as a whole) represents a violation of “space and time.”

First, the industry violates “space” in the sense that those living in rural areas (spaces) are placed at risk for the sake of energy consumption in urban areas. Second, the industry violates “time” in the sense that we produce waste that we are unable to manage in our own lifetime, thus pushing it off on future generations.

For the plaintiffs, who come from various religious backgrounds, respect for life, both present and future, becomes a basic premise. The significance of this lawsuit is that it does not focus on the specific technical or local details, which are, of course, very important, but reminds us of the big picture.

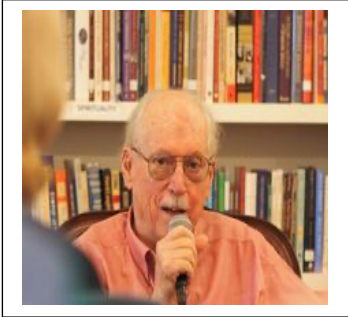
It is about stopping an industry and changing the social structure such that one group of people is not made to suffer on account of more powerful groups. Consideration for future generations will be on the table for the first time to protect the well-being of future generations and the psychological peace and well-being of the present generation. There is also the ethical question of our human responsibility toward all of creation.

This year marks a milestone in the struggle to build a nuclear-free world. In January, we celebrated the ratification and enforcement of the UN Treaty on the Prohibition of Nuclear Weapons. **More than fifty nations have made it illegal to make and possess nuclear arms.**

In March, we mark the tenth anniversary of the Fukushima nuclear disaster by remembering all of the lives and livelihoods that were lost, as well as the ongoing health risks pushed on a certain segment of the Japanese population. We need to ask ourselves what we have learned from the past and what future we intend to build together?

Poet laureate Amanda Gorman said that “poetry stands as a great reminder of the past that we stand on and the future that we stand for.” I believe that these words capture the way God calls us to ministry in a broken world. May the work of the church and our mission partners “serve as a reminder of the past that we stand on and the future that we stand for.”

[From **Global Ministries** by permission of Jeffrey Mensendiek through his mother, Barbara Mensendiek, a retired missionary and fellow resident of Pilgrim Place Retirement Community in Claremont, Los Angeles County.]



## A FACE TO MEET THE FACES

Dr. William Malcomson

T.S. Eliot says "We prepare a face to meet the faces that we meet." Some time ago, when Barbara and I were becoming acquainted, we talked late into the evening about our lives. She had been a therapist, so she helped me be honest with myself. She respected my honesty.

I discovered that I had not dealt with some things that I thought I had dealt with. I actually had prepared a face to meet the faces that I met. I had not even admitted some things to myself about myself. Particularly the darker realities that didn't make me look good.

Even though I was a liberal Christian I still somehow believed that as a Christian I was moving toward the good and becoming more like Jesus. I read ***Denial of Death*** by Ernest Becker and I realized that I had not come to terms with all of the aspects of my life which I wanted to ignore. I wonder if a lot of us create a self-image that we like and that we think that others will admire?

Years ago when I was in Career Counseling, a therapist asked me about my "bringing up". I said that my parents told me that I could be anything that I wanted to be because I was very talented and bright. The therapist said, "You are afraid that you cannot be you and still be loved." Now I realize that he was correct. I was trying to live up to an image of what I thought would be acceptable to my parents and others because I didn't think I was lovable without that face on.

Barbara told me that she did not like attention. For example, if she had given to an organization, she did not like to be listed as having been a donor. I realized that I do like the attention and I do enjoy people saying good things about me. I have prepared a face to meet the faces that I meet. I would like to quit doing this, but it is a long time habit.

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## WHY AM I ANGRY?

Bill Malcomson

**Number 1:** I am angry because I am a part of systemic racism and there is nothing I can do about it. But I do feel that it is true. All of the privileges that white people have is because we are white. I can live where I want to, I can stay where I want to, and I can go out anytime of the day or night without worrying about getting arrested. But that is because of the color of my skin. I am angry because that is the way it is.

**Number 2:** I am angry because I am disabled. I cannot participate in protest marches. I cannot go to church or any event. Do you realize how difficult it is to see people walking normally? There is so much I cannot do and so little that I can do. I am angry that the stroke left me this way.

**Number 3:** My anger is normal. It is not something I need to try to get over. In fact, I need to admit it and talk about it.

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 University 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. Many of us are his secret disciples. *DRYagi.* Bill can be reached at [wmalcomson18@gmail.com](mailto:wmalcomson18@gmail.com)

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## The Tragic Tulsa Massacre of 1921

**Dr. Leroy Seat,** Saturday, May 29, 2021

This weekend is the 100<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the tragic massacre of Blacks in Tulsa, Oklahoma.

### The Basic Facts of the Tulsa Massacre

It all started on a Monday morning, May 30. Sarah, a 17-year-old White elevator operator charged that Dick, a 19-year-old Black man grabbed her arm as he entered the elevator. It is not known what actually happened, but the next day Dick was arrested for attacking Sarah.

By mid-afternoon on May 31, threats of lynching Dick surfaced, and Blacks begin to gather to protect him—but they were far outnumbered by the Whites. About 10 p.m., a White man attempted to disarm a Black man. The gun fired in the ruckus, and the massacre began.

Beginning around 5 a.m. on June 1, Black homes and businesses were looted and set ablaze. At 7:30, Mount Zion Baptist Church was set afire.



Most of the killing and the destruction of property was over by noon, but by then Tulsa's prosperous Black neighborhood of Greenwood, known as the "Black Wall Street," was completely destroyed.

According to the large, impressive book ***The 1921 Tulsa Race Massacre: A Photographic History***, "Perhaps as many as three hundred Tulsans" were killed.

Moreover, "Upward of ten thousand Black Tulsans were without homes or businesses, their lifetime possessions either consumed by fire or carried away by whites" (p. 271).\*\*



### Why Remember the Tulsa Massacre?

One of William Faulkner's most memorable lines comes from his 1951 novel *Requiem of a Nun*: "The past is never dead. It's not even past."

Faulkner's words were paraphrased in "A More Perfect Union," a speech delivered by then Senator Barack Obama in March 2008. He argued that many of the difficulties in African American communities could be traced to the sufferings of previous generations under slavery and Jim Crow laws.

Or, he might have said, traced back to events such as the 1906 lynchings in Springfield, Mo., and the massacre in Tulsa 15 years later.

For decades and decades, evil racist acts of the past were overlooked, disregarded, consigned to the dustbin of history—or so it was hoped.

Just 35 years after the tragic Tulsa massacre of 1921, I took an American history course in Bolivar, Mo., just over 200 miles from Tulsa. I'm quite sure no mention was made of the Tulsa massacre.

According to the online Britannica, "Despite its severity and destructiveness, the Tulsa race massacre was barely mentioned in history books until the late 1990s, when a state commission was formed to document the incident."

Nor was there any mention of the lynchings of African Americans fifteen years earlier in Springfield, Mo., even though that city was only about 30 miles away. My small Baptist college had no Black students, and there was little, if any, interest in Black history in the classroom or on campus.

But the past is never dead—and in 2019 the city of Springfield finally, after 113 years, [erected a historical marker](#) in the city. And now, 100 years after the massacre in Tulsa, the country is finally paying some attention to the tragic events there. The past, thankfully, is no longer forgotten or concealed.

There is hope for the days ahead if the nation learns from the living past in order to create a livable future with liberty and justice for all.

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\*\* The book of photographic history was written by Karlos K. Hill and published in March of this year. Another important book on this subject is Randy Krehbiel's ***Tulsa 1921: Reporting a Massacre*** (2019). (Both of these books were available in my local public library.)

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\*\*\* Yagi: See also [Campbell Robertson](#) and [Audra D.S. Burch](#), NYT, May 29, 2021. 27 coffins unearthed. See also [Yuliya Parshina-Kottas](#), [Anjali Singhvi](#), [Audra D.S. Burch](#), [Troy Griggs](#), [Mika Gröndahl](#), [Lingdong Huang](#), [Tim Wallace](#), [Jeremy White](#) and [Josh Williams](#), NYT, May 24, 2021. See also Hannibal B. Johnson, NYT, May 31, 2021.

This essay was first published on May 29, 2021 in Dr. Seat's blog,

**TheViewFromThisSeat.blogspot.com** Presented here by permission of author.



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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