



COUNCIL FOR PACIFIC ASIAN THEOLOGY (CPAT)

PACIFIC ASIAN VISION

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GOD AS COACH?

"The Lord is my shepherd. I shall not lack anything, Psalm 23:1." Doctors are like shepherds, wise and strong, saving us by their skill in surgery. But we patients must become **weak** by anesthesia, totally dependent--like sheep.

Japanese university students by contrast want to become **strong**, solving their own problems. They want a God like a sports coach. Although a doctor needs his patient to become **weak**, a sports coach needs his players to become **strong** to win the games.

I was faculty advisor to the university table tennis team for 21 years. Our coach was 3rd in the nation as a player when he was 30. But now as coach he could win only through his team. The stronger they became, the more games he would win as coach. Often his advice was, "**Ibiru-na**" (Don't get scared, chicken-hearted)--Kyushu dialect?

Changing the scene: Rev. Nabekura was a skinny runt of a man with a fallen chest, just like me. Walking through the red-light district of Yokosuka late at night, he heard a desperate scream of a woman. Running toward the scream, he grabbed the giant U. S. drunken sailor dragging a scared girl from the bar. The sailor was trying his best to pull her upstairs. Yokosuka, near Yokohama, was the largest U.S. Navy Base in Japan. There were hundreds of sailors out at night, looking for fun and mischief. Few of them sober.

It would be a comic scene if not so scary--a skinny midget Japanese pastor, grabbing a drunken U.S. sailor big as a gorilla! It was pure mercy that two U.S. officers from the military patrol came running to the rescue with their batons out.

One kick and the pastor would have been crippled for life! Rev. Nabekura said, "**Muga-muchū**," In the moment your mind goes blank, and you just fight with all your killer instinct." **Muga-muchū**. Sumo wrestlers, home-run hitters, and table tennis athletes know the feeling of being in that moment. But all would be lost if he had gotten scared--chicken hearted! He might have had his head bashed in. **Ibiru-na! Don't get chicken hearted! Muga-muchū**--don't think. Kill your brain and sharpen your instincts. **Not mental logic but the wisdom of the universe in your muscles!**

I want to become a skilled, wise, and brave warrior with God as my coach. There is pain, many scars, many defeats, and bruises as we become battle-hardened, Spirit-warriors for Jesus. I want God as my coach. I want to live at my maximum as an athlete and **warrior** before I lay down and die as helpless **sheep**. **Ibiru na**. Don't get chicken-hearted!

Rev. Dickson Kazuo Yagi 屋宜

HELL

The opposite of heaven is hell. That was Christian thinking long ago, but seldom discussed seriously today except as jokes and teasing. Although hell is difficult to describe or discuss, it is still a very basic belief for Evangelicals. For Japanese and Japanese Americans the bombshell teaching of Evangelicals is that all Buddhists (Grandpa, Grandma, most of my uncles, aunts and many cousins) are headed for hell. Less than 1% of Japan's population are Christians (0.8%). 1% going up; 99% going down. White American missionaries call this Good News. Being Japanese, I call this **Bad News**. (Karl Barth: When the Good News becomes Bad News, the interpreters have made a mistake somewhere.)

Sermons describing the difference in temperature of hells for varieties of sinners was standard preaching up to a hundred years ago. Seventy years ago I still heard a few sermons zealously threatening the fires of hell, but they were unpopular and disappearing. I have not heard a single sermon describing and threatening hell for some 60 years. But Evangelicals with varieties of interpretation are committed to believe in hell. **Progressives do not believe in hell.**

#1 Popular Cartoon Caricature of Hell

Some popular Christian beliefs are promoted not by Bible or solid seminary teaching, but by the imagination and skill of cartoon artists. The almost universal American cartoon of hell is a devil with horns in a black suit and a red tail torturing people with a pitchfork.

#2 One Storey Afterlife: Shadow World

The earliest thinking in the Hebrew Scriptures (Old Testament) was **long life** as the blessing of God for good people. There were only two worlds--the world of the living and the world of the dead (the world of Shadows, *Sheol*). God blesses good people with long life, but they also die in the end. So in the end there is no difference. Everybody moves from the land of the living to the land of the dead.

#3 Two Storey Afterlife: Heaven and Hell

Most Jews (12 tribes of the Kingdoms of Israel and Judah) were conquered and dragged to live in Babylonia (Exile). In Babylon they learned about heaven for Good people and hell for Bad people. That is, from a one storey house (Sheol for everybody), they learned a two storey house--**Heaven for Good People and Hell for Bad People.**

#4 Hell For Bad People Became Hell For Non-Believers

In the New Testament the gate for Hell became the Gate for Non-believers, instead of Bad People. But here and there were verses retaining heaven for Good people and hell for Bad people. The church, however, ignored those verses and preached the new requirement for heaven--believers instead of Good people--**religion instead of ethics.**

#5 God in Charge, not Satan

The problem with the cartoon caricature of Satan torturing people in hell with a pitchfork was that according to the Bible, God was in charge in Hell, not the Devil. The Devil was the prisoner, the victim.

#6 Who Does the Torture in Hell?

Some 200 years ago popular Christianity was very different, both Catholics and Protestants. God was the foundation of universal justice, punishing evil and rewarding righteousness. Upholding justice in the universe, **God must punish every sin** or the whole system of Justice would collapse, they claimed. That is, every sinner must be punished for every sin. **Jesus taught us to forgive our enemies, but God could not forgive anybody.**

Because God punished Jesus on the Cross (penal substitution) for all sinners, believers can be forgiven and go to heaven. We had a strict and stern and mean Father God that we feared. But we had a friendly, gentle Jesus, meek and mild, who died for us. We feared God and loved Jesus.

Long ago hell was no problem with this strict, mean God torturing sinners in hell. But fast forward 200 years to 2021. The face of Jesus has transformed the face of God. The church attracted by the unconditional love of Jesus, now also sees the face of God as **unconditional love**. We can no longer tolerate a stern, strict, and mean disciplinarian God who enjoys torturing people in hell. The cartoon caricature had Satan poking people with a pitchfork. But it turns out that Satan is the prisoner and victim in hell. God our loving Father is in charge in hell!!! So the unanswerable question is **WHO DOES THE TORTURING IN HELL?**

Conservative Evangelicals still hang on to a basic belief in hell. Progressive Christians have no hell with God as torturer. Imaginative Progressives such as C. S. Lewis describes a hell without a torturer. He humorously describes a **hell** where people cannot bend their elbows and so are starving at the dinner table with a sumptuous dinner in front them.

He imagines that people in **heaven** with the same elbow problem enjoy their dinner by feeding the person next to them. This parable of C. S. Lewis, a British theological novelist, has grown so popular internationally that I heard a Buddhist priest preaching it in Japanese in a Buddhist temple in Japan. Of course, it is a hell without a torturer, acceptable to Progressives with much humor! What do you think?

Popular Japanese Buddhism has many hells (8 major hells, 16 minor hells). One artistic scene has sinners being barbecued on skewers! Two famous scenes are "the Mountain of Needles" (**hari no yama**) and the "Lake of Blood," (**chi no ike**). At the top of the Hell Scroll are the words 勧善懲悪 "promoting Good, punishing Evil" (Not really, really true, but just to scare the kids into behaving?)

What do you think?

Rev. Dickson Kazuo Yagi

Inspiring the Presidents of China and the US to Save the Planet

Imagine a get-together with President Xi Jinping and President Joe Biden. Further imagine that the subject at hand is about how the human family can come together to save the planet.

October 26, 2021 The author of the invitation is Dr. John B. Cobb Jr, renowned author, philosopher and environmentalist. Now 96, he has written a letter to President Xi and President Biden pleading with them to come together to save the human species from self-destruction. Perhaps Dr. Cobb is the only American who can do this, because he is a rock star in China, visiting frequently with people like, Mr. Jialu Xu, the Vice President of the Chinese Parliament, a friend and fellow philosophy professor. Dr. Cobb has worked with Chinese scholars creating thirty-six "Process Centers" teaching process philosophy, an organic world view, in major universities in China. He is a planetary treasure who has dedicated his life to saving the world through the concept of an ecological civilization. An unusually loving teacher, he is beloved by his students around the world.

ABOUT DR. JOHN COBB: For more than a half century he has worked actively on environmental concerns, is a member of the American Academy of Arts and Sciences, a transdisciplinary internationally respected icon, was a professor at the Claremont School of Theology from 1958 to 1990 and in 1973 where, with David Griffin, he established the Center for Process Studies. In 2019 the Cobb Institute was founded in order to promote a process-relational worldview. He has written over fifty books, including, *Is It Too Late? A Theology of Ecology, For the Common Good: Redirecting the Economy Toward Community* co-authored with Herman Daly and *Environment and a Sustainable Future*.

PLEASE help make Dr. Cobb's letter and movement go viral. The letter is in the link below.

[Dr. Cobb's letter to President Xi and President Biden](#)

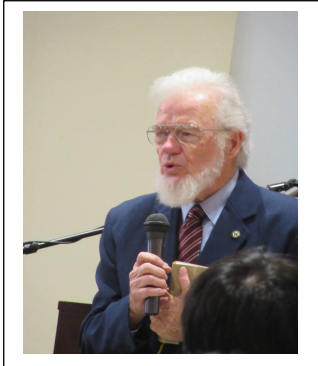
Please click on this black rectangular block to access Dr. John Cobb's letter.



Dr. John B. Cobb, Jr., center in red Chinese shirt, walking with Chinese scholar companions.

Dr. Cobb is the primary advisor for our CPAT, Council for Pacific Asian Theology. He was Dickson's sponsor for entrance to Pilgrim Place Retirement Community in Claremont, CA. He is a graduate of the Canadian Academy (high school) in Kobe, Japan, where Dickson's daughter, Miriam, and son, Nathan, also graduated.

Dr. Cobb was one of the professors under whom Dr. Paul Nagano got his Ph.D. in Claremont. John Cobb was greatly impressed by the ministry of Dr. Jitsuo Morikawa. CPAT was established by Paul Nagano to realise the vision and ministry of Jitsuo Morikawa, former head of Home Missions for American Baptists. So there are deep ties between CPAT and Dr. John B. Cobb, Jr.



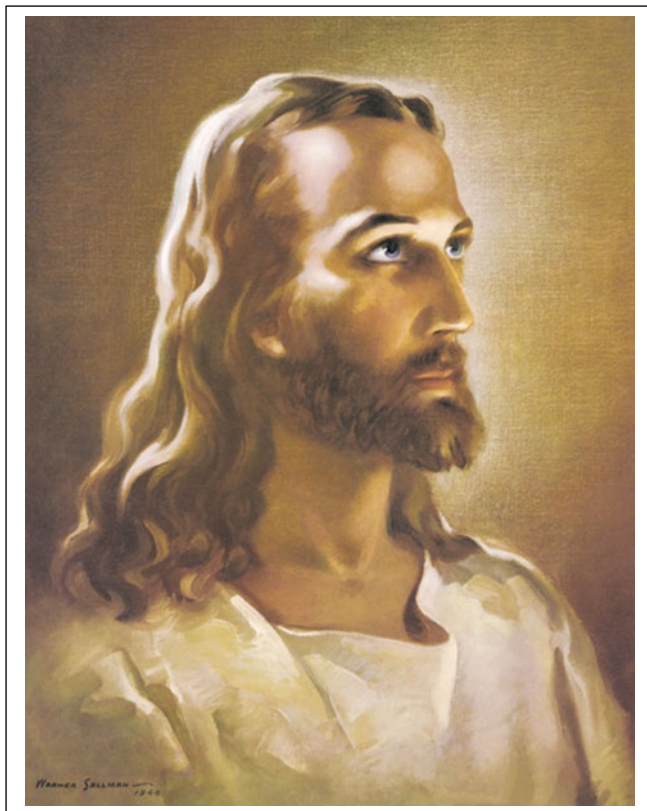
What To Do about a White Jesus?

Dr. Leroy Seat

Earlier this year [2020] I wrote about [removing Confederate statues](#), and my [previous post](#) was about toppling statues of the Franciscan missionary Junípero Serra. But now I tackle an even harder question: what should be done about the statues—and stained-glass windows—of a white Jesus?

The Popularity of a White Jesus

By far, the most famous painting of Jesus is Warner Sallman's "Head of Christ." Sallman (1892~1968) completed that painting in 1940, and in the 80 years since, [some say](#) it has been reproduced a billion times.



News stories this year about Sallman's painting have been titled "How Jesus became white" ([see here](#), for example), but there were a multitude of paintings and stained-glass windows depicting a white Jesus long before 1940.

From the late 16th century until the early 20th century, Raphael's "[The Transfiguration](#)" (1520) was the most famous oil painting in the world, and Jesus is clearly "white" and with blond hair. (See [Anna House's 7/17/20 essay](#), "The long history of how Jesus came to resemble a white European.")

The Problem of a White Jesus

Eminent Black theologian James Cone highlighted the problem of a white Jesus in his book *The Cross and the Lynching Tree* (2011): "The White Christ gave blacks slavery, segregation, and lynching and told them to turn the other cheek and to look for their reward in heaven" (p. 115).

Partly for reasons noted by Cone (1938~2018), according to a June 22 Newsweek article, Shaun King, an American writer, civil rights activist, and co-founder of the Real Justice PAC, has insisted that "[White Jesus statues should be torn down](#)."

King (b. 1979) also asserted that stained glass windows and other images of a white Jesus should be destroyed, insisting that they are "racist propaganda" and "a gross form of white supremacy."

In his hard-hitting 2019 book *Dear Church*, Lenny Duncan, a Black Lutheran pastor, writes about how he and other Blacks have been hurt by the prevalent symbol of "a white Norwegian Jesus" (p. 68).

Kelly Brown Douglas, Dean of the Episcopal Divinity School at Union Seminary in New York, writes in the October 7 issue of *The Christian Century* about "Struggling with Black faith in America."

Dean Douglas says that as a girl, the Jesus of her Sunday school lessons "was always pictured as White. This fact alone made me skeptical of his love for me."

Further, she writes, "How could a White Jesus ever care about me, not to speak of caring for poor Black children? And how could I, a Black person, ever have faith in a White Jesus?"

Douglas goes on to say that as she was “experiencing an agonizing crisis of faith,” she was introduced to Cone’s book, *A Black Theology of Liberation* (1970)—and the content of that book was definitely liberating for her.

“I could be Black with a love for Jesus without contradiction, because in fact Jesus was Black like me,” she realized.

What To Do about a White Jesus?

Since the summer of 2019, I have served as the chair of my church’s Worship Committee. Most of this year has been hard because of not being able to have in-person worship services.

Unexpectedly, our committee was confronted with the problem of what to do, if anything, about the large stained-glass window in our sanctuary. It quite clearly portrays a white Jesus, as you can see in this picture:



Our church building was acquired from the Methodists, and when it was remodeled in the early 2000s the stained-glass window was re-done—but there was no change to the Scandinavian appearance of Jesus.

We continue to wrestle with the question, What should be done about the White Jesus in our stained-glass window?

Saturday, October 10, 2020

This essay was first published on 10.10.20 on 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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