



COUNCIL FOR PACIFIC ASIAN THEOLOGY (CPAT)

PACIFIC ASIAN VISION

VOLUME Thirty-six, Number 7, July 2022. Editor: Dickson Kazuo Yagi, Ph.D.



GOOD SAMARITAN: THROUGH ASIAN EYES

Luke 10: 25-37

By Dickson Kazuo Yagi

Jews are described as God's special people with true religion. But Samaritans were criticized as mixed race and wrong religion. A Samaritan was riding a donkey on a lonely road and guess what, he found a Jew lying on the roadside beaten by robbers and half dead. Why should a Samaritan help a Jew? Jews hated Samaritans. But the Samaritan put the Jew on his donkey, bringing him to an inn where he paid them to nurse the injured man. God accepted this Samaritan because he showed love for this helpless man.



The Good Samaritan by [Jacob Jordaens](#), c. 1616

Many parables of Jesus are famous for being **counterculture**. This Samaritan was the wrong race and the wrong religion, but God accepted him anyway. Why? Because he took great risk in showing love for the injured man, a Jew.

I am also the wrong race. I am Japanese in white supremacist America. I was also the wrong religion. My family in Hawaii was Koyasan Shingon Buddhist. We had a large Buddha altar in our living room. Some mornings I knelt before the altar and chanted with Grandpa, "Namu Daishi, Henjō Kongō."

During WW2 some missionaries chased out of China and Japan spent the duration of the war in Hawaii. Missionaries in the 1940's, before Gandhi, Dalai Lama, and Thich Nhat Hanh, were exclusive and imperialistic--**no interfaith dialogue**, only conversion. They called us "**heathen**"--Chinese, Korean, and Japanese Buddhists. Being the wrong race and wrong religion, will God accept us, too, if we are kind to suffering people?

If God is hungry, can we feed God a hamburger bun? If God is cold in winter, can we clothe God with a winter coat? If God is thirsty, can we give God a bottle of Coca Cola? No, **God is invisible, and God is in hiding**. Why is God pleased if we help someone lying half dead on the side of the road? Because **God is hiding in all suffering people**. God is hiding in refugees on our southern border. God is hiding in Ukrainians dying in war. God is hiding in school children massacred by AR 15 assault weapons.

It may be important to be the **right race and right religion**. But is it also important to see God hiding in suffering people--desperate people lying half dead on the side of the road?

Rev. Dickson Kazuo Yagi

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Dickson 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 the **Tōzai Shūkyō Kōryū Gakkai**, an advanced level of Buddhist Christian Dialogue mainly by university professors.

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POPULAR VIEWS OF ENLIGHTENMENT: (#1) MYANMAR AND JAPAN

by Dickson Kazuo Yagi

Theravada Buddhism

Bragging About Enlightenment: It is virtually a crime for monks in Myanmar (Burma) to claim or imply that they had Enlightenment experiences, which is considered bragging. That is, people can report you to the religious police—that is such a publicly condemned sin—bragging about Enlightenment! I assume that “bragging about Enlightenment” is also forbidden in other Southeast Asian countries with almost totalitarian Theravada control.

Remembering Past Lives: It is considered an essential part of the Enlightenment experience to remember your many past lives. So, talking about remembering your past lives is essentially connected to bragging about your Enlightenment experience. They may call the religious police on you. Both sins are considered as one sin.

Mahayana Buddhism: China, Korea, and Japan

Buddhism does not enjoy such totalitarian control in Mahayana East Asia (China, Korea, and Japan). Here, religious and cultural competition come from Daoism, Falun Gong, Confucianism, Shinto, and atheistic Communism. Few Buddhist priests in Japan are even aware that talking about Enlightenment experience or remembering past lives is forbidden in Southeast Asia.

A renown Theravada professor from Sri Lanka degraded Japanese Zen Enlightenment experiences because they did not remember their past lives. I took his morning class in Buddhism at University of Hawaii. In the afternoon I reported his comments to Mahayana professors in Chinese and Japanese Buddhism. In Mahayana China and Japan, there is no emphasis on connection between Enlightenment and remembering past lives.

Rinzai, Sanbō Kyōdan, and Sōtō Zen

In Rinzai and Sanbō Kyōdan branches of Zen, leaders continually challenge all monks to reach Enlightenment as the only reason for sitting. Of course, leaders describe their enlightenment experiences (initial and later experiences) to challenge young monks.

Sanbō Kyōdan 三宝教団 is the smallest and the most evangelistic Zen denomination, sending many missionaries abroad. Zen Center of Los Angeles near Koreatown in its origins seems rooted

in Sanbō Kyōdan. Also, Diamond Sangha with Zen Master Robert Aitken in Hawaii is also Sanbō Kyōdan. I have sat in both places, with a year in the Diamond Sangha.

My personal Zen guide in Fukuoka was Paul Tesshin Silverman, a member of the major Sōtō monastery in downtown Fukuoka, **Ankokuji**. He is also in Sanbō Kyōdan. He was head priest of a Sanbō Kyōdan rural temple in Oita Prefecture. That was the place of my first **sesshin**. I sat in later **sesshin** at **Ankokuji**.

Sōtō Zen in reaction discourages anybody seeking Enlightenment, offering their slogan of "just sitting" (**shikan taza**¹). **Rinzai and Sanbō Kyōdan** by contrast ridicule sitting on 1st base, 2nd base, or 3rd base, when the only meaning for them is reaching Enlightenment at home plate.

POPULAR VIEWS OF ENLIGHTENMENT: (#2) JESUS, APOSTLE PAUL, PHILIP KAPLEAU by Dickson Kazuo Yagi

Jesus and Paul

Highly respected Zen Buddhologists in Japan (including **Masao Abe**², **Kōshirō Tamaki**³, and **Akizuki Ryōmin**) argue from Philippians 2:5-12 that **Jesus Christ was an enlightened Buddha** by emptying himself out, "Kenosis Christology" (No Self). They argue also from Galatians 2:20 that the **Apostle Paul was enlightened** by being crucified with Christ ("**the Great Death** 大死," dying while still alive). I heard all three Zen Buddhologists lecture at national and international conferences of the Japan Branch of the Society of Buddhist Christian Studies 東西宗教交流学会. I was a member for a decade. These Zen Buddhologists in Japan do Greek exegesis on these key Bible passages and defend their claims by dialogue with Christian theologians.

It was said that Akizuki⁴ Ryōmin was a Congregational Christian until he converted to Zen as a sophomore in college. Later he joined the faculty of Hanazono University in Kyoto. He was also

¹ Dogen, founder of Sōtō Zen, taught the we are all enlightened at birth (Original Enlightenment 本覚). By "just sitting," we remember our Original Enlightenment, our Buddha Nature.

² Masao Abe and Christopher Ives, *Divine Emptiness and Historical Fullness: A Buddhist-Jewish-Christian Conversation With Masao Abe*, 1995. Abe dialogues Christian and Jewish theologians on Philippians 2: 5-12 (Kenosis--Self emptying as "No Self" definition of a Buddha).

³ Kōshirō Tamaki, *Dōgen*. 1996. Jpn edition; Kōshirō Tamaki, *Tōzai Shisō no Kontei ni aru Mono*. (Foundational Elements of Eastern and Western Thought).

⁴ Akizuki Ryōmin, *New Mahayana: Buddhism for a Post-Modern World*, trans. James Heisig, Paul Swanson, 1990. (Amazon.com. in stock)

_____. Akizuki Ryōmin and Seiichi Yagi, 「禅とイエス、キリスト」 (Zen and Jesus Christ), in Japanese, 1989.

Also 「親鸞とパウロ」 ("Shinran and Paul", in Japanese). Akizuki is his family name; Ryōmin is his first name. For reasons unknown, his name in English always appears Japanese style--family name first.

the editor of a respected Zen Journal. Of course, it is common knowledge that taking on a second religion does not mean rejection of the first. Rather, it almost always means a **richer integration** of both religions, a double blessing.

Partnering with Seiichi Yagi, a New Testament scholar and a leader in Buddhist Christian dialogue, Akizuki co-authored ***Zen and Jesus Christ***, and ***Shinran and Paul***, both in Japanese.

Philip Kapleau

In radical contradiction to Theravada Buddhism criminalizing all talk of Enlightenment, the book ***Three Pillars of Zen*** (1965) by Philip Kapleau exploded on the American scene. It offered extended descriptions of **case studies of Enlightenment experiences** of Japanese and American ordinary citizens--a fantastic read! That caught the attention of a flood of excited American youth, including me.

I spent a day and a night in the Sanbō Kyōdan Monastery, ***Hosshinji*** 発心寺 in Obama fishing village on the coast of the Japan Sea facing China. It was at ***Hosshinji*** that Philip Kapleau had spent his years of training. Sadly, I am too dull and undisciplined to be enlightened, but I am addicted to sitting meditation anyway--good for the soul in whatever religion.

"Every day-mystics" sitting in silence have intuitions of **interdependence of everything** in the universe, despite poverty, crime, greed, disease, and war. IZ (Isaiah), a beloved Hawaiian singer sang, "**I am you; you are me; and we are all One!**" Sounds like a popular take on the non-dual Buddhist Enlightenment--from a Hawaiian popular musician! Something he must have caught from the Beatles returning from retreat in Hindu India?

GOOD AND BAD**Dickson Kazuo Yagi**

In Hilo Intermediate School a girl named Akegarasu joined our class from Japan. Over the next months she turned our thoughts from peaceful Hawaii to the desperate survival, poverty, and despair of the Japanese in the months following the defeat of their lost cause in WW2.

Fast forward some 20 years. After college, I lived with the Tanaka family in Tokyo while attending language school. I was preparing to enter Tokyo Union Seminary as their first foreign student from America. Mrs. Tanaka poured out desperate wartime stories of looking for the return of her son from the Japanese army.

There was a total blackout of news about the war dead. By the numbers of the weekly totals of war dead the public would know that they were losing the war. So, there was Mrs. Tanaka, not knowing whether her son was dead or alive.

Fast forward to 2022, some 80 years after the war. Perhaps all Japanese would say today, in a whisper, what would have been a totally unforgivable national heresy before. That it was good that Japan lost the war.

When the war began, my mother-in-law, born-raised-and-educated in Japan, shocked her family in California by saying that Japan must lose this war. If Japan won the war, the men regimented in militarism, Shinto emperor-worship, fascism, racism, and colonialism, would be transformed into monsters. Perhaps Hitler's Germany and Mussolini's Italy would whisper the same verdict today? Are they glad not to shout, "Heil Hitler?"

It brings tears to my eyes whenever I hear Black people singing, "**Deep in my heart I do believe, we shall overcome some day.**" It took Tojo's Japan, Hitler's Germany, and Mussolini's Italy 80 years. It has taken blacks much, much longer.

But was there really a black President of the United States? Do we now have a black Woman Vice President? Was that a black woman becoming a Supreme Court Justice? Overcoming **some day** is getting nearer. They have waited a long, long time--too long!

What do you think?

One Eye on the Bible; The Other Eye on the Newspaper

Dickson Kazuo Yagi

***Wheat Wasting in Ukraine:** "One cannot imagine that million tons of wheat remain blocked in Ukraine while the rest of the world are suffering from hunger. This is a real crime," Josep Borrell, EU foreign policy chief.

LATimes, Leicester and Keyton, 6/21/22.

***New Philippine President and Vice President:** Ferdinand Marcos, Jr. and Sara Duterte are the President and Vice President elect. Associated Press, L A Times, 6/21/22. Perhaps we are too familiar with both family names?



Ferdinand BongBong Marcos, Jr.



Sara Duterte

***Massacre in Oromia, Ethiopia.** Some 230 Amhara were killed in the Oromia region. The Amhara is the second most populous ethnic group in Ethiopia. Witnesses blame the Oromo Liberation Army, which has suffered defeats by federal forces. LA Times, Associated Press, 6/20/22.

***New Names for Forts named for Confederate Generals.** Nine U.S. bases named for Confederate Generals will be renamed. All names had been white males. The new names will include blacks, Latinos, and women. Fort Lee (Robert E. Lee) will become Fort Gregg-Adams. Fort Gordon will become Fort Eisenhower. NYTimes, 5/25/22, Helene Cooper.

***Beyond Betrayal: The Memoir of a WWII Japanese American Draft Resister of Conscience.** A book party was held at the Japanese American National Museum to celebrate this book by Yoshito Kuromiya. Besides numerous essays and articles, it is the only one volume book describing resistance in the Japanese American concentration camps. Rafu Shimpo, 6/02/22.

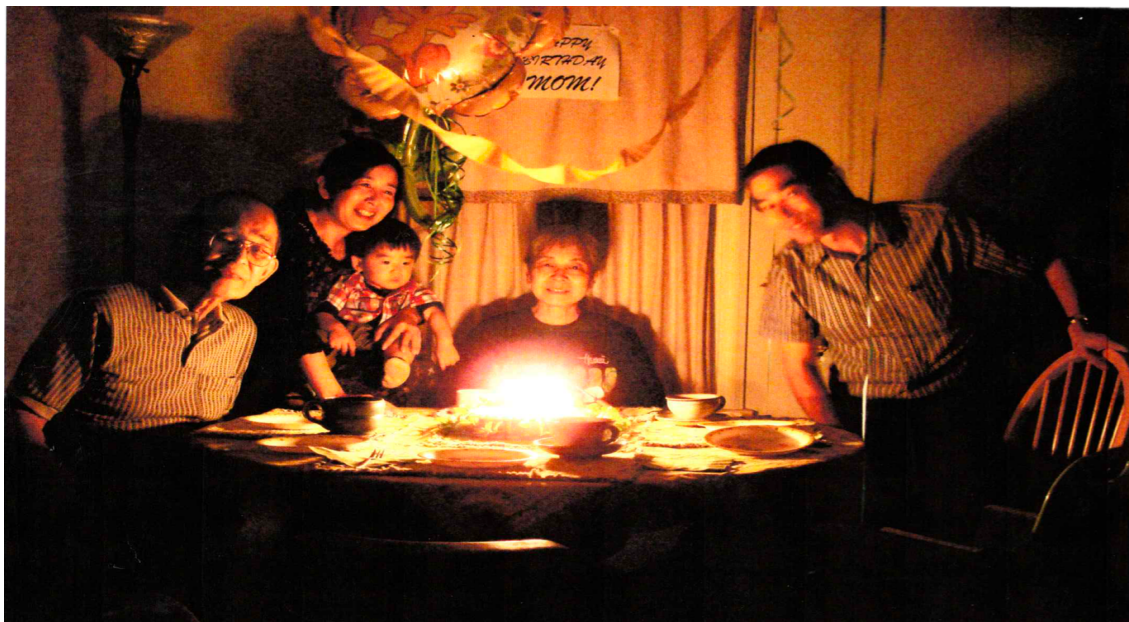
WHAT I BELIEVE ABOUT GOD**Dickson Kazuo Yagi**

The billions of times my mom, dad, wife, siblings, children, friends, and strangers have shown love to me opened my eyes to spiritual living--that I am greatly loved by God at all times--whatever you call God in your religion. Living unaware of this Great Love is a basic tragedy.

Religions that open my eyes to this infinite love are true religions. All loves point to this Greatest Love that is everywhere, always, and forever. Opening my life to this Great Love is salvation. Seeing God in humans--we humans are the windows to the invisible world of Spirit.

Some become aware through religions. Others are aware by intuition--not by talk or thinking. Receiving love a billion times from the sun and galaxies and flowers and dogs and songbirds and fellow workers and fellow athletes and doctors and nurses and our favorite foods and books and music and art--all open our hearts, minds, and lives to this Greatest Love Who is our beginning and middle and end.

"The poignance of being a human being
is that you are the place where the
invisible becomes visible."
John O'Donahue



FAMILY LOVE

WHAT I BELIEVE ABOUT THE EARTH

Dickson Kazuo Yagi

May our planet Earth survive the greed of U.S. corporations, schemes of congressional rivalry, white supremacy, and the rise of U.S. oligarchs with more wealth than many nations, reducing democracy to a farce. Democracy without equality is a wagon without wheels.

May we be healed of military hubris in our bottomless military budget, hundreds of overseas military bases, and designs for world domination--even the weaponizing of space stations for military advantage, and demonizing of China and Russia as our primary rivals. Do we feel our shrinking status as the sole superpower, losing face in Vietnam, Afghanistan, Iraq, and Syria?

Now a new thing--even losing face to our Supreme Court and January 6th insurrection! Are we really criminalizing the heroic whistleblower, Julian Assange of WikiLeaks, who exposed U.S. war crimes in Iraq and Afghanistan? Is there no protection for journalists to expose government crimes? Are we really no better morally than banana republics?



Assange in 2014

God bless America? Or God bless whites? Or God bless minorities? Or God bless everybody? Jesus was not American or white; Jesus was a brown Jewish temporary refugee in Egypt.

We stare at the imminent death of Planet Earth, our only spaceship. Keep the oil in the ground! Switching to electric cars, solar, wind, and wave power is a hint of hope against the melting of Arctic/Antarctic glaciers, rising carbon in the atmosphere, rising ocean levels, intensifying wildfires, and destruction of virgin forests--the lungs of the earth. Is it really too late?

The past--tribal religions caring only for their own tribe. **The future--unity** in global health, world peace, economic flourishing; **diversity** in race, religion, and gender identity.

May my grandson and his companions find hospitality on Planet Earth, our Mother!