



GOD INSIDE

By Dickson Kazuo Yagi

A popular professor was also a priest. After lecture one day a student asked him to talk to her mother who was dying. Her mother had no religion and was "scared to death" about dying.

He accompanied the student home after class one day. He talked to her mother. Like most people, she had identified with her body, and her body was deteriorating. She was terrified.

He said that you must stop identifying with your body which is dying. There is a stream of life flowing throughout the universe keeping alive all living beings. You must stop identifying with your body which has reached its expiration date. Begin identifying with this stream of life flowing through all living beings. Do you understand?

Smiling, she said, "Yes."

The old view of God was modeled as a human father. God is **outside** our bodies in heaven. This new view is God **inside** our bodies, perhaps like gasoline in a car engine? Muslims say God is nearer to us than our jugular vein. That is, God is **inside**.

The old view is an **outside God** whom we must believe, obey, and worship. Those who refuse are called atheists. The new view is an **inside God** who pumps our hearts, compresses our lungs, and speaks to our conscience. It is impossible not to believe in this inside God who is our life-energy and root of compassion--our breath, blood, and conscience.

In academic theology this new view of God was promoted by **Paul Tillich**, who escaped Hitler's Germany to teach in U.S. seminaries. As a scholar he used academic language, talking about God as our "**ultimate concern**." After the war in the 1960's, Paul Tillich even came to Japan and lectured at International Christian University in Tokyo for two years. His influence on American Christianity is tremendous.

A theological movement promoting this inside God is **Process Theology**, inspired by **John B. Cobb, Jr.**, a prominent theologian of the past 60 years. John Ishihara Yokota, a Shin Buddhist scholar, got his Ph.D. studying under John Cobb, a Christian. I taught at Seinan Gakuin University, a Baptist school in Fukuoka, Japan. John Yokota taught at Chikushi Jogakuin Jr. College in the next city. We were both 3rd generation Japanese American professional clergy/professors, but in competing religions.

Being close by, John and several professors from his Buddhist college joined us for Buddhist Christian dialogues every other month for several years. Then, guess what? John published an essay

on **Amida Buddha interpreted through Process Theology**¹. Both Christian and Buddhist scholars should have a keen interest in how Amida Buddha looks through Process Theology. Now retired in eastern Los Angeles, I sometimes find myself at West Covina Buddhist Temple. I was so surprised to meet there John's sister, a trusted activist member. Small world!

God outside is somewhere in heaven. Atheists reject this God. **God inside** is waiting for us in the deepest places of our soul. No one rejects this inside God who is our very blood, our breath, our conscience, and our love for wife, children, co-workers, nation, and our planet Earth.

John B. Cobb, Jr.



Paul Tillich



*Of course, an academic genius like Paul Tillich would never speak of God as "gasoline in a car engine." That was street language from my "pop theology." My mediocre brain needs "pop theology." D.K. Yagi.

**While Paul Tillich (1886-1965) lectured at ICU (International Christian University, Tokyo), I was the first American foreign student in a degree program at Tokyo Union Seminary (東京神学大学 1961-65). I rejected an invitation to hear Tillich lecture. I was a Southern Baptist evangelical. Paul Tillich was too liberal for me at the time, 1961.

*** The brilliant professor/priest whose words I paraphrase to begin this essay is **Taitetsu Unno** of Smith College. His son, Mark Unno, and his brother, Tetsuo Unno, are also brilliant Shin Buddhist scholars, Nishi Hongwanji. For the story above, see Taitetsu Unno, **Bits of Rubble Turned into Gold**, 1993.

Dickson K. Yagi (屋宜和夫) is a 3rd generation Okinawan American from Hilo, Hawaii. He graduated George Washington Univ. in D.C. After a year of language school, he earned bachelor and master's degrees at Tokyo Union Theological Seminary (1965). He then earned another master's degree and a Ph.D. at Southern Baptist Theo. Seminary (Louisville, 1972). He also studied Buddhism at Univ. of Hawaii in post-graduate studies with David Kalupahana (Theravada), David Chappell, and Alfred Bloom (Chinese and Japanese Mahayana Buddhism).

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. It is popularly called the Japan Branch of the Society of Buddhist Christian Studies.

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

¹ John S. Yokota, "Understanding Amida Buddha and the Pure Land: A Process Approach," Dennis Hirota, ed., **Toward a Contemporary Understanding of Pure Land Buddhism**, State University of New York Press, 2000, pp. 73-126. Also published in the journal **Process Studies** 23 (2), 87-97, 1994, "A Call to Compassion: Process Thought and the Conceptualization of Amida Buddha."

SNEAKING BUDDHISTS INTO THE CHRISTIAN HEAVEN

by Dickson Kazuo Yagi

Of course, the very thought of sneaking Buddhists into the Christian heaven is offensive to all Buddhists, especially in the light of shameful past prejudiced projects to "**Christianize Japanese Buddhists**" in order to "**Americanize**" them. Instead of debating complex issues, however, this essay will offer in simplified form my lifetime project of opening narrow Christian paths for other religions. What is available in the history of Christian doctrine and whispered among academics and ministers is often hidden from church members to avoid controversy.

Since I am retired without any church paying my salary, may I open this Pandora's box. I pray it will be a box of blessing to many Japanese Americans--both Buddhists and Christians. This is a Japan specific problem, as less than 1% (0.8%) of Japan's population are baptized Christians.

#1 - Baptism of Desire (Roman Catholic). Some Christians, including Roman Catholics, believe that the ritual of baptism saves. So, what happens if the candidate preparing for baptism suddenly dies by accident or a medical event? The Catholic church comforts the grieving family by the teaching of "**Baptism of Desire.**" Although baptism by water did not take place, the person is already "saved," in a state of grace by the person's decision to accept baptism. Initially created to save babies and adults in Christian families, it was later extended to people who did not have a reasonable chance to hear the Gospel of Jesus **in foreign countries**. They are saved because **they would have believed** if they had heard the invitation of Jesus.

*See Wikipedia on "Baptism of Desire."

*Baptists believe that it is faith that saves, not baptism.

*Quakers reject Baptism and Lord's Supper (bread and wine) -- "magic" rituals that might substitute for real faith.

#2 - Harrowing of Hell. 1 Peter 4:6 offers a second chance to accept Jesus **after death**. "Harrow" means "to plow, to harvest." The early church for hundreds of years believed that Jesus would preach to prisoners in hell, "harvesting of hell," with many paintings and icons picturing the glorious release of prisoners in hell. I asked seven respected Baptist ministers in Japan about the 99% of Japan's non-Christian population. Seven out of the seven ministers quoted 1 Peter 4:6. Japanese ministers have 1 Peter 4:6 memorized in their hearts--a preaching and "**jail break**" in hell after death.

1 Peter 4:6 "For this is the reason the Gospel was proclaimed even to the dead, so that, though they had been judged in the flesh as everyone is judged, they might live in the spirit as God does." NRSV

*Evangelical translations of 1 Peter 4:6 restrict Jesus' preaching to **condemnation**, so read alternative translations.

*My Th.M. thesis at So. Baptist Seminary in Louisville was on 1 Peter 4:6.

*See Wikipedia on "Harrowing of Hell."

*Descent of Jesus into hell also appears in the Apostles Creed and the Athanasian Creed.

Harrowing of Hell, Orthodox Icon



Jesus Releasing Prisoners of Hell

#3 Existential Christianity (Søren Kierkegaard). Many churches baptize infants. That displays the faith of the parents, of course, not the faith of infants. At about age 13 the child attends confirmation classes where church teachings are explained. When the child passes a paper test, giving right answers to religious questions, the child is "**confirmed**" in the faith of the parents. But as European state churches show, this smooth process produces "**folk religion**" focused on religious conformity of the masses with few radical conversion experiences of individuals. Both Christianity and Buddhism at the core are religions of **radical conversion experiences**--"born again Christianity" and "enlightenment Buddhism."

Søren Kierkegaard (1813-1855), a Danish theologian, objected to religion as mind and mouth opinions instead of personal decisions of **real life**--existence, existentialism. Real religion is not memorized phrases you recite before the church to receive their approval for membership. Real religion is whether you tell the truth in the law court at the cost of great financial loss. If real religion

is not how you talk, but **how you act in real life**, then the Buddhist priest or the beggar on the street might be the real disciple of Jesus, instead of the monk, the priest, or the theologian.

If the real Christian is known not by opinions of his mouth or brain, but by actions in real life decisions, then members of **any race and any religion**, even atheists of conscience can be the actual disciples of Jesus. Søren Kierkegaard was **excommunicated** by the Danish Lutheran State Church, but he has certainly won big in the court of public opinion ever since.

Half of our interfaith dialogue group at our university in Japan were Buddhist scholars. The guest lecturer, a brilliant Buddhist professor/priest gave a lecture on Kierkegaard, his lifetime obsession. As he finished, he asked how many had their lives changed by Kierkegaard? Everybody in the room, Buddhist and Christian, raised their hand. I was flabbergasted. My friend explained later that in the desperate decades immediately before and after the end of the war, many intellectuals survived by Kierkegaard's "**Leap of Faith.**"

I knew of the unbelievable popularity of Albert Schweitzer in Japan of the 1970's by the hundreds of Schweitzer clubs throughout Japan. But I was blindsided by the impact of Kierkegaard on Japanese intellectuals. Surely many of these Buddhist scholar/priests were disciples of Jesus unconsciously in their **real-life battles**. We Christian scholar/missionaries might be disciples of Amida Buddha unconsciously in our real-life battles. This dimension of **existential religion** opens our eyes to unexpected new religious horizons.

Higashi Honganji Buddhists celebrated the 750th Anniversary of Shinran's death by the slogan: "**Now, Life (Amida Buddha) is living you.**" [*Ima Inochi ga anata o ikite iru*] Consciously or unconsciously Amida Buddha (Infinite Life) is living through all humans. Looking past our words of brain and mouth, who is to say what religion or religions we are fulfilling through our **compassionate actions**? That is the mind-expanding dimension of the existential Christianity of Søren Kierkegaard.

Søren Kierkegaard



Unfinished sketch of Kierkegaard by his cousin
Niels Christian Kierkegaard, c. 1840

#4 Hide and Seek (Matthew 25: 31-46). In the most prominent spot on the wall in Mother Teresa's Motherhouse (headquarters) in Calcutta of the 1980's, I saw the framed words, "I was hungry... I was thirsty...." No other words were needed for Christians. They all knew that much beloved story of Matthew 25: 31-46.

In that story, Jesus rewards people for serving him when he was hungry, thirsty, cold, sick, or in prison. The people were surprised. They were unaware of ever doing anything for Jesus. Jesus then says that whenever they serve people suffering from hunger, thirst, cold, sickness, or prison, they were serving him.

After the Crucifixion, Jesus became invisible. This invisible Jesus now is **playing hide and seek**, hiding within suffering people. If **compassionate action** is what God seeks, then people of all races and all religions can be included. Rather, is there danger that some heartless Christians might be disqualified?

"And the King will reply, 'Whatever you did for one of the least of these brothers of mine, you did for me.'" Matthew 25:40 NIV

#5. Good Samaritan (Luke 10:25-37).

Jews are described in the Bible as God's special people, the Elect, 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.

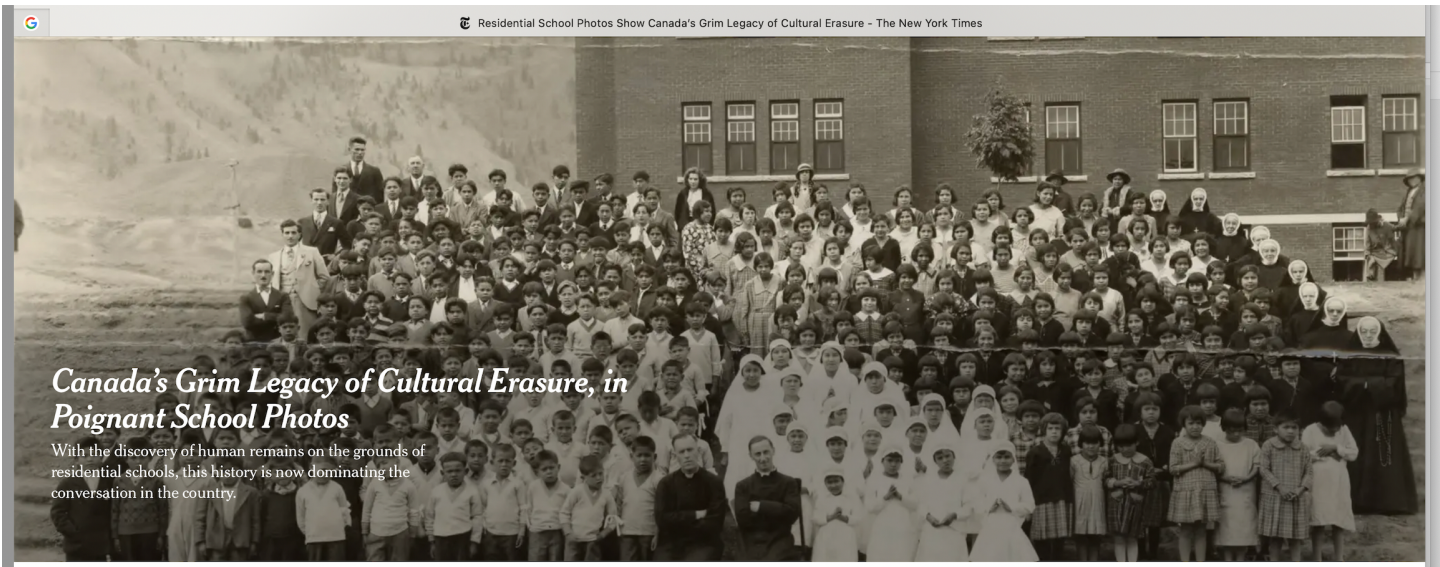
This Samaritan was the wrong race and the wrong religion, hated by many Jews. Jesus makes this hated Samaritan the hero of this parable. This story as a counter-culture parable is especially loved by minority peoples.

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. One morning I knelt before the altar and chanted with Grandpa, "Namu Daishi, Henjō Kongō." Being the wrong race and wrong religion, would God accept me, too, if I helped suffering people lying half dead on the side of the road?

This Good Samaritan parable of Jesus opens the arms of God to all compassionate people--even people of the wrong race and wrong religion. The invisible God is hiding in all suffering peoples--refugees caught on our southern borders, Ukrainians dying in war, and children massacred on the school grounds by AR 15 assault weapons. Isn't a compassionate heart more important to God than being the right race and right religion?

THE BIBLE AND THE NEWSPAPER

*Forced Assimilation of Canadian Indigenous Children



The Kamloops Indian Residential School in 1937. National Center for Truth and Reconciliation, via EPA, via Shutterstock.



Pope Francis visited a cemetery in Maskwacis, Alberta, where local Indigenous people believe children were buried in unmarked graves. Ian Willms for the New York Times.



Pope Asks for Forgiveness From Canada's Indigenous People

During Pope Francis' trip to Canada, he apologized to Indigenous communities for the Catholic Church's role in running residential schools that separated children from their parents, inflicted sexual and physical abuse and forced assimilation, for more than a century. Guglielmo Mangiapane/Reuters

*Forced Assimilation: More Than 400 U.S. Indigenous Schools

Deb Haaland is a Laguna Pueblo, the **first Native American Cabinet Secretary**. She heads a yearlong nationwide tour, investigating government funded boarding schools for indigenous children. From the late 18th century until late 1960s, the U.S. funded **more than 400 such schools** to force Indigenous children to erase their culture, tribal ties, language, dress, hair styles, and religion. At least **500 children died**, the actual numbers may climb to thousands. From 1819--1969, Oklahoma 76 schools, Arizona 47, and New Mexico 43. These three states were central. Obviously, as the investigation progresses, **the worst is yet to come**. These Canadian and U.S. forced assimilations **may equal the Spanish Inquisition in religious criminality?** (D.K.Yagi). LA Times, Sean Murphy, Associated Press, 7/11/22.

*Weaponizing Census

Civil rights groups have long slammed the Trump administration's push for inserting a citizenship question into the census—which informs the allocation of federal funding and the drawing of political voting maps—as a bid to benefit Republican candidates for office." Common Dreams, 7/21/22 Jessica Corbett

*\$1 Billion Weapons Deal for UAE

The Biden administration approved nearly \$1 billion weapons deal with the United Arab Emirates. Biden praised leaders of Israel, Saudi Arabia, and UAE, countries accused of human rights violations, including the arrest of **Asim Ghafoor**. Ghafoor, a U.S. citizen, had previously represented murdered **Jamal Khashoggi**. Progressive see Biden continuing the Trump administration's embrace of Arab dictators and Israel's right-wing government. Common Dreams, Mehdi Hasan, 7/21/22.

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 spaceship.

Keep the oil in the ground.

Stop Minnesota portion of Enbridge Line 3. Biden failed to prevent it.

Protect the Arctic Sanctuary from oil and gas drilling.

Protect National Parks and Monuments. Biden reversed Trump opening of Bear Ears and Grand Staircase Escalante to oil drilling, fracking, and mining.

Gender Equality

Equality for LGBTQ (Supreme Court ruled LGBTQ cannot be fired for being gay.) Biden renewed LGBTQ in military.

Equal pay for equal work.

America's Original Sins:

Stealing land from native Americans by betraying treaties and by genocide.

National economy built on 400 years of black slave labor and Jim Crow laws.

Trans-continental railway built on blood, sweat, and tears of Chinese laborers.

Big Pharma: Drug prices negotiated down.

Destroy Ghost Guns.

No Separation of Children from Refugee Parents on Southern Border.

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.**

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

Priority of the Poor.

Safety nets for the poor and vulnerable. Social Security, Medicare, food stamps, food banks, health insurance for all, \$15 minimum wage or more.

Vaccines: Israel must provide coronavirus vaccines for Palestinians in Gaza Strip. Rich Western nations must share vaccines with African nations, Pacific Islanders, and Palestinians.

GITMO: Close down Guantanamo Detention Center.

Free Julian Assange as Whistle Blower.

Prohibit Civilian Assault Weapons. (Massacres in schools and shopping malls.)

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