



COUNCIL FOR PACIFIC ASIAN THEOLOGY (CPAT)

## **PACIFIC ASIAN VISION**

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### **RETHINKING KARMA**

**By Dickson Kazuo Yagi**

There were about five in the Buddhist panel and five in the Christian panel discussing the **origin of sin/evil**. It was the International Conference of the Society of Buddhist Christian Studies. There were perhaps 200 international scholars there, with the largest contingent from the U.S. and Japan. I was part of the Japan delegation.

The Christian panel presented the Christian teaching of **Original Sin** (Augustine). The Buddhist panel presented **Karma**, an unquestioned universal Buddhist teaching. But that was contradicted by vigorous Christian protest against life as suffering.

Why does Buddhism say that life is suffering? Life is challenges in sports, art, dance, business, medicine, and science--heart transplants, rockets to the moon and Mars, and space stations. Life is adventure, fulfilling our destinies and calling. Only sometimes is it suffering. Why are you blind to life as it is, and only acknowledge suffering?

That was such a shock to the Buddhist panel. They were blind to the giant hole in their exclusive statement of suffering. It was their unquestioned fundamental presupposition, so, no one was ready to defend it! They asked for a 15 minute break to construct an answer.

What followed was what is usually said in such discussions.

1. That what seemed to be happy and meaningful to us humans, was actually suffering when viewed from the long-term deep vision of the Buddhas.

2. That what was thrilling and satisfying for the moment never lasts long enough. It always sours in the end.

3. That our bodies make us real, especially in birthing children. What could be more real than that? But death comes for all, expected but usually forgotten. When our bodies die and disappear, we finally have to deal with the most disheartening fact that we are only **temporary realities**--like flashlight batteries that die out and are discarded. Buddhism teaches **anicca**, impermanence. That is suffering that awaits us at death.

4. Something in the early Buddhism of Southeast Asia's Theravada structure was ignored by the overwhelming presence of Mahayana Buddhists (China, Korea, Japan) at the conference. That is, the thousands of lifetimes in spiral repetitions--**rebirth**. Life is suffering because we are caught in these

endless cycles of rebirth propelled by mountains of bad karma accumulated from each repeated rebirth. **"Born again"** is the goal of conservative Christians. But that is exactly what Buddhists were trying to avoid. This endless cycles of rebirth are suffering. **Escaping these cycles of rebirth** is salvation and Nirvana. This is **Theravada orthodoxy**.

Westerners today disagree that life is suffering because they do not believe they are caught in endless cycles of rebirth. Surprise, surprise! Neither do Chinese, Korean, and Japanese Buddhists with their **Savior Buddhas/Bodhisattvas** (Amida, Vairocana, Jizō, Kannon), **Savior Bibles** (Lotus Sutra), **Savior Meditation** (Zen), and **Savior Esoteric Practices** (Mantras, Mudras, Mandalas, Fire Ceremonies). These are **"Salvation by Grace," (tariki hongan)**. Salvation by grace needs only **one lifetime**. Most Japanese, Chinese, and Korean Mahayanists believe in only one lifetime of grace.

As many speakers at Japan's high school graduation ceremonies say, **"Our precious, once only chance at life (tatta ikkai no tōtoi jinsei)**. Japanese do not believe in cycles of rebirth. Kōbō Daishi taught **sokushin jōbutsu**, 即身成仏 "becoming a Buddha in this very body." Akizuki Ryōmin actually wrote that rebirth is not a necessary teaching in his marvelous book, **New Mahayana: Buddhism for a Post-Modern World**, 1990.

The discussion stalled as the Christians were far from being impressed. At this pivotal moment Ryūsei Takeda of Ryūkoku University stood at the microphone. He said that he hated Americans all his youth. Why did the Americans have to drop the atomic bomb on Hiroshima! He has suffered ever since as an A-bomb victim. He hated all Americans and wished they would be cursed. But then he became a Buddhist, which changed his entire attitude. Buddhist karma taught that it was not the fault of the Americans that he became an A-bomb victim. He was suffering the effects of his own bad karma. So, he stopped hating Americans, because Buddhist karma taught **it was his own fault**. So, he has been able to forgive Americans ever since.

No one spoke for several minutes. You could hear a pin drop. All were in silence, feeling the years of suffering of Professor Ryūsei Takeda, highly respected Buddhistologist of the main seminary of Jōdo Shinshū Nishi Hongwanji (Shin Buddhist West). That was how the discussion on karma ended. It was not the convincing logic of a brilliant mind. It was the lifelong suffering of a man of faith. Not logic, but human suffering transformed into compassion for enemies--**for us Americans**. The result was not applause, but tears from heavy hearts of regret. We just left the auditorium in silence.

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## WHAT IS THE GOSPEL?

The billions of times Mom, Dad, wife, children, and others have shown love to me open my eyes to the platform for spiritual living--**that I am greatly loved by God at all times forever**. Living unaware of this Great Love is the basic tragedy, sin, and heresy. Religions that open our eyes to this infinite love are **true religions**. All loves point to this Greatest Love that is everywhere and forever. Never ever forget that we are greatly loved. That is the mystery of the Cross of Christ. Many Buddhists find this in **tariki hongan** 他力本願, the Other Power of Amida Buddha.

We can be aware by intuition while not conscious in our talk or thinking. *D.K. Yagi*

## Holy Spirit and *Bodhi-citta*

By Dickson Kazuo Yagi

I asked a Japanese Buddhist priest why he became a Buddhist priest. I asked also why he came to America to preach in hesitating English when he could wow listeners through fancy Japanese phrases in Japan. I asked also why he came, being his salary would be better with far greater social respect in Buddhist Japan. I asked also why Buddhist priests from Japan shaved their heads while many Japanese American priests do not--within the same Los Angeles denomination. I should have asked also why Japanese priests were married, while Buddhist clergy world-wide were celibate. Of course, I could ask personal questions because we were longtime friends.

He was grateful for this expanded Buddhism in America for a larger international Buddhist vision. Then he met ordained Christian clergy who sought whatever was spiritually transforming in Buddhism or any religion. In this way by coming to multi-cultural U.S., he was thrilled to find people drawn to a Buddhism beyond the confines of Eastern cultures where Buddhism has stagnated to folk religion of mass conformity. **Believers by birth, not conversion.**

Unrestricted truth-seeking beyond Christian party-line thinking would best be explained as the magnetism of the **Holy Spirit**. In the Hebrew Bible (Old Testament) that would be *ruach*, in the New Testament Greek, *pneuma*. Both key words mean the same: **wind, breath, and spirit**. This is the Holy Spirit.

In my limited Buddhist view, the best Sanskrit slogan word would be *bodhi-citta* (with *citta* pronounced "*chitta*.") That is the magnetism of the **drive for enlightenment** that empowers many youth on their spiritual quest. Holy Spirit in Christianity and *bodhi-citta* in Buddhism are both invisible and uncontrollable. There is hope for the Buddhist and Christian churches as long as *bodhi-citta* and Holy Spirit find new visions and directions to prevent stagnation.

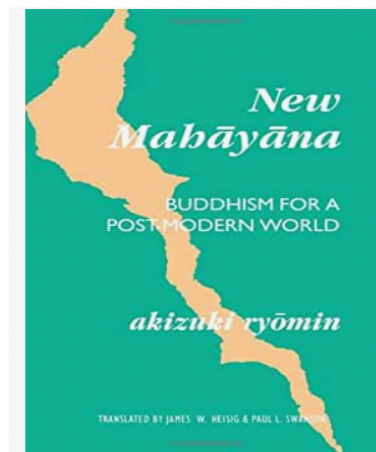
Christianity was a tiny sect within Judaism with all the Jewish tribal restrictions of dietary laws against pork, separate kitchens for dairy and meat, circumcision, purification rituals, and taboo of that era against eating with non-Jews. But the **Holy Spirit** through the Apostle Paul broke this Jewish monopoly on God to free the Gospel of Jesus for the international, interracial, and intercultural Gentile world.

Paul was a Jew raised in Gentile Hellenistic culture. See the **Jerusalem Conference** where church leaders under pressure of Jewish monopoly confer with Paul. Preaching to non-Jews in the communities of Greek culture, Paul was pressed to drop the Jewish prohibitions to free Christianity for the universal Gentile world, **Acts 15**. That was the work of the Holy Spirit. So, I, a Japanese non-Jew can be a Christian today. Thanks to the Apostle Paul and the **Holy Spirit**.

The equivalent of **Holy Spirit** and **bodhi-citta** in other religions freed Islam from the monopoly of Arabs, [Indonesia is the most populous Muslim nation today] and freed Buddhism from the monopoly of India. The Holy Spirit and **bodhi-citta** prove always to be invisible and uncontrollable, opening gates to welcome the masses who seek their spiritual Parent/Source. Already in the 21st Century we find Christians who honor Mahatma Gandhi, Dalai Lama, and Thich Naht Hanh. As we expand outwardly with expanded visions of interfaith networking on social justice, gender, and peace issues, our religious identity and survival depends also on our clear vision of the **anchors of our traditional faith**.

Visionary Buddhist leaders in our interfaith conference in Tokyo lamented: "**I wonder if there will be any real Buddhism left in Japan in 50 years!**" That was 30 years ago. So, there is a call for a **double commitment**: Holy Spirit and **bodhi-citta** for **future oriented** enlarging visions, and a **past oriented** deepening of our grasp of the **unmovable anchors** of our traditional faith. We do our religion today by the memory of our **inspired past** and the visionary call to our **beckoning future**. What do you think?

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The grapevine rumor was that Akizuki Ryōmin was a Congregational Christian until his sophomore year in college. He confirmed that briefly in the first pages of this book. Of course, it is a mistake to think the first religion was discarded. Almost always, religious seekers **integrate** both religions.

Rinzai Zen master Akizuki enthusiastically does Greek exegesis on the Enlightenment experience of Paul the Apostle in Galatians 2:20 of the New Testament. I heard him in the Palace Hotel in Kyoto. *DK Nagi*

## RELIGION IN NEWS

**\*Minor Military Draft.** A military draft was announced in Russia. Nearly 200,000 Russians fled to Georgia and Kazakhstan. The line of cars to Georgia was nine miles long. Dasha Litvinova. Associated Press, LA Times, 9/28/22.

**\*Abe Funeral and Unification Church.** Protesters gathered in Tokyo on August 31st to oppose Japan's state funeral for former Prime Minister Abe who was assassinated in July. It was a protest over the ruling Liberal Democratic Party's cozy ties with the right wing Unification Church (Moonies) of South Korea. The state funeral is seen as an attempt to whitewash Abe's "new nationalism" legacy and the Unification Church's tarnished reputation of brain washing Japanese youth and coercing large donations. The cost of the state funeral is \$11.8 million. Many in the Liberal Democratic Party have cozy ties with the Unification Church. Mari Yamaguchi, LATimes, 9/27/22.

**\*CA Abortion Rights.** Gov. Newsome signed 13 bills that protect abortion rights in California. He has sponsored billboards in seven states. The image is California as a sanctuary state. Melody Gutierrez, LATimes 9/28/22.

**\*Cuba's Liberal Family Code.** On September 25th Cuba adopted a most amazing progressive family code. It legalizes same-sex marriage, surrogate pregnancies, and adoption for gay couples and was approved after community-level meetings across Cuba. [JULIA CONLEY](#), Common Dreams, 9/26/22 **\*Kabul, 19 Hazara Killed.** The Sunni Taliban's ability to protect the minority Hazara (Shia) Muslims in Afghanistan is questioned with this attack at an Education Center in the capitol in which 19 were killed by right wing radicals. Yaqoob Akbary and Christina Goldbaum, 9/30/22, NYTimes.

**\*Trump's Racist Insults.** In a September 30 post on his social media platform, Truth Social, Donald Trump insulted with racist slurs the wife of Senate Majority Leader, Mitch McConnell. He called her "**his China loving wife, Coco Chow.**" She is non-other than **Elaine Chao**. She had served on Trump's Cabinet from 2017 to 2021 and was Secretary of Labor under President George W. Bush. Obviously, Trump's white supremacist base was overjoyed by the racist slurs. Can this uncouth anti-feminist, anti-Asian really endure as the leading Republican candidate for president? Dickson Yagi. Also Rafu Staff Report, Rafu Shimpō, 10/4/22.



Mitch McConnell and Elaine Chao in 2013.

**\*Some thoughts for a November issue:**

Sadhu Sundar Singh

UN report on Xianjiang

Ireicho

Stealing babies from the poor in Franco's Spain

## 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.

Freedom for Myanmar from totalitarian military government.

### 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, AR-15.** (Massacres in schools and shopping malls.)

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