

Enlightenment or Liberation

Two Models of Christ in Contemporary Japanese Theology

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HISTORICALLY SPEAKING, Jesus came to Japan in the sixteenth century. Theologically speaking, however, it could be said that Christ was present in Japan from the beginning. These two claims do not necessarily contradict each other; neither do they exist in simple harmony with one another. And yet they belong inseparably together. A paradox true of Christology in every time and place, it is also the dialectic of Christ in Japan.

Who is Jesus for Japan? By what name should he be called? Do the biblical titles or classical doctrines of Jesus in the West have any validity in this "alien" culture of East Asia? Do the historical experience and spiritual traditions of Japan provide alternative ways of encountering Jesus? By what image of Christ should the church in Japan identify Jesus today?

In this paper I will examine the answer to these questions provided by two contemporary Japanese theologians, Yagi Seiichi and Kuribayashi Teruo. They argue for two different models of Christ for Japan today, one influenced by Buddhism, the other by liberation theology. However, insofar as each draws on the experience and traditions of Japan, they agree in calling for a distinctively Japanese approach to Christology.

CHRIST AND ENLIGHTENMENT (YAGI SEIICHI)

"The life I now live is not my life, but the life which Christ lives in me" (Gal 2:20).

Japanese Theology and Christian-Buddhist Dialogue

Yagi Seiichi's importance for the constructive rethinking of Japanese theology in dialogue with Buddhism is widely recognized. According to Ernest Piryns, in his essay "Japanese Theology and Inculturation," Yagi Seiichi's work is one of the leading examples of the inculturation of Japanese theology, achieved by means of a creative and original "synthesis, integration, or unification between Christ and Buddhist thought" (Piryns 1987, 544–5). According to Richard Drummond in his essay "Dialogue and integration: The theological challenge of Yagi Seiichi," Yagi's work is "an outstanding example in Japan of a profound, biblically and theologically informed Christian attempt appreciatively to understand and constructively relate to the great historical phenomenon of Buddhism" (Drummond 1987, 562). This makes him, says Drummond, "one of the most significant religious thinkers of our time" (Drummond 1987, 573).

In his essay "Japanese Christian theology in encounter with Buddhism," Yagi himself sees his work as an expression of the historical necessity for "future theology, that is, theology in contact with Buddhist thinking, to find and develop what has been contained in the Christian tradition, but has not yet been fully brought to light" (Yagi 1982, 134). In other words, the dialogue of Christian theology with Buddhist thought

makes a new understanding of Christianity itself possible (Yagi 1990, vii). Such dialogue can lead to the transformation of Christianity, in fact to the sort of radical change required if we are ever to reach global mutual understanding (Yagi 1990, viii). For Yagi, therefore, it is interreligious encounter with non-Western traditions and ways of thinking, such as Buddhism, that will increasingly be needed for and constitutive of our "common cultural-religious future" (Yagi 1990, viii).

For Christians in Japan, says Yagi, this dialogue with Buddhism "concerns their very destiny not as doctrine but as "fellow contemporaries" who live their religion (Yagi 1990, vii). Specifically, for Protestant theology in Japan, which until recently has been heavily influenced by the neo-orthodox theology of Karl Barth, it is time to ask how Christian-Buddhist dialogue is possible and how far it can be meaningful for the development of a distinctively Japanese Christian theology (Yagi 1990, 139).

In Yagi's thought this means that the Japanese theology that emerges from Buddhist-Christian dialogue will be a theology that expresses Christian experience in Asian philosophical and religious categories influenced by the Buddhist tradition, just as the classical theology of the West was an expression of Christian experience in the categories of Greek and Latin thought (Yagi 1990, 8). The foundations of Japanese theology, and therefore of Japanese Christology, will rest not on the categories of Western philosophy and theology but on the experience of Asian Christians living in non-Western cultures where the nature of such experience and the categories of such thought are shaped, for the most part, by non-Christian religions (Yagi 1990, 9).

The necessity to rethink Japanese theology on the basis of Christian-Buddhist dialogue arises not simply for "local" or "global" reasons, whether conceptual or pragmatic, but is the direct result of Yagi's

own religious experience. In an autobiographical sketch reported in the introduction to the German edition of *Die Front-Struktur als Bruecke vom buddhistischen zum christlichen Denken*, he confesses that in fact he actually had not one but two "conversion" experiences, one Christian and one Buddhist. One was in Japan where, though raised in a Christian family, he came to Christian faith "in a very self-conscious way" as a university student of the New Testament (Drummond 1987, 558; Yagi 1990, 58). The other was in Germany where, asked about Buddhism and unable to answer, he took up the study of Zen Buddhist texts (Yagi 1990, 58). He experienced what might be called in the Zen tradition *satori*, the transcending of the confines of the "discriminating intellect" and the encountering of reality "as it presented itself from itself, before all forming of concepts." With that powerful breakthrough, he felt he "began to realize the truth of Jesus' words *immediately*" (Drummond 1987, 558; Yagi 1990, 59).

As a result of these two conversion experiences—the first in Japan that confirmed him in his Christian identity and the second in the West that awakened him to his Japanese identity—Yagi arrived, even as a young theologian, at the foundational insight that has shaped his subsequent work: "the essence of Christian faith lies in the liberation from conceptual language more than in the justification of the godless" (Yagi 1990, 60). Beneath his entire theological work as a Christian lies this profound, Buddhist-inspired "pure" or "immediate experience" of awakening to a direct encounter with Ultimate Reality (Odagaki 1989, 274).

The Christological conclusion followed: the event of the Resurrection is the event of Enlightenment. The Christ of faith is the Awakened One.

Thus, based on this parallelism, I have been trying...to show that the formation

of New Testament thinking, inclusive of its earliest kerygma, can be explained as the interpretation of the event of "Enlightenment" (2 Cor 4:6) which took place in the disciples of Jesus after his death, without any presupposition of a "supernatural" intervention by God into history (Yagi 1990, 60).

The parallelism between Yagi's two conversion experiences suggests that in both Christianity and Buddhism one is freed from the old ego-self to receive or actualize a new, truer Self, whether expressed as "Christ in me" (Paul) or as the "true person of no rank" (Japan: Rinzai; China: Lin-chi). Thus, the importance of Buddhist-Christian dialogue for the reconstruction of Japanese theology has for Yagi a double motivation, at once personal and intellectual. It serves to confirm his two-fold conversion experience as well as to support his interpretation of the New Testament faith in the light of that experience (Odagaki 1989, 273). It also provides the necessary context for understanding the Japanese, in particular the Buddhist, nature of his experience and doctrine of both Jesus and Christ.

Toward a "Buddhist" Christology

JESUS

For Yagi, the historical Jesus is the incarnation of the Logos. Jesus is the Christ insofar as in him the pre-existent Logos, God the Son, is incarnate (Yagi 1986, 202). Having said this, Yagi insists on a strict differentiation between the eternal Logos (God the Son), Christ as the incarnate Logos made "flesh," not "human" (Jn 1:14) and the empirical figure of the historical Jesus (Yagi 1990, 151, 37). That is, we must distinguish within the person of Jesus between the reality of the incarnate Logos (the Christ, his divine-human Self) and his empirical Ego. Christ, the incarnate Logos, is the ultimate Subject, the ultimate Self, of Jesus just as Christ is the

ultimate Self of every human being, as Paul expressed when he observed, "not I, but Christ in me" (Yagi 1990, 136).

Borrowing terminology from Takizawa, his predecessor in Japanese Protestant theology and a student of both Nishida and Barth, Yagi distinguishes between two different dimensions of the relationship between God and humans: the "primary contact" and the "secondary contact." The "primary contact" between God and humans, what Takizawa calls the "Immanuel principle" ("God with us"), is the ontological foundation of every human being, whether one is aware of it or not and whether one is Christian or not. It is the primordial fact, the "archefact," of our existence. When a human being "awakens" to this fact, the event is called the "secondary contact" of God and human beings. Yagi, like Takizawa, develops his Christology on the basis of this distinction (Yagi 1990, 140).

Thus Yagi says that Jesus is the Christ, the incarnation of the Logos, because he is the one in whom the primary contact of God with human beings is historically actualized. The secondary contact of God and human beings, that is, human awakening to the fact of the primary reality of the divine-human relationship, becomes effective in human history in the person of the historical Jesus. "Jesus is a human being who so completely realized the secondary contact between God and the human being and gave it expression, that he can be the measure and the model of the second contact" (Yagi 1990, 140). Through the secondary contact (the awakening of the historical Jesus), the primary contact (the incarnation of the Logos in history, first of all in Jesus and subsequently in the church as the body of Christ), becomes alive for human beings. For Yagi, this is "the meaning of Jesus as Savior: the primary contact becomes completely alive in Jesus for the first time in history" (Takizawa 1983, 153).

The primary fact of the divine-human (in Buddhist terms, one's Buddha-Nature or True-Self) becomes existentially real and is historically activated when a human being becomes aware of it (Yagi 1990, 151, 37). Thus Christian faith is that secondary contact of God with human beings that is realized when, through its historical actualization in the person of Jesus as the Christ, it becomes a living possibility in one's own existence. As Yagi says, the words of Jesus awaken in me that of which he spoke. They activate and start my life-possibilities, which were previously dormant, and show me that the reality of Jesus is a possibility for every person. His words become "my words" because his words awaken, activate and bring to language my own possibilities (Yagi 1990, 89).

In short, for Yagi, "the empirical human being, Jesus, is to be distinguished from the 'primordial fact of Immanuel,' and our concept of the activated Self ('Christ in me') can well be compared to the concept of Buddhahood" (Yagi 1990, 144).

More specifically, Yagi's depiction of the historical Jesus draws simultaneously on Buddhist and Christian insights. Jesus, like Zen, speaks as one who has direct access to Ultimate Reality in the immediacy of his own experience. On the other hand, Jesus is also the living incarnation of God's love for the world.

In his essay "Paul and Shinran; Jesus and Zen: What lies at the ground of human existence?" Yagi likens the words of Jesus to the speech of a Zen master. According to Yagi, Zen masters like Dōgen or the contemporary Japanese thinker Hisamatsu Shinichi speak from the depths of an immediate experience of reality that transcends the subject and object, first-person and third-person distinctions of ordinary experience, even ordinary religious experience. "Jesus speaks, when he speaks of God, from this ultimate depth of reality that corresponds to Dharmakaya" (Yagi 1986, 207).

Because the words of Jesus, spoken from this depth, actualize the reality of the divine in human existence, at

this depth all human beings, East and West, North and South, Christians and non-Christians, are united as one. This is the depth at the ground of every person...Jesus called it "God," Zen calls it "the formless." Both Jesus and Zen, it seems to me, know this depth and live it out (Yagi 1986, 209).

Clearly Yagi here comes close to Mahayana Buddhism, according to which every human being has the Buddha Nature (primary contact), by which everyone can become the Awakened One if awakened (secondary contact) to this nature (Yagi 1990, 140).

Thus for Yagi, Zen experience and Zen philosophy provide a new way of thinking about the historical Jesus. But there is also an important difference between Zen and Jesus that requires Japanese Christology to move back from Buddhism to Christianity. As Yagi puts it, "Zen is primarily concerned with thinking, whereas Jesus was primarily concerned with doing" (Yagi 1986, 206). One is reminded of his two conversion experiences, "the first (Christian) focused on acting and the second (Buddhist) focused on seeing." Thus the one who, like the Zen master, speaks from an immediate experience of Jesus as the Christ also incarnates the historical reality of God's active love for the world.

Jesus' words and actions were not limited to the dimension of personal existence (individual awakening). In addition they moved along communal (the people Israel) and interpersonal (unconditional love) axes as well. Jesus' freedom, grounded in his intimate relation to the Father, expressed itself in all three dimensions: as freedom from moral and religious legalism (communal), as freedom from anxiety regarding one's existence (individual), and most fun-

damental of all, as freedom from closed or conditional love (interpersonal) (Yagi 1986, 205). But the ground of all of these was, in turn, the presence in his person of the divine reality itself as the reality of unconditional love in action and as the manifestation of the kingdom of God in history.

CHRIST

Yagi's answer to the question "Who is the historical Jesus?" already suggests his answer to the question "Who (or what) is the Christ of faith and what is the nature of the relation between the historical Jesus and the reality of Christ?" Here too we will find Yagi's unique, and uniquely Japanese, combination of terms drawn from both the Christian and Buddhist traditions.

Yagi's discussion of the reality (the nature and work) of Christ is based on his understanding of the nature of Christian faith, the essence of which he sees as identical with the soteriological core of every religion. In a way similar to John Hick, who speaks of the core of religion as the soteriological transition from "self-centeredness" to "Reality-centeredness," Yagi argues that the central element of every religion emerges when the empirical self or ego (which we normally take to be the agent of action) allows, with full awareness, the Transcendent Reality to become the true Subject, the true Self, the true "Agent" of the ego-self (Drummond 1987, 572). As Paul says, "not I but Christ in me."

To shed light on Yagi's understanding of Christ and the relation of Jesus to Christ, it may be helpful to look first at Yagi's analysis of Paul's experience of Christ. For Yagi, the essence of Christian faith is contained in Paul's words, "the life I now live is not my life, but the life which Christ lives in me" (Gal 2: 19–20). Yagi asks: who is the real subject, the real self, the real agent, the real "I" in Paul's life? Is it Paul or Christ in him?

In Paul's words, says Yagi, the saving reality, the saving power of the Transcendent is immanent. Christ is present and real not just as the incarnation of the eternal Logos in Jesus but also as "the life which Christ lives in me." In these words Paul is acknowledging that Christ is the ultimate agent, the ultimate subject of his self, of his subjectivity. Here, in Christ, the authentic existence of the self is established. It is not that Paul's usual self is destroyed; rather it is established anew in Christ. This is not an ontological statement about the deification of human nature. That, says Yagi, would represent a confusion of Paul's usual self with the reality of the transcendent-immanent in the self, "Christ in me." It is rather an existential-soteriological statement about the grounding of one's human self in a larger Transcendent Reality—about its transformation, in Hick's words, from "self-centeredness" to "Reality-centeredness" (Yagi 1986, 202).

Yagi concludes that in the relation of the usual believing self to the object of its faith and to Christ as the ultimate subject of selfhood, there are two levels (dimensions, depths) of "I" involved: the usual self and its ultimate ground. For Paul, as for all Christians, Christ is the ultimate I "in" the usual I. Christ, the incarnate Logos, becomes the ultimate subject in the human being (Yagi 1990, 136). Thus we must take Paul's words in their "duplexity": it is Christ who speaks when Paul speaks. In the religious language of Paul, Christ (the Transcendent Reality, the ground of authentic existence) is expressed in both the first and third persons (Yagi 1986, 203–4).

What does Yagi's analysis of Paul's experience of and relation to Christ tell us about his understanding of Christ and the relation of Jesus to Christ? In contrast to Paul, Yagi views Jesus as a person in whom the Transcendent was given primary voice in and through his human self. In Jesus "the unity of I and thou, divine and human...

that is, the Self, had come alive," a fact of which Jesus himself was fully conscious, as revealed in his transcendental "I" sayings (Yagi 1990, 142-3). In Jesus' own awakening to this fact, the primary contact of God and humans came to complete and undistorted, immediate and transparent expression in both word and act. For this reason, says Yagi, Jesus was the incarnate Logos of God, in short, the Christ.

Jesus himself did not express it in this way. He spoke of this divine-human reality by other names: the Kingdom of God or (personified) the Son of Man. But for Yagi, the reality that Jesus termed the "Son of Man" or the "Rule of God" is the same reality that Paul and primitive Christianity referred to as the "Risen Lord," "Christ," the "Son of God." "They are only different names for the same reality" (Yagi 1986, 208-9; Yagi 1990, 144).

This claim has two important and controversial consequences for Yagi's Christology. It means, first, that "the empirical human being, Jesus, is to be distinguished from the 'primordial fact of Immanuel,'" that is, from the reality of the Christ (Yagi 1990, 144). The incarnate Logos is not to be immediately identified with the historical Jesus, for it is the same reality as Paul's "Christ in me" (Gal 2:19). As in the case of Yagi's earlier distinction between the "Self" (the ultimate Agent of Paul's "I") and the "Ego" (Paul's empirical self), so in the person of Jesus, says Yagi, we must distinguish between his divine-human Self and his empirical Ego (Yagi 1990, 151, 37).

But secondly, the claim that the reality of Christ, the incarnate Logos, is the same in Jesus as in Paul opens the way to, or perhaps proceeds from, Yagi's "Buddhist" reconstruction of Christology. For Yagi contends that the three-fold distinction of Logos, Christ and Jesus corresponds to the Buddhist Tri-kaya of Dharma-kaya (the Formless or Transcendent Reality beyond subjectivity and objectivity), Sambhoga-

kaya (Amida Buddha, the Savior) and Nirmana-kaya (the historical Gautama) (Yagi 1990, 151, 37).

Yagi makes this "Buddhist" Christological move on the basis of his belief, grounded in his two conversion experiences, that "the same Ultimate Reality is at work in both Buddhism and Christianity, as in all humanity," and that accordingly what is called enlightenment or salvation is available in the context of both traditions (Drummond 1987, 563). There is a basic unity between Buddhism and Christianity in their ontological source, the Transcendent Reality called "God" by Jesus or "the Formless" in Mahayana.

It follows that the essence of soteriology in both Buddhism and Christianity involves the transformation of human beings from self-centeredness to Reality-centeredness on the basis of the working of the Transcendent (the self-revelation of God in Christ, the Dharmakaya in Amida Buddha, the Formless in Zen) in human beings. Enlightenment or awakening is absolutely necessary because for Zen as for Christianity, "Transcendence works upon the human being in every moment" (Yagi 1990, 117-18). Thus Rinzai (Lin-chi) spoke of the inner activity of the formless. In all the life activities of the human being, the Formless Dharmakaya, the Buddha Nature, is present and at work.

What this means for Yagi's Christology, therefore, is that in Jesus as well as in Paul the universal reality of "Christ," the incarnate Logos or "Christ in me," "can well be compared to the concept of Buddhahood" (Yagi 1990, 144). What Takizawa calls the "primary contact" or presence of the Transcendent in human existence, what Yagi calls the presence of Christ, is similar to what Pure Land Buddhism calls Amida Buddha (Takizawa 1983, 144). For Christianity the eternal Logos of God is not visible except at the meeting point of God and human beings: the incarnate Logos, Christ. Similarly, for

Pure Land Buddhism the eternal Dharmakaya is not visible except in the Sambhoga-kaya of Amida Buddha.

So far we have commented on Yagi's understanding of the relation of the incarnate Logos to the historical Jesus. But as the above remarks suggest, a discussion of his Christology would not be complete without at least brief reference to his view of the Trinity, that is, his view of the relation of the eternal Logos (God the Son) to the incarnate Logos (Jesus as the Christ). Briefly stated, the eternal Logos is the structural principle of the working of Transcendence in the world and human beings. The content of the Logos is made visible in the words and works of love in Jesus as the incarnate Christ, in Paul's "Christ in me," and in the working of the Holy Spirit in the church as the body of Christ on earth (Yagi 1990, 123, 150–1, 36). Similarly, in Buddhism the Dharmakaya is that Transcendent Reality whose content is made visible in the enlightened words and deeds of Gautama as the incarnate Buddha, in the compassionate "Vow of Life" of the Bodhisattva Hōzō, and in the saving power of Amida Buddha.

Conclusion

Before concluding, it is important to note some of the questions that have been raised about Yagi's Buddhist-inspired Christology. Does Yagi separate what classical theology has held to be inseparable: the Jesus of history and the Christ of faith? Does Yagi's way of distinguishing the reality of Christ from the person of Jesus undermine the core of Christian faith, "that a man called Jesus is the Son of God, the Christ" (Odagaki 1989, 273)? Is it the case that Yagi demonstrates "a greater preference for the Risen Christ than for the historical Jesus," that in fact he "seems to make Christ so transparent that the historical Jesus of Nazareth fades into the background" (Piryns 1987, 545–6)? Is it true

that in Yagi's "unique approach to Buddhism," in which "Christ finds its counterpart in the universal impersonal Buddha-nature inherent in all things," "Christ becomes an *it* rather than a *him*," "a more and more depersonalized and universalized existential quality of the human condition" (Piryns 1987, 546)? Is it true that Yagi's "Christ in me," his Christ-mysticism, is closer to a Buddhist "union-mysticism" than to a Christian "communion-mysticism" (Piryns 1987, 554)? For Yagi, is the God in whom Jesus believed the personal God of the biblical tradition or a Transcendent Reality indistinguishable from the Formless Dharmakaya, the Absolute Nothing, of Mahayana Buddhism (Odagaki 1989, 272)?

From these questions it can be seen that the expression of a Japanese experience of Jesus as the Christ in categories drawn from Buddhist thought rather than traditional Western Christology will not necessarily be accepted by Western theologians or by Japanese theologians working within Western rather than Asian categories. These issues are ones on which reasonable persons may disagree. One purpose of this overview of the several dimensions of Yagi's Christology, therefore, is to provide an accurate and sufficiently detailed basis for understanding Yagi's original and uniquely Japanese Buddhist approach to Christology and for deciding whether criticisms of his position from the standpoint of traditional Christology are justified or whether they simply prolong the Western "captivity" of Japanese theology.

Whatever the answer, one thing is clear. For Yagi, it is Buddhist-Christian dialogue that makes a new understanding of Christianity possible. If, as Yagi believes, Buddhism and Christianity stand on the same primordial ground, then we must give up the traditional claim of Christianity that Jesus Christ alone is the revelation of God, that Transcendent Reality (God, Dharmakaya) is revealed nowhere apart from him. For then

"Christ in me" is made into an absolutized historical figure, not a universal reality "that can stand in direct relation to every time and every place" (Yagi 1990, 139, 141). Paradoxically, this "confusion" of the incarnate Logos (the universal reality of Christ) with a particular human being (the historical Jesus) means that the concrete reality of the primordial relation of God with all human beings, the universal working of the formless Dharmakaya in all beings, risks being lost (Takizawa, 146). It is Buddhist-Christian dialogue that helps us to see this.

Based on his two experiences of conversion, Yagi early arrived at an interpretation of the New Testament by which "the claim of absoluteness by Christianity can be eliminated" without distorting the core of Christian faith: the presence of the Kingdom of God in the words and life of the historical Jesus and the reality of "Christ in me" in Christ's body, the church. For Yagi, this meant that Christianity was free not only to enter into dialogue with Buddhism but also to "encounter non-Western traditions and ways of thinking, which are proving themselves to be really constitutive of our common cultural-religious future" (Yagi 1990, 144, viii). This, at least, is Yagi's "global" vision for his own modest effort to construct a "local" (Japanese) theology.

But perhaps it is more than that. Richard Drummond observes:

Yagi's basic approach is that of a quest for truth based upon the methodology of dialogue...to the end of constructive change both of ourselves and of the traditions to which we belong (Drummond 1987, 563).

For Yagi, dialogue and mutual self-transformation are possible because the same Ultimate Reality is at work in Buddhism and Christianity as in all humanity; enlightenment or salvation is available in both traditions. Interreligious dialogue is a manifestation of the working of that Trans-

endent Reality. If so, Yagi's "local" Japanese theology, his "Buddhist" Christology, is not only an exercise in academic theology but also a manifestation of that universal spiritual reality and truth of which and out of which it speaks. Perhaps Drummond does not exaggerate when he concludes that Yagi is "one of the most significant religious thinkers of our time" (Drummond 1987, 573).

JESUS AND LIBERATION (KURIBAYASHI TERUO)

"We proclaim Christ—yes, Christ nailed to the cross, though this is a stumbling block to Jews and folly to Greeks" (1 Cor 1:23).

"I will say to Not my people, 'You are my people'" (Hos 2:23).

From the theology of Yagi Seiichi, for whom Jesus is a "Buddhist" Christ, the incarnate Dharmakaya, we turn to another Japanese theologian, Kuribayashi Teruo, who draws on liberation theology to locate the reality of Christ in Japan. Specifically, he finds in the historical and religious oppression of the *Burakumin*, the outcastes of Japan, the resources for a different but, as in Yagi, a distinctively Japanese answer to the question: Who is Jesus for Japan?

Japanese Theology and Burakumin Liberation

For Kuribayashi, theology in Asia, including theology in Japan, must be grounded in the concrete historical context of Asia and Japan. But what is this context? For Kuribayashi it is the context of the outcastes of Asia, and more specifically, the struggle for liberation of the *Burakumin*, the outcastes of Japan (Kuribayashi 1987, ix, xi). Such a theology will therefore have to be critical theology, that is, a theology sensitive to the way religio-cultural ideologies provide legitimacy for structures of sociopolitical domination through concepts of "purity" and "impurity." Castism is reinforced by

the quasi-religious substructure of Asian societies through sanctions based on images of pollution, a phenomenon still true in the secularized society of Japan (Kuribayashi 1987, vi-viii). If theology is to be freed from its Western "captivity" and inculturated or contextualized in its Asian setting, it must therefore focus on the structural as well as spiritual nature of the struggle for liberation among Asian outcastes. And if the living Christ is at the center of Christian faith and life, such a theology must give a Christological reading of its solidarity with the outcastes of Asia (Kuribayashi 1987, xi-xii).

An understanding of this liberation in spiritualistic terms as a liberation from the self, while valid, is not the full meaning of liberation in biblical faith. Faith is not merely a psychological event; it is a part of the larger history of salvation (Kuribayashi 1987, 30). Rooted in the historical experience of Asian outcastes, the theological language of "liberation" must therefore have a sociopolitical dimension as well (Kuribayashi 1987, 38-9).

For Japanese theology, the "specific historical event" of faith is the struggle for liberation by the Burakumin, the outcaste communities of Japan. Why the Burakumin? Because "their communities are paradigmatic of victimization in specifically Japanese terms," a victimization also experienced by Korean residents, Ainu and Okinawan peoples, women and the physically and mentally handicapped (Kuribayashi 1992, 19). Indeed, as Kuribayashi points out, the word "liberation" (*kaihō*) is one the Burakumin themselves used at their first political conference in 1922. At that meeting, they chose this word rather than other possible terms such as "integration" (*dōwa*) or "assimilation" (*yūwa*) to stress that liberation was to be achieved "through their own actions" as subjects of history in their own right (Kuribayashi 1987, 37-8). The Burakumin chose to see themselves no longer as "lowly people" (*senmin* 賤民) but

as "chosen people" (*senmin*, 選民) (Kuribayashi 1987, 42).

Furthermore, it is the Burakumin themselves who first chose Jesus' crown of thorns as the symbol of their own suffering and liberation. This symbol is thus important for a Japanese theology that wishes to identify itself with the struggle of outcastes for liberation. The crown of thorns symbolizes that God is on the side of the oppressed, that God is the God of outcastes, the "marginalized, oppressed, exploited" in their effort to gain redemption from the effects of human evil (Kuribayashi 1987, 40-1). As Kuribayashi reminds us, it is Paul who sees Jesus' crown of thorns as a symbol not only of suffering but also of victory. Jesus on the cross: foolishness to the Greeks and a scandal to the Jews; Jesus on the cross: God on the side of the rejected and the despised rather than of the powerful or wise of the world (Kuribayashi 1987, 47).

For a theology of the crown of thorns, a theology of the liberation of outcastes, sin is not just a matter of moral violations. It is grounded in the prior objectification of other human beings and thus leads, as Yagi also points out, to structures of unjust domination and subordination (Kuribayashi 1987, 111). The oppression of outcastes is a manifestation of sin because it involves the denial that other human beings are my brothers and sisters, made in the image of God, and therefore the potential subjects of their own history. In fact, it is a form of idolatry, of self-worship on the part of dominant classes (Kuribayashi 1987, 31-2). Any theology that fails to address this fact simply perpetuates the system of caste oppression on which it rests.

For this reason Kuribayashi is highly critical of what he labels "academic theology" in Japan. Academic theology in Asia, he says, has had little to say about or to the victims of Asian society. For one thing, its language and conceptuality is too abstract and too Western to be comprehensible to the

outcastes of Asia. It actually suppresses the non-dominant sectors of Asian society because it cannot communicate with, and even conflicts with, their specific historical situation and interests (Kuribayashi 1987, 69).

Kuribayashi applies this criticism to the prevailing kinds of academic theology in Asia. Orthodox and neo-orthodox theology, he says, have no word for praxis, preaching instead a theology that is allegedly neutral and universal but, in fact, is spiritualistic (Kuribayashi 1987, 87–8). Liberal or progressive theology is basically a theology of the middle class, that is, of the modern spirit and liberal ideology of “development” (read: “Westernization”). Liberal theology thus remains basically content with the present distribution of power in society, satisfying itself with abstract notions of “liberty and equality” (88–91). Kuribayashi means his strictures to apply also to the dialogue of Christian theology with traditional religions of Asia, such as Buddhism, dialogues that for the most part are ahistorical or transcendental in their “global” aspirations (4–5).

On the other hand, contrary to the charge usually brought against a theology of liberation, praxis is not a code word for a secular ideology of revolution. It is rather the locus of a community’s concrete historical (spiritual and social) experience, in this case, the Burakumin community of Japan (Kuribayashi 1987, 85). A Japanese theology of liberation must thus be alert to resist the way academic theology in Japan, and the understanding of religion for which it provides theoretical legitimacy, can be co-opted for the sake of an ideology that in fact preserves the status quo at the expense of realizing the full humanity of outcastes (75). A Japanese theology of the crown of thorns must reject any theology or view of religion that is only metaphysical or personalistic. Its focus must not be on human beings in general or the transcendental essence of humanity but on the concrete experience of the outcastes of Japanese soci-

ety. It was, after all, the outcastes of his time who were the focus of Jesus’ mission of liberation (88).

It is the outcaste communities of Asia themselves, says Kuribayashi, who can remind Christianity of its liberating origins and potential. Christianity struck the outcastes of Asia as a religion of justice, activity and life, one that freed them from the ritualism and hierarchism of traditional religions of Asia (Kuribayashi 1987, 106). Thus, subjected to correction by the perspective of outcaste communities, the categories of traditional Western theology may prove capable of disclosing different possibilities (Kuribayashi 1987, 110).

For Kuribayashi, Japanese theology today faces an either-or choice: either it must go on constructing some variety of “neutral” theology, allegedly above all sociopolitical conflict or struggle, or it must become a theology of the crown of thorns, committed to the struggle for liberation of the outcaste communities of Japan. For Kuribayashi the answer is clear. The first option serves simply to legitimize the economic, social and political power of the status quo. The second option, on the other hand, unmasks the false consciousness of that ideological perspective and opens the way, as did Jesus in his mission to the outcastes of Israel, for a genuine praxis of spiritual and historical freedom.

Toward a Burakumin (Japanese Liberation) Christology

JESUS

Jesus of Nazareth is, of course, the foundation of Christian faith. But, asks Kuribayashi, which Jesus? Is it the Jesus of the evangelicals or the incarnate Son of God of classical Christology? Is it the Jesus of liberal theology or the Jesus of so-called “radical” theology? By what name should Asian Christians identify Jesus today? More specifically, which figure of Jesus is most

appropriate for the outcastes of Asia today? (Kuribayashi 1987, 118–20)

To find this new name, we must begin with Jesus himself, the Jesus of the New Testament, says Kuribayashi. We must look to see what the historical Jesus did when faced with concerns of the sort that confront the outcastes of Asia today. Every past Christology, says Kuribayashi, always proceeded from two poles: Jesus of Nazareth and the concrete historical situation of each Christian community. The task for an Asian Christology today is no different. “Reading the scripture through the eyes of an outcaste is necessarily different from reading it as a person who has never experienced discrimination” (Kuribayashi 1987, 128). When we read the New Testament story of Jesus through the eyes of an Asian outcaste today, we see that Jesus was “the man for outcastes.”

Jesus was born among outcastes (shepherds), he lived among outcastes (“sinners”) and he died as an outcaste (among “thieves”) outside the gates of the “holy city” where the outcastes (“polluted”) were required to live (Kuribayashi 1987, 61–2). It was precisely to the outcastes of Israel that he brought the message of liberation, the promise of the Kingdom of God, the good and liberating news that they too were included in the “community of salvation.” Not respecting the division of castes in terms of purity/impurity, Jesus deliberately sought contact with “the polluted, the despised and the ritually defiled” (Kuribayashi 1987, 139). Most dramatically this was realized through his table fellowship with those who had been branded “sinners” (unclean, polluted, outcastes).

Jesus’ mission was therefore clearly a direct attack on the roots of the caste discrimination in the social structure and religious ideology of his times (Kuribayashi 1987, 57, 59–61, 133, 136). For Jesus, the laws of purity were not from God but from those who ruled (Kuribayashi 1987, 140).

Today, Kuribayashi observes, the majority of prosperous Japanese have acquired their status by discriminating against Korean residents and Burakumin, those who do the dirty, dangerous work of society. In other words, outcastes are made “blind, lame and deaf,” made unable to “hear, see and walk” as agents in history, by structures of social and religious dominance (Kuribayashi 1987, 145–6). But the “good news” of Jesus’ message of the Kingdom is that outcastes can be liberated from the spell of religious ideology and social definition that the dominant classes have inculcated in them (Kuribayashi 1987, 147–8).

Kuribayashi notes that the religion of Israel in Jesus’ time was, like Hinduism in India, Shintoism and Buddhism in Japan and other religions of Asia, highly “pollution-conscious.” The coincidence between this pattern of caste discrimination, social and religious, in Jesus’ time and in Asia today is, he says, “concrete and unmistakable” (Kuribayashi 1987, 63–4). In this context the “Kingdom” that Jesus preached to the outcastes of Israel was a concrete and liberating historical event. For Christ to be a living reality in Asia, this historical event must continue to happen in the liberation of the outcastes of Asia today.

But the life of Jesus among outcastes ended with his death as an outcaste among outcastes, condemned as one “outside the law,” as one guilty of the sin of blasphemy (Kuribayashi 1987, 150, 157). In Jesus’ eyes, the privileged place of access to God was not the holy temple but those people who are regarded as furthest from the “holy”...the “defiled, polluted and abandoned.” That was the reason for his “blasphemy.” His accusers saw the alternatives clearly: “the God of the rulers or the God of the oppressed, the holy temple of Jerusalem or the defiled people in Galilee and elsewhere, the security provided by ritual works or the insecurity of God’s coming in power to the ‘sinners’” (Kuribayashi 1987, 158). So his

end was foreordained. As Dorothee Soelle observed, "It is not that love requires the cross, but de facto it ends up on the cross" (Kuribayashi 1987, 155).

As we turn to a consideration of the saving significance of Jesus' suffering, death and resurrection, Kuribayashi argues, it has first been necessary to ensure that we have a clear picture of the particular life that preceded it, for only thus can the meaning of the New Testament faith in the Risen One be correctly and concretely understood. Only then can we answer the question, What was the nature of the victory won in Christ?

CHRIST

Kuribayashi is quite explicit about the foundation of Christian faith: "If the starting point of our Christology is the life and death of the historical Jesus, its culmination is reached in his resurrection. The resurrection of Jesus, or the experience of it in the early Christian community, is the foundation stone of faith in the New Testament" (Kuribayashi 1987, 158).

For Kuribayashi, Jesus' resurrection as the Christ is the basis of hope. For without the necessary courage it imparts, the struggle for liberation cannot be sustained. Jesus' spirit, the spirit of the living Christ, is present among those in Asia who suffer similar agony. "Wherever the outcastes seek justice, compassion, solidarity, communion and understanding among people, wherever they dedicate themselves to overcoming discrimination, there the resurrected one is present" (Kuribayashi 1987, 163, 165).

For Kuribayashi, this is the reason for adopting the title "the One Crowned with Thorns" as the new name of Jesus, the living Christ, for a distinctively Asian theology. It is, he says, "the Christological title par excellence" for the outcastes of Asia. It relates the historical Jesus, his life, death and resurrection, to the concrete experience of Asian outcastes. It thereby enables them

to learn who he was and is, how he is to be found, and what he is doing in Asia today (Kuribayashi 1987, 166).

More specifically, the Christological title "the One Crowned with Thorns" has two main elements that speak to the situation of Asian outcastes: Jesus is co-sufferer (thorns) and Jesus is victor (crown). Therefore, Christ is their liberator.

On the one hand, Jesus the outcaste is their fellow sufferer. Jesus the Crucified One, absurd to the Greeks and offensive to the Jews, was companion (*dōhansha*: Endō Shūsaku) to the outcastes in their suffering. He is not a Greek sage-king "full of wisdom, beauty and glory," free to think and rule while the rest of the population does polluting labor. He is not a royal priest like the prewar emperor of Japan, "free from the contamination of the world"...sacred, holy..."set apart from all people and things that are unclean and defiled." Rather, taking the form of an outcaste and identifying with the despised and powerless, "he shall continue to be crowned with thorns until the day of final redemption" (Kuribayashi 1987, 167-8).

On the other hand, Jesus is Liberator. As we have seen, "liberation" for Kuribayashi has different meanings. Jesus, the resurrected one, the living Christ, continues to speak to cultural, social, political and ideological oppression. He speaks to structural oppression, such as castism, not just to the struggle against self on the personal level. Thus Kuribayashi opposes an Asian Christology based, for example, on "the inner-directed conception of the compassion of oriental sages who seek to reach enlightenment by themselves." A Christology "devoid of a liberating praxis would signify acceptance of the existing discriminatory society and a subtle stand in favor of those who oppress" (Kuribayashi 1987, 173-4).

Kuribayashi completes his reconstruction of an Asian and Japanese theology of outcastes by considering the implications of a

liberation Christology for doctrines of God and the church. The implications for an understanding of God can be summarized thus: "God delivered Jesus and became thereby personally accessible to the outcastes" (Kuribayashi 1987, 194). As for the church: it points to the changed location of salvation and thus to the place where and how the church, as the body of Christ and in identification with Jesus' mission to the outcastes, should live, namely, in a continuous act of solidarity with the oppressed of Asia (Kuribayashi 1987, 229–30).

Talk of God and church in societies that are accustomed to using religion as an ideological instrument is difficult, complicated and extremely ambiguous at best (Kuribayashi 1987, 179, 182). In particular, says Kuribayashi, "It is impossible to confront the discriminatory society of Japan without at the same time challenging the very core of its sociocultural structure and its religious ideology, that is, the emperor system" (Kuribayashi 1987, 182).

For Kuribayashi, the need to create a doctrine of the God and Christ of outcastes is significant because ultimately the credibility of the gospel of Jesus Christ and thus the future of the church in Japan is at stake: "The church in Japan is facing a great challenge. It has been chosen for great causes." It faces two choices: "either the church keeps the golden crown for the powerful and the respected; or takes it off and recovers the crown of thorns that has been revealed in the eyes of the despised and the forsaken in Asia" (Kuribayashi 1992, 31).

Conclusion

Before concluding it is important to note some of the questions that have been raised by more traditional theologians, both Japanese and Western, about Kuribayashi's reconstruction of Christology from a liberationist perspective. In general these reservations take one of two forms. On the one

hand, it is said that liberation theology tends to a one-sided stress on social justice ("political salvation") to the neglect, if not total absence, of any concern for conversion ("spiritual salvation"). As one critic put it, "Being Christian involves more than being involved in a liberation movement" (Pinnock 1992, 34). On the other hand, there is always a danger of using Christian or biblical language to sanctify political movements that are primarily concerned with secular goals. As the same critic observes, "God may or may not be active in the liberation struggles of the Burakumin. One must be discerning as to whether God's Spirit is there or not on the basis of scripture" (Pinnock 1992, 34). Kuribayashi is not unaware of this line of criticism, for he himself asks, "Is this process of symbolism and interpretation by the Burakumin and some Japanese Christians really legitimate in the light of Christian faith? Or is the symbol of the crown of thorns merely used as an image corresponding to a pseudo-messianic character of the *Suiheisha* [Burakumin liberation society]? Do we really have here a new way to articulate the truths inherent in faith, or do we have a 'false ideology,' divorced from authentic Christianity?" (Kuribayashi 1992, 23).

As these questions suggest, the task of expressing a Japanese experience of Jesus as the Christ in categories drawn from the struggle for Burakumin liberation is not one that will necessarily be accepted by Western theologians or Japanese theologians working within more traditional Christological categories. These are issues on which reasonable persons may disagree. One purpose of this presentation of the context and main features of Kuribayashi's Christology is to provide an accurate basis for understanding his attempt to develop a distinctively Japanese liberationist approach to Christology, and for deciding whether these criticisms of his position from the standpoint of more traditional Christologies

are justified or whether they simply prolong the Western "captivity" of Japanese liberation by ideologies supportive of dominant religious and social castes.

Whatever the answer, one thing is clear. For Kuribayashi, it is the contextualization of Japanese theology in the struggle of the Burakumin, the outcastes of Japan, that makes it possible to hope that the gospel of Jesus Christ and the church in Japan will have a credible future among the oppressed in Asia. If, as Kuribayashi believes, the message and mission of the historical Jesus was directed to the outcastes of his time, then the Christ of Japan, the living Christ of Asia, will be found wherever the struggle for the liberation of outcastes is taking place. It is only by relating the historical Jesus to the Burakumin struggle in Japan and to the outcastes of Asia, says Kuribayashi, that we will be able to find this living Christ today.

FINAL REMARKS

Between them, Yagi and Kuribayashi represent two of the major exigencies facing Christian theology today, not only in Japan but worldwide. They constitute the dialogue of Christianity with other religions and the commitment of Christianity to the liberation of the oppressed. I would further suggest that, in the long run, neither of these exigencies can be successfully addressed in the absence of a solution to the other.

For that reason, for all the many and real differences and conflicts between these two Japanese Christologies, one of the continuing challenges of Christian theology, in Japan and globally, will be to ensure not only that neither of these options is lost to Asian or worldwide Christianity but more that they find ways of entering into constructive conversation and working partnership with one another.

Christian dialogue with other religions, for example, Buddhist-Christian dialogue, that

does not take into consideration the spiritual and practical needs of the world's oppressed peoples and cultures, Kuribayashi suggests, is a dialogue that risks becoming only an academic or spiritualistic exercise among like-minded liberals, lending subtle support to the continuance of structures of social and religious dominance. Buddhism can learn from Christianity the importance of Jesus' message and mission to the world's outcastes. Christians engaged in dialogue with Buddhists, for example, Western or Japanese Christian theologians who are drawn to the Kyoto School of philosophers, must be careful not to forget the liberating praxis at the core of New Testament faith.

On the other hand, Christian theologies of liberation, Japanese and others, that neglect the dimension of individual, existential and spiritual salvation in their concern to speak a prophetic word to structures of social and ideological dominance must not forget, as Kuribayashi himself notes, that religion can easily be and has often been used for secular ends far removed from concerns for true salvation, salvation that includes not only liberation from structures of social oppression but also liberation from the threats of non-being at the boundaries of human existence.

Of course no one theologian, perhaps not even any one theology, can be fully "bilingual" in this respect. Every theologian and each theology must speak the words appropriate to its particular context. All the more important, therefore, that "existential-ontological" theologies of Buddhist-Christian dialogue and "social-historical" theologies of liberation of the oppressed find ways to work together as members of the "local" and "global" body of Christ. Yagi Seiichi and Kuribayashi Teruo together are helping the Japanese church to find Christ in Japan. As Christian thinkers, they are also helping the Church Universal to find Christ in today's world. For this we can be grateful to God.

* An abbreviated version of this essay was presented to the Tokyo Theological Discussion Group, July 10, 1993. A fuller version appeared in Japanese translation in the October, November, and December 1994 issues of *Fukuin to Sekai* (Gospel and World). I am grateful to Mr. Kobayashi Nozomu, editor of Shinkyō Shuppansha, for permission to publish this shorter English-language version. —The author.

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