

**Salvation in Jesus's Name Alone:  
How and Why Takakura Tokutaro (1885-1934), I, and Others  
Have Believed that Claim**

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**Abstract**

Takakura Tokutaro (1885-1934) was an influential early-twentieth-century Japanese pastor and theologian. Studying Takakura can provide a window into why and how different Bible-believing Christians can have different foundational impulses for embracing the exclusivity of salvation in Jesus Christ alone. After introducing Takakura's life, context, and ministry, this article examines the fabric of Takakura's thought, including in comparison to intellectual categories more familiar to contemporary, English-speaking Evangelicals. The article then explores differences between Takakura's and others' commitments to exclusivity, along with what those differences can teach us about standing for salvation through "No other name" but that of Jesus Christ.

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Takakura Tokutaro (1885-1934) is little known outside of limited Japanese theological circles. However, the lack of familiarity with this Christian pastor and theologian does not correlate with his importance, influence, and interesting traits as an early-twentieth-century Japanese thinker. As I learned through my in-depth study of Takakura (Jennings 2005), this man was pivotal for his day as well as deeply instructive for any subsequent inquirer who would delve into his life, context, ministry, and thought.

Among the many benefits that come from studying him, Takakura gives a window into why and how different Bible-believing Christians can have different foundational impulses for embracing the exclusivity of salvation in Jesus Christ alone. The Christian leader Takakura Tokutaro resoundingly believed and preached that people were saved exclusively through faith in Jesus and his Cross. At the same time, why and how he believed and preached that message was not the same as why and how many other contemporary English leaders believe and preach, I dare say. The firmness and fervency of commitments to salvation exclusively through Jesus and his Cross are the same; however, the internal logic and makeup of the commitments show some variance.

This study will first briefly introduce Takakura Tokutaro's life, context, and ministry. The second section will explore further the fabric of Takakura's thought, including in comparison to intellectual categories more familiar to contemporary, English-speaking Evangelicals. Finally, we will explore the differences between Takakura's and others' commitments to exclusivity, along with what those differences can teach us about standing for salvation through "No other name" but that of Jesus Christ.

**The Life and Times of Takakura Tokutaro**

Takakura was born in the area surrounding the long-time capital city of Kyoto (京都, or “capital capital”), several hundred miles southwest of the newer capital city of Tokyo (東京, or “east capital”). His father was a merchant who operated a retail store of household goods. Stated negatively, Takakura was not of the samurai class that characterized the families of first-generation Christian leaders in Meiji Japan. That difference will become important later in our discussion.

The Meiji Restoration of 1868 set in motion a dizzying modernization period in Japan. By replacing the Tokugawa Shogunate, which since beginning its rule in 1600 had effectively prepared Japan to become a unified modern nation, the new oligarchy in 1868 ostensibly “restored” the imperial household (in the person of the Emperor Meiji) to its earlier prominence. Over the next two decades the oligarchy led Japan into a remarkably rapid and comprehensive process of absorbing Western modernity. All things Western were imported and adapted: education, government, engineering, military, philosophy, dress, food, and most everything else.

On the religious front, some of the young former samurai whose families had been loyal to the Tokugawas – but had now seen their families dispossessed of their former favored status – found in the Western missionaries’ Christian message a way of re-creating Japan’s lost golden age, through faith in their newfound master Jesus Christ. There were three main streams, or “bands,” of these Christian former samurais that developed, one each that emerged in northern, central, and southwestern Japan. Not long after the impressionable 21-year-old Takakura had moved to Tokyo in 1906 for legal studies, he came under the influence of the leader of the central Japan Christian band (the “Yokohama Band”), the indomitable Rev. Uemura Masahisa. The Yokohama Band is recognized to have been the most church-centered of the three streams,<sup>1</sup> with Uemura thus being the single most important Protestant “church father” in modern Japan. Takakura was soon baptized, quit his legal studies, and became one of Uemura’s prized students at the latter’s small new seminary.

After graduating from that seminary in 1910, Takakura followed in Uemura’s footsteps and entered the pastorate. Over a decade later in 1921, likely as advised and orchestrated by Uemura, Takakura embarked on a three-year study program in the United Kingdom, first in Edinburgh, then Oxford, then Cambridge. Upon returning to Japan in 1924, Takakura was tapped to succeed Uemura as pastor of the flagship Fujimicho Church and as seminary president. What in fact happened was that, following Uemura’s death in 1925, Takakura on one hand did become president of Uemura’s seminary. However, enough church members saw that Takakura was cut from a somewhat different cloth than Uemura’s, so an agreed-upon compromise was for Takakura to pastor a new church (Shinanomachi Church) that branched off from Uemura’s Fujimicho Church.

Having had one book published immediately prior to his studies in Britain, Takakura saw his writing career flourish upon his return to Japan. Of the several articles and handful of books that he wrote, without question Takakura’s most representative, influential, and widely known work was his 1927 *Fukuinteki Kirisutokyo* (“Evangelical Christianity”). We will examine that book shortly as a convenient way of looking at Takakura’s most concise representation of his understanding of the Christian faith.

By this time Japan had bid farewell to the relatively settled Taisho Era (1912-1926) and entered what would become the war-torn Showa Era. As for Takakura, the tidal wave of Barthian

theology that hit Japan in the early 1930s drew his students away from looking to him for theological modeling and guidance. Simultaneously, Takakura became ill with what we would today call clinical depression – so much so that he committed suicide in 1934. The lonely and broken circumstances surrounding Takakura’s death make for a sad backdrop against which we must consider his otherwise lively and fascinating progression as a thinker.

### **Takakura’s Thought**

Before examining some of the particular characteristics of Takakura’s thought, there are two general considerations that are important to highlight.

#### *A Japanese Man*

First, Takakura was a Japanese man who thought, believed, preached, taught, wrote, and lived in Japanese. He read a great deal of theology written in English and in German, and especially during his British sojourn Takakura had to function, at least to a certain degree, in English. Even so, throughout his life Takakura Tokutaro thought and lived in the Japanese language. The fact that he had to incorporate into his Japanese linguistic-conceptual world many ideas that he encountered in English and German simply added to the interesting challenge he faced in articulating to others his passionate understanding of what he came to call *Fukuinteki Kirisutokyo*.

Second, I have already intentionally noted that we are examining Takakura’s thought, not just his theology. Studies of Takakura – most all of which are in Japanese – have tended to focus on his theology in terms of development and characteristics. Most of those studies have included Takakura’s historical context and his self-stated struggle with the “problem of the self” that led to his conversion. However, only a very few studies have included any role at all for Takakura’s pre-conversion experience in shaping his Christian theological understanding (Unuma 1980:49; Jennings 2005:358-359, n.59). Stated more comprehensively, analyses of Takakura have looked at Takakura the theologian rather than taking a more panoramic view of Takakura the human thinker. I have consciously sought to examine Takakura as a man, not just as a theological mind.

#### *Characteristics*

Given those two important qualifiers, what are some particular traits of Takakura’s thought?

theological traits

With respect to his “Evangelical Christianity,” Takakura’s understanding was Bible-based, Cross-centered, and faith-intensive. These three comprehensive themes are evident enough in the five chapter titles of *Fukuinteki Kirisutokyo*:

- I. The Bible and its View of God
- II. View of Christ
- III. View of the Atonement
- IV. View of the Life of Faith
- V. Special Characteristics of Evangelical Christianity (Takakura 1953:5; Jennings 2005:228)

Early in the first chapter, Takakura pointed<sup>2</sup> to the Protestant Reformers as having rightly claimed the Bible as Christianity’s ultimate authority: “The sixteenth-century Reformers ...

achieved the purification of Christianity—as the religion of the Bible.... In the history of Christianity, the time of the Reformers was Christianity’s Golden Age as ‘the religion of the Bible’, ‘the religion of the Word’” (Takakura 1953:7-8; Jennings 2005:229). Toward the end of the fifth chapter, Takakura noted the first special characteristic of Evangelical Christianity to be that of a “religion of the ‘Word’”<sup>3</sup> (Takakura 1953:165; Jennings 2005:258). He distinguished the Bible and the Word of God, noting the necessity of the Holy Spirit to give inward testimony and to rouse faith within the Bible’s hearers. At the same time, the Bible and God’s Word are inseparable – hence the Word of God in the Bible is inspired and has absolute authority (Takakura 1953:21-25; Jennings 2005:232-233).

Takakura tied the Bible’s authority to Evangelical Christianity’s second overall theme, namely the Cross of Christ and the effect that the Cross has on sinful human beings:

The Bible has authority because it drives us sinners to Christ, and in Him brings us into fellowship with the living God.... The dualism of human nature and of the world, the battle between spirit and flesh and between the kingdom of God and this world, is an eternal problem. The living God in the Bible, in the Bible’s central focus of the Lord Christ and His Cross, has gathered up this fundamental problem, and has thoroughly solved it (Takakura 1953:27, 29; Jennings 2005:233).

Moreover, approaching God and the Bible apart from beginning with “God’s atoning *act*” does not “make us sinners righteous before God” and does not give the “*certainty* of salvation.” Only experiencing the “Christ of the Cross,” the “historic revelation” of the Word in “necessary relationship with the Holy Spirit,” is what “guarantees the *certainty* of salvation”<sup>4</sup> (Takakura 1953:166-167; Jennings 2005:258).

Christ and his Cross connect with human beings through the Holy Spirit’s work, through faith – the third comprehensive theme of Takakura’s Evangelical Christianity:

The Cross of Christ, Who was buried in a past grave, in order to work on my sin as a present living power, must be through the leading of the Holy Spirit. That which brings the experience of the historical Cross as the eternal Cross and the present Cross is the Holy Spirit [and] faith. In other words, to the one without faith, the Cross of the Lord Christ has no meaning.... Faith born through the Holy Spirit establishes solidarity between the Cross of history and my sin (Takakura 1953:109-110; Jennings 2005:247).

Faith as such is divinely initiated and paradoxical in bringing together the “external historic fact” of Christ and “spiritual interiority.” It is through having the historic Christ as faith’s cause and object that brings what for Takakura is the all-important “*certainty* and conviction”<sup>5</sup> needed for Christian living (Takakura 1953:120-122; Jennings 2005:250-251).

Filling out the various angles and nuances of Takakura’s description of Evangelical Christianity would require more space. Suffice it here to note the three prominent themes of the Bible, the Cross, and faith as characterizing Takakura’s primary theological emphases.

#### theological influences

Along with all other analyses of Takakura, we should point to two important and clear Christian theological influences on Takakura – or to put it differently, two Christian theologians with whom Takakura had very close connections.

As mentioned in Takakura's biographical summary, Uemura Masahisa played a vital role in Takakura coming to faith in Christ and in his developing as a theologian and churchman. Uemura was an early Protestant convert, baptized in 1873. He became the central figure in one of the main Christian denominations in modern Japan, the Japan Christian Church. Uemura founded a seminary, multiple journals, a flagship church, and regular meetings that gathered politicians and other civic leaders.

Takakura learned from Uemura the central places in the Christian faith of the Bible and of Jesus Christ. Takakura also watched Uemura build institutions and seek to reform modern Japan into a new Christian country. However, as a merchant's son Takakura did not have the same burden as did Uemura, he of samurai lineage and hence burdened for public matters, for societal and institutional reformation. Thus while he always showed deep respect and deference towards his elder statesman, it is also safe to say that Takakura reacted against Uemura's socio-political vision and instead stressed more pointedly the importance of having a vital, internal faith (Jennings 2005:268-269).

A second theologian with whom Takakura felt an extremely strong affinity was the British Congregationalist P.T. Forsyth. During the second year of his U.K. sojourn, Takakura "was engrossed in the writings of Forsyth. I read everything of his I could get my hands on, even articles of his published in magazines. As far as the recent English-American theological world is concerned, I cannot find any other theologian filled with insight that has conviction, and burning with evangelical faith, as much as he. He is certainly a great theologian" (Takakura 1925:23; Jennings 2005:171). Among the plethora of Western theologians whose writings he imbibed, Takakura found in Forsyth a theological kinsman and soul-mate.

By Takakura's own testimony, he was helped by Forsyth in two general ways. First, "The essence of evangelicalism was forcefully clarified through him..." (Takakura 1925:23; Jennings 2005:172). Building on having heard Uemura's evangelical emphases for several years, Takakura's extensive encounter with Forsyth's writings in Britain crystallized even further such quintessentially evangelical categories as "Christ," "grace," "salvation," "moral," and "experience" (Jennings 2005:173). Second, Forsyth instructed Takakura on the meaning of the Church for Protestantism, plus the vital connection between the Church and theology (Takakura 1925:21; Jennings 2005:175). Forsyth's writings on the Church's "dogma" or "primary theology" pointed to what Takakura called the "positive," "historic," "objective," "orthodox," and "evangelical" faith. The Church's "secondary theology" is its doctrine. This general schema helped shape Takakura's notion, repetitive of Forsyth's, of "No theology, no Church." For Takakura, the "weak sentimentalism and shallow utilitarianism within the current Christian Church in Japan" was deeply related to the lack of recognition of "the true meaning of theology." Again reflecting on what he had learned from Forsyth, "Where there is no true theology, in fact there is neither strong, deep faith" (Takakura 1925:24-25; Jennings 2005:175-176).

An additional theological influence that I believe must be emphasized – even though it has not received any attention beyond a slight reference within an analysis of several modern Japanese thinkers (Unuma 1980:49) – is that of the formative role that Takakura's family Buddhist heritage played. Takakura's grandparents, great-grandparents, and beyond, most particularly his grandmother (who spent much time with him), were "fervent" *Jodo Shinshu* ("True Pure Land") believers (Oshio 1955:6, 10). Insofar as that religious tradition flowed through the family generations streaming into Takakura's life, some of that tradition's

characteristic ways of reacting to God's inescapable presence<sup>6</sup> (Jennings 2011:269-272) no doubt left a lasting impression.

Generally speaking a human being's early influences deeply affect – in lasting ways – that person's character, instincts, and sensibilities. Put theologically, the Creator-God of Providence significantly shapes the particular relationships he will have with his children through the familial and cultural contexts into which he brings them. As we will further examine shortly (necessarily only partially within this brief study), Takakura's wrestlings with "the self," his intuitive approach to formulating theological loci, and his final appeal to the basic importance of having "certainty" and "conviction" all stem, I believe, out of the inherited *Jodo Shinshu* soil of his infancy and youth. God in Jesus Christ came to that particular person named Takakura Tokutaro, tailoring the universal gospel to him as he always does in relating to us his children. Coming to grips with this universal-particular dynamic of the Christian faith is centrally important not only to this particular study of Takakura, but also to thinking theologically in general. We will return to this important theme later.

#### theological enemies

It is instructive to note as well the theological enemies that Takakura targeted in his *Fukuinteki Kirisutokyo*. First and foremost was "Liberal Christianity." Here is (again, an English translation of) how Takakura stated the matter: "Those who advocate a so-called Liberal Christianity have fallen into religious subjectivism. Having received the influences of rationalism, naturalism, [and] humanism, the transcendental, objective side of the Christian faith has been neglected, and God's immanent side has been emphasized." Such a phenomenon, according to Takakura, had resulted in a loss of "true prayer" as well as of any "certainty of salvation" (Takakura 1953:9-10; Jennings 2005:229-230). Takakura repeatedly referenced the fundamental shortcomings of a liberal Christianity that simply shifted with the wind-blown cultural sands of the day and had no conviction or certain foundation.

While not as vociferously as "Liberal Christianity," "Social Christianity" also drew the ire of Takakura the author and preacher. Takakura stressed the church's primary purpose to be that of exhibiting the glory of Christ, not social service or the fulfillment of its members (Takakura 1953:144-145; Jennings 2005:255). Another strain of Christianity that Takakura explicitly criticized was what he called the "Traditional Evangelicalism" of his day. Labeling it "religious pharisaism," Takakura decried what he saw as mere theoretical creedal commitment that lacked deeply religious, spiritual intuition (Takakura 1953:165; Jennings 2005:257).

#### underlying traits

In order to get a fuller picture of the characteristics of Takakura's thought, we need to dig underneath his theological traits, influences, and enemies. To explain succinctly here such subterranean findings, I have identified three basic elements of Takakura's thought that help to explain why he thought the way that he did.

First was Takakura's self-professed *jiga no mondai* ("problem of the self"). Per reflections he wrote approximately 15 years after his conversion to Christianity, "I was baptized because I believed that somehow through Christianity I could solve the problem of the self.... I entered seminary not because I intended to become a pastor, but because I thought it would be good to be able freely to read books that I liked, and because I wanted to lead a more earnest and serious

life” (Takakura 1921b:1-2; Jennings 2005:44). Writing further about his experience, in this case about a decade after his conversion (an experience spawned out of writing a commentary on Romans), Takakura noted his discovery both that “Lurking at the bottom of the soul is the evil nature itself,” as well as that he thus “had to hang onto the grace of forgiveness of sin” (Takakura 1921a:146-162; Jennings 2005:307). Takakura had grown from seeking how “to free, fulfill, and thoroughly realize” (Takakura 1921b:1; Jennings 2005:305) the self into genuinely experiencing God’s forgiveness through faith in Christ, conveyed by the Bible’s teaching on sin and God’s grace.

What were the origins of Takakura’s *jiga no mondai*? According to his own explanation cited just now, ego-centric sin would have been Takakura the mature Christian’s own clear answer. But as noted by other analysts, Takakura’s wrestlings with the problem of the self were also connected to his wider socio-economic, intellectual-literary, political, and generational context (Jennings 2005:263-266). The lightning-fast transformation into a modern nation-state that had occurred during the first half of Meiji Japan (1868-1889) quite naturally bred the struggles with self-identity experienced by Takakura’s generation.

As an additional, underlying origin of Takakura’s problem of the self, I want strongly to argue that his family religious heritage played a central role as well. The religious instincts – regarding how to respond to God’s inescapable presence – that developed in the young Takakura were conveyed to him by those who raised him, perhaps preeminently by his fervent grandmother. Central to those *Jodo Shinshu* instincts was the basic, Mahayana-Buddhist goal of realizing the vaporous reality of what we humans imagine to be an independently existing self. Religious practices and teachings that were modeled for Takakura as an infant, boy, and youth ultimately stressed this one goal of realizing that ultimately there is no imagined self. It is no wonder, then, that within his historical context Takakura self-consciously experienced a “problem of the self.” Given Christianity’s translatability and thus its particularistic and contextual character, it is also no wonder that God would have come to Takakura Tokutaro the sinner in a way that was tailored to his instinctive and contextual categories. How Takakura wrestled with God over deep notions about “the self” was a central component of the whole process of Takakura’s conversion to Christ, that is of how God’s Spirit led Takakura in turning all that he was towards Christ.

A second underlying trait of Takakura’s thought was his self-described “faith logic,” “soul logic,” “logic of the conscience,” “superrational logic,” even “antirational” logic. Takakura also spoke of the importance of having religious “insight” and religious “intuition,” not mere human rationality, reasoning, or logic. I see operative here Takakura’s instinctive sense of *chokkan* (“intuition”), or what has been more philosophically expressed as a “subjectivity-only” mindset (Jennings 2005:339-340). Takakura’s consistently strident critique of “subjective” Christianity notwithstanding, his deep sense of God’s presence in Christ by the Holy Spirit rang true in his soul in terms of his inherited Mahayana Buddhist, and more specifically *Jodo Shinshu*, intuitive sense of a “self-transcendent and self-extricated consciousness.” Such a mindset submerges distinctions between “objectivity” and “subjectivity” in accord with a “fundamental nondualistic structure of reality in Mahayana thought” (Jennings 2005:301).

It is worth specially noting at this point that Takakura expressly advocated the central importance of the “objective” Christian faith as opposed to a more changeable, fluctuating “subjective” Christianity. However, what he meant by those two terms – *kyakkanteki*

(“objective”) and *shukanteki* (“subjective”) – is crucial. Uniformly throughout his writings, Takakura’s intended meanings for this pair of terms was not a metaphysical dualism between an external existence and an internal sensibility, but instead a comparison between “public-corporate” and “private-individual.” As a mundane example, Takakura once mentioned administering a financial offering to a particular evangelist “objectively” through the denominational office to the evangelism office. The “subjective” donor remained associated with the offering that was “objectively” processed, just as believers’ “subjective” faith is ever connected to the Church’s “objective” belief. But what was important for Takakura was the stability of the Church’s collective or *kyakkanteki* faith versus the tendency of individual or *shukanteki* experience to vacillate. Relevant to our present discussion, including in relation to Takakura’s operative “faith logic,” is the point that the ontological freight that comes with the English “objective” and “subjective” was largely absent from Takakura’s basic notions about the interrelationship between individual and corporate belief (Jennings 2005:246-247, 342-343).

The third underlying trait characterizing Takakura’s thought was his fundamentally important concern for “certainty” and “conviction,” i.e., *tashikasa* and *kakushin*. The ultimate criterion Takakura cited throughout his arguments advocating the various facets of his *Fukuinteki Kirisutokyo* – whether the Word, the Crucified and Resurrected Christ, God’s grace, “objective” versus “subjective” faith, or whatever else – was that those facets, and not competing alternatives, are what give unshakeable certainty of heart and conviction of soul. As Takakura put it, “Faith is most sensitive to the *certainty* of its object.” Furthermore, “The most important thing for religious consciousness is God’s objective *certainty*”<sup>7</sup> (Jennings 2005:351).

Any number of factors could have gone into Takakura’s default appeal to *tashikasa* or *kakushin* as having ultimate value: a volatile family life during his childhood; his rapidly changing intellectual, socio-economic, political, cultural, and religious historical context; his conflicted posture toward the Uemura-brand of Meiji Christianity bequeathed to him; the linguistically challenging array of Western theology he imbibed. I believe that as deeply rooted as any factor was an embedded longing – again, inherited from his family’s religious heritage – for the *shinjin* explicated by Shinran, the twelfth-century founder of *Jodo Shinshu*. Shinran’s “faith” or “entrusting” in the compassion of Amida Buddha – certain trust in “Other power” versus “self power” – was “perhaps *the* central term in Shinran’s thought”<sup>8</sup> (Ueda and Hirota, 1989:146-148; Jennings 2005:305, 351). It would be hard to imagine that such a central notion would not have found its way into Takakura’s religious instincts that were shaped by his fervent True Land Buddhist grandmother and ancestors.

In sum, his “problem of the self,” religious intuition, and ultimate longing for certain conviction were fundamental, underlying traits of Takakura’s overall thought, including his theological formulations. These traits characterized the boy whom God providentially shaped, the young man to whom God came in the gospel message about Jesus Christ, and the mature man who turned all aspects of himself toward Jesus as God’s Spirit worked in his heart and life.

### **Takakura’s Exclusivity and English-Speaking Evangelicals Today**

We can now examine what Takakura’s life and times, as well as his characteristic manner of thinking, meant for the manner in which he held to salvation in Jesus alone. To follow the line we were just discussing, Takakura would have argued that such a stress on the exclusivity of Jesus as Savior alone would give conviction that was certain. He said as much in the closing summary of his *Fukuinteki Kirisutokyo*. There he noted that starting anywhere else than “the

Word” – religious sentiment, character, reason, or anything else besides “God’s atoning *act*” – would not give the “strength of fellowship from being seized by the living God,” would not “certainly bind us to God,” would not “make us sinners righteous before God,” and would not give the “*certainty* of salvation.” It was only the “absolute authority” of the Word – that is, experiencing the “Christ of the Cross,” the “historic revelation” of the Word in “necessary relationship with the Holy Spirit” – that “guarantees the certainty of salvation” and keeps one’s deity from being a “postulate of the self, a dead god”<sup>9</sup> (Takakura 1953:165-167; Jennings 2005:258).

Takakura’s argumentation did not appeal to what was “right” or “true” per se. The Bible’s gospel was of course “right” and “true” for him, but in the sense that it produces genuine certainty and conviction. As explained above, Takakura’s fundamental value of coming to religious certainty and conviction arose out of his dealings with the self, out of his knowing intuitively that *tashikasa* and *kakushin* are basic values, and out of his engrained need for certainty and conviction, given his particular makeup. Stated theologically, God shaped and came to Takakura as that particular man with that particular makeup, and (especially important for Evangelicals) the Japanese Takakura thus came to his strong biblical convictions as a result of God the Holy Spirit speaking to him in the Japanese Bible.

For most Evangelicals, an ultimate appeal to certain conviction is by itself an insufficient argument. That is because people may be genuinely certain and convinced of something, but that does not prevent them from being sincerely but genuinely wrong. Instead of someone being convinced of something, what is “true,” “biblical,” or reasonably or scientifically “persuasive” are the criteria we need in standing for the exclusivity of salvation in Jesus Christ. That is because (at the risk of both overgeneralizing and oversimplifying) we are people whom God shapes and convinces in the powerful wake of Greek-philosophical and European-Enlightenment historical contexts, i.e., contexts that give ultimate value to the kind of categories that match our instinctive sensibilities of true authority that is to be believed.

What sorts of categories compel English-speaking Evangelicals today to accept and believe something to be true and truly authoritative? Greek philosophical axioms consistent with the law of non-contradiction are perhaps as fundamental as any. Hence John 14:6 and Acts 4:12 have a basic appeal vis-à-vis our basic notion that there cannot be two different “the’s.” Jesus claimed to be “the Way, the Truth, and the Life,” hence there cannot be another. Peter proclaimed that there is “no other Name,” i.e., Jesus is “the Name” by which people can be saved – hence there cannot be another. An “A,” in this case “the Savior = Jesus,” and a “non-A,” that is “the Savior = someone other than Jesus,” cannot co-exist.

A related notional category is that of ontological sensibilities, i.e., those concerning “existence.” The claim that there “is” no other Savior than Jesus, that Jesus “is” the unique Savior, inherently means that Jesus “exists.” Moreover, he exists independently and separately from other existent beings. How else could Jesus “be” the unique Savior if he did-not exist?

A third category that we will mention here is an epistemological one. To state the matter first in more everyday terms, the claim of Jesus’ exclusivity must “make sense.” It must be intelligible, coherent, and (at least to a certain degree) explicable. The scientific worldview we have inherited allows for a range of understandings of the relative roles that faith, rationality, revelation, evidence, presuppositions, and argumentation play in how people “make sense” of

Jesus' uniqueness as the Savior. Even so, there is a consensus that a "non-sensical" claim is out of bounds of what is acceptable as true and trustworthy authority.

Such a philosophical inheritance is all well and good, but Takakura Tokutaro was persuaded of Jesus' exclusive status as the world's Savior within a different constellation of personal sensibilities. He found the Bible just as persuasive regarding Jesus's salvific sufficiency as do twenty-first-century Evangelicals. Takakura was not, however, preoccupied with extensive argumentation regarding Jesus' exclusive place as Savior – because trust in Jesus gave certain conviction: end of discussion. Nor was Takakura driven by a basic, unspoken assumption of Jesus' independent existence – since the aforementioned described "subjectivity-only" mindset was operative for Takakura.

Takakura's context was not the same context as that of English-speaking Evangelicals, namely one that has inherited the values of a Greek-philosophical and European-philosophical heritage. God shaped and persuaded Takakura Tokutaro within his own context, and God shapes and persuades English-speaking Evangelicals today within our own context(s) – one mark of which is not to be aware enough of our contextual particularities. When we start moving into such a discussion of contextual particularity, we can get queasy out of a fear of relativism. That is a legitimate fear, but only if one is entrapped within the contextual moorings that give absolutism and relativism as the only alternatives with respect to Jesus's exclusive claims to be Savior.

## **Conclusion**

One corollary of a comparison of how Takakura Tokutaro and how today's Evangelicals were/are convinced of and advocate Jesus's exclusivity as Savior is the inherent plurality within the one Christian faith. Christianity – inherently universal and normative as it is for all humankind – is inherently particular and contextually rooted. Takakura and I have confessed the same Jesus, but how we have done that is not identical. Quite frankly, what convinced him is not as persuasive to me as are other factors. Which of us is "right"? That question itself betrays my contextual location. Which of us embodies and advocates a faith that is more certain and convinced? That question, too, bears contextual marks. All such questions are going to be contextually rooted, since the Christian faith – the biblical Christian faith – is both universal and particular by nature and in its worldwide expressions.

In the end, we can thank God that he comes to all of us in personal, persuasive, and particular ways. We who by God's creative and redemptive design are contextually rooted and finite people can know, follow, and share Jesus only within the particular categories of thought and life that God has given us. May he accordingly use all of us his followers to convey the only Savior of the world to others in ways that are faithful to Jesus' unique person and work, appropriate in terms of communication methods, and relevant to who people are in all of their particularities (Van Engen and Shaw 2003).

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<sup>1</sup> The northern, Hokkaido Band was distinctive for its leading member Uchimura Kanzo’s *Mukyokai* (“No-church”) movement, while the southwestern Kumamoto Band – while primarily Congregationalist in comparison to the Presbyterian-Reformed missionary roots of the Yokohama Band – produced many societal leaders, particularly through what became Doshisha University in Kyoto.

<sup>2</sup> Instead of the more common present tense when describing a published work, here I am using the past tense to keep the focus on the particular, historical character of Takakura and his thought.

<sup>3</sup> Emphasis original.

<sup>4</sup> Emphases original.

<sup>5</sup> Emphasis original.

<sup>6</sup> “Reacting to God’s inexcusable presence” is my simplest definition of “religion,” as I have explained elsewhere.

<sup>7</sup> Emphases mine.

<sup>8</sup> Emphasis original.

<sup>9</sup> Emphases original.