RESPONSE TO PROFESSOR INAGAKI

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It is a special honor to be able to respond to the fine paper by Professor Inagaki. Not surprisingly, I find myself in basic agreement with the thrust of the paper. Whether we call it theology or philosophy, Professor Inagaki is correct in calling for a Christ-centered, biblically based framework for understanding how we are to live as followers of Jesus Christ in the broader civil society. He reminds us that central to such a framework is Christ's command that we are to love our neighbor as we love ourselves (Mt 22:35-40). Moreover, his consideration of Toyohiko Kagawa as a model for us today is, I think, very helpful. Kagawa was not only a great Japanese social reformer but also an exemplary Christian, whose ministry illustrates how we might bear witness to Christ within the spheres of civil society.

Kagawa lived during a time of considerable social upheaval and rapid change. He drew upon explicitly Christian values and principles in attempting to transform the unjust economic conditions and practices of Japan in the early 20th century. Although the total number of Japanese Christians has never been large, there have been some truly remarkable Japanese Christian leaders, and Kagawa was one of these.

Professor Inagaki's paper focuses upon how we might utilize themes such as common grace and the imperative to love our neighbor in pursuing the common good

throughout civil society. I fully support this emphasis. But in my brief response I want to probe a bit in a different direction, exploring more explicitly what it means to be followers of Jesus in modern societies politically committed to democracy and characterized by increasing religious diversity. This, of course, is the context of Europe and North America, but it is also the condition of large numbers of Christians in Asia and Africa as well. Since the end of World War II many nations have adopted political systems that involve some form of representative democracy. Due to many factors, our societies are becoming religiously much more diverse. Many nations – including Japan, India, and Korea as well as the U.S. – have constitutional commitments to the disestablishment of religion (no state religion) and guarantees of the freedom of religious (or non-religious) expression. Whether in practice the state really is impartial with respect to religion is, of course, another matter.

Religious diversity can be a source of social strength and cultural richness. But all too often religious differences become part of the volatile mix driving ethnic, social and political tensions around the world. Thus, paradoxically, while there are strong tendencies toward religious pluralism ("all religions essentially teach the same thing…"), there are also deeply embedded religious conflicts arising from religious differences. Sadly, religious violence – not just in Islam but in many religions – is very much part of the religious landscape of the early 21st century.[1]

How should Christians live among religious others in diverse, democratic societies? This is an increasingly urgent question for Christians in many parts of the

[1] See Mark Juergensmeyer, *Global Rebellion: Religious Challenges to the Secular State, From Christian Militias to Al Qaeda* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2008). Buddhism has generally been regarded as an exception to the patterns of religious violence, but recent scholarship is challenging this widespread perception. See *Buddhist Warfare*, eds. Michael K. Jerryson and Mark Juergensmeyer (New York: Oxford University Press, 2010).

world. What is needed here is a comprehensive framework appropriate to 21st century realities that enables Christians to understand their obligations as both disciples of Jesus Christ and as good citizens. But this is not simply a matter of Christian discipleship. It is also a profoundly missiological issue. For Christian witness today occurs within the nexus of forces driving both religious pluralism and religious violence. And with respect to both sets of issues, Christians are often perceived as part of the problem, not the solution.

As we consider how, like Kagawa, Christians might influence civil society for Christ, we must think also of the many contentious issues in public policy associated with religious differences. Diversity forces difficult questions about the place of religious values and practices in the various spheres of civil society: Should the dominant religion have a privileged place in the public sector? In democratic societies, how can the will of the majority be enacted without infringing upon the rights of religious minorities? Should religious instruction be included in public education? Should provocative religious practices be allowed in public settings? And so on.

Let us distinguish two broad contexts in which Christians must deal with such challenges. In the first, Christians form a small minority within a general population dominated by one or more non-Christian religious traditions. Japan is a clear example here. So too are India, Thailand, Pakistan, and many other nations.

When the Christian community is a tiny minority, then the issues take a certain form. Survival is a major concern, and thus protection of one's religious rights becomes significant. In such contexts, Christians do not want the government to become entangled in religious matters for fear that the religious majority might impose their convictions on

the minority. There are few illusions about the possibility of Christians transforming civil society or the government so that they reflect Christian values and assumptions.

In this context, then, the example of Kagawa is all the more striking. For in spite of the relative insignificance of Japanese Christians numerically, Kagawa's public ministry on behalf of the poor and oppressed not only had a powerful social impact but it also served as a strong witness to the redemptive work of God in Christ. Kagawa openly based his ministry upon Jesus' commandment to love our neighbor as ourselves. And his ministry can certainly be seen as the living out of this command with reference to the poor in Japan.

Most Japanese, of course, followed religious traditions other than Christianity. I am curious as to how the "love your neighbor" theme might have shaped Kagawa's interaction with such "religious others". Many of the urban poor were also Buddhists, Shintoists, or followers of one of the many emerging "new religions". And in so far as he was engaging with them as complete human beings Kagawa was relating to them as Buddhists or Shintoists. But to what extent was reaching out to adherents of other religions with the gospel of Jesus an *intentional* focus of Kagawa's ministry? If it was, how did loving one's neighbor inform his approach to *this* aspect of their identity?

A second context to consider is when Christians comprise the majority in a society, or when they become the dominant cultural or political force. There are many nations which might be considered here, but let me focus very briefly on the U.S.

The United States' constitution explicitly rules out the establishment of a state religion and guarantees the free exercise of religion. The U.S. has been influenced by Christian values and principles, and even today the majority of citizens claim to be

Christian. In spite of the official "separation" of church and state, Christianity has exerted enormous social, cultural and to some extent political influence. But the U.S. is increasingly characterized by religious diversity, with growing numbers of those who are non-religious and who follow non-Christian religious traditions. American society is undergoing massive changes and it suffers today from deep tensions reflecting sharp divisions along ethnic, cultural, class, ethical and religious lines.

Religion in the U.S. has always been linked to social and political power, but since 1980 the association between Christianity and power has been especially prominent. I am referring, of course, to the rise of the so-called Religious Right, but we must also include here the reactionary movement of the Religious Left. Both attempt, in their own ways, to dominate the public sector of civil society with their vision of a nation shaped by Christian values and teachings. Trying to influence the public sector for Christ tends to become an exercise in power politics, especially for those on the Religious Right. Those who are different – secularists, Buddhists, Hindus, Sikhs, Muslims, etc. – are often regarded with suspicion as antagonists whose influence must be restricted. Public policy debates are framed in terms of "rights", with Christians lashing out at anyone perceived as challenging the rights of Christians as the dominant social group.

How might the Christological themes of suffering/pain and victory/hope inform a theological framework for Christian presence and action in both of these contexts? In cases where Christians comprise the majority, a first step would be to recognize that exercise of power is not an unqualified good or right and that there are times when Christians should willingly relinquish their ability to control the public sector for the sake of a higher good. Jesus himself is the example here, for he willingly set aside his rights,

and the ability to coerce others into submission, for the sake of the Father's will (cf Mt 20:25-28; 26:39, 53-54; Phil. 2:5-11). James Davison Hunter's recent *To Change the World* provides an incisive critique of both the Religious Right and the Religious Left in America for their obsession with power as the way to influence society.[2]

Kagawa suggests the command to love our neighbor as a guiding motif for Christian presence in the public sector. Surely he is correct, and this applies both to contexts in which Christians are a minority and those in which they form the majority. I would like to conclude by placing Kagawa's suggestion within a missiological context and drawing attention to another Biblical principle that should inform Christian thinking on the subject.

Missiology during the past century has focused upon the so-called Great Commission of Matthew 28. But Christ's command here is both richer and more demanding than commonly assumed. Christ's followers are commanded to "make disciples of all nations", and Jesus states that doing so involves teaching his followers "to observe all that I have commanded you" (Mt. 28:18-20). Too often this has been understood narrowly in terms of a truncated notion of evangelism as little more than "information transfer". But Jesus' statement must be understood within the context of the entire Gospel of Matthew, and specifically with reference to all that Christ commanded. This includes, of course, the Sermon on the Mount, the parables, and other discourses. It also includes the so-called Great Commandment, which formed the basis for Kagawa's public ministry (Mt. 22:35-40).

[2] See James Davison Hunter, *To Change the World: The Irony, Tragedy, and Possibility of Christianity in the Late Modern World* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2010).

But fulfilling the Great Commission also involves making disciples who live in accordance with another of Jesus' teachings, the so-called Golden Rule: "So whatever you wish that others would do to you, do also to them, for this is the Law and the Prophets." (Mt. 7:12). This, it seems to me, is a basic principle which should not only shape individual Christian behavior but which can also serve as a guiding principle for a social ethic in religiously diverse societies. It applies both to cases in which Christians comprise the majority and in which they are the minority, but it has special relevance to the former. Should the religious majority – Christians in the U.S. – determine public policy based simply upon its own religious commitments? What if the situation were reversed, and Christians were the minority in a society dominated by atheists or Hindus or Muslims? At the heart of the Golden Rule is a thought experiment: If conditions were reversed, and I find myself in the position of the other, would I want to be treated in the manner in which I am considering treating the other? If not, then I should not treat the other in this manner. This has enormous implications for public policy disputes.

Robert Audi is a Christian philosopher who has tried to articulate a framework for religious participation in public policy disputes in contexts of religious and ideological diversity. He does so by developing the idea of "civic virtue" and using the Golden Rule as a guide for those who are in the religious majority:

> My main question here is this: What should conscientious and morally upright religious citizens in a pluralistic society want in the way of protection of their own freedom and promotion of standards that express respect for citizens regardless of their religious position? …. One answer that may occur to me if I am aware of religious diversity in my society is that I should limit my zeal because I would like people in other faiths, with different socio-political ideals, to limit theirs.

Audi builds his framework around the "principle of secular rationale" and the "principle of secular motivation", which restrict the nature of religious direction in public policy decision making. Audi has been strongly criticized for allegedly banning religious motivation or religious reason from playing significant roles in the public sector, but this, it seems to me, is a misreading of his position. He argues that while religious motivations and reasons can play a role in one's own decision making on a particular issue, if one is to act so as to restrict the freedom of others (by passing legislation, for example) then there should also be some non-religious (secular) reason of sufficient motivating force justifying the action. One's decision should not be based merely upon religious reasons or motivations (see pages 69, 75-78, 109, 112, 172-73, 205-206). [3]

Both Kagawa's appeal to the Great Commandment and Audi's use of the Golden Rule can be understood as helpful attempts to show how Christians might pursue the common good throughout civil society. Taken together, the principles help us appreciate the richness of Christ's Great Commission, by showing how pursuit of the common good in contexts of religious diversity can be a powerful witness to God's redemptive love in Christ Jesus.

[3] Robert Audi, *Religious Commitment and Secular Reason* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000) pp. 84-85.