

# Yasukuni Shrine, Japanese Christian Responses, and a Kuyperian Ecclesiological Perspective

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## Abstract

This article explores the issue of official worship at Yasukuni Shrine and how Japanese evangelical Christians have responded to this problem. Established in 1869 as a mixed Shinto, military, and imperial site, it enshrined the souls of those who died for the emperor. The government used it to mobilize Japanese people for its fascist agenda during the first half of the twentieth century. After the disestablishment of the shrine as a state facility in 1946, many right-wing conservative politicians and war-bereaved families have worked ceaselessly to revive its special status. After surveying Japanese Christians' responses, the ecclesiological background of their arguments is analyzed and the implementation of Abraham Kuyper's ecclesiology to enhance their political engagement is proposed.

## Keywords

*Yasukuni Shrine, Japanese Christians, Abraham Kuyper, church and state, ecclesiology*

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**T**his article explores the issue of reviving the Yasukuni Shrine as a state-operated place of mandatory worship and how Japanese Christians have responded to this ongoing problem. After the visit of Abe Shinzō<sup>1</sup> to worship there in an official capacity on December 26, 2013, citizen groups in Osaka and Tokyo brought appeals against the premier before the corresponding district courts. Prior to that, the official worship of Koizumi Jun'ichirō in 2001–2006 had likewise earned criticism and led to protest demonstrations. After citizen groups in Fukuoka, Matsuyama, and Osaka sued the prime minister in their district courts, similar groups in Tokyo and Chiba appealed to their respective district courts as well. Neighboring countries, particularly China and South Korea, also protested the premier's visit.<sup>2</sup> John Breen has rightly noted that the issue is “a problem of daunting complexity.”<sup>3</sup> As we will show, it involves several interconnected aspects, including the constitution, historical perception, war criminals, commemoration, and war responsibility.

After elaborating on the issues surrounding the Yasukuni Shrine, we will survey the responses of Japanese Christians. We will evaluate those responses from an ecclesiological perspective and argue that Kuyperian ecclesiology can help in the continuing political engagement of Japanese evangelical Christians.

## 1. *The Issue*

Located in the center of Tokyo, the shrine was established on June 28, 1869, as Tokyo Shōkonsha (“spirit summoning shrine”) to memorialize the spirits of fallen soldiers who took the side of the emperor during the Boshin War (1868–1869). Ten years later, the government renamed it the Yasukuni (“pacifying the nation”) Shrine and designated it as a Special Government Shrine. The ritual of the shrine represents the memorializing of war dead by the feudal rulers in the Chōshū regions; it is in Shinto style and centers

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<sup>1</sup> Macrons are used for Japanese terms, except for well-known names and places like Tokyo and Osaka. Japanese names and authors are given in Japanese order; family name precedes first name. For English literature written by a Japanese, the citations are given in the order used for Western authors.

<sup>2</sup> Cf. John Breen, “Voices of Rage: Six Paths to the Problem of Yasukuni,” in *Politics and Religion in Modern Japan: Red Sun, White Lotus*, ed. Roy Starrs (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2011), 285–86; M. William Steele, “Christianity and Politics in Japan,” in *Handbook of Christianity in Japan*, ed. Mark R. Mullins (Leiden: Brill, 2003), 366.

<sup>3</sup> Breen, “Voices of Rage,” 278.

on the emperor.<sup>4</sup> From the beginning, the Yasukuni Shrine had a unique position connecting the Shinto religion, the emperor, and the military.<sup>5</sup>

Despite the connection to Shintoism, the government insisted that the Yasukuni Shrine was a nonreligious national facility. Officials held that enshrinement was the highest honor a Japanese person could obtain, and this could be done only by sacrificing their life for the country. The majority of souls enshrined in Yasukuni are dead soldiers from the Pacific War (1941–1945).

After Japan surrendered to the Allied forces in 1945, General MacArthur (1880–1964) ordered the disestablishment of the state Shinto religion on December 15, 1945. This “Shinto Directive” diminished the Yasukuni Shrine’s state-operated status to that of an independent religious corporation in 1946. However, once the Allied occupation government left Japan in 1952, many right-wing conservative—those who want to revive the system where the emperor occupies a central position—politicians and war-bereaved families attempted to revive the shrine’s special status. Due to protest movements, these efforts have to date not proved successful.

### 1. *Constitution*

One of the reasons for the protests against official visits as well as the movement to renationalize the Yasukuni Shrine concerns the constitution:

#### Article 20

(1) Freedom of religion is guaranteed to all. No religious organization shall receive any privileges from the State, nor exercise any political authority.

(2) No person shall be compelled to take part in any religious act, celebration, rite or practice.

(3) The State and its organs shall refrain from religious education or any other religious activity.

#### Article 89

No public money or other property shall be expended or appropriated for the use, benefit or maintenance of any religious institution or association, or for any charitable, educational or benevolent enterprises not under the control of public authority.<sup>6</sup>

<sup>4</sup> Akiko Takenaka, “Mobilizing Death in Imperial Japan: War and the Origins of the Myth,” *Asia-Pacific Journal* 13.38/1 (September 2015): 5–8.

<sup>5</sup> For a detailed description of the Tokyo Shōkonsha, see Takenaka, “Mobilizing Death in Imperial Japan,” 1–3; John Breen, “‘The Nation’s Shrine’: Conflict and Commemoration at Yasukuni, Modern Japan’s Shrine to the War Dead,” in *The Cultural Politics of Nationalism and Nation-Building: Ritual and Performance in the Forging of Nations* (New York: Routledge, 2014), 140; Breen, “Voices of Rage,” 287.

<sup>6</sup> “The Constitution of Japan,” based on the English edition by Government Printing Bureau, <https://www.ndl.go.jp/constitution/e/etc/c01.html>.

To those who oppose the renationalization of Yasukuni—the use of public money for the Shrine and possibly the revival of the obligation to worship there as in the imperial period—the prime minister’s official visit was a way to smooth the path for that renationalization. Hence, the movement is a violation of both the principle of religious freedom and the separation of state and religion as prescribed by Articles 20 and 89.

Proponents of Yasukuni counter by interpreting Article 20 as guaranteeing the prime minister’s right to worship at a shrine. They also argue that it is a nonreligious Japanese custom and, because it enshrines the war dead soldiers who fought for their country, prime ministers should pay respect to their souls at Yasukuni. Accordingly, proponents insist on special treatment for the shrine.

On the occasion of Abe’s visit, the district and high courts in both Osaka and Tokyo ruled against the lawsuits of citizen groups and avoided giving a verdict on the constitutionality of the prime ministerial visit.<sup>7</sup> Similarly, none of the trial courts ruled in favor of the citizen groups that submitted lawsuits against Koizumi. Since there is no constitutional court in Japan, the protestors could not sue the prime minister for unconstitutionality. They needed to base their appeal on other things, in this case the mental damage caused by the violation of the citizen group members’ religious freedom, human rights, and peaceful living rights. Such appeals led the judges to render a “no [sufficient] reason for the damages claim” judgment.<sup>8</sup> Only the judges in Fukuoka District Court claimed that the visit was unconstitutional by promoting the Yasukuni shrine and Shintoism. However, such opinions are not the decisions themselves and have no binding authority.<sup>9</sup> As a result, on the legal level, there is both opposition to and support for prime ministerial visits to the Shrine.

In order to bolster the legality of official worship at, and the renationalization of, the Shrine, the politicians of the long-ruling Liberal Democratic Party (LDP) submitted a bill in 1969 offering state support. This bill provoked massive protests from opposition parties and religious groups.<sup>10</sup> The ruling party tabled the bill on five occasions in an attempt to have it

<sup>7</sup> *The Sankei News*, November 11, 2019, <https://www.sankei.com/affairs/news/191125/afr1911250033-n1.html>.

<sup>8</sup> For a more detailed description of the results of the lawsuits relating to the Yasukuni Shrine, see Breen, “Voices of Rage,” 281–84.

<sup>9</sup> Fukuoka Chihō Saibansho, April 7, 2004, *Heisei* 13 (Wa), no. 3932, 5 Minji, [https://www.courts.go.jp/app/files/hanrei\\_jp/141/008141\\_hanrei.pdf](https://www.courts.go.jp/app/files/hanrei_jp/141/008141_hanrei.pdf); Osaka Kōtō Saibansho, September 30, 2005, *Heisei* 16 (Ne), no. 1888, 13 Minji, [https://www.courts.go.jp/app/files/hanrei\\_jp/273/002273\\_hanrei.pdf](https://www.courts.go.jp/app/files/hanrei_jp/273/002273_hanrei.pdf).

<sup>10</sup> Steele, “Christianity and Politics,” 366.

pass, failing each time. Seeing that the 1947 constitution represented the biggest hurdle to success, the LDP sought to amend that.<sup>11</sup>

## 2. *Historical Perception*

By amending the 1947 constitution, which was enacted while the Allied occupation government was in power, the LDP believes Japan will experience a return to the glory days.<sup>12</sup> These are typically located in the imperial period (1868–1945), when Japan adopted Western ideologies and methods while utilizing Shinto doctrines that consider the Japanese emperor to hail from an unbroken imperial line descended from the goddess Amaterasu. It was in this context of reviving the central position of the emperor that the government established the Yasukuni Shrine.<sup>13</sup>

To turn Japan into a modern country like the Western countries, the Meiji government enacted a constitution guaranteeing freedom of religion in 1889. At the same time, Articles 1, 3, and 28 of the Meiji Constitution positioned the emperor as the sovereign and the Japanese people as his subjects and used this relationship as a limitation on religious freedom.<sup>14</sup> As a result, Japan became a powerful nation both economically and militarily. It prevailed in military conflicts with Taiwan in the 1870s, with China in the 1890s, and with Russia and other Asian nations in the twentieth century. Proponents of Yasukuni's renationalization emphasize this success story, but opponents point to the dark side of this, namely imperialism and fascism. They prefer to locate the beginnings of modern Japan in the period after 1945.

After issuing the Shinto Directive that led to the removal of the state-operated special status of the Yasukuni Shrine and the establishment of an independent religious corporation, the occupation government announced a new draft of a constitution that was to become the present constitution, which was enacted in 1947. In departing from the Meiji Constitution, the preamble of the 1947 constitution identified the Japanese people as

<sup>11</sup> For an elaboration on this amendment movement and the responses of Japanese evangelical Christians, see Surya Harefa, "Resistance to Japanese Nationalism: Christian Responses to Proposed Constitutional Amendments in Japan," *Evangelical Review of Theology* 43.4 (October 2019): 330–44.

<sup>12</sup> Mark Mullins, "Neonationalism, Politics, and Religion in Post-Disaster Japan," in *Disasters and Social Crisis in Contemporary Japan: Political, Religious, and Sociocultural Responses*, ed. Mark Mullins and Kōichi Nakano (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2016), 108.

<sup>13</sup> Takahashi Tetsuya, *Yasukuni Mondai* [The Issue of Yasukuni] (Tokyo: Chikuma Shinsho, 2005), 6–7.

<sup>14</sup> For the English version of the Meiji Constitution, see "The Constitution of the Empire of Japan," trans. Ito Miyoji, National Diet Library, 2003–2004, <https://www.ndl.go.jp/constitution/e/etc/c02.html#s2>.

sovereign, rather than as the emperor's subjects. This new constitution prescribes freedom of religion and the separation of state and religion (Articles 20 and 89), states that the emperor is just a symbol of the nation (Article 1), and prohibits Japan from keeping military forces (Article 9).

For the proponents of Yasukuni, the post-1945 changes mark the demise of Japan as a prosperous and powerful country.<sup>15</sup> For the opponents of renationalization, in contrast, a revival of its special status would mark a return to imperialism and fascism; they fear that the government will use Yasukuni's status to encourage, if not coerce, people to worship there and to mobilize its citizens to military service again. This concern has only increased as they note the present government's attempt to reinterpret Article 9 and to promote the military character of the Japan Self-Defense Force.

### **3. *Class-A War Criminals***

These issues are of concern to neighboring countries, victims of Japanese militarism and oppression. Significant to this diplomatic problem is the enshrinement of "class-A" war criminals, that is, those who planned, initiated, or waged war according to the classification of the 1946 International Military Tribunal for the Far East. On October 17, 1978, Yasukuni enshrined the souls of these class-A war criminals, including Tōjō Hideki (1884–1948), the military general and prime minister who was responsible for initiating the Asia-Pacific War and the inhumane treatment of prisoners of war.<sup>16</sup> In the eyes of the countries that suffered under the atrocities committed by the Japanese military, class-A war criminals were the source of their suffering. Therefore, the worship of their souls as glorious spirits represents a painful denial of the brutalities that they inflicted on other countries.

Nevertheless, many right-wing conservatives and war-bereaved families believe that the 1946 tribunal was an unfair victor's trial and view the class-A war criminals as having died on duty for Japan.<sup>17</sup> For many LDP politicians, fighting for Yasukuni's renationalization would secure support from members of the Bereaved Society (an association for families of war dead soldiers) and the Shinto Association of Spiritual Leadership (a powerful political organization of the Association of Shinto Shrines).

The matter is more complex, however, because not all Yasukuni proponents agreed with the enshrinement of the war criminals. Even though the Ministry of Health had urged since 1958 that they be enshrined, Yasukuni's

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<sup>15</sup> Breen, "Voices of Rage," 294.

<sup>16</sup> Steele, "Christianity and Politics," 367.

<sup>17</sup> Mullins, "Neonationalism, Politics, and Religion," 107–9.



chief priest at the time, Tsukuba Fujimaro (1905–1978), consistently refused the proposal during his tenure from 1946 to 1978. The famous Shinto figure Ashizu Uzuhiro (1909–1992), president of the Bereaved Society Koga Makoto, and two veteran officers number among those who disagreed with the enshrinement of class-A war criminals.<sup>18</sup> Emperor Hirohito (reigned 1926–1989) never visited Yasukuni after their enshrinement. When the diary of the emperor's aides was published, it revealed that the enshrinement of war criminals was the reason for his absence.<sup>19</sup> Similarly, although Emperor Akihito (reigned 1989–2019) visited Yasukuni four times as crown prince, he never visited it after his enthronement in 1989. He did, however, regularly attend the annual national rite of mourning for the war dead at Budōkan Hall in Tokyo and has made multiple memorial visits to war-related sites such as Hiroshima, Nagasaki, Okinawa, the Ogasawara Islands, Iōjima, and Saipan. These visits show that the emperor does hold much sympathy for the war dead but is reluctant when it comes to Yasukuni.

The shrine's historical position as an imperial site makes the emperor's reluctance to visit the sanctuary remarkable, leading several Yasukuni supporters to propose the removal of the fourteen class-A criminals in the hope that the emperor will conduct official worship there again. Some believe that removing these war criminals will restore the relationship with neighboring countries.<sup>20</sup> However, there is no room in the doctrine of the Yasukuni Shrine for the souls of those who have been enshrined to be removed. Furthermore, the government cannot force their removal, since this would impinge on the principle of religious freedom.

#### **4. Commemoration and War Responsibility**

Another critical angle to the Yasukuni issue is the need for commemoration. The war dead died on duty for their country; bereaved families lost their beloved for the sake of the country. For Yasukuni apologists, the state should therefore provide recognition for the war dead and their families. They also promote the *ishizue* (cornerstone) theory, which considers the war dead the cornerstone for the peace and prosperity of postwar Japan. This narrative has been embraced by many senior LDP politicians and prime ministers, and it is also narrated in the war museum located in the Yasukuni precinct, the Yūshūkan.<sup>21</sup>

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<sup>18</sup> Breen, "Voices of Rage," 296–98.

<sup>19</sup> Ibid., 287–88; 301, note 27.

<sup>20</sup> Ibid., 289, 296–98.

<sup>21</sup> Ibid., 291–93.

Yasukuni's opponents, however, have countered that this narrative is irresponsible given the war's dark side. They consider the war to have been conducted not for the peace of Japan but for the invasion and colonization of other Asian countries. What the soldiers did was far from honorable.

One notorious example is the cannibalism committed in New Guinea. Faced with starvation, Japanese officers shot their comrades to consume their flesh.<sup>22</sup> The war museum in Yasukuni, however, describes the New Guinea campaign as a well-planned battle. There is no place for the story of cannibalism, starvation, or reckless military leaders.

Without any reflection of such facts, Yasukuni rites transform the war dead into glorious spirits. The ceremony of remembrance avoids, if not denies, the issue of the responsibility of the military commanders who initiated the New Guinea campaign. It praises the war dead for their virtues of loyalty, patriotism, and self-sacrifice.<sup>23</sup> The rites decorate their deaths as glorious achievements to be celebrated, rather than recalling a tragedy to be mourned. Hence, many opponents of the Yasukuni Shrine prefer to have an alternate facility to answer the need for commemoration.

## II. *The Response of Japanese Christians*

Japanese Christians were among the first to protest the movement to renationalize Yasukuni Shrine, sending letters to the prime minister, publishing protest statements, and filing lawsuits.<sup>24</sup> To analyze their response from an ecclesiological perspective, we focus on three Christian leaders of the protest movement: Tomura Masahiro, Nishikawa Shigenori, and Inagaki Hisakazu.

### 1. *Tomura Masahiro*

Tomura (1923–2003) was a minister of the United Church of Christ in Japan (UCCJ), the largest mainstream Protestant denomination. Although he was not an evangelical, his view helped evangelicals to understand the issue of Yasukuni. Tomura actively preached and gave seminars on Yasukuni all over Japan, and he served as the chair of the UCCJ Yasukuni Issue Special Committee. He also promoted the movement to confess responsibility for the war.

<sup>22</sup> Toshiyuki Tanaka, *Hidden Horrors: Japanese War Crimes in World War II* (Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield, 2018), 124–26, 140.

<sup>23</sup> Breen, "Voices of Rage," 290–91.

<sup>24</sup> Tanaka Nobumasa, *Yasukuni no Sengoshi* [History of Postwar Yasukuni] (Tokyo: Iwanami Shoten, 2002), 86, 105, 110–11, 116–17, 119, 123–31, 132–36, 147, 156–57, 163, 176, 190–98.



Tomura criticized the extremely inward direction nationalism had taken.<sup>25</sup> For him, Japanese nationalism was unchangingly inward even when Japan ended its isolation and opened up to Western technology in the Meiji period (1868–1912).<sup>26</sup> Nationalism has proved so strong that not even defeat in war could put a dent in the Japanese notion that Yasukuni was a “nonreligious shrine.”<sup>27</sup>

The proponents of Yasukuni saw themselves as merely attempting to recover its original function, but Tomura believed that that itself was the problem. He identified the purpose and arguments used by the Yasukuni proponents during the period from 1960 to 1980 as a “recapitulation” of the nonreligious shrine doctrine popularized under the Meiji government. In his view, along with their efforts to amend the present constitution, revise school textbooks, and establish emergency law, the Yasukuni proponents wanted to revive a system where the emperor occupies a central position. For them, Yasukuni and its festivals were effective in retightening the bonds of the state that may have been loosened.<sup>28</sup>

Moreover, Tomura argued that the Yasukuni Shrine’s practice of enshrining only those war dead who had fought on the emperor’s side had had the effect of brainwashing Japanese people with an oversimplified division between an imperial and a “rebel” army. Anyone who did not fight for the emperor was therefore considered a “rebel.”<sup>29</sup> For Tomura, this brainwashing had been very successful, so that even contemporary Japanese people still have not recovered from its after-effects and still practice such discrimination today, albeit using different terms.<sup>30</sup>

Tomura also referred to the Japanese characteristics that fit group thinking rather than independent, individual thinking.<sup>31</sup> In Japanese thought, the smallest indivisible group unit is not the individual but the family. Although

<sup>25</sup> Tomura Masahiro, “Nihon no Nashonarizumu to no Tatakai: Yasukuni, Gengō, Daijōsai [Struggling with Japanese Nationalism: Yasukuni, Regnal Year, New Emperor’s Food-Offering Ritual],” in *Tennō-sei Kokka to Shinwa: “Yasukuni,” Shisaku to Tatakai* [Emperor System State and Myth: “Yasukuni,” Thought and Struggle], ed. Tomura Masahiro (Tokyo: Nihon Kirisuto Kyōdan Shuppan-kyoku, 1982), 25.

<sup>26</sup> Ibid., 12.

<sup>27</sup> Ibid., 12, 15.

<sup>28</sup> Tomura Masahiro, “Aa Ware Yasukuni-bito naru kana, Kono Chi no Ronri yori Ware o Sukuwan Mono wa Tare-zo: Ro-ma-bito e no Tegami 7:7–25 [O Yasukuni Man that I Am! Who Shall Deliver Me from This Logic of Blood: Romans 7:7–25],” in *Tennō-sei Kokka to Shinwa*, ed. Tomura, 189; Tomura Masahiro, “‘Yasukuni’ to Fukuin: Piripi-bito e no Tegami 2:6–8 [‘Yasukuni’ and Gospel: Philippians 2:6–8],” in *Tennō-sei Kokka to Shinwa*, ed. Tomura, 203.

<sup>29</sup> Tomura, “‘Yasukuni’ to Fukuin,” 202, 206.

<sup>30</sup> Ibid., 202, 205.

<sup>31</sup> Tomura, “Aa Ware Yasukuni-bito,” 189.

the feudal system has long been dismantled, the familial society is still the pattern of self-consciousness.<sup>32</sup> This way of thinking leads Japanese people to distinguish between insiders and outsiders, a distinction that severely hinders the ability to acknowledge those in Japanese society who have different identities or opinions. In Tomura's eyes, this inward familial system is at the very root of the Yasukuni problem.<sup>33</sup>

In addition, Tomura explained that the combination of a culture of shame and a familial society caused Japanese people to turn a blind eye to unfavorable things done by in-group collusion.<sup>34</sup> It is this inability that makes it difficult to reflect seriously on responsibility for the war. He associated Japanese familial society with what Romans 7 refers to as the deadly power of the flesh that exists in the human heart and fights against the power of God from the outside. For this reason, Japanese people need to be freed from this power.<sup>35</sup> Tomura has argued that by continuing their opposition to Yasukuni's proponents, Christians will be able to help their fellow Japanese to overcome the power of Yasukuni and to implement a more liberal nationalism.<sup>36</sup>

Interestingly enough, Tomura warned that the roots of the attempts to privilege the Yasukuni Shrine as a national facility could also be found among Japanese Christians.<sup>37</sup> He therefore reminded his listeners that they are not merely fighting against the emperor, prime minister, and LDP officials, but also against fellow Christians who still cling to such roots.<sup>38</sup>

Tomura likewise emphasized that the churches in Japan should be turning their church planting efforts into a struggle for freedom.<sup>39</sup> Evangelism should be carried out in awareness of the social tide.<sup>40</sup> Noting that the concept of freedom is still underdeveloped in Japan, he argued that this is an "honorable evangelistic opportunity."<sup>41</sup> To his mind, Christian churches have the rare opportunity to be able to think, talk, and at times struggle together with society for freedom. It is not merely the church's social responsibility; rather, it also relates to the church's very existence at a more fundamental level. Tomura believed that it is at once a task and a blessing from God.<sup>42</sup>

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<sup>32</sup> Ibid., 190.

<sup>33</sup> Ibid., 194.

<sup>34</sup> Ibid., 195.

<sup>35</sup> Ibid., 197.

<sup>36</sup> Tomura, "Nihon no Nashonarizumu," 25.

<sup>37</sup> Tomura, "Aa Ware Yasukuni-bito," 188.

<sup>38</sup> Tomura, "'Yasukuni' to Fukuin," 206–7.

<sup>39</sup> Tomura Masahiro, "Shibarareta Te: Shito Gyōden 26:1–32 [Bound Hands: Acts 26:1–32]," in *Tennō-sei Kokka to Shinwa*, ed. Tomura, 180.

<sup>40</sup> Tomura, "Nihon no Nashonarizumu," 25.

<sup>41</sup> Tomura, "Shibarareta Te," 180.

<sup>42</sup> Ibid., 179.

## 2. *Nishikawa Shigenori*

Nishikawa (1927–2020) was a Christian journalist active in both church ministry and politics. He served long as an elder in the Reformed Church in Japan in Tokyo and earned the nickname “the Nishikawa of Yasukuni” for his long and active involvement in the Shrine debates. He was the representative of the Gathering of Evangelical Christians Opposing Yasukuni Shrine Nationalization, and served in leadership positions in several other Christian-related organizations.<sup>43</sup> He was also a bereaved family member since his older brother was a soldier who died of illness during the war in Burma.

Nishikawa protested the movement to renationalize the Yasukuni Shrine in many ways. Besides conducting protest demonstrations at the site and writing protest statements, he wrote several articles for national newspapers and published a number of books. He also delivered seminars on Yasukuni throughout Japan.

Unique to Nishikawa’s approach was his commitment to hearing the plenary and committee meetings of the National Diet. He came to realize the importance of this approach after the ruling party submitted the controversial Yasukuni Shrine Bill to the National Diet in 1969. Even though parliament finally dropped the bill in 1974, the movement to revive the Shrine as a state-operated special corporation continued. Being aware of the nature of several other bills with consequences as serious as the Yasukuni Shrine Bill, Nishikawa decided in 1999 to attend meetings of the Diet. After sitting in on the meetings for ten years, he concluded,

By hearing the National Diet, I could understand that the present National Diet is acting in concert with the proponents [of the Yasukuni] movement outside the Diet, which, with their three pillars—the Constitution, Self-Defense Force, and Education—ignore the basic principles mentioned in the Constitution of Japan, such as Article 9 (War Renunciation), Article 19 (Freedom of Thought and Conscience), and Article 20 (Freedom of Religious Belief and Prohibition of Religious Activities of the State).<sup>44</sup>

His observation of the National Diet provided him historical evidence for the current situation and position of current Diet members, which informed his reflection on the issue and had considerable appeal.<sup>45</sup>

<sup>43</sup> Nishikawa Shigenori, *Yūji Hōsei-ka no Yasukuni Jinja: Kokkai Bōchō 10-nen, Watashi ga Mita Koto Kiita Koto* [Yasukuni Shrine under Emergency Legislation: What I Have Seen and Heard from Ten Years Hearing the National Assembly] (Tokyo: Nashinoki-sha, 2009), 211.

<sup>44</sup> *Ibid.*, i.

<sup>45</sup> *Ibid.*, 204, 207.

While Tomura emphasized the importance of fighting the Japanese notion of an inward, familial society, whose roots he also found in the nation's Christians, Nishikawa suggested more practically and concretely that one should learn the historical facts from before and during the war period. He insisted on inquiring why the war happened and what kind of damage Japan inflicted on neighboring Asian countries. This, he believed, is of crucial importance for perceiving the absurdity of the official worship at the Yasukuni Shrine. He wrote,

In conclusion, by learning the facts of the horrors caused by the [Pacific] war, one becomes unable to deny the war and post-war responsibilities of the emperor. It stands to reason that, if they [the bereaved families] perceive how unfair it is to regard their [war dead] family members, who were made “glorious spirits” by the worship of such [irresponsible] emperors, as subjects of “propitiation” and glorification, they will come to understand the contradiction of their movement towards the realization of the emperor's public worship for which they had hitherto hoped.<sup>46</sup>

Nishikawa also shared his experience when he spoke before several members of the Bereaved Society. Although this society had been one of the most passionate proponents of the Yasukuni Shrine, after listening to the actual historical facts, they could agree that official worship at the Shrine would open the way for the Japanese government once again to mobilize the people for war.<sup>47</sup>

Nishikawa likewise suggested learning and observing the basic principles of the constitution. For him, it prescribes popular sovereignty, pacifism, separation of state and religion, and freedom of belief, thought, and consciousness. However, in practice, the government and the Diet members of the ruling party often ignore those principles in the name of patriotism or Japanese traditions and customs. Knowledge of the underlying principles determined by the constitution enables one to identify unconstitutional practices on the part of the government and Diet members. Claiming that “constant caution is the price of freedom,” he encouraged Japanese people to exercise their rights in assessing and criticizing the government.<sup>48</sup> As for the problem of the Yasukuni Shrine, he insisted that it is crucial to apply the principle of the separation of state and religion. In line with this, Nishikawa also sharply criticized official visits by cabinet and Diet members and the Tokyo governor, as well as the *hatsumōde* (New Year's Worship) at Yasukuni by the prime minister, which was largely ignored in the media.

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<sup>46</sup> Ibid., 169.

<sup>47</sup> Ibid., 168.

<sup>48</sup> Ibid., 43, 127.

Following these suggestions, Nishikawa emphasized the need to offer a sincere apology. He compared Japan with Germany, which was in a similar position when it initiated war and inflicted terrible damage on neighboring countries. As he saw it, Germany was able to reconcile itself with neighboring countries because it had done its best to apologize and to seek reconciliation. Nishikawa believed that if Japanese people were to be educated in war history and the basic principles of the Japanese Constitution, Japan could be as successful as Germany in achieving reconciliation with its Asian victim countries.<sup>49</sup>

### 3. Inagaki Hisakazu

Inagaki Hisakazu (b. 1947) is a member of Tokyo Onchō Church, a church of the Reformed Church in Japan (RCJ) denomination, and a professor of Christian philosophy at Tokyo Christian University, an evangelical institute of theological education.

In contrast to other Yasukuni critics, Inagaki warns that even if the prime minister were to stop official worship altogether and if the class-A war criminals were to be removed from Yasukuni, the problem would still not be solved.<sup>50</sup> The controversial Yasukuni Shrine is not just a political and diplomatic problem, but also a memory and reconciliation problem relating closely with the core of Japanese traditional religion.<sup>51</sup> He writes,

We must distinguish between what we should and should not forget. We must forget the Yasukuni ideology that calls for sacrificing oneself for the sake of the state. This is something that should be put behind us. However, we must remember the past [Pacific] War and the victims of that War. At the same time, we need to face the past scars of war as experienced by people with different perspectives.<sup>52</sup>

For him, the shrine has two functions: honoring the fallen soldiers and offering a place of mourning for the massive numbers of those who died in the Pacific War.<sup>53</sup> These two functions must be taken into account as a

<sup>49</sup> Ibid., 145, 186.

<sup>50</sup> Inagaki Hisakazu, *Yasukuni Jinja "Kaihō"-ron: Hontō no Tsuitō towa Nanika?* [The "Liberation" Theory for Yasukuni Shrine: What Is the Genuine Commemoration?] (Tokyo: Kōbunsha, 2006), 15.

<sup>51</sup> Inagaki Hisakazu, "Kokumin-teki Fukushi to Heiwa: Yasukuni ni kawaru Tsuitō Shisetsu no Mondai [National Welfare and Peace: The Problem of a Memorial Facility for Replacing Yasukuni]," *Kirisutokyō Shakai Fukushigaku Kenkyū* [Christian Social Welfare Science] 48 (January 2015): 7; Hisakazu Inagaki, "Memory and Reconciliation in Japanese History," *Diogenes* 57.3 (2010): 41–51.

<sup>52</sup> Inagaki, "Memory and Reconciliation," 46; Inagaki, *Yasukuni Jinja*, 17.

<sup>53</sup> Inagaki, "Memory and Reconciliation," 42.

solution to the Yasukuni issue. Accordingly, Inagaki suggests instituting public memorial places for recalling the horrors of war and pledging not to commit the same foolish mistakes again. These should be for everyone, Japanese or not, including both religious and nonreligious people.<sup>54</sup> Consideration for the non-Japanese is necessary because the Pacific War caused the death of not only three million Japanese but twenty million non-Japanese.<sup>55</sup>

While Inagaki agrees with the opponents who insist on pacifism and on the separation between Yasukuni and governmental activities, he disagrees with their claim that religious commemoration is merely a private matter.<sup>56</sup> Instead of making the new site free from religious rituals, he urges that “all religious and nonreligious groups, national or international, can gather in this place according to their diverse practices and cultural expressions” and that this facility “should be funded with taxes paid by the Japanese people, but the Government should keep an equal distance from all groups.”<sup>57</sup> Inagaki thus emphasizes the importance of religion in the public square for two reasons: first, the Yasukuni issue is closely related to the uniqueness of Japanese religiosity, and the experience of spiritual conversion taught by the world’s great religions transforms citizens into people who value tolerance. To maintain tolerance in a public space, the most crucial element is communication through dialogue.

Inagaki also suggests that the Japanese notion of *wa* (harmony) is useful for establishing this dialogical element. People in Japan have been practicing this since the sixth century, and the famous Japanese regent Shōtoku Taishi (574–622) considered it the most respectable virtue. Originally, *wa* was one of Confucius’s principles, teaching harmony without uniformity. Therefore, it can be used to encourage the creation of harmony between those of different opinions, religions, and even nationalities. Chinese and Koreans, who suffered the most under Japanese imperialism, will welcome this concept because they are highly influenced by Confucianism.<sup>58</sup> Inagaki concludes his argument by suggesting Japanese Christians propose and put into practice a social movement, based on a Christian worldview, that can transform the government system into a more democratic one that respects the role of religion in the public square.<sup>59</sup>

<sup>54</sup> Inagaki, “Kokumin-teki Fukushi,” 8.

<sup>55</sup> Ibid., 7.

<sup>56</sup> Inagaki, “Memory and Reconciliation,” 43.

<sup>57</sup> Ibid., 47.

<sup>58</sup> Inagaki, “Memory and Reconciliation,” 41–42, 50; Inagaki, *Yasukuni Jinja*, 149.

<sup>59</sup> Inagaki, “Kokumin-teki Fukushi,” 13, 15.



### III. *Ecclesiological Evaluation of Christian Responses*

With his thorough analysis, Tomura can help Japanese Christians understand the complexity of the Yasukuni issue. He clearly recognized the danger of Yasukuni and its cultural and ideological background. His arguments for the importance of pacifism and religious freedom are persuasive.

From the perspective of ecclesiology, we can conclude that Tomura raised awareness of the church's social responsibility. He influenced many Japanese Christians beyond his denomination, especially those who were members of the National Christian Council in Japan. Evangelical Christians also learned much from him.<sup>60</sup> However, they rejected his suggestion to redefine evangelism as a fight for religious freedom. Japanese evangelical Christians thus refuse the so-called Social Gospel implied in his proposal.

Nishikawa's works, on the other hand, help evangelical Christians learn from Tomura without adopting the Social Gospel implications of his project. Nishikawa's efforts in actively engaging with church ministry and political problems are a real model for Japanese evangelical Christians in their engagement with both church and society. He started his unceasing struggle to protest the nationalization of the Yasukuni Shrine back in 1969. His approach of attending the meetings of the National Diet is unique, as he seems to be the only opponent of official Shrine worship to do so. It provided him with real and substantial facts about the position of Diet members that others do not clearly see.

However, it goes without saying that many of Nishikawa's arguments that depend on the present constitution will become invalid once the Yasukuni supporters' attempts to amend the constitution succeed. In addition, since the discussions between opponents and proponents of the Shrine have failed to reach a satisfying conclusion even after decades of struggle, the feasibility of a solution based on protesting the nationalization of the Yasukuni Shrine and demanding a strict separation of state and religion is questionable.

Inagaki attempts to offer a third-way solution to the deadlock between Yasukuni's supporters and its opponents by not just protesting the supporters' movement but also providing a concrete alternative to the present

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<sup>60</sup> For example, the following evangelical literature references Tomura's works: *Idogaki Akira, Shinkyō no Jiyū to Nihon no Kyōkai* [Religious Freedom and the Japanese Church] (Tokyo: Inochi no Kotobasha, 1983), 116; Ikejiri Ryōichi, "Oshiyoseru 'Kokka Shintō' no Nami: Seiji-Shihō Reberu de no Senzen Kaiki no Ugoki [Surging Wave of the 'State Shinto': The Regression Movement to the Pre-War State at Political and Judicial Level]," in *Kokka Shūkyō to Kurisuchan: Futatabi Junan no Toki wa Kuru no ka* [State Religion and the Christian: Will a Time of Suffering Come Again?] (Tokyo: Inochi no Kotobasha, 1988), 29.

Yasukuni Shrine. His proposal is very detailed, comprising both concepts for and contents of the site and even the way to run and maintain it. He accommodates both the proponents' religious needs and the opponents' concerns regarding the violation of religious freedom and the separation of religion and state. His proposal sees to it that the state grants its fallen soldiers and victims their due honor, but it also prevents the new facility from becoming a tool of abuse for mobilizing people for war. He furthermore takes into consideration the traditional Japanese notion of *wa*, which has a much longer history than the Yasukuni practice.

From an ecclesiological perspective, one can see that while Tomura and Nishikawa emphasize the separation between religion and the state, Inagaki suggests the Kuyperian participation of religions in the public space. He rightly understands the dissatisfaction of Yasukuni's supporters with the strict separation between church and state. Inagaki calls his approach *kōkyō tetsugaku* (public philosophy).

One can see that Inagaki's approach originates from the Kuyperian principles of common grace, sphere sovereignty, and distinction of the church as organism and institution. Abraham Kuyper distinguished between local churches on earth as the church institution and all believers bonded together by the mystical body of Christ as the church organism.<sup>61</sup> By proposing direct engagement of the organic church and indirect engagement of the institutional church, Kuyper attempted to secure the church institution's proper conduct of the ministry of the Word while encouraging the church organism to engage actively with society. Christians should be aware of and maintain the synergic relation between these two elements of the church.<sup>62</sup>

In line with this notion, Kuyper developed the principle of sphere sovereignty and common grace. Since absolute sovereignty belongs only to God, each life sphere is equal and has the responsibility not toward other spheres but only to God.<sup>63</sup> Although the state has the function to regulate the

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<sup>61</sup> Abraham Kuyper, *Lectures on Calvinism* (1898; repr., Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1999), 57, 59–62; Abraham Kuyper, "Common Grace [1902–1905]," in *Abraham Kuyper: A Centennial Reader*, ed. James D. Bratt, trans. John Vriend (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1998), 187; Abraham Kuyper, "Rooted and Grounded (1870)," in *On the Church*, ed. John H. Wood Jr. and Andrew M. McGinnis, trans. Nelson D. Kloosterman et al. (Bellingham, WA: Lexham, 2016), 54–57.

<sup>62</sup> Kuyper, "Rooted and Grounded," 54–57; Kuyper, *Lectures on Calvinism*, 59–62. For a recent elaboration on this distinction, see Surya Harefa, "First Rooted, Then Grounded: The Position of the Church Institution in Kuyper's Ecclesiology," *Verbum Christi* 7.1 (April 2020): 25–40.

<sup>63</sup> Abraham Kuyper, "Sphere Sovereignty [1880]," in *Abraham Kuyper: A Centennial Reader*, ed. Bratt, 466–67. Cf. Herman Dooyeweerd, *Roots of Western Culture: Pagan, Secular, and Christian Options*, ed. Mark Vander Vennen and Bernard Zylstra, trans. John Kraay (Toronto:

“inter-, intra-, and trans-spherical” relation by implementing laws or regulations, the state is equal to other spheres and should not break other spheres’ sovereignty.<sup>64</sup> Using the sphere sovereignty principle, Kuyper encouraged Christians to establish Christian associations in every life sphere to develop Christian principles vigorously so that they can be heard and considered by society.<sup>65</sup> At the same time, Kuyper also encouraged Christians to cooperate with non-Christians based on the notion of common grace, which maintains the life of the world, relaxes the curse that rests upon the world, arrests the progress of corruption, and allows the development of human beings.<sup>66</sup> God cares about not only church matters but also matters outside the church, and therefore, Christians should work on unfolding the potential of every life domain in God-glorifying ways.<sup>67</sup>

In my opinion, this organic-institution distinction is vital for Japanese evangelical Christians in their engagement with the Yasukuni problem. It can help overcome the tendency to withdraw from political engagement and answer the concern about replacing the traditional understanding of evangelism with sociopolitical engagement. Moreover, this organic-institutional model, combined with sphere sovereignty and common grace, encourages Christians to organize Christian bodies, including associations for dealing with the Yasukuni problem, that might also cooperate with non-Christians. By having a new direction for political engagement for evangelical Christians in Japan, Christians can provide comprehensive solutions for this complex problem and so communicate with the government and both opponents and proponents of the renationalization of the Yasukuni Shrine.

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Wedge Publishing Foundation, 1979), 43; Bob Goudzwaard, “The Principle of Sphere-Sovereignty in a Time of Globalisation,” *Koers* 76.2 (2011): 361–63.

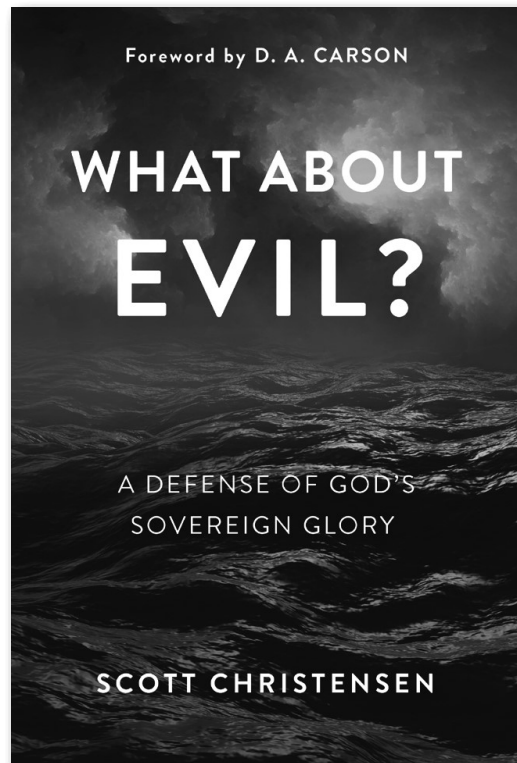
<sup>64</sup> Kuyper, “Sphere Sovereignty,” 472–73; Kuyper, *Lectures on Calvinism*, 99, 104, 106, 108.

<sup>65</sup> Abraham Kuyper, *Pro Rege of het Koningschap van Christus* (Kampen: Kok, 1912), 3:184–94, cited from Kuyper, “Sphere Sovereignty,” 485.

<sup>66</sup> Kuyper, “Common Grace,” 168; Kuyper, *Lectures on Calvinism*, 30, 52, 123–24.

<sup>67</sup> Kuyper, *Lectures on Calvinism*, 31.

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