Ching Feng [New Series, Volume 7, Number 1-2, 2006]

Ching Feng

A Journal on Christianity and Chinese Religion and Culture

Originally published under the title *Quarterly Notes* since 1957, *Ching Feng* is one of the major publications of the Christian Study Centre on Chinese Religion and Culture, by which it seeks to promote critical and constructive studies of all aspects of Chinese Christianity, Chinese religion and culture, and interreligious dialogue between Christianity and other religious traditions in Asia.

Ching Feng

A Journal on Christianity and Chinese Religion and Culture

NEW SERIES, VOLUME 7, NUMBERS 1–2, 2006

Special Issue on the Kingdom of God, the Pure Land and the Human World

Introduction 3

Special Issue Editors LAI PAN-CHIU AND XUE YU

Part I Buddhist Interpretations of the Pure Land

Eschatological Faith in the Coming Kingdom, East and West: Mao Tzu-yüan and the Four Pure Lands 11

WHALEN LAI

Shin Buddhism and Axial Civilization 31

GALEN AMSTUTZ

Establishing a Pure Land in This World: Xingyun's Model 57

JUE JI

Part II Christian Interpretations of the Kingdom of God

The Entrance and Inheritance of the Kingdom of God in the Christian Religion 83

ERIC K. C. WONG

The "Kingdom of Heaven" in China:
Exploring the Taiping Millennial Vision 93
P. RICHARD BOHR

Part III Comparative Studies

Understanding Suffering from Buddhist and
Christian Perspectives 127
XUE YU

God's Vow: A Pure Land Perspective on the
Cross of Christ 153
NOTTO R. THELLE

Birth into the Pure Land and Resurrection of
the Body: A Comparative Study between
Pure Land Buddhism and Christianity 165
MARTIN REPP

Part IV Dialogues in Relation to Contemporary Society

The Kingdom of God and the Pure Land:
A Dialogical Study of Eschatology and Praxis 183
LAI PAN-CHIU

The Pure Land, the Kingdom of God and the
Critique and Transformation of This World 211
ANDRES S. K. TANG

God's Reign and the Pure Land in Interfaith and
Scientific Discourse on *Imago Dei* and Buddha
Nature 225
PAUL S. CHUNG

The Kingdom of God, the Pure Land and the Human World

Ching Feng, n.s., **7.1–2** (2006) 3–8

Introduction

LAI PAN-CHIU AND XUE YU

The Kingdom of God and the Pure Land are the key concepts for the Christian and Buddhist understandings of hope, life after death, eternity and human destiny. Inevitably these concepts and the related doctrinal issues were raised in the Buddhist–Christian encounter and dialogue. In fact the issues related to life after death play an important role in the encounter between Catholics and Chinese Buddhists during the Ming and Qing dynasties.[1] Some Protestant missionaries to China, particularly Timothy Richard (1845–1919) and Karl Ludvig Reichelt (1877–1952), were fascinated by the parallelism between the Protestant Gospel of justification by grace alone and the Mahāyāna Buddhism in China, especially Pure Land Buddhism.[2] The striking similarities between Protestant Christianity and Pure Land Buddhism even made Karl

---

LAI Pan-chiu (LAI Pinchao 賴品超) is professor and the chairman of the Department of Cultural and Religious Studies, The Chinese University of Hong Kong. XUE Yu 學愚 is assistant professor in the Department of Cultural and Religious Studies, The Chinese University of Hong Kong.

[1] See Zheng Ande 鄭安德 (Andrew K. Chung), *Ming mo Qing chu tianzhujiao he fojiao de hujiao bianlun* 明末清初天主教和佛教的護教辯論 [The Catholic–Buddhist apologetic debates in the late Ming and early Qing China] (Dashu, Kaohsiung County, Taiwan: Foguangshan wenjiao jijinhui, 2001), 441–92.

[2] See Timothy Richard, *New Testament of Higher Buddhism* (Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1910), esp. 26; Karl Ludvig Reichelt, *Truth and Tradition in Chinese Buddhism: A Study of Chinese Mahayana Buddhism*, trans. Kathrina van Wagenen Bugge (1934; repr., New Delhi: Munshiram Manhoharlal Publishers, 2001), 127–70, esp. 153. Reichelt's work was originally published as *Fra Østens religiøse liv* (Copenhagen: Gad, 1922).

Barth find it necessary to deal with the difference between Pure Land Buddhism and Christianity when he discusses the notion of "true religion" in his monumental *Church Dogmatics*.[3] A few years ago, when a group of Buddhist scholars attempted to reconsider and reformulate the doctrine of the Pure Land in the contemporary world, a number of Christian theologians were involved, even though it is not a formal occasion for Buddhist–Christian dialogue.[4]

All these might have been sufficient in highlighting the importance of the two concepts in Buddhist–Christian dialogue. However, what makes a Buddhist–Christian dialogue on the Kingdom of God and the Pure Land even more important than before remains the remarkable similarities between the transformations of their interpretations in the modern world. Admittedly, the concepts of the Pure Land and the Kingdom of God are traditionally associated with something taking place in the future, especially after the end of this life, and have no direct impact on one's daily life. In the history of Buddhism, the concept of the Pure Land was often associated with the other-power and otherworld belief that if one has faith in Amitābha Buddha and pronounce the name of Amitābha Buddha, one will be received by Amitābha Buddha into the Western paradise after one's death. In the history of Christianity, the Kingdom of God was traditionally identified as an "eschatological" concept referring to something taking place at the end of the world. It might have something to do with religious practices, e.g. penance, prayer for death, funeral, etc., but it is supposed to be irrelevant to social praxis and politics.

However, during the last two centuries, both concepts underwent some sort of dramatic transformation. The reform of modern Chinese Buddhism led by Yang Wenhui 楊文會 (1837–1911) and Taixu 太虛 (1890–1947), which was highlighted by the rise of Humanistic Buddhism, endeavoured to make Buddhism more relevant to daily life. Part of their innovative enterprise was to reinterpret the concept of the Pure Land, transforming it from a mainly other-worldly concept to a more this-worldly one. The emphasis of this new interpretation is that the Pure Land can be attained or even established in this world through religious and social practices. In Christianity, other than the liberal

---

[3] For an analysis of Barth's view on Pure Land Buddhism, see Charles T. Waldrop, "Karl Barth and Pure Land Buddhism," *Journal of Ecumenical Studies* 24, no. 4 (1987): 574–97.

[4] See Dennis Hirota, ed., *Toward a Contemporary Understanding of Pure Land Buddhism: Creating a Shin Buddhist Theology in a Religiously Plural World* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 2000).

theologians of the 19th century who attempted to make the Kingdom of God the cornerstone for Christian ethics and the Biblical scholars' rediscovery of the importance of the Kingdom of God in the message of Jesus Christ, many 20th-century Christian theologians, including notably Jürgen Moltmann and Wolfhart Pannenberg, endeavoured to make eschatology the basic orientation of Christian theology and the doctrine of Kingdom of God the key concept to the social or political praxis of the Christian churches. It is yet important to note that long before Moltmann and Pannenberg made such efforts, under the influence of some Western theologians, notably those associated with the "Social Gospel" theological movement promulgated by Walter Rauschenbusch (1861–1918) and Harry F. Ward (1873–1966), some Chinese Christian theologians, including notably Zhao Zichen 趙紫宸 (T. C. Chao, 1888–1979) Wu Yaozong 吳耀宗 (1893–1979) and Wu Leichuan 吳雷川 (also known as Wu Zhenchun 吳震春, 1870–1944), had attempted to reinterpret the concept of the Kingdom of God in a this-worldly way in order to develop their contextual theologies as an attempt to address the socio-political issues of Republican China. In both Chinese Buddhism and Chinese Christianity, their apparently "eschatological" concepts are no longer interpreted as merely concerning a remote future, but also beliefs related to the human world, including the religious and social praxis here and now.

Without doubt, that this this-worldly turn of the concepts of the Pure Land and the Kingdom of God emerging in Chinese Buddhism and Chinese Christianity more or less at the same period might have been shaped by the socio-political context of Republican China. However, in order to have a more proper understanding of the transformations of the interpretation of these concepts in China, one has to consider not only these circumstantial factors, but also the development of the two concepts or doctrines in their respective traditions as well as the possibility of mutual influence between the two religions. As we are going to see, although one cannot rule out the possibility that these transformations of interpretations were shaped by the socio-political context, and that the interpretations of the two symbols in the two religions were mutually reinforced, these transformations were largely based on the doctrinal resources of their respective religious traditions.

The papers published in this special issue of *Ching Feng* were presented at an international conference on "Kingdom of God, Pure Land and the Human World," held at The Chinese University of Hong Kong during 18–20 October 2006. This conference is recognized as a sequel to an international conference for Buddhist–Christian dialogue held in Xi'an, China during 21–24 November 2003. The Xi'an conference was

probably the first international conference for Buddhist–Christian dialogue being held in contemporary China and some of the papers presented in it have been published in this journal (new series, vol. 4, no. 2 [2003] and vol. 5, no. 1 [2004]). Unlike the first conference, which did not have a particular focus of discussion, the second conference was intended to have a more focused dialogue on a particular topic. With a clearer focus, it attracted 24 scholars from a wide range of academic specializations and cultural backgrounds: American, Chinese (Hong Kong, Mainland China and Taiwan), German, Japanese, Korean and Norwegian. The success in launching this second international conference for Buddhist–Christian dialogue in China indicates clearly both the recognition of the importance of Buddhist–Christian dialogue among scholars and the growth of pertinent academic studies, including particularly those undertaken in the Chinese-speaking world.

Out of the 24 papers presented at the second conference held in Hong Kong, eleven are published here, which can be crudely divided into three groups. The first group consists of studies on the development of the concepts of the Kingdom of God and the Pure Land in their respective religious traditions. Through a focused study on the writings of a Pure Land devotee of the Song (Sung) dynasty named Mao Ziyuan 茅子元 (Mao Tzu-yüan), Prof. Whalen Lai's paper traces the history of Chinese Buddhism and indicates how a more this-worldly interpretation of the Pure Land began to emerge during the Song. Prof. Galen Amstutz's paper presents the global vision as well as the reformist character of Shin Buddhism, which is one of the most influential forms of Pure Land Buddhism in Japan. Ven. Jue Ji's paper spells out how the concept of the Pure Land, especially the vision of establishing a Pure Land in this world, is employed and reinterpreted to form the cornerstone of Xingyun's 星雲 model of Humanistic Buddhism. Prof. Eric Wong's exploration of the concept of the Kingdom of God in the New Testament demonstrates vividly the complexity of the concept, which combines both the present and future aspects and can be interpreted as a kingdom one can enter or inherit. Prof. P. Richard Bohr's study of the millennial vision of the Taiping rebellion indicates how the notion of the Heavenly Kingdom was interpreted by some Chinese in a very political and revolutionary way. These studies clearly indicate that the concepts of the Pure Land and the Kingdom of God are not merely ones that are related to the other world, but also have their present aspects and social implications.

The second group consists of three papers comparing the concepts of the Kingdom of God and the Pure Land as well as the related doctrines, focusing on the issues of the end of suffering and life after death.

Prof. Martin Repp's comparative study of the Buddhist concept of birth into the Pure Land and the Christian concept of bodily resurrection suggests that there are structural similarities between the two concepts. Prof. Notto Thelle's paper, in comparison to that of Prof. Repp, takes a relatively more theological approach and attempts to reinterpret the meaning of the Cross of Christ through comparing the vows made by Amitābha and God. Through comparing the Buddhist and Christian understandings of suffering and the end of suffering, Prof. Xue Yu's paper highlights the similarities between the two religions and further argues for taking seriously the issues of suffering in the human world and of the end of suffering in interreligious dialogue. His urge points to the third group of papers, which attempt to bring Buddhism, Christianity and the human world together.

The last group consists of three studies focusing on the Buddhist concept of the Pure Land, the Christian concept of the Kingdom of God and their relationship with the Buddhist and Christian socio-political praxis. Taking Paul Tillich's comparison of the Buddhist concept of Nirvana and the Christian concept of the Kingdom of God as the starting point, Prof. Lai Pan-chiu's paper agues that the dialogue can be more fruitful if Tillich had taken the Pure Land as the counterpart of the Kingdom of God for comparison and dialogue, because the Kingdom of God and the Pure Land do not only reflect Buddhist and Christian understandings of hope, but also relate to the social praxis of the two religions. Prof. Andres Tang's paper takes one step further in engaging the contemporary Christian interpretations of the Kingdom of God and the Japanese and Taiwanese interpretations of the Pure Land in a critical dialogue. His paper aims at arguing that the eschatological theologies of Moltmann and Pannenberg, which can keep a right balance between this-worldliness and the critical character of the Kingdom of God, may be able to offer a third alternative to the existing approaches to establish the Pure Land advocated by Critical Buddhism and Topical Buddhism. Prof. Paul S. Chung's paper, with special reference to the theory of evolution, makes a rather innovative attempt by bringing natural science into the dialogue with Buddhism and Christianity on human future. This approach to dialogue or trialogue (among science, Christianity and Buddhism or any other non-Christian religion) may be an approach to be further explored.

At the end of the conference, participants expressed both their appreciations for the dialogic opportunities that the conference offered and their longing for the third conference, which has been scheduled tentatively to be held in Hangzhou, China, two or three years later. This further confirms the success of the second conference. At this juncture,

we would like to take this opportunity to thank those who contributed to the success of the conference. The conference was co-organized by two research centres of The Chinese University of Hong Kong, namely the Centre for the Study of Humanistic Buddhism and the Centre for the Study of Religion and Chinese Society. Whereas the former was established under the Department of Cultural and Religious Studies, the latter was founded by the Chung Chi College. The conference also enjoyed the sponsorship provided by the Christian Study Centre on Chinese Religion and Culture, which has been affiliated with the Divinity School of Chung Chi College since 2000. Although these three centres are structurally independent from each other, their colleagues worked closely and smoothly to make the conference an enjoyable and memorable occasion for academic exchange and friendship. Other than the directors of these research centres, namely Prof. Lai Pan-chiu, Prof. Peter T. M. Ng and Prof. Lo Lung-kwong, we would like to thank all other colleagues in the centres, particularly Miss Fion Leung, Ven. Jue Ji and Miss Tsang Ka-wing for their efforts and operations. Other than the financial contributions from these research centres, the conference was also partially supported by a research grant project financed by the Research Grants Council of Hong Kong (ref. no.: CUHK 4697/05H). As the principal investigator and co-investigator to the project, the editors to this special issue would like to acknowledge their gratitude to the Council and to thank Miss Gloria Chui, research assistant to the project, for her assistance.

Last but not the least, the editors would like to thank once again all the conference participants, including those whose papers have not been included in this special issue as well as those who took part in discussions without presenting any paper. It is our hope that the academic studies of the comparison, encounter and dialogue between Buddhism and Christianity will continue to grow and enhance the mutual understanding among the followers of the two religions.

Part I

Buddhist Interpretations of the Pure Land

Ching Feng, n.s., **7.1–2** (2006) 11–29

Eschatological Faith in the Coming Kingdom, East and West: Mao Tzu-yüan and the Four Pure Lands

WHALEN LAI

The Christian "Kingdom of God" and the Buddhist "Pure Land" can be otherworldly paradises, a post-mortem state of bliss awaiting the faithful in the great Beyond. In that case, they are "not of this world" or *fei jen-chien* 非人間. But God's kingdom and Amitābha's Pure Land may also descend from above, viz. interrupt human history as we know it, and transform the human world or *jen-chien* 人間 in the here and now into the reign of God or the land of bliss of Amitābha. In that case, they are eschatological kingdoms. In that scenario, humans may play two distinct roles set in two extreme forms: be totally passive ("watch and pray") or else take action, in some cases even take up arms to fight the forces of evil and hasten the coming of the Lord or Buddha. We are in the midst of such battle in the Middle East when activists on both sides (Christian and Islamic fundamentalists; three if we add the Jewish component) believe they are waging an eschatological battle in these Final Days. That is not a pretty picture. In fact, it is scary. The voice of moderation may go unheeded. The call to non-violence or ahimsa may fall on too many deaf ears. In this paper at this conference, I want to go back to a lesson in Chinese Buddhist history and a controversy, still unresolved, over a Sung dynasty Pure Land pietist, a monk who is

---

Whalen LAI (LI Hui-lun 黎惠倫) is professor of religious studies at the University of California, Davis, USA.

somehow better known under his "lay" namesake Mao Tzu-yüan 茅子元.

First, a few words concerning the historical context. In the horizon of the time, viz. in the coming Yüan (Mongol) dynasty, the Pure Land tradition of Amitābha, the Buddha of the Western Pure Land (literal Sanskrit original is Bliss Land, a Paradise very amendable to delivering the faithful in the Age of the Degenerate Dharma) will fuse with the eschatological expectation of Maireya, the Buddha of the Future (the Friendly One) whose iconic color or mark is White as in a White Lotus. In some scripts, preceding this sudden descend or arrival of the Future Buddha, there was a Cakravartin King, a King of Light or Ming Wang 明王, who paved the way by first bringing world peace through political unity. A Cakravartin (Wheel-Turning Sage) King is by definition a cosmic king who unites and rules the whole world. In some script, this King of Light would have to fight and defeat the forces of Darkness. And in Chinese history, the Mongols who ruled China were driven away by a native uprising otherwise known as the White Lotus rebellion. The next emperor of China, Ming Emperor T'ai-tsu 太祖, was an ex-monk heading one of the rebel troops. When he came to the throne, he did something unheard of before, viz. name his Chinese dynasty not after any known precedent, but with the word *Ming* 明 ("Light"). Unsaid and not so openly advertised (because Ming T'ai-tsu would move to suppress the very White Lotus movement that gave him the throne), that refers to the Ming Wang cakravartin in the Maitreyan/Amitābhist *mo-fa* 末法 (End of Dharma) Last Days. In other words, the Yüan-Ming transition bore witness to the power of a politicized Pure Land faith. Not only that—since this conference is also on Christianity, the whole battle between Light and Darkness, Good and Evil, was due to a definite legacy of a Christian heresy, viz. the Manichean cosmic dualism that colored the whole episode in question. (The Manichean influence in China has now been traced solidly back to the T'ang and even before that.) It is over that backdrop that I will examine the career of Mao Tzu-yüan, focusing above all on some poems he wrote.

Unlike the unfolding of the Japanese Jōdo 浄土 (Pure Land) tradition which is well covered and well known, the history of the Chinese Pure Land tradition is haunted by this much suspected White Lotus rebellion episode. Mainstream Buddhists consider that to be a heresy because of that injection of a militant, eschatological fervor, and its mixing in of Maitreyan-Cakravartin-Manichean elements foreign to a single-minded Amitābha faith. The history of the Jōdo faith in Japan is told with a certain consensual linear orthodoxy. So it is usually said: In the late Heian period, under the threat of *mappō* 末法 (End of the

Dharma set to commence ca. AD 1050), the Tendai 天台 monk Hōnen 法然 broke away from the official teaching of the Tendai school. Following Genshin's 源信 *Ōjōyōshū* 往生要集, Hōnen turned to relying solely on the authority of Zendō 善導 (Shan-tao). He "chose to be chosen" (*senchaku* 選択) by Amitābha's saving vows and founded an independent Jōdo School. His disciple Shinran 親鸞 went further in considering the salvation to be totally "other-powered," viz. all due to the grace of merits transferred from Amida. He founded the Jōdo Shinshū 浄土真宗 school, and similar to Luther, renounced monkhood (adopted lay life), doing so with full awareness of a break with the monastic tradition as to call himself "neither monk nor lay." Since the Tokugawa period and the institutionalization of the *danka* 檀家 (temple parish) system, Jōdo and Jōdoshin had been solidly grounded in Japanese society and the lives of its ingrained members. Compared with that, the history of the Chinese Pure Land tradition, which never became "sectarianized" (demanding exclusive membership) nor "radicalized" like Shinran's insistence on "Other Power" (and nothing else), is far more complicated.

In China, Shan-tao (Zendō), an important dharma master notwithstanding, was not regarded as the sole authority as Hōnen would make him out to be. Sung China knew a synthesis of T'ien-t'ai 天台 teaching (based on the *Lotus Sūtra*) and the Pure Land faith. The Tendai monk Genshin, who wrote the *Ōjōyoshū* that inspired Hōnen, was in communication with, via correspondence (letters), famous Sung T'ien-t'ai master Ssu-ming Chih-li 四明知禮 (960–1028). Genshin founded *nembutsu* 念仏 (Buddha-nature chanting) after the manner of Chih-li, who had spearheaded such forms of popular Pure Land devotion in China with great success. The T'ien-t'ai school in China, like the Tendai school in Japan, followed then an authoritative commentary on the *Kuan-ching* (*Kuan wu-liang-shou ching* 觀無量壽經; *Amitāyus Dhyāna Sūtra*) attributed to the founding figure, Master Chih-i 智顗. In this text (not truly by Chih-i), there is counted four types of Pure Lands. This text, seeking to incorporate Pure Land faith into the fuller scheme of T'ien-t'ai wisdom and meditation, considered Amitābha's Pure Land to be the lowest of the four, a relatively "easy path" and an effective expediency that is open to both monk and lay. But there are higher forms of Pure Land and higher means of meditative wisdom, with the T'ien-t'ai vision of the "three thousands of worlds in all spaces and through all three times telescoped into one instant thought-moment" being naturally the most profound (see the full explanation of the Four Pure Lands *infra*). Unlike Shinran, who followed Zendō (Shan-tao stressed more faith-reliance), Chinese Buddhists followed him plus

other Pure Land masters. And whereas Japanese Tendai had fully adopted the *Awakening of Faith in Mahāyāna* into its Tendai philosophy (making it more idealist), Chih-li was still fighting off such "Mind Only" idealism in his defense of a purer Mādhyamika legacy kept alive by the orthodox group ("within the mountain" school) and in his attack on the "outside the mountain" school which adopted the Mind Only idealism of the *Awakening of Faith in Mahāyāna*.[1]

The philosophical differences were not enough to create a schism of consequence. What divided the Buddhist community came rather with the so-called White Lotus heresy. What exactly gave rise to that remains a matter of debate. What we know is that by the late Sung, a segment of the Pure Land faith had taken in religious Taoist practices. Then by the Yüan, Maitreyan eschatology and Manichean apocalypticism surfaced therein and one sector of the Pure Land faith led a millenarian uprising known as the White Lotus. That uprising helped topple the Mongol rule and an ex-monk who turned a rebel leader rose to become the founding emperor of the next, Ming ("Light") dynasty. Had he made his one-time faith the new state religion, China's religious history would have been very different. But Ming T'ai-tsu turned his back on the movement that brought him into power. He proscribed the faith and the name "White Lotus" came to stand for a heresy that all proper Buddhists would have nothing to do with. Since then a clear line was drawn between the orthodox Lien-tsung 蓮宗 (Lotus Lineage) and the heretical Pai-lien 白蓮 (White Lotus).[2]

That great divide then affected the evaluation of the Sung monk Tz'u-chao 慈照 whose secular name was Mao Tzu-yüan. The Sung records remember him as the founder of the original White Lotus society. Much honored for his evangelical success, Mao was tainted when somehow that movement turned syncretic (taking in Taoist practices) and heretical (fostering a rebellion). But could Mao be in any way, directly or indirectly, responsible for that later turn of events? Yüan records and early Ming reports that condemned the White Lotus heresy would not lay the blame for that deviancy on Mao, who led a "pure"

---

[1] This amounts to a Hua-yen-esque intrusion into T'ien-t'ai use of the Middle Path. Japanese Tendai however accepted the authority of this *Kuan-ching* commentary attributed to Chih-i from the start, so it had little problem with accepting the idealist premise.

[2] See my essay, "The Origins of Ming Buddhist Schism," in *Heterodoxy in Late Imperial China*, ed. Kwang-Ching Liu and Richard Shek (Honolulu: University of Hawai'i Press, 2004), 109–35.

(pious) fellowship. But modern scholars have to ponder the possibility of indirect influence or unintended consequence.

1. THE PROBLEM AS RESTATED BY DANIEL OVERMYER

Traditional Buddhist historians follow the Ming Buddhist judgment that cleared Mao of any blame. Most textbooks on Chinese Buddhism would also. They would not mention Mao's White Lotus faithful and the later White Lotus rebels in the same breath. Most Buddhist historians would not call the later folk, sectarian faith "Buddhist" as Daniel Overmyer would in his investigation of late dynastic sectarian movements. What Overmyer calls "folk Buddhist religions," "orthodox" Buddhist scholars would regularly call just "folk" without the prefix "Buddhist" so that there is little chance of linking the "heterodoxy" with the original "orthodoxy." In the end, Overmyer himself concludes:

> I believe that the most that can be said about Master Tz'u-chao [Mao Tzu-yüan] is that he popularized T'ien-t'ai and Pure Land teachings, but even at his most popular he did not abandon the epistemological [i.e. idealist] perspective which is the hallmark of orthodox Mahāyāna thought. Perhaps his emphasis on the unity of worldly and holy led others to take him at his words and found a lay association based on this same premise.[3]

The person who so freely mixed the worldly and the holy—viz. the laity and the monk—is thought to be a certain Little Mao. So surmised Overmyer, following the judgment of Tsung-chien 宗鑑 (fl. 1230–40).

In Sung, Tsung-chien already registered how after Mao Tzu-yüan passed away, a Hsiao Mao 小茅 or Little Mao apparently took over a remnant of the White Lotus society. Little Mao headed this "white-clothed" (viz. lay) society; reduced the standard lay precepts from five to just one ("not to take life"); and as he himself was married, helped to perpetuate the tradition of a married ("wife-carrying") clergy. If that sounds familiar to Jōdo Shinshū wherein Shinran also married (an

---

[3] Daniel Overmyer, *Folk Buddhist Religion: Dissenting Sects in Late Traditional China* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1976), 132.

ex-nun as Luther did) and perpetuated a family line of leaders, the next development in the Chinese story might not be.

The sanctification of a married life somehow led to a religious Taoist type of celebration of the instinctual life, for soon after, T'ien-t'ai chronicler and critic Chih-p'an 志磐 [fl. 1260–70] reported such practices within the movement. Chih-p'an noted, for example, how Buddhist *samatā* (realizing the selfsameness of all things) that denotes a "unifying one form" was being read and practised as "male and female becoming one in form (one body)." This and other doctrinal distortions alarmed Chih-p'an.[4]

Overmyer went further though. He hypothesized that Little Mao was Mao Tzu-yüan's son. That is unlikely. It would make Mao Tzu-yüan the first to initiate a married clergy.[5] That is not something Tsung-chien and Chih-p'an would let pass without comment. It was also a near physical impossibility. Mao did not marry and only later joined the order. Born in 1086, he was brought up in a monastery at a young age after his parents passed away. Tonsured at age 19, he founded his White Lotus society in 1133 or at age 47. His movement grew so far and so large that it was at one time proscribed by the state. (A fate known also to the Pure Land movement in Japan, and in both cases, the movement was unstoppable and the leaders, temporarily dishonored, were recalled with honor.) Mao was summoned back to court in 1166, at age 80, a year before his death, when he was granted the title of Master Tz'u-chao ("Compassionate Light"). No allegation that Mao broke his vow was ever charged before or after. So it is more reasonable to conclude that Little Mao was at best a close kin.[6]

2. COMPARING WITH THE JŌDO EXPERIENCE

In his way, Mao Tzu-yüan was also breaking away from the all-inclusive ("catholic") style of T'ien-t'ai towards a more single-minded ("se-

---

[4] See Overmyer, *Folk Buddhist Religion*, 89–98 for a short review of the history up to the Ming.

[5] The fact that Little Mao reduced the lay precepts to just one is taken by Overmyer to be a sign of his legitimizing sex (ibid., 94).

[6] See Whalen Lai, "Legends of Birth and the Pure Land Tradition in China," in *The Pure Land Tradition: History and Development*, ed. James Foard, Michael Solomon, and Richard K. Payne (Berkeley: University of California, 1996), 173–232.

lective") mode of devotion championed by Shan-tao. We may register these points:

(*a*) Mao Tzu-yüan did redact the classic T'ien-t'ai dialectical reading of the Four Pure Lands by following Shan-tao's teaching of deliverance through faithful *nien-fo* 念佛.

I will leave the debate on what *nien* in *nien-fo* actually meant for Shan-tao or others.[7] Like many others in the Sung, Mao knew that it meant both name chanting and meditative recall. The chanting has always had a meditative function.

Unlike T'ien-t'ai master Chih-i, who classified Amitābha's Pure Land under a *nirmāna* land that serves as a lowly expediency, Shan-tao had judged the same to be of a *saṃbhoga* reality of genuine bliss and a lofty reality open to the commoner. Pure Land pietists had always adopted that Shan-tao view. Mao Tzu-yüan followed that trend. He also employed the "Mind Only" idealism of the *Awakening of Faith* that the historic Chih-i had avoided. And in a minor way, Mao reconciled the so-called *hsing–hsiang* 性相 (*Dharmatā–Dharmalakṣaṇa*: Mind Only and Consciousness Only) difference, but these are rather fine scholastic points. Mao's innovation lies elsewhere.

(*b*) Mao's major contribution is in transcribing the T'ien-t'ai schema of the Four Pure Lands into, as he puts it, a set of pictures "one-inch square."[8] He thus made elite wisdom accessible to all. Mao also reduced the canonical "ten *nien* or chants" to just five, though this was hardly new or profound. It is his use of a four-word mantra, *P'u-chüeh miao-tao* 普覺妙道 (Universal enlightenment into the Mysterious Way), that is institutionally more significant.

These four words were used in creating the Dharma names of followers in his lineage. Since we find the words in the names of later orthodox Lien-tsung monks (like P'u-tu 普度) and sectarians like members of the Lo Sect (Lo-chiao 羅教), what we have is a testimony to Mao's widespread influence among the White Lotus faithful before that community became a house divided among itself into the orthodox and the heretical.

---

[7] For example, see Julian F. Pas, "Shan-tao's Interpretation on the Meditative Vision of Amitāyus," *History of Religions* 12, no. 4 (1974): 96–116.

[8] "One inch square" may refer to the size of the diagram; but it is also a metaphor for the mind.

(*c*) Mao employed T'ien-t'ai rhetorics against T'ien-t'ai. Chih-i had intended the highest of the Four Pure Lands to include all the others but Mao Tzu-yüan used the pretext of "common residence" in the lowest land to include (the lights of) the other three. Chih-i saw in the highest a seamless whole that is "neither vertical nor horizontal." Mao presented the "horizontal" escape promised by Amitābha as a "short cut" across the "vertical" ascent of the sage, which reaches the same end.

In late Heian Japan there was a similar shift. Instead of the aristocratic practice of "Lotus *samādhi* in the morning, Amida *nembutsu* evenings," late Heian popular devotion also followed just the easy path of *nembutsu*. In China, Mao best effected this shift in priority, claiming that the horizontal exit by faith is on par with and inclusive of the vertical path of the sage.

(*d*) In so glorifying this "shared residence of monk and lay" in Amitābha's Four Lands, Mao might indeed have opened the door for the later secularization.

Take this description of Amitābha realm as the lowest of the Four Lands:

> Land of Common Residence for Sage and Commoners
> like rising in the world via patronage
> All Three Lights (sun, moon, and star) of the other Three Lands
> are present here.
>
> The nature of sage and commoners are different as would their wisdom.
>
> A person normally would need to rely on cultivation to realize Vairocana,
>
> But fearing that men is frail and would easily be tired en route
>
> (The Buddha) points to this refuge in the West half along the way,
>
> Cutting across the Three Realms (instead of vertical ascendency) is a path that few know.
>
> But you need to have no doubt about this easy practice and easy way.
>
> To gain liberation without as yet removing all mental defilements within,
>
> Simply with single-minded faith generate this wish/vow while reciting the name Amitābha.
>
> That proper thought at death would secure the necessary deliverance.
>
> In three or seven days the outcome would be attested to.

> After being so born in the Pure Land and hearing the Dharma taught continuously,
> No need to worry if you would not be enlightened in opportune time? . . .
> In this land there is needed only faith, vow/wish and name chanting.
> No need to end defilement; no need to leave home; no need to cultivate meditation.
> All are received by Amitābha at death; everyone transported to his Pure Land.
> After acquiring the supernatural powers (of the enlightened),
> There will never be backsliding; there is only inevitable *bodhi*.
>
> [Explanation:] This land of common residence of sage and commoners refers to a land intended for both for-self (recompense) and for-other (enjoyment; *saṃbhoga*). It is replete with the Three Lights (sun, moon, and star) and subsumes the Four Lands as well as the cause of birth for all the nine grades. The three other Pure Lands are included herein; they are not other than this realm. That this land is said to be designed just for the lowest of the lowest grades pertains only to the patriarch's seeing to its being the easy practice and the easy path (for said lot). The other grades with their relative advancement would achieve the same end in full accordance with their merit, vow, and degrees of cultivation . . .

Because in this Pure Land married laymen and celibate ascetics end up alike in realizing the Absolute, Mao Tzu-yüan might have provided the pretext for Little Mao later to create a purely lay society headed by a married clergy instead of by ordained monks. That innovation would surely break the traditional supervision of the laic by the monks. The result is a so-called "neither [truly] monk nor [truly] lay" community, a phrase used against the heretical White Lotus as it was also against Shinran's initial fellowship in Japan. But this laicization process cannot be credited entirely to Mao Tzu-yüan and Little Mao because the statistics on the number, size, and make-up of Pure Land associations in the Sung as compiled by Ogasawara Senshū 小笠原宣秀[9] has shown how

[9] For the statistics on the Sung societies, see Ogasawara Senshū 小笠原宣秀, *Chūgoku Jōdokyōka no kenkyū* 中国浄土教家の研究 [Teachings of the Chinese Pure Land masters] (Kyoto: Heirakuji shoten, 1952), 81–99; also his *Chūgoku kinsei Jōdokyōshi no kenkyū* 中国近世浄土教史の研究 [A history of the Pure Land teachings of early modern China] (Kyoto: Hyakkaen, 1962), 46–49. Ssu-ming Chih-li's program for setting up large communities is told in his *Chiao-hsing lu* 教行錄; for a translation, see Kenneth Ch'en, *Buddhism in China: A Historical Survey* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University

there were other large-size, lay-led lay associations at the time. And Mao Tsu-yüan only copied what eminent T'ien-t'ai monk Ssu-ming Chih-li innovated. The Sung pietists at first emulated the small, elite society credited to Lu-shan Hui-yüan 廬山慧遠 in the early fifth century. Chih-li was the first to launch these large, mixed (i.e. monk and lay) societies. He first chartered 210 sub-sections, each with its own leader responsible for recruiting 48 members (after the number of Amitābha's vows), totalling up to 10,000 for the whole (10,008 to be exact). He soon had to farm these large societies out to others. Mao Tzu-yüan and others soon followed suit. Mao seemed especially successful though.

3. FOLK ZEN AND PURE LAND FAITH

Perhaps what distinguishes the White Lotus society here from the Japanese movement (and vice versa) is the role played by Folk Zen (Ch'an 禪) in the Chinese side of the story. Mao would not be counted in any known Zen lineage, but his biography reports his having a Ch'an-like awakening. Twenty years of bookish learning was dispelled—exposed as being misguided—by the call of a crow. Mao even composed later a poem to mark that event, a kind of (belated) "enlightenment poem" which ideally should be written immediately after. To this poem, Mao appended a lengthier verse reporting on his subsequent devotion to the Pure Land faith after the manner of Lu-shan Hui-yüan. By the "purist" (sectarian) standard of Japan, Mao was first a Zenist before he was enticed to Pure Land piety—and even then, first the elitist type before he was turned by Chih-li to evangelizing it among the people. By Chinese standards though, Mao just synthesized two compatible paths and spread it among the people, all three elements being the vogue of the time.[10]

Mao wrote other poems, now found scattered in his few extant works. They are not particularly high in literary quality—more like versified prose—but they are expressive of a simple faith, in function not that unlike Shinran's *wasan* 和讃, composed consciously for inducing others to the faith. The language is simple; the metaphors are

---

Press, 1964), 402–3n8.

[10] See the translation of Mao's biography in Overmyer, *Folk Buddhist Religion*, 93–94.

folksy. For example, the Four Pure Lands are analogized to four ways of getting promoted to high office. Amitābha "recommends" the undeserving; the *arhat* wins honor as "soldiers on the front line"; the *bodhisattva* graduates through the civil "examination system"; while the Buddha is born the crown prince "anointed" for future kingship.[11] The rest of this essay will be devoted to some of these poems. Therein we will find the Zen elements fused with the Pure Land faith. The stock metaphors for the *Tathāgatagarbha* (Buddha-nature), such as a poor girl pregnant with a future king or a poor family having this hidden treasure, are evoked for depicting a change of fortune (Pure Land bliss) and a change of heart (Zen enlightenment).

POEM (T. 47.336c–337a)
The Vow/Wish of the Nien-Fo *Practitioner*

The myriad dharmas are born of the mind
The myriad dharmas also cease with it
Our Buddha the great *śramaṇa*
Has always so taught this
A keeper of precepts lacking such faith and hope[12]
Will never entrance to the Pure Land gain
He can only hope for rebirth as Man and God
But once that ends to suffer *saṃsāra* again
Round and round to go, with no deliverance in sight
Sutras he reads but the wisdom eye he lacks
Never the deeper import of the Buddha to know
Even if he should gain some wisdom in a future life
His confused mind would find final release hard
Better it is to practise the *nien-fo* name-chant
Desiring neither fame nor fortune here and now
At all times be free from extraneous thought
That would be (realizing) Amitābha
With proper vow and power the precepts to keep
And be bound for birth in the Happy Land

[11] In the prose preface to a long poem inducing men to the Pure Land faith, Mao likens seeing Amitābha to an imperial audience: "Morning and night one should concentrate on worshipping Amitābha. Like presenting oneself to the emperor, one should never miss the opportunity twice" (T. 47.336c).

[12] "Faith and hope" is *hsin-yüan* 信願, "trust and vow." "Vow" doubles as wish in Chinese and in Sanskrit, thus the reason for giving it as "Vow/Wish" in the poem's title above.

Is to accord with sustaining the right deed
Not one in a thousand would not be saved
For such is the promise of the Buddha
Amitābha would come in person to welcome
Various Buddhas would protection lend
The many gods and guardian spirits
Will see to it that this *nien-fo* pietist
Is never too distanced from the Buddha
Abiding by the *bodhimaṇḍala*
Amidst the ever turning Dharma Wheel
That delivers sentient beings to no end
Or like the daughter of a poor family
Pregnant with a cakravartin king
The various gods would her protect
Though she might know it not
That within her is this regal seed
Now the practitioner of *nien-fo*
Is just like that no less
Mindful of the Buddha, chanting as He
He would soon the Buddha become
Various Buddhas would guard him too
Even though he may not know it
Sure to be born in Pure Land, he will
Nonetheless to this world return
And be born again in human form
Or it is like this poor family
Having this buried treasure in the ground
Which the gods duly protect
So it might nev'r be lost
Though the poor family knows it not
In its home is this treasure store
Daily it labors hard for a living
Hoping for enough food and cloth
Now the practitioner of *nien-fo*
Is just like that: he does not know
That as a chanter of *nien-fo*
He already has this Tathāgata Store
But thinking he has no such luck
He was born into his human realm
Or it is like the case of a sick man
Already possessing this magical cure
But not knowing its power

Thinks he could not cure himself
Daily he lies in his sick bed
Suffering no end of pain
Now the practitioner of *nien-fo*
Is also just like that
Not knowing how the *nien-fo* mind
Can cure all ill due greed and ignorance
As such the great doctor is he
As such the treasure trove is here
Able to aid all sentient beings
A Dharma king he may well be
Able to protect the human lot
He would a common man become
And not in Pure Land reside
But rather the precepts to keep
Willing to be born as man again
Once more to practise the path
Ere arriving at the Land Beyond
Seeing other practitioners
He would preach precisely thus
That those not recognizing Amitābha's vow
Those not in accord with the Pure Land sutras
Only allow deviant views their minds to cloud
Such that they think deliverance is blocked
When said obstruction is not due others
It is their minds that self obstructs
Unable to gain Pure Land in this life
They miss a chance and a hundred more
To them I would now preach
Trust the words of this Buddha of mine
The Buddha never lies
Nothing told here is untrue
All you need is to pursue with diligence
This single-minded quest for Pure Land
Like the wind fanning the flame
Little self-effort is required
Fortune awaits this *nien-fo* mind
Merits for exiting the Three Realms assured
He who meets with a treasure but takes it not
Is offered food but choose to starve instead
Alas, what a fool is he
Who cannot recognize what is evident

I wanting just to induce and recommend
Now turn the gospel over to others
So they would spread it in my stead
As messengers of the Tathāgata
Surely sons of the Buddha are they
Who truly the debt to the Buddha repay
May this universal vow be carried out
May we all in the Happy Realm meet again

In the above poem, we see the Pure Land both as reality and as promise, "already but not yet." The devotee is already saved though full communion is yet to be. All men will one day reunite at the end of time in the Happy Realm. The Mahāyāna theme of a voluntary rebirth—the "going to" and the "returning from" the Pure Land—is captured with an ironic note about how a person might suffer now as a mortal on earth. But he might actually have willed such a rebirth in this world of pain for the sole purpose of helping to deliver others.

4. THE FOUR PURE LANDS IN VERSE

Zen wisdom and Pure Land faith are likewise fused in a series of short verses appended to Mao's diagrammatical treatise on the Four Pure Lands. Traditionally, the highest of the four is the land of Eternal, Quiescent Light; it is the equivalent of the Dharmakaya. This land is represented by Mao with an empty circle, a symbol of Emptiness that served also as the Chinese notion of the Great Ultimate. Mao has however presented Amitābha's Pure Land of mixed residence, the most expedient of the Four Lands, as being inclusive of the light of the other three, so for him the path of faith encompasses no less the Emptiness of wisdom. So he explains in the prose preface:

> The *nien-fo samādhi* that severes itself from attachment to form is identical with the profound principle that lies at the awakening of the wise man of superior roots. He can move easily in emptiness and equanimity, knowing in his heart that there is ultimately neither self nor no-self, and that there is no distinction between the mortal (humanity) and the eternal (Amitāyus). . . . This is [also] seeing the nature of all sentient beings as being Amitābha. And since the person does not cling to the two extremes of form and formlessness, the

> fragmented (many) and the eternal (one), he may in every moment reach beyond this world to Amitābha and find the Ultimate Bliss anywhere. If a person can so perfect this *nien* 念 (thought/meditative recall), that thought would be a no-thought and can be suchness itself. All things born would be the Unborn; everything is the "true form of all reality." No-thought (*wu-nien* 無念) is none other than severance-of-thought (*li-nien* 離念). True form is no-form. And as (seeing) no-form is (achieving) non-abiding, non-abiding is entering into the Buddha realm (of Amitābha). (T. 47.310c)

The idea expressed above was not new; it was common fare in Sung Buddhist exegesis. Mao's dense language, necessary for such verse summaries, is uplifting. Brevity favors simplified wisdom formula. So in the first verse (untitled) translated below, he took up a favorite Neo-Confucian metaphor about how the One Principle radiates into multiple manifestations like the same moon is reflected in different streams.

(Untitled)

One (Pure) Land is divisible into Four
Each encompassing the Bodies Three
Land and Body being limitless [One]
Only our sentiments perceive the Many
For the Buddha's power is unobstructed
Like the moon in the round of the sky
Yet every prefecture would see (its own) moon
Even as the same light shine upon them all. (T. 47.315c, 316b)

The next poem has to do with how "all roads lead to Rome" which has a Chinese counterpart, employed in the Hung-chou 洪州 school of Ch'an, which reads "all large roads lead to Ch'ang-an 長安, the capital." That line also reads the "Great Tao (Way) penetrates Eternal Peace (Pure Land)."

Epilogue

The Great Way runs through the Kingdom
Though many prefectures there might be
Even as each prefecture its own road claims
Each road still joins east and west [13]

[13] "East and west" is originally "spring and autumn," a metaphor also for "what something is all about."

When deluded, the Bodies appear Three
Once enlightened, even One should be shed
As there is truly neither This nor That
Do not unnecessary contentions create [14] (T. 47.316b)

But just when Mao seems to agree with the third Ch'an patriarch Seng-ts'an 僧璨 on "not choosing" (not making distinctions), he echoes Hōnen's sentiment on choosing to be so chosen (by Amitābha).

On the Essence of Nien-Fo

There is at heart neither the coming nor the going
Only expediency has me pointing out the way to go
You might ask: But what for? (or: What to do?)
[My answer: Chant] "Homage to Buddha Amitābha" (ibid.)

But that simple chant implicates the presence of the Buddha reality within. In many more words, the *Awakening of Faith* would make the same case—that the awakened mind of faith is the *bodhicitta*, the aspiration for enlightenment, aroused and coming into its own.[15]

Nien-Fo *Opens up the Heart*

To cultivate *samādhi* I practise the Buddha name chant
All of a sudden I see Amitābha passing before my mind
Only then do I realize every act a treasure store
Only then do I see all (Four) Lands interlock (ibid.)

With faith disclosing wisdom, the distinction between practice and theory falls away. This standard pair of "meditation vs. teaching" is explicitly identified as T'ien-t'ai (theoria) and Ch'an (praxis).

Meditation and Teaching Make One Whole

The compassionate teaching of T'ien-t'ai Hsien-shou 賢首
Is no different from the intent of Nan-shan 南山 Bodhidharma

[14] The hidden reference here is to Seng-ts'an's poem "On Trusting Mind" (Hsin-hsin-ming 信心銘): as Mind is Truth, one should not choose (i.e. discriminate). Everything being Not-Two, even the One should not be held onto.

[15] The arousing of faith/confidence in the *bodhicitta* within guarantees the attainment of eventual wisdom.

As acosmic as the many teachings of the Buddha might be
It is all there in the finest tip of a single hair [16] (ibid.)

The harmonization of theory and practice leads to a series of reunification of the Many into the One, beginning with the Three Bodies; going on to the Three Jewels; Mind and Land (subject and object); and finally ending with Self and Buddha.

The Three Bodies Are One

The secret store of Three Virtues permeates the Trikaya
Once revealed as is, do we subdivide the trio still?
As all things interpenetrate, none obstructing none
Don't even present the One End as Three Vehicles (ibid.)

The Three Jewels Are Not Separate

Buddha, Dharma, Sangha, jewels most precious
Are not different from this one numinous Nature
With One comes Three as Three are just One
Don't even misrecognize this "seated trance star" [17] (ibid.)

Body and Land Are Not Two

Vairocana Buddha is the Land of Quiet Light
The Quiet Light is none other than Vairocana
(Buddha) Body and Land have never been ever two
Like imperial city is another name for capital (ibid.)

Mind and Buddha Are No Different

This Mind (essence) is none other than Amitābha
Amitābha is naturally the source of this Mind
People may say the "toad" (moon) light wanes
But everyone knows the moon is forever [18] round (ibid.)

---

[16] A standard meditative metaphor—the whole universe telescoped into the tip of a hair. In Hua-yen, this amounts to the mystery of All in One.

[17] Meaning unclear: "star" should refer to the constellation, i.e. the polar star being fixed and not moving. The One-Three formula is supposed to be dynamic and revolving.

[18] The Chinese text has "daily"; I substitute "forever" to avoid the collision of a nightly moon being daily round.

Assured that the ultimate reality is One, Mao could equate the given of the mundane with the freedom of the transcendental.

No Form at the End of Trace

One thought of perfect enlightenment penetrates the Whole
There is no need to cultivate for three kalpas long
If you can understand the point stated herein
Your (omniscience) would not miss one single dust (ibid.)

The final three verses recalls the foundational wisdom in Mahāyāna. So *saṃsāra* is *nirvāṇa* and *nirvāṇa* is *saṃsāra*. Reality is one; only fools see two. To awake is to know how nothing has changed—except one's mental disposition. This is it.

In the End Everything As Is

The Ocean Womb of Vairocana leaves no trace
The Land of Quiet Light is nowhere found
The final holocaust is empty, nothing ends
The green hill is in the white clouds still (T. 47.317a)

The last line is a Ch'an expression for the unchanging given. Shielded by clouds, mountain is mountain still. The same twist of real and unreal is repeated in the last line of the next poem.

Everywhere Is the Way

Gold and jewel of the Quiet Light or mere rubble
With No-Mind, anywhere you are can be home
If you see the meaning hidden in that cue
The illusory flower is this White Lotus in bloom (ibid.)

Udumbara is the auspicious flower of a tree that bears no flower—except when a cakravartin is born. Then it suddenly blooms as if "out of nowhere." This *kung-hua* 空華 or Empty Flower (a flower conjured up by magic in midair) is as real as it is not.

Everywhere Is the Source

Every mind and thought rests on Amitābha
Every here and there is Vairocana

From tiny dust to ocean wide—laid out like stars
On a single diagram drawn by this mountain monk (ibid.)

So Mao Tzu-yüan sums up his Pure Land faith. All anyone needs to know to be saved is found in these four magical, circular diagrams representing the Four Lands. All rest ultimately with the Three Lights (of the Triyāna) found in this One Mind that is Pure Land.

5. REFLECTING ON CHINA AND JAPAN

I mention this because Mao Tzu-yüan in his time freely mixed metaphors, matched ideas and cite scriptures in ways Buddhologists today would not do. If I do not footnote all his references, it is because we should not turn a popular preacher into a bookish academic. It is not that great minds cannot preach well. Luther and Shinran prove otherwise. Mao Tzu-yüan in the end is not of the same calibre. And in his case, there are good reasons to just re-create just the right atmosphere, the proper tenor, the general feel of how his teaching was perceived and received. Mao Tzu-yüan does not appear to be an original thinker; he was never perceived as such in past reviews of him. He is remembered as a popularizer, as one who condensed the Four Pure Lands into four pictures of one inch square. That is also how best to recall him. He was a bridge builder, between the world of elite ideas and the world of popular piety; between Zen and Pure Land, wisdom and faith. In his train, Little Mao might have also been a bridge builder, this time between Buddhism and Taoism, the holy and the mundane, and perhaps unwittingly and in anticipatory ways, between orthodoxy and heresy.

Ching Feng, n.s., **7.1–2** (2006) 31–55

Shin Buddhism and Axial Civilization

GALEN AMSTUTZ

Abstract

A period of rapid evolution in global Buddhism is underway that encourages a look at all the historical Buddhist resources available. In the case of Japan, some scholars claim that historically the country was at its core outside of the mainstream civilizational streams (Confucianism, Buddhism and Near Eastern monotheism) which emerged in the Axial Age (the heuristic concept proposed by the German philosopher Karl Jaspers). Such a view compromises the potential universality of Japanese cultural resources. Other scholars, however, see in Japanese civilization a combination of features that are both similar to and different from Euro-American ("Western") history, thus posing a more complex problem in cultural comparison and potential interaction and borrowing. That comparative question can be used to approach Jōdo Shinshū, Japan's largest and historically perhaps most influential traditional Buddhist organization. The main argument is that Shin Buddhism, despite its distinct Japanese identity, has certainly been located within the boundaries of Axial civilization. Shin also had a reformist or (loosely) "Protestant" character historically associated with social phenomena which are meaningfully comparable to certain phenomena in Christian reform civilization in Euro-American history. Both points offer an improved view of Japanese civilization's position in global religious history, as well as hinting how Shin may make a contribution to currently developing global Buddhism that has not been fully exploited yet.

Galen AMSTUTZ is visiting guest professor in the Faculty of Intercultural Communication at Ryukoku University, Kyoto, Japan.

1. GLOBAL BUDDHISM EVOLVING

In world history, we are now in a phase of rapid evolution and change in Buddhist traditions. The current creativity seems to come from two main sources: engaged Buddhism (especially from the Chinese sphere and Southeast Asia)[1] and the developing worlds of Euro-American Buddhism, where inherited modes of Asian Buddhism have been rapidly adapted and reconfigured in the past four decades. This paper is concerned with a third source, Jōdo Shinshū 浄土真宗 in modern Japanese Buddhism, which has been the largest of the established forms of Buddhism in Japan and which has had a pervasive (if not fully recognized) influence on all the others in Japan. Up until the 1930s, from a global perspective, Shin Buddhism was probably the most progressive of any Buddhist tradition in any country. Since World War II, however, its evolution has fallen behind that of the other sources.

As a general rule, non-Japanese have had more difficulty learning from Shin Buddhism than from other forms of Buddhism in Asia. One reason is the rhetorical distinctiveness of the doctrine, but another is the way its approach to Buddhism has remained embedded in its original Japanese context and has never (so far) evolved significantly in any other context. This last fact means that even in the present day, after a long history of contact with both the West and other parts of Asia, Shin still poses problems about how its potential usefulness may be teased out and about its accessibility, over against a haze of background issues involving cultural nationalism and comparative civilizational position. This author has addressed the problem of interpreting Shin in an earlier work.[2] This article will adopt an enhanced standpoint provided by some comparative theories, starting with Karl Jaspers's recently revived idea of the Axial Age and following up with the concept of "reform" religion. If Shin Buddhism is an Axial tradition, and if its reform quality is somewhat comparable to religious reform in Europe, the discussion in this article may reinforce the idea that evolving global Buddhism might have something extra to learn from Shin.

---

[1] Sallie King, *Being Benevolence: The Social Ethics of Engaged Buddhism* (Honolulu: University of Hawai'i Press, 2006).

[2] Galen Amstutz, *Interpreting Amida: History and Orientalism in the Study of Pure Land Buddhism* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1997).

2. JASPERS AND THE CONCEPT OF THE AXIAL AGE

The German psychiatrist and philosopher Jaspers presented this provocative idea in his 1949 work entitled *Vom Ursprung und Ziel der Geschichte* (On the origins and goal of history).[3] The Axial Age was introduced in the first hundred pages of this study, which as a whole treated the overall evolutionary movement of human life. In Jaspers's depiction, starting in prehistory humankind had moved in rather linear fashion towards an early stage of old high cultures (Mesopotamia, Egypt, Indus Valley, and central China). However, a special period of transformation of consciousness (ca. 800–200 BCE), which Jaspers called "the Axial Age" (*die Achsenzeit*), followed that early stage; afterwards, it led to the later high cultures of the Near East and Europe, India, and China. The scientific and technical revolution originated much later.[4]

In this broad evolutionary picture, Jaspers placed particular emphasis on the Axial Period, for it was during this rather roughly bounded phase of human history (which had previously been noted by a couple of nineteenth-century European historians) that the principal human moral-intellectual traditions emerged: Near Eastern monotheism, Upanisadic religion and Buddhism in India, Zoroastrianism in Iran, classical Chinese thought in China, and classical Greek thought in the Mediterranean.

Jaspers's imagination was rooted in Christian spiritual evolutionism,[5] but in proposing the Axial concept he aimed to find an empirical base broader than Christianity alone for some sense of moral unification in history. Notably, the idea of the Axial Age placed its emphasis on the accomplishments of a somewhat distant, and international, past, not on the accomplishments of nineteenth-century Europe.

What were the common features of this proposed Axial revolution? In contrast to the previous age of human development, which Jaspers called the mythical age, these features included self-consciousness, radical questioning, reflection, search for liberation and transcendence, openness to the world, critical rationalism, discussion, debate—in short

---

[3] Karl Jaspers, *Vom Ursprung und Ziel der Geschichte* (1949; Munich: Piper, 1983).
[4] Ibid., 48.
[5] Ibid., 17–18.

the production of fundamental categories and operations of thought that are still operant today.[6] As indicated by those features, Jaspers suggested that the somewhat vague, and yet definable, deep inner commonality among the various traditions should render the Axial civilizations able to communicate with each other. Certainly this is a view closely related to the goals of contemporary religious dialogue.

Following in a long line of earlier European historians, Jaspers was well aware of the technological and other kinds of superiority which could be claimed for European civilization. But he was also writing with deep disillusionment in the wake of World War II, and expressed another voice too, which recognized the liabilities of the European experience. Jaspers was deeply interested in mystical religion and suspected that there were alternative possibilities in Asia.

> Asia becomes really present for us first when we ask: In spite of all the superiority of Europe, what has the West lost? There is something in Asia which we are missing and which really matters to us. Questions come to us from there which reside in our own depths. For what we [as Europeans] have brought forth, been able to do, have become, we have paid a price. We are hardly on the path of a humanity which completes itself. Asia is our indispensable completion. If we just understand ourselves, from now on, if we recognize again what we ourselves are, perhaps we can recognize again what has been so hidden and pushed aside in us, that we could never bring it to consciousness without the mirror of the foreign. As we ourselves expand, we would be able to understand what is slumbering in us, as it blooms. In that case the philosophical history of China and India is not an external object which, superfluously, already contains what we already know, and is not just some concrete thing which we study for interesting sociological developments, but instead is something which touches us, because it teaches us about human possibilities which we have not realized, and brings us into feeling contact with the true origin of another human way of being, which we are not, but which we also are potentially: a way which is its own untrodden place in historical existence.[7]

The location of Japan in Jaspers's picture was unclear. Of course, from a general history of ideas standpoint, Japan is normally understood as under the influence of not one, but two Axial traditions, namely Bud-

---

[6] Ibid., 20–21.

[7] Ibid., 95.

dhism and Confucianism. Yet it seems that Jaspers hardly knew what to do with Japan. In one place, he mentioned in passing only that Japan was one of the originally peripheral peoples (like the Germans and Slavs in the West, or the Thais in South Asia) who eventually entered into the circle of one (or more) of the three main Axial groupings and produced on their side new civilizational forms.[8] However, there was one other place where Jaspers surprisingly introduced Japan: a long paragraph summarizing the "Protestant" attitude of Japan's Shin Buddhism, which he used as a prime illustration of synchronisms or parallels in world historical evolution.

> In the sixteenth century the Jesuits found in Japan a Buddhist sect (which had existed since the thirteenth century). It seems to be astonishingly similar to the Protestants and in fact was like that. According to the Japanologist Florenz . . . its teachings were as follows: Human participation in the winning of salvation is ineffective. It comes to faith, faith in Amida's[9] compassion and aid. There are no good works that serve. Prayer is not an accomplishment, but rather thanks for the liberation provided by Amida. . . . Against the received Buddhism, these were the requirements: no works, no magical formulas and procedures, no amulets, no pilgrimages, repentances, fasts or other forms of ascetism. The lay person has the same hope of salvation as the priest or monk. Priests are only a body of teachers for the lay people. They do not need any longer to live lives different from the lay people, they wear the same clothes. The requirement of celibacy is lifted. The family is regarded as the best arena for the religious life. Members of the sect should "maintain civil order, obey the laws of the state and be good citizens for the welfare of the country."[10]

The contemporary popular writer on religion, Karen Armstrong, has recently taken up Jaspers's thesis as the framework for a long book on the Axial Age, *The Great Transformation: The Beginning of Our Religious Traditions*.[11] In her reception of the Jaspers thesis, the period was a true cognitive revolution. The Axial thinkers "discovered a transcen-

---

[8] Ibid., 79.

[9] Amida is the Japanese name of the Buddha Amitābha.

[10] Jaspers, *Vom Ursprung und Ziel der Geschichte*, 31; this was typical of the information long available in foreign languages about Shin Buddhism during the twentieth century.

[11] Karen Armstrong, *The Great Transformation: The Beginning of Our Religious Traditions* (New York: Knopf, 2006).

dental dimension in the core of their being" although this was not necessarily either supernatural or easily articulated. The most important feature of the period was a revolution in behavior, particularly new conceptions of social morality, which put empathy and compassion at the moral center. "If people behaved with kindness and generosity to their fellows, they could save the world."[12] Japan per se is also not part of Armstrong's story, but she is deeply interested in some kind of present-day recovery of the true Axial ethos, which she feels has been frequently distorted by later developments in the various religious traditions, but which is terribly needed in today's global village.

3. HAS JAPAN BEEN INSIDE OR OUTSIDE THE AXIAL SPHERE REALLY?

What about Japan then? Jaspers seemed to suggest that at least parts of its Buddhism should be taken seriously. However, let us examine what two more recent theorists of comparative civilization have had to say about the relation between Japan and the so-called Axial traditions.

In his encyclopedic *Japanese Civilization: A Comparative View* the sociologist S. N. Eisenstadt has pointed out that the interpretive difficulty posed by Japan has been its distinct combination of sameness and difference in comparison to Euro-American traditions. The sameness is found in the high levels of organization and civilization; urbanization, education, communication, family organization, and feudalism. And yet certain underlying patterns often seem to be different also.[13]

On many occasions this same-and-different Japan has seemed to touch "nerves central to Western self-identity." Often those nerves had to do with religion, and quite explicitly with the sense of displacing Christian centrality and superiority. Eisenstadt cites a confession of the Italian scholar Fosco Maraini: ". . . finally the question appeared simply and clearly: does Christianity include history, or does history include Christianity? The answer is obvious. Christianity, the West itself, are not absolutes, they are relative, historical steps in the history of man. Civilization may flourish on many stems. . . . No one has the key. There

---

[12] Ibid., xiii–xiv.

[13] S. N. Eisenstadt, *Japanese Civilization: A Comparative View* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1996), 1–19.

are no chosen people. All men—from Neanderthalers chiseling their stones to Einstein distilling theories about the universe—are spiritually equal, all live through the same predicament." [14]

This religious interaction would "seem to call for a reexamination of many of the basic premises and assumptions of Western civilization." [15] And yet, in the sociologist's overall interpretation, Japan does not fundamentally challenge or contribute to the West, because ultimately Japan is an alternate, non-Axial world, i.e., it has had a distinct civilization that was not dominated or absorbed by any of the Axial traditions of the continents, especially Buddhism. Eisenstadt asserts that ". . . Japanese civilization, unlike that of Western and Central Europe, with which it shares many structural similarities, and that of China, by which it was particularly influenced, did not see itself as a part of a broader civilization, as sharing basic premises and identity with other societies." [16] Japan is a place fundamentally apart. Such an attitude indicates—unlike the contrasting hint one might get from Jaspers—that the larger world has nothing to learn about Axial religiosity from Japan.

Eisenstadt is worth citing in some detail because his views are representative of a certain kind of approach to Japan. He is particularly interested in the historical interaction of religion and authority in Japan, and the implication is that the country has been a political failure in comparison to Euro-American experience. Throughout this argument, there are key philosophical undertones. Eisenstadt does not think that Japanese go beyond this-worldly orientations; they lack development of "critical orientations rooted in universalistic visions or principles that would transcend the given order." [17] They lack a transcendental vision to confront the present reality. Even Japanese new religions do not provide starting points for radical reform; ". . . radical democratic, egalitarian, or communitarian themes were readily hemmed in by the

---

[14] Similar is Eisenstadt's citation from British novelist Angela Carter, describing her reaction when meeting young Japanese people her age: "Their intellectual experience will have been very similar to mine. And then what you come up against is the jarring fact—for instance, I was standing somewhere once and I saw this young girl running down a flight of steps, and clear as anything, I thought, She never realized that Christ died for her sins. . . . What I mean is that the Judeo-Christian tradition was built into me at some point. I've consciously rejected it, but I've obviously retained some of it on an unconscious level. And it isn't in them! . . . And it does make a sense of a different destiny" (ibid., 4–6).

[15] Ibid., 6.

[16] Ibid., 14–15.

[17] Ibid., 146.

hegemonic frameworks and usually not allowed to challenge directly the premises or symbols of those frameworks." "The constitutional-democratic system that has developed in Japan has not been grounded in the conceptions of principled, metaphysical individualism or in a principled confrontation between state and society as two distinct ontological entities." Overall then, religions, lacking the force of metaphysical individualism, have been incorporated into the Japanese system so that they are not a sufficient source of resistance.[18]

Eisenstadt also emphasizes the weakness of Japanese religions in achieving a wholistic vision instead of an inwardness. Following a suggestion of the historian Peter Duus, he offers that ". . . the West generated so many more alternative utopian models in part because of Europe's diverse cultural roots (Jewish, Christian, Hellenistic, pagan, and so on) and its encounter with the Orient and the Americas during the period of its expansion. In contrast the Japanese had a more restricted repertoire of models of social and cultural order and of protest based largely on only Japanese Confucianism and Buddhism . . ." Thus again, "The egalitarian and communitarian themes (sometimes connected with a denial of hierarchy) and the strongly antistatist views that developed in many of these movements were not rooted in a transcendental, universalistic vision."[19]

Eisenstadt accepts a theory that there was in Japanese Buddhism a major general reorientation called immanentization (this-worldliness) of the transcendental, which was accompanied by a particularization of the universal; both reorientations were reflected in Japanese Buddhism's proposal of openness in the access to salvation, emphasizing faith, personal salvation, and ritual, and its interest in "sudden" enlightenment. Japan's this-worldly pagan (*kami*) premises mostly swallowed up normative Buddhism and its transcendental or other-worldly premises, not the other way around. Japanese Buddhism also moved away from the logocentric characteristics of classical Buddhist thought; in Japan it was relatively strongly de-theologized and its religious discourse was weakened. Mythic or non-discursive elements—as set against logocentric ones—were central, and "indexical non-linear modes" of structuring discourse were dominant. Although classic modes of Buddhist discourse developed and even flourished, these were always secondary to the main trend. There were distinctive Japanese conceptions of ontological reality: immanentism, mutual em-

[18] Ibid., 145–46, 152.
[19] Ibid., 213–14.

beddedness of nature and culture; gods as regenerators (but not creators) of world; the dualism of purity *vs*. pollution; a sense of cosmic order; vitalism; and mythocentric rather than logocentric ontological discourse.[20]

Thus, scholars often hold that even when traditional, didactic, doctrinal, self-conscious Buddhist teaching has been present in Japan, that surface should largely been ignored in favor of the presumption that the normal underlying reception is really rooted in archaic pre-Buddhist Japanese values. So, while the spread of Buddhism and an emphasis on inner experience led to a "semi-Protestant" position and "moments of transcendence" (sociologist Robert Bellah), such transcendence was merely "fleeting" as general immanentism became fundamentally hegemonic; this trait minimized the gap between the transcendental and the mundane (a gap which is apparent in European Protestantism and in more normative non-Japanese Buddhism).[21]

Eisenstadt adopts the standard interpretation that under the Tokugawa period's government supervision, Buddhism became something close to a state religion; it conformed to existing Japanese social organization rather than creating something distinctly autonomous vis-à-vis the Japanese setting (unlike, e.g., Buddhist monasteries in China). Buddhism's organizational patterning according to familialistic principles (including the suspension of celibacy and the clearcut monk–lay distinction) had the effect of embedding it in surrounding society and of weakening its autonomy. Eisenstadt writes, ". . . the political themes and activities generated by various Buddhist groups, with the partial exception of Nichiren, did not involve any attempts at the transformation of the basic premises of the Japanese political order. The major new sectarian orientations, most clearly manifested in the Pure Land sect, were in principle directed towards the perfection of the individual, seemingly without the development of any new political premises."[22]

Now, it is the case that recent scholars no longer doubt that many features of premodern Japan were conducive to the country's modernization which began in the late nineteenth century, although the present outcome has been a distinctly Japanese cultural program of modernity. But Eisenstadt denies any universal aspect to this: "In the Meiji Ishin, unlike the great revolutions in Europe, the United States, Russia, and China, no universalistic, transcendental, missionary ideology devel-

---

[20] Ibid., 218–44.
[21] Ibid., 236.
[22] Ibid., 257–58.

oped. The Meiji Ishin was inward-oriented; it aimed at the revitalization of the Japanese nation, at making it capable of taking its place in the modern world, but it had no pretension of 'saving' mankind as a whole."[23] Instead, in the global context, and in universal history, Japan strongly tended to see itself as exclusive and peculiar, and to seek its own authenticity in reaction and in difference. Thus, Japanese thinkers have opted out of envisioning Japan as any part of any universal civilization; and in short one of the running insistences of Eisenstadt's study is that Japan is not one of the Axial civilizations and in effect the Japanese transformation of Buddhism amounted to a de-Axialization of that (formerly) universal tradition.[24]

In contrast, a somewhat different note is struck by Johann P. Arnason, in his *Social Theory and Japanese Experience: The Dual Civilization*. Japan is the "comparative historian's delight and despair"[25] and is a kind of "intermediate world between East and West, open to partial analogies with either side but unmistakeably endowed with an identity of its own."[26] Comparativists have usually focused on Confucian culture or political history but Arnason wants to synthesize these instead around a pluralistic and process-oriented version of civilizational theory.

Arnason's thinking is less Eurocentric, and less influenced by elements of *nihonjinron* 日本人論 (Japanese uniqueness ideology) than Eisenstadt's. Arnason's general conclusion is that Japanese history has complicated affinities and disagreements with mainstream modernization theory. However, in the case of Japan, modernization theory does not need to be rejected even though it needs to be seriously revised (and Arnason simultaneously emphasizes that modernization theory has already been revised even for describing the West, as in thinkers such as Habermas, Touraine, Giddens, and Luhmann). Arnason considers his own position post-Weberian, i.e., indebted to Weber but passing beyond his obsolete Eurocentric assumptions; what Arnason likes about Weber is his sense of a "radical pluralism of socio-cultural spheres, civilizational frameworks and historical trajectories."[27] With this approach, Arnason takes the position that Japan participates in two

---

[23] Ibid., 431.

[24] Ibid., 420–45.

[25] Johann P. Arnason, *Social Theory and Japanese Experience: The Dual Civilization* (London: Kegan Paul International, 1997) xiv, quoting from an article by the historian Carl Steenstrup.

[26] Ibid., xiv.

[27] Ibid., xviii.

cultural complexes—China and Buddhism—but is not subsumed under either. A great deal of comparative history originates with the sense of the expansion and dominance of the West, but this expansion also opened up space where alternatives to Western models could be envisaged; this sense of modernity, combined with alternatives to the Western path, can be called "post-Weberian" because it takes up one of Weber's main points but transcends his Eurocentric horizons. Within this frame of reference the position of Japan has always been ambiguous because of European discovery, from the beginning of the encounter, of peculiar similarities in Japan along with the sense of unfamiliarity.[28]

Arnason finds that comparative approaches to Japanese religion have been relatively neglected by scholars. Four lines of productive comparison might be possible: Shinto, pluralism, modernization, and twentieth-century new religions. Arnason himself is most interested in the transformability of Shinto over time; he understands that all of Buddhism was combinatory and interpenetrated with Shinto, so that all forms of Buddhism drew extensively on Shinto even when they might claim to have demarcated themselves from it. He claims that Japanese Buddhism is weakly centered, having been "shaped by the interaction of divergent trends rather than by any stable patterns of belief or worship"; so an idea of Japanized Buddhism can only apply to this "evolving constellation as a whole, rather than to any particular constants within it." Japan's encounter with Buddhism was set by the Chinese model (syncretism of ideas, pluralism of traditions) although not later confined to it, as demonstrated by Kamakura 鎌倉 Buddhist innovation[29] (which includes the Shin Buddhist tradition).

The Tokugawa political settlement involved "pseudo-archaism and proto-modernity." Overall Tokugawa society was complex, dynamic, growing, in touch with the outside world; this is where the relationship to European experience of "modernization" becomes tricky. The West seemed to be marked by a particular dynamism and growth orientation; Japan displayed similar trends but less intensely, e.g., in its milder engagement with the larger world, and in a strong growth orientation in which the overall social impact of capitalism was nevertheless less strong. Since there was neither religious crisis such as that of the Reformation, nor Enlightenment, all the Buddhists were incorporated into the power structure and used as instruments of social control, and in

[28] Ibid., 3–47.
[29] Ibid., 25–34, 151–57.

this respect an analogy with the West is limited. However, in the end, when the themes such as capitalism *vs.* democracy, pluralization of power, nation-state formation, or long-term economic globalization are in play, Japan possesses no cultural essence which places it outside those sorts of comparative discussions.[30]

Despite his interest in things Shinto, Arnason's Japan sounds, for the most part, more like Jaspers's Axial Asia than Eisenstadt's separated country: Arnason's Japan is perhaps a civilization from which non-Japanese could learn some things.

4. SHIN AS PREMODERN REFORM BUDDHISM: STRUGGLING TO GET A USABLE PARADIGM

These references are meant to illustrate not only the difficulty of civilizational comparison in the case of Japan, but also the fact that there is a communications problem about parts of the Buddhist tradition within Japan. In neither analysis does detailed knowledge of Shin Buddhism—Japan's largest Buddhist tradition—play a part. For example, Arnason gives only three pages to the sixteenth-century Honganji 本願寺 (the headquarters of the Shin tradition) or to the *ikkō-ikki* 一向一揆 (local independence movements of the sixteenth century) and he uses only a handful of sources, in English, to background his understanding of the topic.[31]

What can be done to begin to put a better appreciation of Shin into a more nuanced version of Japan within comparative civilizational theory? Perhaps neither Eisenstadt nor Arnason should be criticized too much. The historiography of Shin Buddhism, especially outside Japan, but also within Japan itself, has had an unsatisfactory record. One can delineate very briefly a series of defective or incomplete paradigms which have limited the approach to Shin.[32]

---

[30] Ibid., 257–89.

[31] Ibid., 240–42.

[32] What follows is mainly a brief survey of some themes in Amstutz, *Interpreting Amida*. It might be noted in addition that Shin Buddhism remains virtually unstudied by Chinese scholars operating in the Chinese language sphere. Almost the only hint in Chinese of the existence of the Shin tradition is one or two Chinese translations of the *Tannishō* 歎異抄, one of the most popular Buddhist texts in modern Japan.

Taking up the Western side to start with: when Shin came into contact with Europeans in Japan's Christian Century, it was from the beginning seen as having some quality analogous to Protestant Christianity, as noted by Jaspers above. In modern times, this perspective has yielded a considerable body of comparative studies which compare the doctrinal structure and psychology of the Shin tradition's founder Shinran 親鸞 (1173–1262) and Martin Luther, for example. However, as an approach to deeper philosophical understanding, not to mention a synthetic cultural understanding, this approach via religious language is inherently problematic because of the fundamental differences in the background traditions, Buddhism and Christianity, from which those two thinkers sprang.

In the early phases of the nineteenth- and twentieth-century Western approach to Buddhism, some Western scholars resisted seeing Shin as one of the "real" Buddhist traditions at all. Later, the sociologist Robert Bellah saw Shin Buddhism mainly as an object for Weberian-Parsonian sociological analysis in his well-known *Tokugawa Religion: The Values of Pre-indusrtial Japan* (1957). However, even from the Meiji period there were other Westerners who recognized Shin as undoubtedly a valid version of Mahāyāna Buddhism, although not necessarily with sufficient elaboration of Shin's global comparative position.

On the Japanese side, within Japan itself, Shin has been subjected to a more complex if perhaps equally incomplete set of paradigms. The earliest paradigm comes from Shin teaching itself, for Shinran came to understand his ideas as a clarification of the "true" meaning of the Pure Land tradition and even as the summit of Mahāyāna Buddhist teaching. This remains the point of view of sectarian self-understanding, but of course does not work as a paradigm for a broader, multidimensional comparative historical analysis.

A number of Japanese thinkers, following their Western counterparts, have similarly looked into the paradigmatic comparison with Christian Protestantism, especially Luther. This approach retains the problems of narrowness and of divergent philosophical underpinnings that have been mentioned.

An important line of Japanese interpretation from the Meiji period onwards also comes from European sociological thought, especially Max Weber and his association between modernity and rationalism. Shin intellectuals in this mode have tended to depict Shin as a particularly rational (non-magical, etc.), and thus historically superior, version of Buddhism. This depiction has been motivated by a search for a kind of modernist respectability in a global comparative context, and the story has been widely accepted by foreigners as well. However, this

ideologized viewpoint on Shin has been fraught with tension, for it is not quite an adequate empirical description of much of Shin practice in Japan.[33] In addition, the "rationalization" debate (concerning what the sociologist Ōmura Eishō 大村英昭 has referred to as the "C" [Catholic] and "P" [Puritan-Protestant] poles of Shin consciousness) shapes the interpretation of Shin around a certain set of odd polemics, in which the dialectical counterreaction against a doubtful Westerncentric Weberian paradigm has the danger that the study of Shin Buddhism might fall back on the framework of a Japancentric folk religiosity which may be similarly doubtful.

During much of the twentieth century in Japan, Shin history has been subject to politicized paradigms applied from both the left and the right. Several major Marxist historians (Ishimoda Shō 石母田正, Hattori Shisō 服部之總, and most recently Kuroda Toshio 黒田俊雄) found the most interesting aspect of Shin to be its egalitarian politics and its rebelliousness against authority up through the time of Rennyo 蓮如 (1415–99), the so-called second founder of Shin tradition. Such relatively favorable Marxist attitudes towards Shin (at least in its medieval form up until about 1500) were coupled with sharply unfavorable attitudes towards it during the *sengoku* 戦国 period (Japan's sixteenth century of "Warring States," in which Shin Buddhism was temporarily but complexly involved) and the subsequent Tokugawa period. The later premodern phase of Shin (ca. 1600–1868) was seen by historian-critics not just as feudal, but positively authoritarian (Kuroda, or Tamamuro Fumio 圭室文雄). Meanwhile, from a right-leaning perspective, Tokugawa Buddhism in general (which was taken to include Shin) was alternatively seen as corrupt, enervated, and crippled by the Tokugawa system's bureaucratic control (this was the theme of the historian Tsuji Zennosuke 辻善之助, whose work remains the dominant postwar influencer of attitudes towards early modern Buddhism in Japan). Like the above polemic on rationalism, however, these ideological approaches have not led to a fully satisfactory empirical description of Shin history, and similarly have shaped the interpretation of Shin around certain sets of narrow concerns.

And in yet another paradigm, within the Japanese Buddhist sectarian world itself, during the twentieth century a significant number of critical modern intellectuals, beginning with Kiyozawa Manshi 清沢満之, have tended to see the historical Honganji organizations as betrayers of

---

[33] Ōmura Eishō 大村英昭, *Gendai shakai to shūkyō: shūkyō ishiki no henyō* 現代社会と宗教：宗教意識の変容 (Tokyo: Iwanami shoten, 1996).

the high ideas and spirituality of Shinran the thinker.

Now, what is really peculiar about the lively interpretive history sketched above—which indicates that Shin Buddhism remains a significant presence in Japanese religious life—is that, at least until recently, it has resulted in its overall effect in a view of Japanese history and world history which tends to marginalize any contribution made by the Shin movement as a whole. Shinran himself was elevated as a profoundly creative and independent religious teacher, but the movement and the organization which was somehow based on his ideas was regarded as peripheral or insignificant.

For the kind of comparative studies represented by Eisenstadt or Arnason, one outcome is that the same Japan in which Shin Buddhism has been a highly influential religious tradition has been regarded as a global "developmental failure" historically. That is, despite its long history of Buddhist influence, Japan is judged to be not even part of Axial civilization, as in Eisenstadt's view, and also in a directly related way appears to be defective when judged against the specific evolutionary course of European history. As summarized by Tomoko Yoshida 吉田智子,[34] historians and sociologists, both Japanese and Western, both Marxist and non-Marxist, who have dealt with Shin Buddhism have to a great extent treated the Christian-related European developmental model as paradigmatic and thus found serious faults in Shin. On this view, despite some (fleeting?) possibilities in Shin Buddhism, Shin—and all of Japanese history—never developed either an Axial principle from which universal ethics could be developed, or a strong sense of individualism. And thus, it might have little to teach the rest of the world.

5. THE PROPOSED AXIALITY OF PART OF JAPANESE CIVILIZATION, REEXAMINED THROUGH A MORE COMPLETE ACCOUNT OF SHIN BUDDHISM

All these partial paradigmatic choices, and the somewhat incomplete state of factual knowledge even among the best comparativist scholars,

---

[34] Tomoko Yoshida, "Kurodo Toshio (1926–1993) on Jōdo Shinshū: Problems in Modern Historiography," *Japanese Journal of Religious Studies* 33, no. 2 (2006), 379–412.

have resulted in the lack of a truly suitable paradigm for Shin for the uses of comparative sociopolitical history. In the process, all of Japan has sometimes been removed from the ranks of Axial civilization. A better model is needed, and a purpose of this paper is to begin to suggest an improved paradigm. The main points, very briefly, might be as follows:

- Shin was a distinctive reform tradition fully within the context of Mahāyāna Buddhist practice and thought.
- What was essentially reformed was the concept of authority in Buddhism. This was brought about by Shinran's postulation of *satori* 悟 as a radically auto-emergent transformation, a claim which bypassed the conventional claims which Buddhist monasticism tended to make. The shift in authority involved psychology, rhetoric and (after Shinran) the fundamental manner of institutionalization. The reform of authority created certain structural resemblances to the Christian reformation(s), although the underlying philosophy and psychology were different.
- Within the larger context of Buddhist history, none of the elements of Shinran's thought was unprecedented. However, because of the new way Shinran linked the issues with each other, and because of Japan's particular sociohistorical circumstances and trajectory, the shift in the presentation of Buddhism was peculiarly catalytic, and eventually (especially because of the mediation of Rennyo) it produced a mass reform movement unique in Asian Buddhism.
- The mass reform movement retained significant differences with other forms of Japanese religion, including most other forms of Buddhism in Japan. These included the factors of non-monasticism, relative separation from government, and relative distancing from Shinto.
- However, the Shin version of Buddhist reform has never really diffused either beyond or within Japan, and so remained confined to a single organization and a single country's sociopolitical history. This fact, however, does not necessarily make Shin Buddhism any less Axial in its core orientation.

Such a comprehensive interpretation—which sees Shin as fully within the Buddhist tradition, but with certain similarities to the European Reformation because of its revision of authority, yet with its own developmental logic in the Buddhist/Japanese context—has long been hard to establish. According to the account by Yoshida already men-

tioned, it may be that the Japanese historian Kuroda Toshio came closer than anyone else to pinning down the problematic of civilizational similarity and difference with respect to Shin Buddhism. Kuroda is most famous for a revisionist history of medieval Japan, but Yoshida argues that his intellectual life was backed up by a particular frame of reference, namely that of the Shin school. Kuroda, though deeply influenced by Marxism, thought that Shin was (at least up through the time of Rennyo) a distinctively progressive and politically important version of Japanese Buddhism despite its limitations and its lack of full parallels with the West.

The special point at which Shin stimulated Kuroda's analysis was the problem of religion and domination. The historian's clearest statement was in his 1990 article, entitled "Bukkyō kakushin undō no rekishiteki seikaku: toku ni shūkyō no kindaika o megutte" 仏教革新運動の歴史的性格—とくに宗教の近代化をめぐって (Historical characteristics of Buddhist reformation movements: especially on the modernization of religion).[35] As summarized by Yoshida, Kuroda identified four general agendas debated in modern Japan as aspects of the "modernization of religion." These include: (1) the separation of politics and religion; (2) freedom of religion; (3) democratization of religious institutions; and (4) disappearance of magico-mythical characteristics in religion. Although Kuroda knew that these criteria were derived from European experience, he thought that historians of Japan could also make reference to them to illustrate aspects of the historical transformation of Buddhism in Japan. Yet in any case Japan was not identical with Europe.[36]

Kuroda found two principal "modern" elements in medieval Shin Buddhism: Shinran's original thought, which departed from the mythical and magical; and Rennyo's teaching, which separated the realms of

---

[35] "Bukkyō kakushin undō no rekishiteki seikaku: toku ni shūkyō no kindaika o megutte" 仏教革新運動の歴史的性格—とくに宗教の近代化をめぐって, in *Kuroda Toshio chosakushū* 黒田俊雄著作集, 8 vols. (Kyoto: Hōzōkan, 1994–95), 2:232–83.

[36] For example, Kuroda's periodization of the Japanese Buddhist history in which these modernization traits might emerge did not resemble a periodization of Christianity. Kuroda's outline had four episodes: (1) sixth to ninth centuries: early Buddhism introduced from continent; (2) tenth to sixteenth centuries: state/aristocracy-sponsored *kenmitsu* 顕密 Buddhism dominates, but reform movements also emerge; the most free and independent historical period for Buddhist traditions; (3) seventeenth to mid-twentieth centuries: Buddhism is captured by the Household system of the Tokugawa regime, and is subject to an absolutist state; (4) present time: Household Buddhism is in decline but all religions are in confusion generally. This Japanese pattern does not show the specific linear progression typically abstracted from European Christian history; modern and premodern aspects are mixed differently.

religion and politics. However, Kuroda thought that the Meiji period actually began a reversal of "modernization" in Japan, particularly in the Meiji government's intent to unify politics and religion. Kuroda found instead more of the "modern" and more of "religious freedom" in Japan's medieval period, when religious life was plural, complex and competitive.

For Kuroda, the fact that the Western-style analytical categories of "modernization" did not exist as such in the language of the Japanese past does not mean that such phenomena did not exist empirically to some extent. In particular, Yoshida suggests that the absence, in Japan, of Western-style freedom of religion, or separation of politics and religion, should not blind us to another concept, namely that of religious flexibility. Also, the fact that Buddhist Japan did not have the same kind of religious transcendence as Christianity did not mean that it was missing another kind of transcendence, namely the calming transcendence at the heart of Buddhist traditions.

One of Kuroda's key ideas should be of interest to scholars in the Chinese cultural sphere. Kuroda was crucially skeptical "if there were a universal law of history against which premodern Japanese society could be judged"; he was "not willing to accept the European model of modernization as definitive."[37] This suggests that despite points of roughly similar evolution, any religious reforms in Japan were essentially non-European and cannot be simplistically measured against Orientalist standards. The paradox of the old Protestantism analogy for Shin Buddhism, as recognized by Kuroda (and Ōmura and many other Japanese scholars), is that the idea was both misleading (because it tends to subordinate Japanese history to a universal, Christian-oriented scheme of civilizational development, under which Buddhism has failed to come up to the global standard) and yet also heuristically useful (because it helps identify distinctive features through which Shin might be seen as a reformist departure from past practice, even if the features were not exactly the same as in European Christian history).

[37] Yoshida, "Kurodo Toshio," 383.

6. AN EXPANDED COMPARATIVE RESEARCH PROGRAM FOR SHIN BUDDHISM

Unfortunately, despite the long history of the "Protestant" analogy, the latent stimulation of Kuroda's work, the churning of all the other paradigms, and frequent recognition of the coexistence in Shin Buddhism of something similar to and something different from Europe, so far scholars have not done a fully satisfying job of lining up the reform features of Shin and laying out a systematic comparison and contrast with European phenomena. A disproportionate emphasis has been placed on narrow themes such as comparisons of the structure and psychology of religious doctrinal language, or outside of doctrine, of the potential Weberian relation between religion and economics. The challenge is not a shortage of data. Indeed, detailed doctrinal and institutional material on the history of Shin Buddhism has long been extensively presented in the Japanese language, and information about the Shin tradition has been treated increasingly also in recent foreign-language studies.

Therefore, it is time to go forward with a better assessment of the overall civilizational impact of Shin Buddhism on Japan and in global comparative context. A proper assessment of that overall impact would take into account some features of the tradition which are not usually emphasized. First, Shin Buddhist history did not stop at the end of the *sengoku* period of the sixteenth century. It was later, when it was under the control of the Tokugawa regime in certain respects, that Shin Buddhism reached the height of its development and cultural influence. Second, throughout its history—and again despite the hegemony in Japan of other sociopolitical forces with other kinds of values—Shin tended to display certain social phenomena which are roughly comparable to certain phenomena of Christian reform civilization in Euro-American history. As suggested above, the best overall comparative term might be "reform," although obviously, as European scholars such as Patrick Collinson have noted, the term lacks much meaning even in European religious history without contextualization and clarification.[38]

---

[38] Patrick Collinson, *The Reformation: A History* (New York: Modern Library, 2003).

Below follows an abbreviated summary, meant merely to be suggestive, expanding the main points given earlier and stressing what may need to be included in an improved research paradigm.[39]

Differences To start with, under the crude category of "reform" in religious tradition, there are unquestionably major differences between anything that happened in Europe and anything that happened in Japan.

- Intellectually and psychologically the European Reformation was backed by the intellectual and spiritual heritages of Christianity. The Shin Buddhist movement was backed by the Indian and Chinese heritages of Buddhism. There are deep historical differences lying between them.
- Modern scholarship has shown that medieval Christianity was popularly thriving, and that the Reformation was imposed on that situation in a way that was not always popular.[40] In contrast, Shin Buddhism appeared to have been more unambiguously a movement which introduced a new positive religiosity to medieval Japan.
- In Europe, religious "reform" had been a pervasive catchword from early medieval period, creating a longstanding environment eventually inherited by Luther. The teachings of Shinran (and his own teacher, Hōnen 法然, 1133–1212) appeared to have been somewhat more innovative in the Japanese context.
- The European Reformation was a vastly complex phenomenon, ranging and varying widely over time, geography, national boundaries, teachers, schools of doctrine, and political transformations. In contrast, the Shin movement was (despite elements of substantial variation within its own Japanese context) comparatively simple and straightforward.
- The role played by Luther was far more antagonistic, public, and politicized than the roles played by Shinran or Rennyo.
- The European Reformation involved severe military conflict, again ranging widely over time and geography, frequently linked to conflicting religious affiliations per se. The Shin tradition was not linked

[39] The observations are based on current research in a wide variety of sources by the author of this article.

[40] See, e.g., Euan Cameron, *The European Reformation* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1991).

to conflict in the same way, despite its involvement and participation in the sixteenth-century feudal instability of Japan.

- In most of its manifestations (i.e., except for relatively minor aspects such as the Radical Reformation (Anabaptism, etc.) the European Reformation involved the intersection of church reform and the evolution of early modern European nation-states and nationalism. The principle of separation of church and state evolved slowly and haltingly. In contrast, the Shin movement remained relatively separate from hegemonic Japanese political regimes throughout most of its history, despite the special kind of supervision exercised by the Tokugawa-period government. (Of course, a massive exception was the period of modern nationalism between the Meiji Restoration in 1868 and the end of World War II in 1945.)
- After the conflicts unleashed by the Reformation were settled in the sixteenth century and European civilization was more or less partitioned, a cold war between Protestants and Catholics lasted until the twentieth century. In Japan, Shin's competitive relationship with conventional monastic Buddhism did not generate as much tension as that between the Protestants and Catholics in Europe.
- Europe's Protestant–Catholic competition was extended to the world colonization activities of European states from the sixteenth to twentieth centuries. Shin Buddhism was for a time involved in Japanese colonialism in Asia, but as noted only for a comparatively brief period between the Meiji period and the end of World War II.

Similarities Despite these major differences of context and evolution, there were some intelligible points of similarity or comparability in certain broad social features of the evolution of much of European Protestantism and Shin Buddhism, based on the fundamental issue of reform of authority in each of the traditions.

- Both kinds of reform thinking emerged against the background of a monastic/clerical tradition which had become problematic (for instance in terms of political power) but yet which was not simplistically decadent or corrupt.
- In both, reform was stimulated by intensely independent religious thinkers who were concerned with expanding religious seriousness on a broad, non-elite social level. Both tended to find meaning and authority in the reevaluation of texts (the Bible or the Pure Land Sūtras) which enabled the bypassing of regnant institutions. In both,

the revised religious doctrines tried to combine rigor and accessibility, aiming to rediscover and relocate the real meaning of tradition.

- In both, the reform consciousness can be considered "popular" only with careful definition of what "popular" might mean.
- The revision of meaning and authority in the respective traditions influenced a range of secondary but concrete phenomena which were guided by or associated with religious teaching. Thus:
- The position of women was somewhat revised. In the Reformation, the ideal female religious role moved from the nunnery to the married household. In Shin Buddhism, the discriminatory sense of lower possibilities for women to reach enlightenment was to some extent neutralized, and the purely male-dominated monastic institution was replaced by temples co-managed by married couples.
- In both, a strengthened positive relationship between religious teaching and entrepreneurial economic activity often emerged. In Europe, the study of this complex and controversial theme has revolved around the Weber thesis that certain Protestant teachings per se had the psychological effect of stimulating economic restlessness; also at work are alternate theories, such as the theory that social marginalization tended to encourage entrepreneurship. On a smaller scale, some such patterns might have existed in Japan among elements of Shin Buddhists, including especially the Ōmi *shonin* 近江商人 (historical merchant houses in what is now Shiga 滋賀 Prefecture).
- Social and psychological space was opened up between the reformed religion and folk religious life (which is this-worldly, magical, diffuse, etc.). In the Reformation, this usually took the form of attacks on folkish religion within medieval Christianity and Roman Catholicism. In Shin Buddhism, this eventually took the form of focusing on a relatively puristic Buddhist temple community and distancing from the normal surrounding matrix of Shinto practice.
- Both kinds of reform traditions were awash with words, conveyed in native vernacular languages (not scholastic or academic languages), promoted especially by preaching, and spread widely by the vehicles of reading and printing. The deep concern for finding meaning, authority and universal accessibility in religious texts thus supported interests in education (at least for basic literacy) and the wide dissemination of information, often as mentioned through cheap publishing.

- The search for rediscovered religious rigor, the suspicion of hegemonic institutions, and the aim to avoid religious conflict could support tendencies to view religion and state as separate. In Europe, this trend emerged slowly, to reach its greatest expression in Anabaptism and in the American model founded and developed from the eighteenth century. In Japan, after the Kamakura period, when Shin Buddhism formed, central governments supported Buddhist institutions without the strong Christian model of state–religion synthesis.
- The reform motives led to revisions in other forms of media and communication as well, especially music and visual arts, and architecture. The Reformation created a new tradition of music for community performance and various kinds of new church designs that directly reflected theories of communal participation according to various Protestant doctrines. Shin Buddhism utilized texts from Shinran and Rennyo for communal chanting and built temples in new layouts which gave the greatest share of the floor space to seating for ordinary members (montos) rather than to seating for monastics. In both, artistic representation was simplified. In Europe, this began with church iconoclasm and continued with many variations in the new church traditions. In Shin Buddhism, simplification grew from the focusing of the teaching on a limited selection of texts involving a single primary deity (Amida Buddha).
- However—and this is very important—neither in Europe nor in Japan did this original idea of "reform" necessarily imply modern "enlightenment" qualities such as political rebelliousness, institutional democracy, scientific rationalism per se, or contemporary modes of individualism.

A way to highlight the argument in conclusion is to address some assumptions appearing in Eisenstadt and Arnason above which with respect to Shin Buddhism are either wrong or debatable:

- The Shin Buddhists in fact did see themselves as part of a universalistic Buddhist civilization.
- They did not necessarily conform simplistically to existing hierarchical Japanese social organization.
- Quasi-familial organization (fictive familialism) did not necessarily weaken their search for social autonomy.

- They were not without politics, especially the politics of quasi-separation of church and state; they did not necessarily simplistically reinforce the existing political order.
- Their goals were clearly transcendental.
- The intellectual tradition was logocentric; it was not de-theologized or discursively weakened.
- Shin was not completely "swallowed up" by *kami* religion.
- It did not operate in a static world of timeless archaic pre-Buddhist Japanese values.
- Shin religious discourse used many mythic or non-discursive elements, but this is true of all religions.
- Shin teaching was a significant source of Japanese egalitarianism.
- Shin Buddhism displayed universalizing, missionary tendencies in the pre–World War II period.
- At its best, Shin displayed the typical qualities of a critical Buddhist mindedness: self-consciousness, radical questioning, reflection, search for liberation and transcendence, and openness to the world, which Jaspers identified as the common features of his Axial Age thinkers. In short not all of Japanese Buddhism was de-Axialized.

7. CONCLUSION: FROM CULTURAL NATIONALISM BACK TO AXIALITY

A conception that none of Japanese civilization has been Axial—especially before the twentieth century—should probably be seen as a product of modern Japanese cultural nationalism (ideology which occurs under the broad heading of *nihonjinron*), which has a record of significant effects on both Japanese and Western intellectual discourses. These sorts of views have a long modern history which has been analyzed by a number of scholars. Unfortunately, while cultural nationalism has been discarded in many fields of intellectual activity (e.g., economics or anthropology), it has shown an ability to hold out in certain kinds of intellectual studies (philosophy and religion) where the participants have a sturdier vested interest in a strong version of some distinct unitary Japanese Identity which can be set against some version of

a unitary Western Identity. However, if the obstacles posed by cultural nationalism can be bypassed, and the hint offered by Jaspers in 1949 can be taken up again, a better starting place exists for seeing how Shin Buddhism might contribute to evolving global Buddhism.

The Shin Buddhist part of Japanese life has certainly been located within the boundaries of Axial civilization. Displaying a reformist or "Protestant" character which has been historically associated with a variety of social phenomena comparable to some of those of Christian reform civilization in Euro-American history, Shin Buddhism injected an element which never dominated Japan but which nevertheless had substantial influence historically. In other words, premodern Japanese civilization contained a strong, though non-dominant, Axial factor along with the rest of its diverse factors. At the same time it was a developmentally different Axiality, which did not follow the particular teleology supposed to characterize Christian Axiality in Europe.

An appreciation of Shin allows a better view of Japanese civilization's comparability and uniqueness in global religious history. A question for the Chinese cultural sphere in particular: Can an increased awareness of the "old" Japanese reform tradition in Buddhism have any use in stimulating aspects of modern Chinese reform Buddhism?

Ching Feng, n.s., **7.1–2** (2006) 57–79

Establishing a Pure Land in This World: Xingyun's Model

JUE JI

In the past six decades, Xingyun 星雲 (1927–) has been promoting Humanistic Buddhism (*renjian fojiao* 人間佛教) throughout his Dharma-preaching career, in Taiwan and worldwide. In Ven. Manyi's 滿義 view, the master's unique way of propagating Buddhism, called "Xingyun's model" (*Xingyun moshi* 星雲模式), is characterized by its special Dharma-preaching language, a distinctive method of Dharma-propagation, its unique vow for the development of Buddhism, and its extraordinary goal of enlightenment.[1] Charles H. C. Kao defines "model" as "a set of methods, a process, an organization, or an assessment of situation on which the success or failure of an enterprise depends."[2] Foguangshan 佛光山 and the Buddha's Light International Association (Guoji foguanghui 國際佛光會) are institutions that have paradigmatically applied Xingyun's model, under the master's leadership.[3] Both

---

Jue Ji 覺繼 is associate director of the Centre for the Study of Humanistic Buddhism at The Chinese University of Hong Kong.

[1] Manyi fashi 滿義法師 (Master Manyi), *Xingyun moshi de renjian fojiao* 星雲模式的人間佛教 [Xingyun's model of humanistic Buddhism] (Taipei: Tianxia yuanjian, 2005), 20.

[2] Gao Xijun 高希均 (Charles H. C. Kao), "Taiwan de 'Xingyun qiji': renjian fojiao zai ningjing zhong quanqiu xingqi" 台灣的「星雲奇蹟」: 人間佛教在寧靜中全球興起 [The "miracle of Xingyun" in Taiwan: humanistic Buddhism flourishing peaceably worldwide], in Manyi fashi, *Xingyun moshi de renjian fojiao*, iv.

[3] Foguangshan (FGS) was established in Kaohsiung, Taiwan in 1967. The Buddha's

have taken "establishment of a pure land in this world" (*jianshe renjian jingtu* 建設人間淨土) as their goal. Based on the Buddha's teaching on suffering and its cessation, Xingyun's model provides intellectual motivation in actively involving oneself in "creating" a pure land in this world.

A recent study on the "Foguang Buddhist perspective" nevertheless voices doubts about the feasibility of Xingyun's model in that, says its author Stuart Chandler,

> such an optimistic model will resonate only so long as technological, social, and political progress continues. If people deem that the quality of their lives is taking a turn for the worse—if, for example, social and environmental problems in Taiwan continue to mount, as they have over the past decade, or the political situation deteriorates—Master Xingyun's assertions about the establishment of an ethical society in a life power era will ring hollow. Such a "healthy-minded" religion can speak only to those who feel secure and see promise in the future.[4]

Thus, in Chandler's view, Xingyun's model for the establishment of a pure land in this world would appear more and more unrealistic if such problems continue to be exacerbated in Taiwan.

In this paper, the idea of the pure land in Xingyun's model is discussed from three perspectives: "non-duality as transcendence," "*upāya* as methodology," and "co-existence as soteriology." From the perspective of non-duality, there exists neither tension between this world and the other world, nor strain between this life and the next. With the doctrine of *upāya*, traditional Buddhist practices are reinterpreted flexibly so as to adapt to different capacities of people in the contemporary society. Endowed with the consensus of coexistence, ultimate bliss is actualized through the understanding of the doctrine of dependent origination.

The contribution of this paper will lie in its in-depth discussion of the operation of Xingyun's model for the establishment of a pure land in this world. It will show that the model echoes the essence of the

---

Light International Association (BLIA) was established in Los Angeles, USA in 1992. Both FGS and BLIA are international organizations. The former mainly serves Buddhist monastics, and the latter mainly lay Buddhists.

[4] Stuart Chandler, *Establishing a Pure Land on Earth: The Foguang Buddhist Perspective on Modernization and Globalization* (Honolulu: University of Hawai'i Press, 2004), 62.

Buddha's teaching and presents an optimal paradigm for contemporary reinterpretation of Buddhist teachings, and that the model is equipped with both universal and ultimate soteriological functions. By way of doing that, this paper will also respond to Chandler's above noted comment on the "Foguang Buddhist perspective."

1. NON-DUALITY: REINTERPRETING THE PURE LAND

Xingyun agrees with other Pure Land advocates that sincerely reciting Amitābha's name can enable oneself to attain rebirth in the Sukhāvatī. But he stresses more on combining *nianfo* 念佛 (reciting the Buddha's name) with purification of one's mind and environment through compassionately involving oneself in improving this world. Chandler describes it as a "return to self-reliance," which "is not [a return] to the individual, isolated self"; rather it is "the community working as a whole toward universal prosperity and liberation"[5]—a "middle path between other-power and own-power." He calls this path "communal-power" (a term he has coined for this purpose).[6] In his view, Xingyun's "tripartite soteriological methodology" "equally balances other-power (reciting the name of Amitabha), own-power (purifying the mind), and communal-power (compassionate involvement in society)."[7] But Chandler so stresses "communal-power" that he seems to have underestimated the important roles the other two powers play, both in traditional Pure Land thought and in Xingyun's model of establishing the pure land in this world.

In establishing a pure land in this world, people cannot simply rely on other-power. They have to work it out by themselves both individually and in team work. In Chandler's own words,

> [Xingyun] feels that, by overemphasizing the supramundane, Buddhists have forgotten that enlightenment is to be found in this very world. One is liberated, not by attempting to forsake the world, but by learning to live properly within it. . . . This shift in emphasis from

[5] Ibid., 59.
[6] Ibid., 60. As Chandler says, "Master Xingyun never uses this wording himself."
[7] Ibid., 60.

> the supramundane to the mundane results in a corresponding shift from a reliance on other-power to reliance on own-power.[8]

At any rate, Xingyun does not forsake the other-power; nor does he denounce the supramundane world. Rather, he affirms the existence of other-power and the supramundane world by asserting a non-dual relationship both between own-power and other-power and between this world and the other world.

Chandler is skeptical about the actualization of the pure land in this world according to Xingyun's model, especially regarding the prospects of Xingyun's work in Taiwan. Chandler asserts, in the passage quoted above, "such an optimistic model will resonate only so long as technological, social, and political progress continues."[9] The following discussions on the Pure Land tradition and Xingyun's model, however, will show that Chandler's assertion about the model can hardly be justified as to the model's effectiveness in actualizing the teaching of the Buddha and the spirit of the Mahāyāna bodhisattva ideal.

1.1 Pure Land Intrinsically Exists in This Sahā World

1.1.1 Non-duality between Sahā World and Pure Land

Fujita Kōtatsu 藤田宏達 has given a brief sketch of the history of the term "Pure Land" (*jingtu* 淨土):[10]

> . . . the term "Pure Land" (*ching-t'u*) was first coined in China; no single Sanskrit equivalent has ever been found. "Ultimate Bliss" (*chi-lê*) was first used by Kumārajīva to translate "Sukhāvatī" into Chinese in the *Smaller* [*Sukhāvatīvyūha*] *Sutra* [i.e., the *Amitābha Sūtra*]. Prior to Kumārajīva, Sukhāvatī was transliterated into its approximate Chinese sound, *hsü-mo-t'i* or *hsü-k'e-mo-t'i*, or translated as *an-lê* (peaceful bliss) or *an-yang* (peaceful rest). . . . Following the time of Kumārajīva, both Ultimate Bliss and Peaceful Bliss are used to render Sukhāvatī into Chinese, but Ultimate Bliss becomes preferred after Hsüan-tsang popularized it during the T'ang Dynasty.

---

[8] Ibid., 59–60.

[9] Ibid., 62.

[10] The following information about the pure land is mainly excerpted from Fujita Kōtatsu, "Pure Land Buddhism in India," trans. Taitetsu Unno, in *The Pure Land Tradition: History and Development*, ed. James Foard, Michael Solomon and Richard K. Payne (Berkeley: Regents of the University of California, 1996), 20–21.

> East Asian Buddhists frequently use both Ultimate Bliss and Peaceful Bliss interchangeably, but such thinkers as T'an-luan (476–542) used Peaceful Bliss (with one exception) and Shinran (1173–1263) preferred Peaceful Bliss, Peaceful Rest, and Land of Immeasurable Light.
>
> *Sukha* is a word found in the early Buddhists texts from the very beginning; it refers to both worldly happiness and spiritual bliss realized in liberation and nirvana. Taking this precedent as a hint, the Mahāyāna Buddhist compilers of the Pure Land sutras must have used it to devise a new expression, *sukhāvatī*, to reveal the fullness and glories of supreme enlightenment.[11]

Expounding the Four Noble Truths, Buddha Gautama described this "fullness and glories of supreme enlightenment" as "*nirvāṇa*," which is the cessation of suffering. If there were no suffering, there would be no need for *nirvāṇa*. Likewise, if there were no Sahā world, there would be no need for a pure land, which is an ultimate goal of the Buddhist cultivation. With the passing away of the historical Buddha Gautama, it became difficult for the ordinary people to picture this elevated state of mind. So, Pure Land thought has presented an idealistic portrayal of a pure land that is concrete and comprehensible, in order to vividly illustrate this realm of spiritual bliss. Intrinsically this "pure land" embodies the Truth of the Cessation of Suffering and symbolizes both a realm where living beings have been purified of their blind passion, and a state in which living beings have been rid of the root of suffering.

1.1.2 Non-duality between Own-power and Other-power

According to Fujita, "when a Mahāyāna bodhisattva becomes a Buddha, this purification has the potential to create a Pure Land into which all beings can enter to participate in the enlightenment process."[12] The notion of the Mahāyāna bodhisattva is therefore rendered as "the enlightenment of self, as well as others, simultaneously and perfectly."[13] That is to say, the pure land exists right in this Sahā world. The perfect and simultaneous enlightenment of self and others eases the historical tension between own-power and other-power in the Pure

---

[11] Ibid., 21.
[12] Ibid., 24.
[13] Ibid.

Land tradition. Indeed, the pure land in Xingyun's model exhibits the non-dual relationship between own-power and other-power in the Mahāyāna bodhisattva ideal.

1.2 Pure Land: Transcending the Boundary of Space and Time

1.2.1 Non-duality between This World and Other World

According to the *Amitābha Sūtra*:

> At that time the Buddha told the elder Sariputra, "Passing from here through hundreds of thousands of millions of Buddhalands to the West, there is a world called Ultimate Bliss. In this land a Buddha called Amitābha right now teaches the Dharma.

The Pure Land of Ultimate Bliss is steadfastly rooted in Mahāyāna thought and is the "manifestation of supreme enlightenment" "realized by fulfilling the bodhisattva path."[14] Fujita states that the "pure land" is not different from "'the peaceful bliss of the nirvana realm' (*nirvāṇa-dhātusaukhya*). The magnificant, pictorial representation of the Pure Land gives definite shape and form to that which is beyond any shape or form."[15] Thus, although the Pure Land sūtras describe the pure land as being in the "West," it is actually "located in an incomprehensibly distant place, billions and billions of universes away."[16] Our common sensory organs are unable to conceptualize such a "distance" of space,[17] and it is the mind that "determines" the distance. Similarly, the specific direction to the "West" is in fact "beyond any specific direction. The formless and nameless absolute is revealed in all its brilliant manifestation which is abundantly real for the spiritually oriented."[18] Therefore, writes Fujita, Sukhāvatī "is the realm of spiritual bliss," i.e., *nirvāṇa*, "articulated in this-worldly imagery."[19] When the mind is purified, the pure land emerges right here and now. It is not the external

---

[14] Ibid., 25.
[15] Ibid.
[16] Ibid.
[17] Ibid.
[18] Ibid.
[19] Ibid.

environment, but rather the internal mental state, that makes the emergence of a pure land here and now possible.

1.2.2 Non-duality between This Life and Next Life

Followers of Pure Land Buddhism take rebirth in the pure land as their goal, as it a guarantee of the realization of supreme enlightenment, the attainment of Buddhahood. Fujita further points out that,

> According to the Sanskrit text, the aspiration for birth in the Pure Land is none other than "to awaken the thought of unexcelled, supreme enlightenment," and birth itself means to be counted among "those who will not retrogress from unexcelled, supreme enlightenment."[20]

Based on early Pure Land thought, Fujita illustrates that such a rebirth is in fact post-mortem, i.e., in a future life. Just as the pure land transcends the spatial dimensions, such a postponement to the future also represents its transcendence of temporality. Thus, the religious implications of rebirth in the pure land should be understood as the "accomplishment of buddhahood transcending samsaric existence, bound by time and space."[21] That is, "establishing a pure land in this world" should not be confined by the worldly concept of time and space. The "birth" in a pure land is determined by the cultivation of the mind, by which this Sahā world is transformed into a pure land here and now.

1.3 Faith in the Transformation of Mind

And it takes "faith" to accomplish such a transformation. According to the Pure Land tradition, the birth in the pure land requires a central practice called "mindfulness of the Buddha" (*buddhānusmṛti* 念佛), which is based on faith. From the Sanskrit text, we found that in the early Pure Land tradition, faith reflects traits relating inherently to meditative practice and cultivation of wisdom. For example, in the Sanskrit text there are three terms most commonly used to denote the concept of faith: (a) *śraddhā* (*xin* 信)—placing one's trust in something or

---

[20] Ibid., 26.
[21] Ibid.

someone; (b) *prasāda* (*jingxin* 淨信)—"pure and clear faith," implying a quiet satisfaction and joy in contrast to the zealous adoration and *bhakti*, the fervent, devotional faith in Hinduism; (c) *adhimukti* (*xinjie* 信解)—"inclined conviction" towards an object of faith, with emphasis on the cognitive function of perceiving reality as it is.[22] Fujita points out that both the Pure Land sūtras and the Pāli canon use these three terms, yet they avoid *bhakti*, which was known in early Buddhism but was never fully accepted by early Buddhists; and he speculates that it shows "the high degree of unity regarding faith in early Pure Land and early Buddhism."[23]

However, this does not mean that the Pure Land tradition and early Buddhism view faith exactly the same way. Fujita elaborates on some obvious differences between them and points out that the Pure Land neglects the aspect of faith in relation to wisdom, which is stressed in early Buddhism; yet Pure Land thought has attributed a new role to faith: it can lead the faithful to birth in the pure land. Such a notion of faith is not found in the Pāli canon.[24] Fujita shows the evolution of Pure Land thought from the *Meditation Sūtra* (*Guan wuliangshou jing* 觀無量壽經 or *Guan wuliangshoufo jing* 觀無量壽佛經), which teaches (a) three kinds of beneficial acts leading to rebirth in the pure land; (b) outlines thirteen methods of contemplation; and (c) describes nine modes of religious practice. In Fujita's view, (a) "the three beneficial acts seem to have evolved from the three acts of generosity, observing precepts, and cultivating meditation that were taught in early Buddhism"; (b) "the methods of contemplation were inherited from the meditative practice of visualizing the Buddha found in the *Pratyutpannasamādhi-sūtra* [*Panzhou sanmei jing* 般舟三昧經]"; (c) the nine modes of religious practices "are regarded as elaborations on the three classes of beings found in the *Larger Sūtra* [*Larger Sukhāvatīvyūha* or *Wuliangshou jing* 無量壽經]."[25] From the above discussion, we may conclude that moral discipline, mental concentration, and wisdom are inherited in the cultivation of faith which leads to the birth in the "pure land." To obtain such a "birth," one has to cultivate one's body, speech, and mind; the cultivation of the mind, however, plays the most significant role.

---

[22] Ibid., 29–31.
[23] Ibid., 31.
[24] Ibid.
[25] Ibid., 32.

2. *UPĀYA*: THE METHODOLOGY

Upāya, or skillful means, is a unique characteristic in Mahāyāna Buddhism. It applies to the Buddhist practice in body, speech, and mind. It is *upāya* which makes the establishment of a pure land in this world possible. In this section, we will discuss the methodology that Xingyun's model adopts to cultivate the "birth" to a pure land in this world.

2.1 Upāya: *Reinterpreting Buddhism for Buddhist Reform*

Xingyun publicly admits that his motif of promoting *renjian fojiao* or Humanistic Buddhism is initially inspired by Taixu 太虛 (1889–1947), who was generally regarded as the most influential revolutionary and leading Buddhist monk during the Republican era (1911–49). However, in describing the same concept, Taixu preferred adopting the term "*rensheng fojiao*" 人生佛教 instead of "*renjian fojiao*." He gave reasons for such preference. Over the past several hundred years, Chinese Buddhism had suffered a great decline, and in great proportion this decline was due to an overemphasis on funerary and other rites devoted to transferring merit for the benefit of the deceased. To rectify this misemphasis, Taixu adopted the term "*rensheng fojiao*" to remind people that the living (*rensheng*) are in the best position to cultivate both merit and wisdom with which to attain enlightenment. Buddhists should in his view make good use of this life for cultivation, not only for themselves, but also for others.[26]

2.2 Upāya: *Modernizing Buddhism by Non-dogmatism*

Xingyun and other leading proponents of Humanistic Buddhism in Taiwan have tried to steer people's attention from the overemphasis on other realms and future lifetimes to present existence in this human world. They remind people that Gautama Buddha was neither a spirit nor a god, but a person who was born in this world, cultivating himself

[26] Don A. Pittman, *Toward a Modern Chinese Buddhism: Taixu's Reforms* (Honolulu: University of Hawai'i Press, 2001), 169–81.

in this world and attaining enlightenment in this world. And thereupon they encourage Buddhists to follow the footsteps of the Buddha, that is, to tread the middle path, neither indulging themselves in the sensory pleasures nor dogmatically insisting on strict asceticism.

Treading the middle path implies possibilities of adjusting Buddhist practices in the modern society. For example, Foguangshan monks and nuns have to learn computer and Internet skills to communicate with the world outside the temple. Though the vinaya rules do not mention the use of modern hi-tech facilities, the sangha order need not be isolated from the hi-tech modern society by dogmatically and stubbornly following the rules set by the Buddha. The Internet world, like the Buddhist Indra's net, weaves people worldwide into one integrated network and makes the world a real global village. But some conservative Buddhists regard the access to the Internet as succumbing to lax practice under weak excuses. The reinterpretation of doctrinal teaching and the readjustment of the vinaya rules are oftentimes denounced as corrupting Buddhist monastic ethics. But with the doctrine of *upāya*, Xingyun's model can be seen as following the footsteps of the Buddha, upholding the essence of the Buddha's teaching on the one hand, and skillfully modernizing the Buddhist practice in the contemporary world on the other. "Establishing a pure land in this world" is a skillful transformation of the traditional Pure Land teaching.

2.3 Upāya: *Re-evaluating "Humanness" in Attaining Buddhahood*

To affirm the value of the pure land in this world, advocates of Humanistic Buddhism emphasize the importance of the perfection of humanness. Thus to tread on the footsteps of the Buddha is equated with cultivating oneself by perfecting "humanness." Taixu praised such cultivation by saying that "Relying on the Buddha, perfection lies in human character; 'humanness' perfected is Buddhahood attained. This is called true reality." This expression is often quoted by Xingyun, too. "Humanness" is, of course, to be perfected by living human beings in this human world. This-worldly pragmatism that serves as the focal point of Humanistic Buddhism has affected Xingyun's attitude toward the interpretation of Chan and Pure Land practice.

Xingyun considers "active Chan" (*dong zhong chan* 動中禪) as the best form of meditation practice. He emphasizes that Chan must be integrated into everyday life; formal sitting is worthless unless one is able to experience "a taste of Chan in daily life." So at Foguangshan,

industriousness is upheld as an essential part of religious practice. Xingyun claims that "industriousness is nutrition" (*mang jiushi yingyang* 忙就是營養).[27] He says that "industriousness is to do the good, to benefit others, to establish friendship with others, and to accumulate merits. Industriousness *is* the truth of Dharma."[28] This mentality applies to his teaching of Pure Land practice.

2.4 Upāya: *Purifying the Mind and Transforming the World*

Like the other two leading advocates of Humanistic Buddhism, Taixu and Yinshun 印順, Xingyun advocates "establishing a pure land in the human realm" (*jianshe renjian jingtu*), which serves as a central motto for the Foguang community. To advocate the superior quality of the pure land in this human world, Xingyun enumerates both the merits and demerits of pure lands such as Sukhāvatī, the Vaidurya Pure Land, and the inner court of Tuṣita (Tushita) Heaven. Those who are reborn in such pure lands will not confront any obstacles to their spiritual cultivation and will suffer no deprivation or distractions; the beautiful and peaceful environments they live in provide an ideal setting for learning the dharma. However, none of these pure lands can perfectly serve the soteriological needs for all beings. Each pure land is relatively advantageous for people of certain capacities who journey on their particular paths to liberation. Hereunder, we will discuss the merits and demerits of the Tuṣita pure land and the Sukhāvatī pure land. Compared to these, the pure land in Xingyun's model is proposed as an optimal and realistic choice in a global village of the Internet era.

2.4.1 Demerits of the Traditional Pure Lands

The inner court of Tuṣita Heaven (*Doushuai neiyuan* 兜率內院) has the advantage of relative ease of access and is available to any Buddhists, yet it is flawed in that it lacks the opportunity for "one-life completion"; that is to say, anyone who follows basic Buddhist practices and who has made a vow to be reborn under Maitreya's guidance will attain rebirth in the inner court even if he or she has yet to cultivate a

---

[27] Xingyun dashi 星雲大師 (Master Xingyun), "Mang jiushi yingyang" 忙就是營養, in *Xin'gan qingyuan* 心甘情願 (Sanchong City, Taipei County: Foguang wenhua shiye, 1999), 117.

[28] Ibid., 122.

stable mind that is no longer under the sway of various emotions. As a resident of a heaven, however, he or she will still be within the cycle of rebirth and thus must retrogress to this world before attaining final salvation. Those who are reborn in Sukhāvatī need not worry about having to go through the trials and ordeals of yet another birth in the *saṃsāra*. But rebirth in Sukhāvatī depends on mindfully reciting Amitābha's name and being untainted by any conflicting desires. This is too difficult for people of ordinary capacities to attain salvation.

2.4.2 The Pure Land of Xingyun's Model

Then, what about the pure land in this world? Xingyun does not want people to accept their current conditions passively while awaiting rebirth. Rather, he encourages them to establish a pure land in the human realm, believing that the optimal spiritual cultivation relies on purifying both the external environment and internal intention. He says: "Today there are many Buddhists who wish to be reborn in the Sukhāvatī Pure Land, but I think that it is not as good as putting one's energies to changing today's world into a Buddhist pure land."[29] Is there really a Sukhāvatī Pure Land? Xingyun asserts its existence and that it certainly serves as a perfect model for our activities. Yet, since we live in this world now, so he says, this is where we should direct our energies. And it is the mind that makes the establishment of a pure land in this world possible.

According to Xingyun, whether a person finds himself or herself in a pure land ultimately depends on the degree of that person's own inner purity of intention and thought. His favorite quote from the *Sūtra of the Teaching of Vimalakīrti* (*Weimojie suo shuo jing* 維摩詰所說經) proves this viewpoint: "Where the mind is pure, the land is pure" (*xin jing ze guotu jing* 心淨則國土淨).[30] So, even our Sahā world can become a serene pure land so long as the mind is tranquil. Tranquillity of mind will actively transform and purify the surroundings. There is no need to wait for one's rebirth to experience the bliss of a pure land. One only needs to fully realize the ultimate purity of mind, extending that to all reality. To actualize the pure land according to Xingyun's model, that is, to "establish a pure land in this world," people must follow the Ma-

---

[29] Shi Xingyun 釋星雲, ed., *Fojiao* 佛教 [Anthology of Buddhism], Vol. 10 (Kaohsiung: Foguang chubanshe, 1995), 413.

[30] Shi Xingyun, *Xingyun dashi jiangyan ji* 星雲大師講演集 [Collection of Master Xingyun's lectures] (Kaohsiung: Foguang chubanshe, 1983), 2:512.

hāyāna bodhisattva ideal by transforming and purifying both their own minds and others' minds. And more than that, the Mahāyāna bodhisattva ideal motivates people to transform and purify the world as well.

2.5 A Pure Land Based on the Mahāyāna Bodhisattva Ideal

The Pure Land sūtras are addressed to the group of people to whom other Mahāyāna sūtras are addressed; namely, "sons of good families" and "daughters of good families," including both monastics and laity. This group of people is frequently referred to as the *bodhisattva-gaṇa*, a group (*gaṇa*; *zhong* 眾) significantly different from the sangha of monastic, sectarian Buddhism. These bodhisattvas devote themselves to the improvement of the community they lived in, taking care of the welfare of other beings, bettering the environment of the shared space, as recorded in the Mahāyāna sūtras. Amitābha Buddha himself emerges from the Mahāyāna bodhisattva ideal. A bodhisattva dedicates himself to attaining enlightenment, not only for himself, but also for all beings, thus manifesting the highest wisdom and compassion. When the bodhisattva's goal is fulfilled, he accomplishes the dual goal of enlightenment for oneself and enlightenment for all beings, one of the common descriptions of what constitutes a Buddha. Consequently, as long as there are many bodhisattvas working to fulfill their vows in this world, there will be innumerable buddhas appearing in countless other worlds. In Humanistic Buddhism, those who initiate the bodhisattva vow are Buddhas-to-be of the "pure land in this world." Like Amitābha Buddha, who establishes his Ultimate Bliss Pure Land with great vows, each follower of Humanistic Buddhism initiates his vow to "establish" a pure land for himself and for others.

3. CO-EXISTENCE: UNIVERSAL AND ULTIMATE SOTERIOLOGY

In the global village today, people are more closely interrelated than before. Xingyun's model aims to transform the human mind as well as the human world through the application of the Buddha's teaching and the implementation of the Mahāyāna bodhisattva ideal. With a recent speech of Xingyun entitled "Buddhist views on global issues," we shall see how he "establishes" a pure land in this world with the guidelines taught by the Buddha.

Xingyun sees the current world as one entity inside which all beings coexist interdependently. Based on the very fundamental teaching of the Buddha, Xingyun expresses his views on current global issues such as world peace, environmental and ecological preservation, racial barriers, and so on. These issues are not confined to certain regions, ethnic groups, religions, and cultures. The understanding of the doctrine of dependent origination leads to the cultivation of equality, the respect for the right to live, and compassion for all beings. We will discuss the universal soteriology of Xingyun's model through his views on global issues, and the ultimate soteriology of the model through his lecture on the "Buddha Light Pure Land" (*Foguang jingtu* 佛光淨土).

3.1 Universal Soteriology: A Vision on Global Issues

In his speech to the Dharma Drum Mountain World Religious Leaders Colloquium, which was held in Taipei on October 20, 2005, Xingyun expressed his views on some global issues.[31] As such issues reflect the conditions of the world in which we live, his viewpoints as to the global problems could be solved can be regarded as reflecting the universal soteriology of Xingyun's model.

(a) World Peace Derives from the Concept of Equality[32]

Xingyun suggests the concept of equality be adopted to resolve the conflicts in the human world. He says:

> Equality is a fundamental concept in Buddhism. When the Buddha established the Sangha community, he introduced the Six Points of Reverent Harmony to make a perfect demonstration of democracy and equality achieved through a set of common ideas, laws, language, conducts and thoughts. Another example of equality is demonstrated by the *Saṃyuktāgama* [*Za ahan jing* 雜阿含經], where it tells us not to underestimate the power of the Four Small Things. The Buddhist theory on equality between the relative and the absolute, between noumenon and phenomenon, between self and others, between foes and family, and between the Buddha and the ordinary are the ultimate concepts of equality. Only equality can enable every living being to

[31] Xingyun, "How Buddhism Views Global Issues?", trans. Miao Guang, *Pumen xuebao* 普門學報 = *Universal Gate Buddhist Journal*, no. 32 (March 2006): 1–7.

[32] Ibid., 2.

> be respected, and only peace can deliver a sense of glory to everybody's heart. In order to achieve world peace, people are required to develop a mind of equality first. Not only should nations treat each other equally, races should also do the same. The greater must respect the smaller, the strong must respect the weak, and the superiors must respect their inferiors. Only with the concept of equality and respect for all can a peaceful world be found.

Xingyun points out that "equality and peace are two sides of the same coin." He attributes all chaotic phenomena to inequality. According to his analysis, the reason for "the weak falling prey to the strong in politics, uneven distribution of wealth, religious and racial conflicts, gender and geographical prejudice" is the absence of the consensus of coexistence. Yet Xingyun is not seeking "superficial equality," that is, treating each individual in the same way; instead, he seeks "true equality," which can be achieved by putting oneself in another's shoes. He says: "When seeing others suffer, we need to consider their needs and problems, and think from their point of view. . . . Only by doing so will equality be achieved between oneself and others." Here we see the difference between superficial equality and true equality: the latter goes deeper in that it is achieved by sympathetic understanding of others, so that one may be able to treat others as we would do to ourselves. For sure, true equality and true peace cannot be achieved merely through individual efforts. The Mahāyāna bodhisattva ideal and its vow and practice are essential to applying the Buddhist compassion to pacify this chaotic world, where many people live under the shadows of wars, racial conflicts, and all sorts of prejudices. It is very clear that the concept of true equality needs to be cultivated to bridge the gap between this Sahā world and the pure land.

For Xingyun, true equality applies not only to living beings, but also to the environment we live in. Thus, it entails a very important concept of "respect for the right to live."

(b) Environmental and Ecological Preservation Derives from Respect for the Right to Live[33]

Xingyun asserts that history can be divided into three eras; he calls the first "the theocratic era" (*shenquan shidai* 神權時代), the second "the autocratic era" (*junquan shidai* 君權時代) and the third "the de-

[33] Ibid., 3.

mocratic era" (*minquan shidai* 民權時代). Then, from the third arises the present era, "the era of the right to live" (*shengquan shidai* 生權時代).[34] He explains the emergence of this era:

> Buddhism is a religion that is fully aware of the need for environmental protection. Not only does it urge people to protect human lives, it also encourages protection for nature, because every being on earth possesses the Buddha nature. For this reason, Buddhism advocates no killing out of respect and compassion for other beings, because all living beings are entitled to the right to live.

Quoting Chinese Buddhist popular sayings, Xingyun further elaborates on the need to respect and care for life:

> My flesh and sentient beings' flesh, although different in name and form, are the same nature in nature. Animals suffer pain and agony while we enjoy their sweet and tender flesh. There is no need for Yama to judge; we ourselves can imagine what the consequences shall be.[35]
>
> Who says the lives of this flock of birds are insignificant? They are also flesh and blood. Please do not aim your shots at the birds resting atop those branches, because their sucklings are awaiting their mother's return to their nest.[36]

Examples from sūtras are also provided to demonstrate how Buddhism protects life:

> The Six Parmitas Sūtra also tells the story of the Buddha as a deer in one of his previous lives where he volunteered his own life to prolong the life of a pregnant deer. Such great act of sacrifice touched the king's heart and turned him from a glutton for venison into a protector of animals.[37]

Environmental and ecological preservation is an urgent issue that requires the world's immediate attention. Many animals have come to the brink of extinction due to the relentless and endless human desires.

---

[34] Shi Xingyun, *Xingyun dashi jiangyan ji*, 2:514–18.
[35] Xingyun, "How Buddhism Views Global Issues?", 4.
[36] Ibid.
[37] Ibid.

Serious threats are posed to the survival of human beings, such as neglect for soil conservation, deforestation, excessive mining of sandstone, excessive extraction of groundwater, burning of toxic waste, improper disposal of industrial wastes, which have caused erosion, landslides, pollution of air and water, as well as abnormal natural phenomena such as global warming and sandstorms. Xingyun remarks, on the basis of scientific research, that "if the current resource consumption and population growth rate of the human race remain unchanged, in fifty year's time two earths' resources will be required to satisfy their needs."[38] Obviously there will be nowhere else and no chance for the human race to survive if we do not care for the earth.

For Xingyun, environmental protection should start from respecting life. The pure land in this world includes not only human beings and animals. Trees, flowers, grass, and even mountains and rivers are also parts of the pure land vision. Humanistic Buddhism, although it appears to focus on the human realm, also cares for other forms of lives, including the environment people live in, the time that structures human lives, the material goods people consume, and so on. Wasting any of these is, in Xingyun's contention, a kind of killing. To respect the right to live, it is important to prevent killing and to protect life. With this being done, the environment and the ecology of the earth can be preserved in good condition.

The world which Xingyun faces today is a Sahā world, rather than a bright, secure, and stable pure land. The world that he wants to transform is in itself definitely not a pure land of any kind. But the teaching of the Buddha is meant to offer people ways to solve the problems and defilements in life. Soteriologically speaking, Xingyun is awakening people to transform and purify their bodies, speech, and minds. He urges them to protect the world by observing the precept of no-killing and respecting the right of all beings to live. But people are prone to discriminate and create racial barriers at the expense of the right to live, causing bloodshed of all kinds in many regions of the world.

(c) The Elimination of Racial Barriers Derives from Compassion[39]

To eliminate racial barriers, Xingyun proposes the cultivation of compassion:

---

[38] Ibid.
[39] Ibid.

> The *Nirvana Sūtra* provides a solution to racial conflict by teaching us to extinguish greed with loving kindness, and anger with compassion. Buddhism advocates compassion by encouraging us not only to offer unconditional loving kindness so as to deliver sentient beings, but also to show impartial compassion so as to relieve them from suffering and misfortunes.[40]

> . . . "Forget old grudges and do not hate evil ones." "The salinity of all waters that flow into the ocean will become balanced, and all monastic in the world share the Śākya surname." All of the above ideas represent the Buddhist concept of peace and equality as well as transcendence of racial prejudice.[41]

For as long as the human race has existed, racial conflict has been around. It has become a frequent cause of war between countries; it has also caused disunity and even civil wars within a nation. Racial conflict, according to Xingyun, is "sometimes caused by geographical factors, and sometimes difference of language, culture or even skin color. Dissimilarity can exist even within a single culture or race, let alone between different races or groups."[42] Xingyun proposes "unconditional loving kindness" and "impartial compassion" as antidotes to racial barriers. Behind these are the Mahāyāna bodhisattva ideal of treating others as one would do to oneself. This expresses the meaning of Xingyun's idea of "true equality," which comes from putting oneself in another's shoes.

In this way true equality is based on the cultivation of compassion, which in turn is based on the understanding of the Buddhist teaching of dependent origination.

(d) A Consensus on Coexistence Derives from the Propagation of Dependent Origination[43]

Xingyun explains the law of dependent origination:

> Condition is the most wonderful thing in the world, because anything can arise when a set of conditions are gathered together. The addition of virtuous conditions can allow unfavorable factors to turn good.

---

[40] Ibid., 5.
[41] Ibid.
[42] Ibid.
[43] Ibid., 6.

> Buddhism calls this an accumulation and harmonization of causes and conditions, and sees this as the reason why people help each other in life. When people search for the existence of fate, they need to realize that fate itself is in fact a product of causes and conditions. The causes you create and the connections you make will determine the kind of effect that results. The nature of this effect will then determine the outcome of your fate. For this reason, it is important that we develop broad and good affinities with other people. For the good causes and conditions we are given, we can also offer the same to others as a way to repay the kindness bestowed onto us. By providing good conditions for one another, we create the right condition for oneness and coexistence.[44]

This world is composed of a great variety of ethnic groups. Xingyun proposes a guideline based on the understanding of dependent origination, upholding coexistence with true equality, respect for the right to live, and compassion. In an ever more intimately interlinked Internet world today, such a consensus of coexistence is essential to establish a pure land. This vision is further elaborated in Xingyun's lecture on the "Buddha Light Pure Land," which is the ultimate goal of Humanistic Buddhism, and also the ultimate actualization of Xingyun's model.

3.2 Ultimate Soteriology: The "Buddha Light Pure Land" as the Perfection of Humanness

3.2.1 The "Three Good Practices" Movement

In the past forty years, Xingyun has set up a paradigm at Foguangshan, known as the "Buddha Light Pure Land." It is a pure land for both the living and the dead—with the Fo Guang Senior Citizens Home housing the elder, the Da Ci Children's Home nurturing the orphanage and young children; and the Fo Guang United Clinic and the Longevity Memorial Park taking care of people throughout their life-long process of birth, aging, sickness, and death. Also there is the Fo Guang Shan Benefactors Committee to glorify benefactors' contribution to Buddhism in this present life, instead of waiting for the benefit until the next life. These are some of the achievements of Foguangshan in establishing a pure land in this world. Behind what Foguangshan has done in culture, education, charity, and spiritual cultivation is the guiding prin-

---

[44] Ibid.

ciple of attaining ultimate salvation, called the "Buddha Light Pure Land." This guiding principle is advocated by Xingyun through the Three Good Practices, namely, to speak good words, to do good deeds, and to nurture good heart.

3.2.2 The Path Leading to the "Buddha Light Pure Land"

Xingyun's model promotes the Three Good Practices, encouraging everybody to purify the human mind, which is the essence of the Buddha's teaching. The purification of the human mind will then evolve into the purification of the society and the world, which responds to Xingyun's favorite quote from the *Sūtra of the Teaching of Vimalakīrti*: "Where the mind is pure, the land is pure." The Three Good Practices are in fact a modern interpretation of the Noble Eightfold Path, which is the cultivation of moral discipline, mental concentration, and wisdom. The "path" that Xingyun's model treads on is one that leads to the "Buddha Light Pure Land," a pure land which is to be accomplished in our Sahā world.

We need world peace because the world is in turmoil and people do not treat one another equally. Our earth is ecologically and environmentally endangered because people do not respect life but are committing all kinds of "killing." As our world becomes like a global village, more conflicts among different ethnic groups will arise. To live peacefully in this world, understanding the law of dependent origination would help us to realize the interdependence of all beings and to respect life of one another accordingly. The teaching of Buddhism is to solve human problems arising from, among other things, human beings themselves as well as the environment they live in.

3.2.3 Characteristics of the "Buddha Light Pure Land"

The "Buddha Light Pure Land" is the accomplishment of the Humanistic Pure Land or the *Renjian jingtu* 人間淨土. The Buddha's light shines all over the human world, making it full of compassion, reason, wisdom, and mutual respect. This is what we call "pure land."[45] Characteristics of the "Buddha Light Pure Land" are:[46]

---

[45] Manyi fashi, *Xingyun moshi de renjian fojiao*, 401.

[46] Ibid., 401–4. The following description is a brief summary of these characteristics

(a) The Perfection of "Humanness"

In the "Buddha Light Pure Land," there are no beings of the three evil realms; all beings are rid of greed, hatred, and ignorance. The establishment of the "pure land" starts from the purification of the mind. When the mind is purified, the land is purified. So there is no doubt, no jealousy, no bully, no insult, no lie, no cheating, no fighting, no struggling, and no defilement in human relationship. All people lead a happy and peaceful life; all needs are satisfied. It is the perfection of "humanness," that is, the attainment of "Buddhahood."

(b) An Ultimate Buddhist Land

It is a "Buddhist world" where every one takes refuge in the triple gem, observes the Five Precepts, understands the law of cause and effect, and establishes good affinities with one another. It is a "benign and beautiful world" where people see beautiful things, hear pleasing sounds, say kind words, and behave justifiable deeds. All people are showered in the breeze-like warmth, all families are bathed in the compassionate light of the Dharma, all days are good days, and all places are places of wisdom.

(c) The Synthesis and Coexistence of the Five Vehicles

The "Buddha Light Pure Land" synthesizes the Five Vehicles, which are human beings, heavenly beings, sravakas, pacceka buddhas, and bodhisattvas. Each Vehicle enjoys a pure land of its own. Confucianism, likened to the "human vehicle," teaches cultivation of the individual, management of the household, statecraft, and pacification of the world. Christianity, likened to the "heavenly vehicle," teaches on the entrance to heaven after death. Daoism, likened to "sravaka and pacceka-buddha vehicles," teaches the return to the reality, purity and inactivity, the state of being self-willed and free. Humanistic Buddhism, likened to the "bodhisattva vehicle," stresses on the pure land here-and-now, is committed to solving various problems of the human realm, and advocates devotion to mundane affairs with a supramundane mind. In other words, the "Buddha Light Pure Land" embraces the capacities

---

defined by Xingyun.

of all the five Vehicles, which coexist harmoniously in the process of attaining enlightenment.

(d) The Optimal Option of All Pure Lands

In the sūtras, there are many pure lands endowed with unique characteristics: (a) The "Flower Garland Pure Land" (*Huazang jingtu* 華藏淨土) views the world from the perspective of the Buddha, which is inconceivable for the ordinary beings. (b) The "Medicine Buddha Lazurite Pure Land" (*Yaoshi liuli jingtu* 藥師琉璃淨土) is good, but the most technologically advanced countries have already reached it. (c) The rebirth in the "Ultimate Bliss Pure Land" (*Jile jingtu* 極樂淨土) requires the mindfulness in recitation of the Buddha's name, which is too difficult. (d) Even though the "Maitreya Tuṣita Pure Land" (*Mituo jingtu* 彌陀淨土) is comparatively simple and easy to attain, it requires rebirth in the human realm in the future. (e) The "Mind-only Pure Land" (*Weixin jingtu* 唯心淨土) claims that the three worlds are reflected by the mind, that all dharmas are nothing more than the manifestation of the consciousness, and that the practitioner will easily fall into superficial lip services. (f) Although the "Vimalakīrti Pure Land" (*Weimo jingtu* 維摩淨土) is a non-dual humanistic pure land, without a profound understanding it would easily be regarded as a form of lay Buddhism. (g) Lastly, the "Buddha Light Pure Land" subsumes the essence and merits of all these traditional Buddhist pure lands and is a pure land that can be applied to the human world; thus, it is the optimal option among all pure lands.

4. CONCLUSION

We have discussed the theme of establishing a pure land in this world from the perspectives of non-duality as transcendence, *upāya* as methodology, and co-existence as soteriology, and we have found that the optimal choice is to take a "birth" right in this world and in this life. This pure land is applicable in all places and at all times. In this pure land, there is no discrimination on the grounds of our capacities, genders, ethnic groups, cultures, and so on. Even though this world is a Sahā world, full of distress and turmoil, we can purify our minds and change it for the better through *upāya* and Mahāyāna bodhisattva vows.

In this technologically advanced era, such a pure land is not an illusion, but a pragmatic, down-to-earth reality for people who bear the consensus of coexistence.

Part II

Christian Interpretations of the Kingdom of God

Ching Feng, n.s., **7.1–2** (2006) 83–92

The Entrance and Inheritance of the Kingdom of God in the Christian Religion

ERIC K. C. WONG

1. INTRODUCTION

The terms "Kingdom of God" and "Pure Land" denote two symbols that belong to Christianity and Buddhism respectively. They signify imaginary situations of ultimate value and destination for human beings, which are understood on the basis of our living, human world.

The symbol of the "Kingdom of God" combines two ideas, a kingdom and God. A kingdom is a concrete entity on earth that belongs to a king who rules over a territory with its inhabitants. God, who has supreme authority in heaven and on earth, is an object of the Christian religion. The "Kingdom of God" is a religious belief whose boundaries extend from conceptual thinking to a concrete expectation. With this expectation, Christians hope for its concrete manifestation on earth when God will intervene in our human history.

The symbol of the "Pure Land" also combines two ideas, purity and land. Land is again a concrete entity: people live on it. The adjective "pure" describes things that stand in contrast to impure or unclean things. So, the "Pure Land" signifies a place different from our existing and contaminated land. It is a place for which Buddhists hope. With its

---

Eric K. C. WONG (HUANG Genchun 黃根春) is professor in the Divinity School of Chung Chi College, The Chinese University of Hong Kong.

atheism, Buddhism does not think of the help from the divine other such as the Christian God in order to acquire the "Pure Land." Rather, Buddhists should do so by themselves.

Both the "Kingdom of God" and the "Pure Land" are expressions of the belief of the followers of Christianity and Buddhism respectively that they can achieve their ultimate expectations of life. In the following, I will concentrate on the concept of the kingdom of God in Christianity, and articulate its characteristics, especially as it appears in the New Testament.

2. KINGDOM OF GOD

The term "kingdom of God" is deeply rooted in the Old Testament, or the Jewish Bible; it is at the same time one of the three central themes of Jesus' teaching.[1] According to a common consensus among scholars of the historical Jesus, the theme of the kingdom of God belongs to the teaching of the historical Jesus. In the New Testament, the term occurs mainly in the Synoptic Gospels (the first three Gospels according to Matthew, Mark and Luke). The term "kingdom of heavens," which appears only in the Gospel of Matthew probably under Jewish influence, is synonymous to "kingdom of God." Above all, Matthew redactionally changes the phrase "kingdom of God" to "kingdom of heavens," which he normally uses.[2] In the rest of the New Testament, this term is surprisingly rare in the Pauline letters, the Johannine literature and other writings.[3]

The term "kingdom of God" has two opposite aspects, namely the present and future aspects, when it is thought of as an event. The phenomenon of these two aspects is well reflected in the first proclamation of Jesus, which says, according to Mark (1:15), "The time is fulfilled, and the kingdom of God has come near (ἤγγικεν); repent, and believe in the good news." The Greek word ἤγγικεν can either mean "has al-

---

[1] The other two are "God" and "God's will" (= ethics); Rudolf Bultmann, *Theology of the New Testament*, trans. K. Grobel (London: SCM, 1978), 1:3–26.

[2] Out of the 55 uses of the word βασιλεία, including changes from the sources Mark and Q, Matthew preserves such an old phraseology only five times—once in our present logion: Matt. 21:31 (also in Matt. 6:33; 12:28; 19:24; 21:43).

[3] O. E. Evans, "Kingdom of God," in *Interpreter's Dictionary of the Bible* (New York: Abingdon, 1962), 3:17–26, gives a concise treatment on the term.

ready come," "is at hand" or "is yet to come in the near future." There are numerous examples for these two aspects in Jesus' sayings. For the future aspect, for example, "Truly I tell you, there are some standing here who will not taste death until they see that the kingdom of God has come with power" in Mark 9:1; and "Truly I tell you, I will never again drink of the fruit of the vine until that day when I drink it new in the kingdom of God" in Mark 14:25. For the present aspect, for example, "But if it is by the Spirit of God that I cast out demons, then the kingdom of God has come to you" in Matthew 12:28 (= Luke 11:20); and "The law and the prophets were in effect until John came; since then the good news of the kingdom of God is proclaimed, and everyone tries to enter it by force" in Luke 16:16 (= Matthew 11:12f.). Therefore, there are different understandings as to whether the kingdom of God has already arrived since Jesus Christ, or is yet to come in the future.

The dynamic aspect of "present–future" or "already–not yet" in the understanding the kingdom of God corresponds to another important Christian doctrine of salvation. On the one hand, Christians can understand that salvation (acquiring the eternal life or acquiring the ultimate end of life) will be taking place after death; it is a purely future event. Or on the other hand, salvation has already begun right after their conversion to the Christian faith, that is, Christians are now having eternal life before death. What exactly is the kingdom of God? It is difficult to describe since it is a pictorial imagination. In Jesus Christ's preaching, the content of the kingdom of God is often taught in the form of parables. In the typical formulation of such sayings, the kingdom of God is compared to a plant or is described in pictorial words, so as to associate the content of the kingdom of God with our daily experiences (Mark 4; Matt. 13). Now, we are not interested in the nature of the kingdom of God *per se*, but its relation with human beings.[4] In the following, we are not going to go into the contents of such metaphorical sayings, but discuss the entrance requirements of the kingdom of God in Jesus' teaching, and also to discuss the theme of the inheritance of the kingdom of God in Paul's teaching.

[4] This is indeed the very position of R. Bultmann's understanding of Paul's theology (*Theology of the New Testament*, 1:187–91).

1. Jesus Christ's Teaching on Entering the Kingdom of God

There are some characteristics of the people who are allowed to enter the kingdom of God. First, as the above quoted example indicates, everybody wants to enter it with different means (Luke 16:16 parr.). However, only those who determine to reject committing sins may be allowed to enter; at the extreme, they should even do what Mark 9:47 demands: "if your eye causes you to stumble, tear it out; it is better for you to enter the kingdom of God with one eye than to have two eyes and to be thrown into hell." In this line of thought, these people are those born of water and spirit, that is, they have faith and received baptism, as the Gospel of John reminds us (3:5). Moreover, it is necessary for Christians to go through many persecutions, at least at the time of the early Church (apart from the time of the earthly Jesus), in order to enter the kingdom of God (Acts 14:22). Furthermore, if they are already at the door of the kingdom of God, they should receive the unimportant people or people of no immediate instrumental use, who are, metaphorically speaking, "little children" (children are still dependent persons). It is to such people that the kingdom of God belongs, and whoever does not receive the kingdom of God as a little child will never enter it" (Mark 10:15–17 parr.). As a result, the requirements for the entrance into the kingdom of God are pointing to ethics as well as the readiness for sufferings.

In connection to the above requirements for the entrance into the kingdom of God, all three Synoptic Gospels preserve a story about Jesus' teaching on the Rich Man (Mark 10:17–31; Matt. 19:16–30; Luke 18:18–30). This story often serves as example to show that Jesus' attitude towards rich persons is unfriendly, if not negative. The rich man in this story solemnly asks Jesus what he should do, in order to inherit the kingdom of God. Here the idea of "doing something" and "inheriting the kingdom of God" (but not "entering into") are put together. In the rich man's mind, the kingdom of God is not like a place or situation that people may enter; it is thought of as something that people can possess, like goods, which can be inherited. Besides the requirement to observe the Law and commandments that the rich man has long fulfilled, Jesus challenges him further to sell his properties and give to the poor, so that the rich man can have treasure in heaven. All these deeds are nevertheless not enough for inheriting the kingdom of God. Jesus demands one more, that is, to follow him. Turning back to his disciples after the man's departure, Jesus tells them the difficulties for rich persons to enter the kingdom of God. Here Jesus in the story goes

back to the word "enter" instead of "inherit," which is used in the rich man's original question. So the orientation of the kingdom of God in Jesus' teaching is overwhelmingly ethical.

2. *Paul's Teaching on Inheriting the Kingdom of God*[5]

Paul has seldom used the term "kingdom of God," and has never combined this term with the idea of entrance, as in Jesus' teaching.[6] The earliest letter of Paul, the first letter to the Thessalonians, preserves for us a concept of the kingdom of God that is similar to that of Jesus'. Paul writes to an audience that God calls into his own kingdom and glory (1 Thess. 2:12). However, he has not further developed this idea. Among all its later uses, Paul's kingdom of God does not emphasize its "entrance" as does Jesus', but on its "inheritance." Speaking of inheritance, Paul understands the kingdom of God as a gift from God, rather than merely as a place for the believers to enter.

Paul lays down a strict condition for inheriting the kingdom of God, "flesh and blood cannot inherit the kingdom of God, nor does the perishable inherit the imperishable," in 1 Corinthians 15:50. In Paul's usual terminology, the phrase "flesh and blood" describes people who remain in their old bodies and who live according to their own will, from which evil deeds come out. So, as converted persons, Christians should not remain in their old life in flesh and blood. How is this to be understood? Paul writes in concrete terms in the same letter (6:9–10):[7]

> Do you not know that the unrighteous will not inherit the kingdom of God? Do not be deceived! Fornicators, idolaters, adulterers, male prostitutes, sodomites, thieves, the greedy, drunkards, revilers, robbers—none of these will inherit the kingdom of God.

Paul preserves the *Gattung* (small text unit(s) related to the text to be discussed) of the entrance-saying of Jesus tradition only once, in 1 Co-

---

[5] The idea of the following presentation appears first in my article, "The Deradicalization of Jesus' Ethical Sayings in 1 Corinthians," *New Testament Studies* 48 (2002): 181–94.

[6] The term occurs only in 1 Thess. 2:12; Gal. 5:21; 1 Cor. 4:20; 6:9f.; 15:50; Rom. 14:17; and further in the deutero-Pauline letters: Eph. 5:3; Col. 4:11; 2 Thess. 1:5; 2 Tim. 4:1.

[7] C. M. Tuckett, "1 Corinthians and Q," *Journal of Biblical Literature* 102 (1983): 619. According to Tuckett, 1 Cor. 4:8 and 13:2 provide evidence that Jesus traditions were used by the Corinthians.

rinthians 6:9.[8] In this text, the concept of inheriting the kingdom of God is used twice. Paul starts with a challenge: "Do you not know that the unrighteous will not inherit the kingdom of God?" Then he lists ten kinds of people who with their behaviours cannot inherit the kingdom of God. All these ten aspects have to do with ethical misconduct. Among these ten kinds of people we focus especially on the prostitutes (πόρνοι) and the greedy (πλεονέκται). In order to see the contrasting understandings about these two kinds of people, we will compare Jesus' and Paul's attitudes towards them one by one.

(a) Prostitutes

It is one of the traditions of the historical Jesus that he himself had meals with social outcasts like tax collectors, sinners and prostitutes, but not with the religious leaders. Jesus ate with these people, disregarding whether they had repented or not. Such table fellowship often had an eschatological association.[9] In rebuking the religious leaders' question about his authority, Jesus says, ". . . and the prostitutes enter the kingdom of God before you [religious leaders]" (Matt. 21:31).[10] The reason for the claim about priority in entering the "kingdom of God" is that the religious leaders do not repent, nor believe him, but the prostitutes do. So Jesus offered the latter inclusion in the kingdom of God not only while they were still sinners, but also without requiring repentance in the normal sense.[11] Jesus' deeds were incredible to his contemporaries.

If Jesus' deeds and value behind them are deviant from norms, Paul seems to be closer to the norms than Jesus regarding the inheritance of the kingdom of God, and perhaps also regarding the acceptance into the earthly Christian community. Paul was reluctant to accept all social outcasts (1 Cor. 6:9–10), for example, if prostitutes (whether they were males or females) remain prostitutes after conversion.[12]

---

[8] The other example is in a deutero-Pauline letter (Eph. 5.5).

[9] János Bolyki, *Jesu Tischgemeinschaften*, Wissenschaftliche Untersuchungen zum Neuen Testament, 2nd ser., 96 (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 1998), 193; E. P. Sanders, *Jesus and Judaism* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1985), 208.

[10] See K. C. Wong, *Interkulturelle Theologie und multikulturelle Gemeinde im Matthäus evangelium. Zum Verhältnis von Juden- und Heidenchristen im ersten Evangelium*, Novum testamentum et orbis antiquus 22 (Freiburg: Universitätsverlag; Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1992), 125–36.

[11] In fact this is Sanders' proposal (*Jesus and Judaism*, 206).

[12] The significance of Paul's choice of πόρνοι, instead of πόρναι, is transparent, as it

(b) Possession

Among the ten kinds of people listed in 1 Corinthians 6:9–10 Paul specifically mentions three (thieves, the greedy and robbers) who are somehow related to money and possessions. Jacob Kremer points out that all three belong to a group of persons who do harm to others' property.[13] Thieves and robbers are rejected by all races; they need no explanation. The greedy are people whose desire continuously drives them to obtain more and more money. A greedy person may be rich. However, a rich person can also be free of greed, of the desire to possess more and more. He may be satisfied with his possessions. In the same way a poor person can be satisfied with his/her own situation, or on the contrary can be greedy.

Paul does not accept the mentality and the values of the greedy. They are excluded from the kingdom of God. The greedy will be rejected, but not necessarily rich people. Jesus, however, thinks that the rich people have hardly a chance of entering the kingdom of God: "How hard it will be for those who have riches to enter the kingdom of God!" (Mark 10:23; Matt. 19:16–22; Luke 18:18–23). According to Paul, rich people themselves may be good if they are not greedy. There is no explicit reason to hinder rich people from inheriting the kingdom of God. Paul is not as radical as Jesus, and does not reject rich people as Jesus does. Paul thinks that not only can these people enter the kingdom of God, they may even inherit it.

3. Further Comparison between Jesus and Paul on Entering/Inheriting the Kingdom of God

Concerning different kinds of persons (whether prostitutes or the rich), Jesus speaks of "entering" the kingdom of God, whereas Paul speaks of "inheriting" it. Between the terms "entering" and "inheriting," there is an obvious difference that cannot be ignored. When Paul speaks of "inheriting," it is probable that he regards the kingdom of God as a gift of God. People "receive" it through faith, but do not pay the price to earn it. Jesus, on the other hand, expects people to do

---

means that whoever (male or female) commits sexual misconduct should not inherit the kingdom of God.

[13] Jacob Kremer, *Der erste Brief an die Korinther*, Regensburger Neues Testament (Regensburg: Pustet, 1997), 116.

something in order to "enter" the kingdom of God. To "enter" is already an activity. The rich man asks Jesus "what he must do" and replies to Jesus, "all these I have observed." Jesus then lays down the challenge that he should do one more thing: "sell what you have, and give to the poor." Paul of course does not think that human beings can earn their own salvation because "flesh and blood cannot inherit the kingdom of God" (1 Cor. 15:50). All those who have repented and believed in Jesus Christ are new persons (cf. Gal. 2:20; Rom. 6:1–11). Paul cannot accept that Christians will stay on with their old flesh and remain in their old fleshly behaviour.

We may also observe another decisive difference between Jesus and Paul, in 1 Corinthians 6:9–11. Insofar as this is an "entrance-logion," it defines the ethical preconditions for inheriting the kingdom. But in verse 11, Paul adds to these ethical preconditions the decisive soteriological conditions: God has washed, sanctified and justified the Christians (*passivum divinum!*). This is an allusion to baptism. By being baptized in the "name of the Lord Jesus Christ" and by the "Spirit of God," the Christians are changed. They are new "creatures" (Gal. 6:15; 2 Cor. 5:17). That God transforms them in terms of soteriology makes human beings' ethical behaviour relative. Jesus accepts sinners, hoping that they may convert. Paul accepts sinners, knowing that they are already transformed by the sacrament. The ethical paradox of accepting sinners is in this way made divergent.

3. CONCLUSION

The above analysis of the concept of the kingdom of God in the Christian religion shows a dynamics of how the concept is understood. The kingdom of God can be understood as a present entity and a future happening. On the one hand, in the metaphorical language of the New Testament, God and/or the risen Lord Jesus Christ will come and break into our human history, destroy the existing power structure and restore a just and fair society. As a result, God's people can live without tears but with joy and happiness in the kingdom of God. On the other hand, the kingdom of God can also be understood as a present entity. It means that God's power exists in our human history since the time of Jesus Christ. The concrete expression of the kingdom of God so understood is thus to be seen as the present reality of the Christian body: God's power has arrived in the world, God's value and righteousness

are being manifested, not exclusively, in the Church since the time of the earthly Jesus. In this line of thought, the manifestation of the kingdom of God, in its present aspect, is to be seen as the establishment and existence of the Christian Church. The ideology and deeds of the Church of our present time are then understood as the expression of the kingdom of God as a present entity.

The present and future aspects of the kingdom of God seem to be contradictory at the first glance. However, both aspects can be understood as the very nature of Christianity. On the one hand, Christians have a share in the ideology and deeds of the Christian Church in this world, so as to express their faith. On the other hand, Christians also believe that the existing situation of the Church and the world will someday all pass away. This latter belief helps Christians not to cling to their existing possessions. By so believing and doing, they can have a healthy attitude towards the adverse situation or events of life.

The concept of entering and inheriting the kingdom of God present two kinds of salvation models. The former emphasizes more on the deeds of persons: the action verb "enter" implies a kind of action. Indeed, ethics is one of the main themes of Jesus' teaching. Jesus expects that people may enter the kingdom of God by fulfilling the requirements he has laid down in his teaching. Jesus sees that people can enter it as long as they fulfil its requirements, thus leaving the temporal aspect vague. The concept of inheriting the kingdom of God, advocated by Paul, emphasizes more on the aspect of God's grace. People can receive or inherit the kingdom of God not by the merit of their deeds, but by faith. Again the temporal aspect is left vague. The ambiguity of the temporal aspect in entering and inheriting the kingdom of God corresponds to the present and future aspects of the kingdom of God. In addition, when the nature of salvation is thought of, the aspect of entering the kingdom of God is a kind of salvation through human merits, or ethics; salvation or the ultimate completion of human life is achieved by human beings themselves. But the aspect of inheriting the kingdom of God is a kind of salvation through God's grace and by faith; salvation or the ultimate completion of human life is not achieved by human beings themselves, but by a third person or an external agent, i.e., God.

As a person on the Christian side, I have explained two aspects of the kingdom of God, which are expressed in the pairs of categories of "present–future" and "entering–inheriting." I am eager to learn how the symbol of the Pure Land in Buddhism is understood. Can it also, like the kingdom of God in Christianity, be thought of as a present and/or future entity? Can it be entered or inherited, no matter whether

by human beings themselves or with the crucial help of a third agent? What actually is the Pure Land? Can Buddhists achieve the Pure Land by themselves just as Jesus expected his followers to do to attain the kingdom of God? If so, are there any amendments to such an understanding of the attainment of the Pure Land in Buddhism at all, amendments that are similar to those Paul made to Jesus' understanding of the kingdom of God?

Ching Feng, n.s., **7.1–2** (2006) 93–123

The "Kingdom of Heaven" in China: Exploring the Taiping Millennial Vision

P. RICHARD BOHR

China's long history is punctuated by millenarian upheavals. None was more devastating than the Taiping Rebellion (1851–64), which integrated Chinese and biblical ideals into a vision of a Heavenly Kingdom of Great Peace and Equality (Taiping Tianguo 太平天國) as an earthly possibility. The Taipings' millennial quest intersected with late imperial China's dual crises of "the decline of the old order and the impact of the West."[1] The Taipings sought to solve China's problems by realizing indigenous goals of peace and equality (*taiping* 太平) through the creation of the biblically-informed theocratic Kingdom of Heaven (*tianguo* 天國) depicted by recently-arrived Protestant missionary pioneers.

This article explores the origins and development of the Taipings' millennial vision; analyzes the ways in which they sought to implement their earthbound Heavenly Kingdom; and examines the reasons for their failure to realize this radical millenarian dream.

P. Richard BOHR is professor of history and director of Asian studies at the College of Saint Benedict and Saint John's University, Collegeville, Minnesota, USA.

[1] Kwang-Ching Liu, "Nineteenth-Century China: The Disintegration of the Old Order and the Impact of the West," in Ping-ti Ho and Tang Tsou, eds., *China in Crisis*, 2 vols. (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1968), 1:93–178.

1. ENVISIONING THE KINGDOM

The concept of the Kingdom of God (also called Kingdom of Heaven) undergirded the Evangelical Protestantism introduced to the Chinese by Robert Morrison (1782–1834), an English Presbyterian, and the Scottish Congregationalist William Milne (1789–1822). Along with other spiritually-reborn farmers and tradesmen abandoning Deist rationalism for a personal commitment to Christ's atonement and social meliorism, Morrison and Milne were swept up in the interdenominational "trans-Atlantic" Evangelical Awakening. Grateful for their own redemption, Evangelicals felt compelled by the "Great Commission" (Matt. 28:19–20) to preach the Gospel to their non-Christian neighbors, whom they deemed deserving of spiritual and physical salvation in anticipation of the Kingdom's imminent descent to the ends of the earth.

China was a major focus of this missionary effort. Because of the Yongzheng 雍正 emperor's (r. 1723–35) revocation in 1724 of the Kangxi 康熙 emperor's (r. 1661–1722) edict of Christian toleration (1692), the London Missionary Society (LMS) sent Morrison to Guangzhou's international trade enclave in 1807 to discreetly translate and publish the Bible. In 1815, Milne established an LMS mission in Malacca, a Western-administered Malay entrepôt on China's doorstep. There he collaborated with Morrison to produce Christian literature which the missionaries hoped would find its way into the Middle Kingdom through the overseas Chinese. Milne also set out to create a Christian community among Malacca's 4,000 Chinese residents to help precipitate, in his own words, the coming of "Christ's kingdom among the nations."[2]

Milne based his quest for Christian converts on an accommodationist approach stressing commonalities between Christianity and Confu-

---

[2] Quoted in [Edwin Stevens], "A Brief Sketch of the Life and Labors of the Late Rev. William Milne, D.D.," *Chinese Repository* 1 (December 1832): 318. For an analysis of Milne's missionary approach, see P. Richard Bohr, "The Legacy of William Milne," *International Bulletin of Missionary Research* 25, no. 4 (October 2001): 173–78. See also idem., "Jesus, Christianity, and Rebellion in China: The Evangelical Roots of the Taiping Heavenly Kingdom," in Roman Malek, SVD, ed., *The Chinese Face of Jesus Christ*, 5 vols., Monumenta Serica Monograph Series 50 (Sankt Augustin, Ger.: Institut Monumenta Serica and China-Zentrum, 2003), 2:613–61 and Murray Rubenstein, *The Origins of the Anglo-American Missionary Enterprise in China, 1807–1840* (Lanham, Md.: Scarecrow, 1996).

cianism. He insisted there was "much that is good" in the Chinese people but portrayed Malacca's 1819 cholera epidemic as God's punishment for abandoning dependence on Him in favor of polytheistic idol-worship; the "sins" of materialism, lying, merchant malfeasance, and gambling; and lack of charity beyond the family. This divine chastisement, he urged, was an opportunity for the Chinese to embrace each other as brothers and sisters and to transform Malacca into a Christian society along the lines proposed by Sir Stamford Raffles (1781–1826), an administrator of the Malay Archipelago and supporter of the social and educational reforms of England's Evangelically-minded Clapham Sect. To this end, Milne set up a chapel, printing press, library, and museum as well as the Anglo-Chinese College dedicated to integrating Asian and Western learning in the effort to prepare Chinese and Western missionaries. Inspired by the Scottish Sunday School Movement which had taught him to read and write, Milne initiated Asia's first "charity schools" for poor boys and, later, girls. He hoped clinics and orphanages would soon follow.

While Milne trained a number of LMS missionaries who went on to plant churches throughout Southeast Asia and, eventually, China itself, the most important Chinese evangelist he nurtured was Liang Fa 梁發 (1789–1855).[3] Too poor to have obtained more than a smattering of Confucian literary training in his native village fifty miles southwest of Guangzhou, Liang moved to that commercial metropolis in 1804, seeking his fortune as a woodblock cutter. In 1813, he published Morrison's New Testament and two years later was assigned to the Malacca mission press.

Morrison's and Milne's published accounts of their teenage dread of eternal damnation magnified Liang's own lingering guilt over the "materialism," "drunkenness," "gambling," "lust," "cheating," and "lying" he had imbibed in Guangzhou. But, convinced that "the Buddha would soon bring punishment and death on such an opponent of the gods,"[4] he declined Milne's invitations to the mission community's Bible study and worship. While printing Milne's tracts, however, Liang warmed to the idea that spiritual salvation through faith in God's grace and the

---

[3] For a biography of Liang Fa, see George Hunter McNeur, *China's First Preacher: Liang A-fa* (Shanghai: Kwang Hsueh Publishing House, [1934?]). For my analysis of Liang's theological development, see P. Richard Bohr, "Liang Fa's Quest for Moral Power," in Suzanne Wilson Barnett and John King Fairbank, eds., *Christianity in China: Early Protestant Missionary Writings* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1985), 35–46.

[4] Quoted in McNeur, *China's First Preacher*, 23.

individual's repentant commitment to willful moral action could resolve the guilt which Confucianism engendered but which Confucian self-cultivation and Liang's attempts at Buddhist "quiet sitting," sutra reading, and prayers to the Goddess of Mercy at Malacca's Pure Land temple could not assuage. He concluded that this indigenous route to salvation was too embedded in China's "decadent" culture and therefore lacked monotheism's filial connection to God's superior morality, from which emerged the "virtuous act" necessary to "obtain forgiveness."[5]

In November 1816, Milne baptized Liang as China's second Protestant Christian. Prepared by the Anglo-Chinese College to proselytize, Liang emulated Evangelical activism by returning to his village to baptize his wife as the first Chinese woman Protestant (Morrison later baptized their son), denounce his lineage's "idol worship" rituals, write a pamphlet condemning opium smoking, and set up China's first Evangelical-style charity school to teach Christianity and Western subjects. He also preached among neighboring villages and distributed Christian literature at examination centers. For violating Yongzheng's ban on Christian evangelism, the local magistrate ordered Liang to be imprisoned and beaten.

The year following Milne's death in 1822, Morrison ordained Liang as the first Chinese Protestant evangelist. By now, Liang was convinced that only Christianity could reverse China's moral decline. In 1832, he published *Good Words to Admonish the Age* (*Quanshi liangyan* 勸世良言).[6] Patterned on the Ming-Qing morality books, *Good Words* was the first Chinese effort to explain Protestant Christianity. Although Morrison did not rearrange its haphazard organization, the booklet presents the fundamentals of Evangelical faith by including excerpts from the 1823 Morrison-Milne Bible: a dozen from Genesis, Psalms, Ecclesiastes, and Isaiah and nearly fifty from twelve New Testament gospels and epistles. Some thirty of these excerpts are accompanied by Liang's own commentaries. Liang also included ten of his homilies based on Evangelical themes drawn from Milne's sermons and from nearly fifty Chinese-language LMS missionary tracts which he published as well as an account of his own conversion and missionary efforts.

---

[5] Quoted in ibid., 23, 25.

[6] Liang Fa, *Quanshi liangyan* 勸世良言 [Good words to admonish the age], in Mai Zhansi 麥沾思 [George Hunter McNeur], *Liang Fa zhuan* 梁發傳 [Life of Liang Fa], 2nd ed. (Hong Kong: Council on Christian Literature for Overseas Chinese, 1968), Appendix.

Liang opens *Good Words* with the Fall, when, he claimed, the Chinese abandoned their long-standing dependence on the "omnipotent," "benevolent," "merciful," and "just" creator-God. This compassionate "Heavenly Father," "emperor of emperors," and "Lord of all nations" had chosen ancient China as a "sacred country" to be part of his global family and had lovingly provided the Chinese with all their spiritual and material needs. Tragically, Satan had seduced the Chinese into rebelling against God and embracing the heretical "Three Religions," in which Confucians coveted wealth and power through examination-taking, Daoists thirsted for physical immortality, and Buddhists quested for Amitābha's "illusory" Western Paradise. Liang denounced China's "sins" of image worship, empty ritual, and such heterodox practices on behalf of material gain as geomancy, witchcraft, exorcism, and fortune-telling. Materialism encouraged licentiousness, gambling, alcoholism, and opium smoking, he argued, and drove people to the "unfilial acts" of jealousy, avarice, quarreling, stealing, family violence, lewdness, sorcery, murder, and some forty similar "sins" now bedeviling China. Even worse, Liang lamented, China's emperors—whom God Himself had instituted as the legitimate political authority (Rom. 13:1)—were now ignoring the people's sufferings, officials were corrupt, and the wealthy were "oppressing" the poor.[7]

After the Fall, Liang explained, God sent Jesus to earth to "turn the world from heterodoxy (*xie* 邪)" and save sinners through the "merit" of his "atonement." Outside China, he noted, even sinners like Paul himself had repented, accepted Jesus, and were "saved." But China was so full of evil that the people's souls could no longer connect them to God. Hence, only the baptized believer's ceaseless "self-renewal" through a sincere, pure heart "set on doing good" could effect the necessary break with China's immoral past and thereby secure salvation. Like Milne, Liang praised Confucian insistence on right conduct and moral accountability. But, he insisted, Confucianism must be energized by Christian moral activism, which would connect Moses' "old law" of the Ten Commandments (of which Liang mentioned eight) with Jesus' "new law" of mercy, purity of heart, and peacemaking embodied in the Beatitudes (Matt. 5–7, included in *Good Words*).

Once China became Christian, Liang promised, it would share in the imminent, global Kingdom of Heaven. This millennial age would usher in "a new heaven and a new earth" (Rev. 21:1), which Liang explained as both the realm of "saved" souls in spiritual Heaven and an earthly

[7] Ibid., 41.

"congregation of God Worshippers" (*bai Shangdi hui* 拜上帝會) centered around "new Jerusalem coming down out of heaven from God" (Rev. 21:2). This new dispensation would include "born again" believers who adhere to the Ten Commandments, give their possessions to the poor (Matt. 19:21–24), and promote peace and justice.[8]

When the earthbound Kingdom comes, Liang predicted, the "entire world will be united as one [family]."[9] For China, participation in the forthcoming Kingdom would "remit our sin and save our country" by reinvigorating dynastic rule so that

> if everyone in the country believes in God and follows His commandments, the poor will be peaceful and the rich good and righteous; they will be happy. If the upper class does not disobey God's commandments, the lower will not transgress the emperor's laws. Not only will the poor be happy not spending money and precious time, but rulers will govern and ministers remain loyal; fathers will be merciful and sons filial, officials will be pure and the people happy. There will be the blessing of great peace [*taiping* 太平]. One will see no closed doors at night; everything will be peaceful, bright, and good.[10]

Good Words concludes under the shadow of the Last Judgment. Liang praised God as a righteous judge who rewards the good with Heaven and punishes the evil with Hell. But unless China quickly repented, Liang warned, God would chastise it with disasters comparable to the Flood, the destruction of Sodom and Gomorrah, the Assyrian invasion, and Israel's imprisonment in Egypt.

Good Words was read by many Chinese who subsequently joined mission churches, but its portrayal of monotheism, morality, and millennialism triggered an unintended consequence in the mind of Taiping founder Hong Xiuquan 洪秀全 (1814–64), who, in 1836, was handed Liang's book outside the Guangzhou examination center by the American missionary Edwin Stevens (1803–37).

Raised in Guanlubu 官祿布, a village in Hua 花 county, thirty miles north of Guangzhou, Hong belonged to South China's marginalized

---

[8] Ibid., 21–25, 121.

[9] Ibid., 121.

[10] Ibid., 105. The final sentence in this quotation from *Good Words* bears a striking resemblance to the last sentence in Hong Xiuquan's quote from the *Liyun* chapter (see page 103 below). It seems remarkable that someone of Liang's meager educational background should have been familiar with this text.

Hakka (Kejia 客家, lit. "guest people") minority, the Han Chinese group most receptive to Christian conversion.[11] Pushed from their north China homeland by nomadic invaders centuries earlier, the Hakka's mountainous migrations southward were sustained by their uniform dialect, mutual dependence, property sharing, industriousness, frugality, loyalty to community over native place, and guerrilla fighting techniques honed through many battles with hostile neighbors. Expert in raising such New World survival crops as peanuts and sweet potato, the Hakka supplemented farm work with itinerant labor.

By 1700, Hakka villages stretched from northeastern Guangdong into southeastern Guangxi. But by the time the Hakka settled there, the most fertile acreage was already owned by the original settlers, called Bendi 本地. A few Hakka, including Hong's own family, owned some land, but most were tenants on the least productive upland fields of Bendi landlords, who belittled the Hakka as "hill dogs" and accused them of debasing Confucian morality because, by not binding their women's feet, they enabled both genders to comingle in farming, market activities, and community self-defense. Stubbornly resistant to calls to assimilate, the Hakka refused to take part in "decadent" Bendi culture, which they condemned as "materialistic," "arrogant," and mired in gambling and opium addiction.

With their high literacy rate, many Hakka were able to move up the socio-economic ladder by obtaining government posts through success in the civil service examinations. Hong himself was academically precocious and aspired to elevate his family's status through appointment to bureaucratic office. But in 1837, he failed the Guangzhou prefectural test for a third time. Exhausted and guilt-ridden, he experienced a series of dreams in which—after being taken to Heaven in a sedan chair—he was greeted by "brothers," "sisters," and a "Heavenly Mother" who, assisted by China's ancient sages, replaced his "impure" heart and bathed him in a river. He was then escorted to a "luminous palace," where, in a hall flanked by "tablets exhorting virtue," he was presented to an imposing "old father" resplendent in a blond beard and black robe and seated on a throne. Complaining that "false gods" had taken credit for his creationism, the patriarch railed:

> All human beings in the world are produced and sustained by me; they eat my food and wear my clothing, but not a single one of them

[11] For an overview of Hakka Christians, see Nicole Constable, *Christian Souls and Chinese Spirits* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1994).

> has the heart to remember and venerate me; what is worse, they take of my gifts and worship demons; they purposely rebel against me, and arouse my anger.[12]

The old man attributed this unfilial behavior to Confucius' refusal to "expound . . . [my] true doctrine"[13] while editing the classics. He then proclaimed Hong to be "Heavenly King" (Tianwang 天王), commissioning him to return the world to monotheism by "beheading the heterodox [*xie*], preserving the orthodox [*zheng* 正]," and "relieving the people's distress."[14] Mentored by his "Heavenly Elder Brother," Hong ranged throughout heaven for "about forty days" killing "demons" with a sword. Shortly after the dreams, Hong wrote:

> I am now a King, and everything I'll do at will.
> As the sun shines brightly on my body, calamities are all gone;
> Dragon and tiger generals are helping me each one.[15]

During the next six years, Hong taught school while preparing for another chance at the exams and reflecting on the meaning of his dreams. In 1842 he told his cousin Hong Ren'gan 洪仁玕 (1822–64) that, according to his understanding of *Good Words* (which, ironically, contained a reference to Jeremiah 23:28: "Let the prophet who has a dream tell the dream. . . ."), his "old father" in the dreams was God, his "Heavenly Elder Brother" Jesus, and the tablets the Ten Commandments.[16] After his fourth examination failure in 1843, Hong abandoned

---

[12] Quoted in Theodore Hamberg, *The Visions of Hung-Siu-Tshuen, and Origin of the Kwang-si Insurrection* (Hong Kong: The China Mail, 1854), 10. For a study of Hong's religious transformation, see Jonathan D. Spence, *God's Chinese Son: The Taiping Heavenly Kingdom of Hong Xiuquan* (New York: W. W. Norton, 1996) and Rudolf G. Wagner, *Reenacting the Heavenly Vision: The Role of Religion in the Taiping Rebellion* (Berkeley: Institute of East Asian Studies, University of California, 1982).

[13] Quoted in Hamberg, *Visions*, 11.

[14] Quoted in ibid., 12.

[15] Quoted in Franz Michael, in collaboration with Chung-li Chang, comp., *Taiping Rebellion: History and Documents*, 3 vols. (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 1971), 2:20.

[16] For my analysis of the impact of *Good Words* on Hong's theological development, see P. Richard Bohr, "The Theologian as Revolutionary: Hung Hsiu-ch'üan's Religious Vision of the Taiping Heavenly Kingdom," in Yen-p'ing Hao and Hsiu-mei Wei, eds., *Tradition and Metamorphosis in Modern Chinese History*, 2 vols. (Taipei: Institute of Modern History, Academia Sinica, 1998), 2:907–53. For an analysis of the impact of *Good Words* on the development of the Taipings, see Philip A. Kuhn, "Origins of the Taiping Vision: Cross-Cultural Dimensions of a Chinese Rebellion,"

his quest for government service in favor of messianic kingship to redeem China.

Hong began his religious campaign to save China by turning Confucianism on its head. He told his biological father: "I am not your son" but the "true son of Heaven" (*tianzi* 天子) whose relatives would henceforth include only fellow believers.[17] After smashing his family's household gods, Hong offered food and prayers before the words "Heavenly Father" (*Tianfu* 天父), which he had carved onto a wooden tablet. In accordance with the conversion scenario in *Good Words*, he baptized himself and his cousins Li Jingfang 李敬芳 (d. 1856), Feng Yunshan 馮雲山 (1822–52), and Hong Ren'gan while intoning the phrase "purification from all former sins, putting off the old, and regeneration." Vowing to "redeem" themselves by "trusting in Jesus' full atonement . . . obeying the Sacred [Ten] Commandments . . . and worshipping one God alone,"[18] they defaced the Confucian tablets and the God of Literature statues in the schoolrooms where they taught. They then made three-foot "demon slaying" swords to "capture all the demons and return them to the web of the earth; . . . Within the four seas all are one family, all in harmonious union. . . . With great peace [*taiping*] and unity what happiness there will be."[19] Hong also distributed to his lineage elders wooden rods for "chastising" adulterers, seducers, thieves, gamblers, unfilial people, and "evil plotters."

2. MAPPING THE KINGDOM

Hong's evangelistic efforts were short-lived. After insisting that his new-found monotheism prohibited him from writing poems to appease the hungry ghosts during the Lantern Festival that spring, the village elders exploded in anger at Hong. Accompanied by Feng Yunshan, he took his religious mission to maternal relatives in southeastern Guangxi's Xunzhou 潯州 prefecture, 250 miles southwest of Hua. In the wake of China's defeat in the First Opium War (1839–42), this mountainous

---

Comparative Studies in Society and History 29, no. 3 (July 1977): 350–66.

[17] Quoted in Michael, *Taiping Rebellion*, 2:639.

[18] Quoted in Hamberg, *Visions*, 20.

[19] Quoted in Michael, *Taiping Rebellion*, 2:20.

hinterland had become a violent, dualistic world of good and evil for which *Good Words* offered dire apocalyptic warnings.

The tripling of China's population to 430 million people since the founding of the Qing dynasty in 1644 outstripped the country's available land and food resources.[20] It also exacerbated rising commodity prices, falling food production, and internal migration. The West River system brought pirates, bandits, and decommissioned Opium War volunteers into Guangxi, where they smuggled opium, robbed, and kidnapped. Particularly hard hit were the Hakka, who had recently fled feuds with the Guangdong Bendi over land and water rights and set up widely-scattered villages on Guangxi's infertile mountain slopes. The exhaustion of silver deposits quickly threw Hakka miners out of work, and Hakka transport jobs dried up after Shanghai supplanted Guangzhou as the locus of China's international trade following the Treaty of Nanjing (1842). Escalating rents, as land became concentrated among fewer Bendi landlords, as well as attacks by Bendi tenants, bandits, secret society gangs, and even the hillside-dwelling Yao and Zhuang minorities forced the Hakka to fight back. Rather than try to end the feuding, corrupt officials perversely raised taxes to extortionate levels for the purpose of lining their own pockets.

For the next few months, Hong and Feng encouraged the people to repent, believe in Jesus' atonement, and live morally. Hong evolved a simple worship regimen and baptized over a hundred Hakka. In November 1844, he returned to Hua to compose poems and essays to "persuade the people to right behavior"[21] in preparation for the coming of the Kingdom to Xunzhou. These compositions became the doctrinal basis of Taiping religion.

Liang Fa had discovered God in the foreigners' Bible, and Hong also discovered Him as *Shangdi* 上帝 or *Tian* 天 in the Chinese classics he studied for the examination. For Hong, God was the transcendent creator and benevolent, sustaining Heavenly Father of "extraordinary grace and infinite compassion," upon whose providential governance all Chinese depended "for every article of clothing and every morsel of food. . . ."[22] In keeping with the Evangelicals' reluctance to criticize the political order, Milne and Liang had accepted the legitimacy of China's dynastic rule. But Hong claimed that God was, in

---

[20] See Ping-ti Ho, *Studies on the Population of China, 1368–1953* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1959), Pt. 1.

[21] Quoted in Michael, *Taiping Rebellion*, 2:4.

[22] Quoted in ibid., 2:14.

fact, China's only true emperor who once governed a utopian age of "great peace and equality" (both concepts were implicit in the term *taiping*[23]) during the "Great Commonwealth" (*datong* 大同) depicted in the "Evolution of Rites" (*Liyun* 禮運) chapter of the Book of Rites (*Liji* 禮記).

This text had been passed down to Hong's generation through scholars steeped in the *Gongyang Commentary* (*Gongyangzhuan* 公羊傳) on the *Spring and Autumn Annals* (*Chunqiu* 春秋). Gongyang scholarship was being revived during the late Qing period in hopes of solving China's deepening crises through a more creative application of Confucianism. Hong was also inspired by Mozi's 墨子 (fl. 479–38 BCE) chapters on universal love. Quoting from the *Liyun*, Hong depicted what he considered the first iteration of God's Kingdom in ancient China:

> Thus, Confucius said, "When the Grand Course was pursued, a public and common spirit (*gong* 公) ruled all under the sky"; they chose men of talents, virtue, and ability; their words were sincere, and what they cultivated was harmony. Thus men did not love their parents only, nor treat as children only their own sons. A competent provision was secured for the aged till their death, employment for the able-bodied, and the means of growing up to the young. They showed kindness and compassion to widows, orphans, childless men, and those who were disabled by disease, so that they were all sufficiently maintained. Males had their proper work, and females had their homes. [They accumulated] articles of value, disliking that they should be thrown away upon the ground but not wishing to keep them for their own gratification. [They labored] with their strength, disliking that it should not be exerted but not exerting it [only] with a view to their own advantage. In this way [selfish] schemings were repressed and found no development. Robbers, filchers, and rebellious traitors did not show themselves, and hence the outer doors remained open, and were not shut.[24]

---

[23] Wolfgang Bauer, *China and the Search for Happiness*, trans. Michael Shaw (New York: Seabury, 1976), 117. See also Wang Qingcheng, "Hung Hsiu-ch'üan's Early Thought and the Taiping Revolution," trans. C. A. Curwen, *Renditions* 15 (Spring 1981): 103–38.

[24] Quoted in Michael, *Taiping Rebellion*, 2:35–36. For an analysis of Taiping ideology in the context of Chinese utopianism, see Vincent C. Y. Shih, *The Taiping Ideology* (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 1967), Pt. 2. See also Peter K. H. Lee and Wong Yuk, "Ta-T'ung and the Kingdom of God," in Peter K. H. Lee, ed., *Confucian–Christian Encounters in Historical and Contemporary Perspective* (Lewiston, N.Y.: Edwin Mellen, 1991), 452–71.

Sadly, Hong lamented, God's rule of China and its ethic of devotion to universal love and the common good were lost when "the old serpent-Devil"[25] seduced China's rulers, beginning with Qin Shihuangdi 秦始皇帝 (r. 221–10 BCE), into usurping God's role and spreading the "heresies" of Laozi and the Buddha. Hence, as Hong concluded by referencing the *Liyun* and Mozi, the Chinese have become selfish and "love those of their own village, hamlet, or clan, and dislike those of other villages, other hamlets, and other clans." They consequently "oppress," "fight," and "kill" one another because they have become "small," "intolerant" and "shallow," their "loves and hates derived from selfishness."[26]

In his preaching around Hua, Hong predicted that China's apostasy would soon give way to God's resurrected earthly Kingdom:

> Great and majestic is the Heavenly Father, belonging to all nations.
> He feeds and rears the people of the world; his merit is boundless.
> In six days he created heaven and earth, mountains and waters.
> He provides things and gives them to people to enjoy and share.
> The Heavenly Father is our close relation; he expels the false gods;
> He has instituted the Heavenly Commandments to instruct and admonish ignorant people.
> After sending down Jesus to give his life for the redemption of sins,
> He also sent [Hong Xiu]quan to proclaim the truth of the Way.[27]

Li Zhenggao 李正高 (1823–85), Li Jingfang's son (or nephew), recalled that, after hearing Hong's message, "we lamented the moral and political decline of our country. According to our sentiment, Heaven had decreed that we should curb injustice and promote justice."[28] Hence, "when we heard . . . [Hong's] dreams, our hearts flew to him, and we thought: certainly Heaven had heard our sighs and had chosen

---

[25] Quoted in Jian Youwen 簡又文 (Jen Yu-wen), *Taiping Tianguo dianzhi tongkao* 太平天國典制通考 [Studies on the institutions of the Taiping Heavenly Kingdom] (Hong Kong: Mengjin shuwu, 1958), 3:1727.

[26] Quoted in Michael, *Taiping Rebellion*, 2:34. The *Liyun* paragraph which Hong paraphrases begins: "Now that the great Tao [Dao] has fallen into obscurity, the world has become divided into families" (quoted in Fung Yu-lan, *A History of Chinese Philosophy*, trans. Derk Bodde, 2 vols. [Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1973], 1:378).

[27] Quoted in Hamberg, *Visions*, 44.

[28] Quoted in Jessie G. Lutz and Rolland Ray Lutz, *Hakka Chinese Confront Protestant Christianity, 1850–1900* (Armonk, N.Y.: M. E. Sharpe, 1998), 123.

this man to bring better times."[29] Having articulated the millennial goals, Hong's challenge now was to discover the theocratic vehicle to usher in those "better times."

3. ANTICIPATING THE KINGDOM

In 1842, the Treaty of Nanjing opened Hong Kong and five treaty ports, including Guangzhou, to Christian evangelism and institution-building. Earlier, *Good Words* had warned that God would crush China's idolatry by "leading other countries to conquer our country, occupy our country, and send us to other countries as slaves."[30] But Hong's view was more buoyant, as he envisioned a resurgent, post–Opium War China taking its rightful place in a new world order under the Heavenly Father's universal reign. The Gongyang scholar He Xiu 何休 (128–82) had envisioned history's evolutionary culmination in a third and final stage of "universal peace" (*taiping*), when the "whole world, far and near, great and small, . . . [will be] like one."[31] Paraphrasing Mozi, Hong elaborated on this notion in 1846:

> China, which is near to us, is governed and regulated by God; so it is in foreign nations, which are far away. In the world, there are many men, all brothers; in the world there are many women, all sisters. Why, then, retain partiality for this country against that boundary? How can we think of your swallowing me or of my overwhelming you?[32]

Hong's first opportunity to encounter a Christian community came in February 1847, when he and Hong Ren'gan accepted an invitation from the Baptist missionary Issachar Jacox Roberts (1802–71) to study Christianity with him in Guangzhou. A product of western Tennessee tent meetings, Roberts had been a farmer and saddler who espoused abolishing slavery and elevating women "from a degraded [status] to a

---

[29] Quoted in Constable, *Christian Souls*, 166.

[30] Liang, *Quanshi liangyan*, 132.

[31] Quoted in Fung Yu-lan, *A Short History of Chinese Philosophy* (New York: The Free Press, 1968), 202.

[32] Quoted in Jian Youwen, *Taiping Tianguo dianzhi tongkao*, 3:1726.

state of equality."[33] Like his Pietist mentor Karl Gützlaff (1803–51), Roberts hoped that preparing Chinese preachers like the Hong cousins would herald "the commencement of the outpouring of the Holy Spirit upon this benighted people"[34] as they went, in emulation of the missionary,

> from house to house, from temple to temple, or from village to village, declaring to the people the gospel of Christ; preaching the atonement, faith and repentance, and the resurrection of the dead, the vanity of their dumb idols which cannot save them and the absolute necessity of turning to the true God who made heaven and earth; and believing in Christ Jesus the only Saviour of mankind, both of Chinese and foreigners.[35]

Roberts had the Hongs study the Medhurst-Gützlaff Bible (a clearer translation than the older Morrison-Milne version and their first exposure to the entire Scriptures) as well as his church constitution, which restricted congregational membership to the baptized, asserted scriptural infallibility, and enjoined adherence to the Ten Commandments and strict Sabbath observances.

Roberts' Southern revivalism in Guangzhou was complemented by several New England missionaries. There, they participated in the Yankee "battle plan for Christianity's final conquest of the world"[36] by taking to China the same commitment to education, publishing, medicine, and other good works which was making Evangelical Christianity such a powerful reformist force back home. Among these pioneering missionary-professionals was Dr. Peter Parker (1804–88), in whose eye clinic Liang Fa, by now a popular preacher in Guangzhou (with its 100 baptized Christians), Hong Kong, and even Singapore, served as an evangelist. Hong also had access to some 170 Chinese-language books which 22 missionaries had published by 1847. These included

---

[33] Quoted in William R. Doezema, "Western Seeds of Eastern Heterodoxy: The Impact of Protestant Revivalism on the Christianity of Taiping Rebel Leader Hung Hsiu-ch'üan, 1836–1864," *Fides et Historia* 25, no. 1 (Winter/Spring 1993): 95.

[34] Quoted in Margaret Morgan Coughlin, "Strangers in the House: J. Lewis Schuck and Issachar Jacox Roberts, First American Baptist Missionaries to China" (PhD diss., University of Virginia, 1972), 316.

[35] Quoted in ibid., 300.

[36] William R. Hutchison, *Errand to the World: American Protestant Thought and Foreign Missions* (Chicago: University Press of Chicago 1987), 51. See also Carl T. Smith, *Chinese Christians: Élites, Middlemen, and the Church in Hong Kong* (Hong Kong: Oxford University Press, 1985), Chap. 4.

religious materials, social critiques, and treatises on Western secular topics.[37] In Hong Kong, Theodore Hamberg (1819–54) of the Basel Mission organized a congregation of Hakka Christians devoted to a Hakka-style community chest and pledged to destroy idols, abandon death rituals and ancestor worship, and cease temple donations.[38]

When Hong requested baptism and subsequent appointment as Roberts' "assistant preacher," the missionary (suspecting pecuniary motives) declined. Disappointed, Hong left Roberts' chapel in June 1847, still convinced he was Christ's younger brother who, if he could not achieve his messianic goals through the Church, would do so by way of the Heavenly Kingdom.

The following August, Hong was back in Guangxi, with Gützlaff's Bible in hand to open an even wider panorama onto the Judeo-Christian experience. In the hardscrabble Thistle Mountain section of Xunzhou, he discovered 3,000 members of the God Worshippers Society (Liang's term in *Good Words*), encompassing a dozen congregations which Feng Yunshan had organized during Hong's three-year absence. Hong praised the God Worshippers as the countercultural vanguard of the revived Kingdom, through which

> we shall [soon] see the world united as one family, enjoying great peace and equality [*taiping*]. How can it be that this perverse and unfeeling world cannot in a day be transformed into an honest and upright world? How can it be that this insulting and encroaching, fighting and killing age cannot in a day be changed into a world where the strong no more oppress the weak, the many overwhelm the few, the wise delude the simple, or the bold annoy the fearful?[39]

Composed primarily of impoverished Hakka recruited along family, lineage, village, and occupational lines, the congregations were united by a common liturgical, prayer, and community life. Congregants were initiated through Roberts' baptism by bodily immersion and local secret society rituals of purification, penitence, and rebirth. Bowing before two burning lamps and three cups of tea, initiates "confessed" their sins, drank the tea, and, as water was poured over their heads, vowed "not to worship evil spirits, not to practice evil things, but to keep the

---

[37] See Alexander Wylie, *Memorials of Protestant Missionaries to the Chinese* (Shanghai: American Presbyterian Mission Press, 1867).

[38] See Constable, *Christian Souls and Chinese Spirits*, 16–19.

[39] Quoted in Jian Youwen, *Taiping Tianguo dianzhi tongkao*, 3:1726.

heavenly commandments."[40] After bathing in a stream, their names and confession texts were burned, the smoke sent up to the Heavenly Father.

To keep the "people peaceful and the country secure,"[41] Hong imposed the Ten Commandments in hopes of eliminating the causes of specific "sins" against the Heavenly Father (idol worship and witchcraft); the community (murder, banditry, ethnic feuding, adultery, and licentiousness); and the individual (materialism, gambling, and addiction to alcohol, tobacco, and opium). He underscored these injunctions with assurances of reward in Heaven or punishment in the "eighteenth layer of Hell."[42]

Hong also wrote a manual of morning and evening intercessions for food, clothing, and protection against sickness and calamity as well as grace before meals. The prayers also petitioned the Holy Spirit "never [to] allow the devilish demons to deceive me" and to "change my [wicked] heart" for help in "repentance" and "self-renewal" so that "my soul may ascend to heaven." Each prayer lauded Christ's atonement and ended with the line from the Lord's Prayer asking that the Heavenly Father's "will be done on earth as it is in heaven." After praying, the God Worshippers were to seek purification by washing in a basin or a river.[43]

Sabbath worship took place in homes. Men and women, calling each other "brother" and "sister" (a Hakka and a Baptist custom), sat on opposite sides of the room. Facing the sunlight to honor Hong (who claimed the Chinese messianic symbol of the sun), the congregation sang hymns. An elder invoked the Heavenly Father's mercy and protection, lauded Jesus' "merits," enjoined "sincerity of heart," and proscribed image worship. (The God Worshippers did not recite the Apostles' Creed as did the Hakka Christians near Hong Kong.[44]) The service concluded with the doxology praising Father, Son, and Holy Spirit.

Property-sharing was concentrated in the Hakka-inspired Sacred Treasury, which Hong sanctioned through the egalitarian "Great Commonwealth" ideal and Liang's exhortations to give up worldly goods to enter the Heavenly Kingdom. Congregants contributed their posses-

---

[40] Quoted in Hamberg, *Visions*, 35.

[41] Quoted in Jian Youwen, *Taiping Tianguo dianzhi tongkao*, 3:1722.

[42] Quoted in ibid., 3:1732.

[43] See The Book of Heavenly Commandments (*Tiantiaoshu* 天條書) in Michael, *Taiping Rebellion*, 2:111–24.

[44] Lutz and Lutz, *Hakka Chinese*, Chap. 9.

sions—including their homes—to this communal fund. This practice not only attracted many converts—as the Taipings' future "Loyal King," Li Xiucheng 李秀成 (1824–64), pointed out, "[We] were poor and had nothing to eat. . . ."[45]—but also helped the God Worshippers cope with the economic damage wrought by their enemies' constant attacks.

By 1849, 10,000 Hakka—along with their former Bendi, Zhuang, and Yao enemies—were flocking to the God Worshippers for refuge from locusts, drought, famine, and typhus as well as from local officials who suppressed famine victims demonstrating against government price-fixing and diversion of relief funds. Hong not only employed the Sacred Treasury but used Hakka prognostication techniques to "'regularly forecast rain or clear weather.'"[46] But it was traditional Hakka shamanism (including some aspects Hong had earlier condemned as "superstition") tied to the Trinity (which *Good Words* had not adequately defined and to which Hong accorded mere symbolic significance in chanting the doxology) which brought the Heavenly Father and Jesus into the God Worshippers' daily midst, there to promise deliverance, accelerate the millennial timetable, and transform the God Worshippers' moral campaign into an insurrection.

The Basel missionaries successfully recruited Hakka converts through Christian healing (while at the same time proscribing traditional Chinese faith healing). The God Worshippers, too, employed this evangelistic technique. *Good Words* had portrayed Jesus as the "Great Physician," Hong "'drew magic charms [in God's name] to cure disease,'"[47] and Yang Xiuqing 楊秀清 (d. 1856), illiterate boss of the local charcoal workers, used Hakka shamanism to take upon himself—in the name of the "omnipotent" Heavenly Father, the "compassionate" Christ, and the "omniscient" Holy Spirit—typhus- and malnutrition-induced illnesses. Yang was also self-appointed medium for the Heavenly Father in prophesying events and publicly reprimanding backsliders who had been identified by the spy network which he modeled on Roberts' congregational surveillance system in Guangzhou. Moreover, Hong's cousin-in-law, Xiao Chaogui 蕭朝貴 (d. 1851), invoked Jesus' name and Yao spirit journeys to help the God Worshippers reenact Hong's 1837 heavenly ascent. Beginning in April 1848, God and

---

[45] Quoted in C. A. Curwen, trans. and ed., *Taiping Rebel: The Deposition of Li Hsiu-ch'eng* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1977), 83.

[46] Quoted in Robert Weller, *Resistance, Chaos and Control in China* (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 1994), 66.

[47] Quoted in ibid.

Jesus descended, through Yang and Xiao, to "display innumerable miracles and powers."[48]

As the God Worshippers sensed themselves under the Heavenly Father's divine protection, they intensified their destruction of ancestral tablets, religious images, and temples, whether dedicated to state Confucianism or to Thistle Mountain cults glorifying illicit love and Zhuang dog worship.[49] Hong dramatized his contempt for Xunzhou's venal officials by destroying the image of Ganwangye 甘王爺, a deified magistrate, while proclaiming that the Heavenly Father, who saves people from "unjust" magistrates, did "not appoint idols in place of virtuous officials. What need is there for those monstrosities invented by mortals . . . in utter disobedience to the Heavenly Father?"[50]

After January 1850, well-armed Bendi militias began attacking the God Worshippers for their iconoclastic attacks on religious institutions, which, the gentry elite pointed out, supported market activities, lineage and village alliances, and social services. The God Worshippers' congregational structure employed a common language, compensated for dispersed Hakka lineage organization, and facilitated the mobilization of thousands of widely-scattered Hakka on a non-kin basis throughout Thistle Mountain. Emboldened by the divine descents, the God Worshippers fought bravely against their Bendi oppressors. By the winter of 1850, Qing government troops joined in suppressing the God Worshippers, whose loyalty to a transcendent God claiming a status far above that of the Manchu Son of Heaven threatened dynastic legitimacy. According to Joseph Levenson, the God Worshippers' challenge was unprecedented, because their "monarchy . . . [was to be] perfectly non-Confucian in its premises, a monarchy, that is, based on a transcendental religious conception, diametrically opposed to the Confucian insistence on immanence."[51]

---

[48] Quoted in Michael, *Taiping Rebellion*, 2:98.

[49] See Robert Weller, "Matricidal Magistrates and Gambling Gods: Weak States and Strong Spirits in China," in Meir Shahar and Robert P. Weller, eds., *Unruly Gods: Divinity and Society in China* (Honolulu: University of Hawai'i Press, 1996), 250–68.

[50] Quoted in Michael, *Taiping Rebellion*, 2:41.

[51] Joseph R. Levenson, *Confucian China and Its Modern Fate: A Trilogy*, 3 vols. (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1968), Pt. 2, 88–89. For an analysis of Taiping restorationism, see Thomas H. Reilly, *The Taiping Heavenly Kingdom: Rebellion and the Blasphemy of Empire* (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 2004).

4. IMPLEMENTING THE KINGDOM

As government attacks intensified, Hong responded by summoning the 20,000 God Worshippers to Jintian 金田, a village at the southern entrance to Thistle Mountain. There, on January 11, 1851, he declared the inauguration of the Heavenly Kingdom of Great Peace (*Taiping Tianguo*). The Heavenly Father (depicted as warrior god and judge speaking through Yang) ordered Taiping men and women to memorize the Ten Commandments within three weeks of enlistment; fight courageously; endure suffering; avoid selfishness, materialism, stealing, and harming civilians; care for one another; deposit spoils into the Sacred Treasury; and avoid gender mixing by segregating themselves into separate camps.

The following September, the Taipings—now 50,000 strong—captured neighboring Yongan 永安. In the effort to deepen dependence on the Heavenly Father, break with the old order, and initiate the theocratic "Heavenly Dynasty," Feng Yunshan mixed solar and lunar elements into a new calendar which eliminated the fatalism of lucky and unlucky days. Moreover, God's rule was to be extended directly to the individual soldier-believer by combining religious, military, and civilian authority into a theocratic pyramid through Hong, now calling himself Heavenly King, and his "brother kings" (of whom Yang was chief-of-staff supervising Feng and Xiao, who were soon to die in battle).

The kings would preside over conscientious bureaucrats (chosen by Hong from among Yongan's failed examination candidates, teachers, and even pawnbrokers) who would emulate the conscientious officials of the Great Commonwealth in making Taiping-controlled territory a "commonwealth of virtuous rule" (as Yao 堯 and Shun 舜 had treated their districts evenhandedly); social harmony (as Confucius and Mencius had taught people "without distinction" and as Tang 湯 and Wu 武 had eliminated the violent and cruel); and security in times of disaster (as Yu 禹 and Ji 稷 had cared for the calamity-stricken regardless of their location). In times of scarcity, the surplus in one district would make up for the deficiency in another.[52] Ethical government would also

[52] Quoted in Michael, *Taiping Rebellion*, 2:36.

insure "justice" in business dealings and the "rules of decorum" in education.[53]

In September 1852, the Taipings swept into the rice-rich Yangzi River valley through Wuchang 武昌, capturing a string of wealthy river cities and inducting thousands of local recruits into their army. Having moved beyond the remote Guangxi hills and studied the Bible from Roberts' church, the Taipings now saw themselves and their new recruits acting within a much broader theological canvass: biblical salvation history itself. Like the Egyptian pharaohs, they charged, the Manchu emperors were alien oppressors who were humiliating the Chinese people. Thousands responded to the Taipings' patriotic summons for *all* Chinese to unite as God's "Chosen People" and march toward liberation from the "devil" Manchus into their millenarian Promised Land. Hong identified this Chinese Exodus as the Heavenly Father's fifth descent (after the Old Testament Flood and Exodus, Jesus' ministry, and Hong's vision) in "great anger" to reestablish his earthly kingdom of peace and equality. *En route*, the Taipings burned land deeds and rent records, massacred Buddhists, Daoists, and Qing officials, and demolished religious sites.

In March 1853, one million Taipings captured Nanjing. Hong designated this former Ming capital "New Jerusalem." It would be the center of "Little Heaven" (in contrast to the "33 layers of . . . Great Heaven above").[54] The Ten Commandments and portions of the Beatitudes were posted on the city gates. Hong now claimed to be the reincarnated Melchizedek, who, as "priest of God Most High" (Gen. 14:18) and "king of righteousness, and . . . also . . . king of peace" (Heb. 7:2), was messianic founder of the first Jerusalem. Hong claimed to have had foreknowledge of the Heavenly Father's descent into Egypt and Guangxi and of Jesus' birth into Abraham's lineage. Moreover, faithful to his monotheism, Hong denied Christ's—and his own—divinity. From this "Heavenly Capital," Hong vowed, the Heavenly Father would topple Beijing's apostate Xianfeng 咸豐 emperor (r. 1851–74), establish a new covenant with the Chinese people, and rule the entire world, in which, Hong exulted, "[a]ll the nations have already reverted [to us]."[55]

---

[53] Quoted in Jian Youwen, *Taiping Tianguo dianzhi tongkao*, 3:1726.

[54] See Hong Xiuquan's annotation to 1 Corinthians 15:45–58, quoted in Michael, *Taiping Rebellion*, 2:232.

[55] See Hong's annotation to Revelation 11:15, quoted in ibid., 2:236.

Hong described the Heavenly Father as the "benevolent," "omnipotent," "omnipresent," "eternal," and "unchangeable" creator and Emperor whose laws are everlasting, who provided just "government of all men and things," and who wore a beard and clothes, had wives, and was grandfather to Hong's son, the "Junior Lord."[56] Hong himself supervised the Taipings' "religious affairs," while Yang remained the Heavenly Father's mouthpiece, overseeing political and military matters through six ministries and fifty administrative units patterned after the utopian *Rites of Zhou* (*Zhouli* 周禮).

Taiping officials (there was no ordained clergy) officiated at worship services, baptisms, weddings, and funerals. Now more elaborate than in Guangxi, Sabbath worship included a recitation of the doxology before an altar of three bowls each of tea, meat, rice, and vegetables. Sermons placed more emphasis on loyalty, courage, and self-sacrifice than on filial devotion in the patriotic struggle against the "devil" Manchus. Hong's commentaries on the Ten Commandments were read aloud, and worship services concluded with hymns, the Lord's Prayer, incense, and firecrackers. Afterward, worshippers received red paper strips to guarantee divine protection. Punishments were harsh: beheading or dismemberment for smoking opium, cowardice in battle, failing to memorize the Ten Commandments, and hoarding private property; lesser violations like tobacco smoking and neglecting religious observances merited the severing of ears and noses, branding of faces, and beatings with bamboo.

The Taipings' detailed millennial blueprint mandated reforms that were far more revolutionary than those of other Chinese rebels, treaty port churches, and even Evangelicals in the West. To democratize the language and thereby facilitate proselytizing, Hong decreed that Chinese become a simplified and punctuated vernacular. References to ancestor worship and other "idolatrous" notions were expunged from the Taiping revisions of some Chinese classics, while many orthodox texts were burned.

Hong's most revolutionary innovations were on behalf of enabling women to participate fully in the new regime. He promoted gender equality through the abolition of footbinding, arranged marriage, polygamy, wife purchase, dowries, widow suicide, and prostitution—practices already shunned by the Hakka. And he decreed women's equal access to schools, property ownership, work outside the home

---

[56] Quoted in Prescott Clark and J. S. Gregory, comps., *Western Reports on the Taiping* (Honolulu: University Press of Hawai'i, 1982), 171.

(including manual labor to which Hakka women were long accustomed), court nobility, civil service examinations, government appointment, and military service. Wherever the Taipings conquered territory, the troops were to execute anyone caught violating women. Even though the Taiping kings maintained harems (a Chinese institution with Old Testament parallels) and employed the traditional Confucian rhetoric of women's "Three Obediences" to father, husband, and sons (which accorded with the Pauline views of women's inferiority in *Good Words*), they imposed monogamy on the rank and file, banned dowries, and encouraged women to marry (and even remarry) of their own free will.

Within Nanjing, theocratic state power was to be the vehicle of the Heavenly Father's loving creationism. No more was individual family wealth to be the basis of power or status. Rather, in the spirit of the *Liyun*, the Taiping state itself would manage commerce, labor, and production and insure equal distribution of all goods and services. Private property, except that which could be carried by hand, was to be turned over to the Sacred Treasury, which provided Nanjing's daily rations. Women, the elderly, infirm, and young were assigned to special institutes (*guan* 官). In addition, 25-member, occupation-specific units were organized to produce for the state. Each unit had its own public treasury, school, and chapel (called "Heavenly Father hall"). Public service institutes were also set up, including those for protection against fire and for medical care, the latter staffed by physicians prohibited from resorting to traditional medical practices except for pulse-taking.[57]

Beyond Nanjing, the Heavenly Kingdom was to be governed through the "Land System of the Heavenly Dynasty," which Jonathan Spence considers "perhaps the most utopian, comprehensive, and authoritarian scheme for human organization ever seen in China up to that time."[58] This revolutionary system went beyond the Gongyang tradition, Mozi, the *Liyun*'s well-field system, and other previous utopian land reform schemes. The *Rites of Zhou*, for example, had claimed that the state owned the land. And the idealistic Sui-Tang "equal field" system later gave way to the "two tax" method of equalizing taxes.

Hong, however, went much further in arguing that, because the land belonged to the Heavenly Father, if "there is land, it should be farmed by all; if there is food, it should be eaten by all; if there are clothes and

---

[57] See John Lovelle Withers II, "The Heavenly Capital: Nanjing Under the Taiping, 1853–1864" (PhD diss., Yale University, 1983).

[58] Jonathan D. Spence, *The Search for Modern China* (New York: W. W. Norton), 175.

money, they should be worn and used by all. There should be no inequality. Everyone should be equally well fed and clothed."[59] To this end, the Taipings proposed to divide comparable-quality land among men and women—for the first time in Chinese history women could now hold title to land—in equal shares (children receiving half the adult amount), according to the number of individuals per family. Families were to keep as much from the harvest as they needed for survival, the surplus to be stored in the congregational granaries for the care of the needy and for potential shortfalls in other areas. Rents were abolished.

The Land System would extend authoritarian state power to an administrative level never before proposed in China: the "congregation" of 25 families under a sergeant personally appointed by Hong himself and centered around a church, where the sergeant would preside over congregational worship, weddings, funerals, and dispute resolution. She or he would insure that people contribute to the Sacred Treasury, from which community expenses were to be paid, and conduct daily classes for children based on the Taiping Bible—which was comprised of the first six Old Testament books, a complete New Testament (Hong himself having rewritten portions of both Testaments), and a third or "True Testament" chronicling the 1848–52 divine descents in Guangxi—as well as various Taiping doctrinal tracts. The Taiping Bible would also become the basis of the Taiping civil service examinations, which, Hong hoped, would bring forth righteous officials.

By 1856, the Taipings governed thirty million people in six provinces along a 300-mile stretch of the lower Yangzi Valley. Yet their theocracy—which had achieved impressive centralized civilian and military control under Yang's leadership—imploded, as the festering conflict over who spoke for God—Hong, the biblical prophet-priest-king, or Yang, the indigenous shaman-medium-generalissimo—precipitated the assassination of Yang and 20,000 members of his court in September of that year. This fratricidal fury crippled Taiping military coordination at the very moment Qing forces were stretched thin fighting other rebels throughout China. Taiping commanders continued to garrison occupied territories and provide relief, regulate trade, administer local examinations, and recruit troops. But, unable to muster sufficient administrative support to implement the Land System, the Taipings were forced to fall back on the old system of private landownership and tax collection. And, over time, troop discipline began to wane.

---

[59] Quoted in Michael, *Taiping Rebellion*, 2:314.

5. RECONFIGURING THE KINGDOM

In April 1859, the Heavenly King sought to reverse the Taiping slide by appointing as "Shield King" his cousin, Hong Ren'gan, to manage the Taiping government and military.[60] Since studying with Roberts in the spring of 1847, Ren'gan had been a teacher around Hua and baptized several Hakka according to the rite described in *Good Words*. In September 1853, after imbibing the Lutheran catechism, he was baptized by Theodore Hamberg. During the next five years, he studied theology, geography, and world history with missionaries in Shanghai, Guangzhou, and Hong Kong. In 1855–58, he was an LMS evangelist and catechist in Hong Kong, preaching in the Lower Bazaar Street chapel, in a medical dispensary, and in the colony's prison.

He also taught school under the supervision of James Legge (1815–97). Nurtured in William Milne's "Missionar Kirk" and with an MA from King's College, Aberdeen, Legge epitomized a number of second-generation Evangelical missionaries committed to enabling the coming Kingdom to realize the fruits of secular progress. As Legge himself stated, God was using scientific education and technological expertise "to show forth his glory" in Hong Kong prior to the fulfillment of the "Great Commission."[61]

The Shield King sought to make Taiping faith more Christian by expunging the vestiges of Yang's shamanism, reversing his cousin's denial of Christ's divinity, replacing Old Testament "compulsion of human force" with Christ's "merciful forgiveness,"[62] and bringing to all of Taiping China the benefits of economic development on display in China's Western treaty port enclaves. Accordingly, he installed a nine- by eleven-foot stone inscription of the Beatitudes in front of his palace and wrote prayers emphasizing New Testament themes. He also intensified calendar reform, supplanting the annual Dragon Boat, Hun-

---

[60] See So Kwan-wai and Eugene P. Boardman, with Ch'iu P'ing, "Hung Jen-kan, Taiping Prime Minister, 1859–1864," *Harvard Journal of Asiatic Studies* 20 (1957): 262–94 and Teng Ssu-yü, "Hung Jen-kan, Prime Minister of the Taiping Kingdom and His Modernization Plans," *United College Journal*, no. 8 (1970–71): 87–95.

[61] Quoted in Norman J. Girardot, *The Victorian Translation of China: James Legge's Oriental Pilgrimage* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2002), 42.

[62] Quoted in Michael, *Taiping Rebellion*, 3:756.

gry Ghost, and Qingming 清明 festivals with observances of the solar new year and birthdays of various world kings.

Hong Ren'gan proposed a startlingly new version of the Heavenly Kingdom, borne of his experience in Shanghai and Hong Kong, where he had glimpsed a "new heaven, new earth, new man, and new world."[63] In his remarkable 1859 essay entitled *A New Work for Aid in Government* (*Zizheng xinpian* 資政新篇),[64] he advocated Taiping China's economic development through its integration into the global economy. Where the Land System was agrarian and statist, *A New Work* advocated commercial development and humanitarian uplift through capitalist-style public-private partnerships and voluntary associations. To this end, Hong urged, the "old, stained, and dirty habits of former times" in China must yield to a "new mind" of modern, Western-style thinking and institutions. Moreover, he recommended, the Taiping government should abolish Buddhism and Daoism (because they "advocate Nothingness" and oppose progress) and transform their temples into churches to spearhead social services. In addition, the government should ban the use of alcohol, tobacco, opium, and other decadent customs—from bound feet, long fingernails, and cricket fights to ostentatious jewelry, lavish funerals, gambling, and geomancy.

The Land System proposed to eliminate China's gentry. But Hong Ren'gan valued their traditional philanthropic activism. Disaster relief, for example, should come from gentry contributions as well as the Sacred Treasury, he urged. Moreover, gentry associations should set up such Western-style philanthropic institutions as orphanages (to curtail infanticide); adoption agencies (to prevent orphans from being sold into servitude and the "coolie trade"); American-style schools to train the disabled, blind, deaf, and dumb for gainful employment; and hospitals (which should also be supported by the proceeds from the sale of Buddhist and Daoist institutions and managed by licensed physicians). He also recommended that convicted felons be rehabilitated through employment in public works projects; that criminals' family members be exempt from punishment for their relatives' crimes; and that decapitation be replaced by hanging.

Taiping China must be economically strong, he urged. National wealth should be developed through mining (to which end, geomancy should be abolished) and manufacturing. This, in turn, should be enhanced by state promotion of Chinese technological innovation, patent

---

[63] Quoted in ibid., 3:828.

[64] For the text, see ibid., 3:758–76.

protection, an expanded transportation infrastructure through road-, railroad-, and steamship-building, new commercial taxes, modern banking services, and provision of life and property insurance. Fellow Christians from the West were partners in this process and should be treated warmly as coreligionists. They should be received in China as hospitably as America was welcoming Chinese immigrants to the California gold fields. Moreover, missionaries and teachers should be welcomed into China's interior to teach. But, because the Kingdom was to be universally equitable, the Taiping government should keep national wealth in Chinese hands by maintaining the controlling shares in global trade and investment arrangements.

The Shield King argued that Taiping China must replace such corrupt practices as bribes and the sale of bureaucratic office with a modern, honest, efficient, and centralized government administration undergirded by Western-style law. Law, he argued, was the source of Britain's imperial power and America's wealth, democracy, and educational prowess and was stronger than Confucian ethics in supporting political and economic institutions. And Taiping citizens should have greater access to their government through the circulation of newspapers and faster communications through a modern post office. Hong even advanced notions of American-style voting in hopes of further democratizing Taiping rule.

Ironically, the very court cliques and bureaucratic infighting Hong Ren'gan hoped his reforms would abolish in fact torpedoed his reform proposals. The gentry opposed his ideas, no matter how carefully Rengan sought to preserve core Confucian principles. Nor was his military strategy against the Qing military successful. The Taipings squandered strategic advantage by refusing, for the sake of ideological purity, to cooperate with other rebels even as the Manchus were preoccupied with suppressing insurrections in every corner of the empire. And although the Taipings asked the Heavenly Father to "bless the foreign brothers and sisters" in their version of the Lord's Prayer, Western Christians, including Roberts himself, eventually condemned the Taipings' "abominable" religion. Meanwhile, by 1860, the Western powers, fearing that a victory for the equality-minded Taipings would end their one-sided commercial privileges (including the lucrative opium trade), began reinforcing tattered Qing forces with American and European mercenaries and matériel.

The Manchus' siege of Nanjing early in 1864 choked off the city's food supply. The Heavenly King ordered his starving faithful to eat weeds, which he dubbed "manna." On June 1, he died. The following month, the Heavenly Capital fell. Hong Ren'gan escaped with the

Young Monarch but was captured. In November, both were executed. By then, the Taiping civil war had taken between twenty and forty million rebel and loyalist lives, destroyed 600 walled cities in 16 of China's 18 provinces, nearly toppled imperial China, and presaged the country's twentieth-century revolutions.

6. THE KINGDOM'S EARTHLY LIMITS

Between the time of China's assimilation of Buddhism and Communism's victory, the Taiping Rebellion was the gravest threat to China's imperial Confucian order. In 1854, Zeng Guofan 曾國藩 (1811–72), who led the loyalist resistance to the Taipings, assessed the dimensions of their heterodox challenge to the Confucian orthodoxy in this way:

> Confucius and Mencius are bitterly crying about [Taiping ideology] in the nether world . . . [because] the moral system, human ethical relationships, cultural inheritance, and institutions of the past several thousand years are swept away in one stroke. . . . Now the Guangdong and Guangxi bandits have appropriated some of the cultural refuse of the foreign barbarians and adhere to the religion of God. . . . [T]hey address one another as brothers, and allege that only Heaven can be called father. . . . Moreover, all the fathers among the people are brothers, and all the mothers sisters. . . . The peasants cannot cultivate their own fields and pay taxes, because it is held that all the land belongs to the Heavenly King. The merchants cannot pursue their own businesses and make profits, because it is held that all commodities are the property of the Heavenly King. The scholars cannot read the Confucian classics, but only the . . . [Bible].[65]

To be sure, the Taipings were not the only Chinese rebels to offer a millenarian alternative to the *ancien régime*. C. K. Yang has observed that, despite the government's constant efforts to control religion, Chinese sectarians often merged piety and politics during troubled times when divinely-appointed leaders like Hong employed scriptural revelation, prophetic preaching, and faith healing to gather marginalized converts into salvationist congregations to convince them that the

---

[65] Quoted in Albert Feuerwerker, *Rebellion in Nineteenth-Century China* (Ann Arbor: Center for Chinese Studies, University of Michigan, 1975), 82–83.

symptoms of cosmic decay, dynastic decline, economic catastrophe, ethnic conflict, and moral depravity portended a cataclysmic end to the prevailing age. The imminent apocalypse would, they vowed, produce a utopian era of individual and collective salvation under such messiahs as the Maitreya Buddha or the Manichaean Prince of Radiance (Ming-wang 明王) who would, in turn, bring to China a new dispensation of equality and plenty under virtuous imperial rule.[66]

The Taipings tapped into this rich sectarian lore.[67] At the same time, they were the first rebels to be inspired by Christianity, which offered far more explosive ideas. Sectarian concepts of equality did not extend beyond self-contained secret society sworn memberships or the Eternal Mother's exclusive White Lotus elect. But the Taipings' Heavenly Father was regarded as creator of all people, who were universally equal as his sons and daughters.

Moreover, beyond the Chinese utopian ideals noted above, the *Liezi* 列子 and the *Classic of Great Equilibrium* (*Taipingjing* 太平經) depict a Daoist paradise of communal ownership, simplicity, personal integrity, and peace in which a virtuous government is responsive to people's needs and achieves harmony among heaven, earth, and society. The Triads, too, had a utopian vision in their concept of the "City of Poplars," which they portrayed as an ideal, plentiful community within the Triad lodges, or "seats of great peace and equality" (*taiping zuo* 太平坐). Yet those same Daoist utopias and Buddhist millenniums lacked a blueprint, timetable, and organization to reorganize secular power. This is why the White Lotus messiah Zhu Yuanzhang 朱元璋 (1328–98), to whom Hong often compared himself, ultimately jettisoned Buddhist eschatology for this-worldly Confucian orthodoxy after overthrowing the Mongols and establishing his Ming dynasty at Nanjing in 1368.

For the Taipings, biblical monotheism connected with and energized Confucian utopianism, Hakka egalitarianism, Daoist and Buddhist eschatology, and sectarian communitarianism to create a millennial framework that attracted the disaffected, inspired the puritanism that disciplined them, molded the theocracy that organized them, and propelled the effort to overturn dynastic government altogether. Their campaign to realize indigenous utopian goals through a foreign, bibli-

---

[66] C. K. Yang, *Religion in Chinese Society* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1967), 218.

[67] See P. Richard Bohr, "The Taipings in Chinese Sectarian Perspective," in Kwang-Ching Liu and Richard Shek, eds., *Heterodoxy in Late Imperial China* (Honolulu: University of Hawai'i Press, 2004), 393–430.

cally-inspired theocracy at Nanjing lasted eleven years. This was not only the longest insurgent utopia in imperial China but the largest millenarian uprising in world history. The Taipings were therefore unique among Chinese dissident movements and went much farther than the missionaries and Chinese Christians in proposing such revolutionary solutions to China's crises as economic, social, and gender equality; reduction of taxes and abolition of rents; socialist alternatives to property rights, landlord-tenant relations, labor management, and the gentry's role in public welfare; and a new relationship between individual and state.

In the end, though, the Taipings' millennial campaign failed to create the institutions needed to implement their vision. In Nanjing, Hong eventually withdrew into mystical detachment as his court reverted to time-honored Confucian bureaucratism. Unable to persuade the scholar-gentry elite to accept their unorthodox religion, notions of public ownership and distributive justice, or to implement their examination system to recruit a civil service, the Taipings could not muster the administrative resources necessary to implement their reform plans. And, although the promise of land to the tiller had wide appeal, the Taipings could not mobilize, indoctrinate, or deploy sufficiently large numbers of supporters to activate the Land System. As a result, the Confucian gentry remained in charge and insured the survival of dynastic government for another half century.

The Taipings Rebellion remains the sole instance in which the Bible encountered Chinese culture to create a powerful revolutionary surge in the quest to bring the Kingdom of Heaven to earth. In later years, Liang Fa's Evangelical Protestantism not only affirmed on-going missionary Christianity but also inspired the rise of indigenous Chinese Christianity, which usually coexisted peacefully with imperial and republican governments. The Social Gospel theology anticipated by Hong Rengan's proposals also presaged the emergence of the self-strengthening search for "modernization" and the more radical efforts of Ren'gan's fellow "Christian reformers" (Paul Cohen's term), such as Wang Tao 王韜 (1828–97) and Zheng Guanying 鄭觀應 (1842–1922), to favor Hong Ren'gan's "progressive" millennialism of China's national development through divine immanence over Hong Xiuquan's "cataclysmic" millennialism of authoritarian theocratic rule through God's transcendence.[68] Inspired by Wang Tao's assertion that the "*tao* of the

[68] For an overview of China's Christian reformers, see Paul A. Cohen, "Littoral and Hinterland in Nineteenth Century China: The 'Christian' Reformers," in John K. Fairbank, ed., *The Missionary Enterprise in China and America* (Cambridge, Mass.:

East and the *tao* of the West form a great unity (*ta-t'ung* [*datong*])," [69] these reformers advocated a China

> more commercial than agricultural in its economic foundation, more modern than traditional in its administration and social arrangements, more Western (Christian) than Chinese (Confucian) in its intellectual bearing, and more outward- than inward-looking in its general global orientation and involvement. [70]

Like Hong Ren'gan, who no longer regarded China as the uniquely superior, self-sufficient cultural Middle Kingdom but as one nation among many, the reformers proposed the development of China's "wealth and strength" through the adoption of science and technology, a legal system, representative political institutions, a modern press, and notions of a civil society from the West.

Non-Christian utopians like Kang Youwei 康有為 (1858–1927), whose egalitarianism was informed in large part by Buddhism, portrayed Confucius as a reformer, valued the Gongyang perspective, and quoted the *Liyun* chapter in much the same way Hong Xiuquan did. And in his influential *Book of the Great Commonwealth* (*Datong shu* 大同書), Kang, like Hong, called for equality to replace hierarchical distinctions of family, lineage, class, and ethnicity and advocated benevolence (*ren* 仁) as the source of social cohesion. He also advanced economic development and humanitarian reforms remarkably similar to those of Hong Ren'gan; recommended placing education, social services, agriculture, industry, and commerce under centralized, public management; and regarded women's rights and parliamentary government as the inevitable consequence of the Great Commonwealth ideal. [71]

Harvard University Press, 1974), 197–225. For an analysis of "progressive" versus "cataclysmic" millennialism, see Catherine Wessinger, *Millennialism, Persecution, and Violence: Historical Cases* (Syracuse, N.Y.: Syracuse University Press, 2000), "Introduction." H. Richard Niebuhr makes the following insightful observation regarding the dilemma of theocratic rule: "It was easy to use the idea of the Kingdom as a critical principle for the overthrow of usurpers of God's absolute authority, but very difficult to employ it for the purpose of establishing a new system of political order" (*The Kingdom of God in America* [New York: Harper Torchbook, 1959], 32).

[69] Quoted in Paul A. Cohen, *Between Tradition and Modernity: Wang T'ao and Reform in Late Ch'ing China* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1974), 69.

[70] Cohen, "Littoral and Hinterland," 197.

[71] See Kung-chuan Hsiao, *A Modern China and a New World: K'ang Yu-wei, Reformer and Utopian, 1858–1927* (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 1975), Parts 3 and 4.

The revolutionary Sun Yat-sen (1866–1925)—a Christian Hakka who called himself "Hong Xiuquan the second"—famously quoted from the *Liyun* chapter: "The whole world is a single commonwealth (*tianxia wei gong* 天下為公)." He credited Taiping egalitarianism with inspiring his notion of the "people's welfare," especially regarding property ownership and state control of workers. At the same time, he castigated the Taipings for ignoring the "people's rights." Moreover, although Mao Zedong (1893–1976) fashioned a chiliastic vision from Marxism-Leninism, he often used the terms "Communism" and "*da-tong*" interchangeably and in 1950 enacted the Marriage Law, which accorded women equal rights in marriage, divorce, and property ownership.

As China's problems intensified in the late imperial and republican periods, increasing numbers of Chinese people appealed to Pure Land Buddhism and the Christian Kingdom of God to quickly descend and ease their suffering. Once engaged with the human world, these millennial convictions offered practical solutions to enhancing human life. Even in today's globalizing China, popular grievances continue to find religious expression among charismatic pseudo- or non-Christian groups articulating the kind of millennialist visions of virtuous government and economic justice which gave rise to the Taipings. Further study of Taiping doctrine and ritual within the larger Chinese religious context will help illuminate the degree to which, no matter how independent Chinese Christians claim to have become since 1949, the Chinese government continues to be as wary of millenarian undercurrents from within as from without.

Part III
Comparative Studies

Ching Feng, n.s., **7.1–2** (2006) 127–152

Understanding Suffering from Buddhist and Christian Perspectives

XUE YU

1. INTRODUCTION

That human beings are in constant struggle against suffering is a universal phenomenon, just as the *Dhammapada* says: "All tremble at the rod; all fear Death" (v. 129). Behind this phenomenon lie the realities of the human world which is characterized by pain and suffering,[1] and of mankind which, since its beginning, is ceaselessly searching ways to release itself from suffering. Religion is one of such ways mankind has discovered to find and achieve happiness, and which has equipped mankind with hope of overcoming suffering through concrete structures and idealistic symbolism. Human history tells us that religion existed at an early stage of human existence because man needs religion

---

XUE Yu 學愚 is assistant professor in the Department of Cultural and Religious Studies, The Chinese University of Hong Kong.

[1] John Hick differentiates pain from suffering: while the former means physical pains, including the pains of hunger and thirst, the latter refers to mental and emotional pains of loneliness, anxiety, remorse, fear, grief, and envy. See John Hick, "Soul-making Theodicy," in *God and the Problem of Evil*, ed. William L. Rowe (Oxford and Malden, Mass.: Blackwell, 2001), 273. However, it is difficult to separate physical pains from mental or psychological pains as they are connected to each other in one way or another. Therefore, in this paper, no such differentiation is made but suffering is understood in a much broader sense as it is implied in the Buddhist term *dukkha*.

to deal with suffering. It can be said that the arising and existence of religion have reflected a real situation mankind undergoes in this world. Karl Marx once said,

> Religious distress is at the same time the expression of real distress and the protest against real distress. Religion is the sigh of the oppressed creature, the heart of a heartless world, just as it is the spirit of a spiritless situation. It is the opium of the people.[2]

Although Marx's remark sounds sarcastic and overemphasizes the illusive effect of religion, it indicates the role and function of religion in human life in actual struggle against suffering. In the face of the reality of human existence, religion serves as a dynamic force for bringing changes to the world of suffering.

The present paper examines the Buddhist and Christian understandings of suffering. I shall first analyze the connection between man and suffering, exploring how the two religions perceive suffering and identify its cause(s), although I will restrain myself from dealing with them in ontological ways. Then I will go further to examine the meaning of suffering and the methods for bringing forth the end of suffering that are advocated in the two religions, in order to find common ground for Buddhists and Christians on the alleviation of and liberation from suffering.

2. MAN, SUFFERING, AND ITS ORIGIN

From a sociological point of view, the existence of suffering reflects the arising and existence of religion, and religion provides explanations for the problem of suffering as well as answers for questions such as why mankind suffers and how suffering can come to an end in connection with human existence. Laozi once said, "What does it mean to regard great trouble as seriously as you regard the body? The reason why I have great trouble is that I have a body. If I have no body, what trouble could I have?"[3] Accordingly, the existence of man is the very

---

[2] Jon Elster, ed., *Karl Marx: A Reader* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1986), 301.

[3] 何謂貴大患若身。吾所以有大患者，為吾有身，及吾無身，吾有何患. The translation of this

source of suffering. Both Buddhism and Christianity have explored the cause of suffering in connection with human life further back before man was born into this world. Buddhists say that the origin of suffering is ignorance and craving, which cause the existence of the five aggregates of man, and which is the root of suffering, like a burning house that is full of pain, fear, frustration, and despair. Christianity, however, suggests that man is born of sin[4] due to his self-alienation from God, and that suffering is necessarily the lot of human existence. Yet, most Christians would on the one hand reluctantly admit that sin and suffering are part of the creation in which God created man among creatures, but on the other hand suggest that suffering is the result of sin committed in the fall. Endowed with freewill, man disobeyed God or alienated himself from God, just as Augustine suggested that it is the evil will that caused evil acts and in turn suffering:

> . . . when an evil choice happens in any being, then what happens is dependent on the will of that being; the failure is voluntary, not necessary, and the punishment that follows is just. For this failure does not consist in defection to things which are evil in themselves; it is the defection in itself that is evil.[5]

Augustine explained that when the freewill leaves the higher and turns to the lower, it becomes bad, not because the thing to which it turns is bad, but because the turning is itself perverse. The arising of freewill is said to be the privation of good, which is not caused but permitted by God. The fall was thus the retribution or rather the consequence of the misuse of freewill, and God had been aware of the possibility of the misuses of freewill and of the consequent possibility of evil.

Augustine's interpretation of original sin and freewill theory have dominated Christian theology for a long period of time, yet they have not satisfactorily explained why an omniscient and perfect God would

---

passage of the *Daode jing* 道德經 (chap. 13) is taken from Wing-tsit Chan, trans. and comp., *A Source Book in Chinese Philosophy* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1973), 145.

[4] Augustine quoted a passage from the book of Ecclesiasticus that "the beginning of all sin is pride" (10:15). The word "pride" indicates the illusion of self-importance due to self-ignorance. The action of eating the forbidden fruit may be interpreted as self-pride of man against God; however, it may also be understood as being motivated by one's desire.

[5] Augustine, "City of God," in *The Problem of Evil: A Reader*, ed. Mark Larrimore (Oxford and Malden, Mass.: Blackwell, 2001), 60.

permit, with the existence of freewill, the occurrence of the fall of mankind and its subsequent suffering. His explanation of the fall—that man leaves the higher and turns to the lower by freewill, thus giving rise to evil through the privation of good—appears rather scientifically implausible in the modern world, because such an explanation may imply that the fall has "brought about the disharmony of nature" in the sense that "earthquake and flood, disease, decay, and death are consequences either of a human fall, or of a prior fall of angelic beings who are now exerting an evil influence upon the earth."[6] Thus, some modern Christian scholars have turned to Irenaeus's (120–202) idea of spiritual maturing for a better explanation. Irenaeus suggested that although man, created in the image of God, was endowed with goodness and was to be brought to the stage of the likeness of God, he was still in the stage of weakness and immaturity. Because man was spiritually and morally imperfect and immature at the time of the creation, he had to undergo spiritual development and moral growth in order finally to be brought to perfection as God intended. John Hick calls this process of development and growth the second stage of God's creative work "of which we are a part," and in which "the intelligent, ethical, and religious animal is being brought through one's own free responses into what Irenaeus called the divine 'likeness.'"[7] The fall interrupted this process, or rather delayed the process of maturation, marking a kind of human weaning from the parental God.[8] Thus man's fall should not be understood as an adult crime full of malice and pregnant with perpetual guilt, but rather as something occurring in the childhood of race, an understandable lapse, and subsequent suffering is considered as the necessary part of the development and growth to the perfection.

Although Irenaeus's idea seems plausible and logical, some questions still remain unanswered, such as what is the purpose of God's creation. It is certainly not the case that God created the world and man due to his haphazard fancy. And it cannot simply be a game that God intends to play with his creatures. How should Christians formulate a theodicy in connection with man's growth or maturing, whether it is the case that God leaves man to act by himself in accordance with the

---

[6] Hick, "Soul-making Theodicy," 266–67.

[7] Ibid., 268. Hick further stated, "But we must not blur our awareness that the ideal state is not something already enjoyed and lost, but is a future and as yet unrealized goal. The reality is not a perfect creation which has gone tragically wrong, but a still continuing creative process whose completion lies in the eschaton" (ibid., 269).

[8] André LaCocque, "Sin and Guilt," in *Encyclopedia of Religion*, 16 vols., ed. Mircea Eliade (New York: Macmillan, 1987), 13:330.

laws he has given, or that God interferes or rather is in control of the process? Furthermore, the whole history of Christianity and its doctrine would have to be reformulated should his idea be accepted as orthodox. Thus, more biblical sources supporting a reinterpretation of the creation narrative in general and that of the fall in particular are still to be sought.

Buddhism seems not bothered by such questions for it is not interested in any creation theory. It claims that the first cause is not found. Although Buddhists have suggested that there are conditioned causes for the beginning of man's existence, such causes, however, cannot be personal but impersonal, such as ignorance and attachment, which inevitably give rise to man's suffering according to the impersonal law of causality. The connection between man's existence, ignorance and attachment, and suffering is illustrated in the doctrine of *paṭicca-samuppāda* or dependent-origination of life-process. Ignorance (*avijjā*) is a mental state that prevents one's mind from seeing things as they are, i.e., from discerning their impermanence and no-self; and that makes one attach to the world and to one's body as if they are "I" or "mine." Ignorance and attachment thus set the wheel of life in motion through twelve phases into the cycle of rebirth, that is, ignorance, conditioning activities, rebirth-consciousness, matter and mind, six sense-bases, contact, feeling, carving, grasping, becoming, birth, old age, and death. Suffering throughout rebirth is the consequence of one's karma performed in connection with ignorance, craving, and hatred.

Thus, in order to understand how Buddhism and Christianity respectively perceive suffering and its connection with human life, it is necessary to better understand the origin of suffering at the early stage of human existence. In both Buddhism and Christianity, suffering of man begins with birth, yet its cause should be found somewhere before one is born. According to Buddhism, the absolute beginning of human life is unconceivable as one conditions and is conditioned by others. Nevertheless, the record for the relatively known beginning of human life on the earth within a cycle of arising, existing, changing, and disappearing of the world can be found in a number of Buddhist texts. The *Aggañña Sutta* relates that at a time of contraction of the previous world, living beings were mostly born in the Ābhassara Brahma world: "Here, they dwell, mind-made, feeding on delight, self-luminous, moving through the air, glorious."[9] They were reborn in this world

[9] "On Knowledge of Beginning," in *The Long Discourses of the Buddha: A Translation of the* Dīgha Nikāya, trans. Maurice Walshe (Boston: Wisdom Publications, 1995), 409–10.

when it began to expand again. At this moment of evolution of the world, there was just one mass of water and savory earth as if the skin cooled down from hot milk. A certain being of a greedy nature tasted the savory earth on its finger and became taken with the flavor, and others followed his suit. Consequently, "their bodies become coarse and hard muscles appeared, losing their delicate skin and supernatural power of [flying]. They lost self luminous glory and came to walk on earth."[10] This is the turning point of the evolution or rather a fall from mind-made beings into human beings resulting from tasting of the earth out of greed and ignorance, which later on became the very nature of human existence and which subsequently gave rise to suffering.

Gradually, the environment on the earth after the evolution also deteriorated as self-growing natural resource of the savory earth gradually diminished, and newly appeared human beings had to work for their survival and their bodies became coarser along with increasing desires, selfishness, hatred, and self-pride that subsequently produced the cycle of rebirth, as it is said, "This is the origin of birth, old age, sickness, and death."[11] After evils and conflicts among humans occurred and further developed, a king or raja was selected to maintain order by punishing evil doers, and human society of four castes came into existence.[12] Thus, man suffered not only spiritually but physically as well in such social and natural environment.

How did suffering occur in connection with human existence, according to Christianity? According to the book of Genesis, "In the beginning God created the heaven and the earth." In the sixth day God created man in his own image and put him in Eden, entrusting him with things created earlier. God said to him: "Of every tree of the garden thou mayest freely eat. But of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, thou shalt not eat of it: for in the day that thou eatest thereof you shalt surely die." Then, God caused a deep sleep to fall upon Adam, and took one of his ribs, making it into a woman and brought her unto the man as wife. Thus, man and woman lived heavenly life in Eden, knowing nothing of suffering, until one day they took the fruit from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil under the seduction of the serpent. Subsequently, "the eyes of them both were opened." God, dis-

---

[10] T. 1 (1) 37c12–13.

[11] T. 1 (1) 38b19–20.

[12] It is worth noticing that the priest class or Brahmins, according to this sutta, were those who, having put aside evil and unwholesome things, went to forest and thus became well-known for their meditation, although later on, they returned to human society and became involved in worldly affairs.

pleased with their disobedience and betrayal, pronounced that "Cursed is the ground for thy sake: in sorrow shalt thou eat of it all the days of thy life, Thorns also and thistles shall it bring forth to thee; and thou shalt eat the herb of the field. In the sweat of thy face shalt thou eat bread, till thou return unto the ground." Eventually, Adam and Eve were expelled away from Eden, and what they did turned out to be the collective sin for all mankind.[13] Suffering becomes the common legacy of mankind and the ultimate price they and their descendents pay for the sin of alienation.

Comparing their accounts of what happened at the beginning of human existence, we may find in the two religions some interesting coincidences of their understanding of suffering and its relation with man. First, man before and after the fall is neither the same nor completely different. He suffers only after he has become fully human. According to Christianity, human existence can be said to have begun with the fall. Although Adam and Eve lived in Eden before, it was only after the fall, which separated them from the previous existence with God, that they became fully identified as human beings. The man God created was somewhat different from the man after the fall, because happiness was then lost and suffering occurred. Only after the fall as the consequence of eating the fruit of knowledge did Adam and Eve come to be self-conscious of their humanness and of suffering. As Ron Reifer said:

> In the Judeo-Christian tradition the pain of "the Fall" is a metaphor of the pain of life. In the myth of Genesis God punishes Adam and Eve for their "original sin" by expelling them from paradise and cursing the woman the pain of birth and the man with the pain of toil. The expulsion from Eden is the primordial change, the change which begins history. It is the change from innocence to sin, from permanence to impermanence, from the eternal rock of changeless paradise to the flowing river of historical time.[14]

In Buddhism, man came into existence after the fall of mind-made beings, although the fall occurred within a single process of evolution instead of creation. The one before the fall and the one after it are nei-

---

[13] All the above quotations are taken from *The New Cambridge Paragraph Bible with the Apocrypha: King James Version*, ed. David Norton (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005).

[14] Ron Leifer, *The Happiness Project: Transforming the Three Poisons That Cause the Suffering We Inflict on Ourselves and Others* (Ithaca, N.Y.: Snow Lion Publications, 1997), 83.

ther entirely the same nor completely different, and only after the fall does one become possessed with human consciousness and live as a human being. In both Buddhism and Christianity, although man did not completely lose their previous goodness after the fall, it caused man into existence fully as man.

Second, the reason for the fall can be found within man's ignorance and attachment or desire. In traditional Christian theology, the cause for the fall is largely assigned to human freewill, which alienated man from God. Sometimes, the devil or the evil force, either personalized as Satan or embodied in the serpent, is also blamed for their seductive role in man's fall. As Langdon Gilkey said,

> The fall, being now captive to the Devil, estrangement or alienation from our natural order or potentialities, enmity towards God and neighbor, the bondage of the will, having to die, being captive of death; and, on the divine side, the judgment and the wrath of God, the punishing righteousness of God, and condemnation.[15]

Tracing the cause of the fall back to human freewill or to God's punishment seems to be not exhaustive enough. We may further trace the cause to ignorance, selfish desire, and self-pride of man (the serpent may be seen as their embodiment). In other words, the freewill can further find its antecedence in man's ignorance of God's words and of man's attachment to that which is personified as Satan. The act of alienation or the fall itself is not the cause but rather the result of ignorance. Man ignored the words of God, which is the manifestation of truth, desiring for or attaching themselves to the fruit of knowledge so that "the eyes of them both were opened." Here, the opening of eyes is a way into human existence. What they "saw" thereafter in fact is the knowledge of man as a result of losing the eyes of divinity. Temporally, the finite will of man initiated by ignorance and desire precedes the fall, and the punishment or curse of God held no place in this process. Thus, the fall was not due to divine punishment or curse, which is only God's logical reaction against man's action. It is rather the natural and direct outcome of man's disobedient and finite will against the will of God.

Buddhism is not interested in finding the first cause, yet, as said before, ignorance is said to have played a decisive role in the cycle of rebirth and suffering of man. Ignorance generates craving, and the two

---

[15] Langdon Gilkey, "The Christian Understanding of Suffering," *Buddhist–Christian Studies* 5 (1985): 56.

together constitute the cause for the lots of life, as the *Dhammapada* says: "From craving springs grief, from craving springs fear, for him who is wholly free from craving, there is no grief, much less fear" (v. 216). The cause of the fall in the case of man's advent into this world, as we have examined earlier, is attributed to the desire for gratification of man's sense pleasure due to ignorance about the consequence of tasting the savory earth. But the acts of eating the fruit of knowledge in Christianity and of tasting the savory earth in Buddhism can be understood metaphorically and symbolically rather than only literally. Both acts may imply that the fall occurred neither out of nothing nor under the influence of outside power, but was due to man's own will and behavior as poisoned by ignorance and desire.

Third, in connection with the second, man's freewill and action initiated by ignorance and selfish desire naturally give rise to the retribution or consequence of suffering, free of outside intervention. In other words, suffering is the natural consequence of the fall or the fall is naturally impregnated with the potential of suffering. Man is responsible for his suffering. The fall foretells the inevitability of suffering that man has to face and undergo. As a direct result, man had to give up his previous enjoyments in the paradise or heavenly world. According to the *Aggañña Sutta*, before the fall (i.e., turning into human beings) the mind-made beings from Ābhassara Brahman World, although neither immortal nor fully enlightened, were bestowed with celestial character and enjoyed much greater pleasures, knowing nothing of suffering.[16] The tasting of the savory earth out of craving and ignorance, however, served as the turning point at which the heavenly beings turned into human beings and were then deprived of happiness they had previously enjoyed. According to the book of Genesis, God created Adam and entrusted him with the charge of everything (including the earth and different creatures) so that Adam might enjoy a heavenly life in Eden without a slight feeling of suffering. His disobedience to God due to ignorance and selfish craving, however, turned the life of heavenly beings into that of human beings as Adam and Eve were driven out of Eden into this suffering world.

> To either case [viz. Irenaeus and Augustine], suffering in all its forms was understood as a consequence of human religious and moral disobedience to God. It was understood as stemming from the broken

[16] According to Chan (Zen) Buddhism, sentient beings are endowed with Buddha-nature and are full of potential for enlightenment, but due to defilements of ignorance of their Buddha-nature, they suffer within the cycle of rebirth.

> relationship ("sin") between humans and God—however that brokenness in turn may ultimately have arisen in the Fall.[17]

John Bowker points out that in the synoptic Gospels, various attitudes in the Jewish tradition towards suffering are found; yet the view that "suffering may well be a punishment or retribution" for sin is implied rather than specifically discussed in them.[18] In them, moreover, virtually no discussion is carried out as to why suffering should exist (e.g., for paralytics). Looking from another perspective, we may find that suffering is neither imposed by God nor by other external powers, but incurred by man himself. In Christianity, suffering is the consequence of one's freewill and action of self-alienation. Looking from the Christian perspective on suffering, Gilkey explained suffering in terms of man's own responsibility by referring to the law of karma. He said:

> In each case the explanation for suffering within finitude is obvious: in the first suffering is the result of the separation or alienation out of which finitude itself arises; in the second it is the result of the mixture of good and evil elements that constitute finitude; in the third, suffering is the consequence of the same natural and neutral forces of things that brought finite life into being in the first place, and in the fourth it arises from decisions taken in earlier lives.[19]

Man should not blame others for his suffering, nor should he attempt to find the causes of suffering outside himself. This is certainly in tune with the Buddhist view that the law of causality operates in universe without the interference of any outside power. Nevertheless, it should be pointed out that self-responsibility for suffering may not be understood as determinism in the sense that one cannot make any efforts to eliminate suffering either by following the path of the Buddha or by renewing one's faith in God.

Fourth, as man has not completely lost their goodness in the fall, suffering may enable man to discover his authentic self by forcing him to give up the false self. According to both Christianity and Buddhism, humans became fully endowed with human characteristics at the moment of the fall as they ignored their true or authentic self and assumed their inauthentic or deluded self. However, on the one hand, this is not

---

[17] Gilkey, "The Christian Understanding of Suffering," 57.

[18] John W. Bowker, *Problems of Suffering in Religions of the World* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1970), 50–51.

[19] Gilkey, "The Christian Understanding of Suffering," 54.

to say that the true self was lost forever, but that it only becomes concealed, waiting for the opportunity to become prevalent and dominant again. On the other hand, the true self cannot be found without the inauthentic self serving as a basis on which a new being could grow. In Buddhism, the authentic and inauthentic selves are in fact not two but one that can be realized through awakening to no-self. As Zen master Dōgen 道元 once said in the chapter of "Genjō kōan" 現成公案 in the *Shōbōgenzō* 正法眼蔵: "To study the Buddha Way is to study the self; to study the self is to forget the self; to forget the self is to be authenticated by the myriad things." In Christianity, the authentic self full of "goodness" can be regained by dissolving the inauthentic self that has been separated from God, so that one can be reunited with God—and this can be done by coming to faith in Jesus Christ as redeemer. Just as Rudolf Bultmann said, "man as man can know that the trouble with man is himself, and that in order to achieve Authentic Being, he must be delivered from self."[20]

The foregoing comparisons between the two religions can be summarized as follows:

Buddhism	**Christianity**
evolution	creation
mind-made living being	man made in God's image
self-sufficient with everything	everything created by God
Ābhassara Brahman World	the heavenly Eden
desire for tasting the earth	desire for eating the fruit
ignorance of things as they are	ignorance of God's words
the fall	the fall
suffering (in connection with karma)	suffering (in connection with sin)
liberation (awakening to no-self)	salvation (reunion with God)

It should be kept in mind that such comparisons are never intended to imply that Buddhism and Christianity have the same attitudes towards man's existence and its connection with suffering. There are indeed quite a number of fundamental differences between them, yet only the similarities are considered relevant to this study. We have used

[20] This passage is quoted from Francis H. Cook's response to Gilkey, in "Responses to Langdon Gilkey," *Buddhist–Christian Studies* 5 (1985): 98.

the term "fall" to refer to the advent of man into this world as recorded in the *Aggañña Sutra*, somewhat differing from the Christian sense of the word, i.e., degeneration of man resulting in his separation from God. However, in the Buddhist sense it may be understood as the way of evolution in the cycle of rebirth. In Buddhism, man are bestowed with some advantages after the fall: although physically and mentally, man has lost some advantages, spiritually he has obtained a better position for achieving the highest goal of complete liberation—better than that of his predecessor, the mind-made being, because his life is now accompanied with suffering, which serves as a necessary force for spiritual advancement.

According to Buddhism, there are six states (devas, asuras, human beings, hellish beings, hungry ghosts, and animals) of existence of sentient beings within the Three Realms (Desire, Form, and Formless). Humans occupy the middle yet advantageous position as they can find both pleasure and suffering in their lives. Above man, devas and asuras exclusively enjoy a pleasant life owing to their previous karma. Yet they know nothing about suffering and lack of motivation for struggle for liberation, and will be reborn in a lower state once their good karma is exhausted. Below man, living beings in the three lower states are absorbed in suffering without the slightest occasion for relaxation, and so they have no chance to know the way out of suffering. Only humans, who live with the mixture of suffering and happiness, could experience suffering and make use of the opportunity and freedom of enjoyment both to initiate their faith on the basis of the teaching of the Buddha and to find the way out of suffering. Therefore, although the human world is full of suffering, birth into the human world as well as the opportunity of encountering the Dharma is a great blessing and a huge advantage, just as Masao Abe said:

> This is the reason that Mahayana Buddhism has the following preamble to the verses which comprise the three-fold refuge in the Buddha, the Dharma, and the Sangha: "Hard is it to be born into human life. We now live it. Difficult is it to hear the teaching of the Buddha. We now hear it. If we do not deliver ourselves in this present life, no hope is there ever to cross the sea of birth and death. Let us all together, with truest hearts, take refuge in the three treasures."[21]

[21] "Responses to Langdon Gilkey," 69.

Having thus understood the meaning of the fall in Buddhism, we may also apply such an understanding to the fall in Christianity despite the traditional interpretation. Irenaeus contended that the fall was not "an infinite crime and cosmic disaster," but is simply the starting point for the spiritual growth from being the "image of God" to the "likeness of God."[22] John Hick, who contends that "there never was a fall from an original righteousness and grace," suggests that man, who is an "intelligent ethical and religious animal," spiritually and morally progresses from the early or lower stage of being "in the image of God" to that of being "in the likeness of God" "through one's own free responses into what Irenaeus called the 'divine likeness.'"[23] Thus, ever since man appeared or was created, he has been constantly and steadily on his way of spiritual development, although he may sometimes encounter setback because of his weakness. Therefore, in both Buddhism and Christianity the fall actually serves as the turning point that affords the opportunity for spiritual development. Thus, the "fall" may not be a fall at all, but a necessary stage for man to go through the process of becoming perfect.

3. MEANING AND END OF SUFFERING: UNDERSTANDING SUFFERING AS IT IS

We have traced the origin of suffering back to man's ignorance and craving even before he is born as man. However, traditional (or orthodox) Christians may not willingly accept the cause and effect theory in explaining suffering because of the claim that God is the cause of all existence. Thomas Aquinas carefully analyzed the relation between God's primary causality as the infinite source and the secondary God-given causality of creatures. Job encounters ordeals not because of any wrongdoings but exactly because he has done nothing wrong. "Job stands fast," said Martin Luther, "and holds that God chastises even the righteous without reason."[24] Bowker presumes that Jesus repudiated a simple cause–effect understanding of suffering yet implied that suffering would be an ultimate punishment. He supports this claim by citing

---

[22] Hick, "Soul-making Theodicy," 267–68.

[23] Ibid., 268–69.

[24] Martin Luther, "Preface to the Book of Job," in *The Problem of Evil: A Reader*, 135.

an episode: When Jesus was told that Pilate had mixed sacrifices with some Galileans' blood, he declared, "Do you imagine that, because these Galileans suffered this fate, they must have been greater sinners than anyone else in Galilee? I tell you they were not; but unless you repent, you will all of you come to the same end" (Luke 13:1–5).

Hesitation or reluctance in accepting man's connection with suffering in terms of cause and effect reflects the Christian dilemma as to why man suffers since his birth despite the fact that God is all-powerful, all-good, and all-wise. Gilkey elaborated Augustine's view on sin and suffering thus:

> For clearly suffering, along with its elder sibling "evil," enter this stage as aliens, as anomalies, as interlopes and "spoilers," as in fact enemies to what is—neither to what is "already there" or to what "essentially is."[25]

Gilkey did not explain how suffering and evil could occur within the framework of creation if such defects had nothing to do with God. He simply suggested that suffering might find its ultimate cause in the fall and reappear through man's own freewill, and that its cure is to be found in redemption. Questions such as how freewill, evil, or sin as if new came into existence at the beginning, and how they are related to suffering, remain unsolved.

From the Buddhist perspective, the problems about original sin and consequent suffering would not come up at all. A Buddhist may suggest that the fall in Christianity can be interpreted in terms of cause and effect from man's perspective instead of God's, without attaching too much importance to creation theology. God created man, yet man creates his own destiny of the fall and suffering. On the one hand, man is responsible for his sin, the fall, and suffering even though God created him. Man is gifted with finite freedom, which may give rise to evil will and act due to ignorance and desire. On the other hand, the reality of suffering may discredit neither the existence nor the perfection of God, who is outside of or beyond cause and effect. The law of cause and effect (conventional reality) can only reveal the existence of man but not what is beyond (ultimate reality), namely the existence of God or the first cause. God may enter into the world and intervene in worldly affairs, yet such intervention cannot be fully understood through human capacity, but must remain mysterious. Thus, the absolute cause of suf-

---

[25] Gilkey, "The Christian Understanding of Suffering," 54.

fering or its first cause cannot be logically or rationally perceived, yet suffering as far as man is concerned can be understood through the experience of it. Suffering in the world may arise under a revealed cause (man has sinned due to his freewill and ignorance) or an unrevealed reason (the purpose of God, who is silent and who is a fair judge). Man may never know the purpose of God, yet it is important and incumbent on man to understand the meaning of suffering and to make efforts to find ways to ease it and bring it to an end. Therefore, instead of adhering to the concept of the original sin, Christians may shift the focus to the dynamic possibility of relieving suffering on the basis of faith and redemption. As Gilkey said, "Christianity, like Judaism, begins not with speculation about origins but with the historical experience of rescue or redemption."[26]

Buddhism and Christianity may attempt to discover the origin of the suffering of man, yet such an attempt can only be understood as intended to satisfy the curiosity of their followers; that however is unessential for their liberation or salvation. Religion is concerned more with the existence of suffering and its end than its origin. As indicated in a Buddhist parable, it is important for the wounded man to take out the arrow first even without knowing who has shot it.[27] In both Buddhism and Christianity, it seems that it is beyond human capacity to perceive the absolute and solitary origin of suffering. Buddhism emphasizes wisdom with which to see suffering as it is, while Christianity stresses the importance of faith in attaining salvation. Buddhism is not interested in providing an answer to the question what is the absolute beginning of human existence; rather, it considers such question within

---

[26] Ibid., 53.

[27] On one occasion Bhikkhu Mālunkyāputta approached the Buddha, demanding to know the answers to some metaphysical questions, such as whether the world is eternal or not. He even threatened that he would abandon the precepts and return to the lay life if the Buddha refused to elucidate them. The Buddha made use of the arrow metaphor in reply: "It is as if a person were pierced by an arrow thickly smeared with poison, and his friends and relatives were to procure a surgeon, and then he were to say, 'I will not have this arrow taken out until I know the details of the person by whom I was wounded, the nature of the arrow with which I was pierced, etc.' That person would die before this would ever be known by him. . . . Whether the world is eternal or not eternal, there is birth, there is old age, there is death, the extinction of which in this life itself I make known." See Mahāthera Nārada, *The Buddha and His Teachings*, 2nd ed. (Kandy, Sri Lanka: Buddhist Publication Society, 1988), 225–26. However, in Mahāyāna Buddhism, especially Chan (Zen) Buddhism, human beings are said to have been originally pure. The *Awakening Faith in Mahāyāna Buddhism* says, "suddenly a [deluded] thought arises." Abe believes that this suddenness does not necessarily mean suddenness in the temporal sense, but rather in the ontological sense ("Responses to Langdon Gilkey," 70).

the process of cause and effect. Thus, one may discuss and attempt to solve the problem of suffering without addressing the question of the first cause or the absolute beginning. Christian theology claims that God is the creator of man and the world, and Christians would gladly accept the fact that suffering is part of the nature of the world. Both Buddhists and Christians may therefore eventually put aside the problem of the origin of suffering and work towards the solution to the problem of suffering. By doing so, one will certainly not be disqualified from following his religion in seeking release from suffering; rather, one may thereby obtain insight about the real meaning of suffering and be enabled to bring an end to suffering.

Religion is for the present or sometimes for the future, but certainly not for the past. It is unnecessary to speculate on the first cause of suffering, and in fact man may never actually know it. Religion can neither afford to ignore suffering here in man's life, nor can it fail to elaborate the hope for its end and the end itself hereafter. Both Buddhism and Christianity, by recognizing and accepting suffering as a fact, highlight the possibility of eliminating it and attaining eternal happiness. Therefore, in comparison to the problem of the origin of human suffering, it appears more important for man to consider the opportunity for the end of suffering provided in the two religions. Bowker urges us not to dichotomize the question on the problem and opportunity of suffering because it is false and dangerous to do so: it will trap us into making a choice which is not only misleading but unnecessary.[28] However, we would say that the opportunity for the end of suffering overweighs the solution to the problem about its origin.

The existence of suffering may need explanation, yet it can be experienced and observed here and now, and its solution can be worked out accordingly. The Buddha once said that he taught only two things throughout his lifetime of religious mission, namely, suffering and the cessation of suffering.[29] In the *Ādittapariyāya Sutta* (Discourse on All in Flames), the Buddha urges people to see the world as if in fire:

> The eye is in flames. Forms are in flames. Eye-consciousness is in flame. Eye-contact is in flames. Feeling which is pleasurable, or painful, or neither pleasurable nor painful, arising from eye-contact is in

---

[28] John Bowker, "Suffering as a Problem of Religions," in *The Meaning of Human Suffering*, ed. Flavian Dougherty (New York: Human Sciences Press, 1982), 37

[29] *The Majjhima-nikāya*, ed. V. Trenckner (London: Luzac, 1964–77), 140 (I.22). Also see *The Collection of the Middle Length Sayings*, trans. I. B. Horner (Delhi: Motilal Banarsidass, 2000), 1:180.

> flames. By what is it kindled? By the flames of lust, hatred, ignorance, birth, decay, death, sorrow, lamentation, pain, grief, and despair it kindled, I declare.[30]

Suffering is the reality of the world, so it is called "truth" (*sacca*) in Buddhism: the Four Noble Truths (suffering, the cause of suffering, cessation of suffering, and the path leading to the cessation of suffering) is the moral as well as philosophical foundation of Buddhism. The world itself is full of suffering; in fact the two words *dukkha* (suffering) and *loka* (world) are sometimes interchangeable. In the *Rohitassa Sutta*, the Buddha states,

> It is, friend, in just this fathom-high carcass endowed with perception and mind, I make known the world, the origin of the world, the cessation of the world, and the way leading to the cessation of the world.[31]

According to this sutta, the young deva Rohitassa, who could travel through the sky at a great speed, was unable to reach the end of the world. Similarly, suffering has no end in the world, as the Buddha told him that the end of suffering here and now is the end of one's world and the realization of peace.

"Suffering" is a normal English translation of the Buddhist term "*dukkha*," which yet, as an expression of concrete feeling, means that which is difficult to be endured (*du* = difficult; *kha* = endure).[32] As an abstract truth, it connotes contemptibility (*du*) and emptiness (*kha*): the world rests on suffering as it is contemptible, and because the world is devoid of any substance, it is empty. Thus, in correspondence to the three marks of existence, namely, suffering, impermanence or emptiness, and selflessness, Buddhists talk about three kinds of suffering, namely, suffering of suffering (suffering caused by attempts to avoiding suffering), suffering of change (abiding change of pleasant state or existence as a painful fact), and suffering of becoming (the fact that conditioned thing is in a ever-flowing state without an unchanging self constitutes suffering; any resistance to the flow will give rise to suffer-

---

[30] See Nārada, *The Buddha and His Teachings*, 63–64.

[31] *The Connected Discourses of the Buddha: A New Translation of the* Saṃyutta Nikāya, trans. Bhikkhu Bodhi (Boston: Wisdom Publications, 2000), 158.

[32] In general, there are eight categories: birth, old age, sickness, death, not getting what one wants, associating with what one dislikes, separating from those one loves, and in general existence of body as fire-pit.

ing).[33] Thus, suffering finds its origin in *sankhāra* (Sanskrit: *samskāra*) or becoming as a result of man's clinging to the impermanent and taking them as "mine."[34]

The Christian understanding of suffering is more often associated with sin or punishment and with the purpose of salvation than with reflection on actual human life. Suffering as punishment or curse results from man's rebellion against God's will. Birth, death as well as hardship are the ultimate price man has to pay for the original rebellion. The concept of sin is more ontologically abstract; only through suffering as its retribution or consequence can sin be concretely understood and experienced. Sin has made man alienated from God and fallen from Eden, yet suffering serves as a living force that drives man to find happiness, reunite with God, and return to the heavenly state. Thus, suffering is neither meaningless nor merely retributive; rather, from the eschatological perspective, it is endowed with the potential of redemption to be fulfilled through the selfless sacrifice of Jesus Christ. Thus, one's salvation is already secured by one's faith in that redemption as expressed by accepting the vicarious catalysis of Jesus and his resurrection.

Although Christians may not accept the law of cause and effect in the Buddhist sense, they could understand God as the creator who is actually in control of this law. Thus, the law that one harvests what one sows manifests the power and existence of God and thus reveals the meaning of human suffering. When Jesus and his followers come across a blind man, one disciple asks him, "Master, who did sin, this man, or his parents, that he was born blind?" Jesus answers, "Neither hath this man sinner, nor his parents: but that the works of God should be made manifest in him" (John 9:1–3). Then Jesus cures his blindness. Here, the suffering of being born blind is neither predetermined nor unchangeable, but accounted as an instrument that reveals God's plan as to Jesus's saviorship and divine sonship. One may not need to ask how this could be so but only to accept it as it is. When Moses protests to God, "Master of the Universe, is this the Torah and this its Reward?", he is told, "Be silent, for this is the way I have determined it" (*b. Menaḥ*. 29b).

---

[33] Zhengguo 正果, ed., *Fojiao jiben zhishi* 佛教基本知識 [Basic Buddhist knowledge] (Fuzhou: Zhongguo fojiao xiehui Fujiansheng fenhui, 1982), 119–21. Meanwhile, a slightly different interpretation of suffering or pain can be found in Leifer, *The Happiness Project*, 73–91.

[34] Ryūsei Takeda, "Pure Land Buddhist View of *Duḥkha*," *Buddhist–Christian Studies* 5 (1985): 8–9.

From the Christian perspective, suffering also serves as a didactical means of getting rid of suffering. Thus, the suffering of Jesus on the cross serves as a paradigm for martyrdom and opens the way for redemption. The event of Jesus's endurance of the unbearable has set a glorious example for Christian individuals as well as communities to endure persecution, injustice, and adversities since the beginning of Christianity, as is related in the Acts of the Apostles. James said in his letter addressed to the twelve tribes: "My brothers, whenever you have to face trials of many kinds, count yourselves supremely happy . . . Happy the man who remains steadfast under trial, for having passed that test he will receive for his prize the gift of life promised to those who love God" (1:2–4).[35] Paul had to undergo ordeals for numerous times,[36] yet he considered them as meaningful and useful: "It is now my happiness to suffer for you. This is my way of helping to complete, in my poor human flesh, the full tale of Christ's afflictions still to be endured, for the sake of his body which is the church" (Col. 1:24).[37] Elsewhere the apostle said, "Suffering produces endurance, and endurance produces character, and character produces hope" (Rom. 5:3–4).

Similarly, in Buddhism suffering serves the didactic purpose of enabling one to attain spiritual advancement. In the *Saṃyutta Nikāya*, the Buddha says,

> Suffering leads to confidence (*saddhā*); confidence to rapture (*pāmajja*); rapture to joy (*pīti*); joy to tranquillity (*passaddhi*), tranquillity to happiness (*sukha*); happiness to concentration (*samādhi*); concentration to knowledge and vision of things as they truly are (*yathābhūtañāṇadassana*); the knowledge and vision of things as they truly are to repulsion (*nibbidā*); repulsion to non-attachment

[35] Cf. the King James Version.

[36] "Of the Jews five times received I forty stripes save one. Thrice was I beaten with rods, once was I stoned, thrice I suffered shipwreck, a night and a day I have been in the deep; in journeying often, in perils of waters, in perils of robbers, in perils by my own countrymen, in perils by the heathen, in perils in the city, in perils in the wilderness, in perils in the sea, in perils among false brethren, in weariness and painfulness, in watchings often, in hunger and thirst, in fastings often, in cold and nakedness" (2 Cor. 11:23–33).

[37] Quoted from Bowker, *Problems of Suffering in Religions of the World*, 74. The King James Version, however, reads: "Who now rejoice in my sufferings for you, and fill up that which is behind of the afflictions of Christ in my flesh for his body's sake, which is the church."

> (*virāga*); non-attachment to deliverance (*vimutti*); deliverance to the extinction of passion (*khaye ñāṇa*); i.e., to Arahantship.[38]

Although Buddhism puts much emphasis on the reality of suffering, it does not teach that one should undergo extreme suffering in order to get rid of it, as do the followers of Hinduism. Too much suffering, just as too much medication, will not cure disease but worsen it. And it may undermine one's confidence, forcing one to give up one's struggle. The right way in dealing with suffering and eventually putting an end to it in Buddhism is the Eightfold Path, which is also called the Middle Path, summarized in the three categories of discipline, concentration, and wisdom. The Middle Path shows that although Buddhism emphasizes the reality of suffering, asceticism has little to do with liberation. Furthermore, the Middle Path of achieving liberation rejects any pessimistic view of life, and urges man to take realistic attitudes in dealing with suffering.

Suffering also assumes the function of personal drilling and testing necessary for faith and spiritual development. In Hinduism, one's liberation is realized through self-mortification so that the soul, which is regarded as being wrapped within a material body, will win release. What Mencius said echoes this idea: "When heaven is going to entrust a great responsibility to a person, it will first discipline his will, test his body, make him starve and fatigue, frustrate whatever he does so as to stir up his mind, enhance his perseverance, and enable him to overcome his inabilities."[39] Christianity holds that a good man suffers more either because God knows that his faith will not be shaken by such ordeals as in the case of Job, or because he is given a great mission as in the case of Paul. Just as Henry Slonimsky said,

> The answer to the question why the good must suffer for the inadequacies of the world would be the fact that the world is growing, developing, and therefore inevitably defective, and there must be someone noble enough to assume the burden, as exemplification of a new insight, namely that nobility obligates, noblesse oblige.[40]

---

[38] This passage is quoted from Nārada, *The Buddha and His Teachings*, 166–67.

[39] 天將降大任於是人也，必先苦其心志，勞其筋骨，餓其體膚，空乏其身，行拂亂其所為，所以動心忍性，曾益其所不能 (VI.B.15).

[40] Henry Slonimsky, *Essays* (Cincinnati, Ohio: Hebrew Union College Press, 1967), 39.

Suffering, whether spiritual or physical, can be both an actual test for one's capability for religious practice and mission, and a force to perfect such practice and fulfill such mission. This can be illustrated in the lives of the Buddha as the Bodhisattva and Jesus Christ. During his struggle for enlightenment, the former underwent tremendous hardships and made numerous self-sacrifices for eons. The Jatakas tell us that he completely identified himself with living beings and sacrificed everything, including his life, in order to save others from suffering. Before attaining enlightenment and in his last birth, the Buddha practiced asceticism in the forest for six years as evidenced in the Picture of the Fasting Buddha. He ate only a very small amount of rice each day and became abnormally scrawny. Although traditionally such asceticism is said to be undesirable, it shows his spiritual determination to pursue truth and thereby to achieve true life, even by risking his life. As Unno Taitetsu 海野大徹 said:

> *Duḥkha* is not just negativity, it is the opportunity to go beyond the conventional level, conventional form of life into a deeper understanding of what life is really about so that the conventional life can be affirmed.[41]

The Bodhisattva, endowed with great compassion and identified others' suffering as his own, endeavored to attain enlightenment not only for the sake of self-liberation but also for the liberation of all sentient beings. He shared others' suffering and selflessly released others from suffering. Vimalakīrti once said that the Bodhisattva became sick when living beings were sick and was cured when they were cured.[42] It is also commonly believed among Buddhists that Kṣitigrabha Bodhisattva, in order to save living beings from hell, entered and stayed there, vowing, "I will not attain enlightenment until hell is empty." The *Yogācāra-bhūmi Śāstra* tells a story about the Bodhisattva: He kills a merchant who is planning to murder five hundred other merchants; although the Bodhisattva knows that killing will naturally result in suffering, he would rather suffer himself than allow others to suffer. Thus, suffering serves as the de facto ground for the bodhisattvas to benefit others. As Takeda Ryūsei 武田龍精 said:

---

[41] This statement is quoted from Unno's response to Gilkey, in "Responses to Langdon Gilkey," 80.

[42] *The Holy Teaching of Vimalakīrti: A Mahāyāna Scripture*, trans. Robert A. F. Thurman (University Park: Pennsylvania State University Press, 1976), 43.

> The bodhisattva's aspiration for enlightenment naturally actualizes itself in "*duḥkha* with others." According to Mahayana sutras, the bodhisattva's *duḥkha* manifests the virtue of the great compassion that is inherent in his nature. This compassion arises from his infinite sensitivity in seeing the pain of all sentient beings as he would that of his own children. Hence his devotional mind is characterized by a "great compassionate heart of one taste."[43]

Suffering not only arouses compassion but also inspires wisdom with which one is able to see suffering as it is—i.e., as impermanent and unsubstantial—so that the end of suffering can be achieved. Having discerned the very nature of suffering, namely, its unsubstantiality or emptiness, one may be able to see the possibility of the end of suffering. And having discerned the impermanence of suffering, one may become more active in liberating suffering living beings.[44] Only those who have understood the nature of suffering will come to the thought of relieving suffering sincerely both for themselves and for others. And only when one has experienced suffering will one be able to endure suffering and to truly love one's neighbors as oneself, by releasing them from suffering as though it were one's own.

Suffering manifested in Jesus Christ—particularly on the cross—is seen as essential for understanding the Christian concept of suffering and redemption. Jesus lived as the suffering servant, died as a martyr, and acted as redeemer in his messianic mission.

Suffering is endowed with spiritual significance if it involves divine participation. Divine participation in suffering as shown in Jesus's self-sacrifice has set an example for divine participation in man's suffering, and has shown that suffering can actually be transmuted and transcended through God's partaking of it. With God's participation in suffering or even his identification with those who suffer, God is held to his promises of enabling sentient beings to deal with suffering and of his ultimate victory over it.[45] Although in Buddhism there is no con-

---

[43] Takeda, "Pure Land Buddhist View of *Duḥkha*," 14–15.

[44] Ibid., 16.

[45] Gilkey, "The Christian Understanding of Suffering," 61–62. Abe, however, holds that the crucifixion of Jesus is not participation in but rather complete identification with our suffering. Thus our resurrection together with the resurrection of Christ cannot be partial, but total and thoroughgoing. "In this completely realized eschatology, divine salvation and the transcendence of suffering are already fulfilled, at least in principle. However, although all people may already be saved through Christ's complete identity with human suffering, they themselves may not realize that they are already saved" ("Responses to Langdon Gilkey," 70–71).

cept of a personal deity such as that of the Christian God, the divinity understood as the qualities of nobility and holiness is always manifested in the lives of the bodhisattvas.

Whether manifesting the quality of nobility or God's participation in human suffering and his identification with the suffering others, both the Bodhisattva's and Jesus Christ's suffering enabled them to fulfill their sacred missions of saving mankind on the one hand, and have inspired millions others to strive for self-liberation and liberation of others. Both Buddhists and Christians, in following the examples of their respective masters and having understood the meaning of their suffering, may also grasp the meaning of human suffering: it is not to be seen as an obstacle to but an opportunity for their religious endeavors and spiritual development, both for themselves and for others.

> Having recognized one's responsibilities through one's own suffering, one is confronted with a new form of suffering that arises from the assumption of the burdens of others. In this respect, suffering is a necessary part of the burden of ascent, since it results from the assumption of tasks that the righteous take upon themselves. Acting virtuously necessarily entails suffering—not a slight, passing discomfort, but intense, agonizing suffering. The doctrine of chastisements of love affirms that God gives special burdens to those who have an unusual capacity to endure them.[46]

In Christianity, suffering is meaningful as a means to affirm one's faith in God, who sometimes makes his will known through suffering, which can be a path to regain the paradise of eternal happiness. Thus, suffering and faith are interrelated in the framework of Christian practice and salvation. In contrast, Buddhists see the world as full of suffering and seek the way out by following the path of the Buddha, who has experienced suffering and found the path to liberation. Thus, although Buddhism and Christianity advocate different doctrines and practices, the aspirations of relieving human suffering and the efforts to achieve them appear similar in the two religions.

---

[46] Jack Bemporad, "Suffering," in Eliade, *Encyclopedia of Religion*, 14:100. Although the above quoted passage describes a Jewish view on suffering, it applies perfectly well to Jesus Christ and the Bodhisattva.

4. CONCLUSION

In recent decades, people have become more fascinated with the development of science, partially because of the increasingly substantial benefits advanced technology can offer to mankind. The hope previously granted by religion for the relief of suffering is now gradually actualized by scientific technology, for the former's benefits to mankind can be accrued more immediately than the latter's. It seems that science has unfolded a promising future before mankind as if it would finally solve all human problems of suffering from birth to death. This situation has generated worries among some religionists and given grounds for optimism among some scientists: the influence of religion will decrease while science and technology continue to develop.

However, religion will not die out unless science can solve all problems, including death, that mankind faces. Science is by its very nature not particularly concerned with man but only with his physical or material parts. It cannot therefore go beyond its own limitation and offer solutions to problems pertaining to the spiritual and psychological life of man, which constitute a larger part of his life. Furthermore, the development of modern science has also produced even more suffering for man, such as nuclear waste and war and ecological disasters. Mankind seems to suffer more than ever before. Science itself cannot solve the problems of suffering it has created for humans, and they need other means to deal with suffering. Religion, as a traditional way to fulfill human wishes of alleviating suffering, will therefore continue to play a vital role in providing answers and solutions for suffering in the physical world. In fact, the very existence of suffering in the human world will keep religion alive.[47]

Suffering serves as the very basis for the existence of religion and a force for religious practice, yet it is not the end of religion but a means of attaining eternal happiness. No one wants suffering, although it is an inevitable part of human life. Both Buddhism and Christianity recognize suffering or unsatisfactoriness of human life as an existing reality

---

[47] "Traditionally, religions have responded to the problem of suffering in two ways: first, by trying to place the human experience of pain within the context of an overall understanding of the universe and, second, by showing ways to overcome or transcend suffering through faith, piety, appropriate action, or change in perspective" (Bemporad, "Suffering," 14:99).

and point the way to one's liberation from it. Thus, one must not be pessimistic, but realistic and full of hope. The Buddha and Jesus provided different means of liberating man from suffering. The Buddha once comforted a suffering mother who had lost her child, by asking her to find a mustard seed from a family that had not suffered from losing a relative. The mother, who failed to find such a family, realized the universality and inevitability of suffering of death and renounced the world. She eventually became one of the Buddha's foremost disciples, filled with compassion in helping others. The story shows that psychologically suffering can become a means of enduring it and discerning the nature of the human world. Similarly, Jesus once asked his followers not to worry about food and clothes but to have faith in God: "Set your mind on God's kingdom and his justice before everything else, and all the rest will come to you as well. So do not be anxious about tomorrow; tomorrow will look after itself. Each day has troubles enough of its own" (Matt. 6:25–34; Luke 12:22–31). This can be taken as the essence of the Christian response to suffering, to be realized in one's faith in God as the savior.

Some common understandings of suffering in Buddhism and Christianity may provide a concrete ground for Buddhist–Christian dialogue, just as Francis Cook said: "Perhaps the best place to engage in dialogue is in our common experience of suffering and faith."[48] Both religions acknowledge suffering as a reality of human life and emphasize the possibility of liberation from suffering. Man may not need to know the original cause of suffering, yet he should know and practice the way of bringing an end to suffering. Hick said, "The human does not, in one's own degree of freedom and responsibility, choose one's origin, but rather one's destiny."[49] Both Buddhism and Christianity may regard the alleviation and elimination of human suffering as their common areas for serving humanity. As humans increasingly undergo suffering, such as wars, earthquakes, pollution, and social unrest, both Buddhists and Christians, rather than speculating about the first cause or causes of sufferings, must act immediately for its alleviation and even elimination so that all humans on earth can live in happiness and harmony. As the problems of suffering manifest in different forms in different places, both here and hereafter, no one religion will be able to solve all of them effectively—not in the normative, but in the functional sense. A religion, which provides a way of life or is itself a way of life, should not

[48] "Responses to Langdon Gilkey," 99.
[49] Hick, "Soul-making Theodicy," 273.

reject the ways or exclude the values of others in such efforts. Only when religions join hand in hand can mankind gradually reduce the problems of suffering and achieve true happiness.

Ching Feng, n.s., **7.1–2** (2006) 153–163

God's Vow: A Pure Land Perspective on the Cross of Christ

NOTTO R. THELLE

My paper is a humble attempt to see whether a central concept of Pure Land Buddhism, the primal vow of Amitābha Buddha, might be used as a possible approach to the interpretation of one of the great mysteries of the New Testament: the cross of Jesus Christ. I realize the inherent problems in my approach. Buddhists may suspect that I borrow their concepts in order to demonstrate how Buddhist aspirations are fulfilled in Christianity, as some missionaries tried before, regarding Buddhism as a preparation for the Christian faith.[1] Christians may suspect that I abandon or dilute central Christian doctrines by applying "foreign" concepts and metaphors in my interpretation. My own experience, however, suggests that a trusting dialogue between two different religious traditions may not only lead to a better mutual understanding, but also deepen one's own self-understanding. The sketchy nature of my suggestion underlines the tentative approach, and my hope here is to invite comments on the viability of my attempt.

Notto R. THELLE is professor of the Faculty of Theology, University of Oslo, Norway.

[1] See page 157 below.

1. BASIC ASSUMPTIONS

I will give a brief sketch of my background and basic assumptions in order to clarify the motive and direction of my paper.

My reflections are based on a lifelong involvement in dialogue with Buddhism, primarily in the Japanese context, where I as a Christian theologian was privileged with sixteen years of close contact with Japanese religious communities. In the last twenty years I have been engaged in theological research and teaching at Oslo University, still with interfaith dialogue as a central concern.

I regard Buddhism and Christianity as two quite different—from certain points of view perhaps even incompatible—teachings which nevertheless share vital concerns. I am not sure whether the apparent attraction between Buddhists and Christians is due to their differences or the commonalities—probably both. Anyway, there are central elements in the two religions that trigger the need for dialogue.

My interest in Pure Land Buddhism was enhanced when I was an audit student at Ōtani University in Kyoto in 1972–73, participating in seminars and lectures on Buddhism in general, and Pure Land Buddhism in particular. In the following years I was privileged to take part in numerous seminars at the Eastern Buddhist Society, an institute related to the same university, where Pure Land scholars taught courses on *Tannishō* 歎異抄 and *Kyōgyō shinshō* 教行信証, and other scriptures from the Shinshū 真宗 tradition of Shinran 親鸞 (1173–1263). My presentation here is certainly influenced by those encounters. Shinshū spirituality emphasizes faith (*shinjin* 信心) alone, total dependence on the power of Amitābha's compassionate vow, rejection of self-power (*jiriki* 自力), and trust in the other-power (*tariki* 他力) of Amitābha. With its deep piety and warm emotional atmosphere Shinshū seemed to have so much in common with the Lutheran Pietism I knew from my own Norwegian tradition, which for me was both confusing and challenging. How can two traditions that are philosophically and doctrinally so different come so close in their religious practice and devotion? Karl Barth (1886–1968), who had never been to the East, was so fascinated by this tradition that he devoted several pages in his *Church Dogmatics* to a thorough discussion of it, concluding that when it comes to Christianity in its historical form (*Gestalt*), as doctrine and

order, it cannot claim to be unique.[2] My own position is not that they are basically the same—not even in their relative expressions—but that a mutual knowledge may provide material for a deepened reflection and thus enhance the understanding of both traditions.

I chose the cross of Christ as my focus not only because it is regarded as one of the basic elements of Christian teaching and piety, but also because it is the doctrine that seems to be most intriguing and incomprehensible to Buddhists in the East. Many Buddhists are moved by the story of Jesus in the Gospels, and often describe the compassionate ministry and self-sacrificing love of Jesus as an example of the selfless compassion of a Bodhisattva. Some have used the concept of emptiness as a key to understanding Christ's self-emptying love (*kenosis*).[3] But when it comes to the doctrinal exposition of the Church, presented as theories of divine reconciliation or atonement, there is little sympathy or understanding. The Christian teaching of the cross is not only rejected as irrational, but is sometimes scorned as ridiculous and absurd, or even abhorrent. While Christian preachers and scholars intended to convey a message of a loving God who was willing to sacrifice the utmost (his own self represented by Jesus Christ) for the salvation of humankind, it was generally interpreted by Buddhists as the story of a savage God who is driven by his angry emotions, unable to love unless his wrath is pacified by blood and suffering and cruelty.[4]

Many Christians would agree that the doctrinal explanations of the cross do have serious limitations and may easily be misunderstood, especially when they are presented as literal truths about legal transactions between God and humankind. That is particularly the case with Anselm's so-called objective theory of atonement, which dominated Roman Catholic and Protestant traditions for centuries, and which still penetrates traditional church life in liturgies, teaching and preaching.[5]

---

[2] Karl Barth, *Die kirchliche Dogmatik*, vol. 1, part 2 (Zollikon, Zürich: Evangelischer Verlag, 1938), 372–77.

[3] Notably Buddhist scholars related to the Kyoto school of philosophy have been preoccupied with emptiness as a key to understanding the ministry of Christ. For a historical review of Buddhist attitudes to Jesus, see my article "Foe and Friend: The Changing Image of Christ in Japanese Buddhism," *Japanese Religions* 12, no. 2 (1982): 19–46.

[4] Ibid., 32–37. As a matter of fact, similar distortions are often seen also among Western critics of Christian doctrines.

[5] Anselm's use of legal categories is certainly much more sophisticated than the simplified versions that are often presented in preaching and teaching, but his use of basic categories of substitution and legal transactions are explicitly or implicitly discernable in most criticism of the Christian teaching of the cross.

It is my contention that the concept of "Vow" in Buddhism—particularly in the Pure Land version—may offer an alternative dimension to the understanding of the cross that may be easier for Buddhists to appreciate. At the same time it may remind Christians about the potential for a Biblical concept of divine vows.

As for theological interpretations of the cross, my own position is that the crucifixion was an unexpected shock to the early followers of Jesus, and that the entire New Testament may be read as a great variety of attempts to interpret the incomprehensible mystery of the cross. A number of metaphors and symbols were used to explain its meaning, referring or alluding to Old Testament sayings, legal and ritual practices, or experiences from daily life: propitiatory sacrifice, vicarious punishment, ransom, conquering death and evil, the shepherd who sacrifices his life for the flock, the healer who takes upon himself the sickness of others, the witness who testifies with his death, the servant who dies for the many, the high priest who enters the Holy of Holies, the precursor opening the way to Heaven, the conqueror who breaks the chains of death, the lord who disarms the cosmic powers, etc. Subsequent theological reflection continued to ponder upon the mystery, leading to a variety of doctrinal theories of atonement and reconciliation, often with a one-sided emphasis on one type of categories and metaphors; yet some combine sacrificial and legal categories, and others focus on the themes of struggle and victory, or adopt categories that are more psychological in nature. This is not the place for presenting such doctrines. Here I only indicate that my own reflection on the meaning of the cross is based on a few assumptions:

- There is a great variety in the New Testament quest for the meaning of the mystery of the cross.
- Solely focusing on one type of metaphors and categories poses a great limitation on our understanding, and easily leads to misunderstanding.
- The continuous reflection on the cross throughout history was influenced by new ways of thinking, new experiences and social realities.
- The encounter with other philosophies and religions is a continuing challenge to further reflection on and interpretation of the meaning of the cross of Christ.

This implies that the mystery of the cross has not been and cannot be fully explained, but must be pondered upon anew and anew, and that

the encounter with new social, political and religious contexts is an invitation to further grappling with the theme.

Allow me to add also a personal note. My father was for many years involved in the work of the Norwegian missionary Karl Ludvig Reichelt (1877–1952), and his Mission to Buddhists in Nanjing (1922–28) and Hong Kong (in the 1930s and 1940s). They regarded Buddhism as a spiritual preparation for faith in Christ, and consistently used Buddhist concepts and traditions in order to guide people to what they regarded as fulfilment in Christianity as the ultimate religion. I have elsewhere described their strategy and practice, and given a critical evaluation of their use of Buddhist conventions and rhetoric in Christian preaching and liturgical practice.[6] There is, however, one expression in their liturgies that has challenged me to further reflection, and which I want to examine in this paper: the use of the vow of Amitābha as a key to understanding the cross of Christ:

十架之奇妙，無量之宏願

People who are familiar with Buddhist rhetoric would immediately recognize the latter part as a reference to Amitābha Buddha's "boundless great vow," and would perhaps wonder how this could be related to the "mystery of the cross." I have not found any detailed discussion of the missionaries' understanding of this particular expression; however, used in a Christian liturgy, the phrase was certainly intended to adopt Buddhist terminology to interpret the universality of God's saving act: "The mystery of the cross, / the great intention of universal salvation," or something like that. I have my reservations about such rhetorical mixture, but still tend to think that there may be some theological wisdom and potential meaning in this particular expression.

---

[6] See my two articles, "A Christian Monastery for Buddhist Monks, Part I: Karl Ludvig Reichelt's Sacred Mountains," *Ching Feng*, n.s., 6, no. 1 (2005): 1–35 and "A Christian Monastery for Buddhist Monks, Part II: Buddhist Rhetoric in Karl Ludvig Reichelt's Christian Liturgies," *Ching Feng*, n.s., 6, no. 2 (2005): 131–77; and in addition "'The Conversion of the Missionary': Changes in Buddhist–Christian Relations in the Early Twentieth Century," *Ching Feng*, n.s., 4, no. 2 (2003): 131–56; "Changed by the East: Notes on Missionary Communication and Transformation," *International Bulletin of Missionary Research* 30, no. 3 (July 2006): 115–21.

2. AMITĀBHA'S VOW

While Pure Land Buddhism is often ignored by Westerners or disregarded as a popular deviation from classical Buddhism,[7] this tradition has in fact dominated Buddhism in the Far East, not only as a separate school or (as in Japan) separate sects of Buddhism, but as an important aspect of Buddhist piety and imagination far beyond established boundaries. At the popular level its influence is ubiquitous. The great variety of religious expressions in the history of the Pure Land tradition cannot be dealt with here, which cover popular beliefs in the magical power of reciting the name of Amitābha, tantric practices in esoteric Buddhism, various types of meditation practices, as well as the classical Pure Land teachings developed by successive Chinese and Japanese masters. I will deal with the last-mentioned established tradition, with the Japanese Pure Land traditions of Hōnen 法然 (1133–1212) and Shinran as the main reference.

The Pure Land tradition, concentrated on faith in the saving power of the compassionate vow of Amitābha Buddha, is primarily based on the three canonical Pure Land sutras. The Larger Sutra of Immeasurable Life tells in rather mythological language that Amitābha originally was a king who innumerable kalpas ago abandoned his royal position in order to pursue truth as a mendicant named Dharmākara. Deeply moved by the suffering of sentient beings and having compassion for all lives he vowed that he would establish a realm of peace and bliss where everyone might be liberated from their pains and blind attachments, and reach the supreme enlightenment. Then, according to the narration, he makes forty-eight great vows in front of Buddha Lokeśvararāja. He vows that he will fulfil his goal and establish a paradise that excels all other Buddha-realms in beauty and harmony. If he is not able to do this, he will rather forfeit his own supreme enlightenment. The essence, according to the Shinshū tradition, is encapsulated in the eighteenth vow, which declares that anyone who with a sincere heart

---

[7] The rather sarcastic remark of Friedrich Max Müller is characteristic of the early Western sentiment towards Pure Land sutras: "I was so much disappointed at the contents of this Sutra, that I hesitated for a time whether I ought to publish it in this volume" (*Buddhist Mahâyâna Texts*, Sacred Books of the East 49, part 2 [Oxford: Clarendon, 1894], xxi).

wishes to be born in Amitābha's land, who believes in him and calls upon his name, will be born there:

> If, when attaining Buddhahood, the sentient beings of the ten quarters, with sincere mind entrusting themselves, and saying my Name perhaps even ten times, should not be born there, may I not attain the supreme enlightenment. Excluded are those who commit the five grave offences and those who slander the right dharma.[8]

The last reservation has gradually been weakened and has been entirely invalidated in the Shinshū tradition. The term "to think upon / meditate on" (*nen* 念, Chinese: *nian*) is in this tradition consistently rendered in terms of calling upon or saying the name of Amitābha.

The essence seems to be that the Bodhisattva Dharmākara stakes his entire awakening and salvation upon the fulfilment of his vow. For countless kalpas, then, he practices the Way, collects merit and fulfils his vow, establishing the Pure Land in the western regions of the cosmos. By the power of his vows, it is hence possible for all who call upon him to be born into this peaceful land, and there attain the final awakened state.

The birth in Amitābha's Pure Land is a saving act that is made possible and guaranteed through the vow of Amitābha. In the words of *Tannishō*, one is "born in the Pure Land, saved by the wondrous vow of Amitābha" (chap. 1). This is not only formally, but also in its essential intention passive words. Salvation is given from outside. In Pure Land expression one speaks about Amitābha's *ekō* 廻向, which means that Amitābha makes his merit available to others, or "turns the merit."

There are many types of vows in the Buddhist tradition, but the Bodhisattva vow in the Pure Land tradition is a sharpening of the potential cost involved in the vow. In our Western tradition a vow may be defined as a solemn promise that one makes by swearing by something that has ultimate value. One may swear by one's own life, by God, by the Sacred Scriptures, by one's own soul, etc., and the implicit meaning is that this ultimate value is lost unless one fulfils the promise. I am not sure that this is always the case with vows in the Buddhist tradition, but the variety of terms used about Amitābha's vows, and the consistent use of pledging, suggest that there is such an element of "swearing" or "oath" in the vow. Apart from traditional expressions, such as vow

---

[8] Quoted from Yoshifumi Ueda and Dennis Hirota, *Shinran: An Introduction to His Thought* (Kyoto: Hongwanji International Center, 1989), 185.

(*gan* 願, Chinese: *yuan*), primal vow (*hongan* 本願, Chinese: *benyuan*), great vow (*kōgan* 弘願, Chinese: *hongyuan*), a number of terms seem to imply aspects of swearing or taking an oath, such as *seigan* 誓願 (Chinese: *shiyuan*), *honzei* 本誓 (Chinese: *benshi*), *kōzei* 弘誓 (Chinese: *hongshi*), and *on'yakusoku* 御約束. If his intention to receive anyone who takes refuge in him is not realized, he will abandon the ultimate awakening (*shōgaku* 正覚, Chinese: *zhengjue*). In other words, he puts the ultimate goal of all Buddhist practice, the nirvanic liberation, at stake.

3. GOD'S VOW

There is no easy way to relate Amitābha's primal vow and Christian interpretations of the cross of Jesus Christ. Even though their stories have similarities, they are quite different in terms of the character of the narratives. Although trusting in the compassionate vow of Amitābha seems to produce a piety and devotional life that are sometimes remarkably similar to, e.g., Protestant piety, they differ in term of the entire philosophical framework. The story of Jesus describes a historical person who claimed to come from God and whose public ministry lasted for at most three years. The story of Amitābha was perhaps inspired by the life of the historical Buddha, but it transcends historical categories with its almost mythical narration of endless kalpas and pure lands in the Buddhist cosmos. Amitābha's vows are primarily concerned with spiritual salvation and awakening, while the Biblical vows primarily deal with social and political realities, covenants, ownership of land, promises of protection against enemies, fertility and offspring. In addition comes the fact that the cross of Christ is never described in terms of a divine vow.

So one has to be careful if one wants to connect the notion of vows in the Buddhist tradition with vows in the Bible. There are, nevertheless, aspects of Biblical vows that may be applied in meaningful ways, notably when it comes to New Testament understanding of God's intention of universal salvation through the people of the New Covenant in Jesus Christ. But first we need to reflect on the notion of divine vows in the Biblical tradition.

Anyone who is familiar with the Old Testament will be aware of the close connection between divine promises and the various covenants between God and his people. A covenant or a pact is negotiated be-

tween two parties that may be individuals, cities or peoples, and the pact is confirmed by solemn oaths, pledges or vows that guarantee that the promises will be fulfilled. In similar ways the relationship between God and his people is described as a pact or covenant involving mutual obligations and promises, guaranteeing God's continual blessing if the covenant is kept. Among the well-known covenants in the Bible are the covenant with Noah, with the rainbow as its sign (Gen. 9:8–19); the covenant with Abraham, with the circumcision as its sign (Gen. 15:18; 17:4–14); the covenant with Moses at Mount Sinai, with the Sabbath and the Law as its signs (Exod. 31:12–18); and those with David and other kings in much later times (2 Sam. 23:5).

One of the prominent features of the Biblical imagination is that God is the one who initiates such covenants, and who guarantees that the promises of protection and blessing will be fulfilled. The people are supposed to adhere to the obligations arising from the covenant, but it is a one-sided relationship. God has committed himself to his people. One might say that God puts his divine majesty behind the promises.

In some cases it is mentioned that the covenant is confirmed by a solemn oath in which God swears by himself, as described in the story of Abraham: "This is the word of the Lord: 'By my own self I swear'" (Gen. 22:16). The vow is further commented on in the Letter to the Hebrews:

> When God made his promise to Abraham, he swore by himself, because he had no one greater to swear by: "I vow that I will bless you abundantly and multiply your descendants." . . . Men swear by a greater than themselves, and the oath provides a confirmation to end all dispute; and so God, desiring to show even more clearly to the heirs of his promise how unchanging was his purpose, guaranteed it by oath. (6:13–20)

The implicit meaning of such a vow is that God stakes his divine authority on the fulfilment of the promise. If his vow were not fulfilled, he would so to say abdicate, for then he would no longer be God.

When the New Testament writers searched for symbols and metaphors for interpreting the role of Jesus Christ, they used their religious tradition with great liberty. The scriptures, with a wealth of stories, personalities, and traditions were material for further reflection and interpretation, as it was common in the Jewish tradition. The Biblical history offered numerous prototypes of what was to come, or prophetic anticipations of the story of Jesus Christ. As for the covenant, later prophetic literature has examples of a new and more spiritual covenant,

a relationship of hearts rather than outward regulations (Isa. 55:3; Jer. 31:31–33; Ezek. 37:26). For the early Christian writers the notion of a new covenant became one of the significant tools for interpreting God's salvific intervention in Jesus Christ. Even though the term "vow" is never used about the cross of Christ, the dramatic happenings leading up to his crucifixion is described by some New Testament writers in terms of a covenant. During the last supper Jesus referred to the cup of wine as a sign of "the new covenant sealed by my blood" (Luke 22:20; Matt. 26:38; Mark 14:24; 1 Cor. 11:25). It is not farfetched, then, that one may reflect on the cross as God's ultimate vow, a sign of his intention of universal salvation in his new covenant.

The Letter to the Hebrews is a good example of how the New Testament writers applied traditional Biblical metaphors and institutions in order to interpret the mystery of the cross of Christ. This letter consistently uses sacrificial metaphors from the temple to explain how Christ has, as the high priest, sacrificed himself once and for all, and thus opened the way through the Holy of Holies to the heavenly sanctuary. Such sacrificial rhetoric is supported by references to God's covenants with his people, arguing that God has now initiated a new covenant and that the "vows"—here reinterpreted as spiritual realities—are inherited by the new people of God. In this case Christ is so to say the guarantee of the fact that the divine "vow" of salvation is valid and fulfilled. Christ, coming from God and representing God, identified himself with the people and experienced the depth of human suffering. "For ours is not a high priest unable to sympathize with our weaknesses, but one who, because of his likeness to us, has been tested in every way, only without sin" (Heb. 4:15–16). Christ in this way becomes a mediator of a new covenant, confirming the divine "vows" with his own death once and for all.

The language of the Letter to the Hebrews probably sounds rather incomprehensible to people nurtured in a Buddhist context—even more so as it was later further developed in the Christian doctrines that interpret the meaning of the cross with sacrificial metaphors derived from a cultic context, as well as legal metaphors derived from criminal law.

At this point the Buddhist notions of vows—represented prominently by the vows of Amitābha—may offer somewhat different approaches to understanding the cross. I have described the vows of Amitābha as a radical promise of salvation for anyone who calls upon his name in faith. The promise is guaranteed by his solemn vow that he will abandon the highest possible good, i.e., the supreme enlightenment, if his vow is not fulfilled.

The cross of Christ may, in a similar way, be described as the sign of the vow of God that "all men be saved and come to the knowledge of the truth" (1 Tim. 2:3). In the early descriptions of God's relationship with his people God, so to say, sealed the covenant by putting his own divine authority at stake. He vowed to bless and protect the people, "swearing by himself" as there was no greater to swear by. If Christ is understood as God's own presence in the world, true God and true man, as it is formulated in classical confessions, the cross may be seen as the ultimate expression of God's willingness to put his own existence at stake for the salvation of humankind. Amitābha's vow, "may I not attain the supreme enlightenment unless all sentient beings may be born in my land," has its parallel in God's vow, "may I not be God unless anyone who comes to me be saved." His willingness to abandon his own divinity in order to save humankind was realized in Christ who abandoned his divine position, emptying himself through his humble incarnation and death on the cross, as it is described in the hymn in Paul's Letter to the Philippians (2:6–11). In this way one might say that the cross is the fulfilment of God's vow.

4. CONCLUDING REMARKS

Working on these reflections, I have come to realize that I have taken a roundabout way in my own process of understanding. It began more than thirty years ago when I was trying to make sense of the vow of Amitābha. It seemed rather incomprehensible to me, even though I had tried to take the story and the related traditions seriously. At that time the Biblical notion of vows, described above as a solemn pledge involving God "swearing" by his own Godhead, enhanced my understanding of Amitābha's solemn pledge and his willingness to put his own awakening at stake. Now it is perhaps the other way round: the Pure Land notion of Amitābha's vow offers a new metaphor for understanding the mystery of the cross of Christ. It is not radically essentially different from some other metaphors, including some of the classical doctrinal traditions of the Church and newer Buddhist–Christian reflections on emptiness. But at least it has invited me to a renewed reflection on a mystery that will never be fully grasped.

Ching Feng, n.s., **7.1–2** (2006) 165–180

Birth into the Pure Land and Resurrection of the Body: A Comparative Study between Pure Land Buddhism and Christianity

MARTIN REPP

1. INTRODUCTION

This presentation deals with a very small portion of the theme of this conference, "Kingdom of God, Pure Land and the Human World," namely with the particle "and." This tiny word "and" bears the heavy burden of connecting the human world to the Pure Land or the Kingdom of God. Since this particle relates fundamentally different realities, the heavy load it has to bear becomes even clearer. This study, though, does not focus on the metaphysical relationship between the two realities, but on their religio-existential connection. In other words, it is about the topic of how human beings departing from this world reach the other world. Again, within this framework I deal with the question of how people can really be sure that they will reach the other world. I attempt to compare Pure Land Buddhism and Christianity in this respect.

Comparison between both religious traditions has quite a history. When Jesuit missionaries came to Japan in the 16th century, they soon observed suspicious similarities between Pure Land Buddhism and the

---

Martin REPP is professor in the Faculty of Letters at Ryukoku University, Kyoto, Japan, and is the associate director of the NCC Center for the Study of Japanese Religions.

Lutheran heresy. The similarities, they thought, consisted in the teachings of the saving other power (*tariki* 他力) and salvation by justification, the central role that faith played in both traditions, and the rejection of one's own works or religious practice as means to attain salvation. Since the late 19th century, these resemblances triggered comparative studies, with some emphasizing the similarities, while others stressing the differences.

To clarify my own methodological approach here, the following may be said: When comparing religions, I think, it is important to see, at the same time, both similarities and differences. However, a qualitative distinction between "similarities" and "differences" has to be made. Both are quite heterogeneous categories. Whereas "differences" are abundant as to the concrete reality of religions, "similarities" can be found rather on an abstract level, that is, in similar forms or structures. Thus, I am convinced of the possibility of drawing structural comparisons, while I am aware that on the concrete level many differences exist at the same time. Amida Buddha, for example, is not the same as the Judeo-Christian God; Hōzō Bodhisattva is different from Jesus the Christ, and the Christian heaven differs from the Pure Land.

At this point, one may ask the basic question of the meaning or purpose of comparing religions. First of all, such comparisons help to better understand another religious tradition as well as one's own because similarities and differences provide their specific profiles. Second, to a certain degree, mutual understanding among religious traditions is a necessary precondition for interreligious dialogue. Vice versa, dialogue also results in an improved understanding of one's own as of other religious traditions. The final aim of interreligious dialogue is to contribute to peace among religions, and thus to peace in our world. This is, as I see it, the social context for academic comparisons of religions.

The set of similarities I would like to investigate here concerns the final process of salvation or liberation, which is called in Pure Land Buddhism "birth into the Pure Land" (*ōjō* 往生, Chinese: *wangsheng*),[1] and in Christianity "resurrection (Greek: *anastasis*) from the dead." Generally speaking, both religious traditions are based on a kind of

[1] Often, this term is rendered into English mistakenly as "rebirth." Such rendering not only prevents one from distinguishing between "birth into the Pure Land" as ultimate liberation, and the "cycle of reincarnations," but is simply wrong because the character 往 does not signify a return, as indicated by its prefix, but a forward movement. Cf. Minoru Kiyota, "Buddhist Devotional Meditation," in Minoru Kiyota, ed., *Mahāyāna Buddhist Meditation: Theory and Practice* (Honolulu: University of Hawai'i Press, 1978), 250.

cosmological and soteriological dualism according to which ultimate salvation, or liberation, cannot be attained during one's lifetime in this world—even though the salvational process begins here already to a certain degree—but in a world beyond in a transcendent dimension, called the Pure Land or Heaven. In respect to our theme, this is the first similarity between the Christian and the Pure Land tradition. Thus, the terms "birth into the Pure Land" and "resurrection" signify the process which transports a human being from this world into the next. In a way, such birth or resurrection forms the connection between the two dimensions. Therefore, they are of crucial significance in the process of salvation.

A second similarity between the two traditions consists in the fact that both perceive this process as occurring during or after a human being's natural death. In other words, when a human life ends, the liberated life or eternal life begins. We also find a third similarity: because this ultimate liberation or salvation occurs after death, it has to be ascertained already during one's lifetime; otherwise there is no basis for hope of such salvation. In this respect, the mainstream of Japanese Pure Land tradition is fundamentally different from those Buddhist traditions which teach direct liberation during one's lifetime. Esoteric (Shingon 真言) Buddhism, for example, teaches *sokushin jōbutsu* 即身成仏, i.e., to become Buddha in this very body; or Zen Buddhism holds that the ultimate liberation of *satori* 悟 (awakening) occurs during one's lifetime—or never. In distinction to these forms of Buddhism, the Pure Land tradition is in this respect quite similar to Christianity.

There is a fourth similarity. The salvational process of birth or resurrection implies also that a continuity of a person (or however it may be termed) persists during the transformation process from this world to the next. As such, this continuity somehow affirms the individual identity of a person also in the world beyond. This marks a characteristic difference from those religious traditions which teach annihilation or dissolution of a person as ultimate salvation. After all, this is the central Buddhist goal of attaining nirvana. However, both the Pure Land and the Christian traditions affirm continuity and preservation of individual identity in the world beyond. We must not forget, though, that the Pure Land is a transitional dimension which in the end serves the ultimate goal of attaining nirvana.

A fifth similarity is immediately connected with the previous one. In both traditions is also the idea that all those who have been transported from hither to thither, will meet their beloved ones there again. In other words, death is only a temporal termination of human relationships. Not only is the individual transported there; a new kind of community

is also constituted there. This idea certainly deprives death of one of its frightening teeth, i.e., separation from beloved ones. Such separation is perceived only as existing for the time being, because in the end a happy reunion will take place. In a way, this idea somehow redresses the imbalance created by an individualistic soteriology, towards which Buddhism and Christianity are somewhat inclined. By reconstitution of certain communities, it affirms also the communal aspect in the world beyond. We may also say that whereas death terminates human communications, resurrection and birth (*ōjō*) reestablish communication, and thereby facilitate new kinds of community.

In this study, I shall focus only on the third similarity, namely the way of ascertaining postmortem salvation or liberation while a human being is still alive. The Pure Land tradition and Christianity employ certain methods of ascertaining future salvation during one's lifetime. These methods of ascertaining the future fate are variegated in each tradition; however, they give room for comparison. I think that such comparisons will help us detect structural similarities. At the same time, this does not mean to neglect the many differences that exist on the concrete level of religious realities. In the following, I begin with a short presentation of some ways in which the Buddhist tradition ascertains birth in the Pure Land. Then I proceed to the Christian tradition. In the final section, I attempt a brief comparison between the two traditions.

2. WAYS OF ASCERTAINING BIRTH INTO THE PURE LAND

In this section, I focus on the Japanese Pure Land tradition of the Heian 平安 and Kamakura 鎌倉 periods (ca. 9th–13th centuries), during which its formative developments occurred.[2] Because the Japanese tradition is based on the Chinese Pure Land tradition, brief reference to the latter may help to understand the context of the subsequent deliberations.

In Chinese Pure Land literature basically we find two ways to ascertain birth into the Pure Land. One consists of a deductive approach in treatises (*ron* 論, Chinese: *lun*) which deduces theoretical arguments

[2] For more detailed studies of this subject, see my article "How to Ascertain One's Birth into the Pure Land? An Investigation into Developments during the Heian and Kamakura Periods," *Shinshūgaku* 真宗学 111–12 (2005): 9–24.

from sutras and commentaries. The other method presents actual (historical) cases of birth in an inductive way, i.e., in form of hagiographies (*den* 伝, Chinese: *zhuan* 傳). In his *Jingtu lun* 淨土論, the Chinese Pure Land teacher Jiacai 迦才 combines both ways by first providing evidence for birth on the basis of sutras and treatises, and then by presenting "appearances (or phenomena; *xiang* 相, Japanese: *sō*) of people who actually attained birth."[3] Here, hagiographies serve to present "evidence (*zheng* 証, Japanese: *shō*) for the factual birth" into the Pure Land.[4]

This twofold method of ascertainment was taken up by the Japanese Pure Land tradition of the Heian period and developed further. In the first major work of the Japanese tradition, the *Ōjō yōshū* 往生要集 (Essentials for birth [into the Pure Land]), Genshin 源信 (942–1017) presented the deductive or theoretical approach. A close acquaintance of his, Yoshishige no Yasutane 慶滋保胤 (ca. 931–1002), however, took up the inductive approach by compiling the *Nihon ōjō gokuraku-ki* 日本往生極楽記 (Japan[ese] records of birth [in the land of] utmost bliss), in which he collected reports of Japanese who were believed to have actually attained birth. As the word "Japan" in the title indicates, Yasutane's motive was to show that birth into the Pure Land did not only occur in China (as the Japanese knew well from Chinese sources), but also in Japan, where Buddhism had been introduced only a few hundred years ago. In a way, both works by Genshin and Yasutane mark the beginning of an indigenous Pure Land tradition in Japan. It is indicative of this new self-consciousness over against their "older" brethren from the continent that Genshin sent both books to Buddhist monasteries in China.

In the introduction to his work, Yasutane takes up Jiacai's aforementioned distinction between the two ways to ascertain birth. Following this lead, Yasutane wants to "prove the fact of birth" (*ōjō no koto o shō-seri* 往生のことを証せり) by presenting cases of actual birth into the Pure Land (*utsutsu ni ōjō no mono o ki* 現に往生の者を記).[5] Yasutane follows also Jiacai's lead in determining the purpose of such collections as to encourage (*kanjin* 勧進) people to follow the Pure Land path. Yasutane further elaborates that such a work is intended to

---

[3] Takakusu Junjirō 高楠順次郎 and Watanabe Kaikyoku 渡辺海旭, eds., *Taishō shinshū daizōkyō* 大正新修大蔵経 (Tokyo: Taishō issaikyō kankōkai, 1924–32), 47:97a.

[4] Ibid.

[5] Inoue Mitsusada 井上光貞 and Ōsone Shōsuke 大曾根章介, eds., *Ōjō-den, Hokke-genki* 往生伝・法華験記, Nihon shisō taikei 日本思想大系 7 (Tokyo: Iwanami shoten, 1974), 11.

counter related doubts (*giwaku* 疑惑) and to strengthen the determination (*kokorozashi o kataku seri* 志を固くせり) for Pure Land practice.[6] He also defines the criteria for ascertaining birth: they are the "miraculous" or "extraordinary signs of birth" (*isō* 異相) in the hour of death which serve as proof for factual *ōjō* of a person.

What are those extraordinary signs? They are phenomena which can be perceived by human sense organs, such as the eye, ear and nose. In concrete terms, they are special smell of incense, heavenly music, and purple clouds in the sky. If those who are dying, or people nearby, observe such extraordinary signs, they can be sure that the dying person will certainly attain birth. Subsequently, I shall present a few examples to illustrate these phenomena.

The death of Kōya (Kūya) 空也, a monk famous for disseminating the Pure Land practice among ordinary people during the Heian period, is reported as follows:

> On the day of the Venerable One's death, he put on new garments, held a censer in his hand, and sat properly facing the West. "Many Buddhas and Bodhisattvas," he told his disciples, "are coming to welcome me into the Pure Land." Even after he had ceased breathing, he still continued to hold aloft the censer. At the time music could be heard in the heavens and fragrance filled the room.[7]

The narrator concludes: the Venerable Kōya "had returned to the Pure Land."[8]

If ascertaining the attainment of birth depends so much on the appearance of miraculous signs, the cases in which they cannot be observed pose a crisis for the believer. In another collection of birth records, the *Shūi ōjō-den* 拾遺往生伝 by Miyoshi no Tameyasu 三善爲康 (ca. 1050–1139), the following story is told: The monk Raisen of Dazaifu in Kyūshū composes a hymn on Amida which contains a prayer for certainly (*kanarazu* 必ず) attaining *ōjō*. When his last hour approaches, he breaks out in tears because he is disappointed for the following reason:

---

[6] Ibid.

[7] Frederik Kotas, "Ojoden: Accounts of Rebirth in the Pure Land" (PhD diss., University of Washington, 1987), 349f. (*Nihon ōjō gokuraku-ki* #17).

[8] Ibid., 350.

> "In the heaven there is no music," he said, "and in the room there are no fragrant odors. My prayers for birth in the Pure Land have gone unanswered and things have run counter to what I have longed for." Raising his voice thus, he sighed two or three times. Suddenly he threw his arms about a three foot image of Amida Buddha, and died in that position. Just then many fragrances rose up in the room. There was neither cloud, nor smoke, yet it would grow dark, and then again clear.[9]

Apart from these sensual or physical ways of ascertaining one's birth, there was also the mental means of dreams. It was believed that a dream can reveal especially the grade of birth, namely on which of the nine levels (*kubon* 九品) somebody had been born in the Pure Land. There are a number of interesting reports about such dreams. I choose here only one concerning the above mentioned Genshin, the outstanding Pure Land master of the Heian period. After he had died, one of his disciples had a dream in which the following conversation between the two took place. Upon the disciple's question

> "Have you been born in the Land of Supreme Bliss?"
>
> Genshin answered: "It's possible to say that I have been born there, and it's possible to say that I haven't been born there."
>
> As the disciple asked what this meant, Genshin replied: "When the sacred assembly gathers around the Buddha like a cloud, I remain at its outermost circle (*saige* 最外). That's why I also said that I haven't been born [in the Pure Land]."[10]
>
> At the end of the conversation, Genshin stated: "It is an extremely difficult matter to be born in [the Land] of Supreme Bliss. That is why I remain within the outermost circle . . ."[11]

It is not really clear what *saige* ("outermost") means ("circle" is added by the translator). It could be an area similar to, or the same as, *henchi* 辺地 ("surrounding land")[12] in which people harboring doubts

---

[9] Ibid., 501; Inoue and Osone, *Ōjō-den, Hokke-genki*, 365.

[10] Robert F. Rhodes, "Pure Land Practitioner or Lotus Devotee? The Earliest Biographies of Genshin. Appendix: Translation of the Kakocho Biography," *Japanese Religions* 21 (1996): 65; Hirabayashi Moritoku 平林盛得, "Ryōgon-in nijūgo zanmai kesshū kakochō" 楞厳院二十五三昧結衆過去帳, *Shoryōbu kiyo* 書陵部紀要 37 (1985): 50.

[11] Rhodes, "Pure Land Practitioner," 66; Hirabayashi, "Ryōgon-in," 51.

[12] Cf. Inoue and Osone, *Ōjō-den, Hokke-genki*, 34; Jōdo-shū daijiten hensan iinkai 浄土

are born and stay for 500 years before being born in the Pure Land proper. In any case, the dream could not ascertain a satisfactory birth for Genshin. The record comments,

> Although there are many reports of epiphanies and oracles like these, they will not all be noted because dreams are difficult to accept and believe.[13]

In other words, even dreams are no perfect means to ascertain birth into the Pure Land. However, putting these doubts aside, the record concludes:

> The Buddha's words are not false and [the relationship between] cause and effect is clear. How can we doubt that [he has gained] the effect of [birth into the Land of] Peace and Bliss . . . upon death?[14]

The technical term for an "assured birth" in Japanese Pure Land tradition is *ketsujō ōjō* 決定往生. This question of an assured birth should play a crucial role in the further developments of Japanese Pure Land Buddhism. Hōnen 法然 (1133–1212), a Tendai monk who established the independent Pure Land tradition in Japan at the beginning of the Kamakura period, was driven by this problem.[15] Among his early writings, there are no less than four texts dealing with Genshin's *Ōjō yōshū* alone, all written under a perspective of which the necessary (*yō* 要) practice is for an assured birth. Hōnen discovered in Genshin's work a quotation of the Chinese Pure Land master Shandao 善導, according to which the "concentrated practice" (*senju* 専修) of the *nembutsu* 念仏 (keeping Amida's Name in mind and reciting it) assures birth. Hōnen now understood the Chinese character 專 (専) as having the meaning of "exclusive." In other words, according to him, the "exclusive practice" of the vocal *nembutsu* is the decisive practice leading to birth for sure. In his main work *Senchaku-shū* 選択集, Hōnen continued to interpret Shandao, especially by focusing on his teaching of the "threefold mind" (*sanjin* 三心). He emphasized particularly the deep mind, which is a firm faith.

宗大辞典編纂委員会, ed., *Jōdo-shū daijiten* 浄土宗大辞典 (Tokyo: Sankibōbusshorin, 1974–82), 3:273.

[13] Rhodes, "Pure Land Practitioner," 66f.

[14] Rhodes, ibid., 67; Hirabayashi, "Ryōgon-in," 51.

[15] See Martin Repp, *Hōnens religiöses Denken. Eine Untersuchung zu Strukturen religiöser Erneuerung* (Wiesbaden: Harrassowitz, 2005), esp. 297–312.

As to the background of Hōnen's new teaching, certain traditional Pure Land practices lost their soteriological significance. For example, the above mentioned emphasis of the hour of death brought forth certain death-bed rituals which were considered to assure *ōjō*. One such ritual consisted in holding a thread connected with an Amida statue as an aid to visualize the Buddha welcoming the dying person in the Pure Land. Such death bed rituals then came to be considered as decisive for successful birth into the Pure Land. In an interesting conversation between a court lady and Hōnen, we hear the following: Upon her question whether birth is possible even without holding the thread and visualizing Amida, Hōnen replied:

> Even if one does not hold the thread and does not see Buddha coming (*raigō* 来迎), one will attain birth if one recites the *nembutsu*. One can attain [birth] even by listening [to the *nembutsu*] only if one has very deep faith (*yoku yoku shinjin fukakute* よくよく信心ふかくて).[16]

Thus, Hōnen considers the simple *nembutsu* and faith as more important than the traditional death rituals. In the *Senchaku-shū*, in the chapter on the threefold mind, Hōnen writes this remarkable sentence:

> By doubt (*gi* 疑) one is locked in the house of birth-and-death, by faith (*shin* 信) one can enter the palace of nirvana.[17]

Here, Hōnen closely connects the subjective attitude (*shin*) and the objective result (*ōjō*). In other words, he perceives the objective *ōjō* as dependent on, or conditioned by, the respective subjective attitude. This is fundamentally new in the Buddhist discourse on the certainty of birth. This becomes clear also in Hōnen's *Jōdo-shū ryakushō* 浄土宗略抄, where he writes:

> Determining (*sadamaru* 定まる) the karmic act for birth depends on a certain mind (*ketsujō no kokoro* 決定の心). If one thinks that [one's] birth is not certain (*fujō* 不定), it is uncertain (*fujō*); if one thinks that it is certain (*itchō* 一定), then one makes it certain (*itchō*).[18]

---

[16] Ishii Kyōdō 石井教道, ed., *Shōwa shinshū Hōnen shōnin zenshū* 昭和新修法然上人全集 (1991 printing; Kyoto: Heirakuji shoten, 1955), 652.

[17] Ibid., 334.

[18] Ibid., 595.

These two quotations demonstrate how crucial the role of the religious subject had become in the Pure Land tradition of the Kamakura period. One's faith or doubt determines one's future destiny. Also, Shinran 親鸞 in his *Tannishō* 歎異抄, for example, follows basically the same way of ascertaining birth.

However, Hōnen's way of ascertaining birth is not completely subjectivistic. In a sermon for the preparation of death called *Gyakushū seppō* 逆修説法, he writes:

> [Amida Buddha] comes to welcome [a person to the Pure Land] not because [the person] is in the proper mental state (*shōnen* 正念) during the last hour. Because he comes to welcome [a person, that person] attains the proper mental state in the hour of death.[19]

This quotation balances the afore-mentioned emphasis on individual faith by maintaining that Amida Buddha will certainly save a person. In other words, subjective faith and objective salvation form an inseparable pair in Hōnen's way of thinking. I will return to the issue in the final section.

In this section we have traced various approaches to ascertain birth into the Pure Land. First was the sensual or physical means of extraordinary signs of birth, such as heavenly music or wondrous smell of incense. Then we observed the mental way to ascertain birth by conspicuous dreams. However, these attempts to ascertain birth were always accompanied by nagging questions of doubt. Finally, we found that Hōnen considered the certainty of birth as a matter of faith or doubt: rather than outer signs or inner dreams, it is firm faith or doubt that determines whether or not one attains ultimate religious liberation. With these structures in mind, we now turn to Christianity and ask how resurrection from the dead is ascertained in it.

3. WAYS OF ASCERTAINING RESURRECTION FROM THE DEAD

As mentioned before, apart from the Pure Land teaching of ultimate liberation after death, the mainstream of Buddhist soteriology stresses

---

[19] Ibid., 234.

that liberation occurs in this world and lifetime, or never. In Christianity we find a similar twofold perception of salvation which theologians call "present eschatology" and "future eschatology." For example, Jesus' main message is that God's Kingdom has come wherever sinners receive forgiveness, sick people are healed, and drop-outs are reintegrated into communities. On the other hand, the Lord's Prayer, for example, holds the fervent hope that God's Kingdom will be realized completely in the future. Whether this realization will take place on this earth or in a world to come, is subject to theological debate. In general, Christian soteriology attempts to maintain the tension between present and future redemption. On the one hand, salvation is experienced "now already" to a certain degree; on the other hand, this is only partial and incomplete, for the perfect salvation has "not yet" been realized (*jetzt schon und noch nicht*). "Resurrection" (Greek: *anastasis*, Japanese: *fukkatsu* 復活) from the dead is believed to be this kind of final salvation.

The early Christian community had inherited the belief in the resurrection of the dead from Judaic apocalyptic traditions. A few passages of the Hebrew Bible, such as Isaiah 26:19 and Daniel 12:2, express belief in the resurrection of the dead. These passages are historically rather late. In the time of Jesus, the religious group of Pharisees believed in the resurrection of the dead, while the Sadducees rejected it.[20] For the early Christian community, belief in the resurrection first of all meant that their traumatic experience of their master's death at the cross had been overcome. The life, teaching and work of Jesus, which seemed to have been nullified by his death as a criminal, had been ultimately verified by his resurrection. According to the oldest gospel, Mark, Jesus eventually became the Messiah or God's Son in the full sense only after his resurrection. All gospels end with stories about Jesus' resurrection.

The youngest gospel, the Gospel of John, narrates a famous story about a disciple's doubt concerning his master's resurrection which is not found in other gospels. Here I leave the question of this account's historicity aside, since this has been treated sufficiently in exegetical literature. What is of interest here is that in this story about the disciple Thomas, doubt becomes its main topic. The so-called Easter story begins with female and male disciples visiting Jesus' grave only to find that it is empty. One disciple entered the cave of the grave and "he saw and believed." However, the disciples did not yet "know the scripture,

[20] Cf. Matthew 22:23.

that he [Jesus] must rise from the dead."[21] Later, Jesus appeared among the disciples, talked with them and showed his hands and his side marked by the wounds of the crucifixion, in order to affirm his identity. However, Thomas, who was not present then, when later being told about this encounter, stated: "Unless I see in his hands the print of the nails, and place my finger in the mark of the nails, and place my hand in his side, I will not believe."[22] A week later, when the disciples were assembled again, Jesus appeared and addressed Thomas directly: "Put your finger here, and see my hands, and put out your hand and place it in my side; do not be faithless, but believing." When Thomas then confessed "My Lord and my God!" Jesus admonished him: "Have you believed because you have seen me? Blessed are those who have not seen and yet believe."[23]

In this story, first the wish for physically or sensually ascertaining Jesus' resurrection is granted, however, only eventually to be harshly criticized. Thus, the message of this narrative is based on a contradiction posed between "seeing" and "believing." Jesus' resurrection might be physically verified by his disciples, but the real way of recognition is the eye of belief. After all, this is the only option left for those who became followers after Christ's final ascension, that is, his definite disappearance from the world.

The early Christian discourse on Jesus' resurrection then focuses mainly on two arguments. The first is that there is the witness of the disciples, who actually had encountered Christ as the risen one. Thus, later generations of Christians, who did not have such privilege, have to rely on the disciples' testimony. The second argument is that Christians ought to believe not only Christ's resurrection, but also their own resurrection. The decisive development of the early Christian discourse on this topic is that Christ's particular resurrection becomes the fundament for the belief in the resurrection of Christians in general. In other words, faith in the resurrection of Christ and belief in one's own resurrection are immediately interconnected. This is documented in the best-known discourse about resurrection, in Paul's first letter to the Corinthians. Paul was the great missionary and theologian who laid the theological basis on which the early Christian community developed from a small Jewish sect into a church in many nations. In chapter 15 of the letter, Paul treats the interrelatedness between the resurrection of

[21] John 20:9.
[22] John 20:25.
[23] John 20:27–29.

the dead in general and that of Jesus in particular. Here he states that one's own resurrection, i.e., one's ultimate salvation, is dependent on the fact of Jesus' resurrection as well as on one's firm faith.

First Corinthians 15 was written in response to certain beliefs of Christians in Corinth who confessed Jesus' resurrection, but who rejected the belief in the resurrection of Christians in general. In his argumentation, Paul first refers to the witness about Jesus' resurrection by many disciples, including himself. Then, he proceeds in his reasoning by writing:

> [12] Now if Christ is preached as raised from the dead, how can some of you say that there is no resurrection of the dead?
>
> [13] But if there is no resurrection of the dead, then Christ has not been raised;
>
> [14] if Christ has not been raised, then our preaching is in vain and your faith is in vain.
>
> [15] We are even found to be misrepresenting God because we testified of God that he raised Christ, whom he did not raise if it is true that the dead are not raised.
>
> [16] For if the dead are not raised, then Christ has not been raised.
>
> [17] If Christ has not been raised, your faith is futile and you are still in your sins.
>
> [18] Then those also who have fallen asleep in Christ have perished.
>
> [19] If for this life only we have hoped in Christ, we are of all men most to be pitied.
>
> [20] But in fact Christ has been raised from the dead, the first fruits of those who have fallen asleep.

Paul's reasoning is as follows. First (v. 12), he points out that the Corinthian position is inconsistent or contradictory, because the Corinthian Christians admit the particular resurrection of Christ on the one hand, but reject general resurrection of the dead, including their own, on the other. Next (v. 13), Paul reasons by reversing the order of the specific and the general: if there is no resurrection in general, then a particular resurrection of Christ is impossible. From here, he concludes (v. 13) that the missionaries have preached in vain and Christians have believed in vain as well, since the contents of their preaching and their faith are the same, namely Christ's resurrection. In other words (v. 15), in such case the missionaries were even false witnesses or liars. The

next two verses (vv. 16–17) repeat an argument previously presented in vv. 13–14. Then Paul points out other consequences of such a position held by the Corinthians (vv. 18–19): not only is their faith in vain; those other Christians who have already died would have perished into obscurity. That is, in their case death would have gained final victory (cf. v. 55). Since the Bible sees death as a result of sin, forgiveness of sin, or salvation, consists in ultimately overcoming death. According to Paul, to hope for salvation pertaining only to one's lifetime is quite a pitiful thing. In v. 20, Paul returns to the confession of faith, namely Christ's factual resurrection.

In this discourse Paul argues in a double way: on one hand, his argument moves somehow in a circle between the two poles of general and particular resurrections which, according to him, condition each other equally. On the other hand, this interconnection of Christ's particular resurrection and the faith in the resurrection of all believers implies an interconnection between Christ's particular resurrection and the individual Christian's resurrection. That is, the objective "fact" of Christ's resurrection and the subjective faith of one's own resurrection condition each other.

4. CONCLUSION

Seen from the perspective of comparative religious studies, there are structural similarities between Christian ways of ascertaining resurrection and Pure Land Buddhist methods of ascertaining *ōjō*. In both traditions we find two basic methods, namely physical or sensual ways of ascertaining one's ultimate salvation and mental or spiritual ways of doing so. Also, both traditions, in their doctrinal development, seem to have moved from the former to the latter method. However, in both traditions this development does not represent a purely subjectivistic approach of faith alone.[24] We saw that Paul's thinking constantly moves between subjective faith in one's own resurrection on the one hand, and the objective fact of Christ's resurrection, as was witnessed by the disciples, on the other. In a similar form Hōnen reasons on the

[24] If this were the case, then the criticism of religion as a purely subjective matter, as was levelled by Ludwig Feuerbach in his subjectivistic reductionism, would have been justified.

one hand that one's (subjective) faith and doubt determine one's ultimate liberation or failure to attain it, and on the other hand that one's birth depends not on an uncertain ("subjective") state of mind in the last hour (*shōnen*), but ("objectively") on Amida's certain coming to lead believers into the Pure Land.

I would like to conclude with a narrative from the early encounter between Christianity and Buddhism in 16th-century Japan. In this story the question of certain birth and that of assured resurrection meet in the heart of a Japanese Christian, who had recently converted from Pure Land Buddhism. The Jesuit missionary Luiz Frois reports this interesting episode from the early period (1563) of the Catholic mission in Japan which documents an intriguing encounter between Christian and Pure Land beliefs.

A well-respected old man, who "desired to save his soul" as Frois remarks, had converted from Buddhism and just received baptism a few days before. He was strolling in front of the church and recited the *nembutsu* while moving the pearls of his Buddhist rosary, as he used to do before baptism. A Catholic priest saw him by chance and asked him:

> "Are you not a Christian?"
>
> "Yes, father, I am," he replied.
>
> "Then where is your Christian rosary?"
>
> "Here, I carry it at my belt."
>
> "So why do you pray with the other one?"
>
> The old man responded:
>
> "Father, up to now I was a grave sinner. With the Christian rosary I pray to our Lord that he may have mercy with my soul. However, since I heard in the sermons that he is very strict and just in judgment, it could be probably that my sins are so many that when I die I won't deserve God's guidance to his glory. Hence, for such case I pray to Amida with this rosary by begging him to lead me into his paradise they call *gokuraku*."[25]

---

[25] Luiz Frois, SJ, *Die Geschichte Japans (1549–1578)*, nach der Handschrift in der Ajudabibliothek in Lissabon übersetzt und kommentiert von G. Schurhammer und E. A. Voretzsch (Leipzig: Verlag der Asia Major, 1926), 146 (trans. by the author).

Whereas the Christian samurai nearby laughed loudly, the father was not that amused; instead, he admonished him not to pray to the Buddha anymore.

This episode illustrates that the certainty of salvation or liberation poses a crucial question to both religious traditions. Thus, the basic challenge is common to both, and, as I hope to have shown above, the responses are structurally quite similar. However, the concrete answers still differ considerably, as the story of the old Japanese Christian also illustrates.

Part IV
Dialogues in Relation to Contemporary Society

Ching Feng, n.s., **7.1–2** (2006) 183–210

The Kingdom of God and the Pure Land: A Dialogical Study of Eschatology and Praxis

LAI PAN-CHIU

1. INTRODUCTION [1]

The Kingdom of God and the Pure Land are the key concepts central to the eschatology of Christianity and Mahāyāna Buddhism respectively. Although the term "eschatology" is used mainly by Christianity rather than Buddhism, eschatological problems concerning death, life after death, eternity, human destiny, etc. are discussed in both Buddhism and Christianity, as well as in the dialogue between the two; for example, eschatological issues constituted one of the major foci of the dialogue between Catholics and Chinese Buddhists during the Ming and Qing dynasties.[2] In recent years, a number of Christian theologians have been involved in the Buddhist reconsideration and reformulation of the

---

LAI Pan-chiu (LAI Pinchao 賴品超) is professor and the chairman of the Department of Cultural and Religious Studies, The Chinese University of Hong Kong.

[1] The research work published here was partially supported by a grant gratefully received from the Research Grants Council of Hong Kong (project no.: CUHK 4697/05H).

[2] See Zheng Ande 鄭安德 (Andrew K. Chung), *Ming mo Qing chu tianzhujiao he fojiao de hujiao bianlun* 明末清初天主教和佛教的護教辯論 [The Catholic–Buddhist apologetic debates in the late Ming and early Qing China] (Dashu, Kaohsiung County, Taiwan: Foguangshan wenjiao jijinhui, 2001), 441–92.

doctrine of the Pure Land in the contemporary world.[3] In fact, eschatology was also a focus of the comparison between Buddhism and Christianity made by Paul Tillich (1886–1965). In his Bampton Lectures (1962), Tillich included a section comparing the *telos* of Christianity and that of Buddhism. In light of this, it is very appropriate for us to take Tillich's interpretation of the Kingdom of God as the starting point for our discussion.[4] In contrast to his discussion, which compares the Kingdom of God with Nirvana, the present study focuses rather on the Christian concept of the Kingdom of God and the Buddhist concept of the Pure Land.

Some might have the impression that the Kingdom of God and the Pure Land are "eschatological" concepts that refer to something taking place in the future, especially after the end of this life, which has nothing to do with social praxis. Admittedly, among the basic Christian beliefs, eschatology might appear to be least important and most irrelevant to the contemporary world. However, it is important to note that the last century saw the rise of the concept of the Kingdom of God in Christian theology. Many modern Christian theologians, including notably Jürgen Moltmann and Wolfhart Pannenberg, attempted to make eschatology the basic orientation of Christian theology and to relate it to the social or political praxis of the Christian churches.[5] Similarly, many modern Chinese Buddhists attempted to reinterpret some seemingly "other-worldly" concepts in relation to Buddhist social praxis, including environmental protection. In both cases, the apparently eschatological concepts are not merely ones that concern the remote future, but also beliefs related to praxis here and now. For this reason, it is very appropriate to discuss these issues together. As will be shown,

---

[3] See Dennis Hirota, ed., *Toward a Contemporary Understanding of Pure Land Buddhism: Creating a Shin Buddhist Theology in a Religiously Plural World* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 2000).

[4] Some of the materials concerning Tillich's interpretation of the Kingdom of God presented here were derived from my paper published under the title "A Contextual Reflection on Tillich's Interpretation of Hope," *Ching Feng* 39, no. 4 (1996): 287–306. A substantially revised and expanded version of the paper was published as "Interpretation of Hope in the Context of Hong Kong," in *Interpretations of Hope in Chinese Religions and Christianity*, ed. Daniel Overmyer and Chi-tim Lai (Hong Kong: Christian Study Centre on Chinese Religion and Culture, 2002), 231–49.

[5] It is important to note that long before Moltmann and Pannenberg, a number of Christian theologians, e.g., Albrecht Ritschl and Walter Rauschenbusch, had taken the concept of the Kingdom of God as a vital foundation for Christian ethics. During the republican period (1911–49), many Chinese Christian theologians, including notably Zhao Zichen 趙紫宸 (T. C. Chao) and Wu Yaozong 吳耀宗, attempted to reinterpret the seemingly other-worldly concept of the Kingdom of God in order to develop their contextual theologies.

political and environmental implications were also involved in Tillich's comparison between the concepts of Nirvana and the Kingdom of God.

This paper will start with Tillich's interpretation of the Kingdom of God and the related discussion concerning Buddhist–Christian dialogue. Of course, his eschatology deserves to be studied in its own right. As Carl Braaten states, "Paul Tillich made the greatest contribution to the interpretation of the Kingdom of God among the theological leaders of the last generation."[6] Another important feature of Tillich's interpretation of the Kingdom of God is that it was formulated in response to the challenge derived from its socio-political context. This makes his interpretation of the Kingdom of God very contextual and particularly relevant to our discussion concerning eschatology and social praxis. Above all, in his dialogue with Buddhism, Tillich has offered a comparative study of the concepts of the Kingdom of God and Nirvana, including the ecological as well as the social implications of the two symbols. It is therefore entirely appropriate to take his thought as the starting point of our discussion. We will investigate how he interpreted the doctrine of the Kingdom of God, how his interpretation can be compared with Mahāyāna Buddhism, and how such discussion can be related to social praxis and ecological concern. I will argue that Tillich's approach—taking the Kingdom of God and Nirvana as the controlling symbols of the two traditions—will have rather limited potential for future dialogue between Buddhism and Christianity. However, if we take the Mahāyāna concept of the Pure Land instead of Nirvana as the controlling symbol for the Buddhist *telos* and compare it with the Christian concept of the Kingdom of God, we will see that there is more room for further dialogue. One of the major reasons for this is that many modern Buddhists have reinterpreted the concept of the Pure Land, making it the controlling imagery for Buddhist social praxis and environmental protection efforts. The inclusion of the Mahāyāna conception of the Pure Land into the discussion will thus enrich the dialogue between Buddhism and Christianity as it may become more relevant to the social praxis and environmental concerns of both religions.

---

[6] Carl Braaten, "The Kingdom of God and Life Everlasting," in *Christian Theology: An Introduction to Its Traditions and Tasks*, ed. Peter C. Hodgson and Robert H. King (London: SPCK, 1983), 291.

2. THE DEVELOPMENT OF TILLICH'S INTERPRETATION OF THE KINGDOM OF GOD

According to Tillich's own account, he began to employ the symbol "Kingdom of God" to formulate his eschatology in the 1920s. His decision to adopt the symbol as the cornerstone of his eschatology was influenced by his experience during the First World War, which is regarded as the turning point of his life and thought.[7] He participated in the religious socialist movement in Germany after the war and became dissatisfied with many existing interpretations of history. In his own words,

> It was the dissatisfaction with the progressivistic, utopian, and transcendental interpretations of history (and the rejection of the non-historical types) that induced the Religious Socialists of the early 1920s to try a solution which avoids their inadequacies and is based on biblical prophetism. This attempt was made in terms of a reinterpretation of the symbol of the kingdom of God.[8]

Since Tillich's interpretation of the symbol "Kingdom of God" originated in such a profoundly political context, particular emphasis has been placed upon the political aspect of the symbol.

In contrast with traditional eschatology, in which the subject matter proper is the "last things," Tillich suggests that eschatology should deal with the relation of the temporal to the eternal.[9] The core issue in eschatology, according to him, is always the present relation of the temporal to the eternal, however future-sounding the symbolism might appear.[10] For him, the symbol of the Kingdom of God is to be understood as the answer to the existential question about the meaning of history.[11] Since groups rather than individuals are the direct bearers of history, the answer to the question about the meaning of history has to be pre-

---

[7] See Wilhelm and Marion Pauck, *Paul Tillich: His Life and Thought*, Vol. 1: *Life* (London: Collins, 1977), 40–56.

[8] Paul Tillich, *Systematic Theology*, 3 volumes (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1951–63), 3:356.

[9] Ibid., 3:298 (emphasis added).

[10] Ibid., 3:298–99.

[11] Ibid., 3:356.

dominantly political.[12] As Tillich remarks, "It is significant that the symbol in which the Bible expresses the meaning of history is political: 'Kingdom of God,' and not 'Life of Spirit' or 'economic abundance.'"[13]

It is rather interesting to note that "Kingdom of God" is less prominent than the concept of the "Kairos" in Tillich's early theology, especially during the 1920s.[14] However, the subsequent political development in Europe made him realize that the "Kairos" would not appear as immediately as he had expected.[15] In his sermon "The Right to Hope," which was written only a few months before his death in 1965, Tillich begins with the biblical text of Romans 4:18: "In hope he believed against hope."[16] This text succinctly summaries his endeavour to uphold the Christian hope against a despairing or seemingly hopeless situation. In the sermon, he attempts to reinterpret the Kingdom of God in a rather realistic tone:

> The goal of mankind [humankind] is not progress towards a final stage of perfection; but it is the creation of what is possible for the human being in each particular state of history. . . . For the kingdom of God does not come in one dramatic event sometime in the future. It is coming here and now in every act of love, in every manifestation of truth, in every moment of joy, in every experience of the holy.[17]

We can see that Tillich's eschatology was contextually shaped. He developed and formulated his eschatology in response to the changing political, social and historical situations of his times.

---

[12] Ibid., 3:308, 312.

[13] Ibid., 3:311.

[14] See Pan-chiu Lai, *Towards a Trinitarian Theology of Religions: A Study of Paul Tillich's Thought* (Kampen: Kok Pharos, 1994), 62–65. Concerning the concept of "Kairos," see Paul Tillich, "Kairos," in *The Protestant Era*, trans. and ed. James Luther Adams, abridged edition (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1957), 32–51.

[15] Paul Tillich, *Political Expectation* (New York: Harper & Row, 1971), 180.

[16] The sermon was first published in *Neue Zeitschrift für systematische Theologie und Religionsphilosophie* 7, no. 3 (1965): 371–77. It has been reprinted in three places: Mark Kline Taylor, ed., *Paul Tillich: Theologian of the Boundaries* (London: Collins, 1987), 324–31; *Christian Century* 107, no. 14 (1990): 1064–67; Paul Tillich, *Theology of Peace*, ed. Ronald H. Stone (Louisville, Ky.: Westminster John Knox, 1990), 182–90.

[17] Paul Tillich, "The Right to Hope," in idem, *Theology of Peace*, 188–89.

Apart from this "realistic" shift, Tillich's interpretation of the Kingdom of God underwent another shift—from a more exclusive to a more open attitude towards alternative interpretations of history or hope that are found in other traditions. As will be demonstrated, his encounter with Buddhism also contributed to the development of his interpretation of hope.

In his essay "Historical and Non-historical Interpretations of History: A Comparison" (1939), Tillich suggests that there are two types of interpretation of history, namely, interpretation through nature and interpretation through itself. These two types are ultimately exclusive; one must choose either one of them.[18] Although in the third and last volume of his *Systematic Theology* (1963) Tillich recognizes the particular strength of the non-historical interpretation, he still finds the mystical interpretation of history fundamentally inadequate. He asserts,

> There is no symbol analogous to that of the Kingdom of God. But there is often a profound compassion for the universality of suffering under all dimensions of life—an element often lacking under the influence of historical interpretations of history in the Western world.[19]

Tillich seems to have found that it is not necessary to consider the historical and non-historical interpretations as mutually exclusive. He further suggests that the encounter of Christianity with Asian religions, especially Buddhism, which affirms a compassionate attitude towards the suffering of other living beings, may give an opportunity to reinstate the Kingdom of God as a living symbol.[20] Tillich's interpretation of the Kingdom of God in the last volume of his *Systematic Theology* represents his own attempt at reinstating the Kingdom of God as a living symbol through dialogue with Buddhism.

---

[18] Paul Tillich, "Historical and Non-historical Interpretations of History: A Comparison," in idem, *The Protestant Era*, 16–17.

[19] Tillich, *Systematic Theology*, 3:352.

[20] Ibid., 3:356.

3. TILLICH'S CLASSIFICATION OF ALTERNATIVE "ESCHATOLOGIES"

Before exploring Tillich's own interpretation of the symbol "Kingdom of God," it is necessary to investigate the reasons for his rejection of other interpretations of the meaning of history. There are in his view three different non-historical interpretations of history that give negative answers to the question of the meaning of history: the tragic, the mystical and the mechanistic. In addition to these, there are three historical interpretations offering positive but inadequate answers to the question of the meaning of history: the progressivistic, the utopian and the transcendental.[21]

The tragic interpretation of the meaning of history can be found in ancient Greek thought. In this view, history does not run towards any historical or trans-historical goal but circles back to its beginning. There is nothing beyond or above this stretch of time, which itself is determined by fate. The glory of life in nature, nations and persons is praised, but there is no hope and no expectation of an immanent or transcendent fulfilment of history.[22]

Tillich suggests that the mystical interpretation can be found in Taoism and some Indian religions, including Buddhism. In view of this type of interpretation, historical existence has no meaning in itself. History itself can neither create the new, nor be truly real. The emphasis of this interpretation is on the individual, and particularly on the comparatively few religious elites who are aware of the human predicament. Tillich finds the mystical interpretation unsatisfactory because it contains no impulse to transform history in the direction of universal humanity and justice. What it can offer is only one way to cope with the ambiguities of life, which is to live with them.[23]

The mechanistic interpretation of hope, according to Tillich, is based on the modern mechanistic worldview, which may be associated with reductionistic naturalism. Unlike classical Greek thought, this mechanistic interpretation does not emphasize the tragic element in history or

---

[21] Ibid., 3:350–56. See also idem, "Historical and Non-historical Interpretations of History," 16–31.

[22] Tillich, *Systematic Theology*, 3:351.

[23] Ibid., 3:351–52.

the greatness of human existence. Since it is related to the technical control of nature by science and technology, it has, in some cases, a progressivistic character. However, it is also possible to derive from it an attitude of cynical devaluation of existence in general, and of history in particular.[24] Tillich thinks that these non-historical interpretations have offered no hope in the proper sense of the word, for they expect nothing new to take place.

In Tillich's view, progressivism is the belief that there is a universal law determining the dynamics of history and that history is running ahead towards a goal. Human society, and especially science and technology, is necessarily progressing through human endeavours. Although this goal is inner-historical, progressivism remains a quasi-religious symbol because it gives both impetus to historical actions and passion to revolutions, and bears the meaning of life for many.[25] However, progressivism alone is not enough because depression is also a fact in history and in some aspects, such as the moral act of freedom, there is no progression at all. Tillich admits that there is progress in science, technology and education, but not in moral act as an act of freedom. Even the justice of democracy, which represents progress above other forms of justice, is a progress only in a quantitative sense and not in a qualitative sense. Each political system points to the justice of the Kingdom of God and there is no progress from the one to the other in this respect.[26]

Unlike progressivism, which takes progress as an infinite process without an end, utopianism believes in a final state of fulfilment.[27] Utopianism is the belief that the utopia, which literally means "no place," will be established on earth and that history will reach the perfect stage in which the ambiguities of life are conquered.[28] Tillich regards utopianism as a form of idolatry because it ascribes the quality of ultimacy to something preliminary. Furthermore, it disregards the always present existential estrangement and the ambiguities of life and history. This kind of interpretation of history or hope, in Tillich's view, is both inadequate and dangerous.[29]

---

[24] Ibid., 3:352.

[25] Ibid., 3:352–53.

[26] Ibid., 3:333–39.

[27] Progressivism, according to Tillich, may appear in two forms: (1) progress as an infinite process without an end; or (2) belief in a final state of fulfilment. While the former is progressivism, the latter may be called utopianism. See ibid., 3:353.

[28] Ibid., 3:354.

[29] Ibid., 3:355.

Tillich also finds unsatisfactory the "transcendental" interpretation found in some forms of Christian tradition, particularly orthodox Lutheranism. This interpretation suggests that Christ appeared to save individuals within the church from bondage to sin and guilt, and to enable them to be received into heaven after death.[30] Tillich identifies three shortcomings in the transcendental interpretation:

1. It contrasts the salvation of the individual with the transformation of the historical group and the universe, thus separating the one from the other.
2. It contrasts the realm of salvation with the realm of creation and the danger of Manichaeism may therefore arise.
3. It interprets the symbol of the Kingdom of God as a static supernatural order into which individuals enter after their life. As a result, it excludes culture as well as nature from the saving processes in history.[31]

4. TILLICH'S INTERPRETATION OF THE KINGDOM OF GOD

As there are so many interpretations of history offering different kinds of hope, one has to ask the question how it is possible to distinguish genuine or true hope from false or foolish hope. Tillich attempts to answer this in the following way:

> Where there is genuine hope, there that for which we hope has already some presence. In some way, the hoped for is at the same time here and not here. It is not yet fulfilled and it may remain fulfilled. But it is here, in the situation and in ourselves, as a power which drives those who hope into the future. There is a beginning here and now. . . . Where such a beginning of what is hoped for is lacking, hope is foolishness.[32]

---

[30] Ibid., 3:355.
[31] Ibid., 3:355–56.
[32] Tillich, "The Right to Hope," 185.

Tillich's suggestion here can be said to be a further development of his view concerning religious symbol in general, expressed in his book *Dynamics of Faith*. In this book he proposes two criteria, based on the nature of religion as ultimate concern, to evaluate a religious symbol. The first criterion is whether the ultimate expressed by the symbol is really ultimate. The second criterion is whether the symbol is alive; in other words, "whether it can adequately express an ultimate concern and in such a way that it creates reply, action, and communication."[33] An adequate interpretation of hope, accordingly, should point to the ultimate reality which is trans-historical or eternal, be related to the immediate experience and present reality, and be able to inspire reply, action and communication. As will be demonstrated, Tillich's interpretation of the symbol of the Kingdom of God aims at providing an interpretation of hope which affirms not only the "ultimate," but also the "immediate" character of the Kingdom of God.

Tillich regards "Kingdom of God" as the most embracing eschatological symbol. He notices that alongside this symbol, there are also ones of the Spiritual Presence and Eternal Life in the Christian tradition. However, as he argues, the connotations of the Kingdom of God are more embracing than those of the Spiritual Presence and Eternal Life, although each of these symbols includes the other two. He suggests that while the Spiritual Presence emphasizes the inner historical character and Eternal Life the trans-historical,[34] the Kingdom of God covers both the inner-historical and the trans-historical aspects. With regard to the symbol of the Kingdom of God, Tillich says,

> As inner historical, it participates in the dynamics of history; as transhistorical, it answers the questions implied in the ambiguities of the dynamics of history. In the former quality it is manifest through the Spiritual Presence; in the latter quality it is identical with Eternal Life.[35]

As to the Kingdom of God within history, Tillich holds that "where there is manifestation of the Kingdom of God, there is revelation and salvation."[36] While Christ is the central manifestation of the Kingdom of God in history, the churches are the representatives of the Kingdom

---

[33] Paul Tillich, *Dynamics of Faith* (New York: Harper & Row, 1958), 96–97.
[34] Tillich, *Systematic Theology*, 3:357.
[35] Ibid., 3:357.
[36] Ibid., 3:364.

of God in history.[37] However, he further points out that the Kingdom of God is not restricted to the religious realm or the daily life of individuals.[38] It is a dynamic power struggling with the demonic forces in churches as well as empires. Tillich believes that the Kingdom of God is not only in world history, but also comprises the whole of reality.[39] The other forms of life and the inorganic world are included not only in the Kingdom of God in history, but also in the Kingdom of God as the end of history.[40]

Tillich insists that the trans-historical side of the Kingdom of God, which is also expressed in the symbol of Eternal Life, embraces not only human beings, but also all other beings. He holds that eternal blessedness is attributed to those who participate in the divine life, yet not only to human beings, but also to everything that is.[41] Tillich further clarifies that instead of being "a future state of things," the eternal "is always present, not only in 'man' (who is aware of it), but also in everything that has being within the whole of being."[42] As Raymond Bulman aptly comments, Tillich's eschatology contains a grand unitary vision which is political as well as transcendent, social as well as individual and cosmic as well as historical.[43]

Affirming both the inner-historical and trans-historical characters of the Kingdom of God, Tillich particularly reminds the churches that as representatives of the Kingdom of God in history, they are charged with the task of keeping alive the tension between the consciousness of presence and the expectation of the coming.[44] His view of democracy reflects his two-character theory of the Kingdom of God. He affirms that "in so far as democratization of political attitudes and institutions serves to resist the destructive implications of power, it is a manifestation of the Kingdom of God in history."[45] However, he also reminds us

---

[37] Ibid., 3:364, 374.

[38] Ibid., 3:381.

[39] Ibid., 3:377.

[40] Tillich explains this with his doctrine of the participation of nature in the process of fall and salvation. For details, see Pan-chiu Lai, "Paul Tillich and Ecological Theology," *Journal of Religion* 79, no. 2 (1999): 233–49.

[41] Tillich, *Systematic Theology*, 3:405, 409, 432, 436.

[42] Ibid., 3:400.

[43] Raymond F. Bulman, "History, Symbolism, and Eternal Life," in *Paul Tillich: A New Catholic Assessment*, ed. Raymond F. Bulman and Frederick J. Parrella (Collegeville, Minn.: Liturgical Press, 1994), 116.

[44] Tillich, *Systematic Theology*, 3:391.

[45] Ibid., 3:385.

that the democratic system is the best so far, although it is not absolute and should not be identified with the Kingdom of God itself.[46]

Tillich believes that historical sacrifice of individuals in every political system would be inevitable.[47] However, he insists that if one is required to sacrifice for something that bears no relation to him or her, it is enforced self-annihilation and not genuine sacrifice. Genuine sacrifice fulfils rather than annihilates the one who makes the sacrifice.[48] Tillich suggests that the Kingdom of God manifests wherever historical sacrifice and the certainty of personal fulfilment are united.[49]

Tillich insists that the assumed well-being of a "last generation" does not justify the evil and tragedy of all previous generations; no future true justice and happiness can annihilate the injustice and suffering of the individuals in the past.[50] Underlying Tillich's discussion is his concept that the Kingdom of God should be where lives of all individuals can participate and be fulfilled. The Kingdom of God will not be present without the participation and fulfilment of the lives of every individual.

5. MAHĀYĀNA CHARACTERISTICS OF TILLICH'S INTERPRETATION

On the basis of the description above, one may notice that Tillich's interpretation of the Kingdom of God is very much in line with the Mahāyāna spirit. His criticism of the individualist interpretation of eschatology can be taken as his Mahāyāna doctrinal classification (*panjiao* 判教), in which the individualist and other-worldly interpretation of hope is classified as a "Hīnayāna" teaching to be transformed or superseded by a Mahāyāna one. From time to time, Tillich criticizes the inadequacy of the "transcendental" interpretation of hope dominant in the theological tradition of the Christian churches. In terms of soteriology, this theological tradition emphasizes salvation of an individual's soul at the expense of any consideration for the salvation of nature. In terms of

[46] Ibid., 3:347, 385.
[47] Ibid., 3:347–48.
[48] Ibid., 3:392.
[49] Ibid., 3:392–93.
[50] Ibid., 3:373.

eschatology, it is individualistic, other-worldly, futuristic and revolutionary in the sense that the Kingdom of God is to be established by God alone and will come suddenly and dramatically.[51] For Tillich, this interpretation of eschatology is inadequate because no individual destiny can be separated from that of the universe.[52] It is not only selfish, but also foolish to hope for oneself alone. At the end of the sermon "The Right to Hope," Tillich makes this final remark:

> Participation in the eternal is not given to the separated individual. It is given to him in unity with all others, with mankind [humankind], with everything living, with everything that has being and is rooted in the divine ground of being. All powers of creation are in us and we are in them. We do not hope for us alone or for those alone who share our hope; we hope also for those who had and have no hope, for those whose hopes for this life remain unfulfilled, for those who are disappointed and indifferent, for those who despair of life and even for those who have hurt or destroyed life. Certainly, if we could only hope each for himself [or herself], it would be a poor and foolish hope. Eternity is the ground and aim of every being for God shall be all in all. Amen.[53]

It is obvious that Tillich's interpretation of the Kingdom of God attempts to strike a balance between the individual and social aspects with a participatory ontology. According to this interpretation, the Kingdom of God is neither individualistic nor established at the expense of the ultimate well-being of the individual. It is to be noted that this view is very much in line with the Mahāyāna understanding of bodhisattva's "altruism," which does not mean sacrifice of oneself for others without one's own partaking of the eventual benefit.

Tillich's vision of the Kingdom of God includes the present and future/eternal dimensions, covering individual, political and even cosmic aspects. This is strikingly similar to the Mahāyāna hope that one day the lives of all living beings will be fulfilled by attaining Buddhahood. Tillich's interpretation of the Kingdom of God implies both an ontological vision of interdependence/participation, which is very similar

---

[51] John Macquarrie gives a typology of Christian interpretations of hope by listing four pairs of contrast: (1) individual *vs*. social, cosmic; (2) this-worldly *vs*. other-worldly; (3) evolutionary *vs*. revolutionary; and (4) realized *vs*. future. There can be sixteen types of hope in total. For details, see John Macquarrie, *Christian Hope* (London: Mowbray, 1978), 86–88.

[52] Tillich, *Systematic Theology*, 3:418.

[53] Tillich, "The Right to Hope," 190.

to the Mahāyāna interpretation of emptiness, and a critique of the individualistic and selfish understanding of salvation, which is similar to the Mahāyāna critique of the Hīnayāna.

6. THE KINGDOM OF GOD AND NIRVANA: TILLICH'S DIALOGUE WITH BUDDHISM

Although Tillich's interpretation of the Kingdom of God has "Mahāyāna" characteristics, he does not seem to be so optimistic about the prospect of the dialogue between Buddhism and Christianity on relevant issues.

In his Bampton Lectures, Tillich perceptively points out that in the dialogue between Buddhism and Christianity, their respective symbols of the *telos* should play an important role. In Christianity it is the Kingdom of God, and in Buddhism, Nirvana. For Tillich, the two symbols imply different approaches to reality and create "the theoretical as well as practical contrast between the two religions."[54] He understands that there are significant differences between the two symbols.

> The Kingdom of God is a social, political, and personalistic symbol. The symbolic material is taken from the ruler of a realm who established a reign of justice and peace. In contrast to it, Nirvana is an ontological symbol. Its material is taken from the experience of finitude, separation, blindness, suffering, and, in answer to all this, the image of the blessed oneness of everything, beyond finitude and error, in the ultimate Ground of Being.[55]

Tillich admits that there are few similarities for comparison; at any rate "both are based on a negative valuation of existence."[56] He recognizes a huge difference between Buddhism and Christianity: while the ultimate in Christianity is symbolized in personal categories, the ultimate in Buddhism is symbolized in transpersonal categories such as "abso-

---

[54] Paul Tillich, *Christianity and the Encounter of the World Religions* (New York and London: Columbia University Press, 1964), 64.

[55] Ibid., 65.

[56] Ibid.

lute non-being."[57] However, he suggests that this difference should not be taken as absolute in light of both theoretical and ethical considerations.

At the theoretical level, whereas Christianity also has such transpersonal category as *esse ipsum* (being itself) in its doctrine of God, "in Mahayana Buddhism the Buddha-Spirit appears in many manifestations of a personal character, making a non-mystical, often very primitive relation to a divine figure possible."[58] Furthermore, Tillich continues,

> If in Paul the Kingdom of God is identified with the expectation of God being all in all (or for all), if it is replaced by the symbol of Eternal life, or described as the eternal intuition and fruition of God, this has a strong affinity to the praise of Nirvana as the state of transpersonal blessedness.[59]

In other words, in each of the traditions, there are counter examples or exceptions to this generalization or demarcation concerning the personal and non-personal.

At the ethical level, Tillich finds that Buddhism, based on its ontological principle of identity and in contrast to the principle of participation implied in the symbol of the Kingdom of God, has developed an attitude of sympathetic identification with nature.[60] He admits that the Christian symbol of the Kingdom of God, when compared with the Buddhist idea of Nirvana, seems to be an anthropocentric symbol in which animals and plants are insignificant. However, he suggests that the Kingdom of God is not only a social symbol, but is also a symbol that comprises the whole of reality.[61] According to Tillich's analysis, the Kingdom of God has four connotations: political, social, personalistic and universal.[62] The personal, social and political connotations are essential and ever-present elements of the Christian experience because the Kingdom of God takes its symbolic material from these spheres.[63] The fourth connotation affirms that the symbol of the Kingdom of God

---

[57] Ibid., 65–66.
[58] Ibid., 67. Here, Tillich might be referring to the Buddhist doctrine of three bodies.
[59] Ibid., 68.
[60] Ibid., 68–69.
[61] Tillich, *Systematic Theology*, 3:377.
[62] Ibid., 3:358.
[63] Ibid., 3:357.

is not exclusive for human beings; rather, "it involves the fulfillment of life under all dimensions."[64] At this juncture, Tillich does not further elaborate why and how the Kingdom of God is not exclusive for human beings. However, he does discuss elsewhere how nature participates in the fall and salvation together with human beings, although his discussion is not entirely based on the symbol of the Kingdom of God.[65] He argues that whereas Christianity can learn from Buddhism and develop more profound compassion for other forms of life that endure suffering, it seems impossible for Asian religions to accept the symbol "Kingdom of God" in anything like its original meaning. Tillich suggests that this is because the personal, social and political spheres are radically transcended in the basic experience of Buddhism, which is expressed in the symbol of Nirvana.[66]

Tillich attempts to understand the difference between Buddhism and Christianity, especially their ontological visions as well as ethical implications, in terms of the distinction between the principles of identity and participation. He suggests that "participation leads to agape, identity to compassion."[67] With regard to Buddhism, he suggests, "Compassion is a state in which he who does not suffer his own conditions may suffer by identification with another who suffers. He neither accepts the other one in terms of 'in spite of,' nor does he try to transform him, but he suffers his suffering through identification."[68] Tillich argues:

> There are great expressions of compassion in Buddhist religion and art, as well as—and here again I can witness—in personal relations with friends, but this is not agape. It differs in that it lacks the double characteristic of agape—the acceptance of the unacceptable, or the movement from the highest to the lowest, and, at the same time, the will to transform individual as well as social structures.[69]

From a Mahāyāna perspective, Tillich's understanding of Buddhism is definitely inadequate. The Mahāyāna doctrine of skilful means, as is

---

[64] Ibid., 3:359.

[65] Since I have published an article on this theme which also discusses its implication for ecological theology, I will not further elaborate on this here. For details, see Lai, "Paul Tillich and Ecological Theology," 233–49.

[66] Tillich, *Systematic Theology*, 3:357.

[67] Tillich, *Christianity and the Encounter of the World Religions*, 70.

[68] Ibid., 71.

[69] Ibid., 71–72.

expounded in the Vimalakīrti and the Lotus sutras, clearly involves a movement from the highest to the lowest. This includes not only Vimalakīrti's being the "incarnation" of a bodhisattva/Buddha living in his Buddha-realm, but also the way in which the Buddha has to tone down his teaching in order to adjust to the level of understanding of sentient beings. In Mahāyāna Buddhism, the acceptance of the unacceptable is basically not at all problematic, for the compassion of the bodhisattva does not depend on the response or status of his/her audience. In Chinese Buddhism, even the icchantikas are believed to be able to attain Buddhahood. Some schools believe that even trees and grasses can attain Buddhahood. Finally, Mahāyāna Buddhism regards the transformation of individuals, which is understood in terms of bringing them to enlightenment and full Buddhahood, as the aim of skilful means. Thus, Tillich's understanding of Buddhism seems to have entirely disregarded Mahāyāna Buddhism.

Tillich is quite right in pointing out that the attitudes towards nature in Christianity and Buddhism are not totally exclusive, because in the history of Christian nature-mysticism the principle of participation can attain such a degree that it is often difficult to distinguish it from the principle of identity.[70] However, he insists that Buddhism has identity but no community because it fails to affirm true individuality.[71] For Tillich, while Buddhists believe that "if every person has a substance, no community is possible," Christians suggest that "[o]nly if each person has a substance of his own is community possible, for community presupposes separation."[72] Tillich further suggests that democracy requires community and participation, not identity, and that for this reason the development of democracy in Japan may have to seek a spiritual foundation of democracy that cannot be provided by Buddhism.[73]

Again, Tillich's understanding of Buddhism has not taken into account the position of Mahāyāna Buddhism, especially Chinese Buddhism. As I have discussed elsewhere, his understanding may have disregarded the participatory ontology involved in the Hua-yen vision of mutual identity and interpenetration of all events (*xiangji-xiangru* 相即相入), non-obstruction among events (*shishi-wuai* 事事無礙), and the

[70] Ibid., 69.
[71] Ibid., 75.
[72] Ibid., 75.
[73] Ibid., 74–75.

vision of one in all and all in one (*yi ji yiqie, yiqie ji yi* 一即一切，一切即一).[74]

Tillich is quite right in pointing out that Buddhist–Christian dialogue may benefit from the construction of Christian ecological theology and the Christian interpretation of hope in the context of ecological concern. Furthermore, Mahāyāna Buddhism may benefit from the emphasis on justice implied in the symbol of the Kingdom of God. However, Tillich might have underestimated the potential for further dialogue between Buddhism and Christianity in this aspect. The main reason for this underestimation, I would like to suggest, is his inadequate understanding of Buddhism, especially Mahāyāna Buddhism. It is particularly unfortunate that he did not discuss the concept of the Pure Land.

7. PURE LAND AND SOCIAL PRAXIS

In the Mahāyāna tradition, the centrality of Nirvana, which was regarded as the ultimate goal of liberation in early Buddhism or the so-called "Hīnayāna," has been sidelined to a certain extent because it is understood as a skilful means only and the prominence of the concept of the Pure Land, which has become the major symbol of the Mahāyāna Buddhist hope. As will be shown, this shift gradually has opened up the possibility of integrating eschatology with social praxis in Buddhism in a new way.

It is without doubt that Pure Land Buddhism appeared as a religion looking for one's own rebirth in the next life in a paradise called the Pure Land through the other-power of Amitābha Buddha. This eschatological hope might appear to be too individualistic, other-worldly and supernatural to be relevant to Buddhist social praxis. In its long history, Pure Land Buddhism has been considered an extremely other-worldly religion that longs for Amitābha's receiving oneself to another world at one's deathbed. This longing seems to have nothing to do with this world, excepting that one should call upon the name of Amitābha Buddha as often as possible. However, during the last century, a number of Chinese Buddhists attempted to reform Buddhism and make it

---

[74] See Lai Pan-chiu, "The Doctrines of the Trinity and Christology and Hua-yen Buddhism," *Ching Feng*, n.s., 5, no. 2 (2004), 203–25.

more relevant to the contemporary world. They found it necessary to reinterpret the concept of the Pure Land to form the doctrinal basis of their reform and the resultant new form of Buddhism.[75] Their reinterpretations emphasizes the "this-worldly" character of the Pure Land.

Master Cheng-yen (Zhengyan 證嚴), probably the best known nun in Taiwan, established the Buddhist Compassion Relief Tzu Chi Foundation, which has become one of the most influential relief agencies in Taiwan. Central to her vision is the idea of the Pure Land. She says,

> We hope for that the world will be a Pure Land of peace and joy. However, only by purifying human hearts, eliminating avarice and hostility, and activating the innate compassion in every person can we give of ourselves selflessly. Only by activating our conscience, revealing the intrinsic love hidden in our hearts, and planting the seeds of goodness can we change evil to good, calamity to good fortune.[76]

Master Cheng-yen does not only link up the concept of the Pure Land to human heart, she also emphasizes the oneness of all beings. In her own words,

> If we remember that all creatures in the universe are one, we will know how to let go of our egotism, eliminate our mutual misunderstanding, and put aside our selfishness. We will then return to the true, clear essence of our human nature, and from the depths of our hearts will arise a reverence for all beings.[77]

---

[75] For the development of the this-worldly interpretation of the Pure Land or the idea of the Pure Land in the human World, see Jiang Canteng 江燦騰, *Renjian jingtu de zhuixun: Zhongguo jinshi fojiao sixiang yanjiu* 人間淨土的追尋：中國近世佛教思想研究 [Searching for the pure land on earth: a study on modern Chinese Buddhist thought] (Taipei: Daoxiang chubanshe, 1989). In fact, some contemporary scholars have attempted to develop Buddhist ethics from the Pure Land tradition. See Kenneth K. Tanaka, "Concern for Others in Pure Land Soteriological and Ethical Considerations: The Case of Jōgyō-daihi in Jōdo-Shinshū Buddhism," in *Buddhist Theology: Critical Reflections by Contemporary Buddhist Scholars*, ed. Roger R. Jackson and John J. Makransky (Richmond, Surrey: Curzon, 2000), 346–63. See also Hirota, *Toward a Contemporary Understanding of Pure Land Buddhism*.

[76] Shih Cheng-yen, "A New Millennium of Goodness, Beauty, and Truth," in *Buddhist Peacework: Creating Cultures of Peace*, ed. David W. Chappell (Somerville, Mass.: Wisdom Publications, 1999), 48.

[77] Ibid.

A similar interpretation of the Pure Land can be found in the motto "to build the Pure Land in our midst" proposed by Master Hsing Yün (Xingyun 星雲) of Foguangshan 佛光山, which is also based in Taiwan.[78] The Master states,

> Where is the Pure Land for a Ch'an practitioner? It is in the performing of lowly tasks. It is in the love for and salvation of others. It is also in the transformation of one's surrounding.[79]

He also asserts,

> Humanistic Buddhism is not a new kind of Buddhism: it is simply a name used to emphasize the core teachings of the Buddha. The Buddha taught wisdom and compassion. These Teachings always lead us back to the lives of other sentient beings. To not understand the unity of human nature and Buddha nature is not to understand the teachings of the Buddha. Humanistic Buddhism encourages us to participate in the world and be a source of energy that is beneficial to others. Our enlightenment depends on others, just as their enlightenment depends on us. Master T'ai Hsü said that we can achieve Buddhahood only by fulfilling our humanity.[80]

Perhaps we can now see clearly how our previous discussions converge on Humanistic Buddhism, whose vision provides an approach to integrating spirituality and social praxis. As Ven. Dr. Yifa 依法, a disciple of Master Hsing Yün, states,

> My teacher, the Venerable Master Hsing Yün, advocates "Humanistic Buddhism," a teaching that brings Buddhism into society. Spiritual cultivation is not the sole prerogative of monks and nuns in a monastery, but is considered a necessary element for humanizing our society. Society should not be seen as just a source of temptation, and thus as an obstacle to spiritual cultivation. On the contrary, society should serve as the soil for nourishing spirituality. From the view point of Humanistic Buddhism, witnessing suffering in society gen-

---

[78] The centrality of the motto is reflected in the title of a recent study of Foguangshan. See Stuart Chandler, *Establishing a Pure Land on Earth: The Foguang Buddhist Perspective on Modernization and Globalization* (Honolulu: University of Hawai'i Press, 2004).

[79] Cf. Donald W. Mitchell, *Buddhism: Introducing the Buddhist Experience* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2002), 302.

[80] Ibid., 302.

> erates compassion. Facing and overcoming temptation in society means not to shy away from desire, but to encounter it without being tainted by it. Training oneself to attain equanimity does not require a solitary place to hide, but rather a peaceful and unmovable mind in the midst of the social turmoil of the world.
>
> Humanistic Buddhism, from which I myself have benefited deeply, provides a philosophy that encourages me to walk into society, keeping social movement and spiritual cultivation in balance.[81]

We can see that in modern Chinese Buddhism, especially Humanistic Buddhism, the interpretation of the Pure Land underwent a significant change from a rather other-worldly concept to a more this-worldly one, from a Pure Land out there to a Pure Land related to the Pure Land in the human heart. The concept not only becomes a major symbol that inspires Buddhist participation in social praxis; it also becomes one of the doctrinal supports for a balance between social praxis and spirituality.

Given these examples in contemporary Chinese Buddhism, one has to query whether Tillich oversimplified the case as he identified Buddhism as a mystical interpretation of history which is individualistic and elitist and which contains no impulse to transform history in the direction of universal humanity and justice.[82] As will be demonstrated, the concept of the Pure Land also provides the imagery supporting not only Buddhist social praxis, but also Buddhist participation in environmental protection.

8. PURE LAND AND ENVIRONMENTAL PROTECTION

In Taiwan, there is a famous Buddhist movement called the Movement of the Pure Land on Earth, promoted actively by the Dharma Drum Mountain (Fagushan 法鼓山) led by Ch'an Master Sheng-yen (Sheng-yan 聖嚴). One of his famous mottos is "Spiritual Environmental Protection." According to him, the emphasis of the approach he prefers is on "the Buddhist idea that peace in society begins with peace within

---

[81] Ibid., 215.

[82] Tillich, *Systematic Theology*, 3:351–52.

oneself,"[83] for there is an "intimate relationship between the environment and the mind" and according to the Buddha, "the world changes according to our state of mind."[84] Sheng-yen says,

> The notion of "a Pure Land on Earth" is particularly emphasized in the Mahayana tradition of Buddhism. The *Hua-Yen Sutra* (*Avatamsaka Sutra*) (Taisho.9, 449) states: "The Moment you give rise to the sincere and earnest intention [to attain enlightenment], you have attained enlightenment." This means that, as soon as you give rise to the aspiration to attain the Buddha's mind of compassion and wisdom, you have become a Buddha. Although you are not yet a perfect and complete Buddha, your mind is in harmony with the enlightenment of all Buddhas. As long as you are a Buddha, the world you see is a Pure Land, for when seen through the Buddha's eye of wisdom and compassion, every place in the world *is* a Pure Land. In other words, peace is created in and with a mind of peace.[85]

Sheng-yen's interpretation touches on a tension of "already but not yet," which is quite well-known to Christian eschatology. However, his own interpretation sounds rather idealistic in the sense that he seems to make the transformation of mind a panacea for all social illnesses and environmental crises.

This kind of "this-worldly" interpretation of the Pure Land is by no means entirely alien to the Buddhist tradition. We may perhaps find *prima facie* scriptural evidence for linking the Pure Land with human heart in the *Vimalakīrti Sūtra*, which seems to suggest that when one's heart is pure, the pure land will appear immediately.[86] However, the establishment of the Buddha-kingdom (*foguotu* 佛國土) or the Buddha-land (*fotu* 佛土) involves many steps according to the sutra, which reads,

> Therefore, Jeweled Accumulation, because the bodhisattva has an upright mind, he is impelled to action. Because he is impelled to ac-

---

[83] Shih Sheng-yen, "A Pure Land on Earth," in Chappell, *Buddhist Peacework*, 175–82.

[84] Ibid., 178.

[85] Ibid., 179.

[86] In fact, this interpretation has been disputed by Pure Land Buddhism in China. See Lu Yang 陸楊, "Lun *Weimojie jing* he jingtu sixiang zai Zhongguo gudai shehui zhi guanxi" 論《維摩詰經》和淨土思想在中國古代社會之關係 [A study on the relationship between the *Vimalakīrti Sūtra* and ancient Chinese society], in *Renjian jingtu yu xiandai shehui* 人間淨土與現代社會 [The pure land in the human world and the modern society], ed. Shi Huimin (Taipei: Fagu, 1998), 207–20.

> tion, he gains a deeply searching mind. Because he has a deeply searching mind, his will is well controlled. Because his will is well controlled, he acts in accord with the teachings. Because he acts in accord with the teachings, he can transfer merit to others. Because he transfers merit to others, he knows how to employ expedient means. Because he knows how to employ expedient means, he can lead others to enlightenment. Because he leads others to enlightenment, his Buddha land is pure. Because his Buddha land in pure, his preaching of the Law is pure. Because his preaching of the Law is pure, his wisdom is pure. Because his wisdom is pure, his mind is pure. And because his mind is pure, all the blessings he enjoys will be pure.[87]

According to one classical commentary, composed by Sengzhao 僧肇 (384–414), a crucial step is the purity of all sentient beings.[88] In other words, the context merely suggests that purity of heart is the starting point or necessary condition for the establishment of the Pure Land. Viewed in this perspective, the current approach to environmentalism seems to place too much emphasis on the inward heart at the expense of the external environment. In fact, similar criticisms have been made by various Buddhist scholars in Taiwan, including Yang Huinan 楊惠南.

Yang Huinan argues that the ideas of "anticipation of the Pure Land in the human world" (*yuyue renjian jingtu* 預約人間淨土) and spiritual environmental protection proposed by Buddhists in Taiwan for environmental protection are inadequate. He suggests that these ideas are not properly supported by basic Buddhist doctrines and fall short of promoting a thorough and comprehensive approach to action for environmental protection. At the practical level, these proposals are restricted to the recycling of resources and concentrate exclusively on the lifestyle of the individual and family. Furthermore, industry, which is the most important source of pollution, as well as political and economic issues involved in environmental protection, are entirely ignored. And a much more serious drawback with these approaches is the fact that they tend to stress one-sidedly the purity of the heart over against the purity of the environment, assuming that the former will inevitably bring about cleanness of the Buddha Land. This approach, according to Yang, concentrates exclusively on the purity of one's own heart at the

---

[87] *The Vimalakirti Sutra*, trans. Burton Watson from the Chinese version by Kumarajiva (New York: Columbia University Press, 1997), 28–29.

[88] For details, see Shi Huimin 釋惠敏, "'Xin jing ze fotu jing' zhi kaocha"「心淨則佛土淨」之考察 [Examining the idea that "the Buddha land is pure when the mind is pure"], in Shi Huimin, *Renjian jingtu yu xiandai shehui*, 221–46.

expense of the cleanness of the external environment. He suggests that it would be better to emphasize the indivisible unity of the internal heart and the external environment as two inseparable aspects. This will be more in tune with the ecological principle of the interdependence of all things as well as with the basic character of Buddhist philosophy.[89]

Yang Huinan further clarifies that the three major schools of Mahāyāna Buddhism, namely the Mādhyamika, the Yogācāra and the Tathāgatagarbha, can offer three different approaches to developing Buddhist deep ecology. According to the Yogācāra, all things are partial emanations of the same *ālaya* (*ālayavijñāna*, the eighth consciousness) and are different parts of the large Self. In this sense, the Other is merely an aspect of oneself. This sort of idealism is to be rejected by humanistic Buddhism.[90] Neither does Yang prefer the Tathāgatagarba approach, which he regards merely as a skilful means which will be misunderstood as upholding the view that there is an eternal soul for each being. Furthermore, such idealism takes the Other as part of oneself and leads to the view that as all things are good, everything must be protected. But for the practitioners of humanistic Buddhism, one should have compassion for all things, regardless of whether they are good or bad. Therefore, the approach that is most compatible with deep ecology is neither Yogācāra nor Tathāgatagarba, but the Mādhyamika, which affirms the interdependence and co-origination of all things.[91]

So, apart from his critique of the approaches that emphasize the inner heart at the expense of the external environment, Yang suggests an alternative way to develop a theory of deep ecology from the Mādhyamika tradition—rather than following the approach widely adopted by various Western scholars and derived from the concept of Tathāgatagarba. Yang wishes to stress that participation in environmental protection is not irrelevant to the attainment of Buddhahood because oneself and others form one body—an idea that is in line with the basic principle of ecology as well as Buddhist wisdom.[92]

It is apparent that Yang Huinan's vision is based upon the ideas of participation and interdependence rather than identity. This contradicts

---

[89] Yang Huinan 楊惠南, *Ai yu xingyang: Taiwan tongzhi fojiao zhi pingquan yundong yu shenceng shengtaixue* 愛與信仰:台灣同志佛教之平權運動與深層生態學 [Love and faith: the equal rights movement of gay Buddhists in Taiwan and deep ecology] (Taipei: Shangzhou, 2005), 229–63.

[90] Ibid., 219.

[91] Ibid., 219–25.

[92] Ibid., 219–25, 249–63.

directly Tillich's characterization of Buddhism in terms of identity without participation, as is shown in his discussion of Nirvana and the Kingdom of God. In fact, Yang's metaphysical vision is quite similar to that of Tillich, who emphasizes very much the interdependence between self and the world, participation in all dimensions of life, and the participation of nature in the process of the fall and salvation together with human beings. According to Tillich, nature is not merely the background for God's saving act, but is also subject to and is a recipient of salvation.[93] Once again, we find that Tillich's characterization, if not stereotyping, of Buddhism is problematic, which disregards some important elements in Mahāyāna Buddhism. However, an even more important finding is the need for further dialogue than Tillich had foreseen.

Lin Chao-cheng (Lin Zhaocheng 林朝成), another Buddhist scholar in Taiwan, recognizing the need to transform the existing Buddhist ideas on environmental protection, suggests the possibility of learning from Christianity. He points out that although Buddhist philosophy is very much in tune with the Western idea of deep ecology, there is a huge gap between Buddhist ecological theory and actual practice. The reason for this is twofold. On the one hand, Buddhists do not have a clear idea concerning their relationship with the government. On the other hand, they fail to understand that compassion and justice are two sides of the same coin.[94] In particular, Lin mentions with approval the achievement of Christianity in recent decades with respect to environmental ethics and ecological philosophy, including its revision of traditional doctrine and integration of ecological spirituality with religious practice which respects nature and ecological justice.[95] Although Lin has not explicitly and concretely proposed dialogue with Christianity on the issue of ecological ethics, his opinion unambiguously points in this direction and affirms this possibility. It is quite possible for Buddhism to learn from Christianity through dialogue on ecological issues.

---

[93] See Lai, "Paul Tillich and Ecological Theology," 233–49.

[94] Lin Zhaocheng 林朝成 (Lin Chao-cheng), "Shengtai gongdao yu zongjiao shijian: yu fojiao senlin baoyu sixiang wei hexin de tantao" 生態公道與宗教實踐：以佛教森林保育思想為核心的探討 [Ecological justice and religious practice: a discussion focused on the Buddhist idea of forest protection], in *1996 nian foxue yanjiu lunwenji* 1996年佛學研究論文集 [Research papers in Buddhist studies, 1996], vol. 2: *Dangdai zongjiao lilun de xingsi* 當代宗教理論的省思 [Reflections on the contemporary theories of religion] (Taipei: Foguang chubanshe, 1996), 25–98.

[95] Lin Zhaocheng, "Shengtai gongdao yu zongjiao shijian," 88–91.

Yang and Lin's discussions clearly exemplify the critical reflections made by Buddhist scholars on the limitations of the existing approach that emphasizes the purification of one's own heart as the panacea for environmental protection and the establishment of the Pure Land. Their discussions also signal opportunities for future dialogue between Buddhism and Christianity on environmentalism.

9. CONCLUSIONS

In the recent development of Buddhism, the belief of the Pure Land has become the doctrinal basis for Buddhist social praxis, which is strongly connected with the Buddhist emphasis on spirituality. The Buddhist approach to social praxis, in comparison with the Christian one, places more emphasis on taking the transformation of the individual's mind as the starting point. It also places particular emphasis on environmental concerns. In comparison with Christianity, however, Buddhism may tend to overlook the social and political system or to reduce the problem of social and political system to one that is to be solved by way of transforming the mind. As the dialogue between John B. Cobb, Jr. and Masao Abe 阿部正雄 has indicated, a comparison between the Buddhist and Christian approaches to socio-political praxis shows that Buddhism is relatively weaker in critical spirit and lacks clear aspiration for historical justice. It follows that Buddhism may learn from Christianity the spirit of protesting and taking reformation and eschatological hope seriously.[96]

In contrast, one may also say that in comparison with the Buddhist approach, the Christian symbol of the Kingdom of God tends to place more emphasis on the system or the socio-political aspect and to overlook the importance of the transformation of heart. If Buddhism may learn from the Christian emphasis on the social and political system, Christianity may learn from the Buddhist emphasis on the cultivation of the individual's mind or heart in social praxis, including environmental protection.

Nowadays, many scholars suggest that the environmental problem is largely derived from the economic system, especially consumerism

---

[96] Masao Abe and John Cobb, "Buddhist–Christian Dialogue: Past, Present and Future," *Buddhist–Christian Studies* 1 (1981): 23–26.

beneath it, which is deeply rooted in inward, human concupiscence, a spiritual problem addressed by both Buddhism and Christianity in their respective ways.[97]

It is interesting to note that in the Christian tradition, the Kingdom of God is not entirely a spatial or political concept. In the gospels, Jesus frequently proclaims that "the Kingdom of God comes, repent." Repentance is a matter of one's heart and attitude, although it is not to be regarded as distinct from one's action. As "Kingdom of God" originally meant the reign of God, the reign of God should extend into the individual's heart as well. This interpretation of the Kingdom of God is not foreign to the Christian tradition. Quoting the words of St. Isaac the Syrian concerning the inner Kingdom hidden within the human soul, Bishop Kallistos Ware further elaborates,

> His purpose is to assure us that there exists, hidden within each one of us, a secret treasure house, an inner Kingdom that is amazing in its depth and variety. . . . Jacob's ladder starts from the point where I am at this very moment; the gate of heaven is everywhere. And this inner Kingdom, present within me here and now, is at the same time the Kingdom of the Age to come; as St. Philotheus of Sinai affirms, the same path leads simultaneously to both of them.[98]

Another aspect in which Christianity may learn from Mahāyāna Buddhism concerns environmentalism. As Tillich already noted, Buddhist compassion for non-human beings is lacking in Christianity. An important issue for Christian theology to consider is whether this Mahāyāna vision of salvation and eschatology, which encompasses all living beings—both human and non-human; past, present and future; individual, social and ecological—can be accepted by Christianity. This Mahāyāna understanding of ultimate universal salvation may seem to be quite different from the "transcendental" interpretation of history held by some Christians—that only those who believe will be saved. Some Christians may insist that since only those who believe will be saved, non-human beings such as dogs do not, and even cannot, have

---

[97] It is interesting to note that one of the distinctive features of Tillich's approach to ecological theology is his emphasis on the existential root of ecological crisis, rather than the so-called historical roots proposed by Lynn White, Jr. This approach will place more emphasis on spirituality. See Lai, "Paul Tillich and Ecological Theology," 233–49.

[98] See Kallistos Ware, *The Inner Kingdom* (Crestwood, N.Y.: St. Vladimir's Seminary Press, 2004), xi.

faith and are therefore excluded from salvation. However, this is not the only understanding of salvation available in Christianity. It is noteworthy that process theology is quite capable of engaging in a fruitful and creative dialogue with Buddhism on ecological crisis because the process philosophy presupposed by process theology is particularly compatible with the principle of deep ecology.[99] Furthermore, as discussed earlier, Tillich's interpretation of the Kingdom of God has Mahāyāna characteristics. Although his interpretation of the Kingdom of God does not explicitly include the universal as well as the inward dimensions, his approach to ecological theology clearly indicates that these two dimensions are already taken on in his thought.

We can see that if we consider the Pure Land rather than Nirvana as the controlling symbol for Buddhist "eschatology," we will find that there is considerable room for mutually beneficial dialogue between Christianity and Buddhism. This may benefit not only their respective social praxes, but also, hopefully, the well-being of the whole world.

[99] David Ray Griffin, "Whitehead's Deeply Ecological Worldview," in *Worldviews and Ecology: Religion, Philosophy, and the Environment*, ed. Mary Evelyn Tucker and John A. Grim (Maryknoll, N.Y.: Orbis, 1994), 190–206.

Ching Feng, n.s., **7.1–2** (2006) 211–223

The Pure Land, the Kingdom of God and the Critique and Transformation of This World

ANDRES S. K. TANG

I

The Buddhist concept of realizing the pure land in the world and the Christian understanding of the transformation of the world are related to the eschatological thought of the respective religions, which is encapsulated in the notions of the pure land and the kingdom of God. Then, what is the nature of such worldly praxes? How do they relate to the eschatology of the respective religions? In other words, how do the concepts of the pure land and the kingdom of God respectively function in the Buddhist and Christian understandings of worldly praxis? In Western Christianity, the eschatological theologies developed by Jürgen Moltmann (1926–) and Wolfhart Pannenberg (1928–) since the 1960s have called for participation in the transformation of the world instead of withdrawal from it.[1] As to the idea of the pure land in contemporary Buddhism, we may especially take note of Master Sheng-

---

Andres S. K. TANG (DENG Shaoguang 鄧紹光) is professor of Christian thought (theology and culture) at Hong Kong Baptist Theological Seminary.

[1] On this see Deng Shaoguang 鄧紹光 (Andres S. K. Tang), "Panwang / zhongmo shenxue" 盼望 / 終末神學 [Theology of hope / eschatological theology], in *Xin shiji de shenxue yicheng* 新世紀的神學議程 [Theology for the new century], vol. 2, ed. Guo Hongbiao 郭鴻標 (Benedict Kwok Hung-biu) and Du Jianwei 堵建偉 (Too Kin-wai) (Hong Kong: Hong Kong Christian Institute, 2003), 295–311.

yen's (Shengyan 聖嚴, 1930–) observation that "during the last twenty years, Humanistic Buddhism (*renjian fojiao* 人間佛教) and the Pure Land in the Human World (*renjian jingtu* 人間淨土), originally ideas espoused only by a minority, were gradually emerging as the main stream of Taiwanese Buddhism which many are discoursing about and practising."[2] According to Sheng-yen, establishing the pure land in the human world is precisely a matter of worldly praxis and transformation for others—rather than for one's own sake. However, he also says:

> The pure land I have been talking about is not a matter of finding a community and developing it, but rather a matter of constantly arousing *bodhicitta* in our daily lives and firmly believing ourselves to have in our hearts Buddha nature—not least by starting with the purification of our thoughts, verbal acts and bodily behaviour.[3]

In the thinking of Sheng-yen, there exists a tension that can also be found in the debate between Critical Buddhism and Topical Buddhism, a debate that has taken place in Japan since the 1990s. The central issues of it are, namely, how worldly praxis is to be understood in Buddhism and what it has to do with modernity. In this paper, I will first point out that an eschatological pure land that has a temporal dimension would be necessary if we want to develop a concept of the pure land in the world as a praxis that critically responds to the challenges of modernity. I will then show that contemporary eschatological theology can be a resource we may use to go beyond both Critical Buddhism and Topical Buddhism when constructing a concept of the pure land in the world, without being trapped in the dilemma of modernity.

II

The debate between Critical Buddhism and Topical Buddhism was sparked off by a series of incidents involving Machida Muneo 町田宗夫, the then president of the Sōtōshū 曹洞宗 (Sōtō sect) and general secretary of the Japan Buddhist Federation, in the late 1970s and the early

---

[2] Shengyan fashi 聖嚴法師 (Master Sheng-yen), *Jingtu zai renjian* 淨土在人間 [The pure land in the human world] (Taipei: Fagu wenhua shiye, 2003), 6.

[3] Ibid., 193.

80s. As a result of his open denial of the existence of social discrimination in Japan, Machida was confronted and criticized. Consequently the Sōtōshū was forced to rethink its own doctrines and social praxis. Hakamaya Noriaki 袴谷憲昭 and Matsumoto Shirō 松本史朗, both Sōtō scholars and priests, criticized the concept of *hongaku* 本覚 (original enlightenment) as they reflected on the issue of social praxis. They concluded that phenomena of social discrimination in Japan were due to the lack of the spirit of criticism as manifested in "topical philosophy" and the traditional idea of *wa* 和 (harmony), which came from the Buddhist doctrines of *tathāgata-garbha* and *hongaku*.[4] According to Lin Chen-kuo (Lin Zhenguo 林鎮國), Critical Buddhism

> addresses the core problem about theory and praxis: contemporary Japanese Buddhism, in the view of postwar scholars Hakamaya and Matsumoto, has degenerated into traditionalism and syncretism and, not unlike the whole academia of Japan, has become too feeble to provide any social critique. Ostensibly, it still places emphasis on the notions of equality and non-difference, but because of the domination of monistic metaphysics (with the doctrines *tathāgata-garbha* and *hongaku*), it is incapable of paying due regard to the individual and to human rights at the level of praxis.[5]

As Lin points out, the primary concern of Critical Buddhism is "to bring Buddhism back to the modern world, because only at the very present time can the issue of theory and socio-political praxis in Buddhism be properly examined."[6] Therefore, Critical Buddhism goes back to the doctrine of non-self (*anātman*) to challenge such problematic theories as that of *hongaku*, which hinders Buddhist praxis; for it advocates transcendental subjectivity and may lead to an authoritarianism that mires people in egocentrism.[7] The aim of Critical Buddhism is

---

[4] Tang Zhongmao 唐忠毛, *Fojiao benjue sixiang lunzheng de xiandaixing kaocha* 佛教本覺思想論爭的現代性考察 [The modern investigation of the debate of the Buddhist thought of original enlightenment] (Shanghai: Shanghai guji, 2006), 134–35. For a brief introduction to the social context of the emergence of Critical Buddhism, see Jamie Hubbard, introduction to *Pruning the Bodhi Tree: The Storm over Critical Buddhism*, ed. Jamie Hubbard and Paul L. Swanson (Honolulu: University of Hawai'i Press, 1997), vii–xii.

[5] Lin Zhenguo 林鎮國, *Kongxing yu xiandaixing: cong Jingdu xuepai, xinrujia dao duoyin de fojiao quanshixue* 空性與現代性：從京都學派、新儒家到多音的佛教詮釋學 [Emptiness and modernity: from the Kyoto School, contemporary neo-Confucianism to polyphonic Buddhist hermeneutics] (Sindian, Taipei County: Lixu, 1999), 23.

[6] Ibid., 268.

[7] Ibid.

clear: being a legacy of the Enlightenment project of modernity, it criticizes and even abolishes monistic and authoritarian thought, so that the individual may be liberated from all kinds of oppression and discrimination. In this way, the establishment of the pure land in the human world is in essence the actualization of the project of modernity, bringing about pluralism and individualism.

But how well does Critical Buddhism achieve liberation in the present human world? From the perspective of Topical Buddhism, Critical Buddhism remains subject to the metaphysics of identity since it uncritically accepts reason as the tool of liberation purposed by the Enlightenment.[8] Topical Buddhism is suspicious of reason and modernity and argues that the notions of "topos" and "absolute nothingness" are not something of monistic metaphysics or transcendental subjectivity. Nishitani Keiji 西谷啓治 (1900–1990), the most prominent philosopher advocating Topical Buddhism, traced modernity back to Cartesianism on which Critical Buddhism heavily relies. Through his in-depth study he found that Descartes' *cogito* is inherently "self-deceptive." He wrote:

> But because this ego [viz. the subject of the *cogito*] is seen as self-consciousness mirroring self-consciousness at every turn and the *cogito* is seen from the standpoint of the *cogito* itself, ego becomes a mode of being of the self closed up within itself.[9]

This means that knowing the ego of the *cogito* is possible only when the thinking ego becomes objectified. Then the thinking ego is internalized as the object of the thinking ego. The thinking ego in turn becomes an ego "closed up within itself."[10] Since according to Nishitani's critique modernity is established on the foundation of the Cartesian self-enclosed ego and the identity of a self-attached ego, he identified this ego as the one which, according to Buddhism, constitutes the transmigrative cycles of life and death.[11] Thus mired in falsehood and illusions, how can the thinking ego respect the alien ego as it really is, yet without homogenizing it? As Lin Chen-kuo aptly summarizes,

---

[8] Ibid., 272.

[9] Keiji Nishitani, *Religion and Nothingness*, trans. Jan Van Bragt (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1982), 14, quoted in Lin, *Kongxing yu xiandaixing*, 272–73.

[10] Lin, *Kongxing yu xiandaixing*, 273.

[11] Ibid.

> scholars who advocate Critical Buddhism have, from the perspective of the proponents of Topical Buddhism such as Nishitani Keiji, and American scholar Malcolm David Eckel, neglected the limitations of reason and been unable to deal with the issue of 'difference' equitably.[12]

Then, how does Topical Buddhism understand the self and the nature of things? How can the issue of "difference" be equitably dealt with? Nishitani clearly stated: "In emptiness [*śūnyatā*] things come to rest on their own home-ground."[13] This "emptiness" is not to be understood as a spatial concept but rather as *pratītya-samutpāda* (dependant arising, dependent co-arising, or inter-dependent arising). "True emptiness," said Nishitani,

> is nothing less than what reaches awareness in all of us as our own absolute *self-nature*. In addition, this emptiness is the point at which each and every entity that is said to exist becomes manifest: as what it is in itself, in the Form of its true suchness.[14]

What Nishitani said echoes Nāgārjuna's saying: "Because of *śūnyatā*, everything is achieved." It is clear that Nishitani did not understand emptiness in terms of locus (*dhātu*), substance and nature itself (*svabhāva*), for he wrote: "On the field of emptiness, substantiality is an absolute non-substantial substantiality."[15] Furthermore, he emphasized that, outside of themselves, our "doing-being-becoming," existence, behaviour and life "are without aim or reason," that is, without any locus or substance that makes them possible.[16] For Nishitani, beings are interpenetrating one another so that each being is not itself yet is itself in such mutual interpenetration. The field (topos) is the field of force that makes all beings beings.[17] This means that all beings achieve

---

[12] Ibid., 262.

[13] Nishitani, *Religion and Nothingness*, 110, quoted in Lin, *Kongxing yu xiandaixing*, 273–74.

[14] Nishitani, *Religion and Nothingness*, 106, quoted in Lin, *Kongxing yu xiandaixing*, 274.

[15] Nishitani, *Religion and Nothingness*, 125, quoted in Lin, *Kongxing yu xiandaixing*, 128.

[16] Nishitani, *Religion and Nothingness*, 252, quoted in Lin, *Kongxing yu xiandaixing*, 275.

[17] Nishitani, *Religion and Nothingness*, 150, quoted in Wu Rujun 吳汝鈞 (Ng Yu-kwan), *Jingdu xuepai zhexue qi jiang* 京都學派哲學七講 [Seven lectures on Kyoto School] (Taipei: Wenjin chubanshe, 1998), 141.

themselves in the field of emptiness. However, this field of emptiness is not something independent of beings; rather, as mentioned above, emptiness is exactly constituted by the interpenetration of beings. With this understanding, Topical Buddhism purposes that the achievement of religious and socio-political freedom is possible only through the critique of human reason.[18]

We may at this point bring up the following questions: Is the critical response of Topical Buddhism enough to achieve social and political liberation that allows individuals to achieve themselves? Is this not a kind of praxis of the pure land only in the mind but not of the pure land in the human world? Buddhism advocates *pratītya-samutpāda* (interdependent arising or dependence-upon-the-other), which requires the liberation of oneself not apart from that of others. This means that the liberation of others is the necessary condition for one's own liberation. It follows that one cannot stay complacent in one's existential-ontological praxis but is also to be involved in socio-political praxis. Topical Buddhism's critique of modernity is correct, but it fails to respond to the demand of socio-political praxis emphasized by Critical Buddhism. At this point we may ask if socio-political praxis could be a moment of existential-ontological praxis. If this is so, then a historical turn could not be avoided. Since modern, this-worldly praxis is in essence historical, there must be a historical turn in the doctrine of the pure land so as to justify this-worldly socio-political praxis as the praxis of the pure land in the human world.

III

In contemporary Christian theology, there has been a historical turn in the development of eschatological theology. It is worth noting that the turn was brought about in opposition to the theologies of Karl Barth (1886–1968) and Rudolf Bultmann (1884–1976), who both advocated an eschatology of eternal presence. In general, they started with the dialectics of Søren Kierkegaard (1813–55) which is concerned with the confrontation of the eternity to every moment here and how. This kind of eschatology criticizes all things in time. However, the response of humanity is certainly existential and non-temporal. It follows that the

[18] Lin, *Kongxing yu xiandaixing*, 262.

praxis arising out of this is not socio-political but within one's existential-ontological subjectivity.

The ways Barth and Bultmann understood the resurrection of Jesus Christ determined their conception of eschatology and the corresponding praxis.[19] To put it simply, Barth and Bultmann talked about the resurrection of Christ in terms of the transcendental subjectivity of God and the transcendental subjectivity of humanity respectively. Barth saw the resurrection of Christ as an eternal event of God's transcendental subjectivity. Although the resurrection of Christ touches the world in tangent, it is not of history. Bultmann pointed out that the resurrected Christ encounters the human transcendental subjectivity in the realm of non-temporal eternity. Both Barth and Bultmann considered that the eschaton appearing in the resurrection of Christ does not belong to history but to eternity only. This means that they did not think that there was any historical or temporal dimension in the resurrection of Christ. Eschaton only happens in the realm of eternity and does not initiate any future for the world.

This kind of eschatology implies non-temporal and non-historical praxis. Moltmann asked Barth, "Can the impression then be allowed to stand that 'self-revelation of God' means the 'pure presence of God,' an 'eternal presence of God in time,' a 'presence without any future'?"[20] "If that were so, then the event of the resurrection of Christ would in itself already be the eschatological fulfilment, and would not point beyond itself to something still outstanding that is to be hoped for and awaited."[21] Moltmann confronted Bultmann with two questions. "Yet why should the anterior understanding which causes man to ask for 'revelation' be only an 'unknowing knowledge' 'about himself' and 'not a knowledge of the world'?"[22] This is because Bultmann presupposed that human being can be understood in himself/herself apart from the social world and history. In contrast, Moltmann thought that "[a]lways man's self-understanding is socially, materially and histori-

---

[19] The following discussion is taken from Deng Shaoguang 鄧紹光 (Andres S. K. Tang), *Zhongmo, jiaohui, shijian: Moteman de panwang shenxue* 終末 · 教會 · 實踐 : 莫特曼的盼望神學 [Eschaton, church, praxis: J. Moltmann's theology of hope] (Hong Kong: Jidao chubanshe, 1999), 54–55.

[20] Jürgen Moltmann, *Theology of Hope: On the Ground and the Implications of a Christian Eschatology*, trans. James W. Leitch (London: SCM, 1967), 57–58.

[21] Ibid., 58.

[22] Ibid., 67.

cally mediated."[23] This viewpoint is in line with that of Critical Buddhism. The second question

> arises whether it is really true that in the event of revelation in proclamation and faith man already come "to himself" in that authenticity which is at once both original and final . . . There would be nothing more that still awaits him, and nothing more towards which he is on his way in the world in the body and in history.[24]

This causes "believing existence, understood in an 'eschatological' sense of this sort, to turn into a new form of the 'epiphany of the eternal present.'"[25] This means that "Jesus with his word has already reached his 'goal' in faith itself . . ."[26]

Here we see that both Barth and Bultmann formulated an eschatology of the epiphany of the eternal present that was not concerned with human praxis in the world. No doubt, the praxis such an eschatology advocates is one that negates the present world, although it does allow of praxis of transforming the world. The underlying reason for it is the discontinuity between the eschatological kingdom of God and this world. Since these two inevitably stand opposed to each other, one need not take action to sublate the latter. Suffering is therefore permitted in the world; in particular, the negative effects of modernity cannot be counteracted properly and one can only "[seek] refuge in something wholly Other."[27] Therefore, Moltmann reinterpreted the resurrection event of Christ thus: "[T]he Easter appearances and revelations of the risen Lord are manifestly understood as foretaste and promise of his still future glory and lordship."[28] Since the risen Lord is also the crucified Jesus who shared the universal suffering of the world in the cross, "all Christian resurrection eschatology bears the mark of an *eschatologia crucis*."[29] Here two points are to be noted. Firstly, as Moltmann clearly stated, "'the possible,' and therewith 'the future,' arises entirely from God's word of promise . . . It does not illuminate a future

---

[23] Ibid.

[24] Ibid., 67–68.

[25] Ibid., 68.

[26] Ibid.

[27] Jürgen Habermas, *Postmetaphysical Thinking: Philosophical Essays*, trans. William Mark Hohengarten (Cambridge: Polity, 1992), 8, quoted in Lin, *Kongxing yu xiandaixing*, 266.

[28] Moltmann, *Theology of Hope*, 85.

[29] Ibid., 83.

which is always somehow already inherent in reality."[30] This implies that the eschatological kingdom of God is not developed naturally by the world itself and that the world will be totally transformed into a future that is totally different from the suffering present. Secondly, this world is full of possibilities and is transformable. Human beings are called to get involved into the praxis of transforming this world. As Moltmann said, "[t]o think God and history together on the ground of the event of promise in the resurrection of Christ . . . [is] to show the world to be history that is open to God and the future."[31] That is, the world is not a self-enclosed system since God in the Christ event causes it open to God and the future. The history of the world then is a history of transformation towards God and the future. Although this transformation is not absolute and eschatological but relative and historical, it precisely criticizes the idea of historical progression emerging since the Enlightenment. With this kind of eschatology, one neither asserts modernity as the end of this world nor totally denies it.

Moltmann introduced a future dimension into the eschatological kingdom of God through the reinterpretation of the resurrection of Christ. This renders praxis in the world possible. Of this he clearly wrote,

> . . . revelation [of the cross and the resurrection of Christ] would not manifest and verify itself *as* history of our present society, but would disclose to this society and this age for the very first time the eschatological process of history. The theologian is not concerned merely to supply a different *interpretation* of the world, of history and of human nature, but to *transform* then in expectation of a divine transformation.[32]

IV

In this section we would like to propose a doctrine of the pure land that includes a kind of praxis in the world so as to respond to the criticism from Critical Buddhism. Here we will employ Master Sheng-yen's

---

[30] Ibid., 85.
[31] Ibid., 93.
[32] Ibid., 84 (italics original).

Jingtu zai renjian 淨土在人間 (The pure land in the human world) as the basic material for further development and elaboration.

On the one hand, we all affirm that the pure land of the *Buddha-kṣetra* (Buddha kingdom) is of the other world rather than this world. As Sheng-yen says,

> Although there are various understandings of the pure land, most of us agree that the pure land of the *Buddha-kṣetra* does not take place in the world. And although according to the *Saddharmapuṇḍarīka Sūtra* the pure land is not separated from the world, it is invisible to the common people of this world.[33]

This tells us that the pure land of the *Buddha-kṣetra* is different from the human world and at the same time it is not separated from this world. These two are different yet not apart from each other. Also, Sheng-yen points out that the so-called pure land must be a *Buddha-kṣetra* of the other world, which is seen when Maitreya comes in the future. This implies that the pure land is not merely eschatological but also future-orientated. There is a future dimension in the *Buddha-kṣetra* of the other world. It is only when Maitreya comes that this world is transformed into the *Buddha-kṣetra*. Therefore, common people cannot see the eschatological pure land since it has not arrived yet. But the *Buddha-kṣetra* is not another world other than this world. They are different from one another only in terms of reality. The former is "pure" while the latter is "profane." They are different or opposing realities of the same world. The transformation from the latter to the former is just transformation from the "profane" reality to the "pure" reality.

As to praxis, however, the emphasis on the pure land in the human world does not deny the belief of the *Buddha-kṣetra* or Buddha kingdom of the other world; rather, it points out that we have to start off with praxis in the human world.[34] This means that human praxis is not apart from the human world. The human world is profane or polluted but it is still transformable. Sheng-yen has quoted from quite a number of Mahāyāna sutras, such as the *Ekottara Sūtra*, the *Avataṃsaka Sūtra*, the *Vimalakīrti Sūtra* (the chapter on *Buddha-kṣetra*) and the *Saddharma-puṇḍarīka Sūtra* (the chapter on *Tathāgata-yuṣpramāṇa*), so as to show us the fact of becoming Buddha in the polluted world. It is only

---

[33] Shengyan fashi, *Jingtu zai renjian*, 134–35.
[34] Ibid., 133.

in the praxis in the human world that we can see the pure land of the Buddha kingdom. However, this does not mean that human praxis can immediately render the polluted world totally pure; rather, it only affords a preview and a foretaste of the eschatological *Buddha-kṣetra* to come. The actualization of the pure land in the human world is not equal to that of the pure land of the Buddha kingdom since the former is always in the process of transformation. In turn this process is necessary, since apart from this we cannot preview and foretaste the Buddha kingdom, and the doctrine of the pure land would otherwise have to do only with a utopia that cannot be actualized. As Sheng-yen has made clear, the pure land has indeed taken place in the human world individually in the mind or in a family, or has been established by people in a certain area in the human world.[35] Although these variegated pure lands are only achieved locally and to a limited extent, they all actualize the pure land in advance and point to the ultimate Buddha kingdom.

Furthermore, we can discuss this in terms of the relationship between the pure land of the Buddha of the future (*weilai fo* 未來佛) and the pure land of the present world. A Buddha of the future is a bodhisattva whose pure land will be ready for the common people when he or she becomes a Buddha.[36] Since the liberation of all common people is the condition for a bodhisattva to attain Buddhahood, the future pure land of a bodhisattva is not for him or her only, but for all. Therefore, the purification of the present world is involved in the actualization of the eschatological pure land. This consists of two stages. The first one is the age of Śākyamuni in which he transformed and is transforming the world through his teaching (dharma). The second one is the age of Maitreya in which he will continue the transformation of this world through the dharma.[37] These two ages of transformation is a process towards the achievement of the pure land of the Buddha kingdom. "Although it is not a pure land," writes Sheng-yen, "with the purification of the human world by the teaching of Buddha it is a Buddha kingdom on the way towards the (eschatological) pure land."[38] It is clear that the present human world is not pure but is in the process of being transformed. This human world will be totally purified when the age of Maitreya comes.[39] This means that at the time of the arrival of

[35] Ibid., 24.
[36] Ibid., 35.
[37] Ibid., 38.
[38] Ibid., 39.
[39] Ibid., 40.

Maitreya the pure land of the other world will be actualized in the present human world. It has to be noted that this pure land is not immediately attained in existential praxis. It is possible only when all common people continually practise the teaching of the Buddha with the pure land of the other world as the ultimate reference. Therefore, this praxis is the transformation of this world corresponding to the future pure land so that the former is getting closer and closer to the actualization of the latter.

V

In the above we tried to point out that in Buddhism there is space for the development of an existential praxis that is not confined to the life of the individual, but provides a critique of this world. In this way, historical transformation is possible. We would like to point out that the problem of Critical Buddhism and Topical Buddhism lies in the lack of a doctrine of a future-orientated pure land which is the consequence of the sublation of this present world. It is this lack that causes Critical Buddhism to be trapped in the crisis of modernity. Critical Buddhism asserts the value of modernity without any critique of it. This leads to the absolutization of modernity. On the other hand, Topical Buddhism has identified the problem of Critical Buddhism but its way out in terms of existential-ontological praxis does not help too much. Such praxis emphasizes the transformation of the moment-of-here-and-now into that of eternity. It does not face and transform the suffering reality of this world. We can say that there is an either-or relationship between Critical Buddhism and Topical Buddhism. The pure lands they respectively advocate oppose one another. The former embraces a pure land which is not eschatologically different from this world. For it, the present world is the ultimate pure land. Apart from the modern world there is not any ultimate pure land. In other words, the ultimate eschatological pure land is absorbed into the present modern world. In contrast to Critical Buddhism's vision, Topical Buddhism advocates another world which is totally different from this one. It is reached through the individual's existential-ontological praxis, which has nothing to do with the social and political transformation of the present reality of this world. This kind of pure land negatively criticizes the present world but does not have any positive transformative functions. This is because, for it, the ultimate pure land is of an otherworldly nature. Hence we purpose

that the present world is not opposed to the pure land of the other world. Rather, they are just different realities of the same world. The reality of the former is profane or polluted while that of the latter is pure. The latter is the reference for the critique of the former. Since they are different realities of the same world, the present world is not self-enclosed but open to the future ultimate pure land. It follows that the present world is transformable. It is certain that this world as the pure land in the human world is different from the eschatological pure land. But this pure land in the human world is on its way towards the eschatological pure land. In this way, we can both assert and criticize Critical Buddhism and Topical Buddhism and yet address the concerns of the two.

Ching Feng, n.s., **7.1–2** (2006) 225–246

God's Reign and the Pure Land in Interfaith and Scientific Discourse on *Imago Dei* and Buddha Nature

PAUL S. CHUNG

Abstract

God's reign is at the center of the Christian message, while *nirvāṇa* (or the Pure Land) is the all-encompassing reality of (Mahāyāna) Buddhism. In light of the notion of the coming of God, I attempt to deal with evolution and the coming future with respect to *imago Dei* and Buddha nature (*imago Buddha*). At this point, a discussion of natural science can be integrated into Buddhist–Christian discourse.

INTRODUCTION

A discussion of the relationship between science and religion has evolved in terms of conflict, independence, dialogue, and integration. A model of conflict about evolution can be found in circles of religious fundamentalism and in circles of scientific materialism or reductionism,

---

Paul S. CHUNG is assistant professor of Lutheran witness and world Christianity at Wartburg Theological Seminary, Dubuque, Iowa, USA.

in which nature replaces God. Evolution removes God so that there is no room for God in the evolutionary life of self-organization and self-development. Chance alone is the source of all creation. Evolution is the product of a mindless, purposeless process that excludes all forms of design or purpose. However, biblical literalism or inerrancy opposes adamantly such a scientific-atheistic viewpoint. God's purposefulness and design of creation and humanity are allied in creation science or intelligent design.

However, unlike a conflict or war model, we are aware that a theology of nature or a process theology can be open for more dialogical enrichment and integration. A theology of nature attempts to reevaluate and reformulate some of the traditional doctrines or theological discourses by integrating scientific findings and principles with them. It can also appear to be a new way of thinking, facilitating interreligious exchange toward contributing to a dialogical and integrative nexus of religion and science.

Special consideration can be given to the *regnum naturae* (kingdom of nature) as the locus of God's gracious activity through the immanence of the Spirit. Process thinkers understand creation as a long and incomplete process in which God involves and influences the world without determining it. In the panentheistic view of God adopted in a process perspective, God is continuously active in, with, and through the evolutionary process, influencing events through persuasive love rather than controlling them unilaterally. God is not all-powerful, but rather a creative participant within the evolutionary community of all beings.[1]

Alongside the dialogical and integrative relationship between Christianity and natural sciences, the Buddhist community's interest in natural sciences becomes striking.[2] It is intriguing to look at and bring the wisdom of Buddhism up-to-date through the scientific way of thinking. The relation between religion and science finds its limitation in the lack of interest in Buddhist–Christian dialogue. Therefore, I propose a Buddhist–Christian dialogue in light of the scientific knowledge of prolepsis and evolution, in which God can meet *śūnyatā* at a scientific level. Buddhist–Christian relationship can in this way expand its horizon and relevance in a more holistic manner.

---

[1] Ian G. Barbour, *Religion and Science: Historical and Contemporary Issues*, rev. ed. (New York: HarperSanFrancisco, 1997), 294–95.

[2] Cf. Matthieu Ricard and Trinh Xuan Thuan, *The Quantum and the Lotus* (New York: Crown Publishers, 2001).

I. ADAM AND DARWIN: CHRISTIANITY IN DIALOGUE WITH THE SCIENCE OF EVOLUTION

For Christianity, Charles Darwin (1809–82) has long become a dangerous name, posing a serious challenge to its beliefs of God's creation and human beings as God's image. The evolution controversy divides Christianity into two different camps, namely: biblical creationism (associated with scientific creationism and intelligent design) and theistic evolution. The latter both affirms the Christian faith and accepts Darwinian theory as a scientific research model.

Let us begin with a brief discussion of what the theory of evolution means. Darwin's *On the Origin of Species* (1859) attempted to give an account of a variety of species of different life forms in the web of the *regnum naturae*, rather than demonstrating or proposing a theory of the origin or creation.[3] Regarding living creatures in their diversity, Darwin was concerned with finding the reason for inherited traits surviving over long periods of time. Over millions of years of deep time, they accumulated diverse modifications, or adaptations, that fit them to specific ways of life.

Darwin combined his theory of natural selection with several ideas: (a) random variation, which refers to change in inherited traits and which demonstrates the occurrence and inheritability of small variations among individual members of a species; (b) the struggle for survival, which confers an advantage in the intense competition for existence in a given environment among members of a species and between different species; (c) the survival of the fittest, which would result in natural selection over a long period of time. Gradual transformation of the species would occur. Given this fact, Darwinism is a scientific belief that natural selection is the main factor and source for determining the direction of evolutionary change, although it is not the only one.

These related ideas became central and pivotal for Darwin to explain evolution in terms of descent with modification over deep time with a slow and gradual rate of change. However, his idea of natural selection

---

[3] Charles Darwin, *The Origin of Species by Means of Natural Selection*, Great Books of the Western World 49, ed. Robert M. Hutchins (Chicago: Encyclopaedia Britannica, 1952). In the first edition, Darwin did not use the word evolution; instead, he referred to descent with modification.

met challenges from the scientific community, because Darwin supposed natural selection to produce everything for the greatest good. Faced with critics, Darwin's idea of natural selection was later combined with the concept of random variation in genetic inheritance through a neo-Darwinian synthesis. The Darwinian model of evolution or evolutionary biology is thus accepted as the paradigm or research model in the scientific community for the study of human nature and biology.[4] In *The Descent of Man* (1871), Darwin attempted to explain all human characteristics in terms of the gradual modification of anthropoid ancestors by the process of natural selection. According to him, human moral and mental faculties differ in degree rather than in kind from the capacities of animals. Human existence is analyzed within the sphere of natural law, and other forms of life are analyzed on the same basis. With the Darwinian concepts of random variation and natural selection, it is claimed that one can give an account of Adam in an evolutionary perspective and in evolutionary terms.

Darwin's theory underlines the unpredictability of variations and the opportunistic character of selection. Darwin rejected evidence of design and benevolence in the web of creaturely life. In view of the misery in the world of nature, Darwin was not convinced of a beneficent and omnipotent God who would have created, with design and purpose, a world in which a cat could play well with mice.[5] The reality of natural life, which was characterized by assault, waste, victims and extinction, led Darwin no longer to reconcile a God of compassion or benevolent design with the ruthless natural and biological world. Already in the kingdom of nature, Darwin found it difficult to accept an image of God proposed by *theologia naturalis* in the Christian tradition.

Natural theology is dedicated to discovering the Creator's plan by studying nature. William Paley (1743–1805) published *Natural Theology* in 1802, in which he proposed that an object or a system was designed or adapted for a particular function and purpose.[6] The clock

---

[4] Genetics and evolutionary theory are brought together in a systematic neo-Darwinianism, for which Julian Huxley in 1942 coined the term "the Modern Synthesis." Cf. Julian Huxley, *Evolution: The Modern Synthesis* (London: Allen & Unwin, 1942).

[5] Charles Darwin, *The Life and Letters of Charles Darwin, Including an Autobiographical Chapter*, ed. Francis Darwin, 2 vols. (New York: Basic Books, 1959), 2:311. In discovering the Ichneumondiae, whose larvae are usually internal parasites of other insect larvae, Darwin opposed an image of God with omnipotence and benevolence. Cf. Ted Peters and Martines Hewlett, *Evolution from Creation to New Creation: Conflict, Conversation, and Convergence* (Nashville, Tenn.: Abingdon, 2003), 23.

[6] William Paley, *Natural Theology: Or, Evidences of the Existence and Attributes of the*

analogy was favored in establishing a relation between God and nature. In view of the concept of God as Divine Clockmaker, nature is not seen as a work of chance but a work of intelligent artifice. The Clockmaker God, as its designer, created the world as a clockwork mechanism. However, for Darwin, nature is a complex web of lives interacting in organic interdependence. In this web there is too much misery and suffering. Sin and suffering are inevitable realities. Adam was not a special creation of God, but a child of blind chance or necessity.[7]

1. God's Activity in Self-limitation

There are a number of theologians whose view of Scripture accepts and recognizes the implications and significance of evolution for a Christian theology of creation. This position is compatible with appreciating evolution as God's way of creating.[8] At any rate, a God of gaps or intervention, or a God that violates natural laws, is not recommendable in the circles of natural theology. Rather, God is to be understood as both a transcendental Creator and an immanent, continuous Creator. God is acting everywhere in, with, and through natural processes to bring forth physical and biological complexity and novelty. Evolution is thus called the way God creates life. This broad position in circles of theology of nature is often called "theistic evolution," with a view to a proleptic or panentheistic concept of God.[9]

Theologians of theistic evolution tend to situate both the *creatio ex nihilo* and the *creatio continua* within a proleptic concept of new creation, or within a process-panentheistic framework. Despite differences in interest, they commonly utilize a classic argument of a free-will defense of God's self-limitation for discussing divine action in relation to

---

Deity, Collected from the Appearances of Nature (New York: American Tact Society, 1802).

[7] In a letter to Asa Gray, Darwin wrote: "I am inclined to look at everything as resulting from designed laws, with the details left to the working out of what we may call chance." Later in his life, Darwin was uncertain about the idea of design, and remained content with agnosticism. Cf. Barbour, *Religion and Science*, 58–59.

[8] In a statement in 1996, John Paul II stated that evolution is more than a hypothesis, and at the same time, he affirmed that each human soul is immediately and specially created by God. This position is ascertained by Ted Peters and Martinez Hewlett in their common book, *Evolution from Creation to New Creation*, 168–69. However, *Lux Mundi*, a liberal Anglican manifesto (1889), defended Darwinian evolution. In this circle, traducianism is affirmed. That is, the soul is not a special divine creation but is inherited with the body in each new human life.

[9] Peters and Hewlett, *Evolution from Creation to New Creation*, 115–57.

a free space for the evolutionary world. For the sake of creaturely self-determination, God freely decides to limit divine power. Natural selection opens up a space for the mechanism for speciation. However, God does not need to be removed entirely from the evolutionary scene because God's power does not restrict human freedom, but allows it. Therefore, God acts in, through, and under evolutionary process and creativity.[10] God's free activity in self-limitation, absorbed in open-endedness and unpredictability, becomes the basis of comprehending that God's being is in becoming. Let me next deal with Arthur Peacocke's (1924–2006) scientific theology, which seems to be more open to the Buddhist worldview in emerging process.

1.1 Semper *Creator*

For Peacocke, God's self-limitation is knowable from God's omnipotence and omniscience. God's self-limitation comes from God's free decision. God's freedom regarding God's self-limitation allows a material world to engage in self-organization and self-development. The open-endedness that God bestows upon creation also allows God's omnipotence and omniscience to be modified, restricted, and curtailed. God has made the world in such a way that there are certain realms over which God has chosen not to exercise power. Along with human free will at the theological level, for instance, the future of certain systems cannot be known to God because of their character of unpredictability and open-endedness (Heisenberg Uncertainty Principle at the sub-atomic level). God has no hidden variables in the Heisenberg case. This is the contingency of God's way that Peacocke articulated as the self-limitation of God's omniscience.[11]

God is the ultimate ground and source of both law (or necessity) and chance.[12] Peacocke conceptualized his idea of God as the ground and source of law (necessity) and chance in terms of the interplay of chance and law, which is creative within time. This combination of the two allows new forms to emerge and evolve. Natural selection in this regard appears to be opportunistic.[13] The interplay and consequences of

---

[10] For a critique of the deistic residue in the concept of the free-will defense of God, see ibid., 130–31.

[11] Arthur Peacocke, *Theology for a Scientific Age: Being and Becoming—Natural, Divine, and Human* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1993), 122–23.

[12] Ibid., 117.

[13] Ibid., 118.

random processes in the law-like framework of the rule is given, and as a result this aspect of "givenness" is interpreted to be a God-endowed feature of the world. Chance operates with this given framework, making it the basis of the inherent creativity of the natural order, enabling, evolving, and generating new forms, patterns, and organizations of matter and energy.[14] Such potentialities—for instance, creativity of the interplay between chance and law—are written by God into creation, and are gradually actualized by the operation of chance, which stimulates their coming into existence.

Therefore, Peacocke argues that the potential of the being of the world is made manifest in the process of becoming, which is made actual by the operation of chance.[15] God as composer creates in the world through the operation of randomness or chance, while chance appears to work like God's search radar. However, from a theistic perspective on God's creativity through this search radar, the actual course of the process of the world is innovative and adaptive, open-ended without purpose. God the Creator is involved in exploring many kinds of unfulfilled potentialities, such that God is busy creating continuously, exploring them through the interplay of evolutionary chance and necessity along with the open-endedness and unpredictability of the world's process.

God is *semper* Creator, and the world is a *creatio continua*.[16] God is busy exploring, acting, evolving, creating the world anew, and cannot rest even on and after Sabbath. This is how God as *semper* Creator is related to created time. The Darwinian idea of chance and natural law in creative interplay testifies to a God *semper* in becoming. How is God, who is *semper* Creator, to be understood in matters of God's self-resting and humanity as *imago Dei*?

2. Imago Dei *in Covenantal-eschatological Setting*

Darwin's theory of revolution posed a challenge to the status of humanity. In a Darwinian account of humanity one can find no place for the notion that the species suddenly acquired a property called the image and likeness of God. How do we think about theological anthropology in light of evolutionary biology? In Genesis 1:26, men and

---

[14] Ibid., 65.
[15] Ibid., 119.
[16] Ibid., 105.

women are said to be created in the image (*tselem*) and likeness (*demut*) of God. God made human beings in God's own image and likeness, so that they might become God's representatives in their care-taking stewardship over creation. However, the bestowal of dominion in Genesis 1:28, which is associated with God's image, has been under fire since it has led to unrestricted exploitation of nature by modern technology and industrial society, and the resultant ecological crisis.[17]

The image of God is not a quality that humans possess by themselves, but according to Martin Luther, it is a relationality in an ongoing interaction between God and humanity.[18] The *imago Dei* is a dynamic principle through which we understand our relationship with God in the past, present, and future. It is to be fulfilled in the second Adam, Jesus Christ, who is the image of God. We are to be transformed into the same image (2 Cor. 3:18). The eschatological new human is manifested in Jesus Christ (1 Cor. 15:45f.), who is to come. The concept of co-humanity corresponds to our openness to Jesus Christ. However, the Bible also sees humanity as rooted in nature, sharing the finitude, creatureliness, and death of all living things, returning "to the ground, for out of it you were taken; you are dust, and to dust you shall return" (Gen. 3:19ff.).

Imago means a copy, analogy, or mirror coming out of ground and dust. Humanity was formed from the dust of the ground (Gen. 2:7), and became a living being through God's activity of life-giving breathing. The breath of God's life was given "to every beast of the earth, and to every bird of the air, and to everything that creeps on the earth" (Gen. 1:30). God gives "drink to every animal," and "the young lions roar for their prey, seeking their food from God" (Ps. 104:11, 21). The creation of human beings in God's image and according to God's likeness essentially open them to a relationship with God and to the participation in God's life. In this relationship, animals are not excluded, so long as they breathe. God's image is also a basis for relationship between humans and other living creatures. This image, which pertains to the relationship between God and human beings, also pertains, in the context of Noah's covenant, to God's universal covenant relationship with all living creatures and the earth.

---

[17] Cf. Lynn White, "The Historical Roots of Our Ecological Crisis," in *The Sacred Earth: Religion, Nature, Environment*, ed. Roger S. Gottlieb (New York and London: Routledge, 1996).

[18] *Luther's Works*, ed. Jaroslav Pelikan and Helmut T. Lehmann (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1957–86), 1:62–63.

According to God's covenant with Noah, every living creature comes into God's covenantal relationship. A flood will not violate or destroy the laws of earth. The law of nature in its independent and free course belongs to God's promise. God loves the world in God's freedom, establishing the promise of covenant. The sign of God's universal covenant is extended beyond Noah toward all future generations. God is no longer a God of distance or gaps but a God of establishing covenantal relationships with creation, and allowing for God's self-limitation according to this covenant, so that the world of nature is driven by natural law and rhythm, open to God's promise. The *imago Dei* can be seen in the mirror of God's relationship with divine life (Gen. 1:26), as well as in human relationships with each other, and it is expanded into the *promissio Dei* for establishing God's universal covenant for universal shalom. "The wolf shall live with the lamb, the leopard shall lie down with the kid, the calf and the lion and the fatling together, and a little child shall lead them" (Isa. 11:6ff.). God's covenantal promise does not take away the evolutionary freedom of the earth, but places a sign of grace accompanying, transforming, and guiding it to God's universal shalom in Jesus Christ, who is the image of God.[19]

God's rest on the seventh day implies that God is not merely busy creating and bringing forth new creatures. God is also in self-resting. In spite of contradictions, conflict, and extinctions, the process of evolution can become a means of God's creation in terms of its creative combination and the interconnection of chance and necessity. In the creaturely world, there is always beginning, cessation, and new beginning. There is no becoming without the perishing of old forms, no perishing without new becoming. Evolutionary-ecological creative movement comes from God's covenantal promise which grants dynamic rhythm in the course of an unbroken and never-ceasing cycle: "As long as the earth endures, seedtime and harvest, cold and heat, summer and winter, day and night, shall not cease" (Gen. 8:22). A *creatio continua* is reassured by God's promise of universal covenant.

The illuminating, dynamic reality of evolution, which is impregnable, unalterable, and indestructible in spite of its shadow side and limitations, can be a conscription to the service of God's glory in speaking of the goodness of the original creation. God's creative activity is not a mere reproduction of existing forms. Expressed in Barthian fashion, it can be instituted, installed, and ordained to the *ministerium Verbi*

---

[19] Jesus affirms that God's goodness and paternal care are manifest in the lives of plants and animals (Luke 12:24–28; Matt. 6:26–30).

Divini, because all sciences might ultimately be theology.[20] *Analogia evolutionis* is a way of seeing God's ongoing creative activity in the constant bringing forth of what is new.

Nevertheless, God is not merely the God of evolution, but the God of alpha and omega, establishing covenantal promise with humanity and creation toward God's final rest within them, in which God's indwelling does not mean ceasing to be God the Creator. In the eschatological assertion that God will be over all (1 Cor. 15:28), God's indwelling and rest within humanity and all creatures are already protologically described as God's Sabbath, the crown of creation (Karl Barth). Divine cessation implies the divine perfection of creation, so that divine rest becomes the basis for *creatio continua*. God's *menuha* refers to the final rest of a God who freely loves and who acts in self-limitation. God's Sabbath as God's world-immanence articulates God's covenantal "yes" to all creatures, complementing the evolutionary process as an instrument to serve God's universal shalom. Scientific laws and formulae, as well as the observation and investigation of the natural sciences, discover divine action in its partial validity in the dynamic rhythm and life-circle of the world, becoming witnesses to the being of God, who is becoming in the coming of God's final rest.[21]

2.1 A Suffering God

In the context of natural selection, pain and suffering as well as consciousness of pleasure and well-being are emergents. The emergence of pain and suffering appears to be an inevitable aspect to the continuous growth and potency of the evolutionary process. Therefore, pain as one of the emergents has an energizing effect, and suffering goads action.[22] Both of them are located within the creatures' right to survive, facing continually the new problem situations which challenge their existence and survival. They are a necessary condition for survival, rather than a failing or sin. For Peacocke, God is a suffering God in the face of the natural evils of the world. His theology of divine possibility comes from a scientific perspective on the inevitability of pain, suffering, and death in a universe which is capable of evolving free, intelligent per-

---

[20] Paul S. Chung, "Karl Barth and God in Creation: Towards an Interfaith Dialogue with Science and Religion," *Theology and Science* 3, no. 1 (2005): 58.

[21] Eberhard Jüngel, *God's Being Is in Becoming: The Trinitarian Being of God in the Theology of Karl Barth*, trans. John Webster (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2001).

[22] Peacocke, *Theology for a Scientific Age*, 68.

sons.[23] The sin and death of *homo sapiens* replace Adam, turning Adam's sin into a contributing factor toward an advanced humanity through the evolutionary-creative process of becoming.

The arrival of *homo sapiens* became possible from the interplay of chance (or randomness) and law-like regularities within which chance operates. That is the matrix for the emergence of *homo sapiens* with free will and self-consciousness. For the arrival of *homo sapiens*, God is instantiated as one who inevitably wills the means of natural evil. Natural evil, constituted by the random effects of chance, becomes the heir of all life. God's self-limitation can be characterized by the world's open-endedness and flexibility, which generates and evolves complexity, consciousness, and freedom on the part of *homo sapiens*.

Likewise, God's covenantal grace neither violates nor eradicates the life of nature in the evolutionary progress, but rather prepares, transforms, and completes it in light of God's coming. God is known only through God who is becoming through God's grace in Jesus Christ and consummating life of creatures. All living creatures, as *larva Dei* (Martin Luther), have a covenantal image and the right to live according to it, open to the divine invitation to new creation.

Therefore, the *imago Dei*, human and non-human, can be understood as a covenantal-proleptic image, open and invited to God's promise and grace. The death and resurrection of Jesus Christ as the image of God demonstrate an ontic and objective ground for a covenantal-proleptic image of God, who reconciled Godself with the world of evolution by experiencing the shadow side of evolution, waste, suffering, and death, and who took them up into the divine life of new creation. All things in heaven and on earth were created in, through, and for Christ, the image of the invisible God, the firstborn of all creation (Col. 1:15). The end will come "when Christ hands over the kingdom to God the Father" (1 Cor. 15:24).

The theistic concept of creational covenant (God of the *regnum naturae*) anticipates and moves toward the Christological concept of universal reconciliation (God of the *regnum gratiae*), within which framework the green grace of God in creation and the red grace of God in reconciliation will be integrated, renewed, and transformed through God's promise of grace in the new creation. Therefore, a covenantal prolepsis does not begin with the coming advent or with God's *futurum* (what will be), which refers to the future as the cumulative result or the actualization of existing potentials.

---

[23] Ibid., 127.

Rather, God's prolepsis is based on God's inbreaking reality and presence in Jesus Christ, who becomes the ontic and objective ground for a theistic prolepsis of covenant and creation. God is alpha and omega, but is not limited to being the First or the Last. God's eternity is in God's uncreated time of Jesus Christ in the presence of the Spirit. Time does not flow from the future, but belongs to God's grace in God's life-giving activity. God's final *novum* is not the completion or perfection of what has been produced by evolution, but is completely God's new act of transformation and final rest through the resurrection of Jesus and his presence in the Spirit.

The resurrection begins with the parousia in its first historical-eschatological sense. Christ the Reconciler gives a *telos* to the evolutionary process of creation, making it open and faithful to God's covenantal promise of new creation. Jesus's death in the world of evolution and his resurrection took place in our present, taking up all perishables in the *regnum naturae* toward the novelty of the *regnum gloriae*. The Christian ethic of theistic covenantal prolepsis argues that we believe in God in Jesus Christ by the Spirit, not in the progress of evolution, but we fight for progress in accompaniment and solidarity with those who are alienated, wasted, and marginalized in the evolutionary process of history and the world, until God becomes all in all. God's love in freedom refers to the God who transforms all in all really and materially.[24] God is God in alpha and omega. However, God transcends the time of evolution. God proceeds into the time of evolution in order to create a covenantal time of communion with humanity and all living creatures.

God is the One who freely loves and who acts in kenosis in matters of interconnection between the *regnum naturae*, the *regnum gratiae*, and the *regnum gloriae*. However, in a covenantal-proleptic framework, the fall is not entirely conflated with the achievement of progressive evolution. Species that become extinct and the suffering innocent victims in the history of nature are not considered to be unredeemable waste. God's love in freedom and life-giving activity in kenosis indicate that God shares in the pain and suffering of those who are victims. *Analogia evolutionis* is framed and transformed socially and materially within the theistic concept of creational covenant for God's universal shalom and solidarity in Jesus Christ for and with those who are "the

[24] Helmut Gollwitzer, *Krummes Holz—aufrechter Gang: Zur Frage nach dem Sinn des Lebens* (Munich: C. Kaiser, 1985), 185.

outcast, the suspect, the maltreated, the powerless, the oppressed, the reviled—in short . . . those who suffer." [25]

Theologia crucis emphasizes God's mysterious presence in Jesus Christ, the victim, in whom God's self-limitation assumes the reality of bringing the innocent victims of suffering and evil into God's life. In the process of natural selection, the reality of evil has no covenantal relationship with God, and is not to be ignored in the historical life of human community.[26] It is God himself who is affected in the process of suffering and extinction. Through the resurrection of the victimized and crucified, God heals, renews, and transforms the reality of suffering, death, and evil. At this point, with the covenantal-proleptic concepts of *imago Dei* and *theologia crucis*, one can construct and mount a prophetic-emancipatory critique of social ideologies tainted by evolution. Rather than the fittest, it is the stone rejected by the builders that has become the cornerstone.

II. BUDDHISM AND NATURAL SCIENCE

Scientific advances have posed challenge to traditional Christian doctrines. Contemporary views of geology, evolution, and cosmology have called into serious question biblical accounts of the origin of the earth, life, and the cosmos. In the scientific community, however, scientific dogma becomes untenable. Einstein's relativity, like Newton's *Principia*, is not seen as final. Science is not fully exempt from scientific dogmatism. As for the relation between Buddhism and science, let me begin with the Buddha's objective and principle. It is to lead people over to the shore of enlightenment for overcoming pain and suffering. Science is based on empirical observation and analysis. But the Buddha performed a peculiar kind of "scientific" analysis in tracing and scrutinizing every phenomenon from the perspective of the middle way. How then is Buddhism comparable to a scientific endeavor? The Buddhist idea of ultimate truth (*paramārtha-satya*), moreover, is beyond linguistic comprehension and definition.

---

[25] Dietrich Bonhoeffer, *Letter and Papers from Prison*, ed. Eberhard Bethge (New York: Macmillan, 1972), 17.

[26] I disagree with Teihard de Chardin's Gnostic idea of evil and his optimistic view on atomic bombing. Cf. Gollwitzer, *Krummes Holz—aufrechter Gang*, 130.

Buddhists affirm that *śūnyatā* represents a spiritual truth which is different from the empirically observable truth of science. According to the doctrine of *anatta* (Sanskrit: *anātman*), a religious or metaphysical quest for a world beyond is rejected. The historical Buddha established *śūnyatā* as a radical counterproposal to the Hindu view of Brahma and Ātman. Later Mādhyamika defined it as the middle way of penetrating the emptiness between something and nothing. It is neither an everlasting essence behind all phenomena nor nihilism. Buddhism began with analyzing the phenomena of the world by means of experience, rather than metaphysical speculation of what exists beyond the world. If all life on earth is interdependent, emptied of substantial self and functioning in radical relationality, then it is in continuous flux, and each is conditioned by environmental factors. This indicates, in fact, the unsatisfactory nature of life. The Buddhist term for this is *dukkha* (suffering, pain and anguish). Given this fact, everything that can be affirmed in the evolutionary process is in *dukkha*.

As long as Buddhism begins with the experience of *dukkha* and *śūnyatā*, it does not contradict scientific method and observation. Although the truth of *śūnyatā* can be conceptualized in linguistic-epistemological terms, Buddhists do not refute the relative truth of *śūnyatā* in terms of symbol, metaphor, and rituals. Scientists also are aware that the highest truth they aspire to is relative truth, such that any descriptive formula is relative to the experience it describes as well as to the meaning of the other parts. Theories are conceptual or symbolic models and are constantly adjusted to take account of new information and discoveries gained from observation and new results. Scientists do not use their formulas or theories as absolutes or ultimates.[27]

Given this fact, the Buddhist approach to truth can appreciate critical realism, yet in more openness to a post-foundational idea of an ongoing exchange between social constructions and historical conditions. Buddhism as a contemplative science is fundamentally similar to natural sciences in methodology.[28] According to Werner Heisenberg, what we observe is not as such, but it is nature exposed to a human method of inquiry. What we observe and define is dependent on human verbal and conceptual designation. The Buddhist centrist view, called conceptual relativity, calls into question the realist ontological assumptions that

---

[27] Barbour, *Religion and Science*, 115–21.Cf. Ricard and Trinh, *The Quantum and the Lotus*, 229–50.

[28] Buddhists seem to find a lack of Buddhist non-dual transcending of human rationality in Ian Barbour's critical realism. Cf. Ricard and Trinh, *The Quantum and the Lotus*, 231, 247.

underlie the Western scientific method. As Alan Wallace argues, no one conceptual system accounts realistically for the complexity among natural phenomena because "objects exist relative to the theory-laden consciousness that experiences them."[29]

There is no belligerent relationship between science and Buddhism, as is seen generally in Christianity. Buddhism deemphasizes faith in a personal deity (except for the Amida faith in Pure Land Buddhism in Japan). If science is a means (*upāya*) to the end of alleviating the reality of suffering, it would be in consonance with the Buddhist ethical idea of compassion for those who are in the samsaric world. Besides the Buddhist epistemology of impermanence, no-self and radical relationality can become the entry points for dialogue with quantum physics. However, if a scientific worldview becomes reductionistic regarding its approach to every phenomenon as does empirical materialism, Buddhists would reject this.

1. Evolutio ex śūnyatā *Underlines Buddha Nature*

The method of science formulates a hypothesis, tests it, and states a new hypothesis on the basis of knowledge obtained by experimentation. It is open to change under new models or paradigms. Buddhism emphasizes the character of the impermanence of all. The ego changes, so physical forms change. Acts are pre-conditioned by preceding acts. The karmic principle exhibits itself as a hermeneutical way of relating to what has shaped human existence in historical, biological, physical, and psychological ways.

Buddhism and evolutionary sciences draw a strikingly similar mapping of mental and emotional life, agreeing on the fundamental laws of nature and living systems. What is the origin of life? Buddhists do not speak about the first cause of life because there is no-self. According to the notion of dependent co-arising, cause and effect are in interrelationship and complementarity. The Buddhist notion of *saṃsāra*, the world of ongoing recurrence of birth and death, can be aptly described as a cycle or wheel. It is not possible to ascertain the beginning of such a wheel of cause and effect. In this recurrent wandering, the first cause of being cannot be perceived. Life is a process of becoming and is in a constant state of flux. The Buddhist teaching of *anatta* (no-soul) indi-

---

[29] B. Alan Wallace, *Choosing Reality: A Buddhist View of Physics and the Mind* (Ithaca, N.Y.: Snow Lion Publications, 1996), 121.

cates that all things, animate or inanimate, are subject to change. Everything is in the flux of impermanence, because nothing is unchangeable.

There is an abundance of life, which is a major factor in the evolution of life. As Darwin argues, abundance leads inevitably to natural selection. In nature, characterized by overproduction of organisms and inevitable struggle for existence, there is the rule of survival of the fittest. As to the evolutionary process, the theory of natural selection indicates how modification in the course of descent came about. That is the theory of descent with slow successive modification. Darwin maintained that humans are derived from a single stock of ape-like animals inhabiting the old world. This single stock had been diversified into numerous species or races. They were adapted or acclimatized by natural selection to resist the diseases of the environments in which they live.

The brute rule of natural selection excludes the idea of intelligent design or *telos* within nature. For the neo-Darwinian synthesis, randomness or chance dominates; the process is directionless and purposeless. The theory of a "Blind Watchmaker" (Richard Dawkins) may articulate the Buddhist insight into the reality of *dukkha* in the samsaric world. The study of geographical variations and isolation, the evidence of comparative anatomy and embryology, the modes of hybridization and the advantages of hybrids in no way contradict the Buddha Dharma.

Buddha's teaching of the karma of evolution is known as the "law of karma." Every action is followed by a consequence, often referred to as individual inherited circumstances and temperament. The Buddha's understanding of karma is summarized in the Sanskrit phrase *pratītya-samutpāda*, which can be translated as "dependent co-arising." It is outlined as twelve interlinking processes that condition our reality. The schema of dependent co-arising indicates a profound acknowledgement of our human condition and all life in nature. Despite differences in emphasis in Buddhist schools, it is worth noting that all elements and phenomena are mutually interacting and influencing throughout the cosmos and through all time. Nothing arises independently of causes and conditions. We then may recognize ourselves and each moment of our experience as interwoven with all creation. Although there was no theory of evolution in the Buddha's time, the concept of life evolving becomes compelling to Buddhism. From this perspective, Buddhism does not hesitate to agree with neo-Darwinian beliefs of atheism and scientific materialism.

Be that as it may, according to the Mahāyāna tradition, Buddha nature in a universal sense aims at attaining true-self. There is no-self without true-self, and conversely there is no true-self without no-self. The Buddhist middle way in the Chinese tradition has developed more ecologically, more cosmically and more compassionately, with a view to all living beings mired in *dukkha*. The Mahayanist ideas of Buddha nature and Bodhisattva's praxis do not endorse the idea of survival of the fittest in the ethical realm. Buddhism may see humans from the perspective of evolution out of *śūnyatā*. The right to dominate animals is not given to humans. All are seated in the same boat of *saṃsāra*. Nevertheless, human rebirth is precious compared to other types of rebirth. For humans, occupying this special place is not necessarily a justification for dominating and exploiting other living beings. Human beings and nature are inseparable and are in a non-dual relationship.

2. *Buddha Nature Is Universal, So Bodhisattva's Compassion Is Non-discriminating*

Despite different interests in Buddha nature among Buddhist communities, the Mahāyāna teaching is convinced about the enlightenment of all sentient beings. Buddha nature refers to Buddhahood, or the capability of realizing and attaining the true-self of enlightenment. According to Buddhist tradition, Śākyamuni, after the enlightenment, affirmed that all sentient beings are endowed with the intrinsic capacity for and wisdom of enlightenment. All sentient beings without exception enter into a universal relationship with Buddhahood, so that they may become Buddha. Buddha is permanent with no change at all.[30]

The T'ien-t'ai 天台 monk Chan-jan 湛然 (711–82) argued that if Buddha nature is the immutable and permanent base of all phenomena, nothing could be excluded from Buddhahood. For Kūkai 空海 (774–835), the founder of the tantric Shingon 真言 school in Japan, all phenomena, whether sentient or non-sentient, are manifestations of the Mahā-vairocana Buddha, the prerequisite for Buddhahood. Dōgen 道元 (1200–1253), the founder of Sōtō 曹洞 Zen in Japan, went further, radicalizing the idea that all beings are Buddha nature rather than only

[30] In the *Nirvāṇa Sūtra* we read: "All sentient beings without exceptions have the Buddha-nature: Tathāgata (Buddha) is permanent with no change at all." Massao Abe, *Zen and Western Thought*, ed. William R. Lafleur (Honolulu: University of Hawai'i Press, 1993), 27.

manifesting or possessing Buddha nature.[31] A universal and cosmological idea of Buddha nature is of ecological relevance, broadening Bodhisattva's praxis of altruism in a universal and non-discriminating way.

The word "bodhisattva," which comes from the Sanskrit roots *bodhi* (awakening, or enlightenment) and *sattva* (sentient being), etymologically includes the meaning of the intention to awaken. Bodhisattva's ideal is, in its universal framework, a key concept for actualizing Buddhist compassion for those who have the capacity for Buddha nature to attain lucid, illumined, and awakened liberation, yet are entangled in the reality of the samsaric world. Bodhisattva's vow is a commitment to the way of enlightenment for the benefit of all in the spirit of non-discrimination.[32]

In Western tradition, humans alone are rational beings. It is held that human beings alone possess an immortal soul, which defines their true nature and relationship to God. This uniqueness of status appears to be denied by the theory of evolution. The distinction between human and animal characteristics was indeed minimized by Darwin and his followers. Absorbed into the process of natural selection determined by chance and necessity, humanity seems to be a product of accidental variations and the struggle for survival.

In this regard, biological and political ideas merged into what has been called Social Darwinism. The theory of evolution became tainted by social ideology. The idea of the survival of the fittest was to become the instrument for the evolution of society. For instance, British colonialism could be justified on such grounds. No one doubts that there are close relationships between science, power, and economics. Hisato Yoshimura 吉村寿人 (1907–90), who received the highest Japanese award in 1978 for his work on the science of environmental adaptation, was during the Second World War a team leader responsible for frostbite under "Unit 731." There was scant attention given to ethical issues in the research circles of genetics and atomic energy. The Mahāyāna emphases on compassion, egalitarian orientation, and the bodhisattva ideal

---

[31] Graham Parkes, "Voices of Mountains, Trees, and Rivers: Kūkai, Dōgen, and Deeper Ecology," in *Buddhism and Ecology: The Interconnection of Dharma and Deeds*, ed. Mary Evelyn Tucker and Duncan Ryūken Williams (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Center for the Study of World Religions, 1997), 113–25.

[32] Taigen Dan Leighton, *Faces of Compassion: Classic Bodhisattva Archetypes and Their Modern Expression* (Boston: Wisdom Publications, 2003), 32.

place Buddhism in opposition to any evolutionary political ideologies. Buddhist altruism is deeply concerned with the well-being of others.[33]

The reality of identity and interdependence in Hua-yen 華嚴 Buddhism in the *Avataṃsaka Sūtra* is reflected by an image, the Jewel Net of Indra, expounded by Fa-tsang 法藏 (643–712). This image provides a pivotal foundation for a socially engaged Buddhism in view of illustration of the holistic dimension of Indra's net regarding the complementarity between *śūnyatā* and fullness. In Indra's net, each jewel exists only as a reflection of all the others, having thus no self-nature. In the infinite world of Indra, a jewel is placed at each knot, so that each jewel reflects every other one. It is generated and sustained through the web of interdependence, or the mutual interbeing of the entire net, so that the reality of identity is empty, yet exists as mutuality and interdependence.

From this new way of looking at things, we discover unity without ignoring diversity, so that we overcome fragmentation and prejudices in terms of cosmic and universal ecology. We treat other people and things as we treat our own bodies. We are able to love our neighbors as our own bodies. The opening of the third eye refers to a spiritual awakening through the practice of Ch'an 禪. However, such an awakening should lead to the opening the fourth eye in the social and cultural context of the Dharma, especially highlighting the social, ethical implications.[34]

The true-self aims to attain liberative enlightenment from the evolutionary process characterized by samsaric reality chained into birth, suffering, and death. For Buddhism, evolution can be a way of affirming the Buddhist reality of *dukkha* and the interconnection of all. However, the concept of natural selection is not adequate for understanding the Buddha's non-discriminating compassion for all who are perishable and victimized. Buddha nature is universal, innately realizing enlightenment *hic et nunc*. However, Buddha nature (*imago Buddha* in Christian terminology) does not necessarily contradict the Buddhist prolepsis of the coming Maitreya, which has fired *minjung*'s messianic dream and revolutionary praxis for the complete *novum* of the world. Unlike the Pure Land in Pure Land tradition, this Buddhist paradise is to be realized in this world rather than after death.

---

[33] For the Buddhist critique of the scientific alliance with political ideology, see Ricard and Trinh, *The Quantum and the Lotus*, 7–22.

[34] Ken Jones, *The New Social Face of Buddhism: A Call to Action* (Boston: Wisdom Publications, 2003), 113.

IN LIEU OF A CONCLUSION: THE WORLD IS IN FLUX, YET OPEN TO FUTURE

Creatio ex nihilo is a post-biblical concept coming from the writings of early Judaism (2 Macc. 7:28f.) in connection with martyrological narrative. God's enabling is the ground for the possibility of God. *Creatio ex nihilo* points to God's glorious creation of new heaven and a new earth (Isa. 65:17), a final resurrection of the dead through God's resurrection of Jesus Christ in the past. Biblical faith in God's creation in its radicalness does not stand in competition with natural scientific deliberation. Rather, creation depends on God's life-giving activity in the world. *Creatio ex nihilo* therefore needs to be understood as a biblical protest to the self-veneration and glorification of the world. The biblical statement of creation looks ahead, belonging to the connection of hope and eschatology. Its essential dimension is not the past but the future under the influence of the God's presence in Jesus Christ. What is said in the beginning is a promise, not a conservative ideology that supports literal or scientific creationism. Nature and history, as well as creation and evolution, cease to be contradictory to each other in God's love in freedom, who acts in self-limitation and hands over Godself to the created time of evolution.

Seen from this biblical perspective, Darwin rather offers us better theological insight. Out of the struggle of nature, hunger, and death, the highest emerges—and there is a higher and more complete existence. All life forms are different from each other and dependent upon each other in so complex a manner, entirely uncontrolled and fortuitous, generated and produced by the laws of natural selection. "In this view of life," said Darwin, "there is grandeur . . . having been originally breathed by the Creator into a few form or into one." "This planet has gone cycling on . . . from so simple a beginning endless forms most beautiful and most wonderful have been, and are being evolved."[35]

The Buddhist principle of the middle way is concerned with the *evolutio ex śūnyatā*, something coming from emptiness which is replete with fullness. As Peacocke argues, "the universe of space-time-matter and energy appears as the result of a 'quantum tunneling' effect whereby absolutely nothing (meaning no space, no time) gives rise to

---

[35] Charles Darwin, *The Origin of Species*, 6th ed. (London: Watts, 1929), 408.

something in (mathematically) imaginary time."[36] According to the Buddhist doctrine of dependent co-arising, no time and no space are in non-dual complementarity with something, the suchness of *śūnyatā*. This non-dual perspective would be close to the panentheistic idea of a suffering God: all in all are in *dukkha*, and *śūnyatā* will be all in all. Nothing can be excluded from the interdependent arising and ceasing. As Masao Abe 阿部正雄 states, "God is 'dazzling darkness' because in God, who is infinite love, self-emptying as-it-is self-fulfillment, self-fulfillment as-it-is self-emptying. Sunyata is 'dazzling darkness' because in Sunyata, which is boundless openness, samsara as-it-is nirvana, nirvana as-it-is samsara."[37] The Buddhist idea of evolution *ex śūnyatā* is open to dialogue with a panentheistic holding together of God's more-than-the-world and God's immanent presence within the world, not in contradiction to it.

However, the Buddhist ethical ideas of altruism and ethical consequence do not conflate evolution with optimistic progress. In fact, both Buddhists and Christians agree that social ethics should not be based on the biological idea of the struggle for survival. Despite all our reservations about Darwin's theory of evolution, it can be apprehended as a way of understanding the reality of life in the world and nature as it is. Christianity and Buddhism may assess the scientific theory of the Darwinian model of evolution in light of God's promise of new creation or in light of the coming Maitreya.

Buddhism is aware of a coming Budhha, the future Maitreya Buddha. Maitreya's call for the future embodies the unfulfilled aspect of the bodhisattva. Against the idea of history as a march of progress, driven by science and technology, and against the Buddhist emphasis on identifying timeless eternity with the present, Maitreya helps find the promise of the future and our responsibility for the future generation. This future Buddha has inspired messianic hopes and utopian dreams, challenging the inadequacies of the present. Lord Buddha's kingdom renews and transforms the life of creatures and the samsaric reality of world. He will herald a climactic new golden age, opening heaven and earth anew. This Buddha has been understood as the overriding principle of the messianic movement in the East Asian context, proclaimed as the herald of apocalyptic configurations, and introducing a new age of peace, justice, and egalitarianism. At this point, Buddha

---

[36] Peacocke, *Theology for a Scientific Age*, 70.

[37] Masao Abe, *Buddhism and Interfaith Dialogue*, ed. S. Heine (Honolulu: University of Hawai'i Press, 1995), 148.

nature can be open to the future rather than relegating all times to the present time of being.[38]

In ethical commitment to the well-being of others, in cooperation for universal shalom in the community of all living beings, and in the messianic expectation of world transformation, Christianity and Buddhism can share their experience, wisdom, and commitment for mutual benefit, renewal, and transformation. In the world of *dukkha*, there is ongoing hope and expectation about the children of God or the Buddha. "[F]or creation waits with eager longing for the revealing of the children of God . . . we know that the whole creation has been groaning in labor pains until now" (Rom. 8:19, 22). Hearing Paul's expectation of the revealing of the children of God, Buddhists may recite the following passage of the *Bodhícaryāvatāra*: "May I become the protector of those without protection, the guide for those on the path, the boat, the bridge, and the causeway for those wishing to go to the other shore. May I become a lamp for those desiring a lamp, a bed for those desiring a bed, a slave for all beings desiring a slave."[39]

---

[38] Leighton, *Faces of Compassion*, 254.

[39] Francis Brassard, *The Concept of Bodhicitta in Śāntideva's* Bodhícaryāvatāra (New York: State University of New York Press, 2000), 46.

ORDER FORM FOR *CHING FENG* AND BOOKS PUBLISHED OR DISTRIBUTED BY THE CHRISTIAN STUDY CENTRE ON CHINESE RELIGION & CULTURE

Parties who wish to subscribe to the new series of *Ching Feng* and/or to order our publications, please complete this form and return it to The Chinese University Press (address: The Chinese University of Hong Kong, Shatin, N.T., Hong Kong; tel.: 2609-6508; fax: 2603-6692; email: cup@cuhk.edu.hk) together with a crossed cheque or a bank draft made payable to "The Chinese University of Hong Kong". Please note that the following listed prices (for local order *only*) in HK$ include local postage, and that the following listed prices for international order in US$ include surface mail postage. Please refer to the front matter for the rates of subscription to *Ching Feng*.

CONTACT PERSON: Rev. / Prof. / Dr. / Mr. / Miss * _____

INSTITUTION: _____

DELIVERY TO: _____

INVOICE ADDRESS (IF DIFFERENT): _____

E-MAIL: _____

CHEQUE NO. (IF APPLICABLE): _____

DATE OF ORDER: _____

* Circle where appropriate.

Publication Details	$ / Unit	Qty. Ordered
English Publications		
Ching Feng, New Series Subscription beginning with Volume _____, Number(s) _____	Please refer to the front matter for the rates	
Ching Feng, New Series Volume 1, Number 1 ☐ Volume 1, Number 2 ☐ Volume 2, Numbers 1–2 ☐ Volume 3, Numbers 1–2 ☐ Volume 4, Number 1 ☐ Volume 4, Number 2 ☐ Volume 5, Number 1 ☐ Volume 5, Number 2 ☐ Volume 6, Number 1 ☐ Volume 6, Number 2 ☐ Volume 7, Numbers 1–2 ☐	Please refer to the front matter for the rates	

Interpretations of Hope in Chinese Religions and Christianity Edited by D. L. Overmyer and Chi-tim Lai	HK $ 135 US $ 19	
Struggling for Survival: The Catholic Church in China 1949–70 By Kim-kwong Chan	HK $ 39 US $ 6	
Taoist Tradition and Change: The Story of the Complete Perfection Sect in Hong Kong By Bartholomew P. M. Tsui	HK $ 55 US $ 9	
Double-Edged Sword: Christianity and 20th Century Chinese Fiction By Lewis Steward Robinson	HK $ 72 US $ 12	
Karl Ludvig Reichelt: Mission, Scholar and Pilgrim By Eric J. Sharpe	HK $ 70 US $ 11	
Chinese Publications		
香港教會系列 Hong Kong Churches Studies Series		
「社會良心」抑「搞事份子」：香港基督教工業委員會歷史之研究 *Social Conscience or Troublemaker? A History of Hong Kong Christian Industrial Committe* 湯泳詩 著	HK $ 34 US $ 5.3	
一個華南客家教會的研究：從巴色會到香港崇真會 *A Study of the Hakka Church in South China: From Basel Mission to the Tsung Tsin Mission of Hong Kong* 湯泳詩 著	HK $ 70 US $ 11	
香港基督徒使命和身份尋索的歷史回顧 *The Mission and Identity of Hong Kong Christianity: A Historical Analysis* 盧龍光、楊國強 著	HK $ 39 US $ 6	
福利與信仰：香港教會推行「慈惠」之果效研究報告 *Welfare and the Christian Faith: A Report on the Hong Kong Chinese Churches' Understanding of Financial Assistance* 龔立人、陳澤群 著	HK $ 34 US $ 5.5	
汪彼得牧師在香港工作之初探 *A Preliminary Study of Rev. Peter Wong's Ministries in Hong Kong* 潘玉娟 著	HK $ 34 US $ 5.5	
景風系列 Ching Feng Series		
開放與委身：田立克的神學與宗教對話 *Openness and Commitment: Paul Tillich's Theology and Inter-religious Dialogue* 賴品超 著	HK $ 90 US $ 13.5	
承受與持守：中國大地的福音火炬 *The Torch of the Testimony in China* 鄧肇明 著	HK $ 90 US $ 13.5	

尋真求全：中國神學與政教處境初探 *Chinese Theology in State-Church Context: A Preliminary Study* 葉菁華 著	HK $ 90 US $ 13.5	
十字蓮花：基督教與中國歷史文化論集 *Cross-Lotus — Selected Essays on Chinese Christianity: Historical and Cultural Perspectives* 梁元生 著	HK $ 100 US $ 14.5	
反帝・愛國・屬靈人── 倪柝聲與基督徒聚會處研究 *Anti-imperialism, Patriotism and the Spiritual Man: A Study on Watchman Nee and the "Little Flock"* 邢福增 著	HK $ 90 US $ 13.5	
中國，開門！ 馬禮遜及相關人物研究 *Open up, China! Studies on Robert Morrison and His Circle* 蘇精 著	HK $ 137 US $ 21	
上帝的人馬：十九世紀在華傳教士的作為 *Under God's Command: Papers on Early Protestant Missionaries in China* 蘇精 著	HK $ 90 US $ 13.5	
其他 Others		
謝扶雅百齡詩文集 *Poems and Essays of Xie Fuya in Celebration of His 100th Birthday* 謝扶雅 著	HK $ 97 US $ 15.5	

07 **Logos & Pneuma**
Chinese Journal of Theology
No.27 (Autumn)

THEME: Sino-Christian Theology in Ming and Qing Dynasties

LI Tiangang Introduction to the Main Theme *
SUN Shangyang The Relationship between Catholicism and Protestantism in China in the Time of Robert Morrison
PANG Fengchuan The Interpretation and the Re-interpretation of Chinese Philosophy : Longobardo and Leibniz*
Desmond CHEUNG The Christian Poetry of Chinese Convert Zhang Xingyao (1633-1715)*
LIU Jingjing The Discussion of Afterlife in the Seventeenth Century — Analysis of *Piwang tiaobo heke*
WANG Dingan To Achieve Unification Because of Difference —The Role Played by Xin Xue in the Cultural Communication between China and the West in Ming and Qing Dynasty

THOUGHT AND SOCIETY

TAN Lizhu The Christian Faith: Argumentation or Narration ? —Starting from Proclus' View on the Theology of Plato
Christine LEE Inquiry and Application of Rudolf Bultmann's Methodology in Existential Theology
XIA Kejun Hapax-theology —Deconstruction of Christianity in Jean-Luc Nancy
YOU Bin The Forgotten Bible Translator: Chinese Literati and Chinese Bible Translation
HUANG Jianbo Local Tradition, State Power and New Religion : Mentuhui in Meigu as the Case

BOOK REVIEWS

LI Yuehong The Marks of the Development of Contemporary Sino-Christian Theology : The Significance of Jason Lam's *Polyphonic View on Sino-Christian Theology*
LIANG Hui Saving our Lord from the religious God — Book Review on Leonhard Ragaz's *Die Botschaft vom Reiche Gottes*
XIAO Qinghe Review on Huang Yilong's *Two-Head Snakes : The First Generation of Chinese Catholics in Late Ming and Early Qing*

* No English abstracts are provided for translated articles, brief book reviews or reports.

This journal is published by the ***Institute of Sino-Christian Studies Limited*** in Hong Kong.
33 To Fung Shan Road, Shatin, N.T.,Hong Kong
Tel.:852-2694-6868 Fax:852-2601-6977
E-mail:editorial@iscs.org.hk Web-site://www.iscs.org.hk