Globethics Repository



Explorations in love and wisdom : Christians and Buddhists in conversation

This page was generated automatically upon download from the Globethics Repository. More information on Globethics see https://www.globethics.net. Data and content policy of Globethics Repository see https://repository.globethics.net/pages/policy.

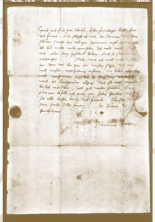
Item Type	Book
Authors	Ludwig, Theodor M.;Mwakabana, Hance A. O.
Publisher	The Lutheran World Federation
Rights	With permission of the license/copyright holder
Download date	2026-11-14 02:19:20
Link to Item	http://hdl.handle.net/20.500.12424/173202



LWF Studies







Explorations of Love and Wisdom: Christians and Buddhists in Conversation

The Lutheran World Federation

Explorations in Love and Wisdom: Christians and Buddhists in Conversation

LWF Studies 2002

March 2002

Theodore M. Ludwig and Hance A. O. Mwakabana
(editors)

Lutheran World Federation
Department for Theology and Studies
Office for the Church and People of Other Faiths

LWF Studies, 2002

Editorial assistance:
Iris J. Benesch

Design:
Stéphane Gallay, LWF—OCS

Published by
The Lutheran World Federation
150, rte de Ferney
P.O: Box 2100
CH-1211 Geneva 2
Switzerland

© 2002, The Lutheran World Federation

Printed in Switzerland by ATAR ROTO PRESSE S.A.

ISSN No. 1025-2290
ISBN No. 3-906706-90-7

Contents

9 ..... *Preface*
Theodore M. Ludwig and Hance A. O. Mwakabana

Part I. Meetings of Christians with Buddhists: Some Historical Perspectives

13 ..... *Meeting of Christians with Buddhists: The Church's Experience in Japan*
Naozumi Eto

19 ..... *Christianity Encounters Buddhism in Japan: An Historical Perspective*
Notto R. Thelle

31 ..... *Buddhist—Christian Relations in Sri Lanka*
Eardley Mendis

47 ..... *Meetings of Christians with Buddhists in the Western World in Historical Perspective*
Theodore M. Ludwig

Part II. Some Theological and Practical Perspectives on Relations with Buddhists

71 ..... *Theological Perspectives on People of Other Faiths*
Kyaw Than

79 ..... *Exploring Christian Theology in Relation to Buddhists*
Theodore M. Ludwig

87 ..... *Issues and Challenges in Relation to Mahayana Buddhists: Coexistence and Dialogue*
Notto R. Thelle

Part III. Buddhists and Christians Caring for People in Life's Concerns and Crises

105 ..... *Death and Dying: Working with Christians, Buddhists and Muslims in a Northern Thai Village*
Chuleepran Srisoortorn Persons

107 ..... *A Buddhist Perspective on Death and Dying*
Pinit Ratanakul

115 ..... *On Intermarriage: A Japanese Perspective*
Naozumi Eto

121 ..... *Prayer and Meditation in Buddhism and Christianity*
Shinryu Takada

129 ..... *Cooperating in Caring for People in Life's Concerns and Crises: A Christian's Perspective*
Kyaw Than

137 ..... *Reflections on Cooperation in Caring for People in Life's Concerns and Crises: A Buddhist's Perspective*
Parichart Suwanbubbha

Part IV. Christian and Buddhist Resources for Wholeness in Human Communities

141 ..... *The Struggle for the Liberation of the "Buraku" People: Christian and Buddhist Endeavors*
Naozumi Eto

147 ..... *Religion, Politics and Morality: A Controversy in Japanese Daily Life*
Shinryu Takada

153 ..... *Asian Women's Reality: Theological Reflections*
Chuleepran Srisoorntorn Persons

159 ..... *Reflections on Women, Women's Rights and Feminism in the Thai Context*
Parichart Suwanbubbha

167 ..... *Blessed Are the Poor: Spiritual Resources for Confronting Poverty in Our World*
Theodore M. Ludwig

179 ..... *Spiritual Practices as a Resource for Life: A Buddhist Perspective*
Sanu Bhai Dangol

191 ..... *Globalization, Global Ethics and Inter-religious Dialogue in a Multireligious Context*
Viggo Mortensen

203 ..... *Attaining Fullness of Life Through Spiritual Practices*
Phra Maha Tuan Siridhammo (Pim-Aksorn)

207 ..... *The Flowering of a Thought: Meaningful Cooperation Between Christians and Buddhists*
Kyaw Than

Part V. The LWF Working Group on Buddhism

213 ..... *Summary Report on Christian Relations with Buddhists*

Preface

Theodore M. Ludwig and Hance A. O. Mwakabana

At its Eighth Assembly, Curitiba, Brazil, 1990, the Lutheran World Federation (LWF) made several important commitments regarding the church and people of other faiths. In its final message, the Assembly affirmed

- to explore with people of other faiths, ways in which we may undertake common endeavors which promote justice, peace and the integrity of creation

- to study our Christian faith in depth and others' faiths sympathetically, in order to understand better the relationships between them

- to accelerate our efforts to equip people for witness and dialogue through education, encounters, one-to-one relationships and the utilization of persons who have crossed religious or cultural boundaries, and

- to hold before our Christian brothers and sisters the interrelationship of witness and dialogue as integral to Christian mission and self-understanding.

On the basis of these general commitments, the study program on theological perspectives on other faiths, involving five study teams on five major religious traditions, was initiated. The Christian-Buddhist study team was one of these study teams, and sought

- to pay adequate attention to both the canonical and popular dimensions

- to explore concrete Christian encounters with the respective tradition in particular contexts (i.e., including ritual and communal dimensions)

- to reflect upon specific theological engagements with the respective tradition, and

- to articulate a proposal for future dialogue with the respective religious tradition.

In light of the above commitments and guidelines, the study group on Christians and Buddhists molded the specific shape of its study project the focus of which is reflected in the title of this book.

Looking to the model of Christ, Christians put forth love as the highest ideal. Following the Buddha's teachings, Buddhists place much emphasis on wisdom. Of course, Christians also cultivate wisdom, as Buddhists cultivate love. Over the past few years, the LWF study group on Christians and Buddhists has experienced the value of mutual study and conversation over matters of love and wisdom, over issues of concern to all of us.

At its first meetings (1993-1996), most members of the study group were Christians, with some helpful participation from Buddhists, as the study group sought to understand the contours of Christian interaction with Buddhists and to explore theological perspectives on relations with Buddhists. Parts I and II of this volume, as well as the Summary Report in part V, represent those discussions. For the last two meetings (in 1999 and 2000), the study group was expanded to include Buddhist members, and the conversations focused on practical issues of life that Christians and Buddhists face in common. These essays and presentations are included in parts II and IV of this volume.

First of all, the study group recognized the crucial need to develop an historical awareness of the interactions between Buddhists and Christians that have taken place, in each Asian country as well as in the West, and to understand how these interactions have shaped the relationships that exist today. Further, it is important to acknowledge and build on the experiences of many other groups of Buddhists and Christians who have talked together and shared together, across denominational and sectarian lines. Christian-Buddhist dialogue must be an ecumenical endeavor on the part of both Christians and Buddhists.

Moreover, the study group discovered that it is essential for both Christians and Buddhists, as they enter into conversation together, to take stock of their own traditions, and to see the resources that can guide them in such conversation. For Christians, this means developing a theological perspective on conversing and working together with Buddhists. There are many resources in Christian theology to encourage and support such conversation and cooperation with Buddhists. As the group studied together, Christians and Buddhists, in an atmosphere of respect and trust, it found many opportunities, new insights, and challenges for the continuing task of theological construction today. It is clear that in the future, Christian theology needs to be theology in dialogue. Christian thought and life will be challenged, shaped, and enriched through conversations with Buddhists and people of other religious traditions.

In the course of its meetings, it became clear that a most promising arena for Christian-Buddhist conversation is in the "dialogue of life," in thinking and working together on common concerns and problems. And so the last two meetings of the study group were devoted to study of and conversation on practical issues of life, such as caring for people in life's crises, societal problems of discrimination and poverty, and the importance of spiritual practices for wholeness of life.

In the dialogue of life—joining together in facing human issues of common concern—many deep insights arise, both with respect to understanding the partners in the conversations, as to deepening the understanding of one's own faith and life. Today, conversation and cooperation between people of the different religious traditions are essential for human well-being. Caring for HIV/AIDS victims, concerns about death and dying, the need for holistic healing practices, problems associated with intermarriage, human rights, women's equality and empowerment, religion and politics, confronting poverty, and much more—the list of practical issues goes on and on, and it is essential that Christians and Buddhists converse and cooperate in engaging with these issues.

One thing that has become very clear to us is the importance of spiritual resources and practices for both Buddhists and Christians as they seek to bring fuller peace and wholeness to human communities. It was helpful for the study group to have the opportunity to understand and learn from the spiritual resources of each tradition—practices of meditation and devotion, parables and stories that shape and motivate life, models of great saints and heroes, etc. Several essays in this collection explore these spiritual resources as foundations for wholeness of life, in both the Buddhist and Christian experience.

It should be noted that this volume includes a diversity of materials, representing the experience of the study group over a number of years. Some of the essays are more academic in style, others are more descriptive of actual experience, or reflect on theological and spiritual understanding. These essays are put forth not as final answers to the issues and concerns, but as explorations into the love and the wisdom that characterize the Christian and Buddhist traditions. It is our hope that they will both instruct in the various topics of Christian-Buddhist dialogue and also provide an impetus for many more people to become involved in Christian-Buddhist conversation and cooperation in their own communities.

Special thanks go to all the contributors, for their energetic involvement in the various meetings and for laboring together to produce this study. We hope the work of this study group can provide a model for other Christians and Buddhists to talk and work together, sharing their love and wisdom.

Meeting of Christians with Buddhists: The Church's Experience in Japan

Naozumi Eto

In order to understand the relationship between Christians and Buddhists in Japan today, it is important to get some sense of earlier experiences between Christians and Buddhists. This historical perspective will help us to understand the nature of their relationship. The first part of this essay includes an overview of the first meetings of Christians with Buddhists in the 16th, 17th and 19th centuries. The second part deals with the development of the dialogue between Christianity and Buddhism on various subjects such as philosophical theory, spirituality, new and neo-new religious movements, and the struggle for justice, peace and human rights.

Overview of the First and Second Meetings of Christians with Buddhists

Francis Xavier and his colleagues made wonderful progress in mission and evangelism during the civil war in the latter half of the 16th century, and at the beginning of the Edo era under Tokugawa Shogun in the first half of the 17th century. Nevertheless, this "Christian" century ended with the severe prohibition of the Christian faith. The following two centuries were characterized by Japan's isolationist policy, during which there was the remarkable phenomenon of what we call the "Hidden Christians."

There are interesting studies on who and how many people were converted to Christianity in this early period. It is estimated that the missionaries gained 150,000 believers and established 200 churches in the first 33 years and that by 1600 there were 500,000 to 700,000 Christians out of a total Japanese population of 27,000,000. It should be noted that with the exception of a few feudal lords and members of "warriors" classes, most of these early Christians were "commoners" whereas in the 19th century most Protestant converts came from the "warrior" and "intellectual" classes.

Although Christianity was prohibited, its influence on Japanese culture prevailed. Today Buddhism is often criticized by being called "funeral Buddhism." But, the popular custom of the Buddhist way of holding funerals was influenced by the Christian burial, where even the common, poor people were attentively treated. In earlier centuries, it

had not been uncommon for a commoner's corpse to be disposed of without a funeral service. It is therefore not surprising that the missionaries attracted the people by treating them equally at their death, regardless of their social class or possessions. It is also well-known that the very popular, therefore often regarded as traditional, Shinto way of wedding was modeled on the Protestant wedding service.

During the second half of the 17th century all missionaries were expelled and Christians were persecuted. Christianity was prohibited, and every Japanese obliged to register at one of the Buddhist temples. In this situation, Buddhists could not find any Christians to be partners in dialogue. In this polemic atmosphere, Christian literature such as *Myotei Mondo* and *Dochirina Kirishitan* (Christian dogmas) were regarded by Japanese Buddhists as texts to debate and overcome.

The Second Wave of Mission and Evangelism in the 19th Century

Christian mission was resumed in 1859, the end of the Edo period. Contrary to the first appearance of Western civilization in the 16th century, this second incursion in the 19th century was accepted by the Japanese. According to A. Toynbee this was so because it was regarded as an "unknown technology," while the earlier incursion had been seen as an "unknown religion."

During the wide-ranging Westernization in the 1880s, Buddhists tried to defend their religious tradition by claiming that Buddhist ideas could be re-interpreted and re-established on the basis of the concepts and framework of Western philosophical ideas. Furthermore, they defended Buddhism by criticizing different aspects of Christian teaching.

One of the assaults on Christianity was directed at the egalitarian and fraternal Christian family and a social ethic which did not seem to go with traditional Japanese ethics and the Emperor system. One very interesting Buddhist critique of Christianity was the one regarding the biblical teaching on creation and the heavenly Lord God as Creator. Buddhists had quickly accepted the "revolutionary theory" as one of the frameworks of Western philosophy. Modern Buddhist ideologies at that time maintained that Gautama's primitive Buddhism and Mahayana Buddhism had a rational basis which understood things and events in a cause-effect relationship, and were thus in basic harmony with Western philosophical ideas about the nature of the world.

It is to be noted that the "Buddhist-Christian controversy" during the Meiji era was a prototype of religious dialogue in modern Japan. And it was Kitaro Nishida's philosophy or philosophy of religion that realized religious dialogue in its most complete form. Nishida labored hard, on the basis of the concepts and methodology of Western philosophy, to make the fundamental ideas of Buddhism logical and systematic. He never meant to abandon or change the essence of Buddhist thought; rather he

tried to characterize its uniqueness by introducing such concepts as "nothingness" or "place," which were foreign to Western philosophical tradition.

According to Tetsuo Yamaori, a leading scholar of the science of religion in contemporary Japan, Nishida's philosophy can be characterized as a monotheistization of Buddhism and universalization and abstractization of the experience of Zen Buddhism through a highly sophisticated circuit of language. What he calls "pure experience" is a result of his enterprise. Only such metaphysical elements of the Western tradition could offer a common ground for religious dialogue, no matter how difficult to understand and to describe its Buddhist essence.

Before we discuss the very theoretical dialogue between Christians and Buddhists after the 1960s, we would like to acknowledge the importance of the coexistence of religions. While religious dialogue is being carried out by élite intellectuals, religious coexistence is being realized among the people. Professor Yamaori observes that as long as people in each religion coexist peacefully without claiming uniqueness for their religion or assaulting others, they share a polytheistic worldview or value. If a monotheistic view is thrown in, a struggle among gods or deities takes place. We must reflect on the question whether the Christian initiative in the dialogue in Japan substantiates Professor Yamaori's theories or not.

Dialogue Between Christians and Buddhists after World War II

The Christian church suffered restrictions and even oppression before and during World War II, during the time when State Shinto played a central role in integrating the whole nation under absolute imperialism. The history of Christianity under the Meiji constitution was, in a sense, a history to gain full citizenship along with Shinto and Buddhism. When Japan was defeated and the whole nation lost its spiritual backbone, the so-called "Christian boom" came to fill the vacuum, but only for a short time. One might say that religious dialogue, in a true sense, started after the "Christian boom" was over.

Theoretical dialogue

As we discussed before, modern Buddhists re-established Buddhism by adopting Western philosophical concepts and frameworks. Nishida, a founder of the Kyoto school, developed a profound philosophy of religion.

Professor Seiichi Yagi, a most active Christian thinker, who has been involved in dialogue with Buddhists for over 30 years, expressed most clearly the ultimate commonality of the religious experience of Buddhists and Christians. Though it is difficult to summarize Yagi's highly complicated discourse and his extensive dialogue with Buddhists, especially Zen philosophers, and Christian thinkers, a few

key features can be mentioned. According to Yagi, the expectation for the coming of the kingdom of God in Jesus was the expectation for the realization of the reign of God. What Paul speaks of as the immanent Christ in the heart of a Christian is the experience that God reigns in the believer's heart, and this indicates the experience of the resurrection. In this sense both Jesus and Paul proclaimed the same reality, namely the reign of God. Moreover, it is "emptiness" in the Zen sense, or "place" in Nishida's philosophy, that is the closest Buddhist concept for expressing the reality of God's reign. To use his term, it is "the principle of integration."

One of his counterparts in dialogue, Professor Katsumi Takizawa, explains the fundamental fact of "Immanuel" as the relationship with God which no one can cut off, and the primordial connection from which no one can escape. Faith, according to Takizawa, is something like enlightenment. It is to be obedient to this fact of "Immanuel" which, to use his own expression, is "the primary contact between God and the human being." Faith can be described as "the secondary contact between God and human being." Yagi speaks of "the principle of integration" as something that reaches everyone who exists, and those who consciously commit themselves to the principle are called those who believe in Jesus as Christ.

All in all, it should be well understood that a Buddhist way of stating things and a Christian way of stating things are not the same but complementary, and that one cannot speak of the total at one time, but of one part of one aspect of the total. Yagi is convinced when he says that the fact that "the reign of God" comes to realization naturally when the human enterprise is abandoned, means that the Dharma can be realized naturally when body and mind stop acting according to their own will, to use a Buddhist expression.

Exchange of spirituality

At the same time as the theoretical dialogue there was another, very different, wave of movements. One movement was called the "Oiso Meeting," named after its meeting place, Oiso Academy House, where, since 1967, Christians (Protestant as well as Roman Catholic) and Buddhists got together every year, sharing their existential reflections on their "spiritual pilgrimage" and discussing the "responsibilities of religion to the contemporary society." Essential for the dialogue participants to understand one another is the common understanding that the central presupposition of the dialogue is personal religious experience. One of the new insights is that Christian prayer in a dialogical form and a Buddhist Zen sitting in a silent form are not opposites but, rather, that they are complementary. Some of the Catholic monks gave personal testimony that Zen practice is very useful for deepening Christian spirituality.

These meetings also affirmed the holistic nature of Christian and Buddhist spirituality. In other words, the significance of corporeality in each religion was confirmed through practice.

Another movement, the "Exchange of Spirituality of the East and the West," was first organized in 1979 with Japanese Zen monks and scholars, and European Benedictine and Trappist monks. Buddhist monks were accepted for a month in Catholic monasteries for living, practicing, working together and experiencing what their counterparts did daily, and vice versa.

These were rare but valuable opportunities to experience and getting to know the other religion from within. This does not necessarily mean that the participants came to deepen their understanding of their counterparts; often they have been troubled because of the differences.

It is a common understanding that this exchange of spirituality does not aim at creating a new universal religion by fusing existing religions. Nevertheless, it cannot be denied that there is an expectation that a deeper awareness of the world in which Christianity, Buddhism, and other religions occur might take place someday.

Emergence of New Religions and Neo-New Religions

Many new religious movements flourished in Japan between 1850 and 1950. Some of them established themselves as religious bodies drawing tens of thousands of followers. Scholars classify most of the new religions as those originally from Shinto and those from Buddhism. The largest one is *Soka Gakkai* from the Nichiren sect boasting 18,000,000 members and a powerful political arm, *Komei-to*.

Relatively newly established religious movements are classified as "neo-new religions." Their distinct characteristics differentiate them from the old "new religions." Some of the characteristics are as follows: (1) a change of motivation for the neo-new religions from poverty, sickness or trouble to a sense of emptiness or meaninglessness; (2) a change from a this-worldly orientation to renouncement of this world and a high evaluation of the spiritual world: (3) weakening of the ethical practice of human relation and increase of psychological control; (4) a strong increase of interest in mystical phenomena and transformation of body and mind; and (5) emphasis on self responsibility and consciousness of the eternal duration of one's soul.

It has not been very common to see confrontations of these new religions with Christianity and traditional Buddhism or Shinto. However, the rapid and often extensive growth of new and neo-new religions, their presence and vital activities cannot help but capture the Christian church's attention, because it is a solid fact that there are many people who seek religious life and spiritual meaning that traditional Christianity has not provided. This is a challenge to Christianity, a refracted challenge from Buddhism.

Cooperation in the Struggle for Justice, Peace and Human Rights

The history of the ecumenical movement has proved that action or issue-oriented cooperation is much more effective in promoting religious dialogue than theoretical dialogue. The joint engagement in the struggle for justice, peace and integrity of creation is not only expression of a common concern but also of the spirituality of each religion. This is why such cooperative work has greatly enhanced mutual understanding and instilled a sense of trust.

These struggles are often developed at a local level, making cooperation on issues such as justice for the marginalized, the physically, psychologically, and economically weak, peace for victims of war, and many ecological issues concrete and immediate.

When we reflect on the case of the struggle for liberation of the oppressed "buraku" people, we have learned that some religions in Japan were themselves a part of oppression and discrimination. Sharing such a painful recognition with people of other religions makes the meeting very meaningful and brings about a strong sense of solidarity.

One of the most burning contemporary concerns is related to medicine, science and technology. They are questions of life and death; questions that humankind has never had to ask before. Humanity is today facing questions regarding life and death, previously thought to be in the hands of God. Today it is our conviction that we need to find answers in cooperation with people of other religions, for they also have insights into those questions.

In one sense, Christianity is ahead of the group since it has been involved in such matters as terminal care, the hospice movement, and issues such as brain death and organ transplants. In recent times, there has been an increase of interest in such issues in Buddhist and Shinto circles. For the well-being of the whole humanity it is crucial that religions work together in these areas.

Conclusion

Humanity is entering a new stage of history, in which there is more awareness of the common pilgrimage of humanity. This understanding does not necessarily mean that all religions are approaching what some have called the "Omega point" and are going to fuse into one. We will see clearly when the day of the Lord comes, but until then what we have to do is to continue our common pilgrimage.

Christianity Encounters Buddhism in Japan: An Historical Perspective

Notto R. Thelle

In the course of many years of research and interfaith dialogue in Japan, I have often met Buddhists and Christians who enthusiastically describe themselves as pioneers in the dialogue between the two religions. There seems to be a consensus that the present dialogue represents the unique and decisive breakthrough in Buddhist-Christian relations. Protestants refer to the World Council of Churches (WCC) and its dialogue programs, which have developed since the 1950s. Roman Catholics emphasize the new attitudes introduced by the Second Vatican Council in the 1960s. And Japanese Buddhists readily respond to the challenges, engaging in exciting encounters with Christians.

There is no reason to underestimate the importance of recent developments in Buddhist-Christian relations. The literature dealing with dialogue has increased dramatically. Whereas a few decades ago only a few concerned individuals published their views in books and articles, there is today an abundance of scholarly and popular books, articles, and reports. Many opportunities for organized dialogue facilitate encounters at various levels: academic discussions on theological and philosophical themes; conferences concerned with peace, environment, and social issues; cooperation on the practical level of social protest and political action; and encounters on the level of spirituality, including meditation, prayer, and sharing of religious experiences.

An additional factor is the internationalization of the encounter between the two religions. Particularly since the 1960s an increasing number of Western theologians and other scholars have visited Japan in order to become acquainted with Buddhist philosophy and practice. Many of them have been impelled to change their view on Buddhism as well as to re-formulating their own theological understanding. The fact that many works of the leading representatives of the Kyoto School of Philosophy, such as Nishida Kitaro, Nishitani Keiji, Tanabe Hajime, and others, have been translated, has contributed to this trend. The direct contact between Buddhist and Christian theologians and thinkers on the international level has also intensified and sharpened the dialogue.

My own interest in the development of Buddhist-Christian relations in Japan stems from the perception that there is a need for an historical perspective on the present dialogue. The lack of an historical consciousness among those involved in dialogue challenged me to engage in a further investigation of the earlier stages of

Buddhist-Christian contact. My final conclusion was that the real transformation of the relationship between the two religions took place just over 100 years ago, in the 1890s. That was a decade of bitter hostility and conflict characterized by extreme nationalistic sentiments, anti-Western and anti-Christian. Those same years were decisive for the formation of a creative dialogue between Buddhists and Christians. The development of the 1890s was, of course, part of a much longer history which, in spite of conflict and suspicion, had prepared the way for mutual respect and understanding. But it was during the 1890s that radical change took place.

In the present study I shall, first, draw a rough outline of major developments since the opening of Japan in the mid-19th century, with the radical transformation in the 1890s as the focal point. Then I shall give a somewhat more systematic sketch of developments and trends in the 20th century. A few remarks on the contemporary dialogue will conclude this essay. The Roman Catholic encounter with Buddhism in the 16th and 17th centuries, and the related history of oppression and persecution of Christianity are featured in other studies and will not be included here, but are presupposed as an important background for the religious conflict after the opening of Japan.[1] Similarly, the role of Shinto is also beyond the scope of this paper.

Initial Conflict: Buddhist Preoccupation with Christianity

The initial contact between Buddhists and Christians after the forced re-opening of Japan in 1854 presented no basis for a peaceful encounter. From the Buddhist point of view, dialogue was impossible. Christianity was regarded as a fatal enemy and there was no room for concessions. From the Christian point of view, dialogue was superfluous. According to missionaries and Western observers, Buddhism posed no threat and there was no need for contact. The relationship was thus extremely unbalanced: a one-sided preoccupation with Christianity on the part of the Buddhists, characterized by exaggerated fear and suspicion; and an almost total neglect of Buddhism on the part of the Christians.

Buddhism in the mid-19th century had inherited the deep-rooted anti-Christian sentiment of the previous centuries. Buddhist communities opposed the opening of the country, and were particularly concerned about Christianity which they confronted with excessive fear. In a characteristic combination of slogans they combined "defense of the state" (*gokoku*) with "defense of Buddhism" (*goho*)

---

[1] This paper is based on research which was first presented as a doctoral thesis and published in limited number of issues, and later published as *Buddhism and Christianity in Japan: From Conflict to Dialogue, 1854–1899* (Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press, 1987). Apart from references to direct quotations from other sources, I refer to this study.

and "opposition to the pernicious religion" (*boja*). A characteristic example is the warning of the Buddhist priest Gessho in 1856:

> If the Land of the Gods is held by the barbarians and the (Christian) heresy prospers, how can we protect Buddhism from decay? [...] I am really afraid that the present trend will finally result in fraternization between the foreigners and the ignorant coastal population. [...] They will be led astray by the heresy and become a (rebellious) band of brutes. Hence, as for the urgent need of coastal defense, today nothing compares to resisting religion (Christianity) with religion (Buddhism).[2]

The anti-Christian sentiment was further stimulated by the fact that Japanese Buddhism was in a serious crisis in the mid-19th century. Among various aspects of this crisis historians often mention the inner corruption of the Buddhist priesthood; 200 years of government protection and control; intellectual trends of anti-Buddhist thought among both Confucian and Shinto scholars; and numerous waves of anti-Buddhist riots and attempts to eradicate Buddhism. According to Tsuji Zennosuke, by this time Buddhism had become entirely formalistic, alienated from the people, and almost paralyzed; "only because of inertia temples and priests barely managed to protect their social position."[3] Soon after the Meiji Restoration (1868) attempts were made to establish Shinto as a national religion at the cost of Buddhism.

In such a situation it is no wonder that Japanese Buddhists found no room for concessions. Buddhism was threatened from all sides, and the renewed encounter with a vigorous Christian church was seen as a possible deathblow. The most easily available method of defense was to appeal to the deep-rooted fear of the foreign faith as one of the first defense measures. Buddhists reprinted the old anti-Christian literature which had been used in the early Tokugawa period, both Chinese writings and pamphlets produced by Japanese propagators.

The old anti-Christian writings, however, had been produced in order to face a different political situation and a different Christian denomination (Roman Catholicism), and were in many ways inadequate. The need for renewed study of Christianity resulted in a fervent activity organized by several Buddhist head temples. Just as the government sent spies to keep the activities of the missionaries under surveillance, the Buddhist head temples dispatched priests disguised as religious seekers in order to control the advances of the missionaries. The

---

[2] Quoted from Kashiwabara Yusen and Fujii Manabu (eds.), *Kinsei Bykkyo no shiso*, Nihon shiso taikei, vol. 57 (Tokyo: Iwanami Shoten, 1973), p. 546.

[3] Tsuji Zennosuke, *Nihon Bukkyoshi*, vol. 9, *Kinseihen*, no. 4, reprint edition (Tokyo: Iwanami Shoten, 1970), pp.493–494.

spies made detailed reports about the activities of the missionaries, wrote summaries of their teachings, registered differences between various denominations, and even compiled lists of the books they found on their shelves. Some of the spies were even baptized in their attempt to conceal their intentions; some apparently converted to Christianity.

A further consequence of such apologetical work was the introduction of Christian studies and Western learning at the Buddhist seminaries. In order to oppose the attack of the evil religion, the Buddhist leadership had to study its teachings and activities.

The missionaries, for their part, were aware of the Buddhist activities and made their observations. Guido F. Verbeck, missionary from the Dutch Reformed Church in America, reported from Nagasaki:

> They (the Buddhist priests) are certainly a strange set of men, if my suspicions are founded; for they have bought whole boxes of Chinese Bibles and Christian books and tracts, and all, as they said, for the purpose of teaching their scholars. These books, perhaps gotten for bad purposes only, may yet turn out a blessing to many, quite contrary to the wicked intention.[4]

Apart from such observations, and in contrast to the Buddhists who engaged in fervent attacks on Christianity, the Christian communities showed no interest in Buddhism. Buddhism was generally regarded as so dated and corrupted that it was doomed to fade away. "The kingdom of Satan is already divided against itself," commented the American missionary O. H. Gulick. The people still favor Buddhism, the government favors Shintoism, "while many, at least not a few who are destined to be the leading minds, think that Christianity is better than either."[5]

It is appropriate to mention here that although the missionaries had their prejudices, including a quite triumphalistic understanding of the situation, their disregard of Buddhism was not based on a particular bias against Buddhism as such. It was rather a reflection of the predominant sentiment of Japanese intellectuals and politicians, who also tended to ignore or even despise Buddhism. In addition, other challenges seemed more relevant, such as Confucian philosophy with its ambivalent attitude to religion; and the increasing influence of what the missionaries called "Western infidelity," that is, religious indifference, atheism, materialism, and trends in philosophy and science. Compared to such challenges, Buddhism was not regarded as a serious rival.

---

[4] Quoted from William Elliot Griffis, *Verbeck of Japan: A Citizen of no Country* (New York: Fleming H. Revell Co., 1900), pp. 134–135.

[5] *The Missionary Herald* (July 1871), p. 207.

Mutual Concern and Mutual Study

Buddhist-Christian relations entered a new stage in the 1870s and 1880s. In 1873 the Japanese government ordered the removal of the notice boards proscribing Christianity and introduced a policy of tacit recognition of Christianity. The change initiated a period of increasing missionary activity. But, as Christianity gradually expanded beyond the narrow boundaries of the treaty ports, with evangelistic campaigns and "church planting" in the districts, the deep-rooted influence and power of Buddhism also became more obvious. One of the first missionaries to acknowledge the power of Buddhism, the American missionary D. C. Green, observed in the early 1870s that Buddhism had a "far stronger hold upon the people than the Sintooism [sic] which the rulers wish to uphold and strengthen," and that "whatever a Japanese may be while he lives, he is a Buddhist when he dies." Hence, he encouraged the study of Buddhism, for "our great fight in Japan, it becomes more and more clear every day, is to be with Buddhism ….[6]

What happened then, particularly in the 1880s, was the development of a mutual concern in the relationship. The apologetical concern was obvious, clearly motivated by the need for preparing oneself for effective propagation and defense. This antagonistic relationship, however, gradually led to more penetrating studies and direct acquaintance. Several missionaries were invited to lecture on Christianity in Buddhist seminaries, while Buddhist priests lectured or gave private instruction to Christian missionaries. In many cases, this resulted in the development of a courteous friendship between the antagonists.

A number of missionaries, and in turn also Japanese Christians, engaged in further Buddhist studies. In spite of quite arbitrary evaluations, one can discern among the Christians a growing admiration of the learning and personal integrity of the Buddhist scholars and leaders. The Congregational missionary, J. H. DeForest, who was active in Japan in the 1870s and 1880s, is a characteristic example of such a change in attitude. He began his career in Japan with successful campaigns against idol worship, denouncing and ridiculing "the evil of worshiping dried wood." Acquaintance with Buddhists, however, gradually convinced him that it was wrong to call the native religions "false" or to call the Japanese "heathen." Instead he regarded Buddhism and Confucianism as part of God's preparatory work, Buddha and Confucius being "the moral prophets to fit the East for Christ."[7]

As regards the Buddhists, the study of Christianity noted earlier continued, but gradually led to new insights. The leading head temples sent delegations to Europe

---

[6] Evarts Boutell Greene, *A New-Englander in Japan: Daniel Crosby Green* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin Co., 1927), p. 120.

and America in order to acquaint themselves with the spiritual base of Christianity. Everything was studied: philosophy, theology, the relationships between church and state, cultural trends, education, political systems, and, most importantly, the new science of religion. The Buddhist observers realized that Western Christianity was weakened by theological unrest and happily introduced the writings of critical theologians to Japan, such as, Ernest Renan's *Vie de Jesus* (The Life of Jesus, 1863). They also discovered that Christianity was threatened by anti-Christian trends in the intellectual world. They introduced, and in some cases even facilitated, the translation of literature they regarded as anti-Christian. It was argued that "science has laid the Christian religion captive at its feet," thanks to such noble men as Darwin, Huxley, Spencer, and Mill, who had "striven to shake off this horrible religion.[8]

Such aggressively apologetical attitudes were, on the other hand, balanced by a number of scholars who went beyond apologetics and apparently had a sympathetic understanding of the Christian faith. It is significant that the Buddhists referred to above belonged to the progressive parties of their respective sects. They were painfully aware of the crisis of Buddhism, and saw the Christian expansion as a real threat. But as zealous reformers they were also stimulated by the challenge from Christianity and believed that the situation would change as soon as their reforms were adopted. This combination of reform zeal and increasing confidence *vis-à-vis* Christianity contributed to more friendly attitudes and in various ways prepared the ground for open dialogue.

Dialogue and Cooperation

While the 1880s had been characterized by enthusiasm for the West, with waves of Westernization and a favorable climate for Christian expansion, the 1890s were characterized by a nationalistic reaction, strongly anti-Western and anti-Christian. It is no exaggeration to say that Buddhism rode on this nationalistic wave, making every effort to defame and stigmatize Christianity as anti-national, dangerous, and incompatible with national polity. Especially in the years from 1889 to 1893 the Buddhists engaged in fervent anti-Christian propaganda, including violent persecution and the destruction of church buildings in the districts. Christian work was systematically obstructed, and Christian families were ostracized. The opposition was so strong that even Buddhist observers sometimes pitied the Christians for their extreme hardships.

---

[7] Charlotte B. DeForest, *The Evolution of a Missionary: A Biography of John Hyde DeForest* (New York: Fleming H. Revell Co., 1914), pp. 230, 239, 244-245. See also Thelle, *op .cit.*, (note 1), pp. 62-66.

[8] From an anti-Christian tract by Hirai Kino, translated in *The Missionary Herald* (Sept. 1883), p. 353.

Given this background, it is significant to note that the 1890s for all its nationalistic and anti-Christian sentiments, were also the period during which the first peaceful encounter between Buddhists and Christians was prepared and reached a decisive breakthrough. The dynamics behind this development cannot be described sufficiently here, but a few elements should be noticed.

First, the Japanese Christians finally managed to convince their critics that it was possible to combine Christian faith and patriotism. Throughout the Meiji era Christians had claimed that their faith enabled them to serve the nation as true patriots, but conservative Japanese, including the Buddhist establishment, had consistently suspected their motives. Nothing proved their patriotism more eloquently than the Sino-Japanese War (1894-1895), when they finally were able to demonstrate in action what they had maintained all the time. With reference to the patriotic spirit of the Christian college, Doshisha, it was commented that,

> if there existed any real doubt of the entire compatibility of Christianity and patriotism, all semblance of ground for doubt had been swept away by the enthusiasm shown at every stage of the Chino-Japanese [sic] war.[9]

It is somewhat ironic that a war was necessary to prove that Christians were loyal citizens who could live in peace with fellow Japanese.

Second, along with the new emphasis on patriotism, the churches developed a theology which systematically advocated the need for the "Japanization" of church life and theology. Expressed in the words of representative church leader and theologian, Yokoi Tokio, Christians,

> should believe in Christianity as Japanese, study theology as Japanese, propagate Christianity as Japanese. [...] We should hold up Christianity with the right hand and stretch down the left hand to grasp the forty million (Japanese) brethren.[10]

Such a new emphasis on Japanese traditions—slightly anti-Western and anti-denominational, but also influenced by Western liberal theology—naturally led to renewed interest in Japanese indigenous traditions, including Buddhism.

On the part of the Buddhists, several reform movements advocated the need of a *new* Buddhism, *shin Bukkyo*. A reformed Buddhism had to be new in terms of a progressive grappling with social and political issues, and new in terms of a radical reformation of the formalistic and hierarchical *old* Buddhism. The concern for reform led to

---

[9] James H. Pettee, *A Chapter of Mission History of Modern Japan* (Okayama, n.d., ca. 1895), p. 99.

[10] *Rikugo zasshi*, no. 114 (June 1890), p. 5.

contact with Christian communities, which to a great extent provided models for practical reform, social work, missionary activity, and for the whole problem of coming to terms with modernity. The very concept of a *new* Buddhism confronting the *old* establishment, was actually borrowed directly from Christianity, where the Protestant Reformation in Japanese was understood as the conflict between the old religion (*kyukyo*) of Roman Catholicism versus the new religion (*shinkyo*) of the Reformation.

Among other factors that facilitated more formal contacts were the establishment of a chair of comparative religion at the Imperial University in 1889, an example soon followed by other places of learning, and the World's Parliament of Religions in Chicago in 1893. A number of Japanese Buddhists attended the parliament, and established contacts in the West. Furthermore, it provided the model for a similar Japanese small-scale parliament of religions in 1896, the so-called Buddhist-Christian conference.

The conference, convened in September 1896, was officially called the Conference of Religionists (Shukyosha Kondankai). Since most of the 42 representatives were Buddhists and Christians, however, it was generally referred to as a Buddhist-Christian encounter (*Butsu-Ya Ryokyo Kondankai*). The meeting was held in the villa of the Viscount Matsudaira in Tokyo, and was organized as a social gathering for the exchange of opinions. Critics denounced the meeting, or ignored it as a gathering of liberal Buddhists and Christians. Nevertheless, it was significant both as a friendly encounter of former enemies, and as a manifestation of a new relationship with symbolic meaning far beyond the actual event.

A Buddhist participant described the encounter in dramatic terms. Many of the leading figures of the religious communities were lined up on the tatami floor, facing each other in formal positions, the Christians on the left side, the Buddhists on the right. "The time had come when the former enemies were sitting side by side in the same hall."[11] The simple fact that people who for years had been involved in mutual struggle now for the first time met each other face to face seemed almost miraculous, and created a very peculiar atmosphere.

The meeting only lasted a few hours, but a number of leading Buddhists and Christians delivered their messages, advocating toleration, friendly relations, and even cooperation. Patriotic sentiment dominated the talks; all seemed to agree that religious leaders needed to join hands for the sake of the Emperor. Another dominant feature was the concern for social problems, but doctrinal issues were also discussed, and a number of speakers suggested ways to find common points or to build bridges of understanding.

Probably the phenomenon itself was more significant than the actual content of the talks. The very fact that earlier enemies met peacefully and enjoyed

[11] Hirota Ichijo in *Kirisutokyo to Bukkyo*, Fukyo shinjitsu, no. 2 (Kyoto: Hozokan, 1899), pp. 98-99.

each other's company was felt to be a unique sign of a new age. As a Christian journal commented, the conference signified that,

> the age of blind obedience and suppression has already passed, the age of gentlemen-like criticism and study is about to come. How can gentlemen who already once have talked cheerfully with each other in the same hall, and, moreover, had a photo taken together, once more start to abuse and slander each other?[12]

The Buddhist-Christian conference and the discussions in connection with it did not reach a sophisticated level of mutual understanding. It is, however, possible to discern themes of later dialogues, and even the basic models of the relationship between the two religions.

In the years 1898-1899 Buddhist communities again engaged in anti-Christian campaigns, this time in connection with opposition against the new legislation which would allow foreigners freely to reside in the interior of Japan, the so-called "mixed residence." But the anti-Christian agitation soon lost its momentum.

Developments in the 20th Century

I have elsewhere compared the development of relations between Christianity and Buddhism in the 1890s—particularly manifested in the Buddhist-Christian conference in 1896—to a railway junction, where lines from different directions come together and then spread out again in many directions.[13] It was a meeting point where earlier developments in Buddhist-Christian relations were brought together and made manifest, positively or negatively, and then developed further in various directions.

A rough sketch must suffice to indicate a few of these directions. For the sake of clarity and convenience, I will indicate three characteristic trends, well aware that the various types of relationships were often combined. These are (1) various types of dialogues at the official level between representatives of the establish religious communities, what one might call the "establishment dialogue"; (2) the dialogue between outsiders and reformers critical of the religious establishment, what one might call the "anti-establishment dialogue"; and (3) various types of spiritual search and encounter.

Establishment dialogue: I have already suggested that even though the first Buddhist-Christian conference in 1896 was planned and carried out by liberal Bud-

[12] *Rikugo zasshi*, no. 190 (October 1896), p. 492.

[13] Thelle, *op. cit.*, (note 1), p. 246.

dhists and Christians and criticized by conservatives, it expressed a concern that was rapidly gaining support also in conservative circles. The "establishment dialogue" represents the contact and cooperation that developed among influential leaders in the mainstream of the Buddhist and Christian establishments.

As already noted, it was nationalism, more than anything else, that broke down the barriers between Buddhists and Christians in the 1890s, enabling them to cooperate for the sake of patriotic purposes. As the Sino-Japanese War prepared the way for the recognition of Christian patriotism in the mid 1890s, the Russo-Japanese War (1904–1905) brought religious leaders together in a common effort to support the government and strengthen the unity of the Japanese people. A "Wartime Conference of Religionists" was convened in 1904, gathering more than a thousand Buddhists, Shintoists, and Christians, and justifying the war as a means to protect the security of the Japanese Empire and eternal peace of the Far East.

In the following years several other conferences and associations were organized, supported by the religious establishments and often by the government. The general aim of such conferences was to nurture the patriotic spirit, strengthen the power of religion, and to create a religious front against such "dangerous ideas" as socialism, Marxism, and anarchism.

Developments in the 1930s and during the war years were, of course, dominated by patriotic and Shinto indoctrination, and religious leaders had to adapt to the circumstances. Further research is necessary to elucidate the religious cooperation and the trend of patriotic Christianity in those years. In general, however, it can be said that the "establishment dialogue" failed to make religious leaders aware of the inherent dangers of identification with the patriotic spirit.

Anti-establishment dialogue: We have already registered that various Buddhist reform movements dissociated themselves from the Buddhist establishment. They denounced the Old Buddhism, and advocated a New Buddhism which could overcome the inherited formalism and inertia and thus face the challenges of modern society. These efforts brought Buddhist reformers into close contact with Christian groups, mainly liberal Christians, Unitarians, and Christians socialists. They were not only in conflict with their own religious establishments, but often critical of what they regarded as political opportunism of the "establishment dialogue" and its naive support of nationalistic policies.

A similar expression of anti-establishment contact was evinced in the years around 1930, when socially concerned Buddhists and Christians stimulated one another and engaged in various types of cooperation. The relationship between Buddhist socialism and social Christianity in those years needs further exploration, but there are interesting areas of ideological closeness. While the Christians anticipated the "establishment of the Kingdom of God," the Buddhists advocated the "establishment of the Buddha-Land," not as a state of mind, but as an actual social reality.

Compared to the "establishment dialogue," the contact between the small groups that were critical of established religion and nationalistic values may seem insignificant. Nevertheless, they stand for a trend that deserves due consideration, particularly because of their critical function in the predominantly conservative religious world of Japan. A vestige of such critical contact may perhaps be seen in recent efforts of religious groups to coordinate campaigns against the nationalization of the Yasukuni Shrine, and the attempts to oppose militarism and nationalism, race and sex discrimination.

Spiritual search and encounter: The above mentioned types of dialogue were certainly expressions of a spiritual encounter, but the term is here used in a narrower sense to characterize various types of contact resulting from a spiritual search at the individual level.

The most common expression of spiritual encounter might be characterized as spiritual pilgrimages. Numerous Japanese have experienced the attraction of both religions. Buddhists who were challenged by Christianity and converted to the new faith, discovered later that Buddhism was still part of their spiritual history, and somehow had to reconcile the two faiths. Or, perhaps more often, Buddhists who were attracted to Christianity without leaving their faith, somehow had to integrate Christian insights into their Buddhist understanding. A number of Christians went the other way, leaving the church and becoming Buddhists, but without abandoning their faith in Christ. Such spiritual pilgrims live in a constant dialogue with the other faith, their own hearts being the place of encounter. There are numerous such Buddhist-Christians or Christian-Buddhists in Japan. They are more or less committed to the traditional religious life in one tradition, but also show affection for the other tradition or include elements of its religious beliefs or practices. Such quiet spiritual search leading to a hyphenated religious life is perhaps the most characteristic expression of the Buddhist-Christian encounter in Japan.

Spiritual search has often been combined with the study of comparative religion. The two founders of comparative religion in Japan, Kishimoto Nobuta (1866-1928) and Anesaki Masaharu (1873-1949), were devoted to Christianity and Buddhism respectively. They were both engaged in the initial stage of interfaith encounter in the 1890s and regarded the study of religion as a vital part of their spiritual search. Of the numerous comparative studies which have been published in Japan, a surprising number deal with Buddhist-Christian studies. The quality varies a lot, but as a phenomenon they are symptoms of a spiritual climate and reveal how many Japanese feel the need of coming to terms with both religions.

The philosophical dialogue between Buddhist and Christians can be traced back to the initial contact, but did not reach any depth until Nishida Kitaro prepared the ground for a more penetrating search. The present dialogue would be inconceivable without the influence of Nishida and his disciples, who in various ways have dealt with such issues as theism and atheism, the personal and impersonal character of the

Ultimate (God), transcendence and immanence, the selfhood and selflessness of the human person. Such discussions took place in the 1930s, and are still vital issues in the dialogue both in Japan and in international forums of Buddhists and Christians.

Christian mission is often regarded as incompatible with the spirit of dialogue. It is, nevertheless, a fact that missionary and apologetical concerns have been among the decisive forces that brought Christians into direct contact and dialogue with Buddhists. Since the more systematic and serious study of Buddhism among Christians in Japan began in the 1880s, a number of missionaries have contributed to such studies, often in a paradoxical combination of missionary commitment, spiritual search, and admiration for Buddhist thought and experience. Such a commitment to dialogue and mission is characteristic of a number of Christian study centers, such as the above-mentioned NCC Center for the Study of Japanese Religions in Kyoto, where I was privileged to work for many years, and the Roman Catholic Nanzan Institute for Religion and Culture in Nagoya. The latter has in recent years contributed to a renewed international dialogue by publishing works of philosophers related to the Kyoto School of Philosophy and by organizing spiritual encounters between European and Japanese monks.

Conclusion

There are several enthusiasts who describe the Buddhist-Christian encounter as the most important event in the 20th century. Such an exaggeration is hardly warranted, but it can be understood as an expression of the excitement and joy of sharing with others in the search for truth. A similar excitement was also found among those who pioneered the dialogue in the 1890s, when the rapprochement was regarded as the beginning of a new age in religion. There is, however, no doubt that the encounter between Buddhists and Christians is important and will continue to play a vital role. An increasing number of Western theologians realize that Buddhism may become one of the most important factors in theological reflection in years to come. And not a few Buddhists have received strong impressions from their study of Christianity.

There are still a number of problems to be overcome. In the Japanese context the dialogue is still one-sidely concerned with Zen Buddhism, and to some extent Pure Land traditions, while, e.g., Esoteric Buddhism, Nichiren Buddhism, and other traditions have only been involved to a limited degree. The Buddhist participants are also characterized by a somewhat eclectic understanding of Christianity. With few exceptions, they have been exposed to one theological tradition or to a few modern theologians; they engage in a philosophical discussion entirely molded by Buddhist presuppositions; or they have a superficial understanding of Christianity based on random observations and readings. In spite of such limitations, there is no doubt that the encounter between the two religions will develop and perhaps contribute to a mutual transformation in the years to come.

Buddhist–Christian Relations in Sri Lanka

Eardley Mendis

Sri Lanka is an example of a country where great religions of the world flourish side by side. Although it is a predominantly Buddhist country, other religions—Hinduism, Islam, and Christianity—are also practiced by about 40 percent of the population. The ethnic composition characterizes the plurality of the Sri Lankan society: Sinhalese (70%); Tamils (20%); Muslims (9%), and some small ethnic groups such as Malays and Burghers rub shoulders with each other in almost all cities and even in some villages. This ethnic, religious, and cultural diversity makes Sri Lanka a perfect example of a pluralist society.

Buddhist Missions to Sri Lanka

The origins of Sinhalese society go back as far as the 5th century BCE.[1] During this time Sri Lankan people held popular religious beliefs and practices. In the 3rd century the Indian Emperor Asoka introduced Buddhism to Sri Lanka. For Tennakoon Vimalananda this is the most significant event in Sri Lankan history:

> Perhaps the most important event in the history of Buddhism in the country is the coming of Mahinda. The introduction of Buddhism to Ceylon is attributed to this son of Asoka, who brought the religion with him, when he came here about the middle of the 3rd century BC.[2]

Mahinda came to Sri Lanka accompanied by a few missionaries. Their first convert was the king of Sri Lanka, Devanampiyatissa. His conversion changed the course of Sri Lankan history. The successive kings were not only Buddhists themselves, but they took it upon themselves to protect, propagate, and espouse the cause of Buddhism. Several factors contributed to the remarkable success of

---

[1] François Houtart, *Religion and Ideology. Sri Lanka* (Bangalore: St. Paul Press, 1974), p. 35.

[2] Tennakoon Vimalananda, *Buddhism in Ceylon Under the Christian Powers* (Colombo: Y.M.B.A. Press, 1963), p. xvii.

Mahinda's mission and the unusually rapid spread of Buddhism on the island. Walpola Rahula summarizes some of these factors as follows:

> […] the royal patronage Buddhism received from the kings of Sri Lanka, the absence of any other religious and ethnic groups to oppose Buddhism, the new order and quality of life Buddhism offered to the people, and the example of the saintly monk, which was an inspiration both to the king and the peasant.[3]

Sri Lanka is the first country Buddhism was spread to outside the land of its birth. Since then there have been several, highly successful Buddhism missions to other Asian countries such as Thailand and Burma. Wherever the Buddhadhamma was spread, it assimilated into the local culture with an identity of its own. Once Buddhism was on foreign soil, it lost its Indian identity and became rooted in the local context. Thus it was no longer Indian Buddhism, but became Thai Buddhism, Burmese Buddhism, or Japanese Buddhism. That is the reason for some of the differences not only between Theravada and Mahayana Buddhism, but also within each tradition. Later, with the arrival of Sangamitta, Mahinda's sister, the order of bhikkhunis (nuns) was established. She also brought a branch of the sacred *bodhi* tree under which the Lord Buddha attained Buddhahood. To date Sri Lankan Buddhists venerate this tree with great piety and consider it the oldest tree in the world.

Buddhism as a State Religion

Asoka was the first emperor to adopt Buddhism as the state religion. This happened in India two centuries after the Buddha's death. In Sri Lanka Buddhism became the state religion from the day of its introduction to the island. From that day until the end of the Sinhala dynasty in the 19th century, only a Buddhist had the legitimate right to be the king of Sri Lanka. There was even a belief that the king should not only be a Buddhist, but also a Bodhisattva. Buddhism and Sri Lanka became inseparable.

The Sri Lankans call the island "the thrice blessed land," as a result of the Buddha's three visits to the island. The Buddha took a personal interest in Sri Lanka and assigned the god Sakka to protect the *Sasana*. Therefore, beginning with King Devanampiyatissa, all successive kings considered it their duty to work for the benefit of the Sasana. Up until the Portuguese captured the Maritime Provinces in 1505, all kings who ruled the country were Buddhists. Even the few Dravidian (South Indian Tamil) kings who ruled from time to time had to embrace Buddhism in order to rule the country.

---

[3] Walpola Rahula, *History of Buddhism in Ceylon* (M.D. Gunasena & Co. Ltd., 1956), p. 60.

According to the five precepts in Buddhism, killing is considered a sin. However, killing for the sake of protecting Sasana was not considered a breach. This is evident in the episode involving King Dutugemunu (CE 101–177) and King Elara. Dutugemunu, the hero-king of Sri Lankan Buddhists, who had to kill thousands of Tamils, including King Elara, has been exempted from any guilt or wrongdoing in his attempt to unify the country. The king was confronted with a moral dilemma and remorse as a result of this human massacre. But eight *arahants* (enlightened saints) comforted the king saying that he had killed only one and a half human beings. Among them one had embraced the Three Refuge formula (Buddha, Dhamma, and Sangha), and the other had observed the five percepts. The rest were "unbelievers and men of evil life."[4]

Historians consider the Dutugemunu—Elara episode as the beginning of Buddhist nationalism that has manifested itself today in the Sinhala—Tamil conflict. It has given Sinhala Buddhists a sense of superiority. Such episodes and events in the island's history have led to the popular assumption that Sri Lanka is the land of the Buddhists, and all other religious and ethnic minorities are aliens on the native soil.

During the Portuguese, Dutch and British rule, which lasted for about 450 years, the Buddhist establishment ceased to receive benefits and privileges it used to get from the Sinhalese kings. The Portuguese were so persuasive that the king of the Kotte kingdom, King Dharmapala, was converted to Roman Catholicism in 1557. Dharmapala was so faithful to the Christian faith that he granted the revenues of the Buddhist temples to the churches and gave lands to the newly established Christian colleges.[5] He got the Portuguese to silence the Bhikkhus who roused the population against him. The Buddhists were stunned when Dharmapala hanged 30 Buddhist monks who revolted against favors granted to the Portuguese. The king's actions kindled hatred and anger among the Buddhists. Some preferred death rather than obeying a king who was no longer a Buddhist.

Therefore when the Sinhala-Buddhist agitations were staged in the latter half of the 19th century, one demand was to restore Buddhism to its prestigious position. Even in the post-independent Sri Lanka, the political opinion was shaped more by Sinhala-Buddhist sentiments than economic and social concerns. The Buddhist monks have returned to the political arena and even actively participate in election campaigns. In the first and second parliamentary elections every effort was made to defeat Christian candidates in Sinhala-Buddhist areas. As a result, only a few Christians were elected to the legislature. Religion and race played a prominent role in casting one's vote. About the resurgent Buddhist countries,

[4] (*Mahavamsa* [the Sinhala Chronicle], chapter 25, verses101-111.

[5] Houtart, *op. cit.*, (note 1), p. 142.

David L. Edwards says, "To be patriotic in Burma or Sri Lanka meant, it was often said or shouted, being Buddhist…"[6] Some Christians who knew their religion was an obstacle to climbing the political ladder embraced Buddhism without hesitation. Thus Sri Lanka had a prime minister and a president both of whom had, at one time, been baptized Anglicans. However, for the average Buddhist, this shift of having Buddhists as rulers is a restoration of the ancient tradition, rectifying a custom long lost during the colonial period. The constitution of 1971 has several articles pertaining to the restoration of Buddhism: "In the Republic of Sri Lanka, Buddhism, the religion of the majority people, shall be given its rightful place, and accordingly, it shall be the duty of the state to protect and foster Buddhism."[7]

Buddhism under Christian Powers

The fabric of the Sri Lankan Buddhist society began to disintegrate with the advent of foreign rulers. When the Portuguese and the Dutch captured Sri Lanka, religious conflicts were at their height in Europe. While the Dutch did boast of reformation in their Calvinistic heritage, the Portuguese could boast of counter-reformation. For them, "*conquista temporal*" was the preliminary sign of the ultimate goal, "*conquista espiritual*," with the intention of converting heathen Sri Lankans to Christianity. Both the Portuguese and the Dutch carried out a vigorous campaigns of proselytism The Buddhist establishment became the target of much persecution and harassment, Buddhist temples were systematically destroyed and public devotions and worship of Buddhists brought under strict scrutiny.

Neither the Portuguese nor the Dutch were able to capture the Kandyan kingdom in the central hills of Sri Lanka. The existence of this kingdom was a challenge to the colonial rulers. It reminded them of the fact that an independent, sovereign Sinhala Buddhist kingdom was in their vicinity. Though most Kandyan kings were Tamil Hindus, they remained faithful to Buddhism as protectors of the "Sasana." The Kandyan kingdom was a refuge not only for the Buddhists, but also for the Catholic clergy and laity who were severely persecuted by the Dutch. Of the state of other religions during the Portuguese and Dutch periods, Kitsiri Malalgoda says:

> Thus, under the Portuguese, Catholicism became the established religion of the maritime provinces, to the exclusion of Buddhism, Hinduism and Islam. And under the Dutch, who succeeded the Portuguese to political power, reformed (Calvinis-

[6] David L. Edwards, *The Future of Christianity* (London: Hodder and Stoughton, 1987), p. 227.

[7] Constitution of Sri Lanka.

> tic) Christianity became the established religion to the exclusion of all else, including Catholicism.[8]

Dutch Christianity failed to take root in the Sri Lankan soil in spite of the severe persecution of the Catholic believers. The harboring of Catholic priests or believers was declared an offense punishable with death. But, in spite of such repression Catholic missions had a more remarkable success than the Protestant missions. It may be partly due to

> the outward similarity of the rich ceremonialism that characterized Catholicism in common with the religious systems that it tried to overthrow. Some Catholic missionaries themselves recognized this similarity and to some extent derived confidence and encouragement from it.[9]

In his *The Life of Father Jacome Goncalvez*, S. G. Perera writes about a debate that took place between Nanclars de La Nerolle, a Frenchman, and Fr. Goncalvez, a Catholic priest, before the Kandyan King, Sri Vira Parakrama Narendrasimha (1707–1739).[10] The attacks of the Calvinist Nanclars particularly on the Catholic practice of image worship was ably refuted by Fr. Goncalvez with Scripture references, much to the amazement of the king and the Buddhist onlookers, who were highly impressed. Thus, the Sinhala-Buddhist Kandyan kingdom became a safe haven for the Roman Catholic clergy to live and work and also to minister secretly to the Catholics who lived in the Dutch territory.

However, by the middle of the 18th century, there was some opposition to the Catholic presence in the Kandyan kingdom. Certain Buddhist leaders resented the support and protection granted to the Roman Catholic Church by the royal court. To make matters worse, some Catholic writers provoked the Buddhist masses with anti-Buddhist polemical writings. Due to increasing Buddhist opposition, King Vijaya Rajasimha (1739–1747) expelled Catholic priests from the Kandyan kingdom. However, this did not affect the Catholic mission work seriously. By this time Catholics were fairly well organized, and even the Dutch government had granted relative freedom to Catholic priests to minister to their flock. The Catholics were no longer considered a threat to the security and stability of Dutch rule.

---

[8] Kitsiri Malalgoda, *Buddhism in Sinhalese Society, 1750–1900* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1976), p. 29.

[9] *Ibid.*, p. 33.

[10] S. G. Perera, *The Life of Father Jacome Goncalvez* (Madura, 1942), pp. 50–55.

It was during the British period (1796-1948) that vast changes took place in the social, political, and religious spheres. An agrarian rural economy was gradually turned into an urban commercial economy. As a result of administrative changes, Sri Lanka was made a crown colony, ending the authority of the British East India Company. The missionary societies found it easier to work under the new administration. Tennakoon says that "by 1830 the Christian church had become sufficiently organized and established in Sri Lanka."[11] Although the British did not interfere with the Buddhist establishment, the clear separation between state and religion became a sore point for the average Buddhist.

Christian missionaries from different missionary societies began to arrive in 1800: London Missionary Society in 1805, Baptists in 1812, Wesleyans in 1814, Anglicans in 1818, and a group of Congregationalist and Presbyterian missionaries sponsored by the American Board of Commissioners for Foreign Missions in 1816. The Christian faith was propagated primarily through education and the societies demanded that education be left exclusively in the hands of the missionaries without any interference from the state.

The educational standard in the schools and colleges established by missionaries was far superior to the education imparted in a Buddhist monastic setting under the tutelage of monks. English education became extremely popular among the élite giving them an opportunity to obtain better jobs which made upward mobility quick and easy. Education became the medium with which to undermine Buddhist society, which the missionaries perceived as evil and superstitious. Thus attempts were made to convert the educated masses to Christianity, which the missionaries thought was the true religion.

However, Buddhists did not take these attempts seriously and they showed their traditional tolerance. Although the Buddhists were more organized and stronger now than during the Portuguese and Dutch periods, there was hardly any opposition to preaching and conversions. Tennent describes the Buddhist attitude as follows:

> Active hostility can scarcely be said to be manifested either by the Buddhists or their priesthood; and although more energetic exertions have been recently made by the latter, in the erection of banamadus, the holding of pinkamas, and ceremonies, the efforts have been directed less to the discouragement of Christian religion than to the extension of their own.[12]

---

[11] Vimalananda, *op. cit.*, (note 2), p. lxviii.

[12] James Emerson Tennent, *Christianity in Ceylon: Its Introduction and Progress under the Portuguese, the Dutch, the British and American Missions with an Historical Sketch of the Brahminical and Buddhist Superstitions* (London, 1850), pp. 320-321.

Even Christian missionaries have praised Buddhist courteousness. Often monks have extended hospitality and accommodation in their temples to itinerant missionaries and allowed the use of the temple *banamaduwa* (preaching hall) for gospel proclamation. But the monks were puzzled by the hard-heartedness of Christian missionaries whenever the monks requested the use of a school hall! The missionaries turned down such requests by stating that Christians cannot share with the heathen. Scholarly monks such as Karatota Dhammarama and Bovala Dhammananda were so open towards the missionaries that they assisted in translating the Bible into Sinhalese. Contrary to the Brahmins in India who shunned any contact with Europeans, Buddhist monks freely associated with the Europeans as long as they were treated with due respect.

Buddhist Reaction to Missionary Intolerance

As stated earlier, in spite of Buddhist tolerance and understanding the missionaries provoked the Buddhist community with their anti-Buddhist writings and preaching. It was unfortunate that missionaries resisted the goodwill and tolerance, and were bent on engaging the Buddhists in a polemical debate to prove the truthfulness of Christianity and the absurdity of Buddhism. In the 1820s Buddhists began to protest by sending petitions to the government. According to Malalgoda, these protests were partly due to the Buddhists' concern for their religion as the religion of their ancestors, and the hurtful feelings created as a result of missionary writings against Buddhism. The Buddhists requested the government to withdraw the pamphlets and assured that Buddhists would never resort to such writings to hurt the people of another faith. But the government failed to take satisfactory measures to curb such writings.

Without any support from the government, the Buddhists felt the need to protect their religion and to counter the attacks of Christian missionaries. For the first time Buddhists also used the printing press to answer the missionaries' accusations. Several books came from the press extolling Buddhist teaching and undermining the Christian faith.

The Buddhist response did not stop with anti-Christian literature. The next step involved verbal debates between representatives of the two faiths. The first such debate took place on February 8, 1865, in Baddegama, a pioneer mission field of the Anglican Church. Several leading monks from all fraternities and over 2000 laymen were present on the Buddhist side, but only about 60 clergy and laity were present on the Christian side.[13] Subsequently several debates took place, the most famous one being the "Panadura Vadaya" (Panadura debate), which took

[13] Malalgoda, *op. cit.*, (note 8), p. 224.

place on August 26 and 28, 1873. The Christian debaters were no match for the Buddhist debaters with their high proficiency in Sinhala and oratory skills.

Preaching, the printing press, and education were the three chief missionary tools used during the British period. While the Buddhists were able to counter the first two successfully, they were far behind with regard to education. The Buddhist monastic education did not cater for the ambitious Sinhala élite, who longed for upward social mobility. The first non-monastic Buddhist school was established in 1869 at Dodanduwa, by a monk named Dodanduwe Piyaratana. By this time the British government was no longer opposed to such a move by the Buddhists, but the Buddhists lacked resources and competent people, especially to teach English. On the other hand the monks were not very enthusiastic about laity engaging in education as they saw it as a threat to their monopoly in the field of education. The first monastic school to qualify for a government grant was Vidyodaya Pirivena started by Hikkaduwe Sumangala Thera (1827–1911). This institution was later granted university status.

Active participation of the laity in promoting Buddhist education began with the formation of the Buddhist Theosophical Society. Under the leadership of two theosophists, Colonel Henry Steel Olcott, an American national, and Madame Helena Petrovna Blavatsky, the Buddhist Theosophical Society launched a vigorous campaign to attack Christian missionaries and the education system and life-style they were supposed to have promoted. Several prominent Buddhist monks joined the Buddhist Theosophical Society. Among them was Migettuwatte Gunananda, a fiery orator, pamphleteer, and fighter who led the challenge to Christianity and missionaries.[14] They worked with two motives in mind.

- The establishment of Buddhist schools to counter the monopoly that the Protestant missions and the Roman Catholic Church had over the educational system. All schools were managed by Christian missions with the help of government funds. Western values and Christian faith were imparted in these schools. There were few schools for the privileged, where the medium of instruction was only English. The purpose of this scheme was to recruit an English educated élite to run the administrative system. The members of the Theosophical Society who were critical of missionary education undertook an aggressive campaign to prevail upon Buddhist parents to withdraw their children from missionary schools.

- The Temperance Movement was the other motive. Christians and Westerners in general were accused of introducing alcoholic beverages to the people.

---

[14] Stanley Jeyaraja Tambiah, *Buddhism Betrayed? Religion, Politics and Violence in Sri Lanka* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1992), p. 6.

> One precept of *panchasila* is the abstinence from alcoholic beverages. Island-wide campaigns were conducted to educate people to refrain from consuming alcohol.

Dharmapala, a member of the Theosophical Society and the founder of the Mahabodhi Society, wrote in the *Mahabodhi Journal*:

> This bright, beautiful island was made into a paradise by the Aryan Sinhalese before its destruction was brought about by the barbaric vandals from the West. […] Christianity and polytheism are responsible for the vulgar practices of killing animals, stealing, lying, prostitution, licentiousness and drunkenness. […] This ancient, historic, refined people under the diabolism of vicious paganism introduced by the British administrators are now declining and slowly dying away. The bureaucratic administrators […] have cut down primeval forests to plant tea; have introduced opium, ganja, whisky and arrack and other alcoholic poisons; have opened saloons and drinking taverns in every village; have killed industries and made the people indolent.[15]

However, the Temperance Movement was another attempt to sling mud at the Christian community and brand them as alcoholics. The irony is that several prominent Buddhists who were arrack renters supported monks and temples lavishly with the income from arrack and other alcoholic beverages. Even today the biggest income to government coffers comes from the tobacco industry and the excise tax. About Dharmapala's Buddhist activities Tambiah says:

> It is most relevant to note that Dharmapala's brand of Sinhala Buddhist revivalism and nationalism was supported by and served the interests of a rising Sinhala Buddhist middle class and a circle of businessmen and that some of these latter were implicated in the anti-Muslim riots of 1915 directed against their competitors—Muslim shopkeepers and businessmen.[16]

The first riots that took place against a minority group were mainly due to the economic and social interests of the Buddhist leaders. They resented the privileges held by Christians and other ethnic minorities. Therefore, this emotional revivalist movement spear-headed by Dharmapala and others, resulted in the first violent communal riots in Sri Lanka's modern history—the riot between Buddhists and

---

[15] Committee for Rational Development (ed.), *Sri Lanka, The Ethnic Conflict: Myths, Realities and Perspectives* (New Delhi: Narvang), p. 121.

[16] Tambiah, *op. cit.*, (note 14), p. 7.

Catholics in Kotahena, Colombo in April, 1883. In the course of this riot several people died and many were injured. Again, in June, 1903, there was anti-Christian rioting in Anuradhapura, in connection with the Buddhist Poson festivities. At various times in history these anti-Christian feelings have surfaced in order to gain a greater share in the power and privileges of colonial society enjoyed by Christians. Dharmapala was not only an anti-Christian activist, he also spoke vehemently against the Muslims and Tamils in Sri Lanka. He condemned them as foreigners and aliens who exploit the *bhumiputhra* (sons of the soil). Such rhetoric against the Muslim community resulted in an anti-Muslim riot in 1915, which was ruthlessly suppressed by the British Raj. Several Buddhist leaders were arrested and Dharmapala left for India to continue the restoration work of Buddha Gaya. As a result of the riots, the Buddhist revival movement faced a temporary setback. The English-educated, westernized Sinhala élite felt that they were humiliated. Instead of confrontation they began to collaborate with the British; instead of going alone as Sinhala Buddhists, a few Tamil and Christian leaders were also included in the independent movement. Although Sri Lanka became independent in 1948, nothing significant happened in the religious or political spheres until 1956.

Betrayal of Buddhism: The Report of the Buddhist Committee of Enquiry

The feelings of betrayal and discrimination during the colonial period continued to lurk in the minds of the Buddhist masses. Their uneasiness and agitation over the status of Buddhism finally led to the appointment of a high ranking committee consisting of both sangha and laity. This committee was set up in 1954 as a result of a resolution passed at the annual general meeting of the All Ceylon Buddhist Congress in 1953. Its report was published in 1956 under the title, *Betrayal of Buddhism.*

The report traces the gradual decline of Buddhism beginning with the Portuguese and culminating during the British period and compares the status of Christianity in Sri Lanka particularly during the British period (1796–1948) and immediately after independence, as well as the status of the Buddhist sangha.

The report highlights the privileges enjoyed by the Christian missions and their highly effective organizational structure. The Christian missions had been given a free hand in proselytizing through mission schools, with the necessary monetary and administrative backing from the British government. On the contrary, the Buddhist sangha was fragmented and suffered many limitations. Tambiah summarizes the two basic remedies submitted in the report:[17]

[17] *Ibid.*, pp. 34-37.

1. Creation of a "Buddha Sasana Council." The demand was to "create and incorporate Buddha Sasana Council to which may be entrusted all the prerogatives of the Buddhist kings as regards the Buddhist religion." The purpose was to bring the state and the sangha together as it was in the time of Sinhalese kings when they even regulated the religion and purified it (*sasanavisodhana*) from time to time. The proposed council would be composed of prominent members of the sangha and laity. This centralized authority would prevent the disintegration of Buddhism in the face of competition from hostile Christian missions. The report demanded a yearly compensation for the confiscated properties belonging to the sangha, which would be utilized to conduct educational activities. Furthermore, the government should appoint a minister for religious affairs who would act to rehabilitate the religions which had suffered under colonial rule.

2. Withdrawing privileges to Christian mission schools. The report also suggested that grants to Christian mission schools should be terminated and all schools should be taken over and brought under a national educational system. The report was very critical of the mission schools and condemned their activities. It further mentioned that Buddhist children found it extremely difficult to obtain admission to mission schools and if admitted were exposed to proselytization.

The Social Revolution of 1956 and Its Aftermath

Sri Lanka achieved independence in 1948. However, it was only in 1956 that major political, social, and religious changes began to take place. The political party ruling since 1948 was defeated in 1956. The party was accused of continuing the colonial heritage in an independent nation. The new party, the People's United Front (Mahajana Eksath Peramuna) that came into power, put forward a manifesto to work with the help of the "five powers,"(*pancha maha balavegaya*), that is, sangha (Buddhist monks), *veda* (native physicians), *guru* (vernacular teachers), *govi* (farmers), and *kamkaru* (workers). Among the five forces the monks were the most powerful. The monks were actively involved in the election campaign. Some of the election promises were made to please the Buddhist masses. Among them were the declaration of Buddhism as the state religion; Sinhalese as the official language; restoration of Buddhist places of worship; the celebration of *Buddha Jayanti* (the 2,500 year anniversary of Buddha's birth) with due grandeur; and the establishment of a ministry of cultural affairs to revitalize the Sinhala-Buddhist cultural heritage.

Buddhism in the 1960s

In the 1960s, Buddhism assumed a bigger role in the religious, social, and political affairs of Sri Lanka. Buddhist religious fundamentalism became visible. According to Tambiah,

> […] the energies of Sinhala Buddhist nationalism were translated into concrete policies and programs of language, education, employment, peasant resettlement, territorial control of the island and so on. […]This period represents a shift from "religiousness" to "religious mindedness," from religion as moral practice to religion as cultural and political possession.[18]

The political Buddhist monks were divided along party lines and canvassed for the two major parties, that is, the United National Party and the Sri Lanka Freedom Party. Most demands and aspirations of the Buddhists were fulfilled during this time. The two prominent *pirivenas* (schools attached to the temple) were granted university status. The schools managed by Christian denominations were taken over by the government. Although a few schools were permitted to function as denominational schools, government grants were completely withdrawn. The universal Sunday holiday was scrapped and the Buddhist sacred day (*poya day*) was declared the weekly holiday. Buddhist employees were encouraged to form Buddhist associations in government offices and public corporations. Christian employees were often branded as anti-national. In many ways this period saw the fulfillment of nationalistic Buddhist aspirations and the restoration of many rights and privileges lost during the colonial era.

In this atmosphere any meaningful dialogue between Christians and Buddhists proved to be a distant dream. Both on the part of Christians and Buddhists there was a hardening of hearts. The politicization of Buddhism led the Christians to mistrust Buddhist motives. Similarly the Christians' impartiality regarding the ethnic issue as well as the fundamental evangelicalism of certain Christian groups led to the Buddhists mistrusting Christians.

Towards Dialogue and Inter-Religious Corporation

Nevertheless, the religious climate was not without hope. The coming together of a handful of Buddhists and Christians for dialogue, conversation, and joint

[18] *Ibid.*

action was a sign of hope. In Sri Lanka, as in most countries, the first steps towards Buddhist-Christian dialogue were taken by Christians. This became necessary at a time when the island was going through a period of transformation due to the social, religious, and cultural aspirations of the people. In order to make a credible presence it became necessary for the Christian community to find a national identity. Undoubtedly this had to be found in the Buddhist culture. With this in view, several international and national consultations were held in Sri Lanka, involving Buddhists and Christians. Some Sri Lankan Buddhists were given an exposure to the initiatives in the rest of the world by inviting them to gatherings organized primarily by the World Council of Churches (WCC) and the Christian Conference of Asia (CCA).

As a pioneer in the field of Buddhist-Christian dialogue, the Rev. Dr. Lynn de Silva made an outstanding contribution. For him, the Ecumenical Institute for Study and Dialogue was a dream come true. The institute functions as a meeting place for those engaged in dialogue. One of its scholarly journals, *The Dialogue*, has a wide circulation around the world and contains articles by eminent scholars in the field. De Silva's unique contribution to the Buddhist-Christian dialogue was expounding Buddha's teaching on *Tilakkana*, that is, *anicca*, *dukkha* and *anatta* (impermanence, suffering, non-self) as a conceptual framework to explain the biblical view of the human being in relation to *Tilakkana*. Expounding this concept he came up with an *anatta-pneuma* concept, which has led Christians to a more scriptural anthropology and the Buddhists to feel the inadequacy of an anthropocentric soteriology in the face of *anatta*. He is the author of several books that critically examine important Buddhist-Christian teachings. De Silva was of the opinion that for a true Asian theology, adherents of different faiths need to be open to the deepest religious convictions of others.

The Jesuit priest, Fr. Aloysius Peiris is one of Asia's finest theologians today. Writing from a religio-cultural perspective, he stresses the importance of undergoing the double baptism: Jordan of Asian religion and the Calvary of Asian poverty. Fr. Cyril Anthony, another Roman Catholic priest, engaged in a controversial encounter when he was a parish priest in a small town called Seeuwa. He established a cordial relationship with Buddhist monks in the local temples. On special occasions, the Buddhist monks and Fr. Cyril exchanged pulpits to the surprise of many. This sharing of pulpits gave the two faith communities an opportunity to understand each other in a profound manner.

Two organizations that have promoted Buddhist-Christian relations at a deeper level are the Christian Worker's Fellowship (CWF) and the All Ceylon Peasant Movement (ACPM). In Asia, where Christians are a tiny minority, a Christian existence apart from their neighbors of other faiths does not make any sense. As Stanley Samartha says, the word ecumenical in its true sense should include

not just Christians, but neighbors of other faiths as well in God's *oikoumene*.[19] In this sense the CWF has been a truly ecumenical organization. It is primarily a worker's movement, working among people of different ethnic and religious backgrounds. Through full-time workers and volunteers, it is trying to organize working class people at their places of work, and encourage trade union participation. The annual May Day service arranged by the CWF is a sign of solidarity with the working class and is celebrated by a group of clergy from different denominations, including Roman Catholics. All participants, including Buddhists, are invited to share in the Eucharist. The ACPM is active mainly among farmers, rural workers, and small landowners. It is a movement led by Buddhist and Christian clergy. As a movement present among the people, it organizes them to protest against land grabs by multi-nationals and other vested interests, both local and foreign. One of its ardent supporters, Fr. Michael Rodrigo OMI was gunned down while he was saying mass in an area where ACPM was staging an agitation against a land grab for a sugar project.

A unique Buddhist-Christian cooperation was displayed in June 1980, when over 100,000 government and semi-government workers went on strike, demanding a reasonable wage increase. The government responded to this humanitarian demand in an inhuman way by laying off all strikers. With a complete deadlock, the workers became desperate when they saw no prospects for settlement. Several workers who had no other source of income to support their families committed suicide. From the beginning of the strike, several Buddhist and Christian clergy, including the late Bishop Lakshman Wickeremesinghe, organized the strikers in different regions to sustain solidarity and provide relief. In the southern region, *Galu Purawesi Peramuna* (Galle Citizen's Front) was very active. On one occasion the police dispersed a rally organized in support of the strikers, by using tear-gas and batons. Several participants were injured, including some clergy. Undeterred by police presence, the demonstrators proceeded to the local Anglican church (All Saint's Church) and continued the meeting, while the police and the members of the armed forces stood around the church. A large number of Buddhist monks, a few Christian clergy, and about 300 strikers were present. It was an historic moment for Christian-Buddhist relations in Sri Lanka.

In a pluralistic society such as Sri Lanka, this kind of interfaith cooperation is necessary for harmony and the well-being of the people. No one religion has answers to all questions and no one religion is capable of solving all problems. Nevertheless, as we have seen above, much can be achieved together. In Sri Lanka there are at least three areas in which such cooperation is urgently needed:

[19] S. J. Samartha, *One Christ—Many Religions: Toward a Revised Christology* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1991), p. xi.

First: the promotion of inter-racial harmony. For the last ten years Sri Lanka has been caught up in a bloody ethnic war bringing much destruction to the country and claiming over 75,000 lives. All negotiations to reach a solution have been proved futile. Therefore it is vital for Buddhists and Christians to get together to find a solution to this vexed problem. While all Buddhists belong to the Sinhalese community, there are both Sinhalese and Tamils among Christians. Therefore the church is in a privileged position to address this issue. The leaders of the two religions should prevail on the political leaders, the rebels, and the armed forces to come to a mutual settlement. As all other efforts to find a solution have failed, the ethnic conflict needs to be approached with Buddhist non-violence and Christian love.

Second: serving and settling the refugees from Asia. The majority of Asian refugees are from predominantly Buddhist countries such as Sri Lanka, Cambodia, Vietnam, Laos, and Burma. It is estimated that there are nearly half a million Sri Lankan refugees both within and outside the country. It is essential that Buddhist and Christians cooperate to diffuse tensions and bring about peace and harmony among people.

Third: education on the economic, social and cultural impact of tourism. Buddhist countries such as Sri Lanka, Thailand, Nepal, and Tibet have some of the most popular tourist resorts in Asia, with the majority of tourists coming from the so-called Western Christian countries. Nudism, promiscuity, male and female prostitution, husbands selling their wives, parents selling their children, and rapid increase of narcotraffic cause irreparable damage to Asian society. It is estimated that over one million women and children are sold, auctioned off, or lured into slavery each year. A genuine effort by the Buddhist and Christian communities is essential to stop this human destruction. Thus Buddhists and Christians, working together in solidarity, will usher in a new era of peace, harmony, and prosperity for the people in Sri Lanka.

Meetings of Christians with Buddhists in the Western World in Historical Perspective

Theodore M. Ludwig

There is a long history of Western contact with Buddhists, going back to a century and a half after the Buddha's death with Alexander's invasion of India, and including some intriguing hints of early Christian contact with Buddhism. Yet, general knowledge about Buddhists and interest in Buddhism on the part of Westerners is actually a very recent phenomenon. Even among Western scholars, accurate knowledge and understanding of Buddhism has developed only in the last two centuries, and Christian theologians have generally been well behind linguists and historians in their contact with Buddhists and their knowledge and appreciation of this major religion of Asian peoples. Needless to say, by and large churches, congregations, and laypeople of the Western Christian world have until very recently thought of Buddhists, together with other Asian and indigenous religious groups, as heathen, belonging to a religion that is to be overcome and extinguished rather than understood and respected.

In the last century there has been a rapid increase both in the numbers of Asian Buddhists present in the Western world and in the numbers of Westerners who have become interested and attracted to the Buddhist path. Many Christian congregations, and Christian people generally, are caught in the midst of a complicated situation with respect to Buddhists. On the one hand, they come into daily contact with Buddhists (both Asian Buddhists and Euro-American Buddhists) in the workplace, in schools, in civic and social contexts. On the other hand, their understanding of Buddhism as a religion is very slim, and their attitudes are still largely shaped by perceptions of a heathen religion with which they should have nothing to do.

History of Contact with Buddhists in the Western World

Early contacts between Buddhists and the Western/Christian world

It seems likely that there must have been meetings and exchanges between people of the Mediterranean world and Buddhists in Hellenistic and Roman times, yet textual evidence for that is scanty and ambiguous. The first obvious contact

came a century and a half after the Buddha's death, with Alexander's raid on India in 327-325 BCE. This penetration into India ended on the west bank of the Hyphasis (Beas) river when Alexander's commanders refused to march further east, so his troops were still several hundred miles from the center of Magadhan rule with its growing Buddhist influence. Reports from this raid, preserved only fragmentarily in much later works, mention certain wise men of India without any specific information about Buddhism. Then, about 291 BCE, Megasthenes, ambassador of Seleucus Nikator (heir to the easternmost portion of Alexander's empire) to the court of Candragupta Moriya (usurper to the Magadhan domains and founder of the first all-India empire), in his memoirs mentions two types of Indian ascetics, *pramanikas* (brahmans) and *samanas*, apparently *sramanas* or ascetic monks. But the memoirs are only fragmentarily preserved, and the precise identity of these monks is ambiguous.[1]

King Ashoka recorded that he sent Dharma envoys in 255 and 256 BCE to the Greek rulers of Syria, Egypt, Macedonia, Cyrene, and Epyrus, though no Western records remain of these contacts. No doubt the Greeks remaining in the east established a Greco-Buddhist civilization, as suggested in the *Milinda-panha* (a dialogue between the Buddhist monk Nagasena and the Greek ruler Menander, ca. 155-130 BCE), and commerce and information flowed between India and the Mediterranean world. Some scholars have speculated that the New Testament was influenced by Buddhism, and there is probably more likelihood of Buddhism's influence on the Gnostic movements and on Manichaeanism in particular.[2]

Yet again textual evidence of the encounter between Buddhists and the Mediterranean world is extremely scanty. It may therefore be valuable to quote in context one of the only references to Buddhism by an early Christian author, Clement of Alexandria, in his *Stromata* (i.15):

> Thus philosophy, a thing of the highest utility, flourished in antiquity among the barbarians, shedding its light over the nations. And afterwards it came to Greece. First in its ranks were the prophets of the Egyptians; and the Chaldeans among the Assyrians;

---

[1] Henri de Lubac, *La rencontre du bouddhisme et de l'Occident* (Paris: Aubier Editions Montaigne, 1952), p. 11. De Lucac's book is the standard study of Western knowledge of Buddhism, from classical times to the early 20th century. For a history of the encounter of Buddhism and Christianity especially in the last 150 years, based on a social and theological analysis of cross-cultural exchange, see L. Michael von Brück / Whalen Lai, *Buddhismus und Christentum: Geschichte*, *Konfrontation*, *Dialog* (Munich: C.H. Beck Publishers, 1997).

[2] De Lubac, *op. cit.*, (note 1), p. 23; and Hans Jonas, *The Gnostic Religion* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1958), pp. 206–237.

> and the Druids among the Gauls; and the Samanaeans among the Bactrians; and the philosophers of the Celts; and the Magi of the Persians who foretold the Saviour's birth, and came into the land of Judaea guided by a star. The Indian gymnosophists are also in the number, and the other barbarian philosophers. And of these there are two classes some of them called Sarmanae, and others Brahmins. And those of the Sarmanae who are called Hylobii neither inhabit cities, nor have roofs over them, but are clothed in the bark of trees, feed on nuts, and drink water in their hands. Like those called Encratites in the present day, they know not marriage nor begetting children. Some, too, of the Indians obey the precepts of Buddha (*Boutta*); whom, on account of his extraordinary sanctity, they have raised to divine honors.[3]

Interestingly, the story of the Buddha's life became the basis for the biographies of two Christian saints, Barlaam and Josaphat.[4] And there were many contacts of Christians with Buddhists along the Silk Route, as Central Asian Turkish tribes were sometimes involved with Manichaean, Christian (Nestorian), and Buddhist influences.[5]

So there must have been various encounters and exchanges between people of the Hellenistic-Roman-Christian world and Buddhists. Yet from all of this era, as Henri de Lubac concludes, there is very little solid documentation of contact and understanding between Western peoples and Buddhists.

During the Middle Ages, the Eastern path of Buddhism was even more distant from the now-Christian West. The eastern part of Asia was cut off from communication with Europe—first through the barbarian invaders, then the Islamic revolution. Further, the center of Buddhism itself shifted as this path died out in India and moved more toward the eastern rim of the continent.

Finally, with the Mongol period, contact of Europeans with Asia began again, as traders and missionaries ventured into the eastern regions of Asia. The pope sent Dominican friars as envoys to the Mongol court (partly because of rumors that there were Christians among the Mongols), but their reports were sketchy

---

[3] In *Fathers of the Second Century*, vol. II of Alexander Roberts and James Donaldson (eds.), *The Ante-Nicene Fathers* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1951), p. 316b.

[4] See Sir E. A. Wallis Budge, *Barlam and Yesasef* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1923); and D. M. Lang, trans., *The Balavariani: A Tale from the Christian East* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1966).

[5] See Hans Klimkeit, "Christians, Buddhists and Manichaeans in Central Asia," *Buddhist-Christian Studies* I (1981), pp. 44–50; and Hans Klimkeit, "Christian-Buddhist Encounter in Medieval Central Asia," in G. W. Houston (ed.), *The Cross and the Lotus: Christianity and Buddhism in Dialogue* (Delhi: Motilal Banarsidass, 1985), pp. 9–24.

and unreliable. France's Louis IX finally stepped in and in 1253 sent a reliable scholar, the Franciscan Friar William of Rubrock, to the court of one of the great Tartar khans. Fr. William did find Christians (Nestorians) among the Mongols as well as many Muslims, but he was most perturbed over the presence of many "idolaters." So he participated in a public debate—the first recorded Buddhist-Christian dialogue—on Pentecost eve of 1254, debating the Chinese Buddhist monk Fu-yü before an audience of Muslims, Taoists, Confucianists, Buddhists, Nestorian Christians, and Shamanists, a debate convened by the Mongke Khan, grandson of Genghis Kahn.[6] Fr. William's mission ended in just six months, but his vivid book of memoirs, *Itinerarium*, provided to the Western world for the first time some sense of the Buddhist ideas and rituals especially as practiced by the resident Tibetan lamas.[7]

Quite a bit of reporting about Buddhism was done by Marco Polo in his *Il milione*, journeying through Mongol Asia and also visiting Sri Lanka.[8] Marco Polo grouped all sorts of sects and rites together as "idolaters" founded by the Buddha, whom he described as an idealized shamanistic miracle worker worshiped as the supreme divinity. Marco hinted at the doctrine of transmigration but apparently knew nothing of nirvana or liberation. But through his limited and often misleading descriptions several centuries of Europeans learned something, albeit little, about Buddhism.

Dramatic new exposure to Buddhists—but not much further real understanding—came with the new age of European exploration, imperialism, and missionary effort starting in the 16th century. Europeans encountered Buddhists throughout Asia, sometimes persecuting them shamelessly, as did the Portuguese in Sri Lanka, sometimes debating and even dialoguing with them, as did the Jesuits in Japan and China. Many Jesuits learned Japanese and Chinese, and their knowledge of Buddhism increased vastly. Yet their relationship with Bud-

---

[6] See David A. Scott, "Medieval Christian Responses to Buddhism," *Journal of Religious History*, 15 (1988), pp.165–184; and Richard Fox Young, "*Deus Unus* or *Dei Plures Sunt*? The Function of Inclusivism in the Buddhist Defense of Mongol Folk Religion Against William of Rubruch (1254)," *Journal of Ecumenical Studies*, 26 (1989), pp. 100–137.

[7] For a translation of his *Itinerarium*, see Christopher Dawson (ed.), *Mission to Asia: Narratives and Letters of the Franciscan Missionaries in Mongolia and China in the Thirteenth and Fourteenth Centuries*, (New York: Harper & Row, 1966), pp. 89–220.

[8] See Leonardo Olschki, *Marco Polo's Asia*, translated by John A. Scott (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1960), pp. 253–292.

dhists was often antagonistic. In Japan, for example, Jesuits and Dominicans derided Buddhism as inferior to Christian teaching, and Buddhist leaders attacked Christians in a series of writings such as Fabian's *Ha-Daisu* (Refutation of God) and Suzuki Shosan's *Ha-Kirishitan* (Refutation of Christianity).[9] In China, Matteo Ricci looked to Confucian literature and values as the basis of Chinese culture and so was critical of Buddhist thought and practice, in turn provoking various anti-Christian writings, some collected by Hsü Ch'ang-chih in 1640 in *Sheng Ch'ao P'o Hsieh Chi* (Collection of Writings of the Sacred Dynasty for Destroying Heresy).[10] What solid information the missionaries provided to Europe was mostly descriptive of Buddhist behavior and ritual, often noting resemblances between Buddhist and Catholic ritual trappings and procedures. Regularly they described Buddhists as vulgar idolaters, and they refused to acknowledge any profound doctrinal understandings in the Buddhist religion.

Some missionaries did attempt to distinguish between two levels of Buddhism, the idolatry of the common people, and the atheistic, quietistic path of the monks. For example, Noël Alexander wrote, in his *Apology of the Dominican Missionaries of China*,

> The secret doctrine of the ministers of the god Fo [Buddha] is unalloyed atheism. The void which they consider to be the principle of all things is, they say, completely perfect and tranquil, without beginning and end, unmoving, without knowledge, and without desire. That is why those who wish to be happy ought to devote all their efforts to becoming like this principle, overcoming and suppressing all their passions to the extent that they become oblivious to everything and that—lost in the highest contemplation, without reflection, without any use of their reason—they will enjoy that divine repose which is the only happiness for man. […] Here is the mystery of this sect which at bottom does not distinguish at all

[9] See George Elison, *Deus Destroyed: The Image of Christianity in Early Modern Japan* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1973). It was not until the end of the 19th century that there began to be some positive interchange between Christians and Buddhists; see Notto R. Thelle, *Buddhism and Christianity in Japan: From Conflict to Dialogue, 1854–1899* (Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press, 1987).

[10] See Douglas Lancashire, "Anti-Christian Polemics in 17th-century China," *Church History*, 38 (1969), pp. 218–241. Finally, in the 20th century there has been more positive interaction between Christians and Buddhists, for example in the activity of Karl Reichelt (1877–1952) and the modern Buddhism reformer T'ai-hsü (1890–1947); see Eric J. Sharpe, *Karl Ludvig Reichelt* (Hong Kong: Tao Fong Shan, Shatin, 1984); and Don A. Pittman, "The Modern Buddhist Reformer T'ai-hsü on Christianity," *Buddhist-Christian Studies*, 13 (1993), pp. 71–83.

> between good and evil; which makes a virtue neither of thinking nor of working to be virtuous; which acknowledges no rewards nor punishments after death; which believes in neither providence nor the immortality of the soul; which reduces everything to a confused void with a simple nothing as its beginning and end; and which considers that perfection consists in perfect indifference, apathy, and an undisturbed quietude.[11]

To some Europeans of the Enlightenment (Voltaire, for example) the quietistic atheism of the monks and literati was a higher, more reasonable religion. But for the most part, European thinkers polemicized against this religion of apathy, nothingness, and annihilation, expressing their disdain and their overwhelming sense of superiority. De Lubac summarizes: Buddhism always appears simply as a "monstrous religion," as an "abominable sect" founded by a "very wicked man." It is a "gangrene."[12]

Surprisingly, some of the better insights into the Buddhist path came from lay sources during this era. Engelbert Kaempfer, physician to the Dutch embassy in Japan in the 1690s, wrote about the complex diversity of Buddhism throughout Asia (he also visited Siam), giving sympathetic portrayals of Zen and yamabushi practitioners.[13] And Le Loubere, envoy of Louis XIV to the king of Siam in the 1680s, provided what may be the first reference to the Buddhist nirvana by name (*nireupan*) in European literature and gave a surprisingly sensitive description:

> [it] is not a place, but a way of being.[…] Nireupan, they say—that is, this soul has disappeared. It will not return again to any world.[…] It is neither true annihilation nor the acquisition of any divine nature.[14]

This depth of understanding was rare and not reached again in Europe until the scientific Buddhist studies of the 19th century.

---

[11] De Lubac, *op. cit.*, (note 1), pp. 86-87, translated in Guy Richard Welbon, *The Buddhist* Nirvana *and Its Western Interpreters* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1968), p. 19.

[12] De Lubac, *op.cit.*, (note 1), pp. 89–90.

[13] Engelbert Kaempfer, *The History of Japan together with a description of the Kingdom of Siam, 1690-1692*, 3 vols., translated by J. G. Scheuchzer (Glasgow: James MacLehose and Sons, 1906).

[14] De Lubac, *op. cit.*, (note 1) p. 99, translated in Welbon, *op. cit.*, (note 11), pp. 21–22.

Buddhism and Buddhists in 19th- and early 20th-century Europe and America

The great linguists who pioneered Sanskrit studies in the late 18th century (Sir William Jones, H. H. Wilson, Charles Wilkins, and Ram Mohan Roy) translated the basic Hindu texts and thus accelerated Western interest in Hinduism. But they tended to dismiss Buddhism as unimportant. Sir William Jones, for example, saw the Buddha as some sort of bastardization of the Egyptian sun god. Scholarly work on Buddhism had to await the availability of Sanskrit and Tibetan Buddhist texts, collected by adventure seekers in the 1820s and 1830s, such as the Englishman, Richard Hodgson, in Nepal and the colorful Hungarian, Sandor Csoma de Körös in Tibet, both of whom also wrote essays on Buddhism.[15] Pali texts were collected in Sri Lanka and elsewhere. Finally a balanced picture of Buddhism began to emerge in European scholarship, notably in the careful work of the French scholar, Eugene Burnouf (1801–1852), who published a Pali grammar in 1824 and then, realizing the need for comparative study of both the Sanskrit and Pali texts, worked on the newly discovered Sanskrit texts. In 1840 he published a translation of the Lotus Sutra, and in 1844 his *Introduction a l'histoire du bouddhisme indien*, which has been judged as the first coherent and accurate Western study of Buddhism.[16]

The way was now open for new, more thorough investigations of the various forms of Buddhism, and such foundational studies and translations came forth in the second half of the 19th century and into the early part of the 20th century. Just to mention the names of some of the leading scholars calls up some of the excitement of the new discoveries and debates: V. Fausböll, Emile Senart, Hermann Oldenberg, J. Minaev, Fedor Shcherbatski, T. W. Rhys Davids, Sylvain Levi, Louis de La Vallee Poussin, and many others. Most influential was Hermann Oldenberg's, *Buddha: Sein Leben, seine Lehre, seine Gemeinde*, first published in 1881 and in revised and translated editions until his death in 1920. Rhys Davids founded the Pali Text Society in England in 1881 to publish texts and translations of the Pali Canon. In America, Henry Clarke Warren co-founded the Harvard Oriental Series (1891) and published translations from the Pali Canon. Western scholars were aided by a roster of Japanese who studied in the West and contributed to Japanese Buddhist studies, including Nanjo Bunyu, Fujishima Ryoen, and Anesaki Masaharu.

---

[15] See Sir William Wilson Hunter, *Life of Brian Houghton Hodgson* (London: John Murray, 1896); and Theodore Duka, *Life and Works of Alexander Csoma de Koros* (London: Trübner & Co., 1885).

[16] Much material on 19th-century Western scholarship on Buddhism is found in Welbon, *op. cit.*, (note 11). On Burnouf's contribution to the scientific understanding of Buddhism, see pp. 51–100.

Thus through scientific textual studies of Buddhism, mostly by European scholars, the Western world finally attained a comprehensive picture of the Buddhist religion. It was, however, a very scholarly, history-centered, text-oriented picture of Buddhism. It is important to look beyond the scholarship and take note of the spiritual response by Western peoples to the newly available knowledge of the Buddhist path.

Some 19th century writers and philosophers were attracted to the new Buddhist ideas and helped to popularize them. Arthur Schopenhauer (1788-1860) often referred to Buddhism in *Die Welt als Wille und Vorstellung*, looking on it favorably because it realistically assessed the presence of suffering in the world. Under Schopenhauer's influence, Richard Wagner sketched out a Buddhist opera which he never completed, and he seemingly wrote *Tristan und Isolde* with Buddhist ideas in mind. In America, the transcendentalists Emerson and Thoreau were attracted to the Buddha as a spiritual sage from India, but they had some distaste for Buddhism's emphasis on nothingness and its lack of even an impersonal God. They preferred Hinduism with its oversoul and its more affirmative mysticism. In England in 1879, Sir Edwin Arnold, who became editor of the *Daily Paragraph*, published his epic poem on the life of the Buddha, *The Light of Asia*. This sympathetic picture of the Buddha, written in dramatic and romantic style, aroused considerable interest in England and America and added to the attraction of this Eastern path.

Probably the first organized group in the West to advocate Hindu and Buddhist religious ideas was the Theosophical Society, founded in New York in 1876 by Madame H. P. Blavatsky, a Russian-born mystic, and Henry Olcott, an American journalist and attorney interested in Spiritualism. They moved to India in 1879 and linked theosophy to Hindu philosophy. They also had much contact with Sri Lanka Buddhists and did much to spread Buddhist ideas in the West. Both of them took *pansil* in 1880, probably the first modern Westerners actually to become Buddhist. Olcott worked hard on behalf of Sri Lankan Buddhists, gaining concessions for them from the British colonial overlords, composing a Buddhist catechism, designing an international Buddhist flag, and lecturing in Japan to promote Buddhist ecumenism.[17]

Resulting from these various influences, gradually more and more Westerners turned to Buddhism and Buddhist societies began to be established throughout the Western world. An early, charismatic Buddhist missionary to the West

[17] On the theosophical movement, see Bruce F. Campbell, *Ancient Wisdom Revisited: A History of the Theosophical Movement* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1980).

was Anagarika Dharmapala (1864–1933),[18] born Don David Hevavitarana to a prosperous Sri Lankan Buddhist family. He went to Christian schools to get a good education, but reacted against aggressive Christian evangelism, finally turning to the Buddhist Theosophical Society (of which his father and uncle were members). He associated closely with H. P. Blavatsky and Henry Olcott and, under their influence, decided to dedicate himself to revitalizing Buddhism. In 1886 he announced his decision to become a *brahmacarin* for life, undertaking the celibate life but not becoming a monk because of his dedication to serving others. He took the name Anagarika Dharmapala, "the homeless one, defender of the Dharma." He accompanied Olcott to Japan in 1888 and also traveled to Bodh Gaya, lamenting the sad state of this Buddhist holy place and resolving to work to return charge of Bodh Gaya to Buddhists. With that immediate purpose, Dharmapala returned to Sri Lanka and founded the Bodh Gaya Maha Bodhi Society in 1891, with Olcott as director and himself as secretary. Through his role as editor of the *Maha Bodhi Journal* he was invited to Chicago for the 1893 World's Parliament of Religions. Both Dharmapala and his Maha Bodhi Society went on to work for international Buddhism for many years, including much missionary work for Buddhism in Europe.

The honor of being the first Buddhist missionary to Great Britain goes to Dharmapala, who spent five months there in 1893.[19] He visited Great Britain again in 1896 and again in 1904, making contact with Rhys Davids, Edwin Arnold, and some theosophists. Reading the poem, *The Light of Asia*, the Englishman, Allen Bennett, converted to Buddhism and became the first known Buddhist monk of occidental extraction, taking the ocher robe in Burma in 1902 as Ananda Metteyya. In 1907 the Buddhist Society of Great Britain and Ireland was founded with Rhys Davids as its president, to prepare for a visit by Ananda Metteyya from Burma. The Society, influenced by theosophism, advocated a somewhat modernistic version of Southern Buddhism in its journal, *The Buddhist Review*. The Buddhist Society dissolved after hard times during World War I, but later, in 1924, its remnants were absorbed in the Buddhist Lodge of the Theosophical Society, with

[18] On Dharmapala, see Gananath Obeyesekere, "Personal Identity and Cultural Crisis: The Case of Anagarika Dharmapala of Sri Lanka, in Frank Reynolds and Donald Capps (eds.), *The Biographical Process: Studies in the History and Psychology of Religion* (The Hague: Mouton, 1976), pp. 221–252; and Richard Grombrich and Gananath Obeyesekere, *Buddhism Transformed: Religious Change in Sri Lanka* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1988), pp. 202–237.

[19] On Buddhism in England, see Philip C. Almond, *The British Discovery of Buddhism* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1988).

Christmas Humphreys (1901–1983) as its first president. Later it became an independent Buddhist Society once again, with its journal now called *The Middle Way*.

Christmas Humphreys of course went on to become a dominant figure in British Buddhism for the next 50 years, turning his interests a bit more toward Zen and meditation practice, while continuing his theosophical slant toward ideas of the "One" and the "Self." Humphreys little book, *Buddhism*, has introduced many Westerners to this faith, and he has provided the story of English Buddhism in his work, *Sixty Years of Buddhism in England (1907–1967)*.[20] The widely-traveled Dharmapala visited England again from 1925–1927, founding a branch of the Maha Bodhi Society (1926). A vihara that often housed resident bhikkhus from Sri Lanka was founded in London in 1938.

In Germany, scholars of Buddhology often felt a strong inner sympathy toward the subject matter of their research. The Pali scholar, Karl Seidenstücker, helped found a Buddhist society in 1903, to promote Buddhist scholarship and to publish a journal, *Der Buddhismus*. After the disruption caused by World War I, Paul Dahlke, a Berlin physician who published translations from the Sutta Pitaka, founded a Buddhist meditation center in Berlin-Frohnan. Another influential leader was Georg Grimm, author of the widely read book, *The Doctrine of the Buddha; the Religion of Reason* first published in1915.[21] In 1921 Karl Seidenstücker and he founded the Buddhist Community for Germany, a community of laymen and women living according to the Buddha's precepts for laity. In 1935 this became the Old Buddhist Community, led by Georg Grimm, holding to the "original" (Theravada) teachings of Buddhism.

Significantly, some Germans were attracted to the monastic life in Asia. In 1904 Anton Güth, born a Catholic, was ordained as Nyanatiloka in Sri Lanka and went on to translate Buddhist texts and teach European monks in Sri Lanka. German Buddhism went on to produce other distinguished monks who lived in the East and wrote important books to popularize Buddhism in the West. Among these were Nyanaponika Thera, a disciple of Nyanatiloka, who wrote *The Heart of Buddhist Meditation*, and Lama Anagarika Govinda, who wrote *The Foundations of Tibetan Mysticism*. A German woman, the pianist Else Buchholz, became the first European Buddhist nun in 1926 as Sister Uppalavarna in Sri Lanka.

In those early years of Buddhist societies in Europe, interest centered particularly on the Theravada tradition. Colonialism had brought Europeans into close

---

[20] Christmas Humphreys, *Sixty Years of Buddhism in England (1907–1967*) (London: Buddhist Society, 1968).

[21] Georg Grimm, *The Doctrine of the Buddha. The Religion of Reason and Meditati* , 3rd ed. (Delhi: Motilal Barnasidass, 1982).

contact with Buddhism in Sri Lanka and Burma. European thinkers at this time seemed to appreciate the alleged rationalism of Buddhism, a quality they found best expressed in Theravada. Influenced by the "quest for origins" emphasized by 19th-century scholars, it was felt that Theravada was the oldest and most original form of Buddhism, closest to the Buddha's own teachings. But interest in the Mahayana traditions soon began to increase, particularly after D.T. Suzuki lectured on Zen in England in 1936, influencing Christmas Humphreys, Alan Watts, and Edward Conze, all of whom had a significant impact on the understanding of Buddhism in the West.

On the American scene, apart from the transcendentalist and the theosophist circles, it was Mahayana Buddhism that generally has had the greater influence. On the whole, Buddhism has played a more important role in America than in Europe, with Hawaii in particular rather heavily populated with Japanese Buddhists. We should note that especially in America and Canada, Buddhism has long been made up of two strands, ethnic Asian Buddhists and occidental Buddhists. The first wave of Asian immigrants was from China, coming to California in the days of the Gold Rush, numbering about 60,000 by 1860. They built a number of Chinese temples, typically combining Buddhist elements with Confucian and Taoist features. And Japanese immigrants began arriving in large numbers at the end of the 19th and beginning of the 20th century, founding the Buddhist Church of America (Jodo Shinshu) in San Francisco in 1899. Generally these Buddhist groups retained their separate ethnic identity, and they did not make their practice of Buddhism a public issue in their attempt to fit into American society. While there was some scattered contact, the interest of occidental Americans in Buddhism was met by a different set of institutions.

As indicated above, some interest in Buddhism among Americans was sparked off by the transcendentalists and the theosophists. Popular interest in America was roused by Arnold's poem, *The Light of Asia*, selling over a million copies. Americans of different types—esoterics, rationalists, and romantics—were attracted to this Eastern path.[22] A key turning point was the 1893 World's Parliament of Religions in Chicago. Vivekananda, disciple of the Hindu saint Ramakrishna and articulate spokesperson for a universalistic Vedanta, was surely the Asian representative that attracted the most attention. But second to him was the charismatic Buddhist,

[22] Thomas Tweed, *The American Encounter with Buddhism, 1844–1912* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1992), suggests that esoterics, rationalists, and romantics were all attracted to Buddhism. Concerning American interest in Buddhism in the late 19th and early 20th century, see also the studies by Rick Fields, *How the Swans Came to the Lake: A Narrative History of Buddhism in America* (Boston: Shambala, 1986); Charles S. Prebish, *American Buddhism* (North Scituate, MA: Duxbury Press, 1979); and Joseph B. Tamney, *American Society in the Buddhist Mirror* (New York: Garland Publishing, 1992).

Anagarika Dharmapala. Dharmapala gave the concluding speech of the opening ceremonies, making quite an impression with his educated language, his passionate delivery, and his long black hair and beard. He argued that the universalistic message claimed by Christians had first been proclaimed by the Buddha, that the Parliament was the culmination of the Council of Ashoka when the king sent out disciples to instruct the world, and that it was Buddhism rather than Christianity that could heal the rift between religion and science. The *St. Louis Observer* gave some hint of American reaction by describing him in this way:

> With his black, curly locks thrown back from his broad brow, his keen clear eye fixed upon the audience, his long brown fingers emphasizing the utterances of his vibrant voice, he looked the very image of a propagandist, and one trembled to know that such a figure stood at the head of the movement to consolidate all the disciples of Buddha to spread "the Light of Asia" throughout the civilized world.[23]

And it is reported that when Dharmapala discovered at one meeting that only five of his audience had read the life of the Buddha, he cried out, "Five only! Four hundred and seventy-five millions of people accept our religion of love and hope. You call yourselves a nation—a great nation—and yet you do not know the history of this great teacher. How dare you judge us?"[24]

There were five Buddhists from Meiji Japan at the Parliament, representing the Pure Land, Rinzai Zen, Shingon, and Tendai schools of Japanese Buddhism. Going against the general mindset of the organizers of the Parliament—accepting the "inferior" paths under the universalistic Christian path—they felt themselves on a mission to correct American misconceptions of Buddhism. In addition to their own speeches, they distributed thousands of copies of short essays in English about Buddhism. Focusing on the theme of Western lack of understanding, the lay Buddhist Hirai Kinzo (the only one of the five who could handle English), gave a fiery speech against the bigoted and self-righteous attitudes of Christian missionaries in Japan, creating quite a furor and cries of "Shame! Shame!" from the applauding audience.[25]

---

[23] Quoted in Fields, *op. cit.*, (note 22), p. 122.

[24] From Rev. John Henry Barrows (ed.), *The World's Parliament of Religions: An Illustrated and Popular Story of the World's First Parliament of Religions, Held in Chicago in Connection with the Columbian Exposition of 1893*, (Chicago: The Parliament Publishing Company, 1893), p. 1571.

[25] As described in *The Chicago Daily Tribune*, 14 September 1893, p. 1; quoted in James E. Ketelaar, "Strategic Occidentalism: Meiji Buddhists at the World's Parliament of Religions," *Buddhist-Christian Studies*, 11 (1991), p. 48.

But the Buddhist leader at the Parliament who probably had the most lasting influence in America was the Japanese monk Shaku Soen, abbot of the Zen monastery Engakuji. He decided to attend the Parliament on his own against the opposition of his followers who felt it improper for a Zen priest to set foot in such an uncivilized country. His paper on "The Law of Cause and Effect, as Taught by Buddha," was translated in advance by the young D. T. Suzuki and (given Soen's limited English ability) was read on the sixth day of the Parliament by the organizer Burrows. Even though he was not a particularly charismatic presence at the conference, Soen attracted the attention of Paul Carus, editor of Open Court Press, and through this contact D. T. Suzuki came to work as translator and editor with the Open Court Publishing Company The influence in America and Europe of layman Suzuki's many books on Zen Buddhism is, of course, well known. An American couple, the Russells, impressed with Soen at the Parliament, visited him in Japan in 1905, and he returned to stay with them in California for six months. During this time Mrs. Russell practiced zazen and did koan work with the Zen master, becoming probably the first non-Asian American to do so. Soen boosted the development of Zen in America by sending two more disciples, Senzaki Nyogen in 1905 and Shaku Sokatsu in 1906. Senzaki Nyogen established meditation centers in San Francisco and Los Angeles. Shaku Sokatsu only stayed in America a few years, but his disciple Sasaki Shigetsu (known as Sokei-an) became a prominent figure, founding the Buddhist Society of America (later the First Zen Institute) in 1931 and leading Zen in America until his death in 1945.

Buddhist presence in the West in the post-war era

By World War II, fairly large communities of Chinese and Japanese Buddhists lived in the West, particularly in America; a comprehensive scholarly picture of Buddhism in its various forms was available in the West; and in most Western countries there were at least fledgling occidental Buddhist societies. Yet, Buddhism and Buddhists were still strangely absent from the consciousness of most Westerners and certainly most Christians in the West. Most Westerners had little contact with or interest in the immigrant Asian Buddhists (thus the lack of public resistance to the internment of Japanese Americans during World War II). Knowledge about Buddhism was by and large limited to the scholarly élite, and the occidental Buddhist societies and centers were tiny and struggling. It is finally during the post-war years and continuing to the present that a considerable growth and flowering has taken place in all these areas.

The influx of Asian immigrants into America, Europe, and elsewhere since World War II has greatly enhanced the presence of ethnic Buddhist communities in the West. Many of these groups have developed a more public institutional presence, with churches, temples, monasteries, and educational activities. The Buddhist Churches of America (affiliated with the Hompa-Hongwanji

branch of Jodo Shinshu) has continued to grow with Protestant style services and other activities. Training institutes for the Buddhist ministry have been established; the Institute for Buddhist Studies in Berkeley, affiliated with the Graduate Theological Union, publishes a scholarly journal in English, *Pacific World: Journal of the Institute of Buddhist Studies*. A sign of acceptance into the American religious world has come with the US Defense Department allowing the church to put forth chaplains for the military.

In addition to the Buddhist Churches of America, other forms of Japanese Buddhism are also present in America as largely ethnic churches, including Jodosho, Shingon, Nichiren, Zen, and Buddhist-based "new religions" such as Rissho Koseikai and Gedatsukai. Another Western country with a large Japanese Buddhist population is Brazil; those who consider themselves Buddhists number between 100,000 and 200,000, representing Jodoshu, Jodo Shinshu, Zen, Shingon, Tendai, and Nichiren.

Since the early 1970s, large numbers of refugees and immigrants have come to the West from Vietnam, Laos, Cambodia, and Thailand. Their numbers may range above half a million in the USA, 100,000 in Canada, 100,000 in France, 100,000 in Australia, 25,000 in Germany, and 20,000 in Britain, with smaller number in many other Western countries. Vietnamese Buddhists in particular have established numerous temples and training centers in the West, as have Thai and Cambodian Buddhists operating in the Theravada tradition.

In recent years occidental Buddhists have had more interaction with Asian Buddhist communities in the West, through intermarriage or by turning to these groups for training and other activities. But by and large, Euro-Americans still have their own institutions and groups in which they predominate, even though the group often centers on teachers and masters from Asian Buddhism. Within Western Buddhism today, the number of non-Asian Buddhists is much smaller than ethnic Asian Buddhists, and that number is quite changeable, in that many are seekers rather than members committed to the long term. Yet some significant developments are occurring in Western Buddhism in the hands of non-Asian adherents.

Largely because of the scholarly and popular writings of D. T. Suzuki, together with popular teachers like Alan Watts, Zen Buddhism enjoyed a surge in interest in the 1950s and 1960s. Large Zen centers were established in major cities such as Los Angeles (1956), San Francisco (1959), and Rochester, NY (1966), as well as the Tassajara Mountain monastery (1967). At first these were led by roshis from Japan, such as Shunryu Suzuki (1904–71). But by the 1970s roshis of occidental descent, such as Richard Baker, Philip Kapleau, and Robert Aiken, had received dharma transmission and headed the more important centers. Western Zen centers have included considerable participation of women in leadership roles. For example, in 1970 an English woman, Rev. Master Jiyu Kennett, founded the Shasta Abbey in northern California as headquarters of the Zen Mission So-

ciety. Born in 1924 to Buddhist parents, she was ordained as a *bhiksuni* of the Chinese sangha in Malaysia and then trained in a Soto Zen temple in Japan before coming to America. Korean and Vietnamese Zen masters have also participated in leading some of these centers. Today there are Zen centers in many Western countries, including France, Italy, Germany, England, Poland, Australia, and many more.

Starting in the 1960s, Tibetan Buddhism began to attract the attention of Westerners, as refugee lamas arrived and began teaching Westerners. Tarthang Tulku, an ex-abbot of the Nyingma school, established the Nyingmapa Center in Berkeley in 1969, and Chögyam Trungpa founded a center in Vermont a year later. He moved his headquarters to Boulder, Colorado, and directs the Naropa Institute there. This has become the headquarters of the Vajradhatu organization, a network including meditation centers, affiliated groups, and a Buddhist institute. Trungpa, a charismatic lama with somewhat controversial behavior, presented the Tibetan tradition in a popular way for Westerners interested in personal growth and transformation. A third lama, Kalu Rinpoche, founded centers in Europe and America, training Western lamas through the traditional three-year retreat so that they could direct their own centers. Tibetan Buddhism in particular has attracted a number of Western scholars, such as Jeffrey Hopkins and Rita Gross, who have advanced the study of Buddhism at the university level.

Recent years have seen a revival of interest in Theravada meditation techniques. Sinhalese established the first *vihara* in 1966 in Washington, D.C. In 1976 Jack Kornfield and Joseph Goldstein, students of Theravada in Southeast Asia, founded the Insight Meditation Center in Barre, Massachusetts, to teach *vipassana* meditation, and other Theravada centers have also been established.

Buddhist groups in the Chinese tradition have also been active and have attracted Caucasians. Coming from Hong Kong by invitation from Chinese-American disciples, Master Hsüan Hua founded the Sino-American Buddhist Association in San Francisco in 1968. He attracted Caucasian followers who soon became the majority among the membership. Eventually a Dharma Realm University, primary and secondary schools, and sangha and lay training facilities were established.

Another Buddhist group with considerable success among Westerners has been the Japanese Nichiren group associated with the powerful Soka Gakkai lay Buddhist movement in Japan. Established in Los Angeles in 1963 and called Nichiren Shoshu of America, membership at first was mostly Japanese. By 1970, however, over two-thirds of the growing membership was non-Asian, largely young people drawn by the lively practice of chanting the Daimoku and the vital positive spirit of the small group meetings. The worldwide organization is now called Soka Gakkai International.

It is impressive that, in little more than a century since it was first presented coherently in the Western world, Buddhism has an institutional presence in the West

that includes all of the main Asian forms of this religion. Moreover, not only ethnic communities but a significant number of non-Asian Westerners have committed themselves to this path. Some observers feel that a new and fresh form of Buddhism will eventually evolve from the experience of Buddhists in Western society.

Dialogue and Sharing Between Christians and Buddhists in the West

In all the history, recounted above, of Buddhist contact with Westerners and Buddhist presence in the Western world prior to the 1960s, there is very little activity that would qualify under the rubric, "dialogue and sharing between Christians and Buddhists." Encounters have been fairly numerous since the 16th century, and accurate knowledge has been available since the middle of the 19th century. But past encounters between Buddhists and Western Christians have always followed some sort of superior-inferior or insider-outsider paradigm of religious debate. The encounters have been contests between the higher religious truths and ideals of one's own tradition and the less-than-ideal practices of the other tradition. This of course has long been the official position of most Christian theologians and the dominant practice of almost all Christian groups, but Buddhist spokespersons also adopted this attitude (for example, the Buddhists at the 1893 World's Parliament of Religions).

But after World War II, beginning about in the 1960s, there are many signs of a different sort of religious encounter between Buddhists and Christians in the West, based on a rather different paradigm that holds sharing and dialogue to have intrinsic value. One impetus for this new paradigm certainly has been the widespread availability of accurate knowledge coming from the academic study of religions and area studies—many of the old claims from both sides about the inferior qualities of the other side simply no longer stand up. But perhaps more importantly, Buddhists and Christians have got to know each other personally and through that have discovered that the others do actually find transforming power in the spiritual practices of their path—a new awareness and respect that leads to more sympathetic sharing and dialogue.

Some early evidences of this new paradigm took place in Asia and in the context of World Council of Churches (WCC) and related activities. For example, in Sri Lanka, Lynn De Silva (1919–1982) discovered in his mission work with indigenous Buddhist families that they often displayed more spirituality than Christians did, and he came to admire them and to advocate dialogue between Christians and Buddhists. Accordingly, in 1963 he founded the periodical *Dialogue* and sponsored the Ecumenical Institute for Study and Dialogue in Colombo. In Thailand, the Christian missionary Sinclaire Thompson began to advocate deepening

spiritual life through interreligious understanding, and as a result of his work this kind of approach has been continued in the memorial lectures given since his death (1963) in Chiang Mai at the Thailand Theological Seminary. Also in Thailand, the formation of the interreligious Coordinating Groups of Religion and Society, formed by layman Sulak Sivaraksa, moved Christian-Buddhist interaction to the level of practical involvement with societal problems.

From the Buddhist side, Zen scholar, Hisamatsu Shin'ichi, in Japan urged his student, Abe Masao, to practice Zen personally as he studied it and then to study Christianity at Union Theological Seminary in New York. This kind of foundation in personal practice and cross-religious understanding led Abe to a long career at the focal point of Buddhist-Christian dialogue in the West. In 1963 he published his ground-breaking paper, "Buddhism and Christianity as a Problem of Today" (in the journal *Japanese Religions*), and the response was widespread.

A Quaker group initiated an experimental Zen-Christian Colloquium in 1967 in Oiso, Japan, that has continued in various location ever since. The participants, including at first people such as Heinrich Dumoulin, Hisamatsu Shin'ichi, Douglas Steere, and Ariga Tetsutaro, purposely avoided trying to make new theological proposals and judgments, but rather focused on their own spiritual journey and on a believer's social responsibility today. After the first ten years of these experiential meetings, Douglas Steere summarized the outcome:

> From the very outset you have come to these gatherings seeking and witnessing to truth rather than to debate or to try to compel others to receive the truth in the traditional vessels in which it has come to you. The result has been that Christians have been led to discover whole new and little-explored dimensions of their own religion, and that Zen Buddhists have had their attention drawn to neglected areas in their witness. In other words, each has irradiated the other, and been irradiated by the other. With this kind of an approach, you have in fact been pioneering a radically fresh approach to the relation of two of the world's great religions […].[26]

This attitude of respect and appreciation for the other's spiritual path was demonstrated already by D. T. Suzuki, featuring Meister Eckhard in his book, *Mysticism: Christian and Buddhist*. Responding to Suzuki and sharing in conversations with him was Thomas Merton, as reported in his book, *Zen and the Birds of Appetite*.

One major characteristic of the sharing and dialogue between Christians and Buddhists in the West has been the predominance of scholarly and academic

---

[26] Yukio Irie, *et al.*, *A Zen-Christian Pilgrimage: The Fruits of Ten Annual Colloquia in Japan, 1967-1976* (Tokyo: Takuro Isomura, 1981), p. 7; quoted in David Chappell, "New Horizons for Buddhist-Christian Encounter," *Bulletin*, The Council of Societies for the Study of Religion, 22 (Sept., 1993), pp. 67–68.

participants and the relative inactivity at the level of local congregations and temple groups. A big boost for Buddhist-Christian dialogue, in fact, has been the great expansion in religious studies and Asian studies in American universities, including state-supported ones, starting in the 1960s. Many college students have now been introduced to an in-depth understanding of Buddhism via religious studies methodology, free from judgmental comparisons with Christianity. They have been exposed to articulate advocates of Buddhism in the classroom and have learned to see Buddhism within its own cultural and historical context. Such understanding and exposure has also to a certain extent been carried over to seminary training in many Christian denominations.

The process of Buddhist-Christian dialogue in the West received a major impetus with the first major international Buddhist-Christian conference held in Hawaii in 1980, sponsored by the state-supported University of Hawaii. Local interest in the conference was stimulated by having a series of over 30 "temple-church" meetings in local neighborhoods prior to the conference. Participants in the conference included many who had been writing in this field and who have since continued to lead in Buddhist-Christian relations, including Lynn De Silva, Winston King, Masao Abe, Donald Swearer, Roy Amore, Masatoshi Doi, Joseph Spae, Fred Streng, Rita Gross, Roger Corless, Tai Unno, Paul Ingram, David Chappell, Seiichi Yagi, and others.[27]

A second international Buddhist-Christian conference met again at Hawaii in 1984, with academic presentations on topics such as views of the self, suffering, and paradigm changes. There was also an emphasis on the practical side: time was also set aside for personal religious practice, panels on religion and healing, and consideration of ethics and justice. The third international conference was held in Berkeley at the Graduate Theological Union in 1987 with over 800 participants; new working groups included the Religion and Healing Group, the Monastic and Contemplative Group, and the Women in Buddhism and Christianity Group. The fourth international Buddhist-Christian conference, at Boston University in 1992, addressed the theme, "Buddhism, Christianity, and Global Healing." Besides a whole array of papers and working groups, there was a strong emphasis on personal spiritual practice in the different traditions. The theme of the fifth international conference in 1996 at Chicago was, "Socially Engaged Buddhism and Christianity." The more than 600 participants included not only Buddhists and Christians but also Jews, Muslims, Sikhs, Hindus, and Native Americans. There was some involvement also by

[27] Some of the papers were published in Frederick Streng and Paul Ingram (eds.), *Buddhist-Christian Dialogue: Mutual Renewal and Transformation* (Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press, 1986).

leaders of the Roman Catholic and Protestant churches. And the theme of the sixth international conference, held in Tacoma in 2000, was "Buddhist, Christianity, and Global Healing." Special attention was paid to explorations of Buddhist and Christian approaches to the Earth Charter and the multifaceted issues surrounding politics, economy, ecology, social justice, gender relations, and other aspects of global society.

In 1987, the North American participants in these Buddhist-Christian conferences formed the Society for Buddhist-Christian Studies, holding its annual meetings in conjunction with the annual meetings of the American Academy of Religion. This society also publishes the important journal *Buddhist-Christian Studies*, attempting to bring together the interests of both academics and practitioners. Thus discussions and articles cover both scholarly topics and issues of personal spiritual practice. Recent conferences have focused on topics such as exploring how the same Scriptures (e.g., the Lotus Sutra and Luke-Acts) can be seen and used by people in the different traditions, mission and dialogue, the relation between practice and social engagement, ritual and its connection to ethical activity, and religion in an age of consumerism. Signaling the increasing importance religious practice is playing in these Buddhist-Christian meetings, the Society established a Committee on Practice, to guide and promote spiritual practice groups, intermonastic interchange movements, and the like. To promote Buddhist-Christian interaction at all levels, the Society also publishes a *Newsletter*, covering activities all over the world in the realm of Buddhist-Christian dialogue.

An important on-going dialogue group within the Society for Buddhist-Christian Studies has been the International Buddhist-Christian Theological Encounter, a small continuing group led by John Cobb and Masao Abe, focusing on more directly theological issues. For example, the theme of a recent conference was, "An Interfaith Reading of the Lotus Sutra."

Meetings between Christians and Buddhist academics and religious leaders are taking place in various parts of the world. Japan of course has met for some years been the locale of Buddhist-Christian conversations of various kinds. Both Japanese and Westerners have been active in the meetings of the Japan Society for Buddhist-Christian Studies, which has met annually for nearly 20 years. Likewise, many gatherings of Buddhists and Christians have been taking place in various locales in Europe. In particular, the European Network of Buddhist-Christian Studies has initiated a series of meetings; recently they have focused on Buddhist and Christian perceptions of Jesus.

Increasingly there are monastic exchanges between Buddhist and Christian monastic groups. Reports on some of these activities are published by organizations like the European group, Dialogue Interreligieux Monastique and the American group, Monastic Inter-religious Dialogue, who now publish a joint interna-

tional newsletter, *DIM-MID International Bulletin*.[28] A highly visible monastic encounter took place at the 1993 Parliament of the World's Religions, when the Dalai Lama met with a group of Buddhist and Christian monastics for a dialogue on the theme, "Sunyata and Kenosis: The Rising of Universal Compassion the Spiritual Journey."

Presentations were given by monastics from both traditions, and the dialogue touched on the similarities and differences between emptying the mind (in Buddhist) and the spiritual practice of kenosis to put on the mind of Christ (in Christianity). Another significant gathering of some 50 Buddhist and Christian monastics took place in 1996 at the Abbey of Gethsemani (which was the home of Thomas Merton). The participants felt that this encounter was the beginning of a significant new stage in the sharing of Buddhist and Christian spirituality. A report on this gathering is available.[29]

The Current Situation and Areas for Further Exploration

The overwhelming impression from this review is that, after many centuries of neglect and even hostility, in the past 40 years or so sharing and dialogue between Christians and Buddhists has been growing apace in certain sectors, especially among academics who are interested in Buddhism and/or Christianity as their personal spiritual path and among people committed to the monastic spiritual life. It is still not apparent that this interest has extended very far into the organized churches and into local congregations.

The most active and visible dialogue in the Western world seems to be taking place in academic-oriented societies such as the Society for Buddhist and Christian Studies, the European Network for Buddhist-Christian Studies, the Japan Society for Buddhist-Christian Studies, and in the other related organizations (e.g., the international Buddhist-Christian conferences and the Theological Encounter group). This means that this dialogue activity is not church-sponsored or even particularly supported or participated in by church representatives. Rather, it takes place for the most part outside

[28] For a report on several exchanges between Japanese Buddhists (mostly Zen priests and nuns) and European Christians (mostly Catholic monastics) between 1979 and 1987, see Mitchiko Ishigami-Iagolnitzer (ed.), *Dialogue Interreligieux Monastique Bouddhistes-Chretiens au Japon et en Europe* (Paris: Sciences et Lettres, 1992).

[29] Don Mitched and James Wiseman (eds.) *The Gethsemani Encounter: A Dialogue on the Spiritual Life by Buddhist and Christian Monastics* (New York: Continuum Press, 1997).

the church or temple context, initiated and led by individuals from a variety of traditions coming together largely out of personal interest and search. A number of well-known Christian theologians have taken part in these theological encounters, such as John Cobb, Hans Küng, David Tracy, Schubert Ogden, Rosemary Ruether, Durwood Foster, Gordon Kaufmann, and others. And well-known Buddhist leaders have also participated, such as the Dalai Lama, Sulak Sivaraksha, and Dr. A. T. Ariyaratne. But in general these theologians and religious leaders participate as interested individuals, not as representatives of their church or religious groups.

The main topics or themes that Buddhist-Christian conversations have focused on have been quite broad, ranging from theological and philosophical issues to very practical and spiritual themes. In the early years of the Theological Encounter group, following on John Cobb and Masao Abe's direction, there was no hesitation in tackling the big issues head-on: the nature of ultimate reality, transformation and salvation, the nature of community and ethics, etc. In recent years the trend in these dialogue groups seems to be toward the more practical questions, areas of mutual involvement, and even mutual spiritual sharing.

Among the practical issues, gender and the role of women in Buddhism and Christianity has been high on the agenda, stimulated particularly by Western Buddhist women with support from Christian feminist theologians. For example, Rita Gross has given autobiographical presentations on her personal experiences within Christianity and then within Buddhism; and her recent book, *Buddhism After Patriarchy: A Feminist History, Analysis, and Reconstruction of Buddhism*, has stimulated much discussion. Since Asian Buddhist groups generally have not provided much support for gender equality, some feel it is Western Buddhism, in conversation with feminist Christianity, that will provide a new, feminist shape to Buddhism. This is argued, for example, by Sandy Boucher, *Turning the Wheel: American Women Creating the New Buddhism*.

Recently the conversations have turned strongly in the direction of "socially engaged" Buddhism and Christianity. For example, this was the theme of the 1996 International Buddhist-Christian Conference at Chicago. The announcement of the conference invited not only academics from around the world, "but also a significant number of spiritual practitioners and socially-engaged members of the two traditions." The vision for the conference was stated in this way:

> At the heart of our efforts is a vision of ever-deepening interreligious dialogue and cooperation, positive address to the social, environmental, and spiritual issues of our age, the nurturing of existing efforts by Buddhists, Christians, and others to

> make a difference in the world, and the creation of new and concrete initiatives for genuine social engagement and caring service to the planetary community.[30]

The organizers of the conference made a special attempt to involve local, national, and international Buddhist, Christian, and interfaith organizations (societies, congregations, academic departments, etc.) in playing a role in the conference.

The emphasis on practical concerns as the focus of sharing and dialogue has of course long been the approach of dialogue efforts sponsored by the WCC and related organizations. This model has been followed with considerable success in several dialogues with Thai Buddhists sponsored by the Lutheran School of Theology at Chicago and the Department of Global Missions of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America. By focusing on practical topics such as religion and suffering, religion and healing, religion and the environment, etc., Christians and Buddhists have discovered they can come to a deeper understanding of the other tradition and, moreover, they discover areas of common concern and cooperation.

A trend that has been much emphasized in recent conversations has been personal practice and spirituality. It has long been recognized that engaging in inter-religious dialogue can lead to personal growth and transformation. But increasingly most dialogue meetings also devote time to spiritual practices for both Buddhists and Christians. This emphasis grows out of the discovery in many dialogue groups that a true and deep mutual understanding of partners in dialogue comes when engaged not just in theoretical discussion, not just in joint social projects, but at that point where the religious path becomes most profound and most intimate—in worship, devotion, spiritual practice.

But a new, and somewhat controversial, program advocated by some is "joint practice" or "dual practice," that is, joint worship and sharing of spiritual disciplines, scriptures, prayers, meditation, and the like. As an example of joint practice, in 1993 the Working Group on Practice hosted a Zen Mind/Christian Mind retreat in Rye, NY exploring the possibility of being "Buddhist/Christian," living one's spiritual life involved in "two traditions, one journey." Each day was framed by practice: morning and evening Zen meditation, a Soto Zen morning service, daily Vespers, as well as a Sunday Eucharist. In the panels and presentations, a theme discussed by many of the participants was the rediscovery of their Christian traditions through the practice of Zen.[31] Needless to say, there has been

[30] From the announcement for the 1996 Conference at DePaul University on "Socially Engaged Buddhism and Christianity," cover letter dated 6 January 1995.

[31] See the report by Susan Postal, "Zen Mind/Christian Mind: Practice Across Traditions," *Buddhist-Christian Studies*, 14 (1994), pp. 209–213.

spirited discussion about joint practice. Some participants feel they personally can find wholeness and spiritual depth in practicing both traditions, while others emphasize that the claims or their own religious identity make such dual practice impossible.[32]

As noted above, the Buddhist community in the West that is most actively engaged in dialogue with Christians is the Western, scholarly Buddhist community. The Buddhist participants in the various dialogue organizations are predominantly academics, and a great many of them are Western; the Asians involved are generally either Western-educated or at home in the Western context. Occasionally an Asian Buddhist will raise the question, "Where are the Asians?" Attempts are being made to involve more ethnic Asian Buddhists, with some success, particularly those living as monks and nuns in the West.

The ethnic Buddhist communities in the West have grown significantly in recent years, yet their efforts go more into finding a place in Western society than toward cultivating their religious identity and engaging in dialogue with Christian groups. The Buddhist Churches of America, which celebrated their centennial anniversary in 1999, are probably the oldest and most stable of the ethnic Buddhist churches. Yet even they talk of the extremely hostile environment and crises of the past and the uncertain future they face.[33] Membership is a perennial problem. Although the mainland American Japanese population has been increasing, now numbering over half a million, membership in the Buddhist Churches of America has been declining slightly. Leaders in the organization feel some quandary over the ethnic issue; to serve the Japanese they need to emphasize ethnic features, yet to grow and fit into Western society they need to reach out to non-ethnic members. Ministerial concerns abound, as potential young ministers are attracted to other careers and Japanese-born ministers find it increasingly difficult to minister to temple members who can no longer speak Japanese.

Tetsuden Kashima points out another factor that makes it difficult for ethnic Buddhists to share on an equal plain with Christians. For Buddhists, he says, the supposed separation between the church and state in America does not exist. Individual churches are separate from the state, but there is an amalgam between the predominant religious groups and the state. That is, Christianity is

---

[32] See the lively discussion between a number of Buddhists and Christians, including Roger Corless, Sallie B. King, Alfred Bloom, Terry C. Muck, and Bonnie Thurston, in *Buddhist-Christian Studies*, 14 (1994), pp. 139-180.

[33] See, for example, the discussion by Tetsuden Kashima, "The Buddhist Churches of America: Challenges for Change in the 21st Century," *The Pacific World: Journal of the Institute of Buddhist Studies*, New Series 6 (Fall, 1990), pp. 28–40

the religion of the land, the state-sanctioned religion, and there is a strong, pervasive, and even blatant push for conformity to the state-supported civil religion.[34] Western Buddhists instinctively know how to deal with this civil religion environment, but the newer ethnic Buddhist communities find it difficult to feel any sense of equal standing with Christians as a basis for sharing and dialogue. For example, when newer ethnic Buddhists want to build a temple, they sometimes get a chilly response from their neighbors. Their young people are under heavy peer pressure to participate in common Christian-based activities. A particular problem faced by some congregations is the mixture of established, well-to-do members and newly arrived refugees. Often the children of the well-to-do go to private Christian schools, for example.

Perhaps the major problem in Buddhist-Christian relations in the West is the gap between the academic or churchly realm of scholars and theologians (those mostly engaged in the dialogue) and the ministers and lay members of the congregations and temples (who mostly are not so engaged). This gap is somewhat intensified on the Buddhist side by the fact that Western Buddhists predominate among those engaged in dialogue, while ethnic Buddhists are not so much involved.

It follows that a major goal needs to be the exploration of more contact and sharing between Christians of local congregations and Buddhists of ethnic/local congregations and groups in America and Europe. This means a program of education is needed, relating to basic Buddhist beliefs and practices and Christian response to Buddhists. Theological resources need to be developed to guide Christians in further sharing with the Buddhists of their local communities.

In particular, areas need to be identified in which Christians and Buddhists can share with common ground and common interests. These will be practical areas more than theoretical, theological issues. They will involve discussing and acting on challenges related to suffering, healing, environment, justice, violence, peace, education, the role of women, mixed marriages, and much more.

[34] *Ibid.*, pp. *36–39.*

Theological Perspectives on People of Other Faiths

Kyaw Than

Since my childhood I have been lived in the context of relations with people of other faith commitments. In grade school the first period of each school day was set aside for learning the major doctrines taught by the Buddha. This was normal for state schools in Burma, as the majority of the population is Buddhist, and Buddhism has undergirded Burmese culture and values over centuries. In the school curricula for language and literature, texts for references and content of courses invariably fall back on the birth stories of the Buddha or on relevant extracts from his teachings.

I remember how my parents, though Christians, were often approached by Buddhists to serve as elders at engagement or wedding ceremonies in the community. At the end of Buddhist lent or in celebration of the Burmese New Year, members of the local community came regularly to pay respects to my parents and to seek their blessing. Similar experiences became mine as I went to Thailand and served on the faculty of Mahidol University, the faculty and constituency of which was mostly Buddhist.

Moving on to serve the regional ecumenical body (the then East Asia Christian Conference) and the Central Committee of the World Council of Churches, I became involved in the program for "dialogue" with people of living faiths and ideologies.

Some Asian Concerns

The East Asia Christian Conference (now known as the Christian Conference of Asia) was inaugurated in 1959 during an assembly convened at Kuala Lumpur and serves some 37.5 million Christians in 16 countries stretching from Pakistan in the west to Japan and Korea in the east, and to Australia and New Zealand in the south. One of the concerns arising out of that gathering concerned the witnessing of Christ to people of living religious traditions in Asia. It was suggested that there should be a departure from the type of approach promoted by the 1938 world missionary conference at Tambaram regarding other religious systems. The assembly at Kuala Lumpur emphasized that the approach should be in terms of people of other religious traditions rather than the traditions or systems as such. Religion cannot be pinned down to one interpretation. It is

more than concepts and rituals; it involves symbols, music, art, meditation, and silence. Above all, we have to be concerned with people as they seek to live by their faith understanding. The statement from the inter-faith dialogue secretariat of the East Asia Christian Conference applies not only to members of Asian churches but also to all Christians everywhere. It said:

> The pressure of our pluralistic societies makes necessary a deeper understanding of our relationship to these other persons and of how that relationship may truly be understood in the purpose of God. A purely negative assessment of these traditions is not true to our growing experience of these systems and ideologies. […]

In another statement Asian Christians said that:

> The Christian encounter is, by its nature, a meeting of "persons" with "persons." Christians meet with and are met by their fellow human beings in the normal converse of life. The increase of life in the cities makes this meeting inevitable and even irritating. Life in the villages, too, is no longer the life of the harmonious community; it involves a great deal of mutual questioning. It is from within this life together that Christians seek to transmit, interpret and give evidence of the good news of God's purpose for all persons and for all the world as it has been made manifest in Jesus Christ.

Further, at the risk of over-simplification, we may say that for some Asian churches interfaith relations have gone through three stages. In the early days of Christian missionary expansion, some adherents of traditional religious traditions became convinced of the good news and came forward to accept Christ in the face of opposition and ostracism by their own families, relatives and community. Those who knew their previous religion thoroughly began to testify to the weaknesses or invalidity in the religion they had left, and to give scholarly testimonies in a language verging on polemics. This inflamed the leaders and scholars of the religious traditions concerned, and the literary or personal encounters that resulted were primarily polemical.

As the churches of the converts became more established and gained more self-confidence, and sought to relate intelligibly and warmly to their compatriots of another persuasion, some indigenous Christian thinkers began to select possible points of contact between Christianity and the dominant religious traditions. There was also desire to discard the "foreignness" of Christianity and to express their faith in terms which might carry meaning in their societies and cultures undergirded by other religious traditions. The presentation of Christianity as the "crown" or fulfillment of the religious search of the peoples of India or Burma was regarded as being fraught with dangers of compromise and

syncretism. In the third and more recent stage, the inter-religious relations have been characterized by emphasis on persons, neighbors, or partners in such relations rather than on doctrines and religion as such. There is also an emphasis in inter-religious relations in pursuit of a common concern or in tackling together a common challenge. Instead of one adherent just looking at the system of the other and vice versa with combative eyes, the two partners within the same locality look together at a common task to be fulfilled. Facing a common challenge, whether it has to do with practical issues of justice, peace or community service, often leads to the sharing of the basis of each partner's concern as they dig into the depth of their spiritual/moral resources to respond to the challenge they face together.

Such an emphasis also takes into account the problem of the ambiguity of religion. There are a numerous religious traditions and there is diversity within each tradition. Each tradition is going through stages of change, evolution or development. Religion, as mentioned earlier, has many aspects; it comprises beliefs, practices, and values, but it is also an historical and sociological phenomenon. We need to recognize the gap between classical formulations of these systems and the actual ways in which convictions are held and lives are lived. People can be farthest from God at the peak of their religious life. Religion can even be the sphere of "irreligion." Consider the wars, conflicts and riots that have been carried out in the name of "religion." Karl Barth described religion as the concern of the godless people seeking the way of self-redemption. As such, religion is unbelief itself. The late D. T. Niles referred to religion as the human approach to God's mystery. Each goes his or her own way to God and tries to find God without finding his or her brother or sister (the fellow human being). But because God loves the world, God has provided for one center and one act of acknowledgement. God has involved the seekers in a common finding rather than in a common search.

A Pluralist World

We live in a pluralist world and we live in a global village. Contemporary Asia has emerged out of two major historical developments since World War II. Political revolutions led to the overthrow of the colonial powers and to the liberation or birth of nations, which changed the map of Asia and the alignment of power within the global village. Second, the Asian renaissance reinforced the ancient religious traditions which had molded or influenced the cultures of these nations for ages.

These developments also had at least two implications for the church's witness in Asia. The colonial powers were from the West which to the Asian mind

was associated with Christendom and Christianity. In fact, revolutionary Asia and renascent Asia were dialectically related. One could not have come into being without the other. The reassertion of traditional values as affirmed by the ancient religions provided added resistance, on the part of Asians, against the missionary efforts of the church. But there was another factor in the equation. The coming of colonialism brought among other things modernization through Western education, science, industrialization, and mass communications. There was re-interpretation and re-affirmation of values of traditional religions. Some became missionary minded with efforts to bring these values to the West. Religious pluralism is a fact in our time.

In his book, *Ecumenism in Transition*, Konrad Raiser referred to three levels of its meaning:

> Religious pluralism describes a situation occurring in more and more countries where different religious communities live alongside one another in the same society and need to find ways to live and work together instead of polemical demarcation.
>
> Secondly, it denotes the result of a variety of research in the religious field which independently of all dogmatic pre-suppositions had developed a dynamic and holistic understanding of religion. Religions cannot be reduced to a static system of concepts and beliefs: they are a living whole which can ultimately only be understood from inside, and of which personal spirituality, ritual and lifestyle are an inseparable part. All major religions have changed in many ways, in part through direct influence on one another.
>
> Thirdly, the phrase "religious pluralism" expresses the experience arising from numerous interfaith encounters, that opposing truth claims cannot be judged at the level of abstract conceptual analysis, but that they rest on concrete acts of religious commitments, the credibility and authenticity of which can only be disclosed in genuine dialogue.
>
> This awareness of religious pluralism is a development of the last twenty years. First in Asia and then increasingly throughout the world, it has led to initiatives for dialogue between adherents of the different religions which is characterized by mutual respect and readiness to be enriched and changed.[…] what is at issue here is the theological interpretation of religious pluralism […].[1]

[1] Konrad Reiser, *Ecumenism in Transition: A Paradigm Shift in the Ecumenical Movement?* (Geneva: World Council of Churches Publications, 1991), pp. 54ff.

Relations with Buddhists

In the Kalama Sutta of the Tipitaka canon one reads the following saying imputed to Buddha:

> Do not go merely by hearsay or tradition; not by what has been handed down from olden times; not by outward appearances; not by cherished opinions and speculations; not by mere possibilities; and do not believe merely because I am your Master. But when you yourselves have seen that a thing is evil and leads to harm and suffering then you should reject it. And when you see that a thing is good and blameless and tends to blessing and welfare, then you should do such a thing.

Not only Buddhists but also the so-called secularists as well as persons of other religious commitments can also subscribe to such an injunction. In our contact with the Buddhists and secularists, Christians face not those who adhere to vanishing outmoded value systems but those systems which tax and challenge the understanding of faith and the quality of the way of life of those who call themselves as witnesses of Christ.

Rational analysis of values, practice of and sacrificial commitment to the teachings (dhamma for the Buddhist, rationalism for the secularists), and openness as well as confidence to share their insights with others are often the characteristics of those we meet in these communities. Buddhists do not usually maintain statistical data about their members. Some might even look upon the concern with such statistics as arising out of un-Buddhist and possessive attitudes! Adherents may visit or take offerings to different monasteries in the same village. But the abbots or monks do not vie with one another to win the loyalty or support of the communities concerned. Millions seek solace and hope through Buddhism. Buddhists and related Hindu populations in the world are estimated to number 350 million and 750 million respectively. Communities of Buddhists and of Hindus are also growing in the Western world. In the Buddhist context "greatness" is understood not in terms of social status or material possessions. Rather it is acknowledged in terms of what one has given up for the sake of knowing and practicing the dhamma. The community of disciples (the sangha) still follows the injunctions from the time of the Buddha (i.e., some 2,500 years ago) leading a shared community life, without personal possessions except for the eight allowed items, fasting daily except for the forenoon meal for which they are dependent on those who offer such to them on their required daily rounds. As members of the Order they give up their householders' life-style in the companionship of wife, parents or children. There is also a different concept of time. The ultimate goal or (nibban) may be one's attainment tomorrow or yet a thousand lives away! The present life does not set for the Buddhist the

limits or boundaries of one's existence. The boundaries are determined by the bundle of merit (or kamma) one is accumulating or has accumulated so far. The "speed orientation" of the West and its "anti-age bias" are questioned in the Buddhist cultural context.

We seek to proclaim Christ in the context of those who see greatness not in terms of those who have so much, but of those who give up so much. Strength is not seen as having the ability to impose one's will on others but in being vulnerable. Pointing to what God had done on the cross can be both a point of contact as well as departure for the members of each communities. Christ the Eternal entered time (*anicca*, impermanence). The kenosis of Christ can be deeply meaningful to those who emphasize *anatt*a (no-self) as one basic concept about life. The cross is Christ's embodiment of suffering (*dukkha*). The Christological hymn of Philippians 2 can be both a meaningful communication of the Christian message, or a hurtful challenge to the Buddhist partner in dialogue. Preaching of the cross as the place of manifestation of ultimate love (*metta*), mercy (*karuna*), and truth (dhamma) can provide a bridge of understanding on one hand while on the other it may be a scandal to the members of these communities.

But we should not be afraid to acknowledge truth wherever it is found. As D. T. Niles, Max Warren, and Kenneth Cragg have insisted: "We are not moving into a void." We go expecting to meet the Lord who has preceded us and has been preparing people within the context of their own cultures and convictions. Both dialogue and mission can be conducted only in an attitude of humility.

Further we are not to be preoccupied (as traditionally we often are) with Buddhism or secularism as views of life as such. For their adherents these are ways of life. We are to avoid being colored by the academic study of Buddhism or secularism and we should not downplay the practice of convictions as a way of life. We are not indulging in a comparative study of religion. Our concern is for relations with people and not with systems, but to be partners and to develop mutual trust. We are not preparing to compete with one another. Rather, we seek to face together our common challenges as we draw from the depth of our religious tradition. It is not a dialogue between confronting combatants. Rather, it is intended to be a cooperative tackling of a common challenge, while the sharing and comparing of resources drawn on can take place in trust and in depth, spontaneously.

The common challenge may not even be a religious matter. It may have to do with a social concern or something connected with a community health program, for example, or a cooperative for pooling water buffalo for cultivation in a rural district. It is not activism we would be after. Action and reflection would go together in such joint ventures.

Recently professors from the Lutheran School of Theology at Chicago, through the help of the Department of Global Mission of the Evangelical Lutheran Church

in America, held a series of consultations with Buddhists particularly from the Theravada Buddhist tradition of Thailand. We dwelt together on the themes of suffering, health and healing, which have deep and wide implications for Buddhist-Christian relations. During the consultation dealing with Religion and Healing, the paper presented by Robert Schreiter of Catholic Theological Union proposed some points for continuing the exchange of understanding between the two faith communities regarding the Buddhist way of life. He referred to the sangha seen as a spiritual as well as societal force. In his view the sangha has always been more directly involved in the world as its members pursued the path to enlightenment.

He noted that Buddhist monks have played significant roles in the upheavals in societies in south Asia, in this century. He asked how contemporary Buddhists balance the world-relativizing teachings of the dhamma with the world-or-civilization creating task that seems to grow out of an understanding of *karuna* (compassion). He went on to inquire how "doing one's salvation" (making merit) relates to the fact that deliverance (or emancipation) comes principally from grasping the Four Noble Truths. He asked if "doing" did not get in the way of "knowing." Cannot making merit become a practical substitute for seeking insight into the nature of *dukkha* (suffering)? He acknowledged similar tensions which Christians (especially Catholics and Orthodox) also experience.

Some Concluding Points

Some remarks concerning issues related to the field of theology of religions may be in order. Christian theology is a theology of relationships (or dialogue).[2] There is in the nature of the triune God, the characteristic of relationships. Christ's redemptive work on the cross is the restoration of relationships between God and humankind.

There is a wideness in God's mercy, and therefore the finality of Jesus Christ in a world of religions (as C. H. Pinnock on the same theme has said) needs to be understood in the light of God's love for all humanity. The object of God's love is the world. We must critically look at any *a priori* view of other religious traditions as either wholly good or wholly bad, and learn to consider each on its merits and demerits case by case. Karl Barth in *Church Dogmatics IV* acknowledged there are parables of the kingdom outside the pages of the Bible and beyond the walls of the church.

[2] See David Bosch, *Transforming Mission* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1991).

It was said that the International Missionary Conference meeting at Whitby in 1947, instead of asking whether pre-conditions for mission and points of contact were present in the world, rather asked whether they were present in the church. The important point that needs underlining in relations between Christians and persons of a different religious commitment has to do more with the cultivation of relationships of trust on the part of Christians than with the search for points of contact in the systems and settings of our partners.

As the San Antonio statement of the 1990 meeting of the Commission on World Mission and Evangelism testifies: "We cannot point to any other way of salvation than Jesus Christ. At the same time we cannot set limits to the saving power of God."

We need to the courage to follow wherever the Holy Spirit may lead us, even beyond the truth-boundaries we can presently recognize. The Holy Spirit is already in the world. By God everything in heaven and on earth was created; the whole universe has been created through God and for God, and all things area held together in God, and in the dispensation of the fullness of times God will gather together in one all things in Christ (see Col 1:15–20). There is nothing outside God's rule, for all things cohere in God. We cannot claim to exhaust the implications of these affirmations and our understanding of the nature of Christ in whom God will sum up all things.

In our zeal to define the uniqueness of Christ others may conclude and we ourselves come to realize that "our" Christ has been too small! Scottish theologian John Baillie translated the formula of Cyprian, *extra ecclesiam nulla salus* (outside the Church there is no salvation) as "the man who keeps to himself cannot be made whole"! The message I get from this is not that of a closed circle but of relationships and outgoing fellowship.

Exploring Christian Theology in Relation to Buddhists

Theodore M. Ludwig

As Christians listen to Buddhists and get to know them as friends and fellow humans—recognizing common ground with them and vast differences of perspective—many challenges arise. In the need for rethinking and revitalizing Christian faith and practice, it is perhaps helpful to hear and respond to those insights and challenges that come to us out of Buddhist experience. Buddhists present particularly stimulating insights growing out of the radical thoroughness of their ideas of truth and the way they relativize all constructs of thought. Especially challenging is their insistence on the priority of praxis in their path toward transformation.

The ideas and insights from Buddhists of course need to be discussed and understood by Christians in various ways. Some challenges represent an antithetical worldview that Christians cannot integrate within their own beliefs. But most helpfully, many of these challenges can be viewed as opportunities for Christians to rethink their own views in order better to understand and live up to the Christian vision. Such challenges provide Christians an opportunity to critique their own accepted views, look at things in a different way, and see facets in the Christian resources they perhaps have not noticed before.

Here are some preliminary explorations into what some of these challenges might be—not to provide theological answers, but to stimulate discussion and responsible theological thought.

Some Challenges in Practical Spiritual Life

Although Buddhists have a vast tradition of philosophical thought, they hold that the spiritual path is primarily practical, not theoretical. So perhaps a first challenge for Christians is to begin rethinking theology at the practical, experiential end rather than the doctrinal, theoretical realm. We recall that to the earliest Christians their religion was simply "the Way of Life" (*Didache*).

Meditation as spiritual practice

It is difficult for Christians, especially in the Protestant, Lutheran tradition, to think of spiritual life without immediately focusing on the Word (*sola scriptura)*. Worship services have much talking but little silence. People get uncomfortable if there is no discur-

sive talking or thinking going on. Devotional activity usually means studying the Bible, reading, praying, and talking about meaning and application to one's life. Buddhists also have similar devotional practices, of course. But their emphasis on insight meditation—quieting the discursive grasping mind, dissolving purpose and goal in spiritual practice—poses an interesting model to consider for Christian spiritual practice.

Of course, Christian spiritual practice cannot be impersonal but is focused on Christ. Yet, it can be questioned whether all devotional activity need involve discursive thinking and talking. If Christ lives in us and we in Christ, can aspects of that reality also be experienced by stopping thinking, emptying the mind, and seeing Christ directly? One calls to mind Christian meditative traditions involving silent rumination, cultivating stillness in waiting for God, etc.

The aspect of purposelessness in Buddhism might be considered in relation to Christian spiritual practices. Word-centered devotion, linked with discursive thinking and reasoning, can become goal-centered. Often it is felt that something has to be achieved, an inspiring message has to be imparted, or we have to learn new things. Even the need to feel more connected with God is a goal with which people engage in worship. Perhaps, responding to the challenge from Buddhist meditation, Christians can bring some questions about the goal-centeredness of such spiritual practice. Does an element of self-centeredness enter in, of wanting to achieve something for ourselves rather than simply giving ourselves to God? Many Christian spiritual masters have wrestled with this question in their devotional practices, and they talk of giving up the self, accepting doubt and dissolution of one's own goals in surrender to God. The insights we hear from our Buddhist friends can perhaps turn us back to these aspects of Christian spirituality.

Buddhists, like Christians, have a range of ritual activities in their spiritual practices. Nevertheless, many Buddhists have a sense of priority for interior mystical experience (meditation, awakening). Ritual accomplishes many things, be that educational, commemorative, bonding the community, setting the frame of mind, etc. Finally, these purposes are not ends in themselves but are relative to the higher path of nirvanic realization. There are various means, but, according to Buddhists, they are not looked to as ends in themselves. Of course, with their sacramental perspective, Christians cannot consider Word and sacrament to be merely "skillful means." Yet, some questions are possible about the relationship between outward ritual worship and the interior spiritual experience of union with God. May it be that occasionally the means—that is, the forms of worship and devotion—tend to become ends in themselves?

The life of the sangha as a concrete spiritual path

The role of the sangha, especially the monks and nuns, suggests many challenges for Christians to consider. Many aspects of course do not fit well within the general Christian view, such as the separation between the laity and the monastic

order, the seeming detachment from society shown by monks and nuns, etc. However, at least ideally, the sangha represents a concrete communal reality visibly present as the spiritual backbone within society, fulfilling a distinctive spiritual function for society and yet different from the rest of society. For many Christians, the idea of the "church" as a spiritual reality is rather abstract and marginal in society. Where the church becomes concrete, in congregations and denominations, it does not seem all that different from society. Except for some of the religious orders, the clergy seem to share in worldly concerns much the same as the laity. A challenge for Christians perhaps is to re-envision the church as a concrete social reality that really is the spiritual backbone of society, different from the world, yet the arena for Christians to fulfill their spiritual path within the world.

The centrality of spiritual disciplines in the life of the sangha is perhaps noteworthy for Christians. A certain way of life is set forth for monks and nuns, focused on nirvanic attainment, and it is assumed that this is the higher path, even though the laity normally do not participate in it. Christians might wonder if the practice of spiritual disciplines, once quite central in Christian life, has not become rather diluted in most parts of the Christian church today, even among the clergy.

The ethical vision of Buddhists

The ethical vision of Buddhists springs from the base of radical selflessness. The virtues of loving kindness (*metta*), compassion (*karuna*), sympathetic joy (*mudita*), and equanimity (*upekkha*) all are based on rooting out the grasping, self-serving ego. While such a motivation of self-giving love is obviously a part of the Christian ethical vision also, Christians might think again how this relates to other motivations such as empowerment, self-value, justice, rights, etc.—motivations which presuppose a strong sense of self. While Christ talked of the need to "lose" one's self, Christians generally have had difficulty understanding how actually to realize that surrender of self in ethical practices.

Concerning issues of bettering society, it appears that Buddhist ideas for social justice and social change are not primarily based on some ideal design for society, some divine law, that ought to be inaugurated. There is of course the tradition of the dharma realm set up by King Asoka, and the sangha has been influential in the political rule of some countries. Yet the main emphasis is on the priority of inner transformation rather than outward social change; that inner transformation then shows itself in peace, justice, giving, helping, etc. Christians will not want to give up their sense of God's design for the world and for society. But they may reflect again on the crucial need for inner transformation into people of peace, love, and justice before the outer structures and laws can effect meaningful change.

Both Buddhists and Christians have done much thinking about suffering and its causes, as well as healing and wholeness. The particular emphasis Buddhists put on

karmic causes as well as interdependency of all beings could help Christians to take another look at their own views. Christians would hardly want to look at suffering and healing simply as a karmic process. Nevertheless, perhaps the popular Christian notion of hopeless universal sinfulness as the cause of all suffering is a bit simplistic. The volitional aspects of karma and its removal may be suggestive of more emphasis on personal responsibility and freedom. At the same time, the Buddhist sense of interdependency could help remind Christians of authentic Christian notions of the real unity of all God's creatures, including unity in suffering and in healing.

Particularly challenging to Christians, perhaps, would be the actual model of a Buddhist society in action, to see how issues of justice, violence, suffering, etc., are understood and addressed in practical terms. For that reason, conversations between Christians and Buddhists focused on practical matters of communal life could be very helpful.

One more example of a challenge in the practical realm might be in the area of mission and relationship with people of other faiths. Buddhists, from the beginning, have had an impulse to mission activity, to spread the dharma for the welfare of all beings. Yet that impulse has mostly (with some exceptions, of course) been linked with tolerance and a willingness to let people retain their own religious traditions, subordinating them in various ways to the Buddhist spiritual path. Christians, who have sometimes been rather aggressive in their mission practices, have recently done a good deal of rethinking in this area, and the Buddhist model can be a further impulse to that.

In interfaith matters, Christians have generally taken the initiative in dialogue situations. It is significant, perhaps, that where Buddhists have taken the lead, it generally has to do not with dialogue over doctrine, but with very practical matters such as world peace, as, for example, the World Conference on Religion and Peace which is sponsored especially by Rissho Koseikai from Japan. Such activity, of course, implies a mutual recognition and even a willingness to promote the welfare of the other faiths. The challenge to Christians may be to put cooperation and service in interfaith situations up front, ahead of the traditional Christian feeling that cooperation with people of other faiths somehow promotes those faiths and thus compromises the Christian faith.

Exploring Some Challenges in Theological Thought

Issues related to revelation and authority

Buddhists for the most part venerate the scriptures (Tipitaka and Mahayana sutras) as "Word of the Buddha," finding the dharma expressed authoritatively in these sacred texts. That truth, of course, was not God's self-disclosure, revealed through prophets; rather, in the most basic sense, the truth was discovered by Siddhartha Gautama in

human experience. Of course, the Buddha achieved the various perfections and attained omniscience, and many Mahayana sutras were preached by the Buddha in heavenly or transcendent form. But a challenging factor is the discovery of the ultimate truth within human experience. This Buddhist perspective perhaps can help Christians take another look at their somewhat dualistic model of revelation as special truth that God sends from outside human experience and knowledge.

Christians might ask about how the prophets and apostles received revelatory knowledge—transmitted directly from God in some special way, or discovered and interpreted in their own historical experience? What do Christians mean by divine inspiration in this context? Christians might recall some of the more mystical descriptions of receiving revelation (for example, Jeremiah, Paul, and Jesus), as well as the more historical and contextual descriptions (Luke, Paul), and look at these anew in the light of the Buddhist model. Further, the Lutheran tradition of "general revelation" (*Uroffenbarung*) might be explored anew.

The revelatory authority of the founder, the Buddha, the Christ, is a related area for some possible rethinking. Christians say Christ reveals the mystery of God and of salvation; they also say that Christ *is* the revelation of God. Can Buddhist insights into the Buddha unveiling the ultimate truth in preaching the dharma provide any suggestive ideas for understanding the Christian assertions? The Buddha's authority is not based on what his nature is, but what he achieved; ultimate authority comes from the dharma. Is Christ's revelatory authority based in his nature as the Son of God, or on what he accomplished as servant?

Paradigms and categories of thought

Christian paradigms and categories of thought often emphasize substance, permanence, and being, as for example the immutability of God and the state of original sin. Relational models are often based on hierarchy and separation, for example, lordship and monotheism. Opportunity to rethink these categories and models comes from Buddhist paradigms that often emphasize conditionedness, transience and becoming, and from relational models that express interdependence and mutuality. These kinds of accents are not foreign to Christian thought and could be retrieved from various sources—early church theologians, Christian mystics, women's experiences, and many modern philosophical approaches. Christian mystics in many ages of the church have reveled in abandonment of reason and logic in the face of the mysterious divine love. Lutheran resources in particular include notions of *simul*, such as the living in the tension of the two realms, in the dilemma of being totally free and totally slave, in the interplay of the hidden and revealed God, in the simultaneity of *iustus et peccator*. These insights call for an acceptance of ambiguity and mystery, of dialectic and paradox.

Perspectives on ultimate reality

Buddhist notions of ultimacy, of course, provide a major challenge to Christian ideas of God. *Pratitya-samutpada* (*paticca samuppada*) and related notions such as *sunyata* are very different from notions of God as the personal creator, the separate ruler of all, eternal and absolute. Yet the challenge of this drastically different view of ultimacy could perhaps evoke some new insights into the Christian ways of thinking about God. Can the total interdependence of God in Godself (Trinity), and of God and world (panentheism), find more resonance in the Christian tradition? Can emptiness be a way of articulating some Christian mystical experiences of the total union in God? Overall, the Buddhist challenge would encourage Christians to plumb more fully the relational, interdependent, mystical models in the Christian tradition of thinking about God.

Some Buddhist models of the ultimate, moving more in the direction of monotheism and cosmotheism, have been found to be more congenial to Christian views, for example, Amitabha of Pure Land Buddhism and Mahavairocana of the tantric Buddhist tradition. Yet, these models, within the authentic Buddhist context, also provide suggestive challenges to Christians. In Pure Land theology, at least in Shinran's tradition, Amida's efficacious name is universally proclaimed by all Buddhas and Amida's light universally penetrates all hearts—thus a universal source of salvation based on the fundamental Buddhist idea of ultimate interrelationality. Similarly, ritual identification with Mahavairocana as the cosmic Buddha brings Buddha realization—again based on the interdependence of all. These insightful Buddhist models would perhaps encourage Christian thought about God toward more emphasis on God's cosmic presence and saving power, as expressed in various Christian mystical traditions.

The Mahayana Buddhist teaching of the *trikaya* (three bodies or dimensions of the Buddha) may be suggestive as Christians think about God ways of action in the world, especially as expressed in the doctrine of the Trinity. In the Buddhist mode, ultimate reality (dharma*kaya*) is expressed in the divine realm (*sambhogakaya*) and manifested in human form (*nirmanakaya*). Can this model provide any insight to Christians in interpreting the trinitarian formula? At least this Buddhist perspective may lead Christians to think more expansively about understanding the various modalities of God's presence and action in the world.

The nature of the world and of humans

The Buddhist cosmology of an endless, self-evolving and self-devolving samsaric world offers a quite different view from the Christian idea of a created world with beginning and end, governed by God. Can the Buddhist perspective stimu-

late Christians to expand their vision better to incorporate modern process theories and scientific ideas about the world process? As Christians in the past have incorporated evolutionary views, is it possible to imagine world cycles and karmic processes as ultimately under God's creatorship? That the world has value and significance (God judged it all as "very good") cannot be doubted by Christians. But perhaps the Buddhist detachment from, and sense of neutrality toward, the world process could help modern Christians rethink the rather materialistic attachment to the world that many seem to hold to today.

For human nature and authentic human life, the Buddhist marks of existence (impermanence, suffering, and no-self) contrast significantly with Christian notions of personal value in the image of God. An insight here might be to see human life bound up with the same marks of existence as all of nature—an ecological interdependence rather than human priority and dominance. The interdependence of all humans, and of humans with all of nature, is something Christians certainly know but still need to integrate more fully into their anthropology. The practicality of the Buddhist teaching—*an-atta* put forth as a therapeutic teaching for overcoming selfishness—may help Christians reevaluate the self-centeredness that can be promoted by an over-emphasis on individual human worth and priority.

Ignorance, grasping, karma—the Buddhist analysis of the cause of human suffering—contrasts greatly with the Christian doctrine that encompasses both freedom of will and bondage to sin. Given the difficulty and disagreements regarding Christian teachings of original sin, freedom, predestination, and the like, it may be helpful to explore some of the Buddhist insights to provide new perspectives on traditional understandings. Can the ignorance – grasping—karma paradigm shed any light on what original sin is all about, for example?

Christological issues

The various Buddhological relationships, such as Siddhartha as the Buddha, and the three bodies of the Buddha, may offer suggestive elements for christological understanding. Is the man Jesus related to the Son of God in any way like Siddhartha is related to the Buddha, or in any way like the *nirmanakaya* is related to the *sambyogakay*a (or the dharma*kaya*)? The ample Buddhist high Buddhology (Amida as cosmic savior, Mahavairocana as universal Buddha, etc.) may stimulate the creation of new christological images and symbols. The linkage of the Buddha Siddhartha Gautama to previous ages (as in the Jataka stories, for example) may provide some new thoughts for Christians on understanding the relation between Jesus of Nazareth and the pre-existent Christ. On the other hand, the Buddhist emphasis on the Buddha's attainment as a human may help Christians in the continuing task of avoiding a docetic understanding of Jesus Christ.

The path of salvation

The Buddhist path of liberation has many parallels with the Christian path of salvation but probably more striking differences. Yet, there are some insights that may be helpful. The Buddhist emphasis on *awakening*, that is, seeing reality as it is, may encourage Christians to retrieve accents of awakening, enlightenment, and wisdom in their own traditions. Even though "faith by hearing the Word of God" is a strong Christian emphasis, that does not have to exclude motifs of seeing and awakening which are also present in the Christian tradition. For example, Adam and Eve are described as awakening to the knowledge of sin, "seeing" their alienation and separation from God. Jesus' own life displays elements that might be understood as awakening experiences, such as his baptism, the temptation in the wilderness, and his inner struggle in Gethsamane. Paul's experience on the Damascus road was an awakening, as was Augustine's conversion and Luther's tower experience. Most of these experiences include hearing God's Word, but the also involve "seeing" as well as hearing and obeying.

The Buddhist contour of grace and works (other power and self-power themes) is an area that could be explored in relation to Christian themes. The different schools of Buddhism place emphasis in differing ways, but overall there is a continuum of individual effort and discipline, on the one hand, and being enveloped in the universal Buddha reality, on the other. Christian theology of course is radically grace-centered, and yet Christian tradition also recognizes that there are both Godward and humanward movements within the larger continuum of grace.

These are some beginning explorations into the kinds of insights and challenges for Christian theology that may arise for Christians as they engage in serious conversation with Buddhists. Rethinking Christian theology is an ongoing task for Christians in every age, and today one important stimulus for that is the opportunity for dialogue with people of the Buddhist tradition.

Issues and Challenges in Relation to Mahayana Buddhists: Coexistence and Dialogue

Notto R. Thelle

From Conflict to Coexistence

As the essay on the church's experience in the encounter with Buddhism in Japan has already shown, Mahayana Buddhists initially encountered Christianity with suspicion and fear. They regarded Christian doctrine and spirituality with its simple stories of creation, fall, divine interventions, and salvation through the suffering of Christ as inferior, even ridiculous or absurd. It was, nevertheless, perceived as a dangerous faith, threatening to the very existence of Buddhism. Particularly its active and missionary spirit supported by the image of being the spiritual foundation of a powerful and expanding Western civilization, provoked aggressive and defensive reactions. Christians generally had such a low esteem of Buddhism that few considered it worthwhile even to regard it as a potential enemy.

Especially in Japan there was a strong anti-Christian sentiment among the Buddhists. Waves of anti-Christian campaigns lasted until the end of the 19th century, attacking Christianity for being subversive. However, such anti-Christian apologetics forced some influential Buddhists to study Christian teaching and practices, and this involvement led to personal contact and even friendly relations between the two religions. Christians gradually realized the spiritual power of Buddhism, and engaged in Buddhist studies in order to confront it more effectively. The process of mutual contact and study finally opened up for dialogue and mutual cooperation in the 1890s.

Even though Buddhist-Christian relations have generally been friendly since that time, notably in Japan, one may still find among Buddhists some of the early uneasiness about Christianity. Its active and sometimes aggressive spirit is felt to be incompatible with Eastern sentiments. While the gospels are often appreciated for their beauty, Christian doctrines are generally depreciated as naive. The churches seem strange and outlandish. The only real challenge is felt to be the contribution of Christians on the level of justice, social work, and political action.

Most Buddhists, including the Buddhist leadership, therefore, accept Christianity as one of the many elements of a highly diversified religious environment, but have no need for or interest in further contacts. The classical ideal of

religious harmony, where various religious practices and commitments coexist peacefully without much contact, still seems to be attractive. Even between the various Buddhists traditions and denominations there is minimal concern for dialogue and contact, and hence there is no reason to expect that dialogue with Christians should be regarded as more urgent.

The Significance of Dialogue

This background of peaceful coexistence without much direct mutual involvement is important in order to understand the setting of the actual dialogue. In most East Asian countries Buddhist-Christian dialogue is a peripheral, but significant, phenomenon. It is peripheral in the sense that it is conducted by a few individuals and groups, and does not play a central role in the religious life of the Christian and Buddhist mainstreams. This point is mentioned here, not in order to diminish the contribution of those who have engaged in dialogue, but to balance the exaggerated reports of some enthusiasts and to give a proper perspective of what is really taking place. Whether or not the dialogue is significant, only the future will show. The assumption here is that in spite of its limitation, dialogue will make a great impact on the future life of the churches, and that also Buddhism will undergo changes as the challenges from Christianity and Christian concerns are taken seriously.

In the East Asian (Mahayana) context I think it is fair to say that Japan is the only country which has a consistent history of dialogue. In China there has hardly been any serious dialogue at all, apart from the combination of dialogue and evangelism in some missionary movements.

Because the Japanese context is so important for the emerging dialogue at the international level, a few words should be said about trends in Japan. This dialogue was pioneered by liberal Buddhists and Christians around the turn of the century, and it has branched out in a variety of contacts, which I elsewhere have characterized as "establishment dialogue," "anti-establishment dialogue," and various types of "spiritual pilgrimage."

Just as the initial animosity between Buddhists and Christians was nurtured by mutual suspicion and fear concerning political and national issues, the initial dialogue was to a great extent inspired by the notion of a common responsibility for the national cause and a feeling of being threatened by common enemies. The enemies might be moral decay, political corruption, or such "dangerous thought" as Marxism, anarchism, or socialism. A great deal of Buddhist-Christian contact in recent years have also been concerned with common threats as posed by modernism, secularism, and anti-religious ideologies. Other types of dialogue were more critically apprehensive of nationalism, militarism, and eco-

nomic exploitation, or advocated a common responsibility for world peace, environment, social justice, etc.

In addition to such pragmatic dialogues, there are—also from the 1890s—a great variety of dialogues concerning doctrinal and philosophical issues, spiritual discipline, and personal commitment. Comparative studies of the two faiths abound and have almost become a literary genre. Buddhist and Christian scholars engage in disputes about philosophical issues, such as the relationship between being and emptiness, the nature of the absolute, and the understanding of the human personality. Foreign missionaries and Japanese pastors involve themselves in Buddhist studies and practices. Lay people and priests from both faiths combine their own spiritual pilgrimage with experimental journeys into the other faith tradition.

The initiative for dialogue, however, seems to be primarily on the part of the Christians. This interest was often related to a sense of mission which tends to regard Buddhists and others as objects of conversion. But, in a paradoxical way, this missionary concern opens the way for a new attitude, an unreserved and unconditional encounter that nurtures a willingness to be transformed by the encounter.

Loci for Dialogue

"Place" is here not used in terms of actual meeting places, such as study centers and dialogue institutions, conferences, and other contexts where dialogues develop, as described elsewhere. The point is to respond to the question, "where do Mahayana Buddhists come down on important concrete issues?" In other words, it is important to locate some of the most significant areas of interest in the dialogue. Which aspects of religious life become meeting places where representatives of the two religions can engage in mutual dialogue, and which aspects are neglected? Which themes emerge as a significant common concern? Which religious traditions are particularly open to dialogue?

The easiest meeting place is obviously the dialogue which emerges from common concerns: social and national issues, moral concerns, practical cooperation, and a common front against common enemies. While the concrete issues may be complicated, cooperation is often easier because the real concern is somewhere outside the sphere of faith, and it does not directly challenge the doctrinal and spiritual aspects of religion.

Dialogue at the level of doctrine and philosophy/theology has traditionally been far more difficult, and often ends up with two, contradictory conclusions: either a sympathetic, but uncritical, assumption that behind the radically different religions there is a common essence; or a frustrated realization that in spite of a deep spiritual friendship, the doctrinal or philosophical framework divides

the two religions into separate worlds. In recent years, the challenge has been to overcome these extremes and to deepen the understanding by developing new approaches and hermeneutical keys.

The spiritual search of Buddhists and Christians has for more than 100 years established meeting places and opened up new ways of contact and communication. Prayer, meditation, and other spiritual practices nurture a sharing of religious experience beyond words and rational discourse. At the moment this seems to be the most popular and exciting type of dialogue, but it is still premature to judge whether or not the sense of unity and friendship that emerges from such experiences will promote a real dialogue in the future. At least the dialogue has to go one step beyond the excitement of spiritual sharing, and again be challenged by a renewed awareness of the very otherness of the other.

At the popular level, one of Buddhism's most prominent roles in the Far East is related to ancestor worship, funerals, and memorial services. The issue of ancestor worship has therefore been one of the most problematic features of Buddhist-Christian relations. Even though pragmatic solutions have been found, the issue remains a problem. While it is not included in the main concerns of this study, because originally it has nothing to do with Buddhist teachings, it should nonetheless be recognized as a controversial issue.

In spite of the variety of themes and concerns indicated above, there are certainly areas which are more or less not touched upon in the dialogue between Buddhists and Christians. The current dialogue might, for instance, be deepened and strengthened by a renewed emphasis on the role of religious ritual and expressions of devotional life. This would also involve a greater emphasis on visual arts, iconography, literature, music, and architecture. This may add new dimensions to the current dialogue.

The current dialogue is also limited by the fact that it has been dominated by specific traditions. In Japan it has been promoted by Roman Catholics and mainstream Protestants, with a one-sided interest in Zen and Pure Land Buddhism respectively, often to the neglect of other significant traditions. Lutherans have particularly devoted energy to the study of and dialogue with Pure Land Buddhism, with its "evangelical" emphasis on faith alone, its rejection of self-power and total trust in the redemptive grace of Amida Buddha. The fact that Tibetan Buddhism has emerged on the international scene as a vital force, has added new elements to the Buddhist-Christian dialogue. This factor will not only promote the exploration of the dialogue with tantric Buddhists, but it will broaden the ecumenical scope and remind the participants that both Buddhism and Christianity include a wealth of other approaches and traditions.

The limitation and strength of the present project is the conscious effort to engage in dialogue with Buddhists from the perspective of the Lutheran tradition, with the particular concerns and insights Lutheranism has added to Christianity. In order to be productive, however, this approach has to be combined with a deep sense of being

part of the great tradition of classical Christianity, and also with a willingness to approach Buddhism not only from narrow Lutheran preferences, but with a sensitivity towards Buddhism as a complex universe of religious teachings and practices.

The Mahayana Perspective

It is somewhat presumptuous for a Christian to attempt to give a general sketch of the Mahayana perspective. One of the basic conditions for a real dialogue is to let the other partner describe his/her own vision of, and to develop one's own understanding by repeating and reformulating the partner's vision in one's own words, by checking whether or not what seemed familiar and attractive really was understood, and whether or not what seemed repulsive and strange was really so strange. Misunderstanding is an important element in the process of understanding because it opens up the way for a corrective response. Reformulating insights from one's own point of view is important, not only in order to have one's view refined, but also to invite the other partner into a mutual process of reformulation and, potentially, revisioning.

The following is a humble attempt to repeat and reformulate some of the key affirmations and commitments in Mahayana as they appear from the perspective of a Christian who for years has been intrigued and fascinated by the experience of dialogue. Of course it is not a representative view, in the sense that it covers all the aspects of Mahayana that are essential for dialogue. Buddhism is a great universe, as is Christianity, and any ambition to be all-inclusive would be ridiculous. The point here is merely to attempt describing a few of those aspects of Mahayana which seem important for the encounter between the two great traditions. As we shall see later, this will also be important for formulating some of the basic challenges from Mahayana to Christian thought.

Basic Orientations

A precondition for any understanding of Buddhism is the awareness that even though Buddhists and Christians relate to the same reality—with hardship and happiness, suffering and joy, despair and hope—there are some basic differences in the very orientation towards that reality. These diverse orientations eventually seem to induce quite distinct ways of experiencing reality.

Seeing and hearing

The primary orientation of Buddhism perhaps comes from its being a religion of the eye, while Christianity—along with Judaism and Islam—is primarily a reli-

gion of the ear. This is a drastic over-simplification which has to be modified, but there is sufficient truth in the statement to make it a point of orientation.

The seeing aspect of Buddhism is obvious, and it penetrates the entire language of faith. Buddha is the one who woke up from the night of delusion, opened his eyes, and *saw* reality. He is the awakened one, the enlightened. Buddhism is a *darshana* (vision) in the Indian sense, a life-transforming vision of reality. The first part of the Noble Eightfold Path is "right seeing," and all the other aspects of the Buddhist way—from practical life to meditation—is related to that seeing. The Buddhist search for insight, enlightenment, wisdom, understanding, and mental clarity is a result of seeing and a search for deepened vision.

If Buddhism is a religion of the eye, Christianity may be characterized as a religion of the ear. God speaks and humankind responds. The world came into being by God's creative command. In many languages hearing is closely related to attentiveness and obedience. The Word of God requires a response: to be human is to be responsible to a divine power who has a claim on creation. If the most representative figure in Buddhism is the enlightened seer who is emotionally detached, the main figure in biblical religion is the prophet who calls his people to commit themselves to God and fellow humans. A prophet may have visions, but the main characteristic of a biblical seer is one who speaks because he has encountered the Holy One. Vision leads to humble submission and loving devotion. Willingly or unwillingly he calls his people to obedience by saying: "So says the Lord …"

In Buddhism there is also a lot of hearing. One of the 32 features of a Buddha is his long ear lobes; to be a disciple is to be a "hearer"; and the classical sutras begin with the words, "Thus I have heard." But hearing is entirely in the service of seeing, aiming at opening the eyes of understanding. There is no urge to relate to a transcendent divine reality beyond the myriad of things and phenomena; rather, a divine power that claims allegiance would be dismissed as one of the many illusions which keep the mind in bondage.

These two basic orientations in Buddhism and Christianity—the Buddhist emphasis on seeing, leading to detached insight, and the biblical attentive listening to the Word and will of God, leading to a committed relationship to God and fellow humans—may be expressed in different ways and may need modification, but there is no doubt that they have consequences for the quite contradictory expressions of the two religions. All the more fascinating then to discover that in spite of radically different conceptions of reality, the two religions often come quite close in their deepest insights in the meaning of human life.

Philosophical vision and story-telling

The distance from seeing to speaking is much longer and more complicated than from hearing to speaking.

What is heard is already formulated in words. The biblical prophet was supposed to convey the Word uncorrupted to the people. Jesus spoke what he had heard from the Father (Jn 8:28). The Qur'an was a recital of the divine message Mohammed had heard through the angel Gabriel.

What is realized in the clarity of enlightened vision may, on the other hand, require a long process of mental work before it can be committed to words. According to a classical story of Buddha's enlightenment, he was tempted to keep the vision for himself, because his experience could not be exhausted in words. It would not be understood, he thought, and it was only through the intervention of the gods that he finally formulated his insights in the basic doctrines of Buddhism.

From this point of view Buddhism might be characterized as the philosophical religion of an élite who had the resources to understand and to practice what the insight required. Only gradually it was transformed and formulated in a language which could be understood also by the common people. This was especially emphasized in Mahayana, which particularly wanted to make Buddhism a religion for the common (lay) people. Christianity, on the other hand, began as a religion of common people who were overwhelmed by the story, or the experience narrated in stories, of a God who loved them. This simple love story gradually became formulated in elaborated doctrines, and finally it was expressed in quite complicated philosophical systems, as we find it in the vast literature of Christian thought through the ages.

The philosophical character of Buddhism is quite obvious. Buddha's teaching was the result of years of spiritual agony, philosophical reflection, and ascetic training. It was expressed in great simplicity and clarity in what is supposed to be his first sermons. But it opened the way to detailed analyses of the character of reality, complicated speculations, and unlimited critical elaboration. No wonder that it primarily appealed to the élite, to the sons and daughters of good families, who had the opportunity to apply themselves to spiritual search, and the capacity to understand its philosophical depth.

With this basic character Buddhism might be described as a philosophical vision searching for stories, or a mental understanding seeking to make itself understood outside the élite. The further development of Buddhism, particularly in Mahayana, gradually opens the way for ordinary people, and it becomes necessary to develop a language which transforms philosophical insight into more easily accessible preaching.

A characteristic interpretation of this concern is found in the hermeneutics of T'ien T'ai Buddhism and its doctrine of the "five periods and eight teachings" (*goji hakkyo*). It is a complicated system that organizes the Buddhist sutras and traditions according to stages in the life of the Buddha, and according to various approaches in teaching methods. The main point in our context is to register its

understanding of the highest expression of Buddha's teaching. From one point of view the peak is the Avatamsaka Sutra which, according to T'ien T'ai, expresses Buddha's original enlightenment before he began to preach his message. In its philosophical depth and penetration, however, this was inaccessible to most people, and hence he had to adapt to their level, preaching the sermons known from the various Agama sutras. During the later stages of his life he taught other sutras of great value. The final stage of this development is, however, the consummation of his teaching as it was expressed in the Lotus Sutra, supposedly his last testament. According to T'ien T'ai, this is the final consummation, not only because it contains the ultimate Mahayana insights about the eternal presence of Buddha and of the universal salvation of all sentient beings, but also because it is expressed in a language which anyone could understand: symbols, parables, and stories. The sophisticated insights of the Buddha became stories.

The two different starting points in Buddhist and Christian, or biblical, use of language are still vividly present in the basic orientations of the two ways. At the same time, however, there is no doubt that their search for other types of expressions brings them into closer contact with each other: the Christian search for philosophical understanding and the Buddhist search for stories and symbolic expressions of the basic insights.

Existence and history

In spite of possible rapprochement in these orientations, one has to realize that the Buddhist orientation towards existential understanding of reality—most essentially expressed in philosophical categories—remains a basic concern and involves a critical questioning of the Christian/biblical preference for stories. The main reason is perhaps that its orientation towards mental understanding means that the historical dimension is of secondary importance. Of course, humankind can only be understood as interwoven in an historical context, and historical persons and happenings may teach important lessons and promote the liberation of the individual. But, Buddhism is primarily concerned with the liberation of the mind, and any dependence upon divine or human interventions in history would increase the delusions and strengthen the bondage of the mind.

The numerous stories, legends, and mythological elaborations in Buddhism are certainly understood as historical facts by many devotees. For the philosophically trained, however, the historical reality behind the stories is of little interest. In principle, not even the historical Buddha is important. They are just *upaya*, efficient or expedient means of elucidating the people and giving them aspirations for liberation.

Christian theology, on the other hand, begins with the historical facts. For both Jews and Christians, the stories are told in order to affirm the faith in a God who

intervenes in history. Whether or not one believes in the resurrection of Christ, historians would generally agree that unless the first Christians believed they had encountered the risen Christ, Christianity would never have become more than just another Jewish sect. Buddhist scholars have seldom felt threatened by demythologization, while Bultmann's views shattered the Christian community.

Mental change and action

Related to the above-mentioned orientations is the Buddhist understanding of mental transformation. Because the starting point of Buddhism is seeing, inner realization and mental liberation, the vital change takes place in the mind. The world may be the same, but the understanding of reality and the relationship to things are radically transformed. In that sense it is a new world, and the new perspective may eventually change the world, but the key is the inner transformation.

Christianity is also concerned about the inner transformation of the individual. Conversion, *metanoia*, is a radical change of mind (*nous*). But the Christian and biblical conversion is inconceivable unless it is has a direction towards God and fellow humans. The biblical call to change of mind is usually also a direct challenge to action: to respond though active involvement in love and care, to struggle against the evils in society, to challenge injustice, poverty, and oppression.

Enlightenment and community

The emphasis on mental change also gives the two religions different orientations towards relationships and human fellowship.

The Buddhist search for insight leads to liberation and detachment from the bondage to things and persons. The consequence is not that Buddhism is unconcerned about relationships, for the other side of wisdom is compassion, a virtue which has given Buddhism, particularly Mahayana, a unique atmosphere of tolerance and friendliness. Nevertheless, community and fellowship are not primary concerns in Buddhism. Its foremost community, the monastic order, is primarily a place for spiritual discipline, not for fellowship.

In Christianity, on the other hand, relationship and fellowship seem to be of ultimate value. The entire meaning of life is summed up in the words: "you shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your mind, and with all your strength. […] You shall love your neighbor as yourself." (Mk 12:30–31) God's kingdom was not primarily a mental reality, but a social reality of human relations, where envy, hatred, and oppression had been exchanged with generosity, love and mutual care.

Note that the reason for sketching these orientations and contrasts is not to stress differences and describe the superiority of the one over the other. Rather, it

is to clarify, and there is ample opportunity for modifications. Even more important, understanding all these differences of orientation opens the way for mutual learning and rapprochement. We can approach each other for deeper understanding of the different approaches, and in the end, put forth new efforts to test out whether or not the other orientation can open new vistas of understanding.

The Buddhist Vision of Reality

"Vision of reality" is a somewhat problematic terminology, for Buddhism questions the "reality" of things, conditions and situations. The same applies to such terms as being, existence, etc. In this context the point is to give a rough outline of what the world looks like from a Buddhist perspective, particularly considering the concerns of Mahayana. From one point of view, Buddhism is nothing but a systematic description of the world as it appears—in its suchness—to the purified eyes of a mind detached from delusion and passion. But this vision is not only an intellectual analysis, but—as a genuine *darshana* in the Indian sense—a soteriological vision which aims at salvation (*soteria*). In Buddhist terms, it aims at mental transformation and liberation.

It is presumed here that the reader is acquainted with the basic traditions and concepts that are common to all Buddhists: the life and spiritual search of the Buddha, his enlightenment, his preaching expressed in the Four Noble Truths about suffering and the way out of suffering, the Eightfold Path, the Middle Way leading to detachment and serenity of mind, and nirvana as the extinction of the fire of passion as the ultimate goal. If greed and passion darken the mind, keep humanity in bondage and distort the relationship to the world, the Noble Eightfold Path, with emphasis on insight, ethical discipline and meditation, liberates the mind and lets the true nature of things appear.

What, then, is the true nature of things? How is the basic structure of existence? The Buddhist analysis of existence is sophisticated, with a wealth of theories and speculative models which often contradict each other, sometimes fascinating, sometimes tiring in their pedantic enumeration of the elements of existence. Behind the multitude of systems and theories, however, Buddhists of all traditions generally agree upon three basic signs of being: 1) all things are transient/impermanent; 2) there is no permanent substance in things (not even in human beings); and 3) everything is accompanied by suffering.

Interdependence

The three characteristics of being are only three different ways of expressing that one has seen through the illusory character of existence, and each must be under-

stood from the principle of *pratitya samutpada*, in English often translated as "interdependence" or "dependent orientation." This is the Buddhist elaboration of the law of karmic causality: it is the key to the Buddhist understanding of reality, the hub which unites all other parts of the dharma wheel. The point is that all things are products of a continual process of cause and effect. Human beings and animals, things and conditions and phenomena—and here nothing is excluded, from ameba to divinity, from the tiniest speck of dust to distant galaxies, from the atom to the atom bomb- come into being, change, and disappear as the result of an unlimited network of relations, and cause new effects in new relations. This means that nothing has its existence in itself, independent of the connections of causes and effects, but has its being in the network into which it is woven. It is impossible to scoop a whirlpool from a river in order to find its inner substance. One cannot cut a mask from a net and describe its nature independent of its total network. In the same way one cannot expect to grasp the true nature of things by looking for an isolated substance in them. All things base their existence on the relations into which they are woven. With reference to biblical terminology, we might say that it is not in God, but in the relations "that we live, and move, and exist." (Acts 17:28)

Impermanence

The first implication of this insight is, then, the inevitable impermanence of all things. There is a constant process of birth, growth, and death, or transformation into other conditions and situations; creation and annihilation are but stages in a continual stream of change. A Buddhist would nod in recognition of the biblical wisdom concerning the vanity of things and humanity's chasing of the wind (Eccl 1–2), or to the Psalms describing life as a few moments of flowering in the morning before withering at dusk (Ps 90:5–6). The radical difference here is that the biblical idea of the impermanence of all things presupposes an eternal origin which gives life to everything, while Buddhism maintains that the basic nature of all things—including any divine reality—is that there is no unchangeable reality upon which one may build one's life, no immovable point, only a never-ending process of change. The point is not necessarily that this is tragic. It is simply presented as an inevitable fact: such is reality when it is seen with the clarified view of a detached mind. At the same time the awareness of impermanence has given most Buddhist cultures a touch of pessimism, often expressed in melancholic appreciation of the ephemerality of life.

Lack of substantiality

The second implication is the absence of any substance in things. Not even human beings have any unchangeable essence, a soul, or an identity independent and separate from the web of relations. That is why Buddhists speak of *anatta*

or *anatman*, meaning "no self," or "no ego." In this sense things are "empty," without permanent substance. Persons, phenomena, and situations are real in the sense that they come into being, are perhaps seen and sensed, act and interact, but they will dissolve and disappear again. Nothing remains apart from the effects they had on other things and conditions.

Pain and its liberation

The third consequence follows from the previous ones: everything is accompanied by pain. The point is not primarily that impermanence and the flow of change are painful, and neither is the lack of substance in things the reason for suffering. Pain is caused by ignorance. Passion darkens the mind, and makes human beings cling to things and phenomena as if they were permanent. Change is felt as suffering, because what one desperately clings to is already changing to something else.

Therefore people build artificial worlds around themselves. They want to have things, own things, control things. One avoids what one dislikes, and clings to what one likes. Children cling to the infant stage and have to accept by bitter experience that they are not the center of the world. For most people adolescence is particularly painful because of the dramatic changes, where one is torn between the yearning for the safety of childhood and the dreams of adulthood. Adult people cling to their own youth, and struggle against age, maturity and wrinkles. Old people find it difficult to accept old age and dying. One constantly tries to keep what has already gone, and yearns for something one will perhaps never be.

In other words, passion and delusion keep humanity in bondage and pain. The aim of Buddhism is, therefore, the total liberation from passion, from the self-centering ego. The illusions about a permanent ego must be exposed, the chains of passion must be broken, the eyes must be opened for the true nature of things: a living stream of change, in which the entire universe, all living beings, and all phenomena are in a constant process of change in mutual dependence. This very vision is also the key to liberation from the pain of delusion. Through enlightenment, the third mark of Buddhism,—everything is in pain—is transformed, and reformulated: nirvana, the extinction of the flame of passion, is harmony and peace.

The unity of all things

It is no secret that the insights expressed in the three signs of being and the basic understanding of causality and karmic interdependence may be developed in quite different directions, even with contradictory interpretations. From the point of view of Mahayana, the more traditional expression of Buddhism in Theravada seems rather negative in its interpretation, with emphasis upon liberation from the world of phenomena by seeing through the emptiness of things. Buddha's Fire Sermon,

for example, seems to be concerned with being liberated from the fire of passions by conceiving "disgust for the things of the senses" (other translations may put it in more moderate words). Some of the classical instructions for meditation dwell on the negative aspects of life—impermanence, sickness, death, and decay—in order to clarify how absurd it is to be attached to things. One is liberated from the world by negating worldly things and ends up in total detachment. In this way Buddhism may be characterized by a world-negating withdrawal, or even contempt of the world.

There are, however, other implications of the Buddhist insights which do not lead to withdrawal or resignation, but rather to a new affirmation of the world. Impermanence is only the negative aspect of the vision. It means suffering because people are blindly grasping things as if there existed isolated egos and permanent situations apart from the flow of change, but if it is really true that all things come into existence and change in a constant process of interdependent relationships, it also means that they are related in a boundless web of interconnections. In various ways this is developed in Mahayana as magnificent visions of the unity of all things. It may be developed in philosophical speculation, as for example in the Avatamsaka Sutra, in the moving parables and symbolic language of the Lotus Sutra, or in poetry and art as for example the stories and fairy tales of the Japanese poet Miyazawa Kenji. The universe becomes an organic whole where all things, from the tiniest particle to the unknown galaxies, are woven together in a living network of relations. True life means to find one's place in this great interconnectedness, to participate in the great symphony of life.

Solidarity

But this universal symphony is not only an harmonious and optimistic music in a major key. There are disturbing sounds deeper down, a "*de profundis*" (from the depths) as an echo of the desperate disharmonies of life. Suffering and pain are part of the whole. At this point the vision of interdependence is developed as an unbound relationship of solidarity with the suffering life. If the cosmos is an organic whole which develops in mutual dependence, nobody and nothing can be isolated from those who live in pain. The damned of the world are inseparably related to the blessed. The lives of the failures and the lives of the successful are tightly interwoven. Hence, there is no salvation for the individual alone. The attempt of the individual to break out of universal solidarity, becomes not only an unacceptable, but basically an impossible, egoistical escape.

The real way to salvation does not lead out of the world, but back to the world. The world is not negated, but rediscovered as a place where one may dedicate one's life in order to lead all living beings toward salvation. All of these points could be greatly elaborated with examples from Mahayana literature, art, and folk traditions.

Religious perfection

This is the background to the understanding of perfection in Mahayana. The highest religious ideal is not the sage who after years of disciplined training has reached enlightenment and abandoned the world in solitary detachment. That is, according to Mahayana, the limitation of the Theravada *Arhat*. Rather, perfection is reached by the enlightened one who is willing to abandon the peace of nirvana in order to return to the world and share his/her insight with others. He or she is a *bodhisattva*, one who is on the verge of entering nirvana, but who vows to abandon all unless all living beings are granted the same salvation.

Emptiness

While further elaboration is called for, I shall only highlight the concepts of emptiness and nothingness, which are central Mahayana expressions of what I have sketched above. These terms are so easily misinterpreted, and yet they have become so central in the dialogue between Buddhists and Christians. One has to be aware of the various aspects of "emptiness:" its more "negative" implications as an expression of the non-substantial, empty character of all things; its more "affirmative" appreciation of things just in their transitoriness and emptiness; and finally in its profound sense of "emptying," the selfless (emptying) abandoning of oneself, understood as the kenotic aspect of true humanity, and of true divinity.

In sum, according to the basic Buddhist vision, reality is impermanent, without substantial reality, and characterized by pain and suffering. Seen through the liberated eyes of the enlightened one who has realized the interdependence of all things, however, the negative abandonment of the world is transformed to a boundless vision of universal unity and solidarity. Withdrawal from the world is replaced by compassionate presence in the world. And the aim is the salvation of all living beings. This is expressed in two concepts which include the totality of Buddhist search: wisdom and compassion, symbolized by the archetypal images of light and life. Wisdom, then, is the detached seeing and understanding, and compassion is the participatory concern for the salvation of all.

Mahayana Buddhists' Interaction with the Christian Perspective

Christian studies: One of the first Buddhist responses to Christianity was to initiate systematic studies of the foreign faith, primarily for apologetical and defensive purposes. That happened in the 16th and 17th centuries, and again in the 19th century when Japan was forced to open up After the mid 19th century many

Buddhist headquarters established centers for the study of Christianity. Their activities were primarily aimed at anti-Christian propaganda, but gradually and reluctantly, they also prepared for contact and dialogue. This combination of apologetic and friendly contact is an important background to Buddhist-Christian dialogue.

Christianity as a social and political threat: As a missionary and self-conscious religion with emphasis on the faith commitment of the individual, Christianity was perceived as a threat to social and political harmony, in the family, in the local community, and at the national level. It was regarded as a religion which accepted neither the established social order, nor the priority of the community over the individual.

***Christianity as a social and political challenge*:** These factors, on the other hand, were also positive challenges to the Buddhist community. The presence of Christianity forced Japanese Buddhists to realize the need of a radical reformation, in terms of spiritual renewal, social activity (prison work, temperance, prostitution, poverty, education), propagation and missionary work, and even more active participation in political life. Most Buddhists are willing to accept that they have to learn from Christianity at the level of social work, ideological awareness, and political involvement.

Fascination with the personality of Jesus: One of the most intriguing points in the Buddhist contact with Christianity is the understanding of the person of Jesus. The first Buddhist response was primarily an emotional rejection of him as a potential rebel who rejected loyalty and filial piety, but this gradually changed into a deep appreciation of his life. Christian teachings about Christ generally fail to impress Buddhists, but his personality and teaching continue to fascinate and inspire. It might be valuable to elaborate on Buddhist readings of the gospel and the life of Jesus.

***The meaning of faith and grace*:** With its rejection of "self power," its emphasis on faith alone, and its total dependence on Amida Buddha's compassionate vow, it is almost inevitable that devotees of the Pure Land tradition (in Japan particularly) have been challenged by the Lutheran emphasis on faith alone and grace alone. The corresponding interest from the Christian side has to a great extent come from Protestant, often Lutheran, Christians.

Meditation and contemplation: Even though Buddhists generally have demonstrated little interest in Christian spiritual disciplines, in contrast to a consistent trend of Christian preoccupation with Buddhist meditation practices, there is a narrow stream of individuals who have been fascinated by Christian prayer

and spiritually. In recent years this has been developed further in various projects aiming at a mutual sharing of spirituality. For various reasons this had primarily developed in dialogue with Roman Catholics, even though Protestants were the first (in Japan) to show an interest in Buddhist mediation, and are increasingly involved in these types of encounters.

Philosophical issues: Although Buddhists have generally tended to regard Christian teaching as an easy target for philosophical rejection, there is a consistent trend of quite penetrating dialogue between Christian and Buddhist philosophers. One key example of this is the Kyoto School of Philosophy, starting with Nishida and developed further by many his disciples. To a great extent this has been a dialogue with Western philosophy, Christian and non-Christian, with Christian literature and thought systems, and only to a limited extent an actual dialogue with Christians. There are important exceptions. In recent years the philosophical dialogue has also been a personal encounter between representatives of both traditions, both in Japan and at the international level.

Important issues for Buddhists include the understanding of God (divinity, godhead); of humanity (personhood and the Buddhist negation of substantiality); being, non-being, and emptiness; etc. Some Buddhist representatives make a wholesale rejection of any belief in God and direct heavy criticism against the Christian understanding of humanity and the world, while others in more positive ways combine criticism with attempts to see how Christianity may be transformed and deepened through the dialogue with Mahayana thought and practice.

Basic Challenges from Mahayana for Christian Thought and Life

***The basic difference in orientation*:** The radical difference in the entire orientation of the two religions is in itself a challenge. Why are two religions that are so radically different in their basic orientations at the same time so attracted to each other? Is there a deeper affinity below/behind the differences? Is it possible for Christians to discover new aspects of faith and religious life in the encounter with Buddhism? Is there a need for reclaiming aspects of biblical faith and religious life in the encounter with Buddhism? Is there a need for reclaiming aspects of biblical faith that have been neglected, for example, the wisdom aspect? There is not only a heretical "Gnostic" gnosis, but a profoundly different biblical appreciation of wisdom that perhaps needs further elucidation.

God: The encounter with a deeply religious tradition which is unconcerned with belief in God as a power/person/something outside the web of interrelations, poses serious questions to Christian theology. The dialogue may provoke recon-

sideration of traditional theological language, the understanding of the reality of God, the meaning of believing in God as a person, the classical questions of theodicy, etc. This may also be important as part of another dialogue, the encounter with modern Western attempts to speak of God in impersonal categories such as energy, a cosmic order or principle, etc.

Personhood—imago Dei. With the Buddhist search for the true nature, one's original face, and the rejection of a substantial ego or soul, there is ample opportunity for further reflection on the Christian understanding of personhood. Do we need a radical reconsideration of traditional terms such as soul, self, personality, and individual/individualism? As Lutherans we may be particularly challenged to a reconsideration of the understanding of the total depravity of humankind, the destruction of the image of God, etc. Has this been overemphasized in order to maintain the radicality of God's grace? Are there other ways to maintain these concerns?

Faith as a relationship: Faith is not only important in the dialogue with Pure Land Buddhism, but is at the very basis of Buddhism. The Buddha Way is inconceivable without faith, commitment, refuge, dedication, etc. Perhaps it is necessary to have a new appreciation of this faith aspect of Buddhism. One the other hand, there are basic differences which challenge our theological understanding, for the Christian understanding of faith emphasizes Christianity as a *relational* religion, different, (I think) from the Buddhist understanding of interrelatedness. Faith in Buddhism is a believing mind (in Japanese, *shinjin*) with emphasis on the mental condition, while Christian faith, particularly in the Lutheran context, is directed towards someone Other, a relationship of trust, faithfulness, commitment, worship, love, a faith in someone (in Japanese, *shiko*). In Lutheran terms, Christianity is a "*coram* religion" (*coram Deo*, *coram hominibus*). We might refer again to what was said above about "seeing" and "hearing" in Buddhism and in Christianity. Will these understandings of faith remain contradictory, or is it possible to reach further in understanding from the point of view of (human) life existence in (inter)relatedness?

Grace and transformation: Grace, likewise, is in not only important in the dialogue with Pure Land Buddhism and its total dependence on Buddha's compassion. That dialogue has to be continued, for behind the close affinity in piety and understanding of human nature and (divine) grace, there are radical differences in the philosophical interpretation.

Another theme to be investigated, which may be particularly challenging to Lutherans, is the aspect of transformation. Buddhism is basically a life-transforming vision; enlightenment is accompanied by an inner transformation. This

is particularly emphasized in tantric traditions, but is part of the entire Buddhist tradition. For Lutherans this may be challenging to reconsider in which sense faith is a life-transforming relationship, or only a passive reception of divine favor; whether grace is only God's justification of the sinner as a forensic act, or also a power that may bring about a renewal of the person.

Salvation—Kingdom of God or nirvana; Perhaps it might be useful to follow up Paul Tillich's attempt to single out nirvana and the kingdom of God as two central concepts in order to grasp some basic differences, and at the same time to let these notions challenge each other. Salvation in Christian terms is primarily understood as a social "thing," inconceivable without a community (images of meals, celebrations, weddings, a people, a family, brothers and sisters, etc.; the kingdom in not within you, "but in fact, the kingdom of God is among you." (Lk 17:21) However, in Buddhist thought, nirvana as the peace of mind is more easily conceived as a mental condition, an inner dimension within each person. The Mahayana emphasis on the universal interrelatedness, on the other hand, opens the way for a dialogue about the communal/fellowship aspect of nirvana. Is there room for mutual inspiration?

Languages of faith. The above-mentioned points are all somehow related to the role of language. We might recall the discussion above about philosophical vision and story-telling in Buddhism and Christianity. The encounter with Buddhism challenges us to further reflections about the type of language we use, the limitations of language, and the potential of various types of language. In addition, we might ask, Are there many different dialects in our own Christian language? Do we Christians speak different languages at the same time?

Death and Dying: Working with Christians, Buddhists and Muslims in a Northern Thai Village

Chuleepran Srisoortorn Persons

I would like to share with you some of my experience in working with people in a village in northern Thailand. A Christian pastor, counselor, and a woman, I serve in a church located in the northern part of Thailand, in Chiang Mai province, about 15 kilometers from the city of Chiang Mai. The Christian church is surrounded by Buddhist temples. The village can be divided into three religious groups: the biggest group is Buddhist, the second is Christian, and the third is Muslim (very small).

The first Christian church in this village was established more than one 100 years ago. The first missionary to come to this village was Dr. McGilvary, from the USA, who worked for two or three years before anyone in the village converted to Christianity. The first person to become a Christian was Noi Siri (Noi is the name of people who have been monks). After he had become a Christian, all the members of his family also became Christian. Today 74 families belong to the church. From conversations with the older villagers, I have learned that while the people of the village live peacefully with each other, they have never felt close to each other, nor have they felt that they live in a real neighborhood.

In recent years all the religious groups in the village have been faced by a real crisis. As a result of HIV/AIDS many people have started getting sick, and many are dying. The Thai people first learned about HIV/AIDS in 1989. At the time, the Christians in the village believed that this crisis would not affect their community. Believing HIV/AIDS to be the result of an immoral life-style they ignored the problem. Moreover, the church refused to listen, to help, or to support people in the village who were suffering from HIV infection.

When in 1990 the Christian pastor of a nearby community passed away, his wife had to face a serious crisis in the church where her husband had been pastor, because the Christian community rejected her also. She suffered much and did not know where or whom to turn to in that situation.

At the time, five of us, four Christian women and one Buddhist woman, started a support group offering counseling and help to women, regardless of their religious affiliation, who have nowhere else to turn to. We called this group "empowerment." Soon many people came to us for counseling, and many others, from every religious group, offered to assist us in helping people. We never refuse

to help. We visit the sick in hospital or at home. As a result of this crisis, the people in this community have come to understand each other, to love and care about one another and to share with each other.

In three years, I have ministered to 47 persons dying of HIV/AIDS. The people of the village and I have together experienced facing the death of a loved one. We have seen that dying is a very lonely experience when perhaps the greatest need is for a trusted friend, one who will stand by the dying person sharing in everything loved and believed in, sharing in unity and fellowship representing the faith, embodying the hope. After the person has died, the counselor needs to help support those left behind.

I have learned a number of important things.

- Although we are Christians, Buddhists, and Muslims in northern Thailand, we have family solidarity. The problem faced by one directly impinges upon the entire family.

- People will share when they can trust.

- There is no true sense of "equality" between male and female counselors, or between older and younger ones; this must be taken into consideration.

- If one member becomes ill, the family dynamics will be affected by fears. Fear of financial problems as much as personal shock, fear of a perceived change in their standing in the community as much as grief.

- People believe that illness comes from the past or from a former life (karma).

- They have high respect for their religious leaders.

In all of this I have seen and experienced care, love, and compassion from everyone in the village. Religion is not the main difficulty, nor is it a barrier for us in working together, for while we are different we are the same in some profound way.

A Buddhist Perspective on Death and Dying

Pinit Ratanakul

Death, Fear and Religion

If there is one aspect of human existence that we want to forget or to avoid talking or thinking about, it is death, the last moment of our existence. It is because this unpleasant fact of life, seen as the termination of life, reminds us of our finitude, fragility and insecurity. It robs life of its joy. But no matter what we pretend to do, we all know that sooner or later we will all die. Yet, we are still disturbed by this inevitability of death and find it difficult to look death straight in the face. Death is an enigma and we are fearful of it. Some people are so overwhelmed by this fear of death that they hardly have any energy or zest for living. Fear of death is thus an unhealthy state of mind, detrimental to our well-being. We turn to religion since, after all, it is religion that is preoccupied with the whole human existence, particularly death and dying. The preoccupation with this part of life in religious teachings, liturgy and rituals has led many scholars including Freud to the assumption that the fear of death is the origin of religion. While this belief is still under debate, we can agree that, despite the diverse interpretations of the nature of death in the world's religions, a religious understanding of death can assist us in the struggle for meaning within the limit of life as well as in our dealing with dying and death, the hardest facts of life. Thus the concern with death in diverse religious traditions is not a preoccupation with morbidity. It is an assertion and affirmation of the value of human life and the significance of death for the understanding of life.

The Buddhist Encounter with Death

The Buddhist understanding of the nature of death stems from its acceptance of the law of change (*anicca*) and the law of becoming (*bhava*) as operating both in the physical and mental realms. These two laws state that everything is in a state of change and that the nature of that change is the process of becoming something else. Accordingly, life is viewed as a process of ups and downs, appearances and disappearances, integration and disintegration. For the Buddhist, this process is not limited to our present existences but is a process without

beginning or end consisting of a series of births and deaths. What we ordinarily call "life" and "death" are only one integral part of this great life process. Death is thus not the terminal or end of life as understood by most people. It is just one state seen as a fall, a passing away in this round of existence or, in Buddhist terminology, the endless life cycle (*samsara*), and it is to be immediately followed by birth, conceived of as arising. In this sense birth and death are present in juxtaposition to each other. This juxtaposition also manifests itself in the mind and the body of our present existence. Both mental states in our consciousness and the cells in our body are constantly dying and being replaced by new ones. Or, in other words, our present existence is a cycle of momentary births and deaths, integration and disintegration, of rises and falls in the endless life cycle. This life cycle is conditioned by the law of cause and effect, of action and reaction (kamma). Life in this cycle then is a kammic (cause-effect) process in which each birth (arising) and death (passing away) acts both as a "cause" (of a following state) and an "effect" (of a previous one), and its quality is determined by the quality of one's deeds.

This interpretation of life in terms of becoming implies that the endless life process is impermanent and unsubstantial. It has no "self" or enduring ego. In other words, it is an impersonal process in the sense that there is no "person" in nor behind this life continuum. It is only a process of "causes" and "effects" interwoven together by continuity. Within this view what is called life after death or rebirth is not a transmigration of the soul as in the case of Hindu thought. Rebirth, from the Buddhist perspective, means "again-arising," or in other words, it is the transmission of kammic energy and is caused primarily by craving or the will-to-live (*tanha*) conjoined with ignorance (*avijja*) or the incorrect view of the nature of human existence. This transmission is possible because the kammic energy is a tremendous force or power which can condition the birth of a being or the formation of a new psycho-physical organism.

The Buddhist Attitude Toward Death and Dying

In its encounter with death Buddhism has no sentiments. It coldly and relentlessly analyses this phenomenon both in the limited context of our present existence and in the larger context of *samsara* life in the light of the three great laws, i.e., the law of change (*anicca*), the law of becoming (*bhava*) and the law of cause and effect (kamma). The cumulative result of such analysis is an understanding of death that leads to the development of a proper attitude towards this dreaded phenomenon.

The Buddhist attitude to death is one of accepting; it accepts the inevitability of death and regards it as something that can come to us at any moment.

With such a realistic attitude Buddhism encourages us to think of death now and then, for "death can at any moment come to us." When such thinking is a habit it dispels the fear of death, and at the same time it helps to level pride (of birth, wealth, and power) and to destroy the infatuation with the pleasure of the senses. Continual thinking about the inevitability of death also gives strength, steadiness and direction to our minds wandering without purpose.

The Buddhist attitude is also creative. It does not regard death as the end of life. On the contrary, as mentioned before, it views birth and death as two consecutive events in the life process, both in the present existence and in the round of existence. This process view of death denies the existence of a permanent entity back and behind the process. It implies that there is no one who suffers dying, but there is only a process of dying, just as much as living is also a process. When this view is adopted, the mind will be freed from self-centeredness the cause of our anxiety and fear of death, and as a result it can face death with calm and fortitude.

The creative aspect of the Buddhist attitude towards death is also found in its affirmation of rebirth and the law of kamma to remind us of the importance of each moment of our present existence. Since the quality of each rebirth depends on the very nature of our deeds and not on any extraneous or arbitrary power, each one of us is the architect of his or her own life. The law of kamma reveals to us the tremendous power of kammic energies—the effects that our human activities can exert on the very nature of our lives in this world and beyond. Distance cannot bar the sequence of cause and effect. These kammic energies are potent enough to create the conditions for rebirth when the bodies which sustained these forces cease to live. With the affirmation of rebirth and the certainty of the law of kamma, the Buddhist attitude towards death and dying involves itself with an ethic of living as a way of making proper preparation for the encounter with death understood as the disintegration of our psychophysical aggregates. Such preparation means to live a virtuous life in conformity with the Buddhist teachings (dhamma) and to practice mindfulness of death (*manvanusati bhavana*), focussing on the universality of death and the great laws such as the law of conditionality or co-dependent origination (*paticcasamuttapad*), the law of change (*anicca*), the law of becoming (*bhava*), and the law of cause and effect (kamma). All these laws are natural laws in the sense that they are in the nature of things and do not depend on any external power. An understanding of these laws will rob death of its fears and terrors and help us to face death with a correct attitude. Ultimately such understanding of these great laws is a way of helping us to die before death, i.e, to be free from greed (*lobha*), anger (*dosa*), and ignorance (*avijja*) conceived by Buddhism as the root cause of all births and deaths, and to attain total release (nibbana), cutting oneself off completely from the round of existence.

Buddhism and Ethical Issues in Death and Dying

Recent advances in scientific knowledge and new medical technologies have raised many questions in the area of death and dying. New life-support technologies, having blurred the line between prolongation of life and prolongation of the process of dying, have raised questions about the adequacy of the traditional definition of death as the cessation of all vital organs. This issue has become entwined with that of organ transplantation when there is the possibility of keeping some organic systems "alive" even in the event of irreversible coma. Increasingly, among physicians there has been acceptance of the criteria formulated by a Harvard University group to detect irreversible coma indicating "brain death" as the criterion to be used for declaring that "death" itself has occurred. But, both the medical community and the general public are still divided on the questions as "when to pull the plug" and how death is to be defined, especially with the organ transplant issue and its possible abuses which have further complicated this issue.

The definition of death

With its understanding of man as a psycho-physical entity (*nama-rupa*) consisting of a combination of aggregates (*khandhas*), namely form (*rupa*), feeling (*vedana*), perception (*samma*), disposition (*sankhan*), and consciousness (*vinnana*), Buddhism upholds a holistic view of the death of cells, tissues, and organs. In this practical context death, the state of passing away, is defined as total cessation of mental and physical functions. In Buddhist teachings what remains after such a cessation is the kammic energy which is compared to the electric current that, after the light is extinguished, will manifest itself in the flash bulb. The holistic definition of death is generally accepted by the Buddhist community in place of the modern brain death definition. Yet, this Buddhist definition cannot accommodate developments in modern medicine in which some cells or organs may be sustained by artificial means after the cessation of all these functions. Nor does it facilitate early retrieval of organs for it does not allow physicians to declare a person dead during the optimal period for harvesting and transplanting vital human organs. Confronted with this practical problem, some Buddhists are willing to re-define the Buddhist criterion of death in order to accommodate such medical progress. Still, many of them see no sufficient reason to change this definition of death to consider each specific organ independently of the total organism. This is reinforced by the discovery of some defects in the practice of modern medicine such as the possibility of faulty diagnoses, uncertainties within medical practice and knowledge, the possibility of remission or the discovery of new cures, and the unknown factor of the degree

of sensitivity and awareness even in those declared irreversibly brain-damaged, as reasons for ceasing treatment. There is the possibility of abuses because of the need to have organ donors or for social or economic considerations which have nothing to do with individual patient's welfare and which could arise if restrictions were too lax.

In spite of all these defects and problems, it seems that today when the "miracle" of transplantation is widely acknowledged, Buddhists will have to find ways of dealing adequately with the issue of organ transplantation. Buddhism itself already gives special value to self-immolation by regarding it as the most precious practice of giving (*dana*). Such emphasis supports the idea of organ donation. The Buddhist reverence for life can also be used as the supporting argument for organ transplantation to prolong life to its due end. Still, for Buddhists the question regarding an adequate definition of death that will accommodate organ transplantation continues to pose a difficult problem. Even if it is accepted that the organs to be transplanted will eventually die after the death of the brain, the brain death definition of death does not coincide with the Buddhist concept of life and death. To accommodate the modern need for organ transplantation a re-thinking of this Buddhist concept is required.

Euthanasia and the Right to Die

There is no doubt that Buddhism with its first precept of abstaining from killing affirms the sanctity of life and prohibits suicide. In the continuing discussion of euthanasia, ethicists have drawn distinctions between passive and active euthanasia and voluntary and involuntary euthanasia in order to clarify the moral implications involved. Passive euthanasia is defined as "allowing or permitting to die" by withholding or stopping treatments. It can be both voluntary and involuntary. Active euthanasia is what is commonly called "mercy killing." It refers to a decision made by society or by an individual to end the life of someone who is suffering unbearable pain and who is unable to end his or her own life or who is unable to make such a decision. This "mercy killing" is sometimes called involuntary euthanasia because an individual is put to death without his or her consent. This kind of euthanasia is usually equated with the right to commit suicide. Another form of voluntary euthanasia refers to the desire of the individual who, being of sound mind, asks that, in the event of his or her becoming grievously ill, his or her life be terminated either through a physician's intervention or through the withdrawal of treatment. Generally, from the Buddhist perspective, euthanasia whether "active" or "passive," voluntary or involuntary, is not morally justifiable, both in the light of the law of kamma and in the context of Buddhist psychology. Viewed from the law of kamma, the bad kamma which

manifested itself in the suffering of the patient needs to be allowed to run its full course here and now, so that the dying patient might be reborn in a higher state when the present life has come to its end. But that could not happen if the patient's life were to be cut short with the remaining bad kamma still to be undergone. The suffering will rise again in another life until the whole bad kamma is completely expended. Therefore Buddhists are advised that even when suffering from a painful and incurable disease they should bear it quietly and patiently while simultaneously trying to rid themselves of the pain and suffering in all possible ways. A Buddhist needs to take the advantage of whatever means of recovery and treatment are available because there is the possibility for every disease to be cured so long as life continues (for the relation between kamma and its result is more conditional than deterministic). Besides life, though in suffering, provides the opportunity for spiritual cultivation. And one must make the most of life despite its adversities.

Apart from the unjustifiability of euthanasia in the context of the law of kamma, it cannot be morally justified in terms of Buddhist psychology. In the case of active euthanasia or mercy killing, no act of killing can be carried out without the arising of ill will, or repugnance towards suffering. In this sense one only terminates life when one is motivated by anger or hatred, on the one hand, or completely negative feeling toward the suffering of the patient, on the other hand. Even though the motivation might have been good (i.e., to alleviate the patient's further suffering), as soon as thought is transformed into action to terminate life it becomes an act of aversion. When doctors perform what they believe to be a mercy killing, they in fact do this because the pain and suffering of the patient are repugnant to them. It is disturbing and they subsequently experience a dislike of the cause that has aroused in them this disagreeable sensation. Subconsciously they transfer this aversion to the suffering to the one who embodies it. Thus, whether considered in terms of the long-range welfare of the patient according to the course of kamma or from the psychological situation of the doctor, the action of the doctor is actually a result of hatred arising out of misconception (believing that it is an act of mercy) and is unwholesome (because an act done from hatred or ill-will has kammic potency) both for him/herself and for the patient.

These are the main reasons for the Buddhist position against suicide or assisted suicide. Yet, while the concept of kamma by its affirmation of the antonomous individual for self-determination, makes euthanasia morally unjustifiable this concept upholds, in the right language, the right of the individual as patient to determine or refuse the kind of treatment s/he wants and the right to choose death. With this later angle of the concept of kamma, Buddhism leaves the individual with the freedom to have control over his or her life. There may be occasions when the continuation of life may not be desirable. But, whether one chooses to commit

suicide or not is up to oneself. Whatever one does one has to face the consequence of one's decisions. For example, if one commits suicide one will have to undergo more suffering again in the next life. The same principle may be applied to the physician who is asked or violate professional codes and to break the law by assisting the patient to terminate his or her life. Acting on the wish of the patient, even in the name of compassion, is believed by the Buddhist to be an interference in the patient's kamma and a violation of the first precept of the abstaining from killing (killing is killing no matter what we call it), for which he will have to suffer the bad kamma result in both the present and later existence.

Care of the Dying

The Buddhist approach to the issue of euthanasia still needs more careful reflection. The problem of suicide involves the issue of the right to live and the right to die. How in concrete cases are we to decide which of these rights takes precedence? Are these rights absolute? The issue of assisted suicide raises questions of compassion and the impropriety of interrupting the patient's kamma. Buddhism's negative position to involuntary euthanasia is to prevent possible conflict of interest. Permitting the killing of the patient for supposedly "his or her best interest" or "his or her own good" may open the door to victimize the patient for the sake of the interest of the others, e.g., physicians seeking organs for transplantation or family members seeking inheritance. Buddhism wants physicians and nurses to do all they can to preserve and to prolong their patient's life and not to end his life. Modern medicine can assist people to die without severe, unbearable pain. The hospice specialists have demonstrated that through the use of drugs, bio-feedback techniques, psychological counseling, etc., we are not only able to rid people of unbearable pain at the end of life but can also help them to be maintained at the level of pain relief which does not impair their faculties or cloud their consciousness, but permits them to have meaningful life to the end. The hospice movement has undermined one of the most powerful arguments used to justify suicide, assisted suicide and euthanasia or mercy killing, namely, to spare patients and their families from unbearable suffering in the final stages of a terminal illness. The success in pain relief pioneered by the hospice specialists indicates that death with dignity is possible without suicide, assisted suicide and euthanasia.

In Buddhist thought the keeping of the patient's consciousness unimpaired by analgesics and sedatives is of great importance in the care of the dying, for it enables the dying patient to fill his or her mind with wholesome thoughts. According to Buddhist psychology, the last conscious state of the dying (*cuti vinnana*) is the most forceful. It can give a special characteristic to the resultant (rebirth)

consciousness (*patissanthi vinnana*) in another life. Even though the character of the new life is affected by the whole previous life, the nature of the last consciousness nevertheless contributes significantly to the quality of the ensuing one. If it is wholesome (*kusala*), this produces a wholesome inauguration of the new life. Similarly, if it is unwholesome (*akusala*), the ensuing new life will be unwholesomely inaugurated. Consequently, dying persons need to have special care to enable them to die a "good death." Therefore, it is of great importance that the mind of the dying person never be impaired by analgesics or sedatives. Impairment of the mind by drugs would affect the consciousness of the dying person and make it impossible to fill his or her mind with wholesome thought. It is ethically justifiable to use every proportionate means to bring a dying patient's pain and suffering under control, but it is unethical to give them such strong analgesics and sedatives that they are unconscious.

The Buddhist spiritual care for the dying is aimed primarily at enabling the dying patient to fill his or her mind with wholesome thoughts to ensure good rebirth and also ultimately to attain total deliverance from the endless life cycle through inner transformation. This spiritual care is reflected in rituals and symbols. One important ritual is the recitation of a passage from the Buddhist scriptures, the Bojjhonga, the purpose being to assist the dying Buddhist to become fully conscious so as to be able to see the impermanent, unsatisfactory and unsubstantial nature of existence; to think of his or her past good efforts (e.g., the practice of morality, charity and meditation); to fill his or her mind with this wholesome thought; to feel peace within him- or herself; to be in deep meditation (serenity); and finally to let go of life without clinging and grasping.

Another important ritual consists of putting a Buddha image before the dying and/or asking them to repeat the sacred word "Buddha" as a symbolic way of taking the Buddha as a refuge. The main purpose here is to boost the self-power of the dying so as to minimize their psychological trauma and permit them to die a "good death," meaning death without rebirth or with a good rebirth.

On Intermarriage: A Japanese Perspective

Naozumi Eto

An Unavoidable Phenomenon

In Japan, Christians are likely to intermarry since they constitute only one percent of the total population. Among Christians, the ratio of male and female believers is one to two. Therefore, even if all Christian men were to may Christian women, half of the female Christians would still be left to find a partner whose religion is not the same as theirs, no matter how seriously their pastors encourage them to make a "Christian home." Intermarriage takes place when a man and a woman have the opportunity to meet not only in church but also in other places such as schools, places of work, clubs, etc. which one can join regardless of one's religious affiliation

Religious Background

One of the characteristics of Japanese religiosity is its multi-layeredness. Therefore, according to statistics, the religious population numbers 200,000,000 while the Japanese population numbers only 120,000,000. One can be a parishioner (*ujiko*) of a Shinto shrine in one's community, while at the same time being a Buddhist who belongs to a Buddhist temple of which one's family has long been a member (*danka*).

It is no wonder then that historically Buddhism, which was introduced to Japan in the 6th century CE, and traditional ethnic Shinto have coexisted. There is a division of labor, so to speak, with Shinto taking care of community-oriented business and Buddhism of family matters. To say today that the newborn baby who visits a Shinto shrine with her/his parents, might celebrate her/his wedding ceremony in a Christian church and finally has her/his funeral service officiated at a Buddhist temple, would not be an exaggeration. The overwhelming majority of Japanese families still observe the funeral and memorial services according to Buddhist tradition. While the majority of weddings take place according to Shinto tradition, many young people today prefer to have a "church-style" wedding in an urban setting.

Three-fourths of the population visit shrines and temples during the first three days of a new year. Before school entrance examinations many votive pictures with personal wishes and petitions (*ema*) are being hung on the branches of the

trees in the yard of a Shinto shrine, especially the Tenjin Shrine. Annual festivals and religious functions of the temple and shrine draw a great number of people.

We can conclude that, first, traditional religions are still very much alive and continue to play an indispensable role in people's lives and today's very secular and materialistic society. Secondly, people's way of thinking, their value systems, and life philosophy are deeply and unconsciously influenced by traditional Shinto, Buddhism, Confucianism, and Taoism. It is therefore not true to say that the Japenes are "non-religious." Thirdly, we should distinguish a family religion (religious tradition) from personal religious commitment or faith.

The Experience of Intermarriage

Many Japanese Christians, especially the women, marry non-Christians—Shinto, Buddhist, or "non-religious" people. Christians not only marry people of other faiths but also people of no faith. There are two types of "people of other faiths": those with personal faith in and commitment to Buddhism or another religion, and those with a family religion but without strong personal faith or commitment. There are also two kinds of "people of no faith": those with no personal faith but a family religion or who sympathize with some religious teaching (but not so much with religious practice), and those who have neither personal faith nor sympathize with any religion, i.e., genuine people of no faith.

Usually Japanese religiosity does not demand an exclusive faith, and there are many people, especially many young people, who claim not to believe in the presence of any deity nor to have any personal faith. Nonetheless, there exists a "family religion" which they must observe as long as they are members of that family. Therefore, when a Christian, especially a women, marries a non-Christian, s/he can get along with her/his marital life well as long as s/he observes the roles and duties of the family's religious life.

There are many roles and duties, the most important of which are the funeral and memorial ceremonies and the daily service at the family altar, a Shinto *kamidana* or a Buddhist *butsudan.* This would include the offering worship with candles (*otomyo*) and incense (*osenko*), giving water, rice, fruits, cakes, flowers, or leaves. These are a housewife's role and duties.

If the Christian church regards these activities as a part of "ancestor worship" and tells its members not to participate in "idol worship," a Christian cannot remain a member of that family. There are churches that do not condone such acts including a number of Protestant churches that have a long tradition of avoiding incense-offerings at the Buddhist funeral service.

The Roman Catholic Church in Japan allows its members to observe "ancestor veneration" and to participate in related activities with Christian love. This seems

to be a solution, not a compromise, to make a personal Christian faith and Buddhist/Shinto family religion (religious tradition) compatible with each other. Whereas this will work practically, and is theologically tenable, are there not limits?

Japanese society observes many annual events, functions, and festivals, most of which have religious origins or implications. These have become "customs" i.e., New Year (*o-shogatsu*) is celebrated with a decoration of bamboo and pine tree at the gate (*kadomatsu*), two-story rice cakes (*kagamimochi*), and other items. *Kadomatsu* used to be a place (*yorishiro*) for the god of the year to come down, and *kagamimochi* was part of the gifts for the god of the year. *Obon* is a big event in August, to welcome the spirits of the ancestors who come home on earth once a year. Family members who live in different parts of Japan return to their "home" to visit graves and to enjoy dancing (*bon-odori*) in the community. *Bon-odori* is a joyous and recreational community event.

One can list hundreds of such examples and explanations. Nonetheless, most people do not know the original meaning and continue observing such traditions as "customs" without caring about religious implications. To what extent and in what sense should Christians avoid these "customs"? If one were very strict and not participate in family or community activities, it would be very difficult to be a good member of the family unless the whole family is indifferent to the customs of the "family religion."

Before World War II, family religion meant the faith of all family members. But with the traditional "big family system" (*ie*) losing its legal ground and function, and being replaced by the "nuclear family," each member of the family gained freedom to have his/her personal faith and to practice it. This they are free to do so as long as they remain faithful to the family tradition.

It is sometimes difficult for a Christian wife to go to church on Sunday mornings when her husband stays at home after a very hard and long week at work, maybe even including Saturdays. If he does not find her at home when he wakes up late on Sunday morning, he would not be very happy. Japanese schools, companies, and communities plan many events and activities on Sunday. This is also a burden for the Christian.

Problems of Intermarriage in a Crisis of Life

Intermarriage may not pose a problem as long as the marriage functions well. But if one partner, for instance, falls terminally ill, the other partner must make important decisions such as whether to be frank and honest about the partner's condition and how to spend his/her last days on earth. These questions have a religious dimension. If the partners share a common religious conviction, it will be of great help to face and overcome this crisis of death and dying. In case they

do not, it might turn into a serious problem. Not being able to prepare oneself for the farewell to the family and transition to the life to come according to one's religion, would be a tragedy.

The way in which funeral and memorial services are performed is worth reflecting on. If a Christian dies and her/his spouse is a committed Buddhist, or vice versa, is this funeral to be officiated according to the Christian or the Buddhist tradition? Is the funeral to be designed for the one who passed away according to his/her religion, or, does the bereaved family have a right to choose how the funeral is to be conducted? These matters should be well discussed between husbands and wives who do not share one religion before the time comes when they might no longer be able to consult with each other.

International marriage is no longer rare these days. It does not necessarily cause a problem if the two persons marry after they have nurtured mutual love and deep understanding. This is different in the case of the Japanese farmer whose wife, by arrangement, comes from a foreign country such as the Philippines or China. Arranged marriages are common among the Japanese rural farming community because many Japanese women do not want to marry farmers. In this case, a Filipino wife is usually a Catholic and a Chinese wife has a Chinese religion, both of which are not popular in rural villages in Japan. Is she obliged to give up her religion in order to become faithful to her husband and family? Definitely not. It is vital that she maintains her own identity and integrity by sticking to her religion. However, she is expected to be a faithful member of the new family and participate in religious life. Here again, it is important to develop a pastoral theology of intermarriage to allow husband and wife to maintain their religions and yet keep their family tradition.

The Merits and Tasks of Intermarriage

Christians, especially Christian women who are married to non-Christian men, are often strongly encouraged to practice "family evangelism." While this is a great opportunity to do so, it is at the same time a very challenging task. Beautiful words to invite her spouse and children to Christian faith do not work as well as expected because they think they know her "true character" in the daily life "despite of her Christian faith." Many non-Christians have the tendency to hold an idealistic image of a Christian personality which they think is often betrayed by the "true character" of their spouses. But, we also know from experience that a life-long witness to Christ before the spouse and family is used by the Holy Spirit and bears fruit after many decades. My father-in-law, whose wife was Christian from her childhood, was baptized at the age of 70. After his retirement a good friend's husband recently started going to church every Sunday.

This was a surprise to everyone. Intermarriage is an opportunity for both husband and wife to reflect their life and faith. It is challenging and yet blessing.

A minority church must seek appropriate ways of carrying out "mission in witness" and "mission in dialogue" in a non-Christian society. A Christian married to a partner adhering to another faith really engages in this "mission in witness" and "mission in dialogue" in a very concrete setting from which s/he cannot escape. Intermarriage is a real opportunity to do dialogue in word and deed between a Christian and a non-Christian. This should not remain a personal experience, but should be deepened to being a communal experience for the church. Thus the "dialogue" between a Christian and a non-Christian spouse at the personal level can be developed and deepened to the level of dialogue between Christianity and Buddhism, Shinto or another religion. In a purely theoretical sense this dialogue may not be dialogue on dogma or doctrine *per se*, but, rather, one on more practical and existential issues. These include ways of being inolved in ancestor veneration and religious events and activities, the understanding of the customs of the community or rites of passage in life—in short, the way to coexist in a meaningful way with other people, i.e., people of other ethnicities, cultures, and religions. A theology of religions may be of help for Christians in these situations. However, the kind of religious pluralism advocated by John Hick may not necessarily solve the problem caused by this intimate "life together." It seems to me that we should develop a kind of theology that does not begin by focusing on issues about the "ultimate reality" behind such a God of the Bible, Buddha, Allah, Shinto Kami, or many other supreme beings or non-beings. We should learn the meaning, the value, and the way to live with our neighbors who are different from us in every sense. It is love that is needed first of all in this situation.

Prayer and Meditation in Buddhism and Christianity[1]

Shinryu Takada

It seems to me that in Christianity prayer and meditation focus more on speaking to God, while in Shin Buddhism (Pure Land Buddhism of the Shinshu school) the emphasis is more on listening. These are two similar, yet different perspectives, although certainly they can be understood as belonging together.

The Word ''Prayer"

First of all, we might ask whether the word "prayer" is linguistically and concretely accurate when used in the context of Shin Buddhism? In the context of Shin Buddhism, "prayer'" is a detested word. Whereas it is perhaps too strong to say "detested," it is certainly avoided, when expressing a highly important matter, the *tariki*, that is, Other Power as a gift of the Primal Vow (*hongan*) of Amida Buddha. Shin Buddhists are perhaps too sensitive or nervous about the Japanese word for ''prayer" (and the word for "spirit" is similarly regarded). This is of course only the case for the Japanese word *inori* which corresponds linguistically to "prayer" (and the word *rei* for spirit). The important meaning contained in the Christian concept of prayer (and in that of spirit) is understood by Shin Buddhists. It is just that two words which correspond linguistically have different meanings.

In my opinion, Shin Buddhists understand the word "prayer" as meaning chiefly, "asking" (asking for something coming from, and intended by human beings). This is why Shin Buddhists consider the word ''prayer" as not accurate in expressing their main concern, which is the release of *jiriki*—one's own power. For this, instead of the word "prayer," Shin Buddhists use the word s*hinjin* (instead of *yui-shin* which means only ''faith")—and they hesitate to translate *shinjin* as "faith." As Shinran says in his *Notes on Essentials of Faith Alone*, "To be free of self-power, having entrusted oneself to the Other Power of the Primal Vow—

[1] This paper was originally written in German for the Rudolf-Otto-Symposium in Marburg (May 1999) and published in Hans-Martin Barth, Eryo Minoura, and Michael Pye (eds.), *Buddhismus und Christentum- Jodo Shinshu und Evangelische Theologie*, (Hamburg: EB-Verlag, 2000), and also in the Japanese volume (Kyoto: Hozokan, 2000). It is published here with the permission of professors Hans-Martin Barth and Eryo Minoura.

this is faith alone."[2] This still does not answer the question regarding what Shin Buddhists actually mean by "prayer" and by "faith."

Prayer as One- and/or as Two-directional

Permit me to attempt a risky, hypothetical explanation. The concept "prayer" includes both what we might call "lower" prayer (demanding) and "higher" prayer (praying), as the ways in which Christians express their own religious experience. When Shin Buddhists hesitate to use the word "prayer," this means not only the lower "demanding," but also the higher "praying" form. Shin Buddhists do not agree with the lower "demanding" form. But what about the "higher" type of praying? Shin Buddhists have no ready words for this. That which is expressed in the word "prayer" perhaps has something strange about it for Shin Buddhists, namely something one-sided, like a one-way street. If there was something reciprocal or mutual in it, Shin Buddhists would not be hesitant about "higher" prayer.

In my view, Shin Buddhists are rather indifferent to the meaning of "praying." Or, they find strange the sort of prayer which Christians experience in speaking to God. And they would give the same explanation for the concept "faith."

The Christian concept of God's love, as I understand it, incorporates two meanings, or two sides. God loves human beings. They in turn love God, in accordance with God's love for them. God and human beings love one another. So my question is: can the word "to pray," be used in place of "to love"? Humans pray to God (in the "higher" sense). Now, can we correctly say, "God prays to humankind," not in a grammatical sense, but with regard to concrete meaning? Perhaps the word "to pray" is used mainly for human beings (or their behavior), and not for God; "prayer" goes in only one direction, like a one-way street. Or is there in Christian prayer something reciprocal or two-way?

If the sentence "God prays to humankind" is accurate in a concrete sense and corresponds to the Christian belief in God, then Shin Buddhists would understand "higher" prayer. But if Christians did not agree with the interchangeability of the words "to love" and "to pray," Shin Buddhists would say, this is strange to us.

We Shin Buddhists express the "two-way" meaning of *hongan-shinjin* with the words "to pray" and "to love." Amida loves us human beings and also prays to us, and we living beings love Amida, and also pray to Amida.

When the love/prayer comes from Amida to us, Shin Buddhists call it *hongan*, and when it goes from us to Amida, *shinjin*. These two words are not used interchangeably by Shin Buddhists. Zen Buddhists would use them in the reverse sense as well. Zen Buddhists often use all too challenging expressions such as "Buddha-

[2] *The Collected Works of Shinran*, vol. II (Kyoto: Jodo Shinshu Hongwanji-ha, 1997), p. 451.

killing," to try to break through the frontiers of human language. In spite of this difference in approach, however, Zen and Shin Buddhists agree on the basic Buddhist view of the above-mentioned "two-way street" or reciprocity.

Let us turn to the next point, that of how *hongan* can be translated. This is one of the hardest tasks for Shin Buddhists. Usually the word ''vow" is used. It is remarkable that Daisetz T. Suzuki has chosen to use the word "prayer"—this has rather astonished many Shin Buddhists. The opening sentence of Shinran's *Kyogyoshinsho* is traditionally translated like this: "I reflect within myself: the universal vow difficult to fathom is indeed a great vessel bearing us across the ocean difficult to cross."[3] In Dr. Daisetz T. Suzuki's translation of the *Kyogyoshinsho*, this passage reads, "As I humbly reflect, Amida's prayer for universal deliverance is beyond my understanding. It is the great boat that crosses the ocean of impassability."

Here I would like to make two points. First, Shinran is here writing reflectively about Amida's *hongan* (Original Vow, Primal Vow) and is not directly addressing Amida-Buddha (that is, he is not in dialogue with the ''person" of Amida Buddha). Secondly, Suzuki uses the expression ''Amida's prayer" (also ''original prayer"). This is somewhat problematic for Japanese Shin Buddhists who find a sort of foreignness in the word "prayer." In my opinion, Suzuki uses the word "prayer" in analogy to the context in which Christians would express their own religious experience. In this context, the Shin Buddhist word *hongan* can be translated as ''prayer." Are Shin Buddhists (and Christians too) for or against this?

Probably many Shin Buddhists are somewhat embarrassed. They understand that there is a resemblance between Amida's love/compassion and God's love of humankind as understood by Christians, and also between the Shin Buddhist *shinjin* and the Christian belief in *sola fide*. However, Shin Buddhists still feel that some things, at least, are strange, namely, God's way of "speaking" as the wholly Other and the sense of history, unique to Christianity, in the redemption from sins through the ''historical" Jesus.

The "God Who Speaks'' and ''Speaking to God"

Let us take another example. Let us remember that Shin Buddhists, in spite of their hesitation, do not propose the words ''prayer" and ''faith" as something positive or as substitute concepts. In my opinion Shin Buddhists are indifferent to what Christians experience in the presence of the "God who speaks." Shin Buddhists would not have this experience. Let us look at the "God who speaks" (a speech addressed to God). This is a matter of belief in which we are "simi1ar, but different."

[3] *Ibid*., vol. I, p. 3.

Prayer in Christianity is "praying to God." That means addressing God, speaking to God. And this prayer (speaking) on the part of humans corresponds to God's addressing, or speaking to, human beings. God was the first to appear and to speak. God's speaking allows human beings, then, to reply accordingly. The speaking from our human side is only that which was prompted from God's side. Humankind speaks to this God who speaks. I am thinking here of Genesis 17, Exodus 3, or the opening sentences of Augustine's *Confessions* and of the *Proslogion* of Anselm of Canterbury.

In Genesis and Exodus, God speaks to Abraham and Moses. The two men have not asked or been expecting anything at all. "Suddenly" God begins to speak; God's presence is made manifest. At first Abraham and Moses are probably quite amazed or baffled, but then they hear the words of God and find their own lives in God's words.

Augustine and Anselm begin their confession or philosophical argument with words of prayer and praise to God, thus in the manner of a dialogue or of speaking to God. In my opinion, Christians take this all too easily for granted. *Magnus es, domine, et laudabilis valde; magna virtus tua et sapientiae tuae non est numerus.* (Great art thou, O Lord, and greatly to be praised; great is thy power, and infinite is thy wisdom).[4]

> *Ergo Domine, qui das fidei intellectum, da mihi, ut, quantum scis expedire, intelligam, quia es sicut credimus, et hoc es quod credimus. Et quidem credimus te esse aliquid quo nihil maius cogitari possit.* (And so, O Lord, since thou givest understanding to faith, give me to understand—as far as thou knowest it to be good for me—that thou dost exist, as we believe, and that thou art what we believe thee to be. Now we believe that thou art a being than which nothing greater can be thought.)[5]

For Buddhists, however, such Christian "prayer" is not always so self-evident. In the Buddhist context, the words of Buddha do not come so *a priori*, but rather after a critical examination of the situation.

As an example I will cite the story of a wanderer, in the parable of the "Two Rivers and the White Path."[6] It is very famous in the Pure Land Buddhist tradition. The parable comes from Zendo (Shan-tao, 613-681 in China) who uses it in his *Commentary on the Contemplation Sutra.* There are two rivers of fire and water, and between them a little white path. A wanderer is fleeing westward, pursued by thieves

[4] St. Augustine*: Confessions and Enchiridion*, edited and translated by Albert C. Outler, *Library of Christian Classics*, vol. 7 (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1955), p. 31.

[5] Anselm of Canterbury, *Proslogion*, Chapter, in *A Scholastic Miscellany: Anselm to Ockham*, translated by Eugene R. Fairweather, *Library of Christian Classics*, vol. 10 (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1956), p. 73.

[6] See *The Collected Works of Shinran*, vol. I, *op. cit.*, (note 2), pp. 90–91.

and animals. He comes to this river of fire and water, and cannot go further. Even though he finds a very narrow white path leading between the fire and the water, it does not seem possible to escape from the thieves and animals by taking this path. The situation is critical: to turn back, to stay here, or to go further, all these three possibilities are fatal and will lead to death. But there is a path and the wanderer thinks, "I will go on. I will certainly make it." Then, suddenly, he hears encouraging words from the eastern dike, "Make up your mind—go on right now." And from the western dike someone calls to him, "Come on, hurry, do not be afraid, I will protect you." The one encouraging him from the east is Syakamuni Buddha in this world of suffering. The one calling from the west is Amida Buddha. In this little story, a basic theme of Buddhism can be found. One finds oneself in an agonizingly critical situation. The words of Buddha do not come at the beginning. First the critical situation is presented, and in the midst of desperation Buddha's words come from a certain direction (in this Pure Land story, the direction, west, is very important). In the Buddhist context, the main interest is the examination (or illumination) of the situation. When it is at the "lower" level, it is considered ''asking."

This theme is different from the miracle story in Exodus 14: God is leading the people out of Egypt. God speaks to Moses, although just before the miracle (crossing the Red Sea) Moses speaks to God in dialogue and asks, "What have you done to us, bringing us out of Egypt?" God's words have *a priori* importance. God's words are the only fundamentally important thing in the story.

"Ecumenism" in Pure Land Buddhism: Diversities of Nembutsu Interpretation

The word "ecumenism" might appear rather foreign in this Buddhist context. With the help of the meaning of "ecumenism" (especially in interdenominationa1 and inter-religious dialogue), however, I would like to say something about the diversities within Pure Land Buddhism in Japan. Until now there have been three directions (traditional *sanghas*): Jodo-shu, Seizan-jodo-shu and Jodo-shinshu. Each represents a group of followers of a disciple of Honen; Bencho (1162–1238), Shoku (1177–1247), and Shinran (1173–1262).

In order to explain one of its very fine but important distinctions, I need to describe two traditions of artistic portrayal of the parable of the two rivers and the white path *(niga-byakudo)*. The one portrayal mentioned above is the Shin Buddhist tradition and the other in the Jodo-shu and Seizan-jodo-shu traditions. In the one portrayal, the elements included are those which are mentioned by Zendo in the parable: a wanderer, thieves and wild animals, river of fire, river of water, a narrow path, Syakamuni Buddha and Amida Buddha. In the other portrayal, besides those in Zendo's portrayal, there are additional elements: the con-

crete representations of the "here" and the "beyond" (in the form of medieval Japanese palaces); and also Amida Buddha coming to receive the dying person, together with Avalokitesvara-bodhisattva and Mahasthamaprapta-bodhisattva.

Here I would point out that in Jodo-shu the image of rebirth into the world beyond is a synthesis, relating it both to being received by Amida at death and to the concretely graphic portrayal of the states before and after rebirth. These elements were not added by chance in the history of Pure Land Buddhism. "Rebirth" into the world beyond by means of nembutsu is always connected with the idea of Amida's appearance at one's physical death. Shinran has a particular way of interpreting "rebirth," namely from the context of *shinjin*. When one has attained this *shinjin*, one is immediately destined to be reborn. Because of Shinran's interpretation of the assured state of rebirth (*genshoshojoju*), the Jodo-shinshu tradition no longer depicts being received at death by Amida. It is mainly the wanderer's decision which is pictured at the center. Shinran states in *Notes on Essentials of Faith Alone*:

> "They then attain birth," means that when a person realizes *shinjin*, he or she is born immediately. "To be born immediately," is to dwell in the stage of non-retrogression. To dwell in the stage of non-retrogression is to become established in the stage of the truly settled. This is also called the attainment of the equal of perfect enlightenment. Such is the meaning of "they then attain birth." [7]

Another dispute had to do with the questions of saying the nembutsu many times or just once. On this subject of "nembutsu: once or many times," I would like to make the following brief remarks. Honen's teaching says, on the basis of Zendo's interpretation, that the nembutsu is the work of Amida (*tariki*, Other Power); only through the nembutsu are we born into the Pure Land. Shinran states, "One who entrusts him/herself to the Primal Vow and says the nembutsu attains Buddhahood."[8]

That was very simple and clear, and convincing but also implied other possibilities for interpretation. The nembutsu, calling upon the name of Amida-Buddha, is the work or the power of *hongan* (Primal Vow). We human beings, low, sinful life forms, recite nembutsu. How can this human action, which takes place not only in our minds but also physically, orally, be interpreted as the work of Amida? And if it is really Amida's work, is "calling once" upon Amida sufficient, or is "reciting it many times" necessary? There was a great argument between people supporting the doctrine of "calling once" (*ichinen-gi*) and people supporting the doctrine of "calling many times" (*tanen-gi*). In "calling once," the

[7] *Ibid.*, vol. II, p. 455.

[8] *Record of Lament of Divergences* [*Tannisho*], in *ibid.*, p. 668.

emphasis is on the immediate realization of rebirth through nembutsu. In "calling many times," the emphasis is on the repeated recitation of the nembutsu as a symbol of Amida's Primal Vow made manifest.

In this debate, Shinran did not take one side or the other. He saw the nembutsu not just as a practice or exercise, but rather as *shinjin* (practice-faith). And this he saw as coming not only from the human side, but also from Amida's side. This accords with his dialectical *shinjin*-dynamic. It was on the basis of such an interpretation that Jodo-shinshu ("Disciples of Shinran") developed as a particular school. In the 20th century there is a small "ecumenical movement" going on among three groups of Pure Land Buddhism in Japan.

Nembutsu Piety as a Life of "Prayer/Meditation"

The word "meditation" with reference to Buddhism often calls to mind Zen meditation. And the word nembutsu represents calling upon the name of Amida Buddha, orally reciting, "*namu Amida butsu*." Today (Zen) meditation and nembutsu mean different things. In the context of Shinran's *shinjin*, however, the understanding is that living in nembutsu piety is none other than "prayer/meditation" in a Buddhist way.

The word nembutsu originally meant "to meditate on Buddha," that is, in silence, through spiritual concentration, to imagine Buddha (as a figure, infinite light, virtue, etc.). In Indian Buddhism this was one of the many exercises one the path towards becoming Buddha. In China the meaning of nembutsu developed further and came to be used in the particular sense of Pure Land Buddhism.

Doshaku (Tao-ch'o, 562–645) understood his time as the "last dharma time." He saw a difference between the "Holy Path of Buddhism" and "Pure Land Buddhism." And he taught that "now, in the last dharma time," there remained only the possibility of Pure Land Buddhism, as the *Contemplation Sutra* teaches "me" as the lowest-born and most evil of human beings, through the nembutsu (calling upon Amida's name) to be reborn into the pure Land, and there to become Buddha. And his disciple Zendo (Shan-tao, 613-681), in the disputations of the day, worked with the teachings of the *Contemplation Sutra* and interpreted the nembutsu as reciting the name of Amida out loud.

The tradition of the Pure Land Buddhism of Doshaku and Zendo developed further in Japan. Honen (1133–1212), "only as led by Zendo" (only on the basis of Zendo's interpretation) placed the nembutsu at the centre of Buddhist doctrinal interpretation. Until then the nembutsu had only been one of the helpful exercises one could do. Honen selected the nembutsu, as devotion to Amida's Primal Vow, setting aside the other possibilities.

For Shinran, the word *nen* (to meditate, concentrate) is inseparable from the word *myogo* (the name of Amida). In *Notes on Essentials of Faith Alone* Shinran states:

> "To say Amida's name" means to make a decision and not to calculate in any way. Thus, these words instruct us, "Be wholehearted in the single practice of saying the Name embodying the selected Primal Vow."[9]

"If you cannot think on Amida"—This is the teaching which urges the person guilty of the five grave offences and ten transgressions and of engaging in defiled expositions of the dharma, "If you are tormented by suffering due to illness and cannot think on Amida, then simply *say Namu-amida-butsu* with your lips." This demonstrates that Amida made verbal utterance the essence of the Primal Vow. The expression "say the Name of the Buddha of immeasurable life" refers to this fact, and "say" instructs us to utter the name.[10]

For Shinran, the nembutsu consists not only of reciting the name of Amida, but also of listening to the name of the Vow. In this context, the nembutsu (= listening) in Jodo-shinshu is a kind of meditation, or it has the meaning of "meditation" in Buddhism.

The realization of Shinran's *shinjin* is found in the piety of the faithful life in the Jodo-shinshu history. Listening does not mean merely listening to the sermons of priests. Everything one does in daily life is always done in the nembutsu, with thanksgiving in response to Amida's compassion. Every action also has the meaning of listening to the name. Everything, i.e., not only the daily lives of uneducated people, but also the "listening reflections of scholars" (like *fides quaerens intellectum*), belongs to this devout nembutsu life in Jodo-shinshu and is nothing other than listening, that is, "prayer/meditation" in the Buddhist way.

> When beings hear my name and think on me
> Here is a word indicating *shinjin*.
>
> "Name" refers to the name embodying the Tathagata's vow. "Think on me" instructs us. Hold this name in mindfulness! This is implied in the compassionate vow that all the Buddhas pronounce the name. "Hold in mindfulness" means that people of true *shinjin* constantly recall the Primal Vow without interruption.[11]

---

[9] *Ibid.*, p. 463.

[10] *Ibid.*, p. 467.

[11] *Notes on Essentials of Faith Alone*, in *ibid.*, p. 456–457.

Cooperating in Caring for People in Life's Concerns and Crises: A Christian's Perspective

Kyaw Than

The topic, "Cooperating in Caring for People in Life's Concerns and Crises," as I understand it incorporates three parts: "Caring for people," "life's concerns and crises" and third, the act of "cooperating." For a Christian, "caring for people" is a central obligation in our response to the two summary commandments. Jesus said that the first commandment is this: " 'you shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your mind, and with all your strength.'

The second is this, 'You shall love your neighbor as yourself.' There is no other commandment greater than these." (Mk 12:30–31)

In another gospel (Lk 10:29–37) the same text is followed by a question by the one who initiated the dialogue with Jesus. He asked, "And who is my neighbor?" And Jesus spoke about a traveler who was attacked by thieves. As he was left wounded, a priest came along the road and saw him, but walked on (possibly not to be late for his religious engagement). Then another person came along the same road. He was a member of the priestly community who, after looking at the wounded victim, also hurried on. Thirdly, a certain Samaritan (or a member of an alien community) came to the scene. He had compassion for the victim, dressed his wounds, put him on the beast he had been riding, and brought him to a wayside hotel where the injured man could be taken care of. The following day as he prepared to continue with his journey, he gave some money to the hotel keeper asking him to provide care for the victim. He also told the hotel keeper that on his return journey he would settle whatever more was spent for the victim's medical and related care.

Jesus asked the one who initiated the dialogue originally, which one of the three travelers who came on the scene was, in his view, neighbor to the victim. "The one who showed compassion to the victim," was the answer. And Jesus said: "Go and do likewise." My understanding of the point of the above dialogue is for us to see everyone (whether we know the person or not) as our neighbor, or as someone to whom we should relate with loving care.

I would like to begin by emphasizing Jesus' basic injunctions namely, to love God and to care for other persons. Both of these injunctions point us away from ourselves, from self-love, to the love for God and others. For Christians, caring for people is a central obligation. Some well-known saintly people come to our

mind: Mother Teresa of Bengal, Kagawa of Japan, Florence Nightingale, David Livingstone, Francis of Assisi, and a host of others. And as human beings we all experience our own moments, moments we share with others in pain and pleasure, anxiety and joy, occasions for celebration and times of sickness, danger, and life's trials.

The exercise of *metta* and *karuna* (love and compassion) is upheld in all religious traditions. When examining "caring for people in life's concerns and crises" we must explore where inter-religious cooperation in such care could be nurtured and promoted.

Some Personal Experiences of Inter-religious Sharing in Joy and Suffering

Human concerns encompass a variety of experiences from birth to death, and even beyond. It is usual in a traditional Asian village for neighbors to share in the pain and pleasure, hope and anxiety surrounding, for example, the arrival of a baby. This includes advice about pre-natal care, preparations at home for the birth, and sharing in the hope and anxiety regarding the mother and the child to be born. These days most deliveries take place in hospitals or maternity clinics.

Weddings are occasions when friends and relatives of different religious backgrounds join together for celebration. I remember my family traveling to a provincial town on the banks of the Mekong, on the Thai side, to take part in the wedding ceremony of one of my Buddhist women students. We were treated as special participants in the wedding ceremony and I was asked to help in presenting gifts to the attending monks, to give a blessing and to pour lustral water on the clasped hands of the newly-weds.

My son-in-law's parents are Buddhists and they participated fully in the wedding celebrations. They even looked at the order of the wedding ceremony in the church and suggested when the newly-weds might come to pay respects in the traditional way to parents on both sides and how the parents on both sides would bless them.

Birthdays, weddings and other happy events are those when friends and relatives of different religious backgrounds join together for fellowship and celebration. In Asia such occasions are often natural settings for the meaningful exchange of religious perspectives on human life and experience. I shall comment later on the issues concerning inter-religious cooperation regarding the care of people in their life's concerns and crises. In the following I shall give a few concrete examples of people in a situation of crisis.

My late colleague, Dr. Mueller, visiting faculty member at Mahidol University came to Thailand some years ago to help with the graduate program in reli-

gious studies. German by birth, he had emigrated to the USA and then come Thailand. One day, on his return from a visit to a provincial town, he was knocked down by a car and taken to a nearby hospital for emergency treatment, where he succumbed to his injuries. It was up to the faculty to make arrangements for his funeral. The Buddhist priests in his class arranged for his cremation at a nearby Buddhist temple reciting the Buddhist sutras after an Episcopalian chaplain had presided over the last rites in a hall at the temple. There were Christians, Muslims, and Buddhists present at his funeral and there was a sense of community among his students, fellow faculty members and his relatives, though we come from different religious backgrounds. His widow and brother sent messages of sincere gratitude to the members of the inter-religious community for the cooperation and care extended on that occasion of shared sorrow.

Recently I was approached on behalf of some seriously sick members of a migrant community, and asked to help arrange for the care of those who are diagnosed as suffering from a terminal illness. One was moved to a hospice outside Bangkok under the care of Catholic priests and nuns while the other was admitted to a health project center in the northern capital. Her teenage son, who is healthy, will have board and lodging separate from her and will receive an education while she will have both material and health support at this project set up by Christians.

Some of my students have done some field research on related issues, and I have come to know about the care provided by temple-related projects in rural areas. I have been particularly impressed by the Sangha Metta Project (Project of Love by Monks) in the Muang district in northern Thailand. It is supported and sponsored by UNAIDS and involves monks in HIV/AIDS prevention and care. The monks play a crucial role in carrying the project, but I also look upon it as a significant example of international and therefore inter-religious cooperation. The project provides helpful support for the monks by coordinating with other organizations to form a network of monks who are involved in HIV/AIDS projects. One of their activities deserves special mention. In Thailand it is usual for lay people to bring yellow *sangkhataan* buckets to the temple as part of the meritorious rites. These buckets are usually filled with canned food, tinned milk, tea, water, soap, toothpaste, matches and other basics. Often the monasteries accumulate an overwhelming number of buckets and alms, which gather dust in the storerooms of the temple. Often the buckets contain medicines, such as pain killers. The monks deposit the tinned milk in milk banks and the medicines in a medicine bank for the children of HIV/AIDS patients or for the patients themselves according to their needs.

In rural areas monks are well respected and looked upon as role models. They visit the homes of HIV/AIDS patients, accept food prepared by them, provide basic education for their children and bring patients out of their isolation to partici-

pate, with members of the regular healthy community, in religious events at the temple. Providing basic material and medical support, teaching handicrafts so that patients can pursue an income generating activity, and caring for their children are certainly the kinds of assistance the HIV/AIDS sufferers need. More significant is the moral embrace offered by the monks who are highly respected. It is a source of inspiration and an example for the villagers, helping them to see that they too can accept these patients and give caring attention to the different needs of their fellow human beings who are often isolated or even rejected.

It is estimated that some 70,000 children are orphans as a result of HIV/AIDS, and it is projected that the number will increase to 250,000 within five years. Many temples are a second home to these children. Boys receive both educational and boarding assistance while the girls cannot be accommodated by the temples (due to monastic rules). The Sangha Metta Project encourages nuns to be concerned with the fate of these girls and to provide them refuge.

Indebtedness is a major problem in the agrarian community. In the past, religious communities in Thailand and Burma avoided getting involved in "secular" activities. In Burma, many farmers lost their land as loan-sharks from South India confiscated land of the Burmese cultivators who defaulted on debt repayments. Although traditional senior monks did not get involved in such problems, younger monks and some exceptional clergy provided the inspiration (at times even directly) for social, economic and political responses to the crises people were facing. In Thailand, monks were instrumental in initiating water-buffalo banks, rice banks and cooperatives to provide assistance to the cultivators at this critical time of need.

Religious Perspectives on Life's Concerns and Crises

The ideal in Buddhism is the life of a "homeless wanderer" who has given up worldly attachments, and henceforth pursues the path of "emptying," or "disciplining" the "self," stamping out egoism in the effort to break the cycle of births and rebirths, deaths and re-deaths, ultimately to reach "the beyond" or nibbana (cessation of the continuum of births, deaths, rebirths, re-deaths). Hence the "homeless wanderer" should not become involved in attachments such as marriage or other secular matters. Rather s/he should "let go" instead of "clinging on" to worldly desires.

However, in the observance of the traditional household rites in India, scholars assume that the Buddha refrained from prohibiting the laity to continue such observance. If there was tacit approval of existing Hindu rites as they were practiced then, it possibly opened the way for Buddhist monks to participate in certain household ceremonies of Brahmanic origin. As the monks began to participate

(and even briefly officiate) in ceremonies such as housewarming, birthdays and weddings, these became occasions for giving respect and offering food to monks and elders, listening to the dhamma and sharing love with friends. It is claimed that King Mongkut of Thailand deliberately substituted Buddhist chants for Brahman sutras at royal birthday ceremonies.

Fundamentally, weddings and Buddhist ideals are incongruent as the former may be interpreted as perpetuating attachment, desire, and the reproduction of sentient life. Hence, weddings are secular affairs having no sanction in the *Vinaya* and no connection with the temple, though as mentioned earlier monks may be invited to recite the Buddhist chants to make the occasion an auspicious one.

In the Christian tradition matrimony or marriage is holy, an honorable estate, instituted by God and even signifying the mystical union between Christ and his church. Hence, matrimony is not to be taken in hand unadvisedly, but reverently, discreetly and in the fear of God. The partners are henceforth no more twain but one. Marriage, home and family life were affirmed by Christ though he also gave priority to following and obeying God, and even, if necessary, renouncing parents, spouse, children, and possessions.

In Japan, reportedly, Buddhism is usually associated with funerals. One might say that Buddhism continually reminds human beings, and for that matter all beings (if they have the ability to reflect) that impermanence, suffering, and non-entity are the basic characteristics of them all. We must live with the consciousness of death as an experience we must all face at any moment. Although scholars and monks remind the average lay Buddhist that death is only a stage in the cycle of births and rebirths, for the common person death is something to be feared and avoided, if possible at all costs. For such a person it is the end, a termination and separation without knowing what the future holds. The teaching points to the possibility of improving one's lot depending on how and what kind of kammic credit one has accumulated. Rebirth does not mean the transmigration of the soul but the inexorable passage of kammic force leading to a certain result or reaction according to the causative action one had perpetuated.

The Christian perspective on death makes one realize that this life is lived only once during this lifetime. Just as the law of cause and effect is stated in Buddhism, so also in Christian belief one will reap what one sows. (cf. Gal 6:7) Then there is the day of reckoning resulting in good or ill through eternity. The unequal struggle between the intention to live aright and the inability to do so can only be resolved through faith in Christ who provides the enabling grace. In this sense Christian teaching presents a pessimistic view of human nature and its inability to achieve morality. But it has optimism and joy in declaring the enabling grace provided through faith in Christ. We cannot alone swim across to reach the other shore. But there is the raft of Christ's grace which carries us across. For the Christian, morality or a life of sanctification (*sila)*, is the fruit of

faith or trust *(saddha)*. It is important to reckon with the similarities and differences between Buddhist and Christian perceptions, for example, about history (*samsara*), anthropology (*vis- à-vis paticca samuppada*), and soteriology (*vis-à-vis* the Noble Eightfold Path).

The Buddhist view of human beings is, to a certain extent, pessimistic since all beings are characterized by impermanence, suffering, and non-entity. But it has also an optimistic view, as through by ascetic discipline and meritorious thought, words and deeds one can work out one's own salvation. One can build up the kammic credit force to counteract the past demerits and contribute toward the ultimate release from repetitious transitions from one form of existence to another (*samsara*). Christians talk of the ultimate hope for those who die in faith. Buddhists will remind the bereaved of the importance of meritorious deeds of the one who had passed away and the opportunity of those left behind to make merit to convey to the deceased to contribute toward a better next manifestation of the kammic force.

Inter-religious Cooperation

In spite of similarities and differences, or points of contact and departure, in the case of Buddhism and Christianity, I believe it is possible for Christians and Buddhists to cooperate in caring for people in their life's concerns and crises.

But it is imperative that we must not bear false witness of the other. Therefore, what I have indicated above as I seek to understand and state the Buddhist perspectives, cannot be taken for granted until these are authenticated by the Buddhists themselves. Neither does it mean that one outside the religious community concerned cannot attempt to articulate what s/he has heard and understood. It also does not mean that we indulge in compromises to come to agreements at all costs. Inter-religious cooperation should be sincere and authentic as we speak and act out the truth in love.

Irrespective of what our own religious tradition has to say about the nature and destiny of human life, we can still join together as neighbors, for example when celebrating family events such as a house-warming, the birth of a baby, or a wedding. Similarly we can cooperate in sharing our care and concern with a family experiencing sickness or the death of a loved one. In Burma and Thailand, as in many other countries, people of different religious backgrounds come together to visit the dying or the family of the deceased to bring consolation and comfort, often making reference to appropriate perspectives in one's own religious heritage.

I have often made a distinction between inter-religious dialogue *per se* and inter-religious dialogue for a specific purpose and for cooperation. I often think of the case of a little town with different fire brigades set up by the townsfolk who

are Buddhists, Muslims and Christians. When a house is on fire in the town no distinction is made whether this is property of a Buddhist, a Muslim, or a Christian. The fire brigades of all religious communities converge on the scene. Similarly, when there are floods, earthquakes, or other disasters, there is cooperation to provide relief to the victims irrespective of their religious affiliation. Each community draws on the resources they have, to cooperate in finding solutions to the common problem they are confronting. Inter-religious dialogue *per se* can deteriorate unconsciously to becoming something like a beauty contest as adherents of each religion try to exhibit how their own tradition is so much more attractive then the other's. Some may even state the strong points in their tradition and seek out to set these against what they see as weak points in the other tradition.

Such unfair practices in comparative religion have taken place in some Asian countries, resulting in estrangement and even in physical conflict and riots. Inter-religious sharing or exchange with the purpose of together honestly facing common challenges can help the partners to appreciate the depth of resources of the religious traditions their partners are drawing on. Such an exercise is not one of competition or confrontation. It is one in which rather than examining each other critically, both are together facing up to a common challenge to find a solution, as they both have a stake in resolving the problem. In such an exercise the partners come to appreciate the nature and depth of the religious resources their partner has been drawing on. The results differ vastly from the experience of competition characterized by seeking to gain points over the partner.

At all levels—local, national and international—there is the need to cooperate when giving early attention to the concerns and cares of the people at large. The protection of the environment, the necessity to combat poverty, distributive justice, and the urgency to uphold peace in the face of nuclear disaster, are just some of the challenges people of different religious commitments must tackle together drawing on the depth of resources each community can bring. As Christians, we have a special responsibility and vocation to fulfill. To use an image from the Old Testament (Isa 21:11–12), we are set as watchmen with the responsibility to keep awake and to tell others of the night and what its signs of promise are as the morning also comes. We are at the beginning of the 21st century. The night is far spent and the day is at hand. Let us prepare ourselves so that we can cooperate in caring for people in their life's concerns and crises.

Reflections on Cooperation in Caring for People in Life's Concerns and Crises: A Buddhist's Perspective

Parichart Suwanbubbha

In theory, all religions have implicit theories about justice, human rights, respect for the earth. They have an unselfish sense for the common good and emphasize the teachings of love and compassion. In practice, we need to be aware that the quality of our faith can be measured by the degree of commitment to concerns of justice and our responsibility toward others.

Both Buddhist and Christian teachings address the concept of universal love and compassion. When Christian talk of "loving others," they also mean "helping" them. Buddhists emphasize *metta* (universal love), which embraces all living beings, and *karuna* (compassion), which embraces all sorrow-stricken beings. *Metta-karuna* are included in the "Four Sublime States" (*brahma vihara*) in Buddhist tradition, expressed in the following way

- *Metta*: goodwill, universal love towards every lining being without any discrimination
- *Karuna*: kindness, compassion radiated with sympathy to relieve others' grievances
- *Mudita*: sympathetic joy, sharing the happiness of others and their progress without jealousy
- *Upekkha*: equanimity, impartiality, maintaining harmony without showing any discrimination.

Owing to their teaching of *Metta-karuna*, Buddhists are called to a life of practical care and help to all those who need our help.

In this brief essay I would like to emphasize the importance of relating our own religious teaching to life and problems in the real world, by creating action-oriented groups in our society. In other words, we need to help bridge the gap between our personal religious beliefs and our action. This is important in order to help more

people in times of crisis, whether during childbirth, family problems, facing a decision about a therapeutic abortion, confronting the question of assisting someone to die, losing a job, a mid-life or retirement crisis, or the time of death.

Since, according to Buddhist teaching, we are all subject to the law of interdependence, wherever we live or whatever religion we adhere to, all of us are affected by the current situation in our world where personal and global social injustice abound. The are many men, women, children who are suffering poverty, abuse, and many other kinds of injustices and who need our care. I think it is vital for us, Buddhists and Christians, to strengthen our cooperation and to share the responsibilities for building stronger coalitions for concern and care of all those who are in need.

Reflections on Engaging in Dialogue Among Buddhists and Christians

Inter-religious dialogue is, among other things, about people of different beliefs coming together in order to learn from one another and to rectify misunderstandings regarding the other's faith. Temporarily "passing over" to the religious practices of the other, such as participating in Buddhist meditation and Christian prayer, sharing devotional practices in Buddhism and Christianity, means including the "dialogue of experience." By so doing, Buddhist-Christian dialogue becomes especially fruitful, because it becomes more than merely talking about various doctrinal aspects in an ivory tower setting.

Inter-religious dialogue is not only exchanging information about one's belief but also trying to persuade one's partners to realize how important each side's beliefs are. For example, Buddhists have tried to illustrate the importance of the mysterious law of kamma and Christians have made an effort to explain the profound meaning of Christian prayer. Thus one is using both an objective method to give accurate information, and a subjective one to confirm one's presuppositions and commitments concerning one's own religious beliefs. Dialogue is neither an interview nor a debate. It is a two-way communication.

Dialogue it is a good opportunity to correct misunderstandings. We must never let "lazy tolerance" destroy our sincerity and honesty with respect to our own faith. Only then can it be considered as genuine inter-religious dialogue rather than monologue.

Dialogue is a good opportunity to critique one's own religions. For example, we may become aware of the inefficiency of the Buddhist monastic educational system or that the warm welcome and hospitality extended by some Christians to Buddhist students ends up with Bible study at their home with the aim of converting their guests. In addition, Buddhist-Christian dialogue is an opportu-

nity to discuss the urgent need and practical aspects of the care given to HIV/AIDS patients by both communities.

There is clearly a necessity for an "intra-religious dialogue" among Buddhist followers in the future, especially in the case of Pure Land Buddhist and Theravada Buddhist conversations. Sincerity and care is necessary in order to specify which practices are ideal and which ones are popular practices. This sincerity may lead to the development of some tensions. These, however, should be welcomed and accepted because there is no final answer for us. We still need room to hear, to learn, to grow, and to change in order to cooperate more fully in caring for people facing different life's crises.

The Struggle for the Liberation of the Buraku People: Christian and Buddhist Endeavors

Naozumi Eto

Let me begin my essay with a personal observation. I teach Christian ethics at Japan Lutheran College in Tokyo and had asked my class to read excerpts from a book about the discrimination against the buraku people by Japanese society. Particularly striking was the speech of a 12-year-old girl at a rally for the liberation of the "buraku." It was a moving speech indeed. I what surprised when only two days after the class I came across an article in the *Asahi* newspaper with the title, "Congratulations! Miho." The article had been written by a journalist, Mr. Wakamiya, who happens to have edited the book I had introduced in my class. In the article Wakamiya reflected on two wedding services; one was that of Miho which just took place a few days previously and the other was that of Miho's parents' 13 years ago. He had been deeply moved by Miho's wedding service.

Miho was the granddaughter of a public servant of the prefecture who although he was in charge of the defense and promotion of human rights was strongly opposed to his own daughter's marriage to a young man of buraku origin. After they had married, Miho's grandfather broke off all relations with his daughter, Miho's mother, who, consequently, could not even attend her mother's funeral service. In her speech 12-year-old Miho appealed to her grandfather asking why he would not accept his daughter and her family as they were. She knew that he was a gentle-minded person who loved and cared for flowers to the extent that he could even sense the pain of the plants. Therefore, she could not understand why he could not or would not sense the pain of the marginalized people.

Twelve years later Miho married a young man and frankly told him and his parents about her family origin. They did not care at all saying that times had changed, and they blessed the young couple's love and marriage. Miho's parents were also very happy and encouraged the young couple to continue their struggle in a society that is not always on their side. For Wakamiya, the journalist, this was a sign that there was hope for a change in the mentality of a society which has for long discriminated against minorities.

For my students this story illustrated the invisible but deep-rooted feelings of the people, as well as changes taking place in society. As urbanization develops, people leave their traditional communities in the countryside and build new communities in the cities. Because the government's efforts, also in the

form of legislation, and the sustained endeavors of the buraku liberation movement, a big change is underway. Nonetheless, the old mentality – such as Miho's grandfather's—prevails in society, both visibly and invisibly.

In the following I will describe the buraku people and their history of liberation, as well as the role of Japanese religious groups in the process of forming and, subsequently, overcoming the discrimination against the buraku people.

The "Buraku:" History and Present Situation

Japanese society is often characterized as being homogeneous and rather egalitarian. To a certain extent this is correct. The constitution guarantees fundamental human rights and prohibits any kind or form of discrimination against a member of the nation on the grounds of birth, family, race, religion, or belief. Since there are no fixed social orders, such as a privileged aristocracy, there should be no group of people who are marginalized because of a condition for which s/he is not personally responsible.

It is estimated that there are or used to be 6,000 "burakus" and two or three million people who are regarded as the buraku people. The Japanese word buraku means community or settlement. It is a neutral word, but it is also used in a specific sense to identify a certain community or settlement where a certain people live. These are the people who have been discriminated against, and these are the communities that have been discriminated against. But, one thing is very clear: between the so-called buraku people and the rest of the society there is no difference at all in terms of ethnic background, physical characteristics, or religion.

In Japan, the historical origin of the buraku can be traced back to the Middle Ages. During the Edo or Tokugawa era (1603–1868) this class was institutionalized in the feudal system as a social class below the officially acknowledged four social classes, namely warriors (*shi*), farmers (*nou*), craftsmen (*kou*), and merchants (*shou*). They were called e*ta* and *hinin*. *Eta* means "the polluted," and *hinin* means literally "non-human being." These people were supposed deal with the carcasses of cows and horses, and in the arrest, detention and execution of criminals. They were forced to live in a certain district and the vocations they could engage in were also very restricted. Many people worked in the leather industry. Marriage partners were to be found among the people of the buraku community.

Even after the edict of buraku liberation in 1871, soon after the Meiji Restoration, children of the buraku were not integrated into the public school system but only allowed to attend the branch of the school located in the "buraku." When the traditional social system was abolished and most of the nation were called "commoners," the people of the buraku were classified as the "new commoners." This form of national registration legally underpinned the discrimination. The standard

of the "baruku's" environment including housing, sanitation, education, employment and income remained very poor and low. Since the end of World War II the government has made a great effort to improve the situation of the buraku and the social awareness of the Japanese people, but it goes without saying that it takes a long time to do away with long ingrained, unconscious antagonistic feelings.

It would be wrong if the reader were to get the impression that Japanese society naturally changed its discriminatory stance against minorities such as the buraku people and the Koreans. It was possible only because of the protest and liberation movement of the oppressed. The *zenkoku suiheisha*, literally the "national association of horizon," was established by the long oppressed people, the "polluted" and "non-human" beings, in March 1922. Their declaration was outstanding if compared to other declarations on human rights. They boldly expressed their pride in being descendants of the buraku and clearly rejected the kind of freedom given as a token of compassion. They were determined to obtain freedom based on the dignity of humanity through their struggle and envisioned that a world of equality would be fully realized in future.

Miho's story bears witness to the fact that their wishes and dreams were not realized immediately. I remember an incident that took place in my hometown in southern Japan about 30 years ago, when because of his marriage to the daughter of a butcher, a young man and his mother were rejected by their own relatives. Today there a certain laws protecting the buraku and progress toward full liberation is being made. Nonetheless, there is still a long way to go.

The Role of Religion in the Oppression and Liberation of the Buraku

In the following I shall describe how religion has played a significant role in the long process of liberation of the buraku people while also colluding in their oppression. Buddhism, did not always side with the ruling class. Rather, there were times when it stood by the common people sharing their message of salvation. The *ikkou* evolt in the 16th century, for example, was a result of the combination of the suffering of the oppressed people and their faith in Shin Buddhism.

With the establishment of a nationwide feudal governing system by the Tokugawa government in the Edo era at the beginning of the 17th century, the religions were also incorporated into the ruling system. Together with the prohibition of Christian mission, all the people were forced to register with one of the Buddhist temples and to become parishioners. This meant that Buddhist temples became a part of the mechanism by which the social order was maintained. This feudal system incorporated a hierarchy of social classes with the warrior class (*shi*) at the top, followed by farmers (*nou*), craftsmen (*kou*), and merchants (*shou*). Below this

structure, as we mentioned above, there was another social class called *eta* and *hinin* living in the buraku. According to Buddhist teaching they should accept their social status as it was as a result of their previous life and to prepare themselves for the coming life according to the teaching of reincarnation.

The tradition of giving Buddhist names at the funeral and inscribing them on the stone tombs is astonishing. This name is called *kaimyo* in Japanese, and was originally the name given at the time when a person committed him/herself to Buddha and Buddhism, rather like a Christian name given at baptism. Both the Christian name and the Buddhist name should be chosen to express religious blessings. But, just as the Christian name became a given name in the *corpus Christianum*, so the *kaimyo* became a posthumous Buddhist name at his/her death in the *corpus Buddhistum*. Furthermore, since all the people were parishioners of one of the Buddhist temples, the choice of *kaimyo* was dependent on their social position and financial contribution. Those who lived a good life and had a high-ranking position were given a religiously high-ranking name, and those who lived a low-ranking life were given a religiously low-ranking name. Therefore, those of the buraku, who are called the polluted and non-human beings, were given very disgraceful names which can easily recognizable as names for the buraku people. This bad custom should not be overlooked because it meant that Buddhism played a discriminating role, rather than standing by the ones discriminated against.

How about the Christian church and its mission? Christians cannot not be excused from their role in discriminating against the buraku people. For example, it was rather common for non-buraku church members to hesitate sharing the common cup with the buraku Christians at the Eucharist. As Peter was scolded by Paul in a similar situation in the early church, this situation in Japan was a severe barrier to be overcome among Christians.

Over the last 20 years the Christian churches have had a hard time re-evaluating and criticizing one of the most popular and respected Christian leaders in Japan, the evangelist and social activist Toyohiko Kagawa. Kagawa was formerly called the "saint of Shinkawa," because of his deep commitment and service to the people in the Shinkawa slum area in Kobe as a witness of the love based in Christ's atonement. He had been regarded as a friend of the buraku people until in his book *A Study of the Psychology of the Poor*, he exposed his prejudice against the marginalized people. Kagawa failed to understand that the buraku had for centuries been victims of social injustice and oppression. He was not in solidarity with them and did not support their struggle for regaining human dignity; rather, he treated them as the object of his love and compassion because of the atonement achieved by Christ on the cross. Through the painful turmoil of criticizing Kagawa and being criticized by the buraku people, the Christian churches are in the process of learning true love and service to the oppressed.

Buddhism and Christianity did play a consoling, encouraging and even empowering role in the long history of the marginalized people. A most symbolic

expression is that the design of the flag of the *suiheisha*, an association of the buraku people, is a crown of thorns. While we should conclude too hastily that this is a token of the Christian influence on their liberation movement, we can and should be encouraged by the fact that the suffering Lord is with them and that we Christians are invited to participate in their suffering and struggle.

The Significance of the Buraku Liberation Movement for Christians and Buddhists

As I mentioned above, the last three decades were difficult times for the Christian churches and the Buddhist temples, with much critique from in- and outside concerning their attitude toward the buraku issue. Not only Kagawa but also some other prominent religious leaders were severely criticized. Nevertheless, it was a good opportunity for the religious bodies to discover the crucial importance of human rights for their mission if they claim that what they proclaim as "salvation" is holistic. If the church wants to remain as the church of the Reformation, it must be the *ecclesia semper reformanda*, i.e., the church which is always reformed.

The Multi-Conference of the Christian Churches Committed to the Buraku Issue was founded in 1980. Many religious bodies concerned with the buraku liberation issue established the League for Solidarity with the Buraku Liberation Movement. Both organizations have been working in close relationship with the Buraku Liberation League which the buraku people themselves are carrying out. This is not an agenda which the religious bodies including the Christian churches and the Buddhist temples have set forth, but it is an agenda that was already set forth by the world. What the religious people should do is to participate in the mission in which God has already taken an initiative, and to serve God to achieve justice and peace on earth.

These concerns and activities are not isolated from other issues of discrimination against minorities, such as the Ainu people, Koreans in Japan or Japanese Koreans, persons with mental or physical disabilities, the homeless, and foreigners in Japan.

The Protestant churches, including the Lutheran church, are the fruits of the missionary work of the West, whose main interest has been the salvation of the soul through the grace of justification. With a few exceptions, Buddhist sects are generally also individualistic in their understanding of salvation. This is why corroborating in the liberation struggle is an opportunity to come to an holistic understanding of the gospel. For example, Dr. Teruo Kuribayashi's *Theology of the Crown of Thorns* is a creative theological reflection on the gospel and the buraku liberation movement. I believe this work would not have been possible

without Kuribayashi's personal history of coming from the "buraku." Lutherans in Japan are developing a theology of "justification and justice" with the encouragement of the Lutheran World Federation. This is the time to rediscover the wholeness of the gospel and when Christians and Buddhists meet to discuss this issue they will find an authentic dialogue partner in each other.

Religion, Politics and Morality: A Controversy in Japanese Daily Life

Shinryu Takada

It is not easy to find examples of concrete cooperation between Christians and Buddhists in the local communities suitable for discussion: Christians and Buddhists coexist without any conflict but also without a great deal of interaction.

Nonetheless, nowadays many traditional Buddhists are thinking about engaging in "social, cultural" activities. It is said, for example, that "Buddhists need to practice not only inside but also outside their traditional world." In this context, "inside" or traditional practices mean Sutra-chanting, listening to sermons, family-ancestor worship, funeral ceremonies etc.; "outside" or contemporary up-to-date actions mean engagement in environmental problems, anti-discrimination, anti-poverty, terminal care or social welfare problems. Just as some Christians actively engage in activities from the perspective of their Christian faith, we Buddhists should do so from our specific perspective. Some Buddhists are seeking their own religious practice through these ideas. These Buddhists do not always act in cooperation with Christians; they have generally had little contact or relations with Christians. Buddhists and Christians together have on the whole not taken part in cooperative movements.

While there is no suitable case for "cooperation" in the literal or "direct" sense there is, in some cases, indirect "cooperation." Many Buddhists seem to be influenced by Christian ideas and regarding ideas or ways of thinking there is some similarity or equivalence among Christians and Buddhists.

Common Concerns

In Japan today, "engaged" Buddhists and Christians share some concerns and in some cases Buddhists and Christians do end up cooperating on these specific issues.

For example, there is the highly controversial problem of "religion and politics" the "Yasukuni" problem. This matter has been taken to court. In one instance, a Christian woman brought her husband's case to trial. Her husband, a Self Defense official (in Japan it is not called the "military") had unfortunately died in an accident, while on duty. According to the Self Defense tradition, in such a case, he had to be deified in the Yasukuni Shrine. This meant that her husband would join the other "Yasukuni kami" (Yasukuni spirits or deities). The Yasukuni Shrine was

built by the Meiji government for soldiers and officers who by dying had dedicated their lives to the state in times of warfare. Since the disestablishment of state-sponsored religious activities in Japan at the end of World War II, the Yasukuni Shrine no longer belongs to the government. In legal terms the Yasukuni Shrine is a religious institution separate from the government. In the minds of many Japanese it is, however, spiritually or culturally "inseparable." This woman's husband would also be worshiped as a member of the "war hero spirits."

For this Christian woman, such a "deification among the Yasukuni kami" went against her Christian faith and she demanded the cancellation or withdrawal of this deification. She said, "my religion is not Shinto but Christianity."

Her appeal for the "withdrawal of deification" was rejected because it is a traditional custom of the Self Defense Force, which is a part of the Japanese government. Actually this means that it was rejected by the Yasukuni Shrine. According to the traditional "doctrine" of the Yasukuni Shrine, all soldiers who die during war, must be "deified" in the Yasukuni Shrine. This doctrine holds that concerning the deification the division of "spirit" is not possible.

Some Buddhists came out in support of this woman's appeal at the trial. Buddhists of Jodo-shinshu (Pure Land Shin Buddhists) have insisted for a long time that war victims should be revered in the Tomb of the Unknown Soldier in Chidorigabuchi (located in Tokyo), not in the Yasukuni Shrine. The Chidorigabuchi Tomb is for all war victims of every religion. The deification at Yasukuni Shrine is Shinto-style. It goes against the constitution and against the spirit of freedom of religion.

Let me mention another court case that dealt with a similar socio-cultural problem concerning religion. There are Shinto shrines everywhere in Japan—in every village or local community—and all members of the village or local community are expected to contribute or donate something in order to support the shrine. This is self-evident for all residents of the village or community. The donation to the Shinto shrine and a membership payment to the village or community are the same thing. To live there means to be counted as a member of the village and of the local Shinto shrine.

A Christian protested against this custom on the grounds of not being a Shinto believer or follower, but a Christian. He was immediately and severely criticized with the community telling him that, "You live here with us in our village. If you don't pay, you will no longer be a member of our village." On being ostracized by the village community the Christian took this matter to the court.

There are two types of judgment that can be reached in these trials: either this practice goes against the constitution or, this practice is a social custom or folk culture and, therefore the constitution has not been violated. These two opposite judgments make it clear that there exist two different ideologies in Japan with respect to understanding traditional religio-cultural practices.

I will mention one more such matter, the *jichinsai* or "ground breaking ceremony," a Shinto folk religious ceremony carried out at the beginning the construction of a house in order to purify the place or to drive out evil spirits. This ceremony is usually performed by Shinto priests and local governments (cities, towns) spend some money on this traditional ceremony. Some citizens insist that it goes against the constitution and the matter was taken to court. The Japanese constitution prohibits public or government officials from spending money on any special religion. If the ground breaking ceremony is deemed "religious," it goes against the constitution, if it is a traditional social custom or folk culture, it does not violate the constitution. Whereas a number of people think that providing support for this ceremony goes against the constitution, many regard *jichinsai* as a part of traditional social folk culture, and thus as not infringing on the constitution.

These trials show some aspects of the socio-religious-cultural situation in Japan. "Yasukuni-deification," "support for the village shrine," and the "ground breaking ceremony" are all a part of the same problem. Are such Japanese domestic folk attitudes and practices to be seen as religious or as moral-cultural? Is this an harmonious coexistence of "religions" or a kind of religious "fusion"?

Affinity of Buddhists and Christians on the Issue of Shintoistic Culture

The main subject arising from these court cases is the relationship between religion and politics. Is Shinto a "religion," or is it rather a moral-cultural tradition of Japan? This has been a controversial topic since the Meiji era. According to Meiji government policy, Shinto is not a religion but, rather, a morality imbedded in traditional Japanese culture. According to this interpretation, "de-religionized" Shinto shrines in villages were included into the Tenno (imperial) governmental hierarchy. People's pious feelings of reverence or worship for Kamis (Tenno is originally Kami and the highest being in the political "theocracy" system) were thus regarded as a central aspect of national morality. On the other hand, some pious movements or groups within the Shinto tradition were recognized as religious denominations (for example, Tenrikyo and Konkokyo), under the designation of Kyoha Shinto (sect Shinto).

If Shinto is not a religion, but a kind of folk morality, there exists no conflict between Shinto (folk moral culture) and religion and there is no contradiction with the modern principle of freedom of religion. Nowadays the situation is not so different during the Meiji era. Freedom of religion in Japan is not the same as in many other countries. After the disbandment of state-sponsored Shinto at the

end of World War II, Shinto shrines in villages no longer belong to the "Tenno theocracy" system. The group of shrines in villages, so called Jinja Shinto, is now also designated as a religious denomination, just as many Buddhist groups, Christian churches, New Religions, and so on.

Thus today there are differences of opinion in Japan regarding the identity and role of Shinto. Shinto could be understood not only as "morality" but also as "religion." For many people, acts in daily life such as the "ground breaking ceremony," the support of a shrine in the village or traditional community festivals are inseparable from "moral-religious" feelings of reverence for or worship of Kami(s). Looked at from the perspective of monotheistic cultures in which the difference of religion and moral is "self-evident," there is an "ambiguity" between folk "custom" (culture, morality) and folk "religion." The Japanese people have encountered the notion of "religion" as a Western concept, which has been strictly distinguished from "morality." Such a distinction of religion and moral (or morality) has been self-evident in the Western European monotheistic traditions. It is, however, not so in Japan.

This ambiguity in Japanese thinking can be seen in the very notion of Kami (gods, spirits, deities). There are many Kami or deities in Shinto, including natural deities, conceptual deities, and anthropomorphic deities.

Natural deities, for example, would include Amaterasu-omikami (Shining Sun Goddess), the deity of the Ise Jingu (shrine). Amaterasu is the supreme deity in Japanese mythology and the ancestor goddess of the imperial family. She is a goddess perhaps not unlike the Greek gods and goddesses. Conceptual deities would include many Kami in the Japanese tradition, for example, the Deity of Good Fortune, the Deity of Safe Driving, etc.

Anthropomorphic deities include a wide variety of the Kami, including some that have been deified in modern times. For example, Nikko Toshogu (the Shinto shrine at Nikko) was built for Tokugawa Ieyasu, the first Shogun of the Edo Bakufu, who was deified in that shrine. Tenmangu Shrine was built for Sugawara Michizane (died 909, Heian era); he was deified to calm his anger (he had been executed for his political activities), in order not to be cursed by his spirit. At the same time, Sugawara was a great scholar and a good calligrapher, so he has been worshiped as the Deity of Scholarship and Calligraphy. Many people visit Tenmangu shrines (there are many Tenmangu shrines throughout Japan) in order to pray for success in examinations or to receive encouragement for their own studies or research, etc. As a third example, General Nogi committed suicide following the death of Emperor Meiji, and a shrine was built, the Nogi Shrine, where General Nogi is deified. Finally, as discussed above, soldiers and officers who dedicated their lives for the State of Japan are deified in the Yasukuni Shrine built by the Meiji government.

A "Monotheistic" Attitude in the "Polytheistic" Religious World: Exclusivism and Inclusivism

Is this folk moral-(magico-) religious attitude in traditional Japanese daily life a "religious fusion" or a kind of special, unique "culture"? It seems to me (as a Shin Buddhist) that the majority of Buddhists are silent or tolerant of such a religious "fusion." They do not find any serious "religious problem" with this situation but there are many Shin Buddhists as well as Protestant Christians who criticize such Japanese religious "fusion."

Shin Buddhism seems to have a somewhat "monotheistic" sensibility. In fact, it could be said that Shin Buddhism is a kind of "monotheistic salvation religion" among the various Buddhist schools. Such a Shin Buddhist viewpoint (Shinran's doctrinal interpretation) stands on the ground of Mahayana Buddhism. The beginning lines of Shinran's "Hymn of True Faith and the Nembutsu" are as follows:

- I take refuge in the Tathagata of Infinite Life (Amida Buddha)

- I take refuge in the Buddha of Inconceivable Light (Amida Buddha).

This "refuge" in Amida Buddha is "one mind." It seems to be particularly "monotheistic." In Japan there are so many folk magico-religious customs and festivals in daily life. Shin Buddhists have struggled for a long time with these folk customs, such as "lucky days" or "happy times," etc. Shinran stated:

> Lamentable it is that people, whether of the Way or of the world,
> Choose auspicious times and lucky dates,
> Worship heavenly gods and earthly deities,
> And are absorbed in divinations and rituals.[1]

And at the same time (or in spite of this "exclusiveness"), Shin Buddhists have existed alongside these folk religious practices with a generally tolerant attitude. In the Shin Buddhist world, one may also find some acceptance of such "Shintoistic" folk religious customs. Some Shin Buddhists have proposed inclusive interpretations. Pure Land Buddhism is a development of Mahayana Buddhism. *Upaya* (skillful means) is a very important notion of Mahayana Buddhism. There are so many Buddhas and Bodhisattvas in Mahayana Buddhism, and every Buddha or Bodhisattva can be seen as an embodiment or an appearance of Buddha's wisdom (*prajña*) and compassion. By means of notions such as "*upaya*,"

[1] *Shozomatsu Wasan*, Ryukoku translation series VII (Ryukoku university), p. 101.

Mahayana Buddhism has integrated many foreign religious elements. Japanese folk religious elements have also been taken or integrated into the Mahayana Buddhist context. We can say that Mahayana Buddhism is a great inclusivistic religion. Yet the Nirvana *Sutra* states that if one has taken refuge in the Buddha, one must not further take refuge in various gods. On the ground of systematic Mahayana doctrines, Shinran developed a kind of "monotheistic pure-mind" focused entirely on the nembutsu (*Namu Amida Buddha*): "As for me, I simply accept and entrust myself to what my revered teacher told me, 'Just say the nembutsu and be saved by Amida;' nothing else is involved."[2]

These are typical words from Shinran which can be cited as the ground for an "exclusive" attitude: just the Nembutsu, nothing else. According to Shinran, every possible religious practice of Buddhism is completely included in the nembutsu itself, which is seemingly only a small easy practice, nothing but the appearance of Amida's mercy.

In conclusion, I would say that there exists in Japan a kind of "inclusive" or "tolerant" Shintoistic religious world. With this Shintoistic "inclusive exclusivism" or "tolerant intolerance," some people, especially Protestants and Shin Buddhists, find a serious problem or crisis for their own religious identity. The controversies about religion and politics or religion and morality in Japan come from the struggle with this Shintoistic "fusion."

In looking for possible examples of cooperation between Christians and Buddhists in Japan, we can regard the common attitude of Protestants and Shin Buddhists in the confrontation with such "Shintoistic community inclusiveness" as a kind of cooperation. Further, in Japan many people are actively engaging the problems of social discrimination, human rights, women's equality, and so on. These problems, of course, are treated not only from the religious perspective but engaged people of faith, whether Buddhists or Christians, can involve themselves in some kind of cooperation in confronting these problems.

[2] *The Collected Works of Shinran*, vol. I, p. 662.

Asian Women's Reality: Theological Reflections

Chuleepran Srisoorntorn Persons

Every day millions of people in Asia experience the daily struggle to eke out a decent life. Fighting against poverty, illiteracy, sex discrimination, injustice, oppression, and corruption is part of their struggle.

Some concerns are common to most Asian countries, since culturally, socially, and religiously they face the same, or similar, problems and struggles. As communities, families, women, men, young people, and children, they wrestle continuously to achieve their goals and desires for a better life. In this battle, women have a great share in maintaining a balance in society and the home. In the following, I will describe some common problems that women face in the Asia of today.

Women's Struggle in the Total Struggle

In Asia many people are exploited and therefore dehumanized. Social justice and human dignity are battlegrounds, and men and women have to fight for their own survival. When the indicators of oppression are applied to women it is clear that they are doubly exploited because of their sex. They have restricted access to education, property, and health care, and lack security. Frequently they are denied any influence in society and in making decisions affecting the community's welfare. They lack political representation in their country and in the life of their religious community. Together with this denial of basic human rights goes widespread physical exploitation.

Women and the Institutions of Marriage and Family

The family is the primary unit of economic survival and support. Economic constraints therefore have a strong impact on emotional values attached to the family. There are things to be said for and against various styles of family life—both the nuclear family and joint or extended families. Their positive and negative aspects require exploration.

In most Asian families, the role assigned to the women is one of subservience to men. Even if a women holds considerable responsibility in her profession and status in society, at home she is expected to be quiet and

obedient. This causes deep frustration in many capable women who wish to share a responsible partnership with men at home as well as in the world at large.

In the family situation a women may be the breadwinner, but she is also the one who cares for the family. She must then bear the burden of economic crisis in the spheres of production and reproduction.

A Woman's Image of Herself

We have maintained that gender roles are the result of conditioning. Many factors influence them. Cultural and historical traditions, economic and political factors, have a great bearing on the way men and women see their role in a society as have religious teachings. A woman's image of herself is closely related to the roles accepted because of such conditioning. Of course she retains certain distinctive characteristics, and these have both positive and negative effects. For instance, biologically she is the one able to conceive and bear a child but her biology ought not determine her role in life.

Women Migrants and Refugees

Families are on the move constantly, either rural to urban within the same country or from one country to another, mostly from East to West. This migration has been stimulated by rapid industrial growth and need of the electronic, textile, and other industries for cheap labor. The proportion of women among new migrants to the cities in Thailand, the Philippines, and South Korea is much higher than in other countries.

Women in migration suffer in many ways. They leave their families to go and earn better wages. Living in other places they are often exploited by their employers. Most of the women who come from the villages to towns are exploited in every way possible. The low-wage jobs give little or no security and working conditions are unsafe and unhealthy.

Refugees are displaced and dispossessed people in terms of land, poverty, culture, language, etc. Women are the worst hit in this process. As families and individuals move from one part of the world to another, women are the ones who courageously have to face their situations and keep their families together as much as possible. War, natural disasters, selfishness and greed are the causes of the refugee situation in the world. In many Asian countries, we see a heart-breaking situation as for example in Sri Lanka and Burma.

Violence and Discrimination Against Women

Domestic violence is a common phenomenon in all societies. Women are considered to be men's property—to be disposed of as men please. Sexual violence toward women is on the increase in some Asian countries and there are not enough laws to protect women from either domestic or sexual violence.

This area has been a continuous struggle for generations of women in Asia. The patriarchal structures affect a child from the very beginning. A girl does not have her own identify or right to exist in the family as a person; she is always referred to as a daughter, sister, wife, and mother. In many Asian countries, girls are denied formal education since the education of girls is considered a waste. Parents do not want to spend money on their education because they are thought to be good only for staying at home and taking care of children when they are married. This kind of treatment continues in the life of a girl as she looks for prospects in life—such as education, job opportunities, social status, etc.

In spite of campaigns for promoting literacy, the rate of illiteracy is on the increase in many Asian countries. The illiteracy rate among women is higher than among men and in some countries as many as 80 percent of women cannot read. This situation denies wholesome growth in a girl. Because of illiteracy, there is much exploitation and oppression in the world.

Prostitution has become an "industry" in many Asian countries where women and girls are bought and sold. Young women and girls are lured into towns and cities for employment or marriage and forced into prostitution against their wishes. In some countries the laws relating to prostitution are totally inadequate, as they are actually discriminatory against women.

A woman is expected to play two roles: a worker outside and a housewife in the home subjecting the woman to more stress and strains. On the work front, 96 percent of women are employed in the informal sector and do not enjoy the rights and privileges that the workers in the formal sectors have. These women do not have the privilege of maternity leave, sick leave, or benefits such as a provident fund, and retirement pension. In many cases women are last to be hired and first to be fired.

In many countries, work is being done to raise the status of women and to provide more opportunities for them. These efforts should not be confined to women alone but, society itself should be subjected to change, and thus become capable of promoting the uplifting of women. The above mentioned concerns cannot vanish overnight nor can they be solved by individuals. There needs to be a joint effort to bring about a climate of equality, justice and peace.

We have to approach all the problems of women from the perspective of human dignity and of how to expand people's opportunities for a human life.

Theological Reflections: Justice and Peace

While Jesus was in this world he showed great concern for the poor and oppressed, particularly for poor women. For this reason, we Christians who claim to be Jesus' disciples must share his concern for women. We believe that Jesus suffers with the poor women in Asia and fights against such dehumanization. Jesus participates in the suffering of Asian women because of the double jeopardy of economic poverty and patriarchal oppression. In the struggle for human dignity, we must listen to their cries, mobilize our love, and join them in their march towards a truly human community where their cries and sorrows are alleviated and they are relieved from the burden of injustice.

According to the creation stories found in Genesis, God is the Creator and source of everything. The creation is an expression and manifestation of God's will. This is especially true with respect to human begins. We are created in the "image of God." Males and females reflect equally the divine character and identity. Because we both come from the same divine source and share the same divine image, we should be given the same dignity. As Christians we need to learn how to work together, how to cooperate, and complement one another so that the relationship between the sexes is one of equality, mutual respect and support.

In the Old Testament the Hebrew words *tsedeq* and *tsedaqah* are sometimes translated into English as "justice," but more frequently as "righteousness." The basic meaning of both translations is "conformity to the norm." And for the Hebrews the norm was God, and the meaning of both "justice" and "righteousness" was also connected with salvation and help for the "poor" and the "needy."

In the New Testament, the Hebrew words for justice and righteousness are translated into Greek by the word *dikaiosune*. For Paul and for the other New Testament writers, "Christian ethical conduct" is equivalent to "living a life of love." The norm and content of justice is provided and revealed to us by God as love. Justice is simply "love in action."

The Christian is God's instrument for making the "good news" known to the poor and the needy, for proclaiming good news to the victims of injustice, for liberating those who are oppressed and enslaved and also to live in the ways that demonstrate the reality of God's love and justice.

Whereas "peace" is commonly understood as the "absence or end of war," in the Bible "peace" means much more than the absence of conflict or strife. In the Old Testament the word for "peace" is "shalom." Shalom refers to "wholeness," "well-being," and "harmony." Peace is the gift of God's love, and when that love is shared with others, peace is established, peace with God and peace with our neighbors. Where there is no justice and a lack of integrity, there can be no peace. Where there is exploitation and oppression, there will be conflict and violence. Where there is no love, there can be no harmony.

Today Asian societies are torn asunder by racial and ethic strife, by religious and cultural difference and by class and economic divisions. The women of Asia are especially victimized by this situation, suffering the consequences of this lack of shalom. We must confess that even within the Christian community itself, there is often a distressing lack of peace. So-called Christian families are not without marital strife and domestic abuse. So-called Christian congregations are often characterized more by divisions and by rancorous acrimony than by love, forgiveness, and reconciliation. This means treating one another with respect and dignity.

We know that in his life and work Jesus taught that laws, customs, and traditions that discriminate against the human dignity of any person must be set aside and disregarded—that laws detrimental to the good of the people are unholy. This teaching of Jesus was revolutionary. We need to resolve to stand up against such practices. We know that with faith we can do so and that Jesus would want us to do so. Thus together we can help to create new history.

Some References

Antone, Hope (ed.), *Our Stories*, *Our Faith* (Hong Kong: World Student Christian Federation, 1992).

Asian Church Women's Conference, *Ecumenical Decade of Churches Solidarity with Women* (Seoul: ACWC, 1990).

Mananzan, Mary, *Women in Asia: Status and Image* (Singapore: CCA, 1979).

Report of the Asian YMCA Consultation on Women in Society, *Women in Society* (Hong Kong: Asia Alliance of YMCA, 1985).

Somswasdi, Virada (ed.), *Women , Gender Relations, and Development in Thai Society* (Chiang Mai: Women's Studies Center, 1997).

Sun Ai, Lee Park (ed.), *We Dare to Dream: Doing Theology as Asian Women* (Hong Kong: AWCCT, 1989).

Reflections on Women, Women's Rights and Feminism in the Thai Context

Parichart Suwanbubbha

One important way of doing dialogue is to focus on contemporary problems which all of us, whether Christians, Muslims, or Buddhists are encountering. The inequality, injustice, and exploitation of women are crucial issues demanding our attention. The degree of seriousness of these problems may vary according to the cultural and social background. In this essay I will try to show the importance and necessity of a feminist understanding in Thai society. In order to do so it is important to explore people's general attitude toward women's issues in Thailand and then to examine how Buddhism can help ease these problems. Moreover, this essay will include an understanding of women's rights related to family life, such as the right to family planning and abortion according to Thai Buddhism. Some arguments also derive from reflections arising out of Buddhist—Christian dialogue.

Women of this World

Generally speaking in today's world women's lives are more or less a struggle. "Women are still hungry—hungry for real power or just plain hungry."[1] While in the industrialized world, women are stepping up their fight for political equality, women in the rural economies of the impoverished south, face an even tougher struggle. According to the United Nation's World Food Programme the wealth gap between men and women is steadily growing.[2] Women are not only in the circle of poverty but also in that of violence. In many parts of this world women are beaten daily at home, raped in the streets, forced into prostitution, including "honor killing" where men kill female relatives suspected of sexual activity outside marriage. This indicates the continued, widespread violation of human rights, in which women are treated as second-class citizens, even though the idea that "women's rights are human rights" is being cultivated in our world today.

[1] *Bangkok Post*, March 9, 2000.

[2] *Ibid.*

An Overview

In Thailand, women are grossly under-represented in national politics and in the shaping of public policies directly affecting their lives. Women hold an average of six percent of policy and decision-making positions at the national level.[3] In the government services, only ten percent of executives are women.[4] These figures confirm the picture of women as "the hind legs of the elephant," a saying that reflects on the Thai value system in which women are to stay behind and follow. Thai society expects women to be neat at housework and never to show off. Owing to a lack of education, training, and skill development opportunities, most Thai women automatically accept this situation.

Saying that Thai women are regarded as second-class citizens is both true and untrue. A Thai saying compares men to rice grains still in the husk, while women are compared to polished rice grains. In other words, the value of the men is productive, important, and independent while women are dependent and less important. This belief may lead to many unfair practices in family life such as insufficient health care and little concern for women's reproductive rights, including the lack of cooperation by men in matters of family planning and contraception.

Most Thai men still claim that Thai women are liberated and have authority in certain domains, especially the management of the household and the family's money. Some people claim that therefore women have "secret powers and authority." According to a leading advocate of women's rights, Khunying Chintana Yosoonthorn:

> It is right. The woman is the holder of the purse strings. It means the men give us money for the head woman to manage. How much is never mentioned, or how the money is earned, and you know very well her share in earning that, too. The money earned is supposed to be given by the master and the lord, but what the lord keeps, there is no mention.[5]

Many Thai women are victims of sexual exploitation and there are many cases of domestic violence, sexual abuse, and prostitution. The general public accuse women of causing these problems themselves. For example, according to a report of the United Nations Population Fund there are about 75 million unwanted

[3] *Thai Rat*, August 28, 2000.

[4] Gender and Development Research Institute, September 1998.

[5] *Proceedings of the Peace Corps Conference on Women and Development* (Chiang Mai: Pituk Karnpim, 1979), p. 10.

pregnancies worldwide. Many Thai men would say that these women did not behave well sending out "sexual signals," such as dressing seductively, and thus indicating their willingness to engage in sexual relations and seducing men.

This may reflect the larger problem of injustice towards women inherent in Thai society. Whenever someone (usually a woman) raises the issue of women's inequality and injustice, most people will accuse her of imitating the roles and activities of Western feminists and behaving like this as the result of experiencing family problems. Therefore it is very challenging to consider and understand Buddhist teachings in the context of the Thai way of life. We need to interpret how the Buddhist perspective can help ease women's problems and to provide ways for people to develop appropriate attitudes towards women's issues.

Human Rights in Buddhism

In this essay I shall attempt to explain that according to Buddhist teaching men and women have to depend on each other. Their roles are complementary; both are important, and they are supposed to share responsibility. That is, both men and women are human beings born in the circle of birth, decay and death. They are equal under the process of changing (*anicca*), suffering (*dukkha*), and lack of substantial self (*anatta*). Theoretically speaking, the Buddhist perspective is much the same as the Christian claim of equality between men and women based on the teaching that both are created in the image of God. They are equally creatures of God and children of God who have sinned.

Moreover, men and women are subject to the same law of cause and effect (law of kamma). One cannot escape from the effects of one's actions. This natural law is just for men and women alike, because everyone has the "right" to participate in whatever activities s/he wishes. At the same time, s/he is "responsible" for accepting the results which vary according to the causes. Therefore, this principle of causality can be utilized to explain the principles of righteousness and justice.[6] By considering this teaching, one may basically claim that both men and women to have "equal rights" which are included in the idea of justice.

Furthermore, according to Buddhism, human rights include the right to have a life beyond suffering.[7] This definition tries to link with the ultimate reality in Buddhism,

[6] ShoyoTaniguchi, "Human Rights and the Buddha's Teaching: A Soteriological Perspective," in *The Pacific World*, no. 6 (Fall 1990), p. 82.

[7] Runjuan Intharakamhaeng, *Sithisatree vitheebudda* [Women's Rights by Buddhist Ways] (Bangkok: Gender Press, 1984), p. 10.

nibbana, the end of suffering. That is to say, no matter what quality of life people possess, even if they call it as having "rights," their life is still suffering. This means that they do not have authentic rights. By this way of explanation, the majority of women in some countries who are poor and oppressed are still far from the category of "rights."

However, the above understanding of "rights" in Buddhism is still related to the "individual self" according to human language. In the dhamma meaning or absolute language, everything is non-self *(anatta)*. Applying this understanding to claiming that abortion is a woman's right, neither the woman nor the fetus could absolutely claim that "this body belongs to me." The body is the combination of the condition of a physical organ and a sensory object reacting interdependently. In reality, nothing exists that one can claim as "mine." In fact, it is possible to say that those who are struggling for rights, in an absolute sense, cannot hold or claim any rights. In other words, one may realize that Buddhist teachings affirm the rights of both men and women. They should not attach or cling to their rights because they cannot hold or control them in the ultimate sense.

Feminism and Thai Buddhism

In applying these Buddhist attitudes to women's rights, we prefer to take the middle way. This way derives from the doctrine of the middle path, not too much, not too little, not too tight, not too loose. That is to say, moderation in all activities and in every aspect of a life, without extreme austerity or extreme indulgence is recommended. (*The Samyuttanikaya* v 421) Therefore we should be careful not to label ourselves as feminists in the extreme sense. However, it is very interesting to consider feminist theology in Christianity in order to learn and grow as partners in dialogue. According to Rebecca S. Chopp, there are four types of feminist theology: liberal egalitarianism, romantic expressivist, sectarian separateness and radical transformist.[8]

In accordance with the general idea of feminist theology, we Buddhists realize the dominant influence of "patriarchy" within the complex set of values in Thai society. Following the idea of feminist liberal egalitarianists, we call for equality, freedom, and liberty, advocating the full ordination of women as bhikkhunis.

We also like the idea of the radical transformists to "emphasize the need for forming new visions of being human and new visions of the social orders."[9] The

[8] Donald W. Musser and Joseph L. Price (eds.), *A New Handbook of Christian Theology* (Nashville:Abingdon Press, 1992), pp. 190–191.

[9] *Ibid.*, p. 191.

following example illustrates the status of women in Thai society. A husband and wife working in the diplomatic service have the possibility to become ambassador in different countries. The traditional Thai male would expect his wife to give up her career and to move with her husband and family to another country as the ambassador's wife. This decision may result from the Buddhist doctrine of interdependence (*pattica samuppada*), which may be interpreted as the reciprocal duties and obligations between husband and wife. This would show how the ethics of reciprocity and interdependence calls for an ethics of responsibility.[10] However, in most cases, social values and traditional stereotypes classify women's rights and duties as related only to the domain of household, despite women's ability in other areas. A similar example would be the popular values which praise values of autonomy and objectivity for men, while "emotion" is seen as a typically feminine attribute.[11] This seems to be the universal stereotype for women. Therefore, as many Christian feminists call for the transformation of the social order, we as Buddhist women also call for the opportunity to be evaluated according to our moral behaviour and actions rather than from being born and holding the qualification of males or females.

Concerning the sectarian separateness type of feminism, this seems not to fit well with the Buddhist idea of interdependence. This type "tends to concentrate on separate space for women, a separate feminist religion and separate communities."[12] This will not work well for Buddhists because it seems too extreme in an egoistic way. According to Buddhist teaching, everything is coexistent and interconnected. While the separate space for women may work well in some situations, it is not normal and unlikely to remain a healthy situation. A concrete example of this is the "women's bus project" in Bangkok. During rush hour, there are buses reserved for women passengers only. The idea behind this is to prevent sexual abuse and harassment on public transport. Although women appreciate this project it solves the problem only superficially. The real prevention from a Buddhist perspective would be the encouragement of practicing and taking seriously the third Buddhist precept on abstaining from sexual misconduct. Buddhist teaching reminds us that we are not supposed to harm others,

[10] Pradmasiri de Silva, "Human Rights in Buddhist Perspectives," in Abdullahi A. An-Nalim *et al.* (eds.), *Human Rights and Religious Values: An Uneasy Relationship* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1995), p. 142.

[11] Musser and Price, *op. cit.*, (note 8), p. 191.

[12] *Ibid.*, p. 190.

whether physically or mentally. The five precepts for lay people are to abstain from killing, to abstain from stealing, to abstain from sexual misconduct, to abstain from false speech, and to abstain from intoxicants causing heedlessness. These Buddhist precepts set forth a basic perspective on human rights:

> To practice the five precepts (*sila*) one is required to recognize and observe justice, freedom, equality, mutual respect and human dignity in one's human relationship. […] It can be said that those who recognize and observe human rights are those who recognize and practice the dharma (dhamma).[13]

The crucial point is how Buddhists can seriously apply these precepts in daily practice. Domestic violence is another area where separating women does not completely solve the problem. There are some emergency shelters for battered women in Thailand but the causes of the problem have not been addressed. We leave men, those who do the battering, without any help and seldom address the "radical causes" of such behavior. In order to address the problem more holistically, in the Buddhist spirit of interdependence, it would be helpful to institute help-lines for husbands.

The last type of feminist approach is the "romantic expressivist," approach which seems to be very challenging for the Thai Buddhist context. This perspective assumes that "women experience and speak quite differently from the way men do."[14] This can, for example, be applied to the issue of safe abortion. Generally speaking, abortions are not morally justified. This is accepted by most Buddhists. Nonetheless, in some cases of unwanted pregnancy women suffer greatly and are alone responsible. Then it becomes necessary to reconsider the authoritative scripture in order to find some interpretive space.

On the one hand, abortion, according to Buddhism, is not morally permissible. On the other hand, "wisdom is purified by virtue, and virtue is purified by wisdom. Where one is, so is the other." (*Dighanikaya* I:84) This implies that Buddhist criteria for the ethics of abortion are open for using wisdom (*paññña*) to decide in accordance with skillful intentions, means, and ends. This provides an opportunity for women to decide for themselves to have a necessary abortion, while still remaining good Buddhists. Concerning the intention of killing, it seems to be clear that the law of kamma always plays a vital role in determining whether moral or immoral actions take place. For example, an abortion preformed by a licensed physician when the mother's life is in danger may be con-

[13] Taniguchi, *op. cit.*, (note 6), p. 76.

[14] Musser and Price, *op. cit.*, (note 8), p. 190.

sidered as "unsevere kamma" as long as this action is not based on the roots of unwholesome or bad action. These are (1) greed (*lobha*), (2) hatred or anger (*dosa*), and (3) delusion (*moha*) (*Dighanikaya* III. 275). According to Thai law, this type of abortion is legal. However, the five conditions of killing are present (namely, an existing being, knowledge that it is a being, intention of killing, effort of killing, and consequent death). Therefore the result or consequence has to follow the associated doers, namely the woman and those medical physicians who performed the "killing" of a fetus by good intention and means to save a mother's life. However, the effects would not be as bad as for those people who abort a fetus due to a pregnancy related to self-indulgence. The same explanation can be applied to cases for the abortion of a fetus resulting from the rape. In that case, abortion is also legal according to Thai law.

Women who face economic hardships or for other reasons are not ready to bear a child will know best what their real intentions and states of minds are when they decide to have an abortion. If they hate these fetuses, unwholesome action happens. They have to weigh the intention and the consequences, and then they will know how serious their retribution will be. If one compares an abortion resulting from self-indulgence, such as having sexual relationship without contraception, to aborting a pregnancy that has occurred in spite of contraception, the former would be more kammically significant than the latter.[15]

This above reconsideration of the criteria and value judgements for necessary abortions may be compared to the efforts of romantic expressivist feminists who focus on experiences that are unique to women.

In addition, the same criteria of Buddhist ethics can be used in the case of the right to family planning. Women should have the right to decide or to take part in the decision-making process. The right to family planning and contraception is morally permissible as long as the method is not used to destroy any life. According to the *Tripitaka*, life begins at the time of conception when three conditions combine, that is, 1) if mother and father have sexual intercourse, 2) it is the mother's fertile period, and 3) the "being to be born" (*gandhabba*) is present. (*Majjhimanikaya* I:265–6) Any methods to prevent the process of this conception are welcome as far as no life is destroyed under any circumstances. In theory, Buddhist ethics considers the appropriate intention, means and ends of each action as facets of moral decisions. The criteria for all intention, means, and ends is that they should avoid actions harmful to oneself, to others, and to both oneself and others. If a government or a husband forces women to accept certain methods of contraception, this will be considered as an unwholesome

[15] James J. Hughes and Damine Keown, *Buddhism and Medical Ethics: A Bibliographic Introduction*, **http://jbe.la.psu.edu**

means due to the mental and physical sufferings of women. Although a husband or a government expect a good end to reduce the economic misery of the family, the consequences may not be pleasant to different individuals, especially women.

Up to this point, we may say that Buddhist teachings, more or less, contribute to the positive aspects of women's rights. How and why are many women in Buddhist societies still suffering and crying for equal rights? This may derive from the way people hold their religion at the present time. That is, many Buddhists are only "Buddhists by name" not "Buddhists by practice." This situation might also apply to the Christian community. The urgent issue which both Christians and Buddhists face is how to persuade their followers to become fully human beings by really practicing and applying the spiritual teachings in their lives, as opposed to unauthentic teachings such as superstition, magic, or the religion of the market, of consumerism and materialism. It is clear that both Christianity and Buddhism are full of resources and can bring about spiritual happiness better than ritualistic and materialistic practices. How can we empower people spiritually so that they can build strong and cooperative communities full of loving kindness? For example, we need to encourage Buddhists to get rid of notions of "me" and "mine," or any egoistic, selfish sense of superiority over women and children as much as possible, in order to reduce family problems and sexism in our society. For Christians, it is necessary to encourage people to serve God and imitate the action of Jesus who "emptied himself." (Phil 2:6–7) His disciples are encouraged to carry the cross (Lk 14:26) in order to love and help others including women. Such people will become the true Christians in our present time. By spiritual clarity on the part of both Buddhists and Christians, we can strengthen our awareness of being part of a larger whole, and we can therefore cooperate to improve our society.

We need to apply our spiritual teachings to our daily problems. This we refer to as "socially-engaged Buddhism." This may be similar to what liberation theologians are doing in Christianity. Within socially-engaged Buddhism, we include cooperation in interfaith activity, gender inclusive activity, ecological responsiveness, peace and social justice activism and humanitarian volunteerism. By way of engaged Buddhism, we have the potential to contribute to the world, and have a potential instrument of personal development.[16] In other words, expressing sincere sympathy for some suffering women and trying to ease their problems by reinterpreting traditional religious teachings and by performing concrete actions is at the same time the practice of one's own spiritual development. We also can describe this as engaging in the dialogue of life to solve problems. It is a dialogue full of promise for promoting peace and wholeness in human communities.

[16] Kenneth Kraft, *The Wheel of Engaged Buddhism: A New Map of the Path* (Tokyo: Weatherhill, 1999), pp. 10–11.

Blessed Are the Poor: Spiritual Resources for Confronting Poverty in Our World

Theodore M. Ludwig

It is nothing new that the majority of human beings live in deep poverty today. And yet, much of humanity, including religious people in Christianity and Buddhism, seem rather indifferent to this human problem. Jesus' words to his disciples have often been quoted: "The poor you have with you always." And in fact it is likely that every human community in the history of the world has included some people living in poverty, lacking adequate food, shelter, and the basic needs for life. But it is unfortunate that Jesus' words have often been used to support a kind of resignation toward the problem of poverty—it is just part of the natural order of things, and there is nothing we can do to change that. But Jesus spoke those words specifically to show the urgency of his own imminent death—"you always have the poor with you, but you do not always have me." (Jn 12:8) It is certainly a misinterpretation to use these words to justify failure to confront the problem of poverty in our world.

The idea of "poverty," and the designation of some people as "the poor," have different levels of meaning in religious discourse. In many religious traditions, including Christianity and Buddhism, these terms can be used in a positive spiritual sense; but they also refer to a destructive state of human suffering. It will be helpful to reflect briefly on these two opposite meanings, for they surely are closely interrelated. In fact, as we shall see, in the Christian tradition, the tragic condition of poverty is at the same time occasion for the revelation of God's grace and spiritual experience: in the suffering of the poor, God suffers; we encounter God when we encounter the poor.

On the one hand, "poverty" is a metaphor for high spiritual status and virtue. "Blessed are you who are poor," Jesus said in the Sermon on the Mount, "for yours is the kingdom of God." (Lk 6:20) There is certainly a spiritual quality that is experienced in poverty, so that religious seekers often voluntarily take on the life of poverty to further their spiritual quest. Poverty in this sense has multiple meanings, from lack of material possessions to the simple bareness of an ascetic life to the emptying out of selfish desires and self-esteem. Gustavo Gutiérrez in his *A Theology of Liberation* speaks of this as "spiritual childhood," which is a profound spiritual attitude of being totally available to the Lord.[1] Such a life of poverty can be

[1] Gustavo Gutiérrez, *A Theology of Liberation*, 2nd ed. (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1988), p. 171.

chosen as part of a spiritual quest. But there is also a sense that those who are "the poor" through birth or social tragedy—the starving, the lepers, the outcasts, etc.—are spiritually blessed, perhaps because they have fewer entanglements to cling to, or because they are specially loved and identified with by God and the saints.

On the other hand, "poverty" refers to the crushing condition of lacking the bare-bones essentials for human life and development—the basics of food security, shelter, and healthful environment. In this sense, poverty does not mean simply not having as much as the others in society. Rather, it is the deprived, tragic condition that does not allow for normal human life and growth. Gutiérrez notes how the Bible condemns those responsible for impoverishing others, for poverty contradicts God's will that humans flourish on earth as the image of God; "the existence of poverty represents a sundering both of solidarity among persons and also of communion with God."[2] Because of their crushed and deprived condition, "the poor" are oftentimes considered beneath and thus outside the normal standards of life; they present a threat to our way of life, a constant reminder of the fragility of life and the possibility that circumstances could reduce us to poverty also.

Today it is crucial that people of various religions use their spiritual resources to confront the crisis of poverty in our world. But to do so, they must themselves become "poor in spirit." Christians, for example, must recover the authentic spiritual sense of selfless dedication to serving God through serving the neighbor. And out of this dedication and service will grow engagement in economic, social, and political efforts to confront and overcome the problem of poverty in our world today.

Global Responsibility for the Crushing Reality of Poverty

Whatever the situation in past ages, today we have an enormous crisis of global poverty. What makes this crisis perhaps more acute than the past is the radical surge in the world's population, the rapid degradation of the global environment, and the globalization of economic and political structures that foster poverty. We of course need to learn from previous religious leaders in our religious traditions, how they envisioned the healing of poverty-related sufferings; but we also need to understand and respond to the new structures of poverty that are embedded in our global society today.

Poverty of course has many causes, including natural disorders such as famine and sickness, but almost always there are social structures that serve to create and perpetuate poverty. Perhaps we may best see poverty not so much as a condition but as a process, arising, growing, and continuing through an array of interdependent forces. The process involves the denial of opportunities and choices that are most basic to human development.

[2] *Ibid.*, p. 168.

We have come to the end of a century that has been the most violent in the history of humanity, so much so that it is impossible to calculate the millions of victims of the two World Wars and the countless other wars and conflicts that have destroyed and are destroying whole communities, even whole nations. Perhaps, however, the greatest violence has not come from the wars and conflicts themselves, but from the institutionalization of poverty in our time, which has brought about the degradation and death of even more millions of human beings. It is said that the world today produces more than enough food for all humans alive today. Yet each day some 35 000 children die of hunger, and a similar number of adults perish of causes related to malnutrition.[3] And that is without counting the millions who barely survive but live in sub-human conditions. There are many forms of violence in the world, but it may be that the social construction of poverty is the cruelest form of violence, for it crushes the potential development of life as humans. Under conditions of starvation, inadequate shelter, unsafe water, and unstable family life, it is impossible to develop and thrive as humans. To deprive a human being of the opportunity to live as part of the human community is certainly a most destructive form of violence.

There are many facets of poverty, but many scholars today point to the global economic system as one leading cause for this violence that produces poverty.[4] According to the United Nations' *Report on Human Development 1996*, the most significant development in the world economy today is the increasing concentration of wealth in fewer countries, and within these countries, progressively in the hands of fewer people—that is, the gap between the rich and the poor is widening. For example, 20 percent of the world population consumes 85 percent of the wealth that is produced on this planet. That means of course that 80 percent of the world's population has to live on only 15 percent of the goods produced in the whole world. In fact, it is clear that the current free market economy is built on the dual foundation of rich and poor, in which the unlimited desires and every higher demands of the minority (the rich) take control over the survival needs of the majority (the poor).

The inherent injustice of the free market system is exacerbated by the rapid globalization of the market economy. While globalization of capitalism, supposedly bringing development and new jobs to depressed nations, has been touted as the solution for poverty, the results have been mixed indeed. There is no guarantee that capital investment brings any lessening of poverty—indeed, U.N. studies have shown that generally poverty increases, and only the multinational

[3] Jose M. Castillo, "What the Poor Say to the Church," from *Cristianisme i Justicia* (April 1999), p. 1.

[4] See, for example, the studies in Michael Zweig (ed.), *Religion and Economic Justice* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1991); and also the articles J. Mark Thomas and Vernon Visick (eds.), *God and Capitalism: A Prophetic Critique of Market Economy* (Madison, WI: A-R Editions, Inc., 1991).

corporations grow richer.[5] Following their operating plan of "capital mobility," the giant corporations invest huge sums to develop and exploit natural resources and cheap labor in a particular community, then just as quickly pull their capital out to move on and exploit other lands and peoples. In their wake are depression, loss of jobs, huge national debts, ecological disasters, and increasing poverty and suffering. Operating beyond accountability to governments and communities of people, the only responsibility the multinational corporations have is profit for their shareholders.

Professor Alberto Munera, having lived and worked in Colombia for the last 25 years, bluntly describes the way the current world economic system enslaves and impoverishes:

> From my perspective of living and working in the poor part of the world, I can see that the main problem is the rapaciousness of the rich with their insatiable consuming patterns. […] This should be obvious to all people of good will. It is painfully obvious to me since I live in "the Third World" and I see the results daily of the lethal savagery that is blithely called "the global economy." The economically powerful have all the possibilities of acquiring lands and goods and of transforming any kind of resources for their own benefit. They not only have the financial power but they are also the producers and owners of technology. […] It is true that some in many countries have acquired great prosperity because of the free market. But it is also true and tragic that the cost of the prosperity of the few rich is the poverty and death of millions of the poor.[…] The tyranny imposed by the free market profiting from the democratic pluralism has invented a new system in which the creation of incredibly large transnational corporations not regulated by the laws of each country are capable of legislating for all the countries where they operate, through mechanisms not controlled by the democracies but only by corporate interests. It is the rule of the greedy, for the greedy, and by the greedy. Large financial institutions, the World Bank, and the International Monetary Fund have an incredible power. The result of this power is often not benign to the poor. Workers are brutalized by unjust "austerity" requirements to meet our debts to the First-World rich.[…] Financial institutions do not demonstrate any interest in ecological issues, because ecology does not produce money in a short term. […] When the only objective is to produce money in great quantities quickly, it does not matter if that production supposes the destruction of the earth's resources.[6]

---

[5] *Overcoming Human Poverty: UNDP Poverty Report 1998* (New York: United Nations Development Programme, 1998), p. 42.

[6] Alberto Munera, "New Theology on Population, Ecology, and Overconsumption from the Catholic Perspective," in Harold Coward and Daniel Maguire (eds.), *Visions of a New Earth: Religious Perspectives on Population, Consumption, and Ecology* (Albany: SUNY Press, 2000), pp. 65–68.

It is important not overly to demonize the global market economy as if this were the one, simple cause of all the poverty in the world today. Rather, it is a central problem closely linked to other problems of over-population, the ravaging of the environment, gender inequalities, conflict over land, lack of education, the breaking up of communities, and much, much more. Consider the global water problem as an example of these interlinking issues. Population growth, industrialization, and resulting pollution have resulted in severe water shortages for many peoples of the world. According to the 1998 report of United Nations Development Programme, 43 percent of the population of less-developed countries and 29 percent of the population of developing countries do not have access to drinking water—that is, 1.5 billion people. And the newest reports state that the problem is accelerating—within 25 years, one-half of the world's population will not have access to proper drinking water. This reality is one of the principal factors for the low life expectancy in these regions. Like all these issues, it comes back to a question of equality and justice: in North America more than 2,000 cubic meters of water per inhabitant are consumed annually, while in Guinnea-Bissau the annual consumption per inhabitant is 20 cubic meters—one hundred times less drinking water per person.[7]

Given these harsh realities of the causes and effects of poverty in our world today, it is important for all religious and moral people to step up and collectively bring about changes in the operations of the world economy and the related structures. And there certainly are wise and prophetic voices calling for that change, and many courageous people dedicating their lives to help bring about change. Yet it is extraordinarily difficult to bring about change and to transform these factors that cause and support world poverty—for the global economy is really global, and almost all people have no alternative but to participate in it. Furthermore, the global free market system has become a powerful quasi-religion with self-evident truths that are widely accepted with firm faith in their efficacy. J. M. Tortosa has drawn up a list of these "truths"

1. The economy can and must grow indefinitely

2. When the economy grows, all of us are better off

3. If each person seeks his/her own welfare, the market will obtain the best for everyone

4. The market permits the best distribution of wealth and the lowest prices

[7] Joaquin Menacho, "Earth's Challenge: Ecology and Justice in the XXI Century," in *Cristianisme i Justicia* (April, 1999), p. 8.

5. The role of humans is to rule nature and use its resources in our service.[8]

All of these "truths" have been shown to be false or questionable, and yet they have a powerful hold over people today. David Loy documents the historical development of this "European religion" or "economic religion," as he calls it, showing how it has become a dogma of almost universal application, the dominant religion of our time. He raises the question why, in spite the obvious gross injustices under this system, we all continue to participate in it:

> The richest 20 percent of the world's population now have an income about 150 times that of the poorest 20 percent, a gap that continues to grow. […] As a result, a quarter million children die of malnutrition or infection every week, while hundreds of millions more survive in a limbo of hunger and deteriorating health. Why do we acquiesce in this social injustice? What rationalization allows us to sleep peacefully at night?[9]

The answer, he says, is that whether we are consciously aware of it or not, we acquiesce in this social injustice because we subscribe to the global economic religion that assures us that this is the inevitable truth of our global society. Most of the world's population participate without much question or resistence in these global structures that create and support poverty for a large portion of their fellow humans.

Spiritual Resources for Confronting Poverty in Our Human Community

These economic, social, and ecological tragedies of poverty are so deep today that it seems almost impossible to solve them through political, economic, and social policies of any governments or even of the United Nations. In reality, this is a profound spiritual crisis for humanity, and the lasting solution can only come through a new kind of piety and spiritual discipline to support a transformation of our world system. First to be recognized, for us, is the participation of our own religious communities, and ourselves, in the social and economic mechanisms that have accumulated wealth for the few and impoverished the rest—and thus are destroying human communities and even nature itself.

---

[8] See F. Javier Vitoria Cormenzana, "A Just Economic Order," *Cristianisme i Justicia* (February, 1999), para. 2.5. See also David Loy, "The Religion of the Market," in Coward and Maguire, *op. cit.*, (note 6), pp. 15–27.

[9] Loy, *ibid.*, p. 16.

David Loy, a Buddhist thinker, points out that this religion of market capitalism is based on the twofold values of greed and delusion.

> From a religious perspective, the problem with market capitalism and its values is twofold: greed and delusion. On the one hand, the unrestrained market emphasizes and indeed requires greed in at least two ways. Desire for profit is necessary to fuel the engine of the economic system, and an insatiable desire to consume ever more must be generated to create markets for what can be produced. [...] The spiritual problem with greed—both the greed for profit and the greed to consume—is due not only to the consequent maldistribution of worldly goods, or to its effect on the biosphere, but even more fundamentally because greed is based on a delusion: the delusion that happiness is to be found in this way. Trying to find fulfillment through profit, or by making consumption the meaning of one's life, amounts to idolatry, that is, a demonic perversion of true religion.[10]

The Christian perspective clearly acknowledges greed as sin, as a moral failure of the will. And sin is not just an individualistic matter, in Christian interpretation. Participating in the sinful structures of our world—these economic and social structures that cause and perpetuate poverty and all the associated suffering for humans and for creation itself—needs to be named as sinful, calling for repentance and transformation of life on the part of the Christian churches and all Christians individually. This is a spiritual matter, and we Christians need to address it as such.

David Loy suggests that this prophetic Judeo-Christian sense of sin as perverted will might well be supplemented with the emphasis that the Buddhist tradition places on seeing through and dispelling delusion, the cloak of ignorance. Here we encounter ignorance as a failure to understand.[11] The moral problem of the will needs to be addressed, of course (sin), but facing up to that sin and doing something about it depends on being able to see clearly the delusion that somehow happiness comes through consumerism. Seeing that delusion clearly is not easy. We need *both* to understand *and* to repent. The web of consumerism—market economy—globalization—poverty is intricate and pervasive. And our best thinkers and scholars need to analyze this reality and point directions toward solutions.

Christians have many spiritual resources to draw on in seeing the delusion, repenting of the sin, and embarking on a spiritual path of healing for our world community. Moreover, given the all-pervasive, global interconnectedness of the problem of poverty, entering into dialogue with Buddhists and people of other religious paths can call forth deeper recognition of those spiritual resources as well as suggest new chal-

[10] *Ibid.*, pp. 24–25.

[11] *Ibid.*

lenges and visions. This problem can only be addressed by the whole human community. And it is particularly the voices of the poor that need to be heard. For surely God the Creator does not will humiliation and degradation for humans, but rather Shalom, that is, wholeness and peace. And so those children of God who are poor, who are suffering and deprived, are particularly able out of their own experience to tell us about the causes that keep them from experiencing Shalom. Here I can only suggest several central Christian theological themes and paradigms that can guide in shaping the new spiritual vision. Surely Buddhists will also articulate their own themes and paradigms that can shape their spiritual vision for confronting world poverty.

One key component in developing a new vision for overcoming poverty today is recovering the sense of community, both in a global and especially in a concrete, local way. A central biblical experience, one that resonates for many peoples today, is *galut*, "diaspora."[12] There is a sense in which all of God's creation is together in exile, on a journey in which all peoples are in a difficult diaspora condition that demands cooperation and obligations from each of us to the whole community of strangers and sojourners of which we are a part. In an exile situation the way is closed behind so no return is possible, and the future goal is difficult and uncertain. All together are on the way through a land not their own, wandering lost at times, seeking the way. The strong and rich need to help the vulnerable and poor, for the common welfare of all. Resources are limited, and voluntary restraint is the mode of life.

Yet exiles also experience expectant joy and fulfillment, for the community itself is the "chosen people" of God. Rabbinic stories tell how, as the Jews wandered in the desert, God was there with them as a fellow wanderer.[13] For Christians, it is the face of Christ that we see through the poor in our exile community. For Christ is the paradigm of the one who is emptied out and goes into exile. Paul exhorts us to live in unity and community, being of the same mind and showing the same love.

> Do nothing from selfish ambition or conceit, but in humility regard others as better than yourselves. Let each of you look not to your own interests, but to the interests of others. Let the same mind be in you that was in Christ Jesus, who, though he was in the form of God, did not regard equality with God as something to be exploited, but emptied himself, taking the form of a slave, being born in human likeness. And being found in human form, he emptied himself and became obedient to the point of death—even death on the cross. (Phil 2:3–8)

[12] See Laurie Zoloth, "The Promise of Exiles: A Jewish Theology of Responsibility," in Coward and Maguire, *op. cit.*, (note 6), pp. 95–109.

[13] *Ibid.*, p. 98.

Christ is the model for the frame of mind and the spiritual disciplines we need to live in community today—the willingness to empty oneself out, to go into exile, to identify with the poor, to go the way of the cross.

To follow the way of Christ means a self-transformation, a drastic change of direction from our normal life, including our economic and social practices. When a rich young man asked Jesus what he might do to inherit eternal life, Jesus told him to keep the commandments: "You shall not murder; You shall not commit adultery; You shall not steal; You shall not bear false witness; honor your father and mother; and also, you shall love your neighbor as yourself. (Mt 19:18–19) But the young man told Jesus that he has kept all these—what does he still lack? And Jesus said, "'If you wish to be perfect, go, sell your possessions, and give the money to the poor, and you will have treasure in heaven; then come, follow me.' When the young man heard this word, he went away grieving, for he had many possessions."(Mt 19:21–22) Because he found the meaning of life in his possessions, he was not able to go and follow Jesus. He grieved about it, but he could not recognize and join Jesus among the poor. In thinking about this story, Christians might call to mind also the story of Prince Siddhartha Gautama, who, though he lived in comfort and luxury, also became a homeless wanderer (like Jesus).

So finally what is needed is a fundamental change in ourselves, first of all, and in our religious communities, if we want to help bring about a change in our whole society. To be willing to follow Jesus' path, we are called to sell our possessions and give the money to the poor—that is a tremendous uprooting for many of us we who are in one way or another relatively rich in possessions. The prophets talked a lot about tearing down and destroying, and also about rooting and planting. When God called the young, reluctant Jeremiah, God touched his mouth and said:

> Now I have put my words in your mouth. See, today I appoint you over nations and over kingdom, to pluck up and to pull down, to destroy and to overthrow, to build and to plant. (Jer 1:9–10)

And that is what the message of Christ is about: uprooting those who are rooted—so that those who are uprooted may become planted.

One of the most powerful illustrations of this transformative power, that turns things upside down, that uproots and tears down the rich, and plants and builds up the poor, is found in the story Jesus told in the setting of the last judgement:

> When the Son of Man comes in his glory, and all the angels with him, then he will sit on the throne of his glory. All the nations will be gathered before him, and he will separate people one from another as a shepherd separates the sheep from the goats, and he will put the sheep at his right hand and the goats at the left. Then the king will say to those at his right hand, "Come, you that are blessed by my Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world; for I was hungry and you gave me food, I was

> thirsty and you gave me something to drink, I was a stranger and you welcomed me, I was naked and you gave me clothing, I was sick and you took care of me, I was in prison and you visited me." Then the righteous will answer him, "Lord, when was it that we saw you hungry and gave you food, or thirsty and gave you something to drink? And when was it that we saw you a stranger and welcomed you, or naked and gave you clothing? And when was it that we saw you sick or in prison and visited you?" And the king will answer them, "Truly I tell you, just as you did it to one of the least of these who are members of my family, you did it to me." Then he will say to those at his left hand, "You that are accursed, depart from me into the eternal fire prepared for the devil and his angels; for I was hungry and you gave me no food, I was thirsty and you gave me nothing to drink, I was a stranger and you did not welcome me, naked and you did not give me clothing, sick and in prison and you did not visit me." Then they also will answer, "Lord, when was it that we saw you hungry or thirsty or a stranger or naked or sick or in prison, and did not take care of you?" Then he will answer them, "Truly I tell you, just as you did not do it to one of the least of these, you did not do it to me." And these will go away into eternal punishment, but the righteous into eternal life. (Mt 25:31–46)

Based on this parable, Christians have the deepest motivation (like St. Francis of Asissi, Mother Teresa, and countless others in Christian history) to let go of their attachments to riches and power, and rather to be present among the poor, to empower them and make it possible for them to lead full human lives. For when we do this for the least of these who are members of Christ's family, we do it for Christ. Christ is present through the poor.

In this parable Christ suggests many dimensions of poverty—hunger, thirst, being a stranger, nakedness, sickness, being in prison—and each of them resonates with real conditions of poverty throughout our world today, grinding poverty that destroys life and makes it impossible for survivors to live human lives. The big question for everyone, of course, is what to do about this, what actions to take that will improve the situation—especially since so many of the so-called solutions have only served to worsen the problems. Fortunately, today there are many dedicated scholars and leaders working on solutions, and we need to make ourselves aware of these. As is often pointed out, it is not enough just to give the poor some food or other aid. What is necessary is to make food secure for them; to build up these human communities; to empower them and enhance their self-esteem; to provide local control over economic resources and jobs; to ensure a maintainable ecology, and all the rest, as outlined, for example, in the report of United Nations Development Project, *Overcoming Human Poverty: UNDP Poverty Report 2000*.[14] Key ideas

[14] *Overcoming Human Poverty: UNDP Poverty Report 2000* (New York: UNDP, 2000); on-line text at **www.undp.org/povertyreport**.

focus on a new sense of community with the poor, a rebinding of humans in our whole human community by restoring the human quality of each local community.

We might say that what is desperately needed today is a new spirituality, a new willingness, in ourselves and in our religious communities, to engage in these enormous tasks. But the spiritual resources are there. For both Christians and for Buddhists, there are many teachings, models, paradigms, and other spiritual resources for kindling the necessary sense of "compassionate solidarity"[15] with the poor. For example, for Buddhists, this may be based in the general sense of interdependence of all beings and certainly in the virtues of loving kindness and compassion. For Christians, the fundamental belief that God is the Creator of all humans and of all nature, combined with the incarnation and sacrifice of Christ as God's body in the world, would provide a strong basis for compassionate solidarity with the poor.

Perhaps a key spiritual notion, at least in the biblical tradition, is the sense that our land and even our lives are not ultimately our own possession—a notion so contrary, of course, to the modern-day capitalist market economy. Rather, we are stewards of our land, our possessions, and our lives, within a larger divine order and purpose of creation. Dorothy Sölle[16] points to the biblical notion of the Sabbath for the land every seven years and the Year of Jubilee every 50 years as a central paradigm for God's economy within the created world (see Lev 25). Periodically, a renewal of nature and of human society is to take place. Every seven years is to be "a Sabbath of solemn rest for the land," when the land should not be "worked," but what it produces by itself will be available for everyone, including slaves, strangers, cattle, and beasts. Central to this notion is the fact that the land is not the possession of those who bought or confiscated it; for God commanded, "The land shall not be sold in perpetuity, for the land is mine; with me you are but aliens and tenants." (Lev 25:23) The individual families and their descendants were entitled to the land, which was distributed to them when Israel first settled in this land. Even if they acquired indebtedness and lost the land, they still rightly remained the holders of the land. And then every 50 years is to be the Year of Jubilee—and that meant all slaves (even those who are aliens) are freed, the land is given back to the original holders, the land is given rest, and all debts are totally remitted. This idealized restoration of God's ecological balance—in both nature and human society—is a powerful image for us to consider today, when the world's twin ecological disasters of poverty and environmental degradation are so clearly caused by possession and exploitation of both land and people. Our world today badly needs a global Year of Jubilee.

---

[15] See Cormenzana, *op. cit.*, (note 8), sect. 3.1.

[16] Dorothy Sölle, "God's Economy and Ours: The Year of Jubilee," in J. Mark Thomas and Vernon Visick (eds.), God and Capitalism: A Prophetic Critique of Market Economy (Middleton, WI: A-R Editions, 1991), pp. 87–103.

In biblical times, after the Jews were swept away in the Babylonian exile, a small community eventually returned to resettle in Judah. There is an intriguing story of poverty and enslavement among these Jews just returned from exile. When Nehemiah was governor of this tiny post-exilic community, struggling to rebuild the walls of Jerusalem, at one point there arose a great outcry of some of the Jews and their wives against their Jewish kin. They complained to Nehemiah that, with their large families, they had to pledge their fields, vineyards, and houses to their richer neighbors in order to obtain grain and to pay the king's tax. "Now our flesh is the same as that of our kindred; our children are the same as their children; and yet we are forcing our sons and daughters to be slaves, and some of our daughters have been ravished; we are powerless, and our fields and vineyards now belong to others." (Neh 5:5) That outcry resonates with hundreds of millions of people in the world today—powerless, enslaved through debt, ravished and starving. What was Governor Nehemiah's reaction when heard this? "I was very angry when I heard their outcry and these complaints." (Neh 5:6) And he gathered the capitalists together—the Jews who had been loaning money and food on interest to fellow Jews and thus reaping the profit of their land and children as slaves. In his anger Nehemiah told them, "The thing that you are doing is not good. Should you not walk in the fear of our God, to prevent the taunts of the nations our enemies? Moreover I and my brothers and my servants are lending them money and grain. Let us stop this taking of interest. Restore to them, this very day, their fields, their vineyards, their olive orchards, and their houses, and the interest on money, grain, wine, and oil that you have been exacting from them." (Neh 5:9–11) And they all took an oath together before God to restore everything to these poor. Nehemiah saw the plight of the poor—and he was filled with anger at the oppressors, who included himself, his brothers, and his servants. And they understood it as their spiritual duty, pledging this before God, to forgive all the debts and restore all they had extracted from their weaker neighbors. "And all the assembly said, 'Amen,' and praised the Lord." (Neh 5:13)

Hearing this story, we cannot help but think of our countries and communities where the impoverished lose their land through debt, where their daughters are given over to prostitution, where even basic food and water are denied them. Like Nehemiah, Christians and other religious people today need to be filled with anger, at our exploitative world structures and at our own complicity in them. We have to be filled with anger at living and cooperating in a system that is indifferent to the poverty-caused deaths of tens of thousands of children, women, and men every day. We all need to renew our spiritual pledge and take action to help bring healing and restoration.

Spiritual Practices as a Resource for Life: A Buddhist Perspective

Sanu Bhai Dangol

A human being is here to stay for a few fleeting moments—maybe 20 years, 60 years, 100 years, or more or less than that. During our sojourn on earth, we have to face different hurdles entangling us from birth to death and making us face an incomplete and unsatisfactory situation in life. This unsatisfactory situation arises from the fact that as humans we exist here as if in an unfixed, changing personality. But within us lies the vast potential to grow, to expand, and to fulfill ourselves in facing the concrete situations of life.

This process of change does not occur simply by reading good books, chanting excellent slogans, or occupying higher positions; real change goes deeper. To develop oneself, we first have to know ourselves and to experience all the hidden parts of our own mind known as wholesome (good) and unwholesome (bad) activities. Until and unless one becomes aware of the hopes, desires, fears, and anxieties that motivate one, one does not know what one is doing or what one is working with. This self-knowledge and realization, the basis of further self-development, comes to us only by the cultivation of spiritual practices. That is why spiritual practices are valued by every religion as the resources for creating wholeness and fulfillment in life. Buddhists have been especially focused on developing spiritual practices as resources for developing wholeness in the concrete situations of life.

In this essay, I will confine myself to the spiritual practices of the Buddhist tradition, and within that, of the Theravada tradition. I have confined myself in this way because the spiritual practices prescribed by the Buddhist tradition are very vast and cannot be detailed comprehensively within the scope of this essay. I will first discuss the concept of Buddhist spiritual practices and then attempt to explain these spiritual practices showing how it is important to cultivate them in our day-to-day life. Only when spiritual practices are cultivated as routine, day-to-day work can they become resources for creating wholeness in life, leading us to peace, serenity and enlightenment. Otherwise, spiritual practices are likely to remain mere theory, without leading us to wholeness and peace in our life.

Buddha, the founder of Buddhism, described the incomplete and unsatisfactory situation in a life full of hurdles, as a mental illness. As the solution to this problem, Buddha taught methods of meditation as the spiritual practices that can lead to the attainment of wholeness and peace and, finally, to enlightenment or

nibbana. As regards the mental illness known as the human experience of life as unsatisfactory and full of suffering, the words of the Buddha are as follows.

> O bhikkhus (monks), there are two kinds of illness. What are the two? Physical illness and mental illness. There seem to be the people who enjoy freedom from physical illness for a year or two [...] even for a hundred years and more. But, O bhikkhus, rare in this world are those who enjoy freedom from mental illness even for a moment, except those who are free from mental defilements (i.e., except *arhants*, enlightened people).[1]

Spiritual Practices in Buddhism

In Buddhism, spiritual practices, known as meditation, aim at producing perfect mental health, that is serenity and equanimity. It is tragic that meditation as laid down in Buddhism is misunderstood even by many lay Buddhists who suppose that meditation is simply a way of escaping from daily activities. According to them, meditation consists of assuming a specific posture in a remote place, cut off from society, and musing on some mysterious thought in a trance-like state. Meditation does not mean escape of this kind, but aims at transforming human life to higher levels of consciousness and thus at preparing a skillful mental state. Nonetheless, meditation is often misunderstood, and the methods of meditation are seen to deteriorate or degenerate into a kind of ritual or ceremony.

The word meditation connotes *bhavana*, which means "mental culture" or "mental development." It aims at cleansing the mind of all kinds of impurities and defilement such as sensual desire, greed, hatred, ill-will, indolence, restlessness, worries, doubt, etc. It is a process through which good qualities—such as concentration, awareness, intelligence, will, energy, confidence, joy, serenity, etc.—are cultivated and generated. These are the virtues that lead a person to wholeness in life and finally to the attainment of highest wisdom. At the time of attaining highest wisdom, a person sees the nature of things (phenomena) as they really are and realizes the ultimate truth, nibbana.

Two Types of Meditation

Buddhism has stipulated mainly two types of meditation methods—*samatha* (serenity) and *vipassana* (insight). S*amatha* is "a meditational technique to calm

[1] Walpola Rahula, *What the Buddhist Taught*, First Paperback Edition (London: Unwin Brothers Ltd., 1978), p. 67.

the mind to a state of tranquility and concentration,"[2] while *vipassana*, is insight, discernment, or clear seeing, the "intuitive cognition of the three marks of existence, namely, the impermanence, suffering, and egolessness of all physical and mental phenomena."[3] According to the Mahayana tradition of Buddhism, meditation is an analytical examination of the nature of things that leads to insight into the true nature of the world—emptiness. Such insight prevents the arising of new passions. Thus, s*amatha* means concentration or focusing one's mind on one point without any distraction, while *vipassana* means insight or seeing all things as they truly are or penetrating into the ultimate reality of all phenomena. To quote Gunaratna's description:

> The practice of serenity-meditation aims at developing a calm, concentrated, unified state of consciousness as a means of experiencing inner peace and generating wisdom. The practice of insight meditation aims at gaining direct understanding of the real nature of phenomena.[4]

In the following I will elaborate more fully on each of these meditation methods.

Samatha Meditation

Samatha is known as meditation of calmness, serenity, or tranquil abiding. Its main objective is to help those who meditate to develop concentration (*samadhi*). The practice of this meditation becomes easy as and when the meditator secures a firm footing in the practice of basic moral precepts (*sila*).[5] Buddhism has prescribed 40 subjects for *samatha*, and they are

- ***Ten Devices*** (*dasa kasina*): including the four great elements, the four colors, along with light and space.

---

[2] *The Seeker's Glossary of Buddhism* (Taipei: The Corporate Body of the Buddha Educational Foundation, 1998), pp. 529–530.

[3] *Ibid*, p. 530.

[4] Henapola Gunaratna, *The Path of Serenity and Insight* (Delhi: Motilal and Banarasidas, 1985), p. 3.

[5] Basic moral precepts (*sila*) denote the *panca sila* or five precepts which include abstinence from killing, stealing, sexual misconduct, lying, and drinking intoxicants. These precepts can be practiced even by non-Buddhists.

- ***Ten Impurities*** (*dasa asubha*): dealing with ten types of corpses.

- ***Ten Reflections*** (*dasa anussatiyo*): concerned with the Buddha, dhamma, sangha, peace, death, mindfulness of body and mindfulness of breathing, etc.

- ***Four Divine Abidings*** (*cattaro brahmavihara*): known as loving kindness (*metta*), compassion (*karuna*), sympathetic joy (*mudita*), and equanimity (*upekkha*).

- ***One Perception*** (*eka sanna*): concerned with loathsomeness of material food (*ahare patikkulasanna*).

- ***One Analysis*** (*ekavavatthana*): concerned with analysis of four elements (*catudhatuvavatthana*).

- ***Four Immaterial States*** (*cattaro aruppa*): concerned with infinity of space (*akasananacayatana*), infinity of consciousness (*vinnanancayatana*), infinity of nothingness (*akincannayatana*), and infinity of neither perception nor non-perception (*n'eva sanna n'asannyatana*).

Selection of meditation subjects

Among these 40 meditation subjects, the meditators are asked to select any of these subjects which may suit their temperament or disposition (*carita*). In order to select the meditation subject, the meditator should seek the guidance of a competent teacher. If such a competent teacher is not available, one should exercise one's own discretion so that the subject may suit one's own temperament. According to Buddhism, there are six kinds of temperaments which a man possesses, and they are the following

- Lustful temperament (*ragacarita*)

- Hateful temperament (*dosacarita*)

- Ignorant temperament (*mohacarita*)

- Devout temperament (*saddhacarita)*

- Intellectual temperament (*buddhicarita*), and

- Discursive temperament (*vitakkacarita*).

Meditation on the ten impurities and mindfulness of body, for example, is intended to attenuate sensual desire, and thus these subjects are suitable for a lustful temperament. These subjects of meditation create disgust in the meditator for the body which fascinates the senses. The four divine abidings and the four color devices, on the other hand, are suitable for a hateful temperament. Mindfulness regarding breathing is suitable for people of an ignorant (deluded) and speculative (discursive) temperament. Reflections on the Buddha, dharma, and sangha are suitable for those of devout temperament, while the reflections on death and on peace, the perception on the loathsomeness of material food, and the analysis of four elements are suitable for people of intellectual temperament. The remaining six devices and four immaterial states are suitable for all kinds of temperaments. These divisions are made on the basis of direct opposition of temperament and of complete suitability. However, it is to be noted that there is no meditation subject which does not suppress defilement and cultivate virtuous mental factors.

Necessary preliminaries

After choosing the meditation subject suited to one's own temperament, the meditator should pursue necessary preliminaries for practicing the meditation. What needs to be done in this context is to withdraw to a quiet place where there are few distractions. The most desirable place in this context is a forest, a cave, or any lonely place. If the mind of a meditator is well settled, even the heart of a metropolis might become a congenial place.

The next thing to be decided in this context is the most convenient time and surroundings. Although morning and bedtime are regarded as the best periods of meditation, the most essential thing to be considered in this context is that one should not be over-tired at the time of meditation. However, it is suggested that the meditator select a specific time for regularly practicing meditation.

The best posture in this context is to sit in a cross-legged position, or to assume a triangular position so that the body remains well balanced. If the cross-legged position is found difficult, the meditator may sit in a half position or in other positions, or use a cushion or sitting comfortably on a chair.

Experience of absorptions

While practicing *samatha*, the meditator finds that the discursive activities of the mind, known as thought, are being slowed down and consequently stopped. The Buddha has described such states of mind as absorptions (*jhanas*) and divided them into various stages: (a) first absorption, (b) second absorption, (c) third absorption, and (d) fourth absorption. Absorption, in this way, is the fruit which is attained by constant practice of meditation methods known as *samatha*.

While practicing s*amatha* meditation, the meditator might feel some unwholesome thoughts crossing the mind. According to Buddhism these unwholesome thoughts are obstructions that hinder the path of meditation. The Buddha has divided such obstructions into five categories and described them as the five hindrances (*pancha-vivarana*): (a) sensual desire (*kamacchanda*), (b) ill-will (*byapada*), (c) sloth and torpor (*thinamiddha*), (d) restlessness and worry (*uddhaccakukkuccha*), and (e) doubt (*vicikiccha*).[6] These are the obstructions which a meditator has to confront in the initial phase of meditation.

By the constant practice of the right concentrations, the meditator finds that some meditative factors are being developed in the mind. In the beginning, they may be superficial but, with constant practice, they go on deepening in the mind of the meditator. The deepening of these meditative factors allows the mediator's mind to absorb meditative factors leading the mind to transcend into the realm of the mystic state known as the first absorption. In the course of meditation practice, the meditator experiences other meditative factors which lead the mind towards other absorptions. These meditative factors, opposed to the five hindrances, are known as *jhanangi*. The Buddha divided these meditative factors into five categories: (a) applied thought (*vitakka*), (b) sustained thought (*vicara*), (c) rapture or joy (*piti*), (d) happiness (*sukha*), and (e) one-pointedness (*ekaggata*). With the arising of these meditative factors, the five hindrances begins to diminish gradually. To quote Piyadassi Thera,

> Sense desire, for instance, is subdued by one-pointedness (*ekagatta*), that is, unification of mind; ill-will by joy (*piti*); sloth and torpor by applied thought (*vitakka*); restlessness and worry by happiness (*sukha*) and doubt by sustained thought (*vicara*). When they are placed side by side they stand thus
>
> | | | |
> |---|---|---|
> | *kamachanda* | - | *ekaggata* |
> | *vyapada* | - | *piti* |
> | *thina-middha* | - | *vitakka* |
> | *uddhacca-kukkucca* | - | *sukha* |
> | *vicikiccha* | - | *vicara*[7] |

When the five hindrances begin to diminish, the meditator transcends into the higher absorptions known respectively as second, third and fourth absorptions.

[6] Sanu Bhai Dangol, *Sotapanna or Flash of Enlightenment* (Kathmandu: Amen Publishers, 1996), pp. 6–7.

[7] Nyanaponika Thera, *The Heart of Buddhist Meditation* (New York: Samual Weser Inc., 1975), p. 207.

On such occasions, s/he finds that the coarser factors of the mind are being obliterated at each successive stage. To quote Nyantiloka,

> When the disciple enters the first absorption, there have vanished (the five hindrances): lust, ill-will, torpor and sloth, restlessness and mental worry, doubts; and there are present: thought concentration (*vitakka*), discursive thinking (*vicara*), rapture (*piti*), happiness (*sukha*), concentration (*citt'ekaggata-samadhi*).[8]

In the second absorption, there remains only rapture, happiness, and concentration, while in the third absorption one experiences only well-being (*upekkha-sukha*) and concentration. In the fourth absorption, there remains only concentration and equanimity.

Although serenity (*samatha*) leads a meditator to attain absorptions (mystic states), they are still mind-created, mind-produced, and conditioned. Hence, they have nothing to do with reality, truth, or nibbana (enlightenment). To reach insight into that, the meditator has to practice insight (*vipassana*) meditation. Hence, serenity meditation is regarded by Buddhists simply as the primary meditation methods.

Vipassana and the Four Foundations of Mindfulness

Insight (*vipassana*) is regarded as the highest form of meditation. The Buddha, before attaining enlightenment, had studied the spiritual practices of serenity (*samatha*) under different teachers and attained the highest mystic states known as material and immaterial absorptions (*jhanas*).[9] The Buddha was not satisfied with them because they lead him neither to complete liberation, nor to an insight into the ultimate reality. He considered these mystic states of absorption simply "as happy living in this existence (*ditthadhamma-sukhavihara*) or peaceful living (*santivihara*), and nothing more."[10] Therefore, he discovered the other form of meditation known as insight (*vipassana*). This method of meditation helps the meditator to gain insight into the nature of things, complete liberation, and realization of the ultimate truth or nibbana. This is essentially the central meditation or mental culture of the

[8] Nuantiloka, *The Word of the Buddha* (Kathmandu: Bhikkhu Dhamma Vansa, 1976), p. 87.

[9] Immaterial absorptions (*jhanas*) denotes the four immaterial states concerned with infinity of space, of consciousness, of nothingness, and of neither perception nor non-perception. These immaterial states are enlisted above under the meditation subjects of *samatha*.

[10] Rahula, *op. cit.*, (note 1), p. 68.

Buddhist tradition. It is an analytical method based on mindfulness, awareness and vigilance or observation. At the time of practicing insight (*vipassana*), the meditator dwells independently, clinging to nothing in the world. The four foundations stipulated by this meditation method are: (a) mindfulness of body (*kayanu-passana*), (b) mindfulness of feelings or sensations (*vedenanu-passana*), (c) mindfulness of consciousness or mind (*Cittanu-passana*), and (d) mindfulness of mental objects (*dhammanu-passana*). To quote the Buddha's words:

> Therefore a monk dwells contemplating the body, in the body—contemplating the feelings, in the feelings—contemplating the consciousness, in the consciousness—contemplating mind objects, in the mind objects, ardent, clearly comprehending and mindful, having overcome, in this world, hankering and dejection.[11]

Mindfulness of body

There are several ways for developing mindfulness in regard to the body, and they are as follows.

Breathing (anapana sati) is practiced by a meditator keeping him- or herself mindful of his/her breathing. That is, one keeps oneself mindful while breathing in and breathing out or while breathing in a long breath or breathing out a short breath. Thus, one remains aware of the entire activities of one's breathing which includes mindfulness on the origination and dissolution of the breath. Conscious of the entire breath-body, one breathes in and breathes out and thus trains oneself in calming the activities of the breath body.

Postures of the body (iriyapatha) is practiced by a meditator by being aware of each and every one of his or her own body postures, that is to say, one remains vigilant when walking, when standing still, when sitting down, or when lying down.

Clear comprehension (sampajanna) is practiced by the meditator by remaining completely aware while walking back and forth, while looking ahead or elsewhere, while bending and stretching, while wearing clothes and other materials, while eating, drinking, chewing and tasting, while obeying the call of nature, while walking, standing, sitting, falling asleep, waking, speaking, and while being silent.

Repulsiveness of body (patikkulamanasikara) is practiced by a meditator by reflecting on his/her own body from the sole of the foot up and from the

[11] There, *op. cit.*, (note 7), p. 117.

scalp down, bound by skin. While reflecting in this way, one recounts how the body is like a bag of provisions filled with different impurities such as head hair, body hair, nails, teeth, skin, etc. This method may be likened to the reflection of a person who takes out different varieties of food grains from a double-mouthed provision bag and counts them one by one.

Material elements (dhatumanasikara) is practiced by a meditator while reflecting on his/her own body as if it were a cohesion of various material elements such as earth (element or solidity), water (element or fluidity), fire (element or temperature), and air (element or motion). This may be likened to a butcher who dissecting the physical body of an animal after having killed it reflects on its various parts.

Nine cemetery contemplations (navasivathikapabba) is practiced by a meditator while reflecting on his/her own body taking examples from nine types of dead bodies abandoned in a cemetery. While reflecting in this way, s/he begins to think: "Verily, also my own body is of the same nature; such will it become, and it has not escaped that state."[12] Thus, s/he practices body contemplation on him- or herself (internally) or on others (externally) or at times both on him- or herself and on others.

Mindfulness of feeling

Mindfulness of feeling is practiced by keeping oneself aware of the pleasant, painful, or neutral feelings when such pleasant, painful, or neutral feelings arise during meditation. Such feelings may be worldly as well as unworldly. While practicing this method, the meditator keeps him- or herself aware of the origination and dissolution of such feelings too.

Mindfulness of mind

Mindfulness of mind is practiced during meditation by keeping oneself mindful of the mind with lust, with hatred, or with delusion when the mind is accompanied by lust, by hatred, or by delusion. Similarly, one remains aware of the mind without lust, without hatred or without delusion when the mind is without lust, without hatred, or without delusion. Likewise, one remains mindful when the mind is indolent, is distracted, is grown great or is not grown great. Likewise, one keeps oneself mindful of the surpassable mind, unsurpassable mind, concentrated mind, not concentrated mind, freed mind or not freed mind when one is with surpassable mind, unsurpassable mind, concentrated mind, not concen-

[12] C. Nyanasatta Thera, *Basic Tenets of Buddhism* (Ceylon: Ananda Semage, n.d.), p. 67.

trated mind, freed mind or not freed mind. Similarly, s/he dwells practicing origination contemplation on the origination—contemplating mind or dissolution—contemplation on the dissolution—contemplating mind.

Mindfulness of mind objects

Mindfulness of mind objects is practiced by contemplating upon the following five mind objects.

Five hindrances (pancanivarana). While practicing mindfulness of the five hindrances, a meditator contemplates on the five hindrances. For instance, the meditator remains aware of the presence of sense desire, absence of sense desire, arising of sense desire or non-arising of sense desire, when the sense desire is present, is absent, is arising or is not arising. Similarly, one remains aware of the arising of the non-arisen sense desire, the rejection of the arisen sense desire, and the absence of future arising of the rejected sense desire. This very method is pursued while contemplating on other hindrances, namely, ill-will, sloth and torpor, restlessness and worry, and (skeptical) doubt.

Five aggregates of clinging (pancakkhanda). A meditator practices contemplation on the five aggregates of clinging thinking like: "Thus is the material form, thus is arising of material form, thus is the passing away of the material form." S/he pursues this very method while contemplating on the mind objects of feeling, perception, mental formation, and consciousness, too.

Six internal and six external sense—bases (salayatana). A meditator practices contemplation on the six internal and six external sense bases by remaining aware of the six internal and six external sense bases. These are: (a) eye and visible forms, (b) ear and sounds, (c) nose and smells, (d) tongue and taste, (e) body and tactile objects, and (f) mind and mind objects (thoughts). For instance, one remains aware of the eye, of the visible (material) forms and of the fetter or contact that arises depending on both (eye and forms). Similarly, one is aware of the arising of the non-arisen fetter, the abandoning of the arisen fetter, or the non-arising in the future of the abandoned fetter, too. This method is pursued while contemplating on (a) ears and sounds, (b) nose and smells, (c) tongue and savors (taste), (d) body and tactile objects, and (e) mind and mind objects (thoughts) along with the fetter that arises depending on their contact.

Seven factors of enlightenment (bojjhanga). A meditator practices contemplation on the Four Noble Truths aware that (a) this is suffering, (b) this is the arising of suffering, (c) this is the cessation of suffering, and (d) this is the path leading to cessation of suffering.

While practicing any of the four foundations of mindfulness, a meditator should dwell independently, clinging to nothing in the world for the growth of knowledge and mindfulness.

Fruits of mindfulness

As regards the fruit of such mindfulness, the words of the Buddha run as follows.

> Verily, O monks, should any person practice the four arousings of mindfulness in this manner for seven years, then he should expect one of the two results: Knowledge (of final deliverance, i.e., *arhatship* or sainthood) here and now, or, if there is yet a remainder of clinging, the state of non-return (*anagami*, the penultimate stage of sainthood). […] Let alone half-a-month, should any person practice these four arousings of mindfulness in this manner for seven days, then he should expect one of the two results: Knowledge here and now, or, if there be yet a remainder of clinging, the state of Non-return.[13]

If a meditator is true and sincere in the practice of these four foundations of mindfulness, s/he can win the knowledge of final deliverance even in the practice of these four foundations of mindfulness; s/he can win the knowledge of final deliverance even in the practice of a few months. It is for this reason that the Buddha extolled this path: "This is the sole way for the purification of beings, for the overcoming of sorrow and lamentation, for the destroying of pain and grief, for reaching the right path, for the realization of nibbana, namely the four foundations of mindfulness."[14]

The Buddha uses another word to denote mindfulness, i.e., "heedfulness" (*appamada*), and he extols its value further with the words: "Heedfulness is the path to deathless, heedlessness is the path to death. The heedful do not die; the heedless are like unto dead."[15] Here, deathless does not mean that the heedful are immortal because all sentient beings are mortal. The idea implied here is that the heedful, who realize the deathless nibbana, are beyond birth and death. The heedless are regarded as dead because they are subject to repeated births and deaths (*samsara*).

---

[13] Piyadassi Thera, *The Buddha's Ancient Path* (Taipei: The Corporate Body of the Buddha Educational Foundation, 1995), p. 194.

[14] Quoted in Sanu Bhai Dangol, *Stray Sentiments* (Kathmandu: Gautam Bajracharya and Laxman Dangol, 1991), p. 68.

[15] Narada Thera, *The Dhammapada* (Colombo: B. M. S. Publication, 1978), p. 35.

The cultivation of Buddhist spiritual practices, specially insight meditation, is an arduous task for us because we have to live as independents, clinging to nothing in the world. If we succeed to live in this way, our life will surely be crowned with success. That is why the Buddha had concluded each of the suttas of insight meditation with the words: "He should dwell independent, clinging to nothing in the world." He concluded these suttas with such words so that we may at least sow our thought in this direction. By sowing such a thought, we will reap an act. When we sow the act, we will reap the habit. When we sow the habit, we will reap the character. And when we sow the character, we will reap the destiny because character is destiny. The words of an old jingle express the spirit of this Buddhist insight:

Sow a thought, reap an act;
Sow an act, reap a habit;
Sow a habit, reap a character;
Sow a character, reap a destiny.[16]

Conclusion

The spiritual practice devised by Buddhism could be cultivated by any person, irrespective of caste, color, race, nationality, etc. Being devised as a way of life and not as part of religious tradition, these practices can be cultivated even without becoming a Buddhist. If cultivated in a perfect manner, these practices could work as wonderful resources for creating wholeness and peace in life and lead a person even beyond the realm of birth and death, to nibbana. It is high time that we try to fulfill our life by cultivating the spiritual practices as taught by the Buddha, because human life is a rare phenomenon which could be missed at any time. The Buddha's words in this context are as follows:

Rare is birth as a human being.
Hard is the life of mortals.
Hard is the bearing of the Sublime Truth.
Rare is the appearance of the Buddhas.[17]

[16] *Sow Good Seeds and Reap the Harvest* (Kuala Lumpur: Buddhist Missionary Society, n.d.), p. 4.

[17] Thera, *op. cit.*, (note 15).

Globalization, Global Ethics and Inter-religious Dialogue in a Multireligious Context

Viggo Mortensen

In today's world we are witnessing the irresistible and irreversible globalization of economic and cultural exchanges. Globalization has become the predominant word to characterize the present situation covering, like all such words, a wide range of meanings. It has its starting point in the interconnectedness of people's political, economic and social lives, and it is pushed forward by trade and the economy, by technology and technological progress as well as political developments.

The motor driving this process is the economy. A new single world economy has emerged after the collapse of the bipolar reality in Europe and has lead to the liberalization of almost all markets. Only a few countries continue to isolate themselves very much to their disadvantage. The tendency toward economic globalization is undeniable and the world economy has become more internationally integrated than ever before.

Transnational corporations (TNCs), which play a significant role in the process of globalization, are subject to considerable controversy. On the one hand, they are often regarded as bullies exploiting workers and natural resources while ignoring the community's well-being; on the other, as quasi-saints bringing advanced technology to the poorer countries and cheap products to the wealthier ones. The truth lies somewhere in between. There are sufficient pull factors in the direction of enhancing the TNCs' activities: these have to do with scale, vertical integration (the wish to have a perfectly smooth transition between supplier, manufacturer and consumer) and competitive advantage. This can result in the exploitative exertion of power, impossible for the political system to control. The TNCs' flexibility makes it harder for governments to raise revenue, to protect the environment and to promote the safety of the labor force.

Nevertheless, a number of developing countries have invited TNCs because they consider the gains greater than the cost. The problem here is that in the developing world most direct foreign investment goes straight to those regions that have the highest growth potential and prospects.

Technology

Everybody agrees that technology, especially information technology, is the vehicle that drives globalization forward. Costs for communication and computing have fallen dramatically; sea and air transport have become far more competitive. The progress in computer technology means that transactions are made at the speed of lightening. If companies do not want to be left behind they need to be able to react promptly. Technological change also influences investment strategies. Sophisticated technology can be introduced in developing countries and there be combined with comparatively low wages. This technological development has changed our perception of time and space and the way in which we communicate. The "network" has become the preferred metaphor to describe a wide variety of activities in the realm of communication. Theorists talk about extension and compression being the two main characteristics of our time: the extension of the effects of modernity to the entire world, and the compression of time and space. Extension brought about by computers, modems, faxes and the Internet brings with it a certain culture, Western culture, a powerful homogenizing system. International trade is globalized; research and education function according to certain globalized patterns. While the homogenizing effect is powerful, it does have its limits. In spite of globalization local culture will often be given enough room to flourish creating plural modernities. So the global and the local complement one another.

The other side of extension is compression. Time and space are compressed; whatever happens on one half of the globe can be experienced instantaneously by those living on the other half. The speed at which all this takes place influences our relationship to the past. The same goes for space; information contained in a single, tiny computer chip would previously have filled an entire library. In search of new opportunities we often leave the place where we were born and where our ancestors had lived for generations. New identities develop in the wake of globalization and there is a tendency to develop multiple or overlapping identities.

How Can We Evaluate Globalization?

Globalization is a complex, many faceted phenomenon. When trying to evaluate it we must begin with the realistic assumption that globalization has become a fact, an irreversible trend promising wealth and growth. What remains to be seen is whether it can cope with the two major challenges the neo-liberal economy faces today: population growth and environmental problems. Movements such as **A**ssociation for the **T**axation of Financial **T**ransactions for the **A**id of **C**itizens (ATTAC) point to the dangers inherent in this process of globalization.

Ecumenical social ethics has until now concentrated on the negative results of globalization and the concomitant widening of the gap between the rich and the poor. The expansion of trade and foreign investment has exacerbated the differences between the developing countries, while in industrialized countries unemployment and disparities in levels of income have reached alarming levels. The fruits of globalization appear to be unevenly distributed: many of the poorer countries have benefited only marginally from the expansion of world trade while others have been simply bypassed with most foreign investment going to the already established centers such as Europe, North America and Japan. Why? In short: because of bad policy, bad terms and bad rules. Factors such as poor macro-economic policy, large fiscal deficits covered by external borrowing, overprotection of markets and neglecting to invest in human resources and infrastructures, have contributed to deterring foreign investment.

Nevertheless, we must be wary not to fall into the trap of holding only governments accountable for not having taken full advantage of the benefits of globalization. It is a well-known fact that developing countries often suffer extremely unfair terms of trade. Falling commodity prices, coupled with the burden of foreign debt aggravated by poor credit ratings, have resulted in exorbitant rates of interest.

When evaluating globalization it is important to remember that it is a human made phenomenon. It has not come down from heaven, and thus it can be influenced and changed. The central mechanism in economic globalization is the market. The market is an effective mechanism for distributing certain goods but the modern market also has certain flaws. The traditional market place was a place of sharing more than just goods and services. One shared information and experienced community. Because modern markets exclude those who cannot compete, the market has developed into a place of exclusion bringing fragmentation.

What Can the Churches Do?

Since globalization touches on all areas of life it, naturally enough it also affects religion. Some of the recent changes in the religious world such as the New Age and other forms of spirituality, Pentecostalism among Christians in Africa and Latin America, fundamentalism within Christianity, Hinduism, Islam and Judaism and new trends within Buddhism can best be interpreted within the framework of globalization. Religion does not function as a global system itself. Within the different traditions there are various ways of responding to the new global realities. When global systems fail to live up to their ideals of progress, equality and exclusion, religions are often mobilized frequently fostering anti-systemic feelings. Nevertheless, they can also offer a religious answer, a "vision" to the problems arising from globalization. R. Schreiter identifies four global flows

related to theological discourses that address the failures and contradictions of global systems: liberation, feminism, ecology and human rights.[1]

While we cannot review these different trends here, it is interesting to note that they all attempt to mediate between the global and the local. They can take the form of anti-globalism, a retreating from the modern world and sometimes even a counter-offensive, which in religious circles manifests itself in fundamentalism and other guises. Fundamentalism has reared its ugly head in several of the world religions. Because of its simplicity it is thought to provide a bastion against globalization. In fact, because of its very simplicity it is no match for the complexities of the situation and will eventually have to collapse or adapt, but maybe not before having caused serious damage.

Another strategy is "ethnification," a process of rediscovering a lost identity based on blood and cultural ties. This happens frequently when asserting a local identity amid rapid social change and cultural instability as we have seen in places where new national identities have had to be formed post colonialism or post Marxism. These examples show us that establishing an ethnic identity is no easy task and that we often end up with a sort of hybrid. A third form of cultural response to globalization is primitivism, in other words, an attempt to revert to an earlier, pre-modern period in order there to find a meaningful frame of reference.

If we look at the religions of the world, it is easy to find examples of these strategies. It would be unfortunate if the Christian churches were to subscribe wholesale to any of these strategies since they are all backward looking. What we need in theology and the churches is a forward-looking attempt to grapple seriously with the very different aspects of globalization. It is a positive sign that we find several examples of what we could call productive encounter or critical distance. Critical distance would be in line with a strong trend in contemporary ecumenical social ethics that is censorious of the neo-liberal capitalist way of trade and production.

Globalization merits neither a comprehensive endorsement nor a blanket rejection; globalization is an ambivalent process. It creates considerable wealth for some while increasing the impoverishment of others; it results in the gap between the rich and the poor growing wider; while homogenizing culture at one level it creates fragmentation and hybridization of culture at another.

Globalization from above—promoted by macro-economic institutions and contributing to the harmonization of cultures—needs to be met by globalization from below advocating diversity as a criterion for sustainable development. This could be the task of the Christian church, which has been one of the world's most successful globalizing movements. Christianity has always been on both

[1] Rober J. Schreiter, *New Catholicity: Theology between the Global and the Local* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis, 1997).

sides: part of the globalizing forces—and that from the very beginning—it has also been involved in many counter-initiatives by which people sought to reassert themselves in their particularity over against the forces of globalization.

Globalization with a Difference

Within the global Christian church, we have seen many different strategies develop to cope with the new situation. These range from trying to create a global Christianity using global economic structures and global technology to enhance the message, to fostering an anti-global feeling, looking backwards and reverting to an earlier pre-modern state of affairs in order there to find a meaningful frame of reference.

The crucial question is whether globalization is at all sustainable. Within the ecumenical movement, the overall tendency has been to respond to this question in the negative. At least one needs a critical realism very much in line with what WCC general secretary, Konrad Raiser, endorsed in his report to the Central Committee in 1997:

> While the WCC and the ecumenical movement cannot but resist globalization as an ideological and political project, we cannot easily opt out of the historical dynamic and the ambiguity of global interdependence. The ecumenical movement must accept the challenge to articulate and embody an alternative understanding and vision of globalization. [...] We are beginning to see more clearly that the challenge of globalization must lead to a re-examination of our ecumenical commitment [...] enabling it to become a source of inspiration for rebuilding community and for developing and strengthening a culture of life and hope.

The church's mission could very well be one of prophetic critique. But it must also be the positive message of salvation. Luke tells us that early Christian missionaries were accused of "turning the whole world [*oikoumene*] upside down" (Acts 17:6). Thus the gospel itself can be characterized as an expression of globalization with a difference.

The modern missionary movement and the resulting ecumenical movement were both response to and product of a new phase of globality brought about by Western colonialism and imperialism. This same missionary movement was not successful in terms of "winning the world for Christ in this generation." The world has not become Christian. Around 1900 one third of the world's total population were Christian. Hundred years and considerable missionary efforts later still only one third of the world's population are Christian. Does this mean that the missionary movement has been a failure? The answer is that it has while it did not reach its immediate goals, it contributed immensely to the process that changed Christianity into a world religion.

The challenges that the church and theology face in the wake of such an emergent global culture are: the fragmentation of globalized society; religious relativism; and the increased individualization of religion. Theology, seldom perceived as the common voice inviting all, has been relegated to the margins. Maybe this is the place to start, if we want to regain the center. Let us here review one of the attempts to counter the negative forces of globalization—the proposal for a global ethics.

Global Ethics

Globalization does not only lead to uniformity, but also to diversity. We find diversity in nature. If we consult evolutionary biology and ask why there is such variety in nature, forms and species we are told that this is so in order to enhance gene-transfer and survival. Why then is it so beautiful? If it were merely a question of the transfer of genes, mother nature or God would have been able to arrange things in a much more economical way. The diversity in nature is a constant source for wonder and awe.

In nature, we are told, diversity is an enormous strength. If the conditions are not optimal for one species, they might well be for another. Diversity and change might be detrimental for the single specimen or individual, but it is good for a different species, the population or the ecosystem. Is it different in the cultural world of ethics and the religions?

The World's Parliament of Religions of 1893

Results of and advances in modern economy and technology were exhibited and celebrated at the 1893 world exhibition held at Chicago. A certain Charles Carrol Bonney influenced by the Swedish mystic, Emmanuel Swedenborg, wanted more than merely to celebrate the material and technological sides of modernity. He wanted to have the cultural and religious dimensions of the human spirit documented, and it was decided alongside the technological and cultural achievements to organize the World's Parliament of Religions. Representatives from 45 different religions came and stood side by side on equal terms. For many this event was a reason for optimism, with some envisioning a common humanity where remaining differences were reconciled. Nonetheless, one could also say that it became clear that religions had lost their dominant influence. One of the consequences of modernization is the differentiation of the various sectors in society. Religion had become a sector in line with others and was weakened by the split in many directions. It was because of this differentiation and split that the dream of uniting and creating understanding between human beings and nations through religion flourished.

The person who made the greatest impression was Swami Vivekananda, a pupil of the great Ramakrishna. The beautiful Hindu monk attracted much attention. He came with a very simple message, an offer of an exchange: you in the West have all the material wealth and economic strength. We in the East have the spiritual wealth and religious strength. Let us share. You could tap into our spiritual and religious heritage, and the East could learn and use some of the material wealth from the West.

For me this is in many ways the history of the 20th century. In 1893, Christianity was at the peak of its development. In the wake of expansion, colonization and imperialism the Christian West had conquered and subdued the rest. India was a British colony and on its knees; China was a bouncing board for European states; Japan was isolated; Africa colonized. It was the European version of Christianity that had been globalized, and one was optimistic that this was the time of golden opportunities. The whole world would be "christinianized" if not in our generation then at least in the immediate future.

The Parliament of the World's Religions of 1993

How different then the mood when the parliament gathered 100 years later. The optimism in the Christian camp had faded. Christianity had barely grown at the same rate as the population. Rather than "christianizing" the world the huge missionary movement had turned Christianity into a global religion. In this situation several attempts were made to identify that which the various religious and cultural traditions have in common. The most widely discussed and most influential of these attempts to formulate a global ethic is the consensus statement drafted by the Catholic theologian, Hans Küng, for the 1993 Parliament of the World's Religions.

> We confirm that there is already a consensus among the religions which can be the basis for a global ethic.[…] By a global ethic we mean a fundamental consensus on binding values, irrevocable standards, and personal attitudes.[2]

This consensus must by its very nature be a minimal one. It is based on a "fundamental demand: every human being must be treated humanely."[3] It also affirms beneficence involving an obligation for all human beings to do good and to avoid

[2] Hans Küng and Karl-Josef Kuschel (eds.), *A Global Ethic: The Declaration of the Parliament of the World's Religions* (New York: Continuum, 1993), p. 18 and p. 21.

[3] *Ibid.*, pp. 23-24.

evil. Basically the initial declaration is built upon what in the Christian tradition is known as the golden rule,

> a principle which is found and has persisted in many religious and ethical tradítions of humankind for thousands of years: What you do not wish done to yourself, do not do to others! Or in positive terms: What you wish done to yourself, do to others! This should be the irrevocable, unconditional norm for all areas of life.[4]

On this basis four irrevocable directives have been developed, here quoted from the more condensed version in the proposal of the InterAction-Council:

- Commitment to a culture of non-violence and respect for all life; "You shall not kill," or in positive terms: "Have respect for life!"

- Commitment to a culture of solidarity and a just economic order; "You shall not steal!" or in positive terms: "Deal honestly and fairly!"

- Commitment to a culture of tolerance and a life of truthfulness; "You shall not lie!" or in positive terms: "Speak and act truthfully!"

- Commitment to a culture of equal rights and partnership between men and women; "You shall not commit sexual immorality!" or in positive terms: "Respect and love one another!"[5]

It is difficult not to agree with this general form and this is not the place to review the many problems such a proposal gives rise to. The main issue will be that of the generality of the statement. Religious identity is most often created by the particularities in the different religions. Here we will only pursue the train of thought that maintains that for such a proposal of a global ethics to succeed it needs to be undergirded by and accompanied with a concern for inter-religious dialogue. In the words of Hans Küng,

> There will be no peace among nations without peace among the religions.
> There will be no peace among the religions without a dialogue among the religions.
> There will be no successful dialogue among religions without the considering of

[4] *Ibid.*, pp. 71-71.

[5] Hans Küng, "Global Ethics. A Challenge for the New Century," in Susanne Wigorts Yngvesson (ed.), *Global Etik* (Uppsala, 2000), p. 17.

> common ethical standards for our globe.
> There will therefore be no survival of our globe without a global ethics.[6]

The strength of the global ethics is its ability to point to a possible overlap among the world's religions regarding a set of normative statements that they all affirm. To determine if this claim is true one simply needs to dig deeper, and that can only happen through inter-religious dialogue. A global ethic is only worth something if it is embraced by all faiths.

The World's Parliament of Religions of 1999

When the World's Parliament of Religions met again in 1999 in Cape Town, South Africa, it was designed to push the process forward by taking the issues to practice. A new document, *A Call to our Guiding Institutions*, was drafted and widely discussed both during the parliament and afterwards. It is a document endorsing all good intentions and directed towards all the evils of the modern world. The formula to counter all those evils is the strengthening of human communities by embracing human diversity. In the words of the document:

> Diversity is a hallmark of our contemporary experience. Today every metropolitan center is home to a striking variety of cultures, ethnic and national groups, and religions. Never before has the encounter between people from different paths and perspectives been so widespread, touching individuals and communities everywhere, enriching the tapestry of our lives together, and recasting the dynamic of our world. When such encounters take place in an atmosphere of respect and mutuality, then new understanding and cooperation can emerge. More evident at present, however, are the tensions, hostilities, and even violence that arise from misunderstanding, fear, and hatred of those who are different. The urgent task is to embrace human diversity in such a way that we no longer erect barriers out of differences but, by understanding and appreciating them, build bridges to harmonious, vibrant community.[7]

This ideal of embracing human diversity raises the question of how much diversity a human being can stand. I think that fair to say that although it is vital to nurture and respect the cultural and religious differences and particularities, there are limits to diversity. If diversity is seen as a resource, then it is impor-

[6] *Ibid.*, p. 18.

[7] *A Call to our Guiding Institutions* at **http://www.cpwr.org/calldocs/CALL.pdf**.

tant to stress how this diversity can contribute to the common good. If the only parameter is that the different cultures are granted autonomy and respect then the multicultural society becomes a mere caricature of itself. Of course we should embrace diversity; it can be fruitful and generate many good things. But in order not to end up in the total fragmentation, one also needs to consider how unity can be furthered. In ecumenical theology one model of unity that has stood the test of time is "unity in reconciled diversity." Maybe this model can be used not only in the confessional *oikoumene* but also in the inter-religious *oikoumene*. Diversity can be embraced but the resources of diversity should be put to work for the unity of all by, for instance, nurturing an intercultural communion of values.

How can Inter-religious Dialogue Help Develop an Adequate Response to Plurality?

Plurality reigns: with the multiethnic comes the multicultural and the multireligious. Many traditional Christian societies in the West experience this as a threat to traditional, mono-cultural ways of life. If this development can be seen as an enrichment it must first be taken up as a challenge. A way of organizing the multicultural and multireligious society by way of segregation or parallel development is, in the long run, not sustainable.

Many take the relativistic consequence of the pluralistic situation, judging it impossible or inappropriate to make qualitative distinctions regarding different cultural or religious practices. Alternatively, one ends up with a form of syncretism. As there are so many fine cultural and religious ideas and practices, then let each of us make one of our own. In the West it is one of the most widespread reactions to plurality to form—through a pick and choose model – one's own private religion. Or one turns to fundamentalism. We see a rise in fundamentalism in many parts of the world and within many of the major religious traditions: Christianity, Hinduism, Islam and Judaism. If we do not think of relativism, syncretism or fundamentalism as the right response to plurality, we need to come up with a better one. Here I see no way that does not include some form of inter-religious dialogue.

It is fitting in the context of dialogue to mention the contribution of Philip Hefner. Hardly anybody has done more to further dialogue, especially when it comes to the dialogue and the interaction between science and theology. Hefner has also been instrumental in placing this dialogue within a multireligious context since if we want to avoid a clash of cultures we need dialogue between religions.

This dialogue comes in different forms. In the dialogue of intellectual exchange, faith is seeking understanding and theologians and religious scholars grapple with issues that cut across religious lines. Often the insights in one tra-

dition are absolutized. The exchange at the intellectual level examines the deeper meaning with rituals, customs and symbols. This must accompany a deeper search for insight, where one seeks to reach the absolute beyond even if one never reaches the final truth.

In the dialogue of spiritual experience an attempt is made to share in one another's search for experiencing God. Here one studies the other's religious resources as spiritual documents with the aim of discerning God's presence and action. Prayer and meditation can be shared and this can be experienced as liberating.

The dialogue of common action can occur at different levels. Common human and spiritual values can be promoted and alliances formed at the political and socio-economic levels with a view to transforming the human community. All religions can normally agree to the goal of making the world a little more just. How this can be achieved is often a matter of discussion. Such discussion carried out in mutual respect and understanding can be an important step towards more lasting and sustainable solutions to the burning problems of the day.

The dialogue between people of different faiths is necessary not only for instrumental reasons, but also because we are bound together in a common search for the truth. Claims to the religious truth may sometimes conflict, but they need to be understood in the context of the whole.

Religions give structure to our lives. They give meaning, foster community and provide liberation. When the inter-religious dialogue transcends the exchange of niceties those questions will come to the forefront. What we need is a frank and truthful exchange of how our respective traditions best contribute to order and community, meaning and liberation.

We do not always know how to make this happen. We have some recipes and by trying them we may find that they work out. As Phil Hefner concludes in his book on human nature:

> What I offer in this book is a set of recipes for understanding our lives and their meaning. I leave it to the reader to decide which of Lydia Mittelstadt's verdicts about her recipes fits mine: "these recipes are a joke; realize that." Or, "this may work out."[8]

I opt for the latter. Sustained by our faith, nurtured by our hope, carried by the love of God, we are called to dialogue and interact in a peaceful and truthful way with our neighbor. "So faith, hope, love abide, these three; but the greatest of these is love." (1 Cor 13)

---

[8] Philip Hefner, *The Human Factor: Evolution, Culture, and Religion* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1993).

Attaining Fullness of Life Through Spiritual Practices

Phra Maha Tuan Siridhammo (Pim-Aksorn)

The Lord Buddha discovered the Four Noble Truths and the Noble Eightfold Path that can help all of us to become true human beings. In following this path, human beings can help themselves by practicing meditation. This is the way we must follow in order to gain real happiness. We cannot get help from outside, no one can purify our mind but we, ourselves. One can get rid of all sufferings only by one's own effort and practice.

Attaining the Objectives of Human Life

There are three kinds of main goals of life to attain the three levels of *attha* or benefits that are the objectives of life.

First level: the temporal objective or the present benefit (*ditthdhammami kattha*)

- Having good health, strong body, free of disease, pleasant appearance and longevity
- Having work and income, an honest livelihood, economic self-reliance
- Having good status, being of good standing in the community
- Having a happy family, making one's family worthy of respect

Second level: the spiritual objective or further benefit (*sampara yikattha*)

- Warmth, deep appreciation and happiness through faith, having an ideal
- Pride in having a clean life, in having done only virtuous deeds
- Gratification in a worthwhile life, in having made sacrifices and done good
- Courage and confidence in having wisdom to deal with problems and to guide one's life

***Third level*:** the highest objective or the greatest benefit (*paramatta*)

- Not wavering in the face of vicissitudes and change
- Not being despondent or distressed because of attachments
- Being secure, calm, clear, cheerful and buoyant at all times
- Living and acting with wisdom, which looks at causes and conditions

One who is able to attain the second level of benefit and upwards is known as a wise person (*pandita*).

These three levels of objectives or benefits can be attained on three fronts

- The objective for oneself or one's own benefit (*attattha*). Whenever practiced for oneself, that means one can do it for others too. So one should establish for oneself or develop one's life toward this benefit.
- The objectives for others, or the people's benefit. The three levels mentioned above mean that one should help other people to achieve success in life by inducing and encouraging them to develop their lives and benefits.
- The mutual objectives or the benefit to both parties (*ubhayatha*). The collective benefit, happiness and virtue of the community or society including environmental conditions and factors, which one should help create and conserve in order to help both ourselves and others advance to the three levels of objectives mentioned above.

One can help oneself and others if one practices building the quality of mind first according to the following principles of conduct. S/he has the "divine abidings," the four mental attributes of a being who is sublime or grand-minded, which are

1. *Metta*—loving-kindness—meaning goodwill and amity, the wish to help all people attain benefit and happiness.
2. *Karuna*—compassion—meaning the desire to help others escape from their sufferings, the determination to help all beings, both human and animals, be free from difficulties, hardships and miseries.

3. *Mudita*—appreciative gladness—meaning that when seeing others happy, one feels glad; when seeing others do good actions or attain success and advancement, one responds with gladness and is ready to help and support them.

4. *Upekkha*—equanimity—meaning when one sees the things as they are with a mind that is even, steady, firm and fair, like a pair of scales; understands that all beings experience good and evil in accordance with the causes they have done or created; and is ready to judge and position oneself in accordance with principles, reason, and equity.

S/he can contribute to social harmony; s/he practices in accordance with the four principles for helpful integration, or qualities that bond people in unity, known as the *sangaha-vatthu*. These are

- *Dana*—giving—being kind, generous, sacrificing, sharing, helping and providing assistance with the four necessities, money or material possessions—including the imparting of knowledge or understanding and learning.

- *Piyavaca*—amicable speech—speaking polite words, pleasant to the ear, and helpful, that point the way to benefit, and that are based on reason and conducive to goodness; words that are sympathetic and encouraging; speaking words that lead to understanding, harmony, friendship, and mutual love, respect, and service.

- *Attha cariya*—helpful action—helping with the physical service, making an effort to lend a hand to others in their activities; performing actions that are helpful to the community, including helping to resolve problems and promote morality.

- *Samanatta*—participation—putting oneself in communion with others, behaving consistently and impartially; behaving equitably toward all people, not taking advantage of them; sharing in their happiness and suffering, acknowledging problems and participating in resolving them for the common good.

These are to help through financial contributions, material things, or knowledge; to help through speech; to help through physical action; and to help through participation in facing and resolving problems.

Meditation Practice for Full Development in Life

The principle teaching of Lord Buddha comprises three categories

1. The study of the scriptures, *pariyatti dhamma*

2. The practice of the dhamma, *patipatti dhamma*, and

3. The state of realization, *pativedha dhamma*.

These depend on one another. If one can complete all categories, that means they are going on the direct way of happiness and peace.

The study of the scriptures refers to the study of Tipitaka, the three collections of the Buddha's teaching in which are contained morality (*sila*), concentration (*samadhi*), and wisdom (*paññña*).

The practice of the dhamma is directed towards training in and development of ethical conduct, concentration of the mind, and intuitive wisdom through the system of Buddhist meditation. The state of realization, being the result of the practice, brings about enlightenment and complete freedom from all forms of mental defilement. This is termed realization according to the Buddhist sense and aim of life. To study the scripture is like a whole coconut; the practice of the dhamma is like breaking a coconut; and the state of realization is like breaking a coconut and eating all its contents. In the same way, one studies and then one practices according to the real teaching of the Buddha. One will have the quality of mind, so that one can give peace to oneself and others in an harmonious life.

May all beings be happy; may all peoples of the world be happy and have a prosperous life, attaining immortal peace forever.

The Flowering of a Thought: Meaningful Cooperation Between Christians and Buddhists

Kyaw Than

Stages of Relationships Between Religious Communities

Relations between people of different religious commitments can be heart-warming or heart-rending in particular countries according to circumstances and situations. Reflecting on such, I am inclined to think of three stages of relations between communities of different religious traditions in my own country, Burma, and its neighbors. These stages had developed chronologically in some countries in south and Southeast Asia, while in others in the same region these stages of seem to overlap.

Briefly and in an over-simplified way these three stages may be referred to as being characterized by polemics, apologetics, and dialogue. The first stage reached back to the days of early converts to Christianity during the time of modern missions, as Western evangelists came to Asia to bring the Christian message to people who were adherents of Hinduism, Islam, Buddhism or animistic traditions as the case may be. In certain situations the converts to Christianity were so taken up by their newly found faith that they began to express verbally and in writing their convictions in terms which spoke polemically about the weaknesses of the religion they had left behind. They were enthusiastic researchers studying the Scriptures and teachings of Christianity, but their polemical writings prompted similar responses from the leaders of the religion they criticized. At times such writings even led to communal riots, and the colonial authorities had to intervene proscribing the publication of such polemical literature.

The next stage arose out of the feelings of Christian converts who had by then become more aware of the larger Christian world. They were quite appreciative of the culture and values related to the old religious tradition of their homeland. Coming to know also of the way the Christians of the West had related their faith to culture, the Asian Christians began to state anew the values of their former religion in relation to their understanding of Christian teachings. Conversely, they began to communicate the thrust of Christian teachings in relation to the thought forms and formulations of their former religion. Certain Christian missionaries sympathized with and were open to non-Christian reli-

gious traditions. Mention may be made of J.N. Farquher and his book, *The Crown of Hinduism*.[1] The kernel of his reflections was based on Christ's own declaration in the Gospel according to Matthew 5:17: "I came not to destroy but to fulfill." Farquher believed there to be an evolutionary connection between Hinduism and Christianity, so that what is only foreshadowed in Hinduism is fulfilled and perfected in Christianity. Farquher felt the crucial need of a workable—apologetic—approach to the educated Hindu, and as a means to that end he sought to find a more satisfactory relationship between Christianity and Hinduism than that of mutual exclusion. In some ways his approach foreshadows that made by Raymond Panikkar in *The Unknown Christ of Hinduism*.[2]

We may also reflect on the attempts on the part of Christians to develop indigenous lifestyles for converts who continue daily to rub shoulders with their Hindu compatriots. The emergence of ashrams in places such as Manganam, Jyotiniketan, and Kodaikanal (just to take a few examples) was due to such attempts. As one entered such ashrams and spent some time there, one initially would have thought that it was a Hindu place with a resident Sadhu. But one would eventually realize that the Sadhu was a Christian and the community related to it was one practicing the Christian faith in an indigenous manner.

The third, or more contemporaneous, stage in inter-religious relations may be described as being characterized by "dialogue." Dialogue involves open sharing back and forth between partners in their exchange of truths each holds dear. Dialogue provides for each partner to give an exposition of convictions held and also to listen, to seek to receive and understand what the partner is communicating. It is not to promote competition, nor to exercise "one-up-manship," nor to indulge in pretense and false diplomacy. It involves speaking the truth in love and humility.

The above references to three stages are not about three mutually exclusive and distinct stages of development in inter-religious relationships. They can overlap, and the dominant characteristics of each of the three stages may also be present in some form in each stage.

Concrete Practices of Cooperation Between Christians and Buddhists in the Local Community

I am grateful that over the years I have had the opportunity to be in the midst of typical communities. In government schools, state educational establishments

[1] J. N. Farquhar, *The Crown of Hinduism* (London: Oxford University Press, 1913).

[2] Raymond Panikkar, *The Unknown Christ of Hinduism* (London: Darton, Longman and Todd, 1964).

and universities I have had the opportunity to move and live among classmates and colleagues from the majority sectors of Asian societies. To make my point let me refer to a conversation I had with my father soon after my matriculation. In Burma, as I believe in our neighboring countries, parents take complete responsibility for their children's education even during their university years. My father asked me which institution of higher learning I would choose, the church-related one or the regular state university. While Christian students usually seek admission at the former, I felt that as a Christian I should not be among members of a minority community. Rather, I should be mixing with members typical of society at large and not limit my experience to being in a select and special community of people sharing a common faith tradition. My father wholeheartedly supported my preference. Holding a position in government service he was often called upon by members of the community to take part in social ceremonies or to adjudicate in controversies. Because of his role in the community, Buddhist-Christian dialogue was often the setting in which I grew up.

Some years ago, in a state university where I served, I was asked to conduct a course on the comparative study of religion. I was a rare Christian faculty member in that context and there were uncertainties in the minds of my Buddhist colleagues whether the students in my class would be at a disadvantage should the Christian teacher conduct the course in a partisan manner. They had reason to entertain such misgivings; a Christian predecessor of mine had pushed Christianity down his students' throats during lectures and while teaching in class. It must be noted that in a Buddhist society, the traditional respect accorded to teachers and parents is on a par with the triple gems, the Buddha, the dhamma, and the sangha, and accordingly a teacher commands a special role both in and outside class, making it difficult for a student to gainsay a teacher's expositions. I admired the decision of the director of the program as he entrusted me with responsibility year after year, proving that those monitoring the course with misgivings had no reason to be concerned.

Usually my class was attended mainly by Buddhists, lay and ordained, and some Christians and Muslims. It occurred to me that it would be wonderful if a faithful Buddhist colleague were to have the opportunity to study Christian theology and help either to conduct such a course or to monitor the manner and content of the course taught by a Christian. The director, the dean and the rector welcomed my proposal and a concrete project for cooperation between the state university and a Christian theological institution was developed. A Buddhist scholar studied in the setting of a Christian community for a doctorate in theology. The dissertation of the scholar dwelt on one central doctrine in Buddhism and Christianity examining its basic importance in the religion concerned, and the significance of each as they are juxtaposed. It may well prove to be a unique research in the annals of the particular theological institution, and even

in the field of Buddhist-Christian dialogue in the world at large. Happily the Christian community welcomed the project and accepted the presence of a Buddhist with open arms. This project led to lasting friendships. More meaningfully, relationships of trust grew out of those years and the project of cooperation between the two academic, but also imaginatively committed institutions could be judged eminently beneficial. The parties involved, including the scholar's family, continue to relate to one another in mutual trust and cooperation.

I do not know of any Buddhist institution in Southeast Asia that sends its members with institutional backing to study Christian theology in seminaries or church-related universities of the West. There may of course be private initiatives. Efforts with conscious institutional or departmental blessings are rare but highly significant practices of cooperation between Christians and Buddhists, with long-term implications for the local communities concerned.

The project had other benefits in that more ambitious and widespread efforts developed through the institutional contacts established. Consultations on Buddhist-Christian dialogue were organized in select Buddhist temples abroad, and in the cooperating institutions in Asia and the USA. Among the different exchanges mention should be made of the consultation which resulted in the publication *Health, Healing, and Religion: An Inter-religious Dialogue*.[3] Dialogue was not only conducted in order to compare different bodies of teachings in each religion, but to pool insights, experiences and resources regarding the concrete ways in which suffering and sickness are tackled in each religious community.

I have often said that dialogue should not be like a secular beauty contest where the competing members come to exhibit their qualities of beauty and attractiveness over against those of the other contender. Dialogue should not be for the mutual inspection and investigation of the weaknesses of the other partner. Rather than critical scrutiny, both parties may examine a common problem or challenge they or society at large are facing, and to find in their resources, positive contributory factors to develop a cooperative strategy toward solving the common problem. Another significant element in this concrete cooperative effort is the invitation by the state university for Christian faculty members to be part of its teaching programs. Likewise, because of the trust that has been built up, even Buddhist universities are taking the initiative to follow the example of the state university.

We may now turn to a second example of concrete cooperation between Christians and Buddhists in the local community. It will not be appropriate to give precise particulars to protect the parties. We all know that certain nations

[3] Pinit Ratanakul & Kyaw Than (eds.), *Health, Healing, and Religion: An Inter-religious Dialogue* (Bangkok: Mahidol University, 1996).

have their own ways of defining the need for order and security of their own peoples. These people are virtually isolated from contacts with the outside world, except for the kind the authorities permit. In some cases opportunities for higher education are made available only according to the order and security plans of the those in power. For years on end the younger generation are denied the opportunity to prepare for life vocations or to contribute to the development of their nation. Perspectives not in conformity with the policy makers are seen as anti-patriotic or nationally obstructive.

Concerned persons from near and far began to think of ways to enable the members of the younger generation in the countries concerned to be exposed to a variety of national development views and experiences. Unless some imaginative initiatives are taken the countries concerned would end up with inadequate human resources or with scores of uninformed and intellectually or experientially unequipped people incapable of providing the leadership and services the nation would need.

Obviously there was a need for young people with potential to have the opportunity to study abroad or to have exposure periods when they could come into contact with ideas and experiences conveyed through written material and/or crash courses. Christians and Buddhists are involved in these initiatives. When a Christian organization provided the opportunity to study abroad the beneficiaries were not only Christians but also Buddhists. When the Buddhists initiated training teams, not only Buddhists but also groups of Christians were provided with this valuable opportunity. Christians were also involved in the Buddhist initiatives, if not in the planning then in the production of basic reference material used during the exposure and training periods. The interesting part of this program was that Buddhists initiated the project and voluntarily involved Christians in the country of training making use of materials produced by Christians. Their valuable contribution lies in the fact that they were instrumental in bringing trainees legally out of the country. Further, the trainees were often grassroots level initiators, be they cultivators, community workers, members of minorities, or those of religious vocation at the local level.

In conclusion: these two examples are particular and specific projects of cooperation between Christians and Buddhists with implications for the local community. In terms of their wider, long-term potential, these may be helpful models which may be reflected on and similar initiatives promoted in relevant situations for establishing trust and the mutual benefit for Buddhists and Christians.

Summary Report from the Working Group on Buddhism[1]

Preamble

We consider it a privilege to meet in Asia, the birthplace of some of the major religions of the world. The ethnic, religious, and cultural diversity of the Asian peoples, with their overwhelming religiosity and overwhelming poverty, is amazing. We discern how God has spoken to the peoples of this planet through the Asian sages, prophets, holy and wise persons, and continues to speak to the world in diverse ways.

The Christian presence is very small in numbers in this largest of continents. In many Asian cultures Christ is an alien, although he belongs to Asia as much as anywhere. It is our hope to explore ways and means to share our deep spiritual and religious convictions with our Buddhist sisters and brothers. We do this in dialogue—listening to and learning from each other. We encourage Christians, especially our Lutheran sisters and brothers, who live in the midst of Buddhist adherents, to establish bridges of friendship, to cooperate with them to build a just and humane world. As two religions that teach love and compassion, Buddhists and Christians in cooperation can spread the message of peace to a society torn apart by ethnic, religious, and tribal strife.

We are aware of the Buddhist influence in the Western world today. Christians in the West rub shoulders with Buddhists in their day-to-day living. Many Westerners adopt Buddhist meditation and monastic life. In this context we encourage our churches to enter into a genuine dialogue with Buddhists and to share the religious and spiritual resources of the two faiths "to mend the bro-

[1] This summary report was presented to the theology of religions consultation sponsored by the LWF in Bangkok in 1996, and was published in the book from that consultation, Hance A. O. Mwakabana (ed.), "Theological Perspectives on Other Faiths," *LWF Documentation 41/1997* (Geneva: The Lutheran World Federation, 1997) pp. 41–72. The study group on Christians and Buddhists has met several times since then, and the papers from those meetings are included in parts III and IV of this volume. The earlier summary report is included here because it is thought to provide a helpful summary of the theological and practical issues related to Christian-Buddhist dialogue, as well as important recommendations for future consideration.

kenness of creation, overcome the fragmentation of humanity, and heal the rift between humanity, nature, and God [...].[2]

Purpose and Guidelines: What Are We Trying to Do?

Meeting here in Thailand where the vast majority (95%) of people are Buddhist, we have continued to explore central issues regarding Christian relations to Buddhists. An essential part of our explorations has been the opportunity to converse in an open, trusting atmosphere with Buddhists throughout our meetings. Further, we have been greatly helped by the participation of Thai Christians who have deep knowledge of Buddhism and live in daily contact with Buddhists. Since many other Christians have long been engaging in relationships with Buddhists, it is important to keep our explorations here in the context of the larger LWF project, "Theological Perspectives on People of Other Faiths." In a world becoming increasingly pluralistic, the LWF has recognized the pressing need for a deeper understanding of the various other religious communities, and this project is intended to provide guidance and encouragement to member churches and congregations in understanding and relating to peoples of other faiths. The project is not in itself a ***dialogue*** with peoples of other faiths, but it has primarily involved self-reflection within the Lutheran-Christian community concerning theological resources in relation to people of other faiths.

It is important to recognize that the work of the study group does not begin *de novo;* many other Christians and Christian groups have been engaging in various ways with Buddhists, on regional and local levels, in dialogue centers and academic institutions. In this work we draw strongly on experiences of other Christians in relationships with Buddhists. While we try to pay particular attention to Lutheran accents in theology, we see our work as an ecumenical contribution. The importance of this project lies in the fact that for the first time the Lutheran communities, represented by the LWF, have begun to engage in these explorations concerning the relationships of Christians with people of other faiths. Of course, some Lutheran individuals and organizations have in the past been involved in study and dialogue with Buddhists. But the reality is that most member churches have had little awareness of or involvement with the Buddhists who live in their communities. There is a general lack of knowledge about Buddhist practices and teachings, few materials suited for educating and guiding the churches with respect to Buddhists, and considerable disinterest on the part of many.

---

[2] Stanley Samartha, *One Christ—Many Religions: Towards a Revised Christology* (New York: Orbis Books, 1991), p. 12.

Yet the increasing globalization of all our societies, the growing pressure of the plurality of cultures and religions in close contact, and the many common problems that face us as humans together in our communities make it imperative that we Christians, both in Asia and in the Western societies, reach a deeper understanding of Buddhists. We have engaged in extensive conversations with Buddhists as we have explored Christian perspectives. The purpose is to serve the churches: to begin to offer some guidance and recommendations to the LWF member churches, encouraging them to live as friends and neighbors with Buddhists.

Christians in many parts of the world are in close, everyday contact with Buddhists as well as with people of other religions. As Christians, we see that relationship within the overall purpose of God: God is already present with our Buddhist neighbors, and as God's people, called into Christ's church, we also are to be present with them. We are together on a common journey, sharing with them in the sufferings and joys of human life; how can we ignore them, turn our backs to their sufferings and needs, and even disrespect their culture? We believe it is the vocation of Christians to be in relationship with Buddhists, to dialogue with them in the fullest sense of the word.

We see such dialogue as central to the mission of Christians. Entering into dialogue with Buddhists does not imply any watering down of the Christian witness, any compromising of Christian convictions. Rather, true dialogue, as has often been pointed out, involves entering in real human relationship with real people. To be present with them in this kind of relationship means standing with religious identity and conviction. It means a full, honest sharing of our convictions, complete with all our hopes and faith, weaknesses and doubts. It means witnessing to the hope that is in us, and hearing and respecting our partners as they share their convictions and faith with us. It is our assumption, then, that dialogue is not a substitute for mission, nor is it a strategy for mission; it belongs to the very nature of mission.

We further feel that, since our relationships with Buddhists have their place within God's overall purpose, theological thinking is best done in the context of this dialogue with Buddhists and with the other peoples of God's world. That is, as we reflect on the contents of our faith and interpret our tradition for this modern age, the "place" of this theology needs to be in the context where we live our lives—in this case, there in our meetings with Buddhists.

We emphasize that relationships by their nature are between persons, so, while doctrine and precepts are important, that is not where Christian life and reflection begin. Dialogue is with persons. Yet persons are always rooted in traditions and institutions—the framework out of which people live their lives and find meaning. So meaningful relationships between Christians and Buddhists will also always involve interaction with the ideas and convictions, the structures and institutions that make up the context of our lives.

Areas of Engagement: What We Are Finding

Relationships between Buddhists and Christians throughout the world are varied and complex. There is no one type of Buddhists (the same goes, of course, for Christians). Much of Asia is predominately Buddhist, with small minorities of Christians. Yet Theravada societies (e.g., Sri Lanka, Thailand, Burma, Laos and Cambodia) are significantly different from Mahayana societies (e.g., China, Korea, Japan). For example, Theravada societies generally have a central role for the sangha (monastic order). Mahayana societies have a variety of traditions and practice devotion to heavenly Buddhas and bodhisattvas. There are many communities in which Tibetan tantric forms of Buddhism are practiced. In various parts of Asia there are Buddhist revival movements as well as new groups that have gained the allegiance of many Buddhists. And all of the varieties of Buddhist communities are also present in growing numbers within the Western world. Further, relations between Buddhists and Christians take on substantial differences depending on locality, types of people involved, purposes for such relationships, etc. Dialogues have been going on for centuries in some places, not at all in others. There are highly intellectual dialogues between scholars as well as interaction in daily life among ordinary people. There are relationships in which Christians aggressively seek to convert Buddhists, relationships in which Buddhists dominate numerically and culturally, relationships in which each group virtually ignores the other. Relationships between Christians and Buddhists necessarily are based in such local, communal considerations.

We are finding some new developments in Christian-Buddhist relations today. While dialogue with Buddhists took place in certain Asian contexts in the past, today that dialogue takes place all over the world. The population of Buddhists in the Western world has dramatically increased, both with immigration of ethnic Buddhist communities and with increasing numbers of Westerners adopting the Buddhist path. Moreover, Buddhists are developing more sense of identity and confidence over against Christians; as Christianity has been the religion of the modern age, some Buddhists feel Buddhism will provide spiritual direction in the post-modern era. There are many indications that one of the major future challenges to Christian self-understanding, and to Christian spiritual dominance even in the Western world, will come from Buddhists.

For these and many other reasons, we believe it is crucial for Christians both in Asia and in the West to learn ways of becoming friends and neighbors of the Buddhists living in their various communities, entering into dialogue of various sorts with them. Key to this is a change in attitude for many Christians—from an attitude of mistrust, fear, ignorance, and/or rejection toward anything and any persons associated with Buddhism, to an attitude that sees Buddhists as God's children and therefore considers sharing in dialogue with them as part of the Christian calling.

Dialogue in daily life

One such place of dialogue is basic everyday living together. Christians in Asian localities, much smaller in numbers than Buddhists, share all facets of daily life with Buddhists—school, work, family life, suffering, death, etc. Yet we are finding that often these Christians feel constricted from sharing with their neighbors and even family in any meaningful way concerning the real spiritual core of life. For example, attending the Buddhist funeral of a family member and engaging in acts of worship to that ancestor at the family altar is a strongly felt obligation for Japanese. Christians often find themselves in a social and religious bind in this and many other such situations. The churches need to provide pastoral guidance to enable those members to discern how to relate meaningfully to their family and community, to give them courage and freedom in this dialogue of life.

Such dialogue in daily life takes many different forms in many different places. Buddhist families in the Western world, for example, have sometimes felt confused and restricted in this predominantly Christian context. Their spiritual needs as Buddhists are often ignored, or they are discriminated against, or they feel pressure to convert to Christianity. Such situations again call for pastoral guidance from the churches to help Christians enter into real personal relationships with Buddhists—dialogue in daily life that shares, respects, and promotes the wholeness of life for the Buddhists.

Dialogue as engagement in common concerns

Another very important place for dialogue with Buddhists is common involvement and cooperation in the many social, economic, and ecological issues and problems all human societies face today. The issues and problems are vast and critical: environment, violence and warfare, refugees, discrimination, exploitation, modernization with its accompanying ills, etc. We have been finding that such a place for dialogue may well be the most promising doorway to opening up a relationship between peoples of different religions. Often it is difficult for Christians and Buddhists to talk about their deep beliefs because they have no relationship of trust and sharing. From our conversations with Buddhists we have been learning how fear of being pushed to convert, for example, keeps Buddhists from trusting Christian intentions. But cooperating on common, practical concerns that call for joint action is a neighboring activity that can begin to create a relationship of respect and trust. These pressing issues affect everyone's welfare and cannot be left only for political and social agencies to solve. Christians need to cooperate with Buddhists to bring the spiritual and moral forces they both have into play for real healing and transformation in society.

As an example of the need for such cooperation, consider the tragic situation of women entering prostitution and children given into prostitution by their families in

poverty-stricken rural communities in areas of Asia. Families in these communities are struggling for survival in the shift of the modern economy toward capitalism, tourism, etc., and prostitution is one of the only sources of support in this desperate situation. Buddhist families often associate their situation with a one-sided understanding of karma (the law of action and effect), thinking one's situation in life is the result of karma from previous lifetimes, so it can only be accepted and paid off. The women who provide support for their families through prostitution think of their sacrifices as making merit for the sake of the family. But Christian families in some of these communities also resign themselves to their lot unquestioningly. Christian prostitutes sometimes defend what they do by saying, "If Christ could give up his life for me, then I should be willing to give up my life for my family." The tragic problem seems intractable and certainly cannot be solved only through social and economic programs. Christians and Buddhists need to talk and work together, recognizing that both groups have been involved in the failure to solve the problem. We all must engage in this issue with a high level of care and commitment, changing not only the underlying economic situations but especially also the attitudes that accept such a terrible situation for young women and for the community itself.

The issue of prostitution is but a specific example of the much broader situation of women in general. While poverty, exploitation of laborers, lack of education, powerlessness, disease, and many more problems affect all people, women often bear the brunt of such problems because of their traditional role and position in society. Christians and Buddhists have much to talk about in this area. Both religions have scriptural basis for the equality of women and men. The Buddha taught that women as well as men can attain enlightenment, and he established the orders both of bhikkh*us* (monks) and of bhikkhunis (nuns), as well as lay men and lay women. Jesus taught women as well as men, and Paul wrote that there is no distinction of male or female, for all are one in Christ. Yet both religious communities have an equally pervasive history of subordination of women in religious roles, reflecting and legitimizing the cultural traditions of male dominance and suppression of women in all these societies. Only recently have Christian groups begun to include women in ordained religious roles. Ordination of women as bhikkhunis lapsed in all the Theravada communities. It is continued today in Chinese Buddhism and the related traditions in Japan and elsewhere; the Buddhist order of nuns is particularly strong in Korea. Today, in Theravada societies, Buddhist women still give themselves totally as renunciants; yet because they are not ordained as bhikkhunis, they have low status and little support. In Thailand, for example, some women serve as Mae Jis, taking the Eight Precepts and serving society in many ways, though they are only given the status of lay disciples. Sometimes in their poverty they are forced to beg, treated with contempt by society—while the ordained monks doing the discipline of receiving food in their bowls are treated with high respect. As we converse with Buddhists on this issue, it behooves Christians, first of all, to recognize that

treatment of women in Christian tradition has been no less oppressive than treatment of women in Buddhist tradition. And then, it is high time for Christians and Buddhists together to work on this problem at all different levels, sharing and working to fulfill the vision of each tradition of a community in which women and men are equal in spiritual worth and, consequently, equal in value in family, labor force, education, and all the other areas of our life in human communities.

In these situations of working together on common concerns and issues, it is important that the dialogue be completely open and honest, without ulterior motive, without condescension. In a relationship of trust and honesty, Christians and Buddhists can share not only their spiritual and moral strengths but also their weaknesses and failures. Social problems in our common society result from failures on all sides, and a self-critical attitude as well as mutual constructive criticism are necessary parts of the dialogue.

Dialogue in spirituality

A promising practical area for sharing and conversation is spirituality and religious discipline. Experience is showing that Christians can share and learn from and with Buddhists in this realm of spirituality, learning also in the process more respect and appreciation for the Buddhist tradition and those who practice it. In Japan, for example, for a long time there have been Japanese Christians who have practiced meditation under Buddhist masters. And in recent years there have been numerous exchanges and retreats in which monks and nuns and others from both Buddhism and Christianity have shared their spiritual practices. Some on the Buddhist side have taken over Christian practices of Sunday sermons and study. Of course, ill will and mistrust can be created when outsiders presumptuously coopt one's deep spiritual practices without understanding and respect, a complaint sometimes expressed by Native Americans and other indigenous peoples. But experience shows that Christian-Buddhist sharing in spirituality generally fosters a higher level of respect and trust between the groups.

Dialogue in theological reflection

These practical areas of dialogue cannot, of course, be divorced from the deeper convictions and resources that each brings to the common concern. Thus these kinds of dialogue—whether dialogue in daily life or dialogue in common projects or dialogue in spirituality—lead more specifically to theological reflection and conversation. If an atmosphere of trust and respect has been created, dialogue can also take place in the deeper, core area of faith and theological convictions.

Christians engaging in such theological dialogue will be aware that the Buddhist vision of the ultimate truth, the nature of the world, human nature, etc., is

very different from the Christian view. These deep differences need to be recognized clearly and even appreciated as hallmarks of these two religions. But experience has shown that such sharing, in a relationship of trust, can lead to deeper understanding on both sides. There are many benefits in such dialogue. Ignorance and false views about Buddhists are overcome; Christians can begin to look at Buddhists in a new, more respectful light. In such dialogue, Christians begin to learn the language of Buddhists, as it were, as Buddhists learn Christian language—an essential step if meaningful communication is to take place.

The authentic Christian motivation to share the gospel—in Christ called to witness—has a close relationship to such dialogue. To communicate the gospel meaningfully in the Buddhist world, Christians need to learn from Buddhists what language is meaningful—and what language is misleading and even threatening to Buddhists. The Buddhist context becomes the arena and sets the agenda for Christians to rethink and reformulate the Christian story and its meaning. It is essential, at the same time, that Christians recognize the authentic Buddhist motivation of spreading the darma; being in relationship with Buddhists means listening as well as speaking. And in listening we may not only better understand Buddhists but learn something of God's ways as well.

As an example of learning meaningful language from Buddhists, some Christians have considered the Buddhist analysis of existence. All living beings have three basic characteristics: all life is transitory (*anicca*), and it is characterized also by pain or suffering (*dukkha*) and non-self or nonsubstantiality (*anatta*). Buddhists refer to these as the three signs of being. In our relations and dialogue with our Buddhist neighbors, these perceptions about existence can help to shape our thought and language, as did other concepts and languages in the early church. "With what boldness did persons like John and Paul press into the service of the gospel the terminology of Greek philosophy, the symbols of the mystery religions, and the structures of thought of the Gnostics." (East Asia Christian Conference, Bangkok Assembly, 1964) The Buddhist understanding of the three signs of being may perhaps provide some context for expressing how our Lord's strength is made known in weakness. For example, the late Lynn de Silva of Sri Lanka suggested that the self-emptying act (*kenosis*) of Christ can be deeply meaningful to those who emphasize *anatta*, non-self. Our desire to assert our ego needs to be examined in the light of our Lord's action who himself was the fullness of God but hung on the cross as *anatta*. The cross is Christ's embodiment of the depth of suffering, *dukkha*. Christ the eternal entered time and became the one characterized by *anicca*, impermanence. The Christological hymn of Philippians 2 can thus be a meaningful sharing of the message and ministry of Christ with Buddhists, as Christians struggle to communicate in new terms and concepts, realizing that this involves self-emptying and giving up some of our familiar, comfortable ways of thinking and communicating.

Being in conversation with Buddhists not only opens up better understanding and communication with Buddhists, it also helps Christians to do some reflecting

on their own theology and practice. While Buddhist ideas may seem very distant from Christian beliefs, we are learning from experience that Buddhists bring many challenges to Christian theology, which can lead to new insights for Christians. For example, the Buddhist tendency to relativize all language and concepts can challenge Christians to take another look at their own basic theological concepts, being reminded that these are after all human constructs designed to express that which is beyond human conceptual capacity—the reality of God and of God's ways. Traditional methods of dialogues with Buddhists based on doctrinal models have not led to much deepened understanding (or increased self-understanding) on either side. Have Christians been willing to try out new and different ways of thinking? Our conversations with Buddhists have suggested that Christians might well explore what kinds of insights can come if we really listen to Buddhists in trusting, sharing conversations and common work.

As many have suggested, religious themes often can be seen in polarities rather than exclusive opposites. While the perspective in one religion may give priority to one pole, the other pole is also present though perhaps submerged in tradition. As we have explored Christian theological views in the light of Buddhist experience, we have found that some Buddhist themes and perspectives actually have a certain resonance in the Christian tradition—helping Christians to retrieve their own tradition and thus deepen their theological understanding. Thus when we Christians dialogue with Buddhists, there also takes place an inner dialogue within us, as we recognize memories and insights long forgotten or neglected.

Buddhism, for example, is a religion that puts much stress on ***seeing***—awakening from delusion, seeing reality directly. The Buddhist search for insight, enlightenment, understanding, and mental clarity is a result of seeing and a search for deepened vision. Christianity, on the other hand, strongly emphasizes *hearing*—God speaks and humankind responds with attentiveness and obedience. The prophet says, "Thus says the Lord," and the faithful hear God's word and obey. As we talk and share with Buddhists, however, we are led to recover a significant "seeing" element in Christian tradition, from the visions of the prophets to the insight of the wisdom teachers to the enlightening activity of the Holy Spirit. At the same time, Buddhists also recognize the place of hearing; a disciple is a "hearer," and the classical sutras begin, "Thus I have heard."

In a related polarity, Buddhists put heavy stress on wisdom or knowledge (*jnana*), while Christians give centrality to love (*agape*). Yet, as Fr. Aloysius Pieris suggests in *Love Meets Wisdom: A Christian Experience of Buddhism*,[3] within the liberative knowledge of the Buddhist path there is a role for love (*karuna*) as the prelude for, and manifestation of, knowledge. In dialogue with

[3] Aloysius Pieris, *Love Meets Wisdom: A Christian Experience of Buddhism* (Maryknoll: Orbis Books, 1988).

Buddhists, Christians also begin to recover the many facets of the wisdom (*gnosis*) tradition that has been an authentic part of the Christian path but was submerged and forgotten in the wake of heresies and doctrinal battles of previous ages.

As another example, we might explore the basic understanding of the human predicament, which seems to be very differently understood by Buddhists and by Christians. According to the Christian tradition, humankind was created in the image of God (*imago Dei*) but lost that status because of the fall. The human predicament is thus described in terms of sin, guilt, and estrangement from God, with death and decay regarded as consequences of the fall. Humanity thus shares the common heritage of a broken relationship that can only be restored through divine intervention bringing atonement and forgiveness. But Buddhists see the human predicament in terms of pain and suffering due to deluded passion (desire, greed, etc.). The original enlightened status of humankind (Buddha nature) can only be restored by knowledge and spiritual discipline, leading to detachment from passions, peace of mind, and enlightenment.

While these perspectives seem very different one from the other, there are nonetheless ample opportunities for further exploration of these issues. For example, the Buddhist idea of Buddha nature (original enlightenment) may suggest some new ways of things about the Christian concept of *imago Dei*. There is in Christian theology no consensus about the degree to which the image of God is lost or destroyed. Lutheran theology inherited the Augustinian pessimism emphasizing the total depravity of humanity. The challenge from the Buddhist perspective may encourage Christians to investigate to what degree this pessimistic view was the result of polemical situations (Augustine confronting Pelagian heresy, Luther confronting Catholic emphases). Further, we note that the Pure Land sect of Mahayana Buddhism strongly holds to salvation exclusively based on the vow of Amida Buddha for all humankind—that is, redemptive work offered from outside. Finding within Buddhism both liberation by one's own effort and salvation from outside, Christians may be encouraged to explore more deeply the biblical images of the human predicament and its solution. The exclusive emphasis on sin and forgiveness narrows down the biblical scope. The Bible includes such themes as suffering, oppression, bondage, sickness, annihilation, persecution, loss, despair, loss of meaning, etc., suggesting in turn various aspects of salvation, such as healing, liberation, restored human dignity, new life, hope, understanding, and wisdom. In all of these investigations the very different Buddhist perspectives provide an ongoing challenge and stimulus for creative theological thought.

Again, challenges from Buddhists concerning the achievements of the Buddha as human might encourage Christians to explore more deeply the human nature of Christ, certainly emphasized in the Bible and confirmed at Chalcedon. The man Jesus embodied a true humanity and offered himself as the example for obedience and the way to walk and live. The essence of his humanity, expressed through incarnation, the life full of love and compassion, and crucifix-

ion, would be characterized with the keyword *kenosis*, emptying oneself, or being for others. This is not only human nature but the very nature of the life-giving God. In this way, conversation with Buddhists encourages Christians to develop more fully a "Christology from below." At the same time, Christian theologians are finding Mahayana conceptions of the cosmic dimensions of Buddha to be suggestive for new insights into the cosmic Christological emphases in the Bible.

Buddhists also offer many challenges as Christians rethink the experience of being the church within a Buddhist context. Christians believe in the Holy Spirit, through whom and in whom the Lord gathers God's people to be the "community-creating community" in a world broken up by separate histories, languages, and cultures. It is interesting that a translation of the Bible into the Buddhist setting used the Pali term *upajjahaya* to connote the Holy Spirit. In initiating a person into the sangha (the set-apart community of the disciples, that is, those who take up the discipline to practice the teachings, the dharma), traditionally the candidate must have an *upajjahaya*, the monk who functions as the guide, counselor, advocate, and teacher. The work of the Holy Spirit as "Paraclete" (the one who accompanies alongside) may take on deeper meaning for Christians as they reflect on the role of the *upajjahaya* in relation to the community. Christians recall that the life of the Buddhist sangha actually had a close parallel in the earliest Christian community whose discipline is indicated in Acts 2:44–45 and 4:32–37. This communal discipline was reportedly not observed for long among Christians, but the Buddhist sangha has continued to maintain such discipline as its requisite through all these centuries. There is no distinction between members who come from a diversity of backgrounds, socially both high and low. Greatness is not seen in terms of those who ***have*** so much, but of those who give up so much. Challenged by the reality of the sangha, Christians need to see with renewed vision that the church which the Holy Spirit leads and guides is the community of Christ's ***disciples*** entrusted with the ministry of reconciliation. The world, standing amid the ruins of broken homes, hopes, ideals, and social structures, must see fellowship in which there is no brokenness.

It may be unsettling to explore new ways of thinking about traditional doctrines and new ways of being the church in the world. But we believe that there is nothing outside God's rule, for all things cohere in God. We cannot claim in our traditional formulations to exhaust the implications of these affirmations and our understanding of the nature of Christ in whom God will sum up all things. We need the courage to follow where the Holy Spirit leads us, even beyond the truth-boundaries we have presently set for ourselves. As an Asian Christian statement put it, we need to discern the work of the Holy Spirit in the hearts and minds of people, seeking to bring them as persons and communities into Christ's obedience.

> This purpose and power of God needs to be discerned as well within as outside the church. […]This is why Christians need to listen and relate to those outside the churches

as they speak about life, its meaning and its possibilities, so that out of such listening may come a greater understanding of the faith itself. To confess Christ is to point to Him wherever He is at work and to follow Him in whatever He is doing.[4]

The Need for On-going Exploration and Some Recommendations

We feel strongly that the churches need to continue in various ways the exploration into theological perspectives on Buddhism. Buddhists are the major population in many areas of Asia, and increasingly they are becoming an important presence in the Western world. Given the rapid globalization and the continued crises in our world situation, the need for dialogue with Buddhists and with peoples of the other religious communities will become even more crucial in the future. Most importantly, that is God's way: God entered into another world—our world—in the incarnation, and so our incarnational action in sharing in God's presence in all cultures and religions is imperative.

(1) We recommend that this work on theological perspectives on Buddhism be continued at numerous levels. It is first of all the responsibility of the member churches at the local and regional levels to see to the on-going work of this project. There may be workshops, training sessions, local joint projects with Buddhists, occasions for sharing spirituality, and much more depending on the needs and resources in each local church.

(2) We strongly recommend that, as much as possible, all planning discussions, programs, study groups, workshops, etc., include the full participation of some Buddhist people as well as Christian people who are well acquainted in Buddhism. We have found that the active presence of Buddhists throughout our study has greatly enhanced our understanding of Buddhist-Christian relations.

(3) We encourage churches at the local and regional levels to address themselves to pastoral concerns in Christian-Buddhist relationships, such as funerals, ancestor worship, intermarriage, participation in Buddhist festivals, folk beliefs, etc. At the same time, we encourage pastoral concerns to be turned also to Buddhist people who struggle with the same sorts of tensions with respect to Christian practices.

(4) We recommend that theological institutions place emphasis on understanding Buddhist history, tradition, practice, and peoples. As much as pos-

[4] East Asia Christian Conference, *Confessing the Faith in Asia Today* (Hong Kong, 1966).

sible, such study should include practical involvement with Buddhists and Buddhist culture.

(5) We recommend that churches on the local and regional levels encourage and provide scholarships or assign pastors, scholars, and students to study Buddhism in Buddhist institutions and contexts, to learn relations with Buddhists from the inside and to provide guidance to Christians in this area. Strong support for this recommendation comes from the case of Mahidol University in Thailand sending a Buddhist woman to take her Th.D. from Lutheran School of Theology at Chicago (LSTC). Five years of study at LSTC gave her a deep understanding of Christianity; her dissertation on Kamma *and Grace* provides a model of Buddhist-Christian theological dialogue; and her return to teach as a Buddhist at Mahidol University means she will be influencing Thai students and faculty into a sensitive understanding of Buddhism in relation to Christianity. Careful use of this model in selected programs for Christians studying in Buddhist institutions will be very beneficial for guiding Christians in this area.

(6) We recommend that the churches assign people to enhance the study of Christian spirituality by sending them to study under Buddhist masters. The area of spirituality is a very important and promising one, and the church needs guidance from persons who have received training from Buddhist masters.

(7) We recommend that the LWF, through its member churches, assign the project of constructing an annotated bibliography (or bibliographies) of materials helpful for Buddhist-Christian relations. This bibliography might be constructed on different levels and for different regions and languages.

(8) We recommend that the churches assign several Lutheran theologians to study with Buddhist scholars and explore the dialogue with particular attention to characteristic Lutheran theological themes and resources. Since some Lutheran perspectives (e.g., the *simul* categories, theology of the cross, etc.) seem to have a certain resonance with some Buddhist perspectives, such work may be a contribution Lutherans could make to the ecumenical work in Buddhist-Christian understanding.

(9) We recommend that, as much as possible, work carried on by the LWF and its member churches in the area of Buddhist-Christian relations be related to the broader Christian ecumenical context.

(10) We recommend that the member churches at regional and local levels devote focused attention to exploring how to communicate the gospel meaningfully

and loving in the Buddhist context in the various areas. This must develop first of all on the local level: Christians engaged in the daily sufferings and joys together with local Buddhists. It would involve new actions such as having a monk come to speak with the congregation, visiting the local temple, etc.

(11) We recommend the publication of an occasional newsletter to keep the member churches informed of on-going activities, seminars, conferences, study opportunities, etc., pertaining to Buddhist-Christian relations.

(12) We recommend that the LWF publish selected material from the papers written by the study groups and make these available as resources to the churches.

The Lutheran World Federation
150, rte de Ferney
CH-1211 Geneva 2
Switzerland

ISSN No. 1025-2290
ISBN No. 3-906706-90-7