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EDITORIAL: CHRISTIAN MISSION TO BUDDHISTS

“Yet, I will leave 7,000 in Israel, all the knees that have not bowed to Baal and every mouth that has not kissed him.” (1 Kings 19:18).

At the last International Society for Frontier Missions in Kansas City, I was invited by Dr. Hans Weerstra, the editor of *IJFM*, to be the theme editor for a special issue focusing totally on mission to Buddhists. It is my understanding that the *IJFM* was established in 1984 to promote the goal: “A Church For Every People By the Year 2000.”

Within the “Every People” there are estimates of between 500-1000 Buddhist people groups that are unreached. The wide variance of these statistics and the immensity of the task has prompted discussions for the past couple of years between several colleagues and me over the need for a consultation on Christian Mission to Buddhists. A series of questions emerged which we sensed, when answered, would serve to encourage and educate missionaries working among Buddhists. Some of these missionaries are among the writers in this special issue who have been asked to address the following three questions.

- 1) Where has the mission movement failed to penetrate the Buddhist World, and why?
- 2) Where has it succeeded, and why?
- 3) Strategies for change.

The writers have answered these questions out of a variety of backgrounds. For example, be encouraged by the historical background provided by Pastor Kung, saved under Karl Ludvig Reichelt’s ministry, the Norwegian Christian Mission to Buddhists, where over 1,800 Buddhist monks came to know Christ during the period of 1920-1950. Be stimulated by the in-depth historical survey of Dr. Covell of the Gospel efforts among Buddhists in China. Be challenged as

you read about Dr. Hesselgrave’s Buddhist neighbors in Japan who advertise: “The Training Center for Buddhist Missionaries to North America.” Be humbled when you read Paul Wagner’s article on the necessity of prayer in light of the intensity of mission among Buddhist peoples. These are just a few of the gems uncovered in the next pages.

My own personal experience stems out of fourteen years training as a Nichiren Shoshu Buddhist. As a graduate of the Nichiren Shoshu Study Department and a senior leader within the organization, I zealously pursued the goals of world peace through the propagation of Buddhism. I personally converted over 54 people to the Buddhist faith and believed wholeheartedly in the religion. In 1981, after an accident in Japan I began to have serious doubts about my faith in Buddhism. In July 1984, because of the loving witness of several devout Christian businessmen, the prayers of a Christian architect named Lauri Mallord and the gospel presentation of a Nazarene pastor named Clarence Crites, God called me out of darkness into the saving knowledge and light of Jesus Christ.

In 1987, a course called “Perspectives on The World Christian Movement” opened my eyes to the Church’s incredible heritage of missionary endeavor. During the course, I was inspired to probe and inquire about which organizations were working among Buddhist peoples, like the Zwemer Institute with Muslim people groups. Much to my surprise, I couldn’t find one organization devoted solely to this task.

Consequently, we were encouraged to establish Sonrise Center for Buddhist Studies in August 1988 as an infrastructure faith mission as our obedient response to Matthew 28:19-20. We

decided to focus upon research and training in order to help equip Christians to evangelize and disciple Buddhist peoples.

We believe that the vision of seeing, “A Church planted and a people disciplined among every remaining unreached Buddhist people group” is in accord with the expressed will of our Lord Jesus Christ. A vision that is not ours alone, but one shared by Christians across the globe in a wide range of mission agencies and denominations.

My hope for this issue of the Journal is that those of you who are called in obedience to this task will continue to discuss this challenge and that a fellowship will be started to further encourage your labors throughout the Lord’s vineyard.

*James C. Stephens
Theme Editor
July 1993
Pasadena, California, USA*

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TAKING THE HIGH PLACES FOR GOD

The spiritual need of Buddhists presents a tremendous challenge to Christian workers. The author suggests a spiritual strategy for God's plan to be fully realized among Buddhist people groups.

BY PAUL WAGNER

All over the world Buddhist thought and practice, with its special appeal to the human mind, is highly respected. Even in many Christian circles we find fascination for this intriguing philosophy. Curiosity combined with a search for inner peace drives countless people to the remotest places. There they hope to get a glimpse of tranquillity which is believed to emanate from sages and devotees. Buddhist monks and laymen alike claim to have access to experiences of supernatural depths and heights which are unknown to the average individual.

In trying to reach the Buddhist world with the gospel there are tremendous odds which have to be faced and overcome and I think we would do well to make this an urgent priority.

Buddhism is not simply a religion of majority groups of people in the so called Buddhist countries. It is interesting to note that Buddhist sanctuaries exist in remote quiet places off the beaten tracks of modern society in many countries. As the very nature of Buddhism encourages isolation from the world it is not surprising to find pockets of Buddhist societies in very secluded places. Most of them are little-known tribal groups which have embraced Buddhism and since then have strongly resisted any outside influences towards change. To this day many are therefore still unreached by the gospel. The barriers surrounding such a people are not only geographic and religious; there are linguistic, cultural, ethnic, sociological, and worldview differences as well. However, these hindrances to the gospel can only be overcome once they are thoroughly understood by those who are venturing to reach these unreached groups.

Concerning Buddhist societies, it must be taken into account that these people have been exposed to Buddhist customs and rituals for centuries. Their way of thinking is shaped by the teachings of Buddha which have been translated and then taught, memorized, and chanted day and night. Life as a whole is conditioned by these tenants. Distinctive cognitive styles have been developed which cause each upcoming generation to be saturated with the same principles and values. Significantly, and this must be understood, these principles/values are diametrically opposed to the gospel and differ greatly from other religious and philosophical systems. As a result of the way religion is handled in such a society, Buddhist thought is firmly rooted in the lives of its adherents and it becomes extremely difficult to reach them with the good news of Jesus Christ.

Theravada Buddhism is prevalent throughout Southeast Asia. The core of this religious endeavor is self-perfection through good works and meditation. To a Buddhist believer, the Christian teaching of receiving salvation by grace through faith appears simplistic and degrading. The goal of Buddhism is to reach nirvana, a word for ultimate annihilation and non-existence. This is sometimes wrongly compared with the biblical concept of heaven which means eternal life and ultimate fulfillment without the extinction of personality. Yet the Buddhist, whose worldview includes rebirth as a natural phenomenon and whose goal is to escape this life cycle, thinks of eternal life as a curse. Buddhism also teaches detachment from any human feelings, including love. Attachment is seen as the main reason for keeping mankind in this troubled

world.

The gospel in turn teaches self-denial as an expression of love which found its greatest example in the substitutional death of Christ. Consequently, the imitation of Christ's love is seen as the solution to human problems. Buddhism offers salvation through self-perfection and the way to reach this goal is withdrawal. Christianity propagates salvation through Jesus Christ and teaches restoration of broken relationships: first with God and then also with our fellowmen. In Buddhism, spirits and demonic powers are appeased; in Scripture they are resisted and cast out.

Despite these differences, Christian influence has already penetrated into the Buddhist world during the first centuries of the Common Era. Characteristically, the result was not a clear breaking away from Buddhism and turning to Christ, but a process of absorbing some biblical ideas into the concepts of Buddhism so that in some points Buddhist teaching has taken on a more Christian interpretation. Especially in areas where Buddhism seemed to have little to offer, Christian elements have been incorporated. Thus, Buddha also sacrificed himself by continuing to live on this earth in order to teach others the way to enlightenment. Although Buddha never claimed to be God, the human need for an object of worship is so strong that for many simple believers Buddha takes the place of a supreme being and nirvana is viewed as similar to the biblical heaven. To top it off, many aspects of ethical teaching in Buddhism seem to coincide with biblical teaching; this prompts even

serious people, from both the Buddhist and the Christian side, to assume that these religions are in essence the same

Preparation and Training

Due to the fact that in Buddhism there are some surface similarities with Christianity, comparative religion experts have done little to point out the crucial differences. Some of the hurdles in trying to reach Buddhists with the gospel have correctly been recognized by evangelical scholars and leaders of mission endeavours. However, there are many factors which have been overlooked or ignored. The orientation and preparation programs for missionaries to Buddhist countries have been lacking in this respect. Even today when much knowledge on how to get to know a different culture is available, the missionaries seldom have the time or resources to be able to thoroughly get acquainted with the situation and people they want to reach.

Mission programs are mostly measured by and evaluated in terms of activity. It is still taken for granted that the same activities which proved successful in one culture will bring forth similar results in another. And the pressure on missionaries to show results to their home churches and mission boards is as great today as it has ever been. There are mission boards who withdraw workers from Buddhist people groups because of lack of desired results. The missionaries are then relocated in animistic tribes because those people are easier to reach.

In order to work among Buddhists it is not enough to be instructed in how to live a simple lifestyle (which is more often than not interpreted as being backward or primitive). In most cases the typical boot camp training for learning survival techniques in jungle areas does not equip a person to reach Buddhist societies as the lifestyle of such a group does not coincide with what was taught. It would be better to follow those secular ethnologists who have gone to some Buddhist places before missionaries ever did, and who have laid open the background of the people and described their rituals and practices in detail. Secular ethnologists, however, are not aware of

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the spiritual implications of the strange mixture of natural and supernatural phenomena. They themselves get easily entangled and become victims of the world of the occult.

The missionary on the other hand may be aware of the fact that there are spiritual powers at work, but he/she is too often ill equipped to battle them. With his background of good Western logic, which he may have acquired at distinguished Christian schools, much of what he experiences in Buddhist societies leaves him puzzled because it defies logical explanations. On the other hand, the very fact that he is battling spiritual forces may instill in him an undue fear of getting involved in such practices himself. It therefore causes him to turn a blind eye to everything which suggests the involvement of supernatural powers. That of course means that he never will be able to really understand the people he is supposed to reach. Others recognize this pitfall and make bold attempts to study the sources of Buddhist thought and their origins without the necessary precautions. It has happened quite frequently that such eagerness gave way to fascination which then backfired and threw the student into utter emotional and psychological distress. But only few realize that they will not succeed in breaking into the vestiges of Buddhist thought as long as their own lives have not been cleansed from sins of similar occult origin.

A common mistake among Christians is that they think that certain occult practices they had done for fun need not be repented of. This assumption leaves every missionary vulnerable. His or her state can be compared to wearing a protective armor which has many holes. As missionaries, we grossly underestimate our enemy if we think he will leave us alone and unchallenged once we venture out into the spiritual battle unprepared.

Last Frontiers in Buddhist Mission

As has been mentioned before, the Buddhist tribal groups are the hardest to penetrate and attempts to reach them with the gospel have yielded little results so far. For instance, all Palaungic peoples groups which live in Burma, China, and Thailand, are still unreached. Their total

population is estimated at close to one million people. Others are members of the Mon Khmer peoples groups like the Mon, So, and Kui people. The gospel has been made known to them but the results are minimal. The Shan and Pao of Burma and Thailand also represent people groups who have hardly responded to the gospel.

There are also ethnic groups who are partly animistic and partly Buddhist. The names of these peoples may appear in statistics as "reached," but in fact, only the animistic societies have been contacted, whereas the Buddhist majorities of the same people groups are still unreached and resist the gospel. This is true for the Lawa in Northern Thailand, for example, and also for the Pwo Karen of Thailand and Burma. Even among the Sgaw Karen of Thailand, who are known to have a Christian majority, it has been observed that the number of Buddhists is increasing much faster than the number of Christians. And though there are growing churches in the animist areas, the Christians there are not equipped to reach out to their Buddhist neighbors. Recent growth among Christians in such areas may more often than not be attributed to the physical growth of Christian families rather than to be the fruit of outreach and evangelism.

Besides these tribal groups there are the neglected majorities of Theravada Buddhism in countries like Myanmar (formerly Burma), Laos, and Thailand. They can look back on a long history in missions, yet their churches are too weak or culturally alienated from the rest of their society. The impact they have in their natural surroundings is very minimal indeed. And all of this happens despite the fact that much of today's mission endeavor is geared towards these peoples as well as to the fast-growing urban societies, whose members are outwardly caught up in a modern world, but inwardly still bound to their old values of a rural past which they forsook only very recently.

A Spiritual Strategy

Looking at statistics and facing the great spiritual needs of Buddhist societies and people groups, the task of reaching them is a tremendous challenge to Chris-

tians in any country. In spite of what has been said before about cultural adjustment and getting to know the peoples to be reached, I am convinced that the answer to the problems involved in reaching the Buddhists in our generation is of a spiritual nature. In order to cope with this formidable task we need vision, perspective, preparation in prayer, dedication to people, perseverance, coordination, and cooperation.

Vision: In Revelation 1 and 7:9 we can see Christ, the supreme Lord, being praised by a great multitude of people from every tribe and nation. This gives us the assurance that all the unreached Buddhist peoples groups will be reached with the gospel before Christ returns. We who are now fighting the many odds to make the gospel heard and understood by Buddhists will at that time have overcome all hindrances and difficulties.

We will be joined by those many people who have not yet heard the good news, but who are still to hear it and receive Christ's salvation. Together we will raise our voices in praising our Savior. It is necessary to picture all the Buddhist peoples before the Throne of God until we are filled with the firm conviction that God will move step by step until this vision becomes reality. Being absorbed by these spiritual realities which are set before us in Scripture will prevent us from becoming casualties of the daily struggles we are facing.

Perspective:

There have been faithful missionaries who have made a lasting impact on some Buddhist peoples groups. Adoniram Judson was a pioneer among them. As a diligent student of the language and culture of the Myanmar Buddhists he spent much time with individuals. The thorough knowledge of his target culture made him an authority in the field. He is still highly respected today. But the true key to his accomplishments was prayer. He was a prayer warrior in the real sense. Taking his cue from Psalm 119:164 he prayed seven times during the course of one day. Even though it was a very slow process in the beginning to win Myanmar Buddhists to Christ there has been a steady increase of believers.

The physical descendants of those first Christians refused to embrace liberalism and later on overcame dead orthodoxy. Today they are among the pioneers who reach out to spread the gospel in the whole country by every means possible. Judson endured imprisonment and suffered the loss of family members without giving up on the great task ahead of him. He compiled a dictionary, translated the Bible, and wrote many tracts which explained the gospel to the Buddhist mindset. By faith he saw that the strongholds of idolatry and witch-

I am convinced that the answer to the problems involved in reaching the Buddhists in our generation is of a spiritual nature.

craft would fall and he triumphed in the final victory of the gospel, although he saw only part of that victory during his lifetime. Because of his perspective he could begin what he hoped for: A lasting movement and ongoing outreach to the Buddhist peoples of Myanmar.

Although Myanmar is a much-troubled nation today, on the spiritual front Christians are advancing into every corner of their country. There is an increasing number of national missionaries reaching out cross culturally to the last frontiers of hidden people groups. Almost two hundred years have passed since Judson's perspective on that nation, yet it is steadily becoming more and more true.

Revivals and movements of the Holy Spirit among Buddhist peoples have been few and far between. Some spectacular reports about enormous church growth in recent years in Thailand, for instance, have been discovered to be largely due to believers from already existing churches changing to another group which happened to have more publicity at that time. Nevertheless, there have been genuine movements of God's Spirit among Christians and non Christians from Buddhist back-

grounds in China, Cambodia, Northern Thailand, and Myanmar. These breakthroughs did not have a large impact on the Buddhist societies as a whole, but the church grew through prayer and repentance, and Buddhists turned to Christ. Political persecution and deprivation of all comforts seems to be the tool God used in Cambodia to bring many thousands of believers into His kingdom in a short time. Missionaries have not always been the initiators of such movements. But in answer to many prayers, God chose different people and circumstances to bring about such awakenings.

Preparation in Prayer:

Mentioning prayer as the main reason for Buddhists turning to Christ, I do not think of prayer as a mechanical tool which will yield quick success as it is applied. An integral part of the lives of people who were totally dedicated to their God, was

prayer, which resulted in dramatic breakthroughs. These believers were ready for anything which God would ask them to do. If those who seek to reach Buddhists with the gospel in our generation pray like the veterans of spiritual warfare, they will find themselves involved in extreme spiritual conflicts. They will be deeply troubled by spiritual burdens which the Lord entrusts to them and which only the Holy Spirit can lift. Once He pleases to do so they will rest in the inner assurance that their prayer is answered and that a breakthrough is to come to the people for whom the burden was given.

It may happen that many persons simultaneously are compelled to pray and find themselves interceding at a time when the Lord wants to move among certain people group. This was the experience of believers in Myanmar some years ago. After several months of prayer the burden was lifted and a new breakthrough took place: Many Buddhists opened up to the gospel and received Christ in similar ways as described in the book of Acts. Unless Christians demonstrate a devotion to Christ and a dependence on the Holy Spirit which is greater than the Buddhists' devotion to their teaching, the followers of Buddha will not be impressed with our message.

Taking the High Places for God

In spiritual warfare it is essential to pray against the spiritual powers and principalities which dominate the people in different areas. Such authorities are normally revered by all the people of their territory and it is relatively easy to find out who they are. These powers have been overcome by Christ's victory on the cross. But only through prayer and the claiming of the victory of Jesus over their territories will they loosen their grip. As a result people will be free to hear the gospel and turn to Christ.

Such prayer is not only restricted to those missionaries or Christian workers who are laboring on the frontlines of gospel outreach. God uses His people all over the world to fight His battles through prayer. On the one hand we need to realize that the Holy Spirit works like the wind which blows wherever it pleases. That implies that we are to wait for the Holy Spirit to work among a people before there are genuine conversions and changed lives. But on the other hand we know we have a God who delights in answering our prayers. In fact He waits for us to pray!

The time of waiting for God's Spirit to move is a time of spiritual cleansing, expectancy, and a deepening assurance of our faith. It is a time of preparation for the task which lies ahead. Once the Holy Spirit starts His work He will use us as His co-workers to help people be born again and become established in their spiritual lives. Only when we as missionaries are prepared to receive such blessings and to cope with the load of personal counselling and nurturing which accompanies spiritual breakthroughs, will there be lasting fruit. Such times of waiting for God's Spirit to move is also a time of outward preparation and acquainting oneself thoroughly with the ways and thought patterns of the people. The above-mentioned awakening in Myanmar, for instance, took place at a time when a few Christian workers had taken the pains to develop a new approach in presenting the gospel to Buddhists. Work among people whom God has prepared for the gospel will then no longer need mere human effort to get things going. It will rather be a daily challenge to keep in step with what God is doing.

Dedication to Prayer: Having said all this about prayer and preparation through prayer it is obvious that we need to commit and ready ourselves to serve the spiritual needs of people. We need to be people oriented rather than task oriented. That means all we do will be measured against the needs of the people and not according to the programs we wish to see established in our target areas. We may have to discard activities or special emphases of a particular organization. Even if that strategy has been very successful elsewhere in the world it may not fit the situation or fill the need of a people at a particular point in time. We may have to part with forms of worship which are dear to us but meaningless to the people we want to reach. We may even have to deny our desire to build organizational structures—which would support us but which are inappropriate for the group we want to reach. Instead we will have to be diligent Bible students as well as alert observers of God's plans. Further we are challenged to demonstrate the same love to the people we want to serve as Jesus served mankind when He forsook heaven and took the form of a servant. In the same way as God's love transforms our hearts into loving the people He sent us to, He will give us enough sensitivity to know their real needs. This will enable us to adjust to their ways and thought patterns in order to initiate changes which are in line with God's Word but do not unduly interfere with their cultural backgrounds.

Perseverance: Many missionaries and mission agencies have stopped short somewhere in the process of penetrating a people group with the gospel. They may have been discouraged by initial minimal response; or their enthusiasm over some first results made them think that their job was done before the seed of the Word of God had a chance to take deep roots in the young believers lives. It may take many years of labor until God moves in a specific group of people and the first believers emerge. But that is only the beginning of penetrating such a group. Recent converts from a Buddhist background have to overcome many problems before they are established in their new faith. The process of changing their minds according to the truth set forth in the Scriptures will be slow and

needs much input and encouragement from more mature Christians. The daily struggle as the odd men out in a close knit family in a highly structured society is sometimes too hard for them to bear. They may experience serious setbacks. And once they realize that the claims of Christ mean a full surrender to Him as Lord over all areas of their lives they may shrink back or settle for a nominal Christian life which lacks total surrender. During all these struggles they need personal help on a day-to-day basis usually for a period of several years.

Also it presupposes that they are able to read and understand Scriptures written in their own languages. Yet in many unreached Buddhist tribes the battle to place the Bible, or even only parts of the Bible, into the hands of new believers in a form which they can readily understand may take years of additional effort. For young Christians to form structures of churches which fit their special cultural patterns and are able to reach out to others may be a task of more than one generation. Only with vision, perspective, and dedication will we be able to persevere individually and corporately until the task of penetrating each language and nation in the Buddhist world is completed. Without this we cannot be regarded as faithful servants when we have to give account of our work on Christ's return.

Coordination and Cooperation

It is obvious that the Great Commission is not the task of one person or one group. It is not sufficient an effort if one organization or Christian denomination pools all its resources to bring the gospel to the Buddhists. Only in the Body of Christ seen in its totality of all believers all over the world do we find the diversity of gifts which is needed to finish the task which was started by the great pioneers of past missions. In these last days God needs workers who can look beyond their organizational boundaries. They need to be firmly rooted in, as well as supplied and backed up by, their home churches and sending agencies. But they will also have to be able to look beyond organizational and doctrinal differences. It is a bad testimony to the unity which is meant to be in the Body of Christ when

certain groups carve out parts of the globe and claim it to be their own territory to the exclusion of others.

It is furthermore especially damaging when different groups with minor differences of creed try to establish their own brand of Christianity in places where there already is an ongoing Christian witness. One organization may be called to do a special task, but it cannot be done in seclusion or separation from the rest of the Body. In order to reach one people group with the gospel it will need the cooperation and networking of several Christian outreach groups working together, not to build their own organization, but the Body of Christ. Thus organizational structures have to be flexible and Christian workers unselfish, humble and free from the hidden ambition to seek approval or recognition for themselves. This may sound quite simple but it is a very difficult to put better knowledge into practice. Where the Holy Spirit is at work He unites those who respond

to His leading. Barriers against true cooperation will be removed and interdenominational and intercultural teams will form with all the gifts and resources available which are necessary to penetrate the Buddhist high places.

Conclusion

When those who want to work among Buddhists take the steps shown in this article there is indeed reason for rejoicing and hope that Buddhists will hear and understand the gospel soon. They will have a chance to experience true enlightenment as the Apostle Paul defined it in Ephesians 1:18. Paul understood the Asian mindset as we find it also among Buddhists today. He prayed for them that they might see with open eyes. He showed them the depth of their needs as people lost and enslaved to the prince of this world (Eph 2:1-5) and he introduced them to the fact that anyone who believes in Christ is united and

raised with Him into heavenly realms which are above all other principalities and powers (Eph 2:6). These are the same powers which until now rule the Buddhist world. Paul also prayed that these believers would be aware of and immersed in the vastness and depth of God's love which in turn enables them to fight the spiritual battles and overcome victoriously against all powers of the evil one.

By assigning ourselves to God in this way we pave the way for the consummation and fulfillment of all that God has designed for our Buddhist friends. They will be able to escape from ignorance and experience true enlightenment which only God can give. In this way the remaining heights which still stand against the Gospel will be taken, and God's plan of redemption will also be realized in the Buddhist world.

Paul Wagner, and his wife Elizabeth, are missionaries who have worked with Buddhists for the past 30 years in Southeast

KARMA AND CHRIST:

OPENING OUR EYES TO THE BUDDHIST WORLD

With an alarming number of Buddhists waiting to hear the message of the Gospel for the first time, the author draws upon his own ministry and field experience in Sri Lanka and examines challenges and keys to Buddhist evangelization.

BY TISSA WEERASINGHA

Nearly 600 million Buddhists the world over are waiting for the gospel to be communicated to them in terms they understand. If a Buddhist were to be asked, "Do you want to be born again?" he might likely reply, "Please, no! I do NOT want to be born-again. I want to reach nirvana." The Buddhist quest is for deliverance from the cycle of rebirths. If a Buddhist confuses "new birth" with "rebirth," the Christian message will be completely distorted. This is just one example. New categories must be developed for the transmission of the gospel to Buddhists in order for us to see the large-scale harvest we expect.

Our mission to the Buddhist peoples has been hampered by the fact that the Buddhist bloc has been largely neglected in contemporary missiological literature. Unfortunately, most people do not seem to realize that if we were to include mainland Chinese (most of whom may profess Buddhism in addition to Confucianism and Taoism) the Buddhist segment would be the largest unreached people bloc in the world.

The good news is that in many Buddhist lands there are reports of unprecedented response to the gospel. While Buddhist missions to the West seem to have gained fresh impetus in recent times, countries that have been traditionally Buddhist provide unprecedented opportunities as well. In countries such as Burma, Kampuchea and Thailand where gospel penetration has been slow in the past, there are signs of great openness and response to the message. In

Sri Lanka, for instance, more new churches have been planted among Buddhists than ever before.

Challenges to Evangelism

Why is it that for so long Buddhists have shown little interest in Christianity? In addition to the misconception that Christianity is just another Western religion, most Buddhists have never really been fortunate enough to have a clear, relevant explanation of the gospel. The colonial history of Christianity in some Buddhist countries has complicated the issue further and discouraged Buddhists from getting too close to anything Christian. Furthermore, Buddhism is essentially a self-salvific philosophy, and even though at the popular level, there is a belief in gods, spirits, and other supernatural beings, the concept of a Creator, Redeemer, Sustainer God is totally foreign to the Buddhist mind. This major philosophical problem has to be dealt with at every stage of the interaction with and evangelization of Buddhist peoples.

Wherever Buddhism is found, it is intimately intertwined with the local culture. This makes the lines of separation between the cultural and the religious difficult for the untrained eye to distinguish. The creation of functional substitutes becomes a complex one in this case. Without such measures conversion becomes a mere cultural and social dislocation for the Buddhist. This process is only at an elementary stage in

many Buddhist contexts. Evangelism simply limps along in such environments.

Keys to evangelism

1. *Karma Concept as a Bridge*

Karma (law of moral causation) is the point of orientation of all things in Buddhism. This central concept is related to the Buddhist scheme of liberation. The belief is that merits or demerits are accumulated in one's life according to the good or evil deeds that one does. No deity oversees this operation. It rather is the net effect of this phenomenon that determines one's karmic destiny and afterlife. In practice, merit accumulation is not something that can only be done for oneself, but can be extended to others, too, and even to the departed dead through charitable acts. This transference of merit from the living to the dead catalyzes the attainment of liberation (nirvana).

We can use this merit transference concept as a bridge to the explanation of the cross. The Lord Jesus Christ is presented as the one who accumulated infinite merits by virtue of His sinless life and meritorious death. Since He was perfect in His nature, He generated an infinite quantum of merits during His earthly life and ministry through His innumerable good deeds (John 21:25). Even though the death of Jesus on the cross generated an infinite amount of merit, what effect could it have on humanity? According to the Buddhist merit transference (pattidana) concept,

Karma and Christ

living beings are believed to have the ability to transfer merit to deceased persons on the basis of charitable deeds. If human beings who are laden with evil and are also unenlightened are believed to be capable of transferring merit, it is not incomprehensible at all that the Lord Jesus Christ would be able to transfer His merit to others. In fact the argument holds that when it comes to the transference of merit, it may only be possible for a perfect being who has no sin within himself to really do so. What happened on the cross was a unique merit transference.* The use of this bridge has resulted in many Buddhists coming to Christianity in our church planting ministry in Sri Lanka.

2. Steps in the Conversion Process

We have observed that conversion takes place in stages among most Buddhists. An analysis of these stages may help us in our personal ministry to them. I present these stages merely as a guide which may or may not fit into other contexts.

A. Turning From Idols: The initial step in the conversion of Buddhists is a cessation of idol worship and spirit veneration. Interestingly, in Paul's letters to the churches in Corinth and Thessalonica, he mentions idol worship as the primary issue in their turning to God (See I Thes. 2:9, I Cor. 10:21 RSV). The cessation of idol worship is a sign that there is a realization of the powerlessness of "gods" against the supremacy of Christ. But, this is only the initial stage of conversion.

B. Moral Regeneration: In Buddhism, there is no concept of forgiveness. This recognition and the receiving of the forgiving grace of Christ is the next stage in the conversion process. Fate and fear

have pushed into the background any feeling of guilt and moral responsibility. But when the Buddhist sits under the teaching of the Word of God and realizes that God is a Personal Being to whom all are morally accountable, there comes a realization of the need for forgiveness. Under ongoing exposure to the Christian scriptures and the wooing of the Holy Spirit, the Buddhist becomes apprehended by the love of God, and seeks the forgiveness of sins. In ministry to Buddhists, we have observed that it is not possible to get them to make instant "decisions." Such "decisions" often mean nothing to them because at the initial stages they have no comprehension of the real implications of the gospel.

What we need to do

In order to enhance current efforts of evangelism among Buddhist peoples the following main steps should be taken.

1. An International Conference on Buddhist Evangelism

It is time for an international conference on Buddhist evangelism to be summoned so that those engaged in missions to Buddhists can sharpen their focus and exchange information, methods, and models. (Inasmuch as a conference on Islamic evangelism served to heighten awareness and concern for Muslim evangelism, conferences on Buddhist evangelism will surface this hitherto concealed segment in the eyes of the larger Christian community.)

2. Literature for the Buddhist World

At the present time there is a great scarcity of literature on the evangelism and nurture of Buddhists. Major Christian publishers who up to now have

shown no interest whatever in the Buddhist world should be wooed to enter this field. Publications at all levels—evangelistic, theological, apologetic, and missiological—are needed.

3. Concentrated Prayer Focus

One can never over-emphasize the need for a massive prayer focus on the Buddhist world. Even in this area I must mention that the AD 2000 Movement's 10/40 Window minimizes the focus on the Buddhist world. This could nicely be corrected by expanding it to the E/40 Window (E for Equator). The occultic, animist, and spiritist forces prevalent in Popular Buddhism make the prayer focus even more critical. We cannot afford to any longer ignore the cry of the Buddhist peoples of the world. Missionary Buddhism and militant Buddhism, a contemporary growing trend, calls for the harnessing of the worldwide resources available in the body of Christ for this great enterprise. Let us not fail to fulfill the Great Commission to the Buddhist world at this hour.

Endnote:

* I have explained this in greater detail in my book *The Cross and the Bo-Tree*, (Communicating the Gospel to Buddhists), published in 1989 by Asia Theological Association, P.O. Box 1477, Taichung, Taiwan, R.O.C. 40099.

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LOOKING AT BUDDHIST AMERICA: A Key to World Evangelization

*“...he who hears the sound of the trumpet and does not take warning,
and a sword comes and takes him away, his blood will be
on his own head.”—Ezekiel 33:4*

BY JAMES C. STEPHENS

URBANA. Prior to the 1990 Urbana student missions conference our staff at Sonrise Center for Buddhist Studies (SCBS) received the InterVarsity brochure entitled: “Jesus Christ Hope of the World.” We excitedly read through it and noticed that they mentioned that He was the hope of the Hindus, the Moslems, the Tribals, and the Chinese, but alas there was no mention that He was the hope of the Buddhists. Our hearts sank. We then wrote a plea to InterVarsity entitled It’s hard to ignore 300 million people, or is it? To their credit they rectified the situation by having one exhibit that would focus on the Buddhist world. Yet throughout the Urbana movement there has been a conspicuous absence of mentioning the need of the Gospel among Buddhist peoples.

Why does the Western missionary effort towards Buddhists continue to find itself in the same position? I don’t think it is any different than the story I heard about a young Swiss watchmaker who invented the digital watch. Prior to his invention, the Swiss controlled about 85% of the watchmaking industry and made 90% of the profit, and knew how to make watches. When they saw the new discovery, they were blind to its potential and decided to shelve the idea.

The inventor, somewhat discouraged, still saw the immense possibilities of his new idea, so he decided to take it to an international watchmaker’s trade show. Texas Instruments and a Japanese company saw it and the rest is history. The Swiss watchmaking industry has never been the same. You can imagine that the loss of over 50,000 jobs was devastating for the small country of

Switzerland.

This insider’s viewpoint illustrates a very important concept called a paradigm shift. For years, something may be done a certain way that brings success and so almost everyone superstitiously follows that pattern. Then someone comes along and says, “Watches don’t have to run with gears.” The idea doesn’t fit the traditional pattern and people who have much invested in the old system don’t want to change or can’t see the benefit that would come with change. Western missionary efforts concentrated on Buddhist peoples is finding itself in a similar position.

Times of great change demand dynamic thinking and spawn new mission structures. Dr. Gordon Lewis, formerly a Professor at Denver Seminary, warned in a 1988 document, “If we wait until 51% of our citizens are sold on a cosmic humanism, it may be too late...If the cultural shift to Hindu [and Buddhist] beliefs continues in America at the present rate, in another twenty years we may have lost a major base for missions to other lands. Hence, an ounce of prevention in America now may be worth a ton of cures later.” So in response to this challenge, Denver Seminary trained two of the first missionaries to the New Age. They now work in the United States. The questions remain: Can we see around the corner without being blinded by our preconceived ideas of what mission will look like? How will we learn?

From the Outside, Looking in

Although America has become pluralistic in its religious makeup, most Americans have little understanding of systems of thought outside their own religious

circles. The local pastor is hard pressed to find the time on a typical Sunday to adequately address this rapidly changing religious paradigm. In this religious climate it is virtually impossible for the average clergy, let alone the laymen to respond to every idea and competing worldview. However, without proper teaching that helps us wrestle with these issues from a Biblical perspective, our thinking will naturally become more ethnocentric and insulate us from the rest of society. Without understanding, ethnic tension and conflict are inevitable. Therefore it is imperative for us to take the initiative to ask our neighbors where they are from and to study and understand how they think.

It is also important for us to gain insight from a historical perspective to see how we arrived in our present predicament. Unfortunately, to paraphrase Bill Moyers, a popular commentator, “Americans know much about what happened in the past twenty-four hours, little of what happened in the last twenty-four years and almost nothing that happened in the last century.” This is a severe handicap for the average Christian in the church, but it is doubly true for those who desire to work among Buddhists.

Arnold Toynbee, the famous English historian, expressed his view of the Buddhist world from outside the normal Christian parameters when he wrote, “When the history of our time is written a thousand years hence, it will stress not so much the war in Vietnam, the conflict of communism and capitalism or racial strife, but rather the interpenetration of Christianity and Buddhism.” Already his words have proven to be prophetic in the case of Vietnam and the former Soviet Union. What is it that he saw? Missiolo-

gists should already be learning many lessons from the breakup in the CIS (Commonwealth of Independent States) and preparing in faith for the great work the Lord of the harvest will reap in Asia.

What have others seen in the Buddhist-Christian interface? Notto Thelle, a Norwegian who is involved with the Christian-Buddhist dialogue in Japan, was talking with a Buddhist friend who expressed the challenge that Buddhism will have on the Christian faith when he said: "Christianity has been through many ordeals. It has endured the fire of persecution, and has through 2,000 years been exposed to various cultures and philosophies. It has been tried by the fire of science, philosophy, skepticism, and antireligious thought, and has somehow managed to get through. However, it has not yet been through the fire of Mahayana Buddhism. When that happens I have no doubt that Christianity will enter a melting pot in which it will be thoroughly transformed by Buddhism" (1987). What a bold statement! However, it is not uncommon to run into this type of thinking when we are talking to intellectual Buddhists, if we make it outside of our own limited spheres of influence. In November 1988, we visited Hacienda Heights, California, where 500 leaders from the World Federation of Buddhists (WFB) were gathered together for the public opening of Hsi Lai ("Coming to the West") Temple, the largest Buddhist structure in the Western Hemisphere. Built by The International Buddhist Progress Society, it covers over 102,000 square feet and costs in excess of \$25 million. At the opening ceremony the Buddhists boldly proclaimed, "The General Conference of the WFB held in the United States for the first time has the geographical significance of connecting the east and the west. It is a small leap geographically, but a great leap in human history." America has become a mission field for Buddhists.

Why is the West Turning to the East?

Dr. Os Guinness (1973) speaks of this danger in his book *Dust of Death*, and points out that modern Christianity is weak at three vital points. The first is its

"compromised, deficient understanding of revelation. Without biblical historicity and veracity behind the Word of God, theology can only grow closer to Hinduism." The challenge of pluralism only magnifies the need for seminaries and schools that teach the Word in the modern context and which also train those people who are called to secular fields that are in positions of daily contact with the world system.

How well are we doing as a church in teaching proper doctrine? You may be as shocked as I was when I read Dr. Norman Geisler and J. Yutaka Amano's book *The Reincarnation Sensation* (1987) which pointed out that, "according to the 1982 Gallup poll, 23 percent of Americans, that is one in every four, believes in reincarnation...increasing to 30 percent among college-age persons...more astonishing is the fact that 21 percent of the Protestant population and 25 percent of professing Catholics believe in reincarnation."

A more recent Barna Research Group survey points out that sixty-four percent of Americans agree that "Christians, Jews, Muslims, Buddhists, and others all pray to the same God, even though they use different names for that God." Tragically, forty-six percent of evangelicals agreed with that statement.

Guinness's second point is that, "the modern Christian is drastically weak in an unmediated, personal, experiential knowledge of God. Often what passes for religious experience is a communal emotion felt in church services, in meetings, in singing or contrived fellowship. Few Christians would know God on their own." The church needs faithful men of integrity who are accountable, committed to servant leadership, who fear God and are willing to deny themselves. It appears we know the language of faith, but somehow there is a short circuit between the brain, the heart and action.

Third, "The modern church is often pathetically feeble in the expression of its focal principal of community. It has become the local social club, preaching shop or minister-dominated group. With these weaknesses, modern Christianity cannot hope to understand why people have turned to the East, let alone stand

against the trend and offer an alternative." People are desperately searching for a home in an increasingly transient society. The church must reorganize to meet the legitimate socio-religious needs of man or see cell-based groups such as the Japanese Buddhist sect the Soka-gakkai International (SGI) continue to erode the spiritual base of our society.

Guinness keenly warned us in 1973, "The subtlety of Eastern religion is that it enters like an odorless poison gas, seeping under the door, through the keyhole, through the open window, so that the man in the room is overcome without his ever realizing there was any danger at all." In light of this where does this put us today on the "Lewis scale of 51%?"

Brooks Alexander wrote in the *Spiritual Counterfeits Journal* (Winter issue, 1984), "The church has opted for the easy agenda of 'the American Dream' rather than the challenges of reflecting the Kingdom of God...It will do very little good for the church to confront the cults [and world religions] unless we simultaneously confront our own participation in the conditions which have produced them."

Knowing the Facts

"If our generation's heart is to be deeply stirred," said John R. Mott some four generations ago, "They must first know the facts." Lit-sen Chang, a former Zen Buddhist reformer and professor from China, now a Christian and emeritus at Gordon-Conwell Theological Seminary, wrote in his book *Strategy of Missions in the Orient*:

"We can no longer remain in an ivory tower or indulge ourselves in irresponsible isolationism or denominationalism. The military strategist must see the war as a whole in the light of ultimate victory. But, so often our preoccupation with local problems has tended to limit our vision to an isolated battle; to make us narrow minded; to blur our vision of the great cosmic struggle between Christ and the forces of evil. We must now deepen our insight and broaden our vision so that we can be delivered from the traditional 'Atlanto-Centric' attachment and courageously move out to face our new front" (1968).

To see our own situation clearly we must first take the time to get a bird's eye view of the Buddhist world. Professor Oscar M. Buck in *Christianity Tested* said in 1934, "The future of the Christian religion is being determined in Asia. The continent of Asia with 55% of the total population of the world still lies unconvinced across the path of Christianity." In Asia there are approximately 565 million Buddhists today located in 22 countries. Our working list of Buddhist people groups numbers around 500, while other estimates range up to 1000 individual unreached people groups with a population of 300 million unreached Buddhist people.

Recently-released official statistics on religious affiliation in China show that 100 million Chinese are Buddhist. Some estimates range all the way up to 300 million who practice Folk Buddhism. These figures are not static, but very dynamic. For example, Mongolia under Communist rule was only allowed to operate one officially-run Tibetan Buddhist lamasery. Within three years of the Russian evacuation, the number of Tibetan Buddhist centers in Mongolia increased to 120. In 1992, when the Dalai Lama visited the remaining believers, over three-quarters of the popu-

lation of the country turned out to greet him. This strongly suggests that the original seed religion in a country will be the among the first to take root after Communism retreats and religious interest returns.

In a conversation before Tiennamen Square, the controller of one of Hong Kong's top corporations predicted that over 600,000 affluent Hong Kong residents will leave the British colony prior to the take-over by the PRC in 1997 [Buddhist World Map (BWM) #6]. Most of these immigrants will hold a dual residence either in Australia, Canada or the US, while they wait out what happens in Beijing." Post-Tienneman estimates have escalated to over one million.

Immigrants from Asia accounted for only 5% of the legal immigrants admitted into the United States during the period 1931-1960, whereas the greatest majority came from Europe which was predominantly Judaeo-Christian in its religious heritage. After the change of the immigration law in 1965, we recognize a significant shift in immigration trends. In the period 1980-1984 the number of legal immigrants coming from Asia increased dramatically to 48% of the total number admitted

into her borders.

Barna, in his book *The Frog in the Kettle*, points out that, "During the '80's, the Asian population increased at twelve times the rate of the native-born population. Immigration, then, has become a cornerstone of America's plans for expansion and prosperity. In 1990, America will accept more immigrants than all other nations of the world combined. Recognize, too, that these figures count only legal immigrants. Estimates of the number of illegal immigrants entering America each year range from 50,000 to 500,000... Asian immigration will also continue to escalate as the Pacific Rim becomes the world's dominant economic center" (1990). Unlike a decade ago, talk of a new Asian order and of the Pacific Rim captures the headlines of major US newspapers.

According to the 1990 US Census, there are over 800,000 people whose nation of origin is Japan. Los Angeles is often referred to as the "thirteenth precinct of Tokyo" and is labeled the "eastern capital of Asia."

Just south of Los Angeles in Long Beach, over 40,000 Cambodian refugees make their homes, contributing to over 470,000 Southeast Asian (SEA) refugees in the State of California alone. Their

problems are representative of most New Americans in that they will speak limited English, have limited education and will require public assistance, housing and vocational and language training.

A *Newsweek* article from February 1988, states, "Asian Immigrants [many of them Buddhist]...who will number as many as 12 million by the year 2000 ...could affect America more profoundly than any other group since the first boat people crossed over on the Mayflower."

In light of these facts, what are we communicating to the Church regarding our responsibility of evangelizing our New American neighbors? Not all the church quite knows how to view the arrival of so many different types of people. The following story conveys my experience with a differing perspective.

In October 1989, I was picked up from the Chicago train station by a Christian brother who was to be my ride to the Rockford Conference on the Cults, where I was to speak on the Japanese Buddhist sect Nichiren Shoshu-Sokagakkai (SGI).

On the way we had a pleasant conversation and at one point I asked him if there were any Southeast Asian refugees in the Rockford area. His answer betrayed some frustration over their arrival and support from the government

in starting new businesses. It was obvious he was also struggling in his own real estate work. I sensitively asked him if I could share my opinion on this situation and he graciously said yes.

"I'm excited that God has brought these precious souls here from countries that are closed to the Gospel. Really, what is our purpose here on earth? Isn't it to see our Lord glorified and to be obedient to the completion of the Great Commission? What will we do with this historic opportunity?"

His humble response was truly encouraging. "I must go back and make friends of the Lao man I was trying to sell property to. I never thought of it that way."

Barna in *The Frog in the Kettle* writes, "For the past five years, parachurch [and I might add mission] agencies geared to sending American missionaries overseas have been lamenting the fact that many nations around the world are closing their doors to our missionaries. Perhaps God is providing a partial solution to such inaccessibility by relocating the mission field within America!" The fact is that many of the New Americans are very open to hearing about Christianity and some are a committed evangelical force such as the Koreans whose population is 80% Christian. According to Cliff Holland, the Director of In-depth Evan-

gelism Associates (I.D.E.A.), who conducted a comprehensive religious survey of Los Angeles County, Koreans have one church for every 224 Koreans, unlike their Thai neighbors who are still very steeped in Buddhism and only have one church for every 10,000 Thai. It is not just a question of Americans evangelizing immigrants, but really one of the entire Church working together to bring the Gospel to an increasingly pluralistic society.

The Emergence of American Buddhism

Buddhism is a missionary faith and wages an international and interactive battle. The Buddhist convert Asoka who was King of India circa 240 B.C. was said to have sent missionaries to Greece and as far west as present day England. He also sent his son Mahendra as a missionary of the Buddhist faith to Ceylon (today's Sri Lanka).

The story of Buddhism coming to America begins in Sri Lanka in 1818 with the arrival of an English Wesleyan missionary, Daniel John Gogerly. Not willing to respond to Buddhism from secondary sources, Gogerly spent fourteen years studying the original Pali texts and translated their writings so well that Buddhist scholar T.W. Rhys Davids proclaimed him a credit to the Christian

faith. The culmination of Gogerly's work was the publication in 1849 of *Kristijani Prajnapti* or *The Evidences and Doctrines of the Christian Religion* (Malagoda 1976). The use of this publication presented the superiority of the Gospel and led many Buddhists to a faith in Christ. It was so well grounded in understanding Buddhism that the Buddhist clergy began producing their own literature to counter the impact of Gogerly's work.

This controversy paved the way in Sri Lanka for the arrival of two Americans in May of 1880: Colonel Henry Steele Olcott and Madame Blavatsky of the Theosophical Society. It was said that, "The resounding welcome that Olcott received on his arrival indicated the symbolic importance that this endorsement of their cause by Westerner's had for the Buddhists." *The Maha Bodhi* later reported, "No king ever received the homage of a devoted people as these two when they landed on the shores" (Bond 1988). With Olcott's help, they began a frontal attack on the Christian faith by establishing a Buddhist catechism, Sunday school, Buddhist songs like, "Buddha loves me this I know, because the sutra tells me so," established organizations like the Young Men's Buddhist Association (YMBA) and even helped design the Buddhist flag.

It was at this time that a fourteen-year-old schoolboy heard Olcott's lecture. In 1884 he was initiated into the Buddhist Theosophical Society in Sri Lanka and took on the name of Anagarika Dharmapala. He "vowed beneath the Bodhi tree to rescue Buddhism from neglect" and founded the Maha Bodhi Society in 1891 to revitalize Buddhism in Sri Lanka and India. Until that time Buddhism in America was almost unknown.

Heinz Bechert in an article entitled "Buddhist Revival in East and West" points to an historic event which gave birth to Buddhism in America. "The World Parliament of Religions which was held in Chicago...[in] 1893 has probably

had greater importance for the early development of American Buddhism than any other single event...On that occasion, two Buddhists delivered speeches: Anagarika Dharmapala (from Sri Lanka) and Soen Shaku (from Japan), a master of the Rinzai school of Zen. Paul Carus (1852-1919) at the age of 41, the owner of the Open Court Publishing Company in LaSalle,...was so impressed by what he learnt there about Buddhism that he decided to patronize the spread of knowledge about it, particularly Zen. He invited Daisetz T. Suzuki (1870-1966), a disciple of Soen Shaku, to work for his publishing house" (Bechert and Gombrich 1984).

Suzuki became the brain child behind the introduction of Buddhism into America via his writings under Open Court. He also led the way philosophically for former Episcopalian priest Alan Watts who became a major advocate and voice on the radio waves for Zen Buddhism in the 1960 and 70's. Although deceased his voice continues its influence today on certain local radio stations.

Another Japanese sect, the Nichiren-Shoshu Sokagakkai (SGI) made its entrance on the American scene under the leadership of Masayasu Sadanaga, a Japanese student at UCLA. Sadanaga, who changed his name to George M. Williams, started the organization with a handful of Japanese "war brides" that came to the United States after World War II. The organization now has an estimated 500,000 members in America [BWM #5] and continues to zealously pursue its goal of one million members by the year 2001. Recently, they spent over \$54 million in Malibu, California to build Soka University of Los Angeles (SULA) which plans on sustaining a campus for 5,000 students. They are not a passing phenomena.

Buddhism has also made inroads in America in the field of psychology[†]. In a commencement address given at the Institute of Buddhist Studies in Berkeley, California on May 26, 1990, the speaker

pointed out that, "During the 1980's a new factor entered the process of developing American Buddhism: [as] a growing number of psychologists began to practice meditation...Journals were founded to disseminate studies about meditation and altered states of mind to psychologists, and as a result, a new kind of perspective on Buddhism began to arise among professional segments of American society...the concern expressed by fundamentalist Christians is an indication ...that the Dharma (Buddhist teachings) had gained respectability in sections of the academic establishment, making it a real threat, of a sort to fundamentalist Christians" (Komito 1990).

Another key element mentioned in the speech was the emergence in the 90's from Buddhist monasteries and nunneries of Americans who have practiced for 10 to 20 years. They have contextualized the message in a way that is attractive to Americans and free from the problems of cross-cultural communication that hampered Asian teachers. The speaker also pointed out that the availability of English translations of sutras, commentaries, and classics by professors of Buddhism in the universities had propelled the growth of Buddhism in the United States. Organizations such as "Bukkyo Dendo Kyokai" (Buddhist Promoting Foundation) founded by Mr. Yehan Numata, a Jodo-Shinshu Buddhist and founder of the Mitutoyo Company, funded the *The Teaching of Buddha*, had it translated into twenty-four languages and distributed, not unlike Gideon's, to hotels such as the Grand Metropolitan Hotel, Ltd., worldwide.

Buddhism is also firmly establishing itself in academic circles. According to Tetsuden Kashima from the Department of Ethnic Studies at the University of Washington, Numata's foundation "endowed three professorial chairs of Buddhism, one each at the University of California, Berkeley, the University of Chicago, and Harvard University, and plans for two others at Oxford University and in Germany."

[†] Just to interject a thought here on psychology. The introductory course on Psychology 101 that I took as a freshman at the University of Montana introduced me to key eastern concepts which led me to the gateway of my Buddhist experience. I am astounded how many Christians do not know the philosophical roots and dangers of modern psychology mixed with the Christian faith. The famous psychologist, Professor Carl Gustav Jung, himself stated, "As a student of comparative religion, I believe that Buddhism is the most perfect one the world has ever seen. The philosophy of the Buddha, the theory of evolution and the law of Karma were far superior to any other creed."

In the 1990's interest in ecology birthed a movement called "Green Buddhism." In my own experience in 1970, ecology was one of the key areas that attracted me to Buddhism. My Buddhist sponsor said, "If you want to clean up the environment, first you must clean up your heart." It was not unlike Aldous Huxley's solution to ecological problems which he mentioned in *Island* (1962) which stated that "Elementary ecology leads straight to elementary Buddhism."

So it is no wonder that there are now over 1000 Buddhist temples, monasteries, and centers throughout the US. One columnist wrote, "In Chicago, which was once considered the heart of Midwestern America, there are now more Moslems than Methodists, more Buddhists than Presbyterians, more Hindus than Congregationalists."

Why Study Buddhism?

Francis Pieper, over 70 years ago, said that, "No man should set himself up as a teacher in Christendom, who has not fully grasped the distinction between pagan religions and the Christian religion." Dr. Philip Schaff, a Swiss church historian and theologian, pointed out in defense of Christianity, that

"Brahminism, Buddhism, and Confucianism are formidable rivals and must be met by learned missionaries."

Yet, in our search for scholars, we have been surprised to find a tremendous gap in pundit level professors who could equip men for the depth of intellectual challenge that work among Buddhists poses. After we conducted a search of Christian colleges, seminaries and networks, we found only three professors with specialized knowledge in this field that we might consider evangelical in their faith. We often came up with some very depressing results. One letter we received from Iliff School of Theology from Assistant Professor Jose Ignacio Cabezon in February 1990 I quote in part, "I am a Buddhist working in a Christian Theology school. You can see, therefore, that I have very little interest in making available my materials to a group whose aim it might be to convert my Buddhist brethren to a religion which I consider well meaning but philosophically fallacious, namely Christianity." No, I can't see why, but it confirmed my past conclusions that there is a vital need for research and training.

Dr. Wong Yong Ji, in an address given at the 1992 Evangelical Theological Society meeting called for the

Church to pay attention to "this alarming new development in the arena of 'Religions,' and for serious reflection on the part of the Christian community. He stated, "Religious studies is no longer a passing fad, but...In fact, it may likely become the foremost concern in the coming decades. The tension and conflict between the theocentric pluralism claimed by men like Paul F. Knitter, John Hick, and many others, and the Christocentric trinitarian paradigm of the evangelical theologians may be increasingly visible in the future." (cf. Carl E. Braaten, *No Other Gospel*, 1992)

There is an old axiom that says, "Experience is the best teacher, as long as it is someone else's." Albertus Pieters looked back on his 30 years of ministry in Japan and shared his thoughts about why Japan hadn't been evangelized. He wrote, "I think sometimes that I made a mistake, as a missionary, in not paying more attention to Buddhism and never preaching about it. If it were a mistake, it is one shared by almost all missionaries and by Japanese preachers as well, for you seldom heard a word from them about Buddhism, and never an address about it intended for Buddhist believers."

Buddhism's doctrines are not easily understood by the western mind. Among

the most demonic of doctrines to be met is the Buddhist doctrine of assimilation. Through this Buddhism strengthens its tenacious hold on the hearts and minds of the local people and because of the lack of a consistent objective standard like the Bible, Buddhism's form changes from location to location. One could liken this situation to a chameleon which takes on the color of the vegetation it is surrounded by. Consequently we find Buddhism mixed with animism, Shintoism, Hinduism, and even Christianity. This makes Buddhism much more difficult to address as a specific religious system, and therefore one of the greatest spiritual and intellectual challenges of Christian mission.

As a new Christian I was disappointed that I could not find literature addressing the critical issues which new converts out of Buddhism face, i.e. the false doctrines of meditation and reincarnation that had attracted me originally. I perused volumes written by Jesuits and Methodists talking about the advantages of using Zen meditation in prayer. I was shocked because I knew already that what they were saying betrayed a lack of understanding of Buddhist meditation and surely of the Christian faith. Buddhist terms and concepts now permeate our advertising, movies and even Christian sermons. One conservative pastor said, "I thought I died and went to Nirvana." His statement only betrays the underlying ignorance of the West of the onslaught of eastern thinking.

The late Dr. Mas Toyotomi, a former missionary to Japan with JEMS (Japanese Evangelical Missionary Society) and founder of Missionary Strategy Agency, pointed out in an Asia Christian conference in 1980 that, "Asia is the continent that has carried idolatry to its ultimate prevalence and sophistication. This makes Asia the greatest and final battleground between God and Satan, for idolatry is the ultimate weapon of Satan."

"Satan's subtle strategy is to camouflage idolatry in such a way that even

Christians do not recognize it as such." And so "not even Christians today are seeing idolatry as the most grievous sin that can be committed by man. Because there is practically no preaching against idolatry in America, they are vulnerable to the temptations of modern, sophisticated idolatry."

During the International Year of Tibet in 1991 there was a host of art museums throughout the United States which sponsored exhibits of Tibetan objects of worship wherein we see idolatry camouflaged and lifted up as fine

God warns us that He abandoned Israel because it was filled "with idols" and "influences from the east."

art. Personally, I observed Tibetan monks teaching young American children how to make religious sand paintings. The children were altogether unaware of the deeper significance of the mandala which becomes a temporary home to 722 deities (we call them demons) during the Kalacakra, a tantric ritual ceremony of empowerment.

Buddhism is also disguised in the media, where it subtly enters our generation's minds while we watch such harmless programs as Davy Crockett on Walt Disney. Normally I don't make a habit of watching much TV, but I caught a program about Davy Crockett with my children and at the end as he was leaving his long-time girlfriend, she looked at him romantically and suggested, "Davy, you know the other day I was reading about reincarnation, and well, I was thinking wouldn't it be nice if we were born again together in our next lifetime?" He then walked off the set. I found it very hard to believe that they were discussing this issue prior to the Alamo. But here is an example of how Satan constructs his case.

Or what about the popular children's cartoon called "Tailspin" by Spielberg? In one cartoon series, I heard the heroine say something like "Trust your heart, not your mind." My interest in the power of media and its negative influence led me to reading *The Religion of the Force* which talked about the movie "The Empire Strikes Back," which Director Irving Kirshner said was designed to introduce Zen Buddhism to children. Yoda, the Jedi's teacher was none other than the proverbial Zen master. The latest movie about Tina Turner's life blatantly touts Buddhism as the way to true happiness. Indeed, today's celebrities are America's gurus. Even the newspaper is not exempt. My son who reads the funny pages and claims it's research has come to me several times with cut-out cartoons that heavily play off the concept of reincarnation. If you are not teaching your children, the media is.

God warns us that He abandoned Israel because it was filled "with idols" and "influences from the east." Rather than serving God and loving Him, they "mingled with the nations and learned their practices" which were detestable to the Lord. So the Lord then "gave them into the hand of the nations; and those who hated them ruled over them" (Psalm 106:40b NASV). The study of Buddhism is like the medical doctor's study of disease. He must beware that he not be contaminated by the disease he seeks to cure. The unfortunate reality is that there are casualties.

But, if doctors did not do their homework many patients would die for lack of knowledgeable treatment. One Sunday after I had taught a fellowship class, two sets of parents came up to me independently of one another and asked, "Do you know that our Christian grade school uses Open Court Publishers?" I had mentioned them in the course of my discussion of the World Parliament of Religions, but confessed I didn't. They admitted they had been unhappy with the curriculum for the presentation of a non-Christian worldview and had already complained to the school administration. They asked me to do some research and

see if it was the same publisher. It was. And, in fact, Paul Carus had authored a book to promote Buddhism in America called, *The Gospel According to Buddha*. The curriculum was removed from the school.

The neighborhood that is surrounding this church is the largest Thai community in the United States. The Thai people practice Buddhism, worship spirits, and heavily rely upon astrology and numerology. Completed in 1979, Wat Thai Buddhist Temple has become the center of the community, and the local polling place is not a church or synagogue, but the temple itself. There is also no organized outreach to the temple or the surrounding community. This only drives home the necessity of rethinking our distinction between foreign and home missions. The field is closer than we think. It is a difficult question, but one that we should all ask ourselves, "Could we be like the Jewish evangelists who would travel land and sea for a proselyte, but would walk around the suffering Samaritan in their midst?"

Approaches to World Evangelization

Dr. Wong Yong Ji anticipates the difficulty of addressing the major move-

ment of world religions into the American scene. He stated, "Knowing the general mood of the religious world of our time, which is seemingly much more 'liberal' than a century ago into the direction of universalism, multiculturalism, and syncretistic trend, one may anticipate much more radical and astonishing happenings in the 1993 Parliament." During the Rio Conference on the Environment in Brazil many organizations, including Turner Broadcasting talked about coverage of the upcoming Parliament. It will be a major event. The question is, "Will we evangelicals like the ostrich bury our head in the sand? How should we approach people of other faiths?"

Dr. Wong Yong Ji concludes, "The concern for us Christians so far has been the danger of falling into 'syncretism...' This concern is still valid; nevertheless..In a time when we cannot possibly live together peacefully without mutual contacts and coexistence, we have to know what others have and teach, as accurately as humanly possible. It is a part of our question on future survival with minimum conflict and antagonism. It is a mandate of our time."

In 1989, Sonrise Center for Buddhist Studies (SCBS) held a mini-consultation

in Pasadena involving about 50 Christian workers reaching out to the Buddhist world. One of the main conclusions was, "If you are my friend, you can tell me anything and I will listen; if you are not, I will not listen." Indeed, the evangelization of the world is a matter of the heart. We must see our fellow travelers on planet earth as our Lord Jesus Christ sees them in the *imago dei*, made in the image of God.

In addressing those of other faiths we must defend their right of expression even if we adamantly oppose their viewpoints. As Os Guinness wrote in *The American Hour*, "Respecting the right to believe anything is a matter of freedom of conscience; believing that anything anyone believes is right is plain stupidity" (1993).

As a new Christian, I had to unlearn the antipathy which I had been taught towards Christianity as a Buddhist. As a SGI Buddhist I had been trained to do a fairly militant form of witnessing known as shakubuku, literally the "tearing and crushing" of other faiths. I recall Buddhist national leaders exclaiming, "How could anyone believe in a religion that worships a dead man on a cross?" This derogatory statement belies a negative aspect of fundamentalism in any

faith, that of the superficial understanding of what others believe. So, rather than responding in an aggressive manner, I had to search for the proper Christian attitude and response to people from other faiths.

A step in that search led me to attending one meeting in a series of a Buddhist-Christian dialogue at Hsi Lai temple in Hacienda Heights, California. Hans Kung, John Cobb, and John Hicks were in attendance. I recall a Thai Buddhist professor who addressed a serious question to a "convinced Christian" panelist. He asked, "What is the view from the [spiritual] mountaintop of your faith?" The panelist replied, "Well, we'll get you a helicopter and you can fly up there and check it out for yourself." I left feeling deeply grieved for the lack of sincere Christian witness to these Buddhist men, who are spiritually without hope. Surely, I thought, this is not the dialogue approach that the Apostle Paul used on Mars Hill.

When Christian missions blaze a trail into a Buddhist area they may be going head to head with an entirely different type of Buddhism than they expected. Realize that many nominal and intellectual Buddhists may be attracted to aberrant forms of Christianity that they think are Christian, such as Modernism, Mormonism and Jehovah Witnesses. Without proper instruction they will fall prey to those wolves in sheep's clothing who will do follow-up.

Modular Training in Mega-Cities

God's missionary strategy through the ages from Daniel in Babylon to Paul in Rome has been to reach peoples through centers of cultural, religious and political importance. Los Angeles is home to over 23 different Asian cultures and is an ideal laboratory for training in a mega-city for an international generation of missionaries. Here forward thinking seminaries are preparing ethnic representatives for leadership and former seminary students live in "incarnational teams" among Southeast Asian refugees.

In 1990, the Sonrise Center for Buddhist Studies established a house to serve as an experimental model for intern training and as a resource center for the Church in its efforts to evangelize

Buddhists. It maintains a library of key books, journals, audio-visuals, and files which have been collected and prepared by staff and missionaries from all over the world. The vision of SCBS is to see a church planted and a people disciplined among the remaining unreached Buddhist people groups throughout the world. It's mission is to provide strategic information and training for those desiring to work among Buddhist peoples, while seeking key opportunities to bring a greater awareness to the church of the challenges of the remaining task.

An essential step in the future is the establishment of an academic Chair of Christian-Buddhist Studies to train leaders to spearhead Christian Mission to Buddhists. The Western capital of the Third World is the mostly likely host to such an endeavor. In the meantime, our present training course offers a platform for specialized scholars to share with Professors, missionaries and other workers pursuing work among Buddhists. This course of study has taken on a distinctively geographic approach by breaking the Buddhist world down into four modules. The Theravada module covers the countries of Southeast Asia, including Sri Lanka, India and Myanmar; while Mahayana covers China, Japan, Korea, Taiwan, Hong Kong, and Vietnam. The Tibetan module focuses on mission to the sixty-six Tibetan people groups found in Tibet, China, Mongolia, the C.I.S., Bhutan, India and Nepal. The fourth module focuses on Mission to Buddhists found in the Western world. Los Angeles again provides an ideal laboratory as it contains all the necessary ingredients for the educational experience ranging from art museums, ethnic programs, Asian communities, and Buddhist denominations from every stripe.

For proper training to take place the Church and mission agencies must be willing to share their resources and establish cooperative training projects. This allows the administrative and financial burden to be shouldered more equitably by a wider constituency. This is not unlike the principle of parity which the mission agencies learned early on when the task, because of its complexity required the sharing of limited resources

on the mission field. The urgent nature of mission to Buddhists today requires what Phil Butler at Interdev calls, "strategic evangelistic partnerships."

Most importantly, we don't need to "reinvent the wheel." Rather we can take lessons from the cooperation of the milk industry and its joint publicity campaign with which most of us are very familiar: "Everybody Needs Milk." For the milk industry to survive, all dairies need publicity whether a given dairy has 5 cows or 1,000; they are willing to pay according to their ability because they know that "united we stand, divided we fall." Through cooperation, smallness does not limit an organization's ability to serve the whole cause.

Windows of Opportunity

Over three years ago the Dalai Lama had an unprecedented meeting with Congressional leaders in the Dome of the US Capital Building. In response to a very strong lobby of Americans involved in the Free Tibet Movement, the US Government in 1991 passed a law allowing over 1000 Tibetan refugees to resettle in 16 cluster sites around the country [BWM #4]. One missionary who worked among refugees from Southeast Asia said that this is one of the most opportune times to communicate the love and Gospel of Christ through genuine deeds of kindness. This window is usually open for a very short period of about six months. We must be reminded that the Lord commands us to "show your love for the alien," for we too were once strangers to the promises of God (Deut. 10:19).

Another key development in mission is what I call "Nulinks." These are creative new links between peoples laid by God before the creation of the world. A prime example would be the tremendous reception that Navajo Christians received from Mongolians in a visit to Mongolia in 1991. Mongol legends claim that American Indians are ancestors who crossed into the New World over the land bridge many centuries ago. If we persist in ethnocentric viewpoints we can miss the creative hand of God and these wonderful reunions that the God of Creation has in store for us all.

Another question that was asked at

the Asia Missions Congress in Seoul, Korea during August 1990 was, "Are there strategic fragments of unreached peoples who are more accessible in another part of the world, e.g., Mongolian students in Czechoslovakia?" Or Kalmyks [an unreached Tibetan Buddhist group from the CIS] in New Jersey? [BWM #1] God moves people. Our job is to recognize the different types of people He has brought our way and to engage in His work among them.

At Urbana '90 I had the privilege of rooming with Dr. Ralph Winter. Because of my responsibilities one evening I missed the bus to the hotel I was staying at and had to walk home quite a distance in a snow blizzard. To thaw out I needed to take a hot bath and unfortunately that night the hot water heater for the hotel broke down. So I called maintenance and the engineer showed up to check out the problem. He was very personable and I asked him where he was from. He replied, "Pakistan." It happened that he was here studying religion and did his Master's thesis on a synthesis of Islam and Christianity at the request of a professor of the local university. He had studied the Bible thoroughly which made for a stimulating dialogue.

The next morning I told Dr. Winter of my interaction and I'll not easily forget his question to me, which was, "That's fine, but what people group was he from? Is he a Baluch or a Sindhi?" I hadn't even

thought to ask, but the point was clear. Knowing the geo-political nation a person is from is not enough. God wants us to know their family, their ethnics. These are the people of the remaining task which the Apostle Paul pointed to in Romans 15:20-21: "And thus I aspired to preach the gospel, not where Christ was already named, that I might not build upon another man's foundation; but as it is written, 'They who had no news of Him shall see, And they who have not heard shall understand.'"

Reflections

It is a sobering walk, a narrower road than I once thought. What does the stage look like that we are about to walk upon? Indeed it is not a new mission field. Andrew Fuller pointed out in a letter on "The Promise of the Spirit as the grand encouragement in promoting the gospel" that: "God had a cause in the world from the earliest ages and this it was which interested the hearts of his servants. It was for the setting up of his spiritual kingdom in the world that he blessed the seed of Abraham, and formed them into a people. This was the work that He carried on from generation to generation among them" (Genesis 12:3).

Adoniram Judson, a missionary in Burma (now Myanmar), offered a sobering call to that same work when he wrote in the 1800's of the Buddhist challenge. "In order to effect the overthrow

this system, together with [Hinduism] and [Islam], the church of Christ must awake to the employment of her highest energies, and must put forth her mightiest efforts. She is to attack the very heart of the fortress, and grapple with the Prince of Darkness on his throne" (Wayland 1853).

How is the Church to carry out this mission? Charles Haddon Spurgeon exhorted the church when he said, "The power of missions abroad lies at home: a holy church will be a powerful church. Nor shall there be lack of treasure in her coffers when grace is in her heart; the free gifts of a willing people shall enable the workers for God to carry on their sacred enterprises without stint."

John Sutcliffe (1752-1814), pastor of Olney Baptist Church in England, sent out a circular letter which read in part: "We take for granted that the spread of the gospel is the great object of your desire. Without this it will be hard to prove that you are Christian Churches...The true churches of Jesus Christ travail in birth for the salvation of men. They are the armies of the Lamb, the grand object of whose existence is to extend the Redeemer's Kingdom."

Conclusion

When the late Bishop Honda of the Japanese Methodist Church was once asked what he thought of the great

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motto, 'The Evangelization of the World in This Generation,' he replied very modestly, "It is a good motto, a very good motto for this generation; and I think it will be a good motto for the next generation, too." As we approach the dawn of the 21st century, we ask ourselves, "Will this be the generation that sees the completion of the Great Commission?"

And yet it is not for us to know the time, but to work diligently while there is still light. The torch was being passed to our generation when J. Oswald Sanders clearly pointed out in one of his last messages that our task is to "transform the present." Although strategic planning is critical to victory, our preoccupation with the future can be a snare. History teaches us many lessons and one that drives the point home with me which occurred during the American Civil War.

"General Stonewall Jackson had assembled his engineers one evening and instructed them to build a bridge across a river he had decided to cross to surprise his enemy. After the engineers left, he called for his wagonmaster who had been a blacksmith and told him to prepare the wagons and artillery pieces and to move them across the river as soon as the bridge was ready.

Before dawn that night the wagonmaster reported to the general that all the wagons and the artillery pieces were on the other side. The general looked surprised and asked, 'And where are the engineers?' The wagonmaster replied with a nod and a grin, 'Sir, they are still in their tent drawing pictures of the bridge they plan to build.' The old blacksmith knew the difference between planning a bridge and building one." Hence, our planning must lead to the action that "transforms the present" (Wiwcharuck 1987). We must remember:

"There is no wisdom, no insight, no plan that can succeed against the LORD. The horse is made ready for the day of battle, but victory rests with the LORD." (Proverbs 21:30-31)

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of Sunrise Center for Buddhist Studies, founded in 1988, which is dedicated to informing and training Christians who are working to evangelize Buddhists.

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EVANGELIZING BUDDHISTS

and How to Lead American Buddhists to Christ

Unique strategies are needed when dealing with the different circumstances surrounding Buddhists. The author presents various evangelical approaches to reaching monks and nuns, as well as Buddhist lay people, carried on at the Tao Fong Shan in Hong Kong.

BY TIMOTHY KUNG

Translated by Martin Chow

Dr. Kung has worked with Christian Mission to Buddhists at Tao Fong Shan Christian Center in Hong Kong, and has pastored numerous churches. He is the author of seventeen books, and currently serves as Professor of Oriental Religious Studies at Christ International Theological Seminary in California.

This essay is a written summary of my observations and experiences in evangelizing Buddhist monks through the work of Christian Mission to Buddhists (hereafter, CMB) in Tao Fong Shan, Hong Kong; and Kyoto, Japan. It will also discuss the work of evangelism among Buddhists in Taiwan.

Strictly speaking, Buddhists are divided into two types: 1) monks and nuns, and 2) lay people. I have evangelized both groups. At present, I am working on various projects, specifically in the area of literature evangelism.

Between 1948 and 1952, I lived in Tao Fong Shan, Hong Kong. I studied at Hong Kong's Lutheran Theological Seminary through the financial support of CMB and at the same time served as the personal Chinese secretary to Dr. K.L. Reichelt, the founder of Tao Fong Shan. I assisted him in preparing the Chinese lecture notes for his course in comparative religions. These were used by him in his class at the Lutheran Theological Seminary, where I was also a student.

In my time with Dr. Reichelt, I was deeply touched by his evangelistic zeal for Buddhists and began to take an interest in preaching the gospel to them. My plan was to travel to Japan after my graduation from seminary in 1952 to engage in evangelism among the Buddhist monks.

The Communists occupied mainland China, and Hong Kong had begun to restrict the entry of mainland Chinese into the colony. As a result, monks from the mainland found it very difficult to come to Tao Fong Shan. So I proposed to Dr. Reichelt the possibility of establishing a branch office of CMB in Japan. At the time he was very supportive of my idea. But because of his advanced age, Dr. Reichelt passed away not long afterwards. Then in 1953, Rev. Stig Hannerz, the Swedish-born superintendent of CMB, and I traveled to Kyoto, Japan, to begin the work of CMB. Afterwards, Rev. Hannerz returned to Hong Kong and sent Norwegian-born Rev. Hemstad to Japan to join me in expanding the work of evangelism among Japanese monks.

While Dr. Reichelt was alive he told me two things. First, he felt the Lord Jesus revealed to him through John 10:16 that the "other sheep" referred to religious people who were not Christians. These people needed to be led before the Lord. Second, he informed me that the architectural design of Tao Fong Shan appeared to be influenced by Christian and Buddhist art, and this was a means to attract Buddhist monks to come to the mountain to study Christianity. He told me his faith in the Lord Jesus never changed and that "salvation was found in no one else" except through Jesus Christ (Acts 4:12).

In the four years I lived at Tao Fong Shan, I had the opportunity to fellowship with the Buddhist monks and attend Christian worship services, Bible studies, and other meetings with them. We ate and lived together. Although I was born into a Buddhist family and

never became a monk, I got along well with the Buddhist monks who had come to Tao Fong Shan to learn of the Christian faith. From their testimony I came to know more of the darker side of Chinese Buddhism and the tragic lives they led in the temples. This motivated me to devote my life to evangelizing Buddhists after seminary graduation. The remainder of this article is divided into two parts. The first part will focus on a discussion of Tao Fong Shan and the evangelistic work of CMB among the monks in Japan. The second part will specifically discuss the conditions of evangelism among lay Buddhists in Taiwan. Circumstances differ between the two groups, so we will discuss them separately.

Part One

The Work of Tao Fong Shan in Hong Kong and the Chinese Mission to the Buddhists in Japan

A. Evangelizing Buddhist Monks, Tao Fong Shan, Hong Kong

1. *Economic Assistance:* Dr. Reichelt established mission agencies in the Lutheran churches of Norway, Sweden, and Denmark that raised support for the work of Tao Fong Shan. To evangelize Buddhists first requires the provision of a meeting place, dormitory, a dining hall and a church facility for Christian worship and Bible study. In this way, the Buddhists that come may learn to live in peace while inquiring into the Christian faith. When they become ill, one needs to take them to see a doctor for treatment. In addition, one must provide everyday clothing for them to wear in place of their usual robe attire. These are

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all provided at no charge due to the fact that the monks never pay for their meals and lodging while affiliated with the Buddhist temple. Of course they have to raise funds for the temple, read the sutras for the dead, and tend to other religious affairs to contribute to the income of the temple and thus support the needs of all the members. Even so, Chinese monks have no monetary savings. The mission agency at Tao Fong Shan provides the full amount of the monks' living expenses. In addition they receive a small allowance for personal expenses. Therefore, if one wants to lead the monks to Christ, there must first be a large sum of money set aside for a budget. These financial resources must come from the continuous support of established organizations (mission agencies) in order to meet the need.

2. *Employment Arrangements:* The majority of the monks at Tao Fong Shan are zealous in their quest for truth. After arriving at the mountain, they devote their energies to learning more of the Christian faith. Later they are baptized and become Christians. Since the monks who are converted to the Christian faith are primarily members of the younger generation between the ages of twenty and forty, few desire to spend the rest of their lives at Tao Fong Shan. The majority look forward to returning to society and working to support their livelihood. Tao Fong Shan has begun classes in porcelain design, with an emphasis on depicting Christian stories through art. Although this is a practical skill, only a small quantity of these products are sold to churches in Norway, Sweden, and Denmark. As a result, this enterprise alone cannot support the livelihood of a large number of converted monks. In their search for vocational alternatives, some became policemen in Hong Kong, some worked as driving school instructors, some became businessmen, and others became pastors and ministers after completing their theological education. At present, many former monks in the United States, Canada, and Southeast Asia who worked as craftsmen have become pastors. They are enthusiastic preachers with excellent testimonies and have led many Buddhists to Christ.

Those who desire to evangelize Buddhist monks must also be concerned

with their post-conversion vocational options and living needs. This ministry must not be neglected. Otherwise, the people who come to Christ and are baptized are without jobs and thus cannot support themselves in the outside world. When this happens, the problem becomes a burden to the churches that may not be readily resolved. I led a monk to Christ in Taiwan at one time and thought that it was good for him just to come, but I did not think about his future after conversion. Fortunately, he was trained as a military doctor. After his conversion, he became an expert in forensic medicine, thus putting my concerns for his future to rest. Now that I think about it, there is still a lingering fear. I have particularly mentioned this point as a focus of concern that cannot be underestimated.

3. *Resident Visa:* Until 1950, when the Communists occupied the mainland, Chinese monks were free to enter Hong Kong from any part of China without any restriction. Living in Hong Kong was also free from any restriction. But after 1950, when China and Hong Kong began to restrict the flow of immigration and emigration, it became increasingly difficult for monks to come to Tao Fong Shan in Hong Kong. In fact, it almost came to a complete stop. I would like to again remind everyone that at present, the Chinese monks in the U.S. are predominantly from Taiwan. A small group of them are from Hong Kong and other places. They are holders of non-immigrant religious worker visas good for a two-year stay in the U.S. Before the visa expires, the Buddhist temple that invited the monk needs to provide documented evidence before applying for an extension. Let us assume that there is a Chinese monk with this type of visa who decides to leave the temple in order to study to become a Christian. His visa is due to expire soon. What do we do in this situation? Because this monk is not a Christian missionary, he cannot apply for a Christian religious worker's visa. In addition, the temple will not issue any documents that will support an extension of his residence status. I have yet to encounter such a situation in the U.S., because up to now, Christian Mission to Buddhists (CMB) has not evangelized American Buddhists. I do want to

remind everyone to pay close attention to this. In the fifties, when I preached in Japan, there was a monk from Hong Kong who wrote me and expressed his wish to come to CMB in Japan and study the Christian faith. But when it came to questions of finding a guarantor, purchasing a plane ticket and providing for living expenses after coming to Japan, I could find no help at the time and thus rejected his request.

4. *Understanding Buddhism:* For missionaries who desire to preach the gospel among the Buddhist monks, a working knowledge of Buddhist beliefs and their life situation is necessary. Of course, the best way is to enroll in a Buddhist college or center for Buddhist studies as a student. Or they may elect courses in Buddhism given by organizations that specialize in Christian outreach to Buddhists such as the Sunrise Center for Buddhist Studies. Or they can engage in independent study of Buddhism, although this method is usually not very effective. The goal is to attain an "intermediate" level of Buddhist understanding. This is because in the work of evangelism among Buddhist monks, most of them are graduates of the Buddhist temple (the Chinese situation). We must be able to compare the doctrines of Christianity and Buddhism and point out Christianity's strengths and Buddhism's weaknesses, thus convincing the monks of their need for a genuine conversion to Christ. The founder of Tao Fong Shan, Dr. Reichelt, and his colleagues, Dr. Stig Hannerz, Rev. Thelle and Chinese pastor, Rev. C. C. Wang were all well-versed in Buddhism. Rev. Wang, now in his eighties and retired, living in San Francisco, is noted for his outstanding Buddhist scholarship.

5. *Wonderful Testimonies:* Over one thousand monks have converted to Christianity at Tao Fong Shan. After they became Christians and pastored and ministered in churches, or worked in the world, all were known to have given outstanding testimonies of their pilgrimage from Buddhism to Christianity. The accounts of their transformation from Buddhist monk to Christian pastor have encouraged the faith of the Christians in the churches and has

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enabled the name of the Lord to be glorified among the nonbelievers. Furthermore, the Chinese Buddhist community was amazed to see the lives of so many monks influenced and changed, leading some to conclude that Buddhism was not the truth. This atmosphere greatly benefited the cause of Christian evangelism among the Buddhists. We cannot help but admit that the work of Tao Fong Shan has been a complete success.

6. *My Recommendations:* Due to the fact that the Communist Chinese persecuted the Buddhists (and the Christians as well), currently in China there are only a few government-sponsored Buddhist temples and monks left on the scene to indicate the presence of religious freedom. Needless to say, because Tao Fong Shan in Hong Kong has a shortage of monks coming to the mountain to pursue the faith, the work has virtually come to a standstill. This does not mean the missions policy of Tao Fong Shan is incorrect; rather, due to the influence of the changes in the Chinese government, the monks have been prevented from leaving their place of origin. But in Japan, CMB continues its work.

Moreover, since Hong Kong will return to China's sovereignty by the end of June, 1997, the future work of Tao Fong Shan will be detrimentally affected. I therefore propose that the evangelistic work of Tao Fong Shan among Chinese monks be transferred to Taiwan, where there are tens of thousands of monks without a Christian witness. According to the Chinese Buddhist Society in Taiwan, between 1953 and 1991, a total of 10,888 people in Taiwan were ordained as Buddhist monks and nuns. If this is added to the several thousand existing monks and nuns, the numbers are substantial indeed. But since the number of Chinese monks are not high, we do not need to consider them for the moment.

B. The Work of CMB Among Buddhist Monks in Japan

Between 1953 and 1960, I evangelized among the Japanese Buddhist monks through the work of CMB. In 1960, at the invitation of the Lutheran Theological Seminary in Taiwan, I left Japan and came to Taiwan to teach. Now I will summarize my work conditions in

Japan.

A Norwegian missionary and I, Rev. Hemstad, arrived in Kyoto, Japan. It was here that CMB purchased a house which contained many rooms, accommodating up to twenty monks. I studied Japanese and went directly to the Buddhist temples to preach. Through the introduction of American missionaries in Japan, I also visited many young monks and invited them to come to the CMB church in Kyoto to begin studying the Christian faith. These monks were all students of the English language in the Bible studies led by the American missionaries. And yet God enabled these young men to know the Savior through this ministry. How truly amazing this was! Up to the time I left Japan for Taiwan, there were over twenty monks at CMB in Kyoto who were studying the Christian faith.

In an effort to more effectively dialogue with the Buddhist monks and discuss comparative issues of Buddhism and Christianity, with the status of a pastor, I enrolled as a student of Buddhism at the Buddhist University in Kyoto. After I received a B.A. in Buddhism, I entered the Graduate School of Buddhism, Otani University, Kyoto. Here I majored in Buddhist culture and received an M.A. in Buddhism. The time I devoted to Buddhist studies contributed much to the evangelistic work I did among the monks in Taiwan. This is all part of God's special grace to me. I praise and thank Him with my whole heart.

Because all the Japanese monks were married, the sons followed the example of their fathers, and had their entire families live in the temple. As a result, for the Japanese monks (not including the unmarried, young monks) to leave their families, wives and children and come to CMB to study the Christian faith was extremely difficult. In addition, the Japanese monks, other than receiving a set income to maintain the needs of the temple, also worked in society where they earned a salary. In this way they could live independently. Consequently, to require that they resign their work in order to come and study at CMB was practically impossible. The large Buddhist sects in Japan all have their own Buddhist universities. Not

only did they establish departments for Buddhist studies, but they also have facilities for study in subjects such as Japanese, English, economics, and social work. The monks were free to choose the subjects they wanted to study. Therefore, many monks held bachelor's, master's, and even doctor's degrees, in addition to the qualifications to work in the world. Some taught in the school system. Others served as prison chaplains to convicts. Needless to say, these Buddhist universities were all accredited by the Japanese Department of Education.

However, God did not forget these monks. Not a few young monks developed an interest in studying the Christian faith and came to CMB. Later, after they were baptized and became Christians, many gave wonderful testimonies and had a definite influence on Japanese society and the Buddhist world. Before I went to Japan, there were already a number of well-known Japanese monks who converted to the Christian faith and became pastors. I took their moving testimonies and initially published them in Japanese. Then, after having them translated into Chinese, I published them in Hong Kong, by the name of the book *A Diary of Buddhist Monks Who Converted to Christianity*. In Kyoto, we also began to preach the gospel among the lay Buddhists. I preached in Japanese. My wife, Harue Shimizu, taught in the Sunday School. Each Sunday, many Buddhists attended Sunday School.

Currently (1993), the work of CMB continues on in Kyoto, now overseen by Rev. Thelle, the son of Dr. Reichelt's colleague, the elder Rev. Thelle. They have also established a church, a study society and a periodical that focuses on Buddhist evangelism. The work is blessed by God and continues to grow. I have had the privilege of meeting with Rev. Thelle in Japan.

A. Evangelism Among the Lay Buddhists in Taiwan

Between 1960 and 1970, I taught at the Lutheran Theological Seminary in Taiwan and began evangelizing among the Buddhists. This was of my own effort. I had no ties with CMB, nor was I financially supported by any mission agency or church.

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The Buddhists I refer to are divided into two kinds: (1) those who had already received the Buddhist initiation rites called Trisarana, or Sarana-gamana (the three surrenders to, or formulas of refuge in, The Three Precious Ones, i.e. to the Buddha, the Dharma, the Sangha). These were the Buddhists who had received their initiation certificates and had formally been admitted into the Buddhist group. Most of them understood Buddhism; and (2) traditional Buddhists, or those who were born into Buddhist families, followed their parents into the faith, but did not gain a thorough understanding of Buddhism. Indeed, some do not even know that Sakyamuni was from India. Nor do they know the difference between Mahayana and Hinayana Buddhism.

When we speak of evangelizing Buddhists, we are mainly referring to the first kind. As far as the second kind of so-called Buddhists, the nominal Buddhists, are concerned, these are not considered in our discussion. Perhaps they could be treated under the general category of personal methods of evangelism. Therefore, the following discussion of "Buddhists" is restricted to the first category of evangelizing Buddhists who understand Buddhist doctrine. Please take note of this.

Mainly two types of evangelism toward Buddhists (including Buddhists of all nationalities, not just Chinese Buddhists) are practiced: verbal evangelism and literature evangelism. Before the gospel is preached, the missionaries themselves must already have a good grasp of Buddhism; otherwise, they are handicapped in their efforts. This is because Buddhists are very proud, see their faith as the only correct one, and look down upon Christianity. If they were to ask you some simple questions, such as, "What is the difference between Buddha and God?" "What is the distinction between bodhisattva and Jesus?" "Why is the Amitabha Buddha incorrect?" "Why are the doctrines of origin (hitupratyaya) and original sin not the same?" "Can you give me some facts that prove Christianity to be superior to Buddhism?" If you cannot give a detailed answer, the opposing party will look down upon you and consider you unfit to discuss questions of religion with him.

Needless to say, if you can only point to the strengths of Christianity while dismissing Buddhism as mere superstition, the Buddhist will reject you as too subjective and refuse to talk to you.

All the prophets in the Old Testament and the apostle Paul in the New Testament were examples of people who had a profound understanding of orthodox beliefs and pagan theology, both indigenous and foreign. Consequently, they were able to be greatly used by God in defending the Christian faith among the peoples who professed pagan beliefs. The following are some methods I employ in evangelizing Buddhists.

1. *Verbal Evangelism*: There are at least four steps in proclaiming the gospel to Buddhists on a personal basis. (a) One must first discover how steeped in Buddhism the prospect is in order to effectively evangelize. The study of Buddhism can be divided into at least three levels: beginning, intermediate, and advanced. Some Buddhists have a beginning level of understanding of their faith while others have an advanced level of understanding. Towards the latter group, if your knowledge of Buddhism is not compatible with the one you encounter, then it is difficult to convince your prospect to believe. (b) Both parties must establish a good interpersonal relationship. (c) Begin to actually engage in evangelism. (d) Point out the errors of Buddhism by means of attacking its doctrines, for example, creation over hitupratyaya, God over Buddha, Jesus over Buddha and bodhisattva, salvation over self-mortification, resurrection over nirvana, Kingdom of God over Pure Land (the place west of Amitabha Buddha's native land), original sin over avidya, the Cross over samsara or transmigration, one God over many gods, identification with the world over leaving the mundane world, etc.

If you can only point to the strengths of Christianity while dismissing Buddhism as mere superstition, the Buddhist will reject you as too subjective and refuse to talk to you.

When I used the above method in lecturing on the differences between Christianity and Buddhism to over fifty thousand people in the Christian churches and fellowships of Taiwan,

Southeast Asia and North America, where about seventy percent of those present were Buddhists, I was later informed that many of these converted to the Christian faith. In Makung, Penghu island in Taiwan, during an open-air evangelistic meeting, the attendance each evening surpassed two thousand people, of which ninety percent were Buddhists. Later, the Buddhist temple leader of this area and I held a Christianity-Buddhism debate, which I won. Thanks be to God! I give Him all the glory. When I engage in personal evangelism with Buddhists, I use the same method of verbal evangelism to good effect. During the time in Taiwan, I led a monk and a nun to Christ. The written testimonies they gave me is recorded in my book entitled *A Diary of Buddhist Monks Who Converted to Christianity*, now sold in Chinese Christian bookstores everywhere. I also discovered that my evangelistic efforts among the Chinese were more effective than my work among the Japanese. This was all part of God's wonderful plan and convinced me to eventually leave Japan.

2. *Literature Evangelism*: The educational standards of the Chinese have uniformly risen all over the world. There are many now with earned master's and doctor's degrees. Therefore, we should redouble our efforts and use literature evangelism as well in winning Buddhists with advanced education to Christ. First, there should be publication of books that research Buddhism and point out the errors in Buddhist thinking. When Buddhists read these books, in the process they will come to a clear understanding of the truth and recognize that Buddhism is not a credible faith. When Christian workers and believers read these works, their knowledge of Buddhism will increase and they will be motivated to evangelize Buddhists. Second, there is a need to write books that compare Christianity with Buddhism, indicating the reasons why the former is superior to the latter, and why one must not believe in Buddhism. After Buddhists read these works, their faith will be shaken, and this will encourage them to believe in Christianity. After Christians read these books, their faith in Christ will be further strengthened. Third, there is a need to publish apologetic literature. Not a few monks in Taiwan have written many arti-

cles and published tracts and books that attack and slander Christianity. Their aim is to discredit Christianity because they envy our amazing growth. To withstand these vitriolic attacks from the writings of these monks, we must offer a strong rebuttal so that the name of the Lord will not be subjected to disgrace (Jude3).

I have written about the three kinds of works described above, and I continue to do so. The numerous articles and books I have written to date total approximately 1.5 million words. I have published seventeen books, all of which have been written with the above three objectives in mind. Ever since I arrived in Taiwan and began to preach the gospel to Buddhists, certain members of the Buddhist community have persecuted me and at times even threatened my life. Out of a zeal to contend for the Buddhist faith, they opposed and attacked me without any regard for their own welfare. But I truly thank the Lord, for He said, "Blessed are those who are persecuted for righteousness, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven" (Matt. 5:10). When I undergo persecution, doesn't this lend support to the fact that my work among the Buddhists is bearing fruit? Even to this day, the Lord protects me and has preserved all the hairs of my head (Luke 21:18).

3. *Eight Precautions:* When evangelizing Buddhists, the following precautions must be taken seriously: (a) Be patient. (b) Do not concentrate your efforts on one person only. Evangelize as many as possible. Because if this person (the one person) does not believe in the Lord, then have you not wasted all your energies? (c) Do not put the person on a pedestal and look upon him as a "prize." This will cause him to be proud of himself, and produce some undesirable side-effects. During my stay in Taiwan, there was a young monk who was ejected from the Buddhist seminary because he had broken the rules. He then went to a Christian church and falsely announced that he wanted to become a Christian. Thereupon, he proceeded to cheat the pastor and foreign missionaries serving

this church out of a lot of money. He was never to be found again. (d) Ask the Lord to personally work among the prospects and save them. (e) Avoid doctrinal disputes. (f) Proclaim more the words of life. (g) Invite the prospect (Buddhist) to give a public testimony of his new-found faith in Christ after his conversion. (h) Do not compromise with the Buddhist

Those who desire to evangelize Buddhist monks must also be concerned with their post-conversion vocational options. . .

beliefs. For instance, don't say: "Buddhism is also good, but it is very difficult for one to attain the goal." When you say this, aren't you agreeing that in Buddhism, one may attain the goal of salvation, but the conclusion remains that this is too difficult for anyone to achieve? Our belief is and should be that "salvation is found in no one else" except the name of Jesus (Acts 4:12). From the perspective of Christian faith, if one were to give Buddhism a grade, it would only get a zero.

B. Personal Recommendations

In the last ten years or so, there has been a great number of legal immigrants coming from various countries in Asia to the United States. Among these people are represented a large group of Chinese from Taiwan and Hong Kong. This phenomena is a product of the political instabilities present in both countries. Along with this new wave of immigrants are numerous representatives of Mahayana Buddhism (Taiwan, Hong Kong), Hinayana or Theravada Buddhism (Southeast Asia) and Lamaism (Tibet) who came to propagate their religions.

In addition, they now have their own bases for publishing their beliefs.

Buddhists from Taiwan who eye Chinese as potential converts have targeted three main groups of people: 1) the average Chinese worker or businessman and their families: most of the monks and nuns target these people; 2) the Chinese intellectual: although there are not many monks and nuns evangelizing this group, the numbers are increasing daily; 3) the Caucasian American: at present there are not many monks devoted to reaching this group of people, but many are being intensively trained. There are already some Caucasian Buddhist monks and nuns who, after their training in Buddhism, are engaging in Buddhist evangelism among their fellow Caucasians. Due to the success of Buddhism on the American continent, Chinese are naturally the first to bear the brunt of its influence.

There have already been reports of a number of Christians who have reverted to Buddhism and now attend the temple services. Furthermore, many new Chinese immigrants would rather go to the Buddhist temples than to the Christian churches. This will have a definite impact on the American churches. To this we must pay close attention.

What follows are some recommendations for American church leaders to consider:

1. *Immediately develop and train specialists in Buddhism.* Send them to Buddhist universities in America or Japan to engage in Buddhist studies. After graduation, encourage them to serve in Christian ministries to Buddhists that are totally supported by designated mission agencies.

2. *As soon as possible, establish courses in Buddhist studies and world religions* in various Christian colleges and seminaries to be taught by Christians who are experts in Buddhism, not taught by Buddhist monks. There are already a number of Chinese seminaries in the United States that have started "Buddhist Studies," "How to Lead a Buddhist to Christ" and other courses taught by the

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author. In an increasingly pluralistic religious environment, such courses should be mandatory.

3. *As soon as possible, establish branch chapters of Sunrise Center for Buddhist Studies*, founded by Mr. James Stephens. Mr. Stephens would be in charge of the promotion of the organization. I recommend that the financial obligations of this ministry be jointly underwritten by a group of American churches and mission organizations. The importance of this work demands promotion that is done by a team of many people, and not just done independently by one or two persons.

If possible, this could be done through the organization of a committee of people representing various churches that have a burden to do evangelism among Buddhists. This committee would bear the primary responsibilities involved with ministry promotion. Mr. Stephens converted to Christianity from Buddhism. He is a devoted Christian

who is very committed to evangelizing Buddhists for Christ. He is also very capable of promoting this work.

4. *Increase sponsorship of intensive courses like "Buddhist Studies" and "How to Evangelize Buddhists"* to be taught in various areas by experts in the field. This can assist pastors, ministers and Christians in their evangelistic outreach.

5. *In various churches, hold classes such as "What Christians Should Know About Buddhism"* to point out the errors of Buddhism and the merits of Christianity. This can help lay Christians to gain an adequate understanding of Buddhism so as not to be misguided in their faith by false doctrine.

6. *Greatly increase the publication of books, tracts and booklets dealing with the subject of gospel proclamation to Buddhists.* These will be written by authors who are experts in the field.

7. *Combine and focus our total efforts on*

evangelizing Buddhists in the United States. Select people will be designated to be in charge of promoting this joint effort..

If we gradually accomplish the above points, not only are we able to curtail the pervasive growth of Buddhism and to protect the churches from its harmful influence, but we will also have a part in leading great numbers of Buddhists to Christ.

The Lord said, "I have other sheep that are not of this sheep pen. I must bring them also. They too will listen to my voice, and there shall be one flock and one shepherd" (John 10:16). So may our Heavenly Father lead and bless us. And may He enable all of us to catch the vision to proclaim the good news to

INSIGHTS FOR FRONTIER MISSIONS TO THERAVADA BUDDHISTS

Successfully communicating the gospel to the Buddhist world is no easy task. The author begins with a brief overview of the historical spread of Buddhism and its encounter with Christianity. He concludes with suggestions for evangelism from personal observation and experience in East Asia.

BY ALEX G. SMITH

Reaching classical Buddhists is a tough task. They do not have common points of contact from biblical revelation like Muslims or Jews, nor do redemptive analogies abound as found in many animistic tribal peoples. Theravada Buddhism proposes a highly integrated philosophical system that is primarily atheistic and totally dependent on self effort.

The Buddhist world

The vast Buddhist world is concentrated in East Asia. However, it encircles the globe, primarily through the Diaspora of Chinese and Southeast Asian peoples plus the overseas Japanese. By the opening of the twenty-first century, the population of Buddhists will exceed 700 million. Many more Chinese could be added to this total since 45 years of iron-fisted Chinese communist control has not wiped out two millennia of Buddhist philosophy and thinking.

Buddhism has many faces among the variegated groups who adopted it. It spread often among peoples where the prevailing religion was animism.¹ Although it formulated a religious system which dominated the traditional belief systems, it did not dislodge these beliefs entirely. Today, some 2,000 unreached people groups are identified with Buddhism.

Two broad schools of Buddhism exist. Mahayana, the large vehicle, accounts for four-fifths of Buddhists, primarily Chinese, Japanese, and Korean. About 14 million of this school adhere to

a Tantric form in Tibet, Nepal, Mongolia, Bhutan, and the Commonwealth of Independent States (formerly the Soviet Union). Theravada, the small vehicle, is the second school, with about 120 million adherents, primarily in Myanmar (formerly Burma), Thailand, Sri Lanka (formerly Ceylon), Cambodia, and Laos. Buddhism also received some popularity in the West, mostly through American soldiers taking home Asian war brides as well as through the influx of Southeast Asian refugees.

Historical spread of Buddhism

The roots of Theravada Buddhism arose five hundred years before Christ through the teachings of Gautama Siddharta, who claimed to be enlightened as the Buddha. In the first three centuries, little Buddhist expansion occurred. It was confined largely to northern India and Nepal.

Then, under King Asoka of Magadha, India, a major expansion of Buddhism burst forth. Through his patronage, Asoka built 84,000 stupas, pronounced edicts exhorting the people to follow Buddhist precepts, and sent missionaries far and wide across his vast kingdom. They helped consolidate his conquests with a peaceable religious doctrine. Missionary monks also traveled the Silk Road into China and followed the trade routes to other lands in spreading the teaching of the Buddha. Then, under the Muslim conquests of the 12th century, Buddhism began to decline. Expansion seemed to have run its course.

Judeo-Christian encounter

During the intertestamental period four hundred years before Christ, a missionary movement of the Diaspora Pharisees reached as far as China.² During this time, Pharisees must have had contact with Buddhists travelling the same roads of that day. Certainly, the Nestorian Christians from the late fifth century A.D. had considerable interaction with Buddhists in China, primarily of the Mahayana school, but the Nestorian church did not survive because of syncretism and severe persecution.

In spite of centuries of significant Christian missions, both Catholic and Protestant, to the Buddhist world, little church planting and growth has resulted, with the possible exception of South Korea where the church now claims about one-third of the population. Koreans had the advantage of having an indigenous concept of God, "Hanim," which provided a vital point of contact for the gospel.

Today Christian populations among most Buddhist peoples are generally less than one percent. Wherever significant growth has occurred it has usually been among tribal animist peoples.

Short-comings

The failure of missions to make a significant impact, especially on Theravada Buddhists, involves both Buddhist barriers and missiological weaknesses. Three major Buddhist barriers need to be mentioned:

1. *Its eclectic nature.* Buddhism adeptly adjusted to the religio-cultural milieu of the peoples adopting it. For survival, it selected and incorporated essential cultural elements into Buddhism the same way that Hinduism did in reclaiming Buddhist India back into the Hindu fold. Like Hinduism, Buddhism comes in many shapes and forms: in China, it is mixed with Taoism and Confucianism; in Japan, with Shintoism, Confucianism, and ancestral worship; in Korea, with shamanism and Confucianism. The Theravada world accepted animistic spirits of the folk religion of the people, such as the “Bon” in Sri Lanka, the “Nats” in Myanmar, and the “Phii” in Thailand and Laos. Lacking rituals and life cycles of their own, Buddhists also integrated Brahman (Hindu) rituals into its syncretistic mix.

Buddhists would go even further to accept elements of Christianity as well, but there would be no room for a unique Christ. They even adapt Christian institutions. In 1880, the Young Men’s Buddhist Society was formed in Sri Lanka. In Thailand and Laos, school children parade weekly in the uniforms of Boy Scouts and Girl Guides under Buddhist guise.

2. *Buddhist solidarity.* Buddhist philosophy is all pervasive permeating the concepts and world views of a people and saturating their culture, language, education, and attitudes with Buddhistic viewpoints. In fact, the social solidarity of Buddhism is so strong that the national identity of the people comes from Buddhism. To be Thai or Burmese means to be Buddhist

3. *Theological barriers.* Paul A. Eakin summarized many historical and doctrinal similarities between Buddhism and Christianity.³ But significant contrasts of theological content, meaning and concepts are crucial to observe, especially in the doctrines of God, man, sin, salvation, and the future. As D.T. Niles points out, the final category in Buddhism is death, in Christianity it is life.⁴

A leading Buddhist scholar, Bhikkhu Buddhadasa Indapanno, comparing Christianity and Buddhism, equates God

with Karma, rejecting God’s personality in favor of impersonal “nature” as cause. He also identifies God the Creator with Buddhist’s *avijja*, meaning “lack of knowledge” or “ignorance,” a term which Buddhists identify as the cause of all evil and suffering.⁵ These theological barriers are so diametrically opposed to biblical truth that great discernment is needed, even though superficial similarities appear to exist.

The first of these three major Buddhist barriers puts pressure on the integrity of the church to remain faithful in a syncretistic society. The second threatens the identity and survival of the church and the isolation of those who would dare to stand out as Christians. The Japanese have a saying: “The nail that sticks up will be pounded down.” The third puts the Christians in a constant defensive mode under subtle, persistent pressure to compromise their beliefs and reintegrate with society.

Missiological weaknesses

1. *Mission Strategy.* Often under the colonial period, the “mission station approach” was common. In its time, it may have been the only viable way to help Christians survive and to get the Church started. But the “gathered, conglomerate,” often separates converts from their people and society and seldom has had a major impact on the core of Buddhist people groups. Christian missions and their churches were seen as outside intrusions and foreign imports to be avoided like the plague. Frequently, converts were considered traitors.

Another weakness common to the late 19th and early 20th century was in philosophy of ministry. To “civilize” and to “Christianize” were thought to be synonymous, so mission was deeply involved in both. In the process, a major tension arose between evangelism and education. Which should come first? Which should have priority? In my book, *Siamese Gold*, I give a case study of what happened in Northern Thailand 1914-1940.⁶

A change of priority in policy and strategy emphasized schools, education and institutions to the detriment of a

growing movement of the churches among the Buddhist population. The strong movement was arrested, or rather, a ripe harvest was largely neglected and died on the vine for lack of pastoral care. The new policy, to educate the Buddhists first so they may be better evangelized later, curtailed reaping the already-receptive harvest in progress. As funds, personnel, and even national evangelists and pastors were transferred into the institutional work, the churches struggled on, but the harvest of over 16,000 newly-baptized people was lost. While the Church could have tripled its 1914 membership in the North by 1940, its growth rate dropped and plateaued.

2. *Ineffective communication.* Too often evangelism revolves around the problem of meaning, especially in cultures saturated with Buddhism. A gospel proclaimer cannot transfer meaning across cultures, only bits of information will be deciphered in the minds of the Buddhist hearers. Often the Buddhist’s response regarding Christianity and Buddhism is, “They are just the same.” This indicates that inadequate communication has taken place. One should not destroy faith as a quality. But in the process of transferring faith from non-gods to the true and living God, priority should be given to communicating biblical concepts accurately. Premature decisions may inoculate Buddhists against the gospel.

3. *Lack of Indigeneity.* The Church among Buddhist societies is usually seen as an alien form and a foreign institution of the West. Frequently, the Church looks more like an imported monstrosity. Its buildings, forms, music, and methods are often so different from those of the Buddhist society. While of necessity there will be differences, too often the Church sticks out like a sore thumb or “a nail that must be pounded down.”

Strengths of Buddhists Missions

Overall, evangelizing Buddhists has been like squeezing a rubber ball—once the pressure of the thumb and finger is released, the ball immediately springs back into its original form unscathed! But four significant positive results arose

from the valiant efforts and years of sacrifice of godly missionaries and national believers who tried to penetrate Buddhist society, albeit with little success.

1. *Gospel seeds planted.* Much pioneering, sweat, and tears in witness and seed sowing among Buddhists over the years laid the foundations for an expected harvest. "You shall reap if you faint not."⁷

2. *The Church survived.* During the last century and a half, small churches have been planted and, against all odds, have survived. Signs today indicate that they are beginning to stir and grow afresh. Some small people movements have occurred. For instance, Dr. Daniel McGilvary, Presbyterian missionary to the Lao of North Thailand, saw a movement from 150 to 7,000 baptized in thirty years between 1884 and 1914. Today, churches in the North still form the strength and backbone of Christianity in that Buddhist land.

3. *Christian leaders trained.* With pressure on the Church to survive, missions took a serious role in developing leaders locally, through theological training and lay programs. Today's church leadership in Thailand and Sri Lanka is no longer the uneducated farmers of yesterday. Many national leaders of stature with degrees, training, and experience are leading the churches forward in Buddhist countries. This provides hope for the future.

4. *Goodwill established.* One benefit of Christian hospitals and educational institutions with their high standards, has been the generating of a large amount of goodwill. However, the nationalization of many of these institutions under Buddhist governments reduced the evangelistic potential. These Christian institutions did not produce a major breakthrough in church growth, but the goodwill built up has helped break down some prejudice against Christianity.

Some holistic, integrated farming experiments, such as those conducted by

Jim Gustafson among Northeast Thai Buddhists, appear to encourage church growth. In fact, where in the past a patron role has been utilized, small and lasting church movements have occurred. The difficulty is to extract oneself from that patron role without being seen as insincere in terms of the people's expectations. Another problem to avoid is the people's dependence on the patron in the process of development.

These four strengths can now be

The folk Buddhists' capacity for the gospel should be studied, especially their fear of demons and ancestral spirits.

built on and integrated into a wider strategy for reaching Theravada Buddhists.

Keys for Strategy

The following twelve suggestions come from years of observation and experience in working with Buddhists. Each is like a pearl which has grown around some irritation and pain. Strung together, these pearls may provide helpful keys for strategizing ministries among Buddhist peoples. Each key is important.

1. *The indispensable means—spiritual warfare.* Jesus said, "I will build my church."⁸ So, essentially mission is the activity of God, the Holy Spirit. Since Christ has chosen to use human vessels to accomplish evangelization, we must take part in His spiritual warfare while depending totally on Him.⁹ So, prayer is a crucial ingredient as we pull down spiritual strongholds.¹⁰

Power and truth encounters will be most effective, not in apologetic frontal attacks on Buddhism, but as power plays at the animistic underpinnings. The folk Buddhists' capacity for the gospel should

be studied, especially their fear of demons and ancestral spirits. Spiritual warfare and confrontation need to be made at these animistic cracks in the Buddhist walls.

2. *The efficient concentration—focus on one people group at a time.* Too often, working with Buddhist groups has been like a shotgun approach to everybody at large. Identifying and understanding the target people group helps concentrate the energy and time needed for acceptance, communication, and repeated contact. It also allows opportunity for diffusion of the message throughout the group.

3. *The connecting point—felt needs.* More study needs to be made on points of contact related to the felt needs of the particular people. Some of the felt needs among Theravada Buddhists in Asia are sickness (often related to the demonic world), bondage and fear of demons, concern for black magic and witchcraft, uncertainty of the future, and Karmic fatalism. Therefore, the application of the gospel concerning spiritual and physical healing, freedom from demonic oppression, protection from sorcery, and hope and certainty for the future are possible clues for approaching Buddhists.

4. *The specific goal—church planting movements.* Planting an individual church among the people is insufficient. Dr. McGavran often talked about developing "clusters of churches." A church movement that proliferates churches must be the aim. Each will be a functioning church in true worship of God, in welcoming others into the fellowship, and in reaching out in witness and service to the surrounding community. Evangelism is necessary, but must go on to produce responsible participation in local churches.

5. *The effectual communication—receptor feedback.* While the communicator must clearly understand his biblical message, it is essential that he listens to the receptor for feedback that will clarify what is actually being understood. This cyclical feedback process will help clarify the concep-

tualization of the gospel and what the actual response over time is. Reaching people at their level of understanding, listening to how God is working in their lives step by step, always makes for good evangelism no matter how long it takes.

Effective communication also needs to be couched in indigenous forms, symbol, analogy, stories and word pictures relevant to the target audience. The use of local flavored media¹¹ such as ethnic song and music, indigenous dance-drama, and other arts, should be investigated and adapted for witness and teaching.

6. *The crucial process—parallel witness and nurture.* Too often delaying evangelism in order to consolidate through Christian education interrupts the flow of continuing outreach, making it difficult to stimulate strong outreach again. Like the two rails of a train track, both evangelism and discipling should be kept running simultaneously. Also, it is very important to keep converts among their own people and culture so that they model their new faith among their relatives and friends and thus maintain contact with them—the potential for further expansion.

7. *The logistical dynamic—family-oriented approach.* Focusing on the whole family or group is a wise and biblical approach. Using the natural bridges of relationships, we should permeate the whole extended family or group with the gospel. Asian Buddhist peoples primarily are linked together by nuclear or extended families or even village web relationships. A network approach aimed at web movements is absolutely essential.

8. *The holistic strategy—comprehensive planning.* Practical steps and processes should be laid out from start to finish with a view to reaching the set goal. Detailed strategies and plans with a clear means of evaluation through each phase of the church planting movement should be drawn up. These plans should cover everything from initial reconnaissance to extension of the church and mission.

9. *The essential division of labor—two groups of leaders.* Leaders for maintenance, working in the church in disciple-

ship, are the pastors and shepherds. Another set of leaders, reaching out to the unchurched community, may be classified as fishermen. The church needs both types of leaders. The shepherds help the church grow where it is. The fishermen help the church go where it isn't. We earnestly need to pray for and develop shepherds with a fisherman's passion, and fishermen with a shepherd's heart.

10. *The continuing momentum—lay movements.* Each Christian is a most valuable agent of the gospel for church planting and extension. Daily he/she is in contact with the society where he works and lives. Church leaders must stimulate lay movements and encourage lay teams to serve both in evangelizing the community and in nurturing new believers. Lay persons provide a rich pool of gifts, abilities, resources, personnel and energy needed to keep the momentum of the Christ-ward movement going. Home disciple groups, evangelistic Bible studies, community friendship groups, and voluntary association projects are essential for ongoing evangelization and church planting.

11. *The vital flexibility—missionary roles.* During the process of evangelization, the missionary as well as the national church planter needs to adjust roles according to the stage of church development. The function in a pioneer stage would be quite different from that of a partnership stage. Working with various growing situations may demand having a different role for each situation. Basic roles such as learner, model, servant leader, are also required. Pioneer and paternal roles should move on to the next stage as soon as practical. Although it is difficult to change roles from time to time, this flexibility is vital for the growth and advancement of the churches.

12. *The final product—indigenous churches and missions.* Evaluating the whole process helps determine how truly indigenous the church is. Note especially its identity with the people group and its level of the full expression of Christ and the gospel to its own society. Are adequate "functional substitutes" being

employed for those crucial areas of culture that would leave voids apart from relevant application from the Bible? Does the church movement have indigenous missions reaching out to other people groups?

The bottom line should be judged on the basis of three R's: Does it have the *respect* of the Buddhist community? Is it taking *responsibility* under the Lord for ministry to the society around? Is it exhibiting *resourcefulness* in evangelizing its Buddhist neighbors and in coping with opposition from without?

Stimulating strong church movements among all the unreached Buddhist peoples demands much wisdom, training, sensitivity and perseverance. Reaching classical Buddhists may be a tough task, but by no means is it an impossible one.

Endnotes:

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BUDDHISM and the Gospel Among the Peoples of China

*Inviting Buddhists to faith in Jesus Christ
should be high on the mission agenda of the Church today.
This challenge is not a new one. For more than 1300 years missionaries
have sought to penetrate Buddhist barriers in and around
China with little success.*

BY RALPH COVELL

The Buddhist faith probably entered China a century or two before the Christian era, but it did not root itself deeply or spread widely until about 150 A.D. Its greatest growth came after the fall of the later Han dynasty (25-200 A.D.) and reached its ascendancy and glory during the Tang dynasty (618-907 A.D.). Ultimately, Buddhism became very popular both among the masses and the official gentry classes and was accepted as an indigenous Chinese faith.¹ The Buddhism which entered China was predominantly Mahayana, although the first books translated into Chinese by monks from India followed the original Pali tradition (Hinayana) espoused by Gautama Buddha.

Mahayana Buddhism, usually called the Greater Vehicle, seeks the salvation of all human beings. It includes the concept of saviors (Bodhisattvas) and a more concrete future existence, filled with heavens and hells. Hinayana Buddhism, the Lesser Vehicle, stresses good works for salvation and follows in the steps of Gautama's early disciples in urging adherents to attain the status of Arhat.

Hinayana Buddhism is found today in China largely along the border between Yunnan Province and Myanmar (formerly Burma) and Thailand, particularly among the Dai minority nationality. Mahayana Buddhism is found throughout the remainder of China proper and has expressed itself in several

different schools.

The Jing Tu (Pure Land), or the Lotus School, became the most popular of the Chinese Buddhist sects and was the one to which the Christian faith related the best. It advocated that salvation is through faith in Amitabha (O-mi-to-fu), one of the many Buddhas found in Mahayana teaching. Trust in Amitabha, shown by endless repetition of his name, leads to future blessedness in the Western Paradise. A savior or bodhisattva assisting in this process is Guan Yin, the Goddess of Mercy.

The Buddhism found in Tibet and Mongolia, although broadly Mahayana, is referred to as Lamaism or Tantric Buddhism. In Tibet it represents a mixture of belief in spirits (the pre-Buddhism *bon* religion) and Buddhism brought in from Nepal. In the early 1400's it was transformed into its present, dominant Yellow Sect form by Tsonk Kaba, the Martin Luther of Tibetan Buddhism.

Lamaism, introduced to Mongolia by Kublai Khan, then emperor of China, in the latter part of the 13th century, replaced the earlier shamanistic faith. It, like its sister faith in Tibet, has been very resistant to the Christian faith.

Nestorian Christianity Enters China: The Cross and The Lotus

Arriving in China in 635 A.D. from their home base in present day Iran, Nestorian missionaries were prob-

ably the first representatives of the Christian faith in the middle kingdom. Welcomed and favored by a tolerant Chinese emperor and his successors, the Nestorian faith prospered. At the time of its demise in China proper, under a severe persecution in 845 A.D., it had hundreds of monasteries, two thousand religious workers, monks, and teachers, and tens of thousands of adherents. The Nestorian tablet, a kind of time-capsule describing the Nestorian work for later generations and now preserved in the Provincial Museum in Xian, speaks about Christian salvation in terms that would have appealed to both a Buddhist and a Confucian audience. As a result of what Jesus has done, there is a "purging away the dust from human nature and perfecting a character of truth." It is further explained that "he brought life to light and abolished death" by opening the "three constant gates," possibly a Buddhist phrase alluding to the eye, ear, and nose. In other words, believers were totally opened up to God's life and light.

When Jesus had "taken an oar in the vessel of mercy and ascended to the palaces of light above," referring probably to the ascension, "those who have souls were then completely saved." Here again the figure of speech is the Buddhist concept of humankind hopelessly lost in a sea of suffering and sin and headed for shipwreck. The compassionate Savior, filled with mercy, provides a vessel for salvation. In a sense, then, Jesus is presented as a Buddhist bodhisattva

descended from God to save humanity.

In his teaching Jesus “laid down the rule of the eight conditions—cleansing from the defilement of sense and perfecting truth.” This probably refers to the beatitudes in Matthew’s Gospel, but it may also allude to the eight-fold path of Buddhism.

Jesus’ work on the cross is couched in the Buddhist phrase, “to hang up the sun.” Therefore, Jesus “hung up a brilliant sun to take by storm the halls of darkness; the wiles of the devil were then all destroyed.” At this early period and continuing to the present, the term *jing* has been used for Christian scripture and the word *si* (temple) to translate “monastery.” Also, the name for Sakyamuni, *shi zun*, literally meaning the “world revered one,” was used by the Nestorian missionaries for the incarnate Lord.

Ricci and Buddhism

The missionaries did not hesitate to preach against the substance of Buddhism. When they talked about the “365 sects” that had arisen to corrupt the true faith, they singled out the idea of “being and non-being” that had been introduced by Satan. In the Sutra of Jesus the Messiah, the writers stressed the importance of filial piety, a doctrine that was not very important to the Buddhists until a later date.

This initial contact of Christianity with Buddhism has raised two important questions. Did Nestorian Christianity contribute to some of the unusual “Christianlike” emphases of Mahayana Buddhism, and, if so, to what extent? Scholars do not agree in their answers, although most would accept the fact that the Nestorian practice of saying Masses for the dead indirectly led both Chinese and Japanese Buddhism to develop a reverence for departed souls. On the role of Amitabha Buddha, the idea of saviors, and “salvation by grace,” there is much less agreement.

Was Nestorian Christianity a syncretistic mix with Buddhism which compromised its purity and vitality? This may have been the case by the time of the 9th century, but we know too little of the precise historical situation to give a definitive answer. As Samuel Moffett observes, “The line between distortion and adapta-

tion or contextualization is difficult to define.”² One person’s syncretism is another person’s contextualization. In either case the Nestorian emissaries deserve a high mark for this initial bold and creative attempt to relate their message to the Buddhist context.

Late Ming and Early Jing China

Roman Catholic missionaries who came to China in the 13th century did not have any significant contact with Buddhism. Most of their efforts seem to have been directed toward the Mongol court and its leaders. This undoubtedly led them to relate in some way to Lamaism, but there is no specific record of this. Referred to by the name *Ye li ko wen*, a Mongol term, the Christianity of this period established no ongoing church among either the Han Chinese or the Mongols and the other tribal groups in the north that they dominated. Nestorian Christianity gained great success among the Uighur, Ongut, and Kerait tribes, but the original faith of these groups was probably a folk religion and not Buddhism.

Matteo Ricci and the Early Jesuits

When Matteo Ricci and his companion Michele Ruggieri first arrived in Zhaoqing, a few miles north of Canton, in 1582, they assumed that Buddhist monks and their faith were highly respected by the local populace. Adopting the life style of these religious figures, they wore long, tattered gray gowns, shaved their faces clean, and had their hair close cropped. They lived wherever they could find space in a variety of temples and adopted a life style of poverty. This was a true immersion, but in the wrong pool! Buddhism and its leaders were not respected, but despised. So Ricci and Ruggieri did a total about face and identified themselves with the Confucian scholars.

Among other things, this meant that they learned to despise Buddhism, even as the scholars did. They did not, however, totally neglect Buddhist leaders. For example, Ricci was invited to debate with a man who had forsaken his position with the *litterati* and was now in charge of the idols in a temple. Ricci

engaged him in a long discussion on the subject of pantheism and tried to show him how he had mistakenly identified God with the material world.

Ricci noted external ways in which Buddhism resembled Catholicism: the masses, pious images, chants, almsgiving, celibacy, paradise, and hell. To the missionaries these were but “traps set by the devil” to delude people.³ Some converts from Buddhism to Catholicism reflected that their former faith was really a degenerate form of Christianity.

Even though the Jesuits’ intended audience was the Confucian elite, ethical works based on natural philosophy, such as Ricci’s *Twenty-five Utterances*, was received with favor also by Buddhist leaders.⁴ The same could not be said about Ricci’s *Teaching of the Heavenly Lord* (Tianzhu Shiyi). He affirms that the “emptiness” of Buddhism and the “nothingness” of Daoism have been the major obstacles to keep people from knowing the true God. He devoted one entire section of his work to refuting the doctrine of transmigration and the Buddhist prohibition of killing animals.

Although many Catholic missionaries felt a thorough study of Buddhism to be a useless task, they did gain enough understanding to enable them and their Buddhist counterparts to engage in periodic dialogue—either personally or through their writings—to sharpen some of the philosophical points of difference between the two faiths. The major stumbling blocks were the Christian idea of a personal God, the incarnation, the nature of the world as illusory or real, the compassion of the Buddha as compared with the seeming intolerance of the God of Heaven, and the Buddhist doctrine of transmigration.⁵

As converts were won, they often found simple functional substitutes for some pre-Christian practices. Michael Yang gave ointment to cure sick people in the temple, praying to the gods for healing at the same time. After his conversion he continued the same practice, only in a Christian meeting place and with a picture of Jesus replacing the gods.⁶

Jesuit Missionaries in Tibet

Catholic missionaries had entered

China in the 13th and 14th centuries under the Mongol leaders and once again in the 16th century. However, they made no effort to enter Tibet until the 1620's, near the end of the Ming Dynasty (1368-1644 A.D.). The first Jesuit missionaries came to Tsaparang in the far south-western corner of Tibet and were permitted to build a chapel. They entered into serious discussions with Buddhist lamas on such weighty topics as the nature of God and reincarnation. This promising beginning fell victim very soon to a local civil war.

During this early period, other Jesuit missionaries reached Xigaze from their base in Bhutan. Again, chaotic local conditions hindered the work, although Christian believers numbered in the hundreds. On March 18, 1716, an Italian Jesuit, Ippolito Desideri, reached Lhasa, even then the ultimate goal of all missionaries. After only a few months of diligent study, combined with intensive discussions with Tibetan lamas on their faith, he prepared an apologetic work. He presented this book to the king and discussed with him all aspects of the Christian faith. The king and his advisers, although disagreeing with Desideri, did not interfere with him, even providing him with a small chapel in which he held daily mass.

In 1717, he moved two miles away from Lhasa itself to continue his studies at a famous monastery, plunging ever more deeply into the complex mysteries of Tibetan Buddhism. Much to his despair, he learned that the most learned of the lamas were not able to answer his questions. Again, political realities took over! The Mongols captured Lhasa, murdering the king and his ministers. The next thrust into Tibet was made by the Capuchin friars about 1740. They opened a small dispensary in Lhasa, translated catechisms, distributed literature, and commenced chapel services. By 1742 they counted 27 baptized adult converts and double that number of interested inquirers. Over 2500 children, most near death, were baptized to gain eternal salvation. Lack of cultural sensitivity resulted in some unwise action by a

number of converts, such as refusing to revere the Dalai Lama by bowing and not performing some expected activities. In the vicious persecution that followed, the mission closed down and the fathers took a hasty retreat to Nepal.⁷

No further Catholic efforts were made in Tibet until 1846 when Abbe Huc and Father Gabet, both of the Vincentian Order and living in Beijing, undertook a long exploratory trip that

missionaries, and they were forced to leave Lhasa.

Roman Catholic efforts from the mid-19th century until 1949 waxed and waned, with alternate periods of revitalization and persecution. The single status of the missionaries enabled them to penetrate further into frontier areas that were more difficult for the family-oriented Protestants. In their several stations of work, some from bases in India and

others from bases in China, the missionaries started schools for young people, held catechism classes for adults, and engaged in many ministries of compassion that attracted people to the Christian faith. Initial evangelistic outreach was usually done through catechists, enabling the foreign priests to remain in the background.

Whenever feasible, the missionaries sought to stimulate "people movements to Christ." Although sometimes

jump-started by promise of French protection to converts, the catechetical process was quite thorough. An important ingredient in this effort was to help people forsake the devil. For six sorcerers who came to the missionaries near the small village of Bonga, they had a ready-made formula: "Be loosed by Jesus and Mary! Embrace the crucifix. Make the sign of the cross. Dismiss them (the demons) in peace." The sorcerers then brought their drums used in exorcism, and these, along with many fetishes used in their worship, were thrown into the river. Three hundred and twenty-three people were baptized in this area.

As the missionaries visited pagan homes, they noted many indications of unbelief: ancestral tablets, idols, and holders for incense sticks. As people believed, the missionaries urged them to use "functional" substitutes--images of Mary, statues of St. Joseph and angels, and a crucifix--to replace these pagan symbols and to help them focus their faith visually.

The most effective Catholic work in the 1930s and 1940s was done in and around Yerkalo, along the Yunnan borders of Tibet. Depending on local circumstances at a particular time, this

In all their years in Tibet, Catholic missionaries lived a simple life among Tibetan nomads and learned well the life and culture of the people...

took them through Manchuria, Mongolia, and Tibet. As they travelled toward Lhasa, the two missionaries had specific missionary goals which they did not seek to conceal. One was to translate a short account from the time when the world was created to the period of the apostles. They put this in the form of a dialogue between a lama of the Lord of Heaven and a Buddha. This detailed record of people, places, and dates contrasted markedly with the lamas' quasi mythical records.

When they reached Lhasa, Huc and Gabet found the Tibetan regent very friendly. He allowed them to set up a little chapel in their home for worship and to explain to those who came the meaning of the large pictures of the crucifixion hanging on the wall. He was very open to this new teaching:

Your religion is not the same as ours. It is important we should ascertain which is the true one. Let us, then, examine both carefully and sincerely. If yours is right, we will adopt it. How could we refuse to do so? If, on the contrary, ours is the true religion, I believe you will have the good sense to follow it.⁸

Unfortunately, the Chinese ambassador was extremely antagonistic to the

village was either in Chinese Tibet or independent Tibet. Father Maurice Tournay, a St. Bernard missionary to Tibet, had innovative ways in which to communicate Christian truth. He wrote plays for his students that resembled the medieval mystery plays, with their drama of the confrontation between angels and devils. These dramas had practical themes: how to overcome avarice, how to defeat an opium-smoking habit. Not strictly religious in nature, but touching critical issues of local society, they attracted both Christian and pagan audiences.⁹

In all their years in Tibet, Catholic missionaries lived a simple life among Tibetan nomads and learned well the life and culture of the people. They were prepared to dialogue philosophically with the lamas or to deal directly with village people on their fears of the spirit world. Seeking whenever possible to promote people movements, they were able to establish Christian communities to which then they ministered through hospitals, schools, seminaries, and institutions of compassion. Their work on both sides of the China-Tibet border has proved to have more lasting quality than any of the many ministries engaged in by Protestant missionaries in the same areas.

The Colony Approach in Mongolia

We have already noted that Kublai Khan, influenced by an imperial tutor from Tibet during his reign as emperor of China, introduced the lamaistic form of Buddhism to his people in the 14th century. However, when the Mongols lost their power in China in 1368 A.D., Buddhism also lost its influence among the peoples of Mongolia. It was reintroduced to the country in the latter part of the 15th century by the grandson of Dayan Khan, who once again unified the many Mongol sub-groups.

As was the case when Buddhism began to prosper in late Han China, a key to its success was its response to widespread suffering. One author has commented:

Shamanism gave neither security for the struggle of life nor consolation in the hour of death, but Buddhism offered both with an emphasis on compassion, hope for

the future life, benevolence, peace, and institutions for a more sophisticated culture. Consequently, Lamaism was accepted by both the elite of society and the masses.¹⁰

When the Mongol dynasty was overthrown in 1368, there were about 30,000 Roman Catholic Christians, many of whom were Mongols. With the advent of the Ming dynasty in 1368, Christianity in China virtually disappeared, and this appears to have been the fate also of these Mongol Christians. When the Jesuit missionaries reached north China in the 17th century, they found mostly Chinese Christians, who had fled for refuge into Mongolia because of periodic persecution by the Jing dynasty rulers.

When Lazarist missionaries penetrated what is now Inner Mongolia late in the 18th century, it was with high hopes of establishing Mongol churches. But this hope for "Missions in Mongolia" quickly became "Missions amongst the Chinese in Mongolia."¹¹

The only large response among the Mongol peoples came out of the suffering wreaked on their villages when Muslims from Shaanxi and Gansu provinces burned their temples and lamaseries and killed a large number of people. Missionaries were able to form a group of converts in this area which formed the foundation for what came to be known as the Mongol Christian community at Poro Balgeson. This became the only enduring work which either Catholics or Protestants had among the Mongols. Poro-Balgeson was one example of the "reductions" developed by the Catholics from land which they had received from the government, often as reparation for lives lost and property damaged by persecution, particularly at the time of the Boxer rebellion in 1900.

Each family admitted to the community for living had to attest in writing to its willingness to convert to Catholicism, to promise to study the catechism and to observe the regulations of the village and of the church, and to obey the commandments of God. Catholic priests and the catechists led in the instruction of new tenants, a process that might extend from several months to two years before baptism was administered. All in the community were expected to

observe adoration, praise, the service of God, obedience to the divine commandments and to ecclesiastical discipline; to receive the sacraments; to recite prayers; and to practice works of charity.

Catholic scholars have often been critical of this economic motivation, but most have concluded that it has been a starting point for a faith that has persevered under severe trials. The Christian community was persecuted by the Boxers in 1900, but it was rebuilt following this disaster and soon attained a population of about 1000 Christians. It continued until the advent of the People's Republic of China, when, along with other reductions, most of its activities were closed down.¹²

Protestant Efforts Among Buddhists in Tibet via India and China

The first Protestant effort to penetrate Tibetan Buddhism came from Moravian missionaries working in Ladak and Leh in the Kashmir area of India. They hoped eventually to get into Tibet proper but were happy for the many opportunities to reach Tibetans living in India and those who travelled as traders back and forth between Tibet and India. From the beginning, the Moravians appointed mission personnel to the vital task of Bible translation into Tibetan. With this task in process, they were able to find the proper terms to use in preparing catechisms, tracts, and scripture portions.

Missionaries learned early from their Tibetan colleagues that a one-to-one witness repeated to someone with an educational background was far better than a public sermon. People were not used to listening to long discourses. Even more difficult, their background with the lamas led them to expect that religious messages were not really understandable, only ritual, to which they need not pay much attention.

Framing Christian truth in stories, particularly those that paralleled some of the parables of Jesus and were interspersed with the pithy, wise sayings used by Tibetan story tellers, was essential if the message was not to be viewed as foreign. Raising up a corps of several well-trained evangelists who would take an increasing leadership role after the first

twenty or thirty years was also central to their strategy.

Tibetans were always attracted by a "Tanka," a cloth banner or scroll on which were painted in the center the head of Christ, and around it in a circular fashion eight scenes from the life of Christ with a parable in each of the four corners. Creative evangelists, imitating Tibetan religious practices, made use of "wayside pulpits," rocks on which they had chiselled or painted scripture portions.

A.H. Francke developed the novel idea of a monthly Tibetan newspaper for limited distribution. His aim was to "disseminate Christian truth, and to educate the Tibetans as regards the advance of knowledge and to give him a wider understanding of the great world in which he lives." The Gospel Inn, a hostel to provide hospitality for travellers and pilgrims, was an important place of contact for discussion and the distribution of literature.

Gospel portions were bound like Tibetan books in loose-leaf covers between either two red or yellow cover boards, wrapped in linen and tied with a string. Scripture was printed on a rough fibrous paper and not with fine English paper, so that it might be much more similar to local books. Evangelists warned the people carefully that gospel portions should not be put on an altar and worshipped.

The Moravians established several churches in this area with hundreds of largely Tibetan Christians, much better than the record of other Protestant groups, whether in China or India.

Most Protestant mission agencies desiring to evangelize Tibetans worked from the China side. These included the China Inland Mission, The Christian and Missionary Alliance, the Assembly of God, and the Foreign Christian Mission Society. The big question all these groups faced was, "Where is Tibet?" Was it that area under Lhasa's jurisdiction, or in the territory controlled by China but still largely populated by Tibetans? Often the boundary was a floating one, which meant that the extent and nature of the difficulties faced by the missionaries escalated wildly. Generally speaking, most of the work was conducted in Chinese Tibet. A leading method in missionary

work was widespread itineration, accompanied by mass distribution of literature and by market preaching. Each mission group had a base somewhere in the northern, central, or southern area of the China-Tibet border frontier, but a large amount of time was spent in disseminating the message widely. People became accustomed to measuring their success and satisfaction by the number of kilometers covered, the number of tracts distributed, the sermons preached, and the contacts made. Was this of value? Undoubtedly, but insufficient effort was given to solidifying the center with a variety of ministries and to following up the most promising contacts. Missionary infatuation with Roland Allen's *Missionary Methods St. Paul's or Ours?* led them to be anti-institutional and to give too much credence to the effectiveness of short-term witness in many widely-separated sites. The extent of ongoing contact needed between the source and receptor of the Christian faith before a solid conversion could result was minimized.

Some missionaries used tents and worked out "travelling agreements" of friendship with local leaders, permitting them to go along with nomads for two- and three-month periods as they worked from place to place. As missionaries moved from place to place, they sought to make friends with lamas in the innumerable lamaseries. Often it was possible to distribute literature and to engage in systematic teaching for several days. Unfortunately, it was difficult to discern between real interest in the gospel and polite hospitality. Very few results came from these visits to lamaseries, the center of Tibetan Buddhist life. Many "loner" missionaries were obsessed more with myth than reality as getting to Lhasa. One brother claimed a victory for the Gospel when he got close enough to Lhasa to see the reflection of the sun off the Potala Palace!¹³ Much promotional hype substituted for the hard task of learning more about Tibetan Buddhism and of finding more appropriate ways to witness in that specific context.

Voices of warning were heard occasionally. D.E. Hoste, General Director of the China Inland Mission, commented on these lone missionary forays into Tibet's interior:

The opinion of some, well qualified by years of experience to judge, is that probably the regions under consideration will be best evangelized by Chinese and Tibetan Christians. . .¹⁴

Wise words for 1907 that are not heeded very well even in 1993!

Susie Rijnhart, a medical doctor with the Foreign Christian Missionary Society, was deeply disturbed by the missionary penchant to despise the Buddhist faith:

There is something pathetic in this spectacle of heathen worship, and it is not, in my opinion, the part of the Christian missionary to assume an air of ridicule and contempt for the religious ideas and practices of peoples less enlightened than his own; for in every religious service, however absurd or degraded from the Christian viewpoint, there is some feeble acknowledgement of and groping after the one great God to whom all men and nations are alike dear.¹⁵

These words, also, need to be heard ninety years later. Few examples can be found of specific ways in which the faith was contextualized to the Tibetan world view.

Demon oppression was rampant in this part of the world. Several missionaries testified of the ways in which God used them to exorcize demons that were holding people in bondage. Faith healing was also a method widely used, particularly among the Christian and Missionary Alliance, to bring people to faith.

We might ask, of the small churches established along the China-Tibet border, how many of the converts were Tibetans? Whatever that number may have been, and statistical tables do not make this clear, few persevered in their faith over a long period of time

North of the Border in Mongolia

Missionaries from the London Missionary Society, who entered Siberia in 1818, were the first Protestant missionaries to work with the Mongol peoples. From their center in Selenginsk, just to the east of the famed Lake Baykal, they ministered to the Buryat Mongols. Their missionary approach followed the

usual pattern: learning the language, translating the Bible, writing and distributing tracts, evangelizing, starting churches, establishing general schools and seminaries.¹⁶

The complexity of the people's belief system led one of the missionaries to question whether it was the "internally verifying truths of Christianity" that would lead people to belief or whether it had to be miraculous gifts of power.¹⁷ No missionary, at least one deserving of the name, would pretend to possess the latter, he believed, and so there was really no choice.

The missionaries did better than they knew in accommodating to the Buddhist context. When the Synod of the Greek Church, under whose general permission they had been allowed to work, withdrew their favor, it was because the missionaries allegedly allowed potential converts to "remain in their former heathendom" and propagated the "errors of infidelity."¹⁸

The best known of the early missionaries to the Mongols was James Gilmour. During his first term on the field, he concentrated on winning Mongols to Christ. Later in his ministry, while still living in Mongolia, he concentrated more on responsive Chinese in Mongolia. Gilmour was not afraid to converse with Mongols on difficult theological issues: What about three gods? What happened to those who died before the coming of Jesus? What about those who never heard the gospel? How is the future state to be reconciled with transmigration? How did a good God allow sin to enter the world? Is not *karma* a more reasonable approach than an easy doctrine of grace and no need for good works? How can you be sure that Christian Scriptures have more truth than the Buddhist canon?

Gilmour questioned some of his own earlier methods and those of his colleagues. He wondered at the value of long itineration, although this had been basic to his initial ministry in Mongolia. Was it not better to reach Mongolians from a Chinese base and to train Chinese to do it? He saw the value of being able from the first to have a community of faith. He claimed that "it is very doubtful if a consistent native Christian could subsist on the plain among his Buddhist

countrymen."¹⁹

Gilmour also concluded that the Bible ought not to be the first literature given to inquiring Mongols. Because Holy Scripture included too many unfamiliar proper names and doctrines that were strange even to an educated Mongol, he felt it far better to use gaudy, multi-colored books that were very short and could give a brief introduction to the Christian faith. The nature of Gilmour's critique reveals something of the discouragement he felt in seeking to penetrate the barrier of Buddhism. This was true of all those who followed Gilmour. Like the Catholics, they worked in Mongolia and saw churches established, but the members were Chinese, not Mongols.

Barriers of Buddhism Among Han Chinese

Early Protestant missionaries among the Han Chinese followed the lead of the 17th century Jesuits in despising Buddhism as a religion. To their supporters at home, they spoke of pagan idols, silly ceremonies, immoral monks, decrepit temples, and systems of thought that were dead. Their hope, epitomized by one missionary speaker at the General Conference in 1877 in Shanghai, was that they might "destroy this fortress of Buddhism." Many, in varying degrees and by differing methods, were prepared to accommodate the Christian message to Confucianism--again in the model of the Jesuits--but not to Buddhism.

Early Protestant literature on Buddhism (usually just called "idolatry") was heavily judgmental. From 1912 to 1949, a period dominated by the New Culture Movement, the Anti-Christian movements, the rise of communism and war with Japan, no books were published which dealt with Buddhism, Confucianism, or Taoism. Apparently no one thought it important to treat China's religions seriously.²⁰

The more perceptive missionaries knew that some accommodation had already taken place. Robert Morrison and early translators of the Bible into Chinese had already incorporated into their translations some of the Buddhist vocabulary found in Catholic Scripture portions and literature. Terms such as

sin, heaven, hell, devil, soul, life to come, new birth, repentance, retribution, and many others were all Buddhist in origin. How would anyone communicate without using local expressions familiar to the people, filling them with new content, and consecrating them to new use?

As scholars translated some of the Buddhist classics and made them more available to the general public in the latter half of the 19th century, a few missionaries developed more open attitudes to Buddhism in China. At the more moderate end of the continuum was W.A.P. Martin who believed that the Christian faith could be considered as a "successor to Buddhism." Buddhism was the trunk of a tree to which the "vine of Christ" could be grafted. He argued that the belief of the Mahayana faith in a divine being, the immortality of the soul, and the future life was a far better preparation for the Christian faith than the materialism of *Daoism* or the agnosticism of Confucianism.²¹ Joseph Edkins felt that the presence of Buddhism in Chinese life led the people to view Christianity with "much less strangeness" than would otherwise have been the case.²²

At the other extreme of the continuum was Timothy Richard, an English Baptist missionary who came to China in 1869. To him the sutra *The Awakening of the Faith of the Pure Land School* was the Gospel in Chinese for the Buddhist peoples of China. In this small book, which he discovered in 1884, he claimed to find a God who is both transcendent and immanent, salvation by faith, a deep sense of compassion for the world, comparable to the Kingdom of God, and a Messiah who had come to bless all humanity. How could this have occurred? Richard claimed that Ashvagosha, the composer of this sutra, had been taught the truth of the gospel in India by the Apostle Thomas. This led him to help in transforming the original Hinayana form to the Mahayana and in bringing it into China as a higher type of Buddhism. Missionary colleagues dismissed this view as preposterous and secular critics gave it no credence. They claimed it was irresponsible to invest the key terms of the sutra with the Christian meanings that Richard alleged were there.

Not as moderate as Martin nor as radical as Richard, Karl Reichelt was a visionary pioneer in charting a new²³ course of approaching Chinese Buddhists. Affiliated initially with the Norwegian Missionary Society, Reichelt focused his effort almost entirely on reaching seekers, or "friends of the Dao," from among Buddhist leaders and laypeople. To this end, he established a program that welcomed wandering monks and pilgrims to visit for religious conversation, trained those who made a commitment to Christ, and held retreats and conferences for seekers. He started with a conference center in Nanjing, but in 1927, under the name of The Christian Mission to Buddhists, he built a new site near Shatin in the New Territories, Hong Kong, and called it Tao Fong Shan. The center continues to today, but with a different emphasis from what Reichelt had.

The Dao Became Flesh

What made Tao Fong Shan unique to those who came to inquire there? Located on a scenic hill top, with many surrounding mountains, its facilities and style of worship created no immediate external obstacles to studying the Christian faith. Most prominent was an octagonal temple, with its roof curved in the familiar lines of Chinese architecture. Within the temple was an "altar in beautiful Chinese style, with a red lacquer finish... the swastika of cosmic unity and perfect peace, the fish of Eastern and Western sanctity, and the Greek monogram for Christ."²⁴ Above the gate through which people entered the complex of buildings was a cross rising out of a lotus to show that the best of Buddhism was fulfilled in Christ. Above the inner entrance to the *sheng dian* (holy temple) was the phrase, "The Dao Became Flesh," and along the two sides of the door were the phrases "The Dao Was with God" and "The Wind Blows Where it Wills."

Candles, incense, and meditation were a part of the worship service. Buddhist monks in their temple services chanted the "Three Refuges" -- "I take

refuge in the Buddha, in the Dharma (law) and in the Sangha (the order/community)." For this central Buddhist affirmation, Reichelt substituted a full liturgy which amplified the basic, "I take refuge in Father, Son, and Holy Spirit."

While holding firmly to faith in the uniqueness of Jesus Christ and the need explicitly to "name the Name" of Christ for salvation, Reichelt believed that Jesus,

to find serious religious seekers. He made significant friendships with important national Buddhist leaders, chief of whom was Tai Hsu, who sought to renew Chinese Buddhism. In 1923, he attended a world conference of Buddhists at Gulin, a summer retreat center, and lectured on John 1 and the identification of Jesus the Logos with the Dao.

Reichelt himself travelled widely to temples and monasteries to find serious religious seekers.

God's Eternal Logos, was working to lead people toward Christ within every religious faith. He based his convictions on what he called "the Johannine Approach." This gave special emphasis to the "light that lights every person was coming into the world" (John 1:9) and to the Logos who was in the world and was both resisted and received by different people (John 1:10-13). When the Logos entered human society and completed his work of salvation, He led these "seekers" to recognize Him in His fullness (John 1:14ff). In this approach Reichelt followed in the path of early Christian leaders like Justyn Martyr, Clement of Alexandria, Origen, and Augustine who promoted the work of what they called the *logos spermatikos*. Reichelt could not claim great results, but, sparse as they were, they far exceeded what other missionaries reaped from the same kind of people.

Including the pre-Hong Kong ministries and the period in Hong Kong from 1930 to 1950, over two hundred people were baptized, and nearly 1500 came to the center to study the Christian faith seriously. Reichelt's influence spread far beyond statistics. Those who were converted had extensive correspondence with their former associates, they wrote testimonial letters in the Chinese press, and they had significant ministries in many places.²⁵ Reichelt himself travelled widely to temples and monasteries

The Message in the Receptor Culture

Reichelt did more than equate Jesus with the Dao of the Chinese religious scene. He probed deeply into Buddhism, seeking to relate God's revelation to such doctrines as the bodhisattvas, salvation as identification with the ultimate, *karma*, *nirvana*, and meditation. This was no "proof text" approach and was not argumentative in style. He truly tried to understand Buddhist thinking and relate to sincere seekers wherever he could find them. An outgoing and warm personality, he made friends with people in such a way as to draw them to Christ.²⁶

Reichelt's approach, with modifications to fit the current world scene, is continued partially by the Tao Fong Shan Christian Center. Its periodical, *Areopagus*, stimulates people to understand, dialogue with, and witness to the religions of Asia, particularly Buddhism. Various articles in the journal, for example, have tried to relate Zen (Chan in Chinese) to the Christian-Buddhist encounter.²⁷

Christians concerned for China continue to interact with Buddhism. The Lausanne Committee for World Evangelization, with a focus on evangelizing the unreached peoples, published a booklet on Christian witness to Buddhists reflecting insights from its world gathering at Pattaya, Thailand, 1980. The Sunrise Center for Buddhist Studies in Sierra Madre, California does research, offers courses on Buddhism, and provides practical outlets for Christian witness.

On a more dialogical note, John P. Keenan, an Episcopal priest with experience in Japan, has followed somewhat in Reichelt's footsteps in his significant

work *The Meaning of Christ A Mahayana Theology* (Orbis, 1989). The author draws upon the Old Testament, the New Testament, and church tradition to show how Christ, the Wisdom of God, is at the heart of traditional Christian mystical thinking. With this as a foundation, he then explains in detail how the Mahayana worldview provides the perspective and language to give new insights, mostly mystical, into the meaning of Christ. Keenan asserts repeatedly his commitment to the classic Christian faith, even as he explores how key Christian doctrines can be expressed within a Mahayana worldview. Is this basically any different than the early church developing its faith within a neo-Platonic worldview?²⁸ Do we need to continue to concretize it in this form?

The Society for Buddhist-Christian Studies has carried on Buddhist-Christian dialogue on a high intellectual and philosophical level since the 1980s. Although the clarification of differences and commonalities has little practical implication for direct Christian witness, the materials are useful to give a better understanding of the intricacies of the Buddhist faith.²⁹

Concluding Reflections

Can we generalize from the many experiences of God's servants as they have sought for several centuries to carry his message to the Buddhist world in China? Let us look at the more obvious of these in outline form.

1. *The message and messenger must be incarnate* in the receptor culture. This includes personal life-style, an attitude of empathy and sensitivity to people whose faith is as devout and sincere as their own, and an outgoing, friendly spirit that accepts people (not all their belief systems) as they are. A key missionary term is "go." This is only a movement across geographic boundaries. More important, it means that witnesses "go" to where people are, conceptually and linguistically. They do not insist initially that people "come" intellectually to where they are.

2. In order to be incarnate, *witnesses must adopt the role of learner*. This does not mean necessarily that they earn high degrees in Western universities, although

this is not precluded. Too many young, earnest missionaries are going to the field with only a smattering of what they need in theology, philosophy, history, culture, and sociology. A compulsive urgency to meet some supposed deadline by which time the task must be completed can only put them into the loop of failure that has characterized most ministries to Buddhists in the past.

As important as pre-field formal education is, the in-depth learning from people and institutions within the receptor culture is also very significant. Buddhism in China is very much alive today.³⁰ Those who wish to witness in this context will do well to spend several years learning, not merely the language but all the ins and outs of this complex faith. Where are those who will follow in the train of the missionary scholar-evangelists from China's past Catholic and Protestant mission history?

3. Witnesses need to recognize that *God reached the land of their potential service long before they did!* They will seek out those in whose hearts Jesus the Eternal Logos has been showing His light. They do not begin from scratch, from a tabula rasa. They follow up what God has been doing. This means they need to identify with these "seekers" to let them know that they too are spiritual and have the authority of Christ to lead them farther in their pilgrimage. Phil Parshall from his ministry among Muslims, some of whom he found to be true inquirers after truth, was appalled to find that even his best friends thought him to be more of a wheeler-dealer Western entrepreneur than a man of God. Western missionaries working among Buddhists with their mystical faith must be men of faith which is much more than gadgets, technique, technology, money, and supporting friends from the West who want a part in the action.

4. As the message and messenger are incarnate within the receptor culture, *a "people movement" to Christ becomes a real possibility*. Sometimes these develop spontaneously--at other times the missionary may need to use specific methods not familiar to him from his Western background and with his Western expectations.

5. In limited-access areas of the world

among resistant people groups, *a unified witness, even among lone individuals from various mission groups, will have much more impact than that made by a number of isolated witnesses*. Such a unified approach will also make it possible to utilize the spiritual gifts of many people and thus provide a far wider range of services for the developing community.

6. *The witness for Christ among Buddhists will include philosophical discussions as well as "power encounters" with the demonic world*. Where confrontation occurs it is not with people, but with ideas and attitudes.

7. The best witness, even that aimed at a people movement, *will be personal "people contact"* and not merely be "points-of-contact." The witness will need to be more visual and less verbal.

8. If possible, *the missionary needs to develop a team* that includes non-Western converts from Buddhism. This will enable the white, Western missionary to stay in the background.

9. Although political stability is not under human control, *mission organizations need to plan for a full range of Christian ministries* over a long time contact with the people and not be satisfied with just a fleeting short term outreach.

10. What do the above principles mean negatively? *The witnesses must not despise Buddhism or the Buddha*; stereotype Buddhism, its leaders, nor its teachings;³¹ nor confuse their assertions of the supremacy of Christ with their own sense of superiority, assuming that their grasp of the truth (not the truth itself) is absolute, nor assume that they have all the answers. In the apt phrase of Daniel Niles they are merely beggars telling other beggars where to find bread.

11. Finally, on a more positive note, *the message is Christ*, not Christianity or a religion as such. This will deliver the witnesses from argumentation and from a religious debate or beauty contest in determining whether Buddhism or Christianity is superior.

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Endnotes

1. For a detailed examination of this

process, see Ralph Covell, *Confucius, The Buddha, and Christ*, (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1986), pp. 133-150.

2. Samuel Moffett, *A History of Christianity in Asia*, Volume I, Beginnings to 1500, (San Francisco: Harper, 1992), 311. Most of the other material in this section on Nestorian Christianity comes from my book *Confucius, the Buddha, and Christ*, Chapter 2, "Jesus and the Lotus — The Nestorian Faith," pp. 20-35.

3. Jacques Gernet, *China and the Christian Impact: A Conflict of Cultures* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1982), pp. 74-75.

4. Gernet, *Ibid.*, p. 143.

5. Some examples of these disputes are given in Gernet. Also, N. Standaert in *Yang Tingyun Confucian and Christian in Late Ming China*, (Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1988), notes that "anti-Christian writings from the end of the Ming Dynasty are numerous and have been studied extensively. Most of these anti-Christian texts are directed against the Jesuits, particularly, against M. Ricci and his most famous successors, N. Longobardo and G. Aleni," p. 162.

6. Standaert, *Ibid.*, p. 89.

7. The material of these initial Roman Catholic efforts in Tibet come from several sources: C. Wessels, S.J., *Early Jesuit Travellers in Central Asia 1603-1721*, (The Hague: Martinus Nijhoff, 1924); M. L'Abbe Huc, *Christianity in China, Tartary, and Thibet*, (London: Longman, Brown, Green, Longmans, and Roberts, 1857), Volume II, 249-271; Fillipo de Fillipi, *An Account of Tibet: The Travels of Ippolito Desideri of Pistola, S.J. 1712-1727*, (London: George Routledge and Sons, Ltd., 1931).

8. Huc and Gabet, *Travels in Tartary, Thibet and China 1844-1846*, (London: George Routledge and Sons, Ltd., 1928), Volume II, p. 79.

9. For Catholic work in Tibet since 1850 several sources are useful: Adrian Launay, *Histoire Tibet; Les Missions Catholiques*, published by Propagation de la Foi et de Saint-Pierre Apotre; Adrian Launay, *Memorial de la Societe Missions-Estrangeres; Annales de la Propagation de la Foi*; various issues of Catholic Missions published by the Society for the Propagation of the Faith in New York, beginning

in 1907. Gaston Gratuze, *Un Pionnier de la Mission Tibetaine Le Pere Auguste Desgodins 1826-1913*, (Paris: Apostolat des Editions, 1968). For more detail on Catholic work in Tibet see my unpublished manuscript, *Yes and No to Jesus the Liberator: The Christian Faith Among China's Minority Peoples*.

10. Sechin Jacchid and Paul Hyer, *Mongolia's Culture and Society*, (Boulder, CO.: Westview Press, 1979), p. 182. Natsagdorji, "The Introduction of Buddhism into Mongolia," *The Mongolia Society Bulletin*, Vol. 7, 1968, (Bloomington, IN: The Mongolia Society, 1968), stresses that neither force nor the majesty of Tibetan Buddhism led to Buddhism's success in Mongolia. He notes that "the Yellow Faith, in contrast to shamanism, prohibits the shedding of blood and teaches quiet patience. This helped the people believe they could eradicate the basis of suffering, find rebirth in the future life, and possess happiness in that life. This appealed to people who were exhausted by war and were seeking freedom from strife," p. 11.

11. J. Leyssen, *The Cross Over China's Wall*, (Peking: The Lazarist Press, 1941), p. 39.

12. For a full discussion of the Poro Balgeson community see Catholic Missions Annals of the Propagation of the Faith, April-May issue, 1944, pp. 8-9, 16-17, 22-23. The following material has also been useful: *Joseph Van Oost Au Pays des Ortos (Mongolie)*, (Paris: Editions Dillen et cie., 1932); Carlo va Melckebeke, C.I.C.M., *Service Social de L'Eglise en Mongolie*, (Bruxelles: Editions de Scheut, 1968); Joseph Van Hecken, C.I.C.M., *Les Reductions Catholiques des Pays des Ordos Une Methode d'Apostolat des Missionnaires de Scheut*, (Schoneck/Beckenried, Suisse: Administration der Neuen Zeitschrift fur Missionswissenschaft, 1957).

13. David Plymire, *High Adventure in Tibet*, (Springfield, MO: Gospel Publishing House, 1959), pp. 113-114.

14. *China's Millions*, April, 1907, p.57

15. Susie Carson Rijnhart, *With the Tibetans in Tent and Temple: A Narrative of Four Year's Residence on the Tibetan Border, and of a Journey into the Far Interior*, (New York: Revell, 1904), p.

111.

16. *The Alliance Weekly*, February 9, 1918, p. 297.

17. William Swan, *Letters on Missions*, (Boston: Perkins and Marvin, 1831), 179.

18. See Archives for World Mission Record Group No. 59, H-2118, Russia Box 3, 1838/40, No. 41 and 1840/42, No. 42. These are found in the Mott Archive Room, Day Mission Library, Yale Divinity School, New Haven, CN.

19. James Gilmour, *Among the Mongols*, (London: The Religious Tract Society, 1882), p. 226.

20. For the early period see Alexander Wylie, *Memorials of Protestant Missionaries to the Chinese*, (Shanghai: American Presbyterian Press, 1867). For the later period see Herbert Hoi-Lap Ho, *Protestant Missionary Publications in Modern China 1912-1949*, (Hong Kong: Chinese Church Research Center, 1988), p. 152. One exception to Ho's generally true statement is Clifford H. Plopper's book *Chinese Religion Seen Through the Proverb*, (Shanghai: Shanghai Modern Publishing House, 1935). Although not specifically a religious book, the author gives 125 proverbs relating specifically to Buddhism which enables the learner not only to enter into some of the deeper mysteries of its teaching, but also to communicate in a relevant fashion with its adherents, pp. 143-163. Many other chapters, not labelled with the term "Buddhism," also relate to this religion.

21. W. A. P. Martin, *The Lore of Cathay or The Intellect of China*, (Taipei: Ch'eng Wen Publishing Company, Reprint, 1971), Chapter 14, "Buddhism, a Preparation for Christianity," pp. 249-263.

22. Joseph Edkins. *Chinese Buddhism*, (London: K. Paul, Tranch, Trubner and Co., 1893), p. 370.

23. Reichelt's method was new in the sense that he explicitly sought "seekers." Sensitive missionaries in Shandong in the late 19th century learned that many of their converts had come from sectarian religious backgrounds. Some of these sect groups were popular Buddhist cults. Their literature stressed personal spiritual cultivation, morality, and devotion. They were most likely to respond to Christian literature which emphasized some of the same themes. See Daniel H. Bays, "Chris-

tianity and Chinese Sects: Religious Tracts in the Late Nineteenth Century,” pp. 122-134 in Suzanne Barnett and John King Fairbank (eds.), *Christianity in China Early Protestant Missionary Writings*, (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1985).

24. Loren Noren, “The Life and Work of Karl Ludvig Reichelt,” *Cing Feng*, No. 3 (1967), p. 14.

25. The stories of two of these interesting pilgrims who found faith in Christ and ministered in his name may be found in *Areopagus*, published by the Tao Fong Shan Christian Center. See Spring-Summer, 1988, for the story of Liang Tao Wei, who served many years at the Center; and Advent, 1988, (Volume 2, No. 1) for the pilgrimage of Tsai Tao Tong, who was pastor for many years at Tao Fong Shan. Another inspiring account is Reichelt’s book entitled *The Transformed Abbot*, (London: Lutterworth Press, 1954).

26. To investigate Reichelt further see the following works: Eric J. Sharpe, *Karl Ludvig Reichelt Missionary, Scholar and Pilgrim*, (Hong Kong: Tao Fong Shan Ecumenical Center, 1984; Hakan Eilert, *Boundlessness Studies in Karl Ludvig Reichelt's Missionary Thinking with Special Regard to Buddhist-Christian Encounter*, (Forlaget Aros, 1974); Ralph Covell, *Confucius, The Buddha, and Christ*, Chapter 6 “The Dao and The Logos,” pp. 122-132. Numerous articles by Reichelt in English may be found in several issues of *The Chinese Recorder*. For his theological method see Karl Ludvig Reichelt, “The Johannine Approach,” pp. 90-101, found in *The Authority of the Faith*, Tamaram Madras Series, Volume I, (London: Oxford University Press, 1939). Chinese Christian leaders show an ongoing interest today in Jesus the Dao. See Luo Zhenfang, “The Logos Discourse in St. John’s Gospel,” *Chinese Theological Review*, 1985, pp. 79-91.

27. See *Areopagus*, Trinity, 1989, Volume 2, No. 4, pp. 31-34.

28. Christian missionaries could well examine the classic book by Edwin Hatch, *The Influence of Greek Ideas on Christianity*, (NY: Harper, 1957. Reprint from 1888). See also “The Old and New Torah: Christ the Wisdom of God,” in W.D. Davis, *Paul and Rabbinic Judaism*, (London: S.P.C.K., 1962), pp. 147-176.

sents his Buddhist friends in complaining bitterly about the ways in which Christian missionaries stereotyped, distorted, and generalized about Buddhism in China, pp. 222-253. Christ within every religious faith.

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REACHING JAPANESE BUDDHISTS

WHERE DO WE START IF WE WANT TO DO BETTER?

Little progress has been made in the development of intensive and specialized training to equip missionary recruits to reach adherents of the world religions. The author presents a solid case for specialized training for effective ministry to Buddhists from his own experience in Japan.

BY DAVID J. HESSELGRAVE

There it was: "Training Center for Buddhist Missionaries to North America," just one-half block off of Kita-oji, the thoroughfare I travelled many times each week enroute to our Kyoto Christian Center. The sign was particularly disconcerting and troubling to me, and for more than the obvious reason. It was so because what was happening in that Buddhist training center was in such sharp contrast to the training I (and the vast majority of my missionary colleagues) had received prior to being sent to post-war Japan. Here I was in a bastion of Buddhism surrounded by elaborate temples and with famed Mt. Hiei visible from my study window, and my knowledge of Japanese Buddhism was almost entirely restricted to what I had learned after my arrival in Japan!

In an attempt to make up for my inadequate knowledge of Buddhism, I began to devote some time every morning to reading a Japanese Buddhist newspaper and other Buddhist literature. That exercise later contributed to a doctoral dissertation on Nichiren Shoshu Soka Gakkai Buddhism. But all of that is incidental and somewhat beside the point. The fact is that Buddhist missionaries to North America were getting the kind of training that was so desperately needed by Christian missionaries to Japan. But in our case it had been almost completely overlooked.

As I write now, that first generation

of post-war missionaries is rapidly being replaced by a new generation. They face new opportunities and new challenges. But some things remain the same and one of them is the challenge of Japanese Buddhism--perhaps more firmly entrenched than ever and certainly more widely disseminated.

Three fundamental questions emerge at this juncture. First, how have training programs fared in the 40-45 years that have passed since the vanguard of that earlier generation landed in Japan? Second, what are some of the most important ingredients of a more adequate training program for missionaries going to Japan? And, third, what are the prospects for the future? Let's look at these in order.

The first question:

How has missionary training progressed during the past generation? This question merits much more consideration than can be given to it here. There can be no doubt that considerable progress has been made in both pre-field and continuing on-the-field education opportunities for missionaries worldwide. Witness the higher levels of general and theological education undertaken by the average missionary; the increased volume of mission-related books and journals; the added courses in the missions curricula of various schools; the inauguration of masters and doctoral

programs around the country; and the availability of seminars and specialized study programs. There can be no doubt that great strides have been made.

However, it appears that comparatively little progress has been made in one very important aspect of missionary training. With the possible exceptions of training for missionaries to Jews and, more recently, Muslims, we still have very little by way of intensive and specialized training designed to help missionary recruits reach large populations of adherents to the other great religious traditions of the world. As a consequence, the missionary recruit heading for Japan today probably has achieved a somewhat higher level of education and may have had a general course or two in world religions. However, when it comes to preparation for effectively reaching Japanese Buddhists, it is unlikely that the new recruit is much better equipped than I and my colleagues were a generation ago.

The second question

What kind of specialized training makes for effective ministry to Japanese Buddhists? Though education is only one ingredient of successful missionary preparation, there can be no doubt that the higher level of education achieved by many contemporary missionary recruits will stand them in good stead when relating to educated Japanese Buddhists.

Reaching Japanese Buddhists

But to more effectively preach, teach and witness among Japanese Buddhists the missionary must know Buddhism as well as most educated Japanese know it and they must know it better than less educated adherents. Credibility is at stake here. As one Japanese put it to me: "If the missionary knows nothing of my religion, how does he propose to convince me that it should be abandoned?"

But it is not only credibility that is at stake. More than rudimentary knowledge will be required to understand the Buddhist mentality; to compare and contrast Christian truth with Buddhist teachings; and to explain (and, at times, expose) the vagaries of Buddhist myth and history and thought and practice. Specialized training is required for those tasks--training that entails a careful study of both Japanese Buddhism and Japanese Buddhists.

Study should highlight the following:

1) *The origin and development of Buddhism*, including its Hindu (Sankhya) moorings, the life and teaching of Gautama Buddha, the origins and distinctives of major schools, the geographical spread of Buddhism, and contemporary developments. This may seem ambitious, but nothing is gained from neglecting the larger picture. I once attended an international conference that featured strategies for reaching the adherents of the world's major religions. The leaders of the section on reaching Buddhists being from Thailand and Sri Lanka, only Theravada (Hinayana) was considered even though Mahayana is more widespread and influential in today's world. Needless to say, conferees from eastern Asia were dumbfounded and disappointed! Wider study would have averted this kind of myopia.

2) *The entry of Buddhism into Japan* and something of its often tumultuous history in that land. Japanese people tend to think of Christianity as a foreign religion and generally unsuited to their culture. The missionary needs to know, and Japanese should be encouraged to reflect on, the peculiar circumstances

surrounding the importation of a (foreign) Indian religion from the (unlikely) country of Korea. They need to understand how early on Japanese Buddhism was informed by Chinese Buddhism, how great teachers such as Saicho and Kukai went to China to sit at the feet of the Chinese masters. Japanese need to rehearse the ups and downs of Buddhism at times when their forebears were attempting to establish their own identity (as recently as the Meiji Restoration and at certain times even in this present century).

What does this history teach us and them? How is it that times and circumstances are so determinative of what is deemed "foreign" and suitable or unsuitable?

3) *The development and teachings of the various schools of Japanese Buddhism*. Schism and strife have characterized Buddhism in Japan almost from the beginning. At times divisions have reflected differences that developed in China and elsewhere, as in the basic differences between Jodo and Jodo Shinshu. At times they reflected Japanese nationalism and iconoclasm as in the teachings of Shinran and Nichiren. Relationships between the schools have at times been amicable, but just as often they have been singularly competitive and highly charged. In any case, the missionary should be prepared to deal with doctrinal and attitudinal distinctives that, though centuries old, still live on in contemporary Japan.

Of course, presence and attraction of the so-called "new religions" cannot be disregarded. Some represent a kind of reformulated "old" Buddhism as in the case of Soka Gakkai. Others, such as Rissho Koseika, can legitimately lay claim to newness in spite of foundations that are profoundly Buddhist. And still others intentionally interweave Buddhist, Shinto, Christian and other notions into a new syncretism. Siecho no Ie is a prime example of this.

All of this has profound implications for the contemporary career missionary in Japan. He/she will deal, not just with Japanese or just with Japanese Buddhists, but with Tendai Buddhists, Jodo

Buddhists, Zen Buddhists etc. The importance of the differences between these groups must be measured by Japanese first and then by missionaries, not vice versa. And when measured by Japanese the differences are indeed critical.

There are still further considerations. We must remember that the Japanese are not confronted by a monolithic Christianity. That presents missionaries with a problem that is partially resolved by reference to a divided Buddhism in Japan. Also with this kind of knowledge it can be shown that Christians are not alone in denying certain Buddhist beliefs. Buddhist teachers themselves often cancel one another out. This latter observation brings us to another and closely related area of study.

4) *Basic Buddhist teachings as taught by Gautama Buddha and as subsequently interpreted by the great masters*. These teachings are, of course, too numerous to even begin to mention here. However, with a view to missionary contextualization, I will put them into three categories.

First, some Buddhist notions are profoundly different from, and diametrically opposed to, the Christian faith. Examples would be the Six Roots of Evil understanding of sin (regret, desire, hatred, fondness, love and being loved); and the "enlightenment" understanding of "salvation."

A second category includes those Buddhist doctrines that have at least a superficial similarity to Christian teaching such as the Trikaya or Triple Body, karma, and nirvana.

In a third are to be found those teachings that are so much like certain Christian teachings that some have treated them as though they were identical. A classic example would be the Mahayana teaching concerning salvation by faith as found in Amidism and salvation by faith in Christian theology. Honen taught that Amida saves all who repeat the nembutsu ("Hail, Amida Buddha!") from the heart in faith. Shinran went even further and said that not only salvation but faith itself is a gift of Amida and that repetition of the name is an expression of gratitude demon-

strating that the mercy of Amida has already been bestowed. When we realize that etymologically and theologically *charis* (grace) in the New Testament is not only unmerited favor but also thankful acceptance, and when we read Romans 10:13 and Ephesians 2:9-10, it does seem that the Buddhist and Christian teachings are almost identical in this regard.

Now the precise use to which the missionary puts this knowledge of the Buddhist teachings of all three types must be left to the individual missionary. However, I will make two observations that seem to me to be very important.

First of all: To teach, preach and witness in Japan without reference to Buddhist doctrine is to miss out on one of the most effective methods of gospel communication, comparison and contrast. Remember, we do not really know what something is until we also know what it is not!

Secondly: It should be remembered that no single doctrine or notion can be fully understood when separated from the system of which it is a part. In a very real sense, the Buddhist teachings that are most like Christian teachings are at the same time most unlike them because they are part of the Buddhist "whole." (In reference to the illustration above, Buddhist faith relates to Amida. But Amida is not Christ. In fact, even according to some Buddhists Amida "is not!")

5) *Buddhist rituals, practices and behavioral patterns.* The missionary who is oblivious to the meaning and significance of Buddhist celebrations such as Buddha's birthday and Obon (festival for the dead), and with Buddhist rites such as those connected with death and ancestor veneration, is at a great disadvantage. Without this knowledge it is unlikely that she or he will be able to take advantage of certain significant opportunities for Christian evangelism and instruction on the one hand, or to deal with the problems these observances occasion for Christian living and church

life on the other. This is not to be interpreted to mean that any outsider including a well-prepared missionary will have all the answers. But it is to suggest that, apart from adequate preparation at this point, the missionary will tend to be a part of the problem rather than a part of the solution.

6) *Appreciation for the contributions of Buddhism to Japanese culture.* While the

nese friends have settled for what I call "multi-religion"—i.e., the compartmentalization of religious life in such a way as to believe and act like Buddhists in certain situations, like Shintoists in others, and so on. Recently, it has even become rather fashionable to be "Christian" at least once in a lifetime. Christian wedding ceremonies are now quite common even among adherents of other religions or no religion!

If there is a need for special preparation for missionaries to Jews and Muslims who share so much of our own religious tradition, how much greater the need for enhanced training when targeting those with whom we share little more than a commitment to transcendence?

religion of the Buddha is idolatrous and inimical to faith in Christ, there is much that we can learn from Buddhist propagation and much that we can appreciate in Buddhist productions. For example, Nichiren Shoshu Soka Gakkai propagation methodology could teach us how to improve our methods of evangelism if we were prepared to learn. And much of Japanese art, architecture, decor, and etiquette which we rightly admire stems from Zen. To admit this and to show appreciation by word and deed is not a sign of weakness. It is a sign of strength.

Study of Japanese Buddhists

Turning now to a brief study of Japanese Buddhists, it would include at least the following aspects:

1) *Japanese Buddhists as syncretists or "multi-religionists."* Most Japanese are firmly convinced that "though there are many roads on Mt. Fuji they all lead to the same summit" and understand the religious implications of this. But, except in certain cases such as in Siecho no Ie mentioned above, there has not been a concerted effort to blend ideas from the various religious traditions into one homogeneous whole. Rather, our Japa-

This brings to mind the response of an elderly Japanese to one of my evangelistic sermons early on. With great emotion he said, "Sensei, I am so impressed by what you had to say tonight. I and my family have been Buddhists and Shintoists for as long as we can remember. But tonight I have made an important decision. From now on we will be Christians too!" Only careful study

will reveal both the validity and invalidity of his "decision" and ways to deal with it effectively.

2) *Japanese Buddhists as secularists and materialists.* One of my university professors attempted to dissuade me from going to Japan by saying, "My experience in Japan teaches me that the Japanese are interested in a changed economic picture here and now; not in pie in the sky bye and bye."

He was right, of course. But he was also wrong. Like large numbers of Americans many Japanese are interested in a religion that promises prosperity and the good life. The "new religions" tend to capitalize on that. But, unlike many other Americans, most Japanese who give evidence of being materialistic and secularistic have no intention whatever of depriving themselves, their ancestors, or their progeny of the good offices of priests, buddhas, and bodhisattvas (savior-beings). All alike have their respect and, at appropriate times and places, their money and even their veneration.

Japanese Buddhism has a primary stake in matters of the soul, the netherworld, and the hereafter. It is precisely in these matters that Christian leaders expe-

rience some of their greatest challenges and some of their greatest opportunities.

3) *Japanese view that logic and doctrine are inadequate.* It has always amused me that, though Buddhism eschews doctrinal in favor of experiential knowledge, the various schools often split doctrinal hairs and on that basis go their separate ways. And it has always amazed me that Buddhist believers of the various sects take refuge in the logic of their faith even when that “logic” is facile or even illogical! The explanation seems to be that the average Buddhist wants to be assured of doctrinal integrity and logical validity, but is quite content to rest in thinking that the “experts” have both well in hand. In the final analysis, the right “feel” in relation to one’s faith and involvement is more important to Japanese in general and perhaps to Japanese Buddhists in particular. To the degree that this is so, it is evident that Christian approaches must respond to both biblical priorities and Japanese proclivities.

The third question

What are the prospects for more specialized training? Currently, missionary education is in flux. In addition to those changes referred to previously there is a trend toward re-naming the discipline itself. Mission studies are now becoming “intercultural studies” in various schools. Valid reasons can be adduced for the change. But if we have learned anything about words it is that they are not just labels, just “sound and smoke,” as some would have us believe. They have their own power. It will prove difficult to re-name the discipline without reforming the offerings. In all likelihood the tendency will be to short-change biblical/theological/religious studies while strengthening the study of culture and culture-related subjects. If so, intensive study of mission theology (which has been fairly important in the past) will be neglected. And specialized study of the various religions (which seldom has been available in recent years) will still be overlooked. Therefore the place of the biblical/theological dimension of mission studies deserves full thorough treatment.

Reaching Japanese Buddhists

Concerning specialized study of the world’s religions and their adherents, it appears to me that three factors argue for a more optimistic outlook in spite of what I have said above:

First, a greatly increased exposure to Oriental religions among Westerners generally has heightened interest in those religions on the part of scholars and laity alike. About one year ago a former student called my office to inform me that he had an opportunity to teach world religions in a local college even though he had only very limited exposure to them in university and seminary. He requested any course materials I would be willing to share and what he received must have been rather overwhelming.

While preparing this manuscript I had another call from the same student. He was ecstatic. He said that he never dreamed that the subject matter was so voluminous and complex. Nevertheless, as a result of his study and teaching his ministry both in the college and in his church had expanded beyond his fondest dreams. Scores of people in the college and in the church had questions and problems growing out of their association with adherents to other religions or, at least, with teachings stemming from those religions.

Second, the advance of religious inclusivism and pluralism, liberal churches and institutions will demand a response from conservative evangelicals. It is increasingly apparent that this response will have to be an informed one, much, much more informed than the kind of response that holds up an index finger and quotes John 14:6.

In the third place, the growth and success of programs designed to provide classroom instruction and hands-on experience in reaching various Jewish and Muslim groups (referred to above) should serve to heighten awareness of the need for specialized training. If there is a need for special preparation for missionaries to Jews and Muslims who share so much of our own religious tradition, how much greater the need for enhanced training when targeting those with whom we share little more than a

commitment to transcendence? The establishment of the Sunrise Center for Buddhist Studies is an indication that we are beginning to recognize how urgently needed this kind of training is.

Conclusion

During my years in Kyoto I became well acquainted with one of Japan’s foremost and most wealthy scientists. I led Bible studies in his laboratory and in his home. He listened. He asked questions. He read the Bible. One Christmas Eve when visiting us in Illinois he came very close to making a decision for Christ, but he did not do it then and, to my knowledge, he never did.

On one of my summer trips overseas I went to his laboratory. A hostess quickly prepared tea and summoned the scientist’s wife. After greeting me warmly she became very somber and said, “I regret that in my sorrow and busyness I did not write to you. Last Christmas Eve my husband suffered a heart attack and died. Please come with me.”

A limousine took us up the mountain to the home we had visited so often in years gone by. She led me down a narrow corridor to a newly-constructed and spacious room. It was empty except for a large, ornate Buddhist altar. On the altar was a picture of my friend along with his *ihai* (ancestral tablet), other Buddhist paraphernalia, and a copy of the New Testament. Now his widow turned to me apologetically and said, “Sensei, please do not misunderstand. I put the Bible that my husband used when attending your studies on the shelf because he said that was the only religious book he really trusted. As for the rest, please try to understand. I didn’t know what to do. But please remember that we are Japanese.”

All sorts of questions flooded into my mind at the time and come flooding back every time I picture that room with its single furnishing. Among those questions two can appropriately be asked here:

Would the story have been different if I had been specifically trained to reach Japanese Buddhists? And, will future missionaries have the benefit of that kind of training?

THE TIBETAN BUDDHIST WORLD

Despite 13 centuries of mission efforts, few of Central Asia's Tibetan Buddhist peoples have responded to the Gospel. This article explores the world and peoples of Buddhist Central Asia, examines Christian efforts to evangelize them and suggests strategies for the future.

BY MARKU TSERING

The Tibetan Buddhist peoples of Asia represent one of the final frontiers of modern missions. Though Christian missions in the area began with the 7th century Nestorian Church, Central Asia's Tibetan Buddhist peoples have experienced little church planting and growth. Even today, the homelands of these peoples remain among the largest unevangelized areas in the world. But recent changes in the region suggest that Tibetan Buddhists can come to Christ in significant numbers.

Buddhist Central Asia stretches across a vast territory from the Caspian Sea to northeastern China, and from Siberia to India. Within this huge region live more than 60 Tibetan and non-Tibetan people groups whose lives and cultures have been shaped by the Tibetan form of Buddhism (see Table 1). Since these peoples and their cultures share values based on Tibetan Buddhism, they are often referred to as the Tibetan Buddhist World.

The largest of the Tibetan Buddhist World's peoples are China's 4.8 million Mongols (more than double the population of neighboring Mongolia). Mongol-related groups are also found in Russia and several parts of China. The second-largest (and perhaps best known) group is the Tibetans, some 4.6 million of whom live within the borders of China. The Tibetans' leader, known in the West as the Dalai Lama, serves as a popular and effective world spokesman for Tibetan Buddhism. Smaller Tibetan Buddhist groups, such as Nepal's famous Sherpas, can be found scattered across the Himalayas and southwest China.

The religion that links these diverse peoples began over a thousand years ago as a synthesis of Tibetan folk religion, yoga, Mahayana Buddhism, and an ancient Indian occultic religion called tantra. By about 1000 A.D., the Tibetans had combined these beliefs into a spirit-worshipping mystery religion promising rapid enlightenment to its followers. Thousands of Tibetans entered monasteries, hundreds of monk-scholars produced a vast spiritual literature, and many missionary monks reached Mongolia, China, Nepal, Bhutan, India, and parts of Siberia. In the ensuing centuries entire peoples embraced the new faith. By the year 1700, Tibetan Buddhists held political power in Sikkim, Mongolia, and Bhutan, and exercised religious influence over peoples in Russia, China, and India.

Tibetan Buddhist peoples attracted the attention of the Church from a very early date. Nestorian Christians sent the first missions to Mongolia in the seventh century; Roman Catholic and Russian Orthodox missions went to peoples in China, Russia, Tibet, and Bhutan. William Carey became the first Protestant missionary to Tibetan Buddhists when he visited Bhutan in 1797. The venerable London Missionary Society led efforts to reach Tibetan Buddhist peoples in Siberia, Mongolia, and India in the 1800's, and the Moravian Church sent an outstanding mission to Ladakh which produced a Tibetan language New Testament in 1885. But none of these attempts to plant the Church in Central Asia enjoyed large-scale success. For instance, in Russia, only two groups (the Buryats and Kalmyks) had any Christian

witness at all, and only small numbers came to Christ. In pre-Communist Mongolia, the Protestant missionary effort came too little and too late. Though almost 140 years of missionary effort was made on the Indian and Chinese borders of Tibet, the harvest was small in proportion to the effort expended, and central Tibet was never effectively reached. These results contrast with those in China, Japan, and India, where Christian missions produced strong, if relatively small, national churches.

What made the difference in the Tibetan Buddhist World? Why did painstaking and dedicated mission efforts, sanctified by prayer, sealed with the blood of martyrs, and continued over 13 centuries by Nestorian, Orthodox, Catholic, and Protestant missionaries, essentially fail to produce strong national churches in so much of Buddhist Central Asia? Are there lessons in this story that can help Christians introduce Christ to Buddhists more effectively today?

Barriers to Missions

The early missionaries faced obstacles that still challenge Christian workers today. The Himalayas, the Gobi and Taklamakan Deserts, the freezing wastes of Siberia, and other generally impassable terrain present formidable barriers to travel. Natural resources are not abundant in such areas, so population densities are very low (e.g., three people per square mile in Mongolia).

This kind of physical isolation encourages the breakup of languages into localized, non-mutually intelligible

The Tibetan Buddhist World

dialects. It also encourages governments to put national borders in the area, which represent fault lines of military and political tension. As a result, much of the Tibetan Buddhist World is sparsely populated, politically tense, and linguistically diverse.

Such places are not known for the free exchange of ideas! These conditions are compounded by differences of race, language, and culture. Except in Mongolia and Bhutan, Tibetan Buddhists live as minority peoples submerged in a dominant culture. For example, the total Tibetan Buddhist population of China (10.6 million) is dwarfed by the ethnic Chinese population of over 1 billion. Tibetan Buddhists in Nepal, India, and Russia face less daunting, but similar cultural and political pressures from majority peoples.

Under these circumstances, many Tibetan Buddhist peoples see Buddhism as a rallying point for cultural survival. An individual who seriously considers religious change becomes open to charges of treason and social betrayal. This kind of group solidarity at the expense of outside ideas is characteristic of Tibetan Buddhism. As a monistic faith, it denies the outside world any objective existence, robbing new ideas of any claim to ultimate truth even before they can be considered. The Tibetan Buddhist focus on self-development turns all religious attention inward, so that one anthropologist aptly called it “a religion of antisocial individualism.”¹ This tendency is reinforced by the fact that in Tibetan Buddhism, all spiritual progress depends upon pleasing one’s lama (or teacher). In traditional societies, this placed great economic and political power in the hands of the monks, who are naturally indisposed to religious change. As a result, fear of foreign ideas embedded itself in cultural and political life, strongly discouraging any interest in non-native or non-Buddhist religious ideas.

The political expression of this kind of xenophobia was that the governments of Tibet, Mongolia, and Bhutan excluded foreigners (especially missionaries) for many years. Of course, spiritual factors played a role in the region’s response to Christian missions. Tibetan Buddhism (especially the folk variety) places great emphasis on occultism and

control of spiritual forces. Many missionaries would say that spiritual opposition blighted church growth and caused evangelistic efforts to fail.

Such is the environment that faced generations of missionaries to the Tibetan Buddhist World. But it would be a mistake to place all the responsibility for failed church growth on external factors alone. The early Nestorian Church’s mission to the Mongols failed not for any external reason, but in part because the church itself lost its sense of missionary vision. The Russian Orthodox Church’s attempt to reach the Tibetan Buddhist Kalmyk people failed when it became entangled in imperial politics. An administrative dispute (what people today would call a “turf battle”) within the Catholic Church forced the withdrawal of one of the ablest missionaries ever sent to Tibet.² Unfortunately, these problems are not confined to mission history. Modern Christians can make mistakes as well. Some, constrained by visa restrictions in countries which do not welcome missionaries, may adopt “short term” methods tailored to the brief periods of time they can remain locally as tourists. They may place a heavy emphasis on literature distribution in areas where literacy rates are low or the attitude of local people to large scale literature distribution is unknown. Some work without consulting local churches or Christian agencies already working in the area. These groups may then suffer when the authorities intervene. Using trade or dominant-culture languages instead of local ones, working with inadequate preparation, poorly defined goals, or failing to do one’s linguistic and cultural homework are other mistakes that can defeat the best intentions.

The model of missions presented by the Apostle Paul in his speech to the Athenians in Acts 17 is very helpful as a pattern to follow in missions to Buddhists. A detailed study of this passage is beyond the scope of this article, and its relevance for work among Buddhists is reviewed elsewhere.³ The main point, however, was that Paul went far beyond simple translation of his message into the Greek language. He adopted Greek thought forms to present the Gospel in a way that made sense to the Greeks. Applying this model today

means taking the time (often years) to learn difficult languages; to use literature, videos, or radio broadcasts especially prepared for Buddhists; and to learn methods of evangelism that are appropriate to the local cultures. It also means taking Tibetan Buddhism seriously.

Missions conducted in ignorance of key Buddhist beliefs about suffering, sin, and redemption can run afoul of unintended meanings. Following Paul’s Athenian example, Christians must know enough about Tibetan Buddhism to present Christ in a way that their listeners can understand and appreciate. The historical facts show that when this is done, and is backed by consistent Christian living, the church can grow in the Tibetan Buddhist World. One is the success stories in 1885, when the Moravian Church set up a mission in Leh, Ladakh, an area of north India also known as “Little Tibet”.

The early missionaries faced extreme hardships and discouraging circumstances with bravery and persistence. In common with other missions of the day, they began a school, did medical work, and built a printing press. But beyond these activities, the Moravians distinguished themselves by their understanding of the people they had come to serve. Several Moravian missionaries were serious scholars whose in-depth understanding of Ladakhi and Tibetan culture produced works of lasting academic value, including the first translation of the Bible into Tibetan.

They put their cultural expertise to good use. For example, the Moravians realized that the Bible speaks in a style very foreign to the average Tibetan Buddhist, whose scriptures are filled with serene speculations on philosophy, instructions for quiet meditation, and methods for achieving passionless peace. They knew that many Tibetan Buddhists were shocked by the Bible’s animal sacrifices, wars, and sharply drawn controversies.⁴

To circumvent this problem, they produced high-quality literature that was specifically written for Tibetan Buddhists. It carefully defined Christian terms and took Tibetan Buddhist needs, world views, and ways of thinking into account. Such careful attention to the life

Marku Tsering

and culture of the people helped plant a church that remains in Ladakh to this day.

Though the Moravian approach was sophisticated and fruitful, it was not the only one that was successful. Several 19th century European missions worked among the Lepcha people in the Himalayan state of Sikkim. At that time the Lepchas were a tribal and animistic people in the early phases of adopting Tibetan Buddhism. Like tribal peoples elsewhere in India, the Lepchas received the gospel warmly, and a Lepcha church endures to this day.

The Tamang people of neighboring Nepal have a culture similar to that of the Lepchas. An entirely indigenous people movement in the late 1980's brought thousands of Tamangs into the Nepali church. The history of the church among the Tamang and Lepcha peoples suggests that the groups most receptive to the Gospel may be tribal or animistic peoples who have received but not yet institutionalized Tibetan Buddhism.

Another lesson from the Tamang church experience is that mission strategy may be irrelevant to church growth! More recent experience in Mongolia suggests other reasons for hope. Under the religious freedom permitted by the country's newly democratic government, churches have appeared in Mongolia. It may be that 60 years of official atheism convinced the Mongols of the need for spiritually-based values, and that there is a more open climate for mission efforts as a result. Cooperation among Christian agencies has been a very recent feature of ministry in Mongolia, one which will hopefully bring glory to God and enhance the growth of the church.

Directions for the Future

The peoples of the Tibetan Buddhist World are more accessible to Christian mission than at any time in past history. Radical changes of government in the Russian Federation, Mongolia, and Nepal have opened many long-closed doors. China continues its opening to the outside world despite tight domestic political controls. In a number of countries, years of secular authoritarian rule have diminished the spiritual dominance of Buddhism and made nominal Buddhists more receptive to new ideas.

The combination of greater access and heightened receptivity bodes well for frontier missions.

Christians working in this new atmosphere need to begin with careful preparation. From a biblical perspective, this means recognizing the spiritual forces at work and praying accordingly. Practically, this means knowing local life and culture well enough to see the world from a Buddhist perspective, much as Paul was able to see the world from a Greek one. Mastering these skills can help enormously in all phases of Christian ministry to Tibetan Buddhists. On the strategic level, recent mission history suggests that the most responsive groups are tribal peoples and those recently emerging from authoritarian rule. Several such groups are waiting for the pioneer frontier mission efforts of Christians who will bring them the Gospel for the first time. Groups less likely to respond are those for whom Tibetan Buddhism is a symbol of cultural survival, or very traditional societies where Tibetan Buddhist institutions are still intact and have retained political power.

Though not specific to ministry among Buddhists, mission agency partnerships and cooperative arrangements will play an increasing role in the future. Such agreements have demonstrated effectiveness in cutting waste and duplication. A number of these cooperative ventures have appeared in the Tibetan Buddhist World, and more are on the way. Their popularity is due to

the fact that each participating agency pays only a fraction of the substantial costs involved in training, equipping, and caring for workers, yet receives all the benefits of long term presence in a given country.

The excitement of a more open climate aside, missions is ultimately a sovereign activity of God in which Christians are privileged to participate. Faithful missionaries who labor for years without seeing a church grow, and people movements that sweep thousands into the Church apart from any missionary presence are helpful reminders of this fact, and help keep our thinking about methods and strategy in proper perspective.

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Endnotes

1. Ortner, Shery B., *Sherpas Through Their Rituals*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1978, reprinted 1986), p. 157.
2. For a review of these mission efforts, see: Tsering, Marku, *Sharing Christ in the Tibetan Buddhist World*, (Upper Darby, PA: Interserve, second edition 1993).
3. Tsering, P. 26 - 31.
4. This is not to say that the Bible is defective or outmoded, but simply to remind us that it speaks in categories that are generally alien to Buddhists.

TABLE 1: Demographics of the Tibetan Buddhist World Population figures are approximate, as reliable information is unavailable for several countries. Figures for some Tibetan Buddhist peoples are not represented in this table. T.B. = Tibetan Buddhist.

| Country | Approximate T.B. population | Percent of T.B. World | Number of T.B. Peoples |
|----------|-----------------------------|-----------------------|------------------------|
| Russia | 800,000 | 5% | 3 |
| Mongolia | 2,200,000 | 15 | 4 |
| China | 10,665,000 | 72 | 13 |
| Nepal | 602,000 | 4 | 13 |
| Bhutan | 490,000 | 3 | 13 |
| India | 150,000 | 1 | 16 |
| totals | 14,900,000 | 100% | 62 |

TABLE 2: List of Selected Tibetan Buddhist Peoples

To qualify as “Tibetan Buddhist”, a people must have Tibetan Buddhist shrines, temples, village priests, monks or monasteries. Peoples are listed by country, and groups living in more than one country may be listed more than once. Some listed groups follow more than one religion (e.g. Naxi). There are unresolved questions about the status of several listed and unlisted groups. Principal group locations are listed in parentheses.

1. Russian Federation

- 101. Buryats (Republic of Buryatia)
- 102. Kalmyks (Republic of Kalmykia)
- 103. Tuvans (Tuva)

2. Mongolia

- 201. Mongols (entire country)
- 202. Buryats (northern Mongolia)
- 203. Ewenki (Selenge Aimag)
- 204. Tuvans (Hovsgol and Hovd Aimags)

3. China

- 301. Tibetans (Tibet, Sichuan, Yunnan, Qinghai, Gansu)
- 302. Mongols (Inner Mongolia, Xinjiang, Liaoning, Jilin, Heilongjiang, Qinghai, Gansu)
- 303. Yugurs (Xinjiang and Gansu)
- 304. Tu (Qinghai)
- 305. Daur (Heilongjiang, Xinjiang)
- 306. Naxi – Mosuo subgroup (Yunnan)
- 307. Monpa or Menpa (Tibet)
- 308. Pumi (Yunnan)
- 309. Jyarong (Sichuan)
- 310. Nu (Yunnan)
- 311. “Pingwu Tibetans” or Xifan (Sichuan)
- 312. Qiang (Sichuan)
- 313. Ewenki (Inner Mongolia)

4. Nepal

- 401. Sherpas (Solu Khumbu)
- 402. Lhomis (E. Nepal)
- 403. Lopa (Mustang)
- 404. Dolpopas (Dolpo)
- 405. Larkepas (Larkye district)
- 406. Tibetans
- 407. Manangi Gurungs (Manang)
- 408. Chuntel people (Central Nepal)
- 409. unclassified groups (living in Mustang, Manang, Humla, Olangchungola, Muktinath, etc.)
- 410. Tamangs (mixed with Hinduism)
- 411. Gurungs (certain subgroups only)
- 412. Helambu “Sherpas” (Langtang valley)
- 413. Thakalis (certain subgroups only)

5. Bhutan

- 501. Ngalops (western Bhutan)
- 502. Khengpas (central Bhutan)
- 503. Sharshops (eastern Bhutan)
- 504. Mangdipas (Tongsa district)
- 505. Gongdupas (Mongar district)
- 506. Tsalipa (Mongar district)
- 507. Bramis (near Tashigang)
- 508. Brokpas (near Tashigang)
- 509. Laya people (Laya)
- 510. Tibetans in Bhutan (Bumthang, Tongsa, others)
- 511. Sherpas (Chirang district)
- 512. Tamangs (Samchi district)
- 513. Lepchas (Samchi district)

6. India

- 601. Tibetans (widely distributed in camps)
- 602. Ladakhis (Jammu and Kashmir state)
- 603. Purikpas (Jammu and Kashmir state)
- 604. Lahulis (Himachal Pradesh)
- 605. Spitis (Himachal Pradesh)
- 606. Jads (northwestern Uttar Pradesh)
- 607. Garwhalis (northwestern Uttar Pradesh)
- 608. Lepchas (Sikkim, West Bengal)
- 609. Sherpas (West Bengal)
- 610. Drukpas (various subgroups)
- 611. Monpas (Arunachal Pradesh)
- 612. Sherdukpens (Arunachal Pradesh)
- 613. Membas (Arunachal Pradesh)
- 614. Khampas (Arunachal Pradesh)
- 615. Ngas (Arunachal Pradesh)
- 616. Tamangs (West Bengal, elsewhere)

AN APPEAL TO DISCIPLES EVERYWHERE

The 230 participants at the Second Adopt-A-People Consultation held in Colorado Springs, Colorado, U.S.A., April 25-27, 1993, made the following appeal to fellow disciples everywhere. They came from more than 107 churches, denominations, mission agencies and other Christian organization, including participants from other countries. They considered the goal of a Church for every people by the year 2000. God strongly impressed upon them the need for prayer mobilization and unity along the pathway of faith and obedience to reach the goal.

INTRODUCTION

The appeal has two sections: 1) shared convictions and 2) ongoing recommendations. With God's help we, the participants of the Second AAP Consultation believe that a Church for every people by the year 2000 is an attainable goal. We do not believe that the date of this goal is necessarily the precise time of the return of Christ nor do we predict certain success by that date. However, we are convinced that it is a goal that still can be accomplished by the enabling grace of God.

OUR SHARED CONVICTIONS

1. We recognize that the reaching of unreached peoples is primarily and ultimately a spiritual battle in which God's grace and power are indispensable.
2. We affirm that the goal of a Church for every people is essential in making the Gospel accessible to every person by AD 2000.
3. We rejoice in reports of God's sovereignty expressed through peoples reached for Christ. They strengthen our faith, increase our hope and galvanize our commitment to a Church for every people.
4. We recognize that we have not done all that we could in making Christ known to the unreached peoples. For this we repent.
5. We celebrate our love for Christ by our commitment to Him and to His Great Commission, a bond which draws us together to find ways to accelerate the establishment of spiritually vital churches among every people on the face of the earth.
6. As we approach the year 2000 we recognize that God has placed Christians in a time of unprecedented opportunity created by the opening of restricted access countries, dedicated prayer networks, and the availability and widespread distribution of the Word of God and other Gospel resources.
7. We celebrate the growth, vitality and missionary endeavors of the Two-Thirds World Church. We recognize their crucial role as full partners in the attainment of the goal.
8. We recognize that research information is essential for concerted prayer and to design appropriate strategies to establish Christ's Church among every people.
9. We believe that a focused attention on unreached peoples requires churches, denominations and missionary agencies to set new priorities in the use of finances, deployment of personnel and strategic focus of energies.
10. We rejoice in the strategic opportunities that all believers now have to champion the cause of the unreached peoples.
11. We realize that our common love for the Lord Jesus Christ and trust in His finished work on Calvary, combined with our desire to work together toward our AD 2000 goal, are stronger than the differences that tend to divide us.
12. We praise God for the growing prayer movement for the unreached peoples of the world.
13. We rejoice in the imminent availability of the Registry of Peoples and Languages (ROPAL) information to researchers as a tool in the development of unreached people strategies.
14. We rejoice in the formation of the Peoples Information Network (PIN) and encourage mission agencies to participate in the network.
15. We affirm the diligent persevering initiatives taken by the Adopt-A-People Clearing House and express our gratitude to them for calling this consultation.
16. We rejoice that the Unreached and Adoptable Peoples listing has been issued as a working document and encourage individuals and agencies everywhere to continue efforts to update and improve it.
17. We rejoice in the cooperation and unity that is evident in our midst and the firm conviction that the task can be done by working together in reliance upon the power of God.
18. We hold that each participant in this conference is a voice for the voiceless peoples and their representative to seek to focus energy, budget and personnel for the unreached peoples of the

world.

country that will provide current, accurate information on the status of reaching unreached peoples.

ONGOING RECOMMENDATIONS

1. Encourage the mobilization of Christians in all countries, regions and continents of the world to take up the challenge of reaching the unreached peoples of our world.
 2. Seek increased participation on the part of our churches and agencies in prayer mobilization focused on the unreached peoples of the world, noting two special prayer events: Praying Through the 10/40 Window on October 1993 and the Day to Change the World on June 25, 1994.
 3. Encourage mission agencies from the developed world to seek partnership with similar agencies from the Two-Thirds World in planning new strategies towards reaching the unreached peoples of the world by the year 2000.
 4. Encourage every mission agency and church group to continue research and provide input to the Peoples Information Network (PIN) regarding the stage of "reachedness" of peoples within their ministry areas.
 5. Encourage deployment of an increasing percentage of our resources for work among unreached peoples.
 6. Commit ourselves to cooperate with the Adopt-A-People Clearing House in the production of profiles for the intercessory prayer movement.
 7. Increase support to make research functions operational in each
 8. Encourage mission agencies and churches to make the most effective use of local and global resources to accomplish the goal.
 9. Encourage the development of catalization resources to mobilize local churches to adopt unreached peoples.
 10. Encourage local churches to take steps in relation to their commitment to world evangelization such as, 1) recognize the high priority of reaching the unreached people groups, 2) establish a budgetary process whereby they can contribute to this kind of outreach, 3) encourage weekly or monthly fellowship for those who wish to pray and work toward this goal, 4) accept the challenge of local congregations adopting unreached people groups by working through a specific denominational or interdenominational mission agency, and 5) seek to pass on the passion for the unreached peoples to three or more additional congregations.
 11. Within a year plan to hold a small working consultation to address remaining issues and strengthen implementation strategies.
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