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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 infra-church 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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