IJFM
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Buddhist-Christian Encounters:
Today's Realities in Light of the Pioneering Work of Karl Ludvig Reichelt in China

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From the Guest Editor

The Ralph D. Winter Lectureship 2021

After the death of Ralph Winter in 2009 it was decided to host an annual lectureship series in his memory. Noted missiologists like Andrew Walls, Rene Padilla, and Dudley Woodberry have shared, and topics like disease, urbanization and creation care have been addressed. The lectures for 2021 focused on the legacy of Karl Ludvig Reichelt of Norway and China for current Buddhist-Christian engagement. This issue of *IJFM* is devoted to the presentations and discussions of that event, which was held virtually from February 24–26, 2021.

Notto Thelle of Norway was the key resource person for this event, and his contributions are central to the papers in this issue of *IJFM*. Thelle had brief encounters with Reichelt as a child, as recounted in the pages that follow, due to his father's role as Reichelt's most-valued colleague. Thelle also recently completed a comprehensive biography of Reichelt in Norwegian. Terry Muck, Rory Mackenzie, and Amos Yong brought decades of experience in the Buddhist-Christian interface to their contributions and interactions. All records of their oral contributions to the lectureship event have been edited for publication and approved by each contributor; the oral tone will still be noted in reading some of these pieces.

Buddhist-Christian Encounters: Today's Realities in Light of the Pioneering Work of Karl Ludvig Reichelt (1877–1952) in China (the official title for the lectureship) is presented here as a significant contribution to missiological thought *(not* merely missiological thought focused on Buddhist issues, but much more widely). Each reader will no doubt be impressed by different aspects of the papers and discussions presented here, but this editorial introduction will summarize a few key points that should not be overlooked.

First, there is still much gold to mine from records of past frontier mission work. Karl Reichelt was an amazing man who did unprecedented things in developing deep, respectful relationships with Chinese Buddhists and Taoists (among others) in the first half of the twentieth century. It is good that we have entered a post-colonial world, and Reichelt's world had collapsed by the time of his death in 1952. But reflecting on the character (not flawless!) and actions (not perfect!) of this great man is good for the hearts and minds of all followers of Jesus who in the 21st century seek to move beyond Christendom to meet with people of other traditions in the name of Jesus Christ.

Second, simplistic statements and theologies of interreligious encounter are not adequate to the dynamic realities of current times. The pages that follow promote neither a clear mental paradigm nor a universal call to action, except in the broadest meaning of those terms. It is not at all clear what "Buddhism" means to the average "Buddhist," let alone what exactly in that complex set of heritages comes into conflict with the spirit and teachings of

Editorial *continued on p. 86*

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Editorial Correspondence
PO Box 41450
Pasadena, CA 91114-8450
(734) 765-0368, brad.gill@ijfm.org

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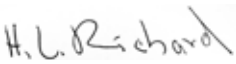
Jesus and the Bible. We might like access to a Google map that says "turn right in half a mile," but such detailed instruction is impossible when image-bearers of God from differing cultural and linguistic and spiritual backgrounds meet in deep human encounters. Perhaps the central desired outcome from the lectureship and this publication is the releasing of people from inadequate paradigms into situational dependence on wisdom from God. This wisdom is not cheap, rather it is bought at the cost of years of careful listening, study, reflection, and engagement, as seen in the resource people who contributed to this lectureship and publication.

Third, new patterns of discipleship to Jesus need to develop across the world, particularly where "other religions" hold sway. Christianity grew out of a particular set of cultural contexts and has been reformed and revived many times over, yet still bears the mark of its Greco-Roman (and to a lesser extent, Jewish) heritage. The "Latin captivity of the church" is a major stumbling block, perhaps even the most major of all stumbling blocks, among peoples who see Christianity as an undesirable foreign religion.[1] Karl Reichelt gave his life to erasing this foreignness, engaging with Buddhists and Buddhist practices in ways that shocked and offended some of his colleagues. How far he succeeded, and whether he always proceeded in wisdom, are certainly topics of vibrant discussion (even in what follows in this journal). The Buddhist engagement of the writers interacting with Reichelt in the papers and discussions here is no less controversial, and also provocative of needed discussions and decisions as Buddhist-Christian encounters continue forward.

Finally, questions of interreligious encounter and dialogical engagement always come home to what is in the heart and mind of the disciple of Jesus. Notto Thelle leaves us in the end with generosity and friendship as the keys (he expounds and illustrates that many times over, complemented profoundly by the other contributors). Are we generous towards people of other faith traditions? Are we genuine friends or merely passing acquaintances with work to do and a mission to accomplish? Seventy years after his death some of Reichelt's weaknesses are apparent; may we learn and see some of ours in time to make changes.

Frontier Ventures, which publishes this journal and has organizational stewardship of the legacy of Ralph Winter (the US Center for World Mission name having been changed in 2015), has made commitments to a fresh focus, without neglecting Muslim peoples, on the Hindu and Buddhist peoples of the world. If the issues of Christ and the Buddhist world raised in this issue stir your heart and compel action, please reach out to us for ongoing discussion and interaction towards appropriate engagement of disciples of Jesus and Buddhist peoples.

In Him,



H. L. Richard, Guest Editor

Endnotes

[1] The "Latin captivity" phrase is taken from Robin Boyd's 1974 book, India and the Latin Captivity of the Church, about the failure of the gospel to adequately engage Sanskritic contexts.

The *IJFM* is pleased to serve our guest editor, H. L. Richard, and the 2021 convening committee of the Ralph D. Winter Lectureship in providing this compendium of those presentations from earlier this year. Dr. Richard is an independent researcher who over the past four decades has focused on the Hindu-Christian encounter, but more recently turned North American attention to current missiological studies of Buddhist-Christian encounter in the life of Karl Ludvig Reichelt.

Brad Gill, Senior Editor, *IJFM*

The **IJFM** is published in the name of the International Student Leaders Coalition for Frontier Missions, a fellowship of younger leaders committed to the purposes of the twin consultations of Edinburgh 1980: The World Consultation on Frontier Missions and the International Student Consultation on Frontier Missions. As an expression of the ongoing concerns of Edinburgh 1980, the **IJFM** seeks to:

- promote intergenerational dialogue between senior and junior mission leaders;
- cultivate an international fraternity of thought in the development of frontier missiology;
- highlight the need to maintain, renew, and create mission agencies as vehicles for frontier missions;
- encourage multidimensional and interdisciplinary studies;
- foster spiritual devotion as well as intellectual growth; and
- advocate "A Church for Every People."

Mission frontiers, like other frontiers, represent boundaries or barriers beyond which we must go, yet beyond which we may not be able to see clearly and boundaries which may even be disputed or denied. Their study involves the discovery and evaluation of the unknown or even the reevaluation of the known. But unlike other frontiers, mission frontiers is a subject specifically concerned to explore and exposit areas and ideas and insights related to the glorification of God in all the nations (peoples) of the world, "to open their eyes, to turn them from darkness to light and from the power of Satan to God." (Acts 26:18)

Subscribers and other readers of the **IJFM** (due to ongoing promotion) come from a wide variety of backgrounds. Mission professors, field missionaries, young adult mission mobilizers, college librarians, mission executives, and mission researchers all look to the **IJFM** for the latest thinking in frontier missiology.

Buddhist-Christian Encounters

Karl Ludvig Reichelt's Pilgrimage: From Conservative Lutheranism to Experiments with Dialogical Outreach to China's Buddhist Monks

by Notto R. Thelle

Editor's note: This article was first presented at the Ralph D. Winter Lectureship in February 2021, and addresses the theme, "Buddhist-Christian Encounters: Today's Realities in Light of the Pioneering Work of Karl Ludvig Reichelt in China."

Karl Ludvig Reichelt

Notto R. Thelle is professor emeritus of the University of Oslo, where he taught ecumenics and missiology from 1986 to 2006. Before that he served as a missionary for sixteen years in Japan (1969–1985), involved in research and interfaith dialogue in what he calls the "borderland" where faith meets faith. Most of the time he served as Associate Director of the NCC Center for the Study of Japanese Religions in Kyoto (1974–1985). He has published some pioneer research concerning Buddhist-Christian relations in Japan and China, in addition to Norwegian textbooks and translations of Buddhist and Eastern traditions. He has written a number of books and essays in Norwegian on the dialogue with Eastern traditions and alternative forms of Western spirituality, and his treatise on Christian spirituality, Who Can Stop the Wind: Travels in the Borderland Between East and West, *has been translated into English.*

Missionary Conversions

He had gone out to change the East and was returning, himself a changed man. He had a special calling to preach the gospel to Buddhists in China, but had discovered that they had a message for him as well. As a missionary, he wanted to change the society which he had come to serve, but was himself changed in the process, and became an important mediator between the East and the West.

My expressions are adapted from an American observer who described the "conversion" of some Protestant missionaries who went to China around the year 1900.[1] They did not convert to Buddhism, Taoism, or Confucianism, and did not worship ancestors, but they did experience a mental change from a total rejection of Chinese religion and culture towards a positive evaluation and fascination. They had to redefine their understanding of Christianity, taking seriously the biblical expectation in Acts 14 that God had not left himself without testimony in the world, searching for points of contact for preaching, and creating an open space for integrating Chinese insights and experiences into their own theological universe.

Such a "conversion" was not possible without mental struggle and inner tensions, at times leading to spiritual confusion. Some missionaries lost their motivation, admitting that China did not need Christ; some searched for a harmony that relativized the Christian faith; some discovered that Buddhism or Eastern philosophy gave more meaning than Christianity. But most of them continued their missionary work with new enthusiasm. They wanted to use their new insight to show that Christ did not teach an alien Western religion, but that Christianity would grow and flourish if it were deeply rooted in the Chinese soil.

Spiritual and Cultural Background

Karl Ludvig Reichelt (1877–1952) belonged to the last group. He grew up in the small provincial town of Arendal on the south coast of Norway, went to middle school, spent one year at a teachers' college, and got his theological training at

the Mission School of the Norwegian Missionary Society (1897–1902). He came to China in 1903 as a traditional Lutheran missionary, nurtured and deeply motivated by a warm pietistic tradition.

One might wonder how this background could prepare a young boy for this type of missionary work in China: a small provincial coastal town in southern Norway, dominated by a rather narrow-minded pietism, and then a rather exclusivist Lutheran school with a strictly defined dogma. I have to limit myself to a few brief points.

In spite of being a modest port town with a population of 2,500 inhabitants, Arendal had the largest merchant fleet in Norway, and it was widely open to the world. More than a hundred years before Reichelt was born, sailors from the district had visited China and even published books about the country. China was part of the lore of the town. Reichelt describes his orientation towards China as the young boy's romantic exodus-dream which was transformed to a clear call for mission.[2]

He grew up in a home that was characterized by an atmosphere of a warm, somewhat strict, revivalist pietism, aptly described by the biblical expression "godliness with contentment" (1 Tim. 6:6). His home was open for visiting preachers and home meetings. The warm atmosphere of spiritual dialogue, friendship, Bible study, and preaching had almost something "sacramental" about it.[3]

He had a remarkable teacher who became a sort of spiritual guide for the young boy. She helped him when the impressions from the revival meetings in the so-called prayer houses became too heavy. He "met God" in these meetings, he commented later,

> but mostly the Yahweh of Sinai. The atmosphere was serious and gloomy, or one-sidedly emotional. Everything was accompanied by an inexpressibly oppressive feeling. I realized that this was not *the totality of God.*

The teacher, who was only a few years older than the boy, helped him through the various crises, and nurtured his spiritual growth. One decisive element from this religious background continued to be a vital element in his spiritual experience: the sense of guilt and contrition and, along with that, the tremendous experience of gratitude for the forgiveness of sin. When he arrived in China for the first time in 1903, he expressed his excitement with the characteristic words: "I don't think I have been so happy since I [for the first time] was able to believe that my sins were forgiven" *(Jeg ved ikke, jeg har været saa lykkelig, siden jeg fik tro mine synders forladelse).*[4]

Another formative experience was his close relationship with the surrounding nature. When he was alone—and he was a solitary boy—he roamed the mountains and woods as his own sanctuary. The silent fir trees, the golden pine stems, and the white birches were his congregation. He preached to them, prayed with them, and blessed them. "Up there I experience the most inexpressible religious sense of being grasped, under the living spiritual breath of Nature," he recalled later.

Perhaps his relationship to nature also prepared him for his fascination with the sacred geography of Buddhism and its mountains in China which he visited on his many travels as a missionary pilgrim. This type of experience probably also stimulated his contemplative and mystical inclinations, expressed in a sense of divine presence in natural phenomena and a feeling of unity with all things.

Pioneer Missionary

I have to skip Reichelt's experiences as a pioneer missionary in Ningxiang, Hunan, (1903–11), and also his career as a teacher of the New Testament at the newly established Lutheran Seminary in Shekou, Henan (1912–20). It is, however, obvious that his experiences as a traditional pioneer missionary in those formative years prepared him for a different type of approach, and gradually convinced him to initiate a new strategy for missionary outreach to the Buddhist monastic community in China. In Nanjing in the 1920s, later in Hong Kong in the 1930s, and until his death in 1952 he established so-called "Christian Monasteries for Buddhist Monks." He and his colleagues were not monks, but the "monasteries" were spiritual centers inspired by Buddhist monastic traditions, where Buddhists and Christians could meet in mutual friendship and openness, in an atmosphere adapted to Chinese culture. He never concealed his wish to guide his Buddhist friends to Christ, not by conquering Buddhism but by guiding Buddhists "from within" towards Christian faith.[5]

Reichelt's dialogical relationship with the Chinese Buddhist community in the 1920s initiated a different type of pioneer work. It was welcomed by Buddhists as well as Christians as a refreshing missionary adventure: finally, there was a missionary who broke the pattern of wholesale condemnation. He not only wanted to respect Buddhism and write learned books, as some missionaries had done before him, but he evidently felt a strong attraction to its religious life and gave his own home constituency a new appreciation of the greatness of Buddhist piety. With all his fascination with Buddhism, however, Reichelt was driven by an intense missionary calling and consistently wanted to convert Buddhist monks to Christianity.

Such a combination of missionary zeal and dialogical sympathy may seem paradoxical, or even self-contradictory and unacceptable to some. But the fact that people like Reichelt contributed to the changing relationships between Buddhism and Christianity in China and in the West invites further investigation of the dynamics behind the changes and of the hermeneutical keys that made him an intermediary between two civilizations.

I will introduce the institutions in some detail later. First, I will say a few words about the process that motivated Reichelt's "conversion," then describe the theological and philosophical ideas behind the strategy, and finally show some of the practical manifestations of the strategy.

It may sound paradoxical that his own pietistic spirituality, with emphasis on the experiential and emotional aspect of faith, prepared him for his fascination with Buddhism.

Mental Conversions

A Conversion from the Western Contempt of China

Most nineteenth century Western attitudes to China were permeated by a lack of respect for Chinese culture. The earlier European fascination with China as the great civilization of the East no longer seemed adequate.[6] China was regarded as stagnated, self-sufficient, and without vitality. More important was the constant political and military humiliation represented by Opium Wars, imperialistic policies, and unjust trade regulations. The years from 1840 to 1905 have appropriately been characterized as "the age of contempt for China."[7] The new generation of missionaries toward the end of the 19th century was part of a movement that rediscovered the greatness of China and committed themselves to serve the new China.

A Conversion from Missionary Prejudices

Part of that contempt was the rejection of paganism as a dark and diabolical superstition. The scholarly types of missionaries admitted that it might be useful to study paganism, but only to clarify its contradictions and absurdities in order to let the truth of Christ shine through.[8] You might find positive elements in Buddhism, but basically it was "a science without inspiration, a religion without God, a body without a spirit, unable to regenerate, cheerless, cold, dead and deplorably barren of results."[9] Some of you may remember Hudson Taylor's appeal: "There is a great Niagara of souls passing into the dark in China. Every day, every week, every month they are passing away! A million a month in China are dying without God!"[10]

Reichelt's conversion happened as a gradual realization as he visited monasteries and got to know some abbots and spiritual leaders. He saw clearly the weakness of Chinese Buddhism, the corruption and moral decay, and the need of reform. But he was impressed by the beauty of the buildings, the atmosphere of worship, the sincerity of some of the monks, and the depth of some of its sacred scriptures. At the same time, he was frustrated by the communication gap—his attempt to preach the gospel did not touch the monks. They understood every word he said, but not the meaning. They seemed to live in separate worlds. Gradually he felt the calling to bridge the gap and find ways to approach the Buddhist community in a meaningful way.

Pilgrimage into Buddhism

In this way his conversion from missionary prejudices became a pilgrimage into Buddhism, a spiritual search for its essence, if it is acceptable to use such a word. His approach began with study and friendship. He traveled, observed, listened, and dialogued. He became a pilgrim missionary—preaching and sharing his faith but also being open for finding truth among the others. He published several books where he described Buddhism as it was practiced, not as Western constructions of rational doctrines. He was particularly touched by the piety of the Pure Land Buddhism with its emphasis on faith in Amitabha, the Buddha of light and life who would embrace all who took refuge in him. He was moved by the way people took refuge in Guanyin, the compassionate "goddess of mercy." He discovered that the central message of Mahāyāna was the vision of a universal salvation, beautifully expressed in the vow of the *bodhisattvas*: to abandon even the bliss of Nirvana in order to contribute to the salvation of all sentient beings. He was particularly impressed by the warm spirit of worship and devotion.[11]

It may sound paradoxical, but it seems clear to me that his own pietistic spirituality, with emphasis on the experiential and emotional aspect of faith, prepared him for his fascination with Buddhism. His own experience of sin and grace and his warm devotion to Christ as savior, enabled him to recognize the depth of Buddhist piety. In spite of all differences, it was familiar. Somehow, they were brothers, friends on the way, touched by God. He began to look forward to a time when the Buddhists could move into Christ's great temple and "take their place there as gleaming jewels in his crown."[12]

Not To Destroy but To Fulfill

Let me mention three points in order to clarify the theological and missiological position implied in Reichelt's process towards his new understanding of a mission to Buddhists.

Religions as a Preparation for Christianity

The first is familiar to anyone who has studied the history of Christian mission and theologies of religions. Reichelt was influenced by the fulfilment theologies that had become popular in many missionary traditions. Just as Jesus did not come to destroy the law and the prophets but to fulfill them, the religions of the world were regarded as a sort of Old Testament that were to be fulfilled by the New. The religions were stepping-stones or preparations for Christianity, part of an evolutionary process that led from primitive religions toward the highest in Protestant Christianity.

One of his favorite symbols of this process was the Nestorian "lotus cross," depicting a Christian cross placed on a lotus, the lotus being a central symbol of Eastern spiritual search. The symbol may be interpreted in many ways: as an image of harmonious coexistence of Buddhism and Christianity; as a triumphalist symbol of the cross replacing the lotus; or as a symbol of the need of Christianity to be rooted in and responding to the spiritual search of the East. Reichelt clearly opted for the last interpretation. He was convinced that the deepest aspirations in Buddhism were fulfilled in the cross of Christ. The cross in the lotus expressed his hope that "all the religious systems of the East will find their redemption and fulfillment in the religion of the cross, Christ becoming all in all."[13]

Figure 1. The lotus cross from the Nestorian Monument

Figure 2. The lotus cross used by Reichelt's Mission to Buddhists

A Johannine Perspective—Reichelt's *Logos* Christology

The biblical basis for Reichelt's position was the classical verses referring to a general revelation outside Christ, such as Acts 14:16–17 and 17:26–29, and Romans 1:19–20. But his favorite basis was what he called the Johannine perspective from the Prologue of John, developed further by the second century Apologists and Church Fathers: the divine *Logos* (The Word) that was in the beginning and was incarnated in Christ, was spread like grains of seed *(logoi spermatikoi)* in the world, and was to some extent available to anyone who was searching for truth and meaning.[14]

In China, this became particularly powerful since the Logos was rendered with *Tao* in the Chinese translation of the Gospel of John. Reichelt never tired of appealing to people that their search for truth (Logos/Tao) would open up to a search for the ultimate truth that was incarnated in Jesus Christ. That is why the name of the mission in Chinese was the Christian "Society of Tao-Friends," and the institution was often called a Brother Home. They were all united as friends and brothers in their search for truth. The logos theology enabled Reichelt to be Christ-centered and Christ-open at the same time.

The "Higher Buddhism"—The Hidden Christianity in Mahāyāna

An additional element in such a fulfillment theology was the growing awareness in China that Mahāyāna Buddhism had many elements that seemed more "Christian" than the original Buddhism: the tendency to divinize the Buddha, the emphasis on faith and compassion, the awareness of sin and lostness, abandonment of "self-power" and dependence on "other power," the grace of the Buddhas and bodhisattvas as sort of divine saviors. One of the early pioneer missionaries, W. A. P. Martin, suggested that "Mahāyāna is a form of Christianity in Buddhist nomenclature." Another missionary pioneer, Timothy Richard, who studied Buddhism with the reformer Yang Wenhui, translated some of the central Buddhist scriptures, and described them as "The New Testament of Higher Buddhism."[15] Several scholars suggested that Mahāyāna must be a result of early contact with Christianity in Western Asia in the early centuries of the church. The new ideas and concepts applied by Mahāyāna were, so to say, borrowed from Christianity. Reichelt learned from Richard to translate Buddhist concepts using Christian expressions. And in turn, he felt free to use Buddhist terms in preaching and liturgies. That was not primarily an attempt to adapt Buddhist rhetoric for Christian purposes. From Reichelt's point of view, he was just reclaiming notions and concepts that had originally come from Christianity, and in this way regained their original meaning.[16] That was, in particular, the case with Pure Land Buddhism in which, according to Reichelt, some of the "most precious gold of Buddhism and Christianity" had been included.

Transforming Lofty Ideas into Concrete Strategies

These ideas were shared by many contemporary missionaries. Reichelt's unique contribution was his consistent attempt to convert lofty ideas into concrete strategies by establishing Christian monasteries for Buddhist and Taoist itinerant monks and other religious seekers.

Pilgrimage as a Spiritual Journey

A Buddhist "pilgrim" or itinerant monk is called *yunsui* (Japanese *unsui),* literally "cloud-water," indicating that they were drifting with the clouds and flowing with the water in search of a master who could guide them towards insight. A

Christian monastery for these monks would have pilgrims' halls for the itinerant monks, and facilities for introducing them to a new master, Jesus Christ. It must be a spiritual center where they could feel at home, with a rhythm of worship, meditation, and dialogical reflection in an atmosphere of trust and friendship.

Figure 3. The first amateur blueprint of a Christian monastery for Buddhist monks, 1919–20

Reichelt's encounter with the young monk Kuandu in Nanjing in 1919 was decisive for his future. During a visit to a monastery in Nanjing he had met this monk who almost spontaneously responded to his presentation of Christ as an answer to spiritual searching. Buddhism had failed to solve his questions, now Christ might relieve his agony. A dramatic process ended with Kuandu's conversion. So, Reichelt ended up with a different type of conversion story—not the traditional account of a person who is saved from the misery and darkness of paganism into the light of Christianity, but a person who comes from the light of Buddhism and, inspired by those glimpses of wisdom, is guided toward the true light in Jesus Christ. In the skeptical conservative missionary circles in Norway, this dramatic conversion story had a much stronger appeal than his theoretical presentations of inclusiveness, logos Christology and "higher Buddhism." Here was a concrete "proof" that the strategy worked.[17]

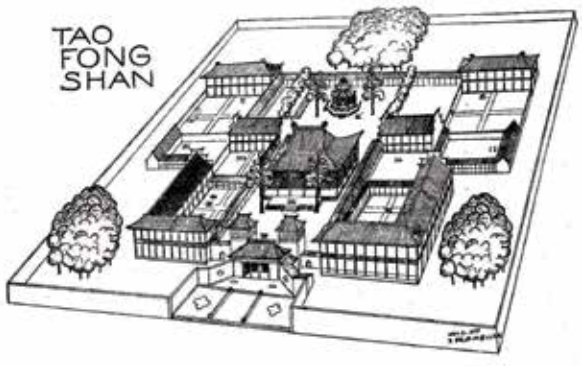
The first monastery in Nanjing was a modest institution in borrowed facilities, rather poor compared to Buddhist monasteries (see photo, p. 99). But in the years from 1922 to 1927, the little "monastery" *(conglin)* was visited by approximately five thousand monks and other religious seekers. They could stay in the pilgrims' hall *(yunsuitang)* as they were used to in their own monasteries, participate in the liturgical rhythm, dialogue with Christians who respected their traditions, and engage in a deeper study of Christianity, if they so wanted. The Sunday worship service was regularly visited by Buddhist monks, from two or three up to twenty monks, who participated wholeheartedly and joined for a vegetarian meal afterwards. Those first years were, in many ways, a living laboratory where Reichelt and his colleagues developed the traditions that were further developed in Tao Fong Shan, Hong Kong, in the 1930s.

Liturgical Spirituality

Reichelt came from a Norwegian Lutheran background where liturgical worship was a central aspect of spiritual life. In contrast to most other Protestant missions, except the Anglicans, the Norwegian Lutherans regarded a rich liturgy as an important asset for appealing to the Chinese, who had a deep appreciation of rituals. Both in Nanjing and Hong Kong, daily life was structured by worship, morning and evening prayers every day, hours of silence and meditation, teaching and preaching, and manual work. Every Saturday there was a special session for contrition as preparation for the high mass on Sundays.[18]

The liturgies were structured as a traditional Lutheran mass, but heavily influenced by Buddhist traditions, as already mentioned. The altar was beautifully made in Chinese style, with a red lacquer finish and richly adorned with golden symbols. The liturgies were adapted to Buddhist expressions, with incense, candles and bells, prayers, hymns, and music inspired by Buddhist conventions, but with a clear message about Jesus Christ as the way and the truth. As stated in the constitution, the ritual was meant "to contain what is essential in the Christian doctrine and on the other hand include some parts of the Mahāyāna ritual which are in perfect harmony with the Christian doctrine."[19]

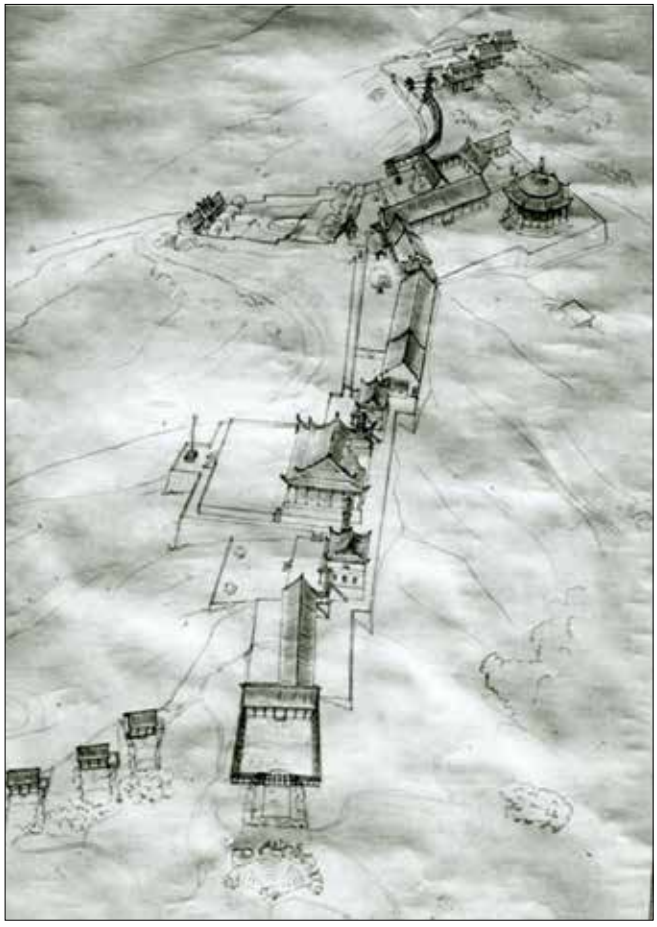
Figure 4. The architect's initial drawings of the planned "monastery," 1929–30, following the traditional structure where all buildings are placed symmetrically behind a rectangular wall



A few words about the prayers and hymns. They sounded like classical Christian prayers when they were translated, but those who knew Chinese Buddhist rhetoric would see that traditional Christian terminology stood side by side with Buddhist expressions. One hymn—with its melody—had been taken directly from the common Buddhist ritual book, only two characters were replaced with the Chinese characters for Christ. The

calligraphic inscription above the altar had the first sentence of the Gospel of John: "In the beginning was the Word," which in Chinese became: "In the beginning was Tao." The inscription on the left side of the altar had an inscription with classical Buddhist symbolism, referring to the ship of grace that leads over to the other shore, interpreted as Christ's grace leading to salvation. The Buddhist expression for taking refuge in the three treasures—I take refuge in the Buddha, the Dharma, and the Sangha—was used for the dedication to the trinity. The content was clearly Christian in its use of traditional expressions about the creator, about Christ as the ransom for sin, and the Holy Spirit, but it was mixed with Buddhist or Taoist expressions.

Figure 5. The architect's solution, placing the various buildings of the "monastery" along the narrow ridge of Tao Fong Shan, 1931.



The Theology of Architecture

Now, almost a hundred years after the beginning in Nanjing, Reichelt is primarily associated with Hong Kong and Tao Fong Shan, the beautiful new "monastery" that was built in the 1930s on a hill above Shatin in the New Territories of Hong Kong. Tao Fong Shan added one new dimension to Reichelt's work: it was not a poor institute in rented facilities as in Nanjing, but a manifestation in beautiful architecture of his vision that Christianity must be rooted in Chinese culture. The Danish architect, Johannes Prip-Møller, was an expert on Buddhist architecture, and used his skills to create a Christian institute where all the elements of a classical Buddhist monastery were integrated: a pilgrims' hall for visiting monks, a meditation crypt, a beautiful sanctuary, educational facilities for visiting monks, and all buildings in classical Chinese architecture.

Figure 6. C. C. Wang's watercolor sketch of Tao Fong Shan

Buddhist monasteries were usually built on a rectangular flat site, or in terraces on a slope of a hillside, surrounded by a wall, with the buildings placed symmetrically, one behind the other. That was also how the original plans for the institute were designed. But that was impossible on the narrow ridge of hill in Hong Kong, so Prip-Møller had to redesign the entire structure of the institute organizing it as a garland of buildings in a zigzag movement along the ridge. He had studied the Chinese tradition of *fengsui* (wind-water) with its awareness of the balance between *yin* and *yang,* and the innumerable rules about directions and the shape of the landscape. He chose to trust his own artistic sensitivity and his sense of harmony between buildings, open spaces, and the landscape. Together with Reichelt, he "put his ear to the ground" in order to listen to the message that slumbered under the turf. He believed that everything was "prepared in advance in the very formation of the hill, in the human mind—created by an invisible, powerful and loving hand."[20] Their dream was to create an institution that harmonized Eastern and Western traditions in a way that had never before been accomplished in the mission history of China.[21] Even today, ninety years later when the traditional work of the Mission to Buddhists has been reorganized as the Areopagos Foundation, which is involved in other types of dialogical approaches, the institute at Tao Fong Shan remains as an architectural reminder of the need to integrate Christianity in the Chinese culture.

To this sacred mountain, monks came from all over China, participating in training courses aimed at preparing monks to become preachers and pastors who in turn would be sent back to their earlier communities in order to share their new faith. That was symbolically expressed by small figures on the roof of the church. Instead of the traditional animals and mythical figures so common on Chinese roofs, the figures were people on their way out to the world with their new message.

Figure 7. The Christ Chapel and other structures of Tao Fong Shan

Success or Failure?

All of this collapsed with the Japanese attack on Hong Kong in December 1941, the same day as the attack on Pearl Harbor. After the war, and with the Chinese revolution in 1949, everything changed, and it was impossible to continue as before. The classical period of Reichelt's Mission to Buddhists was over, and one had to search for new ways.

It would not be appropriate for us today to render judgment on whether or not this approach was successful. But the fact that during the four and a half years in Nanjing, the humble institute was visited by a steady stream of Buddhist and Taoist monks and other religious seekers, suggests that it had a tremendous attraction. Hong Kong was somewhat outside the pilgrim routes, but Reichelt had established a network of contacts throughout China, and even in Hong Kong monks came from all provinces. Toward the end of the 1930s, the dream seemed to be fulfilled: a good staff of Scandinavian and Chinese coworkers; the school had forty students as originally planned; and a vibrant spiritual life attracted visitors both locally and internationally.

There were certainly Buddhists who reacted negatively against the venture, describing Reichelt as a sheep-stealer who borrowed Buddhist traditions in order to convert the monks. At times, there were violent protests. Some scholars have branded his venture as naïve and uncritical, even crude and offensive, and describe him as a "Bible-waving missionary who fraudulently adopted Buddhist guise."[22] But most Buddhists were positive to this radically new type of friendship and openness—missionaries who never concealed their commitment to Christ, but regarded the monks as brothers, truth seekers, and friends. Their only contact with Christianity before had been missionaries and pastors who defamed their religion and ridiculed the monks. Here they met Christians who not only respected their religion, but combined knowledge with a deep fascination, even allowing them to bring some of their sacred treasures into the sanctuary of Christ.

Some missionaries and Chinese Christians rejected Reichelt's approach and accused him of syncretism and idol worship. One of his Norwegian colleagues denounced his combination of "Christian and pagan rituals" as repulsive and unacceptable. After more than twenty years of service in the Norwegian Missionary Society, in 1925–1926 he had to leave the mission and establish a new organization to support his work, The Christian Mission to Buddhists. But a great number of Chinese Church leaders and missionaries reacted with enthusiasm. "Just as Indian Buddhism had been transformed by the encounter with China, Christianity must adapt to a Chinese garment," commented a pastor from Shanghai when the work was introduced. He was happy to see a mission that was ready to undertake this task in the encounter with Buddhism. Even missionaries from non-liturgical traditions were deeply moved when they participated in the worship services. "Never ever in China have I seen a deeper devotion than in this simple, little room," wrote the Quaker missionary Henry Hodgkin. Here Buddhist truth-seekers could come and find the rest that "no alien structure with a foreign ritual and faith could shape."[23] From his Zen Buddhist observation post in Kyoto, D. T. Suzuki wrote with enthusiasm about the work in Nanjing, referring in particular to the form of worship with its "refined, religious atmosphere indigenous to the religious soul of China."[24]

Figure 8. The figures on the roof of the church symbolizing the return to the world with the message

This must do for now. I have tried to introduce some of the central elements in Reichelt's missionary experiment with Buddhism in China. There are so many aspects that need further comment. I am sure some of the responses will open up further elaboration and discussion. And we will be able to share new perspectives and viewpoints. **IJFM**

Endnotes

[1] Earl Herbert Cressy,"Converting the Missionary." *Asia* (Journal of the American Asiatic Association), vol XIX:6, (June 1919): 553–556; Lian Xi, *The Conversion of the Missionary: Liberalism in American Protestant Missions in China, 1907–1932*, (University Park, PA: Pennsylvania State University Press, 1997); Notto R. Thelle, "'The Conversion of the Missionary': Changes in Buddhist-Christian Relations in the Early Twentieth Century," in *Ching Feng: A Journal on Christianity, Chinese Religion, and Culture* (New Series) 4:2 (2003): 1–25; Notto R. Thelle, "Crossing Religious Boundaries: Christian Mission and Global Transformations," in *Religion in a Globalized Age: Transfers and Transformations*, *Integration and Resistance*, edited by Sturla S. Stålsett, (Oslo: Novus Press, 2008).

[2] Reichelt describes his background in a brief account written in 1928, "Fra mitt vita" (From my life).

[3] The classical definition of a sacrament is, according to Lutheran traditions, "a visible sign of God's invisible grace." In this case the visible signs were not water or bread and wine, but the fellowship of concrete persons.

[4] *Norsk missionstidende* (Norwegian Missionary Journal, 1903: 479–81.

[5] Among major studies of Reichelt, see Håkan Eilert, Boundlessness, (Aarhus: Forlaget Aros, 1974); Filip Riisager, Forventning og Opfyldelse (Expectation and Fulfillment), (Aarhus: Forlaget Aros, 1973) and Lotusblomsten og korset (The Lotus and the Cross), (Copenhagen: Gads Forlag, 1998); Tao-vindens bjerg (The Mountain of the Tao Wind), (Frederiksberg: Forlaget Areopagos, 2010); Eric J. Sharpe, Karl Ludvig Reichelt: Missionary, Scholar, and Pilgrim, (Hong Kong: Tao Fong Shan Ecumenical Centre, 1984); Notto N. Thelle, Karl Ludvig Reichelt – en kristen banebryter i Øst-Asia (Karl Ludvig Reichelt: A Christian Pioneer in East Asia), (Oslo: Buddhistmisjonens Forlag, 1954); Rolv Olsen, "Prevailing winds": An Analysis of the Liturgical Inculturation Efforts of Karl Ludvig Reichelt, (Uppsala: Studia Missionalia Svecana, 2007), 104,.

[6] E. L. Allen, *Christianity Among the Religions*, (Boston: Beacon Press, 1960), 33–48.

[7] Harold Isaacs, *Scratches on Our Minds: American Views of China and India*, (White Plains, NY: M. E. Sharpe, 1980), first published in 1958. See also Lian Xi, *The Conversion of Missionaries: Liberalism in American Protestant Missions in China, 1907–1932* (University Park, PA: Pennsylvania State University Press, 1997), 176.

[8] Xi, 176–181; Paul A. Varg, *Missionaries, Chinese, and Diplomats: The American Protestant Missionary Movement in China 1890–1952*, (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1958); Stephen Uhalley, Jr. and Xiaoxin Wu, eds., *China and Christianity: Burdened Past, Hopeful Future* (Armonk, NY: M. E. Sharpe, 2001).

[9] Ernest J. Eitel, *Buddhism: Its Historical, Theoretical and Popular Aspects,* (London: Trübner & Co., 1873, first published in 1872), 1–2, 74, 122.

[10] Varg, *Missionaries, Chinese, and Diplomats*, 68.

[11] Thoroughly documented in Reichelt's first two books, Kinas religioner (China's Religions) from 1913 and Østens religiøse liv (Religious Life in the East) 1922. Published in English as Religion in Chinese Garment, (New York: Philosophical Library, 1951); and Truth and Tradition in Chinese Buddhism, (Shanghai: The Commercial Press, 1928).

[12] Reichelt, *Truth and Tradition*, 7–8.

[13] Reichelt, *Østens religiøse liv* (Religious Life in the East), 1922, 90.

[14] Reichelt's logos theology is a recurring theme in most of his writings.

[15] Timothy Richard, *The New Testament of Higher Buddhism,* (Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1910).

[16] In *Chinese Buddhism: Its Historical, Theoretical, and Popular Aspects* (London: Trübner & Co., 1893), 2–3, Joseph Edkins comments that Mahāyāna got its central concepts from Persia and Babylonia, and refers to studies by S. Beal, B. Hodgson and E. Burnouf.

[17] *Kinas buddhister for Kristus* (China's Buddhists for Christ), a popular booklet that described the conversion of Kuandu, Stavanger: Det Norske Missionsselskaps Trykkeri, 1921.

[18] For a thorough description of the concept of such a monastery for Buddhist monks and a detailed analysis of the liturgies and art work, see Notto R. Thelle, "A Christian Monastery for Buddhist Monks 1: Karl Ludvig Reichelt's Sacred Mountains" and "A Christian Monastery for Buddhist Monks 2: Buddhist Rhetoric in Christian Liturgies," *Ching Feng* (New Series), 6:1 and 6:2, 2005.

[19] Paul D. Twinem, "A New Brotherhood," in *The Chinese Recorder* (1923): 644.

[20] *Buddhistmissionen* (monthly journal of the Christian Mission to Buddhists, 1930): 110–11.

[21] *Buddhistmissionen* (1931): 166–67.

[22] Whalen Lai, "Why is there not a Buddho-Christian Dialogue in China?" *Buddhist-Christian Studies* (1986): 93.

[23] *Kamp og seier* (Struggle and Victory, 1924): 363. Hodgkin was at this time secretary of China Christian Council.

[24] *The Eastern Buddhist* 4:2 (1927): 196.

Presentation Responses

Responses to Notto Thelle's presentation, "Karl Ludvig Reichelt's Pilgrimage: From Conservative Lutheranism to Experiments with Dialogical Outreach to China's Buddhist Monks"

Amos Yong: Response One

I am particularly thankful for the opportunity to engage Dr. Thelle,[1] in part because I noticed that he wrote a book with a title that very much warms my heart: *Who Can Stop the Wind? Travels in the Borderland between East and West,* from 2010.[2] For those that are familiar with my work on the Holy Spirit, I have a book subtitled, *The Spirit and the Middle Way,* which considers the possibility of the divine wind blowing along the Buddha's (so-called) "middle way" or way of moderation.[3] So, I've read some of Dr. Thelle's works, including *Who Can Stop the Wind?,* with great interest in seeing how he used and engaged with new motifs in his own journey, as indicated in his book's subtitle about travels in the borderland between east and west, which is of course very much what this conference's theme is also about. I would also note that Dr. Thelle published *Who Can Stop the Wind?* in the Monastic Interreligious Dialogue series, a point I will comment on later.

My interest in this lecture series is also clearly tied to Karl Reichelt as a missionary to China. I think many of you know that I'm of Chinese descent, born in Malaysia but then immigrated to the United States.[4] It is perhaps in a sense unfortunate that I was raised in Malaysia a (former) British colony where, in the mid-1960s in a Chinese household, I grew up speaking mainly and almost only English. My parents had learned English in school and raised my brothers and I in that medium. The only person I spoke Chinese with was with my grandmother, only a bit of Cantonese, but that was when I was very young.

I've always had a dream, now into my adult years, and particularly as I've developed as a theologian, thinking it would be wonderful at some point if I could learn the Chinese language and maybe even do work theologically with Chinese sources on the history of China and its philosophical and religious traditions. My dreams so far have not become a reality. I took a couple of years of Chinese at a community college at one point about a decade and a half ago, but, unfortunately, I wasn't able to keep that up in ways that actually sustained my learning of the language. Who knows, maybe the Lord will make it possible at some point in the future for me to return and pick this up. But in any case, Reichelt as a missionary in China, was someone who actually had been to the homeland of my ancestors and devoted his life and his passions to learning its culture and engaging with its traditions. So, he lived the dream that I still at some point and in some ways hope to be able to live.

But for my last set of comments this morning, I want to press into the section on Dr. Thelle's description of Christian monasteries for Buddhist monks. And, again, he's talking about Reichelt's experiment, so avant-garde and controversial in his time. Surely, we can all understand why that was controversial almost one hundred years ago, and even still today. So here we are talking about Buddhist-Christian encounter, the Buddhist-Christian dialogue, not just in the abstract, meaning not just relative to ideas, and not just related to interesting philosophical and conceptual notions in which people can sit in circles and engage in theoretical arguments or speculative considerations. Such exercises are great. I've been trained in philosophy and theology and these heady encounters with Buddhists are some of the most dense and robust engagements of my own journey as a theologian.[5] But Christian monasteries for Buddhist monks invites us into something deeper, certainly more embodied, more fundamental even than engaging only "above the neck" (so to speak).

> Our dialogue emerges from our experience of sitting together, meditating together, contemplating together—it's a dialogue of practice.

What happens when we sit together not just to talk, but to meditate, to contemplate, and then to share our experiences in these monastic contexts? These monastic contexts are certainly dialogical, but they're dialogical in a deeper way because we're invited into that dialogue through our bodies—through sitting together and being in the presence of one another. Therefore, our dialogue emerges from our experience of sitting together, of meditating together, of contemplating together. In other words, it's not just a dialogue of ideas, but a dialogue of practice. For Buddhists and Christians, for Reichelt, this was in part what led him down the path that he took, because he began to embody and live and experience this monastic reality in ways that he wouldn't have if he had just engaged at the level of abstraction.

So, how does what Reichelt did apply to today? It would not just be entering into a *sangha* of Buddhists and meditating in their halls, but it would also be for Buddhist monks to come into our churches and our halls of worship. Now in times of the coronavirus we are all meeting digitally, and as we reopen, Buddhist monks are even less likely to feel welcome in our halls of worship, even as we're probably less likely to feel like we belong in a meditation hall of a sangha. So, this is the level of dialogical engagement that Reichelt lived out in his own journey a century ago, and it remains controversial even now.[6] I'll develop some of these thoughts further in my response to Dr. Thelle's second lecture.

Amos Yong is a Malaysian-American theologian and missiologist who currently serves as Dean of the School of Mission & Theology at Fuller Seminary. He has written more than 50 books including two on Buddhism: The Cosmic Breath: Spirit and Nature in the Christian-Buddhism-Science Trialogue *and* Pneumatology and the Christian-Buddhist Dialogue: Does the Spirit Blow through the Middle Way? *One of his most recent books is* The Amos Yong Reader: The Pentecostal Spirit. *He has both participated and served in leadership in the Society for Buddhist-Christian Studies.*

Rory Mackenzie: Response Two

Thank you, Dr. Thelle, for your excellent introduction to the life and ministry of Karl Reichelt. And thank you also for all the other papers you have written in English, thus making Karl Reichelt visible to us who don't read the Scandinavian languages. There is a sense in which visibility means a possibility, at least for many of us. Those of us who engage with the Buddhist world, especially in the West, will probably find ourselves coming into contact with New Agers, members of the Theosophical Society, followers of pagan traditions, healers and shamans. I'm speaking today from Edinburgh and if I were to take you for a walk five minutes down the road, we would come across a shamanic center for world healing. A little bit further on, there is a spiritualist church, and then if we cross the road and walk a bit further, we come to a Zen priory. So, we live in a pluralistic society which holds out many opportunities for engaging with the religious "other." It strikes me that some of these fraternities have commonalities with Buddhism, and since we speak the language of Buddhism there is the potential to engage with these folks on issues such as meditation, *karma,* and enlightenment.

We evangelicals rightly offer a stout defense of the uniqueness or supremacy of Jesus, yet the context is often restricted to churches. These affirmations of faith also need to be done in the context of friendship.

One of Reichelt's detractors told me at a conference in Denmark that Reichelt read widely and, in some cases, with considerable approval in the area of the Theosophical Society. Reichelt apparently appreciated the cosmic dimension of Christ taught by writers in that particular tradition, and he tried to shape his christological understandings to these mindsets so that they would be open to seeing Jesus as the Christ and as a central figure of their belief system. I also heard that one of the national leaders of these fraternities, who became a good friend of Reichelt, came to see things from Reichelt's perspective and stepped down from the leadership of the organization. I cannot find anything written in English on this so I wondered, Dr. Thelle, if you could comment. I really intend to make the point that we evangelicals rightly offer a stout defense of the uniqueness or supremacy of Jesus, yet the context is often restricted to churches. These evangelical affirmations of faith also need to be done in a nuanced manner in the context of friendship with those from the so-called New Age backgrounds, or creation spirituality. And I guess that defense would challenge some of the esoteric teachings from Jesus when viewed as one of many messengers or projections into this world of the cosmic Christ or solar logos. I will end my comments here, and I suppose my question is to what extent Reichelt engaged with non-Buddhist and the more esoteric traditions.

Rory Mackenzie has taught Buddhism and Practical Theology at the International Christian College, Glasgow. He lived and served in Thailand for 11 years and is presently involved with the Thai community in Edinburgh. His 2017 publication, God, Self and Salvation in a Buddhist Context, *is informed by Karl Reichelt's contextualized approach, and advocates friendship with Buddhists while maintaining a clear witness to Christ. In 2007 he also wrote* New Buddhist Movements in Thailand: Towards an Understanding of Wat Phra Dhammakaya and Santi Asoke *(Routledge Critical Studies in Buddhism).*

Terry Muck: Response Three

Thank you very much, Dr. Thelle, for a wonderful presentation of Reichelt's overall ministry; it's so beautifully written. I can't wait for the biography—except that the biography is in Norwegian and I don't speak Norwegian! I'm hoping that part of your plan is to have it translated into English so we can all benefit from it. My response is a question. Since I don't speak Norwegian and much of what Reichelt wrote was in Norwegian (only a few of his books

have been translated into English), I wonder if you could comment on what of his work should be translated? If you were king for a day and could determine this and have them translated, what writings of Reichelt are we English speakers missing out on the most? And what would you recommend as being the ones that should initially be translated into English? That's my only response, but I look forward to the ongoing discussion here. Thank you.

Terry Muck (PhD, Northwestern) is professor emeritus of World Religions at Asbury Theological Seminary. Formerly he was the editor of Christianity Today *and the Dean of the E. Stanley Jones School of World Mission also at Asbury. He has been a long time participant of the Society for Buddhist-Christian Studies and was the editor of their journal.*

Notto Thelle Replies

Well, thank you for the responses. How many hours do we have? I will try to respond but I missed a few comments in my notes. First of all, I am very grateful that you have taken your time to do this.

Dr. Yong. I like your comments about the wind. Actually, Tao Fong Shan was the *Tao*-wind, and as mentioned one of my books is *Who Can Stop the Wind?* (See book review, p. 188.) The wind, of course, in Chinese all the way back from the Nestorian tradition, was used for the Holy Spirit. So, the *Tao*-wind is also the wind of the spirit of *Tao,* and the spirit of Christ. I think I have not read the book you mentioned writing, but I think in our theology of religion sometimes we have been too concentrated, or one-sided, too concentrated on the second article on Christ, sometimes forgetting the first article (God) and the third article of the Spirit which is blowing through the world. We may return to that later.

But then the question about establishing monasteries. I agree that there is a difference between the abstract academic dialogue between Buddhists and Christians, which happens in many places, also in the East. . . . I've participated in a lot of that type of philosophical discussion in Japan, and also as it develops in the West. It is in spirit very challenging and inspiring. But, as you say, when it comes to a monastery where there is a sort of spiritual practice, we do things together. That is another dimension of dialogue. So, there are at least three or four different types or aspects of dialogue; you have the theoretical, doctrinal or philosophical dialogue. You have the sharing of spirituality—what happens when you meditate with Buddhist monks, or when Buddhist monks sit in European or American Benedictine monasteries and participate in what happens there. Or this can take place in a more person-to-person setting where sometimes it happens that Christians and Buddhists pray together. That is a much different type of approach. And then of course there's the daily everyday dialogue between neighbors. Sometimes this everyday dialogue is not regarded as important, but I think there is a wisdom among people living their daily lives with neighbors. These shared experiences sometimes may be more important than the high philosophical dialogues.

Reichelt was nurtured by a very strong faith commitment to Christ. But he was not triumphalistic in his faith; sometimes perhaps he was, but when they had services, or when sitting in the Pilgrims' Hall meditating with Buddhist monks, he had a strong awareness that God was present there and he did not use that as an opportunity to argue. He had a deep expectation that when you sit together and sort of return to your spiritual roots, that Buddhists would perhaps discover, that in the depths they would realize that Christ was there, that the Logos was there, and would realize that Jesus Christ was the deepest or the real incarnation. Of course, he was present in Buddhist worship services, and he was very impressed by the ordination services. He was fascinated with Buddhist worship, but I don't think he ever directly participated, and I don't think (as many do now 100 years later) that he was participating actively in Buddhist meditation, as some of us have done. But he had strong convictions that God is there. I don't know whether that is an adequate response to Dr. Yong, but at least that is some of my reflections.

He had a deep expectation that when you sit together, Buddhists would perhaps discover that Christ was there, that the Logos was there, and that Jesus Christ was the deepest or the real incarnation.

Now Dr. Mackenzie. Yes, my experiences are basically from Japan, and through research, also China, but of course I live in Norway, which in many ways I think must be close to the situation in Scotland. When I was a student in the 1960s, there was one Buddhist in Norway and there was one Muslim. And all of us knew where he lived. I had a friend who knew a friend who practiced yoga. So, the European setting, the American setting, has radically changed, and of course, as in Edinburgh, there are religious fraternities and all sorts of practices on every street corner.

I don't often do this anymore, but for many, many years I participated in large spiritual fairs, alternative fairs, and had a lot of contact with different groups. We live in a pluralistic society.

When I returned from Japan in 1985, I discovered a Norwegian community where the East was present in a different way than before. Previously the East had been a special interest for people with exotic interests or academic interest. Now there were not only all sorts of Indian practices (Maharishi Mahesh Yogi and his Transcendental Meditation), Zen masters, all sorts of Buddhist masters and so on, all with a lot of New Age emphasis which, as far as I could see, to a very great extent had borrowed or integrated aspects of Buddhist or Eastern traditions. These were often popularized, often simplified, and often were not so much religious or spiritual practices as technologies for getting things done.

I wonder if Reichelt had known the Celtic traditions . . . this sense of our place, our situation where there is just a thin layer between this world and the other world.

So, it has become an Eastern focus, rather thin, but it's still there. For the Christians in Norway, it has been realized that it is important to engage these new traditions with a dialogical curiosity, with respect for the people, not with a wholesale condemnation of everything. I think in the New Age Movement you can find the best and the worst of people. There are a lot of committed people who really struggle in their lives and have found some answers which have helped them, and yet many of them are quite open to dialogue.

I could say more about that, but you also asked about Reichelt's connection with theosophists, anthroposophists and what you have referred to as esoteric traditions. On one of the first days after he arrived in Nanjing to start mission work among Buddhists, Reichelt got into contact with an indigenous Chinese version of an esoteric tradition. This group did not have contact with the international Theosophical movement, but it was a sort of theosophical esoteric tradition which accepted five religions: *Taoism (Daoism),* Buddhism, Confucianism and I think Mohammed was also there, and then Christ. Reichelt was deeply fascinated because these people called their institute *Taoyin,* which means the Institute of Tao, which Reichelt called the Logos and the Logos Institute. Their fascination with Tao as the deepest aspect of truth led Reichelt to a lifelong contact with this group.

They had some occult practices which Reichelt didn't like (automatic writing messages from the other side and so on), but Reichelt was fascinated. One aspect of his spirituality was an intense feeling that he was somehow in contact with what was on the other side. I think he was inspired by the theosophists, and he used some of their rhetoric. He was very interested in the veil, as in Madame Blavatsky's *Isis Unveiled,* the Theosophic interest in what is on the other side of the veil. I wonder if Reichelt had known the Celtic traditions . . . this sense of our place, our situation where there is just a thin layer between this world and the other world. . . . So, I think Reichelt felt a sort of communication link in their interest in the cosmic dimension and our relationship to what is on the other side.

When Reichelt went to Shanghai in the interim time between Nanjing and Hong Kong, he came into contact with international Theosophical communities as well as Chinese Theosophists, and it seems that here he began to realize that maybe not all Buddhist monks were very spiritual. There was a lot of corruption and power struggles, and he discovered that not all Buddhist monks were true seekers. But he discovered that among the Buddhist laity and also among these groups of esoteric societies there were genuine truth seekers. These were very committed people, and he started to discover that maybe one should commit more energy to relating to these types of people.

When Reichelt came to Hong Kong, there was a very vibrant international Theosophic society there, and in those ten years in Hong Kong in the 1930s he made very close friends with Theosophists and some anthroposophists. And he was invited several times every year to give lectures to the Theosophical Society.

Central in his preaching was Christ as the ultimate truth and Christ as the center of religion and so on. But he was attracted to them, and they were attracted to him, maybe because he had also a sort of language which was wider than the traditional doctrinal language of Christianity, the cosmic dimension, and so on. His disappointment, both with the Chinese Logos Society (Taoyin) and also the Theosophical society, was that they never seemed to follow him in his emphasis on Christ as the unique incarnation of Tao and the Ultimate Truth. He discovered that people belonging to the Taoyin or Logos Society never understood that he could be so exclusive in his attitude, that he could not see that they accepted Christ as an incarnation of the Tao, but only as one of several such manifestations.

I would have to investigate more your question about one of the leaders of an esoteric society stepping down and becoming a Christian. I haven't seen that, and I think Reichelt was disappointed that they did not seem to accept that Christ was the truth and the way and the life, not only one of many. But all

the way to the end of his life, he felt that they were somehow brothers (well, there were very few sisters in this tradition, so sorry about that), that they had a basic spiritual friendship which was wider than the commitment only to Christ. You can be spiritual friends without having the same opinions about things.

To Dr. Muck's question. Some of Reichelt's books are translated, as you know. One of his books about Chinese religion, one of his first actually, and also a second book about Chinese religious spirituality. I don't know whether all three of his last books, written during the war and published in the 1940s, have been translated yet. I think at least *The Transformed Abbott*, and maybe one other, are in English. I'm not sure what to say about his language. His rhetoric was so flowery, so full of pious language which somehow belongs to a different age. So, I'm not sure that any other of his books should be translated, or if they were translated that they would be read very much. Maybe his beautiful book from 1941 or 1942, *The Sanctuary of Christ-Life*. Even this has a lot of flowery language of cosmic Christianity, the Cosmic Christ. But many Christians found it was too inaccurate, too flowery, while others loved it because it was flowery and used the cosmic language. But I'm not sure it would sell if translated. **IJFM**

Endnotes

[1] Thanks to H. L. Richard and Brad Gill for transcribing and providing an initial edit of the recording of my talk; I provided further edits for clarity and added a few footnotes.

[2] Notto R. Thelle, *Who Can Stop the Wind? Travels in the Borderland between East and West* (Collegeville: Liturgical, 2010).

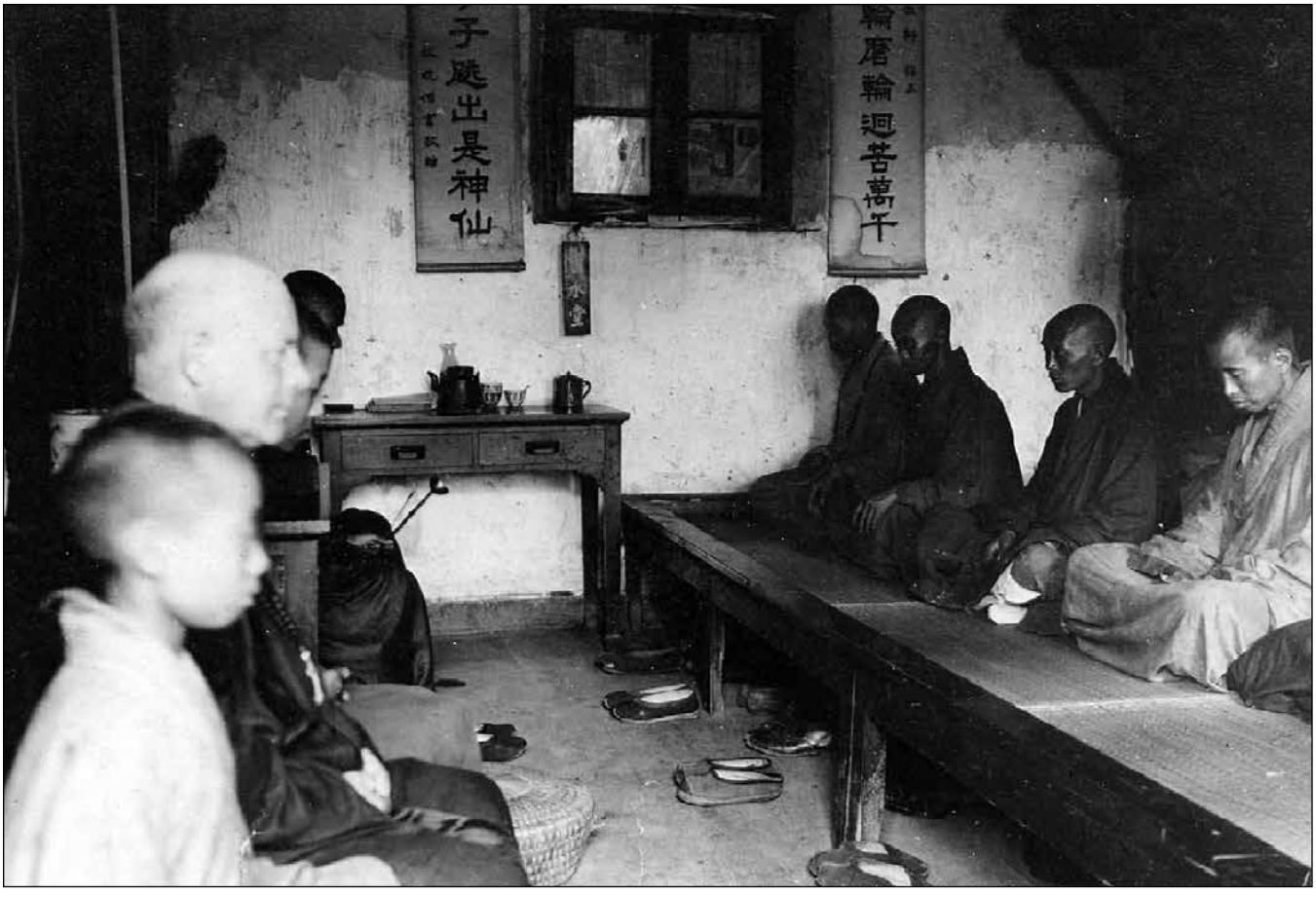
[3] See Yong, *Pneumatology and the Christian-Buddhist Dialogue: Does the Spirit Blow through the Middle Way?* Studies in Systematic Theology 11 (Leiden and Boston: Brill, 2012); I am not sure I had read Thelle's *Who Can Stop the Wind?* when I published my own volume.

[4] I describe some of this experience of migration in my article, "The Holy Spirit, the Middle Way, and the Religions: A Pentecostal Inquiry in a Pluralistic World," *Evangelical Interfaith Dialogue* 2:2 (Spring 2012): 4–15 and 25–26, available at https://fullerstudio.fuller.edu/featured-article-the-holy-spirit-the-middle-way-and-the-religions/; reprinted in *New Life Theological Journal* 2:1 (2012): 8–25.

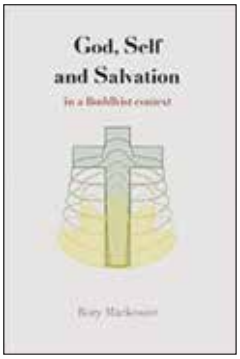
[5] See for instance my review essay, "On Doing Theology and Buddhology: A Spectrum of Christian Proposals," *Buddhist-Christian Studies* 31 (2011): 103–18.

[6] For example, Marianne Moyaert and Joris Geldhof, eds., *Ritual Participation and Interreligious Dialogue: Boundaries, Transgressions and Innovations* (New York: Bloomsbury Academic, 2015).

Reichelt in the Pilgrims' Hall in Nanjing, China, meditating with visiting monks, a snapshot taken by Thelle's father around 1924 or 1925. The facilities were a replica of what the monks were used to on their journeys to various temples.



Books from the Ralph D. Winter Lectureship Presenters

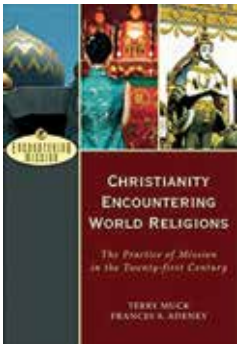


God, Self and Salvation in a Buddhist Context

By Rory Mackenzie | (Wide Margin: Gloucester, Scotland, 2016)

This book is for Christians who wish to develop their understanding of Buddhism. Examining key Buddhist doctrines such as non-self, karma and Dharma, Rory Mackenzie shows the reader ways of sensitively engaging with Buddhists. Informed by Karl Reichelt's contextualised approach, the book advocates friendship with Buddhists but at the same time maintaining missionary encounter. Drawing upon the author's experience on the mission field in Asia and work in the UK, the book offers helpful analogies, illustrations and conversation starters, making this a useful guide for those who wish to share their faith with Buddhist friends.

https://www.amazon.com/God-Self-Salvation-Buddhist-Context/dp/1908860197

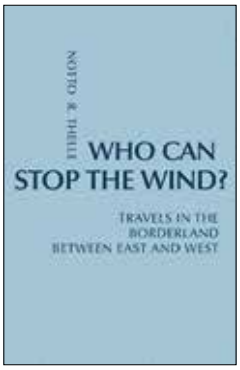


Christianity Encountering World Religions: The Practice of Mission in the Twenty-first Century

By Terry Muck and Francis S. Adeney | (Baker Academic: Grand Rapids, 2009)

The current religious climate poses unique challenges to those engaged in mission. These two authors propose a new and biblical model for interacting with people of other faiths, a model they term "giftive" mission. Based on the metaphor of free gift, this perspective enables us to more closely imitate God's gracious activity in the world. The core of the book explores eleven practices that characterize giftive mission, each illustrated through a figure from mission history who embodies that practice. Further application suggests how to incorporate these practices in specific mission settings.

https://www.amazon.com/Christianity-Encountering-World-Religions-Twenty-first/vdp/0801026601



Who Can Stop the Wind? Travels in the Borderland Between East and West

By Notto R. Thelle (translated by Brian McNeil) | (Liturgical Press: Collegeville, Minnesota, 2010)

In today's global village, where religions can no longer live in 'innocent' and 'safe' ignorance of one another, thoughtful Christians are trying to understand other faiths as never before in our history. This very readable book does not answer with a theoretical study of the relation between Buddhism and Christianity, but rather one of vivid experiences and dialogue. The author, having engaged friends and monks in Buddhist Japan for years, shares a way for us to dialogically engage today's religious pluralism. He affirms the depth of non-Christian ways but then 'passes beyond dialogue' to a renewed understanding and appreciation of the depth of the Christian Way.

https://www.amazon.com/s?k=Who+Can+Stop+the+Wind%3F+Travels+in+the+Borderland+Between+East+and+West&ref=nb_sb_noss

Available at amazon.com. Scan the QR codes for direct access to these books.

Reichelt's Inclusivism in Retrospect and Prospect: A Crisis for Mission?

by Notto R. Thelle

Editor's note: This article was first presented at the Ralph D. Winter Lectureship in February 2021, and addresses the theme, "Buddhist-Christian Encounters: Today's Realities in Light of the Pioneering Work of Karl Ludvig Reichelt in China."

I am not quite sure whether the words "retrospect" and "prospect" are adequate to express my intention in this presentation. *Retrospect,* in this context, is to look back on the history of Reichelt with a critical but also generous evaluation. *Prospect* is to look forward and ask ourselves about the enduring relevance of his legacy.

Based on my previous article (and considering also the responses), I want to reflect upon Reichelt's contribution to missionary work in China and to ask myself what we can learn—positively and negatively. Is the heritage from Reichelt more than an exciting history, interesting stories, and beautiful buildings? Are there insights, attitudes, and strategies that can still inspire and vitalize Christian mission? I believe so, but the entire tradition has to be examined carefully.

Some people say that hindsight gives the best insight. That is true to some extent. Now, almost one hundred years after Reichelt began his Buddhist mission in Nanjing, we know much more about China and about interfaith relations there; we see more clearly the limitations and prejudices that characterized missionary work at that time, including the mixture of missionary idealism and Western ideas of supremacy and triumphalism. We have to use our knowledge in order to come to terms with the history to which we belong, directly or indirectly.

As for Reichelt, it is easy to see that his understanding of Buddhism was limited and manipulated by dominant trends in the scholarship of his time. He embraced the idea that early Christianity had made a strong impact on the development of Mahāyāna, a theory that does not seem to be supported by modern scholarship. He learned from Timothy Richard and others to interpret Buddhist concepts and texts as if they expressed Christian ideas, and then borrowed such concepts in order to convey Christian ideas in preaching, hymns, and liturgies. Apparently, the strategy functioned to some extent and impressed many visiting monks who could approach Christianity in a new way. In hindsight, however, one has to admit that in this Reichelt did not take the "otherness" of Buddhism sufficiently seriously. His evaluation of Buddhism was overly influenced by his Christian perspective, ranking Pure Land Buddhism as the highest, since it was closest to Protestant Christianity.

Notto R. Thelle is professor emeritus of the University of Oslo, where he taught ecumenics and missiology from 1986 to 2006. Before that he served as a missionary for sixteen years in Japan (1969–1985), involved in research and interfaith dialogue in what he calls the "borderland" where faith meets faith. Most of the time he served as Associate Director of the NCC Center for the Study of Japanese Religions in Kyoto (1974–1985). He has published some pioneer research concerning Buddhist-Christian relations in Japan and China, in addition to Norwegian textbooks and translations of Buddhist and Eastern traditions. He has written a number of books and essays in Norwegian on the dialogue with Eastern traditions and alternative forms of Western spirituality, and his treatise on Christian spirituality, Who Can Stop the Wind: Travels in the Borderland Between East and West, *has been translated into English.*

Some scholars have criticized his studies of Buddhism as superficial and too sloppy. To some extent they are right. He was an autodidact—a self-studied man without a classical critical training. His description of Buddhism and other religions as stepping stones towards Christian faith came from popular ideas about evolutionary processes that were part of Western triumphalism and the Christian superiority feelings of his time. In the previous article, I also referred to critical remarks from Buddhist and other observers: that his mission was a sort of proselytism using friendship and dialogue as a bait for catching the monks; or, as Whalen Lai remarked, he was "a Bible-waving missionary who fraudulently adopted Buddhist guise."[1]

Such critical remarks need to be balanced by a more generous evaluation. In his studies of Buddhism, Reichelt did what many other Western scholars were unable to do in their protected Western libraries where they read and translated texts: his privilege was to describe what he observed and heard from actual life, with empathy and enthusiasm. The Buddhists in China generally saw Reichelt as a friend who respected them, a Christian spiritual master who wanted to understand, and who regarded them as friends and brothers on the way. He was sincerely searching for the gold in Buddhism and was happy when he found profound wisdom. He admired the Buddhist reformers who combined zeal and piety, even when their aim was to conquer Christianity.[2] He wanted to use and integrate their wisdom in order to present Christ as a living reality. A leading expert on Buddhist reform movements described Reichelt as "a leading champion of Chinese Buddhism's good reputation" in a time when Mahāyāna was generally regarded as a corrupt type of Buddhism by Western scholars.[3] And—perhaps most important—he never concealed his Christian motivation. He had no hidden agenda and was open about his hope to guide them towards faith in Jesus Christ. Even though he emphasized that the inner aspirations of Buddhism were fulfilled in Christ, he repeatedly maintained that conversion to Christ implied a break with the past.

Buddhists in China saw Reichelt as a Christian spiritual master who regarded them as friends and brothers on the way.

I could have continued the list of strengths and weaknesses in Reichelt's approach, but will rather continue by concentrating on a few central aspects of Reichelt's legacy that I regard as relevant for the present time.

Theology and Anthropology

The most important heritage from Reichelt is his theological praxis based on the conviction that God "had not left himself without testimony" (Acts 14:17), and corresponding insights from Acts 17, Romans 1, and the Gospel of John, as mentioned in the previous article. That gave Reichelt a generous openness toward other religions and cultures, and a corresponding expectation that every human person—independent of religion, race, or nationality—is touched by God in a way that can open up to faith in Jesus Christ. My late colleague in Copenhagen, Theodor Jørgensen, described this as the "Christ signature" in every human person. Our foremost Norwegian hymn writer, Svein Ellingsen, who died recently, formulated a similar insight in the poetic words, "a prayer is hidden in the rhythm of the heartbeat." One does not have to subscribe to the simplistic and triumphalist fulfillment theologies of Reichelt and his generation of missionaries in order to maintain the basic expectation of God's active presence in the world.

More than fifty years after Reichelt's death, The Christian Mission to Buddhists (now Areopagos Foundation) developed a moderate, but still quite open, reformulation of such a position:

> The faith which inspires proclamation of the Christ event as God's central work in human history must be accompanied by faith in the creative and salvific work of the triune God even where Christ's name is not known.… Hence any proclamation of Christ will be accompanied by a humble expectation that God has made himself known, and in various ways may be traced in the wisdom and religious experiences of all cultures. Therefore, mission is not only a one-way proclamation of Christ and his salvation, but involves an attentive listening to the presence of the triune God already there. All mission must consequently be dialogical: what is said and done must take place in an attentive and trusting dialogue, and with a deep respect for the cultures to which the message is communicated, and with an expectation that God also has something to say to the church and its theology through these cultures.[4]

A similar position is now shared by dominant trends among mainstream Protestant churches internationally. The WCC and other ecumenical councils refer to "the mission of God" as an expression of such a position, and corresponding attitudes are formulated in Roman Catholic and Orthodox theology. My impression is that conservative missionary communities (like the Lausanne Movement) that tended to be strongly exclusivist, have, in various ways, opened up to similar positions.

Contextual Theology

Reichelt had a strong concern for making Christianity "indigenous," rooted in the Chinese culture and growing in close interchange with the religious search of his time. His favorite symbol was the cross in the lotus. His famous missionary hymn, "Thy Kingdom, Jesus, ever shall …" expressed such a vision by describing the time of fulfillment when every nation and region with different tongues and languages would gather before the throne of God, worshiping God, "each with its own splendor as a sign."[5]

He did so by a systematic use of Buddhist concepts and artistic expressions in preaching, worship, and architecture. As already mentioned, such a strategy was too direct and naïve in its way of borrowing—some would say stealing—Buddhist hymns and concepts, and hence is no longer adequate. On the other hand, it is inevitable that Christian mission has to use the religious language and artistic forms that are available when Christianity is introduced to new cultures. Reichelt's fascination with, and expectation for, the wisdom and experience of what he called "sacred religious material" may still inspire as a model for an expectant openness to other religions and cultures. At this point, he depended not only on classical theology, but he also shared the expectation of many Chinese who believed that Christian faith would be enriched and deepened if it were truly rooted in Chinese soil.

Such concepts as indigenization, accommodation, and points of contact are now generally replaced by such concepts as inculturation and contextualization. Reichelt was one-sidedly preoccupied with the religious dimension and the essence of religious life, while newer contextual approaches also relate to the broader connection with culture, politics, ideology, and social change. New insights from cultural anthropology and studies of cross-cultural communication have also broadened the scope. But the driving force in Reichelt's concern for indigenization was to make Christianity relevant in an alien culture and to develop the church and its theology in dialogue with the historical and religious experience of that culture. That process is still relevant.

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Meditation and Quietude

One aspect of Reichelt's interests has often been undercommunicated: his concern for meditation and stillness. The spirituality of quietude had accompanied him all the way from his childhood, and permeated the liturgical rhythm in the places he established in China. From Pietism he was familiar with what was called the "closet" or "secret chamber" and "the quiet hour." Reichelt's contribution was to combine classical Christian spirituality with the inspiration from the East, as it was programmatically expressed in a lecture for Norwegian clergy in 1926.[6] Far ahead of his time, he argued for the need of retreat houses, centers for prayer and meditation, and even pilgrimages. It is interesting that his final unfinished manuscript had the title "In quietude before the countenance of God."[7] Only in recent years have such practices been developed in Norwegian and Western Protestantism, with inspiration from pietistic traditions, Celtic, Lutheran, Anglican, Catholic, and Orthodox spirituality, and even from Eastern practices.

Dialogical Processes

Reichelt did not use the word "dialogue" to describe his work—he was a missionary who through conversation and testimony wanted to convert the Buddhists. But he practiced dialogue in the sense that he had the ability to listen to his dialogue partners with deep sensitivity, and was willing to let himself be "converted" by the other in the sense that he had to integrate some of their wisdom into his own universe of faith. His mental horizon changed and was expanded by the knowledge about the other, but at the same time his Christian faith expanded and was deepened by his new knowledge.

Similar things have happened in the realm of interfaith dialogue that have gradually become a part of church life in Scandinavia and in many international contexts. Fifty or sixty years ago, dialogue was generally regarded as threatening or unacceptable in missionary communities. Dominant missionary circles argued that one had to choose—mission *or* dialogue. At least in Norway, those who were concerned with dialogue were generally related to the Reichelt tradition and regarded with suspicion. And the same tradition—now represented by Areopagos—has in recent decades contributed to interfaith dialogue by establishing forums for dialogue and spirituality. Now "dialogue" has been accepted as a central concern in church and missionary circles: dioceses establish dialogue centers and employ dialogue pastors; the Council of Ecumenical and International Relations organizes dialogues with other religions and secular humanists; interfaith dialogue has become an inevitable part of theological education and reflection; interreligious studies have become a part of theological education; and schools are often arenas for such dialogues.

In this process, the meaning of dialogue has somehow changed its character. The church- and mission-oriented dialogue was initially regarded as an effective means of evangelization. When the World Council of Churches in the 1950s and 1960s established international dialogue centers in Asia and Africa in order to prepare for the coming dialogue, it was generally implied that the purpose was to enable the church to have an effective testimony to other religions. The dialogue promoted from evangelical circles also tended to be part of a process to make Christian testimony more relevant and effective. So the missionary dimension will naturally be an inherent part of dialogue—the readiness to share one's faith. But my own experience and my conclusion from many years of observation has convinced me that real dialogue is a much more open process than merely a means for missionary communication. In order to be sincere, dialogue has to be a mutual process in which two or several persons meet without

hidden agendas or purposes, not just to change the other, but to participate towards mutual change or transformation.[8] Dialogue is thus not a mission strategy, but a basic human way of being.

Friendship is a theological quality which may be more important for the communication of the gospel than intelligent theories, good arguments, and elegant formulations.

To Be a Pilgrim—Faith En Route

What I mention here is just another perspective on the dialogical process. When Reichelt repeatedly described himself as a pilgrim, it was not only because he accompanied the Buddhist itinerant monks in order to share his faith with them. He wanted to be a seeker of truth and insight, listening and learning in order to have insight in the same way as they were searching for wisdom and clarity. He was deeply committed to his faith in Jesus Christ, but he was also informed and inspired by those he met on the way.

His own spiritual pilgrimage in China challenged and inspired him to reformulate his faith and integrate new insights. To me it is a reminder of the journey of faith most Christians experience as they encounter new situations and new challenges in life. Growing up in a traditional Christian environment, my impression was that Christianity was a package of truths, already defined and formulated, to be protected unchanged through life. What easily happens with such a position is that people at a certain stage in life discover that things have changed in such a way that the pre-defined faith seems irrelevant. Some end up by opting out of the church and abandoning faith. Others regain their faith by reformulating and redefining it, integrating new experiences and discovering that Christianity is a much larger universe than the little variety they happened to receive when they grew up. Faith is challenged and inspired by the journey through life; there are new things to discover beyond the next turn, and change is an important part of the realities of life.

The Gift of Friendship

One unique aspect of Reichelt's work was never formulated as a strategy, but primarily appeared as a praxis in the encounter with others: friendship, friendliness, and a spontaneous and sincere curiosity for "the other." It was expressed in the name that was often used about the mission, *Taoyou-hui* (The Association of Tao-friends or Logos-friends) and *Xiongdi-hui* (Brotherhood). The idea was that every truth-seeker was a friend and a brother—sorry, there were few sisters then. Reichelt knew that one might be kindred spirits or spiritual friends without entertaining the same opinions or dogmas. He was, at times, accused of using friendship in order to proselytize, but he was always open about his own faith and had no hidden agenda. The main impression is that he had a unique ability for friendship across the boundaries of faith and culture, expressed as an almost limitless curiosity and a friendliness that made a deep impression on those he met.

One aspect of this friendliness was Reichelt's almost naive confidence in people's good intensions. This could create problems. He was cheated by unfaithful servants; he was credulous/gullible in his expectations regarding the spiritual qualities of visiting monks; he thought it was possible to cooperate with both sides in the theological struggle between liberals and conservatives which was ablaze at the time in Norway; he wanted peace and harmony with all. The inevitable result was that he was disappointed and depressed when his expectations were shattered. His friendly confidence was vulnerable, and critics regarded his naivety as a weakness. When he still stuck to his friendly confidence, it was grounded in his theological anthropology. He believed that God was not far away from anybody, and appealed to the inherent longing for God and for truth in every human soul. That is certainly a vulnerable theology, a conviction that was bound to be betrayed by the realities of life. On the other hand, it was probably more life-affirming and powerful than the one-sided preoccupation with the depravity of humankind that has characterized great parts of the Lutheran and Protestant traditions.

Reichelt's work is a constant reminder that confidence is a basic expression of faith. Friendship is a theological quality which may be more important for the communication of the gospel than intelligent theories, good arguments, and elegant formulations.

Piety as a Meeting Point

I have described friendship and friendliness as a central key to Reichelt's ability to establish a trusting relationship where his message could be heard. But even more than his natural ability for friendliness, it seems as if his deep piety appealed more strongly. There is a paradoxical ambiguity in the fact that religious experience was such a central aspect of his personality. I will try to explain the ambiguity with a few observations:

I have already mentioned his spiritual background in Norwegian pietism with its emphasis on religious experience molded by Lutheran tradition: the deep sense of sin and grace, the experience of guilt, a tremendous feeling of gratitude for the forgiveness of sin, and the strong sense of calling to share one's faith. That sensitivity remained a central part of his missionary career.

Paradoxically enough, it was this type of piety that enabled him to be so impressed by what he experienced in dialogues, in Buddhist sanctuaries, and on his journeys. What he saw was, according to traditional standards, alien, pagan, and idolatrous. But he experienced some sort of recognition, a deep feeling of resonance or response in his pietistic emotionalism. He was moved by the hymns and chants in temple worship, the sincerity of the rituals of penitence. He felt the warmth in their dedication to the Buddhas of compassion: Amitabh, Guanyin, and Dizhang.

He was reminded of the pain and joy of his own calling when he attended ordinations of monks who got nine burn marks on their shaven heads.[9] And he maintained a life-long relationship to Chinese and international esoteric movements because he recognized that their search for what was behind the veil that separates time and eternity was part of his own search.

Reichelt's pietistic upbringing and the Lutheran theology of experience *(Erfahrungstheologie)* which had been promoted in Erlangen, recognized the emotional aspect of religion. Both conservative and liberal theologians in Norway were preoccupied with religious emotions, the experience of the numinous and the holy as the very essence of religion.[10]

Reichelt took it one step further, and in unprotected moments he moved far beyond the boundaries of contemporaneous Christianity. He could write about the inner wellspring of religion, the common source where religious boundaries become blurred. One of his recurrent metaphors was to describe religion as silver ore in the mountain. The pure silver is found in Christianity, he argued, but silver is also found in other places. It may be mixed with stone and impurities, sometimes almost invisible among the layers of mountains, but we have to search for it wherever it is found. His critics used such metaphors to say that he failed to see the essential difference between Christianity and other religions. Silver is silver, even though it must be refined and extracted from the impurities.[11]

Reichelt was always willing to a take few steps back, affirming the essential differences, marking the boundaries, and confirming his commitment to Christ as the unique savior. Yet his Christ-centered theology, notably expressed in his use of the concepts of Logos and Tao, also made him familiar with a sort of universalism. And it was this sense of universalism that appealed to many deeply religious people in East and West and gave them a strong sense of affinity with Reichelt.

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Is this paradoxical ambiguity and potential tension between missionary zeal and fascination with the inner essence of Buddhism and other religions a part of the legacy of Reichelt? We may have different opinions about his understanding of religion, and there are now a wide range of theologies of religion.[12] And in any inclusivist theology there is an inherent potential for a universalistic conclusion. If God "is not far away from any one of us," if it is true that "in him (God) we live and move and have our being," how can we maintain an inclusivism that excludes the possibility of a genuine relationship to God outside the boundaries of church and the Biblical revelation?

Implications for Mission among Buddhists

I am not able to spell out fully the implications for today of Reichelt's missionary work and my own observations about Buddhist-Christian relationships. But since we are concerned about mission among Buddhists, I allow myself to add a few comments I made in a book about changes in Christian mission between Edinburgh 1910 and the corresponding centenary meeting in 2010.[13] Thev context was different, but it may be relevant for our own further reflection:

- Mission is to share one's faith and conviction with other people, inviting them to discipleship whether or not they adhere to other religious traditions. Such sharing is to take place with *confidence* and *humility:*
  - *confidence,* because Christ invites and empowers people to turn to God and to their true humanity;
  - *humility,* because God "is not far from any one of us" (Acts 17:27), and has touched all creatures with his loving power.
- Mission to Buddhists should be accompanied by a deep respect for and understanding of the Buddhist way, with a sensitivity about the wisdom and insight God may have revealed in the Buddhist tradition. Such a sharing of faith should also go along with a willingness to listen to what God wants to teach the church through Buddhism.
- Mission to Buddhists should not primarily be focused on conversion, baptism, and inclusion in the Christian church, but on discipleship. Discipleship—to follow the Jesus way—will as a rule lead to baptism and church membership, but does not necessarily involve a break with the Buddhist community. In some cases, Buddhists will prefer to follow the Jesus way without abandoning the Buddha way, just as there are committed Christians who want to follow the Buddha way as Christians.
- In many cases the mission of the church would primarily be to establish dialogue and cooperation with Buddhist communities in order to deal with common moral and social challenges, such as conflicts, violence, discrimination, political oppression, disasters and health problems, poverty and injustice.
- Missionary and pastoral education for people who are expected to be in touch with Buddhist communities should take the study of Buddhism seriously in order to formulate Christianity in a way that is relevant and meaningful in a Buddhist context. The purpose of such a study should not only be to formulate an "effective witness," but to be open for mutual appreciation and sharing of spiritual gifts.
- Unless the church is able to embrace and nurture what is true, good, and honorable in Buddhism, it may not be desirable to engage in mission or to expect conversion. **IJFM**

Endnotes

[1] See Whalen Lai, "Why is there not a Buddho-Christian Dialogue in China?" *Buddhist-Christian Studies* (1986): 93.

[2] A moving example of such admiration is his description of the zealous anti-Christian reformer Yinguang in *Fromhetstyper og helligdommer i Østasia* vol 2 *(Pious Characters and Sanctuaries in the Far East),* (Oslo: Dreyers Forlag, 1948), 115–126; published in English as *The Transformed Abbot* (Lutterworth Press, 1954).

[3] Holmes Welch, *The Buddhist Revival in China* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1968), 240–241.

[4] This translation is based on my own notes.

[5] In Norwegian, *"med hver sin strålekrans som tegn." "Strålekrans"* could also be rendered as brilliance, radiance, aura. Unfortunately, the metaphor that every tribe and nation contributes with their unique "splendor" does not seem to be conveyed in translations. The Danish translation is rather triumphalist, "each with its victory wreath as a sign." In the English translations I have seen, the distinctive contributions of various cultures disappear in a general description of the glorious praise before the throne of God.

[6] Karl Ludvig Reichelt, *Kristelig meditation* (Christian Meditation), (Oslo: Buddhistmisjonen, 1926).

[7] *"I Stillheten for Guds åsyn,"* unfinished manuscript, probably written around 1947–51.

[8] Notto R. Thelle, "Dialogue—Study—Friendship," in *Japanese Religions* 25:1–2 (2000): 8–14.

[9] The ordination of monks in China included the tradition of placing nine pieces of burning incense on the head of the monks as signs of their vow to renounce the world and commit themselves to the Buddha way.

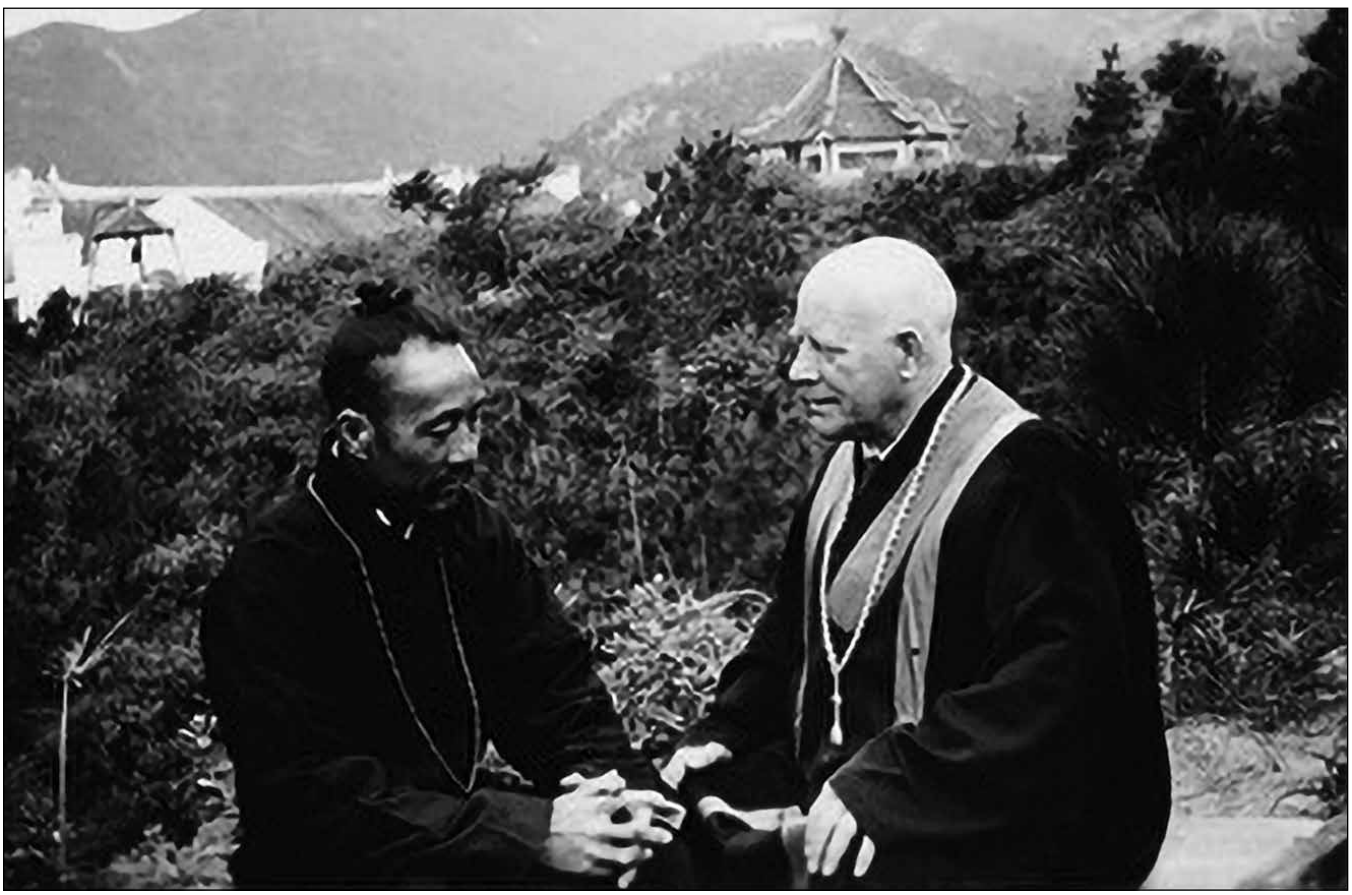
[10] Both Reichelt and many of his contemporary theologians were deeply impressed by Nathan Söderblom's and Rudolf Otto's descriptions of the encounter with Das Heilige / The Holy as the essential religious experience; Otto, *Das Heilige* (Breslau: Trewendt und Granier, 1917); Söderblom, "Holiness," in *Encyclopaedia of Religion and Ethics,* ed. James Hastings, vol. 6 (Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1913).

[11] Most clearly expressed in *Kristus—Religionens Centrum* (Christ—the Center of Religion), (Oslo: Buddhistmisjonens Forlag, 1927); and *Fra Kristuslivets helligdom* (From the Sanctuary of Christ-Life), (Copenhagen: Gads forlag, 1931/1946).

[12] As described in e.g., Paul F. Knitter, *Introducing Theologies of Religion,* Maryknoll, NY: Orbis 2002.

[13] Notto R. Thelle, "Mission among Buddhists," in *Witnessing to Christ in a Pluralisic Age: Christian Mission among Other Faiths,* eds., Lalsangkima Pachuau & Knud Jørgensen (Oxford: Regnum Books International, 2011), 178–188. Quoted from my own manuscript.

Reichelt in dialogue with a Taoist monk at Tao Fong Shan.



Presentation Responses

Responses to Notto Thelle's presentation, "Reichelt's Inclusivism in Retrospect and Prospect: A Crisis for Mission?"

Amos Yong: Response One

I am very grateful for this opportunity to provide a second response to Dr. Thelle's second lecture,[1] and again, I want to pick up and press into some of what I said at the end of my response from yesterday. I want to highlight how Dr. Thelle has observed the manner in which Reichelt was in a full dialogue, what in pietistic circles, including the Lutheran sphere, and certainly in my Holiness and Pentecostal tradition, were called the holistic combination of heads and hands and hearts. Meaning, as Dr. Thelle has illuminated with regard to Reichelt's experiences, it was meditation, it was friendship, and it was piety: meditation engaging the mind and bodies; friendship engaging with interpersonal relationships; and piety expressed in embodied practices in these monastic or communal contexts. So, again, this is a multilevel, multi-dimensional dialogue of life, of ideas, of practices, of commitments, even religious commitments.[2] And, of course, when we engage in that dialogue and these multiple levels it becomes a dialogue of the hands, meaning we sit with each other, we interact with each other, we work with each other; and then the heart, we begin to feel, if you will, with one another. Again, that gets to where the dialogue that takes place in this monastic context really goes a lot deeper than thinking about ideas in the abstract. It's speaking out of a certain level of experience that has touched us below the neck, in our hearts. For me as a Wesleyan, a Wesleyan Pentecostal, heart-religiosity is really where we act out of our deepest sets of instincts, sensibilities, aspirations—and hopes, fears, and anxieties. As we engage in this dialogue of meditation, of friendship, and of piety, it means we're engaged with the religious other and the realities of religious otherness with our heads and our hands and our hearts.[3]

This certainly complicates the life of that dialogue, doesn't it? It doesn't allow us to sit in objective judgment, if you will, on the ideas as if we were engaging only at the level of our heads, meeting above our necks. When we engage at the level of friendship and if we engage at the level of our piety, like the friendships Reichelt developed with Buddhist monks, for instance, then all of a sudden, the Buddhist "other" is no longer merely and only an "other-in-the-abstract." They are now part of who we are in the friendships we've developed, in the interactions forged over years if not decades, and that means that at the end of that day, through this process, we've been transformed, as we see Reichelt's own transformation.

Reichelt was certainly very interested in inviting Buddhist monks to consider the claims of Christ, to be transformed in the encounter with Christ, through he himself as one who bore witness to that living Christ. But, equally we can see that Reichelt exhibited in his relationships with Buddhist monks over years and decades that he had experienced his own transformation, if you will, his own being converted, perhaps not in the sense of formally giving up his Christian faith and becoming a Buddhist adept, but certainly converted in the sense of being transformed in his way of thinking, being transformed in his way of living, being transformed in the sense of who his friends were and how he interacted with them on a daily basis in the public sphere as well in the private spaces of the monastery.

> The Buddhist other is no longer only an other in the abstract, but is now part of who we are in the friendships we've forged . . . and that means we've been transformed.

So, what we have here is a level of mutual transformation at the depths of our existence—our heads, our hands and our hearts. Reichelt invited the conversion of Buddhist monks to his community—an invitation, if you will, to the church of Jesus Christ—maybe not a church formally and organizationally or denominationally structured, but certainly the church that bore witness to God the Father in Jesus Christ, to a God who invited others to love him and to love their neighbors. I think Reichelt attempted to live this out as a result of his own deepened transformation through his journey, through encountering, if you will, the witnesses of others.

So, Reichelt did not cease to bear witness to Chinese others, but in the process of bearing that witness he himself was deeply affected, that affect being a deeper level than just the transformation of ideas in our minds, a level of affectivity that touches the depths of who we are.[4] It was in the process of being on this journey of transformation that Reichelt bore the transformed witness to others that he has left for our consideration. I want to thank Dr. Thelle for highlighting these

aspects of this particular Lutheran missionary witness in the first half of the 20th century, which still is very relevant for us today in the early 21st century.

Amos Yong is a Malaysian-American theologian and missiologist who currently serves as Dean of the School of Mission & Theology at Fuller Seminary. He has written more than 50 books including two on Buddhism: The Cosmic Breath: Spirit and Nature in the Christian-Buddhism-Science Trialogue *and* Pneumatology and the Christian-Buddhist Dialogue: Does the Spirit Blow through the Middle Way? *One of his most recent books is* The Amos Yong Reader: The Pentecostal Spirit. *He has both participated and served in leadership in the Society for Buddhist-Christian Studies.*

Rory Mackenzie: Response Two

Thank you very much, Dr. Thelle, for that very helpful and penetrating analysis of Reichelt's engagement with the religious other and all of that, of course, building on the foundation you laid yesterday. You mentioned Reichelt learning from Timothy Richard, who was born some thirty years before Reichelt. As you know, Eric Sharpe quotes Reichelt saying "Timothy Richard is Spirit filled but often far too bold." Some of us might feel that Reichelt is being bold, but Reichelt himself thought that there was somebody much bolder than himself.

I'd just like to make some remarks about piety as a meeting point. Reichelt was moved by the sincerity and warmth of the devotion of Pure Land Buddhists to their Buddhas. He was moved by the chanting that he heard in their temples, and you point out that his background might have caused him to condemn what he saw, but somehow, in some way, he was impressed by their piety. This is a very interesting paradox worth reflecting on for our own practice. We know two things. First, Reichelt had a very high view of Pure Land and second, he had a lower estimation of other traditions. For example, he wrote in depressing terms of some Tibetan-style Buddhist monasteries he had visited in Mongolia where he refers to black magic activities behind the scenes. In the same year (1937) he visited Siam as it was then (now Thailand) and found the Theravāda tradition there narrow and unimpressive. This section in your talk, Dr. Thelle, challenges me to reflect on how I respond to and conduct myself during acts of attending Theravāda worship as I visit Thai temples and cultural events. So, four brief points as I reflect on my practice of engaging with the Theravāda traditions that I am close to.

First, sometimes in a ceremony we are invited in public to do something that we would rather not do. For example, not so long ago I was asked to offer up robes to the Buddha on behalf of deceased monks at a funeral service. That was meant as an honor for me, and I did it, and I appreciated being asked. But at the same time, there was a conflict in doing what I did. Second, as a Christian how can I best express respect for the Buddhist tradition and the people who are there despite not approving of some of their practices, or the words that are being chanted? Reichelt was moved by the chanting and actually I'm moved by chanting, its melody and so on. But as I look at some of the words in translation from the Pali, they suggest that the Buddha is not just being venerated as a great teacher, but perhaps even worshipped as a God. Third, to what extent is it desirable to show that we are Christians who are being respectful of Buddhism, rather than being Buddhists? We may need to be mindful of converts from Buddhism to Christianity and how they may misunderstand our respect as worship. And I do think there are things we can do which show that we're not Buddhists, but respectful Christians. We don't really have time to go into that just now, but it brings me to my final point.

To what extent is it desirable to show we are Christians who are being respectful of Buddhism, rather than being Buddhists?

These tensions in the area of worship indicate our commitment to God and our reaching out to the Buddhist world that we believe he has called us to. Perhaps God himself experiences similar tensions. You can take the boy out of evangelicalism, but it is harder to take evangelicalism out of the boy! At the risk of sounding a bit judgmental about Buddhism and Buddhists, let me close by looking at some words which are tinged with sadness, but at the same time hold out hope that our Buddhist fellow travelers will see the fullness of what God is offering to them and that they will come to faith. Jeremiah the prophet writes, "Lord, my strength, my fortress, my refuge." See, Jeremiah had gone for refuge. "In the time of distress, you are my refuge, and to you the nations will come from the ends of the earth and say, 'our fathers possessed nothing but false gods, worthless idols that did them no good. Do men make their own gods? Yes, but they are not gods.' Therefore, God will teach them his power and might, and then they will know the name of the LORD." Thank you, Dr. Thelle, for that very helpful paper.

Rory Mackenzie served for 12 years as a church planter with OMF International in Bangkok, and has continued his involvement with the Thai community in Scotland. For 20 years he taught Religious Studies and Practical Theology at the International Christian College, Glasgow. He has also been a visiting lecturer at the Mahachulalongkorn University, Bangkok. His book, God, Self and Salvation in a Buddhist Context *(2017), is informed by Reichelt's contextualized approach, and advocates friendship with Buddhists while maintaining a clear witness to Christ. He has also authored* New Buddhist Movements in Thailand: Towards an Understanding of Wat Phra Dhammakaya and Santi Asoke *(Routledge Critical Studies in Buddhism). He is now retired, and lives with his wife, Rosalyn, in Edinburgh.*

Terry Muck: Response Three

Thank you very much, Dr. Thelle, for this paper. I ended my comments yesterday by saying I wish I would know more about what Reichelt was like. Because when you judge a person's theology or religiosity or spirituality, you're not just talking about their ideas, but you're talking about what they're like, how they come across as a person in a face-to-face conversation. You gave us a lot of that today, and you have this tremendous advantage of having known him and talked to him. You provided today a lot of what I have been longing for and I learned a lot from what you had to say in this paper.

What I wish is that I could have watched him interact with the learned Buddhist monks who came to the monastery, the special kind of Chinese Mahāyāna Buddhist monk. I'll generalize. I know that Taoists and perhaps even some Confucians came also, but to focus on the monks for a minute. Learned, curious, willing to talk. You cannot have a dialogue with one person wanting to dialogue and be respectful and open, and another person not. Then dialogue doesn't work. So the kind of people who came and that Reichelt interacted with, at the very least, had a religious curiosity that they wanted to satisfy. I can imagine, at least try to imagine, what Reichelt was like in initiating those conversations. He probably was open to almost any kind of person. He strikes me as that kind of mission worker. He certainly wouldn't have said, "You sound to me like a fundamentalist Buddhist. Maybe you don't belong here. Maybe this isn't the right place for you."

He strikes me as the kind of person who would have said, "OK, well, that's where we'll start. Tell me what you believe and why you believe it." And then from there he would have also had an openness to an agenda that may very well have included theology and Buddhology, discussion of religious ideas and dogma, but more likely may have been about what it's like to be a Buddhist monk in a temple where you're interacting with other Buddhist monks and also with people who come for religious services of one sort or another. I would have liked to watch how Reichelt did that. That's just basic dialogue methodology, but I would have liked to have seen how he did it. He was committed to it, you can obviously tell that from his writings. But how he did it, there's a lot about it that you would have had to just sit there and watch and participate.

I also would have liked to ask Reichelt what he expected to come out of his dialogues. I have my own vision, that a dialogue is a conversation that never ends or that doesn't have an expectation of any kind of finality when it is done. And I'm wondering if he wouldn't have seen it that way also, that your use of him being called a "pilgrim missionary" would indicate that he probably did. He was always learning. He was always open. When a person came to him, he would see it as another chance to learn to tell his story, the Gospel story. I doubt he ever hesitated at that; he would have been a bad dialoguer if he did. But to do that and how he did it—that would have been wonderful to see.

What I wish is that I could have watched him interact with the learned Buddhist monks who came to the monastery, the special kind of Chinese Mahāyāna Buddhist monk.

I would have liked to ask him some questions, whether he vever thought about how he would do mission to Buddhists if he wasn't in China. As we mentioned yesterday, the relationship among Buddhists and Christians differed depending on the culture and where they were. And I suggested that the China context has a certain openness to rational difference that many cultures don't. So, a dialogue even about the deepest things about Buddhism and Christianity may have been more possible there than it may have been in a more conservative culture, a culture that is not so open to religious difference and religious discussion. From what I read, I assume he would have said: "This is my calling; this is where I belong; this is what I'm good at; and this is where I've learned to relate to Buddhists." But, using the example yesterday of Sri Lanka, if he was in quite a different religious culture, I think he would have done just fine. He may not have felt he was called to that, and he may not have felt that was where he should be. Obviously, he didn't, as he went to China. But because of the way he approached mission and how he saw interpersonal interactions (you just said he didn't call it dialogue, but it sure looks like dialogue to me), I think he would have done just fine wherever he was. He's a model of how you shape missiological strategy to the religious context and cultural context in which you find yourself. You try and do the impossible, this paradoxical thing, talking about absolute truth and the finality of God in Christ in a way that makes it relevant to very, very different cultures and contexts. I have a feeling I would have learned so much. I've already learned so much just from reading what he had to say about these things, but I think I would have really enjoyed and profited from conversing with him about it on a day-to-day basis. I wouldn't have stayed in the monastery for a week, I would have stayed for six months and

just tried to talk to him about it. Anyway, thank you, Dr. Thelle for helping me with all of these questions that I've raised. You're a good substitute for Reichelt, so thank you for that.

Terry Muck (PhD, Northwestern) is professor emeritus of World Religions at Asbury Theological Seminary. Formerly he was the editor of Christianity Today *and the Dean of the E. Stanley Jones School of World Mission also at Asbury. He has been a long time participant of the Society for Buddhist-Christian Studies and was the editor of their journal.*

Notto Thelle: Replies to His Respondents

Thank you, it's been very fascinating to listen to your responses. I don't think I can respond to everything, but I will to a few points at least. Dr. Yong mentioned the holistic attitude, body, mind and spirit, heart religiosity, and I think Reichelt had that. And, of course, he had his gifts, he had his personality, and I think in his basic personality he had some monkish attitudes. He loved to talk to monks. He was married, but for about half of his life in China, his wife was in Norway, and sometimes I wonder how he could do that. He was very kind to his wife, but there was something monkish about his way of being. This gave him the ability to approach Buddhist monks in a special way, and at the same time he had a wonderful ability also to meet other people, other types of people. He had an ability to meet children at the child level. This is maybe off the track, but when my elder brother was two years old in Tao Fong Shan, Reichelt was traveling and he wrote a letter to this little boy whose name also was Karl. I don't remember exactly, but he wrote to my brother Karl, "Dear Karl, my good friend, now you are two years old. But remember, don't be oppressed by the authorities, like your parents" and all these things. So he had this sort of humorous approach also to children and I think he had a sort of charisma. I've seen films of Reichelt and when he approached dialogue with monks, there is a very strange atmosphere. It is very quiet. His body movements were quite vital. I get the impression of a tremendous presence when he encounters other people. I've seen films that show one of his approaches when he talked to Buddhist monks. He always had this lotus cross on his breast, and he would pick up the lotus cross and show it to them. Then, starting from that point, I'm sure he would talk about what that monk was searching for and so on, thus appreciating the lotus spirituality of Buddhism.

As you know, the lotus grows up from the mud of a pond, and then as a miracle it opens to a brilliant white or blue or red pure flower from this muddy field, which is a beautiful expression. I think he often started with the longing of people. But he had his [limitations] . . . maybe I shouldn't speak about his limitations, but I think he used his potential, his gifts, one hundred percent. Some of you may know or have heard about the Japanese social reformer Kagawa. He was a Japanese preacher-evangelist, burning with passion, and also a social reformer. He was very active among the poor in the slums of Japan, and he visited Tao Fong Shan at one time. He was very impressed by the entire setup, but he gave a speech to the students there and said, "It's good to be here, but you have to go out into the world." I don't know whether he felt that Tao Fong Shan was too closed of a community, I'm not quite sure about that. But the vision of Reichelt was to have people sent out and I think Kagawa wanted to affirm the body aspect or the social aspect of being a Christian.

I've discovered that even though the center of activity was on the spiritual level with worship and liturgical spirituality, dialogues about religious matters and all these things, at times whenever necessary Reichelt and his colleagues went out to the society and became very active. For instance in Nanjing, exactly when they were establishing this spiritual center, there was a civil war going on around Nanjing, and Reichelt immediately volunteered to go to the front as a Red Cross helper, and they sent coworkers and students also to help. Later there were other types of upheavals and they received refugees in their centers, filling Tao Fong Shan when the war with Japan started in 1937. A lot of refugees came and stayed at Tao Fong Shan.

He always had the lotus cross on his breast. He would pick it up and talk about what that monk was searching for, thus appreciating the lotus spirituality of Buddhism.

Now Dr. Mackenzie's quite interesting four points. I think anyone who has been in the East in connection with religious communities knows that sometimes these problems develop of what should we do and how can we express our respect without sort of crossing the boundaries of respect for our own tradition. Sometimes I feel perhaps we should not be so afraid. I think God is a God who has humor and generosity and I think he's not so strict about what we do. Of course, you have this relationship then to other Christians who may, to use Paul's expression, stumble because we do things which they don't expect us to do. But I think we should be quite generous in the way we show our respect. If I, in respect to the Buddha, bow in front of the Buddha, my Buddhist colleagues

would know that I'm not worshipping Buddha, I'm just paying respect. As Buddhists and Hindus here in Norway come to church, they want to receive communion. Not that they become Christians, but they want to express their respect. So what do you do when a Hindu is kneeling in front of the altar, expecting to receive communion. Should we just throw them out? I think my pastor friends say that hospitality is so vital and we have to share what we have even though the other one may not really know what we are doing. Then afterwards we can talk about it. So we have to find our ways forward in some of these sensitive areas. I think, if I understand you rightly, your final point was to say that there are some aspects of Buddhism which are problematic, and of course that is true. But you mentioned the word sadness in that respect, which reminded me of a seminar organized by the European branch of the Buddhist-Christian Studies Society in Liverpool at Hope University where the theme was hope in Christianity and Buddhism. What was shocking to my Buddhist friends was that the professor of Buddhist studies, a very knowledgeable and top expert on Buddhism, said that hope does not exist in Buddhism; it's not a central idea in Buddhism. Which is a reminder that (I and my Buddhist friends there did not totally agree) there are aspects of Buddhism where it is so much dependent on your own practice. . . . But there are other sides, like Mahāyāna Buddhists, who would emphasize that there is a compassionate aspects of Buddhist teaching, which also sometimes really takes over. But it's an interesting point to remember in dialogue with Buddhists, because there is a sort of instant Buddhism or Buddhism Lite which sometimes forget that transitoriness. Sadness is also part of a Buddhist spirituality.

Now to Dr. Muck. I'm sorry to say I was only a little boy when Reichelt was still alive. I didn't know him as an adult. He was a very old man to me. I have memories of his warmth and so on, but nothing that amounts to material for reflection. I think one of his real strengths was his charisma, his friendliness, his friendship, which was felt almost as an aura. I have met my old teachers, or other old people in Norway, who heard Reichelt preach, or who met him. They say, well, I don't remember anything of what he said, I can only remember the light which sort of surrounded him. I think that is a way of saying that he had that type of charisma or friendship and openness, and also Christian conviction which for many people was like a blessing. For some, a seed which was sown. I've said sometimes that the real dialogue begins when the last word is spoken. I think to me that is important because a lot of things that are said you are not immediately able to deal with, but it may stay with you, or it may stay with the other and sometimes it may grow and become more than what was said. I was not very clear about this, but I hope you understand my point. **IJFM**

Endnotes

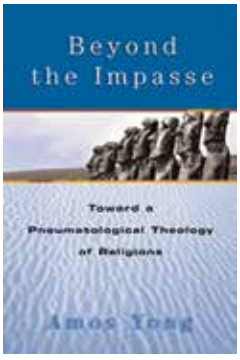
[1] Much thanks to H. L. Richard and Brad Gill for transcribing and providing an initial edit of this recorded response; I provided further edits for clarity and added a few footnotes.

[2] For more on this important theme of practice in the interfaith encounter, see my *Hospitality and the Other: Pentecost, Christian Practices, and the Neighbor,* Faith Meets Faith series (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 2008); also, "The Buddhist-Christian Encounter in the USA: Reflections on Christian Practices," in *Ulrich van der Heyden and Andreas Feldtkeller, eds., Border Crossings: Explorations of an Interdisciplinary Historian – Festschrift for Irving Hexham,* Missionsgeschichtliches Archiv 12 (Stuttgart: Franz Steiner Verlag, 2008), 457–72.

[3] My recent book on theological education is organized triadically according to the hearts-hands-heads structure: *Renewing the Church by the Spirit: Theological Education after Pentecost,* Theological Education Between the Times series (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2020); for more on the important role of affectivity for Christian theologizing, see Amos Yong and Dale M. Coulter, eds., *The Spirit, the Affections, and the Christian Tradition* (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 2016).

[4] This is the affective level of the interfaith encounter; I elaborate on this dimension in two articles: "Hospitality and Religious Others: An Orthopathic Perspective," in John W. Morehead and Brandon C. Benziger, eds., *A Charitable Orthopathy: Christian Perspectives on Emotions in Multifaith Engagement* (Eugene, Ore.: Pickwick Publications, 2020), 183–95, and "Gladness and Sympathetic Joy: Gospel Witness and the Four Noble Truths in Dialogue," in Susan J. Maros and Eun Ah Cho, eds., *Missiology: An International Review* 48:3 (2020): 235–50.

Three Books by Amos Yong

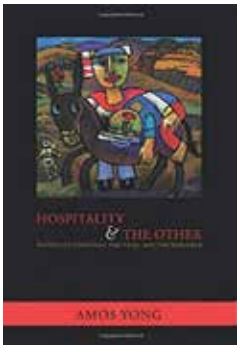


Beyond the Impasse: Toward a Pneumatological Theology of Religions

By Amos Yong | Wipf and Stock Publishers: Eugene, OR, 2014

From the outset, cultures and neighboring faith traditions have influenced the development of Christian theology, and today Christians have begun asking some important questions: How does Christianity differ from other faiths? Can Christians learn from other religions? Amos Yong answers by encouraging Christians to take seriously the cosmic work of the Holy Spirit. Both fully evangelical and richly informed by his Pentecostal roots, this book introduces the various understandings of the Spirit in Scripture and offers guidelines for discerning the voice of the Spirit in other religious traditions. It's for all who wish to formulate a robust, biblical and comprehensive Christian theology of religions.

https://www.amazon.com/Beyond-Impasse-Pneumatological-Theology-Religions/dp/0801026121



Hospitality and the Other: Pentecost, Christian Practices, and the Neighbor

By Amos Yong | Orbis Books, 2008

In this book, Amos Yong shows what happens when the revolutionary practices of Jesus and the early church are applied to Christian relations with people of other faiths. He shows that the religious 'other' is not a mere object for conversion, but a neighbor to whom hospitality must be extended and received. This hospitality, so necessary if we are to be faithful to the trinitarian God of Jesus Christ, pivots towards a new paradigm of theology of religion, interreligious interchange, and missiological theory and practice. The author challenges our contemporary practice to catch up to the revolutionary Biblical notion of extending hospitality beyond every boundary of faith, nation, and ethnicity.

https://www.amazon.com/Hospitality-Other-Pentecost-Christian-Practices/dp/1570757720

Pneumatology and the Christian-Buddhist Dialogue: Does the Spirit Blow Through the Middle Way?

By Amos Yong | Brill Publishers, 2012

Recent thinking in Christian theology of religions has taken a pneumatological turn and asks how the doctrine of the Holy Spirit can contribute to the interreligious dialogue and to the emerging discourse of comparative theology. In this book the author tests the viability of a comparative approach to Christian-Buddhist dialogue by interacting with various Christian and Buddhist traditions within a pneumatological framework. Is the Holy Spirit to be found along the Buddha's middle way? Some Christians say yes, while others demur. The thesis of this volume is that such a pneumatological perspective opens up unexpected possibilities for the deepening and transformation of Christian theology in the religiously plural world of the twenty-first century.

https://www.amazon.com/Pneumatology-Christian-Buddhist-Dialogue-Systematic-Theology/dp/900423117X

Innovations in Buddhist-Christian Encounters: Karl Reichelt's Contributions

by Terry C. Muck

Editor's note: This article was first presented at the Ralph D. Winter Lectureship in February 2021, and addresses the theme, "Buddhist-Christian Encounters: Today's Realities in Light of the Pioneering Work of Karl Ludvig Reichelt in China."

How does Karl Reichelt and his mission work with Chinese Buddhists fit into the overall scheme of 2000 plus years of Buddhist-Christian mission interactions?

This is the question I was asked to address for this three-day virtual celebration of Karl Reichelt's life and teachings. It is a welcome question, and one I relish digging into. I might as well be up-front about my respect and admiration for Reichelt's mission methods to Buddhists. In my judgment, he was far ahead of his time. Yet I am also realistic about the answer I can provide, an answer that must immediately be qualified by the recognition that Reichelt was just one man with little institutional support either at home in Norway or from the wider Christian community. He chose to focus his ministry to an elite segment of the global Buddhist community, well-trained Chinese Mahāyāna Buddhist monks who shared Reichelt's passion for genuine, respectful dialogue with adherents of another religion, in this case Christianity. This qualification means we must be extra cautious about generalizing mission principles from a relatively small sample.

Further, my answer must acknowledge the reciprocal nature of missions when it came to Buddhist-Christian interactions. Both Buddhism and Christianity are missionary religions. That means that when looking at any specific interaction, we must look for evidence of, and information about, both Buddhist *dharmadhatu*[1] and Christian gospel teaching. This reciprocal nature of Buddhist-Christian missions makes more complex not only the historical narrative of the events but also what appear to be the effects or results of the encounters. Certain additional questions must be asked. Who "won" the encounters? How was "winning" viewed by both participants? Were the effects short-term or long-term? How did these encounters confirm and/or change prevailing Buddhist-Christian attitudes toward one another?

Terry Muck (PhD, Northwestern) is professor emeritus of World Religions at Asbury Theological Seminary. He has served as editor of Christianity Today *and Dean of the E. Stanley Jones School of World Mission at Asbury. He has been a long-time participant of The Society for Buddhist-Christian Studies, to which he brought vital leadership. He is widely published on the subject of Buddhism and religious studies and has authored along with Harold Netland and Gerald McDermott the* Handbook of Religion: A Christian Engagement with Traditions, Teachings, and Practices (2014). *Along with Frances Adeney he has also published* Christianity Encountering World Religions: The Practice of Mission in the Twenty-First Century *(Encountering Mission Series, 2009).*

Finally, a word about resources available to us. Reichelt wrote a good deal about his mission work and his thinking on missions to Buddhists, writing aimed largely to Christian audiences. Since he wrote in Norwegian, however, non-Norwegian speakers like me must rely on Reichelt's work that has been translated into English as well as secondary sources in English. These resources are noted in footnotes to the text.

Axial Age

Buddhism and Christianity have many formal similarities. They are both founded religions—that is, they trace their beginnings back to a single religious innovator: Gautama Buddha and Jesus Christ, respectively. And both Buddhism and Christianity are transcultural religions, that is, they are not tied to the culture in which they arose but have become world religions, adaptable to almost every culture they come in contact with across the world.

Buddhism and Christianity became world religions, adaptable to almost every culture.

But many argue that the most important similarity between Buddhism and Christianity is that they are both products of the same historical time period, the Axial Age, a roughly six-hundred year period from 800 BCE to 200 BCE. In 1948 a German philosopher, Karl Jaspers, hypothesized that during this time period the world and its cultures and its religions began a process of change that can rightly be called one of the primary hinges of our collective history.[2] The change was originally noticeable in three major civilizations, China, India, and the countries around the Mediterranean Sea, what the ancients called *mare nostrum,* or "our sea." The most important of the changes that occurred during the "axial" time (for our purposes at least) was the founding of what came to be called world religions: Confucius/Confucianism and Lao Tzu/Taoism in China; the Upanishads/Hinduism and Gautama/Buddhism in India; and the Hebrew prophets, Greek philosophy, and Zoroastrianism around the Mediterranean.

Readers will note that Gautama Buddha, who lived from 563–483 BCE, falls dead center during that axial time period, but that Jesus, who lived from circa 3 BCE to 30 CE, does not. Yet Axial Age theorists consider Christianity an Axial Age religion because the formative thinking on which Jesus focused in his life and teachings was Axial Age emphasis on Hebrew, Greek, and Persian philosophies. In a similar way, the whole world was eventually changed by this thinking as the influences of China, India, and the Mediterranean spread to all lands and cultures.

What was this thinking that changed the world so decisively? Jaspers' teaching can be summarized in three main points. First, Jaspers discerned that during the Axial Age, "in every sense a step was made toward the universal."[3] It was not that a single religion or culture came to dominate the whole world; the teachings of the religions and the *weltanschaungen* of individual cultures endured, and became even more sophisticated. But the collective influence of the religions and cultures of China, India, and the Mediterranean became universal, both physically and temporally: "Mankind is still living by what happened in the Axial Age, by what it created and what it thought."[4] It was not a single faith or culture that came to dominate, but a universal experience of the world that all men and women recognized in one another.

Second, Jaspers taught that, whereas pre-axial teachings limited human beings and their aspirations to what was dictated by their religions and cultures, Axial Age humans felt freed and liberated from what they interpreted as too narrow thinking. Human beings began to develop a consciousness that they could transcend "the arbitrary particularity of the *hic et nunc.*" In Christian terms, this meant that religions themselves became soteriological and focused on helping individuals and cultures escape the mundane world and achieve something transcendent: "Imprisoned in a body fettered by passions, man longs for liberation and redemption and he finds that he can achieve liberation and redemption in [and from] the world."[5]

Third, when the worlds "that experienced the Axial Age meet with one another, a profound understanding is possible. They recognize when they meet that their concerns are the same." Jaspers called this recognition a "summons to boundless communication." And this summons acts like a

> call to communication…[which] is the strongest force opposing the fallacy that any faith enjoys exclusive possession of the truth.… God has revealed himself historically in many ways and opened up many paths to himself.[6]

Thus, when two Axial Age religions meet one another, such as Buddhism and Christianity, they are predisposed to communicate—and understand—one another.

To apply this Axial Age thinking specifically to Buddhism and Christianity and their interactions, these two religions are competitors, yet competitors who are predisposed to talk to one another in such a way that brings understanding.

That they are competitors cannot be doubted. Both founders explicitly charged their disciples with spreading their teachings far and wide. Jesus said,

> All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. Therefore, go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, and teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you. And surely I am with you always, to the very end of the age.[7]

Gautama said:

> Walk, monks, on tour for the benefit of the people, for the happiness of the people out of compassion for the world, for the welfare, the blessing the happiness of *devas* and men. Let not two of you go by one way. Monks, teach the *dhamma* which is lovely at the beginning, lovely in the middle, lovely at the end. Explain with the spirit and the letter the brahmafaring completely fulfilled, wholly pure. There are beings with little dust in their eyes who, on hearing *dhamma,* are decaying, but if they are learners of *dhamma,* they will grow.[8]

And as we shall see, Buddhists and Christians everywhere attempted to fulfill these respective charges as best they could.

There is also no doubt that Buddhists and Christians have been conversationalists. The history we are about to recount, showing some of the highlights of Buddhist-Christian interactions over the years, will reveal an essentially peaceful, respectful, series of encounters, carried on by what we might call friendly competitors.

An Age of Personalist Engagement

It was into this fascinating Buddhist-Christian reciprocal mission history that Christian missionary Karl Reichelt (1877–1952) stepped in the early twentieth century. As you know, Reichelt's *home culture*—where he was trained and from whence he was sent—was Norway. His *mission culture* was China, making him part of a narrative replete with some of history's most intriguing Buddhist-Christian interactions. His *theological culture* was Reicheltian through and through. He tried, and mostly discarded, much of the mission methodology he learned in his Norwegian studies. After an early mission journey to China that included successes and failures, institutional support and rejection, and theological fits and starts, he settled into an innovative mission approach to Buddhism and Buddhists that is still considered *avant guard*—prescient to some, retro to others, counter-productive to still others.

Once Reichelt attained his mature mission years, he championed a method of dialogue that involved bringing Buddhist *bhikkhus* (monks) to his retreat center, taking time to develop relationships with them, and showing throughout an openness to reciprocal discourse with an agenda that changed as often as the parties involved in each discussion changed. Goals and methods were decided together, as were the measurements used to evaluate those goals. Reichelt seemed to intuitively realize the dialogical nature between the two religions as a result of their both being axial religions, "summoned to boundless communication" with each other.

Of course, Reichelt did not introduce his ideas in a missiological vacuum. The nature of the reciprocal missions taking place among Buddhists and Christians in China at that time, what we call "an age of personalist engagement," had many things in common with Reichelt's approach, and is worth summarizing here.

In what follows we will go through a summary of the Buddhist-Christian narrative, highlighting some of the more interesting and important encounters these two religions had with each other. After summarizing each encounter, we will ask three questions:

1. Is there anything in Reichelt's mission history that approximates what is played out here?
2. Is there anything about what happened in each encounter—success, failure, respect, disregard—that can helpfully inform about Reichelt's mission methodology?
3. How would Reichelt have done mission to the Buddhists in this context?

Buddhists and Christians are conversationalists, and their interactions over the years reveal peaceful, respectful encounters, carried on by what we might call friendly competitors.

From this point on, when we mention Reichelt's mission methodology (his mature method practices at Tao Shan) we will be referring to a method with three main emphases which together might be summarized in a phrase, "Personalist Missions." In general, Reichelt's "personalist missions" means that interpersonal relations among the missioners and missionized are key. He provocatively notes in *Truth and Tradition in Chinese Buddhism* that the key to Christian missions is modeled by Pure Land Buddhist approaches to mission: get to know other Christians and Buddhists (147, 162), get to know personally Amitabha and Christ (155), and, above all, know "thyself" (152, 165, 291).

When it came to mission, personalist engagement emphasized:

1. *presence,* face-to-face encounters with Buddhists, Taoists, Confucians, and Christians whenever and wherever possible;
2. *dialogue,* a kind of interaction that honored power equality and honest intellectual exchanges; and
3. *amalgamation,* what social scientists call contextualization, historians of religion call syncretism, and what Christian theologians/missiologists call fulfillment.

One can get a sense for each of these three emphases and their importance to Reichelt's methodology by how (ironically) he admires each when he discovers them in his study of Chinese religions. For example, Reichelt illustrates *presence* when he discusses Pure Land Buddhism, which he considers the ultimate form of Mahāyāna Buddhism. He asks for his reader's permission to share his personal experience with Pure Landers:

> We think of the many thousands of monks, nuns, and lay folk who either, in the monasteries or in private homes, have consecrated themselves to the special worship and special study which the Pure Land requires. It is only through these living human beings that one can come to any conclusions regarding this school's ability to form character or minister spiritual strength and comfort for life's battle and death's pain.[9]

Or, when he discusses a Chinese religious classic,

> [This] is an illustration of the truth that men are always drawn to those who, by self-sacrificing love, give a living testimony to the power of religion and sincerity. It shows that in Buddhism, also, it is the persons that make the institutions.[10]

Of course, Reichelt, as we shall see below, makes the same argument in favor of personal, face-to-face missions using Christian sources and examples.

When Reichelt discusses Confucius' teachings, he admires his teaching method which was almost entirely *dialogical:*

> We find him [Confucius] surrounded by about 3000 disciples. With enthusiasm they listened to him as he set forth various relations of life. Instruction was given mostly in the form of dialogue. Thoughtful questions were highly valued by Confucius.[11]

Again, as we shall see, Reichelt advocates dialogue as the primary means of interaction with those of other faiths, using Christian sources and examples. But his admiration of other religions and other religious who also champion dialogue is telling.

Reichelt illustrates *amalgamation* among Chinese religions and Christianity as mission strategies, in that he never tires of comparing the Johannine use of the Greek *logos* as a means of communicating Christ's centrality (an example of contextualization) and comparing/contrasting it to the central Chinese concept of *Tao* (an example of syncretism). He posits how, in the end, all three conceptual areas lead to a broader, richer understanding of the Christian narrative, the *heilsgeschichte* (an example of his fulfillment theology—see below). As we shall see below, another one of this favorite areas of integration is the Christian understanding of the Trinity.[12]

We will divide the historical interactions among Buddhists and Christians into four principle eras and locations: *Silk Road Missions* (along the trading route, known as the Silk Road, from the Middle East to Central China around 150 BCE), *Syncratic Missions* (in China from the 7th to the 18th centuries), *Capitalistic Missions* (missions attending the colonial expansions of primarily European and North American countries from the 16th century to the 19th century), and *Agency Missions* (in what is called the Great Century of Christian mission: the 19th century).

Silk Road Missions—the Milindapañha

The earliest example we have of Buddhist apologetics *vis-à-vis* Western philosophical/religious thought is a book, the *Milindapañha.* Translated from Pali to English as *The Questions of King Milinda,* the book is formatted as a "dialogue" between a philosophically savvy Greek king, Menander, and an erudite Buddhist *arahat,* an enlightened monk, named Nagasena. We know with some confidence that Menander was a real historical personage who ruled the eastern part of the Greek kingdom from circa 163–150 BCE, while Bhikkhu Nagasena was most likely a fictional character, created by an anonymous author to play the role of respondent to Menander's Greek questions about Buddhism. Their interaction took place on the Silk Road, the thousands of miles long trading route stretching from the Middle East to southern and central China.

I put the word "dialogue" in quotation marks above because the interaction between Menander and Nagasena is not really what we have come to think of as a dialogue—that is, an exchange of ideas characterized by respect and reciprocity. Instead, the format of the *Milindapañha* is simple: King Menander asks questions based on conundrums that arise when sophisticated Buddhist teachings are placed in the context of Greek philosophical thought. Nagasena answers Menander's questions successfully, clearing up whatever perplexities initiated them. Menander does not argue the points Nagasena makes nor does he attempt to assert the thinking of Socrates, Plato, Aristotle, or others. He simply thanks Nagasena and moves on to his next question, one of 236 total queries.[13]

For example, in the first section of questions in the book, Menander asks Nagasena about morality *(sila):* "What is the distinguishing mark of morality?" Nagasena answers:

"The distinguishing mark of morality is that it is the basis of all wholesome mental states. . . ." Menander then asks for a simile, something he does often in these exchanges. Nagasena gives him one:

> Whatever vegetable life and animal life come to growth, increase, and maturity, all do so by being dependent on the earth; even so do all these wholesome mental states develop by being dependent on morality.[14]

As you have surely noticed this is not strictly speaking an example of Buddhist-Christian interaction, but of Buddhist-Greek interaction. But since so much of early Christian dogma was shaped by Hellenistic thought forms, it is not difficult to imagine Menander asking questions very similar to ones Christians, in a few short centuries, would be asking when exposed to the *buddhadhamma.*

How did Christianity and Buddhism evaluate one another's belief systems? How did they borrow terms and concepts without being theologically problematic?

For example, the core Buddhist teaching of *anatta* or no-self is clearly the central question of the *Milindapañha,* especially parts II and III. Menander struggles mightily with a teaching that runs so counter to Greek thought and their strong philosophical traditions centered on their belief in an immortal soul.[15] A Christian king surely would have struggled with the Buddha's teaching on anatta in the same way.

By the time part IV of the *Milindapañha* rolls around, Menander is no longer asking questions as an interested philosopher—we are told he has become Nagasena's pupil and a devotee of the Buddha's teaching. He has, the text said, "taken on the precepts and practices of a pious Buddhist lay devotee."[16] In other words, Menander, under the influence of Dharmadhatu Nagasena, converted to Buddhism.

The results of the encounter related in the *Milindapañha* is clearly a win for Nagasena, the Buddhist monk. His conversation partner, Menander, becomes a Buddhist as a result of the questions he asks and the answers Nagasena gives. It is likely many such encounters occurred on the Silk Road in the early centuries of Buddhist missions, although most were not nearly as sophisticated as the story told in *The Questions of King Milinda* indicates. And we can assume that after the life story and religious teachings of Jesus began to spread beyond Palestine a few centuries later, that conversations among Buddhists and Christians took place along the Silk Road. We can even assume, with some certainty I think, that sometimes Buddhists "won" such exchanges and sometimes Christians did.

The typical historical mission narrative in Asian, South Asian, and Southeast Asian countries, however, favored the Buddhists. Because Gautama lived a half a century earlier than Jesus, Buddhist missionaries always got there first. They taught the *dhamma* and established the *sangha* (the community of monks), usually combining in some form with whatever indigenous religious teaching was present at the time—Hinduism in India and Southeast Asia, Bon in Tibet, Confucianism and Taoism in China, Shamanism in Korea, and Shinto in Japan. Christian missionaries came later and had a lot of catching up to do.

What implications of Silk Road Missions can we imagine for Reichelt, who studied this history carefully? I think the exchange between Menander and Nagasena, while not strictly speaking a dialogue, would have appealed to Reichelt. Absent was a hard sell on Nagasena's part and defensive rejoinders by Menander. The exchange was civil, like most of Buddhist-Christian's interactions throughout history. Reichelt would have liked that.

Syncratic Missions

Historically, the preponderance of Buddhist-Christian mission encounters took place in China. Thus, when asking questions about the implications of Karl Ludwig Reichelt's mission innovations in China, the Buddhist-Christian mission encounters in China should be given extra weight. We are choosing to call these collective efforts *syncratic* because they focus on discerning ways Christianity and Chinese religions, especially Buddhism have affected one another. How did they evaluate where one another's belief systems are comparable? How did they borrow terms and concepts when it seemed missionally effective without being theologically problematic?[17]

This history is long and complicated. So to begin to get a handle on some of its value in helping us assess Reichelt, we will limit ourselves to brief discussions of three major Christian missional incursions: The early Nestorian Eastern Christian missionaries in the 7th to 10th centuries, the Jesuit Missions in the 16th century (especially Matteo Ricci), and the more recent Protestant missions in the 18th to 20th centuries.

Nestorian Missions

The early Nestorian Christians from Syria were probably the first formal group to mount a mission effort to China. Evidence for their early church planting comes primarily from a rock monument, commonly called the Nestorian Tablet or stele, discovered in 1625. This stele is inscribed with Nestorian

doctrines and lists of missionaries who attempted to apply them to the Chinese Buddhism they encountered. The Nestorians founded monasteries and churches and wrote tracts explaining how Christianity and Buddhism influenced one another:

> The monument recounted the Christian message in Buddhist and Taoist terms . . . together, Buddhist and Nestorian scholars worked amiably for some years to translate seven volumes of Buddhist wisdom,

searching for ways they complemented one another.[18] The Nestorians came in the seventh century and were endorsed by the Emperor and enjoyed significant success off and on until the 13th century.

Reichelt learned much from the Nestorians. He believed the syncretism was two-way with both religions borrowing from the other. For example, he believed

> that Pure Land Buddhism's focus on receiving salvation as a free gift as opposed to making merit through observing rituals, was partly due to the influence of the Nestorian Christian mission in China, and that he was simply building on the good work that God had done through that enterprise.[19]

As Reichelt himself put it, "It is as if some of the most precious heritage both from Taoism and the Nestorian Mission had in part been crystallized in this religious form."[20] One of those precious areas of exchange had to do with masses for the dead. As Reichelt notes, "In no other religion do masses for the dead play so large a part as in Buddhism."[21] Reichelt further observes that

> it had not escaped the notice of the Buddhists that the Nestorian Church, largely because of its solemn masses seven times a day for both the living and the dead, had obtained a strong hold on the people.[22]

It may seem odd to suggest Reichelt learned from Ricci. Reichelt came to love and respect Buddhist teachings; Ricci loathed them. But Ricci presaged what Reichelt ended up doing.

The Rites Controversy (Jesuit Missions)

Matteo Ricci was probably the most famous and successful Christian missionary to China. He was born in Italy, took a law degree, trained as a Jesuit, learned the Chinese language and customs in India, and finally arrived in China in 1583. He served in various cities and various administrative capacities until his death in 1610. He had many skills. He was a world class scientist with extensive knowledge of cartography, geography, astronomy, and mathematics.

Ricci's primary mission innovation is something missiologists have come to call *accommodationism.* Where possible, Ricci came to believe, the Christian missionary should engage Confucianist teachings and practices positively, learning about them and practicing them, as a way of showing how one could easily lead to the other.

For our purposes in this paper, that is, trying to discern how Reichelt used or didn't use other missiological approaches to Buddhists in China, it may seem odd to even suggest that he learned something from the way Ricci practiced. Reichelt came to love and respect Buddhist teachings; Ricci loathed them. When Ricci first came to China he realized that in order to avoid the appearances of Christianity being a foreign religion he had to change his appearance—he chose to wear the clothes of common Buddhists and Buddhist monks. Over time, however, he realized that Buddhism in China was the religion of the lower classes. If one wanted to reach the upper class leaders, he needed to identify with Confucian teachings.

> Ricci came to view Confucianism, the dominant school of thought in Late Imperial China, as promoting a worldview similar to that advanced by Stoicism, the early Greek philosophy espoused by Epictetus, the first century Greek thinker eventually honored by Christians.[23]

Indeed, the way to climb the social ladders in China was to master the Confucian classics. So Ricci began to dress like a Confucian *literati,* translate the classics into Latin, and join Confucians in disparaging Buddhism. Reichelt would have cringed at this lack of respect of Buddhists and Buddhism.

Yet, looked at another way, it does seem that some of what Ricci did presaged what Reichelt ended up doing. They both recognized the importance of showing how Christianity was not just a foreign religion, but one that had many, many similarities to Chinese religions. Ricci chose Confucianism for this task, while Reichelt chose Pure Land Buddhism. Both ran afoul of their mission sending agencies because of their commitment to amalgamation. Ricci and the Jesuits were attacked by their fellow Catholic orders, the Franciscans and the Dominicans. The resulting argument, what came to be called the *Rites Controversy,* was adjudicated back in Rome, and decided against Ricci and Jesuits. For his part, Reichelt was judged deficient in his missionary strategy by his sending agency, the Norwegian Missionary Society, (leading to Reichelt's resignation) and by some of the attendees at the wider Christian community at a worldwide mission conference in Edinburgh in 1910.

Voluntary Missions

Individual Protestant missionaries began to come to China in the 17th and 18th centuries, bringing with them a distinctive approach to Buddhists. One example is a Brit named

James Hudson Taylor (1832–1905). Taylor's story was not unlike that of Reichelt's. He trained for missionary service, went out under a mission agency, the Chinese Evangelization Society, which he eventually found constricting, began to test his own ideas, and then founded his own mission society in 1865 which he called the China Inland Mission. He did this in the context of strong, often violent, anti-missionary feelings among the Chinese that at times threatened his life.

What did Taylor dislike about existing Christian missions to China? He disliked that the vast majority of Christian mission was practiced in the coastal cities of China so he went inland and named his mission organization accordingly. He disliked that the Western missioners lived like Westerners so he began to dress like a lower class Chinese worker and lived his life accordingly. He thought that Christian churches and other buildings should be built in the Chinese style. In short, he practiced what we today call contextualization when it came to his lifestyle.

I call these missions "capitalistic" because they depended on colonial powers' economic interests.

Reichelt did the same, and when he experienced life threatening violence, he attempted to live through it (as did Taylor), but when it became threatening to his life he moved his headquarters of operation to Hong Kong, just as Taylor eventually moved his to Singapore.

Capitalistic Missions

Another type of missional interaction between Buddhists and Christians I call *capitalistic missions,* but I could just as easily call it *colonial missions* because it was the type of Christian mission to Buddhists carried out by the colonial powers in the 16th, 17th, and 18th centuries. An easily understood example of this kind of mission was carried out by three successive colonial powers in the island of Sri Lanka, called Ceylon during this time period. The three powers each dominated Sri Lanka for about 150 years, beginning with the Portuguese in 1505 until 1658, followed by the Dutch from 1658 until 1796, when the British came and established themselves in 1873, ruling Sri Lanka as a colonial power until 1900.[24] I call these missions *capitalistic* because the type of mission done depended to a large degree in the nature of the colonial powers' economic interests. Let's take a look at what happened missionally in Sri Lanka, using it as an exemplar of the kinds of things that happened all over Asia. These examples show that the type of missions practiced by the Christian colonial powers had a great deal to do with what was needed to enhance economic interest.

The Portuguese came in 1505 as a result of a sailing event:

> A Portuguese fleet commanded by Lourenço de Almeida was blown into Colombo [the capital city of Ceylon] by adverse winds. Almeida received a friendly audience from the king of Kotte, Vira Parakrama Bahu, and was favorably impressed with the commercial and strategic value of the island. The Portuguese soon returned and established a regular and formal contact with Kotte. In 1518 they were permitted to build a fort at Colombo and were given trading concessions.[25]

The Portuguese were Roman Catholics, so the Franciscans, Jesuits, Dominicans, and Augustinians soon established mission enclaves throughout the island. Their first focus, however, was on providing Christian services for the Portuguese rulers. After this they provided services for the Sri Lankan nobility who converted to Christianity, largely for economic and political advantages. Because the Portuguese interests were based primarily on trade, that is, Sri Lankan laborers brought spices (cinnamon, pepper, areca nuts) and elephants to the coastal forts for payment, the Portuguese did not engage in deep relations with the social structures of Sri Lanka or the everyday lives of the Ceylonese. "The great majority of Portuguese clergy in this faraway enclave were there to attend to the spiritual needs of the Portuguese, their servants, and their slaves."[26]

The Dutch changed that:

> Dutch rule in Sri Lanka was implemented through the Dutch East India Company (Vereenigde Oostindische Compagnie, commonly called VOC), a trading company established in 1602 primarily to protect Dutch trade interests in the Indian Ocean. Although the VOC first controlled only the coastal lands [with the forts the Portuguese had established], the Dutch gradually pushed inland, occupying considerable territory in southern, southwestern, and western Sri Lanka.[27]

This meant that the Dutch were not as interested in pure trade as the Portuguese tended to be, but also became deeply involved in the harvest of spices and capture of elephants. They expanded beyond trade to harvest.

The missional implications were several. First, the Dutch were not Roman Catholics but Reformed Protestants, which meant corresponding changes in missional strategies. But second, and perhaps even more important, by virtue of their interest in trade *and* harvest, they became much closer to the working class families of Sri Lanka, and, of course, the fact that they were Buddhists in need of Christianizing. Their "mission" thus became much more recognizable as evangelistic efforts towards adherents of another religion, rather

than as primarily "chaplains" to Portuguese citizens, already Christian, even if in name only. In short, evangelism toward Buddhists was added to discipleship of Portuguese Christians as a way of enhancing not just the religious climate of Sri Lanka, but its economic advantage to the Netherlands as well.

The British further deepened the meaning of missions to Buddhists. Of course, their interest was still primarily economic trade. The British East India Company's conquest of Sri Lanka simply replaced the VOC as the ruling colonial interest. The harvest of spices and elephants as items of trade continued to be something the British were involved in. But the British developed a further third interest: growing tea in the highlands. They added to trade and harvest, planting and growth of the desired trading goods—Ceylon tea. They brought in workers from South Indian tea plantations to help develop their mountainous tea ranches. Both those families, many of them Hindu, and the indigenous Sri Lankan Buddhist families needed to be educated and missionized.

The British East India Company's missionaries were Anglican and Methodist. The Company was famously resistant to missions at first—their primary interest was economic, and they saw religion as a distraction. But the planting and harvesting of tea required a stable, educated workforce, and education always included religion. The theory was that workers thus civilized were more reliable partners in the economic interest of the British colonial power.

> Tea and rubber attracted extensive capital investment, and the growth of large-scale industries created a demand for a permanent workforce. Steps were taken to settle Indian labour on the plantations.[28]

This settling involved missionary work to attempt to convert Hindus and Buddhists.

This religious motif did not go unchallenged by the local Buddhists, who, remember, were also mission minded. The resulting mission competition led to a famous public debate between Christian and Buddhist leaders in a town called Panadura in 1873. The debate, one of many, is remembered and notable largely because observers judged that the Buddhist participants "defeated" their Christian counterparts. It was a first and highlighted the fact that the Christianizing of Sri Lanka would not go unchallenged. Indeed, although the Christian mission and church is an established fact in present day Sri Lanka, it is far outnumbered by Buddhists: 70 percent of the population is Buddhist and seven percent is Christian.

What might Reichelt have learned about Christian mission to Buddhists in these capitalist missions, where evangelism took a backseat to colonial—read, economic—interests? Although he doesn't say much about these non-Chinese missions, several observations surely occurred to him. First, relief that China was different. Not that the Western powers interested in China had no economic interest in trade—they surely did. But since China never came close to being fully colonized, no colonizing force could dominate Chinese culture. Second, that economic interests don't lend themselves very well to the kind of theological dialogue Reichelt was committed to in Hong Kong. Missions in these smaller, colonized Asian countries followed the needs of business and politics in a way they did not in China.

The 1873 Sri Lanka debate is remembered because Buddhist participants defeated their Christian counterparts. Christianity would not go unchallenged.

Agency Missions

The nineteenth century is often called the Great Century of Missions. For those of us who are Western evangelical Protestants, it is easily the most studied of centuries of Christian missions. When, for example, Kenneth Scott Latourette wrote his magisterial *A History of the Expansion of Christianity* in seven volumes,[29] he devoted three of the seven volumes to the nineteenth century: *Volume Four—The Great Century: Europe and the United States; Volume Five—The Great Century: The Americas, Astral-Asia, and Africa;* and *Volume Six—The Great Century: North Africa and Asia.*

What made this century so unique? First, it was the rise of voluntary, parachurch mission agencies. What are parachurch agencies? Wikipedia defines them as:

> Parachurch organizations are Christian faith-based organizations that usually carry out their mission independent of church oversight. Most parachurch organizations, at least those normally called parachurch, are Protestant and Evangelical. Some of these organizations cater to a defined spectrum among evangelical beliefs, but most are self-consciously interdenominational and many are ecumenical.[30]

In a way, parachurch mission agencies were evangelicalism's answer to diversity of mission methods used on the field. Whereas Roman Catholicism solved the mission diversity problem by creating mission orders within the church, Protestant evangelicals solved it by creating voluntary organizations outside the direct oversight of official denominations, thus allowing for more diversity in mission methods than would otherwise have been the case.

A second characteristic of the nineteenth century was its temporal proximity to the twentieth (and now the twenty-first). Mission events that occurred in the nineteenth century had direct, traceable consequences for the times and places that you and I live in. That gives them an immediacy that creates not only curiosity, but a willingness to learn simply because many of them are like the early parts of our own mission narratives. We identify with stories and we identify with nineteenth century mission stories because they are close enough to us to seem like part of our same story in a way that stories from biblical times and the middle ages do not.

The stories were/are moving. It was a century full of mission heroes who traveled the globe, no matter what the danger, to tell the story of Jesus to those who had never heard it. Although not a 19th century story, I think of Sushako Endo's book, *Silence,* the story of two Portuguese priests who traveled to 17th century Japan to find out the fate of earlier Christian priests and their followers who had fallen on hard times due to persecution of Christians by Japanese authorities.[31] And although the methods of torture used against Christians around the world may have changed, the fact of global religious persecution of Christians is as real as ever.

The missions that were carried out toward Buddhists in Reichelt's time and that we carry out today the world over are very often traceable in form and content to how missions were done in the Great Century.

"Amidst darkness and confusion, and in a world of perversity and demonic powers, there are glimpses of light and fragments of truth shining with great beauty and strength." (Reichelt)

Reichelt's Theology of Religions

In order to understand and evaluate fully Reichelt's mission innovations, we must begin with his theoretical and theological mission fundamentals. As we have seen, there are clear precedents to Reichelt's mission practices: his focus on "personalist engagements" involving *presence* with adherents of other religions, respectful dialogue with those same adherents, and a continuous search for amalgamating factors that open the doors to more satisfying *presences* and deeper dialogue. The earliest Nestorian missionaries were all about amalgamating Buddhism and Christianity; Matteo Ricci lived his mission life in the presence of first Buddhist leaders and then Confucian literati; and those same Confucians engaged in dialogue whenever and wherever they could find willing partners.

But recognizing the facts of his so-called innovations and their possible history in previous mission efforts in China doesn't answer two fundamental questions such innovations create. First, how theologically faithful were they? Second, how much can they be generalized to other mission settings? In order to answer these questions, it is necessary to identify the theological and missiological principles on which they were founded. Such an examination requires more than we can do at the end of this paper; but we can make an abbreviated start by summarizing three of the most obvious theological commitments to mission that Reichelt consistently made in his writings: his theology *vis-à-vis* the world, *vis-à-vis* the religions, and *vis-à-vis* the Christian church.

Theology *vis-à-vis* the World: Universal Revelation

Reichelt saw and emphasized the presence of God in the world everywhere—even in other religions. In fact, Reichelt saw God's revelation in all religions because they "meet, in a most remarkable manner, many of the great religious cravings of life which men in all times and all places feel more or less consciously."[32] He frequently quoted the traditional revelation passages cited by Christian theologians,[33] and he quotes Martin Luther: "All men have the general knowledge that God exists, that he is just and punishes the ungodly and rewards the good."[34] But his go-to passage was the first chapter of the Gospel of John, the logos passage, of which he says, "It is the Gospel of John, more than anything else, that gives us the necessary insight into God's revelation."[35] It is the logos that is the "light which shineth in darkness," and "amidst darkness and confusion, and in a world full of perversity and demonic powers, there are glimpses of light and fragments of truth shining here and there with great beauty and strength."[36] That general knowledge of God shines through everything: "God reveals himself and speaks through Nature and some of the larger religious groups."[37] We can say with confidence that God reveals himself universally throughout the world, and that this fact is the bedrock of Reichelt's theology of religions.

Theology *vis-à-vis* the Religions: Fulfillment Theology

Universal revelation made other religions worth studying in some detail, which Reichelt did extremely well in regard to Chinese religions.[38] Great nuggets of gospel truth could be found through such study. But Reichelt went further than that. Karl Ludvig Reichelt was a fulfillment theologian which means in his eyes that the "larger world religions" were all part of one great human religious story, each one contributing chapter and verse to how God acts in the world, all of those chapters culminating in the final narrative, the story of Jesus Christ coming into the world. Fulfillment theology was used by theologians of Reichelt's day primarily as a way of explaining Judaism's relationship to Christianity. In Reichelt's hands it was used

to explain Chinese Mahāyāna Buddhism's relationship to Christianity. In seeing in the other religions incipient truths that became fulfilled in the Christian story, Reichelt did not take a Pollyannaish view of Buddhism in China. His sometimes lavish praise of what he found in Mahāyāna Buddhism was always balanced by unsparing criticisms when those concepts seemed to him to run counter to Christian truth. For example, he criticized the Confucian literati,[39] the Confucian pantheon,[40] Confucian worship,[41] some Buddhist monasteries,[42] Buddhist apologetics,[43] and various aspects of the Buddhist feasts for the dead,[44] to name a few. Any criticisms of Reichelt for his generous endorsement of Mahāyāna (especially Pure Land) Buddhism need to be balanced by criticisms such as these. For Reichelt, God's truth, no matter where it manifested itself, was still God's truth.

In China, the early Nestorian missionaries attempted to use Mahāyāna concepts to talk about the gospel.

Theology *vis-à-vis* Christianity: Salvation through Christ Alone

Reichelt agreed with Chinese Mahāyāna Buddhists that the goal of human religion should be "the salvation of all living things" *(P'u chi chung sheng)*.[45] But he insisted over and over again that salvation for all came only through Jesus Christ. Indeed, he insisted that all salvation came through Jesus Christ alone: "The special revelation of God, through Jesus Christ, in the New Testament signifies something wholly new and unique."[46] Yes, Reichelt was a fulfillment theologian, but he made clear that "all previous [to Jesus Christ] revelation had been fragmentary and partial."[47] It is Jesus Christ alone who brings salvation to any and all human beings: "Christianity is first of all a person and not a minutely worked out system of philosophy. The Christian religion is the historical person of Jesus Christ."[48] Revelation of God is universal, and our missional goal should be to present the gospel to all in the hopes of salvation of many, but that salvation comes only through Jesus Christ.

Theological Conclusions

Given these three theological fundamentals, how innovative was Reichelt? Or perhaps, a better way to phrase the question is to ask how much of what he did with educated Buddhist monks in China can be generalized to other mission settings throughout the world? Which parts of his mission method can be generalized and which were specific to the Chinese context?

In general Reichelt's innovations are not universally generalizable. What Reichelt did in China worked because of the conditions he found in China, conditions that included (1) an active Buddhist monastic community; (2) an openness to theological and Buddha-logical innovations and syncretism, i.e., religious heterogeneity; and (3) an almost paranoid fear of the political influence of foreign religions. Consider Reichelt's emphasis on monastic leaders. There are few places in the world today with the kind of Buddhist monastic communities Reichelt found in China in his day: a community led by educated monks interested in dialogue. There are exceptions.[49] But the majority of Buddhist-Christian interactions today—and even in Reichelt's time in non-Chinese settings, have primarily lay participants.

Few places in the world were as open to religious pluralism as early twentieth century China, a result of its diversity of religions. The "big three," Confucianism, Taoism, and Buddhism especially, were in addition to the hundreds of local deities worshipped in family temples. The specifically Buddhist-Christian interactions had a similarly long openness to theological innovations, beginning as far back as the early Nestorian missionaries and their attempts to use Mahāyāna concepts to talk about the gospel. Matteo Ricci's efforts at accommodationism were popular in China, but not in the rest of the Roman Catholic world, as witnessed to by the Rites Controversy. Instead, anti-Christian sentiment in China was/is not aimed at religious heterodoxy but at the perceived threat of foreign political influence which the Chinese believed was made much more possible by foreign religious successes.

However, specific missiological innovations championed by Reichelt can be seen as having universal effect. First, and perhaps the most important was Reichelt's insight that mission strategies and practices must be tailored to specific contexts. That is, what worked in China works because China is China. What works elsewhere must be tailored to those times and places. Ironically, Reichelt's major universal missiological innovation was that there are no universal missiological innovations.

Second, Reichelt's openness to the history of religions approach to indigenous religions encountered by all missionaries was a model of how "competitor" religions need to be approached—and where possible, respected and appreciated—by Christians. His work on Chinese religions in *Religion in Chinese Garments,* although somewhat dated, is still essential reading for mission workers interested in China.[50]

Reichelt's Contributions to Today's Missiology

What is the nature of Buddhist-Christian encounters today? And to what extent is Reichelt's practical methodology—*presence, dialogue, amalgamation*—being used or not used?

It is surely the case that all of the Christian approaches to Buddhists mentioned in this paper are being used somewhere in the world today:

1. Traditional mission approaches of gospel preaching, Bible study, and discipleship training.
2. Justice mission approaches that emphasize education, health care, poverty relief, and human rights.
3. Contextualized missions that seek to frame the gospel story in shapes dictated by local languages and cultures.
4. Scholarly, history of religion approaches, that seek to compare and contrast Christianity with the other religions.
5. Christianization of the civil sort as modeled by Western colonialists.
6. Dialogical interactions on a scale that would have warmed Reichelt's heart.

Of course, all these approaches are shaped by modern and postmodern issues that were never thought of in Reichelt's day or before. We live in a globalized world where politics and economics daily interact and influence us the world over. We live in a scientific world where the scientific method sometimes threatens to minimize man's spiritual nature. We live in a world where religion, if acknowledged at all, is seen as an avenue to soft-power influence, psychological health, and/or capitalistic energy, instead of its core purpose of connecting us to the transcendent beyond time and place. In such a world, where all different kinds of mission action are possible, how do *presence, dialogue,* and *amalgamation* stack up as preferred ways of presenting the gospel?

Presence

We live in a time filled with the possibilities of presence. Oceanic voyages from Europe to Asia that could take as long as six months have been replaced by air flights of a few hours. Immigration and emigration, both forced and voluntary, make contact with almost anyone in the world possible. If I want to attend a Buddhist ceremony venerating the Buddha, I can hop on a plane and fly to Thailand—or I can drive ten minutes into downtown Oakland to the Buddhist temple. In both places, chances are very good that I, as a Christian, will be welcomed with open arms. In addition, I can make contact with individual Buddhists the world over without leaving my living room by using social media. We can raise the question as to what extent an email qualifies as social presence, but perhaps, when my daily "friends" on Facebook double or triple or quadruple a lifetime of contacts in the old physical way, we are splitting hairs. I don't have any statistics, but my suspicion is that if you asked in a local church service how many people there know a Buddhist, a large number of hands will go up. Personal encounter is a big thumbs up all over the world.

Dialogue

I belong to a dialogue group, the Society for Buddhist-Christian Studies. The Buddhist participants are mostly Western Buddhists, many with Christian backgrounds. In that sense it is quite different from what Reichelt experienced with his Chinese Mahāyāna Buddhist monks. We must also remember that Reichelt was operating in the days before inter-religious dialogue was really called that. In that sense Reichelt was a trailblazer in not just doing it, but in defining a way of relating to adherents of other religions. As dialogue became recognized as a respectful way of conversing with Buddhists, an issue arose among Christian missiologists regarding the relationship of dialogue to evangelism. Some thought (and many still think) that one precluded the other—one could either attempt to evangelize Buddhists or one could dialogue with them. As time went on a third position emerged, the idea that one could do both. It seems that Reichelt himself would fall in that camp. It is my position, so in this regard I am beholden to Reichelt. So are scores of dialogue groups today whose main reason for being is to talk respectfully and reciprocally to Buddhists.[51]

Amalgamation

There can be little doubt that a great deal of borrowing among Christians and Buddhists takes place in our day and age. I was talking with a colleague recently about the growing number of Buddhist relief and development organizations arising in Asia, and that they seem to take the institutional form of Christian relief and development organizations with whom they have had contact. Many Christians seem enamored with things Buddhist: mindfulness meditation, for example, has attracted the attention of our tradition, perhaps because our once rich heritage of Christian meditation practices have fallen on hard times. There are many other examples of this two-way influencing among the traditions. Reichelt would have not only been sympathetic to this, but a strong advocate. As we have seen, he wrote a great deal about the comparability of grace-filled Christian theology and the teachings of Pure Land Buddhism. He was criticized for it both by historians of religion who were a bit disparaging of his real knowledge of Buddhism, and by missiologists who were suspicious of any suggestions of crossovers between the two religions. As for the historians of religion, I find Reichelt's knowledge of Buddhism quite good, and, based as it was on his obvious mastery of language and his face-to-face conversations with Chinese Buddhists, it seems to me to be exemplary.[52] As for the discomfort it caused and still causes some missiologists, all truth is, after all, God's truth. If globalization and social media have taught us anything it is that God's general revelation of the divine self extends everywhere. Reichelt's openness to this surely is his greatest missiological and theological contribution. **IJFM**

Endnotes

[1] *Dharmadhatu* means "teacher of dharma," *dharma* being Gautama Buddha's teaching. *Dharmadhatu* is sometimes used as the Buddhist equivalent of the Christian word "missionary." Care must be taken to realize that while the two words *"dharmadhatu"* and "missionary" may be functional equivalents, the content of their respective meanings is different.

[2] Jaspers original writing on the subject was an essay published in *Commentary VI* (1948), 430–435. The following summary of Jaspers' thinking on the Axial Age is taken largely from that essay, which was reprinted in a collection of essays, *Identity and Anxiety: Survival of the Person in Mass Society,* eds., Maurice Stein, Arthur Vidich, David White (The Free Press 1960), 597–605, with the title "The Axial Age of Human History." References in the following are referenced to that reprint. Jaspers expanded his thinking on the axial age in a book, *Vom Ursprung und Ziel der Geschichte,* Artemis, 1949, translated into English as *The Origin and Goal of History,* trans., Michael Bullock (Yale, 1953).

[3] Jaspers, 598. See Robert Bellah and Hans Joas, *The Axial Age and Its Consequences* (Harvard, 2012), 9.

[4] Jaspers, *The Axial Age,* 602.

[5] Jaspers, *The Axial Age,* 600.

[6] Jaspers, *The Axial Age,* 604.

[7] Matthew 28:18–20.

[8] "Mahavagga," *The Book of Discipline (Vinaya-Pitaka),* vol iv, trans., I. B. Horner, (Luzac, 1971), 28. This charge appears in several different forms throughout the Buddhist Pitakas. Karl Ludvig Reichelt references one on page 209 of *Truth and Tradition in Chinese Buddhism: A Study of Chinese Mahāyāna Buddhism* (Munshiram Manoharlal, 1928).

[9] Reichelt, *Truth and Tradition,* 147.

[10] Reichelt, *Truth and Tradition,* 262.

[11] Karl Reichelt, *Religion in Chinese Garments* (James Clarke, 2004), 37.

[12] See Karl Reichelt, *Truth and Tradition,* 2, 31, 36–37, 199, 201 as just a few examples of this strong interest on Reichelt's part.

[13] There are several editions of the *Milindapañha,* both in Pali and in English translation. We will use as our reference an abridgement, N. K. G. Mendis, ed., *The Questions of King Milinda* (Buddhist Publication Society, 1993).

[14] Mendis, *Questions,* 34.

[15] Mendis, *Questions,* 9.

[16] Mendis, *Questions,* 10.

[17] We are using the concept of syncretism here in a neutral, history of religions approach, not as some Christian theologians use the term in a totally negative light. For the historian of religion, syncretism occurs when religions come in contact with one another. It is left to theologians and buddhalogians to determine the doctrinal value of the various encounters.

[18] Philip Jenkins, *The Lost History of Christianity* (HarperOne, 2008), 15.

[19] Rory Mackenzie, *God, Self and Salvation in a Buddhist Context* (Wide Margin, 2017), 16.

[20] Reichelt, *Religion in Chinese Garments,* 129.

[21] Reichelt, *Truth and Tradition,* 77.

[22] Reichelt, *Truth and Tradition,* 88.

[23] R. Po-chia Hsia, *Matteo Ricci and the Catholic Mission to China: A Short History with Documents* (Hackett, 2016), 28.

[24] The British actually ruled until Ceylon declared her independence in 1947, at that time changing their national nomenclature to Sri Lanka, meaning "noble island."

[25] "The Portuguese in Sri Lanka (1505–1658)," *Encyclopedia Britannica,* accessed February 2021, https://www.britannica.com/place/Sri-Lanka/The-Portuguese-in-Sri-Lanka-1505-1658.

[26] Hsia, *Matteo Ricci,* 22.

[27] "Dutch rule in Sri Lanka (1658–1796)," *Encyclopedia Britannica,* accessed February 2021, https://www.britannica.com/place/Sri-Lanka/Dutch-rule-in-Sri-Lanka-1658-1796.

[28] "British Ceylon (1796–1900)" *Encyclopedia Britannica,* accessed February 2021. https://www.britannica.com/place/Sri-Lanka/British-Ceylon-1796-1900.

[29] Kenneth Scott Latourette, *A History of the Expansion of Christianity,* seven volumes (Harper 1937ff).

[30] "Parachurch organizations," Wikipedia, accessed February 2021.

[31] Shusaku Endo, *Silence,* trans., William Johnston (Picador, 1969). Since made into a motion picture directed by Martin Scorcese.

[32] Reichelt, *Truth and Tradition,* 1.

[33] Romans 1:19–20; 2:15; Acts 14:8–18; 17:15–34. See for example, Karl Ludvig Reichelt, *Meditation and Piety in the Far East: A Religious/Psychological Study* (James Clarke, 2004 [1954]), 22–28.

[34] Reichelt, *Meditation and Piety*, 22.

[35] Reichelt, *Meditation and Piety*, 32.

[36] Reichelt, *Meditation and Piety*, 33.

[37] Reichelt, *Meditation and Piety*, 33

[38] See Reichelt, *Religion in Chinese Garments.*

[39] Reichelt, *Religion in Chinese Garments,* 50.

[40] Reichelt, *Religion in Chinese Garments,* 60.

[41] Reichelt, *Religion in Chinese Garments,* 65.

[42] Reichelt, *Religion in Chinese Garments,* 113.

[43] Reichelt, *Religion in Chinese Garments,* 135.

[44] Reichelt, *Truth and Tradition,* 93.

[45] Reichelt, *Truth and Tradition,* 1.

[46] Reichelt, *Meditation and Piety*, 45,

[47] Reichelt, *Meditation and Piety*, 46.

[48] Reichelt, *Meditation and Piety*, 46.

[49] One thinks of the dialogue that arose between Tibetan Buddhist monks and Trappist monks in Gethsemani, Kentucky as a result of Thomas Merton's work.

[50] I have found Notto Thelle's assessment of Reichelt's knowledge of Buddhism most balanced: "There is no doubt about Reichelt's deep knowledge of Chinese Buddhism. However, modern scholarship may tend to emphasize the limitations of his studies due to numerous inaccuracies in his writings. His missionary concern never seemed to weaken his sympathy toward Buddhism, but sometimes it distorted the perspective. He tended to read too many Christian ideas into Buddhist piety." Gerald H. Anderson, Robert T. Coote, Norman A. Horner, and James M. Phillips, eds., *Mission Legacies: Biographical Studies of Leaders of the Modern Missionary Movement* (Orbis, 1994), 216.

[51] An additional note. In *Religion in Chinese Garments,* Reichelt notes that Confucius' "instruction was given mostly in the form of dialogue," 37. Reichelt seems to see this as a positive way of engaging his students and suggests it was perhaps a reason for his ability to attract over 3000 disciples.

[52] As Notto Thelle notes in his essay, "The Gift of Being Number Two," *(IBMR* 32:2), "He studied Buddhism for almost twenty years when he began his Christian Mission to Buddhists in 1922." To be sure, he taught himself, but he based much of his studies on first hand experts in China.

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Presentation **Responses**

Responses to Terry Muck's presentation, "Innovations in Buddhist-Christian Encounters: Karl Reichelt's Contributions"

Amos Yong: Response One

I am delighted to be able to respond to Terry's paper this morning.[1] I so very deeply respect and appreciate Terry (I call him Terry, but "Dr. Muck" might be more appropriate in this setting). I remember when I was a graduate student in the mid-1990s being exposed to the Buddhist-Christian dialogue and being engaged with the Society for Buddhist-Christian Studies, and then, again, as I began my own studies in comparative theology, engaging with Buddhist traditions,[2] that all along Terry was one of the few evangelical scholars—maybe singularly so—who were experts, having studied Buddhist traditions, and who had been standing in that space of Buddhist-Christian encounter as forthrightly evangelical, now for the last 40 years.

So, I have always reached out to him, even when I was just a green graduate student. I have always benefited from his wisdom, from his demeanor, from the way in which he engages with challenging ideas and realities, and then embodies them in his own life. So, I'm just thankful to be able to just say a little bit today about what a gift, Terry, you have been, not just to me but to so many evangelicals who have wondered about other religions and haven't had evangelical resources. You have been a trailblazer that has made it possible for others to follow along and to realize that we don't have to give up our commitments to Jesus Christ in order to really be transformed by our encounters with others—religious others—and other religious traditions. So, I wanted to just say thank you for your faithfulness as an evangelical in missiology—and in that space of Buddhist-Christian dialogue—of opening up and engaging with religious plurality, and doing so with a winsomeness and openness of heart, but also with the conviction of commitment to Jesus Christ.[3]

Our commitment to Christ is non-negotiable, and it is also a commitment to a living and personal Christ, not to some kind of system. Reichelt exemplified this.

After all of that, then, I do think that your highlighting of Reichelt's fulfillment theology may be a bit more controversial today. We may even feel that it's rather tribalistic, in the sense of imposing our own perspective on the world, and indeed in this case, on all other religious traditions. And there are certainly other categories and ways in which we need to talk about how Christian faith relates to other religions. But, from a Christian perspective, there is also a sense in which our commitment to Jesus Christ will lead us to something like fulfilment thought, a sense in which it cannot be anything less than how Jesus Christ is the answer at some level to the deepest cries and yearnings of the human condition, regardless of what religious tradition any person finds him or herself in. For us to be Christians, followers of Christ, means that Christ is *the* answer in some fundamental respect. Reichelt called it fulfillment theology. Others might call it a kind of inclusivist theology, and so on.[4] Again, I think the labels are complicated and difficult, but I'm not sure we can completely get away from something along these lines.

On the other hand, I now want to circle back to something you have modeled in your own life, something which both you and Dr. Thelle mentioned in your presentations—I think Reichelt also exemplified this: Our commitment to Christ is in some fundamental respect non-negotiable, and at the same time, it is also a commitment to a living and personal Christ, not to some kind of system. And from that same perspective, if Christ is also the fulfillment for people of other cultures, then that fulfillment is achieved interpersonally and relationally through their specific contributions.

I think what you're saying with Reichelt, and what we're learning about in these couple of days, is that Chinese-ness—that expression of Chinese cultures, Chinese traditions, Chinese ideas, Chinese practices—will leave its own imprint on what it means to be Christ-followers. In fact, it has already left its own imprint for millennia, and has left a deep imprint through the life of our Lutheran missionary from Norway. This Chinese-ness will continue to leave an imprint on what it means to be fulfilled in Christ, because that fulfillment in Christ takes on the shape, the color, the sounds, the tactility, the embodied character of those cultures, those many nations, tribes, tongues, and languages that bring their gifts into the new Jerusalem (as the apocalyptic seer portrays it in the Book of Revelation). So Chinese-ness matters, after all, even in being fulfilled in Christ. In fact, there is no fulfillment in Christ without the fulfillment that is brought by the various cultures of the world, and in particular, for our themes these few days, brought by Chinese cultures and Chinese traditions. I think the discussion of Reichelt allows us to appreciate, on the one hand, why Christ is a fulfillment of the human condition, yet on the other hand, why our Chinese brothers and sisters (for which I praise God, being of Chinese descent myself) have a lot to say and a lot to contribute to how that fulfillment actually takes place.[5]

So, thank you again, Terry, for inviting others along the cultural and religious paths that you have walked, to both appreciate who Jesus is from your witness and to impact us by *how* you have borne witness, much like Reichelt did in his time on similar pathways.

Amos Yong is a Malaysian-American theologian and missiologist who currently serves as Dean of the School of Mission & Theology at Fuller Seminary. He has written more than 50 books including two on Buddhism: The Cosmic Breath: Spirit and Nature in the Christian-Buddhism-Science Trialogue *and* Pneumatology and the Christian-Buddhist Dialogue: Does the Spirit Blow through the Middle Way? *One of his most recent books is* The Amos Yong Reader: The Pentecostal Spirit. *He has both participated and served in leadership in the Society for Buddhist-Christian Studies.*

Rory Mackenzie: Response Two

Thank you, Dr. Muck, for that very creative paper. I loved the way you drew so many strands of missionary endeavor together, all helping to set the scene for Reichelt's missionary work. I have often looked at practitioners who handle criticism and discouragement positively, who not only carry out their duty, but do so with the expectation that God will work, and also at practitioners who are vitalized by their practice. So, I came to your paper and engaged with it through that lens. And I was intrigued to see you make the connection between James Hudson Taylor and Karl Reichelt. They were both dissatisfied with the missionary context they found themselves in. They both brought about change. They were both criticized. Hudson Taylor faced huge challenges as he led a large group of missionaries from many different backgrounds in cross-cultural pioneer evangelism. And it was a worn-out Hudson Taylor who discovered the principle not to strive after faith, but to rest on the faithful one. And that changed everything for him. Hakan Eilert in his book *Boundlessness* writes that Reichelt held that

> faith is much more than blind belief; faith means that a new faculty is set free in my life, a faculty with the most tremendous working radius, a faculty which brings me, an earthbound, feeble, limited being, into contact with the divine, the eternal, the boundless.

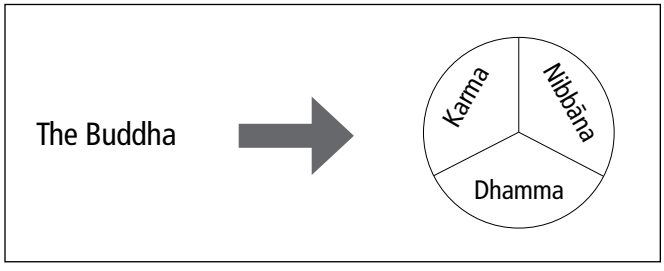
And so there are some commonalities between these two different statements. For both men, something is released deep within, and they're brought into contact with the Divine, the faithful one, the eternal, the boundless, and this gives them an expectation and a confidence in God. Later on, in your talk, Dr. Muck, you talk about three theological commitments to mission that Reichelt held, distinctive features of his understanding of his missional task, universal revelation, fulfillment theology, and salvation through Christ alone. These distinctive features are positive, and I couldn't help but ask myself if Reichelt drew energy from them to persevere in the face of criticism and hostility—criticism from missionaries on the field, from some Buddhists, from some supporters back home, and at least some negative comments from people whose opinion really counted, like Henrik Kraemer. Those of us who do things a bit differently usually face criticism. And there is always a person whose opinion matters looking over our shoulder. I like to think that Reichelt drew strength for his journey through these theological commitments that you mentioned. And maybe they can also raise our expectations and re-enchant us in our own mission.

I like to think that Reichelt drew strength for his journey through these theological commitments. Maybe they can also re-enchant us in our own mission.

So, with regard to the first of Reichelt's theological commitments: universal revelation, or God at work in the world. The Father wishes all to be saved. His Son has made that possible. Perhaps then we should be expecting the Spirit to be at work in our neighborhoods and networks, drawing people to himself. Not necessarily in a sudden conversion, but on a journey of increasing openness to God. Can we have faith that some of the people we have known over the years, with whom we have shared, who have not yet begun to follow Jesus, are on a gradual journey to the Lord? Because God is at work in the world—indeed, our world, the world of our networks and neighborhoods.

Secondly, God at work in non-Christian religions. Did the Buddha point to God at work in the world? He pointed to the *dhamma, nibbāna* and *karma*. It was Winston King who asked the question, "Was the Buddha pointing to three aspects of God's governing actions?" Do not these core Buddhist beliefs respond to ultimate truth *(Dhamma),* liberation from suffering *(nibbāna),* and justice *(karma)*? These were the three realities among many that the Buddha discovered and thought important to teach.

Figure 1. Illustration of the Buddha pointing to God at work in the world.



Here's the Buddha pointing towards these three things, perhaps functions of God in the world, ethical values that God would like to see in people. Take care over your actions as there will be consequences. Choose well. Look for truth. And really, can the fleeting nature of self be satisfied by what we strive after, which is also fleeting? So, there's an ethical component to the teachings of the Buddha, perhaps reflecting on how God would

want people to live in the world. And then Winston King goes on to say that, after the Buddha's *para-nibbāna,* somehow the Buddhists took him and the three things that he focused on in his teaching and put them together. And you can see how after a while something solidifies. So, did the Buddha point to God at work in the world through the teachings of Buddhism?

And then lastly, salvation is through Christ alone. Clearly, Reichelt believed that and expected to meet those both at the Brother house and on his travels who were experiencing exactly that—that salvation is in Christ. In 1937 he wrote an article on Buddhism in China today. He wrote,

> We have one great aim, namely, to give the full Christian message, the full positive Gospel as it is revealed in the New Testament, using all the points of contact which psychologically may help the seekers after truth in East Asia to recognize Jesus Christ as the only way to the Father. We can afford to be broadminded because our work is through and through Christocentric. (Reichelt 1937, 166)

So, somehow, keeping Jesus at the center of who we are and what we do, means that we can be optimistic about our activities at the circumference, on the edge.

Rory Mackenzie served for 12 years as a church planter with OMF International in Bangkok, and has continued his involvement with the Thai community in Scotland. For 20 years he taught Religious Studies and Practical Theology at the International Christian College, Glasgow. He has also been a visiting lecturer at the Mahachulalonakorn University, Bangkok. His book, God, Self and Salvation in a Buddhist Context *(2017), is informed by Reichelt's contextualized approach, and advocates friendship with Buddhists while maintaining a clear witness to Christ. He has also authored* New Buddhist Movements in Thailand: Towards an Understanding of Wat Phra Dhammakaya and Santi Asoke *(Routledge Critical Studies in Buddhism). He is now retired, and lives with his wife, Rosalyn, in Edinburgh.*

Notto Thelle: Response Three

I appreciate very much the presentation about Reichelt. It's interesting, fascinating, to see how positively he is evaluated. I was a little nervous about getting through this consultation or symposium. I thought there would be many more critical at-titudes or reviews of Reichelt. So, I appreciated it, though I can't respond to all the points, but maybe pick up one or two of, Dr. Muck's points.

The first three points, dialogue presence and amalgamation. Well, Reichelt did not use the word dialogue that is popular now. But what he did was actually a sort of very friendly and open dialogue. I've sometimes thought about the dialogue you mentioned between Menander and Nagasena; is it a dialogue? Well, it's a question-and-answer thing which means dialogue may also be used, and has been used at least literally, as a way of arguing your point. When I was a student, we read the Socratic or Platonic dialogues and the Socratic dialogue was not very dialogical, because Socrates knew exactly where it was pointing. He used dialogue as a way of manipulating the other. That's maybe an extreme way of saying it, but dialogues may be also not dialogical, but ways of manipulating. I've seen this in Japan, too, in the 16th century when the Jesuits came. There was one Japanese who later became a Buddhist, but first he wrote a book, a dialogue book between two persons. What he did was to manipulate the story to demonstrate how important and how much better Christianity was. Unfortunately, he converted to Buddhism afterwards, and they used the same arguments the other way.

So, I think we have to be very careful what we mean by dialogue. As a generous way of being concerned about others, listening and talking (we have two ears and one mouth), it is very important. I think presence is also very important. What you say about amalgamation and syncretism—I agree with very strongly. It has become very difficult to use the word syncretism because it has been almost demonized as a very negative thing. But I think we have to recognize how syncretistic Christianity is—I mean, not only on the so-called mission field, but through the whole history of Christianity. I think it's theologian Wolfhart Pannenberg who said that Christianity is a syncretistic religion, and if it had not been syncretistic, it wouldn't have survived.

> We need to recognize how syncretistic Christianity is throughout the whole of history. "If Christianity had not been syncretistic, it would not have survived." (Pannenberg)

What happened when Christianity was transferred from the more Hebrew Oriental context into the Greek context? It's a tremendous process of syncretism. Our entire theological, doctrinal language is not Hebrew, it's Greek. We're using Greek concepts, logos, *ousia* (essence), three persons are the Trinity, everything is expressed in Greek and Roman categories, and so the whole history of Christianity is a process of opening up, accepting, using, and then rejecting. So, I agree totally that Christianity is a syncretistic religion.

Sometimes I think it's become too syncretistic. Luther, in his time used the phrase The Babylonian Captivity of the Church. We have become so European or so Norwegian or so German, and so adapted to modernity that we often become very individualistic and we easily forget that Christianity is not an individualistic faith and religion. We forget that the central point of Jesus is not about individuals; yes, he challenges the person. What he was keen about was not an egoistic heaven, rather everything we learn about salvation in the biblical tradition shows that it is about a community;

it is not something for loners, it's a community thing. Well, my basic point is to support the use of syncretism as a way of understanding Christian history, but also in a very positive sense, but also that we should be critical in the way we come to accept almost everything and sometimes become captive to our own civilization.

I like the comparisons of the various periods with Reichelt. He commented on Confucianism, but he was not very attracted to Confucianism because he felt it was too rational. He didn't have the sort of emotional commitment that he found with Buddhism, while, as you said, the Jesuit, Matteo Ricci, did. Ricci rejected Buddhism because it was then thought of as a religion for simple people, and Ricci was interested in the elite. So, he became a sort of Confucian scholar, using all his scholarship as a missionary method.

One last comment about hospitality. My impression is that in most places where Christians came as missionaries, the Buddhists were extremely gracious, opening the temples, opening the monasteries, not only for Reichelt in China but in Sri Lanka or Ceylon and at that time the missionaries were allowed to preach in the temples. But gradually the relationship became more antagonistic. And I think one of the reasons is that the missionaries were quite aggressive in their preaching. So, the first dialogues in Ceylon were quite friendly, but ended up with this terrible antagonistic disputation, as you mentioned. So, I think Christians have a lot to learn from Buddhist hospitality, because hospitality, I think, is a basic Christian virtue.

Notto R. Telle is professor emeritus of the University of Oslo, Norway where he taught Ecumenics and Missiology. He lived in Japan for 16 years where he served as Associate Director of the NCC Center for the Study of Buddhist-Christian Relations in Japan and China. While there, he was very involved in research and interfaith dialogue in the "borderlands" where faith meets faith.

Terry Muck: Replies to His Respondents

I'll be very brief as our time is gone. But I do think we should always have very good friends of mine give responses like Amos Yong because he says so many good things about me, and that's good.

The question that all three of you raised, either directly or indirectly, is the question of fulfillment theology. I have a little talk on what fulfillment theology is and what it's not, and if you're going to use fulfillment theology make sure you read up on it before you use it.[6] Because it can mean different things to different people, and it's important to know that.

Rory, thanks for the comments about how valuable commitments can be. Reichelt was a committed person and it's a mistake to think that because he believed in this certain approach that he was willing to give up on everything. No, not at all, and I appreciated your comment that it can be a healthy way of handling criticism. Those of us who have been criticized over the years, sometimes we just have to retreat to our commitments, and that's the only way we can survive.

In most places where Christians came as missionaries, the Buddhists were extremely gracious, opening temples and monasteries. But gradually the relationship became more antagonistic.

Dr. Thelle, thank you for your comments on syncretism, and your other points as well. I realize I threw an awful lot at all of you in a very quick way and I appreciate your listening. Reichelt surely had weaknesses, and that is one of the reasons I want so much to read the biography you are writing, to find out a little bit more about what he was like as a person in interaction. I think that's very revealing about missionaries of all sorts, so I'm looking forward to that. And I hope also to have further conversations with you regarding the fact that you knew him and now have written a book about him. It just makes you an amazing resource for those of us who are interested in Reichelt. **IJFM**

Endnotes

[1] I am very grateful to H. L. Richard and Brad Gill for transcribing and providing an initial edit of my response provided from a set of notes; I further edited it for clarity and added a few footnotes.

[2] One of the results of which was my book, *The Cosmic Breath: Spirit and Nature in the Christianity-Buddhism-Science Trialogue,* Philosophical Studies in Science & Religion 4 (Leiden and Boston: Brill, 2012).

[3] So much so that I dedicated one of my books to him: *The Missiological Spirit: Christian Mission Theology for the Third Millennium Global Context* (Eugene, Ore.: Cascade Books, 2014).

[4] I opt for such an inclusivist model in my *Beyond the Impasse: Toward a Pneumatological Theology of Religions* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2003; reprint, Eugene: Wipf & Stock, 2014).

[5] Thus, my long-term engagement with Asian cultures and traditions for my own theological work, more recently in essays such as "Yin-Yang and the Spirit Poured Out on All Flesh: An Evangelical Egalitarian East-West Dialogue on Gender and Race," *Priscilla Papers* 34:3 (2020): 21–26, and "Buddhist-Christian Dialogue on Human Becoming: Next Steps for Pneumatological Anthropology," in Perry Schmidt-Leukel and Elizabeth J. Harris, eds., *A Visionary Approach: Lynn A. de Silva and the Prospects for Buddhist-Christian Encounter* (Sankt Ottilien, Germany: EOS, 2021), 171–92.

[6] It has been included as an article in this issue: Terry Muck, "Fulfillment Theology," *International Journal of Frontier Missiology,* 38: 3–4 (July–December 2021): 137–148, ijfm.org.

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Q & A Session

H. L. Richard:

The first question is, as Christians we are attuned to the many varieties of Christianity but we are a bit lazy when thinking about other faith traditions. Can all of you help us think with more nuanced understanding about "a Buddhist." We have Theravāda, we have Mahāyāna, we have new Buddhist movements, we have what's been called folk Buddhism. When one of us meets "a Buddhist" what should we be thinking? How should we be understanding and responding?

Rory Mackenzie:

Thank you for this question. One thing to bear in mind when we meet somebody who says they are a Buddhist is that they may not be a devout Buddhist and they may be disenchanted with their tradition, and that's why you have new Buddhist movements emerging, people who have left the mainstream and found a spiritual home in another expression of Buddhism. So, we should not immediately assume that we've got to contextualize and do redemptive analogies, because perhaps they have had enough of Buddhism and they're only nominally Buddhist, culturally. They are Buddhist, but perhaps they are looking for something else.

You're right, there are some significant differences between Theravāda and Mahāyāna, and of course Vajrayāna or Tibetan style Buddhism. Reichelt himself noted that Theravāda was quite narrow, and he felt it should be a bit wider. I suppose it is narrow in the sense that it focuses on the *arahat* (one who has reached enlightenment) and there's a real focus on spiritual enlightenment, and for the monastic community that really means let's not get involved with the plight of others until we ourselves are enlightened and in a position to help others. Whereas the Mahāyāna tradition is much more open. There's the *bodhisattva* concept of learning and becoming more enlightened by doing acts of compassion, which I think is just a really great concept, that we learn through doing and we reflect on our practice and refine our practice. So, in many ways, Mahāyāna Buddhists are a bit more open to this concept of someone else doing for us what we can't do for ourselves. Jesus doing for us what we are unable to do for ourselves, is one way of expressing the Christian gospel. The concept of being helped by a divine being is very much present in Mahāyāna. Whereas in Theravāda, technically that's not the case, although they do have *bodhisattvas* in the Theravāda tradition. Maybe it's helpful to remind ourselves that regardless of the tradition, it's often underpinned by a folk or primal tradition. This folk/primal belief and practice is very important to many Buddhists. So, these are some initial responses to the question.

Notto Thelle:

This is a great issue. I think it's impossible to say what "a Buddhist" is. There's not one Buddhism, there are many Buddhisms. You have already many aspects of Mahāyāna and Theravāda. I worked in Japan for many years and sometimes Christians in Japan are a little embarrassed because there are so many Christian denominations. Sometimes Japanese have said, well don't worry about that, we have much more, so many different Buddhist traditions. We've talked about Pure Land Buddhism and Zen Buddhism. Many Westerners think that Zen is the dominant tradition in Japan but it is not. The Pure Land tradition is much more vital and many more people follow it. To follow up on what Dr. Mackenzie said, most Buddhists in the East don't know what Buddhism is. They know what they're going to do if they go to the temple or the monastery, they know how to bow and how to offer incense and so on, but if you ask them what Buddhism is, they wouldn't be able to say very much about it.

In Japan to a great extent there is funeral Buddhism. Westerners often think that Buddhists meditate a lot, but even Zen Buddhists in Japan don't meditate very much, and sometimes they admire Western Buddhists because they are much more eager for doing meditation and so on. And I think they are, because Western Buddhists have found a new way. They've been attracted either to the philosophy or to personalities like Dalai Lama and Buddhist masters, and they do meditation with much more motivation than most Japanese or eastern Buddhists.

> Theravāda spiritual enlightenment means not getting involved in the plight of others, but Mahāyāna *bodhisattvas* do acts of compassion for others. (Mackenzie)

There was a question about the relationship between different traditions of Buddhism in China and Japan. Is there any cooperation there? Actually, there is very little cooperation between the various traditions. In Japan we often speak about Buddhist

sects, and they don't speak to each other, they coexist side by side with very little cooperation. They are not interested in the others, as at least Christian denominations tend to be. There's no ecumenical connection. Where there have been ecumenical relationships within Buddhist traditions, they have been inspired by ecumenical Christians who invite various Buddhist traditions to engage in dialogue. We mentioned new Buddhism and Western Buddhism, and it is my impression that Western Buddhists generally are much more united in the sense that they are there searching for the common roots of Buddhism. Of course, there are some basic insights in Buddhism and they are more ecumenical in the sense that they recognize each other and they cooperate with each other.

H. L. Richard:

Yes, thank you. Dr. Muck, can you help us out here? The question was about diversity and how Christians are naive to it, but now we are overwhelmed. What in the world are we going to do with all of this stuff?

Terry Muck:

Well, it's interesting. They often say about missionaries that they are Methodists or Baptists when home on deputation in the US, but when they get to the field they're just Christians. And the same dynamic works with Buddhists, as Dr. Thelle said. Western Buddhists are just Buddhist, but you go to Sri Lanka and expect to find Theravādins and you go to China expecting to find Mahāyānists, but there is no easy solution to the actual complexity except to say that it's a mixture. One story in support of what my two colleagues have said. I taught a year at Trinity Theological College in Singapore and one of my assignments was to teach an introduction to Buddhism. About thirty students signed up for the course, almost all of them, I believe, all but one or two, had grown up Buddhist and converted to Christianity and were now going to seminary. So, I wasn't quite sure how to approach this group, but I decided to teach the course just like I taught it in the US. I started with the history of Buddhism and then the teachings of the Buddha and then the practices of Buddhists. What I discovered was that my Singaporean students who had grown up Buddhist knew almost as little about the history and teachings of Buddhism as my Western Christian students in seminary, but when we got to the third section, the practices section, they knew everything and I became the learner. I knew almost nothing about what really was the practice of Buddhism. I knew what a book would say, but they taught me about what they did when they had funerals and when they went through all the everyday events of life. I think that's probably what you will discover, that a lot of people, maybe even most people, don't know a lot about their own tradition in certain aspects (particularly the history and the teachings), but when it comes to the practice, they know everything.

H. L. Richard:

Can I follow up again to the three of you? What does that mean then, when we meet a Buddhist and we know this person is probably not theological, they're probably not historically oriented, they probably are ritually oriented, have done rituals and maybe still are doing rituals. Now we're coming in as someone who wants to dialogue and wants to represent Christ, wants to share good news. How do we negotiate that? How do we become the learners? Dr. Muck, you mentioned a classroom situation where it was set up, but you reversed the whole thing, becoming the student yourself. In normal human relationships how does that kind of thing happen, how can we negotiate our turf?

My Singaporean students who had grown up Buddhist knew as little about Buddhist teachings as my Western Christian students, but they knew everything about the practices. (Muck)

Terry Muck:

Well, I'll just kick it off and then Rory and Notto can jump in. It's kind of a cliche that if you want to talk to a Buddhist about common religious interests that you have, you start with practices, not with teachings, not with theology, not with history. You start with what's it like to be a Buddhist in this culture, and then they'll probably ask what it's like to be a Christian in your culture, or something like that. But the focus on practices is very real, maybe especially in Buddhism. We have this image of Buddhism as being a religion that focuses on meditation, but probably few Buddhists really do serious, deep meditation, that's just not the way it works. But the tradition is a meditative tradition in many respects. So, when you meet a Buddhist, start to talk about practices, start to talk about what it's like to be a Buddhist, what do you do? When you go to the temple, or whatever you call it, what do you do? Take advantage of this dialogical approach. Find out what they know that you don't, and then start talking about that. You will learn and you will also have a conversation.

Rory Mackenzie:

Yes, I think that's right, the focus on practice rather than on belief is helpful. The question is how can we listen well to the individual before us, a person with hopes and fears just like us. I think it's great just to talk about their social responsibilities in the community, their practice, what difficulties they face in that. And I think it's important to demonstrate some kind of competence, that we can be trusted with that information.

Many people here know quite a bit about Buddhism, but it's important not to overpower the other person with your knowledge of Buddhism, but just listen to their individual story.

Notto Thelle:

In our Western countries there's a difference between Western Buddhists and what in Norway we call ethnic Buddhists. I mean Thai people, Vietnamese and so on. Because those coming from Asia and living in Norway are very much continuing the tradition of the local cultures from Thailand or Vietnam and so on. And they are truly in a sort of ritual tradition and wouldn't be able to say much about what Buddhism is. As I think I said yesterday, sometimes we answer questions or try to answer questions which haven't been raised. I think the meeting points are things that happen. You happen to become friends with someone you have met, or a colleague, or there are special occasions like funerals or weddings or so on, where it becomes relevant to start to talk. Maybe we will return to that later in thinking about people who have dual belongings, often a place where it's necessary or natural to start a dialogue about faith. But often I think there are not so many occasions. At least that's my experience. Norwegian Buddhists, meaning ethnic Norwegian Buddhists, are not very interested in Christianity. They think they know what Christianity is, they abandoned it and they don't want to talk about it if they haven't come to certain stages in life where suddenly they start to reflect about "What did we leave behind?" And, of course, many such converts to Buddhism will also ultimately discover that Buddhism has problems, too. There's a lot of oppression and power struggles and corruption, as there are in every human community, every human religion. So, that may be a place where people start to search for real answers and questions.

I wonder if we can make a distinction between dual belonging and dual allegiance. The cultural Buddhist belongs to two communities but his allegiance is to Jesus alone. (Mackenzie)

H. L. Richard:

Thank you all very much for your reflections. I'm going to move on to another question which is mixing a few questions from the comments that have come in, and picking up even on what you were just referring to, Dr. Thelle. There's a lot of interest among us in the fulfillment concept that Buddhism leads to Christ and to Christianity, but more recently we have the multiple religious belonging idea which is much discussed and the idea of following Jesus as a Buddhist, as new paradigms for thinking about these things. To all three of you, do you have case studies of the fulfillment kind of person, the multiple belonging kind of person, or the Buddhist follower of Jesus, and how do you view these things? Are those three equally valid paradigms? Is there something that we should be preferring? Are there dangers we should think about with each of them? How should we be thinking about that, how should we be responding?

Terry Muck:

The dialogue society that I belong to here in the US, The Society for Buddhist-Christian Studies, has a lot of people who describe themselves as dual belongers. In fact, we did a couple of issues of our journal particularly on this. Many, perhaps most, of the US members of the society are former Christians who have become Buddhist, but "becoming Buddhist" did not mean giving up everything about Christianity. Rather, they have put together a religious practice that includes elements from both traditions, and our dialogues about this in the society were very interesting, very heartfelt, very creative. There's no single kind of dual belonging. It almost becomes a personal thing, how you construct your personal spirituality. Of course, the most common kind is when someone continues to participate in Christian worship but also meditates. They go to church on Sunday morning and meditate on Wednesday evening, putting it together that way, but there are as many kinds of combining and shaping as there are people.

Notto Thelle:

Maybe America is more mixed than Norway or Scandinavian countries, but I think also now in our countries there are so many people who have just happened to be involved with Buddhism, not because they've been searching and encountered Buddhism, but they are in a family relationship, maybe the father was Christian but mother was committed to Buddhism. How does one deal with that? Somehow they have to, although of course some opt out of all religion. So, there are many who without much serious thought act in some relationships as Buddhists and in other connections as Christians. When it comes to rituals it becomes more important; funerals, for instance. Most people in Norway have Christian funerals; for the Catholics it is mass so it is clearly defined as Christian. But what happens now in the Church of Norway is that the funeral service has an open space where you may read a Buddhist text or something New Age and so on. It is a thoroughly Christian funeral with prayers, hymns, and biblical readings, and most people accept that even though may have other religious commitments. They just want to include an element of their own faith tradition. I think that type of generosity is important. Who owns the funeral? That is a vital question. It's still controversial in Norway, but I think we are trying to find the type of space where it can be a Christian farewell, a Christian service, while at the same time having a space for and hospitality towards the other.

Rory Mackenzie:

I wonder if we can make a distinction between dual belonging and dual allegiance. Dual belonging I can see working fairly well. A person who is culturally a Buddhist, comes from a Buddhist family, and has social responsibilities to the family but has become a follower of Jesus, this person, if you like, belongs to two communities at the same time. But allegiance is to Jesus, not to Jesus and the Buddha. I am just wondering if we can make that distinction. I myself, although a Westerner, I feel that I have a dual belonging as I'm plugged into the Thai temple here, not as a Buddhist, but as a student of Buddhism, long standing friend of Thai people, and a follower of Jesus. I do what I can to help to support the community. I'm part of that community. But at the same time, I follow Jesus so that to me seems a bit different than, say, somebody who worships both Jesus and the Buddha and maybe can't fully decide or doesn't feel they need to decide as they are comfortable with both.

My impression is that the Christian-Buddhist will have a basic commitment to the Christian tradition, but will have integrated and been inspired by Buddhist practices. (Thelle)

H. L. Richard:

So, it sounds like there's good dual belonging and there's bad dual belonging. What about the person who really identifies as Buddhist? I am Buddhist but I follow Jesus. Dr. Thelle, you seem to reference that as a viable option, but how does that work out? Do any of you know people who have identified in this way, who are trying to live that out?

Notto Thelle:

My impression reading and meeting people is that some people call themselves a Christian Buddhist or a Buddhist Christian. I respect that very much, but my impression is that in most cases they would have one sort of basic commitment to one, perhaps to a Christian tradition, but they have integrated and been inspired by Buddhist practices like meditation or philosophy. So, they're rooted in one tradition, either Buddhism or Christianity, but they have been informed and inspired by and have integrated aspects from the other. I met in Japan many Christian Buddhists. One of my old friends who died many years ago was a philosopher, a Buddhist, and told when he was young he was in a spiritual crisis he read whatever he came across of philosophy, east and west, and then one day he read the Gospels and he was so attracted. He read the Gospels once and it was as if he was drawn into a magnetic field. He was old when he told this, "When I read the Bible, the Gospels, two times, I had to tell myself that if this is Christianity, I am a Christian." He was a Buddhist, committed to Christ. Then he said later, which was very disappointing in many ways (but I understand him), "I went to Europe and then I didn't understand anything anymore." He didn't find there what he was searching for.

Terry Muck:

I've always been curious about, really upset in a way, about people who think that if you're a Buddhist you can't respect and like and even love Jesus and if you're a Christian you can't respect or like the Buddha. I lived a number of years in Sri Lanka and while there I bought a Buddha statue and when I came back to the US, I made the mistake of writing something about how much I loved my statue of the Buddha. It was a beautiful piece of art and I also said that I respected Gautama and what he taught and the life he lived. I was young and naïve and I have never experienced the kind of uproar that occurred when I did this. It just seemed natural to me to give credit where credit was due. Buddha was a great man. But it works the other way, too. One of my primary teachers at Northwestern, Walpola Rahula, was a leading Sri Lankan Buddhist who wrote several good books on Buddhism, and one day we were at lunch at Northwestern and I asked him if he had ever read the Gospels. He said he had read Mark. I said, well, what did you think? He said, "I cried." He said, "Jesus was a great, great man." That kind of mutual recognition of the good parts of one another's tradition should be part of any kind of mission work, as we have been discussing, and I am always warmed when I run across it either way.

H. L. Richard:

This kind of intermixture that we're talking about is very threatening to the average Christian. Is it threatening to the average Buddhist also? They're not interested in it, they're in their own world, but are they less threatened by this than Christians are? How do you view a Buddhist follower of Jesus? No one has given a case study of that; maybe we don't actually see that happening, where someone has that primary identity as a disciple of Jesus, but as a Buddhist in a Buddhist family and society.

Rory Mackenzie:

I think a Buddhist would be less threatened than a Christian by dual belonging for a variety of reasons, but I think a Buddhist is very open to anything that nourishes, from whatever tradition. I have a close friend, a Thai Academic, who did his PhD in Edinburgh. We spent years meeting up every week, sometimes meditation, some prayer, studying the Gospels and other things and he would come to church sometimes and was involved in our Christian group for international students. He

loved being part of that and found that the Holy Spirit energized him and his research and gave him wisdom or enhanced his ability to solve the problems he faced. So, something great in Christianity for him, but he's still a Buddhist and doesn't see any need to convert, to change. He knows that this disappoints me and he mentions it from time to time, but that's who he is. So, the two traditions are really important for him and why choose? He doesn't see any need for that.

Is the fulfillment theology paradigm dead? Should we get that out of our thinking as we talk with Buddhists? (H. L. Richard)

H. L. Richard:

None of the three of you nibbled at the fulfillment part of the question. Is the fulfillment paradigm just dead, so we should get that out of our thinking as we talk with Buddhists? Or does that still have some relevance? Perhaps we need to get a refined version of that somehow. Can we talk about that with a Buddhist at all or is that just not a fruitful paradigm anymore?

Notto Thelle:

I'm not sure it's a fruitful paradigm anymore. When I was working in Japan, we arranged a seminar for missionaries and pastors in the mosque in Tokyo. There I heard beautiful talk from the imam when he spoke about the development of religion. We start from the kindergarten of folk religion and then it gradually goes up to school and then it goes further to higher middle school and high school and finally on to university. And his point was that religions have this development towards the highest university, which is of course Islam. I thought, "I have heard those stories before by missionaries." It was very interesting. I was not hurt by it, but it was a reminder that it may be too easy to speak in those terms of preparation and fulfillment. I mean the point of fulfillment theology was to give honor to other religions, to give them a place in God's pedagogy, God's works through history. In the Catholic tradition you speak about anonymous Christians and so on. You can say that as a reflection within the church, but you cannot say to a Buddhist that actually you're an anonymous Christian; if you really follow your aspirations, you will become a Christian. Or as a Muslim says, every person is basically a Muslim, we just have to discover that, and so on. So, this is all a way of thinking which is problematic.

H. L. Richard:

Dr. Muck, you seemed to be more hopeful about fulfillment theology yesterday.

Terry Muck:

When I think about it, I'm attracted to it, yes. As a Christian, I believe salvation is through Christ alone and so the idea that all the other religions are kind of positive preparations for that, appeals to me. But when I think about how it affects people of other religions, let's say Buddhists, I can see how that's a real downer for them. So, maybe fulfillment is not the best way to express it. When I was teaching at a seminary we had several Native American students, and I made a mistake one day; let's say it turned out to be a learning experience. I said, "I went to a friend's house in a suburb of Chicago and we had a sweat lodge out in the back." I thought this would be impressive to these Native American students, but they said, "You're just a 'New Ager put-downer.' You're stealing our tradition and turning it into a New Age experience." So, you have to think about the way you talk about a person's religion, how it affects them, and what it means to them. You can't just try and satisfy your own intellectual longings about a perfectionist evolutionary scheme here. You have to be careful when you're talking about fulfillment, what you mean and how you mean it and who you talk with about it.

H. L. Richard:

Dr. Mackenzie, any thoughts? Have you ever had a stage in your life where you were impressed with fulfillment? Are you still semi-impressed or is this all flat to you?

Rory Mackenzie:

I get some of the points of fulfillment theology. It's a term I don't use myself because it's open to misunderstanding. I try and think of redemptive analogies. There are some things in Buddhism, like *karma* or non-self teaching, that we can show respect for and use as a bridge over which to pass from Buddhism to Christianity, so I think that's the way I approach it. Some great things are there and, as Reichelt said, these are emotional stepping-stones placed there by God over which people may pass as they look for the Truth.

H. L. Richard:

A final question or discussion point I will direct to Dr. Thelle and Dr. Mackenzie. We're talking here about a very slow, gradual process. You have both surely worked with numerous Americans in your time of service and you will understand that doesn't fit the American temperament very well. We want to get things done. We want to do it and accomplish it, and this slow, patient, relational approach to Buddhists is almost an affront to our national character. What do you have to say to

us? How do we deal with this massive change of paradigm? Dr. Muck is welcome to come in and defend our national character or speak more strongly against it in case you two are too polite.

Notto Thelle:

Well, is there a characteristic American out there? I don't know the American personality. I think there are so many different Americans. But, of course, you speak about one sort of stereotype which we Europeans often have of Americans. When I worked in Japan, I didn't meet those Americans. From time to time of course I did, American missionaries who were sort of salespeople. A good friend of mine had a lot of books about how to sell so and so, how to sell this and how to sell that and how to sell Christianity. I wonder if this is an American way of doing things? Is it effective? But most of the Americans I knew were very different from that.

I think Westerners are all sorts of people and we have to find our own ways and try to find out what other people are. Myself, I'm not a very aggressive person, and maybe even afraid of confrontation. This is both a strength and a weakness. But sometimes weaknesses can be good, because I tend to give myself time to react. So, I think every person has to find his or her way to approach other people. I don't think a slow way is always the way to get into dialogue. I think sometimes a frank discussion also may open up understanding. I think even stupid questions sometimes may be good questions because they give an opportunity for clearing up misunderstandings. I sometimes say to my students who are afraid of asking silly questions, "Well, just do it because silly questions are often good questions. You are asking questions that others don't dare to ask." So, I think there are so many ways of relating and maybe I should ask the Americans? Are Americans much more direct and outgoing and so on? I'm not quite sure about that.

Rory Mackenzie:

I'm not the person to ask about this. I've never been to America. In fact, I'm not sure there is such a place! Maybe Harvard is just a referencing system! But certainly, I remember George Verwer, the founder of Operation Mobilization, whom I knew quite well, visiting me in Bangkok. He stayed with us for a night and in the morning at breakfast time he asked, "How many Christians come here?" We stayed in the church, the house we used for a church. When I said fifteen, he said, "Remind me again how long have you been here?" I said six years, and he burst into tears, saying "I don't know how you can do that; I could never do that." I thought what we had done was quite reasonable for Thailand and I put the lack of growth down to my lack of ability as an evangelist, but he was certainly distressed by the whole thing.

I've known monks here for twenty odd years, and I've shared my faith with them. They've shared their understandings of Buddhism with me, and we're the best of friends. They haven't come to faith, and it's the long haul that we're in for. It's about relationships, and it's about finding belief and hope that somehow, in some way, in all of this, God is at work. Can I just tell you a little story? I went for a haircut and I discovered that the hairdresser was heavily into New Age thinking and practice and as I left I said, "Look, I'm actually going to Thailand tomorrow, but I'll get my wife to come in and she will give you a copy of Mark's Gospel which I think you will enjoy reading." So, she read Mark's Gospel and I came back from Thailand and went in for my next haircut and she said, "There you are. Listen, I read that book you gave me. I went to bed that night. I woke up sobbing in the morning as I had a dream." She described the dream where she was in a dark room at a theological college, and there was an old blind guy standing before a fire warming himself. He was pointing to three men in the shadows of the room, sitting together on a couch. She said to me, "I was there to enroll as a student of divinity. What do you make of this dream?" I said to her, "Well, it's very simple. I'm the old blind guy standing in front of the fire and I was pointing towards the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit. It's to them that you have to go." She stopped cutting my hair in amazement and I thought she is about to turn to the Lord, certainly by the time I come back for my next haircut she will be saying that she has begun to follow Jesus. That's over twenty years ago and she has not believed. Maybe by the next haircut!

H. L. Richard:

Dr. Muck, what do we do? Open dialogue that never ends—it's not an easy thing for us to embrace, is it?

None of us can bring these conversations to an absolutely satisfactory conclusion. The best thing is to keep them going, and the only way is with a certain amount of humility. (Muck)

Terry Muck:

No, it isn't easy, and one of the words I keep coming back to in the requirements for being a good and faithful Christian is humility. The fact is that none of us can bring these kinds of conversations to an absolutely satisfactory conclusion. So, the best thing to do is keep them going, and the only way you can do that is with a certain amount of humility about who we are and what we're capable of, each one of us, each one of our cultures. So, we just have to keep talking with goodwill and hopefully moving forward. **IJFM**

Buddhist-Christian Encounters

Fulfillment Theology

by Terry C. Muck

Editor's Note: This paper was written and submitted in response to questions raised during the discussion sessions during the Ralph D. Winter Lectureship in February 2021, an event that addressed the theme, "Buddhist-Christian Encounters: Today's Realities in Light of the Pioneering Work of Karl Ludvig Reichelt in China." The IJFM felt that Dr. Muck, one of the four presenters at the lectureship, provided our readership with an excellent appendix on the historic perspective of Fulfillment Theology.

The relationship of Christianity to non-Christian religions has been one of the most enduring questions in all of Christian theology. That question has three specific forms: the theological form, the dialogical form, and the missiological form. The theological version of the question might be simply stated: *How do the non-Christian religions of the world relate to Christianity?* The dialogical version of the question has a more specific, and personal form: *How should Christians relate to adherents of non-Christian religions?* The missiological version of the question gets even more specific and practical: *What goals should monitor the interaction when Christians meet and relate to non-Christians?*

Strictly speaking, Fulfillment Theology, as the name implies, answers the theological version of the question: *How do the non-Christian religions of the world relate to Christianity?* How one answers the theological question, however, has significant implications for the answer to both the dialogical and missiological questions. That is, answers to the theological question unavoidably influence answers to the dialogical and missiological forms. At the conclusion of this short paper, I will give an example of how various ways of understanding and evaluating Fulfillment Theology affect the way Christians relate to non-Christians dialogically and missiologically.

Some Useful Distinctions

Let's begin by taking note of three useful distinctions in the way the term "fulfillment" is used and understood in biblical and theological discussions.

First, biblical writers use two main Hebrew root words and two Greek root verbs for the word "fulfillment."[1] The word often expresses the sense of completeness, particularly of promises and prophecies made in the Old Testament that are fulfilled in the New, and of New Testament promises that come to be fulfilled in the ongoing life of the church. For example, the Old Testament

Terry Muck (PhD, Northwestern) is professor emeritus of World Religions at Asbury Theological Seminary. He has served as editor of Christianity Today *and Dean of the E. Stanley Jones School of World Mission at Asbury. He has been a long-time participant of The Society for Buddhist-Christian Studies, to which he brought vital leadership. He is widely published on the subject of Buddhism and religious studies and has authored along with Harold Netland and Gerald McDermott the* Handbook of Religion: A Christian Engagement with Traditions, Teachings, and Practices (2014). *Along with Frances Adeney he has also published* Christianity Encountering World Religions: The Practice of Mission in the Twenty-First Century *(Encountering Mission Series, 2009).*

promises of a Messiah to come are fulfilled in Jesus, and Jesus' promise that he would send a helper, a *parakletos,* for our aid is fulfilled in the church's collective and individual experiences of the Holy Spirit. This use of the term is often summed up in the phrase, Promise Fulfillment.

Second, the phrase Fulfillment Theory is very often a specific reference to an understanding of how the Christian church relates to the Israelites, God's chosen people. Since this relationship is central to the gospel story, several possible ways of relating have been offered:

Replacement Theology teaches that Christ and his church simply replaced Israel as the definitive people of God. This position is sometimes called supersessionism.

Dispensational Theology, on the other hand, suggests that Judaism and Christianity represent two of several different ways God has chosen to work administratively with human beings—they call these different ways of administration dispensations, or defined periods when God initiated a new type of management. These dispensations don't necessarily replace one another. In dispensational thinking, both Judaism and the Christian church, for example, continue their separate journeys and have distinctive roles to play in the end times.[2]

Covenant Theology, in its simplest form, teaches that over time God initiated different covenant relationships with humanity. Three of the covenants are often considered major by covenant theologians: (1) the redemption covenant which was an agreement among the three members of the Godhead regarding their respective roles as Father, Son, and Holy Spirit; (2) the works covenant (or Old Covenant) which God offered to his chosen people Israel based on following the Mosaic Law; and (3) the grace covenant (or New Covenant) representing the way Jesus offered salvation as a free gift of grace.

In this context, ***Fulfillment Theory*** is a form of Covenant Theology. It offers a specific way of talking about how God's first chosen people, the Israelites, continue to exist, a dynamic left uncertain in many forms of Covenant Theology. Fulfillment theologians cite the passage "I came not to destroy the law and the prophets, but to fulfill them" (Matt. 5:17), insisting that Israel continues to exist in relation to God as a spiritual people and nation, even if not as a physical people group and nation. Stated in world religion terms, then, Christianity neither destroys nor replaces Judaism, but fulfills its deepest spiritual impulses.

Third, using the biblical relationship between Judaism and Christianity as a sort of analogy, a theology called Fulfillment Theology has arisen that extrapolates the teachings of the Fulfillment Theory referencing Judaism and Christianity to all the major world religions. According to this form of Fulfillment Theology, Christ came not to destroy the world's religions but to fulfill them.

Where did this teaching come from and what does it mean?[3]

What Fulfillment Theologians Believe

Classic, full-blown Fulfillment Theology has five key elements:

1. A humanity-wide offer of salvation
2. A robust general revelation
3. A long-term progressive revelation
4. The means of salvation through Christ alone
5. A commitment to dialogical discourse.

As we shall see, there are many different forms of Fulfillment Theology, and some of the differences have to do with whether or not they stress all five of these elements and how they specifically interpret each element.

One cannot say that none of these five elements existed circa 1800 as modern missions hit their stride. Yet, as Sung Deuk Oak notes in his essay, "Edinburgh 1910, Fulfillment Theory, and Missionaries in China and Korea,"

> The early nineteenth-century Protestant missions regarded other religions as diabolical in their origin and antithetical to Christianity. Non-Christian religions were summed up as "heathenism," "false religions," or "idolatry." Evangelical missionaries, citing Romans 1:18ff, believed that the individual "heathen" was under condemnation with his sin and immorality.[4]

Of course, Promise Fulfillment was eagerly embraced, and Jesus' coming to fulfill the promises of God to His chosen peoples was similarly endorsed, although that form of fulfillment was strictly of the replacement type. Still, nothing like Fulfillment Theology existed vis-à-vis world religions among the missionaries of this era.

As the nineteenth century wore on, however, things began to change.[5] Christians learned more and more about the religions of the world, and it became difficult to dismiss everything about them as evil. Confucian ethics, Buddhist meditation, Muslim acknowledgement of one true god, to cite just a few examples, when measured against Greek values, Roman virtues, and Christian ethics did not fare too badly. By the end of the century, the common attitude, at least among mainstream protestant missionaries, was that the non-Christian religions of Asia contained much truth, and while they could not deliver the salvation offered only in Christ, they did deliver points of contact with Christian truth and could be seen as what Eusebius called *praeparatio evangelica.*[6]

Fulfillment Theology was the theological justification for this about-face change of attitude toward Christianity's major competitors. The collective fulfillment hypotheses emerged in England and Scotland in the theological works of men such as F. D. Maurice (1805–1872)[7] and the history of religion works of Max Muller (1823–1900). Maurice and his kin reminded readers of general revelation (wherever we go in the world, God has been there before us), Paul's sermon on Mars Hill, and the *logos* theologies of Johannine literature. Muller noted that historically the Nestorians had long ago influenced Chinese Mahāyāna Buddhism with Christian ideas and St. Thomas had planted the seeds of Christianity in India. By the time of the Edinburgh World Missionary Conference of 1910, Fulfillment Theology was an irresistible mission force. Commission IV of that conference, "The Missionary Message in Relation to Non-Christian Religions" championed the elements of Fulfillment Theology throughout its summary report, a report generated by answers to a ten-question survey sent to missionaries throughout the world.[8] Two questions of that survey reveal the inclinations of the surveyors toward Fulfillment Theology:

Question Five: "What attitude should the Christian preacher take toward the religion of the people among whom he labours?"

Question Six: "What are the elements in the said religion or religions which present points of contact with Christianity and may be regarded as a preparation for it?" (2)

"Christianity is not antagonistic to the other religions, but a fuller revelation of what the people instinctively groped after." (Edinburgh World Missionary Conference, 1910)

Over 200 missionaries responded in some detail to the survey. Their responses gratified the writers of the survey who freely admitted that two of their goals were to "ascertain from the body of missionaries what they found on the one hand to be really alive in the non-Christian religions," and what "had the power [in non-Christian religions] . . . of preparing the way for faith in Him [Christ]" (1). The report is then divided into five lengthy chapters on mission work to animistic religions, Chinese religions, the religions of Japan, Islam, and Hinduism. To give an idea of the kind of responses they chose to highlight, let's consider the summary of the animistic religions chapter.

It would be hard to imagine a more robust form of general revelation (and its progressive nature) than what missionaries to animistic peoples avowed in their answers to the survey questions. "Christianity is not antagonistic to the other religions, but a fuller revelation of what the people instinctively groped after" (23). "There is a modicum of truth in all religious systems . . . the missionary should look for the element of good, should foster it, and build upon it, gently leading on to the full truth" (22). The assertion that the search for salvation was universal among men and women was affirmed constantly and in many ways, e. g., "widespread is the belief in an afterlife and even in the immortality of the soul" (26). In spite of this generosity of intellectual spirit, however, there is little doubt in the minds of the missionary respondents that the means to salvation comes only through Jesus Christ. Statements like: "Christ is mightier than the devil" (30), and "The general line of testimony is that experience has deepened the belief of the workers that God dwells among men, that Christ is the only Saviour, and that the Holy Spirit sheds abroad power and consolation in the souls of believers" (36), were common and run throughout the report.

The most underdeveloped aspect of Fulfillment Theology in Edinburgh 1910 was a commitment to dialogical discourse.[9] If by dialogical discourse we mean an attitude of:

1. respect toward other religions and religious, and
2. humility toward our own understanding of the mysteries of God and God's work, combined with
3. a deep commitment to our own faith,

the only one of that triad fully evident at Edinburgh was the third one, commitment. Although one can see that respect toward the other religions and religious was developing, still, the language used of those religions betrays a lack of feeling to match the theological assertions of respect. The religions were routinely described as paganism, heathenism, superstition, witchcraft, sorcery, primitive, and uncivilized. Implicit in the make-up of attendees at the conference was a distinct lack of the second one, humility. "West is best" (and "male is best") asserted itself over and over in who was given voice and what was said. The full flowering of dialogical discourse only developed over the course of the twentieth century.

Still, in many ways, Edinburgh 1910 was the high point of what we might call classical Fulfillment Theology. This distinctive way of looking at other religions was taken up by many mission workers in India, China, East Asia, and Africa, and dominated subsequent mission conferences for decades to come. One of the most complete publications espousing the Fulfillment Theology viewpoint and perhaps the high point of this form of strategic missiological thinking was a book by J. N. Farquhar, *The Crown of Hinduism.*[10]

Farquhar's The Crown of Hinduism

J. N. Farquhar (1861–1929) was a Scot from Aberdeen who completed his studies at Oxford. He focused on India and its religions, studying with the likes of A. M. Fairbairn, Max Muller, and Monier-Williams. He decided to go to India as a mission worker in 1891. In India, Farquhar continued the life of a scholar of religions, teaching at the London Missionary Society's college at Bhowanipur, Calcutta. He eventually began work for the YMCA of India, doing evangelism and writing on Indian religions and their relationship to Christianity. The pinnacle of his work was *The Crown of Hinduism,* published in 1913. Poor health forced him to leave India in 1923, and he finished his career teaching comparative religion at the University of Manchester.

"We gladly confess these great results prove the presence of truth in each of these [religious] systems." (Farquhar)

The Crown of Hinduism embodies the principles of Edinburgh 1910's Fulfillment Theology and then some. Farquhar argued that there is truth in Hinduism, that there even may be some salvation for especially dedicated Hindus, but that Christianity is the best religion, fulfilling all that is good about Hinduism:

> The key word in Farquhar's missionary theology was "fulfillment." He did not invent the term but did much to popularize the idea that Christ came to fulfill and bring to completion not only the law and the prophets (Matthew 5:17) but all the world's higher religions. It is in this sense that Christ is the "crown" of Hinduism.[11]

Farquhar also asserted:

There is truth in Hinduism: "We gladly confess that these great and good results prove the presence of truth in each of these [religious] systems" (28). As much as anything, Farquhar was arguing for respect for the religions of the world. Having gotten to know many good Hindu men and women in his time in India, he argues that it would be foolish to deny the value of their religion in giving scope to that goodness. He extends his argument beyond Hindus to include Buddhists and Muslims, but even more:

> Every religion has given its followers at least the idea of duty and of the community, and usually also the idea of God and of worship. There has never been a religion that did not uplift men, that did not bring them nearer to God. (28)

There may even be salvation in Hinduism: "It is possible for every human being, no matter what his circumstances may be, to find his way to God, if he truly uses all the light he has" (26).[12] In this assertion, Farquhar went beyond what most of the Fulfillment Theologians of his day (i.e., the attendees at Edinburgh and the respondents to Edinburgh's survey) believed and taught. As time went on, however, this kind of thinking became more common among theologians attempting to answer the questions of the relationship of Christianity to the world's major religions. One might even say that a fissure was created between Fulfillment Theologians who held to the typical Protestant statement, "salvation by Christ alone," or the typical Roman Catholic avowal, "outside the church no salvation" *(extra ecclesiam nullu salus)* and those who suggested there might be other means of salvation.

Christianity is the best of all the religions: Still, Farquhar maintained the principle that of all the religions, Christianity is the best, the fulfilling of all of humankind's urges toward God: "Every thinking man sees clearly the superiority of the great religions over the lowest faiths. The Christian sees as distinctly the superiority of Christianity to the rest of the great religions" (32). It was this commitment to Christianity's superiority that kept Farquhar in the Fulfillment Theology camp.

The overall message of *The Crown of Hinduism* was a plea for a more generous view of this great religious system in India sometimes called Hinduism and, by extension, all the great world religions:

> Christians acknowledge fully the great and good work that has been done by each of the great religions. We gladly recognize that, in them, many saints have been trained, thousands of homes have been purified and uplifted, and multitudes of men and women have found God. (28)

This is a far cry from the "heathens" and "pagans" and "uncivilized" non-Christians of Edinburgh 1910. In claiming salvation for some, however, many Christian theologians and missiologists thought he went too far and ironically, misunderstood badly the non-Christian religion he studied the most, so-called Hinduism.[13]

Karl Reichelt's Christian/Buddhist Monasteries

In terms of practically orienting mission work to the principles of Fulfillment Theology, one of the most distinctive practitioners was Karl Ludwig Reichelt in his work with learned Buddhist and Taoist monks in China.[14] Reichelt (1877–1952) lived at a hinge of mission history, the two sides of which might be described as pre-fulfillment and fulfillment-dominant. He went to China in 1903 filled with pre-fulfillment missiological ideas not unlike what we cited above in Sung Deuk Oak's paper: Christianity is good, the other religions are bad, and never the twain shall meet. His

early experiences with Buddhist monks in their monasteries, however, proffered a different viewpoint and approach. He was usually received at Buddhist monasteries with hospitality and respect for his Christian viewpoints. He became convinced that by mimicking that hospitality and intellectual respect with the Buddhist monks, his chances of gaining a real, deep hearing of the gospel story increased dramatically. As this conviction grew, he tailored not just his missiological approach but his missiological thinking accordingly, in keeping with what was becoming his version of Fulfillment Theology.

A Commitment to a Universal Offer of Salvation

A specific Mahāyāna Buddhist teaching grabbed Reichelt's imagination early, and he referred to it often in his writings. In his book, *Truth and Tradition in Chinese Buddhism,* he calls the goal of universal salvation of all sentient beings, "the principle thought of the Chinese Mahāyāna."[15] This teaching—"The salvation of all living things *(P'u chi chung sheng)"* meets "in a remarkable manner, many of the great religious cravings of life which men in all times and all places feel more or less consciously" (1). For Reichelt this echoes the Bible's teachings about God's desire for the salvation of all. Christ, God's eternal *logos*, is at the back of God's general revelation."[16] The *logos* exists everywhere and at all times.

A Robust General Revelation

In order to better understand how Christianity and the Chinese religions, particularly Pure Land Buddhism, related to one another theologically, Reichelt embarked on a crash course in Mahāyāna Buddhism. After learning the language, he read the religious texts Mahāyāna Buddhists held dear. In studying those texts, he discovered what he saw as echoes of Christian teaching—lots of echoes. Sometimes he saw direct influences in those teachings, Buddhists learning from Christians, Christians learning from Buddhists. The more he studied, the more General Revelation became not just glimpses of God in nature and in archetypal human consciousness, but in the actual teachings of Chinese religions. Perhaps "robust" is not a strong enough word for what Reichelt saw. Christian teachings in Romans 1:19–20, Romans 2:15, Acts 14:8–18, and Acts 17:15–34 took on weightier meaning.

A Long-term Progressive Revelation

For all Fulfillment Theologians, Christianity cannot be properly understood without seeing it as a story, a narrative of God's progressive revelation to humankind. A sort of spiritual evolutionism arose, probably a response in part to Darwin's teachings which were taking the scientific world by storm at this same time. This spiritual evolutionism might be described as the survival of theological truth. That is, the "fittest" religious teachings of the world religions were found to be even better realized in the teachings of the Scriptures and the Church. Conversely, that which did not contribute to human spiritual flourishing and the flourishing of the Christian church would eventually fall away. In this way the world religions prepared the way for God's special revelations in Judaism and Jesus Christ. One of Reichelt's favorite images of this humanity-wide revelation was to call it the *logos spermatikos* after the teachings of Justin Martyr.[17]

A Reaffirmation of the Means of Salvation by Christ Alone

Yet for Reichelt, salvation comes through Christ alone, the centerpiece of both general and special revelation. All of general revelation is "only partial and fragmentary" to be fulfilled solely in Jesus Christ (46). "It is unthinkable," Reichelt says, "that man all by himself, with the general revelation as his starting-point, could rise to the full apprehension and appropriation of the light and life which the Christian church possesses" (49). Such fullness comes only with Jesus Christ. In affirming this crucial truth, Reichelt places himself dead center in traditional, orthodox Christian teaching. However, one thing changes. Instead of "winning over Buddhism in China in any outward manner" we should be striving to win "Buddhists from within" their own tradition.[18]

A Full-time Commitment to Dialogical Discourse

In a previous section we observed that of the five key tenets of Fulfillment Theology, the missionary conference at Edinburgh 1910 came up short in the fifth, the Commitment to Dialogical Discourse. The same cannot be said of Reichelt. He did not call what he did "inter-religious dialogue" but it certainly presaged all the features of what we call dialogue today. He invited Buddhist monks to come and stay at his Christian monasteries and talk freely with the Christian missioners there about questions of faith. The atmosphere was free and uncoercive. Topics of conversation were decided together, and final conclusions were not the goal of the talks. In many ways, we must consider Reichelt a pioneer of not just fulfillment-influenced missions but of the inter-religious dialogue movement that grew in force through his lifetime and the rest of the twentieth century.

Instead of winning over Chinese Buddhists in any outward manner we should be striving to win them from within their own tradition.

Hendrick Kraemer and the Christian Message in a Non-Christian World

Criticisms of Fulfillment Theology were not long in coming. The most cogent and influential of those criticisms from the conservative side of the theological spectrum came from the pen of

Hendrick Kraemer (1888–1965). Kraemer, a Dutch missiologist, was commissioned to write a book for the World Missionary Conference in Tambaram, India in 1938. His assignment:

> State the fundamental position of the Christian Church as a witness-bearing body in the modern world, relating this to different, conflicting views of the attitude to be taken by Christians towards other faiths, and dealing in detail with the evangelistic approach to the great non-Christian faiths.[19]

And he dramatically reduced Fulfillment Theology's heavy reliance on general revelation—at one point he called general revelation a "contradiction of terms" (111). General revelation, he said, cannot supply what only Jesus supplies:

> It will no more be permitted to consider undiscerningly the glimpses of revelation and the religious intuitions of mankind as a preceding and preparatory stage for the full revelation in Christ. (123)

Kraemer's objections to Fulfillment Theology are unlike the knee-jerk dismissals of the 1800s' missionaries. He argues *against* Christian attitudes of superiority. "The 'orthodox' missionary attitude requires humility."

His most focused response to this is in chapter four, "The Attitude Toward the Non-Christian Religions."[20]

Kraemer's objections to Fulfillment Theology are unlike the knee-jerk dismissals of the 1800s' missionaries mentioned above. He argues *against* Christian attitudes of superiority. He says that "the character of [Christian] faith and the nature of the divine truth of revelation" excludes attitudes of superiority (110). He argues *for* Christian attitudes of humility: "The 'orthodox' missionary attitude requires purification toward humility" (297). And he is certainly in favor of commitment:

> The only valid motive and purpose of missions is and alone can be to call men and peoples to confront themselves with God's acts of revelation and salvation for man and the world as presented in Biblical realism, and to build up a community of those who have surrendered themselves to faith in loving service of Jesus Christ. (294)

In this regard, Kraemer, in his objections to Fulfillment Theology appears to address the weaknesses of Edinburgh 1910's approaches to Dialogical Discourse. Although he does not use the language of dialogue in this area, he actually promotes that aspect of Fulfillment Theology.

But he does have criticisms—major criticisms. It seems he most objects to the direction Farquhar took Fulfillment Theology in championing salvation outside the strict bounds of "Christ alone." For example, Kraemer twice mentioned Reichelt and his work in the book:

> He praised the Norwegian missionary for interpreting Christianity to Buddhist monks but condemned any notion of Christianity as a more refined expression of Mahāyāna Buddhism . . . [yet] he agreed that Reichelt was proclaiming the Gospel in its uniqueness rather than something that grew out of Pure Land Buddhism.[21]

Instead, Kraemer focused solely on the person and work of Jesus Christ and argued that Jesus and his teachings (that is, special revelation) is the only standard we should use to evaluate non-Christian religions: "The most fruitful and legitimate way to analyse and evaluate all religions is to investigate them in the light of the revelation of Christ" (110).

Perhaps the following is the single best summary of his rejection of what he understood to be Fulfillment Theology's teachings:

> The function of natural theology [i.e., general revelation] will henceforth be, not to construe preparatory stages and draw unbroken, continuous lines of religious development ending and reaching their summit in Christ, but in the light of the Christian revelation to lay bare the dialectical condition not only of the non-Christian religions but of all the human attempts towards apprehension of the totality of existence. (125)

Jean Danielou, Karl Rahner, and Vatican II

Fulfillment Theology received a major shot in the arm when the Roman Catholic theologians attending the two year (1962–64) event called Vatican II basically adopted the tenets of the teaching in the primary document they produced having to do with non-Christian religions.[22] *Nostra Aetate,* as the document was called, turned out to be based on innovative theological work done by Karl Rahner, but the title "Father of Roman Catholic Fulfillment Theology" is probably due to Jean Danielou.

So let's begin with Danielou. Jean-Guenolé-Marie Daniélou S. J. (1905–1974) was a Roman Catholic cardinal and a French member of the Jesuit order. He was also a noted theologian and published historian and a member of the Académie Française. In 1958 he wrote a book, *The Lord of History: Reflections on the Inner Meaning of History,* in which he argued that, for Christians, all of history must be seen as a "progressive divine manifestation to humankind."[23] And

within that overall history, a special history emerges which Danielou calls "salvation history," an understanding of history unique to the Judeo-Christian, biblical tradition. For Christians, at least, there is no secular view of history. There is only a history used as a vehicle for God's ongoing revelation to all of humankind and a history specific to Christians that shows what God has done through Israel and Jesus Christ.

Since non-Christian religions are a part of general history, they must also have elements of God's revelation to humankind embedded within them. They are not part of God's special salvation history, a history limited to Judaism and Christianity, but the religions' revelations of God are real and true and beneficial to all humanity. Still, they "were unable in the past, and remain unable today, to lead to the saving faith which can only come from God's gracious intervention in the lives of people."[24] To become useful in a salvific way they must be fulfilled in Jesus Christ and Christianity.

Rahner continues this type of thinking. In 1961, he gave a lecture that eventually was published in volume five of his *Theological Investigations* as a chapter entitled, "Christianity and the Non-Christian Religions."[25] In summary, Rahner begins with the assertion that God wants all human beings to be saved, such that even the nature we live in (including the religions) is graced. Rahner then goes on to argue that since grace must be embodied in order for human beings to embrace it, and since the world religions are part of nature broadly conceived, then the world religions can, and do, embody God's grace. The religions can embody grace and thus be part of the ways of salvation, but only because of what God did and continues to do through Jesus Christ. Thus, adherents of other religions can be saved, although they may not know that the reason they can be is because of Jesus. Rahner, controversially, calls such people, "anonymous Christians."

Non-Christian religions must also have elements of God's revelation to humankind embedded within them.

Danielou and Rahner both heavily influenced Vatican II thinking about the non-Christian religions. The council did not go as far as Rahner, but they went a long way. They acknowledged that

> there is genuine revelation in other traditions or "rays of truth"; but they're just that, "rays," and not enough to enable the full sunlight of God's saving grace to be felt. So, revelation through the religions, yes; but salvation, no.[26]

Vatican II left many questions unanswered, but opened the door for Fulfillment Theology to become perhaps the dominant voice in the Roman Catholic Church's inter-religious theological debate.

So What Are We To Think of Fulfillment Theology Today?

In the first quarter of the 21st century, it is safe to say that Fulfillment Theology is still on the table of theological options when answering the questions raised by the world religions vis-à-vis Christianity: "How do the non-Christian religions of the world relate to Christianity?"

A progressive theologian, Paul Knitter, considers it one of four main theological answers to the question, along with the Replacement Model, the Mutuality Model, and the Acceptance Model. An ecumenical theologian, Veli-Matti Karkkanien, also devotes significant space to it in his 2003 book, *An Introduction to the Theology of Religions*. Many claim it to be the dominant model among mainstream Protestant Christian theologians. Two evangelical theologians of religion, Gerald McDermott and Harold Netland, also consider it in their book, *A Trinitarian Theology of Religions: An Evangelical Proposal,* even though Fulfillment Theology does not in any sense dominate evangelical theology of religions which is still heavily tied to the Replacement Model.[27] Of course, these three books take different positions on the faithfulness and efficacy of Fulfillment Theology as a Christian theological option, but it is treated as a serious option by all three.

Of course, some vociferously object to Fulfillment Theology. The position taken by mission workers in the 1800s—that non-Christian religions are diabolical in their entirety and antithetical to Christianity—is still held by many on the conservative side of the present-day theological spectrum. It is a position ably represented at a pastoral level by men such as John MacArthur, pastor of Grace Community Church in Sun Valley, California. MacArthur recently said that he

> wouldn't fight for the religious freedom [of non-Christian religions] because I won't fight for idolatry.… Why would I fight for the devil to have as many false religions as possible and all of them be available to everyone?[28]

Ironically, strong objection to Fulfillment Theology can also be found on the Christian left among progressive theologians. Whereas the objections from the right center on the idea that Fulfillment Theology gives way *too much* theological and pastoral respect to non-Christian religions (even, in some cases, postulating that one can be saved by them), progressive

theologians argue against Fulfillment Theology because it gives *too little* sincere respect to non-Christian religions. The argument goes something like this:

- Adherents of Fulfillment Theology feel they have come a long way from total rejection of all aspects of non-Christian religions, arriving at a place where they look for, and find, God's truth in many of their teachings.
- Many progressive Christian theologians, however, counter that while this may, from their side of the spectrum, seem like a very positive move in the direction of respect for non-Christians and their beliefs and practices, it is still a put-down to be seen as inadequate when measured against the highest truths of the Christian gospel.
- A further objection put forward by progressive Christians regarding Fulfillment Theology is that it encourages borrowing from other faiths, something that can be seen as a "colonizing" of their religious practices and their religious beliefs. This, too, can be evaluated from two different directions. It can be seen as a positive judgment: "I think enough of your meditative practice to try them myself in my Christian context." Or it can be seen as an attempt to Christianize a practice that is properly speaking Buddhist (or Hindu or Muslim or whatever).

Still, in between these two positions, conservative and progressive, a large central cohort has emerged that embraces at least one of the many variants of Fulfillment Theology as the best of the options we seem to be offered in deciding on a faithful and effective theological approach to non-Christian religions. Let me be more specific about what this can mean by evaluating the five elements of Fulfillment Theology.

Progressive theologians argue against Fulfillment Theology because it gives too little sincere respect to non-Christian religions.

Fulfillment Theology: A Summary

How, then, would a Fulfillment Theologian answer our fundamental question, *How do the non-Christian religions of the world relate to Christianity?* He or she would begin with an assumption that underlies all variants of Fulfillment Theology—that *God desires the salvation of all human beings.* In his first letter to Timothy, Paul asserts that "God our savior . . . wants all men to be saved."[29] He does not say that all men will be saved. Other New Testament texts such as the Parable of the Wheat and the Tares and the Parable of the Sheep and the Goats claim that at the end of time there will be both saved and unsaved human beings.[30] Paul simply states that God *wants* salvation for all. This assumption places Fulfillment Theology square in the middle between theologians who argue that God has determined only a chosen few will be saved and theologians who assume that eventually every human being will be saved. To be clear: Fulfillment Theologians are here making an assumption about what God *desires,* not about what actually happens on Judgment Day.

That God desires all human beings will be saved is consistent with the picture the New Testament draws of God. The Johannine literature especially claims "God is love."[31] It is unreasonable to believe that a loving God would not want everyone to be saved. Conversely, it is reasonable that God would not automatically save everyone. Human beings were created to either choose to follow God and accept God's graceful offer of salvation or to eschew God's sovereignty and reject the gift of salvation.

Further, it is unreasonable to think that if God wants everyone to be saved that he would not provide vehicles everywhere that would enable that salvation. Thus, Fulfillment Theologians typically have a very robust *General Revelation.* There is not a place on earth where God and God's creative work is not visible. The Psalmist lauds this ubiquity:

> Where can I go from your Spirit?
> Where can I flee from your presence?
> If I go to the heavens you are there.
> If I make my bed in the depths [of the sea] you are there.
> If I rise on the wings of the dawn, If I settle on the far side of the sea, even there your hand will guide me, your right hand will hold me fast.
> If I say, "Surely the darkness will hide me and the light become night around me," even the darkness will not be dark to you; the night will shine like the day for darkness is as light to you.[32]

This ubiquitous presence is not at all neutral. It is a witness to God's greatness and goodness:

> What may be known about God is plain to them, because God has made it plain to them. For since the creation of the world God's invisible qualities—his power and divine nature—have been clearly seen, being understood from what has been made, so that men are without excuse.[33]

This kind of global revelation of God and God's nature has been a common feature of orthodox Christian theology. What distinguishes the robustness of Fulfillment Theologians recognition of truth, however, is their willingness to entertain truth claims globally in other cultures, in human philosophies not directly influenced by Christian thinking, and, especially, in other religions. Truth is truth wherever it might be found—"All truth is God's truth" is the common catchphrase.

It is the acknowledgement of truth in the other religions that distinguishes Fulfillment Theology's answer to our question—*How do the non-Christian religions of the world relate to*

Christianity?—from other theological answers. It means that even though the claim that there is truth in other religions is quickly followed by the claim that there is also much error in other religions, the Fulfillment Theology embrace gives the non-Christian religions a cache they have not traditionally been afforded. The truth claim means that interactions with non-Christian religions—religious interactions, cultural interactions, personal interactions—suddenly become complex rather than simple. This provides a careful analysis against biblical truth, not just the automatic dismissal of a false, evil religion. It posits even with the expectation of finding truth, since, for the Fulfillment Theologian, God has everywhere, always gone before us, even in the non-Christian religions.

God has always gone before us, even in the non-Christian religions.

Fulfillment Theologians have a further insight regarding General Revelation. They accept without question that God's revelation is ongoing and progressive. That is, not only does God's revelation fill all of spatial reality, it fills all of temporal reality as well—past, present, and future. God's revelation to humankind did not end with the final jot and tittle of biblical truth, but continues to our very day, much of it enabled by the sending of the *paraclete,* God's Holy Spirit. And, for Fulfillment Theologians, that continuing revelation is part of an overarching story of God's reaching out to human beings, a story that includes non-Christian religions. This is where the word "fulfillment" finds its most important meaning. The non-Christian religions are not destroyed by Christianity, but fulfilled by Jesus Christ and the Christian narrative. Of course, the error in non-Christian religions must be acknowledged and fall away. But the truth in non-Christian religions must also be acknowledged and continued in Christian teaching.

The progressive revelation that characterizes Fulfillment Theology means all of human history is a single story of God reaching out to humankind with a grace-filled desire to make right what was lost in Eden. "All history is a progressive divine manifestation to humankind."[34] Thus, the missionary urge for Christians is a bringing together of the religions from within to form one continuous story, rather than an elimination of them via an external attack from without. We learn from one another. We join hands with one another, and, in Christ, help build God's kingdom on earth.

The important phrase in that last sentence is "in Christ." Fulfillment Theologians hold that the only means to salvation is through Jesus Christ. For most, what God did through Jesus Christ to save humanity is well known and embraced. For some, it may not be known. What Karl Rahner called "anonymous Christians" may be saved through lights of their own; they may not know that their salvation would be impossible without what God did through Jesus Christ. But salvation comes only through Jesus Christ, whether known about or not.

It is ironic that two of the four characteristics of Fulfillment Theology we have examined so far are about salvation. Ironic, because Fulfillment Theology is really more about truth than salvation. Its position on salvation is classic textbook, historical orthodoxy. God offers salvation to all and salvation is possible only through Jesus Christ. The theological innovations regarding Fulfillment Theology have to do with truth, with God's revelations to humankind. Fulfillment Theologians argue that God has an insatiable appetite to reveal the divine self to all creation, humanity and the religions included.

The final characteristic of Fulfillment Theology has to do with the way Christians relate to people of other religions. We must exhibit a skill that has been a hit or miss feature of personal interaction—dialogue. We call this Dialogical Discourse to distinguish it from some of the forms of dialogue advocated in formal settings. Instead, Fulfillment Theologians advocate a more general way of relating to adherents of non-Christian religions. "Dialogue" in this sense means a cooperative search for truth and a reciprocal sharing of experiences. If there is truth in other religions, then the only way for Christians to fully understand and evaluate it is to engage in dialogue with those for whom that truth has the most meaning. That kind of dialogue, a method of discourse, has three main features.

First, it can only occur if we have a high level of respect for our partners in the dialogue. If their religions contain some of God's truth, then even if it is accompanied by much error, we must approach the Other with a respect that will not throw out the theological babies with the cultural bath waters.

Second, dialogical discourse can only avoid the twin snares of triumphalism and exclusivism if we have a high level of humility about our own knowledge. We do not know it all and, more importantly, our religious traditions are not perfect. We have far more to learn than we have capacity to learn it. Much of the content of what we have to learn is about God, who by definition exceeds the limitations of time and space to which we are restricted. Humility is essential and only occurs when we are willing to say, "I must have been wrong."

Third, commitment is also required. One of the most damaging features of some modern approaches to dialogue is the canard that one cannot both participate in dialogue and have a high level of commitment to the truth of one's own religion. Commitment, it is said, reduces the amount of respect and humility one can have in the dialogue. Wrong. In fact, the exact opposite is true of dialogues. The best dialogues involve fully committed participants who can honestly share their religion's truths as they understand them.

Dialogical discourse does not lead to final answers but to a willingness to engage in ongoing discussions for as long as it takes to establish and nurture relationships with members of non-Christian religious traditions. Dialogue, it may be said, never ends. Dialogue, faithfully carried out, can move us and our partners closer and closer to truth, but we never really arrive. A dialogical discussion is a never-ending discussion.

As it turns out, Fulfillment Theology creates a habitable ground somewhere between total replacement theory and religious perennialism, the belief that all religions can be reduced to a finite set of commitments common to all human beings and cultures. As such, it enables Christians to open themselves to aspects of God's revelations, even those that reside in other religions, without fudging on wholehearted commitment to our firm belief that our religion is the right one. Dialogue is not only enhanced by honest sharing of such absolute commitments, but it can only occur in such contexts. It is not in spite of, but because of those commitments, that the ongoing, never-ending conversation continues.

We need to admit that although we continue to embrace "salvation through Jesus Christ alone," we are just not sure—perhaps we are not meant to be sure—who is saved and who is not.

Conclusion

For whatever reasons, the last two hundred years have seen what Karl Jaspers called an Axial Age when it comes to world religion. Jaspers' Axial Age was circa 800 BCE to 200 BCE; ours from circa 1800 CE to 2000 CE and beyond. Call it Axial Age II. Whereas Axial Age I created the conditions for the rise of new and revised religions themselves (i.e., Hinduism, Buddhism, Confucianism, Taoism, Judaism, Christianity, and eventually, Islam), discrete religions that increasingly saw the world in global terms, Axial Age II has focused on a change in the way we view relationships among adherents of the different world religions. With religions no longer limited to tribal groups and with religions able to leap across cultural boundaries in a single bound, a new way of looking at humankind became necessary. In addition to identifying humans and their groups as tribal and racial and ethnic and culture-based, a new category emphasizing the solidarity of all humanity became necessary. Humankind, humanity, and *homo sapiens* (the biological and evolutionary term) are words that made reference to this solidity. And as Axial Age II principles take hold, Axial Age II promises to be as world changing as Axial Age I has been.

What has changed? Or, since we are still in the midst of Axial Age II, it might be better to say, *What is changing?* The *terms of engagement* among peoples of different religions have changed. Whereas those terms used to be antagonistic and exclusionary, and then became competitive and market-driven, they are now becoming dialogic and global. The *means of relating* to adherents of different religions have added to the tried and true means (preaching, publishing, and witnessing) an emphasis on dialogue that demands respect for others, humility about oneself, and honesty in individual and group commitments.

And the *goals of inter-religious relationships* increasingly focus on mutuality and reciprocity. Metaphors that used to be seen as sure signs of theological liberalism—we are all on a religious journey up the same mountain; we are like blind men feeling different parts of a single elephant; we are parts of a broken mirror seeking to be put back together again—now are beginning to make sense, especially in contexts of religious plurality which seem to admit no other possible way of creating the conditions of faith, hope, and love.

Fulfillment Theology is the theology of Axial Age II. As we have seen above, it began as a way of recasting the relationship between two of the Axial Age I religions, the Middle Eastern religions of Judaism and Christianity. From there it spread to China where the Nestorians and then Karl Ludvig Reichelt, among others, used its principles to describe and prescribe relationships among Buddhists, Taoists, and Christians. In India it was used by J. N. Farquhar to propose a possible way of understanding indigenous Indian religions (Hinduism?) and its relationships to the foreign religions of Christianity and Islam. A missions conference at Edinburgh in 1910 distilled Fulfillment Theology principles from what it was hearing from its missionaries in Africa and Asia (and among indigenous peoples everywhere), utilizing a growing body of theological work from the United Kingdom. Roman Catholic theologians such as Jean Danielou and Karl Rahner formalized the principles in ways acceptable to the

Magisterium, such that it became the foundational way of inter-religious theological thinking at Vatican II. And mainstream Protestants in the West adopted it as its most characteristic way of conceiving Christian ways of relating to non-Christian religious traditions.

Perhaps the most telling sign that Fulfillment Theology is the theology of Axial Age II is not that it has been accepted uniformly as a new kind of orthodoxy, but that it has been seen as a mere theological jumping off place for a host of variants. Rather than call it Fulfillment Theology, a better term is Fulfillment Theologies. Religious Pluralists have embraced Fulfillment Theology's commitment to religious diversity and proposed *avant garde* ways of extending God's offer of salvation even beyond the salvation offered in Jesus Christ. Religious Conservatives have begun to embrace Fulfillment Theologies' insistence on religious particularity as a way of maintaining historic Christian orthodoxy in the face of multi-cultural conditions that can make such particularities problematic. Indeed, the variants have proliferated in ways similar to the ways virus variants proliferate, in this case theological mutations designed to better penetrate target audiences with the gospel. The core teachings remain: A universal offer of salvation. A robust and progressive general revelation. A primacy to God's offer of salvation through Jesus Christ. A commitment to dialogical discourse.

Fulfillment Theologies have the potential to teach us the lessons that may very well enable us to survive as religious entities in cultures that are increasing secular and anti-religious. If the religions of the world continue on a course that creates violence and division, then they will continue to be seen as needless adherences to dead and dying traditions. If, on the other hand, they can be seen as useful—indeed essential—to helping create and enforce commitments to peace and justice and human flourishing, then our future brightens. As Christians, the path to growing God's kingdom on earth leads through the unfamiliar terrain of compromise and ambivalence. Perhaps we will need to admit that, although we see ourselves as part of a single spiritual human narrative that ends in a Heaven accessed only by Jesus Christ, it may be that we cannot get there as fully and meaningfully without the spiritual input of all humanity. Perhaps we will need to admit that although we continue to embrace "salvation through Jesus Christ alone," we are just not sure—perhaps we are not meant to be sure—who is saved and who is not. For now, the story continues and we are a part of it. Fulfillment Theologies are a way of insuring that we remain essential to the human story. **IJFM**

Endnotes

[1] Hebrew: *male* (H4848) and *kalah* (H3983). Greek: *anapleroo* and *ekpleroo*.

[2] The technical term for "end times" is the Greek word *eschaton,* which refers to a future described variously in the teachings of several world religions (both Abrahamic and non-Abrahamic), which teach that world events will reach a climax, often including a judgment and an afterlife.

[3] We will note several different definitions of Fulfillment Theology throughout beginning here with the one offered by Veli-Matti Karkkainen, *An Introduction to the Theology of Religions* (IVP 2003): "Since Christianity is considered to be the highest religion, other religions' search for truth and salvation can find fulfillment in Christ and Christian religion." 103.

[4] Sung Deuk Oak, "Edinburgh 1910, Fulfillment Theory, and Missionaries in China and Korea," in *Journal of Asian and Asian American Theology* 9 (March 2009): 29–51.

[5] One of the best resources narrating this change is Kenneth Cracknell, *Justice, Courtesy and Love: Theologians and Missionaries Encountering World Religions, 1846–1914* (Epworth, 1995).

[6] "Preparation for the Gospel" (Greek: Εὐαγγελικὴ προπαρασκευή, Euangelikē proparaskeuē), commonly known by its Latin title *Praeparatio evangelica,* was a work of Christian apologetics written by Eusebius in the early part of the fourth century AD.

[7] F. D. Maurice, *The Religions of the World and Their Relations to Christianity* (J. W. Parker 1847).

[8] *Report of Commission IV of the World Missionary Conference at Edinburgh in 1910: The Missionary Message in Relation to Non-Christian Religions* (Fleming H. Revell, 1910). References to page numbers are in parentheses in the text.

[9] The word "dialogue" was not commonly used to describe interactions among people in this era. We use it here and elsewhere acknowledging the anachronistic problem but suggesting that its use helpfully connects the past and present.

[10] J. N. Farquhar, *The Crown of Hinduism* (Oxford, 1913). References to page numbers are in parentheses in the text.

[11] Eric Sharpe, "John Nichol Farquhar," in *Biographical Dictionary of Christian Missions* (Macmillan, 1998), 208.

[12] See Acts 10:34–35.

[13] See H. L. Richard, editor, *Cultural Gaps: Benjamin Robinson's Experience with Hindu Traditions* (Littleton, CO: William Carey Publishing 2020). Two scholarly works on the form Fulfillment Theology took in India: Martin Maw, *Visions of India: Fulfillment Theory, the Aryan Race Theory, and the Work of British Protestant Missionaries in Victorian India* (Peter Lang, 1990); Paul Hedges, *Preparation and Fulfillment: A History and Study of Fulfillment Theology in Modern British Though in the Indian Context* (Peter Lang, 2001).

[14] Karl Reichelt wrote a great deal, but mostly in Norwegian. Three of his books have been translated into English: *Religion in Chinese Garments* (James Clarke, 1951 [1923]), *Truth and Tradition in Chinese Buddhism* (Munshiram Manoharlal, 2001 [1928]) and *Meditation and Piety in the Far East* (James Clarke, 2003 [1954]). Reichelt didn't use the analytic language of either Fulfillment Theology or Interreligious Dialogue, but made significant contributions to both through his practical mission work.

[15] Reichelt, *Truth and Tradition,* 1.

[16] Reichelt, *Meditation and Piety,* 32.

[17] The clearest statement of Reichelt's theological principles in English is in his book, *Meditation and Piety,* 13–59.

[18] Reichelt, *Truth and Tradition,* 7.

[19] Hendrick Kraemer, *The Christian Message in a Non-Christian World* (Kregel, 1963 [1938]), v. References to page numbers are in parentheses in the text.

[20] I recommend an analysis of Kraemer's work by Christopher James in his blog. In my comments I have drawn from his summary, although my conclusions are different from those of the author: Christopher B. James, "Hendrik Kraemer's 'The Christian Message in a Non-Christian World' (1938): Summary," *Jesus Dust* (blog), accessed on March 7, 2021, http://www.jesusdust.com/2012/06/summary-of-hendrik-kraemers-christian.html.

[21] Rory Mackenzie, *God, Self and Salvation in a Buddhist Context* (Wide Margin, 2017), 13.

[22] Paul Knitter, in his book, *Introducing Theologies of Religions* (Orbis, 2002), framed his discussion of Fulfillment Theology this way: Fulfillment Theology "offers a theology that will give equal weight to two foundational Christian convictions . . . : that God's love is universal, extending to all peoples, but also that God's love is particular, made real in Jesus Christ." 63.

[23] Jean Danielou, *The Lord of History: Reflections on the Inner Meaning of History* (Longmans, Green 1958), 105.

[24] Jacques Dupuis, *Toward a Christian Theology of Religious Pluralism* (Orbis, 1997), 135. See Dupuis full discussion of Danielou in this regard on pages 130–143.

[25] Karl Rahner, "Christianity and the Non-Christian Religions," *Theological Investigations Volume V* (Helicon, 1966), 115–134.

[26] Knitter, *Introducing Theologies of Religions,* 77.

[27] Gerald McDermott and Harold Netland, *A Trinitarian Theology of Religions: An Evangelical Proposal* (Oxford, 2014).

[28] Quoted in a story online in *The Christian Post,* entitled, "John MacArthur: 'I won't fight for religious liberty because I won't fight for idolatry,'" accessed March 6, 2021.

[29] 1 Timothy 2:4.

[30] Matthew 13:24–30 and Matthew 25:31–46, respectively.

[31] 1 John 4:7–21

[32] Psalm 139:7–12

[33] Romans 1:19–20.

[34] Jean Danielou, quoted in Jacques Dupuis, *Toward a Christian Theology of Religious Pluralism* (Orbis, 1997), 134.

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Phil Parshall has challenged us to constantly keep on asking, "How can we do it better, wiser, and deeper?" He persevered and lived among the most neglected, suffering Muslims on Earth . . . through wars, famine, and floods.

Greg Livingstone, founder, Frontiers

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Connecting with Muslims

KENNETH NEHRBASS AND MARK WILLIAMS (Editors)

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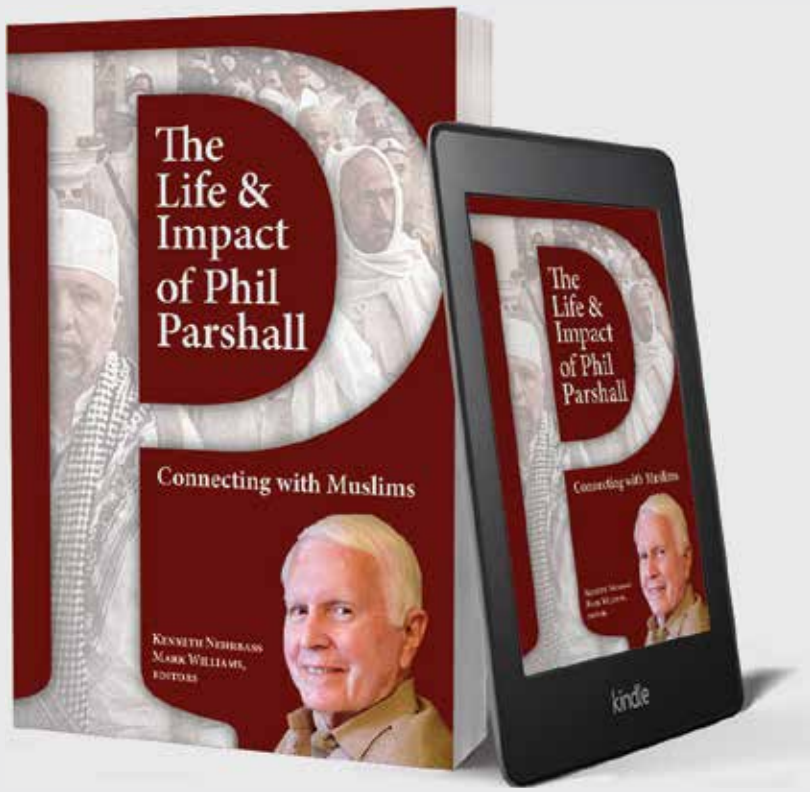

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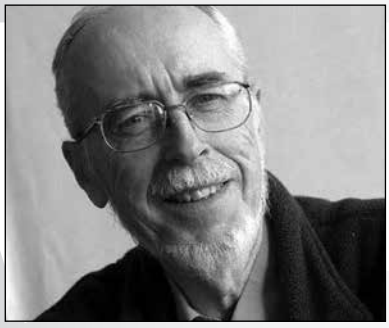
Buddhist-Christian Pilgrimages

My Pilgrimage in Christian-Buddhist Encounter: Lessons for Today's Practitioners

by Notto R. Thelle

Editor's Note: This autobiographical account was originally presented at the Ralph D. Winter Lectureship in February 2021, under the theme, "Buddhist-Christian Encounters: Today's Realities in Light of the Pioneering Work of Karl Ludvig Reichelt in China." Each of the four missiologists who presented was asked to share his pilgrimage and to receive responses from the others.



Notto R. Thelle is professor emeritus of the University of Oslo, where he taught ecumenics and missiology from 1986 to 2006. Before that he served as a missionary for sixteen years in Japan (1969–1985), involved in research and interfaith dialogue in what he calls the "borderland" where faith meets faith. Most of the time he served as Associate Director of the NCC Center for the Study of Japanese Religions in Kyoto (1974–1985). He has published some pioneer research concerning Buddhist-Christian relations in Japan and China, in addition to Norwegian textbooks and translations of Buddhist and Eastern traditions. He has written a number of books and essays in Norwegian on the dialogue with Eastern traditions and alternative forms of Western spirituality, and his treatise on Christian spirituality, Who Can Stop the Wind: Travels in the Borderland Between East and West, *has been translated into English.*

The Way and the Wind

The first five years of my life I grew up at Tao Fong Shan outside Hong Kong, "The Mountain of the Tao Wind" or "Christ Wind." So, to some extent, my pilgrimage with Buddhism began in my childhood. Buddhist pilgrims came from all over China with the fragrance of incense in their robes. They greeted us with deep bows and clasped hands. They had brands on their shaven heads as a sign that they had cut their ties to the world and were now following the Buddha Way in search of wisdom.

Some of them abandoned the monastic habit after a time and let their hair grow. They found a new confidence in their belief that God's grace was stronger than the karmic consequences and decided to follow the Christ Way rather than the Buddha Way. Others realized that Christianity did not alter their lives at all—the Christian systems of thought could not compare with the philosophical reflection and meditative depth of Buddhism.

The few years of my childhood would hardly have been more than a distant dream if I did not have the privilege of returning to the East as an adult, this time to Japan. For sixteen years (1969-1985) I was involved in research and interfaith dialogue there, working as Associate Director of the NCC Center for the Study of Japanese Religions in Kyoto. Buddhism was the main focus of study and dialogue, but I also had the opportunity to have close connections with other Eastern religions, Shinto, and numerous new faiths.[1] In addition, I was responsible for various types of pastoral work in other communities.

The experiences in Japan and the subsequent years of study, reflection and dialogue in the borderland where faith meets faith has been one of the great privileges of my life, a spiritual pilgrimage where I am still wondering about the new landscapes that may appear beyond the next turn of the path. I can only share a few moments of such encounters.

Mission and Apostasy

During my time at high school, I was fascinated by Henrik Ibsen's great play *Emperor and Galilean,* where the emperor Julian the Apostate is the main protagonist. Ibsen portrays the young ruler as a zealous witness to the Christian faith, who seeks to defeat the old religion by undermining it from within. He wanted to conquer the teachers of pagan wisdom by sitting at their feet, following them into their own world, and wrestling the weapons from their grasp:

> Wrestling with the lions! … It is God's will that I should seek out Libanios [the teacher of wisdom]—worm from him his arts and his learning—strike the unbelievers with their own weapons—strike, strike like Paul—conquer like Paul in the cause of the Lord!

What was missing in my encounter with Buddhism was a depth in my faith.

My own background had nurtured my interest in Buddhism. I was fascinated by Reichelt's vision that the deepest aspirations in Buddhism pointed to Christ, and his wish to lead Buddhists "on internal paths" to Him who was the Way and the Life.

In my youthful dreams I would do like the young prince Julian, I wanted to enter the world of Buddhist wisdom, wrest their skill and learning from them, and "strike them down" with their own weapons. In my immature zeal, I failed to recognize the historical fact that it was Julian himself who was conquered by the pagan wisdom and became "the Apostate" Emperor who used his position to conquer the Galilean.

I tell this with some embarrassment. But the story remains as a constant reminder that an honest encounter with Buddhism or other religions and ideologies is risky in the sense that one may discover one day that the other has undermined your commitment and perhaps even "conquered" your faith.

Unprepared for Encounter

When I eventually arrived in Japan as a missionary, it was a shock to discover that I was unprepared for the encounter with Buddhism. It was easy to see that Buddhism had a hard time in Japan: it is primarily a funeral religion, a watered-down piety based on customs and mixed with folk religious practices; people are Buddhists without knowing what Buddhism is. But there are also depths of faith and religious experience which not only present a *positive* challenge to one's faith but may also be a stumbling block.

As a missionary, I brought along much of the best in Norwegian Christian life. I had grown up in the pietistic tradition which was fairly generous and tolerant. My own home was nourished by genuine faith and commitment to missionary work. I went through theological studies, accompanied by the usual stages of fascination and crisis—doubt, uncertainty, and finally clarity. But I soon discovered that my Norwegian background had not equipped me to encounter Buddhism in a meaningful way. The problem was not primarily lack of knowledge—what I knew about Buddhism, could easily be enhanced by further studies. What was missing was the dimension of *depth* in my faith, something that would be capable of encountering what Rudolf Otto has called the "almost incomprehensible experiential world" of Mahāyāna Buddhism—at least Mahāyāna at its best.

The only way forward was to set out on a journey, seeking to penetrate more deeply into Buddhism. I became a student at Otani University in Kyoto, belonging to the Pure Land Buddhist tradition. I engaged in spiritual dialogues with Buddhist friends and teachers, meditated under Buddhist masters, took part in pilgrimages, or just sat in silence while people worshiped.

Is it Buddhism or Christianity that Is Raining?

I shall never forget my first meeting with a Zen master in Kyoto.

> "Why have you come here?" he asked. "You Christians too have meditation and prayer!"

I answered that we did indeed possess these things, but that I wanted to see Buddhism from within; and Buddhism surely had something to teach us Christians too.

> "But why on earth are you so keen to learn about Buddhism —or indeed about Christianity?"

I must admit that I no longer felt quite so self-assured . . .

> "It is raining outside tonight," continued the master.

We sat in silence and listened. The rain fell gently on the moss and herbs in the monastery garden. Then, suddenly, there came the impossible question:

> "Is it Buddhism or Christianity that is raining?"

My thoughts darted around in the silence. But the rain gave me no answer.

> "It is quite simply raining," he commented with a slight smile. "This is a question of *being.* All your theoretical thoughts about Buddhism and Christianity are separating you from the simple and fundamental matter: *to be.*"

This was the first time it dawned upon me that faith could separate me from life, or rather, that speculations and pious explanations could build walls that shut out reality. Perhaps my faith would have to be demolished if I were to become a true Christian. And if the encounter with Christ did not help me *to be* in a way that was true, had I in fact encountered him?

Empty Explanations

This master had studied the Bible, and one day he put me to the test:

> "The Sermon on the Mount says that we are not to worry about tomorrow. What does that really mean?"

What an opportunity for a testimony, I thought. I began to tell him about God's loving care for us. He is our father, and we are the children he looks after.

> "I know that," he interrupted. "But what does it mean?"

I attempted to express myself more clearly:

> "We believe in God's providence. We have nothing to fear. Jesus compared this to the lilies in the field and the birds of heaven . . ."

Again, he interrupted me:

> "Yes, I know all that, but what does it mean?"

Gently but ruthlessly, the surface of all my explanations was peeled back to reveal mere theology, theories and empty words. His point was not to humble me or to undermine my commitment to Christ. He just wanted to know the reality behind the words. How could I express basic Christian insights without theories, pious words, and intelligent explanations?

His point was not to undermine my commitment to Christ. He just wanted to know the reality behind the words. How could I express basic Christian insights without theories and pious words?

Forgetting God?

One day, the master told me how I should enter the hall of meditation:

> "When you go into the hall, you must lay aside all your thoughts and ideas and concepts. Leave your theology behind you. Forget God!"

I pondered these words. Is this possible? And is it right? Eventually, I concluded that this paradoxical action could be profoundly Christian. A Buddhist too must lay aside all his ideas—about Buddha, about enlightenment, about the path to salvation. He must (as it were) abandon Buddha at the entrance to the meditation hall. But the first thing he does on entering is to bow reverently before the statue of Buddha in the hall: he must forget Buddha, but Buddha is there. A Christian entering the meditation hall must lay aside all his theology and bid God farewell outside the meditation hall. But God is there when one enters—as near to us as our own breathing and heartbeat. Was that what Paul wanted to say in his Areopagos speech—"In Him we live and move and have our being"?

I am not saying that words are meaningless. Language is a wonderful instrument which can point to a reality beyond the boundaries of words. But it is too easy for us to succumb to a superstition about words and concepts, forgetting that there is indeed an *unutterable* dimension that lies beyond all our words. The mystery is situated between the *word* and that which is *unsaid*. It cannot be contained within our systems. It can only be praised in stuttering human words. If we are too keen to analyze it and define it, it crumbles away between our fingers.

Shaking Foundations

My early experiences with Buddhism in Japan led me into a critical process where I did not always know where I belonged. As a missionary, I was supposed to have the answers but discovered that I offered answers to questions that no one had put. Sometimes my Buddhist friends gave me insights that were truer than those I had read about in my books. They drew on sources unknown to me, and I had to ask myself whether these had any connection with my own sources. How could I search for their wisdom without abandoning my commitment to Christ?

In my dreams I tried to tell myself about the coming crisis. I could go from room to room in my childhood home, pour gasoline on the furniture and set fire to it. I stood in the pulpit in my underwear, trying to get hold of the manuscript of a sermon which had never been completed. The ground was cracking up in violent convulsions and there was no safe place to stand. I was on a ship tossed by the waves, terrified of the unknown forces that pulled me downward. Terrible dreams.

Then I remembered the stories my father told when I was a child: dramatic stories about typhoons over Hong Kong. Every time, we were astonished by the strange interplay between the forces of nature and the ten-thousand-tonners. The vessels that cut their moorings and put out to sea, into the teeth of the storm, survived; but some of the boats that remained in harbor, attached to their anchor chains and their moorings, were left as rows of wrecks along the harbor wall.

I was inspired by that to see that sometimes, God calls people to go out into the storm, where they must sink or swim—better to capsize with honor than to be hurled against the harbor wall and crushed! Now the storm rages over you. But after you have been whirled around by unknown forces for some time, life takes on a new meaning. Precisely at the point where you fear that the powers of chaos would suck you down into the depths, you realize something of which you had never before been completely certain: you believe. You feel like the first day of creation: out of chaos, newly created life is born.

I had the feeling the deeper I tried to grasp the secrets of Buddhism, the more I was inspired to investigate new dimensions of my Christian faith—not new, but neglected in my tradition.

When I later read Douglas Copeland's *Generation X,* I was stricken by the protagonist's discovery after a spiritual crisis, that "there is still something to believe in after there is nothing more to believe in." I might quote Paul Tillich who in one of his books writes that "The courage to be has its roots in the God who appears when God disappears in the anxiety of doubt."[2]

My early experiences somehow gave me a new freedom of openness and curiosity to combine my studies of Buddhism and Eastern traditions with an expectation that it might deepen my own understanding of the depth of Christianity. Somehow, I had the feeling that the deeper I tried to grasp the secrets of Buddhism, the more I was inspired to investigate new dimensions of my Christian faith—not new, indeed, but neglected in my tradition. It is a strange paradox that two incompatible religious or philosophical systems like Buddhism and Christianity have such a strong mutual attraction. Two quite contradictory systems of thought—at least when it comes to central issues—seem to come close, challenging and inspiring each other to understand what it means to be a true human being.

I tried to share some of my insights in two small books, *Who Can Stop the Wind?*[3] and *Dear Siddhartha.* The first book is not a sophisticated theoretical discussion of commonalities and differences, but a report about encounters and experiences in the borderland where faith meets faith. The other is a follow-up, a collection of letters and stories of encounters between people from the East and the West. Both the letters and the encounters are fictions, but true in the sense that they take place in the minds of people: What would Jesus and Buddha say if they had been able to dialogue? What happens when Laozi suddenly comes out of his book, riding on his black water buffalo asking me to explain who this Jesus is? Most of my fictions are based on well-documented historical encounters: the encounter between Alexander the Great and the Indian Sages; the apostle Thomas' experiences in India; Buddha becoming an object of veneration in medieval Europe; the interactions between Nestorian (Syriac) Christians and Buddhists and Taoists during the period of the Chang dynasty in China; Jesuits and Buddhist monks in Japan in the mid-sixteenth century; and similar encounters in Ceylon and Japan in the nineteenth century. Lastly, is it true that Jesus originally was a Buddhist, as argued by many modern admirers of the East?

These are books for the general reader. If there is any sophistication—and I think there is—it is implied in the stories, and the readers would have to find it for themselves. I have also written textbooks about Buddhism and alternative spirituality. I have translated Zen Buddhist texts for Norwegian readers and edited Taoist texts. I have completed four manuscripts about Japanese itinerant poets in the Buddhist tradition, with a literary biography and translations of their poems. And I have been challenged to write academic analyses of doctrinal questions and about interactions between Buddhists and Christians.

Why Buddhism?

Why is a Christian theologian so involved in dialoguing with Buddhism? For me it happens to be part of a family history. Karmic relations, a Buddhist might say. A Christian would perhaps call it divine providence. My concern is not primarily to find out the historical roots of Buddhism. I am more interested in what Buddhism has become for the millions of people who call themselves Buddhists, in particular, what is happening in my own Western cultural sphere nearly 2,500 years after his death. But my major reason for writing is to find out what Buddha means to me as a Christian. What traces has he left on my mind, on my dreams and longings and fears?

Towards a Greater Faith

We don't have time to go into details. But in a strange way all these efforts have been accompanied by a continual urge to search for a language for my own Christian faith, a language which I feel as my own. I have from time to time used the expression "towards a greater faith." "A greater faith" does not mean a stronger faith or a more self-confident conviction, not better arguments, or eloquent formulations, even though that might be desirable. It is about opening a greater

space in faith where there is room for my own life with all my tensions and inner contradictions. I need a space for faith and doubt, for my dreams and my despair. I need a space for the agnostic in me, the Jew, the Buddhist, the Muslim, the Hindu, the Animist, the secular humanist, and perhaps even the atheist. None of these are entirely strangers, for they accompany me in my inner dialogues; they inspire and challenge me, test my faith, and invite me to search for a language of faith with which I can identify. Perhaps I may also inspire others to discover and redefine their faith in an open space. For Christianity is not only the little piece of reality we have received from our various parochial varieties of faith. It is a great universe, a spacious landscape where people can enter and explore the terrain, and perhaps find a new language by hearing and speaking, seeing, and experiencing. We need fresh air, and we must be free to leave again.

A Christian Who Has Met Buddha: What, then, Is My Relationship to Buddhism?

I do not agree with those who claim that you have to choose: Buddha or Christ, Zen Way or Jesus Way.[4] I would not say, like some people I know, that I am a Buddhist Christian, trying to create a sort of harmony between the two. I could not say, like Paul M. Knitter, that "without Buddha I could not be a Christian."[5] I cannot commit myself wholeheartedly to both Buddhism and Christianity at the same time, either, claiming a sort of complementary position, like Roger Gregory-Tashi Corless who was ordained both in the Christian and the Tibetan tradition. He, and some others, speak in a paradoxical way about an inseparable connection between two incompatible traditions.[6] They are a hundred percent both, but not at the same time. If I should use a metaphor, I might say like the Dominican monk Oshida Shigeto, whom I met in Japan, "I am a Christian who has met Buddha." I am perhaps close to what John Cobb describes as "beyond dialogue," an encounter that leads to a mutual transformation of both.[7]

In most cases, however, it seems that most people will have their center of gravity and their definitive identity in one of the traditions, making space for impulses from or sympathies with the other. One is a Buddhist inspired and challenged by Christianity, or a Christian who in the encounter with Buddhism has been shaken and enriched by new insight and deeper commitment.

Identity and Change

What about identity? I am a professor of theology. I am a preacher with a message to share. I left home to convert the East, and instead I brought the East back home. I am playing with fictional encounters with Buddha and Laozi and other eastern philosophers and masters. I believe that I can read the Bible with their eyes and learn something new. I describe myself as a Christian who has met Buddha. I speak of the "first love"—the great and lasting commitment to Jesus Christ—and the many other friendships and infatuations. But what about faithfulness and consistency? Isn't God a jealous God who must be without any rivals? How can I then move freely in an open landscape where faith is enlarged? Will I become a postmodern chameleon that changes color to suit its surroundings? One cannot be everything to everyone!

Wondering about Wandering

Let me conclude by sharing some musings about personal changes and changes in one's religious life.

Looking back on my life, I wonder whether I am still the little boy who ran barefoot on a mountain outside Hong Kong during the Second World War, who later lived in Kristiansand in southern Norway and in Oslo, who was for several years intensely active in Christian youth work in the pietistic tradition, who studied at the Faculty of Theology in the University of Oslo, who became a husband and the father of five children, who went to Japan as a missionary and researcher, who became a professor of theology at his Alma Mater, who is a grandfather, and who has now retired from his professional career?

Certainly, this is me. My body has changed, but I can still recognize it as my own. The freckles are still there, only a little faded and almost disappeared. Facial features that once were only a potential have become more marked, and no operation can remove them. The cells have been replaced many times—apart from the brain cells, millions of which die while a few new cells are added. But I recognize the same mental patterns, the movements, and reactions in my limbs and inside my body, the same irritating habits, the same weaknesses and strengths, the same cowardly evasiveness, and the same courage to start afresh when it is absolutely necessary.

I would not say, like some people I know, that I am a Buddhist-Christian, trying to create a sort of harmony between the two. I might say, "I am a Christian who has met Buddha."

At the same time, I am someone else. I have changed. The child who was me, the young man, the thirty-year-old, the fifty-year-old: they are still me, but at the same time, they

are several personalities away from me. They are inside me as a kind of archeology of the mind, not congealed and petrified, but layer upon layer of consciousness and nerves, body and muscles which continually rise to the surface, or to which I return.

It strikes me that something similar has happened to my faith. I am nourished by the same scriptures that my father read in the daily family devotions, and by the same sacraments. I sing many of the same hymns and use the traditional words: God, Jesus, the Holy Spirit. The same friends and companions accompany me: Abraham and Moses, the prophets, Peter and John, Thomas and Judas, Paul and Augustine and Luther, and many others.

But although the names remain the same, they have changed their personality. God has changed many times. Even Jesus is not the same—or rather, they look different. I might say that while the subject of the sentence is the same, the predicates have changed, i.e., the words that give content to the subject and describe it. These words are different. I tell the same stories in other ways, and perhaps I tell alternative stories in order to indicate the problematic aspects of the old narratives. Many words have definitely disappeared. Some have lost their meaning, and I have been forced to search for new words. Some words have resurrected with new meaning. Most importantly, new names have appeared. There are many who have left their traces on my mind—both Christians and members of other religions, as well as a good many who have no faith at all. They have taught me decisive things about life and about true humanity, and even some basic things about God.

I discovered in the process that I was more Christian than I realized. Those who search for a new identity beyond all religious boundaries find it strange that I still identify myself with the church and its worship, and with the entire Christian tradition with its good and its bad elements. Perhaps they think it is time to go further.

This is what I am trying to express in my musings about identity and plurality and changes. If I do have a Christian identity, it is not an isolated little world defined as "Christian," but a commitment to Christ which creates a vast space for everything life has given me, both good and evil. Faith runs like a scarlet thread through all the contradictions. Christ becomes the profound field of gravitation that makes sense in my entire experience of life.

I tell the same stories in other ways to indicate problematic aspects of the old narratives. Words have disappeared, lost their meaning, and been resurrected with new meaning.

Ultimately, it is a question of the first great love—which seems destined to become the last love too. I was marked with his sign on my forehead and breast at baptism, as testimony to my belonging. Even before then, the Creator had already marked me with his own image. From time to time, the Master has seemed remote and unreal, and I have wondered whether one might replace him with other masters. But then he has reappeared, more clearly and strongly. And it was not least the encounter with all the others that made him shine with a stronger brilliance. **IJFM**

Endnotes

[1] I worked as acting editor of *Japanese Religions* from 1973–1985, and published quite a few articles there. My doctoral work dealt with the encounter between Buddhism and Christianity in the late 19th century, *Buddhism and Christianity in Japan: From Conflict to Dialogue 1854–1899* (Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press, 1987).

[2] Paul Tillich, *The Courage to Be,* Third Edition (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2014 [1952, 2000]).

[3] Notto R. Thelle, *Who Can Stop the Wind? Travels in the Borderland between East and West* (Collegeville, MN: Liturgical Press, 2010). Published in Norwegian, *Hvem kan stoppe vinden?* (Oslo University Press, 1991). *Dear Sidhhartha: Letters and dialogues in the borderland between East and West* is translated but not published. Norwegian original: *Kjære Siddhartha! Brev og samtaler i grenseland mellom Øst og Vest* (Oriens Forlag, 2005).

[4] Like the Southern Baptist missionary Tucker Callaway argued in *Zen Way, Jesus Way* (Rutland, VT: Tuttle Publishing, 1976).

[5] Paul F. Knitter, *Without Buddha I Could not be a Christian* (Oneworld Publications, 2009).

[6] Roger Corless, "The Coming of the Dialogian: A Transpersonal Approach to Interreligious Dialogue," in *Dialogue and Alliance: A Journal of the International Religious Foundation* 7 (1993/2): 3–17; "A Form of Buddhist-Christian Coinherent Meditation," in *Buddhist-Christian Studies* 14 (1994): 139–144.

[7] John B. Cobb, *Beyond Dialogue: Towards a Mutual Transformation of Buddhism and Christianity* (Philadelphia, PA: Fortress Press, 1982).

Pilgrimage Responses

Responses to Notto Thelle's, "My Pilgrimage in Christian-Buddhist Encounter: Lessons for Today's Practitioners"

Rory Mackenzie: Response One

Thank you, Dr. Thelle. I really enjoyed your paper full of insight and reflection, asking searching questions. I had the advantage of seeing it before hearing it and I thought of it as a great opportunity to reflect on my own journey. I thought parts of it could have been written for a post-Christendom, postmodern influenced young person. In fact, I ran a couple of quotes from your paper past two such people and they both said "Wow." I'm coming back to a point I tried to make earlier, that knowledge of Buddhist concepts and taking a conversational approach somehow equip us to engage with folks in contemporary Western societies. Folks who look within themselves and to their friends for the meaning of life, folks who have written their graffiti over organized religion but still look for some kind of spiritual practice. One of the quotes I noted was that "faith could separate me from life," and that's certainly true, at least in my experience. What I call faith in God somehow also includes my fears of the world as a scary place for Christians who want to live out their faith. My faith clearly is based to some extent on some false understandings that I still have of God. It's true that this imperfect faith has kept me out of trouble, but maybe it has also kept me from fully engaging in the world where God is at work. I think of Meister Eckhart, who is quoted as saying, "God rid me of God." He understood that his understanding of God was imperfect. Maybe we can pray, "God rid me of a faith that separates us from life, the full life that you have called us to." I think if you have time, perhaps you could respond a little bit and give some context about your meditation experiences. Just the way you've let go as you've gone in to sit, and how has that helped you? I'm thinking also about the kind of meditation model that you used, and perhaps even the support given by the meditation master. Thank you.

Notto Thelle Replies

Thank you for your response. I was moved by listening to you. It's interesting that you are in touch with the New Age or these sorts of alternative spirituality. I have made a lot of friends there, and actually I've often been asked to write for their journals. The last book I wrote in Norwegian, *The Silence and the Cry,* is a reflection on Christian spirituality. I was asked to write an article for this alternative network, their journal which is read by thousands of people. To me that is very challenging and inspiring. As for my meditation practice, I studied Zen under Buddhist masters, but I discovered that was not my practice. It doesn't fit my body. And one easily becomes very self-occupied if one is too much into that type of meditation. So, I've ended up with a very simple morning meditation where I start with body movement. I did learn Tai Chi for a long period and that type of body movement. Is that Taoist or what is it? I think it's a good way to move for the body and prepare the body for quiet and silence. I combine that body movement with prayer and after many years of Bible reading, I decided now I'll skip the morning Bible reading and sing through the Norwegian hymnal, which is also based on the Bible, and that is also a great inspiration as a preparation for prayer. Then I sit in silence, but not in a formal way. I do as Luther said, "Read your Bible, say your prayers, and when you finish make the sign of the cross, and go out happy into the world." I could say more, but I think every person has to find his own or her own way of preparing for the day. For me, it's good to do this.

I studied Zen under Buddhist masters, but I discovered it doesn't fit my body. One easily becomes very self-occupied if one is too much into that type of meditation. (Thelle)

Terry Muck: Response Two

Dr. Thelle, it is such a pleasure to listen to someone who has a theology, but manages to invite us into it, rather than keep us out with it. I appreciate what you had to say very much, but I think the thing I appreciate the most is that it feels like an invitation to have a talk with you; let's sit down and have a chat about this and compare notes and talk about these things.

A quick story. I was at an American Academy of Religion meeting, talking to some people who are pure critical thinkers, critical rationalists, for whom everything is kind of cut and dried. We were talking about dialogue and one of the participants said, "You know what really scares me in dialogue is people that come in and have this theology that they want to preach to me." I gave in to my angst there (maybe I shouldn't have?) raised my hand and said, "You know what really scares me are people who come into dialogue and think that they don't have any theology; those are the really frightening people." So, I appreciate the way you're able to talk about your faith in a way that invites me in but doesn't keep me out.

Amos Yong: Response Three

Dr. Thelle, I haven't had a chance to meet you in person and obviously this mediated digital encounter is not the same, but I have certainly appreciated reading what you have presented over the last couple of days. I also appreciate getting to know more of the life behind those texts that I read, particularly in light of some things I'm going to share in a few moments. What struck me was your comments at the very end, amidst all of the richness of your presentation, about your five children and, I assume, a number of grandchildren. I wonder how you feel about your legacy along this path, may it or may it not have been passed on to the next generation? Our children are with us on our journeys, and I'm just wondering if there's anything more you could share about ways in which your own path may be carried on by your children or maybe your grandchildren.

Notto Thelle Replies

That is a great challenge. We live in Norway and Norway is a very secular country and I think one of our great challenges is to find places and contexts where our children can feel at home in a Christian environment. My two elder children have, through music and singing, found a place in church connections through church choirs and so on. My eldest daughter is actually teaching Bible in America, in Wichita University. Of course, this topic becomes quite private, but three younger children have not found a real place where they can thrive. They're beautiful people but find it almost impossible to find a place where they can really live out their concerns in a church context. But it's fascinating, my son who is now in his 40s broke all patterns for many years and was a rock musician. He went to England for that because he did not want to study. Then he came back to Norway and found out that he wanted to study music, to have the theory on what he had practiced, and now he's a PhD student in music. He decided not to baptize his children, but just the other day I got a message for him saying "Dad, when you were in London in 2003, you preached a sermon in the Seamen's Church in London. There was something you said there which grasped me very strongly. I don't remember exactly what it was, but it was something about abandoning your own power positions. Could you find that quotation?" I had to search back and discovered it was a sermon on the first Sunday in the Lenten period about the temptation of Jesus, in which I interpreted Jesus abandoning all his power, how he did not demonstrate his power and so on. And because sometimes when I preach, I listen to other voices from the sideline, I quoted also Lao Tsu in *Tao Te Ching,* beautiful expressions about abandoning power, about water always seeking the low place, that the power of water was the power of the valley, always seeking the lowest position and serving people. So, my thought is that preaching, teaching, talking to kids, anything, the only thing you can do is sow seeds which might grow. Does that respond to some extent to what you're asking?

> Abandoning power is like water.
> The power of water was
> the power of the valley, always
> seeking the lowest position
> and serving people.
> (Lao Tsu in *Tao Te Ching*).

Amos Yong Replies

Absolutely. Thank you very much for sharing that part of yourself as well. Our children are our closest companions in many ways, and it's not surprising that the path that you've been on is also. . . . When I think about music, the study of music, it takes us beyond ratiocination, beyond propositionality, toward engaging with other dimensions, cognitionally and with our bodies, that I think are all parts of what you've actually lived into, beyond the things that you've said, so those are ways in which our journeys unfold. **IJFM**

Buddhist-Christian Pilgrimages

The Many Tongues of Pentecost?
A Chinese-Malaysian-American Pilgrimage in Christian-Buddhist Encounter

by Amos Yong

Editor's Note: This autobiographical account was originally presented at the Ralph D. Winter Lectureship in February 2021, under the theme, "Buddhist-Christian Encounters: Today's Realities in Light of the Pioneering Work of Karl Ludvig Reichelt in China." Each of the four missiologists who presented was asked to share his pilgrimage and to receive responses from the others.

I am grateful for the invitation to be part of this lectureship.[1] I'm sorry that I could not participate more in the events of the last two days, but I'm honored to be in this conversation in the minutes that I have. My story is not a three-point testimony—really, it's five points/parts—but we will see how far we can get through them in the next few minutes.

Amos Yong is a Malaysian-American theologian and missiologist who currently serves as Dean of the School of Mission & Theology at Fuller Seminary. He has written more than 50 books including two on Buddhism: The Cosmic Breath: Spirit and Nature in the Christian-Buddhism-Science Trialogue *and* Pneumatology and the Christian-Buddhist Dialogue: Does the Spirit Blow through the Middle Way? *One of his most recent books is* The Amos Yong Reader: The Pentecostal Spirit. *He has both participated and served in leadership in the Society for Buddhist-Christian Studies.*

Part one would be my growing up. As seen in the title, I was born in the country of Malaysia, I am of Chinese descent, and I am the first born to parents who were Pentecostal preachers. So, I grew up in that environment in Malaysia and didn't know anything about Buddhism at that time. My parents moved to the United States from Malaysia in 1976 and brought me and my two younger brothers to California to do ministry and mission work. I didn't know it then, but I guess they are now called "reverse missionaries."[2] So, I spent the rest of my growing up years in Northern California.

I have come to realize that my upbringing was fairly conventional from the standpoint of Pentecostal preachers of the mid-to late-20th century. My parents were part of the Assemblies of God. My mother came to know Christ through an Assemblies of God missionary who worked in Malaysia in the 1950s, and she met my father through his attendance at the Bible Institute of Malaysia (Malaya at the time), a school established by Assemblies of God missionaries for the training of converts—which in that Muslim Majority nation mostly meant Chinese believers. So, being brought up in the Malaysian Assemblies of God Pentecostal movement, one strongly influenced by North American Pentecostal missionaries, and then our moving to North America, we didn't talk much at all in my family about what it meant to be Chinese, or what it meant to come from Malaysia. Our self-identification was always as Christians. The ethnic dimension of that was never considered important.

My parents said little to me and my brothers as we were growing up about their own backgrounds, which I came to know about when I was older. Both of them had come from popular expressions of Buddhism within the Chinese

immigrant community of Malaysia. I heard stories from my mother as I was growing up about how her conversion to Christ as a teenager brought a lot of negative repercussions from her staunchly Buddhist-committed parents, but she persevered, and by the time I was a teenager, both of her parents had come to Christ. So that's the journey of my mother's side of the family.

As a family of Chinese descent, we had a variety of non-articulated rituals or rites which shaped how we interacted with each other. We call it filial piety.

I did not actually begin to realize much about Buddhism until I went to graduate school. My undergraduate studies were at a Pentecostal Bible college in California, in which I trained for ministry, a Pentecostal preacher's kid also becoming a preacher. I went on to graduate studies at a Wesleyan holiness seminary, at which I was invited out of my Pentecostal circle into the broader Christian community and a different set of conversations. I began to meet others in that context, others who in my earlier Pentecostal days would have been "targets" for conversion, meaning, that's how I, like many Pentecostals of that generation, would have looked at all other "Christians": as persons who went by Christian labels but yet were not fully Christianized from a Pentecostal perspective.[3]

That kind of ecumenical trajectory allowed me to begin to listen, to interact, and to realize for the first time that these individuals, who may not have deserved a label of Christian in my Pentecostal circles, were actually filled with the Holy Spirit in their own way—not exactly in the same way in which I as a Pentecostal had experienced. But, nevertheless, I grew in my appreciation of the fact that the Holy Spirit was at work in the lives of others in ways that I had not been ready to grant up until that time.

Following up on my seminary studies, I went on and did a second master's degree in the history of philosophy. I focused particularly on process and personalist philosophical traditions in the late 19th and early 20th centuries. It was in that context that I was introduced for the first time to Buddhism, particularly through the work of process philosophers like Alfred North Whitehead, Charles Hartshorne, and John Cobb, all of whom engaged with Buddhist traditions.[4] Boston personalists like Edgar Sheffield Brightman, who I studied about, were also engaged in conversations with Buddhist traditions in the 1920s and 1930s.[5] As part of these studies at Portland State University in the mid-1990s I took a directed study about Buddhism with one of the professors who specialized in East Asian history.

In the context of that course of study I began to realize something about my family and myself. I was being given language for something that I had not had language for up until that time. For instance, my father would talk about doing everything with *moderation.* He would talk about *going with the current,* adapting to the current. We, of course, as a family of Chinese descent, had a variety of non-articulated rituals or rites which shaped how we interacted with each other. Together (my parents, my brothers, and my grandparents), we call it *filial piety.* Those so informed would recognize in these descriptions, of course, the *middle way,* the *Tao,* and the Confucian understanding of what it means to exist within the five relationships. I didn't have any of that understanding growing up because we didn't talk about our Chinese-ness as a family. We didn't celebrate Chinese New Year fully either. We didn't do many things appropriately Chinese, because we were Christians, and we were Pentecostal Christians.[6]

I began to realize through this course of study that there was this part of who I was—and who my family was—that connected us and identified for us what it meant to be of Chinese descent. That ethnic dimension was informed by millennia of Buddhist, Taoist and Confucian intermixing and inhabitation, if you will. We registered these traditions in our bodies, not in our minds. I began to see that I could not objectify Buddhism, Taoism, and Confucianism—I could not "other"-ize them—because I embodied these traditions in certain respects. Of course, not in all respects, but in certain respects. In this process I was offered a new language for my own identity, my family's identity. That language, I think, assisted my own journey of moving beyond my Pentecostal confines into a more ecumenical space with regard to other Christian traditions. Then, shortly thereafter, it enabled me to step beyond ecumenical Christian traditions and to ask further questions: Does the wind of the Spirit blow through any other religious pathway, perhaps including the middle way?[7]

The latter became a question in the second part of my studies, but it was not my initial focus. Rather, I focused first and foremost on a broader question of how I, as a Pentecostal, might begin thinking more generally about other religions. These became the guiding set of questions for my own doctoral research,[8] and following on that, I landed my first teaching job at Bethel University in St. Paul, Minnesota, a long way from the Pacific Rim, and of course a regional hub for many Scandinavian immigrants in the 19th century. I met lots of Scandinavian-descent folks in my university, in the classes

I was teaching. One of the upper division theology courses I taught was on Christianity encountering the world's religions. I created that course and I thought I would teach it once a year. The school allowed me to do this, so I decided that every year I would introduce a different religion and invite my students to engage with a different religion.

Yet, every year as I would teach the course again, I would come back to Buddhism. In the course of the six years that I taught that course at Bethel University, I established close relationships with a meditation center in Minneapolis, The Dharma Field, which is still there. I got to know its director (Sensei Steve Hagen, who I believe is still working in that context),[9] and a number of the leading associates. I would bring my students to the Dharma Field—remember, these are Christian 19- to 21-year-olds, students in the upper Midwest. I'd take them to the meditation center as a context for thinking about this course and its topic, Christianity encountering world religions. We would visit and participate there, then come back to class and attempt to think through that experience. My friends at the Dharma Field would accompany me to my classes and interact with my students. When I took my students to the meditation center, they would be welcomed and invited to experience sitting in the Dharma Field, and to think about that form of Buddhist meditation, a developed expression of the Soto Zen Buddhist tradition. So, there was this back and forth, a growth of relationships and growth of interaction at a variety of levels, both at the level of practice, but also at the level of dialogue in both the classrooms of the University to which I would invite Zen practitioners, and in the meditation halls of the Dharma Field where I would bring my students.

Toward the end of that time, I had one semester in which I was invited to be a visiting professor at Xavier University in Cincinnati (a Jesuit institution). During that visit I worked for four months with Fr. Joseph Bracken, who some of you may know, is a Jesuit theologian who has done extensive work with Eastern traditions. We taught a course together on Christianity and Buddhism. Then, he was doing some work interfacing with science,[10] and I was also doing some of the same, so we focused our teaching in that course on Christianity, Buddhism, and science. I'd been working on a book on Buddhist-Christian dialogue, comparative theology and Buddhist-Christian perspectives, and I finished writing that manuscript there at Xavier University. In the course of that semester with Bracken, I took one section of this manuscript focused on the interaction with science, and then developed out of it another full manuscript on the trialogue of Buddhism, Christianity and science. Both of those books have been published since—in 2012: it took a few years for me to get them in print—but you can find them. Both of them were published unfortunately by Brill, whose hardback monographs are exorbitantly priced, so I encourage you to check your university libraries for copies.[11]

I want to turn and reflect on the third part of my journey, starting in about 2006, when I got a lot more involved in the Society for Buddhist-Christian Studies (SBCS). I had been a member since the early 2000s, and was doing a lot of research on Buddhist-Christian dialogue, and writing a number of book reviews along the way,[12] but now I began to get more involved, to participate and serve as a board member for the SBCS. Then I served as the chair of the committee that chose Frederick Streng Book Award for the Society, and I did that for about four years. It was a wonderful experience, being able to not just read widely and further in Buddhist-Christian dialogue, but being able to facilitate the process of the Streng Award recognition (granted annually by the SBCS in its meeting with the American Academy of Religion). Then in 2009–10 I was also privileged to work with Terry Muck and others who are in attendance here, and to serve as co-editor for the SBCS journal, *Buddhist-Christian Studies,* filling in during a one-year transitional period. It was also extremely gratifying for me that in 2016 my book, *The Cosmic Breath*—referred to above—received the Streng Award (I was *not* on the committee to grant myself the award at the time).

I'd take them to the meditation center as a context for thinking about the course, "Christianity Encountering World Religions." They would be welcomed to experience and to think about that form of Buddhist meditation.

My work for over a decade with the SCBS was also deeply rewarding in terms of the relationships I was able to build and the collegiality and level of philosophical and theological conversation I was able to enjoy in that particular context; on the one hand, bringing Pentecostal and evangelical perspectives into that mix, but on the other hand, also being informed by the work that happens in those spheres. Terry, I think I've told you this before, you've always been a trailblazer and an exemplar and a mentor for me. When I was a graduate student, you were involved in the Society for Buddhist-Christian Studies, long before I came around, and I want to

again thank you for your modeling of what it means to bear witness to Christ in complicated contexts like Buddhist-Christian encounters.

I now want to make a few comments about the work that I've been doing over the last five or six years. I have not done much work in Buddhist-Christian dialogue or in Buddhist-Christian studies during this time. In coming to Fuller Seminary, I've taken on some other responsibilities which has made it a bit more difficult for me to continue working in this field, not difficult in any kind of theological sense, but mainly in the administrative loads that I've been carrying over the last five or six years.

The other development that has continued to come on board for me, which does inform my thinking about Buddhist-Christian relations and encounter, is my own continuing desire to interrogate and explore the Chinese or Asian dimension of my identity.[13] As I mentioned, growing up Pentecostal, our ethnicity did not come up in conversation; our cultural realities were not reflected in our family interactions. The past religious life was something that we converted from, and therefore needed very little comment. Well, obviously all of those are in play and part of my journey as a theologian in the last ten years. So, included in the last five years is the question of not just what it means to be Chinese, but now more specifically what it means to be Asian-American. Some of my work in the almost decade has been focused on pressing further into Asian-American consciousness, Asian-American historicity, and of course, that is inevitably informed by my Chinese-ness, and is inevitably informed by my own understanding of what that Chinese-ness entails.[14] In other words, in my ongoing work in comparative theology, my work in ethnicity studies, and my work as a theologian, none of these can be compartmentalized from one another, but they're all mutually informing.

In different contexts, different elements of these threads will come to the fore. In some instances, the comparative theological dimension comes to the foreground. In other instances, Buddhist-Christian issues are at the forefront. In a third arena or dimension it's the Chinese ethnicity or Chinese historicity, and in the fourth it's this Asian-American category. These are what we might call intersectional components of all of our theological journeys. I want to encourage each and every one of us in this. You don't have to be non-white to press into these intersectional realities of your lives, as every one of us are complicated, as Notto Thelle has shared already earlier. Every one of us is multilayered, every one of us is multidimensionally informed—intellectually, philosophically, culturally, racially, and politically, if not also denominationally and thereby traditionally. My thinking at this point is ongoing, in which sometimes Buddhist-Christian realities are in the center, sometimes they're more at the margin. At other times the Asian-American, or maybe the third front, the Chinese-American, are prioritized elements, but they're all interconnected in these fundamental respects.

As an administrator of a theological seminary these days, I'm often engaged in conversations in which we're talking about race, ethnicity, culture, and religion; it's a lot to keep and hold together, but yet that's actually the 2020s, that's actually the 21st century. This is what globalization and migration have brought about, and it's both our challenge and our opportunity. How do we create conversational and learning spaces that allow us to explore these different aspects of our own lives as traditioned persons, as community-formed and shaped persons, in which, for any one of us Buddhism may be more or less intense or real or applicable at any particular moment?

My son's work is in how contemplative traditions can lead us to healing in a multiracial, multireligious, and multi-political world.

I'll therefore close by connecting back to the question I asked Dr. Thelle a few moments ago. My journey as a Pentecostal preacher (I do continue to have credentials with Pentecostal churches as part of my vocation) has included three children, and now (thanks be to God) five grandchildren of five years of age and under. This informs part of the question that I'm led to at this point in my own thinking: how has my work as a Pentecostal theologian, one whose journey has been informed by forays into both intentional-sustained and marginal-incidental engagement with Buddhist traditions, how has that shaped my own life and what I leave behind, particularly for my own children? I share that in part because, Dr. Thelle, right now one of my daughters is probably not on any religious path; another is on a spiritual, but not understanding quite how to be religious, sojourn. My son is a theology professor. I'm not sure that I want to claim responsibility for that, but I'll put it this way: he says, "Dad, you're an abstract, philosophical type. I want to be a practical theologian." So, he's a practical theology professor, and not only that, he says, "Dad, you think and talk about Buddhist-Christian dialogue, I'm going to practice it." His work is in comparative spirituality and practical theology, and how contemplative traditions can lead us to healing in a multiracial, multireligious, and multi-political world. My wife is Latina, so my son and my daughters are very mixed racially, so for my son, contemplative traditions, contemplative

practices, mindfulness, and meditation are at the root of what it means for us to be whole. Without this praxis we cannot be whole in our societies or our religious communities, and we cannot be whole in our personal lives. My son has imbibed, if you will, Buddhist meditational practices not because I have given him instructions about it, but perhaps because when I took my students to the Dharma Field there in Minneapolis, on a number of occasions I would bring my teenage son along. We would have our conversations and he would go on his way, and that's what he's doing now. Thinking about mindfulness and contemplation is part of what it means to heal the world, and, for him, it's being whole as a multiracial, multireligious, and multi-politically-situated person.[15] I'm not sure if that's the legacy I ever intended to hand down, but it is part of our journey so far. **IJFM**

Endnotes

[1] Thanks especially to H. L. Richard and Brad Gill for transcribing and providing an initial edit of my lecture given from a set of power point notes; we have kept the conversational and testimonial tone, even while I have further edited for clarity and added a few footnotes.

[2] The following summarizes what is further elaborated on in my essays, "From Every Tribe, Language, People, and Nation: Diaspora, Hybridity, and the Coming Reign of God," in Chandler H. Im and Amos Yong, eds., *Global Diasporas and Mission,* Regnum Edinburgh Centenary Series 23 (Oxford, UK: Regnum Books International, 2014), 253–61, and "Theological Education between the West and the 'Rest': A Reverse 'Reverse Missionary' and Pentecost Perspective," *Asian Journal of Pentecostal Studies* 23:2 (2020): 89–105.

[3] It may be intriguing to some readers that my master's thesis developed into an argument for the validity of the early ecumenical councils as historic and contextual responses, the result of which invited us into an ongoing journey for re-articulating Christian witness in other (present and future) contexts and times; see Amos Yong, "The Doctrine of the Two Natures of Christ: A Historical and Critical Analysis" (MA thesis, Western Evangelical Seminary, Portland, Oregon, 1993).

[4] An early paper I wrote for one of my professors was on Buddhist views of the self: "Personal Selfhood(?) and Human Experience in Whitehead's Philosophy of Organism," *Paideia Project: Proceedings of the 20th World Congress of Philosophy* (Boston, Massachusetts, 1998), available at http://www.bu.edu/wcp/MainPPer.htm.

[5] See Amos Yong, "From Pietism to Pluralism: Boston Personalism and the Liberal Era in American Methodist Theology, 1875–1953" (MA thesis, Portland State University, Portland, Oregon, 1995).

[6] While focused on Pentecostal Christianity in the West African context, much of Birgit Meyer, "'Make a Complete Break with the Past': Memory and Post-Colonial Modernity in Ghanaian Pentecostalist Discourse," *Journal of Religion in Africa* 28:3 (1998): 316–49, is applicable to the pentecostal experience elsewhere around the world, including in Malaysia, particularly as mediated through North American missionaries.

[7] The initial fruits of this question would be unfolded in my, "The Holy Spirit and the World Religions: On the Christian Discernment of Spirit(s) 'after' Buddhism," *Buddhist-Christian Studies* 24 (2004): 191–207; later, I combined my ecumenical and interfaith research in another essay on this topic: "A Heart Strangely Warmed on the Middle Way? The Wesleyan Witness in a Pluralistic World," *Wesleyan Theological Journal* 48:1 (2013): 7–26.

[8] Published as *Discerning the Spirit(s): A Pentecostal-Charismatic Contribution to Christian Theology of Religions,* Journal of Pentecostal Theology Supplement Series 20 (Sheffield, UK: Sheffield Academic Press, 2000; reprinted, with a new "Preface" by Wipf & Stock Publishers, 2018).

[9] I assigned Hagen's *Buddhism Plain and Simple* (New York: Broadway Books, 1999), to my students also.

[10] Later published as Joseph Bracken, *Subjectivity, Objectivity, and Intersubjectivity: A New Paradigm for Religion and Science* (West Conshohocken, PA: Templeton Press, 2011).

[11] The initial manuscript being *Pneumatology and the Christian-Buddhist Dialogue: Does the Spirit Blow through the Middle Way?* Studies in Systematic Theology 11 (Leiden and Boston: Brill, 2012); the later volume being: *The Cosmic Breath: Spirit and Nature in the Christianity-Buddhism-Science Trialogue,* Philosophical Studies in Science & Religion 4 (Leiden and Boston: Brill, 2012).

[12] I have published over 30 full length book reviews on Buddhism or Christian-Buddhist dialogue over the last almost two decades, including 15 of them in *Buddhist-Christian Studies;* beyond these are also substantial review essays like "Trinh Thuan and the Intersection of Science and Buddhism: A Review Essay," *Zygon: Journal of Religion and Science* 42:3 (September 2007): 677–84, "Mind and Life, Religion and Science: The Dalai Lama and the Buddhist-Christian-Science Trilogue," *Buddhist-Christian Studies* 28 (2008): 43–63, and, on the work of Buddhist scholar B. Alan Wallace, "Tibetan Buddhism Going Global? A Case Study of a Contemporary Buddhist Encounter with Science," *Journal of Global Buddhism* 9 (2008), http://www.globalbuddhism.org/jgb/index.php/jgb/issue/view/12.

[13] Begun in Amos Yong, *The Future of Evangelical Theology: Soundings from the Asian American Diaspora* (Downers Grove: IVP Academic, 2014).

[14] Some of my recent essays develop these themes, e.g., "American Political Theology in a Post-al Age: A Perpetual Foreigner and Pentecostal Stance," in Miguel A. De La Torre, ed., *Faith and Resistance in the Age of Trump* (Maryknoll: Orbis Books, 2017), 107–14, and "Conclusion—Mission after Colonialism and Whiteness: The Pentecost Witness of the 'Perpetual Foreigner' for the Third Millennium," in Love L. Sechrest, Johnny Ramírez-Johnson, and Amos Yong, eds., *Can "White" People Be Saved? Triangulating Race, Theology, and Mission,* Missiological Engagements (Downers Grove: IVP Academic, 2018), 301–17.

[15] See, e.g., Aizaiah G. Yong, "Critical Race Theory Meets Internal Family Systems: Toward a Compassion Spirituality for a Multireligious and Multiracial World," *Buddhist-Christian Studies* 40:1 (2020): 439–47, and also, "All Mixed Up: Multi/racial Liberation and Compassion Based Activism" *Religions* 11:8 (2020), accessible: https://www.mdpi.com/2077-1444/11/8/402.

Pilgrimage Responses

Responses to Amos Yong's "The Many Tongues of Pentecost? A Chinese-Malaysian-American Pilgrimage in Christian-Buddhist Encounter"

Notto Thelle: Response One

Thank you, Dr. Yong, it was fascinating to listen to you. I was inspired by your comments about the hidden Chinese in you, or the hidden traditions which you only discovered when you started to study Buddhism and Eastern traditions; the modesty to go with the current, with the rituals and filial piety and so on. That reminded me of one of my first experiences in Japan when I was teaching a little group of students at an agricultural school, a Christian school where I was supposed to teach religion. I was, of course, an eager missionary, and I started to teach Christianity and the students made their notes and perhaps found it interesting, but nothing touched them. But the moment I started to teach about Buddhism, I asked them to tell me, to answer "what is Buddhism?" They had nothing, they couldn't explain one word of what Buddhism was about. But I tried to introduce it in a good way, so as I started to teach what Buddhism was about, they immediately understood that this is our tradition. So that was quite an important discovery for me. Japan is very secular, but somehow the Buddhist traditions are there.

> As Japanese Christians grew older, they discovered that they had "phantom pain" regarding leaving and cutting away their Buddhist and Japanese religious pasts. (Thelle)

You also reminded me of another topic, of leaving behind tradition. In Japan, maybe in other contexts, too, when you become a Christian, you leave the past. Buddhism or Japanese religions just don't have any meaning, you just forget them. But what happened to many Japanese Christians, they discovered as they grew older that they had pain regarding that which was cut away. I don't know if you use this term in English, the reality of "phantom pain" in a limb which had been amputated. The limb is gone, but you still have pain as if in your arm, and I think that happened to quite a few Japanese Christians who were not helped by pastors or guides to somehow integrate positively or negatively their religious past. These were only remnants of what their grandmothers had taught, and maybe were in their bodies. So, I think this is quite an interesting aspect which has often been neglected in missionary traditions. You have to help people to retain a relationship to their past somehow. Well, there are other things, but I think others have comments.

Amos Yong Replies

Dr. Thelle, regarding the idea of an implicit awareness that's not explicitly thematized, we can certainly say that every East Asian culture has internalized an understanding of Buddhist, Confucian, and Taoist traditions. There's also a certain sense in which, at a certain juncture in Western history and maybe even in certain parts of Western European/North American culture today, we can say that there are internalized (implicit, if you will) Christian cultural assumptions that we may not identify as Christian, but do potentially have some Christian roots. And, so, every cultural tradition probably has something happening along these lines, that there are religious ways that are implicit in how cultural and social realities have emerged.

Sometimes these implicit religious ways are made explicit through certain courses of study and those sorts of processes. As we uncover what is implicit—and this is good—more may need to be made explicit and thematized. We might also discover that there are religious dimensions of what's been internalized that deform those religious expressions, and that deformation needs to be named; those pathways on which those deformations have unfolded need to be "archaeologically" identified so that we can see how cultures also deform religious truths and realities, and not only enable the ongoing sustenance of any society. So, I think that's a fascinating dimension of how religious worlds both inform our socialization in very subtle ways, and how sometimes when they become more explicit, we have work to do; we must decide whether to continue our retrieval of them or intervene and invoke correctives to how religious deformation have become established as unhealthy rather than lifegiving cultural habits. So, that's a part of the work that we all do as theologians and religious educators.

Terry Muck: Response Two

Amos, you've credited me with being a model, thank you for that. If I'd known you were watching me, I would have been more careful with the some of the things I did and said. But you've also been a wonderful model. The range of your scholarship is just amazing. I wondered if you could say a bit, since I

didn't hear it in your presentation, on being handicapped and all that, which you wrote a book on. I wonder how you got into that subject. It was a little bit unexpected, and it was good, but I just wonder how you got into it, why it became an interest of yours.

Amos Yong Replies

My youngest brother is Mark, who's 10 years younger than me, and we have a middle brother. Mark has Down Syndrome, so I grew up as the older brother of Mark. That is, in part, behind my book *Theology and Down Syndrome*.[1] There is obviously this human condition that we're all in, and in this volume, I devote a chapter to the religions and disability in which I try to explore some of that intersection. I think there are ways in which Buddhist traditions and Christian-Buddhist dialogue about disability can be mutually informative, although over the years I haven't done as much work in this direction as I would have liked. But that's certainly part of my own journey, my own story, even as disability and impairment is part of the human condition.[2]

I also would like to say how the Buddhist-Christian encounter gives us a lot of opportunities to press into the things that emerge from common human experience. It therefore interfaces with our work anthropologically, psychologically, and sociologically. So, it seems to me that theology simply becomes one of the nodes or one of the registers along which Buddhist-Christian dialogue, if you will, can explore the human condition together along all of these various trajectories. Your mentioning of the experience of disability gives us again further common ground upon which we can interact with one another in things that are really important. So, thank you for asking about that.

Rory Mackenzie: Response Three

Thanks very much for your paper, Dr. Yong. It's a pleasure to see you on the screen and hear your voice after engaging with your academic work. I guess in that context, I'm wondering if you can share some practical ways in which you have discerned God at work in Buddhism, I mean the Holy Spirit working, outside the church, away from missionaries, away from the Christian faith. Is that something that you could speak to for a few moments?

Amos Yong Replies

Generally, my location has been within the Pentecostal churches and certainly within the broader evangelical spectrum. I've taught at Bethel, at Regent University in Virginia, and then here at Fuller Seminary, all uniquely evangelical in their different ways; so, that's been my primary professional and ecclesial home. So much of my effort has been in translating what I've learned into particularly biblical and also broader theological categories. From the perspective of my own journey and engagement with Buddhism, I have certainly delved into many of the sometimes abstruse theological, philosophical, or religious ideas and how they are connected, and so on and so forth. But in general, I think that what I have found to be more effective in my context is to really help Pentecostals, and Evangelicals especially, appreciate more deeply our theology of general revelation. This means we ask what is it about our conversation and relationships with religious others in particular that opens up a window into the human condition, the human experience. What allows us to identify what we would otherwise have "other"-ed in, let's say, Buddhism over there, or Taoism over there, rather than being able to identify that as part of who we are? Conversely, and equally challenging, what is it about Christian revelation (we distinguish between special and general) that may invite us to be more open to understanding special revelation in relationship to general revelation than we might have otherwise before that conversation? The categories of general and special will become a little bit more blurry, which I think is good, because it allows us to understand humanness in relationship to God in a different way than prior to that relationship. So, for instance,

Can you share some practical ways in which you have discerned God at work in Buddhism, outside the church, away from missionaries, away from the Christian faith? (Mackenzie)

"everything in moderation": Is that a (biblical) proverb? Or is that the wisdom of the Buddha? Or is it both? And what are the implications for our understanding of revelation if it's something like both? And how do we understand God's revelatory character if it's something like both? That is part of the trek I've been on, which is both to understand revelation as received externally from God, but also how our journeys—our own habituated-ness, historicity, situatedness, social and other dimensions of our location—have already internalized that revelatory character in our hearts. What does that mean for our own lives, our journey, and our witness? These have a great deal of missional implications, and certainly a lot of my work in the last few years in missiology has been motivated by some of these discoveries in my own journey.

H. L. Richard's Question

May I ask, Dr. Yong, about your parents—did they learn from you to affirm Chinese identity? Or did they see you as a wayward child? How did they process all of this?

I will say this: I've learned from my son about how to honor my parents in their journey.

Amos Yong Replies

I think there are some aspects in which they've seen me as being a bit wayward. For instance, my father has always wondered about my academic vocation. He's always said, "Well, when are you actually going to do real work in the pastorate, the real work of pastoral formation and pastoral engagement?" He keeps asking me that periodically, even to this day. This just reflects his own pastoral heart. But, no, we don't talk much about the religious, cultural, and theological aspects of the things we've been talking about (during these lectures) in our relationship in our home, and there's a variety of reasons for that. There's a sense in which there has not been much mutuality in these matters. But I certainly have a lot to be grateful for in terms of the legacy that my parents have left me and the opportunities for me to explore that part of our journey. I will say this: I've learned from my son about how to honor my parents in their journey. It's been a journey of leaving behind that, which of course, has shaped me; but that leaving behind has also involved the opportunity to honor their journeys in that process, being able to appreciate what they had to go through to leave behind what they felt they needed to leave behind in order to give me and my brothers the life that we have. So that's part of my journey as well. **IJFM**

Endnotes

[1] Amos Yong, *Theology and Down Syndrome: Reimagining Disability in Late Modernity* (Waco, Texas: Baylor University Press, 2007).

[2] See also Amos Yong, *The Bible, Disability, and the Church: A New Vision of the People of God* (Grand Rapids and Cambridge, UK: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2011).

Buddhist-Christian Pilgrimages

A Journey of Two Parts!
Some Reflections on Reaching Out to the Buddhist World

by Rory Mackenzie

Editor's Note: This autobiographical account was originally presented at the Ralph D. Winter Lectureship in February 2021, under the theme, "Buddhist-Christian Encounters: Today's Realities in Light of the Pioneering Work of Karl Ludvig Reichelt in China." Each of the four missiologists who presented was asked to share his pilgrimage and to receive responses from the others.

Rory Mackenzie has taught Buddhism and Practical Theology at the International Christian College, Glasgow. He lived and served in Thailand for 11 years and is presently involved with the Thai community in Edinburgh. His 2017 publication, God, Self and Salvation in a Buddhist Context, *is informed by Karl Reichelt's contextualized approach, and advocates friendship with Buddhists while maintaining a clear witness to Christ. In 2007 he also wrote* New Buddhist Movements in Thailand: Towards an Understanding of Wat Phra Dhammakaya and Santi Asoke *(Routledge Critical Studies in Buddhism).*

The First Part of the Journey

As I was growing up, I was privileged to hear missionaries speaking of their work and the far-flung places in which they served. Why, even my rather reserved Sunday school teacher had served as a senior nursing officer in a teaching hospital in China and had nursed none other than the great Olympic athlete and missionary, Eric Liddell in a Japanese internment camp. During my career as an officer in the Merchant Navy, I visited Bangkok on a number of occasions. The people and the place "drew me in." One night during a break from cargo operations in Bangkok harbour, I experienced a sense that one day I would return to this city as a Christian missionary.

In 1979, after a time with Operation Mobilisation and Bible college study I (or rather we, as I was now married) returned to Bangkok as a church planting missionary. After initial language learning, we found ourselves in a growing area of the city where there were around 100,000 people but no church. By and large, I think my evangelistic approach was direct, perhaps too direct at times. My goal was to engage those I met in conversations about Jesus and their need for "personal salvation." Distributing Christian literature, inviting people to Bible studies and outdoor evangelistic film shows, and even preaching in the open air were all part of a weekly routine. In addition, I regularly preached and carried out pastoral care in two of Bangkok's prisons—Klong Prem and Bang Kwang. Life in the concrete jungle was basic, we had no phone, TV, or air conditioning. For a considerable time, we had no running water and depended on weekly deliveries from a water truck. This was a challenge with three children under four in temperatures of around forty degrees Celsius!

The two churches we were involved in grew as the Lord added to our number, either through conversion or transfer. I thoroughly enjoyed the variety and freedom of pioneer church planting work. I engaged with people from all classes of society. I also carried out a whole range of practical activities such

as helping fellow missionaries move house, conducting surveys for future church plants, field council meetings and, of course, the evangelism, relationship building, and teaching required in church planting work. A colleague once aptly remarked that all you needed to be a church planter was a toolbox and a concordance! It certainly summed up the "jack of all trades" mode in which we found ourselves operating. There were, however, opportunities to learn both from fellow missionaries and visiting missiologists. We also kept up to date with church planting methods, church growth theories and wider missiological issues.

There were difficulties. Often there was little response to our various outreaches. I found Thai language study challenging, especially reading and writing. Sometimes I looked with envy at the way ministers back home could preach and teach in their first language. The mission's education policy was to send children to boarding school in Malaysia, and so our three daughters would be away from us for four-month terms.

A decline in my ageing father's health acted as a trigger for our return to Scotland after twelve years involvement in church planting in Bangkok. Although it does me no credit, I would like to conclude the first part of the journey with a short story which summed up my attitude to Buddhism. It was a hot Saturday morning and I got off my Suzuki motor bike in a park near where we lived. There was a large group of Buddhist monks, nuns and lay people eating a vegetarian meal together. They were members of Santi Asoke, a new Buddhist movement, who were very critical of mainstream Thai Buddhism and were particularly strict in their own practice. Some of the Santi Asoke members saw me and called out in English "Come and eat with us—we will do you no harm." I declined the invitation feeling that they were, in some way, the "opposition."

Reichelt's story gave me, a conservative evangelical, permission to understand Buddhism on its own terms, and to be involved in Buddhist communities.

The Second Part of the Journey

Now, back in Scotland, I was training to be a Presbyterian minister. My wife gained additional nursing qualifications and began work as a health visitor in the community. Our children attended local schools and adjusted to Scottish culture. True, I now had the things that I had missed when I was a missionary—preaching in my own language and theological study. That said, I missed church planting in Bangkok. I remember pacing the streets of Edinburgh one winter's evening trying to work out a return to Thailand and all that would involve, especially with children's education, and I was struck by the obvious truth—you can't have everything you want in life!

A consolation, however, was being involved with a group of Thai post graduate students in Edinburgh. One student, Dr. Suripon, became a very helpful informant on Thai Folk Buddhism. Another, Dr. Seree, introduced me to the teaching of Buddhadasa (1906–1993), the Thai scholar monk. Research into Buddhadasa's hermeneutics, and his approach to finding common ground between Buddhism and Christianity became a fruitful topic for my MTh dissertation. In addition, it stood me in good stead for many conversations with those who took a more academic approach to Buddhism.

After completing a rigorous course of study at what is now known as the Edinburgh Theological Seminary, I became a licensed Presbyterian minister. Rather than go into parish ministry I enrolled on a master's programme at the University of Edinburgh where I focused on Buddhist studies. I just want to mention two noteworthy aspects of what was to be a very stimulating year. First, as I was applying for the programme, I had a meeting with the founding director of the department, Professor Andrew Walls. As we discussed my application, he attached value to my missionary experience in Bangkok and encouraged me to join the programme. For the first time that I could recall, I felt that there was significance to my missionary experience. Second, I came across the work of Karl Reichelt (1877–1952), a Norwegian missionary to China. Writing of Reichelt's experience while visiting a monastery in the mountains of Weishan, Sorik comments:[1]

> Sitting with the monks, desperately eager to tell them of the Gospel, he found that his words were not heard. They listened politely, but there was no echo. It was as if they lived in a different world; he could not speak to the framework of their thought. He realised that he was simply unprepared and from that time on he began to study Buddhism seriously.

I was fascinated by Reichelt's contextualising of the Christian story and his befriending of Buddhist monks. I read everything I could lay my hands on about Reichelt and his ministry. In seemed, to me at least, that my own theologically conservative background and struggle to speak to the framework of Buddhist thought was mirrored in Reichelt's story—a story which gave me, a conservative evangelical, permission to understand Buddhism on its own terms, and to be involved in Buddhist communities.

Changed Attitude—Changed Approach

In 2002, opportunities to put my new ideas to the test arose! Thai missionary monks *(Dhammadutta)* came to Edinburgh and established a Buddhist temple. I became friends with these monastic pioneers and visited them weekly in the remote farmhouse where they lived; indeed, they would come and visit us in our home. While it was not the intention, these friendships proved to be a way into the Thai community in Edinburgh, a community made up of students, restaurateurs and Thai women married to Scottish men. I helped the monks as best I could by translating letters and making contact on their behalf with various organisations and officials.

I remember one Saturday afternoon visiting the Thai temple to find lots of pairs of shoes outside the temple door! A retreat was taking place and the shrine room was packed. I sat next to the abbot and a couple of ladies sitting nearby wanted to know if I was a Buddhist. I explained to them that I was a student of Buddhism and a follower of Jesus. On hearing this, one of the ladies announced that she had just received a Bible from a neighbour. She began to ask questions about the Christian faith and I explained as best I could. I asked the abbot if I could send this lady some Christian literature. The abbot gave permission and leaning over said to the two ladies "Rory is a highly respected person at this temple and if he gives you something to read make sure you read it carefully." He then went on to tell them to tie a string that they had just woven around my wrist as a mark of respect and to give me one to take home to my wife. I still remember that affirming experience as if it were yesterday!

Co-operating and Competing

On occasions, I was invited by the monks to be involved in the care of the sick and help arrange funerals. One example is a 35-year-old Thai medical researcher who rapidly deteriorated due to an aggressive form of leukaemia and sadly passed away. Leading medical researchers stood shoulder to shoulder with Thai restaurateurs at a packed Buddhist funeral service which I assisted in leading.

From time-to-time members of the interfaith community would visit the temple and I would be asked to explain Buddhist belief and practice to these visitors. Some would congratulate the abbot and me on our relationship telling us that it demonstrated that all religious paths lead to the same destination. To their surprise, the abbot and I would point out that actually we felt that there were significant differences between our traditions, although we remained the best of friends.

The American scholar of religions, Terry Muck, suggests that we can both co-operate *and* compete with those from other faiths.[2] Some issues that I have co-operated or collaborated on with Buddhist communities include education, caring for the sick, and helping those going through marital breakdown. Through addressing these issues together, we got to know each other at a deeper level. Back in 2006, this co-operation was recognised, and I was awarded a certificate of honour by the Royal Thai Embassy in conjunction with the Thai temple in London.

Trusting in Jesus is incredibly difficult for a Theravāda Buddhist because it appears to be morally irresponsible.

Meanwhile, competition (or differing) points to the fact that Buddhism and Christianity have different paths leading to what they believe to be salvation. My understanding is that "being right" with God comes about by trusting in Jesus to do for you what you cannot do for yourself. This belief is incredibly difficult for a Theravāda Buddhist to accept as it appears to be morally irresponsible and indeed impossible, as each person is responsible for achieving his/her enlightenment or liberation from suffering. On this very important issue, the one tradition contradicts the other, but by allowing the other person to hold to, and put forward his tradition's unique position, the relationship between people of different faiths develops and deepens.

Some Christians who reach out to those from a different faith community may have strengths in developing and sustaining friendships and co-operating on areas of shared concern. Yet, the more we know people, the harder it can be to share our faith as we do not want to jeopardise our friendship. Then there are other Christians who are more at home operating on an evangelistic paradigm. Often these two groups of believers disapprove of each other's approaches, even to the point of refusing to work together. If we set aside our differences, we can work together to good effect as the following example illustrates. I would often help the local Buddhist monks prepare for cultural celebrations and at one such event I met a married couple. The wife wanted to know whether I was a Buddhist or not. When I told her that I was a student of Buddhism and a follower of Jesus she indicated that she was a seeker but had been put-off at university by evangelicals who forced her to attend Christian meetings. We had a Christianity Explored course starting the next evening at our church and she and some other Thai joined it. After some time, the couple began to attend a weekly Thai Bible study led by a retired missionary to Thailand. The retired missionary, a conservative evangelical was suspicious of my involvement with the Buddhist community. In time, three Thai came to faith. The boldness of the retired missionary in pointing these

Buddhists to Jesus and his unique path and inviting them to take it reflected who she was, and clearly the Lord used her. Yet the Lord also used the fact that my wife and I had attended various Buddhist ceremonies. We can only share our faith as we can, not as we can't, and God uses different people in different ways. And, isn't it the case that evangelism is a *process* not just an *event* and people input in different ways along the way?

Obtain a translation of the text that is being chanted in the ceremony. This provides insight as to whether the Buddha is being worshipped or simply honoured as a great teacher.

Further Involvement in Buddhist Monastic Communities

On completing studies at the University of Edinburgh I took up a lecturing post at the International Christian College in Glasgow. As part of my work, I developed new courses in Buddhism, and Primal and New Religious Movements. This proved to be an exciting adventure in trying to understand people from a whole range of backgrounds. I would take students to visit various Buddhist temples and New Age style fairs. We welcomed a variety of guests, for example, those who practised Shamanism or non-Christian forms of healing. As well as offering hospitality and trying to understand our visitors on their own terms, we tried to work out ways of communicating the Christian faith with them in a respectful manner.

Labelling myself as a student of Buddhism and a follower of Jesus was an attempt to sum up my spiritual commitment—a Christian not a Buddhist, yet someone interested in Buddhism. This approach was based on my understanding of Karl Reichelt's approach of offering friendship and working hard to understand the religious beliefs and practices of Buddhists. I mentioned at the beginning that I sensed a call to reach out to Buddhists as Bangkok and its people "drew me in." I now felt that the story of Reichelt and his desire to reach out to Buddhists and Buddhist monks in particular "was drawing me in"—it seemed to beckon me. With trepidation, as I did not know where this path would take me and, more importantly, how it would change me, I registered for part-time doctoral studies in Buddhism.

Professor Peter Harvey, a Buddhist and internationally renowned scholar of Buddhism, supervised my work. My part-time research, covering six years, took me back to Thailand on a number of occasions. I analysed the two emerging Thai Buddhist movements of Santi Asoke and Wat Phra Dhammakāya and how they mentored their members.[3] This involved visiting the huge Dhammakāya temple outside Bangkok as often as I could, as well as living at various Santi Asoke communities. On one occasion I returned from field work at one of these centres feeling compromised in terms of my Christian faith and practice. It seemed as if I had spent most of my time listening to Buddhist sermons and showing respect to Buddhist monks. I shared my feelings with a Thai Christian friend—an army colonel. He said "Now you stand in the shoes of Thai Christians." I found that to be a telling response. I had been a missionary for twelve years in Thailand, almost all of them working with him, but now, for the first time, I was experiencing what it was like to be the only Christian living and working in an environment where almost everyone else was a Buddhist.

The extent to which we participate in Buddhist ceremonies is a challenging issue and beyond the scope of this chapter. Buddhists are normally inclusive and readily invite participation in their ceremonies. True, we wish to be respectful of what our Buddhist friends hold in high regard. That said, we do not wish to compromise our allegiance to Jesus. We can certainly learn from Christians who have been Buddhists as to what they feel appropriate participation should be. Yet what is considered appropriate participation varies from person to person, so we need to be prayerful. Not only that, what we are comfortable with regarding involvement in ceremonies changes as we gain more experience and reflect on how we think and feel after the event. You may find it helpful to obtain a translation of the Pali (or other language) text that is being chanted in the ceremony. This can provide insight as to whether the Buddha is being worshipped or simply honoured as a great teacher.

Invitation to Lecture in Buddhism at a Buddhist University

During my library research at a prestigious university for Buddhist monks in Bangkok, I approached one of the librarians asking for advice regarding Pali language (the language used for the Theravādin Scriptures). He was unable to help, but looking up at an approaching monk, said "You are in luck; here comes our Pali language specialist. Let's see what he says." The Pali professor examined my document and said "You really do need some help with this! Where are you staying?" When I told him that I was staying at a guest house he said, "Save your money, come and stay with me at my temple, I have a spare room."

Some days later, I nervously phoned the scholar monk who had kindly invited me to stay with him at the large temple where he lived. He restated his invitation and I moved from the guest house to the spare room in the professor's *kuti,* or residence. I felt a bit like what I imagined Reichelt must have felt like as he stayed in temples experiencing both hospitality and a very different way of living. I certainly experienced a real sense of belonging as temple security guards would sometimes stop me going into the temple in the evening by saying. "Excuse me, the temple is closed to tourists come back tomorrow." I would reply, "I know but I live here, I stay with the professor in *kuti* 18." Some were a bit dubious and escorted me to where I claimed to be staying to make sure that I really did live there! The scholar monk was very helpful; not only with language but in providing me with a variety of contacts who were able to supply the information I needed for my research.

As I was completing my doctoral studies, the Buddhist professor who had been so hospitable said, "When you complete your research, why don't you become a visiting lecturer at my university?" I remember asking "Will that be OK, after all, I am a follower of Jesus and a student of Buddhism?" At that point he picked up my Bible and said, "That's all right, together we can search for the truth." I spent two very rewarding two-month blocks living at the temple and lecturing in the MA International Programme on research methodology and Mahāyāna Buddhism. This offered me the opportunity to get to know some monks and lay people quite well. Together, we created a community of learning as we shared our knowledge and experience and enjoyed a good number of field trips together.

A Thai PhD scholar often remarked that he experienced "God's power" as he spent time with Christians, sensing a flow of energy between them which he identified as the Holy Spirit.

Belonging before Believing

I had the pleasure of meeting up regularly for three years with a Thai PhD scholar, a researcher in the area of diagnostic X-ray technology. He often remarked that he experienced "God's power" as he spent time with Christians, sensing a flow of good energy between them. He identified this flow as the Holy Spirit and, as he opened up his life to the Spirit, he experienced help in his doctoral research. He did occasionally attend church, but his main experience of Christian community was attending weekly English conversation classes and social events. My friend appreciated this space between his Buddhist informed culture and the church. A place where he could experience being part of a group of Christians and not-yet Christians as they explored new ideas together. We would do well to ask our Buddhist friends who are near the kingdom what they think such a space would look like for them, and whether this is something that could be created together.

A lot has been written about "belonging before believing" in the discussions surrounding emerging church or fresh expressions of church. Whether the context is post-Christian British or Buddhist Asians, people need to see the Christian message lived out and have the opportunity to observe, experience and evaluate kingdom living. The *deeds* we do, allow the *words* we say to be heard. Deeds authenticate our words, while words explain our deeds. Deeds without words may mean that we are perceived as just kind people, but we have actually been entrusted to share God's great news of reconciliation. Please see 2 Corinthians 5:17–21 and Colossians 1:19–20.

Ongoing Ministry in the Buddhist Community

There are nine different Buddhist groups meeting in Edinburgh, but my activities focus on the Thai community and Asian students. A lot of time is spent on meeting up with individuals. For example, I met a post graduate Singaporean student at the university chaplaincy centre. His first degree was in philosophy and he was very interested in Buddhism. As a result of his interest, he was directed to me and we spent a couple of hours each week for a year talking about Buddhism and Christianity. As the weeks went by, the conversations focused increasingly on the Christian path. We read the New Testament and ended each session with a time of meditation or prayer. He explored kingdom values and appreciated the experience, although he has not yet committed himself to Christ. He is now back in Asia, but the conversations continue.

The monks I mentioned earlier have disrobed but continue to live in the city as lay Buddhists. We go back almost twenty years with these men and continue to meet up, occasionally discussing the similarities and dissimilarities between Buddhism and Christianity but often just catching up on each other's news. Apart from the current Corona virus restrictions, there are always new people to meet at the temple as well as regulars to keep up with. I have always had a sense of accountability to those I write about, and this involves showing them what I have written and inviting their feedback.

In my conversations with Buddhists, I try to build bridges over which they can pass from a Buddhist understanding of reality to an understanding of the Christian path. The bridge, stepping-stone, redemptive analogy, or cultural connection, whichever term you use, is a place to begin a conversation rather than an ultimate truth. It is a starting point on a journey to a more biblical understanding of a particular truth. Furthermore, this approach demonstrates a humble stance and a non-confrontational posture. For example, rather than push back against the Buddhist belief in non-self *(anatta),* why not use it as an opportunity to speak of the lack of control we humans have over our emotions, desires and actions and speak of God as self *(atta),* indeed the Great Self *(Mahāatta)* because he is in complete control of himself. At the burning bush (Ex. 3), some 800 or 900 years before the birth of the Buddha, God discloses his name to Moses as "I am who I am" from which we get the name "Jehovah." Of course, Moses is not interested in the sound of the name, or even the name itself; his question is whether the one who speaks from the burning bush has the power to do as he promised. Yes, "I am" (or God) can liberate the Jewish people. Despite the overwhelming odds, nothing is able to thwart his purposes. And so, this unfettered power is the nature of the one who may be referred to as the Great-Self *(Mahāatta),* whose existence is not predicated on any cause, and whose amazing power and boundlessness is the antithesis of the limitations of our ever-changing human existence *(anatta).*[4]

The Most Important Thing of All

Our words and deeds need to be motivated by genuine concern, even affection for others. People often develop a hunch as to why we do what we do, and can often sense if we genuinely care for them. I heard a missionary say after decades of service in Latin America "If Christ's love is in our hearts, then the people we are called to will be in our hearts. If they are in our hearts, then we will be in their hearts." A crucial question then becomes how in the busyness of life and discouragement of lack of "results" can we ensure God's love is in our hearts and live out the challenge of 1 Corinthians 13?

Our words and deeds need to be motivated by genuine concern, even affection for others. People often develop a hunch as to why we do what we do and can sense if we genuinely care for them.

Lastly

Serving in Asia was hard at times but being part of another culture, using another language, and working with a wide variety of people was a huge privilege. Since returning from Asia, my journey has changed in unexpected ways—researching new Buddhist movements, teaching Buddhist studies (as a Christian), and becoming involved in monastic communities were not on my radar screen. The journey was, and still is, an adventure, as I try to be a good neighbour to the Buddhists I have managed to get to know here in Edinburgh. Did I become someone else along the way? Perhaps, but maybe I just discovered who I really was.

You may want to think about Buddhists in your community—they may be Asian, or Western converts to Buddhism. What issues do they face and what needs might they have? Is there a temple they visit? What would be the next step for you if you felt you would like to reach out to them? My expectation is that as you do that, you will discover that God has gone before you! **IJFM**

Endnotes

[1] A. Sorik, "The Cross and the Lotus: The Story of the Christian Mission to Buddhists and K. L. Reichelt" In *Areopagus* 9.4 (1997): 72–7, esp. 73.

[2] T. C. Muck, "Missiological Issues in the Encounter with Emerging Buddhism" in *Missiology* Vol. 28, No. 1 (2000): 35–46.

[3] The research was published by Routledge (2007) under the title of *New Buddhist Movements in Thailand: Towards an Understanding of Wat Phra Dhammakāya and Santi Asoke.*

[4] My book, *God, Self and Salvation in a Buddhist Context* (Wide Margin, 2016) offers a number of examples of doing theology in a Buddhist context and trying to make the Christian message more readily understood by a Buddhist audience.

Pilgrimage Responses

Responses to Rory Mackenzie's, "A Journey of Two Parts! Some Reflections on Reaching Out to the Buddhist World"

Terry Muck: Response One

Thank you for sharing your story; it was really good. I had read it in your book, and it's a very moving story. It called to mind for me a struggle that I have had, and still at times have. That is the struggle between seeking answers to these deep spiritual questions, but at the same time recognizing that I will surely never find final answers to these deep spiritual questions. At various times in my life, probably depending on what I'm doing, I will emphasize one or another. Well, I've got to get this done, this is important, this is a spiritual question of import; but at other times, as a scholar, I just enjoy the journey, I enjoy finding out what I think and what others around me think and putting it into a paradigm. My wife will say, "Have you finished that paper yet?" And I'll say, "Well, why would I want to finish it? Why don't I just keep working at it?" I wonder if you recognize that, Rory, in your own life, and if so, how do you deal with that? How do you keep yourself open to maybe not having the final answers, but also realizing that searching for answers is part of the motivation that keeps us going?

How do you keep yourself open to not having the final answers, but realize that searching for answers is part of the motivation that keeps us going? (Muck)

Rory Mackenzie Replies

I guess it's about the journey and the people we meet on the journey and how the journey changes us, rather than being about the destination. It reminds me of the "stages of faith" concept. You have the self-absorbed person, and that person converts to being a conformist to his community, and some people stay in that stage all their lives. They don't ask questions; they don't want changes. But some people step out of that restriction and begin to ask questions, and are maybe very critical of people who aren't asking these questions. Some may stay in that, perhaps uncomfortable, position all their lives. But some people move on to a final stage where they are asking the questions, but they are not so sure that they are ever going to find answers. And actually, it doesn't really matter so much. Perhaps "stages of faith" help us understand ourselves in this area.

Terry Muck Replies

Thank you, that is helpful.

Notto Thelle: Response Two

Thank you very much for your presentation. It's very fascinating to follow a person's journey from here to there, and the journey continues. I want to follow up on one or two points. First is your emphasis on friendship and a generous opening up to other people. I said yesterday, or the day before, that friendship is a central Christian virtue, and I think we sometimes forget humility and generosity in the way we meet others. You touched on the issue of the Theravāda tradition, which is quite tough in many ways: self-power, to liberate yourself from suffering, hard work and so on. Of course, this is Theravāda and I know the Mahāyāna traditions better, which emphasize very strongly the Buddha's compassion and so on. I sometimes ask myself, is there grace in Buddhism? From what I experienced in Japan with Japanese Buddhists, the answer is yes. People who are very deep into Buddhism sometimes say that, of course, there is a lot of hard work and meditation, and so on, but basically deep down in Buddhism, there is some sort of grace. Because you may sit not only for hours and weeks and months, you may sit and meditate for years—very hard work. But the moment you break through to understanding and awakening, you discover that awakening or nirvana is not something you create, it's something which is given to you when you open up. I have a good friend, a Zen monk, a Zen priest in Kyoto or outside Kyoto. He showed me a book he had translated into English. It was a Japanese book, a rather humorous description of Zen novices and their practice, about the hard work and all the strange things these monks were doing. But towards the end of the book there was, to me, a very moving sketch of a monk who had his spiritual breakthrough, a sort of explosive expression of joy. In the picture was a monk who had been sitting for months and perhaps years before he finally had a spiritual breakthrough, an awakening. But what was so moving is that under the place where the monk was sitting, he was sitting on a big hand. I asked my friend, what was this hand upon which this monk was sitting? He immediately said, "Well, that hand is God."

> He did not produce
> his own enlightenment,
> he did not produce
> his awakening.
> It was given.
> (Thelle)

Of course, he did not believe in God in our sense, but I think his point was to say that he had been sitting on that hand all the time, but only when he had his spiritual breakthrough did he realize that he was sitting on the hand (hand of Buddha probably). To me that was a beautiful image of grace. He did not produce his own enlightenment, he did not produce his awakening; it was given. He had to do hard work before he came there, but once he arrived to that breakthrough, he discovered that he was sitting on a hand. To me that is a beautiful image of—well, a Buddhist would not use the word grace, although in the Pure Land tradition they would speak about other power—but I think even in Zen, there is the awareness very deep down that once you are there, you discover it's given.

Rory Mackenzie Replies

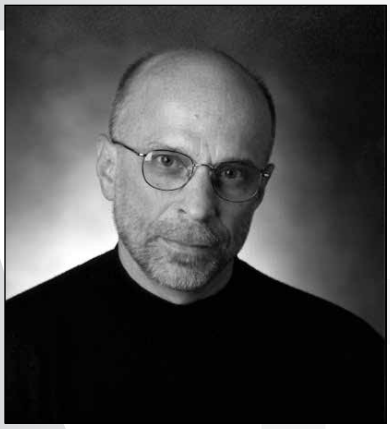
That's a very helpful comment, and I suppose there is maybe not so much divine grace but help within the Theravāda tradition. A monk may go off on a solitary pilgrimage to his own enlightenment, but actually you can only do so through the help of the *sangha,* through the help of fellow monks, teachers in particular, and lay people coming to assist him in his quest for enlightenment. So, there is that dependency, even though the quest for enlightenment appears to be a very solitary journey. It's quite interesting also to notice the four immeasurable qualities that we have in Buddhism: loving kindness, compassion, evenhandedness, and empathetic joy at the success of others. These are central qualities that the good Buddhist will seek to emulate and recognize in others as well. So, as we dig behind what we see, as you've just done, we see the helping of others. That is a kind of grace. **IJFM**

Buddhist-Christian Pilgrimages

My Pilgrimage in Christian-Buddhist Encounter:
From T. Lobsang Rampa to Mahatma Gandhi

by Terry C. Muck

Editor's Note: This autobiographical account was originally presented at the Ralph D. Winter Lectureship in February 2021, under the theme, "Buddhist-Christian Encounters: Today's Realities in Light of the Pioneering Work of Karl Ludvig Reichelt in China." Each of the four missiologists who presented was asked to share his pilgrimage and to receive responses from the others.



Terry Muck (PhD, Northwestern) is professor emeritus of World Religions at Asbury Theological Seminary. He has served as editor of Christianity Today *and Dean of the E. Stanley Jones School of World Mission at Asbury. He has been a long-time participant of The Society for Buddhist-Christian Studies, to which he brought vital leadership. He is widely published on the subject of Buddhism and religious studies and has authored along with Harold Netland and Gerald McDermott the* Handbook of Religion: A Christian Engagement with Traditions, Teachings, and Practices (2014). *Along with Frances Adeney he has also published* Christianity Encountering World Religions: The Practice of Mission in the Twenty-First Century *(Encountering Mission Series, 2009).*

When it comes to religion, I have always had imagination. If imagination is "forming new ideas about external objects not present to the physical senses," then religion is especially susceptible to flights of imagination. Although the *effects* of religion are manifest in our actions (churches, liturgies, theologies, missions, etc.), the *essence* of religion (the spiritual) is not present to our physical senses. Thus, there are as many imaginings about religion as there are people—and for my part I contributed a double or triple share.

As you might imagine, my imaginings did not always sit well with those around me. My mother was horrified when I invited the Jehovah's Witnesses who came to our door to come back again for further conversations. And she was forever checking up on what I was reading. Armchair religion is seductive, and I reveled in the extraordinary variety of books on religion of all sorts available to me. I couldn't get enough, it seems.

To give you an idea, one of the earliest books on religion I can remember reading was by a so-called Tibetan Buddhist monk named T. Lobsang Rampa. The book was called *The Third Eye.* Rampa described his work as "the renowned story of one man's spiritual journey on the road to self-awareness." The "third eye" is a metaphorical description of an eye located in the middle of the forehead that can be used as a bridge to intuitive knowledge of *samsara* and *nirvana*. It was the first book I read about non-Christian religion. And I was hooked. How fascinating to learn about things people who are not Christian believe. How different they were from what I had been taught.

Now before you get the wrong idea about me and my religion, I must assure you that in most senses I was boringly traditional. I went to our Baptist church for Sunday morning worship and Sunday school, Sunday evening testimony time, and our midweek Wednesday evening prayer service. My father was an evangelistic speaker, and I went on the road with my mother and father, and usually

sang a solo in the service—"Bringing in the Sheaves" was my show-stopping number. I quickly learned—and wholeheartedly believed—and still believe—that the Westminster confession could be summed up in the question, *What is the chief end of man?* and its answer: *To glorify God and to enjoy him forever.*

should neither endorse or excuse that sin, we should emulate God who forgave sinners, and acknowledge that many are put back on the road to created greatness because of God's grace. Thus, *The Story of My Experiments with Truth* should be judged by what it says, not automatically dismissed because of the apparent sin of him who wrote it.

There are instances of faithful and unfaithful religions, faithful religions being the ones that seem to succeed at connecting us with God and unfaithful ones that don't. Our task, after all, is to "glorify God and enjoy him forever."

I suppose what I was learning at this early age was *an approach to difference* that has stood me in good stead the rest of my life. This approach has two aspects: The first is that difference is common and universal. And that *religious* difference is just as common and universal. The second is that difference is not to be automatically rejected—as if the way I do things and think things is necessarily the right way to do things and think things. The evidence that I was already learning these lessons from my reading came when I started to read the books not just out of curiosity, but I started to categorize them as good and not-so-good books.

The first really good non-Christian religious book I can remember reading was Mahatma Gandhi's autobiography, which he entitled *The Story of My Experiments with Truth.* It has remained one of my all-time favorite books over the years. My favorite passage is when Gandhi relates his father's death. Gandhi was chosen to sit up with his father during the night as his life ebbed away, and Gandhi considered it a privilege:

> My mother, an old servant, and I were his principal attendants. I had the duties of a nurse, which mainly consisted in dressing the wound, giving my father his medicine, and compounding drugs whenever they had to be made up at home. Every night I massaged his legs and retired only when he asked me to do so or after he had fallen asleep. I loved to do this service. I do not remember ever having neglected it. (89)

Since Gandhi can be a polarizing figure for both Indians and for those of us who study India, I should say at this point why I continue to admire him even when certain weaknesses are pointed out. It goes back to an early Christian theological teaching that has remained with me all these years. The teaching is about the sinfulness of all humanity. The teaching can be phrased this way: "We are all sinners saved by grace." What this teaching has meant to me is that if you scratch hard enough at the details of a person's life, any person, Christian or non-Christian, you will find sin. And while we

This is an extremely important lesson for a historian of religion. Religion is about persons and their stories of the eternal, more than it is about provable truths, or admirable moralities, or aesthetic wonders. Religion is about the collective experiences all human beings have of the realm beyond time and space. When we study religion, we are studying the history of humankind and their various attempts to relate to the divine, however they might see and interpret the divine. The law of difference insists that we not be too quick to judge the relative merits of the religions, but it does not insist that we never make judgments. There are, after all, true and false teachings, and good and bad moralities, and beautiful and ugly aesthetic creations. There are instances of faithful and unfaithful religions, faithful religions being the ones that seem to succeed at connecting us with God and unfaithful ones that don't. Our task, after all, is to "glorify God and enjoy him forever."

To be sure, the history of religions does not in itself provide us with a way of making those kinds of judgments. For that we need a theology. But what the history of religions does provide us with is a tool that gives us the raw material out of which such judgments can be made. The tool is called "compare and contrast." I can remember as if it were yesterday my doctoral advisor at Northwestern University, Edmund Perry, beginning a lecture or a writing assignment or an exam with the admonition, "Compare and contrast such-and-such with so-and-so." He usually designed the two elements, the such-and-such and the so-and-so, in such a way that they had plenty of similarities (the compare part) and plenty of differences (the contrast part). It may be that two elements could be found in two different religions that are exactly the same (all compare) or totally different (all contrast), but I doubt it. I never found any such compare and contrast.

Over the years I have found this history of religions research tool enormously helpful in doing mission. It seems to me that missionaries tend to be of two sorts—those

who are predisposed to recognize the similarities between Christianity and the mission religion in question, and those who are predisposed to see the differences. And my experience has been that those end-of-the-spectrum proclivities are not real—that a balance between the two is what is most true about a religious comparison.

I got an excellent education in the religions of the world at Northwestern University, but when it comes to Christian mission, a good education only gets us part way. What is absolutely essential is the realization that personal relationships with non-Christians are the *sine qua non* of mission effectiveness. I got my first taste of those relationships with Buddhists when I spent two years in Sri Lanka on a Fulbright-Hayes Research Fellowship.

Ostensibly, I went to Sri Lanka to do research for my doctoral dissertation, a comparison of the Christian monasticism characterized by the longer and shorter rules of St. Basil the Great with the Buddhist monastic rule, the *Vinaya Pitaka.* It was a compare and contrast dissertation on a large scale.

I spent my two years in Sri Lanka visiting Buddhist monasteries and interviewing Buddhist monks, asking questions about the ways they followed the *Vinaya Pitaka* rule. It was an eye-opening experience. I came to realize that I could study Buddhism in Northwestern University's library till the cows came home, but I would never really understand Buddhism until I *engaged Buddhists in conversation and shared life experiences* with them. It was in those conversations that I recognized the real similarities and the real differences between Buddhism and Christianity. To be sure, I was helped greatly in those conversations by two books written by a well-known Sri Lankan Buddhist monk, Walpola Rahula. Dr. Rahula came to Northwestern University to teach Buddhism for a year, and I became well-acquainted with him and his books, especially *What the Buddha Taught* and *Heritage of the Bhikkhu* (*bhikkhu* is the Pali word for monk).

Later in life I had another chance to confirm the importance of personal relationships in understanding a non-Christian religion. I taught for a year at Trinity Theological College in Singapore. One of my teaching assignments was an introductory class on Buddhism. Approximately 30 students signed up for the class—almost all of them had grown up as Buddhists and converted to Christianity. I began the course by giving the usual lectures on Buddhist history, Buddhist teachings, and Buddhist practices, the ones I used in my courses on Buddhism at seminaries in the United States. I discovered that my Singapore students knew almost as little about Buddhist history and Buddhist teachings as my US students, but my Singapore students knew far more than I did about Buddhist practices—ways of worship, personal devotions, interpersonal ethics, and the like. For that part of the course, they became the teacher and I the student. And it was through personal conversations with them that my education in Buddhist practices took place.

After my experiences in Sri Lanka interviewing Buddhist monks, it gradually occurred to me that the conversations I was having with Buddhists there had a special character to them. This realization set me on a quest that consumed several decades of my academic life. It started with a book that I had given a cursory reading as an undergraduate, Martin Buber's *I and Thou.* It was a book about dialogue, the ways we relate to others, ways that should really be intimations of our relationship to God, the "Thou" of all "thous." It is a difficult little book, which is appropriate for its subject matter. Dialogue is a difficult topic. For evangelical Christians like myself, interreligious dialogue became controversial, especially as it pertained to another way of relating to people of other religions—evangelism, for example. The question was, "How are faithful Christians to relate to people of other religions, through evangelism or dialogue?" For a long period of time the question was seen as an either/or—one either practiced evangelism with non-Christians or one dialogued with them. It took many years for a third position to emerge: one could do both.

I could study Buddhism in the library till the cows came home, but I would never understand Buddhism until I engaged Buddhists in conversation and shared life experiences with them.

In the meantime, I had helped found a dialogue group, the Society for Buddhist-Christian Studies. It was a group that met annually at the American Academy of Religion meetings in November. I became heavily involved, serving as an officer, editing the Societies journal, *Buddhist-Christian Studies,* for ten years, and eventually serving a term as president of the Society. The Buddhists we Christians dialogued with in the Society were mostly Western Buddhists, that is, former Christians from Europe and the United States who had converted to Buddhism. Membership in the Society has been a

wonderful experience for me. One of the things I discovered was that the most positive outcome of interreligious dialogue is neither agreement nor willingness to disagree pleasantly, but friendship—friendship pure and simple.

In the meantime, I wrote scholarly articles about dialogue and evangelism and the relationship, or lack thereof, between the two. As an academic, I had taken to heart the wisdom of a colleague, George "Chuck" Hunter, who insisted loud and long that unless you write, people will never really know what it is you are thinking. I took Chuck's admonition seriously. I even took it one step further and became convinced that unless you write, you really don't know what *you* are thinking.

And religious testimony is a sharing voice; it can only be done when there are other listening ears.

How to summarize what I have learned about interreligious dialogue, both by studying it and by practicing it? The first lesson is that in doing dialogue, the setting is foundational. Dialogue participants must feel free and unthreatened by any power differences lurking in things like who organizes the dialogue, whose building it takes place in, what questions are considered for discussion, and many other such things.

The second lesson is that real dialogue never takes place unless the two participants enter into it with a certain attitude. Of course, the first requirement is that all sides to the dialogue actually want to have a free, unfettered discussion—that it is not just a camouflage for manipulation. You cannot force people to dialogue; they must sincerely embrace it. Beyond that, the dialogical attitude can be summed as the participants having "full respect for others and their religion and humility about themselves and their religion."

And even if the setting is impeccable and the attitudes of the participants admirable, interreligious dialogue will go nowhere unless a certain voice is used, the voice of testimony. The third lesson is that in order to do interreligious dialogue, one must learn a way of speaking that is sadly lacking in our Western cultures today. That voice can be called many things, but I call it testimony, the voice of interreligious dialogue, the voice of religion. What is testimony? First, what it is not. It is not declaration, the voice scientists and rationalists use once they have digested the results of their experiments and syllogisms. And testimony is not advocacy, like the voice people around the world use to champion one of the myriads of moralities people around the world follow. It is not even the voice aficionados of art use to describe and judge paintings, sculptures, poetry and music. Of course, religious may use all these voices—declaration, advocacy, judgement—in the day-to-days of their religion. But the dominant voice is testimony.

What is testimony? Religious testimony is not the kind of testimony used in a court of law where one provides evidence to bolster the prosecutor's claims of crime. No, religious testimony is a person's relating his or her experiences of the divine in all its mystery and wonder. And religious testimony is a sharing voice—it cannot be done is isolation, but only when there are other listening ears to hear what God—or *dhamma,* or *brahma,* or Allah—has done in one's life.

I was sitting the other day with my Airpods in my ears listening to Spotify's rendition of Sting's "Fields of Gold." It is a love song and it recalled to mind a very warm time in my life. My heart filled up with pleasant memories, with reminiscences that I only occasionally enjoy. The feelings were so gratifying that I wondered to myself, "How can I share this with Frances [my wife]?" I cannot "declare" to her what a great musical composition "Fields of Gold" is—I do not have enough knowledge of music to make that kind of declaration and, besides, Frances knows much more about music than I do. And I certainly cannot "advocate" for the song, saying it is the number one song of all time, or some such silliness. And even saying "it is beautiful" is not quite enough, is it? No, the best way I can communicate with Frances about "Fields of Gold," is to tell her how it is making me warm all over—and what wonderful things it is reminding me of—and leaving it at that. If I do that, she will probably smile, and (hopefully) look at me with love, and perhaps join me in listening to the song. **IJFM**

Pilgrimage Responses

Responses to Terry Muck's, "My Pilgrimage in Christian-Buddhist Encounter: From T. Lobsang Rampa to Mahatma Gandi"

Rory Mackenzie: Response One

Well, thank you, Dr. Terry, for that thought-provoking and imaginative paper. They say that the difference between a good communicator and a great communicator is imagination. It's a great gift. First, I want to say I was inspired to search for "Fields of Gold" by Sting, and I listened to the song. Sting looks like the worship leader in our church, so that made me feel comfortable and at home and I enjoyed the song. But your story about this song is a great example of a critical aspect of dialogue, and it just made me think again about our own experience of God, how God makes me feel, and what effect he produces in me. This reminded me of growing up in an evangelical mission hall where the leader would sometimes call on someone to give a testimony. "Now, John will come and say what the Lord means to him." If John were to stick to his brief, then he perhaps would not go into what the Lord had done for him, although there's clearly a connection. If John were sincere and the audience were open, then something might happen as John tells his audience what the Lord means to him. If that were to continue, a dialogue might start after the end of the meeting and beyond the Mission Hall. I think you made that point yesterday, that dialogue starts after the last word is said.

> I used to think that the testimony approach was outdated, but sharing from our experience and how we feel is actually quite contemporary. (Mackenzie)

I used to think that the testimony approach was outdated, but sharing from our experience and how we feel is actually quite contemporary. This reminded me of Eric Sharpe's four categories of dialogue, and I'll just use my own words here. He talks about discussing doctrine, just being friends, and cooperating on an issue of common concern or interest (secular dialogue as Sharpe calls it). Then he talks about interior dialogue, which is often reserved for monastics of different traditions meditating together and sharing their experiences. The idea here is that these people have been trained in their spiritual exercises, know how to interpret them, and have the language to describe what has taken place. But if I understand you correctly, you suggest sharing what God means to you and the effect that he has on you. I think this belongs to that category of interior dialogue. I think that's really quite special, so I loved that connection between dialogue and testimony. Also, what you said about tone; the tone of what we say. Tones are very important in Asian languages, but tone is important in all languages. But I wondered if you wanted to make the connection between testimony and inner dialogue, which is often perhaps reserved for practitioners who have the experience, the expertise, and even the language to discuss what they are experiencing, or feeling about God.

> It's not encouraged in many places to tell what's in your heart, and I think that's what we do in interreligious dialogue at its best—we reveal what is in our hearts. (Muck)

Terry Muck Replies

Yes, thank you for that. As I mentioned, most Sunday nights, in the church I grew up in, were testimony meetings where the pastor would invite whomever wanted to get up and basically say what God had done for them during that week. Some people were good at it, and some people were really bad at it. I knew somebody who would always get up, and we would all roll our eyes and realize we were in for it. But the service overall never failed to move me. The people talking weren't good speakers, so some of it was pretty rough, but it was *real*. It was what they felt. I think we have lost the capacity, or maybe it's just the occasions we've lost, where we can do that in our culture anymore. We're so calculating and so intent on affecting you in a good way that we forget to tell what's in our hearts, or we're not allowed to. It's not encouraged to tell what's in your heart; it's encouraged to be smart and to say what's clever. It's not really encouraged in very many places that I can think of to tell what's in your heart, and I think that's what we do in interreligious dialogue at its best—we reveal what is in our hearts.

Once a Zen monk stayed in a Benedictine monastery.
Early Easter morning, he ran through the corridors,
beating a drum, shouting again and again,
"I want to see Christ risen among you!"

Notto Thelle: Response Two

Thank you for your presentation. There were a lot of interesting ideas, and I was also moved by your final comment about testimony, which I think is very true. There's something with testimony that is. . . . Well, you end up speaking about your wife, so it's a love language. I was reminded of a story about Norwegian meetings ending up with personal testimonies, sometimes very strange. There is a moving little story where there was a couple sitting there, old people, and she rises and says "He has been so good to me, he has been so good to me." And then the husband was a little embarrassed, so he rose and said, "Well, she's speaking about Jesus." So, as you say, it's a forgotten thing or under-communicated thing.

This also reminds me about something which I did not experience myself, but a very good friend of mine, a Belgian monk, told what happened. There had been a sharing of Japanese and Zen monks and European Benedictine monks for many, many years, and there was a Japanese Zen monk who had stayed for three weeks in a Benedictine monastery. His last week there was Easter week. He did not understand everything that was happening, but he fovllowed the Benedictines as they prayed all day and all night. He followed the rhythm through the silent week (as we call it) and Easter week, all the happenings with Maundy Thursday and Good Friday and Saturday and then the last Easter night with worship services and prayers and so on. But then, early in the morning on Easter Day, this monk was running through the corridors of the monastery beating on a drum, shouting again and again, shouting and shouting and shouting, "I want to see Christ risen among you! I want to see Christ risen among you!" Isn't that what should happen in a real dialogue? Even though he probably did not say very much, he had followed the rhythm. He had followed everything that was happening, and he was inspired and challenged. **IJFM**

Closing Exhoration

H. L. Richard:

Thank you all. We have a few minutes left, so unprompted and unprepared we will give an opportunity for a last word from our three speakers. We still have a significant group of people faithfully with us to the end of this event, and we have so much enjoyed all you have presented to us. So what last word would you leave with us? What do we take away from this event, from these nine and a half hours as we've listened, as we've reflected, as we had a little bit of time to talk to each other and to interact in online discussions. Do you have an exhortation, a word of wisdom, something you want to leave us with as we go on our separate ways. Dr. Mackenzie, you look ready to speak, so I'll call on you first.

Rory Mackenzie:

I think in my own practice I keep coming back to the words I read at the end of my story, words from a missionary from Latin America. If Christ's love is in our hearts, then the people we are called to will be in our hearts, and if they are in our hearts, then we will be in their hearts. I feel that is so challenging; it raises issues of how I can re-enchant my walk with the Lord so that his love is there; how I can have a sense of expectancy that somehow God is at work in the networks I'm involved in even though it doesn't seem like much is happening. So I'm very grateful for that quote from him and I find it an ongoing challenge.

Terry Muck:

The overall impact for me has been a reaffirmation that dialogue opens up big areas of discussion; it does not close things down. If you have a willingness to say what you really believe, that does not discourage other people, it doesn't narrow the conversation, in fact it broadens it. I see too much dialogue based on this idea that you cannot have firm beliefs going into a dialogue. Well, that's silly. It becomes a dialogue and it becomes open and it becomes free simply because you really say who you are and how God is working in your life, and then worlds open up. Our interaction has reaffirmed that to me in a very positive way.

H. L. Richard:

Thank you very much. Dr. Thelle, again, we have all appreciated your input these days. We'll give you the last word.

Notto Thelle:

Thank you. I really appreciate this and not only what we have said but also the relationships. I think two words remain as my concluding thoughts. They are friendship and generosity. Let me share a story which has meant a lot to me. It has been disturbing to me to see that in Buddhism there seems often to be more generosity than in the Christian tradition, which should be there. One of my great experiences in Japan was to participate in a pilgrimage to one of the sacred mountains of Japan with so-called mountaineer priests. To the sacred mountain, you start the three-day pilgrimage from the secular world down below, and you go through many initiation rituals on the way up the mountain. It ends up at the top of the mountain, but before you can go to the top, which is supposed to be the place of the Buddhas and the gods, there is a ritual where every participant is held by their legs hanging over a cliff. The leader asks, "Are you willing to sacrifice your life in order to follow the Buddha and follow the way to nirvana and salvation?" So I asked myself, can I do this? The leader knew I was a Christian and theologian and so on, and I trusted him. So there I was, hanging off a cliff, over a 200-meter drop.

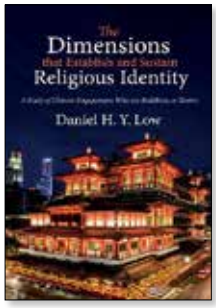
> Hanging by my legs, over a cliff, the Buddhist master asked me, a Christian, "Are you willing to sacrifice your life for Christ?" That was generous—the way Jesus was. (Thelle)

But he did not ask me the same questions. He asked me, "are you willing to sacrifice your life for serving humanity and for peace? Are you willing to sacrifice your life for Christ?" That was a tremendous experience, a Buddhist master asking me as a Christian, not whether I would follow Buddha, but whether I would follow Jesus. To me, that was a tremendous initiation. And then I could go to the top with them. To me, that was generous, a way of generosity. I thought, well, that is the way Jesus was. The church is not always generous. I could not imagine a Christian pastor asking a Buddhist, "Are you willing to sacrifice your life to follow Buddha?" Some might do it. I think of the way Jesus crossed all boundaries and met people exactly where they were. So that type of generosity and friendship I think should be a great ideal for all of us. **IJFM**

Books and Missiology

The Dimensions that Establish and Sustain Religious Identity: A Study of Chinese Singaporeans Who Are Buddhists or Taoists, by Daniel H. Y. Low (Eugene, OR: Wipf and Stock, 2018), 166 pp.

—Reviewed by Todd Pokrifka



Identity—how it's formed and how it's sustained—has been studied for years. The more multicultural cities and countries become, so also the more pressing this question becomes. Religious identity is among the most controversial and important aspects of a person's or group's identity. In his published doctoral dissertation, Daniel Low (PhD, Cook School of Intercultural Studies, Biola University), focuses on the religious identity of Chinese inhabitants of the decidedly multicultural country of Singapore. The book's topic overlaps in part with Low's own sociocultural experience growing up in Singapore as a Malaysian Chinese Christian. At the heart of the book is the issue of the nature of religious identity and what establishes and sustains it. This is a complex issue which is of crucial missiological importance, especially for frontier missiology.

Just how do "spiritual realities"—which include spiritual beings or forces, sacred texts or scriptures, and spiritual practices (74, 142)—relate to a Buddhist's or Taoist's religious identity? Low contends that

> religious identity is established and sustained as the adherents come to experience the enfolding presence and power of these [spiritual] realities through immersing themselves in the dynamic domains of recognition, appreciation, and dedication. (74; cf. 142)

These dynamic domains are distinct yet overlapping areas of life and experience that Low uses to categorize the data which emerged from his interviews and observations of Buddhist and Taoist adherents.

Low makes his case for this thesis in eight chapters. His first chapter summarizes the scope of the research. In subsequent chapters, he reviews existing research on Buddhism and Taoism and religious identity in Singapore. He then moves on to focus on studies or theories of identity and religious identity. He shows how his work will expand the concept of religious identity in contrast to views that reduce it to naturalistic factors (e.g., psychological, social or political), thus neglecting the role of spiritual realities. By chapter four, he begins to unpack his research methods and procedures, in particular, "grounded theory"—a kind of qualitative social-scientific research that aims to "ground" all theorizing and analysis from what naturally emerges in the research data. Low's method uses interviews of religious adherents with observations from them in their religious activities.

Chapters four to six analyze the data in terms of three "emerging domains" or categories that Low believes came to light during his research. Each of these domains includes two or three subdomains. Low uses domains and subdomains to classify and discuss (with many helpful quotations) the experiences and statements of his thirty-two Chinese Singaporean interviewees: sixteen Buddhists and sixteen Taoists.

In chapter four, Low uses the domain of "recognition" to describe the experiences of participation and revelation that his interviewees had in their relationships to spiritual realities. Some told how divine beings appeared in their dreams or otherwise initiated interaction with them. In chapter five, he speaks of his adherents' sense of "appreciation" to spiritual realities for the transformation, direction, and protection that they felt the spiritual beings offered. Many were grateful for increased happiness and well-being that they felt came from their connection to spiritual beings and teachings, both in everyday life and in relation to crises. In this chapter, Low also offers a fascinating summary of his interviewees' negative impressions of Christianity and Christians in Singapore (117–122), and how this reinforces their appreciation for, and commitment to, their own religious traditions. Then, in chapter six, Low uses the domain of "dedication" to analyze the interviewees' future aspirations concerning their spiritual life and their sense of obligation, especially to family, that confirm their long-term commitment to their particular religion and its ideas and practices.

In chapter eight, Low sums up his conclusions about the decisive significance of spiritual realities in establishing and sustaining the religious identity of Chinese Singaporean

Todd Pokrifka (PhD, University of St. Andrews) and his wife, Junia, direct the Institute for Community Transformation as part of Frontier Ventures (www.communitytransformation.org). The mission of this institute is to provide holistic, innovative, and accessible higher education that catalyzes community transformation among neglected and vulnerable people around the world. Todd has been a pastor, and was a professor of systematic theology at Azusa Pacific University for sixteen years.

Buddhists and Taoists. After briefly noting how his conclusions relate to the societal or group dimensions of religious identity (140–141), he reviews his key conclusions concerning the three domains, outlines key implications of his study for both research and practice, and offers some recommendations for further study.

Low's Contributions

What should we make of this book, particularly regarding its bearing on frontier missiology? Besides being exceptional in clear organization and overall persuasiveness, I believe the book makes several key contributions that deserve further reflection. All of them move away from certain typically Western ways of understanding and studying religious identity.

Most significantly, Low demonstrates compellingly how transcendent spiritual realities can be crucial in establishing and sustaining people's sense of religious identity. This contrasts with the tendency in much Western social science to understand religious identity, with attendant practices and underlying worldviews, in secular, rationalistic ways—such as reducing religious realities to immanent psychological or social factors. Such a tendency has also affected Western missiologists and missionaries.[1] This raises important questions for frontier missiology, questions that go beyond the boundaries of this review. How can we recognize the supernatural, spiritual dimension more adequately not only in our understanding of religious identity and commitment, but also in the processes of conversion to Jesus and discipleship? How does this spiritual dimension relate to the other dimensions, such as the societal/familial or intellectual or political, that also form and sustain a given religious identity?

Low demonstrates compellingly how transcendent spiritual realities can be crucial in establishing and sustaining people's sense of religious identity.

A second contribution is the method of Low's book: a grounded approach that listens deeply to the experience of actual adherents in a particular context. Low resists the tendency to impose prior, bookish generalizations or theories on the Buddhists and Taoists he interviews. He avoids the cultural imperialism that has often marked Western interactions with religious others. As Low himself emphasizes, his choice of method aims to express the virtue of listening deeply and respectfully. Drawing from Duane Elmer's work, Low affirms that adequate understanding comes only when we move beyond "learning about others" to "learning from others" and "learning with others" (150–151). Whether or not we are explicitly employing Grounded Theory, as Low did, both scholars and practitioners can and should adopt its humility and attentiveness to distinct socio-religious contexts ways of describing faith. While not denying the importance for missiologists to frame and interpret data in terms of biblically-grounded theological categories (as noted below), we must follow the New Testament's call to humble servanthood and adaptability (e.g., 1 Cor. 9:19–23), both in our pursuit of understanding of others and our subsequent witness to them. How can missional research, practice, training, and theoretical reflection better express these virtues?

A third contribution of Low's book is how he pushes beyond the individualism that is prominent in Western accounts of religious identity (149; cf. 53). Without denying the importance of an individual's pursuit of self-fulfillment through religion, he notes that religious identity often includes important communal obligations, such as devoting oneself to "extend the spiritual benefits bestowed by spiritual realties for others—both the living and the dead" (149). While Low does not give extended attention to the corporate or social dimension of religious identity, these communal features crop up frequently in the interviewees' accounts of their experiences of spiritual realities. In frontier mission, how can we strengthen and enlarge our accounts of religious identity and encourage appropriate, non-individualistic ways of engaging in witness and discipleship?

Moving Beyond Low's Contributions

Using Low's instructive contributions as a helpful springboard, what are ways that we can move forward to construct proposals for frontier missiology and mission among the Buddhists, Taoists, and other followers of non-Christian religions? How can we transcend Low's limits of scope and method to include other disciplines and perspectives to apply the results of his or similar research? Here are several proposals that I hope will build on Low's contributions and move the missiological conversation forward.[2]

First, we need greater attention on the amalgamate nature of religious expressions and practices, including varying degrees and forms of multi-religious belonging and identity. Despite Low's proper aim to ground his analysis in the actual experiences and self-perceptions of his interviewees, his chosen method sometimes led him to neglect the complexities of their religious identities, including potential multi-religious

influences on them. Without denying that the adherents interviewed identified themselves as either Buddhist or Taoist (Low was looking for those that identified as one or the other), it would be important to explore whether and to what extent their lives reflected elements of the "other" religion (i.e., Buddhists affected by Taoism or Taoists affected by Buddhism). It would be helpful to explore whether they saw themselves as following, or being influenced by, other religious beliefs and practices in addition to their main religious affiliation.

Given that the historical trajectory of Chinese religions is one of amalgamation, how deep and wide is the reformist differentiation among the religious practitioners in Singapore?

Also, though the subjects of Low research were all Chinese Singaporeans, he neglected Confucianism, which is commonly connected with Buddhism and Taoism as one of the "three teachings" that are definitive for Chinese religion and culture. This neglect was palpable when Low's interviewees frequently referred to the notion of "filial piety" as motivating their religious acts. This notion of filial piety has roots in Confucianism and has clearly penetrated Chinese Buddhism and Taoism. Low apparently justifies his choice to exclude "those who continue to practice a syncretic mix of Buddhism, Taoism, and Chinese folk religion" in his research (11) by noting that "in Singapore local Buddhist and Taoists have recently undertaken efforts to differentiate themselves from each other" in the context of reform movements (9; cf. 24ff). Yet, given Low's own point that the historical trajectory of Chinese religions is one of amalgamation or syncretism (16–18, 21ff), how deep and wide is this reformist differentiation in the assumptions, beliefs, and actions of the religious practitioners in Singapore?

Recognizing that in other parts of East Asia Buddhism, Taoism, Confucianism (especially with its widespread notion of filial piety), and various folk religions, coexist, we need further studies that highlight the dynamic and multi-faceted complexity of religious identity both in respect to the adherents' self-understanding and in their actual beliefs and practices. Such future studies should also consider the degree to which the average religious adherent is or is not aware of the particular sources and influences of all of their views or practices (i.e., whether they have origins in Buddhism, Taoism, folk religion, or what have you). Further research that is sensitive to the multi-religious or amalgamated nature of much religious expression would equip frontier missionaries and missiologists with a more adequate and accurate basis to develop appropriate forms of witness and engagement with religious others.

I believe such studies are best done by insiders, or at least in close partnership with insiders, who offer "emic" understanding of the religion and its place in life and society (a point to which we will return below). However, Low's book shows that one etic to a religious world, like Low himself, can still carefully listen to, and faithfully and intelligibly describe, what those inside or emic to that religious world say and do. This can form part of the learning path of an outsider who wishes to become an "alongsider," laying the foundations of understanding for fruitful, ongoing relationship with insiders.

Second, and related to my first proposal, I suggest that we pay more attention to different expressions and experiences of any given religion and how they would influence an adherent's process of forming new belonging and identity as a follower of Christ. In particular, I propose that greater attention and clarity be given those expressions that are often designated as "folk religion" and "formal religion." Low does use this distinction at times, but I see a need to take account of the significant complexity and differences that exist between different types of religious adherents. Going beyond the scope of Low's study, it would be helpful to address two related realities sensitively: (1) how the various "spiritual realities" that Low and his interviewees identify are perceived and experienced differently by folk (animistic or mystical) Buddhists and Taoists versus formal (or philosophical) Buddhists and Taoists; (2) how these differences of perception and experience would bear upon the nature of conversion to Christ for such adherents.

My initial assumption would be that those whose religious lives lean toward animistic folk religion would focus more on practices that interact with and honor/appease spiritual beings (gods or ancestors). This would include most Taoists and some Buddhists. On the other hand, more intellectual-ethical reformist Buddhists or Taoists may focus more on understanding and living out classic religious texts (sacred texts are one the "spiritual realities" Low identifies). Perhaps further research could take the three main domains that Low employs—recognition, appreciation, and dedication—and overlay the folk versus formal distinction, yielding six categories by which to understand and assess insider perspectives on spiritual realities. In any case, further attentive research regarding folk versus formal patterns of religious life would be helpful in knowing how to engage missionally with diverse adherents of any faith or combination of faiths or worldviews.

In considering the effect of the folk-formal distinction on conversion, I would like to reflect on the experiences of Buddhist background people with which I am familiar.

Drawing from the stories of Buddhist believers who have come to Christ, both in Korea and among Vietnamese in the United States, my (Korean) wife and I have observed that the nature of "conversion" to Christ among Buddhists often varies significantly based on the kind of Buddhists the individuals were before they followed Christ. Buddhists, who are more mystical or folk Buddhists, are steeped in traditional, often animistic practices and awareness of spiritual beings, tend to break away from Buddhism sharply once they experience the power and presence of Jesus. They quickly regard Christ and the Holy Spirit as dramatically superior to the former spiritual powers or beings, which they now see as deceptive and demonic. By contrast, more "intellectual" Buddhists, closer to the teachings of formal Buddhism and perhaps influenced by recent Buddhist reform movements, tend to find ways to retain or reinterpret varying degrees of Buddhist belief or practice without necessarily experiencing great contradiction between them and their newfound allegiance to Christ.[3]

In the more formal philosophical Buddhists, then, one sometimes finds incidences of "dual religious belonging" or "dual identity,"[4] an important kind of religious identity that Low's study does not have scope to consider. Without attempting to explain various forms of dual identity in their overlapping of spiritual, religious, and social dimensions, I observe that dual identity of certain kinds would allow for potential "insider movements" to Jesus among Buddhists or other religionists, an important but controversial subject among frontier missiologists.[5]

The nature of conversion to Christ among Buddhists often varies significantly based on the kind of Buddhists the individuals were before they followed Christ.

Thirdly, I would like to explore the crucial role that witnesses to Christ—the missionaries or other messengers from a Christ-following community—have in determining the nature of the potential conversion and subsequent spiritual formation of religious "others" like Buddhists or Taoists. Again, for those Low studied, negative views of the Christian community—which they regarded as presenting views that were insensitive and inconsistent with reality—confirmed the adherents in their non-Christian commitments (117–123), but it does not need to be this way. I want to first focus on some key ways that the witnessing community can shape new believers, starting with their conversion, and then I would like to offer initial thoughts on how the role of the witnessing community *should* appear.

Witnesses for Christ shape potential or actual new believers in various ways. One key factor determining the role of such witnesses on a socio-religious frontier is the community's attitude toward and interpretation of non-Christian religions. Among other things, this factor affects what a conversion to Jesus would look like. If this witnessing and discipling community expresses strong, even insensitive, rejection of a person's religion or spirituality of origin (as it apparently did in the case of the Chinese Singaporeans Low studied), then new believers would obviously be much more likely to reject and make a "clean break" from their "pre-Christian" beliefs and practices. If they are told that aspects of the traditions they grew up with are evil or demonic, they would typically want to reject these practices, and often their whole religious heritage, even at the cost of divorcing themselves from family and friends.

However, if the witnessing and discipling community welcomes and encourages indigenous contextual expressions of Christ-following, incorporating and reinterpreting certain elements drawn from non-Christian religions, then both the nature of conversion to Jesus and of the communities of Jesus followers can be contextually fitting while still showing true faithfulness to Christ and the Scriptures.[6] This option of response from the witnesses and their community would encourage a process similar to what Paul Hiebert calls "Critical Contextualization," which could lead to new "contextual congregations."[7] This process, involving Buddhist-background believers in Jesus and supportive alongsiders, would determine such things as how to avoid attachment or allegiance to gods or authorities other than the true God as well as which former practices must be rejected or reinterpreted.[8]

Given this background, what are some initial ideas about what frontier witness should look like in frontier contexts? First, frontier gospel witnesses should generally aim towards the second, more contextually-sensitive form of witness to unbelievers, without diluting a faithfulness to the full counsel of Scripture and to Jesus Christ as the unqualified Lord. This second option, with a more open view to the non-Christian religious heritage and its potentially positive elements, would allow new believers to maintain greater social ties with their family and friends, people whom they could readily lead to Christ. Cultural-religious insiders, whether existing followers of Jesus or the new believers themselves, would be in the best position to discern what is appropriate contextualization of the concrete details of their heritage. They are better equipped to understand the meaning and purpose of familiar beliefs and practices than an outsider. Yet, this role of discernment would require them to be growing disciples, increasingly grounded in

the Scripture-formed gospel and in a Spirit-filled life marked by abiding in Christ—a life in Christ that frontier missionary alongsiders could help to facilitate.

Second, witnesses would need to adapt and contextualize their approach to the particular nature of how religion—say, Buddhism—is expressed in a particular community or person. As noted above, the frontier witnesses' approach should vary depending on whether one is working with folk Buddhists or formal, philosophical Buddhists—especially in the initial phase of witness. With folk Buddhists, one would begin with seeking and demonstrating the tangible presence, power, and gifts of the Holy Spirit, often in power encounters. With the formal, more rational Buddhist, one would likely begin with dialogue and include a compelling and contextually-sensitive presentation of gospel and biblical worldview. If either kind of Buddhist comes to faith, then their mentors and disciplers would need to build on their preferred expressions of faith and practice. This should lead them to a holistic grasp of the fullness of life in Christ which includes both spiritual power and grounding in the truth of the gospel and written word. Accordingly, frontier witnesses or missionaries and the believing communities with which they partner would need to be well-formed and well-trained in both their own Scripture-grounded faith and in the religious "worlds" of others to discern what approach is best for witness or discipleship.

My final proposal is to commend an essential missiological task that is necessary to enable these insights to serve the biblical requirements of frontier witness. This task must be both faithful to the gospel and to God and understandable and relevant to the new peoples and cultures into which the gospel is moving. This task is what I have called "frontier theologizing" (see Pokrifka 2016, 151–154).

> Good frontier theologizing . . . would involve a mutual collaborative partnership between two groups in Christ's body, namely, between (a) the cultural "insiders"—the new, indigenous . . . believers . . . and (b) the missionaries or "outsiders" who could become "alongsiders" who walk with the indigenous believers. (Pokrifka 2016, 152)

Combining the local community's "self-theologizing" and insights gained from carefully contextualized and "translated" biblical perspectives of global outsiders offers hope for a God-given discernment that brings both cultural fit and biblical faithfulness. The Scriptures and the Holy Spirit lead all involved into the true abiding in Christ that alone brings lasting fruitfulness (John 15). With God's grace, this dynamic process of interpreting Scripture and interpreting a context's culture, including its religion, leads to faithful and fitting "critical contextualization."

Frontier theologizing, as a part of frontier missiology, would play the crucial role of placing the social-scientifically derived "insider understandings" that Low's research uncovered into a framework that would allow the biblical gospel to penetrate into and flourish in any new insider context. Low rightly prioritized one aspect of what is needed, listening to and unfolding the insider's perspectives and experiences on their own (non-biblical) terms. But, as followers of Jesus, we are called to move beyond, to understand how Scripture, illumined by the Spirit, would lead us to interpret and assess those perspectives and experiences. Ideally, since frontier missionaries and other outsiders are largely etic to the social and religious world of the insiders, it would be best to have insider followers of Jesus to take the lead in this dynamic process of interwoven biblical exegesis and "cultural exegesis." In this transformative conversational process, all people involved would "be transformed by the renewing of [their] minds" (Rom. 12:2) and would "take every thought captive to make it obedient to Christ" (2 Cor. 10:5). Locals and outsiders would join in humble, mutual submission to one another and to God to forge a new path of obedience in a frontier context, forming new, holistic forms of identity in Christ, which includes what Low calls religious identity.[9]

Low rightly prioritized one aspect of what is needed—listening to and unfolding the insider's perspective and experience on their own non-biblical terms.

The frontier theologizing task and process is fraught with dangers, not least the often unnoticed syncretism and cultural imperialism of the messenger-witnesses on the one side and the native cultural domestication or syncretism of the receptors on the other. Yet it is a task that is required by our Lord's Great Commission and the larger missional purpose of Scripture. Without theological reflection, how can we bridge from the Scriptures into yet unreached cultures and worldviews, and without that bridge, how can we make disciples of all peoples?

Further, without engaging in this frontier theological task, the global theology and practice of the universal church misses the opportunity to be enriched with each novel and beautiful incarnation of the gospel in a previously unreached social-religious people. Despite the daunting challenges involved, we can have hope that the missional task—and thus the "theologizing" required by it—is ultimately God's and that he will fulfill it, empowering and guiding his people by his Spirit and his word.

Conclusions

In sum, Low's significant research, together with proposals on how to extend and apply it, are important to frontier missions and missiology. Let me recap the contributions coming directly from Low's work and proposals that apply and extend it:

1. Spiritual realities must be understood and accounted for in grasping religious identity.
2. Methods of understanding of people's religious identity must be humble, contextually-fitting and adaptive.
3. Understanding of people's religious identity must transcend individualism.
4. Understanding religious identity and practice must be sufficiently complex and flexible to include appropriate amalgamated or multi-religious belonging/identity.
5. Efforts to understand and engage religious others on the frontiers must be sensitive to radically different forms and aspects of religious traditions, folk and formal expressions.
6. Witnesses to religious others, e.g., frontier missionaries and members of native churches, need to be aware of the decisive positive or negative affects they can have on new believers. They should be open to new contextual forms of Christ-following faith and community and adapt their ways of sharing the gospel to different kinds of religious practitioners.
7. Those in frontier situations should grasp the significance of frontier theologizing and embrace it as a crucial, God-dependent practice for navigating how to be both contextually fitting and faithful to God and his word.

In many ways, such culturally- and religiously-sensitive frontier theologizing is what is necessary to apply rightly the points that arise directly or indirectly out of Low's book. As missiologists and mission practitioners, in partnership with indigenous believers, learn to depend on God to navigate these seven aspects to understand and relate to religious others on the frontiers, the cause of God's kingdom will be greatly advanced.

Endnotes

[1] Paul Hiebert, "Excluded Middle," in *Perspectives on the World Christian Movement,* 4th edition, edited by Ralph D. Winter and Steven C. Hawthorne, (Pasadena, CA: William Carey Library), 407–414. This is Hiebert's classic article on the excluded middle. See also much of Charles Kraft's work. In the context of Buddhism, see Paul H. De Neui, ed., *Seeking the Unseen: Spiritual Realities in the Buddhist World* (Pasadena, CA: William Carey Library, 2015).

[2] It is worth noting that Chinese Singaporeans are not themselves an unreached people group, with a relatively high percentage of them being Christian, but we can learn lessons from Low's study of their Buddhist and Taoist members about what it might take to reach people on the religious frontiers.

[3] This lack of perceived contradiction between certain aspects of Buddhism and Christ-following may be due partly to how certain "Buddhist" mindsets (e.g., a karmic emphasis on "reaping and sowing") or practices (e.g., early morning prayer or some form of the honoring of ancestors) persist in the culturally-formed forms of Christianity among Koreans, Vietnamese or other Asian communities influenced by Buddhism, often without the conscious awareness of those Christian communities.

[4] See several publications of Kang-San Tang on dual Buddhist-Christian belonging, including his "Dual Belonging: A Missiological Critique and Appreciation from an Asian Evangelical Perspective," *Mission Studies* 27 (2010): 1–15.

[5] Chris Bauer, "The Fingerprints of God in Buddhism," in *Mission Frontiers* 36:6 (Nov/Dec 2014), http://www.missionfrontiers.org/issue/archive/the-fingerprints-of-god-in-buddhism. This entire issue is well worth reading, but don't miss Chris Bauer's article for an affirmative perspective on insider movements. For a critique of this perspective, see the critical response to this issue in 2015 by leaders in OMF Thailand, together with a response to their written comments, published here: https://www.missionfrontiers.org/blog/post/a-response-to-mission-frontiers-the-fingerprints-of-god-in-buddhism-issue. For further reflection on the issues involved, see Todd Pokrifka, "Prospects for Indigenous People Movements in the Buddhist World," *International Journal of Frontier Missiology* 33, no. 4 (Winter 2016):149–156.

[6] Peter Thein Nyunt, *Missions Amidst Pagodas: Contextual Communication of the Gospel in the Burmese Buddhist Context* (Carlisle, UK: Langham Monographs,2014), 10–17 in which Nyunt explores such issues in the context of Myanmar. The rest of the book is also quite valuable.

[7] Paul Hiebert, "Critical Contextualization," *International Bulletin of Missionary Research* 11, no. 3 (July 1987): 104–112, and Nyunt, *Missions Amidst Pagodas,* 14–17, where Nyunt refers to Hiebert several times.

[8] Despite the necessary amalgamation or mixing (perhaps "neutral syncretism") that are always involved in following Jesus in any culture, disciples of Jesus surely want to avoid problematic syncretism, incomplete or stifled discipleship, or what Charles Kraft calls "dual allegiance" to Jesus and to other entities or spirits. See Charles H. Kraft, "Three Encounters in Christian Witness" in *Perspectives on the World Christian Movement,* 4th Edition, eds. Ralph D. Winter and Steven C. Hawthorne (Pasadena, CA: William Carey Library), 449–450. In addition, the believing community (indigenous and expatriate) would eventually need to recognize and overcome unintended, lingering cultural-religious ideas and inclinations that are problematic and not yet transformed by the Spirit and the Word.

[9] From another perspective, frontier theologizing is the result of insider and outsider believers together undergoing the ongoing process of repeatedly walking through the "three encounters" that Charles Kraft has outlined: "power encounters" that bring freedom, "truth encounters" that bring understanding, and "allegiance encounters" that bring deeper relationship and commitment to the Lord (Kraft, "Three Encounters").

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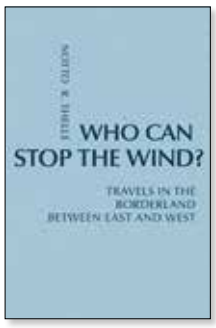
Who Can Stop the Wind?: Travels in the Borderland Between East and West, by Notto R. Thelle, Translated by Brian McNeil (Collegeville, MN: Liturgical Press, 2010), 112 pp.

—Reviewed by Andy Bettencourt



In this short volume, Dr. Notto Thelle brings his Christian journey into conversation with Buddhism, Japanese culture, new religious movements, and his neighbors. This volume inspires readers towards more questions than answers. Some may even be startled by Thelle's missiological interactions and perceived lack of theological boundaries. However, Thelle provides critical experiential analysis for living out one's faith among persons of radically different religious and cultural backgrounds as well as understanding multiple religious belonging. Readers may find themselves making different decisions or arguments from Thelle along the way; however, they should appreciate how his faith is much more than doctrinal assent. For Thelle, faith is always lived out in relationship to one's neighbors.

This volume is part memoir, part theological exploration, and part pastoral guidance to those who have had deep relationships with persons of other faith traditions and have found their own faith transformed through experiences in the borderland. The borderland is "where faith meets faith" and where persons dare to journey beyond "safe borders" (vii). Readers will see how Thelle's own faith, and the faith of his neighbors, changes throughout their experiences in the borderland (vii).

This book is crucial for our era of globalization, where the borderland no longer requires travel to a foreign country but is found within one's own neighborhood, city, and the digital spaces which we occupy. Indeed, one no longer needs to travel to come into close contact with the traditions and landscapes of other faiths and cultures. More than ever, it is important for us to follow Thelle in search of what he terms "a larger faith" that accommodates all dimensions of human life (102).

> A larger faith does not close the borders but throws them open. A larger faith does not claim that it has God under lock and key in its own world but sees God's tracks everywhere…I crossed the border in order to bring God to new worlds—but I discovered God was already there. And naturally enough! How could he not be present in the world that was his own? It was he who blew the breath of life into the human person's nostrils so that Adam became a living being. How could one fail to perceive God's presence when the breath of life became deep and the heart beat strongly? All I could do was point. There he is! Look! And not least, I could point to the place, the time, and the person where God's own being and work shone out in transfigured splendor, namely Jesus Christ (101).

A Brief Disclaimer for this Review

Many, like myself, have not yet experienced a deep and protracted residence in the borderland like this author. We are a new generation looking for mentors on this borderland. Rather than offering a quick synthesis or extended critique as do typical book reviews, I offer a running summary of this book. Each of the chapters of this small book contain vivid stories, personal experiences, and thoughtful theology that go a long way to explaining aspects of Thelle's manner and approach to complex religious worlds like Japan. The way Thelle seeks to make sense of his own Christian faith as he engages with his Japanese friends and Buddhist monks will ring as authentic and real to a younger generation. He offers us a way to wrestle deeply and rigorously with those

Andy Bettencourt (MDiv, Fuller Seminary) serves in the Winter Launch Lab (https://www.winterlaunchlab.org/) and works alongside workers, agencies and networks in discerning innovative ways forward on the frontiers of mission. He is passionate about interfaith dialogue and a mutually enriching discipleship that unpacks each person's identity and life experience alongside the Scriptures.

questions he raises about religion and the Spirit, both in our own lives and in those communities where we intend to serve. This review also provides a complement to Thelle's presentations at the recent Winter lectureship.[1]

The Inception of Thelle's Journey

Thelle begins with his reasons for stepping into the borderland: unhappiness, longing to get away, adventure, curiosity, or perhaps a commission (vii). Thelle was commissioned as a missionary to serve in Japan, and along his journey, he met persons of other dispositions: wanderers, adventurers, curiosity-seekers, academics, monks, missionaries, and those near and far from home. Thelle takes a humble and emotive approach with his friends and neighbors throughout this journey. He is willing to give and receive. He is prepared for transformation and enjoys seeing others transformed.

He enters the borderland more as companion than as a teacher. Perhaps it makes him less a preacher, missionary, or theologian, and more the best kind of friend, pastor, and discipler.

On this journey, he desires an inside experience of other faith traditions, even if it challenges the traditions and claims of his own faith. Thelle is no stranger to inner conflict (ix). He admits that behind all our explanations and answers are more questions and puzzles; thus, truth for him is intuitive and comes "like a quivering joy" (ix–x). His approach is far from logical, yet he dialogues with, evaluates, and encounters other traditions with high respect and careful criticism. He notes how many religious adherents travel a much shallower path than their traditions offer; this could have been different had they only been willing to engage more deeply.

Perhaps, Thelle only wrestles deeply with Christianity because it is brought into tension with other faith traditions. His goal has never been to preserve his Christianity intact; instead, he searches for how to live out an authentic faith in context. He is honest that his book consists mostly of fragments and loose ends, and he insists that we will only be able to integrate all of life's fragments when we sense that these fragments also contain a pattern and meaning (x). Thus, he extends his invitation to enter the borderland more as companion and friend than teacher (x). Perhaps, this makes him less of a preacher, missionary, or theologian, and more of the best kind of friend, pastor, and discipler.

Towards a More Integrated and Abundant Life

For Thelle, faith is more than logic or arguments. He gives the example of Kobo Daishi, a renowned master of Japanese intellectual history who, after leaving behind his aristocratic family and their wealth to become an itinerant monk, said, "Who can shatter my resolve? Who can stop the wind?" For Kobo Daishi, faith was a whole way of life which required him to abandon the security and comfort of his past and its frameworks.

> He knew that he could find a more authentic life only if he encountered reality without any protective clothing. He could perhaps have drowned out this call and shut out the wind, but he knew that it would just keep on blowing. As a man of the spirit, he had no other choice. (4)

Each of us has many "good reasons to shut out the wind," but we also know that when we resist the wind of the Spirit, it keeps on blowing. We dare not allow fear of the unknown to hinder us from following the unstoppable path of the wind (5).

Thelle urges us to welcome doubt as "faith's companion" one that tests its genuineness. It allows the miracle of new life to be born after wreaking chaos within our deepest fears (6–7). He recounts a story from his childhood where it first became evident that "debates are not always decided by neutral evaluations" (8). He utilizes this instance to raise new questions about how we ought not to take inherited faith for granted. For Thelle, faith is not a secure framework. Nor is it absent of doubt. Nor is it neutral. Faith is discovered along the way as one attempts to live a truer and more integrated life in relationship to one's neighbors (9).

Searching Beyond the Forms

Thelle initially wished to "enter the world of Buddhist wisdom, wrest their skill and learning from them, and 'strike them down' with their own weapons" (10). However, he was unprepared and shocked at what he discovered in Japan—both a watered-down Buddhist piety and, at the same time, a depth of religious experience that brought an "onslaught" upon his own faith (10–11). Growing up in a committed Christian family and his several years of in-depth theological studies had not equipped Thelle to understand the Buddhism he was encountering. He lacked the necessary depth of faith that could encounter the experiential world of Mahāyāna Buddhism (11). He began to perceive that "the only way forward was to set out on my travels, seeking to penetrate more deeply into Buddhism, hearing the meaning that lay behind the words, and grasping the life behind the outward forms." (11).

This meant closer contact through conversations, studies, spiritual dialogues, meditation, and a silent, faithful presence alongside Buddhist friends and masters. The knowledge and

theology that Thelle brought to the field had to encounter and engage with the wisdom and training of those whom he met on the field and eventually work itself into contextually appropriate spiritual practices.

He shares the joys of his experiences in this book, but he's also quite candid about his deep struggles. His engagement with a Zen master in Kyoto led to his collapse (14). His Christian faith appeared to be at stake, and his words were insufficient (12–4). However, this Zen master's intention was not to expose him or his Christian faith, but merely "to scrape away hollow explanations" to get to the heart of his beliefs (14).

> In Zen, words must collapse if we are to encounter reality. This is a painful process because it opens the door to fear and despair. Zen speaks of "the great doubt" and "the great death;" it is only after these that "the great faith" comes. (14)

Thus, this task helped to form Thelle's discipleship rather than destroy it. It deconstructed previous explanations and left what really mattered, that which cannot be said in words (15). Christ "did not come to us as a word," nor as an abstract theory but as a flesh-and-blood person who brought the kingdom of God (16). Words are not meaningless but can be used in wonderful ways as signposts to a reality beyond their boundaries (17). Thelle draws the analogy of the black and white brush drawings in Japan.

> The picture is created not only by the strokes of the brush but also by the untouched white surfaces of the paper. When we describe our faith, we often want to fill out every last detail of the picture. Perhaps we ought to take the risk of simplicity, a few strokes of the pen, a few words and hints, so the white surfaces can come alive and the words can bear us further out, across the boundary of our words, into that silence where God's mystery is vibrantly alive. (17–18)

Are You against Buddhism?

A fisherman in northern Norway once asked this author if he was against the Buddhists (18). In trying to answer that question, he found himself at a dead end and mused over the danger of allowing the wrong question to dictate what one says. Mission can become distorted when seen to be an activity directed against others. Members of different religious groups are allies united in their search for meaning in a complex and confusing world. Christians should not conceal their faith in the Triune God,

> but this does not prevent us from listening to others. A new world is disclosed when we abandon our defense mechanisms and take the risk of touching the deeper yearnings and the unsolved puzzles. Our position changes and we discover a genuinely spiritual fellowship that transcends all our boundaries. (19)

Thelle is not saying that Christians don't have beliefs that contradict those of other religions; rather, he is saying that we can vulnerably journey alongside others who do not share our religious traditions and ponder our deeper thoughts and questions:

> The words we employ take on a searching quality as we listen and ask questions. Our words become intriguing and dangerous. Our thoughts wrestle with those of others. Faith is shared and faith is put to the test. Life encounters life. (19)

Thus, Thelle encourages us not to enter simple Bible studies or meditation practices, but to enter a deeper engagement of the religious life, where our vulnerabilities and questions will be called to the surface. Having found deep spiritual community in Japan, even though he was in the religious minority, the author calls for a daring level of interreligious spiritual encounter. This level of interreligious community is exemplified in words like "friends" and "fellow pilgrims." It also can encourage Christians as members of religious minorities to view spiritual community through a different lens.

This Zen master's intention was not to expose Thelle or his Christian faith, but merely to scrape away hollow explanations to get to the heart of his beliefs.

The Impact of an Eastern Landscape

The author opens his second section by discussing the question of where one comes from, the very question the disciples asked Jesus (John 1:35–39) and which pilgrims often ask their Buddhist masters (22). He enlarges this to the Eastern religious concept of the *Tao* (or path), which he argues Christ himself demonstrated through his own life, suffering, and death (22–3). Christ provides a path for one to walk, a Master for one to follow, a cross for one to pick up, not merely a place to stay (23). Through this, readers see how Thelle has rooted the message of Christ more deeply in Eastern culture, an articulation that connects to that context more than some doctrinal utterances from the West.

The vast Eastern landscapes may seem to cause humanity to disappear. To the contrary, he argues, life acquires new dimensions as persons learn to "stand upright and breathe more freely because it is a part of this great totality" (23). These perspectives come from human beings who must find their place in a natural environment of monsoons and typhoons where "nature gives and nature takes away."

> It would never occur to the monsoon peoples to make themselves "lords" over the natural elements; their existen-

> tial wisdom consists in living in harmony with the perennial rhythm of nature. (25)

Conversely, he notes how this environment "has paralyzed people's energy and prevented any change" due to their fatalist resignation. "Critical questions are undesirable since protest destroys the harmony. It is not for nothing that many have experienced the Confucian idea of harmony as an intolerable straitjacket (26)."

Thelle encourages Westerners to listen to what people in the Far East say about our own landscapes. We in the West have been desensitized to nature's mysteries by making humans the lords of creation and by seeing "nature as an opponent" to be conquered (26). The author challenges the Norwegian piety that isolates their spiritual universe to relationships between individuals and God. He argues that the Bible is primarily concerned with human fellowship rather than isolated individuals (28). Readers are encouraged to "see a larger landscape," where humans are part of creation, and to live in "solidarity with all that God has created" (30). In this section, Thelle is widening his spirituality and theology by setting it within the larger cosmos. He is encouraging Christians to not only measure their interactions with persons of other faith traditions but also to think about how they interact with all of God's creation. While he frames his faith in this wider context of relationships, he also critiques, evaluates, and brings Eastern cosmological understandings into conversation with his Western theological upbringing. He seems to enjoy bringing these traditions into conversation with each other and seeing how they interact.

The Christian Engagement with Buddhist Tradition

He goes on to explore Buddhism's gloomy connection with suffering, karma, causality, that "blind yearning that sets everything ablaze," and the practice of withdrawal "for insight" (31–2). He notes how the "Buddha returned to human society" to share "insight with others," just like the pious monks of Mahāyāna Buddhism return to share their insights with the world (32–4). Buddhism understands the world's transitory nature and pain, that "withdrawal sets one free" from all ties to be purified and "transformed into a new vision of universal unity," allowing withdrawal to be "replaced by a merciful presence" (35). He notes how few truly follow Buddha's challenging path to its conclusion and compares it to how Christ expected few to follow His path, the narrow way (36). He notes how Buddha's path and Christ's path are described so differently, yet their paths often intersect and those following them "are surprised to see how much they have in common" (36). Thus, Thelle draws together the seemingly disparate paths of Christ and Buddha not by syncretizing them or reducing them down but by showing the intersections between the lives led and desired by their deepest followers.

Thelle introduces the experience of one student who visited the Zen master, Gasan, in Tenryuji and asked whether he could read the Sermon on the Mount to him. After hearing Jesus' words about the lilies of the field who are clothed without spinning or toiling, and his gentle rebuke of us who worry about food and clothes (Matt. 6:25ff), Gasan then declared this speaker was "enlightened." After hearing the verses "Ask and it will be given to you; search and you will find; knock and the door will be opened for you" (Matt. 7:7), the Zen master said, "Wonderful! The man who spoke these words is not far from the Buddhahood" (36). Over a hundred years ago, another Christian theological student (or Thelle speculates he may have been the same one as the first) who felt called by God to meditate under Gasan's guidance, sought to enter but was thrown out again and again, having met with the common Zen rejections that test the seriousness of one's religious search (36–7). At last, the student, Seitaro Yoshida, joined the monastery's strict rhythms for three years before resuming theological studies and becoming a leading pastor in Japan's Protestant church (37). Thelle notes that many Christians "were impelled by an inner force to put their faith to the test in the encounter with Zen" (37). Some of these returned to Buddhism and left Christianity behind, some returned to Christianity "with a new eagerness," and others "discovered that Zen changed them," making their Christian faith more receptive to Buddhist insights as well as manifestly more Japanese (37–8).

He notes how Buddha's path and Christ's path are described so differently, yet those following them are surprised to see how much they have in common.

Japanese Christians had a wide breadth of responses with their journeys into Zen. Thelle seems to approach these responses openhandedly and trusts the leading of the Spirit in these mysterious endeavors. Take the case of the Dominican priest Shigeto Oshida who late in life formed a small community north of Nagoya that was very influenced by the Zen rhythms of life. Oshida said, "I am a Buddhist who has met Christ." Thelle insists that "everywhere in the East one meets 'hyphenated Christians' whose faith is formed in close contact with their inherited religion and culture" (38). He also notes the existence of many "hyphenated Buddhists" whose "existential attitudes are formed by Buddhism, but they are also friends and disciples of Jesus" (39).

Thelle refutes the notion that the introspection of Zen Buddhism would lead merely to a self-centeredness, commenting that "part of the point about finding oneself in Zen . . . is to tear away the mask from the false ego so that the 'original face' can emerge" (40). The bridge to dialogue between Buddhists and Christians is strengthened by the "awareness that the true human person is born when the ego dies" (40). He audaciously uses sacrament in this chapter's title as a way to draw the radical simplicity of the everyday elements of Zen into dialogue with Christian attempts to live out simplicity in their faith (42–3). In so doing, he demonstrates the possibilities for Zen to enrich the lives of Christians who seek to abide in Christ—in his words, simply because Christ was a man who knew that "true life begins when the self dies" (43). Thus, he puts great effort into drawing the larger themes of Buddhism and Christianity into conversation with each other. He shows just how complex one's religious heritage might be. Our commitments and upbringings are not simple things that fade away or can be put aside, but are the very elements to be brought into dialogue with one another in order to embody a larger faith.

We must take a hard look at the faults and limits of our own tradition, as well as see both the bright spots and depth of other traditions before we can properly engage the two.

The author introduces the story of an American friend and non-traditional missionary (Ron) who encountered Japan with an open mind because of the advice a missionary leader had given him:

> In Japan, you will receive more than you give. But it is precisely by receiving from the Japanese that you will be able to give. You are not going to Japan in order to export the religion of the West. It is not you who take Christ with you to Japan. He is bringing you there so that you can discover new depths of meaning and learn how you can receive in a new way the good news that God loves the world. (44)

This American began to go frequently to meditate in Daitokuji, one of Kyoto's well-known Zen monasteries. For a very long time nothing happened.

> But his eyes glow as he speaks about his conversations with the master. "As I sat there in desperation, the master gave me [Ron] a new question to work on, a new riddle: 'From now on, I want you to breathe Christ,' he said. He talked about breathing the Holy Spirit, about living in one's breath, about breathing Christ." He [the master] wanted Ron to understand what Saint Paul meant when he wrote: "It is no longer I who live, but it is Christ who lives in me." (Gal. 2:20, 46)

Ron was able "to enter more deeply" into his Christian faith by stepping outside his own tradition to engage with a Zen master who helped this "unusual missionary" find new ways to live the Christian life (46–7).

Additionally, Thelle shares of another friend who made a film about Japanese worship, which portrays "the whole range of Japanese religion from the silence and simplicity in the meditation halls to the exuberant prayers and incantations of popular piety" (47). This friend, an Italian priest, had been more of the conservative bent, but had come to Japan to genuinely witness to the mystery of faith. Even though he saw more than he cared to of the "rottenness of Japanese religion," his film cast Japanese worship in a tender light that enlivened his senses (49).

> He was himself a man of prayer deeply rooted in the church . . . but the Christian faith did not shutter his doors: his piety and prayers had opened his senses. He saw God where others saw merely the worship of idols. He wanted to draw the veil aside, so that the others might at least sense what he himself saw—the presence of God. (48)

Thelle again emphasizes his preference for a realistic and deep engagement with other religious traditions. We are not helped by merely looking past the faults of other traditions, nor simply by seeing our own tradition as vastly superior to others. We must take a hard look at the faults and limits of our own tradition as well as see the bright spots and depths of other traditions before properly engaging the two. This led to Ron and Thelle's deep enlightenment.

Undergoing a Buddhist Initiation Rite

In one of the most striking stories of the entire book, Thelle shares his own experience on a pilgrimage up a sacred mountain, where he observed the symbolic initiation rites of Buddhist pilgrims. In this rite, they were suspended over a massive cliff by ropes held by human hands and asked to "commit their whole lives to seek the Buddha's path and attain enlightenment." When it was Thelle's turn, it was optional because they knew he was a Christian.

> How ought I to react if I were asked to make such a vow? . . . I felt confident that the master would respect my Christian faith even in this particular initiation rite. And so it turned out. As I hung over the sheer drop, the Buddhist master asked me, "Are you willing to sacrifice your life in order to create reconciliation between the races and religions? Are you willing to give everything in order to follow your Master, Jesus Christ?" I trembled on the edge of tears. It was a long time since I had been permitted to consecrate my life to him in such a decisive manner. (49–50)

This prompts a lot of questions. Thelle was stunned by how openly Buddhists shared their insight and world without demanding loyalty (51). His personal example challenges Christians to more greatly appreciate God's presence by

engaging with the diverse cultures and religious traditions of the world, thereby discovering a depth to our own faith "that sets us free" (52). Thelle points Christians toward a radically hospitable faith that pushes beyond the boundaries of comfort and security. This should unsettle both the Christians who take up Thelle's challenge and those who do not.

Nishitani refused to be called a Buddhist, but was searching for something that lay beyond or beneath both Buddhism and Christianity.

A Socratic Buddhist—A Disciple of Christ

The author then shares about one of Japan's leading philosophers, Nishitani, someone who was shaped by Zen Buddhism, his study of the Bible, and the philosophies of Kierkegaard, Nietzsche, and Heidegger (52–3). Thelle labels him "a Socratic Buddhist" (53). He recounts the philosopher's struggles with meaninglessness and his great faith that "existence is borne up by a power that holds all things together" (53–4).

> Nishitani was most reluctant to let himself be called a Buddhist but it was even clearer that he did not want to be a Christian. If pressed, he would say with a smile that he was en route to faith; it would be unthinkable for him to end up as a Christian. But when he spoke of Christ, his words expressed his love for the great Master whose friend and disciple he was. (54)

Nishitani refused "to be called a Buddhist" but was searching for "something that lay beyond or beneath both Buddhism and Christianity" (54). "Although he admired Christianity and not least Christ himself, Nishitani was a severe critic who asserted that there is no future for Christianity in its present form"—with the human person understood as the "absolute center of activity and thought" (55). Thelle goes on to say that

> his criticism came from outside the church but it was born of his endeavor to penetrate the riddles of life. As a traveler, Nishitani made countless fellow-travelers his friends. He showed them new landscapes and taught them to see, ask, and wonder. (55–6)

Thelle dedicates his book to this man's memory and shows respect for those who continue to engage a broader interreligious community with thoughtful criticism and conviction (56). In some ways, this philosopher plays with our understanding of the church by both criticizing it as well as welcoming many of its adherents into conversation, mutual learning, and friendship. Might this be a path forward for the church in a world becoming increasingly more religiously diverse?

Death of Buddha and Death of Christ

In his next chapter, Thelle contrasts Jesus' ravaged face as he hangs on the cross with "Buddha's silent peace as he lies on his side, his face to the West" (56). The difference in these two deaths is often seen as an irreconcilable gulf between the two traditions. "Some maintain that Christians' obsession with the cross is a sign of the sadistic tendency in the West—has not the West always stood for violence, brutality, and aggression?" (58).

Thelle notes that it is D. T. Suzuki who expressed this idea in the comparison he makes between the deaths of Jesus Christ and the Buddha.

> Jesus died in a vertical position on the cross, while Buddha lay horizontally in silent meditation. "Christ hangs helpless, full of woe, on the upright cross. This is almost intolerable to an Eastern mind… The vertical axis expresses action, movement, craving. The horizontal axis, as in the case of Buddha, makes us think of peace and contentment." (58)

Thelle's belief is that the deaths of these two figures requires deep engagement.

> Just as Westerners need time and guidance in order to recognize the warmth and tenderness in the apparently impersonal and cold universe of Buddhism, so Easterners too often need time to grasp the devotion and tenderness that Christians feel in the face of Jesus' cross and death. If they come with their inherited ideals of harmony and inner calm, the emotional gulf is almost unbridgeable. The contemplation of the cross seems merely a repulsive contemplation of evil and suffering. But if they follow their Christian friends to the encounter with the crucified Christ, they experience empathy with a reality that is very close to them. (59)

He continues to argue that

> the image of Jesus's death speaks of an identification that brings the vertical and horizontal together. Traditionally, theology has called this "reconciliation." God's love knows no boundaries but is expressed and made a reality in the most inhuman suffering and evil. (61)

Thus, the deaths of these two figures requires an engagement that then grasps what they represent to their individual communities. Both deaths hospitably invite others onto the life paths of these figures.

Buddhist and Christian Symbols of Truth

Thelle then unpacks symbols of truth in the Buddhist tradition: the diamond which represents the flawless, brilliant, shining truth, the hardest of minerals which can cut through everything yet cannot be shattered nor destroyed by anything; the lotus, sprouting up from the mud into "immaculate beauty" reveals the truth of the potential for growth and maturity because it always turns toward light; and the soft warmth of the womb which also stands for growth and

potential—prenatal growth, birth, and growth after birth (63–4). This symbolism allows us to look a little deeper at our own understanding of truth. He compares these Buddhist symbols to Christian symbols for the kingdom of God: the (perfect, shining) pearl of great price, the treasure in the field, and the tiny mustard seed that grows into a huge tree (64). The diamond also works as a symbol for Christians—truth that cuts through deception and darkness. All of these are images for the same thing, the reality of God's kingdom (65). Christianity and Buddhism both use multiple images to capture deeper concepts within their traditions.

He describes Buddhism as the religion of the eye that aims for insight, clarity, and enlightenment, whereas Christianity stresses the ear in order to hear and obey the Word in faith.

He dives into an exploration of the senses when he describes Buddhism as "the religion of the eye" aiming for the light of insight, clarity, and enlightenment, whereas Christianity, on the other hand, stresses the ear in order to hear and obey the Word in faith (65). He illustrates the Buddhist focus on searching for light and enlightenment with a story of the day Buddha became enlightened, a "Buddha" if you will. After meditating all night, Buddha awakens at the dawn to see the rise of the morning star. Thelle contrasts this with 2 Peter 1:19 where followers of Jesus are told to "hold fast to the message of the prophets which is like a 'lamp shining in a dark place, until the day dawns, and the morning star rises in your hearts'" (67). But he also reminds us that "we live our faith with many senses: we want to hear but also to see. We need guides who can open our eyes so that the morning star may rise in our hearts" (67).

Thelle then references the ancient adage, "It is dark at the foot of the candlestick" (67). One must leave Kyoto, the great center of Zen Buddhism in Japan known as "the center of power" (represented by the light of the candlestick) and go away to the countryside to find true, living Buddhism (67). He compares the inverse in Jesus' own birth and life in a poor, peripheral region before being condemned and crucified in Jerusalem, the center of religious and political power (68). Thelle acknowledges that we may need these centers of learning and power to shape society, construct systems, and protect religion from enemies; however, he questions this reality and wonders if religion might better be borne by a small, faithful remnant of despised and forgotten people on the periphery (68–9). He appreciates questions over answers and offers nine of his own. While he acknowledges the fruit of these centers of religion, he questions the status quo of religious life. He consistently acknowledges the harm in religious traditions, whether Buddhist, Christian, or others. It's a quest for a better way forward for himself and others, a way that searches and examines for greater fruitfulness. Might we do the same by abandoning stock submission to the traditions of our own religious past, being willing to examine a better way forward, and openly encountering the critiques, questions, and wanderings of other religious adherents?

Reactions from Thelle's Friends

The author addresses how "a *living* faith does not force itself upon anyone," but must challenge and be challenged (70). He presents a man who was powerfully attracted to the Jesus of the Gospels, who was asking himself, "If this is Christianity, am I a Christian?" But when he traveled in Europe, he then asked himself, "Where is the Jesus I met in the Bible?" and he became confused (72). He then briefly touches on some of Japan's new charismatic (non-Christian) religious movements with their startling gifts of speaking in tongues, healing, and mind reading, not to mention their mysterious focus on love and sacrifice. He recounts how "the dream of love's sacrifice has many variations" and is chiseled into the faces of popular saints, gods, Buddhas, legends, and fairy tales (74). He also introduces the Buddhist concept of a *bodhisattva*, "a person who gives up his or her own salvation in order to help the helpless" (76), remarking how this idea is what draws Easterners into "the heart of the Gospel" and Jesus' radiant model (77). He even shares the story of a "fanatical anti-Christian rabble-rouser" who had a "strange fondness for Jesus" (77). Buddhists are greatly attracted to the *kenosis* of Christ who emptied himself and thus allowed his ego to die—which from their perspective is what happened on the cross (79).

> [Some Buddhists in Japan] think of themselves as travelers who are *en route* to the Christian faith, but who can never become Christians. To "become Christians" in the traditional understanding of this term would imprison them in a system where Christ himself is held captive, i.e., the Christian church with its foreign forms of worship, organization, and doctrine. They prefer to remain *en route.* (79–80)

Some in the Church question the understanding of Christ among these en route. But to these Buddhists, Christ is their friend, master, and a bodhisattva, whose "death and resurrection are not regarded as salvific events but as unique models of the sacrifice love requires" (80). Nevertheless, this has led some Buddhists to discover that Jesus "also belongs to the East—or rather, that his life and death break through all borders and call to everyone who belongs to the truth" (80).

Although Buddhists may find it hard to fit within the trappings, teachings, and doctrines of the church, they have a high regard for Jesus and may even see him as someone to follow in this journey of love and sacrifice. Thelle presents a common conundrum in mission: Buddhists appropriately contextualizing Jesus to their life and world, but Westerners' questioning Buddhists' views of Jesus and their efficacy for salvation. Most assuredly, this promotes conversation and the hope that both sides will be enriched by this dialogue.

Thelle speaks to allegations that Christian mission slices through the roots that are absolutely essential for life to be lived in its fullness (80–1). He acknowledges some validity of these allegations.

> If the Christian faith does not help someone achieve a true relationship to his or her own self, it will always be borrowed goods, a foreign body that threatens personal development. Faith is meant to make people whole, not to make them spiritual refugees nourished on values borrowed from others. (81)

However, simply rebelling against family traditions and inherited values does not necessarily cause one to lose their identity.

> It is impossible to have a whole relationship with oneself unless one has a living relationship to one's past. We can try to reject the past, suppress it, or forget it, but it doesn't go away: sooner or later, it will emerge with its demands. We must work with our past and integrate it—positively or negatively—into the life we live in the present and the future. (82)

After sixteen years in Japan, Thelle is passionate about the wrong done by demands on the part of Christian mission to break with past religious traditions. They failed to recognize that much of their past "was good, that God may have been present in it, and that most of the roots were good" (82). He concludes by commenting that Christian missionary work must earn the right to invite people to follow Jesus by first learning to understand and value what's happening in the heart of other religions and cultures. He admonishes us to be aware and to take care of those roots "if life is to be lived in all its fullness and meaning" (83). He encourages a deep engagement of other cultures and religions that can realize the fruit already born in them—where the Spirit has already been at work. We see his holistic view of discipleship, how Christ's disciples must learn to integrate their past experiences—whether positive or negative—into their present and future living. This manner welcomes and does not categorically reject what is true from their past religious traditions, but carefully, steadily, and faithfully disentangles from the false.

To strengthen this discipleship the author reasons that Jesus knew two forms of mission: he rejected the Pharisees' missional approach, which sought to produce copies of themselves, and he invited them into a discipleship that shapes lives by setting them free to grow (83–4). Thelle notes the great gulf between Christianity and traditional Japanese consciousness. Japanese people may highly esteem Christianity, but they fail to be impacted at the deepest level (85–6). This has led people like Thelle's friend, Noriko, to say "I want to be a Japanese!" They decide to leave the church or to simply disappear through the back door (88–90). These stories help explain the difficulty of mission in Japan, and in Thelle's opinion, why the church has not had a noticeable and lasting impact on Japanese people and society.

He closes this section with the hopeful story of Akiko, who wrestled deeply with her family's Buddhist past after coming to a Christian faith:

> She felt rootless and restless, with an unclear sensation of living in a vacuum. She had heard that people who had had a leg amputated often felt the pain in the leg that had been removed; and Akiko felt pain in the [Buddhist] roots that had been cut off. (90–91)

Eventually she began to "investigate her past. When she did so, her life gained wholeness and richness." She integrated her heritage into her own life journey and became more secure in her Christian faith (90–1). This story resists a simplistic understanding of successful mission in Japan. Instead of presenting a story of mass conversions, Thelle typically tells the single story of an individual—in this case, a woman who experienced faith in Jesus at a deep level and lived it out in the context of her family's larger story. Thelle's rich relationships with individuals and his knowledge of their stories provides hope that, although from a human point of view it appears unlikely that the majority of Japanese people will ever know faith in Christ, some will indeed pursue this journey and find the morning star rising in their hearts.

Christian mission failed to recognize that much of the Japanese past was good, that God may have been present, and that most of its roots were good.

A Greater Faith

Thelle begins his last section with the story of a Jewish man who travels to a distant land to discover a treasure "hidden in his own living room," and he juxtaposes this with a similar journey of an American whom he met in Kyoto who came back to the Christian faith after engaging with the wisdom and

practices of Zen (94–5). Next, he unfolds his own journey, one where he traveled with people of different faiths who opened up their histories and shared their stories together (96–7). One was a former Christian, now a Buddhist, who still took Holy Communion as "one of Jesus's disciples" (96–7). Another was a Hindu man (who had also grown up in a Christian home) who couldn't "believe in a God who kept himself detached from the everyday life of the Hindus," that community where he himself had experienced such "love and care" (97–8). Thelle wrestles with how one might engage spiritually and theologically in the context of one's life experiences and encounters.

He introduces a lovely allegory regarding different "theological addresses." Finding one's way in Japan is not like Norway. The serried and exact numbers on a Norwegian street address is not the manner in Japan, where one uses local landmarks in giving directions—a temple, a school, a prominent tower. The context is used to find one's way. The same is true for theology, which "must be lived in a larger context" and take shape as "neighbors become a part of our life" (98–100).

The shallow and comfortable establishes an inadequate relational foundation. This more superficial orientation causes people to try and dominate and compete with one another . . .

Thelle concludes that a faith that forgets "the border zone" becomes too narrow. That is why he seeks a "larger faith" that does not shut its borders but "throws them open" (100–1). This greater faith is truly centered on Christ, and displays the same openness that Christ displayed (102). Thelle notes how the border zone exists as much in his own mind as it does far from his home. He himself needs a larger faith that accommodates human life in all of its dimensions, that grows through experience and ongoing interaction (102). It does not have final answers but always engages with those questions put to it by life's circumstances. These questions emerge from encounters with friends, neighbors, and people who live in different locations with their different traditions. Indeed, some of these questions are provoked from within his own mind. They may come forth quietly or sometimes even erupt from his past, present, or envisioned future. One may disagree with Thelle's "larger faith," but one would most definitely benefit from a conversation with him about faith and mission. This dialogue would surely lead to a deeper humility for all involved.

My Conclusions

Thelle shows us an example of a faith that must be lived out in the messiness of life and the difficulty of cross-cultural and interreligious encounters. He models for us a remarkable hospitality that abandons the comfort of secure frameworks. For Thelle, religious labels and doctrines matter less than how one lives one's life. He seeks a path that works out the complexity of honoring Christ's life and work in the context of difficult relationships. His expression, "a larger faith," may initially worry many about its ultimate grounding; however, the largeness of this faith seems to be associated with its capacity for dialogue, complexity, growth, and life with others. In other words, it might be said that Thelle does not expand his faith but merely goes deeper into who Christ is by learning how to live out his faith in a community of diverse others, where relationships are complicated by differences of culture, religion and personal experience.

For Thelle, Christ becomes more authentic by engaging with other cultures and religions, because these cultures and religions shine a distinct light upon Christ that one may not see or fully appreciate from one's own cultural or religious vantage point. He encourages us to take a road of difficult and vulnerable discipleship that does not seek an endpoint as much as to find a way of connecting and of making sense of the journey. Thelle allows others to take very different paths in their efforts to follow Jesus in their own contexts. Since each path attempts to integrate their identity and socio-religious tradition with the truth of the Word of God, he gives space for others to come to very different conclusions. Some will retreat from these difficult challenges altogether, and others may engage with more surface issues. However, Thelle will always engage at a deeper level. For Thelle, the shallow and the comfortable establishes an inadequate relational foundation. This more superficial orientation causes people to try to dominate and compete with one another rather than learn from each other.

This is not a work of systematic theology. It is a work that attempts to make sense of faith within one's life story and the life story of others. Its transparent style raises many topics for fruitful discussion in the areas of missiology, theology, interfaith dialogue, and pastoral ministry. I highly recommend that one wrestle deeply and rigorously with this short treatise. **IJFM**

Endnotes

[1] Notto R. Thelle was one of the four presenters at the 2021 Ralph D. Winter Lectureship, due to his scholarship on the theme, "Buddhist-Christian Encounters: Today's Realities in Light of the Pioneering Work of Karl Ludvig Reichelt in China."

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In Others' Words

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Violence against Buddhists

The Sinicization of Tibetan Buddhism

On November 12, 2021, the Chinese Communist Party completed its Sixth Plenum. A Tibetan scholar writing in "Xi Jinping's War on Tibetan Buddhism," in *The Wall Street Journal* claimed that:

> The party's communiqué mentions "national rejuvenation" eight times. The phrase may sound harmless if a bit nationalistic. Yet a key component of national rejuvenation is unification, which in Beijing's view requires the destruction of minority cultures.

He also refers to a conference in Tibet in September 2021 that drew over 500 religious and government officials from Tibetan and Chinese universities. Thirty-five academic papers examined the "Sinicization of Tibetan Buddhism." One area of focus was the translation of Tibetan Buddhist texts into Mandarin: "The ultimate goal is for future lamas and monks to learn Buddhism only in Mandarin—paving the way for the erasure of the Tibetan language." He concludes with the following alarming prediction:

> Beijing's assault on Tibetan Buddhism has three goals: to control Tibetan teaching directly by translating sacred texts into Chinese, to transform Tibetan Buddhism into Chinese Buddhism, and to compete with the flourishing of Tibetan Buddhism in the West. In the absence of a unified resistance to China's most recent efforts, the world puts at risk the vitality of the Tibetan language as a medium of cultural memory and contemporary scholarship, as well as the very existence of Tibetan Buddhist monasticism. ("Xi Jinping's War on Tibetan Buddhism," Wall Street Journal, November 18, 2021)

New Chinese Communist Party Boss in Tibet Has Xinjiang Genocide Resume

In October 2021, a new Chinese Communist Party leader, Wang JunZheng, was named for Tibet. Writing for *Radio Free Asia*, Paul Eckert comments:

> Wang Junzheng, deputy CCP boss and security chief in the Xinjiang Uyghur Autonomous Region (XUAR), has overseen atrocities against the Uyghurs and other Turkic minorities in the XUAR that have been labeled genocide in Western capitals.

He goes on to quote from a statement by the International Campaign for Tibet (ICT):

> "ICT expects Wang to bring his experience to Tibet as part of the party's Tibet-Xinjiang feedback loop. Chen Quanguo, his boss in Xinjiang, took his Tibet experience as the party secretary from 2011 to 2016 to Xinjiang, where he has led the Chinese government's ongoing, horrifying genocide of the Uyghurs," the group said in a statement. Chen moved to the XUAR capital Urumqi in August 2016 after five years as party boss in Tibet, where he built up security measures and surveillance, suppressed support for the Dalai Lama, Tibet's spiritual leader whom Beijing accuses of being a separatist, and criminalized many ordinary religious and cultural activities. ("Dread Among Tibetans as 'Butcher of Xinjiang' Named New Tibet Party Boss," *Radio Free Asia,* October 21, 2021)

Buddhist Violence against Others

Where Did Buddhism Get Its Reputation for Peace?

For centuries, religion has been blamed for fomenting political violence, but Buddhism has generally gotten a pass with its popular image of peaceful withdrawal from society. Last April, an article in *The Conversation* raised a provocative question: "Where Did Buddhism Get Its Reputation for Peace?" Written by a British academic, it highlights the conflict between the first moral precept of Buddhism (avoiding "onslaught on living beings") and the ethnic tensions erupting in Buddhist-majority countries. The author claims, contrary to popular conceptions,

> Buddhists have been involved in violent conflicts pretty much since the religion first emerged. Justifications for such actions have typically been based on defending the Dharma (the Buddhist teachings), occasionally demonising or dehumanising the enemy to make it less karmically wrong to kill them. A particularly uncomfortable example of this is found in the fifth century Sri Lankan quasi-mythological Mahavamsa chronicle, in which monks reassure a king that out of the millions he'd just slaughtered only two were Buddhists and the others were more like animals than humans. When it comes to "Buddhist violence," as with any perceived religious conflicts, religion is only one factor in a complex situation. Often ethnic identity is the real issue—it just happens that one of the ethnic groups in question has historical Buddhist affiliations, the others do not. At one point the Sri Lankan conflict of 1983-2009 saw three different civil wars playing out at once, as much as anything along ethnic and political lines: Sinhalese vs Tamils, Sinhalese extremists vs the Sinhalese government, and the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam vs other Tamil militant groups. ("Where Did Buddhism Get Its Reputation for Peace?" *The Conversation,* April 2021).

Religious Freedom Threatened along Ethnic Lines

For a more recent account of religious freedom in Sri Lanka—and the role that both Islamic terrorism and Buddhist nationalism have played in its continuing weakening—don't miss "Shrinking Space for Religious Minorities in Sri Lanka," *The Diplomat,* October 25, 2021. The author, Knox Thames, covers two significant reports, one from Christian Solidarity Worldwide (CSW) in the UK (a human rights watch group):

> But in addition to ethnic friction, religious divisions persist. Sri Lanka is majority Buddhist, with significant Hindu, Muslim, and Catholic and Protestant Christian populations. It is along religious lines with ethnic overlays that both reports highlight concerns. CSW, based in the United Kingdom, issued "A Nation Divided: The State of Freedom of Religion or Belief in Sri Lanka."

The second report was from the US Commission on International Religious Freedom,

> an independent U.S. government advisory body separate from the State Department that makes recommendations on U.S. policy relating to religious freedom promotion. The fact that USCIRF chose to report on Sri Lanka for the first time in six years demonstrates concern about the country's trajectory. The USCIRF report, "Religious Freedom Conditions in Sri Lanka," warned about the use of the Prevention of Terrorism Act (PTA) to target Muslims and jail them for lengthy periods on trumped-up charges.… USCIRF also highlighted Sri Lanka's use of criminal blasphemy laws against minorities and free thinkers. International pressure is needed to encourage Sri Lanka's government to reform. However, it will not be simple due to the orientation of President Gotabaya Rajapaksa and his brother Prime Minister Mahinda Rajapaksa toward policies that favor Buddhism and Buddhist nationalism. They won the election on a political platform of division and will not quickly walk away from it. Thus, exacerbating interfaith tensions that lead to human rights abuses could be fulfilling campaign promises.

The "Buddhist Bin Laden" Released

An extremist Buddhist monk in Myanmar was abruptly released from prison September 7, 2021. According to *DW,* Ashin Wirathu is known internationally as "the Buddhist Bin Laden" for whipping up savage violence against Myanmar's Muslim minority people, the Rohingyas ("Myanmar: Junta frees monk dubbed 'Buddhist Bin Laden'"). See also, "Wirathu: Myanmar Releases Firebrand Buddhist Monk," *BBC,* September 7, 2021. Wirathu was originally incarcerated on charges of sedition by the democratically elected government of Aung San Suu Kyi, daughter of the country's independence hero. But that government was deposed in a military coup February 2021, triggering street protests by millions ("Myanmar's Coup, Explained," the *New York Times,* October 26, 2021). Speculation is rampant that Wirathu, weak from COVID and long a hardliner ally of the military generals, was released because he is no longer a threat but rather an asset to the new totalitarian regime. For an update on the status of the Rohingya (both in country and outside in refugee camps), see "Rohingya Crisis in Myanmar" on the Global Conflict Tracker website of the Council on Foreign Relations.

Petitioning God in prayer is perhaps the most influential thing we can do. Matters shift in the heavenly realms when his people pray.

Genocide and Coup in Myanmar: Why It Happened and How to Pray

Don't miss the article about Myanmar in the latest issue of *Christianity Today.* Entitled "Why I Pray for Myanmar with Hope," *(Christianity Today,* November 18, 2021), British author Chris Mabey (whose Myanmar-born wife still has immediate family ties back to the country) recounts reasons for the despair in Myanmar as well as signs of hope for the future:

> Unexpectedly, hope dawned in the form of inspiring and energetic young millennials who were dedicated to restoring devastated lives and communities. Drawing on this experience and research, I ask two questions. What factors have led to the current and long-standing malaise in Myanmar? And what signs of hope exist today for a radical shift in fortunes?

We briefly highlight the first and the fourth factors:

> First is the multiethnic nature of Myanmar. Within the national borders, there are at least 130 ethnic groups each with their own dialect or language, indigenous culture, and vested interests. Many, like the Karen, the Chin, the Kachin, and the Shan, have long maintained their own militias, fighting for basic human rights. The conflict between them and the dominant ethnic group, the Bamars, has continued unabated for 60 years.… A fourth factor is benign Buddhist beliefs have infused the Burmese mindset for centuries. Characteristics like tolerance, conservatism, pacifism, and profound respect for others do not readily lend themselves to armed revolt against the political status quo. It would seem that a combination of Bamar socio-ethnic superiority and Buddhist deference to one's leaders, lend multi-layered support to the continuing elitism of the generals in Myanmar. . . .

This article is one of the most informative we've seen about the religious and ethnic complexities in Myanmar. It is also one of the most practical in terms of suggestions that could make a real difference. Mabey concludes with a call to concerted prayer:

> Finally, petitioning Father God in prayer is perhaps the most precious and influential thing we can do. Matters shift in the heavenly realms when his people pray. Bring to him your heartfelt hopes and use the information in this article to bring your specific requests for people and events in Myanmar. **IJFM**

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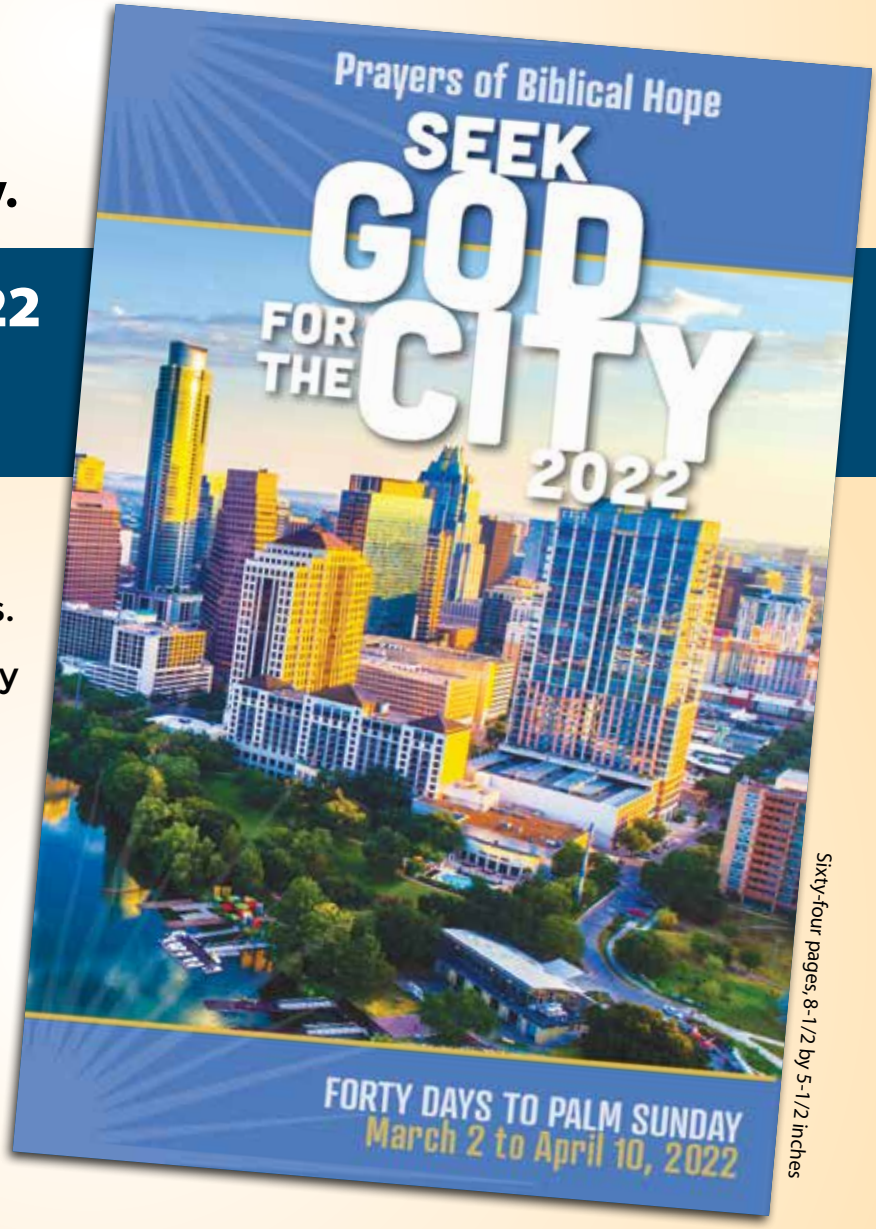

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RALPH D. WINTER LECTURE SHIP

Homogeneity and Hybridity: Revisiting HUP

The homogeneous unit principle (HUP) was an influential and controversial aspect of the church growth missiology of Donald McGavran, highlighted by a consultation moderated by John Stott and sponsored by Lausanne in 1977. Today multiculturalism and hybridity appear ascendant, particularly in mega cities around the world. How do both homogeneity and hybridity impact the birth and growth of fellowships of Jesus followers, and of movements to Jesus which were the core concern of HUP theory?

This and related questions will be the focus of The Ralph D. Winter Memorial Lectureship for 2022, to be held both virtually and on site at Fuller Theological Seminary from March 3-5, 2022. A wide array of speakers from across the globe will reflect on how churches grow (how movements to Christ develop), particularly related to urbanization and ethnicity.

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