

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.

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



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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.

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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.

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.

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 dialogue 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).

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-incident 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 Triologue*, 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 Triologue," *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 Ramirez-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).