A comparison of Buddhist compassion to Christian love: an apologetic study

D.J. McCoy
Student Number: 25110969

Thesis submitted in fulfillment of the requirements for the degree PhD in Theology at the Potchefstroom Campus of the North-West University

Supervisor: Prof. Henk Stoker

Submitted April 2015

Preface

I would like to thank the following people for their role in making this thesis possible:

My wife and daughters for their patience and love

Win Corduan and Henk Stoker for their guidance

My teaching and ministry colleagues for their support

Jesus Christ for creating me, saving me, and giving my life purpose

Abstract

The purpose of this thesis will be a contrast of the Buddhist and the Christian responses to this-worldly suffering. Many scholars have proposed that the best way to create a better world with less suffering is to make Christianity more like Buddhism, so that an interfaith synthesis between the two religions results. These scholars' proposals are described in Chapter 2. However, what these scholars desire (i.e. less this-worldly suffering) will not logically result from the solution they suggest (i.e. Buddhicizing Christianity). For to make Christianity more like Buddhism in its essentials would render Christianity less potent to oppose this-worldly suffering.

The thesis will thus contrast Buddhism with Christianity in five crucial areas, namely, their viewpoints on ultimate reality, ultimate attachments, ultimate aversions, ultimate example, and ultimate purpose. These five areas provide the content to accurately define Buddhist compassion and Christian love.

Chapter 3 describes Buddhism's struggle to ground love of neighbor ontologically, whether by the ontological givens of dependent co-arising or nirvana. Buddhism struggles to ground not only whether we *should* love our neighbors, but also whether we *can* do so. Christianity, on the other hand, proves entirely capable of grounding love of neighbor—whether *should* or *can*—given its theistic ontology.

Chapter 4 describes the Buddhist and Christian responses to suffering when it comes to attachments. Buddhism asks us to let go of rigid attachments to persons, truth and goodness. Meanwhile, Christians are to cling to God, and as a result of loving God, they are to love people,

hunger and thirst for the good, and rejoice in the truth. These ultimate attachments to persons, truth, and goodness help overcome this-worldly suffering.

According to Chapter 5, Buddhism and Christianity differ sharply when it comes to aversion to and grief over sin. Buddhists cultivate equanimity toward the sin, reasoning that the problem is not actually the person's fault and, furthermore, that the problem is not really a problem. Christians, however, are to love people enough that they hate the sin which destroys them. In hating evil and restoring people, Christianity undermines immense worldly suffering.

Chapter 6 contrasts Gautama and Jesus as examples of combatting suffering. At each juncture, Jesus offered more to actually fight against suffering than did Gautama. Incredibly, the interfaith scholar who would Buddhicize Christianity's ultimate example would mar the portrait of the paradigm who exemplifies the very qualities the interfaith scholar wants to emulate.

Chapter 7 examines the Buddhist emphasis on "thusness" and the Christian emphasis on purposefulness. Insofar as the interfaith scholar would Buddhicize Christianity's ultimate purpose, the robust purposefulness that gives one's life meaning and motivation would erode into a purposelessness which, however emancipating, leaves one comparatively impotent in the face of this-worldly suffering.

In light of these five contrasts, Christian love and Buddhist compassion are able to be defined and contrasted. The logical conclusion drawn is that to Buddhicize Christianity's ultimacy would be to truncate Christianity's efficacy, a result which should motivate these interfaith scholars to reconsider their proposals.

Key Words

- Buddhism

- Christianity
- Buddhist Compassion
- Christian Love
- Evangelical tradition
- This-worldly suffering
- Interfaith scholarship
- Apologetics
- Attachment
- Purposefulness

Table of Contents

Preface……....ii

Abstract……..…iii

List of tables……..10

List of figures……10

Chapter 1 (Introduction)…11

1.1 Background and problem statement…11

1.2 Aim and objectives…14

1.3 Central theoretical argument…14

1.4 Research design/methodology…15

1.5 Concept clarification…18

Chapter 2 (Christianity meets Buddhism)…19

2.1 Introduction…19

2.2 A proposed marriage…20

2.2.1 Tip #1 – "Let her pick the movie" (accommodating the antithetic)…21

2.2.2 Tip #2 – "Try to learn her language" (localizing the linguistic)…27

2.2.3 Tip #3 – "Share common experiences" (merging the mystic)…32

2.2.4 Tip #4 – "Don't talk too much" (applying the apophatic)…38

2.2.5 Tip #5 – "Disconnect from old romances" (hurdling the Hellenistic)…42

2.2.6 Tip #6 – "Don't talk too directly" (stigmatizing the specific)…47

2.2.7 Tip #7 – "Discover points of agreement" (harmonizing the hermeneutic)…53

2.2.8 Tip #8 – "Discern the meaning behind the words" (salvaging the symbolic)…63

2.2.9 Tip #9 – "Let Cupid do his thing" (crediting the charismatic)…70

2.2.10 Tip #10 – "Don't just talk about yourself" (eclipsing the egoistic)…76

2.2.11 Tip #11 – "Get the door for her" (accomplishing the altruistic)…80

2.2.12 Tip #12 – "Detach from relatives that don't want you together" (indicting the imperialistic)…87

2.2.13 Tip #13 – "Avoid being right all the time" (excluding the exclusivistic)…95

2.2.14 Tip # 14 – "Avoiding trying to change each other" (extinguishing the evangelistic)…112
2.2.15 Tip #15 – "Make room for the other" (embodying the eclectic)…117
2.3 The point…124
2.3.1 Reason #1 – The less fighting (i.e. converting) each other, the less suffering…125
2.3.2 Reason #2 – The more working (i.e. merging) with each other, the better the world…128
2.3.3 Reason #3 – The less suffering + the better world = the point…131
2.3.4 The perfect synthesis for the perfect world…134
2.4 Why I won't be joining in…140
Chapter 3 (Your Deity is too defined: how ultimate reality relates to suffering)…145
3.1 Introduction…145
3.2 Why should I love my neighbor: Buddhism's ontological groundings…146
3.2.1 Ontological grounding #1 – dependent co-arising…148
3.2.2 Ontological grounding #2 – nirvana…149
3.3 Why should I love my neighbor: Buddhism's reasons given…151
3.3.1 Reason #1 – because destiny is discerning…151
3.3.2 Reason #2 – because Buddhas are benevolent…159
3.3.3 Reason #3 – because egos are empty…161
3.3.4 Reason #4 – because individuals are interrelated…167
3.3.5 Reason #5 – because integrity is instrumental (or intrinsic?)…170
3.3.6 Reason # 6 – because capability is constitutional…175
3.3.7 Reason #7 – because samsara is savage…179
3.4 Why should I love my neighbor: Christianity's ontological groundings and reasons given…184
3.5 How can I love my neighbor…186
3.6 Conclusion…193
Chapter 4 (Your attachments are too ardent: how ultimate attachments relate to suffering)…194
4.1 Introduction…194
4.2 Buddhism's general attitude toward attachment…194

4.3 Buddhism's less rigid attachment to the true…196
4.4 Buddhism's less rigid attachment to the good…201
4.5 Christianity's general view on attachment as compared with the Buddhist view…206
4.6 With overriding soteriology: the highest ethic of Buddhism…210
4.7 With no overriding soteriology: the highest ethic of Christianity…217
4.8 Buddhism's case against love-attachment…225
4.9 Which makes for a better world with less suffering?...231
4.10 Conclusion…235
Chapter 5 (Your demands are too dualistic: how ultimate aversions relate to suffering)…237
5.1 Introduction…237
5.2 Buddhism's aversion to aversion…238
5.2.1 Strategy #1 – It's just an appendage…240
5.2.2 Strategy #2 – It's just a moment…241
5.2.3 Strategy #3 – It's just ignorance…244
5.2.4 Strategy #4 – It's just a lack…245
5.2.5 Strategy # 5 – It's just your karma…247
5.2.6 Strategy #6 – It's just your mom…248
5.2.7 Strategy #7 – It's just your opportunity…250
5.2.8 Strategy #8 – It's just its opposite…251
5.2.9 Strategy #9 – It's just the surface…253
5.2.10 Strategy #10 – It's just your response…255
5.3 Christianity's indignation with indifference…257
5.4 Evil: the problem that does not go away…265
5.5 Which approach to aversion most effectively responds to suffering?...271
5.6 Conclusion…277
Chapter 6 (Your Messiah is too matchless: how ultimate example relates to suffering)…279
6.1 Introduction…279
6.2 The Buddha and the Christ: Ten Points of Contrast…279
6.2.1 Attitude toward history…280

6.2.2 Reaction to suffering…285
6.2.3 Sphere of ministry…291
6.2.4 Depth of diagnosis…297
6.2.5 Fervor of path…301
6.2.6 Level of authority…308
6.2.7 Result of interaction…312
6.2.8 Agenda of choice…316
6.2.9 Intensity of death…318
6.2.10 Role of destination…321
6.3 Conclusion…324
Chapter 7 (Your purpose is too predetermined: how ultimate purpose relates to suffering)…327
7.1 Introduction…327
7.2 Pain of purposelessness…327
7.3 Devastation of disappointment…332
7.4 Emancipation of emptiness…334
7.5 Risk of restoration…339
7.5.1 Too good to be true…343
7.5.2 Too true to be good…344
7.6 The combatting of suffering…348
7.6.1 The inward effects of Buddhicizing Christian purpose…349
7.6.2 The physical effects of Buddhicizing Christian purpose…351
7.7 Conclusion…353
Chapter 8…354
8.1 Introduction…354
8.2 Review…354
8.3 Definitions…358
8.4 Buddhicizing and tranquilizing…359
8.5 Advice for apologetics to Buddhism…363
Bibliography…366

List of tables

Table 5-1: Christian view of evil as distinguished from Buddhist view of evil…258

Table 7-1: Purposes of suffering according to Christianity…349

List of figures

Figure 1-1: Four views of how religions relate to truth…96

Chapter 1

Introduction

1.1 Background and problem statement

Like so many who hope to further the cause of Christian apologetics, I have focused my primary academic pursuits in response to atheism. Atheists, after all, seem to offer the most adamant criticisms of Christianity.[1] Clearly, I believe it is crucial for Christian apologetics to answer these criticisms. However, Christian apologists need to start focusing much more than they traditionally have on competing religions. This is because, in western culture, atheism might weaken Christianity but can hardly hope to replace it. Even if de-converted from Christianity by secularization, a religious impulse always threatens to rush into the vacuum (see Jones, 2011 for indications of what religious reactions against secular humanism are mounting). After all, Kauffman (1979:359), himself an atheist, reminds us that man is the "God-intoxicated ape." Atheism simply cannot offer the transcendence innately craved by humans and promised by religions. Yet Christian apologetics remains focused on defeating atheism, while remaining largely unprepared to deal with other religions, especially a category that is gaining much popularity in the West, namely, Eastern religions. World religions scholar Winfried Corduan (2011) put it this way in an interview:

> We've been doing well with western philosophy of religion. . . . We've done horribly with eastern philosophy of religion. And since it is making inroads into our culture increasingly, I think we need to work on that and learn what Buddhist philosophies and Hindu philosophies and so forth are if we want to engage on the most fundamental level of the philosophical marketplace there.

[1] For example, see Richard Dawkins (2008), Christopher Hitchens (2007), and Dan Barker (2008).

To give an example of the lack of attention Christian apologetics has paid to answering Buddhism, he (Corduan, 2011) went on to point out that as of the interview there was not a single website in any language oriented toward reaching Buddhists for Christ. The need is indeed great.

Therefore, I want to make a contribution to help fill this gap in Christian apologetics. I recognize that whereas Hinduism, being yoked to the caste system, could never threaten to become popular enough to effectively replace Christianity in the West, Buddhism, which can accommodate itself to any culture, whether secular or spiritual, is already enjoying a clear rise in popularity in the United States. Moreover, Buddhism is so attractive to a segment of religion scholars that they propose ways of making the Christian religion more like Buddhism. The rationale such scholars often give is that making Christianity more like Buddhism would result in a better world with less suffering. With all this in mind, I have decided to study Buddhism and Christianity to determine whether "Buddhicizing" Christianity would logically combat suffering. The study centers on the dichotomy of life-affirming Christianity, which offers attached love, against life-denying Buddhism, which offers detached compassion. Since Buddhism is explicitly oriented toward answering the problem of suffering (Humphreys, 2012:82; Hopfe & Woodward, 2005:132), and since Buddhism is packaged for the West as a way of peace and restoration[2] (and thus promises to help alleviate suffering), exploring Buddhism in light of its fundamentally life-denying perspective will help us to determine whether Buddhism will satisfactorily answer the problem of suffering or not.

[2] Consider recent Buddhist writings for western readers such as Thich Nhat Hanh's *The Heart of the Buddha's Teaching: Transforming Suffering into Peace, Joy, and Liberation* (1999) and the Dalai Lama's *The Art of Happiness in a Troubled World* (2009).

I realize that because Buddhism is quite adaptable to other cultures as well as quite fragmented into various schools (Corduan, 1998:220), it would be next to impossible to contrast Christianity with all the various schools and adaptations of Buddhism in one dissertation. Thus, I will be primarily considering Buddhism from the sources most convincingly traceable back to the teachings of the Buddha himself, as well as from those sources that most clearly present the Buddhist ethic of compassion. As for examples of the former category (i.e. original sources), I will be relying heavily upon selections from the Tripitaka[3] of the Pali Canon for the Theravada school and the *Lotus Sutra* (2007) for the Mahayana schools. For example, special emphasis will be given to a particular story in the Tripitaka about the death of Kisa Gotami's son (Thanissaro, 1995), for it might well provide the clearest illustration of the contrast in question. When this story is placed beside the stories of the resurrections performed by Jesus, the contrast becomes glaring. As for examples of the latter category (i.e. sources that feature Buddhist compassion), I will access some very helpful discussions on Buddhist compassion within the Pure Land tradition. Such sources include the *The Three Pure Land Sutras* (2003) and Cheng Wei-an's *Taming the Monkey Mind: A Guide to Pure Land Practice* (2000). My primary source for studying Christianity's response to suffering will be the New Testament, supplemented by Christian creeds and theologians. Some works that will suggest how this research can fit into recent formulations of Christian apologetics to Buddhism will include Timothy Tennant's *Christianity at the Religious Roundtable: Evangelicalism in Conversation with Hinduism, Buddhism, and Islam* (Tennent, 2002), Paul Williams's *Unexpected Way: On Converting from Buddhism to Catholicism* (Williams, 2002), and Keith Yandell and Harold Netland's *Buddhism: A Christian Exploration and Appraisal* (Yandell & Netland, 2009).

[3] This Theravada collection of sutras is called "Tipitaka" in Pali and "Tripitaka" in Sanskrit.

The specific questions I am focusing on include:

- How specifically do Buddhist-Christian interfaith scholars propose Christianity ought to be Buddhicized?
- Why do they propose Christianity ought to be Buddhicized?
- In ethical terms, what was the Buddha's ethical answer to suffering?
- In ethical terms, what was the Christ's ethical answer to suffering?
- Which ethic provides a more effective answer to suffering—Buddhist compassion or Christian love?
- How might these insights refine a Christian's apologetic to Buddhists?

1.2 Aim and objectives

The main aim of this study is to contrast the answers of the Buddha and the Christ to suffering in order to determine which answer provides a satisfactory response to suffering today, and, thus, whether or not Buddhicizing Christianity would logically contribute to or combat suffering.

The specific objectives of the study are to:

-Understand how and why Buddhist-Christian interfaith scholars propose Christianity ought to be Buddhicized.
-Analyze and evaluate the Buddha's ethical answer to suffering
-Analyze and evaluate the Christ's ethical answer to suffering
-Contrast Buddhist compassion with Christian love in order to determine whether Buddhicizing Christianity would make for the better world these scholars envision
-To refine Christian apologetics toward Buddhism by comparing the respective answers to suffering

1.3. Central theoretical argument

The central theoretical argument of this study is that not only is Buddhism's answer to suffering insufficient, especially in comparison to Christianity's answer, but that, far from alleviating suffering, many principles of Buddhism will logically lead to greater suffering.

1.4. Research design/methodology

This study is done from the perspective of an Evangelical tradition. Perhaps what defines Evangelicalism most distinctly (Geisler, 2002:409) is its commitment to the "full inspiration and factual inerrancy" of Scripture, in contrast with the common tendency toward theological liberalism due to the embrace of destructive higher criticism. Evangelicals see this commitment as helping to preserve the historic orthodox view of the Bible as passed down from the beginnings of Christianity.

The following methods are used to answer the various research questions:

1. In order to study the Buddha's answer to suffering, a literature analysis is conducted, primarily centered on those texts closest to and most convincingly derived from the Buddha's original teachings (for example, the Tripitaka, portions of the *Lotus Sutra*). Many additional Buddhist sources as well as commentaries to the Buddha's words will also be studied.
2. In order to study the Christ's answer to suffering, a literature analysis is conducted, primarily from the teachings and actions of Jesus as found in the New Testament. In my interpretation of the New Testament, I will be following the grammatical-historical method, in which the Scriptures will be interpreted in the commonsense, author-centered method according to which, in my conviction, all writings ought to be understood. For an excellent defense of such a commonsense method, see E.D. Hirsch's *Validity in Interpretation* (1976:viii). My attempts at getting at the author's intended meaning will go both ways—whether of Christian or Buddhist writings; however, a distinction is in order. Whereas Christians from the beginning have insisted on the historicity of the biblical accounts (see Luke 1:3-4; 2 Peter 1:16),

many Buddhists seem not nearly as concerned with the historicity of a particular Buddhist story as with whether or not the principle that is taught "works" (Befriending the Suttas, 2001). Whatever the account studied, whether Christian or Buddhist, I will attempt to interpret according to the author's intended meaning. However, there will be a distinction drawn between the Buddhist's pragmatic perspective toward Buddhist stories, with historicity as subordinated to workability, and the centrality for the Christian of the historicity of New Testament stories.

3. In order to determine which answer—Christian or Buddhist—provides a more satisfactory response to suffering today, a logical or philosophical analysis is attempted rather than an historical analysis. Moreover, both religions no doubt have their deviant adherents in history, with the result that a religion can be made unfairly to look better or worse than its premises. So, as far as possible, I demonstrate the logical outworking of the founders' respective answers to suffering, so that we might understand how, for example, a faithful Buddhist would respond to suffering today given the Buddha's teachings. I use historical examples to illustrate, but I use logical connections to argue.
4. Ultimately, I hope this research helps the cause of Christian apologetics to Buddhism. So, how might research that demonstrates Christianity's superior response to suffering fit into the larger apologetics endeavor? Apart from simply making Christianity appear generally more appealing, one way to use this research in intellectual argumentation could be as part of a "cumulative case" showing that Christianity has more evidence for its truthfulness than does Buddhism. In the past, I have typically approached apologetics from the "classical apologetics" perspective,

recognizing that unless the existence of a theistic God is proved upfront, it will be highly unlikely that much else Christian belief can be subsequently proved (Cowan, 2000:16). Hence, if my objective here were a comprehensive apologetics strategy to help lead Buddhists to Christ, I would likely start with the larger metaphysical issues before asking which worldview provides a satisfactory response to suffering. However, because I will be focusing on the issue of suffering, my approach will not be structured according to the classical apologetics approach, even though, as a comprehensive strategy, my inclination is toward that branch of apologetics. If I had to choose a particular apologetics methodology that this research could fall under, it might be useful under the "cumulative case method" (Cowan, 2000:18), in which the point is to show which worldview best fits the data we have. The data at issue here is our ethical obligations, specifically our obligation to alleviate suffering (this obligation is established in our first main point, namely, understanding why religions address suffering). That a religion offers a better solution to suffering is evidence that it is an ethically superior one. In discerning the truthfulness of a religion, one ought to consider, as part of the "cumulative case," that religion's ethical inferiority or superiority. Thus, suppose this research proves that, because of Christianity's historical sturdiness, this-worldly orientation, and ethics of self-sacrificial love, Christianity offers a better solution to this-worldly suffering than does Buddhism. When placed in a larger "cumulative case" apologetics model, the argument might look like this: Because Christianity offers a better solution to this-worldly suffering, it has ethical superiority to Buddhism. Since Christianity has ethical superiority to

Buddhism, this is a piece of evidence to the truth of Christianity in comparison with Buddhism.

1.5 Concept clarification

- Buddhism – those religious groups whose goal is nirvana and whose path to nirvana proceeds from the teachings of Buddha (Corduan, 1998:223, 246)
- Christianity – the religion that recognizes Jesus as Savior from sin and death through His death and resurrection (Hopfe & Woodward, 2005:280)
- Buddhist Compassion – a detached benevolence whose ultimate goal is the rescue of oneself and then others from the cycle of rebirth (Wei-an, 2000:84)[4]
- Christian Love – an attached effort to restore a fellow human to the blessed life experienced in relationship with God (Wei-an, 2000:84; Gal. 4:19)
- Evangelical tradition – the branch of Christianity which commits to the full inspiration and factual inerrancy of Scripture, and which sees this commitment as the historic orthodox position of the Church originating in the Scriptures themselves (Geisler, 2002:409)

[4] Note that these definitions of Buddhist compassion and Christian love are preliminary, based on the sources cited. However, what is coming in chapter 8 (section 8.3) are the final definitions from the cumulated information gathered from the preceding chapters.

Chapter 2

Christianity meets Buddhism

2.1 Introduction

The purpose of this thesis is a comparison of the Buddhist and the Christian responses to this-worldly suffering. The readers I have in mind are those scholars who think that the best way to make for a better world with less suffering will be to make Christianity more like Buddhism, so that an interfaith synthesis between the two religions results. As we shall see in subsequent chapters, what these scholars desire (i.e. less suffering) will not logically result from the solution they suggest (i.e. Buddhicizing Christianity). Before speaking *to* these Buddhist-Christian interfaith scholars, however, it will be helpful to know more *about* them, so that it is made clear that no straw man is being invented, and that my proposed audience is an active and influential segment of academia.

To describe these scholars' presuppositions and goals is the point of this chapter. In this chapter, the views of these scholars will be categorized under various "tips," the governing metaphor of which is interreligious "romance." After describing fifteen such interreligious "tips," we will look at the reason the interfaith scholar gives for why Christianity ought to be Buddhicized, namely that it would make for a better world with less suffering.

Four introductory remarks are in order. First, this chapter is not meant to give a thorough evaluation or critique of interfaith scholars' beliefs. However, along the way, I will give limited immanent critique. Such critique will help explain why I will not be joining their ranks, and why, in subsequent chapters, I feel justified in opposing their logic. But the primary purpose of this chapter is to describe, not to debate, in order that future chapters have an antecedent viewpoint to

debate. Second, it should not be taken as important to the central argument whether a particular Buddhist-Christian interfaith scholar agrees with all 15 of the tips. What is important is that the scholars I debate in Chapters 3-7 simply believe 1) Christianity ought to be Buddhicized, (Section 2.2) and 2) the reason is that a better world with less suffering will result (Section 2.3). The crucial point is *that* we ought to Buddhicize Christianity, not that every scholars concurs with every way (tip) proposed as to *how*. Third, various elements from various Buddhist schools will be drawn upon as part of these scholars' proposals for how to Buddhicize Christianity. The result is that sometimes the various schools will tend to be conflated. Because these interfaith scholars sometimes do not observe the boundaries between schools, it may be necessary at times to grant their conflation in responding to the scholars. Fourth, because of the dialoguing nature of the Buddhist-Christian interfaith relationship, this chapter will take on a similarly dialogical approach.

2.2 A proposed marriage

When two people in love are nearing engagement, it is common for an onlooker to speculate, "It looks like things are getting pretty serious." When it comes to Buddhism's relationship with Christianity, it looks like things *are* getting pretty serious. It is common for altruistically-active Buddhists to dub themselves "Engaged Buddhists" (Gable, 2008:78). Yet, as we shall see in examples below, the way many interfaith scholars write, it would seem that Buddhism was already engaged to another. Perhaps Rudyard Kipling predicted such a romance could never work. Speaking of the East and the West, he claimed, "Never the twain shall meet" (Franck, 1997:297), but he was wrong. The two have met. And many on either side have claimed to have fallen in love with the other.

2.2.1 Tip #1 – "Let her pick the movie" (accommodating the antithetic)

This religious romance begins the way countless relationships do, in a harmless noticing of the other. Process theologian John Cobb (1980:17) tells us that prior to World War I, the typical popular Western response to this foreign "god" named Buddha was that it was all idolatry, pure and simple. The postwar West had time to appreciate the exotic. In place of easily dismissed superstition, Western scholars began to take notice of a religion of sophisticated philosophy and cultivated spiritual technique.

Many less reflective westerners have leapt from an uncritical demonization to a sort of "puppy love" fascination with Buddhism. Self-help meditative techniques spice up secular dullness. Products with the "Zen" catchphrase sell. Living room Buddha statues exhibit one's cultivation. Not surprisingly, such impressionability does not impress real Buddhists. After describing such popular repackaging as "Zen Light" or "McBuddha," one scholar informs us that his Japanese Buddhist friends of the Kyoto school grow weary at the tourists seeking "The Instant Buddhist." One abbot told him, "I give them a meditation cushion and tell them to come back again after they have meditated at home for six months" (Thelle, 2010-2011:73). Despite the reluctance of some Easterners to export their religion uncritically, it seems that an uncritical West imports anything Eastern with open arms. Western culture is accommodating: "sermon and catechism give way before mantra and meditation; guru and avatar displace pastor and savior; resurrection and judgment founder before reincarnation and karma" (Bowers, 1997:396).

In the meantime, however, a serious relationship has been developing. A celebrated intersecting of East and West had already occurred in 1893 at the World's Parliament of

Religions in Chicago. It was there that Zen Buddhist Shaku Soen met Paul Carus, head of the Open Court Publishing Company and editor of *The Monist*. Carus saw in Buddhism a modern alternative to "unscientific" Christianity. Soen went on to mentor Daisetzu Taitaro Suzuki, the illustrious popularizer—or, to many, the controversial oversimplifier—of Zen to the West. With the help of his new publishing partner Carus, Suzuki blessed the West with over one hundred books and articles and became a sought-after lecturer. The matchmaker died in 1966 (Yandell and Netland, 2009:86-87). In the same decade, the Second Vatican Council was repositioning the Roman Catholic stance toward other religions. Many saw in Vatican II's more inclusive posture an implicit blessing on a Buddhist-Christian courtship (Bowers, 1997:396). So with many Christians feeling freer to look around, and with Buddhism in the neighborhood, both sides decided they ought to officially meet. In 1980, Honolulu hosted the first International Conference on Buddhist-Christian Encounter (Bowers, 1997:397). In 1984, Zen Buddhist Masao Abe and Christian-Process Theologian John Cobb initiated a series of annual "theological encounters," in which both sides would present and discuss papers centering on a shared theme (Ray, 1987:115).

Many observers recognized a match made in heaven. Historian Arnold Toynbee saw in the meeting of the two an event perhaps as historic as the invention of nuclear fission. Hoping a Buddhist-Christian alliance could unite and guide humanity, Toynbee speculated, "A thousand years from now, historians looking back upon our century, may remember it less for its conflicts between democracy and communism than for the momentous encounter between Christianity and Buddhism" (Franck, 1997:287-288). After all, according to religion scholar Ninian Smart, Buddhism and Christianity are "those two great shapers of East and West" (Bocking, 1983:94). Surely, they can learn to accommodate each other.

One reason they can learn to accommodate each other is that Buddhism is finally *accessible* to Christians. Christians traveling the world who expected to see other religions either irremediably wicked or embryonically Christian would be surprised to find a religion like Buddhism that is basically neither (see Pomplun, 2006:162 for the Roman Catholic response to this surprise). Honest westerners can no longer force Buddhism into the category of primitive amusement (Morris, 1991:66). Buddhists have learned to be skeptical of even sympathetic westerners trying to force western categories. Buddhists no longer desire the assistance of those like Col. Henry Steel Olcott, who reinvented Buddhism in a western mold only to lament that real Buddhists were woefully ignorant of their own religion (Prothero, 1995:296). Buddhism is no longer a past relic, but a living tradition (Habito, 1985:246). It has the "capacity to answer back" (Bocking, 1983:88). And, as Paul Griffiths puts it, "When we discover…that Buddhist intuitions about such matters differ in almost every significant particular from (most) Christians ones, we are, or should be, given a pause. Is it obvious that our intuitions are more appropriate than those of our Buddhist counterparts?" (Griffiths, 1990:48).

Moreover, Christians have discovered that, in some ways, Buddhism is *analogous* to Christianity. Buddhists too have sincerity and ethics and transformative experiences. Perhaps divergent concepts make communication difficult, but what does that matter? As Roman Catholic monk Thomas Merton suggests, communion takes place before communication. There is alleged convergence at the level of experience (Knitter, 1981a:42). Whatever the doctrinal peculiarities, adherents have claimed to have discovered a surprising "resonance" between the religions (Brown, 1999:182).

But access to and analogy with Buddhism are not the only reasons to learn to accommodate Buddhism. Nor, for those most serious about the relationship, are they the most

important. For these Christians, perhaps the most captivating feature of making room for the relationship is that they find a great deal within Buddhism that would be *advantageous* to Christianity if adopted. (Likewise, "Abe shows us that Buddhism has both something to offer and something to gain from its adaptation to the West" (Palmer, 1997:114)). The great Indian King Ashoka is remembered by Buddhists for ushering in a golden age of ruling according to the Dharma and dispatching missionaries. He is also remembered for advising his people to honor not only one's own religion, but also to honor those of others. Why be so accommodating? One of the primary reasons, according to Ashoka, is that a policy of accommodation helps your religion to grow (Fors, 2005:62). Undoubtedly he was right, as traveling Buddhists adapted to the point of reinvention and Buddhism grew to the status of world religion. However, the proposed advantage of Christians and Buddhists to the interfaith relationship is no longer that one's religion will grow. Despite the proselyting heritage of both Buddhists and Christians,[5] any such "triumphalistic" goal is currently frowned upon. Instead, the admitted advantage is for *personal* growth. Christians see the opportunity to grow in their spiritual techniques (Griffiths, 1990:40).[6] Buddhists see the opportunity to grow in their concern for justice (Makransky, 2011:125). Where once it was fashionable to ignore differences and celebrate similarities, now—since it has become unmistakable just how different the two religions are—the custom has become to not only highlight but celebrate differences. As Buddhist John Makransky (2011:130) puts it, "People of each tradition have much to learn from religious others, precisely because of

[5] Buddhism and Christianity, along with Islam, are referred to as the "three missionary religions" (Montgomery, 2014:178).

[6] Although Griffiths takes an analytic approach, he acknowledges that much contemporary interreligious dialogue centers on spiritual technique.

their otherness. . . . To lose the religious other (by dismissing him or reducing him to a straw man of one's apologetics) would be to lose a potential religious teacher."

So the relationship is made less foreign by its mutual accessibility, less forced by its mutual analogy, and less frightening by its mutual advantages. But, as with any romantic relationship entered with a measure of commitment, there is the possibility one might feel less free. Certain expectations immediately impose themselves. We are told that if the relationship is genuine—and not about the stronger taking advantage of the weaker—certain restrictions apply. Christians are warned ahead of time: No more a priori exclusivism (Griffiths, 1990:50). No more "traditional rejection" (Brown, 1999:189). No more forcing categories (Habito, 1985:246). One's commitment to Christ "must be matched by the breadth of one's openness to the truth that may be contained in Buddha's message" (Knitter, 1981a:41). It is almost as if "Do not be unequally yoked" takes on a new application for Buddhist-Christian relations, namely, that one must split allegiance equally between Christ and Buddha. In the end, one's assumption that she is serving the "one true God" deteriorates from conviction to conceit, or, in the words of one scholar as symptomatic of an "unhealthy psychology" (Morris, 1991:66).

As one might well guess, submitting to such confining expectations will render the Buddhist and the Christian less able to be a genuine Buddhist and a Christian. As we shall see, Buddhism will be rendered less Buddhistic, and Christianity less Christian. This is clearly problematic insofar as the interfaith scholar proposes a serious, not superficial relationship. Certain branches of either religion will be less welcome in discussions than others, and certain doctrines will be uninvited altogether. As this chapter progresses, "less free" will be seen to be an accurate and foreboding forecast.

When William Carey, the "father of modern missions" first went to India to spread the Good News of Christ, only 1% of Protestants lived in Asia, Africa, and Latin America. Today, the majority of the world's Catholics and Protestants call these continents "home" (Tennent, 2002:29). Clearly, if accommodating each other means striving to live beside each other peacefully, then such accommodation should be heartily sought after by both Buddhist and Christian as the only peaceable option. The increasing proximity of Buddhism and Christianity to each other—whether in the East or West—no longer affords either to ignore the other as distant "enemy"; the two are neighbors. Yet such a distinction matters not for the Christian, for Christians are told to love both enemy and neighbor alike (Matt. 5:44; 19:19). Christians are to get along with everyone. "If possible, so far as it depends on you, live peaceably with all" (Romans 12:18). However, for many, accommodating has become "dating." "Love your neighbor" has become less neighborly and more intimate. A line has been crossed to where if one backs out of the relationship on account of irreconcilable differences, a chorus will cry foul. The line we cannot cross back over is, according to Buddhist Rita Gross (2005b:16), our knowledge of the religious other. To study the other and yet maintain one's own status as uniquely true is relational betrayal. According to Gross,

> It might be understandable that such hubris could develop in situations of relative cultural isolation, but, given our current inescapable knowledge about religious diversity and about the conditioned nature of all religious expressions, to maintain such hubris is incomprehensible (16).

It seems there are thinkers who may say "You ought to get to know each other" but are really hearing wedding bells in the background.

2.2.2 Tip #2 – "Try to learn her language" (localizing the linguistic)

Relationship experts can always get a laugh by contrasting the way women and men traditionally communicate. For example, the woman might pry and pry to get her husband to share his feelings. He thinks and thinks, but all he can muster is, "I think I feel like dinner." Depending on the depth of feelings being discussed and the length of time the discussion lasts, it is not uncommon for one not to have a clue what the other is really talking about. If two married people experience inevitable misinterpretation, how much more will people from differing religions? For example, when the Christian missionary tells the Buddhist *arahant* that he can be "born again," the *arahant* might take it as an indictment on his spirituality.[7] Interreligious dialogue moves forward only when the constant threat of miscommunication is recognized. Aware of the potential for Babel, you strive all the harder for Pentecost.

However, there is an even more reliable, albeit circuitous, way to bear fruit interreligiously. It is no secret that one might not know what a religious other is talking about. The secret many interfaith scholars have made their mantra is that, not only does a Christian not really know what a Buddhist is talking about, but also that a Christian does not really know what a Christian is talking about. For example, one assumption of these interfaith scholars is that a Christian, going back in history to Jesus' life, cannot really know anything for sure about what happened back then (e.g. an impassable gulf between the historical Jesus and the Christ of faith) (Bocking, 1983:100). So, when a Christian talks about something Jesus did, he is not really talking about something "back then," but more about something in his own faith community's experience.

[7] In mainstream, pre-Mahayana Buddhism (as preserved by modern Theravada Buddhism), the goal of the Buddhist is to become an *arahant* (Pali) or *arhat* (Sanskrit). An *arahant* is someone who has attained full enlightenment and will enter nirvana at death (Williams, Tribe, & Wynne, 2012:63).

More importantly for the relationship with Buddhism, the same goes for when the Christian is talking about something "up there." She may think she is giving actually accurate descriptions of God, but she is informed that in reality there is an impassable gulf between the finite and the infinite. She can either concede this gulf and her ultimate ignorance of the Ultimate, or she can continue naively to trumpet her personal experience as authoritative. The only way the Christian, according to these interfaith scholars, can, in the end, know anything about her subject, is if she concedes her ultimate ignorance and scales her claims down to the personally experiential level.

Of course, if there is any pushback ("How do you *know* you cannot *know* anything about God?"), the interfaith scholar is armed with a list of attributes she knows about God that are supposed to conclusively prove that no one can know anything about God ("Well, because God, of course, is so transcendent and infinite and ineffable and so on. Everyone knows that!"). So, now we know even more about this "unknowable" God; not only is God unknowable, but also transcendent, infinite, and ineffable. In other words, if the interfaith defense goes on to further describe the "unknowable" divine, the point is only underscored that the scholar knows something about what she has already labeled as unknowable. Even claiming to know that God is unknowable refutes itself. Yet throughout this chapter, we shall see many more descriptions of this "unknowable" God by interfaith scholars who nonetheless depend upon this premise of God's unknowability.

So how does this admission of ultimate ignorance help along the interreligious relationship? Let us follow the thought process. First, we are told about two very distinct categories. While there is the way things actually are, there is the way things appear to us. Immanuel Kant gave us the terms *noumenal* (reality) and *phenomenal* (our experience of that

reality). Now, labels and distinctions do help in clarification, but do not necessarily effect a "Copernican Revolution" by themselves. The revolutionary next premise is that these realms are "wholly other." The idea is that there is ultimate truth (corresponding with reality), and there is conventional truth (corresponding with our experience). We know one, but never the other. We can never rise above our particular histories and contexts (Keenan, 1993:58). For example, in safeguarding the inviolability of the distinction, one scholar assures us that, as acquainted as Jesus might sound in discussing his relationship with the Father, Jesus nevertheless "embodies not an idea of Abba, but a preverbal awareness of ineffable meaning thematized as Abba" (O'Leary, 1997:117). And, of course, if a Christian is stuck not knowing anything of substance about her religion's chief referent, she is all the more in the dark about, for example, Buddhist nirvana. According to Gross (2005b:15), we cannot "transcend expression in form and leap into mind-to-mind transmission. . . . [we are not even] sure if we are talking about the same thing."

So, in the end, religious talk has a source and a goal, and both source and goal are none other than context-bound experience. It may be an experience of something "out there," but we have propositional access to only the culture-bound experience itself, not to any source outside the tangle of context. For example, argues Buddhist-Christian Paul Knitter (Knitter and Netland, 2013:34-35),[8] the reason early Christian talk about Jesus sounds so superlative (e.g. Jesus is *the* way) is not that they actually had propositional knowledge of an ontologically divine status of Jesus. Instead, they were simply enthralled with Jesus; it was basically "love language," and it is natural to use the loftiest descriptions available when you are in love. Thus, no articles of Christian faith, rightly understood, however inflated by enthralled experience, should cause a Buddhist any inferiority anxiety. The source of religious talk is context-bound experience;

[8] Knitter credits the idea of confessional motivation explaining apparent superiority language to Krister Stendahl.

nothing propositional is communicated from outside, because infinity is incommunicable. Not only is the source of religious talk context-bound experience, but so is its goal. "Language is a tool" (Gross, 2005b:15). Religious talk can be propositional—that is, it can communicate anything—only to the extent that it performs something in the speaker's life (Brown, 1999:190). The only way religious talk can be evaluated is according to its power to facilitate spiritual experience. This is not so much to reject true and false as adjudicators, as to redefine them, for "Ultimate truth lies in the realm of mystic awareness" (O'Leary, 1997:125).

So the Christian does not really know what she is talking about when she says, "God created" or "Jesus rose." But how does that incapacity help the interreligious relationship? Is the Christian then to ask the Buddhist the nature of ultimate truth? No, because the Buddhist equally has only "imperfect, ramshackle, myth-laden language…shots in the dark" (O'Leary, 1997:125). The only way either of them can approach any closer to ultimate truth is by realizing that neither of them can. Then, energy, unspoiled on macho attempts to demonstrate superiority, is channeled into productive, here-and-now experience. After all, truth is seen to be performative (see Brown, 1999:170 for a description of truth's shift from metaphysics to ethics). If the referent to our religious language is our experience, and not something that adjudicates from outside the religions, then the entire web is spun from within, and one's religion becomes something akin to a particular language. Each language, with its own grammatical rules and terminology, threads a particular culture together. As a "language game," religious talk works well for its users. The problem, according to these interfaith scholars, comes when one tries to prove his religion as truer than another. How can one language system be "truer" than another (Brown, 1999:169)? Yet, of course, there is a problem, namely, that Buddhist and Christian founders and scriptures all to claim to teach "the truth." Simple, says Gross (2005b:15), a Buddhist:

> Religions are language systems. End of problem. As we concede the relativity of all our language games, we also recognize more than one language could be "valid," whatever that might mean. There is no reason to assume that all people speak my language and it would be illogical to claim that people who don't speak my language are deficient. The worth and utility of my language is in no way diminished because it is not the only language in the world. . . . [Any] language could be a useful tool, so long as we don't endow it with universal relevance, more freight than it can bear.

But what would keep this language system entrapment, this tribal solipsism from making the Buddhist-Christian relationship nothing more productive than the blind leading the blind? To these interfaith scholars, the obstacle to interreligious relations has never been the admission of too little knowledge. Such admissions draw us together for mutual benefit. The obstacle is invariably the assumption that one has all the knowledge she needs—and, far more disagreeably, all the knowledge the other needs as well. But religious truth, we are told, is contextual. At most, religious truth, as they say, is a finger pointing at the moon (O'Leary, 1997:124). You are not the only one who has a finger, and yours could not be any truer than any other's. The moon represents the inaccessible referent, always beyond reach of our predications (of course, it would not hurt the illustration to substitute for the moon something humans have not, in fact, landed on). The point is that each has her own language, and it is "only extreme hubris to say the Formless Absolute speaks my language." It is as silly as demanding that "God speaks Arabic, not Hebrew" (Gross, 2005b:16). Context is king, not in hermeneutics so much as in epistemology. With conceit cast out and egotism exorcised, everybody gets along with an equal(ly depreciated) share of the truth. The class rules have been posted, and now class can begin with no put-downs, no bullying, etc.

Now, some kind of qualifier is needed to make it clear that Buddhism and Christianity are not therefore completely alienated from each other. As this chapter unfolds, it will become apparent that the ability to relate to each other on many levels is not ruled out by this reduction

of religion to a linguistic enterprise. The goal is acceptance, not alienation. For example, one level of mutuality already acknowledged is that of spiritual experience. Another intersection worth mentioning here is that Buddhism has the charming capacity to teach Christianity the very interfaith notions we have been discussing in this section. Much Buddhist thought centers on the "emptiness" of each and every concept; that is, nothing has intrinsic, island-like existence. Nothing is ultimately substantial. Nothing should be held too tightly (Brown, 1999:172). So, says the interfaith scholar, the Christians need to listen to the Buddhists; still believe in God, Jesus, angels, resurrection—whatever you like. Just do not get too attached, because, in the end, even our dearest concepts are about ultimately empty entities. Use your language, but only for dialogue, not for bragging or shouting others down. You may never speak the same language as the other, but at least you can become a gentlemanly enough companion that a relationship with you is an attractive notion.

2.2.3 Tip #3 – "Share common experiences" (merging the mystic)

It is possible to overthink potential relationships. Matchmaking meddlers, thinking that they recognize two people as "simply made for each other," are prone to make observations such as, "If only we could just get those two together." The implication is that, once the two finally met and got acquainted and began sharing experiences together, they would fall in love. There is something powerful in simply sharing experiences and making memories together. You could theorize about a relationship's feasibility for years, but just see what it is like to get to know each other. Stop worrying, stop overthinking, and just jump in and see where the relationship goes. This pragmatic logic plays into the potential interreligious relationship as well. As Dr. Martin Prozesky (1986:68) of the University of Natal said of pluralistic experience, "Here, as so often

elsewhere, a mite of experience is worth a mass of pious theory; for it is the meal that really counts and not the menu." And supposing someone warns against such interreligious experience?

> [I]f I have tasted the food eaten in another culture, and found it good, what will I feel but justifiable scepticism at those who, quoting their scripture or creed or even just their own interpretations of them, insist on undervaluing that food? And thereafter, if they persist, refusing all offers of a sample, will I not justifiably pass from scepticism to disavowal, and correctly judge them an enemy of truth, of justice and of goodness? (Prozesky and Edwards, 1986:70).

It is tough to refute one's experience. Interfaith scholars know this, and so to encourage literalists to move beyond being bound by what this or that scripture says, they know to nudge the naysayer toward simply experiencing what the other religion offers. Catholic theologian Peter Phan (2006:104-105) lists four types of interreligious dialogue, the first three of which are the "dialogue of life," the "dialogue of action," and the "dialogue of theological exchange." Says Phan of the fourth,

> There is finally the "dialogue of religious experience," which is perhaps the most important and the most difficult kind of dialogue. Despite our doctrinal and religious differences, which must honestly be acknowledged, we can and must get together not only to pray and meditate but also pray and meditate together. It is here that we touch what is most sacred, most transcendent and yet most intimate in our lives. When we Buddhists and Christians encounter this Sacred Reality together, in that moment at least, we are no longer strangers, much less enemies to one another. We become rather fellow pilgrims on the way to ultimate peace and joy (Phan, 2006:105).

One should notice on the pilgrimage how similar certain Buddhist practices are to certain Christian practices. To start with, compare the "Jesus Prayer"—"Lord Jesus, have mercy on me"—to the *nembutsu*, which invokes the name of Amitabha, the Buddha of Infinite Light, who established the Pure Land of the West according to many schools of Mahayana Buddhism.[9] Both

[9] The terms *Mahayana* and *Theravada* will be used often throughout this work. Theravada Buddhism is a major school that survives from early Indian Buddhism. Though it is by no means the only early school, it is unique in surviving and being one of the prevailing schools today. Theravada Buddhism continues to be the dominant form of Buddhism in Burma, Cambodia, Sri Lanka, Laos, and Thailand (Gard, 1961:30). Mahayana Buddhism, widely considered the other major branch of Buddhism, began as a reaction against what Mahayanists dubbed the "lesser vehicle," or Hinayana, of which Theravada Buddhism is a part. Whereas the "lesser vehicle" promised its

are recited to invoke a name, to appeal for mercy, and are recited over and over (Wong, 2010:39).

More generally, there is the comparison of Christian prayer and Buddhist meditation. Gross (2002:78) contends, "No area of comparative Buddhist-Christian studies is more fascinating than that of prayer and meditation. Nor are crossovers more common in any other area of comparative Buddhist-Christian studies." Buddhism scholar Winston King (1989:254-255) discusses Theravada Buddhist meditation—with its outward, individual actions for inward, spiritual results, as well as its involving a "real presence"—and concludes that Buddhist meditation has undeniable "sacramental aspects." Not only are there apparent similarities between Buddhist meditation and Christian prayer, but adherents are not necessarily bound to one or the other category based on their religion. As it turns out, Buddhists do "pray" to many beings, such as Amitabha, and though Amitabha is empty of inherent essence (like all that exists; see Gross, 2002:80) and not an all-powerful Creator, he is said to be at least as real as we are. Not only do Buddhists "pray," but they also commonly make "aspirations." Aspirations could be likened to the Christian "serenity prayer" ("God, grant me the serenity to accept what I cannot change, the courage to change what I can, and the wisdom to know the difference"). The difference is that in Buddhist aspiration, they would only be omitting the word *God* (Gross, 2002:79). For example, a common Buddhist aspiration is, "May all sentient beings enjoy happiness and the root of happiness" (Gross, 2002:79).

Christians attuned to interreligious experience are taking notes. Corless (2007:117) adds, "Perhaps the most obvious and immediate result of dialogue is the revival of Christian

adherents personal nirvana, Mahayana (literally the "great vehicle") emphasized the importance of becoming a *bodhisattva* (a Buddha in-the-making), so that the adherent is able to eventually lead all other sentient beings to nirvana. Mahayana Buddhism includes many Buddhist branches and is the dominant form of Buddhism in China, Korea, Japan, Tibet, and Mongolia (Buswell and Lopez, 2014:513).

meditation techniques." Not only can Buddhist meditation be described in terms of Christian sacraments, but Christian sacraments can take the form of Buddhist meditation. Sri Lankan Aloysius Pieris (2007:314) describes a "specifically Asian way to celebrate the Eucharist," derived from the "Buddhist way to interior peace." Among its requirements: "As far as possible, do not formulate or internally verbalize any prayer. Just be prayer" (Pieris, 2007:317). Applauding the ritualistic interpenetration, Merton (Farge, 2009:65) offered his own aspiration:

> [W]e have reached a stage of (long-overdue) religious maturity at which it may be possible for someone to remain perfectly faithful to a Christian and Western monastic commitment, and yet to learn in depth from, say, a Buddhist or Hindu discipline and experience. I believe that some of us need to do this . . . to improve the quality of our own monastic life.

But can religious experience carry any theological weight? Philosophy professor John Maraldo (1981:43) compares what he calls the "hermeneutics of practice" in Zen Buddhist Dogen Kigen Zenji and Christian monastic St. Francis of Assisi. Both taught that religious practice, as the embodiment of truth, was, in fact, a main guide to interpreting their scriptures. As Maraldo summarizes, "When practice becomes a hermeneutical principle, the 'text' to which it is applied becomes the whole world; application is not a separate moment of interpretation; and appropriation does not follow upon but forms truth." So, yes, according to Dogen and Francis, practice does carry much theological weight, as a way to interpret, not merely to apply, religious texts.

Now the discussion becomes interesting, because, if practice can be used to interpret texts, perhaps practice—especially practice refined by interreligious comparisons—can be used to *reinterpret* texts. After somewhat fruitfully comparing seven Buddhist practices with counterparts in Christian practice—prayers, meditations, confessions, aspirations, gestures, etc.—Zen Buddhist Robert Aitken (2002:74) concludes, however, that there is a "huge

difference," and that has to do with the presence of God in Christianity. To Buddhists like Kenneth Tanaka (2002:92), God seems rather like an imposition into the rituals:

> Everything worth being thankful for is attributed to God. I can understand this, given the role of God as the maker of all things seen and unseen, but from a Buddhist view it seems that more credits are warranted for the deserving people, other living beings, plants, or unseen conditions. When one gives thanks to God for the food we are about to partake, shouldn't there be thanks given also to the cow, fish, or broccoli whose lives we took for our benefit? Yes, God created them, but they made the real sacrifice. I realize that for some Christians God represents all, so that in giving thanks to God, one is inherently thanking all the creatures and living things. My reticence with acknowledging only God stems from the Buddhist view that does not see Buddha as a creator.

But if practice can, in fact, help us reinterpret texts—especially with help from interreligious counterparts—then this could turn out to the advantage of those Christians who never really liked certain Christian doctrines to begin with. Of course, a common irritant to Christians interested in Buddhist-Christian dialogue is the duality of God and creation. When feminist Wendy Farley (2011:136) sets out to "experiment with practice as a basis for some kinds of dialogue," she notes that certain practices, when practiced alongside a religious other, can point in directions hidden when interpreted through traditional Christian hermeneutics. For example, says Farley (2011:139), "The language and imagery is of a deity separate from the world, and yet love implies an erosion of the boundary that separates the ego from others as well as God from the world." Therefore, "phenomenologically if not conceptually, practices of love may point in the direction of nondual, nonconceptual awareness." Similarly, Knitter (Knitter and Netland, 2013:44-45) explains,

> [W]e have our being in God, and . . . God has God's being in us. This is one of the ways in which Buddhism has nudged me toward a more unitive, personal understanding and experience of God. Maybe I'm way off Christian base here. But I don't think so. My prayer life, thanks to Buddhism, has improved.

Could a word of caution be in order, however, to at least consider the possibility that the Object of the ritual might be what the worshiper believes about it, namely a personal being who

might just have an opinion on the matter of redefining theology based on practices imported from other religions? Yet the possibility that divine revelation should guide transformative experience—rather than experience transforming into revelation—seems to be excluded. Yet the interfaith scholar will nonetheless be grateful that the question of "object" is being raised: for what is the *object* of the ritual? Gross (2002:83) observes that even in Christian prayer

> such practices are done, it is explained, not because God needs these prayers, but because people need them. People need them to form identity and community, to develop discipline, and to feel connected with the source of life. Theists also will explain that people pray because it is helpful to them. Many theists consider prayer to be a form of spiritual cultivation that transforms the one who prays. That function of prayer is certainly an important dimension of the experience of praying. . . . Even in a theistic context, one would have to argue that prayer primarily benefits the religious subject: People need to pray, but God does not need to receive prayers. Thus, theistic prayer and nontheistic meditation again turn out to be more similar than superficial first impressions might indicate.

King (2002:108) contends, "However illuminating the comparisons between particular spiritual practices are, the main question remains of how such practices spiritually transform people . . . ." Shin Buddhist Gregory Gibbs (2001:116) concurs: "The ontological question of where the efficacy of the saying of Amida's name derives from should never have obscured the crucial fact that we say phrases such as "*Namo Amida Butsu*" and our experience of the world is significantly changed as a result of this practice."

One can ask enigmatic questions all day long about ontology, but, at the end of the day, we are advised: "Reason may supply intellectual answers, if one wishes to solve a mental puzzle, but it is experience, here and now, which eliminates the questions altogether" (Morris, 1991:66). Such seems to be the experience of Union Theological Seminary-trained Kyeongil Jung (Jung, 2012:3). He writes,

> I don't know whether it is due to good karma or divine grace, but I have been walking on two paths, Buddhist and Christian, since I began to pursue a spiritual-social

> transformation of the self and the world. This is possible . . . not because the two paths are the same but precisely because they are different. . . .
>
> I walk on the two paths to peace at the same time. While this may not be possible intellectually and logically, in my experience it becomes possible through praxis.

In other words, overthinking is overrated. Jump in, we are told, and enjoy the experience.

2.2.4 Tip #4 – "Don't talk too much" (applying the apophatic)

"He talked the whole time," does not typically describe the ideal date. Even both talking incessantly back-and-forth, without any reprieve, indicates a nervous, uneasy time. Moments of silence can initially feel out-of-control, but silence allows the couple to reflect and the relationship to breathe. It is probably in the moments of silent reflection that two people realize they are growing together. Thus, interfaith wedding planners encourage silence. This urging is further motivated by the unfortunate fact that when the two start talking with any level of conviction, disagreements turn up, and ideal dates are not spent in argument. Hence, one interfaith scholar (Amell, 2003:374, 376) cautions, "Christianity and Buddhism cannot easily be compared to each other because they are very different." The solution? "The dialogue functions quite well when Buddhists and Christians meet without using words, for example in silence in prayer and different kinds of meditation . . . ."

However well dialogues might function when no words are used, it is difficult to comprehend why such meetings would be called "dialogues." As we saw in the last section ("Localizing the Linguistic"), we are told that we are locked into our own language systems and must therefore treat the other religion—an epistemological equal—with utmost humility. However, at some point, there needs to be actual communication since dialogue is a prerequisite to matrimony. But it cannot be the kind of communication that smacks of anything resembling, "I'm right. You're wrong." Buddhism, we are told, is more equipped than Christianity for such

demarcated dialogue. Notice what Christianity is lacking: "When the partners have to talk together and use words problems arise, partly because in Buddhist traditions the apophatic aspects are dominant, which is not the case in Christianity" (Amell, 2003:376). The answer to Buddhist-Christian dialogue somehow lies in the concept of the "apophatic."

Now, *apophatic* describes a type of theology. When studying the idea of God, Christians use two approaches—a theology of affirmation (e.g. God is love) and a theology of negation (e.g. God is not finite). To the way of affirmation, theologians gave the term *cataphatic*, and to the way of negation *apophatic* (Keenan, 2010:378). If God is said to be all-powerful, and if we are to have a notion of what this predication means, we must possess a notion of power. But our notion of power is tainted by our experiences of fellow humans' abusing power. We cannot apply a corrupt concept to a perfect God. So are we merely equivocating when we say God is all-powerful? If God made us in his image, there is no reason to think we cannot have some notion of the power God has, albeit through a glass darkly. For there to be some understandable and yet unsullied predication of God, we must apply the concept of power only after *negating* all limitations. Hence, we have the way of negation (Geisler, 2002:144). Many attributes of God are even negative in their etymology: infinite, immutable, immaterial, atemporal, etc.

So, apophatic theologizing serves as a check for kataphatic declarations (Keenan, 2010:378). Our affirmations about God must disavow any finitude, lest presumption engender careless God-talk. The way of negation reminds us not only to distinguish concepts—tainted from pure—but also beings: the finite cannot comprehend the infinite fully without presuming itself to be infinite. The apophatic is a restriction necessary for theological accuracy and creaturely humility. However, to these interfaith scholars, it is not the way of negation that is seen as restricting, but the way of affirmation. They fear that theological affirmations consolidate

into armored systems. You find yourself viewing the other religion from behind the walls of a fortress reinforced by centuries of layers. Thus, laments interfaith scholar John Keenan, "Alternate philosophical languages have found favor only insofar as they do not contradict the traditional ontological model" (Keenan, 1993:50).

But if the way of affirmation is too restricting, how can the way of negation—a seemingly more restrictive approach—offer any release? The answer is that the apophatic is not only an approach to theology, but also an invitation to mysticism. This is especially true when the apophatic floats on up undirected by the kataphatic. After all, in mystic encounter, a necessarily non-propositional experience, conscious affirmations impede the ascent. For those whose theology consists solely of the way of negation (so that it has not merely checked, but check-mated the way of affirmation), of what use are concepts anymore anyway (e.g. according to Pseudo-Dionysius, the divine nature is "beyond every assertion and every denial"; see Farley, 2011:139-140)? Nothing remains to micromanage the experience. So apophatic theology comes to be used synonymously with the mystic experience itself. While the *exposition* of negation limits our affirmations, the *experience* of negation liberates us from those affirmations. The apophatic experience untethers free spirits from set systems. Keenan (1993:51) says we need to get back to the kind of spiritual experience long "shunt[ed] to the periphery of doctrinal thinking" and "marginalized by the theological enterprise."

French mystic Marguerite Porete illustrates this marginalization, as one whose out-of-the-box mystic experiences sent her to the stake. But Porete is also used to illustrate why this apophatic-mystic comeback is so crucial for Buddhist-Christian relations. We are told that the reason for Porete's heresy was that she understood her experiences to have nondualism implications (an actually nondual reality, not a mere encounter, between human and divine)

(Farley, 2011:140). Actually, interfaith scholarship can tend to exaggerate here, as Porete was no pantheist: union with God remains on the basis of God's grace, not of any natural ontological nondualism (Corduan, 1992:528-529). However, where mystical experience can be made to suggest nondualism, or at least point in that direction, then Buddhist-Christian convergence becomes that much more likely. The nondualism of all being is a Buddhist fundamental. It becomes clear that not only can negation limit affirmation and liberate from affirmation, but that the apophatic experience can actually lead to new affirmations. As Keenan (Keenan, 1989:391) puts it, "Affirmative, cataphatic discourse can validly occur within an apophatic awareness of silence."

It is time for theology to be informed by the apophatic-mystic approach—doctrines born of silence. So argues Keenan (1989), who then unveils his own Buddhist-Christian synthesis, which he calls "Mahayana Theology." Just think: "New insights into basic Christian themes, Incarnation, Trinity, Church, sacraments, ministry, can be gleaned from such a hybrid endeavor." Says another interfaith scholar, "[T]he contemplative, sapiential emphasis of Buddhism might be a healthy balancing factor for a Christianity often cut away from its spiritual and mystical heritage" (Reynolds, 2002). So interfaith scholars seek out relationship advice from the passionate pens of the ancient mystics. They draw upon the mystic journey of St. John of the Cross as the dark night's negation of all things, as the soul's Lama Sabacthani (Johnston, 1988:129). They consult Meister Eckhart to inquire how to ascend beyond God-talk, until absolutely no conceptual idols remain for clinging (Radler, 2006:112). Theology via negation.

Christians might hesitate here. What is to keep the Buddhist, and now the apophatic-mystic Christian, from not being able to say anything about anything? The interfaith scholar might answer that words are fine, so long as they are borne of profound meditative silence

(Knitter, 1981a:47). So what of substance will be left? Well, perhaps not the rigid divine essence-human essence distinctions. The good news, however, according to these scholars, is that such an insistence on this kind of essence and that kind of essence springs from a philosophical model (Hellenistic, to be specific) that an apophatic theology can dispense of. Even better news is that since the idea of essences is very un-Buddhistic, once such a philosophical model is indeed disposed of, the new Christianity will share something major in common with Buddhism. Hence, the way of negation can be traced to something as exotic as Keenan's "Mahayana Theology," which explicitly supplants Hellenistic philosophy with Mahayana philosophy (Keenan, 2010:4). The best news of all, of course, is that the relationship is moving ahead. In these moments of silence, the two are growing together.

2.2.5 Tip #5 – "Disconnect from old romances" (hurdling the Hellenistic)

Some new romances have old baggage. Unpleasant background information sometimes comes up, but only as something to be cleared out for a new start. Old romances especially must be disowned if trust is to flourish. If your "ex" happens to be brought up in conversation, it is best to attach some sort of criticism to the former flame, followed by an acknowledgement of how much better things are now. In fact, you were never really happy until you met the new person. According to these interfaith scholars, Christianity had a longstanding but ill-fitted romance with a particular philosophy. It is said that, for millennia, Christianity has partnered with the aforementioned Hellenistic (i.e. Greek) philosophy, insofar as Christian theology secures its doctrines in set ontological natures (e.g. human and divine) (Keenan, 2010:4-5). Some say that Hellenism had long grown unattractive to these Christians, who began actively seeking out a new partner. Others suggest that Christians were basically content until they discovered a

new beauty. Whatever the case, these interfaith scholars suggest that, while there is no reason to demonize Hellenistic philosophy (it wasn't the worst spouse imaginable), it is simply more conducive to the new relationship to sever ties and proceed with the more charming Buddhist philosophy.

Hindu culture was to early Buddhism what Hellenistic culture was to early Christianity (Nakamura, 1973:31). The New Testament, of course, was written in Greek, and Greek metaphysical terms framed the Christological creeds. For the first several centuries, Hellenistic philosophy is thought to have been Christianity's "handmaid" (Keenan, 2010:4). The feature of Hellenistic thought most conspicuous in Buddhist-Christian relations is its vocabulary of and emphasis on "essence." The feature of this feature most infamous is the inviolability (and inseparability, inconfusability, unchangeability, indivisibility, etc.) of Jesus' human essence and divine essence. Ultimately, Keenan (1989:393) writes, "The basic doctrines of God, of Trinity, Incarnation, Church, and mission were all evolved within an essentialist perspective." Yet he adds, "One should not, however, make the acceptance of such a metaphysics a prerequisite for Christian living or theologizing."

It is no secret that western philosophers such as Schopenhauer and Heidegger had moved toward more Buddhistic ways of philosophizing (Cobb, 1980:18-19). Why, however, would Christian theologians like Keenan want to exchange philosophies? For one thing, we are told, because our past partner had become unreasonable. First, foreign faiths find essentialist Christianity unreasonable. The stubbornness of Jesus' divine essence offends Jews by its infringement, Muslims by its impiety, Hindus by its individuality, and Buddhists by its inflexibility. Second, faithful foreigners find essentialist Christianity unreasonable. Christians in contexts not native to the essentialist perspective cannot easily accept such categories as human

nature (as opposed to animal) and divine nature (as opposed to human) (Keenan, 1993:49). Finally, modern minds have trouble seeing the reasonableness of certain tenets of essentialist Christianity. Keenan (1993:62) speaks of "the old conundrums of essentialist Christology, always in danger of falling to one side or the other and always teetering on the point of presenting a schizophrenic picture of the Lord." According to Catholic priest Joseph O'Leary (2002:166), the "old Christological language . . . has become dysfunctional. It does not effectively state the truth about Christ for today."

But the past partner was not only unreasonable, but controlling. Theology under its Greek overlord maintained careful submission as an "objective and unchanging science" (Cattoi, 2008:14). According to O'Leary (2002:164), "Dogma gave the Church its backbone, but apparently at a heavy price," including its religious wars, intercollegiate persecutions, and overall arrogance to anything "other." Would that the mystics had weightier voices to ease the essentialism and swerve around the substantialism, but the red-faced Trinitarian and Christological wrangling easily drowned out their contemplations. Essentialism became an essential, and to question it was to blaspheme. O'Leary (2002:166) wishes:

> Suppose one said: "We have encountered God through the teachings and example of the man Jesus, and we believe that other religious traditions equally encounter God or ultimate reality through their chosen teachers." That would be a beautiful simplification . . . solving all Christological and ecumenical headaches.

Following such an established relationship, it could be presumed that all potential partners out there are probably just as unreasonable and controlling. However, according to these interfaith scholars, there is, in fact, right now a very eligible prospect. This prospect has no history of domineering, but a stellar record of levelheaded deliberation. There is not a trace of failing to get along with others. A relationship with Buddhism would help Christianity unlearn the bad relational habits it picked up from all those years yoked to Hellenism. For example,

Buddhist philosophy teaches Christianity just how conventional its proclamations really are. Doctrines are really just "skillful means" (O'Leary, 2002:177). Metaphysical baggage can be left behind since the Buddha responded to such questions with silence anyway (Fredericks, 1988:313). Even such staunch statements as, "The Word was made flesh" can be reinterpreted as the divine emptiness revealed on the cross, a much more Buddhistic notion (O'Leary, 2002:172).

Christian-to-Buddhist convert Zhang Chunyi (1871-1955) proposed to his Chinese countrymen that Mahayana Buddhism provided an ideal hermeneutical framework for Christianity. He proposed "Buddhicizing Christianity" (Pan-chiu and Yuen-tai, 2007:67). Since then, not a few scholars have expressed hope that, just like contact with Greek culture shaped early Christianity, "so today encounter with the East—in this case with Buddhism—will result in changes which are equally profound and far-reaching" (Prozesky and Edwards, 1986:71). And if one confirmation of a sublime relationship is that you are able to really "be yourself," then that is just another reason for the interreligious romance. For, as Keenan argues in his article "Mahayana Theology: How to Reclaim an Ancient Christian Tradition" (1989:379), Buddhist philosophy can help us mine through the layers of "hard-headed theology" to the mystic tradition long marginalized yet truly the essence (in the best sense of the word) of Christianity.

It is not within the scope of this dissertation to ask how faithful to New Testament exegesis the creedal framers were when they ascribed human and divine natures to Jesus. The typical interfaith attitude is that the creeds were fine for their times, and that the need for change comes when such doctrines come into contact with foreign or modern philosophies. So, to exchange philosophies does not seem to be a matter of trying to make Christian doctrines align more closely to New Testament exegesis, but to put Christian doctrines in terms that, for example, Mahayanists (going off of Keenan's Mahayana Christianity) can have an improved

relationship with. What do I mean by "improved"? I can only guess, because we have two possible meanings. Those who would propose exchanging "essence" language for something else could be trying to make Christian doctrine either more *understandable* or more *acceptable*.

If the concern is that Mahayanists are unable to understand, for example, Jesus' human and divine nature, then the solution is clear. Christians need to study Mahayana philosophy more thoroughly to be able to more effectively communicate the Christian message in that context. However, is that solution really what scholars like Keenan are aiming for? It is doubtful that the issue is that Mahayanists have no means for understanding the concept of fixed natures. The Madhyamikan Nagarjuna, who labored so comprehensively to communicate the emptiness of all phenomena of any intrinsic existence, would have to have at least some understanding of a concept he so thoroughly opposed. He attacked the belief that anything has *svabhava*, a Sanskrit word meaning "one's own" or "essence" or "nature" (Buswell and Lopez, 2014:879). Since the problem in need of solving is not the inability of Mahayanists to comprehend traditional Christian concepts of Jesus' human and divine natures, it must be that the problem is not one of understanding, but one of accepting.

The notions of divine and human natures are at least able to be made understandable enough to Mahayanists that it is clear that such notions, in fact, go against Mahayana philosophy. The standard according to which Keenan seeks to realign Christianity is something besides New Testament exegesis, which he is nonetheless able to reinterpret through his new, Mahayana-Christian lens. His standard seems only partially to be apophatic theology, whose primary utility seems to be to open Christian doctrine up to mystic reinterpretation, specifically to fit a more Buddhistic standard. In other words, if Hellenistic concepts of essence were untranslatable to a Mahayana culture, that is one thing. But if, as seems to be the case, such notions, once

understood, prove to be at odds with Mahayana philosophy, then the problem is quite another. And it would only be an underhanded solution to *discard* a concept when it would be perfectly possible as well as far more honest to *translate* the concepts, even if the translation means that the doctrines will not be thereby accepted. A conclusion of incompatibility might be disappointing, but it should not be surprising. For is it really such a surprise when two world religions do not end up agreeing on the nature (e.g. the human and divine natures of Christ) of one religion's central founder?

2.2.6 Tip #6 – "Don't talk too directly" (stigmatizing the specific)

Reification is a word often used by interfaith scholars. "To reify" is to treat something abstract as though it were something concrete. Not only is *reification* often used by interfaith scholars, but it is invariably used as an ugly word. Anger is reified ignorance (Cozort, 1995:95). Good and evil reified can lead to "us" and "them" enmity (Ives, 2006:5). Ideas and experiences are to remain un-reified, and can remain so thanks to apophatic experience (Farley, 2011:140). Moreover, it is no surprise that *reification* has such a connotation for interfaith scholars, for the more concrete or specified something Christian becomes, the less it can be interwoven with Buddhism. The more hazy and unspecified a term is, the greater will be its potential to be understood relationally. Metaphoric metaphysics and conventionalized creeds are the "I love you" of interreligious romance.

Now, a deal breaker for the Buddhist-Christian relationship is just how reified the Christian God is allowed to be. This is especially relevant for those Mahayana branches of Buddhism influenced by Nagarjuna's Madhyamikan philosophy. Against the Abhidharma emphasis on the existence of basic units called "dharmas," Nagarjuna taught that absolutely

nothing has inherent, ultimate reality (Williams, 2009:68). Such Buddhism un-reifies everything. One consequence is that there can be no permanent essences (Farley, 1999:297). This means that, to fit into the Buddhist framework, God too must be empty of intrinsic existence. God must exist interdependently of his creation. At core, no objective existence arises from, let alone existed before, the web of codependence. Yet, according to Christian Scripture, it is God "for whom and by whom all things exist" (Heb. 2:10). "For" denotes will, and "by" denotes action. Scripture presents a purposeful Creator, not an interdependently existing abstraction. Consequently, the interfaith scholars need to devaluate such biblical assertions. As a general rule, they say, any referent for the word *God* must be made less specific and more metaphoric, less concrete and more ambiguous. Again, a decrease in precision supports a more relational application.

The problem is that part of our psyche's fallenness, we are told, is that we tend to objectify everything (Farley, 1999:295). What is more is that even religion, especially Christianity, instead of liberating us from our alienation from God, often simply reinforces the dualisms, between, for example, man and God or one religion and another (Farley, 2011:136). And the more specified God becomes, the more concrete the negative repercussions become as well. Gross (2002:83) makes her position clear: "Any thoughtful theist should be repulsed by the portrait of God as a vindictive tyrant who gets so mad at people who do not pray properly, enough, or at the proper time, that it unleashes suffering upon such people as punishment."

Since it is so ingrained in humanity and so etched in scripture, the reification impulse must be combatted with something equally forceful, according to the interfaith scholars. Where else can one look for something exhibiting such a force than in divine commandments divinely revealed? "Thou shalt not make an idol." In a brilliant counteroffensive, interfaith scholars

stigmatize the notion of reification as nothing less than idolatry. To make this strategy work, some premises have to be assumed. For one thing, idolatry must refer to a mental idol, a concept of God just as much as to a physical idol (e.g. a golden calf). "The Hebrew prohibition of idols" is said to imply a "God who resists objectification" (Brown, 1999:181). Desire for and devotion to an objective God are symptoms of the "concupiscence and idolatry [in] the very heart of religion" (Farley, 1999:299). Theological claims to absolute truth are easily diffused: "All that would be required is to apply the category of 'idolatry' to their own constructions" (Gross, 2005b:18). Meanwhile, interfaith idol-oclasts are grooming Christianity for Buddhism. As Thich Nhat Hanh describes his own religion of Buddhism, "We are determined not to be idolatrous about or bound to any doctrine, theory, or ideology, even Buddhist ones" (Gable, 2008:86).

Now, to be sure, the interfaith scholar has to decipher how a God about which absolutely nothing can be said could have commanded us not to turn him into an idol. One would think that it could simply be assumed that, if he communicated, then such a communicator existed and could be spoken about meaningfully. After all, God prefaced the prohibition of idolatry with specifics about himself: "I am the Lord your God, who brought you out of the land of Egypt" (Ex. 20:2a). In Scripture, idolatry is adultery: idolatry is *forgetting* about the true God. But, to these interfaith scholars, idolatry is, in fact, *remembering* any truth about God as actual truth. In the former case, commitment is the point, while in the latter case, commitment it is the problem. If idolatry can be defined as "substituting something finite for the infinite" (Gross, 2005b:18), then any words about the divine proceeding out of a finite speaker are immediately dubbed "idols," unless those words are recognized as idols and immediately taken back as merely conventional. That mandate applies even if those "idols" were to originate from the divine Speaker himself.

It is fascinating to see to what great lengths interfaith scholars go to avoid anything resembling reification. Professor Harry Wells (2002:131), for example, weeds through the major theories on the relationship between religions and truth. In his estimation, the exclusivist is arrogant to dismiss other religions as false. The inclusivist is only patronizing the religions as she bestows her version of salvation on sincere believers of other faiths. Both exclusivist and inclusivist have reified their particular spiritual experiences as the one true God. The perennialist situates all the religions as proceeding up the same mountain. Everybody is unknowingly climbing toward the same Absolute. But this, too, is reifying somebody's notion of the Absolute. What other options are there? Into this predicament, Wells (2002:131) summons the Trinity. The doctrine of the Trinity reveals "the dynamic communion at the very heart of reality." The Trinity—extrapolated, but definitely not reified—becomes the model for interreligious dialogue, so that, instead of religions ascending the same mountain, the paths create the mountain. Like the Buddhist view of reality, then, the religions are completely interdependent—nothing reified and all sides pacified.

However, once the aspiration becomes to un-reify Christianity to pacify Buddhist concerns, it becomes unclear just how much of what remains can be called "Christianity." Makransky (2011:121) notes, "Any religious beliefs or practices that encourage reifying and clinging to any conceptualization of truth, God, scripture, religious identity, ritual, religious experience, or ethical prescription as an ultimate would obstruct realization of the emptiness of all such constructed forms." The only way we can salvage God's existence is by denying his inherent existence (Corless, 2007:114). According to Abe, "Buddhism considers the notion of one absolute God who is other than ourselves to be inadequate" because "even the divine and the human co-arise and co-cease" (Knitter and Abe, 1988:361). Perhaps the accommodating

Christian generously allows that "the self-giving love of non-reified God could be found in Jesus Christ who was an actual historical person" (Tokunaga). Nonetheless, the Buddhist-inspired ecumenist cannot be satisfied until, not only God is un-reified into Christ, but also Christ has become un-reified so that the Christian "admit[s] the oneness of Jesus Christ and those who believe in him." (Tokunaga). Reification does not cease until there is a complete nondualism. Ultimately, all that can remain of God is an experience without an object. God "remains an ultimate to be encountered, not conceptually grasped" (O'Leary, 2002:176). As a concept, God is "only the pallid, oppressive figure of an omnipotent creator and judge" (O'Leary, 2002:174). So, to escape the charge of idolatry, we must demote God from the conceptual to the contextual: "God as a notion or entity detached from this situational context is already a false God, a dead idol" (O'Leary, 2002:176).

So what are we to think or say of a God totally unable to be conceptualized whatsoever? Of course, "encounter" is a possible answer, but these interfaith scholars ought to be able to respond in some way to the charge that they are proposing a nullity, a practical nonentity. So, if some kind of designation were insisted upon, the safest insurance against the slightest reification would be to describe God using an ambiguity—something unable to be worded without paradox.[10] The ambiguous (thus ungraspable, thus-unreifiable) answer often suggested is this: Since we must be prevented from reifying God as something "out there," God must be somehow immanent. Yet we must also be prevented from reifying God as something too recognizable, so God must be somehow transcendent. The Catholic Merton, in his first letter to the Zen Buddhist Suzuki, explains, "The Christ we seek is within us, in our inmost self, is our inmost self, and yet

[10] I use "paradox" here in the sense of a statement that appears contradictory, but is not necessarily a contradiction. I do not use the stronger "contradiction" because there are ways of transcendence and immanence coinciding (i.e. in God) that are not contradictory.

infinitely transcends ourselves" (Pramuk, 2008:68). As O'Leary (2002:175) put it, "[T]he middle way is God as Spirit, closer to us than we are to ourselves, yet infinitely transcending us." Commentary on a dialogue between Christian-Process Theologian John Cobb and the Buddhist Francis Cook tells us that, "Both see that while the immanence of ultimate reality guarantees that it is experientially accessible to human beings, its transcendence protects it from being 'reduced' to the fallen or samsaric world'" (Ray, 1987:120). If God is to be thought of as anything, and God is to remain absolutely un-reified, then let God be, as Anglican theologian John Macquarrie put it in describing his "dialectical theism": "not half-transcendent and half-immanent, but wholly transcendent and wholly immanent" (Pan-chiu, 2002:158). Now, as described by theologian Norman Geisler (2003:518), God's transcendence and immanence have historically safeguarded the orthodox doctrine of God as Creator from the errors of pantheism (for God is not only immanent, but also transcendent) and deism (for God is not only transcendent, but also immanent). However, the interfaith interplay between transcendence and immanence as described above safeguards the doctrine of God from even something as reified as being the Creator in the first place.

It is often asserted that Buddhism is not atheistic. It is not that Buddhists do not necessarily believe that gods could exist; it is only that, in the Buddhist framework, any god is basically irrelevant (May, 2004:371). Likewise, these interfaith scholars are not atheists, for atheists eliminate God outright. It is smoother for Buddhist-Christian relations not to overhaul oneself too blatantly so as not to create a false impression of one's identity. The key is, insofar as the concept of God threatens the relationship, to mitigate his relevance. This is difficult to do with a God who concretizes himself in an incarnation.

2.2.7 Tip #7 – "Discover points of agreement" (harmonizing the hermeneutic)

Budding relationships thrive off getting-to-know-you questions. It is especially promising in a case when someone asks one such question, and the other answers with a somewhat random, little-known fact, followed by the original questioner's rejoinder, such as, "Really? No kidding! Me too!" For two people's enchantment with the discovery of uncanny resemblances could lead them to believe they were destined for each other. Now, of course, relationships cannot live on "me too" moments alone. One must also recognize the distinctions between each other, and there is peace when each side has its own agreed-upon turf. The Buddhist-Christian romance has its "me too" moments of excitement. And, as might be expected, Scripture must be interpreted in certain ways to justify the similarities.

2.2.7.1 The Christian says, "Me too!"

First, let us ask a get-to-know-you question of Buddhism. What makes Buddhism unique? Many answers could be given, but let us consider the uniqueness of the Buddhist notion of "emptiness." Recall that Nagarjuna, founder of the Madhyamikan school, taught that absolutely nothing has inherent, ultimate reality (Williams, 2009:68). All is empty of intrinsic existence, and that even means—the Buddhist underscores to the Christian—the emptiness of any notion of God. One would indeed be surprised to find a Christian who similarly sees everything—including God—as empty of intrinsic existence, with the result that everything exists nondually. Yet just such a "me too" conversation took place at the 2004 Gerald Weisfeld Lectures (Schmidt-Leukel, 2005:157-158). Kiyoshi Tsuchiya, a Buddhist, pointed out that Christianity holds the self to be sinful yet real, whereas Buddhism posits a nondualism of interconnectivity, rather than individually existing essences. Yet Elizabeth Harris, a Christian,

surprised Tsuchiya by asking him, Are there not strands within Christianity that are nondualist as well? Harris felt that Tsuchiya's summary of Christianity was not comprehensive enough, for Christianity could potentially accommodate a similar no-self doctrine. Tsuchiya responded that such a convergence was conceivable, yet he "insisted on at least a 'possibly contradictory' religious orientation with specific dangers on both sides, so that there is room for mutual constructive challenge."

It is indeed surprising to the Buddhist when the Christian admits that she too is a nondualist. Is such a relational similarity too contrived to be true? We are told that nondualism is, in fact, a validly Christian viewpoint, thanks to the reworking of Phil. 2:5-7: "Have this mind among yourselves, which is yours in Christ Jesus, who, though he was in the form of God, did not count equality with God a thing to be grasped, but emptied himself, by taking the form of a servant, being born in the likeness of men." Traditionally, this self-emptying—kenosis in Greek—was seen as Christ willingly relinquishing certain divine prerogatives in his incarnation, so that, as John 8:28 illustrates, "I do nothing on my own authority, but speak just as the Father taught me." A newer interpretation, quite friendly to Buddhism, has it that instead of a Jesus emptied of certain divine rights, this text is really referring to the Godhead revealing itself, through Jesus, as, in fact, empty. God empties himself of God-self. As O'Leary (2002:172) commentates,

> In the enfleshment of the Word that is realized in Jesus, what happens? We can perhaps phrase it thus: God makes himself known in his proper form (the Word) and in powerful immediacy (the Spirit) as an empty God, dissolving the fixated conceptions of God prevalent until then (and still with us). Christ as "the image of the invisible God" (Col. 1:15) opens up the true dimensions of the divine and opens up human receptivity of the divine; the Word is fully revealed and the Spirit is fully accessible. This opens up of a new relationship between human and divine centers on the self-emptying of Jesus on the cross. In the fleshly conditions of human life God is manifested as Spirit (John 4:24), as unconditioned freedom, no longer bound by the letter of Scripture, the Law, the cults at

> Jerusalem and Mount Gerizim, or any other religious conventions that idolatrously take themselves to be ultimate.

Eminent Kyoto School scholars Kitaro Nishida, Nishitani Keiji, and Masao Abe employed the potential parallel to develop what might be termed a "kenotic Buddhology," wherein the doctrine of emptiness (*sunyata* in Sanskrit) becomes a process of impersonal love emptying itself out (Odin, 1987:38). In Christian terms, "God" impersonally self-empties into creation through his "love." Christians can come to understand God's loving, self-emptying nature through the kenosis of Phil. 2. In the incarnation, God reveals his self-emptying nature through emptying himself into flesh through his "Son" (Fredericks, 1988:311). In fact, this hermeneutical synthesis has been called Abe's most consequential contribution to Buddhist-Christian relations (Shore, 1998:298). Abe christens the hermeneutical convergence by presenting Christians with their own koan[11]: "Son of God is not Son of God (for he is essentially self-emptying): precisely because he is not, Son of God is Son of God (for he always works as Christ, the Messiah in his function of self-emptying" (Odin, 1987:43).

Of course, Christian theologians as esteemed as Hans Küng, Wolfhart Pannenberg, and Jürgen Moltmann can challenge the empty-God exegesis: the text says nothing of the Father's self-emptying, only the Son's. Likewise, the charge of "monophysitic patripassianism" can be brought up: the Church has long held that it was the Son who incarnated, suffered, etc., and *not* the Father. Yet Abe coolly counters that there is no need to revive tired concepts from the Hellenistic days (such as impassability and immutability) (Brown, 1999:183-184). Besides, one can always go above these more recent theologians to the mystics. On the one hand, union with God, Meister Eckhart explains, only comes when our conception of God is emptied of all

[11] A koan has come to mean a paradoxical question that is to be meditated upon as an aid to enlightenment (although the actual Japanese word has a wider and more complex meaning) (Buswell and Lopez, 2014:440).

images, symbols, even conceptions themselves (Kakichi, 1976:121). On the other hand, again Eckhart counsels, "The most powerful prayer . . . and the most honorable of all works is that which proceeds from an empty spirit. The emptier the spirit, the more is the prayer and the work mighty, worthy, profitable, praiseworthy, and perfect. The empty spirit can do everything" (Wiseman, 1993:108). Humans self-empty, so that God can self-empty into humanity. And the "treasure in heaven" begins to sound like an abundant void, a plenteous wasteland—in other words, less a Beatific, and more a Buddhistic type of quest.

But not only does Christ's incarnational kenosis become God's inherent emptiness. In the hands of these scholars, the doctrine comes full circle. The reworking of Phil. 2 began as a Buddhism-friendly interpretation. Now, it becomes, according to Buddhist-Christian Paul Knitter, a Buddhism-inclusive mandate. Says Knitter (Knitter and Netland, 2013:32),

> If we take Paul in Phil. 2:5-11 seriously, we will have to recognize and allow ourselves to be challenged by what for Paul and the early community was an essential ingredient in proclaiming the divinity of Jesus: God incarnates God's self—and Jesus becomes the incarnation of God—through a process of self-emptying. No self-emptying, no incarnation.
>
> So incarnation requires kenosis. . . . God empties God's self, Jesus empties himself, in order to make room for the other. In other words, the purpose of kenosis is dialogue. And relationship and dialogue require that we affirm the value, the dignity—and that means the potential truth—of the other. A dialogue which insists that one side has the truth and the other does not is not based on the kenosis, or self-emptying, that we find in Jesus.

So we discover that not only was the reworking of Phil. 2 for the purpose of dialogue, but that a purpose of Phil. 2 itself was dialogue. As Lutheran interfaith scholar Fritsch-Oppermann (1993:259) puts it, "Precisely because [the kenosis] is such self-emptying love, it has to deny any claim of absoluteness and superiority of one religion over another." As it turns out, the purpose of the incarnation was not that, as the passage continues, "God has highly exalted him and bestowed on him the name that is above every name, so that at the name of Jesus every knee

should bow, in heaven and on earth and under the earth, and every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father." Instead, we are told, the purpose of it all was to open us up to the validity of other saviors.

2.2.7.2 The Buddhist says, "Me too!"

Let us now hear the Buddhist ask the Christian a getting-to-know-you question. What makes Christianity unique? Well, salvation, in the Christian sense, is a gift. Whereas in the other religions you have to earn heaven, nirvana, paradise, etc., in Christianity the Savior gives grace to those who place faith in him. Yet many Buddhists recognize a similar grace-based salvation in their own teaching. Unlike the imaginative reinterpretation of Philippians 2, this parallel was, in fact, recognized by a theologian viewed by the interfaith scholars as quite unprogressive. It was Karl Barth who first drew the connection between the faith-only emphasis of Reformation Christianity and what is called Pure Land Buddhism (Chung, 2004:304). Barth saw a "striking parallelism" (Waldrop, 1987:576) although he maintained that God had uniquely "elected" Christianity (Waldrop, 1987:581, 583) and that Pure Land Buddhism remained one of the "religions of error." The parallel is quite conspicuous, but it will helpful first to understand what Pure Land Buddhism is.

We are told in the "Larger Sutra on the Buddha of Infinite Life" of a monk of innumerable eons ago named Dharmakara. The monk vowed before the Buddha of that era that he, Dharmakara, would become a bodhisattva (a Buddha-in-the-making) who would destine all his merit to the creation of a "western pure land." This pure land would be a place so pristine that nirvana would become a surety for all who were reborn there. Dharmakara further vowed to visit the deathbed of any person who was to hear his name and trust in it, in order to safely escort her

to the pure land. After eons of meditation, Dharmakara was to become the Buddha Amitabha, the Buddha of infinite light (Japanese: "Amida," identified with Amitayus, the Buddha of infinite life in some traditions). Worship of Amitabha stretches back to at least the first centuries of the Common Era. Although Amitabha devotion could be found almost everywhere Buddhism spread, it was in East Asia that Amitabha became the most celebrated Buddha (Buswell and Lopez, 2014:34-35).

Though certainly not the first patriarch of Amitabha devotion, Japanese Buddhist Honen Shonin (1133-1212) introduced a separate school devoted to the Buddha of infinite light. (Williams, 2009:254). Though the chant called the *nembutsu* had been utilized before Honen's time, this was the first time the chant was the complete focus of a separate school. In the *nembutsu*, the devotee repeats, "I take refuge in the buddha Amitabha" (Buswell and Lopez, 2014:566-567). Now, it had long been presumed that following the Buddha's entrance into nirvana, the initial Buddhist fervor would eventually cool and society would inevitably decline to such a state that one simply could no longer follow the Buddha's path as early generations had found it possible to do. East Asian Buddhists adopted a threefold categorization for this decay, the final stage of which was called *mappo* (Japanese) or *mofa* (Chinese) (Buswell and Lopez, 2014:545). Believing themselves to be living in such a degenerate age, many Buddhists were attracted to Honen's simplified, reassuring approach (Williams, 2009:254). Honen's disciple Shinran Shonin (1173-1262) went even further in developing the all-sufficiency of Amitabha's Other Power. Deserting the lay-monk distinction, Shinran even married and had children (Williams, 2009:254-255). Both Honen and Shinran had reasoned from their own incapabilities to the general impossibility of humans to save themselves by Own Power (Williams, 2009:261). Shinran, however, came to see in even the repetition of the *nenbutsu* an attempt to merit

salvation by Own Power. The point, according to Shinran, was not to build up merit oneself, but to put faith (*shinjin*) in the merit Amitabha has already provided, and to receive Amitabha's Other Power in gratitude. Shinran is famous for reasoning that if even a good person can be reborn in Amitabha's pure land, how much more a sinner! His followers went on to establish a new school called Jodo Shinshu, or "True Pure Land School" (Buswell and Lopez, 2014:807-808).

It does not take much inventiveness to see striking parallels between Shinran's view of Amitabha and the Apostle Paul's theology of Jesus. Barth saw in the acknowledged need for Amitabha's grace a providential pathway for opening others up to Jesus (Waldrop, 1987:585). French Jesuit Henri de Lubac (1896-1991) made Pure Land Buddhism a primary academic interest, and his work is hailed as a forerunner in "comparative theology" (Grumett and Plant, 2012:58-59). According to Japanese Christian Yagi Seiichi (born in 1932), both Amitabha and Christ present themselves as agents of the Most High, for Amitabha is to ultimate reality (i.e. *dharmakaya*, the ultimate nature of the Buddha) what the Logos (in John's Gospel) is to God (Drummond, 1987:566). According to Cobb, redemption is continually unfolding throughout history, known to some as Amitabha and to others as the Christ. Cobb hopes that Buddhists can see in the actually historic appearance of the latter the "decisive incarnation of Amida" (Prozesky and Edwards, 1986:69). Luther and Shinran make an especially fruitful comparison: both rejected monastic life for married life, both dissolved the lay-monk distinction, and both stressed the impotency of works and the efficacy of grace (Chung, 2004:302). Grace is not merely efficacious but essential, given both Pure Land and Reformation stress on "original evil karma" or "original sin" (Lee, 2004:172). Pentecostal interfaith theologian Amos Yong (2011a:204) even provides a chart comparing the Calvinistic TULIP doctrines with Pure Land teachings,

convincingly branding Shinran as something of a four-point Calvinist (Amitabha vows to save all sentient beings—so this would be more akin to "Unlimited Atonement").

This is not to say that the two systems do not have their obvious differences or naysayers to their assimilation. Let us mention three differences. One such naysayer, Shin Buddhist Gregory Gibbs, reminds us of the first difference, that of context. Gibbs (1997:281), warns, "You cannot separate *shinjin*, the encompassing heart and mind of true reliance, from the *nembutsu* practice in which alone it is realized. This would be like removing the Communion wafer from the sacramental context in which it is consecrated." The second difference is the question of historicity. Jesus was an historical person, whereas the monk Dharmakara seems to be completely mythological (Chung, 2004:306). The third difference has to do with ontological reality. Beneath the colorful myth of Amitabha, all is empty. True to Buddhist emptiness, Amitabha is not a person to be clung to, so much as a nondual experience of realizing Other Power as one's true nature (Lee, 2004:180). It is relevant to Christian salvation that we are "made in the image of God," but this reality in itself fails to bring about our actual salvation. However, for Pure Land Buddhism, there is an essential unity between Other Power and one's inherent Buddha Nature. As Amitabha devotees surrender the last egoistic strivings, "at the same time they remain precisely as they are—or rather, their fundamental nature becomes radically clear for the first time" (Yoshifumi Ueda quoted in Williams, 2009:261). There is no such thing as an egoistic good deed, for the only goodness comes from Other Power, which is, in fact, one's own true inner nature. As Paul Williams (2009:262) puts it, "Even the voice that recites the *nenbutsu* is not one's own voice but the voice of Amitabha issuing from the mouth of the one who is reciting." But unlike Pure Land *shinjin*, Christian faith has as its object not one's own

nature. After all, one might well not have even been created, and reality could carry on unimpaired. Instead, Christian faith proceeds from creature to eternal Creator.

2.2.7.3 Beyond Excited Similarities

Other "me too" moments have been pointed out, often seemingly contrived. The so-called "Three Bodies of the Buddha" (Trikaya) have been compared with the Trinity, but beyond the "tri," comparisons are admittedly ill-fitting (Fritsch-Oppermann, 1993:248-249).[12] The crucifixion of Christ has been compared to the Zen Great Death, and his resurrection to the Great (Re-)Birth, yet the three-day interval of actual history in the first case presents obstacles (DeMartino, 1998:225). The Buddha's teachings on mindful living in the present exhibit parallels to Augustine's desire to lay hold of the "savour of eternity," instead of living agitatedly by past and future distractions (Highland, 2005:95).

As time goes on in a relationship, however thrilling the "me too" moments might be, it is often the "not me" realities that help the relationship move beyond infatuation to integration. The less popular it becomes to brand a religion as such and such without accounting for differences, and the more differences that come to light between Buddhism and Christianity, the less the relationship resembles a game of matching the pairs together, and the more it appears like fitting puzzle pieces together. Of course, one can force incompatible puzzle pieces together, with one piece bending under the force of the other. Christians can contort Zen into a method of Christian

[12] The three bodies are the Dharmakaya (the Buddha's "formless final reality" which is emptiness), Sambhogakaya (the mode of appearance of a Buddha; e.g. Amitabha), and Nirmanayaka (the Buddha's appearance as a human). Although the comparison has been tried, says Fristsch-Oppermann (1993:248-249), "Nevertheless, in the teaching of Trikaya—as Takizawa and Yagi also have recognized—it is not possible to speak of an 'incarnation of God' in any way or of a doctrine of the two natures of Jesus Christ. God the 'Father' cannot easily be compared with *Dharmakaya*. *Sambhogakaya* has no human nature that could make it comparable with the Second Person of the Christian Trinity. In the final analysis, the concept of three bodies is a mythological expression of ultimate reality, which is Emptiness, and it is therefore not to be compared with the First Person of the Trinity."

mysticism, or Buddhists can contort Christianity into a symbol of Buddhist mysticism (Kreeft, 1971:514). But the interfaith scholars most interested in an enduring relationship between the two recognize such lopsided love as star-crossed. The key is complementarity, not control.

In quantum physics, the term *complementarity* is used to explain the relation of two concepts—particle and wave—once considered contradictory, but now conceded to exist simultaneously as light. In Christian theology, the divine and human natures of Christ are said to synchronize complementarily in one Person. In the same way, these interfaith scholars take what may seem on the surface as contradictions between the two religions and attempt to show their actual complementarity (Pan-chiu, 2002:149). It was John Makransky (2011:129), a Buddhist, who noted that we have much to learn from the other, "precisely because of their otherness." Notice that in the following analysis there is no direct contradiction, no "A is non-A": Gotama is the "master of contemplation," and Jesus the "master of prayer" (Kuntz, 2000:151-152). The Buddha is the liberator and Jesus the redeemer (Schmidt-Leukel, 2005:159). Sri Lankan Methodist Lynn de Silva explains that while Buddhism, emphasizing ultimacy, begins with impersonal emptiness, Christianity, emphasizing intimacy, begins with divine majesty (Schmidt-Leukel, 2003:270). Knitter (2012:25) weds the two religions in a "hypostatic union," in which Buddhism answers the "what" questions and Christianity the "how." While the Buddha teaches us to *be* peace, Christ teaches how to *make* peace. The idea is that Buddhist-Christian differences complement each other. Differences do not have to separate; instead they can supplement. Getting-to-know-you questions give way to what-would-I-do-without-you questions.

2.2.8 Tip #8 – "Discern the meaning behind the words" (salvaging the symbolic)

Some statements are not meant to be taken literally. Spoken in a certain tone, "Do what you want," "That's fine," and "If you say so," must be responded to with great tact. Such evocative statements are more pointer than proclamation, suggestion than statement. Hence, even if the listener can dissect the sentence with grammatical precision, miscommunication will occur so long as the listener only looks at the words themselves and not at their connotations. Let us imagine that one asks how the other is doing and receives a chilly, staccato "Fine." The word itself does not communicate the actual state of affairs, but, if you listen carefully, you will hear the underlying hint. The word points beyond itself in a direction other than the way literalism would dictate. As we shall see, to spot this "symbolic" language is crucial not only for regular, but also for religious "romance."

The difference these interfaith scholars would draw between the two types of romance, however, is that whereas in regular romance, language is often decorated by the symbolic, theological language is actually defined by the symbolic. In religious language, literalism is always bound to end up leading to trouble. Thus, criticism of the Bible's historicity—even coming from atheists—is often welcomed as helping us discard our literalism and begin the really profitable business of seeking out the symbolic. Says O'Leary (2008:360), "[T]he negations of atheism have a valid aspect, in that they highlight objectionable or simply incredible aspects of dogma and force us to rethink them." Pure Land Buddhist John Yokota (2002:139) advises that, for Christian-Buddhist relations, "[S]ecularism must be a dialog partner as well."

From the interfaith perspective can be gleaned three ways that secularistic strikes on Christian strongholds actually help to strengthen the Buddhist-Christian relationship. First, in a certain sense, Buddhism can be found standing *beside* Christianity against secularism. Abe sees

"anti-religious forces" as enough of a threat to the religions that the religions must join together as cobelligerents (Shore, 1998:302). Secularism could potentially plunder the cultural heritage of both religions (Fredericks, 1988:311). And this would be disastrous for the world, reasons Abe, considering the all-important task both religions share in stifling the selfish ego (Shore, 1998:302). Not that this shared opposition spells doom. Instead of disaster, this secularism that threatens to plunder could actually provoke productive reassessments and thus turn out to both religions' advantage. Like Christianity, "in order for Buddhism to remain a living tradition relevant to the challenges we face now, it is necessary to interrogate how [Buddhist] teachings are to be understood today" (Loy, 2013:412).

The second way the Buddhist-Christian alliance can be reinforced under secular attacks is that Buddhism can be found standing *under* Christianity. O'Leary (1997:114) describes the blessing Keenan's Mahayana theology offers the Church:

> Sometimes one is tempted to think of Christianity as a high-rise building that has been hit by an earthquake and is about to collapse. Many have deserted the edifice; others huddle in panic; meanwhile voices of authority deny the rocking of the walls, forbid discussion and dissent, stridently insist on old certitudes. If only there were some assurance of a solution in sight, it might be possible to let go of fear and face the crisis honestly. "But there is!" shouts a fireman from the street below. He holds out a wide safety net, and calls out: "Jump!" The fireman's name is John P. Keenan and the net is called "emptiness." The figures on the balcony stare down in terror—that net looks like a black void—better to clutch at these solid stones, no matter how they quake, than leap out into the unsupported air, entrusting oneself to some nebulous nirvana. The voices warn against the dangers of Buddhist-Christian syncretism, denouncing Buddhism as "a sort of spiritual auto-eroticism" (Cardinal Ratzinger). But the fireman's persuasion begins to take effect. One by one, the trembling believers drop down into the net of emptiness.

Of westerners, Suzuki (2008:69-70) explains, "[T]he majority of those who follow the teachings of Christianity are under the control of an old system of thought that is by and large medieval. . . . This kind of believer is to be found in great numbers among the uneducated classes." Thus, says Suzuki (2008:73), "[T]heir old religion might have offered them some emotional fulfillment, but

what they wish for as well is intellectual fulfillment." Buddhism can thus be packaged for the western seeker as completely in step with modern science, as the oldest of the religions, as a religion without God, revelation, faith, dogma, where "man stands and remains on his own feet" (Holsten, 1959:410). With the "Big Dogs of Atheism" tearing at the Christian notion of God, "Buddhism is responding to a need that many sensitive Westerners feel keenly: a way of salvation that does not depend on an anachronistic deity that you have to flatter and abase yourself in front of in order to join the club" (Betty, 2008:115-116). If Christian theology is reeling from the deaths of God, truth, self, history, and so on, then what better than Buddhism—with its longstanding acknowledgement of the ultimate emptiness of these things—to help Christians salvage some meaning (Glass, 1995:304). Christian interfaith scholar Gordon Kaufman proposes making Christ's weakness, not his lordship, the defining characteristic—deliberately reinventing Christology as an emptier, more Buddhistic discipline—suggesting that "this emphasis would enable Christianity to overcome certain internal theological problems" (Ray, 1987:122). It becomes obvious that many Christians indeed dislike a great deal of their religion and are actively scanning the ground for a safety net.

The third way Christianity and Buddhism are brought together thanks to secularistic pressure has already been mentioned. When the historicity of Christianity is challenged, some Christians "circle the wagons," retaining their literalism by closing themselves off from dialogue. These interfaith scholars see such abdication as one less obstacle to the interreligious relationship. On the other hand, when Christianity is attacked, some Christians are forced to concede the problematic and wonder what of their religion can be salvaged. This is where interfaith scholars step in with the good news that religious language was never about history anyway. It was not even about truth as though it referred to facts about ultimate reality. The point

of religious language was, in fact, never anything that could be injured in any way by secularistic attacks. Such attacks can actually be the stimulant for seeking out the real point, that to which religious language, as pointer, merely symbolizes. Religious language, according to interfaith scholars, was only ever meant to be symbolic (Stenger, 1991:64-65).

To get an idea of what religious language as "symbolic" means, let us introduce the Buddhist concept of *upaya*, or "skillful means." Skillful means is modeled in the *Alagaddupamasutta*, in which the Buddha likened his teachings to a makeshift raft. The purpose of your raft is to get you across the river, but, once across, you would not need to continue carrying the raft around. Let it go the moment it has fulfilled its purpose. In the same way, Buddha's teachings are skillful means to get you where you need to go. The point is not the means, but the end, called Nirvana. Because different audiences have differing levels of understanding, the message can be strategically tailored for the particular audience (Buswell and Lopez, 2014:942). The *Lotus Sutra* is famous for its parables illustrating the Buddha's use of skillful means, as opposed to straightforward truths, for jolting delusional people toward the path (which, in the *Lotus Sutra*'s case is not Nirvana, but actual Buddhahood) (Williams, 2009:154). Thus, when contradictions surface—especially when newly discovered doctrines of the Buddha eclipse old versions—the differences can be credited to the Buddha's proficiency in adapting the means for the audience. But to reify the teaching—the means—is to miss the point (Buswell and Lopez, 2014:942-943).

As we have seen, these interfaith scholars assume critical scholarship concerning the Bible, even encouraging it as a catalyst for seeking out the symbolic. Knitter (1979:651) explains, "Christianity must move beyond 'historicism'—the attitude that equates the real with the factual. . . . [T]he experience of salvation is not mediated through historical events in

themselves but insofar as they are 'mythified.'" We might ask how then one is saved, if historical events like the Atonement cannot be counted upon. Knitter (1979:651) answers that "symbols save; historical events (as events) do not." However, one wonders how symbols save. Knitter (1979:657) explains, "It is only when we are grasped by and find ourselves responding with our whole being to a symbol, myth, or story that we are encountering the divine." The question then becomes how symbols help us encounter the divine. Knitter continues, "What is primarily important is not what actually happened in the life of Jesus but the ability of the message (the symbol-myth) to reveal and transform our lives" (Ogden paraphrased in Knitter, 1979:660). The point is personal transformation, for "the important question to ask is not the historical (Did it really happen?), but the effective (Does it work?)" (Knitter, 1979:668). And, of course, Christianity is not the only religion that is personally transformative. Thus, Knitter (1979:664) can conclude, "All religions are salvific through the illuminative, prehensive potency of their myths and stories, not through the events themselves which may have given rise to these myths."

Those who see the point of religion as personal transformation naturally advise Christians to loosen their attachments to historical particularities and to view those particularities with the same pragmatism as Buddhists view Buddha's *upaya*. For artist/author Frederick Franck (1997:290), *upaya* functions superbly as a transformative means, yet such means become destructive when they are enshrined as immutable doctrine.

> Did not *upaya*, once objectified, change into their opposite, turn from being powerful sharpeners, stimulants of the spirit, into its tranquillizers? Have not *upaya*, dogmatized and absolutized, been tools of oppression and manipulation from time immemorial? The mis-use of these "skillful means" has been the malediction that rests on all exoteric religion. In the West Christianity is inextricably interwoven with a history and a culture that betrayed its essence, caused witch hunts, pyres, persecutions, inquisitions and religious wars. What Christianity at this juncture might still learn from Buddhism—instead of "combating it"—is the awareness of *upaya* as being just that, no more, no less, and that the ignorance, the unawareness of the nature of *upaya* as "compassionate stratagems" is symptomatic of *avidya* [i.e. ignorance].

Now, it ought to be clarified that Franck is using the term *upaya* quite loosely. *Upaya* is a skillful device used by the Buddha to move particular audiences toward the Buddhist path. Franck's opponent seems to be the kind of certainty that comes from believing yourself to have apprehended absolutes. Of course, the oppressive actions that can result from forcefully *imposing* such absolutes is truly lamentable. But let us not forget that an absolute goal is precisely what the Buddha's *upaya* seems to presuppose (e.g. universal Buddhahood in the *Lotus Sutra*). Nonetheless, Franck's irritation with dogmatic religious statements is shared by his fellow interfaith scholars. To them, religious language is best described as clues, pointers, and art; that is, it evokes but should not enshrine. It deals in the "mysterious and ineffable," and thus should never advertise using the "crude slogans of religious propaganda" (O'Leary, 2002:177).

Thus, the superfluity of the historic and superiority of the symbolic join together like parents announcing their child's upcoming wedding. The invitation they send out reads, "You are invited to interreligious dialogue." The only persons not on the guest list are those who cannot handle the solemnity of such an event, insisting on turning a beautiful ceremony of dialogue into a chance to argue and do not comport themselves with the expected refinement. For,

> This renewed understanding of symbol and myth also leads to significant implications and clarifications concerning Christianity's encounter with other religions of the world: Christianity cannot base any kind of claim for uniqueness or superiority on its "historical foundations"; rather, the revealing-saving power of its myth must be compared with that of other religious myths" (Knitter, 1979:671).

And if any arrogance sneaks into the ceremony, it can be expelled with the greatest of all theological insults, charging the perpetrator with the heresy of all heresies: idolatry. For "the symbolic character of this religious speech should warn us against absolutizing the descriptions, turning the descriptions themselves into idols" (Stenger, 1991:65).

If the point of exegesis is to excavate the symbolic from the historic—like a gem from its crude obscurity—and if the point of the symbolic is its personally transformative interpretation, and if no one can argue with any other's interpretation without becoming an idolater, then what could possibly impede dialogue? The Japanese Christian Zhang Chunyi's vision of "Buddhicizing Christianity" can proceed with the blessing of everyone in attendance. Chunyi taught that because "the esoteric meanings of the Gospel truth had not been expounded properly" (Pan-chiu and Yuen-tai, 2007:70, 73), he would "unearth the hidden truths in the New Testament." His most cited verse being Eph. 4:6—"one God and Father of all, who is over all and through all in all"—Chunyi could unearth the shimmering symbol—"that God is the human being's own heart-mind, as well as the One True Realm of Dharma permeating the whole universe" (Pan-chiu and Yuen-tai, 2007:73)—from more monotonous surroundings of "one body, one Spirit, one hope, one Lord, one faith, one baptism" (Eph. 4:4-5). Shin Buddhist John Yokota (2002:149) can repackage the Incarnation from a story to a symbol, as a sort of reassurance that we do not have to "see a random meaningless flow of history but meaningful acts." Humanities scholar Charles Sabatino (1985:15) can read Jesus in the light of Buddhist emptiness and return with the "resurrection symbol" as pointing to "the more hidden depths of the present and its healing possibilities." It takes work to rework the old-guard objectivity, but it is all necessary for "the daunting task of trying to unpack the truth of symbols in propositional statements" (Knitter and Netland, 2013:39).

So, as a pointer, religious language ends up pointing the Christian and the Buddhist toward each other. With help from the secularist, the Buddhist can be found sometimes *beside* the Christian as a support, as well as sometimes *under* the Christian as a safety net. Now, thanks to the search for the symbolic, Buddhism can actually be located *within* Christianity. Knitter

(Knitter and Netland, 2013:40-41) admittedly speaks only of his personal experience, but is not that the point?

> I have found that most, certainly not all, of the contraries—the different fingers—that I have discovered in my exploration of other religions, and especially of Buddhism, have proven to be much more complementary than contradictory. This includes even the examples you have given of what you think are contradictions between Buddhism and Christianity. . . .
>
> Try to look more deeply, for we are dealing with symbolic language, or with fingers that point but can never be identified with what they are pointing to. I have found that what the Buddhists are suggesting to me, and to Christians in general, is that in a very real sense to think about God as a reality that exists as an object outside of ourselves, an object that we can identify, may be leading us to certain forms of idolatry; such language may end up capturing or reifying the mystery of God. What I'm saying here is that for me, my dialogue with Buddhism, and with the Buddhist assertion that there is no God as an entity that confronts me from the outside, has not only enabled me to appropriate the mystical content of our Christian tradition; it has also helped me, I think, to appropriate Saint Paul's talk about God as ultimate mystery (II Cor. 2:7-8; Rom. 16:25; Col. 1:26-27).

In the end, says Knitter (Knitter and Netland, 2013:39), religious talk "becomes language that's more poetry than it is philosophy." And which genre is more conducive to romance?

2.2.9 Tip #9 – "Let Cupid do his thing" (crediting the charismatic)

It is convenient to give some credit for romance to an actual force that caused it. If it is true that, for example, "destiny brought us together," the relationship gains a little extra legitimacy. Crediting a couple's "chemistry" or "karma" or even "the magic in the air" can be metaphors invoking an invisible, impersonal matchmaker. Less romantically, Evangelical pastor-turned-atheist Dan Barker (2008:354) credits an invisible force in his love song "It's Only Natural":

> It's only natural that I would want you.
> It's only natural that you want me.
> A million years of evolution had its way,
> So we can blame it on our parents' DNA.
> I move instinctively in your direction.

Somehow you signal me to turn and see.
You will always be my natural selection,
As a voluntary choice, naturally.

Of course, as frequently extolled in Christian songs, it is often quite romantic to credit God with bringing two people together, that is, unless it becomes a weapon used by one person to prevent the other one from backing out of the relationship. Recently, it appears that interfaith scholars have found *their* force. Knitter (Knitter and Netland, 2013:33) makes the introductions:

> Here I see what I believe is the richest resources that contemporary theologians are drawing on—especially Pentecostal theologians—in order to lay the foundations for a Christian recognition of the truth and value of other religions. Some of these theologians, such as Amos Yong, are suggesting that pneumatology is the way around the impasse that Christology has become for Christian dialogue with other believers. The universal God that Jesus points to can best be understood as the universal Spirit who moves as she will, often as unnoticed as wind, throughout all creation. The activity of this Spirit is essentially the same as, but reaching beyond, the work of the incarnate Word in Jesus. The Spirit, like the Incarnate Word, is at work in communicating the presence and power and love of God, drawing all of creation to an awareness of its source and true being in the Divine.

The Holy Spirit is far less guarded by creeds than Jesus ever was. The Spirit is never bound to a particular place, but is always flitting about as untameably as the wind (John 3:8). One indicator of just how pliable the Holy Spirit is, is that scholars can call the Spirit "she" with much greater ease than trying to make over the heavenly Father or the Son of God as female divinities. As II Cor. 3:17b says, "Where the Spirit of the Lord is, there is freedom." There has certainly been more freedom to speculate on the salvific potentialities of other religions thanks to the renewed emphasis on the Spirit. This is thanks in large part to the Catholic Church since the Second Vatican Council. As James Fredericks (2003:226) points out, "Vatican II is clear and unambiguous about the possibility that those who follow other religious paths can be saved in Christ by the grace of the Holy Spirit." It should be clarified that Pope John Paul II, known for advancing the discussion about the Spirit's role in other religions, nonetheless kept the Spirit's

work fastened to the "Christ-event": the Spirit is "not an alternative to Christ" (Fredericks, 2003:243). Other Catholics, however, such as Roger Haight, would go on to loosen the Son-Spirit bindings. Haight, for example, developed a pluralistic view of the religions, in which divine interventions like the Christ-event were multiplied in history as the Spirit empowered alternative mediators (Fredericks, 2003:241).

Just how much wind can this pneumatology blow into the interfaith sails? Amos Yong (2011b:114) is optimistic. "Can/should Buddhists and Christians do theology/Buddhology together?" he asks. "My answer is yes, through the empowering divine Spirit . . . ." In fact, taking this "pneumatological turn" allows us to "push beyond" and stop getting "bogged down" by the stagnant intramural categories of Exclusivism, Inclusivism, and Pluralism (Yong, 2004:191). How? Yong asks us to recall the birthday of the Church, the Day of Pentecost. Foreigners heard the Gospel message in their own languages and asked, "Are not all these who are speaking Galileans? And how is it that we hear, each of us in his own native language? . . . What does this mean?" (Acts 2:7b-8, 12b). Yong (2011b:113) draws interfaith implications:

> [T]he Spirit's outpouring on all flesh enabled the speaking of the many tongues and languages from around the Mediterranean world, and, by implication, thus also salvaged (redeemed) their concomitant cultures, worldviews, and practices, to varying degrees, yet all the while orchestrating and harmonizing this diversity so as to accomplish the declaration of the wondrous works of God. This framework provides a hermeneutical approach to overcoming the conflict of interpretations, not by silencing, domesticating, or instrumentalizing other voices and views, but by heeding and comprehending their alterity, yet nevertheless mysteriously transforming all in and through the encounter without their assimilation into a homogenized whole.

That is quite an impressive jump, from the utilization of other languages for the Gospel message to the redemption of other religions for the interfaith message. One might even argue that the leap cleared the rest of the book of Acts, because it shows little attempted harmonization with such passages as "there is salvation is no one else, for there is no other name under heaven given

among men by which we must be saved" (Acts 4:12). But the Pentecost narrative is Yong's metaphor for theologizing and reason for optimism.

But what metaphor can be used to fit the Spirit for this interfaith role? Perhaps the Spirit as *author* would work. Since many Scriptures are necessarily avoided by interfaith scholars, and since even those utilized are often "decontextualized," it is conducive to think of the unfettered Spirit as author of those Scriptures. As Yong (2004:194) argues, if it is the unpredictable Spirit who inspired, interprets, and applies the Scriptures, then surely "mere propositionalism and wooden literalism will be insufficient for spiritual discernment." Yong (2004:195) continues,

> [T]he temptation to reify and then absolutize language will always result in miscommunication and then disease, what Buddhists call *dukkha*. But, at another level, that of the perspective of Buddhist *sunyata*, language (or scripture) understood to be empty can be seen as skillful means (*upaya*) with epistemic, pragmatic, and, most importantly, soteriological import. Similarly, from the vantage point of pneumatological theology, language taken conventionally is lifeless until animated by the Spirit.
>
> The whole point about language is, from the perspective of Buddhist *sunyata*, its function as a raft to get us across a particular river (situation), and to be released upon successful crossing.

In such a way, Scripture is less binding, and who knows? Perhaps new, more Buddhistic interpretations become options. Of course, it will be pointed out that, going back and forth from place to place, as the Spirit is known to do, does not equal going back on one's word. The Spirit who inspired the Word also called that Word "imperishable" (Matt. 5:17-19) "unbreakable" (John 10:35) and "true" (John 17:17). Scripture certainly does not present itself as merely a raft. The Spirit *animates* Scripture, perhaps, but why think the Spirit *abdicates* it?

Another metaphor that might work better is the Spirit as *recruiter*. Now, if the Spirit's primary role is to point people to the Christ-event, then the Spirit is not helping move people toward the kind of interconnectedness that interfaith scholars envision. It is true, says Yong (2004:197),

> The Spirit of God is, after all, confessed to be none other than the Spirit of Jesus and the Spirit of Christ. Here we arrive also at the heart of Christian faith. What else can and should we say at this juncture recognizing both the apologetic imperative and the obligation to discern the Spirit(s) in the interreligious encounter with Buddhism?

This is where Yong advises moving the direction charted by John Keenan's Mahayana Theology, which capitalizes on Jesus' self-emptying kenosis in order to fit an essence-less Jesus into the interconnectedness of Buddhist metaphysics. Says Yong (2004:198), "[W]e need to build on approaches like Keenan's if the claim regarding the universality of the Christian message is taken seriously at all."

Of course, it is doubtful just how many Christians want Jesus Buddhicized, nor just how many Buddhists would receive even such an acclimated version of Jesus as one of their own. Besides, by subduing the implications of such claims as "I am the Son of God" (Matt. 27:43), Yong is trying to salvage Jesus' universality. Yet Jesus' universality is still going to be seen by interfaith scholars and Buddhists alike as a problem. In fact, notice how Knitter (Knitter and Netland, 2013:33) applies universality: "We cannot truly understand and take seriously the particularity of Jesus unless we link it to the universality of the Holy Spirit." And according to Yong (2004:198), in the end, "even what appears to be a clear scriptural and dogmatic criterion, confessing the lordship of Jesus, cannot function absolutistically and dogmatically for discerning the Spirit in Buddhism." Could not the Spirit inspire other lords for other regions? Especially if the emphasis is less on the Spirit as *endorsing* Jesus and more on the Spirit as *empowering* Jesus, then could it not be that the Spirit could recruit and empower additional saviors? As Knitter (Knitter and Netland, 2013:34) puts it, "What the Spirit is up to will not be able to be simply reduced to what the Word has revealed."

However, since there is a generous amount of speculation here and not a few contradictions are being created—specifically when interfaith models of the Spirit come up

against the Scripture the Spirit authored and the Savior the Spirit recruited—perhaps it is better to stay with a more familiar metaphor: the Spirit as *gardener*. Christians might be skeptical that the Spirit would abrogate Scripture as if it were a raft or demarcate Jesus' jurisdiction as if he were a bodhisattva creating his own Pure Land. But when Christians see the *fruit* of the Spirit in an adherent of another religion, the Spirit's handiwork is less difficult to perceive. After all, Christians are not the only ones who have love, joy, peace, patience, and so on as the fruit of their behavior. Maybe so, protests the more biblically oriented Christian, but the real question, the ultimate criterion is not "Can you prove yourself to be a good person?" but "Are you saved?" Still, even if that should be the case, Yong (2004:200) maintains that "ultimate soteriological issues . . . are finally confessional in nature" and "lie beyond what can be empirically determined." "In the end," he concludes (Yong, 2004:199), "I suggest that the methodological, apologetic, and dialogical questions on this side of the eschaton are all transformed into the practical question of 'How then can and should we live?'" "Christian discernment on this side of the eschaton," he contends (Yong, 2004:204), "should be judged ethically and morally."

Now, one wonders whose morality is to become the standard for our discernment, since each religion's ontology (which grounds its morality) is said to be inaccessible and only "confessional." Even if it were possible to determine whose morality was the standard without being able to access any ontological grounding, another problem remains. Why, according to Yong, should morality have any kind of objective status in the first place, since, like salvation, it is not "empirically determined"? Nonetheless, after listing the fruit of the Spirit, he asks (Yong, 2004:204), "From a Christian perspective, can it be denied that the Spirit is present and active wherever such signs are present?" Whatever the difficulties involved, the interfaith movement has its romance author, its matchmaking recruiter, and its gardener who cultivates relationships.

2.2.10 Tip #10 – "Don't just talk about yourself" (eclipsing the egoistic)

A solar eclipse occurs when the moon passes between the earth and the sun, obscuring the sun from view. We are told that a window of time exists—dubbed the "total solar eclipse"—when the moon completely eclipses the sun and it is technically safe to look at the sun without protection. However, it takes training to know when this window of protection begins and ends. In the Buddhist-Christian relationship, egoism is continuously indicted as the Christian's obstacle to dialogue. Just how eclipsed must this egoism become, for dialogue to be safe? Someone can be romantically interested in another and yet concede that some major work needs to be done before the relationship can work. Suppose that not only did he talk the entire date, but he talked only about himself! Maybe there is potential there, but in the meantime his egoism stands in the way. Just how egoistic is the Buddhist perception of Christianity, and what needs to be done for a relationship with Christianity to be safe?

Well, for one thing, the free-wheeling ecumenists tell us, Christianity will have to stop talking for long enough to hear of its problem. This lack of self-criticism in itself is a problem because, we are told, Christianity specializes in the "monologue." Why, though, if both Buddhists and Christians talk to each other, is the Christian singled out as the lecturer? The reason is that, even if there are two religions in conversation, monologue happens instead of dialogue anytime the point of discussion is conversion (Ingram, 2000:542). And Christianity is often far more interested in missiology than genuine, mutually enriching dialogue (Ingram, 2006:235).

Now, to be fair, it must be underscored that Christianity is far from alone in its missiological aims. As Terry Muck, co-editor of *Buddhist-Christian Studies*, explains,

"[C]ontacts between Buddhists and Christians have not been characterized by what one might call one-way missions but by what might be called reciprocal missions: Buddhists teaching the *dhamma* to Christians and Christians preaching the gospel to Buddhists" (Muck, 2014:87). It might also be helpful to be reminded that though Buddhists in Tibet, Southeast Asia, or East Asia might resent Christian missions on their soil, the only reason they are Buddhist in the first place is that Buddhist missionaries got there first. As Muck (2014:93-94) puts it, "In all of these countries, the Christian missioners have never caught up with the work done by the Buddhists" and consequently, the indication is that "the first religion to missionize a new place dominates."

Nevertheless, stereotypes are not easily eradicated. So, supposing Christians display enough self-control to pause their assumed monologue and bear the criticism. "What seems to be the problem?" Thankfully, a role model, an example of how it should be done, is sitting right across the table. The interreligious partner is the perfect object lesson:

> Buddhism radically deconstructs the very notion of a subsistent Self continuous through time and indeed of identifiable substance in any dimension of reality. The otherness of the Stranger is thereby not so much transcended as disallowed along with the reality of one's own imagined Self (May, 2000:236).

"But," protests Christianity. "I'm a nice person." On the contrary,

> A greater contrast to the Christian story could scarcely be imagined: in once-and-for-all historical events is disclosed God's election of a people chosen from among the nations to be the channel of God's salvation working itself out through space and time. The covenant with Israel is renewed in Christ's baptism, death and resurrection and extended to all peoples and all creatures in the church catholic. The intensely personal nature of this drama of salvation is expressed using Greek philosophical terminology which makes personhood the key to unlocking the mystery of God and confers upon human persons the supreme ethical value of being ends in themselves" (May, 2000:236).

In short, if Christianity handpicks historical events, elect people, and, indeed, human egos as of supreme importance, then Christianity appears to be hopelessly egoistic.

It turns out that not only is Christianity perceived to be theologically egoistic, but that Christianity, we are told, has adopted cultural egoisms—such as consumerism and class, ethnic, and gender oppression—into its worldview. After decrying Christianity for such a "curvature of the ego onto itself," feminist Wendy Farley (2011:135-136) explains, "For this reason, too, dialogue with Buddhism is important to call Christianity back to its ethical moorings in the ideal of universal love and compassion."

No one appreciates being called "egoistic." So, naturally, the Christian wonders what she can do to correct this defect. Well, suggest these interfaith scholars, Christianity can begin eclipsing its egoism in the way it relates to other religions. Japanese interfaith scholar Kosuke Koyama advocated seeing the other religion through the lens of "neighborology"—that is, the religious other is my neighbor who warrants my love (Irvin, 2013:364). Yet even making room for other religions eclipses only a portion of Christian egoism. There are "no degrees in a bodhisattva's compassion," yet Christian love typically singles out humans (Yao, 2006:198). So, Christians can expand the borders of their ego-centeredness wide enough to escape being labeled exclusivists or speciesists. But is the ego eclipsed enough?

An important line remains to be crossed, or, better put, a stubborn circumference remains to be dissolved. Will it be enough for the Christian to love even enemies with the same sacrificial love with which Jesus loved her (John 13:34-35)? On the contrary, what keeps even the most unimaginably loving Christian constrained by egoism is the fact that there remains an ego doing the loving. Buddhism would teach Christianity not merely to live for another, but to essentially live as the other. As theosophist Annie Besant is said to have claimed, Buddhism "does not tell us to love our neighbors [but] . . . to be our neighbors" (Kreeft, 1971:534). According to the Buddha, our most fundamental and injurious illusion is the notion of one's self. The Buddha

taught that what we call a "person" is really a just heap of aggregates. Since attachment to oneself and one's own is the most fundamental of all attachments, it is when one sees through to the notion of "no-self" (*anatman*) that ignorance is broken and the chain links that have bound oneself to the "wheel" of existence begin snapping one after another (Buswell and Lopez, 2014:42-43).

Buddhist scholar Kenneth Inada (1995:6) suggests that, at birth, we are completely "open organisms," defined by "soft" relationships of interdependence. It is only after becoming "fragmented" by "empirical conditions" do our relationships become "hard," defined by inflexible, dualistic boundaries marking persons off from each other (Inada, 1995:4). In the same way, many see the original, pre-fragmented core, not only of Buddhism, but of Christianity as well, being "the same radical call to destroy the ego and to live in interrelating love" (Knitter, 1981a:56). We are told that, "In both Christianity and Buddhism, the fundamental impediment to spiritual maturity is the concept of an individual ego," for did not Jesus empty himself of ego (Philippians 2), and claim not to act and speak independently from the Father (John 14) (Thurston, 1985:343)? With kenosis language as the bridge, and with our present western crisis as the stimulant for crossing, any hesitance is calmed by the reassurance that "God, Jesus, and the Holy Spirit speak to us through an Asian vision and graced mantra and ask us to bring our Gospel spirituality into dialogue with the insightful Buddhist teaching of self-emptying" (Lounibos, 2000). According to Japanese Christian Yagi Seiichi, the fundamental human problem is egoism, expressed mentally as the "discriminating intellect" and practically as a "lack of love" (Drummond, 1987:557). Note the equivocation between egoism (I have a self) and egotism (I only care about myself), a tactic which allows one to use the unopposed goodness of *moral* selflessness to prove the truthfulness of *ontological* selflessness. Seiichi continues, "the

essence of Christian faith lies in the Pauline perception of 'Christ who lives in me' (Gal. 2:20) and in the concept-practice of 'interdependent love'" (Drummond, 1987:559). In the same way, Merton calls this an apophatically-induced transition from ordinary consciousness to "Christ-consciousness," wherein "his I am becomes my I am" (Doud, 1994:267).

The goal—and this seems to be the most exciting part—is not merely the eclipsing of the egos of a handful of neighborly scholars. Never was a goal so ambitious while still so literally selfless. In their dialogues, Abe and Cobb dreamed global plans. "Transformation," they agreed, "must be in the direction of a new universality of humankind" (Rowe, 2008:123-124). Abe christened it the "third historical age of mankind." Cobb called it the emergence of "a global memory," while Abe called it "the age of Self-awakened cosmology." Now, who does not agree that such an age of peace would be nice, and what politician could be elected without similar rhetoric of predictive platitudes? But Cobb and Abe are not politicians, and they do have an actual plan. So, how, do you ask? Says Abe, "We each must awaken to the root of world evil and historical evil deeply within the self and—in the identical foundation of self, the world, and history—we must awaken to the original Self which has broken through the ego" (Rowe, 2008:125). Such shared dreams draw the two dreamers ever closer. The new, "selfless" Christianity becomes a more marriageable prospect each day. And a total eclipse becomes as romantic as a moonlit night.

2.2.11 Tip #11 – "Get the door for her" (accomplishing the altruistic)

If an observation is permitted at this point, it seems that talk of "Buddhicizing" Christianity tends to be framed by interfaith scholars as something of a gift to Christianity, an opportunity to return to a truer, pre-dogmatic core. Yet at any hint of "Christianizing" Buddhism,

lights flash and alarms ring, for, of course, this is just the same old train of Christian imperialism chugging along and ramming into things. Now, there is the dream that Christianity can someday tame its brutish habits—which have turned it into something of a monologuing, reifying, essentializing, egoistic sectarian—and yet become marriageable in the end. But that potential intimacy is a dream. Is this really a romance between equals? What, if anything, does Buddhism actually see in Christianity to be attracted to it? Surely, it cannot be merely the fact that Christianity has historically amassed wealth and influence, for Buddhism repudiates mundane attachments, let alone something as utilitarian as marriage for money. Does Buddhism see anything that Christianity—not as an interfaith "project," but Christianity itself—is good for?

The answer is a qualified yes. Christianity's appeal goes by different names. It has been called a "social-political dimension" (Fors, 2006:89), or "prophetic element" (Reynolds, 2002). Abe was convinced that Buddhism needed to learn from Christianity "about social ethics" (Cobb, 2008:120). Yokota (2002:154), a Pure Land Buddhist, voices what he discovered missing in his own tradition:

> I see that the general Buddhist attitude of not taking this secular world seriously as a fatal flaw from which we must repent and transform ourselves. . . . The disturbance in encountering the ethically inclined, justice-centered Judeo-Christian tradition awoke me to look again at our tradition and draw out the inferences for a Shin Buddhist social ethics.

Prophetic Judeo-Christian voices often chastised those who exploited the poor, ignored the widow, or spurned the orphan (Isaiah 1:17). Scripture pointed to a coming kingdom of God: "Of the increase of his government and of peace there will be no end, on the throne of David and over his kingdom, to establish it and to uphold it with justice and with righteousness from this time forth and forevermore" (Isaiah 9:7). The prophets predicted such a time, until, of course, one such King came saying, "Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand" (Matt. 4:17).

> And he came to Nazareth, where he had been brought up. And as was his custom, he went to the synagogue on the Sabbath day, and he stood up to read. And the scroll of the prophet Isaiah was given to him. He unrolled the scroll and found the place where it was written, "The Spirit of the Lord is upon me, because he has anointed me to proclaim good news to the poor. He has sent me to proclaim liberty to the captives and recovering of sight to the blind, to set at liberty those who are oppressed, to proclaim the year of the Lord's favor." And he rolled up the scroll and gave it back to the attendant and sat down. And the eyes of all in the synagogue were fixed on him. And he began to say to them, "Today this Scripture has been fulfilled in your hearing" (Luke 4:16-21).

So, after all, Buddhism finds Christianity attractive. And yet, if the relationship is to progress, an awkward conversation has to occur sooner or later. There is no question that the Christian commitment to justice, liberation, etc. is the draw, but even in such commitment itself lies the drawback. No one wants to hear, "I find you attractive, but . . . ," although that is precisely the conversation that has to occur. The reason is that in the prophetic critique or eschatological vision—attractive as they are—there is, in some sense, inherent discrimination. It delivers oppressed from oppressor. It elects humanity and labels the rest of the biological world as surplus. It sets people apart and calls them "holy." It redeems the faithful and expels the faithless. And, of course, it all begins with that doctrine that causes automatic breach with Buddhism and irritation to interfaith scholars: the distinction of Creator and Creation.

All the dualisms of Christianity are placed beside the harmonious interconnectivity of Buddhism, and the hope is that the Christian can automatically see the problem. Because injury always proceeds from an "us" to a "them" or vice versa, then violence should be instinctively traceable back to the very concept of "us" and "them." One hates another because one is not the other. A recurring argument in Buddhist-Christian dialogue that follows this logic is the alleged exploitation of the earth. Heedless humans pollute the planet; the problem must therefore be that they are ignorant of their nondual identity with the rest of the planet. We are told that the "dominion" called for in Genesis is the reason for all sorts of western exploitation, and that a

Christianity that takes its liberation mandate seriously will begin to welcome "repressed" nature not only as a nondual equal, but as a theological dialogue partner (Melin, 2006:360). Allied with Buddhism, Christianity can move toward an "ecological, re-sacralised world view," a "radical relationality" (van Schalkwyk, 2011:79-80). One feminist theologian suggests a "feminist ecological model for Christology" to build ecumenical bridges as well as to respond to Asian ecological crises (Fors, 2005:64). It was Cobb who accepted a colleague's criticism that Christianity was largely responsible for the ecological crisis and began creatively reframing his theology around "issues related to social justice, including ecological crisis, gender equality, political liberation, economical development, etc." And such concerns factor prominently in his dialogue with Buddhism (Lai, 2011:83).

Clearly, the invitation is not merely for Christians to work harder at reducing pollution and protected the endangered. The point is not to be more altruistic. The line being drawn is very distinctly altruism minus dualism. Altruistic action is attractive but incomplete. Knitter (1988:349) contrasts the Buddhist's charitable contribution to the Christian's as that of "contemplation and action," "prayer and work," and "spirituality and liberation." Christianity is constructive Martha, and Buddhism is contemplative Mary. True, Christianity acts in the world. No doubt about it. But the implication is that, without Buddhistic insight into the nondualistic interconnectedness of all sentient beings, Christianity works blindly. But just imagine if Christians were to sit under the Bodhi tree long enough to realize the interdependent emptiness of all. As one interfaith scholar puts it, if only Christians were to "envision God as self-emptying power who strengthens the weak, how might we imitate God's humility in all our behavior toward our fellow creatures?" (Kunz, 2011:184). There is definitely altruistic work to be done.

And Buddhism will gladly extend—provided Christianity disowns its dualisms—the right hand of fellowship.

The hands shake, and work begins. Each has strengths the other lacks. According to Zen Buddhist David Loy (2013:401), Christianity teaches us social justice, while Buddhism teaches us our true nature—both of which we need. Christianity combats social dukkha (suffering), while Buddhism—in combatting individual dukkha—keeps us aware that social good never lasts unless undergirded by personal transformation. Again, both approaches are needed. One can be externally free yet a slave to internal cravings. Likewise, one can be awakened yet hostage to economic and political oppression. Loy concludes, "Buddhism and the West need each other." Abe notes the incompleteness of each religion's this-worldly response without the other: "Buddhism tends to put priority on enlightenment over practice and thereby threatens to become a quietism. Conversely, Christianity tends to put priority on action over prayer and thereby threatens to develop a crusade" (Knitter and Abe, 1988:363). Working together, however, Abe envisioned the glorious possibility of interreligious cooperation—converging in the doctrine of *sunyata*—someday helping to "ground a new global community beyond nation-states" (Ives, 2008b:104).

They are, after all, "world religions," and, as such, have tremendous responsibility. They must "do whatever is possible to promote peace, prosperity, and well-being" as their "global responsibilities" (Reilly, 2003:118). Fortunately for the world, not only is altruism the religions' responsibility, but, we are told, their very root. The Dalai Lama sees the denominator of all the world religions as "the message of compassion, forgiveness, tolerance, contentment, simplicity, then self-discipline" (Beverley, 2001a:69). Catholic priest-turned-Zen master Ruben Habito sees how—using skillful means—we can read the words of the Buddha and Jesus as teaching one

message, as they "flow together in the practice of compassion" (May, 2006:191). Jesus Seminar scholar Marcus Borg, his *Jesus and Buddha: The Parallel Sayings* (1997:14-21), notes a shared altruistic vision:

> Jesus (Luke 6:31): Do to others as you would have them do to you (14).
>
> Buddha (*Dhammapada* 10.1): Consider others as yourself (15).
>
> Jesus (Luke 6:27-30): Love your enemies, do good to those who hate you, bless those who curse you, pray for those who abuse you. From anyone who takes away your coat do not withhold even your shirt. Give to everyone who begs from you; and if anyone takes away your goods, do not ask for them again (18).
>
> Buddha (Dhammapada 1.5; 17.3): Hatreds do not ever cease in this world by hating, but by love; this is an eternal truth…Overcome anger by love, overcome evil by good. Overcome the misery by giving, overcome the liar by truth (19).
>
> Jesus (Matthew 25:45): Truly I tell you, just as you did not do it to one of the least of these, you did not do it to me (20).
>
> Buddha (Vinaya, Mahavagga 8.26.3): If you do not tend one another, then who is there to tend you? Whoever would tend me, he should tend the sick (21).

However, a Christian, according to these interfaith scholars, must not merely take all this talk of love and compassion and assume she is to continue just what she has always done, the only difference being that she recognizes the interfaith blessing on her efforts. No, as we have already seen, these interfaith scholars call for a shift to a radically nondualistic worldview, as something of a prerequisite to true, incorruptible altruism. So where does that land the Christian who wants to enter into relationship with Buddhism, yet nonetheless wants to stay a Christian? To answer we can consider a more particular question: Why is it that John Cobb was such a natural and longstanding dialogue partner with the eminent Masao Abe? It is because Cobb was not only a Christian but a Process Theologian. His divinity was never a reified essence, but was itself in process. God is not an object for the ego to cling to, but itself an instance of the

Buddhistic dependent co-arising of all things. It is not to be objectified as a Creator, but experienced as the ongoing "ground of order and growth in the universe" (McDaniel, 1985:696).

Now, it might be assumed that such an abstraction would fail to impress Buddhists with the one crucial Christian attraction—its prophetic commitment to justice and liberation. True, this god is not all-powerful, but this could be seen as that much less of an obstacle to Buddhists who see the "problem of evil" as an insuperable problem for Christianity's traditionally all-powerful God. Yet just because this god is not all-powerful, it is not, therefore, impotent. The god of Process Theology is to be understood as a "divine Lure" (McDaniel, 1985:696).[13] In some sense, the world's wrongs affect god so that it "feels and empathetically identifies with each event." Then, somehow it responds as an "inwardly felt Lure or Call within the depths of pre-reflective experience" (McDaniel, 1985:694). Such a god is pleasantly uncoercive, and, as Cobb exemplifies, such a religion is winningly sociable. All the attractiveness of Christianity without any of the alleged brutishness—such a partner seems worthy of joining hands with.

However, a potential marriage partner is not typically flattered to be desired for only the more marketable facets of his or her self. It is best to be found attractive because of who one is as a total person, not because of what particulars the person contributes to the relationship. Christianity is desired for what it is able to contribute to society (e.g. its "social-political dimension"). Yet, to these interfaith scholars, Christianity's foundational doctrines are undesirable. So the flower, desired for its beauty, is severed from the unsightly soil from which it grows. What will be soon prove a careless method for enjoying a flower's beauty is also a crass

[13] More specifically, Process Theology's god is "dipolar," having two natures: it is the "primordial nature" that acts as the transcendent, mental lure, and the "consequent nature," which is the immanent, changing physical world. In this way Process Theology has a god, but although such a god is dipolar, it cannot be said that its relationship to the world is dualistic. See Odin, Peace in Shin B and Process Theology.

method for entering a marriage.[14] If you appreciate Christianity's ethics, to sever them from their metaphysics is both unwise and unromantic. Pharaoh demanded that the Israelite slaves make bricks without straw, yet they were not to produce a brick less than their normal quota (Ex. 5:17-18). Interfaith scholars demand that Christians redefine God (i.e. to something more nondual, like the deity of Process Theology), yet they expect not a fraction less of Christianity's societal contributions. Interfaith scholars seem to be more pragmatists than romantics, and the marriage they propose seems more transaction than true love.

2.2.12 Tip #12 – "Detach from relatives that don't want you together" (indicting the imperialistic)

Some couples have the misfortune of there being certain family members who do not approve of the relationship. When these associations are at their most injurious, romances can be star-crossed by fixed feuds and bad-blooded bigotry. Let us assume a similar injuriousness with the relationship between Buddhism and Christianity, because we are told—even though history is one thing and interfaith scholarship another—that historically there has been done undeniably irreparable damage by one religious family against the other. In these potentially catastrophic situations, what is the half with the ruinous relatives (i.e. the Christian) to do? Of course, those relatives will point to the obligations of ancestry and so on. But how can irrational, outdated prejudices overpower true love? They cannot, but what is the Christian, who is "in love," so to speak to do? If a person in love wants the relationship to work despite the regrets of the past and the prejudices of the present, this person must keep two things in mind. First, it is not the time for

[14] The reader would be correct in detecting an allusion to the phrase "cut-flower culture," used by the Jewish-American intellectual Will Herberg to describe the inevitable diminishing of a culture's values once severed from the worldview roots of those values (see Prager and Telushkin, 1986:74).

subtle distinctions. The other partner will be unimpressed and certainly offended by distinctions such as, "I know Grandfather so-and-so says such-and-such about you and your family, but really, on the inside, he is a dear man." It is not the time for such distinctions. Second, it is time for straightforward dissociation. If the inescapable understanding is that "It's either them or me," then, if the relationship is going to survive this blow, there must be no fence-sitting. Loyalties must be unmistakable—guilty actions denounced and guilty relatives disowned. Even if bridges burn as a result, such steps must be taken to keep the relationship from getting pulled apart.

Let us take all the purported historical injuriousness of Christians toward Buddhists and bundle it together with the word suggested by these interfaith scholars: *imperialism*. In this context, the word is used to describe any form of aggressive Christian expansion—from the stream roller of proselytizing plus power-politics to its residual fumes of a religiously superior attitude. We will look at five embodiments of Christian imperialism that keep interfaith discussions equipped with its villain. It is historic imperialism that brings agitation to the discussion and sympathy to the cause. And, for the sake of the relationship, it is imperialism in all its forms that must be disowned.

First, there have been incidents of *statist subjugation*. Born in the historic headquarters of the Inquisition, the Spanish Santayana's view of the matter can be summarized as follows:

> Christianity persecuted, tortured, and burned. Like a hound it tracked the very scent of heresy. It kindled wars, and nursed furious hatreds and ambitions. It sanctified, quite like Mohammedanism, extermination and tyranny. All this would have been impossible if, like Buddhism, it had looked only to peace and the liberation of souls. . . . Buddhism had tried to quiet a sick world with anesthetics; Christianity sought to purge it with fire (Kuntz, 2000:159).

Perusing any church history book will reveal an embarrassing catalogue of brutalities carried out through church-state coalition and in the name of God. Though in recent times, far fewer such Christian incidents are available for tallying, the potential, we are told, is always there. This is

because Christians may have changed their customs since then but not their convictions. Knitter (Knitter and Netland, 2013:30) contends that "holding that there is only one true religion promotes violence" because even though such religions might not necessarily be the direct cause of violence, "they can condone it, encourage it, and strengthen it." The reason is simple: "[I]f you are a president or a king seeking to advance your cause, or if you are a political or popular leader seeking to defend your cause, it sure helps to have at your disposal a religion that holds itself up as God's privileged faith." Just take the signs *Gott mit uns!* posted by German soldiers in the trenches during World War I. Those who "are struggling for God's truth and doing God's will, not only will be braver, they also can be more brutal—ready to give their lives." In speaking of the "dark side of religion," Catholic feminist Rosemary Ruether (2005:36) draws our attention to the present "American messianic nationalism" that equates the "war against terrorism" with the "war against evil." Zen scholar Christopher Ives (2006:5) offers the Zen critique of us-and-them, good-and-evil dualism as a corrective to such "essentialist, polarizing representations," so that instead of kneejerk divine proclamations making their way into the political press conference, there could be "sophisticated analysis of the complex causes of events like 9/11."

Second, and more recently citable than actual episodes of Christian-led persecution, is the matter of *colonial collaboration*. Buddhism is often a national, not merely religious, identity. There is a similar difficulty in separating the mission of the Christian missionary from the colonizing of the western colonizer. Because there is, in the Buddhist's mind, an inextricability to his own national/religious identity and of the missionary/colonizer, the perception is that of a doubly vicious threat to a doubly valuable heritage. It is natural to accuse Christian missionaries of "taking advantage of the power of Western colonialism" in their proselytizing (Burford, 2011:150). Indeed, the approach of the missionary and colonizer is easily conflated: "a triumphal

conversion approach toward Buddhists is too much akin to the early British colonial approach of cultural superiority" (Adams, 2008:226).

The third embodiment of imperialism, and one that flows naturally from discussion of colonial collaboration, is Christianity's *expansive evangelization*. Again note how seamlessly the two are affixed:

> The traditional Buddhist allergy to the notion of learning important religious things from religious others, including Christians, has been exacerbated in the modern period by the Asian experience of Western colonialism, which many experienced, in part, as an aggressive assault by Christian missionaries on indigenous Asian beliefs in support of the Western domination of their societies (Makransky, 2011:123).

Now, to be fair, insofar as Buddhist beliefs once supplanted indigenous Asian beliefs, those supplanted Asian cultures must also have felt they were experiencing what Makransky calls the "aggressive assault" of Buddhist missionaries on "indigenous Asian beliefs." One difference, of course, is that Buddhism was able to spread its own culture across Asia more successfully than Christianity, given the current Asian religious demographics. Nonetheless, in asking why there seem to be so many more Christians interested in Buddhism than Buddhists in Christianity, Gross suggests that Buddhists historically pressured by proselytization feel naturally more defensive than does the progressive Christian who feels "free to admire the Buddha without facing any resulting pressure from Buddhists to convert" (Burford, 2011:147). And whereas Buddhists judge paths by their conduciveness to eliminating greed, hatred, and delusion (and thus other-than-Buddhist paths can be seen as at least useful), Christians have traditionally seen more of an ultimatum based on what a person believes about Jesus. So the dilemma becomes, "Can these Buddhists be saved?" If yes, then why such painstaking efforts to convert? If no, then "what does this say about God's grace and love?" (Adams, 2008:224).

Fourth, Christianity is said to be imperialistic because of its *extensive enculturation*. For many, Christianity's cultural dominance in the west has become a troublesome truism. We are told—perhaps overstatedly depending on one's definition of *Christian*—that "the academy remains dominated by Christians, Christian concepts, and hermeneutical frameworks derived from Christianity" (Burford, 2011:154). Asian Buddhists have to "adopt the language of their Christian oppressors in their efforts to compete and to help their religion survive in the face of overt cultural imperialism." This cultural imperialism is something which "perpetuates lopsided power dynamics" (Burford, 2011:154). And "when we fail either to acknowledge Christianity's dominance or to examine seriously the impact of this dominance on our dialogical efforts to conceive of our common humanity, we risk practicing covert cultural imperialism" (Burford, 2011:150).

But has it not also become a truism in the academy—the interfaith community especially—that the real irritant is evangelistic Christianity and that—heritage or not—Evangelical presuppositions are—to put it mildly—no longer presupposed? In fact, Jeffrey Carlson (2003:82), a participant at an Annual Meeting of the Society for Buddhist-Christian Studies, observed that "Christianity loomed large throughout most of the presentations, as a primarily negative presence." Whether its "overemphasis on word and action," its "patriarchal God," or its "prayer to an absolute other," Christianity was the token piñata. Since so many of the participating Buddhists were escapees from Christianity, Carlson joked to those gathered whether perhaps the Society ought to be renamed the "Society for Studies by Christians and by Buddhists-Who-Used-to-be-Christians" (Carlson, 2003:82). No one laughed, perhaps because humor has to have an element of surprise. At such meetings, while the Buddhists are criticizing Christian exclusivism, Christians are criticizing Christian exclusivism. In the end, "Buddhism,

then, is reduced to a form of non-Christianity, instantiating an ironic and deeply unfortunate version of Christian inclusivism" (Carlson, 2003:83). Carlson (2003:82) concludes,

> Buddhism is viewed utterly and limitingly and distortingly through (anti-) Christian eyes as an antidote to (certain forms of) Christianity. If inclusivism is a form of imperialism, then when Christianity continues to dominate the agenda in this way, have we really progressed beyond previous forms of domination, or have we simply replaced them with another, more subtle and thus more insidious form? What would Buddhist-Christian dialogue look like if only Christianity were not so dominant?

Thus, Christianity—more the banished beast in its traditional forms and more the neutered nullity, the declawed pussy in its welcomed forms—is still vilified as an imperialistic bully because it did not take its shadow with it.

Finally, Christianity is said to be imperialistic because of its *adamant affirmations*. Knitter (Knitter and Netland, 2013:29-30) explains, "The game of dialogue is not possible when one religion enters the game claiming that God has dealt them all the aces." And since the deuce of dialogue apparently trumps aces of affirmation in terms of moral imperative, he adds, "What impedes a moral imperative can be considered, I believe, immoral." (Can Only One). So what is the genuine pluralist to do when she stumbles upon one such doctrinal impediment, which threatens to falsify her pluralism? In Ruether's (2005:35) words, "Can 'liberal' Christians who wish to embrace plurality also draw the line against dualism?" As Knitter (Knitter and Netland, 2013:29-30) shows, the key is to set up a moral hierarchy, according to which certain claims can be dismissed without the "truth" question even having to arise. In the same manner, Ruether (2005:29) assures us that any such dilemma can be easily solved. She tells us that some types of religious affirmation are "life-giving," while others are "death-dealing." "Liberals" already instinctively know where to draw the line:

> They draw a line in practice between healthy plurality and dualistic exclusivism, but they have a problem clarifying the distinction in theory. Liberals who set up public meetings to hear from a "variety of perspectives" generally do not include those who they see as

> hostile to this variety. When they want to understand the tragedy of the Holocaust, they wish to listen to the voices of Jewish victims and survivors, not to defenders of Nazism. When they want to understand apartheid in South Africa, they listen to its black victims and white critics, not to white supremacist South Africans. Why? What is the distinction that is being implicitly drawn here, although seldom clarified in theory, by those who wish to speak of openness to pluralism? (Ruether, 2005:35).

Ruether answers her own question with an inadvertently amusing statement clearly *about* pluralism but very doubtfully a statement *of* genuine pluralism: "I suggest that this very openness to pluralism necessitates a closedness to some kinds of views that would rule out pluralism" (35). Now, religiously motivated violence is contemptible. But it is not only violence Ruether denounces here. The problem is broader, as the "dualism that sets good against evil" and belief against belief. In other words, the problem is the perspective that goes against hers, hers being that "different traditions are not mutually exclusive but complementary" (Ruether, 2005:35). Violence aside, one wonders just what beliefs—Christian or Buddhist—that are sincerely held as being true would not warrant Ruether's "closedness." Just how "life-giving," as opposed to "death-dealing" are Ruether's own beliefs? At least Ruether's sentiments are "life-giving" to the anti-imperialist crusade, though they seem to be death-dealing to adamant affirmations of absolute truth, of which Buddhism and Christianity make many.

Because the Japanese theologian Kosuke Koyama grew up in a Christian family, he knew the unfairness of countrymen unable to distinguish between one's religion (Christianity) and the regime it is associated with (United States, at that time Japan's primary enemy). Koyama would go on to observe the bombings of Pearl Harbor and the resulting napalm on Tokyo and atomic bombs over Nagasaki and Hiroshima (Irvin, 2013:367). After seminary training in the United States, he went on to become a missionary in Thailand (Irvin, 2013:361) Already disgusted with the greedy expansion of empires, Koyama began to develop a distaste for the "crusading" mindset of the missionary endeavor, which often employed such militaristic metaphors as

"occupation of fields" and "conquest of other religions" (Irvin, 2013:360). He began to see beyond a theology that pitted Buddhism against Christianity to a "neighborology" which reconciled Buddhists with Christians (Irvin, 2013:364). He began to connect the missionary impulse with the imperialistic impulse such that the two became indistinguishable. The exclusive hold Christians claimed on religious truth indicated a "crusading mind" instead of a "crucified mind" (Irvin, 2013:365). Is it any wonder that these Christians felt not the slightest qualms busily working in the Wichita factories manufacturing the B-29's (Irvin, 2013:367)?

So when Koyama delivered his inaugural lecture at Union Theological Seminary in 1981, he entitled it "Ritual of the Limping Dance" (Irvin, 2013:367). It was Elijah who chastised the Israelites unsure of whether to worship God or Baal, "How long will you go limping with two different opinions?" We are told that the people did not answer him a word. Koyama applauded the Israelites for their "limping dance" and chastised Elijah, for, after all, it was Elijah who went on to slaughter 450 prophets of Baal in his overzealousness. The point? "[I]n its exclusivist expressions Christianity harbored the capacity to foster and even commit great harm. Christianity needed other religions to keep it from losing its own soul." One might return, "But there are distinctions to be drawn! We believe we have the truth, but we would never dream of barbarity! Besides, we live in a democracy, not an Old Covenant theocracy!"

But no such distinctions are listened to by those intoxicated by love, when, in order to preserve the relationship, there are associations to be severed. Thus, it all gets lumped together and disowned: "those theological claims that promote hatred, exclusivism, violence, and oppression of others" (Ruether, 2005:40). By way of consolation, however, the charge of imperialism does not brand one as a hopelessly narrow-minded bigot, if other convicted imperialists are any indicator. Karl Rahner was no conservative. Yet his gracious attempts to get

even unknowing pagans saved by Christ through "Anonymous Christian" status was "demeaning and imperialist," we are told (Brown, 1999:167-168). Even the most renowned pluralist in recent times, John Hick, imposes his own "vision of reality, the vision of one's religious commitment"—a particular primordial reality—and thus "still disguise[s] an unintentional religious imperialism" (Yokota, 2002:143). The slightest hint of any superiority of any position will simply not be tolerated—all in the name of tolerance and for the sake of love.

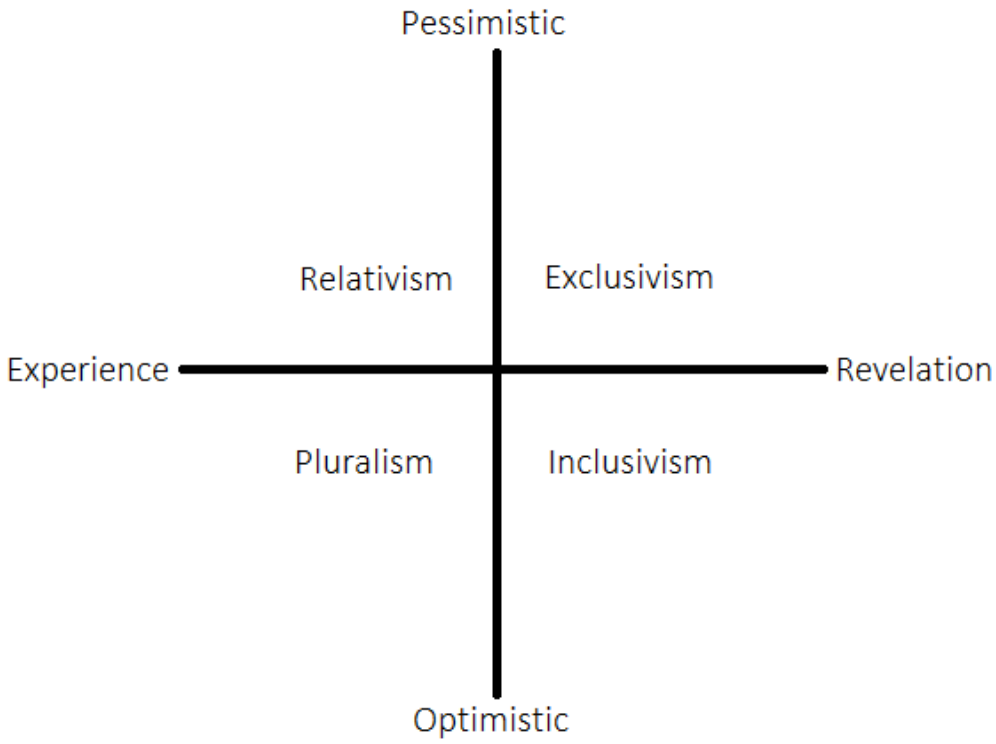
2.2.13 Tip #13 – "Avoid being right all the time" (excluding the exclusivistic)

Infallibility might work in the creeds, but no one enjoys being around it in real life. If in romancing the religious other, you manage to distance yourself as far as possible from the category of "incontestable rightness," you might alienate the base, but you will certainly win the congratulations of the interfaith community. If such is the goal—to avoid being right so as to not be thought of as wrong—which religion's leaders have the edge? In an interview with *Christianity Today*, the closest the Dalai Lama got to claiming "rightness" was to say, "I can say that for me personally, Buddhism is best because the Buddhist approach is most effective to me" (Beverley, 2001a:69). Who could imagine the Pope—even one as approachable as Pope Francis—claiming that Catholicism is best for him because it works best for him! There is just not the kind of elbow room we find in Buddhism for any kind of Christianity that is bound to any measure of infallibility.

In interfaith dialogue, the point is often hazily defined—if defined at all—as getting along better, accomplishing altruistic work better, getting to know other "truths" better, and so on. Being too specific about the goals of dialogue risk one party imposing an agenda. But there is one unmistakable objective presupposed if not mentioned in every lecture, paper, and discussion.

Such a goal—unique in its explicitness—is to remove any and all traces of exclusivism. It is unfortunate to use such a metaphor for such peace-loving folk, but it is as if they band together as allies to withstand a common enemy. This common enemy is clearly defined—or is he? Notice the diagram below:

Figure 1-1: Four views of how religions relate to truth



You will notice the common three categories of how religions relate to truth, going clockwise, as Exclusivism, Inclusivism, and Pluralism. Please note that the Relativism that finishes the clockwise cycle is a very strong type of Relativism, such that there is simply no metaphysical truth whatsoever—not accessible because it is not even existing as a "Real." The strong Relativism envisioned in this final quadrant is to be distinguished from the relativism that undergirds a third quadrant Pluralism, for example, Hick's, according to which there is a Real, to which all the paths—inadequately because of their limited knowledge—point. Please also understand that the categories "pessimistic/optimistic" and "experience/revelation" indicate

continuums. I am not stating that, for example, Exclusivism is always pessimistic (if so, how could missionaries get described as "triumphalistic"?). The idea is that Exclusivism is *more* pessimistic than Inclusivism when it comes to the question of who is saved in the end. Likewise, each quadrant comes in degrees, so that, for example, the more optimistic the Inclusivist, the less she will hold that *sincere* believers of other faiths will be saved through Christ, and she will believe that absolutely *every* believer of whatever faith will be saved (universalism). Using this diagram as a template, let us try to isolate the problem of exclusivity.[15]

2.2.13.1 Exclusivism – All can be saved.

It is clear that, if exclusivism is the enemy, then interfaith dialogue would obviously not welcome any position so far gone that it would actually label itself as "Exclusivism."[16] To be clear, "exclusivistic" describes views (e.g. "That view is too exclusivistic."), but it also is a view (e.g. "That Evangelical identifies himself as an Exclusivist."). Now, before the actual tenets of Exclusivism are even presented, one unfortunate reputation precedes it. As religious scholar Douglas Cowan (2000) documents, many Exclusivists writing on Buddhism have shown themselves to be often misinformed and sometimes downright unpleasant. Here are some examples of obviously sloppy scholarship: The core of Zen is said to be "love of self first, last and always" (Cowan, 2000:27). Buddhism was a "violent protest against Hinduism" (Cowan,

[15] Netland (Knitter and Netland, 2013:35) mentions that the traditional categories of Exclusivism, Inclusivism, and Pluralism are somewhat unhelpful because they simply cannot capture all "different, very carefully nuanced perspectives." This seems like a true observation. However, because no widely agreed upon categories have risen to replace these, it seems best to use them here.

[16] In this section, if used as the official viewpoints being discussed, Exclusivism, Inclusivism, Pluralism, and Relativism will be capitalized. If used as descriptive (e.g. exclusivistic, relativistic), they will be lower cased.

2000:35). Buddhism and Hinduism are simply forms of each other, and fit nicely under the category of "New Age."

But instead of focusing on obviously unfortunate samplings of Exclusivists, will a definition help dig Exclusivism out of its hole? What is Exclusivism? Perhaps the best way to define it in such a way that captures the full shock it gives interfaith scholars is through a story. Shin Buddhist Kenneth Tanaka (2005:41) recounts,

> In one of our sessions a few years back, the discussion moved to a topic of the nature of "ultimate path," which, as it turned out, began to raise some extremely sensitive issues. An unusually tense atmosphere hung over the discussion table, a rare turn of events for our usually jovial dialogue group composed mostly of liberalminded members. One of the Christian members gave voice to her fundamental view that Jesus was the sole path through which one can be saved. It was clearly what anyone would regard as an exclusivist position. In asking for further clarification, she reiterated her view that her Christian faith necessitated that she took that position, and that I as a Buddhist was, therefore, not included in that soteriological scheme. I responded to her that I understood that I would not be in *her* scheme since I was not Christian, but would I nevertheless be saved? After some hesitation, in so many words, she replied that I would *not* be! Had she been a member of a more conservative group, it would have been easier to accept that kind of a response, but coming from an academic with liberal leanings, her comments caught me off guard.

An Exclusivist is diagnosed by interfaith scholars as those who insist on dividing people, in the words of Koyama (2002:80), into "two groups: the saved and damned, children of light and children of darkness, people inside the ark and people outside the ark, the follower of true God (Yaweh) (sic) and false God (Baal), the chosen and gentiles, and sheep and goats." They see antagonism where there could be complementarity because they are doggedly "reacting to the increased awareness of religious diversity by reinforcing one's own identity against all others rather than creatively transforming and developing one's identity through mutual integration or even interpenetration" (Schmidt-Leukel, 2003:267).

Now, admittedly, not all traditional Evangelicals are clumsy with facts or even unpleasant. Evangelical scholars Keith Yandell and Harold Netland are applauded for providing

"an exemplary model for future evangelical discussions of Buddhism" (Yong, 2011b:103), for they have done their homework and avoid constructing straw men. They evaluate Buddhism "respectfully and with dialogical rhetoric quite different from the kinds of polemic deployed by prior generations of evangelicals" (Yong, 2011b:104). However, in the end, they are guilty of presuming "either/or logic" and remaining "at the level of philosophical discourse and analysis," and thus miss the more fruitful commonality that comes at the level of religious practice. According to interfaith scholar Amos Yong, Yandell and Netland—gracious as they are compared to most Evangelicals—are nonetheless lacking in interconnection and hospitality (Yong, 2011b:112-113).

In other words, there is a problem with Exclusivism besides its misinformed, misanthropic reputation. The very idea that one religion uniquely offers salvation with no guarantees given to adherents of other religions is seen as problematic even if the disposition is kind and the scholarship impeccable. Gross (2005b) explains why. According to Gross, a pluralist is not, in fact, obligated to accept all beliefs as true. She calls beliefs pluralists cannot accept "absolutist": "The absolutist does not tolerate tolerance or the coexistence of multiple religious systems. This means that the pluralist is ill-advised to regard religious absolutism as simply another point of view . . ." (Gross, 2005b:18). One reason given for why pluralists cannot accept absolutist views is that absolutist views do not accept pluralist views. She continues, "Such openness [to absolutistic views] would eventually result in the elimination of the pluralist." So, according to Gross, it is an oversimplification to say that pluralists applaud all beliefs equally: "Pluralists claim that multiple religious symbol systems can coexist without needing to be ranked. . . . But pluralists do not claim that all religious symbol systems are equally valid . . ." (Gross, 2005b:18). One might ask what makes a belief system valid or invalid. Gross

answers, "One criterion is paramount: Does a religious belief help or hinder human and planetary well-being? Does it do what religions are supposed to do, that is to promote positive human transformation?" (Gross, 2005b:19).

If the point of religions is to promote human transformation and planetary well-being, then it should seem that Christianity would receive Gross's applause, so long as Christians hold their beliefs as true but not use them to hurt people. However, such a happy presumption would be premature. According to Gross, the problem is not merely the forcefulness with which one *imposes* the belief, but the forcefulness with which one *believes* it: "Exclusive truth claims on the part of any religion are unacceptable to pluralists not because of whatever metaphysical ideas such religions may put forth, but because of the ethical consequences of their claim to exclusivity" (Gross, 2005b:19). Yet one wonders how *truth* claims can have *ethically* unacceptable consequences if one holds them kindly. Gross explains, "Their claim to exclusive truth lands them in the ethical position of causing harm to others by denigrating the religions of others and using all possible methods to get them to change religious allegiance" (Gross, 2005b:20). She goes on to categorize these methods: "'All possible methods' have included physical force and often include psychological coercion . . . ." Of course, embarrassing uses of physical force chronicled in church history books are commonly apologized for and repented of; Christians can accommodate Gross's grievances in that category. But what exactly does Gross see as "psychological coercion"? They "often include the psychological coercion of threatening others about eternal consequences for not converting to the perspective of the religious exclusivist."

In other words, physical force is put into the same category as psychological coercion, which, when defined, translates to "You won't be saved otherwise," and hence simply restates

the Exclusivist position. That is, Exclusivism should not be tolerated by the Pluralist because it can cause physical force, but even when it does not, then Exclusivism should be not be tolerated because it is Exclusivism. However helpful religions might be, we are warned, "when absolute and exclusive truth claims attach to them, they become intolerable monsters" (Gross, 2005b:20). This goes even when they foment nothing more monstrous than a Bible college graduate crossing the sea with a Bible in her hand and "love for the nations" in her heart—still intolerable because she includes in her presentation the fact that Jesus talked a lot about hell. That counts as psychological coercion. Besides, "Such beliefs about exclusivity always have imperialistic and harmful consequences," not least of which is that "it is a point of view that would eliminate its rivals if it could" (Gross, 2005b:20), not least of which is Pluralism itself. Now, to clarify, *eliminate* can mean "to kill" or "to convert." Let us not go reading the worst of church history as a present-day newspaper and plant sensationalistic rumors that Christians are going around beheading those of other faiths. On the other hand, if *eliminate* means "to convert," then are we meant to believe that Pluralism in turn does not also wish to "eliminate" its rivals? Having not clarified the meaning of "eliminate" (but indicating that it has to do with either physical force or psychological manipulation), Gross would assure us she has no wish to do anything so drastic. But somebody at some point needs to clarify the difference between "eliminating" and "relativizing" a religion to nothing more than "language-based truth claims and symbol systems" (Gross, 2005b:18).

2.2.13.2 Inclusivism/Universalism: All will be saved.

So, not surprisingly, Exclusivism is too exclusivistic for these interfaith scholars. Its good news of "All can be saved" presupposes too particular a savior. What about the next clockwise

step: does Inclusivism escape the charge of exclusivity? Of course, Inclusivism is definitely seen as going "in the right direction." Interfaith scholars point out how Nestorian missionaries in the 7th to 9th centuries were commendably quite inclusivistic in their dealings with Chinese Buddhists (Scott, 1985:92-93). In fact, using the philosophical 2nd century Justin Martyr and the 20th century Second Vatican Council as bookends, Corless (2007:107-108) sees the Exclusivism of Christianity as something negotiable, and indeed only basically universal from Augustine through to the Reformation.

However, Inclusivism—appreciated as it is for its good intentions—is clearly not praised as being any great step out of exclusivity. In fact, Inclusivism might be even be perceived as more insulting to the religious other than Exclusivism! This is because whereas the Exclusivist is content to take the religious other's claims at face value (albeit as false), the Inclusivist often presumes to know better what the religious other *really* believes (e.g. "You might think you are a Buddhist, but you are really an "anonymous Christian"). According to Yong (2011b:106), "the inclusivist vision finally subordinates the insights of the alien faith to that of the home tradition." When the innovative Thai Bhikkhu Buddhadasa interpreted Gospels using "Dharma language," he "may be criticised [sic] for claiming the right to define what Christianity is really about, and in doing so closing the doors for further constructive dialogue" (Haug, 2006:77). Comparative theology scholar James Fredericks (2003:253) describes the Buddhist reaction when Christians interpret their Dharma using "Gospel language":

> By casting the question within the framework of Christian soteriology, Catholics continue to talk to themselves. . . . The debate among Catholic "liberals" and "conservatives" over *how* other believers are saved seldom takes into account the teachings of the other religious traditions. This amounts to a subtle triumphalism. Catholic "liberals," following the course charted by Karl Rahner, want to recognize other religious traditions as the work of the Holy Spirit. My own Buddhist friends assure me that this is not the case and that I will never appreciate the *Dharma* to the extent that I persist in this belief. How are Shiite Muslims and Vajrayana Buddhists to react to assurances by Catholics that they are

> saved by Christ? Perhaps they react the way Catholics do when they learn of Hindu groups who teach that Jesus of Nazareth is an *avatar* of Lord Vishnu.

Knitter (Knitter and Netland, 2013:28-29) summarizes the situation as "at one time just about all the churches held firmly that Christianity is the only true religion, today many churches do not. My Roman Catholic community is an example of a major Christian denomination that, as it were, has changed its mind . . . ." Then he summarizes the typical interfaith response: "*This means that more change can come*. . . . [I]f the church has shifted from exclusivism to inclusivism . . . a further shift from inclusivism to pluralism would seem to be possible."

2.2.13.3 Pluralism: All paths will save.

So, while the Exclusivist good news that "All can be saved" offers too particular a savior, the Inclusivist/Universalist good news that "All will be saved" offers too particular a salvation. So the circumference has to widen again. The next step, in order for neither savior nor salvation to be too particularly defined, is to claim that all paths will indeed save. Of course, John Hick paints himself with a rather conspicuous target for explaining exactly *how* all religions can be said to be true. Hick (2006) starts with the Kantian dictum that God is fundamentally unknowable in essence. Thus, any statement about God is necessarily a statement about one's own experience with God as unique manifestations of the unknowable. And, of course, how can one be wrong about her own experience of the ineffable, even if it contradicts another's? Hick's vulnerability lay in his decision to call the Ultimate by a name—a vague name to be sure—but a name nonetheless.

> Hick's *pluralist* position assumes that no one religion is definitive, but that each attempts to articulate an ineffable ultimate reality that Hick calls "the Real."
>
> Yet Hick's pluralistic hypothesis harbors a curious inconsistency: he does not allow various religions simply to coexist. Instead, he imposes an additional global meta-theory about "the Real" that entails specific theological claims of its own. Hick contends

> that the various conceptions of the absolute—Trinity, Allah, Brahman, *Sunyata*—refer to a different "persona" or "impersona" of the Real. In Kantian terminology, they are all "phenomenal manifestations of the noumenal real-in-itself." Hick thus demythologizes each religion, or "phenomenal manifestation" of the Real, on the basis of his meta-theory of "The Real," which becomes the privileged account of ultimate reality (Brown, 1999:167-168).

At least in Buddhist-Christian dialogue, Hick is consistently helpful in making it clear what position one is *not*. While many claim to be "genuine" pluralists, Hick is often dismissed as a pseudo-pluralist. We might ask why. The charge is that he charted a metaphysical summit, even though it is fundamentally impenetrable through the epistemological fog. "The Real" subsumes the rest. In contrast, there are the "real" pluralists such as John Cobb. Cobb calls himself a "radical pluralist" (Fors, 2006:82). While he charges Hick with treating the religions as if each major object of devotion is another name for the same reality, Cobb sees the religions as fundamentally different from each other and reconcilable because of their puzzle piece-like differences. Since, in keeping with this difference, he holds that each religion is only analyzable according to its own norms, Cobb can claim, "So am I affirming Christian uniqueness? Certainly and emphatically so! But I am affirming the uniqueness also of Confucianism, Buddhism, Hinduism, Islam and Judaism. With the assumption of radical pluralism, nothing else is possible" (Fors, 2006:83).

So far so good. Hick makes epistemologically impervious metaphysical claims, but Cobb claims nothing except what each religion claims for itself. However, it should be noted that Cobb's dialogue has not been with each religion, but with Buddhism. Moreover, it is significant that Cobb's Buddhist-Christian dialogue works precisely because Cobb is theologizing from a process theology model. His god is in process; otherwise, his god could not be made to fit into the emptiness of Buddhist metaphysics. Cobb holds that emptiness is the ultimate reality, whereas his god is the ultimate actuality of that reality. "They are two different ultimacies

interrelated with each other" (Fors, 2006:88). This alliance has led some to criticize "Cobb as seeking confirmation in Buddhism for what he already knows through his Whiteheadian Christianity" (Fors, 2006:92). Quite obviously, Cobb advocates a particular metaphysics, but it is simply one amenable to some Buddhists and some Christians and thus is not dismissed as pseudo-pluralism. Yet somehow Hick has been declared guilty of imposing his metaphysics with the enigmatic "Real," whereas Cobb has supposedly stumbled upon a truly universal pluralistic system. However, it is doubtful whether the process god-emptiness synthesis can sail very far toward other seas with its anchor in Buddhist-Christian dialogue. Even if all the religions could somehow be fit into the scheme of Buddhist emptiness, how is this less of an imposition than fitting the religions into a far less defined "Real"?

As it turns out, the heroes of the Buddhist-Christian relationship—those truly able to straddle both worlds—all land somewhere, and tend to plant their flags in more concrete metaphysical ground than the "Real." Like Cobb, Paul Ingram the Lutheran is hailed as a pluralist who "rather than adopting the Kantian epistemology and its agnosticism" nonetheless "defends a Whiteheadian process philosophy and metaphysics" (Yong, 2011b:108). Likewise, Shin Buddhist Yokota (2002:143-145) criticizes Hick's position as "still disguis[ing] an unintentional religious imperialism," but who nonetheless owes his own system "much, if not all, to John B. Cobb's work in interreligious dialog and its general philosophical and theological orientation derived from Whiteheadian process thought." And unlike Hick's endeavor to be a pluralist with regard to all religions, Yokota admits, "Christianity is the only other religious tradition with which I can adequately converse." Knitter (2012:22) the Catholic is clear that his Buddhist-Christian synthesis is possible because although Christianity provides the "living color," it is Buddhist metaphysics that provide the "big picture." Indeed, his is a union between

"Buddhist Ontology and Christian Particularity." The point is that Hick is not alone in having to land somewhere metaphysically. Yet he is "imperialistic" for having done so. Perhaps the solution is to expand the circumference once more.

2.2.13.4 Relativism: All beliefs are safe.

The three traditional categories of how religions relate to truth—Exclusivism, Inclusivism, Pluralism—tend to invite criticism. It is often easy to detect in Buddhist-Christian interfaith scholars irritation toward the categorization. These scholars tend to castigate the first two options and only identify with the third in a highly nuanced way. They claim to be Pluralists, but in an unequivocally non-Hickian sense that nonetheless shows a metaphysical preference for something that fits Buddhism and/or Christianity. Those with process theology or emptiness metaphysics might be able to be "pluralists" when it comes to the two religions that can be made to fit such metaphysics, but then what of the other religions which do not fit without imperialistic revisions? What prevents the pluralistic heroes of the Buddhist-Christian relationship from being Exclusivists with regard to all the other religions? Simply adding one to make two religions that get along is not pluralism. So you can settle for a metaphysics that accommodates a Buddhist-Christian synthesis, but that is not Pluralism. You can settle for Hick's metaphysics that accommodates all religions, but that is still imposing a metaphysics. The problem is not merely Exclusivism, which offers too particular a savior, or Inclusivism, which offers too particular a salvation, but the problem remains even for the Pluralist who, like Hick, cannot help but subsume the religions under too particular a metaphysics. And, of course, the way out of that obstacle is to erase and redraw the boundaries once again, this time eschewing the search for any kind of transcendent Truth whatsoever. The solution to pursuing a particular (even if unknown)

metaphysics is to see all metaphysics as created equal, with emphasis on the word *created* with the meaning of "contrived."

Yokota (2002:143) points out the problem with this Relativism—the idea that there is simply no metaphysical truth whatsoever, not accessible, not even existing—as it relates to the Buddhist-Christian relationship. First, he explains the position: "One reality common to all beyond this multiplicity simply does not exist." This kind of thinking "is most thoroughly upheld by positivistic forms of the history of religions and has taken a radical turn in its most recent evolution through the influence of post-modern deconstructionism." Have we finally stumbled upon that elusive view of complete objectivity? He goes on to point out,

> Nevertheless, it too has an assumed perspective and is in no way totally free to be objective. The metaphysical assumptions that establish and have established religious faith are seen as untenable. The result of this radical religious empiricism is a thoroughgoing relativism. It gives sole credence to socio-historical dynamics (which obviously must be recognized) with no acknowledgment of transcendent and universal claims of truth and the existence of ultimate reality which underlie these claims. . . . Each tradition is unto itself with no basis for mutuality and comparison among its many co-traditions. There is a chaotic multiplicity. This Babel-like condition may be the way things are, but that prospect spells doom for any one religious tradition to make any ultimate claims on it [sic] adherents. For the religious-minded, it would seem to be a fatal turn (Yokota, 2002:144).

It is as if, for those interfaith scholars who have made it thus far through the cycle and still desire to say something not skeptical, the only thing they are able to say with confidence is, "There are many religions, and they all teach what they teach."

2.2.13.5 What about Buddhism?

So, to reference the above diagram again, consider the two vertical pairs: Relativism and Pluralism, Exclusivism and Inclusivism. As we have seen, the Buddhist-Christian interfaith scholar must avoid Exclusivism—because it is impolite to invite others into their circle—but

must also avoid Inclusivism—because it is imperialistic to count them as already in. Likewise, she must avoid Relativism—lest there be no reality to experience—but must also avoid (Hick's) Pluralism—lest there be realities to exclude. So she ends up defining her own "middle way" by way of eschewing all these extremes, and in some form comes out as a relativistic non-Relativist, pluralistic non-Pluralist, inclusivistic non-Inclusivist, unequivocally non-Exclusivist Buddhist-Christian. Again, the most straightforward statement that can be made about her is that she rejects anything exclusivistic. But that includes rejecting much more than just Exclusivism.

In fact, before Buddhism met interfaith scholarship, Buddhism would have been excluded as exclusivistic. Pristine Buddhism remains so. When Tanaka (2005:41-42) was caught off guard with his colleague's assertion that, according to her system, Tanaka was unsaved, Tanaka began reflecting on his own Shin Buddhist tradition. Tanaka began to realize that even the liberal-minded Shinran "firmly believed that the Pure Land way was not only *his* choice but the *only* teaching appropriate for *all* people" (Tanaka, 2005:42). Shinran taught that "the Pure Land teaching was in a *class by itself* and superior to all other 84,000 teachings—thus, exceptional" (42). Yokota (2002:146) too says of this most approachable of Buddhist sects, "The classical material reflects a wholly negative attitude toward other religious traditions. Other Buddhist traditions are negated as well. Even strands of the Pure Land tradition are given a provisional status."

Neither is Zen Buddhism, which joins Pure Land as a mainstay at the interfaith roundtable, as plastic as one might imagine. After years in gracious dialogue, Cobb (2008:120-121) conceded of a Zen Buddhist renowned for East-West harmonizing,

> Abe had been so original and helpful in his proposals for the development of Christian theology that he emboldened me to make suggestions about Buddhism. Abe had taught me so much, I hoped that I could teach him something about process that would enable

> him to accomplish his goal of making Buddhism more relevant to the concrete historical situation. But I could not.

Another observer points out that while Abe asks westerners to repackage their ontology of "God and "Being," yet, for him, the "fundamental ontological category of Zen though ('Nothingness') is never seriously challenged." Perhaps "Abe does indicate the need for Zen to learn from Western thought. Yet this need does not reach down to the essentials" (Dean, 1989:58-59). As Abe (1994:6) himself put it,

> The position of Buddhism towards other faiths is often characterized as one of tolerance by Western scholars. It may, however, be that the term "tolerance" has been applied according to Western, especially Christian, standards, and is misleading in that it does not get to the heart of Buddhism. Grounded in nirvana, the Buddhist position is a "positionless position" in the sense that, being itself entirely nonsubstantial, it lets every other position stand and work just as it is. Buddhism naturally does not exclude other faiths as false, but recognizes the relative truths which they contain.

It is simply a misconception that Buddhists as a whole are as willing to budge on their beliefs as Christian interfaith scholars are eager to do with traditional Christianity. Cobb and Abe once summarized the Buddhist-Christian relationship, noting that, on the one hand, the "dialogue has been more of a monologue, with Christians addressing the questions to Buddhists." On the other hand, they comment, "There is a pervasive Buddhist complacency toward, and disinterest in, Christianity, born out of the conviction of the superiority of 'Emptiness' to 'God,' as a designation for Ultimate Reality" (McDaniel, 1984:304). Interviews with senior Catholic and Buddhist nuns in the United States revealed similar lopsidedness: "Several Buddhist nuns wondered why the Catholic nuns were looking to them for forms, and what this might mean about the state of the Catholic tradition. One Buddhist nun questioned whether the Catholic tradition lacked wholeness" (Bender and Cadge, 2006:237).

Well, what about the Buddha himself? Could it not be that he was more open to other paths, and his followers simply became more exclusivistic as the religion became more

institutionalized? Makransky (2003:344) points out that though the Buddha spoke skillfully, reinterpreting Indic terms and speaking Buddhist truth in the language of other worldviews, the Buddha clearly critiqued opposing views. If there is an edge Buddhism has over Christianity in being less exclusivistic in its doctrines, it is that the Buddha recognized the ability of other paths to potentially help its adherents along in the virtues (e.g. nonattachment) conducive to the Buddhist path. Yet even where there are said to be alien elements conducive to the path, we must not rule out that such words of commendation could be merely *upaya*, meant to move as many as possible, by whatever means possible, onto the true path. And the Buddha's successors, the scholars and branch founders throughout the centuries, have carried themselves with the same conviction of correctness. Makransky (2003:358) concludes after a comparison with Catholic writings, "most Buddhist thinkers, just as the authors of the Vatican documents, have *not* accepted a theological pluralism. They viewed the teaching of their tradition as uniquely efficacious in its salvific function."

To dramatize this point, let us consider Chinese Shin patriarch Shandao's (613-681) Parable of the White Path (Shandao, 2014:84-86). Attacked by thugs and beasts, a traveler flees west until he stops short at what he sees just below him. If he keeps going, he will surely fall into one of two rivers, separated by an incredibly narrow 4-5 inch path. One river swells with violent waters; the other leaps up and down with flames. Both are immeasurably deep and long. If he goes back or stays, there is certain death. His only option is to continue west along this narrow path, with flames licking at his feet and waves sloshing over the path. As he takes his first steps, a voice from the East says, "O traveler, just resolve to follow the path forward! You will certainly not encounter the grief of death. But if you stay where you are, you will surely die." Just then, a voice from the West echoes, "O traveler, with mind that is single, with right-

mindedness, come at once! I will protect you. Have no fear of plunging to grief in the water or fire." With new resolve, the traveler "advances directly forward with mind that is single, forthwith reaches the western side, and is free forever of all afflictions." Now, the attackers are one's own treacherous attachments to ego. The fire and water are the poisons of greed and anger. The encourager from the East is none other than Sakyamuni, the historic Buddha, and the speaker from the West is Amida Buddha from his western paradise. The narrow path going west is the pure mind set on rebirth in the Amida's Pure Land.

The point, of course, is that, if both Christianity and Buddhism claim in various ways to be the "narrow path" (e.g. Matt. 7:13), it seems difficult if not impossible to please both religious founder and interfaith scholar. Indeed, even cycling through the progressively more open views provided by interfaith dialogue—Exclusivism, Inclusivism, Pluralism, Relativism—it is next to impossible to land anywhere that is not labeled too exclusivistic in some sense. Even if you somehow disavow all connections to particular saviors, salvations, and metaphysics, you find yourself in a secularistic wasteland, according to which every religious adherent is patronized as an "anonymous simpleton." The question becomes not, "What is exclusivistic so that we might banish its last traces from our midst," but rather, "What is not exclusivistic so that we might actually have something to build upon?"

Of course, as a Christian, the question I have is, what if Christianity was, in fact, revealed? The fact is that, even if it were true that God did exist and revealed Himself once-and-for-all in Jesus and then told people to tell everybody the news, we could not, according to these interfaith scholars, believe it. The logic seems to be that, even if God revealed something, humans could never comprehend it. Should God create humans in his image so that humans could, in fact, understand, and even if He communicated the message, confirming it through miracles, still the

message should not be held with conviction because it would be setting itself up against the experiences of others with their versions of the Ultimate. In the end, these interfaith scholars are not so much attacking exclusivity (because they themselves are not above excluding certain religious beliefs) as they are averse to the possibility of certain types of reality. Truly, it is impossible to please both founder and interfaith scholar; in fact, if you believe anything strongly whatsoever, it might be impossible to please these interfaith scholars period. The word *insatiable* comes to mind, but that refers to something Buddhists generally frown upon.

2.2.14 Tip # 14 – "Avoiding trying to change each other" (extinguishing the evangelistic)

And now we come to an exceedingly touchy issue. Both of the two whom other people want to get together have something in common that might well spell their ultimate incompatibility. Buddhism and Christianity have always been "transnational religions," or to put it in such a way that the problem immediately manifests itself, "missionary religions" (Yandell and Netland, 2009:69). *Missions* and *missionary* are indeed unpleasant words in the context of interfaith dialogue. If interfaith scholars used a common, "interfaith" dictionary for communicating with each other, it would not be surprising if the word *missionary* was accompanied by a picture of a grouchy miser, with the definition including "one who imperializes, colonializes, and might even cannibalize." But how can interfaith scholars, sworn to preserve traditions so that they are *not* converted to bigger-and-better westernized models, oust this irritating impulse, without becoming the imperializers themselves?

2.2.14.1 Regulate it away.

One way to subdue the missionary impulse—though doubtfully one which simply lets the religions be—is by regulating it away. After all, what can be more damaging to the interfaith impulse than the "climate of distrust, even hatred" that "has characterized [Buddhist-Christian] relationships over past centuries"? Former Buddhist monk, Episcopal theologian Kenneth Fleming (2001:181) explains the reason for this climate:

> Most of the blame is directed at Western Christian missionaries—militant efforts to convert, condemnation of the religion. Such was the case with Francis Xavior in Japan and Matteo Ricci in China. Though appreciative of Asian cultures, they had little respect for Buddhism.

So, yes, sometimes interfaith scholars regulate—whether outright in meetings or implicitly as it advises religious leaders—in order to guard against any motive other than mutual enrichment. Catholic Archbishop Rembert Weakland (2008:94), reflecting upon his opening greetings at the Bangkok conference at which Merton was to give his final lecture, recalls, "They were short and had only one aim: to place the meeting in an open and positive context so that it would contain no shade of proselytizing." He assured participants, "We come not to civilize, not to conquer, not to convert, but to be here." As Evangelical Timothy Tennett (2002:15-16) notes, it has become a pass-or-fail prerequisite in interfaith dialogue: "no one can use the c word (*conversion*). Persuasive speech is characterized as crass proselytizing."

2.2.14.2 Reconcile it away.

A more congenial way of extinguishing the evangelistic is through letting the relationship do it naturally. Perhaps once the relationship has been formalized, each of the two will realize that the other is actually already saved. Merton, reflecting on his friendship with Suzuki, toyed with the idea and decided to go with it:

> [I]f I tried baldly and bluntly to 'convert' Suzuki, that is, make him 'accept' formulas regarding the faith that are accepted by the average American Catholic, I would, in fact, not 'convert' him at all, but simply confuse and (in a cultural sense) degrade him. Not that he does not need the Sacraments, etc. but that is an entirely different question (Pramuk, 2008:81).

It was a dilemma, for, Merton reasoned that Suzuki "would be immeasurably more sincere and more saintly per se, if he came to the Sacraments and were a visible member of the Church," yet, "who says that Suzuki is not already a saint?" (Pramuk, 2008:81). So Merton concluded that he would concentrate on "the most important thing," cultivating the friendship. Ingram (2006:235), a Lutheran, dichotomizes the monologue of missiology—the motive of most Lutheran interreligious contact—and the dialogue that naturally flows from living side-by-side with adherents of other faiths. Says Ingram (2006:235),

> Most lay persons understand that they must live their faith contextualized by their religiously plural neighborhoods. Lutheran laity are interested in the religious practices and worldviews of their neighbors because they are in contact with their neighbors everyday. They desire to meet and know the religious "other" not as "other," but as fellow human beings seeking to live in community.

The implication is clear: you can either see a person of another faith as an "other" to convert or as a human to love as your neighbor. Yet such a dichotomy is false. One might love and seek to convert the same person. In fact, if one truly believes that what she believes is true (and how could she not believe it is true if she truly *believes* it?), she really ought to seek to convert the person *if* she truly loves the person. I realize such logic takes the interfaith scholar far from her convictions, but such logic is indeed logical. Yet the interfaith scholar assumes that once you truly see the "other" as neighbor and friend, the impulse to convert simply evaporates.

2.2.14.3 Reason it away.

Of course, another way to expel evangelism is by persuasion. This can take the form of simply asserting that thinking people are no longer doing that sort of thing. For example, Thai "Engaged Buddhist" Sulak Sivaraksa (2002:86) asserts, "Thankfully, the missionary perspective on the inferiority of non-Christian religions is no longer the reality and we can more [sic] forward as equal partners in a shared struggle." Religion scholar Harold Coward (1988:370) takes a more systematic approach. He disputes the "supermarket" stereotype, according to which people are free to simply choose their own religion. Coward (1988:372-374) gleans from Thomas Kuhn (our scientific knowledge is paradigm-bound), Hans Küng (applied Kuhn's paradigms to religion), Nagarjuna (free choice cannot occur because we are ego-attached to paradigms), Freud (unconscious drives dominate our rationality), and Rahner (no interreligious common ground except as "anonymous Christian"). He contends that the most interreligious exposure usually does is to reinforce or enrich one's relationship to one's own religion, and that true conversion is highly improbable given our paradigm-regulated reasoning. His conclusion reasons from improbability to impermissibility: "The practical implication is that dialogue between religions does not weaken commitment but strengthens it. The missionary goal of converting all others to be like oneself is seen as misguided and inappropriate. Rather, the goal of dialogue is the spiritual growth of all" (Coward, 1988:382). If such an argument from improbability were to fail, Gross (2005a:3) turns up the heat in suggesting that what hangs in the balance is a "world riddled by conflict": "No wonder some religious leaders consider interreligious understanding and dialogue to be urgent. Debate and proselytization cannot be the major modes of interreligious interaction when so much is at stake." Appealing to reason might

work with reasonable people, but, as Apostle Paul put it, "I will show you a still more excellent way" (I Cor. 12:31b).

2.2.14.4 Redefine it away.

If missions is chronic to both religions, then perhaps it will not work to simply regulate or reconcile or even reason it away. Perhaps one does not have to. As some have noted, the evangelistic impulse can be rechanneled in ways advantageous to the interfaith agenda. One could even use the same terminology—no doubt negated of all militancy—to describe the more productive endeavors. Knitter (Knitter and Netland, 2013:41), for example, advocates proposing one's own universal truths to the religious other, with eyes open for universal truths they might be willing to exchange. Thus, he can say,

> And therefore I remain a missionary. All religious believers, if they take their beliefs seriously, have to be missionaries. They want to share the truth that they have been given. . . .
>
> Yes, I make my universal claims, but in the humble recognition that there may be universal claims coming from others (now I'm getting back to the Holy Spirit working in other religions) that could lay claim on me.

That is, of course, a very different rendering of the idea of "missions." Cobb offers an additional rechanneling of the missionary mandate, and one that can also further the interfaith agenda: More "important than the conversion of individual Buddhists, Hindus, or Muslims is the conversion of Buddhism, Hinduism, and Islam" (Prozesky and Edwards, 1986:69). Public policy specialist Virginia Strauss (2002:125) suggests that, since the "usual alternatives" of Exclusivism, Inclusivism, and Pluralism center on the question of "Who is saved?"—and since only few theologians believe the question is even answerable, it is time for new categories and motivations. However, she notes,

> I suggest that Christians may not want to jettison the saving impulse so quickly. Adjusting it to the realities of today's world may be a better approach. Moving beyond the rather hard-hearted question of who is saved and who is not, Christians might see that in earthly terms, everyone needs saving. How can we contemplate the growing economic oppression of peoples throughout the world, warfare and strife and the resulting human suffering, and the destruction of the biosphere without experiencing a saving impulse (Strauss, 2002:125)?

It is remarkable how something potentially disastrous for the relationship can actually turn out in its favor. The missionary impulse, definitive to both religions for millennia, is redefined according to the imposition of 21st century pluralism. It is remarkable how being "in love" casts things in a different light.

2.2.14.5 A new command I give you.

In summary, it appears that those who sought to extinguish the evangelistic were actually hoping more to toss the candle into a campfire they were already stoking. (Of course, Buddhists and Christians sit around it with joined hands and telling favorite stories.) The Great Commission—tamed and tweaked—can serve a Greater Commission. It goes like this:

> All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to us (thus regulating it away).
> Go therefore, and become disciples of all the nations (thus reconciling it away),
> Baptizing the name of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit in them, and observing all that they have taught you, just as we have commanded you (thus reasoning it away).
> And behold not the end, for this age is with you always (thus redefining it away).

2.2.15 Tip #15 – "Make room for the other" (embodying the eclectic)

As the day of the wedding approaches, some essentials are that the wedding license is secured and a credentialed officiator is selected. However, what wedding would be complete without symbols to beautify it? It is common in many cultures for weddings to include some type of ritual symbolizing the union that is being brought about. Bride and groom might step up to a

three-armed candle holder, on which the outside candles are already lighted. Each one takes one of those separate candles, and then they ignite the candle in the center that represents their new unity. Finally, they extinguish the separate ones. Or perhaps each pours sand or wine into a common vase. Sometimes a flower is plucked from separate bouquets and placed together to symbolize the genesis of a new family. I attended a wedding in which bride and groom poured dirt, from their respective states, and planted a tree. To illustrate the two becoming one, the method chosen can be as varied as the participants and the restriction of their culture concerning what is appropriate and inoffensive.

When two religions knit together in one person, there is no standardized marriage manual to which they must adhere. As we will see, any imaginable combination is available. After all, if religious doctrines themselves are more symbolic than substantial, and if the point of the symbolic is to effect personal transformation, then the way those doctrines interweave inside the person can be highly personalized.

This notion applies whether one is a "traditionalist" or more of a "free-spirit." Process theologian Jay McDaniel (2003:67) suggests a more traditionalist way to symbolize the joining of Buddhism and Christianity. He compares a "taproot" as opposed to a "fibrous" approach to dual belonging. A "taproot" devotee has, for example, "primary roots in Christian soil but with secondary roots in Buddhist soil," while the "fibrous" devotee is more like "people with two intravenous tubes in their arms, one providing fluid from a Buddhist lineage and one providing fluid from a Christian lineage." McDaniel advocates the more traditionalist "taproot" approach, at least for starting out, in order to preclude merely superficial infatuation with the other. As who remains someone unequivocal in calling Jesus her "Savior," Bonnie Thurston (1999:127) exemplifies this traditionalist approach. She reflects that "the Buddha offered me a raft. The raft,

itself, was Jesus Christ. Or again, the Buddha pointed out a path that led me home. Jesus Christ was waiting for me on that road with arms outstretched and a feast waiting." Just like the Israelites could cover their Ark of the Covenant with gold from Egypt, secondary roots can absorb distant water (Griffiths, 2000:34).

But then there are ways of belonging in both Buddhist and Christian worlds more fitting for free spirits who would rather not be restricted by either label. For example, Knitter (2012) calls his own dual belonging a "Hypostatic Union." Instead of joining two natures—human and divine—in one person—Jesus, Knitter's union joins two practices—Christian and Buddhist—in Knitter himself. As we can see, it is acceptable among interfaith scholars for one to fashion one's religious belonging in ways that appear cavalier and discourteous to one's traditional religion. Knitter claims to remain a devoted Catholic theologian who nonetheless has taken refuge in a Tibetan branch of Buddhism (Knitter, 2012:19). He concludes, "I am a Buddhist Christian but also a Christian Buddhist—one person with two religious natures or 'principles of operation'" (Knitter, 2012:26). Interfaith scholar Roger Corless (2007:120) envisions an age defined by such progress in dialogue that they would "no longer feel the need to identify themselves as Christians or Buddhists (or both or neither) for they would each severally live in both and both would live in them." Such "co-inherence" would need some kind of name, which Corless (2007:121) recommends as "a polyverse of symperichoretic multiple absolutes." It is said of philosopher George Santayana—no small admirer of Buddhism—that he could have crossed from being a backslidden Catholic to becoming an actual Buddhist. Yet, through his personalized philosophy, he did something even better: "he has become a Buddha" (Kuntz, 2000:163). Indeed, there is a place in the Buddhist-Christian synthesis for even such free spirits who reject any labels whatsoever. After all, even McDaniel's (2003:72) "taproot" need only be the beginning:

> When Christians begin to sink roots into Buddhism, they cannot know in advance whether they will end up in a fibrous mode or a taproot mode. They must be honest to the best of their lights, and they must surrender to the truth as it calls them. . . . Thus, in fidelity to Christ, a Christian may indeed be called to relinquish Christ if she is being open to truth to the best of her lights. Similarly, a Buddhist may be called by this very lure to abandon Buddhism if she is being open to the "lure toward truth" given the best of her lights.

Not only is how devotedly you *embody* the two—from taproot all the way to completely fibrous—customizable, but you can also customize how seamlessly you *experience* the two. Corless is notable for his precision in balancing his dual religious practice. It is said of Corless that "on one day he practices a Catholic meditation" and "on alternative days, a Buddhist meditation," while on the remaining odd day of the week, he joins them together in what he calls "coinherent meditation," a practice he sees as the next step in dialogue (DeMartino, 1998:220). Knitter (2012), on the other hand, cannot separate the two halves of his "Hypostatic Union" so markedly. Contrasting his own approach with the stricter methodology of Corless, Knitter (2012:20) writes,

> Rather, for me, when I am at Mass, I hear the words of the Scripture readings or of the sermon (though I usually resort to Zen mindfulness of my breath during most sermons) with Buddhist ears. I feel the powerful symbols of the Eucharistic liturgy with Buddhist sensitivity. I am constantly translating Christian into Buddhist and Buddhist into Christian, but in what feels like a natural flow back and forth, like a conversation.
>
> On the cushion, whether by myself or during a Foundation for Active Compassion retreat with Lama John, the same conversation goes on. I generally begin with the "double triple-refuge"—first taking refuge in the Buddha, Dharma, and Sangha, and then in the Christ, Gospel, and Church (or in reverse order). I have to do both. My awareness of the breath feels like awareness of the Spirit. The concepts I let go of are Christian concepts. When encouraged to sit like the Buddha I find myself also sitting like the Christ. When Lama John leads us in a Tara practice, it becomes for me a Christ practice. In the guided meditations that are part of our Tibetan practice, I drift between both Buddhist and Christian images.

Buddhism provides Knitter with the metaphysical "big picture" of nondualism, while Christianity fills in the big picture with the "living color" of liberation (Knitter, 2012:22). Christ teaches him to "make peace," while the Buddha demonstrates how to "be peace" (Knitter,

2012:25). Yet, neither "divided nor separated," the "property of both natures is preserved and comes together into a single hypostasis" (Knitter, 2012:21).

How devotedly you *embody* the two and how seamlessly you *experience* the two is completely up to you. It is likewise customizable just how logically you *explain* the two. Some integrate the two with a more experiential and less intellectual harmonization. Seeing Buddhism and Christianity as different languages, neither of which "is really transferable into the other," Professor Sally King admits, "In the end, all truth must be reconcilable. But I am well aware of my distance from that point" (Schmidt-Leukel, 2003:268). Professor Stephanie Kaza (2003:57-58) uses a similarly experiential explanation. "I wanted to see what lined up with my own experience of truth," Kaza writes. Thus, for example, "In one visionary experience, I felt Jesus walking on my left side, while the Goddess held my right hand. Ahead of me danced Coyote, and behind me, keeping me steady, was the Buddha. Surely with all that help I would find my way." Clearly, for some people, logical coherence counts for less than meaningful multiplicity. Presbyterian pastor-theologian Duane Bidwell (2008:5-6) describes his religious identity morphing to fit the needs of the moment. Twice he went to minister to a dying man—the first, upon discovering that the family was Buddhist, began ministering as a Buddhist, and the second, when the Buddhist family asked for prayer, found himself ministering as a Christian. Having gone beyond classifying his religious identity into set categories, Bidwell (2008:9) recommends submitting one's identity to the occasion and obeying the impulse. Daniel Adams (2008:220), also a Presbyterian, proposes removing the obstacle of either/or logic altogether and instead view religions through a more Eastern "both/and" perspective. "Replacing the western 'either/or'" (and thus temporarily suspending the both-and by "rejecting"), explains Adams, enables one to

"be both Christian and Buddhist—either a Buddhist-Christian or a Christian Buddhist" (Adams, 2008:231).

Many interfaith scholars, however, assimilate the two in ways they insist are quite logical. Catholic Peter Kreeft (1971:513) asks, "Is it possible for the same person uncompromisingly to be (exist as) a Zen Buddhist and a Christian at the same time?" Kreeft gives characteristically systematic and succinct answers: Christianity is a religion, whereas Zen offers an experience. Christianity may give the most adequate *meaning* to the Zen mystical experience, and the Zen mystical experience may give the most adequate *method* for the Christian mystical experience (Kreeft, 1971:519). Christianity emphasizes the infinite's transcendence to the world, whereas Zen emphasizes its immanence (Kreeft, 1971:533). If, as Socrates taught, "Virtue is knowledge," then Christianity emphasizes the virtue/wickedness side, and Zen the knowledge/falseness (Kreeft, 1971:528). In short, it is their very dissimilarity that allows them to interlock. As Kreeft puts it, "If two things are unique, they are incomparable; if they are incomparable, they are not contradictory. The two are not strange bedfellows, not because they are alike but because they are different: like a man and a woman" (Kreeft, 1971:518-519). Zen emphasizes that there can be no ego without egotism, whereas, even though Christianity seems to teach the reverse, in the end, the ego too is transcended, so that, "My true self is my participation in God; there, all finite egos are transcended and included" (Kreeft, 1971:531-532). Kreeft (1971:528) is even able to simplify the metaphysics together:

> Furthermore, God is not a person but a "nature" in three persons. Beyond (or within) the three-personal God is the trans-personal Godhead. (Ruysbroek interprets Eckhart's "Godhead" as the unitary Nature and Eckhart's "God" as the trinitarian Persons.) And only the second trinitarian Person has a human nature, and that only by the Incarnation. Finally, even He is not a human person, but only a divine person with a human (as well as a divine) nature. And His Father is ineffably transcendent, and His Spirit seems pretty pantheistically immanent. What Zen does not know, it seems, is the second person of the Trinity, either as eternal Logos (words are only conventional) or as human Savior (egos

> are to be transcended, not saved, transformed, redeemed): that is, Zen is not Christianity. But who maintains that it is? The contention here is only that it does not contradict Christianity.

The consensus among these scholars seems to be that if one looks hard enough at the differences, the compatibilities will manifest. Cobb (1980:18) reasons that, since "[r]eality must be more complex than either tradition by itself has recognized," the most fruitful approach to reconciliation will be through stressing differences, but without simply dismissing them as "theoretical contradictions." Says Cobb, "Both can be true. *I* believe that both *are* true." The piecing together of complementing components has made for some elegant interweavings. Who could argue against the symbolic efficacy of "the tree of knowledge and the tree of love—the tree beneath which Gotama, the Indian mystic, sits in a posture of contemplative calm, and the tree upon which Jesus the Hebrew prophet hangs in a gesture of painful protest" (Pieris, 1987:48)? Kreeft (1971:538) concludes that there is no incompatibility and thus,

> If the ideal man is one who can say "nothing human is foreign to me"; and if it is indeed possible, both theoretically and practically, to be wholly Christian and wholly Zen without compromise (to answer the question with which this study began); and if, further, both are not only essentially right and true but of incomparable and ultimate value; then Man is not fully human until he believes and practices the full synthesis of both.

So, embody the two as devotedly, experience the two as seamlessly, and explain the two as logically as you like it. There is plenty of variety in what has been called "double belonging" or "dual citizenship" (Schmidt-Leukel, 2003:267). Of course, there are rules. For example, the relationship cannot be seen as incompatible, or conversely, as being basically the same thing (Fredericks, 1994:130). Within these parameters, there is plenty of freedom to define the relationship, so long as the two religions are "in love"—not in competition—with each other. So what if the result is an indefinable conglomeration! During one interfaith meeting in Sri Lanka, those in attendance were cautioned, "We are going to hear about the beauties of several

traditions, but that does not mean that we are going to make a fruit salad." When Thich Nhat Hahn rose to speak, he responded, "Fruit salad can be delicious! I have shared the Eucharist with Father Daniel Berrigan, and our worship became possible because of the sufferings we Vietnamese and Americans shared over many years" (Ingram, 2000:541). Something as jumbled as fruit salad might seem far less systematic than many theologians prefer to be, yet, we are told that "constructing a mysterious and miscegenational fruit salad" is not only reasonable to many interfaith scholars but that "we really have no other *peaceable* choice" (Anderson, 2003:102). "Make love, not war" becomes the slogan of the excluded middle. And instead of cake (cake is too easily cut and divided), fruit salad is served at the wedding reception.

2.3 The Point

The guiding metaphor thus far has been romance between Buddhism and Christianity. Let us construct a bridge to this section with that metaphor, and we will relinquish it like a raft by the end of the paragraph. The further a relationship progresses, the more commitment attaches itself. When the weight from that commitment becomes noticeable, the more likely a person in that relationship might get nervous and rethink the whole enterprise. When that happens, close friends and family who want to see the relationship succeed will often tell the one with "cold feet" all the reasons why backing out is a bad idea. As we have seen, among the add-ons a Christian or Buddhist can expect with the Buddhist-Christian synthesis is less freedom: you can no longer go around talking up your religion as if it were superior, you can no longer try to convert, and so on. A Christian or Buddhist contemplating the relationship might weigh the before and after and conclude that the relationship is going to be too demanding. It is at this junction that those who want to see the relationship succeed step in and offer their reasons

against backing out. It is the purpose of this section to give these interfaith scholars the opportunity to present their single greatest reason for not backing out.

The reasoning is simple: Why go to all the trouble to . . .

- Accommodate the Antithetic?
- Localize the Linguistic?
- Merge the Mystic?
- Apply the Apophatic?
- Hurdle the Hellenistic?
- Stigmatize the Specific?
- Harmonize the Hermeneutic?
- Salvage the Symbolic?
- Credit the Charismatic?
- Eclipse the Egoistic?
- Accomplish the Altruistic?
- Indict the Imperialistic?
- Exclude the Exclusivistic?
- Extinguish the Evangelistic?
- Embody the Eclectic?

It comes down to this: we are told that *this is the way to make a better world*. There are three reasons given why this Buddhist-Christian dual belonging or Buddhicizing of Christianity (or Christianizing of Buddhism—though such a notion immediately connotes imperialism and is not emphasized like the former) would help to make a better world.

2.3.1 Reason #1 – The less fighting (i.e. converting) each other, the less suffering.

To anyone thinking about backing out of the "vital inter-religious, inter-faith pluralism in South African society," Dr. David Chidester (1987:81) of the University of Cape Town has advice. Chidester notes that although political apartheid has been "condemned as a heresy," any backtracking from *interreligious* pluralism betrays an equally hostile "spiritual apartheid." He traces the "economic, political, and military domination of a majority by a minority" to a "fundamental flaw in Christian theology itself." Hear his diagnosis:

> The 'spiritual apartheid' that separates the saved from the damned, the light from the darkness, the sheep from the goats, the wheat from the tares, and so on may represent an intrinsic violence in Christian theology that is simply at its most blatant in the doctrine and practice of political apartheid (Chidester, 1987:81).

Chidester (1987:82-83) welcomes the presence of Buddhists in his nation as a "test case" for whether or not South Africa can "adapt to the plurality of religions." No longer should any other faith be dismissed as a "false religion," but rather each should be embraced—not only politically but theologically—so that South Africa can "enjoy the inter-play among the variety of religions as mutually enriching possibilities for truth, goodness and beauty" (Chidester, 1987:86). In the same way, Dr. Felicity Souter Edwards (Prozesky and Edwards, 1986:71) of Rhodes University sees it as a choice between pluralistic convergence and planetary carnage: "West and East have in common against their very existence the twin threats of nuclear holocaust and the unsustainability of the planet due to ignorance and injustice. In this context of planetary crisis interfaith dialogue is not a luxury; it is a necessity."

It seems to be a tautology that the less fighting, the less suffering. What is not a tautology, even though such scholars would like to see it become self-evident, is that the less absolute devotion one has to her religious beliefs, the less suffering that person will cause. Of course, the hidden premises rule out a gentle manner as well as doctrines of love. What if one of those religious beliefs, those absolute commitments were that one must "forgive seventy times seven" or that one must "love your enemy and pray for those who persecute you"? Such good fruit can grow from religious commitment as surely as bad fruit can grow from, for example, racist or nationalistic beliefs; the distinction hinges on what kind of savior one is committed to. But with such qualifiers and distinctions unconsidered, an inverse relationship between one's strongly held religious beliefs and one's ability to "live at peace with one another" can be

assumed, and one might as well assume that tremendous pressure will be placed on those completely devoted to their beliefs to diminish their devotion.

Interfaith scholar Sybille Fritsch-Oppermann (1993:246) can thus say after a comparison of the Christian Trinity and the Buddhist Trikaya (triple body of the Buddha), "The Buddhist-Christian dialogue becomes increasingly important all over the world, as it is a necessary step toward the mutual understanding of different religions. This is also a necessary starting point for world peace." Is she referring to simply getting to know each other and working alongside each other, or does she suggest effecting a more constitutional transformation?

> The experience of religious wars in human history has shown that agreement on pragmatic goals, in the sense of an ethical responsibility for the world, is not sufficient as long as basic conceptual differences exist in the various religions' faith-perceptions regarding salvation and the meaning of life. As long as these differences are not worked through, each religious community will try to find its identity by drawing boundaries and postulating absolute truth or superiority on its own side, instead of trying to achieve a real meeting with the other (Fritsch-Oppermann, 1993:246).

That is, it is not enough to merely stop converting; it is only enough once there are no more claims to "absolute truth" or "superiority" whatsoever. So a conversion indeed takes place, but it is not the conversion *to* but the conversion *of* one's own religion.

Zen-instructor and Protestant theologian Michael von Bruck (2006:62) argues that justice—often elusive because it is taboo to impose a particular metaphysics—can nonetheless be grounded in the mutuality of dialogue itself. In other words, dialogue demands certain rules, and the result when those rules are followed is called "justice." But something often obstructs this dialogical justice and the planetary oneness that would result:

> [T]here is a struggling multiplicity of claims that prevents oneness from becoming a historical fact. However, in spite of their differences and competition, religions have also been aware of a oneness, as a possibility at least, in terms of religious politics such as eschatological ideals, messianic expectations, or utopian constructions of a purpose toward an end in history. I propose that, owing to economic, demographic, and technological developments during the last century, especially the development in

> communication technology, this possibility has become a political imperative (von Bruck, 2006:73).

Again, theological oneness is no experimental nicety for adventurous scholars, but nothing less than a political imperative. Here, the problem is not conversion, nor even a feeling of superiority, but merely the very fact of a "multiplicity of claims." And is there not an overreaction afoot? True, there have been definite abuses when religious differences were forced upon others, but here we are confronted with a new political imperative—this time one of forced sameness.

No doubt there will be less suffering if we stop fighting. But the ambition is to discern where in the cycle this suffering starts. In a way reminiscent of the Buddha, these scholars might say something like,

> From multiplicity of claims comes superiority of beliefs. From superiority of beliefs comes impulse to convert. From impulse to convert comes necessity to enforce. From necessity to enforce comes atrocities of violence. When the mind is directed to the cessation of multiplicity, there is the knowledge, "Released." Oneness is achieved, the holy life fulfilled, the task done. There is nothing further for this world.[17]

Furthermore, it is assumed that these chain links, these wheel spokes rise and fall together, all at once. It is not as though someone could strongly believe yet not feel the necessity to enforce. Such distinctions would invalidate the interfaith blueprints for making a better world.

2.3.2 Reason #2 – The more working (i.e. merging) with each other, the better the world.

The endeavor does not consist only of prohibitions, however. Once all competition between the religions is dropped, all that energy can be channeled into cooperation between the religions for the making of a better world. Since they are no longer taking up arms, the religions can proceed to join hands. Prepositions like *against* and *unlike* give way to *beside* and *with*. Past

[17] The pattern here is modeled on discourses of the Buddha describing dependent co-arising such as we find in the *Sammaditthi Sutta* (2008).

fades into future: what "my religion has always said" becomes "what we will accomplish together." Interfaith scholar Perry Schmidt-Leukel (2010:82) voices the transition from prohibition to reconciliation:

> Why do we engage in inter-faith dialogue? Today, the most frequently heard reason for inter-faith dialogue is the hope that dialogue might help in preventing the "clash of civilizations" (Huntington). This motivation is well expressed in Hans Küng's famous dictum: "No peace among the nations without peace among the religions. No peace among the religions without dialogue between the religions." Yet dialogue is not only perceived as a strategy to avoid or prevent conflict. Along the same lines, but in a more positive or constructive manner, dialogue is also seen as a crucial instrument in support of the kind of international collaboration that we need in order to resolve jointly our global problems and face global challenges with—so to say—combined forces.

As the saying goes, one should "never prohibit without providing."

In the same way as "the less fighting, the less suffering" is tautological, the "more we work together, the better world" seems almost redundant. If a person loves humanity, how could she not agree that working together with people of other faiths would make for a better world? Again, however, it is important to ask just what this "working together" means. Religion scholar and Buddhist Grace Burford (2011:154-155) remarks, "I am drawn to work with Christians on efforts to address the growing dangers in our world . . . more than I am to delving into Christian theology for theoretical purposes." And why is such pragmatic cooperation necessary? "Given the reality of Christianity's cultural dominance, we Buddhists cannot move forward in addressing global threats without the cooperation of Christians." All Burford asks for is a practical working together, but not a theological merging together. If that is the case, then there should not be any controversy, and the question to ask would be why, if the goal is merely working together, interfaith scholars insist on tweaking or at least relativizing one's religious beliefs, given that only a practical interaction is what is needed.

Yet what is often called for is that the actual religions themselves be mixed into something of a "miscegenational fruit salad," because, we are told, "we really have no other *peaceable* choice" (Anderson, 2003:102). One reason Abe took up interreligious dialogue was his "shared concern for the presumably common predicament of human existence" (Dean, 1989:51), but Abe's goal was loftier than mere cooperation. Abe intended the Zen-Western dialogues to pave the way for a "spiritual foundation for future humanity in a global age" (Dean, 1989:60). He and his colleagues in the Kyoto school envisioned a global philosophy, "capable of bridging and drawing together on a common spiritual and ontological foundation 'East' and 'West'" (Dean, 1989:61). Likewise, note that Merton advocated gaining something stronger from the East than mere cooperation: "The horizons of the world are no longer confined to Europe and America. We have to gain new perspectives, and on this our spiritual and even our physical survival may depend" (Farge, 2009:51).

Catholic theologian Peter Phan (2006:89-94) explores how "the followers of the Buddha and Jesus can work together for world peace and global healing" so as to "build a society in which all citizens can live in freedom, equality, and harmony, and in which, at the minimum, abuses of human rights will not occur again." After all, even though atrocities are often fueled in the name of religion, "religion is arguably the most powerful and effective institutional force for peace and reconciliation." Again, however, what does this working together require? According to Phan, it requires a "reconciliation among religions." This reconciliation means far more than simply working together for a common goal; what is needed is to discover a common "foundation of religions." He concludes that there will be "no reaching the foundation of religions without a dialogue of life, action, theological exchange, and, above all, religious experience and prayer" (Phan, 2006:105).

Obviously, public policy specialist Virginia Strauss and theologian Amos Yong reason from different starting points. Just think, says Strauss (2002:126): "As the largest NGOs and grassroots organizations in the world, religions once activated and cooperating together on such projects could have a huge impact . . . ." Yong theologizes from Pentecost. Yet both arrive at the same place. Yong (2004:199) concludes,

> In the end, then, I suggest that the methodological, apologetic, and dialogical questions on this side of the eschaton are all transformed into the practical question of "How then can and should we live?" And the call for joint expressions of liberative action informed by Christian love and Buddhist compassion are especially urgent given the many problems life confronts us with. . . . [W]e should work together from such common ground, whenever possible, for the betterment of the human condition and for the common good.

Similarly, Strauss (2002:126) concludes,

> In the end, I believe the central question to consider for interreligious dialogue between Christians and Buddhists is: What is our priority? In one of his annual peace proposals, Nichiren Buddhist leader Daisaku Ikeda has defined the challenge for a global religion this way: "[I]f we are to avoid repeating the errors of the past, religions must give first priority to serving the needs of real people in their daily lives and finding solutions to the problems facing humanity." He has also stated: "We can and must create a global civil society of the people, by the people, and for the people." I contend that religions could play a crucial role in giving birth to a global humanism. This will be more likely to happen if theoretical discussions such as today's focus in a sustained way on developing a stronger rationale for interreligious dialogue on global ethics.

With both religions merging on global ethics and mobilizing for global enrichment, interfaith scholars excitedly anticipate a better world.

2.3.3 Reason #3 – The less suffering + the better world = the point.

But the point can be made even more strongly. We are told that a better world with less suffering is the very criterion for whether a belief is salvific. Recall the "symbolic" and "mythical" status of religious statements: we are told that a religious statement, like a dispensable raft, is "true" insofar as it gets you where you need to go. Knitter (1979:668)

explains that “to evaluate the religious and salvific content of a myth, the important question to ask is not the historical (Did it really happen?), but the effective (Does it work?).” Ruether (2005:29) argues that it is possible to hold to one’s personal Christian faith and yet at the same time affirm other religious paths, but this does not automatically mean “that every opinion is equally true.” Beliefs can be affirmed or critiqued on the basis of whether they are “life-giving” or “death-dealing.” While “death-dealing” describes beliefs that “promote a fanatical self-righteousness, a demonization of others, and hatred of and violence toward others in the name of fidelity to God,” “life-giving” means “conducive to ways of being spiritually healthy, loving, kind to others, and restorative of one’s own best energies and caring for the health of the planet” (Ruether, 2005:35). That is, a belief is to be believed insofar as it is able to be beneficial.

Moreover, we are told by some that the very point of interfaith dialogue is itself a better world. Paul Ingram (2000:547-548) puts it this way:

> [D]ialogue with traditions of Buddhist social engagement has taught me that interreligious dialogue is not merely an abstract conversation. Interreligious dialogue requires and energizes involvement in the rough-and-tumble of historical, political, and economic existence. Or to paraphrase the Epistle of James, conceptual dialogue and interior dialogue "without works [are] dead." For me, this means that the central point of the practice of faith within the context of interreligious dialogue is the liberation of all creatures in nature from forces of oppression and injustice and the mutual creative transformation of persons in community with nature.

Using the “bridge” as metaphor for interfaith dialogue, Jay McDaniel (2003:70) asks why we should cross. He answers,

> It is because each tradition contains important truths, relevant to human flourishing, that are not found as deeply or emphatically in the other. And it is because an internalization of these truths can help Buddhists and Christians alike live more wisely and compassionately in the world, for the sake of other people, other animals, and the earth.

During the question-answer session following a debate (Knitter and Netland, 2013:47-48), a questioner from the audience asked Knitter, “. . . I get the distinct impression that you’re a

liberationist—that's where your heart is, and that's how your praxis has played out. And from that your pluralism grows. Is that correct?". Answering affirmatively, Knitter went on to describe his shift from a God-centered to a salvation-centered pluralism. Ironically, this assertion meant trading in the glasses which colored nonbelievers as needing eternal salvation, and receiving two pairs in return. "I realized that to be a Christian, I have to confront not just the many religions, but also the reality of the many poor. And I saw that both of those hermeneutical lenses can interpret each other."

Some interfaith scholars go so far as to suggest that, not only is a better world the point of interfaith scholarship, but such is the point of religions in the first place. Studies have shown that spirituality "improves overall health and could increase life" and that practitioners are healthier, live longer, and have less destructive habits (Morse, 2001:232). But some interfaith scholars see these benefits as far more than merely happy byproducts. Says Kyeongil Jung (2012:3), "The primary goal of religion is liberation from suffering . . . ." If so, then religions are graded based on how much better of a world their adherents are likely to make. For interfaith scholar Ursula King (2002:109), "the fundamental question" is "what spirituality does or, more precisely, what spiritual practices do to people." Her answer is a question: "Do we become more compassionate, loving, and wise? Are we more peaceful, just and kind, equanimous, and generous through following the practices of a particular religious tradition?" Gross (2005b:19) explains that "what religious doctrines and practices are supposed to do" is to transform people "from self-centeredness to love and compassion." In short, disposable, raft-like metaphysics must serve real-life ethics. In fact, "What people believe or say about the nature of reality, about deity and salvation, is rather irrelevant so long as these beliefs are not translated into harmful actions or social practices." Joseph O'Leary (2002:176) explains, "One can uphold an objective

referentiality for theological concepts, but only with the condition that the objective content of these concepts cannot be distilled out of their pragmatic function in a discourse of healing and liberation." Kosuke Koyama (2002:82-83) had observed enough enmity—both political and theological—that he began to equate the two. In his opinion, theological wrangling at best obscures the point. And what is that point?

> Having lived seven decades in the century of unprecedented violence and war, witnessing the Civil Rights struggle in the USA in the 1960s, and knowing of so many instances of ethnic cleansing we humans continuously engage in, I have gradually lost interest in the doctrinal aspect of religions. I would value the great Hindu *Upanisads* (sic) if it contributes to the battle against the caste-system that dehumanises (sic) millions. I would value the Buddhist *Tripitaka* if it helps to extinguish the fire of lust ablaze about our heads. I would value the Bible, the Qur'an, the Analects (of Confucius) if they contribute to the elimination of ethnic cleansing in this world.

Besides, even if there is an objective hereafter, Catholic theologian Paul Griffiths (2000:19) notes, not only can we not talk objectively about God, but even "the life of the world to come . . . cannot be characterized or represented narratively because attempts so to represent it are always both incoherent and idolatrous." So, our efforts are spent in the here and now by process of elimination.

2.3.4 The Perfect Synthesis for the Perfect World

Modern reality demands that religion turn a corner or two. German interfaith scholar Klaus Otte (2002:66-67) suggests mulling the following questions if religion is to make the transition: "What influence does faith have in present-day life? How does it affect intercultural affairs, global trade, genetics, ecological problems, peace, research and the process of conciliation between religions?" Something more onward and existential replaces the traditional way of "try[ing] to find solutions to modern problems in written texts and instructions . . . reflecting the direct will of God." No longer can our problems be remedied by backward-looking

theodicies. Feminist Wendy Farley (1999:291) explains, "Classical Christian theodicies . . . have not seemed to stand up well against the traumas . . . millions of children burning in the fires of death camps and atomic bombs." Moreover, besides not explaining evil to her satisfaction, a theodicy justifies too much, for it "seems to render the destruction of human beings by suffering innocuous." Any alternatives? This is where Buddhism steps in with a flesh-and-blood, as opposed to a pen-and-ink, solution: compassion. "Buddhism and Christianity, in addition to their explanations of suffering, also provide a picture of the transformation of the human being by compassion. . . . [R]ecovering the praxis dimension of these two traditions may carry us forward when explanations of evil have failed." Religion scholar Sarah Pinnock (2004:73-74) gladly trades theodicies constructed to "exculpate God for cruelty" for forward-looking "contextual varieties of theology." She advises, "I propose that the shift toward practical or contextual Christian anti-theodicy responses to violence resonates with Buddhist attention to practice, rather than speculation."

Thus, the spirit of the age is far more apt to give her blessing not on attempts to reconcile past pages with present pain, but on attempts to ally religion with religion against that pain. Two religious groups—one Christian, one Buddhist—have already made the alleviation of this-worldly suffering the lens through which they interpret their religion. Whichever past ties threaten to hinder present strides are severed. On the Christian side is Liberation Theology. A Peruvian friar named Gustavo Gutierrez pioneered a theology "based on Jesus' option for the poor." Toppling destructive social structures (e.g. capitalism), such a theology would be efficacious in constructing the "just society" (Gable, 2008:78). According to theologian Harold O.J. Brown (1988:7), Liberation Theology is a "quest in hermeneutics," with scriptures interpreted through the lens of God's preference for the poor. The philosophical scaffolding is

blatant enough that Brown writes, "The perspective, more or less conscious, more or less openly acknowledged, is Marxist; the yardstick is the axiom, 'God is on the side of the oppressed.'"

From the Buddhist side comes "humanistic" or "Engaged" Buddhism. Terry Muck nicknames it "Enlightenment Buddhism," because it shares the goals of the French Enlightenment: equality, liberty, and justice. It aims to liberate from here-and-now oppression (Lee, 2002:86). Phil Henry (2006:3), whose doctoral dissertation researched Engaged Buddhism in the United Kingdom, explains that "apolitical, otherworldly stereotypes" of Buddhism fail when confronted by Engaged Buddhism, "which embraces social and political cultures, and acts out a Buddhist lifestyle challenging the moral and ethical infrastructure of society from a number of standpoints." Vietnamese Buddhist Thich Nhat Hanh coined the term in 1963 yet, interestingly, he has more recently called it a misnomer, asserting that "Engaged Buddhism is just Buddhism. If you practice Buddhism in your family, in society, it is engaged Buddhism" (Henry, 2006:9).

Now, as will be recalled from a preceding section called "Accomplishing the Altruistic," altruistically-minded interfaith scholars (or perhaps this too is a misnomer, and we could simply say "interfaith scholars") recognize uniquely Christian and uniquely Buddhist contributions to their cause. Here, we can attach names to these contributions: Liberation Theology and Engaged Buddhism. In exploring the benefits of dialogue between the two, Mike Gable (2008:77), a Catholic missions director, compares the ministries of Thich Nhat Hanh and Gustavo Gutierrez and concludes, "At this time in history, God knows we need all the collaboration we can muster for individual and global justice and peace."

Interfaith scholars note their similarities but delight in their uniqueness. For example, Liberation Theology teaches us how to make peace, but only once, Nhat Hanh reminds us, we

"be peace" (Knitter, 2004:66). One teaches us to "stand with the oppressed," while the other warns us of "standing against the oppressors" (Knitter, 2004:68). We cultivate solidarity with the oppressed, but only out of a recognition that we are ultimately "inter-all" (Gable, 2008:85). Knitter (Knitter and Abe, 1988:353) explains that we must not remain "confined to temples" or "engrossed only in the inner problems," but that we must confront social realities—yet only after we have, in fact, engrossed ourselves in discovery of Buddhism's "True Self." There is a back-and-forth tension Kyeongil Jung (2012:3) helpfully describes:

> The contrasting difference I have experienced is that while Buddhism is a path of peace to peace, Christianity is a path of justice to peace. This difference has become more apparent to me as I have studied and practiced both socially engaged Buddhism and liberation theology. Engaged Buddhists seek to achieve peace through "being peace," which is an impartial and nonadversarial way of proceeding, whereas liberative Christians seek to achieve peace through working for justice, which entails a preferential and confrontational attitude. But in these differences I believe that the two approaches can complement, not contradict, each other. They can do so because Buddhism and Christianity are differently but equally salvific paths on the common ground of human suffering.

Thus, Sarah Pinnock (2004:83), a westerner, notes that Engaged Buddhism helps us to "prioritize the development of personal peace ahead of future oriented social change," while Engaged Buddhist Sulak Sivaraksa (2002:89), an easterner, observes that the "theologies of liberation articulated by Gustavo Guttierrez (sic) . . . are inspiring in their passionate commitment to the needs of the poor and oppressed in society."

Of course, many Christians have questioned just how "Christian" Liberation Theology really is. The list of contributors to a dissenting volume called *Liberation Theology* (Nash, 1988) reads like a Who's Who of Evangelicalism. Moreover, anything Marxist is—rather understatedly—controversial. Merton's final lecture before his tragic, untimely death in 1968 was received with unease. They had gone to the trouble of bringing Merton all the way to Bangkok, and he had "hijacked" the conference with a keynote address called (and sympathetic

toward synthesizing) “Marxism and Monastic Perspectives” (Weakland, 2008:95). Notes an officiator, “He may not have realized how sensitive the issue was among some of those present. Many of the Koreans had seen their members expelled, under threat of death, from North Korea” (Weakland, 2008:95). Not exactly a historical peacemaker, Marxism struggles to present itself as a unifier. Scholar of Asian studies James Mark Shields (2013:461) explores a Buddhist-Marxist synthesis but admits, “In the past century, several attempts have been made—in India, southeast Asia, China and Japan—to bring together Marxist and Buddhist worldviews, with only moderate success.” It stands to reason that many Buddhists would see in Liberation Theology a lopsided sociological program, where many Christians see a lopsided hermeneutic.

It is also disputed just how “Buddhist” Engaged Buddhism is. Buddhists are unevenly split between majority “traditionalists” (social engagement has always been a part of Buddhism) and minority “modernists” (western contact activated Buddhism’s interest in social engagement) (Henry, 2006:9). While Nhat Hanh claims “Engaged Buddhism” to be redundant (Henry, 2006:9), others such as Melford Spiro (Buddhism’s sole concern is individual salvation) and Christmas Humphreys (“I hold it folly for a Buddhist institution, lay or of the sangha, to become involved in politics of any kind”) disagree (Henry, 2006:6). Traditionalists can point to, for example, the politically active Soka Gakkai branch (est. 1930) of Buddhism (Melin, 2006:369), while modernists can point to the earlier westernizations of Buddhism by those like Colonel Henry Steel Olcott (d. 1907) who attempted to mobilize native Buddhists to stand against Christian missionary influence (Prothero, 1995:285). On the one hand, representatives of relief organizations like Tzu Chi Compassion Relief Foundation assert that while Buddhist benevolence has always been a given and never needed advertising, nowadays, westerners are uninformed and need to be told, otherwise “they won’t understand that Buddhism is about

helping relieve suffering of all human beings" (Sherwood, 2001:72). On the other hand, argues Sri Lankan Mudagamuwe Maithrimurthi Maithrimurthi (2003:123-141), if you actually read the Pali Canon, you find that "the Buddha was more concerned about the individuals who were seeking their salvation as private persons. . . . without being much concerned about the society as a whole."

There is no doubt that, whenever involved in social action, Buddhism contributes a unique perspective. For example, Peter Hershock (1999:154) of the East-West Center suggests that because social activism is so often co-opted by destructive western values, Buddhists must retain their distinctive values of impermanence and emptiness as correctives. Yet it is still debated whether Buddhist distinctives serve merely as correctives for social activism, or as actual catalysts. It would take at least a dissertation to try to solve this dilemma, and even then, because Buddhism is so complex, it might be impossible to arrive at a resolution. Some scholars conclude with contented resignation. Perhaps it turns out that Engaged Buddhism is an experiment in *eisegesis*—importing foreign ideals back into the Buddhist texts. If so, is such a revelation really so upsetting? Zen scholar Christopher Ives (2005:53) reminds us that even if eisegesis is detected, "bringing constructs and values to the tradition is nothing novel, for over many centuries East Asians have been integrating extra-Buddhist ideas and values—Daoist, Confucian, Shinto—into Zen." If, as Paul Williams (2009:266) maintains, "There is probably no clear-cut, unchanging core to Buddhist doctrine," and Buddhists are still "Buddhists," then is it really so important to establish the source of Engaged Buddhism, provided that Engaged Buddhists exist? Loy asks, "Why do we need to decide whether Engaged Buddhism is new or not? Perhaps this issue is more important to scholars of engaged Buddhism who need something definite to deconstruct, than do engaged Buddhists themselves" (Henry, 2006:10). Whatever the

case, Engaged Buddhism, along with Liberation Theology, make the spirit of the age proud and Buddhist-Christian matchmakers excited. It is clear that many interfaith scholars see Liberation Theology and Engaged Buddhism as the perfect synthesis for the perfect world.

2.4 Why I Won't Be Joining In

I appreciate these interfaith scholars for their very sincere efforts to bring "peace on earth." It is imperative to indict religious persecution whichever way it goes, and I appreciate anyone who calls attention to the need for peaceful coexistence. In addition, I commend Buddhism for many reasons, including its rejection of the caste system for greater equality, its insistence on intention instead of ritual, and its realism in analyzing human problems. But while I appreciate Buddhists and interfaith scholars for their various contributions to the world's well-being, I need to be upfront that I will not be joining in the interfaith endeavor to bring Buddhism alongside Christianity as an equally valid path or as an equally important counterpart in salvation. I do not desire to have Christianity Buddhicized. I give three reasons for not joining in.

First, if I were to join in, it would seem *redundant*. In dissenting, I am not merely trying to add diversity to the interfaith mix, but any such contribution would certainly do so. One has only to recall Tanaka's surprise that a Christian colleague actually believed that Tanaka as a Buddhist would not be saved. Tanaka (2005:41) concludes, "This short encounter has been etched firmly in my mind and, ironically, remains for me the most memorable moment among all of the IBCTE sessions attended." For a demographic that is supposed to prize diversity as much as interfaith scholars, there is a surprising homogeneity to what ends up published in the journals—at least when it comes to the big-picture questions of religious truth and ultimate salvation.

Second, it would seem *dishonest*. For the most part, what I have observed is not a Buddhist getting along with a Christian—which seems to the stated, and is undoubtedly a worthy, intention. What I observe instead is a "new creation." To interfaith eyes, the hybrid gains something, but I see a loss of essential, revealed truth. The retort will be, "Ha! He still believes God reveals truth from heaven!" Yes, I do. And I have what I feel are very convincing reasons for doing so (but, unfortunately, those would have to be the subject of another dissertation). Gross (2005a:5) remarked about the International Buddhist-Christian Theological Encounter,

> Throughout its history, the group continued to struggle with fuller representation of the range of traditions in both Buddhism and Christianity. Until the last set of meetings, there was no representation of the Eastern Christian churches, and more theologically conservative Christians or traditional Asian Buddhist leaders were always underrepresented. Sometimes, while celebrating the collegiality we experienced with each other, someone would remark that we probably got along better with each other than we often did with our coreligionists.

As one of those "coreligionists," I agree with her. True, I find a great many of their arguments unconvincing, but the main reason we clash at so many points is that we start from opposing assumptions. As should be inferred from my limited immanent critique throughout, I do not assume, as they do, that, for example, religious language is merely symbolic or that claims to absolute truth are intrinsically imperialistic. I do not find their attempts to harmonize doctrines convincing, nor do I find the rechanneling of the evangelistic impulse altogether loving. I could go on, but the point is, reason does not allow me to join in. And this may be more difficult for interfaith scholars to understand, but it is no less true: love restrains my joining as well. I have to remain honest to my "best lights." Yet, as mentioned in the chapter's introduction, the aim of this chapter was to describe, not to debate the interfaith scholars, so that in future chapters there is a clearly stated position to debate. So, although my aligning with the interfaith endeavor would indeed be dishonest and though I could expound on the critique I have already given to the

interfaith position as described thus far, there is a more important reason for me not joining than that it would be dishonest.

Third (and most importantly for the sake of this dissertation), my joining in would seem *counterproductive*. Recall the primary reason, the overriding motivation for the Buddhicizing of Christianity so prominent in this chapter. The point is to alleviate suffering and make a better world. Hence, the two central beliefs of Buddhist-Christian interfaith scholarship we have discovered so far:

1. The point of interfaith dialogue is to alleviate suffering and make a better world (Section #16).
2. The way to alleviate suffering and make a better world is to Buddhicize Christianity (Sections #1-15).

Before moving forward, let us be reminded of the ways interfaith scholars suggest Christianity become more like Buddhism. To be acceptable, Christianity must

1. Acknowledge its need for Buddhism (Accommodating the Antithetic)
2. Relativize its language for Buddhism (Localizing the Linguistic)
3. Assimilate its practices with Buddhism (Merging the Mystic)
4. Negate its affirmations for Buddhism (Applying the Apophatic)
5. Trade its philosophy for Buddhism (Hurdling the Hellenistic)
6. Blunt its particularity for Buddhism (Stigmatizing the Specific)
7. Reconcile its doctrines with Buddhism (Harmonizing the Hermeneutic)
8. Poeticize its history for Buddhism (Salvaging the Symbolic)
9. Connect its Spirit to Buddhism (Crediting the Charismatic)
10. Abolish its souls for Buddhism (Eclipsing the Egoistic)
11. Become its beneficiaries for Buddhism (Accomplishing the Altruistic)
12. Recant its superiority over Buddhism (Indicting the Imperialistic)
13. Relinquish its truthfulness over Buddhism (Excluding the Exclusivistic)
14. Discontinue its missions to Buddhism (Extinguishing the Evangelistic)
15. Encourage its adherents toward Buddhism (Embodying the Eclectic)

Now, for my point. Since the primary motivation behind the interfaith endeavor is to alleviate suffering and make for a better world, I want to show that there is a better way to meet that need than to go about it in the way prescribed by these interfaith scholars. My contention is that the more Christianity becomes like Buddhism, the less able it will be to combat this-worldly

suffering. Here is my contention: **The interfaith proposals for making Christianity more like Buddhism are self-defeating because although the rationale for such a merger is that it will cause less this-worldly suffering, the more Buddhicized Christianity becomes, the less able it will be to combat this-worldly suffering.** In the next five chapters, I will contrast Buddhism and Christianity in order to find out just how effectively a Buddhicized Christianity would contribute to a better world with less suffering, as compared to Christianity un-Buddhicized. Each chapter will feature a contrast between Buddhism and Christianity that is crucial to the question of combating this-worldly suffering.

In closing, let me summarize this chapter with an illustration. The king makes a move. "Check." The king has moved into the path of the queen. Let the queen—the most powerful piece on the board—represent the interfaith movement: "If you move there, we will brand you as egoistic, exclusivistic, imperialistic, etc.; I think you get the picture." Better not move there. The king tries another square. "Check." This time it is the bishop. If you move there, you might not offend the queen, but you are in danger of offending your religion. The next square yields another "Check." It is the knight, galloping to and fro, able to defy conventionality, oblivious of rules. The knight warns that you are violating your freedom, and instead to be true to yourself, not to any dogma. The king tries another square. "Check." The rook, solid and inflexible as a fortress—guards that way. The rook straightforwardly plows only two directions, reminding you that being "true" to yourself is a misuse of the word *true*. The rook warns that there are, in fact, only two ways a statement like "Jesus was virgin born" can go: either true or false. The king tries the last remaining square. "Check." Of all the threats, the obstruction is now just an annoying little pawn. The point is well taken: no matter which direction you turn, you will be a pawn to somebody. Many are pawns of the spirit of the age and bow to the elites who have the power of

“one of those imperialists” or “one of us.” I choose to be a pawn of the historic Gospel for many reasons I consider quite reasonable, not least of which is, in the end, that it will be less futile than its alternatives.

Chapter 3

Your Deity is too defined: how ultimate reality relates to suffering

3.1 Introduction

As we saw from the previous chapter, the goal of many interfaith scholars is to contribute to a better world with less suffering. Likewise, many interfaith scholars propose that the way to accomplish this better world is by "Buddhicizing" Christianity. But would "Buddhicizing" Christianity logically contribute to such a goal? In order to answer, we will need to contrast Buddhism with Christianity as each religion relates to combatting suffering. We will contrast the Buddhist response to suffering with the Christian response in five crucial areas, namely, their viewpoints on ultimate reality, ultimate attachments, ultimate aversions, ultimate example, and ultimate purpose. After looking at these five areas (each of which will be the subject of each successive chapter), we will be able, in chapter 8, to draw our conclusion. We will call Buddhism's response to suffering "Buddhist compassion" and Christianity's response "Christian love." And, in light of these five areas of contrast (chapters 3-7), we will be able to ask whether making Christian love more like Buddhist compassion will help or hinder the goal of these interfaith scholars to create a better world with less suffering.

This chapter focuses on the first of the five areas we will be looking at in order to understand Buddhism's and Christianity's response to suffering. In short, what is the Buddhist and the Christian view of *ultimate reality*, and how do their views of ultimate reality relate to combatting suffering? It appears that the virtue of loving one's neighbor, to which most people subscribe, is desperately needed if the world is supposed to see less suffering. The first reason Buddhicizing Christianity will not lead to a better world with less suffering centers on how each

religion's view of ultimate reality is able to ground such prescriptions. As we will see, on the one hand, Christianity is able to ground love of one's neighbor in its view of ultimate reality; that is, Christianity has an ontology that makes such ethical prescriptions imperative. On the other hand, Buddhism has difficulty coming up with a counterpart. And if Buddhism has difficulty grounding love of one's neighbor ontologically (however regularly Buddhism may teach love of neighbor), then, logically, the more Christianity absorbs Buddhist ontology, the less capable Christianity will be to combat this-worldly suffering. The two questions we will look at ontologically are 1) Why *should* I love my neighbor, and 2) How *can* I love my neighbor?

3.2 Why should I love my neighbor: Buddhism's ontological groundings

Buddhism does not answer ethical questions with awkward silence. Buddhists come to the discussion with many reasons why Buddhism compels them to be more loving. In fact, certain Buddhist schools have made their cornerstone doctrine selfless compassion. Many Buddhists even claim their morals as objective. Says Peter Harvey (2011:57), scholar of Buddhist ethics,

> [The Buddha's willingness to tell people unpleasant, yet spiritually beneficial truths] assumes that there is such a thing as objectively wrong action. Only then does it make sense to say that one could be *mistaken* in holding something not to be wrong. Given Buddhism's clear criteria of what is unwholesome action, it is quite happy to agree to this, with an action's 'wrongnesss' subsisting in a combination of the action itself and the state of mind in which it is done. It is not a matter of what a person happens to like or dislike (emotivism), or of what his or her society happens to approve or disapprove of (cultural relativism).

The Venerable Sayadaw Pandita (2012:2), a Burmese Buddhist, argues that "the early Buddhist ethic has only one mode, that of absolute values," and that even "the teachings that are seemingly context-dependent" can be harmonized in light of this objectivity. For, "The Buddha might be a pragmatist . . . but it does not mean that he ever deviated from the moral values in

which he believed, nor that he was contradicting what he taught monks and nuns" (Pandita, 2012:8).

So, how could anyone so arrogantly claim that Christianity has a monopoly on being loving and compassionate? Let us be very clear here: *Teaching* love and even *modeling* love are not the same thing as ontologically *grounding* love. But, since Buddhism promotes love, would Buddhism's view of what ultimately exists (i.e. its ontology) really matter? True, Buddhist precepts teach and effect a definite other-centeredness, yet, if Buddhism's ontological grounding for loving one's neighbor, is found to be obscure, then why *should* anyone love her neighbor? Christians answer that such precepts—even if groundless under the Buddhist system—are easily explained as grounded in a universal moral law, placed in the human heart by its Moral Law Giver. From a Christian perspective, any religion that lacks the crucial ontological grounding and yet continues to presuppose such grounding is borrowing heavily from the idea of a moral God, even if that religion sees God as irrelevant, as does Buddhism.

Viewing karma as a less impeachable source of suffering than a Creator God, Buddhists "were always been critical of the idea of a divine creator" (Schmidt-leukel, 2010:87). In the West, Buddhism can even be promoted as the courageous alternative to God-dependent Christianity: a religion "without dogma, without prayer, without forms of worship and without sacrament" and thus "the loftiest assertion of human freedom." What often fuels interest in Buddhism is "an anti-Christian impulse by which the dispassionate outlook of the Buddha appears as a kind of promethean defiance" (Holsten, 1959:411). Even if gods figure in Buddhist narratives (such as the deities complaining that a monk standing in front of the Buddha is obscuring their view of his entering into Nirvana in the *Maha-parinibbana Sutta* (1998g)), Buddhism is clear that God is *ontologically* inconsequential. The following qualifier is

important, but note Buddhism scholar Edward Conze's (1959:39) observation: "If indifference to a personal creator of the Universe is Atheism, then Buddhism is indeed atheistic."

So, the question of whether Buddhism or Christianity has an ontological answer for "Why should I love my neighbor?" should be taken seriously for our purposes, for the following reason: Insofar as Christianity has an ontological grounding that Buddhism lacks, and insofar as Christianity's ontological grounding is Buddhicized out from under it, Christianity will be that less able to justify and initiate love of neighbor. Christianity will be that much more impotent—*ontologically* impotent—in the face of this-worldly suffering.

3.2.1 Ontological grounding #1 – dependent co-arising

So to those who ask whether Buddhism can really ground love of neighbor, or whether instead Buddhism assumes, but cannot explain, a morally charged ontology, what response can be offered? Christianity's ontology is a holy God. What is Buddhism's ontology? In Christianity, the One on the throne says, "I am the Alpha and the Omega, the beginning and the end" (Rev. 21:6a). What is Buddhism's beginning and end? The closest equivalent to a beginning in Buddhism is called dependent co-arising (*pratitya-samutpada*). The Buddha traces suffering from its consummation in "aging and death" backward through "requisite conditions" to ignorance as the root cause. Sometimes summarized as the twelve *nidanas* (causes), the conditions link together in the following pattern: aging and death are caused by birth, birth by becoming, and so on through clinging, craving, feeling, contact, the six faculties of sense, mentality-materiality, consciousness, formations, and ignorance (Buddhaghosa, 2010:623). The conditions are interdependent, so that "each contingent thing could be explained as a causal result of another contingent thing *ad infinitum*" (Williams et al., 2012:47). Everything depends

on everything else, such that, "The Buddha intentionally or by implication replaced any talk of God with that of causal dependence." Though we are inquiring about ontological beginnings, it ought to be kept in mind that the Buddha was not wishing to speculate metaphysically how such a wheel of existence began, as much as to prescribe how someone might escape from the wheel and leave suffering behind (Robinson and Johnson, 1977:31-32). Yet, an ontological view does emerge from the practically-motivated descriptions of dependent co-arising, from which the entire wheel of life is explained. In the Buddha's words, as recorded in the *Maha-nidana Sutta* (1997b), "Such is the origination of this entire mass of stress." And with the causes diagnosed, "suffering can be ended automatically through the removal of its causes" (Williams et al., 2012:48-49), beginning with ignorance.

3.2.2 Ontological grounding #2 - nirvana

So dependent co-arising is how *samsara*, the "wheel of existence," perpetuates itself. If the closest ontological "beginning" is *samsara's* dependent co-arising—problematic in itself yet liberating when discovered—the closest ontological "end" is, of course, nirvana. As Buddhism scholars Paul Williams, Anthony Tribe, and Alexander Wynne (2012:47) put it, "The only real stability therefore lies in nirvana, just because . . . nirvana precisely is not the torrent of samsara. This stress on the dynamic nature of samsara throws into relief the still, calm, dimension of nirvana." So what exactly is nirvana? Nirvana is the "complete cessation of suffering" (Williams et al., 2012:34-36). It "designates an occurrence, an event, but not a *being*, nor Being." It literally means an "extinguishing," though it should not be automatically concluded that upon this extinguishing, one simply ceases to exist. After all, the Buddha continued for years to teach the way to nirvana after having achieved it. So it is helpful to distinguish two types of nirvana.

"Nirvana with remainder" describes those who, like the Buddha before his death, continue to live and act, yet with the fires of "greed, hatred, and delusion" extinguished. "Nirvana without a remainder" (sometimes called *parinirvana*) describes what happens when the enlightened person dies. There is no rebirth, and the parts that have constituted the person, commonly called the "five aggregates" or *skandhas* (Sanskrit) ("body, sensation, conceptualization, volitions, and consciousness" (Faden, 2011:42)) "are not replaced by further psychophysical elements" (Williams et al., 2012:36).

Although the Buddha left us with plenty of data to construct what "nirvana with remainder" looks like, when it comes to "nirvana without remainder," Williams, Tribe, and Wynne (2012:36) explain, "Since there is nothing left for the mind to fix on, nothing more can be said." It follows that since "the Buddha—or any liberated person—is indefinable even before he dies," then "never mind after it." It is for these reasons that nirvana is then described with verbs such as "attaining" and "extinguishing," rather than with the more concrete "Absolute," "Reality," or "God." But suppose nirvana were something more substantial than a bundle of negations? Could nirvana be seen as something of a "domain"? It is said that the Buddha described nirvana this way:

> There is monks a domain where there is no earth, no water, no fire, no wind, no sphere of infinite space, no sphere of nothingness, no sphere of infinite consciousness, no sphere of neither awareness nor non-awareness; there is not this world, there is not another world, there is no sun or moon. I do not call this coming or going, nor standing nor dying, nor being reborn; it is without support, without occurrence, without object. Just this is the end of suffering (Williams et al., 2012:36).

Williams, Tribe, and Wynne (2012:37-38) reason nirvana is best seen as a "domain" only insofar as it is an attainable "object of cognition." That is, "It is not a place," but even if it were, as Yandell and Netland (2009:23) note, "there is no enduring soul or person to enter nirvana." And, of course, note all the *no*'s, *non*'s, and *nor*'s the Buddha ascribes to the "domain." That is, we

must ask, what really can be said of the ontological "end" of Buddhism, except with a mass of negations?

3.3 Why should I love my neighbor: Buddhism's reasons given

It is important to keep in mind the ontological "beginning" (dependent co-arising) and "end" (nirvana) of Buddhism, because we are searching for an *ontological* foundation for love of neighbor in Buddhism. We are now going to discuss the seven most plausible reasons offered for why Buddhism provides a secure foundation for love of neighbor. After describing a given reason out of the seven, we will ask whether that reason should logically lead—as ontologically grounded by dependent co-arising and nirvana—to love of one's neighbor. Keep in mind that as we proceed, I will not be questioning these ontological givens. I will assume that, for the sake of the argument, dependent co-arising and nirvana are unproblematic, and I will then ask of each of the seven reasons whether it should logically lead to love of neighbor. Note as well, however, that beyond these ontological givens, these seven reasons will not be assumed to be unproblematic and must prove their ethical efficacy logically.

3.3.1 Reason #1 – because destiny is discerning.

Karma is a powerful motivator. Buddhism scholar Abraham Velez de Cea (2004:125) observes, "[M]any Buddhists, at least at the beginning of their spiritual practice, act morally not so much motivated by nirvanic virtues, but rather by nonnirvanic virtues such as craving for a proximate goal such as a good rebirth." Sri Lankan Buddhist Mudagamuwe Maithrimurthi (2003:128) explains that, there being no punishments or rewards promised by a personal God, good actions in canonical texts "are often motivated by the doctrine of karma." For, "If one acts

in a morally positive way, he is rewarded automatically by the mechanism of karma granting him/her a desirable rebirth, whereas the one who commits bad run into a (sic) unpleasant state."

We find a sample contrast of the karmic paths in *The Larger Sutra on the Pure Land* (2003b:28-29). On the one hand, notice the beggar:

> The conditions of a beggar in extreme poverty—being at the lowest social level, with barely enough clothes to cover his body, scarcely enough food to sustain his life, with hunger and cold always tormenting him, and having almost lost human contact—are all the result of his misdeeds in former lives. In the past he did not cultivate roots of virtue but instead accumulated riches without giving anything to others. He became more miserly as his wealth increased, desired to obtain more, insatiably hankered after further acquisitions, and gave no thought to good acts. Thus he piled up a mountain of evil karma. . . . [A]fter death he fell into one of the evil realms, where he suffered pain for a long period. When his karmic retributions ended, he was able to escape but was reborn into a lower class; being foolish, base, and inferior, he barely maintains the appearance of a human being.

On the other hand, consider the king:

> The king of a country is the most honored of all men. This is the reward for virtues accumulated in former lives, in which he, with a compassionate heart, gave generously to many, saved people from suffering through kindness and benevolence, performed good deeds with sincerity, and never disputed with others. When that life ended, he was rewarded with rebirth into a higher state. Born in a heavenly realm, he enjoyed bliss and happiness. His accumulated virtues produced such a surplus of good that when he was reborn as a man in this life his birth was, deservedly, into a royal family. Since he is naturally noble, his dignified and majestic demeanor commands the respect of his people, and superb clothes and sumptuous food are prepared and served to him as he pleases. All this is a reward for virtues in his former lives.

Misfortunes from ugliness to a short life can be traced with precision back to specific actions from past lives (Harvey, 2011:16). And, according to the Buddha in the *Balapandita Sutta* (Nanamoli and Bodhi, 1995:1020-1021), once someone has done something bad enough to have a tormented, nonhuman rebirth, then the odds keep getting worse: A blind turtle, coming to the ocean's surface once a surface

> would take less time to put his neck into [a ring moved randomly by wind across the sea's surface] than a fool, once gone to perdition, would take to regain the human state, I say. . . . If, sometime or other, at the end of a long period, that fool comes back to the

> human state, it is into a low family that he is reborn . . . he misconducts himself in body, speech, and mind, and having done that, on the dissolution of the body, after death, he reappears in a state of deprivation, in an unhappy destination, in perdition, even in hell.

So karma never sleeps, but it certainly keeps its believers awake at night. What gives karma its fearsome power? It never overlooks an action. In fact, it never even overlooks a motivation behind that action. While we must be careful not to anthropomorphize it, Buddhist karma has the remarkable ability to excavate the intention from an action. As Pandita (2012:21) puts it, our "intention, efforts, accompanying defilements" are all "input factors fed into the machinery of the karmic law." For example, if I were to run over a dog accidentally, especially if I had been careless, I would have some karmic debt, but not nearly so much as if I were to do so on purpose (Mrozik, 2002:2). It is often noted that the Buddha was an equalizer in his day, most famously challenging the caste system. It makes sense that Buddhism would reject the caste system since the Buddha linked karma with intention; your intention—as opposed to, for example, the family you are born into—is what determines your destiny (Adam, 2013:431). In the Pali canon's Vinaya (the monastic rules), it is not uncommon for culpability to hinge on whether the offense was intentional or unintentional (Harvey, 1999:273). Yet the states of mind more or less accurately punished by the *sangha* (the community of monks) are reciprocated infallibly by karma.

Yet, in the end, karma's biggest potency might turn out to be its most insurmountable problem. Somehow, Buddhist karma is able to store a lifetime of intentions and, at death, construct it into a rebirth of errorless justice. All this is accomplished for a not-self, a heap of aggregates, on the basis of a past not-self's intentions. In a helpful article describing both Christianity's and Buddhism's tensions with modern science, philosophy professor Frank Fair (2005:73) notes that, in examining texts on the subject, he "was struck with the feeling that some

of them are uneasy about the doctrine of karma," and thus many shrink it to a version "so diluted as to be of little religious interest." The problem with the undiluted version is that Buddhist karma presupposes "some kind of filtering mechanism in operation that allows only consequences of intentional acts to affect our future lives. This view is painfully contradicted by our daily experience, in which unintentional actions can have huge consequences for our lives" (Fair, 2005:73). Western ethicists like Damien Keown might assure us that karma is "not a form of sympathetic magic by which the universe mechanically rewards moral action" but it is something closer to the far simpler principle of "actions have consequences" (Evans, 2012:535). However, as Buddhism scholar Stephen Evans (2012:537) reminds us, the Pali discourses clearly distinguish between karma and ordinary causation. Likewise, religion scholar Dale Wright (2005:87), attempting to move Buddhist scholarship "towards a naturalized concept of karma," might ask rhetorically of karma's additional ability to transfer and store merit, "What kind of magical or supernatural entity would karma have to be to make such a gift of merit make sense?" Unwelcomed, Evans (2012:537) again retorts, "The answer is: precisely that kind of magical or supernatural entity."

Now, these criticisms do not find their origin in modern times. Hence, rejoinders from centuries of internal debate on the subject present themselves to the modern Buddhist. For example, the difficulty of explaining the transfer of karma from a not-self to a not-self is mitigated somewhat by the concept of an *antarabhava*, or interim state occupied by the transitional being. The notion of *antarabhava* was held by the Indian Hinayana Sarvastivada school and is now accepted by most Mahayana schools (Buswell and Lopez, 2014:49-50). An even more forceful response comes from the extinct Hinayana Pudgalavada school, which proposed a personal substratum to the five aggregates (Williams et al., 2012:92-93). So there are

at least some resources from within Buddhism to draw upon for responding to modern skepticism about the seemingly magical capabilities of Buddhist karma.

Noting the inverse relationship between a culture which focuses on afterlife and a culture centered on the here-and-now, Peter Hershock (2005:1) makes the inevitable observation, "Karma has not fared well in the course of Buddhism's transmission into the West." Philosophy professor Eric Sean Nelson (2005:9) illustrates this difficulty of transmission. Marching against "reification," Nelson targets popular notions of karma as "fate" or as "theodicy" as reifications of what was meant to be merely an ethical doctrine. He states, "I will argue that karma is at most a moral rather than a natural causality." In fact, "Karma is not so much a metaphysical proposition about the world, whether understood as a speculative or naturalistic explanation of it, as it is an ethical claim to consider the merit of one's present actions." Karma, in the end, un-reifies into a succinct, unassailable principle: "Act as if every action has consequences that follow from the moral qualities of the action that produced them." A modern approach to karma described by Zen Buddhist David Loy (2000:157) simplifies the process to "mental formations" (*samkharas*) that, instead of merely being someone's intentions, actually become that person, so that "we are punished not for our sins, but by them. People suffer or benefit not for what they have done, but for what they have become, and what we intentionally do is what makes us what we are."

In short, karma is unproblematic until we apply the concept to the next life. Wright sees karmic rebirth as not only a metaphysical threat to the not-self doctrine (how can I be reconstituted in the next life when there was no "I" in this one?), but also as an ethical threat to this-worldly endeavors (how can I be concerned with justice in the here-and-now when I am counting on justice in the hereafter?). Besides, we are told, rebirth is too individualistic and focused on external rewards such as riches and status. The problem is that when, for example,

the Dalai Lama teaches, "As a result of stealing, one will lack material wealth," such reasoning only makes sense in the context of rebirth, because, as it stands, the thief actually has more wealth as a result of the theft. But it is precisely in rebirth where, according to Wright (2005:87), "karma is most problematic"; thus Wright (2005:89) proposes a "naturalistic theory of karma" that "would treat choice and character as mutually determining—each arising dependent on the other."

What is a Buddhist to do if she cannot bring herself to abandon karmic rebirth for a more naturalistic version since she views karmic rebirth as foundational to Buddhism? Could not one strategy be to respond that, whatever the complications karmic rebirth presents Buddhism, that, at least, Buddhism is not alone in affirming the miraculous? Hence, Christianity, for example, would be shown to have no superior position from which to criticize, because, after all, Christians believe in the miraculous too. However, there is a crucial difference between defending the miraculous in Buddhism and in Christianity—namely, the ontological "givens." God can do miracles. In Buddhism, however, what invests karma with such capability? Intention already has a supernatural efficacy in humdrum karmic rebirth—infinite intentions birthing infinite rebirths stretching infinitely into past and future. Then, intention in Mahayana Buddhism, in which an adherent's intention will set someone on the path to becoming a Buddha, takes on godlike proficiencies. No wonder Williams (2009:203) calls it "the magical world of the Mahayana," where "a benevolent intention (backed with insight) can work wonders." Can Buddhism's ontology—dependent co-arising at its beginning and nirvana at its end—ground such wonders?

Many would like to see karma as a "conceptual inheritance of Buddhism from the ancient philosophies of India," and do away with it in the same manner as they dismiss the "soul" from

Christianity as merely Hellenistic (Fair, 2005:73-74). Whatever modernists prefer, however, karmic rebirth is, in fact, integral to Buddhism. How could karma be tamed to a truism like "Actions have consequences" and sense still be made of the canonical Buddha's assurance that, upon death, this or that disciple has earned status as a "once-returner" or a "stream enterer" bound for enlightenment in a future life, as described in the *Para-nibbana Sutta* (1998g)? What are we to make of Buddha's claim to be able to see the rebirth of humans with his divine eye and "how they are inferior and superior, beautiful and ugly, fortunate and unfortunate in accordance with their kamma," as we read in the *Samannaphala Sutta* (1997d)? If he did not believe in a karmically-fueled wheel of existence, why would the Buddha promise release from that wheel, such that, according to the *Potthapada Sutta* (2003a), "Birth is ended, the holy life fulfilled, the task done. There is nothing further for this world"? Examples like this could be multiplied to monotony, but the point is that the Buddha believed and taught karmic rebirth.

Defending it, of course, is a different question. Wright (2005:88) asks what evidence there is and concludes,

> [H]ere we encounter an unsurprising division between pious Hindus and Buddhists who write books gathering what seems to them the incontrovertible evidence for reincarnation, and Western scientists who, seeing no evidence whatsoever, don't even raise the question. This is to say that, constrained by a variety of traditional and modern doctrines, this question hasn't been asked in a serious way, both out of deference to religious belief and because the question itself eludes conclusive response because what it pursues is by definition beyond the world in which we live, that is, fully metaphysical.

Now, it is not true that just because scientists have not discovered a physiological mechanism for karmic rebirth, karmic rebirth is thereby excluded from the category of truth. Put another way, even if karmic rebirth belongs completely in the category of metaphysical reality, karmic rebirth is not thereby excluded from the category of "real." Yet even with such a priori constraints lifted, and with dependent co-arising and nirvana granted as ontological "givens," it is still difficult to

fathom how something as impersonal and abstract as Buddhist karma can nonetheless produce the miraculous justice attributed to it.

Just why should karma be just or miraculous? It is sometimes argued that karma is unfair: "Consider the Buddhist nuns raped by Communist soldiers during the purge of Tibet. Was this their karmic debt?" (Beverley, 2001b:69). Such is largely the approach of philosophy professor Whitley Kaufman (2005:19-21) in his critique of karma: how is karma just when, for example, one has no memory of past-life crimes, or why the seeming disproportionality of death or even hell as punishment? Point-by-point, Monima Chadha and Nick Travakis (2007) defend karma against Kaufman and explain how they see karma as actually remarkably just. But this misses the crucial question of why karma should be just in the first place, arising as it does from nothing more substantial than a codependency of pure *dukkha* (suffering). Justice alone calls the rabbit out of the hat, but consider the magic this justice effects. Kaufman (2005:24-25) hypothesizes: If a terrorist detonates a bomb that kills civilians, is the terrorist really to blame when he is merely the "agent" of the civilians' karma? But, argue Chadha and Travakis (2007:546-547), this is to anthropomorphize karma: in reality, "the impersonal nature of the process means that there is no agent or divinity responsible for meting out the relevant rewards and punishments." Even with that said, how could something so completely impersonal orchestrate a plan so intricate as to make certain a terrorist's free will compensates particular civilians' past-life intentions?

It is difficult to resist the conclusion that, though the Buddha adopted karma, his ontology fails to ground it, especially as he refined karma to perceive intention and posthumously reconstitute not-selves. Philosophy professor Bradford Cokelet (2005:10) concludes that karmic rebirth, unlike karma without rebirth, can be helped by "no conclusive argument," and thus, the only way to argue for it is as Kant argued for his ethics: "we should adopt certain supernatural

beliefs because, first, we have a moral obligation to pursue certain ends and, second, pursuit of these ends is rational only if we have the relevant supernatural beliefs" (Cokelet, 2005:3) (though Cokelet (2005:10-11) himself has doubts about the ethical necessity of holding to karmic rebirth). While it is conceivable (says Cokelet) to argue from ethics to karmic rebirth, can we, in fact, argue from karmic rebirth to ethics, when such rebirth arises from an unsupportive ontology? Of course, karma is a powerful ethical motivator for those who believe in karma already. The kind of karma arising out of an interdependent mass of *dukkha*, however, should not logically be able to do the kinds of feats claimed of it. Does Buddhism's "discerning destiny" necessitate love of neighbor? Considering the ontological groundings, it seems the answer is no, unless an extraordinarily clever karma were assumed from the outset.

3.3.2 Reason #2 – because Buddhas are benevolent

Another reason for Buddhists to love one's neighbor is the obvious "because the Buddha says so." Even for lay people, the "five precepts" go far in reducing interpersonal enmity: faithful Buddhists abstain from taking life, stealing, immoral sensuality, speaking falsely, and taking intoxicants (Conze, 1959:86). So it should be easy then to argue from the precepts to loving, social action. British Buddhist Ken Jones reasons, "A socially engaged Buddhism needs no other rationale than that of being an amplification of traditional Buddhist (five precept) morality, a social ethic brought forth by the needs and potentialities of present-day society" (Ken Jones, quoted in King, 1995:80). Add to the Buddha's words his selfless example, and suddenly his authority seems quite strong enough to command what we are looking for, a logical grounding for love of neighbor. Add in the heartbreaking legends of the noble bodhisattvas who pity the "drunken procession staggering towards a cliff" and thus forego nirvana to rescue them

(Tennent, 2002:120). Sometimes those bodhisattvas are so desperate to save they will even disobey precepts when compassion demands it (Keown, 2001:161-162).

The authority of these buddhas and bodhisattvas can be stated more strongly yet. King (1989:253-254) is clear that no informed Buddhist would label the Buddha a "god." "Yet," as King puts it, "no one who has seen a Theravada Buddhist bow before a Buddha image, or heard a believer speak the name 'Buddha' can doubt that for him or her the Buddha functioned and continues to function as saving deity, no matter what is said doctrinally." Religions scholar Timothy Tennett (2002:113) observes, "It seems that the only thing keeping Buddhists from being pushed toward nihilism is this functional theism in which they live, work, and worship." This posthumously-bestowed honorary divinity surely bolsters the authority of the Buddha's precepts.

So the Buddha's ethical authority is undoubtedly binding for Buddhists, but is such ethical efficacy logical, considering Buddhist ontology? Central to Keown's influential *The Nature of Buddhist Ethics* (2001:193) is the Aristotelian notion of the "supreme good" (*eudemonia*). Keown (2001:83) presents nirvana, the consummation of wisdom and compassion, as the supreme good of Buddhism. His opponent is the "transcendency thesis"; he sets out to prove that ethics are not transcended, but consummated, in nirvana. What is his reasoning? The Buddha displayed the perfection of wisdom and compassion *after* having achieved enlightenment. As Keown (2001:75) puts it, "We see from the conduct of the Buddha, who lived an exemplary moral life with nothing to gain thereby, that morality is not a means to an end but an end in itself." According to Keown (2001:80), the Enlightened One embodied "ethical [compassion] and intellectual [wisdom] perfection." Have we thus found in nirvana the supreme good as our ontological ground for love of neighbor? After all, the Buddha was enlightened

when he gave the precepts. We thus have an unbroken line from nirvana to the Buddha to the precepts. His teachings are, indeed, authoritative, because of his direct acquaintance with nirvana.

There is a problem, however, with locating his authority in *ontological* nirvana, specifically with what has been called "nirvana without remainder." Keown (2001:19) concedes this candidly:

> To avoid any confusion, I am concerned throughout this book only with that nirvana in terms of which ethical goodness can be predicated of a human subject, namely "nirvana in this life." I do not address directly the problem of the apparent absence of a moral subject in the light of the no-self doctrine. It seems to me that Buddhism provides sufficient criteria for personal identity to allow the identification of subjects within the moral nexus. The discipline of ethics requires only that one individual can be distinguished from another: to pursue the issue of the ultimate ontological constitution of individual natures in this context is to confuse ethics with metaphysics, and does not make for a fruitful line of enquiry.

Note that Keown not only declines to reconcile his ethics with the metaphysics of no-self, but also leaves the question of metaphysical nirvana, of "nirvana without remainder," completely out of his discussion of the "nirvanic" supreme good. If we are looking for an *ontological* grounding for love of neighbor, we should feel slighted. We are assured that goodness is "nirvanic," yet no premise is even offered to bridge the Buddha's goodness to ultimate reality. True, his example and precepts are indeed moral, but the ontological connection remains unfastened. The grounding for love of neighbor must be discovered someplace else.

3.3.3 Reason #3 – because egos are empty

Nothing obstructs love of neighbor like an inflated ego. Recall from Chapter 2, the section "Eclipsing the Egoistic," where interfaith scholars hammered Christianity for being too "egoistic." Buddhism's purported contribution to this chronic Christian problem is to expose the

inflated bubble as actually empty. There is no self. As Masao Abe (1985:66) makes clear, it is not as though there were some Jungian "collective unconscious" or "unknown self" somewhere: "Zen tries to dig out and cut away the very root of the human consciousness beyond consciousness, including the Jungian or any other hypothesized realm of an unconscious." With the bubbles' bursting into air, what can prevent our finally achieving utter selflessness? Zen-trained Jeff Shore (1998:306), leader of the organization "Being without Self," concludes in his tribute to Abe, "Can Emptiness ground a commitment to a global ethic?" His answer is an enthusiastic yes, but how? "By responding creatively to the suffering, from out of the suffering, in a truly global, selfless commitment to all." One scholar suggests Buddhist selflessness as an Eastern parallel to American ethicist John Rawls's "veil of ignorance" ethical theory (Cho, 2000:78). Rawls suggests a hypothetical return to before the emergence of society. Participants in the theoretical experiment are to design what they believe to be a just society without knowing what function they would play in the hypothetical society, and thus their decisions remain uninfluenced by what considerations might arise from their particular interests. The resulting societal arrangements are thus presumed to be fair. In a sense, the selfless Buddhist can claim to already be there, believing, "I am everybody in the community" (Cho, 2000:80).

Such egolessness surely derails the steamroller of self-assertion. But, once not-self is realized, what kind of love could truly be asserted by one not-self to another? Any such love would certainly require some redefinitions. Shore (1998:299) notes the seemingly ineradicable presumption of self that comes through one scholar's "unfortunate slip": "We must empty Emptiness itself . . . ." It is possible to avoid the error. The emperor discoursing with Ch'an (Zen) master Bodhidharma wondered to what extent "all is empty" and thus asked, "Who is answering me?" Bodhidharma returned, "Don't know" (Faden, 2011:45).

Of course, it will be emphasized by those wanting to construct interreligious bridges that the Buddha refused any concrete definitions. One can point to, for example, a Pali sutra wherein a monk asks the Buddha, "Is there a self?" and is met with silence; so he asks, "Is there no self?" and receives the same reply (Faden, 2011:41). And, of course, Buddhism never denies that the data that comprises the person exists at a this-worldly level. This existing phenomena is what Riccardo Repetti (2014:283) calls the "psychological self," as opposed to the actual "ontological self." Yet, whatever the case, the truth simply cannot be amended that "as facts of ultimate reality, [Buddhists] must reject the 'self' . . ." (Conze, 1959:19). The Buddha continually enunciated that a human is merely five aggregates: "body, sensation, conceptualization, volitions, and consciousness" (Faden, 2011:42). Because none of these "heaps" equals a self, there is thus no egotism to enshrine, no headquarters of possessiveness. The importance of the not-self doctrine for Buddhism cannot be overemphasized. Conze (1959:18) explains,

> The specific contribution of Buddhism to religious thought lies in its insistence on the doctrine of "not-self" (*an-atta* in Pali, *anatman* in Sanskrit). The belief in a "self" is considered by all Buddhists as an indispensable condition to the emergence of suffering. We conjure up such ideas as "I" and "mine," and many most undesirable states result. We would be perfectly happy, quite blissfully happy, as happy as, according to some psychologists, the child is in the womb, if we first could get rid of our selves.

Two questions follow. First, does not-self make love of neighbor possible? On the one hand, the answer seems self-evidently yes. What better prerequisite to selfless action could be asked for than to actually burst the self? On the other hand, how can a not-self accomplish any action at all? Of course, this is the point where the Buddhist interjects that the Buddha was noncommittal on definitions and affirming of this-worldly data, regardless of the metaphysical impermanence of the person. But the question is a valid one: insofar as self is extinguished, how can love of neighbor be expected? Recall one of the reasons Keown (2001:19) limited his ethical grounding to "nirvana in this life" as opposed to the undoubtedly agentless beyond:

> The discipline of ethics requires only that one individual can be distinguished from another: to pursue the issue of the ultimate ontological constitution of individual natures in this context is to confuse ethics with metaphysics, and does not make for a fruitful line of inquiry.

Michael Barnhart (2013:604), arguing (unpopularly, considering its location in a Buddhist journal) the merits of egocentrism, asks Buddhism some tough questions: "Who is the 'I' that is supposed to be lovingkind or compassionate? For that matter, who is the 'I' that is supposed to do all this detaching or avoiding attachment?" Tennett (2002:128) reasons that "Buddhist compassion can never rise above pity because the focus is not on real human sufferers, only on the causal chain of conditions that gives the illusory experience of a self who suffers and is trapped on the wheel."

Though the question as to how not-selves can love is important—so important, in fact, that it has its own section (see "How *Can* I Love My Neighbor" below)—the more relevant question here is, does egolessness provide a *should*? Should we love our neighbor, given the not-self doctrine, grounded in Buddhist ontology? Barnhart thinks not (2013:605):

> [T]here does not seem to be anything logically entailing in the relation between noself metaphysics and virtuous dispositions. For example, while being no-self may make one more attentive and considerate of the needs and feelings of others, it may also make one sad and despondent. Might one not become insensitive to the needs of others, not because he favors himself, but because there is no one to favor and nothing within their lives to favor?

Barnhart opens an important question: What exactly would the logic connecting not-self with altruism look like?

Santideva scholar Stephen Harris (2011) asks in the title of his article, "Does Anatman Rationally Entail Altruism?" Santideva, eighth century Indian Mahayana monk (Buswell and Lopez, 2014:774), actually presented an argument reasoning from not-self to altruism. His *Bodhicaryavatara* traces his logic:

> The continuum of consciousness, like a series, and the aggregation of constituents, like an army and such, are un-real. Since one who experiences suffering does not exist, to whom will that suffering belong? All sufferings are without an owner, because they are not different. They should be warded off simply because they are suffering. Why is any restriction made in this case? Why should suffering be prevented? Because everyone agrees. If it must be warded off, then all of it must be warded off; and if not, then this goes for oneself as it does for everyone else (Harris, 2011:102).

Note that Santideva begins by emphasizing the ultimate unreality of the self. Because interpersonal distinctions are ultimately illusory, then, as Santideva puts it at the end, the choice is between trying to eradicate all or none of this-worldly suffering, and thus not prioritizing one's well-being over another. Note further when Santideva first uses the word *should*. "Why should suffering be prevented?" In his answer, he switches from arguing on the basis of ultimate things to the basis of conventional intuition: "Because everyone agrees." It is not suffering in the sense of "All sufferings are without an owner" that causes all people to intuit that things are bad "simply because they are suffering." No, suffering wins becomes a crucial factor in highly personal experience, integral to what Buddhists call the "conventional self." Who has even developed intuitions about "impersonal" suffering, in "a world where suffering exists in isolated mental flashes completely disconnected from any other mental events?" (Harris, 2011:109-110). In short, Santideva's argument for altruism vacillates between ultimate and conventional reality.

Yet, how can you jump back and forth like that and claim to be tracing a direct logical line? His argument against intuition (one ought to reduce one's own suffering) borrows from intuition (everyone knows suffering ought to be eliminated). Which is it? If suffering is only conventionally connected, there is ultimately no reason to be feverish about eliminating it. If we are truly not-selves and suffering is merely disconnected "mental flashes," then why pretend that suffering is actually something as devastating as it was under the delusion of self? Harris (2011:117) summarizes the dilemma:

> On the one hand, if we emphasize the merely imputed and fictitious nature of the conventional self, then it will be open to the opponent to inquire why we ought to care about anyone's welfare, even that of the future being conventionally identified as identical to my present self. In this horn of the dilemma, it becomes unclear why understanding the truth of anātman should entail altruism rather than apathy. On the other hand, we can reestablish a motivation to help all sentient beings by emphasizing the importance of the conventional self. However, since my future conventional self is conventionally identical to my current conventional self, it would seem that it would not be irrational to prioritize its welfare over other conventional selves.

After all, if we are arguing from conventional intuition, my strongest intuitions do not incline me to feel the suffering of, e.g. a lobster, as strongly as my own or that of my family. Conventional intuition should not be imported into an argument in which convention is overturned (ignore your "self") and intuitions are cherry-picked (ignore your suffering). The most that can be said for Santideva's argument, it turns out, is that, once someone is already on the Mahayana path, "realizing *anatman*, then, is a necessary condition for completion . . . although it does not of itself constitute a reason for entering [the path]" (Harris, 2011:118). In the end, it seems most generous to conclude that Santideva's logic proves to be helpful meditational advice to those who are already Buddhists, even if illogically argued (as Harris (2011:121) puts it, "Taken as a meditational technique, however, this tension dissolves").

So does egolessness entail love of neighbor? At most, it could be said to remove the obstacle of selfishness, but, to what extent it can eliminate self without eliminating the agency that selfless acts presuppose, remains an important question. Removing an obstacle only enables, but does not compel action. As in the case of Santideva, a not-self is free to think conventionally (in which case, intuition welcomes self-concern) or ultimately (in which case, this-worldly suffering is detached from subjects and can be met with equally detached apathy). To find an ontological grounding for love of neighbor, one must look elsewhere.

3.3.4 Reason #4 – because individuals are interrelated

Perhaps the not-self doctrine needs only to be applied more positively. According to Buddhism, negatively we are not selves, but positively we are *interconnected* with one another. Does not *interconnectivity* connote the perfect society? Buddhist interconnectivity rises, of course, from the doctrine of dependent co-arising, the perpetual source of *samsara*. The relentless, monotonous wheel of life, however, can be painted positively, even transforming into something beautiful, as articulated by the Hua-yen school. The Chinese Hua-yen, "Flower Garland," Tradition based itself on the *Avatamsaka Sutra*, which set out to describe the cosmos from the Buddha's perspective (Williams, 2009:132-133). Williams (2009:136) describes the view as one of complete interpenetration: "[I]n a world with no hard edges, the world of luminous flow without shadows, all things infinitely interpenetrate. Inside everything is everything else, and yet no things are confused." The sutra's most memorable metaphor is "Indra's Net," described by Buddhist scholar Chris Kang (2009:78-79) as:

> [R]eality is compared to a multi-dimensional net of jewels each connected to another in an infinite web wherein each jewel contains and reflects the others without end. In this infinite net, no jewel is at the center and no jewel at the periphery; all are equally significant and luminous holons in a boundaryless holographic omniverse. Such a breathtaking view of causality can best be described as omni-causality—inconceivable lines, spirals, dimensions and spheres of cause and effect that elude conceptual demarcation and fabrication, and impervious to existential reification and grasping. In this view, we live in an inter-existing, inter-penetrating cosmos where entire world systems can be found in a single mote of dust.

As seems fitting for such a friendly term, interconnectivity is often claimed as a grounding for Buddhist love of neighbor. For example, the Dalai Lama argues,

> Because self and others can only really be understood in terms of relationship, we see that self-interest and others' interest are closely interrelated. Indeed, within this picture of dependently originated reality, we see that there is no self-interest completely unrelated to others' interests. Due to the fundamental interconnectedness which lies at the heart of reality, your interest is also my interest (de Cea, 2013:533).

Kang (2009:83) reasons that Buddhist causality "challenge[s] us as a species to adopt an ethic of universal responsibility, caring for the needs of all sentient beings rooted in a radical deconstruction of the egocentric self." Buddhist insight "gives rise to a universal ethic of 'interbeing' inclusive of all life forms as opposed to an isolationist ethos of 'every man for himself' seeking a selfish 'survival of the fittest'" (Kang, 2009:97). Sulak Sivaraksa (2002:90) explains, "When we define ourselves as part of a web of relationships, the quality of our interactions and freedom from hatred, greed, and delusion emerge as the highest values of existence." Thich Naht Hanh calls such a web "interbeing": one finds that she is "both the oppressor and the oppressed, the producer and the consumer." Such interconnectivity is said to be "both ecologically sound and interpersonally relevant for this life" (Rochelle, 1991:293). Some go so far as to claim, "The premise of Buddhist 'ethical life' is the awareness of interdependence. Compassion is made possible by grasping the inter-defining tie between subject and object" (Lewis, 1997:144).

But is this interconnectivity the key to "peace on earth"? Now, if the connection between interconnectivity and peace is said to be automatic, even tautological, the answer must be no. Buddhist interconnectivity does not automatically translate into universal harmony, as some western Buddhists have implied. Christopher Ives (2008a:24) explodes such starry-eyed interpretations of dependent co-arising (e.g. Robert Aitken's "We are born into a world in which all things nurture us" and Stephen Batchelor's "in an undivided world everything miraculously supports everything else" (Ives, 2008a:24-25):

> When writers adopt "interdependence" as the English rendering of *pratītya-samutpāda* or interpret this Sanskrit term and the closely related doctrine of emptiness (Skt. *śūnyatā*) in the ways these quotations indicate, they step onto a slippery rhetorical slope and, by extension, run the risk of succumbing to sloppy argumentation. Insofar as these writers are arguing that all things are interrelated, that they affect and condition each other, their discourse would be congruent with Buddhist metaphysics. . . . But to claim that our

> flourishing is dependent on everything else, or that everything nurtures us, is to move onto shaky ground. Though a Ukrainian baby does have a relationship with the Chernobyl reactor, and lingering radioactivity may affect her, one can hardly argue in any intelligible sense that she "arises in dependence upon" the failed reactor, or that once born she is "supported" and "nurtured" by the dangerous iodine and strontium isotopes released by the 1986 accident, or that her well-being is "dependent on" these forms of radioactive poison. Her well-being is actually dependent on limiting her physical relationship with radioactivity, on being independent of it. Hence the reactor gets encased in concrete.

In searching for the ontological foundation for Buddhist ethics, Anton Luis Sevilla (2010:218) found himself skeptical alongside Ives: "[A] child is no less interrelated with a violent and abusive father than it is with an affectionate mother, and citizens are no less interrelated with a vicious and genocidal tyrant than they are with a spiritual beacon like the Dalai Lama." *Dependent co-arising* may roughly translate into *interconnectivity,* but *interconnectivity* does not automatically translate into *paradise.*

But if interconnectivity is not a nurturing force synonymous with peace, does interconnectivity at least provide logical grounds for pursuing peaceful coexistence? Does interconnectivity provide an ontologically grounded "ought" for love of neighbor? Keown (1995:14) summarizes the logic: "Human beings, like everything else, are part of the relational process described in the doctrine of dependent-origination; since no-one exists independently we should look out for one another . . . ." But is such logic sound? Kenneth Inada (1995:3) may be right that, whereas westerners treat others as separate entities ("hard relationships"), Buddhism dissolves such distinctions ("soft relationships"). But just how is Inada able to then move from that observation to claiming that, instead of the "fragmentation, narrowness, and restriction" of hard relationships, soft relationships "manifest themselves in . . . patience, humility, tolerance, deference, non-action, humaneness, concern, pity, sympathy, altruism, sincerity, honesty, faith, responsibility, trust, respectfulness, reverence, love and compassion" (Inada, 1995:5-6)?

Does interconnectivity urge magnanimity? On the contrary, Keown (1995:14-15) sees such an "argument" as "little more than a series of assertions":

> The derivation of human rights from the doctrine of dependent-origination is a conjuring trick. From the premise that we live in "a mutually constituted existential realm" (we all live together) it has "thereby become a fact" that there will be "mutual respect of fellow beings." In the twinkling of an eye, values have appeared from facts like a rabbit out of a hat. However, the fact that human beings live in relationship with one another is not a moral argument about how they ought to behave.

Sevilla (2010:218) agrees: "A metaphysical notion like interdependent arising which dictates how things are cannot be the basis for ethics and how things ought to be." Like not-self, at most, human interconnectivity could remove barriers to selfishness, but, again, *should* does not logically follow and has to be inserted.

3.3.5 Reason #5 – because integrity is instrumental (or intrinsic?)

Much debate has gone into aligning Buddhism with various western ethical systems. Perhaps it is here we will find an ontological grounding for love of neighbor. The two closest western analogues are said to be the inward-oriented virtue ethics and the future-oriented consequentialism.[18] Roughly, virtue ethics tells us, "Do what the virtuous person does," while consequentialism requires, "Do whatever has the best long-term consequences" (Fink, 2013:694). Philosophy professor Charles Fink (2013:692-693) helpfully notes that, besides getting better karma, there are two additional reasons to be moral in Buddhism: it "liberates us from samsara," and it "benefits all sentient beings." Personal liberation matches virtue ethics

[18] Deontological ethics could be mentioned here as well. According to deontological ethics, one must do what is good because that is one's duty. Unlike consequentialism, the point is not what results from the action, but the goodness of the action itself. There is some deontological reasoning that can be seen in Buddhist ethical speculation. For example, one is reminded of Charles Fink's (2013:671-672) "act-centered" virtue ethics, according to which "what gives an action its moral worth is that it is a virtuous act. . . . Even if it has no lasting effect, a kind deed is still a good deed." Yet the two western ethical systems most commonly held to be analogous to Buddhist ethics remain virtue ethics and consequentialism.

(nirvana is one's own supreme good), while benefitting all sentient beings matches consequentialism (ushering all sentient beings to nirvana is the most consequential act).

Buddhist virtue ethics has already been introduced by Keown (2001:74-75), who argues that the Buddha—having reached enlightenment—exhibited moral and intellectual perfection. Keown reasons that nirvana must therefore be one's supreme good (eudemonia). James Whitehill (1994:1) notes that the interest in Buddhist virtue ethics coincides with an upsurge in Christian virtue ethics associated with Alasdair MacIntyre and Stanley Hauerwas. Various Buddhism scholars nod to Keown and offer their own adjustments to Buddhist virtue ethics (Whitehill, 1994:4). Martin Adam (2005:75-76), for example, agrees with the general virtue ethics comparison, yet shows how, because there are various levels of moral agency due to different levels of spiritual attainment, matters are not quite so simple as Keown paints them. For example, whereas an ordinary person's virtue is said to be "meritorious, wholesome, and bright" (*punna*, *kusala*, and *sukka*), virtue for a Buddha can be described as neither these three nor their opposites, because the Buddha's "good conduct is beyond duality." Georges Dreyfus (1995:36-37) suggests that Keown's virtue ethics would be more fittingly patterned after Hellenistic thinkers less politically focused than Aristotle and instead more internally focused. Dreyfus points us to Greeks like Epicurus, Pyrrho, and Seneca, for whom, "Human happiness is found in a state of equanimity (*ataraxia*) achieved by removing the disturbances brought about by passions and anxieties. The achievement of such a state is the goal of ethics, which is intensely therapeutic." In short, within Buddhism virtue ethics is a lively debate.

Peter Harvey (2011:50) backs Keown and shares why Buddhism is not consequentialist: "The Path to this is good or wholesome because it is intrinsically related to this goal, not contingently so: it is not the Path which just happens to conduce to it." That is, consequentialism

praises a deed because it leads to the proper goal, but that deed itself is not necessarily intrinsic, but only instrumental, to the goal, whereas virtue ethics praises a deed because it shares in the perfection of the goal. But even those who, like Fink (2013:695), align Buddhism with virtue ethics, note just how consequentialist Buddhism often appears to be, especially when it comes to "practical criteria for making moral decisions."

Charles Goodman (2013) seems the chief representative for the consequentialist side. He sees virtue ethicists as far too individualistic for Buddhism. He thus proposes an agent-neutral, universalist consequentialism: "they take into account consequences for all sentient beings over the entire future history of the universe" (Goodman, 2013:614). Distancing his position from virtue ethics, Goodman explains, "According to consequentialists, one of my actions can be right even though it is harmful to my flourishing, so long as its consequences are sufficiently beneficial to others, including others who are in no important way related to me" (Goodman, 2013:617). He feels he needs to distance himself from certain fellow consequentialists as well, however, because of the hedonistic stereotype often assumed with such utilitarian theories (Goodman, 2013:614-615). His Buddhist consequentialism is actually extraordinarily exhausting: it "might call for heroic acts of self-sacrifice for the sake of others" (de Cea, 2013:514). In fact, the numerous Mahayana texts featuring bodhisattvas skirting precepts out of compassion suggest that Buddhist consequentialism "could occasionally require morally terrifying actions," such as "lying, stealing, sexual misconduct, and killing when these actions are motivated by a compassionate wish to benefit all beings" (Goodman, 2013:627).

Some writers, of course, are skeptical of the whole endeavor of fitting Buddhism into the mold of any western ethics. Referencing the in-house virtue ethics technicalities, Stephen Evans (2012:521) concludes, "What we seem to have here are distinctions and refinements of

distinctions never made in the tradition in order to answer questions never asked in defense of a thesis that has no precedent." Buddhism is extraordinarily complex as it is, and its ethical assortment does little to unify things. Some, therefore, have opted for ethical particularism, according to which instances of moral goodness can be recognized without having to formulate a more general criteria for goodness (Hallisey, 1996:41). For example, Charles Hallisey (1996:38-39) examines the *Mangalasutta*, a list of thirty-eight ethical duties and notes that while some seem to be good because of their consequences, others seem to be good because of their very nature. Hallisey concludes that Buddhist writings point us "to the rich particularity of each situation before us without holding ourselves to a standard of moral consistency generally associated with taking guidance from a single ethical theory" (Hallisey, 1996:42). Or Neeman (2010:157) explains the particularity by bringing alongside John Dewey and arguing for a scientific, cause-effect ethical pragmatism. Keown (2013:457) acknowledges the ethical variations in Buddhism, yet returns, "If such conflicts can be resolved within the framework of a single theory, as I have suggested, it undermines the particularist claim that since Buddhist stories reveal diverse and contradictory moral opinions there cannot be a successful metatheory of Buddhist ethics." Kevin Schilbrack (1997:99) agrees: "Although the Theravada tradition, like any religious tradition, includes more than one ethical theory, there is no good reason not to inquire into its general or formal features."

At the risk of sounding too accommodating, it seems to me that the best virtue ethics-consequentialism resolution sees them both as applicable in their respective spheres. Goodman (2013:612) is candid about where his consequentialism comes from: Mahayana sources. Says Goodman (2012:614), "The consequentialist theories that I want to put forward as models of Mahayana ethics are universalist . . . ." Keown, on the other hand, gets his inspiration primarily

from the Theravada tradition. One reviewer notes, "Keown tends to emphasize the basic texts of the Theravada tradition, only occasionally turning to the Mahayana or the actual practices of contemporary Buddhists" (Barnhart, 2013:611-612). So, with virtue ethics grounded in a personal context (Theravada nirvana) and consequentialism grounded in corporate thinking (Mahayana compassion) we can ask whether the respective ontologies do, indeed, ground their respective ethics.

I already raised the question under the section "Buddhas are Benevolent" whether or not Keown's supreme good is able to ground love of neighbor. Keown (2001:22) explicitly limits his grounding to "nirvana with remainder," because it was while the Buddha was still alive and distinguishable from others that his enlightenment is said to have demonstrated "ethical and intellectual perfection." Recall that Keown (2001:19) distanced himself from anything "beyond" because "to pursue the issue of the ultimate ontological constitution of individual natures in this context is to confuse ethics with metaphysics, and does not make for a fruitful line of enquiry." If, in fact, Keown has good grounds for love of neighbor, it is in nothing more ontologically anchored than an enlightened, albeit human, exemplar. We must look elsewhere for an actually ontologically grounded love of neighbor.

What about consequentialism? Goodman is correct in criticizing virtue ethics for being ontologically ungrounded, whereas consequentialism is less agent-centered and more metaphysically grounded. According to Goodman (2013:620), "A significant difference between perfectionist consequentialism and virtue ethics, then, involves the metaphysical bases that could be used to support each of the theories." Unlike Keown's virtue ethics, Goodman's agentless universal consequentialism attempts to ground its bodhisattva commitment (to do whatever it takes to get all sentient beings into nirvana) in actually ontological nirvana without remainder.

Yet it is difficult to see how the extreme compassion Goodman requires (such as that of a Mahayana bodhisattva) is more than merely optional. How is such self-sacrifice made into moral obligation on that ontological basis? Moreover, even the compassion that is made optional by nirvana without remainder is arguably quite different (and diminished) from the kind of this-worldly altruism expected by western ethics. Is doing whatever it takes to assist all sentient beings into escape the same as this-worldly love of neighbor? In short, although virtue ethics attempts to find a grounding for this-worldly altruism, such a grounding does not appear to have an ontological basis. Furthermore, while consequentialism tries to ground its ethics ontologically, it is difficult to see how the ethics it seeks to produce is actually morally obligatory or how it can entail this-worldly love of neighbor. In the end, *ontological* grounding for love of neighbor cannot be accomplished through merely aligning Buddhist ethics with western counterparts.

3.3.6 Reason # 6 – because capability is constitutional

According to Christianity, having been made in God's image makes one immediately more deserving of a measure of sanctity (Gen. 9:6). What if there were something similar, viz. an intrinsic worth of human beings, in Buddhism that can supply a ground for love of neighbor? Some believe to have located just such an ethical grounding in the Mahayana doctrine of the *Tathagatagarbha*. *Tathagata*, "one who has thus come," was one of the Buddha's favorite self-designations (Buswell and Lopez, 2014:897). *Garbha* could mean "womb/matrix" or "seed/embryo," basically something's "innermost part" (Williams, 2009:104). The term is most commonly translated as "Buddha-nature," something that all sentient beings are said to possess. In Mahayana bodhisattvas vow to save absolutely all sentient beings (Williams, 2009:195). For those wondering how *all*—even the most hopeless beings—could possibly make it to nirvana,

the answer is the "Buddha-nature" (Buswell and Lopez, 2014:897). In the Mahayana sutras in which the doctrine first appears, having the Buddha-nature meant simply that all sentient beings have the capability to become enlightened. However, the idea evolved for some (for example, the *Lankavatara Sutra*) into "an almost genetic determination that all beings would eventually become buddhas," with some thinkers going so far as to endow it with superhuman characteristics (Buswell and Lopez, 2014:897). Some have tried to justify the doctrine in neuroscience: "[T]here now appears to be evidence that human creatures are neurologically 'wired' for compassion—as long affirmed by the Tibetan Buddhist tradition . . ." (Yong, 2008:49). The doctrine has even been imaginatively if not bizarrely likened to Calvinism's predestination, but with a wider election: It "relates to the notion of original enlightenment in all beings. . . . [I]t's just an awakening to what one already possesses" (Lee, 2004:177).[19]

Keown (2001:189) observes that God makes a convenient "metaphysical justification" for religions that believe in God. Although there is no God in Mahayana, Keown notes: "the concept of the embryonic Buddha-nature (*tathagatagarbha*) is perhaps the closest the Mahayana comes to such a metaphysical ground." The logic flows from the Buddha-nature to universal respect, says Harvey (2011:35):

> Whatever a person is like on the surface, it is held that the depths of their mind are "brightly shining" and pure. This depth purity, referred to as the "embryo of the Truth-attained One" (*Tathagata-garbha*)—or 'Buddha-nature'—in the Mahayana, represents the potential for ultimate change: the attainment of enlightenment, and as such is a basis for respecting all beings.

[19] In his comparison of the Buddhist doctrine of Buddha-Nature with the Calvinist doctrine of predestination, Lee views the Buddha-Nature through the lens of Shinran's Jodo-Shinshu Buddhism (e.g. having "*shinjin* in his own intrinsic Buddha-nature" (Lee, 2004:187).

Anton Luis Sevilla (2010:222) asks, "[W]hile having and respecting rights is good for my own sake, why must I respect another's rights for his or her sake?" What is called for is, of course, compassion, but what grounds compassion? Sevilla (2010:227) explains,

> [T]o say that each sentient being has the Buddha-nature brings an inescapable sense of solidarity to the ethical task of Mahayana Buddhism. "One ought to realize one's Buddha-nature" becomes "We ought to realize our own Buddha-nature, a nature we share with each and every sentient being as we suffer the impermanence of reality in our own ways."

The question, of course, is whether the idea of the Buddha-nature is able to provide an ontological ground for love of neighbor. Does realizing a fellow sentient being's capability, or even the inevitability of her reaching nirvana, obligate someone to love that sentient being? It would seem that such a realization would not even obligate someone to seek to save that sentient being, let alone to obligate actual love. The most it could do would be to remove one possible obstacle of doubt for aspiring bodhisattvas wondering if there really is any efficacy in the "magical world of the Mahayana" where "a benevolent intention (backed with insight) can work wonders" (Williams, 2009:203). A prescription to love one's neighbor simply does not follow logically from Buddha-nature, even if its realization encourages the bodhisattva in her path.

In fact, if the notion of a Buddha-nature has a prescriptive side to it, it might be in the direction away from this-worldly love. Sentience is a broad concept, and some traditions take Buddha-nature to an equally broad conclusion: it becomes acceptance, not merely of how living beings are constituted, but of how any circumstances are—regardless of whether one might consider them to be good or bad. This is especially evident in Zen Buddhism, in which moral reflection is often eclipsed by enlightenment technique (Wright, 2006:5). Sevilla (2010:239) quotes Zen master Dogen Zenji on how Buddha-nature is, in reality, nothing less than "entire being": "It is not the self contemplating, and it is not another person contemplating. It is—

Look!!! Temporal conditions!!! It is the Buddha-nature's emancipated suchness. It is—Look!!! Buddha! Buddha!!! It is—Look nature!!! Nature!!!" Sevilla concludes that "in order to see Buddha-nature and realize it, we must turn to the entirety of reality itself, as it is fully manifest in the arrival of time at each and every moment" (Sevilla, 2010:241). Buddha-nature is taken to teach that, "All worldly reality, whether in its perception as an impure world or a Pure Land, is just a manifestation of the Buddha-Nature to the individual mind" (Schmidt-leukel, 2010:95). Just what sort of ethic does Buddha-nature ground when defined so widely as to blanket all sentient beings but to give no direction as to what is good or evil? The *tathagatagarbha* doctrine has been criticized as leading to "a form of discrimination against the disadvantaged through accepting the status quo and the injustice that this involves" (Williams, 2009:122).

Zen professor Ichikawa Hakugen, reflecting on his tradition's inertness toward and even complicity in Japanese imperialism, sees in the Buddha-nature, as informed by karma, a somewhat tranquilizing force:

> He claims that while Zen has embraced a concept of equality in the doctrine of shared buddha-nature (*bussho*) and has recognized that in society humans differ in terms of health, wealth, and status, Zen maintains that "human beings are equal only in that we all possess buddha-nature and hence have the potentiality of becoming buddhas. Differing social positions, abilities, and circumstances are the retributive fruits of good and bad actions in previous existences." That is to say, traditional Zen thinkers have accepted, explained, and even justified societal differences in terms of karma . . . (Ives, 2005:42).

Likewise, historian of religions John D'arcy May (2004:376-377) notes the potential inertness of Buddha-nature:

> At first sight this conception [of a universal "Buddha-nature"] seems promising in view of the need for Eastern versions of human rights and ecological ethics, but if Shirô Matsumoto and Noriaki Hakamaya are correct, it may well have been the very reason why the critical edge of Buddhist thinking and practice was blunted when confronted by the militaristic ideology of wartime Japanese Imperialism. If everything is Buddha and all are already enlightened, then what can be wrong with going to war and killing enemies who are not real anyway, if that is one's dharma! . . . If the realisation (sic) of non-duality

> by a mind that, having deconstructed the ego-self, is no-mind, not only takes one beyond the dualism of subject and object but eliminates the need to discriminate between good and evil, could it be this that rendered Japanese Buddhism ethically impotent?

This is not at all to suggest that Buddha-nature logically obligates inertness in the face of injustice. The doctrine merely teaches that all sentient beings either can or will make it to enlightenment. What I can say is that the doctrine seems to logically obligate nothing. It is a description that could be used to remind us of the solidarity we have with one another (and so why not work for their enlightenment?), or to remind us of the equality everyone already shares (and so why expend effort trying to make conditions *more* equal?). It is a pliable description that should not be conscripted into service as the missing ontological prescription. One might conceivably love one's neighbor on reflecting that she too has the Buddha-nature, but there is no logical obligation here.

3.3.7 Reason #7 – because samsara is savage

Whether there are universal moral standards is debated, but what remains undisputed is the universality of suffering. Rarely is something so virtually omnipresent also so personal. The Buddha impresses any sufferer with his unflinchingly realistic portrayal of the ubiquity of suffering. Perhaps, suggest some Buddhist ethicists, this undeniable universality of suffering contains the grounding for love of neighbor. Martin Adam (2013:438-439) notes that, although Buddhists have neither the Self nor God to "come to their aid," certain Buddhist tenets encourage treating people with respect, most notably insofar as, "We are all equally capable of suffering and happiness." Says Adam (2013:439), "From a Buddhist perspective, what unites us to other sentient beings is the recognition of our shared suffering—the first noble truth. . . . It is the insight from which the Buddhist moral response, compassion, flows." The idea is that, with its

recognition of universal suffering, Buddhism provides all the rationale for compassion that any western ethical system could, and actually multiplies compassion in ways the West can learn from. For, "Buddhist compassion is universal in scope, extending throughout the six realms of sentient beings" (Adam, 2013:441).

This type of deduction from suffering to compassion can be used whether by Buddhists who insist on keeping the precepts, or by branches, like Zen, which tend to see good and evil as ultimately overridden in nondualism. As an example of the former, philosophy professor Richard Reilly (2003:119) traces our desire to avoid suffering all the way to the Buddhist First Precept:

1. As a living being, I have a will to live and to prosper and to avoid unnecessary suffering.
2. All living beings have a will to live and to prosper and to avoid unnecessary suffering.
3. I would not wish for any living being to cause me unnecessary suffering.
4. One ought not to treat any living being as one would not wish to be treated.
5. Therefore, I ought not to cause any living being to suffer unnecessarily.
6. To intentionally kill a living being is to cause that being unnecessary suffering.
7. Therefore, I ought not to kill intentionally any living being; that is, I ought to abstain from taking life.

True, premise 4 seems to sneak in the Christian "Golden Rule," but, as Reilly reminds us, Buddhists have long called the same idea the "principle of impartiality." Reilly (2003:120) concludes that the First Precept is thus a Buddhist contribution to the "global responsibilities."

Some branches of Buddhism, however, transcend any sort of duality and thus land somewhere "beyond good and evil." Is there any such suffering-to-compassion reasoning available for them? After describing Abe's "ontology without axiology," Kim Bockja (1998:104-105) suggests for Zen,

> I would like to maintain that there "is" such a thing as right and wrong in the phenomenal world. Although what is right and wrong may be taken as relative, being relative does in no way justify the total annihilation of moral standards. . . . For truly enlightened Buddhists, which, I am afraid, must be counted in the minority, going beyond good and

> evil may be fine. But the reality is that most humans are not enlightened and may never be. . . .
>
> Thus the "transcendence" of relative good and evil must not be taken to mean the "violation" or "annihilation" of the existing social norms of good and evil, though it may ultimately be illusory as long as it does not empty itself altogether into Emptiness.

The argument is that, since the unenlightened we will always have among us, there will always be plenty of *samsara* to deal with. In such a world, good and evil—conventional as they might be—are necessary for the type of reality we are stuck with.

There is clearly no shortage of *is*'s. Samsara *is* savage. Grief *is* global. The majority *is* unenlightened. What seems to be missing is any ontological *ought*. Of course, *ought* is often used. Recall Reilly's (2003:119) jump from "we all want to avoid suffering" (premise 2) to "we all ought not to cause it" (premise 3). But where did that *ought* come from? Surely not the preceding premises: the brute fact of the universal undesirability of suffering could just as easily encourage self-preservation at all cost. Some Buddhist thinkers recognize this flaw and tweak the argument. Instead of arguing from suffering straight to compassion, they import the idea of what basic conditions need to be in place for someone to be able to pursue nirvana. Because certain sufferings could inhibit one from the path, the argument modifies to this: Since enlightenment is the goal, anything that impedes the goal ought to be removed; therefore if there are societal conditions that impede one's progress along the path, there is a moral obligation to remove these societal conditions. In this way, the need for nirvana can give wings to the leap from suffering to compassion.

Using Abe's distinction between horizontal and vertical dimensions of human experience, Daniel Palmer (1997:132) observes, "The realization of emptiness, the vertical dimension of experience, is always an awakening in relation to a particular set of socio-historical

conditions, the horizontal dimension, that are the necessary conditions for awakening." Thus, Palmer (1997:133) reasons,

> When persons live in abject social conditions they are much more likely, by necessity, to remain attached to the horizontal dimension of experience. For instance, when individuals have to struggle every day just to earn enough to supply their family with basic needs such as food and shelter these elemental needs will naturally become the prime focus of their life. On the other hand, individuals from social groups that do not have to struggle on a day to day basis to meet such material needs are able to detach themselves from the overriding attachment to these exigencies and thus become aware of the vertical level of experience. A Buddhist social ethic would consist in diagnosing and promoting those social configurations which are more apt to enable the most persons to free themselves from the overriding practical necessities of the horizontal dimension that lead to individuals' attachments with goods and situations in that realm. As the vertical level and the experience of enlightenment always take place in relation to specific socio-historical conditions, Buddhist social ethics must promote those socio-historical conditions that are most conducive to the enlightenment of all persons.

Similarly, Keown (1995:17, 20) sees human rights as "minimum conditions" without which "the scope and opportunity for human fulfillment would be intolerably restricted," and since the pinnacle of human fulfillment is, for Keown, this-worldly nirvana, then at least basic human rights become imperative.

Of course, asking whether we have an ontological *ought* to do our part in making conditions conducive for people to seek enlightenment is part of a larger question: Do we have an obligation to do what we can to help people toward enlightenment? If the Buddha's teaching while he was alive were ontologically binding, then there is at least the duty to be non-injurious on the way to personal enlightenment, but, even then, recall Keown's (1995:20) observation that any such precepts and example are not part of a "transcendent dimension of human good" but are limited to nirvana-in-this-life. Is there an *ontological* obligation to help others toward enlightenment? The bodhisattva path is clearly set apart by Mahayana thinkers as the "superior aspiration" (Williams, 2009:195). Yet it is difficult to see why such self-sacrifice, though superior, is logically obligatory for all people, rather than just for aspiring bodhisattvas (and,

after all, if all sentient beings became bodhisattvas, then what sentient beings would remain to take to nirvana?). Besides, is there anything at all to be said of nirvana-without-remainder besides generalities such as *transcendence, egolessness,* and *negation*? What gives such ontology its ethical nature?

If it is unfruitful to try to locate obligatory love for neighbor in Mahayana ontology, then it is also fruitless to try to locate it in the more specified business of making conditions conducive for others to awake. Buddhist duty it might be, but what is its *ontological* grounding? For that matter, who says that conditions conducive to the path have to resemble "relief of poverty, the abolition of oppression, the establishment of a just social-political order" (Knitter, 1981a:54)? Let us not forget that it was viewing old age, sickness, and death for the first time that spurred the Buddha to seek enlightenment (Robinson and Johnson, 1977:23). In the *Sukhamala Sutta* (1997e), the Buddha recounts, "Monks, I lived in refinement, utmost refinement, total refinement." He describes his expensive clothing and the family's three palaces. He describes what could be a metaphor for his sheltered growing-up years: "A white sunshade was held over me day and night to protect me from cold, heat, dust, dirt, and dew." It is only when he realized that he himself was subject to aging, illness, and death that "the living person's intoxication with life entirely dropped away." Let us not assume that the conditions conducive to awakening are also what make for an easy life. Those who have the latter tend to leach Buddhism as a "picturesque addition to a secular lifestyle that is not supposed to be changed by the Eastern touch" (Thelle, 2010-2011:72). What conditions truly conduce to a path on which any and all attachments are released? How we get from the undesirability of suffering to the obligation of compassion seems to remain a (God-sized?) mystery.

3.4 Why should I love my neighbor: Christianity's ontological groundings and reasons given

Recall that the ontological givens for Buddhism were dependent co-arising and nirvana. Christianity's Alpha and Omega, of course, is God. Does Christianity's ontological given ground love of neighbor? There are at least four reasons for why the answer is yes. First, "God is love" (I John 4:8b). Second, God shows love: "God shows his love for us in that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us" (Rom. 5:8). Third, God commands love: "You shall love your neighbor as yourself" (Matt. 22:39). Fourth, God rewards love: "And the King will answer them, 'Truly, I say to you, as you did it to one of the least of these my brothers, you did it to me'" (Matt. 25:40).

Insofar as God is love, there is an obvious ontological foundation for love. But the point can be made more strongly. Any argument that reasons from God to love hardly has to be made, because the connection is so scripturally evident. Instead, the argument that is often made goes the other way around. It is not uncommon for Christians trying to convince skeptics that objective morality (the pinnacle being love) logically necessitates God. Christian philosopher William Lane Craig (2008:172) puts it in a straightforward syllogism:

1. If God does not exist, objective moral values and duties do not exist.
2. Objective moral values and duties do exist.
3. Therefore, God exists.

Christian ethicist J. Budziszewski (2011b:54), a spokesperson for the revival of natural law theory, describes objective moral values as "what we can't not know" and asks "whether we could know what we owe to our neighbor even without knowing that we owe anything to God." Of course, it is often assumed that we can retain our obligations to neighbor (numbers 5-10 of the Ten Commandments, hence the "Second Tablet") without recognizing any obligations to God

(numbers 1-4 of the Ten Commandments, hence the "First Tablet"). Budziszewski (2011a:35), however, lists four conditions arising from the First Tablet that make a difference as to whether or not one is bound to the Second Tablet: It makes a difference as

> to whether man may be abolished, to whether morality has oughtness or only prudence, to whether we have reason to expect the universe to make any moral sense at all, and to whether, having lied to ourselves about God, we can be honest about the rest of our natural knowledge.

Budziszewski (2011a:39) concludes,

> What shall we say about the Second Tablet Project? Just that it cannot succeed. The Second Tablet depends on the first; whoever denies his duty to God will find, if he is logical, that he can no longer make sense of his duty to his neighbor. Conscience will certainly persist, reminding him of both, but it will seem to him an absurdity in a sea of absurdities.

The point here, of course, is not to establish the merits of these arguments. That is something that would no doubt deserve its own dissertation. The point is this: The connection between obligations as loving one's neighbor and the existence of God is such that it is common to argue from obligation to God. Hence, *how much more* secure is the obligation toward loving one's neighbor with God as the already ontological given (the Christian counterpart to the dependent co-arising and nirvana we have been granting of Buddhism)? Given God, the obligation to love of neighbor is itself a given.

Yet Buddhism continues to struggle with uncovering ontologically obligating morals to the point that many have given up mining its metaphysics at all. It is well-known that the historical Buddha often simply met metaphysical questions with silence (Fredericks, 1988:313). Mahayana revisions may have made metaphysics even muddier: We are told, "[I]t is a truism that the ground of reality as described by Mahayana emptiness theory does not involve a fixed metaphysical regime" (Lewis, 1997:144). In order to guard against the "naturalistic fallacy" (deriving an *ought* from an *is*), Ives (2008a:25) claims, "Something more than metaphysics is

needed here, and this is where soteriology can play a role." Keown (1995:16), too, sees soteriology as the grounding which metaphysics can never be, and thus proposes emphasizing the more optimistic third Noble Truth (eliminate suffering by eliminating craving) and fourth Noble Truth (eliminate craving by the Eightfold Path), rather than trying to reason from the more pessimistic (and more metaphysical) first and second. Keown (1995:20) admits, "Reference to the transcendent dimension of human good and its ground has been avoided" and then gives reasons such as that most human rights charters do not give any transcendent ground and, after all, that many atheists work tirelessly for altruistic endeavors without any such ground. Transcendence might be out there, but it is just too transcendent:

> The above should not be read as a denial that there can be a transcendent ground for human rights in Buddhism. Because the transcendent dimension of human good is left obscure in Buddhist teachings, however, the transcendent ground for human rights is also obscure (Keown, 1995:20).

Many people hope that Buddhism can "supply a philanthropic substitute for God" (McCarthy, 2001:54). Yet it seems that God shoulders a burden that becomes noticeably cumbersome when God is dismissed as irrelevant.

3.5 How can I love my neighbor

If ought implies can, then after having asked what kind of *ought* Buddhism prescribes, we ought to now ask what kind of *can* it provides. Because it is western scholars who are carrying the conversation, the terms used are the typical western ones: determinism (actions are determined by prior causes), libertarianism (actions are chosen by one's own free choice), and compatibilism (no contradiction between one's actions being determined by prior causes and yet freely chosen). Two facts frame the discussion as it concerns Buddhism. First, Buddhism teaches that *reality is determined.* Determinism-denying libertarianism is not even on the spectrum of

Buddhist free will views. Riccardo Repetti, author of a 4-article series chronicling scholarship on Buddhism and free will, concludes that the Buddha's teachings "explicitly endorse something very close to determinism" (Repetti, 2010a:280). After all, as Harvey (2007:44) asks, "As Buddhism sees a person as an interacting complex of conditioned mental and physical processes—the doctrine of Conditioned Arising . . ., how might 'freedom of the will' be seen to arise in this complex of conditioned processes?" Yet most of these scholars opt for a "soft" (compatibilistic), as opposed to "hard," determinism, because they recognize the need to keep room for a person's willfulness even if it is conditioned by already-determined reality. Hence, the second fact: Buddhism teaches that *responsibility is determining*. In Buddhism, one's intentions have definite implications. Why else the precepts, the vows, the path, etc.? Even the deterministic-implying dependent co-arising was "explicitly discussed . . . not as a threat to volitional freedom, but rather as an aid: to teach that volitional (and other) conditions that lead to mental bondage could be reversed . . ." (Repetti, 2010a:283).

Some, like hard determinist Goodman, let determinism override free will (Repetti, 2012a:135). Others, like Mark Siderits, propose that determinism could be seen as ultimately true, while free will is permitted as a descriptor of conditional reality (Repetti, 2012b:39). However, most writers let the two views coexist, with determinism conditioning free will. Such writers agree with hard determinists that "determinism is true, entails an invariable series of events, and thus whatever happens cannot have been otherwise" (Repetti, 2012b:34-35). Yet they omit the hard determinist conclusion: "so we lack free will." Many utilize compatibilist Daniel Dennett's synthesizing (Repetti, 2014:320). Repetti (2010b:167-168) favors compatibilist Harry Frankfurt, renown for such determined/free scenarios as,

> Suppose a scientist, Black, secretly implants a chip in Jones's brain, so Black can monitor and manipulate Jones's neural/mental states, should Jones attempt to behave in ways that

> displease Black. As it turns out, of his own accord Jones makes a certain decision that pleases Black (say, he votes Democratic) and Black does not intervene. But because Black has effectively removed Jones's alternatives, Jones could not have done otherwise, even if he had tried.

In the end, it must be conceded that, however unlikely, such scenarios are indeed logically possible. But how do these scholars make a convincing-enough case that co-arisen cosmology permits not-selves enough moral responsibility that they can be justly sent to suffer the karmic consequences of their actions?

The common response is that freedom (albeit still determined) grows as one nears nirvana. After all, Buddhism takes people from being "all somewhat insane" with the "universality of greed, malice and delusion" so that "there can be no presumption of unfettered free will or simple self-determination" (Loy, 2000:155), all the way to something as free-sounding as "liberation." Repetti (2014:281) contrasts those on the path with "worldlings":

> Although there are exceptions, worldlings typically possess varying degrees of relatively minimal or merely potential agency, in light of their habitually unrestricted volitional expression, which strengthens mental-bondage-fostering dispositions; Buddhist practitioners, however, cultivate volitional regulation, which increases mental freedom.

As Tibetan patriarch Tsongkhapa put it, those who "desire to harm" are "under the control of others, i.e., their afflictions" (McRae, 2012:354). Thankfully, it is possible to cast off such overlords, if one adheres to all the "Rights" of the Eightfold Path (Right Intention, Right Effort, etc.) that point us to, in the words of Repetti (2010b:172), the "magnetic north of liberation." However, we must remember that such freedom is not the kind that "could have been otherwise." After Repetti (2014:281) explains how Buddhist meditation increases the ability to self-regulate, he is careful to add, "Because volitional regulation is consistent with determinism, it does not entail 'libertarianism.'" Even Goodman, denying any and all freedom, still believes that, due to

the "causal history of the universe," a person's meditation "might weaken her angry impulses" (Sridharan, 2013:302).

The growth of freedom as one grows in spirituality brings to mind Christianity. Jesus said, "Truly, truly, I say to you, everyone who practices sin is a slave to sin. . . . So if the Son sets you free, you will be free indeed" (John 8:34, 36). Paul added that, though "you were slaves of sin," "now that you have been set free from sin and have become slaves of God, the fruit you get leads to sanctification and its end, eternal life. For the wages of sin is death, but the free gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord" (Romans 6:20, 22-23). If freedom is defined in Christianity as the freedom to live as we were intended to, then an unnamed fruit of the Spirit is undoubtedly "freedom." And as many Christian theologians lament, Buddhism is not the only religion with a determining force and a free humanity to reconcile. They must be jealous that, since "the Buddha did not explicitly discuss 'determinism' or 'free will,'" that the "'problem' of their compatibility never arose within Buddhism" (Repetti, 2010a:283).

Now, to our question: How *can* I love my neighbor? The answer, of course, rises or falls on human capability. Christian theologian Norman Geisler (2004:46) summarizes biblical anthropology: "Humans have an inner (immaterial) dimension and an outer (material) dimension. The former is often called *soul* (or *spirit*) and the latter is usually called *body*. A distinction between the two dimensions is presupposed by, among other things, Christian eschatology. According to Christian philosopher J.P. Moreland (2014:158-159),

> The human soul, while not by nature immortal (its immortality is sustained by God) is nevertheless capable of entering an intermediate disembodied state upon death, however incomplete and unnatural this state may be, and, eventually, being reunited with a resurrected body.

The two editors for *The Soul Hypothesis* (Baker and Goetz, 2011:251), an anthology of recent arguments for the existence of the soul, inform us that one editor personally starts with theism

and reasons to the soul: If God exists, then "there is a class of entities ("spirits"), which contains at least one member, such that those entities are not made up of matter or subject to physical laws but can interact causally with ordinary physical objects." This being so, one "cannot automatically rule out the possibility that there are other members of this class . . . ." That is, there being an immaterial God who acts in the physical, the foundation is in place for a species, especially one made in that God's image, to assert their wills in the world. Stewart Goetz and Charles Taliaferro, in *A Brief History of the Soul* (2011:204), summarize, "[A]t the heart of a theistic worldview is the existence of a being that purposefully creates at least some beings (e.g. human persons) who also act for purposes." Thus, if we are allowing Christian ontology (i.e. God) as a given for the sake of argument, then there is nothing problematic with Christianity grounding free will: humans *can* love their neighbors.

How does Buddhism do with the question? We already noted that, if something like a Frankfurt example is a logical possibility, then Buddhism could logically provide a sort of freedom, even if the person's willfulness coincided with a state of affairs that could not have been otherwise. If an "interacting complex of conditioned mental and physical processes" (Harvey, 2007:44) "controls her volitions and her actions, whether or not she has alternatives" (Repetti, 2010b:184), then, as Repetti argues, there is enough choice there to render her morally responsible. After all, she made the choice. Logical possibility, however, does not automatically preclude major difficulties. Just how exactly is a dependently co-arisen not-self, a disunified heap of aggregates, to make a choice? Toward the end of his final article in the series, Repetti (2014:335) acknowledges a remaining enigma. Calling the type of free will said to adhere in beings as they near enlightenment "Buddhist-FW," Repetti asks, "But do enlightened beings possess the sort of individual-agent-type volitional regulation found in Buddhist-FW?"

According to Repetti, "this agentless-autonomy issue . . . is perhaps the central Buddhist version of the free will problem—how a non-agent can be autonomous in any meaningful sense."

Somehow the draw of nirvana is credited with making people more free, and yet the question remains how nirvana—whether one pursues one's own or goes on to become a compassionate bodhisattva—is able to effect such a miracle. In personal enlightenment, we are told that "they become increasingly autonomous," yet note the paradoxical provision: "even if upon reaching enlightenment they transcend separate-ego agency altogether—and with it, autonomy" (Repetti, 2010b:196). As for those whose pursuit of nirvana for all sentient beings reaches its summit, "once the bodhisattva realizes the ultimate nonexistence of the self, she is liberated from all notions of moral responsibility and acts in the world with an infinite, limitless, all-encompassing joy and unconditional love that transcends morality" (Sridharan, 2013:291). Just how is the admittedly less-agential nirvana able to draw beings into more pronounced freedom?

In the end, we may be able to grant the logical possibility of a free will to Buddhism. But—strained harmonizations aside—just how robust is its case for free will when contrasted with Christianity? The other editor of *The Soul Hypothesis* (Baker and Goetz, 2011:252) approaches matters differently from his colleague's theism-to-soul logic. "To him," we are told, "the more certain truth is [soul-body] dualism":

> It seems obvious to him that he cannot be simply a physical object, subject to all and only the laws of physics, given his first-person experience, his ability to reason, and his ability to make free choices guided by his purposes. It is also evident that, as a soul, he is able to cause events in his body, such as voluntary movements; agency is clearly possible. This then raises the possibility that there is some other, greater soul, who can in a free and purposeful manner cause events not only in one particular animal body, but anywhere in the material universe. Such a being would be God."

In short, "For him, dualism plus a consideration of relevant facts leads to theism" (Baker and Goetz, 2011:252). Similarly, in *Mind, Brain, and Free Will* (2013:201), Christian philosopher Richard Swineburne argues from the inescapability of free will to the dualism of Christianity:

> [I]t is in those circumstances where desires and moral beliefs are in opposition to each other or we have equally strong competing desires and moral beliefs, and only in those circumstances, that we are conscious of deciding between competing alternatives. We then believe that it is up to us what to do, and we make a decision (Swineburne, 2013:201).

Such a view of free will established, it is natural to then argue that "having moral beliefs and free will (in my sense) is not merely necessary but sufficient for moral responsibility" (Swineburne, 2013:219). Certainly humans *can*, says Swineburne.

Of course, there are objections. True, ever since Descartes's "soul" fell into disrepute, believers in such a soul have had to fight for their voice in the academy. True, it will be asked how a sovereign God can comingle with fallen, depraved humans. Yet, in response, a fallen Descartes is only a caricature (the soul defended nowadays is modernized to where such associations are smokescreens), and, furthermore, a fallen humanity is only a corruption (in Gen. 2:16, God told the first humans, "You are free" [NIV], and, in John 8:36, He promises to make us free again). But I am not aiming to prove soul-body dualism here. All I have done is show that there are such arguments, and that they have led some to accept the existence of God.

My aim is much more modest. I simply want to point out, as we contrast the Buddhist and Christian ontological groundings for free will, two observations. First, Christianity not only has no problem granting the existence of purposeful souls given the existence of a purposeful God, but Christianity actually finds itself able to argue robustly from human freedom to the existence of God. If it can be argued (and not just from logically possible harmonizations, but in actual, step-by-step argumentation) from free will to God, then *how much more* does God as ontological

given enable an affirmative answer to "*Can* we love our neighbors?" One will simply not find a Buddhist attempting to argue from the fact of free will to the existence of dependent co-arising or nirvana. Indeed, it is enough of a labor just to try to get them all to fit together with logical possibility, and this brings us to the other point.

This brings us to the second point. With its deterministic ontology, not-self anthropology, and agentless eschatology, Buddhism struggles to ground the kind of moral responsibility that would lead to voluntary love of neighbor. Is it logically possible? Yes, but only possible, and only in such cases as it could not have been otherwise. Is that true moral freedom? In a sense, perhaps.

3.6 Conclusion

So, if the goal of Buddhist-Christian interfaith scholarship is a better world with less suffering, and if the way proposed is to make Christianity more Buddhistic, how does that work out when it comes to ultimate reality? Buddhism's ontological grounding of why we *should* and how we *can* love our neighbors seems quite fuzzy. Christianity's ontological grounding of both seems quite secure. Christianity even argues from objective morals and free will to Christian ontology, while Buddhism struggles even to ground either somewhere in its ontology. If love of neighbor is an important step toward a better world with less suffering, and Christianity's ontological foundation for this is secure, while Buddhism's is obscure, then to Buddhicize Christianity would not, in this important sense, make for that better world. On the basis of their own overarching goal, interfaith scholars should not render Christianity's ultimate reality less ultimate.

Chapter 4

Your attachments are too ardent: how ultimate attachments relate to suffering

4.1 Introduction

A better world with less suffering might be the goal of interfaith scholarship, and, undoubtedly, both Buddhism and Christianity have historically contributed to this goal in their various ways. One has only to note from the previous chapter that both religions emphasize love or compassion (whether ontologically grounded or not), and thus automatically contribute to the goal just by that commitment alone. However, if we were to corner representatives of each religion by themselves after an interreligious conference and ask, with microphones turned off, what the *ultimate* goal of the religion is, we should find out that they have very different aims. If true to their sources, for each of them the answer would only include this present world secondarily or instrumentally; the emphasis would instead fall on nirvana—personal or corporate—or on the "new heavens and the new earth." Because of this more "ultimate" commitment, we will find that neither religion advocates clinging too tightly to this life. So what are Buddhists and Christians supposed to attach to? And, as we will attempt to answer throughout this chapter, how do their respective attitudes toward attachment relate to this-worldly suffering? We will start with Buddhism.

4.2 Buddhism's general attitude toward attachment

It does not take much digging to unearth Buddhism's attitude toward attachment. Perhaps an effective way to introduce its attitude is to define some oft-used Sanskrit terms:

- *Trsna* (Pali – *tanha*) – "thirst" or "craving": the cause of suffering (the Second Noble Truth); the eighth of twelve links of dependent co-arising, preceded by sensation and followed by attachment (Buswell and Lopez, 2014:926)
- *Upadana* – "clinging," "grasping," or "attachment": the ninth of the twelve links of dependent co-arising, preceded by craving and followed by becoming (and thus it is an especially important quality not to have at death, lest it produce "becoming") (Buswell and Lopez, 2014:938)
- *Lobha* – "craving" or "greed": one of the six fundamental afflictions, ten fetters, ten proclivities, five hindrances, three unwholesome faculties, and one of the three poisons (with ignorance and hatred) (Buswell and Lopez, 2014:478)
- *Raga* – "passion" or "desire": one of the six root afflictions, also used in the three poisons (in place of *lobha*) (Buswell and Lopez, 2014:693)

To understand just how "poisonous" attachment is, note that in the Theravada Vinaya it "has provoked the proclamation of as many as 110 vows," with 33 for aversion and only 27 for ignorance, as the other two poisons (Coghlan, 2004:160). Nagarjuna, considered one of the most important thinkers in Buddhist history, made it clear just how ruthlessly attachments must be eliminated by insisting that even attachment to nirvana itself is a fetter holding us back from it (Tennent, 2002:122). Yet the point is made perhaps even more strongly by narrative. Of all the names he could have given his son, the Buddha chose *Rahula*. *Rahula* means "fetter." According to the story of the Buddha's renunciation of the home life, the Buddha wanted to hold his son one last time, but left so as not to awaken his wife and son and risk awakening his own attachments (Buswell and Lopez, 2014:693).

As we will see, Buddhism will show a more sweeping contempt for attachments in general whereas Christianity will unreservedly advocate what it sees as appropriate attachments. For now, we will look at two disagreements Buddhism has with Christianity in the area of attachments: Buddhism has a less rigid attachment to the true and a less rigid attachment to the good. The degree of attachment Buddhism and Christianity have toward the true and the good will give us a crucial contrast for then asking, "What is the highest ethic?" for each religion.

4.3 Buddhism's less rigid attachment to the true

The *Lotus Sutra* is immensely influential. Being an early Mahayana sutra (its earliest portions most likely composed between the first century BCE and the first century CE) (Williams, 2009:150-165), this sutra is the centerpiece of two Mahayana branches—Tientai and Nichiren. A primary reason for its popularity is its memorable parables. A father recognizes his prodigal son (who in turn has forgotten his father) and employs him, until finally revealing—to the public as well as to his son—the relationship between the two. A rich man sews a jewel into his poor friend's cloak while the man sleeps, so that, when the two meet next, the rich man is able to tell him he is no longer poor as he thinks, but is actually wealthy. A guide leads travelers to a jeweled city, but they, too weary to continue, are rejuvenated after the guide conjures up a magic city for them to rest in for a time. After a doctor's sons have been poisoned and they are too delusional to take his antidote, the doctor fakes his death to arouse them to their senses, and then proceeds to give them the antidote.

The *Lotus Sutra*'s Buddha is assuring his audience over and over that, regardless of what his paranirvana looked like, he is not beyond access, and that he is now unveiling the path in its fullness. As Williams (2009:153) puts it, "What is this new perspective? It is the perspective of the One Vehicle." The Buddhism into which the *Lotus Sutra* was written acknowledged three paths: *Arhats* attained enlightenment under a Buddha's instruction. *Pratyekabuddhas* attained it without a Buddha's help. Lastly there was the torturous path to actual Buddhahood, of which Siddhartha Gautama, the historical Buddha, was this eon's exemplar. Of course, the vast majority of Buddhists prior to hearing the message of the *Lotus Sutra* saw themselves as on their way to Arhatship, viz. a state of sainthood that will merit nirvana, but not Buddhahood. Hence, the vast majority believed that at the end of their path, indeed even of the path of the historical

Buddha, was nirvana, pure and simple. Says Williams (2009:154),

> We have in the *Lotus Sutra*, however, and indeed suggested in texts belonging to certain non-Mahayana traditions, a gradual or relative devaluation of Arhats and Pratyekabuddhas, and an elevation of the Buddha and his attainments. The *Lotus Sutra* marks the culmination of this process. There is in reality only One Vehicle (*yana*), not three. This One Vehicle is the Supreme Buddha Vehicle. Just as the Buddha is infinitely superior to the Arhat and the Pratyekabuddha, so the only final vehicle is the One Vehicle to Perfect Buddhahood. *All* who are capable of any enlightenment at all, if they attain enlightenment, will eventually become Buddhas. The doctrine of the three vehicles was itself in reality nothing more than the Buddha's skill-in-means, in devising the appropriate strategies in context to help his particular audience.

The prodigal already has sonship, the poor friend already has the jewel, and the travelers are already assured of their destination by the very nature of their guide, the Buddha himself. Yet, the glorious reality is skillfully concealed for a time: in the son's employment, in the friend's cloak, and in the magically fabricated city. That is, the path of the Arhat and Pratyekabuddha have their skillful uses. But, in the end, only one vehicle is real. Thus, in perhaps the most famous of the sutra's parables, a father lures his three sons busy at play out of a burning building by promising various vehicles, suited to each child's taste, only to reveal in the end that each was to receive the same vehicle. Regardless of what entices them out of the smolders of *samsara* and onto the path; the happy ending is none other than actual Buddhahood for all (Williams, 2009:155).

Now, the outsider would see in such skillful maneuvers a convenient way to harmonize contradictions. What are the insiders, however, to deduce from the realization that their Lord had been systematically withholding truth from them? In chapter 3 of the *Lotus Sutra* (2007:58), the Buddha actually asks his disciple Sariputra what he thinks: Does the promise of the three vehicles actually count as deception?

> Sariputra replied: "No Bhagavat! The affluent man only tried to help his children escape from the disastrous fire. He saved their lives and did not deceive them. This is by no means a deception. Why? Because by saving their lives they obtained marvelous toys.

> Moreover, they were saved from the burning house by skillful means. O Bhagavat! If this affluent man had not given them even the smallest cart, it still would not have been a deception. Why is this? Because this affluent man thought before: "I will help my children escape with skillful means." This is why it was not a deception. How much more so, since the affluent man, knowing that he had immeasurable wealth and wanting to benefit them equally, gave each of his children a large [ox]cart.

That is, they exit the building and get the toys. So, no, it is not deception. Please note the principle being articulated: What counts is whether it gets the job done.

Whether or not we call it "deception," however, the question is still there of why would it be needed in order to get the job done? Note the state of its recipients in the *Lotus Sutra*: poisoned, fatigued, unaware, at play. Goodman (2011:1) explains the Mahayana perspective that "normal, ordinary people are so irrational that they are relevantly similar to the insane." It is because of this condition that, "The *Lotus Sutra* repeatedly asserts the moral permissibility, in certain circumstances, of deceiving others for their own benefit." A Buddhist analogy illustrating how such skillful methods work is a tiger raised as a sheep. One day, the taste of blood awakens its true identity. Commenting on the religious rites performed in connection with ultimately nonexistent deities, Gross (2002:84) explains, "The visualizations and the liturgies are the blood, but apparently a single taste is not enough to transform our identity from duality to nonduality. The skillful means is to taste over and over until we get the flavor of things as they are."

So trickery it may be, but treachery it is not—neither toward its unreasoning beneficiaries nor even necessarily toward the Buddhist tradition. True, Theravada Buddhists insist that the historical Buddha never told a single lie, yet even they draw a definite distinction between ultimate and conventional truth, for example, in their Abhidharma tradition (philosophizing to determine the fundamental material blocks of the cosmos) (Goodman, 2011:25). Moreover, anytime an aspirant utters, "I take refuge" or "I vow to . . .," what she neglects to mention is that

there is no actual self as the "I" referent (Goodman, 2011:4). There is just too much ignorance ingrained for the novice to be able to handle total truthfulness—so why be too rigid? The seriousness of humanity's situation is the reason that Buddhism emphasizes what works.

This is why Buddhism famously detaches from "views." The Buddha compared the unenlightened mass of humanity to a man dying from a poisoned arrow. Likewise, he compared any of those unenlightened who insist on knowing the correct metaphysical views to that poisoned man insisting on knowing everything about the shooter of the arrow—clan, livelihood, height, type of bow— before accepting any medical attention. The Buddha explained in the *Cula-Malunkyovada Sutta* (1998b),

> [I]f anyone were to say, "I won't live the holy life under the Blessed One as long as he does not declare to me that 'The cosmos is eternal,' . . . or that 'After death a Tathagata neither exists nor does not exist,'" the man would die and those things would still remain undeclared by the Tathagata.

What is needed is not the hairsplitting of views, but the "sorrow, lamentation, pain, despair, and distress whose destruction I make known right in the here and now." As Japanese Buddhist Hajime Nakamura (1973:31) puts it, "Gotama's approach to salvation was thus therapeutic rather than philosophical," for, "It was by detaching oneself from philosophical oppositions that one was able to attain the inward peace of mind" (Nakamura, 1973:45).

So, on the one hand, what is known to be "true" becomes greatly reduced. Harvey (2011:240) lists what gets cut: "The Buddha also often referred to the negative effect of attachment to speculative or fixed views, dogmatic opinions, and even correct views if not personally known to be true . . . referred to the wrangling of views, the jungle of views." One participant in a dialogue about women in Buddhism and Christianity explained, "One of the reasons I was first attracted to studying Buddhist teaching was reading that the Buddha said, 'Don't take anything on authority even from me without checking out your own direct

experience'" (Brock et al., 1990:116). And the list of what could be known as true continued to shrink over time. If, as James Fredericks (1995:510-511) puts it, our nature is to "become attached to the world by reifying experience into false views" and if, "Attachment generated by false views is the origin of suffering," then views must be continually un-reified. This un-reification endeavor was to gradually expand: whereas the Abhidharma scholars listed the various material constituents of the cosmos (called "dharmas"; the point was to break entities down to show their emptiness), Nagarjuna came along and exposed even those dharmas as empty.

On the other hand, however, even that which is known to be "true" is held in check by its subordination to the goal. The Buddha told a simple parable to shame those who turned his teachings into opportunity for philosophical debate: Grasp a snake at the tail, and it bites you. According to the *Alagaddupama Sutta* (2004), one must grasp the Buddha's teachings *rightly*, not for "attacking others or for defending themselves in debate," but "for the goal." After all, explains the Buddha in a follow-up parable, one would not carry around a raft on the other shore after having crossed over. The teaching is the raft, and its point is not itself, but the goal. Keown (2001:103) explains that "one should not become slavishly attached to a view even when that view is true." Such a view is still only a raft.

Now, Buddhism's emphasis on "what works" has given rise to comparisons with the pragmatics of John Dewey (Chinn, 2006:87), but the Buddha's pragmatism can be stated too strongly, so that the truth status of his teachings are trivialized. As commentator Thannissaro Bhikkhu reminds us in his commentary on the *Alagaddupama Sutta* (2004),

Many a casual reader has concluded from the simile of the raft simply that the *Dhamma*[20]

[20] *Dhamma* is Pali for the Sanskrit *Dharma*. Not only is it used as a term for the material constituents of the cosmos can be broken down into (as in the Abhidharma tradition), but it is also used as a general term for the Buddha's teachings as a whole (Princeton – 242).

> is to be let go. . . . However, the simile of the water-snake makes the point that the *Dhamma* has to be grasped; the trick lies in grasping it properly. When this point is then applied to the raft simile, the implication is clear: One has to hold onto the raft properly in order to cross the river. Only when one has reached the safety of the further shore can one let go.

Whatever the case, there is enough adaptability in Buddhism to make it an attractive model for those who would like a less dogmatic Christianity. Williams (2009:266) concludes that, "There is probably no-clear, unchanging core to Buddhist doctrine. Buddhism as a religion in history has no essence, although the truth—whatever it will finally turn out to be—remains forever." "If only!" sighs the interfaith scholar, thinking of Christianity. So, like a chamber of echoes, interfaith scholars tell each other "we must never cling to propositions" (Ingram, 2000:547), we must employ a "self-emptying or non-clinging concern[ing] our relationship with the very traditions we call our own (Wiseman, 1993:117), we need a "Buddhist balance" to tame our "doctrinalism" (Knitter, 1981a:46), we need to disavow any posture holding that "it possesses exclusive truth and defends its own ideas in a 'bloc view,'" lest "dialogue becomes impossible" (Nielsen, 1984:434). However, whereas for interfaith scholars "less attached to Christian doctrine" means the ability to be "more attached to Buddhism," "less attached to Buddhist doctrine" means for Buddhists the all-importance of the goal at the path's end. The shore, not the raft, is the point.

4.4 Buddhism's less rigid attachment to the good

The historical Buddha himself, on his deathbed, is said to have preached leniency toward the "lesser and minor precepts": they are revisable (Loy, 2000:154-155). Little did he know—unless there was omniscience involved—just how far his spiritual descendants would run with that permission. Before we get there, however, Keown helps us fit such developments into a

manageable framework. Recall that Keown (2001:19-22) sees in "nirvana with remainder," modeled in the Buddha's enlightened life before his death, the "supreme good" of Buddhism. There, moral (*sila*) and intellectual (*panna*) perfection consummate. These two perfections, most helpfully labeled "compassion" (*karuna*)[21] and "wisdom" (*prajna*), ought to be held in balance.

Now, it might be wondered why it is compassion and not love that is used to designate moral perfection. Buddhism does advocate love, yet love plays a less prominent role in Buddhism than does compassion. The Pali word used for love is *metta*, and it means "wish for others' happiness," whereas *karuna* is the "wish that others be free from suffering." Both *karuna* and *metta* are crucial in attaining the meditative absorptions necessary for personal enlightenment. But when it comes to the more ambitious bodhisattva path, the moral virtue which clearly subsumes all the rest is *karuna*. In fact, the bodhisattva's wish to liberate all beings will be called "great compassion," or *mahakaruna* (Buswell and Lopez, 2014:424). So, of the moral perfection of compassion and the intellectual perfection of wisdom, Keown (2001:47) explains,

> Undue emphasis on either will lead to imbalance and fixation rather than progress towards the goal. If intellectual development is favored at the expense of moral development, there will be a tendency to cling to theoretical notions, and if moral development is favored at the expense of intellectual development there will be a tendency to become obsessed with external forms of conduct such as rules, rituals, and rites.

Only such an imbalance, argues Keown (2001:107), could substantiate the "transcendency thesis," his chief opponent, and the notion that good and evil are sublated in nirvana. It is precisely such an imbalance that accounts for the radical ethical liberties the Mahayana tradition would come to adopt.

[21] Buddhism also advocates love, but it plays a less prominent role in Buddhism than does compassion. The Pali word used for love is *metta*, and it means "wish for others' happiness." This wish helps motivate the bodhisattva to seek to deliver all sentient beings. (Buswell & Lopez, 2014:518) .

Now, it ought to be kept in mind that the Buddha has always employed skillful methods. The Buddha is a skillful crafter of rafts that get you across, an expert doctor with appropriate prescriptions to get you better. Unlike those endlessly debating philosophizers, the Buddha actually does what it takes to awaken people. Now, the Mahayana tradition made frequent use of the notion of skillful means (*upayakausalya*, often abbreviated to *upaya*) (Buswell and Lopez, 2014:942-943). Keown (2001:159) helpfully distinguishes two *upaya*'s for the Mahayana. *Upaya*[1] simply "allows *bodhisattvas*-in-training a slight degree of latitude in respect to minor offences" out of "greater recognition of the needs and interests of others." Non-Mahayanists only cared about personal liberation, and thus Mahayanists (the "great vehicle") derided those who stressed personal liberation as the "Hinayana" (the "little vehicle") (Williams, 2009:23). In reacting against this apparent apathy toward others, Mahayana swung in the opposite extreme of the Hinayana schools, and absolutized compassion (at the expense of other virtues) in what Keown (2001:159) calls *upaya*[2]. Williams (2009:152) describes it as "a tendency to subordinate all to the overriding concern of a truly compassionate motivation accompanied by wisdom."

Now, let us see where this "compassion-inspired antinomian conduct" led (Keown, 2001:159). We will use the three "poisons"—ignorance, attachment, and aversion—as our guide (Buswell and Lopez, 2014:926). First, is ignorance really so poisonous? In Mahayana, the advanced bodhisattva can employ endlessly divergent pedagogy—for Buddhists or non-Buddhists—"provided it is animated by the Buddha's compassion and wisdom, and is suitable for the recipient" (Williams, 2009:151). *Lotus Sutra*-style "deception" is completely permissible, so long as compassion is the motivation. If many modern Mahayanists figure that Jesus was really a Buddha (Williams, 2009:181-182), that polemic just hints at how comfortable they are with their Buddhist masters stretching Buddhist truth.

Likewise, perhaps attachment is poison, but it may have medicinal value for some on their way to wholeness. In the *Bodhisattva-bhumi,* Asanga, a patriarch of the Mahayana Yogacara school, tells us of a male lay bodhisattva who gives in to an unmarried woman's desire for sex, for the purpose of keeping her from falling into the unwholesome attitude of "enmity" had he refused. Asanga praises this deed for having "no fault but much karmic fruitfulness" (Harvey, 2011:139). One Mahayana sutra, the *Vimalakirti-nirdesa Sutra,* advises a female lay bodhisattva to "become a courtesan to draw men, and alluring them by the hook of lust, establish them in the Buddha's wisdom." A Mahayana sutra of the Huayan school, the *Gandavyuha Sutra*, features a prostitute named Vasumitra, also a bodhisattva, whose favors some find to be conducive to enlightenment. Williams (2009:136) concludes, "Religion, it seems, can be fun." There are also the tantric texts, foundational for the Vajrayana ("Diamond" or "Thunderbolt") Vehicle. Certain of these texts recommend that, instead of suppressing unwholesome energies, these energies can be unleashed under a guru's direction for a speedier enlightenment. Thus, though by no means mainstream, sexual yoga plays its part (Harvey, 2011:141). And in the West, certain Buddhist masters have apparently credited *upaya*[2] when shocking adherents with sexual and alcoholic embarrassments (Prebish, 2013:376).

Even the poison of aversion is compassionate when seen from the perspective of an advanced bodhisattva. According to an oft-cited Jataka tale (tales of the Buddha in previous lives when still a bodhisattva), the Buddha killed a robber to prevent the deaths of 500 merchants. This action prevented 500 deaths and kept the robber out of hell, but wound up sending the Buddha himself to hell for a time (Harvey, 2011:135-138). In a Mahayana form of the *Maha-paranirvana Sutra*, the Buddha is a king who discovered slanderers of Mahayana. To prevent their bad karma and to protect the true teachings, he said, "I had them put to death on the spot. As a result, I

never fell into hell after that." Says Williams (2009:152), "Stories like this have provided the basis for Mahayana participation in violence, such as by Tibetans against the Communists." And just as attachment has its outlet in tantric sexual yoga, aversion can channel its way into tantric violence: "there is a significant body of tantric Buddhist literature that evokes violent imagery or describes violent ritual practices" (Gray, 2007:244).

Now for two much-needed qualifications. First, *upaya*^{2} is permissible only out of compassion. Note that there is not the slightest selfishness in which the Buddha-figure is supposed to indulge: it is only always "what will actually help someone else, which is also known as bodhisattva practice" (Reeves, 1998:242). Second, *upaya*^{2} is permissible only for very advanced bodhisattvas. Keown (2001:157) explains that such power is

> not so much the concern of the common man as an attribute of those who are already perfect in ethics and insight; it is the *upaya* of *bodhisattvas* of the seventh stage . . . and beyond, whose powers and perfects are supernatural. *Upaya*^{2} is depicted as an activity of the Buddhas and Great *Bodhisattvas* and it is only they who have the knowledge and power to use it.

In the end, it ought to be clarified that for a religion that has "a less rigid attachment to the Good," sin is not sanctioned except in radically peripheral situations. It is also only fair to be clear that tantric Buddhists are not often as antinomian as their more sensationalistic practices make it sound. For example, the dominant branch in the tantric-centered Tibetan Buddhism, the Gelug, disavows such practices (Harvey, 2011:142). True, there are the branches of Buddhism which have a more "transcendent" perspective on good and evil than others. For example, Zen emphasizes "three aspects" to the precepts: literal ("don't kill"), compassionate ("positively nurture beings"), and essential ("ultimately there is no-one killed and no act of killing"). Yet moral laxity is still discouraged, and such nondualistic ethics only "occasionally led to antinomianism" (Harvey, 2011:144-146). Similarly, the popular Soka Gakkai branch of the

Nichiren school lacks any formal precepts, yet "behavior tends to align itself with many traditional Buddhist norms nonetheless." So please note that nothing is being said here against the moral character of Buddhists, only that the further one goes in assuming the godlike status of the Mahayana bodhisattva, the more the virtue of compassion tends to radically override the others.

4.5 Christianity's general view on attachment as compared with the Buddhist view

Unlike Buddhism, Christianity advocates attachment. Most importantly, of course, Christians cling to God: "You shall cling to the Lord your God" (Josh. 23:8). "My soul clings to you; your right hand upholds me" (Ps. 63:8). As to what is true, love demands that a Christian "rejoices with the truth" (I Cor. 13:6), and as to what is good, Christians are to "hunger and thirst for righteousness" (Matt. 5:6). Because God's truth and goodness consummate in His commandments, the Christian is compelled to say, "I cling to your testimonies, O Lord; let me not be put to shame!" (Ps. 119:31). Since the true and the good find their genesis in God's immutable nature (Geisler, 2003:356), how can there fail to be more rigidness in the Christian's attachment to them than we see in Buddhism?

However, there are some qualifications in order. When it comes to the truth, Christians do have a very straightforward principle: "God . . . never lies" (Titus 1:2). Let us not go tampering with that basic axiom. But things are not *quite* as rigid as one might expect. Perhaps there is no "old" versus "new" vehicle, but there is an Old and New Testament. There may not be deception ("I said that, but this is the actual truth"), but there is "progressive revelation" ("I said that, but I waited till now to reveal the whole truth"). Jews under the Law were told to obey certain requirements, whereas Christians under grace are given others.

It is not difficult to reconcile things: For one thing, the kingdom of Israel was a physical theocracy, while the spiritual kingdom of God is more real than whatever human regime one may live under. For another, God could not reveal all truth all at once to finite creatures without heads exploding from the pressure. Furthermore, it is not difficult to draw at least some demarcations between Christian and Buddhist attitudes toward the true. Buddhists rely on personal experience and thus are very tentative in calling something "true," but a God aware of all past, present, and future happenings in his world is able to reveal much more that Christians can be certain of. Even the truth that the Buddhist acknowledges as truth is still only a raft, yet, according to the Bible, "The grass withers, the flower fades, but the word of our God will stand forever" (Is. 40:8). But while there are clear differences between the two religions' attitudes toward truth, there is at least some analogy, for example, in the way the two religions let the centrality of salvation trivialize philosophical speculation, as well as in the way more becomes known as time goes on.

When it comes to the two religions' attitude toward the good, there too is analogy. First, let us acknowledge a profound difference. The more "godlike" (i.e. approaches to the *dharmakara*) an entity becomes in Buddhism, the more rules can be overruled by a single virtue; yet, in Christianity, you discover a God who is uncompromisingly loving *and* holy, righteous, perfect, etc. (Hence all the uncomfortable realities of judgment and hell, which are also found in Buddhism, take on a far more final significance). Skeptics sometimes see judgment and hell as morally abhorrent as anything a bodhisattva ever did, but we must not overlook the difference that whereas the bodhisattva's radical attitude springs from his subsumption of all virtue into single-minded compassion, God may be labelled as too radical in his expectations because he may be considered to be too uncompromising in *all* his attributes. Thus, although many people

would prefer that God's only attribute were love, he is also uncompromisingly holy.

Now, let us turn to the analogy when it comes to the good. Harvey (2011:148-149) reminds us that it is not only Buddhist bodhisattvas who prefer certain virtues over others:

> [The Mahayana's] greater emphasis on compassion has meant that it has accepted that this may, in certain circumstances, override the constraints of normal Buddhist morality. Here one sees a rough parallel to the way in which Christianity puts "love" as a central value which might override constraints expressed in the precepts of Jewish law . . . .
>
> True, there is a hierarchy of values in Christianity. One has only to note the word *weightier* in Jesus' rebuke: "Woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! For you tithe mint and dill and cumin, and have neglected the weightier matters of the law: justice and mercy and faithfulness. These you ought to have done, without neglecting the others" (Matt. 23:23). Jesus regularly healed on the Sabbath to provoke recognition of that hierarchy: "Which one of you who has a sheep, if it falls into a pit on the Sabbath, will not take hold of it and lift it out? Of how much more value is a man than a sheep! So it is lawful to do good on the Sabbath" (Matt. 12:11-13). Norman Geisler (2009) explains,
>
> Christians define "right" in terms of what God wills. What God wills is rooted in His moral nature. And since His moral nature does not change, it follows that moral obligations flowing from His nature are absolute (they are binding everywhere on everyone). When two or more absolutes come into conflict, the Christian is responsible for obeying the greater commandment. The Christian is not held guilty for not following the lesser of two (or more) conflicting commandments.

So, there is a hierarchy of trumping values in Christianity, as Jesus continually demonstrated (e.g. justice, mercy, and faithfulness are weightier than tithing; doing good is weightier than meticulous Sabbath observance). Moreover, moral dilemmas can arise when trying to obey even the weightier commandments, because God's nature is not only loving, but also perfect, true, righteous, and holy (Geisler, 2003:417-418). The bodhisattva, on the other hand, develops commitment to the single overriding value of compassion.

So, while Buddhism is undoubtedly less rigidly attached to the true and the good than is Christianity, at least we are able to draw some analogies. But paternal deception is clearly not progressive revelation. Compassion-fueled sexual immorality is incommensurable with healing on the Sabbath. Specific distinctions like these are easily traceable. What I would like to zoom in on, however, is one overarching contrast. Note *why* Buddhism has less rigid attachments to the true and the good. Why, for example, did the Buddha teach about the other vehicles when there was really only one? Precision in truth appears to be less important than doing what it takes to get people enlightened. Why, for example, does an advanced bodhisattva engaged in violence or illicit sex? Perfection in goodness is less important than doing what it takes to get people enlightened. Imprecision in truth and goodness becomes a strategic method for the supreme goal of getting people enlightened. What we see in Buddhism from these less rigid attachments is an overriding soteriology. Deception is "true" and immorality "good" when nudging sentient beings toward nirvana.

Christianity has its new covenants and moral hierarchies. Yet, even though in Christianity salvation is undoubtedly the most central concern, soteriology does not provide an overriding exemption from righteous conduct. True, "The Lord is . . . not wishing that any should perish, but that all should reach repentance" (II Peter 3:9). Yet "He came to his own, and his own people did not receive him" (John 1:11), to the point that he would agonize, "How often would I have gathered your children together as a hen gathers her brood under her wings, and you were not willing!" (Luke 13:34b). Many people end in "weeping and gnashing of teeth" (Matt. 8:12). No Buddha-nature insures universal salvation. Christianity offers no "Great Vehicle" to expand the "narrow gate" (Matt. 7:14). No paternal deception tricks one onto the path; instead, the invitation is quite straightforward: "If anyone would come after me, let him deny himself and take up his

cross daily and follow me" (Luke 9:23).

Since the absence of an overriding moral exemption in soteriology gives us such unpopular realities as judgment and hell, it might be helpful to clarify just why it is that Christianity is so rigid when it comes to salvation. Why does God refuse to use deception, sin, or whatever else it may take just to get people into heaven? The answer is, because God *is* the True and the Good. Christian salvation is not mere escape, but reconciliation. How could the path to the true and good God purposefully detour into falsehoods and immoralities? It is not a matter of simply getting a not-self out of *samsara*, but getting a soul restored to the perfection of its perfect Maker's intentions. The soul cannot be restored via a shortcut; otherwise the soul is not truly restored. On the one hand, bodhisattvas can have a less rigid attachment to the true and the good because the point is to do whatever it takes to usher all sentient beings into enlightenment. On the other hand, God demands rigid attachments to both because the goal is God himself. Only in escape from him, never in reconciliation with him, can the good and true be eluded. Now, that we have isolated this fundamental contrast—one has an overriding soteriological exemption, while the other does not—let us ask, in light of this contrast, what is the highest possible ethics prescribed by each religion?

4.6 With overriding soteriology: the highest ethic of Buddhism

For Buddhism, the answer is not at all difficult. No greater ethic could be demanded than for one to forego nirvana until "all beings 'down to the last blade of grass' have been delivered" (Oldmeadow, 1997). Williams (2009:195) describes the compassionate bodhisattva: "Those of highest, superior, motivation strive to bring a complete end to all the sufferings of others along with their own suffering." As the Jataka tales recount, suffering is not conquered without

suffering, and the bodhisattva literally gives of himself—whether body-parts, wife and children, or his own life—out of compassion (Harvey, 2011:104). The "long and astonishingly—indeed superhumanly—'excruciating' path of the Bodhisattva" (Williams, 2009:245) is said to span "three infinite eons (Buswell and Lopez, 2014:424) and comprise ten stages (*bhumi*'s) (Williams, 2009:207). At the tenth, he has become practically divine:

> [The bodhisattva] can now put into one atom of dust an entire world region, or put innumerable sentient beings into one pore of his skin, without their suffering injury or indeed noticing. He can manifest all the deeds in the earthly life of a Buddha as many times as he wishes throughout innumerable worlds.

There is some dispute as to whether he is now a Buddha or whether still more practice is still needed (e.g. tantric practice) (Williams, 2009:207). Regardless, once free to "reengage in the world" (Keenan, 1989:381), the bodhisattva demonstrates *total* selflessness. The bodhisattva is "drink for the thirsty, food for the hungry, a guard for the protectorless, a guide for those who journey, treasure for the poor, in short, 'a pain-dispelling draft'" (Farley, 1999:298). Bodhisattvas are "shelter for the world, a refuge for the world, the world's place of rest, the final relief of the world, islands of the world, lights of the world, leaders of the world, the world's means of salvation" (Oldmeadow, 1997). In short, the bodhisattva "incarnates" compassion.

To pinpoint the nature of this compassion, it will be useful now to introduce three possible types of compassion. Of course, there is a particular Sanskrit word for compassion, *karuna*, meaning "the wish that others be free from suffering." It is the bodhisattva's "great compassion" we have in mind here, which is distinguished by its scope—all sentient beings—and its agency—the bodhisattva takes it upon himself (Buswell and Lopez, 2014:424). But though compassion is defined well in its motivation to free from suffering, it will be helpful to list exactly *how* the bodhisattva might seek to free others from suffering. In ascending order according to the efficacy of the compassion involved, these three possible levels are:

- Remove the problem with the problem (e.g. removes the tumor's emotional side-effects).
- Remove the problem from the problem (e.g. removes the tumor's physical side-effects).
- Remove the problem from the person (e.g. removes the tumor).

Given these three, which type of compassion does the bodhisattva exhibit?

To answer, let us first ask what type of "person" it is for whose salvation the bodhisattva postpones his own nirvana. According to Tsonghkapa, founder of the Tibetan Geluk school, when someone decides to embark on the bodhisattva path (officially an aspiration called *bodhi-citta*, or "thought of enlightenment") he first enters a series of meditations (Harvey, 2011:126-127). He forces his mind to blend categories of friend, enemy, and stranger by recollecting the love his mother has had for him, but now reciprocating that love toward friend, enemy, and stranger alike. After all, in the endless round of rebirths, each had to have been his mother at one point. Eventually, he "applies such a reflection to beings in every direction." The crucial compassion then arises when he visualizes

> the pitiful lot of a condemned criminal or animal about to be slaughtered, reflecting that his or her present mother and all past mothers have experienced many kinds of such suffering in the realms of rebirth. Thus arises the aspiration to lead all beings from such sufferings, the "great compassion" (Harvey, 2011:127).

Thus, the kind of "person" the bodhisattva aspires to save is nothing less than every sentient being. The bodhisattva may use mother-love as a motivation, but, as Buddhism scholar Guang Xing (2005:94) explains, "Filial piety as part of Buddhist ethics became universalized, and was applied to all sentient beings, when the Mahayana arose in India."

Obviously, one's all-benevolence toward all sentient beings can be hindered by personal attachments. Why else are family attachments so often renounced? According to the early Mahayana *Ugrapariprccha* Sutra, the lay bodhisattva

> is left in no doubt that women are a hindrance in the spiritual path, he should now be

> celibate, and he is exhorted to see his wife as an enemy or executioner, a burden, and destined for hell. . . . He should be detached from his son (he too is referred to at one point as an enemy), replacing fondness for his son with the spirit of loving kindness for all sentient beings (Williams, 2009:35-36).

After all, sexuality forges strong attachments (Harvey, 2011:89). Marriage becomes a contaminator (Senger, 1998:26). Families should be seen as empty of essence just like everything else (Hershock, 2000:87). While one scholar rather optimistically sees Buddhist emptiness as a way to enhance marriages (because it allows us to see marriage's impermanence and thus appreciate each moment) (Polinska, 2010:37), another scholar more realistically sees Buddhist emptiness as a way to help us deconstruct the patriarchal family, which she believes to be our "fundamental problem" (Brock et al., 1990:111). The Buddha certainly did not hint that his path would enrich marriage when he left his own wife and son. What we get instead is advice on how to detach. One monk, for example, advises that lust can be overcome by focusing, when she laughs, on the general foulness of teeth (Neeman, 2010:153).

So, compassion must be without any attachment (Wei-an, 2000:85). No sentimentality is permitted: for example, no distinction between the lovability of a dog and a lobster (Harvey, 2011:170). And the conclusion should be resisted that, therefore, all creatures great and small are automatically valued by the bodhisattva. Philosophy professor Colette Sciberras (2008:218) gives environmentalists hopeful for a "green Buddhism" a choice between bad news and worse news: not only does Buddhism commit speciesism (e.g. what is done to a human is seen as more important than what is done to an animal because of the human's current enlightenment potential), but,

> [I]f one follows this argument to its logical conclusion, what is discovered is not just speciesism, but something far worse for environmentalists. This is the fact that, in early Buddhism, ultimately no being, human or animal, is valued for its own sake. If Buddhists seek to align their faith with current ecological awareness then, it appears that they cannot avail themselves of the concept of intrinsic value of life either (Sciberras,

2008:235).

That is, it is not so much that Buddhism elevates animals, but that it brings everything down to the same level of having no intrinsic value. So, whatever bodhisattva compassion is, it makes a point not to attach itself to any intrinsic worth of its object. Humans might be more instrumentally valuable (based on proximity to enlightenment), but given this ultimate equality, what gives humans any more intrinsic worth than the AIDS virus? After all, "all things in nature" are equally egoless, as Abe (1994:11) puts it, "from dogs to mountains." Even saying that someone possesses something as prestigious as the Buddha-nature often means only that it has inherent emptiness (Buswell and Lopez, 2014:898). No intrinsic value helps insure that there will be no attachments to hurdle.

Since the goal is a detached compassion, it helps to discourage personal attachments when one stops thinking in terms of "persons" at all. Thus, Williams (2009:203) explains, "The Bodhisattva in giving has no awareness of the intrinsic existence of giver, recipient, and gift." According to a passage in the *Astasahasrika Prajnaparamita* ("Perfection of Wisdom in 8,000 Lines"), it is said of bodhisattvas,

> [W]hen the notion of suffering and beings leads them to think:
> "Suffering I shall remove, the weal of the world I shall work!"
> Beings are then imagined, a self is imagined,
> The practice of wisdom, the highest perfection is lacking.
> When he has got rid of the notion of I and the notion of other beings,
> Established in the perfection of morality is that Bodhisattva called (Chappell, 1996:56).

That is, only the bodhisattva who sees no actual persons can progress in the path. Says the Tibetan poet Milarepa, "If ye realize Voidness, Compassion will arise within your hearts; If ye lose all differentiation between yourself and others, fit to serve others ye will be" (Oldmeadow, 1997). Personhood is swallowed up in a universal emptiness.

Now, back to our three types of compassion. It is conceivable that a bodhisattva's

compassion is meant to A) Remove the problem with the problem. This could be the case because the Buddha, after all, taught that suffering comes from desire, and that, once desire is eliminated, suffering will be eliminated (see the *Maha-parinibbana Sutta* (1998g) for Noble Truths 2 and 3). Now, part of what provides the motivation for treading the path is indeed to effect psychological equanimity in the face of suffering. However, merely psychological well-being, as the object of a bodhisattva's compassion, forgets that the bodhisattva's goal is to actually transport all sentient beings eventually into nirvana, which, though not an actual domain, is also not merely a psychological state of well-being. In nirvana (at least nirvana without remainder, toward which the bodhisattva is helping all sentient beings), problems are, in fact, eliminated in an ultimate, not merely psychological sense. If so, then we can likewise rule out B) Remove the problem from the problem, as too weak to describe the bodhisattva's great compassion. Nirvana is not the mere cessation of ill effects, but the actual cessation of all suffering whatsoever (which is the cessation of the Buddhist problem: "All life is suffering").

So, it appears we are left with C) Remove the problem from the person. But recall that no person is actually left—not in nirvana, nor even in the bodhisattva's perception of sentient beings on their way. In fact, all differentiation must be destroyed if the bodhisattva is to even progress on the path. Even our dearest relationships need to be un-reified as conventionalities between not-selves. This is why, "In Mahayana it is not so much the loss of the child that is the cause of suffering as it is our clinging to the child whom we desire to be still alive and our clinging to memories of the child. We suffer because we cling" (Walsh-Frank, 1996). Grief comes from perceiving a self that could be lost in the first place. The bodhisattva's removing the problem from the person is too simply put.

Recall that, as our three types of compassion progress, the compassion increases in

intensity (from merely removing emotional distress to actually removing the problem). Also note another progression: As it moves from removing emotional distress to physical byproducts to the actual problem itself, the assumption is that, not only does the compassion increase in intensity, but so does the problem. Only if the problem is not too severe could one feel justified in merely removing its emotional or physical effects. If the problem, however, is so acute that, even were its effects to be eradicated, it would remain problematic, one would need to actually remove the problem itself to be ascribed with "great compassion." Suppose the problem, however, were even worse still. Supposing the problem were simply unbearable, and worse yet, *incurable*, what then? What if the problem were so irremediable, so integral to the person, that it could not be removed from the person without destroying the person? Is there any option other than allowing the person to writhe in misery? There is, and this is why I propose a fourth type of compassion that seems describes the bodhisattva's compassion best:

- Remove the person from the problem.

Now, this could conceivably describe some sort of clean-slate, mind-erased heaven (whereas the Christian heaven promises restoration, not escape: it is the curse that will be eliminated, not the person). But we mean "removing the person from the problem" in a nirvanic sense. The problem is individual existence and all the suffering that stems from it, and the person must be removed. After all, Buddhism starts with "All life is suffering" (see Noble Truth 1 (1998g)) and ends with all sentient beings "to the last blade of grass" having escaped it all, not least of which is the suffering that comes from the grasping of "self." The problem is indeed so enormous (life itself is a tumor) and so integrated into the person (the tumor has spread inoperably throughout the person) that the only solution is escape, including escape from the very notion of "person." As the *Heart Sutra* (2014) puts it, one can only come to overcome

suffering by understanding that

> [T]his Body itself is Emptiness
> and Emptiness itself is this Body.
> This Body is not other than Emptiness
> and Emptiness is not other than this Body.
> The same is true of Feelings,
> Perceptions, Mental Formations,
> and Consciousness. . . .
> all phenomena bear the mark of Emptiness.

The bodhisattva's great compassion is to remove the person from the problem of the person's particularity.

4.7 With no overriding soteriology: the highest ethic of Christianity

Christianity's highest duty is to love God with all (Mark 12:30). When we talk of "highest ethic," however, since we are contrasting Christianity with a religion that sees God as irrelevant, let us narrow it to our highest duty to our fellow creature (which will, of course, turn out to involve love as well). But since God is for Christians altogether indispensable to this narrower duty, it will be important to start with God nonetheless. Now, in much of what is being written God's love is caricaturized like no other of his attributes. Its radical version in the Bible is often declared to be unpalatable, until in its more popular versions, divine love is smoothed into something so complementary to the prevailing culture that it becomes expected and no longer remarkable. "The result, of course, is that the love of God in our culture has been purged of anything the culture finds uncomfortable," explains theologian D.A. Carson (2000:11). "The love of God has been sanitized, democratized, and above all sentimentalized." The result of these revisions is that, "Nowadays if you tell people that God loves them, they are unlikely to be surprised."

In keeping with love's democratization, it seems as though virtually everyone wants a say

in defining God's love within Christianity. This approach includes interfaith scholars and Buddhists alike. Schubert Ogden (2005:26-27) amplifies love to the status of "ultimate reality" and then reasons from "the boundless love of God that is and must be at least implicitly in every human existence whatever" to the potential validity of other religions, insofar as "any religion re-presents the possibility constituted by this love." Another scholar asserts that Christian teachings "can indeed be appreciated and honored, but they can also be criticized and repented from, all in the name of love" (McDaniel, 2003:75). From the Buddhist side, Indian Buddhist Santaraksita echoes many skeptics: If God were truly loving and compassionate, "then he should make the world absolutely happy" (Schmidt-leukel, 2010:90). Kyoto Buddhist Nishida Kitaro argues that, if God is really love, then that property would entail God's own emptying out in "absolute negation" (Odin, 1987:36).

Perhaps the best way to illustrate popular versus biblical notions of the love of God is by turning to Nishida's Kyoto colleague D.T. Suzuki. One feature of traveling in Catholic countries Suzuki (1983:6-7) disliked was the abundance of crucifixes: "There is something about the sight which I do not like to look at and which goes against my grain." What he "like[s] very much," however, is Mary, who "saves Christianity from being so completely austere." He recounts a popular story where Jesus in heaven complains to Peter that he is letting too many unworthy souls through the gates, but Peter protests that though he turns them away, "The fault is with your mother who helps them in through the back window!" In Suzuki's estimation, love worth his admiration is Mary's "nothing but forgiveness," whereas austere, cross-centered Christianity is ironically said to "not leave much room for forgiveness." Why not love in such a way that it covers not merely "a multitude of sins" (I Peter 4:8), but the very category of sin itself?

It is absolutely fascinating how many non-Christians think they know what Christianity's

essence should be better than Christians do, simply based on its claim to have a loving God. It is as if they would like to reduce Christian metaphysics to love (a nondual God would be unloving), Christian epistemology to love (a religion that claims to have the truth would be unloving), and Christian ethics to love (an ethic that judges actions as evil would be unloving). But the actual love of the biblical God is subtitled best in the title of one of Carson's books: *The Difficult Doctrine of the Love of God* (2000). Sure, if love is deified as the overriding reality, so that God is not love so much as "love is god," no efforts would go to revise the doctrine. However, God's love does not override all other biblical attributes, but instead is defined in relationship to them, as Carson (2000:11) explains:

> I do not think that what the Bible says about the love of God can long survive at the forefront of our thinking if it is abstracted from the sovereignty of God, the holiness of God, the wrath of God, the providence of God, or the personhood of God—to mention only a few nonnegotiable elements of basic Christianity.

So that we can be sure we are defining the greatest ethic of *Christianity* not culture, let us ask what the love of God—in its fullness but not its fashionableness—tells us about Christian love, especially as it contrasts with Buddhism. And here is the crucial import from the love of God: *God's love is anything but indifferent*. It will be helpful to observe the implicit dichotomy set forth in the following verse: "If I give away all I have, and if I deliver up my body to be burned, but have not love, I gain nothing" (I Cor. 13:3). There is a definite distinction between selfless acts (even extraordinarily sacrificial ones) and Christian love. In Christianity, love is not mere robotic dutifulness. Love minus some sort of attachment to its object is not love Christians should have, nor is it the love God has toward us, as Carson (2000:48) chronicles:

> God repeatedly discloses himself to be a jealous God (as in the Decalogue), the God who abounds in "love and faithfulness"—that glorious pair of words constantly repeated in the Old Testament and intoned to Moses as he hid in a cleft of the rock until he was permitted to peek out and glimpse something of the afterglow of the glory of God (Exod. 34:6). God grieves (Ps. 78:40; Eph. 4:30); he rejoices (Isa. 62:5); his wrath burns hot

> against his foes (Exod. 32:10); he pities (Ps. 103:13). And as we have seen, he loves—indeed, with an everlasting love.

Theologian Wayne Grudem (1994:165-166) observes, "He is a God whose passions we are to imitate for all eternity as we like our Creator hate sin and delight in righteousness." Now, the notion of God's "impassability" has been interpreted to mean "God does not have passions or emotions" (165). Taken in such a way, such a doctrine has to sail upstream against wave after wave of scriptures, as we have seen. Geisler (2003:112), however, interprets impassability to mean that God's feelings are steady and never swayed, unlike those of capricious humans. Thus, Geisler (2003:123) holds that nothing is canceled out: "The Bible makes it evident that God has feelings: God's Spirit is grieved at sin (Eph. 4:30); God hates evil (Ps. 45:7); God's jealousy burns with anger against sin (Deut. 29:20). . . . God has feelings, but these feelings are unchangeable."

So far is God's love from indifferent that its object is often annoyed by just how involved it tries to make itself in one's life. C.S. Lewis (1996:39-40) explained that, instead of "senile benevolence," "cold philanthropy," or the "the care of a host," God's love is "persistent as the artist's love for his work and despotic as a man's love for a dog, provident and venerable as a father's love for a child." Note that this interestedness is precisely what makes God's love unpopular. Who wants such a "weight of glory" (II Cor. 4:17)? People get tired of getting barked at by the "Hound of Heaven."[22] Yet, God doggedly pursues, so that, as Lewis (2004a:279) reasons, "The only place outside Heaven where you can be perfectly safe from all the dangers and perturbations of love is Hell."

And, if caught, what effect will such love have on its object? In Victor Hugo's *Les*

[22] This is a reference to the poem of the same name by Francis Thompson (quoted in Zacharias, *Jesus among Other Gods* (2000:19-20).

Miserables (1862:27), a thief is caught and brought back to the bishop he stole from, but the bishop dismisses the guards with, "Ah, there you are! I am glad to see you. But! I gave you the candlesticks also, which are silver like the rest, and would bring two hundred francs. Why did you not take them along with your plates?" The thief, an ex-convict named Valjean, would go on to become the novel's selfless hero. Carson (2000:81) concludes, "Never, never underestimate the power of the love of God to break down and transform the most amazingly hard individuals." The apostle Paul tried to stamp out the young church, but, as he later recounted, "[B]y the grace of God I am what I am, and his grace toward me was not in vain" (I Cor. 15:10). God's love is not indifferent to people's outcome.

And it is from this God that Christians learn to love others. God's love is both how and why: "the model and the incentive of our love" (Carson, 2000:48). As to *why*, I John 4:19 says, "We love because he first loved us." His love won ours, and now, as we love God with all our "heart, soul, mind, and strength," our ultimate commitment to him insures our commitment to the next commandment he gives: "You shall love your neighbor as yourself" (Matt. 22:37, 39). After categorizing the various kinds of human love, Lewis in *The Four Loves* (2004a:277) concludes,

> The loves prove that they are unworthy to take the place of God by the fact that they cannot even remain themselves and do what they promise to do without God's help. . . . Even for their own sakes the loves must submit to be second things if they are to remain the things they want to be. In this yoke lies their true freedom; they "are taller when they bow." For when God rules in a human heart, though He may sometimes have to remove certain of its native authorities altogether, He often continues others in their offices and, by subjecting their authority to His, gives it for the first time a firm basis."

God gives love its authoritative *should*. Recall some reasons Budziszewski (2011a:35) gives as to why the "Second Tablet Project" fails: Without God comes the abolition of "oughtness" as well as of a humanity with any intrinsic moral worth. Why we love others comes, as theologian John Piper (2003:119) traces, from a deeply rooted satisfaction in God as our ultimate

attachment: “Love is the overflow of joy in God that gladly meets the needs of others.”

God’s love also provides the *how*. God may be indifferent to the protests of those content with lesser goods, but only because God is not indifferent to the *ultimate* needs of individuals. Nor can Christians be apathetic. Christians are to pass along what they have received from God: “as the Lord has forgiven you, so you also must forgive” (Col. 3:13b). And since Christians have received salvation, then they are longing for others to find the same reality: “Brethren, my heart’s desire and my prayer to God for them is for their salvation” (Rom. 10:1). Conventional contentment at whatever “doesn’t hurt anybody else” is, for the Christian, far too weak to be called anything like “love.” Lewis (1979:70-71) proposes a threefold checklist to insure a voyage’s success: 1) the ships must not “collide and get in one another’s way,” 2) the ship must be “seaworthy,” and 3) the ship must reach its destination. For, “however well the fleet sailed, its voyage would be a failure if it were meant to reach New York and actually arrived at Calcutta.” Now, the captain’s relationship to other ships, to his own ship, and to his ultimate destination correspond to three relationships all people have: to other souls, to one’s own soul, and to God. Most people, says Lewis, feel that if things are going well with other people in one’s life, then there is really not anything much to bother about. However, this attitude is not acceptable for genuine Christian thinking.

Christians learn from God’s transforming love to be attached, not indifferent, to one’s end. It is apathy that contents itself with simply “no collisions.” The Christian believes that there is an ultimate destination calling. And the Christian believes that one’s relationship with this Ultimate calls for repairs to one’s own vessel, whether convenient or not. For the Christian, there are, in all these relationships, not mere acquaintances to smooth over, but attachments to strive for. The Christian’s foremost attachment, of course, is to God, as Paul exemplifies: “Indeed, I

count everything as loss because of the surpassing worth of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord. For his sake I have suffered the loss of all things and count them as rubbish, in order that I may gain Christ" (Philippians 3:8). When it comes to the other two attachments, Jesus commands one and presupposes the other: "You shall love your neighbor as yourself" (Mark 12:31). In Christianity, one is attached to God, and, therefore, realizes the preciousness of her own soul. She will submit her desires to crucifixion and her world's pleasures to forfeit, all so that, in the end, her soul is saved. Christians apply a ruthless logic: "For what is a man profited if he gains the whole world, and loses or forfeits himself?" (Luke 9:25). Attachment to God and, therefore, to the state of one's own soul compels ultimate concern in any horizontal relationship.

So, in this highest of Christian ethics, dispassion is unthinkable. Each person will live forever, after all. These eternal entities are what Paul calls "my brothers, whom I love and long for, my joy and crown" (Philippians 4:1). They are "our glory and joy" (I Thess. 2:20). Their maturity means "our joy may be complete" (I John 1:4). There is simply "no greater joy" than to see them "walking in the truth" (III John 1:4). Likewise, there is no better warrant for tears. On leaving his dear church at Ephesus for the last time, Paul recounts, "Therefore be alert, remembering that for three years I did not cease night or day to admonish every one with tears," and, in turn, "there was much weeping on the part of all; they embraced Paul and kissed him, being sorrowful most of all because of the word he had spoken, that they would not see his face again. And they accompanied him to the ship" (Acts 20:31, 37-38). Or, to the church in Corinth, again Paul says, "For I wrote to you out of much affliction and anguish of heart and with many tears, not to cause you pain but to let you know the abundant love that I have for you" (II Cor. 2:4). With such ability to cause grief or joy, people are fittingly called the Christian's "beloved ones." This is why, in Paul's letters, he calls people—sometimes as a group, sometimes as

individuals—his "beloved" over twenty times; John does so ten times, Peter seven, James and Jude both three.

And what is the reason for all this rising and falling of the heart? It is precisely the kind of fluctuation the Buddha warned against in his noble truths, because, after all, people often disappoint in the moment and always die in the end. Such attached relationships are not conducive to one's personal cessation of suffering. So, what are they conducive of? Lewis (2004a:278-279) hints at the answer:

> To love at all is to be vulnerable. Love anything and your heart will certainly be wrung and possibly be broken. If you want to make sure of keeping it intact, you must give your heart to no one, not even to an animal. Wrap it carefully round with hobbies and little luxuries; avoid all entanglements; lock it up safe in the casket or coffin of your selfishness. But in that casket—safe, dark, motionless, airless—it will change. It will not be broken; it will become unbreakable, impenetrable, irredeemable.

Why submit to all the "wringing" and "breaking" that Christian love requires? The answer is the breaking in, the penetration, the redemption accomplished only by love. Only through the vulnerability of attached love are people restored.

Perhaps detached benevolence can alleviate suffering, but actual change takes attached love. Christians believe so not only out experience, but because it was what Jesus had to give. We are taught the necessity of attached love through the vulnerability of Jesus, who "for the joy that was set before him endured the cross" (Heb. 12:2) and who now sits enthroned where, because of his endurance, there is made possible all that "joy in heaven over one sinner who repents" (Luke 15:7). Christian love merges agony with joy on behalf of precious souls. Paul made this clear to his "little children, for whom I am again in the anguish of childbirth until Christ is formed in you!" (Gal. 4:19). We can thus define the highest Christian ethic as *the love attached to the ultimate restoration of a person*. Piper (2003:141) explains the process:

> When a person delights in the display of the glorious grace of God, that person will want

> to see as many displays of it as possible in other people. If I can be God's means of another person's miraculous conversion, I will count it all joy, because what would I rather see than another display of the beauty of God's grace in the joy of another person? My joy is doubled in his.

4.8 Buddhism's case against love-attachment

Those interfaith scholars who want to see Buddhism and Christianity unite usually do so by minimizing minor differences and piecing together inescapable differences. The typical response to the two highest ethics for Buddhism and Christianity—compassion and love—is predictably similar. Perhaps there are "differences in nuance," we are told, but we should not pay nearly the attention to their conditioning by "truth claims" as we should to their psychological status as religious "givens" (Carter, 1989:52-53). Philosophy professor Judith Barad (2007:11) brings Aquinas into an imaginary dialogue with the Dalai Lama, and concludes that Aquinas, who fits compassion into his extensive discussion of charity, was ultimately teaching "the same virtue" as the Dalai Lama. Any remaining differences can complement; their "cascading gifts" can "change the world" (Barad, 2007:27). Knitter (1981a:53) notes that, while there may be some differences between *karuna* and *agape* "in theory," there is actually "no difference between the Buddhist practice of compassion and the Christian practice of charity." For, to "love as Jesus did" and to imitate the Buddha's "Compassion and Great Benevolence toward all living Beings" merge in an inner "altruist ideal" that "constitutes the core of the spiritual path in our two religious traditions" (Tierelinckx, 2011:223). In the end, many writers imply that, at core, Buddhist compassion and Christian love are really just different terms for the same state of the heart.

But are they basically the same? One possible Christian response is the caricature that while Christians are engaged in the world, busy "about their Father's business," Buddhists are

solitarily meditating on a pillow behind closed doors. However, there are innumerable inert Christians and many engaged Buddhists. And, besides, we are contrasting the *highest* ethical callings, and, if the tales contain any indicators, the bodhisattva is hardly a merely passive meditator. Another retort could be that Christianity simply has higher demands in its commands to love than we find in the Buddhist precepts. Christians, after all, are told to "treat people the same way you want them to treat you" (Matt. 7:12). However, did not the Buddha say, "Consider others as yourself" (Dhammapada 10.1, as cited in Borg, 1997:15)? Christians are told to "love your enemies" (Matt. 5:43-48). But are not Buddhists told to meditate in such a way that they feel the same pity toward an enemy as toward a friend (Harvey, 2011:127)? Christians are taught, in the parable of the sheep and the goats, to treat the "least of these" as if each were the Father himself (Matt. 25:40). However, even though Buddhism is bound by no heavenly Father, Buddhists are encouraged to treat others as if they were one's own mother (Harvey, 2011:127). Christians are told to imitate Jesus (I Cor. 11:1) and to love as Jesus loved them (John 13:34), while Buddhists are told that their highest ethic is to imitate the Buddha in embarking on the bodhisattva path.

However, while there may not necessarily be a difference in activity or intensity, there remains a major difference, and it is the subject of this chapter. One is attached, while the other is not. Pure Land Dharma Master Thich Thien Tam isolates the crucial distinction:

> Let us be clear that compassion is different from love-attachment, that is, the mind of affection, attached to forms, which binds us with the ties of passion. Compassion is the mind of benevolence, rescuing and liberating, detached from forms, without discrimination or attachment. This mind manifests itself in every respect, with the result that we are peaceful, happy and liberated, and possess increased merit and wisdom (Wei-an, 2000:85-86).

But, if what distinguishes Christian love from Buddhist compassion is attachment, then what exactly is Christian love attached to? Recall that the highest of Christian ethics attaches itself to

the *person*. Now, there is an immediate point of contention here as to whether attachment to a person is good or not. The Buddhist argues that her ethic is superior precisely because it does not attach itself to individuals, but concerns itself with all sentient beings. As Thich Thien Tam explains, individuals are mere "forms" that "bind us with the ties of passion" (Wei-an, 2000:85). When the Christian clings to such forms, her ethic is distorted by "discrimination."

So, there is a clear difference between the two highest ethics, but how is it that this distinction—this attachment to a *person*—is automatically construed as "discrimination"? After all, Christianity teaches no discrimination between "Jew and Greek," "slave and free," "male and female," for "you are all one in Christ Jesus" (Gal. 3:28). Jesus sent all Christians to take the Gospel "to all the nations" (Matt. 28:19). Even if they hate you in return, "love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you" (Matt. 5:44). It is simply unfair to charge Christianity with discrimination when Jesus' blood "ransomed people for God from every tribe and language and people and nation" (Rev. 5:9).

However, in light of the attached love Christians are supposed to have, there are three reasons that could be given for the charge of discrimination. First, the highest Christian ethic, as concerned with ultimate restoration, concerns itself with *humans*, applying this ultimate hope only speculatively and wishfully to animals. For example, C.S. Lewis (1996:132, 145) speculated that God might do something even better than mere "future happiness" to compensate animals for the "appalling" pain they endure, but, again, this solution is more desire than doctrine. Second, Christian love applies itself passionately toward the restoration of each individual—one person at a time—not all sentient beings as a whole. There is a passionate pursuit of the ultimate restoration of each individual, while the bodhisattva—even when skillfully tailoring the message for each individual—always keeps in mind the deliverance of all

sentient beings, and the ultimate cessation, not restoration, of the individual.

Third, not only does Christian love narrow its object from all sentient beings to humanity, and from humanity to the individual, but it also discriminates within each individual a very staunch line between good and evil. There is not the "whatever-it-takes" blunting of the moral edges we see from the advanced bodhisattva. The pursuit is every bit as dogged, but there also remains a dogged commitment to good as unmixed with evil. God and the Christian remain haters of all evil as the corruptor of God's good plans. Tübingen-trained theologian Gerhard Marcel Martin (2009:12-13) observes the tendency of Christian love toward this intrinsic dichotomy:

> In Biblical tradition, love, including God's love, is situated in a polarity over against anger and revenge as manifestations of hate. In a vast number of prayers in the Hebrew Bible appealing to God's faithfulness and justice, God is asked to refrain from his anger and his revenge in favor of his love, grace, mercy and pity. God's essence may be love—his other attributes like anger and revenge are however also real and effective.

Martin (2009:12-17) does list some biblical passages that might help Christians transcend the "ambivalence" and "tensions" inherent in Christian love. But, ultimately, he suggests that learning from Buddhist compassion can help Christians move past these polarities. For example, visualizing the Pure Land is said to transport one from "the powerful sphere of hate into another world—a world of bliss excluding all polarities and ambivalences of love and hate." He concludes that, "In order to realize [the bliss beyond the "strong polarity between love and hate"], the dynamic of compassion is required" (Martin, 2009:22).

I would like to propose that these "discriminations" are merely just the natural outworking of the Christian commitment to individual restoration. Why are animals "discriminated" against? If the Christian position is such that animals do not end up in heaven after they die (though some Christians hope for it), this stance says absolutely nothing against the

goodness of animals. Contrary to Buddhism, Christianity sees inherent purpose in animals. As Williams (2002:93-94) puts it, "It pleased God to create a world with cats . . . . When Wensleydale [Williams's cat] dies, I assume a good ceases. This is the case when each thing that exists ceases as such to exist. There is no reason why a good, *qua* good, should be eternal." If someone, however, insists on the ultimate salvation of cats, this only goes to "show a misunderstanding of what salvation is all about." True, if salvation is mere escape, then why should cats not have that opportunity like the rest of sentient beings? But Christian salvation, as an individual's ultimate restoration, demands certain rational and spiritual abilities. Christ incarnated specifically as a human because the human, made in the image of God, shares certain constitutional capabilities with God. Indeed, the only way we could expect a cat to be saved in the Christian sense is if cats were different creatures entirely. (Yet why is God under obligation to create cats differently? They are good as they are, after all.) As Williams puts it, why should God be "under some sort of moral obligation to make a world with no cats but perhaps with furry creatures with four legs, tails and pointed ears and all the spiritual capacities of humans" (Williams, 2009:94)? To object that cats are not saved in Christian soteriology is to miss the point of Christian salvation entirely: It is not escape, but restoration to its intended reflection of God's glory.

Secondly, why all this focus on the individual, instead of all sentient beings collectively? The answer is simple: Christians do not take themselves to be gods. Bodhisattvas may be able to "put into one atom of dust an entire world region" or "put innumerable sentient beings into one pore of his skin" (Williams, 2009:207), but the Christian has not reached such divine proportions, nor will she. So, love as individual attention does not mean favoritism. It means focus. Humans are made in the image of God, but humans are not God—and cannot be toward

all sentient beings. So each Christian focusing on her "neighbors"—which biblically comes to mean anyone in need, including one's enemy (Luke 10:29-37)—is how Christians realistically participate in others' restoration in a world where they are not God. A bodhisattva might be said to effect universal escape, but when the goal is each person's ultimate restoration, one ought to focus on each individual, one at a time.

Third, why does the Christian insist on such either-or discriminations when it comes to good and evil? This is because, again, the point is restoration. If escape were all one sought, then there would be every reason to adhere only to such distinctions as are conducive to the overriding goal (and, as we see from the bodhisattva's example, there comes a point where all that matters is compassion; do whatever it takes—moral or immoral—to get them on their way). But it is *restoration* that is in mind here, and, what is more, restoration to the God whose very nature is perfect goodness and truth. Deception and immorality are precisely what one is being saved *from*, and cannot therefore be tools for salvation. Good and evil remain stubborn categories so long as the goal is the Holy One. Thus, as we have seen, any complaints that Christian love is discriminatory are, in the end, complaints against its focus on *restoring* individuals.

Of course, a complaint against love-attachment not yet mentioned is that it will eventually cause oneself much suffering. Buddhism teaches the impermanence of each and every entity, whether one is attached to it or not. So, if one's attachments do not render its object any less vulnerable to impermanence, attachments are an unwise bargain. But, of course, the very attachments Christianity advocates are also the very things Christianity holds to be ultimately permanent: God, one's own self, and other selves. So, it is not that this objection to love-attachment is not significant (the suffering attachments can cause makes itself seem

extraordinarily significant at certain of life's moments), but, like the previous objections, it ultimately rises or falls on which metaphysics—that of escape or restoration—ends up being true.

4.9 Which makes for a better world with less suffering?

The question to ask now is, since the goal of interfaith scholarship is a better world with less suffering, and the means it proposes is to Buddhicize Christianity, would such means accomplish such a goal? As we have seen in this chapter, on the one hand, the highest ethic in Buddhism is the bodhisattva's great compassion, an overriding goal to remove the person from the problem. It promises escape from the particularity of personhood. Thus, not only is it detached from persons as particulars, but also from anything that could hinder their escape, to the point that even such virtues as truth and goodness are merely considered to be tools that one can utilize or discard for the overriding cause. On the other hand, the highest ethic in Christianity is love that attaches itself to the ultimate restoration of a person. Humanity is valued as precious persons, created by God and desperately needing reconciliation with God. Since this is reconciliation with a God whose very nature is truth and goodness, Christian love cultivates a rigid attachment, not only to the person, but to the person's ultimate restoration in truth and goodness. There is no overriding laxity, but an overwhelming love. So, would Christian love, Buddhicized to better resemble bodhisattva compassion, make for a better world with less suffering?

I contend the answer is no, for five reasons, and they all have to do with crucial attachments which the Christian cultivates, so that, if Christianity were Buddhicized, its potential to help make this a better world would be relaxed to the world's detriment. First, Christian love

is *attached to God's image*. Buddhism advocates an equal dispassion toward all sentient beings. Christianity, however, advocates passionate attachment to individuals as extraordinarily precious. Scripture speaks of an elation erupting in heaven over even one sinner who repents (Luke 15:7, 10, 32).

Second, Christian love is *attached to God's truth*. Bodhisattvas may employ noble lies, but their assumption is that the world is too unsalvageable and humans too unreasonable for truth to be more valuable than a means to use or abuse. But why should these depressing beliefs be assumed from the outset? Jesus promises that, if we seek the truth, we will find it (Matt. 7:7), and, if we find it, it will set us free (John 8:32). Truth, as one of the most precious of treasures, actually helps salvage the world and bring reason to humanity. It is people committed to learning truth, not to twisting it, that will make this world a better place.

Third, Christian love is *attached to God's goodness*. If indeed the world is so irredeemable that the only sane option is escape, then perhaps other virtues could be made negotiable in order for escape to be realized. But, suppose there are pockets of real goodness, with intermittent revivals of restoration. Would not the world be made better by individuals attaching themselves wholeheartedly to this goodness—not using it as a means, but valuing it as an end—in the hope that it will spread?

Fourth, Christian love is *attached to God's authority*. As it stands, the Christian has her orders: "You shall love your neighbor as you love yourself." Take God out, and it automatically softens into a suggestion: "You shall" becomes "you might." Laws become advice. When all authority passes from God to humans, what is to keep the more stringent "you shall love" (work toward their ultimate restoration) from becoming "you might *please*" (work toward their temporal happiness)? What keeps "your neighbor" (defined biblically as whoever is in need)

from becoming "your neighbor" (whomever I choose as worthy of my help)? Buddhism would revise the biblical commandment to something like, "One would be wise to pity one's fellow sentient being as one might pity one's own impermanence," but, even in this form, it still fails to rise above strong suggestion, without ontological obligation. The more Buddhicized Christianity becomes, the less attached it becomes to any authoritative basis for its love.

Fifth, Christian love is *attached to God's plan*. The Christian finds the world fallen into the valley between the peaks of creation and redemption. The Christian is somewhere between hearing "It is good" and "Well done." It is not the cessation of all but the redemption of all that Christians anticipate: "Behold, I am making all things new" (Rev. 21:5). In the meantime, Christians groan, waiting eagerly (Rom. 8:23). How do Christians know they will not end up waiting for nothing? Jesus gave previews of the plan. The blind cried, "I can see!" and the deaf, "I can hear!" A funeral procession reversed course in exuberant parade (Luke 7:15), as a reminder that, in the end, "death is swallowed in victory" (I Cor. 15:54). After all, Jesus had claimed at the outset, "He has sent me to proclaim liberty to the captives and recovering of sight to the blind, to set at liberty those who are oppressed, to proclaim the year of the Lord's favor" (Luke 4:18b-19). Witnessing all this was more than enough for John to close out the Bible's final chapter with, "Come, Lord Jesus!" The plan is captivating.

But Christians have not been content merely to wait. A phase of the plan was underway, even after Jesus ascended back to heaven. He had told them, "You are the salt of the earth" (Matt. 5:13). "You are the light of the world" (Matt. 5:14). "You will be my witnesses" (Acts 1:8). And so they got to work. In their attachment to God's image, they introduced orphanages (Schmidt, 2004:132-183), hospitals, and institutions for the blind, the poor, the aged, and the mentally handicapped. In their attachment to God's truth, they introduced catechetical and

cathedral schools, and eventually the university and public schools. In their attachment to God's goodness, they unpopularly stood against such evils as the gladiatorial games, abortion and infanticide (Schmidt, 2004:51-63), the father's absolute power over life or death (*patria potestas*) (Schmidt, 2004:111), eventually seeing them all outlawed in the Greco-Roman world. And in their attachment to God's authority, Christians had a unique advantage fueling them on to make the world a better place: a crucified Creator telling them to love others the way he had loved them. That this authority was also their exemplar compounded their persistence in doing the uncannily sacrificial: "Something about Jesus keeps prodding people to do what they would rather not: Francis of Assisi gives up his possessions, Augustine gives up his mistress, John Newton gives up his slave trade, and Father Damien gives up his health" (Ortberg, 2012:18).

In Buddhism, we see all five attachments slackened. Nothing has intrinsic worth. Truth and goodness are elastic. All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to the not-self. The only plan is evacuation. These detachments have meant that "Buddhism is a latecomer to the cause of human rights, and for most of its history has been preoccupied with other concerns" (Keown, 1995:4). Keown continues that "there is no doubt that Buddhism lags far behind religions such as Christianity and Islam in developing the framework for a social gospel within which questions of this kind [human rights issues] can be addressed."

Of course, compassion remains, but it is the kind of compassion that saves the person from personhood itself. The bodhisattva path joins "whatever exists" with "whatever it takes" and thus claims to offer the ultimate in salvific scope. However, as to "whatever exists," what Buddhism offers in breadth it loses in depth, for each precious particularity is dissolved into a featureless generality. Cardinal Henri de Lubac, a 20th century Jesuit who studied Buddhism extensively, contrasted Christian love and Buddhist compassion. David Grumett (2008), de

Lubac scholar, summarizes de Lubac's position: whereas Christian love sees each person as "loved for himself," as for Buddhism,

> [T]he self is ultimately an illusion. Charity becomes compassion (*maitri*) directed to alleviate the other's moral or physical sufferings by setting him on the path to spiritual peace and meditation. Compassion is "declared to be all the more perfect, the more it becomes abstract and generalised," being "more concerned with suffering in general than with each suffering being in particular" (*AB* I 38). Buddhist compassion therefore attains its goal not in universality and particularity, but in generality. In Mahāyāna (Great Vehicle) Buddhism, the highest form of other-regard is pure, objectless compassion, which dissolves finally into the void of *nirvāna*.

If "whatever exists" means some bland generalities, "whatever it takes" means some sensational specifics. If compassion is "whatever it takes" to get people on the road to escape, this can, in the words of Christopher Ives (2008a:32), "lead us into foggy moral territory." Compassion is the Zen master cutting off the disciple's finger or slicing a cat in two, all for the sake of enlightenment. As we have already seen, compassion is the bodhisattva's paternal deception and can even lead to rationalizing illicit sex and bloodshed. No goodness or truth is too sacred to be overridden in compassion's name. Yes, these are the more sensational of examples, and, no, it is not being suggested that individual Buddhists are ordinarily "compassionate" in these bizarre ways. What is being suggested is that the Buddhist's highest ethic, that of the bodhisattva's great compassion, can seem vacuous compared to the Christian's love bolstered as it is in Godward attachments.

4.10 Conclusion

So, is Buddhicizing Christianity the way to a better world with less suffering? Insofar as the Christian's attachments to God's image, truth, goodness, authority, and plan contribute to this goal, the answer seems to be no, especially since Buddhism encourages all five attachments to be released. There is no attachment in Buddhism. Detachment is enlightenment, whereas, for

Christians, attachment to God in all his goodness and truth is what it means to be saved. One ethic offers escape, while the other offers restoration. Neither cling too tightly to this world, but, since one's promise is to escape it all, while the other's is to restore its stewards, one ends up more effective at making for a better world.

Chapter 5

Your demands are too dualistic: how ultimate aversions relate to suffering

5.1 Introduction

Since the goal of many interfaith scholars is to make a better world with less suffering, one ought to ask if their proposed means—"Buddhicizing" Christianity—would logically contribute to such a goal. To answer, we have been contrasting Buddhism's and Christianity's responses to suffering. We will call Buddhism's response to suffering "Buddhist compassion" and Christianity's response "Christian love." In defining Buddhist compassion and Christian love, however, we must first contrast the two religions as they relate to suffering in five areas, namely, their viewpoints on ultimate reality, ultimate attachments, ultimate aversions, ultimate example, and ultimate purpose. This chapter focuses on what Buddhism and Christianity teach regarding aversion, and how these viewpoints on aversion relate to suffering.

If Buddhism so strongly discourages attachments (the subject of chapter 4), is Buddhism then compelled to encourage its opposite—strong aversions? The answer is a staunch, "May it never be!" Aversion too is poison. The goal cannot be reached by repudiating attachments so zealously that one actually feels hatred in their place—because the goal is the tranquility that is nirvana. Buddhists are neither to love with attachment nor to hate with aversion. Contrast this with the Christian's orders: "Abhor what is evil; cling to what is good" (Rom. 12:9b NASB). As we shall see, if Buddhists abhor even for a moment, any hope for nirvana jumps ahead eons. Yet the more fully Christians reach their created purpose, the more they share the hatreds specified by God. After contrasting these two attitudes toward aversion, the question we will attempt to

answer is, in light of these attitudes, which religion is better equipped to make this a better world with less suffering?

5.2 Buddhism's aversion to aversion

Buddhists famously illustrate the tangle of *samsara* with a chart called the *bhavacakra*.[23] This depiction, known as the "wheel of existence," maps the Buddhist worldview with a series of concentric circles. Holding the entire wheel in its mouth is a demon, sometimes the tempter and adversary called Mara and sometimes Yama, the king of death. The wheel's outermost ring is often the twelve links of dependent co-arising. Further inward are the six realms one might be reborn into—from hell to heaven and all in-between. The innermost circle has a bird, a snake, and a pig all chasing each other. These represent the "three poisons" (Buswell and Lopez, 2014:112). These three are the "propelling forces of the cycle of existence" (Robinson and Johnson, 1977:36). One poison we already met in chapter 4: the bird represents the poison of greed and sensuality, that which causes strong attachment. The pig illustrates the poison of delusion. The snake represents the subject of this chapter—the poison of hatred or aversion (Buswell and Lopez, 2014:112).

Just how poisonous is aversion? Two Sanskrit words are used to denote aversion (as well as ill-will, repulsion, and hatred): *pratigha* (listed as a primary mental affliction) and the more prominent *dvesa* (included in lists of afflictions, fetters, proclivities, hindrances, and poisons) (Buswell and Lopez, 2014:277). When it meets people, aversion divides like a snake's tongue into *krodha*, a sudden, destructive anger (Buswell and Lopez, 2014:445), and *upanaha*, a "longer-term simmering grudge" (Buswell and Lopez, 2014:940). But not only does aversion

[23] The *bhavacakra* is most well-known in its Tibetan forms, but it is not limited to Tibetan Buddhism.

give rise to secondary afflictions destructive to others, but aversion is principally destructive to oneself. According to Daniel Cozort (1995:83), editor of the *Journal of Buddhist Ethics*, anger is especially destructive in that, not only does it "plant seeds" for suffering like other afflictions do, but anger will actually "cut the roots of virtue." In his study of *pratigha*, Cozort argues that however gently one tries to interpret certain sutras, there is no way to get around the sutras' unequivocal message that aversion will indeed preclude nirvana for certain people. For example, the *Manjusri-vikridita Sutra* threatens the loss of a hundred eons of merit per single moment of anger. The Indian Mahayana monk Santideva then multiplied this warning tenfold to the eradication of a thousand eons.

Tibetan patriarch Tsongkhapa attempts to mitigate the effects somewhat by limiting the most destructive cases to anger shown toward bodhisattvas and by making "cutting roots" to mean something less than "destroying" (Cozort, 1995:84). However, it remains the case that a "single lifetime's episode of anger (particularly if that life is spent being jealous of one or more real bodhisattvas) could easily dig a hole so deep that even innumerable aeons (sic) seem too brief to permit escape" (Cozort, 1995:93). The odds of being born a human is already likened to a blind sea turtle, emerging every one hundred years, just happening to stick its head through a particular ring somewhere on the ocean, but anger recalculates even these odds to something far more depressing. Cozort concludes that any Mahayana promise of universal liberation is made less credible: anger's "extraordinary damage spreading over many aeons (sic), based on as little as a moment's outburst, seems to make liberation a practical impossibility for most persons" (Cozort, 1995:97).

How does this aversion to aversion relate to that principal object of Christian hatred—sin? It is not as though Buddhists simply ignore sin, because confession is an expected part of the

holy life. Jan Konier (2010:96) lists seven attitudes Buddhists cultivate with regard to their sin, the first six of which are shame at their shortcoming compared to the Buddha, fear at the karmic consequences, disgust at bodily existence, intent for the Buddha-body, equanimity toward all sentient beings, and gratitude for the bodhisattva's labors. With all this exertion put toward one's reformation, it might be assumed that sin should be recognized as an object of strong aversion. Yet, notice Konier's seventh attitude: "Seventh, emptiness. Finally I may expect to realize the illusory nature of sin, its arising and its elimination, for these still belong to the World of causation. On the highest level of truth they have no substantiality." Thus, because of evil's insubstantiality and aversion's liability, we will find the typical reaction to evil very different from the Christian's prescribed abhorrence. When they see evil in others, Buddhists are instructed to cultivate an attitude of, "Well, it's just . . ." so that any aversion is neutralized. We will discover ten such Buddhist strategies to suppress aversion at the sight of evil. Strategies 1-5 condition one to accept that the problem is not actually the person's fault, so why be angry about it? Strategies 6-10 condition one to accept that the problem is not really a problem anyway, so again, why be angry about it?

5.2.1 Strategy #1 – It's just an appendage.

When provoked to anger, Buddhists can recall the doctrine of not-self. If a person is really just "a collection of physical elements and mental processes," then, when someone does something "evil," the Buddhist can ask just "which particular part of them is one of them annoyed with" (Harvey, 2011:245). If, ultimately, there is no person doing the evil, then it might be helpful to see the problem as more of a sickness: thus, when a good king encounters evil in his kingdom, "he should view the wicked as sick, and like a doctor should not get angry with them

but rather make effort to remove their faults" (348). Evil is a malfunctioning appendage more than a malicious heart.

Santideva picturesquely points Buddhists to the guiltlessness of bile (Bommarito, 2011:358-359). His argument goes like this: Bile causes suffering, but we would never get angry at bile. People cause suffering, but we often get angry at people. Yet, in both cases, the problem is "incited by conditions," and thus we should never get any angrier at people than we would at bile. Of course, one immediately intuits differences, and at times even Santideva seems to presuppose differences. For example, insofar as his *Bodhicaryavatara* praises those who choose the path of Buddhahood (*bodhicitta*), there seems to be agency presupposed in the case of the aspiring bodhisattva, but this seems to contradict his analysis of the wicked person (Bommarito, 2011:363-365). Yet it is not uncommon to praise people for favorable traits they had no control over (e.g. loveliness), while only a bully would castigate someone for a handicap. And Santideva reinforces his bile analogy with a metaphysical argument: Autonomy presupposes a self, and there is no self. Thus, there is no autonomy.

Now, not all Buddhists would agree with Santideva here. Buddhist compatibilists might respond that causal chains too can include intentions, even if it all ends up determined. That is, not all Buddhists would necessarily put human causal chains on the same level of culpability as bile. Whatever the case, however, Santideva has provided a technique for quelling aversion: a Buddhist can absolve an evil person as being just as inculpable as bile.

5.2.2 Strategy #2 – It's just a moment.

Just as there is an atomization of the human into a collection of elements, there seems to be in Buddhism a similar atomization of time. Just as anger toward the offending appendage is

unwarranted, so is anger toward the offending moment. Buddhaghosa, fifth-century Indian Buddhist, taught that anger is unwarranted because "the mind-states of a person who has harmed one are likely to be different now from when he or she did the harmful act" (Harvey, 2011:244). King Pasenadi learned this as he tracked the murderous bandit Angulimala (Loy, 2000:149-150). The name *Angulimala* literally means "finger-garland," which gives a clue as to the decorative destiny of his many victims. When Angulimala first glimpsed the Buddha, the Buddha miraculously outpaced him and won his attention. Wonder at the Buddha's physical feats merged with astonishment at his insight into Angulimala's spiritual condition, with the result that Angulimala renounced his banditry and asked to join the Buddha's *sangha*.

On their way to capture Angulimala, King Pasenadi and his cavalry met the Buddha. Learning their intentions, the Buddha asked how the king might respond if the bandit were actually now a good monk. The king replied that he would pay homage to the monk just as to any other. Then the Buddha shocked the king by pointing out Angulimala sitting in the distance. True to his word, after praising the Buddha's ability, the king called off the pursuit, and soon thereafter Angulimala became an arhat (Loy, 2000:150). Clearly, there is, in the *Angulimala Sutra*, an absolving atomization of time. For, according to David Loy, since "the only reason that Buddhism accepts for punishing an offender [is] to help reform his or her character," no further punishment was necessary. Loy (2000:150) concludes, "Then there is absolutely no reason to punish someone who has already reformed himself."

We must be careful not to equate this self-reformation with forgiveness. The Buddha may be said to accept confessions, but no debt is actually canceled. For example, when a king who had killed his father to ascend to the throne confesses to the Buddha, what happens is that, "The Buddha is simply accepting what [the king] tells him, that he has erred but intends to be lawful in

the future" (Attwood, 2008:298). Just as Christianity sees sin as eternally ineradicable (by any mere human), Christianity promises an equally extensive forgiveness. Yet Buddhism rounds off both radical edges, offering instead mitigating procedures for momentary problems. As Harvey (2011:68) explains, "Buddhism does not encourage the developing of strong guilt feelings if a precept is broken. Regretting misdeeds is wholesome, always seeking to do better in the future." Likewise, "The important thing is remorse for a past wrong and a determination not to repeat it" (Harvey, 2011:341). After all, any evil is "conditioned phenomena," and any fixed nature is an illusion (Harvey, 2011:49). It is as if Buddhism offers its own version of I Cor. 4:17: These "light momentary afflictions" (i.e. sin) might not prepare us for an "eternal weight of glory," but at least its realization lets fall any "eternal weight of guilt." Of course, there are karmic residues and "negative seeds" to deal with (Bingaman, 2012:418), but they can be dealt with personally because they can be viewed momentarily.

It the Buddhist perspective sees sin vanish with the moment, then those thinkers who find original sin unacceptable may have been given a handy replacement. So argues Kirk Bingaman (2012:411-416), pastoral and counseling professor at Fordham University. Contemplative practices, especially Buddhist meditations and mindfulness practices, can help re-center oneself in "the hidden treasure of our original worth and goodness." Bingaman enlists the latest findings of neuroscience to make the case that the brain's neuroplasticity (ability to change itself) is encouraged by such practices, but hindered by "theologizing about our inherent wrongfulness." Bingaman goes so far as to declare that even the more optimistic of Christian self-help strategies (e.g. Joel Osteen's *Become a Better You*) ride the "never-ending treadmill of self-improvement." Such Christian efforts seem to suggest that "we have become a chronic self-improvement project," rather than demonstrating a "fundamental trust in our inherent worth and value." Much

better to, as Bingaman puts it, move "beyond the Adamic myth and belief in original sin" because it "inhibits the resculpting of the brain" and embrace those religious practices that are "proven methods for the resculpting of the brain."

5.2.3 Strategy #3 – It's just ignorance.

At the base of the Buddhist wheel of existence, the first of twelve links of dependent co-arising is ignorance (Buswell and Lopez, 2014:669). In the Garden of Eden, however, some ignorance would have been a good thing, specifically ignorance of the result of consuming the forbidden fruit. It was not ignorance that caused the spiral of death, but sin. True, sin eventually confuses our intellect, such that, Romans 1 ascribes "a debased mind" (Romans 1:28) to the prior choice to "suppress the truth" (Romans 1:18). But there is a predictable order, both historically (Genesis 3) and experientially (Romans 1:32—"Though they know God's righteous decree . . . they not only do them but give approval to those who practice them"). So, according to Christianity, humans are primarily sinful, and become ignorant, whereas, in Buddhism, humans are primarily ignorant, and therefore become "sinful."

Thus, another Buddhist strategy for avoiding aversion is to view the offender as merely ignorant. How was the Buddha able to refrain from anger when dealing with his many detractors? They were merely fools, and, as Santideva puts it, "Anger at a fool for harming others is like anger at a fire for burning things" (Harvey, 2011:245). The Buddha rarely called anyone evil or sinful, but would speak of them as "fools." Harvey (2011:56) explains, "A fool neither recognizes a transgression for what it is nor accepts another person's acknowledgement of having committed a transgression." So, in arguing for restorative, as opposed to retributive, justice, Loy (2000:155) reminds us that, according to Buddhism, "all of us are somewhat mad,"

and thus the "insanity defense is always somewhat applicable." Likewise, a major correlation Stephen Morris (1991:45) sees and admires as he compares Zen Buddhism and American Transcendentalism is their shared mental solution: "[I]t is through a process of un-learning that our original, or true, nature will reveal itself. . . . Man does not need a redeemer; he must awaken from his dream state." Morris (1991:53) sees the two philosophies as "soul-mates" in their rejection of Christian doctrines such as original sin. Both contend that our problem is not sin against God, but ignorance of our true nature. If all of our alleged wrongdoings spring from ignorance, then why vilify what was done unknowingly?

5.2.4 Strategy #4 – It's just a lack.

Once there was an emperor, from a long line of good emperors, who followed his father's advice in every way except that he ceased giving to the needy. The resultant poverty among his subjects led them to resort to theft. Brought before the emperor, a thief explained his plight, with the happy result that the emperor graciously gave him what he lacked. Yet this apparent generosity only encouraged more stealing among all of the other people. The emperor decided to make an example out of the next thief who was caught in order to deter theft, and he had him executed. This measure backfired and only instigated armed robberies in the course of which potential witnesses were murdered. The Buddha concludes in the *Cakkavatti-Sihanada Sutra*,

> Thus, from the not giving of property to the needy, poverty became rife, from the growth of poverty, the taking of what was not given increased, from the increase of theft, the use of weapons increased, from the increased use of weapons, the taking of life increased—and from the taking of life, people's life-span decreased, their beauty decreased (Harvey, 2011:197).

On the other hand, in the *Kutadanta Sutta* (2008a), the Buddha told a similar story only in reverse. A Brahman is said to have given the following advice to the king whose country is

"harassed and harried" by pillagers: Taxes and punishments will only make matters worse. On the other hand,

> [T]here is one method to adopt to put a thorough end to this disorder. Whoever in the King's realm devote themselves to farming and keeping cattle, to them let His Majesty, the King, give food and seed-corn. Whoever in the King's realm devote themselves to trade, to them let His Majesty, the King, give capital. Whoever there be in the King's realm who devote themselves to government service, to them let His Majesty, the King, give wages and food. Then those men, following each his own business, will no longer harass the realm; the king's revenue will go up; the country will be quiet and at peace; and the populace, pleased one with another and happy, dancing their children in their arms, will dwell with open doors.

Buddhist professor Mahinda Deegalle (2003:88) finds in such teachings the solution for war-torn Sri Lanka: "By analyzing those causes which lead to violence and transforming violent contexts into non-violent social realities, Buddhism shows a way out of the vicious circle of violence." Like the Buddha, Deegalle advocates income equality as violence prevention. Similarly, John Makransky (2005:31) sees in such teachings a literal application of the Buddhist dictum that love is a protective force: "forces of disruption were unleashed because the leadership lacked a clear focus of care for the poor, a lack of effective love for them." From such teachings, Loy (2000:152) sees additional warrant for rejecting retributive punishment since "poverty is presented as the root cause of immoral behavior." For our purposes, however, we can see in these teachings yet another strategy the Buddha offers for avoiding aversion: beneath any harm one has caused, there is some form of lack. Somebody has an unmet need. The implication is, of course, that such a situation, however inconvenient for oneself, calls for sympathy, and not kneejerk anger.

5.2.5 Strategy # 5 – It's just your karma.

To describe this next strategy, first it might be helpful to describe its polar opposite. Let us call the reverse of karma in all its mechanical indifference "grace." Now, ideally, grace effects gratitude, but, as Karel van Oosten (2008:248) puts it, "from a logical philosophical point of view, there is nothing absurd when people decide to do whatever they want, if they are nonetheless sure to be pardoned by grace." For example, according to van Oosten's research into the devastations in Cambodia, some have suspected that "Cambodians who have converted to Christian faith" are merely trying "to escape their karmic consequences" by invoking "cheap grace" to excuse wickedness. Now, let us take this unfortunate caricature of grace as saying, "It is no big deal what I do because grace makes me exempt." What would be such an attitude's polar opposite? If grace is the unmerited gift, karma is the merited wage. So, we could imagine the opposite of a narcissistic reception of grace to be a philanthropic reception of karma that says, "It is no big deal what harm is done to me because my karma makes me responsible." Let us imagine further that, when it comes to cheap grace, in place of the relief one feels for having "gotten off the hook," there is instead, with karma, the heartfelt concern for the perpetrator of the harm. Would that not be pure selflessness?

Such a consummately selfless attitude forms another strategy for avoiding aversion when someone harms the Buddhist. Santideva encourages Buddhists to think the following when harmed:

> Those who harm me come against me,
> Summoned by my evil karma.
> But they will be the ones who go to hell,
> And so it is myself who bring *their* ruin.
>
> Because of them, and through the exercise of patience,
> My many sins are cleansed and purified.
> But they will be the ones who, thanks to me,

> Will have the long-drawn agonies of hell.
>
> Therefore I am *their* tormentor!
> Therefore it is they who bring me benefit!
> Thus with what perversity, pernicious mind,
> Will you be angry with your enemies? (Santideva's Bodhi-caryavatara, quoted in Fink, 2012:391-392)

If this way of thinking seems lopsided, however, note that, according to Winston King (1995:73-75), the further back in history Buddhism goes toward its canonical days, the less any intention of enforcing "justice" was expressed. This is the case even though "Asia has had its full share of cruel oppressive rulers" because "on the whole the social order was accepted much like the natural order, simply as the way life was." *Samsara* was already perceived by Buddhists as "intrinsically unsalvable," with the only escape not into a "better world but into Nirvana." A bad society was simply the collective product of proximate individuals' bad karma. So, as King asks, "why should human beings think that they can or should do anything substantial to alter the 'unjust' situations and conditions? All the actors therein will receive their full recompense, sooner or later." Santideva was encouraging Buddhists to personalize this logic from accepting collective responsibility for bad societies to indicting oneself for evil individuals. If one feels no anger toward society in general, neither should she feel any toward the perpetrators provoked by her own karma. After all, if one can patiently endure the harm, she can satisfy her karmic inevitabilities and proceed down the path (Harvey, 2011:245).

5.2.6 Strategy #6 – It's just your mom.

It is unnatural to desire to care for all sentient beings like one cares for close relatives. The Jataka tales unsettle us with a radically indiscriminate Buddha who, in one previous life, jumps to his death to provide limbs for a starving tigress and her cubs (Harvey, 2011:172). How

the hero of parables accomplishes such feats is one thing, but how is it possible for such indiscriminate compassion to arise in the ordinary Buddhist? The answer is meditation. Many schools of Buddhism list four objects of meditation that eventually give rise to such indiscriminate tranquility (Buswell and Lopez, 2014:143). They are called the "divine abidings" or "boundless states" or, in Sanskrit, *brahmavihara*. These four "divine abidings" are said to produce the four crucial "meditative absorptions" that start one on the path to enlightenment. These four objects of meditation are lovingkindness, compassion, empathetic joy, and equanimity. The same technique gives rise to all four: the meditators fill their minds with, for example, lovingkindness, and gradually widen their application until they are eventually radiating lovingkindness to all sentient beings in every direction.

But how is one to fill one's mind with lovingkindness in the first place? It would have to be a potent feeling to be dispersible toward all sentient beings. So, some practitioners start with themselves: the love they have for themselves is concentrated as a "warm joyful feeling in the chest" that is then applied to friends, then to neutral persons, then to enemies, and finally to all sentient beings (Harvey, 2011:107-108). Mahayanists employ these four "divine abidings" as part of their aspiration to Buddhahood (*bodhicitta*). Here, lovingkindness is commonly cultivated by first reflecting on one's mother. Memories of her sacrificial love arouse warmth in the heart which is then radiated to all sentient beings. After all, it is reasoned, even enemies in the endless rounds of rebirth would have been one's mother at one time or another (Harvey, 2011:127).

When someone harms the Buddhist, the Buddhist can use the same techniques to suppress anger. Buddhaghosa recommends focusing on the good qualities of the offender, especially thinking about the inevitability of her having been a close relative at one time. If the person harming me was once my loving mother, how can I remain angry at her? In letting the

offense go, one is repaying kindness with kindness, only with uncharted lifetimes of interlude. Such anger management techniques are said to be especially helpful when one is dealing with an ethnic enemy: no matter if the offender seems foreign, the enemy was inevitably once a precious relative (Harvey, 2011:244).

5.2.7 Strategy #7 – It's just your opportunity.

Devadatta is Buddhism's "Judas." He was a cousin and disciple of the Buddha (Buswell and Lopez, 2014:233-234). After attaining supranormal powers, he quickly gained notoriety in the group. With his powers, Devadatta was able to impress and gain the patronage of Prince Ajatasattu, the son of King Bimbisara, the Buddha's primary patron. With successes emboldening him and jealousies embittering him, Devadatta proposed that the Buddha retire and pass the leadership of the *sangha* to him. After the Buddha's stern rebuke, Devadatta began to let his evil nature become visible. He incited Prince Ajatasattu to kill the king and the Buddha. The assassination of the king was successful, but the attempts on the Buddha's life were thwarted. At least three times Devadatta tried to kill the Buddha—through inciting the prince to send his archers, hurling a boulder, and stampeding a bull. After all attempts failed, however, Devadatta decided on a different approach. He seceded from the Buddha's *sangha*, coaxing five hundred additional monks away as well. The eventually return of these five hundred to the Buddha's *sangha* was too much for Devadatta, who began coughing up blood in jealousy. He would never recover. He had already done three actions which are said to bring about immediate rebirth in hell: he tried to kill a Buddha, tried to split the *sangha*, and even succeeded in killing an arhat nun who had rebuked him. His last visit to the Buddha saw the earth swallowing him up and delivering him to hell.

The Buddha, therefore, had plenty of opportunity for anger. And yet, by the time the *Lotus Sutra* was written (between the first century BCE and the first century CE) (Williams, 2009:150), Devadatta had turned into a hero. How? In a previous life, the Buddha tells us in the *Lotus Sutra* (2007:180-181) that the hermit who initially preached this unsurpassable sutra to him was none other than Devadatta himself in a previous life. Upon revealing this connection, the Buddha ascribes the following to his wayward cousin:

> Through the virtuous friendship of Devadatta I was able to become endowed with the six perfections, benevolence, compassion, sympathetic joy, generosity, the thirty-two marks, the eighty excellent characteristics, reddish-gold skin, the ten powers, the four kinds of fearlessness, the four methods of gaining trust, the eighteen excellent qualities, the transcendent powers, and the power of the path. It is all due to the good and virtuous friendship of Devadatta that I attained complete enlightenment and extensively saved innumerable sentient beings.

Following Williams (2009:159), we might speculate that among the virtues the Buddha received through Devadatta's friendship, the foremost was "patient endurance." Thankful for all the help his "good friend" gave him along the way, the Buddha predicts future Buddhahood for Devadatta, no doubt in keeping with the theme of the *Lotus Sutra*—eventual Buddhahood for all.

Thus, we have an additional strategy for eliminating anger: anyone who harms you can be seen as your opportunity to grow in virtue. As Santideva taught, an enemy is actually a "beneficial treasure." Not only should your enemy be tolerated, but venerated as your teacher in virtue (Harvey, 2011:245). If the quintessential villain Devadatta can be praised as the Buddha's benefactor, one's enemies can certainly be appreciated as one's opportunity.

5.2.8 Strategy #8 – It's just its opposite.

The Buddha should not be called a moral relativist (Harvey, 2011:57). Yet there are branches of Buddhist which stand out in emphasizing the ultimate nonduality of good and evil.

Zen Buddhism, in particular, stresses the distinction between good and evil as being of only provisional use (Yandell and Netland, 2009:100). According to Japanese Zen instructor and Jesuit Kadowaki Kakichi (1976:109), "in the Zen sect the sense of guilt is not stressed. Rather, emphasis is on transcendence of the dualism of good and evil." Zen monk Thich Nhat Hanh stresses how tangled good and evil are within each other: "As soon as the idea of good is there, the idea of evil is there. Buddha needs Mara in order to reveal himself, and vice versa" (O'Leary, 2008:364). Likewise, Zen instructor David Loy (2013:405) says, "we cannot have one without the other, because the meaning of each is the opposite of the other." In addition to Zen, however, even a branch of Buddhism that stresses moral guilt as much as Pure Land Buddhism does (hence, the desperate need for saviors like Amitabha) has adherents who teach ultimate nonduality. Gregory Gibbs (2001:118), for example, claims, "[U]ltimately we hope to become reverent toward all things," and that ultimately, "There is no person nor activity that is monochromatically evil from Buddhist perspective."

For Buddhists tempted to get angry, this perspective on the ultimate inextricability of good and evil offers help. Instead of anger, one can bring to mind that evil is ultimately no different from its opposite. Why be angry, then? Many wish such a strategy had been used to prevent wars from happening. Zen has been criticized for having no means to decry militant regimes. Yet Christopher Ives (2006:5) actually utilizes Zen's belief in the nonduality of good and evil to defend Zen against this charge. Ives contends that, since ideologies usually divide the world into a good "us" and an evil "them" (e.g. "between good people and evil-doers, between righteous believers and the Great Satan"), Zen offers the solution by recognizing the nonduality of us, them, good, and evil. Ives (2006:7-8) reasons,

> The anti-substantialist orientation of Zen can prove useful in ideology critique insofar as it sensitizes us to the kind of reification that characterizes ideological representation,

> whether of "evil" as a substantial force operating in the world, or "our" inherently good, innocent, and peaceful nature as opposed to "their" inherently evil, fanatical, and violent nature.

When humanity ignores good and evil's "interdependence," Loy (2013:406) explains, there will always be the need to struggle against evil, and, in struggling against it, we will find ourselves struggling against "evil" people. Hence, we have "inquisitions, witchcraft and heresy trials, and, most recently, the War on Terror." Osama bin Laden and George W. Bush, we are told, were not only "polar opposites" but "mirror images" because they both sought to destroy what they saw as evil. Loy adds their names to the list of history's attempts to "destroy (what we understand as) evil" along with attempts by Hitler, Stalin, and Mao Zedong. The result? "Incalculable dukkha for many millions of people." Unsurprisingly, interfaith scholars likewise see strict, good-evil dichotomies as the root of all kinds of evil, for such bifurcations sometimes play out on battlefields. Rosemary Ruether (2005:35) indicts "a dualism that sets good against evil, seeking to exterminate the other in the name of an exclusive good owned only by one's own group." Ugly words such as "exclusive," "one's own," and "dualism" mix with lethal words such as "exterminate," because, to many Buddhists and interfaith scholars, the connection is only logical. One wonders, of course, why such scholars do not treat the unfortunate abuses (e.g. inquisition, heresy trials, etc.), of such good-evil dichotomizing as both good and evil. After all, they have explicitly renounced such labels. Nonetheless, what anger toward the offender could not be alleviated by recognizing that "evil" is ultimately no different from its opposite?

5.2.9 Strategy #9 – It's just the surface.

How is it that the aspiring bodhisattvas in Mahayana Buddhism can be assured they are not wasting their time vowing to usher all sentient beings into enlightenment? The solution is the

doctrine of *Tathagatagarbha*: all sentient beings possess the Buddha-nature. As mentioned in chapter 3, having the Buddha-nature started out meaning simply that all have the capacity for enlightenment, but it came to be a guarantee that all, in fact, would eventually become buddhas (Buswell and Lopez, 2014:897). For some (e.g. the Chinese *Dasheng qixinlun* or *Awakening of Faith in the Mahayana*), the Buddha-nature enlarged into something of a cosmological principle (Williams, 2009:116-117). It became the substratum of Mind in all that exists. It is said that this underlying reality "universally illumines the mind of man and induces him to cultivate his capacity for goodness."

So in this Buddha-nature, underneath externals, there is a potential, a purity, a goodness. As James Breckenridge (1992:62-65) points out in his contrast of the bodhisattva and Christ, there is a "spirit of optimism" in Buddhism, especially in this doctrine of Buddha-nature, such that the "most accurate thing to say about the true nature of humanity is that 'all is well.'" Harvey (2011:35) reflects on this Buddha-nature "depth purity": "Whatever a person is like on the surface, it is held that the depths of their mind are brightly shining and pure." All that is needed is already within. Rita Gross (2002:80) calls it "one's primordial pure and enlightened state." Zen Buddhist Ruben Habito (1985:238) calls it "the immanent presence of this dormant wisdom of the Enlightened One in all living beings." Zen Buddhist Robert Aitken (2002:70) informs us that even in Buddhist confession, "There is no original sin to be forgiven by God, but rather a shared realization of the essential purity of sunyata as the nature of all things. With this realization in peak experiences, all the evil of the past is purified."

Maha-Ghosananda lost his entire family in the Cambodia of the Khmer Rouge. Yet he was "Cambodia's Ghandi" (Hevesi, 2007). Until his death in 2007, he was Cambodia's spokesperson for forgiveness—initiating peace talks, peace marches, and prayers of peace. He

repeatedly preached the *Dhammapada* verse, "Enmities never cease by enmity in this world; they only cease by non-enmity" (Harvey, 2011:280-282). Even though criticized for it, Ghosananda even advocated Cambodia's interim government including members of the Khmer Rouge because, "With our love, we will do everything we can to assure peace for all." How could Ghosananda be so sure of the power of the peacefulness he preached? It was because whatever violence people saw was only on the surface. Ghosananda explained, "The opponent has our respect. We implicitly trust his or her human nature and understand that ill-will is caused by ignorance. By appealing to the best in each other, both of us achieve the satisfaction of peace." And again,

> Peacemaking requires compassion. It requires the skill of listening. To listen, we have to give up ourselves, even our own words. We listen until we can hear our peaceful nature. As we listen to ourselves, we learn to listen to others as well, and new ideas grow. There is an openness, a harmony. As we come to trust one another, we discover new possibilities for resolving conflicts. When we listen well, we will hear peace growing (Harvey, 2011:283).

How did Ghosananda keep from becoming angry at the atrocities committed against his countrymen, including the murder of his own family? Underneath it all, he saw a purity deeper and more substantial than the surface-level evil.

5.2.10 Strategy #10 – It's just your response.

A final Buddhist strategy for tweaking one's perspective so as to mitigate anger is to stop thinking about the atrocity entirely. If the object in one's mind continues to be the harm caused, then anger will undoubtedly fester, but there are anger-assuaging objects for the mind. To reconcile quarreling monks, the Buddha told a story about a slain king who, just before he died, told his son Dighavu, "Enmities are not allayed by enmity: enmities, dear Dighavu, are allayed by non-enmity" (Harvey, 2011:246-247). Ignoring the advice, Dighavu went out to plot his

revenge against the usurper who had killed his father. He won the trust of the new king. And, on a hunting trip, while the king slept, Dighavu drew his sword three times, but each time prevented himself from killing the king. When the king woke and Dighavu gave his identity, Dighavu gave the following reason for not going ahead and killing his father's murderer: "[I]f I were to deprive the king of life, those who desired the king's welfare would deprive me of life and those who desired my welfare would deprive these of life; thus enmity would not be settled by enmity." And, in the end, the king gave his daughter in marriage to the noble Dighavu. The point is to let go of the offense because anger will only bring harm. The strategy is to stop thinking about the harm done against you and instead to think about the harm your response could cause.

Of the various forms of harm the Buddhist is to think about, the devastation that his response could cause to his own mental state may be the most significant. Harvey (2011:243) writes, "By contrast with the Christian emphasis on not holding ill-will against someone, the Buddhist, particularly Theravada, emphasis is on not holding it within oneself, because of its harmful effects." Buddhaghosa advises, "Whatever harm a foe may do to a foe, or a hater to a hater, an ill-directed mind can do one far-greater harm." Think back to Santideva's argument that since we would not get angry at bile for causing us harm, neither should we get angry at a person because neither "evil" has autonomy. Suppose, as intuition suggests, that his argument is an oversimplification and that there are leaks in Santideva's argument so that anger might not be entirely illogical. As Nicolas Bommarito (2011:373-374) argues, Santideva's argument can still have a useful practical application. This seems to be Tsongkhapa's approach. Tsongkhapa argues simply that if you desire mental peace, then anger is illogical. Bommarito (2011:375) explains, "Your anger at the person who cut in front of you in line is not unwarranted because the person lacks complete control over his will, but because it is not beneficial for you to be angry." So the

strategy is to concentrate not on anything dreadful done to wrong you, but rather on what dreadful consequences await your wrong response.

5.3 Christianity's indignation with indifference

The first five Buddhist strategies for precluding anger advised seeing evil as not so much the perpetrator's fault. In blaming the evil on an appendage, moment, ignorance, lack, or the victim's own karma, the Buddhist blurs the distinction between sinner and sin, to where the perpetrator is no longer considered to be a sinner. Evil becomes just a condition among the heap of conditions commonly called persons. Now, it might be too simplistic to go ahead and draw the distinction with Christianity here, and to say that, exactly where Buddhism dissolves the distinction between sinner and sin, Christianity recuts a deep groove. True, we are told often in the Bible that God hates sin; for example, God abhors idolatry (Deut. 17:4), child sacrifice (Deut. 12:31), religious hypocrisy (Amos 5:21), and divorce (Mal. 2:16). And we are told that God is love (I John 4:8), that God loves the whole world (John 3:16), and that God does not wish a single person to perish (II Peter 3:9). So there is a definite difference between how God feels about sin and how God feels about the sinner.

Yet sin is not a lone force severed from its source. In Pr. 6:16-17, God singles out seven objects of his hatred, and we may notice how sin intertwines with the sinner: haughty eyes, lying tongue, murderous hands, wicked-scheming hearts, feet that rush to evil, false witnesses, and strife-spreaders. In their sin, sinners have become "by nature children of wrath" (Eph. 2:3). So the hatred God pours out on sin is also poured out on the unrepentant sinner, so that "wrath of God remains on him" (John 3:36). D.A. Carson (2000:69) explains,

> God has nothing but hate for the sin, but it would be wrong to conclude that God has nothing but hate for the sinner. A difference must be maintained between God's view of

> sin and his view of the sinner. Nevertheless the cliché (God hates the sin but loves the sinner) is false on the face of it and should be abandoned. Fourteen times in the first fifty psalms alone, we are told that God hates the sinner, his wrath is on the liar, and so forth. In the Bible, the wrath of God rests both on the sin (Rom. 1:18ff.) and on the sinner (John 3:36).

In the end, the tension between God's love for humanity and hatred/wrath on the sin/sinner is resolved only in the cross of Jesus where God pours out both love and wrath. God loves people, and that is why Jesus was sent to take the wrath meant for those people. Carson (2009:69) continues that "there is nothing intrinsically impossible about wrath and love being directed toward the same individual or people at the same time." Hence, a more accurate distinction (than simply distinguishing sin from sinner) we can proceed with is this: Christians should separate the sin from the person *as the person was intended to be*.

Humans were intended by God to bear God's image and to rule as stewards of God's creation (Gen. 1:26). They are much more substantial than heaps of conditions. Biblically, and contrary to strategies 1-5 above, a human who sins is to be seen as very much at fault.

Table 5-1: Christian view of evil as distinguished from Buddhist view of evil

#1 – Evil is much more than just an appendage.	"For from within, out of the heart of man, come evil thoughts, sexual immorality, theft, murder, adultery, coveting, wickedness, deceit, sensuality, envy, slander, pride, foolishness" (Mark 7:20-22).
#2 – Evil is much more than just a moment.	"For I know my transgressions, and my sin is ever before me" (Ps. 51:3).
#3 – Evil is much more than just ignorance.	"So whoever knows the right thing to do and fails to do it, for him it is sin" (James 4:17).
#4 – Evil is much more than just a lack.	"[B]ut when they had grazed, they became full, they were filled, and their heart was lifted up; therefore they forgot me" (Hos. 13:6).
#5 – Evil is much more than just your karma.	"Blessed are those who are persecuted for righteousness' sake, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven" (Matt. 5:10).

Now, it must be acknowledged that sometimes people disobey God's commandments which they might have obeyed had they only thought about it. Likewise, sometimes a person disobeys God only because she was not taught otherwise. That is, there can be blunders due to negligence (Lev. 4:2 – "if anyone sins unintentionally") and ignorance (Acts 17:30 – "the times of ignorance"). Yet, according to Christianity, we have all committed evil at times even though we knew full well it was wrong. It is even the case that sometimes thinking about the sin long enough gives opportunity to convince oneself that the evil is not truly wrong (Rom. 1:18 – "who by their unrighteousness suppress the truth"). It is also the case that sometimes one can justify evil by "accumulate[ing] for themselves teachers to suit their own passions" (II Tim. 4:3). So, while sometimes lack of having thought or being taught seems to make one *less* culpable, there are times when what is unthought and untaught is actually deliberate and would seem to reinforce one's culpability. The point is that, according to Christianity, there are definite times when for able-minded people there is simply nothing to excuse the sin. There are times when the only response is to acknowledge, "I have sinned against the Lord" (II Sam. 12:13).

So, what is to be the Christian's response to such sin done "with a high hand" (Num. 15:30)? As we have seen, the Buddhist uses techniques to mitigate sin's potency in her mind. Whereas strategies 1-5 condition one to accept that the problem is not actually the person's fault, strategies 6-10 condition one to accept that the problem is not really a problem. Hence, the real problem to worry about for the Buddhist is not what is done to oneself but rather one's possible overreaction. In other words, if the Buddhist is permitted to dwell on the evilness of an action, it is never to be on someone else's action but on one's own reaction. So strategies are cultivated so that the reaction is as far away from anger as possible. When it comes to Christianity, however, just as the Christian sees sin as the person's fault, so too is she convinced—and does nothing to

unconvince herself—that the sin is a very definite problem. If sin is "just" anything, then it is "just plain wrong!"

If Buddhism helps reduce one's hatred of evil, Christianity helps reinforce it. If, according to the Buddhist view, the sinner should be viewed as the inculpable victim of sin (e.g. because it is only an appendage, ignorance, lack, etc.), then the sinner is viewed as less of a free, accountable person. Holding such a view makes it difficult to distinguish between the sin and the person who is so inescapably entangled in it. Christianity, on the other hand, holds up what the person ought to have been, and indicts sin as a parasite, declaring, "This is not the person as she was intended to be." And, thus, whereas the Buddhist suppresses hatred toward the sin and accommodates with tranquility whatever the sinner has done, the Christian hates sin *out of love for the person*. It is sin which corrupts the person. So, to love the person as she was intended to be is to hate the sin. It is as Gerhard Marcel Martin (2009:12) notes (see chapter 4, pt. 8) about the automatic polarity inherent in love (a polarity which he believes would be blissfully transcended in Buddhist compassion): "In Biblical tradition, love, including God's love, is situated in a polarity over against anger and revenge as manifestations of hate." Faithful to God, the Christian hates that which God hates. This hatred, when on behalf of a fellow human, targets that which destroys the human, namely, sin.

Those who love God, therefore, will hate evil (Ps. 97:10). "The fear of the Lord is hatred of evil" (Pr. 8:13). Followers of God are to absolutely hate dishonesty and corruption (Ex. 18:21; Pr. 15:27; Pr. 28:16). Why so strong aversion to such things? It is because God's followers "love truth and peace" (Zech. 8:19); they "hate and abhor falsehood, but . . . love your law" (Ps. 119:163). There is an immediate, inherent dichotomy when loving God. Just as to love evil is to hate the good ("you who hate the good and love the evil . . . detest justice and make crooked all

that is straight" – Mic. 3:2, 9), to love the good is to hate evil. As God spoke through the prophet Amos, "Hate evil, and love good, and establish justice in the gate" (Amos 5:15). If love is the real thing, the dichotomy will be unmistakable: "Let love be genuine. Abhor what is evil; hold fast to what is good" (Rom. 12:9).

For the Christian, however, it does not stop at merely hating evil. That built-in aversion to evil is always present, so that when one observes an evil act, an immediate reaction should naturally follow. And that reaction is one of sadness. This emotion ought to be most pronounced when one recognizes one's own sin. If love toward God means hatred of evil, then grief naturally arises in one who realizes she has grieved the God she loves. Unless their hearts are made of stone, followers of God ought to grieve whenever such words are said of them as, "How often they rebelled against him in the wilderness and grieved him in the desert!" (Ps. 78:40) and, "they rebelled and grieved his Holy Spirit" (Is. 63:10a). When a believer realizes the grief she caused her Creator, she herself grieves and should feel right in doing so. "'Yet even now,' declares the Lord, 'return to me with all your heart, with fasting, with weeping, and with mourning" (Joel 2:12). When, in the kingdom of Judah, the Law was rediscovered, its neglect grieved, and its reforms instituted, the king was commended, "because your heart was penitent, and you humbled yourself before the Lord . . . and you have torn your clothes and wept before me, I also have heard you, declares the Lord" (II Kings 22:19). The times come when even gladness is to be frowned upon: "Draw near to God, and he will draw near to you. Cleanse your hands, you sinners, and purify your hearts, you double-minded. Be wretched and mourn and weep. Let your laughter be turned to mourning and your joy to gloom" (James 4:8-10).

Grief is even treated as a sign of maturity. Ecclesiastes contends that "he who increases knowledge increases sorrow" (Ec. 1:18). Thus, "It is better to go to the house of mourning than

to go to the house of feasting, for this is the end of mankind, and the living will lay it to heart" (Ec. 7:2). Yet, just because maturity demands a realistic melancholy in life's shadowed regions does not mean that final doom has been spoken. Jesus blesses "those who mourn, for they shall be comforted" (Matt. 5:4). Christians face death, humanity's greatest enemy (I Cor. 15:26), with a different kind of grief than is found in others "who have no hope" (I Thess. 4:13). When Jesus heard the weeping coming from the dead girl's house, he asked, "Why are you making a commotion and weeping? The child is not dead but sleeping" (Mark 5:38-39). In the end, Christians are promised that Jesus will "wipe away every tear from their eyes, and death shall be no more, neither shall there be mourning, nor crying, nor pain anymore, for the former things have passed away" (Rev. 21:4).

But, in the meantime, where evil is found, tears are appropriate. Yet not so in Buddhism. Buddhists see grief and the aversion it springs from as responses that simply lead to more of the same problem. Philosophy professor Chris Frakes (2007:101) argues that compassion can too easily provoke counterproductive reactions. If it is too passive, compassion leads to a paralyzing anguish, but, if it is too reactive, compassion becomes violent on behalf of those who suffer. Thus, Frakes proposes that what compassion needs in order to become a constructive rather than destructive emotion is Buddhism. Specifically, it is Buddhist equanimity that keeps a compassionate soul from despairing or destroying (Frakes, 2007:105). Christianity, however, proposes what it holds to be a very constructive combination of aversion and grief. The Christian displays anything but equanimity in the face of evil: one feels either sorrow for sin or gratitude for grace. This equation of hatred of evil plus grief over evil equals neither despair nor destruction, neither paralysis nor prejudice. What such hatred and grief lead to, according to

Christianity, is restored lives. Paul caused grief to one of the churches he had planted, but he felt sadness only temporarily:

> For even if I made you grieve with my letter, I do not regret it—though I did regret it, for I see that that letter grieved you, though only for a while. As it is, I rejoice, not because you were grieved, but because you were grieved into repenting. For you felt a godly grief, so that you suffered no loss through us. For godly grief produces a repentance that leads to salvation without regret, whereas worldly grief produces death (II Cor. 7:8-10).

That is, hatred of evil and grief over evil produce change.

But just what is to prevent such passion that Christians cultivate from bubbling out destructively? After all, God's hatred of evil was often followed by destruction: "Yet I persistently sent to you all my servants the prophets, saying, 'Oh, do not do this abomination that I hate!' But they did not listen . . . . Therefore my wrath and my anger were poured out" (Jer. 44:4-6). Here is where a fourfold classification, which follows a certain progression, might be helpful:

1. Aversion to evil
2. Grief over evil
3. Anger because of evil
4. Wrath against evil

The Bible recognizes the ease with which anger becomes wrath and thus often warns against having an angry spirit. Thus, "Refrain from anger, and forsake wrath! Fret not yourself; it tends only to evil" (Ps. 37:8). Taming anger is a theme of many of the Bible's proverbs: Instead of level-headed productivity, those who are quick to get angry end up accomplishing folly (Pr. 14:29), transgression (Pr. 29:22), strife (Pr. 30:33), and more anger (Pr. 15:1). Yet the wise person is slow to anger and thus ignores insults (Pr. 12:16), turns away wrath (15:1), quiets contention (Pr. 15:18), and rules his spirit (Pr. 16:32).

The New Testament continues this warning. Some scriptures offer to those already angry rescue from anger's heated potentialities: "Be angry and do not sin; do not let the sun go down

on your anger" (Eph. 4:26). "Know this, my beloved brothers: let every person be quick to hear, slow to speak, slow to anger; for the anger of man does not produce the righteousness of God" (James 1:19-20). Other scriptures aim to prevent anger from arising in the first place. Not only must Jesus' followers not murder, but "everyone who is angry with his brother will be liable to judgment" (Matt. 5:22). Why so strict? Because murder begins with anger. Lest one think one's own variety of anger is absolved, Eph. 4:31 clarifies just how wide a swath is covered: "Let all bitterness and wrath and anger and clamor and slander be put away from you, along with all malice." In that list are the Greek counterparts to the aforementioned Sanskrit terms *krodha*, a sudden, destructive anger (Buswell and Lopez, 2014:445), and *upanaha*, a "long-term simmering grudge" (Buswell and Lopez, 2014:940). Ephesians 4:31 prohibits both "wrath," the furious *thumos* (Bauer, 2001:461), and "anger," the simmering *orge* (Bauer, 2001:720).

The Christian is content to leave anger and wrath in God's hands, while continuing to hate evil and grieve over it. Seeing a person's sinfulness and original intention as separate gives hope and provides direction. In light of this separateness, Christians do not hate the person, nor do they grieve over the person's hopelessness. Rather, their hatred springs from love, and their grief works toward repentance. And because anger and wrath are abdicated to God ("Vengeance is mine, I will repay, says the Lord" – Rom. 12:19), change comes from a zeal undefiled by violence. Jesus was immensely zealous for bringing about his Father's redemptive will yet preached and lived non-violence. The "Prince of Peace" never defended himself with violence, and even rebuked a disciple for taking up arms to defend him (Matt. 26:52). His followers are blessed "peacemakers" who turn the other cheek and pray for their persecutors (EPS, 2011). All the while, Christianity remains undoubtedly zealous, just not violently so. Christians David Horner and David Turner (2012) have this to say about Christian zeal:

> Jesus himself is lauded for zealously stewarding the purposes of God, and, in New Testament passages of particular ethical importance, Paul and Peter explicitly commend zeal for Jesus' followers. Later Christian luminaries like William Wilberforce and Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. embodied zeal in working for justice and equality in their day. In these and other cases, zeal plays a crucial role in the morally excellent character and behavior of God's people.

Steering a sensible course between the extremes of fanaticism and sloth, "Biblical zeal helps renew our will to fervently pursue the purposes of God" (Horner and Turner, 2012).

5.4 Evil: the problem that does not go away

Caught somewhere between Buddhism and Christianity, many interfaith scholars are tempted to answer quickly that the Buddhist view of aversion would lead to less suffering than the Christian approach. Why? Because Buddhism—at least according to interfaith versions—proposes a far less strenuous method for fixing humanity's alienation from God than the Christian's more exacting route. Rather than having us hate and grieve over that which separates us from God, Buddhism simply educates us on the basic nonduality and interconnectedness of all that exists. Applied to Christianity, this concept would mean the nonduality of God, you, me, they, and it.[24] Evil demands no hatred or grief. No ceasefires between God and humanity await sacrificial reconciliations. Evil, instead, can be erased when, simply through realization, the lines separating us from each other are erased. According to Paul Knitter (1981b:290),

> Buddhism reminds us that a deep, authentic experience of God is not an experience of an object but of a reality which transcends subject-object duality. Ontologically prior to and permeating our self-awareness is a given unity of Being in which the finite and Infinite cannot be distinguished as subject and object.

Such nonduality, of course, has implications for what sin is and how bad it is. A more Buddhistic reinterpretation of human fallenness offers a less painstaking resolution. D.T. Suzuki and

[24] See chapter 2 for numerous examples of interfaith scholars advocating a nondual version of Christianity, especially the section called "Harmonizing the Hermeneutic."

Thomas Merton came to interpret our "original sin" as, in the words of Knitter (1981b:292), "when we start thinking of ourselves and God as separated selves." This is "the heart of the problem, the source of all 'sinful acts.'" Knitter (1981a:47) contends that Christianity's primary symbols—"kingdom, incarnation, resurrection"—are "this-worldly and non-dualistic" as they depict a God "intimately involved in history and working with human action." Yet, many Christians remain, adapting the words of Karl Rahner, "anonymous dualists" (Knitter, 1981b:285). Thus, they remain bound to the unsettling dichotomies of "saved and damned . . . sheep and goats" (Koyama, 2002:80) which were only ever meant to be taken as "educational speech," says Kosuke Koyama (2002:83); Koyama assures us each was never meant to be taken as an "absolute category."

If there is, in fact, no duality, then sin is made easily solvable, or even already solved if only realized. Knitter (1981b:292) continues,

> If evil does not stem from an ontological cleavage between God and humanity which can only be fully repaired when our ontology is restructured in the next world, then perhaps there is more hope for this world than we thought! If as Merton and Buddhism suggest, the root of our problem is ignorance, then even though that ignorance is "invincible," even though through years of collective bad karma it has seeped into our social structures, still there is hope that there can be an increasing, even final enlightenment of humanity in this world. Our consciousness can be altered; here and now we—all people—can put on the mind of Christ.

If all interconnects with God, and God is love (Wendy Farley (2011:139) speaks of the nondualistic "deification of love"), and love casts out fear (Gregory Gibbs (2001:112) says that "there is nothing like the 'fear of god' in Buddhism"), then there is nothing ultimately to fear. What evil can separate us from God save the evil *of* separateness? The only separation we have left to fear is separation itself.

Thus, Knitter, as a committed "liberationist" whose passion for a better world drives his pluralism (Knitter and Netland, 2013:47), optimistically assures us that his Buddhicized version

of Christianity—heaven and earth in indistinguishable interconnectivity—will make for a better world. Such a realization assures Christians "that this world is good and through their actions they can and must make it better" (Knitter, 1981b:295). The question must be asked what Knitter can mean, however, by that word *better*. If literally everything is interconnected, with God's hand indistinguishable from human endeavor, then would that amalgamation not also have to include the unnerving parts of existence, those that are found in the world's shadows? Knitter, however, acknowledges these realities and is quick to clarify,

> No doubt, we must be careful of going to the other extreme by denying the experiential reality of sin and evil. The symbol of the Fall does touch realities that all humans confront within themselves and their world: that creation, while basically good, is also warped; that the human heart, besides bearing a "natural desire for God," is also "turned in on itself"; that we are always in danger of identifying our ideologies with God's Kingdom. And yet, somehow, a better, a non-dualistic balance must be struck between our sinfulness and our ability, with God, to bring this history to term. If we accept the present, widespread understanding of sin, we really cannot work any substantial improvement in history (Knitter, 1981b:288).

Note that the "warping" is the human "turned in on itself" and humans "identifying our ideologies with God's Kingdom." Again, what is wrong is said to be the notion of separateness—with being separated from being, ideology superior to ideology. This coincides with the primal ignorance Knitter (1981b:292) sees as our "original sin." Our salvation's impediment is separateness. The assurance is that, once simply realized and repented of, the Fall is undone. So *better* means more interconnected.

One has to wonder what, therefore, Knitter (1981b:288) can mean when he speaks of "substantial improvement in history." The farther one goes nondualistically (in which absolutely everything is interconnected), the less one should be able to distinguish good from evil—except insofar as the "good" is rather question-beggingly defined as interconnectivity itself. But even then, what is said to be the "good" (i.e. interconnectivity) is only descriptive, not prescriptive.

There is no logical obligation to seek reconciliation with one's fellow participants in interconnectivity, only a recognition of the fact. A worldview of nondualism demands that dichotomies—including that between good-and-evil—are transcended. Of course, Knitter acknowledges the "*experiential* reality of sin and evil," but this is not meant to be a statement of ontology. Knitter (2004:68) personally includes enough Christianity in his beliefs to credit God with a "preferential option for the poor." But recall that, for Knitter (2012:22), the Buddha provides the ontological "big picture," while Jesus infuses it with "living color." Buddhism provides the interconnective *what*, while Christianity fills the Buddhist framework with the *how*. But with Christianity's good-evil distinctions only describing "*experiential* reality," and with Buddhist ontology plugging whatever distinctions remain, how is any "preferential option" (for the poor or true or good or anything) any more than merely a preference imported from a religion that is only "experientially" valid?

Is there anything *objectively* wrong with social injustice? It might be that all beings are interconnected with each other, but just as this brute ontological fact cannot obligate "love your neighbor" (see "Because individuals are interrelated" under ch. 3), ontological interconnectedness does not render injustice an *objective* wrong. How does one *logically* draw the distinction between good and evil in a nondualistic world? Perhaps, as Knitter (1981b:292) puts it, "God cannot fully be God, grace cannot really be grace without us," and that "therefore our good works of liberation and social movement are God's works. That means they they are ultimately valuable." But if God's works are indistinguishable from humanity's, then, when God "works," what is to distinguish "grace," "liberation," and other "good works" from all the many *evil* works done by humanity? The moment Knitter coincides one set of actions, but not their opposite, with "God's works," he introduces a moral dichotomy into his nondualistic framework.

How does he warrant the distinction when God has no substantial nature to render divinity distinct from humanity? No doubt interfaith scholars who advocate a nondualistic Christianity have their input as to which direction this indistinct impulse lures humanity, but they do so on no stronger ontological basis than nondualism. It might be impossible to pinpoint just which actions come from a God described as "nondual," but we can certainly observe humanity's actions, and, when we do, we find a lot of evil. Just how is it that God is to be identified with the good and not the evil? God's nature is no longer the demarcation; all that remains to mark the distinctions are vague notions of justice and love leftover from beliefs that, ultimately, are ontologically transcended.

To summarize, the interfaith scholar sets out to give us a less strenuous method for resolving humanity's alienation from God. Traditionally, Christianity gives us a God angry at our sin. Sin separates us from God. Borrowing from Buddhism, the interfaith scholar proposes an *immediate* solution: There is no need to bridge the gulf, because there is no gulf. All that is needed is to realize our nonduality with God, and evil evaporates. Now we are on our way—in fact, we are already there, in a sense—to the better world. But what happened when evil evaporated was that so did the distinction between it and its opposite. If God's works are interconnected with humanity's, and God's nature is insubstantial except insofar as that nature is interconnected with humanity's, then categories of good and evil become "experiential" instead of ontological. If one feels certain that God shows preference for the poor, for example, how is there any objectivity to one's criticism of those who exploit the poor? This method of forcing peace with a God angry at evil is to erase evil as a category. And then they expect to work for a better world? The word *better* becomes hollowed out, depleted until it entirely depends on the mercy of whatever preferences one imports.

Yet, evil remains real. One of the great criticisms leveled against Christianity by interfaith scholars is that its theodicies are too flimsy to sustain the massive weight of the world's evil. Evil, according to them, is very real. Paul Ingram (2011:166), for example, contends that

> the experience of suffering raises the theodicy problem for classical Christian theism. How can a loving, omnipotent creator of the universe permit unmerited suffering? Here, the assertion of God's creative power and love creates a boundary question that cannot be resolved apart from rethinking the nature of God.

Likewise, Jay McDaniel (1984:320) calls what traditional theodicies face an "insuperable problem."

We find that even atheists who are outspoken against assigning guilt to humans (i.e. who believe free will is an illusion) are also outspoken again the potency of theodicies. Take atheist Bertrand Russell for example. In 1925, Russell (in "What I Believe"; see Russell, 1957b:71) acquitted humanity of sin: "The view that criminals are 'wicked' and 'deserve' punishment is not one which a rational morality can support…The vindictive feeling called 'moral indignation' is merely a form of cruelty." In 1927 (in "Why I Am Not a Christian"; see Russell, 1957c:22), he predicted a coming golden age: "A good world needs…a fearless outlook and a free intelligence. It needs hope for the future, not looking back all the time toward a past that is dead, which we trust will be far surpassed by the future that our intelligence can create." After all, "Science can teach us…no longer to look around for imaginary supports, no longer to invent allies in the sky, but rather to look to our own efforts here below to make the world a fit place to live in."
But those statements were before the ovens of Auschwitz. By 1957, Russell (1957a:vi) had seen actual evil, but, in keeping with his atheism, he blamed them on God: "[T]here is to me something a little odd about the ethical valuations of those who think that an omnipotent, omniscient, and benevolent Deity . . . would consider Himself adequately rewarded by the final emergence of Hitler and Stalin and the H-bomb." That is, even those who do not believe in the

reality of guilt are still forced to reckon with the destructiveness of evil. Moral evil does not go away, even when it does not fit comfortably into one's worldview. Atrocities dot our timelines, like the 1994 Rwandan massacres, after which a returning United States ambassador wrote, "There are no categories to express such horror. Someone used the word 'bestiality'—not, that dishonors the beasts. Animals kill for food, not for pleasure. They kill one or two at a time, not a million for no reason at all" (Guinness, 2005:37).

If there is a recurrent fact that insists on reminding us of its undeniability, it is moral evil. And religions ought to be evaluated according to their responses to this relentless source of suffering. Criticizing another religion's theodicy is one thing, but, in the end, each religion must offer its own response. The interfaith scholar caught in the middle of Buddhism and Christianity might have proposed an easy solution in merely denying any duality; they simply erase the gulf between God and humanity by realizing the gulf's nonexistence. But when it then becomes impossible to call anything evil, they have to resort to importing experiential categories, because moral evil simply does not go away. Rather than trusting in easy, dismissive solutions which continually need propping up, the interfaith scholar ought to carefully consider which religion—Buddhism or Christianity—has a better response to moral evil. After all, if the interfaith scholar wants a better world with less suffering, moral evil remains an antagonist that cannot be simply reasoned away.

5.5 Which approach to aversion most effectively responds to suffering?

In evaluating how Buddhism's attitude toward evil relates to this-worldly suffering, the infamous Japanese "Imperial-Way Zen" (Ives, 2008a:27) comes to mind. Though some Buddhists protested the imperial policies, Harvey (2011:270) writes that "In the Second World

War, most Buddhist schools agreed to support the nation in its efforts." According to Harvey, the Zen "contempt for death" was utilized in training Kamikaze pilots and even contributed to the grisly treatment of war prisoners and eventual suicides when surrender became the only other option. Historically, Zen's emphasis on "no-mind" had been used to encouraged warriors not to hesitate, but to see life and death as empty. According to one medieval Japanese poem, "But striking is not to strike, nor is killing to kill. He who strikes and he who is struck—they are both no more than a dream that has no reality" (Harvey, 2011:266). One Zen teacher, Takuan Soho Zenji, instructed samurais, "The uplifted sword has no will of its own, it is all of emptiness. It is like a flash of lightning. The man who is about to be struck down is also of emptiness, as is the one who wields the sword" (Harvey, 2011:268). Even the idea of everyone's inherent "Buddha-nature" has been thought by some to have contributed to Zen's helplessness in critiquing combativeness: "If everything is Buddha and all are already enlightened, then what can be wrong with going to war and killing enemies who are not real anyway" (May, 2004:376-377).

In light of the historic utilization of these doctrines, it is difficult to see Zen's complicity in Japan's nationalistic aggression as merely a historical fluke. The postwar Zen priest Ichikawa Hakugen famously critiques the Zen priests for their collaboration, but he sees a major culprit—Zen's repeated emphasis on "pacifying the mind"—as intrinsic to Zen (Ives, 2005:39-40). One example among the many such teachings that "appear repeatedly in Zen texts" comes from Dogen, founder of Japan's Soto Zen school: "Setting everything aside, think of neither good nor evil, right nor wrong." American Zen instructor Jeff Shore (1998:306) acknowledges that the "questionable, if not plain rotten, track records for the Zen sect . . . in responding to socio-ethical issues must not be ignored or simply explained away." There is something about Zen itself, and not merely about certain Zen Buddhists, that makes the World War II complicity understandable.

Whatever the case, Zen scholar Dale Wright (2006:2-12) believes he has the solution. His solution is not to conclude, as some have tried to, that the Zen masters who showed such "complete and utter indifference to the pain and suffering of the victims of Japanese aggression" were simply unenlightened. No, as Wright puts it, "Given the sheer numbers of authenticated Zen masters whose actions in the war fit this pattern, however, and the scarcity of those who comported themselves otherwise, this response is inadequate," for, "these Zen masters were indeed enlightened according to the tradition's own criteria." Rather, Wright argues that the culprit is the absence of moral reflection in Zen education. After all, reflection of any kind is discouraged by Zen as incompatible with the state of "no-mind." As Wright contends, "If you have not developed the arts of reflection and imagination in the domain of morality, your actions will be vulnerable to a whole host of dangers, even to those that the early Buddhists had diagnosed so clearly—to greed hatred, and delusion." So, Wright claims that moral reflection is what is needed, and undoubtedly this would have helped.

But just what is available for the Zen Buddhist to morally reflect upon? Ironically, Wright (2006:17) suggests reflecting upon nondualism. "If Zen practitioners had been encouraged to engage in debate on the meaning of 'nondualism,'" contends Wright, "they might have more easily recognized the dangers of the dualism between 'us' and 'them' that advocates of the 'unity of Zen and war' could not see." Perhaps reflecting on nondualism will help someone to see "us" and "them" as peacefully interconnected, but how can such reflection help from likewise rendering "good" and "evil" as nondual? Masao Abe declared, "from the ultimate point of view even [the Holocaust] should not be taken as an absolute but a relative evil" (Yandell and Netland, 2009:102). Reflecting on Zen's ultimate nondualism between good and evil, Jewish theologian Eugene Borowitz said in response to Abe that it is unimagineable "that

the ultimate response to the Nazis would have been for Jews to raise their consciousness from a radically moral to a higher, postmoral level."

Suppose, however, that someone responds that this is much ado about one historical episode of only one branch of Buddhism. Perhaps other Buddhist schools offer more in the way of denouncing evils. As already quoted, Wright (2006:2-12) mentions that early Buddhists were able to cultivate moral reflection when it comes to "greed, hatred, and delusion." What, therefore, is the *reflective* Buddhist's response to evils? We have already discussed it. When encountering evil, Buddhists can take their pick of techniques. The Buddhist can reflect that the evil is not really the person's fault—by calling it an appendage, moment, ignorance, lack, or the victim's own karma. Likewise, the Buddhist can reflect that the evil is not really that much of a problem—by considering it as merely the work of one's past-life mother, an opportunity, its opposite, the surface, or only about one's own response. It turns out that when there is reflection, as Wright's solution demands, there are added even more reasons for seeing violent nationalisms or Holocausts as not really all that evil.

Such techniques do not even seem to try to stand up against evil, except as it might affect one's own inner peace. As Gross contends, Buddhism simply lacks the "prophetic voice" found in Christianity (Melin, 2006:368). Instead of rising up on behalf of the victim, Buddhism advocates impartiality—not only toward the victimizer, but seemingly toward the evil as well. Thus, Kyeongil Jung (2012:4) speculates,

> Perhaps this impartial compassion toward both victims and victimizers is a natural outcome of the Buddhist insight into the Three Marks of Existence: dukkha (suffering), anattā (non-self), and anicca (impermanence). First, dukkha: everyone suffers, including victimizers. Second, anattā: there is no independent self. We are all interconnected. We are both victims and victimizers. Third, anicca: everything is impermanent. Evil cannot be permanent. For these reasons, Buddhists don't (and can't) take sides in an absolute sense. If they have to, they take sides with *everyone*.

True, there have been nonviolent reactions by Buddhists against oppressive regimes, such as the Vietnamese Buddhist "Struggle Movement" (1963-1966) and the Burmese Democracy Movement (1988-1990, 2007) (King, 2009:104). And, as Sallie King (2009:104) describes, none of these causes have succeeded. Yet even if they had, it would still be unlikely that, given Buddhism's prescribed responses to evil, it would be *Buddhism* that had provided its adherents with the power necessary to overcome it. King (2009:109) observes that Buddhists are very wary of power struggles: "negative attitudes towards the idea of struggling for power and quizzical attitudes towards winning such a struggle are present in the contemporary Buddhist world." After all, there is suffering in everything, says the Buddha (see the *Maha-parinibbana Sutta* (1998g) for Noble Truth 1). Thus, when King (2009:108-109) asked one Buddhist his reaction to the Buddhist movements' failures, he replied, "ah, but what is winning?" There is suffering in any desired pursuit, and that is especially the case where a particular pursuit compels aversion. Changing the state of things takes aversion to the way things currently are. According to Buddhism, suffering is quelled not when it is *things* that are changed, but when one alters one's *perspective* toward those things. It does not matter that certain things may be detestable: the real wrongdoing, according to Buddhism, is in the detesting.

Christians, on the other hand, hate Holocausts. But it is a very specified hatred borne of love. Christian love is grounded in a God who is love (I John 4:8). Thus, Christians are told to "love your enemies . . . so that you may be sons of your Father who is in heaven" (Matt. 5:44-45). Because their love is to be genuine, and not a vacuous generality, they are to "abhor evil" (Rom. 12:9). This cultivated aversion to evil becomes grief whenever it is experienced. It is precisely because each person is to be loved as a precious particularity that evil is hated and grieved. Hatred's object is whatever defies God and corrupts the person. This need for such a

careful specification of Christian hatred explains why anger is so often warned against for the Christian: it is recognized that anger too easily leads to the wrath which is the prerogative of God alone. When it is clear that the patient is loved but the disease is hated, the only harm that is done is able to be directed against the real enemy. Their "prophetic critiques" are to be incisive not explosive. This distinction between the person as intended and the evil as parasite is what led C.S. Lewis (2003:329-330) to draw the analogy between one's assessment of oneself and one's love for oneself: "I might detest something which I have done. Nevertheless, I do not cease to love myself" (Lewis). In the same way, one might detest what someone else has done, but, if it is Christian hatred, the deed is hated precisely because the Christian loves. And it is not only love for the victims but for the victimizer herself with "a steady wish for the loved person's ultimate good as far as it can be obtained."

Yet do not Christians have their "Imperial-Way" embarrassments as well? Indeed, they have many. "As [Pope] Urban ended his impassioned appeal a roar rose from the multitude: *deus Volt!* God wills it! So there on the spot Urban declared that *Deus Volt!* would be the crusader battle cry against the Muslim enemy" (Shelley, 1995:187). It is unfair to bring up Zen's complicity in Japanese militancy and not mention Christian complicity, for example, in European militancy. It is not within the scope of this work to even open the discussion as to whether the crusades were understandable yet often unfortunate episodes, or whether they were unmitigated monstrosities. Neither is it at issue to evaluate the morality of Japanese nationalism. Here is the issue: *Insofar* as their proximate governments acted unjustly, which religion better has the ability to critique that evil? Which religion can call evil what it is?

Contrary to Knitter (1981b:289), who claims that God-humanity dualism "keeps Christians from affirming . . . that they must act to improve this world," it is having a God

separate from humanity that provides humanity with ontological justification for objective improvement. What else could compel objectively good change? And *change* is precisely what Christianity's perspective on aversion compels. The Christian is reminded of a creation that was created "very good" (Gen. 1:31) and is promised that, in the end, "I am making all things new" (Rev. 21:5). So, in the meantime, Christians have the ontological bookends to be able to point to evil and call it evil. Yes, they wish certain things destroyed: that is what hating something means. But it is a destruction of what destroys the person: "For the weapons of our warfare are not of the flesh but have divine power to destroy strongholds" (II Cor. 10:4). "For we do not wrestle against flesh and blood, but against the rulers, against the authorities, against the cosmic powers over this present darkness, against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly places" (Eph. 6:12). Knowing what is at stake, Christians are not beneath begging: "Therefore we are ambassadors for Christ, God making his appeal through us. We implore you on behalf of Christ, be reconciled to God" (II Cor. 5:20).

5.6 Conclusion

So, which religion's attitude toward aversion makes for a better world with less suffering? It depends on which is the worse kind of suffering: If it is the lack of inner peace that is our worst enemy, then the Buddhist attitude toward aversion might very well be more conducive. Buddhism teaches us to not hate evil, but to see the sinner and sin as not that bad. If someone is able to achieve such equanimity in the face of evil, one's own inner world would certainly be more at peace, burdened with much less emotional distress. But Christianity teaches us to hate and grieve. Christians hate evil and grieve what it does to people. If it is not merely one's own inner peace that is at stake, but the restoration of those precious persons, then

Christianity is more conducive to making a better world with less suffering. The Buddhist attitude toward aversion changes certain perspectives, while the Christian attitude changes certain facets of the world for the better, insofar as the restoration of people makes for a better world. An enormity of suffering has as its source human evil. So, in hating evil and restoring people, Christianity combats immense suffering.

Now, it might be argued that, if *everybody* were to follow the Buddhist path and achieve perfect inner peace, there would no longer be any evil to hate or suffering to combat. Evil would cease without ever having to be hated. Mahayana Buddhism, after all, has something akin to a blissful eschatology since its adherents aspire to someday save all sentient beings. Christians, of course, have their eschatology. Yet both Buddhists and Christians should view predictions of universal peace prior to such consummations as enormously naïve. The record of history certainly forecasts no end to evil, and the biblical record only sees an end to evil at the end of history. In the meantime, there is evil to confront, not to mentally mitigate. Christians remain realistic and view evil as real. They burden themselves combatting evil for the joy of seeing people restored.

Chapter 6

Your Messiah Is Too Matchless: How Ultimate Example Relates to Suffering

6.1 Introduction

If the goal of interfaith scholars is a better world with less suffering, and the means proposed is to Buddhicize Christianity, then we need to ask whether it is a realistic expectation that Buddhicizing Christianity will actually help achieve this goal. This chapter raises this question in the light of the central figure of each religion. Here, we will contrast the Buddha and the Christ. Now, on the face of it, such a contrast would demand multiple dissertations in itself. Moreover, just which Buddha is to be contrasted with which Christ? To narrow the focus for this chapter, we will be contrasting what we can learn about Siddhartha Gautama from the earliest Buddhist scriptures (the Pali Canon)[25] with what we can learn about Jesus Christ from the Christian scriptures (the New Testament). This contrast will be further specified by asking how they, as the central paradigms of their religions' ethical standards, exemplify the combatting of this-worldly suffering.

6.2 The Buddha and the Christ: Ten Points of Contrast

We will discuss ten points of contrast that relate to the Buddha's and the Christ's ability to combat (or to exemplify how to combat) this-worldly suffering. These ten points will trace a loosely chronological path through their lives. Before providing event-by-event contrast,

[25] Details of Gautama's story will be filled in with other and later sources when no canonical sources tell us what have become important details of Gautama's life.

however, our first contrast centers more generally on the difference between these two figures' attitudes toward history, a contrast which frames the rest of the ten.

6.2.1 Attitude toward History

In this section, we will discuss what Gautama's and Jesus' attitudes toward history tell us about their ability to combat this-worldly suffering. A convenient contrast offers itself at once when the Buddha and the Christ are plotted on timelines. This is the length of interval between the men's lives and their written records. Even New Testament scholars quite unfriendly to attempts to bridge the historical Jesus with the New Testament records cannot widen the interval to any distance comparable to what we find in Buddhism. For example, Bart Ehrman places all four Gospels within the First Century CE, with Jesus dying somewhere around 30 CE (Ehrman, 2004:52). On the other hand, as Edward Conze (1971:11) put it,

> In Christianity we can distinguish an "initial tradition," embodied in the "New Testament," from a "continuing tradition," which consists of the Fathers and doctors of the Church, the decisions of councils and synods, and the pronouncements of various hierarchies. Buddhists possess nothing that corresponds to the "New Testament." The "continuing tradition" is all that is clearly attested. The bulk of the selections in this book was written down between A.D. 100 and 400, in other words about 600 to 900 years after the Buddha's demise.

Religion scholar Niels Nielsen, Jr. writes, "The time span, the gap between the life of the founder and the first written records, is much longer than in the case of Jesus" (Nielsen, 1987:349). Thus, Knitter, who sees even the quest for the historical Jesus as "foredoomed to a measure of failure" (Richard Robinson, quoted in Knitter, 1979:666), concedes that when it comes to difficulties in discovering an "objective Gautama," "Indeed they are greater" (Knitter, 1979:665). As Knitter describes, the "first complete 'lives' of the Buddha" were written 500 years after he died, and,

though the earlier Pali canon contains some biographical information, "for the most part these are only incidental or fragmentary references to events of his life." Pure Land Buddhist John Yokota (2002:141) concludes, "The legend of Gotama's life is certainly tenuous support for saying anything definite about his activities." Williams urges "extreme caution as regards the details of the traditional life of the Buddha" (Williams et al., 2012:17).

However, this difference in length of interval does not warrant an immediate resort to skepticism. Perhaps discovering the centuries of interval could lead someone to question the historicity of the surviving accounts of the Buddha's life. Yet even an interval of decades, as in the case of Christianity, is enough to compel some scholars to dismiss any quest for the flesh-and-blood Jesus as hopeless. If the Christian believes she can know significant details concerning the historical Jesus, she ought not to uncritically assume what critical scholars tell her about the unknowability of the Buddha. Imposed ignorance is ungracious in the case of Buddhism, if it is then rejected in the case of one's own Christianity. There is a legitimate debate as to just how historically accurate these stories are, separated as they are by centuries, but in all fairness the temptation of unquestioning skepticism needs to be resisted. Let no one insist on the historicity of the Gospels, for example, and then dismiss the Buddhist documents out of hand. More to the point here, however, this difference in length of interval appears irrelevant in determining which paradigm offers better tools for combatting this-worldly suffering, which is the question of this chapter.

Yet there is a contrast related to history that is relevant to the question of this-worldly suffering. As the previous paragraph makes clear, the contrast could only unfairly be put in terms of a historical figure versus a mythical figure. Rather, the contrast more accurately hinges on Jesus as a *necessarily* historical figure. That is, Christianity necessarily takes certain actions of

Jesus in history as of unparalleled importance. Take how crucial, for example, the historicity of Jesus' resurrection was according to Paul:

> And if Christ has not been raised, then our preaching is in vain and your faith is in vain. We are even found to be misrepresenting God, because we testified about God that he raised Christ, whom he did not raise if it is true that the dead are not raised. And if Christ has not been raised, your faith is futile and you are still in your sins. Then those also who have fallen asleep in Christ have perished. If in Christ we have hope in this life only, we are of all people most to be pitied (I Cor. 15:14-19).

Religion scholar George Bond (1978:406) observes that historically-centered hermeneutics

> is appropriate for Christianity for it is a religion centered in time ascribing revelatory significance to events in history and anticipating a salvation within history and a redemption of history. Christianity has always had a vested interest in historical questions and its historically oriented methods of interpretation developed naturally.

Yet, in Buddhism, whether or not the Buddha's actions were historical is of far less importance than Jesus' actions for Christianity. In Buddhism there is no definite beginning or predictable end to history anyway, no creation or "climactic consummation" (Yandell and Netland, 2009:195-196). Bond continues, "Theravada Buddhism, on the other hand, is a non-historical religion for it neither depends upon a historical revelation nor expects a salvation within historical time" (Yandell and Netland, 2009:406). Instead, "The truth of the *dhamma* transcends historical and cultural conditions" (Yandell and Netland, 2009:427). It is the timelessness of the dharma and the relative unimportance of its historical manifestations that leads Williams, Tribe, and Wynne (2012:16) to conclude that general books on Buddhism that begin with the story of the Buddha might be getting things out of order: "It is only self-evidently appropriate to start the study of a religion with the life-story of its founder if we hold that the life-story of the founder is in some sense a crucial preliminary to understanding what follows." This is undoubtedly the case in Christianity, but "the effectiveness of the Dharma does not in

itself depend on its discovery by a Buddha. If the Buddha did not exist then someone else existed who (re)discovered the Dharma."

Since, in general, the Buddha's particular actions in history are much less important than the Dharma he taught, it makes sense that the historicity of particular stories would be less important than the spiritual effects those stories would have on the adherent. So, according to Williams, Tribe, and Wynne (2012:19), the stories of the Buddha, whether pieces are historical or not, fit comfortably into the genre of hagiography: "how it was, how it should have been, and how it must have been if he or she was who he or she indeed was, are united under the overriding concern of exemplary truth." The authors continue, "The Buddha's hagiography should be read as an illustration of what is to Buddhists important." We find the Buddha as no ordinary "renunciate," of which there were many in India at the time, but son to the king, husband to a beautiful princess, father to a healthy son. Yet the Buddha renounced these "highest possible attainments[s] within the householder framework" to find enlightenment (Williams et al., 2012:20). If this prince of fortune could find nothing worth keeping him attached to the cycle of history, then neither should any Buddhist. In other words, these stories have the markings of hagiography, and this concession should be unproblematic to the Buddhist. For historicity is made less crucial to Buddhism by the Buddha's insistence on the supremacy of his teachings over his own coming into the world, let alone the historicity of the details surrounding it. After all, in the *Lohicca Sutta* (1998f) the Buddha mentions occasions of "a Tathagata appear[ing] in the world," but the constant is always that he "teaches the Dhamma admirable in its beginning, admirable in its middle, admirable in its end." The Dharma is perennial.

So, thus far, we have seen that the interval between the events and the records is much shorter in Christianity than in Buddhism, but this, in itself, has no bearing on how the two

paradigms combatted this-worldly suffering. We also saw that while Christians see Jesus as a necessarily historical figure because of the weight Christianity places on certain historical events, Buddhism sees the events surrounding its founder as less important than the dharmic effects those stories accomplish in those who hear it. Likewise, this latter contrast might appear to have no bearing on the question of this-worldly suffering. However, the attitudes toward history that Buddhism and Christianity have is actually quite relevant to suffering. The Buddha taught the dharma as a means to *escape* history. One of the primary objects of the Buddha's renunciation, after all, was history itself, as we read in the *Samannaphala Sutta* (1997d): "Birth is ended, the holy life fulfilled, the task done. There is nothing further for this world." It is no wonder that the historicity of these stories is said to be subordinated to their hagiographic effect, for the Buddha saw history itself as something to escape. The historicity of the details of one's renunciation of history itself would be understandably held as of very little importance. For in Buddhism, the dharmic effects not only transcend historicity in importance, but one of those dharmic effects is actually to personally transcend history by escaping it.

Thus, we can formulate a first contrast between the Buddha and the Christ as their lives relate to this-worldly suffering. The Buddha changed history, seemingly incidentally, by teaching how to exit history. His attitude toward history was that it is an unending cycle of suffering to be escaped, a "miserable bondage to rebirth in *samsara*" (Robinson and Johnson, 1977:31). Jesus too changed history, but as something to be redeemed, not escaped. As Bond (1978:406) puts it, "Christianity has held that God has entered into history and revealed himself in history" and that "This rule of God over history . . . has not abated but will continue until the perfection of history and the coming of the Kingdom of God." As it relates to this-worldly suffering, we can describe the Buddha's attitude toward history as one of escaping the suffering *of* history, while, as we

shall see, the Christ actively combatted suffering *in* history. We thus arrive at our first contrast, a general one which sets up and is developed by the rest of the contrasts: Gautama taught how to exit history, while Jesus exemplified how to change history.

6.2.2 Reaction to Suffering

In this section, we will look at how Gautama and Jesus reacted when facing the troubles of the world. Then, we will ask how these reactions affected their abilities to combat this-worldly suffering. Since this is the first contrast that we are attempting in loosely chronological order, we will start at the beginning of their lives, to put their reactions to suffering in context of how they grew up, a context which will turn out to be especially formative for the Buddha's reaction.

Gautama was born in privilege. We are told in the Introduction to the Jataka ("The Birth" in Sources, 1998h) that the future Buddha was a god in the Tusita heaven who, right before he was born, was able to pinpoint the perfect

- Time – when the lifespan was around a hundred
- Continent – in India where Buddhas are born
- Country – in the "Middle Country" where Buddhas are born
- Family – the warrior caste as this caste was at the time "higher in public estimation"
- Parents – "king Suddhodana shall be my father. . . . The mother of a Buddha . . . has fulfilled the perfections . . . and has kept the five precepts unbroken from the day of her birth. Now this queen Maha-Maya is such a one; and she shall be my mother."

Thus, Queen Maha-Maya dreamt that after circling her three times, a "superb white elephant" entered her womb. When she recounted her dream to the king, the king summoned 64 wise Brahmans and told them what had occurred. They prophesied that the queen would have a son who could choose between two possible paths: If he continued in the householder path, he would become a "Universal Monarch," but, if he were to renounce such a life, he would become a

Buddha “and roll back the clouds of sin and folly of this world” ("The Birth," in Sources, 1998h).

When he was conceived, we are told that “the ten thousand worlds suddenly quaked,” and all manner of wonders broke out. The blind, deaf, dumb, hunchbacked, and lame were cured. People became kind, weather became lovely, and diseases became benign. Even the fires in the hells were blown out. When it came time for the birth, the Future Buddha emerged spotlessly clean. The infant looked around, surveyed the landscape in all ten directions, and upon seeing no equal, exclaimed, “This is the best direction.” He walked seven steps and shouted, “The chief am I in all the world” ("The Birth," in Sources, 1998h). Now, of course, one could be forgiven for seeing little room for historicity in these stories, for these are in the Jataka tales, after all. But the point conveyed is not to be missed: Gautama was privileged in every way even prior to his conception and was clearly no ordinary child.

Now, the king naturally desired his son to continue the lineage and so fulfill the prophecy’s alternative of glorious kingship. This explains why Gautama as a young adult had to ask his charioteer what old age, sickness, and death were as he saw them for the first time on a ride around the city. It also explains why, after returning after each ride, the king interrogated the charioteer: “What then did he see on his drive?” After all, the king reasoned, “We must not have Gotama declining to rule. We must not have him going forth from the house into the homeless state. We must not let what the Brahman soothsayers spoke of come true.” So the king would continue to indulge his son with all imaginable pleasures, in the hopes that Gautama would continue enjoying himself and not stop long enough to consider any futility in his current path (DN 14, in Sources, 1998h).

Yet the images of sickness, old age, and death stuck in his mind: "am I too subject to old age . . . to fall ill . . . to death?" And, as it would turn out, the worst possible image the king could have imagined would lodge itself most stubbornly in Gautama's thinking: "And he saw, as he was driving to the park, a shaven-headed man, a recluse, wearing the yellow robe" (DN 14, in Sources, 1998h). And where thoughts of sickness, old age, and death could have filled him with despair, Gautama realized that there was hope in renunciation. It is only those who are "intoxicated with youth . . . health . . . life" who would be "horrified, humiliated, and disgusted" to behold them. According to his own account long after he had renounced the householder path, Gautama would reflect, "Monks, I lived in refinement, utmost refinement, total refinement. . . . I had three palaces." Yet when he came to realize that he too was subject to old age, sickness, and death, all the intoxications of youth, health, and life "entirely dropped away" (AN 3.38, in Sources, 1998h). After all, he had seen true serenity in the monk who had "gone forth" into the "peaceful life" (DN 14, in Sources, 1998h). He came to discover that, just as there was nothing but futility in all the "sensuous pleasures" that had surrounded him, there was no reason to panic at the inevitability of losing them. Thus, though initially disconcerting, the sight of sickness, old age, and disease were, after much reflection, no reason for sadness whatsoever.

Jesus, however, was not privileged to be born into a family of wealth. Levitical law dictates that, after bearing a son, the mother would bring the priest a lamb to be sacrificed. However, if she were too poor to afford a lamb, she could bring a pair of turtledoves or pigeons (Lev. 12:8), and it is this lesser offering that Mary and Joseph brought to the temple (Luke 2:22-24). There are few superlatives regarding the family. Joseph was not a king but a carpenter (Mark 6:3). Jesus' birth narratives blend sublimity—angels' announcements (Luke 2:14) and wise men's gifts (Matt. 2:1-2)—with humility—laid in a feeding trough (Luke 2:5) and visited

by shepherds (Luke 2:16). Reminiscent of "treasure in jars of clay" (II Cor. 4:7), the "fullness of God was pleased to dwell" (Col. 1:19) in an embryo implanted by the Holy Spirit into an unassuming virgin confused why God would pick her (Luke 1:34). She marveled at her reversal of fortunes: "he has looked on the humble estate of his servant. For behold, from now on all generations will call me blessed . . . he has filled the hungry with good things, and the rich he has sent away empty" (Luke 1:48, 53).

Thus, although Jesus would eventually renounce carpentry for ministry, it cannot be said that he renounced great wealth in doing so. Like Gautama, however, he became an itinerant teacher, to a certain extent "going forth into homelessness." When someone eagerly asked to follow him, Jesus answered, "Foxes have holes, and birds of the air have nests, but the Son of Man has nowhere to lay his head" (Luke 9:58). As the Buddha and his *sangha* were supported largely by laypeople's alms, Jesus and his band of disciples likewise had benefactors, such as the list of women in Luke 8:2-3 who "provided for them out of their means."

Gautama grew up in a polarity where lavish wealth only temporarily masked the encroaching horrors of old age, sickness, and death. Yet he was able to accept these horrors as inevitabilities as he detached from those pleasures which diverted his contemplation. Gautama's reaction against an upbringing of craving the impermanent and dreading the inevitable makes sense of his enlightened equanimity. What in Jesus' growing up years makes sense of his reaction to these chronic horrors?

First, let us discuss what that reaction was. Now, it will help to note upfront that Jesus healed the sick and raised the dead. So, whatever his reaction, he had the power to make things right. Yet, notice his reaction to the death of a friend whom he was about to raise from the dead. "When Jesus saw [the deceased man's sister] weeping, and the Jews who had come with her also

weeping, he was deeply moved in his spirit and greatly troubled" (John 11:33). Then, upon approaching the tomb, "Jesus wept" (John 11:35). The implication is confirmed in I Cor. 15, Paul's celebrated discussion of the certainty of Christ's, and thus of the Christian's future, resurrection. Amidst the triumph, Paul writes soberly, "The last enemy to be destroyed is death" (I Cor. 15:26). The implication of Jesus' tears is that, in the meantime, death is an enemy.

Raising the dead and healing the sick, Jesus spread joy, and, contemplating death, Jesus grieved. What Jesus did not exemplify in the face of humanity's greatest sufferings was equanimity. In fact, even contemplating his own death—the very reason he came in the first place (Mark 10:45)—was unmet by tranquility. Agonizing in the garden, he "began to be sorrowful and troubled," pleading with his Father to "let this cup pass from me" (Matt. 26:37, 39). "My soul is very sorrowful, even to death," he said (Matt. 26:38). There was a deep sadness Jesus felt in his ministry toward all things that reminded him of the ancient curse (Gen. 3). This is why "when he drew near and saw the city, he wept over it," because Jerusalem had not recognized its visitation from the Son of God (Luke 19:41, 44). This is why, when the synagogue leaders valued Sabbath traditions over the restoration of a man's withered hand, Jesus "looked around at them with anger, grieved at their hardness of heart" (Mark 3:5).

So, where did this deep sadness come from? If it is difficult to connect it to Jesus' upbringing, as is appropriate for Gautama, perhaps we should look further back in the past. We are told that, "In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God," and that "All things were made through him" (John 1:1, 3). We are told that "by him all things were created, in heaven and on earth, visible and invisible" (Col. 1:16). It is his preexistence as Creator that makes sense of his grief at what had become of his creation. True, if existence were bookended with endless cycles of impermanence, as Gautama believed, then it

would make perfect sense for one's own well-being to approach the highs and lows with equanimity. Yet Jesus believed himself to bracket any impermanence with the splendor of his and his Father's eternality: "And now, Father, glorify me in your own presence with the glory that I had with you before the world existed" (John 17:5). Since "In the beginning God created" (Gen. 1:1) and he said it was "very good" (Gen. 1:31), then old age, sickness, and death were not the world as they had been intended. And, in the meantime, they grieved Jesus.

Thus, we arrive at our second contrast between these two paradigms as it relates to their abilities to combat this-worldly suffering. Gautama accepted suffering with equanimity, while Jesus grieved it as an unwelcome enemy. Now, as we shall see in the next chapter, this does not mean that Christianity sees no good coming from suffering; indeed the Bible provides many examples of suffering's benefits. Yet that is only the case in the context of a world under a curse in which "death reign[s]" (Rom. 5:14) and "all die" (I Cor. 15:22). And this cursedness is what Jesus grieved, and the implications of this reaction were predictable for the incarnation of God: He grieved sickness and so healed the sick. He grieved death and so raised the dead.

Gautama, on the other hand, is known for welcoming thousands into the serenity he had found in the midst of suffering. Yet even radically changing one's perspective toward death, which is only a mental escape, is not a par with defeating death itself, so that the person is restored. The Buddha's equanimity predictably resulted in very little of the change the enlightened Gautama could have potentially effected outside of the existential experiences of his own disciples (e.g. social change). Mudagamuwe Maithrimurthi (2003:124) explains,

> The Buddha was almost always depicted as hesitant and reserved when he was asked to comment on events like war and other social concerns. In the rare cases where he is seen as discussing such problems he is rather concerned about the psychological, moral and salvific relevance of the problem for each and every individual, rarely about what we call today a social problem.

David Loy (2013:407) adds, “According to the Pali Canon, the Buddha was consulted by kings and gave them advice, yet apparently he did not castigate or challenge them. Nor did the *sangha* do so after he died.” It seems that even what Gautama could have done to actually combat suffering outside the mind, equanimity prevented him from doing.

6.2.3 Sphere of Ministry

In this section, we will look at a conspicuous divergence in the styles of ministry between Gautama and Jesus. This analysis has to do with how involved each man was in the lives of regular people. Both had ministries of teaching, but how deeply were each of these two figures intertwined with the actual lives of these people? We can then ask which style was more conducive to combatting suffering in the lives of those people.

Let us begin with a boast. In the *Maha-Paranibbana Sutta* (1998g), A disciple of one of Gautama’s former teachers prior to his renunciation, Alara Kalama, approached Gautama and bragged on his teacher. Alara Kalama, said the disciple, was in a state of deep calmness when a procession of 500 carts passed by him, covering his robe in dust. Yet when a man who had been following the procession noticed Alara Kalama’s calmness, he became curious if Alara Kalama was actually conscious. When it turned out he was indeed conscious, only in meditation, the man was so impressed that he placed his faith in Alara Kalama. Not to be outdone, Gautama then asked the disciple which would be more difficult: remain conscious yet unaware of a procession of carts, or remain conscious yet unaware of torrential rain, complete with lightning and thunderbolts all around. The disciple felt certain that even hundreds of thousands of carts were no distractions compared to such a storm.

Well, continued Gautama, once he was staying in a barn when just such a storm raged outside. In fact, two farmers who were brothers were even killed in the storm just outside the barn, along with four oxen. When Gautama left the barn, there was quite a crowd gathered around the corpses. Gautama then asked what could have happened that such a crowd would gather like this. The man he questioned asked where Gautama had been not to have noticed the storm going on, yet Gautama answered, "I was here, brother." The man was amazed, sure that Gautama must have been asleep or unconscious. Yet Gautama answered that he was very much conscious. At this point in the story, the disciple of Alara Kalama exclaimed to Gautama, "The faith, Lord, that I had in Alara Kalama I now scatter to the mighty wind," and took refuge in the Buddha.

Let us consider another story. Serious storms commonly arise without warning on the Sea of Galilee (Keener, 1993:146). One such storm took the disciples by surprise as they sailed across the sea with Jesus. Yet, similarly to Gautama, Jesus was unaware of the storm. Unlike Gautama, however, Jesus had fallen asleep in the boat's stern. With the windstorm tossing wave after wave into the boat, the disciples began to panic and woke Jesus, shouting, "Teacher, do you not care that we are perishing?" And Mark 4:39 says, "He awoke and rebuked the wind and said to the sea, 'Peace! Be still!' And the wind ceased, and there was a great calm."

These two stories illustrate a noteworthy contrast between Gautama and Jesus as their ministries relate to suffering. On the one hand, Gautama boasts of his ability to calm himself during a storm. On the other hand, Jesus calms the storm. Presumably, Gautama remained dry, emerging only after the storm, while Jesus, sleeping in the serenity of the stern, presumably got drenched as he left the stern and spoke the storm into submission. Their ministries followed this pattern. Gautama's was a ministry of withdrawal. He famously left his wife and son the night his

son was born, but not before naming the son *Rahula*, meaning "fetter" (Buswell and Lopez, 2014:693). From that moment on, Gautama had renounced the householder life. As Williams, Tribe, and Wynne (2012:12) put it, "In Indian social terms he was a drop-out." In the *Maha-Saccaka Sutta* (2008c) Gautama reflects,

> Before my Awakening, when I was still an unawakened Bodhisatta, the thought occurred to me: "The household life is crowded, a dusty road. Life gone forth is the open air. It isn't easy, living in a home, to lead the holy life that is totally perfect, totally pure, a polished shell. What if I, having shaved off my hair and beard and putting on the ochre robe, were to go forth from the home life into homelessness?" So at a later time, when I was still young, black-haired, endowed with the blessings of youth in the first stage of life, having shaved off my hair and beard—though my parents wished otherwise and were grieving with tears on their faces—I put on the ochre robe and went forth from the home life into homelessness.

In this way, Gautama embarked on his ministry of withdrawal.

However, "withdrawal" needs clarification. Upon attaining enlightenment, Gautama contemplated just how deep and difficult his enlightenment had been to achieve. Then he considered just how intoxicated with attachments was the culture he lived in. Contrasting the difficulty of his path with the weakness of his generation led him to resolve not to teach the Dharma, for, as he put it, "if I were to teach the Dhamma and if others would not understand me, that would be tiresome for me, troublesome for me." Fortunately for his generation, however, Gautama received a visitation from a deity, Brahma Sahampati, who begged Gautama to go ahead and teach the Dharma, for there would be at least some who would understand it. Thus, Gautama, "out of compassion for beings, surveyed the world" and, as Brahma had predicted, saw beings with the right attributes to understand the Dharma. And so, instead of withdrawing, Gautama resolved to live out the rest of his days teaching people what he had learned.

Yet following his enlightenment, Gautama's daily routine continued to exemplify withdrawal, even as it brought him into contact with people. Not only were there the predictable

status differentiations, but there was simply a lack of actual involvement in people's everyday lives, especially the lives of regular people. What we discover instead of interaction are merely the insights and techniques of a detached instructor. Buddhaghosa, commentating on the Pali Canon's *Digha Nikaya* ("The Buddha's Daily Habits," in Sources, 1998h), tells us of five categories of the Buddha's daily habits. First were his "before-breakfast habits." Having woken early, Gautama would wash himself and sit until it was time to go into the village to beg for food. Into the village he would take his bowl, which would be filled with food by reverent laypersons. Perfumed and dressed in their finest robes, these laypersons would also bring Gautama flowers and other offerings. After a special seat was prepared for him, he would eat. These laypersons would then gather around Gautama to hear him teach the Dharma until he returned to the monastery. At the monastery, he would sit on his Buddha-mat in the pavilion, waiting for the monks to finish their meals.

Second were his "after-breakfast habits." He would first go sit in his perfumed chamber on a seat prepared for him by his servant. After washing his feet, he would rise and deliver a message to his disciples in the monastery. Then he would assign them various meditative exercises, after which, they would bow to him and disperse to go meditate. After they left, the Buddha would again enter his perfumed chamber and lie on his side for a time. Then, he would get up and survey the world. Eventually, the townspeople would again bring Gautama offerings, and Gautama would again sit on his Buddha-mat and teach them the dharma, after which they would do obeisance and leave.

The last three types of habits connect to the first, middle, and last watch of the night. During the first watch, Gautama would bathe, meditate, and then field questions from his disciples. During the middle watch, he would answer questions asked him by various deities. In

the last watch of the night, he would pace to relieve his discomfort from the meditative posture. Then, he would lie down in his perfumed chamber. Lastly, he would sit and mentally scan the world to discern possible renunciates. What we see developing in these habits is the predictably marked contrast between the spirituality of the layperson and that of the monk. Such a distinction is no surprise given that the religion itself was founded by a renunciate. In fact, the atmosphere of veneration—offerings and obeisance—is no surprise either, given the great honor these villagers knew in being visited by a Buddha. Neither is the Gautama's aloofness—his air as a detached teacher of insights—a surprise. It would only be considered odd in contrast to the paradigm of Christianity.

Jesus' ministry, on the other hand, was one of involvement. One place where this involvement displayed itself quite prominently was at mealtimes when Jesus sat, elbow to elbow, with the common person. Lest this be taken as merely the way Jewish rabbis typically conducted themselves, S. Scott Bartchy (1992:796) helps us understand just how radical Jesus' table manners were:

> One distinctive feature of Jesus' ministry was his practice of a radically inclusive and non-hierarchical table fellowship as a central strategy in his announcement and redefinition of the inbreaking rule of God. In so doing, Jesus challenged the inherent exclusivism and status consciousness of accepted social and religious custom and presented a living parable of a renewed Israel.

Thus, whereas Gautama could boast of his ability to withdraw, Jesus was ridiculed for his radical involvement: "Now the tax collectors and sinners were all drawing near to hear him. And the Pharisees and the scribes grumbled, saying, 'This man receives sinners and eats with them'" (Luke 15:1-2). "And as Jesus reclined at table in the house, behold, many tax collectors and sinners came and were reclining with Jesus and his disciples. And when the Pharisees saw this, they said to his disciples, 'Why does your teacher eat with tax collectors and sinners?'" (Matt.

9:10-11). The taunt went like this: “Look at him! A glutton and a drunkard, a friend of tax collectors and sinners!” (Matt. 11:19). When a woman came to anoint Jesus, the Pharisee thought to himself, “If this man were a prophet, he would have known who and what sort of woman this is who is touching him, for she is a sinner” (Luke 7:39).

Now, lest we turn this into a contrast between Jesus who welcomes sinners and Gautama who keeps them away, we ought to recall the story of Angulimala, the murderous, “finger garland” thief whom the Buddha converted to become a peaceful member of his *sangha* (Loy, 2000:149-150). The contrast is not about the kind of person the paradigm deems worthy of attention (after all, the Buddha himself critiqued the caste system (Keown, 1995:10)), but about the level of interaction with people: Gautama remains the detached sage, while Jesus was appropriately titled the “friend of sinners” (Matt. 11:19), with *friend* taking on the typical connotations of familiarity and closeness. Jesus’ interactions were attached and engaged.

Jesus continued to minister among the people, getting close enough to scandalize his respectability among those who believed in keeping a distance of distinction. To heal a leper, Jesus got closer than even a doctor would: “Moved with pity, he stretched out his hand and touched him and said to him, ‘I will; be clean’” (Mark 1:41). He rebuked his disciples for rebuking the mothers of the young children invading their comfort zones: “Let the little children come to me and do not hinder them” (Matt. 19:14). Jesus held a lengthy discussion talking theology with a woman who was supposed to be a racial enemy and who had been married five times and was living with her boyfriend: when his disciples returned and saw this, “They marveled that he was talking with a woman” (John 4:27). The evening before he was arrested, Jesus could be found on the floor, dressed as a servant, washing his disciples’ feet (John 13:1-5).

Thus, we arrive at our third contrast between these two paradigms as they relate to combatting this-worldly suffering. Gautama withdrew as a detached teacher, while Jesus drew near as an engaged friend. Both ministered out of compassion. Both changed lives. Gautama did it by withdrawing from society and calling others to do the same. When he did interact with regular people, it was as a teacher of insights and techniques. Jesus too was an itinerant teacher, but his interactions with people were personally engaged enough that critics accused him of not being aloof enough. His proximity was not sufficiently discriminating for the respectable religious leaders. With regard to suffering, therefore, we can conclude that Jesus combatted suffering by engaging people's lives—getting close, even getting attached to their suffering (e.g. John 11:35). The results were specified remediations of particular sufferings (i.e. by performing miracles miracles). Gautama combatted suffering by withdrawal—not only withdrawing into monkhood, but withdrawing from suffering itself into the solace of his own inner serenity.[26]

6.2.4 Depth of Diagnosis

This section will contrast the levels of the two paradigms' diagnosis of the human condition. As we will see, Gautama's diagnosis undercuts sin metaphysically—by having the adherent realize the nonexistence of the self and thus neutralizing the abuses of the self's passions. Jesus' diagnosis cuts deeper into the will of the person herself. We will then ask which diagnosis is better fitted for combatting this-worldly suffering. First, we will continue Gautama's story after he withdrew from the home he had always known.

[26] Gautama too was said to be able to perform miracles. According to Gautama, there are ten supranormal powers a Tathagata has, but this list does not include anything like the specified acts of compassion Jesus demonstrated. Instead, they have to do with the superlatives of the Buddha's powers of setting the "Wheel of Brahma" rolling and powers of perception (to recollect past lives and see beings coming into and out of existence. See the *Maha-sihanada Sutta* (1994).

After withdrawing from the householder life, Gautama went on to study with skilled renunciates such as Alara Kalama, but soon surpassed their powers. According to the *Maha-Saccaka Sutta* (2008c), he tried his own methods of severe asceticism, eventually growing so emaciated that "The skin of my belly became so stuck to my spine that when I thought of touching my belly, I grabbed hold of my spine as well." As he became aware that such an approach was getting him nowhere, he recalled a meditative pleasure he had experienced in his youth—but one that had nothing to do with sensuality. Perhaps the path to enlightenment lay between the extremes of asceticism and sensuality. It was no use testing this new approach when so famished, so, to the disgust of fellow renunciates, he ate some food. According to the *Dhammacakkappavattana Sutta* (1993b), his meditations under the famous Bodhi tree yielded progress, such that Gautama would later reflect,

> There are two extremes that are not to be indulged in by one who has gone forth. Which two? That which is devoted to sensual pleasure . . . and that which is devoted to self-affliction. Avoiding both of these extremes, the middle way realized by the Tathagata . . . leads to calm, to direct knowledge, to self-awakening, to Unbinding.

According to the *Samannaphala Sutta* (1997d), he would later trace the path to enlightenment as entering the four jhanas (meditations), manifesting supranormal powers, then directing the mind to one's own past lives, then to the passing away and reappearing of other beings, then to the ending of "stress." In this way, this middle path went on to yield to enlightenment, so that Gautama would indeed become the Buddha, or "the enlightened one" (Buswell and Lopez, 2014:148).

Once enlightened, Gautama sat there enjoying the "bliss of release" ("First Events after the Attainment," in Sources, 1998h). He kept sitting in the shade of the Bodhi tree for seven days, dwelling on how "this" leads to "that." He emerged from this absorption ready to teach the twelve steps of dependent co-arising. He was able to trace "this entire mass of stress and

suffering" back through the other steps to the "requisite condition" of ignorance. In Buddhism, the fundamental ignorance is that persons exist as separate selves (Palmer, 1997:126). Thus, as Georges Dreyfus (1995:45) puts it, "When the meditator realizes selflessness, she loses her self-centered attitude and attachment to herself. This in turn leads to the abandonment of negative emotions such as attachment, hatred, and pride, which are all based on ignorance." When ignorance is replaced with insight, vice is replaced with virtue. Grasping for what pleases oneself and loathing what angers oneself—and all the stress that results—evaporate into equanimity when "oneself" is realized to be a fiction. In this way, the insight-to-virtue correlation makes sense. And since ignorance is the original malady, Gautama quite appropriately assumed the posture of a teacher. His diagnosis cuts deeply into the metaphysical permafrost of conventional self-analysis.

Jesus, however, saw the base of the human problems quite differently. Centuries earlier, Isaiah had prophesied of him, "But he was pierced for our transgressions; he was crushed for our iniquities," and, "All we like sheep have gone astray; we have turned—every one—to his own way; and the Lord has laid on him the iniquity of us all" (Is. 53:5, 6b). Shortly before his birth, it was prophesied, "you shall call his name Jesus, for he will save his people from their sins" (Matt. 1:21). At the outset of Jesus' ministry, his prophesied herald, John the Baptist, exclaimed, "Behold, the Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world!" (John 1:29). His ministry began with the word *repent* (Matt. 3:2). He came specifically for those who admitted they were sinners (Mark 2:17). He warned against sin's destructiveness (Matt. 5:30). He called practicing sin "slavery" (John 8:34). He narrated how to restore someone who sins against you (Matt. 18:15). He forgave sins (Matt. 9:2; Luke 7:48). The evening before his death, he predicted that his blood would be "poured out for many for the forgiveness of sins" (Matt. 26:28). For Jesus,

eternity hinged on the condition of oneself in relation to sin. He predicted resounding joy in heaven "over one sinner who repents" (Luke 15:10). Yet he warned, "unless you believe that I am he you will die in your sins" (John 8:24).

Whereas Gautama saw the origination of all our problems in ignorance, and thus proposed a diagnosis of great metaphysical depth, Jesus' diagnosis cut deeper into the heart of the person herself. Gautama diagnosed a perspectival shift toward what metaphysically *is*, while Jesus' incision into the human problem delved far deeper than the mental state of a co-arisen mass of stress. Jesus pointed not to a chain of events by which one was helplessly dragged along, but to the fundamental and willful depravity of each human heart. Jesus explained, "For from within, out of the heart of man, come evil thoughts, sexual immorality, theft, murder, adultery, coveting, wickedness, deceit, sensuality, envy, slander, pride, foolishness. All these evil things come from within, and they defile a person" (Mark 7:21-23).

Thus, we arrive at our fourth contrast between these two paradigms as they combat this-worldly suffering. Gautama diagnosed our fundamental problem as ignorance, while Jesus diagnosed it more deeply as willful sin. Suppose someone comes to know—cognitively, experientially, or meditatively—all the truest insights. Suppose she even comes to realize, as Buddhism teaches, her own identity as a co-arisen collection rather than as a self. So she knows just how foolish it is to grasp for pleasure and get angry at inconveniences, because she knows there is no self whose welfare must be nurtured. Jesus' diagnosis goes deeper still: insofar as she exists even as a collection of aggregates, she still makes decisions. The Buddhist might be tempted to retort that once someone is enlightened, there is no more need for moral introspection. Yet, according to the *Ayacana Sutta* (1997a), even Gautama after his

enlightenment was faced with a moral choice: should he teach the Dharma even if it were "tiresome for me, troublesome for me," or should he suppress any compassion that should arise?

Jesus recognized sin's stubborn ability to fortify itself in even those whose religious training had marked them head and shoulders above the rest. As knowledge went, the religious leaders were superstars, yet it was out of "envy that the chief priests had delivered him up [to be crucified]" (Mark 15:10). And this is not the only case in which the religiously enlightened were in need of Jesus' deeper diagnosis. In light of the "sheer numbers" of authentically-enlightened Zen masters collaborating with the "mindless brutality" of imperial Japan, Dale Wright (2006:2) concludes that something more incisive was needed to cure their "moral blindness." He recommended cultivating moral reflection (Wright, 2006:20). In the same way, Jesus' critique cuts deeper than to the mere level of ignorance these authorities had mastered. Thus, insofar as people sin knowledgeably (e.g. religious leaders), and insofar as such sin causes this-worldly suffering (e.g. crucifixion), Jesus' deeper diagnosis would be more effective than Gautama's in combatting this-worldly suffering.

6.2.5 Fervor of Path

In this section, we will consider the two paths laid out for Gautama's and Jesus' adherents. We will find that, while the Buddha advocated a "Middle Way," the Christ preached a path of superlatives, both in its demands and its rewards. Then, we will consider which path is better conducive to the combatting of this-worldly suffering. The approach we will take is a contrast of the Buddhist Eightfold Path with the Christian Beatitudes.[27] Now, it will become apparent that the two lists are a bit like the proverbial "apples and oranges." The Eightfold Path

[27] I am indebted to Tim Hyunmo Lee (2002:92) for the idea of using the Beatitudes to formulate a kind of "Christian Eightfold Path." Though I did not utilize his exegesis, I am grateful for the general notion.

and the Beatitudes were intended to have entirely different functions. Aside from the shared numbering, the choice to contrast these lists might seem somewhat arbitrary. And though the contrast is somewhat forced, the contrast will nonetheless be useful in drawing out important distinctions between the two paths.

It was in Gautama's first sermon that he unveiled the Four Noble Truths, the first three of which summarized Gautama's view that all is stress, craving produces stress, and therefore stress is overcome by eliminating craving (see the Dhammacakkappavattana Sutta, 1993b). It is the fourth truth that especially concerns us here, which Gautama said was the "noble truth of the way of practice leading to the cessation of stress." Gautama's plan no doubt sounded blissful, but exactly how does one simply cease craving? In this fourth truth, Gautama showed his audience of five monks the way, and he called it the "Noble Eightfold Path": "And what is the middle way realized by the Tathagata that—producing vision, producing knowledge—leads to calm, to direct knowledge, to self-awakening, to Unbinding? Precisely this Noble Eightfold Path." The language of "middle way" calls to mind Gautama's nirvanic realization that neither austerity nor sensuality was conducive to enlightenment.

Likewise, it was in Jesus' first recorded sermon in the book of Matthew that we find the Christian's own eightfold path. The sermon is called the Sermon on the Mount, and the path is commonly called the Beatitudes. Now, it ought to be underscored that, in these eight principles, Jesus was not teaching the way to be saved from sin, as Gautama had taught in his path the way to enlightenment. We realize this because elsewhere Jesus made it clear that it is "whoever believes in him" that will "not perish but have eternal life" (John 3:16). But though salvation comes through faith in Jesus to deliver the sinner (Eph. 2:8-9), this lifestyle Jesus sets out in the Beatitudes is nonetheless the lifestyle demanded and commended of those who place their faith

in Jesus. The Beatitudes are, as one scholar put it, "types of character that have God's approval," and thus take the form of "comforting words of congratulation" (Garland, 1992:79) .

First, Gautama listed "right view." According to Gautama, this basically means knowing the Four Noble Truths (Gard, 1962:133). The Beatitudes begin with cultivating a different sort of view: "Blessed are the poor in spirit" (Matt. 5:3a). First off, the Christian is to view herself as spiritually needy. Instead of commencing the spiritual journey equipped with learnedness, the Christian approaches God shyly. As Leon Morris (1992:95) puts it, "They recognize their lack of spiritual resources and therefore their complete dependence on God." Jesus promises that "theirs is the kingdom of heaven" (Matt. 5:3b).

Second, Gautama proposed "right intention." This is the aspiration towards the path of "renunciation," "benevolence," and "kindness" (Gard, 1962:133). Such an intent matches the confidence of the previous "right view." If one has discovered the right view, what is to stop her intention from resulting in the righteous life? Yet, Jesus tempers optimism with, "Blessed are those who mourn" (Matt. 5:4a). The guilty have their sin to mourn, and, as is more likely the implication here, the oppressed have a great many reasons to mourn (Keener, 1993:56). As Gautama discovered as a young man, it is those with lives lavished with pleasure that miss out. Contrary to Gautama, however, equanimous intention is not enough to make things right. Jesus taught that it is those who first mourn that "shall be comforted" (Matt. 5:4b).

Third, Gautama taught "right speech." This means "abstaining from lying, slander, abuse and idle talk" (Gard, 1962:133). Similarly, Jesus taught the blessedness of showing mercy. It might be tempting to slander or abuse or lie about someone, especially someone who has done the same to oneself. Yet, Jesus claimed, "Blessed are the merciful" (Matt. 5:7a). Abstaining from revenge, as Gautama and Jesus both advocate here, is one thing, but Jesus adds the promise that

"they shall receive mercy" (Matt. 5:7b). This promise parallels the inflexible correlation Jesus continually points out between the mercy one shows others and the mercy one receives from God (Matt. 6:14-15; Matt. 18:35; Mark 11:25; Luke 6:37). So both advocate mercy, but again Jesus underscores our own desperate need for mercy from above.

Fourth, Gautama preached "right doing." In his discussion on the Eightfold Path, Gautama singled out three actions to abstain from: murder, stealing, and illicit sexuality (Gard, 1962:133). This gets expanded into the "five precepts," the standard summary of Buddhist morality, which adds to these three the resolves to abstain from lying and intoxicating drink (Lester, 1987:82). Jesus infuses right doing with emotional intensity: "Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness" (Matt. 5:6a) A greater contrast with the cessation of suffering via the cessation of desire could not be imagined: for after passionately desiring righteousness as if it were one's food and drink, Jesus assures his followers that "they shall be satisfied" (Matt. 5:6b). R.T. France (1985:115) explains that this is "the ultimate satisfaction of a relationship with God unclouded by disobedience."

Fifth, Gautama offered "right livelihood." Since Gautama taught that the point of this livelihood is to be "fully possessed of the noble path" (see the Maha-cattarisaka Sutta, 2008b), we see that Gautama was urging monkhood (Corduan, 1998:224). Jesus too proposed a livelihood for his followers: "Blessed are the peacemakers" (Matt. 5:9a). On this side of Christ's cross, Paul applies the Christian's peacemaking livelihood to the reconciliation of others with God: "All this is from God, who through Christ reconciled us to himself and gave us the ministry of reconciliation" (II Cor. 5:18). He continues, "Therefore, we are ambassadors for Christ, God making his appeal through us. We implore you on behalf of Christ, be reconciled to God" (II Cor. 5:20). Appropriately, therefore, Jesus calls peacemakers "sons of God" (Matt. 5:9b).

Sixth, Gautama urged "right effort." This is a stirring up of one's energy, a forcing of the mind for the willing away of bad states and the arising and persistence of good states (Gard, 1962:133-134). Such mastery of self-control is indeed impressive. Jesus too promised control to his followers, but it was of a much wider realm: "they shall inherit the earth" (Matt. 5:5b). However, the means is rendered, "Blessed are the meek." We are told that this probably indicates the recognition of one's "inability to forward one's own cause," yet the confidence that God can always be relied upon to "come to the rescue" (Nolland, 2005:201). Like the prerequisites of lacking, mourning, begging, and hungering, we find complete dependence upon God the condition for tremendous blessings.

Seventh, Gautama counseled "right mindfulness." The meditating monk is to remain "ardent, self-possessed and mindful" (Gard, 1962:134) in order that she might steer a middle path through the "greed and distress with reference to the world" (see the Saccavibhanga Sutta, 2005). Here, we see reiterated the all-important avoidance of the extremes of attachment on the one hand and hatred and anger on the other. Jesus too counsels against hatred and anger, all the while predicting hatred and anger from persecutors and telling his followers to actually calculate it as joy: "Blessed are those who are persecuted for righteousness' sake . . . . Blessed are you when others revile you and persecute you and utter all kinds of evil against you falsely on my account" (Matt. 5:10a, 11). And where Gautama steered between the two extremes, Jesus told his followers they ought to be craving a particular reward and that any temptations to revenge ought to be rechanneled and swept up into the extreme delight of this reward: "Rejoice and be glad, for your reward is great in heaven, for so they persecuted the prophets who were before you" (Matt. 5:12). While Gautama's mindfulness steers between extremes, Jesus' promise is meant to quicken the heart.

Eighth, Gautama ended with "right rapture." Here, he lists the four *jhanas* he experienced the night of his enlightenment. Gautama describes the fourth and final as "rapture of utter purity of mindfulness and equanimity, wherein neither ease is felt nor any ill" (Gard, 1962:134). Jesus too lists purity as an attitude God blesses: "Blessed are the pure in heart" (Matt. 5:8a). Craig Blomberg (1992:100) calls this purity a "single-minded devotion to God that stems from the internal cleansing created by following Jesus." Yet the promised result could not be described more inappropriately than as "equanimity, wherein neither ease is felt nor any ill" (Gard, 1962:134). For the promise is that such people "shall see God" (Matt. 5:8b). Seeing God brings terror: "Woe is me! . . . for my eyes have seen the King, the Lord of hosts!" (Isaiah 6:5). It also brings great joy: "in your presence there is fullness of joy; at your right hand are pleasures forevermore" (Ps. 16:11).

In summary, let us acknowledge that there is often a convergence in the ethical precepts across the major world religions. C.S. Lewis famously included an appendix to his *Abolition of Man* (2001a:83-102) which listed precept after precept common to the various religions (needs citation). We see glimpses of such a convergence as we contrast the Eightfold Path and the Beatitudes. In both cases, effort is demanded to do what is right (e.g. mercifulness) and avoid what is wrong (e.g. revenge). What seems to be quite different is not the ethical content so much as the level of fervor displayed in the path. The emotional intensity of the follower of Jesus—humility before God, desperation for righteousness, joy in the path—contrasts decisively with the middle way with which Gautama steers his followers between emotional extremes. We thus arrive at the following contrast: <u>Gautama taught a path of skill that leads to equanimity, while Jesus taught a path of yearning that leads to unspeakable joy</u>.

Now, a distinction is in order before we go on to ask which path would better combat this-worldly suffering. Since Jesus assumes persecution for those on his path (even promising it in Luke 21:21 and John 15:19-20), it would seem that such a path would *conduce* to suffering instead of combatting it. A distinction, however, ought to be drawn between combatting suffering for oneself, and combatting it for others. Christianity could very well produce more suffering for its adherents than Buddhism produces for its. However, when we are asking which path is more conducive to combatting suffering, we are asking what the adherent can do to alleviate the suffering around her—a worthy pursuit that could nonetheless risk great suffering to herself.

So, which path—the Eightfold Path or the Beatitudes—is better conducive to combatting this-worldly suffering? The Buddhist puts forward great effort to avoid that which hinders her nirvanic progress, including avoiding any harm toward others. The follower of Jesus avoids harming others as well, but is more emotionally invested in the positive processes of getting rid of others' suffering: making peace, showing mercy, and seeking righteousness. The Buddhist follows her middle path, arriving unscathed in equanimity. The Christian strives for God's righteousness at the level of her innermost passions—mourning, hungering, and rejoicing. Therefore, insofar as being emotionally invested in a pursuit is more likely to result in the achievement of its fulfillment, it seems the Christian path has the upper hand. However, it must be replied that the Buddhist is not necessarily emotionally invested in her own pursuit of nirvana—at least at the crucial levels of equanimity—and yet this does not prevent the Buddhist from attaining enlightenment. True, but we are not discussing here the pursuit of nirvana, but the pursuit of alleviating the suffering of others. Since the Christian path explicitly calls for active peacemaking and mercy, while calling for emotional intensity toward these suffering-combatting

ends, the Christian would seem to be more motivated to alleviate suffering than the Buddhist with cultivated equanimity who emphasizes nonharming more than active societal redemption. This contrast between emotionally invested societal activity versus equanimous nonharming suggests the following observation: the Buddhist renunciate walks a path that appears to be going the opposite direction from the one Jesus calls, after listing his Beatitudes, the "salt of the earth" and "light of the world" (Matt. 5:13-16).

6.2.6 Level of Authority

In this section, we will contrast the basis for authority that these paradigms claimed for their teaching. As we shall see, the Buddha's authority lay in his insight as someone who had gained enlightenment, while the Christ's authority lay in his status as the Son of God. We will then ask how this relates to the combatting of this-worldly suffering.

King Bimbisara, Gautama's most distinguished patron, met a tragic end when his son Ajatasattu murdered him and took the throne. As mentioned in chapter 5, it was Gautama's own cousin Devadatta, who was jealous and saw Bimbisara's patronage as his greatest obstacle to success, who incited Ajatasattu to do the deed (Buswell and Lopez, 2014:119). Now, we are told that, as king, Ajatasattu eventually reformed his ways. After hearing Gautama talk about the Dharma, King Ajatasattu announced he would take refuge in the Buddha, after which he confessed to Gautama his shameful act. Gautama replied, "[S]ince you have acknowledged the transgression and confessed it as is right, we will accept it. For he who acknowledges his transgression as such and confesses it for betterment in future, will grow in the noble discipline" (Attwood, 2008:280). As Jayarava Michael Attwood explains, Gautama is not forgiving Ajatasattu, for patricide is said to be "unpardonable" in Buddhism (Attwood, 2008:291), and,

after the king left, Gautama told the other monks that the king was "wounded" and "done for" (Attwood, 2008:298). After all, says Attwood, "since Ajatasattu has not directly injured the Buddha, it would be illogical for the Buddha to say that he forgives Ajatasattu." Instead, Gautama is merely accepting what Ajatasattu tells him, that he will strive to live henceforth as a changed man.

Jesus, on the other hand, forgave people, not only of particular acts, but seemingly of their sins collectively. Before healing a paralytic, Jesus told him, "Take heart, my son; your sins are forgiven" (Matt. 9:2). He shocked his dinner host when a notoriously sinful yet obviously repentant woman entered and began anointing Jesus' feet. Again, Jesus' reaction was to say, "Your sins are forgiven" (Luke 7:48). Lest one think this is simply how rabbis interacted with repentant people, observe that both instances caused scandal. Onlookers said, "This man is blaspheming" (Matt. 9:3) and, "Who is this, who even forgives sins?" (Luke 49). And, in the first instance, Jesus decided to back up his ability to forgive sins with a miracle: "'But that you may know that the Son of Man has authority on earth to forgive sins'—he then said to the paralytic—'Rise, pick up your bed and go home'" (Matt. 9:6). Jesus was aware of the extremity of this ability to forgive.

The contrast as it relates to these paradigms' level of authority is stark. It can be seen in the way they interacted with their opponents. Gautama argued on the basis of his insights, socratically challenging their opinions. Jesus rebuked his opponents for their unbelief and hypocrisy (Nakamura, 1973:37). As Joseph O'Leary puts it, "Jesus speaks more as a prophet than as a master of spirituality" (O'Leary, 1997:122). It can be seen in the way they interacted with their friends. "Be lamps unto yourselves," said Gautama (Thurston, 1999:125). Jesus told his friends, "Whoever believes in me, though he die, yet shall he live" (John 11:25).

The contrast is glaring in their final instructions. According to the *Maha-paranibbana Sutta* (1998g), the dying Gautama reassured his monks,

> It may be, Ananda, that to some among you the thought will come: "Ended is the word of the Master; we have a Master no longer." But it should not, Ananda, be so considered. For that which I have proclaimed and made known as the Dhamma and the Discipline, that shall be your Master when I am gone.

Just before he breathed his last, Gautama told them, "Strive with earnestness!" (Maha-paranibbana Sutta, 1998g). Note how exceedingly different from Gautama's were Jesus' final instructions before his ascension, as recorded in the Gospel of Matthew:

> All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you. And behold, I am with you always, to the end of the age (Matt. 28:18-20).

There is a fundamentally different view each had of his own authority. The Buddha was the Buddha because he attained enlightenment, an attainment which he taught his disciples to strive for as well. There seems to have been effort on his part to discourage worship as if he were a god (Nakamura, 1973:33). He was a way-shower, but he did not consider himself, as Jesus did, the Way (John 14:6). Perhaps the crowds were astonished at the great authority Jesus assumed when he taught (Matt. 7:28-29), but to speak with such authority was only appropriate in Jesus' mind, and nothing overblown, because he believed himself to actually be God in the flesh. In *Putting Jesus in His Place* (2007:23), Robert Bowman and Ed Komoszewski memorably outline Jesus' view of himself with the acronym *HANDS*. Jesus claimed the "honors" of God, for example accepting worship as the Son of God (Matt. 14:24-33), recalling shared glory with his Father before creation (John 17:5), and claiming honor equal to that given his Father (John 5:23). He claimed the "attributes" of God, such as having all authority in heaven and earth (Matt. 28:18) and living pre-existently (Luke 13:34; John 8:58). He claimed the "names" of God,

accepting such designations as "my Lord and my God" (John 20:28), and claiming, "I and the Father are one" (John 10:30), "before Abraham was, I am" (John 8:58), and, in answer to whether he was the Son of God, "I am, and you will see the Son of man . . . coming with the clouds of heaven" (Mark 14:62). He claimed the "deeds" of God, including the ability to forgive sins (Mark 2:7), save the world (John 3:17), judge the world (Matt. 16:27), speak with eternal authority (Mark 13:31), and send the Holy Spirit (Luke 24:49; John 15:26). Finally, he claimed the "seat" of God: he would be "seated at the right hand of Power" (Mark 14:62) and "sit on his glorious throne" (Matt. 25:31).

So, how does this contrast between Jesus' and Gautama's level of authority relate to this-worldly suffering, or, more specifically, as their authoritativeness would logically lead their disciples to combat this-worldly suffering? Both believed they had much authority, and both were believed to have much authority by their disciples. Yet, according to their own criteria, Jesus' authority was more authoritative. There is not the moral *obligation* to follow a way-shower that we find in following one who shows himself to be the ultimate authority. Gautama shows how one *can*, but Jesus shows both how one can and explains why one *must*. Gautama gave insightful precepts, and Jesus gave authoritative commands. One thus has to ask if human evil, a cause of tremendous this-worldly suffering, is more able to be combatted through the teaching of insights or through the teaching of insights backed up by commands from an absolute authority. Our contrast is this: Gautama taught from cultivated insights, while Jesus commanded from absolute authority. Thus, insofar as human evil (and the resulting suffering) is more able to be combatted where the commands are more authoritative, then Jesus' commands are more conducive to combatting evil and suffering.

6.2.7 Result of Interaction

In this section, we will contrast the outcome of spending time with these two paradigms. Of course, the quick answer is that the eventual results were nirvana and heaven. But what was the actual substance of these interactions; what was being accomplished? We will then ask which of these results is better conducive to combatting this-worldly suffering.

Let us reflect on three stories about grieving women, the first two of which would go on to become esteemed arhat nuns.[28] Kisa Gotami was a poor woman whose in-laws treated her as beneath them until she bore a son. One tragic day, however, her young son was outside playing when he suddenly died. Kisa's grief drove her mad. Though the child was clearly dead, she picked up the corpse and went door-to-door asking for medicine to treat him. "What good is medicine?" they would explain, but she did not understand (Olendzki, 2005).

Taking pity on her, someone finally told her about the Buddha residing nearby. He explained that Kisa could ask the Buddha for medicine. So she hurried to find the Buddha, and here is what he told her: "Go, having entered the city, into whatever house has never before experienced any death, and take from them a mustard seed." With renewed hope, she again went house-to-house asking for the special seed. Yet her optimism diminished with each visit as each person informed her the house had been visited by death multiple times. Suddenly, she discovered the Buddha's "medicine." She exclaimed, "This indeed is what is true—impermanence." Still carrying the corpse, she went that very moment to the charnel ground, left the corpse there, and returned to the Buddha. He explained what she had already discovered:

A person with a mind that clings,

[28] The story of the dead child is uncontroversially applied to Kisa Gotami, but certain sources ascribe the story of the dead family to her as well, where other sources say the woman with the dead family was Patacara. The commentary says this second story was about Patacara, while the canon attributes it to Kisa Gotami (Thig 10, Kisagotami Theri, Thanissaro's Introduction). Here, for simplicity's sake, we will proceed as if the first story is about Kisa Gotami and the second is about Patacara.

Deranged, to sons or possessions,
Is swept away by death that comes
Like a mighty flood to sleeping town (Olendzki, 2005).

The problem was not the death of a son, but the clinging to that son which had made grief inevitable. That day, Kisa joined the community of nuns, and it would not be long before she attained arhathood (Olendzki, 2005).

Patacara too was a woman acquainted with grief. Along with her husband and son, she was on her way to deliver her second baby at her parents' house when they were caught in a storm. She gave birth on the road, and her husband went to gather grass and sticks to construct a shelter for the family. When he did not return even the next morning, Patacara took her two children to look for him. They found him dead from a snakebite. The widow decided it was best to go ahead and complete the trip to her parents' house. Now, the previous night's storms had caused the river to swell. So, to cross, she thought it best to carry the infant across first. She left the baby on the far side of the bank and turned to fetch her firstborn. However, as she was crossing, she looked back to see a hawk swoop down and snatch her baby and carry him off. In her alarm, she raised her arms, which her eldest took to be a signal to go ahead and cross. Jumping in, the firstborn too was carried away, this time by the current. She arrived at her parents' house griefstricken and alone, when she discovered the house burnt to the ground, struck by lightning in the previous storm (Thanissaro, "Translator's Introduction," Kisagotami Theri, 2006).

Driven mad and wandering naked, she became a nuisance driven away by everybody (Buswell and Lopez, 2014:634). One day, however, she met the Buddha, and he told her,

Miserable woman, your kin all dead
And limitless *dukkha* you've known.
So many tears have you shed
In these many thousands of births (Kisagotami Theri, 1998e).

The Buddha helped her realize the universality of death and that the only way to not feel its sting would be through accepting its inevitability and seeking nirvana, the "Deathless." She reflected later that she had witnessed in "the charnel ground, the muscles of sons being chewed. With family killed, despised by all, my husband dead, I reached the Deathless. I've developed this path, noble, eightfold, going to the Deathless" (Kisagotami Theri, 2006). Later, when Mara, the tempter, would remind her of her loss, she would tell him, "I've gotten past the killing of sons . . . . I don't grieve, I don't weep—and I'm not afraid of you. . . . Having defeated the army of death, free of fermentations I dwell" (Gotami Sutta, 1998c).

In a town called Nain, about six miles from Jesus' hometown of Nazareth, a funeral procession was just exiting the city gate when Jesus and his disciples arrived to the town. In the coffin was a corpse of a man whose mother was weeping in the procession. This was her only son, and her husband had died. So not only was she grieving the loss of her son, but in the background was the nagging reality that she had lost her provider and her family line was ended (Morris, 1988:159). According to Luke 7:13, "when the Lord saw her, he had compassion on her and said to her, 'Do not weep.'" Up to this moment, the story could have well been told about Gautama, with the compassion and exhortation not to grieve. Yet Jesus took the woman's rehabilitation an enormous extra step. After touching the coffin so that the pallbearers would halt, he spoke to the corpse, "Young man, I say to you, arise" (Luke 7:14). Life reanimated the corpse, he sat up, and the crowd began to tell each other, "God has visited his people!" (Luke 7:16).

The result of interaction could not be more different. Kisa had exclaimed to the Buddha, "You have indeed restored me" (Olendzki, 2005). But this seems inaccurate. Nothing was restored, in the sense of "remade as it was intended to be." Rather, the Buddha had taught her to

accept death. It was Jesus who restored the dead to life. In his insistence on quelling attachments and hatreds, Gautama effected renunciation and release, a way out. The examples of Kisa Gotami and Patacara are indeed poignant, yet they exemplify the core of the Buddha's message to everybody, articulated by Kisa: "This indeed is what is true—impermanence" (Olendzki, 2005). Gautama used the same formula for a leper; he taught the leper about suffering's cessation through the Dharma, but did nothing to restore his health (Kutthi Sutta, 2012). Jesus, however, effected restoration, not just of the dead (Mark 5:22-24; Luke 7:11-15; John 11:1-44), but of the leper's skin (Mark 1:40-42), paralyzed limbs (Mark 2:3-12), blind eyes (Mark 10:46-52), and deaf ears (Mark 7:31-37). These were all previews of the glorious restoration to come when Jesus returns: "He will wipe away every tear from their eyes, and death shall be no more, neither shall there be mourning, nor crying, nor pain anymore, for the former things have passed away" (Rev. 21:4). That is, Gautama and Jesus have different methods of drying eyes: one through teaching resignation, the other through restoration. And what Jesus did to restore the physically broken makes visual what he promised to do on the inside, as predicted by the prophet Ezekiel: "I will give you a new heart, and a new spirit I will put within you. And I will remove the heart of stone from your flesh and give you a heart of flesh" (Ez. 36:26).

How does this contrast between the results effected by Gautama and Jesus relate to this-worldly suffering? First, here is the contrast: Gautama released his disciples from suffering's disturbance, while Jesus restored his disciples through suffering's reversal. Perhaps Gautama was able to effect for his patients great psychological comfort through teaching them the inevitability of suffering and thus the preventability of attachment. But, since we are asking which result better combats this-worldly suffering, Jesus' actual reversal of the situation clearly offers more to combat suffering than Gautama's proposed resignation. Gautama's alleviation of

Kisa Gotami's and Patacara's grief through acquiescence is hardly comparable to the joy Jesus brought the widow at Nain. Yet, the Buddhist might wonder, would not Jesus' restorations only set their recipients up for greater disappointment when, for example, death strikes again? But, again, Jesus was restoring what was broken physically to prove that he could restore spiritual brokenness, with the ultimate result of "making all things new" (Rev. 21:5). So, whether at the temporal level of reversing particular sufferings, or at the ultimate level of undoing suffering itself, Jesus combats suffering more effectively than Gautama who effects resignation at the temporal level and release at the ultimate level. Nothing is restored by Gautama. Instead of the person restored, it is suffering that is left intact because suffering is merely left, not combatted.

6.2.8 Agenda of Choice

In this section, we will describe Gautama's and Jesus' intentions as to the consummation of their ministries. Both predicted their own ends and did nothing to swerve themselves from the path. We will then ask how this intentionality relates to their ability to inspire their adherents to combat this-worldly suffering.

After determining that it would be the compassionate thing to teach others what he himself had discovered (Ayacana Sutta, 1997a), Gautama proceeded to teach the Dharma. His reputation as an "incomparable teacher" of enlightenment continued to spread (Salayyaka Sutta, 2011), until he had spoken to "many hundreds" of assemblies (Maha-sihanada Sutta, 1994a). He was able to convert kings (Pabbatopama Sutta, 1997c) and outcastes alike (Sunita the Outcaste, 1994b). He continued his itinerant ministry of teaching into old age. The day came when Ananda, one of Gautama's foremost disciples, noticed and commented to Gautama that "the Blessed One's complexion is no longer so clear and bright; his limbs are flabby and wrinkled; his

back, bent forward" (Jara Sutta, 1998d). Gautama ministered until his eightieth year, when he finally told Ananda, "Now I am frail, Ananda, old, aged, far gone in years. This is my eightieth year, and my life is spent. Even as an old cart, Ananda, is held together with much difficulty, so the body of the Tathagata is kept going only with supports" (Maha-parinibbana Sutta, 1998g). He predicted that, at the end of three months, he would enter nirvana and "utterly pass away." Now, at one point about this time, Gautama hinted to Ananda that a Buddha can actually remain on the earth for as long as the particular eon endures. His intention was to hint that, if Ananda would entreat Gautama to remain, he would indeed do so. Yet Ananda did not get the hint. So Gautama rebuked him, "Herein have you failed, inasmuch as you were unable to grasp the plain suggestion" (Maha-parinibbana Sutta, 1998g). Now, Gautama would be leaving them far earlier than was necessary. But this was more Ananda's failure against his fellows, and not against Gautama himself, who had already "renounce[ed] his will to live on" (Maha-parinibbana Sutta, 1998g). It was set: at the end of three months, Gautama would enter nirvana.

Unlike Gautama, Jesus did not minister into old age, nor did he intend to. Especially the Synoptic Gospels record Jesus' predictions of his coming death in Jerusalem. H.F. Bayer (1992:630) explains, "Like birth pangs signaling a delivery, they point to Jesus' inescapable mission awaiting him in Jerusalem." Having prepared his disciples by explicitly and repeatedly predicting what was coming (Matt. 16:13-23; 17:22-23; 20:17-19; Mark 8:31; 9:31; 10:32-34; Luke 9:18-22; 9:44; 18:31-33; John 2:19-22), Jesus resolutely "set his face to go to Jerusalem," because it was "when the days drew near for him to be taken up" (Luke 9:51). He also predicted his blood would be "poured out for many" (Mark 14:24) and, similar to Jonah, he would "be three days and three nights in the heart of the earth" (Matt. 12:40). He even told a parable about a vineyard owner whose son went to check on the hired hands only to be killed by them: "When

the chief priest and the Pharisees heard his parables, they perceived that he was speaking about them" (Matt. 21:45). Jesus knew what was coming, but it is not as though he were trying to prevent it. In fact, according to Jesus, it was all part of the predetermined plan. As he said to those arresting him, "Have you come out as against a robber, with swords and clubs to capture me? Day after day I sat in the temple teaching, and you did not seize me. But all this has taken place that the Scriptures of the prophets might be fulfilled" (Matt. 26:55).

So, our contrast is as follows: Gautama's agenda was to minister peacefully until nirvana at an old age, while Jesus' was to minister purposefully toward execution at a young age. After all, Jesus had said that "the Son of Man came not to be served but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many" (Mark 10:45). As it relates to combatting this-worldly suffering, this contrast simply implies that Jesus exemplifies a more demanding resolve. Gautama undoubtedly did much good in his many years of ministry, yet his sacrificial intent seems to be at a weaker level than that of Jesus. Jesus' intent on bleeding for his cause coupled with his relentlessness in combatting suffering provides us with a stronger paradigm than Gautama when it comes to the utter resolve to combat suffering.

6.2.9 Intensity of Death

In this section, we will describe Gautama's and Jesus' death. Their deaths being almost incomparable in their level of intensity, we will ask what this tells us about the example they set on combatting suffering.

After predicting his imminent entrance into nirvana, Gautama ate a meal that gave him dysentery and sharp pains. Yet, we are told, he "endured them mindfully, clearly comprehending and unperturbed" (Maha-parinibbana Sutta, 1998g). He had Ananda prepare a couch for him

between two trees where he lay down. Tree blossoms and flowers from the sky rained down upon him while voices sang from the heavens. All the deities gathered to watch, for which Gautama had to ask one monk to move aside so they could see. Gautama gave Ananda instructions to care for his body after death and construct a stupa as a memorial as one would do for a universal monarch. When Ananda began to weep, Gautama corrected him, "Enough, Ananda! Do not grieve, do not lament! For have I not taught from the very beginning that with all that is dear and beloved there must be change, separation, and severance?" (Maha-parinibbana Sutta, 1998g). One final convert was made of a renunciate named Subhadda who was able to converse with Gautama in his final hours. Gautama then gave Ananda some final instructions concerning abolishing the lesser rules and instructing the monks to chastise an arrogant monk named Channa. Channa had been Gautama's charioteer for the celebrated "four visions," eventually joining the *sangha* but becoming overbearingly prideful because of his close association with Gautama (Buswell and Lopez, 2014:175-176). Gautama ended a brief final lesson with the famous last words, "Strive with earnestness!" Then, after cycling through the appropriate meditations, he "passed away." We are told there were earthquakes below and thunders above and weeping deities declaring the event's significance. Gautama's body was cremated, and the bones dispersed among various groups who had played a role in his life. Each promised to construct a stupa over their particular relic (Maha-parinibbana Sutta, 1998g).

Jesus was betrayed by a disciple and arrested on a Thursday night (Mark 14:43). The trial called that night condemned him of blasphemy, after which they beat him and spat on him (Mark 14:64-66). The next morning, the Sanhedrin rubber-stamped the previous night's decision (Mark 15:1). They marched him to Pilate, governor of Judea (Luke 23:1), who sent him to Herod Antipas, the tetrarch of Galilee (Luke 23:7), who, after his soldiers mocked him, sent him back to

Pilate (Luke 23:11). No one quite knew what to do with this man the religious authorities accused of blasphemy yet the political authorities saw as innocent. Pilate had him scourged, but this did nothing to appease the crowd that kept shouting, "Crucify him!" (Mark 15:14-15). After twisting together a crown of thorns for his head, they pretended to hail him as the king, all the while clubbing his head with a reed and spitting on him (Mark 15:17-19). Finally, they marched him outside Jerusalem where they crucified him (Mark 15:22). As he hung there, the guards gambled for his clothing (Mark 15:24), and the religious leaders laughed at his helplessness (Mark 15:31). He responded by asking his Father to forgive them (Luke 23:34) and assuring a fellow crucifixion victim that they would be together in paradise (Luke 23:43). Six hours later, as the end came, he cried out, "It is finished" (John 19:30), and finally, "Father, into your hands I commit my spirit!" (Luke 23:46). As he breathed his last, we are told that earthquake occurred (Matt. 27:51) which split the temple's curtain, that symbol of God and man's separation, in two (Matt. 27:51; Mark 15:38; Luke 23:45).

Gautama cannot be blamed for the comparative tranquility of his death. After all, it is not that peaceful deaths are undesirable; ultimately, that is what everybody would prefer. Even Jesus asked his Father, "If it is possible, let this cup pass from me" (Matt. 26:39). But what does our contrast tell us about Gautama's and Jesus' example as it relates to this-worldly suffering? The intensity of suffering, for which Jesus did nothing to avoid, tells us that Jesus was willing to undergo whatever it took, no matter how extreme, to restore humanity. The tranquility of Gautama's death does not allow us to say the same about him. Gautama exemplified a tranquil death, while Jesus exemplified the ultimate sacrifice. Again, there is nothing dishonorable about the way Gautama met his end. It is just that, as it relates to combatting this-worldly suffering, the way Jesus died exemplifies an extraordinary level of commitment. He bled for his cause. He did

not merely die in such a way as to set an equanimous example for people; rather, he died for people. And since, as we have seen, Jesus' cause incorporates the combatting of this-worldly suffering, those that take Jesus as paradigm have a more determined motivation to do whatever it takes for such a cause than do the disciples of Gautama.

6.2.10 Role of Destination

This section deals with the nature of Gautama's and Jesus' existence after their deaths. While Christians have historically held that Jesus rose from the dead and ascended to the Father, the matter is far less clear cut for Gautama's destination, though fairly straightforward as regards the Pali Canon, our primary source for this chapter. After this admittedly (very) brief overview, we will then ask how the nature of these post-mortem existences relates to the combatting of this-worldly suffering.

As was typical when asked metaphysical questions, Gautama responded that to ask the question, "Does the Tathagata exist after death?" was to engage in useless speculation (Brahmajala Sutta, 2010). When it comes to nirvana, after all, as Williams, Tribe, and Wynne (2012:36) put it, "Since there is nothing left for the mind to fix on, nothing more can be said." Whatever nirvana is, no self remains to do any experiencing. What we are told in the sutra that details Gautama's entrance into nirvana is simply that "the Blessed One immediately passed away" (Maha-parinibbana Sutta, 1998g). After all, at Gautama's passing, Brahma Sahampati, the deity who had convinced Gautama to teach the Dharma, exclaimed, "All must depart—all beings that have life must shed their compound forms. Yea, even one, a master such as he" (Maha-parinibbana Sutta, 1998g). Now, of course, as we see in the *Lotus Sutra*, Mahayana Buddhists view the Buddha as still accessible. In this sutra, the Buddha is found to be very much alive; his

death had been merely a skillful means for, as one parable represents it, shocking his children into taking the antidote (Williams, 2009:157). Such a development helps to validate the Mahayana view for many Buddhists, but it is not an appropriate view to rely on in this chapter which has relied so heavily on the Pali Canon. These canonical and foundational sutras' perspective on nirvana and Gautama's entrance into it does not match the *Lotus Sutra's* optimism about Gautama's post-mortem accessibility. According to the canon, Gautama practiced what he preached: "Birth is ended, the holy life fulfilled, the task done. There is nothing further for this world" (Chachakka Sutta, 1998a).

When Jesus was arrested, most of the disciples scattered and ran (Mark 14:50). One disciple, Peter, followed at a distance, but, when he began to be indicted as one of Jesus' followers, he violently denied any connection (Mark 14:66-72). Within days of their leader's crucifixion, however, and in the same city, these same disciples were exclaiming to crowds in public, "Let all the house of Israel know for certain that God has made him both Lord and Christ, this Jesus whom you crucified" (Acts 2:36). To explain things, rumors had been circulating of these disciples having stolen the body of their Lord and pretending he had risen from the dead (Matt. 28:11-15), obviously presupposing that the tomb was somehow found empty and that these followers of such a good man had turned out to be deceivers. Our earliest records of the apostles' lives, however, tell us that they stuck to their story even unto martyrdom (see Acts 12:2; chapter 1 in Eusebius, 2009). As Williams writes, "They had become extremely brave. Why? And what motive could they have for such a conspiracy?" (Williams, 2002:123).

Scholars often date Jesus' death at 30 CE. Around twenty-five years later, Paul wrote a letter to the church in Corinth (Bruce, 1977:475). In his letter, he tells about a teaching he received from the church at Jerusalem twenty years earlier when he visited Jerusalem in 35 CE:

> For I delivered to you as of first importance what I also received: that Christ died for our sins in accordance with the Scriptures, that he was buried, that he was raised on the third day in accordance with the Scriptures, and that he appeared to Cephas, then to the twelve. Then he appeared to more than five hundred brothers at one time, most of whom are still alive, though some have fallen asleep. Then he appeared to James, then to all the apostles (I Cor. 15:3-7).

Paul himself had been a skeptic and a persecutor of the church (I Tim. 1:13) until he experienced a vision of Jesus in 33 CE. Thus, he adds to the end of these appearances, "Last of all, as to one untimely born, he appeared also to me" (I Cor. 15:8).

Jesus died on a Friday, and it was Sunday that the rumors began that Jesus was alive. Luke, the first century physician and church chronicler, explains, "He presented himself alive to them after his suffering by many proofs, appearing to them during forty days and speaking about the kingdom of God" (Acts 1:3). After promising to send his Holy Spirit to indwell and empower his followers, Jesus is said to have ascended to the Father (Acts 1:8-9). There, he is said to intercede on behalf of people (Heb. 10:12-14; Heb. 7:25; I John 2:1). This intercession, write Norman Geisler and Ron Rhodes, is crucial "for our salvation from the power of sin in the present. It is closely related to the lifelong process of sanctification, which involves progressively being made more and more like Christ" (Geisler and Rhodes, 2008:158).

Does this contrast tell us anything with regard to how these paradigms combat this-worldly suffering? Obviously, if Gautama is inaccessibly caught up in the negations of nirvana, and Jesus is actively interceding and intervening on behalf of people to this day, this just goes to show yet another way in which Jesus is more actively involved in helping people than is Gautama. However, why should the Christian tradition of Jesus' resurrection and continued eternal existence be thought any more credible than, for example, Gautama's continued existence as a Mahayana teacher whose death was merely a skill-in-means? Williams (2002:134), for years a faithful Buddhist who eventually became convinced of the truthfulness of Christianity, notes,

> [I]t does not seem to me that any other religion or spiritual teaching has anything so dramatic or convincing as resurrection from the dead—a resurrection that still seems plausible two thousand years later—to support its claims. Buddhists (and others) sometimes talk about the wonders their spiritual heroes and heroines have done and can do. But nowhere is there a case so clearly and plausibly demonstrated as the resurrection. That, it seems to me, is a fact.

After all, we are comparing the earliest yet comparatively far later records of Gautama's life to a tradition traceable back to within five years of Jesus' death—given to Paul at his visit to Jerusalem in 35 CE. So, the contrast is a valid one, and here is what we learn: Gautama entered nirvana, while Jesus rose from the dead and continues to intercede on behalf of people. This presents yet another reason why Jesus is a superior paradigm when it comes to combatting this-worldly suffering.

6.3 Conclusion

The interfaith scholar feels compelled to tame the ultimacy of Christ. Aloysius Pieris (1987:70) laments what he sees as the typical but unpalatable options of exclusivism and inclusivism, explaining, "The false start that leads theologians down a blind alley, is, I believe, their obsession with the uniqueness of Christ." Charles Sabatino (1985:29, 34) appreciates the capability of Christian symbols for evoking meaningfulness, but he warns against Christians' tendency to use them to "single out Jesus and set him apart," for Jesus never truly intended "any absolute claims for himself." So it is no surprise that one of the benefits John Keenan (1993:54, 62) sees in his Mahayana Christology is that it can avoid the "conundrum" of trying to reconcile Jesus' human and divine nature, because, in the end, it presents Jesus as "empty of essence," just like everyone else. To help align Buddhism and Christianity, Yagi Seiichi assures his fellow Japanese that Jesus never believed his death to be "cosmically redemptive for others," and any miracles ought to be interpreted existentially (Drummond, 1987:573). Buddhadasa Bhikku

explains to his fellow Thai that Christianity is basically a "religion of action and of self-help" (Haug, 2006:55, 66) with any reference to "eternal life" as merely Dharma language. Brian Bocking (1983:106) advises bringing Gautama alongside Jesus by reducing them to the indistinct common denominator of "perfect man." Even the Dalai Lama teaches that Jesus was a "fully enlightened being" who had to teach "lesser truths" because of the ignorance and condition of those he taught (Beverley, 2001a:72). James Hanson (2005:86-87) goes so far as to claim—based on similar teachings, parallels in stories, the travels of Buddhist missionaries, and the unknown whereabouts of Jesus before his public ministry—that Jesus was actually a Buddhist at some level.

The attempt, however, to counterbalance Jesus with Gautama, to the diminishing of the biblical portrait, is wrongheaded. If not in step with fashion, Groothuis (2003) is at least far more honest to the sources of both religions when he remarks,

> The essential teachings and ministries of Jesus and Buddha cannot be reconciled or synthesized. No amount of religious tolerance or pluralism can erase the deep and sharp differences between these two identities, their worldviews, and their actions. By accurately defining these differences we do justice to both religious leaders while communicating the truth in love to those who would place them on the same plane.

True, the interfaith scholar feels compelled to fit the two together to fulfill her intention of pluralizing for the sake of peace. However, insofar as she is serious about combatting this-worldly suffering to make for a better world, she needs to rethink her program of Buddhicizing Jesus. As we have seen in this chapter, Jesus consistently exceeds Gautama at multiple levels as his example relates to combatting this-worldly suffering. Why strive to make Jesus *less* ultimate when he in all his ultimacy so strongly exemplifies the spirit needed to achieve what the interfaith scholar most desires—the alleviation of this-worldly suffering? In the end, the contrast as it relates to this important criteria is conspicuous indeed.

1. Gautama taught how to exit history, while Jesus exemplified how to change history.
2. Gautama accepted suffering with equanimity, while Jesus grieved it as an unwelcome enemy.
3. Gautama withdrew as a detached teacher, while Jesus drew near as an engaged friend.
4. Gautama diagnosed our fundamental problem as ignorance, while Jesus diagnosed it more deeply as willful sin.
5. Gautama taught a path of skill that leads to equanimity, while Jesus taught a path of yearning that leads to unspeakable joy.
6. Gautama taught from cultivated insights, while Jesus commanded from absolute authority.
7. Gautama released his disciples from suffering's disturbance, while Jesus restored his disciples through suffering's reversal.
8. Gautama agenda was to minister peacefully until nirvana at an old age, while Jesus' was to minister purposefully toward execution at a young age.
9. Gautama exemplified a tranquil death, while Jesus exemplified the ultimate sacrifice.
10. Gautama entered nirvana, while Jesus rose from the dead and continues to intercede on behalf of people.

The same contrast is already summarized for us in religious art, as Groothuis (2003) notes:

> Images of Buddha worldwide show a man sitting in tranquil contemplation with his eyes shut to a world he wants to transcend. How different from this posture was the defining act of Jesus, who, though nailed to a cross, bruised and bloodied, gazed in love on the world He came to redeem.

Gautama's middle path is philosophically astute yet is simply not what interfaith scholars say they want nor what a hurting world knows it needs. Jesus, however, offered more than philosophic insights and therapeutic release. James Breckenridge (1992:69) explains, "Only after he has endured the agony of descending to the depths can he return in triumph to the light of day." Jesus is indeed the ultimate paradigm of caring to his core about hurting people.

Chapter 7

Your Purpose Is Too Predetermined: How Ultimate Purpose Relates to Suffering

7.1 Introduction

A significant amount of human suffering is nonphysical. A worldview can combat suffering outwardly beginning with what it commands and exemplifies, but it can also combat suffering inwardly through the picture it paints of existence. We will look at Christianity's robust sense of purposefulness and the inward emboldening it effects as well as the best Buddhism has to offer to combat inward suffering. Now, it must be stated upfront that the question of whether a religion's view of reality combats or deepens inward suffering does not automatically address the further question of whether the religion is true. In limiting ourselves to the inward nature of suffering, one certainly ought to ask which view resonates better with a person's experience of reality in the quest for religious truth. Yet, within our narrower focus, we shall focus on two questions concerning the two worldviews: 1) whether Buddhicizing Christian purposefulness would help combat, or end up deepening, inward suffering, and 2) whether or not Buddhicizing Christian purpose would help combat physical suffering. Because Buddhism's emphasis on "thusness" and Christianity's emphasis on purpose are so integral to their solution to inward and physical suffering, we will need to take the time to examine these postures.

7.2 Pain of Purposelessness

In this and the next section, we will discuss two sources of inward suffering relevant to Buddhism and Christianity. This section will feature what appears to be an existential weakness

of Buddhism, while the next section will focus on a source of inward suffering that will place Buddhism in a more positive light. After a look at these two sources of inward suffering, we will, in consequent sections, be better able to explain the best Buddhism and Christianity have to offer when it comes to combatting inward suffering.

Our first source of inward suffering is the pain of purposelessness. Consider a helpful article by Alex Lickerman, M.D. (2010), a Buddhist, listing why people try suicide. At the top of his list, "without question the most common reason people commit suicide," is depression. This is where, according to Lickerman, the "pain of existence" becomes too much to bear. This is not the pain of mere suffering, but of suffering accompanied by the "belief that escape from it is hopeless." To get an idea of the scope of what we will call the "pain of purposelessness," take Lickerman's notion of one's suffering being hopelessly unbearable. Now, multiply that attitude of hopelessness toward all existence. The attitude would become that, whatever course be taken, existence simply *is* suffering, and there is no hope out of its overarching futility.

Let us attempt to render this abstraction even more understandable. One type of suffering might break one person and strengthen another. It is hard to see how one type of physical suffering can be labeled as the "worst" kind, because even the harshest types are sometimes borne with great perseverance, sometimes with great redemption wrought on the other side. There is, however, an inward suffering that can make all other types of suffering positively unbearable. How do you know when suffering is unbearable? You find it unbearable when you see no hope of good coming out of it and thus are ready to end it all. You find yourself asking, "What is the point? Is there any point?" We will call this perception of pointlessness, applied to all existence, the "pain of purposelessness." How can you bear suffering with great perseverance when there is absolutely no redemption in sight on the other end?

It is no secret just how crucial it is to perceive purpose to make it through suffering. Holocaust survivor and psychiatrist Victor Frankl (1969:115) explained, "Suffering ceases to be suffering in some way at the moment it finds a meaning, such as the meaning of a sacrifice." An illustration would be the clear inward difference between a man losing a hand through a car accident and a man losing a hand sacrificially in a combat situation (Cozort, 2013:365). In advocating spiritual striving, the opposite of which tends to deteriorate the human spirit, Suzuki (1983:5) notes the difference meaningfulness makes:

> Without knowing the significance of the conflict that is the cause of our suffering, the struggle is meaningless. When we know what these conflicts are all about, then we find that we can go on. But as long as we continue, unaware and blind, life is a most tragic thing.

To suffer without meaning is indeed tragic.

Physical suffering without meaning is one thing. Meaninglessness without physical suffering is another. Is meaninglessness its own suffering? Philosophy professor Tim Oakley (2010) argues that it is, calling it a "crisis of meaninglessness." Let us say that this crisis, when one begins to internalize what we are calling the "pain of purposelessness," is an ocean-like experience of futility, miles deep and wide as the horizon. Oakley helps us understand the tributaries that make it the ocean that it is. Attempting to give a holistic definition of the "meaningless life," Oakley observes that such meaninglessness could come from perceiving no ends as valuable and thus lamenting a wasted life or from losing all desires, whether their objects are valuable, outweighed, or unattainable.

Now, note just how closely these diagnoses of a "meaningless life" parallel the Buddhist prescription: Because all life is suffering, valuing it and desiring it simply lead to suffering. The answer is therefore, in the words of the Buddha, "the quality of dispassion—the subduing of intoxication, the elimination of thirst, the uprooting of attachment, the breaking of the round, the

destruction of craving" (Iti 90, 2001). It is craving—strongly valuing and strongly desiring—one's life that is supposed to lead to rebirth. Recall that in the twelve steps of dependent co-arising, "Birth comes from becoming…Becoming comes from clinging…Clinging comes from craving" and so on (Maha-nidana Sutta, 1997b). Thus, according to Oakley's description, Buddhism's central beliefs would logically lead to a "meaningless life," because meaninglessness is, in effect, intentionally cultivated by the Buddhist as she suppresses value and desire.

Moreover, if there were any overarching purpose to anything, in addition to purposes conjured up from within (e.g. from compassionate bodhisattvas), anything overarching would seem to be the work of a demon. For recall that in the *bhavacakra* diagrams, the entire wheel of samsara is not in the hands of a gracious Creator, but in the teeth of Mara, the tempter and adversary, or of Yama, the god of death (Buswell and Lopez, 2014:112). "The All . . . is aflame with birth, aging and death, with sorrows, lamentations, pains, distresses, and despairs" (Adittapariyaya Sutta, 1993a). Ingram (2011:169) discusses what "boundary questions" get brought up as science interacts with Buddhism. In doing so, he cites materialist scientists Stephen J. Gould and Richard Dawkins as insisting that the universe they have studied turns out "pointless" and "without value." If this is really the case, Ingram cannot resist asking, "can Awakening mean anything more than becoming experientially aware of universal pointlessness?"

Buddhist activists argue in return that Buddhism infuses plenty of purpose as it relates to the world, for Buddhism is the champion of peaceful coexistence among all sentient beings, logically commencing such causes as "eco-Buddhism" (Harris, 1994:45). Even here, however, we have to ask just how Buddhistic such pursuits are in an admittedly purposeless universe. Ian

Harris (1994:46) admits that his "heart" would like to be able to ground such endeavors (e.g. eco-Buddhism) in the Buddhist framework, yet his "mind" points out for him that in order for Buddhism to see a particular state of affairs in the world as truly better than any other state, "Buddhist causation must be shown to be teleologically meaningful." The problem is that the world for Buddhism is fundamentally "dysteleological," there being no "end" or "purpose" to the world (Harris, 1994:53). As Harris puts it, "All is in a state of flux yet all is quiescent for all forward movement lacks a sense of purpose" (Harris, 1994:51).

Now, this is only part of the story. We will give Buddhism plenty of space to answer this charge of purposelessness in subsequent sections (see 7.3 and 7.4 below). Right away, we can defend Buddhism against what could be perceived as an implicit argument—that Buddhism's attitude toward life is the component that is able to turn suffering into "ending it all" (i.e. suicide). Let us be clear: Human rebirths are seen by Buddhists as rare and thus precious, and the averse state of mind leading to suicide would just about guarantee that a human rebirth would not come along again for a very long time. Thus, Harvey (2011:286) explains, "as an attempted escape from the sufferings of life, suicide is, according to Buddhist principles, totally ineffective." So, whatever the typical connection tracing magnitude of suffering, depreciation of value, and loss of desire to suicide is already disconnected with regard to Buddhism. But it remains the case that insofar as Buddhism makes values vacuous and desires undesirable, Buddhism offers the elements that form the pain of purposelessness. The Buddhist will no doubt point out that things are not so bleak because, in fact, there is escape available. Yet if escape is the only solution, what does that reveal of the Buddhist's fundamental outlook on existence?

7.3 Devastation of Disappointment

At first glance, the Buddhist's outlook is the bleakest one available, an instant concoction to wake up to a meaningless universe. It is as William Lane Craig (2008:75) dismally reminds those who have not quite thought through their rejection of God to the gloomy end of atheism's tunnel:

> If death stands with open arms at the end of life's trail, then what is the goal of life? To what end has life been lived? Is it all for nothing? Is there no reason for life? And what of the universe? Is it utterly pointless? If its destiny is a cold grave in the recesses of outer space, the answer must be yes—it is pointless. There is no goal, no purpose, for the universe. The litter of a dead universe will just go on expanding and expanding—forever.

In fact, Buddhists would seem to have it worse. Atheists like Friedrich Nietzsche who recognized existence's ultimate purposelessness at least had securities such as the "overman," the life-affirming "this-worldly antithesis to God," to run to (Kaufmann, 1972:511). By comparison, Buddhism's "not-self" appears to be the "overman's" this-worldly antithesis—purposeless and spiritless to make things any better. Crippled by metaphysical impotence, the Buddhist would seem victim of the worst imaginable inward suffering.

But that is only at first glance. Perhaps Buddhists are right and there is a worse inward suffering than the pain of purposelessness. Could it be that those who have embraced purposelessness are in less pain than, for example, the pair of dejected disciples of Jesus leaving Jerusalem after his crucifixion, speaking the resigned past perfect tense: "We had hoped that he was the one to redeem Israel" (Luke 24:21). Perhaps acceptance of the inevitable is existentially preferable to getting disappointed again and again. On the one hand, Jesus' ride into Jerusalem on "Palm Sunday" was hailed with "Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord!" by onlookers long-awaiting the inauguration of "the coming kingdom of our father David" (Mark 11:9, 10). On the other hand, Jesus' procession out of Jerusalem and subsequent crucifixion on

"Good Friday" was met with mockery by those accustomed to seeing messiahs fail: "He saved others; he cannot save himself" (Mark 15:31). Existentially, who was better off—the cheerers or the mockers?

It appears Buddhists would resonate with at least one Bible book. An advocate of reading the book of Ecclesiastes "in conjunction with the teachings of the Buddha," Daniel Polish (2008:371) contends that the mood of Ecclesiastes "seems to be one of disillusionment" and one which "counsels resignation." As Polish (2008:381) reads it, Ecclesiastes paints a Sisyphus-like futility of life, escaped by "freedom from attachment."[29] Other Christian teachings, however, offer not legitimate escape, but escapism, according to the Buddhist. Whalen Lai (1991:575), a Christian and Buddhist, writes, "Buddhists are often accused of being otherworldly, but to them Christians are escapists into the false refuge of an immortal soul, an eternal paradise, a life hereafter, an almighty God." To Buddhists, Christians are inwardly greater sufferers because they anchor their hopes in slippery platitudes rather than in the bedrock of reality.

From his enlightenment on, the Buddha counted disappointment as more devastating than purposelessness was painful. Even something as marvelous as a baby's birth he accepted as suffering so as to anticipate and eliminate the disappointment that would inevitably follow:

> Birth is *dukkha*, aging is *dukkha*, death is *dukkha*; sorrow, lamentation, pain, grief, and despair are *dukkha*; association with the unbeloved is *dukkha*; separation from the loved is *dukkha*; not getting what is wanted is *dukkha*. In short, the five clinging-aggregates are *dukkha* (Dhammacakkappavattana Sutta, 1993b).

"[R]educing one's desires," explains Harvey (2011:221) with regard to Buddhist economics, "makes it easier to achieve satisfaction." Certain ancient Greek philosophers seemed to concur.

[29] It would seem that Polish's reading of Ecclesiastes fails to give full significance to the ending of Ecclesiastes. The ending suggests that it is a meaningless life only if one lives without acknowledging God: "The end of the matter; all has been heard. Fear God and keep his commandments, for this is the whole duty of man" (Eccl. 12:13).

Thinkers like Pyrrho and Seneca sought a similar satisfaction in equanimity (*ataraxia*) by taming their passions (Dreyfus, 1995:36-37). It seems the Buddhists were not alone in pursuing peace of mind through preventing disappointment. Maybe the acceptance of ultimate purposelessness is preferable to its alternative of perennial disappointment. Now, the Christian will disagree that resigned purposelessness and reverberating disappointments are the only two alternatives, but, first, let us hear the Buddhist make a case for the inward advantages to her acceptance of ultimate purposelessness.

7.4 Emancipation of Emptiness

The point of this section is to let the Buddhist present Buddhism as a force that combats inward suffering. Rather than merely arguing, as the previous section suggested, that the acceptance of purposelessness is existentially more satisfying than recurrent disappointments, this section allows the Buddhist to make a positive case as to why Buddhism is not only less devastating than its alternatives, but actually combats inward suffering through cultivating a blissful inward experience.

Let us begin by letting Buddhism reply to the common indictment that Buddhism is nihilism. What is nihilism exactly? If nihilism means that nothing exists after death, then the Buddha has already anticipated that charge. "Annihilationism" was one of the views the Buddha listed as merely "the feeling of those who do not know and do not see; that is only the agitation and vacillation of those who are immersed in craving" (Brahmajala Sutta, 2010). That is, the Buddha remained intentionally silent when it came to metaphysical views (Fredericks, 1988:313), including this nihilistic view of nothing existing after death. Perhaps, however, nihilism were better defined instead as the absence of everything existing now. After all, some

Mahayana Buddhists (following Nagarjuna's Madhyamika version) hold that everything is empty of intrinsic existence (Williams et al., 2012:105). Yet even this intensification does not make Buddhism nihilistic, in the sense that nothing exists. As Thomas Reynolds (2002) points out, "there is neither a denial of continuity nor a denial of what might be called 'relative' empirical existence," but merely that "nothing exists as a self-sufficient and independent entity having its own-being or inherent nature." That is, everything exists relationally "within an interconnected cosmic nexus." Nagarjuna intentionally prevented this universal emptiness from being reified into a nihilistic metaphysical theory by insisting that he was claiming nothing and negating nothing (Williams, 2009:71).

But perhaps nihilism could be taken to mean there is no overarching purpose. In this case, would not Buddhism be considered nihilistic? Perhaps so, but we are about to meet many Buddhists who count purposelessness as something blissful, and so would only accept the designation *nihilism* if the word were to shed its unpleasant connotations. Before moving onto those Buddhists, however, let us consider a Christian perspective to have an opposite to contrast these attitudes with. In an essay called "Truth," George MacDonald (2006:17) suggests that we ought not to settle on determining an entity's physical components and then labeling those components as that entity's "truth." Truth is a higher matter than can be answered by asking questions of "What?" Instead, MacDonald reasons that we have only arrived at "the truth" of something when we can answer its "Why?" For example, we do not know the truth of water by discerning its composition of H_20, but only when we decipher water's *purpose*. Why was it created? MacDonald (2006:23) gives the illustration of a father giving his child a toy: "He allows his child to pull his toys to pieces, but were they made that he might pull them to pieces? He is not a child to be envied for whom his inglorious father would make toys for such an end!"

However, the Buddhists we will be looking at give the opposite answer as to what is something's truth. One only arrives at the truth of something when one atomizes its and deciphers its emptiness. There is no purpose, no hierarchy, no function, only emptiness. And that, according to these Buddhists, is what gives life its bliss.

Seeing "the glass as half-empty" is an idiom for pessimists. Yet the idiom does not hold with these Buddhists who see everything as empty and count themselves the utmost optimists. Buddhist emptiness (*sunyata*) has been called a "state of freedom from impediments and limitations," a "state of spontaneous receptivity" (Oldmeadow, 1997). Experiencing emptiness means "the present is lived fully, free from anxiety, selfish desire, and ignorance" with "nothing gained or lost, for one is awakened to everything just as it is" (Reynolds, 2002). Buddhist emptiness is not only "freedom from attachment" but also "freedom for creativity," like that of an artist (McDaniel, 1984:310). Buddhist awareness of the immediate "thusness" of all existence is a "nirvanic joy" akin to the "divine glory blazing out in the renewed creation" (O'Leary, 2002:173). Of course, one will recognize in these acclamations of emptiness the common Mahayana severing of the distinction between samsara and nirvana (Brown, 1999:173). And, thus, where one might be tempted to see such spontaneity as a celebration of apathy, one ought to be reminded that it is emptiness so understood that somehow enables the "great compassion" so prominent in Mahayana (Farley, 1999:297).

Such a paradox is difficult to picture. But for many, what initially appeared to be a lonely cave of emptiness can turn out to be a comfort, properly understood. Thomas Michael LeCarner (2009:403-414) notes that the disillusioned post-World War I generation saw in Buddhist emptiness a nihilism they dreaded like a nightmare they feared coming true. An exception to this attitude, according to LeCarner, was T.S. Eliot who had studied Buddhist texts in Sanskrit and

Pali and so understood Buddhist thought as he wrote *The Waste Land*. Eliot famously begins the poem with "April is the cruelest month," suggesting that, as the recurring season of spring illustrates, "thirst . . . leads to rebirth." But the apparent pessimism seems to fade by the end, where the king dies in tranquility, reciting the Sanskrit "*Shantih shantih shantih*," meaning "peace." LeCarner argues that "What Eliot discovered was that this 'nothingness' was in truth, everything from a Buddhist perspective," and that emptiness "was anything but nihilistic; it was the purpose behind everything."

Seen in such a way, emptiness becomes the solace in a world of chaos. Such a perspective is illustrated well by a traditional Buddhist story (as told by James Heisig, 1996:217-218). A man chased by elephants climbs a vine down into a well, only to notice mice chewing the vine from above, dragons breathing fire from the bottom, and venomous snakes slithering up toward him. He looks up and glimpses honey, just a few drops, on the vine. *What a delightful taste!* He indulges himself and forgets all about his situation. The implication, James Heisig concludes, is that "we, in the fullness of life, 'let go' of our attachment to ordinary ideas about life and death, that we surrender ourselves entirely to the moment."

We find much talk of this bliss of thusness from several of the scholars connected to Japan's Kyoto University. These bridge builders to western philosophy are often called the "Kyoto school." Keiji Nishitani, for example, taught that the zero of nothingness is a "boundless Infinite," which "permits truly new things to emerge" (Phillips, 1987:88-89). It is because there is no teleology in Buddhist emptiness that there are "no restrictions on future determinations." Thus, emptiness is a "grand life-affirmation" typified by Zen practices of spontaneous "play" and "just sitting" (Phillips, 1987:94). As Nishitani describes it, emptiness is like the 0 degree angle which is at the same time 360 degrees. Emptiness can even be described as the "womb of God"

(Russell, 2008:30). Likewise, Masao Abe (1994:7) acknowledges that *sunyata* can sound nihilistic, but that it is really a "fullness of particular things and individual persons functioning in their full capacity and without mutual impediment," including the impediment of "dependence on God." Instead of awaiting a future act of God, "Eternity manifests itself in the here and now" (Abe, 1994:12). As Cobb (2008:119) describes his friend Abe's view, eternity is "embodying the absolutely immediate, ever-changing reality that is experience now," a realization which "makes us wholly acceptant of whatever is." Steve Odin (1987:53) connected the Kyoto school to the death of God theologies (i.e. of Thomas Altizer) as both affirming the divine's total self-emptying into the "immediacy of the actual moment." As one scholar put it, it is like the "Incarnation without a stopper" (Odin, 1987:59).

It was this spontaneous bliss that attracted Merton to Suzuki's Zen even before their friendship began. According to Suzuki , "Paradise has never been lost and therefore is never regained" (Van Bragt, 1994:75). Suzuki saw the "poverty of spirit" of Jesus' beatitudes as analogous to Zen emptiness: "Nothing to gain, nothing to lose, nothing to give, nothing to take; to be just so, and yet to be rich in inexhaustible possibilities" (Pramuk, 2008:77). Merton would appropriate this thinking for himself: "It is simply opening yourself to receive" (Pramuk, 2008:80). Rather than trying to concentrate on God's presence, you, as when experiencing fresh air and sunlight, "just enjoy it. It is all around." In the end, says Merton, "The rock, all matter, all life, is charged with *dharmakaya* . . . everything is emptiness and everything is compassion." This ubiquity freed Merton to experience what he called the "beautiful purposelessness" (Burton-Christie, 2012:286) of our original innocence, or "child mind" (Burton-Christie, 2012:299). This "mental vacuity" (Doud, 1994:255) filled Merton with what he called "contemplative liberty" (Doud, 1994:263).

Thus, the longer Merton would play at this "deliberate irrelevance" (Lane, 1989:266), the more unconventional he would become, for example, getting told at one point by his superiors to stop practicing yoga in the monastery after he and a fellow monk were discovered meditating while standing on their heads (Lane, 1989:261). One is reminded of the third of Nietzsche's metamorphoses in *Thus Spake Zarathustra* (1982:27). Spirit becomes burdened camel, camel becomes defiant lion, and once the lion has shaken off all external constraints, he becomes a child: "The child is innocence and forgetting, a new beginning, a game, a self-propelled wheel, a first movement, a sacred 'Yes.'" Likewise, the burdens of age are dropped and the pressures of purpose released as the Buddhist defies the cycle and journeys backward to the bliss of an inexhaustible childhood.

7.5 Risk of Restoration

The Christian is not counseled to set out after an experience of inward bliss. Rather, the Christian is concerned with relating properly to God (Deut. 4:29; Acts 17:27). It is in the context of this paramount endeavor that we can begin to talk about the blissful inward effects that this relationship has on the Christian. So let us describe the basics of this all-important relationship before going on to describe the resulting inward delight. We are told the reconciliation was initiated by God, who "shows his love for us in that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us" (Rom. 5:8). God's goal was that people be restored to their intended relationship with him (II Cor. 5:18). This restoration is offered freely to humanity by God; they are able to receive this gift through faith in Christ (Eph. 2:8-9). The process of restoration continues to depend on God's grace and the believer's faith. This process continues in three stages, helpfully categorized as follows: Christians are 1) justified—saved from the penalty of sin (at one's placing faith in

Christ) (Geisler, 2004:235); 2) sanctified—saved from the power of sin (a process throughout the Christian's life) (Geisler, 2004:237); and 3) glorified—saved from the presence of sin (complete restoration in heaven) (Geisler, 2004:241).

Now that the process of restoration has been described, let us now ask how this restoration combats inward suffering. How does inward delight logically result from such a process? Let us divide the inward effects into two parts which we will describe below: first, discovering God's presence and, second, discovering one's purpose. This could be called "seeing God's glory" and "reflecting God's glory." Since, unlike Buddhism, Christianity offers zero warnings against emotional attachments when it comes to God, we will offer no qualifications in labeling the resulting inward posture "joy." It should be noted that truncated Christianity—for example, when someone places faith in Christ to be saved from the penalty of her sins (justification) and yet does not continue to trust in Christ to be saved from the power of those sins (sanctification)—will not naturally result in the kind of joy we will be describing below.

Before we discuss the joy of seeing God's glory, let us consider its Buddhist antithesis. One of the three sections of Buddhism's canonical Tripitaka is called the *Abhidharma*, named after the early Buddhist philosophical endeavor of breaking everything down into its conditional components to discover the elements of reality. The Buddhist mentally reduces typical objects of clinging to their bare components and is thus aided in letting go of any clinging (Williams, 2009:67). In this way, objects grow smaller in size and significance, and in so doing draw attention away from anything worth attaching to. The intended effect is for the Buddhist to remark, "Why, all along, this was only . . . ." Thus, the Buddhist solution to Eve's dilemma as she stares at the fruit in the Garden of Eden would have been, "Stop craving so passionately." In Buddhist terms, the "fall" comes from craving (Lai, 1991:576).

This is precisely the opposite path taken by Christians. Eve is not advised to stop craving, but to stop craving so anemically. She could have God, while she is lusting after a fruit! Creation in its conditionality was not meant to confirm existence's ultimate futility, but to excite a hunger for an actually existing ultimate satisfaction. After Jesus fed the crowd the evening before, the people woke hungry and began searching for Jesus. When they found him, he told them, "Do not work for the food that perishes, but for the food that endures to eternal life . . . . I am the bread of life" (John 6:27, 35). Hunger reminds us of the more important need for the eternal. Bits of creation point us ever higher. C.S. Lewis (2004b:10) kept experiencing these hints of what he called "joy": "It was a sensation, of course, of desire, but desire for what?" The atheist grew continually less able to intellectually keep God out, as he let into his philosophy an Absolute, then "Spirit," (Lewis, 2004b:129), until finally, Lewis describes, "As the dry bones shook and came together in that dreadful valley of Ezekiel's so now a philosophical theorem, cerebrally entertained, began to stir and heave and throw off its grave-clothes, and stood upright and became a living presence" (Lewis, 2004b:124). The hints traced to God.

And in God's presence is "fullness of joy" (Ps. 16:11). He is to be thirsted after (Ps. 63:1), tasted of (Ps. 34:8), and delighted in (Ps. 37:4). A.W. Tozer (2007:19) said that "in Him we shall find that for which we have all our lives been secretly longing." Ravi Zacharias (2003:166) writes, "He is the one who lifts my sights and my heart through the wonders that are all around to the greatest wonder of all—Himself." John Piper (2003:20) explains, "Our mistake lies not in the intensity of our desire for happiness, but in the weakness of it." However, supposing we allow our desires to be inflated to such an extent, what happens when they burst? The question virtually assumes inevitable disappointment, but let us recall that we are referring to the infinite God. Williams (2002:79) observes,

> God is the one who is really desired in all our desires, for if we desire good, beauty, love, and so on, then it seems arguable that there would be no limit to how much of these we would (or should) desire, given the option. Thus we all really desire the perfection of good, the perfection of beauty, the perfection of love. That is God. It follows, thus, that a strong desire for God is, from the Christian perspective, in itself totally appropriate, if it is truly a craving for God and not something thought to be God.

As Piper (2003:28) puts it, "The deepest and most enduring happiness is found only in God. Not from God, but in God." As Augustine (1993:1) famously prayed, "[Y]ou made us for yourself and our hearts find no peace until they rest in you." After he found God, Lewis (2001b:26) remarked,

> Indeed, if we consider the unblushing promises of reward and the staggering nature of the rewards promised in the Gospels, it would seem that Our Lord finds our desires not too strong, but too weak. We are half-hearted creatures, fooling about with drink and sex and ambition when infinite joy is offered us, like an ignorant child who wants to go on making mud pies in a slum because he cannot imagine what is meant by the offer of a holiday at the sea. We are far too easily pleased.

But the joy of God's presence is no ascent to a peak from which earth grows dimly inconsequential. Christians return with purpose. Futility is swallowed up in the joy of significance. In his dissertation on Paul's use of "glory" (*doxa*) in the book of Romans, Donald Berry (2014:62-66) shows just how integral human purposefulness is to redemptive history. Though intended to be God's image-bearers (Gen. 1:26), humanity "exchanged the glory of the immortal God for images resembling mortal man and birds and animals and creeping things" (Rom. 1:23). Predictably, they became like that which they chose to worship; they, like everything they severed from its intention, became purposeless. As Tozer (2007:21) puts it, "But sin has introduced complications and has made those very gifts of God a potential source of ruin to the soul."

Yet, God had not forgotten the purpose for which he had created his "vicegerents." As Berry (2014:279-280) puts it, "What God is by nature he determined to display on the canvas of

creation. Human beings, made in the image of God, are the Artist's brush, designed to paint his glory across the globe." Those restored from the futility of sin to the glory of God's original intention will find themselves being used to restore the rest of creation out of its futility: "For the creation was subjected to futility, not willingly, but because of him who subjected it, in hope that the creation itself will be set free from its bondage to corruption and obtain the freedom of the glory of the children of God" (Rom. 8:20-21). Of course, in keeping with our threefold categorization of salvation above, full glorification awaits heaven. Yet, even here and now, the Christian is a new self, with this self continually "being renewed in knowledge after the image of its Creator" (Col. 3:10).

In short, there is joy in saying, "Holy is the Lord God Almighty" (Rev. 4:8) and in hearing, "Well done, good and faithful servant" (Matt. 25:21). There is delight in seeing and in reflecting God's glory. There is joy in experiencing the presence of God and fulfilling the purpose of God. But this joy has its skeptics. Let us consider two challenges to Christian joy.

7.5.1 Too good to be true

This critique can be found in the beginnings of Christianity. The rumors had gotten out that Jesus had been calling himself a king (John 18:33). But a king is easy to spot. The king wears the robe and crown. The king receives shouts of praise. He holds the scepter. When the king enters, everyone bows down. And everywhere the king rules, you find all sorts of inscriptions—on coins, statues, walls. Jesus made himself conspicuous by claiming to have a kingdom, so "sympathizers" obliged him: "And they clothed him in a purple cloak, and twisting together a crown of thorns, they put it on him" (Mark 15:17) so he would have a robe and crown. "And they began to salute him, "Hail, King of the Jews!" (Mark 15:18) so he would have shouts

of praise. So that he would have his scepter and people bowing, "they were striking his head with a reed and spitting on him and kneeling down in homage to him" (Mark 15:19). They even made sure he had his own inscription: "And the inscription of the charge against him read, 'The King of the Jews'" (Mark 15:26). This set of actions plus the laughter at the scene of crucifixion equals mockery. They gave Jesus a robe only to remove it from him, a crown only to cut into him, praises only to provoke him, a scepter only to strike him, bows only to blaspheme him, and an inscription only to insult him.

Why mock Jesus? The point of mockery is to bring somebody down to size, to make somebody think twice before sticking his neck out so far. Messiahs had come before, and their boasts had turned out empty. Examples abound for the cynic of any age. In Buddhist terminology, it all turns out empty. Trust empties into regret. Dreams empty into disappointment. Life empties into death. As Buddhists have resigned themselves to for centuries, everything in life seems to turn out empty. Yet there has been one clue, even in emptiness, that has reversed the process for the followers of Jesus, so that sorrow has ended in joy. They found a tomb empty. Is the Christian claim of eternal life and endless joy for those who love God too good to be true? It all hinges on whether or not Jesus rose from the dead.

7.5.2 Too true to be good

Let us recall Merton's term of "beautiful purposelessness" (Burton-Christie, 2012:286). How could purpose be something whose absence causes enjoyment? When challenged to read through J.R.R. Tolkien's *The Lord of the Rings* trilogy to see what Buddhism could be found in it, Paul Andrew Powell (2011:32-36) was anticipating fruitlessness until he stumbled upon the character of Sauron's Eye. This "single, lidless eye perched smugly atop a vertical monolith"

could stand, he thought, for the "pronoun I," from which Buddhism promises liberation. The Eye's "vengeance and possessiveness" also reminded Powell of another character in literature, namely the "jealous God" of the Bible. To the Buddhist, such a God is guilty, with all his "repayment and retribution," of "robbing life of its naturalness." Freed from the tyranny of the I/Eye, Earth's/Middle Earth's occupants find themselves liberated to be as "humble," "playful," and "spontaneous" as the hobbits. Without an overlord, humanity gains "the fundamental freedom to live." Similarly, John Keenan (2010:19) praises Buddhism's "lack of a restricting meta-narrative" as something that "frees us to be open to the world about us."

Just which aspects of God's purposes are so restricting? Front and center is his insistence on obedience, which Powell interprets as the squashing thumbprint of a "jealous and wrathful king seeking to bind and control" (Powell, 2011:37). The Christian responds, however, that an evil humanity needs to learn obedience. Well then, answers the Buddhist, why did he not create them properly in the first place? Buddhism is often presented as able to sidestep the problem-of-evil debates, realistically explaining evil without resorting to "simplistic theodicies" (Holsten, 1959:413). So when the Christian retorts with the typical theodicy language along the line of, "he gave them free will to choose good or evil," the Buddhist sees such a response as too simplistic and wants to know why God cannot fix them nowadays. Well, says the Christian, he does work to combat humans' evil, but with, not against, their will. But, asks the Buddhist, why not just do it? If he is God, there should not be all these painful in-between attempts to bind and control. Suppose, as the Christian believes, God can make things right; well then, why not just do it?

Let us return to the mockery Jesus heard on the cross, and we will see that such thinking has been around for millennia. Mark 15:29-32 says,

> And those who passed by derided him, wagging their heads and saying, "Aha! You who would destroy the temple and rebuild it in three days, save yourself, and come down from

> the cross!" So also the chief priests with the scribes mocked him to one another, saying, "He saved others; he cannot save himself. Let the Christ, the King of Israel, come down now from the cross that we may see and believe." Those who were crucified with him also reviled him.

In one way or another, they were all saying that Jesus ought to just do it. If he is going to tear down the temple and rebuild it, then he should do it. If he is going to save people, then he should do it. If he is a king, he should rule. If he is a savior, he should come down from the cross and start saving. Why go through such painful in-betweens that permit (through freedom) so much suffering and yet demand (through everything from commandments to the cross) so much difficulty to make things right?

While many debate whether there is a purpose of suffering, what should be undisputed is that there is suffering bound up in purposefulness, what we might call a "suffering of purpose." Anytime there is a purpose, it means that something is intended that is not yet the current state of things. So when God purposes something, there are inevitable risks if it involves creatures with any measure of freedom. Risks follow because such creatures can always attempt to replace, realign, or reject whatever those purposes are. At the cross some people came to believe (Matt. 27:54), but others got worse (Mark 15:13). After all, Jesus was "appointed for the fall and rising of many" (Luke 2:34). So why, instead of purposing with semi-free creatures, did not God just do his will outright, so that there would be no millennia of in-between distress? If there was to be an interim period between creation and redemption, at least God's purpose could have been Buddhicized so that there were many rebirths to get things right (karmic rebirth), eventual salvation for all (bodhisattva vow), and universal personal "goodness" (*dharmakaya*).

In defense of God's controversial purposefulness, it must be said that God was not restoring (to use a Buddhist emblem) chariots or any other physical object. Psalm 23:3 says, "He restores my soul" and adds, "He leads me in paths of righteousness for his name's sake." Insofar

as the soul[30] alone out of God's earthly creation has a measure of freedom, then the soul is the only thing on the planet that cannot be restored against its will. For, if the soul were "restored" against its will, then the soul would not really have been restored—overridden perhaps, but not *restored*. Put another way, if God can say the word and whatever he wills be done, why the agony of the cross? The mockers believed him to be making too much of himself, but if the Son of God had intended to make much of himself, there certainly would not have been any mocking. The reason there was mocking is not that Jesus was making too much of himself, but that he was making too much of human souls. He could have forced himself upon humans in any manner of ways, but he wanted to truly change people. And what is able to change a person into a new creation when the person has a measure of freedom? I John 4:19 says, "We love because he first loved us." There is an accomplishment even more godlike than the miracle the crowds were asking for, and this is God's ability to actually change the soul. Miracles kept the curious crowds and argumentative authorities asking for more (John 6:30; Matthew 12:38), but the divine kindness displayed on the cross can actually provoke repentance (Rom. 2:4). The cross can change even calloused souls (Mark 15:39).

That is, the Christian response to any vexation at the flux of an earth caught somewhere between heaven and hell is that God makes much of humans. And to wish it not to be the case is to wish for less love, not more. For, according to Christianity, it is love that gave humans a measure of freedom and love that seeks to make them right again. One can take the side of Fyodor Dostoevsky's (2007:279) Grand Inquisitor who rebukes Jesus: "Instead of taking possession of men's freedom, You didst increase it, and burdened the spiritual kingdom of

[30] "Soul" here is taken in the same generic sense as it is used in ch. 3 as a generic designation for the human "inner (immaterial) dimension" (Geisler, 2004:46).

mankind with its sufferings for ever." But the Inquisitor was interested in effectiveness, not affection. The risk of restoration is understandable insofar as persons are precious to God.

7.6 The Combatting of Suffering

So, on the one hand, we find a religion with no overarching purpose, but which seems nonetheless content in its blissful thusness. On the other hand, we find a religion saturated with purpose, so much that it feels stifling to those unsure of the goodness of an in-control God. As we have done in previous chapters, we now arrive at the question of how these varying positions relate to combatting this-worldly suffering.

The backdrop to this discussion, as in the previous chapters, is that interfaith scholars propose Buddhicizing Christianity as part of their hope for less suffering and a better world. Relevant to this chapter is the distaste these scholars have for what they see as the rigid purposes of Christianity which they believe ought to be Buddhicized. For example, the purpose toward which Christianity sees history as moving needs to be interpreted "iconically." We are reminded of Paul Griffith's (2000:19) argument that any substantial statements about the afterlife are always "idolatrous." In this way, Griffiths subtly takes a major step in expunging Christian history of an overarching purpose. As for this world, explains Bonnie Thurston (1999:124), Buddhism can teach us not to put so much intensity into purposive action, for Buddhist "sitting" provides a "wonderful corrective to the Christian compulsion to 'do.'" Something like the Buddhist bliss of thusness seems to be how Rita Gross (2005b:17) views the interfaith endeavor in general once the religious claims are relativized:

> What a relief not to worry any more about determining whether or not your religion says the same thing as mine, only in different language! What a relief not to have to try to disprove your religion and demonstrate that mine makes more sense! What a relief to simply enjoy the variety and profundity of the world's religious symbol systems.

Let us now return to the two questions framed in the introduction: will Buddhicizing Christian purpose as these scholars suggest end up combatting this-worldly suffering, either inwardly or physically?

7.6.1 The inward effects of Buddhicizing Christian purpose

If purpose makes suffering bearable, then Christianity makes suffering bearable. Consider the following purposes of suffering, according to Christianity: Suffering makes

Table 7-1: Purposes of suffering according to Christianity

Evil our enemy	Suffering helps us hate evil because we see its consequences.	"Whoever desires to love life and see good days . . . let him turn away from evil and do good; let him seek peace and pursue it" – I Peter 3:10-11
Goodness our gift	Suffering helps us appreciate the good we have been given.	"I will turn their mourning into joy; I will comfort them, and give them gladness for sorrow" – Jer. 31:13
Consequences our coach	Suffering helps us learn from our sins.	"For when I kept silent, my bones wasted away through my groaning all day long. . . . I acknowledged my sin to you" – Ps. 32:3, 5
Righteousness our result	Suffering helps us cultivate endurance and character.	"[W]e rejoice in our sufferings knowing that suffering produces endurance, and endurance produces character" – Rom. 5:3-4
Time our trial	Suffering helps us see urgency in getting right with God.	"[T]he Lord will bring upon you all the evil things . . . if you transgress the covenant of the Lord your God, which he commanded you" – Josh. 23:15-16
Trivialities our trash	Suffering helps us perceive what is truly important.	"[T]he cares of the world and the deceitfulness of riches and the desires for other things enter in and choke the word, and it proves unfruitful" – Mark 4:19
Outrage our oversimplification	Suffering helps us self-examine rather than having the kneejerk reaction to blame God.	"For the wrath of God is revealed from heaven against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men, who by their unrighteousness suppress the truth" – Rom. 1:18
Submission our salvation	Suffering helps us look up to God.	"Then they cried to the Lord in their trouble, and he delivered them from their distress" – Ps. 107:6

Self-sufficiency our sham	Suffering helps us admit our weaknesses.	"[T]he affliction we experienced . . . was to make us rely not on ourselves but on God" – II Cor. 1:8-9
God our glory	Suffering helps us prioritize God's glory over our own agenda	"I want you to know, brothers, that what has happened to me [my imprisonment] has really served to advance the gospel" – Phil. 1:12
Christ our companion	Sufferings helps us identify with Christ.	"For to this you have been called, because Christ also suffered for you, leaving you an example, so that you might follow in his steps" – I Peter 2:21
Compassion our contribution	Suffering helps us notice those suffering similarly and gives us resources to show them compassion.	"God . . . comforts us in all our affliction, so that we may be able to comfort those who are in any affliction, with the comfort with which we ourselves are comforted by God" – II Cor. 3-4
Affliction our alarm	Suffering helps us wake up to the reality we have been avoiding.	"But when he came to himself, he said, 'How many of my father's hired servants have more than enough bread, but I perish here with hunger! I will arise and go to my father, and I will say to him, 'Father, I have sinned against heaven and before you'" – Luke 15:17-18
Heaven our hope	Suffering helps us long for heaven where suffering will be no more.	"He will wipe away every tear from their eyes, and death shall be no more, neither shall there be mourning, nor crying, nor pain anymore, for the former things have passed away" – Rev. 21:4
Us his workmanship	Suffering helps us realize that we are God's workmanship, not kings of our own kingdoms.	"For we are his workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand, that we should walk in them" – Eph. 2:10

When people suffer, Buddhism offers tranquility. Negatively speaking, the Buddhist can quell suffering through quieting the passions (Iti 90, 2001). Positively speaking, the Buddhist can put suffering out of mind by enjoying the bliss of thusness. Yet there is no ultimate purpose to any suffering. Now, Buddhists have compiled their own lists of uses that suffering can have. Even though suffering is fundamentally "the problem, the enemy" of Buddhism (Cozort, 2013:358, 360), Buddhists like Santideva have acknowledged the humility, endurance, compassion, and impetus to seek nirvana that can arise from suffering. That is, suffering can

actually be seen to be conducive to the path of eventually escaping suffering. But, of course, such "purposes" are not ultimate but are imported as practical. As such, these "purposes" would be able to counter suffering existentially to an extent.

To *what* extent becomes an impossible question to answer here, however, because only the experiencer could say at which point something becomes existentially blissful. But the question we are asking is perhaps a bit more answerable: whether Buddhicizing Christian purpose would logically combat inward suffering better than leaving Christianity in tact. Insofar as suffering void of any meaning is tragic (Suzuki, 1983:5), and insofar as Christianity infuses suffering with ultimate purposes that Buddhism cannot offer, it would seem the answer is no. Again, in the end, it would be up to the experiencer to give her specific answer, since these are questions about inward experience. But if the desired result is less suffering, one should not Buddhicize away such robust ultimate purposes as Christianity offers to sufferers.

7.6.2 The physical effects of Buddhicizing Christian purpose

Inward suffering aside, would Buddhicizing Christian purpose end up better combatting *physical* suffering? The direction would be away from intensity of purpose and toward the inward bliss of uncritically savoring the moment, as we have seen described in this chapter. Yet, some scholars question whether there even has to be a choice between Buddhist and Christian approaches, for they see the two as very reconcilable as it relates to purpose. Reynolds (2002) explains, "the salvific return to right-relatedness with God and creation in Christianity and the return to right-relatedness with the nature of cosmos in Buddhism produce kindred postures toward others and the world." Douglas Burton-Christie (2012:294) actually sees what he calls the "purposeless life" as basically the goal of not only Buddhism but also Christianity, insofar as

Christianity envisions God as "all in all," with the "whole world . . . risen in Christ" (Burton-Christie, 2012:281). Burton-Christie explains that Adam and Eve were the original practitioners of the "purposeless life," and that return is simple: "All we have to do to encounter it, to feel the heavenliness of things, is to open our eyes or ears," and thus experience that "nothing is any more separated from God" (Burton-Christie, 2012:302-303).

So, in the end, what is the difference between a Buddhist Eden and a Christian Eden? The Buddhist Eden is a "grand life-affirmation" through spontaneous "play" and "just sitting" (Phillips, 1987:97). It enjoys the now, becoming "wholly acceptant of whatever is" (Cobb, 2008:119). If so, then, as Stephen Phillips (1987:94-95) asks: "Does *sunyata* affirm all desires and goals equally, the murderer's and extortioner's as well as the Zen seeker's?" "Are we to play and just sit while people are oppressed and nations with unenlightened leaders move closer to nuclear war? Are we to 'just sit' while people in Africa, or anywhere, starve?" It is possible that the bliss of thusness would existentially outweigh the angst of knowing that one is accepting and not actively trying to transform an evil world. But is it right that such bliss would do so? Would the interfaith scholar with an eye toward a better world think this a good thing? The Christian Eden, however, is not an inward experience of meditative bliss, but a restored reality already in the works: "And he who was seated on the throne said, 'Behold, I am making all things new'" (Rev. 21:5a). Here, the revelator speaks of a "final renewing at the End" already begun by a God who "continually makes things new here and now" (Morris, 1987:234). God is not presented as savoring the present fallenness but of continually restoring creation to his original intention, especially humans to their intended glory (Rom. 8:18). So, what is the difference between a Buddhist and a Christian Eden? The difference is the word *change*. So, no, Buddhicizing Christian purpose would not better combat physical suffering.

7.7 Conclusion

Buddhism offers tranquil, even blissful, purposelessness, while Christianity offers ultimate purpose. Buddhists reason that acceptance of purposelessness is existentially preferable to getting continually disappointed by the popping of inflated desires. Perhaps so, but Christianity offers ultimate purpose grounded in a trustworthy God. Were the interfaith scholar to Buddhicize Christianity as regards its ultimate purpose, this would diminish Christianity's power of infusing suffering with meaning. Thus, there would be a blow to Christianity's ability to combat inward suffering, with Buddhism not able to offer a comparably robust meaningfulness for sufferers. Moreover, a Buddhicized Christian purpose would tend the same weakened direction when it comes to physical suffering. For an acceptance of thusness may bring one inward bliss, but it will not contribute to changing the world for the better like the Christian's restorative purposes grounded in a God at work making all things new. So, yet again, we have another reason that Buddhicizing Christianity would be an unwise idea for those who care about making a better world with less suffering.

Chapter 8

Conclusion

8.1 Introduction

The overarching goal of many Buddhist-Christian interfaith scholars is to contribute to a better world with less suffering. Their proposed means to bring about this result is to "Buddhicize" Christianity. Our fundamental question is whether or not Buddhicizing Christianity can reasonably be expected to aid them in attaining their goal. It is now time to give an answer. We intend to contrast Buddhist compassion with Christian love (Chapter 3, Section 3.1) and to determine, without abandoning logical thinking, which one offers greater potency in helping these interfaith scholars achieve success. Chapters 3-7 gave us the content that will make informed definitions of Buddhist compassion and Christian love possible. In those chapters, we examined the Buddhist and Christian responses to suffering with regard to five crucial areas, namely, their viewpoints on ultimate reality, ultimate attachments, ultimate aversions, ultimate example, and ultimate purpose. In this chapter, after briefly reviewing these contrasts, we will suggest formal definitions for Buddhist compassion and Christian love. Once we have done so, we will be in a position to provide a direct answer to the question: "Given the rationale of these interfaith scholars, is the attempt to Buddhicize Christianity compatible with sound thinking?"

8.2 Review

Let us briefly review chapters 3-7. As we saw in chapter 3, Buddhism struggles to ground love of neighbor ontologically, whether by the ontological givens of dependent co-arising or nirvana. Not only is this struggle apparent when it comes to the question of whether we *should*

love our neighbors, but even whether we *can* do so, in the sense of possessing the moral responsibility necessary for voluntary love. In contrast, Christianity is able to argue robustly from the objective obligation to love one's neighbor to the existence of the theistic God, and likewise from the fact of human free will to God's existence. How much more naturally, therefore, does love of neighbor and moral freedom find a home given Christian ontology! The interfaith scholar who would Buddhicize Christianity's ultimate reality to something less ultimate would no longer enjoy the ontological grounding that makes love of neighbor possible, let alone binding.

Chapter 4 described the Buddhist and Christian responses to suffering when it comes to attachments. Both religions agree that material cravings are ultimately unsatisfying and improper as the objects of strong desire. However, Buddhism advises its adherents to loosen attachments to even those things that Christianity considers eternal and worthy of attachment. For example, Buddhism asks us to let go of rigid attachments to persons, truth and goodness. Meanwhile, Christians are to cling to God, and as a result of loving God, they are to love people, hunger and thirst for the good, and rejoice in the truth. Thus, on the one hand, when it comes to Buddhist benevolence, not only is the goal an eventual detachment from the concept of personhood, but emotional detachment from the person one is helping is at the very core of benevolence itself. Christians, on the other hand, are motivated by attachment to the person's restoration according to the good and the true. Insofar as Christianity's attachments to persons, truth, and goodness—in short, to God's restorative plan for creation—contribute to a better world with less suffering, then the interfaith scholar who would Buddhicize Christianity's ultimate attachments would cause a restorative endeavor to be eclipsed by an ethic of escape.

The contrast of chapter 5 dealt with aversions. Both religions warn against human anger and wrath because both religions recognize the destructiveness anger and wrath can cause. However, they differ sharply when it comes to the underlying aversion to and grief over sin. Buddhists cultivate equanimity toward the sin, reasoning that the problem is not actually the person's fault and, furthermore, that the problem is not really a problem. According to Buddhism, a sin can be seen as just an appendage, a moment, ignorance, a lack, a product of one's own karma, the actions of one's mother in a previous life, one's opportunity, its own opposite, only a surface phenomenon, or only problematic insofar as it provokes anger. Christianity, however, insists that if sin is "just" anything, it is just plain wrong. Christians are to cultivate an aversion to sin because, without such aversion, the Christian cannot truly help along the sinner's restoration. Christians are to love people enough that they hate the sin which destroys them. In hating evil and restoring people, Christianity overpowers immense worldly suffering. That is to say, the evils and resultant suffering that Buddhism responds to with passive positivity are singled out as the targets of Christian aversion. Thus, the interfaith scholar who would Buddhicize Christianity's ultimate aversions would be working against her own stated aversion to this-worldly suffering.

In chapter 6, we contrasted Gautama and Jesus as examples of combatting suffering. Gautama taught how to exit history, while Jesus exemplified how to change history. Gautama accepted suffering with equanimity, while Jesus grieved it as an unwelcome enemy. Gautama withdrew as a detached teacher, while Jesus drew near as an engaged friend. Gautama diagnosed our fundamental problem as ignorance, while Jesus diagnosed it more deeply as willful sin. Gautama taught a path of skill that leads to equanimity, while Jesus taught a path of yearning that leads to unspeakable joy. Gautama taught from cultivated insights, while Jesus commanded from

absolute authority. Gautama released his disciples from suffering's disturbance, while Jesus restored his disciples through suffering's reversal. Gautama's agenda was to minister peacefully until nirvana at an old age, while Jesus' was to minister purposefully toward execution at a young age. Gautama exemplified a tranquil death, while Jesus exemplified the ultimate sacrifice. Gautama entered nirvana, while Jesus rose from the dead and continues to intercede on behalf of people. At each juncture, Jesus offered more to actually fight against suffering than did Gautama. Incredibly, the interfaith scholar who would Buddhicize Christianity's ultimate example would mar the portrait of the paradigm who exemplifies the very qualities the interfaith scholar wants to emulate.

Chapter 7 examined the Buddhist emphasis on "thusness" and the Christian emphasis on purposefulness. We asked how effectively these emphases overcome one's inward suffering. Moreover, we asked how these emphases, once internalized, influence one's motivation to oppose outward suffering. True, there is pain in purposelessness. And insofar as Buddhism removes an overarching sense of purposefulness, inward pain should logically result. However, reflection would lead many people to argue that, as painful as a sense of purposelessness is, the disappointment of thwarted purposes is even more devastating, and it is this devastation that Buddhism seeks to combat. In fact, Buddhists have noted just how emancipating it can be to simply view all of life as empty of intrinsic existence. One can "just sit" and accept reality as it comes with "beautiful purposelessness." Christianity responds, however, that the Christian never need fear the devastation of disappointment. For the Christian finds herself being restored to a glorious purposefulness that, far from being thwarted by the way things really are, is instead precisely as God intended reality to be. And this purposefulness not only makes suffering bearable inwardly, but it motives one to fight against suffering outwardly as well. Insofar as the

interfaith scholar would Buddhicize Christianity's ultimate purpose, the robust purposefulness that gives one's life meaning and motivation would erode into a purposelessness which, however emancipating, leaves one comparatively impotent in the face of this-worldly suffering.

8.3 Definitions

As already mentioned (Chapter 3, Section 3.1), we will call Buddhism's response to suffering "Buddhist compassion" and Christianity's response "Christian love." In light of the five areas of contrast just reviewed, we now arrive at our definitions of Buddhist compassion and Christian love. First, Buddhist compassion can be defined as

> the endeavor to follow the Buddha's example of rescuing sufferers from the seduction of an enduring reality and the disappointment of frustrated purposefulness while remaining unattached to their selves and untroubled by their sins.

On the other hand, we will define Christian love as

> the endeavor to participate in Jesus' project of restoring sinners to their ultimate purpose in light of God's ultimate reality, motivated by attachment to their ultimate well-being and thus by grief over their sins.

Let us make two observations. First, clearly, Buddhist compassion and Christian love are not the same virtue. Rather than consolidating two religions that share the same central virtue, Buddhicizing Christianity would alter Christianity's central virtue into something altogether different (as would Christianizing Buddhism, though that is not the issue). Second, not only are Buddhist compassion and Christian love not the same virtue, but they are unequal in their approach to fight against this-worldly suffering. Buddhist compassion is not as concerned with restoring this-worldly existence to any high ideal so much as with diagnosing its illusoriness, accepting its purposelessness, and ultimately seeking to escape it. Christian love, established as it

is in the "ultimates" just discussed, is concerned with and effective at opposing—not merely accepting and escaping—suffering.

8.4 Buddhicizing and tranquilizing

Thus, we arrive at a contradiction. The Buddhist-Christian interfaith scholar has in mind to create a better world with less suffering. The means proposed is to Buddhicize Christianity. And yet, to Buddhicize Christianity would be to diminish Christianity's ultimate reference points that are fundamental to its capacity to oppose suffering. Christian love is grounded on ultimate reality. It is motivated by ultimate attachments. So that there is not the vacuous affirmation of any and all behavior, Christian love is concentrated by ultimate aversions, thereby preventing the chaos that results from the indiscriminate affirmation of any behavior as legitimate. In every way, it is patterned after the ultimate example. And, in the end, Christian love is vindicated by an ultimate purpose. In every contrast, Buddhism offers less potency in opposing suffering. Why would the interfaith scholar, who so desires to overcome this-worldly suffering, Buddhicize such points of strength out of Christianity? To Buddhicize Christianity's ultimacy is to tranquilize Christianity's efficacy.

It is tempting to truncate Jesus' message. John 5 provides examples. The chapter opens with Jesus healing a paralyzed man. Not only did the man have nothing to offer Jesus in return, but the man even inconvenienced Jesus by later revealing Jesus' identity to his persecutors (John 5:15-16). Here, Jesus demonstrated costly compassion, one of his trademark characteristics praised from all sections of the Buddhist-Christian continuum. However, not only was Jesus incredibly compassionate, but Jesus was also extraordinarily confrontational. After healing the man, Jesus found him later at the temple and said, "See, you are well! Sin no more, that nothing

worse may happen to you" (John 5:14). When you ask yourself what could possibly be worse than 38 years of paralysis, you may begin to entertain the notion that Jesus was threatening hell, a warning quite consistent with Jesus' teachings (Matthew 5:22, 29-30; 10:28; 23:33). So, Jesus not only comforts us with his *compassion*, but he also turns out to be uncomfortably *confrontational*.

The day was a Sabbath, on which no work was to be done. So Jesus, whose identity the formerly paralyzed man disclosed to the religious authorities, now had to defend himself against their charges that he had broken the Sabbath. What was Jesus to say that would get him out of trouble? He selected a defense that, while profound, would not actually get him out of trouble at all. His argument was that his Father kept working on the Sabbath (it is not as though God stops being God every Saturday), and so Jesus was simply doing what he has always seen his Father do. Jesus said, "Truly, truly, I say to you, the Son can do nothing of his own accord, but only what he sees the Father doing" (John 5:19). What Jesus demonstrates is an astounding acquiescence to the will of the Father. Like his compassion, Jesus' acquiescence is an admirable characteristic, one that would likely be praised by interfaith scholars. Yet, what does this acquiescence entail? Jesus then went on to list the kinds of duties he does that he has seen his Father doing:

> For as the Father raises the dead and gives them life, so also the Son gives life to whom he will. The Father judges no one, but has given all judgment to the Son, that all may honor the Son, just as they honor the Father. Whoever does not honor the Son does not honor the Father who sent him. Truly, truly, I say to you, whoever hears my word and believes him who sent me has eternal life. He does not come into judgment, but has passed from death into life (John 5:21-24).

That is, not only is Jesus commendably *acquiescent*, but he is remarkably and unfashionably *authoritative*. It is tempting, even imperative, for interfaith scholars to truncate Jesus' message to include the former but not the latter.

Moreover, Jesus is inviting. This acquiescent, compassionate benefactor invites all to be forgiven so they no longer cower under judgment (John 5:24). He offers life to the dead (John 5:25). All this comes at no cost to anyone other than himself, for he becomes the bearer of their grief (Isaiah 53:4) and the sacrifice for their sins (Isaiah 53:5-6). Prodigals need only turn toward home and will find themselves warmly wrapped in his joyful embrace (Luke 15:20). All that needs done has already been accomplished; just believe and receive (Eph. 2:8-9). He really is that inviting. And because he is so inviting, Jesus is warmly admired.

But again, Jesus seems to aim for something far deeper than public admiration, which he could so easily have had if he had only truncated his message. True, Jesus invites everyone to accept his offer, an altogether unimposing gesture when one can imagine God overriding human decisions with his own divine will. Yet, again, Jesus does not allow public opinion to rest at the perception of himself as only inviting. He is not only likably inviting but unmistakably intimidating. For, eventually, invitation ends, and judgment commences:

> For as the Father has life in himself, so he has granted the Son also to have life in himself. And he has given him authority to execute judgment, because he is the Son of Man. Do not marvel at this, for an hour is coming when all who are in the tombs will hear his voice and come out, those who have done good to the resurrection of life, and those who have done evil to the resurrection of judgment (John 5:26-29).

His public perception could have remained honorific in his time and in ours, for he presents himself as laudably *inviting*. Yet not having curtailed his reputation at that point, he invited persecution from the leaders of his day as well as truncation by scholars of our day by presenting himself as enormously *intimidating*.

Jesus claimed to have the authority to judge the living and the dead, and this assertion trumps any offense created by Sabbath breaking. Jesus' audience was truly shocked. So Jesus felt he ought to back up his claims with some evidence. One piece of evidence was something they

had seen, but had not accepted, the very miracles for which Jesus was being rebuked: "The works that the Father has given me to accomplish, the very works that I am doing, bear witness about me that the Father has sent me" (John 5:36). Another piece of evidence was something they had accepted, but had not truly *seen*: "You search the Scriptures because you think that in them you have eternal life; and it is they that bear witness about me, yet you refuse to come to me that you may have life" (5:39-40). In other words, Jesus was not only *evidenced* but also *evaded*. How could somebody be both? Jesus gave his explanation: "How can you believe, when you receive glory from one another and do not seek the glory that comes from the only God?" (John 5:44). According to Jesus, the apex of his accusers' value system was to follow each other's rules so as to win each other's stamp of approval. Obviously, Jesus did not care to follow their rules to win their stamp of approval. He said plainly, "I do not receive glory from people" (John 5:41).

In the spirit of human glory and by the authority of mainstream scholarship, Jesus' ultimacy is truncated as a matter of course. Evidence for his claims is regularly evaded on the principle of following each other's rules to win each other's stamp of academic credibility. Hermeneutics becomes handmaid to the Buddhist-Christian synthesis. Evangelism becomes a matter of converting the religion itself, not its adherents. Divine Son is truncated to extraordinary man, while heavenly Father becomes impersonal Spirit which in turn becomes interfaith matchmaker. Divine revelation might be noteworthy, but human glory is intoxicating. With the unabridged message evaded, the miniature model is unveiled to the sound of applause. Jesus the caricature—compassionate but never confrontational, acquiescent but never authoritative, inviting but never intimidating—is praised as the archetypal interfaith sage. He will abolish theological distinctions as trivial and inaugurate a new era of worldwide peace. The real Jesus is

pierced for our truncations; he is crushed for our efficacy. Yet, as we have seen, to truncate Jesus' ultimacy and the ultimacy of his message is ultimately to truncate Christianity's efficacy. Christians must not evade Jesus by diminishing his ultimacy even if human glory is at stake. Christian love in all its superlatives ought to be esteemed if for no other reason than that the better world the interfaith scholar so desires is also at stake.

8.5 Advice for apologetics to Buddhism

Reflecting on the points made in this thesis, let us close by considering three general pieces of advice for Christian apologists. First, be courageous. Apologists have for decades been formulating effective arguments toward Western secularism. The same cannot be said for apologetics to Eastern religions like Buddhism. There seem to be very many apologetics articles and books regarding atheism and even Islam, but very few regarding Buddhism. Thus, the appeal to and opportunity for some Christian apologists would be to consider doing research in different aspects of Eastern religions in general and Buddhism in particular. Secularism can weaken Christianity in a culture, and such weakening makes a culture thirsty for a new form of spirituality. An option such as Buddhism that can be made to appear both secular and spiritual at the same time becomes attractive. As Buddhism becomes more and more fascinating to the Western world, Christian apologists in the West ought to anticipate Buddhist infiltration and—all the while genuinely loving the Buddhists themselves—make ready a winsome defense of Christianity as it relates to their religion.

A couple areas of Buddhist study that Christian apologists might develop further ought to be mentioned. First, although Buddhist cosmogony defies neat categorization, Christian apologists ought to contrast the notion of theistic creation out of nothing with the best

explanations of the cosmos Buddhism has to offer. The point would be to contrast the religions' cosmogonies to consider which religion provides a more logically probable and scientifically intelligible explanation of the universe's existence. Since the temporality of the universe proves to be a strong piece of evidence for the existence of a theistic God (for an example, see Craig, 2008: 111-154), more work ought to be done to discern how Christian cosmological arguments can be effectively communicated to the Eastern mindset.

A second area deserves mention. There is a growing strand of Buddhism that markets itself primarily as a practical solution for here-and-now tranquility. With Mahayana roots in China and Taiwan, this "humanistic" or "Engaged" Buddhism branches out all over the world. Its practical message of meditative well-being and charitable coexistence makes humanistic Buddhism especially attractive for people in the West. Of course, mention was made in Chapter 2 (Section 2.3.4) of humanistic Buddhism and its appeal. Yet further research into this growing movement by Christian apologists is needed. It is one thing to ask, as this thesis has done, how Buddhism *logically* helps to alleviate this-worldly suffering. It is quite another when a strand of Buddhism distances itself from Buddhist beliefs whose implications devalue many this-worldly cares of the western world. More research into just how authentically humanistic Buddhism derives itself from Buddhist roots, as opposed to merely accommodating itself to Christianized peoples, would be fruitful, as Christians will no doubt have opportunities to cooperate with, as well as respond to, this movement.

Our second piece of advice to Christian apologists is to be honest. Evangelicals should resist the temptation to use sloppy generalities to describe Buddhism. Buddhism is incredibly complex and ought to be approached as such. Evangelicals need to be reminded of their Lord's command to treat others the way they would like to be treated. Christians know what it is like to

be sloppily mischaracterized (Matt. 5:11), and they should never treat anyone else with the same disregard. Treat Buddhists with respect by understanding their religion. Of course, to truly understand the Buddhist religion will mean to do the difficult work of studying the various branches and doctrines. The result will be an apologetic that goes beyond Evangelicals talking to themselves.

Finally, be faithful. Remember that the Christian faith has been revealed and not cleverly invented (Heb. 1:1-2; II Peter 1:16). Since Christianity has been revealed, it would be arrogant and foolish to change its essence to appease any temporal culture. Buddhicizing Christianity not only shows little regard for the practical results of such a counterproductive endeavor, but it also shows little regard for Jesus and his message. There is not only the better world to think about, but the next world to keep in mind as well. Christianity undiminished is the best for both worlds. Pluralism is undoubtedly fashionable and, for that matter, so is Buddhism. A pluralistic Christian-Buddhist synthesis might seem like skillful means for the flourishing of Christianity in a pluralistic culture, but fashion-fueled evangelism is gimmicky. Gimmicks are insulting and ultimately counterproductive. So, whether we consider the next world, this world, or this particular culture, it is best for everyone considered to let Christianity in all its ultimacy remain itself. As Paul, the apostle who went before us, let us consider it an accomplishment to have "kept the faith" (II Tim. 4:7).

Bibliography

1993a. Adittapariyaya Sutta: the fire sermon (SN 35.28) [Online]. Translated from the Pali by Thanissaro Bhikkhu. *Access to Insight*. Available: http://www.accesstoinsight.org/tipitaka/sn/sn35/sn35.028.than.html [Accessed 13 December 2014].

1993b. Dhammacakkappavattana Sutta: setting the wheel of dhamma in motion (SN 56.11) [Online]. Translated from the Pali by Thanissaro Bhikkhu. *Access to Insight*. Available: http://www.accesstoinsight.org/tipitaka/sn/sn56/sn56.011.than.html [Accessed 9 December 2014].

1994a. Maha-sihanada Sutta: the great discourse on the lion's roar (MN 12) [Online]. Translated from the Pali by Nanamoli Thera and Bhikkhu Bodhi. *Access to Insight*. Available: http://www.accesstoinsight.org/tipitaka/mn/mn.012.ntbb.html [Accessed 9 December 2014].

1994b. Sunita the outcaste (Thag 12.2) [Online]. Translated from the Pali by Thanissaro Bhikkhu. *Access to Insight*. Available: http://www.accesstoinsight.org/tipitaka/kn/thag/thag.12.02.than.html [Accessed 13 December 2014].

1997a. Ayacana Sutta: the request (SN 6.1) [Online]. Translated from the Pali by Thanissaro Bhikkhu. *Access to Insight*. Available: http://www.accesstoinsight.org/tipitaka/sn/sn06/sn06.001.than.html [Accessed 9 December 2014].

1997b. Maha-nidana Sutta: the great causes discourse (DN 15) [Online]. Translated from the Pali by Thanissaro Bhikkhu. *Access to Insight*. Available: http://www.accesstoinsight.org/tipitaka/dn/dn.15.0.than.html [Accessed 11 October 2014].

1997c. Pabbatopama Sutta: the simile of the mountains (SN 3.25) [Online]. Translated from the Pali by Thanissaro Bhikkhu. *Access to Insight*. Available: http://www.accesstoinsight.org/tipitaka/sn/sn03/sn03.025.than.html [Accessed 13 December 2014].

1997d. Samannaphala Sutta (DN 2) [Online]. Translated from the Pali by Thanissaro Bhikkhu. *Access to Insight*. Available: http://www.accesstoinsight.org/tipitaka/dn/dn.02.0.than.html [Accessed 15 October 2014].

1997e. Sukhamala Sutta: refinement (AN 3.38) [Online]. Translated from the Pali by Thanissaro Bhikkhu. *Access to Insight*. Available: http://www.accesstoinsight.org/tipitaka/an/an03/an03.038.than.html [Accessed 19 October 2014].

1998a. Chachakka Sutta: the six sextets (MN 148) [Online]. Translated from the Pali by Thanissaro Bhikkhu. *Access to Insight*. Available: http://www.accesstoinsight.org/tipitaka/mn/mn.148.than.html [Accessed 13 December 2014].

1998b. Cula-Malunkyovada Sutta: the shorter instructions to Malunkya (MN 63) [Online]. Translated from the Pali by Thanissaro Bhikkhu. *Access to Insight*. Available: http://www.accesstoinsight.org/tipitaka/mn/mn.063.than.html [Accessed 22 October 2014].

1998c. Gotami Sutta: Sister Gotami (SN 5.3) [Online]. Translated from the Pali by Thanissaro Bhikkhu. *Access to Insight*. Available: http://www.accesstoinsight.org/tipitaka/sn/sn05/sn05.003.than.html [Accessed 13 December 2014].

1998d. Jara Sutta: old age (SN 48.41) [Online]. Translated from the Pali by Thanissaro Bhikkhu. *Access to Insight*. Available:

http://www.accesstoinsight.org/tipitaka/sn/sn48/sn48.041.than.html [Accessed 13 December 2014].

1998e. Kisagotami Theri: the woman with the dead child (Thig 10) [Online]. Translated from the Pali by Hellmuth Hecker and Sister Khema. *Access to Insight*. Available: http://www.accesstoinsight.org/tipitaka/kn/thig/thig.10.01.hekh.html [Accessed 13 December 2014].

1998f. Lohicca Sutta (DN 12) [Online]. Translated from the Pali by Thanissaro Bhikkhu. *Access to Insight*. Available: http://www.accesstoinsight.org/tipitaka/dn/dn.12.0.than.html [Accessed 14 March 2015].

1998g. Maha-parinibbana Sutta: last days of the Buddha (DN 16) [Online]. Translated from the Pali by Sister Vajira & Francis Story. *Access to Insight*. Available: http://www.accesstoinsight.org/tipitaka/dn/dn.16.1-6.vaji.html [Accessed 10 October 2014].

1998h. Sources on the Buddha's life and death [Online]. Fordham University. Available: http://www.fordham.edu/halsall/india/buddha-life.asp [Accessed 27 September 2014].

2001. Befriending the Suttas: tips on reading the Pali discourses [Online]. *Access to Insight*. Available: http://www.accesstoinsight.org/befriending.html [Accessed 3 Aug. 2013].

2001. Itivuttaka: the group of threes [Online]. Translated from the Pali by Thanissaro Bhikkhu. *Access to Insight*. Available: http://www.accesstoinsight.org/tipitaka/kn/iti/iti.3.050-099.than.html#iti-090 [Accessed 13 December 2014].

2003a. Potthapada Sutta: about Potthapada (DN 9) [Online]. Translated from the Pali by Thanissaro Bhikkhu. *Access to Insight*. Available: http://www.accesstoinsight.org/tipitaka/dn/dn.09.0.than.html [Accessed 15 October 2014].

2003b. The three Pure Land Sutras: the larger sutra on Amitayus [Online]. Berkeley: Translated from the Chinese by Hisao Inagaki. *Numata Center for Buddhist Translation and Research*. Available: http://www.bdk.or.jp/pdf/bdk/digitaldl/dBET_ThreePureLandSutras_2003.pdf [Accessed 11 October 2014].

2004. Alagaddupama Sutta: the water-snake simile (MN 22) [Online]. Translated from the Pali by Thanissaro Bhikkhu. *Access to Insight*. Available: http://www.accesstoinsight.org/tipitaka/mn/mn.022.than.html [Accessed 22 October 2014].

2005. Saccavibhanga Sutta: an analysis of the truths (MN 141) [Online]. Translated from the Pali by Thanissaro Bhikkhu. *Access to Insight*. Available: http://www.accesstoinsight.org/tipitaka/mn/mn.141.than.html [Accessed 13 December 2014].

2006. Kisagotami Theri (Thig 10) [Online]. Translated from the Pali by Thanissaro Bhikkhu. *Access to Insight*. Available: http://www.accesstoinsight.org/tipitaka/kn/thig/thig.10.01.than.html [Accessed 13 December 2014].

2007. The Lotus Sutra [Online]. Translated from the Chinese of Kumarajiva by Tsugunari Kubo and Akira Yuyama. Berkeley. *Numata Center for Buddhist Translation and Research*. Available: http://www.bdk.or.jp/pdf/bdk/digitaldl/dBET_T0262_LotusSutra_2007.pdf [Accessed 21 October 2014].

2008a. The Kutadanta Sutta: on true sacrifice [Online]. Translated by T.W. Rhys Davids. *Buddhist Publication Society*. Available: http://www.bps.lk/olib/wh/wh120-p.html [Accessed 24 October 2014].

2008b. Maha-cattarisaka Sutta: the great forty *(MN 117)* [Online]. Translated from the Pali by Thanissaro Bhikkhu. *Access to Insight*. Available: http://www.accesstoinsight.org/tipitaka/mn/mn.117.than.html [Accessed 13 December 2014].

2008c. Maha-Saccaka Sutta (MN 36) [Online]. Access to Insight. Translated from the Pali by Thanissaro Bhikkhu. Available: http://www.accesstoinsight.org/tipitaka/mn/mn.036.than.html [Accessed 5 December 2014].

2008d. Sammaditthi Sutta: right view (MN 9) [Online]. Translated from the Pali by Thanissaro Bhikkhu. *Access to Insight*. Available: http://www.accesstoinsight.org/tipitaka/mn/mn.009.than.html [Accessed 7 October 2014].

2010. Brahmajala Sutta: the all-embracing net of views (DN 1) [Online]. Translated from the Pali by Bhikkhu Bodhi. *Access to Insight*. Available: http://www.accesstoinsight.org/tipitaka/dn/dn.01.0.bodh.html [Accessed 13 December 2014].

2011. Salayyaka Sutta: (Brahmans) of Sala (MN 41) [Online]. Translated from the Pali by Thanissaro Bhikkhu. *Access to Insight*. Available: http://www.accesstoinsight.org/tipitaka/mn/mn.041.than.html [Accessed 13 December 2014].

2012. Kutthi Sutta: the leper (Ud 5.3) [Online]. Translated from the Pali by Thanissaro Bhikkhu. *Access to Insight*. Available: http://www.accesstoinsight.org/tipitaka/kn/ud/ud.5.03.than.html [Accessed 13 December 2014].

2014. The insight that brings us to the other shore: new Heart Sutra translation by Thich Nhat Hanh [Online]. Plum Village. Available: http://plumvillage.org/news/thich-nhat-hanh-new-heart-sutra-translation/ [Accessed 23 October 2014].

Abe, M. 1985. The self in Jung and Zen. *The Eastern Buddhist,* 18(1):57-70.

Abe, M. 1994. Suffering in the light of our time, our time in the light of suffering. *The Eastern Buddhist,* 27(2):1-13.

Adam, M. T. 2005. Groundwork for a metaphysic of Buddhist morals: a new analysis of Puñña and Kusala, in light of Sukka. *Journal of Buddhist Ethics,* 12:62-85.

Adam, M. T. 2013. Buddhism, equality, rights. *Journal of Buddhist Ethics,* 20:422-443.

Adams, D. J. 2008. Universal salvation? A study in Myanmar Christian theology. *Asia Journal of Theology,* 22(2):219-236.

Aitken, R. 2002. Formal practice: Buddhist or Christian. *Buddhist - Christian Studies,* 22:63-76.

Amell, K. 2003. Typology of Christian reactions to Buddhism and its spread in Europe. *Swedish Missiological Themes* 91(3):371-376.

Anderson, T. 2003. Persons and awareness. *Buddhist - Christian Studies,* 23:101-116.

Attwood, J. M. 2008. Did King Ajātasattu confess to the Buddha, and did the Buddha forgive him? *Journal of Buddhist Ethics,* 15:279-307.

Augustine. 1993. The confessions. *In:* Adler, M. J. (ed.). *The confessions, the city of God, on Christian doctrine.* Great Books of the Western World. Chicago: Encyclopaedia Britannica, Inc.

Baker, M. C. & Goetz, S. 2011. Afterward. *In:* Baker, M. C. & Goetz, S. (eds.). *The soul hypothesis: investigations into the existence of the soul.* New York: Continuum Books.

Barad, J. 2007. The understanding and experience of compassion: Aquinas and the Dalai Lama. *Buddhist - Christian Studies,* 27:11-29.

Barker, D. 2008. Godless: how an Evangelical preacher became one of America's leading atheists. Berkeley: Ulysses Press.

Barnhart, M. G. 2013. Impermanence, Anattā, and the stability of egocentrism; or, how ethically unstable is egocentrism? *Journal of Buddhist Ethics,* 20:592-611.

Bartchy, S. S. 1992. Table fellowship. *In:* Green, J. B., McKnight, S. & Marshall, I. H. (eds.). *Dictionary of Jesus and the Gospels.* Downers Grove: InterVarsity Press.

Bauer, W. 2001. A Greek-English lexicon of the New Testament and other early Christian literature, 3rd edition. *In:* Danker, F. W. (ed.). Chicago: The University of Chicago Press.

Bayer, H. F. 1992. Predictions of Jesus' passion and resurrection. *In:* Green, J. B., McKnight, S. & Marshall, I. H. (eds.) *Dictionary of Jesus and the Gospels.* Downers Grove: InterVarsity Press.

Bender, C. & Cadge, W. 2006. Constructing Buddhism(s): interreligious dialogue and religious hybridity. *Sociology of Religion,* 67(3):229-247.

Berry, D. 2014. Glory in Romans and the unified purpose of God in redemptive history. Dissertation – PhD. Montgomery: Amridge University.

Betty, S. 2008. What Buddhists and Christians are teaching each other about God. *Cross Currents,* 58(1):108-116

Beverley, J. A. 2001a. Buddhism's guru. *Christianity Today*, 45(8):64-72.

Beverley, J. A. 2001b. Weighed down by karmic debt. *Christianity Today*, 45(8):69.

Bidwell, D. R. 2008. Practicing the religious self: Buddhist-Christian identity as social artifact. *Buddhist - Christian Studies,* 28:3-12.

Bingaman, K. A. 2012. Beyond original sin: a paradigm shift for the age of neuroscience. *Pastoral Psychology,* 61(4):411-422.

Blomberg, C. L. 1992. Matthew. Nashville: Broadman.

Bocking, B. 1983. Comparative studies of Buddhism and Christianity. *Japanese Journal of Religious Studies,* 10(1):87-110.

Bockja, K. 1998. Ontology without axiology? A review of Masao Abe's account of the problem of good and evil from a Western philosophical perspective. *The Eastern Buddhist,* 31(1):85-108.

Bommarito, N. 2011. Bile and bodhisattvas: Santideva on justified anger. *Journal of Buddhist Ethics,* 18:356-381.

Bond, G. D. 1978. History and interpretation in Theravada Buddhism and Christianity. *Encounter,* 39:405-434.

Borg, M. J. (ed.). 1997. Jesus and Buddha: the parallel sayings. Berkeley: Ulysses Press.

Bowers, R. H. 1997. Defending God before Buddhist emptiness. *Bibliotheca Sacra,* 154:396-409.

Bowman, R.M. & Komoszewski, J. E. 2007. Putting Jesus in his place: the case for the deity of Christ. Grand Rapids: Kregel Publications.

Breckenridge, J. 1992. The respectful bodhisattva and the crucified Christ. *Christian Scholar's Review,* 22(1):57-70.

Brock, R. N., Cooey, P. & Klein, A. 1990. The questions that won't go away: a dialogue about women in Buddhism and Christianity. *Journal of Feminist Studies in Religion,* 6(2):87-120.

Brown, C. A. 1999. Can Buddhism save? Finishing resonance in incommensurability. *Cross Currents*, 49(2):164-196.

Brown, H. O. J. 1988. What Is liberation theology? *In:* Nash, R. H. (ed.). *Liberation theology.* Grand Rapids: Baker Book House.

Bruce, F. F. 1977. Paul: apostle of the heart set free. Carlisle: Paternoster Press.

Buddhaghosa, B. 2010. Visuddhimagga: the path of purification [Online]. Translated by the Pali by Bhikkhu Nanamoli. *Buddhist Publication Society*. Available: http://www.accesstoinsight.org/lib/authors/nanamoli/PathofPurification2011.pdf [Accessed 11 October 2014].

Budziszewski, J. 2011a. The line through the heart: natural law as fact, theory, and sign of contradiction. Wilmington: ISI Books.

Budziszewski, J. 2011b. What we can't not know. San Francisco: Ignatius Press.

Burford, G. G. 2011. Asymmetry, essentialism, and covert cultural imperialism: should Buddhists and Christians do theoretical work together? *Buddhist - Christian Studies,* 31:147-157.

Burton-Christie, D. 2012. Practicing paradise: contemplative awareness and ecological renewal. *Anglican Theological Review,* 94(2):281-303.

Buswell, R. E. & Lopez, D. S. 2014. The Princeton dictionary of Buddhism. Princeton: Princeton University Press.

Carlson, J. 2003. Responses. *Buddhist - Christian Studies,* 23:77-83.

Carson, D. A. 2000. The difficult doctrine of the love of God. Wheaton: Crossway Books.

Carter, J. R. 1989. Love and compassion as given. *The Eastern Buddhist,* 22(1):34-53.

Cattoi, T. 2008. What has Chalcedon to do with Lhasa? *Buddhist - Christian Studies,* 28:13-25.

Chadha, M. & Trakakis, N. 2007. Karma and the problem of evil: a response to Kaufman. *Philosophy East and West,* 57(4):533-556.

Chappell, D. W. 1996. Are there seventeen Mahayana ethics? *Journal of Buddhist Ethics,* 3:44-65.

Chidester, D. 1987. Review article: Christians, Buddhists, Muslims and others. *Journal of Theology for Southern Africa,* 81-86.

Chinn, E. Y. 2006. John Dewey and the Buddhist philosophy of the middle way. *Asian Philosophy,* 16(2):87-98.

Cho, S. 2000. Selflessness: toward a Buddhist vision of social justice. *Journal of Buddhist Ethics,* 7:76-85.

Chung, P. S. 2004. Martin Luther and Shinran: the presence of Christ in justification and salvation in a Buddhist-Christian context. *Asia Journal of Theology,* 18(2):295-309.

Cobb, J.B. 1980. Buddhism and Christianity as complementary. *The Eastern Buddhist,* 13(2):16.

Cobb, J.B. 2008. Masao Abe. *Buddhist - Christian Studies,* 28:119-121.

Coghlan, I. J. 2004. A survey of the sources of Buddhist ethics. *Journal of Buddhist Ethics,* 11:143-166.

Cokelet, B. 2005. Reflections on Kant and karma. *Journal of Buddhist Ethics,* 12:1-13.

Conze, E. 1959. Buddhism: its essence and development. New York: Harper Torchbooks.

Conze, E. (ed.). 1971. Buddhist scriptures. Translated by Edward Conze. Harmondsworth: Penguin Books.

Corduan, W. 1992. The gospel according to Margaret. *Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society,* 35(4):515-530.

Corduan, W. 2011. Interview with Win Corduan [Online]. Apologetics 315. Available: http://www.brianauten.com/Apologetics/interview-win-corduan-mp3 [Accessed 1 Jul. 2013]

Corduan, W. 1998. Neighboring faiths: a Christian introduction to world religions. Downers Grove: InterVarsity Press.

Corless, R. 2007. The Christian exploration of non-Christian religions: Merton's example and where it might lead us. *Merton Annual,* 20:206-224.

Cowan, D. E. 2000. No harmony: some notes on Evangelical Christian response to Buddhism. *Religious Studies and Theology,* 19(2):17.

Cowan, S. (ed.). 2000. Five views on apologetics. Grand Rapids: Zondervan.

Coward, H. 1988. The possibility of paradigm choice in Buddhist-Christian dialogue. *Journal of Ecumenical Studies,* 25(3):370.

Cozort, D. 1995. "Cutting the roots of virtue": Tsongkhapa on the results of anger. *Journal of Buddhist Ethics,* 2:83-104.

Cozort, D. 2013. Suffering made sufferable: Santideva, Dzongkaba, and modern therapeutic approaches to suffering's silver lining. *Journal of Buddhist Ethics*, 20:357-375.

Craig, W. L. 2008. Reasonable faith: Christian truth and apologetics. Wheaton: Crossway Books.

Dalai Lama & Cutler, H. C. 2009. The art of happiness in a troubled world. New York: Doubleday.

Dawkins, R. 2008. The God delusion. Boston: A Mariner Book.

De Cea, A. V. 2004. The criteria of goodness in the Pali Nikayas and the nature of Buddhist ethics. *Journal of Buddhist Ethics,* 11:122-142.

De Cea, A. V. 2013. The Dalai Lama and the nature of Buddhist ethics. *Journal of Buddhist Ethics,* 20:500-540.

Dean, T. 1989. Masao Abe on Zen and Western thought. *The Eastern Buddhist,* 23(2):48-77.

Deegalle, M. 2003. Theravada attitudes towards violence. *Journal of Buddhist Ethics,* 10:82-93.

Demartino, R. & Kramer, K. 1998. Perspectives on self-emptying: a Zen-Catholic dialogue between Richard DeMartino and Kenneth Kramer. *The Eastern Buddhist,* 31(2):219-244.

Dostoevsky, F. 2007. *The Karamazov brothers.* London: Wordsworth Editions Limited.

Doud, R. E. 1994. Emptiness as transparency in the late poetry of Thomas Merton. *Horizons,* 21(2):253-269.

Dreyfus, G. 1995. Meditation as ethical activity. *Journal of Buddhist Ethics,* 2:28-54.

Drummond, R. H. 1987. Dialogue and integration: the theological challenge of Yago Seiichi. *Journal of Ecumenical Studies,* 24(4):557.

Ehrman, B. 2004. A brief introduction to the New Testament. New York: Oxford University Press.

Evangelical Philosophical Society. 2011. Christianity not a source of violence [Online]. Evangelical Philosophical Society. Available: http://www.epsociety.org/library/articles.asp?pid=96 [Accessed 27 September 2014].

Eusebius. 2009. Church history: book III [Online]. Translated by Arthur Cushman McGiffert. *New Advent*. Available: http://www.newadvent.org/fathers/250103.htm [Accessed 13 December 2014].

Evans, S. A. 2012. Ethical confusion: possible misunderstandings in Buddhist ethics. *Journal of Buddhist Ethics,* 19:514-544.

Faden, G. 2011. No-self, Dogen, the Senika doctrine, and Western views of soul. *Buddhist - Christian Studies,* 31:41-54.

Fair, F. 2005. Buddhism, Christianity, and modern science: a response to Masao Abe. *Buddhist - Christian Studies,* 25:67-74.

Farge, E. J. 2009. Going East with Merton: forty years later-and coming West with Paramahansa Yogananda today. *Cross Currents,* 59(1):49-68.

Farley, W. 1999. "The pain-dispelling draft": compassion as a practical theodicy. *Perspectives in Religious Studies,* 26(3):291-302.

Farley, W. 2011. Duality and non-duality in Christian practice: reflections on the benefits of Buddhist-Christian dialogue for constructive theology. *Buddhist - Christian Studies,* 31:135-146.

Fink, C. K. 2012. Buddhism, punishment, and reconciliation. *Journal of Buddhist Ethics,* 19:370-395.

Fink, C. K. 2013. The cultivation of virtue in Buddhist ethics. *Journal of Buddhist Ethics,* 20:668-701.

Fleming, K. 2001. The crossing of two ways: an overview of the Asia Christian encounter with Buddhism. *Studies in World Christianity,* 7(2):178.

Fors, J. O. 2005. Asian theology and Christian dialogue with Buddhism. *Swedish Missiological Themes,* 93(1):61-74.

Fors, J. O. 2006. Mutual transformation: John Cobb's theology of religions and his dialogue with Buddhism. *Swedish Missiological Themes,* 94(1):81-96.

Frakes, C. 2007. Do the compassionate flourish?: Overcoming anguish and the impulse towards violence. *Journal of Buddhist Ethics,* 14**,** 100-127.

France, R. T. 1985. Matthew: an introduction and commentary. Nottingham: Inter-Varsity Press.

Franck, F. 1997. Upaya: stratagems of great compassion. *The Eastern Buddhist,* 30(2):287-293.

Frankl, V. E. 1969. Man's search for meaning: an introduction to logotherapy. Translated by Ilse Lasch. Boston: Beacon Press.

Fredericks, J. 1988. The Kyoto School: modern Buddhist philosophy and the search for a transcultural theology. *Horizons,* 15(2):299-315.

Fredericks, J. 2003. The Catholic church and the other religous paths: rejecting nothing that is true and holy. *Theological Studies,* 64(2):225-254.

Fredericks, J. L. 1994. The far side of nothingness: reading Mitchell's spirituality and emptiness. *The Eastern Buddhist,* 27(2):130-139.

Fredericks, J. L. 1995. The incomprehensibility of God: a buddhist reading of Aquinas. *Theological Studies,* 56(3):506-520.

Fritsch-Oppermann, S. 1993. Trikaya and Trinity: reflecting some aspects of Christian-Buddhist dialogue. *Journal of Ecumenical Studies,* 30(2):245-261.

Gable, M. 2008. Engaged Buddhism enhances Christian missiology and congregations. *Mission Studies,* 25:77-102.

Gard, R. A. 1962. Buddhism. New York: George Braziller.

Garland, D. E. 1992. Blessing and woe. *In:* Green, J. B., McKnight, S. & Marshall, I. H. (eds.). *Dictionary of Jesus and the Gospels.* Downers Grove: InterVarsity Press.

Geisler, N. 2002. Systematic theology, vol. 1: introduction and Bible. Minneapolis: Bethany House.

Geisler, N. 2003. Systematic theology, vol. 2: God and creation. Minneapolis: Bethany House.

Geisler, N. 2004. Systematic theology, vol. 3: sin and salvation. Minneapolis: Bethany House.

Geisler, N. 2009. Any absolutes? Absolutely! [Online]. *Christian Research Journal*. Available: http://www.equip.org/articles/any-absolutes-absolutely/#christian-books-3 [Accessed 23 October 2014].

Geisler, N. & Rhodes, R. 2008. Conviction without compromise: standing strong in the core beliefs of the Christian faith. Eugene: Harvest House Publishers.

Gibbs, G. 1997. Understanding Shinran and the burden of traditional dogmatics. *The Eastern Buddhist,* 30(2):267-286.

Gibbs, G. 2001. Reverence and reality. *The Eastern Buddhist,* 33(2):107-121.

Glass, N. R. 1995. Splits and gaps in Buddhism and postmodern theology. *Journal of the American Academy of Religion,* 63(2):303-319.

Goetz, S. & Taliaferro, C. 2011. A brief history of the soul. Chichester: Wiley-Blackwell.

Goodman, C. 2011. Paternalist deception in the *Lotus Sutra*: a normative assessment. *Journal of Buddhist Ethics,* 18:1-30.

Goodman, C. 2013. Consequentialism, agent-neutrality, and Mahayana ethics. *Journal of Buddhist Ethics,* 20:612-643.

Gray, D. B. 2007. Compassionate violence?: On the ethical implications of tantric Buddhist ritual. *Journal of Buddhist Ethics,* 14:239-271.

Griffiths, P. J. 1990. Encountering Buddha theologically. *Theology Today,* 47(1):39-51.

Griffiths, P. J. 2000. Nirvana as the last thing? The iconic end of the narrative imagination. *Modern Theology,* 16(1):19-38.

Groothuis, D. R. 2003. Jesus and Buddha. *Christian Research Journal,* 25(4).

Gross, R. M. 2002. Meditation and prayer: a comparative inquiry. *Buddhist - Christian Studies,* 22:77-86.

Gross, R. M. 2005a. The international Buddhist-Christian theological encounter: twenty years of dialogue. *Buddhist - Christian Studies,* 25:3-7.

Gross, R. M. 2005b. Religious identity and openness in a pluralistic world. *Buddhist - Christian Studies,* 25:15-20.

Grudem, W. 1994. Systematic theology: an introduction to biblical doctrine. Leicester: Inter-Varsity Press.

Grumett, D. 2008. De Lubac, Christ and the Buddha. *New Blackfriars,* 89(1020):217-230.

Grumett, D. & Plant, T. 2012. De Lubac, Pure Land Buddhism, and Roman Catholicism. *The Journal of Religion,* 92(1):58-83.

Guinness, O. 2005. *Unspeakable: facing up to the challenge of evil.* San Francisco: HarperSanFrancisco.

Habito, R. L. F. 1985. On "Dharmakaya" as ultimate reality: prolegomenon for a Buddhist-Christian dialogue. *Japanese Journal of Religious Studies,* 12(2):233-252.

Hallisey, C. 1996. Ethical particularism in Theravada Buddhism. *Journal of Buddhist Ethics,* 3:32-43.

Hahn, T. N. 1999. The heart of the Buddha's teaching: transforming suffering into peace, joy, and liberation. New York: Broadway Books.

Hanson, J. M. 2005. Was Jesus a Buddhist? *Buddhist - Christian Studies,* 25:75-89.

Harris, I. 1994. Causation and telos: the problem of Buddhist environmental ethics. *Journal of Buddhist Ethics,* 1:45-56.

Harris, S. 2011. Does *anatman* rationally entail altruism? On *Bodhicaryavatara* 8:101-103. *Journal of Buddhist Ethics,* 18:93-123.

Harvey, P. 1999. Vinaya principles for assigning degrees of culpability. *Journal of Buddhist Ethics,* 6:271-291.

Harvey, P. 2007. "Freedom of the Will" in the Light of Theravada Buddhist Teachings. *Journal of Buddhist Ethics,* 14:35-98.

Harvey, P. 2011. An introduction to Buddhism ethics: foundations, values and issues. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Haug, K. S. 2006. Did Jesus teach about wisdom and *kamma*? A critical analysis of a Buddhist Bible interpretation. *Swedish Missiological Themes,* 94(1):55-79.

Heisig, J. 1996. The recovery of the senses: against the asceticisms of the age. *Journal of Ecumenical Studies,* 33(2):216-237.

Henry, P. 2006. The sociological implications for contemporary Buddhism in the United Kingdom: socially engaged Buddhism, a case study. *Journal of Buddhist Ethics,* 13:2-43.

Hershock, P. D. 1999. Changing the way society changes: transposing social activism into a dramatic key. *Journal of Buddhist Ethics,* 6:154-181.

Hershock, P. D. 2000. Family matters: dramatic interdependence and the intimate realization of Buddhist liberation. *Journal of Buddhist Ethics,* 7:86-104.

Hershock, P. D. 2005. Valuing karma: a critical concept for orienting interdependence toward personal and public good. *Journal of Buddhist Ethics,* 12:1-29.

Hevesi, D. 2007. Maha Ghosananda, called Cambodia's Ghandi, dies [Online]. The *New York Times*. Available: http://www.nytimes.com/2007/03/15/world/asia/15ghosananda.html?ref=obituaries&_r=0 [Accessed 24 October 2014].

Hick, J. 2006. Is Christianity the only true religion, or one among others? [Online]. Available: http://www.johnhick.org.uk/jsite/index.php?option=com_content&view=article&id=49:is only&catid=37:articles&Itemid=58 [Accessed 6 August 2011].

Highland, J. 2005. Transformation to eternity: Augustine's conversion to mindfulness. *Buddhist - Christian Studies,* 25:91-108.

Hirsch, E. D. 1976. Validity in interpretation. New Haven: Yale University Press.

Hitchens, C. 2007. God is not great: how religion poisons everything. New York: Twelve.

Holsten, W. 1959. Buddhism in Germany. *International Review of Missions*, 48(192):409-420.

Hopfe, L. & Woodward, M. 2005. Religions of the world, 9th Ed. Upper Saddle River: Pearson Education.

Horner, D. & Turner, D. 2012. A brief sketch on zeal [Online]. Evangelical Philosophical Society. Available: http://www.epsociety.org/library/articles.asp?pid=114 [Accessed 27 September 2014].

Hugo, V. 1862. Les miserables. New York City: Dodd, Mead and Company Publishers.

Humphreys, C. 2012. Exploring Buddhism. Abingdom: Routledge.

Inada, K. K. 1995. A Buddhist response to the nature of human rights. *Journal of Buddhist Ethics,* 2:1-9.

Ingram, P. O. 2000. "Fruit salad can be delicious": the practice of Buddhist-Christian dialogue. *Cross Currents*, 50(4):541-549.

Ingram, P. O. 2006. Book review of *Martin Luther and Buddhism: the aesthetics of suffering*, by Paul S. Chung. *Buddhist - Christian Studies,* 26:235-237.

Ingram, P. O. 2011. Buddhist-Christian-science dialogue at the boundaries. *Buddhist - Christian Studies,* 31:165-174.

Irvin, D. T. 2013. The ritual of the limping dance: Kosuke Koyama's positive assessment of pluralism for Christian theology. *Journal of Ecumenical Studies*, 48(3):359-368.

Ives, C. 2005. What's compassion got to do with It? Determinants of Zen social ethics in Japan. *Journal of Buddhist Ethics*, 12:37-61.

Ives, C. 2006. Not buying in to words and letters: Zen, ideology, and prophetic critique. *Journal of Buddhist Ethics,* 13:1-13.

Ives, C. 2008a. Deploying the dharma: reflections on the methodology of constructive Buddhist ethics. *Journal of Buddhist Ethics,* 15:23-44.

Ives, C. 2008b. The thought and legacy of Masao Abe. *Buddhist - Christian Studies*, 28:103-105.

Johnston, W. 1988. All and nothing: St. John of the Cross and the Christian-Buddhist dialogue. *The Eastern Buddhist,* 21(2):124.

Jones, P. 2011. Confronting neo-paganism in the culture and the church [Online]. TruthXChange. Available: http://truthxchange.com/articles/2011/04/12/confronting-neopaganism-in-the-culture-and-the-church/ [Accessed 1 Mar. 2013].

Jung, K. 2012. Just peace: a Buddhist-Christian path to liberation. *Buddhist - Christian Studies,* 32:3-15.

Kakichi, K. 1976. Introducing Zazen into Christian spirituality. *The Eastern Buddhist,* 9(1):106-122.

Kang, C. 2009. Buddhist and tantric perspectives on causality and society. *Journal of Buddhist Ethics,* 16:69-102.

Kaufman, W. R. P. 2005. Karma, rebirth, and the problem of evil. *Philosophy East and West,* 55(1):15-32.

Kaufmann, W. 1979. Critique of religion and philosophy. Princeton: Princeton University Press.

Kaufmann, W. 1972. Friedrich Nietzsche. *In:* EDWARDS, P. (ed.). *Encyclopedia of Philosophy, Vol. 5.* New York: Macmillan Publishing.

Kaza, S. 2003. Penetrating the big pattern. *Buddhist - Christian Studies,* 23:55-59.

Keenan, J. P. 1989. Mahayana theology: how to reclaim an ancient Christian tradition. *Anglican Theological Review,* 71(4):377-394.

Keenan, J. P. 1993. The emptiness of Christ: a Mahayana Christology. *Anglican Theological Review,* 75(1):48-62.

Keenan, J. P. 2010. The prospects for a Mahayana theology of emptiness: a continuing debate. *Buddhist - Christian Studies,* 30:3-27.

Keener, C. 1993. The IVP Bible background commentary. Downers Grove, InterVarsity Press.

Keown, D. 1995. Are there "human rights" in Buddhism? *Journal of Buddhist Ethics,* 2:3-27.

Keown, D. 2001. *The Nature of Buddhist Ethics.* Basingstoke: Palgrave.

Keown, D. 2013. Some problems with particularism. *Journal of Buddhist Ethics,* 20:445-460.

King, S. B. 2009. Buddhism, nonviolence, and power. *Journal of Buddhist Ethics,* 16:103-135.

King, U. 2002. A response to reflections on Buddhist and Christian religious practices. *Buddhist - Christian Studies,* 22:105-112.

King, W. L. 1989. Sacramental aspects of Theravada Buddhist meditation. *Numen,* 36(2)**,** 248-256.

King, W. L. 1995. Judeo-Christian and Buddhist justice. *Journal of Buddhist Ethics*, 2:67-82.

Knitter, P. F. 1979. Jesus – Buddha – Krishna: still present? *Journal of Ecumenical Studies,* 16(4), 651-671.

Knitter, P. F. 1981a. Horizons on Christianity's new dialogue with Buddhism. *Horizons,* 8(1):40-61.

Knitter, P. F. 1981b. Thomas Merton's Eastern remedy for Christianity's "anonymous dualism". *Cross Currents,* 31(3):285-295.

Knitter, P. F. 2004. Overcoming greed: Buddhists and Christians in consumerist society. *Buddhist - Christian Studies,* 24:65-72.

Knitter, P. F. 2012. A "hypostatic union" of two practices but one person? *Buddhist-Christian Studies***,** 32:19-26.

Knitter, P. F. & Abe, M. 1988. Spirituality and liberation: a Buddhist-Christian conversation. *Horizons*, 15(2):347-364.

Knitter, P. F. & Netland, H. A. 2013. Can only one religion be true?: A dialogue. *In:* Stewart, R. B. (ed.). *Can only one religion be true?: Paul Knitter and Harold Netland in dialogue.* Minneapolis: Fortress Press.

Konior, J. 2010. Confession rituals and the philosophy of forgiveness in Asian religions and Christianity. *Forum Philosophicum: International Journal for Philosophy,* 15(1):91-102.

Koyama, K. 2002. What can Christians contribute to the understanding of Buddhism in Thailand, Part I. *Swedish Missiological Themes,* 90(1):77-83.

Kreeft, P. 1971. Zen Buddhism and Christianity: an experiment in comparative religion. *Journal of Ecumenical Studies,* 8(3):513-538.

Kuntz, P. G. 2000. Santayana and Buddhism: the choice between the cross and the bo tree. *Buddhist - Christian Studies,* 20:151-165.

Kunz, S. C. 2011. Respecting the boundaries of knowledge: teaching Christian discernment with humility and dignity, a response to Paul O. Ingram. *Buddhist - Christian Studies,* 31:175-186.

Lai, P.C. 2011. Inter-religious dialogue and social justice: Cobb's Wesleyan process theology in East Asian perspective. *Asia Journal of Theology,* 25(1)**,** 82-102.

Lai, W.W. 1991. Tillich on death and suffering: a key to Buddho-Christian dialogue. *Journal of Ecumenical Studies,* 28(4):566-580.

Lane, B. C. 1989. Merton as Zen clown. *Theology Today,* 46(3):256-268.

Lecarner, T. M. 2009. T.S. Eliot, dharma bum: Buddhist lessons in *The Waste Land*. *Philosophy and Literature,* 33(2):402-416.

Lee, K. D. 2004. Comparative analysis of Shinran's shinjin and Calvin's faith. *Buddhist - Christian Studies,* 24:171-190.

Lee, T. H. 2002. Christianity vis-a-vis Eastern religions with emphasis on Buddhism. *Southwestern Journal of Theology,* 44(2):75-94.

Lester, R. C. 1987. Buddhism: the path to nirvana. San Francisco: HarperSanFrancisco.

Lewis, C. S. 1979. Mere Christianity. New York City: Macmillan Publishing Company.

Lewis, C. S. 1996. Problem of pain. San Francisco: HarperSanFrancisco.

Lewis, C. S. 2001a. The abolition of man. New York: HarperCollins.

Lewis, C. S. 2001b. The weight of glory and other addresses. San Francisco: HarperSanFrancisco.

Lewis, C. S. 2003. God in the dock. In *The timeless writings of C.S. Lewis: the pilgrim's regress, Christian reflections, God in the dock.* New York: Inspirational Press.

Lewis, C. S. 2004a. The four loves. *The beloved works of C.S. Lewis.* Edison: Inspirational Press.

Lewis, C. S. 2004b. Surprised by joy. *The beloved works of C.S. Lewis.* Edison: Inspirational Press.

Lewis, S. J. & Amstutz, G. 1997. Teleologized virtue or mere religious character? A critique of Buddhist ethics from the Shin Buddhist point of view. *Journal of Buddhist Ethics,* 4**,** 138-159.

Lickerman, A. 2010. The six reasons people attempt suicide [Online]. *Psychology Today*. Available: http://www.psychologytoday.com/blog/happiness-in-world/201004/the-six-reasons-people-attempt-suicide [Accessed 27 September 2014].

Lounibos, J. B. 2000. Self-emptying in Christian and Buddhist spirituality. *Journal of Pastoral Counseling,* 35.

Loy, D. R. 2000. How to reform a serial killer: the Buddhist approach to restorative justice. *Journal of Buddhist Ethics,* 7:145-168.

Loy, D. R. 2013. Why Buddhism and the West need each other: on the interdependence of personal and social transformation. *Journal of Buddhist Ethics,* 20:401-421.

MacDonald, G. 2006. Truth. *In:* Phillips, M. (ed.). *The Truth in Jesus.* Minneapolis: Bethany House.

Maithrimurthi, M. 2003. The Buddha's attitude towards social concerns as depicted in the Pali Canon. *Journal of Buddhist Ethics,* 10:123-141.

Makransky, J. 2003. Buddhist perspectives on truth in other religions: past and present. *Theological Studies,* 64(2):334-361.

Makransky, J. 2005. No real protection without authentic love and compassion. *Journal of Buddhist Ethics,* 12:25-36.

Makransky, J. 2011. Thoughts on why, how, and what Buddhists can learn from Christian theologians. *Buddhist - Christian Studies,* 31:119-133.

Maraldo, J.C. 1981. The hermeneutics of practise in Dogen and Francis of Assisi: an exercise in Buddhist-Christian dialogue. *The Eastern Buddhist,* 14(2):22-46.

Martin, G.M. 2009. Love, hate, compassion: a Buddhist-Christian depth psychological dialogue. *The Eastern Buddhist,* 40(1-2):1-24.

May, J.D.A. 2000. Strange encounters: on transcending violence by transcending difference. *Studies in World Christianity,* 6(2):224-244.

May, J.D.A. 2004. Loving nothingness? Possibilities of prayer in Buddhism and Christianity. *Swedish Missiological Themes,* 92(3):371-381.

May, J.D.A. 2006. Conversion and religious identity in Buddhism and Christianity. *Buddhist - Christian Studies,* 26:189-192.

McCarthy, S. 2001. Why the Dalai Lama should read Aristotle. *Journal of Buddhist Ethics,* 8:42-60.

McDaniel, J. 1984. Zen Buddhism and prophetic Christianity. *Encounter,* 45(4):303-323.

McDaniel, J. 1985. The God of the oppressed and the God who is empty. *Journal of Ecumenical Studies,* 22(4):687-702.

McDaniel, J. 2003. Double religious belonging: a process approach. *Buddhist - Christian Studies,* 23:67-76.

McRae, E. 2012. Emotions, ethics, and choice: lessons from Tsongkhapa. *Journal of Buddhist Ethics,* 19:344-369.

Melin, A. 2006. Environmental philosophy in Christianity and Buddhism: meeting places for a dialogue. *Ecotheology: Journal of Religion, Nature & the Environment,* 11(3):357-374.

Montgomery, R. L. 2014. Conversion and the historic spread of religions. *In:* Rambo, L. R. & Farhadian, C. E. (eds.). *The Oxford handbook of religious conversion.* Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Moreland, J. P. 2014. The soul: how we know it's real and why it matters. Chicago: Moody Publishers.

Morris, L. 1987. Revelation: an introduction and commentary. Nottingham: Inter-Varsity Press.

Morris, L. 1988. Luke: an introduction and commentary. Nottingham: Inter-Varsity Press.

Morris, L. 1992. The Gospel according to Matthew. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans Publishing Company.

Morris, S. 1991. Beyond Christianity: Transcendentalism and Zen. *The Eastern Buddhist,* 24(2):33-68.

Morse, D. R. 2001. Spirituality and pain. *Journal of Religion & Psychical Research,* 24(4):209-233.

Mrozik, S. 2002. The value of human differences: South Asian Buddhist contributions toward an embodied virtue theory. *Journal of Buddhist Ethics*, 9:1-33.

Muck, T. C. 2014. Buddhism: Christian contacts. *In:* Muck, T. C., Netland, H. A. & McDermott, E. R. (eds.). *Handbook of religion: a Christian engagement with traditions, teachings, and practices.* Grand Rapids: Baker Academic.

Nakamura, H. 1973. Faith and reason in early Buddhism and Christianity. *Journal of Ecumenical Studies,* 10(1):30-50.

Nanamoli, B. & Bodhi, B. (eds.). 1995. *The middle length discourses of the Buddha: a new translation of the Majjhima Nikaya.* Boston: Wisdom Publications.

Nash, R. H. (ed.). 1988. Liberation theology. Grand Rapids: Baker Book House.

Neeman, O. 2010. Theravada Buddhism and John Dewey's metaethics. *Journal of Buddhist Ethics,* 17:141-165.

Nelson, E. S. 2005. Questioning karma: Buddhism and the phenomenology of the ethical. *Journal of Buddhist Ethics,* 12:1-14.

Nielsen, N. C. 1984. Buddhism and Christianity: advancing the dialogue. *The Christian Century,* 101:433-435.

Nielsen, N. C. 1987. "Analogia entis" as the basis of Buddhist-Christian dialogue. *Modern Theology,* 3(4):345-357.

Nietzsche, F. 1982. Thus spake Zarathustra. Translated by Walter Kaufmann. New York, Penguin.

Nolland, J. 2005. The gospel of Matthew: a commentary on the Greek text. Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company.

O'Leary, J. S. 1997. The significance of John Keenan's Mahayana theology. *The Eastern Buddhist,* 30(1):114-132.

O'Leary, J. S. 2002. Emptiness and dogma. *Buddhist - Christian Studies,* 22:163-179.

O'Leary, J. S. 2008. Knowing the *Heart Sūtra* by heart. *Religion & the Arts,* 12(1-3):356-370.

Oakley, T. 2010. The issue is meaninglessness. *The Monist,* 93(1):106-122.

Odin, S. 1987. Kenosis as a foundation for Buddhist-Christian dialogue: the kenotic Buddhology of Nishida and Nishitani of the Kyoto School in relation to the kenotic Christology of Thomas J. J. Altizer. *The Eastern Buddhist,* 20(1):34-61.

Ogden, S. M. 2005. Christian identity and genuine openness to the religious beliefs of others. *Buddhist - Christian Studies,* 25:21-27.

Oldmeadow, H. 1997. Delivering the last blade of grass: aspects of the bodhisattva ideal in the Mahayana. *Asian Philosophy*, 7(3):181-194.

Olendzki, A. 2005. Skinny Gotami and the mustard seed (commentary to Thig 10.1) [Online]. *Access to Insight*. Available: http://www.accesstoinsight.org/noncanon/comy/thiga-10-01-ao0.html [Accessed 13 December 2014].

Ortberg, J. 2012. Who is this man? The unpredictable impact of the inescapable Jesus. Grand Rapids: Zondervan.

Otte, K. 2002. Life in the vow: practical and ethical implications of the three book-religions in the modern world compared with those of Shin Buddhism. *Pure Land,* 18-19:66-71.

Palmer, D. 1997. Masao Abe, Zen Buddhism and social ethics. *Journal of Buddhist Ethics,* 4:112-137.

Pan-chiu, L. 2002. Buddhist-Christian complementarity in the perspective of quantum physics. *Buddhist - Christian Studies,* 22:149-162.

Pan-chiu, L. & Yuen-tai, S. 2007. Mahayana interpretation of Christianity: a case study of Zhang Chunyi (1871-1955). *Buddhist - Christian Studies,* 27:67-87.

Pandita, V. 2012. If intention is karma: a new approach to the Buddha's socio-political teachings. *Journal of Buddhist Ethics,* 19:1-32.

Phan, P. C. 2006. Global healing and reconciliation: the gift and task of religion, a Buddhist-Christian perspective. *Buddhist - Christian Studies,* 26:89-108.

Phillips, S. H. 1987. Nishitani's Buddhist response to "nihilism". *Journal of the American Academy of Religion,* 55(1):75-104.

Pieris, A. 1987. Christianity and Buddhism in core-to-core dialogue. *Cross Currents,* 37(1):47-75.

Pieris, A. 2007. An Asian way to celebrate the eucharist. *Worship,* 81(4):314-328.

Pinnock, S. K. 2004. Overcoming violence in practice. *Buddhist - Christian Studies,* 24:73-85.

Piper, J. 2003. Desiring God. Sisters: Multnomah Publishers.

Polinska, W. 2010. "Till death do us part"? Buddhist insights on Christian marriage. *Buddhist - Christian Studies,* 30:29-40.

Polish, D. F. 2008. The Buddha as a lens for reading Koheleth/Ecclesiastes. *Journal of Ecumenical Studies,* 43(3):370-382.

Pomplun, T. 2006. Divine grace and the play of opposites. *Buddhist - Christian Studies,* 26:159-172.

Powell, P. A. 2011. Hobbits as Buddhists and an eye for an "I". *Buddhist - Christian Studies*, 31:31-39.

Prager, D. & Telushkin, J. 1986. The nine questions people ask about Judaism. New York: Touchstone.

Pramuk, C. 2008. "Something breaks through a little": the marriage of Zen and Sophia in the life of Thomas Merton. *Buddhist - Christian Studies*, 28:67-89.

Prebish, C. S. 2013. Mahayana ethics and American Buddhism: subtle solutions or creative perversions? *Journal of Buddhist Ethics*, 20:376-400.

Prothero, S. 1995. Henry Steel Olcott and "Protestant Buddhism". *Journal of the American Academy of Religion*, 63(2):281-302.

Prozesky, M. & Edwards, F. S. 1986. Review article: *Beyond dialogue: towards a mutual transformation of Christianity and Buddhism*, by John B. Cobb. *Journal of Theology for Southern Africa*, 56:67-73.

Radler, C. 2006. Losing the self: detachment in Meister Eckhart and its significance for Buddhist-Christian dialogue. *Buddhist - Christian Studies*, 26:111-117.

Ray, R. 1987. From dialogue to mutual transformation: the third Buddhist-Christian Theological encounter. *The Eastern Buddhist*, 20(2):115-127.

Reeves, G. 1998. Appropriate means as an ethical doctrine in the *Lotus Sutra*. *Journal of Buddhist Ethics*, 5:241-260.

Reilly, R. 2003. Conscience, citizenship, and global responsibilities. *Buddhist - Christian Studies*, 23:117-131.

Repetti, R. 2010a. Earlier Buddhist theories of free will: compatibilism. *Journal of Buddhist Ethics,* 17:279-310.

Repetti, R. 2010b. Meditation and mental freedom: a Buddhist theory of free will. *Journal of Buddhist Ethics,* 17:166-212.

Repetti, R. 2012a. Buddhist hard determinism: no self, no free will, no responsibility. *Journal of Buddhist Ethics,* 19:130-197.

Repetti, R. 2012b. Buddhist reductionism and free will: paleo-compatibilism. *Journal of Buddhist Ethics,* 19:33-95.

Repetti, R. 2014. Recent Buddhist theories of free will: compatibilism, incompatibilism, and beyond. *Journal of Buddhist Ethics,* 21:272-345.

Reynolds, T. E. 2002. Toward the other: Christianity and Buddhism on desire. *Journal of Ecumenical Studies,* 39:325-339.

Robinson, R. H. & Johnson, W. L. 1977. The Buddhist religion: a historical introduction. Encino: Dickenson Publishing Company.

Rochelle, J. C. 1991. A book worth discussing: *a Buddhist critique of the Christian concept of God,* by G. Dharmasiri. *Currents in Theology and Mission,* 18:292-295.

Rowe, S. 2008. Masao Abe and the dialogue breakthrough. *Buddhist - Christian Studies,* 28:123-125.

Ruether, R. R. 2005. Religious identity and openness to a pluralistic world: a Christian view. *Buddhist - Christian Studies,* 25:29-40.

Russell, B. 1957a. Preface. *In:* EDWARDS, P. (ed.). *Why I am not a Christian.* New York: A Touchstone Book.

Russell, B. 1957b. What I believe. *In:* EDWARDS, P. (ed.). *Why I am not a Christian.* New York: A Touchstone Book.

Russell, B. 1957c. Why I am not a Christian. *In:* EDWARDS, P. (ed.). *Why I am not a Christian and other essays on religion and related subjects.* New York: A Touchstone Book.

Russell, H. A. 2008. Keiji Nishitani and Karl Rahner: a response to nihility. *Buddhist - Christian Studies,* 28:27-41.

Sabatino, C. J. 1985. Paradox as vision: recovering transcendence within the world. *Horizons,* 12(1):27-43.

Schilbrack, K. 1997. The general and the particular in Theravada ethics: a response to Charles Hallisey. *Journal of Buddhist Ethics,* 4:98-111.

Schmidt-Leukel, P. 2003. Buddhism and Christianity: antagonistic or complementary? *Studies in World Christianity,* 9(2):265-279.

Schmidt-Leukel, P. 2005. The 2004 Gerald Weisfeld lectures: Buddhism and Christianity in dialogue. *Buddhist - Christian Studies,* 25:157-160.

Schmidt-Leukel, P. 2010. Toward a Buddhist-Christian theology of creation: an exercise in inter-religious theology. *Ching Feng,* 10(1-2):81-100.

Schmidt, A. J. 2004. How Christianity changed the world. Grand Rapids: Zondervan.

Sciberras, C. 2008. Buddhism and speciesism: on the misapplication of Western concepts to Buddhist beliefs. *Journal of Buddhist Ethics,* 15:215-240.

Scott, D. 1985. Christian responses to Buddhism in premedieval times. *Numen,* 32(1):88-100.

Senger, N. M. 1998. The message of Christianity to Buddhism. *Brethren Life and Thought,* 2(3):22-29.

Sevilla, A. L. 2010. Founding human rights within Buddhism: exploring Buddha-nature as an ethical foundation. *Journal of Buddhist Ethics,* 17:213-252.

Shandao. 2014. Parable of the white path. *In:* Andreasen, E. (ed.). *Popular Buddhism in Japan: Shin Buddhist religion and culture.* Abingdon: Routledge.

Shelley, B. L. 1995. Church history in plain language, 2nd Edition. Nashville: Thomas Nelson.

Sherwood, P. 2001. Buddhist contribution to social welfare in Australia. *Journal of Buddhist Ethics,* 8:61-74.

Shields, J. M. 2013. Liberation as revolutionary praxis: rethinking Buddhist materialism. *Journal of Buddhist Ethics,* 20:461-499.

Shore, J. 1998. Abe Masao's legacy: awakening to reality through the death of ego and providing spiritual ground for the modern world. *The Eastern Buddhist,* 31(2):295-307.

Sivaraksa, S. 2002. What can Christians contribute to an understanding of Buddhism in Thailand, part II. *Swedish Missiological Themes,* 90(1):85-91.

Sridharan, V. 2013. The metaphysics of no-self: a determinist deflation of the free will problem. *Journal of Buddhist Ethics,* 20:287-305.

Stenger, M. A. 1991. Ultimacy in relation to affirmation and negation: Buddhist and Christian perspectives. *Dialogue and Alliance,* 5(1):55-67.

Strauss, V. 2002. Beyond the usual alternatives? Buddhist and Christian approaches to other religions. *Buddhist - Christian Studies,* 22:123-126.

Suzuki, D. T. 1983. Talks on Buddhism (II): Buddhism and Christianity. *The Eastern Buddhist,* 16(2):1-8.

Suzuki, D. T. 2008. The prospects for Buddhism in Europe and America. *The Eastern Buddhist,* 39(2):69-77.

Swineburne, R. 2013. Mind, brain, and free will. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Tanaka, K. K. 2002. Christian prayer seen from the eye of a Buddhist. *Buddhist - Christian Studies,* 22:87-92.

Tanaka, K. K. 2005. Acceptance of the other as a similarly valid path and awareness of one's self-culpability: a deepening realization of my religious identity through dialogue. *Buddhist - Christian Studies,* 25:41-46.

Tennent, T. C. 2002. Christianity at the religious roundtable: Evangelicalism in conversation with Hinduism, Buddhism, and Islam. Grand Rapids: Baker Academic.

Thelle, N. R. 2010-2011. The "humanization" of Buddhism: aspects of Western adaptations of Buddhism. *Ching Feng,* 10(1-2):67-79.

Thurston, B. 1999. A Christian's appreciation of the Buddha. *Buddhist - Christian Studies,* 19:121-128.

Thurston, B. B. 1985. The conquered self: emptiness and God in a Buddhist-Christian dialogue. *Japanese Journal of Religious Studies,* 12(4):343-353.

Tierelinckx, R. R. 2011. On dialogue. *Swedish Missiological Themes,* 99(2):217-226.

Tokunaga, M. (n.d.). Amida as an "ultimate point of reference" [Online]. Manuka: Muryoko: Journal of Shin Buddhism. Available: http://www.nembutsu.info/tokuamid.htm [Accessed 17 January 2015].

Tozer, A. W. 2007. The pursuit of God. Whitakers: Positive Action for Christ.

Van Bragt, J. 1994. Some comparative reflections on the diverging uses of desire in Buddhism, Christianity, and Jodo Shinshu. *The Journal of the International Association of Shin Buddhist Studies,* 10-11:68-92.

Van Oosten, K. 2008. Kamma and forgiveness with some thoughts on Cambodia. *Exchange,* 37(3):237-262.

Van Schalkwyk, A. 2011. Sacredness and sustainability: searching for a practical eco-spirituality. *Religion & Theology,* 18(1-2):77-92.

Von Brück, M. 2006. An ethics of justice in a cross-cultural context. *Buddhist - Christian Studies,* 26:61-77.

Waldrop, C. T. 1987. Karl Barth and Pure Land Buddhism. *Journal of Ecumenical Studies,* 24(4):574-597.

Walsh-Frank, P. 1996. Compassion: an East-West comparison. *Asian Philosophy,* 6(1).

Weakland, R. G. 2008. Thomas Merton's Bangkok lecture of December 1968. *Buddhist - Christian Studies,* 28:91-99.

Wei-an, C. 2000. Taming the monkey mind: a guide to Pure Land practice. Translated with Commentary by Dharma Master Suddhisukha. New York: Sutra Translation Committee of the U.S. and Canada.

Wells, H. L. 2002. Beyond the usual alternatives in Buddhist-Christian dialogue: a trinitarian pluralist approach. *Buddhist - Christian Studies,* 22:127-131.

Whitehill, J. 1994. Buddhist ethics in western context: the "virtues" approach. *Journal of Buddhist Ethics,* 1:1-22.

Williams, P. 2002. The unexpected way: on converting from Buddhism to Catholicism. London: T & T Clark.

Williams, P. 2009. Mahayana Buddhism: the doctrinal foundations. London: Routledge.

Williams, P., Tribe, A. & Wynne, A. 2012. Buddhist thought: a complete introduction to the Indian tradition. London: Routledge.

Wiseman, J. A. 1993. Emptiness: a Christian perspective. *Dialogue and Alliance,* 7(2):108-122.

Wong, J. 2010. The Jesus prayer and inner stillness. *Religion East and West***,** 10:35-48.

Wright, D. S. 2005. Critical questions towards a naturalized concept of karma in Buddhism. *Journal of Buddhist Ethics,* 12:78-93.

Wright, D. S. 2006. *Satori* and the moral dimension of enlightenment. *Journal of Buddhist Ethics,* 13:1-22.

Xing, G. 2005. Filial piety in early Buddhism. *Journal of Buddhist Ethics,* 12:82-106.

Yandell, K. & Netland, H. 2009. Buddhism: a Christian exploration and appraisal. Downers Grove: IVP Academic.

Yao, F. 2006. There are no degrees in a bodhisattva's compassion. *Asian Philosophy,* 16(3):189-198.

Yokota, J. S. 2002. Shin Buddhism and the Christian-Buddhist dialog: what is to be gained? *Pure Land,* 18-19:138-158.

Yong, A. 2004. The Holy Spirit and the world religions: on the Christian discernment of spirit(s) "after" Buddhism. *Buddhist - Christian Studies*, 24:191-207.

Yong, A. 2008. Mind and life, religion and science: his holiness the Dalai Lama and the Buddhism-Christianity-science trialogue. *Buddhist - Christian Studies,* 28:43-63.

Yong, A. 2011a. Ignorance, knowledge, and omniscience: at and beyond the limits of faith and reason after Shinran. *Buddhist - Christian Studies,* 31:201-210.

Yong, A. 2011b. On doing theology and Buddhology: a spectrum of Christian proposals. *Buddhist - Christian Studies,* 31:103-118.

Zacharias, R. 2000. Jesus among other gods: the absolute claims of the Christian message. Nashville: W Publishing Group.

Zacharias, R. 2003. Recapture the wonder. Nashville: Integrity Publishers.