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BOSTON UNIVERSITY

SCHOOL OF THEOLOGY

Dissertation

A PRACTICAL THEOLOGICAL EXPLORATION OF CHRISTIAN EVANGELISM IN RELATION TO CONTEMPORARY CHRISTIAN-BUDDHIST DIALOGUE IN THE U.S.A.

By

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Doctor of Philosophy

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A PRACTICAL THEOLOGICAL EXPLORATION OF CHRISTIAN EVANGELISM IN RELATION TO CONTEMPORARY CHRISTIAN-BUDDHIST DIALOGUE IN THE USA

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A PRACTICAL THEOLOGICAL EXPLORATION OF CHRISTIAN EVANGELISM IN RELATION TO CONTEMPORARY CHRISTIAN-BUDDHIST DIALOGUE IN THE U.S.A.

(Order No.)

Paul Dongwon Goh

Doctor of Philosophy

Boston University School of Theology, 2012

Major Professor: Bryan P. Stone, E. Stanley Jones Professor of Evangelism

ABSTRACT

This dissertation, informed and shaped by Christian-Buddhist encounter and dialogue in the United States at the beginning of the twenty-first century, seeks to contribute to a reconstruction of the theology and practice of Christian evangelism as a form of contemplative spiritual guidance. By examining qualitative data from a study of the interreligious experiences of Christian-Buddhist practitioners and spiritual seekers, and by placing that data in conversation with several current theologies of evangelism, this project in practical theology explores how the theology and practice of evangelism can be enhanced by a deeper responsiveness to religious pluralism in general, and Christian-Buddhist engagement in particular. The dissertation recommends a practical theology of evangelism in correlation with Christian-Buddhist dialogue; engagement in interreligious dialogue as a virtuous Christian practice; recovery and renewal of contemplative spirituality as a source of evangelism; and transformation of evangelism as contemplative spiritual guidance.

By providing empirical data from in-depth interviews and participant observation, and by analyzing texts from the Roman Catholic Church and the World Council of Churches, this study

advances current theological debate while seeking to move beyond the standard threefold typology used by theologians to construct a theology of inter-religious engagement: exclusivism, inclusivism, and pluralism. The dissertation concludes that exclusivists too often disregard the lived experiences of interreligious practitioners and fail to address important practical theological questions that surface in the relations between interreligious dialogue and Christian evangelism. Conversely, emerging proposals to adopt a pluralist approach toward other religions and to construe evangelism as merely "interreligious dialogue" is inadequate to the invitational aims of evangelistic practice.

The analysis of selected theological texts reveals creative tension between interreligious dialogue and evangelizing mission. While such tension causes confusion and suspicion from inside and outside of the church, it is also indicative of the possibility of mutual enrichment and transformation through a reflexive relationship. Qualitative analysis of in-depth interviews with ten Christian-Buddhist practitioners and spiritual seekers, along with participant observation at a Christian-Buddhist retreat center reveals a profound spiritual hunger for experiencing God, who is both transcendental and immanent, and the inadequacy of propositional presentations of the Gospel in a postmodern and religiously plural context.

CHAPTER ONE

INTRODUCTION: THE PROBLEM AND ITS SETTING

A Story: A Catholic American Encountering a Korean Buddhist at Harvard

Shortly before I traveled to the United States for my theological studies, I encountered an American Buddhist monk with blue eyes at a Catholic University lecture hall in Seoul, Korea. His Buddhist name is Hyon Gak, which means "endlessly profound enlightenment." At that time, he was Abbot of Hyon Jeong Sah Temple in the So Baek Sahn Mountain range, South Korea, the first Westerner to be appointed abbot of a traditional Korean Son (Zen in Japanese) temple. He was born Paul Muenzen in 1964 to a family of devout Catholics in New Jersey, U.S.A. Having actively engaged in his early life at a Roman Catholic church, he had hoped to become a priest. But he gradually became skeptical and critical of the "dogmatic and no longer plausible" old Christian teaching he received in private Catholic schools. He attended Yale University, where his passionate search for the truth that he could not find in the institutional churches led him to enroll in Harvard Divinity School. It was at this old university, founded by the Puritans of New England in 1636 to educate Christian clergy, where young Paul encountered the Korean Buddhist monk Seung Sahn[1] on a December day in 1989. He recalls:

[1] Zen Master Seung Sahn is the 78th Patriarch in his line of transmission in the Chogye order of Korean Buddhism. In 1972, he came to the United States and started the Providence Zen Center, the first center in what is now the Kwan Um School. He and his students have founded over a hundred temples, centers, and groups around the world. Raised in a Protestant family in Korea, he is the author of *The Whole World is a Single Flower*, which includes Christian kong-ans. In the Providence Zen Center, his American disciple has co-directed "Christian-Buddhist retreats" with Father Kevin Hunt OCSO in the belief that Christians and Buddhist can use very similar techniques of contemplative prayer and meditation to help make their spiritual teachings a living part of their daily existence. These retreats emphasize sitting and walking silent meditation, with both Christian and Zen chanting and include talks and discussion. For an academic treatment on Seung Sahn, see Steven Heine and Dale Stuart Wright, *Zen Masters* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2010), chapter 10.

> The teaching of the monk was not sophisticated or complex at all, but that was very simple as well as profound. He did not give an academic-style lecture or sermon. Indeed, he did not trying to explain *about* the Buddhist philosophy. Rather he just gave a question like this: Descartes said, 'I think, therefore I am. Therefore this I comes from thinking. Where does thinking come from? Who are you? When you were born, where did you come from? When you die, where do you go?' The audience members, along with many professors, could not find any adequate answer. He said, 'I will give you a hint. Understanding cannot help you. Even though you read all the books in the Harvard library ten times, you cannot understand your true self.' I replied, 'I don't know.' What answer he [Seung Sahn] gave me too is not a direct answer. Instead, he gave a direction, 'Keep your Don't Know mind and just practice, practice, practice.'[2]

Having taken this direction seriously, Paul "has chosen" to be a Buddhist monk to seek truth and has enthusiastically practiced Zen both in America and Korea. Did he give up his Christian faith? His answer is: "Now, I am not an official Christian. But the more I am walking the Buddhist spiritual path; the more I am appreciating and understanding the true meaning of Gospel of Jesus. I would like to dare to say I am following Jesus' Way through a Buddhist Way."

Finally he was ordained in 1992 in Southern China, received Bikkhu precepts at the Diamond Altar of Tong Do Sah Temple in Korea, and has been practicing in various remote mountain places, including three intensive 100-day solo retreats and some fifteen three-month intensive group meditation retreats. His autobiography, titled *Man Haeng: From Harvard to Hwa Gye Sah Temple* was published in Korean in 1999 and became a bestseller.[3] Up until now,

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[2] This is originated from my informal dialogue with Hyon Gak Sunim on April 2000 in Seoul, Korea.

[3] There is also DVD about him. See Korea Foundation, *Cloud Path: Journey of a Wandering Monk* (Seoul: Korea Foundation, 2006).

he has been very actively involved in "evangelizing" Korean Son (Zen) Buddhism in Korea and abroad as well as participating in Christian-Buddhist dialogue.

As Buddhism came to America, it did not land in a vacuum or blank space. The Judeo-Christian roots of American culture are alive in Americans' lives. For many, the roots of faith are rather hidden, perhaps due to deep dissatisfaction with institutionalized religion. Within this religious vein, Paul's story witnesses a new religious phenomenon: choosing the Buddhist way as an alternative or complementary spiritual path to Christianity is increasingly common in America,[4] known as one of the most religiously plural Western societies.

Today, one can see Buddhist meditation centers spreading and various workshops taking place in a number of sites, attracting not a few Americans to "not dogmatic but practical" ways of spirituality. The "pagans" that missionaries went to convert are now at home converting Christians, challenging Christianity's exclusive claims and provoking serious theological reflection on Christians' attitude toward other religions. How do churches and theologians evaluate and respond to Paul's story and his spiritual journey? For the task of evangelism for the Christian Church, is Buddhist practice a threatening competitor or a new source of continuing transformation of Christian practice?

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[4] In the modern history of America, a Christian's conversion to Buddhism is not a new phenomenon. For example, Dwight Goddard (1861-1939), an American missionary who went to Asia, was converted to Buddhism in China. See *Asian Religions in America: A Documentary History.* Edited by Thomas A. Tweed and Stephen Prothero (New York: Oxford University Press, 1999), 193. For an evangelical treatment on Buddhism, see Harold A Netland and Keith E. Yandell, *Buddhism: A Christian Exploration and Appraisal* (Downers Grove, Ill: IVP Academic, 2009).

Statement of the Problem

The purpose of this project is to address theological questions that surface in the relation between interreligious dialogue and Christian evangelism by investigating contemporary religious encounters between Buddhism and Christianity in the United States. Its primary question is how the practices of evangelism today in the multi-religious world are informed and re-shaped by taking seriously the issue of religious pluralism in general, and Buddhist-Christian dialogue in particular.

According to Robert Wuthnow's recent sociological research, many American Christians are living in contradiction in that they are "pluralists collectively but absolutists in our private lives."[5] He argues that Christian theologians have not adequately wrestled with the questions of particularity and the truth of Christian faith in the context of pluralism.[6] Furthermore, Harvey Cox contends that both Euro-American theologians and the "mainline" churches have failed to grasp the most urgent theological issue of the globalized world: "how Christianity can root itself in cultures steeped in Hindu, Buddhist, Confucian, and indigenous religious symbols and still remain Christian."[7] On the other hand, newly emerging proposals[8] to adopt a pluralist paradigm

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[5] Robert Wuthnow, *America and the Challenges of Religious Diversity* (Princeton and Oxford: Princeton University Press, 2005), 287.

[6] Ibid., 312.

[7] Harvey Cox, "Thinking Globally About Christianity," in *The Oxford Handbook of Global Religions*, ed., Mark Juergensmeyer (New York: Oxford University Press, 2006), 246.

toward other religions and to construe evangelism as "interreligious dialogue" have posed significant challenges to the traditional understanding of Christian evangelism as "proclamation."[9]

Living in a post-modern and post-Christendom age and challenged by religious pluralism, it would be to the great benefit of American Christians to be informed by a thorough analysis of our contemporary religious context. Likewise, a call should be made for theologically responsible guidance toward authentic engagement with religious others not only relevant to our contemporary interreligious experience, but also faithful to the evangelistic mission of the church. Thus, the focus of this study is the theology of evangelism in relation to interreligious dialogue with the ultimate question of how this engagement revisions and contextualizes the theology, aims, and practice of evangelism. By describing and analyzing this specific Christian-Buddhist dialogue in terms of the lived experiences of ordinary people, this project intends to identify and address practical theological issues that emerge from it. In doing so, I seek to explore alternate models of evangelism in the context of Christian-Buddhist engagement.

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8 Kenneth Cracknell, "Dialogue is evangelism, evangelism is dialogue" in *Fullness of Life for All: Challenges for Mission in Early 21st Century*, eds., Daneel, M. L., Charles Edward van Engen, and H. M. Vroom. Currents of encounter, v. 22 (Amsterdam: Rodopi, 2003); Luiz Carlos Susin, Andrés Torres Queiruga, and J. Ma Vigil. eds., *Pluralist Theology: The Emerging Paradigm* (London: SCM Press, 2007); Paul F. Knitter, *Jesus and the Other Names: Christian Mission and Global Responsibility* (Maryknoll, N.Y.: Orbis Books, 1996).

9 Paul Mojzes and Leonard Swidler eds., *Christian Mission And Interreligious Dialogue* (Lewiston, New York: The Edwin Mellen Press, 1990); Harold A. Netland, *Encountering Religious Pluralism: The Challenge to Christian Faith & Mission* (Downers Grove, Ill: InterVarsity Press, 2001).

For the purpose of this dissertation, I choose Buddhism for the following reasons. Like Christianity, Buddhism is recognized as one of the world's first "transregional" religions as it has moved throughout Asia and the rest of the world "out of compassion for the world."[10] Robert Buswell, Jr., a renowned Western scholar on East Asian Zen Buddhism, presents Buddhism as "one of the greatest missionary movements" as well as "one of the three major world religions, along with Christianity and Islam."[11]

In the contemporary United States, Buddhism is attracting popular interests in books, films,[12] and markets[13] reshaping the American religious landscape.[14] While a number of Americans have converted to Buddhism,[15] a national survey in 2003 showed that one American

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[10] See Gananath Obeyesekere, "Thinking Globally About Buddhism" and Thomas A. Tweed, "Buddhist Communities Abroad," in *The Oxford Handbook of Global Religions*, ed., Mark Juergensmeyer (New York: Oxford University Press, 2006), 69-82, 161-172; Linda Learman ed., *Buddhist Missionaries in the Era of Globalization* (Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press, 2005).

[11] Robert Buswell, Jr., ed., *Encyclopedia of Buddhism* (New York: Macmillan Reference, 2004).Vol. 1. vii. Likewise, Peter Harvey introduces Buddhism as one of the "three great missionary religions of the world" with its own distinctive way of evangelism. Two other missionary religions, according to him, are Christianity and Islam. See Peter Harvey, *Buddhism* (London and New York: Continuum, 2001), 3.

[12] Buddhist-theme movies such as *Kundun*, *Seven Years in Tibet*, *Little Buddha*, *The Golden Child*, *The Razor's Edge*, and *The Cup* have shown in major U.S. theatres grossing more than 135 million dollars from U.S. box offices. http://www.adherents.com/movies/buddhist_box.html

[13] Whole markets devoted to meditation cushions and Buddhist art has emerged. See Douglas Padgett, "Americans Need Something to Sit On or Zen Meditation Materials and Buddhist Diversity in North America," *Journal of Global Buddhism*, vol. 1, 2000, 61-81.

[14] Diana L. Eck, *A New Religious America: How A "Christian Country" Has Become the World's Most Religious Diverse Nation* (N.Y.: HarperCollins, 2001); Stephen Prothero ed., *A Nation of Religions: The Politics of Pluralism in Multireligious America* (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 2006).

[15] A few statistics on American Buddhists are available, but they vary considerably. In 1997, *Time* magazine suggested there were "some 100, 000" American Buddhist converts. In the same year, Martin Baumann suggested that there were 3 or 4 million Buddhist in the United States, the most in any Western country. Also, it will

in seven claims to have had a fair amount of contact with Buddhists and that one American in eight believes Buddhist teachings or practices have had an important influence on his or her religion or spirituality.[16] American Buddhism is claimed as an emerging field of academic study [17] and is being taken as a missiological and theological subject in relation to Christian evangelism.[18]

Significance of the Study

This research project will contribute to the task of reconstructing the theology and practice of Christian evangelism in relation to the phenomenon of Christian-Buddhist encounter

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need to be noted that the "Nightstand Buddhists," coined by Thomas Tweed, do not show up in any statistics on the American Buddhist population. Thomas Tweed, "Night-Stand Buddhists and Other Creatures: Sympathizers, Adherents, and the Study of Religion," in *American Buddhism: Methods and Findings in Recent Scholarship*, eds., Duncan Williams and Christopher Queen (Richmond, Surrey: Curzon, 1999), 74.; David Van Biema, "America's Fascination with Buddhism," *Time* (Oct. 13, 1997), 75,; Martin Baumann, "The Dharma Has Come West: A Survey of Recent Studies and Sources," *Journal of Buddhist Ethics* [online] 4 (1997), http:// jbe.la.psu.edu/ Quoted in Richard Hughes Seager, *Buddhism in America* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1999), 11. More recently at around 4 million is placed as the total number of Buddhists in the United States, including immigrants and their descendants and native-born converts. Julie Poppen, "Monument to Buddhism," *Rocky Mountain News*, August 17, 2001, 7A Quoted in Robert Wuthnow, *America and the Challenges of Religious Diversity* (Princeton and Oxford: Princeton University Press, 2005), 47.

[16] Robert Wuthnow and Wendy Cadge, "Buddhists and Buddhism in the United States: The Scope of Influence," *Journal for the Scientific Study of Religion*, 2004, 43: 361-78.

[17] Charles S. Prebish, *Luminous Passage: The Practice and Study of Buddhism in America* (Berkely: University of California Press, 1999); Richard H. Seager, *Buddhism in America* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1999); Duncan R. Williams and Christopher S. Queen, eds., *American Buddhism: Methods and Findings in Recent Scholarship* (Surrey, U.K.: Curzon Press, 1998).

[18] Terry Muck, "Missiological Issues in the Encounter with Emerging Buddhism," *Missiology*. 28, no. 1 (Ja 2000): 35-46.; Stan Guthrie, "America becoming fertile mission field for Buddhism," *Christianity Today* Vol. 38 No. 13 (1994), 72-73. ; James C. Stephens, "Looking at Buddhist America: A Key to World Evangelization," *International Journal of Frontier Missions*, 10 no 3, 1993, 105-115.; Mark S. Heim, "The Trinity and Buddhism: A Perspectives on Christian Mission and Buddhist Mission," in *News of Boundless Riches: Interrogating, Comparing, and Reconstructing Mission in a Global Era*, eds., Max L. Stackhouse and Lalsangkima Pachuau (Delhi: Cambridge Press, 2007), 249-263.

by providing empirical data of interreligious experiences related to that phenomenon and facilitating a correlational dialogue between this data and the theology of evangelism. In this process of reflection, I also will note implications for two related disciplines—the theology of religions[19] and the study of spirituality[20]—and I will engage the literatures of those disciplines so as to amplify my discussion of the theology and practice of Christian evangelism.

In contemporary theological discourse, the impact of interreligious engagement on Christian evangelism has emerged as an important and controversial issue. One of the central questions is "Should we replace mission as it has been practiced up till now by a dialogue with the other religions?"[21] Is it legitimate for Christians to evangelize in dialogue or not? Some Christians feel that evangelism is the antithesis of dialogue, whereas others contend that evangelism is a valid part of the dialogue process. Two opposing currents can be distinguished in

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[19] Two recent introduction books are: Paul F. Knitter, *Introducing Theologies of Religions* (Maryknoll, N.Y.: Orbis Books, 2002) and Veli-Matti Kärkkäinen, *An Introduction to the Theology of Religions: Biblical, Historical, and Contemporary Perspectives* (Downers Grove, Ill: InterVarsity Press, 2003).

[20] For understanding the academic study of spirituality, see *Minding the Spirit: The Study of Christian Spirituality*, eds., Elizabeth A Dreyer and Mark S. Burrows (Baltimore, MD: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2005).

[21] This question was implicitly anticipated by Paul Tillich and Karl Rahner from theological perspectives. Then it was explicitly probed by Willem Visser't Hooft, the first general secretary of the World Council of Churches (WCC), in 1974 for the ecumenical agenda. See W.A. Visser't Hooft, *Has Ecumenical Movement a Future?* (Belfast: Christian Journals Limited, 1974), 30. Quoted in S. Wesley Ariarajah, "The impact of interreligious dialogue on the ecumenical movement," *Ecumenical Review* 49.2(1997): 212-22. See Paul Tillich, *Christianity and the Encounter of the World Religions* (New York, N.Y.: Columbia University Press, 1963); Karl Rahner, "Christianity and the Non-Christian Religions," *Theological Investigations*, trans. Karl Kruger (Baltimore: Helicon Press, 1966), 115-134.

contemporary Christianity and these lead to a sharp polarization among Christians.[22] The first current, often called "exclusivism," stresses an evangelistic approach towards non-Christians which seeks the pursuit of converts. The second current, known as "pluralism," emphasizes a dialogical engagement with people of other religions seeking greater cooperation for the common causes such as peace, justice and ecological wellbeing.

A pluralistic theology of evangelism espoused by John Hick and Paul Knitter suggests that Christian evangelism should not aim to convert the adherents of other religions to Christianity, but that Christian evangelism instead needs to be transformed as a dialogue.[23] Against this pluralistic solution, John Milbank and Harold Netland have argued that the 'end' of dialogue must be conversion to Christianity in an effort to maintaining Christian particularity.[24] These two circles are deeply divided in their respective attitudes toward other religions and they have addressed and debated this fundamental tension between evangelism and dialogue. As a result, evangelism and dialogue are generally taken to be mutually exclusive options and this dichotomy seems to force Christians to choose either proclamation or dialogue.

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[22] John B. Cobb Jr. and Ward McAfee, *The Dialogue Comes of Age: Christian Encounters with Other Traditions* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2010), 17-19.

[23] John Hick, *A Christian Theology of Religions The Rainbow of Faiths* (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 1995), 116-119.; Paul F. Knitter, *Jesus and the Other Names: Christian Mission and Global Responsibility* (Maryknoll, N.Y.: Orbis Books, 1996), 136~146.

[24] John Milbank, "The end of dialogue" in *Christian Uniqueness Reconsidered: The Myth of a Pluralistic Theology of Religion,* eds., Gavin D'Costa (Maryknoll, N.Y.: Orbis Books, 1990), 174-190.; Harold A. Netland, *Dissonant Voices: Religious Pluralism and the Question of Truth* (Grand Rapids, Mich: W.B. Eerdmans, 1991).

In order to forward this debate, this dissertation aims to assess critically the impasse of current theological approaches to such problems and show that they stand in need of new perspectives. More precisely, by critically analyzing theological statements and ecclesial documents published by the Roman Catholic Church and the World Council Churches for the ecclesial and ecumenical response to these challenges, this dissertation ultimately aims to find an ecclesiologically responsible way of bearing Christian witness beyond conservative exclusivism or liberal pluralism, being both faithfully committed to the Gospel story and genuinely open to non-Christian spiritualities and practices.

As to the second of these, this study will contribute to bridging the gaps between the academic/ecclesial discourse and grass-roots interreligious experience and practice[25] by bringing them into a correlative dialogue for mutual critique and enrichment. In the case of Buddhist-Christian dialogue in America, most participants are academic Christians who are usually professors, as Whalen Lai and Michael von Brück observed in *Christianity and Buddhism: A*

[25] Interreligious practice involves sharing or borrowing some or all spiritual practices of another tradition while still retaining allegiance to one's own tradition. It will be used interchangeably with "multiple religious participation" proposed by John Berthrong. See John Berthrong, "Syncretism, Religious Identity, and Multiple Religious Participation," in *A Great Commitment: Christian Hope and Religious Diversity*, eds., Stephen Plant, Susan White (Peter Lang, 2000), 131-146.

Multicultural History of Their Dialogue.[26] Even in general, there are a few literatures for a nonacademic audience.[27]

While a number of average Christians are encountering their religious neighbors not only in the streets, campuses, and work places but also at deeper levels of spirituality[28] and spiritual practice,[29] the churches and theologians have not sufficiently addressed the issues raised by their interreligious practice in relation to Christian spirituality.[30] Some scholars involved in interreligious dialogue have found that previous 'theological/philosophical dialogue' has proven to be deficient in that they have not taken interreligious practice seriously.[31] Donald Mitchell

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[26] See the chap. 6 of Whalen Lai and Michael von Brück, *Christianity and Buddhism: A Multicultural History of Their Dialogue* (Maryknoll, N.Y.: Orbis Books, 2001), 193-235.

[27] Harvey Cox, *Many Mansions: A Christian's Encounter with Other Faiths* (Boston: Beacon, 1988, 1992).

[28] For the purpose of this dissertation I use a working definition of spirituality with a primary emphasis on the lived experience. Sandra Schneiders defines spirituality as "conscious involvement in the project of life integration through self-transcendence toward the ultimate value one perceives." This inclusive definition is fitting to this study because it embraces both Christian and non-Christian religious spiritualities. Sandra Schneiders, "Christian Spirituality: Definitions, Method, and Types," *The New Westminster Dictionary of Christian Spirituality*, ed., Philip Sheldrake (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 2005), 1.

[29] By spiritual practice, I mean mainly prayer, scripture reading and meditation. Yet, some authors define "spiritual practice" more broadly including scientific inquiry, political and ecological activism, etc. For example, see Peter Van Ness, ed., *Spirituality and the Secular Quest* (Volume 22 of World Spirituality: An Encyclopedic History of the Religious Quest) (New York: Crossroad, 1996).

[30] See "Dialogue and Spirituality: The example of Buddhist-Catholic dialogue in the U.S.A." in *Interfaith Dialogue: A Catholic View*, Michael L. Fitzgerald and John Borelli (Maryknoll, New York: Orbis Books, 2006), 193-211. Also see Tosh Arai and Wesley Ariarajah, eds., *Spirituality in Interfaith Dialogue*(Geneva: WCC Publications, 1989); Kwok Pui-Lan, "Interfaith encounter," in *The Blackwell Companion to Christian Spirituality*, ed. Arthur G. Holder (Oxford: Blackwell Pub., 2005).

[31] Paul Knitter, "Horizons on Christianity's New Dialogue with Buddhism," *Horizons* 8, no 1 (1981) 40-61; John Berthrong, "Trends in Contemporary Buddhist-Christian Dialogue," *Ecumenical Trends* 14, no. 9 (1985): 136; Paul Ingram, "Two Western Models of Interreligious Dialogue," *Journal of Ecumenical Studies* 26, no.1 (1989):

argues that 'dialogue of religious experience' is the most demanding and yet the most promising.[32] Even a historical theologian of mission anticipates that "the statement: 'Dialogue becomes the medium of authentic witness' will find its most complete fruition in the realm denoted by 'spirituality'"[33]

At this point, I hope that my project will contribute to both fields of scholarship: the practical theology of evangelism and Christian spirituality, by exercising mutually critical correlation between contemporary Christians' lived experience of Buddhist spirituality and Christian theology of evangelism. Since spirituality and evangelism are internally related[34] in light of the identity and the mission of the church, the theology of evangelism is informed and critiqued by spiritual experience and practice as one of its sources and vice versa.[35]

27;Michael Amaladoss, "The Spirituality of Dialogue," *Studies in Interreligious Dialogue* 3, no. 1 (1993): 60.; Julius Lipner, "The 'Inter' of Interfaith Spirituality," *The Way Supplement* 78 (Fall 1993): 66-68.

[32] Donald Mitchell, "A Revealing Dialogue," *The Way Supplement* 78 (Fall 1993): 49.

[33] Kenneth Cracknell, *In Good and Generous Faith: Christian Responses to Religious Pluralism* (Cleveland: The Pilgrim Press, 2005), 141.

[34] Bryan Stone, "Evangelization and Spirituality," *The New Westminster Dictionary of Christian Spirituality*, 291-292. ; Walbert Bülmann, "Spirituality," *Dictionary of Mission: Theology, History, Perspectives*, eds., Karl Muller, Theo Sundermeier, Stephen B. Bevans, Richard H. Bliese (Maryknoll, New York: Orbis books, 2006), 413-416.; Robert C. Neville, "Christian Spirituality in a Secular World: A Comparative Perspective," in *Religion and Spirituality* (Seoul, Korea: Handle Publishing House, 1998), 211-228.

[35] With regard to this mutual and organic model of relationship between spirituality and theology, see Sandra M. Schneiders, 'Theology and spirituality: strangers, rivals, or partners?' *Horizons* 13 (1986): 253-74; Philip Sheldrake, *Spirituality and Theology: Christian Living and the Doctrine of God* (London: Darton, Longman&Todd, 1988); Claire E. Wolfteich, "Animating Questions: Spirituality and Practical Theology," *International Journal of Practical Theology* 13, Issue 1 (September, 2009): 121–143 and "Graceful Work: Practical theological Study of Spirituality," *Horizons* 27, no. 1 (Spring 2000): 7-21.

By taking the "dialogue of religious experience" as its point of departure and exploring the lived experiences and theologies of Christian-Buddhist practitioners, this qualitative study will advance the current discussion regarding a Christian theology of religions. A theology of religions is intrinsic to the theology of evangelism in determining not only the methods of evangelistic practice but also its aims. That discussion has been dominated by a well-known, threefold typology: exclusivism, inclusivism, and pluralism. Though many scholars continue to rely on this typology and believe it to be valid, others have begun to criticize this terminology as over-simplifying and "apt to miss the special and particular nuances of any one position."[36] Presumably, these categories are determined primarily by soteriology and secondarily by revelation. But within each of these categories we find a variety of theologies of religions.[37]

Among Western theologians, Schubert Ogden,[38] Ian Markham,[39] and Michael Barnes[40] have criticized this typology's limitations and restrictiveness and have suggested alternative

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[36] Alan Race, *Christianity and Religious Pluralism: Patterns in the Christian Theology of Religions* (Maryknoll, N.Y.: Orbis Books, 1982), 139.

[37] For example, the 'exclusivism' of Karl Barth is very different from the 'exclusivism' of some of the evangelical thinkers whose thinking may rightly be called 'restrictivism.' Furthermore, among the pluralists themselves, there is a variety of pluralisms. For example, Mark Heim discusses the peculiarity each of the pluralistic theologies of John Hick, W.C. Smith, and Paul Knitter and proposes his theology, which he names "orientational pluralism." See Mark Heim, *Salvations: Truth and Difference in Religion* (Maryknoll, New York: Orbis Books, 1995) and *The Depths of the Riches: A Trinitarian Theology of Religious Ends* (Wm. B Eerdmans Publishing Co., 2001).

[38] Schubert Ogden, *Is There One True Religion or Are There Many?* (Dallas: SMU Press, 1992).

[39] Ian Markham, "Creating Options: Shattering the 'Exclusivist, Inclusivist and Pluralism' Paradigm" *New Blackfriars* vol. 74, issue 867, (January 1993):33-41.

[40] Michael Barnes, *Christian Identity and Religious Pluralism: Religions in Conversation* (Nashville: Abingdon, 1989).

models. Kenneth Surin argues that this typology is ideologically produced by Western-liberal-pluralists to dominate non-Western religious others.[41] Very recently, Terry Muck points out that this standard paradigm is a Western model and suggests that we need to get "beyond the paradigm."[42] In *Introducing Theologies of Religions,* Paul Knitter attempts to revise the three-fold typology with four models of Christian's attitudes toward other religions: the replacement model, the fulfillment model, the mutuality model, and the acceptance model.[43] But Asian reviewers critically comment that this book ignores non-Western, non-Christian sources.[44] Without considering specific experiences of interreligious encounter in concrete contexts, universalizing theological discourse on it reaches an impasse[45] by being couched in categories that do not fit the context.[46] In exploring the relevance of interreligious dialogue for evangelistic

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[41] Kenneth Surin, "A 'Politics of Speech': Religious Pluralism in the Age of the McDonald's Hamburger." In *Christian Uniqueness Reconsidered,* ed., Gavin D'Costa (Maryknoll, N.Y.: Orbis Books, 1990), 192~212.

[42] Terry C. Muck, "Theology of Religions after Knitter and Hick: Beyond the Paradigm" *Interpretation* 61, no. 1 (Ja. 2007): 7-22.

[43] Paul Knitter, *Introducing Theologies of Religions* (Maryknoll, New York: Orbis Books, 2002).

[44] Peter C. Phan, Review of *Introducing Theologies of Religions* by Paul Knitter, *Horizons* 30, no. 1 (Spr 2003):113-117. ; K. P. Aleaz, Review of *Introducing Theologies of Religions* by Paul Knitter, *Asia Journal of Theology* 17, no. 2 (October 2003): 442-459.

[45] As an example of Korean context, in 1992 the Korean Methodist church excommunicated two professors of the Methodist Seminary, Byun Sun-Hwan and Hong Jung-Soo. Prof. Byun was dismissed from the presidency of his school and also deprived of his professorship "mainly because of his sympathetic understanding toward other religions, particularly toward Buddhism." Oh Kangnam, "Buddhahood and Metanoia: The Buddhist-Christian Dialogue in Korea," *Journal of Dharma* (Bangalore) Vol. 20, no. 2 (April-June 1995): 229.

[46] Aloysius Pieris, "Interreligious Dialogue and Theology of Religions: An Asian Paradigm," *Horizons* 20 (Spr 1993): 106-114.; Moonjang Lee, "Experience of Religious Plurality in Korea: Its Theological Implications," *International Review of Mission*. 88 (O 1999): 399-413.; Moonjang Lee, Review of *Jesus and the Other Names: Christian Mission and Global Responsibility* by Paul Knitter, *Studies in World Christianity*. Vol. 5 (1, 1999): 93-95.

practice from the perspective of a practical theology of religions, this dissertation will not ask soteriological questions such as whether "adherents of other religions can be saved." Rather, this project will ask questions such as "what can Christians learn from Buddhist practices and experiences in the task of evangelism?" By doing so, the study aims at to formulate a practical theology of evangelism informed by the lived experiences of Christian-Buddhist dialogue and faithful to the Christian tradition with its mission to proclaim the Gospel.

Method of Investigation

This project is a practical theological exercise. I see all Christian theology as fundamentally practical in that its subject matter is the life and praxis of the church as it engages the world. I take practical theology as the theological guide by which the Christian community engages the world and determines the practices of Christian life in a critical and transforming dialogue between the Christian tradition and contemporary experience.

Tillich's method of correlation personifies the fundamental approach of practical theology. The method of correlation discerned the questions from human existence and provided a theological response from the Christian message. As such, theology is a function that serves the needs of the church. It is supposed to present the "truths" of the Christian faith as well as show how these truths are relevant for each era in human history.[47] Practical theology is the critical-reflective process by which the church and the truth of the Christian faith are transformed,

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[47] Paul Tillich, *Systematic Theology* vol. 1 (Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press, 1951), 1.

becoming relevant to specific religious, historical and social contexts. Practical theology also has a non-theological side, i.e., it may benefit from conversation with the social sciences. Tillich says the theologian must utilize current knowledge from the psychological and sociological arena, and have an understanding of the current socio-political and cultural situation of humanity.[48] Practical theology, therefore, becomes a bridge between the Christian message and the human situation.

David Tracy expands the method of correlation and makes it a more viable approach for practical theology. He argues for a mutually critical-correlation method for practical theology. This model prompts a critical reflection and reinterpretation of authentic Christianity and authentic contemporary experiences within a post-modern framework. This revisionist model holds that "a contemporary fundamental Christian theology can best be described as philosophical reflection upon the meanings present in common human experience and language, and upon the meanings present in the Christian Fact."[49] Tracy sought to develop a model for a theological engagement most appropriate for a pluralistic context. This model is adequate for our contemporary situation because it seeks to correlate "contemporary human experience" with Christian fact and investigates the human situation and identifies revised Christian symbols to address the situation. Whereas Tillich's method of correlation only identifies questions from

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[48] Ibid., 33.

[49] David Tracy, *Blessed Rage for Order* (Chicago and London: University of Chicago Press, 1996), 43.

human existence and provides the necessary religious symbols for answers, Tracy allows the culture to interact and affect (critique and revise) Christian theology.

Don Browning goes even further than Tracy and redefines Christian theology as essentially practical.[50] Theology is "critical reflection on the church's dialogue with Christian sources and other communities of experience and interpretation with the aim of guiding its action toward social and individual transformation."[51] Contrary to the "theory to praxis model," which begins with theoretical concepts and seeks to apply those concepts to life situations, Browning proposes a "present theory-laden practice to a retrieval of normative theory-laden practice to the creation of more critically held theory-laden practices."[52] All theological norms, even scripture, were developed in reflection on practices and actions in which the church was already involved. Our experiences and actions give rise to our reflections and subsequent theories. Therefore, theory does not precede practice. Rather, practices produce theories.

Interreligious dialogue is a practical theological concern because it is a contemporary human experience and a context in which Christians and Christian churches are engaged. I also see religious practices as a means for interreligious engagement.[53] A person's experiences shape

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[50] Don Browning, *A Fundamental Practical Theology: Descriptive and Strategic Proposals* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1996), 7.

[51] Ibid., 16.

[52] Ibid., 7.

[53] John Berthrong, "An exploration of the study of religious practices as an avenue for interreligious engagement and its implications for Practical Theology," paper presented at The Association of Practical Theology,

and affect that person's understanding of God and world. One derives beliefs about God and persons of other religious traditions less from propositional-conceptual thinking, and more from encounters with God and persons of other religious traditions. Practical theology reminds Christians of this fact, and in using interreligious encounters and experiences as a source for the theology of evangelism, it expressly affirms that people's experiences influence/shape our theological beliefs as much as their theological beliefs influence/shape their practices.[54]

Recognizing this dialectical and reciprocal relationship between theology and experience, I take the lived experience of interreligious dialogue as an important source in the construction of a practical theology of evangelism as Gerald Hall articulated his method of missionary practical theology: "Christian commitment to liberating praxis needs to be equally attentive to the power of the gospel—the voice of prophecy—and the reality of the human situation—the voice of dialogue. The relationship between the two voice—prophecy and dialogue—is dialectical: that is, they need to be understood together and in reference to each other as two poles of the theological task."[55]

November 20, 2004 forum entitled "Horizons in Practical Theology: Religious Practices as a Context for Interreligious Engagement."

[54] See Margaret Miles, *Practicing Christianity: Critical Perspectives for an Embodied Spirituality* (Eugene, OR: Wipf & Stock Publishers, 2006) and Miroslav Volf and Dorothy C. Bass, eds., *Practicing Theology: Beliefs and Practices in Christian Life* (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2002).

[55] Gerard Hall, "Prophetic Dialogue: A Foundational Category for Practical Theology," in *International Journal of Practical Theology*, vol. 14, (2010): 34.

Sources of the Study

This project consists of two main sources of information. The first lies within a qualitative interview process and participant observation built on previous research begun in the Church and Theology in Contemporary World course, 2001-2002, at Boston University co-directed by Dr. Peter Berger and Dr. Claire Wolfteich.

The second body of main sources includes theological statements and ecclesial documents on interreligious dialogue and evangelism by the ecumenical and ecclesial offices. As for the Catholic church, I will examine a selection of key documents from and since the Second Vatican Council: *Nostra Aetate* [Declaration on the Relationship of the Church to Non-Christian Religions](1965); *Lumen Gentium* [Dogmatic Constitution on the Church](1964); *Ad Gentes* [Decree on the Churches' Missionary Activity](1965); *The Attitude of the Church toward Followers of Other Religions* (1984 declaration of the Vatican Secretariat for Non-Christian Religions); *Redemptoris Missio: On the Permanent Validity of the Church's Missionary Mandate (1990)*; *Dialogue and Proclamation* (1991).[56]

As for the World Council of Churches, the following documents will be analyzed: *The Chiang Mai Statement: Dialogue in Community* (1977)*; Guidelines on Dialogue with People of living Faiths and Ideologies* (1979); *Mission and Evangelism: An Ecumenical Affirmation* (1982)

[56] While I am aware of other more recent statements by and controversies regarding Pope Benedict on the subject of interreligious dialogue such as *Dominus Jesus* (2001), I will not cover these recent developments in the Roman Catholic world for the purpose of limiting the scope of the dissertation.

"Witness among People of Other Living Faiths," San Antonio Report (1989)*; Religious Plurality: Theological Perspectives and Affirmations* (*Baar Statement,* 1990)

For a wider appreciation of various confessional approaches to the interreligious encounter, *Grounds for Understanding: Ecumenical Resources for responses to Religious Pluralism*, edited by S. Mark Heim will be referenced.[57] The references for scholarly work on the Buddhist-Christian dialogue and theologies of interreligious encounter are found mainly in two sources: *Buddhist-Christian Studies,* a quarterly journal published by the Society of Buddhist-Christian Studies in the U.S.A., from 1981 to 2010 and *Faith Meets Faith Series,* published by Orbis Books. Theological work on the question of Christian evangelism and the practice of interreligious dialogue in the American context[58] of religious pluralism will be particularly focused on in this study.[59]

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57 Mark S. Heim, *Grounds for Understanding: Ecumenical Resources for Responses to Religious Pluralism* (Grand Rapids, Michigan: W.B. Eerdmans, 1998).

[58] Because my study will focus on the U.S., I will not include resources found on the outside of the country such as Tao Fung Shan Center in Hong Kong.

[59] Because my primary materials for theological analysis will come from the ecumenical and Catholic circles of American Christianity, I will not be addressing all aspects of World Christianity. According to Christian Smith's research, evangelicals are the most active religious group to participate in evangelistic work in the U.S. But due to the limit of scope of this dissertation, I will not engage in theological discussions with the evangelical circles in-depth. Cf. Christian Smith, *American Evangelicalism: Embattled and Thriving* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1998); For evangelical approaches to religious pluralism, see John Gordon Stackhouse, ed., *No Other Gods Before Me?: Evangelicals and the Challenge of World Religions* (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Baker Academic, 2001).; Stephen D. C. Corts, *Particularism as An Evangelical Responses to Religious Plurality* (Ph. D. diss., Southern Baptist Theological Seminary, 1991).

Location of the Researcher

At the outset, I need to situate myself as an researcher outside the context of the United States, as I am an Asian Christian with my particular religious and ecclesial background. I was born and raised in South Korea, a multi-religious society steeped in about one thousand years of Buddhism, over six hundred years of Confucianism, and over two hundred years of Christianity.. Currently, about 25 % of the population of South Korea identifies as Christian and about 30% as Buddhist. In South Korea, both Buddha's birthday and Christmas are celebrated as national holidays. There is also religious competition, conflict, and even violence between the two religions. But what mostly concerns me is that within the same Christian groups there are divisions between conservatives and liberals, evangelicals and ecumenicals, regarding the issue of Christians' attitudes toward other religions. Many conservative evangelical circles look at non-Christian religions as demons and treat the people of other religions merely as objects of evangelism, trying to convert them to Christianity. Against this dominant stream and criticizing evangelicals as exclusivists, some liberal and ecumenical circles advocate a dialogical approach toward other religions. For this reason, the conservative evangelical side of Christian churches have condemned ecumenicals as syncretists and pluralist. This cycle is antagonistic, hostile, and painful. When I was at seminary, the Korean Methodist Church excommunicated two professors of the Methodist seminary, depriving them of their professorship, mainly because of their sympathetic attitude toward other religions, particularly Buddhism. Some ultra-conservative Christian leaders have even condemned the Roman Catholic Church as heretical because of its

dialogue with other religions and refused to join the World Council of Churches because they perceived the WCC's position as religiously pluralist.[60] This climate has led Korean Christians to choose either exclusivism or pluralism, evangelism or dialogue. I believe that this is a false dichotomy; these categories are not mutually exclusive, but can and should be integrated. From my own Korean experience of religious pluralism, this research was motivated by my hunch that Christian evangelism needs to be informed and shaped by a religiously plural context and interreligious engagement while seeking an alternate model of evangelism beyond the dichotomy between conservative exclusivism and liberal pluralism. By doing so, I hope to contribute to the reconstruction of the theology and practice of Christian evangelism and interreligious engagement from an Asian perspective.

[60] These conservative denominations are currently against the Korean Churches' hosting of the 10th Assembly of the WCC which will take place in Busan, South Korea, in 2013.

CHAPTER TWO

REVIEW OF RELATED LITERATURE

The Religious Situation in the U.S.A.

New Religious Landscape: Christian Country vs. Multi-religious Society

Recently scholars of American religion have changed their old 'Protestant paradigm' into what Stephen Prothero calls 'a new pluralist paradigm' that perceives the United States of America as "a nation of religions whose skyline is punctuated not only by church spires but also by onion domes and minarets."[1] Until the mid-twentieth century, it would be safe to say that there was no objection to the historical claim that America was a nation of Christians in general, Protestant in particular.[2] In 1955, the Jewish sociologist Will Herberg asserted in his book *Protestant, Catholic, Jew* that Protestants must reconcile themselves to the fact that this is no

[1] Stephen R. Prothero ed., *A Nation of Religions: The Politics of Pluralism in Multireligious America* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2006), 4. For the "Protestant paradigm," he presents two representative books: Robert Baird, *Religion in America, or, An Account of the Origin, Progress, Relation to the State, and Present Condition of the Evangelical Churches in the United States: With Notices of the Unevangelical Denominations* (New York: Harper, 1844), and Sydney E. Ahlstrom, *A Religious History of the American People* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1972). Regarding the paradigm change in the sociology of American religion, see Stephen R. Warner, "Work in Progress Toward a New Paradigm for the Sociological Study of Religion in the United States," *The American Journal of Sociology* 98, no. 5 (Mar., 1993) : 1044-1093.

[2] A detailed examination of America's religious history is, of course, beyond the scope of my dissertation. However, the brief review of works on America's changing religious landscape by scholars of American religion will serve as a background for the descriptive task of the project I am undertaking.

longer a Protestant country, but one in which three faiths operate on an equal basis.[63] By the 1960s, however, neither the old Protestant paradigm nor Herberg's "triple melting pot" theory[64] could accurately describe America's new multi-religious situation.

Most scholars are in agreement that the new pluralist paradigm of American religions was prompted by the Immigration Act of 1965, which eliminated the quotas linking immigration to national origins. Immigrants from all over the world have come to the United States along with their religions, including Buddhists, Muslims, and Hindus. By living and practicing their faiths in their new American homes, immigrants are unprecedentedly and drastically changing the religious landscape of the United States.[65]

A clearer portrait of the new reality of religious plurality in the United States has been offered by 'the Pluralism Project' at Harvard University directed by Professor Diana L. Eck. Based on this demographic research project, Eck and her research associates have provided an introduction to the new religious landscape of America, "from a Cambodian Buddhist temple set amidst the farmlands of Minnesota, to a multiethnic storefront mosque on a sloping San Francisco street," in a multimedia CD-Rom entitled *On Common Ground: World Religions in*

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[63] Will Herberg, *Protestant, Catholic, Jew: An essay in American religious sociology* (Chicago: The Univ. of Chicago Press, 1983), Chapters I, VI, X.

[64] Ibid,, 33.

[65] It is worth noting U.S. Supreme Court Justice William Douglas' comment in 1965 that the United States was no longer Christian or even Judeo-Christian but a "a nation of Buddhists, Confucianists and Taoists" too. *United States v. Seeger*, 380 U.S. 163 (1965), quoted in Stephen Prothero, *American Jesus: How the Son of God Became a National Icon* (New York: Farrar, Straus, and Giroux, 2003), 4.

America.[66] The first chapter, "A New Religious Landscape," describes approximately 400 religious organizations from eighteen different locations across the United States. The second chapter, *"*America's Many Religions," presents the history and ecology of fifteen world religions in the American context. The third chapter, *"*Encountering Religious Diversity," discusses the recurring issues of "American identity" in relation to its religious plurality. Finally, Eck contends in *A New Religious America,* published in 2001, that recent immigration from Asia has transformed the United States from "a Christian country" into "the World's most religiously diverse nation on earth."[67]

As part of her research into the contemporary religious composition of America, in the process of discovering how new that landscape is, Eck quantifies her findings of a multireligious America as follows: "there are more Muslim Americans than Episcopalians, more Muslims than members of the Presbyterian Church U.S.A., and as many Muslims as there are Jews—that is, about six million. We are astonished to learn that Los Angeles is the most complex Buddhist city in the world, with a Buddhist population spanning the whole range of the Asian Buddhist world

[66] It was first published by Columbia University Press in 1997; a second edition was released in 2002. In 2008, a third edition was released by the Pluralism Project. The primary content of the third edition remains unchanged from its original publication in 1997.

[67] Diana L. Eck, *A New Religious America: How A "Christian Country" Has Become the World's Most Religiously Diverse Nation* (New York: HarperCollins, 2001), 4.

from Sri Lanka and Korea, along with a multitude of native-born American Buddhists. Nationwide, this whole spectrum of Buddhists may number about four million."[68]

Consequently, Americans are now composed of adherents of world religions interacting each day at school, at work, and even at home in interfaith marriages, as Paul D. Numrich points out in his new book, *The Faith Next Door: American Christians and Their New Religious Neighbors.*[69] Calling this a "Main Street phenomenon," Eck demonstrates that "the new multireligious reality" is not only found in the metropolitan cities of America but also in the "heartland of America" such as Salt Lake City, the Bible Belt of Dallas, the suburbs of Cleveland, and so on.[70] However, Eck argues that many Americans are not well-informed about the country's dramatic transformation into a multireligious society.

In contrast to Eck's claim, Philip Jenkins argues that "to adapt Professor Eck's title, what we are rather seeing is *How Mass Immigration Ensured that a Christian Country Has Become an Even more Christian Country*," because the vast majority of immigrants from Latin American countries are either Catholic or Pentecostals, and significant numbers of Asian immigrants are

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[68] Eck, Ibid., 2-3. Regarding American Buddhism, see also Andrew Lam, "Buddhism Roots Deep in America," article in *New America Media* posted Oct 18, 2009; James William Coleman, *The New Buddhism: The Western Transformation of an Ancient Tradition (*New York: Oxford University Press, 2001); Richard Hughes Seager, *Buddhism in America* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1999); Charles S. Prebish and Kenneth K. Tanaka eds., *The Faces of Buddhism in America* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1998); Charles S. Prebish, *Luminous Passage: The Practice and Study of Buddhism in America* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1999); Duncan Ryuuken Williams and Christopher S. Queen ed., *American Buddhism: Methods and Findings in Recent Scholarship* (Richmond: Curzon Press, 1999).

[69] Paul D. Numrich, *The Faith Next Door: American Christians and Their New Religious Neighbors* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2009).

[70] Eck, *Op.cit*., 20-1.

converting to Christianity in the United States.[71] Based on ethnographic research, R. Stephen Warner, a sociologist of religion, points out that two-thirds of post-1965 immigrants are Christian[72] and this fact is obscured in Diana Eck's *A New Religious America*.[73] According to him, in the past four decades, the US Christian community has lost members by conversion to Islam (especially African Americans) and to Buddhism (especially European Americans) but has gained by the conversion to Christianity of others (especially Chinese).[74] In the final analysis, he maintains that the new immigration is making the United States more rather than less Christian.

Calling this "the Christian America debate," Stephen Prothero, a scholar of American Religion, convincingly criticizes these two opposing views in that "the Christian nation camp overlooks the vitality of non-Christian religions in the United States, while the multireligious camp turns a blind eye to the public power exercised by the Christian majority."[75] Amanda Porterfield, former president of the American Society of Church History, provides a helpful

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[71] Philip Jenkins, *The Next Christendom: The Coming of Global Christianity* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002), 105. Also see Jenkins' review essay, "A New Religious America," *First Things* 125 (August/September 2002): 25-28.

[72] R. Stephen Warner, "The de-Europeanization of American Christianity," in *A Nation of Religions: The Politics of Pluralism in Multireligious America* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2006), 234. For a full analysis on the diverse religious communities of post-1965 immigration, see his *Gatherings in Diaspora: Religious Communities and the New Immigration* (Philadelphia: Temple Univ. Press, 1998.) Related works are Janet Saltzman Chafetz and Helen Rose Fuchs Ebaugh, *Religion and the New Immigrants: Continuities and Adaptations in Immigrant Congregations* (Walnut Creek, CA [u.a.]: AltaMira Press, 2000) and Karen I. Leonard, *Immigrant Faiths: Transforming Religious Life in America* (Lanham, MD [etc.]: AltaMira Press, 2006).

[73] See Warner, Ibid., Footnote 5, 249.

[74] Ibid., 244.

[75] Stephen Prothero, *American Jesus: How the Son of God Became a National Icon* (New York: Farrar, Straus, and Giroux, 2003), 5-6.

explanation in connecting these two seemingly opposite views on the present religious situation of America. She writes: "the transformation to a post-Protestant culture is the result of a variety of factors working together to loosen the dominance of Protestant institutions over the larger culture while at the same time allowing beliefs and activities rooted in Protestant tradition to interact more freely than ever before with beliefs and attitudes from other traditions."[76] Having embraced the different emphases of both camps and considered the Protestant tradition's transformation in a new religiously pluralistic situation, I suggest seeing the United States as both a 'Christian' country and a 'multireligious' society, rather than what Prothero calls "a nation of religions," or what Porterfield names "a post-Protestant America."

The Challenge of New Religious Pluralism

What will this new religious diversity mean for contemporary Americans' religious life in general, and the Christian practice of evangelism in particular? Before proceeding with this section, I need to distinguish between "diversity" or "plurality" and "pluralism." Although these words are used interchangeably in some cases, it is important to note that religious pluralism is more value-imbedded than religious diversity, which is simply a descriptive term.[77]

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[76] Amanda Porterfield, *The Transformation of American Religion: The Story of a Late-Twentieth-Century Awakening* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001), 6.

[77] Peter Byrne defines 'pluralism' as "one intellectual response to that fact of religious diversity," from the perspective of the philosophy of religion. See his book, *Prolegomena to Religious Pluralism: Reference and Realism in Religion* (Basingstoke [England]: Macmillan Press, 1995), 1and chapter 1.

Clarifying the difference between diversity as a "fact or condition" and pluralism as an "ideal or impulse" for "acceptance and encouragement of diversity," William R. Hutchison argues that religious pluralism in America is "a work in progress," which has been developing and accordingly has been redefined from "toleration" to "inclusion" to "participation" since the second half of the twentieth century.[78] Defining pluralism as "the engagement that creates a common society from all that plurality," Eck also differentiates between diversity and pluralism, advocating pluralism along with the following four points: 1) Pluralism is the vigorous "engagement with diversity," 2) Pluralism is "active seeking of understanding" beyond a mere tolerance, 3) Pluralism is "the encounter of commitments" without losing one's own identity, and 4) Pluralism aims at mutual enrichment and critique by means of "dialogue."[79]

Interpreting the current American situation of religious plurality as the loss of Protestant hegemony, Stanley Hauerwas criticizes liberal Protestants for wrongly using the term pluralism as an "ideology" to "give themselves the illusion they are still in control of, or at least have responsibility for, the future of America."[80] Thomas F. Banchoff summarizes Hauerwas' critique of the "liberal use of the terms:"

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[78] William R. Hutchison, *Religious Pluralism in America: The Contentious History of a Founding Ideal* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2003), 1-10.

[79] The Pluralism Project at Harvard University, *What is Pluralism?* http://pluralism.org/pages/pluralism/what_is_pluralism (accessed June 16, 2010). See also Diana Eck, "Exploring the New Religious Landscape of the US," *Church and Society* 83:1 (1992): 4-8.

[80] Stanley Hauerwas, "The End of Religious Pluralism" in *Democracy and the New Religious Pluralism*. ed. Thomas F. Banchoff, (New York: Oxford University Press, 2007), 284-285. In this essay, Hauerwas presents John Howard Yoder's approach to the interfaith dialogue as an adequate model of Christian response to the challenge of religious pluralism.

> First, the term *religion* often connotes a narrow form of privatized belief that arose within the modern constitutional state. It tends to abstract faith from community … marginalize traditions less centered on beliefs and more on social practices. Second, the term *pluralism* has problematic normative associations. For Hauerwas the theologian, it evokes the idea that religions are so many paths to the same truth. For many other observers, it suggests an affirmation of U.S.-style interest group politics over the corporatist or statist alternatives more prevalent in other democracies.[81]

Looking at new religious pluralism as a product of modernism and globalization, Peter Berger describes the globalized situation of "missionary" world religions as follows:

> Hasidic movements with headquarters in Brooklyn, New York, are sending missionaries to Israel and to Jewish communities in Eastern Europe. The so-called Jesus Movie, a film produced by an American evangelical organization and synchronized in well over a hundred languages, is being screened by aggressive missionaries in villages throughout India, despite the outrage of pious Brahmins and the opposition of the Indian government. But Hinduism is returning the compliment. Devotees dance and chant in praise of Krishna in major American and European cities. Hindu missionary organizations (ranging from the sedate Vedanta Society to the exuberant Sai Baba movement) are busily evangelizing wherever they can. Similarly, Buddhist groups with headquarters in Japan, Taiwan, and Southeast Asia are attracting sizable numbers of converts in Western countries.[82]

Religious pluralism, according to Berger, has not only "institutional" implications but also a "cognitive" one.[83] Among religious institutions, religious pluralism has established a kind of

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[81] Thomas F. Banchoff, *Democracy and the New Religious Pluralism* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2007), 5. Here Banchoff suggests a working definition of "religious pluralism" non-normatively as "the interaction among religious groups in society and politics."

[82] Ibid., 20.

[83] Peter Berger, "Pluralism, Protestantization, and the Voluntary Principle," in *Democracy and the New Religious Pluralism*, 21.

"religious market" in which they have to "compete" for "religious consumers." This competition is tempered with respect; certain religious organizations such as mainline Protestants, Catholics and Jews form tacit agreements not to target one another's adherents for conversion.[84]

Another implication of religious pluralism bears on the subjective consciousness of individuals for Berger: "religion loses its taken-for-granted status in consciousness."[85] It is Berger's long-held argument that modern pluralism is not only an external social fact but also an internal psychological fact, encompassing "the uncertainty of identity" and "the uncertainty of meanings."[86] Confronted with others who do not take for granted what was understood as traditional in their own communities, individuals must now reflect on the cognitive and normative assumptions of their traditions, and consequently they must make choices "from the most trivial choices between competing consumer commodities" to "beliefs, values, and worldview."[87] In his previous book, Berger calls this necessity of choice "the heretical imperative," from the Greek verb *harein*, "to choose." In this sense, Berger claims, "everyone must be a "heretic" in this age of religious pluralism.

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[84] Ibid., 22.

[85] Ibid., 23.

[86] Peter Berger, "The Pluralistic Situation and the Coming Dialogue Between the World Religions," *Buddhist-Christian Studies* 1 (1981): 32-3.

[87] Peter Berger, *The Heretical Imperative* (Garden City, New York: Anchor Books, 1979), 19-20.

Another important effect of religious pluralism that Berger raises is "a blurring of boundaries between 'insiders' and 'outsiders.'"[88] This de-recognition of religious boundaries is happening at both the intra-religious and inter-religious levels. At the intra-religious level, denominational boundaries within Christianity in America are losing their significance. Based on a sociological survey, Wade C. Roof discusses this by making two interesting observations. First, it is easy to switch from one denomination to another today.[89] Americans "shop" for a place of worship based on practical reasons such as a family's needs when they move from town to town, regardless of denominational differences. Second, there is a highly individualized and privatized notion of 'spirituality' that allows for a religious or spiritual life for each person composed of elements borrowed from several denominational traditions. One of the interviewees, Roof reports, "described himself as 'primarily Catholic,' but while he attends mass weekly, he also belongs to an ecumenical prayer group in his neighborhood and frequently worships at a local evangelical church because of its 'good preaching.'"[90] At the inter-religious level too, one can detect such de-recognition of boundary lines. Today, there are Catholic priests who are also Zen masters, and lay Protestants who identify themselves as Buddhist-Baptists or Zen-Christians.[91] Of course, not

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[88] Peter Berger, "The Pluralistic Situation and the Coming Dialogue Between the World Religions," 35.

[89] Wade Clark Roof, *A Generation of Seekers: The Spiritual Journeys of the Baby Boom Generation* (New York: Harper San Francisco, 1993).

[90] Ibid., 245.

[91] For a general introduction of dual or multiple religious participation, see John H. Berthrong, *The Divine Deli: Religious Identity in the North American Cultural Mosaic* (Maryknoll, N.Y.: Orbis Books, 1999). While multiple religious belonging is a relatively new phenomenon in the Western religious traditions, it is of course far

every contemporary American experiences this kind of pluralism in the same way or even as a problem. There are also upsurges of conservative religious movements that reject religious pluralism, such as fundamentalism.[92] Nevertheless, it is undeniable that religious pluralism has made a significant impact on American Christians' beliefs and practices.

In her presidential address entitled "Prospects for Pluralism: Voice and Vision in the Study of Religion" delivered to the American Academy of Religion in 2006, Diana L. Eck claimed that "Understanding and interpreting religious diversity... is a theological challenge, a question of faith—age old, and yet insistent and new in our time."[93] Religious pluralism, for Eck, is not only "a critical civic issue for citizens of increasingly diverse societies" but also "a critical theological issue for people of faith, raising fundamental questions about one's own faith in relation to the religious other."[94] As a Christian who was born, raised and is still actively

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more familiar in the East. Hence it is not surprising that the issue is particularly raised in dialogue with Eastern religions. See, for example, John H. Berthrong *All Under Heaven: Transforming Paradigms in Confucian-Christian Dialogue* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1994), 165-187. For a Christian-Buddhist context, see William Johnston, *Christian Zen* (New York: Harper & Row, 1971); Robert E. Kennedy, *Zen Gifts to Christians* (New York: Continuum, 2004); Ruben L. F. Habito, *Living Zen, Loving God* (Boston, MA: Wisdom Publications, 2004). For a theological analysis and reflection, see Catherine Cornille, *Many Mansions?: Multiple Religious Belonging and Christian Identity* (Maryknoll, N.Y.: Orbis Books, 2002); Peter C. Phan, "Multiple Religious Belonging: Opportunities and Challenges for Theology and Church," *Theological Studies* 64 (2003): 495-519. Phan's article was later included in his book. See Peter Phan, *Being Religious Interreligiously: Asian Perspectives on Interfaith Dialogue* (Maryknoll, N.Y.: Orbis Books, 2004).

[92] See *The Desecularization of the World: Resurgent Religion and World Politics*, ed. Peter L. Berger (Washington, D.C.: Ethics and Public Policy Center; Grand Rapids, Mich.: W.B. Eerdmans Pub. Co., 1999).

[93] Diana L. Eck, "Prospects for Pluralism: Voice and Vision in the Study of Religion," *Journal of American Academy of Religion* 75, no. 4 (December 1, 2007): 767.

[94] Ibid., 743.

involved in the United Methodist church, Eck tells us her personal spiritual journey.[95] Through the years of encountering world religions, she says, "I have found my own faith not threatened, but broadened and deepened by the study of Hindu, Buddhist, Muslim, and Sikh traditions of faith. And I have found that only as a Christian pluralist could I be faithful to the mystery and the presence of the one I call God."[96] What about other Christians' responses to the prevailing religious pluralism? Eck knows that many Christians would not agree with her acknowledging that there are many Christians who have no trouble speaking of "our God" in exclusionist terms as if God had no dealings with people of other faiths.[97] Taking "the reality of difference as its starting point," Eck contends, "the challenge of pluralism is not to obliterate or erase difference, nor to smooth out differences under a universalizing canopy, but rather to discover ways of living, connecting, relating, arguing, and disagreeing in a society of differences."[98]

In *Encountering Religious Pluralism: The Challenge to Christian Faith & Mission*, Harold Netland rightly addresses theological and missiological challenges posed by religious pluralism: theologically, religious pluralism "strikes at the heart of Christian faith, touching every major area of theology, including theological method, revelation, the doctrine of God and,

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[95] See Diana L. Eck, *Encountering God: A Spiritual Journey from Bozeman to Banaras* (Boston: Beacon Press, 2003).

[96] Eck, *A New Religious America*, 23-24.

[97] Ibid., 24.

[98] Eck, "Prospects for Pluralism: Voice and Vision in the Study of Religion," 746.

most obviously, Christology and soteriology."[99] Within missiology, religious pluralism raises "troubling questions about the nature and even legitimacy of Christian mission," provoking "an acute sense of crisis." This crisis comes, he argues, from the widespread loss of "confidence in the truth claims of Christian faith and traditional Christianity in favor of more pluralistic alternatives."[100] Netland's assessment is confirmed in a poll taken in the United States in 2002.[101] The following questions were designed to measure the acceptance of religious pluralism:

> "Should Christians seek to convert people of other faiths or leave them alone?" 22 percent said "convert," and 71 percent said "leave them alone."
> To the statement "All religions have elements of truth," 78 percent said yes.
> To the statement "My religion is the only true religion," only 17 percent answered yes.

In this regard, Robert Wuthnow provides intriguing information on the American Christians' evangelistic activities based on the Religion and Diversity Survey.[102] He reports:

> [R]espondents in the survey who said they were Christians were asked if they considered it important for Christians to share their faith with non-Christians.

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[99] Harold Netland, *Encountering Religious Pluralism: The Challenge to Christian Faith and Mission* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 2001), 14.

[100] Ibid., 15-16.

[101] The poll was commissioned jointly by PBS's *Religion and Ethics Newsweekly* and *US News and World Report*, and its results were published in *The Christian Century* (May 8-15, 2002), 16.

[102] This survey was a part of The Responses to Religious Diversity Project directed by Robert Wuthnow at Princeton University. He introduces the overview of the survey: "The project sought to understand how the majority Christian population of the United States is responding to the growing presence of other religions, particularly Muslims, Hindus, and Buddhists…This survey was conducted between September 18, 2002, and February 25, 2003…A total of 2,910 individuals age eighteen and over, living in the continental United States, were interviewed." The full results of the Responses to Religious Diversity Project are reported in *America and the Challenges of Religious Diversity* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2005), quoted in Robert Wuthnow, Religious Diversity in a "Christian Nation" (Discussion Draft for conference on "The New Religious Pluralism and Democracy," April 21-22, 2005, Georgetown University) www.ipri.pt/eventos/pdf/Paper_Wuthnow.pdf (accessed June 17, 2010).

> Sixty percent said this was very important and most of the remainder (26 percent) said it was fairly important. But sharing one's faith apparently means something other than making converts. When asked how important it was for Christians to encourage people from other faiths—such as Muslims, Hindus, or Buddhists—to become Christians, only 36 percent said this was very important…Among those who had done any evangelizing in the past year, only 10 percent had tried to persuade a Muslim to become a Christian, only 5 percent had tried to persuade a Hindu, and only 7 percent had tried to persuade a Buddhist.[103]

Even Christian exclusivists, Wuthnow concludes, prefer to talk to their friends who belong to non-Christian religions about Christianity without actively engaging in trying to convert them. Surely Christian exclusivists will not agree with some pluralistic theologians' argument that non-Christian religions may be said to be ways of salvation and religious pluralism is part of God's providential plan.[104] But in practice, it seems that both exclusivists and pluralists are facing thorny questions regarding conversion as the primary goal of evangelism.

In *Evangelism after Christendom: The Theology and Practice of Christian Witness*, Bryan Stone pointedly raises practical theological questions in response to these challenges of religious pluralism:

> If, on the one hand, we accept the relativity of the Christian faith among a plurality of religious options, what could possibly serve as the motivation for and aim of inviting other persons to become Christians? If, on the other hand, we insist that the Christian story is the truth about all peoples and about all history,

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[103] Robert Wuthnow, *America and the Challenges of Religious Diversity* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2005), 221-222.

[104] Peter C. Phan, *Being Religious Interreligiously: Asian Perspectives on Interfaith Dialogue* (Maryknoll, N.Y.: Orbis Books, 2004), xxiii.

> thereby affirming its standing as a "metanarrative," what is to be the evangelist's attitude toward adherents of other religions and toward interfaith dialogue?[105]

It is clear that religious pluralism and interreligious dialogue are interrelated key challenges facing Christian churches and practicing evangelism today, both in the United States and increasingly throughout the world. Careful reflection on Christianity's truth claims and evangelistic practices in relation with other religions in their particularity is an important and necessary practical theological task.

Changing Spirituality in a Interreligious Context

Arguably, one of the most distinctive phenomena of the latter part of the twentieth century and into the twenty first century has been a growth in interreligious spirituality. Newly emerging forms of spirituality in the past fifty years have been shaped by an increasingly interreligious context and has penetrated the process of interreligious dialogue. Zen masters and Hindu swamis, who came to America in the 1960s, capably responded to the deep spiritual hunger of many Americans and provided them with teachings and practices that guided them into the new spiritual journey.[106] Previous surveys indicate that six religious expressions have attracted widespread attention in America: transcendental meditation, yoga, the charismatic

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[105] Bryan Stone, *Evangelism after Christendom: The Theology and Practice of Christian Witness* (Grand Rapids: Brazos Press, 2007), 152.

[106] See *Eastern Spirituality In America*, ed. Robert S. Ellwood (Mahwah, NJ: Paulist Press, 1987).

movement, mysticism, faith healing, and various Eastern religions.[107] They have also demonstrated a marvelous flexibility in adapting ancient religious teachings and practices to fit a modern, technological Western culture.[108] "By now American Eastern religion shows every sign of being deeply and permanently interwoven into the spiritual life of an increasingly pluralistic society."[109]

The changing patterns and shifting orientations of personal spirituality in contemporary America are well examined in *After Heaven: Spirituality in America Since the 1950s* by Robert Wuthnow, sociologist of religion, who based this work on interviews and surveys.[110] "A spirituality of dwelling" during the 1950s changed into "a spirituality of seeking" in the 1960s as Americans faced social and cultural changes. Since then, "practice-oriented" spirituality—"making a deliberate attempt to relate to the sacred" through disciplines—has been emerging. As a result, a new form of spirituality has been forming beyond established religious institutions, emphasizing various spiritual disciplines and the experiences of the sacred.

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[107] George David Gallup. Jr. Poling, *The Search For America's Faith* (Nashville: Abingdon, 1980). "More than twenty-seven million people have been in touch─superficially or deeply─with these religious expressions… Clearly the deep spiritual hunger of young people is not being met by the established church" (17).

[108] A fine example of modernized Buddhism can be found in the works of Thich Nhat Hanh: *The Miracle of Mindfulness* (Boston: Beacon, 1975); *Peace is Every Step* (New York: Bantam, 1992).

[109] *Eastern Spirituality In America*, 6.

[110] Robert Wuthnow, *After Heaven: Spirituality in America Since the 1950s* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1998).

At the end of his book, Wuthnow concludes that people of different faiths are forced to interact with one another and writes, "The outcome of this process is always uncertain."[111] What is now certain, however, is that "interspirituality"[112] is emerging and gradually reshaping the personal faith and practice of many who belong to mainstream religious organizations, e.g., Christian churches. An "interfaith spirituality" is now proposed as an adequate response for a religiously plural world by some Christian scholars of religion.[113] Furthermore, some scholars also argue that spirituality holds possibilities for the Christian's authentic witness in a context of

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[111] Ibid, 198.

[112] See Alan Race, "Interspirituality in the Waiting," in *Interfaith Encounter: The Twin Tracks of Theology and Dialogue* (London: SCM Press, 2001), 144-160.

[113] The following personal story by a renowned Western scholar of Buddhism illustrates this dramatically changing spirituality:

> I remember quite well a conversation with one of my former theological teachers when I was a postgraduate student. At that time I was writing my thesis on Buddhist-Christian dialogue, and the Professor of Mission tried to convince me of Christianity's superiority. As one piece of evidence he claimed that in no other religion the high ideal of loving one's enemy could be found. I contradicted and told him about the Buddha's parable of the saw, where the Buddha exhorted his disciples that even if someone came with a sharp saw to cut them into pieces bit by bit, they should stay free from any hatred or malevolence and embrace that person with undiminished love and compassion (Majjhima-Nikâya 21). The Professor was impressed by my objection, but then he responded: 'This makes dialogue with Buddhism even more difficult.' Obviously the only objective of inter-faith dialogue that he could think of was to demonstrate to the other the superiority of the Christian gospel.
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> I must confess that I could understand my professor, for there had been a time when I felt alike. But through my encounter with Buddhism my attitude had changed radically. Today I believe that the time for such a mentality has gone. I am well aware that this mentality is far from being extinct. But I am convinced that it is no longer adequate. Or to be more precise, it never was adequate, but nowadays this has become more apparent than ever before. What we now need to develop is an attitude which permits us to let Non-Christians and their religious traditions becoming a positive part of our own religious consciousness, that is of our spirituality. The new spirituality for a religiously plural world needs to be an inter-faith spirituality.

Perry Schmidt-Leukel, "A New Spirituality for a Religiously Plural World" in *A Different World Is Possible*, ed. Susin, Luiz Carlos, Jon Sobrino and Felix Wilfred (London: SCM Press, 2004), 62-63.

interreligious dialogue[114] and that Christian spirituality in cooperation with other religions, e.g., Buddhism, can contribute to the recovery of the evangelistic nature of the Christian message in a secularized world.[115]

Since the 1960s, sociologists of religion have described the phenomenon of the "spiritual seeker," who does not belong to an established religion but who is still interested in religious questions and experiments with many paths, regardless of their religious traditions.[116] In *Spiritual, but Not Religious: Understanding Unchurched America,*[117] Robert C. Fuller attempts to describe and explain this new phenomenon in relation to religious institutions.

> The confusion stems from the fact that the words "spiritual" and "religious" are really synonyms. Both connote belief in a Higher Power of some kind. Both also imply a desire to connect, or enter into a more intense relationship, with this Higher Power. And, finally, both connote interest in rituals, practices, and daily moral behaviors that foster such a connection or relationship....
> [However, during the twentieth century, the] word **spiritual** gradually came to be associated with the private realm of thought and personal experience while the word **religious** came to be connected with the public realm of membership in

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[114] "Kenneth Cracknell, "Is Your Heart Right with My Heart? A Spirituality for Religious Pluralism," in *Good and Generous Faith: Christian Responses to Religious Pluralism* (Cleveland: The Pilgrim Press, 2005), 141.

[115] Robert C. Neville, "Christian Spirituality in a Secular World: A Comparative Perspective," in *Religion and Spirituality* (Seoul, Korea: Handle Publishing House, 1998), 211-228.

[116] Cf. Wade Clark Roof, *Spiritual Marketplace: Baby Boomers and the Remaking of American Religion* (Princeton: Princeton Univ. Press, 2001), *A Generation of Seekers: The Spiritual Journeys of the Baby Boom Generation* (San Francisco: HarperSanFrancisco, 1993), Paul Heelas and Linda Woodhead, *The Spiritual Revolution: Why Religion Is Giving Way to Spirituality* (Malden, MA [u.a.]: Blackwell Pub, 2005), and Robert K. C. Forman, *Grassroots Spirituality: What It Is, Why It Is Here, Where It Is Going* (Exeter: Imprint Academic, 2004).

[117] Robert C. Fuller, *Spiritual, but Not Religious: Understanding Unchurched America* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001).

> religious institutions, participation in formal rituals, and adherence to official denominational doctrines.[118]

Viewing "spirituality as a journey" toward personal growth and fulfillment, Fuller describes how these "spiritual but not religious" individuals pick and choose elements from a wide range of alternative religious beliefs and practices as they construct what Fuller calls "unchurched spirituality."[119]

However, persons who claim they are "spiritual but not religious" are not limited to the so-called "unchurched" group but can be found within "churched" Christians too. Thus, scholars of spirituality have begun to address this issue from their own Christian points of view. Sandra Schneiders writes:

> As Christians have encountered other religions and quasi-religions directly, rather than purely academically, they have experienced the power of rituals and practices from Native American sweat lodges to Zen meditation, from African drumming to feminist nature rituals, from psychotherapy and support groups to channeling and twelve-step programs. Eclecticism, syncretism, and relativism, familiar to the postmodern mind in the areas of art, science, medicine, business, and education, seem natural enough also in the sphere of religion.[120]

In order to describe the current "incredible diversity in spiritualities" vividly, Claire Wolfteich, a practical theologian of spirituality, tells of her trip to Sedona, one of the New Age spirituality sites in America:

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[118] Ibid, 5.

[119] Ibid., 6.

[120] Sandra M., Schneiders, "Religion vs. Spirituality: A Contemporary Conundrum," *Spiritus: A Journal of Christian Spirituality* 3 (2003) : 164.

> I also visited Sedona, Arizona, a city referred to as the New Age capital of the United States. At Angel Valley Retreat Center, visitors can walk an Angel Wheel or meditate in the energy of vortex sites, as well as walk two labyrinths. At the Center for the New Age, seekers made appointments for aura photos, psychic readings, astrological reports, past life regression, Reiki, and channeling sessions. They bought crystals and books on topics such as Kabbalah, Tarot card reading, Native American spirituality, Buddhism, and animal communication.[121]

Confirming the fact that "the term 'spirituality' is used now by many religious communities and speaks to many individuals who resist institutional religion," Wolfteich raises some important practical theological questions:

> What should one make of this great variety of spiritualities? Does it reflect the abounding grace of a creative God, or the delusions and confusions of contemporary persons?…what 'identities, nonidentities, and analogies' exist between New Age spiritual practices and 'normative' Christian practices? What explicit or implicit challenges do New Age seekers raise to Christian practices, traditions, teachings, and style? How do, and how should, the Christian churches in Sedona engage the New Age spirituality so prevalent in the context?[122]

Connecting the "spirituality of seeking or journeying," a term used by Wuthnow and the "Self-spirituality of the New Age movement,"[123] a term suggested by Paul Heelas, with challenges of religious pluralism, Harold Netland properly points out the question of truth claims and the crisis of religious commitment. Accordingly, Christianity's long-held "affirmation of the

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[121] Claire E. Wolfteich, "Animating Questions: Spirituality and Practical Theology," *International Journal of Practical Theology* 13, Issue 1 (September, 2009): 121–143.

[122] Claire Wolfteich, "Animating Questions: Spirituality and Practical Theology," 125.

[123] Paul Heelas, *The New Age Movement: The Celebration of Self and the Sacralization of Modernity* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1996), 2. Quoted in Harold Netland, *Encountering Religious Pluralism: The Challenge to Christian Faith and Mission* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 2001), 155.

exclusivity of Jesus Christ as the one Lord and Savior for all peoples,"[124] and its superiority to other religious traditions, are seriously questioned by many Christians themselves. "Given the many different, conflicting religious alternatives, and given the cacophony of voices claiming religious authority, how is one to know which path to follow?"[125] "Even if in principle it is granted that one religious tradition might be superior to the rest, why should we assume that Christianity is in this privileged position? After all, why Jesus and not the Buddha?"[126]

As shown through the above reviews, the increasing presence of what Fuller termed "unchurched" spiritual seekers and Christians' encounters with other spiritualities in a religiously pluralistic America have enormous implications for the evangelistic task of the church, as well as for Christian spirituality.

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[124] Harold Netland, *Encountering Religious Pluralism: The Challenge to Christian Faith and Mission*, 151-157.

[125] Ibid., 154.

[126] Ibid., 157.

Theological Responses to Religious Pluralism, Interreligious Dialogue and Christian Evangelism

While many contemporary Christian theologians make no distinction between world "religions" (in the plural) and "religion" (in the singular), Jacques Dupuis differentiates between "the theology of religion" which "[as a Christian enterprise] asks what religion is and seeks, in the light of Christian faith, to interpret the universal religious experience of humankind …." and "Christian theology of religions" which "studies the various traditions in the context of the history of salvation and in their relationship to the mystery of Jesus Christ and the Christian Church." [127] Christian theology of religions, according to Amos Yong, is "the attempt to reflect on the relationship between God and the phenomenon of the religions from the standpoint of Christian faith."[128] T. R. Phillips lists pertinent questions for Christian theology of religions from the evangelical perspective:

> The celebration of religious diversity in the Western world has re-confronted the Church with fundamental theological issues. Is the spirituality and religious piety of adherents of other religions authentic? Is salvation available outside a knowledge of the gospel of Jesus Christ? No other issue is more important for Christian identity right now. For these questions target the central Christian

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[127] Jacques Dupuis, S.J., *Toward a Christian Theology of Religious Pluralism* (Maryknoll, N.Y.: Orbis Books, 1998), 7, 8.

[128] Amos Yong, *Beyond the Impasse: Toward a Pneumatological Theology of Religions* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker, 2003), 14. J. Van Lin defines theology of religions as the theoretical and practical foundational ideas on the basis of which "Christians can determine their relationship to people of other living faiths." See Van Lin, "Models of a Theology of Religions" in *Missiology: An Ecumenical Introduction: Texts and Contexts of Global Christianity*, eds. F. J. Verstraelen et al. (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1995), 177.

> doctrines: the veracity of Scripture, the nature of God, humanity's sinfulness, the uniqueness of Jesus' person and work, and the church's mission.[129]

Kosuke Koyama also raises interrelated questions: "Is there a 'radical discontinuity' (Hendrik Kraemer) between the gospel and other faiths? How do Christians bear witness to the name of Jesus Christ in an interreligious context? In what ways are Christians thinking of the plurality of religious truths?"[130] For the purpose of this dissertation, I suggest that the theology of religions must be taken seriously within the practical theology of mission and evangelism in the context of interreligious engagement. A theology of religions is intrinsic to a theology of evangelism in determining not only the methods of evangelistic practice, but also its aims.[131]

Current Christian Theologies of Religions: The Threefold Typology and its Impasse

In the last two decades of the twentieth century, a threefold typology—exclusivism, inclusivism, and pluralism—has dominated Christian literature on the issue of Christianity's

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[129] T. R. Phillips, "Christianity and Religions," in Walter A Elwell ed., *Evangelical Dictionary of Theology* (Baker reference library. Grand Rapids, Mich: Baker Academic, 2001), 231-234.

[130] Kosuke Koyama, "Missiology" in *New and Enlarged Handbook of Christian Theology*, edited by Musser, Donald W., and Joseph L. Price (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 2003), 328.

[131] For this point, I am indebted to some theologians and missiologists: Amos Yong, *Hospitality and the Other: Pentecost, Christian Practices, and the Neighbor* (Maryknoll, N.Y.: Orbis Books, 2008). See especially chapter 3. "Performing Theology of Religions: Christian Practices and the Religions," 65-98. Here Yong explicates the question of "how Christian theologies of religions assume and inform Christian interreligious practices," including evangelism and dialogue and demonstrates "how contemporary options in Christian theology of religions are shaped by and inform different Christian practices in the encounter between religions." For missiologists, see Gerald H. Anderson, "Theology of Religions: The Epitome of Mission Theology" in *Mission in Bold Humility: David Bosch's Work Reconsidered*, eds. W. Saayman and K. Kritzinger (Maryknoll, N.Y.: Orbis Books, 1996), Gerald H. Anderson "Theology of Religions and Missiology: A Time of Testing" in *The Good News of the Kingdom: Mission Theology for the Third Millenium*, eds. Charles Van Engen et al. (Maryknoll, N.Y.: Orbis Books, 1993); Eric J. Sharpe, "New Directions in the Theology of Mission" *Evangelical Quarterly* 46 (January-March, 1974); David Bosch, *Transforming Mission: Paradigm Shifts in Theology of Mission* (Maryknoll, N.Y.: Orbis Books, 1991).

attitudes and relationships to world religions, although there have been other Christian views on the topic. Alan Race, in his book *Christians and Religious Pluralism*, likely first introduced the exclusivist/inclusivist/pluralist typology terms.[132]

Exclusivism designates the theological position that salvation requires an explicit faith in Jesus Christ and that other religions are therefore of little or no value. God has revealed Himself in the Bible and in the person of Jesus, the only Savior and Lord, without whom there is no salvation whatsoever. Inclusivism, by contrast, refers to the position that other religions do have salvific significance, but only by virtue of the hidden and unrecognized redemptive work of Christ in them, requiring their fulfillment in Christianity. The inclusivists regard Christ as the legitimate ways of salvation apart from the way of Jesus Christ, the latter being merely one of many equally valid ways. Inclusivism has been the official stance of the Roman Catholic Church since the Second Vatican Council (1962-1965). One of the key architects of the Second Vatican Council was Karl Rahner, one of the most influential Roman Catholic theologians of the twentieth century. He positively viewed religions as "vehicles of God's selfcommunication" or "God-willed means of helping people recognize the presence of God."[133]

The pluralist rejects the premise of the exclusivist and the inclusivist that God has revealed Himself in Jesus in any unique, central, definitive or final sense. While exclusivism and inclusivism have been long-standing dominant theological stances in the history of Christianity,

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[132] Alan Race, *Christians and Religious Pluralism* (Maryknoll, N.Y.: Orbis Books. Rahula, Walpola 1983), 7.

[133] Kärkkäinen, *Op cit.* 41.

pluralism is relatively new and is the most debated model proposed and worked out, from the 1970s onward, by theologians such as John Hick.[134]

Hick argues that his pluralistic project is not only the result of theological evolution but also most relevant to the global phenomenon of world religions: first, that any of the great world religions cannot claim moral superiority, and second, that all great world religions promote a common vision of salvation as detachment from ego-centeredness and commitment to Reality.[135] As an adequate response to this, Hick calls for a decisive shift that he terms "the Copernican revolution" in theology: from the view of religious life centered on one's own religion ("Ptolemaic") to one centered on God ("Copernican" or "theocentric"),[136] requiring Christians to abandon their long-held exclusive claims for the uniqueness and universality of Jesus and the superiority of Christianity.[137] As first suggested by the programmatic volume *The Myth of Christian Uniqueness* and later revised by Knitter, "the theological Rubicon" between exclusivism and inclusivism on the one side and pluralism on the other is to be crossed by three "bridges:" the philosophical-historical bridge, the religious-mystical bridge, and the ethical-

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[134] John Hick, *The Center of Christianity* (New York: Harper & Row, 1968); *God and the Universe of Faiths* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1973); "Jesus and the World Religions," in *The Myth of God Incarnate* (London: SCM Press, 1977), 167-185.

[135] John Hick, *A Christian Theology of Religions: The Rainbow of Faiths* (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 1995), 14-22.

[136] "a paradigm shift from a Christianity-centered or Jesus-centered to a God-centered model of the universe of faiths. One then sees the great world religions as different human responses to the one divine Reality." *Christianity and Other Religions*, ed. by John Hick and Brian Hebblethwaite (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1980), 180-181.

[137] Ibid., 83-103.

practical bridge.[138] The pluralists who cross the first bridge, notably John Hick, base their arguments on the historically and culturally limited nature of all religions, which denies any one of them claims of absoluteness, and on the philosophical possibility that underlying them all is one Divine Reality, the essence of religion, that transcends and grounds religions as its diverse epiphenomenal manifestations.[139] Those who traverse the second bridge, on the other hand, foremost among them Raimondo Panikkar, base their claims on the recognition that the Divine Mystery as experienced mystically is infinite and ineffable and therefore beyond all particular forms of religious experience, forbidding any one religion from having the final say on the nature and characteristics of the ultimate.[140] The proponents of the third bridge, represented by Paul Knitter, make the crossing in quite a different manner in the sense that the ethical-practical bridge focuses on the shared practical concern of all religions for justice and salvation in the face of the common problems of injustice and suffering in the world, which brings them much more effectively to a dialogue and a common praxis.[141]

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[138] John Hick and Paul K. Knitter ed., *The Myth of Christian Uniqueness: Toward a Pluralistic Theology of Religions* (Maryknoll, N.Y.: Orbis Books, 1987), ix-xii. See also Paul F. Knitter, *Introducing Theologies of Religions* (Maryknoll, N.Y.: Orbis Books, 2002), 112-113.

[139] See John Hick, *An Interpretation of Religion: Human Responses to the Transcendent* (London and Basingstoke: The Macmillan Press, 1988).

[140] See Raimundo Panikkar, *The Cosmotheandric Experience: Emerging Religious Consciousness* (Maryknoll, N.Y.: Orbis Books, 1993).

[141] See Paul Knitter, "Toward a Liberation Theology of Religions," in *The Myth of Christian Uniqueness: Toward a Pluralistic Theology of Religions* (Maryknoll, N.Y.: Orbis Books, 1987), 178-200, and *One Earth, Many Religions: Multifaith Dialogue and Global Responsibility* (Maryknoll, N.Y.: Orbis Books, 1995). *Jesus and the Other Names: Christian Mission and Global Responsibility* (Maryknoll, N.Y.: Orbis Books, 1996).

A Critique of the Three-Paradigm Taxonomy

Though pluralist scholars continue to rely on this typology and believe it to be valid,[142] others have begun to criticize this terminology as over-simplifying and "apt to miss the special and particular nuances of any one position."[143] Presumably, these categories are determined primarily by soteriology and secondarily by revelation. But within each of these categories we find a variety of theologies of religions.[144] A self-identified exclusivist, Netland specifically states that he is "increasingly unhappy with" the above-mentioned categories as they tend "to obscure subtle, but significant, differences among positions and thinkers," and that these three categories are not "clearcut categories."[145]

Moreover some theologians have viewed the typology as "misrepresenting non-pluralist approaches as theologically deficient and/or ethically insensitive."[146] Likewise, Michael Barnes,

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[142] Alan Race, *Interfaith Encounter: The Twin Tracks of Theology and Dialogue* (London: SCM Press, 2001); Paul Hedges and Alan Race ed., *Christian Approaches to Other Faiths* (London: SCM, 2008).

[143] Alan Race, *Christianity and Religious Pluralism: Patterns in the Christian Theology of Religions* (Maryknoll, N.Y..: Orbis Books, 1982), 139.

[144] For example, the 'exclusivism' of Karl Barth is very different from the 'exclusivism' of some of the evangelical thinkers whose thinking may rightly be called 'restrictivism.' Furthermore, among the pluralists themselves, there is a variety of pluralisms. For example, Mark Heim discusses the peculiarity each of the pluralistic theologies of John Hick, W.C. Smith, and Paul Knitter and proposes his theology, which he names as "orientational pluralism." See Mark Heim, *Salvations: Truth and Difference in Religion* (Maryknoll, New York: Orbis Books, 1995) and *The Depths of the Riches: A Trinitarian Theology of Religious Ends* (Wm. B Eerdmans Publishing Co., 2001).

[145] Harold A. Netland, *Encountering Religious Pluralism: The Challenge to Christian Faith and Mission* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2001), 46-54.

[146] Tim S. Perry, *Radical Difference: A Defence of Hendrik Kraemer's Theology of Religions* (Waterloo, Canada: Wilfrid Laurier University Press, 2001), 11.

a British Jesuit theologian, states that his "major objection" to the three-fold typology is that, though useful at times, "it tends to serve the interests of the pluralist agenda only."[147] Furthermore, Kenneth Surin argues that this typology is ideologically produced by Western-liberal-pluralists to dominate non-Western religious others.[148] Very recently, Terry Muck points out that this standard paradigm is a Western model and suggests that we need to get "beyond the paradigm."[149]

Even among liberal Western theologians, Schubert Ogden and Ian Markham have criticized this typology's limitations and restrictiveness and have suggested fourth options.[150] In the same line with these critics, I also argue that the threefold paradigm has become loaded with pejorative meanings and, more importantly, is no longer sufficient to address the complexity of interreligious conversion and diversity among Christian communities.

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[147] Michael Barnes, *Theology and the Dialogue of Religions* (Cambridge, U.K.: Cambridge University Press, 2002), 8-9. Also see his *Christian Identity and Religious Pluralism: Religions in Conversation* (Nashville: Abingdon, 1989).

[148] Kenneth Surin, "A 'Politics of Speech': Religious Pluralism in the Age of the McDonald's Hamburger." In *Christian Uniqueness Reconsidered,* ed., Gavin D'Costa (Maryknoll, N.Y.: Orbis Books, 1990), 192~212.

[149] Terry C. Muck, "Theology of Religions after Knitter and Hick: Beyond the Paradigm" *Interpretation* 61, no. 1 (Ja. 2007): 7-22.

[150] Schubert Ogden, *Is There One True Religion or Are There Many?* (Dallas: SMU Press, 1992); Ian Markham, "Creating Options: Shattering the 'Exclusivist, Inclusivist and Pluralism' Paradigm" *New Blackfriars* vol. 74, issue 867, (January 1993):33-41. Cf. Heung-Gyu Kim *Prolegomena to a Christian Theology of Religions* (Lanham, MD: University Press of America, 2000).

A Christian Search for Alternatives

J. Andrew Kirk offers an alternative suggestion by proposing three "new" ways of viewing other religions in light of Christianity. Instead of using the less-than-desirable terms of "exclusivism," "inclusivism," and "pluralism," he prefers these terms: "particularity," "generality," and "universality." It is true that the new terms "represent the same positions, but [they] do not suffer from immediately negative connotations."[151] Although Kirk's new terms are more value-neutral than the exclusivism or inclusivism or pluralism typology, he still has not expanded beyond the conventional, three-school typology.

In recent years, within Christian circles, new and innovative approaches that transcend the simplistic three-perspective topology have been emerging. In *Introducing Theologies of Religions,* Paul Knitter attempts to revise the three-fold typology with four models of Christians' attitudes toward other religions: the replacement model, the fulfillment model, the mutuality model, and the acceptance model.[152] But Asian reviewers critically comment that this book ignores non-Western, non-Christian sources.[153] Without considering historical, cultural, ethnic,

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[151]J. Andrew Kirk, *What is Mission? Theological Explorations* (Minneapolis, MN: Augsburg Fortress Publications, 2000), 127-130.

[152] Paul Knitter, *Introducing Theologies of Religions* (Maryknoll, New York: Orbis Books, 2002).

[153] Peter C. Phan, Review of *Introducing Theologies of Religions* by Paul Knitter, *Horizons* 30, no. 1 (Spr 2003):113-117. ; K. P. Aleaz, Review of *Introducing Theologies of Religions* by Paul Knitter, *Asia Journal of Theology* 17, no. 2 (October 2003): 442-459.

and gender differences[154] between local contexts, universalizing theological discourse on interreligious encounters reaches an impasse[155] by being couched in categories which do not fit the context.[156]

S. Mark Heim goes beyond taking sides on exclusivist and pluralist views. Calling the three-school typology "inadequate,"[157] Heim rejects the pluralists' common view that all religions point and lead to the ultimate end. He argues that various religions serve diverse ends or goals. In other words, according to Heim, different religions teach and demonstrate different goals or salvations, and these salvations might be different in and of themselves.

Amos Yong, a Pentecostal theologian from Malaysia, proposes a pneumatological approach to the world religions. Citing John 3:8 ("the Holy Spirit blows wherever the Spirit wills"), Yong asks "what the pneumatological categories of divine presence, divine activity, and

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[154] Cf. Pui-lan Kwok, *Postcolonial Imagination and Feminist Theology* (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 2005).

[155] As an example of Korean context, in 1992 the Korean Methodist church excommunicated two professors of the Methodist Seminary, Byun Sun-Hwan and Hong Jung-Soo. Prof. Byun was dismissed from the presidency of his school and also deprived of his professorship "mainly because of his sympathetic understanding toward other religions, particularly toward Buddhism." Oh Kangnam, "Buddhahood and Metanoia: The Buddhist-Christian Dialogue in Korea," *Journal of Dharma* (Bangalore) Vol. 20, no. 2 (April-June 1995): 229.

[156] Aloysius Pieris, "Interreligious Dialogue and Theology of Religions: An Asian Paradigm," *Horizons* 20 (Spr 1993): 106-114.; Moonjang Lee, "Experience of Religious Plurality in Korea: Its Theological Implications," *International Review of Mission*. 88 (O 1999): 399-413.; Moonjang Lee, Review of *Jesus and the Other Names: Christian Mission and Global Responsibility* by Paul Knitter, *Studies in World Christianity*. Vol. 5 (1, 1999): 93-95.

[157] S. Mark Heim, *Salvations: Truth and Difference in Religion* (Maryknoll, N.Y.: Orbis, 1995), 221.

divine absence...would look like when they are brought in dialogue with the religious symbols of the non-Christian faiths."[158]

In an effort to find more useful ways of speaking about the religions in relation to biblical faith, an evangelical-reformed theologian, Gerald D. McDermott, declares in *God's Rivals* that this three-view typology "has collapsed." Rather, he urges evangelicals to take a radical turn from the question of salvation (i.e., can non-Christians be saved?) to the question of the role of religion in human history and God's redemptive history, as proposed initially and advanced by Joseph DiNoia and S. Mark Heim.[159] I also concur that Christian soteriology-centered approaches, once embraced and popularized by religious pluralists, have not produced many meaningful or fruitful results in interreligious dialogues among people of different faiths.

While there will be disagreement about what to do with and what to think about other religious traditions, the principal theologians on dialogue agree on four basic points regarding today's pluralistic situation and the Christian response to it: 1. Christians cannot ignore the many religions; 2. Respect for them and a willingness to learn from them are essential to viable dialogue; 3. Faithfulness to the Christian heritage remains essential; 4. The Christian tradition

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[158] Amos Yong, *Beyond the Impasse: Toward a Pneumatological Theology of Religions,* 191-192

[159] Gerald R. McDermott, *God's Rivals: Why Has God Allowed Different Religions? : Insights from the Bible and the Early Church* (Downers Grove, Ill: IVP Academic, 2007), 23.

must therefore be read anew in light of today's situation so that Christians can responsibly account for the new while remaining faithful to their heritage.[160]

Theological bases for interreligious dialogue

I present a three-fold theological basis for interreligious dialogue with devotees of different faiths. First, I affirm that God has sown "the seed of religion" in the human soul. Second, I appeal to the Holy Spirit's working in the lives of all people and religious traditions. Third, I affirm that all humans share in the quest for truth and reality.

Justin Martyr of the second century was the first Christian theologian to teach that the seed of the Logos (Word) is within every person. In *The Institute of the Christian Religion* (1536), the great Reformer, John Calvin, claims that humans have an innate sense of the Divine, for God has planted "the seed of religion" in humans.[161] As a matter of fact, the Latin term *semen religionis* is more accurately translated as "the seed of religion-ness." But Calvin concludes that only a minority of people develop this awareness of the Divine because the manifestation of God is "choked by human superstition and confusion."[162] Nevertheless, the seed, at least from a

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[160] Francis Clooney, "Christianity and World Religions: Religion, Reason, and Pluralism," *Religious Studies Review* 15, no.3 (1989): 199.

[161] John Calvin, *Institutes of the Christian Religion 1*. John T. McNeill, ed. (Philadelphia, PA: Westminster Press, 1990), 51-53.

[162] Ibid., 63-66.

Christian angle, functions as a common denominator and is a starting point with followers of different religious communities for interreligious dialogue.

Second, the working of the Spirit is unpredictable and beyond human control. The Holy Spirit's wisdom, thoughts, and guidance go beyond and above human comprehension. Thus, I affirm Yong's assertion that "the world's religions have their place in the divine providence for divine purposes," because the Spirit of God is "universally present" and is "the life breath of all human interpersonal and communitarian activity."[163] However, Yong is not explicitly clear in describing the biblical-theological criteria by which Christians could discern, judge, and validate various workings of the Holy Spirit in other religions.

D'Costa, an Indian Roman Catholic, cautions Christians that limiting or monopolizing God exclusively in terms of Jesus only "fails to account for the fullness of the self-disclosure of God" in the history of humankind. His rationale for this remark is based on his belief that Jesus is "wholly God" (totus Deus), but "never the whole of God" (totum Dei). It is a very significant and helpful distinction in an ecumenical discussion. In D'Costa's view, Jesus of Nazareth represented the wholeness of God (e.g., divine attributes), but Jesus did not reveal the total revelation of God—e.g., God's heart and Spirit, God's thoughts and plans, God's means and purposes for all of humanity in human history. D' Costa acknowledges the reality in which "the

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[163] Amos Yong, *Beyond the Impasse: Toward a Pneumatological Theology of Religions,* 184.

saving activity of God outside [the gates of] the church" is present and important.[164] He supports this view by claiming that the Holy Spirit's activity cannot be confined to the Christian faith alone.

The third theological basis for interreligious dialogue is the most important. Just as pedestrians travel on a bridge from each side, interreligious dialogue is a two-way street and requires a "give and take" interaction. Interreligious dialogue requires Christians "to really listen and learn from the world religions and in this process be open to the judgment of God upon the Christian community."[165]

Maurice Wiles sees dialogue with members of other religions as a means of "receiving as well as offering truth from God." To him, other religions function "in some sense as a revelation of God from which we need to learn,"[166] for "it is impossible for Christians to rule out in advance the truth of all other religions and to claim to know, on the basis of what has already been given to them in their own faith, that truth belongs exclusively to them," thereby requiring "a genuinely open dialogue."[167]

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[164] Gavin D'Costa ed., *Christian Uniqueness Reconsidered: The Myth of a Pluralistic Theology of Religions,* 18-19.

[165] Ibid., 17.

[166] Maurice Wiles, *Christian Theology and Inter-Religious Dialogue* (Oxford, UK: Trinity Press International, 1992), 4-5.

[167] Ibid., 43.

In the same vein, McDermott proposes an intriguing thesis in his book, *Can Evangelicals Learn from World Religions?*, that even evangelical Christians may "learn from" other world religions about the character and attributes of God that have been revealed to humanity by God Himself outside the history of Israel and of the Church. His fascinating biblical thesis holds that, though imperfect and "fallen" like humanity, the world religions originated from God-created angelic beings, were sown with "seeds of the Logos," and have been permitted by God's design and providence.[168] In other words, to McDermott, God has preserved the religions, though filled with errors and distortions and even having demonic influences, and allows these "fallen" supernatural beings or powers to accomplish divine purposes in God's redemptive history.

Refuting the traditional Reformed Christian dichotomistic view of "special revelation" (God's self-disclosure with His words and actions) and "general revelation" (God's self-disclosure in nature), McDermott argues this kind of knowledge of God revealed through other religions belongs to a new, different category. Hendrik Kraemer, author of a seminal book *The Christian Message in a Non-Christian World* (1938), was another staunch defender of the position, and refused to divide God's revelation into general and special categories for the same reason.[169]

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[168] Gerald R. McDermott, *God's Rivals: Why Has God Allowed Different Religions?*, 159-168.

[169] Timothy C. Tennent, *Christianity at the Religious Roundtable: Evangelicalism in Conversation with Hinduism, Buddhism, and Islam* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2002), 17.

Purposes and values of other religions

To McDermott, one major, God-intended, purpose of the existence of other religions in the world, by God's design and providence, is to teach Christians (to "open up" to) other "dimensions" of Truth and Ultimate Reality, that "for centuries have remained buried" in the history of Christian thought.[170] Therefore, McDermott argues that through the world religions Christians might be able to discover some "biblical truths" or truth claims about the Triune God, which are not explicit in the Bible or nature, e.g., hidden mysteries of God's characteristics and purposes.

In *God's Rivals*, McDermott entertains this crucial question in the Christian theology of religions: "If the true God is the Father of Jesus Christ, why did God permit the rise and flourishing of other religions?"[171] According to the author, divine-intended purposes of the existence of the other religions include: (1) God's grace and patience toward human hardness of heart; (2) good for teaching both believers and seekers; (3) good for apologetics, showing Christ as the fulfillment of all the religious yearnings expressed by other cultures; and (4) good for theology, giving the church deeper insight into the meaning of Christ and the biblical deposit of truth.[172]

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[170] Gerald R. McDermott, *Can Evangelicals Learn from World Religions?: Jesus, Revelation & Religious Traditions* (Downers Grove, Ill: InterVarsity Press, 2000), 148, 208-209.

[171] Gerald R. McDermott, *God's Rivals: Why Has God Allowed Different Religions?,* 11.

[172] Ibid., 161-162.

While pointing out the danger of the demonic forces and elements that are present in the world religions, McDermott highlights the view that "God has always been at work in every human culture, but always by the Word, the Logos ... [and that] God is still at work, using even distorted truth to teach truth" to humans, along with the active working of the Holy Spirit in individuals and cultures.[173]

McDermott's openness to other religions is in direct line with his Protestant predecessors. Wolfhart Pannenberg, a German Lutheran theologian, takes a similar approach: truth claims learned from other religious traditions facilitate Christians' understanding of God and His revelation.[174] McDermott's and Pannenberg's "learning approach" to the world religions, attempting to discern neighboring religions' spiritual values such as goodness and holiness, was a dominant topic at the Jerusalem Conference of 1928. The final statement of the council acknowledges diverse spiritual values of world religions such as: "the sense of the Majesty of God" in Islam; "the deep sympathy for the world's sorrow" in Buddhism; "the desire for contact with ultimate reality" in Hinduism; "the belief in a moral order of the universe" in Confucianism; and even "disinterested pursuit of truth and human welfare" in secular civilizations as "a part of the one Truth."[175] With respect to determining values of other religions for Christians,

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[173] Ibid., 168.

[174] Wolfhart Pannenberg, "Religious Pluralism and Conflicting Truth Claims: The Problem of a Theology of the World Religions," in *Christian Uniqueness Reconsidered: The Myth of a Pluralistic Theology of Religions* (Maryknoll, N.Y.: Orbis Books, 1990), 103.

[175] Jerusalem Report 1:409, as quoted by Lesslie Newbigin, "The Basis, Purpose and Manner of Interfaith Dialogue," in *Inter-Religious Dialogue*, Richard W. Rousseau, ed. (Montrose, PA: Ridge Row Press, 1981), 19.

Karkkainen proposes two discerning criteria to take into consideration: (1) does the person [of that faith] fear God? and (2) does the person [of that faith] pursue righteous behavior?[176]

Goals of interreligious dialogue

As Wiles correctly points out, interfaith dialogue "is not a matter of negotiating a better relation between two ways of speaking and living religiously;" rather "it's a shared search for truth." [177] In a similar manner, McDermott reminds Christians that the other religions at times can function as different means God uses to show new insights about God's revelation in the Bible or Christ that the Church has not yet clearly seen. The author uses Augustine as one example, among others, to substantiate his claim: Augustine's deep knowledge of Neo-Platonism and Gnosticism enriched and expanded his and the Church's understanding of the divine and Christ.[178]

Second, if and when the Spirit of God and the Word of God are present and dynamic in other religious traditions, the Church stands under the judgment of the Holy Spirit, warns D'Costa, for its belief and ecclesiological systems that are misguided or distorted. According to D'Costa, in order to remain faithful to God's riches and mysteries stored and revealed in the person of Christ, the existence of other world religions is "vital." The neighboring religions,

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[176] Kärkkäinen, *An Introduction to the Theology of Religions,* 49-50.

[177] Maurice Wiles, *Christian Theology and Inter-Religious Dialogue*, 39.

[178] Gerald R. McDermott, *God's Rivals: Why Has God Allowed Different Religions?*, 162, 167.

through their non-Christian testimonies and narratives, may serve as God's tool in certain circumstances to "proffer judgment upon Christians, often requiring repentance, reformation, and transformation" upon the Church and Christian values, among other things.[179]

The Relationship between Dialogue and Evangelism

In contemporary theological discourse, the impact of religious pluralism and its accompanying interreligious dialogical engagement on Christian evangelism has emerged as one of the controversial issues. Observing "for some, dialogue has become a substitute for mission, a replacement," Ted Peters addresses it as a significant problem: "if we take up our responsibility to demonstrate respect for persons holding religious views different from, or even antithetical to, Christian claims, does this respect require that we deny our own missionary impulse? Must we give up the Christian mission to evangelize in order to affirm respect for persons through respecting religious diversity?"[180] Evangelism and dialogue are generally taken to be mutually exclusive options and this dichotomy seems to force Christians to choose either proclamation or dialogue.[181]

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[179] Gavin D'Costa, *Christian Uniqueness Reconsidered: The Myth of a Pluralistic Theology of Religions,* 22-26.

[180] Ted Peters, "Re-Framing the Question: How Can We Construct a Theology of Religions*?," Dialog,* Volume 46, Number 4, (Winter 2007): 326.

[181] See Anto P. Stadler, "Dialogue: Does It Complement Modify or Replace Mission?," in *Interreligious Dialogue: Facing The New Frontier*, Richard W. Rousseau, ed. (Montrose, PA: Ridge Row Press, 1981), Theodor Ahrens, "Mission and Dialogue: Contradictory or Complementary?," in *Irish Theological Quarterly* (1996, 62, 4): 314-330. Carl E. Braaten, "The Christian Faith in an Inter-Faith Context," in *Dialog* 43:3 (Fall 2004): 233-237.

Both evangelical and ecumenical theologians have addressed and debated this question of the relationship between evangelism and dialogue. One of the central questions has been "Should we replace mission as it has been practiced up till now by a dialogue with the other religions?"[182] This question was implicitly anticipated by Paul Tillich and Karl Rahner from their dialogical-inclusivist theological perspectives[183] and explicitly raised by John Hick and Paul Knitter from their pluralistic theological views.

For Hick, Christian missionary practice stems from a belief in the superiority of Christianity over all other religions based on the thirteenth-century Roman Catholic doctrine "Extra ecclesiam nulla salus" (Outside the church, no salvation), with its nineteenth-century Protestant missionary equivalent (Outside Christianity, no salvation).[184] Reinterpretation and revision on these traditional doctrines along with the Incarnation and the Trinity in light of pluralistic theology have led Hick to conclude about the issue of mission and evangelism as follows:

> Insofar as the missionaries of the mainline churches are acting in Christian love to share some of the technical resources of the industrialized West with the people of the third world, their work must surely be welcomed and applauded. But the older project, with which the word "mission" is still indelibly associated in most

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[182] This question was explicitly probed by Willem Visser't Hooft, the first general secretary of the World Council of Churches (WCC), in 1974 for the ecumenical agenda. See W.A. Visser't Hooft, *Has Ecumenical Movement a Future?* (Belfast: Christian Journals Limited, 1974), 30. Quoted in S. Wesley Ariarajah, "The impact of interreligious dialogue on the ecumenical movement," *Ecumenical Review* 49.2(1997): 212-22.

[183] See Paul Tillich, *Christianity and the Encounter of the World Religions* (New York, N.Y.: Columbia University Press, 1963); Karl Rahner, "Christianity and the Non-Christian Religions," *Theological Investigations*, trans. Karl Kruger (Baltimore: Helicon Press, 1966), 115-134.

[184] John Hick, *God Has Many Names* (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1980), 27.

> people's minds, of converting the world to Christianity is from a pluralist point of view a complete mistake.[185]

It is precisely this point that pluralism and accompanying interreligious dialogue are considered a betrayal of mission, which is the heart of the Christian faith by the conservative and evangelical camps of Christianity.

In response to concerns that "these new perspectives reduce mission to either an ambiguous earthly well-being or to a conversational exchange with other believers," Knitter holds that these pluralistic models "lead not only to a revision but to a reaffirmation of missionary activity."[186] In his soteriocentric approach, Paul Knitter develops a vision of the Reign of God as central to his revised understanding of mission, the church and conversion: 1) "the primary purpose of missionary work is the Reign of God not the Church," 2) "other religious traditions of the world can and should be considered possible "agents" of what Christians call the Reign of God," and 3) "The assimilation of Jesus' message by another religious community may result in conversions that are real but that do not make for new members of the Church."[187]

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[185] Hick, *A Christian Theology of Religions*, 117.

[186] Paul Knitter, "Missionary Activity Revised and Reaffirmed," in *Christian Mission and Interreligious Dialogue*, eds., Paul Mojzes and Leonard J. Swidler (Lewiston, N.Y.: E. Mellen Press, 1990), 78.

[187] Ibid.

Referring to soteriocentric dialogue, Knitter says, "We come together, first of all, not to share our beliefs but to act out of our beliefs, together"[188] changing "the imperial model of mission" into "a servant model."[189] Mission, he concludes, is a "dialogue with our fellow pilgrims on other paths in a shared effort to promote the well-being of our people and our planet."[190] The pluralistic theology of evangelism espoused by John Hick and Paul Knitter suggests that Christian evangelism should not aim to convert the adherents of other religions to Christianity, but that Christian evangelism instead needs to be transformed as a dialogue.[191]

The most vigorous arguments against the pluralistic proposal of interreligious dialogue come from those who are concerned that such dialogue will replace the practice of evangelism. Against this pluralistic solution, John Milbank argues that the 'end' of dialogue must be 'conversion' to Christianity in an effort to maintain Christian particularity.[192] It is important to recognize that many scholars of religion, both Christian and non-Christian, abhor or object to interreligious dialogue that has conversion as its goal. Arguing that dialogue is the most

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[188] Paul F. Knitter, *Introducing Theologies of Religions* (Maryknoll, N.Y.: Orbis Books, 2002), 244.

[189] Paul F. Knitter, *Jesus and the Other Names: Christian Mission and Global Responsibility* (Maryknoll, N.Y.: Orbis Books, 1996), 160.

[190] Paul Knitter, "Missionary Activity Revised and Reaffirmed," 134.

[191] John Hick, *A Christian Theology of Religions The Rainbow of Faiths* (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 1995), 116-119.; Paul F. Knitter, *Jesus and the Other Names: Christian Mission and Global Responsibility* (Maryknoll, N.Y.: Orbis Books, 1996), 136~146.

[192] John Milbank, "The end of dialogue" in *Christian Uniqueness Reconsidered: The Myth of a Pluralistic Theology of Religion*, eds., Gavin D'Costa (Maryknoll, N.Y.: Orbis Books, 1990), 174-190.

appropriate form of mission and evangelism in today's multireligious world, Kenneth Cracknell suggests a 'dialogical evangelism' as 'a missiology for religious pluralism.'[193] As Leonard Swidler succinctly warns, "dialogue is not debate" for the sake of forcing "change" on the dialogue partner's position.[194] However, at the same time, it needs to be taken seriously with a question: "How can one have genuine [interreligious] dialogue without a faith commitment?"[195]

Lack of a faith commitment is one of the "main reasons why [religious] pluralisms fail," thereby not facilitating "a real encounter" between dialogue partners.[196] Without deep commitment to their own particular religious traditions, dialogue partners would only engage in a mere exchange of intellectual ideas, not core religious or spiritual values that they live by. Likewise Stephen Neill also claims that in order for Christians to have a meaningful dialogue with persons of other faiths, their "personal surrender" to Jesus "to do truth" in a self-committed way is a pre-requisite.[197] He echoes the same sentiment for interreligious interaction in the conclusion of his book *Call to Mission*: "If we affirm that Christianity is true... we can only reply

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[193] Kenneth Cracknell, *In Good and Generous Faith: Christian Responses To Religious Pluralism* (Cleveland: The Pilgrim Press, 2005), 143.

[194] Leonard Swidler, "Ground Rules for Interreligious Dialogue," in *Inter-Religious Dialogue,* Richard W. Rousseau, ed. (Montrose, PA: Ridge Row Press, 1981), 9.

[195] Timothy C. Tennent, *Christianity at the Religious Roundtable: Evangelicalism in Conversation with Hinduism, Buddhsim, and Islam* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Book House, 2002), 14.

[196] Veli-Matti Karkkainen, *Trinity and Religious Pluralism: The Doctrine of the Trinity in Christian Theology of Religions,* 76.

[197] Stephen Neill, *Christina Faith and Other Faiths* (London: Oxford University Press, 1961), 32-33.

that, whereas there should hardly be any limits to our tolerance of people as people... we are faced by the painful issue of the intolerance of truth [by not proclaiming the gospel]."[198]

Arguing that any coherent religious truth claim must be based on an understanding of propositional truth, Harold Netland calls evangelism "exclusivism's corollary" and states that "involvement in evangelism with a view toward conversion of non-Christians is obligatory for all Christians."[199] Netland explicitly rejects interreligious dialogue when it is assumed that Christians "cannot claim to enter into dialogue with any definitive truth."[200] "For evangelicals," he advocates, "proclamation of the gospel, with the conversion of the other person as its objective, cannot be divorced from dialogue," when dialogue is properly defined for the purpose of "effective" evangelism.[201] Then, he concludes that "dialogue is not incompatible with a commitment to evangelism."[202]

In the middle of the two poles, Jürgen Moltmann and Terry Muck propose that dialogue and evangelism are not mutually exclusive but intrinsically connected in that both are commanded by the teaching of the Bible.[203] Muck suggests: "Dialogue does not demand that

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[198] Stephen Neill, *Call to Mission* (Philadelphia, PA: Fortress Press, 1978), 9.

[199] Harold A. Netland, *Dissonant Voices: Religious Pluralism and the Question of Truth* (Grand Rapids, Mich: W.B. Eerdmans, 1991), 279.

[200] Ibid., 292-293.

[201] Ibid., 298.

[202] Ibid., 301.

[203] Jurgen Moltmann, "Dialogue or mission? Christianity and the Religions in an Endangered World," in *God for a Secular Society: The Public Relevance of Theology* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1999), 226-44.; Terry

either side eschew evangelism. Dialogue does demand nonmanipulative, chaste evangelism. Dialogue must be seen in some kind of relationship to evangelism."[204]

In the last chapter of his book, *the Logic of Evangelism*, William J. Abraham argues that evangelism and dialogue are not one and the same practice. For him, then, using dialogue as "a covert form of evangelism" is not genuine.[205] Similarly, the purpose of dialogue, warns Barnes, is not for developing a Christian "apologetic structure," which is used in turn to enable Christians to place others in a Christian "conceptual scheme."[206] Accordingly, more emphasis must be given to dialogue partners (individuals) rather than their belief systems (religions), according to Barnes. But Abraham contends that a high Christology provides a theological rational for both evangelistic and tolerant dialogical engagement with the adherents of other religions in response to the challenge of the "wider ecumenism."[207] Criticizing Abraham's position as well as the one of the WCC as a false dichotomy between "covert forms of evangelism" and "genuine dialogue,"[208] Scott J. Jones argues that "dialogue is worth pursuing as a form of evangelism"

Muck, "Interreligious Dialogue and Evangelism," *Buddhist-Christian Studies* (Honolulu, Hawaii: University of Hawaii Press), Issue 17, (1997): 139.

[204] Terry C. Muck, "Evangelicals and Interreligious Dialogue," *Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society* 36 (December 1993): 529.

[205] William J. Abraham, *The Logic of Evangelism* (Grand Rapids: EerdMans, 1989), 228.

[206] Michael Barnes, *Christian Identity and Religious Pluralism: Religions in Conversation*, 162.

[207] See Abraham, *The Logic of Evangelism*, chapter 10.

[208] Jones indicates that the last sentence the WCC's 1979 document, *Guidelines on Dialogue with People of Living Faiths*, is a false dichotomy between "manipulation" for evangelism and "genuine fellow pilgrims for dialogue. Scott J. Jones, *The Evangelistic Love of God & Neighbor*, 181-182.

keeping “the conversion of the other” as part of the dialogue agenda at the same time seeking the truth together as "genuine fellow pilgrims."[209] While there is definite tension between dialogue and evangelism, Jones contends, Christians can and should affirm both "with the attitude of faith seeking deeper understanding," as he puts it: "Dialogue can be transformative in the sense that encounters with other religions can cause Christians to understand their own faith more deeply and to rediscover aspects of their traditions that have been forgotten."[210]

From a postliberal point of view, Bryan Stone convincingly argues, without abandoning any of the particularity (“the historical relativity”) and the universality (“comprehensiveness”) of the gospel, Christians can and should practice both “evangelistic invitation and genuine interfaith dialogue” not as a mutually exclusive mode but in a mutually transformative manner.[211] In line with Newbigin and Yoder, Stone presents interreligious dialogue as “a spiritual discipline by which evangelizing Christians seek the mutual transformation of their partners and of themselves in repentance and hope.”[212] This insight is not only helpful to address the interconnected relationship between dialogue and evangelism but also most relevant to what I call “interreligious practical theology of Christian engagement” for which this dissertation is seeking.

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[209] Scott J. Jones, *The Evangelistic Love of God & Neighbor: A Theology of Witness and Discipleship* (Nashville, TN: Abingdon Press, 2003), 182.

[210] Ibid.

[211] Bryan Stone, *Evangelism after Christendom: The Theology and Practice of Christian Witness* (Grand Rapids: Brazos Press, 2007), 152-162.

[212] Ibid., 161.

Lesslie Newbigin suggests the doctrine of the Trinity as "the true grammar of dialogue," and elucidates the kind of attitudes that will enable fruitful interreligious dialogue. First, we and our dialogue partners meet as children of one God (Father). Second, we participate in this dialogue as members of one body in Christ vulnerable and open-minded.[213] Regarding the quest for seeking Truth together through the means of interreligious dialogue, I appreciate Newbigin's suggestion in *The Open Secret*. When the Christian meets his/her neighbor of another religion, his/her basis is his/her commitment to Jesus Christ. No dichotomy between "confession" of Jesus and "truth seeking" exists. One's confession is his/her starting point of his/her truth seeking. One meets his/her partner with the expectation and hope of hearing more of truth. The position of final authority cannot be taken by anything other than the Gospel. Confessing Christ-incarnate, crucified, and risen as the true light and the true life, the Christian cannot accept any other alleged authority as having right of way over this.[214]

He constantly reminds and challenges the reader that when one engages in an interreligious dialogue, the person must be willing and ready to be corrected by this encounter, even at the "risk" of losing one's Christian faith.[215] I strongly identify myself with his position that one has not heard the message of a great religion until one has felt in one's soul the dynamic

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[213] Lesslie Newbigin, *The Open Secret: An Introduction to the Theology of Mission* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, First edition 1978, Revised edition 1995), 206-212 Also see Lesslie Newbigin, *The Gospel in a Pluralist Society* (Geneva: WCC, and Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1989).

[214] Lesslie Newbigin, *The Open Secret*, 190-191.

[215] Ibid., 211.

power and influence of it.[216] What is needed in the context of interreligious dialogue is both faithful commitment to the 'logic of mission' and radical openness to be transformed along with 'confidence in the gospel.' Newbigin succinctly states his own model of dialogue: "The purpose of dialogue for the Christian is obedient witness to Jesus Christ who is not the property of the Church but is rather the Lord of the Church… In this encounter the Church is changed and the world is changed and Christ is glorified."[217]

For D'Costa, sharing the message and the love of Jesus Christ with neighbors is an "imperative for all Christians," for loving neighbors or having a loving dialogue with neighbors "is co-essential with the love of God."[218]Along the same line, John Stott lists four "marks" of attitude needed in interaction between dialogue and evangelism: authenticity, humility, integrity, and sensitivity. First, dialogue places evangelism in an "authentically human context." John B. Cobb challenges the reader to "hear in an authentic way the truth which the other has to teach us" and be transformed by that truth as well.[219] Second, humility is not only needed but required in this interreligious dialogue; humility is a "beautiful grace." Third, integrity is a quality

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[216] Ibid., 208.

[217] Ibid., 206.

[218] Gavin D'Costa, *Christian Uniqueness Reconsidered: The Myth of a Pluralistic Theology of Religions*, 20, 21.

[219] John B. Cobb, *Beyond Dialogue: Toward a Mutual Transformation of Christianity and Buddhism* (Philadelphia, PA: Fortress Press, 1982), 77.

indispensable in meaningful discussions. Fourth, dialogue is a "mutual listening" in order to understand each other with sensitivity.[220]

Amos Yong describes the current status of the issue in mainline Protestant and Catholic churches in the US: "While there are a few who polarize the issue in terms of advocating only one or the other kind of activity as legitimate Christian witness in a pluralistic world, most wrestle with the recognition that authentic evangelism includes dialogue and vice versa."[221] For American evangelicals, he presents two different trends: 1) the conservative evangelicals claim that "dialogue must always serve the purpose of witness and evangelism understood in traditional terms…in such a way as to lead non-Christians to conversion to Christ," and 2) the progressive evangelicals such as "Emergent churches" "emphasize genuine dialogue, encourage visiting other sacred sites and even participating in their liturgies and insist on learning about the lives and religious commitment of others…even to the point of being evangelized by those of other faiths in ways that transform Christian self-understandings."[222]

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[220] John R.W. Stott, *Christian Mission in the Modern World* (Madison, WI: Inter Varsity Press. 1975), 71-73.

[221] Amos Yong, *Hospitality and the Other: Pentecost, Christian Practices, and the Neighbor,* 35.

[222] Ibid., 36.

The Christian-Buddhist Encounter in the USA

Brief Historical Background

While in the early nineteenth century American Christians' encounter with Buddhism and Buddhists was limited to that of missionaries in Asia and intellectuals at home, it was during the period from 1840 to 1924 that Americans began a "face-to-face" encounter with Buddhism and Buddhists in the form of the first Asian immigrants.[223]As a result of this, some Americans "sympathized" with and even "converted" to Buddhism. In 1880, a founder of the Theosophical Society in New York City, Henry Steel Olcott (1832-1907), who was born into a Presbyterian family, moved to Ceylon (now Sri Lanka) and publicly became the first American Buddhist convert.[224]

The World Parliament of Religions,[225] held in Chicago in 1893, is perceived by many scholars as "the beginning of interreligious dialogue" as well as "the first great Buddhist-Christian conversation in America."[226] At this historic event, Anagarika Dhamapala, who has

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[223] Thomas A. Tweed and Stephen Prothero, *Asian Religions in America: A Documentary History* (New York [u.a.]: Oxford Univ. Press, 1999), 61, 62.

[224] See Stephen Prothero, *The White Buddhist: The Asian Odyssey of Henry Steel Olcott* (Bloonmington: Indiana University Press, 1998).

[225] Sixty addresses given to the World's Parliament of Religions were collected and published in *The Dawn of Religious Pluralism: Voices from the World's Parliament of Religions, 1893*, ed. Richard Hughes Seager (La Salle, Ill: Open Court, 1993).

[226] Whalen Lai and Michael von Brück, *Christianity and Buddhism: A Multicultural History of Their Dialogue* (Maryknoll, N.Y.: Orbis Books, 2001), 195; Thomas A. Tweed, *The American encounter with Buddhism,*

been called "the first Theravada Buddhist missionary" to the United States, delivered a speech, titled "The World's Debt to Buddha." In it he argued that "the universalistic message claimed by Christians had first been proclaimed by the Buddha"[227]—that "it was Buddhism rather than Christianity that could heal the rift between religion and science"[228]—and he appealed for "the compassionateness shown by Buddhist Missionaries," saying: "Actuated by the spirit of compassion, the disciples of Buddha have ever been in the forefront of missionary propaganda. The whole of Asia was brought under the influence of Buddha's law. Never was the religion propagated by force, not a drop of blood has ever been split in the name of Buddha…"[229] After the Parliament, he and Japanese Zen teachers including Shaku Soen, who befriended Paul Carus, editor of the Open Court Press, pioneered Buddhist mission work in the United States, sending "Buddhist missionaries" and establishing meditations centers and Zen centers.[230]

1844-1912: Victorian culture and the limits of dissent (Bloomington: Indiana Univ Press, 1992, 2000) ; Donald W. Mitchell, *Buddhism: Introducing the Buddhist Experience* (New York: Oxford Univ. Press, 2002).

[227] John R. McRae, "Oriental Verities on the American Frontier: The 1893 World's Parliament of Religions and the Thought of Masao Abe," *Buddhist-Christian Studies* 11 (1991): 22.

[228] Ibid., 23.

[229] Anagarika Dhamapala, "The World's Debt to Buddha" in *The Dawn of Religious Pluralism: Voices from the World's Parliament of Religions, 1893* (La Salle, Ill: Open Court, 1993), 410-420. For a convert's perception of Buddhism and Buddhist mission, see William Sturgis Bigelow and Carl Theodor Strauss. *Presenting Convert Interpretations: Buddhism in the United States, 1840 - 1925* (London: Ganesha Publ. [u.a.], 2004). Especially see C.T. Strauss, "The Buddha and His Doctrine:" "During the 2500 years since that time not a single person has been converted by force, nor has there been spilt a single drop of blood for the propagation of the doctrine. And yet Buddhism is a missionary religion; it spread rapidly over all Central and Easter Asia, and modified the customs of wild peoples like the Mongols and Tartars" (107).

[230] Regarding the history of the introduction and establishment of different schools of Buddhism in America see Gurinder Singh Mann, Paul David Numrich, and Raymond Brady Williams, *Buddhists, Hindus, and Sikhs in America: A Short History* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2008), chapters I, II, III; Charles S. Prebish,

This event marks a new phase of the Christian-Buddhist encounter in the American history of religions. Prior to the event, Christian-Buddhist contacts were largely motivated by a Christian missionary impulse to convert Buddhists to Christianity. However, after the historic event, there began a "reverse missionary movement" that brought Buddhist and other Asian spiritual leaders to the United States, and initiated what Terry Muck calls "the era of two-way missions efforts."[231] This can be identified as the moment when two missionary religions, Christianity and Buddhism, became "rivals," as cited in the title of Ninian Smart's book.[232]

The Buddhists' attitude of superiority toward Christianity at the 1893 Parliament sparked contention. An American scholar of Buddhism recorded antagonistic sentiments between Christianity and Buddhism in early twentieth century America: "The two great missionary religions, which traveled round the world in opposite directions until they met, have hitherto been strangers to each other. The younger one has called the older 'heathenism,' [while] the older one has called the younger 'the superstition of the Franks.'"[233]

American Buddhism (North Scituate, Mass: Duxbury Press, 1979) ; Rick Fields, *How the Swans Came to the Lake: A Narrative History of Buddhism in America* (Boston: Shambhala, 1986).

[231] Terry Muck, *"*Missiological Issues in the Encounter with Emerging Buddhism*," Missiology* 28, no. 1 (January 2000): 35-46.

[232] Ninian Smart, *Buddhism and Christianity: Rivals and Allies* (Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press, 1993).

[233] Albert J. Edmunds and Anesaki Masaharu, *Buddhist & Christian Gospels. Being Gospel Parallels from Pāli Texts [Reprinted with Additions] Now First Compared from the Originals*. (Tokyo: The Yūhōkwan Pub. house [American agents: The Open Court Pub. Co. Chicago], 1905), 9.

However, after World War II, there was a significant change in the long-held polemical relationship between Christianity and Buddhism "from controversy to dialogue," which would qualify under the rubric, "Christian-Buddhist dialogue," and was based on mutual respect and scholastic appreciation.[234] For example, Japanese Zen scholar D.T. Suzuki and American Trappist monk Thomas Merton engaged each other in in-depth dialogue in 1959, sharing their common interests in the "mysticism" found in both Buddhism and Christianity.[235]

In 1963, Paul Tillich published a book, *Christianity and the Encounter of World Religions,*[236] after a trip to Japan in 1960, where he met some eminent Buddhist scholars and monks. Provocatively claiming "not conversion but dialogue,"[237] for the new attitude and task between Christianity and Buddhism, he compares and contrasts the symbols of the two religions and their points of convergence and divergence are shown. In the same year, Japanese Zen

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[234] See Perry Schmidt-Leukel, "Intimate Strangers: An Introduction," in his edited book, *Buddhism and Christianity in Dialogue* (London: SCM Press, 2005), 1-26. For a detailed description of its development and expansion, see John Cobb, "The Buddhist-Christian Dialogue Since 1946: The Christian Side," in *Religious Issues and Interreligious Dialogues: An Analysis and Sourcebook of Developments Since 1945,* ed. Charles Wei-hsun Fu and Gerhard E. Spiegler (New York: Greenwood Press, 1989), 571-611. ; Joseph John Spae, *Buddhist-Christian Empathy* (Chicago, Ill: The Chicago Inst. of Theology and Culture [u.a.], 1980), 207.

[235] Daisetz Teitaro Suzuki, *Mysticism: Christian and Buddhist* (New York: Harper, 1957): Thomas Merton, *Zen and the Birds of Appetite* (New York: New Directions, 1968). *Mystics and Zen Masters* (New York: Farrar, Strauss and Giroux, 1967). Cf. Thomas Merton and Robert E. Daggy, *Encounter: Thomas Merton & D.T. Suzuki* (Monterey, KY: Larkspur Press, 1988).

[236] Paul Tillich, *Christianity and the Encounter of the World Religions* (New York, N.Y.: Columbia University Press, 1963). Cf. Carl Olson, "Tillich's Dialogue with Buddhism, *Buddhist-Christian Studies* 7 (1987): 183-195.

[237] Ibid., 95.

Buddhist scholar, Masao Abe published a paper, "Buddhism and Christianity as a Problem of Today," which brought widespread responses from American Christian theologians.[238]

After critically reviewing thirty-five authors' works on the subject of Christian-Buddhist dialogue published during 1970s, Paul Knitter enthusiastically pronounced that Christianity could be enriched by learning from dialogue with Buddhism and that Christian doctrine and practice are in need of revision with the aid of Buddhism.[239]

Christian-Buddhist Dialogue in the Academy

Whalen Lai and Michael von Brück suggests that the United States of America is currently the most dynamic region for "academic-intellectual encounter[s]" between Buddhism and Christianity out of six key regions of the world: India, Sri Lanka, China, Japan, Germany and the U.S.[240] Christian-Buddhist dialogue in the U.S., they observe, has been institutionalized at a high level with the foundation of the Society for Buddhist-Christian Studies (1987) and the International Buddhist-Christian Theological Encounter Group (Cobb-Abe Group, 1984).

In the field of interreligious dialogue as an academic discipline, the study of Christian-Buddhist dialogue has recently secured an important place due to the considerable amount of

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[238] Masao Abe, "Buddhism and Christianity as a Problem for Today," *Japanese Religions* 3 (1963): 8-31. Also see Masao Abe, *Buddhism and Interfaith Dialogue: Part One of a Two-Volume Sequel to Zen and Western Thought* (London: Macmillan, 1995), 52.

[239] Paul Knitter, "Horizons on Christianity's New Dialogue with Buddhism," *Horizons* 8/1 (1981): 40-61.

[240] Whalen Lai and Michael von Brück, *Christianity and Buddhism: A Multicultural History of Their Dialogue* (Maryknoll, N.Y.: Orbis Books, 2001), 7.

attention scholars have afforded it compared to the study of other interreligious dialogues. Specifically in the area of Christian-Buddhist dialogue, there have been significant studies of both the theory and practice of this engagement.[241] For this reason, it has been pointed out that one major characteristic of the Christian-Buddhist dialogue in America has been the predominance of scholarly and academic participants and the relative inactivity at the level of local congregations and temple groups.[242]

The first international Buddhist-Christian conference was held in Hawaii in 1980 and some of the papers were published in 1986.[243]A second international Buddhist-Christian conference met again in Hawaii in 1984, with academic presentations on topics such as views of the self, suffering, and paradigm shifts. There was also an emphasis on practical matters: time was set aside for personal spiritual practice, panels on religion and healing, and consideration of ethics and justice. The third international conference was held in Berkeley at the Graduate Theological Union in 1987 with over 800 participants discussing the theme, "Buddhism and

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[241] Besides the works already cited, see Hans Waldenfels, *Absolute Nothingness: Foundations for a Buddhist- Christian Dialogue* J.W. Heisig, trans. (New York: Paulist Press, 1980); Seiichi Yagi and Leonard Swidler, *A Bridge to Buddhist-Christian Dialogue* (Mahwah, NJ: Paulist Press, 1990); Paul O. Ingram, *The Modern Buddhist-Christian Dialogue: Two Universalistic Religions in Transformation* (Lewiston, N.Y.: The Edwin Mellon Press, 1988); David Tracy, *Dialogue with the Other: The Inter-Religious Dialogue* (Louvain: Peeters Press, 1990); Frederick J. Streng and Sallie B. King, ed. *The Sound of Liberating Truth: Buddhist-Christian Dialogues in Honor of Frederick J. Streng* (Surrey, U.K.: Curzon Press, 1999), among many others representative of this ever-increasing field of scholarship. For this dialogue in relation to science see, Paul O. Ingram, *Buddhist-Christian Dialogue in an Age of Science* (Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, 2008).

[242] Whalen Lai and Michael von Brück, *Op.cit*., 234.

[243] Paul O. Ingram and Frederick J. Streng, *Buddhist-Christian Dialogue: Mutual Renewal and Transformation* (Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press, 1986).

Christianity: Toward the Human Future." New working groups included the Religion and Healing Group, the Monastic and Contemplative Group, and the Women in Buddhism and Christianity Group.[244] The fourth international Buddhist-Christian conference, held at Boston University in 1992.[245] Besides a whole array of papers and working groups, there was a strong emphasis on personal spiritual practice in the two religious traditions. The theme of the fifth international conference in 1996 at Chicago was "Socially Engaged Buddhism and Christianity."[246] There was some involvement by leaders of the Roman Catholic and Protestant churches. The theme of the sixth international conference, held in Tacoma, Washington in 2000, was "Buddhist, Christianity and Global Healing."[247] Special attention was paid to explorations of Buddhist and Christian approaches to the Earth Charter and the multifaceted issues surrounding politics, economy, ecology, social justice, gender relations, and other aspects of global society.

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[244] Daniel J. O'Hanlon, "The Third International Buddhist-Christian Conference," *Buddhist-Christian Studies* 8 (1988) : 171-172. I need to note that the perspectives of women in each tradition have been particularly prominent in the Christian-Buddhist dialogue. Judith Simmer-Brown and Rita Gross are interesting Buddhist examples to examine, as well as Rosemary Radford Reuther on the Christian side. All three women have been active participants in Buddhist-Christian dialogues, especially the Cobb-Abe group conferences. One work that will likely be included for its Buddhist-Christian conversation from a feminist perspective is Rita M. Gross and Rosemary Radford Reuther, *Religious Feminism and the Future of the Planet: A Christian-Buddhist Conversation* (New York: Continuum, 2001).

[245] John Berthrong, "Reflections on the Forth Buddhist-Christian Conference," *Buddhist-Christian Studies* 13 (1993): 135-45.

[246] John Berthrong, "The Fifth International Buddhist-Christian Theological Encounter," *Buddhist-Christian Studies* 9 (1989): 257-260.

[247] John Berthrong, "The Sixth International Buddhist-Christian Theological Encounter," *Buddhist-Christian Studies* 21 (2001): 107-108.

Finally, the theme of the seventh international conference in 2005, hosted by Loyola Marymount University, Los Angeles, California, was "Hear the Cries of the World."[248]

As shown by the topics of the above-mentioned conferences, the themes of Christian-Buddhist dialogue in the Academy vary widely from abstract and philosophical concepts such as the emptiness of God or cosmic nothingness to down-to-earth social justice and world peace issues. One of the questions I am concerned with regarding these scholastic endeavors is the aim of Christian-Buddhist dialogue in relation to the "missional nature" of the two religions.

One important work in this regard is John Cobb's *Beyond Dialogue: Toward a Mutual Transformation of Christianity and Buddhism*.[249] He points out that the notion of "dialogue" between Buddhists and Christians has mostly been a rather artificial or superficial comparison and contrast of views, a mere exchange of outlooks. There has been no expressed attempt by scholars of Buddhist-Christian dialogue to develop a theory that expects significant changes in attitudes and viewpoints of those involved. Cobb argues that all real interreligious conversations proceed with the intention that one will learn something valuable from the other. That is, he argues that what Buddhist-Christian dialogue should be aiming for is not exactly "dialogue" but the "mutual transformation" of both individuals and the traditions.[250] He explores how

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[248] Darnise C. Martin, "The Seventh International Buddhist-Christian Conference: Hear the Cries of the World," *Buddhist-Christian Studies* 26 (2006): 185-187.

[249] John B. Cobb, Jr., *Beyond Dialogue: Toward Mutual Transformation of Christianity and Buddhism* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1982).

[250] Ibid., Chapter 2.

Christians/Christianity might be transformed by Buddhists/Buddhism (with special attention to Pure Land Buddhism) and vice versa.[251]

Paul Ingram and Frederick Streng's book, *Buddhist-Christian Dialogue: Mutual Renewal and Transformation* explores the theme of transformation in Buddhist-Christian dialogue.[252] This anthology of essays by both Buddhist and Christian scholar-practitioners concentrates on how Buddhist-Christian dialogue might give insight and a conceptual framework for authentic living, contribute to answering some of the basic problems of modern human life, and seek to explore the difficulties and possibilities of religious renewal in genuine engagement with another faith.[253] Of particular importance in the study of transformation in Buddhist-Christian dialogue is Paul Ingram's article on understanding dialogue as a source for creative transformation, grounded in a process theological perspective.[254] Ingram's essay uses Whitehead to argue that the Christian process theology is a demonstration of creative development through the practice of dialogue with Buddhism.

In the compilation of essays entitled *Buddhism and Interfaith Dialogue,* Masao Abe writes of the influence his dialogue with Christians and engagement with Christian concepts has

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[251] Ibid., Chapter 5 and 6.

[252] Paul O. Ingram and Frederick J. Streng, *Buddhist-Christian Dialogue: Mutual Renewal and Transformation (*University of Hawaii Press, 1986).

[253] Ingram and Streng, Prologue to *Buddhist-Christian Dialogue,* 3-4.

[254] Paul O. Ingram, "Interfaith Dialogue as a Source of Buddhist-Christian Creative Transformation," in *Buddhist-Christian Dialogue: Mutual Renewal and Transformation,* 77-94.

had on his self-understanding as a Buddhist.[255] Also, Abe expresses his conviction that Buddhists and Christians can learn from one another concerning conceptions of the Ultimate, human nature, liberation/salvation, and practice in conversation with Christian and Jewish theologians in the important anthology of essays called *The Emptying God*.[256]

Christian-Buddhist Dialogue in Spirituality

Christian-Buddhist dialogue has been claimed as "the most energetic and significant spiritual dialogue" among the various interreligious movements in contemporary America.[257] However, there has not been a substantial amount of scholarship produced focusing on spirituality in dialogue between Buddhists and Christians. I will provide a brief overview of the small amount of scholarship on Buddhist-Christian dialogue in spirituality.

Donald Mitchell's book, *Spirituality and Emptiness*, contains two chapters that speak to transformation in Buddhist and Christian spirituality. Chapter five examines the similarities and differences between Buddhist *sunyata* and Christian *kenosis* as it pertains to personal spiritual

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[255] Masao Abe, "The Impact of Dialogue with Christianity on My Self-Understanding as a Buddhist," in *Buddhism and Interfaith Dialogue*::, 52-62. Also see Abe's conversation with Paul Knitter in the same volume, "Spirituality and Liberation: A Buddhist-Christian Conversation (with Paul F. Knitter)," in *Buddhism and Interfaith Dialogue*::, 223-243.

[256] John B. Cobb, Jr. and Christopher Ives, eds., *The Emptying God: Buddhist-Jewish-Christian Conversations* (Maryknoll, N.Y.: Orbis Books, 1990).

[257] Eck, *op. cit*., 377.

development as understood in each tradition.[258] In chapter six the communal and social dimensions of Buddhist and Christian spiritual growth are examined.[259] While these chapters certainly compare and contrast the elements of spiritual transformation in both traditions, they do not take this further and specifically address how Buddhist-Christian dialogue plays a part in the spiritual experience of Buddhists and Christians.

Raimundo Panikkar also speaks of spirituality in Buddhist-Christian dialogue in his treatise, *The Intrareligious Dialogue*.[260] This work generally examines interreligious relations as they affect the inner life of the individual practitioner. However, Panikkar dedicates an entire chapter to how Buddhists and Christians attend to the human predicament through respective notions of emptiness and fullness,[261] and he explores briefly the role of growth in interreligious encounter.[262] He provides his own perspective on Buddhism's and Christianity's answer to the human problematic and explicates his conception of growth as consisting of both continuity and novelty (or change).

Beyond the conceptual comparison between Buddhist *sunyata* and Christian *kenosis* initiated by the Cobb-Abe dialogue, E.B. Cabanne makes a case for a spiritual-experiential point

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[258] Donald W. Mitchell, *Spirituality and Emptiness: The Dynamics of Spiritual Life in Buddhism and Christianity* (New York/Mahwah, N.J.: Paulist Press, 1991), 109-141.

[259] Ibid., 142-181.

[260] Raimundo Panikkar, *The Intrareligious Dialogue* (New York, N.Y.: Paulist Press, 1999).

[261] The chapter entitled "Sunyata and Pleroma: The Buddhist and Christian Response to the Human Predicament," Ibid., 77-100.

[262] Ibid., 69-72.

of departure in Buddhist-Christian dialogue. In his article, "Beyond Kenosis: New Foundations for Buddhist-Christian Dialogue."[263] Cabanne reinterprets Philippians 2:1-11 according to the broader understanding of the psychospiritual consciousness or "Mind" that is the "heart, soul, and spirit of Christian spirituality."[264] He also suggests that *sunyata* is underpinned by the wider concept of "Mind" in Buddhism.[265] He argues that a more appropriate basis for dialogue between Buddhists and Christians is not *sunyata* and *kenosis*, but more primary mental categories of spiritual experience, bodhicitta and the Mind of Christ.[266] Cabanne feels that a shift to these fundamental characterizations of spirituality will offer a paradigm for dialogue that will better address the transformational aspect (metanoia and metamorphosis) of the Buddhist and Christian experience.

Buddhists Talk about Jesus, Christians Talk about the Buddha,[267] edited by Rita Gross and Terry Muck, is a compilation of essays originally published in the journal Buddhist-Christian Studies. The editors asked four Christian scholar-practitioners to write about the Buddha and four Buddhist scholar-practitioners to write about Jesus. The Buddhist contributors express problems with the popular Christian claim of Jesus' exclusivity, uniqueness, and absoluteness as

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[263] E.B. Cabanne, "Beyond Kenosis: New Foundations for Buddhist-Christian Dialogue," *Buddhist-Christian Studies* 13 (1993): 103-117.

[264] Ibid., 105.

[265] Ibid., 112

[266] Ibid.

[267] Rita M. Gross and Terry C. Muck, eds., *Buddhists Talk about Jesus, Christians Talk about the Buddha* (New York: Continuum, 2003).

the way.[268] The Buddhists seem to make suggestions for the revision of theological and doctrinal understandings of Jesus Christ according to their Buddhist worldviews.[269] Also, the Christians' accounts of the Buddha were much more personal than the Buddhists' reports of Jesus. Thus, the Christian essays provide more explicit information concerning spiritual transformation, since most of them recount stories or instances of personal growth as a result of contact with the Buddha and Buddhists.[270]

On the Christian side, Elizabeth Harris has learned much from the Buddha by reading scripture, participating in devotional ceremonies, and through Buddhist friends.[271] Donald Swearer speaks of the no-self doctrine illuminating Paul's notion of Christ within (Gal. 2:20) and how the dialectic between the universal Buddha and particular images has enlarged his understanding of the Incarnation.[272] Bonnie Thurston relates that her engagement in dialogue

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[268] See especially Jose Ignacio Cabezon, "A God, but Not a Savior," in *Buddhists Talk about Jesus, Christians Talk about Buddha*, 17-31; Rita M. Gross, "Meditating on Jesus," in *Buddhists Talk, Christians Talk*, 32-51; "Christ as the Truth, the Light, the Life, but a Way?" in *Buddhists Talk, Christians Talk*, 52-58.

[269] For example Gross' proposition of conceiving of Jesus as a yidam (anthropomorphic personification of enlightened activity) "Meditating on Jesus," in *Buddhists Talk, Christians Talk*, 47; and Soho Machida's proposal for viewing Jesus as sinful since he is fully human, "Jesus, Man of Sin: Toward a New Christology in the Global Era," in *Buddhists Talk, Christians Talk*, 59-73, 61.

[270] With the exception of the responses of Marcus Borg and John Dominic Crossan to the four Buddhist essays, all four of the other Christian essays exhibit a strong personal-spiritual dimension that is ostensibly lacking in the Buddhist articles.

[271] Elizabeth J. Harris, "My Unfinished Business with the Buddha," in *Buddhists Talk, Christians Talk*, 89-94, 90-93.

[272] Donald K. Swearer, "Buddha Loves Me! This I Know, For the Dharma Tells Me So," in *Buddhists Talk, Christians Talk*, 107-117, 111.

with Buddhism has given her greater clarity about Christ.[273] All of these essays convey a sense of first-hand experience of Buddhism and that this experience has given them greater insight in their personal spiritual development. These personal accounts will serve as valuable instances of Christians being transformed by an encounter with Buddhism.

This personalized tone is relatively absent with the Buddhists. However, the Buddhists elucidate an understanding of Jesus according to their particular perspective and forward a critique of exclusivist Christian interpretations, which suggests that they have been affected in some way by Jesus and Christians. For the most part this volume speaks more to the problems and difficulties in dialogue since there is very little evidence in the essays of any semblance of a nuanced treatment of the subject matter; there is much generalization on both sides.

Christians Talk about Buddhist Meditation, Buddhists Talk about Christian Prayer is also a compilation of essays first published in *Buddhist-Christian Studies*.[274] The question the editors put to the contributors was "How have you used and/or learned from the meditative and prayer practices of the other tradition?"[275] Once again, the Christian scholar-practitioners seem to convey more personal understandings of Buddhist meditation based on direct experience, whereas the Buddhist scholar-practitioners tend to speak more of their ideas about and

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[273] Bonnie Thurston, "The Buddha Offered Me a Raft," in *Buddhists Talk, Christians Talk*, 118-128, 119.

[274] Rita M. Gross and Terry C. Muck, eds., *Christians Talk about Buddhist Meditation, Buddhists Talk about Christian Prayer* (New York: Continuum, 2003).

[275] Terry C. Muck, Introduction to *Buddhist Meditation, Christian Prayer*, 7-11, 8.

perception of Christian prayer with little to no evidence of first-hand practical experience.[276] This is not to say that this group of Buddhists has not been transformed in some way by their encounter with Christian prayer, but they did not write explicitly about it here.

Frances Adeney tells of his first practice of Buddhist meditation, which helped him enter deeper into God's presence through preparation, cultivation of self-understanding, and humility in the face of the vastness of the Divine.[277] Mary Frohlich gained a better realization of how true knowing of the Divine is "unknowing" through the Buddhist practice of sitting.[278] Terry Muck speaks of his growth in awareness of the importance of readiness that has come from his interactions with Buddhism[279] and Bardwell Smith suggests that through Buddhist-Christian dialogue and shared practice he and others are becoming something beyond simply "Buddhists" or "Christians," but it is hard to define this transformation.[280] These essays provide further indication of Christian spiritual transformation in dialogue. The Buddhist essays here may be used to point to an openness and willingness to engage in a dialogue. However, since they are

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[276] Ibid.

[277] Frances S. Adeney, "How I, a Christian, Have Learned from Buddhist Practice, or 'The Frog Sat on the Lily Pad … Not Waiting,'" in *Buddhist Meditation, Christian Prayer*, 15-19.

[278] Mary Frohlich, "What I Know and Don't Know: A Christian Reflects on Buddhist Practice," in *Buddhist Meditation, Christian Prayer*, 20-26, 25.

[279] Terry C. Muck, "Readiness: Preparing for the Path," in *Buddhist Meditation, Christian Prayer*, 37-44.

[280] Bardwell Smith, "In Contrast to Sentimentality: Buddhist and Christian Sobriety," in *Buddhist Meditation, Christian Prayer*, 45-52.

largely so personally removed and intellectual in nature, these Buddhist essays show no clear evidence of the writers having been transformed by Christian prayer.

Speaking of Silence: Christians and Buddhists in Dialogue is an abbreviated collection of transcripts of the various interactions that occurred during the first five annual Buddhist-Christian dialogues hosted by Naropa University in Boulder, Colorado from 1981-1985.[281] This exchange broke new ground since it was the first extended Buddhist-Christian dialogue in the West to emphasize contemplative practice.[282] It is also considered an important dialogue because it focused on the life of prayer and meditation and involved mainly North Americans who shared a common socio-cultural contextual experience. Some of the major contributors to this conversation were H.H. the Dalai Lama, Chogyam Trungpa, Reginald Ray, David Steindl-Rast, Tessa Bielecki, and Thomas Keating, among others. In this volume the presenters do not often overtly articulate their experience of spiritual transformation as a result of dialogue. Like other transcriptions of dialogical encounters, *Speaking of Silence* does not contain reflections upon what happens during dialogue since the participants are in the very midst of the dialogue itself. However, their shared topics such as "Renewal, Transmission, and Change" and "Prayer and Meditation" are important for understanding their spiritualities both in the personal and institutional life of the respective religious traditions.

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[281] Susan Szpakowski, ed., *Speaking of Silence: Christians and Buddhists in Dialogue* 2nd ed. (Halifax, Nova Scotia: Vajradhatu Publications, 2005).

[282] Judith Simmer-Brown, Preface to the Second Edition *Speaking of Silence*, 3-10.

Much like *Speaking of Silence, The Gethsemani Encounter* compiles transcriptions of a Buddhist-Christian dialogue.[283] It records an exchange that took place between Buddhist and Christian monastics at the Abbey of Gethsemani monastery in Kentucky from July 22 to 27, 1996, where participants lived, ate, prayed, meditated, and conversed together.[284] The inspiration for this momentous meeting originated at the Parliament of the World's Religions' 100-year reunion in 1993.[285] During this week-long retreat practitioners centered their efforts on the issues of the practice of prayer and meditation, the stages in the process of spiritual development, the role of teacher and community, and the goals of personal and social transformation.

In this collection as well, the presenters do not frequently or explicitly talk about spiritual growth that has occurred because of dialogue with others. Rather, since they are in the midst of a dialogical encounter, they tend to verbalize the importance of their personal paths of transformation according to their own religious traditions, occasionally touching upon the import the other religion has for their spiritual development. They do speak of learning more about each other and sharing the experience of spiritual practice through prayer, meditation, and ritual, which is indicative of transformation.

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[283] Donald W. Mitchell and James Wiseman, O.S.B., eds., *The Gethsemani Encounter: A Dialogue on the Spiritual Life by Buddhist and Christian Monastics* (New York: Continuum, 1999).

[284] This is the Trappist monastery of the late Thomas Merton who was one of the pioneering Catholic monastics involved in interreligious dialogue and engagement.

[285] Donald W. Mitchell and James Wiseman, O.S.B., Introduction to *Gethsemani Encounter*, xvii-xxiii.

The Ground We Share: Everyday Practice, Buddhist and Christian is a transcription of an intimate dialogue between Robert Aitken Roshi and Br. David Steindl-Rast that treats a range of subject matter from the standpoint of how spirituality is applied on a daily basis.[286] These two experienced dialoguers came together to discuss such issues as religious experience, self and the Ultimate, spiritual practice, the transformation of character, and the social implications of spirituality.[287]

As with other transcriptions of interreligious dialogues, this one does not include any extensive commentary on the aspects of transformation in dialogue with the other. However, in the midst of the deeply personal conversations between Aitken Roshi and Br. David it is possible to recognize elements of transformation. That is, through their discussion of everyday spiritual practice they are learning from one another, increasing in their understanding of each other and themselves.

In his popular work entitled *Living Buddha, Living Christ,* Thich Nhat Hanh, a renowned Vietnamese Buddhist monk, recognizes that dialogue transforms the individual and fosters spiritual growth. He does so considering 1) personal experiences of peace efforts during the Vietnam War; 2) dialogues with Christians such as Fr. Daniel Berrigan, Fr. Thomas Merton, and

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[286] Robert Aitken and David Steindl-Rast, *The Ground We Share: Everyday Practice, Buddhist and Christian* ed. Nelson Foster (Boston: Shambhala, 1996).

[287] See Chapters 1, 2, 6, 7, 9, 16, and 17.

Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr.; and 3) the importance of a deeper understanding of one's own tradition so as to better grasp that of another.[288]

The Dalai Lama has participated in many interreligious dialogues over the years. At the 1994 John Main Seminar in London, the Dalai Lama expounded upon important passages from the Sermon on the Mount, the Kingdom of God, the Transfiguration, the Resurrection, and others. His comments have been published as a book.[289] During this event, he responded to Jesus' teachings from his own perspective as a Buddhist and spoke forthrightly about how these Christian scriptural passages have affected him spiritually.

Christian perspectives outnumber those of Buddhists concerning participation in interreligious dialogue.[290] Though there are many and various Christian voices in Buddhist-Christian dialogue, a representative few who have communicated the impact of the encounter with Buddhism on their own spiritual life or understanding of Christianity are Thomas Merton, John Cobb, Raimundo Panikkar, and Aloysius Pieris.

Thomas Merton has been a highly influential figure for those interested in

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[288] Thich Nhat Hanh, *Living Buddha, Living Christ* (New York: Riverhead Books, 1995); also see Daniel Berrigan and Thich Nhat Hanh, *The Raft is Not the Shore: Conversations Toward a Christian-Buddhist Awareness* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1975).

[289] His Holiness the Dalai Lama, *The Good Heart: A Buddhist Perspective on the Teachings of Jesus* (Somerville, MA: Wisdom Publications, 1998).

[290] See Whalen Lai and Michael von Brück, *Christianity and Buddhism: A Multi-Cultural History of Their Dialogue* (Maryknoll, N.Y.: Orbis Books, 2001), 250- 253.

interreligious dialogue in general, Christian-Buddhist dialogue in particular. He speaks of his encounter and understanding of Zen Buddhism in *Zen and the Birds of Appetite*, where he conveys how he has been influenced intellectually and spiritually by Zen as articulated by Daisetz Suzuki.[291] Especially in this work, Merton exhibits a felt change in how he understands himself and his own Christian tradition through his study and practice of Zen, which is indicative of spiritual transformation.

In terms of both scholarship and practical engagement, John Cobb has done pioneering work in the Buddhist-Christian dialogue. As mentioned above, his interaction with Masao Abe,[292] and the ongoing dialogues that this has produced, have furthered the aim of mutual understanding that is the central task of interreligious conversation.[293] His writings reveal that he has entered into deep, personal dialogue with Buddhists and has consequently formulated a process theology that reflects this encounter.[294]

Panikkar, a Jesuit priest, has been an active proponent and participant in interreligious dialogue for many years. He has been involved in dialogue largely with Hindu and Buddhist practitioners, advocating a pluralistic theology of religions of openness and inclusivity toward

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[291] Thomas Merton, *Zen and the Birds of Appetite* (New York: New Directions, 1968).

[292] See John B. Cobb, Christopher Ives, Masao Abe, *Emptying God: a Buddhist-Christian conversation* (Maryknoll, N.Y.: Orbis Books, 1990).

[293] For the significance and fruitfulness of the Cobb-Abe dialogue group see Lai and von Brück, *Christianity and Buddhism*, Chapter 6.

[294] His extensive activity in the International Buddhist-Christian Studies Conferences and the corresponding papers he has published in the Buddhist-Christian Studies journal as well as other longer works attest to this influence.

religious others.[295] Panikkar evinces a profound commitment to interaction and engagement with others. It is apparent in his writing that he has integrated Buddhism into his spiritual practice, which has certainly led him to new insights and a fuller experience of his own Christianity.[296]

The above are representative examples of exchanges (formal and informal) and individual practitioners that exhibit signs of Buddhists and Christians being affected by dialogue with one another in spirituality.

Evangelical Engagement with Christian-Buddhist Dialogue

It is important to note that the above mentioned development of Christian-Buddhist dialogue has been mainly driven by the liberal Christian theologians and scholars reflecting America's "liberal heritage of intellectual culture," as Whalen Lai and Michael von Brück concluded in their survey on American history of Christian-Buddhist dialogue.[297] They left open the question of the future possibility of conservative and evangelical Christians' engagement with Christian-Buddhist dialogue. Since their publication of the book in 2001, just such an engagement has emerged from some evangelical Christian theologians, missiologists and

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[295] See Raimundo Panikkar, *The Intrareligious Dialogue* (New York, N.Y.: Paulist Press, 1999).

[296] This can be seen not only in *The Intrareligious Dialogue* but also *The Silence of God: The Answer of the Buddha* (Maryknoll, N.Y.: Orbis Books, 1989), which offers his understanding of what the Buddha's teachings have to offer Christianity and how they may change Christians.

[297] Whalen Lai and Michael von Brück , *Op.cit.*, 234-235.

scholars. Here I will briefly introduce them for the purpose of the further theological discussion I will take up in-depth in the next section.

As both a Christian theologian of mission and an active member in the Society of Buddhist-Christian Studies, Terry Muck enabled evangelistic engagement with Buddhism to be heard in the current discourse on Christian-Buddhist dialogue. In an article in 2000, he addressed missiological issues in the encounter with what he termed "emerging Buddhism"—how can Christians maintain their evangelistic task in response to the missionary challenges raised by American Buddhism?[298]

An evangelical Reformed scholar, McDermott argues that evangelicals can learn from the world religions including Buddhism. By emulating the rigorous practice of Buddhism's "letting go" of the self and of the egocentric mind, he claims, Christians can learn more about the value and power of Christ's *kenosis* and God's call to serve others.[299]

Taking seriously both religious pluralism and Christians' commitment to witness to the gospel, Timothy Tennent criticizes both conservative and liberal approaches to interreligious dialogue and suggests what he terms "engaged exclusivism" based on two theological emphases: first, "a more open stance regarding general revelation as a *preparatio evangelica*" and second,

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[298] Terry Muck, *"*Missiological Issues in the Encounter with Emerging Buddhism*," Missiology* 28, no. 1 (January 2000): 35-46.

[299] Gerald R. McDermott, *Can evangelicals learn from world religions?: Jesus, Revelation & religious traditions* (Downers Grove, Ill: InterVarsity Press, 2000), 151-154.

"good theology must be missiologically focused."[300] As an exercise in this approach, he demonstrates mutually-engaged and evangelistically-aimed "table talk" with Buddhists on the subjects of God and ethics.[301]

In a similar vein, evangelical Korean-American theologian Sungwook Chung takes what he calls a "missional" approach by proposing the Buddha's Four Noble Truths, along with Buddhist teachings of *Bodhisattva, Amida* Buddha, and *karma*, as "significant and substantial points of contact" for Christian-Buddhist dialogue and employing these points of contact to share the gospel with Buddhists.[302]

Recognizing a rapidly-growing American Buddhism as "a viable alternative to traditional religion" for American Christians, Keith Yandell and Harold Netland explore and appraise Buddhism based on a scholastically informed "compare and contrast" approach from an evangelical perspective.[303] Most recently, the Pentecostal experience and possible theological themes in encounters with Buddhism have been presented by an evangelical-Pentecostal

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[300] Timothy C. Tennent, *Christianity at the religious roundtable: evangelicalism in conversation with Hinduism, Buddhism, and Islam* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2002), 11-27.

[301] Ibid., 89-137.

[302] Sung Wook Chung, C*hrist the One and Only: A Global Affirmation of the Uniqueness of Jesus Christ* (Milton Keynes: Paternoster [u.a.], 2005), 228-239.

[303] Harold A. Netland and Keith E. Yandell, *Buddhism: A Christian Exploration and Appraisal* (Downers Grove, Ill: IVP Academic, 2009).

theologian, Amos Yong, who is also an active member in the Society of Buddhist-Christian Studies.[304]

Conclusion

In this chapter I have sought to review relevant literature related to three key areas for the purpose of providing foundation, shape, and direction for the project, and preparing the way for deeper theological reflection later in the dissertation. The first goal of the literature review was to outline the religious context in the U.S.A. I attempted to show that the religious face of the nation has shifted from a primarily Christian society to a religiously pluralistic society. In light of this new societal context, many scholars have offered a Christian response that addresses the theological and missiological challenges that the church now faces. Challenges span a breadth of issues and in the midst of the practical outworkings of a theology of dialogue and evangelism in the context of interreligious engagement. Scholars have suggested a new perspective that needs to be explored: a re-examination of the theology of religion that moves beyond current and existing theologies of religion, such as the threefold typology, to a search for theological alternatives. Scholars have set the case that alternatives must make room for genuine interreligious dialogue that holds together dialogue and evangelism.

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[304] Amos Yong, "From Azusa Street to the Bo Tree and Back: Strange Babblings and Interreligious Interpretations in the Pentecostal Encounter with Buddhism," in *The Spirit in the World: Emerging Pentecostal Theologies in Global Contexts*, ed. Veli-Matti Kärkkäinen (Grand Rapids, Mich: William B. Eerdmans Pub. Co, 2009), 203-226.

More specifically this chapter has explored literature on Christian-Buddhist dialogue. Some scholars-practitioners have indicated that the sharing of Buddhist and Christian spiritual practices has assisted in enhancing interreligious dialogue in terms of mutual transformation, which is in need of clarification and further exploration. However, neither liberal nor evangelical engagements in this dialogue have taken the lived experiences of Christian-Buddhist dialogue into consideration in relation to the practice of evangelism. I will investigate this in the following chapters.

CHAPTER THREE

EVANGELISM AND INTERRELIGIOUS DIALOGUE IN CREATIVE TENSION: AN ANALYSIS OF SELECTED DOCUMENTS OF THE ROMAN CATHOLIC CHURCH AND THE WORLD COUNCIL OF CHURCHES

The purpose of this chapter is to demonstrate through the analysis of selected documents from the two main ecclesial bodies, the Roman Catholic Church and the World Council of Churches, that the practical theological questions of interreligious dialogue and evangelism are surfaced in response to religious plurality and the two practices of the church are in persistent tension. Arguably, it is only in the missional context of the Church that the appropriate relation between evangelism and dialogue can be understood. In the one mission of the church, dialogue and evangelism are two distinct aspects. Neither can replace the other. Just as dialogue is not meant to replace the proclamation of the gospel, so the obligation to proclaim the gospel must never negate the work of engaging in dialogue.

Roman Catholic Church: Vatican Council II and Post-Council

Introduction

In response to the new awareness of a religiously plural world, the Roman Catholic Church has been officially engaged in the issues of interreligious dialogue and evangelism since the Second Vatican Council (1962-1965). Marking a historical turning point in the relationship of the Roman Catholic Church towards people of other religious traditions, this Council gave

impetus to interreligious dialogue in the Church's life and missional vocation.[305] It was the Second Vatican Council that formally recognized interreligious understanding and broadened it to include "interreligious dialogue" as an explicit teaching with a universal status.[306]

In this section I will survey the Roman Catholic Church's official responses to the issue of interreligious dialogue and its relationship with the Church's evangelistic mission by analyzing selected documents of the Second Vatican Council and post-Council.

Lumen Gentium (*The Dogmatic Constitution on the Church*)

The Dogmatic Constitution on the Church (*Lumen Gentium*), which was promulgated November 21, 1964, is the first ecclesial document to contain an entire section on "non-Christians" and to discuss the status of people of other religions with reference to their relationship with the Church.[307] The new element introduced by this document is the discussion on the possibility of salvation for adherents of other religions. This document affirms that salvation is possible for other believers outside the visible confines of Christianity. It states the following:

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[305] Jacques Dupuis, *Toward a Christian Theology of Religious Pluralism* (Maryknoll, N.Y.: Orbis Books, 1998), 4.

[306] Michael L. Fitzgerald and John Borelli, eds., *Interfaith Dialogue: A Catholic View* (Maryknoll, N.Y.: Orbis Books, 2006), 55.

[307] Ilaria Morali, "Salvation, Religions, and Dialogue in the Roman Magisterium," in *Catholic Engagement with World Religions: A Comprehensive Study*, ed., by Karl Josef Becker and Ilaria Morali (Maryknoll, N.Y.: Orbis Books, 2010), 125. Also see Chidi Denis Isizoh ed., *Milestones in Interreligious Dialogue: A Reading of Selected Catholic Church Documents on Relations with People of Other Religions: Essays in Honour of Francis Cardinal Arinze, a Seventieth Birthday Bouquet* (Rome: Ceedee Publications, 2002), xiv.

> The plan of salvation includes those also who acknowledge the Creator...with us, adore the one and merciful God who will judge mankind on the last day. Nor is God far from those who in shadows and images seek the unknown God; for He gives to all men life and breath and all things, and as Savior desires all men to be saved. For those also can attain eternal salvation who without fault on their part do not know the Gospel of Christ and His Church, but seek God with a sincere heart, and under influence of grace endeavor to do His will as recognized through the promptings of their conscience.[308]

The document talks about various qualifications of the people of God: first, the Christians are called the People of God. Those who belonged to other religions are "related to the People of God in various ways,"[309] in grades. For each grade there are reasons and conditions for being included in "the plan of salvation."[310]

However, the question of how people outside of the church receive salvation through Christ even without knowing him was not explicitly elaborated in this document.[311] Rather, what is explicitly enunciated in this document is the doctrine of *praeparationes evangelicae* (preparation for the Gospel), a term taken from Eusebius of Caesarea, found at the important passage: "Whatever good or true is found amongst them is looked upon by the Church as a

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[308] "Dogmatic Constitution on the Church (Lumen Gentium)," in *The Document of Second Vatican Council*, ed., by Walter M. Abbott (New York: Guild Press, 1966), no. 16.

[309] Lumen Gentium, no. 16.

[310] Ibid.

[311] Robert B. Sheard, *Interreligious Dialogue in the Catholic Church Since Vatican II: An Historical and Theological Study* (Lewiston: E. Mellen Press, 1987), 30.

preparation for the Gospel. (20) She knows that it is given by Him who enlightens all men so that they may finally have life."[312]

Nostra Aetate (*the Declaration on the Relationship of the Church to Non-Christian Religions*)

The Second Vatican Council's dialogical engagement with people of other religions is best seen in *Nostra Aetate,* the Declaration on the Relationship of the Church to Non-Christian Religions, promulgated on October 28, 1965. Having been considered as "the Catholic Magna Carta for interreligious relations,"[313] this document has had widespread influence on Christian relations with other faiths, not only for Roman Catholic Christians but also for Christians of other ecclesial traditions.[314] Because of increasing awareness of religious pluralism in the world today, this document is one of the most discussed documents of the Vatican II.

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[312] Lumen Genitium, no. 16. Regarding this specific passage, Ilaria Morali notes that "the Council attributes the status of preparation for the gospel not to religions, which are not mentioned in this text, but to whatever good or truth is found among non-Christian persons." Ilaria Morali, "Salvation, Religions, and Dialogue in the Roman Magisterium," 127. For Jacques Dupuis this text is the first affirmation of a positive value attributed to the dispositions of individual people, not to any religious or other groups to which they belong. Jacques Dupuis, *Toward a Christian Theology of Religious Pluralism*, 62.

[313] Chidi Dennis Isizoh, ed., *Milestones on the Inter-religious dialogue*, xv. Fir this document's significance in the history of modern Catholic Church, see Giuseppe Alberigo, *A Brief History of Vatican II*, trans. Matthew Sherry (Maryknoll, New York: Orbis Books, 2006), 105. Alberic Stacpoole, *Vatican II Revisited: by Those who Were There* (Minneapolis, Minnesota: Winston Press, Inc., 1986), 220.

[314] Michael Kinnamon and Brian E. Cope, *The Ecumenical Movement*, 398. See Michael Ipgrave, "Understanding, Affirmation, Sharing: *Nostra Aetate* and an Anglican Approach to Inter-Faith Relations," *Journal of Ecumenical Studies*, 43:1, (Winter 2008), 1-16.

Calling for interreligious dialogue from its first to its last line, *Nostra Aetate* states some of the theological basis for it: all human beings are one, stemming from "the one stock which God created to people the entire earth; all share a common destiny, namely God whose providence, evident goodness, and saving designs extend to all men and women."[315] In this document, the Council moves away from proving a graded "orientation" of members of other religions toward the Church; it rather exhorts everyone to overcome divisions and to foster friendly relations: "For all peoples comprise a single community, and have a single origin, since God made the whole of men dwell over the entire face of the earth (cf. Acts 17:26)."[316] By situating the foundations on common origin, John Borelli observes that the common origin means that, despite the evident differences, there is a basic unity, which is reflective of the very nature of the human person, *homo religious.*[317]

The document opens by acknowledging the common foundation of every religion, namely the human attempts to respond to the metaphysical, moral, and spiritual questions of all humanity, some of which are:

> What is man? What is the meaning and purpose of life? What is upright behavior, and what is sinful? Where does suffering originate, and what end does it serve? How can genuine happiness be found? What happens at death? What is judgment? What reward follows death? And finally, what is the ultimate mystery, beyond

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[315] *Nostra Aetate*, no. 1. See also, Chidi Dennis Isizoh, ed., *Milestones on the Inter-religious dialogue,* xv.

[316] Ibid., no. 5.

[317] Fitzgerald and John Borelli, *Interreligious Dialogue,* 60.

> human explanation, which embraces our entire existence, from which we take our origin and towards which we tend?[318]

The document confirms that human nature throughout history has continued to seek the divine as a supernatural being who has power over all, and that "other religions which are found throughout the world attempt in their own ways to calm the hearts of men by outlining a program of life covering doctrine, moral precepts, and sacred rites."[319] Therefore, *Nostra Aetate* implicitly concedes that there is no one religion holding a monopoly on the practice of religion in human society and human experiences of God, and expressions of those experiences are pluralistic.

Particular religions are appreciated: Judaism has common roots with Christianity.[320] Buddhism contributes to overcoming of human suffering. Hinduism and Buddhism are given as examples of the human search for an answer to the "unsolved riddles of human existence."[321] After mentioning some of these religions, *Nostra Aetate* states a pivotal point that firmly acknowledges and complements some intrinsic goodness in the non-Christian religions:

> The Catholic Church rejects nothing of what is true and holy in these religions. With sincere respect she looks on those ways of conduct and life, those precepts and teachings, which, though differing on many points from what she herself

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[318] See *Nostra Aetate,* no. 1.

[319] Ibid., no. 2.

[320] *Nostra Aetate* was originally designed to address the need for a new and positive direction in relationship between Christianity and Judaism or Christians and Jews, while issues of relationship with other non-Christian religions were to be treated separately. However before it was finally approved there was need to extend its coverage to all non-Christian religions. See Edward Idris Cardinal Cassidy, *Rediscovering Vatican II: Ecumenism and Interreligious Dialogue, Unitatis Redintegratio, Nostra Aetate* (New York/Mahwah, New Jersey: Paulist Press, 2005), 125-128.

[321] *Nostra Aetate,* no.2.

> holds and teaches, yet not rarely reflect a ray of the Truth, which enlightens all men.[322]

However, the *Nostra Aetate* immediately follows an implicit caution that this positive attitude toward people of other religions should not lead to weakening the Church's imperative mission of proclamation with the statement: "But she proclaims and must ever proclaim Christ, “the way, the truth and the life” in whom men find the fullness of religious life, and in whom God has reconciled all things to Himself."[323] While there must be a deep respect for the spiritual and moral truths of other religions, *Nostra Aetate* is very clear that Catholics' dialogical engagement should be carried out "in witness to the Christian faith and life."[324]

Ad Gentes (*the decree on missionary activity*)

The validity and the perpetual necessity of the Church's evangelizing mission are reconfirmed in *Ad Gentes*, which was promulgated on December 7, 1965, against “the new theological trends that tended to underestimate the role of the Church and the uniqueness of Christianity.”[325] The evangelizing mission has an ecclesiological foundation: “Missionary activity flows immediately from the very nature of the Church.”[326] Even when people can be led

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[322] Ibid., no. 5.

[323] Ibid.

[324] Ibid., no. 2.

[325] Ilaria Morali, “Salvation, Religions, and Dialogue in the Roman Magisterium,” 125.

[326] *Ad Gentes*, no. 2, 6.

by God to the faith in ways nobody but God knows, “the Church, nevertheless, still has the obligation and also the sacred right to evangelize. So, today as always, missionary activity retains its full force and necessity.”[327]

As does *Lumen Gentium, Ad Gentes* implicitly promotes interreligious dialogue for the purpose of discovering "the seeds of the Word hidden”[328] in other religions which may serve as "preparation for the gospel."[329] Thus, interreligious dialogue is not antithetical but subordinate to the Church's evangelizing mission.

Post-Vatican II Documents

The proactive approach of Pope Paul VI to the issue of interreligious dialogue resulted in the institutionalization of the Secretariat for Non-Christians (SNC) in 1964. One of the central objectives of the SNC was to clarify “the connection between dialogue and mission.”[330] It was renamed in 1988 as the Pontifical Council for Interreligious Dialogue (PCID). Subsequently, a number of official publications came out to further address the question of evangelism and interreligious dialogue. Three such documents will be reviewed, titled: “*The Attitude of the*

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[327] Ibid., no. 7.

[328] Ibid., no. 11.

[329] Ibid., no. 3.

[330] Editorial, *Bulletin* No 55 (XIX/1) 1984,1.

Catholic Church towards the Followers of Other Religious Traditions: Reflections and Orientations on Dialogue and Mission" (1984); *Redemptoris Missio: On the Permanent Validity of the Church's Missionary Mandate* (1990); and "*Dialogue and Proclamation*" (1991).

The Attitude of the Catholic Church towards the Followers of Other Religious Traditions: Reflections and Orientations on Dialogue and Mission (1984)[331]

This document addresses the questions of mission and dialogue that surfaced in practice and in theory in the twenty years after the establishment of the Secretariat for Non-Christians, aimed at exploring "the place of interreligious dialogue in the total mission of the Church" and providing practical guidance in the spirit of the Second Vatican Council and more importantly in the light of *Nostra Aetate*.[332] It identifies the various tasks that make up the contemporary Church's mission, describes the foundations and forms of dialogue, and discusses the relationships between dialogue and mission.

Dialogue is broadly defined as consisting of "not only discussion, but also includes all positive and constructive interreligious relations with individuals and communities of other faiths which are directed at mutual understanding and enrichment."[333] From a more affective domain,

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[331] Catholic Church and Francesco Gioia, *Interreligious Dialogue: The Official Teaching of the Catholic Church from the Second Vatican Council to John Paul II (1963-2005)* (Boston, MA: Pauline Books & Media, 2006), 566-579.

[332] This document was published on June 10, 1984. It is, so to speak, a product of the plenary session of the Secretariat for Non-Christians.

[333] Secretariat for Non-Christians, "The Church and other Religions: Reflections and Orientations on Dialogue and Mission," *The Pope Speaks: The Church Documents Quarterly,* Vol. 29, No. 1(1984): 253.

the document defines dialogue as "a manner of acting, an attitude and a spirit which guides one's conduct. It implies concern, respect, and hospitality toward the other. It leaves room for the other person's identity, his modes of expression, and his values."[334]

From these inclusive definitions of dialogue, the document is clearly attentive to three main subjects: mission, dialogue, and dialogue and mission. It identifies the mission of the Church as founded on love in imitation of God who is love.[335] Quoting from the text of *Ad Gentes,* the document reaffirms the traditional goals of the missionary activity of the Church: "the evangelization and foundation of the Church among peoples or groups in which it has not yet taken root,"[336] as well as working for the extension of the values of the kingdom of God among all people.[337] It enumerates the principal elements of the Church's missional practices very holistically: simple presence and living witness of the Christian life; commitment to the service of all people; liturgy and prayer; interreligious dialogue; and announcement and catechesis.[338]

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[334] Ibid., 260.

[335] Ibid., 254-258.

[336] Ibid., 255. Also see *Ad Gentes,* no. 6.

[337] Cf. Secretariat for Non-Christians, "The Church and other Religions," 255.

[338] Ibid., 255-256.

In the spirit of the Second Vatican Council, the document also calls on Christians "to love and respect all that is good in the culture and the religious commitment of the other."[339] This segment of the document concludes "that Christian mission can never be separated from love and respect for others is proof for Christians of the place of dialogue within that mission."[340]

Addressing the subject of dialogue, the document traces its foundation both anthropologically and theologically. From the anthropological perspective "a person discovers that he does not possess the truth in a perfect and total way but can walk together with others towards that goal."[341] From the theological perspective, the document firmly identifies the root of dialogue in a Trinitarian theological imperative, that "in the Trinitarian mystery, Christian revelation allows us to glimpse in God a life of communion and interchange."[342]

The document proceeds to identify four forms or levels of dialogue: living dialogically in one's daily life; deeds and collaborations with others for humanitarian, social, economic, and political goals toward the emancipation and advancement of people; dialogue of specialists toward confronting, deepening, and enriching a diverse religious heritage; and the commitment of active adherents to sharing their religious experiences of prayer, contemplation, faith and duty, and searching for the Absolute.

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[339] See Secretariat for Non-Christians, "The Church and other Religions," 258.

[340] Ibid.

[341] Ibid., 258-259.

[342] Ibid., 260-262.

On the subject of dialogue and mission, the document limits its attention to two issues, namely mission and conversion, and dialogue as a means of building God's reign. Addressing the question of mission and conversion, the document acknowledges that one of the expected end results of mission is conversion. The document's functional understanding of conversion stems from biblical language and Christian tradition. Consequently, the document defines conversion as "the humble and penitent return of the heart to God in the desire to submit one's life more generously to Him."[343] The document makes it clear that everyone is invited to this conversion. It acknowledges, however, that in the course of this process of moving over to God (conversion), "the decision may be made to leave one's previous spiritual or religious situation in order to direct oneself toward another."[344] The document submits that this "crossing over" or change to a new spiritual or religious domain must respect the ultimate law of conscience, "because 'no one must be constrained to act against his conscience, nor ought he to be impeded in acting according to his conscience, especially in religious matters.'"[345] This is so because "the principal agent of conversion is not [a person] but the Holy Spirit."[346]

The second issue in the subject of dialogue and mission is that of using dialogue to build the kingdom of God. The document affirms that one of the Church's fundamental obligations is

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[343] Secretariat for Non-Christians, "The Church and other Religions," 262.

[344] Ibid.

[345] Ibid. See also *Dignitatis Humanae,* no. 3.

[346] Cf. Secretariat for Non-Christians, "The Church and other Religions," 262.

to establish and sustain the reign of God among all people. This understanding of her mission and obligation to humanity explains why the Church identifies herself as "the universal sacrament of salvation."[347] The document explains that the Church seeks to work and collaborate with everyone toward fulfilling the role of building God's reign. This work of collaboration, the document reasons, is most effective through open dialogue. Thus, this document implies that interreligious dialogue needs to be taken as an effective method of the evangelizing mission of the Church, whose aim is Kingdom of God. In this way, interreligious dialogue is explicitly located within the purview of the Church's evangelizing mission in this document. Here again, dialogue is subordinated to evangelism.

Redemptoris Missio: On the Permanent Validity of the Church's Missionary Mandate (1990)

In this encyclical, John Paul II identified and addressed the questions of mission and dialogue: Is missionary work among non-Christians still relevant? Has it not been replaced by interreligious dialogue? Is not human development an adequate goal of the Church's mission? Does not respect for conscience and for freedom exclude all efforts at conversion? Is it not possible to attain salvation in any religion? Why then should there be missionary activity?[348]

In response to these and related questions, *Redemptoris Missio* is broken into eight chapters. The first chapter addresses one of the fundamental doctrines of Christianity, namely

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[347] Cf. Vatican II, *Lumen Gentium,* no. 48.

[348] See John Paul II, *Redemptoris Missio,* no. 1 and 2.

"Jesus Christ as the only Savior." This dogma draws its statement and inference from biblical texts such as Jn 14:6, Acts 4:12, Heb 1:1-2; cf. Jn 14:6, l Tm 2:5; cf. Heb 4:14-16, Col 1:19-20.[349] The chapter proceeds to affirm other dogmatic statements and positions of the Church that are connected to the question of universal salvation in Christ. Among these are: the Church is the sign and instrument of salvation for all; salvation in Christ is offered to all; and proclamation of the good news is an obligatory responsibility for both the Church and all Christians.[350] Commenting on the statement of the universal applicability of salvation in Christ, the document points out that "the universality of salvation means that it is granted not only to those who explicitly believe in Christ and have entered the Church... it must be made concretely available to all."[351] This statement, in my view, is deeply proactive and relevant for addressing the topical question and Catholic position on religious pluralism today.

Chapter two of the document dwells on the theme "the Kingdom of God."[352] Using many biblical texts, the document establishes a correlation between the Kingdom of God, the kingdom Christ came to establish, and the Church as the primary servant of the kingdom: "the kingdom cannot be detached either from Christ or from the Church."[353] While this chapter affirms that

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[349] See John Paul II, *Redemptoris Missio,* no. 4.

[350] Ibid., nos. 9-11.

[351] See John Paul II, *Redemptoris Missio,* no. 10.

[352] See John Paul II, *Redemptoris Missio,* nos. 12-20.

[353] Ibid., no. 18.

God's kingdom extends beyond the ecclesial boundaries of the Church, it also maintains that the Church, the bride of Christ, has as her primary duty the task of inviting and keeping all people in that same kingdom. Then, it identifies the ways the Church is of service to the kingdom, in terms of preaching, establishing faith communities and founding new particular churches, globally spreading the gospel values, and prayers.[354]

In chapter three the document turns its attention to the role of the Holy Spirit as the principal agent of mission.[355] It identifies the Holy Spirit as the transcendent and principal agent for the accomplishment of the work of evangelization and mission of the church throughout the world.[356] It argues that the mission of the Church is directed by the Holy Spirit. It defends this assertion by using scripture texts to demonstrate the direct impact and directional guidance of the Holy Spirit through the life of the early Church. While acknowledging the particular role and influence of the Holy Spirit in the Church and her members, it also affirms that "his presence and activity are universal, limited neither by space nor time."[357]

The fourth chapter, *Redemptoris Missio*, reflects on the Church's mission to the whole world. It argues that though there is a diversity of activities to be carried out by the Church, the mission is still one. However, it also acknowledges the need to make distinctions within that

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[354] See John Paul II, *Redemptoris Missio,* no. 20.

[355] Cf. Ibid., nos. 21-30.

[356] See John Paul II, *Redemptoris Missio,* no. 21.

[357] Ibid., no. 28.

mission. Hence, there are three situations for mission: to non-Christian peoples and groups, to strong and vibrant Christian communities and peoples, and to former Christian communities that are waning in faith.[358]

The duties of the Church in this regard, according to the document, should be "characterized as the work of proclaiming Christ and his Gospel, building up the local Church, and promoting the values of the kingdom."[359] Evaluating the enormity of the task ahead of the Church in this mission, the document observes: "mission *ad gentes* faces an enormous task, which is in no way disappearing. Indeed, both from the numerical standpoint of demographic increase and from the socio-cultural standpoint of the appearance of new relationships, contacts and changing situations, the mission seems destined to have ever wider horizons."[360]

The fifth chapter of *Redemptoris Missio* maps out the paths of mission.[361] According to this chapter, the first form of evangelization is witness. This is described as "the very life of the missionary, of the Christian family, of the ecclesial community, which reveal a new way of living."[362] The document equally underlines the most appealing aspect of this evangelical

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[358] Ibid., no. 33.

[359] Ibid.

[360] See John Paul II, *Redemptoris Missio*, no. 35.

[361] Ibid., nos. 41-60.

[362] Ibid. no. 42.

witness as "concern for people, and of charity toward the poor, the weak and those who suffer."[363]

The next step is proclamation. The document affirms the position of Paul VI in his Apostolic Exhortation, *Evangelii Nuntiandi*, by holding that proclamation should be the foundation, center, and summit of evangelization.[364] According to the document, the aim of proclamation is Christian conversion. Therefore, this should be concomitant with proclamation. It, however, alludes to the fact that conversion is an activity accomplished in people as a gift from God. Therefore, "it is the Spirit who opens people's hearts so that they can believe in Christ and 'confess him' (cf. 1 Cor 12:3)."[365]

Baptism into Christ should logically be the next step of progress.[366] The next level after baptism is the creation of local churches. Therefore, the document recommends that churches should be established to accommodate all those converted and baptized in Christ. The goal of this formation or structure is to inject gospel values into the cultures of the society where mission *ad gentes* is active.[367] The document uses the inferences and ideas from Paul VI's *Ecclesiam Suam*, the Second Vatican Council's documents *Lumen Gentium, Nostra Aetate and Ad Gentes* to

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[363] Cf. Ibid. no. 42-43.

[364] Ibid., no. 44. Also see Paul VI. *Evangelii Nuntiandi*, 27.

[365] Ibid., no. 46.

[366] Cf. ibid. no. 47.

[367] Cf. Ibid., nos. 52-54.

amplify and demonstrate the Church's assertion that interreligious dialogue is in an integral aspect of the mission and evangelization mandates of the Church.[368]

The final chapter calls for upholding a missionary spirituality, which involves being led by the Spirit, living the mystery of Christ, and loving the Church and humanity as Jesus did.[369] The chapter concludes with the call to holiness of all missionaries: "Holiness must be called a fundamental presupposition and an irreplaceable condition for everyone in fulfilling the mission of salvation in the Church."[370] This call holds true for all Christ's faithful.[371] Therefore, anyone engaging in the activities of mission, which includes interreligious dialogue, needs to be aware of the nobility and sacredness of her or his responsibility.

Dialogue and Proclamation: Reflection and Orientations on Interreligious Dialogue and the Proclamation of the Gospel of Jesus Christ.[372]

Dialogue and Proclamation (DP) is a document published by the Pontifical Council for Interreligious Dialogue in collaboration with the Congregation for the Evangelization of Peoples

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[368] Cf. Ibid., nos. 55-57.

[369] Ibid. nos. 87-89.

[370] Ibid. nos. 90-91.

[371] See John Paul II, Apostolic Exhortation *Christifideles Laid* (December 30,1988), 17.

[372] Pontifical Council for Interreligious Dialogue. *Dialogue and Proclamation*. http://www.vatican.va/roman_curia/pontifical_councils/interelg/documents/rc_pc_interelg_doc_19051991_dialogue-and-proclamatio_en.html

in May 1991. DP states at the outset that its starting point is the Second Vatican Council's statement *Nostra Aetate* (October 1965).

Dialogue and Proclamation begins by acknowledging the contemporary significance of religious plurality for our time, stating that "the important role played by religious traditions [in religious plurality] cannot be overlooked."[373] The introduction to this document gives three reasons that make the relationship between dialogue and proclamation a relevant theme to study. The first is that in the world of interdependence, rapid communications, and mobility of peoples in which we live "there is a new awareness of the fact of religious plurality."[374] Secondly, interreligious dialogue between Christians and non-Christians has yet to achieve a commendable success. Finally, the practice of dialogue raises problems in the Church from people who hold two extreme positions. On one hand are those who think that dialogue replaces proclamation; on the other are those who do not see any value in interreligious dialogue.

Through DP, the Council for Interreligious Dialogue advances a position on dialogue that understands people as situated within particular religious traditions. The context of religious plurality, as I read it, takes shape in the relationship between religious believers and their religious practices—practices which are fundamentally bound up in religious traditions. Because DP acknowledges both people and traditions, the Council for Interreligious Dialogue, from the

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[373] no. 4.

[374] Ibid., no. 4 (a).

outset, takes a step toward seeing religious plurality as a practical theological issue and interreligious dialogue, and thereby as a situated component of this issue.

As its title suggests, the goal of *Dialogue and Proclamation* is to discuss the basic purpose of interreligious dialogue and proclamation from the perspective of the Church, and to address the relationship between these two activities. Proclamation, DP states, "aims at guiding people to explicit knowledge of what God has done for all men and women in Jesus Christ, and at inviting them to become disciples of Jesus through becoming members of the Church."[375] DP notes that proclamation is an activity in "response to the human aspiration for salvation."[376] Proclamation is therefore both soteriologically motivated and oriented.

On the whole, interreligious dialogue "includes both witness and the exploration of respective religious convictions."[377] Christian participants act as witnesses and sharers of "Gospel values." However, this does not mean that Christians should enter dialogue with the intention of preaching the Christian gospel for the purposes of conversion. Rather, it is the case that all participants in dialogue, regardless of tradition, "proceed in response to the divine call of which they are conscious."[378]

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[375] no. 87.

[376] no. 67.

[377] no. 9.

[378] no. 84 .

Although Christians do not enter into dialogue in the same way that they proclaim the Christian message, DP emphasizes both dialogue and proclamation as "the integral elements of the Church's evangelizing mission."[379] Evangelization, as defined in DP, aims "to transform human culture and cultures with the power of the Gospel."[380] While dialogue is an integral part of evangelization, DP states clearly that the Church remains committed to dialogue regardless of the outcome.[381] Thus, while dialogue is important irrespective of its outcome and therefore does not actively aim at catechesis of the Christian message to others, it is still a constituent part of the Church's evangelizing mission. For these reasons, the concept of dialogue is at once complementary to and in tension with the concept of proclamation.

The theological grounds that the Council for Interreligious Dialogue offers for interreligious dialogue in DP are both christological and pneumatological in character.[382] In a sense, Christian participants in interreligious dialogue act as an extension of God's initiative to dialogue with all humankind. DP notes that God's initiative to dialogue with all of humankind was instantiated by the ministry of Jesus Christ. Through Jesus' ministry, "a new horizon of interaction" was opened.[383] However, Jesus' ministry does not stand alone. As DP asserts, "It is

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[379] no. 9.

[380] no. 75.

[381] no. 53.

[382] no. 21.

[383] no. 21.

the Spirit who 'seals' Jesus' witness, authenticating it as true."[384] The Holy Spirit not only importantly puts Jesus' ministry into effect, but also plays an important role in the continual expansion of this new horizon of interaction, doing so through its presence in the hearts of dialogue participants—Christians and non-Christians alike.

DP offers a theological warrant for dialogue that includes a crucial pneumatological component. DP notes that *Dominant et Vivificantem*, an encyclical letter written by Pope John Paul II to address the role of the Holy Spirit in the life of the Church and world,[385] follows *Nostra Aetate* in acknowledging "the universal action of the [Holy Spirit], even outside the visible body of the Church."[386] This statement—promulgated in a papal encyclical—opens the door for the Pontifical Council for Interreligious Dialogue to openly acknowledge "the presence of positive values not only in the religious life of individual believers of other religious traditions, but also in the religious traditions to which they belong."[387]

On one hand, DP commends dialogue because it is through interacting with religious others in an interreligious conversation that Christians can recognize the "inchoate reality" of the

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[384] no. 57.

[385] John Paul II, Dominum et Vivificantem (1986), http://www.vatican.va/cdocs/ENG0142/INDEX.HTM This encyclical, which focuses on the Holy Spirit, forms a trilogy with encyclicals addressing the Trinity: Dives in Misericordia (1980) http://www.vatican.va/edocs/ENG0215/_INDEX.HTM and Redemptor Hominis (1979) http://www.vatican.va/holy fathcr/john_paul_ii/encyclicals/index.htm

[386] no. 26.

[387] no. 17. The Council tempers its positive appraisal of religious traditions to a certain extent: "To say that the other religious traditions include elements of grace does not imply that everything in them is the result of grace. For sin has been at work in the world, and so religious traditions, notwithstanding their positive values, reflect the limitations of the human spirit, sometimes inclined to choose evil" (DP no. 31).

"Kingdom of Christ." This reality resides in "the hearts of the followers of other religious traditions insofar as they live evangelical values and are open to the action of the Spirit."[388] Theologically, interreligious dialogue demands recognizing the Christological and Spirit-ordained aspects of the beliefs and practices of other religious persons. DP seems to be saying that dialogue has theological value because it opens Christians up to the presence of Christian grace in all places, even the hearts of non-Christians.

On the other hand, and perhaps more significantly, DP also draws attention to the notion that the Kingdom of Christ is inchoate in the hearts of all people, including Christian themselves: "In the last analysis truth is not a thing we possess, but a person [Christ] by whom we must allow ourselves to be possessed."[389] Thus, the theological warrant for interreligious dialogue is as much about witnessing the presence of Christ's Kingdom in the hearts of others as it is about seeking a more complete presence—creating a more developed Kingdom—in Christian hearts.

DP lays out four forms of interreligious dialogue in which Christians engage: the dialogue of life, the dialogue of action, the dialogue of theological exchange, and the dialogue of religious experiences. The four forms of dialogue are described in the following ways. In the dialogue of life, "people strive to live in an open and neighbourly spirit, sharing their joys and sorrows, their human problems and preoccupations." In the dialogue of action, "Christians and others collaborate for the integral development and liberation of people."

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[388] no. 35.

[389] no. 49.

Scholarly specialists seek to deepen their understanding of their respective religious heritages, and to appreciate each other's spiritual values, in the dialogue of exchange. And, finally, in the dialogue of religious experience "persons, rooted in their own religious traditions, share their spiritual riches, for instance with regard to prayer and contemplation, faith and ways of searching for God or the Absolute."[390]

In these practices of dialogue, DP notes that there must be "mutual acceptance of differences, or even of contradictions" and "respect for the free decision of persons taken according to the dictates of their conscience."[391] DP also emphasizes the fact that Christians must be willing both to question the content of others' beliefs as well have the content of their own beliefs questioned.[392] Because the kind of interreligious dialogue recommended by the Council for Interreligious Dialogue non-defensively maintains the expectation that Christian beliefs will be challenged, and cultivates a spirit genuine exchange, it must also address the possibilities of the outcomes of dialogue.

DP states, “The foundation of the Church's commitment to dialogue is not merely anthropological but primarily theological."[393] The Church is not invested in interreligious dialogue only for the benefits it produces for persons in their daily lives and for the social

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[390] no. 42.

[391] no. 41.

[392] no. 32.

[393] no. 38.

ramifications, but also for the theological implications of dialogue. DP notes three interrelated implications. First, Christians may be "purified" in their commitments as Christians. The Council for Interreligious Dialogue states,

> While keeping their identity intact, Christians must be prepared to learn and to receive from and through others the positive values of their traditions. Through dialogue they may be moved to give up ingrained prejudices, to revise preconceived ideas, and even sometimes to allow the understanding of their faith to be purified.[394]

Dialogue with non-Christians can bring about a renewal in Christian faith because it reminds Christians of the ways in which their beliefs may have become moribund or distorted.

Secondly, Christians may be converted to the faith of another tradition. The Council implicitly acknowledges that the theological significance of dialogue does not always cut in favor of Christian beliefs. Dialogue demands, DP states, the willingness to "engage together in commitment to the truth and the readiness to allow oneself to be transformed by the encounter."[395] It is possible that the transformation to which dialogue participants open themselves is the transformation of conversion.[396] Some may read this transformation as conversion away from explicit commitment to a Christian community. But other forms of transformation that do not involve conversion to another faith tradition are also quite possible.

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[394] no. 49.

[395] no. 47.

[396] While DP acknowledges the possibility of Christian conversion to another religious tradition, it does not welcome or advocate for this form of conversion.

Christians and non-Christians alike open themselves to this possibility, if they engage in dialogue in the way prescribed by DP.

Somewhere in between renewal and conversion is the third and final option. The Council for Interreligious Dialogue encourages an attitude of deference to God's will in interreligious dialogue: "All... are invited by God himself to enter into the mystery of his patience, as human beings seek his light and truth. Only God knows the times and stages of the fulfillment of this long human quest."[397] It also encourages participants in "prayerful discernment and theological reflection on the significance in God's plan of the different religious traditions and the experience of those who find in them their spiritual nourishment."[398] Thus, the outcome of interreligious dialogue is that Christian participants in dialogue are profoundly affected and even changed by its process.

DP calls Christians to reflect on and pray over the fact that non-Christians find "spiritual nourishment" outside of Christianity and they are asked to rest in this mystery.

The Council for Interreligious Dialogue's final word on the outcome of interreligious dialogue is, simply, that, "Far from weakening their own faith, true dialogue will deepen it."[399] The Church reveals a bold willingness to see interreligious dialogue as in the service of spiritual formation rather than to its detriment.

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[397] no. 84.

[398] no. 78.

[399] no. 50.

The third and final part of the major division of *Dialogue and Proclamation* is "Interreligious Dialogue and Proclamation."[400] Here the document finds theological correlation between dialogue and proclamation. It starts off by acknowledging that both are "authentic elements of the Church's evangelizing mission,"[401] yet "the two activities remain distinct."[402] Both activities need to be carried on simultaneously by each Christian and each Church.

The document affirms that "the Church's mission extends to all. Also in relation to the religions to which they belong, the Church in dialogue can be seen to have a prophetic role."[403] Part of her mission is to bear witness to Gospel values. By doing this, the Church "raises questions for these religions."[404]

The document makes it clear that although Christians are invited to be personally involved in both dialogue and proclamation, they must consider the two as constituting the one mission of the Church. No one of the two is equivalent to the whole mission of the Church. However, it points out that dialogue is "oriented toward proclamation in so far as the dynamic process of the Church's evangelizing mission reaches in it its climax and its fullness."[405]

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[400] nos. 77-86.

[401] no. 77.

[402] Ibid.

[403] no. 79.

[404] Ibid.

[405] no. 82.

As Jacques Dupuis has noted in his theological analysis of the text, there are some positive elements in the document in terms of maintaining dialogue as a central feature of contemporary Catholic identity and keeping the dialogue arena free of explicit mission efforts. But because the document was very much a compromise statement intended to incorporate the concerns of both Vatican offices, serious ambiguities remain in the document.[406] For Dupuis, *Dialogue and Proclamation* hardly resolves the continuing tension between dialogue and evangelizing mission. Dupuis even observes that perhaps it is a tension that can never be fully resolved.[407]

Critical Assessment

Concluding his discussion on various statements of the Council, Robert Sheard presents some issues that the documents did not address: the question of whether the non-Christian religions as such were positive means for the mediation of God's saving grace and the relationship between dialogue and mission. I observe that this issue of mission and dialogue remains in considerable tension not only in the Roman Catholic Church but also in various Protestant churches as well. It is clear that at the time, the Second Vatican Council encouraged a

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[406] Jacques Dupuis, "A Theological Commentary: Dialogue and Proclamation," in William Burrows, ed., *Redemption and Dialogue: Reading Redemptoris Missio and Dialogue and Proclamation* (Maryknoll, N.Y: Orbis Books, 1994),119-157.

[407] The tensions have increased in recent years, in large part because of the controversial document issued in 2000, *Dominus Jesus*, the work of Cardinal Joseph Ratzinger who then headed the Congregation for Sacred Doctrine and now Pope Benedict XVI. For a full and critical analysis of this document, see Bradford E. Hinze, *Practices of Dialogue in the Roman Catholic Church* (N.Y. & London: Continuum, 2006).

positive attitude toward other religions and promoted dialogical engagement with them. While the documents do emphasize the importance of mission in relation to dialogue, it has been argued that the Second Vatican Council's theology of religions resulted in a loss of missionary fervor, which had often been motivated by the concern for saving souls from damnation.[408] This motivation for the evangelizing mission was no longer deemed appropriate and the traditional concept of conversion to the Christian Church as an aim of evangelism was strongly challenged. Furthermore, Paul Knitter criticizes the teaching of Vatican II documents on interreligious dialogue as a movement from resolute reductionism to blatant minimalism. According to him:

> While the Second Vatican Council forms a watershed in Roman Catholic attitude toward other faiths, there still remains a residual ambiguity in its understanding of just how effective the truth and grace within the religions are. The ambiguity stems from the tension between God's salvific will and the necessity of the Church that is evident throughout the history of Catholic thought.[409]

Regarding the Council's practical effects on Catholics and Western Christians, I would note the emergence of the new interreligious practices and a seeking spirituality as an Anglican bishop expresses it: "A new openness—or aggiornamento (up-to-date-ness) as it was called—was encouraged among Catholics throughout the world, which unlocked the door for huge numbers of Christians to begin exploration of other spiritual paths. Vatican II set the stage for

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[408] John T. Pawlikowski, OSM, "Mission and Dialogue in Contemporary Catholicism," *Modern Believing*, 51 no 3(Jl 2010) : 48.; Mary Motte, "Roman Catholic Missions," in *Toward the Twenty-first Century in Christian Mission*, ed. James M. Phillips and Robert T. Coote (Grand Rapids: William B. Eardmans Publishing Company, 1993), 32.

[409] Paul F. Knitter, *No Other Name? A Critical Survey of Christian Attitudes toward the World Religions* (Maiyknoll, N.Y.: Orbis Books, 1985), 124.

large pilgrimages of Westerners, often young people, heading for Asia in search of enlightenment and wisdom they could not find at home."[410]

At the heart of these official teachings of the Roman Catholic Church is an operative vision of evangelism that is broad, comprehensive, and holistic; it is often termed "integral evangelism." Several elements—including interreligious dialogue—are seen as constitutive dimensions of this evangelizing mission. In fulfilling her mission of evangelism, the Church engages the people of other religions, because it is believed that in this interreligious encounter all dialogue participants will experience a mutual transformation under the influence of the Holy Spirit. This new approach to the issues of interreligious engagement initiated by the Roman Catholic Church contributed to opening and widening the scope of the ecclesial and ecumenical responses of the mainline Protestant churches. Without doubt, the World Council of Churches, beside the Roman Catholic Church, has been actively participating in this movement and promoting dialogical interreligious engagement.

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[410] Michael Ingham, *Mansions of the Spirit: The Gospel in a Multi-Faith World* (Toronto: Anglican Book Centre, 1997), 41.

The World Council of Churches

Introduction

The modern history of the World Council of Churches (WCC) provides a graphic picture of the growth of interreligious dialogue. The discussions at WCC assemblies and studies undertaken at various consultations, in which serious attempts were made to grapple with the issues raised by the encounter of the Church with other religions, indicate a steady proliferation of dialogical engagement.[411]

Since the third assembly in New Delhi 1961, a large number of organized dialogues, some bi-lateral, others multi-lateral, have been held under WCC auspices. The consultations included the relationship of Christians with persons of other faiths, Mexico 1963 and Kandy 1967; dialogue in relation to evangelism, Bangkok 1973; and review, evaluation and future directions at Chiang Mai 1972. Beginning with a continuing dialogue with Jews, and later Muslims, people of four different faiths—Hindus, Buddhists, Christians, and Muslims—were brought together at the Ajaltoun Consultation in March 1970.

Since the WCC central committee's formulation of a policy statement on interim guidelines for dialogue at Addis Ababa in 1971, a wide program of actual dialogue has been

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[411] See C. F. Hallencreutz, "A Long-standing Concern: Dialogue in ecumenical history 1910–1971," in *Living faiths and the Ecumenical Movement,* ed., by S. J. Samartha (Geneva, Switzerland: World Council of Churches, 1971), 57-71. Also see S. Wesley Ariarajah, "Interfaith Dialogue," in *Dictionary of the Ecumenical Movement* (Geneva: WCC, 1991, 2002), 281-287. ; Israel Selvanayagam, "Interfaith Dialogue," in *A History of the Ecumenical Movement: 1968-2000*, ed., by John Briggs, Ruth Rouse (World Council of Churches, 2004), 149-174.

carried out, initiated by the Sub-Unit on Dialogue with people of Living Faiths and Ideologies and by various dialogue centers. The second multi-lateral dialogue in Colombo in 1974 included Jews in addition to the other faiths represented at Ajaltoun. At Nairobi, 1975, for the first time in the history of WCC assemblies, five members of other faiths were present—a Jew, a Hindu, a Buddhist, a Muslim and a Sikh.

Along with these increased engagements there has been a marked change in theological emphasis with regard to the interreligious encounter, a change that is reflected in official statements of the WCC and in the terminology used to describe people of other faiths. *Uppsala to Nairobi*, a report commissioned by the central committee of the Council in preparation for the fifth assembly, points out that the later formulations sought to avoid the description of other religions as "non-Christians." Thus, "It is no longer 'the Gospel and Non-Christian Religions' or 'The Word of God and the Living Faiths of Men.' It is 'Dialogue with People of Living Faiths and Ideologies.'"[412] The progressive shift of Christian perspective regarding interreligious relationships has also been reflected in the evolution of the themes of the WCC conferences, as David Bosch first pointed out and later Amos Yong re-emphasized:

> Commission for World Mission and Evangelism meeting in Mexico City (1963): "The Witness of Christians *to* Men of Other Faiths" (one-way monologue directed *at* religious others, although they are recognized as being of faith rather than not);
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> East Asia Christian Conference in Bangkok (1964): "The *Christian Encounter* with Men of Other Beliefs" (Christian initiative emphasized, although such interactions involve the responses of people of other faiths);

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[412] WCC, *Uppsala to Nairobi 1968-1975*, ed., David E. Johnson (New York: Friendship Press, 1975), 98.

> Ajaltoun (Lebanon) (1970): "Dialogue *between* Men of Living Faiths" (people of other faiths affirmed positively and as equal dialogue partners);
> Chiang Mai (Thailand) (1977): "Dialogue *in Community*" (fully mutual emphasis, including a gender inclusive approach).[413]

These developments and shifts in the WCC have raised the question of the relationship between evangelism and interreligious dialogue struggling to confront the tension between a missionary commitment and openness to people of other faiths.

By Evanston, 1954, the influence of Hendrik Kraemer was on the wane, and by 1961 at the New Delhi Assembly interreligious dialogue had come to be looked upon as a form of mutual evangelism. According to the official report Christians must take up conversations with persons of other faiths, "knowing that Christ addresses them through us and us through them."[414] Therefore dialogue is a "form of evangelism" which is often effective today.[415] Since Uppsala, 1968, the issues of the relationship of dialogue to evangelism have been intensified in the following conferences and the Assemblies of the WCC.

The Chiang Mai Statement: Dialogue in Community (1977)

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[413] David J. Bosch, *Transforming Mission: Paradigm Shifts in Theology of Mission* (Maryknoll, N.Y.: Orbis Books, 1991), 484 and Amos Yong, *Hospitality and the Other: Pentecost, Christian Practices, and the Neighbor* (Maryknoll, N.Y.: Orbis Books, 2008), 34-35.

[414] Visser't Hooft, ed. *The New Delhi Report, The Third Assembly of the World Council of Churches*, 1961 (New York, Association Press, 1962), 82.

[415] Ibid., 84.

The theme, dialogue in community, is theologically articulated as a means of incarnating the Christian faith in human relationships, i.e., as "a means of living our faith in Christ in service of community with one's neighbors."[416] This understanding of dialogue in community, in essence, is an expression of the faith in the mission of God (*missio Dei*). Christians are called to participate fully in the mission of God "with the courage of conviction to enable them to be adventurous and take risks" and to "humbly share with all their fellow human beings in a compelling pilgrimage."[417] Yet it should be noted that the focal point of this participation in the mission of God was Christocentric as stated,

> We are specifically disciples of Christ, but we refuse to limit Him to the dimensions of our human understanding. In our relationships within the many human communities we believe that we come to know Christ more fully through faith as Son of God and Saviour of the world; we grow in His service within the world; and we rejoice in the hope which He gives.[418]

Significantly, it was the question of "the theological significance of people of other faiths" that was recognized as unavoidable in "faithful 'dialogue in community.'"[419] The statement contends that dialogue should proceed in terms of spiritual discernment of God's action in "people of other faiths and ideologies rather than of theoretical, impersonal systems."

What Chiang Mai suggested is that dialogue is neither a betrayal of nor a new tool for mission; rather, dialogue is a way of confessing Christ today while seeking community together

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[416] WCC, *Dialogue in Community*, 17.

[417] Ibid.

[418] Ibid., 16

[419] WCC, *Dialogue in Community*, 18, 19.

with others. Of course, Chiang Mai's basis of dialogue, for some, was not "theological" enough; for others, it was not "sociological" enough.[420] But arguably, the WCC, through the Chiang Mai statement, "wisely took a middle road between dialogue as a substitute for mission and dialogue as a subterfuge for mission."[421]

Guidelines on Dialogue with People of Living Faiths and Ideologies (1979)

Based on the "theological statement" of Chiang Mai, the Central Committee of the WCC held in Kingston, Jamaica, in 1979 finally adopted the policy document *Guidelines on Dialogue with People of Living Faiths and Ideologies* (hereinafter *Guidelines*). This major landmark document deals with the following three questions: 1) What is the theological basis of interreligious dialogue? 2) Does dialogue leads to syncretism? and 3) What is the relationship between interreligious dialogue and mission?[422]

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[420] On the one hand, a Christian from India commented, "The theological reasons for dialogue are not brought out. The given reasons are mostly 'sociological' and 'ethical'. One detects a certain unwillingness to enter into a search for the revelational word, or to expect a discovery of 'the mystery of God in the dialogical activity'." On the other hand, a Muslim from India commented that the Chiang Mai statement "seemed to remain still an essentially Christian concept," raising "the question how such a document can be the basis for inter-faith dialogue. The reference to the Trinity, the Incarnation, God's son involved in the cross are exactly those which raise strong rejection and opposition in a Jew or a Muslim." Quoted in Samartha, "Response to the Chiang Mai Statement: An Interim Report," in WCC/ Dialogue with People of Living Faiths and Ideologies, *Minutes of the [3rd] Working Group Meeting* (Geneva, WCC, 1978), 102, 103.

[421] James A. Scherer, *Gospel, Church, and Kingdom: Comparative Studies in World Mission Theology* (Minneapolis: Augsburg, 1987), 162.

[422] S. J. Samartha, "Guidelines on Dialogue," *The Ecumenical Review* 31, no. 2 (1979): 156.

Guidelines takes interreligious dialogue as "a life-style" and "a way of living out Christian faith in relationship and commitment to those neighbors with whom Christians share town, cities, nations, and the earth as [a] whole."[423] It is a dynamic, relational concept referring to a lived life together with others; it is not to be "precisely defined" but to be "described, experienced and developed." It happens in a concrete context of life where people of different faiths, cultures, and ideologies encounter one another "on the basis of a mutual trust and a respect for the integrity of each participant's identity." For Christians, it is "a fundamental part of our Christian service within community."[424] When *Guidelines* "endorsed dialogue as having a distinctive and rightful place within Christian life, in a manner directly comparable to other forms of service," it did not mean that dialogue was "totally different or separate."[425] *Guidelines* saw dialogue as presupposing the integrity of the participant's identity, i.e., his or her "starting point" as a religious person committed to a definite faith. *Guidelines* made it clear that "Christian identity includes an integrity of response to the call of the risen Christ to be witnesses to Him in all the world." It follows then that focusing on dialogue rather than mission or evangelism does not intend "to escape the Christian responsibility to confess Christ today." It intends, rather, "to

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[423] WCC, *Guidelines on Dialogue*, 16.

[424] WCC, *Dialogue in Community*, 17.

[425] Ibid., 17-18.

explore other ways of making plain the intentions of Christian witness and service."[426] On this point *Guidelines* states,

> In dialogue Christians seek "to speak the truth in a spirit of love", not naively "to be tossed to and fro, and be carried about with every wind of doctrine". (Eph. 4.14-15). In giving their witness they recognize that in most circumstances today the spirit of dialogue is necessary. For this reason we do not see dialogue and the giving of witness as standing in any contradiction to one another. Indeed, as Christians enter dialogue with their commitment to Jesus Christ, time and again the relationship of dialogue gives opportunity for authentic witness.[427]

In the final version, *Guidelines* added the following words to this qualified definition of dialogue: "This in no way replaces or limits our Christian obligation to witness, as partners enter into dialogue with their respective commitments."[428] That is to say that in dialogue lays the dimension of evangelistic commitment. This interconnection between dialogue and evangelism was why *Guidelines* attempted to clearly strike a balance between openness and commitment in dialogue.[429]

The point is that interreligious dialogue within the framework of the WCC is officially promoted for the purpose of seeking community with others, without abandoning the evangelistic responsibility of the church. Of course, some pluralists might object that dialogue, as

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[426] WCC, *Guidelines on Dialogue.*

[427] Ibid.

[428] Ibid.

[429] In fact it was already pointed out at the previous meeting of the Working Group on Dialogue that had produced the draft Statement and Guidelines that there was "the need for guidelines to emphasize the Christian's commitment not less than his or her openness and vulnerability." WCC/Dialogue with People of Living Faiths and Ideologies, *The 3rd Dialogue Working Group*, 6.

it is conceptualized in the WCC's "policy" statement and guidelines, is still not free from "a covert form of evangelism," what William Abraham characterizes as a misuse of dialogue.[430] As Samartha put it, "in fact, dialogue emerged out of the womb of mission and it has never been easy for missions to cut the umbilical cord and to recognize the independence of the growing child without denying the relationship."[431] This mother-child metaphor describing mission-dialogue relations is historically fitting as well as theologically challenging. It is fitting because while cutting the historical umbilical cord between dialogue and mission was already accomplished organizationally in Addis Ababa in 1971, dialogue seen in the perspective of mission was still in its swaddling-clothes. It is also challenging because, though Samartha's interest in dialogue here does not lie in doing away with mission, his emphasis is certainly on ascertaining first the independence of dialogue from mission.[432] What *Guidelines* insists, in this regard, is that dialogue as "a style-of-living-in-relation" should not inadvertently cut its historical and theological tie with mission as authentic witness to Christ. The primary concern of *Guidelines* was with the theological interdependence of dialogue and mission rather than independence from each other. Ultimately, *Guidelines* proposes that interreligious dialogue and

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[430] William J. Abraham, *The Logic of Evangelism* (Grand Rapids: EerdMans, 1989), 228.

[431] Samartha, "Guidelines on Dialogue," 155.

[432] In his last report as Director of Dialogue, Samartha said that dialogue "should not be subordinated to or made dependent on other Christian activities" and that "the relation between dialogue, mission and unity has yet to be worked out in a manner that is theologically convincing and practically possible." Samartha, "Director's Report," in WCC/Dialogue with People of Living Faiths and Ideologies, *Minutes of the [4th] Working Group Meeting*, April 9-16, 1980, Matrafured, Hungary (Geneva: WCC, 1980), 34.

evangelistic mission can and should be perceived not as mutually exclusive but mutually inclusive. Furthermore, *Guidelines* implies a possibility of mutual enrichment on the side of Christians in the process of dialogical encounters with people of other faiths:

> Thus, to the member churches of the WCC we feel able with integrity to commend the way of dialogue as one in which Jesus Christ can be confessed in the world today; at the same time we feel able with integrity to assure our partners in dialogue that we come not as manipulators but as genuine fellow-pilgrims, to speak with them of what we believe God to have done in Jesus Christ who has gone before us, but whom we seek to meet anew in dialogue.[433]

The last sentence presents a Christian in dialogue with people of other religions as a fellow-pilgrim and a seeker. This view contained in the document caused suspicion that the WCC encourages Christian churches to adopt a pluralist approach to interreligious dialogue within evangelical circles.[434] The tension between evangelism and dialogue resulted in a much debated question of "whether witness and proclamation presupposed dialogue and could only take the form of dialogue, or whether dialogue itself was already a threat to mission and evangelism."[435]

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[433] WCC, *Guidelines on Dialogue* .no 19.

[434] Scott J. Jones, *The Evangelistic Love of God & Neighbor: A Theology of Witness and Discipleship* (Nashville, TN: Abingdon Press, 2003), 181.

[435] Jan Hendrik Pranger, *Dialogue in Discussion: The World Council of Churches and the Challenge of Religious Plurality between 1967 and 1979* (Utrecht: Interuniversitair Instituut voor Missiologie en Oecumenica, 1994), 126.

Mission and Evangelism: An Ecumenical Affirmation (1982)

Now let us turn to another of the WCC's policy statements on evangelism, *Mission and Evangelism: An Ecumenical Affirmation*, which is said to "do justice to a real and healthy tension in our missionary convictions."[436] The 1976 Central Committee agreed, upon the proposal by the CWME, that "high priority should be given to the field of evangelism" and that "efforts should be made to clarify the practice and meaning of evangelism, especially the relationship of mission and dialogue."[437] For some, looking in retrospect, *Mission and Evangelism* seems to give full attention to the former mandate[438] and not sufficient attention to the latter.[439] It does not follow,

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[436] Castro, "Editorial," *International Review of Mission* 71, no. 284 (1982): 424. It is also said that *Mission and Evangelism* "may be the single most important ecumenical statement on mission" and "has been warmly acclaimed in both conciliar and non-conciliar circles as a statement of convergence." Scherer and Bevans, eds., *New Directions in Mission and Evangelization I: Basic Statements* 1974-1991, 36. It was not an easy process," confided Emilio Castro, then Director of the CWME of the WCC, to the SEDOS General Assembly, December 9, 1982. "There were strong voices against the attempt [to develop this ecumenical affirmation]. It took us at least three years, that is, three sessions of our commission (i.e., CWME) to convince people that the exercise was worthwhile." Castro, "The World Council of Churches' Ecumenical Affirmation: Mission and Evangelism," in *Trends in Mission; Towards the 3rd Millennium. Essays in Celebration of Twenty Five Years of SEDOS*, eds. William Jenkinson and Helene O'Sullivan (Maryknoll, New York: Orbis. 1991), 294. Still, its first preliminary draft was "severely criticized and was withdrawn for lack of support" in the midst of the ecumenical-evangelical tension at the World Missionary Conference in Melbourne in 1980. Costas, *Christ Outside the Gate*, 147. Considering this difficult process, the adoption by the WCC of Mission and Evangelism in 1982 could be regarded as a major breakthrough.

[437] WCC/Central Committee, *Minutes and Reports of the Twenty-Ninth Meeting* (Geneva 1976), 26.

[438] Though "neither very clear nor consistent with its use of 'mission' and 'evangelism,'" this document gives the urgency to the evangelistic calling of the church by "reserving the term evangelism for a central part of mission, i.e., 'naming the Name.'" Jacques Matthey, "Missiology in the World Council of Churches: Update. Presentation. History, Theological Background and Emphases of the Most Recent Mission Statement of the World Council of Churches," *International Review of Mission* 90, no. 359 (2001): 428, 429.

[439] "Indeed, dialogue is one of the points on which the 1982 Affirmation seems a bit weak." Jacques Matthey, "Milestones in Ecumenical Missionary Thinking from the 1970s to the 1990s," *International Review of Mission* 88, no. 350 (1999): 297.

however, that this document fails to point to the dialogical engagement with people of other religions that *Guidelines* envisions; in fact, it shares the latter's vision.

A Christocentric Trinitarian understanding of mission is clearly laid out when *Mission and Evangelism* describes "the call to mission:"

> As a fellowship of churches which confess the Lord Jesus Christ as God and Savior, according to the Scriptures, and therefore seek to fulfill together their common calling to the glory of the one God, Father, Son and Holy Spirit, the rallying point of the World Council of Churches is the common confession of Jesus Christ. The saving ministry of the Son is understood within the action of the Holy Trinity; it was the Father who in the power of the Spirit sent Jesus Christ the Son of God incarnate, the Savior of the whole world. The churches of the WCC are on a pilgrimage towards unity under the mission vision of John 17:21, "that they may all be one; even as thou, Father, art in me, and I in thee, that they also may be in us, so that the world may believe that thou hast sent me."[440]

Here, we can identify three important components of ecumenical mission: the centrality of Jesus Christ, the mission of the Triune God (*missio Dei*), and unity in God's mission. *Mission and Evangelism* emphasizes the urgency of the evangelistic calling of the church-in-mission and "the inextricable relationship between Christian unity and missionary calling, between ecumenism and evangelization."[441] The traditional understanding of ecumenical mission as unity in God's mission, or in other words, "common witness," here is firmly affirmed on the basis of the Christian faith.

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[440] WCC, "Mission and Evangelism: An Ecumenical Affirmation," *International Review of Mission* 71, no. 284 (1982): 428

[441] Ibid., 427-428.

The last (seventh) but not the least ecumenical conviction of *Mission and Evangelism*, subtitled as "Witness among People of Living Faiths," presents the relationship between evangelism and dialogue. Perhaps, from a Roman Catholic perspective, this section is "a cautious statement, which only begins to breach the issue."[442] Yet the issue that this section has to do with, in fact, was already breached by *Dialogue in Community* and *Guidelines.*[443]

> The influences of the former can be found in the initial paragraph of this section: Christians owe the message of God's salvation in Jesus Christ to every person and to every people. Christians make their witness in the context of neighbors who live by other religious convictions and ideological persuasions. True witness follows Jesus Christ in respecting and affirming the uniqueness and freedom of others. We confess as Christians that we have often look for the worst in others and have passed negative judgment upon other religions. We hope as Christians to be learning to witness to our neighbors in a humble, repentant and joyful spirit.[444]

Looking at interreligious dialogue as "an encounter of commitments,"[445]*Mission and Evangelism* envisions Christian evangelism as "mutual witness" that is not a "one-way process" but "two-way" between Christians and people of other religions. Mutual witness in dialogue, for the Christian, is a faithful and self-critical incarnation of the Christian faith and it is theologically

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[442] Basil Meeking, "For Every Human Being in the World," *International Review of Mission* 71, no. 284 (1982): 454.

[443] Excerpts from the Guidelines on Dialogue are included in the Appendices of the Mission and Evangelism. Cf. WCC, *Dialogue in Community*, 18-19 or *Guidelines on Dialogue*, 11-12.

[444] WCC, "Mission and Evangelism: An Ecumenical Affirmation," 445-446.

[445] Ibid., 447.

underpinned by the idea that God is the creator of the whole universe and that "God has not left himself without witness at any time or any place."[446]

With regard to the question of the salvific efficacy of other religions, this section affirms the perennial fact that "among Christians there are still differences of understanding as to how the salvation in Christ is available to people of diverse religious persuasions," though it is firmly believed that "the Word is at work in every human life" (Para. 42). At the same time, *Mission and Evangelism* quickly adds here the following words of evangelistic conviction: "But all Christians agree that witness to the decisive presence of God in Christ should be rendered to all."[447] The universal salvation in Jesus Christ is the focal point of *Mission and Evangelism*. "It is this Jesus," says *Mission and Evangelism*, "that the Church proclaims as the very life of the world because on the cross he gave his own life for all that all may live. ... In him there is abundant life, life eternal."[448]

The second half of the last sentence leads us again to the key issue of *Mission and Evangelism*, that is, "mission (as true witness) in Christ's way." Mission, in this regard, should be carried out in the spirit of dialogical openness. It does not mean that dialogue replaces mission.[449] It rather means that dialogue corrects the way mission has been done untruthfully.

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[446] Ibid., 446, 447.

[447] WCC, "Mission and Evangelism: An Ecumenical Affirmation," 446.

[448] Ibid., 432.

[449] A Roman Catholic response to *Mission and Evangelism* has this to say on this point: "The word 'mission' may be discarded where it is too evocative of a certain form of proselytism, but the word 'dialogue' cannot

The spirit of proselytism as false or corrupted witness here is refuted not merely because "an imperialistic crusader's spirit was foreign to Jesus Christ." It is given up, more importantly, because "the Spirit of God is constantly at work in ways that pass human understanding and in places that to us are least expected."[450]

Thus, the spirit of dialogue helps "Christians seek to discern the unsearchable riches of God and the way he deals with humanity." This is a self-critical seeking to learn more about the mission of God in the world. This humble seeking leads inevitably, on the one hand, to the recognition of "the validity and significance of the ministry of others to the Church, in order that the Church may better understand and be in closer solidarity with the world, knowing and sharing its pains and yearnings." On the other hand, it leads to "an even more intimate interior dialogue" among "Christians who come from cultures shaped by another faith" through which the principle of incarnation and solidarity becomes the principle of "inculturation" of the gospel "as another way of describing Christian mission."[451]

While not clear about the "theological" significance of other religions, both policy documents, *Guidelines* and *Mission and Evangelism*, attempt to hold together evangelism and dialogue on the basis of the Christocentric Trinitarian faith and *Missio Dei*. In these statements,

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be purely and simply substituted for the word 'witness'." "Memorandum from a Consultation on Mission (Rome 1982)," *International Review of Mission* 71, no. 284 (1982): 467.

[450] WCC, "Mission and Evangelism: An Ecumenical Affirmation," 439, 446.

[451] Ibid., 446, 430, 446, 438.

evangelism and dialogue are recommended as complementary, rather than competitive, practices of the church to bear witness before the religiously plural world.

"Witness among People of Other Living Faiths," San Antonio Report (1989)

The tenth world missionary conference was held in San Antonio in 1989 under the theme of "Your Will be Done: Mission in Christ's Way," and it was the first conference that people of other faiths had been invited as guests. The subject of the theology of evangelism in relation to other religions was dealt with in Section I ("Turning to the Living God"), though its report was "open to varied interpretations."[452] It needs to be noted that both Wesley Ariarajah, who was the WCC's secretary for dialogue, and Raymond Fung, who was the WCC's secretary for evangelism, supported the report on "Witness among People of Other Living Faiths" of Section I.[453]

Having affirmed the "evangelistic mandate," this report presents Christians as "only the recipients of God's grace" and "witnesses to others, not judges of them" with "no full understanding of God's truth" and "imperfect knowledge of God's saving power."[454] From this

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[452] Norman E. Thomas, "Ecumenical Directions in Evangelism: Melbourne to San Antonio," *Journal of the Academy for Evangelism in Theological Education* 5 (1989-1990): 57.

[453] Wesley Ariarajah, "San Antonio and Other Faiths," in WCC/Dialogue with People of Living Faiths, *The Challenge of Dialogue*, Papers from the Meeting of the Dialogue Working Group, Casablanca/Morocco, 19-28 June 1989 (Geneva: WCC); Raymond Fung, *Evangelistically Yours: Ecumenical Letters on Contemporary Evangelism* (Geneva: WCC, 1992).

[454] Frederick R. Wilson, ed., *The San Antonio Report. Your Will be Done: Mission in Christ's Way* (Geneva: WCC, 1990), 32.

epistemologically humble approach, the report moves to one of the most well-known sentences of San Antonio (the first sentence of paragraph 26): "We cannot point to any other way of salvation than Jesus Christ; at the same time we cannot set limits to the saving power of God."[455] Hence comes the invitingly committed and suggestively open-ended conclusion of the paragraph 26: "We therefore state: (a) that our witness to others concerning salvation in Christ springs from the fact that we have encountered him as our Lord and Savior and are hence urged to share this with others; and (b) that in calling people to faith in Christ, we are not only offering personal salvation but also calling them to follow Jesus in the service of God's reign."[456]

The report then recaps the ecumenical consensus on mission-dialogue relations. In paragraph 27, the "two-way relationship" between witness and dialogue is reaffirmed: "We affirm that witness does not preclude dialogue but invites it, and that dialogue does not preclude witness but extends and deepens it." In paragraph 28, the aspect of "faith commitment" as well as the independent "place" and "integrity" of dialogue is also affirmed: "Indeed, life with people of other faiths and ideologies is by its very nature an encounter of commitment (*Mission and Evangelism* 45)." In this encounter Christians are "invited to listen in openness to the possibility that the God they know in Jesus Christ may encounter them also in the lives of their neighbors of other faiths."[457]

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[455] Ibid.

[456] Ibid.

[457] Ibid., 32, 33.

Then comes what Jacques Matthey calls "a majority consensus formulation that stands as such since 1989" about mission-dialogue relations[458]: "We are well aware that our convictions about and the ministry of witness to Jesus Christ stand in tension with what we have affirmed about God being present and at work in people of other faiths: we appreciate this tension, and do not attempt to resolve it."[459]

According to David Bosch, San Antonio's position of holding mission and dialogue in creative tension means first to accept the reality that "we encounter this tension whichever way we turn." It also means to admit that "we do not have all the answers and are prepared to live within the framework of penultimate knowledge." Nevertheless, for him, this does not mean to "opt for agnosticism, but for humility." It is rather "a bold humility-or a humble boldness."[460]

The same remark could be said in relation to those who were at the other end of the spectrum of thinking about mission-dialogue relations. Ariarajah, for one, would later criticize San Antonio's position interpreting it as a theologically "neutral" position. He appealed to the WCC to advance further from a theologically neutral to a theologically positive position as it had done from a theologically hostile to a theologically neutral position with regard to Christian

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[458] Jacques Matthey, "Missiology in the World Council of Churches: Update," *International Review of Mission* 90, no. 359 (2001): 432.

[459] Wilson ed., *The San Antonio Report*, 33.

[460] Bosch, *Transforming Mission*, 488, 489. Bosch acknowledged that his theology of creative tension would "certainly need further refinement and clarification" in the eyes of evangelicals. David J. Bosch, "Your Will Be Done?: Critical Reflections on San Antonio," *Missionalia* 17, no. 2 (1989): 135.

attitude towards people of other faiths.[461] In the last chapter of his book, "Dialogue or Mission: Can the Tension Be Resolved?," Ariarajah persuasively argues:

> When my Hindu neighbor says that he or she has a life in God, it should become part of my theological agenda. It says something about God that has much to do with my mission. I can no longer stay neutral. I cannot say, "I don't know." Nor can I say that this constitutes "a tension I do not seek to resolve."
> The "tension" itself constitutes the theological agenda for a new understanding of mission in pluralistic situations. It needs to be pursued within the practice and in the spirit of dialogue. Meaningful mission in the next millennium may well depend on the resolution of this tension.[462]

In the final analysis, San Antonio allowed both the language of evangelism and that of dialogue to be spoken on its own terms and made it possible for both the evangelism-minded and the dialogue-minded to take a positive look at evangelism-dialogue relations. The question that arises for us, then, is: What drove San Antonio forward in ecumenical discussions on evangelism-dialogue relations? In my view, the real driving force behind the San Antonio concord between evangelism and dialogue was neither simply a sudden emergence within the WCC, as Ariarajah presumed, of many voices that "called for a radical re-appraisal of the missionary movement's working hypothesis of God's relation to neighbors of other faiths."[463] Nor was it simply a sudden "marking of the final step" or "logical conclusion" of the supposedly

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[461] Jean Stromberg, "Christian Witness in a Pluralistic World: Report on a Mission/Dialogue Consultation," *International Review of Mission* 78, no. 307 (1988): 420.

[462] S. Wesley Ariarajah, *Not Without my Neighbor: Issues in Interfaith Relations* (Geneva: WCC, 1999), 129.

[463] Ariarajah, "San Antonio and Other Faiths," 145.

delayed integration process between the WCC and the IMC, as Fung assumed.[464] I contend that San Antonio was "explicitly emphatic" on the tension between evangelism and dialogue and on sustaining it.

Religious plurality: theological perspectives and affirmations (*Baar Statement*, 1990)

As the culmination of a four-year study process, undertaken by the interfaith dialogue sub-unit of the WCC, entitled "My Neighbour's Faith and Mine," the *Baar Statement* was produced by "Orthodox, Protestant and Roman Catholic participants."[465]

The *Baar Statement* consists of the following six sections: i) an introduction; ii) a theological understanding of religious pluralism; iii) ambiguity in the religious traditions; iv) Christology and religious pluralism; v) the Holy Spirit and religious pluralism; and vi) interreligious dialogue: a theological perspective.[466]

I extract the five theological points articulated in the *Baar Statement*: (1) Theological understanding of religious plurality begins with faith in the One God who created all things, the

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[464] Fung, *Evangelistically Yours*, (June 1989): 252.

[465] Michael Kinnamon and Brian E. Cope, eds., *The Ecumenical Movement: An Anthology of Key Texts and Voices* (WCC, Geneva, 1997), 417.

[466] WCC, "Religious Plurality: Theological Perspectives and Affirmations," *Current Dialogue*, no. 19 (1991): 47-51.

living God, present and active in all creation from the beginning. People have all times and in all places responded to the presence and activity of God among them, and have given witness to their encounters with the living God. We cannot set limits to the saving power of God; (2) Religious plurality need to be taken not so much as an obstacle to be overcome, but rather as an opportunity for deepening our encounter with God and with our neighbors as we await the fulfillment when 'God will be all in all'(1Cor. 15:28); (3) Christians need to move beyond a theology which confines salvation to the explicit personal commitment to Jesus Christ; (4) It is affirmed unequivocally that God the Holy Spirit has been at work in the lives and traditions of people of various living faiths. We need to respect their religious convictions, different as these may be from our own, and to admire the things which God has accomplished and continues to accomplish in them through the Spirit; (5) Interreligious dialogue is therefore a 'two-way street.' Authentic dialogue opens both partners to a deeper conversion to the God who speaks to each through the other. Through the witness of others, we Christians can truly discover facets of the divine mystery which we have not yet seen or responded to.

The reason why the *Baar Statement* is significant in comparison with other theological statements concerning other religions is that it signified a change from Christocentric thinking, which dominated the WCC up to 1990, to what would be called theocentric and/or Pneumatocentric thinking. Thus, this document opened up new horizons for theological insights.

However, this statement does not weaken the decisive meaning of the revelation in Jesus Christ. Christocentric theology affirms that in the incarnated Jesus Christ the whole human race

is being united, and that God's redeeming salvation event takes place in the Christ event. In part 4, ‘Christology and religious pluralism,' the *Baar Statement* says:

> We affirm that in Jesus Christ, the incarnate Word, the entire human family has been united to God in an irrevocable bond and covenant. The saving presence of God's activity in all creation and human history comes to its focal point in the event of Christ... This saving mystery is mediated and expressed *in many and various ways* as God's plan unfolds toward its fulfillment. It may be available to those outside the fold of Christ (Jn. 10: 16) in ways we cannot understand, as they live faithful and truthful lives in their concrete circumstances and in the framework of the religious traditions which guide and inspire them. The Christ event is for us the clearest expression of the salvific will of God in all human history. (I Tim. 2:4)[467] (emphasis mine)

A controversial answer to the questions of Christology and salvation was given in the *Baar Statement*: “We find ourselves recognizing a need to move beyond a theology which confines salvation to the explicit personal commitment to Jesus Christ.”[468] According to Diana Eck, who acted as moderator of the consultation, “all” participants agreed on this point and yet their interpretations of this sentence varied. In addition, she maintains that the *Baar Statement* “contains a somewhat modified inclusivist view” of Jesus Christ in relation to people of other faiths.[469]

The *Baar Statement* says that the Christ event is the “focal point” of God's “saving presence” in creation and human history; it “discloses for us the universal dimension of the

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[467] Ibid., 49.

[468] Ibid.

[469] Diana Eck, "On Seeking and Finding in the World's Religions," *Christian Century*, (May 2 1990): 455.

saving mystery of God;" it "is for us the clearest expression of the salvific will of God in all human history (1 Tim 2:4)."[470] Some evangelicals are suspicious and critical of the use of the phrase "for us" and of the fact that the *Baar Statement* ignores Acts 4:12 while quoting Acts 14:17. "Nowhere do they i.e., the participants in the Baar consultation suggest," Gerald Anderson points out, "that it is essential for everyone even to hear about the salvific will of God in Christ."[471]

Accordingly, for evangelicals, the *Baar Statement* is alleged to give up the evangelistic commitment. And yet, according to the inside story given by a participant, Paul Knitter, when the participants discussed the topic of "Christ and the Faiths," they "felt the necessary tension between affirming the value of other religions and affirming the value of Jesus Christ." Unlike what evangelicals say they hear from the *Baar Statement*, he argues, what the participants wanted to say (or "unambiguously *affirm*") about the Christ event was "the universal relevance of Jesus Christ, and the necessity of universally proclaiming him."[472]

The thin end of the wedge put between these two points of view about the *Baar Statement* is the theological meaning of San Antonio's "affirmation of what God has done and is doing among people of other faiths." On the one hand, Raymond Fung welcomed this affirmation and

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[470] WCC, "Religious Plurality: Theological Perspectives and Affirmations," 49. 50.

[471] Gerald Anderson, "The Theology of Religions and Missiology," in *The Good News of the Kingdom-Mission Theology for the Third Millennium*, eds. Charles Van Engen, Dean S. Gilliland, and Paul Pierson (Maryknoll, New York: Orbis, 1993), 204.

[472] Paul Knitter, "A New Pentecost?: A Pneumatological Theology of Religions," *Current Dialogue*, no. 19 (1991): 34 (my emphasis), 40.

yet took this to be "irrelevant" to the evangelistic commission. According to Emilio Castro, there have been "three levels of the ecumenical experience in the matter of the role and place of other faiths:" coexistence or pro-existence, dialogue, and debate on the theological value of religious experience of people of other faiths. As Castro sees it, none of them "questions the central tenet of the Christian faith: that God was in Christ reconciling the world to God's own self."[473] Perhaps this is what Anderson wants to but cannot hear from the *Baar Statement*.

On the other hand, as Diana Eck argues, a "new era of theological thinking had surely begun" at Baar, for the question of "seeking" and "finding" of God by people of other faiths was not the issue. The participants were profoundly agreed, says Eck, that people come to find God "in the sincere practice of their own faith," "not in spite of it."[474] In other words, they recognized God's "saving" presence and activity or "the mystery of salvation" in other faith traditions.[475] Paul Knitter evaluated in this sense that the *Baar Statement* attempted "a cautious but clear advance over previous WCC documents on a theology of religions."[476]

Here again we face the tension between evangelism and dialogue. There is a discrepancy between what one person (say, Knitter) thinks he/she said and what another person (say,

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[473] Castro, "Evangelism," in *Dictionary of the Ecumenical Movement*, eds. Nicholas Lossky and others (Geneva: WCC,1991), 399.

[474] Eck, "On Seeking and Finding in the World's Religions," 456, 455.

[475] WCC, "Religious Plurality: Theological Perspectives and Affirmations," 48.

[476] Knitter, "A New Pentecost?," 39.

Anderson) says he/she heard. In my view, Knitter's argument for unambiguously affirming "the necessity of universally proclaiming Jesus Christ" is not easily substantiated in the *Baar Statement* itself, even though the drafters meant to say it. Anderson heard it right. And yet, I think the absence of explicit wording on the evangelistic commitment and the recognition of the saving presence and activity of God in other faith traditions do not necessarily mean that the *Baar Statement* propounds universalism. It is just another ambiguous statement of the WCC that has a slant of universalism.[477] Rather it would be more accurate to say that Baar experimented with a Pneumatological starting point, "that God the Holy Spirit has been at work in the life and traditions of people of living faiths." to move "toward a dialogical theology."[478]

The possibility of mutual witness and mutual transformation in dialogue is clearly suggested in the *Baar Statement*:

> Christians must enter into dialogue in a spirit of openness, prepared to receive from others, while on their part, they give witness of their own faith. Authentic dialogue opens both partners to a deeper conversion to the God who speaks to each through the other. Through the witness of others, we Christians can truly discover facets of the divine mystery which we have not yet seen or respond to. The practice of dialogue will thus result in the deepening of our own life of faith.

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[477] In 1980 after the Melbourne World Missionary Conference, David J. Bosch said with reference to the "alleged" universalism of the WCC that "the WCC position on this subject is ambiguous." Even though "there are indeed WCC documents that suggest universalism," as he saw it, "no statement of the WCC (or the IMC) can be found in which universalism is officially propounded. In fact, if it could be said that such a tendency had been developing from New Delhi (1961) to Bangkok (1973), it would probably be correct to say that the tendency since Nairobi (1975) has been in the opposite direction." Bosch, "Behind Melbourne and Pattaya: A Typology of Two Movements," *IAMS News Letter* nos. 16-17 (1980): 32, 33.

[478] WCC, "Religious Plurality: Theological Perspectives and Affirmations," 50, 51.

> We believe that walking together with people of other living faiths will bring us to a fuller understanding and experience of truth.[479]

As the subtitle of the dialogue study project, "theological discoveries through interfaith dialogue," has it, the point of the *Baar Statement* is that the self-understanding of the Christian faith could be enriched through dialogical encounter with people of other faiths.

In his examination on the *Barr Statement*, Veli-Matti Kärkkäinen found the WCC's theological openness: "the freedom of the Spirit to give inspiration and guidance to all people in their universal longing and seeking for truth, peace and justice."[480] He rightly accesses the WCC's current stance toward other religions in terms of "openness and ambiguity."[481] Finally he left an unresolved question of "is it possible, as the Roman Catholic Church claims, to preserve missional fervor while being open to the possibility of salvation apart from hearing the gospel?"[482] In this regard, I think the real issue of the theology of evangelism in relation to other religions is not to determine whether other faiths have salvific efficacy in an either/or fashion. No one can play God in this matter. What is needed for the transformation of evangelism in relation to interreligious dialogue is rather to "discern the wisdom and purpose of God" in other

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[479] Ibid., 51.

[480] Ibid., 158-159.

[481] Veli-Matti Kärkkäinen, *An Introduction to the Theology of Religions: Biblical, Historical, and Contemporary Perspectives* (Downers Grove, Ill: IVP Academic, 2003), 159.

[482] Ibid., 161.

religious traditions and open oneself to being “continually challenged by the Spirit” who is working in the “seeking” and “finding" of people of other faiths. [483]

Critical Assessment

As I have demonstrated in this analysis, the major theological task of the WCC was not only to balance evangelism and dialogue but also to carry out a focused theological reflection on an inclusive and holistic theology of evangelism and dialogue on the basis of the Christocentric Trinitarian faith, as Kärkkäinen summarized: “a Trinitarian approach to the *missio Dei* concept promotes a more inclusive understanding of God’s presence and work in the whole world and among all people.”[484] Through its statements on the issues of evangelism and dialogue, the WCC contends that it was theologically necessary to hold together openness to the religiously plural world (dialogue) and commitment to the gospel (evangelism) based on the ecumenical understanding of the "the church as a community of reconciliation of people of all faiths."[485] Frances Adeney contends:

> A theology of evangelism that focuses on community practices can be seen in the World Council Churches' focus on interreligious dialogue. In this view, God's work in the world goes beyond the church to bringing all things together under the

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[483] Ibid., 49.

[484] Veli-Matti Kärkkäinen, *An Introduction to the Theology of Religions: Biblical, Historical, and Contemporary Perspectives* (Downers Grove, Ill: IVP Academic, 2003), 159.

[485] Frances S. Adeney, *Graceful Evangelism: Christian Witness in a Complex World* (Grand Rapids, Mich: Baker Academic, 2010), 85.

> reign of Christ (Eph. 1). Practicing loving our neighbors of other faiths, engaging in a dialogue of life with them, and building peace among religions all become evangelistic practices in this theology.[486]

The WCC's intention to live with the tension was most clearly expressed in the San Antonio report: "We cannot point to any other way of salvation than Jesus Christ; at the same time we cannot set limits to the saving power of God." The question of the salvific efficacy of other faiths, i.e., a bone of theological contention in evangelism-dialogue relations, however, was not to go away with this "humble yet bold" determination to live with the tension. Accordingly, the WCC attempted to reflect theologically on the meaning of God's presence and action in the lives of people of other faiths, both from the missionary and dialogical perspective. On the one hand, there was "a new round of theological thinking" (Diana Eck) of openness which moves "beyond a theology which confines salvation to the explicit personal commitment to Jesus Christ." On the other hand, there was the conviction that recognizing God's saving work in either the "seeking" or the "finding" (or both) of people of other faiths need not contradict the very essence of the Christian faith, i.e., commitment to bearing witness to Jesus Christ.

These two perspectives made the WCC's theology of evangelism and dialogue appear seemingly ambivalent as Kenneth Cracknell critically noted[487] but open to the possibility of mutual transformation as David Bosch appealed for a theology of creative tension.[488] Thus, it

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[486] Ibid.

[487] Kenneth Cracknell, "Ambivalent Theology and Ambivalent Policy: The World Council of Churches and Interfaith Dialogue 1938-1999," *Studies in Interreligious Dialogue* 9 (1999): 87-111.

[488] David Bosh, *Transforming Mission*, 474-489.

would be inappropriate to locate the WCC's theology of religions "in a perspective of total replacement," as Paul Knitter insists.[489] As we have examined in this chapter, the WCC has a mutually inclusive theology of evangelism and dialogue in creative tension.

Conclusion

In the official documents of both the WCC and the RCC, the evangelistic mission on the one hand, and interreligious dialogue on the other, are regarded as interrelated but not interchangeable: each has its own appropriate realm and relevance within the holistic mission of the Church. A tension concerning evangelism and interreligious dialogue stems from a theological conviction and affirmation: on the one hand, Jesus Christ is the normative way of salvation; on the other hand, the saving power of God cannot be limited. There is also a particular theological tension: on the one hand, God at work in and through the Christ event; on the other, God present and at work in people of other faiths. This tension has ever been appreciated, even addressed; but little formal attempt at a theological resolution has been made.

For both the WCC and the RCC, the evangelistic mission is construed in the modality of 'dialogue,' but with the implication that interreligious dialogue is effectively subsumed within this mission. The interrelationship between evangelism and dialogue comprises a perennial theological issue, and yet the "theological understanding of the relation between dialogue and

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[489] Paul Knitter, *Introducing Theologies of Religions* (Maryknoll, New York: Orbis, 2002), 43.

mission has not always been clear."[490] Nevertheless, dialogue is understood to include both the witness to, and exploration of, the respective religious convictions of dialogical interlocutors. Thus, the practice of dialogue can certainly involve discerning and confirming religious value in the other. But at the same time, the identification of incommensurable values and genuine contradictions is seen to distinguish Christianity from any other religion with which it engages: from the Catholic perspective, the idea 'that all religions are essentially the same; that every religion is equally a way to salvation' is regarded as erroneous.[491] Indeed, this would find an echo within the WCC constituency. Furthermore, I would add that it makes sense phenomenologically: religions are different. Despite some common values, there are many that are unique and resist commensurability; hence, the need for mutually transformational and correlational dialogue to probe the reasons for that—and, where appropriate, to provide challenge and critique that enables the necessary critical self-reflective engagement of intra-religious dialogue: and so the possibility of self-transformation results in interreligious dialogue.

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[490] M. Zago, 'Dialogue in the Mission of the Church,' *Bulletin* No. 57 (XIX/3), 1984, 268.

[491] Ibid., 264.

CHAPTER FOUR

QUALITATIVE ANALYSIS: FINDINGS AND INTERPRETATIONS

Introduction

This chapter provides a report of findings from the qualitative research I conducted in an attempt to answer what are the lived experiences of Americans who are engaged with Christian-Buddhist dialogue. In order to gain the empirical data for this section of the dissertation, I used qualitative research methods: interviews[492] and participant observation. Using the principles of "chain" sampling,[493] I sent letters of research recruitment to ten spiritual-retreat centers[494] oriented to interfaith and Buddhist-Christian practices, asking for names of Buddhist or Christian clergy and laity who are engaged with Buddhist-Christian practices. After being contacted and receiving letters of support by ten volunteers, I interviewed six people from May 2009 to

[492] With regard to IRB approval for interview, I attached IRB research application form, informed consent form, and interview questions. See Appendix A, B, C.

[493] Michael Quinn Patton, *Qualitative Research and Evaluation Methods* (Thousand Oaks, California: Sage Publication Inc., 2002), 237.

[494] Names and addresses of contacted centers are: Cambridge Zen Center: 199 Auburn Street Cambridge, MA 02139; Open Meadow Zen Center: 212 Marrett Rd, Lexington, MA 02421; Providence Zen Center: 99 Pound Road Cumberland, RI 0286; Chogye International Zen Center: 400 E14thSt. #2D/2E New York, N.Y. 10009; Morning Stat Zendo: 50 Glenwood Avenue, Apt. 309, Jersey City, NJ 07306; Clear Mountain Zen Center: 22 Lackawanna Plaza, Montclair, NJ 07042; Empty Bowl Zendo: 36 South St., Morristown, NJ; The Interweave Center: 31 Woodland Ave. Summit, NJ 07901; High Mountain Crystal Lake Zen Center: 393 Crescent Ave. Wyckoff, NJ 07481.

November 2009. Also, I received four written responses to my interview questions. A total of ten people were contacted and selected who each fit into one of three categories: Buddhist (lay) practitioners[495] who were Christian, Christians[496] who are practicing Buddhism, and "spiritual seekers" who are practicing both Christian and Buddhist spiritual practices. The participants were: five females and five males; three Buddhists, five Christians and two self-identified Buddhist (Zen)-Christian; six lay persons, three ordained ministers and one nun; five Roman Catholics, one Episcopalian, one member of United Church of Christ, one ex-Lutheran, one ex-Catholic, one ex-Southern Baptist; seven Euro-Americans, one African-American, one Latino-American, and one Korean-American.

The type of interview I conducted was an "unstructured interview."[497] I recorded the interviews with a digital recorder and they were transcribed by paid professionals. The

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[495] By taking spiritual practices from Buddhism, some Christians have converted to Buddhism. Yet, they are very uncomfortable with the word "conversion,"; rather, they prefer to use "taking up practices" from Buddhism. It is widely recognised that American Buddhism is almost exclusively a lay movement and that its leadership is the "scholar-practitioner." See Prebish, Charles and Martin Baumann. *Westward Dharma: Buddhism Beyond Asia (*Los Angeles: University of California Press, 2002), 79. Rick Fields, one of the so-called fathers of American Buddhism, noted early that "lay practice is the real heart of American Buddhism" (1992, 371). Rick Fields, *How the Swans Came to the Lake: A Narrative History of Buddhism in America* (3rd. Boston: Shambhala Publications, Inc., 1992), 371.

[496] These Christians are integrating Buddhist practices in their spiritual lives in order to get some benefits from Buddhist practices.

[497] This type of interview is "guided by the researcher, who intentionally introduces a limited number of questions and requests the interviewees to explore these questions in depth. The researcher encourages the interviewees to reflect, in detail, on events they have experienced." Herbert J. Rubin and Irene S. Rubin, *Qualitative Interviewing: The Art of Hearing Data* (Thousand Oaks: Sage, 1995), 2. It needs to be noted that the results obtained from this type of interview are indicative and not statistical.

interviews were conducted using the following guiding questions to be addressed by each participant: How would you like to describe your lived experiences of Christian-Buddhist encounters[498] in your spiritual journey? What are your motivations and aims of conversion or dual (multiple) religious participation? What (if any) scriptural, theological, ecclesial, and other ideas and values are imbedded in and have informed your engagement with Buddhist or Christian practices? How and where is your engagement practiced? How is that engagement guided, supported or rejected within your church/denomination? How has that encounter impacted your understanding of Christian or Buddhist faith and the practice of evangelism? What are your reflections on and expectations of Christian evangelism?

As a form of participant observation, I took part in a Buddhist-Christian Retreat co-directed by a Buddhist monk and a Catholic monk at Providence Zen Center in Rhode Island in June 2009.

The Lived Experience of Christian-Buddhist Encounters

What has been happening to Christians encountering Buddhist practice? Drawing from interviews and participant observation, I present the key findings in terms of motivations, aims, and religious practices and experiences.

[498] By 'encounter,' I mean to engage actively in other religious practices which leaves open the possibility of personal change and transformation.

Motivations

What kinds of things have led some contemporary Christians to start practicing Buddhist spiritual practices? Why did those persons not merely continue spiritual practices following their own Christian traditions rather than coming to Buddhist spiritual practices? Was there something lacking in Christianity that led them to seek something in Buddhism, or did they feel some dissatisfaction with Christianity that led them to Buddhist practices?

Almost all participants have been motivated by a sense that there was "something missing" in the spiritual life of their own churches or a lack of deepening guidance. When asked these questions, one male Episcopal priest who was raised in the Churches of Christ responded:

> There was definitely something lacking in the Christianity I grew up with. The fundamentalism I grew up with was highly rationalistic, very anti-emotional and very anti-experiential. They came out of old light Presbyterianism, not new light Presbyterianism. Which led me to seek a more new light kind of experience, which I found in evangelical Christianity and then in Charismatic Christianity. And so, that's what was lacking in the Christianity I knew and that's what led me to be interested in the sacred experience of other traditions. Because all this stuff had been lost in my own Christian tradition, I found it in Buddhism. And it's only after I found it in Buddhism that I went back and found it in Christianity.

Another male pastor of the United Church of Christ who was born into the Christian Reformed Church and has been practicing Zen meditation for ten years responded that he "was looking for a sustainable spiritual practice" because his "particular version of Christianity did not teach meditation practice." One respondent blamed this dissatisfaction on the lack of a practice of meditation/contemplation within the Christian tradition: "I believe Christians are practicing Zen because it is primarily about practice or *praxis*. Zen urges Christians to sit and pray, not

simply to think about praying." In the Christian-Buddhist retreat I attended as a participant observer, Father Kevin Hunt, who is a Christian director for the retreat and a monk of St. Joseph's Abbey in Spencer, Massachusetts, said,

> I didn't get interested in Buddhism and Zen as something I wanted to study. I basically got into it because the traditional Christian explanations of what my practice was didn't satisfy me. Like a drum, to get the right tone, you have to tighten the skin on the drumhead. So, too, in order to firm up my practice, I learned some of their ways of doing things.

Another Buddhist director for the retreat, Zen Master Dae Kwang who was raised Christian and is now the guiding teacher of Zen centers in Wisconsin and Mexico said,

> The reason I went to Buddhism is the Christian tradition I was raised in didn't have any contemplative practice. I became interested in Zen Buddhism because it contained a very strong tradition of practice. I saw it not so much as an alternative to Christianity but as offering something I had never encountered before.[499]

Many expressed that either Christianity or *the presentation* of Christianity had not led them to the same contemplative depths as had Buddhist practice. The following respondent sounded the reoccurring motivation of turning to Buddhist practice as a remedy to deficiencies within their experiences of Christianity:

> For me Christian prayer doesn't go far enough. It was not the freedom I was looking for. When I discovered just the breath as the instruction—it felt like it removed all mediation or devices through which I would obtain something other than my own life. Jesus said, "I came that you may have life and have it to the full." I experience this fullness in the breathing practice of Zen. Maybe others experience this in Christian meditation, but I didn't—at least not to the same degree.

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[499] Fr. Hunt and Zen Master Dae Kwang gave me permission to use their accounts that I adapted from their talks during the retreat at Providence Zen Center in June 2009, along with their names.

These allusions to the lost art of teaching contemplative practices within faith life suggest that, in the absence of accessible Christian contemplative tools, some Christians have sought Buddhist paths such as Zen, which offers a clear methodology. Frustrated by the relative absence of contemplative resources they found within their principal tradition, respondents ironically sought outside Christianity what is implicit to Christianity—a path to the lived experience of God in each moment.

Other respondents similarly critiqued a theological and moral tradition that has relied heavily on conceptual and theoretical teaching. While the respondents did not reject the Christian intellectual tradition outright, one female interviewee, raised an Irish Catholic in New England, who has practiced Zen for about eight years, expressed her sense of a hunger and moral exactitude in this way:

> For a long time, I was examining my Christian practice and feeling that there's so much in Christian teaching and in Christian expectation that, you have to be a good person…There never really seemed to me to be a way in the Christian practice that I was exposed to, to address the points… I think there's some writing in Christian Scripture by Saint Paul where he says, "The thing that I would do, I do not do. The thing that I would not do, I do." And that's what I'm talking about. And so I wanted a way to address that…Why doesn't Christianity give me some way to zero in on that and understand it?... Buddhism had these really specific techniques for introspection and taught teaching about impermanence, where things will arrive and they'll be there for a while and then they'll go away… And I never really got something that specific from Christian practice. And so that was when I realized that I need to get, I need to know more about this Buddhist practice and how do I apply these techniques so that I can use them to deal with this stuff.

As found in this research, the participants did not report turning to Buddhism because they ceased to believe in the central tenets of Christianity; rather, they reported that they wanted to *experience* what the Christian message has promised them. A male interviewee, raised a Lutheran, who "dropped all religion" when he got to high school and became a "spiritual seeker" after college, explained his motivation for taking on a Zen practice:

> I was not really searching for another religion. I was really searching for a way, a means of liberation. And I saw that meditation was the solution to that…I wasn't interested in information or the system of belief. I didn't want so much to know what Jesus experienced or any. I wanted to have that, I wanted that experience myself. And so I looked for practices that would allow me to experience that myself. It wasn't just enough for me to know about it. I wanted it directly.

Lack of spiritual guidance in Christianity was also raised as a reason to seek a teacher outside of the church by another female interviewee who is actively involved both in a Catholic Charismatic community and Zen communities:

> What I kind of felt lacking in Christianity was someone to really teach me, to guide me. In a sense that's not true because my teacher was Catholic but I found him not because he was Catholic but because he was a Zen teacher…it's really hard to find someone to talk about my prayer life with and help me develop it in my church.

To sum up, their shared criticism is that the promise of the Christian theological and spiritual tradition—the reality of a lived experience of God in Christ—has not often been fulfilled in evangelism and spiritual guidance. They have turned to Buddhism in the hope of finding a teaching and practice that would satisfy their hunger for spiritual experience. They are looking for something more than moral teaching, intellectual Bible study and conventional

spiritual practices. They are yearning for the depth of the spiritual tradition and do not find it in their own faith communities.

In the Buddhist tradition, participants claimed that they have found forms of practice that have been both challenging and enriching. Indeed, a clear contemplative method has not seemed accessible to many Christians. They, both Catholic and Protestant, remain almost completely unaware of the spiritual potential in general, and meditative/contemplative prayer in particular, contained in their own tradition. The practical method/direction of spiritual discipline and the experience of the sacred/transcendent are lacking in the various denominations in which they were raised. Like many Christians attracted to the Pentecostal or Charismatic renewal movement, they are eager to taste "God" not by dogmatic explanations but through their own direct experience.

Buddhist Practices

As scholars of American Buddhism have noted about their practice experiences, the practice of most participants in my research is also usually centered on meditation. While there are many approaches to meditation in the different schools of Buddhism, *zazen*, seated meditation, is the central core of practice for the Buddhist practitioners in my project. All the participants described the centrality of seated meditation in their private and communal practice. *Zazen* is practiced in silence usually for periods of between twenty and forty-five minutes. In monasteries and formal Zen retreats (*sesshin*), periods of *zazen* are punctuated by walking

meditation to ease the tension and pain (along with the beginner's mental anguish) associated with long periods of sitting meditation. In walking meditation, the student practices bringing the same focused attention and inner stillness of *zazen* to the kinesthetic praxis of walking as a way of integrating the Zen life on and off the cushion.

All participants consciously practice Buddhist meditation on a regular basis. As one who is a mother of three children and a primary school teacher explains, "I do the Zen every day. I do it at home. It's at a special part of the day. I get up, I take a shower, make a cup of tea, and then I sit. It's not at a specific time, but it's in my routine." She also regularly attends a kind of group meditation session in a meeting house called zendo:

> I'm involved in a few different zendos, pretty much two. There's one in Montclair that one I go to on Sundays, from like 9 to 11 am. But I guess primary for the Zen is the zendo in Jersey City. Their main sitting is Saturday 9 am to 1 pm. They also have sitting in the early morning, like between 5:30 and 7 am. So that varies, when I'm in school, once or twice during the week. Like in the summer, I tend to go more often, because well, I don't have to go to school!

Another one who is a minister of the United Church of Christ said, "I practice a *zazen* meditation twice daily morning and evening at home." Both home and zendo are two primary places most participants are practicing. Only one was practicing in a Zen center as a resident-practitioner. She emphasized the importance of community in her practice:

> I could never have come along in my practice this far without a community to do it with. It's very important. It's very hard to practice alone. It's very lonely. There are times when I'll sit, I'll be practicing chanting with other people and I'll realize that I'm so focused on what I'm doing to, I'm just hearing my own voice, and I'll realize, 'Oh, I need to be listening to other people and hear them.' And I'll realize that when I can hear them around me and that I'm really grateful that

> they're too. So it's good to just appreciate other people's practice, they're supporting you.

According to her, the center provides people with daily Zen meditation practice consisting of bowing, chanting and sitting in the morning (5:45-7:00 am) and in the evening (7:30-8:05 pm). Afternoon sitting (12:30-1:00pm) is offered on Tuesdays and Thursdays and long sitting with an interview is offered on Tuesday night (7:30-9:30 pm) and Sunday morning (9:00-11:30).

They also occasionally participate in one-day, three-day, six-day or one-month retreats at the zendo, Christian retreat centers and Buddhist temples. One of the most vigorous practitioners among the interviewees, a member of a Christian meditation group at the Shalem Institute in Washington D.C., had made several seven- to thirty-day retreats at Tibetan and Zen Buddhist centers since 1975. In 1984 and 1985, he made a three-month retreat at the Insight Meditation Center in Barre, MA. Most of them usually attended three to six-day retreats for the purpose of intensive practice.

Another integral part of Buddhist practice my participants emphasized is the one-on-one interview with a Zen Master or teachers who have been approved by the specific Schools of Zen. This is called a *kong-an* interview in Korean Zen traditions and *dokusan* in Japanese Zen traditions. This teacher's private encounter with the student complements the intensive practice of *zazen* and the communal instruction in *teisho*.

Within Buddhist practices, *dokusan*, the essence of the master-student relationship, is the place where intimate personal instruction is offered. Here, students pose questions about their practice and receive guidance. In Zen training, students are assigned a *kong-an* to deepen their

Buddhist practice and to aid in awakening to their true nature. Students work with the same *kong-an* until they provide a satisfactory answer to the teacher.

Most importantly, *dokusan* is the forum where students are tested in their demonstration of their assigned *kong-an*. Students must demonstrate that their comprehension of the *kong-an* transcends intellectual understanding or mere verbalizing. The most experienced teacher can immediately determine the depth of his/her students' understanding with a single incisive question or by observing the way his/her student walks into the *dokusan* room. Philip Kapleau describes the essence of *dokusan* as the student's ability to respond spontaneously to questioning:

> The proof of the student's awakening lies in his ability to respond instantly in a "live" way to questions that demand a concrete demonstration of the spirit of the *kōan*. What convinces the *rōshi* [teacher] are not merely the students' words or gestures or silence (which can be equally effective), but the conviction and certainty informing them, that is, the comprehending look in the eye, the decisiveness of the tone of voice, and the spontaneity, freedom, and thoroughness of the gestures and movements themselves.[500]

Father Hugo Enomiya-Lassalle, a German Jesuit who went to Japan for a missionary work and became a qualified Zen master, introduced this concept of *dokusan* to Christian readers.[501] I found a close similarity between this specific Buddhist practice and the practice of

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[500] Philip. Kapleau, *The Three Pillars of Zen: Teaching, Practice, and Enlightenment*. (New York: Harper & Row, 1966), 98.

[501] Hugo M. Enomiya-Lassalle, *The Practice of Zen Meditation* (Aquarian Press/HarperCollins, 1990). "dokusan, the personal interview with the master. In dokusan the master assesses the pupil's understanding and then gives him or her further pointers."(14)

spiritual guidance in Christian traditions from participants' stories. One interviewee describes her practice of *dokusan* and her relationship with her teacher in this way:

> [Teacher is] someone who's open to me listens attentively, tries to say something that will help me go deeper in my practice… I share myself pretty intimately on what's happening in my life concerning my practice and experience… There's a sense of being you know, when we're in *dokusan* and we're really really present with each other for those 5 to 10 minutes, so there's an intimacy there… There may occasionally be things I decide not to speak about. But when it comes to my actual practice, no, I wouldn't hide anything about that.

Another interviewee who is a Dharma teacher-in-training explains his understanding of *dokusan* comparing to Christian practice:

> There's the face-to-face teaching, which is sort of unique. Well, I guess it's sort of like confession or something in Catholicism. I don't know that much about it. But you know, you go and see, a student will come and we meet face-to-face and we will talk, I will talk directly about their practice, which experiences they're having, or anything else that may come up…As the students' practice deepens, it becomes more than that… I don't even know if I could name what it is. But there's a certain intimacy that takes place that's very profound. And it's, you know, I don't know that much about spiritual direction in that sort of a Christian concept as I know it. My experience of it is, anyway, that's a direction that goes from the head to the head. It's more of a…this is a different kind of, sometimes even beyond words. So certainly this is important, but it's not limited to that. There's a deeper thing and so the guidance is a little bit different or more subtle.

Besides these practices, participants reported that they benefit by taking on some Buddhist spiritual practices such as *kong-an* practice, walking meditation, chanting, mantra practice, bowing and reading in different ways.

Aims

One of the most persistent themes to emerge from the research responses was the pragmatic efficacy of Buddhist practice.[502] In addition to providing a clear, detailed, and tested method, Buddhist spirituality also offers a pragmatic process with clearly defined experiential outcomes that correspond to the personal struggles, anxieties, and yearnings of our times. The participants were asked about their aims of turning to Buddhism, and their responses were frequently framed within the practical and quite quotidian role that Buddhist practice plays in their daily spiritual lives.

When asked what goals they were aiming for in taking up Buddhist meditation, the vast majority offered variations on the following themes:

> To achieve quietness in my soul.
> To learn to be quiet and feel peaceful in my life.
> To get focused. I enjoy the calm, and letting go of the unnecessary tapes in my head and unnecessary thoughts.
> To calm my mind and clear out mental clutter [in order] to have an anchor for my day.

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[502] I am not using the term 'pragmatic' based on a specific philosophical tradition of Pragmatism per se. Rather, I intend to emphasize some Americans' adaptation of Buddhist practice into their spiritual life without taking seriously the belief system imbedded in it. In his essay on Zen and Christianity, Michael Barnes defines "Buddhist pragmatism" as "the capacity of the tradition to adapt to particular needs and circumstances." See Michael Barnes, "Zen and Christianity," in *The New Westminster Dictionary of Christian Spirituality*, 656. For scholastic discussions on the relationship between Buddhism and Pragmatism, see Jose Ingacio Cabezon, "Truth in Buddhist Theology," in *Buddhist Theology: Critical Reflections by Contemporary Buddhist Scholars*, eds., Roger Jackson and John J. Makransky (London: Routledge, 1999), 136-154. Richard P. Hayes, "Did Buddhism Anticipate Pragmatism?" *ARC: The Journal of the Faculty of Religious Studies*, McGill University 23, (1995): 75–88. Hayes presents three examples of similarities between some forms of Buddhism and some forms of Pragmatism as follows: 1) a tendency in both systems to be suspicious of authoritarianism, 2) a tendency to eschew doctrines that are not demonstrably relevant to the concerns of people who have not yet taken up permanent residence in a graveyard, and 3) a belief that virtue (or good character) is not innate but can be acquired—a belief that results in an emphasis on the development of good character through the influence of education.

> To calm my mind and slow down as well as to try to get closer to God.
> To address issues with stress and anxiety and out of curiosity. Continuing to keep growing spiritually, becoming more peaceful, noticing subtle but definite changes in myself and life, [becoming] more open to things and people because it is benefiting me.
> To relieve stress and anxiety.
> To experience stillness and peace.

These comments indicate that the rationale for integrating Buddhist practice into the Christian life is profoundly pragmatic in a popular sense. It is not surprising that a Buddhist tradition like Zen that does not compartmentalize life into categories of sacred versus secular would become a tool for Christians to better integrate their spirituality into daily living. For these Christians, Buddhist practice offers a contemplative means of experiencing God while providing a healing and pragmatic solution to daily stresses, anxieties, and mental clutter. They imply that Buddhist practices and beliefs can be separated: thus Christians and non-Buddhists can use Buddhist practices for pragmatic purposes without necessarily becoming Buddhists in terms of religious identity.

What could be called "spiritual pragmatism" also expresses itself prominently in the participants' hunger to "live in the present moment." The present moment as the place to discover the presence of God is a theme that was sounded consistently throughout the research process. Participants who are haunted by past hurts or future concerns find in Buddhist practice a way to live peacefully in the now of God's presence. When asked why they embraced Buddhist practices, the following responses illustrated the connection between Buddhism, God, and the present moment:

> Because the practice of the present moment has been the most life-giving of all the ways that I have known to find God.
> To live in the now fully aware of being. The past and future thoughts can hinder us if we do not breathe into now.
> [Because of the] importance of now . . . [and the] importance of deep, open silence all of which impacts my experience of Christ.
> To embrace the God within; a spirit of God in the present moment, a feeling of being in touch with the power of God.

This capacity for mindfulness or present moment awareness recognized as the foundational practice of Buddhism in general Zen Buddhism in particular, has become for these Christian participants their primary practice of the presence of God. The very goal of Buddhist practice—living in the present moment without mental commentary, judgment, or theoretical obstruction—becomes the gateway to experiencing God.

For Christians who practice Buddhist meditation, the experience of God and the experience of the self are simultaneous. Alongside the theological and pragmatic reasons for integrating Buddhist practice into Christianity, participants responded that Buddhist practice helps them to understand their identity. Some report that they practice Buddhist meditation for the following purposes of self-understanding:

> To understand myself.
> To reinforce my personal reference points in the world.
> [To experience] my nature.
> Zen gets to the absolute center of our being and our commonality with all existence.

These participants have found in Buddhism the reoccurring spiritual wisdom taught by Christian guides for centuries: Self-knowledge and divine knowledge are intertwined. Knowledge of the self is inherently linked to knowledge of God, and knowledge of God is intrinsically related to

knowledge of self. Not surprisingly, the Buddhist tradition that urges its practitioners to transcend dualism becomes attractive to Christians, particularly because it provides a methodological framework for knowing God and the self simultaneously.

Impacts on Christian Faith: Convergence and Divergence

The continuity between Buddhist practice and Christian spirituality was one of the strongest recurring themes throughout the survey data. For the vast majority of participants, Buddhist practice is a natural extension of living the Christian life. When asked to describe the way in which Buddhist practice had informed their understanding of Christianity, one participant commented: "For many, [Buddhist practice] seems to connect them to their own original face; this opens them to Jesus' truth: the kingdom of God is within you, or as in the Gospel of Thomas, and without you."

Likewise, when asked why Christians are turning to Buddhism, the following participant speculated that Buddhism operates within Christianity as a practical discipline and a contemplative method to support living out the Christian life in the world:

> I wonder if Buddhist practice—which is the practice of becoming more human, entering the Western world now in history—will offer a pathway for the churches to deepen their family relationships with one another through right speech and right action.

The following two comments likewise expressed convergence of the Christian and Buddhist path through experience of silent stillness. Silence, for a vast number of participants, is the long sought-after means to a deeper awareness of God's presence:

> Christian contemplative prayer practiced mostly by monks and Buddhist practice to me seem the same, being quietly still before God and all creation. There is no difference [between *zazen* and Christian contemplation].

> The power of mindfulness and intention unites me with the one I am praying for, thinking about, or with. The communal prayer of the Christian liturgy evokes the intention of the people gathered. It is the same as the *sangha* gathered with the intention to practice on behalf of all things.

Within the Christian life, Buddhist practice quiets the mind and stills the body, awakening the practitioner to the pervading presence of God in all things. When asked about any insights that Buddhist practice allowed them to incorporate into their Christian spirituality, several participants directly commented on the capacity of Buddhist practice to open oneself to the reality of God's immanence in creation:

> [Buddhist practice has led me to appreciate] a spirit of embracing the God within; a spirit of God in the present moment, the feeling of being in touch with the Power of God.

> I think that my Buddhist experience has brought me to my present beliefs that all is one—and that God is in everything, place, person, breath. I don't separate [Buddhism and Christianity].

A significant theme for this cohort of participants is that Buddhist practice can be harmoniously integrated within the Christian life in a way that accentuates fundamental Christian convictions; namely, the immanence of God and the importance of a silent, contemplative path. The convictions of these participants suggest, in part, that for these Christians, Buddhist practice

within the Christian life is a way to stand in continuity with the tradition and paradoxically reclaim aspects of the Christian tradition "from the outside" through the practices of another religious tradition. If, on the one hand, Christian-Buddhist practice is an act of continuity with the Christian tradition, another prominent theme suggests that exploration of Buddhist practice also marks a dissatisfaction with the present expression of the Christian tradition.

Participants frequently referenced the discovery of the mystical and contemplative language of *apophasis* and *kenosis* in their practice of Buddhism. Several commented on the role of Buddhist practice in providing a framework to experience God beyond thoughts, words, and concepts:

> [Buddhist practice] allows me to be with "Being" in a pure way. "Emptiness, Being, Reality, and Fullness," all beyond words, point to the one presence, you may call "God."

> *Zazen* is the process of self-emptying—much of what has been or is taught as Christian prayer looks outside the self for answers which I believe lie within each of us. It emerges as we go deeper into silence. Zen moves toward what is experienced by Christian mystics.

Ironically, Buddhist practice has allowed this group of Christians to access the apophatic tradition articulated in the Christian West by Gregory of Nyssa and Pseudo-Denis, the anonymous Author of the Cloud of Unknowing, Meister Eckhart, and John of the Cross among many others.

While Buddhist practice has led to a deeper appreciation of God's immanence, the integration of Buddhist practice into the Christian life has also reaffirmed God's radical transcendence for several participants. The Christian who practices Buddhist meditation realizes

that a God present in all of creation can never be fully expressed within reality. Likewise the fullness of God can never be exhausted by the human quest to describe and quantify the divine. This theological and epistemological humility was echoed by several participants:

> God is beyond anything we can think!
>
> Words fall short and stay with thought forms. [*Zazen*] allows you to stay deeper and be present to "Reality."
>
> [We need in the Christian tradition] less words, less thoughts and more presence and more honesty and purity at the feet of "Reality."

The simultaneous presence and absence of God reported by these Christian practitioners of Buddhism is accentuated in the Buddhist discipline of silence. *Zazen* offers a method of contemplative silence in which the Christian experiences the "already-not yet" tension at the heart of the Christian tradition. On the one hand, silence confirms the presence of God: "Silence, taking time to be still, realizes or confirms the divine living inside of us. It has led to [my] feeling connected to God."

On the other hand, the silence of Buddhist meditation for Christians provides a kenotic method of experiencing the presence of God through the absence of God. Emptying the self of any vestige of God's "presence" becomes a paradoxical pathway to experiencing God. As one participant describes it:

> The self-emptying of Buddhist meditation has deepened my understanding of my relationship to Christ and has given me a genuine experience of my larger self, which I can ultimately bring to my ministry, my service, my experience of word and sacrament.

With its love of paradox and its insistence on the Buddha's middle way, Buddhist practice has provided these Christians with a contemplative method that allows them to experience in silence the central paradox on which Christianity is built—God's immanence and transcendence.

While many participants use Christian and Buddhist terminology interchangeably, a significant number expressed a more carefully nuanced view of the relationship between the two religious traditions. The following responses articulate convergence between Buddhism and Christianity:

> I see myself incorporating *zazen* as part of my Christian prayer and don't see them as separate.
> I do see them as different—with the Christian prayer focused on spoken prayers (aloud and quiet petitions) and active visualization (holding a sincere vision of what I pray for) while the *zazen* is intentionally an absence of focus on outcomes or intentions.
> There is no question to me that what Buddhists call "Reality" and "God" are the same. [Each] is expressed in a totally different way however. When we talk about *experience* of God, Buddhist method is more helpful.

According to these participants, the two are complementary—Buddhist practice adds to, enhances, and strengthens Christian faith or other faiths as well.

Companion themes of convergence and dissonance simultaneously arise as Christians attempt to integrate Buddhist practice into the Christian life. At the level of experience the two traditions have much in common. As one participant said, "What you do on your cushion is what you do on your cushion." In other words, there is no such thing as Buddhist silence or Christian silence; there is just *silence*—reality as it is without any need to explain or categorize. At this level, Christians feel very at home in the world of Buddhist practice, and for many practitioners,

the differences seem to melt away entirely. As this research has demonstrated, these two religious paths share much in common—contemplative silence, *apophasis, kenosis,* and attention to the present moment.

However, even while Christians enjoy the theological and pragmatic benefits of integrating these complementary paths, vast irreconcilable differences in worldviews remain. As the Dalai Lama humorously warned against combining Buddhism and Christianity, "Don't try to put a yak's head on a sheep's body."[503]

For some, the temptation of this religious chimera which does justice to neither tradition is very real. The most vocal critic of this interreligious amalgam is Roger Corless, a Christian participant in the Buddhist-Christian dialogue, who has critiqued Christian appropriations of Buddhist practice that do not recognize the contradictory conceptualizations of the two traditions. He maintains that the ontological differences between the two traditions must be maintained even as the meditative practices of these two traditions are fused.[504] Leo Lefebure, in conducting similar surveys among Christians who have appropriated Buddhist practices, describes the dialectical tension of harmony and disharmony at the intersection of Buddhism and Christianity:

> From a certain angle of vision the similarities in concerns seem so great that the differences are nugatory. From another perspective, the differences in the

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[503] Bstan-'dzin-rgya-mtsho, Dalai Lama XIV, Robert Kiely, *The Good Heart: A Buddhist Perspective on the Teachings of Jesus* (Boston: Wisdom Publications, 1996), 105.

[504] Leo D. Lefebure, "The Impact of Buddhist Meditation on Christian Prayer," *Chicago Studies* 44, no. 2 (2005): 183.

> understanding of reality are so profound that it seems difficult to even communicate across the divide.[505]

As in all true dialogue, the ability to listen and respect every voice is critical to the exchange. No single voice or perspective exhausts the multifaceted reality of truth. The warnings of Coreless and the Dalai Lama are as necessary to the conversation as the voice of the Christians who practice *zazen* seamlessly within the Christian life. From the Christian perspective, the purpose of interreligious dialogue is not only to get answers about similarities and differences across traditions but, more importantly, to participate in God's mission of reconciliation. As Benedictine monk and articulate contributor to Christian-Buddhist dialogue Laurence Freeman writes: "Dialogue is meant to illuminate both the parallels and the divergences of belief in order to dispel the dark forces of delusion, fear, anger, and pride that can lurk in the spaces between people and their religions."[506]

My main purpose in this research project is not in judging what level of Christian adaptation of Buddhist practice is theologically appropriate, nor do I seek to conduct an exercise in comparison and contrast. Rather, I wish to explore what this *dialogue of religious experience* might reveal about the aims, efficacy, and needs of contemporary Christian evangelism. As the Pontifical Council on Interreligious Dialogue prophetically reminds churches, dialogue and proclamation are two components of the same mission. In the end, this Christian engagement

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[505] Ibid, 181.

[506] Bstan-dzin-rgya-mtsho, Dalai Lama XIV, Robert Kiely, *The Good Heart*, 20.

with Buddhism aims at the development of an interreligious practical theology of evangelism, grounded in dialogue and born from the evangelistic nature of Christianity.

Reflections on the Christian Evangelism

In the spirit of the reflexive relationship between evangelism and dialogue, the survey participants were also asked about their reflections on Christian evangelism. The experience of some Christians who have embraced Buddhist practice may help the churches better understand a particular kind of spiritual hunger which contemporary evangelism must strive to feed. Their responses have been grouped into four categories according to theme.

The Character of the Evangelist

In reflecting on the topic of evangelism in the Christian life, one of the most common themes was the importance of the evangelist's character. Spiritual seekers yearn for the message that organically flows from the life, witness, and experience of the evangelist. When asked what makes for authentic evangelism, the following comments were representative of the responses that fell into this category:

> A spiritual message can only be delivered by someone who truly embodies its content.
> The integrated presence of the speaker.
> Most importantly, one cannot be a good evangelist if one is not a person of prayer.
> The evangelist living deeply what he/she shares.
> Hearing about how someone "walks the walk" as well as "talks the talk."

In a post-Christendom age that cynically questions the relationship between words and their meanings in Christianity, spiritual seekers most highly value the evangelist's authenticity and transparency. One respondent simply implored, "Be real." Not surprisingly, the Buddhist ideals of authenticity, embodiment, and the alignment of one's "inner" and "outer" lives are reflected in these seekers' evangelistic expectations. Additionally, these seekers also articulated the following needs:

> A story of the evangelist's experiences that reveals vulnerability and weakness. [The reality that] I am not different from you—I am the same as you. Talk to me as a person who is seeking holiness, not someone who needs a lesson in manners or good behavior.

Hopes for authentic, prayerful, embodied evangelists, however, are not overly idealized. Ethos comments in the surveys also suggested a keen appreciation of the human condition. While the struggles, shortcomings, and challenges shared by all contemporary people need to be reflected in the person of the evangelist, people continue to expect that evangelists will be the embodiment of what they announce as Good News. Evangelists are the demonstration that amid the brokenness and vulnerability of life, the experience of God is still possible.

Primacy of Experience

Another frequent refrain sounded by these Christian practitioners of Buddhism was the need for what one participant calls "genuine experience" in evangelism. Buddhist teachers incessantly drive practitioners to move beyond speculation, thought, and personal narrative to the

direct experience of life. In the basic practice of mindfulness, foundational to Buddhism, one seeks to become aware of the experience of the present moment. These Christians steeped in Buddhist practice similarly apply the same experiential framework to Christian evangelism, stressing the importance of personal experience in evangelism. When asked what makes for effective evangelism, the participants offered the following:

> To be true teachers who speak from experience with specific insights.
> Have the experience of the presence first. The rest will flow from the center.
> When the evangelist tells a story from experience and knowledge.
> Tell your message from your own experience and be yourself. Trust your intuition and the work of the Holy Spirit. Pray often.

For these particular respondents, the practice of evangelism is the act of sharing the fruit of their experience of God. It is not primarily the act of imparting information, offering dazzling rhetoric, or presenting doctrine. Although the participants' comments suggest that the evangelist witnesses with one's own experience, some participants indicate that personal narrative alone is insufficient.

Dialogue becomes the necessary bridge between the experience of the evangelist and that of the seekers. One of the evangelist's primary roles is to guide others to experience God's presence. The participants were asked what is most necessary in contemporary Christian evangelism, and the comments reflect the role an evangelist plays in guiding seekers to experience God, as evidenced in the following:

> Less words and more pointing to the presence and encourage them to the experience. Once people get even a faint taste of it, they will take off on their own.
> [The greatest need in evangelism is] to present the humanity, the commonality

> that is Christ and to present the experiential nature of Christ. I'm not looking for a sermon but a real tangible experiential experience of Christ.

While the ability to pass along the contemplative experience of God to others is critical in effective evangelism, the exact nature of the experience remains unclear. Is the hoped for experience mystical, contemplative, ecstatic, ordinary, and so forth? Only one participant specified what kind of experience ought to inform evangelism by saying the following:

> To draw individuals into the experience of belonging to a large, whole, international community of diverse people. The contours of these people are visible but they extend outwards to humanity itself and even to the more than-human world.

No matter what kind of experience these participants are hoping for, they make clear that they expect evangelistic dialogue to transcend an intellectual apprehension of the truth. They seek, in practicing Buddhism, nothing less than an experience of God, and they expect the evangelist to be a witness to the truth of God's presence, an embodiment of what is also possible for seekers to achieve.

Contextualization

A third theme emerging from the survey results reflects the need of contextualization. Christians who embraced Buddhism did so, in part, because of its efficacy in dealing with the internal and external struggles of life. Similarly, these Christians expect that Christian evangelism will address concrete needs, worries, and dilemmas that contemporary people

encounter daily. When asked what makes for relevant evangelism, the following responses were gathered:

> Touching people's lives. Understanding where they're at and helping them with their life issues.
> Personal stories that apply to everyday life. Explaining what the Bible said to Early Christians and how it applied to their time in history. And how in modern times it applies to us.
> Have a sense of the needs of the person in the outside of the church. Christian faith must [offer] something to *do* and not just [offer] words to hear. People need concrete suggestions.
> Be relevant to today's issues. People are struggling with moral issues every day and want and need help sorting things out.

The last comment may indicate that this participant has failed to see the connection between the Christian message and the contexts of his or her life. Evangelism will only move the people to the extent that it takes into account people's life context. Only with an appreciation for people's daily hopes, dreams, and struggles can churches offer "something to do" and share "concrete suggestions" for how seekers can likewise experience and embody the Good News that the evangelist proclaims.

Invitational and Confrontational

Christians who embrace the sometimes strenuous and physical discipline of Buddhist practice expect evangelism to reflect the challenging work involved in spiritual growth. When asked what makes for a powerful evangelism, themes of invitation and inspiration, challenge, conversion, and confrontation emerged in participants' answers:

> When I am called to consider my "old way of thinking"

> When I am called to change
> When I understand the connection between me/God/and the church
> When I am encouraged to listen to the voice within
> When I am confronted by the love/power of God.
> [When] my humanity is extended and awakened to service of others.
> I want to feel compelled to take a risk and feel vulnerable and put whatever I learn into practice

One comment in particular best expressed the imperative that evangelism be the dual ministry of invitation and confrontation:

> Push me, challenge my thinking. . . . I want to be accepted. I want you to push me, teach me and help me understand knowing that you will accept me and my doubts and reservations.

While the participants' evangelistic expectations are vast and demand much from the evangelist intellectually, spiritually, and personally, these Christian-Buddhist practitioners shed light on the desires of particular Christians committed to the disciplined work of the spiritual life. And though this group is unique, their ecclesiological hopes and concerns are not; thus, their conscious decision to explore a path outside of Christianity suggests valuable insights for the evangelistic mission of the church.

A Lived Theology of Evangelism of Christian-Buddhist Practitioners

Interviews with Christian-Buddhist practitioners demonstrate how a theology of evangelism informed and developed from Christian-Buddhist dialogue can address the crisis of meaning endemic to the postmodern context. A Zen master and Trappist monk for nearly fifty

years, describes the possibilities of a Christian theology of evangelism informed by Buddhist practice:

> Zen allows the evangelist to access his experience. I know that suggesting the usefulness of Zen is experimental. In a way, we are doing something new here. Zen offers a language of experience; and it helps us to trust our experience. Zen is about your experience of reality. I try to preach from my experience of God. The great problem with most Christian evangelists is that they are not trained to talk from their own experience. . . . The great problem with them is the obsession with the absolute and their fear of speaking about the relative.

For him, Zen practice brings to Christian evangelism a methodology of experience and a contemplative praxis that enables evangelists to be more fully the witnesses that our postmodern age demands. The shifting postmodern context demands that evangelists fully appreciate the experiential worldview and fundamental assumptions of a growing number of contemporary people.

Although scholars increasingly debate the existence of a coherent, homogeneous movement that can be singularly classified as post modernity, this widespread cultural shift in worldview emerging in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries pre-eminently values pluriformity and diversity. In the absence of a permanent, underlying narrative to account for reality, the postmodern mind relies on personal experience to create meaning and make sense of the world.[507] With the relocation of authority within the individual, post modernity renders

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[507] Peter Phan, "Liturgical Inculturation: Unity in Diversity in the Postmodern Age," in *Liturgy in a Postmodern World*, ed. Keith F. Pecklers, S.J. (London: Continuum, 2003), 55.

obsolete external sources of objectivity, elevating personal interpretation and private experience as the accepted epistemology.

While the hallmarks of post modernity represent significant challenges to Christian evangelism, this profound cultural shift also represents new opportunities to be faithful to that tradition. The contemporary evangelistic ministry is gravely hindered by the widespread abandonment of the search for truth and the cynical conviction that all truth claims involve the will toward human domination and oppression. Still, theologian Mark Schwehn suggests that the Christian tradition can be strengthened by engagement with postmodernity just as Christianity was fortified through contact with other cultural contexts throughout its history.[508]

Bringing Buddhist spirituality into dialogue with Christian evangelism is a practical way to contextualize evangelism in an experiential framework that speaks to postmodern seekers who instinctually value personal experience as the primary way to apprehend the truth. Given the postmodern suspicion of appeals to external authority, rooting evangelism in the core liberative experience of Christ provides a way for churches to employ an epistemology that is both faithful to the scriptural witness and engaging for contemporary seekers. A Christian-Buddhist practitioner describes the experience at the heart of evangelism in the following way:

> The core liberative experience of Christianity is the experience of God in Jesus. How we do this as evangelists is still questionable, and it is difficult to give parameters. We don't train [evangelists] to be aware of their own experience of God. The most important thing is to have an experience of

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[508] Mark R. Schwehn, "Toward a Postmodern Christian Faith," in *Dialog; A Journal of Theology*, 36, no. 2: 88.

> God yourself. How can you speak about liberation if you haven't recognized your own liberation?

A Jesuit priest and Zen teacher, who is at the forefront of Christian-Zen practice, describes the Christian temptation to over-invest in abstract theories and formulations in evangelism: "We often exchange real life for a theory. [Evangelism] is awakening in others what is possible and transferring the mind of the cosmic Christ."[509] He underlines the importance of ethos and experience in evangelism. The effectiveness of the evangelist demands that he/she embody what he/she says. The evangelist must have had the *core* liberative experience before transferring it to others. While this Christian-Buddhist practitioner describes the practice of evangelism as analogous to the transmission of the Buddha mind from Zen master to student, above mentioned practitioner describes the core liberative experience of Christianity by using the metaphor of *awakening*, common to both the Christian and Buddhist tradition. He says:

> We say we share by grace in the divinity of Christ who is the son of God, by nature. And that's fine, but the important thing is to have the experience of this presence of God as our true identity in Christ as children of God. So evangelism should be first of all an exemplification of that. The evangelist should be the icon of that...The effective evangelist is the one who mirrors and radiates what he is talking about. . . . *The evangelist's main job is to awaken desire.* Awaken them, to use a Zen expression and Paul's expression: Awaken, and rise from the dead, and Christ will be your light (Ephesians 5.14). Awaken them to their identity, to the possibility of their lives, awaken them to the presence of the Spirit. Awaken them to their connection with everything. Awaken them to their connection to God. You do that by what you say but above all by how you say it, not just how you phrase it, but how you embody it. That's what makes evangelism so exciting.

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[509] I have found a scholastic attempt to construct evangelism as an act of "awaking of the divine within." See John O'Donohue, "To Awaken the Divine Within: Towards A New Theory of Evangelization," *The Way: Review of Contemporary Christian Spirituality*, Vol. 34, number 4 (October 1994), 265-272.

He continues by suggesting that the awakening to which evangelism is directed is the core liberative experience of Jesus that is the foundation of the Christian spiritual life:

> The core liberating experience was articulated by Jesus as the kingdom of God that we are children of the Father. We are in a sense divine; that we are the adoptive children of God, to use the theological phraseology. We therefore, live by God's Spirit and we have this radiance, energy, this identity that is hidden deep within us—that can become more and more conscious and it can become more and more felt and lived. It can become more and more our own energy, our own experience of life.

In using the dialogue of religious experience to bring Buddhist practice into conversation with Christian practice of evangelism, these practitioners have offered a Christian theology faithful to the tradition and ideally suited to the postmodern mind. This lived theology of evangelism declares that the primary aim of evangelism is to guide, facilitate, and embody the liberative experience of Christ, whose life, death, and resurrection become the pattern for the Christian life.

Conclusions

In this chapter I presented major findings on what it is that draws Christians to Buddhist practices and what these Christian practitioners of Buddhism then hope to see transferred back to their Christian experiences. Drawing on these Christian-Buddhist lived experiences, I found that to understand the attraction of Christians to Buddhism is to understand some of the deepest desires and struggles of our postmodern world. Understanding this pull toward Buddhism can help the churches meet the deepest longings of the human heart. As our age changes, our needs and concerns evolve, and so too must the guidance and wisdom we provide to the churches as practical theologians. So too, the churches might best learn to adapt critically and dynamically by paying close attention to the Christian-Buddhist interreligious dialogue.

In the next chapter, I will respond to the insights gained from this qualitative research in Christian-Buddhist dialogue, and I will explore how bringing Christianity into dialogue with another tradition like Buddhism allows us to reclaim lost or under-accentuated dimensions of our own theological heritage. Ironically, interreligious dialogue can help Christian churches become more faithful to the Gospel by highlighting aspects of the Christian tradition to be rediscovered or re-examined based on the articulated needs of Christians in the context of interreligious engagement; for Christian attraction to Buddhism says as much about Christian evangelism and presentation of Christianity as it does about the allure of Buddhism itself.

Finally, I will suggest an interreligious practical theology of evangelism that grows out of dialogue with Buddhism. This new approach stems from the finding and insight that authentic

and effective Christian evangelism must be grounded in and must guide others to an experience of God.

CHAPTER FIVE

A PRACICAL THEOLOGY OF EVANGELISM IN RELATION TO CHRISTIAN-BUDDHIST DIALOGUE

Context of Contemporary Evangelism: Suffering and Otherness

Developing a practical theology of evangelism in correlation with Christian-Buddhist dialogue challenges churches to clarify the aims of Christian evangelism and examine the context in which the Good News is proclaimed. Proclamation of the Gospel occurs in a world of brokenness and suffering from a complex matrix of wounds.[1]

Structural oppression systematically binds people in cycles of bloodshed and poverty. Discrimination based on gender, race, sexual orientation, and religion scars the human community. The last two centuries have witnessed unprecedented violence wrought upon the earth and the destruction of natural resources, never to return again. These outer scars of human brokenness only mirror the inner wound within humanity. Amid this violence, humans continues to search for meaning, too often concluding that in the contemporary world there is no solid ground for hope and healing. Instead, despair, consumerism, and materialism provide the all-too shallow container for human longing. More intimately, our inner woundedness fuels our discontent and greed, driving us to extend the shadow of sin onto one another and the world.

[1] Ruben Habito, *Healing Breath*: *Zen for Christians and Buddhists in a Wounded World* (Boston: Wisdom Publications, 2006), 2-3. Also David R.Brockman and Ruben L. F. Habito, *The Gospel Among Religions: Christian Ministry, Theology, and Spirituality in a Multifaith World* (Maryknoll, N.Y.: Orbis Books, 2010), 2-5.

Although the context of Jesus' evangelistic mission differs from that of today, the pervasiveness of economic injustice and the burden of suffering on the poor mirrors the woundedness in the contemporary world. Jesus describes the human condition beset by greed and resistance to change as he explains the effects of this matrix of suffering on his listeners:

> For this people's heart has grown dull, and their ears are hard of hearing, and they have shut their eyes; so that they might not look with their eyes, and listen with their ears, and understand with their hearts and turn—and I would heal them (Matthew 13.15).

I argue that Christian dialogue with Buddhism can support the development of a practical theology of evangelism in which Christian evangelism becomes the healing proclamation so necessary in a world of woundedness and blindness.According to Ruben Habito, a Christian teacher of World Religions and practitioner of Zen, in the Buddhist analysis of human suffering it is the perceived otherness of reality which generates fear, anxiety, and *dis*-ease in the human community.[511] For the Christian, creation and Creator should be distinguished given the qualitative difference between the two. Yet, Christians affirm that in Christ, the Creator as "one God and Father of all, who is above all and through all and in all" (Ephesians 4: 6) is united to all creation and humanity. In God's own personal existence below the apparent division and separation experienced at the everyday level of form and experience lies the formless presence of God that unites all of reality. Blind to the ultimate unity of creation, we misperceive people created in God's image as other, objectifying them as competitors or threats to status.

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[511] Ibid., 7.

Recent history since the industrial revolution reveals how humans have viewed the natural world as other, perceiving the "environment" as something external to the human person to be exploited, manipulated, and destroyed for our own short-term benefit. As contemporary people, having lost a common understanding of human identity, we even view ourselves as other, feeling the inner ache of self-alienation, loneliness, and despair. In the postmodern vacuum of identity that lacks any common understanding of what it means to be human, materialism, acquisition, and power quickly fill the perceived void.

The Aim of Christian Evangelism

The aim of Christian evangelism amid this perceived pattern of otherness is to articulate a vision to see through the veil of separation and recognize the interconnectedness among all creation. While Buddhist teaching strives to awaken in students the Buddha's enlightenment that transcends all duality between *I* and the other, Christian evangelism similarly fulfills its healing role when it connects persons to the primordial experience of union with God, extending throughout the entire community of creation.

Aloysius Pieris, a Jesuit theologian and participant in Christian-Buddhist dialogue, suggests that this experience is the necessary impulse that sustains religion over time.

> The "core" of any religion is the *liberative experience* that gave birth to it and continues to be available to successive generations of humankind by developing its own peculiar medium of communication. . . . It is this primordial experience that functions as the *core* of a religion at any time in any given place, in the sense

> that it continually re-creates the *psychospiritual mood* proper to that particular religion, imparting at the same time its own particular character to the *socio-cultural* manifestations of that religion.[512]

In light of this experiential understanding of religion, Christian evangelism might be formulated as a public, ecclesial practice of passing along the core liberative experience of Jesus the Christ to all the human community. Because any religion will die when it has lost its means of communicating the core liberative experience of its founder, faithful evangelism, then, is not only announcing what Christ announced, but proclaiming from the liberative experience of Christ that guides people to the experiential knowledge of Christ. Understanding the core liberative experience of Christianity is critical to the development of a practical theology of evangelism that addresses the context of religious pluralism and interreligious engagement.

Traditionally, scholars of religion have tended to compare the core liberative experience of Buddhism and Christianity with the following distillation: Buddhism calls followers *to know* something, and Christianity invites followers *to love* something. The primary images used to depict the founding fathers of each religion reveal the center of gravity in each tradition. As the expression of *gnosis*, the Buddha is commonly imaged sitting beneath his tree of enlightenment, embodying the knowledge of the nature of suffering and its solution. As the embodiment of

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[512] Aloysius Pieris, S.J., *Love Meets Wisdom: A Christian Experience of Buddhism* (Maryknoll, N.Y.: Orbis Books, 1988), 110–11.

agape, Jesus is most commonly imaged hanging on the tree of the cross, his body bearing the cost of his selfless love.[513]

While the Buddha's enlightenment is fundamentally an awakening to saving knowledge (*gnosis*), Jesus' mission is the accomplishment of saving love (*agape*). In Buddhism, the Absolute is a nonpersonal reality to be realized rather than a personal Thou to be loved.[514] Therefore, scholarship in the last century has tended to brand Buddhism as a religion of *gnosis* and Christianity as a religion of *agape*.

Every caricature is both an accurate distillation and an aberrant distortion of the truth. While these two characterizations are not unfounded, Pieris suggests a nondualistic approach, recognizing that Christianity contains a valid gnostic element and Buddhism has an appropriate *agapeic* dimension.[515] By *gnosis*, Pieris refers to the saving knowledge that is at the heart of the Buddha's enlightenment. Likewise, in *agape*, Pieris describes the redemptive love that Jesus preaches, embodies, and invites his followers to emulate. Pieris describes *gnosis* and *agape* not as mutually exclusive categories that uniquely define two particular religions, but, rather, as: two mystical moods that can alternate according to spiritual fluctuations of individuals, groups, and

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[513] Ibid., 111.

[514] Ibid., 14.

[515] Ibid., 9.

even of entire cultures, without either of them allowing itself to be totally submerged by the other.[516]

While Buddhism has often been charged as being quietistic, individualistic, and world-negating, the Buddha posed a two-fold posture toward the world often unrecognized by outside commentators. Pieris observes: Wisdom (*prajñā*) provided [the Buddha] the perspective to see the world correctly and the vantage point to serve the world with loving-kindness (*karunā*). . . . His vision involved gnostic disengagement and *agapeic* involvement.[517] While some contemporary Buddhist teachers such as Thich Nhat Hanh have suggested that Buddhism can learn from Christianity's social engagement and emphasis on love, Christianity has had a more difficult time recovering a healthy dimension of *gnosis*.

Christianity has long held a strict bias against Gnosticism associating it with such heresies as Docetism, Manicheism, Catharism, Jansenism, Quietism, and Albigensianism.[518] Christian theologians throughout history have been wise to avoid the dangerous application of Gnosticism which can result in lifeless, inward, and world-hating aberrations of Christianity. The contemporary gnostic heresy of our own time is an aggressive elevation of scientific knowledge

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[516] Ibid., 9.

[517] Ibid., 75.

[518] Ibid., 10.

and technological prowess as the ultimate liberating force. Still, something's misuse does not preclude its proper use.

Pieris suggests that the renewed interest in Buddhism in particular, and Eastern religion in general, over the past century has been fueled by the unarticulated hunger in Western people to recover a lost element of healthy *gnosis* nearly erased in the early centuries of Christianity. This hunger for saving knowledge (*gnosis*) in the West is evidenced by the recent popular and scholarly explorations of Thomas Merton, Teilhard de Chardin, and Medieval mysticism along with widespread contemporary interest in Eastern religious practices (e.g. meditation, yoga, mindfulness, tai chi, and so forth).[519] The renewed interest in the East marks a need to redevelop a healthy dimension of *gnosis* within Christianity after two millennia of suspicion and misapplication.

While the theological convention within Christianity has been to regard the two in opposition to one another, Pieris suggests that *gnosis* and *agape* are two mutually inclusive modes of apprehending reality: [*gnosis* and *agape* are] irreducibly distinct languages of the spirit. . . . It is the dialectical interplay of wisdom and love that ensures a progressive movement in the realm of the human spirit.[520]

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[519] For an earlier exploration on this interest see Harvey Cox, *Turning East: The Promise and Peril of the New Orientalism* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1977).

[520] Pieris, *Love Meets Wisdom: A Christian Experience of Buddhism*, 10.

Both are necessary elements of a healthy spirituality and mutual correctives that keep religion from devolving into private quietism on the one hand, and limp, social activism on the other. Pieris offers Buddhism to the serious and practicing Christian as a model of how the energy of *gnosis* and *agape* can fuel one another in a single tradition:

> In Zen, the two poles of genuine spirituality—gnostic disengagement and agapeic involvement—are maintained in their dialectical tension. . . . Wisdom without love was inhuman, and love without wisdom was blind. . . .East and West have both developed a sapiential and an affective dimension of their respective spiritualities—the former is underlined in the Gnostic religions (of both the East and the West), and the later is accentuated in the Semitic or biblical traditions.[521]

Pieris suggests that shunning *gnosis* is as dangerous as its abuse. Christianity must make room for the gnostic idiom that is faithful to its own earliest traditions or else it will risk being swallowed up by the techno-scientific gnosticism that has become the postmodern heresy du jour.[522] In examining the way in which Buddhism maintains a balanced dialectic of *gnosis* and *agape*, Christians can likewise rediscover an emphasis on *gnosis* that balances the inward impulse of saving knowledge and the outward thrust of saving love.

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[521] Ibid., 12.

[522] Ibid., 28.

Mysticism and Contemplative Spirituality as a Source of Christian Evangelism

Historically, the Christian tradition has preferred as its organizing principle doctrinal formulation over mystical experience. Christianity's creedal preference is not surprising, considering the geographic vastness and demographic scope of the Christian world. Over the centuries, theologians and ecclesial leaders have maintained a cautious posture toward mystical experience that can be difficult to define, often quixotic, and a challenge to accommodate within traditional theological formulations. Despite its aversion to theological classification, mysticism has been a vital, if underrepresented, strain in the Christian tradition.[523]

The language and logic of Christian mysticism provides the nexus where Buddhism and Christianity might engage one another in the development of a practical theology of evangelism.[524] While mysticism has been commonly regarded as the esoteric pursuit of the spiritual elite, a growing chorus of twentieth-century Christian theologians and spiritual masters describe mysticism as the birthright of all baptized Christians.[525]

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[523] For a solid scholarly work on Christian mysticism see, Bernard. McGinn, T*he Presence of God: A History of Western Christian Mysticism* (New York: Crossroad, 1991); *The Foundations of Mysticism* (New York: Crossroad, 1995); *The Growth of Mysticism* (London: SCM Press, 1995); *The Flowering of Mysticism: Men and Women in the New Mysticism (1200 - 1350)* (New York: Crossroad, 1998). For an introductory purpose, see Bernard McGinn, *The Essential Writings of Christian Mysticism* (New York: Modern Library, 2006).

[524] Cf. Elaine A. Heath, *The Mystic Way of Evangelism: A Contemplative Vision for Christian Outreach* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2008).

[525] Such writers include, among many others, Teilhard de Chardin, Thomas Merton, Thomas Keating, Basil Pennington, John Main, Laurence Freeman, William Johnston, Anthony DeMello, and Richard Rohr.

By demystifying mysticism under the rubric of contemplation, these authors seek to encourage contemplative practices among all Christians. William Johnston, scholar of Christian-Buddhist dialogue, suggests that contemplation with its philosophical roots in the Greek notion of *theoria* is helpful in appreciating the universal call to contemplation that should inform Christian evangelism:[Contemplation is] the supreme and magnificent act in which one grasps the truth in an instantaneous flash accompanied by great joy. *Theoria* describes moments when one tastes the joy of discovering why he exists.[526] This universal contemplative path involves plunging the self deep below the worldly realm of difference and particularity to grasp the underlying divine essence from which

all creation emanates.

Teilhard de Chardin describes his own experience of God that is paradigmatic of encounters described by many Christian mystics and contemplatives.

> And so, for the first time in my life perhaps (although I am supposed to meditate every day!) I took the lamp, and leaving the zone of everyday occupations and relationships where everything seems clear, I went down to my inmost self, to the deep abyss whence I feel dimly that my power of action emanates. But as I moved further and further from the conventional certainties by which social life is superficially illuminated, I became aware that I was losing contact with myself. At each step of the descent a new person was disclosed within me of whose name I was no longer sure, and who no longer obeyed me. And when I had to stop my exploration because the path faded from beneath my steps, I found a bottomless abyss at my feet, and out of it came—arising I know not whence—the current which I dare to call *my* life.[527]

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[526] William Johnston, *The Still Point: Reflections on Zen and Christian Mysticism* (New York: Fordham University Press, 1970), 132.

[527] Teilhard de Chardin, *The Divine Milieu: An Essay on the Interior Life* (New York: Harper and Row, 1960), 45.

Mysticism is at once the discovery of something new and the remembering of an older unity. Teilhard describes the ambiguity of losing the self and simultaneously recovering a new sense of self—a bigger self maintained and joined at every moment to the one Life. The mystical moment in which God's saving knowledge (*gnosis*) is disclosed redefines reality in larger terms. The narrow and distinct self-identity can no longer be maintained as separate from the One who gives rise to it. A deep unity with God holds this self in existence while holding all of reality together. In the mystical encounter, the boundary between self and God is blurred as distinction is paradoxically maintained without division.

Like Teilhard, Thomas Merton describes this saving knowledge in terms analogous to Zen. Merton invites, not just the spiritual elite, but all the Christians to know the following reality at the center of one's existence:

> A point of nothingness which is untouched by sin and illusion, a point of pure truth, a point or spark which belongs entirely to God, which is never at our disposal, from which God disposes of our lives, which is inaccessible to the fantasies of our own mind or the brutality of our own will.[528]

Transcending language, this contemplative or mystical experience is accessed most directly in silence. Springing forth from the Semitic impulse to refrain from imaging God, this encounter operates below the level of language, image, and symbol. The ironic *apophatic* insight of the contemplative tradition is that language can actually separate us from the reality it strives

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[528] Thomas Merton, *Conjectures of a Guilty Bystander* (New York: Image Books, 1965), 158.

to communicate. Maintaining the penultimacy of concept reverences the sovereignty of a God who is always greater than the sacred language used to name the divine. Though the *apophatic* impulse has been present throughout Judeo-Christian history, this mystical path has not always been accessible to mainstream Christians. Merton maintains that the retrieval and cultivation of this *apophatic*, contemplative path is crucial for the survival of Christianity.

> There is an absolute need for the solitary, bare, dark, beyond-concept, beyond thought, beyond-feeling type of prayer. Not of course for everybody.
> But unless that dimension is there in the Church somewhere, the whole caboodle lacks light and intelligence. It is a kind of hidden, secret, unknown stabilizer, and a compass too. About this I have no hesitations and no doubts, because it is my vocation.[529]

Throughout much of Christianity, institutional energy has been invested in doctrinal formulation and conceptual exactitude. For many necessary and complex reasons, it became critical throughout history to clarify and document with exactitude certain articles of faith and practice. Yet the penchant for theological exactitude may leave contemporary Christians hungry for the experience of God and searching for this experience even in non-Christian spirituality. In an autobiography titled, *Dreaming Me: An African American Woman's Spiritual Journey*, the author, Jan Willis, who was raised in the Baptist South and is the first African American scholar-practitioner of Tibetan Buddhism in America, described her own experience of contemplation gained from a Buddhist practice as follows:

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[529] William H. Shannon, ed., *Hidden Ground of Love: Letters of Thomas Merton* (New York: Harcourt Brace Javanovick, 1985), 73.

> It felt as though my mind suddenly became immeasurably vast. It encompassed everything, the very universe, itself. There was no longer any separation between me and everything else in the universe. The duality of "subject" and "object" simply dropped away and disappeared. The birds and I were of one essence. I was completely convinced that I had tasted that ineffable knowledge about which only the saints can speak. I felt happy, light, ecstatic, completely blissful… Wasn't this the same bliss the Christian mystics had spoken of? For the first time, I felt I had some understanding of the great joy and peace that St. Francis enjoyed with God's creatures. This kind of peacefulness was not limited to Buddhism."[530]

Although it has developed its own vibrant speculative tradition, Zen Buddhism in particular has developed a skepticism toward doctrine and a vehement insistence on the priority of saving knowledge (*gnosis*) in the form of experience. Zen masters repeat the bold and halting wisdom of Master Lin Chi who said, "Be aware. If you meet the Buddha in the road, kill him."[531] Rather than seeking conceptual notions of the Buddha, which inevitably ensnare the mind in idiosyncratic theories, Zen Buddhism calls its practitioners to enter into the Buddha's enlightenment experience which transcends thought-forms. All conceptual notions of the Buddha must be slain. In Zen Buddhism, sharing the Buddha's experience is more important than any concept of the Buddha.

While no other tradition so graphically cautions its followers against any illusory conception of its founder, Master Lin Chi's wisdom mirrors the Semitic injunction against idolatry. Such commands remind the Christian that the divine mystery always transcends even

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[530] Jan Willis, *Dreaming Me: An African American Woman's Spiritual Journey* (New York: Riverhead Books, 2001), 221. Having experienced this kind of similarity between Buddhist spirituality and Franciscan spirituality, she became a "Baptist-Buddhist" in the belief that this dual-citizenship is an honest description of her identity. See Ibid., 310.

[531] Thich Nhat Hanh, *Going Home: Jesus and Buddha as Brothers* (New York: Riverhead Books, 1999), 62.

our best images of God. While the Hebrew Scriptures warn against idolatry because of God's transcendence, Buddhist tradition warns against idolatry because the Absolute is fundamentally immanent. Both agree that an over-reliance on concept and image distorts the true nature of contact with reality.

In his personal exploration of Buddhism, *Zen and the Birds of Appetite,* Merton offers a similar critique not of doctrine per se but of Christianity's tendency to substitute theological concepts for direct experience. "[The] obsession with doctrinal formulas, juridical order and ritual exactitude has often made people forget that the heart of Catholicism, too, is a living experience of unity in Christ which far transcends all conceptual formulations."[532]

Merton does not advise abandoning Christian creeds or theology but rather suggests that theoretical formulations must drive Christians to experience directly what they assent to intellectually. Evangelism is precisely the place where creeds and doctrine must be contextualized within the field of human experience. Belief in the body of Christ, for Merton, must lead to the actual experience of Christ. Ruben Habito offers striking wisdom analogous to Master Lin Chi's: "If you meet Christ in the road, crucify him."[533] If you find the Christ you are looking for, then it cannot really be the Savior. Because the person of Christ always transcends notions, images, and concepts, the Christian must discipline herself to crucify these tempting surrogates for Christ, which will always fail as pale replacements.

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[532] Thomas Merton, *Zen and Birds of Appetite* (New York: New Directions, 1968), 38–39.

[533] Ruben Habito, *Living Zen, Loving God* (Boston: Wisdom Publications, 2004), 37.

Merton famously describes his own extraordinary liberative experience of Christ while walking down an ordinary city street. This "mystical experience" awakened him to the presence of Christ in others in a way that he had not calculated theoretically. Christ's appearance on the street corner embodies and yet transcends the Nicene creedal formulation of Christ:

> In Louisville, at the corner of Fourth and Walnut, in the center of the shopping district, I was suddenly overwhelmed with the realization that I loved all these people, that they were mine and I theirs, that we could not be alien to one another even though we were total strangers. . . . It was like waking from a dream of separateness, of spurious self-isolation in a special world, the world of renunciation and supposed holiness. The whole illusion of a separate holy existence is a dream... I have the immense joy of being man, a member of a race in which God Himself became incarnate... And if only everybody could realize this! But it cannot be explained. There is no way of telling people that they are all walking around shining like the sun.[534]

The contemplative experiences of Teilhard and Merton point to the underlying unity of all creation. They represent an encounter that transcends concept and language by directly experiencing the reality to which traditional doctrinal formulations point. Inspired by the engagement with Buddhism's insistence on experience, Christian evangelism can begin to guide persons to the lived and liberating experience of God in Christ that lies at the heart of Christianity.

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[534] Thomas Merton, "Conjectures of a Guilty Bystander," in *Thomas Merton: Spiritual Master, The Essential Writings*, ed. Lawrence S. Cunningham (New York: Paulist Press, 1992), 144.

Emptiness and *Kenosis*: A Form of Christian Evangelism[535]

Buddhist practice has famously privileged concrete practices that enable the practitioner to embody the truths and access the experience at the center of the Buddhist tradition.[536] The embodiment of Buddhist teaching and the unity of all existence come together in the teaching of emptiness. *Satori*, the awakening to the emptiness of all things, is not the destruction of the self or the denial of one's existence, but the proper relatedness to all things in unity. Zen master Thich Nhat Hanh clarifies the common Western misconception about the Buddhist teaching of emptiness or non-existence of reality.

> Buddhism does not teach that everything doesn't exist in the literal sense. .. . *Emptiness* means the emptiness of a separate existence, the emptiness of a permanent entity, emptiness of all concepts. . . . It is therefore not correct to say that Christianity teaches being while Buddhism teaches nonbeing. If you spend a little time studying Buddhism, you will find that the practice is to transcend both notions of being and nonbeing.[537]

Thich Nhat Hanh refers to this underlying unity which transcends notions of separateness as *interbeing*.[538] The individual has only provisional existence alone; all things are mutually dependent upon one another for existence and meaning. The awakening to which Buddhist

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[535] Please note that there has been a missiological approach to present *kenosis* as a model of interreligious engagement. Here I attempt to develop this idea in the context of Christian evangelism. See Frederiks Martha, "Kenosis and a model for interreligious dialogue," *Missiology* 33, no. 2 (April 1, 2005): 211-222.

[536] For example, z*azen* (seated meditation), *kinhin* (walking meditation), *kong-an* training, and *dokusan* (personal interviews with a master).

[537] Thich Nhat Hanh, *Going Home: Jesus and Buddha as Brothers* (New York: Riverhead Books, 1999), 27.

[538] Robert H. King, *Thomas Merton and Thich Nhat Hanh: Engaged Spirituality in an Age of Globalization* (New York: Continuum, 2001), 121.

practices is directed apprehends the interdependence of all things and the ultimate illusion of division. Such language of interbeing may be helpful to Christianity, which has tended to accentuate the particularity and otherness of reality.

Daisetsu Suzuki, the famous teacher whose lectures and writings initiated Buddhism's new era of popularity in the West, suggests that the language of distinction and otherness at the heart of Christianity has become the dominant idiom of the West."The Western mind has grown accustomed to I-Thou language for expressing religiosity. This thinking is dualistic and oppositional. In the East, the tendency is to submerge the ego and dissolve it in the unity of all things."[539]

In the East, the *I* disappears to the extent that it is submerged in a matrix of interbeing; in the West, the ego sets itself apart as distinct. Since the time of Sigmund Freud, the ego has become the centerpiece of Western identity so much so that Westerners cannot imagine being human without the notion of a separate self. Although this particular psychological notion of ego as a separate self is scarcely a century old, its roots are deeply embedded within the Judeo-Christian and Western philosophical tradition. With early precedence in the I-Thou relationship of the Hebrew and Christian Scriptures, this idiom of distinction was further concretized by the

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[539] Daisetsu Suzuki, quoted in Johnston, *The Still Point*, 21.

rationalism of Descartes:"The Cartesian trend in Western thought has tended to assume that knowledge can only be found in clear and distinct ideas."[540]

Buddhism encourages the death of the ego and the discovery of a self beyond ego identity where there is no ultimate distinction between subject and object. This state of nonself, called *mua* in Korean, seems to stand in empirical opposition to Christian metaphysics with its clear distinction drawn between Creator and creation.[541] While Christian mysticism has always been wary of pantheism and the conflation of the creature with the Creator, the mystical tradition also bends language in a manner similar to Buddhism's *mua*. St. John of the Cross describes the place where the distinction between his created soul and God seem to dissolve:

> Hence, that the soul be in its center—which is God, as we have said. . . .
> But once it has attained the final degree [of love], God's love will have arrived at wounding the soul in its ultimate and deepest center, which is to transform and clarify it in its whole being, power, and strength, and according to its capacity, until it appears to be God.[542]

The insight that the self must be submerged and dissolved into a greater unity is the foundational conversion experience of St. Paul who declared with Zen-like boldness: "For through the law I died to the law, that I might live for God. I have been crucified with Christ; yet I live, no longer I, but Christ lives in me" (Galatians 2.19–20a).

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[540] Johnston, *The Still Point*, 144.

[541] Ibid., 55; *mua* translates *anatta* in Sanskrit.

[542] St. John of the Cross, "The Living Flame of Love," in *St. John of the Cross: Selected Writings*, ed. Kieran Kavanaugh (New York: Paulist Press, 1987), 298.

An encounter with Buddhism and its practice reveals to the Christian that as in Buddhism, the notion of a separate, distinct ego is not the entire story of the human-divine relationship. The self must be contextualized within the new Christ reality. The Christian tradition has typically referred to this ego exchange as *kenosis*, the necessary emptying of the self and the subsequent filling of the self with Christ. Much of Paul's writings call for this ego exchange with Christ: Let the same mind be in you that was in Christ Jesus, who though he was in the form of God, did not regard equality with God as something to be exploited, but emptied himself (Philippians 1.2–7a). In this passage, Paul enjoins the congregation at Philippi to have the very same mind as Christ. Similarly, in the first letter to the Corinthians, Paul reminds his readers of the transformation of the mind into Christ's mind: For who has known the mind of the Lord as to instruct him? But we have the mind of Christ (1 Corinthians 2.16). What is the mind of Christ? The mind that recognizes that all things are bound up in Christ, who is the Logos through whom "all things came into being . . . and without [whom] not one thing came into being" (John 1.3). According to the fourth Gospel, all creation exists within the reality of Christ. This experience of Christ as the foundational reality at the heart of creation is the core liberative experience from which and toward which Christian evangelism is oriented.

While Paul's mystical theology of contemplation offers a distinct conceptual path from Zen Buddhism, Thomas Aquinas provides a common language to explore areas of overlap and elements of difference. Drawing from Aristotle's notion of *theoria*, Thomas

defines *contemplation* as the simple act of gazing upon the truth (*simplex intuitus veritatis*).[543] This mode of contemplation is available to all people, even those outside the Christian tradition. For Thomas, what distinguishes Christian contemplation from general contemplation is that the truth apprehended is the fruit of faith and love: "a loving encounter with God."[544] Love within the heart enlightens one's intelligence and perception of the truth that cannot be gleaned from conceptual reasoning. For Thomas, true wisdom can only be attained by God's love; the knowledge of God (*gnosis*) produces the love of God (*agape*).[545] Likewise, William Johnston, the Jesuit scholar of Christian-Buddhist dialogue and Christian mysticism, suggests that the most common definition of medieval mysticism is simply the "experiential knowledge of God mediated through love."[546] For Christianity, *agape* has been the privileged mode of divine revelation. Rooted in Jesus' preaching and Paul's epistles, this agapeic epistemology is most succinctly expressed in the First Letter of John: Beloved, let us love one another, because love is from God; everyone who loves is born of God and knows God. Whoever does not love does not know God, for God is love. . . . No one has ever seen God, yet if we love one another, God lives in us and his love is perfected in us (1 John 4.7–8, 12). Thomas calls this knowledge *connatural*

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[543] Thomas Aquinas, ST 2-2.180.3 ad 1, in *Summa Theologica: First Complete American Edition in Three Volumes*, vol. 2, ed. Fathers of the English Dominican Province (New York: Benzinger Brothers, 1947), 1933. Also see Keith J. Egan, "Contemplation," in *The New Westminster Dictionary of Christian Spirituality*, ed., Philip Sheldrake (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 2005), 211-213.

[544] Keith J. Egan, "Contemplation," in *The New Westminster Dictionary of Christian Spirituality*, 212.

[545] Johnston, *The Still Point*, 133.

[546] Ibid., 115

because it arises from the knowledge of one's loving union with God. Love is Christian *gnosis*; mutual love among humans is the path to true knowledge of God.[547] As Pieris summarizes:

> A genuine Christian experience of God-in-Christ grows by maintaining a dialectical tension between two poles: between action and non-action, between word and silence, between control of nature and harmony with nature, between self-affirmation and self-negation, between engagement and withdrawal, between love and knowledge, between *karuna* and *prajñā*, between *agape* and *gnosis*.[548]

I argue that dialogue with Buddhism can help churches reach back into the Christian tradition to revive a creative dialectical tension between *gnosis* and *agape* with the goal of sharing with people in general, and spiritual seekers in particular, the core liberative experience of God in Christ.

Telling the Embodied Experience of Encountering

The earliest evangelistic message recorded in the Scriptures reveals that the initial Christian evangelism was nothing more than a response to the liberating experience of Christ. Mary Magdalene, cast as the very first evangelist in John's Gospel, announces the Good News of the resurrection based upon her encounter at the tomb. The narrative lays the foundation of evangelism upon the dialectic of experience and proclamation: "Mary Magdalene went and announced to the disciples, "I have seen the Lord:" and she told them that he had said these things to her" (John 20:18).

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[547] Ibid., 114.

[548] Ibid., 27.

Later in the first letter of John, the author repeats what must have been an early tradition of experience and proclamation whereby evangelism drew upon the core liberative experience of Christ that moved them to share the fruit of this experience with others:

> We declare to you what was from the beginning, what we have heard, what we have seen with our eyes, what we have looked at and touched with our hands, concerning the word of life—this life was revealed, and we have seen it and testify to it, and declare to you the eternal life that was with the Father and was revealed to us—we declare to you what we have seen and heard so that you may also have fellowship with us; and truly our fellowship is with the Father and with his Son Jesus Christ (1 John 1.1–3).

The author's declaration simply reflects the fruits of his own embodied encounter with the Father through the Son, Jesus Christ. Even Jesus' own self-reflection on his soon-to-be-initiated evangelistic practice begins with his own experience of the Lord as inspired by the words of Isaiah:

> 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 bring good news to the poor. He has sent me to proclaim release to the captives and recovery of sight to the blind, to let the oppressed go free, to proclaim the year of the Lord's favor." And he rolled up the scroll, gave it back to the attendant, and sat down. The eyes of all in the synagogue were fixed on him. Then he began to say to them, "Today this scripture has been fulfilled in your hearing" (Luke 4.17–21).

Jesus' own public reflection on his new evangelizing mission would be born from his own experience of anointing by the Spirit and the experience of the Lord's presence upon him. His evangelism, rooted in the anointed liberative experience of God, provides the foundation for an evangelistic practice that would guide others to an experience of freedom, vision, and rejoicing.

Proclaiming the Gospel as *Kong-an*

Within Buddhist tradition in general, Zen Buddhism in particular, *kong-an* (*Koan* in Japanese) practice has developed as one of the primary methods of guiding students to the core liberative experience paralleling the Buddha's awakening. *Kong-an* practice exposes the limits of the rational mind by trapping it in its own cycles of judgment and evaluation. As the intellect is paralyzed, the *kong-an* provides a doorway into non-rational experiential knowledge beyond the boundaries of mental reasoning. Yasutani *Rōshi* explains the function of the *kong-an* within Zen Buddhism:

> [*Kong-an* training teaches] us the inherent limitation of the logical mind as an instrument for realizing ultimate truth. . . . [*Kong-ans*] pry us loose from our tightly held dogmas and prejudices, strip us of our penchant for discriminating good from bad, and empty us of the false notion of self-and-other, to the end that we may perceive that the world of perfection is in fact no different from that in which we eat and excrete, laugh, and weep.[549]

Buddhist students spend years working their way through volumes of these riddles, graduating to subsequent *kong-ans* only after their responses to each *kong-an* have been approved by the teacher. This practice seeks to guide each student to his/her deepest identity and to experience the ultimate unity of reality which lies just below the illusion of separateness.

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[549] Mark R. Schwehn, "Toward a Postmodern Christian Faith," in *Dialog; A Journal of Theology,* 36, no. 2: 90.

The Gateless Gate is one of the most prominent collections of *kong-ans*, and the following excerpt exemplifies the way in which Christian evangelism can be contextualized as the evocation of the *core liberative experience* of Christ:

> A monk asked Jōshū in all earnestness, "I have just entered this monastery. I beg you master, please give me instructions." Jōshū asked, "Have you had your rice gruel yet?" The monk answered, "Yes, I have." Jōshū said, "Then wash your bowls." The monk attained some realization.[550]

Typifying the Zen Buddhist insistence on experience, this *kong-an* invites students to wrestle with and ultimately embody the monk's realization—that the enlightenment that the student seeks is not to be found apart from the daily tasks of life. While the *kong-an* demonstrates that the *core liberative experience* of Zen Buddhism is the very experience of life itself, Ruben Habito suggests that Jōshū's question about a morning meal is simultaneously a question of ultimate meaning. "Have you had your breakfast?" becomes a way of asking, "Have you discovered your true identity? Have you had your fill? Have you found what will really sustain life?"[551] Zen Buddhism offers an invitation that echoes the Christian exhortation to "taste and see" (Psalm 34.9). The practitioner of Buddhism working with this *kong-an* seeks to mirror the monk's experiential realization that the monk experiences. As Habito suggests, this realization is nothing more than the following: "the quiet joy of simply being. To embody the

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[550] Kōun Yamada, trans. *The Gateless Gate: The Classic Book of Zen Kōans* (Boston: Wisdom Publications, 2004), 40.

[551] Habito, *Healing Breath*, 88.

way of awakening in our daily life is nothing more than living every moment, just as it is, empty of ego and filled with a sense of mystery and wonder."[552]

Transcending conceptual logic, the *kong-an* points to the "unthought thought" and surprises the student with an unexpected answer that is really not an answer at all.[553] Jōshū's simple, straightforward question, rather, redirects the monk back to his own experience and identity.

Zen practice can become a gift to Christian churches when their announcing Gospel can appropriate the function of a *kong-an*, pushing seekers to experience for themselves their identity in Christ.[554] Similarly, Jesus' evangelistic proclamation is rooted in a framework of liberative experience wherein he invites his listeners to realize their identity in relationship to the triune experience of the Godhead:

> This is the Spirit of truth, whom the world cannot receive, because it neither sees him nor knows him. You know him, because he abides with you, and he will be in you. I will not leave you orphaned; I am coming to you. In a little while the world will no longer see me, but you will see me; because I live, you also will live. On that day, you will know that I am in my Father, and you in me, and I in you. They who have my commandments and keep them are those who love me; and those who love me will be loved by my Father, and I will love them and reveal myself to them (John 14:17–21).

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[552] Ibid., 88.

[553] J. K. Kadowaki, *Zen and the Bible* (Maryknoll, N.Y.: Orbis Books), 121.

[554] Cf. Robert E. Kennedy, *Zen Gifts to Christians* (New York: Continuum, 2004).

The Christian liberative realization is the experience of one's identity and indeed the experience of all of reality as enfolded within the one, triune life. In his proclamation, Jesus invites his disciples to know, to see, and to experience this interpenetration of Father, Son, and Spirit within themselves. From the vantage point of divine indwelling (which the world cannot see), the experience of life itself becomes the occasion of divine encounter. The experience of loving and being loved by Christ (*agape*) is simultaneously

the realization (*gnosis*) that the divine life and human life are distinct, but continuous.

This is the Christian liberative realization—that one's human identity is bound up in Christ's divine identity.

Interviews with Christians who practice Buddhism suggest that their model of evangelism follows Jesus' evangelistic paradigm of guiding seekers toward the realization of their identity. Relying on the *imago Dei* anthropology within the Genesis creation account, Kevin Hunt in his directed Christian-Buddhist retreat suggests that the proclamation of Gospel and indeed the central question of all religion is rooted in the fundamental question of identity[555]:

> The Buddha left home and practiced six years spending his time in meditation; he, then, spent forty years in preaching. The question that drove him from his home and family is the same question that confronts each and every one of us no matter what religious tradition we might follow: Who am I? Both Christianity and Buddhism attempt to answer that question. I say *attempt* because any answer that we articulate is limited and so inadequate.

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[555] As I noted in Chapter Four's footnote nine, Fr. Hunt gave me permission to use his talks during the retreat at Providence Zen Center in June 2009, along with his name.

The entire Christian life is aimed at the discovery of an identity that is both born of this world and "born from above" (John 3.3). As no single theological statement can exhaust divine identity, no single anthropology can express human identity. Any account of Christian identity must walk the thin edge of marrying the human and the divine without conflating them. Hunt continues:

> So the way of *zazen* is giving birth to the reality of "Who am I?" This *I* is not egocentric. It is not a *me*. The realization of this question is the salvation of the world. The goal of evangelism is to realize who you are in Christ. You are Christ. This is just a matter of being faithful to the Scriptures. Paul is insistent on this theme.

Each of the Christian-Buddhist practitioners understands the goal of evangelism as the actualization of one's Christ nature paralleling the inherent Buddha nature that Buddhists believe is latent in all beings. For these practitioners, the Pauline realization that his and Christ's identities have been commingled is the goal of faithful evangelism: "I have been crucified with Christ; and it is no longer I who live, but Christ who lives in me" (Galatians 2. 19b-20a).

Drawing from this Pauline theology of identification, an interviewee who is an Episcopal priest describes the Christian core liberative experience as the awakening to the reflexive relationship between Christ and the human person:

> When you discover your true identity you discover that it's not yours—it's Christ. It is Buddha nature. It is universal and therefore connects you to everything. It goes beyond. That's why you are always trying to let go of your own judgments, your own ideas and impressions because they get in the way from knowing yourself truly.

As Paul writes in his letter to the Romans, the one who dies with Christ will also rise with Christ (Romans 6). The intertwining and commingling of identities is at the heart of his mystical theology of union. For Paul, the one participates with Christ in the transformative mystery through faith. Proclamation of the Gospel seeks to awaken seekers to the cruciform and resurrected identity that is simultaneously Christ's and one's own.

Conclusion: "Taste and See"

In this chapter, I examined the need to reclaim the mystical and contemplative dimensions of evangelism in the context of Christian-Buddhist engagement. I discussed how the Christian-Buddhist dialogue has excavated the Christian *kenotic-apophatic* tradition and considered how the rediscovery of the Christian contemplative-*apophatic* tradition, inspired by dialogue with Buddhism, can help the church address the challenges and opportunities of our post-modern situation.

Rooted in Pauline theology, grounded in the early Christian story, and patterned after the evangelizing ministry of Jesus, a practical theology of evangelism in correlation with Christian-Buddhist dialogue aims to guide seekers to a full appropriation of Christian identity. The Buddhist tradition's emphasis on praxis, method, and experience challenges Christianity to root evangelism in the context of a liberative experiential framework aimed at awakening, leading

and forming seekers to their spiritual identity in Christ. In this way, evangelism is closely connected to the task of spiritual formation.[556]

For much of its history, the personalist idiom for God has been the primary point of reference for understanding Christian evangelism.[557] Whether drawing from the Scriptural sources or the early creedal tradition, God has been referenced through the idiom of personhood (e.g., Lord, King, Savior, Father, Son, Spirit, and so on). While this personalist idiom is intrinsic to the Judeo-Christian tradition, an encounter with Buddhism suggests that Christian evangelism might draw upon Paul's mystical theology to expand the personalist idiom. The traditional use of a personalist approach in speaking of God does not preclude the use of other images and idioms

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[556] I find evangelism's resonance with spiritual formation in Claire Wolfteich's elaboration of spiritual formation in general, Christian spiritual formation in particular. She articulates:

> Spiritual formation is a process of sustained theological reflection and the learning of practices to foster rightful orientation to the divine. More specifically, Christian spiritual formation turns persons toward the incarnational God in Christ, revealed and made present through the work of the Spirit in the created world. God has created each person in the image and likeness of the divine (Gen 1:26-27). Yet human beings easily forget that created identity and mar the image. Spiritual formation leads people to a deeper awareness of who they most fundamentally are in God. It attunes them to carry a keen awareness of their created identities and a loving attentiveness to the created world... We are meant to be fully who we are. Moreover, spiritual formation invites people to "abide in Christ" (John 15:4) and to take on "the mind of Christ" (1 Cor 2:16), to see the world from the perspective of the compassionate Co-Sufferer and the Redeemer in whom life triumphs over death. Spiritual formation draws people into life "in the Spirit" and helps them to see that toward which God continues to call them.

Claire E. Wolfteich, *Navigating New Terrain: Work and Women's Spiritual Lives* (Mahwah, N.J.: Paulist Press, 2002), 163.

[557] Cf. Ben Campbell Johnson, *Speaking of God: Evangelism As Initial Spiritual Guidance* (Louisville, KY: Westminster/John Knox Press, 1991), chapter 1.

to image the divine. A theology of evangelism in dialogue with Buddhism explores ways of speaking about God that do not separate the presence of God from human existence so radically.

The task of Christian evangelism is to guide others to the liberative and transforming experience of the triune God. This experiential framework was the basis for Jesus' evangelism and the early Christian proclamation. Faithful evangelism aspires to be the very sharing of this core liberative experience of Christ with the whole human community. David Steindl-Rast, Benedictine monk and active participant in Christian-Buddhist dialogue, laments the common lack of synthesis in Christian spirituality between theological formulations and personal experience. In the end, the reflexive relationship between theology and experience must be rediscovered to ensure the vitality of the Christian tradition. The Trinitarian dogmas were not formulated in order to describe some divine object out there. They were formulated to describe the divine structure of every human being's innermost experience.[558]

If the structure of reality is intrinsically Trinitarian, the practice of evangelism is to guide seekers attend to the presence of God that is universally accessible, even in human finitude and brokenness. Contemporary Christian evangelism is faithful to Jesus' evangelism and the early Christian proclamation when it guides seekers to encounter directly what its words can only point to indirectly. Buddhist teacher Thich Nhat Hahn suggests that Buddhist teachers cannot transmit the enlightenment experience to their students, but must use ideas and concepts to point

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[558] Robert Aitken and David Steindl-Rast, *The Ground We Share: Everyday Practice, Buddhist and Christian* (Boston: Shambhala, 1996), 58.

the student toward the experience itself: "The issue is how to help the disciple go through the same kind of experience. For instance, you know how a mango tastes, and you may like to try to describe the taste of the mango, but it is better to offer the disciple a piece of mango so that he can have a direct experience."[559]

Surprisingly, the pedagogy offered by a Buddhist teacher bears a striking resemblance to the experiential logic of the Eucharist. A psalm verse and popular Eucharistic refrain invites believers to taste and see the goodness of the Lord. (Psalm 34:8)

Christian evangelism is the sacred practice of inviting seekers into this tasting that is an encounter with the mystery of the triune God who is at once accessible to human experience and beyond its reach. Ironically, it is the infinite knowability of God that draws the limited human mind to pursue the experience of the divine.

As postmodern life overwhelms people with the noise of incessant information and messages, there is a newfound urgency for the churches to draw from the contemplative wells of silence. More than ever, evangelism must welcome seekers into the experiential "knowledge too deep for words" (Ephesians 2.18–19). Perhaps it is this "relationship with silence" that has led so many contemporary seekers and faithful Christians alike to drink from the wells of Buddhist spirituality. The ancient wisdom of the East that proclaims the transformative power of silence parallels the insights of Christian contemplative masters who

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[559] Thich Nhat Hanh, *Going Home: Jesus and Buddha as Brothers*, 72.

sought a similar transformation in the encounter with God in the contemplative-*apophatic* experience of nothingness. What would evangelism itself look like if it sprang from the contemplative spirituality? I will recommend an alternate way of evangelism as spiritual guidance in the next conclusion chapter.

CHAPTER SIX

CONCLUSIONS: PRACTICAL RECOMMENDATIONS

In this dissertation, I have explored ways in which a Christian encounter with Buddhist practice can inform and transform Christian evangelism. Its primary question was how the practices of evangelism today in the multi-religious world are informed and re-shaped by taking seriously the issue of religious pluralism in general, and Buddhist-Christian dialogue in particular. The focus of this study was the theology of evangelism in relation to interreligious dialogue with the ultimate question of how this engagement revisions and contextualizes the theology, aims, and practice of evangelism. By conducting qualitative research aimed at describing and analyzing this specific Christian-Buddhist dialogue in terms of the lived experiences of ordinary people, this project attempted to identify and address practical theological issues that emerge from it and to articulate a practical theology of evangelism in correlation with Christian-Buddhist dialogue. In this concluding chapter, I seek to recommend and explore an alternate model of evangelism in the context of interreligious engagement. Because this dissertation has been focused on a particular form of interreligious engagement, that which focuses on religious experience, it needs to be noted that the recommendations within the dissertation will not address other dimensions of interreligious engagement such as that which is focused on theological and doctrinal discourse, or on social ethics and actions. Rather, I am attempting to present an interreligious practical theological model of evangelism as a form of contemplative spiritual guidance informed and shaped by a specific Christian-Buddhist spiritual

practice and experience of meditation and spiritual direction. Before proceeding with this task, I will identify some challenges and opportunities of Christian-Buddhist dialogue and revisit the issue of relationship between interreligious dialogue and evangelism in an attempt to find a new way of relating the two fundamental elements of missional practices of the churches in the religiously plural world.

Interreligious Dialogue as a Virtuous Christian Practice

In an age of unprecedented religious pluralism, interreligious dialogue has grown far beyond its earliest expressions as an intellectual curiosity or an exercise in quaint neighborliness. Today we recognize the interreligious encounter to be a necessity of responsible global citizenship and authentic Christian discipleship. Such exchange flows out of the Christian charge to create social structures built upon love, mutual understanding, and reconciliation. Beyond the global and political ramifications of interreligious dialogue, I argue Christian engagement in this conversation across traditions can and should be in itself an authentically Christian virtuous practice that fosters the deepening of faith, hope, and love.[560] Throughout this dissertation I have attempted to suggest this possibility of spiritual enrichment and evangelistic implications of the Christian-Buddhist encounter and dialogue. The striking parallels between these traditions are opportunities to clarify self-identity and to counterbalance the tendency that each tradition has

[560] Bryan Stone construes evangelism as "a virtuous practice" and suggests four virtues in the post-Christendom context: presence, patience, courage, and humility. See Bryan P. Stone, *Evangelism After Christendom: The Theology and Practice of Christian Witness* (Grand Rapids, Mich: Brazos Press, 2007), 277-312.

had to over-accentuate its founding impetus. Amid the obvious differences of culture, geography, history, and doctrine, Christian-Buddhist dialogue, still in its adolescence, offers wisdom and spiritual riches for its many participants, as demonstrated in this research.

In addressing the relationship between interreligious dialogue and evangelism, Volker Kuster identifies four possible models.[561] The two positions at either end of the spectrum involve either dialogue substituting for evangelism, on the one hand, or evangelism instrumentally using dialogue as a means of conversion, on the other hand. A third, mediating approach involves the conscious attempt to keep evangelism and dialogue structurally separate. This approach is exemplified by the World Council of Churches (WCC) and the Vatican, with their separate units for mission and evangelization (WCC)/ the Congregation for the Evangelization of Peoples (Vatican), and the subunit for interreligious dialogue (WCC)/ the Pontifical Council for Interreligious Dialogue (Vatican), respectively.

A fourth alternative explores the possibility of relating evangelism and dialogue dialectically. Within this model, Kuster describes the "double command" of interreligious dialogue: "1) to try to understand the religious other in a way that the other can recognize himself or herself in my perception; 2) to give witness and to share the best of one' own faith with each other."[562] Kuster further articulates a key component of genuine interreligious dialogue, one

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[561] Volker Kuster, "Toward an Intercultural Theology: Paradigm Shifts in Missiology, Ecumenics, and Comparative Religion," In Viggo Mortensen, eds., *Theology and the Religions: a Dialogue* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2003), 171-184.

[562] Ibid., 179.

which I readily affirm: "As a matter of fact, there can be no real dialogue without witness. Only someone who has a religious conviction and is willing to share it not only by questioning the other but also by allowing himself to be questioned gives due respect to the religious conviction of the other and can be taken seriously."[563] By this mutual witness in interreligious dialogue, both dialogue partners must be open to be corrected, changed, and even converted to others. In this sense, interreligious dialogue is "a spiritual discipline by which evangelizing Christians seek the mutual transformation of their partners and of themselves in repentance and hope," as Bryan Stone rightly expresses.[564]

Catherine Cornille has identified five virtues as foundational for interreligious dialogue and I believe these need to be nourished and cultivated in the task of evangelism as well: spiritual and doctrinal humility, commitment to a particular tradition, interconnection, empathy, and hospitality.[565] First, a genuine dialogue requires "a recognition of the presence of elements of genuine truth and value in the other religion and of the equal dignity and religious integrity of the partner in dialogue." As Lesslie Newbigin puts it, "Christians do not meet their partners in dialogue as those who possess the truth and holiness of God but as those who bear witness to a truth and holiness that are God's judgment on them and who are ready to hear the judgment

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[563] Ibid.

[564] Bryan P. Stone, *Evangelism After Christendom: The Theology and Practice of Christian Witness* (Grand Rapids, Mich: Brazos Press, 2007), 161.

[565] Catherine Cornille, *The Im-possibility of Interreligious Dialogue* (New York: Crossroad Pub. Co., 2008).

spoken through the lips and life of their partner of another faith."[566] Next, commitment as an "openness to change, while preserving the integrity and truth of one's own fundamental religious convictions," is indispensable.[567] A solid anchoring within a particular tradition serves as an asset to facilitate dialogue.[568] Third, genuine dialogue is undergirded and motivated by a sense of interconnection between different religious communities based on common external challenges (secularization, world peace, and alleviation of suffering) and common experience of Mystery and unifying transcendent reality. Fourth, the virtue of empathy as "process of transposing oneself into the feelings, the thoughts, and the experiences of another" not only enables one to gain a deeper understanding of the other, but also broadens and enriches one's own tradition which results in reciprocity.[569] Finally, hospitality as a virtue that welcomes and embraces the other as one's own in a spirit of kinship and "an attitude of openness and receptivity to those very differences as a possible source of truth," constitutes the sole sufficient condition for interreligious dialogue.[570] By virtue of hospitality, interreligious dialogue can lead both partners to mutual growth and change making space for Mystery. Cumulatively, these virtues or

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[566] Lesslie Newbigin, *The Open Secret: An Introduction to the Theology of Mission* (Grand Rapids, Mich: W.B. Eerdmans, 1995), 181-182.

[567] Cornille, *The Im-possibility of Interreligious Dialogue*, 92.

[568] Ibid., 94.

[569] Ibid., 138-140.

[570] Ibid., 177.

[10] Cornille, *The Im-possibility of Interreligious Dialogue*, 71-72.

conditions lead to a dialectical relating of evangelism and interreligious dialogue in a stance of bold humility. Cornille captures this dialectical nature of genuine dialogue well:

> [A]ll authentic dialogue necessarily contains a missionary and apologetic dimension. The fullness of dialogue may be regarded as a form of mutual proclamation in which participants alternately adopt the roles of missionary and seeker. While seemingly contradictory, these roles may coexist in a religious attitude capable of balancing humility and conviction.[571]

As these virtues should also be required for the practice of evangelism as well as interreligious dialogue, I suggest interreligious dialogue itself needs to be construed as a Christian virtuous practice through which Christians may grow in faith, hope, and love. James Fredericks observes three ways in which such interreligious dialogue can be a Christian practice.[572] First, dialogue fosters the church's proper self-awareness. Interreligious conversation guards against triumphalism by humbly acknowledging that the Christian community is a pilgrim people journeying toward God's kingdom and is itself not the kingdom in its fullness. Secondly, interreligious dialogue provides a necessary sense of "eschatological incompleteness" by reminding religions that in the end, no single tradition is triumphantly rewarded as the victor. The eschaton is not fundamentally a religious phenomenon that can be identified with one particular tradition; rather in the end, the eschaton belongs entirely to the sovereign God who transcends the particularity of religious expression so reverenced on this side of eternity.

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[11] Fredericks, 102.

Third and finally, interreligious dialogue becomes a Christian practice when it springs forth from the desire to love and serve others more fully. Knowing and understanding the lives of fellow seekers from other traditions enables us to love and serve them in a deeper way. The very act of getting to know others is the process of getting to know the Other. If the Christian call to *agape* is to be realized in a way commensurate with the scope and diversity of humanity, the interreligious encounter will increasingly become a Christian virtuous practice of evangelistic love and compassion.

Evangelism as Spiritual Guidance

As shown and examined in this study, the lived experiences of Christian-Buddhist encounters reveals that the appropriation of certain elements of its teachings and practices can deepen the Christian churches' capacity to proclaim the Gospel in the postmodern and multi-religious context. Drawing on this research, I argue that Buddhism's stress on personal experience, the pragmatic insistence on spiritual praxis, and the emphasis on the practice of spiritual direction make it an ideal dialogue partner for Christian churches. In an age defined by a fragmentary experience of reality, interreligious dialogue with Buddhism reminds churches of the possibility of proclaiming a Christian vision of reality that guides seekers to a unifying experience with all of reality amid a world of pluriformity, violence, and division. Paradoxically, engagement with Buddhist practice allows the salvaging of aspects within the Christian tradition

of spiritual guidance that are critical to reclaim if followers of Jesus are to address the spiritual hunger and proclaim the Gospel anew.

The roots of Christian spiritual direction are found in Christ, the way, the truth and the life.[573] Since Jesus' ministry of spiritual guidance, there have been various ways of spiritual direction in Christian tradition.[574] What is newly emerging and challenging aspects of this Christian practice in the contemporary world is its cross-cultural, multi-religious development in accordance with globalization and religious pluralism.[575] One of the benefits of the ecumenical and interfaith movements has been the immense cross-fertilization among spiritual paths. Today plurality in spirituality and spiritual guidance is perceived not only as a problematic reality but also as an opportunity of renewal or transformation of our faith and life.[576] One of the leading spiritual directors, Carolyn Gratton, points out its potential advantages:

> It offers us opportunities for learning both to respect the great variety of spiritual ways, and at the same time to deepen our appreciation for the unique gifts of our own tradition. It offers us a chance to participate in the historic grace/charisma of

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[573] Carolyn Gratton, "Spiritual Direction" *The New Dictionary of Catholic Spirituality*, ed. Michael Downey (Collegeville, Minnesota: Michael Glazier, 1993), 912.

[574] Cf. *Traditions of Spiritual Guidance*, ed. Lavinia Byrne (Collegeville, Minnesota: The Liturgical Press, 1990).

[575] Cf. *Common Journey, Different Paths: Spiritual Direction in Cross-Cultural perspective*, ed. Susan Rakoczy, IHM (Maryknoll, New York: Orbis Books, 1992); Howard A. Addison, *Show Me Your Way: The Complete Guide to Exploring Interfaith Spiritual Direction* (Woodstock, Vermont: Skylight Paths Publishing, 2000).

[576] Walter Principe suggests, "while the pluralism of spiritualities thus raises many issues and problems for understanding and judgment, this pluralism should nevertheless be viewed as one of the most significant revelation of God's wisdom and goodness." Cf. Walter Principe, "Theological Trends: Pluralism in Christian Spirituality" *The Way*, January 1992, 54-61.

> the ecumenical movement and of profound interfaith dialogue. There are deeper ways, too, in which this context can purify us and hasten our growth toward waiting for God in the darkness of faith, beyond formulas, ideas, and images.[577]

There are a variety of words used to describe spiritual direction and those who participate in it. The ministry or art itself has been called spiritual direction, guidance, companioning, and friendship. Historically, these have represented a continuum of authority. Direction has been the most prescriptive and least egalitarian, bordering on the master/disciple relationship. Spiritual guidance reflects a difference of experience more than that of authority—a veteran traveler along the spiritual path would use his or her acquired insights to help point the way for relative newcomers. Companioning and friendship indicate greater mutuality—that of equals offering counsel and support to each other.[578] A simple working definition of spiritual guidance is accompanying another in their journey in and with God who is Holy Mystery. "It is a multi-faceted experience of listening, responding, affirming, clarifying, teaching (occasionally), challenging (as appropriate) as two people seek the direction of the Spirit of God together."[579]

What has spiritual direction to do with evangelism? Having addressed the deficiency of models of evangelism as either proclamation or church growth "in an increasingly pluralistic and

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[577] Carolyn Gratton, *The Art of Spiritual Guidance* (New York: Crossroad, 1992), 28, 29.

[578] In this discussion, "direction and guidance" and "director and guide" will be used interchangeably for stylistic clarity. The term "seeker(s)" will be used in two different ways. One will reflect the general sense of those who are searching for meaning and exploring the wisdom of different traditions as part of their quest. The other, more technical usage will be in reference to those who have sought out spiritual direction and are in a guidance relationship. I use "seeker" in this sense because terms like "directee" and "advisee" are too clumsy, and "companion" or "friend" imply the mutuality of an equal peer relationship.

[579] Susan Rakoczy, "When difference matters: Reflections on spiritual direction in cross-cultural settings," *Spirituality And Spiritual Guidance*, The Way Supplement 1998/91, 136, 7.

post-Christian culture," William J. Abraham argues that evangelism needs to be expanded to include "spiritual direction, an introduction to the spiritual disciplines and the sacraments of the gospel, initiation into the basics of the Christian moral and doctrinal tradition, some orientation on the kinds of religious experiences which may accompany entry into the kingdom of God."[580] Thus he seeks to revision the church's evangelistic practices more comprehensively consisting of several dimensions of the initial formation of Christian disciples as an integral component of its evangelism: social (incorporation into the local church), cognitive (intellectual assent to the Christian worldview), a moral vision for life, personal encounter with God, the reception and development of spiritual gifts for service, and the practice of spiritual disciplines for growth in discipleship including spiritual direction.[581]

While Abraham takes spiritual direction as a process of Christian formation for new believers, Ben Campbell Johnson argues that "initial spiritual guidance" can serve as a new way of evangelism.[582] Like Abraham, Johnson is also critical of modern model of evangelist as "the proclaimer of the gospel" in that he or she has been widely perceived as "the manipulative, religious salesperson."[583] Alternatively the model of evangelist as "the spiritual guide," he

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[580] William J. Abraham, "The Theology of Evangelism: The Heart of the Matter," *Interpretation* 48 (April 1994): 125-126.

[581] See William J. Abraham, *The Logic of Evangelism: The Creed, Spiritual Gifts, and Disciplines* (Grand Rapids, Mich: W.B. Eerdmans, 1989). Chapters 5, 6, 7.

[582] Ben Campbell Johnson, *Speaking of God: Evangelism as Initial Spiritual Guidance* (Louisville, KY: Westminster/John Knox Press, 1991).

[583] Ibid., 15.

suggests, can revitalize the evangelistic practice within mainline churches by "speaking of God" to three groups of people effectively and moderately: (1) those who believe but do not belong, who dropped out of the church in the sixties; (2) the seekers, those who have tested the nondenominational fellowship, the fundamentalist congregations, and the ego-centered experience of the New Age Movement or the inwardness of Eastern religion; and (3) persons nurtured in the church without a dynamic experience of God.[584]

The possibility of spiritual direction as a form of evangelism lies in their interconnected focus, aim, and orientation as Johnson seeks to combine two disciplines:

> Both concern the divine-human relation: evangelism seeks to initiate it and spiritual direction to mature it. Both deal with human consciousness: evangelism seeks to create a new center in human awareness (the presence of Christ), and spiritual direction endeavors to expand that awareness. Both evangelism and spiritual direction expect a response of trust from the subject: evangelism calls for an initial response of faith in Christ as Savior and Lord, and spiritual direction a continued disposition of trust in Christ's activity in one's life.[585]

The style and the approach of the spiritual director seem full of implications for the evangelistic task by respecting and appreciating contemporary Americans' spirituality of seeking. He writes:

> The spiritual director engages the person not as an alien but as a fellow citizen, not as an outsider, but as a brother or sister. The goal of spiritual direction aims not so much for one person to change another as for the director to help the directee notice the movement of God in his or her life. The relationship of the director to the directee requires "seeking with" rather than "acting upon"; both

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[584] Ibid., 29-30.

[585] Ibid., 26.

> evangelization and spiritual direction seek to discern the presence of God in a person's life, rather than impose a predigested formula of religious truth.[586]

Philip Meadows insightfully elaborates a Wesleyan approach to evangelism as spiritual direction accompanying three inseparable dimensions in his article titled "The Journey of Evangelism:" (1) there is the dimension of proclaiming the gospel, which broadly characterizes any activity having the form of call and response; (2) evangelism as initial spiritual direction involves equipping seekers with the means of grace, both works of piety and mercy. It is the role of the evangelist to discern and recommend these means according to the particular need of the seeker; (3) evangelism as spiritual direction involves journeying alongside the seeker as those sharing the common goal of entering and deepening communion with God. Evangelists do not lead seekers into their own private spiritual experience, but invite them to share in Christian fellowship, as brothers and sisters in the family of God, and fellow participants in the kingdom of heaven.[587]

Angela Reed supports the possibility of spiritual direction as a model of evangelism in the context of spiritual seekers in that "spiritual direction provides tools for relationships with people on a spiritual quest who are outside the church," as shown in her illustration of the story of real persons she interviewed:

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[586] 26-27.

[587]Philip R. Meadows,"The journey of evangelism," in *The Oxford Handbook of Methodist Studies,* eds., William J. Abraham and James E. Kirby (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009), 411-429.

> Jason is rather surprised to find himself in church this Sunday. It is not something he ever expected to be doing, yet here he was again. Jason is openly agnostic and does not mind saying so, yet something draws him back to this place. It started when his friend Karina invited him to hear her band play on a Sunday morning. Jason was surprised to be invited but wanted to support his friend and was frankly a little curious about this place that she raved about. His parents had only taken him to church occasionally on holidays when he was a child, and he had found it utterly boring. He had come to think it was quite a pompous thing to believe that you knew the way to God — a God that probably doesn't even exist. Karina never said much about what her church believed and so Jason was curious about what to hear the pastor talking during the service about some of his own religious doubts.
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> Karina introduced Jason to pastor Thomas after the service, and they had an interesting conversation. Thomas did not seem to mind hearing Jason's challenging questions. In fact, he invited him to come again next week. Their relationship grew and now they meet together every month for coffee. Thomas accepts the fact that Jason is not easily swayed towards faith in God. He welcomes Jason's questions about God in a world suffering and injustice. He even admits that he would rather talk with someone who has questions than someone who seems to have all the answers.
>
> Clearly Thomas has strong faith in God, but he doesn't push his perspective on others. Jason feels accepted right where he is at, as if Thomas genuinely cares about what Jason is thinking and feeling. Jason finds this completely surprising — in a good way. The he thinks about it, the more he recognizes that many in the congregation seem to be this way, including Karina. While he does not feel ready to make any radical changes on his outlook. Jason appreciates what he has found in Karina's church and he expects to stay a while and see if anything new might come out of this for him.[588]

What about people who "have been looking to the East for forms of meditation" outside of the church? Gordon Jeff suggests what I call a "contemplative model of evangelism as spiritual guidance" in the context of interreligious or interspiritual spiritual direction:

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[588] Angela H. Reed, *Quest for Spiritual Community: Reclaiming Spiritual Guidance for Contemporary Congregations* (London: T & T Clark, 2011), 45.

> They may, however, not yet be able to hear any very direct Christian teaching...So, rather than speak to the deaf, I prefer to trust the Holy Spirit and the intuition of enquirers, which when they are ready will prompt them to look for answers to the more directly Christian questions. If people are looking for ways of learning to be quiet, I do not think we should be afraid of inviting them to practice simple breathing and awareness exercises, and ways towards quietening the mind. If we can take literally the words, 'Be still and know that I am God,' we may learn to trust the indwelling Holy Spirit to do the work for us... Simple exercises to develop awareness of the body can be suggested, and exercises in quietening the mind, in being aware of thoughts and distractions, can be suggested to believer and unbeliever alike. And if these are persevered with there are likely to arise further questions which can take us into more specifically Christian teaching-but only if there is a wish for it.[589]

As Jeff suggests, if the term spiritual direction is not to be used only for a professing Christian and can be accommodated to those who are spiritual seekers or adherents of other religions,[590] then the roles of the spiritual guide seem to fit well with the tasks of evangelism in a dialogical, invitational, and embodied way through listening, praying, and contemplating together, seeking encounters with God.

In a talk titled "Spiritual Guidance and the Attainment of Nirvana," the Dalai Lama remarks on the role of the Buddhist spiritual guide in attaining nirvana: "For there to be a good and strong spiritual community, there must be teachers who teach the path well, and for that, they must provide proper role models. Teaching about spiritual matters does not just take place

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[589] Gordon H. Jeff, *Spiritual Direction for Every Christian* (London: SPCK, 1987, 2007), 86-87.

[590] Linda Crain presents four possible relations between the director and directee in the model of multifaith spiritual tradition: (1) share the same faith tradition; (2) be from similar faith traditions; (3) not share the same faith tradition; and/or (4) not recognize or belong to a faith tradition but consider themselves 'spiritual.' See Linda R. Crain, "*The Ministry of Multifaith Spiritual Direction, Theological Literacy and Theological Reflection*," (D. Min Thesis, Boston University School of Theology, 2007), 1, 5.

on the intellectual level. The teacher must also show what is taught to his or its followers by example. The teacher must provide an example for the eyes of his or its followers. Then the students will develop a genuine appreciation or respect."[591]

Here he is referring to the necessity of seeing genuine holiness of life, as the fruit of transformation, in the spiritual guide, a fruit that demonstrates consistency between wisdom and character. Sister Donald Corcoran, a Benedictine nun, talks on the role of the spiritual guide from the monastic experience, and this is of course the Christian contemplative vision stemming from the early Catholic Church. One of the points she emphasizes is that the human spiritual guide is an instrument of the Divine. She puts it succinctly: "It is the Spirit, promised by Jesus Christ, who will 'teach you all things.' This is the reason the Christian tradition has always emphasized that Christ or the Holy Spirit is the true guide of the soul—the human teacher being a vehicle of grace, as it were."[592]

Given the above scholarship and drawing on the findings from my qualitative research, I recommend that there can and should be a contemplative way of evangelism as spiritual guidance to help interreligious seekers in their own spiritual journeys. As one creative way of outreach in the context of post-modernism, Richard Peace presents "'contemplative evangelism'

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[591] Donald W. Mitchell and James A. Wiseman, *The Gethsemani Encounter: A Dialogue on the Spiritual Life by Buddhist and Christian Monastics*. (New York: Continuum, 1997), 119. For a discussion of Buddhist model of spiritual direction and the relationship between Teacher and Student in Buddhism and other religions, see Norvene Vest, *Tending the Holy: Spiritual Direction Across Traditions* (Harrisburg, PA.: Morehouse Pub, 2003), 3-60.

[592] 126.

in which seekers and the curious are invited to engage in spiritual activities such as silent retreats, liturgical services, spiritual direction, Ignatian small groups, spiritual journaling and autobiography, and prayer experiences so as to encounter God directly in an interpretive environment that incarnates the presence of Jesus."[593] Arguing the necessity of blurring evangelism and spiritual formation, Peace concretely describes contemplative evangelism:

> I suggest that it would mirror the results of careful listening to God: it would express directly the love of God which we are experiencing ourselves and to which we invite others. It would be evangelism that bids others to come into this space with us and seek God. It would be evangelism that urges others to notice and remember the many ways God has already been active in their lives. ...This would be evangelism out of the silence rather than via the loud proclamation. It would be evangelism of companionship—as both evangelist and seeker reach out to God...It would be evangelism of spiritual direction (in which the voice of God is sought) rather than evangelism of the witnessing monologue.[594]

The most critical practical issue is not why, but how we can construct a contemplative way of evangelism as spiritual guidance grounded in the Mystery of God and embracing other religions' rich spiritual heritage. Of course there are immediately two opposite approaches to

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[593] Richard Peace, "Evangelism," in *Dictionary of Mission Theology: Evangelical Foundations*, eds., John Corrie, Samuel Escobar, and Wilbert R. Shenk (Nottingham, England: InterVarsity Press, 2007), 118.

[594] Richard Peace, "Evangelism and Spiritual Formation, " *Theology News and Notes*, Fuller Theological Seminary (Fall 2004): 10-23. For a scholarly discussion of conversion and evangelism, see Richard Peace, *Conversion in the New Testament: Paul and the Twelve* (Grand Rapids, Mich: W.B. Eerdmans Pub, 1999). For the practical guide to the ministry of contemplative evangelism, he published many books to be helpful in the evangelical churches as well as liberal churches. See *Holy Conversation: Talking About God in Everyday Life* (Downers Grove, Ill: IVP Connect, 2006);Richard Peace and Jennifer Howe Peace, *Spiritual Storytelling: Discovering and Sharing Your Spiritual Autobiography : a Small Group Discussion Guide* (Colorado Springs, Colo: NavPress, 1996); *Spiritual Autobiography: Discovering and Sharing Your Spiritual Story* (Colorado Springs, Colo: NavPress, 1998); *Spiritual Journaling: Recording Your Journey Toward God : a Spiritual Formation Study Guide* (Colorado Springs, Colo: NavPress, 1998); *Meditative Prayer: Entering God's Presence* (Colorado Springs, CO: NavPress, 1998); *Small Group Evangelism: A Training Program for Reaching Out with the Gospel* (Downers Grove, Ill: InterVarsity Press, 1985).

developing a ministry of evangelism as spiritual guidance in an interreligious context. One seeks a direct application of the traditional model of evangelism as proclamation rejecting any interaction with other religious traditions. The other is uncritical acceptance of the methods and techniques of other religions' spiritualities. Neither is desirable, as I argue below, and I suggest a few recommendations as follows.

First, we need accurately to understand contemporary seekers' religious experience. We usually affirm the hermeneutical structure of experience and context. Yet it is easy to ignore it in practice when we try to understand a tradition where it is particularly formed. Just as there is no pure context but an experienced context, so there is no simple experience but a contextualized experience. Experience is fleshed out in the interpretive framework of a specific living context. Experience and context determine each other and thereby constitute an object to be interpreted. But we have a problem that either contextualized experience may be perverted, or experienced context may be distorted. Either a Buddhist's experience may mis-contextualize the Christian message, or a Christian context may make him or her misunderstand the Buddhist experience of Christianity. These cross-hermeneutical problems call for a cross-cultural, multi-faith methodology, which holds a relational integrity between experience and context so as to critically appropriate both the contextualized experience and the experienced context.

It is my idea that our quest for a contemplative way of evangelism as spiritual guidance can begin with the rediscovery of the ancient methods of perceiving religious truth and spiritual practice, which is also found in the other religious traditions and spiritualities. As demonstrated

in the witnesses of my interviewees, contemporary seekers discredit soteriologically exclusive *a prioristic* paradigm and the methodology of Christian evangelism as propositional/ rational presentation of the Gospel disconnected "lived experience of faith" in a post-modern and religiously plural context. The modern model of evangelism was understood as such: communicate the propositions of the gospel, identify the listener's errant beliefs, and challenge the listener to adopt correct beliefs.[595] Newbigin's early insight needs to be heard again: "The way in which the gospel will come alive to every human person will be known in that person's experience and cannot be determined a priori."[596] Christian evangelism needs to address not only the cognitive aspect of gospel to peoples' head but also the experiential aspect of gospel to their heart. In the context of spiritual guidance, Gratton notes: "People live out not just according to the conviction in their rational minds, but also by the feelings in their hearts and in their guts. Spiritual guidance can help people to anchor those feeling hearts and guts in spiritual foundations. It can help people to accept life changes, even painful ones, as doors opening on to new life."[597]

Nevertheless it is neither possible nor desirable to abandon cognitive propositions or verbal proclamation, for these are important, though not sufficient, tools for us to use to comprehend and communicate Christian beliefs and practices. It is not sound at all for us to hold

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[595] Brad J. Kallenberg, *Live to Tell: Evangelism for a Postmodern Age*(Grand Rapids: Brazos Press, 2002), 70.

[596] Lesslie Newbigin, *The Finality of Christ* (Eugene Or: Wipf & Stock, 2009, originally published in 1969), 260.

[597] Carolyn Gratton, *The Art of Spiritual Guidance* (New York: Crossroad, 1992), 41-2.

that rational argumentation and apologetic are to be totally discarded in our new way of evangelism. However, what we rediscover through contemporary seekers and interreligious practitioners' experiences is the fact that there are realities and spiritual teachings hard to get access only with rationality and verbal communication. We need to emphasize that these are necessary but imperfect tools to help contemporary seekers comprehend the world, universe, humanity, nature and Ultimate reality. We are awakened to the fact that in interreligious engagement we have had contemplative ways of comprehending and representing the realities beyond reason and rationalism. The perceived need for missiologically-inclusive correlational paradigm of evangelism is closely linked with this rediscovery and awareness of the mystical and contemplative dimensions of the Gospel as a source of evangelism and calls for renewal of contemplation in the practice of evangelism.

Renewal of Contemplative Spirituality

As demonstrated in this dissertation, one of the prevailing reasons for the contemporary interreligious seeker’s attraction to Buddhist spiritualities is his or her hunger for spiritual experience. Most Christians remain almost totally unaware of the spiritual potential contained in their own tradition. Even within the context of monastic practice and experience, Thomas Keating, who has been a member of a community of Cistercian monks since 1944, confesses he

has had the rare opportunity to absorb the contemplative tradition of Christianity.[598] Keating illustrates this situation within the Catholic Church:

> As a result, the Church has been in a spiritual desert for the past several centuries and unable to nourish its children with the solid food of contemplative prayer. A significant indication of this can be found in the massive movement of Catholics toward Eastern religions in order to investigate their techniques and methods of spirituality. Many have found in them the contemplative dimension that was lacking in their own religious training.[599]

In this respect, the renewal of contemplation within Christian tradition is desirable and is a recommended response to contemporary seekers' spiritual hunger and needs which have to be addressed in the practice of evangelism today.

But this strategy contains difficulties in the life of the Church. For a long time, contemplative prayer has been considered a form of prayer reserved for monks and something extraneous to the ordinary Christian. Recent years have seen the awakening in the Church of a certain interest in contemplation, and the form of contemplative prayer has been introduced into the life of many Christians through schools of prayer, prayer groups, and retreat movements. However, it remains a fact that contemplative prayer is still limited to particular groups and movements, while the majority of Christians do not practice it.

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[598] Thomas Keating, "Theological Issues in Meditative Technologies," *Interfaith Spirituality*, The Way Supplement 78 (Autumn 1993), 54.

[599] Thomas Keating, "Charismatic Renewal and Contemplation," ed., Paul Hinnebusch, O.P., *Contemplation and Charismatic Renewal* (New York/Mahwah: Paulist Press, 1986), 29.

I argue that contemplation is not something reserved exclusively for monks, but is the vocation of every Christian, although there are different degrees of practicing.[600] If average Christians are not informed about the contemplative tradition of Christianity, and if it is not appreciated as an integral element of their Christian life, then their use of Buddhist meditative practices will remain an extraordinary experimentation and finally cause serious questions such as a Christian identity and the integrity of Christian faith. Therefore, the Christian's use of Buddhist meditation into their spiritual practices requires, above all, the effort to rediscover the value and the place of contemplation in the Christian life. Catholics will be in a better position to accomplish this task if they first rediscover the forgotten richness of contemplative Christianity in both its *kataphatic* and *apophatic* manifestations.[601] What about Protestants? Does this contemplative spirituality reflect the Protestant tradition? Can Protestants use this kind of spiritual practices with their integrity? There may be those who judge that contemplative spirituality is the domain of the Catholic faith, and not of the Protestant Reformation and its offshoots. Yet, as Joseph Driskill demonstrates, Protestants can share their spiritual heritage and practices with Catholics and even other faiths:

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[600] See Paul Hinnebusch, "Contemplation is for All," *Contemplation and Charismatic Renewal* (New York/Mahwah: Paulist Press, 1986), 7-26.

[601] Tom Chetwynd, who was converted to Catholicism as a youth, tells the story of how his skeptical first encounter with Zen Buddhism led him to discover the rich Christian tradition of contemplative prayer. In his book he explores the surprisingly Zen-like teachings of the Desert Fathers and other Christian meditation masters whose practice stems from the very first Christian communities. See Tom Chetwynd, *Zen & The Kingdom of Heaven: Reflections on the Tradition of Meditation in Christianity and Zen Buddhism* (Boston: Wisdom Publications, 2001).

> Because spiritual practices do reflect certain theological traditions and perspectives, it is important for the leaders to have some knowledge of the theological assumptions they may implicitly be teaching through their use of given practices. This is not to say, however, that Protestants cannot use Roman Catholic spiritual practices. Protestants need to claim the first sixteen centuries of the church as their own. Many practices in the pre-Reformation period of church history can be reclaimed without violating Protestant principles or beliefs. Spiritual practices from other faiths may also be useful.[602]

During the last two decades, a number of Protestant leaders, both clergy and laity, have sought renewal and guidance by turning to Roman Catholic retreat houses for spiritual guidance. They found that spiritual growth added a depth and richness to life that had been neglected by their churches.

In fact, as my qualitative research indicated in chapter four, a number of Protestants are freely exploring and practicing Catholic traditions as well as other religious spiritualities. What is commonly needed for both Catholics and Protestants who take seriously the pluralistic interreligious context is to retrieve their forgotten traditions with radical openness to other traditions.

Evangelism with a "Third Eye": an Asian Proposal

In this final part of the conclusion, I will present an Asian perspective on the reconstruction of Christian evangelism in dialogue with Asian religious traditions in general, and Zen Buddhism in particular, drawing on C.S. Song's theology. Just as I situated myself as an

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[602] Joseph D. Driskill, *Protestant Spiritual Exercises: Theology, History, and Practice* (Morehouse Publishing, 1999), 68.

Asian Christian in the Introduction, so also I intend to close my dissertation with an Asian reflection, seeking this research's implications for Asian Christians as well as American Christians. While there are important limitations when attempting to speak about the entirety of Asia, I believe that Song's work provides an important basis for speaking of Asian patterns of theological reflection that can be helpful here.

Recognizing the problem of inculturation of Christianity in China, C.S. Song proposes "Third Eye theology" as an Asian way of doing theology.[603] The title of his book is very symbolic. In Zen Buddhism, to reach an understanding, one overcomes the dichotomy between subject and object. They call this epistemological and hermeneutical perspective the "third eye." If we use another analogy, the primitive Christian community is the first eye, the Greco-Roman perspective is the second eye, and the Asian perspective is the third eye. For C.S. Song, doing theology in Asia with the perspective of the third eye means to expose the mystery of God incarnate in Asia through Christ, that is, incarnational theology. So how are Christ and God perceived to Asians' third eyes?

First, Asians do not describe God, the ultimate reality, in logical language; instead they experience God in present day life. More specifically, the foundation of culture in East Asia was influenced by the Middle Way or the Mean (中庸) and the Sincerity (誠) of the Confucian classics, the emptiness and fullness of Tao thought, and the *prajna* and *sunyata* of Mahayana

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[603] Choan-Seng Song, *Third –Eye Theology: Theology in Formation in Asian Settings* (Maryknoll: Orbis Books, 1979).

Buddhism. This middle way is nothing but the proper and right position of all things as suchness. It is the place from which to produce the universe with sincerity. The Doctrine of The Mean reads as follows: "Sincerity is the way of Heaven. The attainment of sincerity is the way of men. He who possesses sincerity, is he who, without an effort, hits what is right, and apprehends, without the excise of thought; he is the sage who naturally and easily embodies the right way. He who attains to sincerity, is he who chooses what is good, and firmly holds it fast."[604]

For East Asian people, truth as the ultimate reality works by emptying Himself out, yet at the same time He fills up the universe. Here the paradox of emptiness-fullness is operating. Since God's creative work in renewing the universe never ceases, for the East Asians the ultimate reality is felt within the present experience of the creative world. The absolute transcendence of "the wholly Other" is hardly understood except as a theologically abstract being. Some Western theologians and missiologists have criticized it as pantheism, humanism, or atheism. However, there are many points of compatibility with Christianity as well. If we say that the ultimate reality is inseparable from the creatively interpenetrating process of the universe, then we are saying something similar to St. Paul's testimony in his pastoral letters to the Ephesians and in Athens:

> One God and Father of us all, who is above all, through all, and in all. (Eph. 4:6)
> He is not far from each one of us, for in him we live and move and have our being. (Acts 17: 27-28)

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[604] Confucius, and James Legge, *The Confucian Analects, the Great Learning & the Doctrine of the Mean* (New York: CosimoClassics, 2009).

Second, as C.S. Song indicated, creation and redemption are inseparable and East Asians regard neither of them to be in chronological order.[605] Therefore, God's salvation history is not a sudden intervention of God into human history in order to solve the unfortunate reality of sin found in the created world. The creation event itself is a salvific redemptive event from the very beginning. Order out of chaos, meaning out of nonsense, light out of darkness, life out of no-life, dynamic creation out of inactive tranquility, all these creative activities are redemptive works of God. So to East Asians, creation and redemption are like two sides of a coin. The witness to salvation history as reported in the scriptures is meaningful to East Asians only as long as it means that creation is redemption, and redemption is a new creation. In other words, the creation of Heaven and Earth, the creation of Adam, human's fall in Eden, the calling of Abraham, the covenant with Israel, the sending of Jesus Christ, the founding of the Church, the ending of the world at the judgment, the completion of the universe, all this linear salvation history is a typical model for interpreting the scriptures. Yet, for East Asians, this linear story is too simple to accommodate the diverse life experiences of Asians over thousands of years.

For Asian eyes, God's creation and redemption are one and starts from 'here and now' and expands to the whole universe, thus it accommodates the present life reality. For East Asians, the center of life is here and now.

Third, East Asian spirituality especially emphasizes what I will call “body method.” Body method focuses on the unity of life, the concretization of life, the materialization of life,

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[605] Choan-Seng Song, *Third –Eye Theology: Theology in Formation in Asian Settings*, 39-40.

the sacramental aspect of life by overcoming the dualism of body and mind. In the East Asian way of thought, a person does not possess a body; a person is a body. Body and mind are not two separate entities; they are one reality. In 'sitting meditation' (*son* in Korean, *zazen* in Japanese) in Buddhism and 'Quiet Sitting' in Neo-Confucianism, the human body is a beginning and end of spiritual practice. Breath control and harmonizing body with mind is all part of spiritual discipline. Asians read, understand, and experience the words of the scriptures with their bodies (體得 in Chinese letter).

What the Asian evangelist as spiritual guide needs is to find a way to communicate the Christian Gospel with a third eye. That is to say, what is required is dialogue with Asian spiritualities based upon the premise that Christianity maintains its own particular story and self-identity while being correlated with the Asian religions. Such an attempt at the process of mutual dialogue shows that Christian evangelism as spiritual guidance can only take place through a widening of the Christian evangelist's spiritual horizon. In East Asian culture, Christianity cannot replace the traditional religions in the manner of a radical paradigm shift. The spiritual heritage of East Asian culture is too rich to be discarded. In the same vein, Pieris argues that the root problem of Christianity in Asia lies in Latin Christianity's practice of separating religion from culture and calls for not just in*culturation* but in*religionization* of Christian church in Asia. He writes:

> The Council says that the missionary responsibility of the Church which consists in restoring the values of other religions to Christ their Maker, tends to fulfillment at the end of time (A.G. 9). Now, if the Church herself is straining towards fulfillment at the end of time (L.G. 5) could we say that both the Church and other

> religions should find fulfillment in Christ in the Kingdom at the end of time? Should one therefore speak of mutual fulfillment, mutual conversion, mutual completion ... by which all religions including Christianity march towards fulfillment in the Total Christ which is the Kingdom.[606]

For the mutual enrichment and creative transformation of both Christian evangelist and Asian seeker, they have to be co-pilgrims toward God, whose "mystery is wider than that revealed in Jesus, but God cannot be less than that revealed in Jesus."[607] With this conviction about the wideness of God's revelation, and the possibility of encountering Christ within and without the Christian tradition, the contemplative model of Christian evangelism as spiritual guidance seeks to witness both humbly and boldly Christ, who is crucified and resurrected, to a world beset by division, violence and hunger.

This dissertation aims at a transformation of Christian evangelism informed and shaped by the Christian-Buddhist encounter and dialogue. I began it with a story of a young Catholic man's encounter with a Korean Zen master at Harvard. I conclude it with another story of an Asian Zen master's challenge to a Christian monk at St. Joseph's Abbey in Spencer, Massachusetts:

> It was the Zen master's first visit to the monastery, and he was so impressed by the spirit of prayer and quiet withdrawal that he offered to lead the monks in a

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[606] Aloysius Pieris, "The Church, the Kingdom and the other Religions." *Dialogue* 22 (1970): 5. Also see Pieris, "Interreligious Dialogue and Theology of Religions: An Asian Paradigm," *Horizons* 20/1 (1993) For an in-depth study of Pieris' views on the enreligionization, see Hans Tschiggerl, "Mission and Dialogue: Aloysius Pieris' Theory of Enreligionization," *East Asian Pastoral Review* 34 (1997) 4: 261-84.

[607] Roger Haight, "Towards an Understanding of Christ in the Context of Other World Religions," *East Asian Pastoral Review* 26 (1989): 248.

retreat. In form the retreat followed the discipline of Zen, with long periods of contemplation mixed with occasional prayers and interviews with the master. What was distinctive was the content of the interviews. Instead of giving the monks a Zen *koan* to consider, the master chose to adapt his teaching to Christian tradition. When the first monk entered the master's room, the monk saw that the master had two copies of the New Testament in front of him, one in Japanese and one in English. The master said: "I like Christianity. But . . . I would not like it without resurrection." He leaned forward so that his face was only inches from the monk's and said: "Show me your resurrection. . . . That is your *koan*. Show me your resurrection."[608]

[608] Ernest Boyer, Jr., *A Way in the World: Family Life as Spiritual Discipline* (San Francisco: Harper & Row, 1984), 82-84. Quoted in David Eckel, "Show Me Your Resurrection," *Current Dialogue* (Geneva, Switzerland: World Council of Churches, Dialogue with People of Living Faiths and Ideologies) December 2011: 90.

APPENDIX A

IRB RESEARCH APPLICATION

1. Category of review: The applicant's assessment of whether the research is Non-exempt.

2. Project Title: Contemporary Christian-Buddhist Encounter in the United States of America: Its Implications for Christian Evangelism

3. Principal Investigator: Dongwon Goh
Ph. D. student, School of Theology, Boston University
Phone: 617-869-2580
E-mail: goeden@bu.edu
ID No: U95815228

4. Co-Investigators: N/A

5. Granting Agency and Date of Submission: N/A

6. Expected Duration of Study: Twelve months, ending October 2009

1. Description of Project

A.1. Objective and expected outcome: The purpose of this project is to investigate contemporary Christian-Buddhist encounters in the United States, in order to address the theological problematic about how interreligious dialogue relates to Christian evangelism and spirituality. I expect that the findings of this research can contribute to both the church and the society at large in promoting the mutual understanding of Buddhism and Christianity in terms of the lived experiences and practices of people.

A.2. Experimental design: This project will use qualitative method (in-depth interviews with 8-10 participants) to explore the research problem. This project is experimental because very little study has been done to understand interreligious conversion and religious hybridity that occurs at the level of spiritual practice.

A.3. Materials and procedures: See attached informed consent form and interview questions. Using principles of "chain" sampling, I will contact key informants and spiritual-retreat centers oriented to interfaith and Buddhist-Christian practices, asking for names of Buddhist or Christian

clergy and laity who are engaged with Buddhist-Christian practices. Collected names will be sorted and 8-10 people will be selected and will be contacted by e-mail or letter. If they are willing to participate, I will meet with them at a convenient place and time, and go over the informed consent form. If they agree, we will do the interview.

B. Criteria for the selection of Participants: a Buddhist convert who was a Christian, a Christian convert who was a Buddhist and a "spiritual seeker" who is practicing both Christian-Buddhist spiritual practices.

C. Information provided to participants: See attached informed consent form.

D. Circumstances for obtaining informed consent: Before beginning the interview, I will go over the informed consent form with those interested in participating, and if they consent, they will sign the form.

E. Expected benefits: For participants, it may provide them with an opportunity to remember and reconstruct their spiritual journeys (including conversion, if any) in a structured way. For the churches and theologians, findings of the interviews may be used for their ministerial and educational purposes.

F. Risks: There are no known risks associated with this study. If the participant feels uncomfortable at any time in the process, he or she is free to withdraw his or her consent and discontinue participation without prejudice.

G. Confidentiality: Each interview will be audio taped so that it may later be transcribed for analysis. To ensure the confidentiality of the information obtained, details that might identify the participant will be eliminated or changed.

2. Informed Consent Form.
I accept responsibility for assuring that this study will be carried out in accordance with all applicable federal state and local laws and regulations and in accordance with the policies of Boston University, with respect to the protection of human subjects participating in this study.

Signature of Principal Investigator Date

This application has been reviewed and approved for submission to the Charles River Campus IRB.

Chairman/Director of Department Date

APPENDIX B

Informed Consent Form

Project Title: Contemporary Christian-Buddhist Encounter in the United States of America: Its Implications for Christian Evangelism

Investigator: Dongwon Goh (Phone: 617-869-2580, E-mail: goeden@bu.edu)

Dear Participant:

I am a Ph. D. candidate at Boston University School of Theology. Thank you for considering participating in my doctoral dissertation research project on Christian-Buddhist encounter. Please read the information presented below. You will be asked to give your written consent at the end.

The purpose of this project is to investigate contemporary Christian-Buddhist encounters in the United States, in order to address the theological problematic about how interreligious dialogue relates to Christian evangelism and spirituality.

If you agree to participate, you will be asked to allow me to interview you at a mutually convenient location for about one or two hours. In this interview we will discuss your

experiences of Buddhist and/or Christian spiritual practices and, if any, conversion. The interview will be audio taped so that it may later be transcribed for analysis.

There are no known risks associated with this study. If you feel uncomfortable at any time in the process, you are free to withdraw your consent and discontinue participation without prejudice. Should you decide to withdraw from this study, all personal information, including audio taped recordings, will be destroyed. During or after the interview, you will be free to discuss any concerns raised by this study. If you have questions after the interview, you may contact me by telephone or email. To ensure the confidentiality of the information obtained, details that might identity you will be eliminated or changed. In the final dissertation held in the BUSTH library, and in any material that might be published from this study, every effort will be made to protect your identity.

Telling your spiritual journey in a structured way may be helpful for your spiritual reflection. Moreover, understanding your interreligious experiences will benefit both the church and the society at large in promoting the mutual understanding of Buddhism and Christianity. Your contribution is highly appreciated. Thank you.

I have read and understood the above information and willingly consent to participate in this study according to these guidelines. I understand that I will receive a copy of this signed consent form.

Signature Date

APPENDIX C

Interview Guide

Background Information:

Sex: Male ( ) Female ( ) Age:

Ethnicity: Religious affiliation:

Education: Profession:

1. Were you born in a specific religious family?

2. Did you have any kind of faith or spiritual practice before encountering Buddhism (or Christianity)?

3. How have you learned about Buddhism (or Christianity)? Monks? Classes? Retreats? Books? Internet?

4. What feelings/attitudes did you have when you thought about Buddhism (or Christianity)?

5. Have you learned about other religions?

6. What is your earliest memory of any experience that you might describe as sacred/ spiritual?

7. What led you to start practicing Buddhist (or Christian) spiritual practices?

8. What kind of practices?

9. What attracted you do it?

10. How and where is your engagement practiced?

11. How long have you been involved in it?

12. Why did you not just continue doing spiritual practices following your own Christian tradition instead of coming to Buddhist spiritual practices?

13. Was there something lacking in Christianity that led you to seek something in Buddhism, or did you have some dissatisfaction with Christianity that led you to Buddhist practices?

14. What have been occurred to you while practicing Buddhist (or Christian) spiritual practices? (Experiences)

15. Was there a particular person(s) or group(s) who played an influential role in your engagement?

16. How would you describe your relationship to this person(s)/ group(s)?

17. What, if any, scriptural, theological, ecclesial, and other ideas and values imbedded/ informed the engagement with Buddhist or Christian practices?

18. How is that engagement guided, supported or rejected within your church/denomination?

19. Have you converted to Buddhism (or Christianity)?

20. If yes, what are your motivations and aims of conversion?

21. How has your life changed as a result of your conversion?

22. If no, what are the reasons you did not?

23. How, if at all, has Buddhism (or Christianity) influenced the way you practice your faith?

24. How has that encounter impacted your understanding of Buddhism or Christian faith and the practice of evangelism?

25. How, if any, do you practice evangelism?

26. How would you identify your religious identity?

27. If you are practicing Buddhist practices as a Christian, how would you describe the forms or types of your inter-religious practices?

28. In what ways do you see Buddhism and Christianity contradicting or complimenting each other?

29. What do you think of the benefits or values of Buddhist spiritual practices for Christians?

30. What do you think of the dangers or limitations of inter-religious practices for Christians?

31. What would you like to practically recommend to individuals, local churches and denominational organizations (or spiritual centers) as adequate responses for inter-religious dialogues in relation to the practice of evangelism?

32. Other input or comments, especially on the tasks of the Buddhist-Christian dialogue and the practice of evangelism in the context of religious pluralism

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