

EVANGELICAL INTERFAITH

dialogue

Fuller Theological Seminary



EAST OF ATHENS: The Spirit of Christ and the Way of Buddhism • Featured Article: Amos Yong

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At a Glance



04

Amos Yong

The Holy Spirit, the Middle Way, and the Religions: A Pentecostal Inquiry in a Pluralistic World

Amos Yong offers a personal narrative highlighting his journey as a theologian who is committed to addressing the complexities of a pluralistic world. His emphasis on the Holy Spirit's work in his trinitarian framework offers a helpful corrective to the general underdevelopment of *pneumatology* in much Evangelical theology. Theology that is responsible to Christian tradition and responsive to contextual realities, argues Yong, must be undertaken in the public square in the presence of other religions.



16

Veli-Matti Kärkkäinen

A Fellow Pentecostal Theologian's Musings

Veli-Matti Kärkkäinen picks up on Yong's emphasis of interfaith dialogue as being necessarily a personal encounter between believers. Kärkkäinen argues that while there is value in comparative theologies between religious traditions, it is religion as experienced at the grassroots level and not primarily through books where interfaith dialogue necessarily returns. Thus it is in the face and life of our Buddhist neighbor in which we are given the task of discerning the Spirit's work in their life.



18

Robert S. Covolo

What Evangelicals Can Learn from Amos Yong

Robert Covolo demonstrates how Yong's *pneumatological* turn steers dialogue away from employing universal categories that fail to deal adequately with the particularity of other religions. He goes on to argue that such an emphasis on the person and work of the Holy Spirit can enhance Evangelical resources for interfaith dialogue by complimenting the widespread Christological categories already in use.



20

Ken Gnanakan

A Response Commending Yong's Personal Touch

Ken Gnanakan shows how a pneumatological approach to theology can awaken Evangelicals to their own culturally embedded version of Christianity. He finds Yong's Charismatic and Evangelical religious roots useful in helping empower the church for mission—especially in the area of helping discern the Spirit's work in culture among persons of other religions.

22

William Kenneth Nelson

Praxis: Interactions Between Christians and Buddhists in Thailand

William Kenneth Nelson offers a portrait of Christian-Buddhist interactions in Thailand. Although the origins of Buddhism lie in India, Buddhism has made its way into the fabric of Thai culture and has grown to over 62 million adherents. At a mere .3 percent of the population, Christian presence is a small community in a predominantly Buddhist culture. Thai Christians are most effective in their witness, writes Nelson, when their lives exhibit what it means to be both authentically Thai and faithfully Christian.

Editorial Note

Given Buddhism's missionary impulse and the relative ease with which it can be translated across cultural boundaries, snapshots of Buddhism as it is currently manifested in various cultures are presented throughout this issue of the journal. Included in this description is a brief history of the development of Buddhism in that context and its appeal to inhabitants of those cultures today.

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Vision Statement

This journal seeks to create space for Evangelical scholars and practitioners to dialogue about the dynamics, challenges, practices, and theology surrounding interfaith work, while remaining faithful to the gospel of Jesus and his mission for his Church.

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EAST OF ATHENS

The Spirit of Christ and the Way of Buddhism

What if the Apostle Paul went to China instead of Athens?¹ Or what if we could follow the Apostle Thomas on the Silk Road and hear his message to those who lived east of Ephesus? How might our understanding of Christianity look different if the epistles were written to churches in Confucian cultures rather than Greco-Roman?



In contexts where Hinduism and Buddhism emerged and took root, hearing the gospel in “their own tongue” (Acts 2:1–12) would have entailed using languages and thought forms of a distinctly *Eastern* mold. Most certainly the titles of Messiah (Hebrew), Kyrios/Lord (Greco-Roman), and Logos (Greek) would have sounded foreign and perhaps incomprehensible to Buddhist ears. While the Scriptures are situated in particular socio-historical contexts, there is an abiding work of the Spirit of God throughout the various cultures of the world. Language is just the beginning of what sets Eastern and Western cultures and religions apart.

Buddhism centers on embodying a way of life modeled by the Buddha. Like Christianity, Buddhism has a missionary impulse and has proven to be translatable across cultural divides. Whereas many religions remain bound to a single culture or language group, Buddhism and Christianity both draw on local elements of culture as they make their home in new places. Christians entering into dialogue with Buddhists find that they must learn about a religious system, which, like Christianity, touches on all facets of human life and is adaptable to every culture, but has essential *practices and rituals* at its core. If it is this embodied life of Buddhism that is sought, then accessing the lived religion of Buddhists in their daily routines must be a primary aim of dialogue; analysis of truth claims is necessary but insufficient for understanding Buddhism.

In the lead article for this issue of the journal, Pentecostal theologian Amos Yong argues that the Christian task of dialogue requires a journey into Buddhism with Buddhists all the while looking for evidences of the Holy Spirit’s activity in their religious practices. Commitment to Christ is likely to deepen for such Christians as they present the Christian gospel in a way that takes into account the Spirit’s presence as well as the truths and virtues found in Buddhism. While Christians in the West have traveled little along the Silk Road, the Holy Spirit has long been active among the many cultures east of Ephesus.

Amos Yong is J. Rodman Williams Professor of Theology at Regent University School of Divinity, Virginia Beach Beach, Virginia.



THE HOLY SPIRIT, THE MIDDLE WAY, AND THE RELIGIONS:

A Pentecostal Inquiry in a Pluralistic World

This essay reflects autobiographically on the task of doing theology in the pluralistic world. I do so not because I think my engagement with the question is especially deserving of consideration, but because I know it best, having lived it myself. I also believe that the kinds of issues I have navigated as a Pentecostal theologian set in relief some of the major challenges that continue to confront Christian theologians conscious about their vocation in a world of many faiths.

In any case, as it has been going on twenty years now that I have been in ongoing dialogue with Buddhist traditions, the eve of the appearance of two of my books on the topic seems a good time to track the developments and reconsider the issues.¹ The five parts of this essay (1) sketch my original formulation of the theological problem, (2) overview the theological framework originally articulated in response, (3) detail its application to engaging with the Christian-Buddhist dialogue, (4) document the critical questions that have since arisen to my proposals, and (5) summarize the basic trajectories of where my work has brought me to today and how this is featured in the shape of the two volumes that are on the horizon. My hope is that these reflections will serve to highlight the major lessons learned and chart fruitful ways forward for Christian theologians conscientious about working in a religiously plural world.

Formulating the Problem (1990–1995)

I grew up as a “pastor’s kid” and “missionary kid” to a Pentecostal preacher in the Assemblies of God denomination.² Those who know about contemporary Pentecostalism know that it is one of the most vibrant forms of Christian faith today and it is at the vanguard of Christian expansion around the world, especially across the global South. A large part of the reason for Pentecostal success is its intense missionary and evangelistic commitment. At the heart of Pentecostal spirituality is the Lukan thesis regarding the expansive growth of the early church described in the book of Acts and announced at the very beginning: “But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you; and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem, in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth” (Acts 1:8). Socialization into the Pentecostal way of life thus involves immersion into the missionary vocation, as well as the expectation that the Spirit of God will be present to empower Christian witness to the world.³

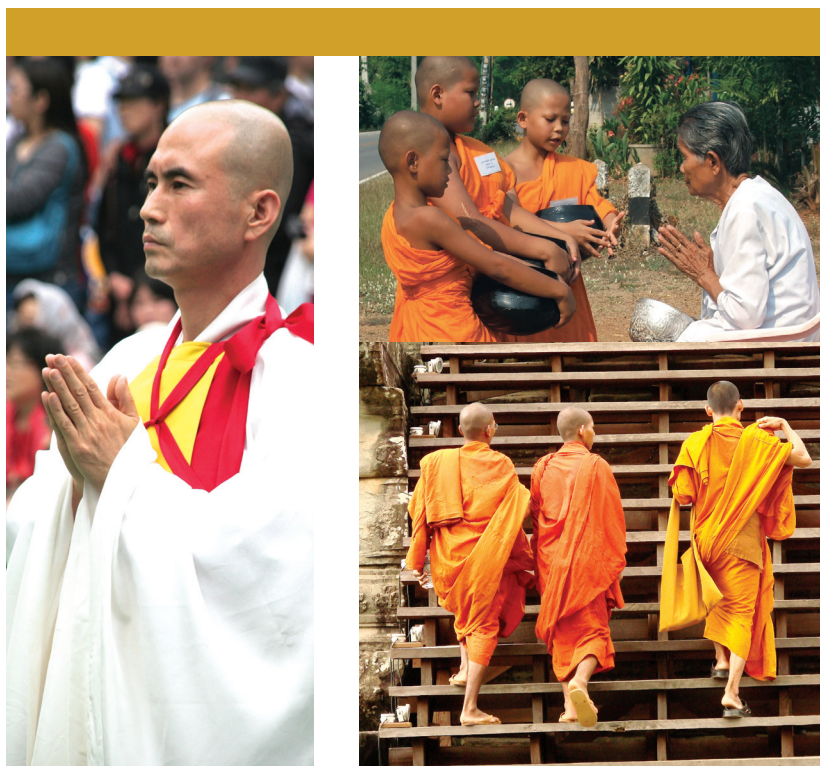
Pentecostal fervor, as Peter said of God in the context of his encounter with Cornelius, “shows no partiality” (Acts 10:34). All people are, potentially, equal opportunity beneficiaries of the gospel and thus appropriate recipients of the Christian witness. The Spirit empowers Christian witness at every time, in every place, and to every person. Pentecostals therefore divide the world into two groups of persons: those who are born again and those who are not.⁴ The latter are all viewed as those to whom people filled with the Spirit should carry the gospel. This includes those who are only nominally Christian.

Thus one frequently hears testimonies in Pentecostal churches that begin like this: “I grew up Catholic [or Presbyterian or Lutheran, etc.] but got saved [usually in a Pentecostal church].” In this regard, the nominal Catholic, etc., is not much different from an agnostic, an atheist, a Buddhist, or an adherent or even devotee of any other faith. Moreover, because the Holy Spirit empowers Christian witness, the emphasis is placed almost exclusively on what others have to gain from encountering (Pentecostal) Christians; little consideration is given to whether (Pentecostal) Christians might have anything to learn from listening to others. In fact, time was of the essence: Spirit-empowered believers should waste little of it in meaningless conversation or chitchat. Rather, there ought to be urgency about getting the gospel message out to others since eternity beckons.

It was while attending a Wesleyan Holiness seminary (Western Evangelical Seminary in Portland, Oregon, starting in the spring of 1990) that I first began to question this standard account. I met many non-Pentecostals, those my tradition had indicated could only be nominally Christians, and discovered not only that these members of other churches and even mainline Protestant denominations were genuinely Christian but also that they were people of the Spirit even if they didn’t believe in, embrace, or practice my kind of Pentecostal spirituality. It was also during this time in seminary that I began to consider a vocation as a theologian. In order to prepare for doctoral studies in theology, I enrolled in a second masters program at Portland State University (PSU) in history, with a major emphasis in the history of philosophy.

My studies at PSU included an elective course on metaphysics in which my professor, John Hammond, introduced me to the process philosophy of Alfred North Whitehead.⁵ Extensive reading in Whiteheadian philosophy that term and subsequently led me to the work of John B. Cobb Jr. at Claremont University and the Center for Process Studies that he cofounded. As a Malaysian-born and American-naturalized person of Chinese descent, I resonated with the research that the Center was facilitating in bringing Christian faith into dialogue with Asian cultural, philosophical, and religious traditions. I had grown up thinking that Christian conversion meant leaving behind one’s cultural trappings—in my case, Chinese cultural realities.⁶ Yet I could not deny the “Asianness” that forever will be written phenotypically on my face and the color of my skin. Engaging with these ideas nurtured in me the possibility, even the hope, that there was more to my Asianness than simply these biological accidents. Would it be possible for me to be authentically Christian *and* Asian simultaneously? What would that mean and how would that look?⁷

In the spring of 1994, I enrolled in the only course I have taken (so far) on Buddhism, an independent study with professor Linda Walton, a historian of East Asia. I read a good deal in the history of Buddhism, especially in China and Japan, while focusing also on the recent history of the Buddhist-Christian encounter. It was during this semester that I realized that my father’s repeated insistence on doing all things in moderation was informed as much by the Buddha’s urging to stay on the “middle way” as it was by



Left: Buddhism was first introduced to Korea in the fourth century C.E. and blended with indigenous forms of Korean Shamanism. *Right above:* Thai Buddhist children participating in *pindacara*—the collection of alms. Almsgiving connects lay Buddhists with the monks’ study of Buddha’s teachings. *Right below:* Buddhist monks ascend the stairs of Angkor Wat, Cambodia—an ancient Hindu temple that is considered sacred by Buddhists.

the ancient Hebrew proverbs; that his easy-going demeanor could be as much reflective of the Daoist-Buddhist synthesis in the Chinese context as a personality disposition; and that our family structures and relationships remained thoroughly Confucian, even if we did not acknowledge them as such. What did all of this mean for me? What did it mean, if anything, for Christian theology?

An Overview of Buddhism Sarah Taylor

Estimates concerning the number of people currently practicing Buddhism vary widely, ranging anywhere from 360 million to 1 billion. Conflicting assessments of the size of the Buddhist population are the result of differing interpretations of the faith; the more conservatively Buddhism is defined, the smaller the estimate is. Buddhism derives its name from the word *Buddha* (“enlightened one”), a status to which Buddhists aspire (and an objective that most Buddhists believe takes many lifetimes to accomplish). Reaching enlightenment—gaining complete knowledge—puts an end to the suffering of the enlightened one, Buddhists believe, because experiencing suffering is the product of failing to realize the truth. Liberation from suffering, *nirvana*, is the driving force behind Buddhist philosophy and the goal of Buddhist enlightenment.¹ Enlightenment is said to release one from the cycle of reincarnation by eliminating one’s desire, which ends one’s suffering.

Buddhists affirm the Four Noble Truths, a set of teachings intended to lead to enlightenment: (1) Life is full of suffering. (2) The cause of suffering is human desire. (3) The cessation of suffering (*nirvana*) is attainable. (4) *Nirvana* can be achieved by following the Eightfold Path.² The Four Noble Truths are the core of Buddhist belief, the doctrinal foundations of the conduct described in the Eightfold Path. In other words, the Four Noble Truths are the orthodoxy to the orthopraxy of the Eightfold Path. Buddhists consider the Eightfold Path to be a “Middle Way” between the extremes of asceticism and sensuality:³ (1) right view (knowing the Four Noble Truths); (2) right intention (renunciation, benevolence, and nonviolence toward living beings); (3) right conduct (foregoing lies, gossip, and slander); (4) right conduct (refraining from stealing, from taking life, and from debauchery); (5) right livelihood (pursuing an occupation that does not bring others harm); (6) right effort (abandoning harmful thoughts and embracing wholesome ones); (7) right awareness (maintaining mindfulness of one’s body, feelings, and thoughts); and (8) right concentration (the technique and exercise of meditation).⁴

There are two main branches of Buddhism, both of which contain several further “denominations.” Theravada (“the ancient teaching”), the more conservative of the two branches, is widely practiced in Sri Lanka and Southeast Asia. Mahayana (“the greater vehicle”), which is far larger and more diverse than Theravada, is common in China, Nepal, Tibet, Taiwan, Singapore, Vietnam, Korea, and Mongolia. Many distinctives separate Mahayana and Theravada Buddhists, but chief among them may be that Mahayana Buddhists believe salvation (reaching *nirvana*/enlightenment) to be obtainable by all people, while Theravada Buddhists hold that enlightenment is available only to a small number of true believers.⁵

While Buddhism has no universally agreed upon central text, most Buddhists affirm as canonical the *Vinaya Pitaka*, a code of conduct for monks and nuns, the *Sutta Pitaka*, which contains legends of the Buddha’s previous lives and wisdom regarding social and moral situations, and the *Abhidhamma Pitaka*, a collection of psychological and philosophical discourses.⁶ These three collections compose the *Tripitaka*, or “three baskets” of Buddhist teachings. In addition to revering the *Tripitaka*, Mahayana Buddhists also follow a collection of teachings called the *Mahayana Sutras*, a collection of over two thousand writings that cover a broad variety of topics.

At this point early in my theological studies, then, what is important to note is that the interreligious question was but a short step removed from the more specifically ecumenical question. From a practical point of view, growing up Pentecostal did not lend itself to a nuanced perspective of those who were not Pentecostal Christians. Generally speaking, all those outside the Pentecostal fold were defaulted into a “non-born-again” category unless they proved themselves otherwise. In short, nominal Christians needed the gospel witness just as much as did non-Christians and those in other faiths. Hence, what I now consider to be a legitimate intra-Christian or ecumenical issue of how Christians relate to each other across various Christian traditions was, at that time, an issue of proselytism: bearing witness to the gospel in the hopes that others would come into explicit Christian faith. Working in that mode rendered the ecumenical and interreligious challenges noticeably indistinct.

A Pentecostal Theology of Religions (1996–2002)

I began my PhD at Boston University in the fall of 1996, motivated to write a dissertation on a Pentecostal theology of religions. With two master’s degrees in hand, my advisor, Robert Cummings Neville, allowed me to take the minimal number of doctoral seminars and I also wrote research papers in almost each one on some aspect of my topic. This allowed me to complete the dissertation and the program within two and a half years.⁸ I left Boston with the conviction that responsible theological scholarship had to be adept in engaging at least three publics: that of the church, that of the academy, and that of the world.⁹ Included in the last was that of contemporary culture, the world of modern science, and the pluralistic voices and perspectives encountered amidst many faiths.

In the years after completing the PhD, I published a number of articles (some of which were papers written originally for my PhD seminars) that were then collected, revised, and expanded in book form.¹⁰ If my dissertation was addressed specifically to my Pentecostal colleagues, this collection of essays was addressed to the broader Evangelical academy (I was now teaching at Bethel University in St. Paul, affiliated with the Swedish Pietist denomination the Baptist General Conference, and a member of the evangelical Council of Christian Colleges and Universities). These two books reflected my

preliminary efforts to respond to the questions generated in my graduate education and have charted my path in theology of religions over the last decade. The following summarizes their basic thrust and highlights their fundamental methodological features.

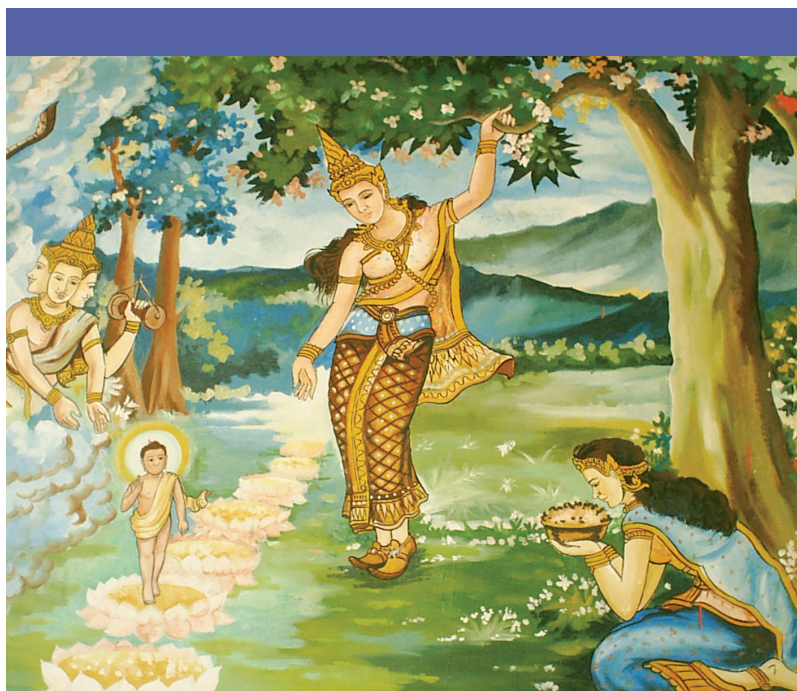
The gist of my contribution was to develop what I called a pneumatological approach to theology of religions. Christological categories were too particular in engaging the interreligious dialogue since they either risked imposing Christian perspectives on other faiths (whether in colonial or imperialistic fashion or in the problematic form of Rahner's "anonymous Christianity" claim) or inhibited interfaith conversation from the get-go (because of the incommensurability between traditions, at least as understood by cultural linguistic theories of religion). A pneumatological approach, on the other hand, appeared to be capable of advancing the discussion in at least three distinct forums: the theological, the Pentecostal, and the religious studies academics.

Theologically, I suggested that within a robustly trinitarian framework, the missions of the Son and the Spirit were related but also distinct (without distinction, trinitarianism would collapse into binitarianism, but without relationship there would be nothing specifically Christian about the Spirit). If this is the case, then we might discern a pneumatological mission "outside" of the church or vis-à-vis the religions that invite other than just christological assessment. Hence there ought to be criteria for discerning the religions that do not turn only on christological parameters. This was proposed as a temporary epistemological and dialogical strategy that allowed

engaging the interfaith dialogue, somewhat analogously to going into a movie theater to appreciate the show on its own terms while suspending our personal judgments.¹¹ Many Pentecostals and Evangelicals do actually approach religious others respectfully, as my proposal insisted was important. However, the rationale is more pragmatic and missiological: if we want others to listen to what we have to say, we ought first to listen to what they have to say. I do think such civility is essential, but I wanted more than just evangelistic motivations for such modes of interaction. Further, I wanted to establish my bona fides as a systematic theologian (the notion of a Pentecostal theologian is still an oxymoron in some circles!), not as a missiologist (for which we Pentecostals are well known). Authentic engagement with those in other faiths thus had to be founded, in the end, on theological premises, and such I was hoping to provide.

Yet this fundamental trinitarian argument was also deeply Pentecostal, at least as I understood it. Growing up Pentecostal and thoroughly shaped by it, I felt that there were distinctively Pentecostal insights that could be brought to bear on the discussion. Going back to the Day of Pentecost narrative at the heart of Pentecostal spirituality, I noted that the visitors in Jerusalem from around the Mediterranean were amazed that "in our own languages we hear them speaking about God's deeds of power" (Acts 2:11). This suggested that the many tongues and cultures of the world were potentially conduits of the testimonies to God's marvelous works. It also suggested that there was a pneumatological arena within which people—of various languages, cultures, and even religious traditions, since the last was separated only arbitrarily from the former—could meet and communicate.

So beyond the basic theological and Pentecostal aspects of my proposal were those related to the discipline of religious studies as that had been evolving in the last decade of the twentieth century. Part of the challenge of teaching religion in the academy had to do with whether outsiders of any tradition could effectively instruct students in that tradition. In the past, when religions were defined primarily by their doctrines, such an intellectual approach may have worked, but if religions involved not just ideas but also practices, among other dimensions,¹² then how could those who were not participants truly communicate the heart or essence of religion in a scholarly classroom? One way to mitigate this problem was to invite insiders to give their own accounts and to confirm whether or not they recognized the accounts of outsiders as accurate to their experience.¹³ I felt that my Pentecostal account provided theological reasons for receiving the "witness" of religious others on their own terms. In other words, I felt I could embrace the basic premise of religious studies scholarship about the importance of heeding the voices and perspectives of people in other faiths because I had explicitly theological reasons for doing so. In addition, coming as a Pentecostal into the religious and theological academy was intimidating since we were known for speaking in tongues—



A painting located in a Laotian temple depicts Queen Maya at the birth of Gautama Buddha at Lumbini, Nepal. According to legend, after his birth the Buddha made 7 steps and proclaimed that he would end suffering and attain supreme enlightenment in this life.

i.e., gibberish—rather than being intellectually coherent or eloquent. Hence, I saw a parallel between the marginalization of my own religious tradition and community and the legacy of colonial marginalization of other faiths from the Christian center. On both counts, the Day of Pentecost narrative appeared to provide narrative redemption.¹⁴ If I now expected to be heard as a Pentecostal theologian on our own terms, I should also grant to religious others the same dialogical courtesy of allowing them to be heard on their own terms. The difference, again, was that this was motivated for me now not by political correctness, but theologically.

There was one final reason for my pneumatological turn. For too long, I felt, religion had been approached doctrinally predominantly as a set of ideas. Yet I knew as a Pentecostal about matters of the heart, about the importance of spiritual practices, and about the complexities attending to the spiritual dimension of the world that we Pentecostals continuously had to discern.¹⁵ Therefore, it seemed to me that the world's religions were similarly constituted affectively, materially, and spiritually. A pneumatological approach to the religions, it seemed to me, was more primed to engage these aspects of religious life than other methodological options.

A Pentecostal Approach to Buddhist Traditions (2003–2007)

Part of my training at Boston insisted that our speculative theological ideas would travel only as far as there was empirical traction that connected them with the real world. Thus, I knew that I needed to test my pneumatological approach in the actual world of interfaith dialogue and encounter. Because of my interest in Buddhism, I naturally gravitated in that direction. I became involved with the

Society for Buddhist-Christian Studies that meets annually at the American Academy of Religion and presented papers in that venue, published in and regularly contributed book reviews for its journal (*Buddhist-Christian Studies*), served as interim coeditor of the journal for one issue (2009), and have chaired its book award committee for the last three years (2009–2012). When I taught world religions and theology of religions at Bethel, I took my students to the Dharma Field Zen Center in Minneapolis and invited the Center's advanced students to come to my classes to engage my students in conversation. Gradually, over the course of teaching on Buddhism for these few years, a book manuscript emerged wherein I applied to the Christian-Buddhist dialogue the pneumatological categories developed in my dissertation.

My thesis then, and still today, is that the pneumatological symbols of divine presence, divine activity, and divine absence are distinctively but not exclusively Christian, and thus they are both usefully generalizable to the religions and yet also sufficiently vague so as to facilitate viable religious and theological comparisons and contrasts. The challenge here was at least threefold. First, the task of comparative theology needed adequate comparative categories that juxtaposed interreligious realities without collapsing their differences. Second, such comparative categories had to be substantively informed by the home tradition since no one could claim to have an “objective” view from nowhere. Third, such comparative categories also had to enable the registration of what was important in the other tradition, and that from the perspective of those in other traditions.¹⁶ Later, when I came to see more clearly the intertwining of beliefs and practices, I also felt that a pneumatological approach to the Christian-Buddhist dialogue



Left: Built by King Suryavarman II in the 12th century, Angkor Wat (City Temple) is the largest Hindu temple complex in the world. In the 13th century, Angkor Wat became a sacred space for Theravada Buddhism. *Right:* Indonesian monks making alms rounds in Magelang, Central Java.

Buddhism in India Joshua Muthalali

enabled consideration of the role of practices that was otherwise often neglected in analyses that focused on religious doctrines.

Of course, my Evangelical and Pentecostal colleagues wanted to know if we could discern the presence and activity of the Holy Spirit in Buddhism. That is a valid question to ask as Christians, but answering this question was not a dialogical one that involved Buddhists since the latter were neither theists nor believers in the Holy Spirit. Similarly, Christians wondered: does Buddhism as a religious tradition and with its core texts mediate divine revelation? Well, again, this is a Christian question to which Buddhists would simply demur as being inapplicable to them since there is no theistic framework within which such revelation can be understood or received. Perhaps most important, Christians want to know if Buddhists can be saved as Buddhists. But only a few realize that Buddhists generally do not aspire to attain salvation as Christians see it.¹⁷

I was thus unhappy with the established set of Christian responses to Buddhist traditions in particular and to the religions in general. I was an exclusivist in understanding Christ as the only way to salvation, but what if Buddhists were neither asking that question nor providing competing answers to the problem of sin discerned by Christians? I was also a pluralist then in terms of believing that Buddhist traditions (alongside other religious traditions) offered a set of meditative and other related practices designed to achieve distinctive Buddhist (etc.) goals, but I knew it made little sense to say that Buddhists (etc.) were traveling the same soteriological path as Christians. I felt most comfortable as an inclusivist, believing that God could find other means to save even people of other faiths in Christ through the Spirit. But I also felt very uneasy about imposing this overarching understanding as an explanatory framework for other traditions. This reluctance was especially palpable in the presence of my Buddhist friends, primarily because of the legacy of colonialism but also because I knew that people of other faiths had their own overarching paradigms within which I and those in my faith were located, and I did not think it profitable to debate these notions that were adjudicable only eschatologically.

In the fall of 2004 I was invited to serve as the Edward Brueggeman Visiting Chair in Theology and Dialogue at the Jesuit institution Xavier University, in Cincinnati,



India holds a special place in the Buddhist tradition as the land where Siddhartha Gautama (later known as Buddha) attained his awakening or enlightenment. This experience occurred in the present-day state of Bihar, India, in the sixth century B.C.E. Buddhism spread outside of India under the missionary zeal of the Indian

King Ashoka (273–232 B.C.E.), who converted to the nonviolent religion of Buddhism after witnessing the horrors of war. Buddhism began to decline in India because of its tendency to be absorbed into Hinduism and due to the twelfth-century Muslim invasions.¹ As of the 2001 Indian census, 0.8 percent of the population is Buddhist.² Although a minority, Buddhism has regained strength in India, especially due to the presence of the Dalai Lama. Also, the conversion to Buddhism of Dr. B. R. Ambedkar (a well-known Indian statesman) in the 1950s and his renouncing of the Hindu caste system have garnered a great number of converts, especially from the Dalit community.³

Daily expressions of Buddhism in India include meditation, chanting prayers, offering gifts, making vows, and burning incense. These practices vary among the major branches of Buddhism, all of which have a representation in India. In addition, the frequency and nature of these practices depend on whether an individual is a monk or a lay person. For instance, Theravada Buddhism emphasizes the monastic life as a “surer path” to attaining nirvana; while Mahayana Buddhism provides a religious path and rituals for those living in the world.⁴ Vajrayana practices include the magical dimension and emphasize the potential of attaining Buddhahood in the present life.⁵ Meditation is one of the key practices in all three branches for soteriological and philosophical ends. Indian Buddhism generally practices two types of meditation: “enstatic” and “observationally analytic.” In enstatic meditation, an individual seeks to detach from his/her senses and thoughts in various stages until “no passionate attachment remains” in one’s consciousness.⁶ In observationally analytic meditation, the individual seeks to understand Buddhist doctrines and then “internalize” them.⁷

Meditation that involves the renunciation of earthly attachments resonates with those who are “dis-satisfied with reality,” especially those in India who have been jilted by the empty promises of financial success.⁸ Mahayana Buddhism perhaps has the greatest appeal in India because of the inclusion of rituals, especially those that resemble the Vedic past of many of the Buddhist converts.⁹ Furthermore, the Mahayana Buddhist concept of “skillful means” (*upaya*) encourages use of “whatever helps a person move to the next stage of awareness.” This is especially favored by lay persons who may not be able to assume a monastic life.¹⁰ Perhaps this adaptability speaks to the notion of impermanence that stands at the core of Buddhist philosophy. Indian Buddhism is unique in that, although it is opposed to Hindu philosophy, some of its practical expressions have semblances to those of the followers’ Hindu past.

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Ohio. There I had the privilege of teaching a master's level course on theology and science with Fr. Joseph Bracken.¹⁸ While at Xavier, I decided to take one chapter of the book I was then working on, a chapter devoted to thinking about theological anthropology not only in dialogue with Buddhism but also in dialogue with the cognitive sciences,¹⁹ and expand that into its own manuscript on the Christianity-Buddhism-science triad, which was then read by the seminar of students. What was already a complex conversation now became even more complicated.

On the one hand, introducing science into the discussion was beneficial because Buddhists were increasingly engaging the sciences,²⁰ and it therefore provided a mediating discourse for Buddhist-Christian dialogue just as the discipline of philosophy had served that role for Christian theology for many centuries before. Further, science itself is a fully public enterprise, and theology's engagement with the public square has increasingly recognized the need to engage in dialogue with modern science. My own commitments to doing public theology (foregrounded through my sojourn through the Boston University program) had already led me to see that, eventually, I needed to think also about theology in conversation with science.²¹ Most important, I felt that bringing the religion-and-science framework to bear

on the Christian-Buddhist dialogue would also allow the broad range of Buddhist perspectives, especially in terms of the various self-understandings of schools in that tradition as a psychology or even a philosophy of mind, to be registered in the conversation.

But to be sure, factoring modern science into the Christian-Buddhist dialogue brought forward a completely new set of challenges as well. Now the dialogue had expanded into a triad, and the methodological questions that had previously required adjudication across two sets of commitments had to be negotiated triadically. And, of course, one now had to be cognizant of the spectrum from right (more conservative if not fundamentalist) to left (more progressive if not liberal) on three, not just two fronts. So, a range of Christianities now had to contend with a multiplicity of scientific disciplines, not to mention positions within these domains of knowledge, as well as a variety of Buddhist voices, perspectives, and traditions. Yes, I was all for the "many tongues of Pentecost," but I began to worry that such a cacophony and plurivocity would produce not just bewilderment and perplexity (Acts 2:5, 12) but also sneers that advocates for such a triad were "filled with new wine" (Acts 2:13).

All along the way, I had also felt the pressure of thinking theologically in an intercultural, interreligious, and interdisciplinary context. I had

Buddhism in China Henghao Liang, PhD



In modern China, it is reported that there are fewer than 20 million formally converted monks and nuns (more than 100 million asserted Buddhists) worshipping in various temples,¹ with the Shaolin Temple in Henan province as the most famous. However, the Buddhist monks in temples are not the most significant dimension of Buddhism in China. If one travels to China, one encounters the common scene of many Buddhist temples full of ordinary Chinese people, kneeling at many Buddhist statues, burning incense and asking for blessings, and praying for their needs. Buddhism is deeply rooted in the Chinese way of life, which is the most important part of Chinese Buddhism. Apart from these expressions, there are some unique symbols of Buddhism in China, such as the most popular Chinese Shaolin Kungfu (a school of martial art integrated with Zen ideas from the Shaolin Temple); here one will also find amazing Buddhist art including architecture, paintings, statues, and literature.

Buddhism was introduced from India and developed in China over about two thousand years. Buddhism in China has changed and adapted to various Chinese contexts with their own characteristics.

set sail as a comparativist, desiring to establish my bona fides as a systematician—so the Christianity-Buddhism-science triad made good sense—but had gradually come to see that my work as a Pentecostal theologian could not be divorced from theology of mission.²² It was not just that mission and evangelism was what Pentecostals were known for, but also that I came to recognize how theology of religions could not, and should not desire to, in the long run, be divorced from ecclesiology and missiology (the nature of the church and its mission). Yet in a pluralistic and late modern context, Christian theology could no longer proceed merely kerygmatically, and my work as a comparative theologian, systematician, and even missiologist needed to be carried out with nuance, patience, honesty, and also humility.

Resistance and Critical Questions (2008–2011)

As a Pentecostal theologian, my work has always been situated in some respects within the broader Evangelical tradition in part due to my training at a Wesleyan Holiness seminary and in part due to my having taught, over the last twelve years, in Evangelically affiliated universities (Bethel University was part of the Swedish Pietist Baptist General Conference, and it and Regent University, where I currently teach, have been part of the Evangelical coalition Council for

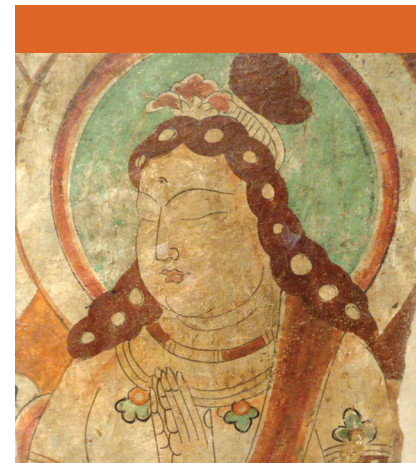
Christian Colleges and Universities). So, while Pentecostal theologians and scholars who have responded in print to my work have been largely encouraging, this does not mean that they agree with the details of my proposals.²³ But most have seen the need for Pentecostal theological reflection on such matters and have been able to appreciate that my efforts intend both to be loyal to Pentecostalism, broadly defined, and yet also to critically advance the discussion while engaging wider theological and scholarly concerns. Evangelical theologians who are outside of the Pentecostal tradition, however, have been more critical. Perhaps this is because they lack the Pentecostal horizon from which to resonate with the theological sensibilities animating my work. Or perhaps I have simply failed to be clearer or more convincing to those outside the Pentecostal theological orbit.

What have been the concerns of some Evangelical theologians? Much of the published material has been focused on my pneumatological theology and its relationship to Christology in particular and to trinitarian theology in general. Whereas in my earlier work I had attempted to articulate how the mission of the Spirit was related to but yet also distinct from that of the Son—so that the missions of these “two hands” of the Father, to use St. Irenaeus’s phrase, would not be conflated (required for trinitarian theology) and so that discernment of the religions could involve both christological and pneumatological criteria (only the latter of which I had specifically developed)—Evangelical worries question whether my proposal severed the two hands of the Father.²⁴ The choice is put this way: either “Christ or the Spirit.”²⁵ So unless the work of the Spirit in the religions was to glorify Christ, the point of a pneumatological theology of religions would be misguided. Building on the latter presupposition especially, the point is most starkly made in the title of an article in *Trinity Journal*, published by one of a handful of flagship Evangelical seminaries, Trinity Evangelical Divinity School: “The Spirit of Truth as Agent in False Religions? A Critique of Amos Yong’s Pneumatological Theology of Religions with Reference to Current Trends.”²⁶ My suggestions to hold at bay christological categories momentarily in order to explore how pneumatological perspectives might open up other pathways of dialogue and understanding is being taken as opening up to a naïve acceptance of even false religions. The question mark in the title of the article notwithstanding, the implications are clear: pneumatological

For instance, it has combined with Chinese cultures and lost its uniqueness, such that many Chinese people cannot even differentiate it from Taoism and other folk beliefs. Due to the differences in history, region, language, ethnic culture, etc., Buddhism in China has developed three main branches: Chinese Buddhism, Tibetan Buddhism, and Theravada Buddhism.²

It is worth noting that the Chinese government today calls on the revival of traditional culture, but Buddhism is also attractive to Chinese people because it appeals to peace and quiet in the self, society, and the world; emphasizes personal practice of the Dharma; and pays attention to charity for the poor and the disadvantaged. These values are very helpful for nurturing the Chinese mind, and they are in accordance with the Chinese construction of a harmonious society and a harmonious world.

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*Opposite: A group of statues in the Jade Buddha Temple, Shanghai, China.
Above: Fragment of wall painting from the Bezeklik Thousand Buddha Caves in the Flaming Mountains, China.*

Buddhism in Thailand William Kenneth Nelson (Pseudonym)



Auntie Nuu is a community leader in a slum in Bangkok, and she is also an example of what many Thai consider a strict Buddhist. She tries hard to keep the five precepts—abstaining from killing, lying, stealing, adultery, and intoxicating substances. Rising in the morning, she bathes and then prostrates herself three times in front of a Buddha image on a small shelf in her home to remind herself to take refuge in the Triple Gem of the Buddha, the Dharma, and the order of monks (Sangha). After this, she places her palms together and chants three times a memorized line in Pali that praises the Buddha. Next, she will chant other Pali texts that are intended to help bring success in business or solve family problems. After she finishes, she thinks about her parents, the monarch, and the royal family with gratitude. Finally, she spends some time in meditation.

Auntie Nuu would say that most Thai people may only do the prostrations in the evening and others do nothing. Most would not know the meaning of the chanted Pali. But this does not mean that these people do not consider themselves good Buddhists.

Thai religion is an inextricable amalgam of traditional religion, Brahmanic practices, and Theravada Buddhism. The quest for liberation from the cycle of suffering by extinguishing desire requires following the arduous eightfold path in Theravada Buddhism. The average person, focused on the concerns of daily life, does not have the time to develop the rigorous discipline in meditation that this requires. So, in practice, merit-making—doing good to receive good—becomes a key pursuit. Merit-making takes many different forms and can be for oneself or for others. Chanting, giving food or other things to monks, donating money to a temple, putting gold leaf on a Buddha image, releasing birds or fish that have been taken captive, and going to the temple on Wan Phra (Buddhist Sabbath) can all be meritorious. By increasing one's store of positive karma, one lessens the effects of bad karma caused by doing evil.

Buddhist ritual and merit-making are good for the pursuit of ultimate liberation, but life also presents many problems. Consequently, people employ a number of folk religion practices for help with daily life and needs. These can include making and keeping vows to various deities, astrology, horoscopes, palm reading, exorcising evil spirits, breaking the power of curses, and using various kinds of amulets for blessing and protection and tattoos that make one invulnerable to bullets and knives.

I once asked a Thai monk at a Thai temple in the United States how he felt about all of the common practices that lie outside of the strict scope of the pursuits of doctrinal Buddhism. He explained that someone who is strong walking up a staircase does not need a railing. The weak person requires the railing to help with balance and stamina. Later in another life, if the person becomes stronger, he or she will know the truth and not need the railing.

approaches to theology of religions—and Yong's in particular—are imprudent at best and deceptive and dangerous at worst.

There is no space here for any extended apologetic for my project, especially since these criticisms in particular all have come from scholars who appear to have opted to make their case on only a narrow selection of my published work on this topic.²⁷ The rationale for these selective readings is incomprehensible to me especially since I have already provided responses to similar concerns in other work that has been easily available.²⁸ Yet aside from these methodological flaws, I believe a deeper problem remains: that of a classical pneumatological neglect or subordination that is captured nicely in Eugene Rogers's saying, "there is nothing the Spirit can do, that the Son can't do better."²⁹ While I agree that pneumatology should not be severed from Christology, I also assert that the historic subservience of the Spirit should not be perpetuated.

Perhaps, however, the misunderstandings are due to ambiguities for which I need to take responsibility. In the interests of clarifying my stances, let me make the following three affirmations central to the historic Christian tradition. First, I affirm the trinitarian rule of faith regarding the indivisibility of the Father, Son, and Spirit. Indivisibility, however, does not mean identity (since that would collapse trinitarian confession into mere monotheism) and it may be that my persistence in exploring the distinctiveness of the Spirit's mission has led to the perception that I am introducing a cleavage between the economies of the Son and the Spirit. Second, I affirm as a Christian that salvation is in Christ alone, and that other religions do not save—in fact, do not even aspire to such salvation—understood ultimately as eternal life with God, in Christ, by the Spirit. This does not mean that there are no this-worldly dimensions to God's salvific work, and it is perhaps my asking about if and how the religious traditions of humankind might be means of grace in this penultimate sense that have led some to misunderstand me as a pluralist who thinks that all religions are equally salvific. Third, I affirm that ultimately for Christians, the work of the Spirit is discerned through that of the incarnational and cruciform work of the Son, and that Christian judgments regarding other faiths always be informed by these commitments. The question is whether or not the lack of explicit christological markers—which

is what would be expected in other faiths—means that the Holy Spirit of Jesus is entirely absent even if the fruits of the Spirit are present.³⁰

So hopefully with the preceding having cleared the air, I return to the question that I have been asking: what difference does the Holy Spirit make, if any, for Christian theology of religions? While Roman Catholic theologian Gavin D'Costa shares many of the concerns of the Evangelical theologians identified in the preceding, he also understands that this question deserves to be asked.³¹ Yet unlike Evangelicals, for whom the inner-trinitarian issues loom so large that not only is there no room for a pneumatological theology of religions but there is also not much of a constructive response possible for theology of religions period, D'Costa seeks to acknowledge the inner-trinitarian relations between Son and Spirit but yet also recognize the relative distinctiveness of the Spirit's mission. Such a more robustly formulated pneumatology, and hence trinitarian theology, has implications for understanding the religions within the Christian frame of reference. For instance, pneumatological categories such as inspiration and prophecy can be helpfully applied

to the Christian dialogue with the world religious traditions, consistent with and building upon recent developments even in the magisterial tradition of Roman Catholic theology,³² D'Costa argues (especially with reference to Islamic and Hindu traditions). In the end, a high pneumatology and a high Christology not only complement one another, but the former also results in a richer appreciation for divine presence and activity in a religiously pluralistic world. This means that the church can learn from other faiths even as the church proclaims the richness of the message regarding the person and work of Christ. The Spirit who leads into all truth is capable of illuminating even Christians through the encounter with other faiths precisely because from our historically finite vantage point, there will always be new situations through which the Spirit will teach the church what has in previous times and places not been required. In the end, then, the "Spirit is far from subordinate, but is actively leading the Church into the fullness of the mystery of Christ, in proportion to its critical attentiveness to the Spirit in the world religions."³³

Buddhism in Los Angeles Liam McCann

The visit to Shambhala Meditation Center of Los Angeles presents a basic description of two everyday expressions of Shambhala Buddhism in Los Angeles: creating an "awake quality" in the surrounding environment and "coming to the [meditation] cushion every day [to sit and meditate]." The "awake quality" of the environment is designed and maintained with a respect for the world and human senses (*feng shui* was used in the location and arrangement of the Center). It was created this way to foster contemplation in order to quiet and experience one's mind. With a Japanese sense of space, the Center's atmosphere communicates gentleness. Regarding the environment, one person declared, "presence is what it's all about. The challenge is to just be. Being available." This foundation of "presence" leads to the second everyday expression of "coming to the cushion every day." By coming to sit in meditation regularly, one cultivates presence by "learning how to just let go and relax and by asking [oneself] what's here?"

The origins of Shambhala Buddhism in Los Angeles start in the 1970s, when Chögyam Trungpa introduced to North America Shambhala Buddhism (in short, a branch of Buddhism incorporating elements of Tibetan and Zen Buddhism). Some of Trungpa's first students established the Los Angeles location in the late 1970s or early 1980s.

The appeal or "good news" in Shambhala Buddhism for those in the Los Angeles context includes, first, the teaching and existence of "real knowledge of the mind"; second, the idea "that human nature is actually basic goodness"; third, that "we all have the potential to do what the Buddha did" ("it's not insurmountable;" "we learn how to get out of our own way and be who we already are"); and fourth, the atmosphere of gentleness and genuineness. Gentleness is found in being fully welcoming to all people, while genuineness is found in the authenticity of the tradition and the trueness of people being present to one another. The community at the Shambhala Meditation Center of Los Angeles provide both their hospitality and graciousness.¹



The difference between D'Costa's criticisms and those of some Evangelicals is the difference between realizing the promise of a pneumatologically generative and fully trinitarian theology on the one hand and returning to a subordinationist pneumatology and its concomitant theological binitarianism on the other. I am just as concerned as others about preserving the interconnections between pneumatology and Christology. Yet I value D'Costa's critical perspective precisely because he, while insisting that christological commitments ought not to be put on hold, still proceeds to do the hard work of pneumatology in general and pneumatological theology of religions in particular, resulting in more helpful ways to understand and engage the religions theologically than before. That is precisely one of the essential tasks of contemporary Christian theology in a pluralistic world. If some people think that a pneumatological approach is more unhelpful than helpful in this regard, then develop other more constructive proposals. Gavin D'Costa's fidelity to the Great Tradition, to orthodox Christianity, and to a robust trinitarian (i.e., both christological and pneumatological) approach to theology of religions means that he has been a beneficial interlocutor on this issue.

So where does this leave us at this juncture? My response is still that we are very early in our thinking pneumatologically about theology and about theology of religions and theology of interfaith dialogue/ encounter in general, not to mention about theology of Buddhism and theology of Christian-Buddhist dialogue and encounter in particular. I am grateful to my Evangelical critics for keeping before us essential aspects of the biblical and theological traditions. But at the same time, I think that pneumatology provides grounds for important elements of the theological task in a pluralistic world, three of which are the comparative, the contextual-missional, and the constructive-apologetic. In these concluding pages, I briefly reflect on these interrelated moments of doing Christian theology in a world of many faiths.

The Spirit, the Middle Way, and the Religions: Taking Stock and Looking Ahead

The first and most important theological task in our global context today, in my estimation, is comparative theology.³⁴ Adequate comparisons involve, as I have indicated above, allowing those in all faiths to highlight their own perspectives, identify what is important, and explain why that is so. The pneumatological approach I have proffered invites and even requires the many tongues of humanity to be heard. With regard to my current work on Christian-Buddhist dialogue, for instance, I have not only sought to undertake the conversation in an interdisciplinary framework but also in a modality that highlights the varieties of Christian and Buddhist traditions, and how these might meet, listen to, and engage with the other.³⁵ Pneumatology invites, even requires, the important work of listening so that we do not bear false witness about our neighbors (because

we presume things about them rather than know them) or to our neighbors (because we have not taken the time to hear them out before preaching to them). And if we take the particularities of the many human tongues and languages seriously, then we might want to spend some time learning in depth those tongues and languages—not just biblical (Hebrew, Greek, etc.) or Western academic (German, French, etc.) ones. How might a pneumatological and trinitarian theology in dialogue with Buddhism in particular and other Asian traditions in general look, feel, and

“The . . . most important theological task in our global context today . . . is comparative theology. Adequate comparisons involve . . . allowing those in all faiths to highlight their own perspectives, identify what is important, and explain why that is so.”

sound if conducted in the languages of the Eastern hemisphere? There is a great deal of work that needs to be done across disciplines, traditions, and cultures going forward.

Only an adequate comparative theology provides a solid springboard for the other two moments of the global theological task. Both the contextual-missional and the constructive-apologetic tasks are centered on Jesus Christ as the norm of Christian faith—because pneumatology also always brings christological commitments as the Spirit of God is also the Spirit of Christ, the way, the truth, and the life—albeit centripetally and centrifugally so. The former moves dialectically in effect from Pentecost to the incarnation and back: the Spirit not only points to Christ but also invites faith in Christ. Christian theology is in that sense also missiological, although always contextually focused and engaged with local histories and realities. Thus, interreligious dialogue inevitably returns to, even as it has never really departed from, evangelical proclamation. Effective witness is always based on dialogue, and authentic dialogue is always at the heart of Christian mission.

Dialogical mission or missionary dialogue, however, occurs not just on the cognitive or verbal plane, but also includes the heart and the hands. Christian witness is thus not just spoken but also felt and performed. There are compassionate affections that are manifest in works of mercy even as there are affective passions that motivate works of justice. These suggest the interpersonal and socio-political-economic-structural dimensions of missional engagement.³⁶ Further,

these are some of the many ways that pneumatology (the winds of the divine) also informs Christology (the Word of God) and vice versa. The Christian encounter with Buddhism thus cannot remain on the linguistic, verbal, or propositional plane, especially since, for some Buddhist traditions, all words are like rafts that are to be discarded once we reach the yonder shores (or, like fingers pointing to the moon that are no longer necessary once we catch a glimpse of the latter). Yet the compassion of the bodhisattvas invites revisitation of the compassion of Christ, empowered as that also was by the Holy Spirit. In these cases, the truths of the Christian faith are no longer merely asserted in the presence of Buddhists, but ought to be embodied, felt, and even performed. The Logos who is said to be in the beginning now becomes the Dao, or the Way of the Spirit-empowered Christ. This does not mean that the role of words ought to be minimized. It does mean that declaration of the gospel of Christ is undermined when it is un-embodied or non-dialogical. It also means that in some cases and with regard to some issues, Christians bear most adequate witness to the gospel when they collaborate with Buddhists to make a difference in a fallen and hurting world. There are some missional tasks related to the common good that demand mutual engagement involving all people of faith in order for change to be effected. Who knows if such shared enterprise will also open up even further opportunities to bear witness to the gospel at an interpersonal level.

If the contextual-missional moment of the global theological task involves the intertwining of the Pentecostal and incarnational missions of the Father, then the constructive-apologetic moment spans the entire eschatological horizon of the Christ event. Thus the Christ is not only the historical divine representative empowered by the Spirit to inaugurate the restoration of Israel and the reign of God, but he is also the one raised from the dead by the power of the Spirit, ascended into heaven, and coming to receive and rule over the kingdoms of this world.³⁷ Thus the Spirit who has been poured out on all flesh in the last days (Acts 2:17) opens up an eschatological horizon that heralds the coming Christ, who we now see through a glass dimly (1 Cor 13:12) but then we shall fully know (1 John 3:2). This constructive-apologetic moment for Christian theology therefore involves taking into account the eschatological redemption of the many tongues of the many nations, tribes, peoples, and languages (Rev 7:9; cf. Rev 21:24–26). So even if Christians believe, in the end, “that at the name of Jesus every knee should bend, in heaven and on earth and under the earth, and every tongue should confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father” (Phil 2:10–11), they will do so in their own way and bear witness to the Son whose full glory is yet to be unveiled.

My claim is that the eschatological horizon invites the task of a constructive-apologetic theology that does not just repeat previous formulations but is open to realizing a deeper, fuller significance of the identity of the Son in light of the testimony of those in other faiths.³⁸ Such a constructive-apologetic undertaking involves a

reconsideration of the Christian theological vision as a whole so that it is capable of accounting for whatever else is also good, true, and beautiful found in other faiths. In a global context, this involves but also goes beyond the comparative task. If Christian theology has developed by and large in conversation with Western traditions so far, we now cannot avoid asking the question: what if Paul had gone East instead?³⁹ The answer, of course, is that we would be in dialogue not only with the legacies of Plato and Aristotle but also of the Buddha, Confucius, and Laozi, and this invites us to consider the interreligious conversation as a springboard for mutual transformation. We cannot interact with others in a pluralistic world with any degree of authenticity without also being vulnerable to being touched by others. The resulting provisionality of our theological work is not therefore merely epistemologically derivative but pneumatologically grounded in a fundamental sense.⁴⁰ If the Spirit does lead into all truth, why should we be surprised if some of this is mediated through people of other faiths? As a systematic theologian, then, I listen to Buddhist voices and perspectives in order to discern if I can hear, see, or be transformed by the truth, and in order that I can reconsider how to think about Christian faith in light of Buddhist accounts.⁴¹ Similarly, I engage with the theology and science dialogue also in order to be so informed and transformed. Doing theology in a pluralistic and late-modern global context invites discerning Christian engagement that is interreligious in scope, intercultural in character, and interdisciplinary in approach, as challenging and demanding as any of this is. The Christian-Buddhist dialogue thus must be interdisciplinarily attentive, while the Christianity-science dialogue also ought to be interreligiously informed. Christian theology is most effective apologetically in our religiously pluralistic world when its truths are articulated in ways that also account for the truths pointed to in other faiths.

The Christian theological task in the contemporary world includes these comparative, contextual-missional, and constructive-apologetic dimensions as interrelated moments of inquiry. One may focus on one of these trajectories more than the others, but effective theological reflection will both implicitly involve all three simultaneously and at moments intentionally engage each task. In some respects, my two books on Buddhism are more constructive-apologetic in orientation,⁴² although discerning readers will be able to recognize the other two moments present in these undertakings. Through encounter along the “middle way” of Buddhist traditions, I am suggesting that Christians might find themselves transformed into a deeper commitment to Christ. I believe it is also possible that Christian willingness to sojourn along the path of the Buddha will in turn manifest the presence and activity of the Spirit in this between space.⁴³ This is not wishful thinking, but what we would expect of the Spirit of God in Christ that “blows where it chooses, and you hear the sound of it, but you do not know where it comes from or where it goes” (John 3:8).⁴⁴

EJFD

VELI-MATTI KÄRKKÄINEN

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A FELLOW PENTECOSTAL THEOLOGIAN'S MUSINGS

on Amos Yong's "The Holy Spirit, the Middle Way, and the Religions"



I felt honored to have been invited to add a few remarks on the essay by my long-term friend and highly acclaimed academic colleague Professor Amos Yong. I was delighted to have an occasion to reflect specifically on the *Buddhist-Christian*

issues, having had myself an opportunity to practice Buddhist engagement at the grassroots level for many years when living and teaching in Thailand. I felt relieved that the invitation did not concern an academic response to Amos's numerous writings, both books and articles, on Buddhist-Christian studies, let alone on the theology of religions at-large. (By the time this journal goes to publication, I expect a few more writings of his on the topic will have seen daylight!)

I have known Amos personally since his student days at Boston University. It must have been one of the annual meetings of the Society for Pentecostal Studies in which we met for the first time a number of years ago. A young doctoral student at the time, I could tell that Amos had a sharper and more creative mind than many of his more established colleagues. After the steady flood of his high-level publications on various issues in theology—including science-religion, theology of religions, and comparative theology issues—my initial perception of his intellectual skills and brilliance of thought has appeared to be accurate.

Most people who read Amos's academically high-level, sophisticated, and constructive writings may miss one important point about his personality: a deep and wide anchoring in his own Pentecostal spirituality and faith. One part of his rootage in that spirituality has to do with the appreciation of the category of testimony. Pentecostals are well known for using testimonies and personal sharing as a major avenue for religious communication. Usually testimonies are embedded in personal narrative, one's autobiography.

Dr. Yong's essay in this issue of *Evangelical Interfaith Dialogue* follows that testimonial and narrative format. In order to honor that precious way for a scholar to communicate in a nonargumentative and nonanalytic manner, yet based on a vast amount of scholarship,

I will not subject my Pentecostal colleague's essay to a typical scholarly critique. After all, even if I wished to critique it, Amos would hasten to repeat what he says in the opening paragraph: "I know it best, having lived it myself"!

I wish to highlight the importance of two issues that arise out of Dr. Yong's remarkable autobiographical sharing of his journey in Buddhist-Christian engagement, namely, the importance of personal encounter between believers of differing traditions and the role of discernment. These two are linked together.

Comparative Theology at the Grassroots Level

Amos reminds us of the important lesson he learned as a graduate student in Boston, namely, that "speculative theological ideas would travel only as far as there was empirical traction that connected them with the real world." As a young missionary-theologian preparing for moving to Thailand with my wife and then young daughters to teach in a local theological college, among other things, I studied a fair amount about Buddhism from the books. I was eager to get any perspective on the religion of the land that can be learned from a distance. That was a great help getting started when finally landing in that exotic and foreign country. That said, my academic reading about Buddhism also had to be subjected to severe critique, reshaping, and reorientation. So vastly different did the Theravada Buddhism of Thailand appear to me that at times—even after I gained fluency in the local language—I wondered if I had picked the wrong books as my sources of study! As my former doctoral student from Thailand Satanun Boonyakiat, who wrote a brilliant study comparing and contrasting the notion of suffering in Christian theology (M. Luther, J. Moltmann) and the Theravada tradition,¹ reminded me, the "official religion" of Thailand is "animism."² Even Theravada spirituality may manifest itself mainly as folk religiosity and—in light of the textbook wisdom—appear to be focused exactly on the kinds of things that the original form of Buddhism sought to turn away from! In numerous other ways, lived Buddhist faith appeared to be so very different from the descriptions in the books.

Even more important, I learned that interfaith dialogue is done not between books but rather between living persons. *People* talk to each other about their religious convictions—or lack thereof. *People* fear each other for the sake of religion. *People* demonize the Religious Other. And it is *people* who embrace these with different faith commitments. *People* believe—and doubt.

When you see—as I did—your children playing, laughing, weeping, running together with children who come from different faith traditions, you are suddenly reminded of the common bond that links all of us together in a more profound way than religious convictions. This may strike one as strange coming from the lips—to be more precise, the keyboard—of a systematic theologian whose work is to analyze ideas, sentences, writings. Yet I am sure readers can put my statement in perspective: It is not to deny the importance of religious beliefs, including their dividing effects. It is not to undermine the significance of careful academic writing, analysis, comparing of notes, and so forth. It is just to remind us of the obvious: as soon as one begins to engage living persons of other faiths, the perspective changes. Similarly to Amos, when teaching courses in world religions and theology of religions, I have noticed time after time how useful it is for students, many of whom never entered a holy site of another faith tradition, to pay a visit and have personal encounters.

Discerning the Spirit(s)

The first major monograph of Professor Yong was his published dissertation on the topic of discerning the Spirit(s), a highly fitting topic for a Pentecostal. The way he developed the theme of

discernment—namely, as a way to help compare the truth claims of diverse faith traditions—however, is new and novel in his tradition. Pentecostals typically conceive of “discernment” as one of the gifts of the Holy Spirit, and hence, often speak of the “gift of discernment.” That gift, they believe, is given to believers and communities in order to make a distinction between the right and wrong message uttered by fellow believers, often claiming to be speaking under the Spirit’s influence. While the business of discerning between the spirits in the sense of judging whether a healing or a message comes from either the Spirit of God or from (demonic) spirits is a common theme in Pentecostal settings, they do not often use the gift in the sense that the wider Christian tradition does, that is, in terms of checking on the interpretation of Scripture, pondering one’s vocation or lifestyle, and so forth. As said, applying the category of discernment to other faith traditions by and large has been an unknown activity among Dr. Yong’s own spiritual folks. That task, however, is a most important continuing challenge for any church finding itself living in the midst of a religiously plural world.

Linking together the two themes inspired by the reading of Dr. Yong’s essay, namely, personal contact with practitioners of another faith tradition and discernment of Spirit(s), sets us on the path for Buddhist-Christian dialogue. The two, of course, go hand in hand: nowhere else are you in a better place to discern than in lively everyday contact with men and women who take their faith traditions most seriously and wish to share about them. **EIFD**



A sampling of Buddhist temples from various countries reveals Buddhism’s ability to blend with the local architecture of diverse cultures.
Left to right: Nan Tien Temple, Australia; Chateau Stoupa, France; Linh Son Temple, France; Pagode Mittelfeld, Germany.

ROBERT S. COVOLO

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WHAT EVANGELICALS CAN LEARN

from Amos Yong's "The Holy Spirit, the Middle Way, and the Religions"



It is an honor to be invited to comment on Amos Yong's theological reflections on the religions—reflections that are inseparable from his many years of experience in interfaith Christian-Buddhist dialogue. Not only is Yong one of the most

interesting, constructive, and creative contemporary theologians, he is also one of the most prolific. His ever-expanding body of work has provided a wealth of pneumatologically enriched theological reflection on ecclesiology, soteriology, theology of mission, theological hermeneutics, Trinity, gender, theology and disability, theology and science, theology and politics, and so on. Also included in this litany (and most fortunate for readers of this journal) is the central place Yong has given to thinking about other religions. As he tells us, this is not merely the result of intellectual curiosity, but implicit in his journey as an Assemblies of God pastor raised in a Malaysian-Chinese home.

For Pentecostals Only?

Many Evangelicals will recognize elements of Yong's Pentecostal experiences as similar to their own. Speaking personally, the nondenominational church of my youth also conflated its division between those born once and those born again to include a suspicion of other Christian denominations and communities that did not share this language. And in a fashion similar to their Pentecostal cousins, Evangelicals have also suffered from a poor track record when it comes to interfaith dialogue.

Additionally, Yong's work to reclaim a more robust pneumatology is not merely a Pentecostal impulse but a move that builds on and adds to the considerable attention the Spirit has received by theologians from across the theological spectrum—Evangelical theologians included. As Alister McGrath gladly reported in 1994, the Holy Spirit was no longer the Cinderella of the theological ball (left at home while the Father and Son enjoy notoriety and attention), rather she was finally a subject worthy of independent observation.¹

Given the proximity of our theological traditions and the resurgence in pneumatology among Evangelical theologians, I believe Evangelicals should (re)consider Yong's important contribution to the discussion.

Learning from Yong

One of the central elements of Yong's work on interfaith dialogue involves what he calls the "pneumatological turn." Yong claims that whereas Christological models approach the different religions via universalized categories, a pneumatological grammar emphasizes improvisation and particularity. What exactly does Yong intend in his accent on the "many tongues" of Pentecost? Does his call for a distinctly pneumatological grammar have an exegetical basis? Or is this something only those with a gift of knowledge can know?

In this regard, Evangelicals should revisit the exegetical grounds for Yong's call for a distinctly pneumatological grammar. Although it is far beyond the scope of this simple response to expound on what has been done in this regard, the following elucidates one important difference between Christological and pneumatological grammars.

The New Testament reminds us that the second person of the Trinity not only takes up a particular humanity (the person of Jesus of Nazareth), but also assumes a corporate humanity (the church which is the body of Christ). Regarding the latter, a predominant New Testament expression states that *believers are in Christ*. Not accidentally, this phrase "in Christ" echoes the Christological logic of assumption—the many are brought under the one. However, pneumatologically, the direction is reversed: *the Spirit is in believers*. This speaks to the indwelling of the Spirit in individual believers as well as the distinct distribution of the various gifts of the Spirit—the one works to reinforce the particularity and diversity of the many. This rudimentary distinction illustrates how different Christological and pneumatological grammars suggest different economies. Moreover, as has been noted, recognition of a distinctly pneumatological grammar is not unique to Pentecostal theologies.

For example, in 1964 Dutch Reformed theologian A. A. van Ruler, in his own “pneumatological turn,” called for a careful delineation of the differences between Christological and pneumatological grammars.² In other words, in calling for a more vibrant appreciation for the unique work of the Spirit, Yong is echoing the sentiments of a large number of theologians in last half-century who have accented the distinguishing work of the Spirit. Given this, Evangelicals have good reason to pay attention to Yong’s desire to rethink the implications of a pneumatological grammar for interfaith dialogue.

Concomitant with his pneumatological thrust is Yong’s call for a greater circumspection regarding the categories we bring into interfaith dialogue. And as Yong reminds us, we should recognize how traditionally such categories have neglected a pneumatological grammar. To appreciate this, Evangelicals should resist viewing Yong’s “pneumatological turn” as necessitating an abandonment of the Christological category or its various frameworks (e.g., exclusivism/inclusivism/pluralism). As Yong clearly states, his desire is not to discard existing categories and frameworks but to consider the way other theological categories and frameworks can add additional tools to our theological toolbox. More helpful would be for Evangelicals to consider how they might follow Yong’s example. For instance, how might the current call for a “depth view” of the gospel (as about more but not less than proclamation) among Evangelicals open up new frameworks for interfaith dialogue? If the gospel activates words and deeds in its engagement of head, heart, and hand—the entire self—how might such a perspective invite fresh frameworks for interfaith engagement?

Similarly, Evangelicals can learn from the valuable connection Yong makes between interfaith dialogue with global and public theology. Regarding the former, Yong speaks of his interest in Christian-

Buddhist dialogue as a correlate to his personal question of identity as an Asian American whose Pentecostal faith has been planted in the soil of a Buddhist and Confucian culture. As Yong asks, “what if Paul had gone East instead?” Interfaith dialogue, as with global theology, inevitably reconsiders the faith’s dependence upon its Western cultural inheritance. Regarding the latter, Yong’s essay reminds us that interfaith dialogue resonates with the task of public theology. After all, both assume Christian theology should account for that which is considered good, beautiful, and true within communities outside the faith. And implicit for both interfaith dialogue and public theology is the assumption that Christian theology has within itself the possibility of being (at least in part) conversant in discourses that are birthed and developed outside the faith. Given these parallels, it is fitting that Yong should engage science and Buddhism in a joint conversation. Both discussions are possible because—as Yong claims—God’s Spirit is already at work in all religions and institutions, including those we might least expect (Ps 139:7).

I conclude these reflections by offering a final thought on what this can do for Evangelicals. In following the Spirit’s work in Eastern cultures and religious traditions, a surprising pattern emerges. While on the one hand such a movement relativizes and challenges Western culture’s implicit superiority, on the other hand, it opens up the possibility to appreciate and critically re-appropriate resources from Christianity’s long history in the West. Yong’s work thereby provides a helpful resource for reawakening Western Evangelicals to the value and limitations of their own culturally embedded Christianity—thus serving to free them up to perceive and learn from the work of the Holy Spirit throughout the world today. **EIFD**

Key Buddhist Terms & Ideas

Enlightenment

The awakening to the nature of reality as it truly is.¹

Compassion

The intention and capacity to relieve and transform suffering and lighten sorrows.²

Nirvana

The ground of being, the substance of all that is. . . . The complete silencing of concepts. . . . The extinction of all notions. . . . It is not the absence of life. . . . It means pacifying, silencing, or extinguishing the fire of suffering. Nirvana teaches that we already are what we want to become. We don’t have to run after anything anymore. We only need to return to ourselves and touch our true nature. When we do, we have real peace and joy.³

KEN GNANAKAN

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A RESPONSE COMMENDING YONG'S PERSONAL TOUCH



I warmly commend Amos Yong's personal touch as he elaborates the academic struggles that he has undergone, as a result of both his own Pentecostal background and the wider theological challenges.

His Asian heritage, his Pentecostal background, and his sound academic background are well reflected in his essay. I must confess that I will make only some cursory comments on two basic issues from Amos Yong's discussions that I believe call for further exploration.

Culture and Christianity

The first of these is the sensitive issue of culture, as the relationship between culture and Christianity has been an ongoing debate. I suspect that most Christian Americans (and their mission fields) have lived in a "Christ against culture" paradigm, or perhaps the "Christ above culture," as we recall Richard Niebuhr's classic study.¹ Biblical justification for these paradigms has been drawn out of scattered verses or passages, and sometimes out of context. Culture is an inevitable part of our lives, and scholars such as N. T Wright and Andrew Walls have legitimized the need for culturally based Christianities drawing on the New Testament itself as well as church history. We still live in the aftermath of the Enlightenment's dualistic perspective, and this needs to be corrected as we explore more integration of the church into culture and society.

Lausanne's "Willowbank Report: Consultation on Gospel and Culture" gave Evangelicals a good start, as it asserted boldly:

God created mankind male and female in his own likeness by endowing them with distinctive human faculties—rational, moral, social, creative and spiritual. He also told them to have children, to fill the earth and to subdue it (Gen. 1:26–28). These divine commands are the origin of human culture. For basic to culture are our control of nature (that is, our environment) and our development of forms of social organization. Insofar as we use our creative powers to obey God's commands, we glorify God, serve others and fulfill an important part of our destiny on earth.²

Amos Yong describes what many of us in Asia were forced to consider in relation to our cultures. There was the Western missionary influence, and most often it labeled our Asian cultures as sinful or even demonic, while the Western culture was tacitly accepted as being Christian. This we can condone, as it was part of a wider movement in Europe in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, and not just a missionary perception. Human beings and their cultures are fallen, we learned, but the Western culture through Christianity (not necessarily Christ) had evolved to being superior.

Yong's Pentecostal background does not appear to hinder him from addressing these issues courageously. We will really need to wrestle with the issue of culture far more in order to regain lost ground. Going to the Bible, the same Gospel writer, John, who said, "Do not love the world or anything in the world" (1 John 2:15), also talked about the incarnated Jesus who came into his culture. Further, there is the oft-quoted Johannine distinction of being "in the world" yet not "of the world." The world's culture is certainly a part of our life.



A Pneumatological Approach

Second, I was fascinated by Yong's underlying thesis: "The gist of my contribution was to develop what I called a pneumatological approach to theology of religions. Christological categories were too particular in engaging the interreligious dialogue since they either risked imposing Christian perspectives on other faiths . . . or inhibited interfaith conversation from the get-go." As one who has grappled with interfaith studies, I have seen how restricted we can be if our starting point is only "Christological." I am sure that neither Amos Yong nor I will suggest that Jesus Christ should not come into the discussion. Our ultimate aim is to proclaim Jesus Christ. But for Yong "A pneumatological approach . . . appeared to be capable of advancing the discussion in at least three distinct forums: the theological, the Pentecostal, and the religious studies academics." Our discussions need to "advance" and the suggestion promises much for future discussions.

This refreshing insight will help us stay a bit more open to the Spirit's working in line with Jesus's teaching. One will admit that most of our approaches to Christian attitudes towards other religions have been from the standpoint of Jesus Christ. This is not wrong! But Jesus himself promised the Spirit would speak on his behalf. The pneumatological approach has *not* been adequately pursued. However, we need to be reminded that these discussions have already taken place in liberal settings, as in the World Council of

Churches, but the ramifications have been questionable. Sadly, the trinitarian Holy Spirit is equated with all kinds of "spirits" in the world. This has probably made us cautious and therefore we refrain from going too far into the Spirit's outworking in interreligious discussions.

Regardless, Amos Yong is convinced that the pneumatological approach would enable more effective communication. Rather provocatively he comments, "My thesis then, and still today, is that the pneumatological symbols of divine presence, divine activity, and divine absence are distinctively but not exclusively Christian, and thus they are both usefully generalizable to the religions and yet also sufficiently vague so as to facilitate viable religious and theological comparisons and contrasts."

In a recent book, Gary Tyra develops a biblical theology of the Holy Spirit that assists in deepening our understanding of life as the church, the people of God.³ Since the church's mission into the world is both evangelistic and prophetic, there is greater emphasis on the working of the Spirit in our preaching, proclamation, and service. As with Amos Yong's concern, Tyra brings together both charismatic and Evangelical emphases, and makes for a far more enriching mission than when either is taken separately. Yong's thesis can enhance such emphases.

Pneumatology cannot be ignored. Jesus had already made the message clear and informed his disciples of their mission. They had to wait before they embarked on it: "But ye shall receive power, after that the Holy Ghost is come upon you: and ye shall be witnesses unto me both in Jerusalem, and in all Judaea, and in Samaria, and unto the uttermost part of the earth" (Acts 1:8 KJV). So, it was essential for them to receive the power of the Holy Spirit before accomplishing anything in Jesus's name. It was through the power of the Holy Spirit that they would be communicating to the world; we could regain some of this power.

I agree that pneumatology, as long as it is not severed from Christology, could be a positive step in better communication in our interreligious interactions. If God is the Creator and the Holy Spirit works on behalf of God, then we must allow the Holy Spirit to be active everywhere in God's creation, not just the church or with the Christian community. This same Spirit is working on behalf of Jesus Christ: "When the Advocate comes, whom I will send to you from the Father—the Spirit of truth who goes out from the Father—he will testify about me" (John 15:27). The Spirit has set us free, and we need to set the Spirit more free to speak on behalf of Jesus Christ. **EIFD**



Far left: A Japanese Soto Zen monk meditating in Kyoto, Japan. Left above: Buddhist monks participating in a Festival in Darjeeling, West Bengal, India. Left below: A painting from Sravati, India, depicting the first meetings between Buddha and Angulimala. Legend has it that Angulimala was looking to make Buddha his 1,000th murder victim but was persuaded instead to seek enlightenment through the Buddhist path.

INTERACTIONS BETWEEN CHRISTIANS AND BUDDHISTS IN THAILAND

I have lived in Thailand since 1986 working with a Thai church movement. In a population of 62 million ethnic Thai, only .3 percent are Protestant Christians—a small minority surrounded by a Buddhist world.¹ Consequently, the question at hand is the nature of the interaction between Buddhists and Christians.

The interface between Christians and Buddhists in daily life allows for various modes of interaction.² Those who are Evangelical Christians desire to communicate in word and deed the good news of what God has done in Christ for us. Before I share some of my observations on the kinds of interactions I have observed in Christian-Buddhist relations, let me offer three brief caveats. First, my own experiences represent only a small slice of the diversity present in Buddhist-Christian relations. Second, my experience comes from the Pentecostal and Evangelical perspectives. Finally, my focus is on the interface of the everyday life of regular people rather than the Christian-Buddhist dialogue on the academic level.³

Antagonism

After nearly two hundred years of Protestant Christianity in Thailand, the Christian faith is still seen as a foreign religion.⁴ To be Thai is to be Buddhist, and those who turn to Christ are perceived as leaving the ancestral ways and adopting foreign ways. While actual violence is rare, there is unrelenting pressure on those who embrace the Christian faith to return to the fold. The deep-rooted nature of this feeling is hard for outsiders to grasp. A Thai pastor related to me that as he picked his son up from school one day, a group of second-grade boys surrounded them, asking if they were Christians. After the pastor affirmed this question, the boys responded that they couldn't be Christians since they didn't speak English.⁵ This experience for new converts of being marginalized, scrutinized, and having their "Thainess" challenged on a repeated basis forms the backdrop to relationships between Christians and their Buddhist relatives and neighbors.

Isolation

Antagonism means that for the new convert to Christianity there is not a lot of space for irenic discussion of doctrinal differences and religious philosophy. They are seen by the majority of Buddhists as sheep that need to be brought back into the fold. This societal pressure and antagonism creates a reaction that isolates Christians

from the Buddhists. Even further, the original transmission of the faith required a complete separation from everything that had to do with Buddhism. Christians are perceived to break family unity by their refusal to participate in the vast ceremonial life that is part of folk Buddhism. Instead, the church becomes the focal point of a new set of social relations. Unfortunately, there has been too little exploration of creative ways to express love to family while abstaining from practices involving idols. Consequently, although cross-cultural workers learn about Buddhism to intelligently communicate with the Thai majority, Thai believers of the second generation and beyond often know nothing of Buddhism and see little reason for learning about it.

Sometimes accurate communication can completely change the dynamics of a relationship between a Buddhist and a Christian. A Thai pastor told me of a young man who was thrown out of his house for becoming a Christian. The pastor asked to speak with the mother, and finally she consented to call him. After he heard her concern that she believed Christians were told to reject their families, he talked about the biblical perspective of honoring one's father and mother. After she heard that, she said that her son could attend church and live at home. Clarifying this misunderstanding solved a potentially giant family breach.

Unclear Message and Methods

Although research on conversion reveals that Thais respond to the gospel if they can see it lived out, assess the message, and experience its power, Christians are sometimes unclear regarding the message and its delivery.⁶ People often ask me—a foreigner—what I do, and I tell them I work with a foundation that was started by Thai Christians. I ask them if they have ever met a Thai Christian; if they have, I will ask them whether a Thai Christian has ever shared their faith with them. I have been surprised how often the answer is no. Some have told me that friends said they to go church and learn, while other were given the impression that Christianity is the same as Buddhism in terms of trying to be good and make merit.

Compounding the problem of an unclear message are problematic methods. Nantachai Mejudhon did research for his doctoral dissertation on how Thai Christians share the gospel and found that Thai believers emulated the practices of westerners in the way they shared the gospel: aggressive, confrontational, nonrelational, and propositional methods are not appreciated by Thais.⁷ One of

Nantachai's questions to Buddhist interviewees was, "What way of presenting the gospel would most appeal to Buddhists?" The answer was very revealing:

Buddhists mentioned that Christians should demonstrate the gospel in such a way that Buddhists experience the power of quietness and peace in their hearts. A Buddhist said, "If the gospel helped Buddhists to gain what they seek in Buddhism, it would be communicable and reasonable. Buddhists seek an escape from suffering, quiet minds, and *Kham Loom Yen* (cooled shade of life), happiness."⁸

The average Thai Buddhist is focused on concrete here-and-now experience rather than future-oriented ultimates like escaping suffering by extinguishing desire and achieving nirvana.

Talking Past Each Other

I have noticed how both Christians and Buddhists tend to miss each other by interpreting the other through their own worldview lens. In the Christian faith, we emphasize orthodoxy (right beliefs), but in Buddhism it is *orthopraxy* that matters (right behavior). Christians often share their faith by telling people what to believe, while the Buddhist listener is more concerned with the question, "What do I have to do to enter Christianity?" Christians tend to look at their Buddhist neighbors through the lens of orthodoxy and see them not going to temple, not meditating, not reading their Scriptures, and wrongly assume that "they are not good Buddhists." On the other hand, Buddhists will look at the good lives of their Christian friends and assume that they are making merit and endeavoring to increase the chances of having a better life the next time around. When this occurs Buddhists and Christians talk past each other and fail to communicate their faith clearly.

When Christians Touch the Buddhist Heart—Finding Thai Ways of Following Jesus

Although sometimes interface results in an obscured transmission of the message, other practices can make a deep impact on Buddhist family and friends, leading many to seriously consider the claims of Jesus Christ. These are the things that are causing the Thai church to grow at a rate of 4.2 percent per year.⁹

I have found that new Christian converts were usually impacted by something they saw in the life of a Christian—a uniquely different way of living and relating to each other and outsiders. Christians loving and serving others without seeking personal benefit causes

Buddhists to take notice. We hear of many becoming Christians in areas hit by the tsunami back in 2004 because it was Christians who came and helped in the rebuilding after the crisis.

Thai Christians will share their own stories of what happened when they met Jesus and prayed for their friends; when people experience distinct answers to prayers directed to Jesus they often begin to want to learn more about him. Thai Christians invite their Buddhist friends and family to experience God's family in small groups or church services. Many people find a sense of family they have never experienced and "belong" to this new community before they actually begin to "believe."

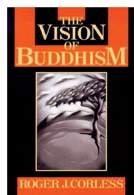
An increasing number of people, both cross-cultural workers and local Thai believers, are exploring Thai ways of following Christ. Through music, developing ceremonies that communicate biblical truth in the Thai context, and other approaches, people are attempting to remove the association with foreignness that prevents many Thai Buddhists from considering a relationship with Jesus. EIFD

Nelson has lived and worked in Thailand for 26 years.



In countries like Thailand and Cambodia, the regular presence of monks in various parts of society provides a consistent reminder of the significant influence that Buddhism plays in the culture.

Important Works on Buddhism On the Significance of Presence/Mindfulness and Sitting



THE VISION OF BUDDHISM

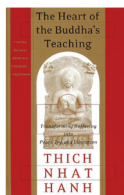
by Roger J. Corless

New York: Paragon House, 1989

While sitting in the proper posture one strives *just to sit*. Even observing the breath is not necessary. If a thought arises, it is allowed to disappear. The mind is like the sky, the thoughts are like passing clouds. . . . The mind is not made a blank. If we blanked the mind (which we probably could not, anyway) we would destroy consciousness, and become like a stone. A stone, however, is not a liberated being.

We just sit. Why do we sit? Because we sit. What are we doing? Sitting. What shall we do next? Sit. . . . In meditation we strive to . . . leave the worlds of apprehensions, and of dreamy fantasy, and *enter* the world of NOW, which is the only real world.

When we give up wandering and come home to the dimensionless present, samsara momentarily disappears. This is called *satori*, “awakening”. . . . It is the purpose of Zen to permit *satori* experiences, . . . cultivate them, and allow their frequency and depth to increase. (150–51)



THE HEART OF BUDDHA'S TEACHING: Transforming Suffering into Peace, Joy, and Liberation

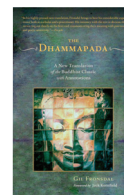
by Thich Nhat Hanh

New York: Broadway Books, 1998

Right Mindfulness (*samyak smṛiti*) is at the heart of the Buddha's teachings. . . .

When Right Mindfulness is present, the Four Noble Truths and the seven other elements of the Eightfold Path are also present. . . . Right Mindfulness is the energy that brings us back to the present moment. To cultivate mindfulness in ourselves is to cultivate the Buddha within, to cultivate the Holy Spirit. (64)

Sitting and watching our breath is a wonderful practice, but it is not enough. For transformation to take place, we have to practice mindfulness all day long, not just on our meditation cushion. Mindfulness is the Buddha. . . . When we practice mindfulness we are in contact with life, and we can offer our love and compassion to lessen the suffering and bring about joy and happiness. (81)



THE DHAMMAPADA

translated by Gil Fronsdal

Boston: Shambhala, 2005

All experience is preceded by mind, led by mind, made by mind. Speak or act with a corrupted mind, and suffering follows as the wagon wheel follows the hoof of the ox. All experience is preceded by mind, led by mind, made by mind. Speak or act with a peaceful mind, and happiness follows like a never-departing shadow. (1–2)

The mind, hard to control, flighty—alighting where it wishes—one does well to tame. The disciplined mind brings happiness. The mind, hard to see, subtle—alighting where it wishes—the sage protects. The watched mind brings happiness. (35–36)

Additional Works

- *Buddhist Wisdom: The Diamond Sutra and the Heart Sutra*. Translated by Edward Conze. New York: Vintage Books, 2001.
- Suzuki, Shunryu. *Zen Mind, Beginner's Mind*. Edited by Trudy Dixon. New York: Weatherhill, 2000.
- Trungpa, Chögyam. *Shambhala: The Sacred Path of the Warrior*. Edited by Carolyn Rose Gimian. Boston: Shambhala, 1995.

End Notes

Introduction

¹ Amos Yong's discussion in the lead article of Gerald R. McDermott, "What If Paul Had Been from China? Reflections on the Possibility of Revelation in Non-Christian Religions," in *No Other Gods before Me? Evangelicals and the Challenge of World Religions*, ed. John G. Stackhouse Jr. (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2001), 17–36.

The Holy Spirit, the Middle Way, and the Religions

¹ Amos Yong, *Pneumatology and the Christian-Buddhist Dialogue: Does the Spirit Blow through the Middle Way? Studies in Systematic Theology 11* (Leiden and Boston: Brill, 2012), and *The Cosmic Breath: Spirit and Nature in the Christianity-Buddhism-Science Trialogue, Philosophical Studies in Science & Religion 4* (Leiden and Boston: Brill, 2012).

² Other autobiographical details are in my articles, "Between the Local and the Global: Autobiographical Reflections on the Emergence of the Global Theological Mind," in *Shaping a Global Theological Mind*, ed. Darren C. Marks (Aldershot, UK: Ashgate, 2008), 187–94; and "The Spirit, Vocation, and the Life of the Mind: A Pentecostal Testimony," in *The Stories of Pentecostal Scholars*, ed. Steven M. Fettke and Robby C. Waddell (Cleveland, TN: CPT Press, 2012), forthcoming.

³ See also further discussion of the historic emphases on Pentecostal power in chapter 3 of my *Spirit of Love: A Trinitarian Theology of Grace* (Waco, TX: Baylor University Press, 2012).

⁴ Note thus the title of the book on Brazilian Pentecostalism by R. Andrew Chesnut, *Born Again in Brazil: The Pentecostal Boom and the Pathogens of Poverty* (New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 1997).

⁵ I wrote an essay for professor Hammond that term, and later presented it at a major philosophy conference during my doctoral studies: "Personal Selfhood(?) and Human Experience in Whitehead's Philosophy of Organism," *Paideia Project: Proceedings of the 20th World Congress of Philosophy* (1998), electronically published and available at <http://www.bu.edu/wcp/MainPPer.htm>.

⁶ This is part of the standard expectation regarding Evangelical and Pentecostal conversion; see, e.g., Kirk Dombrowski, *Against Culture: Development, Politics, and Religion in Indian Alaska* (Lincoln, NE, and London: University of Nebraska Press, 2001), on how Pentecostal conversion signifies breaking with native American culture, and Birgit Meyer, "'Make a Complete Break with the Past': Memory and Post-Colonial Modernity in Ghanaian Pentecostalist Discourse," *Journal of Religion on Africa* 28, no. 3 (1998): 316–49, for the same in the West African context.

⁷ I am working on a book tentatively titled *Evangelical Theology in the 21st Century: Soundings from the Asian American Diaspora* (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic, forthcoming), which will engage with some of these questions.

⁸ Defended in December 1998 and published shortly thereafter as *Discerning the Spirit(s): A Pentecostal-Charismatic Contribution to Christian Theology of Religions*, Journal of Pentecostal Theology Supplement Series 20 (Sheffield, UK: Sheffield Academic Press, 2000).

⁹ My second book was on theological method, clarifying these matters: *Spirit-Word-Community: Theological Hermeneutics in Trinitarian Perspective*, New Critical Thinking in Religion, Theology and Biblical Studies Series (Burlington, VT, and Aldershot, UK: Ashgate, 2002; repr. Eugene, OR: Wipf & Stock, 2006).

¹⁰ See my *Beyond the Impasse: Toward a Pneumatological Theology of Religions* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2003).

¹¹ As suggested by Frank D. Macchia in Yong, Macchia, Ralph Del Colle, and Dale T. Irvin, "Christ and Spirit: Dogma, Discernment and Dialogical Theology

in a Religiously Plural World," *Journal of Pentecostal Theology* 12, no. 1 (2003): 15–83, at 21. I am developing this Macchian insight with the help of anthropologist André Droogers in a lecture, "Observation, Participation, Explanation: Methodological Options in the Study of Religion." Religious Studies and Theology (under review).

¹² Ninian Smart identifies seven religious dimensions: the doctrinal, the mythological, the ethical, the ritual, the experiential, the institutional, and the material; see his *Dimensions of the Sacred: An Anatomy of the World's Beliefs* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1998).

¹³ This latter methodological rule has been recognized as essential for the teaching and study of religion since Wilfred Cantwell Smith's groundbreaking *The Meaning and End of Religion* (New York: Macmillan, 1962).

¹⁴ For overviews of the arguments for this claim, see my articles, "As the Spirit Gives Utterance . . .": Pentecost, Intra-Christian Ecumenism, and the Wider *Oekumene*," *International Review of Mission* 92, no. 366 (July 2003): 299–314, and "The Spirit Bears Witness: Pneumatology, Truth, and the Religions," *Scottish Journal of Theology* 57, no. 1 (2004): 14–38. The former was the first article I published in a missiology journal, a point of significance to which I will return momentarily.

¹⁵ These elements of the Pentecostal worldview have been nicely summarized in James K. A. Smith, *Thinking in Tongues: Pentecostal Contributions to Christian Philosophy*, Pentecostal Manifestos 1 (Grand Rapids and Cambridge, UK: Eerdmans, 2011), ch. 2.

¹⁶ The task of developing adequate comparative categories is what I consider the most important contribution of my book *Beyond the Impasse* (see esp. the final chapter, 7), a point that few of my critics recognize—on which more in the next section.

¹⁷ I wrestled with these issues initially in my article, "The Holy Spirit and the World Religions: On the Christian Discernment of Spirit(s) 'after' Buddhism," *Buddhist-Christian Studies* 24 (2004): 191–207.

¹⁸ Fr. Bracken is a prolific Catholic theologian who has long been engaged in the task of doing theology in dialogue with Asian traditions and with modern science; see my review essay, "A Catholic Commitment to Process Cosmology: An Appreciation of Joseph Bracken's Latest Works," in *The Global Spiral: A Publication of the Metanexus Institute* (Fall 2010), <http://www.metanexus.net/book-review/catholic-commitment-process-cosmology>

¹⁹ Initially published in "Christian and Buddhist Perspectives on Neuropsychology and the Human Person: *Pneuma and Pratityasamutpada*," *Zygon: Journal of Religion and Science* 40, no. 1 (2005): 143–65.

²⁰ As I document in my articles, "Mind and Life, Religion and Science: The Dalai Lama and the Buddhist-Christian-Science Trilogue," *Buddhist-Christian Studies* 28 (2008): 43–63; and "Tibetan Buddhism Going Global? A Case Study of a Contemporary Buddhist Encounter with Science," *Journal of Global Buddhism* 9 (2008), <http://www.globalbuddhism.org/>.

²¹ Originally sketched in "Academic Glossolalia? Pentecostal Scholarship, Multi-disciplinarity, and the Science-Religion Conversation," *Journal of Pentecostal Theology* 14, no. 1 (2005): 61–80; and "Discerning the Spirit(s) in the Natural World: Toward a Typology of 'Spirit' in the *Theology and Science* Conversation," *Theology & Science* 3, no. 3 (2005): 315–29; and now developed and expanded as *The Spirit of Creation: Modern Science and Divine Action in the Pentecostal-Charismatic Imagination*, Pentecostal Manifestos 4 (Grand Rapids and Cambridge, UK: Eerdmans, 2011).

²² My book, *Hospitality and the Other: Pentecost, Christian Practices, and the Neighbor*, Faith Meets Faith (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis, 2008), took up the missiological question in full force.

End Notes (continued)

- ²³ One of the more cautious has been Simon Chan, "Encountering the Triune God: Spirituality since the Azusa Street Revival," in *The Azusa Street Revival and Its Legacy*, ed. Harold D. Hunter and Cecil M. Robeck Jr. (Cleveland, TN: Pathway Press, 2006), 215–26, esp. 215–21, whose main criticism is what he thinks is a failure of discerning the difference between the Spirit of creation and the Spirit of Pentecost, in particular the role of the church in God's salvation historical scheme of things (a concern that I also am attentive to, so I am more than happy to allow his critical point to stand as a reminder about the importance of this matter). See also his book *Pentecostal Ecclesiology: An Essay on the Development of Doctrine*, Journal of Pentecostal Theology Supplement Series 38 (Blandford Forum, UK: Deo Publishing, 2011), which argues against what he calls "creation-centered pneumatologies" (ch. 1). As a side note: Chan's approach to my work has been informed by a more Barthian perspective, which I then think is offset by the fact that one of the foremost Pentecostal Barthians, Frank D. Macchia, has been nothing but encouraging of the articulation of a pneumatological theology. Time will tell whether the latter will make a positive contribution over the long haul.
- ²⁴ Keith E. Johnson *Rethinking the Trinity and Religious Pluralism: An Augustinian Assessment* (Downers Grove: IVP Academic, 2011), 121–26.
- ²⁵ The subtitle to ch. 7 of Todd L. Miles, *A God of Many Understandings? The Gospel and Theology of Religions* (Nashville: B&H Academic, 2010).
- ²⁶ R. A. James Merrick, "The Spirit of Truth as Agent in False Religions? A Critique of Amos Yong's Pneumatological Theology of Religions with Reference to Current Trends," *Trinity Journal* 29, no. 1 (Spring 2008): 107–25.
- ²⁷ In particular, the most rhetorically inflammable criticism, the last mentioned journal article, has already been responded to, by Tony Richie, "The Spirit of Truth as Guide into All Truth: A Response to R. A. James Merrick, 'The Spirit of Truth as Agent in False Religions? A Critique of Amos Yong's Pneumatological Theology of Religions with Reference to Current Trends,'" *Cyberjournal for Pentecostal-Charismatic Research* 19 (2010), <http://pctii.org/cyberj/cyber19.html>.
- ²⁸ E.g., Amos Yong, "A P(new)matological Paradigm for Christian Mission in a Religiously Plural World," *Missiology: An International Review* 33, no. 2 (2005): 175–91; and "The Spirit, Christian Practices, and the Religions: Theology of Religions in Pentecostal and Pneumatological Perspective," *Asbury Journal* 62, no. 2 (2007): 5–31.
- ²⁹ See Eugene F. Rogers Jr., *After the Spirit: A Constructive Pneumatology from Resources Outside the Modern West* (Grand Rapids and Cambridge, UK: Eerdmans, 2005), 19.
- ³⁰ Much of the substance of this paragraph derives from prods received from critical questions posed to my work by my good friend and colleague Gerald R. McDermott, who is working with others on a book on trinitarian theology of religions.
- ³¹ Gavin D'Costa, "The Holy Spirit and the World Religions," *Louvain Studies* 34 (2010): 279–311.
- ³² In particular, pronouncements from the Second Vatican Council and pontificate of John Paul II; see Jacques Dupuis, SJ, *Christianity and the Religions: From Confrontation to Dialogue*, trans. Phillip Berryman (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis, 2002), 68–73.
- ³³ D'Costa, "The Holy Spirit and the World Religions," 310.
- ³⁴ I have learned about both the virtues and the hard work involved in comparative theology from my *doktorvater*, Robert Cummings Neville; see the three volumes that he edited on *The Comparative Religious Ideas Project* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 2000).
- ³⁵ See my review essay, "On Doing Theology and Buddhology: A Spectrum of Christian Proposals," *Buddhist-Christian Studies* 31 (2011): 103–18.
- ³⁶ I develop this line of missional thinking in my essay, "The Buddhist-Christian Encounter in the USA: Reflections on Christian Practices," in *Border Crossings: Explorations of an Interdisciplinary Historian—Festschrift for Irving Hexham*, ed. Ulrich van der Heyden and Andreas Feldtkeller (Stuttgart: Franz Steiner Verlag, 2008), 457–72.
- ³⁷ Here I have learned a great deal from my colleague Frank D. Macchia, especially his most recent and profound book, *Justified in the Spirit: Creation, Redemption, and the Triune God* (Grand Rapids and Cambridge, UK: Eerdmans, 2010).
- ³⁸ By "apologetic," then, I am not referring to the classical answers or responses of Christians to the challenges of other religions; this is itself an important part of Christian witness (1 Pet 3:15), although I would say this kind of traditional apologetics is part and parcel of contextual-missional engagement. See also Paul J. Griffiths, *An Apology for Apologetics: A Study in the Logic of Interreligious Dialogue* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis, 1991).
- ³⁹ This is a paraphrase of the question in the title of an important essay posed by Gerald R. McDermott, "What If Paul Had Been from China? Reflections on the Possibility of Revelation in Non-Christian Religions," in *No Other Gods before Me? Evangelicals and the Challenge of World Religions*, ed. John G. Stackhouse Jr. (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2001), 17–36. McDermott himself has pressed this conversation in his *Can Evangelicals Learn from World Religions? Jesus, Revelation and Religious Traditions* (Downers Grove: InterVarsity Press, 2000).
- ⁴⁰ Intra-Christian disputes that challenge prior and even conciliar formulations include the emergence of Oneness Pentecostalism, for instance. The verdict here is not closed, but my point is that the Oneness case shows that new christological formulations can emerge that shift our Christian self-understanding. So, as Jesus himself warned: "Not everyone who says to me, 'Lord, Lord,' will enter the kingdom of heaven, but only one who does the will of my Father in heaven" (Matt 7:21). My claim is that this not only connects doctrinal and theological confession with praxis, but it also suggests the twofold surprise on the eschatological horizon: those we thought would be "in" are absent, while those we thought would be "out" are present!
- ⁴¹ Explicated in further detail in my "From Azusa Street to the Bo Tree and Back: Strange Babbings 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: Eerdmans, 2009), 203–26.
- ⁴² In part because I think my Evangelical and Pentecostal colleagues do a good job on the contextual-missional front; I hope that they see my work as complementary to theirs, which is precisely what is intended.
- ⁴³ See Yong, "A Heart Strangely Warmed on the Middle Way? The Wesleyan Witness in a Pluralistic World," *Wesleyan Theological Journal* (forthcoming).
- ⁴⁴ Thanks to Stephen Bevans for the invitation to give this Annual Missions Lecture on 5 March 2012 at Catholic Theological Union in Chicago, and for his encouragement to use it as an occasion to reflect on my work as a theologian in dialogue with Buddhist traditions. I also appreciate the feedback on an earlier version of this lecture by my graduate assistant Vincent Le, and my friends and colleagues Tony Richie and Christopher Stephenson. Last but not least, Prof. J. Abraham Vélez de Cea of Eastern Kentucky University also sent some very helpful comments. Needless to say, the thoughts expressed here remain my own responsibility.

A Fellow Pentecostal Theologian's Musings

- ¹ Satanun Boonyakiat, "A Christian Theology of Suffering in the Context of Theravada Buddhism in Thailand," PhD dissertation, School of Theology, Fuller Theological Seminary, 2009. It is hoped that this fine work will appear soon as a published monograph.
- ² I am well aware that contemporary missiological literature does not like the term *animism* any more and rather (rightly!) speaks of folk religions. However, in certain instances, I find that term almost irreplaceable; it points to the deep, shared "spirited" core of common religiosity across the various faith traditions, be they Christian, Buddhist, Muslim, Hindu, or others.

What Evangelicals Can Learn

- ¹ Alister McGrath, *Christian Theology: An Introduction* (Cambridge, MA: Blackwell, 1994), 240.
- ² See A. A. van Ruler, "Grammar of a Pneumatology," in *Calvinist Trinitarianism and Theocentric Politics: Essays Toward a Public Theology*, trans. John Bolt (Lewiston, NY: Edwin Mellen, 1989).

A Response Commending Yong's Personal Touch

- ¹ H. Richard Niebuhr, *Christ and Culture* (New York: HarperCollins, 1996).
- ² "The Willowbank Report: Consultation on Gospel and Culture," Lausanne Occasional Paper, 1978, 2, <http://www.lausanne.org/en/documents/lops/73-lop-2.html>.
- ³ Gary Tyra, *The Holy Spirit in Mission: Prophetic Speech* (Downers Grove: InterVarsity Press, 2011).

Overview of Buddhism

- ¹ Antony Fernando and Leonard Swidler, *Buddhism Made Plain* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis, 1992), 20.
- ² Robert C. Lesser, *Buddhism: The Path to Nirvana* (San Francisco: Harper & Row, 1987), 16.
- ³ Fernando and Swidler, *Buddhism Made Plain*, 20.
- ⁴ Hans Wolfgang Schumann, *Buddhism: An Outline of Its Teachings and Schools* (Wheaton, IL: Quest, 1973), 68–72.
- ⁵ OMF International website, http://www.omf.org/omf/us/peoples_and_places/religions/buddhism (accessed March 24, 2012).
- ⁶ Ministry among Buddhists website (copyright 2005), <http://www.bridgesforministry.org/index.php> (accessed March 25, 2012).

Key Buddhist Terms and Ideas

- ¹ Roger J. Corless, *The Vision of Buddhism: The Space under the Tree* (New York: Paragon House, 1989), 304.
- ² Thich Nhat Hanh, *The Heart of the Buddha's Teaching: Transforming Suffering into Peace, Joy, and Liberation* (New York: Broadway Books, 1998), 172.
- ³ Ibid., 136–40.

Buddhism in India

- ¹ Anukul Chandra Banerjee, *Buddhism in India and Abroad* (Calcutta: The World Press, 1973), 3–179.
- ² Government of India: Ministry of Home Affairs, "Distribution of Population by Religions," Census 2001, http://censusindia.gov.in/Ad_Campaign/drop_in_articles/04-Distribution_by_Religion.pdf. This statistic has its limitations because of the inability to compare it with past data. However, one can say that Buddhism was a minority religion in India from its inception.
- ³ L. Kenadi, *Revival of Buddhism in Modern India* (New Delhi: Ashish Publishing House, 1995).
- ⁴ Michael Molloy, *Experiencing the World's Religions* (New York: McGraw Hill, 2008), 143–169.

- ⁵ Edward Conze, *A Short History of Buddhism* (Boston: George Allen & Unwin, 1980), 73. Although this school became exclusively associated with Tibetan Buddhism, the presence of Tibetan exiles in India has revived Vajrayana Buddhism in India.
- ⁶ Paul J. Griffiths, "Indian Buddhist Meditation," in *Buddhist Spirituality*, ed. Takeuchi Yoshinori (New York: Crossroad, 1993), 42.
- ⁷ Ibid., 63.
- ⁸ Jyothi Thottam, "India's New Buddhists," *Time*, July 15, 2008, <http://www.time.com/time/world/article/0,8599,1822787,00.html>.
- ⁹ Molloy, *Experiencing the World's Religions*, 150.
- ¹⁰ Daigan and Alicia Matsunaga, "The Concept of Upaya in Mahayana Buddhist Philosophy," *Japanese Journal of Religious Studies* 1, no. 1 (March 1974): 51.

Buddhism in China

- ¹ Ze Jin and Yonghui Qiu, eds., *Blue Book of Religions: Annual Report on China's Religions* (2011) (Beijing: Social Sciences Academic Press, 2011), 20–21.
- ² <http://baike.baidu.com/view/18697.htm> (accessed April 6, 2012).

Buddhism in Los Angeles

- ¹ Shambhala Meditation Center of Los Angeles: <http://la.shambhala.org>.

Interactions between Christians and Buddhists in Thailand

- ¹ These statistics are from the eSTAR Foundation website: <http://e-star.ws/ws/index.php/en/christian-map-of-thailand> (copyright 2011), on the Thailand data tab. This represents the work of a subgroup of the Thailand Evangelism Committee (TEC) that has gathered and is now continually updating statistics on the status of Protestant Christianity. TEC is a part of the Thailand Protestant Church Coordinating Committee. The Christian presence map on this site has statistics down to the subdistrict level for the whole country.
- ² For various modes of interface between Christians and Buddhists, see Terry C. Muck, "Interreligious Dialogue: Conversations that Enable Christian Witness," *International Bulletin of Missionary Research* 35, no. 4 (2011): 189.
- ³ For an example of this kind of work and an extensive bibliography, see Kenneth Fleming, *Asian Christian Theologians in Dialogue with Buddhism*, ed. James Francis, Religions and Discourse 11 (Oxford: Peter Lang, 2002). See also the work being done by the *Society for Buddhist-Christian Studies*, <http://www.society-buddhist-christian-studies.org/bcsd.html>.
- ⁴ For a history of Christianity in Thailand, see Alex G. Smith, *Siamese Gold: A History of Church Growth in Thailand 1816–1982* (Bangkok: Kanok Bannasan [OMF Publishers], 1981).
- ⁵ We have discovered from team members working in the north, where 50% of all Protestant Christians (both tribal and ethnic Thai) reside in the upper three provinces, that in the presence of larger numbers of Christians, churches, and public displays of the Christian faith, the idea that to be Thai is to be Buddhist begins to carry less weight. Interviews with Buddhist University students showed they felt one could be a Christian and be Thai. This would not be true in the rest of the country where Thai identity is still tightly linked to Buddhism.
- ⁶ Marten Visser, *Conversion Growth of Protestant Churches in Thailand*, Missiological Research in the Netherlands 47, editorial board: G. J. van Butselaar, Th. van den End, M. T. Frederiks, M. M. Jansen, J. A. B. Jongeneel, A. M. Kool, and J. J. Visser (Netherlands: Uitgeverij Boekencentrum, Zoetermeer, 2008), 132–33, 137.
- ⁷ Nantachai Mejudhon, "Meekness: A New Approach to Christian Witness to the Thai People," DMiss diss., Asbury Theological Seminary, 1997, 314. See the entire section, 283–318.
- ⁸ Ibid., 308.
- ⁹ Visser, "Conversion Growth," 10.

Seeing Differently Makoto Fujimura



A reoccurring theme in this issue has been the fundamental connection between religion and culture. Discerning the Holy Spirit's work in the world requires us to examine the various philosophical and religious influences on specific cultures as well as the distinct art forms arising from those contexts. These too can be a means in which life and beauty find their way into the world through the Spirit.

CHARIS-KAIROS (The Tears of Christ)

80" X 64" • Mineral Pigments
Gold on Belgium Linen

Charis (Grace) *Kairos* (Time), takes the methods I developed for my *Soliloquies* series, which exhibited my large scale works with Modernist master Georges Rouault's paintings. Taking Rouault's indelible images as a cue, I decided to start with a dark background, to illumine the darkness with prismatic colors. I write in the introduction to the Four Gospels' project by Crossway: "I painted the five large-scale images that illuminate this volume, *The Four Holy Gospels*, using water-based Nihonga materials (Japanese style painting), with my focus on the tears of Christ (John 11)—tears shed for the atrocities of the past century and for our present darkness." (from: <http://www.makotofujimura.com/works/the-four-gospels-frontispieces/>)

Explore more of Fujimura's work and writings at:
www.makotofujimura.com
<http://twitter.com/iamfujimura>

To learn more about Crossway's "The Four Holy Gospel" and other projects, visit: crossway.org

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