

Buddhist-Christian Dialogue

General Theses:

- Christianity is not a path to be traveled, but a way of walking that can accommodate many paths... “walking with Christ” or “practicing the presence of God in daily life.”
- Buddhism can help Christians become better Christians by enriching their capacities for walking with Christ.
- It can enrich those capacities in at least seven ways.
- Process theology offers a bridge that can help Christians internalizing insights from Buddhism, by affirming twelve ideas (some Buddhist and some Christian) that are sometimes thought to be incompatible. Thus process theology can assist Christians in learning from Buddhism and it can also help Buddhists, if they wish, to learn from Christians.

I. Background

- Claremont Experience: teaching Zen master, discovering process theology
- Teaching world religions to college undergraduates: widening my understanding of Buddhism and seeing its relation to other world religions.
- Encounter with “Buddhism in America”
- Encounter with “ecology and problem of consumerism”

II. Larger Social Relevance of Christian Dialogue with Buddhism

- Need for a world with four values: Respect and care for community of life; social and economic justice; ecological integrity; non-violence, democracy, and peace
- Special Problem of Consumerism in Western culture. Need for western peoples to find ways of living that can help them –us- become become the peace we commend to the world.

III. The Seven Gifts of Buddhism... or, more accurately, seven aspects of practicing the presence of God in daily life, to which Buddhism can contribute.

- *Listening to Others*: Listening to others with empathy and understanding, sharing in their joys and sorrows, without being distracted by private agendas.
- *Responding with Compassion*: Creatively responding to the needs of others – human and non-human alike – in ways that nurture their well-being.
- *Appreciating the Sacrament of each Present Moment*: Appreciating that the infinite becomes finite in each present moment, and that ordinary life itself – even with its tragedies – is a miracle and a blessing.
- *Relinquish Inordinate Attachments*: Letting go of inordinate attachments to things as they pass away, and to inner impulses that have become false gods in one’s life, such as a need to receive approval or to be in complete control.
- *Creatively Adapting to New Situations*: Being able to adapt to new situations, without foisting onto them pre-determined programs from the past, through openness to fresh possibilities for thinking, feeling, and acting.

- *Facing Suffering with Courage*: being able to accept one's own suffering, and perhaps more importantly the suffering of others, without hiding or running away.
- *Trusting in a Hidden Wholeness*: Living from a deeper center, trustful that all things are gathered into a hidden wholeness that surpasses verbal understanding.

IV. Process theology as a conceptual bridge by which a Christian can cross over into Buddhism, learn from it in deep ways, and return with enriched capacities for walking with Christ.... Twelve planks on the Process Bridge.

1. A world beyond words
2. Many ways of knowing, including meditation.
3. Impermanence.
4. Aliveness of nature: intrinsic value and spontaneity.
5. Unclingability: the "perceptual perishing" of subjective immediacy: Impermanence.
6. Interconnectedness: inter-being or inter-containment as experienced in felt connections.
7. No-Self: the absence of a "subject" separate from the process of experiencing.
8. Emptiness as the Ultimate Reality. Emptiness as (1) the emptiness of words and concepts as adequate descriptions of things as they are, (2) the sheer presence of things as they are in their suchness, (3) the absence of self-contained substantiality, or "own being" within things, (4) the pure becoming of all things, (5) the spontaneity or self-structuring creativity within each moment of experience, (6) the non-dualistic awareness in which the previous insights are understood.
9. God as the Ultimate Actuality. The sky-loke mind – the One-embracing-many – who shares in the joys and sufferings of each living being and who is an example of, not an exception to, no-self, interdependence, and becoming.
10. Complementarity of Emptiness and God. Emptiness not a creator, but rather the creativity and pure happening-ness of all that happens. God as indwelling lure to wisdom, compassion, and freedom in human life.
11. Christ: a window into the heart of God as "the great compassion" who shares in the joys and sufferings of all. Reveals God as healing energy, as fellow sufferer, and as source of new life.
12. Prayer: contemplative and address as modes of communion with God.

V. Conclusion: Practicing the presence of God in daily life and practicing the Dharma are different, but overlapping ways of being in the world, that can contribute to the larger need for a world that has respect and care for the community of life, ecological integrity, social and economic justice, non-violence, democracy, and peace.