

The Witness

Volume 81 • Number 6 • June, 1998

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Christians and Buddhist wisdom



Struggling with exile

I'VE BEEN SUBSCRIBING to *The Witness* for a long time now and I am continually impressed by the scope and depth of your articles. I just read your April issue, "What do you do with what you don't believe?" and was really struck with the honesty and compassion with which you delved into a subject that is current, critical and very close to the heart of the Christian community of faith. That so many churches, publications and individuals are in denial about the health of our belief system is to me a strong indication that we need to be talking and writing more about our ambivalent feelings and finding ways to discuss them with one another. I applaud your decision to devote a whole issue to this and thank you for the breadth of the coverage.

I have a group of friends with whom I used to meet regularly for prayer and theological reflection. I think it's significant that every single one of us has been experiencing our own struggles with feelings of exile in the past five years. I am sure each of these fellow searchers would find your April issue as helpful as I have. Please do me the favor of sending them a copy. I enclose a check. Thank you and do keep up the great work.

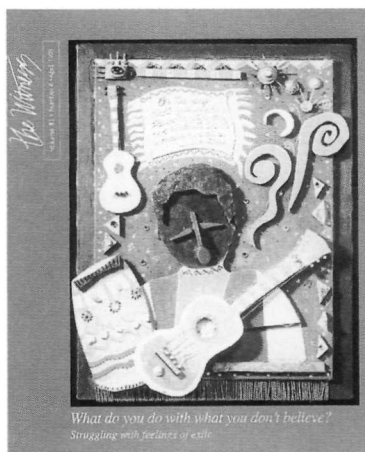
Sallie Shippen
Ashland, OR

JULIE WORTMAN'S INTERVIEW WITH Verna Dozier was a wonderful reminder of Verna's great gifts and wisdom. The first time I heard Verna was at a conference in the Diocese of Virginia in the 1970s. She walked with us through the roles of "the Christian educator" and she took me into the first real step I had taken on my own path of formation. Her words are balms to my Gilead!

Betsy Willis
Zionville, NC

IN RESPONSE TO YOUR INTERVIEW with Walter Brueggemann [4/98]:

Letters



I feel the confession is necessary in the liturgy before coming to the eucharistic table. I do not see it as an enforced guilt trip, rather a gift. I am freed from my humanness in confessing my errors, my omissions, and my excursions away from rather than toward God. I can be rid of all the burdens I carry, including the exhaustion from living amongst those who do not follow the same vision. I need to be cleansed not only of sin, but worry, doubt, and sometimes lack of faith. Then I am ready to receive the bread and wine which nourishes me and gives me the strength to continue the battle, to keep on with the race, to press on toward that final victory we know awaits us.

Mary Carter
Selinsgrove, PA

I LOVE BRUEGGEMANN — and I am using the part about the complaining Psalms in liturgy Sunday.

However the other part of the interview had me thinking that Bill Stringfellow would be chiding. The saints will lose — we're to be fools for Christ — it's still about doing quality work of advocacy and resistance — efforts so good that they should change the world — and sometimes winning — but most times seeming the fool.

Our new pastor believes the 20-40s are going to be the prophetic voice for 2000. Surely the Korean theologian and Charleston are tuning into something. Stringfellow would say "Come Lord Jesus." Are we prone to want to be effective, or right or even ready? Or to be sure we're being faithful?

I like the Iced Tea commercial — the person just falls back into the water.

Maybe there's still a role for confrontational politics and mystical experience. Hang with it. We need you.

Wilma Righter
Dayton, OH

[Ed. Note: More on this in July!]

CIA cover-up

AS I MENTIONED IN MY ARTICLE, "CIA Role in Priest's Disappearance" [TW 1-2/98], on March 4, 1997 the CIA and Defense Department released 75 pages of declassified (and heavily expurgated) documents concerning James Carney, the U.S. citizen who "was disappeared" in 1983 after entering Honduras as a chaplain to a revolutionary group.

Heavy use of the black marker is evident in the documents released by the CIA. One page, bearing the date of June 3, 1988 and showing several lines blacked out, discusses a *New York Times Magazine* article (June 5, 1988) by James LeMoyné entitled "The Honduran Army's Death Squad: How Much Did the U.S. Know?" The CIA states that Florencio Caballero, a former Honduran sergeant who was the source of much of LeMoyné's information, received human resource training (debriefing techniques) sponsored by the CIA during 8 February - 13 March 1984. Caballero, a resident of Toronto until his death several months ago, admitted that he participated in many human rights violations as a member of the official death squad.

He testified before the Inter-American Court of Human Rights in Costa Rica on Oct. 6, 1987 concerning an American advisor known as "Mr. Mike" who "had access to us" and was closely associated with interrogations.

"Mr. Mike" is linked to the Carney case. Caballero told Carney's relatives that the priest had been captured and thrown to his death from a helicopter by Honduran troops [BBC-TV documentary Nov. 22, 1987 as reported in *The Nation* Jan. 23, 1988]. He added that previously Gen. Alvarez Martinez, head of the Honduran armed forces, had told Caballero and other officers in a planning meeting: "When you capture Guadalupe [Carney], kill him after interrogation." Also present at the meeting, Caballero said, was a U.S. agent known as "Mr. Mike."

Has the CIA Inspector General, who as the

Washington Post reported (Dec. 23, 1996) has "reopened an investigation into the failure of agency clandestine officers to report allegations of torture by a CIA-supported Honduran military intelligence unit," questioned "Mr. Mike" concerning his alleged association with the still-unsolved disappearance of Carney?

A curious omission in the CIA report on the LeMoyné article, possibly part of the blacked out material, is its failure to note that LeMoyné cited Caballero as saying that he personally interrogated Carney after the priest's capture: "Caballero said he interrogated an American priest, Father James Carney...." Caballero's account that "Father Carney and nearly 70 of the captured guerrillas were executed" was "seconded by a Honduran officer."

Why doesn't the CIA's summary of its documents take note of an extremely significant statement in the article cited in one of the documents—namely, Caballero's report to LeMoyné that he personally questioned Carney? What is the CIA's assessment of that statement (which, it must be noted, Caballero never repeated in subsequent testimony)?

Concerned readers may wish to bring the Carney case, and these questions in particular, to the attention of their U.S. Senators and Representatives and ask their assistance in the search for truth and justice. People desiring more information may contact me.

Joseph E. Mulligan
Managua, Nicaragua
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Welfare reform

I'M A NEW SUBSCRIBER. The March 1998 issue on welfare reform was great — hoping others are as good.

Noella Poinsette, OSF
Danville, KY

Witness praise

FINALLY! A PUBLICATION which communicates to those who are not irreligious or on the political Right. Thank you!

Loren R. Strait
Goodland, KS

Letters continued on back cover



Classifieds

Working for peace in Ireland

Corrymeela is a Christian Community working for peace and reconciliation in Northern Ireland. Corrymeela works with Youth, School, Church and Community groups bringing people of all ages and traditions together. For information contact: Corrymeela Community, 8 Upper Crescent, Belfast, N. Ireland, BT7 1NT. Phone 011 44 1232 325008. Fax 011 44 1232 315385. <belfast@corrymeela.org.uk>.

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Arun Gandhi at Kanuga

Arun Gandhi, grandson of Mohandas K. Mahatma Gandhi, will lead a conference entitled "A Garland Instead of Ashes: Nonviolence in the Midst of Violence," September 14-17 at Kanuga. Explore the secrets and successes of nonviolence in workshops led by experienced staff. Kanuga Conferences, PO Box 250, Hendersonville NC 28793; 828-692-9136; e-mail <kanuga@ecunet.org>; website: <www.kanuga.org>.

New Lentz distributor

The icons of Robert Lentz, which have often been featured in *The Witness*, are now available through a new distributor: Natural Bridges, P.O. Box 91204, Albuquerque, NM 87199-1204; 800-699-4482.

Classifieds

Witness classifieds cost 75 cents a word or \$30 an inch, whichever is less. Due 15th of month, two months prior to publication.

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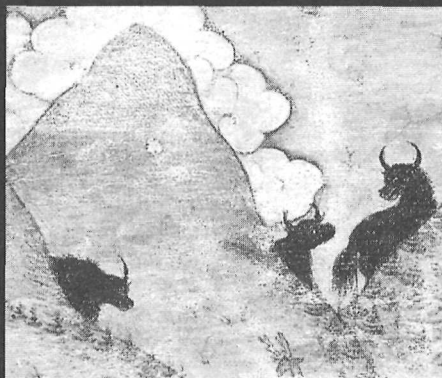
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22 Speaking up for Tibet by Natasha Ma

A teacher who spent two years in Tibet reports on the current state of affairs and the increasing international advocacy for the Tibetan people.

The Witness offers a fresh and sometimes irreverent view of our world, illuminated by faith, Scripture and experience. Since 1917, *The Witness* has been advocating for those denied systemic power as well as celebrating those people who have found ways to "live humanly in the midst of death." We push boundaries, err on the side of inclusion and enjoy bringing our views into tension with orthodox Christianity. *The Witness'* roots are Episcopalian, but our readership is ecumenical. For simplicity, we place news specific to Episcopalians in our Vital Signs section. *The Witness* is committed to brevity for the sake of readers who find little time to read, but can enjoy an idea, a poem or a piece of art.

Manuscripts: We welcome multiple submissions. Given our small staff, writers and artists receive a response only when we are able to publish. Manuscripts will not be returned.

The editor whose editorial appears on page 5 crafted this issue.

Cover: Ensō (Zen circle) by the 19th-century Japanese Zen monk Mugaku Bunikei.

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A larger silence

by Marianne Arbogast

Not long ago, I noticed a bumper sticker which read, "My karma ran over my dogma." Though I'm usually given to more nuance in expressing it, the slogan resonates with my experience—and, I believe, with the experience of growing numbers of Christians who find that elements of Buddhism are running into, if not over, their faith in significant ways. Scan publishers' catalogues, retreat listings or religious studies course offerings, and you can't help but be struck by the explosion of interest in Buddhist-Christian spirituality and dialogue.

For many, the seeds of this flowering were sown several decades ago, when Thomas Merton was recording his explorations into Asian spirituality along with his clear-eyed condemnation of the carnage in Vietnam, and the roots of faith-based resistance were fed by a contemplative sensitivity that spanned traditions in the persons of Thich Nhat Hanh, Daniel Berrigan and others. While yet in high school, I read and reread Berrigan's *The Dark Night of Resistance*, which chronicles his time underground, on the run from the FBI, in the light of John of the Cross and Zen teachers.

Contemplation, more than anything else, is the gift that today's Christians seem to seek from Buddhism. Many find that Buddhist meditation practice enables a depth of silence that they have not tasted in Christian settings. They cite the careful attention paid to the body and the radical trust that enjoins the practitioner to let go, completely, of everything, even (perhaps especially) God. As John Healey puts it [p. 14], Zen offers a way to go into silence "without the clutter of Christian presuppositions."

Marianne Arbogast is assistant editor of *The Witness*, <marianne@thewitness.org>.

Without the dogma.

It is not that dogma has no place, but that we tend to worship it idolatrously. Jay McDaniel connects fundamentalism (which, he points out, can take liberal as well as conservative forms) with living in our heads, inordinately attached to correct belief [p. 12].

As John Healey puts it, Zen offers a way to go into silence "without the clutter of Christian presuppositions." Without the dogma.

In his recent book, *Zen Spirit, Christian Spirit* (Continuum, 1997), Robert Kennedy, a Jesuit Zen master, quotes a poem by Wallace Stevens:

*It was when I said
"There is no such thing as the truth,"
That the grapes seemed fatter,
The fox ran out of his hole. ...*

*It was when you said,
"The idols have seen lots of poverty,
Snakes and gold and lice,
But not the truth";
It was at that time, that the silence was
largest*

*And longest, the night was roundest,
The fragrance of the autumn warmest,
Closest and strongest.*

"To insist on one truth that we do see is to block other truths from coming into focus," Kennedy comments. "There are many truths in every human being, but to steer toward one truth can block our unde-

veloped side from rising forever. If we grasp the rudder too tightly, we become predictable and repetitious, flat characters in a play who only read one line."

If meditation can loosen our grip on "the truth," allowing us to honor dogma while holding it more lightly, Buddhist philosophy also tips the scales away from an inflated confidence in language and thought. John Keenan, an Episcopal scholar engaged in the groundbreaking work of viewing the Christian gospel through a Buddhist philosophical lens, explains that "Mahayana Buddhist thinkers reject a metaphysics that would define the essences of things in final and irreversible philosophic visions" [p. 18]. In this issue of *The Witness*, he describes how this approach could alter the terms of a controversy such as the much publicized historical-Jesus debate.

For me, this perspective echoes the insistence of Verna Dozier [TW, 4-5/98] that we embrace ambiguity, let go of our exclusive claims on the truth and learn to base our commitments on something other than the identification of our views with God's.

In addition to freeing us from over-attachment to correct belief, Jay McDaniel suggests that meditation practice can also offer a corrective to the activist pitfalls of burnout — "inordinate attachment to correct action" — and the "will to mastery" [p. 12]. Ruben Habito also cites meditation as an antidote for burnout [p. 20]. Paradoxically, what looks like withdrawal can be a healthy instinct to sink deeper roots.

Buddhist teachers do warn about escapism — though, I confess, it's hard for me to see how anyone who has ever experienced a *Zen sesshin*, for instance, could imagine it an attractive escape. I remember coming



editor's note

to a week-long insight meditation retreat with the arrogant confidence of one who had made quite a few eight-day Ignatian-style retreats — a context in which I had found silence restful and enjoyable. By the end of the first evening, I knew I was in new territory — silent, but not restful. Much as I longed for deeper prayer, dry as the well of my own thoughts had become, I found it excruciating to have no mental escape from the silence. (The American Zen teacher Charlotte Joko Beck calls *sesshin* “a prolonged experience of ‘It’s not the way I want it!’”).

Ninian Smart reminds us that we live in a world where the free flow of ideas is engendering more religious cross-pollination than ever before. All of us are probably more influenced by Buddhism than we know. An idea like “interconnectedness,” for instance — so prevalent in contemporary thinking about ecology and justice — while not exclusively Buddhist, is front and center in the Buddhist worldview.

Many insights connected with ecology and earth-consciousness are, in fact, thoroughly Buddhist. Perhaps no other tradition has emphasized so clearly the interdependence of all life, or held non-human creation in as deep a respect. Many years ago, I remember reading that an obstacle at a dialogue between American Christians and Asian Buddhists was the incredulity of the Buddhists at the Christian tendency to discount all but human life. I’ve delighted in the instructions on observing the precepts mailed out before some Buddhist meditation retreats, which include the injunction to kill nothing, not even a bug; and in Torei Zenji’s Boddhisattva Vow, recited during Zen *sesshins*:

When I look at the real form of the universe,

all is the never-failing manifestation of the mysterious truth of Tathagata.

In any event, in any moment, and in any place,

none can be other than the marvelous

revelation of its glorious light.

This realization made our founding teachers and virtuous Zen leaders extend tender care, with the heart of worshiping, to animals and birds, and indeed to all beings. ...

At the end of *sesshin*, a dedication is offered “for the enlightenment of bushes and grasses and all the many beings of the

Ama Samy, an Indian Jesuit Zen master who has led Zen sesshins in the U.S., warns against “colonizing” Zen by absorbing it into Christianity or translating too quickly into Christian terms.

world.” *Vipassana* retreats also have participants offering prayers for the freedom and happiness of all beings — human and non-human, visible and invisible.

In light of this understanding, the suffering of the people, the animals and the land of Tibet — long a center of devout Buddhist practice — seems all the more grievous [see p. 22 and review, p. 29]. Jim Perkinson rightly warns against a romanticized spiritual identification with “the east” that avoids engagement in real suffering and struggle; Natasha Ma points to ways in which the international community — including the Christian churches — is beginning to respond to the crisis.

There are numerous issues involved in Buddhist-Christian dialogue and in the grassroots interfaith practice that is flourishing in many places. Is there a common experience, for instance, at the heart of both religious traditions, or is experience itself

too culturally conditioned to make such an affirmation? There are some who readily identify themselves as “Buddhist-Christians” and others — equally respectful of both traditions — who are troubled by such fusing. Ama Samy, an Indian Jesuit Zen master who has led Zen *sesshins* in the U.S., warns against “colonizing” Zen by absorbing it into Christianity or translating too quickly into Christian terms. “When you do Zen, do Zen,” he advises. “When you practice Christianity, practice Christianity.” Nevertheless, he suggests that there may be great benefit in “passing over” for those who feel called to experience both traditions from within.

In this issue of *The Witness*, we have not attempted to address — or even identify — all of these questions. We have tried, rather, to simply relate the experience of some of the many Christians who are finding their faith broadened and enriched by Buddhist thought and practice. The long-term impact on Christian thought and practice remains to be seen.

TW

BACK ISSUES WITH CONNECTIONS TO THIS MONTH'S TOPIC

The following back issues of The Witness contain articles which may relate directly to Christians and Buddhist Practice or simply to the spirit of this month's topic.

- *Silence* (1-2/96)
- *When the church engages rage* (12/92)
- *Alternative ways of doing church* (9/94)
- *Women's spirituality* (7/94)
- *American Faces of Islam* (5/96)
- *Staying in my denomination* (10/94)

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Hakuin Zenji: Song of Zazen

by Hakuin Ekaku

All beings by nature are Buddha,
as ice by nature is water;
apart from water there is no ice,
apart from beings no Buddha.
How sad that people ignore the near
and search for truth afar,
like someone in the midst of water
crying out in thirst,
like a child of a wealthy home
wandering among the poor.
Lost on dark paths of ignorance
we wander through the six worlds;
from dark path to dark path we wander,
when shall we be freed from birth and
death?

For this the zazen of the Mahayana
deserves the highest praise:
offerings, Precepts, Paramitas,
Nembutsu, atonement, practice
the many other virtues
all rise within zazen.
Those who try zazen even once
wipe away immeasurable crimes

where are all the dark paths then?
the Pure Land itself is near.
Those who hear this truth even once
and listen with a grateful heart,
treasuring it, revering it,
gain blessings without end.
Much more, if you turn yourself about,
and confirm your own self-nature
self-nature that is no nature
you are far beyond mere argument.
The oneness of cause and effect is clear,
not two, not three, the path is straight;
with form that is no form,
going and coming never astray;
with thought that is no thought
singing and dancing is the voice of the
Law.

Boundless and free is the sky of Samadhi,
bright the full moon of wisdom,
truly is anything missing now?
Nirvana is right here, before our eyes,
this very place is the Lotus Land,
this very body the Buddha.

Hakuin Ekaku was a Japanese monk (1685-1768). "Zazen" is formal meditation practice; "paramitas" are ideals or virtues; "Nembutsu" is the practice of calling on the Amida Buddha; "samadhi" is meditative concentration. This poem, frequently recited during Zen sesshins, is reprinted with permission from *Encouraging Words: Zen Buddhist Teachings for Western Students*, © 1993 by Robert Aitken, Pantheon Books, N.Y.

Poetry

Borrowing from Buddhism:

an interview with Ninian Smart

by Scott London

Ninian Smart is a scholar of comparative religions, the author of more than 30 books, and the founder of the first religious studies department in England, at the University of Lancaster. Smart is a faculty research lecturer at University of California, Santa Barbara and serves on the board of the Society for Buddhist-Christian Studies.

Scott London: Someone once quipped that the study of comparative religion can make one “comparatively religious.” Have you found that to be true?

Ninian Smart: No, I don’t think that’s true. Exploring the world’s various religions can certainly change your outlook and may push aside some of the narrower views that are found in every religious tradition. But on the other hand it may deepen your religious experience. It depends on what sort of person you are.

S.L.: In your case, you belong to the Episcopal Church but have come into contact with and learned from many of the world’s great religions.

N.S.: Yes. I came in on this in a very unusual way. I was drafted into the British Army at the end of World War II and was put into the so-called Intelligence Corps. The first thing I did was spend a year and a half learning Chinese. That completely took me out of my original world view. We studied Confucian texts and so on. Then, the army being what it was, I was sent to Sri Lanka (or Ceylon,

as it was then called). The dominant religion there is Buddhism. We were training local soldiers there. We decided that it was ridiculous to have a Christian chaplain for a unit that was predominantly Buddhist and some Hindu. So we invited the monk who was in charge of the neighboring temple to become our chaplain. I think we were the only unit in the British Army that had a Buddhist chaplain. I was 18 when I went into the military so I became acquainted with other religious views at a very early age.

S.L.: How would you describe your own faith today?

N.S.: I often say that I’m a Buddhist-Episcopalian. I say that partly to annoy people. [laughs]

The Buddhist notion is that our chief problems are greed, hatred and delusion.

S.L.: How do you mean?

N.S.: I like to annoy people who think that a religion can contain the whole truth. No religion, it seems to me, contains the whole truth. I think it’s mad to think that there is nothing to learn from other traditions and civilizations. If you accept that other religions have something to offer and you learn from them, that is what you become: a Buddhist-Episcopalian or a Hindu-Muslim or whatever.

S.L.: How does Buddhism complement your Christian beliefs?

N.S.: I think the Buddhist ethic is clearer and more systematic in some ways. The

Buddhist notion is that our chief problems are greed, hatred and delusion. Well, delusion is not much mentioned in the Christian tradition. In the West, we have underplayed the idea that our moral and spiritual troubles have to do with a lack of clarity or insight because original sin has dominated so much of our thinking. We tend to think that our troubles are caused by insufficient will power. There are merits in thinking that, of course, but I think you can learn something too from Buddhism. In that respect, Buddhism is complementary to Christianity.

S.L.: Perhaps this is one reason why Buddhism is being embraced by so many Americans today.

N.S.: I think the attractiveness of Buddhism is that it doesn’t involve a belief in God. That appeals to a lot of people — intellectuals and well-educated people in particular. It is also a very practical religion that offers techniques such as meditation. Also, there is the more peripheral fact that Buddhism has a very good spokesman — the Dalai Lama — who has had a lot of impact, and quite rightly so.

S.L.: You wrote a book a few years ago in which you spoke of Buddhism and Christianity as “rivals and allies.”

N.S.: Yes. In a sense, they are incompatible because there is no God in Buddhism — particularly in Theravada Buddhism. But they are also allies because their values and practices are compatible and they can work together — indeed, they would benefit greatly from doing so. But the fact of the matter is that Buddhism has changed a lot. In Mahayana and Tibetan Buddhism, for example, you do get something like God or Christ. In fact, when St. Francis Xavier arrived in Japan, he wrote back to the Vatican and made a joke. “It is unfortunate,” he said, “that the Lutherans were here before me.” By this he meant that Pure Land Buddhism was so much like Lutheranism.

S.L.: Pure Land Buddhism?

Scott London hosts “Insight & Outlook,” a weekly National Public Radio program. He lives in Santa Barbara, Calif., <insight@west.net>.

N.S.: Yes, it is a form of Buddhism in which if you call on the name of the Amida Buddha in faith (or Anitabha in the Indian context), you will be reborn in the Pure Land, which is like heaven. One of their saints said, "If a good person can be saved, how much more can a bad person be saved?" Luther could have written that. So there are forms of Buddhism which are very much like Christianity.

S.L.: The Dalai Lama has been very outspoken about the need for mutual understanding between religions. Do you see any signs of progress on that front?

N.S.: Certainly the understandings have advanced tremendously in the last 50 years, even if it is primarily through religious education and interfaith dialogues and things of that sort.

S.L.: Some critics feel that interfaith dialogues tend to be rather wishy-washy — mostly polite conversation.

N.S.: That's partly true. I don't go for dialogues greatly (though, in fact, tomorrow I'm going to Rome to participate in one). People say that it's mere conversation but, first of all, what's wrong with conversation? What would people otherwise be doing? They could be fighting each other. Secondly, who is going to decide what is wishy-washy? Suppose I would say, "I don't believe in hell," and somebody turns around and says that I'm a wishy-washy character because I don't believe in hell. Am I supposed to believe in hell to escape the disaster of being wishy-washy? What if two denominations, or two groups of people, decide they are going to do some work building houses in Tijuana to help the poor — is that wishy-washy?

S.L.: There is a striking passage in your book, *Choosing a Faith*, where you describe the great number of West African Yorubas in Los Angeles today, the number of Sikhs in Birmingham, England, the Mormons in the Fiji Islands, the Tibetan

Buddhists in Scotland, the Hindus in South Africa, and the Confucians in Berkeley, Calif. How will all these different traditions manage to coexist in the future?

N.S.: Not just in the future — they are coexisting now. They are getting on together, despite the clashes and bitter warfare that we notice in places like Bosnia and Sri Lanka. This has come about partly through peaceful migration. For example, many doctors from Asia migrate to Brit-

Zealand. And so on.

S.L.: What will be the fate of religion in this new global village?

N.S.: Well, one result of all these migrations is the emergence of new forms of religion. For example, some Hindus are building temples in Malibu now. They may have been educated in the West and know very little about Hinduism. So they have to invent it from scratch because they want their children to be Hindus.



Buddhist Cambodian family in N.Y. observing a religious service for the dead

Kathleen Foster/Impact Visuals

ain or the U.S. to practice medicine. But a lot of it is also a result of unpeaceful migration. World War II left behind 300,000 Poles in Britain. There are Palestinians all over the Middle East. One could go on and on. The net result is that we have never had such a mingled population as we do now. There is not a big city in the world (except perhaps in Japan and one or two other places) where there are not sizeable numbers of whoever you care to mention. The second largest Greek city today is Melbourne, Australia. The largest Polynesian city is Auckland, New

And this is happening not just for Hindus, but for Muslims, Confucians, and so on all over America and Europe. That's a hopeful sign. One of the effects of religions getting together is that they borrow from one another. For example, I remember going into a town in the south of Sri Lanka and one of the first buildings I saw was the YMBA — the Young Men's Buddhist Association. It was a young men's organization modeled on the YMCA. They were borrowing a Christian organizational item. Another example is the growing number of Catholics who

are practicing yoga and meditation techniques borrowed from Buddhism and Hinduism. So there are these borrowings which I think fertilize the religions.

S.L.: Syncretism, the word usually invoked to describe this kind of cross-pollination, tends to have negative connotations.

N.S.: Yes, this can be disturbing to people. They have often been taught, "You have to have solid faith and must be sure of your religion." They fear that they might be threatened by these new developments and mergings. So you get a backlash against it. I believe that if you wanted to, you could work out a few equations. What happens when Religion A meets Religion B? Well, A becomes a little B-ified, and B becomes a little A-ified. Then people in A don't like the B-ification, so they become AA types. And the same goes for B. So there is always that dynamic going on when religions meet. Now, for the first time in history, all religions are meeting. So they are bound to interact in some alarming ways.

S.L.: Do you think the spread of democracy around the world today is having an effect on how and what people believe?

N.S.: Yes, I think so, partly because it removes the pressures to believe in any particular way. People have access to other ideas and ways of doing things that they never had before. And they have new freedoms. To put it a little crudely, these days nobody is afraid of excommunication. The churches no longer have the disciplinary powers to keep their followers in check.

I think there is a certain inevitability about these trends. For example, the government of Iran has been trying to ban satellite dishes because they worry that Western ideas will come in and corrupt Islam. Well, whether they corrupt Islam or not, satellite dishes are going to win out in the long run. One of the causes of the collapse of the Soviet Union was that

they were unable to insulate their people, as they had done in the past, from fax machines, television, radio and all that. So people inevitably get new ideas.

S.L.: Do you subscribe to the idea, expressed by some scholars of religion — most notably Huston Smith — that there is a core wisdom at the heart of the world's great religions?

N.S.: No, I don't, because I don't think it can be shown or specified. I believe strongly that the mysticism of all the religions is just about the same. But that is not the only core. Anyway, why should they have a core? Wouldn't it be more interesting if they didn't? Or if they had several cores?

S.L.: Perhaps we are evolving toward a time when there will be a single world religion composed of different tenets of the various world faiths?

N.S.: I don't think religions will merge

into a great global faith. But I do believe we are moving toward a global ideology that has a place for religion and recognizes the contributions of the different traditions. Hopefully, it will have an overarching view as to how we can work together for the promotion of human values and spirituality. I would like to see an agreement that recognizes that we live on the same planet and that some interests (such as human rights) must be universal and that all religions must be respected.

S.L.: A universal ethic based on tolerance?

N.S.: Yes. Tolerance implies more than saying, "Well, let the Muslims go on with what they are doing." It also means trying to learn something from them and adding that to your own tradition. That is the attitude I think needs to inform the global citizen of the future.

TV

Books on Buddhist-Christian thought and spirituality

Gentling the Heart: Buddhist Loving-Kindness Practice for Christians by Mary Jo Meadow, Crossroad, 1994.

The Gethsemani Encounter: A Dialogue on the Spiritual Life by Buddhist and Christian Monastics, ed. Donald W. Mitchell and James Wiseman, Continuum, 1997.

The Good Heart: A Buddhist Perspective on the Teachings of Jesus, by His Holiness the Dalai Lama, Wisdom Publications, 1996.

The Gospel of Mark: A Mahayana Reading, John P. Keenan, Orbis, 1995

The Ground We Share: Everyday Practice, Buddhist and Christian by Robert Aitken and David Steindl-Rast, Shambhala, 1994.

Healing Breath: Zen Spirituality for a Wounded Earth by Ruben L.F. Habito, Orbis, 1993.

Light Sitting in Light by Elaine MacInnes, Harper-Collins, 1996.

Living Buddha, Living Christ by Thich Nhat Hanh, Riverhead, 1995.

The Meaning of Christ: A Mahayana Theology by John P. Keenan, Orbis, 1989.

The Mirror Mind: Zen-Christian Dialogue by William Johnston, Fordham, 1990.

Purifying the Heart: Buddhist Insight Meditation for Christians by Kevin Culligan, Mary Jo Meadow and Daniel Chowning, Crossroad, 1994.

Total Liberation: Zen Spirituality and the Social Dimension by Ruben L.F. Habito, Orbis, 1989.

With Roots and Wings: Christianity in an Age of Ecology and Dialogue by Jay B. McDaniel, Orbis, 1995.

Zen Spirit, Christian Spirit by Robert E. Kennedy, Continuum, 1997.

'I fear they are Pagans'

Pagan originally meant "country dweller," anyone who was attached to the land. (The word "peace," as a "binding together," shares the same root.) Country people had rites and ceremonies in keeping with the seasons and honoring the earth upon which they depended.

As Christianity spread through the cities of the Roman Empire, "pagan" began to equal non-Christian. Then it was expanded to mean all non-Christians, including city-dwelling Jews, Muslims and Buddhists. The sense of "pagan" as religious practice bound to the earth, however, was never lost.

Terry Tempest Williams points out that when then-Secretary of the Interior James Watts was asked what he feared most about the ecology movement he replied, "I fear they are Pagans." Williams says that he was right to be afraid. Are today's Pagans Pan-demonic Earth ecstasies? Perhaps, depending on who's talking. Pagans as a strong force of activist rage? I don't think so. Not yet, anyway. They're too busy enjoying themselves and Great Nature.

Even if practitioners do not conform to outside expectations, Neo-Pagan-Wiccan Earth-based religions exhibit the potential to be among the greatest inspirations for ecological action and social change.

— Robin Leveque, *Whole Earth*, Winter 1997

Veggie libel laws

The food industry began pushing for veggie libel laws following the uproar over Alar in 1989. Washington State growers said that media depictions of the chemical as a cancer threat — most famously in a *60 Minutes* episode — caused sales of apples that were treated with Alar to plummet. The growers sued CBS News but lost when the court held that the exposé should be judged by standards established by the Supreme Court beginning with its 1964 decision in *New York Times v. Sullivan*. Under those standards, meant to foster debate about topics of public import, libel plaintiffs must

demonstrate that defendants made statements with "knowledge or 'reckless disregard' of their falsity."

Angered by this defeat — and despite the federal E.P.A.'s subsequent decision to ban Alar as a carcinogen — the food industry prodded various state legislatures to pass veggie libel laws. Under such statutes, the onus is on defendants, who must prove that their statements are based on "reasonable and reliable scientific inquiry, facts or data." Because agricultural corporations produce and control much of the information available about food science, the companies themselves are in a particularly strong position to influence what is considered "reasonable and reliable."

Some veggie libel laws also provide legal fees for plaintiffs, but not for defendants, who prevail in court. Since even victory can therefore lead to bankruptcy for defendants, cash-rich corporations have every incentive to file frivolous lawsuits in order to harass and intimidate their critics.

For example, in response to its efforts to stop Hawaii from irradiating exotic tropical fruits, the Vermont-based public interest group Food & Water received a threatening letter last year from attorneys hired by the United Fresh Fruit and Vegetable Association. The letter pointedly noted the emergence of food-disparagement laws and warned that "Food & Water's actions will be closely scrutinized. ... We strongly advise you to cease and desist from these irresponsible actions immediately." This crude tactic failed when Food & Water gleefully reported the action in its newsletter and said it looked forward to filing a countersuit over the threat to its right to free speech.

But David Bederman, a law professor at Emory University in Atlanta who is serving as a consultant to several defendants in food libel cases, says the possibility of being sued has many food safety advocates and journalists running scared. "News stories on food safety issues are being subjected to a very high level of libel screening and pre-clearance," he says. "I'm hearing about cases where

stories are being spiked by lawyers."

— Ken Silverstein, *The Nation*, 4/20/98

Ground Zero at 21

The Ground Zero Center for Nonviolent Action will celebrate 21 years of nonviolent witness and resistance to the Trident nuclear weapons system August 6-8, 1998 at its home next to the Bangor Trident submarine base in Kitsap County, Wash.

Ground Zero was formed in 1977 in response to the arrival of the Trident nuclear submarine, USS OHIO. Eight of these Trident subs, along with their 24 Trident I (C4) nuclear missiles, are now based at Bangor. Ground Zero, which sits on three wooded acres next to the Bangor base, was formed to offer a continuous nonviolent presence right next to the heart of the world's most violent and destructive weapons system ever built.

The August gathering, which falls on the 53rd anniversary of the atomic bombings of Hiroshima and Nagasaki, will feature talks by Ground Zero co-founders, Jim and Shelley Douglass, longtime anti-nuclear activists Joe and Jean Gump and Pam Meidell, Director of The Atomic Mirror/Earth Ways Foundation/Abolition 2000.

On August 9, participants will go to Bangor's gates to act on the moral imperative to abolish all nuclear weapons by engaging in, supporting, or witnessing nonviolent resistance. The "Raging Grannies" will be on hand to entertain and educate with their unique brand of musical satire.

For information call 360-377-2586; e-mail <jackisue@ix.netcom.com>; or write Ground Zero at 16159 Clear Creek Rd. NW, Poulsbo, WA 98370.

short takes

Trusting in silence:

Christians doing Buddhist meditation

Jay McDaniel: Breath as icon

I call myself a “recovering fundamentalist.” Twenty-five years ago, I was seeking a way of moving past a form of Christian thought that, to my mind, was making me not a more loving person but a more narrow person. I turned to the writings of Thomas Merton, and his interest in Buddhism prompted my own — yet with fear and trembling, because I was enough of a fundamentalist that I didn’t know if I wanted to turn to such an alien source.

I went to Methodist seminary about that time, and was asked to be the English teacher for a Zen Buddhist monk from Japan, who is now a Zen master. A year’s worth of every day being one-on-one with him gave me a taste for living Buddhism in a way that books could never do. He introduced me to Zen meditation, and ever since then, off and on, I’ve been doing it, but for the past 10 years in a much more serious way.

We Methodists, our cardinal belief is that God is really nice. Also, we have a great social conscience, so we’re very activist. But Methodism lacks the contemplative dimension, and I’ve found for a full Christian life, you need not only belief and action, but you also need prayer — and not just verbal prayer, something more than words.

I’ve not found a more helpful way than Zen to find quietness. It’s basically very practical, because it takes the body so seriously. I think a lot of western spiritual disciplines have not

remembered the importance of the body as a means to quiet the mind.

When Christianity is reduced to applied belief — believing the right things and putting them into action — three problems emerge. One is fundamentalism, which is an inordinate attachment to correct belief. But another is burn-out, which is inordinate attachment to correct action — pouring yourself into trying to make the world a better place, but lacking the inner animation to keep

If the person is going to be transformed by Christ, there has to be some way to do it. Most preaching has tended toward the intellectual, and using the will to overcome our sin — which doesn’t really work.

— Anna-Louise Reynolds-Pagano

on going — and probably being too much attached to the fruits of your action. And if all your stakes are in social action, then it easily seeps into the will to mastery. You call it helping the world for God’s sake, but it can be a kind of remodeling the world into your own image.

Prayer loosens you from so much attachment to verbal belief, and it gives you a source of animation for creative healing action in the world. And it chastens your tendency to be so attached to results that you can’t let the

Spirit operate in other, more mysterious ways.

Many years ago, I accepted Jesus as my personal Lord and savior in exactly the way born-again Christians do. And I’ve not rejected that invitation, I still want that rich connection with the living Christ. But what happened was that that commitment, that entrusting of my heart to Christ, became boxed in with a real conservative theology. I needed to be certain, and I needed for everybody to agree with me so that I was certain I was certain. You can be a liberal fundamentalist as well as a conservative fundamentalist. I know a lot of liberals who also live in their heads, but they live in terms of liberal ideas rather than conservative ideas. Buddhism, I think, can help free us from casting so many stakes in right belief and thus living in our head.

I lead a prayer and meditation group at the local Episcopal church called Journey into Silence, co-sponsored by the Ecumenical Buddhist Society of Little Rock, Ark. and St. Peter’s Episcopal Church, Conway, Ark. Every Monday evening, 10 to 20 of us meet in the beautiful, old sanctuary and we do quiet sitting in Zen style. Some of us are Buddhist, some are Christian and some are none of the above. We just say, if you need an hour of your life in which you try to trust in silence, this can be that hour. It’s complemented by a commitment to a daily discipline of quiet sitting in Zen style. My morning practice is about 30 to 45 minutes of Zen meditation, and then I do the daily readings from the Book of Common Prayer. So it feeds into *lectio divina* and intercessory prayer.

For the Buddhists, it’s awakening to the Buddha-mind.

For Christians, the breath is their holy icon. Breathing is a portable icon, you can take it wherever you go, and

Artist Anna Oneglia lives in Santa Cruz, Calif.

your relaxing into your breathing would be understood as contemplative prayer. It's a living icon, because breathing has a kind of rhythm to it. And you can never be attached to your breathing, but at every moment of our lives we trust and depend on our breathing. It is probably connected with the primal experiences of Spirit that are part of the biblical tradition, because *ruah*, the Hebrew word for Spirit, is etymologically connected to breathing. The immediate experiences of breath and wind and fire were contexts through which early Christians and Jews found God. We feel like we're reclaiming that.

— Jay McDaniel is a theologian, writer and professor of religion at Hendrix College in Arkansas.

Mary Jo Meadow:

"That which leads us home"

I was reared Catholic, and for about 12 years I had practiced a Christian devotional meditation. Then I wound up with some of the problems that many people had in the 1960s in the Catholic Church, and I took a 12-year sabbatical. During that time I found Hindu yoga and practiced it.

In 1985, when my last child left home, I took a year's leave of absence from the university, and went looking for the longest, hardest, most intense spiritual retreat that I could find. I did three months of *vipassana* meditation at the Insight Meditation Center in Barre, Mass.

Vipassana is a very precise, disciplined method of being 100 percent present. It has no specifically religious content. It's simply being attentive to what goes on in one's own body and mind, and leads to the kind of self-knowledge that John of the Cross said is the only way to God. It's just being there and attentive.

Vipassana meditation is part of the



Meditation

Anna Oneglia

early Buddhism of southeast Asia. It's just the core teachings of the Buddha, who considered himself an ordinary human being who found a method for healing the human heart. It's an enormously profound psychology. When I started traveling to teach this practice, I closed down my psychotherapy prac-

tice, because I truly believed — and I have not been altered in that opinion — that I have a more profound psychology to offer people. I've quit drawing the line between the psychological and the spiritual. We're unified beings and we function as unified beings, and healing is healing. The words "health" and

“holy” come from the same root, which has to do with wholeness.

The method opens us up in such a way that the necessary work starts getting done in us. It heals unhealed emotional wounds, brings up all our unfinished emotional business, and we just sit and look at it and let it be lifted off. It starts opening up understanding of things like the impermanence of all things, which sets one quite squarely on the spiritual path, when you start realizing the pointlessness of grasping after anything, because it’s all going to go eventually. And you see it in a way that’s not an intellectual grasping — it’s a realization. *Vipassana* is sometimes translated “insight meditation.”

Vipassana has the capacity to get people working beneath the surface — instead of just saying prayers or singing songs or listening to words, to get to the still places behind the words, where one can listen very deeply and start to hear and see. There are no shortcuts and no magic — you have to do your own work. And it’s by doing your own work that you leave yourself open to what Christians would call grace.

There are analogous concepts in Buddhism — for example, a concept called *dharmmoja*, the heart of *dharmma*. *Dharmma* is the Truth with a capital T, Reality with a capital R — that which supports and upholds us, the basis for all realities, that which leads us home. And the heart or essence of *dharmma*, *dharmmoja*, is that within our heart that, as we become increasingly docile to it, guides us more and more, and takes over guidance of our lives — rather a notion like the indwelling of the Holy Spirit, really.

I also found in Buddhism a broad kind of tolerance that accepts people where they are and doesn’t insist that, if you’re a member of our club, you can’t be a member of someone else’s.

The key virtue that the Buddhist would be encouraged to develop would be tolerance, probably, not drawing lines between people in any way.

After I found the Buddhist practice, I came back to some sort of working arrangement with the Catholic Church. I’m a Catholic in that it’s the family I was born into and I honor my roots; I’m a Buddhist in that it has been the form of practice that has given me more than any other; and I’m a Hindu in that some of my most important spiritual teachers have been Hindu.

— *Mary Jo Meadow is a clinical psychologist and professor of religious studies at Mankato State University in Minnesota, who teaches and writes on insight meditation.*

Ignatius’ notion of finding God in all things is what I think the experience of satori, or enlightenment, is about.

— *Dan Roche*

John Healey: “Decentering”

I was really aware of the need for some kind of contemplative practice in my life, and I knew of a Buddhist group that was meeting in an ecumenical setting. As soon as I went there, the first feeling I had was, I was coming home again.

It was a way to go into silence without having what I’d call the clutter of Christian presuppositions. In the type of Zen that we do, you set aside all thoughts. I found out that as I started sitting in total silence, I was able to hear my own Christian tradition in a new way and really respond to it more. It was like the gospel scene of the Samaritan woman, where the people of the town say, “You told us, but now we hear it for ourselves.” All of a sudden I began to hear the Scripture

differently. I think it’s because we usually bring to the Scriptures all kinds of inherited notions and presuppositions, and this allows us to hear it with a new freshness.

So much of centering prayer — which certainly is a good Christian practice — is trying to grasp the tradition. You might take a phrase from the New Testament, for example, and become centered on that. The difficulty that I find with that is that it feels a little bit like just trying to bring myself in line. In the Buddhist tradition, I think it would be more accurate to say that we seek to become “decentered,” less concerned with ourselves and with the judgments, convictions, illusions and prejudices that we use to prop up those “selves.” With decentering, you’re letting go of your presuppositions and your conceptual framework — and then somehow you’re open in a new way to the tradition.

I find that some of the emptying that takes place is very close to a Christian experience of self-emptying — it’s a getting out of the way of grace. I think it gets close to justification by faith. It’s not your works that are going to save you. You just have to empty yourself, and — as a lot of the Protestant reformers said — let God be God. But that means getting even thought out of the way. It means that you’re not going to manage God.

I think that there’s a vast gap between a lot of the preaching of the church and the complexity of our own tradition. There’s a loss of the mystical dimension — especially in an emphasis on believing rather than experiencing. And when that happens, people fall into a fundamentalism, where a literalism with regard to the Bible takes over. It’s when people aren’t aware of the complexity of the tradition that they feel that this is going into heresy.

There's such an enormous gap between the theologians who are trying to work out the relationship of Christianity to the non-Christian religions, and those in the pews. In India, for instance, where they are a minority, both Anglicans and Romans have had to come to terms with other religious traditions. And that's happening more and more in this country. We're going to have to come to terms with Islam, and we're going to have an increasing Buddhist community in the U.S. as the Asian community grows.

I feel a responsibility to carry the Christian story — my story is a story of God's action in the world. But I have to be able to speak about God in a way that doesn't turn God into an idol or into some construction of my own. The Buddhist reluctance to talk about God should make us more cautious in talking about God, and make us speak with more sense of God's mystery.

— John Healey is director of the Archbishop Hughes Institute on Religion and Culture at Fordham University.

Anna-Louise Reynolds-Pagano: Coming into spaciousness

I had been teaching prayer in my parish, and one of the people in my prayer group had experienced some Buddhist meditation, and she encouraged me to do this. I didn't really have time, and I was quite leery — I didn't understand how it would benefit my Christian practice. But eventually, at a very low point in my life, between jobs, I had time to go to a 10-day *vipassana* meditation retreat, led by an Indian Buddhist living in Burma. It was absolutely transformative.

I went through these funny stages

while I was there. I got really worried that my bishop would find out and put me up for trial or something. I also felt a strong urge to stand up in the meditation hall, denounce the teacher, and tell these people that the answer was not Buddhism, it was Christ! You're in a cauldron situation where there's no talking, no eye contact, you're simply put back on yourself. So you face your-



Meditation at the Zen Mountain Monastery in Mt. Tremper, N.Y.

Jack Kurtz/Impact Visuals

self and everything comes up.

The method was breathing and body-scanning — you just go through the body, and feel everything in the body. There's a lot of theory behind it about how the body actually stores griefs and injuries in the cells, and we begin to react out of those rather than out of

what's in the present. The idea is to let those pieces dissolve, kind of like air bubbles, as you sit.

The Christian meditation teaching that I've encountered didn't go as far into the psychology of the person, and I think it's very important. If the person is going to be transformed by Christ, there has to be some way to do it. Most preaching has tended toward the intellectual, and using the will to overcome our sin — which doesn't really work — and then kind of making a mystical leap. I noticed that in my sermons I'd describe our human situation, "Here's what the Gospel says we do in our sinfulness ..." and then make sort of a leap: "But when we rely on the power of Christ ..." What is that power and how do we get to it?

At the end of this first Buddhist retreat, I experienced such a diminution of the conflict I've always had with my mother — without any thinking about it. I didn't think about my mother at all, I was concerned about present-day issues that were hounding me as I sat. On the last day, I had this sort of vision, in a metaphorical scene, of my relationship with my mother. She had tried to make me into her image, and I realized that she didn't do it, so I didn't have to fight any more. I don't have to bristle if someone thinks I'm a nice lady; I don't have to show

them that I'm really a tough person. To me, it was worth 10 years of psychotherapy.

I was just reading in the daily office from 1 Corinthians 10:13: "God will see to it that every temptation has a way out, so that it will never be impossible for you to bear it." This practice,

for me, provides the way out. For example, if I'm angry — if anger arises, as the Buddhists say — the practice teaches me to observe the anger in my body, not to repress the feelings and not to act them out, but to go through them. Anger is painful, and if I shout or yell at somebody, or deck them, it's because I'm trying to get rid of that feeling. If I just go through it and experience it, then it dissipates.

In meditation, the small self — the ego, who always wants to be in charge — gets softened, and we become aware of this larger self. That's what Jesus is saying: You must lose your life in order to find it. You must give up your rigidity, your hard edge, your thinking you're right, your wanting to be right. There's much more space in the self — it becomes more open and spacious and larger. I've noticed that a lot, just with noise around my house — some truck backing up and beeping — which has the potential to fill my whole consciousness and really make me mad and say, "I can't work here, there's noise!" In meditation I've learned to take those things and kind of put them somewhere off at the edge. It's there, but it's not knocking me over.

My practice is to sit for an hour every morning, then I read the daily office and go to mass. On Sundays, I go to a local Zen center and sit with them from 9 until 10:30, and then I go to mass, and I find that a great preparation. There is chanting and prostrations. Somebody said that Buddhism is learning to bow, learning to be respectful and compassionate to whatever is.

To me, religions are like wells. They look different on top, everyone has their own little structure, but they all go down to the same water. I don't think they're totally homogenous, but somewhere in this universe, this reality that we're living in, they meet. The

Buddhists are great at "both-and." I think the western mind always wants to go "either-or." Is this right or is that right? The Buddhists say, yes!

— Anna-Louise Reynolds-Pagano is an Episcopal priest in the Diocese of North Carolina.

Dan Roche: Just plain "paining"

I had worked with Saul Alinsky and done some fairly radical community organizing in the black community in Chicago, and then I worked in India for an ecumenical foundation for roughly five years. I was pretty much fried after that experience. I had been deported from Hong Kong, I had been beat up a couple of times in India by some paid thugs, I'd been trailed by the KCIA in Korea. I'd been chain-smoking and there was a period of my life in Asia when I was living a very unwholesome, unhealthy life. I

*It's profoundly moving to me
how much falls away when
you really attend to the moment
you're in.*

— Rosanna Kazanjiaan

wanted to just clean out before coming back to the U.S.

I ended up spending about nine months of intensive practice, doing some yoga as well as some intensive Buddhist meditation. After spending some time in an ashram where I stopped smoking, I really began to calm down in terms of my anger level around some of the social justice issues that I'd been working with. Ironically, my way of getting back to my own Christian, Catholic roots was through Buddhist meditation practice.

In order to listen to God, you have to be quiet and aware and attentive. Those are key words in Buddhism as well as

in Ignatian practice. It's about being aware of those patterns of behavior that condition me and make me unfree and present obstacles to God flowing through me.

Part of my own practice is being aware of everything in the present moment, whatever is the dominant sensation. If the dominant sensation is pain, then being present to the pain, and seeing what my behavioristic response is to that — fear, aversion, acceptance.

On one retreat, we sat for two hours without moving in a lotus or half-lotus posture. You go through agonizing pain. You can wallow in your pain, and identify with this pain as my pain, with the emphasis on "my" instead of just plain "paining," but if you can let go, a change occurs. The pain becomes more intense, it becomes less intense, it changes to other parts of your body, and, in fact, it can really open up the blocks in your own body. It's just part of the ebb and flow, and you break through these kinds of thresholds. But the key is to dissociate yourself from this "my," this identification and possession.

The Buddha speaks of the source of suffering as people holding onto things as being permanent. This whole notion of detachment is so present in Ignatius of Loyola, and is certainly present in the teaching of Jesus.

The Buddha never affirmed or denied God. Basically the question was, if there's a God, we should go within and experience that awareness ourselves. The experience of the holy people from all mystical traditions is a oneness with all that is — and that oneness with all that is, is God, for me. Ignatius' notion of finding God in all things is what I think the experience of *satori*, or enlightenment, is about.

Ignatius was detached from the monastery, just as the Buddhist would say that the ultimate goal is not to with-

draw from the world, but to forsake that security in the life of the *bodhisattva* [an enlightened being who is dedicated to helping all living beings reach enlightenment]. The experience is in the marketplace, not in withdrawal but in presence in the world.

Both in Buddhism and Christianity, the point of meditation practice is to foster compassion. What Gandhi and Martin Luther King were speaking to — compassion for the oppressor as well as the oppressed — is a profound kind of spiritual experience. When that infuses social justice work, it is significantly different from a kind of Machiavellian control or power model. In my own experience, there was a need for balance, for a practice of holistic compassion for self, as well as others.

— *Dan Roche is a former Jesuit who also spent time as a Trappist novice under the direction of Thomas Merton. He is currently director of the Milford Spiritual Center, a Jesuit retreat house in Ohio.*

Rosanna Kazanjiaan: “Kitchen Buddhism”

What wore me out, to some extent, about Christianity is the incredible number of words that we use. At this stage of my life, I’ve moved to silence as a kind of blessed relief. Some of the language that is traditional and old and beautiful certainly conjures up images that deepen the spirit, but there wasn’t enough silence for me in my own church setting.

I have a dear friend who is a Buddhist, and about six or seven years ago I said to her, “I need some good books about Buddhism and I need to learn how to meditate better.” And she said, “Just do it.” So I began to sit for short periods of time. Now my practice is to

sit each morning for about an hour. Then, in our Greenfire community, we have silent meditation in the evening.



Meditation at the Zen Mountain Monastery in Mt. Tremper, N.Y.

Jack Kurtz/Impact Visuals

A year ago, I went to Green Gulch, a Zen center in California, and spent 10 days there in fairly disciplined practice, and this year I went to Barre, an Insight Meditation center, for a week.

I’m slowly trying to give myself the gift of silence and coming to stillness. I’ve found that by making time and space inside myself, I lessen the spaces between myself and others, because I’m making a place from which to come to relationships or to compassion.

The longer I live as a Christian and as a priest, the simpler my faith gets. I’m not as excited by dogma and theological premises as I am about the basic

personhood of Jesus as both a compassionate human being and a man of justice. And I think I’m more drawn to the Jesus of the desert and of the quiet times than I am to the theology that has grown up around him.

I find some aspects of Buddhism really useful, because it is so practical. I can call on it for everyday, practical interactions in my life, and ways of living more compassionately and in the moment. It’s profoundly moving to me how much falls away when you really attend to the moment you’re in — and that doesn’t mean not being involved in justice issues — it means being engaged with what is right at hand and what you can actually do something about.

I’m mostly interested in western interpretation of Buddhism through women who are Buddhists and long-time practitioners. I like what they’re doing, which is to include the body and the more ordinary things of life — a kind of “kitchen Buddhism.”

I live in the country and I have chickens and I do a lot of gardening. I’m the cook here, and I feed the guests in the summertime from the garden. There’s something about being just present to those very ordinary things that Buddhism seems friendly with.

And because the Christian way is my way — it’s in my bones and my soul — I find that another language that speaks of some similar things makes the landscape a lot larger and richer. I think I needed a freshening up of the language of the spirit.

— *Rosanna Kazanjiaan is an Episcopal priest living and working at Greenfire, a retreat center for women in Tenants Harbor, Maine.* **TW**

Emptying Jesus

by John Keenan

These days, an Episcopalian or Presbyterian may well tell you about her Zen master. And Roman Catholic nuns and priests travel about teaching Zen meditation. I would honor the openness of these seekers, Christians who are willing to recognize wisdom in this practice of the great Buddhist tradition.

For myself, I have been content to carry on with the various traditional forms of Christian contemplation that I learned in a Roman Catholic seminary in the late 1950s. The gift that I seek from the Buddhist tradition is of another shape altogether. That is the gift of philosophy.

I believe that Buddhism can make a contribution to Christianity precisely because of the “otherness” of its language — because it brings to speech very different approaches to philosophical issues, enabling one to pose new questions and thus come to new insights. For this reason, I have chosen to base my attempts at Christian theologizing upon the Mahayana philosophy of emptiness, which teaches that all views are empty of any unchanging core content. Any view, religious or otherwise, is necessarily conditioned by the multitude of historical and cultural factors that are entailed in human living.

Mahayana Buddhist thinkers reject a metaphysics that would define the essences of things in final and irreversible philosophic visions, but they do not thereby banish philosophy or negate the

value of human thinking. Paradoxically, by demoting human thinking to a human, conventional status, they affirm its validity as a human construct.

In no wise is emptiness the debunking of meaning in a “that’s-all-there-is, Virginia” fashion: No Santa, no magic, just the boredom of everyday life. No. To affirm that everything is “only” dependently co-arisen from a host of different causes is to affirm that — if one could but see with the eyes of awakened wisdom — these everyday experiences are replete with profound significance.

The alternative is to cling each to our own images and ideas as if somehow they could actually capture reality and express it in clear and unambiguous language. Indeed, this clinging to imagined realities is the very meaning of delusion and primal ignorance. And it can be the source of arrogant and intolerant religious certitude.

Mahayana Buddhist philosophies can offer Christians new philosophical models through which to think about the faith without succumbing to traditional metaphysical arrogance. When these models are applied, the Gospel can indeed become diverse to diverse people, can be preached to those who have no understanding of — or who reject — the familiar metaphysical models of the West. We can demonstrate that the faith is capable of being articulated in as many tongues as there are languages.

Mahayana philosophy can, for example, offer an altogether new framework in which to consider the current dispute about the historical Jesus. Opposing views in these debates have become clearer, starker and more denunciatory in recent months. To sketch the positions of

one pair of opponents in these discussions: In one corner we have Robert W. Funk with his *Honest to Jesus*, concluding that we have “only the story about Jesus,” with no supernatural realities anywhere, no self-serving theological ideologies, no comforting guarantees. Echoing Ernest Renan’s *Vie de Jesus*, Funk proclaims that Jesus is a poet who had a glimpse of God’s imperial domain, not the theological “heavy” of later Christians. In the other corner we have Luke Timothy Johnson, arguing in *The Real Jesus* that the truly real Jesus is not the construct of Funk’s Jesus Seminar, with its debunking approach, but rather the Jesus of the gospels, who is encountered by practitioners as the risen Jesus who lives today.

From a Mahayana philosophical perspective the framework of this “historical Jesus” debate is far too narrow. Each side makes assumptions that would be negated in a Mahayana approach. Each makes claims that, if emptied, would be affirmed in a Mahayana approach.

Funk definitively rejects the overlay of later Christian theory, for in his view this is precisely what Jesus needs to be liberated from. Jesus, the divine son co-eternal with the Father, “deserves a demotion,” he writes. To achieve this demotion, we are to go on a “theological diet” anchored in the historical Jesus, the sage teacher and poet of God’s domain. To this end, Funk attempts to uncover the “specific difference” of Jesus’ visage from the general crowd. In a Mahayana context, Funk is indeed engaging in emptying traditional Christological views, presenting us with “just Jesus,” in all his historical bareness and power. So far, so good, for no view can represent the final state of anything.

Yet Funk fails to empty emptiness — and thus he fails to recover a sense of the historical reality and significance of early Christian faith experiences and confes-

John Keenan is professor of religious studies at Middlebury College and an Episcopal priest. He is the author of *The Meaning of Christ: A Mahayana Theology* and *The Gospel of Mark: A Mahayana Reading*.

sions. The point of a metaphysically empty Christ is not to have an essential definition of Jesus arrived at via a historical method driven by a positivistic agenda, which allows us only scanty glimpses of the earliest, pre-gospel figure of Jesus. It is not enough merely to empty views. The view of emptiness itself must be emptied, and this is done by reclaiming the dependently co-arisen truth of the tradition. Indeed, why should we privilege the image of Jesus at one particular point in history — a reconstructed, pre-gospel view of Jesus — over depictions of Jesus in the gospels, or over other views of him throughout the long history of the later faith?

Luke Timothy Johnson in his *The Real Jesus: The Misguided Quest for the Historical Jesus and the Truth of the Traditional Gospels* presents a trenchant and apposite critique of the procedures and protocols of Funk and the Jesus Seminar. He is especially critical of the “creeping certitude” that extrapolates from first instance probabilities to second instance certitudes. Indeed, one often does wonder how Funk or any scholar can be so confident of opinions that seem to admit only of greater or lesser probability. Johnson’s critique is a liberating breeze that whisks away those overwrought historical certitudes.

Johnson, however, goes on to assert that there does exist in the gospels a constant, normative and true pattern of Jesus, a pattern that presents a core experience of Jesus as risen, a pattern that is expressed from a post-resurrection perspective. Johnson seems to recommend a new version of the kerygmatic theology so in vogue a few decades ago, a theology in which one can clearly identify the core meaning of the gospels as the real canon within the canon, with little regard for — or need of — historical research into the actual conditions of the times and texts. Johnson rightly critiques Funk’s approach

as making an unfounded assumption that “the recovery of origins means the recovery of essence.” Quite the contrary, he argues, only through a “post-resurrection perspective” can one encounter the real Jesus, the risen Jesus who lives today. “The significance of Jesus is not determined by his ministry alone, but above all and essentially by the mystery of his death and resurrection.” Again the intrusion of essentialist categories, as if Nietzsche had never lived and no postmodern ever critiqued anything. More history is needed, not less!

Having declared the emptiness of all ideas and words, the awakened person is liberated to engage in ideas and words with passion and commitment.

If we divorce our awareness of Jesus from critical historical study, then might not the image of a risen Christ become just another frozen paradigm for a self-defined religious life, without in any significant way challenging the very identity of the Christian? Might not a risen Christ serve simply as a support for one’s cherished cultural identity? If we can safely ignore the history of Jesus, why can we not ignore the history of later traditions? Furthermore, who says that there is a univocal, core experience of the risen Lord? An “experience” can be just as “essential” as a cherished doctrine.

Johnson’s argument for a core experience and a normative perspective parallels the metaphysical approach of traditional Christology. It too would be negated by the Mahayana philosophy of emptiness, but not in the sense of debunking the faith experience or perspective.

All core experiences and all perspectives are declared to be empty of inner essence, and thereby we are freed to cultivate and proclaim experiences of the risen Lord and to develop perspectives that bring those experiences to speech, as in the four gospels.

The Mahayanists encountered a parallel problem long ago — they too had to come to terms with an awareness that all meanings, even those associated with the Buddha, were language constructs and empty of any final referent. They too had a metaphysical tradition that claimed to provide the final and absolutely true viewpoint and they too had docetic tendencies that depicted a scarcely human, supernatural Buddha. Thus, Mahayana thinkers declared that words and stories — *a fortiori* historical words and stories — get at nothing core and central, no final, absolute viewpoint, because whatever is contained in a viewpoint is language-formed and humanly constructed. And yet those words and stories are still words and stories, patterning our reading of life, inscribing themselves upon our minds and constructing our identities. Their not being absolute does not mean that they are not true. The patterns, conventional though they be, can nevertheless be powerful and true. True insofar as not absolute. True insofar as producing good fruit, insofar as fostering engagement in compassionate activity.

Zen Buddhism teaches that there is nothing special, no special realm of ontologically true being, no special realm of privileged history, whether early or late. Having declared the emptiness of all ideas and words, the awakened person is liberated to engage in ideas and words with passion and commitment. Precisely because nothing is guaranteed by supernatural status claims, human effort is crucial and indispensable. **TW**

Realigning the wheel: an interview with Ruben Habito

by Marianne Arbogast

Born in the Philippines, Ruben Habito spent nearly two decades in Japan, where he completed Zen koan training. Habito is the author of Total Liberation: Zen Spirituality and the Social Dimension (Orbis, 1989) and Healing Breath: Zen Spirituality for a Wounded Earth (Orbis, 1993). Habito is currently residing in Japan, on leave from his duties as resident teacher at Maria Kannon Zen Center in Dallas, Tex.

Marianne Arbogast: You have written about the growth of Zen in the Philippines among Christians who were deeply committed to social and political change. How did this develop?

Ruben Habito: There was a Roman Catholic sister from Canada — Elaine MacInnes — who had lived in Japan and practiced Zen for many years, and was reassigned to the Philippines in the late 1970s. She began sitting with a group in the Philippines and little by little the group began to grow. They were coming together to sit in Zen meditation and deriving not only new spiritual energy but also a vision for social transformation.

During the days of the Marcos dictatorship, many of them were working in human rights and in rural or urban action. Elaine herself was going to the political prisoners' detention camp, and she was given permission by the military authorities to teach Zen to the political prisoners.

In 1986, during the time of the famous



Ruben Habito

February revolution in the Philippines, many of them were right there in the middle of the action, in front of the tanks and so on. There was even a prominent doctor who was a Zen practitioner who later became a cabinet minister of the Aquino government.

M.A.: Is there still a community like that in the Philippines today, of people who are sitting together and also actively engaged in work for social change?

R.H.: Yes. Maybe they are not engaged in social action as a Zen community, but groups of them or individual members certainly are. The Zen Center for Oriental Spirituality in Manila is now being directed by three persons. One of them is a Catholic sister, Rosario Battung, who was authorized to teach Zen by a Japanese Zen Buddhist master. She is a very good model of that kind of social engagement, having worked in peoples' movements in many rural and urban contexts.

There are more and more persons from

the grassroots sectors, even from urban poor areas, who are learning to sit in Zen. I recall one sitting session I attended mainly for a group of about 40 people from a poor district in Manila held at a retreat house run by Catholic sisters. After the sitting session and the shared lunch, they all joined the rally of the farmers in front of the Presidential Palace in Malacanang, demanding land reform and basic changes in society.

M.A.: It sounds like a kind of engaged Christian Zen. Are there other places where that is happening?

R.H.: Well, it need not be just Christians. I have visited Buddhist countries — Sri Lanka and Thailand — where there was a very obvious gap between the rich and the poor, and a structure of power that was not benefitting the poor. And I knew some monks whose task it was to introduce meditation to those engaged in social transformation and vice versa, to introduce the monks to situations of poverty and oppression. And they were in alliance with Christians who were engaged in social transformation, and also learning about meditation.

M.A.: What can Zen offer to Christians who are committed to working for social change?

R.H.: It can offer a recovery of the contemplative dimension of the Christian faith, which tends to get submerged in a lot of do-goodism. There are many Christians who are already engaged in works of social and ecological justice. The meditative or contemplative practice that Zen can offer gives a sense of grounding — not so much in an ideological or even theological view of things, but on a more deeply spiritual level, as they find themselves connected with the community of fellow creatures who are in situations of suffering.

Socially active Christians might tend to say, "Don't just sit there, do something." But then the Buddhists would say,

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"Don't just do something, sit there." It's not that one has to choose — they need one another. Sitting there is what grounds people in their connectedness with everyone else, and that very direct and very tangible sense of connectedness with one's fellow beings can empower one to the kinds of social and ecological action that are so much needed in today's world. If their suffering or pain is embraced as one's own, then one cannot but do something about it.

M.A.: Are there differences between a Christian and a Buddhist view of suffering?

R.H.: The Buddhist way of looking at suffering is based on the Sanskrit and thereby Pali-translated word which is *dukkha*. The word *dukkha* literally means that the wheel is misplaced or misaligned. The human situation, then, is seen as dysfunctional because it's not what it's meant to be. That's just a phenomenological observation, that the Buddha noted as his First Noble Truth. The human situation as we know it, based on pursuing egoistic desires and cravings, tends to this kind of dislocation within oneself, with one's fellow human beings and with the natural world. Many Buddhists have taken that mainly on an individual plane, but now there are groups that are calling themselves "socially engaged Buddhists" who are also applying this notion of *dukkha* on a social/ecological plane. All these levels — personal, social and ecological — are characterized by *dukkha*. From the Buddhist view, in the sense that there is dislocation, it needs to be corrected.

Of course in the Christian tradition, liberation theology has called us to a renewed understanding of sin no longer as just an individual act but as something that is also institutionalized and structuralized. What we mean when we say *metanoia*, a total turning back to God, is not something we can confine to an

individual personal plane, but it involves all of the implications of our dislocated being.

There is a tendency among some Buddhist communities to see a situation of poverty or of discrimination, for example, as the result of evil actions of the people involved in their past lives. And so they would say, if they are able to bear this faithfully they will gather merit for the next life and they will be reborn in a better state. That's one kind of view from a Buddhist perspective that would be against the liberative vision of Buddhism as such. So it's a task Buddhists have to address.

Zen can offer a recovery of the contemplative dimension of the Christian faith, which tends to get submerged in a lot of do-goodism.

In the same way, many Christians have called our attention to the fact that the cross can be used as a justification or rationalization of situations of suffering — "It's your cross, so you should bear it." But that is certainly a gross misunderstanding of the mystery of the cross — one could even say a blasphemous way of understanding, if it is meant to condone victimization of persons or of other creatures. So we in the Christian tradition need to clarify for ourselves a theology of the cross that is liberative.

M.A.: What is your impression of the trend in this country, where it seems many fewer books are being published now on liberation theology, but more on spirituality? I have heard that meditation retreats often fill up very quickly, whereas seminars on social justice issues don't.

R.H.: It's a swing of the pendulum. Perhaps many of those who were socially and/or ecologically engaged in the 1960s

and 1970s find that after all these years, there's nothing that's really changed, and so they're turning to other sources of spiritual nourishment. Or perhaps it's a kind of a long-phase burnout.

There is a sense of hopelessness that can overcome one after years of expending one's efforts, and it can cause a state of numbness. This kind of sitting is a very nourishing practice for people in that situation. They can derive a sense of hope and confidence that one need not tie the worth of what one is engaged in with the external results. There is a sense of engaging in actions for social/ecological transformation as the path itself.

In the New Testament, the disciples were often given the advice to go to the desert before going out again to proclaim the word. I would liken this to the two phases of breathing — the in-breath and the out-breath. We can't be exhaling all the time.

M.A.: How would you evaluate what seems to be a waning of interest today in being part of big movements for change?

R.H. Perhaps there is a disillusionment with large institutionalized structures. Even though they may start out with an admirable motivation, somehow as a movement grows larger, it tends to get caught up in power plays or ways of action that are motivated more by the desire to preserve the institution. Small communities, where one can truly relate with others and be responsible to the group, seem to be the kind of matrices for social change that we can place our hope in. Community-based groups can be empowered by one another and learn about what others are doing, but without having to be subsumed under a structure whereby there's somebody who calls the shots from the top and then everybody moves based on that. This kind of a vision can be empowered by the practice of contemplation, and Zen is a way that can build community.

TW

Speaking up for Tibet

by Natasha Ma

Last July 25, the 72nd General Convention of the Episcopal Church in the U.S. passed a resolution affirming the importance of Tibetan culture and religion, which teaches nonviolence and peacemaking as a way of life, expressing "concern for the safety and future" of the Tibetan people and urging "direct dialogue" between the Chinese leadership and the Dalai Lama.

Prior to the Chinese invasion of 1950, religion permeated the Tibetans' daily lives. But in 1960, the International Commission of Jurists found "that the Chinese will not permit adherence to and practice of Buddhism in Tibet." All but 13 of Tibet's 6,254 monasteries were mostly destroyed during the Cultural Revolution.

China has bragged, since 1982 when it lifted a ban on religious practices, of allowing its Tibetan captives religious freedom. But today it maintains strict control over religious institutions and practices. In 1993, Asia Watch reported a sharp increase in the number of political arrests of Tibetan nuns. Reports of gender-specific torture, such as rape by electric cattle prods, became numerous. In 1995 two nuns, Gyaltsen Kelsang and Phuntsog Yangkyi, died from injuries sustained in prison shortly after they were released from custody.

Freedom House, in its 1995 survey of political rights and civil liberties in the world, listed Tibet among the worst

rated territories, citing China's interference in imposing its own choice for Tibet's second most important religious figure, the Panchen Lama. Gedhun Choekyi Nyima (chosen for this role by the Dalai Lama) has been held under house arrest in Beijing since May 1995. The world's youngest prisoner of conscience (nine years old on April 25, 1998) may become a life-long charge of China's Public Security Bureau.

After denouncing the Dalai Lama's choice, Beijing chose Gyaltzen Norbu, a boy of the same age, whose upbringing and education the Chinese leaders will control. When the Dalai Lama dies, they will use their puppet Panchen

Lama to force a successor upon the Tibetan people.

Since 1995, the New York-based Human Rights Watch/Asia has reported China's steps toward curtailing religious activity in Tibet: forbidding the reconstruction of monasteries destroyed during the Cultural Revolution; limiting the number of monks and nuns allowed in monasteries; prohibit-

In February 1996, orders were issued to close all "politically active" monasteries. Repression, imprisonment, and abuse or torture of monks and nuns accused of political activism have increased.

ing the building of new monasteries; prohibiting Tibetan State employees and Communist Party members from practicing religion; and strengthening control of the government over each monastery through "Democratic Management Committees" (composed of Chinese soldiers).

In April 1996, the government banned photographs of the Dalai Lama in monasteries and private homes. Police conducted house-to-house searches to enforce the ban. In May 1996, the

Action for Tibet

- Encourage your representatives to push for immediate sanctions on China, as they did on Sudan, until religious persecution has ceased (as pursuant the Freedom from Religious Persecution Act, H.R. 2531/H.R. 1685).

- Adopt a prisoner of conscience through International Campaign for Tibet, 1825 K Street, NW, Suite 250, Washington D.C. 20006; phone: 202-785-1515 and contact the People's Republic of China continuously on his or her behalf. Also write frequently to the prisoner.

- Urge religious leaders to pressure China for permission to visit Tibet.

- Urge your representatives to press China to engage in dialogue with the Dalai Lama concerning Tibet's future.

- Boycott China's products, and inform companies (such as REI) and stores why you are not buying their products.

For further information contact International Committee of Lawyers for Tibet, 2288 Fulton Street, Suite 312, Berkeley, CA, 94704, tel: (510)466-0586; and Amnesty International USA, 500 Sansome Street, #615, San Francisco, CA 94111.

Natasha Ma is a freelance writer living in Texas, who taught English in Tibet for two years (1991-92). She uses a pen name when writing about Tibet, so as not to jeopardize her chance of obtaining permission to return there.

government began “registering” and “reeducating” dissident monks at Tibet’s three main monasteries. “Patriotic reeducation” is now carried out even at remote monasteries. Monks are coerced to sign statements criticizing the Dalai Lama. Those performing in an “unsatisfactory” manner must leave the monastery. Hundreds have been forced out in recent years. Some monasteries have been closed, police stations permanently constructed in others. Every monastery visited by Virginia Congressman Frank Wolf in August 1997 was controlled by resident Chinese overseers.

Last November, Communist party members indicated that the “reeducation” campaign would be extended to schools and villages. Under the pretext that religion would have a negative influence on Tibet’s economic development, the new policy aims to undermine and destroy the distinct cultural and national identity of the Tibetan people. The official Chinese newspaper, *Tibet Daily*, has called on Tibetans to embrace atheism.

The continuing exodus of Tibetan refugees into India and Nepal now includes many monks and nuns who report increasingly harsh restrictions on religious freedom and brutalities inflicted on those refusing to comply with the Chinese government directives. Yet corporate interests in the U.S. are pressuring the Clinton administration — in the interest of profit — to turn a blind eye to human rights abuses in Tibet. For over 40 years, Tibet has been abandoned by the world because Beijing threatened to reduce or eliminate trade with any country supporting human rights or freedom for Tibetans. Finally, however, people are speaking up.

In 1996, the International Campaign for Tibet launched an Interfaith Net-



Milarepa, the laughing Dorje

work for Tibet. Last April 24 the Dalai Lama, religious and moral leaders from all faiths, and thousands of Americans

gathered at the National Cathedral in Washington, D.C. to rededicate themselves to securing for all the world's

people the right to worship.

In September 1997, the U.S. House of Representatives International Relations Committee held hearings on religious persecution around the world. Legislation has been introduced by Sen. Arlen Specter (R., Pa.) and Rep. Frank Wolf (R., Va.) that would create a White House position to monitor religious persecution and have the power to im-

pose sanctions against offending countries.

And last October, Secretary of State Madeleine Albright appointed Gregory Craig as Special Coordinator for Tibetan issues — a unique, first-of-its-kind-in-the-world position. Craig's task is to promote human rights and the preservation of the unique religious, cultural and linguistic heritage of the

Tibetans, and to encourage dialogue between the Chinese government and the Dalai Lama.

The Clinton administration claims to stand up for Tibet's religious freedom, although it will not support self-determination for Tibet. But the two will always be intertwined: Freedom for the Tibetan people will come only when authoritarian rule ends. **TW**

Tibet's ecological crisis

Before the Chinese invasion, Tibet had the world's most successful system of environmental protection — Tibetan Buddhist compassion. Children were taught that life is to be taken when necessary for survival: Wolves could be killed only because they killed goats, for example, or rats because they devoured crops.

Today, most Tibetans are still gentle and compassionate, but as endangered as their fragile, high-altitude ecosystem. Until the last few years, the true situation was kept secret. Even U.S. wildlife groups funding research in China wouldn't risk their relationships with Beijing. But the truth gradually leaked out: The Chinese are abusing Tibet's natural resources so much that the region may never recover.

At the 1996 World Conservation Congress in Montreal, the International Committee of Lawyers for Tibet, the UK's Free Tibet Campaign, international sponsors including the World Conservation Union, and China's delegation negotiated the first resolution adopted by an international body on Tibet's environment. It supports cooperation,

specifically citing concerns over the hydroelectric project at Yamdrok Tso, Tibet's most sacred lake.

But Yamdrok Tso isn't the only body of water in peril. China plans dozens of hydro-electric dams on Tibet's rivers, for the export of electricity to Chinese cities. Tibet lies on a vast plateau rising four kilometers in the Himalayas' shadow. Since all of Asia's major rivers, including the Yellow and Yangtze, begin there, the implications for the entire continent are enormous.

The Tibetan Information Network estimates that a quarter of the accessible forests in both China and Tibet have fallen. Reforestation is neglected, leaving hillsides vulnerable to erosion. Clear-cutting threatens the habitat of the endangered giant panda and golden monkey, as well as over 5,000 plant species, including the native rhododendrons that bloom on the east side of Mt. Everest in the legendary Valley of Flowers.

Tibet's sacred sites are mined for uranium. Nuclear testing continues, and there are reports of nuclear waste dumping on plains where Tibetan nomads suffer illness and death from mysterious diseases consistent with radiation exposure. At

least 17 secret radar stations and 14 military airfields are established, as well as at least five bases for ICBMs and intermediate-range nuclear missiles. About 300,000 troops and a quarter of China's 350 nuclear missiles are based in Tibet.

Agricultural development, combined with Chinese migration, is disrupting traditional practices and the ecological balance maintained by Tibetan farmers for centuries.

For Tibetans, wild animals are symbols of freedom. For 1,300 years of Buddhist rule, they were protected. Today, as a result of unrestricted Chinese hunting, wild animals exist only in the most remote areas, and many species are near extinction.

When the 14th Dalai Lama received the 1989 Nobel Peace Prize, it was the first time a citation made specific reference to this ecological crisis. Still in exile, Tibet's spiritual and temporal leader dreams of his home's transformation into a free refuge where humanity and nature can live in peaceful, harmonious balance.

— N.M. [*Excerpted from a longer report first published in Toward Freedom, 11/97*]

Lambeth to examine international debt and economic justice

[The following is excerpted from the study document issued by the planners of Section One of the Lambeth Conference of Anglican bishops, which is scheduled to meet this summer in Canterbury, England. This section of the conference is to examine the theme, "Called to Full Humanity."]

The measure of the economic crisis that engulfs many developing and underdeveloped countries of the world on the eve of a new millennium can be judged by the fact that all the provinces of the Anglican Communion placed the issue of International Debt as a matter for urgent discussion at the Lambeth Conference 1998. The reason is not difficult to understand. A recent World Bank Report states that in 1995, 1.3 billion people in the developing world still struggle to survive on less than \$1 per day and the number continually increases. Every year 8 million children die of diseases linked to impure water and air pollution; 50 million children are mentally and physically damaged because of poor nutrition and 130 million children, 80 percent of them girls, are denied the chance to go to school. At the same time, one-fifth of the world's population enjoys 85 percent of the world's income.

The alarming fact is that despite higher levels of international co-operation since the establishment of the World Bank and the International Monetary Fund 50 years ago, populations of the developing world are sliding into a spiral of increasing poverty. For example, World Bank figures show that the gap between the rich and poor is widening; the richest fifth of the world's people had 60 times more income than the poorest fifth in 1991, up from 30 times in 1960. Oxfam is one among many voices of development agencies

who maintain that debt repayments contribute heavily to this tragedy of escalating poverty. A 1996 Oxfam Briefing Report states that it would be possible by the year 2000 to make social investments which would save the lives of around 21 million African children and provide 90 million girls with primary education, for less than is currently being spent on servicing international debt.

A 1996 Oxfam Briefing Report states that it would be possible by the year 2000 to make social investments which would save the lives of around 21 million African children and provide 90 million girls with primary education, for less than is currently being spent on servicing international debt.

The trigger for the current debt crisis was the increase of oil prices by OPEC countries. Some of the new oil income was lent to developing countries, with little attention paid to how viable the loan was. The borrowing governments used the loans for varying purposes, depending on the nature of those governments. Then world interest rates rose dramatically and prices of developing countries' exports fell. The debt became unpayable. Accordingly, the debt is further impoverishing the poorest countries' citizens. The debt servicing bill of many poor nations is often the highest budget item, several times more than is spent on basic needs

like health care and education. In reality, the debt payments now being paid by the poor countries of the world are usurious interest repayments which have escalated well beyond what could have been anticipated at the time when the loan agreement was entered into. The amount of the original capital loan, in most instances, was paid off. But interest payments have accumulated, and the sum still owed has risen. In order to keep paying interest, debtor nations find they have to borrow more. It is a vicious spiral which, critics have noted, amounts to a new form of slavery.

A recent World Bank forecast on African economies has encouraging news. It reports that half sub-Saharan African countries have had economic growth of at least 5 percent in the past two years. And that overall economic growth in Africa is forecast at 3.8 percent over the next decade. The report, however, insists that such growth will not benefit the people of Africa unless Africa is relieved of crippling debts.

The debt crisis is a symptom of a breakdown of the management systems of the global economy. First among the causes of this breakdown is globalisation that undermines power of national governments. National economies are now inter-linked as they have never been before. Flows of money, technology and trade make nations more and more inter-dependent. A trillion dollars cross national boundaries through electronic transactions every day. Trading nations are now grouping together into economic and trading blocks to effect ease of movement of goods and capital across boundaries and also to protect themselves against competitors. On this



basis, the world economy is being dominated by a few countries, mainly the Group of Seven, the most successful trading nations of the world. These are the creditor nations and, as they have an interest in the economies of the poorer nations of the world, they also have power to dictate how those economies are managed. Australia and New Zealand, for example, have suffered from the consequences of the formation of the European Union as tariff increases mean that their agricultural produce is no longer competitive. Ironically, globalisation is designed to achieve exactly the opposite result.

Favouring globalisation is the argument that consumers now have the possibility of choice and, through greater competition, market factors maintain lower prices. It is also argued that globalisation makes possible the development of a mechanism for regulating the markets, thus ensuring stability. For the poor nations of the world, however, globalisation means deregulation which can lead to cheap imports being dumped in their markets to the detriment of the domestic producers, with the consequent loss of jobs. In practice, the "hidden hand" of macro-economic markets was intended to benefit the lowest strata of society by a process known as "trickle down", but this has not materialised. Instead it maintains a vice-like grip over the destinies of ordinary people.

The other factors lying at the root of the critical state of the global economy are corruption and militarism. Some national credit agreements are made available to finance the purchasing of goods and services from particular creditor nations. This arrangement was not totally innocent. It also provided a facility for corrupt and despotic leaders to trade in arms from Western arms manufacturers in order to engage in wars they cannot afford, thereby disturbing the peace of neighbouring nations and oppressing opposition within their own countries. In situations

of conflict, the military expenditure bills, the loss of lives and skills, the direct damage to property and production facilities, disruption to education, all have a devastating effect on the economy and life itself. A military culture inevitably breeds corruption and abuse of power and the violation of human rights. It is an excuse for suspending democratic rights and civil liberties and it makes government unaccountable to the people.

Theological Reflection

Economics is a matter of life. The Greek etymology of the word can be broken down as *oikos* and *nomos*, meaning the law of the household. It is the management of the household that ensures that "the mountains yield prosperity for the people and the hills, in righteousness" (Psalm 72:3). Christians cannot avoid engagement with economic issues. The World Council of Churches Study on Economic Life, Christian Faith and the World Economy (1992: 4/15) makes an impregnable case that Christian people and churches must be critically involved in the economic debate and in the formation of economic policy.

Christians have a duty to steward the resources of **C r e a t i o n**, preserve their renewable capacity, meet the requirements of life for those in need and share with the destitute and poor. Stewardship is a fundamental obligation for Christians. The health of the natural order must be preserved and the environment sustained. In order to maintain this eco-balance, it is essential that rampant consumerism be restrained and production kept at sustainable levels. Christians must question price manipulation arrangements whereby production is

curtailed in order to decrease supply and increase demand and schemes that promote production of cash crops in a way which limits food production for primary consumption. Good stewardship demands that banks and donors take corrective steps when their use of resources lead directly or indirectly to poverty.

Economic theory and practice are morally sustainable only if they promote the justice of God and the well-being of humanity. God, in Christ, came to live among us and took our nature upon himself, calling humankind to care for one another and to bear one another's burdens.

The call for the remission of debt has strong biblical authority. The Book of Leviticus requires that, in the promised land, the abode of those who are called to holiness because the Lord their God is holy, inhabitants must regularly order their society afresh, in keeping with the holiness of God. God's holiness mandated the people to set limits on the gains of the rich, to minimise hardship on the poor and indebted.

During the Jubilee Year balances in nature and in human relations had to be restored. There is no evidence that this ideal society was ever achieved, though the practices of returning land and cancelling debt

were widespread at the time. The devastation and human breakdown we are experiencing from the magnitude of world debt merits our advocacy of the application of these biblical values to the present circumstances.

As we approach the end of the millennium, it is fitting that the church challenges the developed world to the remission of debt. Debt remission means that the poor nations of the world can make a fresh start. This is the Year of Jubilee. For those in debt, this would

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practice are morally
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of God and the
well-being of humanity.*

be an occasion to experience the redeeming love offered by Jesus on the Cross as he personally, spiritually and physically embodied the values of mercy, forgiveness and reconciliation, recognised in the Jubilee tradition. Creditors of the world would experience the offering of sacrificial love in the true unity of humanity, thereby being liberated from the weight of the burden of guilt from the oppression and poverty they helped foster.

Putting into context

It is demonstrable that the present arrangements of the global economic system are not sustainable. Restructuring the world's economy presents the greatest challenge before us, our Church and our nations. Debt results in a spiral of poverty. The international banking system and modern technology makes for ease of speculative currency dealing and can lead to bankruptcies like the one of the London-based Barings Bank. The laws of the modern market economy stimulate individualism and greed. Two-thirds of the world must not be condemned to a life of debilitating poverty without hope of relief. The church must address the underlying immorality that has rendered all of this both possible and desirable for many. Recognising that its own policies to date have made only marginal impact

on reducing world poverty, the World Bank had reassessed its strategies and begun to take its own measure to address the situation. The Bank has devised a new strategy based on promoting broad-based economic growth, developing human capital and providing safety nets for vulnerable groups. The vehicle for this strategy is the Structural Adjustment Programme (SAP). The report states that "this learning process must involve the participation of the poor themselves so that they can better understand and have input into the government's programme to generate growth and reduce poverty." SAP, which goes under the slogan, "short-term pain for long-term gain," has been subject to severe criticism, for example, for failing to create jobs or promote processing of raw materials at the point of production. Neither has it dealt with the problem of corruption. As a result, critics say, commodity prices have continued to fall. However, a new and welcome debt-relief programme has been introduced, but it is insufficient and its implementation has been sluggish. Its first beneficiary is Uganda, but observers point out the arrangement will make only

The laws of the modern market economy stimulate individualism and greed.

a minimal contribution to relieving Uganda of its debt. Unfortunately, its spending on debt repayments remains twice its health spending.

Ultimately, we must return to the proposal to cancel international debt. It can be argued that there are three compelling reasons for doing so. First

is a moral imperative, recognising that no community that claims to be civilised should tolerate a world

situation where unpayable debt burden fosters the evils of mass malnutrition, disease and illiteracy. By making basic human rights and opportunities available to poor people, debt relief would encourage human dignity at the close of the 20th century. Second, is the economic argument. Debt reduction will release the productive potential of marginalised communities and help create a framework for more self-reliant growth. Third, is the argument of prudence. It is not in the long-term interests of the world, and certainly not of the richer countries, that so many people be pauperised.

Proposals to cancel debt must also address how to prevent the problems recurring. The Archbishop of Cape Town has put forward proposals for both lenders and borrowers, limiting the extent and use of loans and increasing the influence of the general public in the borrowing country.

In conclusion, it must be noted that economics should never disregard its impact on the lives of people or theological and ethical considerations. Neither should those who manage the economy on our behalf be left unaccountable. The economic system must always be alive to public criticism and be ready to reshape itself to meet the needs of the people. Economics is not independent of the laws of nature or ethical responsibility. Basic economic literacy will help the church to address these issues.

Openly gay candidate in June 6 episcopal election

The upcoming election of a bishop to succeed John Shelby Spong of Newark may intensify debate over the status of homosexual clergy living in committed relationships — both in this country and at the Lambeth conference of Anglican bishops this summer. Among the five candidates for the Newark post is Gene Robinson, the canon to the ordinary in the Diocese of New Hampshire and an openly gay man living in a committed relationship. As with any episcopal election, a majority of the church's diocesan standing committees and a majority of the bishops with jurisdiction would have to ratify the election results. The other candidates on the slate are Jack Croneberger of Tenafly, N.J., Rosemary Sullivan of Alexandria, Va., Gray Temple, Jr., of Atlanta, Ga., Will Wauters, of Lawrenceville, N.J., and Jack McKelvey, the diocese's suffragan bishop.

'Injustice does not go away because of time'

On June 18, 1925, Robert Marshall, a black coal miner who was suspected of killing a white law enforcement officer, was lynched before a crowd of 1,000 people just outside of Price, Utah. C. Matthew Gilmour has never forgotten. He was 15 years old at the time, and saw the man who bought the rope. This past April Gilmour, now 88, invited religious and political leaders to join him in publicly acknowledging the injustice that had occurred—and in seeking reconciliation.

"Injustice does not go away because of time," said Gilmour, a retired lawyer and active Episcopalian. "It is important that injustice is acknowledged. Because of [this service] we have a new beginning coming. We can realize that all of us are members of one another."

Participants included Carolyn Irish, Episcopal bishop of Utah, Metropolitan Isaiah of the Greek Orthodox Church, George Niederauer, bishop of the Roman Catholic Archdiocese of Utah, France Davis, pastor of Calvary Baptist Church in Salt Lake City and Ben Banks, elder of the Utah South area of the Mormon Church.

Utah's governor, Mike Leavitt officially declared the day Racial Diversity Day and in his proclamation spoke of the service of reconciliation as an important step in overcoming racial divisions. A letter from President Bill Clinton said, "Racial diversity has contributed to the strength of our country," but "we must recognize that hatred and prejudice sometimes have separated us. ... Such community action as yours will help to bridge the gap."

Marshall had been apprehended outside of Price after a nearly three-day manhunt. Following his capture, sheriff's deputies transported him to jail in Price. Marshall was left unattended in a car outside the jail while the deputies were inside. An angry crowd reportedly took the car with Marshall in it and headed south to a hanging tree outside of town.

The deputies caught up with the crowd 10 minutes after Marshall was hanged. They cut him down. Discovering that Marshall was still alive, the crowd overpowered the deputies and rehanged him.

Marshall's body was photographed while hanging from the tree and then placed on display at the local funeral parlor. Pictures of the hanging were sold to townspeople for 25 cents.

Eleven men were arrested for Marshall's death. The Grand Jury convened to investigate the matter called 120 witnesses, but not one would give evidence against the accused. One story describes the atmosphere in the jail as much like a party, with cold drinks for all the prisoners. One person reported at the time, "Why make waves with these boys now? The deed is done. It saved the town a bunch of money. They would have hung him anyway."

A *Salt Lake Tribune* story of the time reported, "Vengeance was claimed."

"Robert Marshall was lynched because he was an itinerant black man," said historian Larry Gerlach, who has extensively researched the Marshall lynching. "Community solidarity kept the 11 accused of lynching him from coming to trial. This was certainly an act of racism."

Noting that the Marshall lynching was not the only lynching in Utah at the time—there were 17 others that year—Gerlach said it "illustrates both the thin veil of

civility under which we live and the deep tragedy that resulted when the rule of law was ignored."

Bernie Morris of Price donated and inscribed the gravestone placed to mark Marshall's previously unmarked grave. The inscription reads, "Robert

"Robert Marshall was lynched because he was an itinerant black man.

Community solidarity kept the 11 accused of lynching him from coming to trial.

This was certainly an act of racism." — Larry Gerlach

Marshall. Lynched June 18, 1925. A Victim of Intolerance. May God Forgive."

— based on a report by Jeff Sells in *Diocesan Dialogue*, the newspaper of the Episcopal Diocese of Utah

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Buddha lite

by Jim Perkinson

Seven Years in Tibet, film directed by Jean-Jacques Annaud, 1997.

Seven Years in Tibet has come and gone, giving North Americans the latest popular culture version of “redemption from without” — in this case, by way of the Dalai Lama as “saving sage of the east.” Such a salvation packaged in stunning cinematography enters the hungry Western eye all too easily. But beneath the alluring visual surface there is a useful rebuff at work for the eye alert to irony. Buddhism is uncompromising in the seriousness with which it takes the idea that redemption begins and ends in the here and now and makes use of anything to hand (including movies).

At first blush, *Seven Years* incarnates nothing so much as the typical Western fantasy of redemption on the run. All the requisite signifiers are there: Brad Pitt as blond “hero-bad boy” giving us the first-person narration of Heinrich Harrer’s autobiographical account; Tibetan ochre and maroon garb, snoring trumpets, scintillating cymbals, and guttural male chant providing the sensible intrigue; smoky dark of monastic inner sanctums leveraging mystery; even a Yoko Ono look-alike with braided hair subtly suggesting the “erotic exotic.” The plot is patent: disaffected virile conqueror nearly self-destructs at the far end of his arrogance, descends into his “dark heart” in the chaos of a colonial war situation, begins to find redemption in small “revelations” of

friendship and meaning at the bottom of fortunes, is embraced by the “penetrated” other culture and honored for his Western know-how, exchanges expertise for wisdom in his intimacies with the “saving other” (the then adolescent Dalai Lama, in this case). By movie’s end, he has come full circle, owned the integral connection with the son he ran away from fathering, returns to Austria and teaches his “salvation child” mountain climbing under the flag of Tibetan independence. Joseph Conrad’s *Heart of Darkness* is

At first blush, Seven Years incarnates nothing so much as the typical Western fantasy of redemption on the run.

here stripped of horror, recycled through Kevin Costner’s “going-native-redemption” in *Dances with Wolves*, and updated for a Richard Gere kind of activism that is sincerely, but naively, concerned for imperial destruction “over there.”

None of this is wrong as far as it goes. But the ironies abound. That the lesson of simplicity should require such a complicated adventure, that healing of the powerful comes from the “grace” of the violated, that redemption is finally a matter of return to the embrace of a father-son relationship visualized in terms of sitting alone atop a mountain in Europe, is nowhere queried. The citation of statistics related to the real-life destruction of the Tibetan people and culture by China since the 1950s at the movie’s conclusion is in no way linked up to the reality of ongoing struggle against such—or to larger-scale analysis of the global patterns of imperial takeovers that render all of us complicit in “the problem.”

The right of the Tibetans to maintain their borders and manage their treasures

against the illegal ingress and imperial appropriation of European “adventurers” like Harrer and Aufschnieter is exactly what is at stake in their resistance to Chinese takeover. And European images of redemption that locate such in a panoramic vision of “father” and “son” one more time conquering the heights and sitting alone looking down on “the cosmos” comes all-too-uncomfortably close to the imperial Christian vision of God-Father as King and Savior-Son as Judge dominating human destiny from on high.

More to the point for a Christian conversation about the kind of redemption contemporary Tibetan suffering may represent is the Dalai Lama’s gentle rebuke of Harrer’s expressed desire to remain with “His Holiness” near the story’s end. The boy-king simply repeats Buddha’s own refusal to be culturally domesticated: “Salvation does not come from the sight of me. It demands strenuous effort and practice. So work hard and seek your own salvation diligently.” What such could mean must begin with the question of why we would rather have our salvation offered from the cloud-plateaus of Northern India (or a tranquil hill next to the Sea of Galilee) than find it in the struggle against our own demons organized in transnational practices and congressional policies.

Seven Years in Tibet is good entertainment; but it is precisely a capitulation to the Powers we should be challenging to mistake romanticizing Tibetan culture for actual engagement with our own spiritual agenda. Hollywood can never offer more than Buddha lite. The real thing will taste of sweat and may require blood. **TW**

Jim Perkinson is a member of The Episcopal Church of the Messiah, Detroit, and director of the D.Min. Program at Ecumenical Theological Seminary in Detroit.

review

In a small, wood-frame church in Rye, N.Y., silence is doubly honored — on Sundays, by a community of Quakers who gather there for weekly meeting, and on week nights, by Zen students who sit together under the guidance of Zen teacher Susan Jion Postal. The two streams of tradition — Buddhist and Christian — that flow together in the Rye Meeting House/Empty Hand Zendo merge also in Postal herself.

“It’s like two lineages,” Postal says. “In Buddhism, they talk about the line of transmission, and I think of it as intravenous — I’ve got two i.v.s going, and they mix in the heart.”

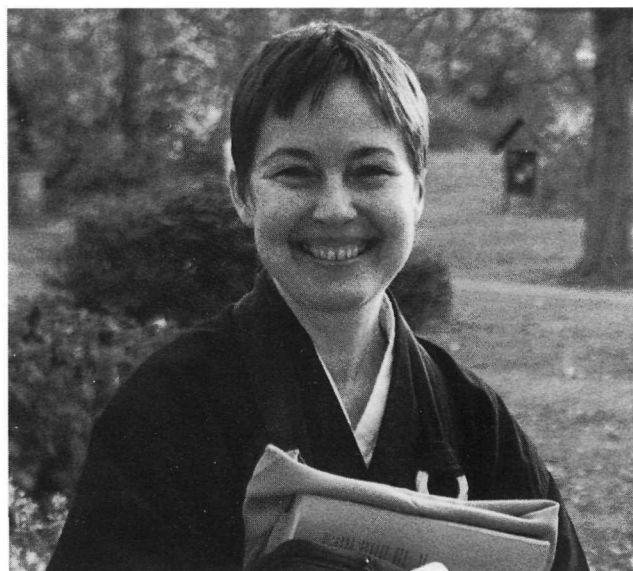
For Postal — in contrast to many westerners who come to Zen from a Christian background — Buddhism came first.

The daughter of European immigrants who had rebelled against a strict Lutheran upbringing, Postal grew up in a “very freethinking but spiritually inclined atmosphere.” From an early age, she sought out quiet times and places, but her contacts with Christian churches left her unsatisfied.

“What was taught there had these boxes around it,” she explains. “We were told, anyone outside this little box isn’t saved.”

At Stanford in the late 1950s, Postal attended a lecture by Alan Watts. “I was very excited,” she recalls. “I understood there was a teaching that was about breaking these very boxes that had so bothered me and expanding everything into wide open possibilities.” Years later — after a

Suddenly, out of some part of my viscera, came this sentence, “Would you baptize me?”



Susan Jion Postal

Sitting with Christ

by Marianne Arbogast

graduate degree from Harvard in anthropology, two semesters of teaching and marriage — Postal discovered a form for her inquiry. She met a Tibetan Buddhist teacher, the first person she’d encountered who “offered a teaching that wasn’t just in books, that had to do with transforming one’s being, becoming awakened.”

Devoting herself to meditation practice, Postal soon realized that “something was happening, a cleansing and a purifying. After a few years, I knew for myself that something was possible, that there is such a thing as transformation.”

After 10 years, Postal moved on to study Zen. At this point divorced and the mother of two children, she struggled between work and family responsibilities and “an almost driving aspiration to break through and somehow be not bound by this self which I began to know so well.”

Her breakthrough came with koan practice, which she took up at her teacher’s insistence. Postal was given the “mu koan”: “A monk asked Joshu, ‘Does a dog have buddha-nature?’ And Joshu answered, ‘Mu.’”

“A koan is a question which can’t be answered with the conceptual mind,” Postal explains. “One is asked to bring one’s entire being into becoming the question. You have to sound this ‘mu’ out loud with your teacher. I was far away from my voice. I was self-conscious, critical, skeptical, and certainly wasn’t manifesting as the sound of ‘mu.’ I decided I was hopeless, just a failure. But I kept sitting — there was this tiny voice, saying that’s what you’re supposed to be seeing, this is your self operating, this is up against the wall.”

After a few months, Postal says, her teacher “heard that something had shifted,

*Witnesses,
the quick and the dead*

Marianne Arbogast is assistant editor of *The Witness* <marianne@thewitness.org>.

that I wasn't so far away from that sound."

Soon afterwards, she found that "a loosening was happening. I would sit and cry and shake. It felt like the house of cards on which Skeptical Sue and the whole structure was built began to crumble. The last three months were a little scary, but in the end it was tremendously joy-filled."

Yet soon afterwards, a serious impasse with her teacher plunged Postal into severe depression. "It was very dark, I was scared that I was just going to die, and if I hadn't had my son home I wonder if I wouldn't have harmed myself. I did go for some short-term counseling, and the person I went to was very wise — a devout Christian psychiatrist well-versed in Zen. He said, 'I see something much bigger than this problem with your teacher. You're just getting ready to turn your whole life over.'"

What neither anticipated was the setting where this would occur.

"Somehow my feet walked into the local Episcopal church," Postal says. "I went every single evening for vespers, and the psalms spoke to my heart. I just sat and cried and prayed.

"The priest there hardly talked to me. I said, 'Do you mind if a Zen person comes? I'm going to be ordained as a Zen priest.' He kind of looked at me funny, but he said, 'Sure, everybody's welcome here.'

"One day after vespers I couldn't get out of my chair. The priest said, 'Would you like to talk?' and we went into his study next door. I really had nothing to say, I couldn't talk. And he started talking about what was coming up in his church, and how he was going to do baptisms, and suddenly, out of some part of my viscera, came this sentence, 'Would you baptize me?' He looked at me and said, 'Now?!' and I said, 'I don't know.'

The priest invited Postal to go back into the chapel and showed her the rite of

Baptism.

"He said, 'Are you comfortable with these words?' and I said, 'I translate very well.' So he got out this little tin cup and this bowl, and proceeded with the sacrament of Baptism. And I can only say that it was like a huge match came and lit up my heart. And that huge ignition was definitely from Christ. It was Jesus' forgiveness of the cause of the pain I'd been

To be truly compassionate is to give with no giver.

in, and therefore my ability to finally forgive, complete peace with the whole woundedness that I'd been through. I felt such joy!

"The next day I woke up, and my heart was still on fire. I went to the zendo, which was my custom that night of the week. I could talk to my heart — which is a strange way to put it — but I could ask, 'What do I do with this?' And I got a clear, almost verbal answer, 'Sit here. Just keep on sitting here with Christ.'"

For some time after her baptism in 1985, Postal expected that she would take some role in the Episcopal Church "because I thought that's how you express gratitude," she says. Instead, she came to realize "that my work to do in this life is very much involved with Zen. But I do it with these flames in my heart that are always there."

Postal, who was later ordained a Zen priest by a different teacher, feels that interfaith work gives her the opportunity to honor her baptism. In Buddhist-Christian dialogue and retreat settings, she participates "as a Buddhist teacher, but acknowledging the truth and the power of the Christian experience in my own body.

"I can call on each tradition separately, but often I choose not to," Postal reflects. "It's like there's this field of

emptiness or openness or peacefulness that doesn't have to do with any tradition, that feels like home. And then there is this heart flame. I notice for myself, in times of sorrow or trouble I call on it."

Now 58, Postal works as an activities director at a nursing home, a field she entered after being diagnosed with systemic lupus in the mid-1970s. The progression of her illness, which causes fatigue and severe headaches, is stretching her capability to continue that along with her Zen teaching schedule.

"It's an edge in my practice," she acknowledges. "I think that's one of the basic teachings in Zen — being okay with what we don't like."

On the altar in the Empty Hand Zendo is a statue of Kwan Yin, the *boddhisattva* of compassion.

"Kwan Yin is the representation of the awakened, compassionate heart," Postal explains. "In Japanese it's called Kanzeon, which means the one who hears the cries of the world.

"Compassion is basic to Buddhism. To be truly compassionate is to give with no giver, because the notion of self has been dissolved and we're able to respond to a situation appropriately and freely. Zen is very much about how you live and not about some self-absorbed thing.

"In this country Buddhist communities have done some wonderful hospice work with AIDS patients and all kinds of peace work. But Thich Nhat Hanh and other leaders in the activist realm all say you have to keep on sitting, because as long as your motivation is a kind of do-gooder thing where you're getting self-inflated, that's a real limitation on the amount of good you can do. So much more can happen if we can really give with no giver, no notion of 'I'm giving to you,' no I and other. Your neighbor isn't separate. You reach out to others because it's your own life."

TW

continued from page 3

HERE'S MY RENEWAL of my many-years subscription. *The Witness* is a most important part of my regular reading schedule. Retired for a dozen years, I find it a refreshing alternative to all the other "church periodicals" I read on a regular basis. My sincerest thanks to the entire *Witness* staff for a continually superb job!

Josiah O. Hoffman, Jr.
Sacramento, CA

YOUR ARTICLES ARE WELCOME
FOOD for this feminist soul starving to
stay spiritually alive in our patriarchal
culture.

Patricia Roop Robinson
Westminster, MD

I'M LOOKING FORWARD to receiving my new subscription. SE Kansas is a very conservative area and I feel *The Witness* will be a welcome addition to my home and my liberal viewpoints.

Buddy D. Bailer
Iola, KS

Defining the issues

I DIRECT MY COMMENTS to the letter in the March 1998 *Witness* by Zabeth Adams. She wrote to say she'll not renew her subscription to *TW* because, among other reasons, she prefers that you seek common ground "rather than polarization." I suggest that unless both sides are very clear on where they stand, seeking common ground is not possible. The issues first have to be defined.

Obviously, the editors of *TW* see their mission to state their views as succinctly as possible. It is for others to establish common ground between the two sides of any issue.

Adams' statement reminds me of some of Mother Teresa's critics, who said she should have sought ways to change the social structures that caused poverty. Her response (paraphrased): "It is my job to minister to poverty's victims. God calls others to change the structures that cause it."

TW is doing its job. Perhaps Adams (or someone like her) will establish a magazine that "seeks common ground." Meanwhile, I believe you do seek unity and communication. Keep up the good work!

Donna Acquaviva
Gerrardstown, WV

Gun control

I FEEL LIKE A LONE VOICE regarding activism to support gun control and the ultimate disarmament of the general population. I am a donor to Handgun Control, Inc. and the Center to Prevent Handgun Violence. Their role is vital and has met measured success, but no movement is successful without grass root activism.

I protested a local gun show in Phoenix, Ariz., by myself. It was my first attempt at a protest. I received some support from passersby, but, not surprisingly, was mostly subjected to vehement antagonism. I feel uncomfortable repeating this by myself and seek an organization or a group of like-minded individuals.

Do you know of any organizations or individuals who are active in anti-gun demonstrations or have any advice on how I can begin such an organization? I am most interested in my local Phoenix area, but would be willing to travel up to 500 miles away to make contacts.

Gerry Theisman
Phoenix, AZ

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