

THREE NOTES ON THE CHRISTIAN-BUDDHIST DIALOGUE

by Joseph J. Spae

In this *Zeitschrift*, July 1973, Heft 3, p. 187—201, I have published an article on the "Contents of the Christian-Buddhist Dialogue", particularly related to the situation in Japan. I should like to add three notes to this material. The first two notes introduce the reader to some of the bibliographical data useful for further study of the matter with reference (I) to Japan, and (II) to other countries. My information goes as far as December 1972.

The third note, also largely of a bibliographical nature, deals with the often-assumed superiority of Christianity over other religions. It examines the meaning of this assertion in the context of Japanese religious feeling and literature; it suggests a dialogal attitude, true to Christianity and yet respectful of an encounter between all religions, at the heart of which is genuine religious experience.

I. THE CHRISTIAN-BUDDHIST DIALOGUE IN JAPAN

The depth and extension of the Christian-Buddhist dialogue, it is well known, has considerably increased during the last ten years. Its beginnings go back to the earliest contacts of Christians with Buddhists. A complete history of these contacts and of their influence upon the development of Christians as well as Buddhist thought remains to be written. Yet even now we have available a considerable volume of bibliographical data and general studies in European languages of interest to anyone who intends to pursue the dialogue in today's Japan¹.

From the double point of view of content and bibliographical usefulness I refer the reader to what, half a century ago, the Belgian Buddhologist LOUIS DE LA VALLÉE-POUSSIN wrote on true and imaginary parallels in Buddhist-Christian literature². A more advanced study of actual contacts chiefly between missionaries and Buddhists in India, China and Japan, is

¹ Perhaps the first attempt at a systematic bibliography on Christian-Buddhist relations is that by HANS HAAS, *Bibliographie zur Frage nach den Wechselbeziehungen zwischen Buddhismus und Christentum* (Leipzig: Hinrichs, 1922), 47 pages, followed by E. BENZ and M. NAMBARA, *Das Christentum und die Nicht-Christlichen Hochreligionen* (Leiden: Brill, 1960), p. 53—66. SINSHO HANAYAMA, *Bibliography on Buddhism* (Tokyo: Hokuseido, 1961), has 327 entries referring to "Christianity". An annotated bibliography of source material related to Japan and covering the earliest contacts since Francis Xavier until 1965 is J. L. VAN HECKEN, "Le problème du dialogue chrétien avec les bouddhistes du Japon", *Neue Zeitschrift für Missionswissenschaft*, 1967, p. 1—17, 115—32

² LOUIS DE LA VALLÉE-POUSSIN, *Bouddhisme* (Paris: Beauchesne, 1925), p. 4—17. Some of these parallels, true and false, became well known in Japan thanks to a book by ALBERT J. EDMUNDS and M. ANESAKI, *Buddhist & Christian Gospels* (Tokyo: The Yuhukwan Publishing House, 1905). See also M. WINTERNITZ, *A History of Indian Literature* (Calcutta: University of Calcutta, 1933), vol. 2, p. 402—423

found in the work of HENRI DE LUBAC³, critically evaluated by JACQUES-ALBERT CUTTAT in a substantial article, "Fait Bouddhique et Fait Chrétien selon l'Œuvre du Père de Lubac"⁴. Two other Jesuits, HEINRICH DUMOULIN⁵ and H. ENOMIYA-LASALLE⁶ have done yeoman's work in fostering the dialogue, particularly with Zen.

Official Protestant attention to Buddhism in Japan, it would seem, dates from the early eighties. The *Proceedings of the Second Missionary Conference*, held in Osaka, 1883 (Yokohama: Meiklejohn, 1883), p. 90—101, refers to the work of Dr M. L. GORDON⁷, of the American Board Mission, whose life had repeatedly been threatened by Buddhists and who is, I believe, the first Protestant missionary in Japan to make a detailed study of Buddhism. GORDON thought that Buddhism was the greatest obstacle to the reception of the Gospel by the Japanese, because it held doctrines that conflicted with the biblical teachings on God, sin and salvation. He remarked that Buddhists deny creation and creator:

Whenever we teach that God is the creator and ruler of the universe, Buddhists rejoin that Shaka cares for 3000 such universes... God cannot be the judge of all mankind, for the destiny of every man is immutably fixed by the law of karma. Buddhists betray utter scepticism and indifference to sin. The Shin sect teaches salvation by faith through the power of Amida: it is salvation from the misery of the present world rather than salvation from sin.

Among other minor obstacles from the Buddhist side, Gordon cites the following:

1. The Buddhist doctrine of the present world as evil and evil only;
2. Buddhist miracles so numerous that the bonzes themselves do not believe in them;
3. Incarnations, many and degraded;

³ HENRI DE LUBAC, S. J., *La Rencontre du Bouddhisme et de l'Occident* (Lyon: Aubier, 1952), *Amida* (Paris: Seuil, 1955), *Aspects of Buddhism* (New York: Sheed and Ward, 1944)

⁴ *L'Homme devant Dieu, Mélanges offerts au Père de Lubac*, vol. 3 (Lyon: Aubier, 1964), p. 15—41

⁵ H. DUMOULIN, *Christlicher Dialog mit Asien* (München: Hueber, 1970); several articles, among them „Buddhismus und Christentum“, *Zeitschrift für Missionswissenschaft und Religionswissenschaft*, 1958, p. 208—217, „Theologische Aspekte des Christlichen Dialogs mit dem Buddhismus“, *Ibid.*, 1971, p. 161—170. And *Buddhismus der Gegenwart*, ed. by DUMOULIN (Freiburg: Herder, 1970)

⁶ H. M. ENOMIYA-LASALLE, *Zen, Way to Enlightenment* (London: Burns and Oates, 1966), *Zen-Meditation für Christen* (Weilheim: Barth, 1969), and numerous articles.

⁷ In 1885, Dr GORDON published a 60-p. pamphlet entitled *Bukkyō tanomu ni tarazu* which went through a 3rd edition in 1902. About the same time as Gordon, Fr. AIMÉ VILLION, M. E. P., began his studies of Buddhism in Kyoto. Much of his work remains in manuscript. See VAN HECKEN, *o. c.*, p. 119 and note 140 there; also A. F. VERWILGHEN, "The Buddhist Studies of Fr. Aimé Villion", *The Japan Missionary Bulletin*, May 1970.

4. Heavens innumerable which makes it difficult for Buddhists to accept the biblical teaching on this subject.”

GORDON's stand had practical implications. His friend, Dr JOHN H. DE FOREST, advocated nothing less than “the extirpation of the superstitious heathen religion”. However, a quarter of a century later, he changed his mind under the influence of EBINA DANJŌ whom he repeatedly heard as his Hongo Church eloquently addressing up to 600 intellectuals on the biblical text “I am”. EBINA made “the deepest Buddhist truth of the Great Self (*taiga*) and the Minor Self (*shōga*) fairly shine with the Christian light of personality in God, the God of love”⁸.

The only postwar Protestant missionary who has produced a booklength study on Buddhism and Christianity is Dr. TUCKER N. CALLAWAY, a former Southern Baptist missionary in Japan⁹. It is CALLAWAY's aim to have his Christian readers arrive at “a clearer understanding of the uniqueness of their faith and of the vast gulf which separates it from Buddhism”. The book is essentially a comparison of “salvation” in the Zen, Jōdoshin and Nichiren sects with its counterpart in Christianity. At least one competent reviewer has blamed CALLAWAY for “placing the Buddhist in an unfair position by defining the alternatives as irreconcilable and then stating that, if the Buddhist submits himself to Christian categories, he will see the error of his position”¹⁰. A similar remark could be made, I submit, about CALLAWAY's Christian theology and it seems possible to do greater justice to both sides by improving the bridges of understanding rather than by widening the chasm of separation. The only book in English on Buddhist-Christian doctrinal relationships, written by a Japanese scholar, is MASUTANI's *A Comparative Study of Buddhism and Christianity*¹¹. Professor MASUTANI intends to answer four questions: What is the nature of man? What should I hope to be? What should I rely upon? and What should I do? Throughout these pages a running, if friendly, contrast between Buddhism and Christianity, between Buddha and Jesus, is kept up. This antithetical structure, however, is not free of apriorisms and contradictions, and it strains the facts on either side. In particular, the

⁸ DE FOREST further remarks: “Oh, if we missionaries only knew this royal road of fulfilling rather than destroying, we should have ten times the power we now have.” Quoted by TADAKAZU UWOKI, *Studies in the Christian Religion*, August 1963, p. 312

⁹ TUCKER N. CALLAWAY, *Japanese Buddhism and Christianity* (Tokyo: Shinkyō shuppansha, 1957)

¹⁰ ALFRED BLOOM, *The Japan Christian Quarterly*, April 1958, p. 177

¹¹ FUMIO MASUTANI, *A Comparative Study of Buddhism and Christianity* (Tokyo: The Young East Association, 1957). The Japanese revised text came out in 1968 under the title *Bukkyō to Kirisutokyō no hikaku kenkyū* (Tokyo: Chikuma-shobō), itself preceded by another book in which MASUTANI advances “the claims of Buddhism versus Christianity”, *Kirisutokyō ni taisuru bukkyō no shuchō* (Tokyo: Daihōrinkaku, 1951).

Christian sensibility may refuse to recognize itself in what is basically the gospel according to HARNACK, RENAN and WELLHAUSEN on whose exegesis the author rests his case. In MASUTANI's book, a Buddhist rationalist dialogues with Christian rationalists, not Buddhism with Christianity.

To the busy reader, the books of CALLAWAY and MASUTANI are recommended as an introduction to the dialogue. They will tell him what to expect; but they need not dampen his enthusiasm for a very worthy task.

II. THE CHRISTIAN-BUDDHIST DIALOGUE OUTSIDE JAPAN

Christians and Buddhists have met in many countries with far-reaching consequences to the relationship between their faiths. In fact, the Theravada-Christian dialogue in some East-Asian countries far surpasses in intensity anything which Japan could show. The details which follow merely intend to call the reader's attention to part of the ongoing research.

The political and religious atmosphere in which modern Buddhism comes and meets with Christianity has been described by Tokyo's Time-Life Bureau Chief, JERROLD SCHECTER¹. SCHECTER calls Buddhism "a faith in flames". His book is a study of Asia's Buddhist world from Ceylon to Japan, covering Communist China, Cambodia, Burma and Vietnam. In all these countries, despite the fact that it "contains no dogma, has no organized church or hierarchy, is without a Pope, without a Rome, with no supreme council and no permanent staff" (p. 17), Buddhism appears as a great spiritual force searching for new political forms in which to interpret its age-old cultural role. The new face of Buddha reflects in many ways the new face of Asia which, on the side of Christians, calls for an attentive and sympathetic approach.

Fortunately, the theoretical foundations of this approach already exist in part. I refer to three important books written by WINSTON L. KING², and to the work of TAYMANS D'EYPERNON³, CORNELIS⁴, OSBORNE⁵, NEIL⁶, and SIEGMUND⁷.

¹ JERROLD SCHECTER, *The New Face of Buddha* (Tokyo: Weatherhill, 1967).

² WINSTON L. KING, *Buddhism and Christianity* (London: Allen and Unwin, 1962), a discussion of Theravada-Christian parallels on God, love, guilt and suffering, prayer and meditation, the conquest of self, grace and faith; *In the Hope of Nibbana* (La Salle: Open Court, 1964), a study of Theravada ethics; *A Thousand Lives Away* (Oxford: Cassirer, 1964), a description of present Burmese Buddhism and its tensions, partly produced by the impact of Christianity. Dr King has repeatedly visited Japan and was recently engaged in a study of Zen.

³ FR. TAYMANS D'EYPERNON, *Les paradoxes du Bouddhisme* (Paris: Desclée De Brouwer, 1947).

⁴ ETIENNE CORNELIS, *Valeurs Chrétiennes des religions non-chrétiennes* (Paris: Cerf, 1965), which is "a history of salvation in Christianity and Buddhism".

⁵ ARTHUR OSBORNE, *Buddhism and Christianity in the light of Hinduism* (London: Rider, 1959). The author intends to prove that, although Buddhism and

A few words about the dialogue in selected countries of the Far East. It is granted on all hands that the dialogue between Buddhists and Christians is most seriously undertaken in Ceylon, now Sri Lanka, due to their mutual willingness to come to grips with the economical and religious problems which beset their nation⁸. Ceylonese Buddhism at present shows a growing internationalism and ecumenism evinced in its participation in the World Sangha Council and in the World Fellowship of Buddhists whose mouthpiece is *World Buddhism*, a monthly established in 1951 which frequently discusses Christian subjects⁹. Christians in Ceylon have engaged since 1963 in an intensive study of Buddhist doctrine and institutions at the Study Centre for Religion and Society in Colombo under the leadership of the Rev. LYNN A. DE SILVA. It publishes *Dialogue*, a quarterly of which 25 issues had appeared by the end of 1972¹⁰.

Christianity are diametrically opposed as doctrines, they nevertheless are complementary to each other within the purview of Hinduism.

⁸ STEPHEN NEIL, *Christian Faith and Other Faiths* (London: Oxford University Press, 1961). Anglican Bishop NEIL has some 25 pages on basic problems common to Buddhism and Christianity, approached in dialogue form.

⁷ GEORG SIEGMUND, *Buddhismus und Christentum* (Frankfurt a. M.: Knecht, 1968). SIEGMUND, who visited Japan, insists on the need for "a preparation to dialogue", particularly through an examination of man's yearning for an Absolute also in the Buddhist tradition. There is a Japanese translation of the book, *Bukkyō to Kirisutokuyō* (Tokyo: Enderle, 1971).

⁸ See for details, V. PERNIOLA, "Buddhism in Modern Ceylon", *Studia Missionalia*, XII (Rome: Gregorian University, 1962), p. 68—80; J.M. HONDIUS, „Buddhismus und Christentum auf Ceylon“, *Zeitschrift für Religions- und Geistesgeschichte* 20 (Köln, 1968), p. 79—81; DONALD K. SWEARER, "Lay Buddhism and the Buddhist Revival in Ceylon", *Journal of the American Academy of Religion*, Sept. 1970, p. 255—275, and his *Buddhism in Transition* (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1970). An important, if acrimonious, book is *The Revolt in the Temple* (Colombo: Sinha Publications, 1953) whose real author is known to be D. C. WIJEWARDENE, an advocate of controversial reformist Buddhist movements. The book is highly critical of Christianity.

⁹ Ceylonese Buddhists often complain, in the words of Dr. G. P. MALALASEKERA at the 53rd Annual Session of the All Ceylon Buddhist Congress held at Matale, Dec. 25, 1970, that they "suffered greatly at the hands of Portuguese missionaries who inspired their country to burn Viharas and libraries and kill Buddhist monks". But he also added that "the Buddhists are most anxious to live in the utmost friendship with followers of other faiths. We had a convincing demonstration of this fact during the recent visit to this country of His Holiness the Pope." *World Buddhism*, Jan. 1971, p. 172—173.

¹⁰ Publications by the Colombo centre are a storehouse of information useful for the dialogue, also in Japan. I refer particularly to an 81-p. collection of papers by scholars from Burma, Thailand and Ceylon, entitled *Consultation on Buddhist-Christian Encounter*, Rangoon, Feb. 21—6, 1961; also to BRYAN DE KRETZER's *Man in Buddhism and Christianity* (Calcutta, 1954) and D. T. NILES' *Buddhism and the Claims of Christ* (Richmond, Va.: John Knox Press 1952),

Burma and Thailand are closely related to Sri Lanka, geographically and ideologically. Already in 1955, J. ULLIANA was invited to teach Catholic religion at the College of High Studies for Buddhist Bonzes and, in 1964, at the Department of Religion, Bangkok¹¹. Buddhist contact with Christianity is described by PHRA KHANTIPĀLO, London-born Buddhist monk who lives in Thailand and by BHIKKHU BUDDHADĀSA INDAPAÑÑO, in a very controversial book, *Christianity and Buddhism*¹². Protestant efforts led to several encounters, such as that of Rangon in 1967, to which I have already referred, and to the publication of several books, among which that by KENNETH E. WELLS is of particular interest to our theme¹⁴.

Christian-Buddhist relations in China have a venerable history about which one can read in the books of HENRI DE LUBAC. Among modern Protestant missionaries the name of KARL REICHELT stands out. The dialogue with Buddhism which he started is still carried on at the Tao Fong Shan Christian Study Centre on Chinese Religion and Culture in Hong Kong of which he was the founder¹⁵.

written against the Ceylonese background. On the Catholic side, see T. BALASURIYA, "Christian-Buddhist Dialogue in Ceylon", *Logos*, 1969, p. 33—9.

¹¹ See his communication in *Christ to the World*, 1958, p. 458—66, and in *Bulletin*, 11, June 1969, Rome: Secretariat for Non-Christians. Fr. ULLIANA has complained that, "on the Catholic side, little has been attempted with a view to dialogue, and no organization has been set up." Cf. *Christ to the World*, 1970, p. 491.

¹² PHRA KHANTIPĀLO, *Tolerance, a Study of Buddhist Sources* (London: Rider, 1964).

¹³ Chiangmai: Thailand Theological Seminary, 1967. P. ANATRIELLO reports on the Buddhist reactions (some of which appeared in *World Buddhism*, May and Sept. 1969) in *Bulletin*, 15 (Dec. 1970, p. 164—73). The Rev. LYNN DE SILVA answered BUDDHADĀSA's views on the Ultimate Reality and God in a booklet, *Why I Believe in God?*, Colombo, 1970. BUDDHADĀSA's work, replete with references to Christianity, is presented by DONALD K. SWEARER, in *Toward the Truth* (Philadelphia: The Westminster Press, 1971).

¹⁴ KENNETH E. WELLS, *Theravada Buddhism and Protestant Christianity* (Chiangmai: Thailand Theological Seminary, 1963).

¹⁵ KARL LUDWIG REICHELT is best known for his two books, *Truth and Tradition in Chinese Buddhism* (Shanghai: Commercial Press, 1928, and New York: Paragon, 1968) and *Meditation and Piety in the Far East* (New York: Harper, 1954). The Tao Fong Shan Centre publishes *Ching Feng*, quarterly notes on Christianity and Chinese religion and culture, which frequently refers to Buddhism. Communist influences on Buddhism in the Far East are studied by ERNST BENZ in his *Buddhism or Communism: Which Holds the Future in Asia?* (New York: Doubleday, 1965). See also three important books by HOLMES WELCH, *The Practice of Chinese Buddhism, 1900—1950* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1967), *The Buddhist Revival in China* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1968), and *Buddhism under Mao* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1972).

Christian-Buddhist relations in the West vary considerably according to the countries, scholars and centres involved¹⁶. Among these centres two deserve special attention. The World Council of Churches, Geneva, organizes discussions around the theme "Dialogue between Men of Living Faith and Ideologies", which has led to the publication of important statements on the nature, content, method and theological qualifications of the Christian-Buddhist Encounter. On the Catholic side, the Secretariat for Non-Christians with headquarters at the Vatican publishes a *Bulletin*, 21 issues of which had come out by the end of 1972. The Secretariat has also published a series of books which bring new insights and guidelines for the Christian-Buddhist dialogue¹⁷.

III. IS CHRISTIANITY SUPERIOR TO OTHER RELIGIONS?

This question may sound anachronistic to the reader who recalls that it was the topic of a heated debate among philosophers of religion in the first quarter of the Twentieth Century. Yet, I submit, it has lost little of its actuality. Not only do we all enter into the Buddhist-Christian dialogue with some elements of an answer in our mind, but even now many Buddhists suspect that Christians are bound, by the very nature of their faith, to answer this question with an unequivocal "yes". Buddhists in Japan, indeed, frequently refer to "Christian dogmatism, caste-consciousness and intellectualism", which, they say, all betray an innate superiority complex¹.

The debate to which I refer took place within the wider framework of an inquiry into "the truth as found in Christianity and in the world religions". There is an enormous literature on the subject, which I cannot even pretend to summarize². One first remark, however, is in order. All

¹⁶ Some recent source material is found in the following books: LOUISE H. HUNTER, *Buddhism in Hawaii* (Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press, 1971), a study of Buddhist-Christian interaction; KŌSHŌ YAMAMOTO, *Buddhism in Europe* (Ube: Karinbunko, 1967); JOSEPH M. KITAGAWA, "Buddhism in America", *Japanese Religions*, vol. 5 (1967), p. 32—57; ERNST BENZ, "Buddhism in the West", *Ibid.*, vol. 6 (1970), p. 1—22. There is a wealth of information scattered in *Présence du Bouddhisme*, ed by RENÉ DE BERVAL (Saigon: France-Asie, 1959).

¹⁷ *A la Rencontre du Bouddhisme*, 2. vol. (Rome: Ancora, 1970) and *Religions, Fundamental Themes for a Dialogistic Understanding* (Rome: Ancora, 1970). The first book is a history of Buddhism, past and present, which covers most East-Asian countries. The second book is a study of the major religious traditions on the nature of religious experience, the quest for salvation, the absolute, good and evil.

¹ For a critical analysis of these impressions, not limited to Buddhists in Japan, see my *Christianity Encounters Japan* (Tokyo: Oriens Institute, 1968), p. 166—177

² Bibliographical and historical data are found in ERNST BENZ and MINORU NAMBARA, *Das Christentum und die Hochreligionen* (Leiden: Brill, 1960), H. DE VOS, *Het Christendom en de andere Godsdiensten* (Nijkerk: Callenbach, 1962), W. PHILIPP, *Die Absolutheit des Christentums* (Heidelberg: Quelle & Meyer,

religions cherish some notion of their own superiority, exclusiveness, finality, and absoluteness, and they share a common concern for impressing that superiority upon their followers and upon the public at large. Thus, in the baldest terms, a modern English Buddhist tells us that "(Buddhism) is not just a way to Enlightenment, but the *only* way", and that "Buddhism is superior to all other forms of religion"³. Another Westerner, converted to Buddhism, states: "The Buddhist regards all other religions as first steps to his own"⁴.

It was ERNST TROELTSCH who popularized the impression that "Christianity is the absolute religion" through his book *Die Absolutheit des Christentums und die Religionsgeschichte* which appeared in 1901⁵. TROELTSCH follows SCHLEIERMACHER in assuming that all religions share a common essence set forth in their goals: spiritualization, internalization, moralization and individualization. The point of convergence of man's spiritual uplifting is Christianity, itself a "relative" historical phenomenon much like the other religions, and yet "absolute" because, "among the great religions, Christianity is the strongest and most concentrated form of personal religiosity"⁶. The weakness of this argument lies in the fact that, according to TROELTSCH, in the last resort, the decision to accept Christianity as the absolute religion remains subjective and a personal matter of inner decision. Twenty years later, TROELTSCH, under the influence of SPENGLER, modified his mind on two important points: (1) the individuality of the great religions is such that "there can be no conversion or transformation of one into the other, but only a measure of agreement and mutual understanding", and (2) the historically conditioned nature of Christianity is such that "it is at a critical moment of its further development, and that very bold and far-reaching changes are necessary,

1966), G. SIEGMUND, *Buddhismus und Christentum* (Frankfurt a.M.: Knecht, 1968), and in the little book of ULRICH MANN, *Das Christentum als absolute Religion*, 1970.

³ ALFRED VIAL, "Buddhism and Other Religions", *Dialogue*, November 1966. p. 3

⁴ ALEC ROBERTSON, "Buddhist Attitude to Christianity", *Ibid.*, Dec. 1967, p. 25

⁵ TROELTSCH (1865—1923) is well known in Japan, particularly through the efforts of KAN ENKICHI, his translator and interpreter. Together with (the early) BARTH he is, more than anyone else, responsible for the attitude of many Japanese Protestants toward other religions. See my *Christianity Encounters Japan*, p. 210—211.

⁶ *Die Absolutheit des Christentums*, 2nd ed., p. 86. TROELTSCH distinguished two types of religion: the prophetic (such as Christianity), and the philosophical (such as Buddhism). He was aware that Buddhism, and all other religions, might, under certain conditions, stake out a similar claim to absoluteness. To refute such a claim, TROELTSCH wrote his *Der Historismus und seine Überwindung* (1924), translated in Japanese by OTSUBO SHIGEAKI, *Rekishishugi to sono kokufuku*.

transcending anything that has yet been achieved by any denomination"⁷. Thus did TROELTSCH abandon "absoluteness" in favor of historical relativism, an oft-forgotten fact in Japan.

Let us now examine in what sense Christianity claims absoluteness, and how it can do so without giving offense to other religions.

Christians look upon this problem from within the perspective of their faith. They contend that Jesus Christ is the perfect religious man; that he is *the* revelation of God to man; that he, and no other, is the supreme manifestation of all perfection; that in him dwells all that is good and true.

To Christians, Christ is God incarnate. In this sense, and in no other, is Christianity said to be "superior", namely, insofar as *Christ* is "the way, the truth, and the life" (*John* 14 : 6) in whom men find the fullness of religious life, and in whom God has reconciled all things to himself⁸.

But Christians do not believe that this uniqueness of their religion entails exclusiveness when Christianity is seen in its existential, historical and cultural forms. They are aware that no one can assert that "a Christian civilization" is superior to any other civilization which arose from religious influences other than their own. They hold that Christianity is not Christ *simpliciter*, but that, in its human dimension, it is time- and culture-bound like the other religions. Christians, like all other men, confess to sin and imperfection; they know that they fall short of man's ideal which is Christ.

It follows from the above that Christianity claims a specific, universally valid role, different from that of Buddhism. As Vatican II has pointed out in its enumeration of the many things which Christianity has in common with other religions, its *Ausschließlichkeitsanspruch* or exclusive validity claim (to use a formidable word dear to KARL JASPERS) is today seen in a different light from that of the past. The confrontation with other religions has reinforced, among Christians, the concept of a mutual illumination which radically banishes all thought of superiority and rejoices in the promotion of "the spiritual and moral goods found among men of other religions, as well as the values in their society and culture"⁹.

This illumination which comes from other faiths benefits Christianity as a necessary factor for self-identification. It also reflects the quality of the Christian presence in the pluralistic society of today and, consequently, it must be seen as an invaluable source of information about the way Christianity appears in non-Christian eyes¹⁰. Modern thinking on the role

⁷ *Christian Thought* (London: University of London Press, 1923), p. 30 and 31, translated from a 1923 lecture, "The Place of Christianity Among the World-Religions".

⁸ Cf. *2 Cor.* 5:18—19, and Vatican II, *Declaration on the Relationship of the Church to Non-Christian Religions*, 2.

⁹ *Ibid.*

¹⁰ The feedback information derived from contact with men of other faiths is to Christianity a kind of *Fremdprophetie* — prophetic knowledge received from

of Christianity in today's world does not recognize a radical distinction between the proclamation of the Kingdom of God and the practice of Christian living which gives this proclamation its credibility and attractiveness. It is a common Christian belief that, although the empirical Church reveals the mystery of man's salvation, she does not do this without shadows. She betrays a constant inner tension. As LUTHER said, she is *sancta simul et semper purificanda*, holy and yet always in need of further purification. Hence it is thinkable that, in Buddhism, one finds men "holier" than in Christianity. This fact shows that the fullness claimed by Christianity in and through Christ is not claimed in opposition but rather in complementarity with whatever is good and true in other religions. The nature of this complementarity, although it remains mysterious, yet invites Christians to participate in what is sometimes called a "wider ecumenism" or dialogue with other religions. Together with their fellow wayfarers of other religions, Christians aspire toward a pleroma or perfection, more or less clearly perceived in this world and yet never reached¹¹. With Buddhists, Christians say: "The time will come when we shall see reality whole and face to face. At present all we know is a little fraction of the truth" (1 Cor. 13 : 12).

In sum, the pendant of "Christian absoluteness" is Christian humility, a pendant which not only relativizes any claim to superiority in the face of others but also is the measure of its acceptability¹².

outsiders — which is a potential *locus theologicus*: it echoes experientially the nature and effectiveness of the Christian witnessing, a fact from which missionary methodology could greatly benefit.

¹¹ For more details on the "wider ecumenism", see my *Christianity Encounters Japan*, p. 233—247.

¹² Additional bibliography, specifically on the problem of "Christian absoluteness", see M. HEINRICHS, *Théologie catholique et pensée asiatique* (Tournai: Casterman, 1965), p. 69—110 and H. WALDENFELS, "Der Absolutheitsanspruch des Christentums", *Hochland*, 62 (1970), p. 202—217. PAUL TILLICH, in his *Christianity and the Encounter of the World Religions* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1963), discusses "Christian principles of judging non-Christian religions" (p. 27—51). Over against a Christian reaction of total negation or partial negation (some statements are true and some are not) to other religions, TILLICH favors "a dialectical union of acceptance and rejection". The practical implications of this statement are not made clear. TILLICH applies to Buddhist-Christian conversations his concept of a "dynamic typology" by which "persons can transcend the type to which they belong without losing their definite character", a fact which makes it impossible "to call Christianity the absolute religion, as HEGEL did, for Christianity is characterized in each historical period by the predominance of different elements out of the whole of elements and polarities which constitute the religious realm" (p. 56). I fail to understand how this can mean in practice, "not conversion, but dialogue" (p. 95).