

LOOKING AT BUDDHIST AMERICA: A Key to World Evangelization

*“...he who hears the sound of the trumpet and does not take warning,
and a sword comes and takes him away, his blood will be
on his own head.”—Ezekiel 33:4*

BY JAMES C. STEPHENS

URBANA. Prior to the 1990 Urbana student missions conference our staff at Sonrise Center for Buddhist Studies (SCBS) received the InterVarsity brochure entitled: “Jesus Christ Hope of the World.” We excitedly read through it and noticed that they mentioned that He was the hope of the Hindus, the Moslems, the Tribals, and the Chinese, but alas there was no mention that He was the hope of the Buddhists. Our hearts sank. We then wrote a plea to InterVarsity entitled It’s hard to ignore 300 million people, or is it? To their credit they rectified the situation by having one exhibit that would focus on the Buddhist world. Yet throughout the Urbana movement there has been a conspicuous absence of mentioning the need of the Gospel among Buddhist peoples.

Why does the Western missionary effort towards Buddhists continue to find itself in the same position? I don’t think it is any different than the story I heard about a young Swiss watchmaker who invented the digital watch. Prior to his invention, the Swiss controlled about 85% of the watchmaking industry and made 90% of the profit, and knew how to make watches. When they saw the new discovery, they were blind to its potential and decided to shelve the idea.

The inventor, somewhat discouraged, still saw the immense possibilities of his new idea, so he decided to take it to an international watchmaker’s trade show. Texas Instruments and a Japanese company saw it and the rest is history. The Swiss watchmaking industry has never been the same. You can imagine that the loss of over 50,000 jobs was devastating for the small country of

Switzerland.

This insider’s viewpoint illustrates a very important concept called a paradigm shift. For years, something may be done a certain way that brings success and so almost everyone superstitiously follows that pattern. Then someone comes along and says, “Watches don’t have to run with gears.” The idea doesn’t fit the traditional pattern and people who have much invested in the old system don’t want to change or can’t see the benefit that would come with change. Western missionary efforts concentrated on Buddhist peoples is finding itself in a similar position.

Times of great change demand dynamic thinking and spawn new mission structures. Dr. Gordon Lewis, formerly a Professor at Denver Seminary, warned in a 1988 document, “If we wait until 51% of our citizens are sold on a cosmic humanism, it may be too late...If the cultural shift to Hindu [and Buddhist] beliefs continues in America at the present rate, in another twenty years we may have lost a major base for missions to other lands. Hence, an ounce of prevention in America now may be worth a ton of cures later.” So in response to this challenge, Denver Seminary trained two of the first missionaries to the New Age. They now work in the United States. The questions remain: Can we see around the corner without being blinded by our preconceived ideas of what mission will look like? How will we learn?

From the Outside, Looking in

Although America has become pluralistic in its religious makeup, most Americans have little understanding of systems of thought outside their own religious

circles. The local pastor is hard pressed to find the time on a typical Sunday to adequately address this rapidly changing religious paradigm. In this religious climate it is virtually impossible for the average clergy, let alone the laymen to respond to every idea and competing worldview. However, without proper teaching that helps us wrestle with these issues from a Biblical perspective, our thinking will naturally become more ethnocentric and insulate us from the rest of society. Without understanding, ethnic tension and conflict are inevitable. Therefore it is imperative for us to take the initiative to ask our neighbors where they are from and to study and understand how they think.

It is also important for us to gain insight from a historical perspective to see how we arrived in our present predicament. Unfortunately, to paraphrase Bill Moyers, a popular commentator, “Americans know much about what happened in the past twenty-four hours, little of what happened in the last twenty-four years and almost nothing that happened in the last century.” This is a severe handicap for the average Christian in the church, but it is doubly true for those who desire to work among Buddhists.

Arnold Toynbee, the famous English historian, expressed his view of the Buddhist world from outside the normal Christian parameters when he wrote, “When the history of our time is written a thousand years hence, it will stress not so much the war in Vietnam, the conflict of communism and capitalism or racial strife, but rather the interpenetration of Christianity and Buddhism.” Already his words have proven to be prophetic in the case of Vietnam and the former Soviet Union. What is it that he saw? Missiolo-

gists should already be learning many lessons from the breakup in the CIS (Commonwealth of Independent States) and preparing in faith for the great work the Lord of the harvest will reap in Asia.

What have others seen in the Buddhist-Christian interface? Notto Thelle, a Norwegian who is involved with the Christian-Buddhist dialogue in Japan, was talking with a Buddhist friend who expressed the challenge that Buddhism will have on the Christian faith when he said: "Christianity has been through many ordeals. It has endured the fire of persecution, and has through 2,000 years been exposed to various cultures and philosophies. It has been tried by the fire of science, philosophy, skepticism, and antireligious thought, and has somehow managed to get through. However, it has not yet been through the fire of Mahayana Buddhism. When that happens I have no doubt that Christianity will enter a melting pot in which it will be thoroughly transformed by Buddhism" (1987). What a bold statement! However, it is not uncommon to run into this type of thinking when we are talking to intellectual Buddhists, if we make it outside of our own limited spheres of influence. In November 1988, we visited Hacienda Heights, California, where 500 leaders from the World Federation of Buddhists (WFB) were gathered together for the public opening of Hsi Lai ("Coming to the West") Temple, the largest Buddhist structure in the Western Hemisphere. Built by The International Buddhist Progress Society, it covers over 102,000 square feet and costs in excess of \$25 million. At the opening ceremony the Buddhists boldly proclaimed, "The General Conference of the WFB held in the United States for the first time has the geographical significance of connecting the east and the west. It is a small leap geographically, but a great leap in human history." America has become a mission field for Buddhists.

Why is the West Turning to the East?

Dr. Os Guinness (1973) speaks of this danger in his book *Dust of Death*, and points out that modern Christianity is weak at three vital points. The first is its

"compromised, deficient understanding of revelation. Without biblical historicity and veracity behind the Word of God, theology can only grow closer to Hinduism." The challenge of pluralism only magnifies the need for seminaries and schools that teach the Word in the modern context and which also train those people who are called to secular fields that are in positions of daily contact with the world system.

How well are we doing as a church in teaching proper doctrine? You may be as shocked as I was when I read Dr. Norman Geisler and J. Yutaka Amano's book *The Reincarnation Sensation* (1987) which pointed out that, "according to the 1982 Gallup poll, 23 percent of Americans, that is one in every four, believes in reincarnation...increasing to 30 percent among college-age persons...more astonishing is the fact that 21 percent of the Protestant population and 25 percent of professing Catholics believe in reincarnation."

A more recent Barna Research Group survey points out that sixty-four percent of Americans agree that "Christians, Jews, Muslims, Buddhists, and others all pray to the same God, even though they use different names for that God." Tragically, forty-six percent of evangelicals agreed with that statement.

Guinness's second point is that, "the modern Christian is drastically weak in an unmediated, personal, experiential knowledge of God. Often what passes for religious experience is a communal emotion felt in church services, in meetings, in singing or contrived fellowship. Few Christians would know God on their own." The church needs faithful men of integrity who are accountable, committed to servant leadership, who fear God and are willing to deny themselves. It appears we know the language of faith, but somehow there is a short circuit between the brain, the heart and action.

Third, "The modern church is often pathetically feeble in the expression of its focal principal of community. It has become the local social club, preaching shop or minister-dominated group. With these weaknesses, modern Christianity cannot hope to understand why people have turned to the East, let alone stand

against the trend and offer an alternative." People are desperately searching for a home in an increasingly transient society. The church must reorganize to meet the legitimate socio-religious needs of man or see cell-based groups such as the Japanese Buddhist sect the Soka-gakkai International (SGI) continue to erode the spiritual base of our society.

Guinness keenly warned us in 1973, "The subtlety of Eastern religion is that it enters like an odorless poison gas, seeping under the door, through the keyhole, through the open window, so that the man in the room is overcome without his ever realizing there was any danger at all." In light of this where does this put us today on the "Lewis scale of 51%?"

Brooks Alexander wrote in the *Spiritual Counterfeits Journal* (Winter issue, 1984), "The church has opted for the easy agenda of 'the American Dream' rather than the challenges of reflecting the Kingdom of God...It will do very little good for the church to confront the cults [and world religions] unless we simultaneously confront our own participation in the conditions which have produced them."

Knowing the Facts

"If our generation's heart is to be deeply stirred," said John R. Mott some four generations ago, "They must first know the facts." Lit-sen Chang, a former Zen Buddhist reformer and professor from China, now a Christian and emeritus at Gordon-Conwell Theological Seminary, wrote in his book *Strategy of Missions in the Orient*:

"We can no longer remain in an ivory tower or indulge ourselves in irresponsible isolationism or denominationalism. The military strategist must see the war as a whole in the light of ultimate victory. But, so often our preoccupation with local problems has tended to limit our vision to an isolated battle; to make us narrow minded; to blur our vision of the great cosmic struggle between Christ and the forces of evil. We must now deepen our insight and broaden our vision so that we can be delivered from the traditional 'Atlanto-Centric' attachment and courageously move out to face our new front" (1968).

To see our own situation clearly we must first take the time to get a bird's eye view of the Buddhist world. Professor Oscar M. Buck in *Christianity Tested* said in 1934, "The future of the Christian religion is being determined in Asia. The continent of Asia with 55% of the total population of the world still lies unconvinced across the path of Christianity." In Asia there are approximately 565 million Buddhists today located in 22 countries. Our working list of Buddhist people groups numbers around 500, while other estimates range up to 1000 individual unreached people groups with a population of 300 million unreached Buddhist people.

Recently-released official statistics on religious affiliation in China show that 100 million Chinese are Buddhist. Some estimates range all the way up to 300 million who practice Folk Buddhism. These figures are not static, but very dynamic. For example, Mongolia under Communist rule was only allowed to operate one officially-run Tibetan Buddhist lamasery. Within three years of the Russian evacuation, the number of Tibetan Buddhist centers in Mongolia increased to 120. In 1992, when the Dalai Lama visited the remaining believers, over three-quarters of the popu-

lation of the country turned out to greet him. This strongly suggests that the original seed religion in a country will be the among the first to take root after Communism retreats and religious interest returns.

In a conversation before Tiennamen Square, the controller of one of Hong Kong's top corporations predicted that over 600,000 affluent Hong Kong residents will leave the British colony prior to the take-over by the PRC in 1997 [Buddhist World Map (BWM) #6]. Most of these immigrants will hold a dual residence either in Australia, Canada or the US, while they wait out what happens in Beijing." Post-Tienneman estimates have escalated to over one million.

Immigrants from Asia accounted for only 5% of the legal immigrants admitted into the United States during the period 1931-1960, whereas the greatest majority came from Europe which was predominantly Judaeo-Christian in its religious heritage. After the change of the immigration law in 1965, we recognize a significant shift in immigration trends. In the period 1980-1984 the number of legal immigrants coming from Asia increased dramatically to 48% of the total number admitted

into her borders.

Barna, in his book *The Frog in the Kettle*, points out that, "During the '80's, the Asian population increased at twelve times the rate of the native-born population. Immigration, then, has become a cornerstone of America's plans for expansion and prosperity. In 1990, America will accept more immigrants than all other nations of the world combined. Recognize, too, that these figures count only legal immigrants. Estimates of the number of illegal immigrants entering America each year range from 50,000 to 500,000... Asian immigration will also continue to escalate as the Pacific Rim becomes the world's dominant economic center" (1990). Unlike a decade ago, talk of a new Asian order and of the Pacific Rim captures the headlines of major US newspapers.

According to the 1990 US Census, there are over 800,000 people whose nation of origin is Japan. Los Angeles is often referred to as the "thirteenth precinct of Tokyo" and is labeled the "eastern capital of Asia."

Just south of Los Angeles in Long Beach, over 40,000 Cambodian refugees make their homes, contributing to over 470,000 Southeast Asian (SEA) refugees in the State of California alone. Their

problems are representative of most New Americans in that they will speak limited English, have limited education and will require public assistance, housing and vocational and language training.

A *Newsweek* article from February 1988, states, "Asian Immigrants [many of them Buddhist]...who will number as many as 12 million by the year 2000 ...could affect America more profoundly than any other group since the first boat people crossed over on the Mayflower."

In light of these facts, what are we communicating to the Church regarding our responsibility of evangelizing our New American neighbors? Not all the church quite knows how to view the arrival of so many different types of people. The following story conveys my experience with a differing perspective.

In October 1989, I was picked up from the Chicago train station by a Christian brother who was to be my ride to the Rockford Conference on the Cults, where I was to speak on the Japanese Buddhist sect Nichiren Shoshu-Sokagakkai (SGI).

On the way we had a pleasant conversation and at one point I asked him if there were any Southeast Asian refugees in the Rockford area. His answer betrayed some frustration over their arrival and support from the government

in starting new businesses. It was obvious he was also struggling in his own real estate work. I sensitively asked him if I could share my opinion on this situation and he graciously said yes.

"I'm excited that God has brought these precious souls here from countries that are closed to the Gospel. Really, what is our purpose here on earth? Isn't it to see our Lord glorified and to be obedient to the completion of the Great Commission? What will we do with this historic opportunity?"

His humble response was truly encouraging. "I must go back and make friends of the Lao man I was trying to sell property to. I never thought of it that way."

Barna in *The Frog in the Kettle* writes, "For the past five years, parachurch [and I might add mission] agencies geared to sending American missionaries overseas have been lamenting the fact that many nations around the world are closing their doors to our missionaries. Perhaps God is providing a partial solution to such inaccessibility by relocating the mission field within America!" The fact is that many of the New Americans are very open to hearing about Christianity and some are a committed evangelical force such as the Koreans whose population is 80% Christian. According to Cliff Holland, the Director of In-depth Evan-

gelism Associates (I.D.E.A.), who conducted a comprehensive religious survey of Los Angeles County, Koreans have one church for every 224 Koreans, unlike their Thai neighbors who are still very steeped in Buddhism and only have one church for every 10,000 Thai. It is not just a question of Americans evangelizing immigrants, but really one of the entire Church working together to bring the Gospel to an increasingly pluralistic society.

The Emergence of American Buddhism

Buddhism is a missionary faith and wages an international and interactive battle. The Buddhist convert Asoka who was King of India circa 240 B.C. was said to have sent missionaries to Greece and as far west as present day England. He also sent his son Mahendra as a missionary of the Buddhist faith to Ceylon (today's Sri Lanka).

The story of Buddhism coming to America begins in Sri Lanka in 1818 with the arrival of an English Wesleyan missionary, Daniel John Gogerly. Not willing to respond to Buddhism from secondary sources, Gogerly spent fourteen years studying the original Pali texts and translated their writings so well that Buddhist scholar T.W. Rhys Davids proclaimed him a credit to the Christian

faith. The culmination of Gogerly's work was the publication in 1849 of *Kristijani Prajnapti* or *The Evidences and Doctrines of the Christian Religion* (Malagoda 1976). The use of this publication presented the superiority of the Gospel and led many Buddhists to a faith in Christ. It was so well grounded in understanding Buddhism that the Buddhist clergy began producing their own literature to counter the impact of Gogerly's work.

This controversy paved the way in Sri Lanka for the arrival of two Americans in May of 1880: Colonel Henry Steele Olcott and Madame Blavatsky of the Theosophical Society. It was said that, "The resounding welcome that Olcott received on his arrival indicated the symbolic importance that this endorsement of their cause by Westerner's had for the Buddhists." *The Maha Bodhi* later reported, "No king ever received the homage of a devoted people as these two when they landed on the shores" (Bond 1988). With Olcott's help, they began a frontal attack on the Christian faith by establishing a Buddhist catechism, Sunday school, Buddhist songs like, "Buddha loves me this I know, because the sutra tells me so," established organizations like the Young Men's Buddhist Association (YMBA) and even helped design the Buddhist flag.

It was at this time that a fourteen-year-old schoolboy heard Olcott's lecture. In 1884 he was initiated into the Buddhist Theosophical Society in Sri Lanka and took on the name of Anagarika Dharmapala. He "vowed beneath the Bodhi tree to rescue Buddhism from neglect" and founded the Maha Bodhi Society in 1891 to revitalize Buddhism in Sri Lanka and India. Until that time Buddhism in America was almost unknown.

Heinz Bechert in an article entitled "Buddhist Revival in East and West" points to an historic event which gave birth to Buddhism in America. "The World Parliament of Religions which was held in Chicago...[in] 1893 has probably

had greater importance for the early development of American Buddhism than any other single event...On that occasion, two Buddhists delivered speeches: Anagarika Dharmapala (from Sri Lanka) and Soen Shaku (from Japan), a master of the Rinzai school of Zen. Paul Carus (1852-1919) at the age of 41, the owner of the Open Court Publishing Company in LaSalle,...was so impressed by what he learnt there about Buddhism that he decided to patronize the spread of knowledge about it, particularly Zen. He invited Daisetz T. Suzuki (1870-1966), a disciple of Soen Shaku, to work for his publishing house" (Bechert and Gombrich 1984).

Suzuki became the brain child behind the introduction of Buddhism into America via his writings under Open Court. He also led the way philosophically for former Episcopalian priest Alan Watts who became a major advocate and voice on the radio waves for Zen Buddhism in the 1960 and 70's. Although deceased his voice continues its influence today on certain local radio stations.

Another Japanese sect, the Nichiren-Shoshu Sokagakkai (SGI) made its entrance on the American scene under the leadership of Masayasu Sadanaga, a Japanese student at UCLA. Sadanaga, who changed his name to George M. Williams, started the organization with a handful of Japanese "war brides" that came to the United States after World War II. The organization now has an estimated 500,000 members in America [BWM #5] and continues to zealously pursue its goal of one million members by the year 2001. Recently, they spent over \$54 million in Malibu, California to build Soka University of Los Angeles (SULA) which plans on sustaining a campus for 5,000 students. They are not a passing phenomena.

Buddhism has also made inroads in America in the field of psychology[†]. In a commencement address given at the Institute of Buddhist Studies in Berkeley, California on May 26, 1990, the speaker

pointed out that, "During the 1980's a new factor entered the process of developing American Buddhism: [as] a growing number of psychologists began to practice meditation...Journals were founded to disseminate studies about meditation and altered states of mind to psychologists, and as a result, a new kind of perspective on Buddhism began to arise among professional segments of American society...the concern expressed by fundamentalist Christians is an indication ...that the Dharma (Buddhist teachings) had gained respectability in sections of the academic establishment, making it a real threat, of a sort to fundamentalist Christians" (Komito 1990).

Another key element mentioned in the speech was the emergence in the 90's from Buddhist monasteries and nunneries of Americans who have practiced for 10 to 20 years. They have contextualized the message in a way that is attractive to Americans and free from the problems of cross-cultural communication that hampered Asian teachers. The speaker also pointed out that the availability of English translations of sutras, commentaries, and classics by professors of Buddhism in the universities had propelled the growth of Buddhism in the United States. Organizations such as "Bukkyo Dendo Kyokai" (Buddhist Promoting Foundation) founded by Mr. Yehan Numata, a Jodo-Shinshu Buddhist and founder of the Mitutoyo Company, funded the *The Teaching of Buddha*, had it translated into twenty-four languages and distributed, not unlike Gideon's, to hotels such as the Grand Metropolitan Hotel, Ltd., worldwide.

Buddhism is also firmly establishing itself in academic circles. According to Tetsuden Kashima from the Department of Ethnic Studies at the University of Washington, Numata's foundation "endowed three professorial chairs of Buddhism, one each at the University of California, Berkeley, the University of Chicago, and Harvard University, and plans for two others at Oxford University and in Germany."

[†] Just to interject a thought here on psychology. The introductory course on Psychology 101 that I took as a freshman at the University of Montana introduced me to key eastern concepts which led me to the gateway of my Buddhist experience. I am astounded how many Christians do not know the philosophical roots and dangers of modern psychology mixed with the Christian faith. The famous psychologist, Professor Carl Gustav Jung, himself stated, "As a student of comparative religion, I believe that Buddhism is the most perfect one the world has ever seen. The philosophy of the Buddha, the theory of evolution and the law of Karma were far superior to any other creed."

In the 1990's interest in ecology birthed a movement called "Green Buddhism." In my own experience in 1970, ecology was one of the key areas that attracted me to Buddhism. My Buddhist sponsor said, "If you want to clean up the environment, first you must clean up your heart." It was not unlike Aldous Huxley's solution to ecological problems which he mentioned in *Island* (1962) which stated that "Elementary ecology leads straight to elementary Buddhism."

So it is no wonder that there are now over 1000 Buddhist temples, monasteries, and centers throughout the US. One columnist wrote, "In Chicago, which was once considered the heart of Midwestern America, there are now more Moslems than Methodists, more Buddhists than Presbyterians, more Hindus than Congregationalists."

Why Study Buddhism?

Francis Pieper, over 70 years ago, said that, "No man should set himself up as a teacher in Christendom, who has not fully grasped the distinction between pagan religions and the Christian religion." Dr. Philip Schaff, a Swiss church historian and theologian, pointed out in defense of Christianity, that

"Brahminism, Buddhism, and Confucianism are formidable rivals and must be met by learned missionaries."

Yet, in our search for scholars, we have been surprised to find a tremendous gap in pundit level professors who could equip men for the depth of intellectual challenge that work among Buddhists poses. After we conducted a search of Christian colleges, seminaries and networks, we found only three professors with specialized knowledge in this field that we might consider evangelical in their faith. We often came up with some very depressing results. One letter we received from Iliff School of Theology from Assistant Professor Jose Ignacio Cabezon in February 1990 I quote in part, "I am a Buddhist working in a Christian Theology school. You can see, therefore, that I have very little interest in making available my materials to a group whose aim it might be to convert my Buddhist brethren to a religion which I consider well meaning but philosophically fallacious, namely Christianity." No, I can't see why, but it confirmed my past conclusions that there is a vital need for research and training.

Dr. Wong Yong Ji, in an address given at the 1992 Evangelical Theological Society meeting called for the

Church to pay attention to "this alarming new development in the arena of 'Religions,' and for serious reflection on the part of the Christian community. He stated, "Religious studies is no longer a passing fad, but...In fact, it may likely become the foremost concern in the coming decades. The tension and conflict between the theocentric pluralism claimed by men like Paul F. Knitter, John Hick, and many others, and the Christocentric trinitarian paradigm of the evangelical theologians may be increasingly visible in the future." (cf. Carl E. Braaten, *No Other Gospel*, 1992)

There is an old axiom that says, "Experience is the best teacher, as long as it is someone else's." Albertus Pieters looked back on his 30 years of ministry in Japan and shared his thoughts about why Japan hadn't been evangelized. He wrote, "I think sometimes that I made a mistake, as a missionary, in not paying more attention to Buddhism and never preaching about it. If it were a mistake, it is one shared by almost all missionaries and by Japanese preachers as well, for you seldom heard a word from them about Buddhism, and never an address about it intended for Buddhist believers."

Buddhism's doctrines are not easily understood by the western mind. Among

the most demonic of doctrines to be met is the Buddhist doctrine of assimilation. Through this Buddhism strengthens its tenacious hold on the hearts and minds of the local people and because of the lack of a consistent objective standard like the Bible, Buddhism's form changes from location to location. One could liken this situation to a chameleon which takes on the color of the vegetation it is surrounded by. Consequently we find Buddhism mixed with animism, Shintoism, Hinduism, and even Christianity. This makes Buddhism much more difficult to address as a specific religious system, and therefore one of the greatest spiritual and intellectual challenges of Christian mission.

As a new Christian I was disappointed that I could not find literature addressing the critical issues which new converts out of Buddhism face, i.e. the false doctrines of meditation and reincarnation that had attracted me originally. I perused volumes written by Jesuits and Methodists talking about the advantages of using Zen meditation in prayer. I was shocked because I knew already that what they were saying betrayed a lack of understanding of Buddhist meditation and surely of the Christian faith. Buddhist terms and concepts now permeate our advertising, movies and even Christian sermons. One conservative pastor said, "I thought I died and went to Nirvana." His statement only betrays the underlying ignorance of the West of the onslaught of eastern thinking.

The late Dr. Mas Toyotomi, a former missionary to Japan with JEMS (Japanese Evangelical Missionary Society) and founder of Missionary Strategy Agency, pointed out in an Asia Christian conference in 1980 that, "Asia is the continent that has carried idolatry to its ultimate prevalence and sophistication. This makes Asia the greatest and final battleground between God and Satan, for idolatry is the ultimate weapon of Satan."

"Satan's subtle strategy is to camouflage idolatry in such a way that even

Christians do not recognize it as such." And so "not even Christians today are seeing idolatry as the most grievous sin that can be committed by man. Because there is practically no preaching against idolatry in America, they are vulnerable to the temptations of modern, sophisticated idolatry."

During the International Year of Tibet in 1991 there was a host of art museums throughout the United States which sponsored exhibits of Tibetan objects of worship wherein we see idolatry camouflaged and lifted up as fine

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art. Personally, I observed Tibetan monks teaching young American children how to make religious sand paintings. The children were altogether unaware of the deeper significance of the mandala which becomes a temporary home to 722 deities (we call them demons) during the Kalacakra, a tantric ritual ceremony of empowerment.

Buddhism is also disguised in the media, where it subtly enters our generation's minds while we watch such harmless programs as Davy Crockett on Walt Disney. Normally I don't make a habit of watching much TV, but I caught a program about Davy Crockett with my children and at the end as he was leaving his long-time girlfriend, she looked at him romantically and suggested, "Davy, you know the other day I was reading about reincarnation, and well, I was thinking wouldn't it be nice if we were born again together in our next lifetime?" He then walked off the set. I found it very hard to believe that they were discussing this issue prior to the Alamo. But here is an example of how Satan constructs his case.

Or what about the popular children's cartoon called "Tailspin" by Spielberg? In one cartoon series, I heard the heroine say something like "Trust your heart, not your mind." My interest in the power of media and its negative influence led me to reading *The Religion of the Force* which talked about the movie "The Empire Strikes Back," which Director Irving Kirshner said was designed to introduce Zen Buddhism to children. Yoda, the Jedi's teacher was none other than the proverbial Zen master. The latest movie about Tina Turner's life blatantly touts Buddhism as the way to true happiness. Indeed, today's celebrities are America's gurus. Even the newspaper is not exempt. My son who reads the funny pages and claims it's research has come to me several times with cut-out cartoons that heavily play off the concept of reincarnation. If you are not teaching your children, the media is.

God warns us that He abandoned Israel because it was filled "with idols" and "influences from the east." Rather than serving God and loving Him, they "mingled with the nations and learned their practices" which were detestable to the Lord. So the Lord then "gave them into the hand of the nations; and those who hated them ruled over them" (Psalm 106:40b NASV). The study of Buddhism is like the medical doctor's study of disease. He must beware that he not be contaminated by the disease he seeks to cure. The unfortunate reality is that there are casualties.

But, if doctors did not do their homework many patients would die for lack of knowledgeable treatment. One Sunday after I had taught a fellowship class, two sets of parents came up to me independently of one another and asked, "Do you know that our Christian grade school uses Open Court Publishers?" I had mentioned them in the course of my discussion of the World Parliament of Religions, but confessed I didn't. They admitted they had been unhappy with the curriculum for the presentation of a non-Christian worldview and had already complained to the school administration. They asked me to do some research and

see if it was the same publisher. It was. And, in fact, Paul Carus had authored a book to promote Buddhism in America called, *The Gospel According to Buddha*. The curriculum was removed from the school.

The neighborhood that is surrounding this church is the largest Thai community in the United States. The Thai people practice Buddhism, worship spirits, and heavily rely upon astrology and numerology. Completed in 1979, Wat Thai Buddhist Temple has become the center of the community, and the local polling place is not a church or synagogue, but the temple itself. There is also no organized outreach to the temple or the surrounding community. This only drives home the necessity of rethinking our distinction between foreign and home missions. The field is closer than we think. It is a difficult question, but one that we should all ask ourselves, "Could we be like the Jewish evangelists who would travel land and sea for a proselyte, but would walk around the suffering Samaritan in their midst?"

Approaches to World Evangelization

Dr. Wong Yong Ji anticipates the difficulty of addressing the major move-

ment of world religions into the American scene. He stated, "Knowing the general mood of the religious world of our time, which is seemingly much more 'liberal' than a century ago into the direction of universalism, multiculturalism, and syncretistic trend, one may anticipate much more radical and astonishing happenings in the 1993 Parliament." During the Rio Conference on the Environment in Brazil many organizations, including Turner Broadcasting talked about coverage of the upcoming Parliament. It will be a major event. The question is, "Will we evangelicals like the ostrich bury our head in the sand? How should we approach people of other faiths?"

Dr. Wong Yong Ji concludes, "The concern for us Christians so far has been the danger of falling into 'syncretism...'. This concern is still valid; nevertheless..In a time when we cannot possibly live together peacefully without mutual contacts and coexistence, we have to know what others have and teach, as accurately as humanly possible. It is a part of our question on future survival with minimum conflict and antagonism. It is a mandate of our time."

In 1989, Sonrise Center for Buddhist Studies (SCBS) held a mini-consultation

in Pasadena involving about 50 Christian workers reaching out to the Buddhist world. One of the main conclusions was, "If you are my friend, you can tell me anything and I will listen; if you are not, I will not listen." Indeed, the evangelization of the world is a matter of the heart. We must see our fellow travelers on planet earth as our Lord Jesus Christ sees them in the *imago dei*, made in the image of God.

In addressing those of other faiths we must defend their right of expression even if we adamantly oppose their viewpoints. As Os Guinness wrote in *The American Hour*, "Respecting the right to believe anything is a matter of freedom of conscience; believing that anything anyone believes is right is plain stupidity" (1993).

As a new Christian, I had to unlearn the antipathy which I had been taught towards Christianity as a Buddhist. As a SGI Buddhist I had been trained to do a fairly militant form of witnessing known as shakubuku, literally the "tearing and crushing" of other faiths. I recall Buddhist national leaders exclaiming, "How could anyone believe in a religion that worships a dead man on a cross?" This derogatory statement belies a negative aspect of fundamentalism in any

faith, that of the superficial understanding of what others believe. So, rather than responding in an aggressive manner, I had to search for the proper Christian attitude and response to people from other faiths.

A step in that search led me to attending one meeting in a series of a Buddhist-Christian dialogue at Hsi Lai temple in Hacienda Heights, California. Hans Kung, John Cobb, and John Hicks were in attendance. I recall a Thai Buddhist professor who addressed a serious question to a "convinced Christian" panelist. He asked, "What is the view from the [spiritual] mountaintop of your faith?" The panelist replied, "Well, we'll get you a helicopter and you can fly up there and check it out for yourself." I left feeling deeply grieved for the lack of sincere Christian witness to these Buddhist men, who are spiritually without hope. Surely, I thought, this is not the dialogue approach that the Apostle Paul used on Mars Hill.

When Christian missions blaze a trail into a Buddhist area they may be going head to head with an entirely different type of Buddhism than they expected. Realize that many nominal and intellectual Buddhists may be attracted to aberrant forms of Christianity that they think are Christian, such as Modernism, Mormonism and Jehovah Witnesses. Without proper instruction they will fall prey to those wolves in sheep's clothing who will do follow-up.

Modular Training in Mega-Cities

God's missionary strategy through the ages from Daniel in Babylon to Paul in Rome has been to reach peoples through centers of cultural, religious and political importance. Los Angeles is home to over 23 different Asian cultures and is an ideal laboratory for training in a mega-city for an international generation of missionaries. Here forward thinking seminaries are preparing ethnic representatives for leadership and former seminary students live in "incarnational teams" among Southeast Asian refugees.

In 1990, the Sonrise Center for Buddhist Studies established a house to serve as an experimental model for intern training and as a resource center for the Church in its efforts to evangelize

Buddhists. It maintains a library of key books, journals, audio-visuals, and files which have been collected and prepared by staff and missionaries from all over the world. The vision of SCBS is to see a church planted and a people disciplined among the remaining unreached Buddhist people groups throughout the world. It's mission is to provide strategic information and training for those desiring to work among Buddhist peoples, while seeking key opportunities to bring a greater awareness to the church of the challenges of the remaining task.

An essential step in the future is the establishment of an academic Chair of Christian-Buddhist Studies to train leaders to spearhead Christian Mission to Buddhists. The Western capital of the Third World is the mostly likely host to such an endeavor. In the meantime, our present training course offers a platform for specialized scholars to share with Professors, missionaries and other workers pursuing work among Buddhists. This course of study has taken on a distinctively geographic approach by breaking the Buddhist world down into four modules. The Theravada module covers the countries of Southeast Asia, including Sri Lanka, India and Myanmar; while Mahayana covers China, Japan, Korea, Taiwan, Hong Kong, and Vietnam. The Tibetan module focuses on mission to the sixty-six Tibetan people groups found in Tibet, China, Mongolia, the C.I.S., Bhutan, India and Nepal. The fourth module focuses on Mission to Buddhists found in the Western world. Los Angeles again provides an ideal laboratory as it contains all the necessary ingredients for the educational experience ranging from art museums, ethnic programs, Asian communities, and Buddhist denominations from every stripe.

For proper training to take place the Church and mission agencies must be willing to share their resources and establish cooperative training projects. This allows the administrative and financial burden to be shouldered more equitably by a wider constituency. This is not unlike the principle of parity which the mission agencies learned early on when the task, because of its complexity required the sharing of limited resources

on the mission field. The urgent nature of mission to Buddhists today requires what Phil Butler at Interdev calls, "strategic evangelistic partnerships."

Most importantly, we don't need to "reinvent the wheel." Rather we can take lessons from the cooperation of the milk industry and its joint publicity campaign with which most of us are very familiar: "Everybody Needs Milk." For the milk industry to survive, all dairies need publicity whether a given dairy has 5 cows or 1,000; they are willing to pay according to their ability because they know that "united we stand, divided we fall." Through cooperation, smallness does not limit an organization's ability to serve the whole cause.

Windows of Opportunity

Over three years ago the Dalai Lama had an unprecedented meeting with Congressional leaders in the Dome of the US Capital Building. In response to a very strong lobby of Americans involved in the Free Tibet Movement, the US Government in 1991 passed a law allowing over 1000 Tibetan refugees to resettle in 16 cluster sites around the country [BWM #4]. One missionary who worked among refugees from Southeast Asia said that this is one of the most opportune times to communicate the love and Gospel of Christ through genuine deeds of kindness. This window is usually open for a very short period of about six months. We must be reminded that the Lord commands us to "show your love for the alien," for we too were once strangers to the promises of God (Deut. 10:19).

Another key development in mission is what I call "Nulinks." These are creative new links between peoples laid by God before the creation of the world. A prime example would be the tremendous reception that Navajo Christians received from Mongolians in a visit to Mongolia in 1991. Mongol legends claim that American Indians are ancestors who crossed into the New World over the land bridge many centuries ago. If we persist in ethnocentric viewpoints we can miss the creative hand of God and these wonderful reunions that the God of Creation has in store for us all.

Another question that was asked at

the Asia Missions Congress in Seoul, Korea during August 1990 was, "Are there strategic fragments of unreached peoples who are more accessible in another part of the world, e.g., Mongolian students in Czechoslovakia?" Or Kalmyks [an unreached Tibetan Buddhist group from the CIS] in New Jersey? [BWM #1] God moves people. Our job is to recognize the different types of people He has brought our way and to engage in His work among them.

At Urbana '90 I had the privilege of rooming with Dr. Ralph Winter. Because of my responsibilities one evening I missed the bus to the hotel I was staying at and had to walk home quite a distance in a snow blizzard. To thaw out I needed to take a hot bath and unfortunately that night the hot water heater for the hotel broke down. So I called maintenance and the engineer showed up to check out the problem. He was very personable and I asked him where he was from. He replied, "Pakistan." It happened that he was here studying religion and did his Master's thesis on a synthesis of Islam and Christianity at the request of a professor of the local university. He had studied the Bible thoroughly which made for a stimulating dialogue.

The next morning I told Dr. Winter of my interaction and I'll not easily forget his question to me, which was, "That's fine, but what people group was he from? Is he a Baluch or a Sindhi?" I hadn't even

thought to ask, but the point was clear. Knowing the geo-political nation a person is from is not enough. God wants us to know their family, their ethnics. These are the people of the remaining task which the Apostle Paul pointed to in Romans 15:20-21: "And thus I aspired to preach the gospel, not where Christ was already named, that I might not build upon another man's foundation; but as it is written, 'They who had no news of Him shall see, And they who have not heard shall understand.'"

Reflections

It is a sobering walk, a narrower road than I once thought. What does the stage look like that we are about to walk upon? Indeed it is not a new mission field. Andrew Fuller pointed out in a letter on "The Promise of the Spirit as the grand encouragement in promoting the gospel" that: "God had a cause in the world from the earliest ages and this it was which interested the hearts of his servants. It was for the setting up of his spiritual kingdom in the world that he blessed the seed of Abraham, and formed them into a people. This was the work that He carried on from generation to generation among them" (Genesis 12:3).

Adoniram Judson, a missionary in Burma (now Myanmar), offered a sobering call to that same work when he wrote in the 1800's of the Buddhist challenge. "In order to effect the overthrow

this system, together with [Hinduism] and [Islam], the church of Christ must awake to the employment of her highest energies, and must put forth her mightiest efforts. She is to attack the very heart of the fortress, and grapple with the Prince of Darkness on his throne" (Wayland 1853).

How is the Church to carry out this mission? Charles Haddon Spurgeon exhorted the church when he said, "The power of missions abroad lies at home: a holy church will be a powerful church. Nor shall there be lack of treasure in her coffers when grace is in her heart; the free gifts of a willing people shall enable the workers for God to carry on their sacred enterprises without stint."

John Sutcliffe (1752-1814), pastor of Olney Baptist Church in England, sent out a circular letter which read in part: "We take for granted that the spread of the gospel is the great object of your desire. Without this it will be hard to prove that you are Christian Churches...The true churches of Jesus Christ travail in birth for the salvation of men. They are the armies of the Lamb, the grand object of whose existence is to extend the Redeemer's Kingdom."

Conclusion

When the late Bishop Honda of the Japanese Methodist Church was once asked what he thought of the great

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motto, 'The Evangelization of the World in This Generation,' he replied very modestly, "It is a good motto, a very good motto for this generation; and I think it will be a good motto for the next generation, too." As we approach the dawn of the 21st century, we ask ourselves, "Will this be the generation that sees the completion of the Great Commission?"

And yet it is not for us to know the time, but to work diligently while there is still light. The torch was being passed to our generation when J. Oswald Sanders clearly pointed out in one of his last messages that our task is to "transform the present." Although strategic planning is critical to victory, our preoccupation with the future can be a snare. History teaches us many lessons and one that drives the point home with me which occurred during the American Civil War.

"General Stonewall Jackson had assembled his engineers one evening and instructed them to build a bridge across a river he had decided to cross to surprise his enemy. After the engineers left, he called for his wagonmaster who had been a blacksmith and told him to prepare the wagons and artillery pieces and to move them across the river as soon as the bridge was ready.

Before dawn that night the wagonmaster reported to the general that all the wagons and the artillery pieces were on the other side. The general looked surprised and asked, 'And where are the engineers?' The wagonmaster replied with a nod and a grin, 'Sir, they are still in their tent drawing pictures of the bridge they plan to build.' The old blacksmith knew the difference between planning a bridge and building one." Hence, our planning must lead to the action that "transforms the present" (Wiwcharuck 1987). We must remember:

"There is no wisdom, no insight, no plan that can succeed against the LORD. The horse is made ready for the day of battle, but victory rests with the LORD." (Proverbs 21:30-31)

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