

TALK IN THE SHADE
OF THE
BO TREE

Wan Petchsongkram

Translated and Edited by Frances E. Hudgins

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Some Observations on Communicating the Christian Faith

In Thailand

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PREFACE

Thailand, as a Theravada Buddhist country, has been a field of Christian endeavor for several centuries - of Roman Catholics since the mid-seventeenth century and for Protestants since the early nineteenth. One of the most pleasant and prosperous countries of Asia, Thailand has been largely free of the problems of grinding poverty, overpopulation, foreign colonization and endemic wars that have plagued some of her neighbors. Traditionally freedom-loving and independent, Thailand has not only had open cultural and commercial relations with the West, but holds also many of the ideas and ideals which, in the West, find strength and support in the Judaeo-Christian heritage. Yet for all the prodigious labors of many Christian missionaries, some of whom have had exceptional qualities of mind and heart, response to the Christian faith has been minimal. An oblique influence on Thai society may have been considerable but numerical gains have been small. For the most part Thai people have not understood that Christ has anything to offer them. They are simply not "turned on" by what they know of the Christian faith. Thai reports of early Christian missions generally conclude with the appraisal, "They did not understand us."

It has become axiomatic in missionary circles that one of the reasons for this indifferent response may very possibly be the "westernisms" which have accompanied or even characterized presentations of the Christian message. No longer is it debatable that the church of Jesus Christ must, in each given country, reflect the tastes and preferences of that one place and be a natural and genuine expression of the Christian faith and discipleship of its own members. One thinks of the oft-quoted statement of D.T. Niles, "No one can render obedience to Jesus Christ on my behalf." Always and everywhere, what one is asked to render up is his own obedient response, not another's. When this is not clearly understood, subtle temptations lie in wait for those who feel impelled to commend the Christian faith to others. The sensitive Christian minister, foreign or not, is always aware of the possibility of the de-humanizing manipulation of his hearers, of the ease with which one can stitch up for others an ill-fitting ideological jacket which, if worn, makes life unnecessarily complex. Certainly there is something incongruous about a Thai Christian whose tones and gestures, tastes and manners have been made over in the western image in the mistaken notion that this is the image of Christ, or whose clerical trappings, unnatural poses of strident manner say clearly that he has really lost his own cultural identity. Generally, the non-Christian is quick to spot this kind of artificiality and mimicry. Except in jest no one can really be expected to appreciate a caricature, least of all the Lord of all truth. No doubt genuineness and authenticity are all that in the final accounting can be expected to pass the divine inspection. What is wanted, therefore, is a church that both has appeal for Thai people because it speaks in their own cultural idiom and is also an authentic expression of full Christian faith.

In the absence, however, of any clear model of such a church or any consensus on what constitutes indignity, there is today on the part of those who commend the Christian faith in Thailand a great lopping and chopping in order that the faith presented be free of its western accretions and the resulting church truly indigenous. Focusing attention on church structure, architecture or location, some conclude that the church must resemble a Buddhist temple; others, that only house churches will suffice. Those who concentrate on hymnody quite properly decry the foreignness and abstruseness of most church music presently in use. Yet others see Christian education as unnecessary and unsuitable for a "loosely structured" society, and still others would reduce the gospel presented to a bare minimum and decline to participate in the development of the church lest their western approach prove contaminating and the work of the Holy Spirit in the Thai churches be contravened.

But does the formation of a church which truly expresses indigenous Thai Christian faith necessarily or even desirably have to pass through this sort of customs inspection for the elimination of "westernisms" before it can proceed? Is there not some more positive approach to the complex problems involved in acceptance and indigeneity? Has it not been left largely unnoticed that

“indigenous” and “non-western” are not synonymous terms, that subtraction only leaves one diminished and bereft, that a new house cannot be built merely by fumigating an old one?

It should not be left unobserved that the frankly western offering of the missionary enterprise is what has been accepted in Thailand. The Thai typewriter, modern education, medicine and social service have been so received and integrated into Thai life that few remember them as originating in the Christian mission. The fact that so much that is western is readily accepted and eagerly, even energetically, sought after raises the question whether the main impediment to receptivity toward the Christian faith is the alleged “we sternness” of the church’s forms as much as the failure to communicate the faith of the church in terms which can be readily understood. Often, Thai people, in describing their own society, will say with mixed consternation and pride, “Thais are not like other people.” Some anthropologists who see Thai society as defying attempts at analysis in terms of familiar sociological theories would probably agree. At least, Thailand is one of the few countries where Theravada Buddhism has traditionally been all but *de rigueur* and Buddhist concepts inform the speech and thought-forms and feelings of the great majority, if not all of Thai society. In this, Thailand is certainly unique. And the Christian who in this setting witnesses to his faith only in traditional terms may very possibly seem to his Buddhist hearers only to be reciting conundrums.

One Thai pastor, Acharn Wan Petchsongkram, who spent eight years as a Buddhist monk attaining the rank of Barian 5 (ปรีชาญาณ 5) before becoming a Christian, insists that the first vital step toward acceptance of the Christian faith and indigenoussness in its expression lies in presenting the message of Christ to Buddhists in all its wholeness, even in all its complexity and profundity, yet doing so in full consciousness and recognition of Thailand’s Buddhist stance; and that all other deletions and adaptations are but superficial tinkering without this important step. The terms through which the keenest insights and strongest affirmations of the Buddhist way are expressed thus become indicators of where learning readiness lies and the avenues through which Christ may seek his own. Esteem for the Triple Gems may become a means of awakening appreciation for the one Pearl of great price. The beautiful Pali term *vimutti* (วิมุตติ) denoting release or liberation may be an enlightening way to speak of salvation in Christ. This is not syncretism but incarnation. The Christ who took our flesh also takes our language to present himself as the eternal Word of God.

As a pastor and hospital chaplain, Acharn Wan has spent many hours discussing the Christian faith with Thai Buddhists. In 1972 he conducted a series of studies in apologetics for a group of interested Christian leaders at the Thailand Baptist Theological Seminary. His lectures were aimed at giving an introductory understanding, not so much of philosophical Buddhism, concerning which there are many excellent texts both in Thai and in English, but of popular Buddhism as practiced in central Thailand, with suggested guidelines for presenting the Christian message to the Thai Buddhist in terms which he would find intelligible. Attempt was made to set Buddhism in Christian perspective and in the ordinary setting of everyday life in the hope that humanizing it for the Christian evangelist might help him to see some Buddhist terms and thought forms as vehicles for the expression of the Christian faith.

These lectures are here presented. They were translated from transcribed tapes and therefore the translator has found it necessary to do some editorial work, deleting repetitions, combining similarities, and making what was originally a spoken word a written word, but certainly with no intention of altering the meaning. A brief glossary of Pali terms with their Thai equivalents and English meanings has been appended.

In the preparation of this translation many were helpful. Rev. Judson Lennon had the taped lectures transcribed and made the Thai copies available. Several others have read the translations and given time and advice, notable among them, Dr. Donald Dawe, Professor of Theology at Union Theological Seminary in Virginia under whose supervision and encouragement the work was first undertaken in connection with studies there in 1973. And Mrs. Judson Lennon took on the exacting task of typing the final manuscript and did so voluntarily. To all of these special thanks are here expressed. But they must not be charged with errors and inaccuracies of the translation nor with necessary concurrence in the views expressed.

The Bo tree is, of course, the place of Buddha's enlightenment and it spreads its influential shade over the whole of Thailand. It is to be hoped that this "talk in the shade of the Bo tree" may be illuminating to those who would help Thai people see Christ who awaits them there.

Frances E. Hudgins

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I. FROM WHENCE COMETH OUR HELP?

It goes without saying that good ministers of Jesus Christ must understand the feelings of the people they serve. Consequently we may say that those who present the gospel of Christ to Thai people must do so in the Thai way using Thai modes of expression if they expect to be understood and believed. This does not mean, of course, that one must necessarily adopt Thai presuppositions. Western newspapers are always reporting that no matter what one asks Thai people, they reply, “Never mind”, *mai pen rai* (ไม่เป็นไร) . And concerning God and religion, the Thai attitude is that all religions are good or that any belief is all right (เชื่ออะไรก็ได้ ไม่เป็นไร). It is not this stance that must be adopted but rather the terms in which Thai life is normally expressed that must be employed if communication is to take place.

So how shall Christian ministers have Thai feelings, how shall we conduct ourselves in the Thai fashion, how shall we use Thai terms correctly? For it must be emphasized that all of these are almost completely derived from Buddhism. Feeling is forged out of Buddhist concepts. Culture, customs, behavior and language all originate in Buddhism.

If we study Thai attitudes through books written by Thais we will find the almost unanimous opinion that Buddhism is a religion of cause and effect (เหตุผล) and that reason is considered to be the great thing in Buddhism. There is no interest in faith that is non-rational, nor in sacred powers, nor angels, nor gods. And beyond that, the writers continue, the important thing in Buddhism is that everything is unstable (ไม่เที่ยง), hurting (เป็นทุกข์), and formless (ไม่มีตัวตน). One should not grasp at anything or fall under the power of anything for everything is only emptiness. The experts all contend that this teaching is unique to Buddhism, not present in any other religion. Buddhism is the only religion which, in its search after the ultimate, has discovered emptiness, or in Buddhist terms, *anatta* (อนัตตา).

1. *Anatta* (อนัตตา) is then the first principle of Buddhism, not to be found in any other religion. So, when Thai people feel that they already have the highest possible religion, what else can be said to them? If what they have is already better than what Christians have, how can Christians speak to them of the Christian faith? Why should they receive what we have to offer? Everywhere in Thailand, when we talk about God, Buddhists will say that what they have is sufficient and there is no need to change. If any Thai person does become a Christian, Thai people demand to know why on earth he has done so. Most Thai people suspect that the Thai Christian is a Christian for pay or for employment, not because the religion of the Christian's God is a superior religion. One of the reasons for the suspicion is that most Thai Christians do not know enough to explain with sufficient clarity for Thai people to understand how Christianity is more advanced than Buddhism. It is generally felt that if anyone converts to the Christian religion, he must feel that Buddhism has little to offer, that Christianity has something better; yet if it is asked in what way the new faith is better, though some Christians may attempt an answer, the answer, instead of helping the inquirers see, only serves to confirm their suspicions.

For example, while Buddhists believe that *Nibbana* (นิพพาน), the idea of unreality, is the highest thing in the universe, we turn around and say that God is a reality, God is a person. When we talk like this, they reply, “Your religion is not yet the highest.” They feel that Christians have looked at ultimate reality as one looks at matter with the naked eye. Matter, when analyzed, is shown to be composed of atoms, small particles which cannot be seen with the human eye. It is only because our vision is limited that we cannot see them. When we talk of God as real, as a person, Buddhists say, “You Christians are nearsighted; if you would only look further you would find emptiness or nothingness.” So what shall we do? Certainly we do not need to interpret God as unreality or nothingness, but we need to explain with more depth and clarity what we mean when we say that God is real. Instead of saying only that God is a person,

we must go on to say that God is a Spirit and that that Spirit ordinary men cannot see at all, either with the eye or with the mind; he can only be seen when he reveals himself to us. The reason that Lord Buddha saw only unreality as the ultimate was that he had no such vision. He could not see as God sees that things which are non-material do, in fact, have form and reality. Buddha had no means of perception for seeing into the spiritual world which is fully known only to God. Perhaps if we would go into this, Buddhists would be able to understand that God is no ordinary and human supposition. We will return to this later on, but in passing let me say that though I feel that the means of teaching Christians which we now use—that is, the traditional approach—is acceptable, if we employ this method outside the churches in teaching non-Christians, the result will be no better than what has been experienced in the one hundred fifty years of Christian history just past.

2. *Karma* (ကံဒါမ) When we preach that Jesus was crucified, the Buddhist response is that he must have been very exceedingly sinful for his violent death shows that in a former life he must have committed terrible sins for which he is, in this life, being punished as a recompense. We are fond of recounting his many virtues, even to his willingness to die on the cross for us, but our hearers will see him as an extremely pitiable character. What we preach, thinking it is our most exalted concept, Buddhists will see as the basest doctrine. If they consider that what we are saying is vile and ignominious, they not only will not believe, they will not even regard the Christians' God with respect. So, we must find another way. Of course, if we talk with the ignorant, possibly we can go ahead like this; but if we speak to thinking people we cannot just preach the simple gospel with no thought of the prior concepts of our hearers. There are, for example, two important aspects of the Christian understanding of God which Buddhists find completely unacceptable. One of these is love.

Concerning love, there is a Thai proverb, "Danger arises from what we love" or filth comes from love. Therefore, the Buddhist standard is to eliminate love completely. Anyone who has severed himself from all love and does not love his children, his wife, his money, his possessions, not even himself, is on a high level of attainment in Buddhism. But Christian ministers say, "God so loved the world that he gave his only son...." Buddhists hear it and think, "Oh, how pitiful; this God is full of unwholesome passion. He is still very sinful, for he is worried." And when Christians talk about the wrath of God the reaction is even worse.

The whole idea of the wrath of God is very offensive to Buddhists. Of course, when God exercises wrath he is not like us who tend to be mastered by our moods and emotions. When we hate we are under the power of hate. When we are vindictive we are dominated by the thirst for revenge. When we are jealous we are motivated by jealousy. Whenever ill-humor arises in us we are overpowered by it. But God exercising his wrath is still God. Although he is still angry he does not give vent to his anger in a human way. We have to understand and be able to explain this. There are many books which have been written by Buddhists about the wrath of God and they all conclude that such a God is not worthy of respect. Thais who really hold to Buddhism, who are the very strictest Buddhists, count the words they speak; when they walk they walk slowly; when they move they move gently; and when they speak they speak softly. All this is to indicate that they are in complete control of themselves, in charge of their own feelings, their movements, their walking, their sitting. These are the kinds of people who are considered devout. We have to understand this if we are to communicate.

As regards the concept of God, the major religions of the world may be divided into two classes. Those which may be termed theistic hold to belief in a God who created and sustains and exercises providence over the things which have been created, holding them in systematic order. These are religions like Christianity, Islam and Hinduism. Others may be termed atheistic, and Theravada Buddhism is one of these. But even among Theravada Buddhists there are two main groups. One has no belief in God at all, vehemently denies his very existence, strongly argues that there is no creator. The other believes that there is a creator but that he is not

worthy of worship. They believe in a god but do not reverence him. Why? Because they think of this god as extremely contemptible. The reason is that he created something evil, an evil world - which indicates that he himself is evil.

The Tripitaka expounds on the subject: if the world is evil the one who created it must be evil, too, and is therefore not worthy of worship. Let us look at only one paragraph: "In a time when the world had perished, it was re-formed" – meaning that the world once toppled and disintegrated and was subsequently re-created or re-established "There was a class of beings called Brahma (พรหม)"- meaning the father of the Hindu religion or the god of the Hindus. "One of them decided that it was not proper to be alone but that others should be allowed to come forth" – and whatever the Brahma thought up would come about as soon as it was thought. "As a result others were born also." This is what Lord Buddha said. "After a long interval similar beings arose and among them, the first one to appear indicated that he was god, one who had power over all others, with no one greater than himself. He thought he was the Creator."¹ He went on to explain that as soon as the beings who came afterward were born, they looked to see where they came from and naturally thought that the one who came before them was their Creator. Therefore, when men think that one who preceded them is their Creator, in the final analysis they acknowledge that that first Brahma was their Creator and the Creator of mankind. In their ignorance of their origin they are willing to accept that they come from Brahma. So the God of the Christians is a Brahma. We will return to this. But Buddhists conclude that God is in the position of one of the Brahmas and only imagines that he is a creator when, in fact, he did not create. Therefore, they do not respect him.

Then since Buddhism is a religion without God we need to pursue the question of what Buddhists teach that one should trust in or depend upon. We Christians have no problem here. We depend on God because we believe God exists, we came from him, this world is his. We are in his world, God's world, and we rely on him. But if Buddhists have no god, what do they trust in and depend upon for help? If we say that they have nothing on which to depend (and I have heard it preached that if we have no god we have no foundation for our lives), they say they do. They reply to any question about what it is by saying, "We rely on ourselves."

When we speak with Buddhists about the Christian faith, we are always interested to know what they think about God for no Buddhist has a doctrine of God which is comparable to that of the Christian faith. Yet Buddhists also have a ground of faith (ที่พึ่ง).

Recently a local newspaper carried a cartoon in which there was a picture of a gigantic Buddha image and the caption read, "Buddha taught us to depend on ourselves but his teaching is now passé: today people depend on the image." This is a sort of sarcasm which this newspaper is directing at Thai people. Originally Buddha taught his followers to depend on self. Now they are not willing to do it, primarily because they find that they cannot, and they are now feverishly trying to find something outside themselves as a foundation for their lives. Everywhere they hear of any thing promising they go. Wherever there is some miracle or sacred thing, people will rent a taxi and go by the hundreds and thousands. It is indicative that people are searching for something stable outside themselves which they can hold to for support. The doctrine is, "Depend on yourself," and they acknowledge that the doctrine is good, but they know that they cannot follow it. If we ask them, "What is your source of help?" they will reply, "Myself", but when they are alone or even while they are speaking to us, they are trying to reassure themselves. "Depend on yourself" then is only a slogan. In reality everybody has the feeling that he must hold on to something sacred or some power or god or something else which can give stability to life. "Depend on yourself" really means that one must depend on his own effort to refrain from what is evil. It means:

3. In anything whatever that will get us into trouble, we positively refuse to do it. Since every kind of evil will get us into difficulty, we refrain from anything which is wrong. This is the basic idea in self-reliance.

4. While we no longer practice evil we also have to do what is good. "Quit evil and do good." When we depend on ourselves our good will bring rewards; therefore, we must do good so that we ourselves will receive the fruit and benefit of our deeds.

When we have refrained from evil and done good we will be at peace and we can be our own “help” and support. We do not need God. We are sufficient, we can rely upon ourselves. And from our goodness many good results will come: people will respect and honor us and praise us as good men. They will believe in us and we will never be despised. And if we are known as good men our goodness will lead to continually higher and higher advancement. If we do something praiseworthy we will be promoted, salary will be increased, position will be elevated. We do not need God to help us, we can make progress on our own. How?

5. The Buddhist answer is, “By making the heart pure.” When the heart is unclean, or there is sin in the heart, it preys upon us even though we may not yet have committed it. So, we must purify the heart and train it or as they say, “Practice the heart every day.” There is a proverb which says, “Schooling the heart brings peace” (การฝึกจิต นำความสุขมาให้). For this reason, entering the priesthood or perseverance in trying to advance in Buddhism requires practicing the heart, the inner self. This kind of training one must do for himself, It does not require dependence on any outside power. This is self-reliance.

Now, let us quarrel with this doctrine a bit.

Although Buddhism has a way of explaining it, it is really a doctrine which is self-contradictory. In Buddhism, the self has nothing to give it reality; it is *anatta* (อนัตตา), a non-entity. The word for self is *atta* (อนัตตา). *Ana* (อะนะ) is part of another word which means *not having*. The two combined really come out meaning *without form, without reality*-this highest principle in Buddhism which sees everything as not having form or reality. Take, for example, a piece of chalk. It has a form which is easily seen, but it is made up of tiny, invisible particles which have combined to make it a stick of chalk. Buddhists say that you can disassemble everything in this way until there is nothing left to analyze. Every stick of wood, every material object, can be reduced to nothing in this same way. A person is also a combination of various elements, which, if separated, leaves nothing; only emptiness remains. The person who understands this clearly and sees everything from the perspective of unreality is one who is considered to have special insight (ตาวินิษย). People with ordinary vision are simply deluded, but if they possess this special discernment they can see that, in the end, a piece of chalk, for example, is really nothing, So, if Buddhists teach that there is no real self and yet teach that one is to depend on self, how can this possibly be? You are nothing, I am nothing; no one at all has a real self but we are only collusions of elements, yet we must depend on ourselves.

About this, there is now a good deal of new thinking. Formerly, we did not think very much about the contradiction. Whatever Buddha said, we simply accepted without question. But today, when people are reading and thinking, some are questioning the doctrine. If the self is not a reality, how can we depend on it?

Let us assume that the world has come about as an illusion, not in reality; actually, then, man is more a shadow than a person - chemical elements presumed to be combined. But we call this physical entity Mister this or Mister that and teach that he must depend upon himself. What is this self? Besides not existing, it is also transitory (อนิจจัง), unstable; it cannot stand. Or as one philosopher put it, “You cannot jump in the same river twice” or you cannot say the same thing twice. The words may refer to the same thing each time but they are not the same words. The water in the river has flowed on before one can jump into the river a second time. This is called being insubstantial (ไม่เที่ยง) or transitory (อนิจจัง). People are fleeting or insubstantial, for they are first children, then young people, then adults, then old, and finally they die. Buddhists say that people are *mai tiang* (ไม่เที่ยง), our selves are *mai tiang* (ไม่เที่ยง) yet we are to depend on self, something which is transitory and fleeting.

When we depend on God is it like this? If we cannot pray to him about the same thing twice, we are really in trouble. If God is always changing, Christians are in difficult circumstances. But we may, in fullest confidence, say that as Christians we depend on

God who is *tiang tae* (เที่ยงแท้) absolutely sure, an unchanging reality, eternally unmovable, who will not under any circumstances change. As the phrase of a hymn has it, there is in him “no whisper of change.”

But if we depend on self and the self is constantly in flux, as I am when one day I decide on a certain course of action and by the next day I have changed my mind, this is an astonishing kind of dependence, this depending on something which cannot stand up. What will result? The result can be nothing but uncertainty. Most Buddhists are very unsure about belief in the next life-because their source of help is so unsteady.

Actually, we cannot even depend on self in the present world. As the Thai proverb goes, “The boat depends on the river, the tiger on the forest” (เรือพึ่งน้ำ เสือพึ่งป่า) meaning that we are all interdependent. One farms, another tends orchards; one sews, another makes sewing machines - all are dependent on others. When we go to the market every day, we are dependent on the merchants and at the same time, the merchants must buy their rice from the farmers - in mutual interdependence. Isn't it strange that though daily life is like this, people still advocate dependence on self. It is in direct opposition to what we experience in daily life. Particularly in a large city like Bangkok, it would be impossible to depend solely on oneself for daily sustenance. Virtually nobody would feel that he is self-sufficient. If in such a comparatively simple matter we cannot be self-sufficient, how can we imagine that we are competent in matters of the world to come? If in material concerns we are not adequate, how can we be in matters of the ultimate? Many people never give this a thought. Or perhaps you might ask the question, “If there were a bus which would not run, what is there in it to make it start up again?” If in this world we cannot depend solely on our own frame, how is the inner self to depend on it in the future?

Besides the self there are other sources of help as well - according to the view of some. Everybody knows the phrase, “Depend on yourself” but some, if asked, would not reply with this phrase. They would say, “Depend on the Triple Gems”, *Ratanadrai* (รัตนตรัย). *Drai* means three and *ratana* means jewels or precious stones - three precious stones: Buddha, his teachings, and the Order of his disciples. In daily “prayer” the Buddhist will say in Pali “พุทฺธัง สรณัง คัจฉามิ ชัมมัง สรณัง คัจฉามิ สังฆัง สรณัง คัจฉามิ” let me hold to the Buddha, the Teaching, the Order.” It is a daily act of trust. Some say that if repeated before retiring it will purify the heart, removing jealousy and anger. How do Buddhists “trust” in these three? This is not the same as the Christian's trust in God but it rather means holding the practices of Lord Buddha as a model or example and trying to emulate him. Or it may mean to try to follow selected teachings of Lord Buddha. It does not mean to commit oneself to following all of them as the Christian commits himself to the Christian way.

Before he died, Lord Buddha said, “Look Ananda, what do the bikkus hope for from me? I have given the teaching (ธรรม), I have kept nothing back. Nothing is a secret, nothing at all. Now I am already eighty years old. Hold to the teaching.” When I read this I feel a great pity for the old man. It is as if he were saying, “I am getting ready to die”, and his voice breaks; then he continues, “everything I have I have given to you; you must not hope for anything else from me.” But Buddhists say, “I depend on Buddha” while he says, “No, you must not, I have nothing left, I have given it all.” Buddhists don't think much about this, but I cannot help thinking. Can you believe that I was a monk for eight years and never once thought of it? But when I was preparing to teach and read it again, I sprawled over it, startled into a new recognition that Buddha could not be one to depend on (ที่พึ่ง). He himself forbade it, but Buddhists continue to do it.

Let us now turn to the office of the Buddha, for the word Buddha is not a personal name but the name of an office. The personal name of the one we call Lord Buddha was Somanakhodom (สมณโสดม) or Gotama. In the centuries preceding him for who knows how many million years, there were many Buddhas. This present era, however, is to last for five thousand years-that is to say, according to the textbooks Buddhism will last for five thousand years. It is now a little more than 2,500 years-about half the time has

elapsed. Then there will be another Buddha who will be called Sriariya (พระศรีอาริย์). Some lay Christians like to say that this will be Jesus Christ in his second coming. Don't believe it! This is not the same thing at all and cannot be interpreted in that way.

Of course, in the celebration of the 2,500 anniversary, there were certain prophecies, many of them distributed as tracts, in which it was predicted that there would be wars with great trouble and suffering throughout the world. It was very frightening to those who took it seriously. Certainly we have today many perplexing problems in the world, but not the kind mentioned in the tracts - fire that would burn over the entire earth, confusion, suffering, sin, a great reduction in population. Actually, we are now concerned with population explosion!

But there are three kinds of Buddhas:

6. *Buddha Pacheka* (ปัจเจกพุทธเจ้า) a Buddha who is known only to himself. Enlightened just as Buddha was, he is still unable to teach others. The world has had many of these whom no one recognized as Buddha.

7. *Buddha Sammasam* (สัมมาสัมพุทธเจ้า) a universal Buddha, like the Lord Buddha whom people reverence. No one at all has taught him, he is enlightened by himself, he knows intuitively and is able to teach others.

8. *Anubuddha* (อนุพุทธเจ้า) followers of Buddha who can teach others, who are of two varieties:

- a) *Arahanta* (อรหันต์), meaning distant from sin or sanctified. These are Buddhist apostles who are on the highest level of attainment in Buddhism. A full arahanta is the real meaning of the term Buddha.
- b) Those who are enlightened by the teaching of others but can also teach. When in the monkhood they generally retreat to the forest. They are not particularly well-informed and usually have learned through traditions and customs.

Later on we will study about the four stages of attainment in Buddhism of which the fourth is *arahanta*. But if we listen to the apostles of Jesus, especially to Paul, we will feel that some of them are genuine *arahanta*. Measured by the Buddhist pattern, Paul is certainly an *arahanta* and more because he did not hear the teachings of Jesus directly; he gained an understanding on his own. Christians would say that he was taught by the Holy Spirit, but of course, Buddhism knows nothing of the Holy Spirit. If we look at him from the standpoint of Buddhism we see that he said with conviction that he had been "enlightened", *dratsaru* (ตรัสรู้).

When Lord Buddha was enlightened he did not study from anyone else. First, he practiced concentration according to the accepted method. Those who practiced it sat quietly, did not even so much as blink, held their tongues firmly to the roof of their mouths, scarcely breathed, folded their hands until they nearly grew together. We can almost say that they tortured themselves. Lord Buddha tried this discipline for six years without success and eventually gave it up. Finally he turned to the use of the mind and was able to solve the problem through thought. At last he knew the "truth" about life. This experience of his is called enlightenment, *dratsaru* (ตรัสรู้).

Let us look briefly at enlightenment and the method of attaining it. The first step is to quiet the mind, closing the eyes and heart to all distractions until finally one is unaware of sound, taste, touch, and sensation. The senses are completely closed to outside stimuli. There are some Buddha images in this attitude which are called *Phrapitawan* (พระปิตทวาร), or Buddha in meditation, *Phrasamadhi* (พระปางสมาธิ). In this kind of concentration an effort is made to keep the mind from wandering by fixing it upon a single object. First, we select an object on which to fix attention. When practiced in the art, we will focus only on empty space until finally we can see nothing at all and our minds are emptied of all thought. Buddha rose to the very apex of this kind of meditation and when he was finally at peace, the three-fold knowledge came to him. He learned three truths or *vidya* (วิชา 3) which are considered the highest wisdom in Buddhism:

9. He knew about his own previous reincarnations. According to one account he saw that he had been reincarnated five hundred times, sometimes as a monkey, sometimes as a dog, a bird, a cat, a mouse and in many tens of other ways. He had been a man, a robber, an outlaw. But gradually in these many rebirths he advanced until he became Lord Buddha. This was the first of the three revelations.

10. He was enlightened of the births and deaths of others, together with the dates of births and deaths. On a given date he knew who would be reborn and who would die and where these events would take place. This ability is called the Celestial Eye (อภิปรัญญา).

Parenthetically, it may be said that Jesus was also enlightened. “He knew all men and needed no one to bear witness of man; for he himself knew what was in man” (John 2:25) and “before Abraham was, I am” (John8:58). Of course, it is somewhat unfair to make such comparisons, for Christians believe that Jesus was not a mere man but the incarnated Son of God. However, if we have opportunity to talk with Buddhists about this, we may refer to these passages. Perhaps we could also refer to Ephesians 1:4 “He chose us in him (i.e. Christ) before the foundation of the world.”

11. He knew himself to be emancipated from ignorance and from the cycle of rebirths. He had been enlightened.

After his enlightenment Buddha subsequently saw four other truths which are called *Ariyasacca* (อริยสัจ). Incidentally, if we wish to use this term, we may. Of himself Jesus said, “I am the way, the truth...”. We may therefore say that this statement of his is an *ariyasacca* (อริยสัจ) for the term means something which is higher than truth. *Ariya* means precious, noble, or above the ordinary; *sacca* means truth.

12. He knew about the origin of suffering, that it is because certain component elements converge to form the person so that in collusion they create suffering. These components, sometimes called the five aggregates, are called *khandha* (ขันธ์). If they were diminished into nothingness, there would be no suffering, or if no person existed, there would be no suffering. But when we become physical entities, suffering is the inevitable result. The five components of personality are:

- a) Form, *rupa* (รูป)
- b) Feeling, sensation, *vedana* (เวทนา) which is sometimes at peace, sometimes in pain, despising, hating, jealous, angry
- c) Recognition, perception, *sanna* (สัญญา)
- d) Conscious impression, emotional reaction, *sankhara* (สังขาร)
- e) Consciousness, *vinnana* (วิญญาณ)

These five centers of tension collide in one person and produce suffering.

13. The cause of suffering

The second of Buddha’s discoveries was what causes suffering to be thus produced, or what brings the aggregates together. The culprit is desire, hankering (note the similarity to the Adam and Eve story). Craving, wanting to obtain, whatever the object, is the cause. This is called *tanha* (ตัณหา). It may be desire for wealth, position, honor, fame, or it may be sexual desire. In the case of pastors, it may be the desire for a large membership of a name for themselves. Or it may even be desire to be nothing. To want to die or to commit suicide is also desire (อนัตตตา). Once we want something, we set out to get it. We expend thought and time and energy; we are troubled and fretful. All of this causes pain, and all of it stems from desire.

14. The extinguishing of desire

Buddha found the switch to turn off suffering, *anatta* (อนัตตา). To turn off desire, to turn off the physical body, to turn off sin, turns off life as well until nothingness is left. If one is reborn, suffering is reborn; therefore the solution to the problem is not to allow it and then suffering will not result. We must cut off the source. If there is no fuel there will be no smoke though there may still be a fire. The fire comes from birth, from our physical selves.

15. The way to extinguish suffering

Of course, if we know Christ, we know the way. But Buddha found a way which he called the Eightfold Path (มรรคแปด). One must diligently practice the rules in order to arrive at the goal.

But first, let us consider the characteristics of Buddha. There are nine of them, called Buddha graces (พุทธคุณ),² and this formula is a sort of “confession of faith” of Buddhists everywhere, a chant in praise of Lord Buddha (บทสวดมนต์).

16. He is *arahant*, one who is now without sin (เป็นพระอรหันต์).

17. He is a Sammasam Buddha, by himself enlightened (เป็นผู้ตรัสรู้ชอบเอง).

18. He has the three-fold knowledge and the fifteen strict practices (เป็นผู้ถึงพร้อมด้วยวิชาและจรณะ).

19. He has attained eternal peace (เป็นผู้เสด็จไปดีแล้ว).

20. He has attained omniscience (เป็นผู้รู้แจ้งโลก).

21. He is the guide for moral practice; there is no greater (เป็นสารทิแห่งบุรุษพึงฝึกได้ ไม่มีบุรุษอื่นยิ่งไปกว่า). His knowledge of the world is called *Lokawitun* (โลกวิทู) - combination of the words for world and knowledge to signify all-knowing. But here is a problem. There are two interpretations: According to one, it is said that he knew only about spiritual matters and the problems of life, but did not know their solution. For example, he did not know how to build an airplane or anything else in the modern world. Another view is that he knew everything. He knew how the world originated; he knew what modern scientists have now discovered. Therefore, the two schools of thought have become separate sects, divided on this point.

22. He is the religious father of angels and of men (เป็นศาสดาของเทวดา และมนุษย์ทั้งหลาย).

23. He is the awakened and spirited one (เป็นผู้ตื่นแล้วเป็นผู้เบิกบานแล้ว).

24. He is possessor of ultimate felicity (เป็นผู้มีโชค).

According to the textbooks, Buddha was but an ordinary man before his enlightenment, but afterwards he was a sublime personality. He was incomparable in knowledge and in purity. Previously he had known nothing about the problems of the world, about ideas, and other matters concerning life, but after his enlightenment, he knew about the problems of life in a very unusually penetrating way.

If Christians wish to teach about this it may be compared with I Corinthians 2 and with Proverbs, with Isaiah 45:9, and with Isaiah 55:8, 9. These passages are clearly in contrast with what has been said. Of course they will not be instantly believed and accepted for Buddhists are firmly convinced that Buddha knew more than any other man has ever known. But we must get at that feeling. This opinion must be demonstrated to be untenable.

Again, about their saying that Buddha is all-knowing or omniscient, Buddhists believe it because they believe that he had some special knowledge that enabled him to see beyond the ordinary. But if we listen to the teachings of Buddha, we will see that he actually did not claim to know so much. Buddhists as a whole revere Buddha but do not really know what he taught. Buddha himself said to his disciples, “Now, don’t, don’t...I don’t know enough...”. But his followers say, “he knew everything.” Why? Because they want to depend on him. Buddha said, “Don’t, don’t lean on me; I have nothing to lean on.” But they insist, “Yes, you have...” They try to force him. Listen at his teaching about knowledge. If anyone insists that Buddha had knowledge of the universe, of space, of the solar

system, he simply misunderstands and attributes to him untruths. Actually, he claimed only three kinds of knowledge. He did not know science, medicine or any other subject. To claim more for him than he claimed for himself is to falsify.

Those who teach Buddhism to Buddhists often describe him as omniscient, but certain teachings of Buddha should be cited to induce them to think. They use the term *Lokanat* (โลกนาถ), the Great One of the world, the one on whom the world's people can depend, to describe him. Another term for him is Conqueror of the Demons (ผู้พิชิตมาร). There is, of course, a passage about his conquering *Mara* (มาร), the personification of Evil. But when he was near death *Mara* came and announced that it was nearing the time for him to die. Buddha motioned for one of his disciples to request of *Mara* that his life be spared but the disciple who was under the sway of *Mara* did not understand his master's gestures. When *Mara* then told Buddha that in three months he would die, the disciple came to himself, went and knelt before Buddha and said, "Why did you not stay, why not stay a thousand years?" Buddha replied, "A little while ago I motioned for you to ask for an extension of my life but you did not ask. What good does it do for you to come to me about it now? I have already told *Mara* that I would die." When *Mara* came and asked for Buddha's death, he was willing. In Christ "death is swallowed up in victory" (I Corinthians 15:54). But in the end Buddha died.

II. UNDERSTANDING THE DHAMMA

In the study of the *dhamma* it is first of all necessary to make clear the meaning of the word. Actually, the same word may have two different pronunciations and two different meanings, though it must be admitted that not all Thai people use the word correctly. If the word has the prefix *phra* (พระ), it refers to religious teaching - of Islam, Christianity, Buddhism or any other - and is pronounced in Thai *tham* (ท่า) - in Pali, *dhamma*. But if it is pronounced *thamma* and is used without the prefix *phra*-, it does not refer to religious teaching but to whatever is natural to this world: objects, such as tables, chairs and automobiles; feelings such as anger, loathing, hatred; good and evil. We must make the distinction between the two terms, but here we are concerned with the word as it refers to religious teaching – *phratham* (พระธรรม) , the teaching which is considered fundamental or natural to the universe and which has to do with appropriate moral behavior.

Actually, the teaching which has to do with good behavior is called in Thai *tham* (ธรรม) and that which has to do with prohibitions and restraints, is called discipline (วินัย) though both are commonly understood to come under the heading of *tham* (dhamma); or we may simply call it Thamma-Discipline (ธรรมวินัย).

In Buddhism there are 84,000 *tham* categories (ชั้น). The disciplines are all contained in the *Tripitaka*, literally translated, the three baskets. Baskets are used for collecting fragments and also for distributing food. If the *dhamma* of Buddha were arranged into categories, there would be three categories:

25. The Sutras (พระสุตฺต) or the parables, the character stories to be used as examples or models for human behavior.

26. The Disciplines or various laws and directions for the regulation of human life. For example, there are the Five Precepts (ศีล 5) which are universally applicable. If one wishes to advance further still, there are the Eight Precepts (ศีล 8) and those who keep them are called *upasaka* (อุบาสก) for men or *upasika* (อุบาสิกา) for women. Sometimes these precepts are observed in the monastery. This word, *upaska* is an interesting word; it means “one who sits near the truth” and it would not be inappropriate to use for Christians, especially for cultivated Christians. In Buddhism, those who are called *upasaka* are those who have observed the Eight Precepts:

- a) Do not kill animals.
- b) Do not steal.
- c) Do not commit sexual offenses.
- d) Do not lie.
- e) Do not drink intoxicants.
- f) Do not eat after noon.
- g) Do not sing, play a musical instrument or dance.
- h) Do not use cosmetics or personal adornments.

Beyond the Eight Precepts there are the Ten which are primarily for the novices in the monasteries, those who are below the age of twenty (usually 12-19). Regular monks observe the 227 rules which include such provisions as “If one steals more than one baht, he is to be expelled from the priesthood.” Murder will bring about instant dismissal. To claim to be an *arahant* will result in immediate discharge.

There was formerly an order for women with 311 rules but this order no longer exists. Lord Buddha did not want women in the orders but was pressured by one woman who begged earnestly to be allowed to be initiated. He allowed it and then laid down several hundred rules so as to make it practically impossible for the order to endure. And this order did disappear long ago.

27. The third category is called the *Abhidhamma* (อภิธรรม), the highest branch of Buddhist philosophy, much more refined than the ordinary *dhamma*.

Actually, the word *dhamma* in all these uses is morally neutral, neither good nor bad. True, most people understand it only in the sense of good. If one is said to be a man of *dhamma*, it is understood that he is a good man, but actually it is like saying that one has an opinion; it can be either right or wrong. If we mean *dhamma* in the sense of good we should use the term *kusala dhamma* (กุศลธรรม) or *thammadi* (ธรรมดี). If we mean *dhamma* in the sense of evil we should say *akusala dhamma* (อกุศลธรรม), or if morally neutral, the *dhamma* is correct. Generally, however, people use the term in the sense of good.

Can we depend on or trust in *Phradhamma* (พระธรรม) as in the affirmation of the Triple Gems (“ซันมัง สรณัง-ธรรมเป็นที่พึ่ง)? Taking the *dhamma* as a refuge means that we will act according to its precepts, which in this case means the teaching of Buddha. If we depend on it, we have to behave by it; there is no other way to depend on it. If we observe it correctly and well we will be at peace, we are told. So Buddhists say that if we only do what is right we do not need God to interfere or to infuse his blessing into our lives. He need not hold out help to us. If we do good, we will receive good; it is automatic. *Dhamma* will provide for or look after the one who lives by it. If an automobile accident occurs and the occupants are not killed Buddhists will say, “The *Dhamma* took care of them” or “merit protected them from death.” There are many stories of people who, on their way back from merit-making at the temple were involved in automobile accidents in which others were killed, but those who had just made merit survived. It will be said that merit protected them (บุญคุ้มครองให้พ้นอันตราย) and that there is no evidence that God had anything to do with it.

Again, Buddha said, “*Dhamma* is the way.” Jesus said, “I am the way.” Which is the more believable, the more easily accepted? Recently someone in Bang Kua came to me and said, “Please explain the Christian way to me simply so that I may understand it.” I answered by saying, “The difference is this. Suppose you went to Lord Buddha and asked him the way to go from Bang Kua to Bangkok. He would tell you where to go to find a bus stop, how the bus has to turn right, then left and after about a hundred kilometers arrive in Bangkok where you can find a taxi to take you to your destination. Buddha will answer you by telling you the way or by drawing a map. But if you ask Jesus Christ he will answer by saying, ‘Come, I will take you there’. Jesus does not simply tell you the way. He is the one whom God has sent to lead us, not to advise us.” It is not surprising that Buddhism has such detailed instructions and that the religion of Jesus Christ is by comparison sparse in its moral teachings.

I have sometimes asked such seekers which they would prefer, a set of detailed instructions or a guide. They have always responded that the guide is preferable because with instructions it would be so easy to get lost. The next life is a country we have not seen. If we have only a set of instructions, it will be trying and difficult to travel by them. This, of course, is only an oversimplified illustration.

If we depend on the *dhamma* how will it help us? Buddha explained that it would bring peace, that those who find their joy and satisfaction in the *dhamma* would be at peace and the *dhamma* would defend them. They would not descend to one of the Buddhist hells but would go to heaven instead. (Heaven here does not mean Nirvana, but only a state of peace beyond this life.) Those who are established in the *dhamma* will not sin, he said. But in daily living is it really like that?

Actually, depending on the *dhamma* for support is nearly all our own doing. It is scarcely different from depending on self for it is really self-improvement based on the teachings of Buddha. There is no outside power to aid us and the strength and

encouragement to follow the teachings is from our selves as well. So it is very difficult for those who set out to observe the *dhamma* to succeed.

The *dhamma* which is not concerned with religious teaching and which is morally neutral may be divided into many categories such as:

28. Form *dhamma*, *rupa dhamma* (รูปธรรม) This refers to things which have a physical shape, such as material objects, men and animals.

29. Formless *dhamma*, *arupa dhamma* (อรูปธรรม) These are the intangibles, such as anger, love and jealousy.

30. Conditioned *dhamma*, *sankhata* (สังขตธรรม) Things which have been made or developed or composed or assembled with the use of tools or equipment fall in this category.

31. Unconditioned *dhamma*, *asankhata dhamma* (อสังขตธรรม) Things which exist of themselves, such as Nirvana in Buddhism (or in Christianity, God) belong here

32. Worldly *dhamma*, *lokiyadhamma* (โลกีย์ธรรม) This has to do with what the Christian might call worldly or sensual pleasures, such as drinking to excess, lying, anger, jealousy.

33. Non-material *dhamma*, *lokuttara dhamma* (โลกุตระธรรม) Just the opposite of sensuality, there are none of these in Buddhism - the Four Noble Truths, Four Rewards, and Nirvana.

Now let us try to make a critical appraisal of the *Dhamma*.

When you preach, if you say, "We depend on God", Buddhists will simply reply, "And we depend on the *Dhamma*." There are any number of books written on the subject, "*Dhamma* is God." Therefore, the question of utmost importance for us to consider in connection with this study is whether or not this statement is true. Is *Dhamma* God?

Suppose someone should say to you, "What you preach about God is nothing new. Your God is simply our *Dhamma*." And in addition, suppose that person saw a copy of the Gospel of John in the recently published popular version and read the first verse, "In the beginning was the word" which is there translated, "in the beginning was the *Dhamma*." He would say, "See, Buddhism and Christianity are the same. God is the *Dhamma*, exactly that and nothing more." If we do not know enough to explain the difference, we had better not reply for they will simply insist on that point of view. What can we say?

Let us listen first to what they say. They say that God, the Creator, the God of the Christians, is a mysterious power at work in the universe. It swirled and revolved around in its own cycle of cause and effect for many millions of years, very much as modern science claims. Gradually, slowly, changes took place until there came into being a world and men and animals and plants. This mysterious power, they say, is God, like the God of the Christians.

Since they are willing to accept that there is such a power, we must try to get them to move from that idea to the idea of God. How can we do so?

If that power is formless, impersonal and mechanical, how can we explain the occurrence of the world which has form, and the presence of life in that world? How can we explain the orderliness of the physical universe and the meaning that that universe has for human existence? We must first of all try to make people see that this world looks very much more like the product of mind and intelligence than of disorder and accident. We must try to translate the mysterious power they posit into the idea of God instead of letting them translate God into an impersonal force.

If we speak of God as Savior, Buddhists will reply that this only refers to good and bad *karma* (กรรม) . Good *karma* brings peace, bad *karma* brings suffering. The God who helps us enables us to escape suffering and this is salvation. God is, therefore, like *karma*.

When we refer to God's providence they say that it is natural law which watches over and protects the world with sun and wind, rain and seasons. There is a law at work in sun and moon and stars and earth which precludes the need for God.

And if we speak of God as one who transcends time and place, they will say, "You mean *karma*, which also is all-pervasive." *Karma*, like *dhamma* is morally neutral. It may be good or bad. But there is an oft-quoted saying, "Play against men, you sometimes win; play against fate, you always lose."(แข่งอื่นแข่งได้ แข่งวาสนาแข่งไม่ได้) In other words, in a game one is sometimes lucky, but in life, if one has not made merit in the previous existence, nothing will change the ill-fortune which results in this life. Nothing will turn out right. This is why so many people who try so hard to become wealthy never succeed.

I have an uncle who is very hard-working and industrious. Actually, in the village in which he lives, there is no one else quite like him. He is always in his fields from early to late and he cares for seven or eight children. But he has worked for thirty years and is certainly anything but wealthy. There are some other nearby farmers who do not work nearly as hard but advancement has come to them easily. This uncle is very discouraged about it but explains it by quoting the proverb just referred to (แข่งอื่นแข่งได้ แข่งวาสนาแข่งไม่ได้). He feels that in a former life he made no merit for himself and is now suffering the effects of his former misdeeds.

Everything depends on the character of the God who controls the universe. In a recent conversation with a patient at Bang Kla Hospital, he spoke of God as *karma* and then said, "Actually God is like an encyclopedia which includes everything." Really, it is *dhamma* that is like an encyclopedia which includes everything. But we must find a way of saying that God is not *dhamma* -or at least, in my understanding he is not. It seems to me that it is like when one of my children comes and stands beside me to measure his height against mine. I am tall and he is short, but he will stretch to try to make himself as tall as I am. To compare *dhamma* with God is only an effort to make *dhamma* come up to God's standard but it cannot be done.

The willingness to concede that there is probably a mysterious power behind the universe, we must not overlook. But they have no way of explaining the juncture between that mysterious power and the presence of life on earth. There is no question but that God is a mysterious power. But if we look carefully we will see that that mysterious power is not raw power. There is something else hidden in the world and in the things which have been created, and that thing is life.

I have tried this tactic in explaining, and I have also tried to get my inquirers to see things which appear about them as possibly coming from a Creator. As far as we know, life must come from life, not from the inanimate. Besides that, this world is not floating aimlessly in space but it operates according to an intricate system. The evidence is that the mysterious power to whom they refer is a person, not just a power, and that he is good. One often feels that Buddha just grazed the truth; he came amazingly close to it. Through his teachings we can almost see God but we do not quite see him. He probably came as far as human reasoning can come in apprehending the truth.

There is a teacher from Sri Lanka who says the Bible reports that in the beginning the earth was empty and God created out of that emptiness. He says that Buddha saw this, too, and in the end, everything must be seen as empty (อนัตตา). Isn't it true that Buddha came very close to the truth and just barely missed it? For in the emptiness there is the living God whom Buddha could not see.

One of the books which comments on the subject puts forth the idea that if Christians would translate the meaning of the word God into a fable for use in teaching barbarians and children - for actually, God is only the law that controls the natural world - Buddhism and Christianity would be the same. Then he continues, "But because God is an ignoramus in creating this universe, and God

is an ignoramus in creating this universe, and God is the law of *karma*, and *karma* is the impartial judge of good and evil, therefore God may be defined as a combination of *avijja* (อวิชชา) and *karma* (กรรม) combined. The teaching of the church is to reverence and trust in this God, but Buddhism teaches that we should annihilate and conquer this God at all costs.”³ And this is not his strongest paragraph. He continues, “Kill him, kill him! Why should we do so? Because God has created to suffer, created an evil world, which proves that he is stupid. The God of the Christians is *avijja* (อวิชชา).”⁴

This book, called “An answer to a Priest’s Question”, makes the most scathing attack on the Christian faith. It was occasioned by the question of a Catholic priest in Samut Songkram Province when he asked a Buddhist monk to tell him the truth in the teachings of Buddha about God, about creation and the philosophical arguments used in support of it, about the origin of suffering, and about why there are people in the world and what purpose there is for them. The priest was named George Urian. The answers in the first two pages are simple and in irenic spirit, but afterward, the writer evidently warmed to his subject and was carried away into writing a whole book. It is a book which chastises Christians in the most painful fashion. Of course, it was not printed for sale but for distribution. Wherever there was a funeral, those responsible for the book would ask to be allowed to distribute copies of it. Probably every Buddhist leader in this country has read it.

III. THE MEANING OF VINNANA

First of all, let us look at the term *ditthi* (ทิฐิ) which we shall need to use in this study. It is a neutral word which may be translated view, or opinion, but it is generally used in the negative sense. If I should say of someone that he has a strong *ditthi* (ทิฐิ) what I really mean is that he has opinions so strong as to be overpowering. *ditthi* (ทิฐิ) then is generally used in the negative sense, although the form of the word has nothing to indicate it. If we want to use a clearly negative word, we should use the term *michaditthi* (มิชฌาทิฐิ) *micha* means misguided. If we want to be specific about the opposite, a right or orthodox opinion, we should use the term *sammaditthi* (สัมมาทิฐิ).

What I want to say about this is that according to ancient belief, particularly in India, there were two schools of thought concerning the soul or *vinnana* (วิญญาน) of man. According to one view, man is a stable reality, *tiang* (เที่ยง). That is, when he dies his soul remains; it does not change. Another believed that the soul may be reborn as an animal or something else - the soul is not an unchanging reality, *mai tiang* (ไม่เที่ยง). It disappears, nothing remains of it, it is dissolved. The first school said that something of it is left but not all of it remains. Lord Buddha said that both these schools of thought were misguided or *michaditthi* (มิชฌาทิฐิ), heterodox. We must ask then what he taught about the soul of man. If one holds that it is an unchanging reality, this is wrong' if one holds that it is dissolved at death, this is wrong. What does Buddhism teach? To this there is really no exact answer. When I was studying Buddhism I was very confused about this and tried for many months to find an exact answer, but I could not find one. I do feel, however, that there is something we can discover about it.

First, let us look at the meaning of the word for soul, *winyan* (วิญญาน)⁵, and perhaps we can gather some understanding from it. The meaning of the word in Thai is "to know clearly." *win* (วิญ) means "clearly"; *yan* (ญาณ) means "to know"

The meaning given to the word in the Thai Bible is not quite true to the inherent meaning of the word. But the popular understanding does not reflect the inherent meaning of the word either. Popular feeling is one thing, translation is another, and Buddhist teaching is still another. According to Buddhist usage the word means "feeling" or "sensation." This sensation may occur through six avenues; the eyes, the ears, the nose, the tongue, touch and the heart. For example, when we see an object with the eyes we immediately feel something about that object; when our ears hear a sound or food is put in our mouths, or we smell a fragrance or touch something, or something touches us, a sensation is created. Not only so, but some sensations arise from within, as when we are touched by someone's words, we may feel sad or amused or glad. So, these six avenues are called the six *winyan* (วิญญาน 6).

According to one view of the matter in Thailand, *winyan* (วิญญาน) refers to these six sensations, and it is felt that the *winyan* endures only as long as the person lives; when he dies, the *winyan* is dissolved. His eyes cannot see, his ears cannot hear; therefore, his *winyan* is extinguished and there is nothing left. According to this view, life is the *winyan*, or the sensations. Without the sensations there is no life.

A second Thai opinion is that the *winyan* is something which remains after death. According to this belief, *winyan* does not refer to the feelings or sensations but to a kind of power which resides in the body and leaves the body at death. Those who hold this opinion believe that the *winyan* will seek a new residence. They see the physical body as compared to a house and the *winyan* as the person who resides in that house. When one dies he simply moves his residence to a new location. They believe, then, that the *winyan* remains.

There are still others who believe that there is a *winyan* in everything, in the air, the water, and even in the smallest objects and plants. All of these opinions are held by Buddhists who are very confused about the subject, some holding that there is something in man which survives death, some believing that *winyan* is confined to the six senses, and some teaching that there is a *winyan* in everything. Generally, village people believe that the *winyan* exists after death and must be reborn. The more educated are apt to feel that the *winyan* is sensation.

There is a very interesting little book called, A Dispute Between Two Buddhists⁶. It resulted from a meeting held concerning the movie star, Mitr Chaibancha, who died in a fall from a helicopter while making a film in 1972. At one point in the meeting there was a discussion about his *winyan*. One group said that his *winyan* was having great trouble in trying to be reborn. Another group said they did not believe it. Many people in the meeting grouped themselves on one side of the argument or the other and one side took to the newspapers to denounce the other. The second side had no newspaper outlet, so they published this little book to contradict the opposing view. It is very entertaining. One man said, "I wish to reemphasize that the explanation of those people who say that when one dies the *winyan* will leave the body and wander according to its *karma*, sometimes to a pleasant place because of having done good, sometimes floating downward to some nether region because of its evil deeds, and that before it can bob up and be reborn it must exhaust that *karma*. I want to affirm that that teaching is absolutely wrong. It comes from Hinduism and Buddhists have brought it in and wrongly understand it to be Buddhism." If you want to understand this, you should read this book about heretical Buddhism (ลัทธินอกพุทธศาสนา).⁷

There are many other paragraphs in which very strong words are used in the conflict. One person said, "The side that believes in *winyan* cited the king, saying that when His Majesty presided over the dedication ceremony at the statue of Rama V he also performed the rite of propitiating the *winyan* and therefore those who do not believe in the *winyan* blaspheme the king."

In the meeting itself, whenever one side would stand to speak, the other side would send some rowdies over to make noise so they could not be heard. The first side would retaliate by cutting off the microphone and they even went so far as to cut the electric lines. On the second day the same thing happened and it culminated in a grand melee - all about the understanding of the *winyan*.

If I may be allowed an opinion, I would say that it is the fault of the Lord Buddha himself who gave no clear teaching on the subject. His lack of clarity is responsible for the arguments over it. There are many sections in the Buddhist scriptures that deal with it, however. One⁸ particularly, is about a man who asked Lord Buddha to explain it. He answered in ten rather mystifying statements:

34. Is the world eternal?(โลกนี้คงอยู่ตลอดกาลหรือไม่)
35. The world is probably temporary.(โลกนี้อยู่ชั่วคราว)
36. The world is limited.(โลกมีขอบเขตจำกัด)
37. The world is unlimited.(โลกไม่มีขอบเขต)
38. The body and the spirit are the same.(กายกับจิตเป็นอันเดียวกัน)
39. The body and spirit are different.(กายกับจิตเป็นคนละอย่าง)
40. When one dies life will not disappear.(ตายแล้วไม่สูญ)
41. When one dies life will disappear.(ตายแล้วสูญ)
42. Some disappear, some do not disappear (สูญก็มี ไม่สูญก็มี)
43. Dissolution is not so, non-dissolution is not so.(สูญก็ไม่ใช่ ไม่สูญก็ไม่ใช่)

This was Buddha's teaching, a summary of commonly held views about metaphysics. One of Buddha's disciples was very puzzled about the answer and asked him to explain what was meant. One commentator writing for Buddhism said that these were ideas

from outside Buddhism. If anyone held them he could never go to *Nibbana*; he could advance only to the third stage and *Nibbana* is the fourth. He did not explain or elucidate but claimed that Lord Buddha made no such statement, that it may be a legend. But the story is that a disciple named Malunkya (มัลลกฺข) went to Lord Buddha and asked about the ten statements. He said, “O Lord Buddha, I beg you to explain your teaching about the ten statements. If you do not tell me, I will leave the monkhood.” And Buddha replied, “But I promised you nothing; I did not promise to explain. If you do not tell me, I will leave the monkhood.” And Buddha replied, “But I promised you nothing; I did not promise to explain. If you must leave, then leave, but I will not answer you.” And Buddha warned his followers that the ten statements are like very shallow water in which a boat cannot sail. So, Buddhists still warn about these matters, “If you think about them, your boat will stick in the mud.” For this reason, in these statements about the world and about the relationship between body and spirit, it is not clear whether body and spirit are one or not. Buddhism does not teach whether the world has limits or not, whether it will continue or not, and Buddhism does not tell whether death dissolves all or not.

But in Thailand there are very many people who believe that the *winyan* survives physical death and that it is reborn. How can they believe this? It is strange and rather pathetic, isn't it, that we Thais have been Buddhists for who knows how long, yet worship without knowing what Buddha taught.

Another way to look at it, however, is that in one way it looks as if Buddha taught that the *winyan* survives death because he declared that he himself had been reborn 500 times. Yet when someone asked him a direct question, he did not give a conclusive answer.

Another example: there was a priest named Sadhi (สทธิ). He had the understanding that the *winyan* does not dissolve at death and Lord Buddha said that priests with this understanding should not be allowed in the priesthood.⁹ He then confronted the priest with it and asked where he got the idea, whether he had heard Lord Buddha teach it – that is, the idea of reincarnation. The priest answered that he had. Buddha told him that he was a useless bikkhu and added that the *winyan* is sensation.

There is another passage¹⁰ in which Buddha taught that the *winyan* and the body are paired together and mutually interdependent. When one disintegrates, the other does also.

At another time¹¹ Buddha said that the body and the *winyan* are born together and vanish together. And he gave an explanation.

To witness to the Christian faith, among Buddhists, we have to know what they think. We can summarize by saying that in terms of their view of the meaning of *winyan* there are four different groups:

44. There are those who do not believe at all, and they are the most difficult to help. Sometimes when we try to talk to them we feel that it is useless, that we need not say much for we will not succeed. They deny everything. Always there is one among them who will say, “If I see, I will believe; what I do not see I will not believe.” I have sometimes answered by saying, “Excuse me, but in what direction did you see the sun come up this morning?” They will, of course, answer, “In the east.” And I have replied, “But what we see is really incorrect. Actually, the sun does not come up; it is the earth that is revolving. Our eyes deceive us. What we see with our eyes is always deceiving us. So, if we believe only what our eyes see, that is not enough.”

45. There are others who half believe, half disbelieve, and we can talk with them, but if they are to accept our point of view, we must make it understandable. We must give them some intellectual foundation and some reason for belief.

When I was a new Christian I had occasion to visit a former teacher of mine. He said, “Look here, Wan, I hear you are a Christian. What are you doing believing in God? Where is there any God?” I replied, “Sir, do you believe there is a *winyan*?” “Yes,

indeed,” he answered. I then said, “You believe in other *winyan*; do you not believe in the *winyan* of God?” He would not go that far, even though he acknowledged the reality of other *winyan*.

Another teacher said, “No, there is no *winyan* of any kind. Buddhism has no such teaching.” I then opened the book (พุทธศาสนาวิทยา) and pointed out the sections here presented.

46. There are some who follow the teachings of Lord Buddha to the letter. These people are somewhat like Christians who accept the Scriptures as authoritative. They refer to the Scriptures constantly as their basis of belief and are not willing to rely on their own ideas to correct Buddha’s teachings. We can talk to them also.

47. There are some who are simply disinterested and live heedlessly from one day to the next,

When we consider that there are at least these four kinds of Buddhists in Thailand, we can see that being a Christian witness among them is no easy matter. We must first try to discover what their stance is before we can really talk to them about the Christian faith. Most villagers are ardent Buddhists with a belief in *winyan*. So why don’t they accept what we say about God? Why do they insist that there is no God even though they believe in *winyan*? Probably it is because we Christians make the idea of God too different from what they already believe, when, often enough, what they believe is somewhat akin to what we believe about God. But we use language that is vastly different from theirs. It is good not to use exactly the same terminology, but we should not move so far away that they deny what we have to say. We should explain that God is *winyan*, not an ordinary *winyan* like the ones in which they believe. If we look at Paul’s preaching we will see that he generally based his message on something that his hearers already held in common with Christians and then he would expand it to include the new truth of Christ. He did not discard the old entirely. For example, in speaking to the Jews, he talked about the law. He did not say that the law must be abandoned, but he applauded it as a prelude and added that now that Christ had come, it was not necessary to live under the law, for grace had superseded it. We can see clearly that Judaism and Buddhism in Thailand are similar in their reliance upon laws and regulations. The main difference is the difference concerning faith. Even so, most Buddhists in Thailand have a belief about God even though he is unlike the Christian God, We can see this in the spirit houses where a god is thought to reside, and in the sacred trees where people feel that a divinity is present in the tree. Some use of images assumes the presence of the holy in the figure. And in the commonly used blessing, “May all the sacred things in the world come to your aid,” there is clear indication of belief in a hidden power though there is no use of the word God.

There is another passage¹² which indicates that Buddhism teaches that there is a *winyan*. Lord Buddha said that there are some few who are reborn as human beings, but those who are reborn in hell are not human beings; many are demons (เปรต) as tall as buildings and crying out in the night. Some angels are reborn as men but most who are reborn in hell are more apt to be demons. This passage leads us to believe that Buddha did have a teaching about reincarnation. But in the book titled The Stream of Life¹³ (ลำธารชีวิต) the modern Buddhist who is the author, and who was the former ambassador to India, who also established an organization for the revival of Buddhism, says that Buddhism has no teaching about reincarnation. So, Buddhist organizations today have many problems. But I am grateful that Thai people are becoming better informed Buddhists. When they know more they will see how ambiguous the teaching really is and it will be easier to speak to them about the Christian faith.

What is the Christian view? Is the *winyan* stable, immortal (เที่ยง)? Yes. But if we teach that the immortality of the *winyan* means that it will not be born, age, suffer pain, and die, Buddhists will reply that this is wrong, heterodox (มิชอบ). This is what Buddha called it. If anyone expresses the opinion that Christianity is *michaditthi*, we should ask what Buddhism teaches. If the reply is, “reincarnation”, ask how this can be if there is no *winyan* or if the *winyan* is impermanent. If the reply is that there is no *winyan*, point out Buddha’s second answer in which he said that if we say there is no *winyan* we are wrong. Try to get people to consider whether

there is a *winyan* or not. Villagers will probably answer that there is a *winyan*, but the educated will probably say that there is not. When we talk about it we want to know where our hearers stand.

It may be well here to comment on the difference between animals and men as it affects the subject of *winyan*. Actually, if *winyan* is understood to be sensation or feeling, certainly animals have this. Buddhism teaches that animals and men are alike in having the same kind of *winyan*. Animals have some of the same sensations as human beings. My uncle who is a priest in Haad Yai says that there are four sensations which animals and men have in common - hunger, thirst, sleep, sex. But we are also different from animals. The animal mind and ours are not alike though this has nothing to do with the *winyan* but more to do with the physical body. Animals cannot speak as humans can, although some can make sounds, but many of their sensations are like ours. Therefore, for Buddhists, killing animals is sin. If I were to speak as a Buddhist I would say that there is a rudimentary *winyan* in animals. Some of them have the power of recognition and know some degree of "ought." Buddhists see some expression of what is in men and say that animals have the same *winyan* as men but cannot express themselves because their bodies are not sufficiently developed. This is because in a former life animals have committed more evil deeds than men and their bodies are consequently poorly developed. It is like a child with a tongue which is malformed. He cannot speak clearly even though his feelings are like ours. But actually, this is popular belief, not a teaching of Buddhism.

Whether we see killing animals as a sin or not, however, in presenting the Christian message to Buddhists, we should never approach the subject in any way. Unless they bring it up it is better not to mention it. If we do, Buddhists will immediately counter that Christianity is an extremely degraded religion. Since animals have the same life, blood, pain and other sensations that human beings have, why should killing animals not be considered a sin? No matter what explanation you give, Buddhists cannot be relieved of the feeling they already have about it. They have been taught by their parents from earliest childhood that killing animals is a heinous sin. They were told as children, "Don't cry or a ghost will get you" and when they grow up, no matter who tries to prove that there are no ghosts, they will not believe it. The matter of killing animals is just the same. Thai people cannot be rid of their feeling about it.

You ask, is killing mosquitoes a sin also? Yes, it is. And what about germs? Let's take mosquitoes first. There was a certain priest who was troubled by mosquitoes. He then pressed the mosquitoes to his body and they died. Someone asked him, "Why are you killing animals? It is a sin." The priest replied, "I did not kill them; I saw they were trying to get through my skin, so I helped them." He felt that whether it is considered killing or not depends on the intention. If you intend to kill, it is a sin; if not, it is not a sin. So, a doctor who treats illness is not sinning when he kills germs because he does not set out to kill germs but to treat the illness.

A certain Christian leader told me that once when he built a new house and moved into it, in the evening he decided to make chicken curry because he happened to have some chickens. He caught the chicken and proceeded to make the curry and while he was doing so he overheard his neighbors saying, "Christians are as black-hearted as crazy people." In spite of this, there are many Thai butchers who are Buddhists. They hold to the teachings, but they have no intention of abiding by them. Generally, when Buddhists talk about their religion, they talk about its lofty and difficult concepts and principles, but not about exalted living. One does not have to live like a Buddhist to be a Buddhist. Buddhists take more pride in the sublimity of the doctrine. When we preach we must not be afraid that Christianity is too difficult because in village thought, the more difficult it is to understand and practice, the better.

The book about killing animals which is probably the best one in print is one by Acharn Boon Mi called The Wind Blows, the Tail Wags" (ลมพัดไหวหางไหวกัน).¹⁴ People do not hesitate to kill animals while holding that the teaching is good, yet make no attempt to follow it.

Depending on Buddha actually means both taking him as an example and also doing what he taught. To take him as an example would lead one all the way to enlightenment (ตริตฐิ). To follow his example would mean to follow from beginning to end, not just selecting the highest in it. Whatever he did that led to enlightenment we also must do from the very initial step. Taking only the final step will not bring about success.

It has been asked whether Buddha is considered sinless because of his enlightenment, or because he followed his own teachings. Actually it was because he followed the rules. But when one has followed the rules, he has not done so completely until he has experienced enlightenment. When enlightenment has come, that is being able to see clearly, a new feeling is created. It was as if, beforehand, Buddha could refrain from many sins, but was not able to relinquish them all completely. The more elementary sins could be renounced by practice, or could be destroyed by effort, but the deepest sins which rest on inner misunderstanding, must be eradicated through enlightenment. Later on we will consider the ten human failings of which it is said that five can be easily eradicated, but the last five require advancing to the stage of *arahant* to forsake.

IV. IN THE BEGINNING, GOD-OR AVIJA?

Several years ago there was a Catholic priest who went to Buddhadasa, the most renowned Buddhist monk in Thailand. Many people of education and prominence make an annual pilgrimage to Surat Thani Province to consult with him. The Catholic priest asked him whether there were any teaching in Buddhism comparable to the doctrine of creation in the Christian religion. In response Buddhadasa wrote a little book called Reply to a Catholic Father (ตอบปัญหาบาทหลวง).

First of all he said that in Buddhist doctrine there is no clear reference to God but there are some clearly discernible implications. For example, he says that “God” is only the natural law which governs the universe¹⁵ and if Christians would interpret the word “God” as natural law, Buddhism and Christianity could be at one. But, if Christians insist on seeing God as a person the two cannot be in accord, for Buddhism has no personal God and no reference to a God as a person. Moreover, “God” in Buddhism is *avijja* (อวิชชา), the very essence of ignorance. An ignoramus was the creator of this universe. This was the epitome of ignorance since what was created was completely ruined.

In this statement it is not meant to imply that God is a person but only the personification of a state (ตัวสภาพ). It is as if there were a kind of formless power in the world which had in it a cause-effect fact - or that gradually grew and developed until at last it evolved into shellfish, plants, animals, men and a world. Here the author takes a bow to science and continues with the explanation that everything came into being on its own by factors and causes within itself. There was no creator to arrange it all. Yet, if it could be conceded that there were, that creator must have been stupidity itself, as expressed in the Buddhist concept of *avijja* (อวิชชา), nescience, or natural evil. This *avijja* did not know the consequences of its own action when developing itself to the point of poisoning and endangering the universe and bringing down upon it the penalty which is evident in the present world. This conclusion, of course, is speculation based on observation of our world.

Buddhadasa has also said that God is the law of *karma* (กรรม) and that all beings have *karma* in themselves; the god who punishes and rewards them is *karma*. Therefore, for Buddhadasa, God is a combination of nescience (อวิชชา) and *karma*. In that he was the creator he was *avijja* (อวิชชา); in his providence and as judge he is *karma* (กรรม). Buddhism teaches that this god should be conquered and destroyed. When Christians hear this should they not feel appalled? The Buddhist conclusion is that this god should be annihilated! Buddhists oppose this god and are not in the least willing to be his servants. They are given the greatest freedom in struggling against him with all their might until they are free from his power. It is exactly opposite from the stance of those who worship God and who hold to the principle that one must be willing for God to operate in his life, asking only his mercy. Actually, this idea does not at all appeal to the Thai love of independence. They often say that Christianity is not compatible with them, for the Christian is not free. Actually, the problem is that all men are incompatible with God. John the Baptist said that he was not worthy to stoop down and untie the laces of Jesus’ sandals. Men are not worthy even to be God’s servants. It is a high honor just to be allowed to serve him, the highest honor humans can hope to receive. Are Thai people really so independent as is claimed? Actually, nobody in the world is free, including Thai people whose nobody in the world is free, including Thai people whose name means free. If we are not the servants of God we are servants of something else which is less than God. Many Thai people are slaves of drink, of gambling, of various other vices and certainly, of self. There is no such thing as Thais who are really free. And this is as true of others as it is of Thais. There are no really free people in the world. Paul spoke proudly when he said, “I am a slave of Christ.” It was more valuable to him than any kind of freedom he might have had.

Buddha had nothing at all to say about a personal God, but he pointed the way toward a god who is *avijja* and *karma* combined.

And there is another passage about the origin of the world. How does Buddha explain it? The answer is that *avijja*, which is a state of not knowing, is the creator of everything, yet everything has a principle of truth hidden in it. For example, when I pick up a piece of chalk and write with it, there is a law in it that it will gradually wear down until nothing is left. This law is hidden in the chalk. If I lay it down it will lie there quietly. Buddhists say that every action has its own accompanying law without anyone having to create it. *Avijja* (อวิชชา), the creator, was devoid of sense in himself. This is self-evident because otherwise, why would he have created this evil and confused world? He created mice, then created cats to eat them. He created men, then created a terrible world in which to place them. He created men to be born, age, suffer and die, and then created doctors to try to halt these processes. If God were clever, why didn't he create man to be just the opposite, to be perfect? Or if he had been wise, he would not have created anything. How can we know if he is wise? There is no way to know.

They totally misunderstand. They try to transfer the sins of mankind onto God. If we read Genesis, we find the truth clearly stated there. Everything that God made, he saw as good-in every single period of creation. And in I Timothy 4:4 also it is said that "everything created by God is good..." Then where did what is not good come from? This is a question to which we must try to find a satisfactory answer. We cannot overlook it for every time we preach we will confront it, and if we have no answer to give, it will be very detrimental. So, we must sit down with this question and ponder it until with the help of God we find an answer and have it clearly in mind when we go to preach. If all that God created was good, how did that which is not good originate?

Actually, there are many answers that can be given, but the great thing to remember is that God created everything good. What is not good, we know comes from man. As Ecclesiastes 7:20 says, "Surely there is not a righteous man on earth who does good and never sins", and the same message is reiterated in Romans and in I John. It would be well to ponder the meaning of these passages.

So, the Buddhists say that the ideal of Buddhism is to seek knowledge or to be enlightened (ศรัทธา) in order to destroy all nescience so completely that it cannot be recreated. We must put it out, cold! Since we are created by stupidity, we must try to discover knowledge. When we find knowledge, we will extinguish life, passion, sin, birth, old age, pain, death. By the power of enlightenment we will not have to be reborn.

In another stinging passage, Buddhadasa writes, "Kill father and mother-that is, *avijja* which has given us birth! Kill it, and then to *Nibbana* (นิพพาน)." ¹⁶ If we extinguish it, he says, there will be no need to be reborn, age, suffer and die. We shall not have to be troubled with this terrible cycle of rebirths. Buddha was in revolt against and sought no reconciliation with God or any Sustainer of the universe, and even felt a great freedom in attempting to destroy *avijja*, or the state of things.

The Christian minister should fully realize this when he prepares to preach. Especially is it necessary if he speaks on radio or television when people throughout the country may be listening. Often today as people listen not only to local programs but to English programs by short wave, they say, "I can't see that the Christians have anything to offer; they just talk about believing and that is all." They are very critical of Christian radio and television broadcasts. It is necessary, therefore, to take care not to preach in such a way as to make God seem to them evil and thus defeat our real purpose. In the eyes of those who are not Christians we may be saying something outrageous. What they hear, they collect, weigh, evaluate, compare with Buddhism and decide which is weightier, which is more reasonable, more beautiful, more incisive. In the end they will decide on that which seems to them better. So it is absolutely essential that in preaching the gospel, we select not only the simple and the easily understood, but also the weighty, the profound and the difficult as well.

In a recent newspaper there was an article which praised Christians for doing good, for taking seriously such responsibilities as distributing literature to hotels, hospitals; for social service and serving others. But the article went on to say that Buddhism has many better teachings which, if followed, would far surpass Christian service, but Buddhists simply do not follow their own teachings. Even though Christian teaching is not especially praiseworthy, Christians do pay attention to it. The writer here has “raised the price” of the Christian faith, evaluating it on the basis of Christian action, not on the basis of doctrine. Every time we preach our hearers will compare Christianity with Buddhism and decide which is better, which is higher, which is preferable. We absolutely must understand this mentality. They are convinced that if this world were the handiwork of a benevolent God, it would not be as cruel and filthy as it now is. The very meaning of the Thai word for God indicates that he is glorious, majestic and pure (พระเจ้า), but the world he has created indicates just the opposite: that there is nothing divine about him. So, they conclude that the creator of the world is none other than *avijja*.

In another passage, “If God, that is, *avijja*, created the world, what result will come from praying to him? We should rather destroy him and worship a better deity. When, since the beginning, has this world ever enjoyed even one day of peace or purity or calm such as we would hope to receive from God? In all of history, not one is to be found. So, no matter how much we pray to God it is of no avail.”¹⁷

He continues, “Suffering results from coveting, anger, and being misguided. The absence of suffering results from the absence of these conditions without the necessity for anyone to create it or provide it. When there is cause for suffering, one suffers; when there is no cause, one does not suffer - all without God’s help. People can find a way to separate themselves from suffering just as a child who burns his hand can find a way not to play with fire.”¹⁸

And another section: “Since this world which is a treasury of science is bubbling over with scientific principles of which cause-effect is the most important feature, it is clear that the sacred, such as God, is only a story for children or barbarians deep in the jungle. God’s fingers have been cut off for they cannot help anything. There is no one to reach out a hand and arrange peace for this world. All that is left is man’s intelligence; it is useless to depend on God. This world has nothing to do with God. The whole idea of God arose out of the necessity of an unenlightened age. Now that we do not need him we had better discard him.”¹⁹

Some years ago Acharn Taud Pratipasen wrote a reply to this book and it would certainly be interesting if the two could be published together.²⁰

But let us now return to the term *avijja* and try to understand it. There are eight kinds of *avijja* and two possible interpretations of the term, Ignorant One (อวิชชา). The first interpretation is ignorance or a state of not knowing; the second is Nature which is unknowing. The second one is probably better. Buddha said that *avijja* is the creator of the world. What is *avijja*? It is that which Buddha did not yet know. He did not, by his own wisdom, know who the creator was. In the textbooks of Buddhism, the word *avijja* is interpreted as natural law which is ignorant. But Buddhadasa does not interpret it that way. He construes it as a state of not knowing. So his translation is the same as saying that God is ignorance, stupidity, In reality, *avijja* probably should be understood to mean the law of nature which man cannot know through his own intelligence. If that is what is meant, we can agree. Man could not know that God is the creator unless God revealed it or inspired men to know it. Man has no way of knowing, for he was not present at the creation. He can know nothing about it except through revelation.

Now let us look at the eight basic statements about *avijja*.

48. *Avijja* was ignorant of what suffering is. (*Avijja* did not know that this world is the birthplace of suffering, that the body is where suffering is located.)

49. *Avijja* was ignorant of the cause of suffering, not knowing that the cause of suffering is *tanha* (ตัณหา) sexual desire, ambition, the lack of ambition.

50. *Avijja* was ignorant of the extinguishing of suffering. (To extinguish *avijja* or ignorance will extinguish suffering.)

51. *Avijja* was ignorant of the way to extinguish suffering. (The way is the Noble Eightfold Path-มรรค 8)

52. *Avijja* was ignorant of the past.

53. *Avijja* was ignorant of the future. (The world was created because the creator did not know that the consequence would be an evil one.)

54. *Avijja* was ignorant of the past and future together, not knowing the relation of cause and effect.

55. *Avijja* did not know the chain causation of suffering (not knowing that evil has a cumulative and multiplying effect).

There are eleven reasons why this is so:

56. *Avijja* is the original cause. (If we should ask where *avijja* came from, the reply would be “from *avijja*”.)

57. From *avijja* arises formation *sankhara* (สังขาร), or organization, or assembling (สังขาร). Just as the parts of an automobile are assembled to form the vehicle, so the various elements are organized to form man.

58. From *sankhara* (สังขาร) arises feeling or sensation-*vinnana* (วิญญาน).

59. From *vinnana* (วิญญาน) arise mind and body *nama-rupa* (นาม-รูป), literally name and form.²¹ There is a Buddhist scholar who says that *vinnana* is the creator, but actually this view runs counter to the Buddhist understanding that *vinnana* (วิญญาน) is sensation. Nor is the Christian willing to say that sensation is the creator.

60. From mind and body arise six sense spheres *ayatana* (อายตนะ) –the eyes, ears, nose, tongue, body, mind and their objects: form, sound, odor, flavor, tactile object, thought.

61. From *ayatana* (อายตนะ) arises contact or touch (สัมผัส).

62. From contact arises reaction or mood - *vedana* (เวทนา). When the eye sees a beautiful object, it brings pleasure; an ugly object brings pain. A beautiful sound brings delight; an unpleasant remark brings pain. This reaction is called *vedana* (เวทนา), meaning that the external is internalized. The resulting mood may be pain (ทุกข์), pleasure (สุข) or equanimity *upekha* (อุเบกขา).

63. From *vedana* (เวทนา) arises craving *tanha* (ตัณหา). Wanting and not wanting are both called *tanha* (ตัณหา). The mood gives rise to desires of various kinds.

64. From *tanha* (ตัณหา) arises attachment, *upadana* (อุปทาน). When we have begun to desire something, we soon feel that we absolutely must have it at all costs; or we decide that we must succeed in some project, come what may.

When I was a teen-ager, I swore to myself that I would one day get even with an uncle who struck me violently and I held it in my heart for fifteen years. This is *upadana* (อุปทาน), attachment or grasping. But the word does not only refer to a grudge; it may refer to a belief as well. For example, some Thai people still treat illness by tying a string around their necks. They are very strong in their belief in its efficacy and they cannot be convinced that it has no value. Such tenacious beliefs about spiritual matters are also called *upadana* (อุปทาน). Holding fast to our Christian faith is likewise *upadana* (อุปทาน). In order not to be guilty, Buddhists teach that one should not hold to anything, but have an empty heart, a detached spirit.

65. From *upadana* (อุปทาน) arises being or existence *bhava* (ภพ).

66. From *upadana* (ภพ), because of *tanha* (ตัณหา) arises birth and the consequent old age, pain and death.

Now if we retrace the steps, we may say that death comes from pain, pain from old age, old age from birth, birth from being, being from the sense spheres (อายตนะ), the sense spheres from *tanha* (ตัณหา), *tanha* or craving from *vedana* (เวทนา), *vedana* or

reacting (เวทนา) from contact (สัมผัส), contact from *ayatana* (อายตนะ), *ayatana* from *nama-rupa* (นาม-รูป), *nama-rupa* from *vinnana* (วิญญาน), *vinnana* from *sankhara* (สังขาร), *sankhara* from *avijja* (อวิชชา). So, *avijja* is the first in the series and therefore, the origin of the world. This chain of causation is basic in Buddhism. In saying that *avijja* is the cause, it must be remembered that *avijja* is unknowing and back of this there is nothing at all.

If one asks, “Who created God?” we answer that God is the beginning. If there were another, God would not be God.

If we are asked about the present state of the world, we can say that the world is in its present evil state because of human action. Does rust come from iron or the maker of iron? Evil arose from the man whom God created, not from God who created him. Yet although man ruined the world that God had made, God was not left without a plan; he was not ignorant (อวิชชา), for God knew how to repair the damage. For this reason Jesus prayed and taught his disciples to pray, “Thy kingdom come...on earth.” If the kingdom is established in the heart of anyone, that person is a citizen of heaven. Pain and the problems of this world are still with him, but they do not completely incapacitate him and even death will not put down that kingdom. So, our god is not *avijja*.

The entire list just considered is negative. It may be asked if there is anything positive.

Yes, however, it is not considered to be of religious worth, but rather a part of this material world. Any good which the Buddhist would consider of spiritual value would be something that would cause one not to be reborn.

V. OR WHAT IN CREATION?

In beginning to witness in Thailand to those who are unacquainted with the Christian faith, we must begin with God and try to make it clear that God is the living God who is alive and present. But whether people understand or not depends on our explanation of what this means. If we present the being of God, his attributes and character, ambiguously, people will reject him and will try to refute what we say, declaring that no such God exists. This is especially true if we say only that there is a God but do not help people understand who he is. At one and the same time we must teach both that God exists and what he is like. When this has been made clear we then come to the subject of God as creation. What, if anything, did he create? The subject of creation considered in Chapter Four is still incomplete, that is, the subject of *avijja* (อวิชชา). As we have seen, there is no unwillingness to say that there is a God and that he created something, but it is felt that this creator should be thought of as nescience. Is this a God who can be worshipped? Certainly not! We cannot say that there is anything of value in *avijja*. This is the demonic, the perpetrator of evil. According to the Christian faith, this is the power of darkness, the satanic, or sin. It is the very thing which causes suffering, and Buddhists say that from it, *avijja* (อวิชชา), arise birth, old age, pain, death, and so much confusion in the world. If people are led to understand that *avijja* is God, it is as if God were responsible for all that is evil in the world. If God is understood under this representation, how can he possibly be worshipped? Therefore, we must describe the character, the attributes of God as exactly opposite from those of *avijja* in order to enable people to understand what God is like.

My own explanation is something like the following:

In the beginning there was only emptiness, a void with nothing in it except the living God who is a Spirit. God was unconditioned (and this is very important to stress); he had life in himself. He was not dependent upon any other element, or factor or aid. He was different from us who have no life in ourselves and when we are given life are dependent on certain supports to maintain it. But God has life in himself and does not need to depend on anything. From the beginning, before anything else, he was; and in this emptiness, he had the plan and intention to create. The Bible says, "God created..." That is, God had a plan before he carried it out. And when he did create, the material universe appeared. Then God created man to oversee it in cooperation and in contact with him. In the Garden of Eden Adam and Eve were in close touch with God, knew him, were in intimate association with him, could converse with him. But while man was living in comfort and convenience in the Garden, Eve saw there a forbidden fruit. It was beautiful and desirable. Here is where *avijja* was born, began to be formed in the heart of man. *Avijja*, or ignorance, was the instigator which told Eve to go ahead and eat the fruit, convincing her that it would be delicious. Eve replied that God had absolutely forbidden it and that they therefore could not eat it. It was suggested to her that instead of being punished she would be enlightened, she would be wise, and thus *avijja* tried to entice her into doing it. It is the very same thing that often happens to us today. There is a power that arises in our hearts and says, "Do it!" And sometimes it adds, "No missionary or minister is going to see you; no one will know. There are no Christians here; never mind, go ahead and try it." Then there is a battle royal within us. And if our faith in the power of God is at a low ebb we fall under the sway of that power. Our hand picks the evil fruit. This is exactly what happened to Eve. And because *tanha* (ตัณหา) arose in her heart, she succumbed. *Avijja* had come first and though it was invisible, it led Adam and Eve to be unaware of the peace in which they lived, the comfort of knowing God, and the value of living in companionship with him. Their minds were blinded and they saw the thing which deceived them as being desirable, as delicious, as peace-giving, as their life's desire. When they had been overcome by *avijja*, *tanha* (ตัณหา) arose in them. They wanted this fruit, and this was *tanha*, and their desire for it was coupled with the voice in their

hearts that said, “Go ahead and eat it.” From the moment Eve obeyed, she was under the domination of *avijja*. She could no longer see God clearly. From that time forward, *avijja* was like a wall between man and God, and man could no longer communicate with God. When *avijja*, which is called ignorance, or not knowing, or blindness of the spirit, when this darkness came down, from that time forward, men who are descended from Adam, have been born in and influenced by sin. Once this wall had been erected, subsequent men followed the original pattern and have done so until this very time. Men have tried to think their way to a knowledge of the origin of birth, of the world. But since man is afflicted with an inner blindness, his searching for the answers is as a blind man searches. Since he cannot find the answer in his heart, he has to use a method of the material world. In trying to find God man must use what is present before him as a means of his search. He turns to scientific investigation. Science can prove when a tree was born; it wants only the tree which is present before it to use as a tool and it can tell by observation how old the tree is. Likewise, when man tries to discover how man came about he examines what is presently before him and things around him and the various studies available, and uses them in his search. Man pulls out the chain link by link and when he comes to the last link, after which he can pull out no other (because after this there is a wall so that he cannot pull it completely out) he then thinks that he has it all and that he has found man’s origin. That is why Buddhism says that the creator of man is *avijja*. This is the point at which man’s wisdom is exhausted, his ability to understand is at an end. He stops investigating and the idea is put forth that man and the world come from *avijja*. But Christians have the faith that we cannot find God by means of our wisdom or ability - I Corinthians is clear about this, that in the search for God, man’s wisdom is insufficient. When God reveals himself to us and is known to us, however, we acknowledge him, trust in him, commit our lives to him, and when we do, the Holy Spirit is with us and at work within us. And when this happens the Holy Spirit will open a door in that wall, tear it down, and make us open our inner eyes. With these new spiritual eyes, we can see through and over the wall of sin, of *avijja*. Therefore, Christians everywhere say that the originator of man is not *avijja*, but they go farther, past the Garden of Eden, to the beginning of things, to the empty void, and when we look down into it, our spirits meet the Spirit of God. When we meet him we are made to understand him and to recognize that deeper in life than *avijja* or the wall it erected, there is the one living God, the Originator of all things.

If we explain it in this way, Buddhists can accept it, particularly those who are familiar with Buddhist teaching. Although there will be problems and they will argue and protest to some extent, they can understand it.

Those who want to deal a blow to Christianity translate *avijja* as ignorance but specialists who write the textbooks and curricula of Buddhism, in examining the word itself, say that it should not be interpreted as ignorance but Nature which was as yet unknown. There is a saying of Lord Buddha, “Where the world originates we do not know; where it ends we do not know” (สังสารนี้กำหนดที่สุดและเบื้องต้นไม่ได้). This animal body is controlled by *avijja*, addicted to *tanha* (ตัณหา), and is continually being recycled. It does not appear to us where it begins or ends. Therefore it is apparent that there were things still unknown to Buddha, and *avijja* should be translated as Nature which is as yet unknown. If it can be interpreted in this way, Christians can accept it. And if man depends on himself and his own ability and intelligence, there are things which he will not discover, and those things have to do with the spiritual. But God can open up to us mysteries that intelligence alone cannot fathom. So we accept the idea of God, not through our intellect or ability to fathom mysteries but through the revelation of God and through the Holy Spirit who leads us, shows us, and reveals to us.

But here problems arise when we explain. Some will say to us that in Buddhist beliefs there is a great deal about God also and some subjects are very much like the Christian’s God. For example, in the Brahma Sutra there is one section in which Lord Buddha said that actually it is not God whom we call God but Brahma. You may remember this from the first chapter. The story is that at one

time the world was destroyed and afterwards there was a great world-wide fire called *Banlaikal* (ไฟพรวิชัยกัลป์). At the time of the fire, Brahma was traveling about in space. It rained and put out the fire and there was a fragrance that arose to Brahma, so he came down to taste the earth. Once he had done so, he was unable to fly again and had to remain in the world. Others born after him said of him that he came first and was, therefore, the creator of all who followed. Actually he was not. Most Thai people know this story or one which is similar to the story in the Brahma Sutra. Probably all villagers know it. Older people particularly will know of the Brahma who came down and ate a lump of clay, and besides they will have many views about where various things come from. When we go to talk to them we will meet these ideas. There are several of them.

67. There are those who say that God did not create things, but they arose by themselves (เกิดขึ้นเอง). How can we reply? It is not necessary to stand up and preach; we can just talk with these people, but we must have some object as a means of teaching. Anything that we see before us we can pick up and ask, "This, did this come to be by itself?" And then we can continue, "And the things around us, which one came to be by itself? Why do you think that this world which is full of beauty and order and mystery came about on its own?" If we go too far afield for illustrations, people won't think. We must use some thing right in front of their faces. If they still insist on the same point of view, that the world came to be by itself, we can explain something of the order and law of the universe. We must try to bring our hearers to the point of feeling that there must have been a creator, and we must do so by use of common experience, not just academic knowledge or abstract thought. The education of many people is limited and if we depend only on philosophical arguments, they will not be able to understand. But if we speak to them in terms of their own experience, they can understand. It is not surprising that the preachers in Thailand whom people most like to hear are those who talk about everyday experience, not those who preach what is in the textbooks.

68. Another group (and I am not dealing with tenets as much as with people) will say that God did not create the world, but it came from four elements - earth, water, wind and fire. Everything is made up of these four. The firm parts of our bodies like bones and flesh are called the earth element. The liquids like blood are made of the element of water. Breath is the air element and warmth is the fire element. These four elements came together of themselves by the power of *avijja*, and once together, they formed a human body or a material object.

What should be said to those who hold this view? First, we might ask them how much of each element it took, and second, at what time these elements were mixed. If they answer, "From the beginning", we could ask, "And why do these elements not combine themselves today to make people and animals so that they will not have to be born?" And again, if these elements can combine themselves to make people it looks as if scientists today should be able to do it but no scientist ever has. And if these elements combined themselves why do we have eyebrows over our eyes? Why do we have nails at the ends of our fingers and why do our bodies work according to a pattern? We must ask them questions that will make them think about it.

Once I met a man at Dong Yang. I was sitting there in a coffee shop talking and he walked in. When I invited him to sit down, he asked curtly, "Why?"

"Come and visit and talk a while," I replied.

"About what?" he asked.

"Oh, anything that interests you," I replied.

Then he said, "You are a Christian, aren't you?"

"Yes."

"Well, what about God?"

“God is a Spirit, and ...”

“Have you seen him?”

“No.”

“Then why do you believe in him?”

“What is your religion?” I asked.

“I am a Buddhist.”

“Have you seen Buddha?”

“Don’t ask me questions.” Then at last he pulled out a twenty baht bill. “If you want anything you can get it with this,” he said. “This is my god.” “You have studied a lot,” I said. He had told me of having been a priest for over ten years. “Surely you make a distinction between the material and the spiritual. You are taking a material object for a god. The God I worship is not a physical object but a God of the spiritual. If you take an object for a god, one person has more, the other has less. The richer people are, the more they can boast about their god. But Christians cannot do this because God is not a material God but a God of the spirit. Although I cannot see him he has a very profound meaning for my life. Actually, money and every other material thing owes its existence to him.” The man was not willing to accept this or to stop talking about it. Finally I took out a note and said, “You have a note and so do I, but you think of this as a god. This has no real ultimate meaning to me; I am not enslaved by it.” Then I tore up the note (although actually I hated to do it), and I said, “I am still in possession of my life; I have not committed it to money and if we are Christians we find that not being enslaved by money is not hard to achieve. We commit our lives to Christ who is far more to us than this.” Finally he said that he had been a priest a long time and during those years he had not been addicted to money.

I asked the Christians there if they knew the man. They said that previously his children had slipped in to Sunday School until he had punished them for coming and forbidden them to return. He had come by to see me three times but only on the third visit had he courage enough to speak.

The point of all this is that we must help people to see that God is greater to men than any material object or any physical thing in this world or else they will never be willing to turn from the material to seek him. Today the world has been enslaved by materialism and if people cannot see the high value of knowing God they will continue to give themselves to the material. If anybody in the present is to give up monetary gain or pride of place and name to come to God, he must first see that God is of higher priority to him than those things. And if the lives of Christians have any depth of fellowship with God they will give themselves to him more fully-but that is another matter.

Recently, I went again to Dong Yang. Some time ago the Christians there had in hand 1,000 baht and they decided to build a small room for worship, but after they began building they found that it would cost twice that amount and the room was not finished. Every Sunday the Christians there asked me to try to find the money for them so that they could finish it. On the way back I remarked to a friend who was with me, “In ordinary terms, what we are doing is senseless. If we would stay in our own churches and work no one would object and we would be much more comfortable. The salary we receive we could spend or put in the bank. But because we cannot sit still we go off to some remote village to work, and as soon as there are Christians they come and ask us to help them. When people are sick and need money they come and tell us; and when they want to build something that costs money, they come and ask for help. They all have 108 problems each, and as a result we, too, have problems. But when we know God instead of thinking that doing nothing is comfortable, it is just the opposite. If we do nothing we are uncomfortable. So, we have to go.” But to get to this point is to

taste heavenly food (ทิพย์อาหาร), the very Bread of life. If we have never tasted it, we shall never have known the taste of the delight that is in Christian service. Unfortunately, it must be admitted that most Christians have never had a real taste of it.

69. Some say that it is not God who creates but Nature creates. This view is very common and we have all heard it. In this, we must ask them to explain what Nature is, and then try to take up something near at hand to ask if Nature made it and how it was done. Suppose there is a cat nearby. Did Nature make it? When Nature is inanimate how could it make this cat have life? Something which we must always do is to ask questions.

70. Another group declares that it does not believe in a Creator, but in science. When man first set foot on the moon there was one person in Thailand who said, "Now there is nothing that man cannot do." When someone in Bang Kua quoted this to me, I said, "Really?" (จริงหรือ), and then I said, "If there is nothing that man cannot do what about illnesses we do not know how to treat? Have you ever counted the stars? How many? We cannot see them all with the naked eye but even with the most powerful telescope we can make, can we see them all?" There is another scientist in Thailand who says that even though man can go to the moon he must not forget his finiteness. This is only a first step into the vast reaches of space. How much more is there that man knows nothing at all about? Is it true then that man now knows everything and that there is nothing he cannot do?

Students, particularly, whether they are high school or university graduates, and those who think they are students, love to talk about science-the little bit of it that they have found in the textbooks, and they like to say that the earth broke off from the sun. If we try to witness to people from high school graduates up, this is what they will talk about. God did not create the world; it broke off from the sun.

Once in the southern town of Pattalung one man said to me, "Well, we know too much to believe that God created the world."

"Excuse me, sir, how much have you studied?" I asked.

"Tenth grade," he replied. What we need to do with people like this is to pinch them a little, not enough to hurt, but just enough to make them come to. What I wanted to say to this man was, "Yes, of all the scientists in Thailand, there is no one who is yet able to write a science text of any depth. Nearly all of the texts used in the university are translated from textbooks used abroad where people believe in God as the Creator."

When we do not know science very well, but have read a little from the texts about the earth breaking off from the sun, it sounds impressive. But this is not what the textbooks say. What they say is that it is speculated that the earth broke off from the sun. This shows that the scientists are not really sure. But tenth grade students all accept it as pure truth and will argue that God did not create the earth because we now know that it come from the sun. When we talk to students we might say, "What you think is almost right, but not quite, even according to what the scientists say. But there is more. There is God..."

So we see that there are many different opinions. We must not only read the Bible but we must read our hearers to see what they already believe. We must be like doctors who examine their patients before prescribing a cure.

There are many Thai Christians who would say of the methods that I have been proposing that they depend too much on our ingenuity. But if I give my life wholly into my abilities are his to use, surely he will use me according to these qualities. It is not at all true that we are not to use what we have. Sad to say, most Christians in Thailand seem to have the erroneous idea that once they are Christians all natural ability must be kept safe in a cupboard so as to allow God to work. Yet, on the contrary, God wants to join hands with our hands. We must emphasize this for Christians, for it is the very heart of Christian witnessing.

The greatest questions we face are: “Is there really a God?” and “Did God really create the world?” If people are willing to accept an affirmative answer to these questions, what follows will not be difficult. There are few people who are willing to accept a Yes to these questions who are not also willing to accept that Jesus Christ is the Son of God. Generally their unwillingness to be Christians is connected with the understanding that there is no God and that there is no Creator.

Why do people not believe?

Recently there was a man who said, “A good hen will have good baby chicks. If the hen is not a good strain, her babies will not be either. If the world is evil it shows that God is evil.” But the world was not hatched; it was created. When one makes a cake, is the cake like his face? The world was not born; it was created. So, we cannot compare the world with its maker.

But then we get the reply, “If God knew beforehand that the world would be like this, why did he create it? It just shows that he did not know what he was doing!” How can we answer? We have to answer that God knew beforehand and still created it. He had a way in Jesus Christ “before the foundation of the world” to correct the world’s problems. That he cannot correct problems in us is not because he is unable or unwilling, but because we will not cooperate with him in their solution, and we are not willing for him to do the correcting. To put it simply, man is ill and will not allow the doctor to treat him.

In answer to the question, however, let me offer an illustration. A car is parked in front of us, and we can see that the car has had an accident. The maker of the automobile knew beforehand that it might possibly have an accident, that the driver and the passengers could be killed. Would it not have been better never to have made automobiles in the first place? One man to whom I asked this question would not answer at first but finally he said, “I think the car and the world are two different things.”

If men would conduct their lives and use the world’s resources according to God’s purposes the world would be something like the car that never has an accident. But if men will not follow God’s will, the world will be like that wrecked car.

It is strange, isn’t it that when a car is wrecked, we blame the driver; we rarely blame the manufacturer. Yet when the world goes awry why do we not blame the driver? Man “drives” the world because God has given it to him to oversee. If it is wrecked we should blame the driver who is irresponsible. If we blame God it shows that we are not willing to take responsibility in the thing that God has given us to do. If you are an employer and your employee will not take responsibility, what then? We men are willing to take responsibility for the world only when things go well. When things go wrong we throw it all back upon God. This we must explain.

VI. ATTAINING THE HIGHEST

In some respects Christianity and Buddhism may be said to be compatible; in others it is not so easy to find a common meeting ground. One of the difficult areas is in those teachings about how one comes to completeness or perfection-to salvation.

When Buddhists become interested in Christianity one of the first questions they ask is, “What practices are necessary to reach the highest stage of attainment in the Christian faith?” The question is asked in the Buddhist way. According to the practices of Buddhism there is a ladder of attainments which one must climb and the question is in what way one should climb it. But in Christianity there is no climbing from stage to stage, no set of performances by which one may ascend to heaven. The highest is not attained by means of human effort alone. If it were to be compared to climbing a tree the Buddhist teaching is that one must climb it from the ground up, but in the Christian understanding God reaches down to lift us up. The two methods have very little in common.

Many people in Thailand, especially those who are concerned with education, are very critical of the fact that, in teaching their faith, Christians begin with God and with faith in him. The highest seeks the lowest; God reaches down to man. We begin the Christian life by committing our lives to God with all our heart and mind and soul and strength and by trust in him we are gradually transformed into his likeness. But Buddhists generally begin with the most elementary truths and move upward toward the highest. So, we must try to prepare a witness according to the Buddhists’ graduated scheme.

All of Buddhism is really summed up in three phrases: refrain from evil, do good, and purify the heart. And all of this is to be accomplished by oneself. We are to refrain from evil by following the prohibitions regarding what is evil. The admonition to do good includes many kinds of good prescribed in fine detail. And finally, after we have dealt with these external matters we turn inward to “purify the heart.” Since for the Christian the order is reversed, Buddhists are often heard to say that Christian teaching is contrary to good psychology and pedagogy and that Christians just grasp at the highest first with no attention to preliminary matters - to prohibitions and duties - at all.

In truth, however, Jesus was a better psychologist than we are, for he knew that the important center of a man’s being is the heart. When one loves God with all his heart everything else falls into place. Even death is not a problem. But whatever does not capture the heart of a person does not usually come to completion in him. This can be seen clearly in the distinction between the practice of Buddhism and Christianity. Though Buddhism has many excellent moral teachings, many Buddhists cannot follow them because their hearts are not really in it. But for Christians, even though the Bible does not always lay down clear and detailed prescriptions for belief and practice, performance often surpasses the rules (not always, of course) when Christians have really committed themselves to God. Take, for example, the matter of drinking intoxicants. Though it is not forbidden in the Bible, many Christians see it as quite an important matter and often really go beyond what is required in the Scriptures. This is true because if our lives are given in love to God, obedient actions follow without coercion and without reluctance.

Buddhism teaches salvation by one’s own effort but in Christianity salvation is a gift. So, in Buddhism there is an important word that is often used, the word “attain” (บรรลุ). It connotes completion. To go to *Nibbana* (นิพพาน) is called attaining *Nibbana* (บรรลุ นิพพาน). One attains the level of *arahant*; one attains this level or that- one completes it.

Let us turn now to the Eightfold Wisdom (วิชิชา 8) which is the exact opposite of *avijja* (อวิชชา). This is a list of powers and achievements gained on the way to *Nibbana*. This is not knowledge of the world but supernatural knowledge which will enable one

to transcend suffering, to escape the wheel of rebirth, power which arises from the practice of the highest *dhamma* (ธรรม). One who so acts will attain to wisdom that bestows eight different powers: (วิชชา 8)

71. Supernatural wisdom arising from contemplation (ความรู้ที่เกิดจากวิปัสสนา)
72. Supernatural creative powers (ฤทธิ์ทางใจ)
73. Supernatural powers of movement (ฤทธิ์)
74. Supernatural powers of hearing (หูทิพย์)
75. Supernatural knowledge of others (รู้ใจคนอื่น)
76. Supernatural memory of past lives (ระลึกชาติได้)
77. Supernatural vision (ตาทิพย์)
78. Supernatural power to destroy evil (รู้ในการทำลายบาป)

Let us examine these powers more closely.

The first is wisdom arising from *vipassana* (วิปัสสนา). This term really means “insight” or “to see clearly.” However, this is not knowledge which comes from disciplined insight or reasoned thought but rather a power that results from contemplation. There are two levels of mental training through contemplation. The first is *kammatthana* (กัมมัฏฐาน) and the second, *vipassana* (วิปัสสนา). The two interlock, but *kammatthana* must be practiced first.

The word *kammatthana* (กัมมัฏฐาน) means “a site of work.” *Kamma* means “work”; *thana* (ฐานะ) means “location” or “site.” Those who engage in *kammatthana* are called *samatta* (สมถะ), and their objective is to quiet the heart, to train the mind, to calm oneself. This is connected with the third duty of Buddhists, to purify the mind - the highest of the duties. Action that leads to *Nibbana* (นิพพาน) is of two kinds. When we begin to advance toward this highest level of attainment in Buddhism, to the state of the Noble One, the *Ariya-puggala* (อริยบุคคล), we must begin with one of these two exercises. These will not take one as far as *Nibbana* but will go nearly there. On the way there are four levels of attainment which are interconnected links of a chain: Stream-winner - *Sotapanna* (โสดาบัน), Once-returned - *Sakadagami* (สกทาคามี), Never-returned - *Anagami* (อนาคามี), and Holy One - *Arahant* (อรหันต์). If one practices *kammatthana* (กัมมัฏฐาน) he may attain to the third stage but he cannot be an *arahant*. To attain to the fourth stage, to *arahant*, one must practice *vipassana* (วิปัสสนา).

In practicing *kammatthana*, one must find a way to quiet the mind, for this is what it is - a way to peace. Our minds are not by nature at peace. We think of 108 things every day; we are busy with this and that. We are jealous, loving, angry, crying, laughing, by turns, experiencing many different feelings, and it is hard to be at peace. Many Buddhists say that Christians are very materialistic because they are always busy and involved and they cannot get rid of their work and their responsibilities. This means that they have no deeper understanding of life because they are always entangled with things of this world. They look at us Christians and say that we cannot attain even to the third stage because we are too involved with the present world. In some respects they may be right though we have our own explanation. I have sometimes explained it in this way: a boxer, before he becomes champion, must train before he gets into the ring. He cannot just rest, saying to himself, “I am the champion.” You Buddhists want to be champion but you are just resting. Not only so, but Buddhists have three duties: to refrain from evil, to do good, and to purify the heart. You are taking only the last of these; it is a shortcut, and you are not concerning yourselves with the first two. In school, we cannot study the fourth grade until we have had the first three. Likewise, in Christianity, we have to take things in their proper order. We have to take responsibility in this world first; we cannot simply pass up this world for the next because it is the wrong order of things. We have to be responsible both in

the material world and in the spiritual realm at the same time; to latch on to salvation without any interest in this world is not the Christian way. However, it is for this reason that Buddhists see Christians as worried and busy and lacking in spiritual qualities.

In calming the heart, we must practice. I have practiced *kammatthana* (กัมมัตถฐาน) often and still do so. It is sometimes helpful when I am overwhelmed with work and have 108 things on my mind. I try to think how to relieve tension and anxiety when I am so severely criticized that I cannot eat or sleep. Sometimes when I wake up at four in the morning and cannot go back to sleep for thinking of all the problems, instead of thinking of Immanuel Church, Paak Naam Church, Bang Kla Church, Cholburi Church and Song Kla Church, and the problems of all the pastors and Christians until I cannot sleep, I occasionally practice *kammatthana* (กัมมัตถฐาน) - sometimes sitting up, sometimes lying down. I close my eyes and perhaps an image of the moon will appear. One part will be light, one dark. When I stare at it I forget everything else. I try to see the image more and more clearly, making the dark segment disappear by looking hard at the light side of it. Sometimes it takes an hour before the image is entirely light. The dark will flash in and then disappear. But when we do this, we forget everything else except the image on which we are focusing. This is elementary *kammatthana* (กัมมัตถฐาน), and it is very engaging (สนุก).

Or we might think of someone we know. At first we can see only the face of the person but we will keep on trying until we can see the whole. It may take several hours but this is *kammatthana* (กัมมัตถฐาน), quieting the heart. And there are many ways of doing it. If we wish to try it we do not have to use the categories of Buddhism. We may devise our own. Perhaps in larger cities people might find the practice particularly useful, for nervous disorders are a common occurrence there where the problems of society are complex and perplexing. *Kammatthana* (กัมมัตถฐาน) helps one to forget things. There are many Buddhist temples which are called centers for meditation *Sannak Kammatthana* (สำนักกัมมัตถฐาน). Anyone with problems may go to one of the hundreds of rooms built for the purpose. There one will be alone, will eat only enough to keep himself alive, and will perform *kammatthana*. I have often thought that churches should have such rooms in which Christians, when they find life very complicated and want to pray, could spend a week in prayer and retreat at the church. Perhaps at some time in the future this can be done.

There are many aids to *kammatthana*, but let us turn now to some of the more important of them. The first is to concentrate on the fact that we must all get old as a matter of course, for there is no one in the world who can escape. What will we gain from this kind of examination? It will keep us from being too proud of our youthful figures, too vain and self-admiring. We will age one day. Then when we find we are aging, we will not panic as people often do. Some, when the first grey hair appears, are so sad and alarmed that they must find some way of changing its color. If we understand life, a grey hair is nothing to get upset about; it is a most common occurrence. If we have contemplated it, we will not panic, because we are fully aware of our physical condition.

We are also sometimes in pain and no one can avoid it entirely. Some people panic when they are ill, but if we think of it as a universally common occurrence perhaps it will reduce our anxiety or suffering.

Death is common also and no one can escape it. Those who understand this and can release it from their minds will not be shaken, no matter whether they live or die or whatever may happen. They are not in terror of death. They do not suffer unduly, have no insuperable problems with it because they understand life.

Christians also have this poise and equanimity if they trust in God. Even though we have not constantly contemplated and thought about pain and death, we are not anxious and our hearts are not fearful. We can go anywhere and do anything in peace. If we die in God it is all to the good, as Paul said. So the Christian has this assurance also.

It is natural that we shall have to be separated from what we love but we need not be crushed by the loss. Some people, when a child dies, are saddened to the point of suicide because they do not know how to take it. It seems to them as if father and son

must be together forever without interruption, and so when a child dies, they go off balance. They feel that they can no longer endure without this child. This is evidence that one does not understand life in which, if not today, then some day, we shall have to be separated from those we love. Therefore, we must loosen our grasp. We must contemplate this until we understand it so that we may not be unduly troubled when a child, or a husband, or a wife dies. From the practical standpoint it is difficult, to be sure, but we will not be thrown off balance by it and come crashing down.

Buddhists say that we must also consider the fact that whatever our *karma* we shall have to accept the consequences, whether good or bad. Later on we will look more closely at *karma* which Buddhists say is like our shadow which we cannot escape. Wherever we go it follows and brings to us its consequences at every step; it is an elementary principle of life.

And there are other areas which we must contemplate. One is death which is appointed for us; the date is fixed. "Of what are our bodies composed?" it is asked. One being initiated into the priesthood will answer, "Hair" – *gesa* (เกศา-ผม); "body hair" - *loma* (โลมา-ผม); "skin" - *dejo* (ตะโจ-หนัง); "teeth" - *tanda* (ทันดา-ฟัน). This is called *kammatthana* (กัมมัฏฐาน); that is it must be contemplated every day. Today my hair is black, but not many years hence it will be white, or perhaps I will, in not many years, all fall out and I will have false teeth. My skin is taut, but when I am old it will be dry and wrinkled. These must be considered constantly in order that one may detach himself from them.

We must consider our feelings - *vedana* (เวทนา), such as "This I like; this I dislike; about that I am indifferent." We must mull over these feelings, go over and over them and analyze them.

We must contemplate our moods and reactions. In this, if we think of anyone we will call his name; if we are angry we will say we are angry; if hostile we will say so; if we love we will express it. We will report to ourselves the moods and reactions that enter our minds.

We must contemplate the *dhamma*. Good *dhamma* (ธรรม) is meritorious, *kusala* (กุศล). Whatever is not good is not meritorious, *akusala* (อกุศล).

There are many other things that one may contemplate - earth, water, wind, fire, green, yellow; the object is to concentrate on one of these in order to still the heart. Beyond these, when one has advanced to a higher level, he will contemplate a corpse. When I was in the priesthood in the south the priests were asked to do this. Whenever there was a cremation (and perhaps the body had been in the coffin a week), they would call the priests together, those who were ardent Buddhists, and have them gather around the coffin and feel in it. Those who were not so pious would take advantage of the others who were more devout and say to them, "You go first; I'll stand behind", because in front it was terrible. I have done it. Some bodies were swollen with their tongues sticking out, green, or half-eaten by an animal. They would have us contemplate that this is what happens to people, this is the way life is. Once when my uncle who is a priest was teaching us he told this story from the time of Lord Buddha. There once was a beautiful woman who was a prostitute, but one bhikkhu when he begged his daily rice at her house, was very taken with her and wanted to leave the priesthood for her. He returned to the monastery but he forgot to eat and he could not sleep for thinking about her. Then one day the news came that the woman had died. Previously she had been worth about five thousand baht. They brought the body to Lord Buddha and said, "Anybody may have this woman for five thousand baht." No one volunteered. "One thousand, then." Still there was no one. "One baht." No one moved. Lord Buddha then said, "See, life is of no value."

The purpose of the *kammatthana* just described is to destroy attachment to life, to the world, to the body, to the beautiful. When we understand the impermanence of all these, we will not be addicted or attached to them. When we are detached, it is as if we are removed from the world and can withdraw our feelings from these things. This is the basis of *kammatthana* (กัมมัฏฐาน).

Let us now turn to *vipassana* (วิปัสสนา) which is the very important second stage of Buddhist meditation. After completing *kammathana* in all its stages, we contemplate the four *rupa-jjhana* (รูปฌาน), and the four *arupa-jjhana* (อรูปฌาน)- the material and immaterial spheres of mental concentration. When one has become skilled in both of these, he is called *sombat* (สมาบัติ 8). If we look at these exercises and try to place them in Buddhism we see that they lead to the understanding that everything is impermanent, suffering, formless. When one understands this clearly he has experienced *vipassana* (วิปัสสนา). From *vipassana* arises wisdom, the wisdom that sees a mysterious progress in life, and when this wisdom comes we are able to relinquish our grasp on everything. We can cut ourselves off from the world for we are not any longer intoxicated with it. Buddhists say that *avijja* has been destroyed and *tanha* has been annihilated. *Upatan* (อุปทาน) or attachment has been broken. When these three, which are the cause of evil in the world are broken, we are free. And in a moment we become an *arahant*. It is over. We are in *Nibbana* (นิพพาน).

In the Eightfold Wisdom, the first in the list is knowledge arising from *vipassana* (วิปัสสนา) or enlightenment, the clear understanding that birth, old age, pain, and death are common to man. It is inevitable that one should suffer them and together they are called impermanence. Moreover, everything when analyzed is shown to be formless. Our bodies are only a bundle of components and if analyzed would disintegrate into nothingness. If we were wise enough to see the truth, we would be bored with living and would not be intoxicated with it. This is *vipassana* (วิปัสสนา).

Another of the eight powers is the power to create (ฤทธิ์ทางใจ). With this power one can, at will, become two or more persons.

The third is supernatural powers of movement (ฤทธิ์). This is the power to fly. A story from the *Tripitaka* illustrates it.²² One day a disciple of Jain and a disciple of Lord Buddha met. A man said to them that he had made a begging bowl and had hung it in the highest place he could find. He suggested that of the two priests, the one with the most power should fly up and get it. The Buddhist won. The story added that the disciple of Lord Buddha flew up and got the bowl, that he could fly above the earth and dive under the earth. Of course, we can all fly in the air and dive under the earth today - in airplanes and subways!

The fourth in the series is supernatural powers of hearing (หูทิพย์). Today this would probably be accomplished by means of telephone and telegraph!

Clairvoyant knowledge of others (รู้ใจคนอื่น) or the ability to read their minds is the fifth skill. Actually, this is not just a supernatural power but may be the result of experience as well. Christians ought to have this intuitive insight also.

Memory of past lives (ระลึกชาติได้) such as that which came to Lord Buddha is the sixth power. And the seventh is supernatural vision (ตาทิพย์) through which one can remember past lives and see into the lives of others.

The climax of all these kinds of knowledge is the power to destroy evil (รู้ในการทำลายบาป).

It was said that Lord Buddha had all these powers. It may be easy to confuse the Eightfold Wisdom (วิชา 8) with the Eightfold Path (มรรค 8). Indeed, there is a connection between them. The Eightfold Path (มรรค 8) is the initial stage of advancement on the Buddhist way; the Eightfold Wisdom is the climax of it and has to do with the last group of duties outlined in the Eightfold Path. The three divisions of the Eightfold Path are moral duties (ศีล), contemplation (สมาธิ), and wisdom (ปัญญา). We are now considering the last two of these divisions. Everything in Buddhism is like a link in a chain connected with something else.

Although Christians do claim to have the powers described as the Eightfold Wisdom, experience with other people will enable us to understand them. We can look at their faces and see their problems. However, this is not exactly what is meant in the Eightfold Wisdom. What is described there is a means of knowing others as one knows himself which depends on supernatural wisdom, the product of attaining the *dhamma* (ธรรม), almost as Christians receive a gift from God.

The two kinds of *dhamma* in Buddhism, as we have already mentioned, are mundane *dhamma – lokyadhamma* (โลกิยธรรม), and *supermundane dhamma-lokuttharadhamma* (โลกุตตรธรรม). What we have been discussing in this chapter has to do, not with the first of these, but with the second. It is felt that this world is in the grip of *avijja*, and as Buddha said, the beginning and end of the world are not apparent. Therefore, the way to eradicate *avijja* is through *vipassana* (วิปัสสนา) by means of wisdom or *panna* (ปัญญา). When *panna* (ปัญญา) which is the result of *vipassana* arises in us who have been in the grip of *avijja*, what will happen? When we have had *avijja* in our hearts, we have not known the truth about life and we have attached ourselves to it. This is because of *tanha* (ตัณหา). Our ignorance makes us desire the world and this develops into *upatan* (อุปทาน), attachment. When we have acted upon this, *karma* (กรรม) results. So if we would eliminate *avijja*, we must do so through the wisdom that comes from *vipassana*, and when this has occurred and we see everything as it really is – impermanence (ไม่เที่ยง), suffering (ทุกข์), emptiness (อนัตตา) and we see the Triple Gems *Ratanadrai* (ไตรรัตน์), *avijja* is extinguished. We no longer have *tanha* (ตัณหา), *upatan* (อุปทาน), *karma* (กรรม) and we are in *Nibbana* (นิพพาน). The cycle of rebirths is over.

Seeing the truth as outlined above is called Enlightenment (ตรัสรู้). When Lord Buddha was enlightened (ตรัสรู้) he began with *kammatthana* (กัมมัฏฐาน) as the first step and continued by means of *vipassana* (วิปัสสนา) to the four *rupajhana* (รูปฌาน) and the four *arupajhana* (อรูปฌาน). This he achieved when he was with the two sages. When he came to the Bo tree, for six years he had strayed off into the use of physical privation in his search, but when he realized his error, he returned to the spiritual and began to concentrate on the spiritual. He went through the *kammatthana* (กัมมัฏฐาน) and the *jhana* (ฌาน) and the *arupajhana* (อรูปฌาน), analyzing each in turn. He then offered himself to the Triple Gems and wisdom arose. At that moment he was enlightened. He said that he could see clearly. This is called Enlightenment, *dratsaru* (ตรัสรู้).

In the practice of *vipassana* (วิปัสสนา), some people can accomplish it in seven days, some in fifteen and some take many years, depending on their mental preparation (ภูมิปัญญา) and the merit which they have accumulated, or failed to accumulate, in former lives. But if one will complete the Eightfold Path (perform *sammattha*-สมณะ) before beginning *vipassana* (วิปัสสนา), it will help to induce results, and he will acquire the Eightfold Wisdom (วิชา 8) also. Those who are *arahants* can attain it in seven days. Most who attempt it, however, have no special qualifications; they are ordinary people.

In the book called *Milinda – panha* (มิลินทปัญหา), *Questions of King Milinda*, it is said that Buddhism would disappear in five thousand years. This is now the third thousand and there are not so many who advance this far in Buddhism, although there may be more than anyone knows about. If one is really an *arahant* and boasts of it he is immediately expelled from the priesthood. So, not many are willing to mention it even though some would like to declare that they have attained it.

There is only one Buddha now recognized. There is to be another, *Phra Sriariya* (พระศรีอาริย์). Lord Buddha said that there had been some twenty before him who came at intervals to help the world. The present one is *Gotama* (โกตมะ) and most villagers think that he is the only one. Buddhists know about the others mentioned in the textbooks of Buddhism but do not think much about them. Actually, this subject is primarily academic. In practice most Buddhists are indifferent to it, but if we know as much or more about it than they do, it will be a help in witnessing to them.

Those who enter the priesthood today have only one idea in mind, to repay their parents. In Thai custom it is felt that if one has a son, he brings much merit (บุญ), and if that son goes into the priesthood, the mother benefits. When she dies she may, by virtue of the son's ordination, "go to heaven on yellow cloth" (เกาะผ้าเหลืองขึ้นสวรรค์). She goes to heaven on the merit of her son. There are many stories about this.

There are many different reasons for going into the priesthood. There is a jingle that villagers quote, “บวชผลาญข้าวสุก” meaning “Go into the priesthood and have fun with your friends.” In the south there is another jingle. In August there is a festival, *Kaw Pahnsaa* (เข้าพรรษา) when people make popped rice (ข้าวตอก), and in November at the *Ook Phansaa* (ออกพรรษา) they make rice gruel. The villagers have a jingle, “เข้าพร้อมกับข้าวตอกออกพร้อมกับข้าวต้ม”, or “Go in with popped rice, come out with gruel.” There are many such ditties about the occasion.

And there are many reasons for entering the priesthood: custom, others are doing it, unemployment, old age, illness, physical and social problems. And there are some few who are hiding from the law. Some sincerely believe in it and some want to attain to the stage of *arahant*. Some, especially government officials, take the yellow robe for a period to get away from the pressing demands of their work. But most today enter the priesthood because of custom. If we ask why they do it most would answer, “My parents have brought me up; I want to repay them. They want me to do it and I am doing it for them.”

There are some people, who if they have a son who does not go into the priesthood, will be unhappy about it all their lives, and never stop lamenting it. The son who has never been a priest, they call green; the son who does, they call ripe. So the priesthood has a very important meaning for Thai people. In the south the derogatory term *Ai* (ไอ้) instead of the polite *Khun* (คุณ) is used as a title for one who has not been in the priesthood. It is a rude word and it is very cutting. Even to be called by one’s name with no title is preferable. But it is very demeaning to be called *Ai* (ไอ้). Those who have completed the season in the priesthood are called *Ner* (เณร), and are always looked upon with respect. In some provinces in Thailand no girl is willing to marry and no father is willing to give his daughter in marriage to one who has not been a priest.

VII. THE MEANING OF KARMA²³

Today in Europe and America there are many people who have left the church and are no longer interested in religion. Feeling that God is remote from them and from twentieth century concerns, they conclude that they cannot reach him, and having no hope of reaching him, they simply abandon the effort. They live secular lives with no thought of God and no wish to follow his way. So the church tries to bring God down from on high and make him seem a part of the world so that he may be seen to fit into people's lives. It is emphasized that God is near, that he is man's best friend. He is present as a friend is present, and instead of using "thee" and "thou" to refer to him or speak to him, the more familiar "you" is substituted. It is apparently felt that nothing must be done to emphasize that God is majestic, exalted and that men are his subjects. He is presented as more like a friend than a sovereign. In prayer one must not think of him as lofty but as one who is ready to be everything that one needs.

All this may be true but in Asia this approach will not do. If God is brought down to that low level people will simply tread on him. Thais already think of the Christians' God as debased and of Christianity as inferior to Buddhism. If the Christian message is made to appear too easy or presented in too simple a form people will only trample upon it. It is of utmost importance that in teaching the Christian faith in Thailand, we present God as the supreme ruler of the universe, glorious and exalted. When this has been done, we may then explain in simpler terms. Not only theology, but ethics as well, must be presented in the highest possible terms. If people do not understand Christianity as a higher religion than that which they already hold, they will not be interested in being Christians, but will rather despise Christianity and look upon it only with condescension. There are some important psychological differences between different sections of the world.

Recently there was an article in the newspaper in which a certain man wrote to the editor and said, "Since you are well-versed in the Christian Scriptures, having studied abroad, I would like to ask about *nama-rupa* (นาม-รูป), the five *khanda* (ขันธ 5), and *ariya sacca* (อริยสัจ) which are the *dhamma* (ธรรม) of Buddhism - is there anything of comparable depth and refinement in the Christian religion? As far as I know about Christianity, there is the teaching that one should believe in God, revere his teachings and follow them. Buddhism includes such conventional teachings as the one about purifying the heart from sin and also the more profound *Abhidhamma* (อภิธรรม), the *sila* (ศีล), prayer (ภาวนา), *padhaniyanga 4* (สติปัฏฐาน4), *sammatta* (สมณะ), *vipassana* (วิปัสสนา), and many others which I have studied from Buddhist professors by radio."

The editor replied, "All religions teach the same kind of *dhamma*, that is, how to act in accord with religious teachings, and this includes people of every class and station. In Christianity also all alike must behave according to the purposes of God. But Buddhism is distinctive in that it has two levels of attainment, the ordinary level or the mundane level - *lokiyadhamma* (โลกิยธรรม), which all other religions have, and the supermundane level, *lokuttaradhamma* (โลกุตตรธรรม). In the latter, Buddha teaches one to see the cause of suffering and to understand the way to extinguish it."

Actually, the answer is not strictly correct. However, he means that the elementary teachings of Buddhism are like those in other religions, but in *lokuttaradhamma* (โลกุตตรธรรม), the object is to stop the cycle of rebirths which is responsible for suffering and to do so in such a way that it cannot be revived - and that only Lord Buddha has this teaching. This doctrine is to be found in no other religion, neither Christianity nor Islam, nor Hinduism. It is to be found in only one religion, Buddhism. This *lokuttaradhamma* (โลกุตตรธรรม) is based on the four Noble Truths, *ariya-sacca* (อริยสัจ 4).

This view is representative of all Buddhists everywhere who feel that of all the religions in the world Buddhism is the most profound. When Buddhists have this kind of pride in their own religion how can Christians teach them anything? When they hear what Christians have to say, they feel that they know already that there is nothing to be found in Christianity which can compare with the doctrines of *lokuttaradhamma* (โลกุตตรธรรม). Therefore, there is on their part no inclination to become Christians. It is imperative, therefore, that Christians present the very best that Christianity has to offer and let Thai people know about it. In communicating the gospel, whether by means of books or radio or television, or in preaching, teaching, or conversation, it is necessary that we begin with the profound in the Christian faith. Traditionally, we have begun on the lowest plane, with *lokiyadhamma* (โลกิยธรรม), because we try to make Christianity easy enough for people to receive it. In this we are trying to follow Jesus, who though he was with God, stepped down to be born as a man. This is right, that we should try to accommodate ourselves to people. But let us not forget to tell them the highest. Though Jesus Christ came down to our level, he taught us about God - he brought us the highest. As long as we teach only the outer shell of the truth and not its central core, Christianity will continually be regarded with disdain by those who hear it. I am very greatly concerned about this. It is high time that we did something about giving Christianity's most profound teachings to the Thai people.

We may ask if the Christian faith has any such teaching. The answer is most emphatically yes, but few Christians understand that there is anything in their faith which is on the level of profundity of *lokuttaradhamma*. And still fewer can interpret it so that others understand. Most preachers only moralize, teach the ten commandments - don't do this and you ought to do that. This is very elementary. In the book of Hebrews we are told that repentance, the new birth and faith are but the beginning and the author admonishes his readers to leave these elementary doctrines and go on to higher things - to what it means to be crucified with Christ, to dying with him, and to all that the new life in Christ involves. It is not easy to explain, especially for missionaries for whom language is a problem in explaining anything of depth. *Dhamma* language has two levels and if we use the lower level to explain the higher, it will turn into something ordinary and commonplace. But this is only introductory. The subject of this lecture is *Karma* (กรรม).

Karma is a principle which is very important for us who are Christians because this is a word which every class and condition of people understand, and it is a subject which is predominant in Thailand. There are hundreds and hundreds of books about it and it is the outstanding theme of Buddhism. We might say that it is basic in Buddhism, though we scarcely find it at all in other religions. In Buddhism it is believed that everything is born and is extinguished according to the power of *karma*, and that we need not have anything to do with God. One writer says that the hand of God cannot reach down into the affairs of those who believe in *karma*. One is good or evil according to the power of *karma*. We should study *karma* as thoroughly as possible. It is a word which is on everybody's lips; everybody can talk about *karma*, but few people have thought deeply about it.

In the Thai language there are many words which, like this one, mean action or deeds (กรรมกระทำ) and most of them come from the word กิ. For example, serving the Lord's Supper is called บริกั. Service is called บริการ, which means "to facilitate." The *karn* (การ) in this word comes from the same stem as *karma* (กรรม) which means "doing." So, the word *karma* (กรรม) means deed or action which is followed by consequence, or action and reaction (กิริยา and ปฏิกิริยา). *Karma* then is action; it may be good, bad, or morally neutral, but it brings about a reaction. In Buddhism there are twelve major delineations of *karma* and they are divided into three groups of four each. The first concerns the maturation date of *karma*. It may be in the present, in the next life, in succeeding future incarnations or it may be nullified or inactivated - *ahosi-kamma* (อโหสิกรรม). Suppose, for example, one should be tried at court and receive two sentences, the second worse than the first as in the case of striking another person and then killing him. One would not be

sentenced for striking the man, but for killing him. The first sentence would be inactivated by the second because it has been superseded by the greater sentence which followed it. It is *ahosi-kamma*.

According to this scheme it is something like planting fruit trees; some will produce quickly, some take many years and some are *ahosi-kamma* – we never can use the fruit.

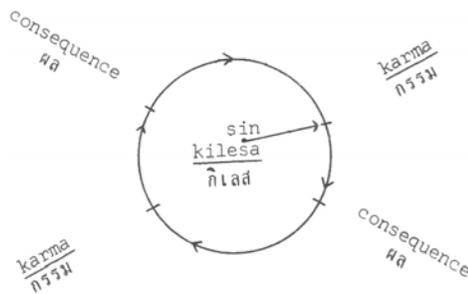
The second delineation concerns the major duties of *karma*. It causes to be born (ให้มาเกิด), or reinforces (ส่งเสริม), or acts as a barrier (ขัดขวาง) or reverses (ดีดร้อน).

First, *karma* causes to be born. Put this way it sounds rather bland, but in the original Pali it is expressed by use of the term, father: *karma* is the father of birth.

In Buddhist belief, if one dies young, it is because in a former life he has killed many animals. A newspaper account of the nine who were killed recently in Prachuab Province explained it by saying that it was the result of *karma*. These people had killed many animals in a former life and now were getting their just deserts. They themselves were killed in early life.

Those who are sickly are thought to have tortured animals in a former existence. Those who have been butchers moo like a cow when they are nearing death. Ugly skin is caused by anger, grudges, revenge and ill-will.

If one has no position or prestige it is because in a former life he was jealous and could not bear to see others advance. The poverty-stricken are in this condition because they were penurious and would not use their money to make merit. People born in a low-class family, the ignorant, did not study or have inquisitive minds. Buddhists place great stress on these beliefs. It is almost like God handing out rewards and punishments. From these beliefs comes the well-known and oft-quoted proverb, “Do good, receive good; do evil, receive evil” (ทำดีได้ดี ทำชั่วได้ชั่ว). Therefore, reward or punishment result from our own doing. There is no need for God to have anything to do with it because the principle of *karma* will produce the consequences. So, when we hear people say, “*Karma* will take care of it” (กรรมมันให้ผล), we see what is meant. The *karma* which “takes care of it” now will come to fruition in the next life. When we talk about God’s forgiveness or reconciliation, this “reconciliation,” or coming to terms of *karma*, all but takes the place of God and, in Buddhist understanding, renders God unnecessary. We were born because *karma* sent us into the world. The first cause of rebirth is sin. The desire to sin arose in us, we did it, it set *karma* in motion. Whether much or little, it brings consequences of which there are three parts: sin (*kilesa*-กิเลส), *karma* (กรรม), consequence (ผล). These three together form a circle, or a cycle called *wanda* (วัฏ).



If we are not to be reborn, we must sever ourselves from *kilesa* (กิเลส) and this is what it means to go to *Nibbana* (นิพพาน). It is because of *kilesa* that *karma* sends us back to be reborn. This *kilesa* we can also call *avijja*, for ignorance is one kind of sin. *Tanha* (ตัณหา) is *kilesa* also and causes rebirth. Therefore, when Christians teach that God created man, this makes God into *kilesa*.

A second duty of *karma* is to give reinforcement. If one does good, *karma* makes it better. If one does evil, *karma* makes it worse.

Karma may also serve as a barrier. For example, suppose someone is born with a strong, healthy body, but then *karma* causes him to become a cripple. This is called *karma* three (กัรรวม 3). It also may work in the opposite way. One who is born wealthy becomes even wealthier because of *karma*.

A fourth duty is to make one become the exact opposite of what he was at birth, to reverse what has come about - as if the back of the hand had become the palm of the hand.

The third delineation has to do with nature of consequences which may be heavy or light.

Suppose three wrongs are committed, one heavy, one medium and one light. The worst wrong receives a recompense first. It is as if three men were walking and the one who walks fastest arrives first. The one who commits the worst sin will receive his sentence first. Another kind of sin is that which is accumulated, little by little over a long period but is so frequently done that it becomes a habit. This kind of sin will receive its recompense second. *Karma*, which is completed before one dies will be third. Last of all will be the *karma* which was unintentionally done. Buddhists compare it with a buffalo pen. The old buffalo near the door will come out first when the door is opened. Villagers say, "We are born of *karma*" (มนุษย์เรามีกรรมเป็นกำเนิด) or "*karma* is the one who fathers us." This is on the tip of every tongue. Lord Buddha had a saying, "Men and beasts exist by the power of *karma*" (มนุษย์และสัตว์เป็นไปตามอำนาจของกรรม) or are under the power of *karma*. Another saying is, "Fortune and misfortune are ordained by *karma*" (โชคดีหรือโชคร้ายกรรมบันดาล). Another is, "*Karma* disposes" (กรรมบันดาล). We must explain that *karma* cannot bring anyone to birth.

Sometimes, however, it is recognized that one who does evil receives good (ทำชั่วได้ดี). Sometime ago this Buddhist-teaching-in-reverse appeared as a slogan on the city buses. The bus companies were using this means of expressing their opposition to certain government policies considered detrimental to their interests. They claimed that they try to "do good, but receive evil" while government employees do not do good, but get wealthy.

Buddhists recognize the problem, but have a way to explain it. Ask them and they will say that in a former life we produced good *karma*, but it is not yet time for it to come to fruition in this life, while the evil we did in a former life is now bringing fruit.

Although we may have done much good in a former existence, they say, we are now receiving a recompense because the evil of a former life is bringing fruit.

In witnessing to people who have this belief about it, we must, by all means ask what is the meaning of the word *karma* (กัรรวม) and let them answer. It means doing. Then we must make it clear that there must be an agent of the doing. The person who does the act must be above the act, but Buddha places the act above the person. If *karma* causes to be reborn and *karma* is an act, who is the one who produced the *karma* which causes rebirth? If they are willing to admit that *karma* must have someone to do it before it can be, then we can make it clear that doing alone, without an agent of the doing, cannot cause rebirth. There are many minute details of the subject which we cannot take up here, but let us look at it in the context of the subject of creation.

The problem is, does Christianity teach *karma*? I have heard ministers deny it and say that Christianity has no such teaching. But I usually say that *karma* is a fundamental principle of God in creating the world. If we deny *karma* there is no salvation possible. If one does good, he will be rewarded. If you commit murder, the police will arrest you and put you in jail. If you are good you will go to heaven. This is *karma*. If one works well, his salary will be increased; if not, there are suitable consequences - reduced salary or being fired. This is *karma*. But will one's salary in fact be increased for hard work? In Christianity we believe that though God uses *karma*, he is above *karma*. We men concentrate on *karma* or the deed itself, because we cannot see any farther than this. But God, though he

considers *karma*, determines the outcome on the basis of righteousness, which is deeper than *karma*. That is, *karma* can be deceptive - such as in those who do good, but not out of an honest heart, or those who seem evil but are really good. But in his administration of the world, God takes into account justice and righteousness also, for he is able to tell whether good *karma* comes from pure or dishonest motives. Though God rules the world by *karma*, yet he is above *karma*. And sometimes he waives the rules but he always follows the truth in his decisions.

Actually, we love what turns out right but what turns out wrong, we will not accept. There was a priest who was a bookmaker on the state lottery. Every seven days people would consult him to ask the winning number. If he were wrong the buyer would say, "I really haven't any luck" - meaning no "merit." He would not blame the priest but he would blame himself. But if the priest were right he would say, "This priest is really good; he is always right." Those who teach *karma* accept only the good *karma* but not the bad. And those who are Buddhists do not blame Buddha; they blame themselves when they are down on their luck. It is just the opposite among Christians. When a Christian gets sick, he points to God, though actually he himself may be at fault. We claim that good fortune is due to our ability and cleverness, but when misfortune comes, we blame God. God bears the burden of our sins in every area of life!

So Buddhism and Christianity differ on the subject of *karma*. Failure and wrong do not rest upon the doer in Buddhism, but in Christianity, wrong is the responsibility of the one who commits it. All the way from Jesus Christ to the minister, everyone has responsibility for his own actions.

Today we have looked only at the major teaching about *karma* for we cannot look at the fine points in this brief study. But there are many stories about *karma*. One is about a Chinese man whose business was to cook and sell mussels. He cooked them in a large receptacle, and then he dipped them out for his customers. He did this every day until the pot was half-full of boiling liquid (we don't know whether he ever washed the pot or not). One day, unexpectedly, he fell into the pot. It was *karma's* recompense for cooking the mussels.

There is another one which someone told me from his own experience. He decided one day to have some fun by striking a match to a red ant nest. When he struck the match it dropped on his trousers leg and he was badly burned. There are many such stories about *karma* and its consequences.

Christians talk a great deal about the will of God - "Let God's will be done" - but when I was a new Christian, I thoroughly disliked this phrase because I could not see that God was coming into our lives and doing anything. I could only see that if we did wrong we were punished accordingly and if we did what was right, we were rewarded. I could not see God in it at all. When we talk about God's will and leaving things to him, Buddhists laugh at us and new Christians do not believe in it either. They still secretly believe in *karma*. How can we teach them to believe in God? Actually, if our teaching is only doctrinal and academic, it is not effective. Only experience will convince that God does bless and that he does judge and Christians who have had the experience do not need to be taught. Their experience will enable them to see God at work in their lives and whenever they are doing wrong, at the very least, they have a bad conscience about it - which is a part of the judgment. When we do wrong, perhaps no one else will know except ourselves and God, but we are strangely uncomfortable about it. We know that God sees and he can punish. Only experience can teach us this. When God blesses, we are also aware of it. When Christians sin, they know that it is a sin against God. Some, when they hear this, ask, but has God not redeemed us? Does he still judge? We must make it clearly understood that there are two levels on which our sins are dealt with, that God deals with us both in the present and in the future.

VIII. SIN AND SALVATION

The question has sometimes been asked, “For what is man born according to Buddhism?” Buddhadasa has answered the question in this way: “Man has life in order to struggle, to wrest himself free of the trap of suffering in which he is caught, by destroying the god who created him. His goal is to escape from the hand of his maker, or from the great heap of suffering which is the product of *avijja* (อวิชชา). This salvation is called *vimutti* (วิมุตติ). It is release from being fettered to a state in which there are no such fetters and nothing at all that is binding.”²⁴ This is a powerful answer. Let us consider it.

In the use of the word “god” here the author departs from its original meaning in Buddhism and when he speaks of “salvation” he speaks more of liberation from suffering than from sin. In answer to the Christian’s question, “What does Buddhism teach about God?”²⁵ he replied that God is *avijja* or sin. So, his teaching is that we are born through the power of sin – of God – and when thus born, our goal is to be free from the hand of God or from the fetters which God has placed upon us. He really denounces God! I wonder if he knows much about God. He thinks God is responsible for all suffering. He says, “If God created, he had to create both good and evil, including Satan. Suffering, trouble, disease, God created. And, if God created all of these, he is not as good as Christians believe. He is more like *avijja*.” Therefore, one must free himself from the power of God and this freedom is called *vimutti* (วิมุตติ).

Vimutti is really a beautiful Pali word which means to “liberate” or to “set free,” and if I understand it correctly, Christians may use the word to refer to salvation.

In Buddhism, one is set free when he performs *vipassana* (วิปัสสนา). When one has been completely freed, when he has completed *vipassana* (วิปัสสนา) and fully understands the Four Noble Truths (อริยสัจ 4) or suffering, the cause of suffering, the extinguishing of suffering and the way to extinguish suffering, he is *vimutti* (วิมุตติ). It is similar to the Christian’s release from the power of sin by the mighty power of God. Sin is the fetter that binds us. When we speak of sin – and this is often the subject of preaching, and Christians are always talking about it, for the New Testament says that all have sinned - we must consider Thai feeling. Most Thais cannot accept the Christian explanation because they do not define sin in the same way that we do. We say that everyone is sinful but they do not believe it because in Buddhist thought sin is an evil deed or an evil act. According to the understanding of villagers to whom we may witness, sin is evil and appears in the form of overt activity; it is something we do with our hands; or it comes out in speech or in dishonest dealings and corrupt practices, in *tucharit* (ทุจริต). This word which is used for dishonesty really means evil action. *Tuch* (ทุ) means evil; *charit* (จริต) means action. There are three kinds of *tucharit* in common understanding. Evil physical action is called *kai tucharit* (กายทุจริต); evil speech is called *wachi tucharit* (วาจทุจริต); evil in the heart is called *mano tuchrit* (มโนทุจริต) But in Christian thought sin is not just action. An evil act, for us, is not so much sin as the result of sin in the heart. The agent of sin no one has ever seen, for actually it has no form (ไม่มีตัวตน) but if Christians speak of sin as an overt act of sin – sinful speech, a sinful heart – we have to explain what we mean. When we sin with our lips, it is not our lips that are sinful, but the action stems from something deep within us. When we have evil thoughts it is not that the physical organ, the heart, is evil, but that evil expresses itself through the medium of our physical bodies. Buddhists, villagers especially, believe that sin has two avenues of expression, the body and the heart, although if it is only in the heart, they do not count it as sin and it does not carry a penalty. It is punishable only when it becomes an overt act. If we will sit down and explain this to people, it will change their whole outlook on it. Most villagers, when they hear that the Christian Scriptures declare that “all have sinned” immediately counter, “That is not true.” They

are in opposition because their view of what sin is differs from ours. When the word sin is mentioned, they think immediately of prison or lawbreaking, and most people will think, “Never in my life have I broken the law.” It is on the basis of law that it is determined whether one is a sinner or not. Or if one has done more wrong than right he is considered a sinner. Or a sinner is one who is habitually evil in speech or action; he is a liar or he seems to have the vocation of doing what is wrong, or he makes it his business to be deceptive. One who has an evil job such as butchering is considered sinful. The principle underlying these opinions is the Buddhist idea that there is no such thing as a sinner but only a person who commits sin.

In the Christian faith “all have sinned” really carries a double meaning. One is original sin; the other is acts of sin which we commit. Both of these arise from within, from our relationship or lack of relationship with God, from our heritage as human beings. But according to Buddhism, a child is born pure – “as white as cloth” they say. When the child grows up he will sin and when he does he becomes “a person with sin” (คนมีบาป). But we must explain the difference between being a sinner and being “a person with sin.”

Sin in Buddhism is what causes rebirth. The specialists in Buddhism talk about “former sin” (บาปดั้งเดิม) but most villagers do not understand it and do not think like the specialists. They do not think about where we came from. However, if we use the phrase “sin which was from the beginning” (บาปตั้งแต่เดิม) they will understand it and accept it. They will acknowledge the fact that we have sin clinging to us from the beginning.

In their understanding of this question Buddhists do not all share the same level of sophistication. Some will say simply that an infant is born sinless and sins only when he is older. But leaders of Buddhism will say that men are born out of sin. We have to see where our hearers stand on the question. However, there is no doctrine on which all Buddhists agree. Even more than among Christians, there is a great divergence of opinion. Perhaps if doctrine were held with the consummate seriousness that Christians attach to it, Buddhists would be separated into many different sects as well.

The Buddhist way of correcting sin is through the *sila* (ศีล) which acts like a cleanser. Like white cloth which has been soiled, when we would restore its original whiteness, we use the *sila* as a cleansing agent. The *sila*, of course, are the five prohibitions – do not kill animals, do not steal, do not commit adultery, do not prevaricate, do not drink alcohol. Then there are five *dhamma* (ธรรม) which are like dye. The *sila* cleanses and the *dhamma* dyes the cloth a new color. The *sila* prohibits sin and the *dhamma* teaches what is right. If we would be free from sin we must keep the prohibitions as a first step and do what is right as a second. But the standard of goodness accepted by most Buddhists is amazingly different from the Christian standard. Villagers believe that the good man is one who has never done an evil deed, has never served a jail sentence, has never committed a crime. Others say that one who is simply inoffensive is a good man. I do not agree and have sometimes used the following analogy in stating my position. Suppose we have two glasses, one of them filled with contaminated water, one filled with pure water. When the contaminated water is poured out, is the glass useful? It is empty; when we are thirsty, it offers nothing to us. If it is to be of use to us it must be filled with pure water. Men become good only when they do something useful with their lives, not when they simply exist inoffensively.

Many outsiders think that entering the priesthood will make one sinless, that priests are more than ordinary men and in their hearts there is only good. But they have never been in the priesthood and do not know what those who have experienced it know. I know from experience that when one is initiated into the priesthood he does not feel himself to be sinless. In his heart he is just like ordinary men. True, in the monastery there are 227 rules to be kept and the new priest, especially, lives in fear that he will break one of them. But these rules are only a fence built around him which prevents him from acts of sin. The rules do not affect the desire to sin except perhaps to drive it inward where it may really be more damaging. Priests are very different from ordinary people who can express themselves freely and do not have to bottle up their inclinations inside themselves.

How is sin to be corrected? One person answered the question by saying, “It is not necessary to do good, but refrain from evil” (ทำดีไม่ได้ดี แต่อย่าทำชั่ว). True Buddhism teaches to do good but most people think it is enough not to do any harm. Thai society is satisfied with this much, or if one does more right than wrong he is considered good. If the merit one makes outweighs the harm he does he can be considered good. But how is it in Christianity? Even if the two are equal it is insufficient and the person cannot be considered good. It is very important to understand that the standard of righteousness in the Christian religion is perfection, as Christ was perfect. One must be altogether perfect; 99.9% righteous will not do. Of course, there is no one on this level, therefore no one can be considered righteous and no one on his own can climb to heaven.

If we would ask why people cannot do good even though Buddhism teaches them to do so, we may answer that it is because Buddhism does not teach how to eliminate the sin that is already present in one’s life. The priest living under rule in the temple does not drink but the desire to do so may not have been conquered; he does not steal but he may still covet; he does not commit adultery but the inclination to do so may not have been eliminated. In Christian belief sin is corrected by a radical change of race. Instead of being of the stock of Adam we are given the family of Christ, the very life of God himself. When this new life begins to develop in us it will gradually unfold and we will grow up toward a mature life. Therefore, in the Christian way there is not so much emphasis on individual acts of goodness, although real Christians can often outdo others in virtuous living.

We must acknowledge that Christians and churches in Thailand are very weak, yet no matter where one looks in society morality among Christians is considerably higher than the ordinary. Why? Because Jesus Christ changes the nature of the heart. This is not simply a method for alleviating sin, like a sedative given for a tension headache – which reappears when the sedative has worn off because the headache has not been cured but only temporarily relieved. The correct treatment for illness is not to treat the symptoms but to eliminate the cause of the illness. It is this that Jesus Christ does with regard to sin. Of these two cures, if one wants to know which is best, it does no good to sit down and compare the tablets and argue about them. The important thing to ask is, which one, when believed in, really delivers from sin. And in the church we have an exhibit which others will observe in trying to find an answer to the question.

In the church where I am pastor I think that if any Christian did lapse the whole village would rise up against it. So far, the church has kept its good name for which we are grateful to God. There are some rumors, it is true, but for the most part these Christians adhere to a high standard of moral living. If any Christian falls outsiders will say, “He is a pseudo-Christian”, for they are convinced that if anyone is a real Christian this will not happen.

Let us consider some important Buddhist teachings about sin and how to deal with it:

79. “Evil is done by self alone, by self alone is one stained; by self alone is evil undone, by self alone is one purified. Purity and impurity depend on one’s own self. No man can purify another.”²⁶ This is considered one of the loftiest teachings of Buddha. It is certainly a very important one and people often refer to it in the firm belief that no one can help another to be pure. But is it true? If so, why teach anything? Why have schools? Why preach? Why evangelize? It is true that we cannot remove another’s sin as a doctor performs an operation but we can influence others. A father whose life is lived in integrity can help his son toward clean and wholesome living. If we are morally upright our environment and our neighbors will be affected. If we teach others the way of righteousness and peace it will be of benefit to them. If we are always quarreling at home it will adversely affect our children and they may follow our example. Whether we like it or not we have a share in changing the lives of others for better or for worse. In the Thai language we have a proverb, “One rotten fish in a trap spoils the whole catch” (ปลาช้องเดียวกัน ถ้าหมื่นสักตัวก็หมื่นหมด) but it does not coincide with Buddha’s teaching.

80. A second principle of Buddhism is that we are purified by wisdom (คนเราประพาศได้ด้วยปัญญา). But we must ask how this can be, for criminals are not all ignorant and stupid and some of the best educated and most intelligent are also the most dangerous to society. It does not seem that they are purified by wisdom.

81. Another firmly held belief is that there is no sin in those who do not sin (บาปไม่มีแก่ผู้ไม่กระทำบาป). This is often said by Buddhists who are knowledgeable. They compare it to one whose hands have no open wounds. If placed in poison the poison has no way to enter the body. So, if we do not sin, sin has no means of entry into our lives. In response, Christians have to explain that sin already lurks within our lives so that what we do is not so much sin as the result of sin.

82. Again, it is thought that sin which has already been committed cannot be altered. Whatever we sow we reap. But Christianity teaches that, above all things there is God; there is a power above sin which can change it. There is nothing which God cannot transform and he does this because of his love. The change may not nullify the consequences but it can transform the person. These who are called *sammana* (สัมณะ), that is the bikkhus who have suppressed sin, are supposedly at peace, but their sin has only been quieted; the germ of it has not been killed. When we are not at war we are also not necessarily at peace; the point at issue is not necessarily resolved. We can be at peace only when there is no issue in our hearts to be resolved. If there is sin in our hearts and it has not yet been overcome, we are not yet *sammana* (สัมณะ).

83. There are five “mortal” sins: murdering a father, murdering a mother, murdering an *arahant*, blaspheming Lord Buddha, and causing divisions in the priesthood so that priests are unable to join in the same rites and observances. In Buddhism it is held that those who have committed these sins cannot attain *Nibbana*.

The Christian firmly believes that salvation from sin is possible through the love of Christ. Buddhists say, however, that the love of Buddha is equally as great. Though “love” is considered sin and forbidden in Buddhism, the term employed here is mercy, *metta* (เมตตา). It is this, Buddhists claim, that supports the world and it includes all that Christians know of love and more. Lord Buddha is described as having four sublime attributes, the *brahma-vihara* (พรหมวิหาร) – he is like Brahma in showing mercy in every direction; he had *metta* (เมตตา), *karuna* (กรุณา), *mudita* (มุทิตา) and *upekha* (อุเบกขา) mercy, kindness, joy and equanimity. These qualities are also the *dhmma* requirements for those in authority such as rulers and parents but they are considered too lofty for ordinary people to reach. In Christianity, on the other hand, the love of God is boundless, “deep and wide” as the chorus has it. No one who hopes in him is finally to be excluded from his presence and every Christian’s first duty is to love.

In presenting this, however, we should choose our words very carefully. Several years ago at a teachers’ convention held by the Ministry of Education, representatives of all religious bodies in Thailand were asked to present the highest doctrine of their respective faiths. Roman Catholics, Protestants, Muslims and Buddhists were all present. One Catholic priest rose and said that the highest teaching in Christianity is love and he quoted, “For God so loved the world...”; the Protestant representative then said that he had nothing to add. Finally, when the Buddhist spoke, he said that Buddhism teaches one to sever all love, all hate, to sweep the heart clean so that it is above love and hate, and this teaching is highest in Buddhism. The words of the Christian were pale by comparison and, in the understanding of those present, they were clearly inferior. But this was because the term “love” was used improperly. It is not wrong in the context of biblical faith but it is wrong in the context of Thai life. Children would understand that love is something good but those closer to the *dhmma* would not be willing to admit that it is. There is a teaching of Lord Buddha, “Wherever there is love, there is suffering; danger is born of love. Love is the spring of suffering and sorrow.” Put this way, God is then guilty of sin, for he suffers. Actually, it is true that where there is love there is suffering. We see it clearly in the sufferings of Christ which resulted from his love for men. But the love of God is not the kind of love to which he is enslaved; as strong as it is, God is in control of it. His love is

free and unnecessitated. On the contrary, the love referred to in Buddhism means love which possesses and enslaves and it is seen as sinful. If we would speak of the love of God it is possible to use the term love, but it must be explained. To use the single term in a public meeting is unwise. One should use the term *metta* (เมตตา) if there is no opportunity for explanation or if our hearers are not Christians.

The word *metta* (เมตตา) as used in Buddhism is almost a holy word; it means love that is unadulterated by impure motives and though it can be used to express the love of parents for children, it is not generally so used. Even parental love can be corrupted and may become sinful. According to Buddhism, this love, like all others, should be severed if we are to advance to a high level of spiritual attainment. Lord Buddha separated himself from property, wife, and sin, and consequently Buddhism teaches that possessions, wife, and children are like a noose around the neck. The noose, of course, is the love which binds us. It is attachment, and therefore, sin which we should sacrifice. But when we speak of love which is *metta* (เมตตา), it is really compassion or pity; perhaps it could be called beneficence or grace. In our families, of course, we freely use the word love and we really care about it but as Christians we must be careful about using the word in public where people may easily misunderstand. As soon as they hear the word love they take it up immediately.

Advice given to old people is always that they must sever their ties of love and affection. My grandmother, for example, is eighty years old and she still loves her children and grandchildren very much. She also likes to take care of other children and really does not like to be alone. Her relatives tell her that she must cut her ties of affection now and that she must not worry about her children and grandchildren. She replies that she is all right, we need not worry about her for she is prepared to relinquish us and she is ready to die; her ties are cut. But the last time I saw her she wept as I left saying through her tears that her ties were severed. Buddhism teaches that this is what one should do.

IX. HEAVEN OR NIBBANA?

What is *Nibbana*? Buddhist teaching characterizes it in five ways. It is freedom from *tanha* (ตัณหา); freedom from anxiety, grasping, old age, and death; freedom from all physical distress; freedom from rebirth, correction, and *avijja* (อวิชชา); and freedom from *raga* (ราคะ), *dosa* (โทสะ), and *moha* (โมหะ). Let us now consider these five characteristics against the background of New Testament teaching about eternal life.

Freedom from *tanha* (ตัณหา) means that one has separated himself from all grasping or craving of which there are three major varieties: sexual desire (กามตัณหา), personal ambition (ภวตัณหา), and hopelessness (นิภวตัณหา). To have conquered all three is to attain *Nibbana* (นิพพาน), for these three are the root cause of sin. The New Testament also has something to say about these sins but in the Christian faith these three forms of *tanha* (ตัณหา) are not considered our primary trouble. Our primary *tanha* is our sinful human nature which must, by God's power, be overcome. In the life of the Christian inordinate *tanha* must be extinguished as much as in the life of the Buddhist, but it cannot be done as a human attainment. It occurs only as God is at work in us to nullify its power.

Note that *Nibbana* (นิพพาน) is not described as a place, but as a state of being. It is characteristic of this state to be free from anxiety. One does not worry about life. One does not love self or anything else; one loses all desire, all material concern; one does not care for life, for power, for position or reputation. The heart is free.

There is no grasping because one has come to the moment of truth. He sees at last that nothing has substantial reality, nothing is worthy of being grasped. One who is fond of his own image, his graceful figure, his fine facial features, has not yet understood this impermanence. Some people are distressed at aging and grasp tenaciously at their youth. But in *Nibbana* we shall not age or die. Why? Because, there is nothing to age or die. To be in *Nibbana* (นิพพาน) is to be extinguished. It would be well to read Galatians 5 in connection with this point, particularly verse 24 where Paul says, "And those who belong to Christ Jesus have crucified the flesh with its passions and desires" (RSV). If we are in the Spirit, we will not grasp at the finite as if it were of eternal worth. We are God's and therefore, grasping vanishes, the power of the flesh disappears. Real Christians who believe in God trust things to him. It is not that they are irresponsible or unconcerned. As Christians, we both take responsibility and put ourselves into our work, but we are not unduly anxious, remembering that Jesus said, "Do not be anxious about your life," and "Which of you by being anxious can add one cubit to his span of life?". We do not, therefore, need to live in fear and anxiety. And *Nibbana* is free from death? Well, this is the way Christians have been from the very beginning.

In *Nibbana*, it is said, the whole body will be at peace; there will be freedom from all physical distress. Nothing in our lives will still be in turmoil and anxiety. Whatever anxiety we have had will be extinguished. Beauties we have seen that delighted us, harmonies that we have heard, fragrances we have enjoyed, flavors we have loved - this curry or that of which we have been fond - all have lost their power over us. If there is a person who is not a slave of appetite, who will eat anything without complaint, he is considered a good Buddhist; this is how Lord Buddha taught his followers to be. Priests, he said, must be satisfied to eat anything put before them, not blanching at anything. They were not to live to eat, but to serve the *dhamma*. So, any feeling about anything must lose its power over us. We will not be perturbed about money nor exhaust ourselves in pursuit of it. Some who crave beauty will pay large sums and ride long distances to see something beautiful only to find that the peace it brings is fleeting. Time and money and energy must be expended but anxiety is not thereby diminished. If material things have lost their power over us, however, we can no longer be enslaved by them.

It is also characteristic of *Nibbana* (นิพพาน) that there is no birth, no re-creating, no correction, for there is nothing to be reborn or corrected. The cause of all this, *avijja* or *tanha*, has “gone out” like a light. Attachment has been terminated, and when the cause has been extinguished there is no possibility of rebirth. *Raga* (ราคะ), *dosa* (โทสะ), and *moha* (โมหะ), the three greatest sins in Buddhism, sometimes called the three bonfires, have been conquered. *Raga* (ราคะ) is passion; *dosa* (โทสะ) is anger; and *moha* (โมหะ) is delusion – the product of *avijja*. These three fires must be extinguished and when this has been done, one has attained *Nibbana*.

In Buddhism, one who performs the Dhamma to completion is called a Noble One, *ariya-puggala* (อริยบุคคล). It may be said that a Christian *ariya-puggala* is one who is no longer enslaved by the flesh but who lives by the Spirit of God. Buddhism, however, outlines four stages of attainment on the way to liberation:

84. *Sotapanna* (โสดาบันน์), Stream-winner, is the first stage, for one now has a vision of *Nibbana* and is free from the first three of the Ten Fetters. That is, he is not self-concerned. It is not that he does not think whether he is sad or happy, lowly or great, but that he does not consider himself to have reality. He is free from belief in a permanent self. And he is no longer doubtful about which way to turn in life. His path is sure; he stands firm. He does not doubt that the proper direction for life is forward on the road to liberation. (In Buddhism there are many such people just as there are in Christianity). Moreover, a *sotapanna* (โสดาบันน์) does not believe in astrology, in sacred articles or lucky omens.

Is it possible to bring these three characteristics over into our Christian situation? The first, of course, we cannot. The Christian cannot see himself as having no reality; but he can see that flesh is impermanent, finite and, therefore, of lesser significance, though there is an inner self which is permanent and will endure. Not only so, but the Christian also lives with assurance and certainty, free from wavering and wondering. And he puts no trust in charms and omens.

85. *Sakadagamin* (สกทาคามี), Once-returner, is the second stage of attainment, but by this time the three great sins of *raga* (ราคะ), *dosa* (โทสะ), and *moha* (โมหะ) are decreasing. Some trace of them remains, but their power is broken.

86. *Anagamin* (อนาคามี), Never-returner, is the third stage and such a person is utterly free from the first five fetters.

87. *Arahant* (อรหันต์) is the final stage on the road to liberation. There are five additional items from which an *arahant* must be free: the love of form, the love of the formless (peace, *dhamma*, praise), selfish conceit, credulousness and fantasy, and *avijja*.

Release from these fetters must be taken in order. The last five cannot be overcome first, for they are considered to be *moha* (โมหะ), delusion, and they are produced by *avijja* which is the last enemy to be subdued. In *Nibbana*, one will not thirst, for he has arrived at the truth. There is nothing that he desires. There is no want left, and no hunger. All that has had power over one is now powerless.

Nibbana means a state which is beyond comparison, though there are two interpretations of the word. One is that it is a state beyond penetration. The second is that it is the state in which *avijja*, *tanha*, *upatan*, and *kilesa* are all annihilated, extinguished, so that they cannot arise again.

And there are two major views of *Nibbana*. According to one, sin is done away but life remains; that is, an *arahant* who has extinguished sin is called *kilesa-nibbana* (*nibbana* being used as a verb to mean “extinguish”). The other view is that both life and *kilesa* (กิเลส) have been extinguished. There is great divergence of opinion among Buddhists on this point. Some deny the possibility of *Nibbana* while still having life. They claim that the first of the two refers only to the first three stages of attainment on the way to becoming an *ariya-puggala*, and not to the fourth, the *arahant*.

There are three views concerning the state of the *vimana* (วิมฏาน) in *Nibbana* (นิพพาน):

88. The *vinnana* (วิญญาณ) is present but does not suffer rebirth, age, pain and death. This can be compared to eternal life in the Christian faith, but it is not really consistent with Buddhist doctrine of *anatta* (อนัตตา) – no soul. This view can then be considered *miccha-ditthi* (มิจฉาทิถุ์) or heterodox. The view itself is called *sankahta-ditthi* (สังคตติถุ์) and the term may also be used of eternal life in the Christian religion. Lord Buddha said that this was incorrect though many Buddhists persist in interpreting *Nibbana* in this way.

89. The second view is that in *Nibbana* everything disappears; nothing at all remains. It is often claimed that this is what Lord Buddha taught, that *Nibbana* is absolute emptiness. But this cannot be maintained because one teaching of Buddha is that if we believe nothing remains it is called *ucceda-ditthi* (อุจเฉทติถุ์), the annihilation view, which Lord Buddha also attacked as misguided.

90. The third view is that the state of the *vinnana* (วิญญาณ) after death is like a seed that is planted. It seems to disappear but presently a new tree grows up. This latter explanation approximates eternal life of the Christian faith. Certainly the two views, that something remains and that nothing remains, cannot be held together. Probably the correct view of *Nibbana* is somewhere between the two – the *vinnana* does not evaporate, but it does remain. How? It changes form. In fact, however, Buddhist leaders cannot explain it.

Recently I went to speak to a group of about seventy young people, most of them non-Christians. They asked me to explain the difference between *Nibbana* and eternal life. I replied that I could say something about eternal life a life that will not be reborn, age, suffer and die, a life at peace with God throughout eternity. But if I were to attempt to explain *Nibbana* I would find it very difficult because there is no Buddhist scholar in Thailand who can give an exact definition. In the three opinions mentioned above there is no common denominator that all can agree upon as correct. Some say that the *vinnana* disappears, but when they have heard the Christian teaching, they tend to adapt their teaching to it. In fact, Lord Buddha's teachings about it seem rather contradictory. First he taught that the *vinnana* would disappear, and then he said “นิพพานังปรมังสุขัง” *Nibbana* is the greatest peace How can there be peace if there is nothing left to experience it? No doubt, this question is the reason for the divergence of opinion. Scholars are unable to explain how there can be peace if there is no instrument of peace.

Not only the second view, but the first also is a problem. Actually the two vie for the distinction of being the most heterodox.

The third is somewhat more appealing but it is still so ambiguous that little explanation of it has been made, and as one of the newer views, it has not found wide acceptance. It bears some similarities, however, to the Christian view of eternal life.

Nibbana is a state, not a place. It is not located on the moon or on Mars, Venus, or Jupiter. It is a state which is uncreated but already existing. Sometimes it is asked by what way one must go to *Nibbana*. The answer is by the Noble Eightfold Path, the *Maak Paat* (มรรค 8) of which *maak* (or in Pali, *maggā*) means “way.” That is to say, one travels toward *Nibbana* by keeping the prohibitions, the *sila* (ศีล), by concentration, *samadhi* (สมาธิ) and by *vipassana* (วิปัสสนา) in order that wisdom, *panna* (ปัญญา) may result. Very briefly, this is the way.

What are the differences between *Nibbana* and the Christian view of heaven? There is a recent book on Buddhism which makes the following comparison:²⁷

91. Heaven is a particular place while *Nibbana* is not a place but a refined state of being.

Can we agree? It is true that heaven is often thought of as a place, but a place in the sense of John 14, “I go to prepare a place for you...” If however, heaven is in the realm of God, it is not a place in the sense of a physical location, but a sphere or domain. It is still, however, in great contrast to *Nibbana*.

92. Heaven is a reality, but *Nibbana* is unreality.

Jesus rose from the dead and after the resurrection he ascended bodily to heaven. But *Nibbana* is *anatta* (อนัตตา), formless, empty, and those who attain it become one with it.

93. One goes to heaven after death, but *Nibbana* begins in this life and comes to completion after death.

There is a sense, of course, in which this is true, for full salvation remains a future prospect for the Christian. But Christians have already begun the journey from the very time that trust in God began, and the salvation to be experienced after death is already operative in those who believe.

94. One may go to heaven by faith without destroying sin, but in Buddhism one must overcome *avijja* (อวิชชา), *upadan* (อุปทาน), and *kilesa* (กิเลส) beforehand.

Can we accept this? We are certainly willing to acknowledge that one may go by faith, but faith in God is a special instrument for destroying sin. It opens the way for God's redeeming power to operate in us, and this power is an extraordinary weapon against sin which ordinary men do not have. Although we also have *avijja* and *upatan*, by faith they can be conquered. By faith we understand how sin originates without the aid of a special enlightenment (ตวิตัญญู). We do not have to attain the stage of *ariya-puggala* (อริยบุคคล) before knowing.

And by faith we receive another power, the power of hope which will take us farther than the strength of ordinary men. It is many times greater than ordinary human strength. This faith opens our eyes to sin that ordinary men do not see and helps us to cut the root of sin at a deeper level. A simple example will illustrate this truth. In Buddhism it is not held that sin in the heart is sin or is culpable as sin. In Buddhism it is also not held that refraining from good is sin. Only wrongdoing is sin to the Buddhist. But in Christianity there are sins of omission as well as commission. When by faith we know of sin which others do not recognize, we can say that salvation by faith is more deeply penetrating than salvation which is man's achievement. This is a very important difference between the two faiths. In fact, the difference is so great that the two are almost opposites.

95. In heaven Christians will serve God and praise him but there is no God and no such activity in *Nibbana*.

Such activity is sinful in Buddhist thought. This is not, however, a picture of sin, but of peace with God.

96. In heaven there is life, while in *Nibbana* life has been extinguished.

In Genesis 1 we read that in the beginning the world was "without form and void." This is *Nibbana*, the state of things before God created the world. To return to this is not progress but regression. The Christian faith teaches that we are going back to God, not back to the state of things at creation. To move from nothingness to God is to give life value. If it is just the opposite, what value does life have?

97. Heaven is created by God who is its sovereign, but *Nibbana* has neither creator nor lord.

We may ask what it is that is extinguished in *Nibbana*. Is life extinguished? It seems more likely that the Buddhist aim is to extinguish *vinnana* (วิญญาน) which is not life, but sensation, the result of having a physical body. It is our inner reaction to what the physical senses bring to us. If this may be compared to what the New Testament calls the flesh, and if this is what is to be extinguished, Christians can agree. The sensations and desires which are under the power of the flesh must go. But the *vinnana* which has eternal life comes from God; it is not the product of the physical body but the gift of God, and nothing can destroy it. It is the very breath of God himself.

X. SEEING OURSELVES AS BUDDHISTS SEE US

Generally speaking, Thai people are more philosophical than activist, preferring to mull over things rather than to work at them. There are many evidences that this is true. For example, most Thai people prefer to live where it is quiet, and though the Thai and the Chinese are alike in many respects, they are very different in their choice of vocation. The Chinese in Thailand are predominantly business people and finance is very important to them, but Thai people love peace and tranquility and business is only a secondary consideration. For this reason, Thais are not fond of the city and the marketplace, and will, if possible move away from any place of development. They do not like competition and struggle. They will work if necessary but pray to be spared from any great strain and exertion. Thai farmers, especially, work only three or four months a year and otherwise are largely unoccupied. When free, they may engage in cockfights or fish fights, gamble or go to some entertainment; otherwise they have nothing to do but sit and talk or drink together. Or if they have nothing else to do, they will put on a loincloth and go visit a friend where, if they have heard any news, they will relate it. I remember that when I was a child there were many tens of people who came and sat and talked together at our house until ten or eleven o'clock every night. They rarely failed to talk about the temple and what the priests were doing. Generally they got around to discussing Buddhist doctrine. This is one reason why it is so difficult to win farmers to the Christian faith. In my experience at Bang Kla, many orchardists have become Christians, but scarcely a single farmer. Farmers are very argumentative, not very disposed to listen, and even when they do, they may not believe what they hear. Since most Thais are farmers, we may even go so far as to say that this is descriptive of the majority of people in Thailand.

Ten to twenty years ago Thailand was a very comfortable country in which to live. There was enough to eat if one worked only an hour or two a day and no one had to fret about it. There was an abundance of rice and one could go out to the middle of a flooded field, cast his hook, and in a few minutes catch a fish. Recently, in the South, I caught a basket of fish in one hour. This was and still is the norm for many country people. No one was burdened with work, their minds were free, and therefore many people were great talkers. Sometimes such people can outdistance the Christian evangelist in religious discussion, but their thinking always follows patterns familiar to them.

Why are Thai people so philosophical? Actually, religion is responsible for this behavior pattern, too, for wisdom, *panna* (ปัญญา) is greatly emphasized in Buddhism. Cerebrating about things is a kind of search for it. Thai people love theories even if they do not feel constrained to follow them or live by them. If asked about their practices, many people would be greatly embarrassed. No doubt, Thailand would be a very much more advanced country if people followed the ideals and principles they already have.

Unfortunately, the church partakes of these same characteristics. We are always meeting to make good plans, but more often than not, the plans are left forgotten in our notebooks. We are sadly delinquent in action and service and in the practice of the Christian faith.

Today we are in a new era and many changes are taking place. Older people are fleeing the market for quieter places to live, but there is not much forest left, and younger people are very different from their elders. Even ten years difference in age makes for a wide generation gap. Even so, it is not easy to change radically and it is still necessary to adapt the Christian message to our hearers rather than hoping they will adapt to us.

One aspect of the Christian faith that does not fit with Thai life is its zeal and enthusiasm. Buddhism teaches the extinguishing of zeal. Christianity teaches one to light a flame; Buddhism teaches one to put it out. The Thai ideal is to be cool and

equanimical in everything. A common expression of this attitude is “The faster one walks, the hotter he gets, and the more he perspires.” It is always thought to be important to be composed and self possessed.

There are many Buddhist teachings that encourage and reinforce the propensity to philosophize, such as *vipassana* (วิปัสสนา), the Eightfold Wisdom (วิชา 8), the Three Signs of Being (วิชา 3), the Four Noble Truths (อริยสัจ), and the Six Revealed Truths (อภิปัญญา 6). Moreover, Buddhism teaches us to analyze everything that has form. The body is examined as to how many hairs, how many teeth, how many bones there are. The priests in the temples recite all this like a study in anatomy - hair, body hair, teeth, nails, skin. Thoughts and motives are scrutinized and catalogued with great refinement of detail. For example, the heart is seen as having eight characteristic states: communication (ประชาสัมพันธ์), reception (รับ), examination (พิจารณา), decision (ตัดสินใจ), love and aversion (รักหรือไม่รัก) and moral discrimination (พิจารณาธรรม). Everything must be broken down into its component parts in order to understand it. We will then be able to see its instability, its pain (ทุกข์), its emptiness (อนัตตา). In any conversation between Christians and Buddhists about their faith, the Buddhists may seem to come off the victor, to speak with greater understanding and in more minute detail. They have heard Buddhist tenets over and over until they have memorized them and can speak of them like experts whereas among Christians more emphasis is generally placed on overall understanding.

Buddhists and Christians look at life and at religion from widely different perspectives and with different presuppositions. For example, Buddhists do not believe in miracles; they have many stories about them, but do not take the stories literally. In the matter of the devil, for instance, Buddhists would not accept that the devil is the personification of evil and if Christians speak of it, they will immediately think of the experience of Buddha under the Bo tree when the demons *Naga* (นาคา), *Tanha* (ตันหา), and *Ahradi* (อาระดี) came to tempt him. These three appeared in the form of women, but the real meaning of the story is that they were personifications of craving, jealousy, and other lustful desires. If we speak of the devil as a person, Buddhists think we have not yet understood, we have taken the letter rather than the sense of the matter. Similarly, with God, it is thought that personification is only a literary device and that God is, in fact, *dhamma* (ธรรม). In the same way, the parables of Jesus seem to them fables with a moral. Heaven and hell are not actualities but meanings. If Buddhists hear of Jesus' healing the blind, they think not of the healing of one particular man, but of healing in general. Death and resurrection are understood in the same way: a new heart, a new life is received. This is the way Buddhists hear us when we preach. If we should differ with their interpretation, they will only reply that we have not yet arrived at the truth, that we are too literal minded.

A man asked me recently about the virgin birth and added that he could not believe it because it is unnatural. I asked if he remembered the story of Suwan Sam (สุวรรณสาม), a husband and wife who were both blind. The husband entered the priesthood and afterward an angel (เทวดา) came and told him that they were to have a child since they were blind with no one to care for them. He was to go home to his wife, but he replied, “That is impossible; I am a priest and I keep the *sila* (ศีล).” The angel then said, “All right, only touch your navel and your wife will have a child.” I asked him if he believed the story. He would not answer.

To believe without thinking is to contravene the warning of Buddha against hasty credulity. Buddha said, “Do not believe my teaching until you have used the strength of your arm” (อย่าเชื่อคำสอนของเราจนกว่าจะใช้ศอติปัญญา). Buddhists claim that Christians are overly credulous, that we think the idea of God was let down from heaven and must be believed entirely without alteration. Please do not bring all this credulity into Buddhism, they plead. Some years ago, a certain teacher proposed that Buddhism in Thailand organize in such a way that all Buddhists would help each other. The scheme was labeled credulous, sentimental (รักมาก). Buddhism is a religion of freedom, it was replied; everyone should accept only what he himself sees and decides upon.

There is one teaching of Buddhism which I feel is really incompatible with the Thai personality pattern. It is Buddha's famous advice on the subject of authority which may be found in the *Kalamas Sutra* (กาลามสูตร) and is often quoted in opposition to theists whom Buddhists consider to be overly credulous. It is called the Ten Admonitions (คำเตือน 10),²⁸ and cautions against believing according to:

1. rumor (ได้ฟังตามกันมา)
2. tradition (โดยลำดับสืบๆ กันมา)
3. report (ได้ยินว่าอย่างนี้ อย่างนั้น)
4. textbooks (โดยอ้างตำรา)
5. guess (นึกเดาเอา)
6. supposition (คาดคะเน)
7. deduction (ตรรกตามอาการ)
8. preference (ชอบใจหรือเข้ากันกับความเชื่อถือเดิม)
9. credibility of the speaker (ผู้พูดสมควรจะเชื่อได้)
10. partiality to the teacher (เป็นครูของเรา)

But ask if Thai people follow them. Not at all! The entire country believes what is in the textbooks, follows tradition and rumor. If a holy man is reported to have appeared anywhere, everybody will believe him even though he may be perfectly ignorant. In spite of the admonitions, some people speak out without knowing what they are talking about and some follow their own inclinations and opinions. Some Thais believe because what they hear is similar to their own thinking, as an example, when science is referred to as being like Buddhism. If asked in what way this is true, the reply will probably be that it is because Buddhism holds that emptiness gives rise to the body (อนัตตมาเป็นเหตุเกิดสังขาร) and the body gives rise to the spirit (สังขารเป็นเหตุเกิดวิญญาณ). How do Thai people believe? They believe in all the ways in which Buddhism warns them not to believe. And for that matter, who has really waited for evidence before believing in Buddhism? The Ten Admonitions are fine theory, constantly referred to, but not necessarily practiced.

Christians will sometimes comment that a certain preacher or teacher has not taught according to the Scriptures. But Buddhists have the opposite view. They are critical of Christians for believing whatever they find in the Bible without thought of whether it is right or wrong, proper or improper. When inquirers are sometimes told, "Believe and then you will know for yourself", the suspicion that Christians are gullible is only reinforced. We need to try to explain, always realizing, of course, that we cannot fully explain God. Many Scripture passages bear this out:

"Thou hast multiplied...thy thoughts toward us...Were I to proclaim and tell of them, they would be more than can be numbered." Psalm 40:5

"The nations are like a drop from a bucket..." Isaiah 40:15

"How unsearchable are his judgments and how inscrutable his ways." Romans 11:33

Though we can never fully comprehend we must use our minds to the fullest possible extent in trying to know and understand. We must do so in response to the command of Jesus, "You shall love the Lord your God with all your...mind." For Buddhists, whoever can win the word battle wins, and we are being judged on this basis in Thailand every day.

If in Christianity, faith is the great requirement, knowledge and understanding must still not be underrated. Faith and knowledge fortify each other. Without at least a modicum of prior faith, one would hardly take the trouble to study. Study is rewarding

because we have prior faith. While it is true that there is some knowledge that can come only through experience, it must be remembered that the whole matter of God is truth, a subject of knowledge.

Many Christians lack the depth of understanding needed to be good apologists for their faith. Yet because Buddhists do not have an accurate knowledge of the basic truths of Christianity, they misinterpret nearly everything we teach. When Christians teach about sin, they object in Buddhist terms; about salvation, they see it only from the Buddhist perspective and protest on Buddhist grounds. Usually they do not know the finer points of interpretation but only the general subject headings of Christian doctrine. Therefore, today Buddhist intellectuals take every opportunity to denounce the Christian faith and Christian theism, calling it unreasonable. Only those who somehow come close to convinced Christians know better.

What can be done to solve this problem? Perhaps we shall have to wait for a more widespread understanding of the Christian faith in Thailand. But today more intellectuals are studying religion at a deeper level and people are listening to what they have to say. If Christians do not make some effort to win the intelligentsia, we shall not be able to compete. We shall not have books and other reading materials which are explanatory of the Christian faith.

It is essential that Christians learn to be good apologists and that we use terms that people already understand, not just the language of the Christian faith.

XI. PARAMI, REINCARNATION, AND SOCIETY

The Christian standard of perfection is God himself: “You, therefore, must be perfect, as your heavenly Father is perfect” (Matthew 5:48). In Theravada Buddhism the standard of perfection is *parami* (ปารมี) or the transcendent virtues. *Parami* refers to progressively lofty rules of behavior, strictly adhered to. There are, in all, thirty categories, each with ten subdivisions, arranged in ascending order of moral difficulty. These thirty stages of moral achievement Buddha himself had to practice before he attained Buddhahood and while still a *bodhisattva* (พระโพธิสัตว์), that is, in the final stage of attainment before Buddhahood. All thirty must be accomplished before one can become a Buddha. In light of this, some Thai Buddhists say that Jesus was simply a *bodhisattva*.

The first stage of *parami* (ปารมี) is almsgiving or giving of material things such as money, possessions, fields, gardens or any other tangible object. The second is a little higher, the gift of a part of the body. The third is to give one’s life for another. It is for this reason that some Thais say that Jesus was a *bodhisattva* (พระโพธิสัตว์) but that he has not yet attained Buddhahood. Of course, we are not willing to accept this definition because we do not agree that Jesus, the Son of God, had to begin at a low moral level and advance up the ladder of virtue until he could attain the stage of *bodhisattva*. He was God from the beginning (John 1:1).

Very often, acceptance of the formulas of Buddhism would be destructive of the Christian faith just as to accept Christian faith puts one at variance with Buddhist doctrines. The two are in many ways antithetical, as for example in the doctrines of reincarnation and eternal life. There are many, of course, who would like to say that the two religions are essentially the same. But clearly, if they were to be blended, one or the other would have to lose its distinctive doctrines. Both cannot be retained in their entirety. They are like two different tiered lunch pails (ปิ่นโต), the sections of which are not interchangeable; they will not fit with each other. They are of different design, different material, and they will not stack together.

Actually, *parami* (ปารมี) is itself stacked up, one stage upon another, each depending upon the one before it and advancing a stage beyond it, from *paramitaan* (ปารมิตถปารมี) to *paramattan* (ปารมิตถทาน). Every Buddha as well as every *arahant* (อรหันต์) and every *bodhisattva* (โพธิสัตว์) must practice the *parami* (ปารมี) but all of them do not fulfill the requirements equally well because of their differences in status. Buddha has practiced the *parami* at the highest level and for a longer time than the others while his disciples may have practiced to some extent but for a shorter time or less intensely.

Buddhist teaching concerning *parami* is not entirely clear and it is nearly impossible to be exact. Buddhist scholars do not give details; they only say that to attain to Buddhahood one must have practiced extensive *parami*. For example, in the case of Phravessanda (have you read the story?) when he was a practicing *bodhisattva*, a man came to request the gift of his wife and sons. Phravessanda (พระเวสสันดร) loved them very much but since he was a *bodhisattva* (โพธิสัตว์) and his supplicant was a beggar who asked nothing else of him, he had to acquiesce. King Phravessanda aspired to be a Buddha but his pursuit of the goal caused bitter suffering for his family who were accustomed to the comfort of living in a palace. The beggar to whom he gave his family was so poor that he did not even have food to eat and they had to follow him deep into a virgin forest. When the children were unwilling to go, Phravessanda had to whip them and force them to do so. It is often asked whether it was right for Buddhahood to be thus attained at the expense of the suffering of this family. The question is always answered in the affirmative with the explanation that actually it is a son’s duty to support his father and it was therefore right that the father should have been helped on to Buddhahood in this way. This is a strange explanation when compared with the Christian understanding that God himself came down to earth to bear our suffering, that he

does not ask us to bear his, but he bears ours. This comparison can certainly be made when intelligent people hold up Phravessanda as an example of high ideals for which he was willing to sacrifice even his own family, and with no sense of remorse or regret.

It is thought that people like this who have severed themselves from all that would restrain them are fit to be Buddhas. They are extolled as being of the very highest virtue, free from all love, all sense of loss, even to the point of giving up wife and children. So, Phravessanda is a *bodhisattva*. But the God who comes to us in Jesus Christ is the very opposite of this ideal and the intelligent inquirer may perhaps be able to see that in reality Phravessanda was very selfish. There is much in Buddhism that encourages and even enjoins this kind of behavior. Charity, as practiced today, is for little else but for one's own purposes. Entering the priesthood and keeping the *dhamma* are primarily expressions of self-concern.

Indian philosophers say that all love without exception is self-love no matter toward what or whom it is expressed. If I love my wife, it is because she has a part in my happiness; or my children, because they are a part of me. I love my possessions or friends for the same reason. All the love in the world is in the end, therefore, self-love. There is some truth in what they say. But there is another kind of love which gives, that is, the love of God which seeks no gain for itself but only the good of the beloved. And however rarely it may be found among men, it is this love which Jesus calls upon his followers to practice. This is an important point in Christian witnessing, a point which, if people are willing to think, they must acknowledge as valid.

Often the reason that people are unwilling to accept what we say about Christ is that they misunderstand our motives. They think that the reason we preach the gospel is not that we care about them but that we want something from them. They suspect missionaries of preaching westernism or spreading American influence. And they suspect Thai Christians of preaching for pay. Something must be done to divest them of this misunderstanding. We must find a way to demonstrate that we really are concerned for them and that we are not seeking any benefit from them for ourselves. If they really see our love for them, I think they will respect it. At the very least, it will cause them to respect the messenger and perhaps in the end draw them to accept the message. When what we do is directed by the Spirit of God and we meet with people to whom he has led us they will receive something from our lives and will perhaps come to know Christ. This is what must be emphasized. But we cannot win if we who preach are like hirelings who hope for remuneration rather than men of pure motives who come as sincere servants of Christ. Or if people cannot see that what we are doing is for their benefit rather than for our own, if the minister is naturally self-centered, it will be very hard to be convincing. For example, if when we preach we take along things to sell, we will be thought of as merchants rather than ministers. We must be sure that we have only their interests in mind in what we are doing. This is consonant with the teachings of Christ, and if we present ourselves in this way there are doubtless many people who will be receptive. On the other hand if they see clearly that what we desire in life is wealth or position, that we are not yet satisfied with what we have, it will show in everything we do and people will see our covetousness and our selfishness. But if we seem to live simply as those who have given themselves to the service of God, I believe people will receive us gladly because Thai people already have faith in and admiration for this kind of life, that is, the life of sacrifice. All those in Buddhism whom they admire, whether abbots or priests or Buddha himself, are people of sacrificial lives. If Christians present themselves like Jesus, it will certainly reinforce what they say.

Of course the trouble is, we are not very much like Jesus. We may be too concerned with denominational gains, with our own particular church so that we become offensive (น่าเกลียด) in our pursuit of certain goals. To do anything beyond what is appropriate (เกินสมควร) is considered offensive (น่าเกลียด). If we push people into making premature religious commitments, it is offensive. Instead of being a good thing, it makes our motives seem suspect. For example, if, when people are going to a theatre, we go and speak to them there, they may think, "Generally people talk about the movie at a theatre. These people must be hired to do this."

Witnessing must be natural, it must be done in the course of our everyday lives, not in some unusual way. If in our families we are orderly and well-behaved the neighbors will see that we practice the Christian faith. If at work our employer sees that we are honest and dependable, that we come to work on time, go to lunch on time, take our coffee breaks on time and leave on time, this is also a witness. And if in speech we habitually tell the truth and are not deceptive, this is also a witness. The Christian life and Christian witnessing must go together. Of course, there are always those who will try to take advantage of us and we must not become the tools of the unscrupulous. We have to be careful when helping people that we are not made into instruments of their dishonesty, but we have to have a sacrificial spirit.

The second topic of our discussion in this lecture is reincarnation (เวียนว่ายตายเกิด). This is another problematical doctrine in Buddhism, for it is taught in the *Tripitaka* (ไตรปิฎก) but in conflicting ways. Some passages affirm it, some deny it, and some evade it. It is difficult for students of Buddhism to decide what is really taught. There are two views of the subject. One accepts it as true. The other holds that we are born once, die once. The second is the more modern view, the view of most present-day intellectuals. Villagers in Thailand have a belief that when one dies the spirit leaves the body. But where does it go? There are many different ideas. Some say that the spirit goes to meet *Yamathud* (ยมทูต), whose duty it is to bring the newly dead to Death's hall of judgment, or *Yamabal* (ยมบาล), the guardian of hell. *Yamathud* has a book (this is a folk tale not held by intellectuals) in which minute records are kept on the details of every life. Once one is there, the book will be opened, the record will be examined and it will be decided to what level of hell one will be consigned, or if one is to be reborn and in what form. When Christians teach that Jesus Christ will judge the world villagers will trot out this story by way of comparison. But Buddha is not the judge. The judge is *Yamathud* (ยมทูต). Some others claim that death is immediately followed by rebirth.

Now, can Christians concur in the doctrine of the reincarnation? Is it true? Some Buddhists claim that it is very scientific, very easy to reconcile with Darwin's theory of evolution and insist that Buddhism is the religion for a scientific age. But this can quickly be countered. Actually, Buddhism does not teach that there is a necessary evolution or advancement from lower to high forms of life but one may be reincarnated first as an angel, then a man, then an animal, then a ghost, and back again to human form.

Buddhists have a number of reasons for belief in reincarnation. Some claim to remember their former lives and can relate experiences from them. It is interesting, however, that most of these recollections come from Asians. Rather than being true it is far more likely that they arise in the minds of those who are already convinced. Then when something unusual occurs in their lives, it is explained by means of a belief already firmly held.

Recently in the Northeast a child was born with a peculiarly scaly skin. It was popularly believed to be the result of a former life when the child had had the form of a snake and the incident caused a great sensation in that area. But if it were investigated perhaps it would be found that the condition has a medical cause and could be corrected.

Some claim ability to make contact with the dead. A medium, when he contacts the one who has died, will report that his spirit has entered this or that person. If, for example, I am told that my mother's spirit has entered the god, *Intra* (พระอินทร์), I may want to know if she is happy there. "Oh, yes," the medium quotes her as saying. "It is wonderful; I don't have to do anything, only eat and sleep." And when I ask when she will return to be reborn I may get the reply that in about ten years she will get to be a human being again. According to folk tales, one who has been reborn cannot be called up by a medium. Only those who have not been reincarnated or who have become angels who are thought to be without form, or those who are wandering about seeking a new place for themselves, can be contacted through a medium. Some sorcerers say that they have called Jesus up and have found that he is a *bodhisattva* (โพธิสัตว์) in the Brahman world but this is a folk tale not universally believed and we should mention it only with the

greatest care. If people come and say that Buddhism is full of a certain thing and ask why Christians do not believe it, it should not simply be dismissed as a story. True, it may be a legend, but it is a story written to embody the faith they hold. Another little secret is that if we point to reincarnation as a Buddhist belief some of our hearers will quickly deny it, calling it an outmoded doctrine.

Another reason for the belief is the observation that some very good people have to suffer while some who are patently evil are free of all suffering. The commonest explanation of the problem is *karma* (กัรรรม). What was done in a former life is receiving recompense in this one. This explanation, of course, reinforces the belief in reincarnation.

The fact that some problems of this life seem to have no solution or explanation also suggests the existence of another world from which we have come. There must be some reason for this present occurrence in the world.

Both Buddhists who reject the doctrine of reincarnation and Christians have questions to ask about the doctrine:

1. If there is another world from which we have come, why can most people not remember it? Buddhists counter by asserting that there is no direct connection between the former life and this one.

2. If we press the question of their grounds for belief, which they like to answer by referring to evidence, they will finally have to admit that there is no proof and the belief rests only on faith that it is so. Certainly, Christians cannot prove God either, but we have the evidence of Christ and of the Christian's experience of new life in fellowship with him.

3. Another retort concerns the population explosion. Where do all these people come from? If everyone is reborn only as one, how does the increase in population come about?

4. When one dies and is reborn, what is reborn? If it is *winyan* (วิญญาน) that is reborn, but *winyan* (วิญญาน) is understood as feeling which disappears when one dies, what can be said to be reborn?

There are a number of consequences in society and to the individual of the belief in reincarnation. Let us look first at some of the unfortunate results.

1. The belief has a deleterious effect on morals. People tend to feel that they can put off moral living until another reincarnation. They are therefore free to sin as much as they please, free to follow their own evil impulses which can be corrected in another life. This is a major problem in Thai society. Intellectuals who are aware of this danger tend to deny the doctrine of the reincarnation, seeing that it supports and furthers wrongdoing. People no longer fear evil, thinking that they have a long time ahead in which to deal with it. The belief encourages indolence and the wrong use of time. Time is not seen as valuable since there is so much of it.

2. It encourages indifference to others. When we see wrongdoing, we simply wait for *karma* (กัรรรม) to take care of it without our having to be involved. In the problems of corruption in society in Thailand, there are not many to rise up and concern themselves. We simply wait for evil men to get their come-uppance in the next life and as a result society rots. On the other hand, if we feel that this life is all we have, we will be encouraged to take responsibility in solving the problems of our country and our world instead of leaving it to *karma* (กัรรรม) to solve problems of the future.

3. It causes some to lose heart and to become resigned to what is. Some do not even try to solve their problems, thinking that what happens to them is a result of *karma* or merit (บุญวาสนา). There is a common proverb แข่งอะไรก็แข่งได้แต่อย่างแข่งบุญวาสนา which means "fight anything but *karma*." If we cannot fight it, we simply have to let it be. Another proverb which expresses this attitude is แล้วแต่บุญแล้วแต่กรรม "As *karma* wills." This causes loss of nerve.

There are also some helpful effects.

1. If it is really seriously believed, it may cause a fear of sin and its consequences so that one does not dare bring an evil recompense down on one's own head.

2. The belief that evil of a former life still follows us encourages one to believe that he must try to do enough good to counterbalance it.

What about the Christian belief that there is no reincarnation? We have opportunity only in this life. We must use thought, strength, faith, time and opportunity now, and there is no way to make amends if we fail. This has the most important social effect. It brings about industry, the proper use of time, and responsible living. It is no wonder that countries with the Christian ethic are advanced, for these beliefs are cultural as well as religious. Western nations are not wealthy because God has helped them as much as because the teachings of Christ in their consciousness have impelled people to use their lives and their time well. Actually, they have helped themselves.

XII. AND WHAT ABOUT MIRACLES?

Some students of Buddhism are fond of saying that if the whole matter of the miraculous were eliminated from religion, Buddhism would not suffer because it does not root in the miraculous but rather in that reason and virtue which everyone can see for himself. The two are vastly different, Christianity is founded upon the mighty God who is the source, support and end of all things; but wisdom, *panna* (ปัญญา), is the foundation of Buddhism. This, of course, refers to human wisdom, philosophy, or reason. Therefore, any religious discussion with Buddhists must start from reason; or if we talk about supramundane powers (ฤทธิ์เดช), we must know how to go about it.

Recently I had opportunity to talk about the Christian faith with a man who is clerk of the court in a certain province in the North. His son had been in an automobile accident and was a patient in the hospital where I am chaplain. Since I thought he would probably not respond to talk of the supernatural, I began on another level, using a rather philosophical or humanistic approach. After several days I was still rather puzzled about him because, though he seemed to listen attentively, he did not really respond. By the third day I recognized that he was a believer in black magic (ไสยศาสตร์); I noticed that he wore the sacred thread on his wrists and ankles, used incantations, brought amulets to his son, walked around in the courtyard reciting sacred texts, and invited priests to the hospital to help in the treatment. I was shocked. I had thought he would not believe in the supernatural. How could he? He was a man of education, but here he was steeped in superstition. If we look closely enough we will see that even though Buddhism gives little weight to supramundane powers, many, many people in Thailand today are really part animist, whether they are educated or not.

Of course, there are at all levels of society both those who believe in the occult and those who do not. Yet even those who are skeptical still believe that the miraculous as presented in the *Tripitaka* (ไตรปิฎก) is meaningful. Take, for instance, the claim that as soon as Buddha was born, he walked seven steps. Some say that this indicates that Buddha was not an ordinary man; he was superhuman, brilliant, unusual. But some interpret the story as a prophecy that Buddha was to take his religion to seven countries, an allegorical interpretation that does not take the story literally.

In presenting the Christian faith, it is all-important to discern who our hearers are. If we begin to talk of the unseen world to those who disdain it, they will begin to walk away as soon as we open our mouths. Many people are interested to know what the Bible teaches about moral behavior, what duties it enjoins and what it forbids, but if we begin with the miraculous, we have already lost our audience. We must be able to read our hearers as well as the Bible. Sometimes people come and ask to hear stories from the Christian Scriptures. Others think stories are too elementary and want to hear something more philosophical or speculative. "If before the creation of the world, there was nothing, how could God exist?" they ask. If they want to be speculative and we try to be elementary, they will be unmoved by what we say.

Actually, to talk about Buddha is not to talk about God or the supernatural although some Buddhists who think of Buddha as a god are not yet aware of it. Those who are informed, of course, understand that Buddha is not to be worshipped as God but revered because he rose from a humble state to attain the highest *dhama* (ธรรม), something which other men could not do. When we talk about the supernatural some Buddhists accuse us of having "eaten the fruit, rind and all." For them, metaphysics is the rough durian peel not meant to be eaten along with the sweet fruit inside. To believe it all is to be so indiscriminate as really to miss the heart of the matter. Buddhists see the Christian Scriptures, and particularly the miracles of Jesus, in the same way. By this token, the feeding of the five thousand would simply mean that the Word of God satisfies all who receive it.

In Buddhism there are three classes of miracles or demonstrations of divine might.

1. Miracles of power (อิทธิปาฏิหาริย์)

These are demonstrations of supernatural power, like magic – as if one could go from third floor to first without using the stairway, or be able to fly, or if, when struck, instead of being injured, one would vanish.

2. Miracles of clairvoyance (อาภิศนาปาฏิหาริย์)

Miracles of this kind involve the power to see into the minds of others. When Buddhists have come to a very high level of attainment in the practice of the *dhamma*, they are thought to have this power, the ability to discern the thoughts of others, to see former existences and future reincarnations. It was said that the disciples of Buddha knew, as soon as someone entered the temple, who it was and what was wanted. Every morning upon awaking, Buddha would pass the world before his eyes in review (ตรวจโลก) to see what were the day's needs and who was hungry for the *dhamma* in order that he might go where need existed. Having preached, he could discern who would come to enlightenment that day. This kind of cognition was considered to have been made possible by his special powers of mystical vision.

This mystical knowledge of others is an oft-mentioned feature of Buddhism. However, it seems likely that it was more psychological than supernatural, as expressed in the Thai proverb, “their heart, our heart” (ใจเขาใจเรา), an essential in ministering to others. It is a matter of consideration for other people. When others are sick we sense their feelings by remembering when we were sick. If, when we were disturbed by the noise someone made, we will be careful not to disturb others by making noise when they are asleep. This is “their heart, our heart” and scarcely different from what is taught in Matthew 7:12, “Whatever you wish that men would do to you, do so to them...” The Christian minister must also have this skill. He must always be prayerfully aware of needs about him and address his work to those needs.

3. Miracles of rebuke (อำนาจสั่งนินทาปาฏิหาริย์) or command

It was once through such a word that a robber, a man who had killed 999 persons, was converted when Buddha was preaching. This man had been very ambitious to study with a certain teacher. The teacher greatly feared that such a brilliant student might one day surpass him and really wanted to do away with the man but was afraid of being considered a criminal. In trying to find another way he said to his would-be student, “If you would study with me, you must first go out and kill one thousand people and bring their fingers to me as evidence of having done it.” The teacher thought that the man would himself be killed long before he finished the job. But the prospective student actually went out and began to do what was required. When he had killed 999 people he met Lord Buddha who was to be the thousandth victim. He followed Buddha for a long way and finally catching up with him, he called out, “Stop right there!” Buddha replied, “I have stopped, but you have not.” Kuliman was converted to Buddhism by this one word. Jesus also had this kind of presence, this command of a situation. “Follow me,” he said, and Peter, John and others left all and followed him. Strange, isn't it, how we preach for years without a convert!

Of these three divine powers, Buddhism attaches priority to the third, the powerful insight into others which can arrest and command their response. The apostle Paul, however, seems to have seen the first as of greatest value. In I Corinthians 2:4-5 he declares that the faith of the Corinthians does not rest in the wisdom of men, but in the power of God; and in the same chapter he says in his own defense that he has taken precautions in preaching lest the cross of Christ be emptied of its power.

The third of these was not only valued by Buddha but is highly valued in Buddhist circles today as well. For this reason, if we would be Christian witnesses we must not overlook the need for penetrating insight into the needs and feelings and intentions of those about us and the necessity of suiting our message to those needs.

Although Buddhists may accept the supernatural, their overwhelming tendency is to understand and apply it on the material plane: “If your God truly exists, can he support me without my having to work?”; “If your God is real, can he heal my illness now?”; “Can he tell me the winning lottery numbers?” The whole matter of the miraculous in Buddhism is seen as having to do with material benefit. Therefore, if we do not explain the spiritual implications of the miracles of Jesus and of the powers of the unseen world, the point of them is lost for our hearers.

Have you noticed the nine spiritual gifts (or powers) mentioned in I Corinthians 12? One has the gift of wisdom, another the ability to speak with knowledge; another, faith; another, healing. These powers are also claimed by Buddhism. Once when Lord Buddha went out to pray for a sick girl, she recovered when she heard his voice. Now, when people are near death, they call on priests to come to the house and chant sacred stanzas in Pali as บั้งกุศลเป็น , a ceremony to secure life. If four priests are called, it is for ศวด ๗, a rite similar to extreme unction; if five, it is for the assurance of life, บั้งกุศลเป็น . As a priest I often participated in such services. Two or three days afterward when we went to inquire after those for whom services had been held, in some cases they had recovered. Buddhists also feel that they have the gift of healing. To acknowledge this is not to belittle the power of God to heal, but if divine healing is overly stressed, Christians will simply be told that Buddhists have the power also.

Another of the gifts mentioned in I Corinthians 12 is miracles. Buddhists today are practicing this gift in many places. Some give lucky numbers, some treat illness with incantations, some use ancient potions, and some make sacred amulets for the personal protection of the wearer.

Another will be given the gift of tongues, Paul says. One group of experts in Buddhism is said to have the gift of นิรุกติ, a Sanscrit term for those especially skilled in the minutiae of language use. Perhaps it may be compared with the gift of tongues for which some have special facility. Without great effort they can comprehend and use language.

Another will be given the gift of interpretation which Buddhists call ปฏิบัติมกัฏฐา, and which really means “to break open.” Some truths are as obscure as if locked in a steel case; when it is broken open, the contents fly everywhere and understanding is multiplied. The term อรรถนิษัฏฐา may be used to refer to those who have special expertise in interpreting the Word of God.

Another special language ability which Buddhists prize is ปฏิภาณ, the gift of extemporaneous speech. In common parlance and usage this gift is called กลอนสด, or the ability to make rhymes spontaneously.

Since Buddhism is a religion which stresses wisdom, *panna* (ปัญญา), however, it is this gift at the head of Paul’s list which Buddhist value most. The term ปฏิบัติมกัฏฐา is greatly stressed as the product of intensive practice of the *Dhamma*. All four varieties of it are held in high esteem: ability to explain the *Dhamma*, ability to preach the *Dhamma*, competence in language, and ปฏิภาณดี, skill in other languages.

Finally, Paul mentions the gift of prophecy. This is a refinement of the subject not to be found in Buddhism but might perhaps be compared to Buddha’s experience when he went to heaven and spoke the language of heaven, then descended to hell and spoke the language of hell. However that may be, the point is that when we speak to Buddhists of demonstrations of divine power, they have many of their own to compare.

The superhuman powers which Buddhists recognize are all thought to be moral achievements and result from intensive practice of the *Dhamma*. All the divine powers referred to in the Christian Scriptures result from trust in and commitment to God. Therefore, in the church, when we know of those who have particular gifts - of language, of prophecy, of healing, of knowledge, of wisdom - we gladly welcome them if they are gifts of God. We must also discern and reject those “gifts” which have only been conferred upon us by ourselves, or are practiced in pretense, or are only figments of our vain imaginations.

There is a recent book on Buddhism in which the author praised Christians²⁹ (a rare occurrence) for their treatment of matters of the spirit, *winyan* (วิญญาน). He noted that though Buddhism does not teach about the spirit, there are among them those who practice exorcism and scorcery; they call upon the spirits of the dead to enter this or that person, they ask for lucky numbers and winning lottery tickets. People believe in all this and it becomes a money-making racket. Christians, he said, teach about the spiritual, but do not make dishonest gain out of it. Instead the spiritual is held in great respect and reverence. For this reason, a right explanation of the Biblical teaching will doubtless awaken an appreciative response from thoughtful Buddhists.

Throughout Thailand today Christianity is considered a religion of the ignorant and everywhere the real truth about it is obscured. The appraisal most commonly held is that Christianity is inferior to Buddhism both in moral requirements and in doctrinal profundity. The Christian faith has been known in Thailand some four hundred years and Protestant Christianity has been present since 1828. Laboring alongside churches and Christians of Thailand, countless missionaries have poured their lives and resources into its propagation. Today it is estimated that there are about 100,000 Christians of all denominations of whom some 30,000 are Protestants. Can it be said that these statistics are anywhere near commensurate with the time and effort involved? Why is there so little fruit from these endeavors?

Some would offer the explanation that it is not yet time, that God has not yet opened the doors to the acceptance of the Christian message in Thailand. But the New Testament rebukes us when in Ephesians 3:10 we are told that it is “now” the will of God that through the church the world should know the manifold wisdom of God. Christ works with us and we must work with him. By faith we must not only pray but we must also prepare ourselves to be useful. We must sharpen our tools. The church in Thailand today absolutely must learn to give a reason for her faith in intelligible and convincing terms. Thailand is a developing nation and education is becoming more and more widespread. It is unthinkable for Christians to remain ignorant and inarticulate. When as Christians we are asked for an explanation of our faith, it simply will not do to reply that we do not know but we will try to find out. We must know! And we must know our faith in relation to the other faiths about us.

GLOSSARY

All terms are from Pali, the language of the Theravada Tripitaka, unless otherwise indicated: (T) Thai, or (Sk.) Sanscrit.

- Abhidhamma** (อภิธรรม) - the third section of the Pali canon which contains abstract and philosophical writings.
- Abhinna** (อภิญญา) - supernatural insight of those who have reached a high level of spiritual development resulting from apprehension of the Four Noble Truths.
- Ahosi-kamma** (อโหสิกรรม) - inactivated *karma*.
- Anagamin** (อนาคามี) - “Never-returner”, the third stage of attainment on the road to *Nibbana*; one wholly free from the Five Fetters of belief in an enduring self, doubt, trust in rules and rituals, sensual desire, and ill-will.
- Anatta** (อนัตตา) - non-entity, absence of permanent selfhood, emptiness. Together with *dukkha* (ทุกข์) and *anicca* (อนิจจัง), the three basic marks of existence, *ti-lakkhana* (ไตรลักษณ์).
- Anicca** (อนิจจัง) - transitory, fleeting, evanescent. One of the three fundamental characteristics of existence.
- Anubuddha** (อนุพุทธเจ้า) - disciples of Buddha who are awakened as he himself was.
- Arahant** (อรหันต์) - the highest level of attainment on the way to *Nibbana*; one who has cast off the final five of the Ten Fetters.
- Ariya-puggala** (อริยบุคคล) - Noble One.
- Ariya-sacca** (อริยสัจ) - Four Noble Truths.
- Arupa-jhana** (อรูปรฌาน) - the highest level of meditation where form is no longer sensed and psychic vitality results. *Jhana* in its Sanscrit form passed through Chinese Buddhist usage as *Ch'an* into Japanese as *Zen*.
- Atta** (อัตตา) - self, soul, entity.
- Avijja** (อวิชชา) - ignorance, nescience; the basic root of evil and the cause of *tanha* (ตัณหา) which creates the unsatisfactoriness of existence.
- Ayatana** (อายตนะ) - the six sense organs and their objects, such as the eye and visual objects.
- Bhavana** (ภาวนา) - meditation as an exercise in the development of mind control.
- Bhava-tanha** (ภavadตัณหา) - personal ambition, craving for existence.
- Bodhisatta** (พระโพธิสัตว์) - bodhisattva (Sk.), one who aspires to Buddhahood. In Mahayana Buddhism, it has replaced the *arahant* ideal, and those who have attained it are considered heavenly beings who are able to help men.
- Brahma** (พรหม) - one aspect of the divine in Hinduism, but sometimes used as an adjective to denote holiness.
- Brahma-vihara** (พรหมวิหาร) - the four limitless virtues of *metta*, *karuna*, *mudita* and *upekha*. (พรหมสี่หน้า-a representation of Brahma with four faces.)
- Buddha** (พระพุทธ) – not a proper name, but a term for “an enlightened one” and thus, Gotama.
- Devata** (เทวดา) - a heavenly being belonging to the lowest order of the celestial hierarchy.
- Dhamma** (ธรรม) – natural law, including moral law. A word that occurs in many ways in Buddhism but with the primary meanings of doctrine, righteousness, condition, phenomenon. The sense of that which is ultimate underlies all its uses.
- Ditthi** (ทิฏฐิ) – view, opinion, belief.
- Dosa** (โทสะ) – anger, ill-will.

Dratsaru (ตรัสรู้) – enlightenment.

Fai-banlaikal (T. ไฟบรรลัยกัลป์) – the holocaust that ends a Hindu cosmic cycle of 432 million years. Doomsday.

Gotama (โศกตะมะ) – the family name of Buddha.

Indra (พระอินทร์) – an ancient Indian god who was the “mighty one.”

Jhana (ฌาน) – trance-state of meditation which leads to supreme wisdom. Two levels of *jhana* are *rupa-jhana*, the material sphere, and *arupa-jhana*, the immaterial sphere of mental concentration.

Kalamas Sutra (กาลาสูตฺร) – Buddha’s discussion with the Kalama tribe on the subject of belief, as reported in the Anguttara Nikaya I section of the Sutra Pitaka.

Kama-tanha (กามตัณหา) – lust, sensual craving.

Kamma (กรรม) – *karma* (Sk.); deed, action, law of automatic moral retribution

Kammatthana (กรรมฐาน) – meditation upon objects.

Karuna (กรุณา) – active compassion, kindness; one of the four aspects of the *brahma-vihara*.

Khandha (ขันธ) – aggregate, component of existence, of which there are five: form, *rupa*; sensation, *vedana*: perception, *sanna*; volition, *sankhara*; and consciousness, *vinnana*.

Kilesa (กิเลส) – sin, morally defiling passion.

Kusala (กุศล) – wholesome. *Akusala* (อกุศล) –unwholesome. Acts which will result in favorable *karma*.

Lokanath (โลกนาถ) – Lord of the world, a title sometimes used to refer to Buddha.

Lokiyadhamma (โลกิยธรรม) – the worldly or mundane.

Lokuttara Dhamma (โลกุตฺตรธรรม) – the other-worldly, the transcendent.

Magga (มรรค) – path, way; The Noble Eightfold Path (มรรค 8).

Mai tiang (T. ไม้เที่ยง) – literally, not upright, thus, unable to stand, insubstantial.

Malungkyaputta (มาลุงกยบุตร) – a disciple of Buddha who was addicted to speculation and whose question elicited the famous response found in Majjhima Nikaya I that a holy life does not depend on dogma.

Mara (มาร) – the Evil One, Death, the Tempter, the personification of evil.

Metta (เมตตา) – active good will, benevolence, charity, pity; one of the four *brahma-viharas*.

Micha-ditthi (มิฉาทิถฐิ) – a wrong view or belief; heterodox.

Milinda Panha (มิลินทปปัญหา) – The Questions of King Milinda, a not-canonical work recording discussions between the Greek King Menander and the Buddhist elder Nagasena.

Moha (โมหะ) – delusion.

Mudita (มุติตา) – gentleness; one of the four *brahma viharas*.

Nama-rupa (นาม-รูป) – literally, name and form; having material substance. Psycho-physical existence.

Nibbana (นิพพาน) – *Nirvana* (Sk.). The final goal of Buddhist striving – release from existence which has been driven by craving (ตัณหา). The word is derived from a verb meaning “to cool by blowing”; the cooling refers to being relieved of the fever of greed, hatred and delusion.

Pacceka-buddha (ปัจเจกพุทธเจ้า) – a Buddha who is known only to himself; a private Buddha.

Panca-sila (ศีลห้า) – the Five Precepts or moral rules which all Theravada Buddhists must observe.

Panna (ปัญญา) – wisdom, the direct apprehension of ultimate truth which results from vipassana.

Paramita (บารมี) – perfection; the six transcendent virtues achieved by the bodhisattva in his progress to Buddhahood: charity, morality, patience, vigor, meditation and wisdom. Four additional virtues are sometimes added: skill in teaching, psychic powers, spiritual determination, knowledge. The last four, however, are amplifications of wisdom.

Patibhana (ปฏิภาณ) – skill in repartee, ready wit.

Paticca-sammuppada (ปัจจุจสมุปบาท) – dependent origination; conditioned genesis.

Peta (เปรต) – demons, hungry ghosts of Buddhist “purgatory” where men in between lives are tortured for a while by their own unsatisfied desires.

Phala (ผล) - fruit, results; technical term for insight which arises from vipassana.

Pinto (T. ปิ่นโต) – a tiered lunch pail.

Rage (ราคะ) – greed, passion; together with *dosa* and *moda*, the three cardinal sins, the “three fires.”

Rupa (รูป) – form, image, physical object; one of the five aggregates, *khandha*, *rupa-jhana* and *arupa-jhana*, the material and immaterial spheres of mental concentration or ecstasy.

Sakadagamin (สกทาคามี) – “Once-returner.” He is nearly free from delusions of the senses and ill-will or aversion. The second stage on the journey to *Nibbana*.

Samadhi (สมาธิ) – concentration, focusing the mind.

Samatha(สมถะ) – mental tranquility in the negative sense of withdrawal rather than in the positive sense of vipassana.

Samma-ditthi (สัมมาทิฏฐิ) – right view; orthodox.

Samma-sambuddhassa (สัมมาสัมพุทธเจ้า) – Supreme Lord Buddha. Supremely enlightened.

Sampada (สมบัติ) – one skilled in the eight trance levels including *rupa-jhana* and *arupa-jhana*.

Sankhara (สังขาร) – one of the five *khandas*, the volitional constituent of psycho-physical existence.

Sankhata Dhamma (สังขตธรรม) – the visible world which has been artificially constructed or put together, therefore conditioned.

Asankhata (อสังขตธรรม) unconditioned, therefore, *Nibbana*.

Sanna (สัญญา) – perceptive awareness, one of the five *khandas*.

Sanuk (T. สนุก) – fun, enjoyable, satisfying.

Sati (สติ) – a priest in the time of Gotama Buddha.

Sila (ศีล) – rule of moral behavior.

Sotapanna (โสดาบัน) – “Stream-enterer”, a convert to the way of Buddha. The first of four of four stages on the journey to *Nibbana*.
At this point one is free from the first three of the Ten Fetters: the illusion of being a separate self, mental doubt, and reliance on rites and ceremonies.

Sri Ariya (T. พระศรีอาริย์) – *Maitreya*, the Buddha yet to come.

Sutta (พระสูตร) – *Sutra* (Sk.); literally, a thread on which beads are strung. The second “basket” (*pitaka*) of the Buddhist canon which contains the discourses of Buddha. The term is also used to refer to a verse or quotation.

Tanha (ตัณหา) – desire, hankering, craving; the thirst for existence.

Tipitaka (ไตรปิฎก) – *Tripitaka* (Sk.), the three main divisions of the Theravada Buddhist scriptures: *Sutta*, discourses; *vinaya*, rules of morality, and *Abhidhamma*, philosophy.

Ti-ratana (รัตนตรัย) – literally, the three jewels: Buddha, the *Dhamma* and the Order.

Ucceda-ditthi (อุลเฉตทิฏฐิ) – the annihilation view of personality which is considered false.

Upadana (อุปทาน) – attachment, grasping; the ninth link in the chain of causation.

Upasaka (อุบาสก) – literally, one who sits near the truth; one who keeps the Eight Precepts. A devoted Buddhist layman; *upasika* (อุบาสิกา), a laywoman.

Upekkah (อุเบกขา) – equanimity, serenity. A neutral state, one of the four brahama-viharas and the state of mind in which the other three can be practiced.

Vasana (Sk. वासना) – perfuming impression of merit; memory.

Vedana (เวทนา) – sensation, feeling, one of the five *khandha*.

Vibhava tanha (วิภวะตัณหา) – thirst for non-existence.

Vimutti (วิมุตติ) – release from bondage, salvation, liberation

Vinaya (วินัย) - discipline. One of the divisions of the Pali canon, containing rules of morality and discipline for the Order.

Vinnana (วิญญาน) – consciousness, the most important of the five *khandha*, that which passes into a new form of existence after death.

Vipassana (วิปัสสนา) – insight meditation, the Buddhist means of developing “right mindfulness.”

Wian wai taai kerd (T. เวียนว่ายตายเกิด) - the Thai equivalent of *samsara*, transmigration. สงสารวัฏ wheel of rebirths.

Yama (ยมทูต) – the Lord of Death who escorts the newly dead to judgement.

NOTES AND ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Chapter I. FROM WHENCE COMETH OUR HELP?

¹ *The Tripitaka*, (Bangkok: Department of Religion, B.E. 2514), Vol. IX, p.23.

² สมเด็จพระมหาสมณเจ้า, ธรรมวิภาคปริเฉทที่ 2 (มหามกุฏราชวิทยาลัย, พ.ศ. 2503), หน้า 92.

Chapter II. UNDERSTANDING THE *DHAMMA*

³ คณะธรรมทาน, ชุมนุมเรื่องยาวของพุทธทาสภิกขุ (ไชยา: โรงพิมพ์ธรรมทาน แคนก มุลนิธิ, พ.ศ. 2513), หน้า 151.

⁴ *ibid.*, p. 161.

⁵ Since the discussion concerns the use of the Thai term winyan (วิญญาน) the Thai rendering is used rather than the Pali *vinnana*.

Chapter III. THE MEANING OF *VINNANA*

⁶ ปุ่นจงประเสริฐ, คนตายแล้วมีวิญญานหรือไม่ (กรุงเทพฯ: องค์การฟื้นฟูพุทธศาสนา, พ.ศ. 2514).

⁷ *ibid.*

⁸ แสงจันทร์งาม, พุทธศาสนาวินัย (กรุงเทพฯ: สำนักพิมพ์ บรรณาคาร, พ.ศ. 2512 หน้า 188.

⁹ *loc. cit.*

¹⁰ โพธิวัฑฒ์, ตำราชีวิต (พระนคร: โรงพิมพ์ห้องภาพสุวรรณ, 2514), หน้า 263

¹¹ *The Tripitaka*, Anguttara Nikaya I.

¹² โพธิวัฑฒ์, *loc. cit.*

¹³ โพธิวัฑฒ์, *loc. cit.*

¹⁴ บุญมี รุ่งเรืองวงษ์, ลมพัดไหว หางไกว่กัน.

Chapter IV. IN THE BEGINNING, GOD – OR *AVIJJA*?

¹⁵ พุทธทาส, “เรื่องตอบปัญหาบาทหลวง,” ชุมนุมเรื่องยาวของพุทธทาสภิกขุ เล่ม 1 (ไชยา: คณะธรรมทานจัดพิมพ์, พ.ศ. 2511, หน้า 152

¹⁶ *ibid.*, p.161.

¹⁷ *ibid.*, p.171.

¹⁸ *ibid.*, p.170.

¹⁹ ibid., p. 171

²⁰ ทอด ประทีปะเสน, พระวาระของพระเจ้ากับปรัชญากรรมของมนุษย์(ธนบุรี,nn. 1965)

²¹ Note how this order coincides with the Christian idea that God who is Spirit is before all things and the cause behind the material universe: “In the beginning, God created the heavens and the earth...”

Chapter VI. ATTAINING THE HIGHEST

²² มหามกุฏราชวิทยาลัย, พระธรรมปทัฏฐกถาแปล (กองตำรา พ.ศ. 2456), หน้า 105.

Chapter VII. THE MEANING OF *KARMA*

²³ Although the Thai term is *kamma* following the Pali, the Sanscrit term *karma* is used here because it is more familiar to English readers.

Chapter VIII. SIN AND SALVATION

²⁴ พุทธทาส,op.cit., หน้า 192.

²⁵ ibid., p. 155.

²⁶ The Tripitaka, Dhammapada 165.

Chapter IX. HEAVEN OR NIRVANA?

²⁷ แสงจันทร์งาม, op.cit.,หน้า308.

Chapter X. SEEING OURSELVES AS BUDDHISTS SEE US

²⁸ From the Kalamas Sutra, Anguttara Nikaya I.

Chapter XII. AND WHAT ABOUT MIRACLES?

²⁹ ปุ่นจงประเสริฐ, คนตายแล้วมีวิญญาณหรือไม่ (กรุงเทพฯ: องค์การฟื้นฟูพุทธศาสนา,พ.ศ. 2514), หน้า 100