A CHRISTIAN INTRODUCTION

Paul F. Knitter

In introducing the topics for our Buddhist-Christian conversation, I would like to follow the advice of my feminist theologian friends and take a personal approach. I think I can make clear why I am eager to talk with Professor Abe by first speaking about what I did in the summer of 1987 and what happened to me.

First of all, I went to Japan. It was my first visit to the Orient, and I had all of six weeks. The official reason for my trip was research: I was working on a history of Zen Buddhism at Nanzan University. But the real, the impelling, reason I went to Japan was to immerse myself in the history, the spirit, the experience of Buddhism, especially of Zen. As much as possible, I wanted to practice, to sit, to follow the guide of a master, and to do all this in the land where, after its birth in China, Zen had taken on a new identity that has endured through the centuries. Especially during the days I spent in the old monastery of Hosshinji, in Obama, in the southwestern mountains of the main island, my wish was granted. I sat, and chanted, and worked, with the thirty monks and nuns who carry on the Soto Zen tradition of Hosshinji.

Why did I want to do this? Why this pressing need to “pass over,” as John Dunne puts it,¹ to Buddhism? It certainly was not because of any fundamental or serious dissatisfaction with Christianity. I was not running away. On the contrary, I would say that the need to taste of Buddhism came out of my own Christian faith and experience. Here Thomas Merton helps me understand what I felt. His own life and experience illustrates that the more one enters into the fullness of the mystery of Christ, the more one is open to others and the more one can appreciate the beauty and richness of other religious ways. In his Seven Storey Mountain, Merton had little good to say about Eastern religions; in fact he gave up his explorations into Hinduism as a waste of energy; it was only after his entrance into Gethsemane, only after the years of deepening his own Christian mysticism, that he was, as it were, able to return to the East and read the Zen and Taoist classics, as well as the works of


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D. T. Suzuki, with new eyes and a new heart. He saw and felt what he had earlier missed. And as his *Asian Journal* attests, his study and experience of Zen had a penetrating influence on his own spirituality. (I would argue that it helped make Merton's spirituality more "this-worldly."² In any case, I experienced just a little of what Merton discovered—that to know Christ is to be open to the presence of truth or ultimacy wherever it may play. This is part of what drew me to Japan.

But there was more. It was not just a question of being open to or appreciating other religions, but of needing them, of having to dialogue with followers of other paths. This is difficult to explain. There is a paradox here, something that more and more Christians, especially in Asia, are sensing. What called me to Japan was a sense that something was missing in the fullness of Christian faith if I did not open myself to the riches of other ways. Or, the more I know of Christ, the more I realize that something is missing in Christ if I do not also know Buddha. Merton, I think, felt that.

And so I went to sit and study with the Buddhists of Japan. And what I realized convinced me that John Cobb was indeed right when he suggested a few years ago that Christians and Buddhists, through dialogue with each other, can be "mutually transformed."³ It is a transformation not just in "technique" or practice ("Now I use Zen for my prayer!") but in self-understanding (doctrine) and in experience itself (new ways of experiencing the Ultimate). My Japan experience confirmed for me what many Christians like Thomas Merton and Buddhists like Professor Abe have been discovering over the past decades—that interreligious dialogue is an ever-more pressing challenge and opportunity for all people of faith. In order really to be Christian, we must also, as it were, be Buddhist (or, Hindu, Muslim, Jewish).

But I did something else that summer. In August, I went to El Salvador. With thirteen other Cincinnatians, my wife and I (for the third summer in a row) traveled to Central America to learn more about what is happening there, to be with and learn from the people who are the victims of war and unjust social structures, and to protest here at home what we think is the unwise and immoral policy of our government in Central America. Much of the motivation for our trip came out of our work in the Sanctuary Movement in Cincinnati.

But we went not just as concerned citizens. We went primarily as Christians. As with the trip to Japan, it was my Christian faith that drew me to El Salvador—a faith that for me has best been articulated by Vatican II and liberation theologians. With so many other Christians in both South and North America, I have felt, more and more clearly/
uncomfortably, that to be a Christian, one who follows the way of the Nazarean, we cannot remain in the warmth of our churches; we must enter the grime and mess of the world, especially the world of victims. In El Salvador, familiar post-Vatican II themes took on compelling reality: that God wills to save us not just for heaven but in the world; that the Kingdom is to come on earth, as it is in heaven, that sin is social, and to be saved is to be saved from sinful social structures; that Christians therefore must be part of the world, including the world of politics and economics—and most sharply and demandingly, that to know God is to do justice. But as Jon Sobrino told us in San Salvador, the reverse is perhaps even more accurate: to do justice, to be active with the struggling poor, is to know God—i.e., to experience God, perhaps, as one has never before experienced the Divine. In short, Christian life must be lived in and out of some form of liberative praxis—some concrete action that seeks to liberate people (ourselves included) from that which prevents them from living a full human life, whether it be in El Salvador, or in South Chicago, or in our own neighborhood.

All this was confirmed for me in El Salvador. From our visits to the many refugee camps, our reflection and prayer with the base Christian communities, our fear of the ever-lurking military and Cherokee vans of the death squads—from the oppressed of El Salvador we were enriched. We returned home with much more than we could ever give them. Yet when I look back at that summer, I am, in a sense, perplexed. It is a familiar perplexity. It was out of my Christian faith that I went to both Japan and El Salvador. And that Faith was abundantly enriched by both experiences—by both sitting with the monks of the Hosshinji Temple and by talking and praying with the victims of bombing in the Bethania refugee camp. Both experiences were so good, so necessary. But how do they fit together? Do they fit together? Does one have a priority over the other? Must I continue doing both?

This is where I think Buddhism can help us Christians. Both on the basis of their practice and their teaching, Buddhists can aid us to respond, in our contemporary world, to the time-tried question of how to combine “contemplation and action,” “prayer and work,” “Martha and Mary,” spirituality and liberation—Japan and El Salvador. In the context of my summer’s experience, here are some of the questions and issues I would like to discuss with Professor Abe.

Are both sitting in meditation and acting for social-political liberation necessary in order to be a follower of Jesus—or of Buddha? Why? The same question from another angle: Christian theologians urge us all to make a preferential option for the poor, maintaining that today the primary concern of the churches must be for the oppressed and the marginalized of our society and world. How does this fit into what seems to be Buddhism’s “preferential option for meditation and enlightenment”? Would Buddhists agree with the claim of liberation theologians
that unless we are involved in some form of praxis of liberation, our meditation-prayer will be empty and/or self-serving?

- The liberation claim is that we do not really know God or the Ultimate unless we are working for justice—that it is in the very experience of acting with and for the oppressed that God can be discovered in new and necessary ways today. I realized this in El Salvador. But I also sensed, as I sat for seven hours a day facing the wall of the Hosshinji Temple, that in zazen the Ultimate was present to me in ways I had not really known before. Again, is the Ultimate present differently in sitting with an empty mind than in acting for justice?

- A question that pursued me especially in El Salvador: do people who sit, who meditate, act differently as they go about their liberative praxis, than people who do not sit? What happens to us in sitting?

- Also, what does sitting tell us about what we can hope for, what we should strive for, in our acting and involvement in the world? From his own experience of zazen, his own spirituality, what does Professor Abe hope we can do with this world of suffering and injustice? Can we really change this world?

What I want to talk about with Professor Abe is summed up for me in a feeling I had while I sat in one of the beautiful gardens of the Zen Temple of Ryoanji in Kyoto and watched the tall pine trees swaying Zen-like in the wind. I realized that in two months I would be in the squalor and pain of the refugee camps outside of San Salvador. And I knew I wanted to be in both places; I was certain of that. But I don’t know why.

II
A BUDDHIST PERSPECTIVE

Masao Abe

In his introduction, Professor Paul Knitter vividly talked about his experiences in Japan and El Salvador two summers ago, the experiences in which his Christian faith prompted his involvement. He told us that his faith was abundantly enriched by both experiences—by both sitting in meditation with the monks of Hosshinji Zen Temple in Japan and by talking and praying with victims of bombing in the Bethania refugee camp in El Salvador. Then Professor Knitter raised the question: “How do they [these two experiences] fit together? Do they fit together? Does one have a priority over the other? Must I continue doing both?” This question, that is how to combine “contemplation and action,” “prayer and work,” “spirituality and liberation,” is one of the most fundamental and crucial questions which any religionist must confront—especially in our contemporary world.
I myself have been struggling with the same kind of question since my student days. I was a university student in Japan during the Second World War. As the war developed, students were enlisted and ordered to the battlefield by the government. Around that time my Buddhist professor, Shin'ichi Hisamatsu¹ and his disciples including myself had organized an association named Gakudō-dōjō² which emphasized Zen meditation as the basic forum of practice. By joining the army, we students were to give up academic studies and Zen meditation, and were to be confronted by death on the battlefront. What is the meaning of Zen meditation in relation to national and world peace? This was a serious question for all students of our association.

After the War which ended in 1945 with Japan’s unconditional surrender, we continually grappled with the same problem. In 1951, shortly after the Korean War, addressing the question of how we were to reform the world and create true history, we formulated “The Vow of Humanity.” It runs as follows:

Keeping calm and composed, let us awaken to our true Self, become fully compassionate humans, make full use of our gifts according to our respective vocations in life; discern the agony both individual and social and its source, recognize the right direction in which history should proceed, and join hands without distinction of race, nation, or class. Let us, with compassion, vow to bring to realization humanity’s deep desire for self-emancipation and construct a world in which everyone can truly and fully live.

Hisamatsu was highly critical of the concept of the nation-state, in particular its self-interested sovereignty, which he saw as being at the source of international conflict. He insisted that true sovereignty rests with humanity as a whole³ and emphasized the necessity of establishing a political system “of all humanity, by all humanity and for all humanity.”

In 1958, we reorganized our association, Gakudō-dōjō into the FAS Society⁴ in order to make clear our threefold understanding of human existence which, we believe, is essential to religious awakening and social change. (We used this English acronym, FAS, because there is no adequate Japanese abbreviation to express this threefold notion.)

²A Zen association established in 1944, Gakudō dōjō literally means “the place for learning and practicing the way.”
³Masao Abe, “Sovereignty Rests with Mankind” in Zen and Western Thought (New York: Macmillan; Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press, 1985), pp. 249-60. This essay was inspired by Hisamatsu’s idea of true sovereignty.
What, then, is FAS? "F" stands for "Awakening to the Formless Self" referring to the dimension of depth of human existence, i.e., the True Self as the ground of human existence. "A" stands for "Standing on the Standpoint of All Humanity," referring to the breadth of human existence, i.e., human beings in their entirety. And "S" stands for "creating history Suprahistorically" referring to the dimension of the chronological length of human existence, i.e., awakened human history. Accordingly, the three aspects of FAS indicate a threefold structure of human existence, that is depth, breadth and length of human existence—more concretely speaking: self, world, and history. (This threefold notion may correspond to the traditional Western threefold notion of the soul, the world, and God. In our threefold notion, however, God is absent.) In the notion of FAS, these three dimensions of human existence are grasped dynamically, and though different from each other they are inseparably united with each other.

The first dimension, that is "F," which stands for Awakening to the Formless Self," signifies nothing other than satori in the Zen sense. Traditionally, it has been said that the primal concern of Zen is Kōji-kyūmei, "investigation of self," that is, inquiring and awakening to one's True Self, or original face. Hisamatsu calls True Self the "Formless Self"5 because, being entirely unobjectifiable, True Self is without any form that can be objectified. True Self is realized to be really formless by going beyond both form (being) and formlessness (nonbeing). Traditional Zen greatly emphasized the importance of investigating and seeing into the Self, but it also admonished not to remain in silent illumination or fall into a nihilistic demon cave by becoming attached to the formlessness of the self. Zen thus stresses the necessity of great dynamism or the wondrous function of helping others. Hisamatsu, however, criticizes this formulation of traditional Zen by saying that if the so-called "wondrous function" signifies only the process leading other individuals to awaken to their True Self, its function remains limited to the problem of self without penetrating more widely beyond it even by one step. He says:

If, as in traditional Zen, wondrous function remains a compassionate act of enlightening others from beginning to end, then it has nothing to do with the formation of the world and the creation of history. Being apart from the world and history Zen eventually becomes a mountain Buddhism or a temple Buddhism, or at best becomes a meditation hall Buddhism. After all it cannot escape from the demon cave Zen.6

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A complete compassionate act in Zen must be to form a true world and to create true history freely without any bondage, through having people awaken to their authentic, True Self, i.e., the Formless Self which is solitarily emancipated and nondependent.\(^7\)

According to Hisamatsu, a formation of the true world necessitates the second dimension of human existence, that is “A” which signifies “Standing on the Standpoint of All humanity,” because unless we grasp racial, national, and class problems from the perspective of all human-kind, we cannot solve any of them adequately. Thus, in addition to the “investigation of Self,” what I call sekai-kyūmei, an “investigation of the world” is needed to discover the nature and structure of the world.

Furthermore, a creation of true history requires the third dimension of human existence, that is “S,” standing for “Creating history Suprahistorically,” because true history cannot be created by an approach immanent in history, such as class struggle in Marxism or social reform in humanism. Unless we take a suprahistorical religious standpoint, that is, in Hisamatsu’s case, the awakening to the Formless Self as our basis, we cannot create true history. Therefore, what I call rekishi-kyūmei, “investigation of history,” is necessary to understand the real meaning of history and its origin and purpose.

Currently, we have various forms of peace movements, human rights movements, and various other social reform movements. If these movements, however, are pursued only from a political and social standpoint without a basis in our deep realization of True Self, such approaches may not yield adequate solutions. Even if those who participate in such movements are full of much good will and possess a strong sense of justice, if they lack an awakening to the original nature of self and others, their actions are without real power, or worse, they create more confusion. On the other hand, if only the internal religious aspect of the human being is emphasized and priority is given to one’s own salvation, thereby neglecting affairs of the world, however serious individuals may be in their religious quest they cannot attain a profound religious solution. Mere concern with self-salvation is contrary to even the Bodhisattva’s “Four Great Vows.”\(^8\) Today’s Buddhism is apt to be removed from social realities and confined to temples, and engrossed only in the inner problems of the self.

Koji-kyūmei, the “investigation of self,” will necessarily become superficial and without reality if it is sought only for its own sake. Therefore, we should work upon sekai-kyūmei, the “investigation of the

\(^7\) Ibid.

\(^8\) Bodhisattva’s “Four Great Vows” read as follows: However innumerable beings are, I vow to save them; however inexhaustible the passions are, I vow to extinguish them; however immeasurable the Dharma are, I vow to master them; however incomparable the Buddha-truth is, I vow to attain it.
world,” that is, the problem of what is the true world, what is the root
and source of the world in which we live. Accordingly, the “investiga-
tion of the world” is not separate from the “investigation of self.” But to
study and clarify the world is also inseparably linked with rekishi-
kyūmei, the “investigation of history,” that is, studying and clarifying
the origin and true meaning of history.

In short, the questions of what the self is, what the world is, and
what history is, are all related to one another. The problem of what the
self is cannot be resolved in its true sense if it is investigated indepen-
dently of those problems of the nature of the world and the meaning of
history. On the other hand, world peace, for example, cannot be estab-
lished in the true sense, nor can history be truly created, unless one
clarifies what the self is. These three problems are inseparably related
and united at the root of our existence.

In order to respond to the questions raised by Professor Knitter
concerning how to combine spirituality and liberation, I would like to
answer that we should clearly realize that we are always standing and
working at the intersection of three dimensions: “investigation of self,”
“investigation of the world,” and “investigation of history.” Each
approach must include the other two, otherwise each may fail even for
its own sake.

III
A CHRISTIAN RESPONSE

Paul Knitter

Professor Abe, as in past conversations with you (and with other
Zen Buddhists), I have found your remarks as inspiring and challenging
as they are intriguing and elusive. Your threefold distinction of the
dimensions of reality—the investigation of the self, the world, and
history—was extremely helpful not only in clarifying the relation
between spirituality and liberation but in clearing away certain Chris-
tian misunderstandings of Buddhism. Yet your distinctions—what you
mean by the terms and how you interrelate them—left me with as many
questions as answers. I would like to formulate my part of our conver-
sation at this point in two general questions, each of which goes in a
different direction. The first expresses what I think is a central Buddhist
challenge for Christians; the second formulates what might be a Chris-
tian challenge for Buddhists.

You Cannot Change the World Unless You Sit

If I can summarize what for me was your main message, it would be
something like: “You cannot change the world unless you sit.” That is,
we will not be able to liberate the world and transform it unless we sit in meditation and are internally transformed ourselves, unless we are enlightened or experience satori, unless we investigate the self and realize (or start to realize) the Formless Self. As you put it, "if they lack an awakening to the original nature of the self and others, their actions are without power, or worse, create more confusion." “[W]orld peace... cannot be established in the true sense, nor can history be truly created, unless one clarifies what the self is.”

There is a danger that in listening to you we Christians will sit back and say, “Oh yes, I know what he means. All actions must flow out of contemplation. That is what our Christian mystics have said all along, what every true spiritual adviser will insist on. It is even what Cardinal Ratzinger has stressed in the Vatican's recent statement on liberation theology: social transformation must be preceded by personal conversion and devotion.” The danger is that what you have told us may sound too familiar—or that we too quickly translate what you said into our familiar Christian categories. I suspect that when you and other Buddhists insist that one must realize the Formless Self before being able to be truly involved in the world and history, you are saying something more than what is already familiar to us Christians. This is your challenge to us. To sharpen its message, I would ask you, Professor Abe, to challenge us more by telling us more.

I think it would be helpful, perhaps even unsettling, if you can state more clearly what you mean by the Formless Self, the True Self. Here is where I suspect there might be significant differences in what Buddhists and Christians take to be a necessary condition for social transformation.

What happens to a person when she or he begins to experience the Formless Self? What does such a person see or feel? Is it appropriate to ask whether there is an object to this experience? What is the person experiencing?

What I am trying to get at with these questions can be approached from a different direction: Why is it necessary for us to experience the Formless Self before trying to change the world? You said that without this experience our actions in the world are without energy, or they create confusion. Is the experience of our True Self an experience of a kind of cosmic energy—the “Force” of Star Wars? And just how does the experience keep us from causing further confusion? What does it reveal that prevents this confusion?

I come closer to the intent of my questions when I raise an even more difficult issue: why are you apparently reluctant to associate this experience of the Formless Self with God? You mentioned that in your distinction of self/world/history, you leave God out. Why? Do you feel that the traditional Christian notion of God gets in the way of an authentic
experience of the Formless Self or that it prevents the full integration of
the self with the world and history?

All these questions are trying to nudge you to formulate more
expressly and uncomfortably what I think is the Buddhist challenge to
Christian spirituality and liberation. I suspect that Buddhists refuse to
speak of God because they want to make sure that the experience of the
Formless Self or of the Ultimate is genuinely an experience in and of
oneself—an experience of the Ultimate as oneself, as the world, i.e., not
separate from oneself. I sense that the Buddhist fear of the Christian
insistence on the otherness and transcendence and personality of God is
that such a God, in God's own otherness, does not allow for the kind of
religious experience that calls forth the full promise and potential of the
human self and of the world and of history. Buddhists are challenging
Christians, I think, to explore a much more immanent concept and
experience of the Ultimate, an experience in which one senses the
inadequacy of speaking of God as other or as a person. For the Zen
Buddhist, only such a nondual, immanent experience of God as the
Formless Self will truly enable an affirmation of this world and of the
need for human action and responsibility in it.

You Cannot Sit Unless You Change the World

The second issue I would like to discuss with you might be sum-
marized in the overly simplified statement: "You cannot sit unless you
change the world." By that I mean the Christian insight—as formulated
by liberation theologians—that we cannot taste the fruits of meditation
or prayer, we cannot experience the Ultimate or the Formless Self,
unless we are first, or at the same time, acting to transform the world.
Meditation will not work unless it is preceded/accompanied by action
for social transformation. We cannot realize our Formless Self in the
meditation hall unless we are also realizing it in actions for justice.
Perhaps here too there is a certain danger that Buddhists might too
quickly agree with what liberation theology is saying, claiming this to be
something they already hold. Perhaps Christianity, in its modern dress
of liberation theology, is saying something quite different from tradi-
tional Buddhism (and traditional Christianity!).

To try to clarify this Christian challenge to Buddhism, let me ask
you some questions about what you mean by "investigating the world
and history." While I clearly understood your insistence on the inter-
relatedness of investigating the self-world-history, I did not grasp how
you go about your investigation of world and history. To be more
precise, I am not sure just what the investigation of the world and history
really adds to what you already have discovered from the investigation
of the self. In your remarks, you insisted that the investigation of self,
world, and history are "inseparably related." But it seems to me that
there is a certain priority in this relationship, with "investigation of the self" holding the priority.

Even for Hisamatsu, enlightenment takes place essentially within, in meditation, in discovering the Formless Self; when one investigates the world and history, one applies or lives out what one has discovered in satori. The essential discovery takes place in the enlightenment experience, not in and through investigating and acting within the world. In other words, it seems to me that the enlightenment one gains through sitting or practice has a certain epistemological priority. As you said, when we investigate the world we find that we are one family, all interrelated; and we discover that history must have a transhistorical source of meaning and energy. But these are discoveries that we already knew in realizing our Formless Self through enlightenment.

Liberation theologians, if I understand them correctly, would hold that by itself faith or prayer or meditation or personal enlightenment is not enough for investigating and understanding the world and history. By acting in the world, i.e., by getting involved in some form of action for justice and social transformation, especially by a preferential option for the poor in which we act with and share the experience of the poor—by such forms of "praxis" we discover and see things not only about the world and history but also about God and the Ultimate that we could never see in our prayers or meditation or traditional understanding of religious experience. Also, the liberation theologians suggest that to investigate the world and history we need, besides our spiritual perspectives born of faith, some form of concrete social-economic analysis. Without some hard-nosed social analysis, our faith-or-satori perspective on the world may easily turn out to be an ideology that deludes ourselves and exploits others.

In other words, liberation theologians, drawing on what they think are biblical insights, suggest that action has a certain epistemological priority over prayer or meditation or the explicitly religious. Yes, if we can never really transform the world unless we are enlightened, liberation theologians would respond that we can never attain enlightenment unless we have made a prior option to act for justice and love for and with others. Only out of the soil of such action or liberating praxis will true enlightenment, true experience and knowledge of God, grow. In fact, they would argue—and they feel that history makes this clear—to engage in sitting or prayer or intense religious practice without some concrete involvement in trying to transform the world easily leads to a false image of God, to inauthentic religious experience, to a Self that is not truly Formless. Praxis or working for justice, therefore, holds a certain priority (which does not mean that praxis can ever stand by itself, i.e., without contemplation and sitting).

These claims for a certain priority of praxis are based on what some have seen as a fundamental difference between Christianity and Bud-
Christianity emphasizes agapē or love, which then leads to and needs gnosis or knowledge, whereas for Buddhism (both Theravada and Mahayana?) the emphasis falls on gnosis or contemplative knowledge which then includes karuna or love. Christian life and identity are first of all a matter of agapē—of living God's life, of loving, or doing what God does, of working for the Kingdom, before it is a matter of praising God or clearly knowing God; not those who proclaim "Lord, Lord" but those who do the will of the Father are called blessed. The living of God's life, the praxis of love and justice, leads one to know God, to celebrate God, to express this life in liturgy and sacrament and religious doctrine. We do before we know. The spirit lives within us before we confess the Lord Jesus. In Buddhism, I think, the emphasis is on first knowing, on enlightenment, on sitting, which then, by its very nature, will embrace acting. Gnosis before agapē; prajña before karuna. The differences between the two spiritualities are clear and significant, though not at all contradictory or exclusive.

Again, Professor Abe, can you tell me whether these observations on the relation between agapē and gnosis, and on the priority of acting over knowing, make any sense from your Buddhist perspectives. If Buddhists insist that we cannot change the world without sitting and enlightenment, would they also agree that we cannot sit and experience enlightenment unless we are trying to transform the world?

**IV**

**A BUDDHIST RESPONSE**

Masao Abe

Professor Knitter has made a very insightful and penetrating response to my Buddhist perspective on the problem "Spirituality and Liberation." It is indeed an important challenge for Buddhists, one which no Buddhist can avoid in the contemporary social situation.

A.

Professor Knitter summarized the Buddhist standpoint in the statement, "You cannot change the world unless you sit," whereas he summarized the Christian message in the statement, "You cannot sit unless you change the world." And, in his conclusion, he states that in Christianity, "We do before we know. The Spirit lives within us before we

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1 I draw this understanding of complementary differences between Buddhism and Christianity especially from the writings of Aloysius Pieris. See his "A Theology of Liberation in Asian Churches?" in *Asian Theology of Liberation* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis, 1988), pp. 111-26, and especially his soon to be published *Love Meets Wisdom: A Christian Experience of Buddhism* (Orbis), as well as his essay in this volume of *Horizons.*
confess the Lord Jesus.” In Buddhism, the emphasis is on first knowing, on enlightenment, on sitting, which, then, will embrace acting. Gnosis before Agapē; prajña before karuna (that is, wisdom before compassion). This is a clear analysis of the difference between Christian and Buddhist spiritualities. On the basis of this understanding, Professor Knitter raises a very challenging question to Buddhists: “Why is it necessary for us to experience the Formless Self before trying to change the world?

In this connection, I would like to raise a counter question to Professor Knitter. When in referring to Christianity, you say, “We do before we know” and in referring to Buddhism, “wisdom before compassion,” what do you mean by the word “before”? Does this “before” indicate “before” in the temporal sense? Do you understand Buddhists to believe that the attainment of enlightenment must precede working for others and transforming the world? If this is your implication, there remains a misunderstanding of Buddhism. Buddhism, particularly Mahayana Buddhism, strongly emphasizes the way of Bodhisattva which tries to help others awaken while attaining enlightenment. This is because Mahayana Buddhism insists that one can attain true enlightenment only through helping others become enlightened. Buddhism teaches us to overcome samsara, i.e., living-dying transmigration, and attain nirvana by awakening to wisdom. But if one stays in nirvana, being apart from samsara, one is still selfish because abiding in nirvana, one may enjoy one’s own salvation while forgetting the suffering of one’s fellow beings who are still involved in samsara.

To be completely unselfish one should not stay in nirvana but return to the realm of samsara,—that is, this actual world—to respond compassionately to suffering fellow beings. This is the reason Mahayana Buddhism emphasizes that “In order to attain wisdom, one should not abide in samsara; in order to fulfil compassion, one should not abide in nirvana.” Not abiding either in samsara or nirvana, and freely moving from samsara to nirvana, from nirvana to samsara, without becoming attached to either—this dynamic movement is true nirvana in Mahayana Buddhism. In this dynamic movement of true nirvana there is no before-and-after duality.

Sitting in Zen meditation does not necessarily indicate a quiet sitting by physically taking the full lotus posture. Tradition emphasizes: “Walking is Zen, sitting is Zen, whether talking or remaining silent, whether moving or standing quiet, the Essence itself is ever at ease: Even when greeted with swords and spears, it never loses its quiet way.” Even in walking, moving and talking, Zen meditation must be realized. What is essential for Zen meditation is not physical sitting but the well-composed, quiet mind under any circumstances. This is the reason Zen emphasizes “stillness in movement, movement in stillness; and that, “meditation practice in movement is far more important than medita-
tion practice in stillness." Accordingly, Zen sitting in meditation does not exclude activities but provides the basis for our vital activities. In the case of the FAS Society, this activity includes the investigation and formation of the world and history.

When I said, "World peace... cannot be established in the true sense, nor can history be truly created, unless one clarifies what the self is," I did not mean that the clarification of one's self must come temporally before a world peace movement and historical change. Rather, I mean that the clarification of the self, that is, the awakening to the True Self is necessary as the existential or ontological ground for our social movement. Without the awakening to the True Self as the existential ground, we cannot establish world peace in the true sense.

For this reason, I emphasized the inseparability of investigating the self-world-history. In other words, the true investigation of the self must include the investigation of the world and history, and the true investigation of world and history must include the investigation of the self. In their inseparability, there is no before-after relation in the temporal sense. They take place simultaneously.

B.

In this regard, however, I must listen more carefully to Professor Knitter's testimony concerning liberation theology. In his response, he states: "We cannot know God or experience God unless we are working for justice." I would like to know the implication of this statement clearly. Does Professor Knitter mean by this statement that working for justice is a necessary worldly and practical condition for experiencing God or is an essential ground for experiencing God? It seems to me that by that statement, based on liberation theology, he indicates that working for justice is not merely a practical condition for experiencing God but rather an essential ground or source for experiencing God. I have such an impression especially when he states:

By such forms of "praxis" [i.e., by getting involved in some form of action for justice and social transformation], we discover and see things not only about the world and history but about God and the Ultimate that we could never see in our prayers or meditation or traditional understanding of religious experience.

If Professor Knitter means by these statements that our religious experience of God is deepened and expanded by our action for justice, I can well understand and agree to it. However, if he and liberation theologians mean that our action for justice is the ground which yields a new religious experience of God himself, I cannot agree. For the authentic religious experience of God must come from God himself because God is the ground and source of revelation. It is the character of religious
experience of God that may be conditioned by our actions in time and space. Our action in time and space, however serious and important it may be, cannot become a ground or source of our God-experience while it can certainly deepen and expand our God-experience.

The same is true with the Buddhist notion of awakening to True Self. Awakening to True Self is self-awakening, not awakening caused by something else. This is the reason why the True Self to which one must awaken is called "Formless Self" because True Self can never be objectified in any sense. But, just as God's revelation is not separated from human activities in time and space, awakening to Formless Self is not apart from human activities in the world and history. Human actions in the world and history are indispensable for our God-experience or for our self-awakening. However, they are indispensable not as the ground or source of our religious experience, but as the practical condition or worldly occasion for our religious experience. We should not confuse what should be ground with what should be occasion, what should be source with what should be situation. If we take our praxis of transforming the world not as an occasion but as a source of religious experience, it is mistaken.

Professor Knitter asked: "Why are you apparently reluctant to associate this experience of the Formless Self with God?" This question touches upon one of the most crucial problems of Buddhist-Christian dialogue. Fundamentally speaking, Buddhism considers the notion of one absolute God who is other than ourselves to be inadequate. Gautama Buddha did not accept the age-old Vedantic notion of Brahma as the sole foundation underlying the universe, although it is believed to be identified with Atman, the eternal self at the core of each individual. Instead, the Buddha emphasizes as the ultimate principle pratitya samutpada, that is dependent coorigination or relational origination. Even the divine and the human co-arise and co-cease. The otherness of a personal God that necessarily implies the objectification of the Ultimate is not acceptable to Buddhism to which the awakening to one's True Self is crucial.

In Christianity, however, the otherness of God is inseparably connected with the clear realization of human finitude, that is the realization of sinfulness and death. Human sinfulness can be redeemed not by our works but only by pure faith in the love of God. (Even such faith is believed to be the gift of God.) From this Christian point of view, the Buddhist emphasis on the awakening to one's True Self may sound unreal, even self-deceptive, at least lacking serious realization of human finitude. In this regard, however, Buddhists are led to raise the following questions: Can human finitude in terms of sinfulness be fully overcome by faith? What is the ground of this faith and hope in which our death and sin can be completely redeemed? Is humanity's finitude one which
can be overcome by such faith? To Buddhists, human finitude is so deep
and so radical that it cannot be overcome either through pure faith or
through the work of God as the divine other power. Hence the need for
the realization of absolute nothingness. Awakening to Formless Self is
just another term for the realization of absolute nothingness.

C.

Professor Knitter also asks: "How [do] you go about your investiga-
tion of world and history? ... What [do] the investigation of the world
and history really add to what you already have discovered from the
investigation of the self?" Again, in this respect, we should not confuse
what should be ground or source with what should be situation or
occasion. Although the awakening to true Self is the ground or source of
our activities, it cannot be historically actualized in the world without
certain conditions. The necessary conditions for the historical actual-
ization of this awakening are natural and socio-scientific knowledge and
political and economic policy and strategy. If one thinks that this knowl-
edge and strategy can be spontaneously derived from the awakening to
True Self, one is mistaken. True investigation of the self, however,
includes the investigation of the fundamental meaning of the world and
history just as the awakening to True Self includes the realization of this
fundamental meaning. From there one can properly use knowledge,
policy, and technology necessary to transform the world.

In sum, however essential religious experience may be as the
ground of activities, the ground without particular situations is abstract.
For this reason, I said earlier "If only the internal religious aspect of the
human being is emphasized and priority is given to one's own salvation,
thereby neglecting affairs of the world, however serious individuals may
be in their religious quest, they cannot attain a profound religious
solution." On the other hand, however important the action to transform
the world may be, if it is not based on God-experience or awakening to
True Self, it is also inauthentic. And for this reason, I said earlier, "If
these movements (peace movements, human rights movements, and
various social reform movements) are pursued only from a political and
social standpoint without bases in our deep realization of True Self,
such approaches may not yield adequate solutions." To be precise,
ground and condition, source and occasion must always be combined.
And in my understanding, at the depth of human existence, the problem
of self, the problem of the world and the problem of history are insepara-
bly connected with one another. Thus, we must realize that we are
always standing and working at the intersection of three dimensions of
self, world and history.

From this integrated and dynamic point of view, I would like to
examine further Professor Knitter's standpoint. He states that in Bud-
dhism the enlightenment has a certain epistemological priority over practice, whereas in Christianity action has a certain epistemological priority over prayer. To this understanding, I would like to raise the following two questions: first, when Professor Knitter speaks of an epistemological priority, does he imply that there is no ontological priority between enlightenment and practice, prayer and action, but only an epistemological one?—or, does he also admit the issue of an ontological priority among these realities?

Second, when Professor Knitter speaks of priority within Buddhism or within Christianity, where does he take his stand? As a Christian who is sympathetic with liberation theology, Professor Knitter must have taken his stand on action rather than prayer as an epistemological priority. However, in order to discuss a priority between two items, he must have initially distinguished those two items from one another. Accordingly, my question may be restated as follows: When he makes a distinction between prayer and action, enlightenment and practice, where does he take his stand? Does he stand within prayer (enlightenment) or action (practice) in making such a distinction? Since it is impossible to make a distinction between two items by taking one of them as one's standpoint, Professor Knitter must have, consciously or unconsciously, taken a third position outside of the two items in question. But such a third position outside of prayer and action, enlightenment and practice is nothing but a conceptual construction. It is a projected position established through speculation. In our non-conceptualized living reality, prayer and action, enlightenment and practice are indistinguishable. Speaking from the non-conceptualizable and unobjectifiable depth of our existence, questioning the priority of enlightenment or practice, prayer or action, is already inauthentic. In the ontological dimension, that is, the most profound existential dimension, both in Buddhism and Christianity, meditation and practice, prayer and action are not two, but one.

Phenomenologically speaking, however, I agree with Professor Knitter when he states that in Buddhism enlightenment has a certain epistemological priority over practice whereas in Christianity action has a certain epistemological priority over prayer. By saying this, I mean that Buddhism tends to put priority on enlightenment over practice and thereby threatens to become a quietism. Conversely, Christianity tends to put priority on action over prayer and thereby threatens to develop a crusade. To avoid such a tendency and overcome quietism, Buddhists must learn from Christianity, and especially from liberation theology. However, if liberation theology insists that “Only out of the soil of such action or liberating praxis will true enlightenment, true experience and knowledge, grow,” the Buddhist must disagree. For as I said before (Part I), this understanding takes action and praxis in time and space—which
cannot be more than practical occasion or worldly condition—as if it were a ground or source for our religious experience which originates in God or true self-awakening. If liberation theology takes liberating praxis as the only source for genuine God-experience by putting priority on action over prayer, I am afraid it deviates from Christianity. For as I said earlier, in Christianity as in Buddhism, if I am not mistaken, in its ontological dimension, that is, its most profound existential dimension, prayer and action, faith in God and working for justice are not two but one.

D.

Each human being is a single dynamic existence who encompasses both horizontal and vertical dimensions. The horizontal dimension indicates the dimension of space and time, world and history, whereas the vertical dimension signifies the transspatial and transtemporal dimension, namely the dimension of Self or God, that is religion. What I call practical condition, occasion, or situation indicates the horizontal dimension, whereas what I call ground or source refers to the vertical dimension. At this point, we must clearly realize that although the horizontal dimension and the vertical dimension are qualitatively different, in living reality they are undifferentiated. They are one not two, and yet not a fixed one, but are distinguishable into two. In sum, the horizontal dimension (spacio-temporal condition) and the vertical dimension (trans-spatio-temporal ground) are neither one nor two, and yet both one and two. We are always standing and working in this dynamism. More precisely speaking, we are this dynamism and this dynamist is us. Unless we start from this dynamism, we cannot solve the problem of how to combine "meditation and action," "spirituality and liberation," and the problem of which has a priority, enlightenment or practice, action or prayer.