Dissertations   Graduate Research

1982

Christian-Buddhist Dialogue in the Writings of Lynn A. De Silva

Tissa Brian De Alwis
Andrews University

INFORMATION TO USERS

This reproduction was made from a copy of a document sent to us for microfilming. While the most advanced technology has been used to photograph and reproduce this document, the quality of the reproduction is heavily dependent upon the quality of the material submitted.

The following explanation of techniques is provided to help clarify markings or notations which may appear on this reproduction.

1. The sign or "target" for pages apparently lacking from the document photographed is "Missing Page(s)". If it was possible to obtain the missing page(s) or section, they are spliced into the film along with adjacent pages. This may have necessitated cutting through an image and duplicating adjacent pages to assure complete continuity.

2. When an image on the film is obliterated with a round black mark, it is an indication of either blurred copy because of movement during exposure, duplicate copy, or copyrighted materials that should not have been filmed. For blurred pages, a good image of the page can be found in the adjacent frame. If copyrighted materials were deleted, a target note will appear listing the pages in the adjacent frame.

3. When a map, drawing or chart, etc., is part of the material being photographed, a definite method of "sectioning" the material has been followed. It is customary to begin filming at the upper left hand corner of a large sheet and to continue from left to right in equal sections with small overlaps. If necessary, sectioning is continued again—beginning below the first row and continuing on until complete.

4. For illustrations that cannot be satisfactorily reproduced by xerographic means, photographic prints can be purchased at additional cost and inserted into your xerographic copy. These prints are available upon request from the Dissertations Customer Services Department.

5. Some pages in any document may have indistinct print. In all cases the best available copy has been filmed.

University
Microfilms
International
300 N. Zeeb Road
Ann Arbor, MI 48106

8318614

de Alwis, Tissa Brian

CHRISTIAN--BUDDHIST DIALOGUE IN THE WRITINGS OF LYNN A. DE SILVA

Andrews University TH.D. 1983

University
 Microfilms
 International 300 N. Zeeb Road, Ann Arbor, MI 48106

Andrews University

Seventh-day Adventist Theological Seminary

CHRISTIAN--BUDDHIST DIALOGUE IN THE WRITINGS OF

LYNN A. DE SILVA

A Dissertation

Presented in Partial Fulfillment

of the Requirements for the Degree

Doctor of Theology

by
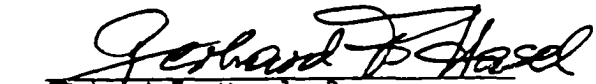
Tissa Brian de Alwis

November 1982

CHRISTIAN--BUDDHIST DIALOGUE IN THE WRITINGS OF
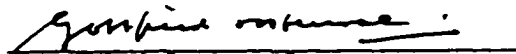
LYNN A. DE SILVA

A dissertation presented

in partial fulfillment of the requirements

for the degree

Doctor of Theology

by

Tissa Brian de Alwis
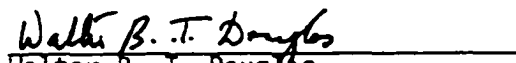
APPROVAL BY THE COMMITTEE
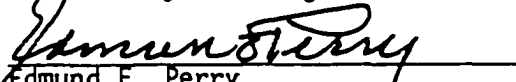
Robert M. Johnston, Chairman
Professor of Theology

Daniel A. Augsburger
Professor of Historical Theology

Gottfried Oosterwal
Professor of Mission

Walter B. T. Douglas
Professor of Church History
and History of Religion

Edmund F. Perry
Professor of the History
and Literature of Religions
Northwestern University

Gerhard F. Hasel, Dean
SDA Theological Seminary

23 November 1982
Date Approved

Copyright © 1982 Tissa Brian DeAlwis

ABSTRACT

CHRISTIAN--BUDDHIST DIALOGUE IN THE WRITINGS OF

LYNN A. DE SILVA

by

Tissa Brian de Alwis

Chairman: Robert M. Johnston

ABSTRACT OF GRADUATE STUDENT RESEARCH

Dissertation

Andrews University

Seventh-day Adventist Theological Seminary

Title: CHRISTIAN--BUDDHIST DIALOGUE IN THE WRITINGS OF
         LYNN A. DE SILVA

Name of researcher: Tissa Brian de Alwis

Name and degree of faculty adviser: Robert M. Johnston, Ph.D.

Date completed: November 1982

This dissertation studies the theological implications of inter-religious dialogue that call for resolution from the Christian standpoint, the Christian self-understanding in religiously plural context, and the essentials of authentic inter-religious dialogue by an analysis and evaluation of Lynn A. de Silva's dialogue with Sri Lankan Buddhism.

Chapter I surveys the historical factors which heightened the encounter between the religions and describes the background from which De Silva's theology emerged. Developments in the debate on inter-religious dialogue in missionary conferences in Asia and in the World Council of Churches reveal the confrontation between Asian and European theologies. It is shown that De Silva's dialogical

2

concerns arose out of existential contact with Sri Lankan Buddhism, and that the resurgence of Buddhism and the transition in Christian missionary attitudes led to a Sri Lankan expression of Christianity.

Chapter II describes De Silva's holistic dialogical approach in contrast to theoretical Western approaches. The basic ingredients essential to authentic dialogue and its objectives, as spelled out by De Silva, are noted. In his appraisal of the Buddhist approach to dialogue, dialogical exchanges with Buddhist thought leaders, and use of Buddhist terms, a practised theology of dialogue emerges.

Chapter III describes the translational nature of De Silva's dialogical theology. The process of conveying concepts from one religious context to another is traced in his use of Tilakkhana (the three signata of Buddhism) as a conceptual framework in the development of: (1) a Christian-Buddhist estimate of man--the relation between anattā (non-self) and the Christian teaching about the spirit, (2) an inclusivist Christology--Christ as Dharma-Logos, and his salvific role in the religions, and (3) anattā and the indispensability of God.

Chapter IV evaluates De Silva's treatment of Christianity and Buddhism as complementary systems and sifts out that which is theologically decisive for authentic inter-faith dialogue. It deals with the Buddhist response to De Silva and assesses his dialectical approach. It is shown that the salvific status accorded to other religions is crucial to Asian Christian self-understanding on the questions of church and mission.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

iv

Chapter

III. (Continued)

v

Chapter

III. (Continued)

PRONUNCIATION GUIDE TO BUDDHIST TERMS

Consonants				Vowels			
c as ch in rich				a as u in but			
t as th in think				a̱ as u in fur			
ṯ as t in to				ā as a in art			
d as th in then				i as i in pin			
ṃ as ng in ring				ī as ee in seen			
ū as u in rule				u as u in put			

N.B. (1) Vowels e and o are always long in Pali and Sanskrit
except when followed by a double consonant, vg. [sic] ettha.
(2) In the consonants, the asphirates kh, gh, dh, th, dh,
bh, are pronounced with h sound immediately following as in
blockhead, pighead, cathead, loghead etc., but, in each
instance –combined with the preceding consonant in pronunciation.[1]

---

[1]Antony Fernando, Buddhism and Christianity Their Inner
Affinity (Kelaniya, Sri Lanka: Empire Press, 1981), p. v.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

It is with deep gratitude to God that one looks upon the completion of a doctoral dissertation, and grateful thanks must be also expressed to many others for their active support and friendship.

I must first acknowledge a debt of gratitude to the memory of the late Dr. Lynn A. de Silva, who generously made the treasure of his writings available to me.

I am particularly grateful to Dr. M. E. Cherian, President, of Spicer Memorial College, whose inspirational teaching and concern for inter-faith dialogue sparked my own interest in the subject, and to the College Board for the sponsorship which made this study possible.

My sincere thanks are due to the members of my committee, Dr. Gootfried Oosterwal, for the benefit of his experience in dialogue with Sri Lankan Buddhism; Dr. Dan Augsburger, for his valuable insights and helpful criticisms; and Chairman Robert Johnston, who was always available for consultation, for his unceasing kindness and inspiration.

A word of appreciation must be expressed to Mrs. Joyce Jones, the dissertation secretary, who made her expertise available so cheerfully; and to Mrs. Rebecca Twomley, Mrs. Doris Helm and Mrs. Mary Reye whose assistance in the library greatly facilitated this study.

Finally, I must thank my wife whose love, encouragement, and tireless labors, saw me through to the end.

viii

INTRODUCTION

Inter-religious dialogue, more especially the relation of Christian faith to religious pluralism, forms the essential backdrop of this study. Not only is it one of the dominant missionary and pastoral issues for Christians today, it is clear that the time when theological formulation can proceed independently of the reality of other living religions has clearly passed. Though Christianity had existed in small pockets in Persia, India and China from an early period, it was with the geographical discoveries of the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries that Christian Europe came to realize that people belonging to other ancient religions were living in distant places. Medieval Europe, in which the Church dominated all aspects of life, now came into contact with other ancient religious cultures. As successive Western powers took control over different parts of the world, Christianity, moving with the conquering powers, came to be looked upon as a "militantly expansionist and aggressively proselytising faith."[1] The Christianity which accompanied the imperialist invader of Asian and African countries was, with rare exceptions, incredulous as to the worth of non-Christian religions and impatient of their survival.[2] The Christian claim of an exclusive revelation in

---

[1] K. M. de Silva, "Religion," Sri Lanka: A Survey, ed. K. M. de Silva (Honolulu: University Press of Hawaii, 1977), p. 379.

[2] That this was the settled attitude of European Christians to

1

Jesus Christ, which alone was able to provide a true and adequate knowledge of God which is salvific, was the motive force behind the missionary enterprise. The Christian position that it was <u>the</u> true religion and its denial of the validity of claims to truth by other religions precluded the possibility of dialogue.[1] As R. Panikkar succintly observes regarding the er of self-sufficient Christendom:

> It is a fact of history, fraught with powerful theological repercussions, that for the last thousand years at least the Church has never entertained the idea of a dialogue with the world religions. Whenever she has embarked upon missionary activity she has always spoken directly and one-sidedly to men rooted in different religious climates and has therefore ignored the bonds binding these others to their own cultural and spiritual traditions.[2]

There has, however, since the nineteenth century, been a confluence of several factors which have led inexorably to encounter and dialogue between Christianity and other faiths. Radical changes

---

other religions is well attested. For a description of this general attitude in relation to 19th century Britain, see H. A. C. Cairns, <u>Prelude to Imperialism</u> (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1965), pp. 150ff. Notions of nineteenth century triumphalism spilled over into the twentieth. At the World Missionary Conference at Edinburgh in 1910, an interpreter of the conference could write, "The spectacle of the advance of the Christian Church along many lines of action to the conquest of the five great religions of the modern world is one of singular interest and grandeur." See W. H. T. Gairdner, "Edinburgh 1910: An Account and Interpretation of the World Missionary Conference," London, 1910, p. 135.

[1]The rationale behind the missionary endeavour and its attitude to other world religions is evident in nineteenth century Christian hymnody. In Bishop Heber's well-known missionary hymn, "From Greenland's Icy Mountains," people of other faiths are "men benighted" or "the heathen in his blindness." Christians, by contrast, are said to have "the lamp of life," and their "souls are lighted with wisdom from on high." (The Church Hymnal [Washington D. C.: Review and Herald Publishing Association, 1941] p. 345).

[2]"The Church and the World Religions." <u>Religion and Society</u> 14 (June 1967): 59-60.

brought about by scientific technology have resulted in a rapidly

shrinking world. The conquest of distance, the expansion of world

trade and industrialization, and the unifying effect of mass media

have vastly increased personal contacts between Christians and men of

other faiths. For M. M. Thomas, chairman of the World Council of

Churches (WCC) Central Committee and one of the foremost Indian theo-

logians of dialogue, it is not simply the conquest of distance through

the development of modern communications that is compelling all faiths

to reinterpret their understanding of God, man, and the world, in re-

lation to other faiths. He sees the ferment of a revolutionary world

drawing people of all faiths, including the humanistic faiths that are

non-theistic, into the stream of a single universal history.[1] Among

the forces in the modern world working as a ferment in all cultures and

religions are the process of secularism, the revolt of the oppressed

and the poor, the Socialist and Communist movements of Western socie-

ties, and the Nationalist movements of Asian and African peoples for

political independence. As Jacques-Albert Cuttat, Swiss ambassador to

India and organizer of several inter-religious dialogue conferences

has so aptly stated, the meeting of religions "constitutes an inevitable

---

[1]Man and the Universe of Faiths (Madras: Christian Literature
Society, 1975), p. 1. Paul Tillich also assigned a role to humanistic
faiths, terming them quasi-religions, in the current meeting of world
religions. Religion was for him the state of being grasped by ultimate
concern, thus quasi-religions were those which have elevated national
and social concerns to unlimited ultimacy. He took the seemingly
paradoxical position "that the main characteristic of the present
encounter of the world religions is their encounter with the quasi-
religions of our time" (Christianity and the Encounter of the World
Religions [New York: Columbia University Press, 1963], p. 5).

corollary of the contemporary confrontation of peoples and civili-
zations."[1]

With the rise of Asian independence movements there has been
a resurgence of Asian religions. These religions now take an apolo-
getic stance, having first undergone reinterpretation to bring out
their adequacy for contemporary life. They became mission conscious,
broke the territorial limits to which they had hitherto been confined
and began to make incursions into the Christian West. Christians,
increasingly conscious of living in a religiously plural world, are
being compelled to rethink their approach and attitude to other
religions. Sociologist Peter L. Berger maintains that modernity
has multiplied the choices, that modern man thus lives "in a plural-
ized world of competing views," and that "this has given all religions
in the world a commonality of condition that must have an effect on
their relations with each other."[2] There are no longer any isolated
areas in the realm of world views and religion. While theologian
Paul Tillich hoped that new types of systematic theology would be
developed as a result of the encounter with world religions,[3] orien-
talist Otto Wolff contends that it is actually dangerous to concern

---

[1]The Encounter of Religions (New York: Desclee Company,
1957), p. 17.

[2]The Heretical Imperative (New York: Doubleday, 1979),
pp. 28-29.

[3]"The Significance of the History of Religion for the
Systematic Theologian," The Future of Religions, ed. J. C. Brauer
(New York: Harper & Row, 1966), p. 91.

oneself only with the Christian religion seeing how close the religions have moved to one another today:

> Even the Western Christian or theologian, no matter of which confession, is no longer in a position to carry on an exclusive monologue. The purely internal demonstration of truth of Christianity stands naive and unarmed before the encircling active movement which has broken forth from the non-Christian religions.[1]

Speaking on behalf of Evangelical Protestants, whose attitude to dialogue has been one of disinterest and non-participation, David Hesselgrave says, "Unless as evangelicals we are willing to risk locking ourselves up in a closet of monologue where we speak primarily to one another, the question for us is not, 'Shall we engage in dialogue?' but, 'In what kinds of dialogue shall we engage?'"[2] Carl F. H. Henry, calling for a major evangelical conference on missionary concerns relating to non-biblical religions, voices the same concern: "The only adequate alternative to dialogue that deletes the evangelical view is dialogue that expounds it. The late twentieth century is no time to shirk that dialogue."[3] Waldron Scott maintains that this hesitance is largely limited to the North American context, which inherited the religious triumphalism of an earlier generation of evangelicals. Eighteenth and nineteenth-century evangelicals like

---

[1] *Indiens Beitrag zum neuen Menschenbild: Ramakrishna, Gandhi, Sri Aurobindo* (Hamburg: Rowohlt, 1957), p. 9. quoted in George F. Vicedom, *The Challenge of the World Religions* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1963), p. 10.

[2] "Evangelicals and Interreligious Dialogue," *Mission Trends No. 5: Faith Meets Faith*, eds. Gerald H. Anderson and Thomas F. Stransky. (New York: Paulist Press, 1981), p. 124.

[3] "Confronting Other Religions," *Christianity Today* 13 (August 1, 1969): 31.

Jonathan Edwards and Josiah Strong expected Christianity to prevail over all the earth. However evangelicals outside North America "frequently have a more open approach to non-Christian religions and to inter-religious dialogue."[1]

The days of religious isolationism and the period of self-sufficient Christendom are over, and dialogue is seen as the major if not the only viable basis of encounter with the world religions. Asian Christians have repeatedly stressed the need for restating Christian theology in relation to the faiths in Asia.[2] Today it has come to be recognized that sifnificant inter-religious dialogue must take place between Asians in the Asian milieu. It has been pointed out that "with four centuries of missionary prescence the Christians are numerically and qualitatively an insignificant minority: a mere 2 percent of the Asian masses," and while Africa is becoming numerically and qualitatively a powerful Christian voice within the Third World,

---

[1] "'No Other Name' -- An Evangelical Conviction," Christ's Lordship and Religious Pluralism, eds. Gerald H. Anderson and Thomas F. Stransky (New York: Orbis Books, 1981), p. 67. Conservative North American evangelicals acknowledge the need for dialogue with great reluctance and continue to have strong reservations. Harold Lindsell, editor of Christianity Today and an influential evangelical voice, holds that at best: "All non-Christian religions are counterfeits of the one true faith." See "Fundamentals for a Philosophy of the Christian Mission," The Theology of the Christian Mission, ed. Gerald H. Anderson (London: SCM Press, 1961), p. 247. Richard R. De Ridder, of the Calvin Seminary in Grand Rapids, Michigan, warns that attempts at inter-religious dialogue have resulted in "aberrations of the faith" since the biblical witness to God and the gods has been overlooked in the current debate. See "God and the gods: Reviewing the Biblical Roots," Missiology: An International Review 6 (January 1978): 11-28.

[2] Dr. Eddie Asirvatham traces the attempts of Indian Christians to restate Christian belief and experience in the light of India, and more especially of Hindu thought and tradition. See Eddie Asirvatham, Christianity in the Indian Crucible (Calcutta: Y. M. C. A. Publishing House, 1957), pp. 118 ff.

"Asia, as circumstances clearly indicate, will remain always a non-Christian continent."[1] Asian Christians who have always been a minority in the midst of other religions, and have been already in dialogue for many years in day-to-day contact with them, are beginning to engage in dialogue dealing with theological or doctrinal content. Thus Wesley Ariarajah, a Sri Lankan Methodist, calls dialogue "a new principle of the theological task in Asia," and notes that: "It is significant that most of the new theological thinking that has come out of Asia is from people who live in an 'inner dialogue' with their culture and tradition."[2] It is in this context that the works of Sri Lankan theologian Dr. Lynn A. de Silva on Christian-Buddhist dialogue take on special significance, and have been selected for this study.

The Problem

The subject of inter-religious dialogue raises a number of basic implications for Christian theology that call for resolution. There is a clear need to determine the Christian self-understanding in the new context of religious pluralism, as well as the theological significance of people of other faiths and ideologies. Since the various cultural contexts and historic situations where the gospel is preached and Christian faith expressed are so different, there are

---

[1]Aloysius Pieris, "Towards an Asian Theology of Liberation: Some Religio-Cultural Guidelines," Asia's Struggle for Full Humanity: Towards a Relevant Theology, ed. Virginia Fabella (New York: Orbis Books, 1980), p. 80.

[2]"Dialogue in the Asian Context," A Vision for Man: Essays on Faith, Theology and Society, ed. Samuel Amirtham (Madras: Christian Literature Society, 1978), p. 269.

also specific theological emphases relative to the particular dialogue situation to be considered.

Reviewing a number of WCC statements on dialogue, beginning with the interim policy statement and guidelines adopted at Addis Ababa in 1971, Samartha, director of the WCC sub-unit on Dialogue with People of Living Faith and Ideologies, emphasizes the need for careful theological reflection on three unresolved areas. First, there is the need to be clear about the nature and purpose of dialogue, particularly its theological basis, and so he asks: "What exactly is the purpose of dialogue with neighbours of other faiths? To join them? To eliminate differences? To shape a world religion?" The second central question is, "Does dialogue lead to syncretism?" The third, which is related to the other two, is: "Does dialogue blunt the cutting edge of mission? Is it a substitute for proclamation? What is the relation between dialogue, witness and mission?"[1] The text of the statement adopted at the landmark Chiang Mai Theological Consultation in 1977 seemed to touch on the entire gamut of Christian theology. The participants found agreement possible in several areas in which there were "fruitful discussions" and "growth of understanding." However, there were other areas in which agreement was found to be more difficult and at times impossible.[2]

---

[1] Stanley J. Samartha, "Guidelines on Dialogue," The Ecumenical Review 31 (October 1979): 156.

[2] Four particular issues commended for further theological attention were:
What is the relationship between God's universal action in creation and his redemptive action in Jesus Christ?
Are we to speak of God's work in the lives of all men and women only in tentative terms of hope that they may experience something of him, or more positively in terms of God's

Methodological Considerations

Aim of Study

In stating the aim of this study we must keep in mind the tension in any theological frameowrk that takes seriously both the claims of Christian theology to hold universal validity as well as the self-understanding of the dialogue partner. Questions Christians must ask are: Does the notion of the plurality of religious truth or a common religious heritage connote a limited validity of the Christian vision of truth? Are other religions as valid as Christianity, i.e., are all religions ultimately the same? How salvific is revelation apart from the Judeo-Christian scriptures? Is Christianity one among many different saving encounters with the divine given to men in different historical and cultural settings? Is authentic dialogue on matters of theological substance possible? What are the goals and dimensions of such a dialogue? The aim of this study is to seek answers to the basic theological implications of inter-religious dialogue that call for resolution from the Christian standpoint, as well

---

self-disclosure to people of living faiths and in the struggle of human life and ideology?

How are we to find from the Bible criteria in our approach to people of other faiths and ideologies, recognizing as we must, both the authority accorded to the Bible by Christians of all centuries, particular questions concerning the authority of the Old Testament for the Christian Church, and the fact that our partners in dialogue have other starting points and resources both in holy books and traditions of teaching?

What is the biblical view and Christian experience of the operation of the Holy Spirit, and is it right and helpful to understand the work of God outside the church in terms of the doctrine of the Holy Spirit?

See "Dialogue in Community," The Ecumenical Review 29 (July 1977): 263.

as to the related issues of the Christian self-understanding in the

new context of religious pluralism and the essentials of authentic

inter-religious dialogue, by an analysis and evaluation of the dialogi-

cal approach to Sri Lankan Buddhism in the writings of Dr. Lynn A.

de Silva.

Relevance

The need for a study of this nature is highlighted by Paul

Löffler who draws attention to the inadequacy of "theoretical new

approaches" and calls for "a practised theology of dialogue" which

is the result of actual meetings with representatives of other reli-

gions. Löffler sees two serious shortcomings in the various attempts

to define a new Christian approach to men of other faiths: "It is

striking for me how retrospect and introvert the entire undertaking

has been." He finds these abstract concepts of dialogue are expressed

entirely within Christian terms of reference, thus, "It must be

doubted that these positions adequately deal with the reality of living

religions."[1] De Silva's works on the other hand, as Panikkar points

---

[1]Paul Löffler, "Representative Christian Approaches to People
of Living Faiths: A Survey of Issues and Its Evaluation," Faith in
the Midst of Faiths: Reflections on Dialogue in Community, ed. S. J.
Samartha (Geneva: World Council of Churches, 1977), p. 20.
    Löffler illustrates his criticism of the introvert nature of
Western theologies of dialogue pointing out how retrospective in most
cases their points of orientation are. Thus Khodr draws on Patristic
concepts which have been formulated before any encounter of Christiani-
ty with the great religions (though Löffler does not deny that Chris-
tian theology orients itself on biblical sources and criteria
elaborated in Patristic Theology); Schlette leans on classical Roman
Catholic theories of general and special revelation; and likewise,
"Barth's re-affirmation of radical discontinuity between biblical
revelation and religions is part of an inner-Christian argument partly
directed against the medieval scholastic 'analogia entis' and partly
against liberal Protestantism of the history of religion school in
the last century" (ibid.).

out, deal "with the concrete problems of the Christian dialogue" with
Buddhists.[1] Since the corpus of De Silva's works is a restatement of
the fundamentals of Christian theology in relation to Sri Lankan
Buddhist thought, speaking from its context and its terms, it commends
itself to us as a most fitting test case for a study of authenticity
in religious dialogue.

Method and Plan

Since De Silva's theology is presented as an Asian theology,
and more especially as a theology that arose out of the living context
of dialogue, chapter 1 attempts to provide the historical setting and
perspective in which his theology took shape. It focusses on the
religiously plural situation in Asia--in particular to the situation
of dialogue in which De Silva has engaged Sri Lankan Buddhism for three
decades. The chapter includes a brief description of developments re-
lating to the debate on inter-religious dialogue in the World Council
of Churches--where De Silva emerges as an influential Asian spokesman;
an account of the resurgence of Buddhism and the transition in mission-
ary attitudes; and, a survey of the events and the literature of the
Buddhist-Christian dialogue in Sri Lanka.

In chapter 2 De Silva's theology of dialogue is discussed,
i.e., his views on the principles or basis of inter-religious dialogue
and the theological significance of people of other faiths. De Silva's
reflections on the historical perspective of the Buddhist-Christian

---

[1]R. Panikkar, "The Internal Dialogue--the Insufficiency of
the so-called Phenomenological 'Epoche' in the Religious Encounter,"
Religion and Society 15 (September 1968): 55.

encounter in Sri Lanka; his estimate of Buddhism, appraisal of the Buddhist approach to dialogue, and use of Buddhist terms; and, dialogical exchanges with Buddhist thought leaders are dealt with in this chapter.

Chapter 3 describes the translational nature of De Silva's theology, and considers a statement of the framework, starting point, and guidelines for the development of an indigenous theology. Constituting a major section of the paper, this chapter consists of a careful delineation of De Silva's dialogical theology on a topical basis. His understanding of both the Christian standpoint, as well as the meeting point in Buddhism on themes such as the human predicament; the doctrine of man, Christ, and God; creation and redemption; and mission are explicated at length. The Buddhist response to these topics has also been included.

Chapter 4 addresses itself to a critical examination of De Silva's dialogical theology and method, taking into account his recurrent thesis that Christianity can be expressed authentically in dialogue.[1] In order to select the most suitable criteria for the evaluation of the theological implications of those emphases that have emerged from the investigation in chapters 2 and 3, a multiplex approach has been followed. Thus evaluative criteria have been drawn from biblical dialogical principles, typologies of dialogic modes in the early Christian Church (e.g., the Apologists and the

---

[1]His position that dialogue is neither a temptation to syncretism nor an impediment to mission is well stated in the fundamental propositions of his address at the WCC session at Nairobi in 1975.

Alexandrians), in subsequent Church history where Christians found themselves in a milieu of religious pluralism, and from contemporary approaches.

This chapter is one of reflection and summation which are largely shaped by findings and conclusions in the foregoing chapters. An attempt has been made to draw together the theological conceptions on dialogue which have emerged by sifting out that which is theologically decisive and influential for dialogue. New directions and lines of investigation for reconstructing frameworks of theological understanding of other religions are suggested on the basis of the findings.

CHAPTER I

THE MATRIX OF AN INDIGENOUS THEOLOGY

The Historical Setting

By the nineteenth century, liberal Christians were looking more sympathetically at the world religions as a result of the development of scientific and historical knowledge. Edward Burnett Tylor's study of religion in culture, conducted in 1871, paved the way for studies in anthropology of religion and sociology of religion.[1] Orientalists, notably F. Max Muller with the series Sacred Books of the East, made the sources of oriental religious traditions available to the Western scholar.[2] Muller was already speaking of a "dialogic process" between the religions, it was "a kind of Durchsprechen" that is, "in German the threshing out of a subject" comparable to the dialogues of ancient Greece.[3] A vast amount of studies in comparative religions followed and gave rise to the development of theories of religion in the later nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. These theories sought to posit explanations for the origin, evolution,

---

[1]Primitive Culture (New York: H. Holt and Company, 1874).

[2]Sacred Books of the East (New York: Colonial Press, 1900). Mircea Eliade notes that with the establishment of Indo-European philology and comparative linguistics in the first half of the nineteenth century, "the history of religions first really entered its own with Max Muller (1823-1900)" (The Sacred and the Profane [New York: Harcourt, Brace and World, 1959], p. 229).

[3]F. Max Muller, Ramakrishna: His life and Sayings (London: Longmans, Green & Co., 1898), p. 25.

14

differences, and similarities among the religions.[1] The task of classifying religions according to main recognizable types was also undertaken, notably by Nathan Söderblom (1866-1931) who drew a clear distinction between the prophetic and mystical types of religious approach. In all these comparative studies Christianity was included as one of the several phenomena to be studied.

The focus of the discussion next shifts to the East and centers around the towering figure of Hendrik Kraemer who "took up a position as different as possible from that of all the supporters of the comparative method."[2] Kraemer denied the basic premise of the comparative method which had assumed that the possibility of comparison between religions is self-evident. There was a radical discontinuity between the biblical revelation and all religions including Judaism and Islam because it "has stood and stands under continuous and direct influence and judgment of the revelation in Christ."[3] The uniqueness of Christianity calls for an uncompromising proclamation of the Gospel. The task of Christian mission was therefore conversion, not dialogue,

---

[1]H. Kraemer lists the main theories produced by the scientific study of religion under two divisions: (1) the naturalistic-psychological with a natural explanation of religion, and (2) the transcendental-philosophical which regarded religion as the realm in which the human spirit transcends nature and encounters the Ultimate (Religion and the Christian Faith, [Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1956] pp. 54-57).

[2]Stephen Neill, Christian Faith and Other Faiths (London: Oxford University Press, 1961), p. 3.

[3]H. Kraemer, The Christian Message in a Non-Christian World (New York: Harper and Brothers, 1938), p. 145.

it was the "announcement of the Message of God which is not adaptable to any religion or philosophy."[1]

In formulating this view of radical discontinuity in preparation for the third ecumenical missionary conference at Tambaram in 1938, Kraemer was in direct opposition to the "fulfilment theory" which had gained some credence since Edinburgh 1910.[2] Kraemer was also implicitly rejecting the inclusive view published in the report Re-thinking Missions: A Laymen's Inquiry after One Hundred Years in 1932. Edited by W. E. Hocking, and representing a liberal attitude toward theology and missions, this report envisioned that in a "world

---

[1]Ibid., p. 302. Kraemer's position, formulated prior to Tambaram 1938, remained basically unchanged in his later works. In Why Christianity of All Religions, published in 1960, he maintained that the acceptance of other religions as valid alternatives would be a betrayal of Christ. Christianity was not absolute, nor even in all respects the 'best' religion. Accepting the Barthian distinction between revelation and religion he maintained what is absolute is not Christianity but the revelation of God in Jesus Christ. Christianity is the best religion because it is there that the Gospel is to be heard, and the Christian church is the body of Christ to whom alone God is savingly revealed. See Why Christianity of All Religions (Philadelphia: The Westminster Press, 1962), pp. 115-117.

[2]The "fulfilment theory," most typically expressed by J. N. Farquhar, held that in Christianity Hinduism finds its explanation and consummation. Influenced by the evolutionary theories of his time and their application to theology, he presented Christ as the fulfilment of the highest aims and aspirations of Hinduism: "In Him is focused every ray of light that shines in Hinduism. He is the Crown of the faith of India" (The Crown of Hinduism [London: Oxford University Press, 1913] p. 457). In similar vein in 1913 Rev. R. G. Milburn of Bishop's College, Calcutta, proposed that the Old Testament should be replaced by the Vedantic writings in the Indian Church. See D. B. Forrester, "Not to Destroy but to Fulfil," The Indian Journal of Theology 15 (April-June, 1966): 69. Rev. Bernard Lucas, an L. M. S. missionary, in his development of the hypothesis concluded that all religions were moving toward a universal faith in which the "common centre is the universal Christ as manifested in the personality of Jesus" (The Empire of Christ [London: Macmillan & Co., 1908] p. 406).

faith" in which the insights of all the great religions are combined, "we can desire no variety of religious experience to perish until it has yielded up to the rest its own ingredient of truth."[1] Kraemer who could see no such agreement among religions warned against syncretism as a danger to Christian authenticity and held that "points of contact in the real, deep sense of the word can only be found by antithesis."[2] In his view of biblical realism other religions were great coherent systems. Every religion was "a living, indivisible unity," and the significance of any part of it could not be understood, "without keeping constantly in mind the vast living unity of existential apprehension in which this part moves and has its being."[3] Kraemer considered it a fatal mistake to use the uniqueness and finality of Christ as an argument against incarnation and adaptation. But he also held that all attempts at incarnation and adaptation have syncretistic distortions as their inevitable accompaniment. This emphasis, which came to be equated with the fear of syncretism, was to influence missionary theology decisively regarding inter-faith relations in the years to come.[4]

---

[1](New York: Harper & Brothers Publishers, 1932), p. 44.

[2]Kraemer, Christian Message, p. 139.

[3]Ibid., p. 135.

[4]Ibid., pp. 308-327. Murray Rogers maintains, that among other things, the impact of Kraemer's writings "created among Asian Christians what one might describe as a pathological fear of any form of Relativism." See "Hindu and Christian--A Moment Breaks," Religion and Society 12 (March 1965): 38. M. M. Thomas considered the fear of syncretism after Tambaram to be theologically destructive for the Indian Church "because it made the churches close in on themselves and live in imported shells of Western confessions rather than open themselves to their own milieu with a view to confessing in categories

18

Asian theologians reacting to Kraemer now began to formulate

a theology of inter-religious relations very differently. Notably,

the "rethinking Group," which had been formed in 1936 by Indian Chris-

tian laymen who were concerned about the need for interpreting the

Christian faith in terms of Hindu spirituality and ethos, "found

Kraemer's interpretation of the Revelation of God in Christ unsatis-

factory for a meaningful encounter between Christian faith and Hindu-

ism."[1] According to M. M. Thomas, Kraemer's stance had only served to

---

of the self-understanding of people in their own situation" ("Some
Trends in Contemporary Indian Christian Theology," Religion and Society
24 [December, 1977]: 5).

[1]K. C. Abraham, Interpreting Christian Social Ethics in
Modern India (Ann Arbor, Michigan: University Microfilms International,
1980), p. 13. The "Rethinking Group" was so called because of the
title of its best known publication, Rethinking Christianity in India,
ed. D. M. Devasahayam (Madras: Sudarsanam, 1938), which was an Indian
reply to Kraemer's The Christian Message in a Non-Christian World.
Contributors to the book included Justice P. Chenchiah, V. Chakkarai,
A. N. Sudarisanam, Eddy Asirvatham, G. V. Job, S. Jesudason and D. M.
Devasahayam. For a brief survey and evaluation of some major Indian
and Sri Lankan theological positions in the light of Kraemer's offen-
sive against syncretism see G. C. Oosthuizen, Theological Battleground
in Asia and Africa (London: C. Hurst & Company, 1972), pp. 14-47.
Oosthuizen sees two general divisions of thought in Indian Christian
approaches to Hinduism and Buddhism, viz., the "orthodox" and the
"modern". The essential characteristic of the orthodox approach is
that it takes the Bible alone as its norm for theology. The modern
approach seeks to bring scientific thought and the metaphysical ex-
positions of man as seen in philosophy and religion into harmony with
the theological exposition of the Bible. Oosthuizen lists Bishop A. J.
Appasamy and "Rethinking Group" members P. Chenchiah, V. Chakkarai and
G. V. Job as those in whose theological efforts Hindu philosophy had a
marked influence. He sees the attempt of these men to establish
Pratyaksha (intuition) as the important or only norm of Christian
theology as unacceptable to a historically rooted Christianity. Their
syncretistic approach has an anthropocentric basis of construction,
the emphasis on religious experience in place of the Scriptural norm
derives from the universalistic philosophical outlook of Hinduism.
Thus Oosthuizen views these men as having made the grave mistake of
having consciously or unconsciously shifted the axis from the Gospel
to Hinduism. Then there is a different approach by men like D. G. Moses,

freeze the established syncretisms of Western Christianity. Thomas,
along with Paul Devanandan, D. T. Niles, Russell Chandran, and others,
felt the inadequacy of Kraemer's approach to Asian religions and
sought a more adequate post-Kraemer theology that "emphasized the
positive potentialities of the inter-religious traffic rather than
the danger of syncretism."[1]

After the Tambaram Conference in 1938, the next event of
major importance in the inter-religious encounter was the establish-
ment in 1950 of the Christian Institute for the Study of Religion and
Society at Bangalore. Founded by Devanandan and Thomas it grew to
be the most influential dialgoue center in Southern Asia and gave
expression to a post-Kraemer inter-religious theology.[2] Established

---

Surjit Singh, P. D. Devanandan, and Sri Lankans D. T. Niles and S.
Kulandran, which has its axis in Scripture. The Indian representatives
reject Radhakrishnan's idea of Santana Dharma, i.e., a Pan-Hinduism
which includes and utilizes elements from all types of religion.
Rejecting pragmatic utility they maintained that the criterion of
religious truth is Scripture. What is significant for Oosthuizen is
that in relating to Eastern religions, these men are careful not to
compromise "the creed of the Christian Gospel" and take their axis in
Scripture.

[1]"Christ-centered Syncretism," Religion and Society 26
(March 1979): 29.

[2]Through the Christian Institute for the Study of Religion and
Society (CISRS) Devanandan and Thomas began to develop a theology of
dialogue conversant with the Indian experience. Having made a thorough
study of the Hindu renaissance, beginning with Ram Mohan Roy and the
Brahmo and Arya Samaj movements of the 19th century through to Gandhi,
the Neo-vedanta of Radhakrishnan and the secular humanism of Nehru,
Devanandan saw Christ at work in reformed Hinduism. See P. D.
Devanandan, Preparation for Dialogue (Bangalore: CISRS, 1964)p. 161.
As Nirmal Minz points out a basic proposition of Devanandan's theology
is that "God's purpose in Jesus Christ is an all-inclusive cosmic pro-
cess touching nature man and society" ("Theologies of Dialogue--A
Critique," Religion and Society 14 [June 1967]: 9). In this wider
Christology the coming of Jesus Christ as the first fruit of a new

to develop a dialogue between Christian theologians and the leaders of renascent Hinduism, the Institute organizes seminars and study conferences on the living faiths of India. It publishes the journal Religion and Society, in addition to papers and books, and has built up an impressive body of materials dealing with dialogue, the social revolution, the Christian role in nation-building and other issues. In 1938 Kraemer's thrust put an end to the idea of a common religious basis for inter-religious fellowship which had been mooted in the Jerusalem International Missionary Conference (IMC) meeting in 1928. It also effectively set back Hocking's emphasis on religious relativism.[1] However, by 1950 Devanandan, who had been associated with the "Rethinking Group" and shared its concerns, along with Thomas and other CISRS associates, led out in the movement towards a post-Kraemer inter-religious theology. The post-Tambaram tendency to absolutize

---

humanity is the promise of the new creation for all. The cosmic Christ is present in every aspect of human history and culture, he can therefore take form in different cultures and reform from within them.

For M. M. Thomas, since cultures are moulded inwardly by the spirit of their religions, "The idea of Christ's transcendence has to be extended to include religions. If Jesus Christ transcends the Christian religion, as its judge and redeemer, it opens up the possibility of Christ reforming all religions and in-forming Himself in them" (Man and the Universe of Faiths [Madras: Christian Literature Society, 1975] p. 151). Here is a Christocentric relativisation "which relativises all expressions of religiosity radically" (Ibid., p. 148). For the basis of this post-Kraemer theology of religious pluralism, Thomas says he has drawn on the dialectical theology of Barth, since "its understanding of Jesus Christ as the humanism of God rejecting and electing all mankind in Jesus Christ points to a transcendent power which can renew them all." (Ibid., p. 147).

[1] For a description of the profound impact made by Kraemer's book, The Christian Message in a Non-Christian World, both on the Tambaram delegates and on Christian thinkers in general, see Eric J. Sharpe, Faith Meets Faith (London: SCM Press, 1977), pp. 91-101.

the Christian religion over against other religions was now countered

by a theology of religious and cultural pluralism. The new era of

theological openness became evident not only in the activities of the

CISRS in India but throughout Christendom where we find both Protes-

tant and Roman Catholic theologians beginning to formulate ideas very

differently from Kraemer.[1]

---

[1]Even in the West a new era of theological openness is evident.
Among both Protestant and Roman Catholic theologians there is a shift
from discontinuity to religious pluralism. Hans Küng, Karl Rahner,
Wolfhart Pannenberg, and John Hick provide notable examples of this
theological trend which has been prominent since the declaration of
Vatican II on the relation of the church to non-Christian religions.
The declaration seemed to question the traditional Roman Catholic dogma,
extra ecclesiam nulla salus, and admit there might be saving light
in non-Christian religions.

Soon after the Vatican Council declaration in 1964, Hans Küng
proposed that the world religions should be regarded as "the more com-
mon, the 'ordinary' way of salvation," and "the way of the Church
can be considered as the great, the 'extraordinary' way of salvation!"
For Küng, "The men of world religions are not professing Christians,
but, by the grace of God, they are called and marked out to be Chris-
tians" ("The World Religions in God's Plan of Salvation," Christian
Revelation and World Religions ed. J. Neunner [London: Burns & Gates,
1967], pp. 53-56). Even prior to Vatican II, the influential Catholic
theologian Karl Rahner had proposed a similar radical shift with the
notion of an "anonymous Christianity." . . . "Christianity does not
simply confront the member of an extra-Christian religion as a mere
non-Christian but as someone who can and must be regarded in this or
that respect as an anonymous Christian." Thus Rahner concluded that
in a genuine sense other religions could be termed "ways of salvation."
("Christianity and the Non-Christian Religions," Theological Investi-
gations 20 [Baltimore: Helicon Press, 1966]5: 131).

Wolfhart Pannenberg's proposal of an "unconscious participa-
tion in salvation" by those unreached by the Christian gospel may be
considered a liberal Protestant version of this anonymous Christianity.
He suggests that the concept of Jesus' descent into hell and his
preaching in the realm of the dead is the way of salvation for those
who were never exposed to the revelation in Jesus Christ. The solu-
tion lies in a post-mortem encounter with the person of Christ, or
a second chance after death (Jesus--God and Man, tr. Lewis L. Wilkins
and Duane A. Priebe [Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1967], p. 272).

The final step or the end result of this theological trend
may be seen in what John Hick calls "the Copernican revolution in
theology." He welcomes what he terms, "the shift from an ecclesio-
centric to a theocentric understanding of the religions." The

Christian dogma is no longer at the center, rather it is God who is at the center of all the religions of mankind. Hick has taken the final step in abandoning the "Christ only" of salvific revelation. According to him all religions are equally valid, therefore he predicts that the relation between the religions will "perhaps be somewhat like that now obtaining between the different denominations of Christianity in Europe or the United States" (God and the Universe of Faiths [New York: St. Martin's Press, 1973], pp. 130-132). With this affirmation of religious pluralism, the swing of the pendulum is complete. Christianity is for many no longer the absolute religion, and the goal of the present encounter of religions is, as it is for Paul Tillich, "Not conversion but dialogue" (Christianity and the Encounter of the World's Religions [New York: Columbia University Press, 1963], p. 95).

However, Paul Knitter has drawn attention to some resistance in German Protestant theology to this trend toward theological openness. Writing from the standpoint of Roman Catholic tradition he makes a call to a "dialogue within dialogue," i.e., a dialogue among Christians in order to engage more effectively in a dialogue with non-Christians. In a case study of Paul Althaus' attempt to elaborate a theology of religions which would avoid the extremes represented by Troeltsch and Barth, Knitter has evaluated Protestant attempts to understand and encounter other religions. He notes that Althaus bases his efforts on his "Protestant heritage", especially on the doctrine of justification, thus:

> As a "case study," he would seem to imply that any theologian who adheres to this traditional understanding of justification cannot really judge the non-Christian religious world as anything more than a negative preparation for Christ. The religions can never be ways of salvation; they can only voice "questions"; never can they provide real answers.

This downgrading of the theological significance of other religions is traced largely to the "inescapable influence of Karl Barth." And though attitudes have changed to some degree, German Protestant theologians do not pay much attention to other religions ever "since Barth unleashed his apocalyptic 'No' to religion and since it took on added resonance--mainly through the works of Hendrik Kraemer--in the third World Missionary Conference in Tambaram in 1938." See Towards a Protestant Theology of Religions: A Case Study of Paul Althaus and Contemporary Attitudes (Marburg: N. G. Elwert, 1974), pp. 182-184.

It must also be kept in mind that Evangelical Christianity, with its concept of the uniqueness of the Christian revelation and the lostness of those outside its pale, continues as the most powerful stream in mission. The 1969 survey of North American Protestant agencies with overseas ministries revealed 33,290 active missionaries working in 181 nations or other geographic subdivisions outside the United States of America and Canada. Of this number Asia received twenty nine percent. See North American Protestant Ministries Overseas 9th ed., (Monrovia, California: Missions Advanced Research and Communication Center, 1970), pp. 2-3.

Inter-Religious Dialogue--the Debate
in the World Council of Churches

The conflicting emphases, i.e., the danger of syncretism vis-a-vis the positive values of inter-religious dialogue, come into sharp focus in the thinking and activities of the World Council of Churches (WCC). A study of WCC assemblies, documents, and the activities of the WCC unit on dialogue, provides a picture of the role played by Asian theologians in this debate. It not only serves to highlight the theological implications of inter-religious dialogue but also identifies De Silva's role in the debate and introduces us to his theology of dialogue.

The history of the WCC, especially since Evanston 1954, provides a graphic picture of the growth of inter-religious dialogue. The discussions at WCC assemblies and studies undertaken at various consultations, in which serious attempts were made to grapple with the issues raised by the encounter of the Church with other religions, indicate a steady proliferation of dialogical activities.[1] Along with

---

[1]A large number of organized dialogues, some bi-lateral, others multi-lateral, were held under WCC auspices. The consultations included, the relationship of Christians with men of other faiths, Mexico 1963 and Kandy 1967; dialogue in relation to evangelism, Bangkok 1973; and review, evaluation, and future directions at Chiang Mai 1972. Beginning with a continuing dialogue with Jews, and later Muslims, people of four different faiths--Hindu, Buddhist, Christian, and Muslim-- were brought together at the Ajaltoun Consultation in March 1970. In the same year twenty three Christian theologians met at Zurich to evaluate the Ajaltoun Consultation. Since the WCC central committee formulated a policy statement on interim guidelines for dialogue at Addis Ababa in 1971, a wide programme of actual dialogues was carried out initiated by the Sub-Unit on Dialogue with people of Living Faiths and Ideologies and by various dialogue centers. The second multi-lateral dialogue in Colombo in 1974 included Jews in addition to the other faiths represented at Ajaltoun. At Nairobi, 1975, for the first time in the history of WCC assemblies, five members of other faiths were present--a Jew, a Hindu, a Buddhist, a Muslim, and a Sikh.

this increased activity there has been a marked change in theological emphasis with regard to the inter-religious encounter, a change that is reflected in official statements of the WCC and in the terminology used to describe people of other faiths. Uppsala to Nairobi, a report commissioned by the central committee of the Council in preparation for the fifth assembly, points out that the later formulations sought to avoid the description of other religionists as "non-Christians." Thus, "It is no longer 'The Gospel and Non-Christian Religions' or 'The Word of God and the Living Faiths of Men.' It is now 'Dialogue with People of Living Faiths and Ideologies.'"[1]

In a significant article espousing the viewpoint of evangelicals Klaas Runia observes a similar theological shift as inter-religious dialogue occupies an increasingly prominent place in the thinking and activities of the WCC. Maintaining that the official report of the Nairobi Assembly had failed to do so, Runia goes on to distinguish three different levels of dialogue: (1) coming to a better mutual understanding; (2) searching together for a better form of society; (3) dialogue in missionary communication. It is at the third and crucial level, involving theological issues, that Runia calls for extreme caution and a careful listening to Scripture "lest one fall into the dangerous trap of syncretism."[2] For Runia the trend is alarming, he sees real dangers in the irenic approach toward other religions.

---

[1]Uppsala to Nairobi, ed. David E. Johnson (New York: Friendship Press, 1975), p. 98.

[2]"The World Council of Churches and Inter-Religious Dialogue," Calvin Theological Journal 15 (April 1980): 34.

Though he can go along with "a kind of dialogue whose purpose it is
to listen sensitively in order to understand," he asks: "But is there
not more to the present shift within the WCC toward assigning an even
greater role to dialogue? Is there not a special brand of theology that
lies behind it, a special view of both the Christian faith and other
religions?"[1] In answer to his question he takes his stand firmly with
Kraemer and points out what he sees as dangerous errors in Protestant,
Roman Catholic and Eastern Orthodox dialogical theology.[2] He takes
particular exception to what he calls an endorsement of the new syn-
cretism by S. Wesley Ariarajah, a Methodist minister from Sri Lanka.
Ariarajah has called the event of Jesus Christ "a" and not "the"
decisively significant event in man's entire history, thus giving up
the uniqueness of Jesus Christ. Runia therefore concludes, "Evangeli-
cals can only say a heartfelt No against this kind of view."[3]

---

[1] Ibid., p. 30.

[2] These include: the view that somehow all religions are
ways of salvation; that Jesus Christ is in one way or another active
in other religions; the attempt to relate Christian worship and the
meditative use of the holy books of other faiths; the notion which
he finds common in Roman Catholic theology that elements of grace are
present in non-Christian religions though in a hidden manner; the
view of Eastern Orthodox Metropolitatn Georges Khodr that through the
work of the Spirit Christ is made present in other religions; the view
of Dr. S. J. Samartha (Director of the WCC Sub-Unit on Dialogue with
People of Living Faith and Ideologies) that the Holy Spirit is also
at work in secular faiths and ideologies; and finally, his overiding
concern is that the missionary mandate of the Church will be vitiated
by mixing various religious ideas and experiences.

[3] Runia, p. 41. According to Carl E. Braaten extreme positions
have been taken by orotagonists on both sides of this debate. It is
the ecumenical fashion for men such as Paul Knitter and John Hick to
maintain that no exclusive claim belongs to the core of the Christian
message. They hold, that there is salvation without Christ in the
other religions, "not only outside the church, not only apart from faith
in Christ, but apart from Christ altogether." See "The Uniqueness and

By Evanston, 1954, the influence of Hendrik Kraemer was on the wane, and by 1961 at the New Delhi Assembly dialogue had come to be looked upon as a form of evangelism. According to the official report Christians must take up conversations with men of other faiths, "knowing that Christ addresses them through us and us through them."[1] Therefore "Dialogue is a form of evangelism which is often effective today."[2] It was at Uppsala, 1968, that the proponents of dialogue came into confrontation with the evangelicals. The major point at issue dealt with the relationship of dialogue to evangelism as explicated in the report "Renewal in Mission." It was highly controversial. Slack observes, "Certainly no section draft had aroused more concern even before the section discussions began."[3]   D. T. Niles of Sri Lanka, who had been involved in ecumenical thinking about evangelism ever since Tambaram in 1938, found it refreshing. Niles sees for the first time the right posture about evangelism, the report endeavours

---

Universality of Jesus Christ," Mission Trends No. 5: Faith Meets Faith, eds. Gerald H. Anderson and Thomas F. Stransky (New York: Paulist Press, 1981), p. 81. Evangelical Protestants have had sharp negative reactions to such expositions of dialogue, "preferring instead to hold a monopoly for Christians on the salvation which God in Christ has accomplished for the world." (Ibid). Representatives of this "exclusive mindset," such as Harold Lindsell, "restrict salvation in the end to those who actually hear the gospel and put their faith in Christ" (Ibid., p. 79). Thus in his description of the evangelical thrust in the debate, Braaten says: "We find a new affirmation of the heritage of exclusiveness among the neo-evangelicals who are conducting a vigorous campaign against every form of universalism" (Ibid., p. 73).

[1]The New Delhi Report. The Third Assembly of the World Council of Churches, 1961 (New York: Association Press, 1962), p. 82.

[2]Ibid., p. 84.

[3]Kenneth Slack, Uppsala Report (London: SCM Press Ltd., 1968), p. 75.

to tell what God was doing in the world and gets out of the posture of "we" and "they."[1]   John R. W. Stott, the prominent evangelical Anglican, found the report disturbing and wondered whether the crucified Lord was central enough in the report. Stott maintains that it was pressure from the evangelicals that forced an acceptable wording of the relationship of dialogue to proclamation. The statement reads, "As Christians we believe that Christ speaks in this dialogue, revealing himself to those who do not know him and correcting the limited and distorted knowledge of those who do."[2] As proposed earlier in the discussion it was worded: "In this dialogue Christ speaks through the brother, correcting our limited and distorted understanding of the truth." If this wording had been agreed upon, Stott maintains, "This would have turned evangelism upside down and presented dialogue as the proclamation of the gospel to the Christian by the non-Christian."[3] At the Nairobi Assembly John Stott would recall the lament of Bishop Arias that "evangelism had become the Cinderella of the WCC," and challenge the Council to prove it had a heartfelt commitment to evangelism: "You say that you do, but where is the evidence?"[4] Thus the significance of dialogue as it relates to evangelism

---

[1]Ibid., p. 76.

[2]Official Report of the Fourth Assembly of the World Council of Churches, Uppsala, July 4-20, 1968. Norman Goodall, ed. (Geneva: World Council of Churches, 1968), p. 29.

[3]John R. Stott, "Dialogue, Encounter, Even Confrontation," Mission Trends No. 5: Faith Meets Faith, eds. Gerald H. Anderson and Thomas F. Stransky (New York: Paulist Press, 1981), p. 165.

[4]Harvey T. Hoekstra, The World Council of Churches and the Demise of Evangelism (Wheaton, Illinois: Tyndale House Publishers, 1979), p. 183.

continues to be a sharply controversial issue as the debate shifts to Nairobi.

At Nairobi in 1975 the issues of dialogue, i.e., the fear of syncretism as opposed to the positive potentialities of inter-religious traffic, occupy center stage. At Uppsala dialogue had received only marginal attention as part of concern for mission, but now it comes up for discussion in the sections and at the plenary sessions. Representatives of five other faiths were present as guests and participated in the section discussions. The Section III theme of "Seeking Community," with people of other faiths, cultures, and ideologies, when presented in the plenary session, was almost forgotten as repeated allegations of syncretism were made. Dr. Stanley Samartha, director of the WCC programme on Dialogue with People of Living Faiths and Ideologies, notes that the discussion of Section III was marked by fear,-- "fear of losing the 'uniqueness' of Christ, fear of weakening the sense of 'mission', and the persistent fear of 'syncretism'."[1] In the main, it was the European theologians, evangelicals from Scandinavia, West Germany, and England, who voiced their fears. The Asian and African participants called for a more definite endorsement of the dialogue approach. Dr. Lukas Vischer, director of the Secretariat of the Faith and Order Commission, observes that: "Although the groupings in the debate were in fact much more complicated, the disagreement was regarded exclusively as a conflict between European and

---

[1]Stanley J. Samartha, "Courage for Dialogue: An Interpretation of the Nairobi Debate," Religion and Society 23 (September 1976): 22.

Asian theology."[1] It is in this context that we must take note of the contribution made by Lynn A. de Silva, who was one of the leading voices for the Asian viewpoint. The Nairobi debate serves to high-light the fundamental theological implications of dialogue with refer-ence to the Asian situation which is determined by the plurality of religions. It also introduces us to De Silva's role in the WCC debate as a practitioner of dialogue in the Asian context.

Dr. Samuel Rayan, the Roman Catholic observer who took part in the section discussions, sees the tension beween Asian and northern European theologians resulting from the difference in theological perspectives. Summarizing the European viewpoint Rayan notes that the Europeans saw dialogue as leading to an "illegitimate syncretism." No community of prayer with people of other religions was possible. Only sociological dialogue could be had, and it could have only one purpose: "To know them in order, to evangelize them." These conclu-sions rested on reasoning such as: "Christ is only in the church and nowhere outside. He is present only in the Word and Sacraments. In the world He may be present as Creator, not as Redeemer. Otherwise why did he become incarnate and teach and die on the cross?"[2] The

_____

[1]Lukas Vischer, "Dialogue--Impasse or Open Door?" A Vision for Man: Essays on Faith, Theology and Society, ed. Samuel Amirtham (Madras: The Christian Literature Society, 1978), p. 254.
The view point of Asian evangelicals, who are numerous in East Asia and as fearful of syncretism as their Western counterparts, was evidently not heard at Nairobi. Yasuo C. Furuya, Professor of Theology at the Tokyo Union Theological Seminary, speaking on behalf of Asian Christians rejects John Hick's view that all religions are equally valid, and concurs with Hendrik Kraemer that oriental religions are "formid-able opponents." See "The Significance of Asian Christianity: A Note to Western Theologians," Pacific Theological Review 9 (Spring 1977): 24-26.
[2]Samuel Rayan, "'The Ultimate Blasphemy': On Putting God in a Box," International Review of Mission 65 (January 1976): 132.

strong European opposition resulted in a revised drart with a new pre-amble, which in turn brought forth a counter-reaction to the critical contributions from European theologians:

> Is every Christian experience and every theological initia-tive which is not North Atlantic invalid, inadmissible, and unworthy of a hearing? Or is it that the extensive syncret-ism of the Bible and Western Christianity is entirely in order while all syncretism elsewhere is to be ruled out a priori as illegitimate? Or are the Evangelicals deeply influenced by fear of the unfamiliar and the unknown? Or is it Christian smugness and an over-confidence in armchair theologies?[1]

In the conflict between European and Asian theology at Nairobi, Douglas J. Elwood hears "the collective voice of Asia" loud and clear. He cites two Sri Lankans--the Rev. Kenneth Fernando who, speaking from the floor, observed that "exclusivism" is a far greater danger for most Asian Christians than "syncretism"; and Wesley Ariara-jah who pointed out that at least in its theological formulations, symbols, and practices, Christianity is itself a syncretistic religion.[2] Carmencita Karagdag of the Philippines felt that the revised preamble had become overcautious and reflected what she called "The paranoia of Western countries which have little or no contact with other faiths."[3] The two weightiest and theologically most influential con-tributions came from Principal Russell Chandran of the Church of South India, and Dr. Lynn A. de Silva, a Methodist from Sri Lanka, Chandran

---

[1]Rayan, "Ultimate Blasphemy," p. 133.

[2]"Emerging Themes in Asian Theological Thinking," The Human and the Holy, eds. Emerito P. Nacpil and Douglas J. Elwood (New York: Orbis Books, 1980), p. 239.

[3]Kenneth Slack, Nairobi Narrative (London: SCM Press, 1976), p. 67.

reviews the history of the question from Edinburgh 1910 to show that the pendulum had swung back to the position at Tambaram 1938. He emphasizes that it was "the first-hand experience of those who have lived and moved with people of other faiths," along with a deeper theological understanding of the gospel, that "led many to modify or abandon the Kraemerian approach and to adopt the approach of dialogue." Since the response of people of other faiths deepens our knowledge and experience of Jesus Christ and his gospel, for Chandran, "the Church which evangelizes is also evangelized." Thus he makes a plea to the European theologians to avoid the mistake of making judgments on the basis of traditional doctrines, and calls on them "to be willing to listen to the testimony and insights of those who have a more intimate knowledge of other faiths and are in no way less committed to Jesus Christ and his mission."[1]

The other major contribution was that of Lynn A. de Silva. Samartha characterizes De Silva's contribution as "one of the most powerful interventions in the Assembly in support of dialogue" from one who has had many years of actual experience of dialogue.[2] Hallencreutz describes it as the personal witness of an experienced theologian from Sri Lanka; and goes on to say "that 'sharing in spirituality' does not necessarily mean abandoning the Gospel's claim to exclusiveness. Instead, inter-religious contact may offer fresh angles

---

[1]Breaking Barriers: Nairobi 1975. The Official Report of the Fifth Assembly of the World Council of Churches, 23 November-- 10 December, 1975, ed. David M. Paton, (Grand Rapids, Michigan: WM. B. Eerdmans, 1976), pp. 71-72.

[2]"Courage for Dialogue" p. 31. As a leading spokesman in the WCC for the Asian view point, De Silva must be considered a shaper of

of approach to the interpretation of the Gospel message."[1] After sur-

veying the contributions of De Silva, Chandran, and others, Hallen-

creutz effectively sums up the basic point of contention between the

Asian and European theologians:

> The heat of the Asian theologians' reaction would seem to
> be explained by their impression that theologians from
> religiously fairly homogenous environments in Europe were
> questioning their theological integrity, when they were
> trying to penetrate the traditional ecclesiastical exclusive-
> ness in their own environments, where richly differentiated
> religions predominate and where they had also met with genuine
> religious experience in their neighbours.[2]

It is in terms of this confrontation between European and

Asian theologies that De Silva's own theology of dialogue must be seen.

Significantly he chose to title his editorial reflections on the

Nairobi debate "Freedom from Teutonic Captivity."[3] The passing of the

---

WCC thinking and policy. He has been a WCC Central Committee member
(Paris 1962, Geneva 1967 and 1973); a member of the working committee
of the Division of World Mission and Evangelism (Mexico 1963, Zurich
1966 and Cantebury 1969); and most importantly a member of the working
committee on Dialogue with Faiths and Ideologies (DFI) since 1969.
Among the DFI consultations attended by him were Ajaltoun, Beirut 1970,
Athens 1973, Berlin 1974, Colombo 1974 and 1978, Chiang Mai, Thailand
1977, Jerusalem 1978, Trinidad 1978 and Budapest 1980. DFI Study Center
Directors Consultations included Kandy 1966, HongKong 1971, and Singa-
pore 1980. Other significant ecumenical activities include study tours
in Buddhist countries and study programs in centers of Buddhist study
in the West, such as the Buddhist-Christian Encounter in Rangoon in
1961, and the conference on "Buddhist-Christian Renewal and the Future
of Humanity" at the University of Hawaii in 1980. He was also a parti-
cipant at the 1976 sessions of the Ecumenical Association of Third
World Theologians in Dar-es-Salaam, Tanzania, and the Asian Theological
Conference at Wennappuwa, Sri Lanka in 1979.

[1]Hallencreutz, Carl F. Dialogue and Community. Ecumenical
Issues in Inter-religious Relationships, (Uppsala, Sweden: Swedish
Institute of Missionary Research, 1977), p. 101.

[2]Ibid.

[3]Dialogue New Series 3 (January-April 1976):   125.

report on "Seeking Community" by an overwhelming majority is seen as the Protestant equivalent of the approval of dialogue by Vatican II. And for him the significance of this confrontation between first- and third-world theologians is three-fold:

> 1. It revealed the strength of the Afro-asian solidarity in their commitment to dialogue; 2. it revealed more clearly than ever before that the Third World Churches will no longer tolerate being dictated to by the Western Churches; 3. it revealed their determination to break away from teutonic captivity and discover the Christ who "Frees and Unites" in the living context of Asian and African religions.[1]

As stated in the introductory remarks of his address to the general assembly, De Silva's concern is to set at rest the many misgivings, fears, and anxieties voiced by the Europeans about dialogue. These arise, he pointed out, in the minds of people who have not encountered people of other faiths, nor even lived among them. In a speech that may well be looked upon as his manifesto for dialogue, he maintains that one can share in the spirituality of others without in any way diminishing full and loyal commitment to one's own faith.[2] Instead of being a temptation to syncretism, dialogue is a safeguard against it; thus it is possible to seek the wider community without compromising the true skandalon of the gospel. Asian Christians must therefore break down the walls that separate one religion from another and seek to express the universal Christian faith in the thought-forms and life-forms of Asia. De Silva's stance is decidedly post-Kraemerian and in line with that of P. D. Devanandan, M. M. Thomas, and D. T. Niles

---

[1] Ibid., p. 2.

[2] Breaking Barriers. . . pp. 72-73.

who advocated the positive potentialities of inter-religious dialogue.
It is to the evaluation of this stance by an examination of the corpus
of his writings that this study is devoted, however, in order to spell
out the aims of our study, we must now turn to De Silva's particular
dialogue situation in the Asian context and his dialogical approach
in it.

Buddhist--Christian Dialogue in Sri Lanka

"It is granted on all hands that the dialogue between
Buddhists and Christians is most seriously undertaken in Ceylon, now
Sri Lanka, due to their mutual willingness to come to grips with the
economical and religious problems which beset their nation."[1] This
assessment by Joseph J. Spae, the well-known Catholic scholar in
Buddhist studies, underscores the importance of surveying the Buddhist-
Christian dialogue in the Sri Lankan context. Spae also underlines the
importance of De Silva's role in this dialogue: "Christians in Ceylon
have engaged since 1963 in an intensive study of Buddhist doctrine and
institutions at the Study Centre for Religion and Society in Colombo
under the leadership of the Rev. Lynn A. de Silva."[2] Not only is De
Silva the foremost Christian leader in this dialogue, but as Spae notes
elsewhere, this study center "is perhaps the most active of all study
centres. It is ably led by Rev. Lynn A. de Silva, a biblical scholar
and prolific writer on Buddhist-Christian relations."[3] De Silva's

---

[1] Joseph J. Spae, "Three Notes on the Christian--Buddhist
Dialogue," Zeitschrift Fur Missionswissenschaft und Religionswissen-
schaft 59:1 (January 1975): 24.

[2] Ibid.

[3] "The Buddhist-Christian Encounter: Encounter Centres Through-
out the World," Pro Mundi Vita Bulletin 67 (July-August 1977): 11.

contribution as a Christian leader, both before and after his appoint-
ment as the director of the Study Center, is worth noting. Born in
1919 and ordained to the Methodist ministry in 1950, he served as
a teacher, superintendent and circuit minister, manager of fourteen
Methodist schools in Sri Lanka, and editor of the "Christian News
Bulletin" and the Sinhala journal Suba Hasun. Having worked as co-
translator of the Bible into Sinhala since 1964, he became the chief
translator of the joint Protestant-Roman Catholic translation of the
Bible in 1973. Other positions occupied by him included that of
William Paton Lecturer at Selly Oak Colleges, Birmingham, England, in
1970-71, and Visiting Lecturer in Asian Religions at the University of
Bristol in the same year; member of the committee on research of the
senate of Serampore college, responsible for the M. Th. and D. Th.
degrees; and, Executive President of the National Council for Religion
and Peace in 1979-80. He died in May 1982.

De Silva · was in charge of the Study Center since 1962.
The Study Center was set up in 1951, with Rev. G. B. Jackson as secre-
tary, because of the growing c.nviction in the Sri Lankan Methodist
Synod that the gospel needed to be relevant in the context of the nation-
al culture and heritage particularly as a result of the impact of
resurgent Buddhism after independence. By arrangement with the Methodist
Synod, the work of the center was integrated with the National Christian
Council and thus became a center for inter denominational activity.
Originally set up "to study and interpret the religious and social
movements of the people of this land, in order to assist the Church to
fulfil its calling to witness and service in the life of the nation,"
it was later organized under two divisions:

(a) The concern of the Division of Buddhist Studies
is to promote study and research in classical Buddhism
and modern developments in Buddhism, and to foster a
deeper understanding of Buddhism among Christians with
a view to engaging in dialogue with Buddhists.
(b) The concern of the Divison of Frontier Studies is
to explore the theological and social implications of the
Christian faith for the life of the nation.[1]

J. J. Spae observes that this assignment has been successfully carried out by the Center by organizing dialogues, meetings and seminars: "Some of these top-level colloquia are held at the Centre itself; others in universities, including Buddhist ones, at the International Buddhist Centre, and even in the local parishes."[2] In 1977 the Study Centre for Religion and Society was renamed the Ecumenical Institute for Study and Dialogue. It was now set up as an autonomous body, not "subject to the direction and control of any religious body or institution." While Buddhist-Christian studies and dialogue continued to be the main emphasis, provision was made for other studies by the addition of the Division of Studies of other Faiths and Ideologies.[3] The various publications of the Institute are of vital interest to our study. In addition to several books on dialogue between Christianity and other religions, the Insitute publishes the quarterly Dialogue, in which De Silva had a leading Buddhist philosopher as co-editor. Michael Rodrigo, of the National Catholic Seminary at Kandy, says: "Dr. Lynn

---

[1]Lynn A. de Silva, "Encounter with Buddhism," A History of the Methodist Church in Ceylon 1814-1964, ed. W. J. T. Small (Colombo: The Wesley Press, 1971), p. 577.

[2]Spae, "The Buddhist-Christian Encounter" p. 11

[3]Lynn A. de Silva, "The Ecumenical Institute for Study and Dialogue," Dialogue New Series 4 (September-December 1977): 117.

de Silva's study-centre occasional bulletins as they treat of racism, oppression, the gap between the rich and the poor, the relationship between developed and developing nations, ecology and pollution bring dialogue into sharper focus."[1]

De Silva has pointed out that the origin of the study center and the increase in dialogical exchanges resulted from the changed historical situation. After Sri Lanka became independent in 1948 and after the Buddha Jayanthi (the 2500th anniversary of Buddhism) in 1956, "The conviction of the need to restate the Christian message in a Buddhist idiom grew stronger."[2] The approach of De Silva and the Center to the dialogue with Buddhism must therefore be seen in relation to the revival of Buddhism in Sri Lanka, by taking note of previous attempts at dialogue, and most importantly by tracing the transition in Christian attitudes and approaches to Buddhism from the early missionary period to the present.

Sri Lanka, an island republic in the Indian ocean off the south-eastern coast of India, is the geographical setting of this study. The salient fact of Sri Lanka's ancient history is the coming of the Sinhalese ("Lion-race") in the sixth century B. C. However, its history has remained somewhat shadowy, belonging to the realm of myth and legend, till the introduction of the Buddhist religion in the third

---

[1]Michael Rodrigo, "Buddhist Christian Dialogue in Sri Lanka," Buddhism and Christianity, eds. Claude Geffre and Mariasuasai Dhavamony. (New York: The Seabury Press, 1979), p. 105.

[2]Lynn A. de Silva, "Theological Construction in a Buddhist Context," Asian Voices in Christian Theology, ed. Gerald H. Anderson (New York: Orbis Books, 1976), p. 40.

century B. C. when its authentic historical era begins.[1] There are

certain developments in the history of Sri Lankan Buddhism and Chris-

tianity that are of paramount importance in our study of the encounter

between the two religions. De Silva draws attention to the fact that

Sri Lanka had a long and dominant tradition of Buddhism and Buddhist

culture since the third century B. C. and identifies two dominant

characteristics that have been evident in this Buddhist national

heritage:

> One is the religio-national solidarity. From the very
> beginning Buddhism was recognized and accepted by the
> state as its official religion. There has been a close-
> knit interpretation of religion and state, of monk and
> monarch, as in the West. The other characteristic is the
> sense of destiny and mission. The Buddhists believe that
> they are the "chosen people" and that Sri Lanka is the land
> favored by the Buddha, the land in which the Dhamma
> (Buddhist doctrine) will shine in all its glory, its light
> radiating throughout the world.[2]

---

[1]Other important historical landmarks are the coming of in-
vaders from Europe (three successive colonial powers) beginning in the
sixteenth century; the Chola invasions from South India beginning in
the eleventh century which left a permanent Hindu-Tamil population in
the north by 1325; and national independence gained in 1948. The
Sinhalese constitute the majority community (71.9 percent) and the
Tamils the largest minority (20.5 percent). Smaller groups are the
Ceylon Moors, descendants of seafaring Arab merchants; Malays; Burghers,
partly descendants of the Dutch, partly Eurasians; and a small number
of naturalized Europeans, Indians, and other nationalities.
Religious affiliation seems to largely follow the pattern of
communal distribution. The Sinhalese are mainly Buddhists and the
Tamils are principally Hindus. Moors and Malays are uniformly Muslims,
the Christians are constituted mainly from the Sinhalese and Tamil
groups. With a population of over fourteen million, the statistics of
religious affiliation in 1977 are as follows: Buddhists 67.4 percent,
Hindus 17.6 percent Christians 7.7 percent, and all other 0.1 percent.
See K. M. de Silva, "Religion," p. 379. This breakdown serves to in-
dicate the religiously plural nature of the country today and the inevi-
tability of inter-religious encounter and dialogue on a day-to-day basis.

[2]Lynn A. de Silva, "Theological Construction in a Buddhist
Context, . . ." p. 37.

With regard to the first characteristic it is especially significant that Buddhism entered Sri Lanka through the conversion of the king, thus from the very beginning Buddhism came to be closely identified with the institution of kingship in Sri Lanka. The pre-eminent sacro-political role played by the king involved more than building of viharas and stupas, it also meant the royal authority would be exercised for the purification of the Sangha whenever it was found to be corrupt. The Sinhalese national chronicles record several instances when the king exercised his royal prerogative and performed Sodhana, a ceremony of purification in which he unfrocked bhikkus who were unworthy of the role. It is this aspect of Sri Lankan Buddhism, i.e., its close connection with the institution of kingship according to the Buddhist tradition that was to profoundly affect its encounter with Christianity.[1]

---

[1]Earliest Buddhism, i.e. precept and practice as taught and lived by its founder and immediate followers, was of a non-political nature. With the conversion of the Indian Emperor Asoka in the third century B. C., we see the development of the connection between Buddhism and political authority. Originally the normative pattern for those who sought salvation was that of mendicant wanderers, and missionary preaching constituted one of the major functions of Buddha's followers. With the conversion of Asoka we have the development of the concept of the Cakkavattin or Dharmaraja (the ideal Buddhist king), and the state becomes a soteriological institution. The model of the ideal king whose devotion to the Buddha, the Dhamma, and the Sangha was complete and effective, is central to the history of Sinhalese Buddhism. Buddhism made its entrance to Sri Lanka in the reign of Tissa (247-207 B. C.) who sought the title of "Devanampiya" from Asoka since it meant "Beloved of the Gods" and was equivalent to "His Majesty." The list of Tissa's successors indicates that the title "Devanampiya" continued to be used by kings in Sri Lanka till the middle of the sixth century A. D., and W. Rahula notes that, "As time went on, the title seems to have been regarded as a specific title of Buddhist kings" (History of Buddhism in Ceylon [Colombo: M. D. Gunasena & Co. 1956], p. 28). Regina T. Clifford sees the Buddhist state as existing for "the protection and promotion of the dhamma, functioning in a way parallel to the sangha in the spiritual realm," and points out that Devanampiya-tissa, Dutthagamani and Parakkamabahu, the three ideal kings of the

On the loss of state patronage under European occupation of the island

beginning in the sixteenth century, Malalgoda pertinently comments:

> An important consequence of the transfer of political power
> into alien hands, as far as Buddhism in Ceylon was concerned,
> was the loss of state patronage which it had enjoyed for
> centuries, and which, . . . was a necessary condition for
> the proper functioning of its central institutions. Under the
> Portuguese and Dutch, the strength of the state machinery was
> not merely withdrawn from Buddhism; it was actively used
> against Buddhism on the side of Christianity.[1]

Also of great importance to our study of Buddhism's encounter

with Christianity is the second dominant characteristic identified by

De Silva, viz., the Dhammadipa (island of Buddhist doctrine) tradition,

which gave an expressly national character to Sri Lankan Buddhism.[2]

According to this tradition the Buddha is said to have consecrated

Sri Lanka to become the sanctuary of the true dhamma and prophesied

that it would be the place where Buddhism would flourish. The influence

---

Sri Lankan national chronicles "ruled Lanka with precisely this crucial
understanding of the purpose of the state" ("The Dhammadipa Tradition
of Sri Lanka: Three Models within the Sinhalese Chronicles," Religion
and Legitimation of Power in Sri Lanka, ed. Bardwell L. Smith [Chambers-
burg, Pennsylvania: Anima Books, 1978], p. 40).

[1] Kitsiri Malalgoda, Buddhism in Sinhalese Society 1750-
1900 (Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1976), p. 28.

[2] The distinctly national character of Buddhism on the island
goes back to the earliest days of its establishment and was largely due
to the efforts of Mahinda, its first missionary to Sri Lanka. Accord-
ing to a legend recorded in the Samantapasadika, the traditional
history of Buddhism in Sri Lanka by Buddhaghosa the fifth century
Buddhist commentator in India, Mahinda tells the king that Buddhism
could be deep-rooted only when a "son born in the island of Tambapanni
became a monk here (i.e., in the capital city of Anuradhapura), studied
the Vinaya here and recited it here." Sukumar Dutt concludes that:
"Mahinda's idea undoubtedly was that Buddhism in Ceylon, to be deep-
rooted must become Ceylonese Buddhism. So it eventually became and
remained so through all the centuries." (Buddhism in East Asia
[Bombay: Indian Council for Cultural Relations, 1960], p. 27).

of the tradition is such that the chronicled history of traditional

Sri Lanka (as recorded in the Pali chronicles, the Mahavamsa, Dipavamsa,

and Culavamsa) is virtually the history of Buddhism in the island.

Regina T. Clifford maintains that the Dhammadipa tradition, "comprises

the central thread running through centuries of Sinhalese Buddhism."[1]

Bardwell L. Smith sees in these chronicles a world not unlike that of

the Old Testament. Like Jewish history it is ethnocentric history:

"It is Heilsgeschichte. It is the sacred history of a people destined

with a sacred mission, namely, to maintain the purity of the Dhamma in

a world of impermanence and self-seeking."[2] To the Sinhalese, Buddhism

was not merely a set of beliefs, rites, and legends but also the cen-

tral theme in the history of their island and culture. Thus Buddhism's

religio-political concept, and the Dhammadipa tradition which forged

the inextricable links between Sinhalese nationalism and the national

religion constitute key elements of the historical and ideological

background to the encounter with Christianity. De Silva therefore

insists that to fail to take full cognizance of Sri Lanka's Buddhist

national heritage is to fail to enter into meaningful dialogue.

> In rejecting Buddhism Christians have rejected the nation
> and the people and as a result Christianity itself has
> been rejected. This is something that Christians have
> not yet understood.
> Buddhism, the nation and the Buddhist people have
> throughout the history of our country been so inextricably

---

[1] "The Dhammadipa Tradition of Sri Lanka," p. 36.

[2] "The Ideal Social Order as Portrayed in the Chronicles of
Ceylon," The Two Wheels of Dhamma, ed. Bardwell L. Smith (Chambers-
burg, Pennsylvania: American Academy of Religion, 1972), p. 32.

associated that to reject one means to reject the other two. Thus the rejection of Buddhism has meant the rejection of the nation and the people.[1]

As we turn to Buddhism's early encounter with Christianity, its resurgence in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, and the dialogue situation at the present time, these distinctive aspects of the Buddhism that took root in Sri Lanka take on special significance.

Though a Christian community existed in Sri Lanka in the sixth century only historical records and archaeological evidences of it remain today.[2] Christianity came to stay with the advent of the colonial powers—the Portuguese (1505-1658), the Dutch (1658-1796), and the British (1796-1948). The Portuguese arrived in 1505, and under their protection Roman Catholicism was established in the coastal areas. A twentieth-century Christian assessment of the 150 years of Portuguese rule and their coercive missionary methods sees them as a denationalizing force:

> The Portuguese in Ceylon, like their brothers the Spaniards in America, committed horrible cruelties in the name of

---

[1]Lynn A. de Silva, "The Meaning of Religion in Sri Lanka Today: A Christian View," Dialogue New Series 2, No. 1 (January-April 1975), p. 13.

[2]Indian Christians confidently hold that the Apostle Thomas brought the Gospel to India in A. D. 52. It is certain that by the sixth century there was a flourishing Christian community in the Malabar area and one in Sri Lanka. Recent archaeological findings of Nestorian crosses locate it at Anuradhapura, the ancient Buddhist capital of Sri Lanka. According to the account by the Greek navigator Cosmas Indico Pleustes in his Universal Christian Topography, Cosmas says when he visited the island about the year 522 he found a Church of Christians with clergy, a congregation "with a presbyter appointed from Persia and a deacon, and all the apparatus of public worship." See F. E. Keay, A History of the Syrian Church in India (Madras: Society for the Propagation of Christian Knowledge in India, 1951), p. 19.

Christ. With them religion and temporal power went hand
in hand. In the parts they conquered the Sinhalese were
forced to give up their names. The old temples and monu-
ments, some of them valuable works of art were destroyed
and Sinhalese art was strangled. Is it then a wonder
that non-Christians blame Christianity as a denationali-
zing force?[1]

A recent Buddhist assessment merely quotes Sir Emerson

Tenent's remark that the Portuguese period was marked by "rapacity,

bigotry and cruelty." It goes on to observe that Buddhists were sub-

jected to forced conversions on a large scale, Buddhist religious

opinions were insulted, and schools were set up with the sole intention

of propagating the Catholic faith. The writer then sums up the impact

on subsequent Christian-Buddhist relations:

It is probable that the anti-Buddhist propaganda emanating
from such institutions formed the earliest incitement to
anti-Catholic feeling which moved the Sinhalese Buddhists ·
to resentment against any foreign faith--a phenomenon which
ultimately has had such a profound effect on inter-religious
attitudes, and in the course of time generated what has
come to be known as 'militant Buddhism.'[2]

According to Wijesekera, under Dutch rule Buddhism did not

suffer to the same extent by direct persecution as under the Portuguese.

However, their hold on education and the introduction of an alien cul-

ture did great harm to the temple-oriented educational system and the

social life of Sinhalese Buddhists.[3] The Dutch government imposed

---

[1]H. W. Mediwaka, "Christianity and Nationalism," The Inter-
national Review of Missions 13 (1924): 53.

[2]O. H. De Wijesekera, "Theravada Buddhist Tradition under
Modern Cultures," The Impact of Modern Culture on Traditional Religions,
eds. Herbert W. Schneider and B. A. van Proodij (Leiden: E. J. Brill,
1968), p. 36.

[3]Ibid.

heavy civil disabilities on all who would not profess its brand of Protestant Christianity. After nearly one and a half centuries of Dutch rule, when the country was being ceded to the British, there were over 478,000 professed believers. Yet within the next ten years more than half this number had declared themselves to be Buddhists, and "a large proportion of the 'Government-Religion' churches were in ruins."[1] As it happened, with the collapse of each successive colonial regime great numbers of baptized Sinhalese returned to their traditional Buddhist beliefs.[2]

It is with the British era that we see the resurgence of Buddhism and a transition in Christian missionary attitudes and approaches to Buddhism--the two most significant factors that paved the way for the present dialogue. Kitsiri Malalgoda is correct in stating that the distinctive feature of the Buddhist revival of the nineteenth century was that it depended on voluntary efforts rather than state patronage. Though this colonial order differed radically from that of the traditional Sinhalese-Buddhist kingdoms, it also represented a radical break from the religious intolerance of the Portuguese and Dutch. Thus Malalgoda says: "The British in contrast to their colonial predecessors, professed a policy of religious liberty, and this policy, however qualified or attenuated it was in actual practice, was significantly different in that it allowed the free operation

---

[1]Charles Henry Robinson, History of Christian Missions (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1915), p. 20.

[2]Ernst Benz, Buddhism or Communism: Which Holds the Future of Asia? (New York: Doubleday & Company, 1966), p. 38.

of voluntary efforts to promote Buddhism."[1] The beginnings of the

Buddhist renewal in Sri Lanka are thus intimately linked with this

official policy of neutrality, it provided the Buddhists the option of

voluntary self-help despite the attempts of the missionaries to "dis-

establish"[2] Buddhism in the nineteenth century.

The attitude of the missionaries to Buddhism was clearly the

expression of nineteenth century evangelical triumphalism, and they

regarded the destruction of Buddhism as one of their main objects.[3]

---

[1]"Buddhism in Post-Independence Sri Lanka," Religion in South
Asia, ed. G. A. Oddie (Columbia, Missouri: South Asia Books, 1977),
pp. 183-184. Under the British there was no active suppression of the
Buddhist religion as in Portuguese and early Dutch times. When the
British brought the hitherto independent Kandyan kingdom under their
rule, the Kandyan provinces were ceded under the Kandyan Convention of
1815. The fifth article of the Convention stated: "The Religion of
the Buddhoo professed by the Chiefs and inhabitants of these Provinces
is declared inviolable and its Rites and Ministers and Places of Worship
are to be maintained and protected." The Christian Governor certainly
could not take the place of a Buddhist monarch, however the Buddhists
were left alone for the most part. There was, however, governmental
backing for the propagation of Christian missions, with the Anglicans
receiving preferential treatment. The report of the Committee of
Inquiry, appointed by the All-Ceylon Buddhist Congress in 1953, notes
that Buddhism continued to be undermined during the British regime
by discriminatory laws, the expropriation of temple lands and the use
of government funds for the promotion of Christian schools as a means
of proselytisation. See The Betrayal of Buddhism: An Abridged Version
of the Report of the Buddhist Committee of Inquiry (Balangoda, Sri
Lanka: The All-Ceylon Buddhist Congress, 1956).

[2]The process of disestablishment aimed at was the severance of
the association which the State had entered into with Buddhism at the
Kandyan Convention of 1815. In a pamphlet titled, "The British Govern-
ment and the Idolatry of Ceylon," R. Spence-Hardy argued for the dis-
establishment of Buddhism on the grounds that there could be no connec-
tion between a Christian government and an idolatrous religious system,
and, that by dissociating the State from Buddhism the religion would
lose its hold on the people. See K. M. de Silva, Social Policy and
Missionary Organizations in Ceylon 1840-1855 (London: Longmans, Green
and Co., 1965), pp. 67-73.

[3]Malalgoda points out that the apocalyptic and inevitable
triumph of Christianity over all other religions, which was very much
a part of the early nineteenth century evangelical frame of mind, was

They undertook a serious study of the Sinhalese and Pali Buddhist Scriptures with a view to, as stated by D. J. Gogerly at the time, "overturn from its base, if possible, the whole system of the Buddha."[1] The Methodist historian W. J. T. Small traces the unsympathetic approach of the missionaries to Buddhism to the fact that the Buddhism in Sri Lanka at the time was intermingled with superstitious beliefs and practices and to basic theological presuppositions common to evangelical Christianity in England at this time, e.g., the absolutely sharp and clear-cut distinction between Christianity and every other religion or way of life.[2] The efforts of the missionaries had the effect of strengthening instead of weakening Buddhism. In spite of the confident expectations of the Christians, the second half of the nineteenth century was to see a powerful Buddhist revival, and the Christian approach to Buddhism was to undergo a profound change.

Serious opposition to Christianity began to develop with the forming of The Society for the Propagation of Buddhism. A number of

---

widely prevalent among both the missionaries and the colonial administrators of nineteenth century Sri Lanka. J. Forbes, an English missionary writing in 1840, expresses the general tenor of the ideas Christians held regarding the future of Buddhism: "I anticipate that Buddhism shorn of its splendour, unaided by authority, and torn by internal dissension, will not long have power to retain even its present slight control over the actions of its votaries. . . , and that it will fall into disuse before Christianity is prepared to step into its place." Twenty one years later the prominent Sinhalese Christian, James Alwis, while discussing the "prospects of Buddhism" in the course of a lecture he delivered in Colombo, declared: "There are, indeed, good grounds for believing that Buddhism will, at no very distant period, disappear from this island." See Buddhism in Sinhalese Society 1750-1900, pp. 173-174.

[1] W. J. T. Small, ed., A History of the Methodist Church in Ceylon p. 158.

[2] Ibid., p. 156.

Buddhist pamphlets and tracts aimed at discrediting Christianity and proving the Bible untrue appeared in reply to the Christian publications. Among the other methods used by Buddhists to counteract the teachings of Christianity were the production of school books, legends and ballads. Most striking was the series of public religious debates between the Buddhists and Christians. The revival of modern Buddhism is often dated from 1873 when the most notable of these, the Panadura Debate, took place. The Panadura Debate had far reaching effects as the eloquent Buddhist spokesman Migettuwatte Gunananda claimed a resounding victory over David de Silva, a Wesleyan clergyman. A most significant result was that the account of this controversy reached the United States of America and inspired Colonel Henry Steele Olcott to come to Sri Lanka in 1880 to champion the Buddhist cause.[1]

Colonel Olcott played a vital role in the development of what later came to be known as "Protestant Buddhism,"[2] in which individual efforts and voluntary associations played a vital role. Olcott advised the Buddhists:

> If you ask how we should organise our forces, I point you
> to our great enemy, Christianity, and bid you look at their

---

[1] Vito Perniola, "Buddhism in Modern Ceylon," Studia Missionalia 12 (1962): 68.

[2] In summing up the implications of the term "Protestant Buddhism," which G. Obeysekera used to describe the changes brought about in Buddhism as a result of its confrontation with Christianity, K. M. de Silva refers to three basic aspects: (1) Buddhism's protest against Christianity, (2) the imitation of the norms, practices, and organizational forms of Protestant Christianity as could be seen in the Society for the Propagation of Buddhism, Young Men's Buddhist Associations, Sunday schools, Buddhist schools modelled on missionary schools, Buddhist catechisms, etc., and (3) the process of laicisation, also a feature of Protestant Christianity in which the traditional position of leadership of the clergy was handed over to the laymen. See K. M. de Silva, "Religion," p. 386.

large and wealthy Bible, Tract, Sunday School, and Missionary Societies--the tremendous agencies they support to keep alive and spread their religion. We must form similar societies, and make our most practical and honest men of business their managers.[1]

The list of Olcott's achievements on behalf of the Buddhist cause is impressive. Realizing that the educational backwardness of the Buddhists was the principal obstacle to Buddhist renewal, he reorganized the Buddhist educational system on modern principles. Hitherto education had largely been the preserve of the colonial government and the missionaries. He founded the Buddhist Theosophical Society (BTS) of Ceylon and within a few years opened three colleges and 200 schools for some 20,000 children. The BTS adopted a Buddhist flag and prevailed upon the British Governor to declare Vesak (the Buddhist festival of the full moon commemorating its founder's birth) a public holiday, a significant victory for Buddhism as hitherto only Christian Sundays and British national holidays had been celebrated.[2]

The overall impact of the revival greatly stimulated the self-respect of the Sinhalese Buddhists. Anagarika Dharmapala was an outstanding leader of the Buddhist revival, whose goal of restoring the Sasana (the teachings of Buddha) and resuscitating Dhyana (meditation) in Sri Lanka forged strong links between the revival and nationalism. John R. Mott, doyen of the foreign missionaries to Asia in his day, took serious note of the element of nationalism in the Buddhist revival:

---

[1]Old Diary Leaves, IV (1887-1892), Madras, 1931, p. 120, cited in Kitsiri Malalgoda, "Buddhism in Post-Independence Sri Lanka," Religion in South Asia, ed. G. A. Oddie (Columbia, Missouri: South Asia Books, 1977), p. 184.

[2]Benz, Buddhism or Communism p. 40.

> The southern part of the island of Ceylon is Buddhist, and
> while Buddhism there, until about the year 1880, was compara-
> tively inert, it has since then been largely resuscitated.
> Its leaders carry on an aggressive propaganda. . . The move-
> ment is, moreover, decidedly more hostile to Christianity than
> it has been in the past, representing Christianity as alien
> and Buddhism as national. This attempt to identify Buddhism
> with national patriotism and to urge upon people that loyalty
> to the country implies loyalty to this religion is undoubtedly
> one of the most serious and significant aspects of the Buddhist
> revival.[1]

John Mott was writing around 1910 when Christians in Sri Lanka

were still a privileged group but were for the most part outside the

surge of nationalism which led to Sri Lankan independence in 1948.

Based on non-indigenous concepts and interpreted on Western lines,

Christianity was looked upon as an aspect of the foreign occupation.

After the First World War missionaries in Sri Lanka and other Asian

countries began to see the need, though very hesitantly, for coming to

terms with nationalism.[2] Already the revival of Buddhist activity and

---

[1]The Decisive Hour of Christian Missions (New York: Student
Volunteer Movement for Foreign Missions, 1910), pp. 50-52.

[2]Even during colonial times there were Western missionaries
who saw the need for a more open attitude to Asian cultures and relig-
ions. An outstanding example in the Sri Lankan context is Alek Fraser,
the renowned missionary principal of Trinity College, Kandy. In 1907,
Fraser submitted a paper to his fellow missionaries in which he said
that Buddhism was advancing faster than Christianity and making converts
from all three of its rivals, Christianity, Islam and Hinduism. Christ-
ianity in Sri Lanka was on the defensive because Buddhism was represen-
ted as the national religion and Christianity as foreign, with Christ
as merely the Western Buddha. One of the great weaknesses that Fraser
put his finger on was that the theological training of the Sri Lankan
clergy was based on the English Bible and the writings of Western theo-
logians: "You will find pastors in Ceylon who would gladly show their
keen if ignorant partisanship on a Wace-Driver discussion, but who
have neither seriously considered nor recognized the vastly more import-
ant and interesting problems raised by the impact of Christianity on
Buddhism." Fraser listed a number of proposals to change this undue
Westernization. Among these were the redesigning of the school
curriculum "to knit them to their own people"; thus (1) Sinhalese,
Tamil and Sri Lankan history should be prominent, (2) Western ethics

the reform of Buddhist institutions had served to freeze the Christian
population at the figure that had been attained by the end of the nine-
teenth century.[1] The introduction of a free education scheme on secu-
larist lines before independence, and the government takeover of most

should be illustrated and compared with Eastern, and (3) real Buddhist-
ic literature should be studied and compared with the Bible. See W. E.
F. Ward, Fraser of Trinity and Achimota (London: Ghana Universities
Press, 1965), pp. 53-55. Fraser was in effect making a call for a
real sense of national solidarity on the part of the Christian and the
Church in Sri Lanka. He realized that if Christianity was to be mean-
ingful it had to enter into dialogue with the culture and religion in
the Sri Lankan national context. A fact, as P. D. Devanandan pointed
out half a century later, that Asian and especially Western Christ-
ians had long failed to realize: "What we, as Christians everywhere,
have yet to realize is that nationalism in Asian lands had reached a
new phase in its growth and development. A new meaning-content is
put into that word which other people, especially those in the West,
are not able to understand." See P. D. Devanandan, The Gospel and
Renascent Hinduism (London: Student Christian Movement Press Ltd.,
1959), pp. 23-24.

[1]S. Arasaratnam uses census figures to show that evangelism
practically ceased and that the Christian element of the population
frozen at around 10 percent maintained a remarkable uniformity in the
twentieth century.

TABLE 1

PERCENTAGE OF CHRISTIANS IN TOTAL POPULATION

Census Year	Percentage
1921	9.8
1931	9.8
1946	9.07
1953	9.07
1963	8.4
1970*	9.4

*This is a Pre-Census estimate.

("The Christians of Ceylon and Nationalist Politics," Religion in
South Asia, ed. G. A. Oddie [Columbia, Missouri: South Asia Books,
1977], p. 166).

denominational schools in 1960 drastically curtailed the influence

that Christian churches in Sri Lanka had wielded. With the introduc-

tion of universal suffrage and the continued increase of Buddhist rep-

resentation in legislative bodies, political parties began competing

with each other to restore Buddhism to its "rightful place," i.e., the

state patronage it enjoyed in traditional Buddhist societies. For Sri

Lankan Christians confronted by the revival of national culture, the

Westernism of their religion proved to be a source of embarassment and

frustration. Dialogue, as Lynn de Silva has pointed out, "is no longer

a matter of choice--it is a necessity."[1] To fail to enter into dial-

ogue with the Buddhist religion and its culture amounted to rejecting

the people and the nation as well.

> The antipathy evoked by the rejection of Buddhism as a false
> religion gave rise to the slogan "to be a true Sinhalese one
> must be a Buddhist", which by implication meant that Christ-
> ians could not be true Sinhalese: they could only be second-
> class citizens, aliens in the land of their birth, with no
> identity except their identification with colonialism, cap-
> italism and imperialism. Dialogue is therefore an essential
> part of the discovery of our identity as persons and as a
> community. It is the discovery of our true identity in a
> plural society that makes living authentic and proclamation
> meaningful and relevant.[2]

The Christian dialogue with Buddhism, impelled largely by his-

torical circumstances, began as a movement toward indigenization with

the Protestants in the forefront. This meant the revival of indigenous

names and dress, the cultivation of native arts and crafts among Christ-

ians, and the appointment of nationals to positions of church leader-

ship. It also dealt with the externals of worship such as music and

---

[1]Lynn A. de Silva, "Dialogue: A Matter of Necessity," One
World, February 1977, p. 11.

[2]Ibid.

architecture. Thus when the WCC sponsored an interdenominational theological college, it had as its two-fold object:

(a) For the sake of presenting the Gospel to the people of Ceylon in the language and idiom of the swabasha speaking people of the country;

(b) For the closer integration of the Church into the life of the Nation, and indigenisation not only of its worship but its life and thought.[1]

Though Catholics lagged behind the Protestants in the dialogue with Buddhism, Michael Rodrigo claims the pacesetting of Vatican II found an ecno in Sri Lankan Catholicism. Soon after the council a complementary theological training programme on a contextual level was organized. Since 1966 Bhikku Anomandassi has been teaching Buddhist studies at the National Catholic Seminary in Kandy. In 1973 the Uva diocese organized a Ministries School for a ministry of dialogue with Buddhists and with other religions. The ministries to different religions, known as sevakas (meaning servantship), were engaged in the study of principles of dialogue and languages in the preparation of dialogists for the diocese. Since 1975 the Ministries School has celebrated religious festivals annually--Thai Pongal, a harvest festival, with the Hindus; Milad-un-Nabi, Prophet Muhammed's birthday, with Muslims; and Vesak, a triple Buddhist festival recalling the birth, the enlightenment, and the passing-away of the Buddha. At the initial Vesak celebration, the Buddhist speaker, the Venerable Amarakongana Amarawansa of the Diyatalawa training school for monks said: "Till today, one would have thought that the Buddha Jayanthi of some years ago was the climax of it all. Today, we find we have gone further in a Dhamma Jayanthi where doctrines of truthfulness get together to feast

---

[1] "Ecumenical Chronicle: Asia, Ceylon," The Ecumenical Review 12 (January 1960): 236.

Buddhism. It is a signal victory for religion." Rodrigo, however, observes that Catholic efforts at dialogue have not always been a success story, thus "Where the tenets of Vatican II do not percolate to the people, dialogue easily evaporates." He regrets that the Catholic Messenger no longer carries the middle-page spread of festivals of other religions, that the many inter-faith seminars organized by the women religious in Colombo have ceased since 1974, and that the non-Christian news bulletin from the Archbishop's House in Colombo ended after its second volume in 1969.[1]

The church was seeking to give a truly Sri Lankan expression to Christianity. As D. T. Niles told the WCC Assembly at New Delhi in 1961: "The trouble with the missionaries was that they brought Christianity to us as a potted plant. Now we are breaking the pot and putting the plant in our own soil."[2] According to a Buddhist participant in the current dialogue, Mahinda Palihawadana, professor of Sanskrit at Sri Jayawardenepura University, "Divorced from temporal power after decolonization, Christians are profoundly concerned, especially at an individual level, to renativize themselves culturally, without discarding the Christian heritage that they have acquired." He goes on to draw attention to the intellectual aspect of this process of indigenization and cites as examples the Study Centers led by Lynn de Silva and Aloysius Pieris.[3] The early period of the Buddhist revival had been marked

---

[1] "Buddhist-Christian Dialogue in Sri Lanka," pp. 100-103.

[2] "Religion: The Ecumenical Century," Time, Dec. 8, 1961, p. 78.

[3] Mahinda Palihawadana, "A Buddhist Response: Religion beyond Ideology and Power," Christian Faith in a Religiously Plural World, eds, Donald G. Dawe and John B. Carman (New York: Orbis Books, 1980), p. 45.

by theological disputation and polemics on doctrine between the Buddhist and Christian clergy, in more recent years there have been some initiatives towards theological dialogue. These theological approaches by Christians have proved to be significant steps towards rooting the Gospel in Sri Lankan soil, and Buddhist initiatives in turn are an indication of the changed climate from one of disputation to dialogue.

The rather brief work of Dr. D. T. Niles,[1] Buddhism and the Claims of Christ, first published in 1946 under the title Eternal Life Now, merits description as the first major Sri Lankan effort to restate the Christian message in Buddhist terms and thought-forms. Claiming that the study of Buddhism has fertilized his faith and enriched his understanding, Niles says of his use of Buddhist terms such as annica, dukkha, samsara, sarana, anatta, sila, samadhi, panna and arahat: "I use these words and ideas not as intending to graft into the Christian faith elements of truth as I see them in Buddhism, but as attempting to state the Christian faith in language that already had significance for you."[2]

A rather different approach is taken by Dr. Bryan De Kretser in his doctoral dissertation at the University of Edinburgh on Man in Buddhism and Christianity.[3] More in the nature of an academic statement

---

[1]Niles was a President of the Methodist Church in Sri Lanka, as well as one of the WCC Presidents. He was also engaged in dialogue with Hinduism and is the writer of a number of other theological works.

[2](Richmond, Virginia: John Knox Press, 1967), p. 22.

[3](Calcutta: Y. M. C. A. Publishing House, 1954). De Kretser was a minister of the Reformed Church in Sri Lanka at the time this work was written, and later embraced Catholicism. He is now at Prithipura Homes for Handicapped Children, an inter-religious venture.

on the Buddhist and Christian conception of man, De Kretser "is not concerned with the immediate problem of Evangelism."[1] He has sought to explicate the relations between the Buddhist and Christian man with the tools of Reformed Theology as shaped by Karl Barth, Emil Brunner and Reinhold Niebuhr and claims his work is no more than a study of comparative religion. However, as the introductory remarks indicate, it is an approach that seeks to make an authentic contribution to the present dialogue:

> Several students of Comparative Religion, and of Buddhism, have contrasted the "dogmas" of Buddhism with an over-simplified version of Christianity, which no Church would accept, or else they have reduced both faiths to a few simple moral principles. Both these methods seem to fail to do justice to the two religions, for the Christian faith is not just "the Fatherhood of God and the brotherhood of man", nor is the message of Buddhism, a pure, a rational Ethicism.[2]

Two outstanding Catholic contributions have come from Fr. Aloysius Pieris, SJ, director of the Tulana Research and Encounter Center, and Fr. Tissa Balasuriya, OMI, director of the Catholic Center for Society and Religion in Colombo. In addition to promoting dialog-ical encounters, they have also made written theological contributions. Balasuriya's approach to Asian religions takes its cue from Latin Amer-ican Liberation Theology and calls for "Interreligious Action-Reflection." Reflecting with believers cf other religions means respecting and re-flecting on their scriptures too, and Christians must "have a satisfac-tory view of the role of the Buddha in our world vision and in our Christian thinking."[3] Pieris also takes his cue from Liberation Theology.

---

[1] Ibid., p. i.

[2] Ibid., pp. 1-2.

[3] Tissa Balasuriya, The Eucharist and Human Liberation (New York: Orbis Books, 1979), p. 154.

In the Western tradition theology and theo-praxis parted ways. The
Asian Christian is called to liberation-praxis, the locus of which is
in Asian religiosity and poverty. This locus is the "God-Experience
(which is at once the Man-Concern) of God's own people living beyond
the Church." Which is to say, for Pieris, "Theology in Asia is the
Christian Apocalypse of the non-Christian experiences of Liberation."[1]
Also worth noting is Pieris' "Sacramental theory" which, M. M. Thomas
says, "seems an original contribution from Asia."[2] In addition to these
principal contributions there are several journal articles and pamphlets
on the subject, most of them coming out of the dialogue centers.

Of the three principal Buddhist initiatives, two were from
Sri Lanka and the other from Thailand. The first is A Buddhist Critique
of the Christian Concept of God, by Dr. Gunapala Dharmasiri, presently
Lecturer in Philosophy at the University of Sri Lanka. It is indeed a

---

[1]Aloysius Pieris, "Towards an Asian Theology of Liberation:
Some Religio-cultural Guidelines," Dialogue New Series 6, Nos. 1 and 2
(January-August 1979): 50.

[2]"Book Reviews," Religion and Society 20 (September 1973):
100. Pieris traces the Christian attitude to non-Christian religions
in the last four centuries as moving from their interpretation first
as anti-Christian (to be conquered), then as non-Christian (to be
adapted), now as pre-Christian (to be fulfilled), and probably soon as
anonymous Christian, which is to lead to the sacramental approach as
advocated by him. The attitude toward non-Christian religions should
be one of "assumption", since Christ did not merely appear as a man
but fully assumed human nature. The idea of conquest wrongly identifies
the kingdom of God with the visible church, and adaptation makes the
incarnation too docetic since it robs a culture of its religious content.
Even the Vatican Fulfilment theory fails to satisfy though it takes the
kindgom as "a wider reality" than the church since Pieris finds it
difficult to consider non-Christian religions as purely natural religions
as contrasted with Christianity as supernatural. In the sacramental
form of the Kingdom, the Church must "explicate in her own life" the
presence of God and anonymous Christianity implicit in the religions
surrounding her. Thus, for Pieris, the relationship between the church

<u>critique,</u>[1] however Dharmasiri maintains that his intention is not to disparage Christianity and that "it is instructive for Christians to see what other religionists have to say about Christianity." Moreover, "If the Buddhist's criticisms are unsound, the Christian can always point it out and show why they are unsound and this might at least, help the Buddhist to correct his own wrong perspectives. And by these means a real understanding among religions may be brought about."[2] The problems that current Christian theology has with the concept of God are traced to "the fundamental irrationality and anti-rationality of the Christian faith," which Dharmasiri sets out to critique from the

---

and other religions should be one of "mutual fulfilment, mutual conversion, mutual competition. . . by which all religions including Christianity march towards fulfilment in the Total Christ which is the Kingdom." See <u>The Salvific Value of Non-Christian Religions According to Asian Christian Theologians Writing in Asian-published Theological Journals 1965-1970</u>, ed. Asandas Balchand (Manila: East Asian Pastoral Institute, 1973). For another notable contribution by Aloysius Pieris, see "Western Christianity and Asian Buddhism: A Theological Reading of Historical Encounters," (<u>Dialogue</u> New Series 7 No 2 [May-August, 1980]: 49-85).

[1]Editorializing in Dialogue, Aloysius Pieris sees Dharmasiri's work as a ruthless critique of Christianity: "Its tone is polemical, its language provocative and its purpose apologetical." However, Pieris goes on to say:
> "But Dr. Dharmasiri is perhaps the first Buddhist thinker in Sri Lanka who has taken Christian theology with academic seriousness. This is something Christians have long been waiting for. . . . The contextual theology which we must construct in a Buddhist milieu can never become a reality till Buddhist scholars begin to bring present day theology into a crisis point. Dr. Dharmasiri, for all we know, has already begun the process for us." See "A Buddhist Critique and a Christian Response," <u>Dialogue</u> New Series 2, No. 3 (November-December 1975), pp. 83-85.

[2]Gunapala Dharmasiri, <u>A Buddhist Critique of the Christian Concept of God</u> (Colombo: Lake House Investments, 1974), pp. x-xi.

standpoint of early Buddhism. The next contribution by Dr. Shanta Ratnayake, Lecturer in Philosophy and Religion at the University of Georgia, sets out in detail an exposition of the idea of Perfection and the way to Perfection as found in the Buddhist way of "Insight-Wisdom" expounded by Buddhaghosa in his Visuddhimagga, and the Christian way of "Faith" as expounded in The Works of John Wesley. He draws out both the comparisons and contrasts of the spiritual itinerary that a Buddhist or Christian may take in the pursuit of the summit of perfection.[1] Finally we have the Thai Bhikku, Ven. Buddhadasa Indapanno, making his contribution in the fifth series of the Sinclair Thompson Memorial Lectures on Christianity and Buddhism. His contribution is of special significance in view of the close relationship between Thai and Sri Lankan Buddhism, and of De Silva's reply to Indapanno in his work, Why Believe in God? The Christian Answer in Relation to Buddhism.[2] The basis of Indapanno's approach to dialogue was that "The founders of all religions in the world were born to help man achieve perfection of which he is in need." In comparing Christianity with Buddhism the word "religion" should be defined as "'a system to observation and practice which binds men to the highest thing,' call it what you will--God or Nirvana." There is need of "a terminology of religious terms common to all religions" so that in fairness to each other the outer form of one religion could be compared with the outer form of the other, and the

---

[1] Shanta Ratnayake, Two Ways of Perfection: Buddhist and Christian (Colombo: Lake House Investments Ltd., 1978).

[2] Lynn A. de Silva, Why Believe in God? The Christian Answer in Relation to Buddhism (Colombo: The Christian Study Center Division of Buddhist Studies, 1970).

inner essence with the inner essence. On this basis Indapanno finds

many points in agreement between the New Testament and the Tripitaka,

which in turn forms the basis of the Buddhist attitude towards Christ-

ianity. Since Christ "laid special stress on action or practice of

the commandment," he concludes that both Christianity and Buddhism

"are religions of action--to be done by oneself." And so,"in this way

both religions are in agreement in all respects."[1]

With this survey of Buddhist-Christian dialogue in Sri Lanka

we must now see De Silva's theological stance in its perspective. The

dialogical approach following the pattern of the Incarnation was an

attempt by the church to take a form that would not be alien to the

Buddhist culture. It confronted the church with a new set of challenges

and problems, as David Young has so aptly stated: "Through dialogue

one begins to discover what the Church might look like if it were to

take a Ceylonese shape. But it is by no means easy to decide in what

ways the Church should absorb the culture in which it is set and in

what ways it should remain distinctive."[2] The question is fraught with

larger and more difficult problems when it takes place at the level of

doctrinal teaching and conceptual thought, the more usual sphere for

which the term "dialogue" is used. De Silva, whose writings enter into

this discussion of beliefs and ideas with Buddhism, insists that des-

pite the dangers and difficulties involved, if Christianity is to be

authentic to its calling, there is no alternative to incarnational dialogue:

---

[1]Christianity and Buddhism (Chiang Mai, Thailand: Sublime
Life Mission, 1967), pp. 58-59.

[2]"The Open Dialogue--Buddhist and Christian," Face to Face:
Essays on Inter-Faith Dialogue (London: Highway Press, 1971), p. 49.

The grain of wheat must fall into the native soil; it
must die; it must take root in that soil; it must grow and
bring forth its own fruit. What we need is not Christianity
in Burma or Thailand or Ceylon. What we need is Burmese
Christianity, Thai Christianity and Ceylonese Christianity.[1]

It is to a consideration of De Silva's own theology, an Asian

theology that derives from the particular dialogue situation of Sri

Lanka, that this study has been devoted. As the capstone of his speech

at the WCC General Assembly in Nairobi, De Silva claimed that "above

all, dialogue is essential for us to discover the Asian face of Jesus

Christ."[2] He is not content that Asians should live in imported shells

of Western confessions, but he wants theology in Asia to have its own

identity. His dialogical concerns arose out of existential contact

with Sri Lankan Buddhism and thus an Asian theology must result from

specific Asian historical contexts and be related to the particular

socio-cultural and religious factors of the dialogue situation. Walls

of separation built up through the fear of syncretism and by "out-moded

theological pre-suppositions" must be broken down, thus he maintains

"radical new thinking is necessary, which, to those in teutonic capti-

vity may appear heretical."[3] As to the risk of heresy as the gospel is

allowed to take its own shape in diverse Asian contexts, he holds with

John A. T. Robinson, the Bishop of Woolwich, that there is "more danger

---

[1]Lynn A. de Silva, "Buddhist-Christian Dialogue," Inter-
Religious Dialogue, ed. Herbert Jai Singh (Bangalore: C. I. S. R. S.,
1967), p. 195.

[2]Breaking Barriers. p. 73.

[3]Lynn A. de Silva, "Freedom from Teutonic Captivity," p. 2.

in static doctrinal fundamentalism than in most heresy."[1] An authentic

Asian theology must confront the limited perspective of Western theo-

logians who did their thinking in Christian surroundings. Thus De

Silva's comprehensive statement of the theological basis for his restate-

ment of Christian thought in relation to Theravada Buddhist thought de-

serves our careful attention as we set out to specify the aims and

scope of this study:

> Theology is a living thing and has to do with our very
> existence as human beings in a particular situation and there-
> fore must be related to the traditional beliefs, classical
> expressions of faith, and cultural forms. Theology is not
> an intellectual activity that takes place in the seclusion
> of a classroom, but a human activity that takes place in a
> culture; it is not a theoretical science with a fixed struc-
> ture of thought applicable to all times and all places, but
> one that is dynamic and mobile and adaptable to changing cir-
> cumstances. Of course there are elements of constancy and
> continuity and an unchanging content in any theology, but
> the form or the mode undergoes change in relation to the
> context. Authentic, living theology arises from an interplay
> between the "Logos" and the culture in which it seeks to ex-
> press itself. The theologian, being part of the culture,
> cannot but speak from its context and in its terms.[2]

---

[1] Ibid. Cf. John A. T. Robinson, The Difference of Being a
Christian Today (London: Colins Fontana Books, 1974), p. 48.

[2] Lynn A. de Silva, "Christian Reflection in a Buddhist Context,"
Asia's Struggle for Full Humanity: Towards a Relevant Theology, ed.
Virginia Fabella (New York: Orbis Books, 1980), p. 96.

CHAPTER II

A PRACTISED THEOLOGY OF DIALOGUE

De Silva has written extensively on inter-religious dialogue
describing its basic premises, its historical dimensions, its goals,
and "the rules of the game." His address to the WCC General Assembly
at Nairobi in 1975 may be considered his manifesto on dialogue as it
represents his mature thinking on the subject. It is a restatement
of his basic thesis, a summary of the underlying propositions of his
dialogical approach, and a powerful assertion of the significance and
importance of dialogue in the Asian context. Stated as a polemic
against the paralyzing fear of syncretism which inhibited dialogue, he
advances three fundamental propositions:

1. Dialogue does not in anyway diminish full and loyal commit-
   ment to one's own faith, but rather enriches and strengthens
   it.
2. Dialogue, far from being a temptation to syncretism, is a
   safeguard against it, because in dialogue we get to know
   one another's faith in depth. One's own faith is tested and
   refined and sharpened thereby. The real test of faiths is
   faiths-in-relation.
3. Dialogue is a creative interaction which liberates a person
   from a closed or cloistered system to which he happens to
   belong by an accident of birth, and elevates him to spiritual
   freedom giving him a vision of wider dimensions of spiritual
   life by his sharing in the spirituality of others.[1]

In the latter part of his Nairobi address De Silva makes a
case for the necessity of dialogue in an Asian context characterized by

---

[1]*Breaking Barriers* pp. 72,73.

62

religious pluralism. Dialogue he says, is urgent and essential to rid Christianity of its image as an aggressive and militant religion which has obscured the gospel and made Jesus Christ "appear as a Western Christian of an affluent society." Dialogue is also essential because misunderstandings and prejudices of the past, caused by the negative and exclusivistic attitude of Christians to other faiths, has made proclamation ineffective and irrelevant. There is a need to create a healthy atmosphere "where we can receive as well as give, listen as well as proclaim." Finally, dialogue is therefore seen as being supremely essential "to discover the Asian face of Jesus Christ as the suffering servant, so that the Church itself may be set free from its institutional self-interest and play the role of a servant in building community--the community of love or the kingdom of God."[1]

Dialogical Approach, Leitmotifs, and "the Rules of the Game"

The extreme difficulties of Buddhist-Christian dialogue in the Sri Lankan setting are epitomized in the reply of a learned Buddhist monk to an invitation by De Silva to speak at a meeting organized to promote inter-religious dialogue:

> I see no common ground where we could meet. While Christianity takes its stand on faith, Buddhism takes its stand on reason: while Christianity depends on divine revelation, Buddhism depends on human intelligence. The God of Christianity is a divine being who became human; the God of Buddhism is a human being who became divine. Christianity talks from heaven, Buddhism talks from earth. We start from different premises. The situation being such, I wonder if we could truly communicate. Our efforts to meet might look

---

[1]Ibid.

like the monkey trying to kiss its fiancee through
a glass wall. The screen of dogma stands between us.[1]

This statement is for De Silva an example of the ignorance
which has led people of different faiths to believe that dialogue is
impossible. It also vividly describes the tragic relationship between
the two religions resulting from the foreign rulers attitude of
superiority. The conclusion by Buddhists and Christians that there
is no common ground on which to meet results in claims of exclusive-
ness, disputes, and clashes. De Silva nevertheless contends that even
with a religion like Theravada Buddhism which denies the basic tenets
of Christianity, dialogue helps to "dissipate this mist of ignorance
and discover areas of agreement."[2] The task before Christians and
Buddhists is to penetrate this screen of dogma in the common search
for community, and to be open to be addressed by those who belong to
the other faith. As a result of the fear of syncretism, Christians
have built walls to protect themselves from what they call "non-
Christian", resulting in "an unchristian ghettoism", "a segregated
spirituality that stinks", and a church which has become "a lonely
crowd in a crowded world." Outmoded theological presuppositions
within the Christian community, ill-informed attitudes, and pre-
determined judgments have isolated Christians, and the task before
them now is to break down these walls "so that we can be truly
Christian."[3]

---

[1]"Dialogue a Matter of Necessity," p. 10.

[2]Ibid.

[3]"Freedom From Teutonic Captivity," p. 2.

A Holistic Approach

De Silva's dialogical stance is the fruit of a practised theology of dialogue, though he often uses Buberian categories to describe it. In his explication of dialogue in the I-Thou relationship, he has stressed the need of mutuality, a kind of believing-in-love, and a concerned openness in which human authenticity is experienced. The presence of the Buddhist monk's "screen of dogma", which prevents communication and meeting in love, is a lamentable situation because man, as Martin Buber has pointed out, is "neither organic nor rational, but dialogic," and "becomes an authentic being only in a living relation with other individuals." For De Silva, "meeting in love or being engaged by the faith of others is the central meaning of dialogue." Thus to fail to enter into dialogue, which is seen as the most really human of all relationships, is to ignore "the imperative of love that makes dialogue imperative." To remain walled in by dogmas, creeds, confessions, and prejudices "is not only a denial of authentic living but also a falsification of the faith one professes, because love (maitriya in Buddhism, Agape in Christianity) is central in all religions." Thus he sees the need for dialogue on three inter-related levels:

> 1. Intellectual, where conceptual clarification and understanding of the teaching of different religions is sought . . . . 2. Experiential, where we seek to share one another's spiritual experiences for mutual enrichment. . . . 3. Sociopolitical, where in developing nations there is a common search for community, for a just and stable society and for peace, justice and development.[1]

---

[1] "The Understanding and Goal of Dialogue," Dialogue New Series, 4 Nos. 1 & 2 (January-August 1977): 3-5.

Eric Sharpe and Richard W. Taylor, theoreticians of dialogue who have outlined types of dialogue similar to the levels described by De Silva, have observed that in praxis sharp dichotomies have been placed between the different types. For Taylor, the dialogue which is usually planned and achieved between churchmen and men of other faiths is discursive dialogue. He sees this as the typically Western approach, "In the Western tradition this is the dominant strain. It involves abstraction and analysis through the use of common sets of categories or symbols." He clearly sees discursive dialogue as often being almost the exact opposite of "Buberian dialogue", and it results in a "crippling situation" comparable to the Buddhist monk's "screen of dogma":

> This is because there is an important sense in which intellectualizing in terms of categories becomes a putting up of thought processes as a screen between man and man whereas the major facet of buberian dialogue is that it seeks to explicate a relation of loving openness between man and man.[1]

Reacting to Taylor, Eric Sharpe maintains that due to the variety of pre-suppositions that underlie the use of the word "dialogue," the mere use of the word does not ensure agreement as to its precise meaning. There is a need for some semantic tidying up, and so he says, "I agree with Richard Taylor that there is potential conflict in principles between discursive and human (or 'Buberian') dialogue, though I do not agree that the achievement of discursive dialogue only is necessarily a 'crippling situation.'"[2] Thus Sharpe distinguishes between discursive dialogue which "involves meeting, listening and

---

[1] "The Meaning of Dialogue," Inter-Religious Dialogue, ed. Herbert Jaisingh (Bangalore: CISRS, 1967), pp. 57-58.

[2] "The Goals of Inter-Religious Dialogue," Truth and Dialogue, ed. John Hick (London: Sheldon Press, 1974), p. 91.

discussion on the level of mutual competent intellectual inquiry," and human dialogue which is based on the I-Thou relationship, in which the important activity is to "penetrate divisive doctrinal and ideological rationalizations in order to get at the root of the matter--the fact that man is meeting man."[1] Nevertheless, for Sharpe, being occupied only with discursive dialogue is not a "crippling situation." And instead of becoming, as Taylor sees it, "a screen between man and man," discursive dialogue is "our only key to the understanding of what men actually believe--as opposed to what we would like them to believe."[2]

De Silva's own approach does not proceed on such sharply divided lines precisely because it developed in an unstructured way out of the needs of his particular dialogical situation. While in agreement with Sharpe's emphasis on the importance of discursive dialogue, De Silva's holistic approach avoids the pitfalls of Taylor's "crippling situation." Thus, De Silva observes, that while some seek to avoid dialogue on the intellectual level, as it is at this level that tensions and clashes on ultimate issues can arise, others feel that "honest intellectual confrontations are mutually enriching," and "a healthy dialectical tension is a good thing and if carefully handled can be used creatively."[3] This approach is therefore able to appreciate the precise nature of the dialogue partner's beliefs, and is a safeguard from what Sharpe sees as the great weakness that besets a purely 'human'

---

[1] Ibid., pp. 82-83.

[2] Ibid., p. 91.

[3] "Understanding and Goal of Dialogue," pp. 3-4.

approach in dialogue, i.e., "a tendency to treat the 'partner in dialogue' as an abstraction, separable from his cultural, intellectual and religious setting."[1] De Silva also includes the 'Socio-political level' with its emphasis that the solution of pressing social issues must be accomplished by dialogue between men of various faiths. This holistic view of dialogue is, as De Silva's experience indicates, the result of an awareness that comes from living in day-to-day contact with other religions, and sharply contrasts with the Western emphasis on an almost exclusively discursive dialogue. He therefore explicitly warns against the compartmentalization of the dialogue experience: "The confrontation of minds for intellectual understanding, the meeting of hearts for spiritual enrichment and the joining of hands for social upliftment are all aspects of human experience which cannot be separated from one another. One must be buttressed by the others."[2]

Commitment

If De Silva opened his Nairobi address affirming that full and loyal commitment to one's own faith is strengthened rather than diminished by dialogue, it is because for him "genuine dialogue can take place only between committed people." Commitment to one's own religious vision does not, however, preclude openness to that of others; rather De Silva maintains, that, "Partners in dialogue while being deeply committed to their respective faiths must be open to the insights of others."[3]

---

[1] "Goals of Inter-Religious Dialogue," p. 84.

[2] "Understanding and Goal of Dialogue," p. 4.

[3] "What Is Dialogue?" Dialogue New Series 1, No. 1 (January-April 1974): 2.

He recognizes that every religion has its "jealousies," i.e., those

points at which the adherents of every religion claim a universal

significance and finality.

> For instance the Muslims claim that the Holy Q'ran is not
> just another revelation but is God's word. The Jews claim
> that Israel's covenant with God and her attachment to the
> Holy Land has a central significance in the determinate
> purpose of God. The Christians claim that in the life
> death and resurrection of Jesus, God has acted decisively
> for all mankind.[1]

Thus a fact which needs to be recognized, accepted and res-

pected is that dialogue partners are "committed people having specific

convictions at the heart of their allegiance." This commitment is not

however inimical to dialogue, because "the hard core of commitment need

not constitute an impenetrable screen of dogma; rather, mutual under-

standing of one another's convictions can lead to a breakthrough into

deeper commitment without being imprisoned in systems of thought,

dogma or tradition." The end-result of this holding together of commit-

ment and openness is <u>meeting</u> (emphasis De Silva's), i.e., genuine meet-

ing resulting in authentic human existence. And since "genuine meet-

ing is based on trust, mutual acceptance and respect for each other's

convictions and integrity," dialogue becomes, for De Silva, "neither an

encounter of porcupines nor a coming together of jelly fish, but a

meeting of persons."[2]

Meaningful dialogue between committed partners results in

genuine meeting but always entails risk. However, for De Silva, it is

the only viable answer to the twin fears of syncretism and the betrayal

---

[1]"Every Religion Has Its Jealousies," <u>Dialogue</u> New Series
7, No.1 (January-April 1980): 2.

[2]"What Is Dialogue," p. 2.

of mission. It has been found to be in practice the most effective
safeguard against syncretism: "We have discovered that the more openly
religious dialogue is conducted, the more clearly the specific differ-
ences of the Christian Gospel emerge."[1] It is not dialogue that blunts
proclamation but the lack of it. Dialogue inevitably involves risk,
but it is the inescapable means of proclaiming the Gospel in an authen-
tic manner in the multi-religious Asian context:

> Where we cannot enter into a meaningful relationship
> with others, meaningful proclamation of the Gospel becomes
> impossible. Where there is no authentic living the authen-
> tic notes of the Gospel will not be heard. How can we pro-
> claim the love of God if we do not love our neighbours?
> If we are not prepared to listen to what people of other
> faiths have to say to us, how can we expect them to listen
> to what we have to say to them? In such a situation effect-
> ive proclamation becomes irrelevant and well-nigh impossible.
> Proclamation without meeting in love is a noisy gong or a
> clanging symbol.[2]

In answer to the query of a Buddhist participant at a Buddhist-
Christian consultation in Pilimatalawa, Sri Lanka, De Silva draws
attention to the fact that both the Buddhist and the Christian do
indeed take proclamation seriously. The Buddhist sought to know
what Christians hoped to achieve through dialogue: "Does this mean
that it is the firm intention of the Christian Church to baptize
people of all nations into Christianity so that in the end there will
be only Christians in the world and no people of other faiths?"[3] In

---

[1]"Dialogue: a Matter of Necessity," p. 11.

[2]Ibid.

[3]Lynn A. de Silva, "Proselytism," Dialogue New Series 4,Nos.
1 & 2 (January-August 1977): p. 37. The question arose from a dis-
cussion centering on a statement from the Nairobi section report,
"Seeking Community: The Common Search of People of Various Faiths,
Cultures and Ideologies":
    "We are all agreed that the Great Commission of Jesus
    Christ which asks us to go out into all the world and

reply De Silva argued that Christians take Christ's commission in Matthew 28:19 as seriously as the Buddhists take Buddha's commission, "Preach, O Bhikkus, the doctrine which is glorious in the beginning, glorious at the end, in spirit and in letter. Proclaim a consummate, perfect and pure life of holiness. . . ." He further cites the pledge taken by the delegates to the first World Buddhist Fellowship held in Kandy, Sri Lanka, in 1950, in obedience to this Commission: "To strive with might and main to make known the sublime doctrine of the Buddha, so that its benign spirit of service may pervade the whole world." He says there should be no objection to Buddhists winning converts in all parts of the world by proclaiming the Buddha Dhamma.

> In fact to "strive with might and main to make known the
> sublime" teaching of the faith one holds is a sure sign
> of vitality of that religion. This "should not in any way
> be abandoned or betrayed, disobeyed or compromised",
> whatever maybe the religion. . . . Just as Buddhists would
> be happy to receive converts to Buddhism, so Christians
> would be happy to receive converts to Christianity.[1]

In the light of his view of dialogue as "a genuine meeting based on trust and mutual acceptance," De Silva accepts the risk of dialogue in which each dialogue partner is prepared to have his most cherished and basic convictions about religion challenged. As R. Panikkar notes, "This love-understanding of the neighbour is risky; it involves the possibility of one's own conversion so strongly that one's

---

> make disciples of all nations, and to baptize them in the
> Triune Name, should not be abandoned or betrayed, disobeyed
> or compromised, neither should it be misused. Dialogue is
> both a matter of hearing and understanding the faith of
> others, and also of witnessing to the gospel of Jesus Christ."

[1] Ibid., p. 38.

previous beliefs may be greatly changed or even superseded."[1] For

Panikkar dialogue becomes a religious act par excellence at the point

when the intra-religious dialogue begins, i.e., "when the two views

meet head-on inside oneself, when dialogue prompts genuine religious

pondering, and even a religious crisis, at the bottom of a Man's heart;

when interpersonal dialogue turns into intrapersonal soliloquy."[2] De

Silva argues that such genuine religious conversions are not at odds

with the Gospel commission as Jesus desired converts and not proselytes:

> Jesus sternly condemned proselytism. "Woe to you
> Scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites" He said, "for you
> traverse sea and land to make one single proselyte, you
> make him twice as much a child of hell as yourselves"
> (Matthew 23:15).
> In Jesus' Temptations too we see that He rejected
> proselytism, (Matt. 4: 1-11). He refused to win people
> by material inducements or by doing sensational things or
> by using worldly power or influence. Never did He coerce
> people to follow Him. Like the Buddha who sent out His
> disciples to preach the Dhamma so Jesus sent His disciples
> to proclaim the Good News and there is not the slightest
> hint anywhere not even in the Great Commission that He
> encouraged proselytism.[3]

Like Jesus, Gautama too did not make proselytes or encourage

cheap discipleship. De Silva describes the practice in vogue at the

time of the Buddha's preaching ministry. Bands of religious seekers

engaged in debates explaining and defending their faith, and when a

flaw was revealed the loser was expected to follow the victor's religion.

---

[1] The Intrareligious Dialogue (New York: Paulist Press, 1978),
p. 254.

[2] Ibid., pp. 8-9.

[3] "Proselytism," p. 38. De Silva seems to imply a substantive
difference between the terms "convert" and "proselyte". Proselyte is
evidently used pejoratively, like the epithet "rice-Christian", in
contrast to the making of disciples who were convinced converts.

Citing an instance of Gautama's concern to make only convinced converts, De Silva points to the spirit of tolerance, charity, and freedom characteristic of the dialogues of the Buddha:

> The Buddha won many converts in this way for, unlike other teachers, he had the amazing ability for detecting and pointing out erroneous thinking. Yet he never disparaged another faith nor coerced the loser to follow him. This is clearly seen from the story of Upali the millionaire, a follower of Niganta Nathaputta. After a discussion with the Buddha he was convinced of the truth of the Dhamma and decided to follow the Buddha. But the Buddha advised him first to make a thorough investigation and come to a decision of his own free will. After he became a devotee of the Buddha, he was encouraged to continue his charity to the disciples of his former teacher.[1]

Conversions then, are not to be influenced by extraneous factors. They occur beyond the stage of increased understanding and mutual enrichment. Since they are a response to truth-claims, both partners must enter the dialogue as fully committed members of their own religious traditions. Only full commitment ensures the integrity of inter-faith dialogue and results in genuine conversion and not merely a more subtle and sophisticated form of proselytism.

Community

Central to the objectives of dialogue is the task of building community. De Silva places dialogue in the context of the common human search for community at the local, national, and international levels. Its positive purpose is "to affirm the unity of mankind, understand our responsibility to one another and harness all resources for living together in community."[2] Attention is drawn to the need for dialogue

---

[1] "Dialogue and Mission: Some Lessons from the Past," Dialogue Old Series, Nos. 20 & 21 (June 1970): 15.

[2] "What Is Dialogue," p. 2.

in the light of the irreversible empirical fact that we live in a pluralistic world in which many religions exist, and therefore must learn to live together in peace and harmony.[1] Thus dialogue seeks to promote racial and social harmony, generate a universal conscious-ness, and most importantly to create "an atmosphere in which people of different religious convictions can live together in openness and mutual respect working together for the building up of a world commu-nity."[2]

In the quest for new human relationships that go beyond the economic and political structures, De Silva emphasizes the special role of religion. Millions have been disillusioned with religion, seen it as a divisive force,and turned to science. People of different religious faiths can no longer live in a state of mutual warfare and rivalry. Alluding to Arnold Toynbee's observation on the failure of materialism and nature's need to "turn to the realm of the spirit for satisfying man's hunger for infinity," De Silva calls on men of differ-ent religious communities "to serve a community creating role." This role is described as participation in an effort to recreate human community by bringing in the spiritual insights of all religions and ideologies to that participation.[3]

In one of his lengthier editorials, which he significantly titles "Holy Worldliness" (using Dietrich Bonhoeffer's striking

---

[1]"Living in a Pluralistic World," Dialogue New Series 4, No. 3 (September-December 1979): 83.

[2]"What Is Dialogue," p. 3.

[3]Ibid., pp. 2-3.

expression by which he denoted a simultaneous involvement in this world
through participation in a reality that takes one beyond this world),
De Silva explores the relevance of religion to the quest for world
community. The issues addressed are from the discussions of the fifth
Christian-Buddhist encounter in Sri Lanka. Issues raised by science
and technology, the challenge of new models of society based on
ideologies like Marxism, and the question of spirituality, i.e., "the
spirituality of the secular" which challenges the traditional notions
of the 'spiritual,' are dealt with. On the one hand, religion has be-
come unreal with its other-worldliness, and on the other, "this-worldly
secular ideologies" tend to make everything, including man, a means to
an end. The need is for these two approaches, religion and secularity,
to meet, correct, and supplement each other--i.e., religion serving
secularity by guarding it from being inhuman, and in turn being protec-
ted by secularity from unreality. Therefore, "If religions preach a
way of life as a private passport to heaven they will have no relevance
to this world. If religious virtues cannot be translated into social
values they are more than useless." Citing several examples of Marxist
humanism, De Silva points out that it is being increasingly recognized that
"human nature is not simply the product of social existence, but has a
deeper personal dimension." This need of man to go beyond himself so
that he reaches a spiritual dimension of life is also true of Pandit
Jawaharlal Nehru's scientific humanism. The Buddhist insight of the
need of a spiritual struggle to overcome the root-conditions of lust
(lobha), hatred (dosa), and delusion (moha) is placed alongside the
Christian insight of losing oneself in order to find oneself, i.e., of

becoming an authentic being by eliminating selfishness. The ultimate goal in the search for community, the goal to which man can move away from himself, can be called <u>Nirvana</u> or the kingdom of God.[1]

In another editorial on community, this time basing his comments on the discussions at the "Theological consultation on Dialogue in Community" held at Chiang Mai, Thailand, 1977, De Silva points out that the goal of world community is neither syncretistic nor in conflict with the objectives of mission. The traditional Christian view of the end as an ingathering of all peoples into the Christian church, he maintains, has not allowed us to look over our self-protective fences. However, as the Buddhist proverb ("When a finger points to the moon it is foolish to look at the finger") indicates, there is a need for proper perspective. Dialogue breaks down these fences and becomes the means of achieving community while at the same time it guards against losing one's religious identity or the specificity of one's faith. "Any religion worth its salt must not only preserve its saltiness, but also seek ways of adding its undiluted flavour to the emerging world community, to which the finger points." When dialogue is used as an evangelistic means of accomplishing the dream of baptizing everyone into the Christian church, it becomes "the python approach" to other religions, "the python spews saliva on its prey before swallowing it." This type of mission has no place in a pluralistic world as it refuses to accept the fact that other religions also have a mission.[2]

---

[1] "Holy Worldliness," <u>Dialogue</u> New Series 2, No. 1 (January-April 1975); 1-6.

[2] "The Turn to 'Community' as the Focus for Dialogue," <u>Dialogue</u> New Series 4, Nos. 1 & 2 (January-August 1977): 1-2.

De Silva is concerned with defining the task before the re-
ligions in today's pluralistic world in which the visible boundaries
of traditional religious communities are fast breaking down. The task
is the achievement of "complementarity" which results in the dis-
covery of a framework of values which can coexist with other faiths.
Claims made by people of different faiths should not be in opposition,
"but in complementarity with whatever is good, true and noble in each
religion." This "complementarity" finds a distinct congruity with
"the sharing in the spirituality of others" theme of his Nairobi
address: "Part of the nature of this complementarity will be a re-
assessed and renewed understanding of one another's religion." The
direction in which the finger points is towards "a kind of symbiosis"
in which people of all faiths could coordinate their resources to build
community.[1] The realization of mankind's search for community in which
authentic living is possible requires the contribution of all religions:

> The religious life of man should not be regarded as mutually
> exclusive systems but as dimensions of a universal spir-
> ituality. Therefore all spiritual experience in its various
> manifestations must be given full recognition in our theo-
> logies which cannot remain exclusive any longer but must be
> global in outlook. We need to adopt a catholic humanitarian
> world view; we need to realize that the convergence of all
> spiritual traditions is essential to the future of man and
> society.[2]

This is, however, not a sanction to absorb the spirituality of
other religions without critical study, and De Silva insists on making
it clear that the world community that is envisaged is not a syncretistic

---

[1]"Turn to 'Community' as the Focus," p. 2.

[2]"Meaning of Religion in Sri Lanka Today," p. 13.

amalgamation: "The purpose of dialogue is not to seek for the lowest common denominator; not to create a Parliament of Religions; not to work towards one world religion."[1] Neither does it mean "the absorption of all world religions into one world religion. It is not a fruit-salad of religions put together. The one world will be typified by unity as well as diversity." Employing the terms "labelled religion" and "global religion", De Silva maintains the inclusivity of, and complementarity between, religion in its particular form and the global vision. The universal and the particular aspects of the religions are consistently held together, and even though it is not possible to say what the one world will finally look like, "it is important to stress that each religious tradition must be kept distinctive while it reaches for universal diffusion among all men. It is essential that these be concrete expressions of the one religious world."[2]

The theme of search for community through dialogue, which is a fundamental aspect of De Silva's theology, must await a fuller development in the next chapter in which writings such as his definitive work The Problem of the Self in Buddhism and Christianity[3] is considered. That he assigns a theological basis to the current meeting of world religions and ideologies and the movement toward one inter-dependent humanity, and that it is central to his concept of mission is clear.

---

[1]"What Is Dialogue," p. 2.

[2]"Meaning of Religion in Sri Lanka Today," p. 14.

[3]The Problem of the Self in Buddhism and Christianity (New York: Barnes and Noble, 1979). See especially chapter 12--"The Kingdom of God--Community of Love."

We must have the widsom to understand the signs of
our time and to discern God's activity outside the insti-
tutional Church and in the revolutionary process, and go
forward hand in hand with others to build a new world
order. We can no longer look at each other through a
glass wall, and stand aloof from what is happening all
around us. A major part of our mission is to break down
that wall and join hands with others in our search for
community and for a better world.[1]

The Rules of the Game

An indispensable ingredient for authentic dialogue, De Silva

maintains, is that the participants are able to enter into the "game"

with a genuine openness because a basic mutuality has been found with

regard to the "rules." It is when the encounter is truly religious

that dialogue is fruitful, for when committed participants meet with

a genuine openness to truth it always entails the risk of conversion.

To consent to this mutual openness, i.e., one which accepts the risk

of conversion either to particular beliefs or the religion of the

other, is to play the game fairly. Note De Silva's definition of open-

ness in this context:

> Openness means being penetrable or accessible to one
> another; it implies a willingness to subject oneself
> to a process of mutual correction and learning. This
> involves critical appreciation and balanced judgment
> based on sober criticism pursued in a rational manner
> with modesty, respect and charity.[2]

In his editorial in the initial issue of Dialogue, De Silva

advances the two basic rules, or "underlying general principles",

which are applicable to dialogue in any context: "the disposition to

listen," and "the ability to speak." The raison d'etre of the journal

---

[1] "Dialogue: a Matter of Necessity," p. 11.

[2] "What Is Dialogue," p. 2.

Dialogue, the editorial claims, "is to foster among Christians a desire for an adequate and sympathetic understanding of Buddhism so that we could listen with sympathy and 'speak the truth in love.'" Applying the rules to his own dialogue situation, De Silva underlines the importance of the mutuality that should be found between Christians and Buddhists if dialogue which is both creative and genuine is to be achieved.

> The simple truth is that no creative dialogue is possible unless we speak in terms that the other can understand, and how else can this be done except by a sympathetic understanding of the beliefs and practices and habits of thought of those with whom we are engaged in dialogue, and in our context it means the Buddhists among whom we live. The purpose of this knowledge is not simply to collect objective data about Buddhism, but to understand our Buddhist brethren better so that we may be understood better by them. This is the sovereign cure for Avidya (ignorance) which is the root cause of conflict and disputation.[1]

In November 1963, De Silva attended a talk by Gunaseela Vitanage, secretary of the Bauddha Jatika Balavegaya (Buddhist National Movement), on the subject "The Search for the Historical Jesus." At this meeting De Silva replied to some of the issues raised in Vitanage's talk and subsequently dialogued with Vitanage in the columns of the Ceylon Daily News and Dialogue. He has drawn attention to the manner in which these dialogical exchanges were conducted. Unlike Buddhist-Christian controversies of earlier times, they were free of acrimony and invective, thus he perceives a true spirit of dialogue. Noting that the criticism of religious beliefs is often construed as a personal attack, and that these beliefs "are so much a part of our associative-emotional mind," De Silva points

---

[1] "From Diatribe to Dialogue," Dialogue Old Series, No. 1 (September 1963): 1-3.

out that the success of this and future dialogues depends on a care-

ful adherence to the twin rules of "listening" and "speaking".

> Dialogue therefore calls for a "delicate sensitivity
> on both sides", and the ability to listen with sympathy
> and understanding and speak the truth in love. We are
> glad that this discussion on the historicity of Jesus Christ
> has preserved the essential elements of dialogue and we
> hope that with such dialogues as this a new era in Buddhist-
> Christian relationships will begin.[1]

When sensitive listening and speaking in love take place,

both partners submit themselves selflessly to the dialogue experience.

Nothing is preplanned or orchestrated, truth is permitted to come to

light. De Silva takes pains, therefore, to explore the wealth of

meaning in the term "dialogue" and to define what it is and what

it is not, as well as to reiterate the foundational nature of the

basic rules.

> Dialogue is not a pleasant conversation, nor a con-
> troversy nor a negotiation nor an argument. Dialogue is
> a discussion, verbal or written, in a sincere effort to
> reach mutual understanding. It is an earnest effort to
> appreciate the truth in the other's convictions. It is
> not an attempt to make compromises in order to appear to
> be modest, but a frank facing of our agreements and dif-
> ferences. Dialogue therefore involves an openness to
> listen and a disposition to speak--to listen with sym-
> pathy and interest to the extent of being affected by
> what we hear and to speak with modesty and respect in a
> way the other can understand.[2]

De Silva has spelled out the implications of the disposition

to listen and the ability to speak for the Christian and the Church.

He speaks of the "assumptive power" of the Church, i.e., of the

ability "to take into itself the treasures in other religions and

---

[1]_Bauddha Jatika Balavegaya and the Search for the Historical_
Jesus (Colombo: Rev. L. A. de Silva, 1964), pp. i-ii.

[2]_Why Can't I Save Myself? The Christian Answer in Relation_
to Buddhist Thought (Colombo: Christian Study Centre-Division
for Buddhist Studies, 1966), p. i.

bring them into full fruition in Christ." It is through this assump-

tive power that the Church becomes a microcosm of the divine common-

wealth. By functioning as a catalyst, it enables all religions to

develop those elements that promote the growth of the divine common-

wealth within their own culture. The task of the Church is to exer-

cise reverent care and generous appreciation in the study of the

specific features of other religions to see what they might contri-

bute to the fullness of the Christian faith. Thus he spells out what

the "listening" and "speaking" of true dialogue involves:

> (a) We should be able to lay ourselves open to the deepest
> influences coming from people of other faiths, and become
> one with them in mind and spirit.
> (b) We should be able to see things through the eyes of
> Buddha or Confucius and others who searched for the solu-
> tion to the riddle of existence.
> (c) We need to learn the language they speak and under-
> stand their modes of thought in order to open up lines of
> communication.
> (d) In certain cases it will be our duty to lead non-
> Christians into a deeper understanding of their own faith
> and encourage them to live their own faith better, so that
> they could reach their best and bring their wealth to en-
> rich world community.[1]

As we go on to consider De Silva's estimate of a resurgent

Buddhism and its apologetic claims, and the application of the "rules,"

his dialogical approach must be viewed in the historical perspective

of the Buddhist-Christian encounter in Sri Lanka. We turn now, there-

fore, to De Silva's reflections which provide this perspective from

within his own Christian community.

---

[1]"Dialogue in the Context of Sri Lanka Buddhism," -- New
Approaches to Interfaith Dialogue, ed. T. Dayananda Francis (Colombo:
Church of Sweden Mission, 1980), p. 100.

"The Early Period" and "The Modern Approach"

Commenting on the Buddhist monk's striking simile of "the screen of dogma" that separates Christianity and Buddhism, De Silva acknowledges the existence of a state of "theological apartheid." Christians are held largely responsible for this negative attitude toward Buddhism, which has in turn evoked a negative response. Noting the antipathy evoked by the rejection of Buddhism as a false religion, he points out that Christians have not as yet fully recovered from the damage that has been done.[1] In his essay, "Encounter with Buddhism", De Silva has traced the transition to a more positive attitude to Buddhism from within the history of Methodism in Sri Lanka, providing an useful insight into the background of his own dialogical method.[2]

In his account of "the early period," i.e., from the arrival of the first Wesleyan missionaries in 1814 to the Edinburgh Conference of 1910, the attitude of Methodist missionaries to Buddhism is described as "radical exclusivism."[3] The two main factors which conditioned the attitude of the earliest Methodist missionaries were the background of their missionary theology and the prevailing state of religion in the country. Since the missionary theology held that Christianity was the only true religion and all other religions were pagan and false, Buddhism was considered a particular brand of paganism.

---

[1]"Dialogue: a Matter of Necessity," p. 11.

[2]"Encounter with Buddhism," A History of the Methodist Church in Ceylon, ed. W. J. T. Small (Colombo: Wesley Press, 1971), pp. 570-579.

[3]Ibid., pp. 570-574.

The belief that with the expansion of the "Christian West" the "heathen religions" would be overthrown preparing the way for the kingdom of God was also part of this theology. The presence of demonism, superstition, and slavery in the country convinced the exclusivistic missionaries that all religions were pagan and confirmed their uncompromising and exclusive attitude. It was the polemical thrust of their writings, and the Buddhist response to them, that led to the Buddhist-Christian controversies climaxing in the Panadura Debate of 1873. Significantly, one of the ten conditions of the debate was that "Christians should try in their talks to prove that Buddhism is false, and Buddhists should likewise try to prove that Christianity is false."[1]

Contrasted with the negative approach of the early period is the transition to a new outlook in what De Silva terms "the modern approach."[2] The influences that brought about this transition could be summed up under two headings: (1) the availability of a better

---

[1]Ibid. This condemnatory attitude was not directed to the Buddhists themselves, while paganism was denounced, "men--to whatever faith they belonged--were valued as persons who were to be saved, because Christ died for them." De Silva also notes that the works of Gogerly, Hardy, and Ward, the three greatest Methodist missionary scholars, included scholarly descriptive writings in addition to polemical ones. They undertook a serious study of the religion and sought a true and accurate exposition of the Buddhist texts. The two strands that characterized their work were scholarly restraint and evangelical passion, thus "They never allowed their scholarship to be blurred or coloured by their evangelical zeal, neither did they allow their evangelism to be based on ignorance and prejudice." However, it was their polemical works which exhibited a spirit of arrogance that had a negative impact on Buddhist-Christian relations. Hardy wrote, "Turning from Buddha to Christ is like passing away from deep darkness to the most intense light." Gogerly regarded Buddhism as "a citadel of Satan's kingdom," and his book Kristiyani Prajnapti is described by De Silva as "a violent attack on Buddhism and an uncompromising defence of Christianity."

[2]Ibid., pp. 574-579.

knowledge of Buddhism in the West, and (2) the emergence of a new missionary approach. The first was brought about through the translations of Rhys Davids; the work of German scholars; Edwin Arnold's The Light of Asia; and, the missionary activity of Buddhists like Anagarika Dharmapala in the West. The second resulted from the influence of Hocking and the school of thought which believed in the unity of all religions; the recognition at Edinburgh 1910 that other religions, however limited, were also light-bearers; and, the Tambaram debate in 1938 on how to correlate the content of the Christian Kerygma with the religious and cultural context in which it was proclaimed. The two outstanding figures exemplifying this new approach were A. Stanley Bishop, the first Methodist missionary to catch the spirit of this new attitude, and D. T. Niles, the Sri Lankan contributor. Both Bishop and Niles sought "to find meaning for Buddhist concepts in the Christian context, and restate the Christian message in a way that would carry meaning for the Buddhists."

This historical perspective of Buddhist-Christian relations from within his own Christian communion constitutes an useful basis for understanding De Silva and his stance toward Buddhism and his estimate of it. In his own work, and that of the Ecumenical Institute for Study and Dialogue, we find the developed expression of "the modern approach." It is thus aptly pointed out that,

> The basic assumption of the early period was that there are
> no contact points between Christianity and Buddhism. The
> characteristic of the modern period is the growing feeling
> that there are contact points between the two religions,
> and consequently the main drive of the thinking of this period
> is the search for a common basis on which dialogue is possible.[1]

---

[1]Ibid., p. 574.

In De Silva's constant quest of a common basis through meeting with Buddhist representatives, we see a practised theology of dialogue emerge.

Estimate of Buddhism

In his introductory remarks at Nairobi, De Silva stated that the age of disputation was over and the age of dialogue had begun. He sees the painful period of controversy as being virtually over and finds Buddhists themselves taking the lead in the dialogue.[1] He has welcomed the initiative of Dr. Padmasiri de Silva, Head of the Department of Philosophy in the University of Sri Lanka, who affirms that a renewed understanding of one another's faith will result in the discovery of "a framework of values which can co-exist with other faiths as found in the pluralist structure of Sri Lanka."[2] In response to both Buddhist and Christian initiatives to find this common basis, Lynn de Silva has made a serious appraisal of the Buddhist approach to dialogue.

Concept of Dialogue in Early Buddhism

De Silva has shown that the concept of inter-religious dialogue is rooted in Buddhism from the earliest times. He draws

---

[1]The call to dialogue was initially received by Buddhists with the suspicions that it was motivated by the failure of Christians to reach their missionary objectives, and by a desire to curry favour with the Buddhists since the loss of their privileged status with the advent of Sri Lankan independence in 1948. Thus Buddhist participants at the first bi-lateral dialogues organized by the Study Center in 1963 could remark, "Dialogue is a subtle invitation to the 'heathen' fly to walk into the parlour of the 'Christian spider,'" and, "Christians are now trying to kiss the hand they failed to cut off." See "Dialogue in the Context of Sri Lanka Buddhism," p. 90.

[2]Lynn A. de Silva, "The Turn to 'Community' as the Focus for Dialogue," p. 2. cf. Padmasiri de Silva, Value Orientations and Nation Building (Colombo: Lake House Investments, 1976), p. 3.

attention to Gautama's tolerant approach which is specially evident in the _Kalama Sutra_. In the third century B. C., the Emperor Asoka "instituted the practice of what he called _samavaya_ (which may very well be translated 'Dialogue'), that is the coming together of exponents of different religions in religious assemblies, evidently, that they may get to know each other better." The emperor also commended proficiency (_bahusruta_) in the scriptures of different faiths, the practice of _vaccigutta_ or the restraint of criticism of other religious sects, "and the promotion of what constitutes the essence of all religions as their common good (_mula_)." With its irenic approach Buddhism spread rapidly, but when Buddhist missionaries went to China, Buddhism met with its first real test since "it had to compete with a highly developed civilization with strong philosophical traditions." Despite the friction and disputations that followed, it is considered significant that some form of dialogue (as is evident from the Chinese text _Li Huo Lun_, i.e., "Treatise on the Clarification of Doubts") emerged, and that Buddhism and the two Chinese religions were mutually enriched by the encounter.

> The final result of the Buddhist missionary enterprise in China was a "Three in one" religion in which the fundamental elements of the two Chinese religions, Confucianism and Taoism, and the imported religion Buddhism, came to represent parts of a whole while remaining separate identifiable religious systems stimulating and enriching one another.[1]

---

[1]"Dialogue and Mission: Some Lessons from the Past," pp. 15-16.

De Silva cites instances of the influence of the Buddha's teaching and Asokan edicts on Asian political leaders in an editorial commentary on the Non-aligned Nations Summit of 1976. The Sri Lankan Prime-Minister Srimavo Bandaranaike's quote from the Buddha's last discourse, the _Mahaparinibbana sutta_, "If we can meet together in concord, so long may we be expected, not to decline but to prosper," is

The history of the Christian encounter with Buddhism in Sri

Lanka, it has been shown, was far from conducive to promoting dialogue.

In its reinterpretation to meet the challenges of the modern world,

Buddhism has posed a challenge to Christianity. De Silva suggests

that the Christian response to the Buddhist challenge should take

account of "(a) the claims made by Buddhists to the detriment of

of Christianity; (b) the main areas of disagreement and the possible

solution to them; and (c) the specific questions facing Christians

living in a Buddhist environment."[1] This last aspect which has to

do with the manner and form of the Christian message as it seeks to

express itself in an indigenous culture, is discussed in the last

section of this chapter. The second aspect refers to theological-

philosophical or conceptual differences which receive detailed treat-

ment in the next chapter. Of immediate import to our discussion of

De Silva's estimate of Buddhism is the cognizance he takes of the

---

the basis of the editorial, and is commended to people living in
multi-religious and multi-racial contexts. The Indian Prime-Minister
Indira Gandhi's use of an Asokan edict to explain the Indian notion
of a secular state is an application of the principle of mutuality
among the different religions in India today: "Secularism means
neither irreligion or indifference to religion, but equal respect
for all religions--not mere tolerance, but positive respect. Secular-
ism demands constant self-examination and unceasing exertion. That
great truth is inscribed on rocks by Asoka. that no man reverences
his own religion unless he reverences others' religions also." He
also finds it most encouraging that some leaders of third world
countries which have emerged from colonial domination and exploitation,
like Julius Nyerere of Tanzania, are deeply committed Christians.
The evident implication is that Nyerere's political experiment of so-
cialism, i.e., "Ujamaa" or Familihood, in which Christian, Muslims
and the followers of the traditional African religions are all part
of the extended family, is an example of concord. See "Concord,"
Dialogue New Series 3, No. 2 (May-August 1976): 43-45.

[1]"Buddhist--Christian Dialogue," p. 182.

Buddhist resurgence with its positive missionary outlook and his evaluation of Buddhist apologetics, as a prelude to our study of the response he makes to the claims made by Buddhists to the detriment of Christianity in their first major dialogical encounter.

Appeal of a Resurgent Buddhism

We have already noted De Silva's identification of the two dominant characteristics of Sri Lankan Buddhism, i.e., its religio-national solidarity and the Dhammadipa concept that Sri Lanka is the land favored by the Buddha for radiating the light of the Dhamma throughout the world.[1] He also draws attention to the new missionary dynamism of a resurgent Buddhism, resulting from a renewal of the missionary ideal of earliest Buddhism to meet the challenges of the modern world. This missionary outlook which is not merely international, but universal or cosmic, is traced back to Buddha's commission to his disciples to preach the Dhamma: "Go ye now, O Bhikkus, and wander for the gain of many, out of compassion for the world, for the good, for the gain and for the welfare of gods and men. Let not two of you go the same way. Preach, O Bhikkus, the doctrine. . . ." The light of the Dhamma was for all worlds, "for the welfare of gods and men," thus giving the Buddhist missionary outlook a cosmic dimension. The Buddha is also depicted in several Nikayas as one "born into the world for the good of many, for the happiness of many, for the advantage, the good, the happiness of gods and men, out of compassion for the world." Thus De Silva concludes, "The Buddhists feel that it is their duty to fulfil this

---

[1]See above, pp. 38-42.

mission. The consciousness of such a cosmic mission is by far the
most powerful operative force in the Buddhist resurgence."[1]

In describing the process of reinterpreting Buddhism to make
it capable of becoming a world religion, four prominent themes have
been traced in Buddhist apologetic literature.[2] First, Buddhism
is presented as "the only religion capable of being the basis for
world peace." To support this contention pointed reference is made
to the two world wars fought among Christian nations, whereas in
contrast "during the past two-thousand-five-hundred years of Buddhist
history not one drop of blood was shed in the cause of Buddhism."
Missionaries to Eastern countries are depicted as coming with im-
perialistic motives, "carrying the Bible in one hand and the sword
in the other." Buddhism alone is posited as the solution since it
teaches better than any other religion how Tanha (craving or desire),
the root cause of evil, can be conquered by the practice of medita-
tion and other ways of discipline. Second, it is claimed that truth

---

[1] "Buddhist-Christian Dialogue," pp. 170-176. The activities
of international Buddhist organizations to carry out this mission are
described at length. The World Buddhist Fellowship founded in 1950
at the Temple of the Tooth in Kandy, Sri Lanka, resolved "to strive
with all might and main to make known the sublime doctrine of the
Buddha, so that its benign spirit of service and sacrifice may per-
vade the entire world." The Lanka Dhamma Duta Society is a special
missionary agency for activity in Germany. The World Buddhist Sangha
Council, founded in 1966 in Sri Lanka, has made a serious attempt to
reconcile the Theravada and Mahayana schools of thought, and one of
its major concerns "is to unite the different sects in Buddhism for
more effective evangelism throughout the world." The activities of
the Buddha Sasana Council extablished by an Act of Parliament in
Burma in 1950 and the Thailand Religious Department to propagate
world-wide Buddhist missions are also described. The Buddhist
emphasis on vigourous inward preparation for their missionary endea-
vours is reflected in the numerous meditation centers that have been
set up: "Meditation centres are considered to be the centers of power
in Buddhism."

[2] Ibid., pp. 177-182.

of the Buddha Dhamma is scientifically and experimentally demonstrable. De Silva cites the contention of Dr. K. N. Jayatilleka, a leading Buddhist scholar, that science has not only controverted the specific dogmas of Western religion but also vitiated the general religious outlook on things, particularly the belief in a personal God. Buddhism, on the other hand, is not at variance with science, "so long as scientists confine themselves to their methodology and their respective fields without making a dogma of materialism."[1] Not being a blind faith like Christianity, Buddhism is able to invite people to "come and see" (ehi passico). Third, since the primary aim of Buddhist missions is not conversion but the inculcation of Buddhist principles and the permeation of the world with the spirit of Buddhism, it is presented as "a universal religion without sectarian interests." Fourth, "Buddhism has an unrivalled social message." Apologetic claims and developments in this regard include; (a) the belief that the principles essential for a good and stable government, as outlined by the Buddha, are embodied in the Dasa-Raja-Dhamma or the Ten Duties of the King and have been exemplified in Asoka's reign; (b) the adaptation of the Buddha's message to fit into a socialist framework with the emphasis on the Bodhisattva ideal of service to mankind, rather than the individualistic ideal of Arahat, (c) the interpretation of Metta (loving kindness) as a principle of social action by U. Thittila, the Burmese monk; and, (d) the development of the Lokanibbana (nibbana on earth), i.e., the Burmese Buddhist utopian idealism of "a state which is attainable within history

---

[1]Ibid., p. 178. Cf. K. N. Jayatilleke, Buddhism and Science, ed. Wu Shu (Kandy: Buddhist Publication Society, 1959), p. 1.

and towards which history is moving." Resurgent Buddhism has had considerable impact on the West, strongly appealing to the secular mood and especially "to many people disillusioned by dogmas, rituals and ceremonies in other religions."

De Silva has also observed that the presence of tensions and disruptive forces in Buddhism poses difficult questions which Buddhism like other religions will have to face. There is the laity's loss of faith in the Sangha, the third Refuge, because of participation by Buddhist monks in politics. Buddhists have been made painfully conscious of "sins of division" in their ranks, as in Germany and England where missionary Buddhism is becoming divided into different camps. The disparity between theoretical or philosophical Buddhism and popular Buddhism as it is practiced is becoming more marked. The application of textual criticism to the Buddhist canon poses the question: How will the second Refuge, the <u>Dhamma</u>, stand in the face of higher and lower criticism?

With its encouragement of free thought, the spirit of the open mind, and a critical approach to religious truth, Buddhism has held strong appeal. Buddhist spokesmen have claimed that the spirit of Buddhism has as its basis this attitude of tolerance. We now consider De Silva's examination of this claim in a series of dialogical exchanges that proved to be one of the most intensive episodes of the give and take of dialogue in the Buddhist-Christian encounter in Sri Lanka.

<u>Buddhist Tolerance and Christian "Absolutheitsanspruch"</u>

The claim that Buddhists are most loudly trumpeting today is that Buddhism is a tolerant religion, with no record of the shedding of one drop of blood in the cause of

spreading the Dhamma during the last two thousand five hundred years of its history. This is a claim which carries with it a reproach to Christianity which has had a bad record of war and bloodshed. Buddhism has a clean sheet; Christianity has many dark spots.[1]

In this statement De Silva has starkly stated the central issue of a series of dialogical exchanges that took place between De Silva and Buddhist spokesmen in 1966 and 1967, i. e., Buddhist tolerance versus Christian intolerance. The series of exchanges were the result of a seminar organized by the National Christian Council (NCC) Study Centre in July 1966 on the subject of the Buddhist attitude to Christianity and vice versa. The presentations were given wide publicity in the national newspapers, and discussions were continued in the columns of the Ceylon Daily News and subsequently in Dialogue. De Silva seems to have been the sole Christian spokesman, while Buddhist view points were presented by two English Buddhists, Alec Robertson and Alfred Vial, and Sri Lankans, Gunaseela Vitanage and K. N. Jayatilleke, who was Head of the Department of Philosophy at the University of Ceylon.[2] A delineation of the claims,

---

[1]"Buddhist-Christian Dialogue," pp. 182-183.

[2]Delivering the Dona Alphina Ratnayake Trust lecture on "The Buddhist Attitude to Other Religions," at the University three months earlier, Jayatilleke described the Buddhist attitude as one of critical tolerance. Of Buddhism's ability to combine missionary zeal with this tolerant outlook he said:

> Not one drop of blood has been shed throughout the ages in the propagation and dissemination of Buddhism in the many lands to which it spread and religious wars either between the schools of Buddhism or against other religions have been unheard of. Very rare instances of the persecution of heretical opinions are not lacking but they have been exceptional and atypical" (See: The Buddhist Attitude to other Religions [Colombo: Public Trustee Department of Ceylon, 1966], p. 1).

the responses, the counter responses in these exchanges gives us an insight into De Silva's approach to this sensitive issue in the encounter.

Alec Robertson's opening talk at the N. C. C. seminar reflects the main thrust of the Buddhist claim: (1) That not a drop of blood has been shed in the propagation of Buddhism is said to be "to the unique credit of Buddhism"; (2) that the encounter of Upali the millionaire with the Buddha[1] is a demonstration of "the rare and unique tolerance of the Buddha"; (3) that the Buddha's attainment "to the ecstasy of the GREAT COMPASSION (Maha Karuna Samapathi)" every morning and afternoon extending his boundless compassion to all beings shows "the Buddha's incomparable love" which treats "all beings alike without any invidious distinction whatsoever"; and (4) that conversions by force and propagation by the sword have not been necessary since Buddhism's appeal lies "in its own instrinsic merit and unsurpassing[sic] beauty." Thus, Robertson maintains, "It is verily this spirit of kindly tolerance and boundless compassion which epitomises the life and teaching of the Buddha, so that it extends a hand of fellowship and goodwill to Christianity and other religions despite their divergent and vast doctrinal differences." A. as of agreement in doctrine, as well as basic differences, are found relating to salvation, the doctrine of God. approaches to life and death, faith, and reality. However, Buddhism does not claim the monopoly of truth, neither does it condemn any other religion. And it has never claimed absolute or totalitarian authority. Robertson's conclusion merits quotations at length since

---

[1]See above, p. 73.

the source and basis of this tolerance is traced to the broad pers-

pective of Buddhism, which is able to contemplate all beings with

goodwill and lovingkindness in the light of the fundamental doctrine

of rebirth.

> According to the Immutable Laws of the Dhamma as dis-
> covered and explained by the Buddha, even a Christian who
> leads a good life will be born in a heavenly abode in the
> next, while a Buddhist who violates these Immutable Laws
> would be reborn in the lowest hells. Buddhism is able to
> hold such a tolerant view because the next birth in a
> happy or sorrowful state is not the final end and goal of
> a being's sojourn in Samsara. Such re-birth is only a
> step in a series of other steps leading finally to Eman-
> cipation in Nibbana. . . .
> Thus there is no antagonism or acrimonious disputes
> in Buddhism against other religions. These systems are
> treated as conditioned states in which Man finds himself   –
> according to his spiritual development.[1]

Soon after Robertson's talk was reported in the Ceylon Daily

News, responding as Director of the N. C. C. Study Center which organ-

ized the seminar, De Silva affirms the dialogic intent of the meeting:

> One of the important things for us today is to study
> one another's religions sympathetically and deeply so that
> we can intelligently discover where we are at one and
> where we are at odds. A right understanding of our agree-
> ments will certainly promote amity and concord, but our
> differences need not divide us if we rightly and intelli-
> gently understand them. Samaditthi, right understanding,
> can be the basis of unity even when we disagree on certain
> points.[2]

He admits the presence of the arrogant, exclusive attitude

of the Crusaders among some Christians even at the present time.

Citing an instance from the Mahavamsa, and quoting the reflections

---

[1]Alec Robertson, "Buddhist Attitude to Christianity," Dialogue Old Series, No. 13 (December 1967): 3-7.

[2]"The Christian Attitude to Buddhism," Dialogue Old Series, No. 13 (December 1967): 10.

of the Sri Lankan Buddhist scholar Dr. E. W. Adikaram on the incident, De Silva goes on to point out that this arrogant exclusive attitude has also been found in Buddhism. The story from the Mahavamsa narrates the dismay of the Buddhist king Dutugemunu after he had slain "millions" of Tamils. He is then comforted by ten Arahants who tell him that unbelievers are "not more to be esteemed than beasts." Dr. Adikaram's comment indicates that this arrogant unBuddhistic attitude to men of other religions is surfacing in present day Buddhism.[1] De Silva holds that neither Christianity nor Buddhism is to be blamed for the crimes committed by the followers of these religions, but that "if we are to find out the real attitude of one religion to another we must find out what the attitude of the founders of the different religions was to people of other faiths."[2]

Thus the true Christian attitude to other religions is the attitude of Jesus. The attitude of the Jews was similar to the attitude reflected in the passage from the Mahavamsa, they looked on

---

[1]Ibid., p. 8.
    The full quote from Dr. Adikaram's article, "Buddhism and the Doctrine of Hate," which appeared in the Ceylon Daily News Vesak Supplement of May 25, 1964, reads:

> "Mahavamsa, the historical Chronicle of the Sinhalese Buddhists, has made the biggest murderers the greatest protectors of Buddhism in Ceylon. King Dutugemunu, who according to this Chronicle ruthlessly killed millions of Tamils, did so to save the Buddha Sasana from extinction. Was the author of the Mahavamsa, who was a Buddhist monk, so grossly ignorant of the fundamental teachings of the Buddha or was he, too, a helpless victim of the doctrine of hate which had infiltered into Buddhism even at that time? . . . The present day Buddhist, faced with the impossible contradiction of trying to practise both love and hate simultaneously, has become unbalanced and blind. This has forced him to escape into a kind of militant Buddhism which is no Buddhism at all."

[2]Ibid.

all Gentiles or non-Jews as 'dogs.' To show that the attitude of
Jesus was altogether different, several incidents from the Gospels
are cited. The story of the good Samaritan (Luke 10:25-57) shows
that it was not Jewish leaders, priests, or theologians that prac-
tised the will of God but the outcast Samaritan; in the incident of
the ten lepers (Luke 17:11-19) only the "foreigner" who was despised
by the Jews receives commendation for his gratitude; while orthodox
Jews did not believe that a non-Jew was capable of faith, Jesus com-
mends the faith of the Canaanite woman (Matthew 8:5-13); and in
the story of the Roman Centurion (Matthew 8:5-13), which De Silva finds
the most impressive, Jesus commends the faith of a non-Jew above the
faith of the Jews who believed that they were the chosen people of
God. These incidents show that "Jesus treated all people alike,
and that He extended His boundless love and respect to all people
irrespective of race or creed." Referring to declarations made by
the WCC and the Vatican Council, De Silva notes that the attitude
exemplified in the life of Jesus has also received emphasis in the
councils of the Church.[1]

Gunaseela Vitanage's reply to De Silva does not concern
itself with doctrinal differences, it addresses the issue of dialogue
between the two religions. He welcomes the move by the NCC Study
Centre to organize the seminar inasmuch as the traditional Christian
attitude "has been one of agressiveness and hostility until the other
day." He notes that it was comparatively recently that Karl Barth
characterized any attempt at dialogue with the non-Christian religions

---

[1]Ibid., pp. 8-10.

as "howling with the wolves" and refers to similar strong expressions by nineteenth- and twentieth-century Popes. This assiduous cultivation of exclusivism has been largely responsible for Christian exclusiveness, intolerance, and aggressiveness. Since traditional habits of thought die hard, even the organizers of the seminar have yielded to "the temptation of trying to prove that Buddhism is inferior to Christianity, and that where the Christians have erred, the Buddhists have also erred." Lynn de Silva's article "is typical of this ambivalent attitude."

Vitanage faults De Silva for committing a breach of mutuality. By citing the Dutugemunu story and quoting Dr. E. W. Adikaram in support of his view, De Silva has attempted to make out Buddhism is not without blame in using the secular arm for its propagation. Whereas Alec Robertson has carefully abstained from referring even by implication to Christian methods of propagation, not even making a passing remark about "the crimes committed by Christians," Vitanage designates De Silva's position--that neither religion can be blamed for the crimes committed by their followers, a use of the 'tu quoque' argument. Since men of all religions are capable of both good and evil, Vitanage is in agreement with De Silva that a religion cannot be blamed for the crimes of its followers, but he maintains that it must be held responsible for any crimes directed and inspired by its leaders. Thus he poses the challenge: "Taking the historical role of Buddhism for over twenty-five centuries, can Rev. de Silva say that Buddhism ever inspired any crime against humanity for its own expansion and aggrandisement?"

Raising the question as to whether pacifism is a viable option when a country is being invaded, Vitanage points out that the Tamils slain by Dutugemunu were invaders. Whether he was a hero or murderer depended on who was sitting in judgment. Moreover, he suggests that the words put into the mouths of the Arahants in the Mahavamsa passage may be purely apocryphal. Citations are made from Edmund Holmes and Rhys Davids in support of Robertson's claim that not one drop of blood has been shed in the propagation of Buddhism. Notwithstanding the use of bulldozer methods to destroy Buddhism, he points out that many educated and sincere Buddhists hold Jesus Christ in reverence and regard him as a Bodhisattva. Sarvapalli Radhakrishnan is quoted at length to make the point that Buddhism and Christianity are twin expressions of one great spiritual movement. Vitanage does not see the Buddhist-Christian problem in Sri Lanka as one stemming from doctrinal or metaphysical differences. Rather it is one of social and economic conflict between an underprivileged Buddhist majority and a privileged Christian minority. The imbalance created in colonial times needs correction. The objective of dialogue should therefore be neither to convince the Buddhists of the error of their ways nor to establish the superiority of Christianity, rather it is in the words of Dr. J. B. Pratt, "to ratify a treaty of enduring peace, alliance and friendship between the two great religions."[1]

---

[1]Gunaseela Vitanage, "Buddhist Attitude to Christianity," Dialogue Old Series,No.13 (December 1967): 13-17. Evidently Vitanage considers Pratt's comment on the Buddhist-Christian conflict highly significant since Pratt had spent a lifetime in the East as a Christian missionary and it summed up the Buddhist position. The full quote read:
    The attitude of the great majority of Buddhists towards
    Christians and towards Christianity is one of genuine

Dr. K. N. Jayatilleke's response to De Silva on the question of Buddhist tolerance can be dealt with briefly, as his main concern is the clarification of doctrinal misrepresentations of Buddhism on questions such as the relation of the Dhamma to theism. The Dutugemunu story, he argues, has not been viewed in the total context of the Mahavamsa, since the Mahavamsa also makes it clear that it did not hold non-Buddhists as necessarily wicked. Examples of this can be found in references to non-Buddhist Tamil kings like Elara, Sena, and Guttika, who are described as having ruled 'righteously'." Jayatilleke contends that the question of whether it is un-Buddhistic to fight in even a defensive war is a different one from that of the estimate one places on peoples of other religions. He therefore asks De Silva, "If Dutugemunu was an un-Buddhistic and un-Christian murderer, how much more so were Constantine I and Winston Churchill? Would Rev. de Silva say that the latter were not Christian?" In the light of modern knowledge, both Buddhism and Christianity are having their credentials questioned, so careful studies need to be done "on the basis of an honest quest for truth, which implies a readiness to give up as well as to accept."[1]

De Silva's lengthy reply to Vitanage and Jayatilleke consists mainly of the response to Vitanage's challenge to provide historical

---

friendliness. If there is to be a fierce and long con-
tinued war between the two religions, it will be all the
work of Christianity. For its part Buddhism would be only
too glad to ratify a treaty of enduring peace, alliance and
friendship between the two religions.
   Ibid., p. 16, cf. J. B. Pratt, The Pilgrimage of Buddhism
(New York: Macmillan Company, 1928), pp. 735-736.

[1]"Christian Attitude to Buddhism (criticized)," Dialogue Old
Series, No. 13 (December 1967): 17-19.

evidence of crimes inspired by Buddhism for its expansion. Pleased
with the objective and dispassionate manner in which the discussions
are proceeding, and confident he will not be misconstrued because of
an earlier positive dialogical encounter with Vitanage,[1] he ventures
"to make some comments on a delicate matter." He then proceeds to
present extensive historical evidence from authorities such as Dr.
Edward Conze, Sir Charles Eliot, William K. Bunce, and Dr. S. Parana-
vitana, indicating that Buddhist behavior was not different from
the Christian, but as Conze has pointed out: "In their desire to
express disapproval of Christianity, many authors have painted the
record of Buddhism too white."

The evidence from Conze, Bunce, and Eliot consists of
numerous instances of Buddhism's use of violent and warlike measures
in Tibetan, Japanese, and Chinese Buddhism. These include the
canonization of a monk who assassinated an oppressive king, a Buddhist
king making war to seize a copy of the scriptures, popular movements
resorting to violence using Buddhist terminology, the persecution of
some Buddhist sects by soldier monks, the development of a warrior
class in Zen Buddhism, and violent ecclesiastical quarrels. Quoting
Dr. S. Paranavitana, the Sri Lankan historian and Curator of the
National Museum, on the military exploits of Dutugemunu, De Silva
makes the point that a band of bhikkus accompanied the army, and the
campaign assumed the character of a holy war: "The ideological
factor was duly taken into account; it was installed into the minds
of the soldiers that they were risking their lives and fortunes. . .

---

[1]See above, p. 80.

solely for the glorification of the faith which was so dear to them."[1]

De Silva reiterates that his objective in pointing out these facts is not to serve as self-justification for Christians, neither is it to bring any reproach on Buddhism, but Vitanage's challenges makes it necessary. "For the sake of truth it is very necessary for us to test the claims we make for our respective religions in the light of historical facts."

Conceding that there is a lot of truth in Vitanage's analysis of the Buddhist-Christian problem in Sri Lanka, De Silva calls for self-examination on both sides and to "a joint endeavour without assuming that 'all fierce and long continued war between the two religions' will be 'all the work of Christianity,'" In answer to the question raised by Vitanage and Jayatilleke as to whether it was unBuddhistic or unChristian to fight in a defensive war, an article in Bhavan's Journal on the Chinese invasion of India in 1962 is cited. The choice between unmitigated pacifism and the use of force as a defensive measure was discussed. The point was made that it was historically incorrect to say that India was a peace-loving nation practising Ahimsa, as at no time even after the Buddha did the people of India abjure war, and even Asoka waged war till he had nothing more for which to fight. De Silva points out that Bhavan's Journal justified the resistance against the Chinese aggression in the same way that Dutugemunu interpreted the war against the Tamils. Asking how "our understanding of Christian love and Buddhist maitriya stands in the light of this," he proposes "a heart-searching dialogue" between

---

[1]Cf. S. Paranavitana and C. W. Nicholas, eds., History of Ceylon (Colombo: Ceylon University Press, 1961), p. 161.

Buddhists and Christians on the subject. He concludes, as did Vitanage, with a quotation from Pratt on what the relationship between Buddhism and Christianity ought to be.[1]

Robertson's reply, ending the series of exchanges, was for the most part a refutation of the allegation that he had misinterpreted Christian doctrine. He also made the counter charge that De Silva had made "a travesty and hotch-potch of the two teachings as expounded by the Founders of the two doctrines" in his attempt to reconcile the fundamental doctrines of the two religions. Regarding Buddhist-Christian relations he faults De Silva with having forgotten the original noble sentiments of mutual understanding, goodwill, and fellowhip, with which he inaugurated the discussions. To Robertson's "consternation and utter dismay," De Silva has struck a discordant note "by referring to the so-called atrocities committed by King Dutugemunu against the Tamils, which is nothing but an undesirable manoeuvre to make the readers think that the Buddhists were no better than the Christians in their intolerance and arrogant attitude to other religions." Robertson considers it a pity that the Dutugemunu

---

[1] "Christian Attitude to Buddhism: A Reply," _Dialogue_ Old Series, No. 13 (December 1967): 19-24.

J. B. Pratt's proposal, which De Silva commended for the study of both Buddhists and Christians, said:

"There are four possible relations that the two religions may hold to each other in the future. They may, namely, continue in the state of mutual warfare which to a considerable extent characterizes them today. Secondly, one of them may succeed in destroying the other. Thirdly, they might 'conceivably coalesce. Or, finally, they might tacitly agree to settle down and live side by side, as partners, perhaps, in a common business, as friendly rivals, but not as foes. As the reader may have guessed, this last is in my opinion the consummation most devoutly to be wished" (See, _The Pilgrimage of Buddhism_, p. 734).

incident should have been brought up. It disrupts the healthy trend

he had set in the opening talk, since it was never his intention to

expose the "multitudinous atrocities and examples of intolerance"

on the part of Christians. In support of his contention that history

attests to Buddhism's spread "through its own intrinsic merits without

resorting to the secular arm," he quotes at length from Dr. H. Von

Glasenapp's Buddhism and Christianity and Canon B. H. Streeter's

The Buddha and the Christ.[1]

J. J. Spae commenting on the criticisms of Buddhist intol-

erance by De Silva in the NCC seminar, as well as criticism made by

others, submits that such considerations should give pause to Buddhists

in judging Christian intolerance.[2] De Silva has noted in a subsequent

comment that when Buddhists become aware of these facts, it is bound

to have a salutary effect on recent arrogant tendencies in their

midst. However, he cautions that.

> This must not lead to self-justification on the part
> of Christians in any way. These hard facts should rather
> serve to make Buddhists and Christians realize that sin
> or tanha (desire) which has been the cause of war and
> rumours of war, is the enemy against whom we have unitedly
> to wage a spiritual battle.[3]

Along with this emphasis on the need for a preparedness by

the dialogue partners to face hard facts and answer tough questions,

---

[1]"Buddhist Attitude to Christianity: Continued," Dialogue
Old Series, No. 13 (December 1967): 24-28.

[2]"The Buddhist-Christian Encounter: Buddhism and Christianity:
A New Era of Encounter," Pro Mundi Vita Bulletin 67 (July-August 1977):
6.

[3]"Buddhist-Christian Dialogue," pp. 185-186.

De Silva calls for an on-going dialogue as the seminar revealed their mutual ignorance of one another's beliefs.[1]

"Tolerance," says J. J. Spae seeking to identify the basic issue in the exchanges between De Silva and Buddhist spokesmen, "is that characteristic of their faith which Buddhists in dialogue are most likely to mention in contradistinction to Christianity's 'intransigence,' or what Germans call its Absolutheitsanspruch." However, it is not simply a matter of Buddhist tolerance versus Christian intolerance, as it is the Absolutheitsanspruch of both religions that hinders dialogue. To the Buddhist the very nature of the Christian's faith, with its dogmatism, caste-consciousness and intellectualism, betrays an innate superiority complex. Thus Spae detects "an insidious prejudice in the mind of Buddhists in regard to Christians which is liable to surface at almost every turn of the dialogue." The Buddhist, likewise, claims some type of finality and superiority as a basis of identity and acceptability, thus Spae maintains:

> The Christian partner in dialogue ought not to be astonished
> that his Buddhist interlocutor too cherishes some notion
> of his religion's own superiority, exclusiveness, and
> finality. Thus in the baldest terms, a modern English
> Buddhist tells us that "Buddhism is not just a way to
> Enlightenment, but the only way", and that "Buddhism is
> superior to all other forms of religions" (Dialogue no.
> 10, p. 3). Another Westerner converted to Buddhism, states:
> "The Buddhist regards all other religions as first steps
> to his own" (ibid no. 13, p. 25).[2]

---

[1] "Some Issues in the Buddhist-Christian Dialogue," Dialogue Between Men of Living Faiths ed. S. J. Samartha (Geneva: World Council of Churches, 1971), p. 49.

[2] "The Buddhist-Christian Encounter: Buddhism and Christianity: A New Era of Encounter," pp. 5-6. Cf. Alfred Vial. "Buddhism and Other Religions," Dialogue Old Series, No. 10 (November 1966): 3; and Alec Robertson, "Buddhist Attitude to Christianity: Continued," p. 25.

Following the seminar and the publication of both view-points in the <u>Ceylon Daily News</u> on Buddhism's claim to have always been a tolerant religion in contrast to Christianity's intolerance and smug exclusiveness, De Silva observed: "But when we examine the matter closely we see that Buddhists are guilty of the same sin that they condemn in Christians." He was reflecting on the Buddhist viewpoint as presented by Alfred Vial and Alec Robertson. Vial contended that tolerance to the average Buddhist meant that he must be prepared to "endure" and "put up" with people of other faiths because they are people of a very low level of intelligence, and that this exclusive attitude finds support in the words of the Buddha.[1] Robertson is also said to reflect this attitude by his contention that Buddhism is able to hold a tolerant view because of its belief that this one life is not decisive in determining one's eternal destiny, and other religious systems are thus treated as conditioned states in which man finds himself according to his spiritual develop-ment.[2] De Silva thus concludes:

> From this it is seen that Buddhists would regard other religions inferior to their own, that they would "put up" with people of other faiths because this earthly span of life is not decisive and all have a chance of accepting the true faith in another birth.
> The Buddhist and the Christian claim to the superiority of the respective faiths is equally strong. Both are guilty of arrogating superiority to themselves; but the Buddhist view that this life is not the only one is more accomoda-ting and conducive to a tolerant attitude, whereas the Christian view of the decisiveness of this life tends to give support to an attitude of intolerance.[3]

---

[1]Cf. "Buddhism and Other Religions," pp. 3-6.

[2]See above, p. 95.

[3]"Beyond Tolerance," <u>Dialogue</u> Old Series, No. 10 (November 1966): 1.

Here De Silva introduces us to another significant aspect of his dialogical theology. In a later explication of the notion of progressive sanctification after death, he considers the difficulties which the theory of <u>Karma</u> and rebirth presents, as well as those encountered in the "Double Predestination" theory. It is evident that in this early encounter he has already seen it as a potential meeting point between the religions.

> It is a hopeful and encouraging sign that in the thinking of contemporary theologians the old theory of double predestination built on the notion of a single determinative life confined to this world, is giving way to a more open and less dogmatic view, according to which human life is to be seen as a continuous process extending beyond the grave in which the positive elements are developed and the negative diminished, until man becomes perfect as his heavenly Father is perfect. There is scope in such a theology to go beyond tolerance to genuine reverence to people of other faiths.[1]

Along with this concern to go beyond tolerance to a genuine reverence of the other's religious convictions, he adds the proviso that there must be a firm theological foundation to ensure a genuine reverence. Since the absence of such a foundation would make dialogue a deceptive pretense, he calls upon Christians to re-examine their theological presuppositions in order to lay the foundation for an honest and sincere dialogue.[2]

Discovering the Asian Face of Jesus Christ

In the development of his theology De Silva has consistently maintained the validity of expressing the meaning of Christ and Christianity in terms of the indigenous religious traditions of Asia.

---

[1] "Beyond Tolerance," pp. 1-2. See chapter 11 "Progressive Sanctification after Death," in <u>The Problem of the Self</u>.

[2] Ibid.

The call at Nairobi "to discover the Asian face of Jesus Christ as the

suffering servant" was in effect a call to Christianize Asia by

Asianizing Christianity.

> One of our urgent tasks is to redeem Christ from the Medi-
> terranean and Western setting and present him in the frame-
> work of the thought-patterns of and mental world of people
> of other faiths. Christ is there in the searchings of the
> people of other faiths, buried and unknown and perhaps con-
> sciously rejected because of our poor Christian witness to
> him, and our distorted presentations of him. We need to
> rediscover Christ in the context of the pluralist world in
> which we live, a task in which people of other faiths can
> help us.[1]

Symbiosis and Reconception

De Silva describes this process of discovery as a "symbiosis",

and again he terms it a "process of 'reconception' or reassessment."

He wonders whether, as dialogue deepens, it would not be possible

"to visualize that people of all faiths should aspire together to-

wards a kind of symbiosis."[2] For the Christian symbiont this dia-

logical process connotes the development of "a new intellectual

---

[1]"Dialogue in the Context of Sri Lanka Buddhism," p. 97.

[2]"The Turn to 'Community' as the Focus for Dialogue," p. 2.
De Silva traces the origins of this view to Harvard professor W. E.
Hocking's Hibbert Lectures in 1939. Hocking considered ways to a
world faith seeking a solution to "the scandal of plurality" which
the meeting of the world religions had made painfully evident. The
way of radical displacement which calls the hearer to "be done with the
old allegiance and take on the new one", and the way of synthesis in
which there is a mutual teaching and learning incorporating into
one's religion certain elements of other religions, both fell short
of providing a solution. Hocking therefore proposed the way of re-
conception as the desirable relation between the religions. This
way led one to understand one's own religon better, to reconceive it,
to arrive at a deepened self-understanding, and thus discern the
essence which underlies all the profusion of religious expression
(Living Religions and a World Faith [London: Allen & Unwin, 1940],

apparatus with words, concepts and thought forms taken from other religions,"[1] because "a symbiosis of the idioms is possible if only we are prepared to learn the language proper to each other's religion in its particular territory."[2]

De Silva's Use of Buddhist Terms

Raising the question, "What right have I to use terms and ideas that belong to Buddhism to express Christian truths?" De Silva

---

pp. 139-208). Paul Devanandan and John Macquarrie have also contributed to the development and definition of the idea of reconception in De Silva's thought. He takes note of Devanandan's emphasis that: "By the process of reconception, every religion should reconceive its own essence so as to somehow include as a new element in its own essence the essence of other religions. In this way we do not commit ourselves to an enduring plurality of religions or to an amalgamation of religions" (Preparation for Dialogue pp. 139-140); as well as Macquarrie's commendation of the idea that "As religions get to know each other, they begin to reconceive themselves in the light of what they learn from the other faith. This takes place without people moving out of one religion into another" (Christian Unity and Christian Diversity [London: SCM Press, 1975], p. 109. In his own definition of the concept De Silva sees it as the means to achieve the goal of dialogue without compromising one's sense of religious commitment or the sense of community.

> "Here there is no attempt to eliminate differences by holding that all religions lead to the same goal and therefore differences do not really matter; neither is there the hope that separate identities will in the end vanish in a larger framework of one World Religion. Reconception will it is believed, lead to a relation in which identities will be seen not as exclusive but as relational; it will be a relation of commitment and openness. It will be a relation in which we regard the religious life of man not as enveloped in mutually exclusive systems but as dimensions of a universal spirituality. It will be a relation in which we discover a unity of relatedness in the midst of diversity. It is in this way that the intensity and vitality of religions in their particular forms can be power-cells in community. Thus the goal of dialogue should be to discover, through a process of reconception or reassessment, Faith in relation to Faiths. Such a relation, the core of which is love, will be the basis of community in a pluralist world" "The Understanding and Goal of Dialogue," p. 8).

[1]"The Understanding and Goal of Dialogue," p. 7.

[2]"Dialogue in the Context of Sri Lanka Buddhism," p. 94.

provides the simple answer, "I am doing what is inevitable in a multi-religious context and what most religious teachers have done."[1]
In his use of Buddhist terms De Silva seems to have found a contact point in dialogical method which goes back to the Buddha himself. He notes that the Buddha "baptized" the terms and thought-forms of other religious systems by giving them a particular Buddhist flavor, and thus incorporated them in his own system.

> In seeking to proclaim the Dhamma he used the language of the people so that the people from different traditions who engaged in dialogue with him could understand what he said. "How I know well," said the Buddha, "that when I approached various assemblies, even before I sat down there, or had spoken or begun to talk to them, whatever their language, so was my language. And I rejoiced them with a talk on the Dhamma, made it acceptable to them, set them on fire, gladdened them."[2]

In one of his earliest dialogical encounters, a debate on the historicity of Jesus Christ with the <u>Bauddha Jatika Balavegaya</u> (Buddhist

---

[1] <u>The Problem of the Self</u>, p. xiii.

[2] "Dialogue and Mission: Some Lessons From the Past," p. 16. Since phraseology can often become a barrier to right understanding, De Silva takes note of the importance the Buddha attached to correctly understanding the message which its expression is meant to convey. The advice given by the Buddha to one Cunda, found in the <u>Digha Nikaya</u> 29: 18, and 19, "as to how he is to deal with a person who has mixed up meaning and phraseology," is considered highly significant for inter-religious dialogue:

> "Unapproving, unblaming, ye are to address him thus:-- Of this meaning brother, either this is the phraseology or that: which fits better? Or:--Of these phrases either this is the meaning or that: which fits them better? If he reply: Of this meaning brother, just that phraseology is the more fitting or of these phrases brother, just that meaning fits them better, he is neither to be set aside nor upbraided. Neither setting him aside nor upbraiding him, ye are with careful attention to explain to him both meaning and phraseology." (See "Buddhist-Christian Dialogue," pp. 196-197).

National Movement), De Silva had occasion to make a case for his use

of Buddhist terms. In a rebuttal of Gunaseela Vitanage's charges

that Christianity was a cult and had no true historical foundation,

and that the Gospel is a "syncretism of Jewish Messianic ideas and

Pagan Gnostic ideas", De Silva both asserts the historical reality

of Christ and Christianity and refutes the charge of syncretism.[1]

Maintaining that Christianity did not rise in a vacuum, Vitanage

contended that the virgin birth, the death, resurrection and ascen-

sion were attributes of the saviour-gods of the mystery religions which

were applied to Jesus without a historical reality behind them.

Having first shown that Jesus unlike these mythical figures was set

in a definite historical period (of which the social, political and

religious background was well known), De Silva agrees that Christian-

ity like every other religion was not born in a vacuum. If it did

it would have remained in the vacuum and disappeared, however, "If

it is to spread it has to make its message intelligible by using

the thought-forms, terminology and idiom of the day."[2] He points out

that the Buddha was influenced by Hindu cosmology and mythology and

used Hindu concepts and terms, even the first four of the Five

Precepts which are considered to be distinctively Buddhist have been

taken over almost verbatim from Jainism. Thus he argues from the

Buddha's historical context that the use of the thought-forms and

terminology of the environment does not necessarily mean a lack of

historicity or result in a syncretistic distortion.

---

[1] Bauddha Jatika Balavegaya, pp. 24-27.

[2] Ibid., p. 27.

> Can we therefore conclude that Buddhism is a syncretism
> of Hindu and Jain ideas? If we examine the sources of
> the life of the Buddha we would see the multifarious in-
> fluences that have played upon them. Can we therefore
> deny the historicity of the Buddha? There is no doubt
> that the New Testament writers make use of the thought-
> forms, terminology and even mythology of the day, but,
> the important fact is that they use them to express in
> an intelligible way a reality which they had seen with
> their eyes and touched with their hands.[1]

De Silva argues that a religious message can pass from one con-

text to another while remaining essentially the same message. This

holds true even though words and terms in the context of one religion

convey quite different meanings in the context of another. It is

necessary to get behind the terminology and understand the meaning

that underlies the form of words, and also "to employ terms and modes

of expression with which the one who is listening is familiar."[2] Thus

he does not share the fear of many Christians that the acknowledgement

of spiritual truths in other religions will weaken the Christian's

commitment to his own faith. Buddhist terms and concepts have taken

on real meaning for him in the context of his own faith enabling him

to see new dimensions of truth "as I looked at Christian teaching

through Buddhist eyes, as it were."[3] He is convinced that his ex-

perience with Buddhism has deepened and broadened his own faith, and

that "There are truths in Buddhism that can be absorbed or adapted

into Christianity and which can fertilize and enrich a Christian's own

faith. Some of these can be a corrective to certain deviations from

---

[1]Ibid., pp. 27-28. Cf. 1John 1:1-4.

[2]Why Can't I Save Myself? p. ii.

[3]The Problem of the Self, p. xii.

biblical truths."[1] While he has attempted to demonstrate the truth
of this statement in his own dialogical writings, De Silva also draws
attention to Rhys Davids' observations regarding the Buddha's use
of such terms as _Karma_, _Dharma_, _Nirvana_, and _Brahma_, indicating an
experience in which the adopted terms deepened understanding, facili-
tated communication, and may be said to have expanded to fill the
new context. Rhys Davids maintained that for the most part the
morality, metaphysics, and principles of Gautama could be found in the
orthodox Hindu systems of his time, and these were taken over by the
Buddha and "adopted," "enlarged," "ennobled," and "systematized."[2]

---

[1]Ibid.

[2]Ibid., p. 13; cf. C. A. F. Rhys Davids, _Buddhism_ (London:
Lutterworth Press, 1922), pp. 83-84.

CHAPTER III

THE TRANSLATIONAL THEOLOGY OF LYNN DE SILVA

IN THE CONTEXT OF SRI LANKAN BUDDHISM

From our survey of De Silva's dialogical method it becomes
evident that in his view dialogue takes place in living relationships
among people. It is a form of incarnational ministry, with an
awareness of the global situation in which the Christian lives and
respect for the situation into which the word must be translated.
In Sri Lankan dialogue one must take into account the living realities
of the Buddhist religion as a way of life that is set in a culture
which permeates every part of society. However, dialogue takes place
not only at the level of culture and custom; there is also "a con-
frontation of minds for intellectual understanding."[1] There is the
need to grapple with the question of religious truth which is insep-
arable from cultural presuppositions and social values. And it is on
this level of doctrinal concepts that De Silva has made his most
notable contribution to the Buddhist-Christian dialogue.

The Framework of a Translational Theology

De Silva's theology may be described as a translational
theology.[2] It is an attempt to explain the Christian message in the

---

[1]See above, p. 68.

[2]John Ross Carter provides a concise definition of the term:
"Translational theology is the attempt to provide new form
for traditional content, to give new expression to the salvific

114

terms and thought-forms of the Buddhists. It is an indigenous ex-
pression of Christianity that seeks a responsive chord in Buddhism.
He maintains that such an approach is inevitable in a multi-religious
context, and that the history of the Christian church has been one
of communication, i.e., a process of conveying concepts from one
religious context to another:

> When we turn to the New Testament we see how its writers
> pressed into the service of the gospel words, concepts, and
> symbols taken from Greek philosophy, Mystery Religions and
> Gnosticism, in order to make sense of the Christian message
> in the context in which it was proclaimed. This kind of
> thing is bound to happen in the multi-religious context in
> which we live today.[1]

The Johannine Paradigm

In the task of conveying concepts from one religious context
to another, of communicating central biblical concepts by drawing
upon weighty concepts in other religious traditions, the Johannine
writings are for De Silva the classic paradigm. He observes a parallel
between the Buddha's use of the term Brahman and John's use of the
term Logos. It is pointed out that though the Buddha rejected many
ideas associated with the word Brahman, he used it repeatedly to
depict the highest life, and that "just in the same way St. John, in

---

activity of God in Christ. The newness which translational
theology seeks is not merely the novel. Rather, it is the
fresh attempt to make relevant responses to the issues and
questions raised by men and women within the Christian
community and in other religious communities as they encounter
one another in different times, in different places, and in
different contexts" ("Translational Theology: An Expression of
Christian Faith in a Religiously Plural World," in Christian Faith in
a Religiously Plural World, ed. Donald G. Dawe and John B. Carman
[New York: Orbis Books, 1980]. p. 172).

[1]The Problem of the Self, p. xiii.

order to convey to the readers of his gospel the idea of the Eternal Christ who became Incarnate, used the Greek term Logos (Word) which was meaningful to them."[1] Since scores of such examples could be given, De Silva maintains that "there can be no valid objection to the employing of terms and modes of expression of one religion to communicate truths of another religion.[2]

The two inseparably intertwined strands of theology and language are at play in John's use of the expression "God is Light": "When John says that 'God is Light' he is using a symbolic expression that had a universal significance in religious and philosophical thought and is particularly marked in the Johannine writings."[3] He sees John's equation of the logos of his Gospel with the equivalent of Philo's "archetypal Light"[4] as the plunge that had to be taken if

---

[1]Why Can't I Save Myself? p. ii. The close resemblance of the Johannine logos and dharma of the Buddhist scriptures has led De Silva to trace a parallel to the Buddhas as revealers of the eternal dharma. For a brief exposition of the term dharma, which seems to have been the basis for the adaptation of the word to translate logos in the new translation of the Sinhala New Testament, see "Good News of Salvation," p. 452. He has also entered into the discussion on the understanding of the meaning of God in terms of Dhamma in dialogue with the Thai monk Venerable Indapanno. See below p. 223-224, cf. Why Believe in God?

[2]Why Can't I Save Myself? p. ii.

[3]"Christian Community within Communities," in Religiousness in Sri Lanka ed. John Ross Carter (Colombo: Marga Institute, 1979), p. 286.

[4]Ibid., p. 287. De Silva points out that Philo, an Alexandrian Jew who had imbibed both Greek and Hebrew culture, was referring to the words of the psalmist in Ps. 104:2 when he said: "God is light, and not light only, but the archetype of every other light; or rather, more ancient and higher than any archetype." De Somnis, 1:75.

the Gospel was to be meaningfully communicated to John's religious and philosophical environment:

> The Logos in the fourth Gospel is equated with "the real Light" which is equivalent to what Philo calls "the archetypal Light" and Christ the incarnate Logos is called the "Light of the World." Although in the Gospel the writer stops short of going all the way in adopting the language of current religious philosophy in defining God in terms of Light, in the Epistle he is less guarded. In spelling out the teaching in the Gospel, he is, as C. H. Dodd says, "giving it a turn which brings it nearer to the current forms of expression, and nearer, no doubt, to the language of the heretics whom he is criticising." In view of the need to communicate in an intelligible language he even risks the possibility of syncretism and defines God in metaphysical ontological terms as Light.[1]

In the same vein, John Ross Carter has referred to the translation of "the Word" (Logos) as dharmayano or dharma-person in the joint Protestant-Catholic Sinhala New Testament, of which De Silva is the chief translator, as an "example of translational interaction" which "might play an important part in sharing faithfully the Christian testimony of the saving activity of God in Christ." Significantly Carter notes that whether or not dharmayano continues as a profoundly engaging translation "depends not only upon the insights the term might enable Sinhalese Christians to gain but to a considerable degree upon the response of Sinhalese Buddhists."[2]

---

[1] "Christian Community within Communities," p. 287.

[2] "Translational Theology," p. 177. Carter is referring to Nava Givisuma, The Sinhala New Testament: A Common New Translation, which was approved by the Bible Society and the Catholic Bishop's Conference in Sri Lanka in 1975. Carter, who did his doctoral dissertation on dhamma as a religious concept within the Theravada tradition, is persuaded that the Christian translators misunderstood what the Buddhists were saying since "they were not alert to the affirmation that dhamma, on the highest level, transcends personalistic ascriptions" (ibid., p. 175). However he readily recognizes that translational theology is not only relational but also personal, and making such a

Guidelines and a Basis for an Indigenous Theology

The integration of Buddhist terms and thought-forms into Christianity is therefore imperative for De Silva if theological thinking is to be meaningful and relevant. He offers three basic guidelines for a restatement of the Christian message in the idiom of indigenous cultures, with illustrations from the context of his own theology, viz., Buddhism. The three essential principles are: (1) "the need for a delicate sensitivity to the sentiments of the people to whom the Gospel is preached"--as can be seen in the revulsion the Buddhist feels toward the killing of the fatted calf in the story of the prodigal son; (2) "the need to redefine basic theological terms in the light of Buddhist thought"--an example of which is the use of the vernacular work <u>kukkucca</u> (Pali) to translate the word repentance, <u>kukkucca</u> meant nothing but remorse, and remorse is offensive

---

judgment about the meaning of <u>dhamma</u> is for him an illustration of how personal translational theology can be. This on-going task, of discovering in "oneself and in scripture a process of thinking that represents a continuity within the Christian tradition and that is in accord with the deepest apprehensions of religious truth of men and women of other religious communities," will be one that is "wholesomely exhilarating" for "Christians whose intellect is buttressed by the Holy Spirit" (ibid., p. 174). Thus of the use of <u>dharmayano</u> (dharma-person), to replace <u>vakyayano</u> (Word-person) of earlier translations, by De Silva and the translators of the new Sinhala New Testament, Carter says:

> "Some Sinhalese Christians, our brothers and sisters through discipleship in Christ, have listened carefully to the testimony of some Sinhalese Buddhists, our brothers and sisters through the teachings of Christ, and have drawn upon their own religious experience to discern the magnificence of a Theravada Buddhist concept. . . . These Sinhalese Christians have grappled intellectually with the concept within the Buddhist religious heritage. They have struggled with the moral issues of possible divisive reactions within and between the Buddhist and Christian communities in Sri Lanka and, perhaps elsewhere. Assuredly they have prayed for guidance in this demonstration of faith expressed through translational theology" (ibid., p. 175).

to Buddhists as it is a defilement according to Buddhist preaching; and, (3) "the need for baptizing Buddhist terms into Christianity"-- as is illustrated in the effectiveness of Adoniram Judson's transla- tion of Holy Spirit with the word Vinyana (which, according to some schools of Buddhist thought in Burma, denotes supramundane conscious- ness that transcends mortality and persists after death in Nirvana) while discarding the word Nat which means a deity or divine inhabitant of the heavenly realms.[1] De Silva has raised the question whether such a translational theology could be developed on the level of basic doctrines. He has maintained that for such a task Asian theolo- gians are in need of new bottles for new wine which is produced locally, since "we are now convinced that our experience and the new insights we have gained through dialogue cannot be expressed within the framework of traditional Christian theology."[2] Thus of his own encounter with Sri Lankan Buadhism, he is able to assert that "one of the basic principles that must be borne in mind is that the Christian message could be commended to the Buddhists on the basis of a theological structure oriented to the conceptual framework of Buddhism."[3] In 1967 he proposed such a basis for an indigenous Christian theology. Since then his thought has undergone considerable development and several of his major theological works have been published. However, the 1967 proposal in the form of a comprehensive

---

[1]"Buddhist-Christian Dialogue," pp. 197-199.

[2]"Dialogue a Matter of Necessity," p. 11.

[3]"Good News of Salvation to the Buddhists," International Review of Missions 57, No. 288 (October 1968): 449.

statement represents his basic theological thrust and therefore

serves as an useful introduction to the discussion of this theology

on a topical basis:

> Christianity, like Buddhism, can characterize man's
> existential situation in terms of Anicca, Dukkha and Anatta.
> Man's lost condition is due to his denial of these three
> realities of creaturely existence, in pretending to be his
> own lord. Anicca means impermanence or transitoriness. There
> is no unchanging reality in existence as such. Dukkha,
> though ordinarily translated 'suffering', means much more than
> that and is probably best translated by the word 'depravity',
> which is suggested by the two syllables Du (contemptible) and
> Kha (void). Anatta means soullessness or mortality. Man is
> mortal; there is no immortal soul in him. But Buddhism speaks
> of the Real and the Permanent ("There is, O monks, an unborn,
> unoriginated, unmade and unconditioned"), of Redemption
> (Vimukthi) i.e. of an escape from the born, orginated, made,
> and conditioned, and of the Deathless (Amata). If these three
> negative facts in existence, as Buddhism teaches, mean anything,
> their counter positive realities cannot be derived from the exis-
> tential situation itself. Anicca cannot produce that which
> is permanent; Dukkha cannot give rise to redemptive grace;
> Anatta cannot 'put on' immortality by itself. The source of
> these positive realities has to be found outside the human
> situation. The Christian solution to the problem can be stated
> as follows: Anicca is overcome by God, who is the Unchanging
> Reality: Dukkha is overcome by Christ, in whom is redemptive
> grace; and Anatta is overcome by the Spirit, who gives onto-
> logical reality to the individual. Thus the Christian Trinity
> is the answer to the three signata in Buddhism.[1]

Tilakkhana--Christian-Buddhist Meeting Point

The Buddhist understanding of the human predicament arose out

of an existential concern and not mere theoretical interest. Since

it begins with an analysis of the human condition, it is for De Silva

the right starting point for theology, "for a living theology must

begin with living existential realities and not with metaphysical

---

[1]"Relevant Areas of Dialogue with Buddhists," Study Encounter
3, No. 2 (1967): 80.

speculations."[1] Thus the Tilakkhana analytic--anicca, dukkha and

anattā,[2] the three marks or characteristics of all existence discovered

by the Buddha in his diagnosis of the human predicament--has been

chosen as the basis of his dialogue with Buddhism. In his attempt

to restate the fundamentals of Christian theology in relation to the

Theravada Buddhist thought of Sri Lanka, De Silva considers the

Tilakkhana analytic an adequate basis, because in it "we have a com-

prehensive analysis of the human predicament, in which the anthropo-

logical, and experiential problems converge embracing the whole

breadth of human existence."[3] Here he finds an avenue for Christian

faith to meet Buddhist thought since the essence of the Buddha's

teaching is summed up in the Tilakkhana and it forms the conceptual

framework of Buddhism.

De Silva points to "the Great Renunciation" of Prince

Siddhartha[4] as a paradigm for understanding the human predicament and

---

[1]"Emergent Theology in the Context of Buddhism," in Asian Christian Theology: Emerging Themes, ed. Douglas J. Elwood (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1980), p. 221.

[2]According to the Theravada, the three characteristics (ti-lakkhana) or the general characteristics (samanna-lakkhana) of the universe and everything in it are, like the teaching of the Four Noble Truths, a teaching peculiar to the Buddhas (buddhānam samukkamsika dhamma-desanā). See G. P. Malalasekera, "Anattā," Encyclopedia of Buddhism (1961), 1: 567. Anicca (impermanence), dukkha (suffering), and anatta (soul-lessness) are the hallmarks of all existence in the space-time order of reality.

[3]"Emergent Theology," p. 222.

[4]One of the most significant episodes in the life of the Buddha, the Great Renunciation is the account of the Buddha as a youthful prince driving forth from his palace and seeing three sights, an old man, a sick man, and a dead man. While pondering the meaning of what he saw he was told by the charioteer, "This comes to all men." On seeing the fourth sight, a hermit who had gone forth into the

finding a solution to it, and then traces striking parallels of this description of the human predicament in modern existentialist writers. The three sights seen by Siddhartha correspond to the three signata-- anicca, dukkha, and anjttā. Experiencing "ontological shock" the prince asks the question that all men ask, "Will this happen to me?" The fourth sight of the serene hermit signified that "there was a transcendent state beyond conditioned existence."[1] De Silva relates Siddhartha's experience to Søren Kierkegaard's conclusion that the man who comes to realize that "all men are mortal" knows the universal essence of existence. However, this man will only feel the need to find a purpose and a destiny in life when he concludes in his own case: "I too must die." The aim of Kierkegaard and the Buddha was identical, it was to help men to experience the tru'.h of anicca, dukkha, and anattā, i.e., "to help people understand the real nature of existence and seek for a rationale of authenti: living which can bring liberation from conditioned existence."[2] More pointedly De Silva finds a parallel in Nietzsche's reference to the three ways in which the threat of the possibility of non-being comes to man: "They meet an invalid, or an old man, or a corpse--and immediately they say: 'Life is refuted'."[3] Seeing the existential significance

---

homeless life, the prince "felt the positive call to save not only himself but all mankind from birth in the world of suffering." See Christmas Humphreys, Buddhism (Baltimore: Penguin Books, 1962), p. 31.

[1]"Emergent Theology," p. 222.

[2]Ibid.

[3]Ibid., cf. Friedrich Nietzsche, Thus Spake Zarathustra, trans. R. J. Hollingdale (New York: Penguin Books, 1961), pp. 71-73.

of this passage Tillich describes three aspect of anxiety which De

Silva understands in terms of <u>Tilakkhana</u>:

> Anxiety is "the state in which a being is aware of its
> possible non-being" (i.e., the possibility of <u>anicca</u>).
> This awareness is due to the fact that "nonbeing is
> part of one's own being" (i.e., man is <u>anatta</u>). It is
> an "existential awareness" because "Anxiety is finitude,
> experienced as one's own finitude" (i.e., the state of
> <u>dukkha</u>).[1]

Thus De Silva concludes that an Asian Christian theology

should begin where Buddhism begins, i.e., attempting to understand

man's existence out of the concrete experience common to all men.

Tilakkhana--the Biblical Context

In the <u>Tilakkhana</u> analytic, De Silva sees a fundamental

category in which a genuine congruence can be achieved with basic

biblical teaching. Thus in tracing the consonance of the <u>Tilakkhana</u>

analysis of existence with Biblical themes, he has sought to establish

contact with Buddhism in its own idiom and thereby to understand

Buddhism within Christianity and Christianity within Buddhism. He

locates <u>anicca</u> and <u>dukkha</u> in a number of Biblical passages which

speak of the transitoriness, suffering, and anxiety of human life

(Ps 144:3-4; Eccl 2:11; 2 Cor 4:18). He has undertaken exposi-

tions of Ps 90 and Rom 8:18-25 as in both passages "the undertones

of the terms <u>anicca</u>, <u>dukkha</u> and <u>anatta</u> occur together." Thus though

there is no systematic exposition of the human condition in the Bible

as is found in the Buddhist texts, he maintains that the <u>Tilakkhana</u>

analytic could be employed to do theology in the Buddhist context as

---

[1]"Emergent Theology," p. 223. Cf. Paul Tillich, <u>Courage to
Be</u> (New Haven, Conn.: Yale University Press, 1952), pp. 27, 36-37.

"the polarity of conflict between being and the possibility of non-being that lies at the core of human existence, the mood of anxiety, the finitude and precariousness of man's life, is a familiar theme that runs through the Bible."[1]

Commenting on Rom 8: 18-25 De Silva observes that Paul's description of the human predicament with the terms mataiotes, pathemata, and phthora have close approximations to the Pali terms anicca, dukkha and anattā, respectively. The Buddhist overtones are said to be striking. Firstly, the whole creation is subject to vanity (mataiotes). This means that all things in nature are perishable and therefore impermanent (anicca). By the use of mataiotes Paul is saying "that the whole universe is in 'bondage to decay.' The Greek words mataiotes mataioteton is a refrain of the 'Vanity of Vanities, all is vanity' of Ecclesiastes. It means that all things are subject to corruption and decay." Secondly, Paul uses pathemata to indicate that "the whole of creation, nature as well as man, is groaning in travail. There is a derangement in nature. Nature is subject to dukkha." Thirdly, with the use of phthora Paul indicates that the creature is subject to mortality, to decay, and to death, which means "Man is Anattā."[2]

In his exposition of Ps 90 in its correspondence to the Tilakkhana analytic De Silva notes that the Psalm lends itself to meditation in a Buddhist style. In this meditation attributed to Moses, the transience, misery, and emptiness of human existence is

---

[1] "Emergent Theology," pp. 223-224.

[2] "Religious Dimensions in Humanity's Relation to Nature: Christian Scriptural Insights," in Man in Nature: Guest or Engineer? ed. S. J. Samartha and Lynn de Silva (Colombo: Ecumenical Institute for Study and Dialogue, 1979), p. 22.

measured against the Eternity, Majesty, and Power of God. In the

third verse man is <u>anattā</u>, he is turned back into dust from where he

came; in the fifth, he is <u>anicca</u>, his life is like a dream as the

grass withers; and, in verses nine and ten, man's life is <u>dukkha</u>

because his short span of life is full of toil, trouble, and anxiety.

Summing up the cumulative impact of the Psalm in its correspondence

to the <u>Tilakkhana</u> analytic, De Silva points out that in the Biblical

context the solution to man's predicament of <u>anicca</u>, <u>dukkha</u>, and

<u>anattā</u> can be found only in the eternity, majesty, and glory of God:

> In this whole Psalm there is no attempt to blur the
> truth of the nihility of human existence by a facile
> belief in the immortality of the soul, of which there
> is not the slightest hint in the Old Testament. The
> pathos and the melancholy pessimistic tones are unmistak-
> ably clear. In this human situation there is no security,
> no hope of fulfilment. There is no security unless we
> can see beyond the transience of life to the Eternity
> of God; there is no hope unless we can see beyond the
> misery of life to the Majesty of God. There is no
> fulfilment unless we can see beyond the emptiness of
> life to the Glory of God.[1]

De Silva's theology develops, it would seem, out of the

attempt to communicate the biblical solution to the questions raised

by the Tilakkhana analysis. Since inter-faith dialogue is a search

for living truth he sees the need for Christians to be honest in the

interpretation of their own tradition and to re-root the Christian

message in basic biblical teaching. They must also be ready to listen

carefully to the implications of what is being said to them so that

the insights of one religion can fertilize another. Thus we see his

theology developing in the quest for a common language of understanding

---

[1]"An Existential Understanding of the Doctrine of Creation
in the Context of Buddhism," in A Vision for Man: Essays on Faith,
Theology and Society, ed. Samuel Amirtham (Madras: Christian Litera-
ture Society, 1978), pp. 89-90.

126

in the context of Sri Lankan Buddhism, with the common predicament
of both Buddhist and Christian as the starting point for the clarifi-
cation of the fundamental themes of man, salvation,and God.

"Anattā-Pneuma"--A Christian-Buddhist Estimate of Man

A long-standing assumption among adherents of both religions,
including students of comparative religion, has been that Christianity
and Theravāda Buddhism are so unlike each other (apart from common
ground on the ethical plane), that it would be impossible to have any
kind of fruitful dialogue. A powerful stream in Christendom has tradi-
tionally taught that man possesses the quality of inherent immortal-
ity, which stands in direct opposition to the Buddhist doctrine of
anattā. By seeking to understand Buddhism on its own terms and in
its own idiom, De Silva finds basic agreement between the Christian
and Theravada doctrine of man. He finds that while Buddhism has re-
mained true to its scriptural teaching of the doctrine of anattā,
traditional Christianity has moved away from the biblical teaching
about man into acceptance of the doctrine of the immortal soul.
Modern biblical scholarship,however, rules out the notion of an immortal
soul inhabiting the body and also discredits the popular Christian
belief of the resurrection of the flesh into a heavenly world. Though
both religions rule out eternalistic notions about man, neither succumbs
to a nihilistic view as both teach there is a future life and a here-
after beyond the grave, raising the crucial questions: "What is
it that survives death? What is its nature? What is its relation
to the physical body? If there is no soul how can we speak of

survival after death?"[1] Thus De Silva's delineation of the truth
about the nature and end of man evaluates the Buddhist and Christian
answers to these questions.

De Silva's estimate of man begins with the account of man
in his fallenness. He has attempted to help Buddhists understand
Christianity within their description of the human predicament. In-
dicating basic commonality (as well as differences and distinctions)
in the fundamental categories of sin and tanha, he has dealt with the
problem of suffering and the significance of anattaness in Christianity
and Buddhism in the solution of man's predicament. He then takes
up the Buddhist view of man and confronts the dilemma posed by the
Theravadins, viz., the problem of denying the self or the soul without
falling into the error of nihilism, and of affirming self-identity
without falling into the opposite error of eternalism. The discussion
of the question of self-identity in relation to the doctrine of
anattā, of karma and rebirth, and nibbana, with its numerous logical
difficulties is taken up. Finally, using biblical perspectives in
relation to the doctrine of anattā as a possible solution to the
problem in a Buddhist-Christian context, he proposes that it is in
the understanding of man as anatta-pneuma (non-egocentric relationality)
that one should seek for a solution to the problem of self.

Tilakkhana and the Human Predicament

De Silva's explication of the human predicament in terms of
Tilakkhana and the biblical perspective begins from man's existential
situation. Man's predicament is that he is conscious of the tension

---

[1] The Problem of the Self, p. 1.

between what is and what ought to be. With regard to himself, in
relation to suffering, and in relation to the world in which he lives,
man is compelled to say:

> We feel that we are made for blessedness; perfection is
> what is meant for us, but we do not have what should
> have been ours. Our experience of the conflict between
> what is and what ought to be points to the fact that
> something has gone wrong somewhere.[1]

This conflict in man has been described by some modern
writers in terms of anxiety which bears a striking resemblance to
dukkha, a word which defies precise definition. In his exposition
of the term, De Silva notes that ordinarily it may be used in differ-
ent contexts to mean discomfort, illness, unsatisfactoriness, unrest,
etc. In its wider sense it can be best expressed by the phrase
"existential anxiety" and "indicates the human predicament in all
its aspect, comprehending the totality of existence."[2] It describes
man's "fallenness," i.e., "the predicament in which man is, bound
by conditioned existence in samsāric life."[3] In seeking to understand
the human predicament De Silva finds that the Genesis story of the
fall and the Buddhist parallel known as the Agganna Sutta found in the
Digha Nikaya constitute an useful starting point since both stories
begin with the "what is" in the human predicament--the fact of the
fallenness of man. The two fall stories indicate a congruence in
Christian-Buddhist understanding of the human situation and clearly

---

[1] "The Problem of Suffering: The Christian Answer in the
Light of Buddhist Thought," Dialogue Old Series No.4 (October, 1964): 5.

[2] "Theological Construction in a Buddhist Context," p. 41.

[3] The Problem of the Self, p. 28.

show that <u>anatta</u> and <u>anicca</u> have a direct bearing on <u>dukkha</u> in all its aspects.

Both Buddhism and Christianity are seen as employing symbolic stories to explain the human predicament. The account of the fall in Genesis and the <u>Agganna Sutta</u> are for De Silva "myths", i.e., not fables but picture-thoughts "symbolizing religious and other-worldly truths which cannot be expressed in historical or scientific categories,"[1] in which we see striking similarities with regard to fundamental aspects of man's fallen condition. Thus he maintains that the

---

[1]"The Problem of Suffering," p. 5. De Silva notes that though the <u>Agganna Sutta</u> has not had serious recognition as a Buddhist parallel to the fall, it has been recognized as such by scholars such as Berriedale Keith and Bhikku Sangarakshita. Sangarakshita's specific reference to this <u>Sutta</u>, in <u>A Survey of Buddhism</u>, p.108, is cited: "The transition from sensation to craving, from passive feeling to active desire, is the psychological fact standing behind all myths of the 'Fall of Man' from paradise to earth, from a blissful to a miserable state and sphere of existence " (ibid., p. 6). Since the <u>Agganna Sutta</u> is much longer than the Genesis account of the fall, and is not so well known, De Silva has condensed it and compared it with elements in the biblical account as follows:
"This Sutta begins somewhat like the book of Genesis,
pointing to the beginning of this world-cycle (Kalpa) when
'all had become one world of water, dark, and of the dark-
ness that maketh blind,' almost echoing the words in Genesis
1:1 : 'The earth was without form and void and darkness
was upon the face of the deep.' At that time, the Sutta goes
on to say, there were 'Radiant beings' 'self-luminous travers-
ing the air in abiding loveliness.' Here again we are re-
minded of a similar notion in a passage in Ezekiel which might
be considered to be a complementary story of the Fall. Ezekiel
speaks of such 'Radiant beings' whom he calls the 'Cherub,'
supernatural beings 'perfect in beauty' (ch. 28:11-19). These
beings, according to the Agganna Sutta, lived in the world of
light (Abassara loka). Ezekiel says that the Cherub lived in
'Eden the garden of God.' The symbolism in both stories points
to a state of blessedness and perfection. But from this state
of blessedness these beings fell. This fall came about in this
wise. After a long long time a kind of crust or scum formed
over the world of water. This was the beginning of the solid
earth. This earth-scum was endowed with colour, odour and smell.
This tasty earth, like the fruit in the Garden of Eden, was a

concern of the Genesis writer was not to make a scientific or philo-

sophical analysis of the origin of things, rather it was the existen-

tial concern of <u>dukkha</u>.[1] Moreover, the doctrine of creation provides

---

       source of temptation to these Radiant beings. One being,
giving way to this temptation, tasted the savoury earth.
The others followed his example. The act of one being in-
volved the others too, just as Eve's act involved Adam.
Now as these beings gratified their taste, their self-
luminance disappeared, their bodies became solid and differ-
ences in their bodily features came to be noticed. When
these differences were noticed by these beings, pride and
envy entered them, and as they became vain and conceited, the
savoury earth disappeared. Outgrowths of soil and creepers
then appeared and passed away in the same way. Finally rice
appeared and as these beings feasted on the rice their bodies
became more and more solid, differences in their bodily fea-
tures more and more pronounced. Then they became conscious
of sex-distinctions. Here again we have a parallel in the
Genesis story of the Fall, where it is said that when Adam
and Eve ate of the fruit of the tree, 'the eyes of both of
them were opened and they knew that they were naked' (2:7).
As a result of the consciousness of sex-distinctions 'passions
arose and burning entered the body,' and these beings 'in con-
sequence thereof followed their lust' and became more and more
subject to mortality. Thus the Fall was complete" (ibid., pp. 5-6).

[1]De Silva holds that the creation narratives are not the start-
ing point of Old Testament theology and belong to a later date. Sub-
scribing to the documentary hypothesis he dates the P account (Gen 1.:
1-2; 4a) in the times of the exile or later, and the J account
(Gen 2:4b-25) to the time of the early monarchy. Israel's spiritual
history is said to begin with the covenant, and the first prophet to
take serious note of the doctrine of creation was Jeremiah, "who
saw the meaning of God's sovereignty in the fact that God was Creator,
and who perceived in the constancy and orderliness of nature the
pledge of his faithfulness promised in the covenant" ("An Existen-
tial Understanding," p. 81). Thus creation was embraced within the
theological meaning of the covenant relationship and was looked upon
as the first act of God's saving deeds through the eyes of the
covenant faith:
       "This is a significant point, because it was during the suffer-
ing in Exile that the people seriously asked the question
about the meaning of existence and found the answer in the
doctrine of creation, which underscored the relationship
between the Creator and creature, thus reasserting their
covenant faith. It is. we might say, the <u>dukkha</u> situation
that gave meaning to the doctrine of creation. Thus the
meaning of the doctrine of creation is best seen in relation
to <u>dukkha</u> " (ibid).

an in-depth understanding of the existential significance of <u>Tilakkhana</u>, "which is obscured by the excessive rationalism of Theravāda Buddhism."[1]

De Silva draws on the scholarship of Karl Barth, Emil Brunner, and Claus Westermann to underscore the existential significance and bring out the spiritual meaning of creation. Creation had nothing to do with a cosmogony, it was not a phenomenological account of how all things were brought into being, rather it revealed the purpose and meaning of existence. He maintains that:

> It is pre-eminently a religious affirmation about the
> sovereignty of God and the absolute dependence of the
> creature. The intention of the creation story in Genesis
> 1 is not to analyse man's essence or to define God's nature,
> but rather to indicate man's task and his relationship
> as creature to the Creator.[2]

Christianity is in agreement with Buddhism in rejecting speculative theories about the origin of the world. The Buddha's main objective was to proclaim a solution to the existential problem of <u>dukkha</u>, as his conversation with <u>Bhaggava</u> and <u>Sunakkhatta</u> in the <u>Patika Suttanta</u> of the <u>Digha Nikaya</u> reveals. Rejecting the theories that the world has come out of "something," that it had come out of itself, and that it had happened by chance, the Buddha said: "Whether the beginning of things be revealed, or whether it be not, is the object for which I teach the Dhamma this: That it leads to the thorough destruction of <u>Dukkha</u> for the doer thereof."[3]

---

[1]"An Existential Understanding," p. 79.

[2]Ibid., p. 82.

[3]Ibid., p. 81.

The Fallenness of Man

There are obvious differences between the fall stories in the Buddhist and Christian scriptures. In the <u>Agganna Sutta</u> there is no mention of God, the tree, or the serpent. De Silva sees differences of imagery in these myths, but both point to the central underlying truth that man is in a state of fallenness. Three aspects of man's fallenness are common to both accounts, the fact of the fall, its cause, and its consequences.

The Fact of the Fall

Both stories describe the evil state man is in and point to a state of blessedness prior to that. In the <u>Agganna Sutta</u> the beings are "made of mind, feeding on rapture, self-luminous, traversing the air in abiding loveliness." In the Genesis myth man is made in the image of God and dwells in the garden of Eden. Both also say that man has fallen from this state of blessedness. In Genesis man's image is distorted and he is driven out of Eden; and in the Buddhist myth the beings lose their lustre, descend from the Abassara world to earth where their bodies become solid, and become subject to mortality.[1]

The Cause of the Fall

The cause of man's fall in both stories is seen as desire (<u>tanha</u>), which is equated with sin. In both stories temptation comes in the form of food--"the fruit of the tree" and "the savoury earth." Asserting that "both these are images of desire (<u>tanha</u>) which is the

---

[1]Lynn A. de Silva, "The Christian Solution to the Problem of Man in Relation to Buddhism," a paper presented at <u>A Consultation on Buddhist-Christian Encounter</u>, ed. U. Kyaw Than, Rangoon, 1961. (Mimeographed.)

cause of man's fall," De Silva points out that "the word 'desire' (tanha) is right there in the Genesis story." In Christ's temptations "the devil attempts to arouse desire in our Lord." James traces temptation to desire (1: 14-15). Thus De Silva concludes, "De_ire (tanha) is sin."[1]

He also draws attention to the remarkable points of contact between the Christian analysis of sin and the Buddhist analysis of tanha. Just as classical Christian theology makes a threefold analysis of sin, viz: lust, pride (hubris), and unbelief, classical Buddhism also makes a threefold analysis of desire, viz: Kama tanha (sensual craving), Bhavatanha (craving for existence), and Vibhava tanha (craving for self-annihilation or suicidal desire). The Christian idea of lust and the Buddhist idea of kama are viewed as being more or less identical in meaning. Just as lust refers to all aspects of man's relation to himself and to the world, so too kama is not to be understood in a narrow sense as striving for sensual pleasure, it is the desire for anything, even for Nirvana. Pride and Bhava tanha are also very close in meaning. The Buddha would have wholeheartedly agreed with Tillich's definition of pride as "turning to one's self as the centre of one's self and the world," since Bhava tanha is the desire to make the self the center of everything. However, in the Christian context pride meant "the self-elevation of man into the sphere of the Divine." There is also a correspondence between unbelief and Vibhava tanha, though Buddhism does not think in the Christian sense of turning away from God. The Buddhist view involves the

---

[1] Ibid.

loss of faith in any ultimate values leading a person to despair and suicidal desire.[1]

The Consequences of the Fall

Man's predicament is the consequence of the fall and has been described in Buddhism under the categories of anattā, dukkha, and anicca. De Silva has seen the Tilakkhana as a valid description of man's tragic existence which Christian theology can accept as a fundamental basis for dialogue. While he finds basic areas of agreement with the Buddhist analysis of the consequences of the fall, he also points out fundamental differences and distinctions.

That man has come under the power of finite existence by reason of his sin is indicated by his expulsion from the garden in Genesis and the luminous beings losing their lustre and their bodies becoming solid in the Agganna Sutta. According to the Buddhist analysis of finitude everything changes and lacks substantiality, i.e., all is anicca and anattā. The aniccaness of man is indicated in both stories as decay and death are the consequences of man's sin. That all things are anicca need not sound strange to the Christian-- Paul said that the things that are seen are temporal, Jesus said heaven and earth will pass away, and sin gives death the power which it otherwise would not have. Man's state of existential anxiety derives from his awareness of his fallenness, i.e., his awareness of anicca, which is the possibility of non-being; and of anattā, which is the fact that non-being is part of one's own being because man does not have an immortal soul; and, the experience of dukkha, in which finitude is experienced as one's own finitude.

---

[1]Ibid.

Creatio ex Nihilo and Creaturely Reality

Attention has been drawn to the distinctively Christian doctrine of creatio ex nihilo (of which the Buddha was not aware and is not found in the Pātika Suttanta) which implies the absolute impermanence (anicca) of all things apart from the creator. It is this doctrine that best expresses the truth of man's creatureliness, or his anattaness and aniccaness. Apart from the creator who maintains all things by the power of his word they would cease to exist:

> As they were created out of nothing at His Word, so they vanish into nothingness at His Word. As all things, including man, have been created out of nothing, so all things including man stand vis-a-vis the threat of non-being (anattā and anicca). On the other hand it implies the Lordship of God over existence. In other words God is the Uncreated, man is the created; God is Asankhata (Unconditioned), man is the samkhata (conditioned).[1]

It is maintained that man is ontologically anattā since in conformity with biblical teaching Christianity asserts that man is naturally mortal. The symbol of the tree of life guarded by the cherubim and flaming sword so that man may not eat from it and live forever makes it obvious that "Man becomes eternal only in relation to the Eternal, apart from the Eternal man is mortal. In other words apart from God man is Anatta."[2] The Bible also asserts implicitly,

---

[1] "An Existential Understanding," p. 85.

[2] "The Christian Solution to the Problem of Man," p. 66.
Christian theological comment on the creator-creature relationship as expressed in the doctrine of Creatio ex nihilo has been cited by De Silva to elucidate the truths of man's creatureliness (anattaness), and of his being threatened by non-being (anicca). Thus Karl Barth would say that the doctrine denies that any creaturely power can of itself overcome the negativities of anicca, anattā, and dukkha because all things (ta panta) are upheld by God's word:

in the doctrine of creatio ex nihilo, that in spite of the creation

man is threatened by the possibility of chaos:

> According to the cosmology of Genesis, chaos surrounds
> the habitable world on every hand. Man's life was sus-
> pended above the formless abyss and surrounded by the
> waters of chaos which threatened to engulf him and his
> world. He thus lived existentially with the threat of
> falling into the abyss of non-being. Unless the Creator
> upholds His creation by His power the waters would sweep
> in and the world would return to the precreation void.[1]

The doctrine of creatio ex nihilo therefore gives precision

and depth to the perception that all things are anicca--that the

universe is samkhata, a structure of finitude; that man is ontologically

anattā--having only a conditional immortality; and, that when man

fell into sin anicca and anattā became a reality bringing him into a

state of dukkha--the existential awareness in which finitude is ex-

perienced as one's own finitude. Anicca and anattā now become real

to man as misery and anxiety drive him to utter despair and hopeless-

ness because non-being is now an ultimate possibility. It is pointed

---

"Creaturely reality means reality on the basis of creatio
ex nihilo, creation out of nothing. . . . The creature is
threatened by the possibility of nothingness and of destruc-
tion, which is excluded by God--and only by God. If a
creature exists, it is only maintained in its mode of exis-
tence if God so wills. If he did not so will, nothingness
would inevitably break in from all sides. The creature
itself could not rescue and preserve itself." ("An Existential
Understanding," pp. 85-86). Cf. Karl Barth, Dogmatics in Outline
(New York: Harper, 1959), p. 55. For John Macquarrie the importance
of the doctrine of creatio ex nihilo is that man is, in so far as he
participates in Being, but at any time he may cease to be. Man is
the paradigm of creaturely being (the equivalent of anattaness and
aniccaness) because "he actually experiences the 'nothingness' that
entered into his existence " ("An Existential Understanding,"
p. 86). Cf. John Macquarrie, Principles of Christian Theology (New
York: Scribner, 1966), p. 198.

[1]"An Existential Understanding," p. 85.

out that in both stories the earth is cursed because of man's sin.

In Genesis the ground was cursed because of man's sin, and it was to

bring forth thorns and thistles. In the Agganna Sutta beings gathered

themselves and bewailed saying, "From evil and immoral customs be-

coming manifest among us, powder has enveloped the clean grain, and

where we have reaped is no regrowth; a break has come, and the rice-

stubble stands in clumps." Because of man's sin the entire universe

is overtaken by Dukkha:

> The universe itself has fallen. The Bible certainly affirms
> that the structure of the finitude is good in itself but
> under the conditions of human sin it has become a structure
> of destruction. Under the conditions of sin suffering
> lays hold on a man in a destructive way. Dukkha is an
> element of finitude. Dukkha does not only mean mere physical
> or mental pain or anguish. These are only the symptoms
> of the deceased (sic) nature of existence in which man is
> involved. Dukkha is the description of finitude as such.
> The whole creation travails and groans in pain as St. Paul
> says. Suffering is an expression of finite existence.[1]

The Problem of Suffering

De Silva's description of the consequences of the Fall takes

up the universal question: "Why do people suffer?" Man suffers be-

cause the Fall has affected man in three ways (morally, biologically

or physically, and socially), and nature is said to be affected

materially. It is in these consequences that we can find the causes

of human suffering, because consequence and cause are linked up with

each other.

The Moral and Social Causes of Suffering

Both myths of the Fall indicate a moral cause, as both speak

of the evil ways of man after he fell. Though sin is a universal

---

[1] "The Christian Solution to the Problem of Man," p. 66.

fact, the Bible also speaks of suffering as punishment for the sin of the individual. Evil results from a broken relationship, and for Christians, "Sin is primarily a break in our relationship with God."[1] In Buddhism the moral basis for suffering is found in the teaching of karma, which concerns the good or bad actions of man. The term karma (Pali kamma) literally meant action or deed. The opening verses of the Dhammapada describe karma as the law of cause and effect or action and reaction:

> All that we are, is the result of what we have thought;
> it is founded on our thoughts, it is made up of our thoughts.
> If a man speaks or acts with an evil thought, pain follows
> him, as the wheel follows the foot of the ox that draws the
> cart. . . . If a man speaks or acts with a pure thought,
> happiness follows, like a shadow that never leaves him.[2]

It is nevertheless pointed out that neither in Buddhism or Christianity can we say that there is either "an exact correspondence between sin and suffering," or "an exact equivalence between sin and punishment, merit and reward."[3] Jesus suffered though he was without sin and we know that innocent people suffer. Even karma fails as an adequate explanation as the cause of all suffering. The Buddha suffered even after his enlightenment when he had "burnt up all unskill," i.e., when there was no akusala (demerits) left and according to the law of karma there was no cause to effect suffering.[4] De Silva

---

[1] "The Problem of Suffering," p. 9.

[2] The Problem of the Self, p. 38.

[3] "The Problem of Suffering," p. 9.

[4] Ibid. The general assumption that according to orthodox Buddhist doctrine karma is the cause of all suffering, it is pointed out, is not acceptable to many Buddhist scholars. De Silva notes that according to the Sinhalese scholar Aggamahapandita Polwatte

therefore points out that though the doctrine of karma with its

corollary, the doctrine of reincarnation, seems to offer a satisfying

explanation of suffering, it poses serious logical difficulties

from the Buddhist viewpoint:

> According to this theory, we have no memory of what each of us was in a previous existence, and do not have any sense of moral responsibility for what we are supposed to have done then, and because, according to the Buddhist theory of rebirth there is no identifiable permanent self that develops a destiny from life to life, the doctrines of karma and reincarnation fail to give a satisfying explanation of suffering.[1]

In his discussion of the social causes of suffering De Silva

proposes an answer, at least in part, to the puzzling question of the

suffering of the innocent and the saints. The pain which the Buddha

suffered after his enlightenment was not due to his karma or to any

fault of his. It was due to the malice of his traitorous disciple

Devadatta, who rolled a great stone against the Buddha from which a

---

Buddhadatta Thera, the Buddha discarded such a fatalistic doctrine of karma as a heretical view. The Thera refers to a conversation between King Milinda and the Venerable Nagasena in the Milinda Prasna, in which Nagasena affirms four instances in which the Buddha suffered after the Buddha "attained omniscience when he had burnt up all unskill and there was no unskill remaining in the Lord." Nagasena explains the Buddha's post-enlightenment suffering by pointing out that karma was only one of the eight causes of suffering. The first four (Vatasamutthana--wind upset, Pittasamutthana--bile upset, Semasamutthana--phlegm upset, and Sannipata--union of the humours) were biological reasons; five and six (Rituperalima--change of seasons-- and Visamaparihara--stress of circumstances or being attacked by adversity) were material reasons relating to changes and circumstances in nature; seven (Parokkamika--aggression of an enemy) was the social cause of suffering; and lastly there was karma, the moral reason for suffering. Thus Nagasena points out to the king that not all that is experienced is rooted in karma, it is only one of the eight causes of suffering, and therefore "Small is what is born of the maturing of the kamma, greater is the remainder." Ibid., p. 7.

[1] Ibid., p. 9

broken splinter grazed the Buddha's foot causing it to bleed. De
Silva maintains that this suffering could be understood only in the
social context, "because we are meant for fellowship, when that
fellowship is broken everyone suffers as a result.[1] Deeper than social
unity, this fellowship meant that man is "dialogic" by nature, i.e.,
that man does not merely belong to society but to an organic soli-
darity. Paul using the symbol of body (1 Cor 12:12) and Jeremiah
the proverb "The fathers have eaten a sour grape, and the children's
teeth are set on edge" (Jer 31:29) illustrate the fact that due to
this organic solidarity what happens to one happens to all: "We
are so interrelated that we cannot do anything alone; our sin can
bring suffering on others."[2]

The Physical and Material Causes of Suffering

Man's physical nature is affected by the Fall, disease,
decay, old-age, and death has set in. According to the biblical view
of man, as well as the psychosomatic concept in modern medical science,
the human personality is a unity. Thus just as man is not what he
ought to be morally or spiritually, physically too he is not what he
should be--and suffering is the result. This is true of the whole
of nature, as both Buddhist and Christian Fall myths indicate that
nature has been affected by man's actions--the world is no longer the
realm of light (Abassara Loka) or the Garden of Eden. Thus in Rom
8:19-23, Paul speaks of a fallen world which stands in need of redemp-
tion as man does, and De Silva concludes, "So closely linked are

---

[1] Ibid., p. 10.
[2] Ibid.

human nature and physical nature that the Bible thinks of the ultimate redemption of man as involving the transformation of the physical universe. Since man and the world have fallen, man as well as the world must be redeemed."[1]

The Quest for Deliverance

Both Buddhism and Christianity are agreed that sin or tanha is at the root of man's state of dukkha. However, De Silva considers it very important that a distinction be made between the Buddhist understanding of suffering as identical with finitude, and the Christian understanding of suffering as an element of finitude:

> In Buddhism Dukkha is finitude and finitude is Dukkha; they are identical. Existence and evil are the same. In Buddhism the basic malady of Man is finiteness and the suffering it implies. In Christianity the malady is sin. So the Buddhist quest is for deliverance from finiteness, from existence itself. For Christianity salvation is from sin on which suffering is dependent. When sin is conquered the structure of finiteness will change and suffering will be transformed. But Christianity knows that such a transformation of suffering is only partly possible in space and time.[2]

In Christianity sin is in relation to God the Creator, and is to be understood in the Creator-creature relationship. And man's predicament--the existential anxiety that arises from his knowledge of the hiatus between the "what is" and the "what ought to be," and the suffering it entails--is the result of turning away from God. In Buddhism man's predicament is that he is bound by conditioned existence in samsaric life. Threatened by the possibility of non-being, he

---

[1] Ibid., p. 11.

[2] "The Christian Solution to the Problem of Man," p. 66.

conceives a false notion of the self as a permanent entity. This imaginary notion of the self is in conflict with the fact that "decay is inherent in all things" (anicca), and the result is dukkha-- the state of existential anxiety. The root cause of dukkha is tanha, i.e., "the desire or thirst to exist, to re-exist, to continue to exist, which arises as a result of the belief in a permanent self or soul which has thrown man into the predicament in which he is."[1] Thus the elimination of the root cause of dukkha means the elimination of tanha, which in effect means the elimination of the notion of self. The Buddhist solution, therefore, to this conflict between the fact of impermanence and the false notion of a permanent self, is the realization of the fact of one's own soullessness (anattā):

> The solution to the problem consists in dispelling the
> false notion of the 'self'. When it is seen that decay
> (anicca) is inherent even in the so-called self, when one
> realises that even the so-called self is impermanent, the
> conflict ceases and dukkha comes to an end, for there can
> be no conflict between the law of impermanence (anicca)
> and the impermanent self (anattā), because they are seen
> to be identical.[2]

We now turn to De Silva's exposition of the Theravada estimate of man, because it is through the minute analysis of the empirical self that Buddhism brings one to a realization of the fact of soullessness (anattā) which leads to freedom from dukkha.

The Buddhist View of Man--the Theravada Explanation

De Silva sets out to gain an in-depth understanding of the Buddhist view of man, especially the Theravada point of view developed

---

[1]The Problem of the Self, p. 28.

[2]Ibid., p. 29.

on the basis of the scriptural canon.[1] This view was built on the

doctrine of anattā, which forms the subject of the anattalakkhana

sutta--the second sermon of the Buddha--and is considered to be one

of the main cornerstones upon which the edifice of the Buddha's

teaching is built.   Undertaking a detailed analysis of the doctrine

of anattā (etymologically, anattā consists of the negative prefix

an plus attā--the self or the soul), he examines the various soul

theories that were found in the Buddha's Vedantic background. There

were two main sets of views--sassatavāda, i.e., eternalistic views

according to which the soul had no beginning in time and hence no

end, and ucchedavāda or annihilationist views. The Brahmajāla sutta

claims to have dealt exhaustively with the various theories, and some

teachers who held soul theories "wriggled like eels" refusing to give

clear answers regarding the origin, nature, location, knowability,

and destiny of the attā. It is against this background that the

Theravadins developed their doctrine of anattā as found in the Pali

scriptures.[2] The Theravada view contradicted all previously held

---

[1]The Theravada Buddhist tradition has at its center a body of
scripture, the Tipitaka (three baskets). Regarded as canonical and
authoritative, the three Pitaka are Vinaya--the rules that were to be
followed by the monks and their community; Sutta--a collection of the
sayings, discourses, and sermons of the Buddha and his disciples; and
Abhidhamma--the doctrine of the Buddha arranged systematically
according to subject matter. Orthodox Theravadins maintain that the
Tipitaka is literally "the word of the Buddha" (Buddha vacanam) which
was committed to memory soon after his parinibbana. Other Theravadins
hold that "the contents of the completed canon can be considered
the 'word of the Buddha' because they are encompassed by the supreme
wisdom of the Buddha." See George D. Bond, "The Dhamma and 'Sola
Scriptura': The Interpretation of Scripture in Theravada Buddhism and
Christianity," Dialogue New Series 2, No. 2 (May-August, 1975): 50-51.

[2]The Problem of the Self, pp. 11-16. Tracing the meaning
of atta (atman in its Sanskrit form) in the Vedantic background,

De Silva finds its original meaning and derivation obscure. Some-
times it could mean "breath" in the sense of "life", or the breath-
life that could leave the body and return to it again. In the
Vedantic conceptual framework atman was the little self that was a
part of Brahman, the manifestation of which was sometimes personified
and called Brahma, the Great Self, God or the Absolute. The realiza-
tion of the oneness between Brahman and atman was prevented by ignorance
(avidya), and salvation (moksha) meant the removal of this veil of
ignorance. Thus the concept of the self came to be expressed in
the words tat tvam asi ("that thou art"), and "the atman came to be
thought of as an eternal immutable substance, free from the vicissi-
tudes of change and decay."

Prior to and during the time of the Buddha there were many
atman or soul theories that could be classified into two groups, i.e.,
the eternalistic and the annihilationist view points. The eternalists
held that the soul was eternal and had arisen without a cause (adhicca-
samuppana). Pakudha Kaccayana, a contemporary of the Buddha, held that
a person could not be killed as he was constituted of seven uncreated
immutable elements and at death the body dissolved into these seven
eternal elements. The Samkhyas held to a doctrine of the eternal
existence of a plurality of souls. Makkhali Gosala, another contem-
porary of the Buddha, held the Samsara Visuddhi theory of a cycle of
reanimation, a fixed series of existences which everyone passed
through till he was completely purified and freed from misery. The
Jaina view was that the soul was intrinsically omniscient though
cluttered up by material particles of Karma, and the soul would shine
in its natural and intrinsic lustre when the Karmic particles ceased
to be. The Upanishads maintained that the atman, being conscious,
had real thoughts (satyasam kalpah) and was free from death (vimrayuh).
All the eternalists held that the soul had no beginning in time and
hence no end, thus De Silva concurs with S. Radhakrishnan's summation
of Hindu thought upon the soul--that "If there is one doctrine more
than another which is characteristic of Hindu thought, it is the
belief that there is an interior depth to the human soul which,
in its essence, is uncreated and deathless and absolutely real "
(Cf. Eastern Religions and Western Thought [London: Oxford University
Press, 1939], p. 83).

In opposition to the eternalists the annihilationists main-
tained that after the death of the body sooner or later the soul is
completely annihilated. Ajit Kesakambali, another contemporary of
the Buddha, held that a man is constituted of four elements which
are completely annihilated at death when the elements return to
their corresponding mass of great elements. Other annihilationists
denied the existence of an atman. Some admitted a dualism of body
and soul as a concession to the annihilationists saying that if there
was an atman it ceases to exist at death, either in this world or
in another. It was against this backdrop of eternalist and annihi-
lationist theories of the soul that the Theravadins developed their
doctrine of anatta. Ibid.

views in an all-embracing sweep. In its analysis of the various aspects of the individual it concluded that there was no atta since none could be found when the person was so analyzed. Discussing the analytical and ethical arguments for the Theravada position De Silva first describes the two-step analysis of man it undertakes and then proceeds to illustrate the distinctive significance of this analysis from Buddhist literature.

The Analytical Argument

The Nāma-rūpa analysis was the first step. Nāma (literally, name) could be translated into English by the word "Mind," though in Buddhist psychology it is a collective name for the psychological and mental aspects of the human being. Rūpa, (literally, form) could be translated as "Matter," "Body," or "Corporeality" and is a collective term describing the physical aspect of being. De Silva points out that Nāma and Rūpa are interdependent and belong to each other in an integral manner, "thus Namarūpa (Name and Form) taken together comprise the psycho-physical organism which constitutes a person as a separate and distinct individual."[1] The second step, the analysis of man into the five Khandhas (aggregates), is the classic Theravada Pancakkandha theory. The Nāmarūpa psychosomatic organism consists of five khandas, i.e., rūpa, and the four subdivisions of nāma--

---

[1] The Problem of the Self, pp. 17-19. De Silva points out that there is much in common between the Buddhist view of mind and matter and the view held by some process thinkers like Sewell Wright (who looks upon mind and matter as two aspects of the same reality). Buddhism, however, does not accept a permanent element as is found in modern process philosophy which recognizes an inner reality, e.g., "the within of things" (Teilhard de Chardin) or the "element of mind" (Hartshorne). A number of passages from Buddhaghosa are cited to underscore the Buddhist view that mind and matter cannot exist without each other.

Vedana (sensation or feeling), Sanna (perceptions), Samkhara (mental states or activities, volition), and Vinnana (consciousness). Though eighty-one basic elements make up these five aggregates, none of them is permanent, therefore there is no soul. Summing up the Theravada Buddhist concept of how man is constituted, De Silva says, "When the five aggregates come together they take a certain form or shape and what is thus formed is given a name. Thus we have 'name and form' (nama-rupa), but when the elements disintegrate there is no nama-rupa, no person, no ego."[1]

The significance of the Pancakkhanda analysis is then elucidated from the chariot illustration in the conversations of the Arahant Nagasena and King Milinda and from several scriptural passages. The theme that is stressed repeatedly is the impersonality and emptiness (sunnata) of the five aggregates, thus "the notion of the self as an entity, is the result of the mistaken identification of one of the aggregates with the so-called self." The point is also made that in the Buddhist texts the reality of the puggala (person) is denied. References to a person, a self, or rebirth of a being should be unstood as a "conventional mode of speech," consequently, "The only actual realities are those psycho-physical phenomena, although they have only a momentary duration. There is no permanent reality; the only reality is impermanence."[2]

---

[1] Ibid., pp. 19-21.

[2] Ibid., pp. 23-24.

The Ethical Argument

In the Anattalakkhana Sutta the analytical and ethical arguments are correlated, anattā is related to anicca and dukkha. Succinctly stated by De Silva, the ethical argument for the Theravada "no-soul theory" was that:

> The delusion of a permanent self is the root cause of dukkha and so one must get rid of the false notion of the self by traversing the Noble Eightfold Path. It is the false notion of the self that gives rise to tanhā (craving), which in turn leads to birth, decay, old age and death (jāti, jarā, marana). As long as there is a belief in the existence of the 'self', there will be a thirst for existence, and as long as there is a craving for existence there will be a manifestation of the khandas in some concrete form, which is subject to dukkha.[1]

Walpola Rahula, expressing the Theravada point of view, holds that according to the teaching of the Buddha all the evils in the world can be traced to the false notion of the self.[2] The Anattalakkhana Sutta undertakes an analysis of the five aggregates of the psycho-physical complex to show that they are devoid of any soul substance. An immortal soul could not be subject to suffering, and since all khandas are subject to suffering it means that they are anicca (impermanent). Thus, "the fact of anattā is corroborated by the fact of anicca, which, by stressing the transient character of all khandas, leaves absolutely no room for any notion of a permanent self or substance."[3] The ethical import being that if all khandas

---

[1] The Problem of the Self, p. 24.

[2] Ibid., p. 25. Cf. W. Rahula, What the Buddha Taught (London: Gordon Frazer, 1959), p. 51.

[3] The Problem of the Self, p. 27. De Silva takes note of the importance of the concept of anicca to the Sri Lankan Buddhist mind,

are subject to <u>dukkha</u> and <u>anicca</u>, one must perceive their true nature

by the right understanding which comes by following the Noble Eight-

fold Path. When the real nature of the <u>khandas</u> is perceived, i.e.,

that "decay is inherent in all things," one conceives an aversion to

them and is freed from the shackles of <u>tanhā</u>. Until one attains to

the knowledge that in reality there is no self there can be no

deliverance from <u>samsāric</u> existence.

Neither Eternalism nor Nihilism

In summing up the Theravāda point of view, De Silva concludes

that the clear evidence of the scriptural texts is that the Buddha

had neither an eternalist or an annihilationist view. The fourth

book of the <u>Abhidhamma</u> describes three types of teachers in the world,

the nihilist or annihilationist <u>(uccheda vadin)</u>, the eternalist (<u>sassata</u>

<u>vadin</u>), and finally, the one who was neither an eternalist nor a

a nihilist, "He is the Buddha." The <u>Dhammapada</u> likens eternalism

and nihilism to two warrior kings who are to be conquered if the goal

is to be reached. The <u>Dhammasangani</u> dismisses both eternalism and

nihilism as speculative theories. In a well-known conversation with

Vacchagotta found in the <u>Samyutta Nikāya</u>, the Buddha makes it clear

to Ananda that he remained silent when pressed for a direct answer to

the question: Is there a self or is there not a self? "because he

did not want to side in with the eternalists or nihilists, for both

---

thus <u>a</u> frequently uttered formula is <u>sabbe samkhārā aniccā</u> (all
<u>samkhārā</u> are impermanent). Other classic statements of the Buddha on
the transitoriness of all phenomena are: <u>Aniccā vata samkhārā uppā-
davayadhammino</u> (impermanent are the <u>samkhārā</u> which are subject to
origin and decay); and, <u>Vayadhammā samkhārā, appamādena sampādetha</u>
(subject to decay are all compounded things. Do ye abide in heed-
fulness).

these views are not in keeping with his knowledge that 'all things are not-self'." Thus for De Silva it is quite clear that anattā meant neither an absolute negation nor a positive affirmation, and paraphrasing Walpola Rahula he concludes that the correct Theravāda position "is to look at things objectively and see their real nature as a combination of psycho-physical aggregates in a continuous process of change."[1]

The Buddhist contention that it does not fall into the errors of nihilism or eternalism confronts it with the problem of reconciling the doctrine of anattā, which denies the self, with the doctrine of karma and rebirth, which affirms the identity and continuity of the self. As De Silva has aptly stated:

> To save what it holds as an empirical and psychological
> truth which has a moral significance, Buddhism rightly
> rejects the notion of an immortal soul; to save what it
> holds to be a necessity of justice it retains the belief
> in karma and rebirth. How can these two conflicting views
> be maintained without falling into the errors of nihilism
> and eternalism?[2]

The problem is posed most acutely in relation to the concept of Nirvana. Is it total annihilation or eternal bliss? And, who is it who attains Nirvana? We now take up the discussion of these problems confronting the Theravadin.

Problems Posed by the Theravada View

In his long dialogue with Sri Lankan Buddhism De Silva has endeavored to listen empathetically and understand it from within.

---

[1] The Problem of the Self, pp. 30-32. Cf. W. Rahula, What the Buddha Taught, p. 66.

[2] Ibid., p. 2.

He has also been consistent in practising the other basic component of his dialogical method, viz., "the ability to speak", which involved approaching a subject analytically and critically. Thus having listened in depth to the Theravada view point he undertakes a critical examination of the Buddhist position. In 1961 at a consultation on Buddhist-Christian encounter in Rangoon, he presented a paper analyzing the doctrine of anattā, and then went on to "show how this doctrine calls for the Christian solution."[1] He was responding to Bhikku Walpola Rahula who seemed to be suggesting that a middle course between the Scylla of eternalism and the Charybdis of nihilism was to be found in the doctrine of becoming (bhava). That is, as De Silva elaborates: "Man is to be understood not as a static being, but as a moment in the process of becoming. There is nothing that remains unchanged in the process of becoming. All is becoming, nothing becomes."[2] He argued that Paul Tillich's criticism of the process philosophies would be a valid criticism of the Buddhist doctrine of becoming.[3] The Theravada position that nothing persisted in the

---

[1] "The Biblical Understanding of Man in Society in Relation to Buddhism," paper presented at A Consultation on Buddhist-Christian Encounter, ed. U. Kyaw Than, Rangoon, 1961, p. 58. (Mireographed.)

[2] Ibid., p. 59.

[3] In the Tillichian dialectic of being and becoming though the dynamic character of being implied the tendency to transcend itself, it also tended to conserve its own form as the basis of its self-transcendence. Thus his criticism of process philosophies was that:
"Becoming would be impossible if nothing were preserved in it as the measure of change. A process philosophy which sacrifices the persisting identity of that which is in process sacrifices the process itself, its continuity, the relation of what is conditioned to its conditions, the inner aim (telos) which makes a process whole." (Paul Tillich, Systematic Theology, 3 vols. [Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1951-63], 1:181.

process of becoming was not tenable because it lead to nihilism.
Thus there has been in Buddhism an age-long quest for a concept of
the identity and continuity of the self that avoids the pitfalls of
nihilism and eternalism. In a comparison of the affinities of
Buddhism and process philosophy, De Silva notes, almost two decades
after the Rangoon consultation, that "in the Buddhist theory of be-
coming, personal value in the sense of self-conservation, does not
appear to be preserved, and this is what seems to have led to the
search for a principle of self-identity."[1]

The common man found the Theravada interpretation of _anattā_
unintelligible and incompatible with his strong belief in rebirth.
According to Edward Conze the most controversial tenet of Buddhism
has been the _anattā_ theory because it suggests that nowhere can a
"self" be apprehended, and that "The prospect of complete self-
extinction, welcomed by the true Budahist, seems so bleak and arid to
many students of the Dharma that they dream up a 'true self' which,
they say, will be realized by the extinction of the false, empirical
self."[2] De Silva notes the presence of an instinctive belief in an
identifiable permanent "self" throughout the history of Buddhist
thought which the different schools tried to smuggle in but was per-
sistently resisted by the Theravadins. Recent developments in
Buddhism indicate either the rejection of the belief in rebirth due
to its incompatibility with the doctrine of _anattā_, or the attempt

---

[1] The Problem of the Self, p. 48.

[2] Ibid., p. 49. Cf. Edward Conze, Buddhist Thought in India
(London: Allen and Unwin, 1962), p. 122.

to smuggle in the notion of an indestructible soul in one form or another.[1]

---

[1]Ibid., pp. 49-62. De Silva has surveyed the main ideas of the different schools that arose in the quest of the identity and continuity of the self in relation to the anattā doctrine. The idea of an indestructible soul was so much a part of the Indian religious scene, that the Theravadins had to constantly resist attempts to re-introduce the idea in some form and thus subvert the anattā doctrine.

Two centuries after the Buddha, the Puggalavādins or Per-sonalists claimed that the self was real. They held that in order to remember, recognize,and repeat texts there must be a knower. Thus the Buddha was able to recall former lives because there was a continuity of the same self. The self was indentifiable and distinct from the five khandas, on the grounds that it was not the five khandas that bore the burden of craving. The bearer of the burden was the person or the self since the renunciation of craving lays the burden down. To harmonize their theory of the self and anattā they proposed a theory of correlation using the analogy of fire. Just as fire and fuel co-existed in a kind of structural unity, so the self co-existed with the khandas. Thus the Personalists maintained that the self was a reality in the ultimate sense, and that it can be an object of true experience. Problem of the Self, pp. 49-51. Cf. Buddhist Thought in India, p. 125. In the attempt to hold on to the self other schools proposed psuedo-selves. The Sautrāntikas and the Mahīsāsakas taught that the khandas migrated from one life to the other. The Sautrantikas postulated an incorrupt-ible "seed" of "goodness" which persisted through all change till emancipation was found in Nirvana. The Yogācārins maintained that there were some wholesome and indestructible dharmas. Against all these attempts the Theravadins remained the champions of soullessness.

De Silva has also surveyed attempts to hold on to the notion of the soul in recent Buddhist studies. J. G. Jennings maintains that the Buddha rejected the idea of rebirth, and that Buddhism is exclusively a system of ethical conduct in which the Buddha saw the self as a collective karma, "according to which every action, word and thought of the individual, transient though he bc, brings forth inevitably consequences to be suffered or enjoyed by others in endless succeeding generations" (The Problem of the Self, pp. 53-55). Cf. J. G. Jennings, The Vedantic Buddhism of the Buddha (London: Oxford University Press, 1947), p. xxxvii. T. A. P. Ariyaratne,holding a similar ethical emphasis,rejects the theory of rebirth as being rationally incompatible with anattā. The Buddha's aim was to remind all men that they had only one span of life to live. and therefore they should strive earnestly and forget the self The Problem of the Self, p. 55. Cf. T. A. P. Ariyaratne, The Philosophy of Anatta: Reconstruction of the Real Teaching of Gotama (Nugegoda, Sri Lanka: Deepanee Printers, 1974), p. 58.

A. K. Coomaraswamy has contended that the Buddhist and Vedantic teaching are in agreement, and that the self is ātman. The

Buddha and Sankara are saying the same thing because the self that
the Buddha denied in the Anattalakkhana Sutta was only the false self,
not the Supreme Self of the Upanishads. De Silva notes that orthodox
Theravadins resisted this tendency to Hinduise Buddhism maintaining
that Buddhism was not merely a reform movement within Hinduism but a
radical revolt with contradistinctive teachings. Problem of the
Self, pp. 55-57. Cf. A. K. Coomaraswamy, Hinduism and Buddhism (New
York: Wisdom Library, n.d.), pp. 58-62.

Mrs. C. A. F. Rhys Davids, in contrast to Coomaraswamy, holds
that the atta is not the Supreme Self but the immanent deity in man
which made him a real self. The positive affirmation of the self is
said to have given place to the doctrine of anatta and the negative
concept of Nirvana under the negativistic trend in Monastic Buddhism.
Thus she maintains that in the "folk-gospel" of the Buddha, "Attha
is essentially a standpoint of man, not of one who in gaining it
ceases somehow to be man. It is the man who is valuing: this is
my aim. It becomes meaningless if, in winning it he wanes out"
(The Problem of the Self, p. 58 Cf. C. A. F. Rhys Davids, Wayfarer's
Words (London: Luzac, 1941), pp. 643-644.

Christmas Humphreys, one of the best known exponents of
Buddhism in the West, agrees with the doctrine of anatta while re-
jecting the Theravada interpretation of it as meaning an unqualified
no-self. He speaks of the self as a changeless principle. There is
an immutable PRINCIPLE on which all speculation is impossible, this
first and ultimate Form is SELF, and "It has not nature, for it is
beyond all predicates, and being the essence of Life it is the ex-
clusive property of none " Problem of the Self, p. 60. Cf. Christmas
Humphreys, Studies in the Middle Way (London: Allen & Unwin, 1951),
p. 42. De Silva finds Humphrey's use of the Pauline terms body, soul, and
spirit to define the self most interesting as he comes very close
to the biblical understanding of these three terms:

> "Taking Body to include those factors which compose the
> 'personality', Soul to mean the nobler qualities of man
> which form his essential character, and Spirit as the
> Life which fills all forms alike and is the monopoly of
> none, we have a working analysis of man's constituents
> which may be reasonably called the self, the Self and
> the SELF respectively" (See Problem of the Self, p. 60). Cf.

Studies in the Middle Way, pp. 42-43. The term Body he uses in the
sense of "personality", composed of the lower attributes or khandas,
and Soul is used to refer to the evolving bundle of attributes or
characteristics forming "character". About the Spirit he says that
this Atman, "so far from being that which distinguishes man from
man is actually the common denominator of all forms of life and is
hence the philosophic basis of the brotherhood of man " (Problem of
the Self, p. 60). Cf. Buddhism, p. 86. Thus he considers the
common Christian conception of an "eternal soul" which distinguishes
each man from his neighbour, and which will be either "saved" or
"damned" at death according to his deeds, a caricature of the teaching

Anattā in Relation to Rebirth and Karma:
The Problem of Self-identity

De Silva poses the problem of self-identity, which Theravada

Buddhism has wrestled with from the earliest times in its attempt to

reconcile the doctrine of anattā with the belief in karma and rebirth,

in the form of two persistent questions: (1) If there is no self or

soul who is it that is reborn? (2) How can you deny the self and

yet assert moral responsibility, which karma implies? To the first

question the traditional Theravada answer was that the person who is

reborn is neither the one who died nor another (na ca so na ca anno).

Having earlier expounded this answer at length, De Silva now gives

the gist as follows:

> At death, consciousness perishes only to give rise
> to another consciousness in a subsequent re-becoming.
> The moment of dying begets the moment of consciousness
> in the womb and passes on its heritage of karma. The
> renewed life-flux inherits all past experiences. Each
> successor 'has all the potentialities of the predecessor
> and more'. The new being is neither absolutely the same
> as the past (because of its different composition), nor
> is it totally different (because it becomes within the
> identical strain of karma-energy).[1]

---

of St. Paul. De Silva finds Humphrey's emphasis on the social and
existential dimensions of the self very significant as it echoes
biblical teaching, and says: "Attention should be drawn to Humphrey's
idea of spirit as a relationship and thus 'the philosophic basis
of the brotherhood of man'. This is a thoroughly biblical idea which
is a heritage he has brought into his new-found faith and system of
thinking " (The Problem of the Self, p. 61).

[1]The Problem of the Self, p. 45. De Silva is careful to dis-
tinguish the Buddhist notion of rebirth from the Hindu belief in a
transmigrating soul. The Buddhist explanation of the process of re-
birth or rebecoming is found in the theory of Dependent Origination
or Conditioned Co-production (Paticca-samuppāda). The principle of
this theory, found in the formula: "when this is, that is: this
arising, that arises; when this is not, that is not; this ceasing,

that ceases", does not deal with a theory of evolution or of the
origin of life. Rather it is concerned only with the process of
birth and death. It maintains that the objects of our experience
exist dependently and conditonally, therefore instead of simply
perishing away produces some effect or other. According to the law
of karma, which operates in its own field without the intervention
of an external agency or lawgiver, beings are born in various states
in accordance with their good or bad deeds. As long as the karmic
force survives, there is rebirth or rebecoming. The beginning of this
process of cause and effect which goes on ad infinitum cannot be de-
termined since it is impossible to say whence this life-flux was
encompassed by avidya (ignorance). However,when there is a complete
cessation of ignorance there will also be an ending of samsara (the
cycle of birth and death). See the Problem of the Self, pp. 37-48.

In a detailed explanation of how rebirth takes place De Silva
seeks to clearly delineate the Theravada viewpoint. The Theravadins
maintained that the doctrine of Anatta was consistent with the belief
in rebirth and attempted various explanations of their paradoxical
stance. Several similies (both modern and ancient) which aid in
clarifying the paradox na ca so na ca anno are given. According to
Nyanatiloka Mahathera's explanation of the Theravada view of rebirth,
nothing transmigrates from one life to the next. The father and mother
only provide the necessary physical material for the formation of the
embryonic body. Regarding the characteristic features, the tendencies
and faculties lying latent in the embryo, Nyanatiloka's explanation
of the Buddha's teaching is as follows:

> "The dying individual with his whole being convulsively
> clinging to life, at the very moment of his death, sends
> forth karmic energy which, like a flash of lightning,
> hits at a new mother's womb ready for conception. Thus,
> through the impinging of the karmic-energies on ovum and
> sperm, there arises, just as a precipitate, the so-called
> primary cell" (ibid., p. 40). Cf. Nyanatiloka Mahathera, Karma

and Rebirth (Colombo: Buddhist Publication Society, n.d.), p. 2.

The high authority of Buddhaghosa, the fifth-century
Buddhist commentator, is cited by De Silva to explain the Buddhist
belief "that as a rule the thought, volition, or desire which is
extremely strong during lifetime, becomes predominant at the point
of death and conditions the subsequent birth." In his explanation
of the last thought as the mental act of transitive causation, Buddha-
ghosa maintains that:

> "No elements of being transmigrate from the last existence
> into the present, nor do they appear in the present existence
> without causes in the past existence. For at the hour
> of death, the last conscious act is as a man who, to cross
> a ditch, swings himself over by a rope hung on a tree above
> him. Yet he does not alight, for, while the last conscious
> act dies away (and this is called 'passing'), another con-
> scious act arises in a new life, and this is called 'rebirth'
> or conception. But it is to be understood that the latter
> conscious act did not come into the present life from the
> previous life" (See The Problem of the Self, p. 42). Cf. The

The Theravada answer to the second question, as to whether there could be moral responsibility without an identifiable self or soul, was in the affirmative. Because there is an identity and continuity of process it was maintained that there is moral responsibility.[1]

The Problem of Self-identity and Nibbāna

If the doctrine of anattā is taken in all seriousness and in reality there is no immortal soul or self, the Theravadin must explain "What is it that attains Nibbāna?" Various answers have been posited depending on the meaning of Nibbāna, or the interpretation of the meaning of Nibbāna.[2] Most of these were paradoxes which did not settle the issue, and attempts to smuggle in some idea of a soul in a disguised form to save Buddhism from a nihilism are evident. The dilemma persists because the various solutions to the question of self-identity in Buddhism in relation to the doctrine of anattā,

---

Path of Purity, vol. 3 (Pali Text Society, 1931), p. 655.
   Anuruddha, the eleventh century writer, in the Abhidhamma-athasangaha (Compendium of Philosophy) proposes a concept of the "Stream of Being" in which the image of the "stream" provides a sort of identity of the self. However for Anuruddha the notion is based on the ground of continuity, and "the causal process consists in the individual transmission of potentiality." Thus De Silva concludes his summation of Anuruddha's thought: "Hence there is no conscious subject behind consciousness, no actor apart from action, no percipient apart from perception, no identity apart from continuity" (The Problem of the Self, pp. 43-44). Cf. Compendium of Philosophy, a translation of the "Abhidammatha Sangha" by Shwe Zan Aung; ed. C.A.F. Rhys Davids (London: Luzac and Co., 1963), p. 42.

[1]The Problem of the Self, p. 45.

[2]Ibid., pp. 63-74. Composed of the particles "Ni" (implying negation) and "Vāna" (craving), the Pali term Nibbāna (Sanskrit Nirvāna) basically meant the state attained when all forms of craving are extirpated, the karmic forces have ceased to operate, and thus ended the cycle of birth and death. Thus in its most basic definition Nibbana meant the extinction of desire. It is also explained in the

Buddha's famous Fire-sermon as the extinction of the fire of lust
(rāga), hatred (dosa), and delusion (moha). The idea of extinction is
also expressed in other passages without the use of the similie of fire
as the cessation of thirst (tanhā). Even suicide by the one who has
attain Arahathood is justified, as the study of the Venerable Channa's
suicide illustrates, if there is no craving or desire for the Five
Aggregates of Existence. For the Arahat there is no arising else-
where and Dukkha is ended forever. He has a sense of exquisite joy
in knowing that this is his last existence, and that when he divests
himself of his body he reaches Parinirvana--the dreamless peace
and happiness. Ibid., pp. 63-65.

Nibbāna has also been described as the experience of happiness
with the use of such synonyms as sivam (happiness), santam (peace),
and the best-known paramamsukham (highest bless). Nibbana is looked
upon as an experience of self-negation resulting from the extinction
of defilements. And the ensuing happiness is experienced even if
there is no "experiencing of self i.e., no sensation, because "that
there is no sensation is itself happiness." The two stages of
Nibbana are (1) Kilesa-parinibbāna--the five aggregates still remaining
after the extinction of all defilements and (2) khanda-parinibbāna--
which takes place with the death of the Arahat when the khandas also
become extinct. Thus the Buddha's answer to the question as to
whether the Arahat after death continues to live as a distinct in-
dividual was neither negative nor affirmative, it left Nibbāna an
ineffable paradox, since "The person who attained the goal is beyond
measure (na pamanam atthi)" Suttanipata 1075 (ibid., pp. 65-67).

Divergent views have been expressed by scholars on Nibbāna,
the most discussed subject in Buddhism. De Silva has dealt with four
of the major positions in the interpretation of the term. Nibbāna is
most often seen as annihilation or extinction since it is impossible
to harmonize the doctrine of anattā with any kind of survival. As
Paul Dahlke, a representative of this view observes, "Only in Buddhism
does the conception of freedom from pain remain purely a negative
thing and not a positive in disguise--heavenly bliss" (Ibid., p. 69).
Cf. Paul Dahlke, Buddhist Essays (London: Macmillan, 1908), p. 48.
As opposed to this nihilistic view which makes Buddhism a philosophy
of pessimism and despair, Nibbāna has been interpreted to mean a
positive ethical state. Thus in the Tripitaka a number of epithets
describing Nibbāna as "the harbour of refuge", "the cool cave", "the
supreme joy", etc., are found. Of special significance is the epithet
"Holy City" or "City of Nibbana" (Nibbāna Nagara), suggesting a kind
of fellowship. This has, however, not been interpreted by Buddhists
to mean that there will be some sort of personal existence in the
final state, they prefer to leave the matter a paradox because the
Buddha rejected both eternalism and nihilism. Since paradoxes
neither console the heart nor satisfy the mind some Buddhists have
leaned toward the Upanishadic ideal of Moksha with its notion of
absorption into the Absolute. This, however, is rejected as a heretical
view which has crept into Buddhism.

Since the Buddha denied immortality as a metaphysical concept
G. C. Dev has suggested that he accepted it as a moral achievement,
thus Nibbāna becomes "the philosophy of permanence in Buddha's
ethics," and signifies an "ethical immortality" (ibid. pp. 71-72).
Cf. G. C. Dev, Buddha the Humanist (Lahore: Paramount Publishers,

of <u>karma</u> and rebirth, and of <u>nibbana</u>, have tended either towards ni-

hilism or eternalism. Thus De Silva asks the pivotal question, "Can

we arrive at a concept of the self that can hold together both

poles of nihilism and eternalism without one contradicting the other?"[1]

Anattā-Pneuma--Non-egocentric Relationality

Having explicated the Buddhist view of man and defined the

problem of self-identity in the Christian-Buddhist context, De Silva

undertakes a careful analysis of the biblical view of man. He finds

that it is possible to speak of a Christian doctrine of <u>anattā</u>, which

is far more radical than the Buddhist one. Moreover, the biblical

perspective avoids the pitfalls of eternalism and nihilism and

"proposes a solution to the problem of the self in which the dialecti-

cal tension between these two extremes is brought into a synthesis by

the concept of the 'spirit'."[2] Taking into consideration that theories

1969), p. 149.   De Silva points out that, though in this view the
ethical element has the quality of immortality, it fails to tell us
who or what achieves immortality.

Finally De Silva takes note of Rune Johansson's attempt to
explain <u>Nirvana</u> as <u>Citta</u>, a state of personality. <u>Nibbāna</u> is described
as a state of personality, not consisting of "personal factors"
(<u>khandas</u>) but of <u>Citta</u> (mind). <u>Citta</u> is defined as "the core of per-
sonality, the centre of purposiveness, activity, continuity and
emotionality. It is not a 'soul' (attā) but it is the empirical
functional self" (ibid., pp. 72-73). Cf. Rune Johansson, <u>The Psychology</u>
<u>of Nirvana</u> London: Allen and Unwin, 1963   p. 30.   De Silva sees
Johansson's attempt to save Buddhism from nihilism as bordering on
the opposite error of eternalism. He concludes that the best we can
do is to leave the matter as a paradox, and observes that G. R.
Welbon after examining the various interpretations concluded that:
"It need be neither cowardice nor ignorance that forces us to say
finally that Nirvana's meanings are many and include both annihilation
and bliss, negation and affirmation, non-existence and existence "
(ibid., p. 74).Cf. G. R. Welbon, <u>The Buddhist Nirvana and Its Western</u>
<u>Interpreters</u> (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1968), p. 299.

[1]<u>The Problem of the Self</u>, p. 74.

[2]Ibid., p. 77.

about the self largely focus either on the <u>individual</u> man or on the

<u>social</u> man, he proposes that

> A plausible solution to the problem of self-identity
> could be found in the biblical insight that the true self
> is to be found, not in the isolated individual, but in
> personal existence constituted by inter-personal relation-
> ships; not in the egocentric I, as the <u>anattā</u> doctrine
> stresses, but in the mutuality of the I and the Thou, which
> the term <u>pneuma</u> signifies. It is in the understanding of
> man as <u>anattā-pneuma</u> (non-egocentric relationality) that
> one should seek a solution to the problem of the self.[1]

In the Christian-Buddhist concept of <u>Anattā-Pneuma</u> we have what

may be considered the most significant original contribution by

De Silva. We now carefully trace the development of this idea and

its implications since it is the central concept that undergirds and

informs his dialogical theology.

The Biblical View of Man: Psyche-Sarx and Nāma-Rūpa

De Silva opens his argument for the Christian-Buddhist concept

of <u>Anattā-Pneuma</u> with an exposition of the biblical view of man.

He sees fundamental agreement between the Buddhist doctrine of <u>anattā</u>

and biblical theology, thus he finds it possible to state the biblical

view of man employing Buddhist categories of thought:

> Just as in Buddhism man is a unity of <u>nāma-rūpa</u>, so
> in the New Testament man is a unity of <u>psyche-sarx</u>; just
> as Buddhism says that there is no soul entity within the
> nāma-rūpa complex, so the Bible leaves no room for a
> notion of an immortal soul within the <u>psyche-sarx</u> unity
> of man. Thus we could, in a sense, speak of the biblical
> doctrine of <u>anattā</u>. We could put the matter thus:
> psychosomatic creatureliness is <u>anattā</u> (i.e., soulless
> and substanceless).[2]

---

[1] Ibid., p. 74.

[2] Ibid., p. 84. By marshalling the views of biblical scholars

to reject the dichotomous concept of man, emphasizing man's creature-
liness, and examining significant biblical terms, De Silva argues
that the Bible leaves no room for the notion of an immortal soul.
The Bible is said to present a synthetic view of the self, man is a
unity of soul, body, flesh, mind, etc., man must be saved in his en-
tirety since God created man entire, as such the notion of an im-
mortal soul as found in Greek and Hindu thought is not to be found
in the Bible.

Christian theologians have acknowledged this contention.
A.R. Johnson draws attention to the synthetic, holistic nature of
Hebraic thinking, which is characterised by "the grasping of totality."
Karl Barth makes an earnest protest that the anthropology marked by
a separation of the soul over the body is not the Christian picture,
as it is one which "cannot possibly do justice to the biblical view
and concept of man." Paul Tillich laments that large sections of
Protestant thought have replaced the symbol of the resurrection with
the symbol of immortality in its "non-Christian pseudo-Platonic form
of the continuation of the temporal life of an individual after death
with a body." He therefore calls upon Christians to reject this
view of immortality, "for participation in life eternal is not 'life
hereafter.' Neither is it a natural quality of the soul" (ibid., pp.
75-77). Cf. A.R. Johnson, The Vitality of the Individual in the Thought
of Ancient Israel (Cardiff: University of Wales Press, 1964), pp. 1-2;
Karl Barth, Church Dogmatics, 13 vols. (Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark,
1961), 3, pt. 2:382; Paul Tillich, Systematic Theology, 3 vols.
(London: Nisbet, 1964), 3:437).

We have already noted De Silva's emphasis on the creature-
liness of man in his exposition of the doctrine of creatio ex nihilo.
See above, pp. 134-136. This doctrine implying the impermanence
(anicca) of all things apart from the creator who sustains them by the
power of his word, underscores man's anattaness, i.e., the universal
characteristic of creaturely being, which leaves no room at all for
the notion of eternalism. That the biblical view of the unity of the
self is a protection against eternalism (sassataditthi) is seen in
the Hebrew understanding of the term nephesh. This term which has been
translated as "soul" cannot designate an immortal soul because at death
the nephesh ceases to exist (Gen 35:18; Job 14:22; Eccl 12:7).
Norman Snaith warns that if preachers use Gen 2:7 to refer to an im-
mortal soul they must on the basis of Gen 2:19 acknowledge that
animals too have immortal souls. And as H. Wheeler Robinson points
out, "The Hebrew idea of personality is an animated body, not an in-
corporated soul" (ibid., pp. 77-79). Cf. Norman Snaith, "Heart and
Soul and Spirit," Preachers' Quarterly 3 (1957) 21; and, H. Wheeler
Robinson, Religious Ideas of the Old Testament (London: Epworth Press,
1947), p. 83.

The influence of the Greek notion of the soul on the Wisdom
literature of the inter-testamental period is evident. De Silva notes
positive hints of a pre-existent immortal soul that goes to Hades in
the Wisdom of Solomon. However Jewish thought during this period for
the most part looked upon immortality as essentially a gift of God
rather than belonging to the intrinsic nature of man. The apocryphal

books Maccabees, Tobit, Judith,and Ecclesiasticus preserve the Hebrew usage of nephesh corresponding to the New Testament usage of psyche, which continues to maintain the same unitary concept of man.

In the study of the uses of the term psyche, De Silva concludes that nowhere in the New Testament is it conceived as existing in a bodiless state. Like nephesh, it is used in the sense of life (Rom 11:3, 16:4), vitality or 'aliveness', and is contrasted with apsychos, a generic term for all inanimate objects (I Cor. 14:7). Scripture also makes it clear that this is only "natural life" as distinct from "spiritual life" (1 Cor 15:54; cf. Rom 16:4; Phil 2: 30; 1 Thess 2:8; and 2 Cor 1:23). Psyche is also used in the psychological sense as the seat of feeling, thought, and will (Matt 26:38; Luke 1:46; John 12:27; Luke 12:19; 2 Cor 1:23; 1 Thess 2:8; Eph 6:6; Col 3:23; and Phil 1:27). In Rom 13:1 psyche refers to the whole person, and in Rom 2:9 for the whole person as capable of sinning. In 1 Cor 2:14-15 and 15:42-50 Paul uses psychikos to describe the "natural" or "unspiritual" man as opposed to the spiritual man. In instances where psyche seems to receive a heightened meaning (Heb 6:19; 1 Pet 1:22 and 2:11,25) and where the salvation of the psyche is spoken of (Heb 10:39; Jas 1:21; 1 Pet 1:9), De Silva finds the principle of unity preserved in every instance, and nothing in this usage to suggest that psyche is immortal. Ibid., pp. 80-82.

Finally De Silva takes note of instances suggestive of a dichotomy or trichotomy, such as Matt 10:28 and 1 Thess 5:23, and a few passages where one could possibly trace some influence of the Greek idea of immortality, such as 2 Cor 5:1-5; Phil 1:21-23, and 3:8-10. Of the latter he notes that the word psyche does not appear at all in these passages. On Matt 10:28 he quotes Oscar Cullmann"s comment on this verse that the reference to "soul" and "body" should be understood in relation to the resurrection, that man should "fear God, who is able to give you over completely to death; to wit, when he does not resurrect you to life." Cullmann's emphasis is that since the soul can be killed and cannot remain without a body, "The soul is not immortal. There must be a resurrection for both; since the Fall the whole man is 'sown corruptible'." W.D. Stacey's comment on 1 Thess 5:23 that Paul is emphasizing the entirety of the preservation of man explains for De Silva the holistic view of man in the New Testament, "The whole man is preserved, and spirit, and soul, and body, simply underline the inclusiveness of the conception. Man in every aspect, man in his wholeness, is to be preserved." The New Testament in particular and the Bible as whole rejects the Greek idea of the soul and holds to the Hebraic conception of man, thus De Silva concludes, "Paul uses a series of terms in his anthropology, such as soma, sarx, nous, psyche and pneuma, which only suggest the diversity of aspect within the intrinsic unity of man" (Ibid., pp. 82-84).Cf. Oscar Cullmann, Immortality of the Soul and Resurrection of the Dead (New York: Macmillan, 1958). pp. 36-37; and W.D. Stacey, The Pauline View of Man, in Relation to Its Judaic and Hellenistic Background (London: Macmillan, 1956), p. 123).

Just as the Buddha declared in his second sermon that none of the aggregates (nor the sum of them) constituted the self or the soul, so too biblical teaching maintains that there is no soul-entity in any of the component parts, nor does the psychophysical unity which results when these parts are put together constitute a person as an independent self-existent being. The Bible uses the striking metaphors of dust (Gen 2:7; 3:19; Isa 40:6; Ps 49:12,20), the shadow (Ps 39:5-6), and the mist (Jas 4:14) to teach that creatureliness apart from the spirit of God is anatta. De Silva holds that the biblical doctrine of anatta is far more radical for two reasons. Firstly, though Buddhism denies the self, it maintains that man has an intrinsic capability to work out his own salvation, though man is anatta he is his own saviour (Dhamma-pada 160,165), and he alone can do something to save himself. In contrast, in Christianity man is saved by grace and not self-effort. Secondly, the implication of the Buddhist theory of karma and rebirth is that "there is 'something' within man, either his karma or an operative mental or psychic force (vinnana) which has the power to cause or perpetuate life after death in 'persons' or momentary 'selves'."
The Bible, on the contrary, leaves no room to generate life beyond the grave, it is only by the power of God that man can inherit eternal life. Thus De Silva concludes that "when the Bible says 'no' to eternalism it says so without any reserve."[1]

Man in the Image of God-
Man as "Spirit"-Pneuma

Even as it says "no" to eternalism the Bible also rejects nihilism with the same commitment in the doctrine that man is created in the

---

[1]Ibid., p. 85.

image of God. Here the word _created_ indicates man's creatureliness, and the stress on the word _image_ indicates a relationship between man and God. The crucial word describing this relationship is "spirit", i.e., _pneuma_ in the New Testament and _ruach_ in the Old. Thus De Silva sees the need to carefully consider and rightly understand the meaning of "spirit" because it is at this point that the fundamental difference between the Buddhist and Christian views is found. In his search for a Christian doctrine of _anattā_ which does not yield to nihilism and which affirms authentic selfhood without yielding to eternalism, De Silva feels that "the term 'spirit' functions descriptively as the central core concept of the authentic 'self', which exists only in relationship." Thus for him it is a theological necessity for the solution of the problem to undertake "a biblically-based new assessment of the meaning of 'spirit', as the personal-communal dimension of man."[1]

In his discussion of _ruach_ and _pnuema_, De Silva notes that 'spirit' has to do with the human spirit as well as the Divine Spirit, since the two are implicates of each other. In the New Testament the distinction is made by using the definite article when denoting the Divine Person. Both _ruach_ and _pneuma_ indicate that the image of God lies not in the human structure, but in the relationship. In the Bible both _ruach_ and _pneuma_ are "God-given" and not "man-produced," and in no way suggestive of the Hindu notion of man's oneness or identity with God. The biblical emphasis that God is Spirit and man is flesh (Gen 6:1-4) indicates that man can live only if God gives him

----

[1]Ibid., p. 5.

life, and he dies when God withdraws his spirit (Ps 104:29-30).

Immortality is not man's natural possession, "the terms image and

ruach mean the possibility of fulfillment in actuality, what is beyond

human potentiality through relation to the Eternal (the Amata)."[1]

W. D. Stacey's analysis of pneuma is found particularly helpful

by De Silva for elucidating his position. Stacey defines the six

senses in which pneuma is used in the Pauline Corpus and warns against

confusing God and the natural spirit of man, "... THE SPIRIT OF MAN

WAS ENERGIZED BY THE SPIRIT, BUT THE HUMAN SPIRIT NEVER ROSE TO SHARE

THE DIVINE NATURE. THERE IS FELLOWSHIP AND COMMUNION, BUT NOT

ABSORPTION" (capitals given by De Silva).[2]

Though the natural pneuma is no different from the psychē, and

---

[1] Ibid., p. 87. The nature of this relationship between God and man is described in the Old Testament by the term ruach, which according to Reinhold Niebuhr gradually becomes "the more specific designation of man's relation to God, in distinction to nephesh which achieves a connotation identical with soul or psychē, or the life principle in man" (cf. Nature and Destiny of Man [London: Nisbet, 1943], p. 162). And as Norman Snaith has pointed out, "A man can control his nephesh but it is the ruach which controls him" (cf. The Distinctive Ideas of the Old Testament [London: Epworth Press, 1947], p. 150).

[2] Ibid., p. 88. Cf. W. D. Stacey, The Pauline View of Man, p.133 The six senses in which Stacey distinguishes pneuma are: (1) as applied to the Divine -- to God, to the Holy Spirit and to the Spirit of Christ; (2) as a divine influence in the life of believers, creating in them "spiritual gifts"; (3) as applied to "seducing spirits" in opposition to the Divine Spirit; (4) as the evil influence which ensued from the disobedient spirits; (5) as a purely Christian spirit created in the believer which enables him to hold communion with God because spirit with spirit can meet; (6) as "the natural possession of every man, which is of itself neither good nor bad, and is not easily distinguished from psychē." Stacey's warning is that sense five,which deals with the spirit of man as it related to God's spirit, should not be confused with six, the natural spirit of man which is mortal, morally indifferent,and liable to corruption. Ibid., pp. 128-9, 142.

though _pneuma_ (like _nephesh_ and _psychē_) connotes aliveness as opposed to the inanimate, for De Silva the distinctive difference between them is that while _psychē_ is the life that man shares with the animals, _pneuma_ is the life which man only can live. _Psychē_ is the self estranged from God, what Paul calls "the carnal self," and ends in death. Though opposed to each other _psychē_ and _pneuma_ are also interrelated in some passages (Isa 26:9; Luke 1:46-47; Phil 1:27), the _psychē_ can be transformed by _pneuma_ into the image of God in Christ (2 Cor 3:8), thus "we could say that _pneuma_ is _psychē_--the indivisible whole-- raised to a new dimension of being by the power of the Spirit." With this understanding of the spirit as a dimension of life, and of the relation of the Divine Spirit to the human spirit, and that man is a creature with the possiblity of non-being as well as a creature in the "image of God", De Silva sums up his view of man:

> Man is a unity of creatureliness and God-likeness; in other words, a unity of _anatta_ and _pneuma_. The nature of man can thus be described as _anatta-pneuma_. _Anatta_ indicates man's organic nature; the fact that within the psycho-physical organism there is no permanent immortal entity and that, as such, man is subject to _dukkha_ and _anicca_. _Pneuma_ indicates that extra dimension of being which makes man more than just a physical organism or a psychosomatic complex. _Pneuma_ is not another substance or a thing (the 'thinking thing', _res cogita_); it is rather the dynamic quality which makes man a person. _Anatta-pneuma_ signifies the self-empty but spirit-full life.[1]

The Personal-Communal Structure of "Spirit"

We now come to what De Silva considers to be the real point of difference between the Buddhist and Christian concept of man, viz.,

---

[1] _The Problem of the Self_, p. 89

that according to the Bible the authentic "self" can exist only <u>in</u> <u>relationship</u>. He has pointed out the difficulties of Buddhism in arriving at a satisfactory concept of identity and continuity of the self which steers clear of the extremes of eternalism and nihilism because of its treatment of man from a purely individualistic stand-point. He proposes therefore that from the biblical point of view, a "solution to the problem should be sought within the framework of the personal-communal nature of the self, in which the self emerges as a recognisable identity."[1]

-----

[1] Ibid., p. 96. De Silva lays the groundwork for the development of this theme by following Tillich closely in the use of the term "dimension" to describe the various forms of life which while preserving distinction maintains a unity without contradiction. Thus the New Testament term "spirit" (pneuma) applies to the individual man as the authentic self, as well as to "the Divine Spirit as the ground of being and the power that creates community and posits the self." It is also seen as "the principle in which all things cohere" and "an all-inclusive totality" in which distinction is maintained. This is not to suppose that the spirit in man is an ephemeral form of the Divine Spirit, rather as Oliver Quick points out, Spirit "represents an invasive rather than a pervasive power" (ibid., pp. 90-92).Cf. O. C. Quick, <u>Doctrines of the Creed</u> (London: Nisbet, 1938),p. 275.
    Spirit is seen as constituting personality. It is the life-creating breath of God, "the power of animation", "God's dynamic creative activity" manifest in persons. Citing Kierkegaard's explanation that "the self is grounded transparently in the power which posited it," De Silva indicates that the self is a relation, and that "Spirit is the dimension in which personality actualises itself, not as a separate entity, but as an identity within a unity" (ibid., pp. 92-93).Cf. Søren Kierkegaard, <u>Fear and Trembling, Sickness unto Death</u>, tr. Walter Lowrie (New York: Doubleday, 1954), p. 146. The next dimension of spirit "is the communal dimension of life in which a person as a person emerges in community." The New Testament testifies that man is not an isolated individual but a person whose existence is found in the relation of persons, a relation that is constituted by the Spirit. Thus the Holy Spirit becomes the spirit of the "community," and the dimension of the life of the church as the body of Christ (1 Cor 12:13), the source of its unity (Eph 4:3), the fellowship in which Jew and Gentile find communion in God, and the life of the Church consisting of persons in the Spirit (Eph 4:4).
    De Silva has cited the illustration of the mother-child relationship used by John Macmurray to point out that "Personality is mutual in

The point that authentic being is found in participation, and that in this relationship one goes beyond oneself, is best expressed for De Silva by Martin Buber who refers to the aggregate as being "built up of living units of relation."[1] In Buddhism too there is the comparable notion of the self being build up by the five factors which "are in a sense units of relation." Thus De Silva suggests that sarx, psychē, sōma, pneuma, etc., are also relational terms indicating the truth that man is a communal being. Since to be is to be related authentic being is found in relationship, or as Buber put it, "I came into being over against the thou: all life is of the nature of encounter,"[2]

---

its very being," because, "self only exists in the communion of selves" (Ibid., pp. 93-95).Cf. John Macmurray, Persons in Relation (London : Faber, 1961), p. 17.

The final dimension De Silva explores is that of the spirit as the category of self-transcendence. He describes the main character of Spirit as "procession" since the Spirit of truth proceeds (ekporeuetai) from the Father (John 15:26), and using the word exience (coined by John Macquarrie to bring out the dynamic character of spirit as ex-sistence), which means "going out," he identifies self-transcendence as the essential characteristic of the spirit. It is the Spirit who enables man who cannot transcend himself in the personal-communal relationship to reach beyond himself to the Other: "The Spirit is the Unconditioned in the conditioned driving the conditioned beyond itself; it is the Uncreated in the created, grasping and drawing the created out of itself." Thus De Silva concludes that it is because of the relation to the Other that it is possible for man to transcend the differentiated self and cease to be an ego entity. It opens the way to authentic selfhood, because "selfhood is always being fulfilled by being transcended. It is by transcending the self that the ego is negated and the authentic self is affirmed" (ibid., pp. 95-96).Cf. John Macquarrie, Paths in Spirituality (London:SCM Press, 1972), p. 45.

[1]The Problem of the Self, pp. 97-98. Cf. Martin Buber, Between Man and Man, tr. R. G. Smith (London: Kegan Paul, 1947), p. 144.

[2]Ibid., p. 98. Cf. Martin Buber, I and Thou, tr. R. G. Smith (Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1937), p. 18.

All existence is co-existence, in Kenneth Cragg's words, "One cannot be without interbeing."[1] This does not dispense with self-awareness, which is one of the essential marks of the authentic self, because "self-awareness is a simultaneous experience of self-relatedness." Thus personality is neither lost nor absorbed in communion, neither can it be abstracted from communion without the peril of being completely lost. Thus the paradox of the biblical understanding of the communal dimension of pneuma is that while it is logically possible to become anattā in the nihilistic sense of the word if one severed all relationships, "on the other hand one could lose oneself without annihilating the self in a relationship which takes one beyond oneself."[2]

Anattā-Pneuma--Three Dimensions

De Silva is now ready to sum up the interrelation between the distinctive Buddhist concept of anattā and the distinctive Christian concept of pneuma. He sees three dimensions of mutual relation in these concepts -- the psycho-physical, the ethico-social, and the transcendental.

In the psycho-physical or nāma-rūpa dimension, Theravada Buddhism is unique because of its rejection of the atta, eternal self or soul, or any permanent entity within man. Christian theology can be greatly enriched by absorbing the doctrine of anattā because it is a corrective to the wrong notion of an immortal soul that has invaded popular

---

[1]Ibid., cf. Kenneth Cragg, Christianity in World Perspective (London: Lutterworth Press, 1969), p. 150.

[2]Ibid., p. 99.

Christian thinking. On the other hand the biblical view of pneuma can

enrich Buddhism since it goes beyond the pancakkhandha analysis (which

seems to reduce man to a psychosomatic organism) and thus contributes

to a fuller understanding of the concept of man:

> Pneuma points to a dimension of reality which cannot
> be exhausted by a scientific or psychological analysis
> of finite life, it signifies that extra dimension of
> finite life which is constitutive of authentic being which
> makes a person more than a bundle of aggregates or merely
> a psycho-physical organism or an unusually complex animal.
> Pneuma is not some kind of a 'thing' or a substance paral-
> lel to the substance of physical entities; it is a dynamic
> quality of being which lifts man above finite existence.[1]

In the ethico-social dimension too, anattā and pneuma complement

each other. The significance of the anattā doctrine here is its em-

phasis on non-attachment, particularly to the false notion of the

soul which is the root cause of all evil. Buddhism, unlike other

religions which are also concerned with relinquishing the self, "stands

unique in its ethical discipline designed to root out everything that

inflames the self." But since this is done from a purely individual-

istic point of view which can lead to isolation and a socially irrele-

vant ethic, De Silva proposes that pneuma, which affirms the social

dimension, provides the balance that leads to authentic being which is

achieved only in relation. But love, which is the basis of the re-

lationship, and is capable of negating exclusive individuality and

fulfilling personality, stands in need of anattā: "If one is not dis-

ciplined in non-attachment and forgets the ideal of self-obliteration,

one will turn love and interpersonal relationship into a selfish game.

Therefore anattā, with its stress on non-attachment, will always be a

---

[1] Ibid., p. 102.

safeguard against such a danger."[1]

De Silva has shown the complementarity and distinctiveness of anattā and pneuma at several points in the transcendental dimension. Though man is anattā, the fact that he is aware of his anattāness and is able to evaluate the flux in which he is involved, indicates that "there is a transcendental quality in man which enables him to rise above his finite existence and affirm the Transcendent."[2] However, anattā understood in its final depth, affirms that this transcendental quality is not found in man or derived from existence. It is to be found in man's relation to God, the sense of the transcendent is derived from the Transcendent. De Silva therefore proposes that the Christian concept of transcendence in pneuma enables us to understand the paradox of transcendence in the Buddhist concept of Nirvāna. In Nirvāna the realization of emptiness implied in anattā is fulfilled, the self has been transcended because supreme bliss is experienced when man is totally emptied of self, yet Buddhism stresses this does not mean annihilation. The question De Silva has sought to answer in the Anattā-Pneuma concept may well be posed - - "How does the concept of pneuma enable us to understand this paradox in a Christian-Buddhist concept of man?" He answers:

> The pneuma concept provides one way of understanding it.
> Pneuma signifies that capacity for transcending oneself,
> of going out of oneself and beyond oneself, of losing one-
> self in communion with Reality: The more a person goes
> beyond himself, the more is the spiritual dimension of his

---

[1]Ibid.

[2]"Emergent Theology," p. 227.

life deepened, the more he becomes a true person. In transcending oneself one ceases to be a self-contained entity; but self-hood is always being fulfilled by being transcended. Pneuma signifies communion. The underlying principle is that communion differentiates by negating exclusive individuality and by perfecting personality. Personal identity will be retained in a complete harmony without that identity being expressed in the exclusiveness of self-contained individuality.[1]

Thus Anatta-Pneuma signifying non-egocentric relationality, or egoless mutuality is the essence of the nature of man.

Tilakkhana and Salvation in Jesus Christ

In the Tilakkhana analytic De Silva has found an effective basis for a constructive dialogue in setting forth "what it means to 'confess Jesus Christ as God and Saviour' when this proclamation is made to Buddhists."[2] Not only does he find it possible for Christianity like Buddhism to characterize man's existential predicament in terms of anicca, dukkha, and anatta, he also contends "that in Christ one finds the perfect solution to these problems."[3] At the Consultation on Buddhist-Christian Encounter in Rangoon in 1966 he presented a paper in which he posited Jesus Christ as the most complete answer to man's tragic condition marked by Tilakkhana.[4] In Psalms 90, a biblical passage in which the Tilakkhana analytic is paralleled, the psalmist who has a vision beyond the emptiness of life to the glory of

---

[1]The Problem of the Self, p. 103.

[2]"Good News of Salvation," p. 448.

[3]Ibid., p. 449.

[4]"The Christian Solution to the Problem of Man in Relation to Buddhism," p. 67.

God prays, "Let thy works be manifest to thy servants and thy
glorious power to thy children" (vs. 16). It is a prayer for deliver-
ance from the transitoriness, suffering, and insubstantiality of life,
which "is fulfilled in Christ in whom God subjected Himself to the
transience, misery and emptiness of the human situation, in order
to conquer these negativities of life and make their opposites avail-
able to mankind."[1] The meaning of Christ and his credibility as
saviour is therefore best communicated to the Buddhist mind in terms
of Tilakkhana.

Anatta and Man's Need of a Saviour

To bring home man's need of a saviour to the Buddhist, the
point of contact chosen by De Silva is the doctrine of Anatta. The
doctrine is utilized to distinguish the Christian and Buddhist so-
teriologies:

> The Bible knows no soul theory at all. In fact it would
> not be wrong to say that the Bible has an Anatta doctrine
> which is far more radical than the Buddhist doctrine.
> While Buddhism says that man is Anatta, it insists at the
> same time, rather paradoxically, that man must save
> himself by his own efforts; but Christianity would say
> that man by himself is Anatta and as such cannot save
> himself.[2]

---

[1]"Good News of Salvation," pp. 449-450.

[2]Bauddha Jatika Balavegaya, p. 25. De Silva describes Buddhist
soteriology as "anthropocentric or homocentric," since "Man is res-
ponsible for the predicament in which he is, and the whole responsibi-
lity of deliverance is his alone" (The Problem of the Self, p. 34).
According to the Buddhist doctrine of salvation the ultimate aim of
the Buddhist is to seek liberation for himself from samsāric existence,
i.e., to escape the process of repetitive "rebecoming" through endless
ages, and enter into Nirvāna. Nirvāna (a subjective state that can
only be known through experience) is the ultimate goal to which
Buddhist morality is directed. De Silva's dialogue, however, is with
the ordinary religiously minded Buddhist, whose "aim is to escape

Though both Buddhism and biblical Christianity are agreed
that the psychosomatic entity called man has no soul entity within
it, it is the Bible that carries <u>Anattā</u> to its logical conclusion
by teaching that man is nothing by himself and can do nothing by him-
self about his salvation. Since <u>Anattā</u> is the clinching argument for
man's need of a saviour, it constitutes "one of the deepest dilemmas
for Buddhism." De Silva reveals the contradiction in the Buddhist
position by raising the question, "What is the self that denies the
self and at the same time asserts that it alone can save the self?"
The inescapable answer is that man stands in need of saving grace.[1]

Three reasons are given in answer to the question, "Why cannot
man save himself?"

"<u>Firstly, man cannot save himself, because as implied in the
Buddhist doctrine of anatta, man has no power in himself sufficient
for salvation.</u>"[2] According to the doctrine of <u>Anattā</u>, though there
is a "being" when the five <u>khandas</u> (aggregates) are in combination
there is no abiding personality, the so called person or self is an
illusion.[3]

---

misery in this world or in one of the hells, and attain to one of the
heavens by performing meritorious deeds." See "Good News of Salvation,"
p. 448.

[1]"Good News of Salvation," pp. 450-451.

[2]<u>Why Can't I Save Myself</u>, p. 5.

[3]Ibid., p. 6. This idea is expressed in Buddhaghosa's <u>Visuddhi
Magga</u> xvi as follows:
      Mere suffering exists, no sufferer is found;
      The deeds are, but no doer of the deeds is there.
      Nirvana is, but not the man that enters it.
      The path is, but no traveller on it is seen.

However, persisting questions (What is the self that denies the self? If there is no self, what does self-effort mean?) led some to argue that the Buddha did not deny the self absolutely. Though strict orthodox Buddhists may differ, a widely prevailing notion was that what the Buddha denied was the unauthentic (olarika) self. He did not explain what the true self was because his chief concern was with ethics not metaphysics, i.e., with enabling human beings to get rid of the olarika self and be liberated. According to Christian teaching and experience also man is anattā, and it is imperative for the Christian to say to himself, "I am anattā" and deny his olarika self if he is to follow Christist.[1] Man's creation in the imago dei, relates him to God.

> If this relationship is distorted by selfishness or tanha, man ceases to be the authentic self. He will become an olarika self. In that sense he is anatta; he is not the true self. If man breaks this relationship completely he will cease to be. . . . God alone is immortal and it is only in relation to Him that man can become immortal. All that man is and has is, like the image which is dependent on the object, derived from God.[2]

---

[1] Ibid., pp. 7-8. Not only does the Bible express the idea that man in himself is 'nothing' with striking metaphors of man as dust, mist and shadow, there is also the recognition of this fact in the Christian's experience. Thus De Silva cites several examples beginning with the statement of the anonymous writer of the mystical work Theologica Germanica: "Man of himself and his own, is nothing, has nothing, can do and is capable of nothing, but only infirmity, evil and wickedness." Isaac Pennington acknowledged, "I am a worm, I am poor, I am nothing in myself." And William Barclay commenting on Jesus' call to deny oneself and take up one's own cross and follow him (Luke 9:23), said: If we are to follow Jesus we must obliterate self and forget that self exists." (Daily Study Bible: The Gospel of Luke [Edinburgh: Saint Andrew Press, 1957], p. 122). Thus in communicating man's inability to save himself by his own effort, De Silva finds that Anattā is a point of contact that Christianity in Sri Lanka "can lay hold on with great advantage, to make the Christian message intelligible and forceful in the environment in which Christians live" (ibid., pp. 7-9).

[2] Ibid., p. 9.

"Secondly, man cannot save himself because self-saving devices result in making a person more and more self centred."[1] The futility of self-saving devices which try to conquer the self by the power of the self is brought out in the conversation between Nigrodha the ascetic and the Buddha recorded in the Udumbarika Sihanada Suttanta of the Digha Nikaya.[2] The conversation reveals that Nigrodha and his companions were ascetics of the extreme type whose self-mortifying austerities resulted in a calculated goodness. It becomes impossible for a man to save himself by asceticism because the restriction and repression of the self, or desire, or evil by self-effort only results in their reappearance in another form. Selfishness is at the root of man's nature, and his best deeds are vitiated by it. The man who resorts to self-saving devices becomes hypocritical, "and the merit in which he puts his trust would be a kind of calculating goodness, and religion to him would be a form of self-serving and a source of pride."[3]

"Thirdly, man cannot save himself, because the way of works, or punya karma, as a self-saving device gives no assurance of salvation."[4] The lesson that good works fail to give the assurance of the goal which they are believed to ensure is illustrated in a story about King Dutugemunu recorded in the Mahavamsa. When an account of the unparalleled meritorious deeds done by the king has been read he responds:

---

[1] Ibid., p. 10.

[2] Why Can't I Save Myself, pp. 11-13.

[3] Ibid.p. 13.

[4] Ibid.

"But all this giving while that I reigned, rejoices not my heart; only the two gifts that I gave, without care for my life, the while I was in adversity, those gladden my heart."[1] Thus good deeds done with the motive of gaining merits become selfish deeds, and the accumulation of merit does not ensure salvation.

Thus Buddhism, De Silva maintains, has rightly diagnosed that self is man's problem, and the Buddhist solution is that man must conquer the self by realizing his emptiness or _anatta_ nature. For the Christian it is impossible to conquer to self by relying on the self, therefore, "He must turn his attention away from self. He must cease to rely on himself and turn to a source outside himself. And outside himself he needs a power greater than his own to save him."[2]

Having dealt with man's inability to save himself, De Silva goes on to show that the need of a saviour has found expression in Buddhist faith in numerous ways. In spite of the claims of doctrinaire Buddhists, for the vast majority of lay Buddhists in Sri Lanka the Buddha is not merely a dead teacher but a living saviour who is able to confer blessings on mankind. The history of Buddhism shows that "while with the top of their heads Buddhists deny the need of a saviour, in their hearts they yearn for someone like Jesus Christ, a loving, humble, suffering and forgiving Saviour."[3] Early Buddhists yearning for an object of worship began by venerating the Buddha as a perfect saint and paying homage to his relics. This in turn led to actual

---

[1]Ibid., p. 15.

[2]Ibid., p. 16.

[3]"Good News of Salvation," p. 451.

worship though the Buddha had claimed no divinity for himself. Today Sri Lankan Buddhists fulfill the need of a savior by paying homage to modern adaptations of the early Buddhist counterparts of Hindu gods, e.g., Manjusiri, Avalokitesvara, and Padmapani. They look forward to Maitreya, the Buddha-elect who is destined to save the world. G. P. Malalasekera's remarks from World Buddhism of January 1960, explaining the Buddhist attitude to prayer, are cited. He speaks of the "living presence of the Master" and says the Buddha is "unrivalled as a guide and friend to those who seek his guidance." While stating that for the devotee, the Vihara (a Buddhist retreat or monastery) is where the Buddha lives, Malalasekera qualifies this statement by saying that the devotee makes offerings "to someone who to him is yet alive in that the Buddha's teachings are alive."[1] Thus for De Silva, Buddhist history and the existential affirmations by which the Buddhist actually lives today prove that man's heart cries out for a savior.

The Credibility of Christ as Savior

We have seen that De Silva describes man's lostness in terms of Anatta, Dukkha, and Anicca. He has also shown that if these three negativities of finite existence are understood in their final depth

---

[1] Ibid. De Silva has also traced the rise of the Mahayana doctrine of grace as opposed to self-salvation. In Japanese Jiriki (the way of salvation by self-power) is contrasted with Tariki (the way of salvation by "other help"), and the belief "that man can be saved only by the grace of Amida through faith in him" closely parallels Christian belief in Christ. Japanese Buddhists adapting the Christian hymn sing, "Buddha loves me this I know; for the Sutra tells me so." Since Mahayana Buddhists do not claim any historicity for Amida Buddha, De Silva concludes that "he is the fragmentary actualization of the universal need for a saviour in a symbolic form. Or in other words, He is the personification of man's need for a saviour" (Why Can't I Save Myself, pp. 18-21).

and meaning salvation has to be sought outside of man and his existence.
Through the Dharma-Logos point of contact, the use of the bodhisatva
concept, and an exposition of the deep significance of kenotic Chris-
tology in terms of Tilakkhana, he has sought to establish the credi-
bility of Christ as Saviour in the Buddhist mind.

Christ as Bodhisatva and Dharma-Logos

Jesus Christ is presented as the historical actualization of
the ideal Bodhisatva who identifies with the Anatta, Dukkha, and Anicca
of human existence to bear the karma of humanity. For De Silva the
deep truth that the Saviour must identify himself with the sinner is
apprehended in the Bodhisatva ideal in Buddhism, in which the Bodhisatva
is believed to take different bodily forms in order to be able to
save:

> A Bodhisatva resolves: I take myself the burden of all
> suffering I am resolved to do so, I will endure it. . .
> I must rescue all these things from the stream of Samsara,
> which is difficult to cross. . . I myself must grapple with
> the whole mass of suffering of all beings. To the limit of
> my endurance I will experience in all the states of woe,
> found in my world system: all the abodes of suffering!
> This truth apprehended in Buddhism as an ideal and symbolized
> in the figure of the Bodhisatvas who were, to use Edward
> Conze's words "productions of the mind and without historical
> or factual basis" (Buddhism p. 150) was actualised in Jesus
> Christ within historical existence. In practically all re-
> ligions there are approximations to this ideal e.g. Avataras
> in Hinduism and Bodhisatvas in Buddhism, but the Christ event
> is the only historical actualization of this ideal.[1]

---

[1]"The Christian Solution to the Problem of Man," p. 67. The
depiction of Christ as a Bodhisatva seems to be an attempt to dialogue
with the average lay Buddhist (whose beliefs are strongly influenced
by Mahayana concepts) rather than the orthodox Theravadin. The
Bodhisatva in the Theravada view means an aspirant for Buddhahood, and
in original Pali Buddhism the term was used more or less exclusively
to designate the Buddha prior to his Enlightenment. A. G. S. Kariya-
wasam says that in the Pali canon the Bodhisatvas are treated as
"'larval forms' of the Buddha", or "a rare type of man appearing at a

Man is saved by Christ's victory over the negativities of human existence. By his incarnation Christ identified himself completely with man's tragic existence, while at the same time maintaining a permanent unity with God. This two-fold participation, in existence, and with the Eternal, "is the power which overcomes the negativities of existence and that power is available for man who participates in Christ."[1]

In communicating Jesus as the perfect solution to the problems of Tilakkhana, De Silva uses a combination of the Johanine and Pauline ways of presenting Christ as found in the prologue to John's Gospel and in Phillipians 2. Because of the close resemblance between the logos of John's Gospel and dharma of the Buddhist scriptures, he sees "an excellent contact-point" to "present Jesus Christ as the unique revealer of the eternal logos just as the Buddhas are revealers of the eternal dharma."[2] This, however, may be done with the proviso

---

certain stage in time and space." However, later works like the Mahayana sutras "went on developing the bodhisattva-concept in such a way that he became an object of devotion and his human nature gradually disappeared. The Mahayanists, in trying to remedy the situation, ended up by making him a saviour" ("Bodhisattva", Encyclopedia of Buddhism (1971), 3:231 Christmas Humphreys says that in contrast to the Theravada ideal of the Arhat, in Mahayana the Bodhisatva "renounces Nirvana in order to help humanity on its pilgrimage. The Bodhisattvas are often called 'Buddhas of Compassion' as love in action guided by wisdom is their aim " ("Bodhisattva", A Popular Dictionary of Buddhism [1976], pp. 46-47).

[1]Ibid.

[2]"Good News of Salvation," p. 452. Having explored the dimensions of the term, De Silva notes that the word dharma has already been adapted to translate the word logos in the new Sinhalese translation of St. John's Gospel. In the Indian philosophical setting dharma could mean "that which forms a foundation", "that which upholds", "the eternal, uncreated order of law in the universe", and "Ultimate Truth". Brahman, the Ultimate Reality of Hinduism, is equated with the dharma of the Buddhist scriptures. Thus in Tillichian terms dharma could be called the "Ground of Being." The other dimension

that the historicity of Jesus is given utmost stress, and the recognition that the divinity of Jesus is both "firmly rooted in history and at the same time supra-historical, all embracing and all-sufficient."[1] In dharma De Silva finds an immense wealth of meaning which enables us to employ it the way John did with the word logos. Because there is a striking similarity in the logos concept to the idea of the tatha-gata, in which there is a reaching out for a concept of dharma in personal terms, it is an useful point of contact to commend the Christian view of the incarnation to the Buddhist. Thus he says:

> We should pursue the idea of the tathāgata identified
> with the dharma spoken of as the Lord and having the synonym
> dharma-body. The tathāgata as an embodiment of the dharma
> is a spiritual principle rather than an individual, and in
> later developments his body is described as 'a vesture which
> looks like a physical body', but is not material. It is at
> this point that we need to press home the truth that 'the
> Word became flesh'.[2]

---

is that there is a reaching out for a concept of dharma in personal terms within the Buddhist scriptures as a significant passage from the Digha Nikaya indicates:

> He, Vasettha, whose faith in the Tathāgata is settled,
> rooted, established, firm, . . . may say 'I am the Lord's
> son, born of his mouth, born of the Dharma, created by the
> Dharma, heir of the Dharma'. What is the reason for this?
> This, Vāsettha, is a synonym for the Tathāgata; Dharma-body
> (Dharmakāya) and again Brahma-body and again Dharma-become
> and again Brahma-become. The Buddhas are only revealers of
> the Dharma, 'immanent, eternal, uncreated' and as such 'he
> who sees the Buddha sees the Dharma (Truth)', and 'whoever
> worships the Dharma finds in this worship the highest grati-
> fication' and 'whoever slanders the Dharma receives the
> worst punishment after death' (ibid).

[1]Ibid.

[2]Ibid.

At this point a logical transition to the Christological

hymn in Phil 2:1-11, which explains the relevance of the Christ-event

to the human predicament, is seen. Christ identifies himself with

the realm of <u>samsara</u> by his incarnation but maintains an unbroken

unity with the realm of reality:

> For the Christian the eternally existent unborn, unbecome,
> not-made and unconditioned--the Logos, the Word, the Dharma--
> was fully manifest in Jesus Christ. He is preexistent and
> eternally present reality--"Before Abraham was I am." In
> him, in his incarnation, there was a unique relation between
> the conditioned and the Unconditioned.[1]

Unconditioned identity--De Silva's kenotic christology

Identity with the Conditioned

The significance of Christ's <u>kenosis</u> for De Silva's Christology

is that in his <u>kenosis</u> Christ became <u>sunya</u> (void) and identified him-

self fully with conditioned existence, which bears the marks of <u>dukkha</u>,

<u>anatta</u>, and <u>anicca</u>. This, it is maintained, is clearly indicated in

the three assertions found in Phil 2:7-8. Firstly, he became <u>dukkha</u>

in order to redeem man from a state of <u>dukkha</u>. When Christ took upon

himself the <u>morphe</u> (form, condition, nature) of a <u>doulos</u> (slave or

servant) he filled the role of the suffering servant of Isa 53:4-5. .

This is the biblical image of one who has taken upon himself the

suffering of the world. Thus in Heb 2:10, God who brings many sons

to glory makes "the leader who delivers them perfect through suffering."[2]

Secondly, Christ became <u>anicca</u> by being born in the likeness of man,

i.e., by really taking human nature, he identifies with man's

---

[1] "Emergent Theology," p. 230.

[2] "Theological Construction in a Buddhist Context," p. 48.

impermanence. When he was born into this world he took upon himself

the real conditions to which all men are subject:

> There is no room here for the Docetic view that Christ's
> form appeared to be human, but was actually a spiritual
> body. The Word really became flesh. To be born in the
> likeness of man is to be mortal like every man, who has
> no immortal soul. By becoming man Christ took upon him-
> self this human nature.[1]

Thirdly, Christ became <u>anattā</u>. When Christ emptied himself

he took upon himself the nature of mortal man and became obedient to

the death of the cross....He died a real death like all men, and

through his death he truly partook of man's <u>anattāness</u>. He became sin,

and the wages of sin is death. This death, De Silva explains, corres-

ponds to <u>anattā</u> since it involves "not only physical death but the

possibility of complete annihilation. The experience of Anatta is

the experience of the threat of non-being that comes to all."[2] It is

this anxiety of having to die that Christ experienced in the garden

of Gethsemane when he prayed that the cup might pass away from him,

an anxiety that was not relieved by the expectation of the resurrection.

Christ's participation in man's mortality comes to its climax in his

death, since "on the Cross he tasted the horror of being ultimately

lost when he cried 'My God, My God, why hast thou forsaken me?' He

experienced anatta which is a consequence of alienation from God and

being subject to natural fate."[3]

---

[1] Ibid., p. 49.

[2] "The Christian Solution to the Problem of Man," p. 68.

[3] Ibid.

Identity with the Unconditioned

The passage in Philippians also suggests that because Christ maintained a permanent unity with the Unconditioned (God), his kenosis was also a plerosis. De Silva has sought to commend this to the Buddhist in terms of Sunyatā (the doctrine of the void, emptiness, negation) and Punnatā (plerosis). Three major antitheses in the passage under consideration indicate the plerosis-kenosis, sunyatā-punnatā identity of Jesus.

Firstly, though he became a servant and suffered on the cross he was exalted and given a name above every other name. Secondly, though born "in the likeness of man," he was in the "form of God." The point is made that there is no suggestion that he renounced his divine morphe, and that "anatta was conquered in his being by being brought into participation with the Unconditioned." Thirdly, though he subjected himself to death and became anicca, "anicca was conquered in his being by his participation in the Deathless (amata)." Thus it is concluded that "Christ negated himself without losing himself. Negation and elevation happened together in his kenosis. This was possible because in a unique sense his identity with the conditioned was an unconditioned identity."[1]

The Unconditioned identity

Having affirmed that in Christ's kenosis there was the identity of the conditioned and the Unconditioned, De Silva notes that the doctrine of emptiness means the unconditioned identity of the. conditioned and the Unconditioned and then asks, "In what sense is this

_____

[1]"Theological Construction in a Buddhist Context," p. 50.

identity unconditioned?" He finds the answer in the sinlessness of
Christ. In the light of the implied contrast of Phil 2, between
Christ's emptying himself and not grasping at equality with God and
Adam's willful act of grasping at equality with God, the sinlessness of
Christ stands in contrast to the acts of Adam and all mankind which
are motivated by tanha (greed, desire, or presumptuousness):

> In Christ's act of emptying himself there was no trace
> of tanha, which binds man to conditioned existence and
> puts him under the power of anicca, dukkha, and anatta.
> Christ was sinless; hence, conditioned existerce had no
> power over him. His identity with conditioned existence
> was therefore an unconditioned identity and he was thus
> able to negate himself without losing himself. And this
> is what makes it possible for mortal man to lose him-
> self and yet find himself, by being "in Christ," by
> participation in him.[1]

It is his simultaneous identity with existence (the conditioned)
and his unity with God (the unconditioned) that enables Christ to bear
the karma of humanity and solve man's predicament. De Silva explains
to the Buddhist how Jesus in his identification with man could be
tempted in all points like us and yet be without sin. Without desire
(tanha) there can be no temptation, but desire in itself is not sinful.
It becomes sinful "when what is desired is desired apart from God."
Jesus' victory over temptation rested on the fact that all that was
desired was desired within the unity of God. However, "desire and
temptation were real to Jesus because His decision was a decision made
under the conditions of finite existence." His finitude was real be-
cause his temptations were real. Though he had the real desire of any
man it "was not actualised under the pressure of temptation as in Adam
and Eve." Thus the words of the writer of Hebrews, "He was tempted in

---

[1]"Theological Construction in a Buddhist Context," pp. 50-51.

all points like us but without sin," are a summary statement which implies that there was no trace of concupiscence, kama tanha (karmic desire), in Christ. In the temptation story Jesus rejects the offer of food and unlimited power because "there was no trace of Hubris (Bhava tanha) in Him." And since "there was no trace of unbelief in Him," with the cry of dereliction Jesus commits himself to the hands of God.[1] Thus De Silva concludes that Jesus was "wholly man and wholly God," and because he accepted "the elements of tragic existence into this God-man unity" and conquered them, he becomes "the most perfect and all sufficient Saviour of the world."[2]

The Human Response--Pistis and Saddhā

The total adequacy of Jesus Christ as the answer to anattā, dukkha, and anicca, i.e., the fact "that God's atoning activity in Jesus Christ is an objective reality achieved once for all and for all time," is the basis of the human response.[3] Christ lifts man into the sphere of spirit (pneuma) where the destructive elements of tragic existence are conquered, this state of man being grasped and drawn into Christ is described by Paul as "being in Christ" (2 Cor 5:17). Thus for De Silva it can be shown in terms of Tilakkhana that salvation is entirely the work of God in Christ:

> It is this simultaneous participation of Christ that makes
> the human response possible however feeble that response

---

[1] "The Christian Solution to the Problem of Man," p. 68.

[2] Ibid., p. 69.

[3] Ibid.

> may be. There is nothing within man which makes the response possible because man is anatta. There is nothing in the conditions of space and time which makes this response possible because space and time are dukkha and anicca respectively. Conversely there is nothing within finite existence which bears the character of anatta, dukkha and anicca which makes man acceptable to God. Just here is the paradox; in spite of man's unworthiness, God has accepted him. Man must accept just this.[1]

De Silva's understanding of the human response to salvation in Christ is found in his exposition of Eph 2:8,9. The four truths implied in these texts--salvation is by grace alone, it is appropriated by faith, the reception of grace leads to good works, and salvation is a right relationship--serve as a basis to delineate the Christian view of man's role in salvation in relation to Buddhist thought.

Salvation by grace and grace alone

De Silva points out that at this point he is dialoguing with popular Buddhism, since theoretically Buddhism would explicitly deny the operation of grace, since it conflicts with Buddhist doctrines of self-effort and karma. However, he finds that in Buddhism, as it is practiced, there are striking approximations to the Christian idea of grace. The doctrine of Patti-dana, which has canonical justification (Anguttara Nikaya VII:50), maintains that it is possible to transfer merit acquired through giving alms and meritorious deeds.[2] In the Amida cult of the Mahayana stream, as developed by Genku-Honen (the founder of Pure Land Buddhism) and his pupil Shinran, "the doctrine of grace

---

[1]Ibid., p. 70.

[2]Why Can't I Save Myself, p. 23.

which is implicit in Hinayana Buddhism has come to its full fruition."

According to Pure Land Buddhism man is not saved by self-effort or

human merit but by the "grace of the compassionate Redeemer, Amida

Buddha." De Silva admits that these beliefs, to which the Mahayana

has given ecclesiastical approval, would be condemned as heretical

by the Hinyanists, but cannot be disregarded as they are to be found

in their popular religion.[1]

Salvation is through faith--pistis and saddhā

De Silva's views on the role of faith in the two religions,

and the relation of the two concepts to each other, are found in the

paper "Pistis and Saddha" presented : at the National Christian Council

(N. C. C.) Study Centre Seminar on "Faith in Buddhism and Christianity"

on June 28, 1967. The leading Buddhist participant, Nihal de Silva,

opened the sessions with a paper on "The Buddhist Quality of Faith."

The Christian participants were Dr. G. C. Mendis, Professor of History

at the University of Ceylon, and Fr. Vito Perniola S. J., Professor

of Pali of Aquinas University College in Colombo. Gunaseela Vitanage,

secretary of the Bauddha Jatika Balavegaya, subsequently replied to

Fr. Perniola's paper.

The Greek word pistis and the Pali word saddhā translated by

the one English word "faith" are seemingly identical in meaning, but

Lynn de Silva points out that there are some vital differences. Never-

theless he also find much more that is common in the concepts of faith

in Christianity and Buddhism than is usually realized.[2] This common

---

[1]Ibid., pp. 24-26.

[2]"Pistis and Saddhā," Dialogue Old Series No 12 (September
1967): 21. Buddhist and Christian view points at the N. C. C. Seminar

focused on these similarities and differences. Nihal de Silva held that to a Buddhist <u>saddha</u> meant "faith or confidence in the Buddha and his teaching." He maintained that in the Buddhist view free-thought can stimulate wisdom and even faith unlike in most theistic religions in which free thought is considered a grave sin. Thus he concludes that Buddhism differs from the theistic religions on two main points: "Firstly, free-thought in Buddhism, unlike in theistic religions, is not considered a heinous crime. Secondly, whereas theistic religions depend mainly on faith for deliverance from suffering, Buddhism on the contrary indicates self-effort as the main factor involved."("The Buddhist Quality of Faith," <u>Dialogue</u> Old Series No. 12 [September 1967]: 18. G. C. Mendis commenting from the Christian viewpoint sees the seminar as an attempt by the Christians to understand what the Buddhists meant by "faith". He is in agreement with Lynn de Silva that it is only in the later Theravada or in the Mahayana texts that <u>saddha</u> resembles the meaning of faith in Christianity. According to Mendis, the difference is that the early Theravada Buddhists looked upon the Buddha as a man who showed the way to salvation, while to the Christians Jesus was the Son of God. Thus he concludes, "In Christianity faith involves confidence both in the teacher and in his teaching and is by itself a way to salvation, and thus has a much deeper, more extensive and richer meaning than Saddha in early Buddhism" ("Faith in Bud-dhism and in Christianity," Dialogue Old Series No. 14 [February 1968]: 4). Fr. Vito Perniola's lengthy paper dealing with the examples of Malunkyaputta Subaddha and Upali leads him to interpret the act of faith in the Buddhist disciple as total commitment to the Master and his doctrine:

> Faith occupies in Buddhism very much the same place
> that it occupies in other religious systems, and this
> faith consists in accepting the doctrine of a teacher
> who has proved himself capable of guiding others,
> and in fashioning one's life on the model presented
> by the doctrine of such a teacher. And it is this
> modelling of one'e life that makes of faith not a mere
> intellectual assent but a real personal commitment"
> ("Faith in Buddhism," <u>Dialogue</u> Old Series No. 14 [February
> 1968]: 9).

Gunaseela Vitanage in a lengthy reply contests Perniola's thesis that "faith occupies in Buddhism very much the same place that it occupies in other religious systems." He points out that the Buddha laid no claims to divinity, nor did he claim to be a saviour in the sense of taking the burden of the sins of others on himself; "He only claimed to be the Discoverer of the Way of Release from the ills of the world, and the Instructor and Guide to that Way." Thus the Buddhists repose their faith in him as their friend, guide,and philosopher. The Buddha himself had said that reason (<u>Buddhi</u>) must act as a corrective and guide to faith, and thus he did not expect even his disciples to accept his teachings uncritically. Thus Vitanage maintains that "faith" in Buddhism differs in meaning and concept from "faith" in Christianity. See, "Faith in Buddhism II: A Reply to Fr. Perniola," <u>Dialogue</u> Old Series No. 14 (February 1968): 10-15.

ground is indicated by combining the Barthian definition of faith as trust, knowledge, and confession with the Buddhist scholar Edward Conze's definition of saddhā as "a resolute and courageous act of the will," "an attitude of serenity and lucidity," and "a trusting assent to doctrines."[1]

Faith as trust, or a resolute and courageous act of the will, is described by the revered monk Nagasena in the Milinda Prasna as the mark of leaping forward (Sampakkhandana Lakkhana). He illustrates it with the story of a strong man who crosses a turbulent torrent and is seen by a large crowd which follows and crosses over. Here De Silva sees a remarkable parallel to the Christian view that salvation is by grace through faith:

> Christians would see that the strong man in this illus-
> tration represents Jesus Christ in some respects. Of
> Him it could truly be said that he triumphed over death
> and crossed over. Not only did He cross over, He has
> given the promise that He would help, strengthen and
> guide those who are crossing over from death to life.[2]

Thus trust in Christ enables one to become "a Saddhanusari, a faith-follower of Jesus Christ." Moreover, this attitude of trust and acceptance of authority expressed in relation to the Buddha indicates "that there has always been a bhakti movement--a cult of devotion and faith--in Buddhism which gave a central place to the Buddha as a person." De Silva considers it especially significant that the term Saddhāvimutti (emancipation through faith) occurs frequently in the Pali scriptures, and faith is depicted as a way of emancipation by

---

[1]Ibid., cf. Buddhist Meditation (London: George Allen and Unwin, 1956), p. 27.

[2]Ibid., p. 22.

which one could reach Arahathood--the highest ideal in life. Thus he

finds that faith occupies a central place as trust in a person and

as a way of emancipation in both religions.[1] However, he also draws

attention to the vital difference in the Buddhist's faith in the

Buddha and the Christian's faith in Jesus Christ:

> Faith in the Buddha is, theoretically speaking, impersonal
> or at least less personal than faith in Jesus Christ. The
> faith which the simple Buddhist reposes in the Buddha and
> which comes very near to the Christian notion of faith,
> especially in some of the Mahayana schools, has no place
> in orthodox Buddhism. But in Christianity the place that
> Christ occupies is of far greater significance. Faith is
> an affair of the whole personality.[2]

The second mark of faith sampasādana lakkhana is illustrated

by Nagasena by comparing faith with a water-clearing gem which is cast

into muddy water to make it clear, pure, and serene. This meant that

---

[1]Ibid., p. 22. De Silva has also attempted a harmonization
of the four stages of emancipation described in the Anguttara Nikaya
with the implications of faith in the Christian sense. He says
The four stages are:
1. Sotapatti--entering the stream. In this stage one has to
   be free from three fetters, namely, Personality belief,
   Sceptical doubt and Attachment to mere rule and ritual.
2. Sakadagami--Once-returning. In this stage one becomes
   nearly free from the 'ourth and fifth fetters, namely,
   Sensuous craving and Ill-will.
3. Anagami--Never-returning. In this stage one becomes fully
   free from the above five fetters.
4. Arahat--In this last stage one becomes free from five other
   fetters, namely, Craving for Fine material existence (rupa-
   raga), Craving for Immaterial existence (aruparage), Conceit,
   Restlessness and Ignorance.
It could be said that one becomes a Sotapatti in the Christian
sense when he is free from the first three fetters. Free from person-
ality belief means not trusting in or relying on oneself. Free from
sceptical doubt means trusting in Jesus Christ. Free from rule and
ritual means that religion be inward and not based on externals.
All this is implied in the word faith. See Why Can't I Save Myself,
p. 44.

[2]Ibid., p. 23.

"faith is that which gives lucidity, clarity and illumination." In regarding faith as knowledge or an attitude of serenity and lucidity, Christianity and Buddhism meet since in both religions faith is basic to the attainment of knowledge and truth. However, De Silva notes that the story of Nigantanaruputta and Citta in the _Samyutta Nikaya_ and that of Vakkali in the Anguttara Nikaya in which faith is sometimes considered to be a hindrance indicates that "Buddhism places a greater value on knowledge than on faith." In Christianity on the other hand, he finds no contradiction between faith and knowledge, as there are many passages in the Gospels (as in John 6:69) where faith and knowledge are used synonymously. Thus he concludes: "For Buddhism the best kind of faith is one which says 'I know'; for Christianity the best kind of knowledge is one that says 'I believe'"[1]

The third aspect, faith as confession or a trusting assent to doctrines is also a feature that both religions have in common. Doctrinal formulations are important as they are the means by which "our experience of faith as trust and illumination become rational and coherent." Thus the Christian creeds, formulated after the time of Christ and the New Testament, were the result of the need to articulate the New Testament faith (trust and knowledge). De Silva notes that the Buddhist participant in the seminar, Nihal de Silva, has pointed out that the Four Noble Truths and the Noble Eight-fold Path have to be accepted on faith, thus "in a sense they could be called the Buddhist Confession."[2]

---

[1]Ibid., pp. 23-24.

[2]Ibid., pp. 24-25.

Salvation--a right relationship

In a sermon at the Kollupitiya Methodist Church on Good Friday in 1969, De Silva contrasted the Buddhist emphasis on salvation as an individual concern with the Christian emphasis on relationship: "The Christian view of salvation is not individualistic; it is conceived in terms of a relationship. Salvation means a right relationship, the basis of which is love." Because God has said through Christ on the Cross that man is accepted unconditionally, man "must accept that he is accepted." Nothing more than the response of faith to God's unconditional love is required. "In this acceptance man is restored to a right relationship with God, and that is what salvation means. For this relationship nothing is demanded, no moral achievement nor intellectual understanding, nothing but <u>acceptance</u>."[1]

The nature of this relationship is brought out in the parable of the prodigal son. It is forgiveness that restores the broken relationship, and by stages that relationship is perfected. Thus De Silva depicts the younger son as being overcome by <u>tanha</u> (thirst or desire),leaving for the far country, and when he came to himself, it "meant that he realized he was nothing by himself (anatta)." The son returns home when he realizes "that he was his true self only when he lived in a true relationship, i.e., of a son to his father." The father forgives and accepts him as a son and the broken relationship is restored.[2]

---

[1] <u>The Cross and the Bodhi Tree</u> (Colombo: Wesley Press, 1969), pp. 4-6.

[2] <u>Why Can't I Save Myself?</u> p. 37.

De Silva then draws attention to the Buddhist version of the story of the prodigal son found in the <u>Lotus Sutra</u>,[1] which serves "as a corrective to the sentimental way in which Christians think about the gospel parable." Attention is drawn to the fact that to many the Buddhist parable will seem to be more in accord with reason and common sense, and thus raises the question as to whether the prodigal stands in need of discipline for his own good, lest mere forgiveness be far too sentimental. He points out that forgiveness does not absolve one of discipline, nor does it instantaneously transform one into a perfect being, rather

> It means that the barriers to a relationship are removed
> so that through faith one can enter into the path of
> holiness which is the beginning of a new life the proof
> of which is seen in "good works." A relationship implies
> a life of discipline and service.[2]

Thus for De Silva the Buddhist parable helps Christians to guard against the notion of a cheap grace since Buddhism has stressed the importance of virtue to complete faith. In the <u>Vinaya Pitaka</u>, the Buddha says, "Bhikkus, a Bhikku who is a believer but not virtuous is not complete with regard to this quality. He should complete this

---

[1]De Silva sums up the Buddhist parable as follows:
"In this story the son goes away from the father and remains
separated for fifty years. The father becomes very rich and
the son very poor. In his wanderings the son comes upon his
father's palace but recognizes no one. But the father now
a very old man recognizes his son but does not welcome him.
He hides himself and puts the son through a course of discipline
to test the genuineness of his conversion and to purify him.
It is only on his death-bed that the father reveals himself
and explains to the son why he acted in this way" (Ibid., pp.
37-38).

[2]Ibid., p. 38.

thing."[1] From the Christian viewpoint the old slogan "saved to serve" expresses the truth that faith must bear fruit in good works. In Jas 2:14-19, 26, he finds a strong attack on "the notion that a mere confession of faith or the recital of the creed ensures one's salvation regardless of his conduct and behaviour."[2] De Silva has also stressed two aspects of Christian service from which Buddhism can benefit:

> Firstly, Christian service is ideally non-calculating. There is no thought of gaining merit. . . .
> Secondly, the Christian life is not a life of detachment but of involvement; not a way of escape from suffering but a way of love which would bear one another's burdens; not a way of seeking one's own salvation by retiring to a desert or monastery, but of active service in society.[3]

Non-Christians and God's Plan of Salvation

In his christology and soteriology De Silva addresses some of the thorniest questions pertaining to inter-religious dialogue from the Christian point of view. For the Christian the most basic of all questions is what the confession of Christ as Lord and saviour means in a world in which the overwhelming majority of mankind lives by other faiths and ideologies. If God's action in Jesus Christ has universal and abiding significance, it must cohere with his action in relation to the large majority of mankind which has not encountered Jesus Christ and is not a part of his church. De Silva has squarely confronted the issues of the uniqueness and universality of Christianity

---

[1] "Pistis and Saddhā," p. 25.

[2] Why Can't I Save Myself? p. 31.

[3] Ibid., p. 32.

and deals with the "searching" and "embarrassing" questions pertaining to them. If Jesus Christ and his Gospel is the only way of salvation for all men everywhere in all ages, what does the Christian living in the midst of other ancient faiths have to say about the salvation of the countless millions who have lived in the past and are going to live in the future outside the church and altogether outside Christianity? The Christian, according to him, is called upon to answer such embarrassing questions as:

> What happens to those who lived before Christ, and those who have not heard the Gospel? What about those who, due to physical, biological and psychological reasons, have not been able to progress in any way? Will they be saved or damned?[1]

De Silva's evaluation of Hans Kung's suggestion that the world religions represent the "ordinary" path to God, and Christianity the "extraordinary" way raises crucial questions pertaining to the concepts of Christ as saviour, and of church and mission. If other religions had their own God-given expressions of salvation and revelation, the task of mission loses its urgency and the Christ-event its uniqueness and finality. Thus De Silva asks:

> If, on the other hand, we grant that people can find salvation without belonging to the Christian Church and without explicit faith in Jesus Christ, we will be faced with a number of searching questions such as these:
> In what sense is Christ unique?
> What is the purpose of mission?
> Why preach the Gospel at all?[2]

---

[1] "Non-Christian Religions and God's Plan of Salvation," _Study Encounter_ 3, No. 2 (1967): 65.

[2] Ibid., pp. 61-62. Cf. Hans Kung, "The World Religions and God's Plan of Salvation," p. 184.

The biblical concept of salvation-- absolute, relative, eschatological

De Silva has essayed the task of finding a way out of this dilemma seeking to understand the theological significance of Jesus Christ to people of other faiths on the basis of "a fresh understanding of the meaning of salvation in the Bible."[1] The basic finding of this analysis of the biblical concept of salvation is "that God's work of salvation is a continuous process related to the particular moments in history, and that God works through all sorts of people and events to achieve His purposes."[2] He has outlined three biblical strands which lead to the distinctive conclusions he has arrived at.

Firstly, there is salvation in the absolute sense, i.e., "God is the absolute Saviour." The testimony of the entire Scriptures is that God is the God of salvation, and the only saviour. They also testify to the all-encompassing scope of God's salvation consisting of his mighty deeds or acts beginning with creation and consummated in the new creation (Cf. 2 Cor 5:17-18). Though he may send other saviours, it is he himself who saves (Isa 43:11; cf. 45: 21; Hos 13:4). The New Testament also speaks of him as the one and only saviour in no less than six passages (e.g. Luke 1:47; Jude 25). And, because he is identified with God, the saviourhood of Jesus is also thought of in the absolute sense (Luke 2:11; John 4:42; Eph 5:23; Phil 3:20; Titus 1:4; 2:13; 3:6; 2 Pet 1:1,11; 2:20; 3:2,18).[3]

---

[1] Ibid.

[2] Ibid., p. 64.

[3] Ibid., p. 62.

Secondly, there is salvation in the relative sense, i.e., God uses human beings for his saving deeds. Biblical examples are given in which salvation is thought of in a general or secondary sense, viz., a preacher is said to save his hearers, meaning that God saves them through these preachers (1 Cor 1:21; Rom 11:14; 1 Cor 9:22), or Christians may save their unbelieving partners (1 Cor 7:16). De Silva avers that God sends "Saviours" (Gen 45:7) and empowers them to work their deeds of salvation (Judg 6:15-16). Thus in the Old Testament the title "saviour" is used for successful captains (Judg 3:9) and kings (2 Kgs 13:5), and "It is also applied to leaders and deliverers of the people in the course of their history, who need not necessarily belong to the Jewish race and religion (Neh. 9:27)."[1] Speaking in diverse manners and through diverse people, in every age and sphere of human life, God has not left himself without witnesses. They are "ministering spirits sent forth to serve, for the sake of those who are to obtain salvation" (Heb 1:14). Thus he sums up and draws the conclusion that

> Ultimately it is God who saves, but He uses human beings to achieve His purposes. In the Divine plan for the salvation of the world, God works in and through the lives of persons of real flesh and blood, sinful and fallible as men are, who were nevertheless chosen to be His instruments, not through any virtue of their own nor through anything such as race or religion that makes them worthy of his choice. In this sense Confucius, Zoroaster and Buddha are saviours.[2]

De Silva sees the saviourhood of Jesus also in the relative sense. Just as God works through other agents, in the New Testament

---

[1] Ibid., pp. 62-63.

[2] Ibid.

God is depicted as working out his salvific purposes through Christ. Just as others were his instruments for the salvation of the world, so Jesus Christ too becomes God's instrument. He manifests God's saving grace (2 Tim 1:10); the world is reconciled to God through Christ (2 Cor 5:19); and he becomes one of the saviours in so far as God works his salvation through him (Acts 5:31; 13:23). For the apostle John it is God who has sent Jesus as saviour into the world (1 John 4:14), and Jesus' saving work is what God does through him.[1]

Thirdly, there is salvation in the eschatological sense. Three things stand out in De Silva's exposition of this aspect of salvation: (1) In the New Testament salvation is bound up with the Christ-event, which "like every other historical event in which God has acted to save His people, is only a foretaste or earnest of the great salvation that is to come in the Parousia." He explains that the biblical expression "God has saved", as in Titus 3:5, should be understood as "God will save" because the past is identified with the future in the Hebrew-Greek idiom. We are living in an intermediate state "between the times", and our knowledge of Jesus Christ (cf. Luke 1:77) is the guarantee of the salvation that is to come with the new heaven and the new earth.[2] (2) Salvation is a cosmic fact, an event in which all things are summed up in Christ. This is an idea inalienably connected with eschatology since our salvation is bound up with the redemption of the universe (Rom 8), and God's plan is to unite all things in Christ (Eph 1:10; Col 1:20).[3]

---

[1] Ibid.

[2] Ibid., p. 63.

[3] Ibid.

(3) Since salvation is eschatological, man now lives in the hope of salvation (Phil 3:20; Titus 2:13; Rom 8:24; 1 Thess 1:8). The Christian message is seen as a message of hope (1 Pet 3:15), and the relation of the concept of hope to salvation is of great significance for our understanding of the Church's mission. In summing up the theological significance of hope, De Silva notes that man is saved by hope (Rom 8:24); it is the earnest of salvation in this age (2 Cor 5:5); our hope must be in the revelation that is to come (1 Pet 1:5); the ultimate source and power of this hope is God himself (Rom 5:5; 15:13; 4:17-21; Gal 5:5; cf. Jer 14:8), the ground of this hope is the resurrection (Rom 1:1-5; 1 Pet 1:3, 21). Thus Christ becomes man's hope (Col 1:27) and the only hope (Eph 4:4).

Eschatology--the key to the uniqueness and universality of the Christ event

On the basis of this analysis of the biblical concept of salvation, De Silva takes up the questions of the uniqueness and universality of the Christ-event. He is dealing with the embarrassing questions that he has posed relating to the salvation of those who have never heard the gospel, and to the salvific value of other religions.[1] He is aware that this biblical exposition in which God is depicted as working through all sorts of people and events to achieve his saving purpose "may seem to reduce the significance and uniqueness of the Christ-event upon which so much stress is laid in the New Testament."[2] Therefore the question he must squarely confront

---

[1]See above, pp. 193-194.

[2]Ibid., p. 64.

is whether this conception of salvation can do justice to the New
Testament sense of the uniqueness of the Christ-event and its insis-
tence that "there is no salvation in anyone else at all, for there
is no other name under Heaven granted to men, by which we may receive
salvation" (Acts 4:12 N. E. B.). For De Silva this verse and others
expressing the same idea can best be understood in the eschatological
concept of salvation. He suggests:

> We cannot speak of salvation in any sense of finality
> until the final consummation. Our salvation is bound
> up with the summing-up of "all things in heaven and
> earth" in Christ, and it is Christ alone who has the
> power to do this. No religious leader has made this
> claim. Therefore we should assert as strongly as
> possible, as the Bible does, that there is no salvation
> apart from Christ.
>   This does not mean that only those who consciously
> acknowledge the Lordship of Jesus Christ as known in
> history, will be saved and all others will be lost
> eternally. The Christ-event is the classic instance
> of salvation, but not the exclusive event in history
> through which God has mediated His salvation to mankind.
> The other events, although they do not measure up to the
> classic event, are in no way insufficient means of ·
> salvation. Each event, like the Christ-event, is a
> promise and guarantee of the salvation that is to be in
> the end-time.[1]

---

[1] Ibid. For De Silva the solution to the questions of the
uniqueness and the universality of the Christ-event must be found
in the eschatological context because even commendable attempts,
like that of D. M. Baillie to solve the problem by investing the
event in time with eternal significance, fall short of the New Testa-
ment emphasis. De Silva commends Baillie's position for liberating
Christian theology from the error of relativizing the absolute by
absolutizing and universalizing the relative. For Baillie the divine
sin-bearing was not confined to a moment in history but was eternal,
i.e., God's work of reconciliation was not confined to a moment in
history but still goes on in every age in the lives of sinful men,
whose sin he still bears. Thus Baillie says:
> "If we then go on to speak of an eternal Atonement in
> the very life and being of God, it is not by way of
> reducing the significance of the historical moment of
> the Incarnation, but by way of realizing the relation
> of the living God to every historical moment" (God was
> in Christ [London: Faber and Faber, 1948], p. 190).

Therefore for De Silva it is in the context of the end-time that the uniqueness of Christ as saviour and the universal scope of salvation in him must be understood.

The vindication of the Christ-event is to be found in the final resurrection and in the concept of progressive sanctification after death. The haunting problems that have dogged Theravada Buddhism in its endeavor to reconcile the doctrines of anattā and rebirth, the persistent questions regarding self-identity and what happens to the self finally, and the contradictions of karma and samsaric existence, find their resolution in the Christ-event focused in the biblical doctrine of the resurrection in relation to the Theravada paradox of na ca so na ca anno. The solution of what happens to the countless millions who have not heard the gospel, and the salvation or damnation of those who due to physical, biological, and psychological reasons have never been able to progress in anyway, is to be found in an "intermediate state," which, De Silva says, Protestants prefer to call "progressive sanctification after death," and Roman Catholics "purgatory." De Silva finds that the "Double Predestination" theory with its notion that at death a person passes either to everlasting damnation in hell or to eternal happiness in heaven "has been one of the greatest stumbling blocks to Buddhists who, in contrast, find in the doctrine of rebirth or reincarnation something far more satisfying."[1] Thus "progressive sanctification" is proposed by De Silva as the Christian alternative to rebirth.

---

[1] "Good News of Salvation to the Buddhists," pp. 453-454. It must be noted that in the dialogue at the N. C. C. Seminar on "The Buddhist Attitude to Christianity," Alec Robertson argued for the advantages of the Buddhist theory of rebirth as it was able to treat

The resurrection body--<u>Na ca so na ca anno</u>

Before the discussion of this intermediate stage is taken up, it is necessary to delineate De Silva's theology of the final resurrection. The ground of man's hope is the resurrection, and God's great salvation comes in the Parousia, but most importantly, for De Silva, it is the resurrection that vindicates the Christ-event:

> The idea that the Christ-event marks the end of the periods of time, pointing to its eschatological fulfilment, can make a powerful appeal to Hindus and Buddhists to whom history moves in cycles and has no finality. Such a message could liberate them from the nightmare of karma and rebirth.[1]

Not only does a final cataclysmic resurrection provide a satisfying answer to the difficulties of the Buddhist notion of cyclic time, the doctrine of the resurrection body gives new meaning to the Buddhist phrase <u>na ca so na ca anno</u>. Meeting the Buddhist in his conceptual framework, De Silva endeavors to show how the biblical doctrine of the resurrection body can provide a satisfying resolution of this Theravada paradox. He has maintained that resurrection is most meaningful in the context of <u>Tilakkhana</u>, because if <u>anattā</u> is real, natural survival is impossible:

> From the Christian point of view, to affirm the continuity of one's own karmic force or memory contradicts the truth of <u>anattā</u>. If <u>anicca</u> and <u>anattā</u> are real, there can be

---

other religious systems as "conditioned states in which Man finds himself according to his spiritual development" (see above, p. 95). De Silva recognized a potential meeting point between the religions if human life is "seen as a continuous process extending beyond the grave" (see above, p. 107).

[1]"Non-Christian Religions and God's Plan of Salvation," p. 67.

nothing in man that can survive death. In the
Christian view, it is only by an act of re-creation
that continuity beyond the grave is possible. This
is what resurrection means.[1]

In explicating the meaning of the resurrection De Silva

draws attention to the biblical doctrine of the Resurrection of the

Body, which avoids the extremes of an immortal soul, distinct from

the body, which survives death, on the one hand, and the resurrection

of the flesh on the other. The body here is not the physical body,

but the Spiritual Body (sōma pneumatikon), a term which entered

Christianity through the language of St. Paul. De Silva has under-

taken an exposition of the terms sōma and sarx out of which emerges

the significant point that while in its simplest non-ethical sense

sōma is synonymous with sarx, it differs from sarx as it is the vehicle

of the resurrection life.[2] To understand this resurrection body, it

---

[1] "Emergent Theology in the Context of Buddhism," p. 232.

[2] The Problem of the Self, pp. 104-107. De Silva's exposition
takes note of the close affinities of sōma with the Hebrew word bāsār.
Both signify man's solidarity in finite existence and social existence.
Man as bāsār is flesh-substance, a part of the finite world bearing
the marks of anicca, dukkha, and anattā. However, since this flesh-body
is man's God-given form of earthly existence, he stands in ambiguous
relation to God and the world. Paul has preserved this ambiguity
by using the two Greek words sarx and sōma. Sarx like bāsār basically
means flesh-substance common to man and beast, and thus understood
could lead to a doctrine of nihilism, but Paul uses the word sōma
which negates the nihilistic view. De Silva notes that in J. A. T.
Robinson's study of Paul's somatology, sōma is not simply man's body,
since sarx not sōma is body as opposed to mind. Robinson sees sōma
as the whole psycho-physical unity made up of sarx and psyche, and as
the nearest word in Greek for personality, i.e., "the whole man consti-
tuted as he is by the network of physical and mental relationships in
which he is bound up with the continuum of other persons and things"
(In the End, God [London: James Clark and Co., 1950], p. 85). Thus
sōma acquires a distinctive sense of opposition to sarx when man is
called into a responsible relationship with God. As Robinson notes
elsewhere, however, much sarx and sōma may come to describe the same
thing because of the Fall, they designate different aspects of the

is necessary to completely rid ourselves of the Greek notion of

sōma-sēma, which had as the aim of life the escape from the tomb

of the body. For Paul the aim of life was not escape from the sōma

but its transformation through pneuma, i.e., "a re-creation or

resurrection of the whole person for life on a spiritual plane."[1]

Since everything in man is anicca (finite) the Christian hope of

survival rests solely on God, as De Silva sums up in the words of

Oscar Cullmann, "the whole man who has really died is recalled to

life by a new act of creation by God."[2] The significant point is

that individuality is maintained, thus, "The Christian doctrine of

the Resurrection of the body is an assertion of the eternal signifi-

cance and of the uniqueness of the individual person."[3] There is no

loss of identity, the person continues as the same person; as De

Silva explains:

> The change that comes about at death is not from a life
> in a body to a life without a body or with a revivified
> material body, but from a life in one type of body
> (earthly body) to a life in another type of body (spiritual
> body).[4]

---

human relationship to God, "while sarx stands for man, in his solidarity
of creation, in his distance from God, sōma stands for man, in the
solidarity of creation, as made for God" (The Body--A Study in Pauline
Theology [London: S. C. M. Press, 1947], p. 31. Thus De Silva con-
cludes that "while there can be no resurrection of the flesh, there
is a resurrection of the body" (The Problem of the Self, p. 107).

[1]Ibid., p. 108.

[2]Ibid. Cf. Immortality of the Soul and Resurrection of the
Dead, p. 27.

[3]Ibid., p. 109.

[4]Ibid.

This understanding of the resurrection body is helpful in un-
tangling one of Buddhism's deepest dilemmas as contained in the para-
dox <u>na ca so na ca anno</u>, i.e., the crux of the Theravada concept of
rebirth, that the one who dies and is reborn is not the same and not
another.[1] Since at death the whole man dies the physical body which
holds together a man's distinction, self-expression and individuality
in this earthly sphere of existence is completely destroyed. Since
nothing is taken up from this body in the resurrection, De Silva
explains that

> In the resurrection God re-creates anew a 'body' suited
> to a new sphere of existence in which distinction, self-
> expression and individuality are preserved. Because this
> is a re-creation the spiritual body is not the same as
> the self which existed in an earthly body (<u>na ca so</u>).
> But because the re-created body preserves the distinc-
> tion, self-expression and individuality which belonged
> to the earthly body, the re-created body is not a
> different person (<u>na ca anno</u>).[2]

---

[1] See above, pp. 153-154.

[2] <u>The Problem of the Self</u>, p. 109. De Silva further explains
his view in terms of John Hick's "replica" theory (ibid., pp. 112-
114). The explanation of some modern theologians like Unamuno,
Edwards and Pannenberg, who reject the view that man's soul persists
after the decease of the body, that post-mortem identity is preserved
in God's memory of man, is found wanting by De Silva. See Miguel de
Unamuno, <u>The Tragic Sense of Life</u>, trans. J.E.C. Flitch (London: Fontana,
1962); David Edwards, <u>The Last Things Now</u> (London: S. C. M. Press, 1969);
Wolfhart Pannenberg, <u>What Is Man?</u> (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1970).
To say that when a man ceases to exist that identity is preserved in
God's memory, and that one participates in eternity by being remem-
bered by God falls short of the biblical concept. John Hick holds
that this view postulates "a static, frozen immortality," and has
proposed the "replica" theory which De Silva finds more helpful. See
<u>Death and Eternal Life</u> (London: Collins, 1976), pp. 213-216. For
Hick it is possible to speak of resurrection as the "replication"
of the person who dies, i.e., God creates "an exact psycho-physical
'replica' of the deceased person" (Ibid., p. 279). It is not the
living organism of the body itself but " its encoded form that is
transmitted" (ibid., p. 282). De Silva sums up the three-fold signi-
ficance of the "replica" theory to the Buddhist phrase <u>na ca so na ca</u>
<u>anno</u>, as follows:

The intermediate state--rebirth, purgatory,
progressive sanctification after death

The embarrassing questions pertaining to the salvation of
those outside the church and altogether outside of Christianity, i.e.,
the unevangelized, derive from the understanding that men are lost
because the salvation provided in Jesus Christ has not been made
available to them. De Silva has attempted a resolution of this
problem primarily on the basis that the eternal destiny of man is not
finally determined by the short period of his life between birth and
death. He has also advocated the view that the biblical evidence is
that God's eternal salvific presence has been operative among all
people everywhere.

In 1968 De Silva presented "seed-thoughts" for the basis of a
dialogue within a tentative "theological framework which accepts the
spiritual significance of reincarnation, purgatory and the intermediate
state."[1] Since Buddhism speaks of destroying many fetters and defile-
ments on the path of holiness, he raised the question whether it was
not possible to understand reincarnation as Tillich has suggested as
a symbol which points to the higher or lower forces (kusala and akusala
karma). Purgatory (though it has been repugnant to Protestants due

---

"Firstly, just as the replica is not the result of self-
generation, so life after death is not self-generated.
Secondly, just as a replica is not the same as the original,
so the one who is resurrected is not exactly the same as the
one before death (na ca so). Thirdly, because replication
is a re-creation from the encoded form of the psycho-physical
organism, the 'replica' is not anything other than the original
(na ca anno)" (The Problem of the Self. PP. 113-114).

[1] Reincarnation in Buddhist and Christian Thought (Colombo:
Christian Literature Society of Ceylon, 1968), p. 162.

to the traditional imagery which stressed the sufferings undergone

as a penalty to be paid) also symbolizes this process of purging

by which a person is fitted for his ultimate destiny. Thus he states

> It must be stressed that these states are not states
> into which we enter after death. Reincarnation symbolizes
> the fact that death and rebirth take place continually,
> not empirically but spiritually. Purgatory symbolizes
> the fact that death and rebirth is a process of purging
> and purification which can happen daily beginning in this
> life . The Intermediate state symbolizes the fact that
> through death and rebirth, through purging and purifica-
> tion, the person, beginning from this life progresses
> stage by stage until the goal is reached.[1]

This concept of the intermediate state, which has undergone

considerable development since it was initially mooted as a basis

of dialogue, contradicts the double predestination theory and provides

a Christian alternative to the theory of rebirth. De Silva also sees

belief in some such state of progressive sanctification necessary

as a Christian theodicy. Suffering and evil in God's world are not

without moral purpose, and if man's eternal destiny is finally deter-

mined by the span of life in this earthly existence, then as John

Hick says, "the whole earthly travail of faith and moral-effort is

rendered needless."[2]

---

[1]Ibid., p. 163.

[2]The Problem of the Self, p. 117. Cf. John Hick, Evil and the
God of Love (London: Macmillan, 1966), p. 383.
    Other Christian theologians who have rejected the Double Predes-
tination theory and opted for an intermediate state are cited by
De Silva. See The Problem of the Self, pp. 115-117. William Strawson's
comments indicate. the trend that modern biblical scholarship instead
of attempting to divide man into two categories, rather thinks of the
process of divine activity as one in which the positive elements are
developed and the negative diminished. See "The Future Life in Con-
temporary Theology," Expository Times 77, (October 1965): 9-13.

De Silva explains that in this concept of progressive sancti-
fication the mental and spiritual qualities of a person continues
to grow after death.

> The identity and continuity of the self is an identity
> and continuity in relationships, which death does not
> sever. 'We pass from death into life,' says St. John,
> 'because we love the brethren' (1 John 3:14). Love is
> eternal, because God is Love and he who abides in Love
> has entered the sphere of the Eternal. This sphere of
> life begins here and now and continues in the hereafter.
> And it is in this sphere that a person is progressively
> sanctified until he reaches perfection.[1]

Thus the corporate solidarity which begins on earth does not
end at death since in the New Testament love is the quality of eternal
life, and "it is in and through love that resurrection or 'replication'
takes place." Through replication as an authentic self the personal-
communal context of life in which a person exists continues in the
intermediate stage. Thus man does not become perfect at death but

---

Nicholas Berdyaev calls eternal damnation "one of the most dis-
gusting of human nightmares," and says that while reincar-
nation has obvious advantages it is another nightmare "of infinite
wanderings along dark passages; it finds the solution of man's destiny
in the cosmos and not in God" (The Destiny of Man [London: Geoffrey
Bles, 1937], p. 279). Archbishop William Temple has maintained that
there are no biblical passages that teach a once-for-all decisiveness
of the moment of death and endless torment. This misunderstanding is
the result of literalistic distortions of symbols and the mixing
up of terms such as Hades, Hell, Sheol, Gehenna, Abraham's Bosom,and
Heaven. See Nature, Man and God (London: Macmillan, 1960), p. 464.
Modern theologians favor an intermediate state, and Paul Tillich
describes this process of the development of the positive elements in
eternal life as "essentialisation " and notes that "in the case
of infants, children and underdeveloped adults, for example, this
would be a complete absurdity. In the case of mature people it
disregards innumerable elements which enter every mature personal
life and cause profound ambiguity" (Systematic Theology vol. 3,
p. 444).

[1]Ibid., p. 7.

continues to be progressively sanctified "from one degree of glory to

another" (2 Cor 3:18). Thus De Silva concludes:

> Progressive sanctification in terms of anattā-pneuma means
> the progressive realisation of anattaness or egolessness
> by the elimination of - the negative elements in man,
> and the progressive actualisation of pneumaness by the
> development of the positive elements until individuali-
> sation and participation reach perfection in the kingdom
> of God, through a process of continuous recreation.[1]

In addition to progressive sanctification as an answer to the

embarrassing questions about the salvation of those who never come

to a knowledge of Christ in their earthly lifespan, De Silva pursues

a second line of thought, viz., that God's eternal salvific presence

has been operative among all people at all times. In an article

for a forth-coming publication in honor of S. J. Samartha this line

of thought is summed up thus:

> There has been from the very beginning of history a
> communication of the Triune God to the whole of mankind
> in which He disclosed the divinely intended truth about
> every man and that there has always been God's eternal
> salvific prescence prior to its temporal manifestation
> and is still operative among all people whether they are
> aware of the temporal event or not. "I was found by
> those who were not looking for me; I was clearly shown to
> those who never asked about me" [Rom 10:20].[2]

-----

[1]Ibid., p. 123.

[2]"Theological Significance of People of Other Faiths," n.p.,
1981, p. (Typewritten.) This article brings together several important
aspects of the current discussion on the "universalist testimonies"
found in scripture indicating that God's salvific presence has not
been limited to the Judeo-Christian tradition. The Bible testifies
that the initiative in salvation is with God and not man, and God is
salvifically present everywhere in Christ (Titus 2:11). This is in-
dicated in God's dealings with non-Jewish personalities such as the
"holy pagans" of Ezek 14:14, 20. Thus God makes a universal cove-
nant with Noah who, like Daniel and Job, is described as a righteous
man. In the New Testament, too, mention is made of God-fearing "pagans"
such as Cornelius. Another aspect of the current discussion is the
universality of the Spirit, indicated most strikingly in the Johanine

Thus De Silva's concept of the "righteous", i.e., in Christian
terms those who believe in and have found salvation in Christ, are
those "who have responded to that Reality which Christians call God
without using this term God or even while rejecting it."[1] Those who
have sincerely sought God can attain to everlasting salvation though
they were altogether outside of the church and did not hear the gospel
because Christ brings grace and judgment to all men. De Silva can
therefore agree with Jacques Maritain when he says, "Under many names,
names which are not that of God, in ways only known to God, the
interior act of the soul's thought can be directed towards a reality
which in fact truly may be God."[2] This response to Reality is a
response of faith to Christ because "the Christian believes that
ultimate Reality was manifest in Christ." De Silva sees this view
as being in harmony with the divine initiative in salvation since
"eternal life is not a human achievement, although man has his part
to play. Eternal life is that which comes from God and which man

---

gospel. Wherever men have responded to the glory of God in nature or
history, the Spirit of Truth has been at work. The functions of
pneumatology and Christology are inseparable because the Spirit bears
witness concerning Jesus Christ and proceeds from the Father through
the Son. Thus De Silva makes the point that it is necessary "to
discover the Christ Reality beyond a purely historical point of
reference," because "the saving purpose of God revealed in Jesus
Christ was operative from eternity and is therefore unconditioned by
anything that has happened in history. What happened in history in
the Christ event is a temporal moment of an eternal reality. The
temporal moment has no significance apart from the eternal reality"
(ibid., pp. 4-5).

[1] The Problem of the Self, p. 122.

[2] Ibid., cf. J. Maritain, True Humanism, trans. M. and R. Adamson (London: Geoffrey Bles, 1938), p. 56.

man appreciates by responding to the Eternal (the Amata'; it is life in the Spirit."[1]

The question remains as to what happens to the "unrighteous" or the "lost". De Silva has not dealt conclusively with this question, however a careful reading of his writings on this point indicates that he does not subscribe to the view that the "lost" suffer endless torment in hell. Hell, heaven, and the intermediate stage are not ontological realities, instead he says that

> Hell, heaven and purgatory are not sharply separated states, but form a kind of continuum through which one passes from even the "utter state" of near-annihilation which is called hell, to the closest union with God. Thus hell is also a phenomenon within this continuum and can be experienced here and now, and even after death, in varying degrees.[2]

Lostness in the final sense has not been defined by him because in his view the ultimate destinies of men cannot be decided within this lifetime. Thus he indicates that all men go through a "process by which one is purged of all egocentric elements, purified, and fitted for one's ultimate destiny"[3] and is able to say that "there is no one bad enough to go straight into eternal damnation and conversely there is no one good enough to go straight to eternal bliss."[4] The difference in the experience of the "unrighteous" and that of the "righteous" during the intermediate period seems to be a

---

[1]Ibid.

[2]"Emergent Theology in the Context of Buddhism," p. 232.

[3]Ibid.

[4]The Problem of the Self, p. 116.

relative one as all men undergo a progressive actualization of the
positive elements leading to perfection. However, the description of
the distinctive aspects of the experience of the "unrighteous" is
worth quoting in full:

> To those who have been rebellious, who have sinned
> against the truth, who have turned away from the light,
> the intermediate state involves anguish and remorse, a
> torturing unrest in the knowledge of having fallen short
> of the goal about which one becomes acutely conscious
> when earthly limitations are removed at death. The
> degree of anguish and torture corresponds to the degree
> of the separation from Reality. The story of Dives and
> Lazarus illustrates this distance and anguish, which
> are symbolised by the term Hell (Gehenna). Hell is not
> a place situated in the underworld. It is not an onto-
> logical reality but a psychological experience which a
> person can have in this life as well as in the next.[1]

De Silva's exposition of the biblical basis of this intermediate
state seems to lead ultimately to a concept of universal salvation.
Along with C. Harris he sees the parable of Dives and Lazarus as the
locus classicus of this concept. The parable is not seen as a des-
cription giving details of the life after death, but for De Silva
"it cannot be denied that the state of the afterlife depicted here is
true to what Jesus knew about it."[2]   He maintains that since

---

[1] Ibid., pp. 121-122.

[2] The Problem of the Self, p. 172. According to Harris "Abraham's
bosom" was "a common rabbinical designation of the intermediate abode
of bliss." He notes two lines of thought which emerge from Jewish and
early Christian thinking on the intermediate state, i.e., (a) "a state
of painful confinement in which the unrighteous expiated their crimes,
and were in some cases cleansed from sin", and (b) "a state of bliss-
ful expectancy in which the righteous awaited their reward." De
Silva observes that "in both states there is a period of waiting, of
purgation and progressive sanctification" (ibid., pp. 119-120; cf.
C. Harris, "State of the Dead (Christian)," Encyclopedia of Religion
and Ethics Vol. 11, p. 837).

Dives and Lazarus went to Hades after death, and Jesus too descended

to Hades to preach to the dead (1 Pet 3:18-20; 4:6), it "shows

that 'Hades' was not a place of ultimate doom."[1] De Silva also

takes note of biblical passages such as Phil 2:9 and Rev 5:13

in which the ultimate triumph of Jesus in every part of the universe

is stated. Of special significance are the "many mansions" (Greek

monai) in the Father's house in John 14:2. This verse conveys the

idea of stages of development rather than an abode or home in the

sense of a permanent habitation as from very early times monai has

been interpreted to mean "resting-places where pilgrims on their way

to eternity stop for training and instruction, as they proceed further

and further towards the final goal."[2] Thus this process of

---

[1]Ibid., p. 119. De Silva notes that Barclay finds the answer
to the "embarrassing" question regarding the ultimate destiny of
those who lived before Jesus Christ, and of those who never heard
the gospel, in Christ's preaching to the dead in Hades. Barclay
says that the message of grace has gone into every corner of the uni-
verse, and that:

> This is the point that Justin Martyr fastened on long ago:
> 'The Lord, the Holy God of Israel remembered His dead, those
> sleeping in the earth, and came down to them to tell them
> the good news of salvation.' The doctrine of the descent
> into Hades conserves the precious truth that no man who
> ever lived is left without a sight of Christ, and without
> the offer of the salvation of God. (Ibid., p. 121. W. Bar-
> clay, The Daily Study Bible, the Revelation of John [Edin-
> burgh: St. Andrew Press, 1957], 2:287.

[2]Ibid., p. 124. De Silva finds support for the interpretation
of monai as meaning "stages on the way" in the Greek writer Pausanias,
and in Origen and Clement of Alexandria. William Temple who described
the monai as "wayside caravanserais-shelters" notes that "These many
resting-places, marking the stages of our spiritual growth, are in the
Father's house. If we are travelling heavenwards, we are already in
heaven" (ibid., cf. William Temple, Readings in St. John's Gospel
[London: Macmillan, 1963], p. 220).

sanctification which begins here and now progresses stage by stage in the hereafter, till fellowship with God is perfect.

The eschatological community and the meaning of mission

If the questions relating to theodicy, and the embarrassing questions regarding the unevangelized are answered in the concepts of God's eternal salvific presence   to all men and progressive sanctification after death, De Silva notes that "other questions arise, particularly with regard to the meaning and purpose of mission."[1] If salvation could be found without belonging to the Christian church or without explicit faith in Jesus Christ, what is the role of the church? What is the purpose and meaning of mission? In answer De Silva makes three significant points.

First, "since salvation is primarily an eschatological concept, mission is defined by eschatology." In this regard Eph 1: 9-10 is found to be a significant text because it deals with human history and God's purpose for the entire universe, "things in heaven and things in earth." De Silva's exegesis of this text indicates that the ton kairōn are a succession of world periods, each ending in a cataclysm. The Christian era is the last in the series, and all history will finally be consummated in Christ. Since all things "are gathered into one in Jesus Christ," the text means that all the diverse factors of the universe, history, and of all being, will be brought together in an all-embracing harmony through the consummation in Christ.[2] Therefore he maintains:

---

[1] "Non-Christian Religions and God's Plan of Salvation." p. 65.

[2] Ibid., pp. 65-66.

Mission therefore consists in promoting this harmony by
bringing all things into a true relation with God in Christ,
and thereby into a relationship with one another. Negatively,
mission is the breaking down of all barriers that separate
man from man and man from God. In this sense, to fight
against racial discrimination, caste and other social evils
is mission; to stand for justice and fair-play is mission,
His mission, whoever does it. On the other hand, to win
over non-Christians into Christianity and to turn them
against their former brothers is not mission. It is an
act of alienation and not reconciliation. The numerical
expansion of the Church does not necessarily mean evan-
gelization.[1]

Second, "mission is theocentric and not church-centred."

The church is never the sole agent of mission because though God uses

others for mission it must never be forgotten that mission remains

primarily his activity because he is saviour in the absolute sense.

Thus for De Silva the notion of a church monopoly of mission, or the

idea of mission in terms of church expansion, are untenable from the

biblical viewpoint.[2]

Third, in De Silva's concept of mission, "the main task

of the Church is to be the eschatological community in the world."

"Ecclesia" is an eschatological term for a community of people living

in the hope of the kingdom of God. The church may not be the only

instrument God uses, but its mission derives from its very nature as

the body of Christ and by virtue of being the eschatological community

to which there is no parallel. De Silva therefore explains that the

unique role of the church in respect of mission must be understood in

relation to the saviourhood of Christ:

---

[1] Ibid., p. 66.

[2] Ibid.

> Just as the Saviourhood of Jesus Christ is thought of
> in a secondary sense, the Church is thought of in a
> secondary sense as the instrument which God uses to
> accomplish His divine purpose by extending the work of
> Christ. . . .
>
> But just as the Saviourhood of Jesus Christ is also
> thought of in the absolute sense, in that He embodies
> the fullness of God, so is the Church the historical
> embodiment of the fullness of Jesus Christ. To the
> Church, God has imparted full wisdom and insight and
> has revealed His hidden purpose, which makes the Church
> a unique instrument in His hands. The world outside does
> not possess this wisdom and insight and revelation, but
> the fact that the Church has this inheritance does not
> set the Church against the world or other religions;
> rather it makes the Church responsible for the world.[1]

Anattā and God

Theravāda Buddhism has been classified as atheistic be-

cause it rejects the idea of an omniscient, omnipotent, personal,

creator God. De Silva has acknowledged that Buddhist agnosticism

about a personal God, and Buddhism's offer of a way of peace and

insight without the need to believe in God, constitutes "a novel and

powerful challenge to Christianity." Observing that "the word God

has become meaningless in the traditional images in which it has

been expressed", and that this situation indicates "the need for a

reorientation of Christian thought about God", he raises the question

whether the Buddha and Buddhism do in fact deny the reality of God.[2]

In striking dialogical exchanges with Buddhist thought-leaders he has

maintained that the concept of God, which seems to be the most

divergent doctrinal issue between the two religions, could become a

---

[1]Ibid.

[2]"Buddhist-Christian Dialogue," pp. 189-190.

fruitful area of dialogue. He has carried forward the discussion on the significance of the development of a Buddhology and contributed to the development of the Dharma-God idea. However, the distinctive contribution, which De Silva makes from the Christian standpoint, towards overcoming this Buddhist-Christian incompatibility is that a biblical understanding of <u>anattā</u> can locate the place of "God" in Buddhist thought.

Gautama--"The First Great Death-of-God Theologian"

In one of his earliest publications De Silva discusses the obstacles to belief in God encountered by the Buddhist and examines the Buddha's own attitude to the question. He points out that Gautama was neither a pessimist nor an atheist in the strict sense of the word; what the Buddha had done was to refute "the Brahamanical conceptions of the Absolute."[1] For De Silva the Buddha's attitude to God can be explained in terms of the "death-of-God" movement, and the Buddha could be described as "the first great death-of-God theologian." Though this movement has shocked many, it should be welcomed as a prophetic protest movement "which will enable us to get rid of some base notions we have of God, and come to a true understanding of what we mean by God."[2] Thus de Silva is of the view that

---

[1] Belief in God (Colombo: Committee for the Publication of Christian Literature, 1957), p. 1.

[2] Why Believe in God, p. 24. Among the base notions of God that must die De Silva lists "the venerable Book-keeper," "the ruthless Moralist with the big stick," "the grand old Gentleman-- the man-size," "the dreadful Judge on a golden throne," and the Aladdin Lamp God."

the Buddha's rejection of Brahmanism and its pantheon of gods should

not be considered atheistic or agnostic, nor even non-theistic.

Citing Mahatma Gandhi's assessment of the Buddha he maintains that

the Buddha was a reformer who revolted with prophetic courage against

the base notions of God that were prevalent in his time. Gandhi

saw the Buddha as "ONE OF THE GREATEST HINDU REFORMERS" debunking

spurious religious practices and inveighing against a system of

priestcraft selling the notion of a capricious God who could be bribed

or placated by offering sacrifices. For the Buddha such a God was

dead, and De Silva concludes that "it is clear that what the Buddha

rejected was not the Ultimate Reality that the term 'God' or 'Brahman'

signified; what he rejected as Gandhiji says, were the base things that

passed in his generation under the name of God."[1]

The Buddha's role as a reformer helps De Silva understand

his seemingly ambivalent attitude to belief in Brahma in the Buddhist

scriptures. At times he speaks disparagingly of belief in Brahma,

and at other times he gives him all the respect and honour that the

Brahmins give him. The Buddha did not reject the concept of Brahma,

nor did he deny the Brahmin view that the highest goal is the attain-

ment of reunion with Brahma. For the Buddha Brahma is perfect love,

and "the highest Reality whose all-embracing kindness, love, sympathy

and benevolence pervade the whole world." Thus he proposed that

the way to reunion was by the practice of the four Brahma-viharas,

viz., love (metta), kindness (karuna), sympathetic joy (mudita), and

equanimity (upekkha). Therefore De Silva notes that:

---

[1]Ibid., p. 18.

It is significant that these virtues are called
Brahma-viharas, meaning Brahma-like or God-like
qualities or abodes. The Buddha affirms that
Brahma is perfectly pure, and therefore it is by
treading the path of purity that one can come into
union with Brahma. . . .

From this we see that the Buddha did not deny
the God who is perfect Love which the term Brahma
signifies. He only denied base notions connected
with belief in God.[1]

---

[1]Ibid., p. 19. De Silva draws attention to the Buddha's
"Great Renunciation", when he "saw the fact of suffering in all its
poignancy", and left everything and went in search of the meaning of
existence. His biggest obstacle to belief in Brahma centered in the
problem of pain, and the Hindu view of suffering as an illusion
failed to satisfy him. Thus the Buddha could not reconcile the
apparently meaningless pain and suffering with the assertion of an
all-wise, all-powerful God of Love (Belief in God, p. 1). De Silva
has underscored this point by citing Douglas M. Burns' view of
original Buddhism. Burns concluded that original Buddhism must be
classified as atheistic and points to some very strong statements
made by the Buddha as if in reply to the biblical assertion of the
existence of God. He quotes from Isaiah 45:6-7 where Jehovah says:

"There is none beside me.
I am the Lord, and there is none else.
I form the light, and create darkness:
I make peace, and create evil:
I the Lord do all these things."

Then Burns quotes from the Buddhist scriptures positing the
Buddha's statement of the problem of pain as if in reply to the
above assertion about God in Isaiah:

"He who has eyes can see the sickening sight;
Why does not Brahma set his creatures right?
If his wide power no limit can restrain,
Why is his hand so rarely spread to bless?
Why are his creatures all condemned to pain?
Why does he not give happiness to all?
Why do fraud, lies, and ignorance prevail?
Why triumphs falsehood,--truth and justice fail?
I count your Brahma one among the unjust,
Who made a world in which to shelter wrong"
(Why Believe in God, p. 1). Cf. Douglas M. Burns,
Buddhism, Science and Atheism (Bangkok: Buddha
Puja Publications, 1965), p. 25.

Commenting on the significance of the conclusion that Brahma has made
the world to shelter wrong, De Silva says that for the Buddha,
"That God, that Brahma surely is dead. But not the 'God' who is
perfect Love" (ibid., pp. 1, 19).

A parallel development, the "death of Yahweh," is seen by De Silva in the history of the Hebrews, and he makes the significant observation that "what the Buddha tried to do was in some ways similar to what the prophets tried to do."[1] In order to give the people a correct understanding of God, the Buddha and the Hebrew prophets attacked unworthy notions connected with Brahman or Yahweh, but they did not deny the Ultimate Reality that these terms signified. Similarly some theologians have attempted to get rid of the term "God," and instead use terms like "The Ground," "Being Itself," and "Ultimate Concern." Gandhi chose to substitute the term TRUTH, a term which would commend itself to Buddhists as they would find no difficulty in thinking of an "Ultimate Reality in terms of TRUTH as an abstract, impersonal principle." De Silva sees difficulties in this usage as Gandhi was a man of prayer, and one cannot pray to an abstract, impersonal principle. Thus he notes that it was the search for a more adequate term for "the controversial and debased word Brahman," that led the Buddha to use Dharma as a synonym for Brahman.[2] In his

---

[1] Ibid., p. 23. The parallel development in Hebrew history, which begins with the prophets and reaches its climax in the New Testament, depicts the "death of Yahweh" or the transformation of the idea of God. De Silva cites H. E. Fosdick's summation of this transformation which includes the transition from a storm god on a desert mountain (Exod 3:1; 19:18; 20:18) to the God who is a Spirit (John 4:24); from the tribal war god leading his devotees to bloody triumph over their foes (Exod 15:3; 23:22; 1 Sam 15:21) to the God who is Love (3 John 4:16); from the territorial deity to the universal Father (Rev 5:9); and, from "a god whose highest social vision was a tribal victory, it ends with the God whose worshippers pray for a world-wide kingdom of righteousness and peace" (ibid., pp. 22-23). Cf. H. E. Fosdick, A Guide to Understanding the Bible: The Development of Ideas within the Old and New Testaments (New York: Harper and Brothers, 1938), pp. 53-54.

[2] Ibid., pp. 24-25.

endeavor to speak to Buddhists from within Buddhism De Silva further explores the Dhamma-God idea and engages in the discussion of how theists could speak about God in a way comparable to Buddhists speaking of Nirvana.

The God-shaped Gap in Buddhism

De Silva uses H. G. Wells' phrase "a God-shaped gap" to describe the void created in Buddhism by the "excessive rationalism" of the Theravada school.[1] It was the Theravada over-emphasis of the

---

[1]A series of open letters written by De Silva in 1968 to Professor K. N. Jayatilleke, chairman of the Sri Lankan radio broadcast "Buddhist Symposium", provides an insight into the rationalist orthodoxy of scholarly Theravada Buddhists and their attitude to the idea of God. De Silva takes Jayatilleke to task for concluding that belief in an omniscient God and belief in free-will are mutually contradictory and therefore anti-rational. He cites Aldous Huxley, who is said to be "in a sense anti-Christian", to show that while the idea of creation was not contradictory, the doctrine of anatta was irrational. Having pointed out that the Buddhist doctrine of anatta closely corresponds to Hume's theory that man is a bundle or collection of different perceptions, Huxley says:
> "Hume and the Buddhists give a sufficiently realistic
> description of selfness in action, but fail to explain
> how and why the bundles ever became bundles. Did their
> constituent atoms of experience come together of their
> own accord? And, if so, why, or by what means and with-
> in what kind of a non-spatial universe? To give a
> plausible answer to these questions in terms of anatta
> is so difficult that we are forced to abandon the doctrine"
> (The Perennial Philosophy [London: Fontana, 1959], p. 50).
De Silva points out that on the other hand Huxley did not find the notion of a creator of some kind contradictory, thus he could say: "That a temporal world should be known and, in being known, sustained and perpetually created by an external consciousness is an idea which contains nothing contradictory" (ibid., p. 194). De Silva then tells Jayatilleke that the sheer rationality which he claims as a basis for rejecting belief in an omniscient creator God and free-will is a sword that cuts both ways:
> Now, what you find irrational is quite rational to
> Huxley, and what he finds irrational is quite rational
> to you. The main issue therefore is by what criterion
> you judge who is right and who is wrong. If you have
> such a criterion how did you get it? Who is to judge

Buddha's ethicism that led to the development of Buddhism as an atheistic philosophy. The Buddha himself was not concerned with the metaphysical speculations of the Brahmins which he considered a hindrance to liberation from samsaric existence.[1] However, De Silva notes that it would be wrong to consider the Buddha a skeptic or an agnostic simply because he remained silent on metaphysical questions. This becomes evident in the worship he accorded to the Dharma, and his substitution of it for the older concept of Brahman. In the case of the Buddha's followers De Silva sees "compensatory modifications" arise to fill in the "God-shaped gap", and in the course of the history of Buddhism "we see that there was a gradual sliding of the simple Theravada negative and atheistic creed into a variety of polytheistic and theistic conceptions."[2] Thus we now consider these two developments relating to the concept of God in Buddhism, viz., the

---

that your criterion is right?" (See Open letter (2) in "Faith, Authority and Omniscience," Dialogue Old Series, No. 15 [July 1968]: 21).

[1] The Buddha explains his silence on God and metaphysical questions to his disciples in the Samyutta Nikaya:
"Because, my disciples, it brings you no profit, it does not conduce to progress in holiness; because it does not lead to the turning from the earthly, to the subjection of all desire, to the cessation of the transitory, to peace, to knowledge, to illumination, to nirvana: therefore have I not declared it unto you" (ibid., p. 43).
The Buddha's primary concern was intensely practical. Douglas M. Burns says that the Buddha remained silent on matters beyond the reach of men's conceptual powers as they were irrelevant to life's problems. However he did not deny the possibility of some "cosmic entity," "unifying principle" or "Intelligence" as the basis of existence, neither did he affirm such a possibility. See the chapter "The Buddha and God" in Buddhism, Science and Atheism.

[2] Ibid., p. 46.

development of the Dharma-God idea, and theistic developments in Buddhism including the development of a Buddhology.

The God "Dharma"

In 1970, at a seminar on "The Buddhist Attitude to God" held at a Sri Lankan university, the significant point was made that "there is evidence to show that the concept 'Dharma' was deliberately substituted by the Buddha for the older concept of 'Brahman' which signified the ultimate Reality for the Brahmins."[1] In 1957, in a pamphlet aimed at helping Christians formulate their answers to questions raised by Buddhists, De Silva drew attention to the Buddha's view of Dharma as an useful point of contact for the discussion of the doctrine of God.[2] He further developed this view in a dialogical response to the Thai monk Buddhadasa Indapanno. In 1970, he noted that the doctrine of God is a question about which it is generally assumed that there is no agreement at all between Christians and Buddhists, and described his contribution to the Dharma-God idea as an attempt "to carry this discussion further in the hope that there will be a better understanding between Buddhists and Christians."[3]

In his earliest exposition of the subject De Silva states that Dharma was not merely the teaching of the Buddha, it was for the Buddha the ultimate ideal or norm. The Buddha, and all previous Buddhas, were only discoverers of the Dharma who "were able to discern

---

[1]Some Issues in the Buddhist-Christian Dialogue," p. 53.

[2]Belief in God, p. ii.

[3]Why Believe in God? p. ii.

an eternal orderly principle of the universe in which the rational

and ethical elements were fused into one." And in the <u>Samyutta Nikaya</u>

ii 25-27, <u>Dharma</u> is depicted as rationality, as the ideal that is the

norm of reason and morality.[1] At this point De Silva is confronted

with "the antinomy of the ideal." On the one hand <u>Dharma</u> like any

other ideal "can be real only as concept," however, it is also an

objective norm and thus external to persons. The two ways of resolv-

ing this antinomy are, whether to think of <u>Dharma</u> as pure mind--"the

objective source and sustainer of values," or, of positing "a supreme

mind which is the source and sustainer of the <u>Dhamma</u>." Thus the

logical conclusion for him is that

> Whatever alternative we accept, we would see that both
> point to the same object that religious worshippers
> have found, namely, a supreme Being in whom the highest
> ideals are acknowledged and actualized. If there is
> nothing beyond the Dhamma, then the Dhamma must be that
> supreme Being.[2]

It is in his dialogical response to Buddhadasa Indapanno

that De Silva's most definitive exposition of the Dharma-God idea is

to be found. He welcomes the contribution Indapanno has made to

the Buddhist-Christian dialogue in the Sinclair Thompson Memorial

Lectures (1967) by "speaking to Christians in the Christian language."

Indapanno has been able to see the meaning of the Cross in relation

to the doctrine of <u>anattā</u>, and of God in terms of <u>Dharma</u>. Thus for

Indapanno, "the Ultimate Reality is <u>Dhamma</u> which he equates with God."[3]

---

[1]<u>Belief in God</u>, p. 2.

[2]Ibid., p. 3.

[3]<u>Why Believe in God?</u> p. ii. Though Indapanno's contribution
to the Dhamma-God idea has been welcomed by De Silva, and agreement
has been found at several points, there are significant differences

in their views. Joseph J. Spae considers De Silva's Why Believe in God? an answer to Indapanno's views on the Ultimate Reality and God ("Three Notes on the Christian--Buddhist Dialogue," p. 25). For Indapanno the conflicting views on God between the two religions could be resolved if God was understood in terms of Dharma. Reasoning that the word "religion" applies to a theistic system of belief in God and prayers, Buddhists have hesitated to use the word to speak of the Buddha's doctrine. This was because they did not know what the term God meant in the language of Dharma. God cannot be explained in the conventional language of man, mind,or spirit (vinnana), but must be understood in terms of Dharma, "in the religious language God means Dhamma or the power of Dhamma which is self-existent according to Nature" (Christianity and Buddhism, p. 63).

Indapanno maintains that God is neither a person nor spirit, because then he would be finite and measurable by standards of one kind or another. Rather God is "Dhamma or Nature in the sense of something non-constituent, unconditioned or uncompounded (Asankhata-Dhamma)" (ibid., p. 74). Since Dhamma is complete in itself, even as that which is called God is complete in itself, a study of the four aspects of Dhamma would enable us to explain "God" as found in Buddhism. These four aspects are: (1) Sabhāvadhamma--the nature of things, (2) Saccadhamma--the Law of Nature, (3) Patipattidhamma--duty performed according to the Law of Nature, (4) Vipakadhamma--fruits of practice or realization. Indapanno sees the second aspect, the Law of Nature as standing directly in the position of God, Dhamma as nature is God's creation or the result of his will, Dhamma as duty is abiding by the will of God in order to attain to God, and Dhamma as results refers to the highest thing that man can receive and is what Christians call "the grace of God". Basically, for Indapanno, these four "are, in one way or another, the aspects of 'God in true religious language'" (ibid., pp. 66-69). To know God in the Dharmic sense, i.e., to be with God forever is the same as the realization of Dhamma by the Buddhist. By Dhamma or God is meant "Absolute Truth", and this truth is attained when all feelings of self and selfishness are destroyed and one is freed from suffering. This is "the attainment of the Deathless (AMATADHAMMA) or God", and in this stage of experience there is no ego-self left to die or to be born. Nature alone is left, "which is by itself without any death or birth" (ibid., pp. 27-28).

A significant feature of Indapanno's view is the all-inclusiveness of Dhamma or God. They are one and the same thing, and there is nothing that has not come from the Dhamma or God. Not only does nature in the form of natural phenomena manifest the will of God, but "in fact all natural phenomena constitute the very God" (ibid., p. 68). Satan, who is nothing but a test of man by God, "is included in the word 'Dhamma; or God, because if God had not created Satan what could have created him?" (ibid., p. 71). Thus he concludes:

"If there were anything else apart from God then God
would not be perfect. Therefore, nature itself is in-
cluded in the word God and there is also to be found

Dr. S. Radhakrishnan has also lent his support to the view that in the mind of the Buddha the concept of the Dharma as the Absolute replaces the Upanishadic concept of Brahman.[1] However the origins of the Dharma-God idea in oriental studies are traced to Mrs. Rhys Davids and to Wilhelm Geiger, the most exhaustive study of the word Dhamma in Pali literature being the monograph "Pali Dhamma" in German.[2] We now consider De Silva's own exposition of Dharma as God, as the object of devotion, as the Transcendent Reality, a "personal" reality, and as the Summum Bonum.

Dharma--the object of devotion

The Buddha's post-Enlightenment utterance that "It is ill to live paying no one the honour and obedience due to a superior," or as in another translation, "Ill at ease dwells the man who reverences

---

Satan or the Devil, call it what you may. So we can see that the so-called God is what in Buddhism we call, 'Dhamma'" (ibid., p. 72).

[1]Ibid., p. 27. Radhakrishnan's assessment of the Buddha's view of Dharma in his work Gautama the Buddha, cited by De Silva, is worth noting:

"Those who tell us that for the Buddha there is a religious experience, but there is no religious object, are violating the texts and needlessly convicting him of self-contradiction. He implies the reality of what the Upanishads call Brahman, though he takes the liberty of giving it another name Dharma, to indicate its essential ethical value for us on the empirical plane. The way of the Dharma is the way of Brahman. To dwell in Dharma is to dwell in Brahman. The Tathagata is said to have the Dharma as his body, the Brahman as his body, to be one with Dharma and one with Brahman."

De Silva also draws attention to the fact that the last three sentences are references to Samyutta Nikaya 1. 141, Anguttara Nikaya 1. 207, and Digha Nikaya 1111. 84, 81 (ibid., pp. 27-40).

[2]M. and W. Geiger, Pāli Dhamma vornehmlich in der kanonischen Literatur (Abhandlungen der bayrischen Academie der Wissenschaften Philosophisch-Historische Klasse, vol. 31, No. 1, 1920).

not, obeys not," [1] is for De Silva reminiscent of Augustine's words,
"My heart is restless until I find rest in thee." He finds the
Buddha's statement significant because the Buddha is "ill at ease"
(dukkham) if he does not reverence, honor, and obey, i.e., worship,
a reality greater than himself. Unable to find anyone worthy of
worship in the world of devas (gods) or mankind, since there was
no one perfect in all virtues (i.e., sila--morality, samadhi--
concentration, panna--wisdom, and vimutti--emancipation), the thought
comes to the Buddha to honor and worship the Dharma in which he had
been enlightened. Thus he asks, "Suppose this Dhamma in which I
have been perfectly enlightened, suppose I were to dwell honouring,
reverencing, obeying and serving that Dhamma?" While asking the
question it is said that the Brahma Sahampati appeared to him and
exhorted him as an enlightened one to "dwell honouring, reverencing,
obeying and serving the Dhamma" like all Arahants, supreme Buddhas,
and Exalted Ones had done in the past. De Silva notes that the
Geigers commenting on this passage say that "here the Dhamma ranks
higher than the Buddha as an objective reality."[2]

Dharma--transcendent reality

Dharma, as the supreme, all-embracing, sublime, and trans-
cendental Reality was not, De Silva maintains, a creation of the
Buddha but a concept that went back to Vedic times. He explains that
Dharman--the oldest form of the word--is closely related to rta in

---

[1] This passage entitled "Holding in Reverence" is found in
Samyutta Nikaya 1. 138-140 and Anguttara Nikaya 11. 20-21.

[2] Ibid., pp. 27-30.

the Rigveda. Rta meant "law" or "binding rule" which signified cosmic order" originally and later came to mean the principle of righteousness. It came to be the principle which preserved the world from physical disorder and moral chaos and was identified with Truth (satya). While rta almost disappears in the Sanskrit, Dharma takes its place and is used in the Upanishads to represent the highest reality. In the Brhadaranyaka Upanishad 1. 4. 14, Dhamma is described as "the sovereign power of the sovereign power", and in Mahanarayana Upanishad 21:6, "nothing is harder to describe than the Dharma." Thus De Silva concludes that "in this word Dharma the Buddha found ready a concept of the highest Reality which was familiar in the Brahmin schools of his time and which he could use in place of the word Brahman."[1]

Dharma--personal Reality

Dharma also becomes a personal Reality. De Silva sees the Dharma become hypostatized into a Divinity, as in the "Holding in Reverence" passage, just as the abstract concept of Brahman became

---

[1]Ibid., pp. 31-32. Instances of the Buddha's use of Brahman and Dharma as equivalents and compound expressions are cited. Especially meaningful is the use of Dhammakayo, which literally meant a Dharma-body or the incarnation of the Dhamma. In the Agganna Sutta king Pasenadi honors Gautama not because the latter is "well-born," but because the Dharma "has found its most complete realization in the Tathagata." Buddhaghosha's interpretation of the reference to the Tathagata as the incarnation in this Sutta states:
> "The Dhamma is his body because he springs from the Dhamma. Because the Dhamma is his body, he is called the Incarnation of the Dhamma; for the Dhamma in the sense of the highest (settha) is called Brahman. He has become the Dhamma, that is he possesses the nature of the Dhamma, and because he has become the Dhamma he has become the Brahman" (ibid., pp. 33-34).

the personal god _Brahma_. The Geigers have drawn attention to the
celebration of a god named _Dharma_ in Bengal in present day India who
is identified with _Brahma_ and is praised as the creator and originator
of all things. Through this kind of popular hypostatizing the concept
of _Dharma_ was personified and stood in the center of Buddhist thought
and devotion through the centuries. Though the common man thought
of _Dharma_ as a god like Vishnu or Siva, in the Buddhist view _Dharma_
was "completely supernatural" and could be seen only by those who
possessed the "Dhamma-eye" (_Dhamma Cakku_). Nevertheless it is pointed
out that "the _Dhamma_ is a reality to which one pays homage, reveres,
honours and serves; in other words, worships." Evidences of this are
cited from the Pali canon, in which _Dhamma_ is conceived of in personal
terms as a protecting deity (_Jataka_ IV. 55.1; 1.31.31; _Theragata_ 1.
303).[1]

Dharma--ethical Ideal and _summum bonum_

Dharma is also the ethical Ideal and the _summum bonum_ in
Buddhism. In Hinduism the _summum bonum_ is the attainment of oneness
with _Brahman_, and in Buddhism it is the attainment of _Nirvana_.
Although in the Pali canon Dhammahood is not spoken of as a state of
attainment, De Silva traces a connection between the ultimate attain-
ment in the two religions and _Dharma_. Thus he says, "In the Buddhist
scriptures the term Brahma Path ("_Brahma-patha_") is the way which
leads to salvation, to deliverance, to Nirvana. Thus the word Brahman
becomes for the Buddhist a designation of Nirvana."[2] Terms such as

---

[1]Ibid., pp. 34-36.

[2]"Some Issues in Buddhist-Christian Dialogue," p. 53.

nibbuto (allaying), sitibuto (quenching),.and sukhapatisamvedi (bliss)
which are associated with attainment of Brahmahood are also associa-
ted with the attainment of Nirvāna. This correspondence between
Brahman and Nirvāna is evident in the frequently found passage in the
Pali canon, "He is neither a self-tormentor, nor a tormentor of others,
is here now allayed, quenched, become cool, an experiencer of bliss
that lives with self Brahma-become" (Digha Nikaya III. 233; Majjhima
Nikaya I. 341, 344, 349, II. 159-161; Anguttara II. 206, 208, 211).
Thus the correspondence De Silva has traced between Brahman and
Nirvāna relates to the Dhamma-God idea because of the correspondence
between Brahmapatha (Brahma path) and Dhammamagga (the path of the
Dhamma). Dhamma is the ethical Law contained within the Cosmic Law,
the ethical is set within and has value only in the context of the
metaphysical because "The ground and significance of the 'ethical
Dhamma' is that it is based on and derived from the 'Eternal Dhamma.'"[1]
De Silva finds that Rabindranath Tagore fittingly sums up the main
thrust of his discussion thus:

> This Dharma and the Brahman of the Upanisads are
> essentially the same. . . . Dharma in Buddhism is an
> eternal reality of Peace, Goodness and Love for which
> man can offer up the homage of his highest loyalty, his
> life itself. This Dharma can inspire man with almost
> superhuman power of renunciation, and through the ab-
> negation of self lead him to the supreme object of his
> existence, a state that cannot be compared to anything
> we know in this world, and yet of which we can at least
> have a dim idea, when we know that it is only to be
> reached, not through the path of annihilation, but
> through immeasurable love. Thus to dwell in the constant
> consciousness of unbounded love is named by Lord Buddha,
> Brahmanihara or moving in Brahman.[2]

---

[1]Why Believe in God? p. 39.

[2]Ibid., pp. 39-40.

Buddhology--Adi-Buddha and Dharmakaya

Even though Buddhist orthodoxy frowned on the concept of God
deep spiritual yearnings within the hearts of Buddhists sought ful-
filment through a slowly developing Buddhalogy. To begin with "the
Buddha never claimed to be divine, and he never wanted people to
worship him." However, De Silva asserts that today, while the ex-
pressions of devotion may vary, "there is no doubt that the centre
of devotion for all Buddhists, in whatever land they are, is the
Buddha himself."[1] This transition began with the veneration of the
dead teacher as perfect saint and homage being paid to his relics.
Later symbols representing the Buddha (the Bodhi tree and Buddha
images) became the object of worship. Eventually it climaxed in
the worship of the Buddha himself, who was "converted into the very
God he denied, calling him 'The chief god of all gods' (Devatideva)."[2]

This process of deification was resisted by the Hinayana
Buddhists, but among the Mahayanists the Buddha came to be venerated
as "a reflection of the Supreme." He was accorded with miraculous
powers and titles with numinous connotations such as Bhagavad and
Tathagata, and the scriptures represented him as higher than the
Brahma in Hinduism. Hindu gods were adopted into popular Buddhism
in the attempt to reconcile Buddha as a divinity with the historical
fact of a teacher who did not claim to be divine. Even for the
average Theravada Buddhist the Buddha is "the Ideal of worship and
devotion, who lives now," thus instances of Buddhist prayers are

---

[1]Ibid., p. 47.

[2]Ibid., p. 46.

cited from Sri Lankan newspapers. However the orthodox, informed

Theravada Buddhist of Burma, Thailand,and Sri Lanka continues to re-

gard the Buddha "as the Supreme Teacher, the greatest Guide who has

shown man the way to perfection--but yet a man."[1]

The two most important Buddhological developments identified

by De Silva are the development of the important religious concept of

Adi-Buddha, and the philosophical concept of Dharmakaya. Addi-Buddha,

a central concept of Nepalese Buddhism also having an important place

in Tibet and Japan, is prevalent in Sri Lanka but never developed

strongly. De Silva sums up the Adi-Buddha's main attributes calling

him "the Primordial Buddha, the originative Buddha essence, self-

creative, the source and originator of all things and the original

Evolver of the Buddhas and Bodhisatvas."[2] He has thus no difficulty

---

[1]Ibid., p. 47.

[2]Ibid., p. 49. A clearer picture of the concept of Adi-Buddha
is revealed in a consideration of his titles. As Paramadibuddha he
is Buddha from the beginning; as Andibuddha, the beginningless Buddha;
as Urubuddha, the Buddha of Buddhas; and as Svayambhu lokanatha he is
"the Self-Existent Lord of the World." Among the Bodhisatvas
evolved by Adi Buddha are (a) Manjusri, "the Lord of Harmony", the
male personificatior of Wisdom, and the counterpart of Brahma or
Visva-karma the creator of the universe; (b) Avalokitesvara, "the
Lord who looks down with pity on all men", who is said to have been
incarnated three hundred times in order to save those in danger;
and, (c) Vajra-pani "the thunderbolt-handed", the dread enemy of
spirits whom he destroys with his thunderbolts. It is significant
that these three correspond to the Hindu Trimurti, i.e., Manjusri
to Brahma the Creator, Avalokitesvara to Vishnu the Preserver, and
Vajra-pani to Shiva the Destroyer. Notable among the Buddhas
evolved are Amitabha, worshipped as a personal God who grants grace
by the Mahayanists; and Maitreya, the embodiment of love whose
advent is expected to take place five thousand years after the
Parinirvana of Gautama. De Silva has noted that Buddhists reject
the Christian suggestion that the messianic expectations connected
with the worship of Maitreya are fulfilled in Christ (ibid., pp.
50-54).

in seeing <u>Adi-Buddha</u> as "an adaptation intended to serve as a counter-

part of the Hindu concept of <u>Brahma</u>, the personal creator God."[1]

    <u>Dharmakaya</u>, the philosophical concept of the "One Cosmic

Mind" or of "Reality," a central concept in Madhyamika Buddhist

philosophy,[2] is like <u>Adi-Buddha</u> identified particularly in Japanese

Buddhism. Literally meaning Dharma-Body, and in philosophical

language "Essential Body", De Silva says:

> It indicates the eternal reality that is the ground
> or source of everything. It is the ground of Being.
> "Absolute Suchness", "the Void", "the <u>Alaya-vinnaya</u>"
> [central or universal consciousness], "<u>Prajna</u>" [divine
> intuition] and "<u>Nirvana</u>" are some epithets used for
> <u>Dharma-kaya</u> in different contexts. It is <u>Dharma</u> as
> the Absolute or Ultimate Reality.[3]

    <u>Dharmakaya</u> being the "Essential Body" is the source of all,

and the "Reflected Bodies" which are divided into the categories of

---

[1]Ibid., p. 50. G. P. Malalasekera in his encyclopedia article
on the <u>Adi-Buddha</u> differs strongly saying:
    "It would be a complete misconception to consider
the Adi-Buddha as just another version of the God Creator.
That would be an absolute reversal of the Buddhist point
of view which essentially and fundamentally denies the
notion of a god creator. The conception of the Adi-Buddha
should rather be regarded as an attempt to express the
universality of experience, the essential oneness of
Samsara and Nirvana which has played so important a part
in the development of the Mahayana." See <u>Encyclopedia of
Buddhism</u> (1961), 1:214.
    De Silva however maintains that Malalasekera's rationalization
of this concept is unconvincing since <u>Adi-Buddha</u> is said to be "the
origin of all things" and "to have appeared at the beginning in the
form of light and by meditation produced <u>Avalokita</u>, who in turn
produced the universe with all the Buddhas and <u>Bodhisatvas</u>" (<u>Why
Believe in God?</u>. p. 50).

[2]The Madhyamika or the Middle Doctrine School of Mahayana
Buddhism was founded by Nāgārjuna in the second century A. D. to har-
monize rival doctrines on the nature of Reality.

[3]Ibid., p. 55.

Nirmana-kaya and Sambhogakaya are its manifestations. Nirmana-kaya
or "Form Body" is the incarnation of the Dharmakaya in a human form
as Buddha, as in the case of Gautama. Although these "incarnations"
take human flesh and blood they are believed to be mere appearances
and not real persons. The Sambhoga-kaya, "the Communal Body", is
"the Body in which the Dharmakaya appears to superhuman beings and
Bodhisatvas in this world and other celestial realms, and preaches
the Dharma." Since the term Sambhoga implies the idea of community,
mutuality, or fellowship, De Silva ventures what he terms "a fantastic
suggestion" in asking, "Could it be that Sambhoga-kaya is that which
creates fellowship or is the basis of communion?"[1]

De Silva concludes his delineation of the development of
Buddhalogy with the Trikaya (Triple Body) doctrine referred to as the
Buddhist Trinity. Bhikku Sangarakshita calls it "one of the finest
flowers of Buddhist thought", and Ninian Smart who sees its similarity
to the Christian doctrine of the Trinity notes that its significance
for us is that in it "we find intimations of a religion of devotion
and worship so dear to the hearts of theists."[2] D. T. Suzuki has
suggested that the central concept in this devotion and worship, the
Dharmakaya, is personal, since the Buddhas and Bodhisatvas who emanate
from him are personal. De Silva sees some similarities and also
significant differences between Trikaya and Trinity, and at best is
able only to find striking approximations, thus he says: "The
Dharma-kaya seems to echo the Christian doctrine of God, the

---

[1] Ibid., p. 56.

[2] Ibid., cf. Ninian Smart, World Religions: A Dialogue
(Baltimore: Penguin, 1966), p. 83.

Nirmana-kaya the doctrine of the Son who is the Incarnation of the Father, and the Sambhoga-kaya the doctrine of the Holy Spirit."[1]

Anatta and the Indispensability of God

In proposing that the biblical understanding of Tilakkhana, especially anatta, can enable us to understand what the term "God" means, De Silva has found a basis to speak to the Buddhist from within the Buddhist's non-theocentric view of life. He maintains that the logical consequence of examining the human condition in terms of anatta is to acknowledge the indispensability of God. Thus he says:

> It is my contention that, if anatta is real, God is necessary; it is in relation to the Reality of God that the reality of anatta can be meaningful. Because man is anatta, God is indispensable; because man is absolutely anatta God is absolutely necessary. The conditioned (samkhata) man has nothing to hope for unless there is an Unconditioned Reality (asam-khata).[2]

The Buddhist affirmation that man has an intrinsic power by which he can save himself contradicts the doctrine of anatta. The Bible takes anatta in all seriousness and denies any form of intrinsic power in man (either karmic force, or the power of mind--vinnana) by which he can transcend conditioned existence. Thus citing the Calvinist axiom finitum non capax infiniti (the finite is not capable of the infinite), De Silva asserts the Christian position that "there is no human solution to the human problem." Or as Karl Barth has put it, "man exists as he is grounded, constituted and maintained by God."[3]

---

[1] Ibid., pp. 56-57. Cf. World Religions: A Dialogue, p. 83.

[2] The Problem of the Self, p. 138.

[3] Ibid., p. 139. Cf. Church Dogmatics, vol. iii, Part 2. p. 346.

De Silva has maintained that the dimension of transcendence

has manifested itself in Buddhism in its inclination towards an ulti-

mate reality in Nirvāna. At the 1970 seminar on "The Buddhist Atti-

tude to God", he found himself in full agreement with the Buddhist

university professor who spoke of Nirvāna as being beyond logic and

as the object of experience.[1] The Buddha refused to give an answer

to the question as to what Nirvāna is as the real answer could only be

---

[1]See above, p. 222. De Silva maintains that God is known
not by argument but in experience, as "unless the conviction of God
is given in and through experience, it cannot be reached by logical in-
ference." Several instances of this conviction are cited, e.g.,
Wordsworth's experience in his poem on Tintern Abbey when he "felt a
presence that disturbs me with joy," Sir Ernest Shackleton's vivid
consciousness of a Divine Companion in his book South, Sadhu Sundar
Singh's vision of Christ that led to his conversion, and the words of
Douglas M. Burns, "I sometimes experience a strong feeling of the
existence and presence of something transcendent, infinite, eternal
and good; something which can influence my own destiny and the destiny
of all creation." However the question remains whether the conviction
that is experienced does in fact point to the existence of God. The
question in the Buddhist mind is, "Can God be proved?" For De Silva,
the dialogue between king Milinda and the Venerable Nagasena, on the
possibility of proving the existence of Nibbāna, is useful to answer
the Buddhist. In reply to Milinda's question as to whether it was
"possible by simile or argument or cause or method to point out the
shape or configuration or age or size of Nibbana," Nagasena's reply
is that Nibbāna defies description as it has no counterpart and like
the devas (gods) belonged to an incorporeal class (arupakayika deva).
Nibbāna, he avers, could be experienced just as "a precious gem causes
delight; even so, sire, does nibbana cause delight." While the reality
of Nibbāna could not be proved by logic, reasoning, or argument, "the
Venerable Nagasena took for granted that Nibbāna IS." Neither Nirvāna
nor God can be proved by argument. De Silva therefore maintains that
the so-called proofs of the existence of God--cosmological, teleological,
ontological, etc.,--are useful only to help us understand what we
have already experienced. They do not induce belief or create faith
but only serve to clarify, confirm,and support what we believe already.
And as to the validity of experience in establishing the existence of
God, he says:
> "The knowledge of God can be verified on the level of
> spiritual experience, and this verification is as valid
> as the verification of the sweetness of the cake by the
> "experience" of taste or the sweetness of music by the
> aesthetic experience" (Why Believe in God, pp. 2-10).

discovered in experience. Similarly God too is beyond logical analysis and is known only in experience. It was also pointed out that in the approach to the question of the reality of God, it would be a mistake to begin with a definition and description because God cannot be defined just as **Nirvāna** cannot be defined. However both God and **Nirvāna** could be spoken of as "Transcendent Reality," as De Silva notes; the fundamental thesis of the professor's presentation was that

> While Buddhism rejects the notion of God so defined
> [as found in the Oxford Dictionary, and the descrip-
> tion found in the Book of Common Prayer], it accepts
> an impersonal, transcendent and ultimate reality
> beyond time, space and causality. In this sense
> Buddhism could speak of a God beyond the God of theism.[1]

The scriptural quotation most frequently employed to support the notion of a Transcendental Reality in Buddhist thought is the famous Udāna passage in the Pātaligama Vagga of the **Khuddaka Nikāya** I. 3-8.

> Monks, there is (**atthi**) a not-born (**ajātam**), a not-become
> (**abhutam**), a not-made (**akatam**), a not-compounded
> (**asamkhatam**). If that unborn, not-become, not-made,
> not-compounded were not, there would be apparent no escape
> from this here that is born, become, made, compounded.
> But since, monks, there is an unborn, unbecome, unmade,
> uncompounded, therefore is apparent the escape from this
> here that is born, become, made, compounded.[2]

The underlying implications of this passage are of crucial importance to the discussion of the Buddhist view of God. Whether the epithets "Unborn" and "Uncreated" refer to **Nirvāna** as the Absolute or to an Absolute Reality beyond **Nirvāna** has been a matter of dispute among scholars. It has been argued that **Nirvāna** as "cessation of desire", which is its traditional interpretation in a positive sense,

---

[1] "Some Issues in the Buddhist-Christian Dialogue," p. 53.

makes it dependent on a psychological state prior to which it could

not have existed. On the other hand if Nirvāna is interpreted nega-

tively as an experience of complete extinction, it cannot exist

separately. Thus since the epithets "Unborn" and "Uncreated" cannot

in the strict sense be applied to Nirvāna, some have held "that these

epithets refer to an Absolute Reality distinct from Nirvāna. It is

a Reality that is (atthi)".[1]

The import of the Udāna passage for De Silva comes into

sharp focus in his dialogical response to Gunapala Dharmasiri's con-

troversial work A Buddhist Critique of the Christian Concept of God.[2]

---

[1]The Problem of the Self, p. 140. Attempting to understand
Nirvāna from the Christian viewpoint De Silva holds that it is "an
experience related to the Absolute and is not the Absolute in itself."
The Udāna passage has been interpreted in this way by some Buddhist
interpreters. Nāgārjuna making specific reference to this passage is
of the view that Nirvāna (deliverance from conditioned existence) is
possible because there is a Paramārtha (Ultimate Reality). According
to D. C. Wijewardene and H. Oldenberg it is likely that expressions
applied to Brahman in the Upanishads were borrowed, which would mean
that the epithets used in the Udāna passage would apply to an Ultimate
Reality other than Nirvāna. Cf. D. C. Wijewardene, Revolt in the
Temple (Colombo: Sinha Publications, 1953), p. 398, and H. Oldenberg,
Buddha: His Life, His Doctrine, His Order, tr. William Hoey (London:
Luzac, 1928), p. 283. Even E. R. Sarathchandra, who rules out the
idea that the Buddha believed in an Absolute Reality, refers to the
Udāna passage as the solitary instance which might lead to the inter-
pretation "that the Buddha placed an uncaused absolute reality against
the fleeting reality of the phenomenal world as did the Vedānta."
Cf. E. R. Sarathchandra, Buddhist Psychology of Perception (Colombo:
Ceylon University Press, 1958), p. 101. Thus De Silva concludes that
since this manner of speaking about Ultimate Reality was congenial to
the Indian mind, it is likely that the Buddha and later Buddhist
thinkers were influenced by the Upanishads. (The Problem of the Self,
pp. 140-141).

[2] See above, pp. 56-57. De Silva has undertaken a critical
examination of Dharmasiri's treatment of the related concepts of
anattā and Nirvāna in this book. He sees Dharmasiri making a false
start in the first chapter "God and the Soul" by assuming that "an
understanding of the soul contributes much to the understanding of

According to Dharmasiri Nirvāna is complete extinction, thus he says

that the Udāna passage cannot be understood "to indicate a positive

and an ontological existence of Nirvana."[1] Dharmasiri's negative

interpretation leans heavily toward the error of ucchedaditthi

(nihilism). By dispensing with the idea of God he has also eclipsed

Nirvāna. Thus Dharmasiri's book is, for De Silva, a classic illus-

tration of the truth that "if God is not annihilation is the end."[2]

God", and then concluding that "the soul cannot be a good analogy to
a morally and spiritually perfect God" (cf. A Buddhist Critique,
pp. 1, 30). Dharmasiri is said to be laboring under an erroneous
premise due to a lack of understanding of the Hebrew-Christian view
of man. He has mistakenly equated the imago dei with the Greek
idea of the immortality of the soul and attempted to depict the
Christian view by using the concept of the immortality of the soul
as an analogy for God. See "Anatta and God," Dialogue New Series 2,
No. 3 (November-December 1975): 106.

[1] A Buddhist Critique, p. 185.

[2] "Anatta and God", p. 108. De Silva contends that Dharma-
siri's explanation of Nirvāna as "absolute extinction" makes of
Buddhism "a deferred or delayed materialism." Thus Dharmasiri says
that the Buddha used Nirvāna in the sense of "complete extinction,"
and that when the five khandas are annihilated "consciousness reaches
its end" (cf. A Buddhist Critique, pp. 180-181). By "absolute
extinction" Dharmasiri does not mean the extinction of desire (tanha),
a view which would have been consonant with the best Theravada tra-
dition. Instead, as De Silva points out, what he means is that
"at death the saint becomes 'completely' extinct." Even the positive
statements about Nirvāna as "supreme bliss," "intellectual enlighten-
ment," "uprooting of attachment,"etc., Dharmasiri maintains are
applicable only when the person is living. Complete Nirvāna takes
place at the death of the arahant which is always referred to as
"parinibbana," "pari" meaning "completely" or "in every respect" (cf.
A Buddhist Critique, p. 188). Dharmasiri maintains that the ucche-
davada that the Buddha rejected was not "the annihilationist view,"
but the materialist view according to which all men are fully ex-
tinguished soon after death. The Buddha rejected the materialist
view because he accepted the fact of rebirth. It is only at the
parinirvana of the saint, after his cycle of rebirth is ended, that
he becomes "completely," "in every respect" extinct. This view,
according to De Silva, is nothing but " a deferred or delayed material-
ism." See "Anatta and God", pp. 107-108.

Since man is absolutely _anattā_ there is a need for a hypothesis of an Ultimate Reality, God, or the Unconditioned, to avoid the error of _ucchedaditthi_. Thus the basic implication of the Udāna passage is "that the Unconditioned Reality is indispensable if man is to escape the conditioned; apart from the Unconditioned there can be no escape for that which is conditioned."[1]

For De Silva then, the Christian-Buddhist meeting point on the doctrine of God hinges on the fact that the full depth and significance of _anattā_ can be understood only in relation to the Unconditioned (God). He concludes his exposition responding to H. Oldenberg's interpretation of the Udāna passage, which he says "probably voices the Theravada position." For Oldenberg the Buddha's words "there is an uncreated" need not necessarily signify that _Nirvāna_ is a Transcendent Reality, but they merely signified "that the created can free himself from the curse of being created--there is a path from the World of the created out into dark endlessness."[2] Oldenberg, seeing that this position is open to a negative or positive interpretation, raises the question: "Does the path lead into a new existence? Does it lead into Nothing?" He answers: "The Buddhist creed rests in a delicate equipoise between the two. The longing of the heart that craves the eternal has not nothing, and yet the thought has not a something which it might firmly grasp [italics De Silva's]."[3] The words he has italicised De Silva considers crucial, as they point

---

[1] _The Problem of the Self_, p. 139.

[2] Ibid., pp. 141-142. Cf. H. Oldenberg, _Buddha: His Life, His Doctrine_, p. 283.

[3] Ibid., p. 142.

us to what he believes represents the Buddhist understanding of the

import of the Udāna passage:

> They mean that the longing of the heart for the eternal
> hits something and not nothing, but that something
> is a reality apprehended in religious experience which
> surpasses the human mind and speech to grasp, define and
> describe. If this can be regarded as the Buddhist
> approach to reality, then there is much that Christians
> can learn from it.[1]

Thus for De Silva the correct Theravada position is that the

concept of <u>Nirvāna</u> indicates that "the longing of the heart for the

eternal hits something", i.e., a Transcendent Reality or God. To

adopt the negative interpretation of <u>Nirvāna</u>, as Dharmasiri has done,

is to dispense with God at the expense extinguishing <u>Nirvāna</u>. By

doing this all that Dharmasiri has achieved is in "making Buddhism

the most materialistic and pessimistic of all religions."[2] Since the

born, the become, the made, the compounded, cannot by its own intrin-

sic power transcend finitude, God or the Ultimate Reality becomes

absolutely necessary.

Dharmasiri's book, is however, a challenge to search for a

worthier concept of God. Having found theological and philosophical

explanations of God wanting, he himself seems to be looking for a

nobler concept of God.[3] Christians need to guard against thinking

---

[1]Ibid., pp. 141-142.

[2]"Anatta and God," p. 108.

[3]That Dharmasiri's book can have a positive value for Chris-
tians becomes apparent to De Silva, because of what is said at the
end of the sixth chapter:
> "lastly, it is not only a good fortune but a logical
> certainty that a good Buddhist will necessarily achieve
> union with God, provided God exists and is good, as the

that they can understand God by theories and conceptual formulations. By putting God under a microscope and minutely analyzing him, Christian theology has hindered belief in God "to the point that God ceases to be God," and "the resulting theologies, theories, and conceptual formulations (most of which are inventions of a western culture and not truly biblical) have obscured our vision of Reality."[1] Thus De Silva posits the view that God must be found and experienced at "the supra-depth level of ultimacy."

It is at the supra-depth level of ultimacy that one has a relationship with the Transcendent, and a sense of oneness and communion with Reality. It is at this level, to the Buddhists the realm of Avyakata (the inexplicable), that one realizes there is a Reality which goes beyond the level of rational thinking. Of the discovery of this Reality, this Unborn, Unbecome, Unmade, and Uncompounded, De Silva says:

> God is really known in the abyss of one's being, in the realisation that one is anatta and therefore cannot depend on oneself for one's salvation. To reach that point, one has to pass through the dark night of the soul; through the desert where God himself has forsaken one. . . . It is the discovery of emptiness--that man is but dust and to dust he shall return--

---

Buddha explained to the brahamin Vasettha who desperately insisted that Brahma (God) exists: 'And so you say, Vasettha, that the bhikku (Buddhist monk) is free from anger, and free from malice, pure in mind, and master of himself; and that God is free from anger, and free from malice, pure in mind, and master of himself. Then in sooth, Vasettha, that the bhikku who is free from anger, free from malice, pure in mind, and master of himself should after death, when the body is dissolved, become united with God, who is the same--such a situation of things is every way possible" (A Buddhist Critique, p. 124).

[1]The Problem of the Self, p. 142.

that can annihilate self, and in the annihilation
of self, one is led to the discovery of the oneness
of emptiness and fullness. When man realises that
he is <u>natthi</u> (nothing) in himself, he discovers that,
he is in fact <u>atthi</u> in the abyss of his being.[1]

Of this realization of one's nullity or <u>anattāness</u>, of one's

utter creatureliness, this experience of dying in order to be released

from the burden of self, De Silva declares: "This I take is what

Nirvana means--the extinction of the ego."[2] This experience is

common to both Buddhist and Christian. He notes that Muggeridge,

speaking of the sense of oneness that results from the experience of

confronting God, says, "This sense of oneness, with the consequent

release from the burden of the self, I take to be God--something

which indubitably exists, which not only has not died, but cannot

die."[3] What Muggeridge calls "something" is the living God, and

of this "something" there has never been and never will be a completely

---

[1] The Problem of the Self, p. 143. Noting that there are
certain states of consciousness in Buddhist psychology which exceed
rational thought in which realities not present to the senses can
be known, De Silva draws attention to <u>Lokuttara</u>, the spiritual
sphere in which God is realized. Four spheres are listed in the
<u>Dhammasangani</u>, the first book of the <u>Abhidhamma</u>, which deals with
the states of consciousness (<u>cittas</u>), viz., <u>Kamaracara</u>--the sensuous,
<u>Rupavacara</u>--the form sphere, <u>Arupavacara</u>--the formless, and <u>Lokuttara</u>--
the supramundane. As consciousness passes from the lower to the
higher spheres there is an "emergence of states of insight which
can plumb depths of truth which discursive intellect cannot reach,
which includes intellectual or cognitive faculties but transcends
them." In the highest and final stage, the <u>Lokuttara</u>, is found
<u>An-annatannassamit'in-driya</u> or the faculty of "believing I shall come
to know the unknown." Thus of the <u>Lokuttara</u> De Silva asks, "Is this
not the level on which God can be known?" See <u>Why Believe in God?</u>
pp. 12-13.

[2] "Anatta and God," p. 112.

[3] The Problem of the Self, p. 143. Cf. M. Muggeridge, <u>Jesus
Rediscovered</u> (London: Fontana Books, 1969), p. 4.

satisfactory definition. This "something", undefinable and indescribable, is the Absolute Reality distinct from Nirvāna. It is the "ultimate Beyond which gives meaning to the proximate beyonds--the experiences of transcendence in everyday life."[1]

Despite the utter ineffability and incomprehensibility of God, man's attempt to give expression to his realization of God inevitably results in the use of some kind of symbol. Radhakrishnan's remark that the Absolute reveals himself as Light, Love, and Life to seekers of different temperaments is especially significant as the very same symbols are used in the Bible to signify God. However, it is pointed out that the meaning of the symbols, analogues, and metaphors that are used is bound up with the faith-community that uses them. While Allah has significance for Muslims and Jehovah for the Jews, these terms may not carry meaning in different contexts. For De Silva, this means that

> We cannot talk of God without at the same time talking
> of ourselves. Whatever name we may use for 'God' will
> be meaningless unless it points to something within us
> and beyond us. In other words, the term 'God' must
> combine the existential and the ontological, the ethical
> and the metaphysical, the within and the beyond.[2]

---

[1] "Christian Reflection in a Buddhist Context," p. 106.

[2] Why Believe in God?, p. 62. The hesitance to speak about God due to the difficulties and limitations of language is illustrated in the experience of the Israelites. Thinking the name of God was too sacred to be pronounced they used the four consonants YHWH to signify him, but sheer necessity forced them to come up with the pronounceable name Adonai (my Lord). Christian mystics who have felt that God is not definable and nameable have had the same experience, as can be seen in the work of Pseudo-Dionysius the Areopagite who wrote about God as follows:
"Ascending higher, we say. . . .
   not definable,
   not nameable,

As we have already noted certain symbols were used to signify the ultimate Reality in Buddhism, e.g., the Adi-Buddha idea (comparable in some ways to the Father-God in Christianity) and the Trikaya doctrine (similar to the doctrine of the Trinity).[1] A particularly noteworthy meeting point between the religions in the use of symbols for God is found in the Trinitarian concept. De Silva has traced the resemblances between Trikaya and Trinity and has also drawn attention to the points of contrast between the Buddhist and Christians views. The basic reason he advances for the rise of trinitarian concepts is stated as follows: "The tension between ultimacy and concreteness in the concept of the Absolute drives towards a unity in a trinitarian structure [italics De Silva's]."[2] In the development of the Trikaya doctrine there is at first the Dharmakaya, the Absolute or the Ultimate. The need to think of the Absolute in concrete terms, since Dharmakaya was a pure abstraction that failed to satisfy religious

---

not knowable,
not dark, not light
not untrue, not true,
not affirmable, not deniable
    for
While we affirm or deny of those orders of beings
    that are akin to Him
we neither affirm not deny Him
    that is beyond
    all affirmation as unique universal Cause and
    all negation as simple pre-eminent Cause,
    free of all and
    to all transcendent.
Thus Dionysius begins by saying God cannot be defined or named, but ends up calling him the Beyond, the unique universal cause, the pre-eminent cause, the transcendent (ibid., pp. 62-64).

[1]See above, pp. 231-234.

[2]Ibid., p. 72.

aspirations, resulted in the Nirmanakaya. However, this urge for

concreteness resulted in a kind of polytheism, viz., the belief in

Buddhas, Bodhisatvas, and gods, and the Absolute in Buddhism became

prone to the danger of losing its ultimacy. The gods in Buddhism

being only super beings and subject to the law of anicca lacked

ultimacy. Thus De Silva maintains that in the resulting tension

between ultimacy and concreteness, a trinitarian concept arose to

maintain the balance. The resolution of this tension within the

framework of the Christian concept of the Trinity stands in marked

contrast and is stated by De Silva as follows:

> In Christian thought God is the Ultimate Reality
> (Dharma-kaya): but in the Incarnation (Nirmanakaya)
> he became the concrete Reality. Christ was not a
> partial revelation of Reality. In Him was the full-
> ness of the Godhead. Thus in His concreteness ulti-
> macy was not lost. We say that God is Spirit. Spirit
> is opposed to matter; spirit is transcendent to all
> things material. But the spirit is immanent in all
> things. Thus transcendence (ultimacy) and immanence
> (concreteness) are held together in a unity. The
> concept of the Trinity is of great importance because
> in it ultimacy and concreteness, transcendence and
> immanence, metaphysics and ethics, stability and
> dynamism, are held together in a Unity.[1]

De Silva's translational theology in terms of Tilakkhana, in

all its facets, finds its fulfilment in the reality that is God. It

is in his anattaness, in the abyss of his being, that man discovers

God and his authentic self. "If God is, then the realisation that

one is anatta leads to the experience of emptiness and fullness

(sunnata-punnata, natthi-atthi, anatta-pneuma) all in one."[2] It is

---

[1] Ibid., pp. 71-72.

[2] The Problem of the Self, p. 145.

in the worship and experience of God that man makes his pilgrimage toward that ultimate goal the Kingdom of God, the Community of Love. Christianity and Buddhism agree on the need for self-negation, which Buddhists emphasize is an essential aspect of the Nibbāna experience. Both see the need to put an end to the egocentric life of craving and self-interest by deliberately denying the self. This, however, "does not mean the annihilation of the self but an experience in which the notion of 'I', 'me' and 'mine', of separate individuality, disappears."[1] In Christian teaching and experience there is something strikingly analogous to the Buddhist notion of the need to strip oneself of I, Me, Mine. But the essential point of difference is in the Christian emphasis on the indispensability of God. Since man is really anattā, God is indispensable for his salvation:

> Unlike Buddhism Christianity says that it is only by abandoning oneself to God that one can die to self . . . . So the sovereign cure for the problem of self, as Christianity sees it, is to turn one's attention away from self to God and allow the divine reality to occupy the centre of one's being.[2]

It is only by losing oneself in this I-Thou relationship that one can cease to be a separate self. The Bible teaching is that the authentic "self" exists only in relationship. It is a relationship in which one "loses oneself completely, and in losing oneself one finds oneself. Exclusive individuality is negated, but personality finds fulfilment."[3] Thus in the New Testament idea of the Kingdom

---

[1] Ibid., p. 125.

[2] Ibid., pp. 128-129.

[3] Ibid., p. 129.

248

of God as a Community of Love, in which "love integrates being with being and being with Being,"[1] De Silva suggests, "we have an answer to the Buddhist quest for self-negation as well as for a form of self-fulfillment, without one contradicting the other."[2] This is the basis for a Christian doctrine of <u>anattā</u>, in which the self is denied without yielding to a nihilistic view, and authentic selfhood is affirmed without yielding to an eternalistic view:

> Here we can find a satisfactory solution to the problem of the quest for self-identity which does not fall into the errors of either nihilism or eternalism. Since the person exists only in participation and not by an intrinisic potentiality, there is no question of eternalism; and since the person retains a differentiation in communion, there is no question of nihilism. But such an understanding is possible only if we accept the reality of God, with whom a person can enter into communion.[3]

---

[1] Ibid., p. 135.

[2] Ibid., p. 130.

[3] Ibid., p. 137.

CHAPTER IV

EVALUATION AND REFLECTION

> Religious truths do not meet in the library, they
> meet in the minds and souls of men.[1]

In 1966, as director of the Study Center, De Silva said in
his report to the NCC and to the Methodist Synod: "What the present
situation demands from the church are. . . a re-formulation of her
theology, a re-adjustment of her methods and a readiness to perceive
points of contact with non-Christian religions--a task to which the
church pays only lip service."[2] That he has essayed this task almost
single-handed to become the foremost practitioner of dialogue on the
Sri Lankan scene is widely acknowledged.[3] In this chapter we have
made an evaluation and an interpretive assessment of the re-formulation
of theology that De Silva has undertaken, and of the dialogical
method he has spelled out in his constant quest for points of contact
to dialogue meaningfully with the Buddhist. We have compared his
dialogical approach with other Sri Lankan approaches, Buddhist and
Christian, and considered some Buddhist responses with regard to
dialogical method and the central theological issues of the Buddhist-

-----

[1]Buddhism and the Claims of Christ, p. 22.

[2]Reported by Gottfried H. Rothermundt, "An Evaluation of
'Dialogue': Some Reflections on the Old Series (1963-1973)," Dialogue
New Series 1, No. 3 (September-December 1974): 88, n.7.

[3]See above, pp. 34-37.

Christian encounter. We have also reflected on these issues, seeking to bring together that which is decisive for the construction of a framework of theological understanding of other religions.

The basic issue we confront in our evaluation of the corpus of De Silva's writings as a test case on inter-religious dialogue is whether authentic religious dialogue is possible. In the fundamental propositions he made at Nairobi, De Silva asserted that it is indeed possible to know the religious faith of others, i.e., that there is a "sharing in the spirituality of others," and "the real test of faiths is faiths-in-relation." In dialogue the authenticity of one's own faith and that of the other is maintained, because in it one gets to know the faith of the other in depth, and it "refines and sharpens" one's faith and "enriches and strengthens" commitment to it.[1] Our description of De Silva's theology as "a practised theology of dialogue," and as "translational", predicates that theological reflection should begin with concrete involvement in living encounter with other religions. Thus dialogical theology is seen as theology-in-context. It is in the process of reflection in the context of each other's faith that the limits of present clarities are transcended. From the Christian standpoint De Silva's theology must be evaluated on whether he has maintained an authentically Christian relation to the Buddhist and his world; and from the Buddhist viewpoint, for De Silva's theology to be translational the Buddhist must be able to recognize his faith in De Silva's portrayal of it. We must ask the question whether his dialogical efforts have in fact been a two-way

---

[1] See above, p. 62.

process in which a true congruence of concepts and categories have been achieved. Whether De Silva and his dialogue partner have grasped each other's centralities, and the degree to which mutuality has been achieved while preserving the authenticity of the respective faiths, constitutes the underpinning of the evaluative criteria we have used.

Our examination of De Silva's dialogical theology and method, and his use of Buddhist terms and thought-forms in relation to Christianity, is set in the perspective of the Asian Christian theologian living in the midst of non-Christian religions. We must examine the validity of De Silva's stance that Asian expressions of theological thought need to be freed from Western theological systems in the task of making truth intelligible. His call for "freedom from teutonic captivity," was a call to break down the walls of separation between the religions.[1] In practice this meant that Asian theology needed to be translational, an approach which required an openness to the deepest religious convictions of others. This approach has raised the fear of syncretism which, largely under the overpowering influence of Kraemer, has come to be understood as an illegitimate mingling of different religious elements. Ever since Tambaram (1938) the rightness of one's approach to interfaith relations has proceeded by taking up a position relative to Kraemer, either endorsing or repudiating.[2] De Silva's dialogical approach has challenged the Kraemerian view and maintained that translational theology is the

---

[1]See above, pp. 16-17.

[2]See above, p. 64.

inevitable risk that Asian Christians living in the midst of other religions must take. Thus in our evaluation of the validity of his stance on the basic issues of dialogue such as the uniqueness of Christ, revelation outside of Christianity, other religions as ways of salvation, and the relation of witness to mission, the pivotal question we ask is: In translation, i.e., in speaking the language of the Buddhist, has De Silva recognized the "other" as "other" and refused to water down genuine distinctions between the two faiths?

Sri Lankan Christian Approaches
Points of Departure

A comparison of De Silva's dialogical point of departure, with those which contemporary Sri Lankan Christian theologians have taken in their conversation with Buddhism, bears significantly on De Silva's assertion that the real test of faiths is faiths in relation. He has repeatedly asserted that Buddhism can fertilize and enrich the Christian's faith and enable him to see new dimensions of truth, indicating that for him in authentic dialogue there are converging foci of truth. We find De Silva looking at Christianity through Buddhist eyes and maintaining that some truths in Buddhism are correctives to certain deviations from biblical truths. Thus for him truth, especially religious truth, is not simply a matter of either-or but of both-and. A comparison with the approaches of other Christians seems to bear this out.

In his selection of the three signata of Buddhism, anicca, anattā, and dukkha, as the starting point for the construction of a framework of theological understanding, De Silva has taken hold of Buddhism's most central categories. As S. Z. Aung has noted, the

<u>anattā</u> theory "forms the central doctrine of Buddhist philosophy."[1]
This is the right starting point for De Silva who maintains that a
living theology begins with living existential realities. Kraemer,
who saw a radical discontinuity between the biblical revelation and
all religions and maintained that syncretistic distortion resulted
from adaptation, has pointed out that Buddhism's "originality and
force reside in the fact that it conceived the transience (<u>anitya</u>
or <u>anitta</u>) of all existence and the supreme need to achieve escape
from it with such extreme intensity as cannot be surpassed."[2] Though
Kraemer could also say that "Buddhism teaches with a kind of pro-
phetic vigour that what really matters is man and his deliverance,
and nothing else,"[3] his concept of revelation precluded empathetic
understanding of Buddhism.

De Silva's empathetic understanding of Buddhism, and ability
to speak from within it, stands in contrast to the approaches of
fellow Sri Lankans D. T. Niles and Bryan De Kretser. D. T. Niles,
who differed from Kraemer in that he saw the possibility of greater
mutuality between the two religions, saw Buddhism as one of the most
realistic of the great religions of the world. He describes himself
as a Christian student of Buddhism and says that "while to some
extent a student can approach the study of religion neutrally,
he can never completely or even adequately do so."[4] Thus he does not

---

[1]"Introduction to Anuruddha," <u>Compendium of Philosophy</u>, ed.
C. A. F. Rhys Davids (London: Luzac, 1963), p. 6.

[2]<u>The Christian Message in a Non-Christian World</u>, p. 174.

[3]Ibid., pp. 174-175.

[4]<u>Buddhism and the Claims of Christ</u>, p. 22.

attempt any formulation of a general theory between the Christian

faith and the Buddhist dhamma, but says to the Buddhist, "all that

I can do is to present my faith as a Christian to you as a Buddhist

in as meaningful a language for you as I am able to use, and then

leave it at that."[1] His use of Buddhist terms is therefore, as the

title of each chapter in his book indicates, to communicate the

Christian's perspective, dogmas, faith, life, beliefs, and proclama-

tion in language that has significance for the Buddhist. He differs

significantly from De Silva in that while he speaks to the Buddhist,

and listens, he does not communicate from within Buddhism.[2] We find

that De Silva has spoken from within Buddhism both on the theoretical

and existential levels. He dialogues with the Theravada as well as

the other branches of Buddhism. Recognizing that Buddhism runs a gamut

of mentalities from the deeply critical to the animistic, De Silva

dialogues with theoretical as well as popular Buddhism. Thus while

Niles remains at a comparative approach--as he dares not minimize

the contradiciton between faith in God and the Buddhist's natural

presuppositions,[3] De Silva has found the point of contact--that if

anatta is real God is indispensable, and traces the development of

---

[1]Ibid.

[2]Kraemer's evaluation of Niles' work gives the impression
that Niles is speaking one-sidedly rather than dialogically. He says
that Niles has become "a Buddhist to the Buddhists" in order to preach
Christ as the power and wisdom of God. He sees Niles "striking a
right balance in the confrontation of Buddhism and Christianity,"
because "he is able to demonstrate that Buddhism in no sense affords
a foundation on which the Christian faith can be based. In Christ
all things become really new" (ibid., p. 11).

[3]Ibid., p. 24.

a Buddhology in the attempt to bridge the gulf, which in the view of traditional apologetics, exists between so-called Buddhist "atheism" and the Christian idea of a personal God.

Bryan De Kretser, another notable Sri Lankan contributor to the Christian-Buddhist encounter, takes a clearly one-sided either-or approach and describes his work Man in Buddhism and Christianity as "an academic statement on the Buddhist and Christian conception of man,"[1] in which comparison is "made between dogmatic Hinayana orthodoxy and dogmatic Christianity."[2] While religious meaning is in some measure accessible to the non-participant scholar, is the academic exercise of comparative religions adequate? Is not subjective participation an essential condition for understanding the faith of others? As Wilfred Cantwell Smith has pointed out, to merely play the role of an observer is to ignore the faith of the other:

> The participant can see very clearly that the outsider may know all about a religious system, and yet may totally miss the point. The outsider may intellectually command all the details of its external facts, and yet may be--indeed, as an outsider, presumably must be or demonstratively is--untouched by the heart of the matter.[3]

De Silva's approach to Buddhism stands apart from that of Niles and De Kretser in that he has to a greater measure attempted the apprehension of Buddhism as a dynamic living faith. He has studied Buddhism in Sri Lanka's Buddhist universities, receiving a

---

[1]P. i.

[2]Ibid., p. 1.

[3]The Meaning and End of Religion (New York: Macmillan, 1962), p. 134.

diploma in Theravada Buddhism from Vidyalankara and following a

study course in the Mahayana at Vidyodaya. More importantly, he has

in his numerous encounters listened empathetically to Buddhists on

living issues such as nationalism, politics, race, and violence. This

empathetic approach has facilitated the development of a contextual

theology. Note, for instance, the relevance to dialogue of his grasp

of the Buddhist view that from the earliest times the Buddhist

religion and the Sinhala nation constituted an indivisible whole.[1]

That he sought to come close to the heart of Buddhism and understand

its existential meanings is best revealed in his work Buddhism:

Beliefs and Practices in Sri Lanka, in which he portrays the look

and the feel of being a Buddhist in the various strata of society.

Here he presents not a highly rational, intellectual philosophy but

the Buddhism of the believer, a religion in which devotion and feel-

ing play a major role. Thus he says:

> Buddhism has a religious sap which has made it a living
> vital religion. This religious sap consists, as in
> other religions, not only of doctrines and ethical teach-
> ings, but also of historical traditions, ceremonies,
> rites, rituals and myths, all of which have combined to
> form the faith by which Buddhists live.[2]

---

[1]See above, pp. 38-40.

[2]Buddhism: Beliefs and Practices in Sri Lanka (Colombo:
The Ecumenical Institute, 1980), p. v. The kind of personal engagement
that De Silva had with Buddhism was reflected at his funeral, as the
obituary issued by the Ecumenical Institute indicates:
> "It was perhaps significant that, on its way to the
> crematorium at Kanatta, the funeral procession wended
> its way through both the Christian and Buddhist sec-
> tions of the cemetery symbols of a man who had sought
> to bring about a deeper understanding between these
> two faiths." "Rev. Dr. Lynn De Silva," Colombo: 1982,
> p. 2 (Mimeographed.)

De Silva's most original contribution to theological thought is the Christian-Buddhist concept of anattā-pneuma, which we have delineated in the third chapter. He has acknowledged that it was the systematic treatment of anattā in the Buddhist texts that led him to the analysis of comparable texts in the Bible, and thus the recognition of the biblical denial of the immortality of the soul. It is the willingness to accept the Buddhist understanding of anattā without minimizing it in any way that has made this conceptualization of Buddhist-Christian anthropology possible, and also makes it valid in terms of the dialogue. It is not possible to grasp the meanings of concepts apart from the context of their religious functioning. Thus the pervasive notion, found in traditional Christianity and Western thought, of an immortal soul has prevented Sri Lankan Roman Catholics from entering into a dialogue on the most central of Buddhist centralities, anattā.

G. H. Rothermundt, noting the difference in the concepts of the soul "between De Silva and Roman Catholic theologians who are also engaged in the quest for a contextual theology," says that "Obviously the latter are aiming at an indigenous theological anthropology from a different angle."[1] He cites Mervyn Fernando's article

---

[1] "An Evaluation of 'Dialogue'," p. 91. A recent example is that of Dr. Antony Fernando, lecturer in Christian Culture at the University of Kelaniya in Sri Lanka, who has questioned whether De Silva's exposition of anattā is what the Buddha understood it to be. Fernando has reacted to De Silva's statement that the notion of an immortal soul "entered Christian thinking through the influence of Greek philosophy and is altogether alien to what the Bible teaches about the nature and destiny of man" (Problem of the Self, p. 3). He says that the doctrine of anattā (soullessness) was not the Buddha's view but resulted from the confrontation between early Buddhism and Greek philosophy. He maintains that the Buddha's view found in the

"Self, Reality and Salvation in Christianity and Buddhism," as an

example. In it Fernando calls for true congruence of concepts and

categories and maintains that the categories of "Self," "Absolute

Reality," and "Salvation or Liberation" are the "most basic and fun-

damental categories" of both systems.[1] He then proceeds to expli-

cate the concept of the self in terms of Aristotelian "substance,"

as "an independent, perduring entity."[2] Michael J. Mooney in a res-

ponse to Fernando points out that though Christians may have expli-

cated the concept of the self in terms of Aristotelian substance,

"the final meaning of such notions should be sought in the function

---

Anattalakkhana Sutta (the no-self sermon) is not the metaphysical
version of the no-soul theory found in the Buddhist classic the
Milindapanha, a dialogue that is "traceable to the days of Greek
domination in India and conducted between a Buddhist monk called Naga-
sena, and a Greek monarch called Milinda (or Menander)" see Antony
Fernando, Buddhism and Christianity: Their Inner Affinity (Colombo:
The Ecumenical Institute for Study and Dialogue, 1981), p. 46. Naga-
sena's illustration that the five aggregates consist of the human
being in the same way that different parts makes up the chariot was
not the Buddha's view. The Buddha's aim was to show that the true
self was to be found outside the aggregates. His discussion on the
aggregates had nothing to do with the soul but was concerned with a
personality building technique. Thus for the Buddha there were two
types of self and neither was the soul. The first was the false self
that is to be negated in samsara, and the second is the enlightened
or emancipated self in Nirvana. Thus Fernando concludes: "The 'no-
self' or the 'anatta' doctrine of the Buddha is not a doctrine of 'no-
immortal soul' or even of 'no-individuality'" (ibid., p. 51). Fernando
states in his introduction that he has aimed at maximum fidelity to
the original thought of the Buddha, and that some of his thoughts are
not "identical with the interpretation found in some contemporary
Buddhist manuals" (ibid., p. 3). Orthodox Sri Lankan Theravadins are
likely to see Fernando's interpretation as another attempt to smuggle
in, or leave the way open for, belief in the soul as a permanent entity.
See above, pp. 150-152, and 173.

[1] International Philosophical Quarterly 12, No. 3 (September
1972): 415.

[2] Ibid., p. 416.

they perform in the concrete religious life of their traditions as disclosed in the texts analyzed."[1] He then cites the eminent Buddhist scholar T. W. Rhys Davids, who insisted that Buddhism rejects, as religiously bankrupt, any and every theory of enduring selfhood and noted that the failure to grasp this "has rendered so very large a portion of the voluminous Western writings on the subject of so little value."[2] The difference between the Catholic approach and that of De Silva is that Catholics proceed deductively from their own tradition, whereas De Silva proceeds dialogically from a common point of departure by getting as close as possible to the Buddhist meaning of anattā.

The Buddhist Response and the
Search for Common Ground

Margaret Chatterjee makes the observation that in the past religion has done much to foster the spirit of "we" over against "they", and religious language has been "persuasive" and often backed up by force, thus impeding genuine communication. Answering the question whether the language of one faith can be translated into the language of another faith, she says that "the crux of the problem of the failure of inter-religious communication lies in the contrast between 'This means to me' and 'That means to you'." Religious faith however becomes translational when we find "a vehicle which can lead

---

[1]"On Comparing Christian and Buddhist Traditions: A Response to Mervyn Fernando," International Philosophical Quarterly 13, No. 2 (June 1973): 270.

[2]Ibid., Cf. T. W. Rhys Davids, Buddhism: Its History and Literature (New York: Putnam, 1896), pp. 39-41.

to the affirmation "This means to me but I know what that means to you'."[1] We now consider some Buddhist responses to De Silva's dialogical affirmations and compare his approach to that of Buddhist dialogists.

De Silva has clearly gone beyond the comparative religions approach of Shanta Ratnayake in the endeavor to meaningfully translate his religious faith. Ratnayake has been a co-editor of Dialogue and has undertaken a serious comparative study in his work Two Ways of Perfection: Buddhist and Christian.[2] Assessing Ratnayake's contribution in the foreword to this book, Edmund Perry describes Ratnayake as a "comparative religionist" who as one born, reared, and disciplined in Theravada Buddhism, has demonstrated that it is possible through academic study to "enter into the spirit of Christianity as well as into its thought-world and thereby gain an admirably accurate understanding of Christianity as Christians themselves understand it."[3] However the question remains whether comparative religious studies at the academic level are an adequate vehicle for the translation of one religious faith to that of another. Ratnayake has treated the data of both religions with fairness and respect and taken pains to point out the basic distinctions between the religions. The study ends listing the similarities and dissimilarities between the Buddhist way of insight-wisdom and the Christian way of faith; as

---

[1] "The Presuppositions of Inter-Religious Communication--A Philosophical Approach," Religious Studies 3 (1967-8): 397.

[2] See above, p. 58.

[3] Two Ways of Perfection, p. xiii.

Perry points out,he has sought to understand each way in its own environment "having grasped the Buddhist contextual understanding and separately the Christian contextual understanding."[1] There has, however, been no attempt to speak from within the other's context; thus we find no significant degree of mutuality has been achieved.

De Silva's approach differs significantly. Beyond identifying parallels and non-parallels he seeks for points of contact to listen to and understand,to speak and be understood. Religions must not only eschew their exclusivity, they must overcome their introvert nature as there can be no meaningful communication as long as discussion remains solely within Christian or Buddhist terms of reference. De Silva's dialogical contribution stands apart from that of other Sri Lankans in that his religious faith has in some measure succeeded in transcending its embodiment to arrive at an inclusive attitude to the faith of the other. It is this impulse toward mutuality, this openness or porosity, the acknowledgement that other faiths contain truths that enables one to transcend present clarities and make a creative contribution to theology. This does not mean the abandonment of personal commitment to one's particular faith since for De Silva the point of contact was often antithetical, and though the way was open for mutual fertilization there are also points of doctrinal irreducibility. Thus we find that he has in the main taken a dialectical approach and treated Buddhism and Christianity as complementary systems.[2] We now consider the response of three notable Buddhist interlocutors to this approach.

---

[1] Ibid., p. xii.

[2] Though the words of the Buddhist monk, who likened Buddhist-Christian dialogue to a monkey trying to kiss its fiancee through a

What is "Christian," What is "Buddhist"

De Silva has been charged by Alec Robertson, in the ex-
changes following the NCC seminar in 1967, with making "a travesty
and hotch-potch of the two teachings as expounded by the Founders
of the two doctrines."[1] He sees De Silva erring in his attempt
to come up with new interpretations by reconciling the fundamental
Christian doctrines of God, heaven, and repentance, with the doc-
trine of the Buddha. We now consider a fundamental problem of
conceptual dialogue which Robertson's allegation points to--that
of correctly defining the other's position within the spectrum of
his own religion.

With regard to his interpretation of the doctrine of God,
De Silva is faulted for the use of Amata (Deathless), Akatannu
(Uncreated), Asankatha (Unconditioned), and Tathata (The Truly-So)
to suggest the Christian idea of God, whereas these terms refer to
Nirvana in Theravada Buddhism and "in fact have no resemblance to the
Christian idea of God."[2] Robertson also objects to De Silva's use of

---

glass wall, indicate a sheer dissonance between the religions (see
above, pp. 63-64), De Silva's dialogical method indicates an attempt
to transcend the radical differences and find a certain harmony. This
is not found by a facile inclusivism but dialectically, as De Silva's
choice of similes so well illustrates. Thus dialogue is neither a
meeting of porcupines or jelly fish, but of persons (see above, p. 69);
and this form of dialogue takes neither the "python" approach which
does not recognize the mission of the other (see above, p. 76), nor
does it envisage a synthesis of all religions to form a world religion
(see above, p. 78). Commitment and openness are the hallmarks of the
authentic dialogue in which there is neither a total acceptance nor
a total rejection of the other.

[1]"Buddhist Attitude to Christianity: Continued," p. 25.

[2]Ibid., p. 26.

Mahayana terms such as "pure essence," "basis of the world," "cosmic mind," and "body of the Buddha," as these are "not found in the Pali Canon of the Theravada (the pristine and pure teachings of the Buddha accepted by scholars as the authentic teachings)."[1] He also takes exception to De Silva's observation that a deification of the Buddha has taken place, and that to the average Buddhist the Buddha is an all-knowing, prayer-answering God. Malalasekera's reference to the living presence of the Buddha in the Vihara[2] has been completely misunderstood, as this is only "a symbolic representation" or "an aid for the concentration of the mind." Even to the most illiterate Buddhist it did not mean that the Buddha was present in reality in the Vihara. Since this view is diametrically opposed to the teachings of the Buddha, Robertson concludes that De Silva has come up with "a novel and new-fangled interpretation to fall in line with the Christian doctrine that the Living God is present in the Church," and that "There is no truth whatsoever in the statement of Rev. de Silva that there is a wide gulf between theoretical Buddhism and Buddhism as it is practised."[3]

In our view Robertson's denial of a gulf between theoretical and popular Buddhism cannot be sustained.[4] His appeal to the authority

---

[1]"Buddhist Attitude to Christianity: Continued," p. 26.

[2]See above, p. 176.

[3]"Buddhist Attitude to Christianity: Continued," p. 26.

[4]Urmila Phadnis has shown that Buddhism, regarded strictly as a system of thought in its canonical context, is only an aspect in its evolution and growth as an ideology and an institution. She has

of the Pali Canon as acceptable to scholars and the rejection of

Mahayana terms raises the question whether dialogue is valid only if

it is a scholarly exercise and appeal can be made to the "original

gospel" or the Buddha-vacanam (Buddha-word). Buddhists and Christians

are confronted by a bewildering array of sects or denominations in

each other's religions and have difficulty in defining what is

"Buddhist" and what is "Christian." De Silva's own dialogical enter-

prise has taken both popular and scholarly Buddhism into account,

an approach dictated by the needs of the dialogical setting. In

communicating the Christian view on the themes of God, man, and

salvation in relation to Buddhist thought, he has been cognizant of

the rational temper of Sinhalese Buddhism and of the lay Buddhist's

existential affirmations. For Robertson, De Silva's citation of

terms and texts from schools other than the Theravada, are inadmissible

as a basis for dialogue as it would not be citing the "Buddhist"

viewpoint.[1]

---

noted contrasts in the major characteristics between canonical
Buddhism and Sinhalese Buddhism and observes:
> "In practice, some of the 'supernatural' attri-
> butes of the Buddha endow him with a position
> and status in the hierarchical structure which,
> strictly speaking, is not wholly convergent with
> the spirit of the canon. To illustrate, the
> position of the Buddha in the Sinhalese pantheon
> ascribes to him attributes which make him a su-
> preme being." See Religion and Politics in Sri
> Lanka (New Delhi: Ramesh C. Jain, 1976), p. 28.

[1]Edward Conze has pointed out that the Sri Lankan Theravada
and Japanese Zen both reject traditional Buddhism, the former in the
name of a Pali Canon and the latter in the name of "a direct trans-
mission outside the Scriptures." He describes the exclusivism of
the Sri Lankan Theravadins thus:
> "The original gospel, spoken in Pali (!) by the
> Buddha, taken to Ceylon about 250 B. C., then
> forgotten everywhere else, and preserved alone by

Is an authentic dialogue possible between De Silva's inclusive approach and Robertson's exclusive, sectarian position? With an ecumenical outlook in relation to his fellow Christians, De Silva recognizes a central core of teachings which constitutes historic Christianity. He sees a unity that can be called "Christian" in the diversity of schools and traditions. He has engaged other Buddhist interlocutors who have recognized the possibility of a valid dialogue between participants who subscribe to the central traditions of their religions.[1] The absence of agreement on what is "Christian" between Robertson and De Silva in their 1967 encounter stands out in their discussion on anthropology. Robertson's description of the Christian view of the soul as an immaterial substance maintained in eternal existence after the dissolution of the body at death[2] and his

---

virtuous Ceylonese and those others who received it from them. How this reminds us of Calvinism, with its few children of the light, and its vast "mass of perdition" (Further Buddhist Studies [Oxford: Bruno Cassirer, 1975], pp. 147-148).

[1] Bhikshu Sangharakshita uses the simile of the tree to depict a central tradition in Buddhism, i.e. the Buddha-sasana (the Buddha's teaching) or the manifold formulations of the Dharma:
"It may be said that the Buddha's transcendental realization is the root, His original Doctrine. . . the trunk, the distinctive Mahayana doctrines the branches, and the schools and the sub-schools of the Mahayana the flowers. Now the function of flowers, however beautiful, is to produce fruit. . . . The Bodhisattva Ideal is the perfectly ripened fruit of the whole vast tree of Buddhism" (A Survey of Buddhism [Bangalore: The Indian Institute of World Culture, 1957], p. 432).
Buddhadasa Indapanno views Buddhism and Christianity as systems in their totality, of which the inner essences and the outer forms could be compared. See above, pp. 58-59.

[2] "Buddhist Attitude to Christianity," p. 5.

view that the final resuscitation of the material particles of the

body is also Christian teaching are rejected by De Silva on the basis

that "it is quite foreign to the teaching of the Bible," though he

says some Christians may have held this position.[1] In our delineation

of De Silva's estimate of man (see chapter III), it can be seen that De

Silva differentiates between the view of an immortal soul in traditional

Christianity under the influence of Platonism and the view of man

as a unity for which he repeatedly cites biblical authority. Faulted

by De Silva for wrongly interpreting Christian doctrines, Robertson

claims to have "presented orthodox Christian doctrine" and holds that

De Silva has given "modern interpretations to Christian doctrines so

that they may fall in line with the Buddhist teachings, which view

is not acceptable to the majority of the Christian denominations."[2]

Perhaps Robertson means to say that De Silva's existentialist approach,

which allows him greater latitude in accomodating Buddhist views,

would not be acceptable to traditional, conservative, evangelical

theology.

This dialogue carried on at the discursive level points to

the limitations imposed by the difficulties of identifying what is

"Buddhist" and what is "Christian." There was the need to settle

what was authoritative for each of the dialogue partners if they were

to be heard authentically. J. J. Spae, musing about this problem, asks:

> What is the specific place, or should I say, the
> specific "authenticity" of the Buddhism professed

---

[1] "Christian Attitude to Buddhism," p. 12.

[2] "Buddhist Attitude to Christianity: Continued," p. 27.

by the Kyoto School within the overall spectrum of
Buddhist doctrines, traditional and modern? In
other words, when dialoguing with these scholars,
to what extent do we dialogue with "Buddhism"-- or
with "Christianity"--seen through their eyes?[1]

A question pertinent to the whole enterprise of inter-

religious dialogue is whether genuine dialogue takes place between

two systems, or more specifically between two narrowly defined

positions. The exchanges between De Silva and his Buddhist inter-

locutors in the same dialogical series (see above, pp. 100-103), on

the acts of Buddhist and Christian intolerance, are indicative of

its wider scope. Neither Buddhism nor Christianity can detach itself

completely from its associated history. In both religions things

have gone wrong historically and it has not been all "Heilsgeschichte."

Heinrich Ott has rightly pointed out that "Buddhism and Christianity

are not systems, but complex 'worlds.' The method of the philosophical-

theological unification of systems (as a whole or in particular points)

is for this reason doomed to failure (when viewed as the method)."[2]

But the worlds of Buddhism and Christianity do not touch each other

unless there is first and foremost a meeting of people, of Robertson--

the English Theravada Buddhist, and De Silva--the Sri Lankan Methodist

Christian. Hans Waldenfels has maintained that those engaged con-

cretely in dialogue (as in the case of De Silva) come to realize

"that there is simply no such thing as a dialogue between the

religions in the abstract sense. There is only dialogue between

---

[1]"Marginal Notes on Absolute Nothingness," Zeitschrift für
Missionswissenschaft und Religion swissenschaft 61 (1977): 273.

[2]"The Beginning Dialogue between Christianity and Buddhism
The Concept of a 'Dialogical Theology' and the Possible Contribution
of Heideggerian Thought," Japanese Religions 11, Nos. 2 & 3
(September 1980): 82.

people." And it is only when there is "a basic openness to listen
to one another" that "we can speak of shared investigation of the
truth in the broadest sense of the term."[1] Authentic dialogue develops
out of specific encounters and is not the result of theological
methodologies worked out in libraries.

Existence Transcending Reality and God Talk

"It is an etymological injustice to refer to Buddhism as a
religion. ... To call Buddhism a religion is a contradiction in terms.
Buddhism not only does not admit the existence of a God, it also
denies the existence of a soul."[2] These statements from the The
Buddhist, the journal of the Young Men's Buddhist Association in
Colombo, raise the question whether Buddhism could be called a relig-
ion. It also raises the question whether inter-religious dialogue
is possible with Buddhism, especially with the Theravada. As Carl
F. H. Henry reports, the reaction of Buddhist spokesmen in Sri Lanka
was hardly conciliatory when a Roman Catholic churchman claimed that
the Buddha "was surely in communion with God." Henry points out that
in the Sri Lankan Buddhist view, "The Buddha did not believe that
ultimate reality is personal, and Buddhism therefore has an atheistic
or antitheistic foundation."[3] We now consider the Buddhist response
to De Silva on this question.

---

[1] Absolute Nothingness: Foundations for a Buddhist-Christian
Dialogue, trans. J. W. Heisig (New York: Paulist Press, 1980), p. vii.

[2] Cited in H. Van Stralen, Our Attitude Towards Other Religions
(Tokyo: Enderle-Herder, 1965), p. 99.

[3] "Confronting Other Religions," Christianity Today 13, No. 22
(August 1969): 31.

De Silva has argued that Buddhism is a religion and that the concept of God is not absent in it. He has taken several approaches, but in keeping with his use of the central Buddhist categories his main dialogical thrust has been that the biblical understanding of anattā can locate the place of "God" in Buddhist thought. Describing the Buddha as "the first great death-of-God theologian" he has argued that the Buddha did not reject but reformed the concept of God or Brahma. He has also traced Buddhological developments in Mahayana Buddhism and the deification of the Buddha in popular or lay Buddhism. However, we find that his Theravada interlocutors, K. N. Jayatilleke and Gunapala Dharmasiri, point to stark differences between Theravada orthodoxy and De Silva's use of the Buddhist concepts of Tathata--Dharma and Nirvāna--to denote the idea of God.

At the NCC seminar in 1967, Jayatilleke objected to De Silva's handling of the terms "Yahweh" and "Tathata,"[1] as he considered it a spurious identification and a misrepresentation. Yahweh was considered the "God of war," and the more precise meaning of Yahweh was "I will be that which I will be." "Tathata" had been used in the Pali Canon to refute an erroneous view, it had "never been used of any theistic deities and is a Buddhist coinage to denote the Transcendent." It was an "abstract noun formed from Tatha meaning 'true, thus, so or such' and is used of the transcendent reality of Nirvana in the sense of

---

[1]De Silva had maintained that Tathata, a word found in the Theravada canon, and Yahweh seemed to point to the Ultimate Reality. Since Yahweh meant "I-am-that-I-am " and Tathata "That-which-is-as-it-is," De Silva noted that it accorded with St. Bernard's definition of God: "HE IS" ("Christian Attitude to Buddhism," p. 11).

the 'The Truth' (the sense is impersonal)."[1] De Silva found Jaya-

tilleke's more precise definition of Yahweh helpful in elucidating

his view of God, as it meant that "God is 'Being' and not 'a being',

and secondly that He is active and unfolding Being and not static

being."[2] He also sees a connection between this idea and the idea

of <u>Tathatta</u> (the synonym for Tathata),which is defined as "the state

of being so" in the Pali-English Dictionary of the Pali Text Society,

and is used in the sense of "The Truth" and of <u>Nibbāna</u>. He thus

maintains that the comparison between the terms is not so spurious

as Jayatilleke makes it out to be, and notes that:

> Dr. Jayatilleke will, however, say that the Truth as
> conceived by Buddhism is impersonal and cannot be
> identified with the personal God of Theism. I think
> the difficulty here is that when we talk of theism
> we think in anthropomorphic terms, as the ancient
> Hebrew people certainly did and even thought of Jeho-
> vah as the God of War. For this reason some theolo-
> gians prefer to drop this misleading term theism and
> talk of a "God beyond theism". This does not mean
> that God is impersonal; rather it means that God is
> suprapersonal. It means that 'Being' has some deter-
> minate character and is distinguishable from becoming
> and as such possesses the character of transcendence
> like Nibbana. But as active and unfolding Being,
> Being also has the character of immanence so that it
> is possible for us to say in the words of St. Paul,
> "we live and move and have our being in Him."[3]

It is worth noting that though Jayatilleke does not believe

in a divine, omnipotent creator, he acknowledges the transcendent

reality of <u>Nirvāna</u>, which he sees as impersonal Truth. In the limited

---

[1] "Christian Attitude to Buddhism: Criticized," p. 18.

[2] "Christian Attitude to Buddhism: A Reply," p. 23.

[3] Ibid.

discussion that was possible at the Seminar, De Silva argued

convincingly against Jayatilleke's characterization of the compari-

son between <u>Tathata</u> and <u>Yahweh</u> as a spurious identificaiton. He

focussed on the nub of the dialogical problem, the difficulty of

expressing the Transcendent or finding an adequate language to talk

about God. In this context Jayatilleke's position could be described

as a transcendental agnosticism, one which does not preclude the

definition of Buddhism as a religion. Trevor Ling observes that in

contexts where studies in religion are being undertaken and systems

of thought and philosophy are classified, Theravada Buddhism is con-

sidered a religion even though "belief in a divine, omnipotent

creator is the <u>sine qua non</u> of any system that is to be called relig-

ion."[1] Theravada Buddhism qualifies because the most basic criterion

by which a movement passes as religious is "belief in some existence-

transcending reality." Belief in a creator-god is just one example

of this basic feature of religion. Thus he says of Theravada

Buddhism:

> For although Theravada Buddhism is non-theistic, or
> agnostic about the idea of a creator-god, nevertheless
> its central affirmations include both the characteri-
> sation of empirical human existence as inherently un-
> satisfactory, and a <u>belief</u> in the possibility of its
> transcendence by means of the enlightenment gained by
> the Buddha. It is this which seems to give Theravada
> Buddhism the quality of a religion and which accounts
> for its general acceptance as such.[2]

The existence transcending reality becomes the common basis

for a dialogue between Theravada Buddhism and other religions. Ling

---

[1] <u>Karl Marx and Religion in Europe and India</u> (New York: Barnes & Noble, 1980), p. 155.

[2] Ibid., pp. 155-156.

points to the Buddha's enlightenment as the means by which the Buddhist

transcends his unsatisfactory state. De Silva has dealt with the

more apposite question regarding the source of the Buddha's enlighten-

ment, as according to the "Holding in Reverence" passage the Buddha

is directing worship to a reality greater than himself.[1] Using Ling's

term we may thus say that the Dhamma in which the Buddha took refuge

is the "existence-transcending reality," which De Silva identifies

as the "Dharma-God." This concept connotes the idea of the worship

of an existence-transcending reality, and for De Silva, "the heart

of religion is worship and the essence of worship is adoration."[2]

The idea of a personal God is also seen, as he cites evidence from

the Pali canon that Dhamma is conceived in personal terms.[3] It is

at this point that De Silva's Buddhist interlocutors see the widest

gulf between the Buddhist and Christian concepts of the existence

transcending reality. Buddhadasa Indapanno identifies Dharma with

God, but in his explanation of God as found in Buddhism, he sees God

neither as a person nor a spirit but as an all-inclusive entity.[4]

Gunapala Dharmasiri's negative interpretation of Nirvāna dispenses

with the notion of an existence-transcending reality altogether. In

meeting Dharmasiri's contention De Silva has shown that the import

of the Udāna passage is that an existence-transcending reality, be

---

[1] See above, pp. 225-226.

[2] "Anattā and God," p. 114.

[3] See above, pp. 227-228.

[4] See above, pp. 223-225. John Ross Carter has noted that
at the highest level Dhamma transcends personalistic ascriptions.
See above, pp. 116-117.

it God or Nirvāna, is indispensable because of man's anattāness.
This is the crucial Christian-Buddhist meeting point for De Silva,
as he goes on to show persuasively that in harmony with the
Theravada position "the longing of the heart for the eternal hits
something," i.e. a Transcendent Reality or God.[1] This "something"
in the Theravada conceptualizations may not be the Christian way
of expressing God, but it is the point at which the Christian and
Theravada Buddhist can meet and speak to each other.

The problem is one of God-talk, a common language, and
translational theology. Thus Paul Knitter takes note of De Silva's
emphasis on the need to be open to each other's experiential theology,
as by entering into the words used in Buddhist scriptures and paying
due regard to the practices of contemporary Buddhists "we will
recognize that the Buddhist experience of Nirvana, Sunyata, Satori
is not unrelated to the Christian experience of God."[2] The Buddha's
silence on God, Buddhist apologists have maintained, is due to his
recognition of the limitations of the human intellect and the empti-
ness of words. However Knitter notes that, in De Silva's view, to
label Buddha an atheist or to declare that Nirvāna or Sunyata are
utterly godless is "to abuse Buddha's language--or lack of language."[3]
Thus De Silva sees the need for a willingness on the part of the
Christian to learn from Buddhist experience and language of the

---

[1]See above, pp. 239-240.

[2]"Horizons on Christianity's New Dialogue," Horizons 8,
No. 1 (1981): 43.

[3]Ibid.

Ultimate. God is in the realm of avyakata (the inexplicable), and is known in the realization of one's anattaness, in the abyss of one's being--the supra-depth level of ultimacy. Since Christians, trained in Western methods of analysis and interpretation, have put God under a microscope and attempted to conceptualize that which is beyond all concepts, Buddhists silence commends itself as a corrective to Christians in coming to a realization of what is beyond words.

Thus at this point, where others have seen the most radical differences between the two religions, De Silva sees possibilities of a fruitful dialogue. There is of course always the need to give expression to experience in order to give it meaning, and it is in the conceptual realm that insurmountable divergences surface. Ninian Smart questions De Silva's claim that for the Buddhist the heart of religion is worship and that the Buddha worshipped the Dhamma. Smart sees the Buddha reshaping and emasculating the idea of worship, "Indeed the great relevance of Dr. Dharmasiri's critique is that God is an object literally of worship, but literal worship is not at the heart of Theravada."[1] Smart focusses on other hazards in the dialogue, and noting that Dhamma and Nirvana were not known by Jesus and Paul just as covenant and Israel were unknown to the Buddha, he observes that it "shows how unnerving the whole issue about the truth of religions is."[2] A translational theology such as De Silva's seems

---

[1] "Remarks on Gunapala Dharmasiri's Critique on Christian Theism," Dialogue New Series 3, No. 1 (January-April 1976): 19.

[2] Ibid., p. 20.

to provide a viable answer, as the traditions have developed in isolation and need a common language to find common ground. Unbridgeable differences may be found, and at these points, Buddhists and Christians must at the present stage of the dialogue recognize a doctrinal irreducibility rather than yield to a facile syncretism. The conversation must continue, because it is in this interaction that each other's language is learned, that new means of communication are created, and new frontiers conquered.

Buddhism and Christianity as Complementary Systems
Anatta-Pneuma the Translational Basis

Translational theology is exploratory in nature and entails risks. In 1961, the Rangoon Consultation Statement noted that the paper presented by De Silva had demonstrated that there were great advantages in the use of Buddhist concepts to "translate" the Gospel, and it also warned of the attendent dangers to which the church had not yet been exposed as it had been overcautious in the translation of the Gospel. It warned against "bending" the Gospel to make it fit Buddhist conceptions and of leaving the impression that there was no essential difference between the two messages. It also stated that "there must come the point where the conceptions of Buddhism are transcended or restated in a revolutionary way that the Buddhist as such, would not accept: This is the challenge of the Gospel."[1] There is always the need to guard against the danger of syncretism, it might however be asked whether the element of risk

---

[1] A Consultation on Buddhist-Christian Encounter, "Rangoon Consultation Statement: Communication of the Gospel to the Buddhists," p. 73.

has been avoided and whether the Rangoon statement has obviated the possibility of dialogue. This approach makes the Christian gospel the yardstick in the discussion, rules out mutuality, and fails to be translational. M. M. Thomas, commenting on De Silva's Rangoon paper which attempted to clarify the message of Jesus Christ in terms of the historical actualization of the ideal bodhisattva, warns of "certain dangers of minimising the real differences in 'meaning-content' of the categories used." He also points to the "possibilities of building a common language for inter-faith dialogue about fundamental differences," and that "it also helps the Buddhist and Christian to have an appreciation of each other's faith within the scheme of salvation of one's own."[1] Thomas is pointing to the risk that De Silva and all Asian Christians are compelled to take in spelling out their thoughts in the languages of non-Christian cultures. In today's context of cultural and religious pluralism the word "dialogue" indicates this compulsion. De Silva has taken this risk and attempted the development of a common language. He has maintained that this is precisely what the Buddha did, as did the Bible writers and early Christians living in religiously plural settings. In order to communicate in an intelligible language, the Gospel writer John risked the possibility of syncretism.[2] Our evaluation now considers De Silva's use of Buddhist concepts and terms and his treatment of Buddhism and Christianity as complementary systems.

---

[1] Man and the Universe of Faiths, p. 94.

[2] See above, p. 116.

De Silva has treated Buddhism and Christianity as comple-
mentary systems with the aim of helping Buddhists understand Christi-
anity within their description of the human predicament. We see
De Silva the evangelist proclaiming the Gospel and making it meaningful
to the Buddhist, and De Silva the dialogist establishing a theological
foundation and thus indicating a genuine reverence for the religion
of the other. He has seen these as mutually complementary roles,
and indeed as the pressing challenge before Asian Christian theolo-
gians, viz., that of reconstructing theologies in their different
contexts without relinquishing Christ's theological irreducibility
on the one hand, or taking up the absolutist view that rejects the
possibility of God's saving action from within non-Christian faith.[1]
To what extent has he succeeded in terms of his thesis that such a
venture need not result in a syncretism or an emasculated Gospel?

---

[1]The theological stance that Christ has been salvifically
at work in other religions, explicitly stated in more recent articles
(see above, pp. 208-210), has been implicit in his approach to Bud-
dism. De Silva's theological task bears comparison with that of the
second century apologists, especially Justin Martyr, who lived in a
religiously plural context. James E. Sellers holds that the risk
in the expression of the new and different message of Christianity
by the apologists was inevitable as "they could do so only by taking
over the familiar old motifs and giving them new meaning" (The
Outsider and the Word of God: A Study in Christian Communication
[Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1961], p. 61). According to Paul Tillich
the task of relating theology to the surrounding culture is risky
but unavoidable,

> "I am not unaware of the danger that in this way the
> substance of the Christian message may be lost.
> Nevertheless, this danger must be risked, and once
> one has realized this, one must proceed in this
> direction. Dangers are not a reason for avoiding
> a serious demand." See Systematic Theology, voi. 3
> (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1963), p. 4.

Sellers notes that Justin maintains in his second Apology that
the divine logos had imparted seeds of truth to those outside Christi-
anity, and that men like Abraham and Socrates who had discerned
the reality of the logos could be called Christians. However, in

With the exception of the 1963 encounter with Gunaseela

Vitanage on the subject of the "Search for the Historical Jesus,"

in which he took a somewhat apologetic posture, nearly all of De

Silva's dialogical writings treat Buddhism and Christianity as com-

plementary systems. He finds this a viable enterprise because of

the repeated correspondences between the biblical account and the

Buddhist texts on the Tilakkhana analytic which is fundamental to

the Buddhist view of reality. By tracing close approximations be-

tween terms and parallel accounts, and by the constant juxtaposition

of Buddhist and Christian doctrinal conceptions, De Silva attempts

to transcend the old categories and give expression to converging

insights in his expositions of Christ as Boddhisattva, anattā-pneuma,

progressive sanctification and rebirth, and Dharma-logos. David C.

Scott, in a review of De Silva's essay "An Existential Understanding

of the Doctrine of Creation in the Context of Buddhism," has questioned

---

this use of the logos concept to find common ground, Christianity
would not yield to a syncretistic relationship with pagan philosophy
as "The point of contact is the very point--indeed, the only point--
at which Christianity's Gospel and paganism's unbelief come into
conflict. Justin seeks both 'the contrast and the connection' be-
tween divine revelation and human knowledge" (The Outsider and the
Word of God, p. 63). The aim of Justin and the apologists was to
show that Christianity was the truth since it alone had a correct
understanding of God. Hendrick Kraemer's position has been essentially
the same--that points of contact in the real deep sense of the word
could only be found by antitheses. For De Silva the point of contact
could become a source of mutual enrichment, serve as a corrective,
and at points of doctrinal irreducibility be antithetical. The pre-
liminary assumptions of Justin and Kraemer pre-empt dialogue, whereas
De Silva is open to the possibility of formulating or reformulating
his position in the context of dialogue since inter-faith dialogue
is a search for the living truth, and as he has cogently pointed
out, "Authentic, living theology arises from an interplay between
the 'Logos' and the culture in which it seeks to express itself."
See above, p. 61.

the antiphonal nature of De Silva's explication of the existential

significance of the biblical creation account in terms of Tilakkhana:

> My main problem is at the point of de Silva's
> apparent methodological presupposition that Buddhism
> articulates the questions implied in the human pre-
> dicament while the Bible provides the answers.
> Surely a greater degree of mutuality than this is
> discernible in Buddhist-Christian relationships.[1]

Scott's criticism calls attention to a necessary condition

for genuine dialogue--the need to avoid undue dominance from one

side. While neither partner in the dialogue may claim twenty-twenty

vision, there is always the need to guard against the temptation

to read into the other tradition what one would like to find there.

De Silva's exposition of Buddhism and Christianity as complementary

systems seeks to avoid an uneven centrality of concepts by accepting

the Buddhist concept of the three characteristics of all phenomenal

existence as the common basis, common because De Silva finds an

even more radical expression of Tilakkhana in the Christian scriptures.

It was the systematic treatment of anattā in the Buddhist texts that

sent him back to the Hebraic roots of the Christian faith and the

insight that Buddhism is in harmony with the biblical understanding

of man. Since it can be shown that in the biblical and Buddhist

texts there is nothing in man that can be identified as a soul-entity,

Christian theology is faced with the same problem as Buddhism, viz.,

finding a satisfactory explanation of the meaning of selfhood or per-

sonality which provides for the negation of the self that does not

amount to nihilism (ucchedaditthi) and for the affirmation of the

self that does not amount to eternalism (sassataditthi). It is this

---

[1] "Book Reviews," Religion and Society 15, No. 3 (September 1978): 94.

basis of commonality that makes his most original contribution, a Buddhist-Christian estimate of man--the <u>Anattā-Pneuma</u> concept--possible. Here, in answer to a question articulated in Buddhism but which Christianity too has to face, De Silva has dealt with the relationship between Buddhist non-self and the Christian teaching of the spirit.

There is a dual aspect in De Silva's dialogical platform. It is the common element of the <u>Tilakkhana</u> analytic that opened the way for a creative interaction, thus De Silva first speaks <u>from within the Buddhist conceptual framework</u>. The traditional Theravada answers failed to provide a satisfactory definition of authentic selfhood. The paradox of <u>na ca so na ca anno</u> did not settle the question of personal identity, neither was it possible to argue that there was moral responsibility (which <u>karma</u> implies) because of <u>Vinnana</u>, a continuity of process without an identifiable self. Neither the attempt to smuggle in the soul idea, nor a nihilistic interpretation of <u>Nirvāna</u>, settled the question of what attained <u>Nirvāna</u>. In the light of this De Silva then answers <u>from the Christian point of view</u>. Traditional Christianity with its belief in an immortal soul tended toward an unscriptural eternalism, but the radical biblical teaching of <u>anattā</u> meant that man needed a power outside of him to escape nihilism. Man is created in the image of God which indicates a relationship, this is <u>pneuma</u>--the personal-communal dimension of man. Since <u>pneuma</u> is a gift this is not a new hidden soul theory, but selfhood found in relation to God who is Spirit, in a mutually interacting "I-Thou" and not in an exclusive "I". There is fellowship and communion, but not absorption, thus personal identity

will be retained but not an exclusive self-contained individuality--
a concept of selfhood that yields neither to <u>ucchedaditthi</u> nor to
<u>sassataditthi</u>.

The significance of De Silva's exposition of the <u>anattā-
pneuma</u> concept to dialogue depends on the willingness of both Buddhists
and Christians to recognize the potential of translational theology
to open up new frontiers of religious understanding. Already we see
distinct advantages in this method of communication, i.e., the treat-
ment of Buddhism and Christianity as complementary systems of thought.
It opens the way for a much greater measure of intelligibility,
giving the terms and categories of each faith deeper meaning and
richer significance. It has led Christians to a more scriptural
anthropology, and in the reconciliation of Buddhist and Christian
anthropology, we see De Silva open a window for Buddhist agnosticism
to consider the need for God in view of the inadequacy of an anthro-
pocentric soteriology in the face of <u>anattā</u>. This approach does
not water down the need to remain true to that which is essentially
Christian or Buddhist. De Silva has maintained that in any theology
there is always an unchanging core containing elements of constancy
and continuity, faithfulness to which is indispensable to authentic
dialogue.[1] The approach recognizes that there are varying degrees
of mutuality at different points, and there is need to suspend
judgment until more familiarity with the other has been established.

---

[1]In his quest for points of contact with Buddhism we find
De Silva often meets the Buddhist in an antithetical way, thus
Trinity is distinguished from <u>Trikaya</u> because the gods in Buddhism
lack ultimacy; the Buddhist's faith in Buddha, being less than per-
sonal, differs from the Christian's faith in Christ; and, in

The translational approach is not tradition bound; rather it is experimental and exploratory. It does not prejudice the dialogue with a preconceived general theory of religious interpretation but seeks a basis for understanding the religious insights of others and making Christian affirmations more comprensible to them.

Asian Christian Self-Understanding
Christology, Mission, Eschatology

The decisive issue in inter-faith dialogue for the Christian, sine qua non, is the uniqueness of Jesus Christ as saviour and the universality of the salvation provided in him. The claim to uniqueness and universality mandates the need to determine the salvific status of other faiths. A negative conclusion raises questions of theodicy, a positive one threatens the dynamic of mission. To the Asian Christian seeking a new self-understanding in his religiously plural setting the question is: Is salvific revelation to be found in religions outside of Christianity?

An Inclusivist Christology

De Silva's stance is clear, that God's acts of divine self-communication take place not only within Christianity but also

---

Christianity suffering is only an element of finitude, for the Buddhist suffering and finitude are identical. In his treatment of the Agganna Sutta and the biblical creation and fall stories as symbols to be spiritually interpreted, he is careful to maintain the distinction that creatio-ex-nihilo is a religious affirmation of the sovereignty of God and the creatureliness of man. However, in commending the uniqueness of Christ as the ideal Bodhisattva, he opts for a literal understanding of the incarnation rather than a mythical expression of the fact. Thus he argues that the Avataras of Hinduism and Bodhisattvas of Buddhism, unlike in the Christ-event, were without historical or factual basis. There are times when his identification of terms could benefit from a wider application of scriptural meaning, as in his identification of desire (tanha) with sin as in Jas 1:14-15. Desire is the root of sin when it is misdirected, but there is also a righteous desire as in Ps 42:1-3 and Matt 5:6.

outside its structures. Salvation in the absolute sense is rooted in God. In Christ it is absolute (as he is identified with God) and relative as he is the agent working out God's salvific purposes even as Confucius, Zoroaster and Buddha are God's instruments. The uniqueness of Christ is preserved in the eschatological aspect of salvation, the fact of his ultimate divine rulership of history. It is because salvation is a cosmic fact, and Christ alone of all religious leaders has claimed that all things are summed up in him, that the New Testament emphasis on the uniqueness of the Christ-event is vindicated. De Silva's position ultimately does not seem to differ from the fulfillment theory, though the fulfillment takes place as an eschatological reality in Christ and not in empirical Christianity. The irreducible difference between Christ and the other instruments of God is that he alone gives meaning and value to history. While this may still appear as religious imperialism to the non-Christian, it provides a Christological basis for the recognition of the reality and salvific presence of God in other religions.

The import of De Silva's Christology for Asian Christians is that theological reflection must take into account these other instruments of God. Salvation in other faiths is not seen as human striving; it is by grace because it is the divine initiative that calls these salvific instruments into use. In the process of reconception a symbiosis can take place because they too are God's instruments. The non-Christian religions are not merely loci of divine encounter, as Kraemer would have them, nor are they simply human creations; they are vehicles of salvific revelation. Such an

inclusive approach, however, seems to blur the need for an explicit avowal of Christ and missionary activity.

Dialogue as Mission

De Silva's understanding of the church and its mission stems from his inclusivist Christology. Since mission is primarily God's activity and the church is never the sole agent of mission, mission is defined inclusively. The recognition that other religions too have a mission connotes a broader view of mission. The numerical expansion of the church is not mission, rather the proclamation of authentic "good news" means collaborating with non-Christians in those concerns which touch people everywhere as human beings. De Silva's stricture that winning over non-Christians into Christianity is an act of alienation must be viewed in relation to the pejorative meaning the word "proselytism" has acquired in Asian countries. It would seem that a major task confronting Asian Christians is that of re-thinking their conceptions of mission and evangelism and distinguishing them from mere proselytism.

De Silva's own conception attempts to hold a delicate balance between proclamation, conceptual dialogue, and social action. Because Christ is already at work in other religions, partnership with the other in social concerns is Christian mission, and proclamation may be done within the conceptual framework of the other. We might say that in this sense Christian mission can be looked upon as the quest for ultimate reality and ultimate meaning, and that proclamation is most effective in dialogue as it transcends present understanding and widens the periphery of mankind's religious vision.

The evaluation by a Western Christian of the Christian and Buddhist

reaction to De Silva's use of __Dhamma__ in the translation of __logos__ in

John 1:1 brings home this distinctive mission that belongs to the

Asian theologian. He says that

> Christians will have demonstrated that they see more
> in dharma-person (dharmayāno) than in Word-person
> (vākyayāno). They will have extended the horizon of
> their vision of Christ and will have deepened the bases
> of their self-understanding in Christ through the
> notion of dharma-person. Buddhists will have found
> occasion to rest at ease knowing that Christians, in
> their different way, have also discerned the fundamen-
> tal good news shared for centuries by Buddhists:
> dhamma/dharma, salvific truth, abides and is not remote
> from persons.[1]

De Silva's experience underscores the importance of inter-

faith dialogue for a theology of missions, as proclamation must

take place within the cultural milieu and heritage of the other.

The church must give up its institutional self-interest and discover

the Asian face of Jesus Christ in an incarnational ministry. To

do this it must unreservedly accept its minority position. Only

in this way could it be the servant church. Christianity could be

given a real chance if the church were freed from the opprobrium

of colonialism. The Buddhist evaluation of De Silva's Study Center

is significant. Mahinda Palihawadana sees De Silva's Study Center

break from the missiology of conquest and power characteristic of

the colonial era and undergo cultural incarnation without discarding

its Christian heritage.[2] De Silva's framework of theological under-

standing of other faiths commends itself to the Asian Christian as

---

[1]"Translational Theology," p. 176.

[2]See above, p. 53.

a model of self-understanding as it developed out of the conversation with Buddhism. In doctrine and practice he has epitomized dialogue as mission, seeking to maintain the irreducible theological unique-ness of Christ while finding a place for God's saving activity through Christ in the non-Christian religions.

Eschatological Expectations

In presenting the resurrection as the answer to the Theravada paradox na ca so na ca anno, De Silva makes a very sharp judgment on the difference of quality between the Christian and Buddhist hope. The resurrection gives assurance that the continuity and separate identity of the individual is maintained. It also liberates the Buddhist, in whose cyclical view of time history has no finality, from the nightmare of karma and rebirth. There is no assurance in the Buddhist notion of eternal recurrence, during which good and bad epochs alternate, of a collective salvation from suffering or a final happy consummation.[1] De Silva's emphasis on the once-for-allness of

---

[1] Swami Vikrant has, however, pointed out that the attempt by Christian apologists to press for the superiority of their tradition because of its historical nature, and its linear concept of time, needs to be reconsidered. He maintains that in the dialogue with Indian religions it must be noted that Indian systems of thought do not teach a purely cyclic concept of time, and "the linear concept of time itself is metaphysically inadequate as it leaves the beginning and the end unexplained" ("Christian Mission and Indian Religious Plural-ism," Journal of Dharma 6, No.2 [April-June 1981]: 155-156). It must be noted that De Silva is cognizant of the Mahayanist eschatology which holds to the definitive fulfillment of the advent of Maitreya five thousand years after the Parinirvana of Gautama. See above, p. 231. Paul Knitter takes note of the warning that has been voiced in the current dialogue that it is too simplistic to brand the Buddhist experience of time as cyclic, and observes that: "Given the central Buddhist affirmation that bad karma can be overcome and that there is a process of rebirths, one might better speak of an upward spiral move-ment or time within Samsara" ("Horizons on Christianity's New Dialogue

an eschatological solution takes on special force in the framework
of the _Tilakkhana_ analytic. Christ gives meaning to all men who
live in history, as by his involvement in history he has conquered
the negativities of _anicca_, _dukkha_,and _anatta_. Thus the final solu-
tion to the unsatisfactoriness and transitoriness of life is found
when he sums up all things in himself in the end time.

De Silva,however,has difficulty in harmonizing the once-for-
allness of resurrection with the intermediate state which he proposes
as the Christian alternative to rebirth in contradiction to the once-
for-allness of the double predestination theory. The advantage of
such a position in speaking to the Buddhist, in whose view there
are many opportunities for salvation in the recurring circles of
birth and death, are obvious. However,in doing so,De Silva fails
at several points to be consistent to the radical biblical concept
of _anatta_, the central category in his dialogue with Buddhism.

Evidently De Silva's concept of progressive sanctification,
an actualization of the positive elements and purging of all egocen-
tric elements, goes on in the spiritual sphere of life. For the
Buddhist it is death and rebirth taking place continually,not empiri-
cally but spiritually, and for the Roman Catholic it is a process

---

With Buddhism," p. 52). Kosuke Koyama, a Japanese Christian dia-
loguing with the Theravada in Thailand, presents the view that the
cyclical and not the linear view has been the source of hope to the
Thai Buddhist in his existential context. Since nature is cyclically
oriented, hope and salvation come with the monsoon rain, thus "when
a man's life is viewed and experienced in terms of a circular move-
ment, he becomes relatively free from the sense of despair and
crisis. Once-for-allness breeds psychological tension and turmoil"
(Waterbuffalo Theology [New York: Orbis Books, 1976], p. 30). The
"many-times" life "accepts nature's hope and salvation" (ibid.)

of purging and purification happening daily beginning in this life. These views he finds comparable to John's view of passing from death into life, i.e., eternal life beginning now. It is, however, not quite clear whether the intermediate state, in which man is progressively sanctified till he reaches perfection, begins at death or after the resurrection.[1]

De Silva's position is strikingly reminiscent of Origen's view of the history of salvation as the progressive restoration of the spiritual creation to its primal state. In the first book of

---

[1] De Silva's statement that the anguish and the remorse of the rebellious, i.e., of those "who have sinned against the truth, who have turned away from the light," begins when "earthly limitations are removed at death" (see above, p. 211), seems to indicate that the intermediate state begins at death. This would imply a conscious existence in the intermediate state between death and resurrection, which certainly cannot be reconciled with the biblical view of the nature of man as delineated by De Silva. The whole point about biblical _anatta_ is that it depicts man's utter inability to transcend conditioned existence which is subject to decay and death. He has also indicated that the intermediate state is spent in the "many mansions" at the time of the second coming of Christ, "I will come again and receive you" (John 14:3),which according to the biblical picture of the end-time is when the general resurrection of the righteous takes place. That the intermediate state begins at this time would seem to be his overriding position, as indicated by an unambiguous statement indicating that death is the complete cessation of life:
> "If _anicca_ and _anatta_ are real, there can be nothing in man that can survive death. In the Christian view, it is only by an act of re-creation that continuity beyond the grave is possible. This is what resurrection means. Resurrection is most meaningful in the context of Tilakkhana. . . .
> The doctrine of resurrection contradicts the notion of the immortal soul within man which survives death. It emphasizes the fact of man's mortality, that man comes to a total end at death" ("Emergent Theology in the Context of Buddhism," p. 232).

It appears that his ambivalence at this point stems from difficulties posed by such passages as the story of Dives and Lazarus, which when taken in isolation from the overall biblical picture of _anatta_ can be construed to imply a conscious state after death.

his _De Principiis_, Origen supposes that even the damned and the
devils would be brought into voluntary subjection to Christ after
having undergone sufficient disciplinary punishment.[1] De Silva's
intermediate state, as the theodicy which answered the embarrasing
question of the salvation of the unevangelized, concerned those who
were never consciously aware of Christ. Thus he includes among the
righteous the "anonymous Christians," i.e., those who have responded
to the reality which Christians call "God" whether they knew Christ
explicitly or not.[2] Apparently De Silva makes no distinction between
those who were never consciously aware of Christ and those who con-
sciously rejected him. Since hell, heaven, and the intermediate
state form a kind of continuum in which one passes from a near state
of annihilation to the closest union with God, it seems that the con-
cept of judgment in the biblical sense is almost entirely absent in
his eschatological scheme. Lostness in the final sense has not been
defined, and it appears that he slides into an unrestricted univer-
salism that is inconsistent with his radical biblical picture of
anattā.

In his kenotic Christology De Silva leaves us in no doubt
that the anxiety which Christ experienced in Gethsemane, and the cry
of dereliction on the cross, indicate that Christ shared in man's
anattāness by experiencing the sense of perdition that is not relieved
by the expectation of the resurrection.[3] The death which is the
result of the wages of sin, unlike physical death, is complete

---

[1] Origen _Origen De Principiis_ 1:6-8 (ANF 4:260-267).

[2] See above, p. 209.

[3] See above, p. 181.

annihilation. <u>Anattā</u> represents the utter desolation that the enmity against God means. The biblical truth about <u>anattā</u> is that by his conscious and persistent rejection of God man can be ultimately lost, i.e., be totally annihilated because of eternal separation from God.[1] Thus the biblical solution to <u>anattā</u>, <u>anicca</u>, and <u>dukkha</u> must be consistent with a biblical eschatology conceived of in cataclysmic and ultimate terms of final judgment, second coming, resurrection, and a final restoration in which sin and sinners will be no more.

Final Reflections

Resurrection as the Point of Contact
and the Differentia

We have already made the point that the Asian Christian theologian is faced with a challenge very similar to that of the patristic writers, i.e., making the gospel meaningful to their non-Christian environment by finding points of contact.[2] The Asian theologian, however, as in the case of De Silva, maintains an openness in which the point of contact is the entry for a dialogue. When doctrinal

---

[1] J. S. Whale, commenting on the urgency of the issues raised by eschatology, maintains that though the Christian life is a foretaste of the eternal blessedness in God, grace can be resisted and salvation is not inevitable:

> "There is something genuinely at stake in every man's
> life, the climax whereof is death. Dying is inevitable,
> but arriving at the destination God offers to me is
> not inevitable. It is not impossible to go out of the
> way and fail to arrive. Christian doctrine has always
> urged that life eternal is something which may conceivably
> be missed. It is possible to neglect this great sal-
> vation and to lose it eternally, even though no man
> may say that anything is impossible with God or that
> his grace may ultimately be defeated." (<u>Christian
> Doctrine</u> [Cambridge: The University Press, 1956],
> p. 186.

[2] See above, pp. 276-277.

views collide he explores the possibility of overcoming the seem-

ing antithesis in a higher synthesis. He does not attempt to resolve

doctrinal tensions in isolation but as fitted into a wider framework

of thought. Being open to the possibility that the views of other

religions may be closer to the Bible, and thus remind him of blind

spots and of insights he may have lost on his journey, he is ready

to listen. There are also points at which it is necessary to recog-

nize that he is up against ultimate incompatibilities. Ernst Benz

says that in this respect "the discussion between Christianity and

Buddhism has reached a point that is basically similar to the situation

resulting from Augustine's study of Neo-Platonic writings."[1] He

is referring to the statement, in _Confessions_ (VII, 9), that Augus-

tine found all of the Johannine statements about the _Logos_ in the books

of the Neo-Platonists except for the one which stated that the _Logos_

had become flesh. In their endeavour to universalize the Christian

consciousness while maintaining its characteristic differentia, the

patristic writers emphasized the role of the incarnation in God's

saving plan. In De Silva's treatment of Buddhism and Christianity

as complementary systems, the resurrection seems to perform such a

function and is suggestive of an approach similar to the patristic

use of the incarnation.[2]

---

[1] "Buddhism and Christianity," _Japanese Religions_ 8, No. 4
(October 1975): 14.

[2] William A. Thompson maintains that the Christian's belief
in the risen Lord generates the openness that is needed for a creative
encounter with the world religions. Thus he calls for a shift away
from the patristic focus on the incarnation, the reformation focus
on the _theologia crucis_, and the more recent Roman Catholic emphasis

The resurrection has been presented by De Silva as the solution of the Theravada paradox <u>na ca so na ca anno</u> with telling effect as a means of establishing individual identity. It seems to us that a good case can also be made for resurrection as a more consistent theodicy than De Silva's intermediate state. An intermediate state, in which hell and heaven become a continuum, fails to recognize Jesus as the Lord of history who fulfills the Christian expectation of the <u>eschaton</u> with its idea of a definitive fulfilment of salvation history at the end of time. We have noted De Silva's apposite presentation of Jesus Christ as the ideal <u>Bodhisattva</u> who has come into human history and provides the perfect solution to the negativities of <u>Tilakkhana</u>. The dimension of resurrection is necessary to complete the picture because it is in resurrection that <u>samsaric</u> existence is terminated, the cosmic dimensions of resurrection are crucial to theodicy. The solemn biblical truth is that in the resurrection all men receive their final rewards. Unlike the "many many times" of the cyclic view, or the intermediate state in which all men are in progressive or regressive states till ultimate salvation, in the resurrection God brings a halt to the state of <u>dukkha</u> and an end to the impermanence of this world.

---

on merit, to a focus upon the resurrection:
> "The more a belief in the risen Lord becomes the center of Christianity, the more that belief itself should universalize the Christian consciousness--the more, that is, the Christian himself should participate in that paschal mystery of death to one's narrow and compromising horizons and resurrection to wider and more universal horizons" ("The Risen Christ, Transcultural Consciousness, and the Encounter of the World Religions," <u>Theological Studies</u> 37, No. 3 [September 1976]: 408).

The once-for-allness of resurrection does not, however, stand in the way of the free human response if it is held that salvific revelation is made available to all men. J. Verkuyl points out that the Christ who is coming to the final manifestation of his messianic kingdom is ceaselessly active in "the harvest fields of the history of religions... In the crucified and resurrected Lord, God is reaching forth his hand to the whole cosmos and to human beings in all religions (cf. II Cor 5)."[1] Thus while there is no salvation apart from Christ, in some way divine grace impinges upon the human consciousness. The redeemed life begins at this point, but it must await the consummation of the resurrection. The biblical categories of judgment and resurrection are antithetical to the notion of universal salvation, and to miss this is to distort the biblical picture of salvation.

Syncretism and a Frontier Theology

Though there are patristic counterparts to current Asian theological problems, and some of what they have to say is suggestive, we must take note of the new kind of confrontation that dialogue implies today. There is a greater dimension of mutuality, theologians of dialogue in the Asian situation while advancing the claim that Christianity is universally adequate must at some time recognize the universality and adequacy of other faiths. Unlike the frontier in the age of the Fathers, the Asian Christian has the added task of breaking the lead strings of the West and of overcoming the syncretisms

---

[1] Contemporary Missiology: An Introduction (Grand Rapids, Michigan: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1978), p. 359.

of Western Christianity. In a translational theology such as De

Silva's, freedom from Teutonic captivity also means the liberation of

the Asian Christian from his exclusivistic attitude to other faiths.

Thus two aspects of religious encounter which must engage the attention

of Asian theologians is the need for a redefinition of the term

"syncretism" and the development of a "frontier theology." Michael

Pye has taken note of J. H. Kamstra's disagreement with Kraemer's view

of syncretism as an illicit contamination or a sign of religious

decadence.[1]   Kamstra sees syncretism as "the coexistence of elements

foreign to each other"[2] and as a "syncretism from within" in which

elements continue to exist in a religion merely because of their

familiarity even after they have lost their original meanings. Pye

observes that as a result of his emphasis "from within", Kamstra

> . . . is able to recognise a parallel hermeneutical
> activity in quite diverse traditions. In any religion
> considered dynamically syncretisms may be seen to be
> in the process of being unmasked and broken off while
> at the same time new ones are being built up again.
> Kamstra says that in this sense every theologian and
> every theological faculty moves in a frontier terri-
> tory.[3]

The frontiers of inter-religious dialogue pose peculiar

challenges to Asian and Western Christians. Each religion requires

a dialogical hermeneutic suited to its ethos, as Marcello Zago says,

---

[1] Michael Pye, "Syncretism and Ambiguity," _Numen_ 18 (1971): 83.

[2] Ibid., cf. J. H. Kamstra, _Synkretisme op de Grens tussen Theologie en Godsdienstfenomenologie_ (Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1970), p. 10.

[3] Ibid., p. 87.

"every religion has a physiognomy of its own."[1] De Silva has shown

the impossibility of theologizing in the Buddhist context till a

common language is developed. The language may not meet all the

requirements of traditional orthodoxy, but as Niels-Erik Andreasen

has said in another context, "God is more concerned with presenting

His message in common human language than in shielding it from all

potential misunderstandings."[2] In a similar vein M. M. Thomas notes

that even the best theological definitions of faith are fragmentary

or partial; thus he calls for a new understanding of the meaning of

orthodoxy and heresy with respect to Christian theology. In his

view the heretic has often been a better Christian and invariably a

better evangelist because "he is on a particular frontier in dialogue

with the world of men."[3] An important component for fruitful inter-

faith dialogue will be Christian tolerance and understanding of

frontier theologians who do not always conform to traditional and

conceptual forms of confession.

A frontier theology will be cognizant of persons and not

conceptual systems, it does not proceed abstractly from a theological

concept but begins with the meeting of persons. As Koyama states it,

"our ultimate interest must lie with understanding the Buddhist and

not Buddhism; what matters for the Christian gospel is not Buddhism,

---

[1]"Evangelization in the Religious Situation of Asia,"
Evangelization in the World Today (New York: Seabury Press, 1979),
p. 77.

[2]"From Vision to Prophecy," Adventist Review January 28,
1982, p. 4.

[3]The Acknowledged Christ of the Indian Renaissance (London:
SCM Press, 1969), p. 310.

but the Buddhist."[1] In the _Majjhima Nikaya_, Sutta 72, the Buddha is said to consider rigid doctrinal positions to be "a wilderness, a puppet show, a writing and a fetter," which are "coupled with misery, ruin, despair and agony"; thus "this that is called doctrine is something that the Tathgatha has quit." M. Palihawadana sadly admits that Buddhists failed to assimilate this lesson and "went on to build a strong attachment to what were called 'right views'."[2] Thomas Merton, out of a living encounter in Buddhist lands, concluded, in contradiction to the practice of Western scholars of Buddhism, that the real area for investigation was theology rather than psychology or asceticism. However, he adds, "It must be theology as experienced in Christian contemplation, not the speculative theology of textbooks and disputations."[3] In their dialogue with Zen Buddhism, Christians are well-advised to look for their inspiration to a Bernard of Clairvaux rather than a Thomas Aquinas or a Karl Barth. Dialogue is personal and relational rather than propositional. As Lukas Vischer has observed: "Systematization inevitably turns the concept of dialogue into a Procrustean bed into which much can only be fitted by force."[4]

Systematization is nevertheless an indispensable rearguard to a frontier theology as it ensures the holistic nature of authentic dialogue. Paul Knitter sees conceptual formulations or doctrines as

---

[1]_Waterbuffalo Theology_, p. 122.

[2]"A Buddhist Response," p. 44.

[3]_Zen and the Birds of Appetite_ (New York: New Directions, 1968), p. 58.

[4]"Dialogue-Impasse or Open Door," p. 257.

a corrective to the Buddhist emphasis on "the emptiness of words and the limitations of intellect." However he maintains that Christians "can proclaim the value and even necessity of doctrine only if with equal insistence they recognize its inadequacy."[1] There is a wide consensus among Christians that a doctrinal basis for dialogue between religions rests on the question whether salvific revelation is to be found in other faiths. The fulfillment theory, anonymous Christianity, the unknown Christ, prevenient grace, and cosmic covenant may be considered attempts to sift out that which is theologically decisive for the validity of a universally salvific revelation. They are attempts to show how the particular history of Jesus can have redemptive efficacy on universal history. The claim of Asian Christians in actual encounter has been that it is possible to hold to a doctrine of salvific revelation in other faiths without compromising the finality of Christ. Thus De Silva claims for Christianity a specific, universally valid role distinctive from Buddhism but he does so not in opposition but in complementarity. A task facing theologians of dialogue everywhere is to determine the biblical essentials of a consistent view of salvific revelation in the world religions.

The Arena of the Spirit

A theology crossing religious frontiers is imperative to Christian mission as it seeks to show in what way Jesus Christ as Lord encompasses the world and therefore all religions. It must necessarily be a theology of openness with an inclusive perspective, but this openness is not free from certain underlying biblical

---

[1]"Horizons on Christianity's New Dialogue," p. 47.

presuppositions. On the basis of our study the essentials of a consistent biblical view would include the universality of God's salvific will, the uniqueness and therefore the indispensability of salvation in Jesus Christ, the fact of the confused state of man in sin who is therefore in need of a special revelation, and the response of faith which connotes the element of free human decision, all brought together in the all-embracing work of the Holy Spirit in mediating the grace of Jesus Christ to all men. Such a view holds together the vindication of God and the genuine worth of man. God does not condone man in his sin, neither does he deny man the opportunity of salvation. Grace is available to all men but it is resistable, thus man must take the responsibility if he is ultimately lost. Thus God is both just and a saviour, and man is not a mere cipher in the plan of salvation. In harmony with this biblical view of salvific revelation interfaith dialogue becomes the arena in which the Holy Spirit is at work. D. T. Niles indicates that the Spirit is beckoning from ahead, thus Christians must be prepared to encounter "the result of God's free initiative, the previousness of Jesus Christ in every situation."[1]

Salvific revelation in such a view is not confined to the Judeo-Christian scriptures, nor is it limited to the outreach of the evangelistic agencies of the church. While there will always be the need for a distinguishable, organized, visible Christian community manifesting the new life available in Christ, salvific revelation

---

[1] _Upon the Earth_ (New York: McGraw-Hill Book Company, 1962), p. 86.

by the Holy Spirit is not limited to the visible Judeo-Christian

structures. As Paul Loeffler has said:

> The Spirit is according to the Acts, always 'ahead'
> (not 'outside') of the Church, precisely because sal-
> vation and the Church are never complete. Thus the
> present circle of members has to be broken open all
> the time to bring in people of different races, creeds,
> cultures and social groups.[1]

Thus the dynamic of missions is not vitiated, for in the

New Testament account of the Spirit and the Church, there was the

need of the evangelizing agencies of the church and at the same time

the Spirit mediated grace universally making possible the salvation

of the unevangelized. Since it is impossible to limit the Spirit's role

in salvific revelation. We must humbly acknowledge God's free initia-

tive in revelation. This revelation by the Spirit though not accom-

panied by the written revelation does not contradict it, for both

are given by the same Spirit. Jesus testified of the Spirit, "The

wind blows where it wishes and you hear the sound of it, but do not

know where it comes from and where it is going; so is everyone who

is born of the Spirit" (John 3:8).

---

[1]"Baptism, The Church and Koinonia," Some Theological
Dialogues, ed. M. M. Thomas (Madras: Christian Literature
Society, 1977), pp. 141-142.

SELECTED BIBLIOGRAPHY

SELECTED BIBILIOGRAPHY

Lynn A. de Silva

Primary Sources

Books and pamphlets

Bauddha Jatika Balavegaya and the Search for the Historical Jesus.
   Colombo: By the author, 490/5 Havelock Road, 1964.

Belief in God. Colombo: Committee for the Publication of
   Christian Literature, 1957.

Buddhism: Beliefs and Practices in Sri Lanka. Colombo: The
   Ecumenical Institute, 1980.

The Cross and the Bodhi Tree. Colombo: Wesley Press, 1969.

The Problem of the Self in Buddhism and Christianity. New York:
   Barnes and Noble, 1979.

Reincarnation in Buddhist and Christian Thought. Colombo:
   Christian Literature Society of Ceylon, 1968.

Why Can't I Save Myself? The Christian Answer in Relation to
   Buddhist Thought. Colombo: Christian Study Centre
   Division for Buddhist Studies, 1966.

Why Believe in God? The Christian Answer in Relation to Buddhism.
   Colombo: Christian Study Centre Division for Buddhist
   Studies, 1970.

Articles

"Anatta and God." Dialogue New Series 2, No. 3 (November-December
   1975): 106-115.

"Beyond Tolerance." Dialogue Old Series, No. 10 (November 1966):
   1-2.

"The Biblical Understanding of Man in Society in Relation to
   Buddhism." Paper presented at A Consultation on Buddhist-
   Christian Encounter. Edited by U. Kyaw Than. Rangoon:
   1961. (Mimeographed.)

301

"Buddhist-Christian Dialogue." In Inter-Religious Dialogue, pp.
170-203. Edited by Herbert Jai Singh. Bangalore: CISRS,
1967.

"Christian Attitude to Buddhism: A Reply." Dialogue Old Series,
No. 13 (December 1967): 19-24.

"The Christian Attitude to Buddhism." Dialogue Old Series, No. 13
(December 1967): 7-12.

"Christian Community within Communities." In Religiousness in
Sri Lanka, pp. 273-300. Edited by John Ross Carter.
Colombo: Marga Institute, 1979.

"Christian Reflection in a Buddhist Context." In Asia's Struggle for
Full Humanity: Towards a Relevant Theology, pp. 96-107.
Edited by Virginia Fabella. New York: Orbis Books, 1980.

"The Christian Solution to the Problem of Man in Relation to
Buddhism." A paper presented at A Consultation on Buddhist-
Christian Encounter. Edited by U. Kyaw Than. Rangoon: 1961.
(Mimeographed.)

"Concord." Dialogue New Series 3, No. 2 (May-August 1976): 43-45.

"Dialogue: A Matter of Necessity." One World, February 1977,
pp. 10-11.

"Dialogue and Mission: Some Lessons from the Past." Dialogue
Old Series, Nos. 20 & 21 (June 1970): 15-16.

"Dialogue in the Context of Sri Lanka Buddhism." In New Approaches
to Interfaith Dialogue, pp. 89-102. Edited by T. Dayananda
Francis. Colombo: Church of Sweden Mission, 1980.

"The Ecumenical Institute for Study and Dialogue." Dialogue New
Series 4, No. 3 (September-December 1977): 117.

"Emergent Theology in the Context of Buddhism." In Asian Christian
Theology: Emerging Themes, pp. 220-238. Edited by Douglas
J. Elwood. Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1980.

"Encounter with Buddhism." In A History of the Methodist Church
in Ceylon, pp. 570-579. Edited by W. J. T. Small. Colombo:
Wesley Press, 1971.

"Every Religion Has Its Jealousies." Dialogue New Series 7, No. 1
(January-April 1980): 1-3.

"An Existential Understanding of the Doctrine of Creation in the
Context of Buddhism." In A Vision for Man: Essays on
Faith, Theology and Society, pp. 78-91. Edited by Samuel
Amirtham. Madras: CLS, 1978.

"Faith, Authority and Omniscience." Dialogue Old Series, No. 15
(July 1968): 19-26.

"Freedom from Teutonic Captivity." Dialogue New Series 3 (January-
April 1976): 1-5.

"From Diatribe to Dialogue." Dialogue Old Series, No. 1 (September
1963): 1-3.

"Good News of Salvation to the Buddhist." International Review of
Missions 57, No. 288 (October 1968): 448-458.

"Holy Worldliness." Dialogue New Series 2, No. 1 (January-April
1975): 1-6.

"Living in a Pluralistic World." Dialogue New Series VI, No. 3
(September-December 1979): 83-84.

"The Meaning of Religion in Sri Lanka Today: A Christian View."
Dialogue New Series 2, No. 1 (January-April 1975): 12-14.

"Non-Christian Religions and God's Plan of Salvation." Study
Encounter 3, No. 2 (1967): 61-67.

"Pistis and Saddhā." Dialogue Old Series, No. 12 (September 1967):
21-25.

"The Problem of Suffering: The Christian Answer in the Light of
Buddhist Thought." Dialogue Old Series No. 4 (October 1964):
5-14.

"Proselytism." Dialogue New Series 4, Nos. 1 & 2 (January-August
1977): 37-39.

"Relevant Areas of Dialogue with Buddhists." Study Encounter 3,
No. 2 (1967): 79-80.

"Religious Dimensions in Humanity's Relation to Nature: Christian
Scriptural Insights." In Man in Nature: Guest or Engineer?
pp. 16-23. Edited by S. J. Samartha and Lynn de Silva.
Colombo: Ecumenical Institute for Study and Dialogue, 1979.

"Some Issues in the Buddhist-Christian Dialogue." In Dialogue
between Men of Living Faiths, pp. 47-58. Edited by S. J.
Samartha. Geneva: World Council of Churches, 1971.

"Theological Construction in a Buddhist Context." In Asian Voices
in Christian Theology, pp. 37-52. Edited by Gerald H.
Anderson. New York: Orbis Books, 1976.

"The Turn to 'Community' as the Focus for Dialogue." Dialogue
New Series 4, Nos. 1 & 2 (January-August 1977): 1-2.

"The Understanding and Goal of Dialogue." Dialogue New Series 4,
Nos. 1 & 2 (January-August 1977): 3-8.

"What Is Dialogue?" Dialogue New Series 1, No. 1 (January-April
1974): 1-3.

Unpublished Materials

"Theological Significance of People of Other Faiths." Prepared
for a forthcoming publication: 1981. (Typewritten.)

Secondary Sources

Breaking Barriers: Nairobi 1975. The Official Report of the Fifth
Assembly of the World Council of Churches, 23 November-
December 1975. By David M. Paton, editor. Grand Rapids
Michigan: William B. Eerdmans, 1976.

Carter, John Ross. "Translational Theology: An Expression of
Christian Faith in a Religiously Plural World." In Christian
Faith in a Religiously Plural World, pp. 168-179. Edited
by Donald G. Dawe and John B. Carman. New York: Orbis
Books, 1980.

De Silva, Lynn A. Obituary issued by The Ecumenical Institute.
Colombo: 1982, p. 2. (Mimeographed.)

Elwood, Douglas J. "Emerging Themes in Asian Theological Thinking."
In The Human and the Holy, pp. 231-266. Edited by Emerito
P. Nacpil and Douglas J. Elwood. New York: Orbis Books,
1980.

Fernando, Anthony. Buddhism and Christianity: Their Inner Affinity.
Colombo: Ecumenical Institute for Study and Dialogue, 1981.

Hallencreutz, Carl F. Dialogue and Community. Ecumenical Issues
in Inter-religious Relationships. Uppsala, Sweden: Swedish
Institute of Missionary Research, 1977.

Jayatilleke, K. N. "Christian Attitude to Buddhism (criticized)."
Dialogue Old Series, No. 13 (December 1967): 17-19.

Knitter, Paul F. "Horizons on Christianity's New Dialogue."
Horizons 8, No. 1 (1981): 40-61.

Palihawadana, Mahinda. "A Buddhist Reponse: Religion beyond
Ideology and Power." In Christian Faith in a Religiously
Plural World, pp. 34-45. Edited by Donald G. Dawe and
John B. Carman. New York: Orbis Books, 1980.

Panikkar, R. "The Internal Dialogue--the Insufficiency of the
So-called Phenomenological 'Epoche' in the Religious
Encounter." Religion and Society 15 (September 1968):
55-66.

Robertson, Alec. "Buddhist Attitude to Christianity: Continued."
Dialogue Old Series, No. 13 (December 1967): 24-28.

Rodrigo, Michael. "Buddhist Christian Dialogue in Sri Lanka." In
Buddhism and Christianity, pp. 99-106. Edited by Claude
Geffre and Mariasuasai Dhavamony. New York: Seabury
Press, 1979.

Rothermundt, Gottfried H. "An Evaluation of 'Dialogue': Some
Reflections on the Old Series (1963-1973)." Dialogue New
Series 1, No. 3 (September-December 1974): 87-92.

Samartha, Stanley J. "Courage for Dialogue: An Interpretation of
the Nairobi Debate." Religion and Society 23 (September
1976): 22-35.

Scott, David C. "Book Reviews." Religion and Society 15 (September
1978): 94-97.

Smart, Ninian. "Remarks on Gunapala Dharmasiri's Critique on
Christian Theism." Dialogue New Series 3, No. 1 (January-
April 1976): 19-20.

Spae, J. J. "The Buddhist-Christian Encounter: Buddhism and
Christianity: A New Era of Encounter." Pro Mundi Vita
Bulletin 67 (July-August 1977): 3-8.

_____. "The Buddhist-Christian Encounter: Encounter Centres
Throughout the World." Pro Mundi Vita Bulletin 67 (July-
August 1977): 9-11.

_____. "Marginal Notes on Absolute Nothingness." Zeitschrift
fur Missionswissenschaft und Religion Swissenschaft 61
(1977): 271-282.

Than, Kyaw U., ed. "Rangoon Consultation Statement: Communication
of the Gospel to the Buddhists." A Consultation on Buddhist-
Christian Encounter. Rangoon: 1961. (Mimeographed.)

Thomas, M. M. "Book Reviews." Religion and Society 20 (September
1973): 100-102.

_____. Man and the Universe of Faiths. Madras: Christian
Literature Society, 1975.

Vial, Alfred. "Buddhism and Other Religions." Dialogue Old Series,
No. 10 (November 1966): 2-5.

Vischer, Lukas. "Dialogue--Impasse or Open Door?" In A Vision for
    Man: Essays on Faith, Theology and Society, pp. 253-262.
    Edited by Samuel Amirtham. Madras: Christian Literature
    Society, 1978.

Vitanage, Gunaseela. "Buddhist Attitude to Christianity." Dialogue
    Old Series, No. 13 (December 1967): 13-17.

General Secondary Sources

Abraham, K. C. Interpreting Christian Social Ethics in Modern India.
    Ann Arbor, Michigan: University Microfilms International,
    1980.

Adikaram, E. W. "Buddhism and the Doctrine of Hate." Ceylon Daily
    News, 25 May 1964, Vesak Supplement.

Andreasen, Niels-Erik. "From Vision to Prophecy." Adventist Review,
    January 28, 1982, pp. 4-7.

Arasaratnam, S. "The Christians of Ceylon and Nationalist Politics."
    In Religion in South Asia, pp. 163-182. Edited by G. A.
    Oddie. Columbia, Missouri: South Asia Books, 1977.

Ariarajah, Weslev. "Dialogue in the Asian Context." In A Vision
    for Man: Essays on Faith, Theology and Society, pp. 263-271.
    Edited by Samuel Amirtham. Madras: Christian Literature
    Society, 1978.

Ariyaratne, T. A. P. The Philosophy of Anatta: Reconstruction of
    the Real Teaching of Gotama. Nugegoda, Sri Lanka: Deepanee
    Printers, 1974.

Asirvatham, Eddie. Christianity in the Indian Crucible. Calcutta:
    Y. M. C. A. Publishing House, 1957.

Aung, S. Z. "Introduction to Anuruddha." In Compendium of Philosophy,
    pp. 1-76. Edited by C. A. F. Rhys Davids. London: Luzac
    and Co., 1963.

Baillie, D. M. God was in Christ. London: Faber & Faber, 1948.

Balasuriya, Tissa. The Eucharist and Human Liberation. New York:
    Orbis Books, 1979.

Balchand, Asandas, ed. The Salvific Value of Non-Christian Religions
    According to Asian Christian Theologians Writing in Asian-
    published Theological Journals 1965-1970. Manila: East
    Asian Pastoral Institute, 1973.

Barclay, W. The Daily Study Bible, the Gospel of Luke.
    Edinburgh: St. Andrew Press, 1957.

Barclay, W. The Daily Study Bible: the Revelation of John.
Edinburgh: St. Andrew Press, 1957.

Barth, Karl. Church Dogmatics. 13 vols. Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark,
1932-1967.

_____. Dogmatics in Outline. New York: Harper, 1959.

Benz, Ernst. "Buddhism and Christianity." Japanese Religions 8,
No. 4 (October 1975): 10-18.

_____. Buddhism or Communism: Which Holds the Future of Asia?
New York: Doubleday & Co., 1966.

Berdyaev, Nicholas. The Destiny of Man. London: Geoffrey Bles,
1937.

Berger, Peter L. The Heretical Imperative. New York: Doubleday,
1979.

Betrayal of Buddhism: An Abridged Version of the Report of the
Buddhist Committee of Inquiry. Balangoda, Sri Lanka:
All-Ceylon Buddhist Congress, 1956.

Bond, George D. "The Dhamma and 'Sola Scriptura': The Interpretation
of Scripture in Theravada Buddhism and Christianity."
Dialogue New Series 2, No. 2 (May-August, 1975): 47-60.

Braaten, Carl E. "The Uniqueness and Universality of Jesus Christ."
In Mission Trends No. 5: Faith Meets Faith, pp. 69-89.
Edited by Gerald H. Anderson and Thomas F. Stransky. New
York: Paulist Press, 1981.

Buber, Martin. Between Man and Man. Translated by R. G. Smith.
London: Kegan Paul, 1947.

_____. I and Thou. Translated by R. G. Smith. Edinburgh: T &
T. Clark, 1937.

Buddhaghosa. The Path of Purity. 3 vols. Colombo: Pali Text
Society, 1931.

Burns, Douglas M. Buddhism, Science and Atheism. Bangkok: Buddha
Puja Publications, 1965.

Cairns, H. A. C. Prelude to Imperialism. London: Routledge and
Kegan Paul, 1965.

Central Committee of the World Council of Churches. "Dialogue in
Community." Ecumenical Review 29 (July 1977): 254-264.

Chatterjee, Margaret. "The Presuppositions of Inter-religious
Communication--A Philosophical Approach." Religious Studies
3 (1967-68): 391-400.

Clifford, Regina T. "The Dhammadipa Tradition of Sri Lanka: Three Models within the Sinhalese Chronicles." In Religion and Legitimation of Power in Sri Lanka, pp. 36-47. Edited by Bardwell L. Smith. Chambersburg, Pennsylvania: Anima Books, 1978.

Compendium of Philosophy. A translation of the "Abhidammatha Sangha" by Shwe Zan Aung. Edited by C. A. F. Rhys Davids. London: Luzac and Co., 1963.

Consultation on Buddhist-Christian Encounter. "Rangoon Consultation Statement: Communication of the Gospel to the Buddhist." Edited by U. Kyaw Than. Rangoon: 1961. (Mimeographed.)

Conze, Edward. Buddhist Meditation. London: George Allen and Unwin, 1956.

_____. Buddhist Thought in India. London: Allen and Unwin, 1962.

_____. Further Buddhist Studies. Oxford: Bruno Cassirer, 1975.

Coomaraswamy, A. K. Hinduism and Buddhism. New York: Wisdom Library, n.d.

Cragg, Kenneth. Christianity in World Perspective. London: Lutterworth Press, 1969.

Cullman, Oscar. Immortality of the Soul and Resurrection of the Dead. New York: Macmillan, 1958.

Cuttat, Jacques-Albert. The Encounter of Religions. New York: Desclee Company, 1957.

Dahlke, Paul. Buddhist Essays. London: Macmillan, 1908.

De Kretser, Bryan. Man in Buddhism and Christianity. Calcutta: Y. M. C. A. Publishing House, 1954.

De Ridder, Richard R. "God and the gods: Reviewing the Biblical Roots." Missiology: An International Review 6 (January 1978): 11-28.

De Silva, K. M. "Religion." In Sri Lanka: A Survey, pp. 379-380. Edited by K. M. de Silva. Honolulu: University Press of Hawaii, 1977.

_____. Social Policy and Missionary Organizations in Ceylon 1840-1855. London: Longmans, Green and Co., 1965.

De Silva, Nihal. "The Buddhist Quality of Faith." Dialogue Old Series No. 12 (September 1967): 15-21.

De Silva, Padmasiri. Value Orientations and Nation Building. Colombo: Lake House Investments, 1976.

Devanandan, P. D. The Gospel and Renascent Hinduism. London: SCM Press, 1959.

_____. Preparation for Dialogue. Bangalore: Christian Institute for the Study of Religion and Society, 1964.

Devasahayam, D. M., ed. Rethinking Christianity in India. Madras, India: Sudarsanam, 1938.

Dev, G. C. Buddha the Humanist. Lahore, Pakistan: Paramount Publishers, 1969.

De Unamuno. The Tragic Sense of Life. Translated by J. E. C. Flitch. London: Fontana, 1962.

De Wijesekera, O. H. "Theravada Buddhist Tradition under Modern Cultures." In The Impact of Modern Culture on Traditional Religions, pp. 25-38. Edited by Herbert W. Schneider and B. A. van Proodij. Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1968.

Dharmasiri, Gunapala. A Buddhist Critique of the Christian Concept of God. Colombo: Lake House Investments, 1974.

Dutt, Sukumar. Buddhism in East Asia. Bombay: Indian Council for Cultural Relations, 1960.

"Ecumenical Chronicle: Asia, Ceylon." Ecumenical Review 12 (January 1960): 231-260.

Edwards, David. The Last Things Now. London: SCM Press, 1969.

Eliade, Mircea. The Sacred and the Profane. New York: Harcourt Brace and World, 1959.

Farquhar, J. N. The Crown of Hinduism. London: Oxford University Press, 1913.

Fernando, Mervyn. "Self, Reality and Salvation in Christianity and Buddhism." International Philosophical Quarterly 12, No. 3 (September 1972): 415-425.

Forrester, D. B. "Not to Destroy but to Fulfil." Indian Journal of Theology 15 (April-June 1966): 67-69.

Fosdick, H. E. A Guide to Understanding the Bible: The Development of Ideas within the Old and New Testaments. New York: Harper and Brothers, 1938.

Furuya, Yasuo C. "The Significance of Asian Christianity: A Note to Western Theologians." Pacific Theological Review 9 (Spring 1977): 24-26.

Gairdner, W. H. T. "Edinburgh 1910: An Account and Interpretation of the World Missionary Conference." London: n.p., 1910.

Geiger, M. and W. Pāli Dhamma vornehmlich in der kanonischen Literature (Abhandlungen der bayrischen Academie der Wissenschaften Philosophisch-Historische Klasse, vol. 31, No.1, 1920.

Harris, C. "State of the Dead (Christian)." Encyclopedia of Religion and Ethics. 1st ed., 1921. 11:833-838.

Heber, Reginald. "From Greenlands Icy Mountains." In The Church Hymnal, p. 345. Washington D.C.: Review and Herald Publishing Assoc., 1941.

Henry, Carl F. H. "Confronting Other Religions." Christianity Today, August 1969, pp. 31.

Hesselgrave, David. "Evangelicals and Interreligious Dialogue." In Mission Trends No. 5: Faith Meets Faith, pp. 123-127. Edited by Gerald H. Anderson and Thomas F. Stransky. New York: Paulist Press, 1981.

Hick, John. Death and Eternal Life. London: Collins, 1976.

_____. Evil and the God of Love. London: Macmillan, 1966.

_____. God and the Universe of Faiths. New York: St. Martin's Press, 1973.

Hocking, W. E. Living Religions and a World Faith. London: Allen & Unwin, 1940.

_____., ed. Re-thinking Missions: A Laymen's Inquiry after One Hundred Years. New York: Harper & Brothers Publishers, 1932.

Hoekstra, Harvey T. The World Council of Churches and the Demise of Evangelism. Wheaton, Illinois: Tyndale House Publishers, 1979.

Humphreys, Christmas. "Bodhisattva." A Popular Dictionary of Buddhism. Edited by Christmas Humphreys. London: Curzon Press, 1976. 1:46-47.

_____. Buddhism. Baltimore: Penguin Books, 1962.

Huxley, Aldous. The Perennial Philosophy. London: Fontana, 1959.

Indapanno, Buddhadasa. Christianity and Buddhism. Chiang Mai, Thailand: Sublime Life Mission, 1967.

Jayatilleke, K. N. Buddhism and Science. Edited by Wu Shu. Kandy, Sri Lanka: Buddhist Publication Society, 1959.

_____. The Buddhist Attitude to Other Religions. Colombo: Public Trustee Department of Ceylon, 1966.

Jennings, J. G. The Vedantic Buddhism of the Buddha. London: Oxford University Press, 1947.

Johansson, Rune. The Psychology of Nirvana. London: Allen and Unwin, 1963.

Johnson, A. R. The Vitality of the Individual in the Thought of Ancient Israel. Cardiff: University of Wales Press, 1964.

Johnson. David E., ed. Uppsala to Nairobi. New York: Friendship Press, 1975.

Kamstra, J. H. Synkretisme op de Grens tussen Theologie en Godsdienstfenomenologie. Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1970.

Kariyawasam, A. G. S. "Bodhisattva." Encyclopedia of Buddhism. 1st ed., 1971. 3:224-233.

Keay, F. E. A History of the Syrian Church in India. Madras: Society for the Propagation of Christian Knowledge in India, 1951.

Kierkegaard, Søren. Fear and Trembling, Sickness unto Death. Translated by Walter Lowrie. New York: Doubleday, 1954.

Knitter, Paul F. Towards a Protestant Theology of Religions: A Case Study of Paul Althaus and Contemporary Attitudes. Marburg: N. G. Elwert, 1974.

Koyama, Kosuke. Water Buffalo Theology. New York: Orbis Books, 1976.

Kraemer, H. The Christian Message in a Non-Christian World. New York: Harper and Brothers, 1938.

_____. Religion and the Christian Faith. Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1956.

_____. Why Christianity of All Religions. Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1962.

Kung, Hans. "The World Religions in God's Plan of Salvation." In Christian Revelation and World Religions, pp. 25-66. Edited by J. Neunner. London: Burns & Gates, 1967.

Lindsell, Harold. "Fundamentals for a Philosophy of the Christian Mission." In The Theology of the Christian Mission, pp. 239-249. Edited by Gerald H. Anderson. London: SCM Press, 1961.

Ling, Trevor. Karl Marx and Religion in Europe and India. New York: Barnes & Noble, 1980.

Loeffler [Löffler], Paul. "Baptism, the Church and Koinonia." In Some Theological Dialogues. Edited by M. M. Thomas. Madras: Christian Literature Society, 1977.

Löffler, Paul. "Representative Christian Approaches to People of Living Faiths: A Survey of Issues and Its Evaluation." In Faith in the Midst of Faiths: Reflections on Dialogue in Community, pp. 16-27. Edited by S. J. Samartha. Geneva: World Council of Churches, 1977.

Lucas, Bernard. The Empire of Christ. London: Macmillan & Co., 1908.

Macmurray, John. Persons in Relation. London: Faber, 1961.

Macquarrie, John. Christian Unity and Christian Diversity. London: SCM Press, 1975.

_____. Paths in Spirituality. London: SCM Press, 1972.

_____. Principles of Christian Theology. New York: Scribner, 1966.

Mahathēra, Nyanatiloka. Karma and Rebirth. Colombo: Buddhist Publication Society, n.d.

Malalasekera, G. P. "Addi-Buddha." Encyclopedia of Buddhism. 1st ed., 1961. 1:213-219.

_____. "Anatta." Encyclopedia of Buddhism. 1st ed., 1961. 1:567-576.

Malalgoda, Kitsiri. "Buddhism in Post-independence Sri Lanka." In Religion in South Asia, pp. 183-194. Edited by G. A. Oddie. Columbia, Missouri: South Asia Books, 1977.

_____. Buddhism in Sinhalase Society 1750-1900. Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1976.

Maritain, J. True Humanism. Translated by M. and R. Adamson. London: Geoffrey Bles, 1938.

Mediwaka, H. W. "Christianity and Nationalism." International Review of Missions 13 (1924): 52-59.

Mendis, G. C. "Faith in Buddhism and in Christianity." Dialogue Old Series, No. 14 (February 1968): 3-5.

Merton, Thomas. Zen and the Birds of Appetite. New York: New Directions, 1968.

Minz, Nirmal. "Theologies of Dialogue--A Critique." Religion and Society 14 (June 1967): 7-20.

Mooney, Michael J. "On Comparing Christian and Buddhist Traditions: A Response to Mervyn Fernando." International Philosophical Quarterly 13 (June 1973): 267-270.

Mott, John. The Decisive Hour of Christian Missions. New York:
Student Volunteer Movement for Foreign Missions, 1910.

Muggeridge, M. Jesus Rediscovered. London: Fontana Books, 1969.

Muller, Max F. Ramakrishna: His Life and Sayings. London:
Longmans, Green & Co., 1898.

_____., comp. Sacred Books of the East. The World's Great
Classics. New York: Colonial Press, 1900.

Neill, Stephen. Christian Faith and Other Faiths. London: Oxford
University Press, 1961.

New Delhi Report. The Third Assembly of the World Council of
Churches, 1961. New York: Association Press, [1962].

Niebuhr, Reinhold. Nature and Destiny of Man. London: Nisbet,
1943.

Nietzsche, Friedrich. Thus Spake Zarathustra. Translated by R. J.
Hollingdale. New York: Penguin Books, 1961.

Niles, D. T. Buddhism and the Claims of Christ. Richmond, Virginia:
John Knox Press, 1967.

_____. Upon the Earth. New York: McGraw-Hill Book Company, 1962.

North American Protestant Ministries Overseas. 9th ed. Monrovia,
California: Missions Advanced Research and Communication
Center, [1970].

Official Report of the Fourth Assembly of the World Council of
Churches, Uppsala, July 4-20, 1968. By Norman Goodall,
editor. Geneva: World Council of Churches, 1968.

Oldenberg, H. Buddha: His Life, His Doctrine, His Order. Translated
by William Hoey. London: Luzac, 1928.

Oosthuizen, G. C. Theological Battleground in Asia and Africa.
London: C. Hurst & Company, 1972.

Origen Origen De Principiis. The Ante-Nicene Fathers. 1:

Ott, Heinrich. "The Beginning Dialogue between Christianity and
Buddhism, the Concept of a 'Dialogical Theology' and the
Possible Contribution of Heideggerian Thought." Japanese
Religions 11, Nos. 2 & 3 (September 1980): 74-112.

Panikkar, R. "The Church and the World Religions." Religion and
Society 14 (June 1967): 59-63.

_____. The Intrareligious Dialogue. New York: Paulist Press,
1978.

Pannenberg, Wolfhart. <u>Jesus--God and Man</u>. Translated by Lewis L. Wilkins and Duane A. Priebe. Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1967.

_____. <u>What Is Man?</u> Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1970.

Paranavitana, S. and Nicholas, C. W., eds. <u>History of Ceylon</u>. Colombo: Ceylon University Press, 1961.

Perniola, Vito. "Buddhism in Modern Ceylon." <u>Studia Missionalia</u> 12 (1962): 68-80.

_____. "Faith in Buddhism." <u>Dialogue</u> Old Series No. 14 (February 1968): 5-9.

Phadnis, Urmila. <u>Religion and Politics in Sri Lanka</u>. New Delhi: Ramesh C. Jain, 1976.

Pieris, Aloysius. "A Buddhist Critique and a Christian Response." <u>Dialogue</u> New Series 2 (November-December 1975): 83-85.

_____. "Towards an Asian Theology of Liberation: Some Religio-Cultural Guidelines." In <u>Asia's Struggle for Full Humanity: Towards a Relevant Theology</u>, pp. 75-95. Edited by Virginia Fabella. New York: Orbis Books, 1980.

Pratt, J. B. <u>The Pilgrimage of Buddhism</u>. New York: Macmillan Company, 1928.

Quick, O. C. <u>Doctrines of the Creed</u>. London: Nisbet, 1938.

Radhakrishnan, S. <u>Eastern Religions and Western Thought</u>. London: Oxford University Press, 1939.

Rahner, Karl. "Christianity and the Non-Christian Religions." <u>Theological Investigations</u> 20 (1961-1981): 115-134.

Rahula, W. <u>History of Buddhism in Ceylon</u>. Colombo: M. D. Gunasena & Co., 1956.

_____. <u>What the Buddha Taught</u>. London: Gordon Frazer, 1959.

Ratnayake, Shanta. <u>Two Ways of Perfection: Buddhist and Christian</u>. Colombo: Lake House Investments, 1978.

Rayan, Samuel. "'The Ultimate Blasphemy': On Putting God in a Box." <u>International Review of Mission</u> 65 (January 1976): 129-132.

"Religion: The Ecumenical Century." <u>Time</u>, December 8, 1961, p. 78.

Rhys Davids, C. A. F. <u>Buddhism</u>. London: Lutterworth Press, 1922.

_____. <u>Wayfarer's Words</u>. London: Luzac, 1941.

Rhys Davids, T. W. Buddhism: Its History and Literature. New York: Putnam, 1896.

Robertson, Alec. "Buddhist Attitude to Christianity." Dialogue Old Series, No. 13 (December 1967): 3-7.

Robinson, Charles Henry. History of Christian Missions. New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1915.

Robinson, J. A. T. The Body--A Study in Pauline Theology. London: SCM Press, 1947.

_____. The Difference of Being a Christian Today. London: Colins Fontana Books, 1974.

_____. In the End, God. London: James Clark and Co., 1950.

Robinson, Wheeler H. Religious Ideas of the Old Testament. London: Epworth Press, 1947.

Rogers, Murray. "Hindu and Christian--A Moment Breaks." Religion and Society 12 (March 1965): 35-49.

Runia, Klaas. "The World Council of Churches and Inter-Religious Dialogue." Calvin Theological Journal 15 (April 1980): 27-46.

Samartha, Stanley J. "Guidelines on Dialogue." The Ecumenical Review 31 (October 1979): 155-162.

Sangharakshita, Bhikshu. A Survey of Buddhism. Bangalore: Indian Institute of World Culture, 1957.

Sarathchandra, E. R. Buddhist Psychology of Perception. Colombo: Ceylon University Press, 1958.

Scott, Waldron. "'No Other Name'--An Evangelical Conviction." In Christ's Lordship and Religious Pluralism, pp. 58-74. Edited by Gerald H. Anderson and Thomas F. Stransky. New York: Orbis Books, 1981.

Sellers, James E. The Outsider and the Word of God: A Study in Christian Communication. Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1961.

Sharpe, Eric J. Faith Meets Faith. London: SCM Press, 1977.

_____. "The Goals of Inter-Religious Dialogue." In Truth and Dialogue, pp. 77-95. Edited by John Hick. London: Sheldon Press, 1974.

Slack, Kenneth. Nairobi Narrative. London: SCM Press, 1976.

_____. Uppsala Report. London: SCM Press, 1968.

Smart, Ninian. World Religions: A Dialogue. Baltimore: Penguin, 1966.

Smith, Bardwell L. "The Ideal Social Order as Portrayed in the Chronicles of Ceylon." In The Two Wheels of Chamma, pp. 31-57. Edited by Bardwell L. Smith. Chambersburg, Pennsylvania: American Academy of Religion, 1972.

Smith, Wilfred Cantwell. The Meaning and End of Religion. New York: Macmillan, 1962.

Small, W. J. T., ed. A History of the Methodist Church in Ceylon 1814-1964. Colombo: Wesley Press, 1971.

Snaith, Norman. The Distinctive Ideas of the Old Testament. London: Epworth Press, 1947.

_____. "Heart and Soul and Spirit." Preacher's Quarterly 3 (1957): 20-24.

Spae, Joseph J. "Three Notes on the Christian--Buddhist Dialogue." Zeitschrift Fur Missionswissenschaft und Religions wissenschaft 59:1 (January 1975): 20-29.

Stacey, W. D. The Pauline View of Man, in Relation to Its Judaic and Hellenistic Background. London: Macmillan, 1956.

Stott, John R. "Dialogue, Encounter, even Confrontation." In Mission Trends No. 5: Faith Meets Faith, pp. 156-178. Edited by Gerald H. Anderson and Thomas F. Stransky. New York: Paulist Press, 1981.

Strawson, William. "The Future Life in Contemporary Theology." Expository Times 77 (October 1965): 9-13.

Taylor, Richard W. "The Meaning of Dialogue." In Inter-Religious Dialogue, pp. 55-64. Edited by Herbert Jai Singh. Bangalore: CISRS, 1967.

Temple, William. Nature, Man and God. London: Macmillan, 1960.

_____. Readings in St. John's Gospel. London: Macmillan, 1963.

Thomas, M. M. The Acknowledged Christ of the Indian Renaissance. London: SCM Press, 1969.

_____. "Christ-Centered Syncretism." Religion and Society 26 (March 1979): 26-35.

_____. "Some Trends in Contemporary Indian Christian Theology." Religion and Society 24 (December 1977): 4-18.

Thompson, William A. "The Risen Christ, Transcultural Consciousness, and the Encounter of the World Religions." Theological Studies 37, No. 3 (September 1976): 381-409.

Tillich, Paul. Christianity and the Encounter of the World Religions. New York: Columbia University Press, 1963.

_____. Courage to Be. New Haven, Conn.: Yale University Press, 1952.

_____. "The Significance of the History of Religion for the Systematic Theologian." In The Future of Religions, pp. 80-94. Edited by J. C. Brauer. New York: Harper & Row, 1966.

_____. Systematic Theology. 3 vols. Chicago University Press, 1951-63.

Tylor, Edward Burnett. Primitive Culture. New York: H. Holt and Company, 1874.

Van Stralen. Our Attitude towards Other Religions. Tokyo: Enderle-Herder, 1965.

Verkuyl, J. Contemporary Missiology: An Introduction. Grand Rapids, Michigan: Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1978.

Vicedom, George F. The Challenge of the World Religions. Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1963.

Vikrant, Swami. "Christian Mission and Indian Religious Pluralism." Journal of Dharma 6, No. 2 (April-June 1981): 155-166.

Vitanage, Gunaseela. "Faith in Buddhism II: A Reply to Fr. Perniola." Dialogue Old Series No. 14 (February 1968): 10-15.

Waldenfels, Hans. Absolute Nothingness: Foundations for a Buddhist-Christian Dialogue. Translated by J. W. Heisig. New York: Paulist Press, 1980.

Ward, W. E. F. Fraser of Trinity and Achimota. London: Ghana Universities Press, 1965.

Welbon, G. R. The Buddhist Nirvana and Its Western Interpreters. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1968.

Whale, J. S. Christian Doctrine. Cambridge: University Press. 1956.

Wijewardene, D. C. Revolt in the Temple. Colombo: Sinha Publications, 1953.

Wolff, Otto. Indiens Beitrag zum neuen Menschenbild: Ramakrishna, Gandhi, Sri Aurobindo. Hamburg: Rowohlt, 1957.

Young, David. "The Open Dialogue--Buddhist and Christian." In Face to Face: Essays on Inter-Faith Dialogue, pp. 48-58. Edited by David Young. London: Highway Press, 1971.

Zago, Marcello. "Evangelization in the Religious Situation of Asia." In Evangelization in the World Today, pp. 72-84. Edited by Norbert Greinacher and Alois Müller. New York: Seabury Press, 1979.