

# ENBCS St. Ottilien 1997

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The conference was held Friday to Monday, 17th to the 20th October 1997, Benedictine Abbey of St. Ottilien.

There were 29 participants from Austria, Germany, Ireland, Netherlands, Great Britain, Japan, Sri Lanka and Sweden.

Topics of the conference were:

- Monasticism
- Social engagement
- Woman
- Hermeneutic/ doctrinal studies

*Transcript of conference-talks, see the below.*

## ***Friday***

Introduction to the Conference  
Fr. Götz Welcome to Monastery  
and Personal experience of intermonastic exchange.

## **Saturday**

Dr. Shenpen Hookam - Women in Buddhism

Dr. von Bruck - Hermeneutic/doctrinal approaches

## **Sunday**

Prof. Aasulv Lande, Experiences in Christian Buddhist Encounter

Dharmachari Kulananda, Western Buddhist Order, Engaged Buddhism

Brother Josef Götz - slides - with guests invited from Munich.

Presentation about the network - Dr. Andrew Wingate.

## **Monday**

Plenary to summarise and conclude meeting.

## Transcripts

Hermeneutic Aspects

Michael von Brück, Conference 1997 St. Ottilien

Michael Von Bruck

Introduction by Dr. E. Harris

Works at the University of Munich in the Faculty for Evangelical Theology. Within that Faculty there is an institute for religious studies. He is head of that Institute and Dean of the Faculty.

He is a prolific writer. A recent book, published a week ago, on Buddhism and Christianity, and I believe he will speak about that later. He has also written an Introduction to Tibetan Buddhism and now is working on an Introduction to Buddhism, with another book following that in the future. He is just back from the United States, and from research and work there.

I first met Michael in Sri Lanka, staying in the same hotel. That was a very good event. We were both taking part in a conference.

We are all looking forward to what you have to say: Michael von Bruck

Thank you Elizabeth.

Well first of all, I'm very happy to have been able to make it, and I would like to apologise that I can be here for only a few hours. This is not very good for the conference, I know. But I have just returned, two days ago from the University of Hawaii, and East West Centre. I have been a couple of months over there, and I have to resume my duties as a dean now. So I am busy the whole week-end in my office. And even just after this presentation, I will have to go back to Munich back to my office.

I didn't know that I would have to speak in English. So actually I thought it would be appropriate to introduce this latest publication on Buddhism and Christianity, which is a kind of summary of the Buddhist and Christian encounter through the ages in different areas of the world. Which my friend and colleague Whelan Lei, Chinese, who teaches in California, and myself have been working on for the last 10 years or so. So, I will may quote in German some parts, and then translate it into English, depending on the mood --- translating while reading and so on.

My presentation, would have if we have the time and it is permitted, eight parts.

The first one would be just a very small methodological introduction.

The second would be an attempt to locate the present encounter of Buddhists and Christians in the present history.

The third one would be an emphasis on the personal dimension of the meeting of Buddhism and Christianity or the meeting of personalities, which already have changed institutions and are continuing to do so.

The fourth one would be an interpretation or an explanation of what I would call a historical hermeneutics, which is what this book is all about.

The fifth one, would be a structuralisation of the philosophical outlines of the encounter between Buddhism and Christianity - and maybe I'll skip that, although it's quite interesting.

The sixth one would be application of the whole thing on the problem of dialogue and language. That might be good for another meeting.

The seventh would come out of the sixth one, would be an interpretation of engaged Buddhism in the whole perspective of the problem of dialogue and language.

And the eighth one, which would be the most interesting for you I think, would be a kind of reflection on my experiences in America during the last few months. Because I was there, of course, among other things, to survey the Buddhist - Christian dialogue - the status of the dialogue - there especially on the West Coast in Hawaii, and some other areas as well.

OK, so lets see what we can make out of this. That would be the ideal thing. And I may have been able to cover it had I prepared it in German, in a more consistent way. But, lets just start and see where we end up.

One

Just to give you a hint, I write here in the Introduction to the Book, about the methodology of the book, explaining what methodology is here, I write, Comparisons, the comparison between Christianity and Buddhism and so on, do not reconstruct the facts. But they construct a new horizon of understanding under the present day perspective of historical events in new contexts. That is, when we speak of Buddhism and Christianity, we do not speak about THE Buddhism of the past or of a community of tradition, or THE Christianity. But we recreate tradition in the moment of speaking about Buddhism or Christianity here and now. That is, Buddhism and Christianity are already changed, and are already appearing with changed parameters, when we put them together, and look at Buddhism from a Christian perspective or look at Christianity from a Buddhist perspective. And so on. So we do not deal with facts, but we reconstruct tradition in talking about Buddhism and Christianity. I think this is very important.

Two

Let me just read something - where I would locate the present situation. Please allow me to read this page first in German. Then I will translate.

(Perhaps you could reproduce the passage here, together with the page number?)

What I want to say here is that we have a tremendous shift of emphasis in our perception of Buddhism in the 19th and the 20th century. And this shift is, of course, intrinsically connected with a change of consciousness in Europe and America, which again is a reflection of the historical situation after the two World Wars. I describe here the Spengler's reaction, the end of the western civilisation, and Jean Gatteauro's cultural-philosophical reflection of an emerging new consciousness for transgressional, transpersonal, diaphane, as he calls it, archaic (please check all these spellings!) consciousness. This consciousness, this new, this burst of a new perspective in all walks of life, not just in the religious, but in the arts, he describes it very carefully, in Picasso, and in modern music, in interpretation of modern Physics. In changes in language, in changes in cultural patterns and so forth. This is actually, the locus, the place, where Christian and Buddhist dialogue takes place. What we have done here, is that we have surveyed a lot of publications and so forth, and we can show that especially in Germany, but also in England and the United States, it is not

just a meeting of two religions or two churches or two ecclesiastical structures, the Sangha and the Church. But it is a meeting of cultural concepts, it is a meeting of human perceptions of reality, which reflects itself in philosophy, in arts, in theology, but in all walks of life and certainly in different life-styles. This is, as I see it, the present day encounter. We make an analysis of China, we make an analysis of Japan. And vice-versa, it can be shown that in Japan and China and therefore in Sri Lanka, and \_\_\_\_\_ has said this - and I quote her faithfully, in Sri Lanka as well, it is a political situation which actually pre-dictates, in a way, the agenda of Buddhist - Christian dialogue.

And the change of consciousness, which is a spiritual dimension and change, and the political situation and the political change, cannot be separated at all. Whether we want it or not, or whether we respond to it or not. This is how the perception of Buddhism in the West has developed in this century. And in this context, here in one chapter, just to give you an idea, the book is distributed in three parts. The first part describes as we call it, in a narrative way, a narrative history, the encounter of different countries. That is, India, Central Asia, Sri Lanka, China, Japan, Germany and the United States. Germany is just as an example, we didn't include Britain or France because it is already 800 pages. So, this is the first part. The second part goes into as, we call it, the "problems" of the dialogue, Buddha, Dharma, Sangha, gives the opportunity to talk on Christ and the Buddha, and what do we actually make of the historical founders, what do we make of the normative criteria, in both traditions. And it can be shown that especially in Japan in the 19th century, or in some of the 18th century, the whole question for the historical Jesus and for the historical Buddha, is already influenced by the Western attack on the classical traditional consciousness of Japanese culture, and it somehow falls back onto the Buddhist-Christian dialogue. Similarly, but with very different parameters, is the situation in China. So what we discuss is the question of the normative looking at the two founders. Then, we have a chapter on God and Dharma, which is very interesting I think, and then a chapter on Sangha and Church. And here we show the encounter programmes. So St. Ottilien is here in it, also, of course. Because we had this meeting of personalities, changing institutions, for the last twenty or thirty years. And we analyse the documents and the reports and the diaries of those who have taken part in the exchanges. In order to find out what actually has happened.

In the third part we look at the paradigms of historical development, of Buddhism and of Christianity, and the whole thing ends with the hermeneutics.

So what I would like to present to you now, is just one piece, which is very important now, out of the middle of the book, of the personal encounter. We take three pioneers of the Buddhist-Christian encounter, that is, Thomas Merton, \_\_\_ La Salle, and the Dalai Lama. Three pioneers in order to show, it is not the question our - the question would be wrong if we asked it this way : that we are actually persons or individualities meeting and then changing the traditions, or is actually the meeting of Buddhism and Christianity, a meeting of "isms" or of structures or of social or ecclesiastical structures or doctrine or structures? Rather, we can show this field, and this in a way is a contribution to the whole principle debate in the history, that the impetus of individuals on institutions, on the institutional history, can be immense. And this can be shown with these charismatic pioneers, as La Salle, Merton and the Dalai Lama, in very different ways. Certainly they have been and still are. So, these personal encounters, which can be very nicely shown in the history of Merton and also of La Salle, these personal encounters have changed, their orders have changed. The Church has made their impact in the Vatican II and its interpretations and certainly have not failed to

make an impression on the respective programmes of the whole Council of Churches.

Now, what Merton is concerned - let me just give you an example from his writings. Merton actually, and this shows you where the Buddhist-Christian dialogue is or should be situated, or located, as I said before, Merton actually sees it as Geatzer, or I and many others would see it, not just a meeting of two religions but a meeting of two perceptions of reality. East - West and of course they are very much differentiated, but Merton, as it were, comes up in his writings with four criteria, four criteria which are needed for a new consciousness. Which are needed for human survival on earth. So, in a way, he takes a very pragmatic approach, and having established these criteria, which he more or less, without careful investigation, he just formulates as a kind of do's and normative criteria, then he looks into Buddhism and Christianity and asks what do these two traditions actually present or have in their storage, which could fulfil or actualise these criteria? Now let me just say something on these criteria. The first of his criteria is "unity of reality", the second is "holistic life", the third one is "an overcoming of the dualism of 'holy' and 'profane'", and the fourth one is "an overcoming of egocentricism".

Now, in a way you can link this up with Perry's attempt to locate the hermeneutics of Buddhist-Christian dialogue in the anthropology. However, it is here not just anthropology, but it is very much the poly-tology of the present age, if you like. But in the actual leads of our present quest, of our present self-understanding, and then from this present self-understanding, reconstructing, or actually constructing, the two traditions. That is why at the very beginning of this paper, I told you that comparisons do not say much about the past, but about our constructions of the past. And Merton very openly does it.

Now, what does he mean by "unity of reality"? He says, a renewed consciousness should express the need for community in authentic love, to all sentient beings. This, of course, includes social and ecological, the social and ecological sphere. For the survival of human kind cannot be established in a quietistic withdrawal into some kind of inwardness, but only in reception of all different dimensions of life. That is, both the classical Christian and the classical Buddhist spirituality, are here as it were at the test for a new orientation and a new engagement on the basis of this problem of the unity of life.

The second point he makes here, is "holistic lifestyle". Again, he argues, the renewed consciousness should penetrate the daily life of human beings and change it. You have it so nicely: "Daily life is the way". Precisely it.

Because any kind of idealistic dualism, of idealistic withdrawal of a mystical consciousness into a kind of "here and now" which would be a withdrawal from the world, from the market place, in Buddhist terms, would be against both Biblical realism, as well as an understanding of the Buddhist "holism".

The third aspect here is "overcoming the dualism of 'holy' and 'profane'". He says, a renewed consciousness should cultivate a human being which actually penetrates his whole life with "the holy" whatever that is. The dualism in "holy" and "profane" is certainly one of the very important aspects of any religious history of the past. But he sees that is precisely what is to be overcome. I quote him: he says, "Of wrong and separating holiness or super-naturalness, makes human beings a cripple."

And fourth, of course, of "overcoming egocentrism". A renewed consciousness should counterbalance at least human beings over exaggerated drive for ego. And now, actually, he tries to look at Christianity and

Buddhism in order to find what kind of impulses, not only doctrines, but maybe, metaphors, or images, or resonating counterparts we have in the tradition which fulfil these criteria. And these are the ones we should stress and these are the ones we should celebrate, in Buddhist-Christian dialogue, not just discuss, but certainly celebrate. Merton was an artist, he was a poet and he liked Thich Nhat Hanh and so on. It's a celebration, of our dances, of our body, its a celebration of our psyche and also of our mind. That's an important point that I would add. That our mentality is not just a dry thing, we have here in boxes in the corners, but thinking itself is a ritual, thinking is a celebration. That, anyway, is what I think. So Merton comes in here, and he comes with , he comes up with the Christian tradition, looks into Christian tradition. And he brings in of course the understanding of Creation, of eschatology, Jesus' own example of the overcoming separatedness of the holy and profane, and of course the understanding of the Justification. I won't go into the details here, because I think you know what that means.

And then he scrutinises, as it were, the Buddhist tradition and comes up with several Buddhist ideas, which would be very wholesome and would very much contribute here to these ideas. That is, the concept of karma, which is so essential, and not only as in Mahayana Buddhism, but also in different ways and in different structures, but nevertheless also very important in the early Buddhist movement and in the later Theravada. Karma. Second, of course, the understanding of the Suchness, the Thatata, of all things. And of course the understanding of the unity of consciousness which is expressed in the idea, I would better say - I do not say 'doctrine' - I don't say it here, either, but maybe the metaphor of Anatta, of non-self.

Just let me put it in brackets. Just the other week, just a week ago, I was with David Kalupahana, who is the philosopher, the Buddhist philosopher in Hawaii, from Sri Lanka. And David actually had counted at least I - I didn't re-count it - he counted the references in the Pali Canon - he makes two different doctrines, two different ideas, and he says that there are two things most commonly expressed in the Pail Canon, one is - you don't find as many references as to this understanding - is to this - the doctrine of anatta. It comes again and again and again. I don't know how many times. And the second, rejection of the caste system. And both of course are intrinsically connected I cannot go into this here now, but both, as it were, are the reflection of each other. And in so far, of course, Buddhism is heterodox within the Brahmanic world view.

So Merton comes up with this very pragmatic perspective. He looks at the tradition, both traditions, in a very creative way, as an artist or a human being who actually wants to work with the tradition, looks at it and is not so much bothered by the question of whether "this is Buddhist" and "this is Christian" and I had better take care not to mix it up. But sees : this is our common heritage and we are here in need and we are very much in trouble. And we had better check and see how we can consistently apply both cumulative traditions, to use an expression of \_\_\_\_\_ Cantos-Smith ? \_\_\_\_ Can apply it to answer our question, or really to in-form our life and our life-style.

So in this way, he has really been a pioneer and of course due to his untimely death this life, as it were, has a stamp of authenticity in a very special way. Merton certainly is one of these great pioneers, who have inspired the Dalai Lama, who have inspired the whole movement of Buddhist-Christian dialogue among American monastics. Thich Nhat Hanh was very much influenced by Merton. And of course, all these lines and little connections we have been able to trace.

La Salle, I don't have to introduce, I don't have to say anything. \_\_\_\_\_ was here, is just writing a book on La Salle, and if she would

certainly be able to make her comments here. He has been the teacher of many of us. - who brought us on the way. Of course, La Salle, and I show that here, had his tremendous problems and inconsistencies. When he tried to interpret Satori, or Ken-sho actually, in Christian terms, it becomes absolutely clumsy. And when you see how he struggles, and I have been able to look at the books, at the different editions of his Zen Buddhism, and how he tries to struggle, how he tries to interpret his own experience with a classical fixed up doctrine, set up with the classical language, he fails. Its really clumsy. His inner experience and his radiating personality is so much more than what is there in the books. And you can see in the later La Salle, he breaks up with the whole thing and he interprets it in John \_\_\_\_\_'s terms. John Geatzer, I mentioned before, in his book Original and Present, from 1949.

So in a similar way, we look at La Salle and the Dalai Lama. And I'm sure that we can see here that these personalities, and its not just them, they are part of the total, that they have influenced, made a tremendous influence on the institutions. Be it the Pope, himself, not so much the Vatican, unfortunately, especially not Cardinal Ret\_\_\_\_\_, but the monastic orders, on both sides. Mind you, on the side of the Buddhists there are a lot of, how shall I put it, politely, misconceptions, about dialogue. Among Tibetan Buddhists there is a strong lobby against Buddhist-Christian dialogue. In Sri Lanka of course there is no need to mention that. But, in Zen circles as well everybody is concerned with the "purity" of his or her tradition. And we had better look at this psychologically, or even you know among Buddhists here in Germany, we have a strong resistance against it. But nevertheless, these authentic personalities, Thich Nhat Hanh is still alive, is around us with the very good example of changed institutions, changed structures. I think this is a very, very strong finding we can get out from this book. And I would suggest this is a kind of stimulus for us, after all we are just individuals and small figures around here.

Four

Let me come up with my fourth part which is explanation of what I understand under historical hermeneutics. I call the methodology of of this book "historical hermeneutics". There is an attempt, certainly not yet manageable and not yet the last word on it, but, an attempt to read the history of ideas and the history of social institutions and of political movements simultaneously. And when you look at the Buddhist-Christian dialogue over the last 150 years or in seminal (?) parts several hundred years before, even to antiquity, you can clearly see that the dialogue is certainly about God, Dharma, Sangha, Church, Anatta, Soul and this and that. But the concepts of the ideas get a very different flavour and reading in the different histories in the different parts of the world. And for that matter, in different languages. Mind you we do not have this dialogue primarily between Pali and Greek or Latin, but we have it in Chinese, Japanese, Thai. We have it in Singhala, We have it in English, German and so forth. And this is quite a different matter. To talk about Anatta or to talk about Nichzeiller (spelling?) in German, or non-thought. That is something very different. Just in different languages. And the languages are of course so embedded, are so much the colour of actual social, historical development, that one has to be very careful to see why does a certain kind of dialogue develop? Why does a certain kind of encounter develop in this way and not the other way. For example, in China, its quite interesting in this chapter, after Richie and the figurists (?) and so forth, and why is it so different in Japan? We had excluded Korea, because one of my students is writing a book or a thesis on Korea. And again, in Korea, Korea is not an appendix to China. Its a very, very different culture to China. Some very different patterns of encounter are emerging. Similarly in Germany, in America and so forth. So

historical hermeneutic studies singular situations and is a kind of historical narrative, a narrative dialogue which may, if we succeed, will contribute to a new awareness of language. Not just the THE German, you see there is no point to speak about THE Buddhism, THE Christianity, we know all that, there are very, very different traditions. Even if you take one tradition, there is not ONE Protestant Christianity. Or Catholic, its so different - it is different spatially - in Latin America, it is a totally different situation than Germany or England, in terms of Catholicism, but also in terms of time. In 19th century Catholicism is so different to the 20th century, and the Catholicism of the 1950's is so different to the Catholicism of the 1990's. Or what ever. And we have to take this into account. And mind you, on the Buddhist side, its as differentiated as on the Christian side. Its only that we don't see it because we are not informed enough or we are not taking the trouble to read in between the lines and so forth. So it is very much a narrative dialogue, an attempt to tell the story and the richness and the difference of all these stories which we too easily and too fast subsume under the Buddhism and the Christianity meeting and then "God" and "Dharma" and "Jesus" and "the Buddha" and this and that. Its all much more complicated. And the complication is the richness and the beauty and is the texture which we can really fit into.

So, I do not - I come up here at the end of this book - more or less I still use the terms "Buddhism" and "Christianity" but problematise them, and try to avoid them. We are not talking about THE religions, "Buddhism" and THE religion "Christianity", but we are talking about a continuing process of encounters. A continuing process of encounters. Or, as Wilfred Ken Ross-Smith (spelling?) calls it "the cumulative tradition". Buddhism, Christianity, all these traditions, are never fixed, are never a basket, as it were. And even if you talk about the Tripitaka, or a Canon, its never fixed. So we look in much more terms of fluency, of a current, of a movement of these encounters. You see, even if you look at Christianity, for instance, what is Christianity. What actually is it? Its a continuing process. From the very beginning there is not a single event, or there is not a single language or a single symbol. It is all coming together from the very beginning. And there are so many different symbols. Its a process of encounter. Its a process of dialect which forms what we then, abstractly, call Christianity. And not only later, but right in the Gospels we have this enormous variety over there. There is enormously different situations. What has been spoken in Aramaic is so different from the Syriac, or from the Hebrew or the Greek. And when you look at the formation of what we call "the Church" in the first and second centuries, we see these different models, these enormous different influences. Perhaps some Buddhist influences from Alexandria, and Antioch. And so on. And the same is true for Buddhism. You see, Buddhism is not an "ism" in the beginning. It is a movement. An intellectual and social movement. A monastic movement. And a spiritual movement. Altogether, within the whole fabric of the Indian tradition of enormous of changes in India in perhaps the 3rd or 4th centuries before Christ. And at this time, Buddhism slowly emerges and is in continuous encounter and goes on like this - when it goes over to China, there is a whole paradigm shift there. It goes into a totally different language world, And East Asian Buddhism again is so different from the South Asian one. And I see that we have to see that our Buddhist-Christian situation today as a continuation, certainly a new step, with a new quality, of this continuous, cumulative tradition of historical processes of encounter.

Therefore, I come up here with what I call a "hermeneutical field". Perhaps I should write this. And again, this will be the process of understanding and re-creation of re-celebration of being human, informed in the languages of what we call Buddhism and Christianity.

And this field, I call it :

I have three points, as it were, of a triangle within that field. Or, the field is structuralised by three points, which are, however, not fixed. They are just "virtual points". So I call this a process-word interpretation...

It is a continuous self-assurance - we use our language to attempt to understand each other, to clarify our terms, to clarify our metaphors, to celebrate our metaphors, to, as it were, avoid being in a solipsistic universe, but in a kind of community. Of course, we all need that.

The next aspect is the inner experience. For instance, the faith, the trust of the early Christians as it was beautifully expressed in the: they all ran away, but the trust didn't work, but later, the women came, Mary and the others called them together, and somehow building what Christianity is on the basis of this new trust in the risen Christ. This is a kind of trust as an inner experience, of course. Otherwise the disciples wouldn't have had the guts to set out and so forth. And this inner experience and re-interpretation as the third aspect of this, is not objective, but this is something which is there in the past and is re-constructed again and again. And this is what I would call the "data" about the historical origin.

Now, if this works for Buddhism and Christianity, it wouldn't work for Hinduism and Taoism and so forth... Because if you see, if you look in the history of Buddhist-Christian dialogue, if you look into the history of the cumulative tradition, of both Christianity and Buddhism, you see that again and again they try to come back : "what is the origin", "what has the Buddha really said", "what has Christ really said", in different ways, but it goes through history. The way it is done, the method it is done, the traditional tools which they use are different, are developing through history, but it is always the drive, somehow, to go back to the root, Now, this creates, I would say, a field, a hermeneutical field which is continuously in process and informing each other. There is no inner experience which is abstract and totally separated from the interpretation. In other words, there is no un-interpretable experience, because as soon as I become aware of any experience, be it total nothingness, but Sunyata, and become aware and interpret. And interpret it in the terms and the metaphors that a certain community has given. I argue in another paper, that I know that I am not crazy, but enlightened, I know only through \_\_\_\_\_interpretation\_\_ (?)

Personal and interpreted experience. On the other hand, the interpretation is process-al. It changes again and again through experience, from individuals and from individuals to the roots of the course.. and both of course are basing their check-up as it were, their criteria, from the historical origin.

We show this here in the chapter on the historical Jesus, and show not only what the real Christ is or the real Buddha is but how both traditions have worked with this criteria. Especially the 19th and 20th centuries (?) but even before.

You see, this field now, is, whether we want it or not, I think it is unavoidable, is a field of cross-cultural, and inter-cultural and inter-linguistic exchange. In other words, Buddhist - Christian studies or Buddhist - Christian dialogue, is not something we are now creating, because we are people who have an interest in it, but it is going on, and what we make of dialogue, we just make conscious, as it were, something that is already going on. This can be proven when you look in the movies, when you look in the language as it is developing. I'm sure it's the same in England. "Karma" is already a German word. And other things as well. So the whole structure, the whole basic vocabulary, the basic imagery, is

already changing. The same of course is happening in the Buddhist world. So we have a new field and we have a new hermeneutic vocabulary and field. And that means we have now to apply these criteria or this field to both traditions. Whether we want to or not. And in countries which have a rather conscious dialogue for more than a hundred or a hundred and fifty years already, this is taking place and this is can be documented and we try here and in our situations. And its rather new but nevertheless its in the process.

In this hermeneutical field, again, I want to add, I want to focus on: there is no fixed starting point, where we really can start. And we do not have a set of criteria : this is Buddhist , this is Christian and now that's dialogue. We do not even have a fixed question, where we could say this is it. But we have an open process which starts. The only fixed thing, which is not fixed, is we And each dialogical situation will be different. So, in a way, this is the field and I try of course here now I try to develop this is terms of both the Christian Trinity, which is my "hobby", as it were, and on the other side, on the understanding of the Patticca-Samupadda principle, and of course, you see it already that works quite well.

Five

The next point would be point five of my paper, which I skip, as I already said. It would be an attempt to describe the philosophical encounter of this book . Now, when you look at the books, and especially the big conference papers of the last 30 years. Especially in America, the big Buddhist-Christian conferences, the papers of the \_\_\_\_\_ group, the various conferences for the Society for the Buddhist-Christian Studies in America, when you look at this enormous library of paper. And we actually went through, and that's why it took more than 10 years, you find amazing variety of comparisons. Of course, you have all these scholars from many American Universities, very few British and only a few Germans. And comparing everything with anything.

(end of tape 1)

...You don't hear much about \_\_\_\_\_ culture, but you say a lot about your encounter with reality in the Cathedral of Chartes. And this might be very, very interesting search of discovery. So a lot of these papers, and there are thousands, we had to deal with and we had to be careful to include every essential person and say a few words and so on. So we had to summarise, of course, or we have to structuralise it. And the attempt to structuralise it is to ask here the phenomenological and psychological debate - we have basically the Theravada and the speculative and existential discussion we had with Mahayana. And here I say in the introduction, what I mean by phenomenological-psychological and speculative and existential. And how actually these different topics, these vast amount of different topics somehow, at least here in my head, comes together in some sort of interconnected meaningful set of questions. Let me - -- Dialogue and language. This is quite a nice, quite an interesting chapter. You see, we are often frustrated. This question here is analysing the problem with the dialogue with Zen. Zen, is allegedly a tradition of "no language", silence, and so forth. Which is totally wrong, by the way. Zen has a lot of literature, speaks a lot, just in different ways, as we are used to speak. And then Christianity as a religion of "the Word", and the two sitting with each other, the Zen master just silent - the Christian trying to explain - getting frustrated after some time, and of course the Buddhists then making themselves present through absence in meetings like that. Not so easy. And the reason here is that on the basis of the different understanding of dialogue, we have two very different concepts of, understandings of, dialogue.

The Christian is usually informed by the Socratic tradition of the dialogue, finding the truth through dialogue. And after our exchange, we might be more wise in a way. The Zen master, usually, turns any dialogue into a monologue. And the monologue is not a dialogue. The monologue is the exchange between the Zen master and the student. It is not \_\_\_\_\_ the truth at the end, after the monologue, but truth is before. The truth is always there, it is the enforcement of the Buddha Nature. The Socratic Christian dialogue is \_\_\_\_\_ - as Socrates calls it, whereas the Buddhist mundo, or the Zen Buddhist mundo, is , like the Christian Orthodox ikon, showing the gold, showing the everlasting truth, presence, however you would call it, in discovering it. So there are two totally different situations, and two totally different expectations meeting each other. The problem is not "Shunyata" and "God" or "Nothingness" or "No speech" and "God" and "Speech" and "attributes of God" and so on. The problem is, there are two different attitudes which are, as it were, the precondition out of which I go into the encounter. And as soon as one becomes aware of it and speaks it out, clarifies it, then it becomes much better, it becomes much clearer. We analyse here several stages of language, the metaphorical expression, the first verb as it were, the utterance, the tomatzin (?) to use Platonic terms, which is different from a system. This is different from notions which are being expressed , and one has to be very careful, in dialogue, to make sure that one always speaks on the same level. If we ping pong with metaphors in order to evoke, in order not to describe, but to evoke, a certain state of mind, and certain state of community, and so forth, that is something totally different as if we would have a discursive dialogue talking about these philosophical ideas. It is not that one is less important than the other, by no means, because you can clarify it, you can actually uphold metaphors only if the metaphors are explained, and so forth. And you had better make sure that you are consistent here. That there are two different language games. So, language games have to be distinguished here. Different religious language games have to be clarified . And these clarifications, these methodology, I think its more important for the future, than just talking about "God" and "Dharma" and this and that. And clarifying these language games is also very important practically, in engaged Buddhism, because we might be confused here, talking about different things even if we are - if we claim to do the same thing. We might do different things. We should become aware of that.

So that is why in my presentation, though my time is up now, I would have talked an hour on the basis of these readings, I wanted to read a few pages in - which automatically leads in to the question of engaged Buddhism. And what I wanted to show here, in my book and in my presentation is, that such a seemingly abstract debate on the methodology of language and distinguishing different language games, the seemingly abstract and scholarly debate, is not abstract and scholarly at all. It should be consistent and clear, but has immediate and practical consequences for our self-understanding in our actions. In our dialogue. And we show this here in analysing the different engaged Buddhist movements. It starts with the FAS movement before Second World War in Japan, Isimatzu Itchi and others founded this group, which is quite interesting. And then goes on of course with Sri Lanka, Cambodia and Thailand, today, and we end up with the Sakya Ditta movement, of Buddhist women. Analysing what is actually going on.

Then, we come, in the last five minutes.. I may take a little longer on this last point ... What is happening today, in Buddhist Christian dialogue in the United States, and as you know, as in many fields, whether we want it or not, that is where the music is made. The main thrust of the intellectual dialogue, also of encounter, and - is in the States or coming out of the situations from the United States. The present debate in America is over one question. Who defines Buddhism? What is Buddhism? Who defines it? Are these the scholars in the Universities? White, middle class, American scholars? Or are these the white, middle class, professing

Buddhists? The convert Buddhists? Who say "this is pure Buddhism, this is right Buddhism"? Or are these the ethnic Buddhists, the Japanese, Chinese, Vietnamese, more and more on the West Coast or in Hawaii, or even now in the East Coast. Who actually defines Buddhism. We have very different Buddhisms here. The Buddhism of the scholars, you know, going back to the understanding of scriptures, and the right interpretation, by historical-critical methods of the scriptures, coming up with "This is what Buddhism is, or should be." Or the practitioners, and here of course they are fighting each other because, whether you follow a Tibetan lama is very different, whether you follow a Zen master. And following a Zen master means following a very specific path, another Zen master would be a totally different tradition. In Tibetan tradition we have many schools, fighting each other. So actually what this authentic Buddhism is - this is a big question. Especially since a lot of racial problems, of course, in America, come in. The blacks, American blacks, some of them as you know, following Islam, and going to the Muslim Black movement, are writing now in the Buddhist journals in America, and claiming that they are racially neglected, that they are not in the main stream, that the whites are the ones who define Buddhism and they are also Buddhists, but they would define Buddhism quite differently. So, the whole question comes up. Who defines Buddhism. Now, more and more ethnic Buddhists come up and say, well, you Western scholars despise our Pure Land Buddhism, which has been very much Christianised, in many ways. If you take this statement, "You despise it as not authentic, or just folk Buddhism, or just you know "lower Buddhism" or whatever. And you people in the Dharma Centres, which are very expensive, by the way, you say you are the right followers of the Buddha, just because you can pay \$150 per weekend."

So this \_\_\_\_\_ is very bitter it is expressed in the journals, Tricycle, for example is one of the main journals, everyone will know, like the Lotus \_\_\_\_\_ in Germany, and Hauptge\_\_\_\_\_, its right there in Dharma Centres, in \_\_\_\_\_ in San Francisco and other places. Who defines Buddhism?

A book came out recently "Pruning the Bodhi Tree" where, again, Western and Japanese scholars, are together trying to argue all these developments in Buddhism, in Tantric Buddhism, especially now in Western Tantric Buddhism, are not quite authentic, so lets just prune the Bodhi tree. But then, of course, the others would come up and argue this is another way of Western intellectualism, actually Western colonialism, imperialism, and so on and so forth. So the Western scholarship on Buddhism is under attack of being colonialism. And so on. This is a very interesting debate, and it is a debate, of course, which is intrinsically, a Buddhist-Christian debate. Because the argument goes, that these Westerners who converted, to Buddhism, to Tibetan or Zen masters, define, more or less, the Buddhist traditions, the mainstream Buddhist traditions in America, because they have the money they have the centres, they have the transmission lineages, which are financially potent, they have the books, they have the control of the newspapers and so forth. So that these lineages, and these Western - these Westerners, are by no means Buddhists. The Asian Buddhists, the Japanese or the Chinese Buddhists would - authentic Vietnamese - in Hawaii at least - would \_\_\_\_\_ they \_\_\_\_\_ - Christians just in the robe of Buddhists. Their understanding of personality, their understanding of the relationship of person and community is by no means Buddhist. It is very individualistic, it is very Western, it is very white, middle class, Protestant, Calvinist for that matter. Western. And just a little bit of Buddhist language, a Buddhist patina, as it were, but in the heart, they would be Trojan horses. Then, of course, the counter argument would be, "Wait a minute, does being a Buddhist mean being Asian? Does it mean falling into the cultural pattern of, say, Vietnamese \_\_\_\_\_ - and by the way "Asian" is a very abstract term. The way a personality perceives him- or herself is very different, as you know, in China or Korea or Japan or Vietnam, or South-East Asia. So what is Buddhism, after all, in Asia? Is Buddhism, in Asia, authentic Buddhism? So we come with all these questions which we have been struggling with in Western scholarship, in \_\_\_\_\_ in the

definition of religion, definition of Christianity, in the normative questions, what is descriptive, what is normative? Do we have anything descriptive which is not informed by normative? And so on, all this is coming. So we must be aware of this debate. The debate which is even more tricky. Because in the book "Pruning the Bodhi Tree" which is a presentation of - a joint presentation of Japanese and American scholars, the other Asians would say, "Well, you see the imperialism: the Japanese and Americans together. : hunting for small tigers (?)"

So it is becoming very political. I think it is a very interesting debate. It is very wholesome for understanding and it is in a way I think the hermeneutical field we try to develop here, could be a methodological basis on which we might be able to address these questions on a rather unambiguous way. I think so.

Another interesting movement I came across, is Sokagakai International. I think all of you will be familiar with the Japanese movement, Sokagakai. Sokagakai was founded as a counter-reaction, at the end of last century it got started, but it really gained momentum in the 1920's and 30's. As a counter-reaction against Japanese nationalism. Nagaguchi himself, was in jail, and the second the president, Toda, died in jail. Sokagakai, was a lay offshoot of the Nicheren Sho shu, which after the war, lay people became very potent, financially, politically, Sokagakai controls the third largest political party in Japan, the Komento, and very rich. Very ambitious, economically as well. Nobody knows exactly what their assets are, they are very aggressive in their way of making converts, from traditional Japanese movements. And when they became potent enough they cut their ties with the Nicheren Sho shu, though its now Sokagakai, an individual group. So the Sokagakai, I have to make a long story short, in Japan, could be regarded as something quite un-ecumenical, despising other Buddhist traditions, giving internationally, a cover of being very dialogical, towards Christians, but towards other Buddhists being rather un-ecumenical. But towards the Catholic Church - not the Catholic church, but the Vatican... (?) at present.

Sokagakai has founded a sub-structure, called Sokagakai international. In the beginning, in the 1960's and 70's, and early 80's they were just an off shoot of Sokagakai in Japan. Under the control, under the financial control, under the ideological control of Sokagakai in Japan. But in the late 80's and now in the 90's Sokagakai International in the United States and in Latin America, has become very independent and has turned a very different direction. As a Buddhist lay organisation, which is open, which is really dialogical, sharing openly. Attacking the policy of the Japanese and, this is very interesting, making converts among the blacks and the Hispanics in America, especially in the Los Angeles area, in Southern California, but also in Texas. They are one of the fastest growing religious institutions in these communities. The University of Hawaii has made a long-term study of this movement, and that is why I am a little bit informed - by David Chapell (?), actually works, with them and among them. Now this is very interesting. Here, Buddhism becomes a totally different twist. It is - it is not a kind of liberation theology, not with the whites, as it were, reaching out, but Japanese groups reaching out to the American blacks, and to the Hispanics. And this creates a kind of Buddhism in America which is very different from the Dharma Centre Buddhism, very different from the Buddhism as we know it, established at the Universities, and also very different from the traditional, ethnic Buddhism as it came in with the immigrants who came in during the last century or the beginning of this century, and have their Japanese, Korean, Chinese, family temples in America. And quite a number of people, such as David Chappell, and certainly the Society for Buddhist Christian Studies in America watch this movement closely and are willing and very interested to get in touch with them and dialogue with them and actually share their life, their future, their hopes, their prospects and so on.

European Network for Buddhist-Christian Studies

St. Ottilien October 1997

Professor Michael von Bruck

Questions and Answers

Transcribed by: Paul Trafford <pt@easynet.co.uk>

NOTES: =20

1. Text entered in square brackets [like this] denotes additions or comments inserted by the transcriber. =20
2. Further, comments with dots and a question mark, e.g. like, [..?..] denote missing words; a question mark by itself [?] denotes uncertainty about preceding text, particularly a name.

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[Eliz Harris + Ramona]

Man 1: "I think that this discussion that you mentioned of defining Buddhism [delete next to words?] because it has this special west American political overtones - political correctness and so on =85 But in a way it remembers [reminds?] us as Christians this discussion could be quite interesting [=85?] What is the essence of Christianity?"

And the discussion about the essence of Christianity was an offspring of the traditions of Christians. Now the situation of the Buddhists in Western countries, the situation is the beginning of ecumenical inner Buddhist dialogue which could never have happened within the Asian Buddhist countries. In Tibet, there couldn't have been a question of who defines Buddhism because it was quite clear in the Dalai Lama[?]. The same in Sri Lanka and all the other parts of the Buddhist world countries, but now in the West you have Tibetan Buddhists, Zen Buddhists, Pure Land Buddhists, Theravada Buddhists - you have all together forming something like Buddhist churches in America, Deutsches Buddhism in [=85?], and so on. It is quite natural, I think, that there is inner ecumenical Buddhist discussion about what is Buddhism and [..?..] and then there comes typical overtones that there are some Northern Buddhist experts [..?..] doing their own contributions to this discussion.

I think that is also a problem, with a sign of growing Buddhist ecumenism.

Man2: "Let me just make [..?..] through [allow someone to speak]"

Man3: "I would just change it a little bit and put the question: "Who hijacked Buddhism?" Because that is my impression and it is a basic question in a sense of who is dealing with the religion is an abstract discussion by some people who have the means of university facilities: Are they clearly defining it, turning it over the head, because everyday life is the way."

If I look at who is living Buddhism, not who is defining Buddhism, then it comes to complete unbalance; to me that kind of debate is sometimes unofficial, dealing in, not completely backroom, but that kind of exported Buddhism, having lost the roots in the stage [process], because, as you [can] say, "their music is playing", the big music of academics

institutions is playing.

But is that affecting Buddhists who are living Buddhism? I see a discrepancy between what's happening: they are coming to engage [with] Buddhism, to real life Buddhism, to some extent, but to me it is a complete academic debate and you can play it in Hawaii and between university institutions, but does it affect the millions of people who consider themselves to be Buddhists living with something that has nothing to do with what's going on there, practically nothing?

Von Bruck: "Well, yes it does: if you ask "Who lives Buddhism?" What does it mean to live Buddhism? That would be already an issue, for me."

Those practitioners at the universities for response: they would do their Dharma practice, they would do their prostrations in the morning, they would have a [..?], see monastic life and the Buddhists in the temples, Chinese or Vietnamese, they go [..?] perhaps once a week, do a little prayer in the morning at their house shrine and then they go once a week to the temple.

This group would say "You don't practice the Dharma - you just have a kind of superstitious religion, with the Buddha as a prop agent over there. We are trying to follow the dharma." They would say, "You are just Americans, Protestant Americans disguised as Buddhists. We are the Buddhists because we have uninterrupted tradition in Asia."

What is the meaning of uprooted Buddhism? Is Chinese Buddhism uprooted?

When Buddhism came from India to China it was a total cut, you see. Of course, translations [exists], but when you look at the translations - What has the Chinese canon got to do with the Tripitaka and so forth? It is so difficult to translate. The social structures, the monastic code is so different in China from South East Asia. It is a totally different civilisation. Is it genuine Buddhism or not?

These questions have been raised at the time of the 2nd, 3rd, and 4th century. This issue is difficult. Exactly, it is there. What does it mean to practice Buddhism or how can you define?

Ramona: [brings in Shenpen?]

Shenpen: [asking for clarification] "You told us that Soka Gakkai was an offshoot from Nichiren Shoshu [..?]"

Von Bruck: Soka Gakkai International. We have two separations: Soka Gakkai was an offshoot, in 1920s especially, from Nichiren Shoshu, which is a traditional school, going back to [..?] Buddhism, but Soka Gakkai International, which is American based, did not separate, but follows a totally different line from Soka Gakkai in Japan.

Shenpen: [acknowledgement] So which ones are unecumenical?

Von Bruck: Soka Gakkai [..?] are the ones in Japan, [..?] forceful conversion, Shenpen and Kulananda [clarifying situation in GB] In Britain, who are they [..?]

Man: That's SGI

Woman: I see! That's why they are interested dialogue. [..?]

Von Bruck: =91SGI=92 - Soka Gakkai International. =20

Woman: I have just written a paper about Soka Gakkai in Japan and I should say that all the people I have met in Japan say it is no longer right to discriminate between Soka Gakkai and Soka Gakkai International. They are one now. So there is not this forceful Soka Gakkai and this ecumenical and =91good=92 Soka Gakkai International - they are becoming one.

It is still very problematic, and a very delicate matter in Japan, but I do not think it is right to say that they are two separate things. I think it has a lot to do with the disconnection from Nichiren Shoshu, there was a big quarrel between Nichiren Shoshu and Soka Gakkai. From that time, I think, Soka Gakkai has changed a lot also in Japan.

Von Bruck: OK

Kulananda: I would like to come to this point of contemporary Buddhism, contemporary Buddhist ecumenism that was raised, the idea that traditions nowadays are meeting one another and haven=92t been able to before. Something I=92ve noticed from my experience in this area, is, strangely enough, it is that the Westerners that tend to be ecumenical.

So that I anticipated for example in the conversation about the network of Western Buddhist teachings in that should have Ajahn Sumedho practising in the Forest tradition of Thailand, happily meeting with Roshi Verner/Bernard[?] Glassman who is working in Soto Zen tradition in New York

City meeting with people like Shenpen practicing in the Tibetan tradition, happily exchanging, talking about what they have in common. [They are] Sometimes finding it very very difficult to carry that dialogue over to their own Asian antecedent[?] teachers and traditions, meeting quite a lot of resistance in that area. =20

So that is another level of complexity which has to be brought in, which is the commonality that is sometimes experienced in Western practitioners of the Dharma, Western teachers of the Dharma, who would seem quite easily, willing and able to enter into dialogue, meeting resistance, firstly in respect to their own antecedent teachers and secondly the fact that the traditions out of which they spring cannot yet be said to be ecumenically engaged to a very high level at the present time. =20

The Dalai Lama himself said in Dharmasala in 1993 that he felt he had better connections with the Pope than with Zen Buddhism.

Shenpen: What was it [..?..] Part of their commonality [..?..] is a question of having lived there [..?.. ] lived in all sorts of ways we are sharing.

Kulananda: I think another point that needs to be brought in to [..?..] these conversations is that the Western Buddhist Order doesn=92t have an antecedent tradition.=20

Aasulv Lande: [Says thanks for "exciting presentation"]

I was wondering about this question of ecumenism. People in America, as you say, are trying to define Buddhism by rules[?] [..?..] [..?..] . But is there also, as we have in the Western world, a growing Buddhist ecumenicity, people who say, "Why don=92t we come together, come to an understanding. Why don=92t we try to develop an ecumenical Buddhism?" Is that type of mentality developing or do we see signs that type of mentality is developing also behind or in the discussions [..?..] in the United States.

Von Bruck: Yes, I see it in some aspects in different situations in

different contexts, again differently. If you ask about the United States, the forum of the ecumenism is in the universities, not in the Dhamma centres, because, you know, they are in competition with each other - that's a factor, isn't it? But at the universities and in the engaged

Buddhist movement, that is where they meet and where they have a common goal, and have a perspective where they can participate and contribute without giving up in any way their different Dhamma connections.

Another situation would be, say, Japan: Japan, of course, is in a very difficult situation because you have so many traditional Buddhist sects [shus] - Shoshus, different Shinshus and the different subdivisions of it and Zen shus and the Nichiren traditions and, of course, you have even Shingon, to some extent, and here and so forth. Then you have many many offshoots of modern religious movements, some with Buddhist backgrounds, some with totally different backgrounds, but now all under attack because of Oshindrikyu[?][..?..] and the new law of the Japanese government.

And here in this situation of being pressurized by the government and by whole public opinion against religion and against religious institutions, they are coming together and trying to find out who are we? And what are we? So far, when I was in Japan, in my Zen monasteries, what I heard about in modern groups was, "They are rich ones" and there was jealousy. Even the best Zen monks and Zen roshis were full of jealousy against these million yen holding big modern organisations such as Rissho Kosei Kai and Soka Gakkai. But now being under pressure, there is a kind of ecumenism in this situation.

Look at Tibet and here I would elaborate a little bit on Perry's remark. Well, it was not so clear who defined Buddhism in the past - it was a matter of power when you see the bitter, very bitter and violent fighting between the Kagyulupas and Gelugpas over history, military fighting. You see that defining Buddhism is something we knew very well from our Christian history as well. And when you see at the present debate, that's why I am mentioning it, the trouble the Dalai Lama has with his own Gelugpa groups - the Shubten controversy. Actually this is my present research - the history of Shubten conversion in Tibet going back to the 16th Century.

This is exactly the question, Who defines Buddhism, or even within the Gelugpas, who defines "What is Buddhist? What is Pagan? What is Shamanistic?" etc. .. That's very very difficult.

Of course, in Sri Lanka, the whole history of Sri Lanka, and othersituations as well, I think, you see, that Buddhists only now, or some Buddhists only now, become aware of this situation of the inter-connectedness of power, of economy, and so forth, which we have been aware of for at least a hundred and fifty years, thanks to Karl Marx and others.

This social political awareness among Buddhists, especially among the younger generation, changes, I think, Buddhism quite a lot even in Vietnam, Japan and China for that matter, right now.

Aasulv: [trying to make a point, following on from Man3] You mentioned this word hijacking Buddhism. I wonder is there any American company which tries to buy this?

Von: Richard Gere, Hollywood

Aasulv: =85 Companies, sponsors and through advertisements, [get] support and so on - various movements, for instance, sports groups are sponsored by companies, and so on and so forth. Is there anyone who comes near to buying Buddhism?

Von: No I=92m not aware of it - its individuals. Certainly some very important Hollywood people =85 we are laughing, but for America that=92s what moves history and that=92s where the money comes=20 from - the money goes into universities and that is how Dharma centres are financed. =20

That is very strong, but I have never heard that companies respond to= Buddhism

Harris[?]: [bringing in John May]

John May: That=92s absolutely fascinating. Whatever is going on in the controversies, something is happening so we need this sort of work.

It reminds me of a debate that I have been catching up with recently called postcolonial theory, which seems to have originated in literary criticism in the British colonies and Commonwealth Literature [..?..] where the colonisers stood back and now you have people like Cyracuse Dibac[?] and Edward Said [..?..] as indigenous intellectuals, yet esconced in Western Universities and, therefore, able to play with all these registers, critiquing Westerners for their views or their traditions, but at the same time reflecting on their privileged position vis-a-vie those traditions which those in them don=92t have as a rule etc.

So everything is opening up and that=92s great. One of the reasons I think it is great is that=20 here we might at last have the means of breaking down, in my view, that invidious distinction between world religions and primal folk whatever, which you did mention.

I came across an article recently (which I=92ll have to follow up) called =91Aboriginal religion =85 =92 (the Australian Religion) regarded as the most primitive religion there is .. =91Aboriginal religion as world religion=92. I found it really fascinating because this man, an anthropologist, had lived among them, Aboriginal people, and he was shown that they are just as meditative, spiritual, transcendent, mystical as any Hindu guru or Zen Master, if you only now how to get it out. There are no books, no philosophies, no abstract concepts - you have to know how to dig them [out], the gold that is there. I really find that marvellous if we could improve [..?..]

Von Bruck: Of course, we have this debate on Sri Lanka with [..?..] trying to relate the =91book Buddhism=92 (I don=92t have a better word now) of the real lived Buddhism and the religions, to the Buddha Dhamma in general, there the genuine Buddhism [is taken] as the Buddhism of the monks. It is just that the monks more or less have been in power and been controlling the resources to define their way.

But as long as we can go back in the history of Buddhism, at least now we have got the Western perspective with historical critical scholarship, we see from the very beginning, the Buddhism of the laity, of the monks and there would have been no Buddhism of the monks without the Buddhism of the laity, and if you go back to the Vinaya, you see it, it is there.

Elizabeth Harris: [trying to bring in Shenpen Hookham, but =85]

Man 1: I just want to respond. Of course you are completely right that we have some inner difficulties, struggles in these discussions but the spectrum is obviously much wider in Western Buddhism. In Catholic tradition there was fighting between Franciscans and Jesuits for centuries, but modern ecumenical consciousness that we have nowadays [..?..] is much stronger. =20

And you have this factor of politics and power and all that and it is a very [..?..]factor [..?..] in life. [..?..]

I would like to see the positive chance that these offer. One chance is to see the very trivial answer that there is no substance, like Buddhism. And Buddhists should not be surprised, at least Mahayana Buddhists, because there are no substances [..?..] for Buddhism.

But if they seize the chance to comprehend the Buddhist tradition as a living tradition and to understand how the different traditions in a way do belong to each other, and do realize the different potentialities that are implicit in that powerful message, that powerful revelation, then it could really be a chance for the future development of Buddhism, like Christian ecumenism, as I still do believe, as an ecumenical theologian, is a big chance for Christians. It can help to bring the Buddhism out of Buddhism, but it is of course there, in spite of all the denials of Buddhists.

Von Bruck: I very much agree with you Rick. I think we could perhaps address the issue under the term, =91It raises the level of Buddhism onto a different level of self consciousness.=92 What it already does, in terms you are describing, is making, for instance, the Vietnamese community in Los Angeles ask themselves, Who we are? Instead of just being this Vietnamese community and stabilising our community life in being Buddhist and going to the temple? Because, after all, we are not an isolated community, we mix in a wider cultural spectrum, and for that we have to have different terms of [..?..] interpretation.

Then comes the question that we are Buddhist. In their traditional terms, they are not Buddhist, they are this Vietnamese group who are visiting their temple because this is what stabilises their community. Similarly, there is a typical American historical thing of American religion: there are different confessions: you are not just a Christian in America, that=92s new[?], but you are in this little community, where you come from, where you have your ethnic roots =85 in Scandanavia=20 in Loosemoor, etc =85 , and this is what stabilizes community, but the more American society becomes multicultural and it does, especially now with the Mexicans coming in, who do not and refuse to speak English, and who keep their culture - they are strong enough: we have a second language emerging in America - the more these non-vocal abstract identities become important.

Here Buddhism or, for that matter, being a Christian, over against Buddhists or Muslims or Jews or whatever, becomes an issue. This is precisely what=92s happening and I think in a way what=92s happening in America, mutatis mutandi, is happening all over the place.

In India, for instance, the Western Buddhist Order is doing missionary work among the Dalits and under[...?...]s. Totally new question now: we are Buddhists, we are not just this caste still with the Hindu, it=92s= different.

This is very important for them because it creates a different level of social [...?...] [standing?]

Harris: One more question - Wolfgang.

Wolfgang: On that note, isn=92t there a big danger of a new fundamentalism in these different groups, when the =91ordinary people=92 get a [...?...] that

there is such a discussion and they haven=92t done it on a level [...?...] and

in the hierarchy other positions that now they get along without[?]

They have some problems to define this and that and that would mean that they could come up with big danger of fundamentalism within these groups.

Von Bruck: I don=92t see that among the Buddhists and there could be many reasons. =85 I think the reason is not because the Buddhists are the good guys, but the social groups bearing Buddhism, in America, as it were, the Chinese, the Vietnamese, the Japanese, want to integrate into the mainstream of American society much more than those who embrace Islam, or the Jews for that matter.

At least in economic terms, in what schools, universities, and all the cultural life is concerned, they don=92t want to be apart - only where marriage is concerned, though in Hawaii and California and those Western states, you already have a lot of inter-marriage, among the Chinese and Westerners, Chinese and Korean, not so much Japanese, Vietnamese are too young.

I think this is the reason why, among these groups, fundamentalism along these Buddhist terms is not to be expected.

Harris: We must stop now. =85 Thank you for your energy, for the analysis you have given us, for your vision=85. I=92ll think I=92ll have to learn German very quickly.

Ramona: How long do we have to wait for an English edition? =85=20

Von Bruck: They are a bit scared.

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European Network for Buddhist-Christian Studies

St. Ottilien October 1997

Dharmachari

Kulananda

(following Prof. Aasulv Lande's talk)

Transcribed by: Paul

Trafford Date: 26 July 1998 NOTES: =20

1. Text entered in square brackets

[like this] denotes additions or comments inserted by the transcriber. =20

2. Further, comments with dots and a question mark, e.g. like, [...?...] denote missing words; a question mark by itself [?] denotes uncertainty about preceding text, particularly a name.

-----Start of Transcript-----

There has to be some kind of response to other beings because we are, after all, in a state of interconnectedness with one another. We cannot cut off from other living beings and at the same time go for refuge to the Three Jewels - to ignore other living beings is to deny the very process of going for refuge to the Three Jewels and [...?...] point. =20 So these facts account for two separate but related aspects of Buddhist engagement. The altruistic dimension of going for refuge leads Buddhists into three areas of engagement: it leads them into Buddhist missionising, the desire to help other beings by spreading the Dharma; it leads to social work; and it leads to social activism. And the dimension of relatedness leads to the perceived need to create Buddhist social frameworks, frameworks within which practising Buddhism, the practice of going for refuge to the Three Jewels is possible. It seems to me that the impulses in these directions are intrinsic to the process of going for refuge to the Three Jewels. They spring naturally from it as a spiritual experience. It's not something that has to be added on to a spiritual life which can somehow do without them. I think as a spiritual life begins to unfold, impulses of that order will arise at some point. Now, recently [there has been] a plethora of activity in the western Buddhist world in this regard - an outbreak of social activism, social work. A number of Zen centres in the United States, for example, have gone about different projects. The San Francisco Zen Center has its hospice, now very well known, a hospice project in San Francisco working particularly at one point with people who were dying from AIDS - medical science had moved on to working with cancer patients [?] The Zen centre in New York in Yonkers[?] is doing a huge amount of work under the guidance of=20 Roshi Bernard Glassman amongst homeless people, unemployed people, people with AIDS, people with drug problems. The Rokpa Foundation in the UK and in India does a good variety of social work under the auspices of the Karma Kagyu tradition. The Karuna Trust, of which I am a trustee, has been doing a great deal to promote social work in India amongst Untouchable Buddhists. And so it goes on. Perhaps I shall fill in just a little background detail about the work of the Karuna Trust, for that is the work I know most intimately, though I think Bernard Glassman's experiments in New York would certainly repay further investigation for anyone interested in this area. I think his way out ahead of most other people in this field, although whether it is going to remain Buddhist or not is a good question - time will tell. The Karuna Trust is a response to the situation that members of the Western Buddhist Order found themselves in in India. The founder of our order, Sangharakshita, had done a lot of work with a man called B. R. Ambedkar, who was a leader of Untouchables in the 1940's and 50's, a political leader, who had himself had been born Untouchable and who came up very strongly against the caste system and engaged in a great deal of political work on behalf of the liberation of the Untouchables and came to the conclusion eventually that untouchability was not going to be eradicated from Hinduism. The only way forward for the Untouchable people was to convert to Buddhism, for if they converted to Buddhism they would escape the caste system. Several million therefore converted with Ambedkar and became new Buddhists. Ambedkar died and [...?...] Sangharakshita engaged himself with it. Interestingly enough, very few other Buddhists around the world seemed to take the movement seriously and this is an important fact and also it needs to be considered when one considers the issue of engaged Buddhism. Why wasn't there a response from particularly Southern and South East Asians to the conversion, a response which Ambedkar passionately called for in= [...?...]? So you had several million new Buddhists in dire straits in India, looking

for guidance, receiving it from very few people, one of whom was an Englishman in [...?..]=20 Sangharakshita came back to England, founded an order. In due course some of his disciples went back to India to help work amongst these new Buddhists. One of the things we discovered there was that the immediate needs were for Dharma, above all that was what people wanted. We were dealing with some of the most impoverished people in India, some of the poorest people in India. What they were asking for from Westerners who were making themselves available was not for social work, not for education or health care or employment. What they were asking for was religious help, help in understanding the steps they had taken in becoming Buddhist, what it

all meant - Dharma teaching. =20 This is something I've noticed myself time and again as I've travelled through India, sometimes throughout[?] the villages, giving lectures, a desperate hunger for instruction for these people had been left to their own devices for a long time. They didn't really understand fully the steps they had taken, [so] wanted very much to know more. At same time, we felt that whilst wanting to engage very fully with them, we couldn't avoid the social context - the immediate need for education, primary health care and employment, but perhaps above all for education. As a consequence, we helped to found an organisation called [...?..], for the welfare of the many, which is now run entirely by Indian members of our order, providing hostels - 16 or 17 educational hostels - around India, where boys and girls can go and stay from the villages in order to get education in the towns, because very often in the villages education isn't [...?..]. And suddenly what you notice in India is that if somebody gets education in the family, it's not just their benefit, but for the whole family's benefit, because they then get reasonable employment, they send money back to the village and it brings in their own cousins and nephews also into education, so the whole family lifts up. Something which I

noticed very much as I was travelling around India lecturing, was that if you went to a village where there were two or three men living in the city, it was a relatively prosperous, relatively educated, and in some ways civil,

for Untouchables living there [?]. If you went into villages where that was not happening, the village was illiterate and more than that, to some extent, the issues that people faced, were very often [...?..] They were often very strongly at odds with another. =20 (This is a bit of a diversion). It is hard to describe the effects of systematically depriving people of religion for a thousand years. When you systematically deprive a people of a religion for a thousand years, as the caste system has done, the

implications are devastating for the culture in which that happens, because when you deprive people of religion you are also depriving them of their ethical foundations and people are left with nothing, they just don't know how to go about organising themselves, how to relate to one another in kindly ways. It really is quite devastating. The caste system has been an extraordinary abomination in the practice of Untouchables in India.=20 Now what we've found is that whilst people who were involved in the caste system

have come to hear about Buddhism, it has given them an ethical framework to live by, which they immediately respond to in that way [?], but also a feeling of self worth. Untouchability deprives people of self worth absolutely, Buddhism has given them a sense of self worth - this is very very important. So the work that we do in India is valuable, I think, but it

has a dependent counterpart in the West, which is very interesting. In the West, we have a number of people who depend upon the work in India, quite literally, for their livelihood because they are raising the funds to support the charitable work in India. So they require this to be happening in order for them to be able to practice right livelihood. This is an interesting turnaround, that's one we need to be reminded of time and time again that people who are donors in the North depend upon the benefactors,

the recipients in the South. So in the UK the Karuna Trust was established, which raises about a million dollars each year for social work in India and the main way of raising the money is people decide to volunteer for six weeks a year - they go knocking on doors, asking for money. This is a powerful practice for many of our Friends, it really confronts someone with themselves. They live communally for six weeks, they train in the work and then they go off every evening knocking on the doors of complete strangers, saying this is who I am and "I'd like you to give =A310 a month =85 in perpetuity to help us fund our work=85" And that's very very challenging to many people. It really confronts them with their own reservations, their own

lack of conviction, their lack of courage, helps them to develop self confidence, straightforwardness, honesty and many other important spiritual qualities. So we see the fundraising work as an important dimension of spiritual training and we present it as such, we offer it as such - an aspect of spiritual training. So the people who are engaged in fundraising work, live together, meditate together, do devotional exercises (puja) together and in the evening they will all go off onto the streets of whichever town they are and try to get one or two or three people to sign up

and give =A310 a month. They find this enormously challenging - in trying to

meet their targets and so on - and people found that they come out at the end of these fundraising appeals substantially changed for having engaged in

them, spiritually changed for having engaged in them. =20 So perhaps this sort of thing is a flavour of what we might mean by 'engaged Buddhism' these

days, a form of Buddhist practice that engages with the world and transforms

it. Another dimension to engaged Buddhism, which I think may be worth touching briefly on, is this need to create Buddhist social frameworks. It is not easy to practice Buddhism in isolation, it is not easy to sustain a regular meditation practice, to sustain a particular kind of ethical practice, to keep up a devotional practice and so on, in isolation. We find that people benefit from living and working together - communal situations. I've come to understand from my own experience why Buddhism has placed so much emphasis on community over the years, spiritual community, particularly

on monastic communities. They make such a significant difference to people's

lives to be able to practice communally.=20 But also in the west today, one can't as a Buddhist practitioner just go out with begging bowl and [...?] for support. It's not on. It doesn't happen. So one is confronted if one is taking up full time spiritual practice with issues of livelihood. So how does one engage in full time spiritual practice in the West today without large charitable institutions or state taxes which are willing to support the individual who is engaged in such spiritual practice? This is an issue that confronts Western Buddhist today? One of the solutions that we have found is what is called 'team based right livelihood business'. A group of men or women get together with the intention of starting some kind of business enterprise for the sake of supporting themselves and hopefully making a surplus to [...?]. So a group of people will start a project together working communally, living communally, trying to live as simply as possible, not taking too much, and working on the basis - in our own organisation - of 'give what you can and take what you need'. So people take

as little as possible, try to disengage from the consumerism all around them

and try to make surpluses available for the charitable and [dana..?] One of the most successful right livelihood businesses we have now is Windhorse Trading which operates in Cambridge and employs something like a hundred people. It has sales of over \$10 million a year and this year, I hope, we

will be able to give away over a million pounds in dana towards supporting Buddhist activities around the world. All the men and women working in Windhorse Trading adopt this basis of 'give what you can, take what you need'. They live communally, live very simply, in a semi-monastic residential community, receive small pocket money for medical and other expenses, 6 weeks of retreat allowance a year, and so on, and share - share cars, share washing machines, etc. They don't have a great deal of private property apart from books, CD's, music systems and the occasional portable computer. This kind of experiment is taking place and perhaps this is an important dimension of social engagement, a new way of engaging in society. It is also taking on the issue of consumerism which, I think, western Buddhists have critically to address because if we are trying to deal with problems of craving, aversion and delusion, living in society which is seeking all the time to inculcate craving as deeply as possible within us, and I think we have actively to find ways of turning away from consumerism, finding alternative ways of living. These are some of the models that social

engagement that are working. It's interesting that in=20 Windhorse Trading, I think there are probably more Ph.D.'s per square foot working on the warehouse floor in the world and the Managing Director takes no more by way of personal remuneration, than someone who is newly arrived - may take less because if the person newly arrived has greater need in the family they support and so on, they may take what they need in order to do that. So these are some of the ways in which engaged Buddhism is beginning to work its way out in the western Buddhist context. But all that having been said, I think we must return to the subject that consciousness is primary. A quote

I've not been able to track down from Thomas Merton, but which [..?..], which I've taken to heart and believe in is the notion that "Hermits are spiritual engines of the cosmos." Something like that. =20 Engagement is, after all, engagement with the Three Jewels. That is the most important engagement. Practice is centrally important. It is not essential in all of this to be rushing around doing good to be practicing the Dharma. Sometimes in order to practice the Dharma, one has to go away, sometimes for very considerable periods of time, even into isolation in order to practice the Dharma. But if one takes as one's archetype the life of the great saint Milarepa, one of the founding fathers of the Kagyu tradition, who lived as a

hermit in the Himalayas, the influence of his life upon the world has been immense. His songs continue to inspire Buddhists down the ages, even now, many many hundreds of years after his death. =20 So engagement is above all engagement with practice, with the Dharma, and engagement with the Dharma may lead one to wish to shepherd that, may lead one to want in different ways to change the world, but above all it leads one to want to change consciousness and that is the most important thing. Thank you. [ =85 people then talk amongst themselves about what Kulananda said =85 ] [Question and Answer Session =85] Prof. Gerhard Koberlin [?]: [..?..] consciousness without changing the world. Can you separate the consciousness of the actual

work that needs to be done? I still have difficulties with accepting a phrase like this: 'Consciousness is prior to =85 you said =85=20 Shenpen[?] [..?..] Koberlin: to [..?..] Kulananda: Consciousness is primary to being[?], secondary Koberlin: =85 Primary and secondary, yes. And I still try to find a formula to speak of the interconnectedness of both and not try

to separate again. Kulananda: Ultimately, there is a level at which distinction cannot be made. The doctrine of dependent origination which [..?..] showed you can't make ultimate separations. I think you have got to look at something like the teaching of Kamma, which suggests that it is the quality of volitions behind an action that determines the outcome. So although they cannot be intrinsically separated, we are not talking about ultimate duality between being and consciousness, but rather=20 within total

reality there is a dimension which is consciousness and a dimension which is

being - they are not ultimately separate, they are part of the same overall process. Nonetheless it is the quality of the consciousness that determines the quality of being and obviously the quality of being feeds back into the quality of consciousness. It's like this. I find it very difficult to meditate at the side of a motorway. I can meditate much better in a shrine room, certainly. The quality of being around me affects obviously my level of consciousness. My activities in the world, the quality of my activities in the world, the way in which I impinge upon the world and begin to affect it for better or for worse will be determined by the quality of my consciousness. So there is something to be said for withdrawing for a time, for example into morning meditation, trying to change my consciousness in the best possible conditions in order to affect the world in the most useful

kind of way. That's the sort of thing I mean. German Man: I would like to add one point to the question. I also feel that mind has priority in Buddhism. a few examples. For instance, beginning first with the Dhammapada,

"All things come from mind." But there are also some philosophical reasons for that because Buddhism believes in genuine freedom, genuine human choice,

it is not deterministic. So there cannot be a complete balance between mind and surrounding because if that was a real balance, it would mean that=20 the mind was in the same way determined by its surrounding like it was possible to influence its surrounding. That would eliminate genuine freedom,

I think. Therefore it is important to keep that priority, but this does not exclude that there is a heavy influence of your context on your decisions and on the field [..?..]. Buddhism clearly acknowledges that society is important for the conditions of the flourishing of the Dhamma, for instance,

and that the Sangha is very important for the conditions of the development of the single member who is in the Sangha. My question is: you mentioned that the converts of the Ambedkar movement had been left without any Dhamma teachings and I wanted to question you a little about that because Ambedkar wrote 'Buddha and his Dharma' and I read the whole book - it is a big book, as you know. If you read that book you understand why no other Buddhist schools came and did that work because Ambedkar did not convert into an existing Buddhist strand or tradition, he converted into a kind of Buddhism that he had created himself before. This 'Buddha and his Dharma' was projected for him as the basis of the teaching that he wanted to spread.

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So my question is what did the Western Buddhist Order do? Did you spread Ambedkar's 'Buddha and his Dharma' or did you do some corrections on that?

Kulananda: One has to work very very skilfully with that. Obviously, Ambedkar is venerated amongst his follows. Today, his photograph is on the wall of every house, garlanded every morning, it is side by side with the Buddha. He's a great hero, the great liberator and his achievement in humanist spiritual terms is quite outstanding. He has freed seven [?] people

for a start. So we accept that, we have to work with that. He is a saint of this movement. That can't be ignored. =20 At the same time, 'The Buddha and his Dharma' is an idiosyncratic book, so one has to work very skilfully around it. I think Sangharakshita has done this with a certain degree of mastery. He teaches in India the same number that he teaches everywhere else. He is very familiar with Ambedkar's books. He goes around. So members of our order in India who have trained in India would find themselves very much at home without [?] the training we have received in the West. The training we receive in the West is much more classical than that. We have difficulties in India inasmuch as the figures of the Bodhisattvas, the Mahayana Bodhisattvas, remind people in that tradition of the Indian gods. They react very strongly to that, but gradually they are introduced.

Gradually people come around to that - it is a gradual process. I think that should never have been a stumbling point. It is just a matter of working with that, working around that, and being skilful and [...?] careful. It can be done. Man [who?]: What, for instance, would you do with the doctrine of reincarnation? Kulananda: We don't stress it. =85 Man: [...?]

Kulananda:

It has been taken for centuries as the justification of the caste system. So

we leave it as an open question. Frankly, I think that as a doctrine it has to be treated as an open question. It has to be treated that [...?] one[?] of us remember where we were in our past lives. Let's see. This is what the tradition presents us with. The doctrine of reincarnation. Let's see. We can

treat it as an open question and continue to practise Buddhism Man 2: I want

to go back to the question of the active life and the meditation, how they go together? One thing I found fascinating about the Jesuit past, the Jesuit

life, is a saying 'Contemplativus in Actione' - you are contemplative, but very active. The founder Ignatius had much difficulty with people who needed

a lot of meditation and contemplation. He was presented with a request by some people, "We need at least 8 hours every day, otherwise we cannot function." [...?] And either its one hour and you need to be over - all these people who need 8 hours, he cut it down - one hour should do and then... [tape change] And you were saying, of course, there is a difficulty on the noisy roads to do your meditation. But to some extent I would say the

[...?] ideal is exactly on the noisy roads in the noisy cities, do your meditation and especially once you have reached a certain stage how much meditation do you really need and then would you go along to find in the action these brief moments of contemplation or meditation being sufficient to carry on. Kulananda: I think that in our own experience it's a mix. We generally recommend committing members of our order to take at least a month's solitary retreat each year, and to maintain at least one hour's meditation practice each day as a minimum. Beyond that, there are many people in our order, who have very long periods - 10 years, 15 years =85 - living in meditation retreat centres, just doing meditation, then they may do something else. Or someone may spend several years in a meditation retreat centre and then go off and live a more active life. There are also people living quite active lives who keep up a significant meditation practice. I think it is also easy to fool yourself in what is your real capacity to maintain a clear meditative state of consciousness in the midst of activities [...?]. It is very easy just to get active and to say that "Oh yeah, my activity is my meditation!" I'm not always convinced. One has to observe the quality of the action - is it mindful. When I watch my own teacher scratch his nose, he does this =85 [...?] There is a difference here, there is a continuous mindfulness, continuous awareness and that's raw

consciousness. Shenpen: You don't have to [...?] You could mindfully

[...?] Kulananda: Sure [...laughter...] You can see the difference between the mindful [... laughter] and ... Someone used to say to Ajahn Chah, "What do you mean by meditation." (Ajahn Chah was one of the great forest monastics of the last generation in Thailand). What he would often do - he would pour them a glass of water, just mindfully pour them a glass of water.

That was what he meant by meditation. I don't think there was any symbolism in the glass of water - it was the activity, an important thing to bear in mind. Man 2: Yes, otherwise you get some problems if you divide the meditation and the other practice and whatever it means. As far as I understood the teaching of the [...?], it's a way of doing something that

separate doing [..?..] and the activity =85 in the garden or the work in the

kitchen, that'= s the way of doing something. You can do whatever you like, if it is in a special way of consciousness, then you are in meditation.

Kulananda: Then, the question is how do you access and [..?..] those states of consciousness? That becomes an important question. Man 2: of the person [?]. Shenpen[?] Something that interests me is this 'engaged Buddhism', a Western term to counterbalance the idea that Buddhist practice is all about going off and meditating. It strikes me in comparison, having lived in the East and lived with Eastern Buddhists, what they would understand by 'engaged Buddhism' would actually be accumulating punnya. And what's quite interesting, I noticed psychologically the difference between thinking of engaged Buddhism as accumulating punnya and, yes, if you are lucky you might

be able to meditate while you do accumulate punnya and even you don't manage, anyway you've accumulated punnya. So [it's] psychologically very fulfilling. And also the punnya-making is defined by motivation and actual action, so if your motivation is to worship the Buddha, for example, and you

make an offering, then that would definitely produce a certain amount of punnya. If you decide your motivation is to help the poor and you start to try and help the poor and you give away a lot of money, then that has created the punnya, so you don't need to worry about it too much, what the actual effect is of giving the money. Whereas, I think, as engaged western Buddhists, we are much more concerned with the sophistication of awareness, and being aware of what we do, and being aware of the effects of what we do,

and that maybe if we give money to these people it might do them more harm than good and actually it might turn out to be a bad thing we have done. So we are worrying about that sort of thing, which you could say is a higher form of awareness, but at the same time does allow you to feel at the end of

the day that you have totally failed, because not only did you fail to do it

mindfully, but also what you tried to do to help others actually turned out to be destroyed overnight because of whatever, or it turned out to be ill-conceived, or whatever. So you could end up feeling very undermined, going back and feeling very negative about yourself. =20 I think that's quite an interesting contrast. I wonder if at all this idea of punnya is taking off in the engaged Buddhism world or if you think that it would be a bad thing if it did, which is also a possibility? Man 2: Could it be=85 My suspicion is because it is Western Buddhism, isn't there an interaction of some what you could call Christian ideas into Buddhist thinking and framework. Is it something that has to be thrown out or can we say this is a

kind of inter-religious learning from one another and enriching one another?

Shenpen: Certainly =85 [..?..] Kulananda: Two interesting and separate questions. Punnya issue - I don't know. It is interesting the way that westerners just don't seem to take to the idea. I think it is a wonderful idea. It makes tremendous sense to me. Just think of Punnya as the uninspired =85 the unexpired[?] vipakas, the positive vipakas. [..?..] I think because people don't understand [..?..] haven't a sufficiently deep appreciation of the doctrine of karma yet. Shenpen Certainly not of good Karma. I also think they are obstructed because they have taken on a Christian idea =85 I think they have taken on this Christian idea that your actions should be selfless and you shouldn't want any return on your action and you shouldn't look for result from your action and from that point of view it's a very high morality. And I think that there is an automatic clamping down where, "I don't want to think I get anything back from the action", because even if I think, "Oh well, I am going to give away all the punnya," you know that the doctrine is that you get even more punnya if you did that. So that people think, "I don't want to get involved in that,

that's egocentric, that's kind of grasping at things [..?..]. Its not just they're not taking up on that, they actually don't like the idea.

Kulananda:

I think that is right. Man 3: They fear that they get attention with what they do. [..?..] they are dealing with and all that. That's the first answer

you get in the East. It doesn't matter in which country you come, when you ask, "Is there any social work in the Buddhists surrounding you, you will mostly get the answer 'no', or just some little things come up. When you ask, "Why don't you do it?" First you get the answer, "Because it is not really in the teachings, that's wrong." Second is "That might a problem because you are attached to what you do and you want to do more and the people are lucky, and then you get more and more involved in that and that is not getting detached from the world." =20 Therefore I agree that in contact with the Western thinking and the Christian thinking, that you can bring out in such an emphasised way the activity in Buddhism, although the Buddha has, as far as I know, no problems with that involvement. Once he was

very angry with his monks that they didn't care for a sick person. He chastised them that nobody took care, so he went and washed him and took care of him and then he told the monks, "When you have left your home - that

means father, mother and family - then you must be father, mother and family

to each other. You can't put it more precisely than that. Kulananda: Yes.

Aasulv: Thank you. Just a comment. [..?..] I visited Soka Gakkai a few years

ago and it is impressive how they have developed this idea of compassion in a social context, particularly for health care and medical health and so forth. And they based this on the studies of suttas - I don't know exactly where they've found it, but it is in the idea of the compassion of Buddha, and it is in this context a very strong and comprehensive Buddhist concern for society and the whole human [race]. Shenpen: =85 Many years ago in the mid-60's, I was talking with [..?..] Rinpoche, who was then in Britain. He actually said that he thought that a major contribution of Western society -

a good influence on Buddhism - would be (and would definitely come about) would be this sense of a social conscience, the sense that we ought to be doing something for others rather than simply thinking in terms of punnya. He actually deliberately didn't actually put forward this idea of punnya.

It

is quite noticeable that he doesn't mention it. I mentioned this to Tibetan nuns, saying what a wonderful teacher Trungpa Rinpoche was, "You know he never talks about punnya." They said, "What! How can you have Buddhism without talking about punnya? If all else fails, at least there is punnya."

It strikes me that what happens with social work =85 although, in Tibetan society, the monks and the lamas were the centre of learning, the centre of medical care, the centre of any kind of legal system there was, they were the centre of the community, which was a kind of social work. But in terms of what people were actually thinking when they were making offerings to the

monastery, they weren't thinking of social work, they were thinking that you

get more punnya if you give to the Buddha, Dharma, Sangha. And you see this among refugees as well. They will use their money not to improve their situation, but to actually put more [..?..] lamps, burn more lamps at the shrine - what we would call extravagance. You could see that as the negative

side of punnya. Perhaps? I don't know. Kulananda: Who knows what the outcomes are? Man 1: Regarding the social dimension, I completely agree with

what you said at the beginning of your speech. It is interesting, just the passage you mention about the Buddha washing the ill monk. =20 When Albert

Schweitzer came across this passage he said, "There you can see how the Buddha acts against his own teaching." =20 It is very difficult for Western interpreters of Buddhism with their preconceptions. They did not see that their preconceptions were wrong. You can give any proof you like, "This is a problem of Buddhism that it does not stick to its own principles.' [...?..] In order to see what has happened, I think it would be helpful here to look at the history because at the time of the Buddha himself, it was impossible for his poor followers to do any of what we would call social work. All they could do was to offer some rice to the Sangha, something like that, not to do any kind of social work. But the people who were able to do something like that (the kings, princes, rich merchants and so on), were constantly admonished to do that. The is abundantly full of telling kinds to give money to poor people, and to build wells, roads, [...?..] houses and so forth. All this has been realised within the Buddhist kingdoms until the time of colonialism. The big break came with colonialism and you can really prove that. The situation is different in the Chinese/Japanese area because Buddhism there had never succeeded in dominating societies but in [...?..] you can really see where all those .. [recording stops] =85  
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European Network of Buddhist-Christian Studies

October 1997 Munich

Shenpen Hookham

Women and Buddhism

I am not involved in women's issues as such, and the topic seems so vast. I will talk around the subject, with some thoughts from a paper that I prepared some years ago. In this paper I look at the subject from the point of view of Triyana Buddhism - Tibetan Buddhism, which has the special quality that it uses all three yanās : Hinayana, Mahayana, and Vajrayana. They use this terminology, and which is quite an interesting and useful model. Its useful because it points to three ways that Buddhism presents itself.

>From the point of view of the tradition as a whole, the ideal figure is the Buddha, and the Buddha is male. And perhaps like the Christian tradition, the Buddhist world is struggling with this: Why male?

For centuries it hasn't been questioned, it has just been accepted. The Buddha is not actually your ordinary male. If you look at the qualities of the Buddha as a person, even as a human person, he is quite astonishing. He has a head that goes up, with the top of his head going on forever, with his arms and shoulders, knees, fingers and toes, extraordinary details : such as his sexual organ withdraws up inside him, like a horse, which is an interesting detail.

It's not an ordinary male form anyway. And I think you also have to bear in mind in the Buddhist tradition that women don't feel that that is their total identity. And that men, present men, are not in the pure form of the Buddha, any more than the women are. Men around us now might be men now and women another time, and that women might be men next time. So its not very strongly - if we were only one-off, men or women. But, still, it is a problem.

Women Buddhists can feel strongly dominated by this male "clergy" if you like. It's not a clergy exactly, but each of the teaching lineages, in all the traditions, it's almost completely male. If you go into a monastery, or a temple, it's just all the male teachers around you with the male Buddha in the middle. The male Sangha takes precedence. When your attention is drawn to it, it is very striking and quite oppressive. Though, I must say I never particularly noticed it until it was pointed out. Being brought up as a Western, modern Western woman with a Western education, I simply expected to be treated as equal, and all doors to be opened to me, and I must say that, I didn't find being a woman an obstruction.

What my experience of the tradition, which has been mostly in the Tibetan tradition, is that if you ask the right questions of the right people, then you get the right answers. If you don't ask the right questions, anything might happen. That's my experience. Talking with Tibetan nuns, and I lived seven years as a Buddhist nun, and five and a half of those years I was in India, I was in retreat in Buddhist nunneries, - and the Tibetan nuns themselves were holding themselves back from asking questions. One young nun, that had a Western education was asking questions, of the older nuns in the nunnery, was actually being held back, She was told that she shouldn't ask those questions. This is like putting yourself above others. That she should "learn things by heart and do things like we do and not put yourself forward as something special." It was quite terrible to see women doing that to each other. And certainly, more recently, an old friend of mine who is a very respected woman, lama, you would have to say she is a lama, she spent seven years in retreat, after a long life of devotion to the practice. And she was automatically assuming that since I was a woman, that I would be less

qualified to speak than a man with the same experience. She said, "we don't know about these things, we should ask the lama," and the Westerner that she was accepting as a lama, he was - its a very loose title, in Tibetan Buddhism, "lama" - its given to somebody who starts teaching Dharma, teacher - lama means guru - its the lama. For her, because he was teaching Dharma, she decided he was a lama. But what about her? I asked her, why weren't we lamas? Its just so deeply in the culture, for that respect to be for the teacher - I was quite shocked to find this attitude in her. So that is my personal experience.

But it comes from the society rather than from the Buddhism. And its been there for a long time. Though not for always. There are periods, times and places when women have been in quite high status, and that is reflected in the Scriptures. We have the Srimali Devi Sutra. There are a number of Mahayana sutras which feature the main person in the sutra, having a dialogue with the Buddha, is a woman.

There is a woman giving teaching. Almost always there is something which is a kind of pointing of a finger, saying, "look at this, this is a woman, fancy that. A woman speaking to monks, good heavens! How extraordinary, you wouldn't expect it would you," kind of tone to it. And sometimes there will mischievous plays - sex-changes or - "why aren't you a man," so she changes into a man.

One of the most famous stories: in the \_\_\_\_\_ of Vimalakirti, where the Goddess changes Shariputra into a woman. So it turns all our concepts on their head. But these are usually interpreted to say, "There is no difference, actually." Between all these beings, In the ultimate reality there are no distinctions, on that level. So its not particularly positive towards women, really, its like accepting the convention that they are supposed to be inferior but fancy that, they can actually - Ultimately, this is a false distinction.

What I like about the Vimalidevi Sutra is that the story is simply that the king and queen, King Passineda and his queen Maleka, discussing their very intelligent daughter and thinking how good it would be for her to - she is very intelligent and she is approached - receives this letter telling her about

the Buddha - which is a bit strange because she must know all about it - and she says "The Buddha is in the world, so if out of compassion he should appear to me, because the Buddha appears where ever he is called." So she calls the Buddha, and he appears in a miraculous way. So she praises the Buddha, and she holds forth, in a very profound teaching. The more I look at it, the more I recognise that it is what in Tibetan Buddhism is referred to as Dzochen, Maha Ati, Nyingma tradition, teaching. It is a very profound teaching. And at the end of the Sutra, it says, the Buddha says, Queen Shrimala, it is quite remarkable what you are saying, and only the highest Bodhisattvas - it is "you, as a high Bodhisattva," or "only you and the other high Bodhisattvas - realise these profound truths." So then she goes back and teaches it in her land. She teaches it to her husband, and he teaches to the men and she teaches it to the women, and the Buddha teaches it to \_\_\_\_\_ and the whole community. And nothing is said at all about her being a woman, which I really like. There is no - its just not an issue. So, that means that when it was written, it was not an issue. Women were teaching Dharma.

Its reflected in the sutra itself, when she refers to lay - at a time when there is a lot of tension among the different factions of the Sangha, "any group of people who meet together to practice the pure Dharma will meet with success."

In the introduction, \_\_ Weyman? \_\_\_\_\_, mentions that there is this kind of - in other sutras it is mentioned about Mahayana Gattas, Mahayana gatherings, which are not particularly monks or nuns, or monastic. And that this seemed to be a way of practicing outside the monastic community. And its quite interesting that in the sutra, the Buddha leaves the monastic community, comes and speaks to Queen Shrimala, \_\_\_\_\_ Mahayana community, and then goes back, takes the teachings back, which was first delivered in the non-monastic community. I'm hesitating to call it a lay community, because it implies that you've got a lay community and a monastic community which are in that relationship to each other, whereas its more like you've got a monastic and a non-monastic community. And then the Buddha goes and takes this teaching back to the monastic community, where they have a parallel system. I think that's particularly important for

Western Buddhism which is obviously my prime concern: That there is a long history of this kind of parallel development. And it relates to women in Buddhism very strongly. Because if you can have an equal status, non-monastic Buddhist community, presumably those people are practicing and gaining realisation, gaining enlightenment, in their home-life situation. In which case this is a very positive message. Not the message that you actually get from the tradition itself I must say. And this is something I find quite disturbing. As a modern woman practicing the Buddhist tradition. Although it is said, and you can look in the history of Buddhism, and find in the Therigatta, the Stories of - songs of the early Buddhist disciples, women disciples. And also in the Women of Wisdom, stories of Tibetan yoginis, and also in Mahayana sutras: The women are either: they have given up the home life, and they are nuns, or they are yoginis, and again they have given up the home life and they are wandering around. And very much emphasising what bondage home life is. Or they are queens or very rich, powerful women who would not have to deal with the trials and tribulations of a home life. There are very few examples of women in the home situation, or even men in the home situation. Even, you get Vimalakirti, - he is not at all involved in an ordinary working life, not in the sense that most of us would understand it. So, although Tsultrim Alione write in her introduction to Women of Wisdom celebrating the women's role and women's religion about how creative it all is, it doesn't come across in the Buddhist tradition at all. I wish it did. But it's - it is presented as an obstacle - the home life. And Subuti, a member of the Western Buddhist Order has written about Sangharakshita's view on women in Buddhism. And Sangharakshita is putting this same view over really, that - he is making the same assumption: that the spiritual life is something that is different to the home life, ordinary living in the home, and since women are more involved in that than men, then women are at a disadvantage. Now, I take issue with that. I can't say that the tradition as a whole gives me much material to go on. There are one or two stories of women Siddhas and there are one or two who are householders. But when you read the stories carefully you realise that they were very exceptional people. They received

the teaching and the transmission and had seen the truth of the Dharma before they went into the home life. And it was almost in spite of home life that they were able to carry on their practice to maintain tremendous presence of mind or spirit to actually then within the home life situation they get a real break through and realisation about - \_\_\_\_\_ - as her water pot broke she realised - got her final realisation. There are similar stories by nuns in the Therigatta where - from awareness of - it's obvious that they have been practicing awareness in their everyday actions and that some everyday occurrence marked the end of the process. She awakens at the moment when she puts the candle out. That is when she realises nirvana. That is a very common theme. And that the very context of those moments of realisation suggests that one should be able to practice this way of awareness in one's everyday life and for this kind of way to be possible. And certainly I think that this is what as a whole the Western Buddhist community is counting on being possible. So it's a pity that there isn't more literature to back up that kind of sense that it should be possible. A very major influence on Buddhism in the West, and talking about personal experience, as a Western woman, as a Western Buddhist, and a very strong influence on that whole \_\_\_\_\_ - being Chogyam Rinpoche. He was a very eminent Tibetan lama who came out very early, he was already established in Britain in the 1960's, that is when I met him. And he had the full training in Tibet. He was already regarded as realised, and then - extraordinarily - before he came to the West. He did do something quite remarkable, I found. ( Because I am in a way, double-cultured, I have spent so long with Tibetans, that Tibetans regarded me as one of them, - they would speak to me about Westerners as "them" meaning I wasn't one - I have quite a good understanding of their culture and how they think ) I found it quite impossible to actually translate that whole framework into Western terms. But Trungpa Rinpoche, in a very short time, actually shed that whole load of Tibetan, and stepped into speaking about the heart of the Dharma and the experience the whole Buddhist experience, directly in English. Without any reference to his Tibetan roots. If you take anything written by Trungpa Rinpoche and you try to translate it back into

Tibetan, you can't. It just comes out -- it just doesn't work, it isn't a translation. He just spoke directly in English, in Western terms of the heart of the teaching, with a great deal of subtlety, which were not coming from a Tibetan background at all. He really believed that you can practice in daily life, that you can practice as a modern western in a modern western life. He didn't encourage people to become monks and nuns at all. And this - I found this quite challenging.

When I first got interested in Buddhism I met Trungpa Rinpoche and I asked him - of all the Buddhist teachers I had met, he was the one that appealed to me the most - and I asked him what I should do, and he was the one that suggested I go to India, and go to a Tibetan nunnery. I think I became a Tibetan nun because I wanted to do the most committed thing possible. And in Tibetan culture, being a nun is the most committed thing. The most extreme - I was in that kind of mood, I still am.. Meanwhile, he was emphasising that this was - not even that it wasn't necessarily the way - he was saying that it was not the way. So, when I came back seven and a half years later and met him, I was in a different world. The very interesting thing happened to me at this point, and that was that I met a Tibetan lama that was known for his learning and for his yogic experience, : the way you get known in Tibet - there is a hierarchy, institutions, teachers, and so on - but there is also a network of those who know in some sense. Those who have got experience. And they don't always relate to the actual hierarchy on the ground. But his particular yogi was well known among yogis as somebody that was quite exceptional. And when I met him, and felt that I had a very strong connection with him, and asked him to be my teacher and so on, he actually told me to stop being a nun. He cut through that - he told me that he thought that was not the way I should be practicing, that he thought it was making me proud. I challenged him: I said, if you think taking my robes off is going to stop me being proud...forget it! I couldn't see that it was going to make any difference. But it was very interesting that when I took off the robes, I remember that my last thought was "How am I going to maintain my sense of having a special mission? Now I will be just ordinary," I did find that quite significant. I felt I needed some kind of mark

of specialness, in order to maintain my sense of commitment. It made me think quite seriously. I don't want to get these two issues muddled, but there is a connection in my mind. What I am trying to say is that, I don't think I practised as a lay person, the lama sent me off to study more. He was right. I didn't know enough. I'd just been practising meditation, but I was rather weak background in understanding philosophy and issues that did have bearing on meditation practice. The implication was that I could practice with equal commitment without the support of the nun's robe and that whole institution and all the attitudes that supported it. And as time went on, I realised that he really believed that one could practice as in ordinary life and that although he was telling me to avoid family life, because he thought it would be a distraction from the particular way of life he wanted me to follow, he wasn't saying that to other students, he was actually encouraging them and in exactly the same way as Trungpa Rinpoche was encouraging them. And it was much later on that I discovered this sutra, called the Definitive Vinaya, which talks about: saying that the Buddha would sometimes talk to his students about suffering, the suffering of the home life, the life of renunciation and so on. Sometimes he would do this and sometimes he wouldn't. Sometimes he would stress joy and love, certainly not stressing renunciation of the home life, simply because, if he were to stress the renunciation of the home life too much, at the wrong moment, it can actually produce feelings of wanting to disconnect from other beings. And in the Mahayana it's very important to want to have a strong connection with other beings. And that home life can assist in this.

Although it was a fault to have attachment, it is not a very serious fault. And very difficult to avoid. So, a Bodhisattva should not be afraid to develop attachments, if they were of benefit to other beings. And it's stressed very much, this is a very interesting sutra, it says "Of course, hatred is a very bad fault, but it is easy to avoid, not like attachment." Which I think is true. And, "Ignorance is a very bad fault, and very difficult to avoid." That is what is keeping us in Samsara, so I was very interested to find this Sutra, which is presenting a whole new attitude to renunciation. It's quite appropriate. The

Bhikku who is receiving this sutra from the Buddha, is Uppali, who is the one who is supposed to be chief, the one who is very learned, the expert on Vinaya. I'd always noticed that we would pray to have discipline like (Shila) such as Uppali, but I didn't know that in the Mahayana sutra, specifying that Uppali's discipline was concerned with this very different attitude towards renunciation.

So, from the Mahayana point of view, it seemed to be a very weak case to put forward the idea that being a monk or nun was the way you should practice as a Buddhist. And then this reflects in the way that the Sangha has developed, and is developing in the West, where you have a very strong following for someone like Trungpa Rinpoche, who has inspired a lot of people to practice and not thinking in terms of giving up the home life and not being encouraged to do so. And Sangharakshita's organisation doing the same thing, and in other contexts. Not thinking of themselves as less committed than the nuns and sisters in other monastic community. And this goes a long way, because as I started off saying, the Triyana Buddhism, one yana is what is called Hinayana : is called the "Pratimoksha" the discipline, where you give up your own actions and follow the basic Buddhist discipline. And then the Mahayana, which is the great yana where you practice in order to liberate all beings, and therefore keep your connection with all beings. And so it requires a different kind of prioritising. And then of course, on top of that you have the Vajrayana, where the woman is no longer, just empty, it is a very positive - there is a lot of play going on between the feminine and the masculine and the symbolism of male and female, the symbolism of sexual union, and symbolism of ultimate reality being a play between two aspects, which from their combination comes this tremendous creativity. Whole worlds are created from this play of duality, in the ultimate nature of reality, it's a whole new ballgame in terms of using male and female imagery, using sexual imagery. And in fact, in that tradition, it would be an offense to, in any way, look down on women. Also, it's an offense to reject the sense pleasures, so that the whole way that the whole monastic thing is written and taught, is actually to be used a Tibetan way of expressing it, "Back to back". How you are supposed to practice. It's inappropriate for Tantric practitioners to have

monastic: the  
bhikksu, bhikksuni, vows. And this is my last point. That the whole  
thing  
was turned on it's head for me, having devoted so many years of my  
life to the  
discipline of being a nun. And when you think this is the best  
thing I can do  
is become a Bhikksuni. I actually now find myself in the strange  
position of  
practicing a tradition and a discipline which is in a way, against  
it. I  
remember my teacher, who belongs to the Kagyu tradition of Tibetan  
Buddhism, and he travels all around the world as a full-time teacher  
in the  
Kagyu centres. And one of the Kagyu nuns, very much in the spirit of  
this  
conference, talking about raising the status of Buddhist nuns by  
making the  
Bhikksuni ordination more available, to build up the Bhikksuni  
sangha. She  
came to Khenpo Rinpoche, saying that she wanted to help women in  
Buddhism by increasing the status of the Bhikksuni sangha and helping  
it.  
And he said "If you want to help women in Buddhism, then that is  
exactly  
what you should not do." He said, "Because, in the Bhikksuni sangha,  
the  
rules are all establishing that the woman is - the Bhikksuni sangha  
is  
controlled by the male sangha. And it's based on the idea that the  
woman  
shouldn't be independent. You don't need rules like that in the  
West. You  
don't need it in Triyana Buddhism, you don't need it in Mahayana  
Buddhism,  
or in Vajrayana Buddhism. It puts women down. You don't need it."  
And  
this for me was a complete turning around, in my experience of the  
tradition.  
And this - all the other Tibetan lamas that I know, except for  
Trungpa  
Rinpoche, say, "To be a Bhikksuni, it would be so wonderful, such a  
great  
blessing, such a great power you are doing." And, "That's really it,  
to help  
Bhikksunis, that would be the best thing you could do." And here  
was, not  
just that he was my teacher, but I could see that logic of it. :  
You don't need  
that. I think that that is a nice point to end on, something to  
think about,  
consider. Also to think about in relationship to what Brother Josef  
was saying  
yesterday. And maybe to give a bit of background, about the point I  
was  
making then, that when we talk about the Buddhist sangha, is the  
assumption when we talk about the Buddhist sangha, that it therefore  
should  
be with those with the highest ordination, with Bhikksuni or Bhikksu  
ordination, is something you have to approach very carefully. And to  
understand the whole history of this from many points of view.  
Rather than  
making this assumption. Although I'm not saying that people who are

able  
to devote their whole lives to a discipline outside of home life,  
obviously have  
a tremendous amount of energy to put into it. And that isn't to be  
sniffed at.  
It is very difficult to find enough energy while in the home life.  
But I am very  
interested in that whole area, of what is being said, what is  
possible for, not  
just women, male practitioners, too. It's an ongoing issue.