

BOOK REVIEWS

THE CHRIST AND THE BODHISATTVA. Edited by Donald S. Lopez and Steven C. Rockefeller, Albany, N.Y., State University of New York Press, 1987, pp. viii + 274. ISBN 0-88706-402-9

The very active SUNY Press of New York offers us here a beautiful volume, well edited and pleasing to the eye in layout and illustration. "This volume was inspired by the Symposium on the Christ and the Bodhisattva which took place at Middlebury College in September 1984" (p. vii). It seems reasonable to surmise, then, that the nine chapters of the book are corrected versions of papers presented at the conference, and the long and interesting introduction was added later, together with a selected bibliography and an index.

The book thus represents an effort at Buddhist-Christian dialogue and should be judged first and foremost from that perspective. Questions can then be asked about the felicitousness of the topic and the aptness of the method of the dialogue. As to the topic, it cannot be doubted that the ideal figures of a movement provide us with a privileged slant on that movement. The introduction explains why, on the Buddhist side, the Bodhisattva (this "most dynamic figure in Mahāyāna Buddhism," p. 2) was chosen rather than the Buddha, but I am left somehow with the impression that, in that case, a better balance would be struck if on the Christian side one then involved also the panoply of saints. As to the method, the speakers (three on each side) were asked to provide direct witnesses on the significance in their lives and thoughts of these figures, and not especially to speculate on points of comparison between the two figures. This naturally makes for an irenic atmosphere, well expressed by one of Robert Thurman's aphorisms: "Why insist on some . . . inalterable difference between these universal Messiahs of humankind and all living beings?" (p. 95) The drawback of this method is, however, that the two figures are apt to be treated on different levels and from different traditional perspectives, so that they do not truly meet—the dialogue ending in a *monologue à deux*, and the tricky problems simply left untouched. I regret to say that the present volume does not escape this danger, but must confess that I nevertheless enjoyed reading it and learned much from it.

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Before coming to the “entrees” proper we are served two scholarly hors d'oeuvres. The first, the (unsigned) *Introduction*, offers us a systematic overview of the images of Jesus in the West and a much shorter and less systematic treatment of the Bodhisattva figures in the East, thereby forcefully highlighting “the wide range of meanings with which the two figures have been invested” (p. 2). Of the author’s consequent considerations on attitudes towards other religions, I found his summation of Buddhist positions especially instructive. In the second introductory essay (*Chapter 1: Perspectives on the Buddhist-Christian Dialogue*), M. D. Eckel investigates models of the relationship between Buddhism and Christianity and outstanding problems in the Buddhist-Christian dialogue. With many others nowadays he stresses the point that the dialogue is rendered extremely difficult by the multiformity and historical complexity of the two traditions—a point illustrated anew by the ensuing chapters.

Chapter 2 then opens the series of presentations on the Christ and the Bodhisattva. The Introduction had summarized these as follows: “The Christ was considered from the perspectives of the Roman Catholic monastic tradition, modern depth psychology, and liberal Protestant theology. The Bodhisattva was approached geographically, from the Indian, East Asian, and Tibetan Buddhist traditions” (p. 2). The treatments of the Bodhisattva figures are highly instructive. As expressed in the title, *The Buddhist Messiahs: The Magnificent Deeds of the Bodhisattvas*, Robert Thurman, in chapter 2, stresses the “cosmological, socio-political role of the Buddha and Bodhisattvas. In line with his historical vision of the “messianic, socially transformative, even revolutionary impact of Buddhist monasticism” (as the tamer-civilizer of Eastern peoples), he highlights the point that “the Buddha’s choice of teachings and design of institutions had a messianic, ‘this-worldly’ aim as well as transcendent foundations” (p. 69). One wonders whether this particular (and typically Western?) accent is going to be one of the contributions to the Buddhist tradition by Western Buddhists.¹

Luis Gomez—in chapter 5: *From the Extraordinary to the Ordinary: Images of the Bodhisattva in East Asia*—succeeds in impressing upon us the idea of the pullulating richness and complexity of the Bodhisattva figure, a “system of symbols” rather than a single symbol (p. 154). After discovering in the *Buddha-avatamsaka Sūtra* at least four types of religious ideals all designated by the name “Bodhisattva” (p. 145), he goes on to demonstrate how they constantly combine and overlap, so that together they form a con-

¹ A minor remark: The student of Japanese Buddhism may be slightly baffled by Thurman’s short-cut from the Pure Land sutras directly to Shinran, with disregard of the “seven patriarchs” (on page 91).

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tinuity in tension, wherein we must not arbitrarily make a selection of one single element and consider this as the only "orthodox" one. Although Gomez' illustrations appear somewhat arbitrarily chosen, I have the impression that subsequent treatments of the Bodhisattva figure will have to take this essay into account.

A Tibetan view on the Bodhisattva (chapter 8) is then presented by none less than the Dalai Lama himself. His is a testimony of living faith—in the existence today of Bodhisattvas and of "an exalted level of consciousness" (p. 219)—embedded in a cast-iron framework of traditional scholastics. This presentation is preceded by an overview of the Dalai Lama's life. The tragic but at the same time mysteriously successful story of Tibetan Buddhism is here evoked, as well as the human need for a living embodiment of the Absolute.

Coming now to the three papers on "The Christ," we may first remark that they make us experience anew how impossible it is to capture Christ with pen and ink, but must then immediately add that all three are truly interesting "tries" as well as real testimonies of faith. Langdon Gilkey's essay (the "liberal Protestant" position; chapter 6) may be the most objective and encompassing one. Gilkey sets himself the avowedly impossible task of unifying the many facets of this "almost perversely enigmatic and many-sided figure" (p. 194). He does this by seeing in Christ, on the one hand, a dialectic of the affirmation of life and, on the other, the polarity of God's sovereignty and human autonomy. I believe that both these viewpoints are, indeed, fruitful ones for the dialogue with Buddhism.

As indicated by the title of his paper, *Who is Jesus Christ for us today?* (chapter 3), Brother David Steindl-Rast lays even more stress than Gilkey on the relevance of the Christ figure in the present age, characterized (according to him) by the nuclear threat, the encounter of religions, and the revival of mysticism. His thesis, which is also extremely relevant for the Buddhist-Christian dialogue, is beautifully expressed on page 113: "Each Christology answers the question who is Jesus? in a different way. But the upshot is: It's you. Until you can recognize Jesus Christ in yourself and yourself in Jesus Christ, you haven't caught on to the Christian message."

Finally, the long paper on *The God You Touch* (chapter 4) by Ann Belford Ulanov, a Jungian psychiatrist "who conjoins in her academic life psychiatry and religion," may be the most challenging one for Buddhist readers, by its stress on the importance of the bodily concrete and on the need of "the human ego to assimilate, house and channel the beyond-ego" (p. 121)—so that the spiritual life is characterized by her as "the space of a relationship between our experience of I-ness and the transcendent Other" (p. 135).

The volume is rounded off by a Panel Discussion (chapter 9), "designed to explore the interconnections, the relationships, and the differences between

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these figures" (p. 230). Some interesting points are touched upon here, but lack of time evidently did not permit any real dialogue in depth to develop.

All in all, a book very worth reading.

JAN VAN BRAGT

NO ABODE: The Record of Ippen. Translated with an Introduction and Notes by Dennis Hirota. Ryukoku University, Kyoto, Japan, 1986. 251 pp. ISBN 0-940583-01-1

This book gives a thorough account of the life and writings of the wandering "holy man" (*hijiri*) Ippen. Ippen (1239–1289) was born into an influential warrior family. At the age of nine, his mother passed away and he entered monastic life. He was sent to study under the monk Shōdatsu, his father's former colleague and a scholar of the Seizan branch of the Pure Land school, but when his father died twelve years later, Ippen returned to lay life as a samurai and took a wife. At the age of thirty-two, however, Ippen resolved to "abandon the ties of love and enter the realm of the uncreated."

He went to consult Shōdatsu about his decision, then set out on a journey of pilgrimages and retreats, which took him first to Zenkōji, and then to sites associated with Kūkai on his native Shikoku. Eventually he came to the realization that would remain the foundation of his thought for the rest of his life: the inseparability of the fulfillment of Amida's Vow to save all sentient beings and one's attainment of birth in Amida's Pure Land in saying the Name, *Namu-amida-butsu*. This is in accord with the teachings of the Seizan branch, which assert that birth is possible only through the *nembutsu*.

At Sugō, a mountainous region on the island of Shikoku, Ippen made the major decision to cease his solitary practice as a recluse and to take up a life of roaming in practice (*yugyō*). In short, he gave up the settled life of house or temple and took up the life of travel to bring people into contact with the Dharma.

Ippen's method of propagation was to distribute slips of paper on which Amida's Name was written. In doing so, he stressed the concept of *ichinen*, which could mean either "one moment" of time or "one thought," and which, in the Pure Land teaching, came to mean "one utterance" of the *nembutsu*. Ippen, in offering these slips, used the term to mean "even once." Here there was no need for the adherents to direct their thoughts or even to attain a certain state of faith. The "one thought-moment" of utterance held the non-differentiation or simultaneity of the time of Amida's fulfillment of the Vow